

Rev. Horace Waller: Dr David Livingstone's friend in Leytonstone

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In the summer of 1874, in a vicarage in the 'pretty village' of Leytonstone near Epping Forest on the outskirts of east London, two feted Africans, Abdulla Susi and James Chuma put their heads together on an editorial project of great moment. These two loyal servants of Dr David Livingstone's had delivered his body to the coast and enabled his remains to come home. Burying his heart under a tree, they had used hunters' skills in preservation and had travelled with their leader's body from Old Chitambo in North-Eastern Rhodesia's western Luangwa district, some 70 miles south of the notorious Bangwuelu swamps, all the way across to the coast at Ujiji. Susi and Chuma, plus sixty bearers, took the body as far as Bagamoyo where a warship, the H M S Vulture, commissioned from Zanzibar, collected it. Contrary to myth, Susi and Chuma did not accompany the body on its ocean journey on that occasion and it was a year later before they were summoned to Britain.

Following Livingstone's state funeral, the task that Waller and the two Africans were engaged upon was the painstaking scrutiny of Livingstone's final reports, ramblings and observations - which he made right up until his last breath. This book, *'The Last Journals of David Livingstone in Central Africa: his last moments and sufferings obtained from his faithful servants Chuma and Susi'*, by Horace Waller, FRGS, Rector of Twywell, Northampton¹ would be published in two volumes by John Murray at the end of that year. Chuma and Susi were but servants, each being paid £5 for their literary endeavours under the auspices of the Royal Geographical Society. Their host in Leytonstone was the Reverend Horace Waller, three years in the parish following a commendable career in African missionary work. Waller, an admirer and follower of Livingstone, had been a member of the pioneer party that went out following Livingstone's famous appeal at the University of Cambridge. Waller was a lay superintendent under Bishop Mackenzie, acted as surgeon and was responsible for secular affairs. There could be serious disputes for a man in such a position to deal with, so Waller must have been made of robust material. The author of *'Laws of Livingstonia'*, remarking upon the problems of perpetual fighting, stealing and slave-raiding that could occur at any station, called it nothing short of 'an extraordinary situation' when 'a solitary white man [was] wielding the power of life and death over a savage people whose language he did not understand and whose fierce passions were unrestrained by any moral principle.' A layman missionary-in-charge would be 'appealed to' daily 'and... in the position of an autocratic chief', administered 'justice'. Waller therefore was also charged with 'inflicting punishment, and generally mixing himself up in local affairs'¹.

Horace Waller was not ordained until such time as he returned to England following a stay in South Africa. There he is remembered best for making himself responsible for the female released slaves' safe passage to Cape Town, when expedition members Mackenzie and Tozer died and slave boys were removed to Zanzibar, 'leaving all the girls with nowhere to go'.

The Reverend Waller's friendship with Livingstone spanned many years and Dr Livingstone often resided at St John's Leytonstone vicarage. Livingstone once wrote ahead to Waller saying that upon leaving Africa he would be in dire need of a good dentist - and did Waller happen to know of one?

¹ Waller had moved to a new parish by the time the book was published.



Susi and Chuma stayed at the vicarage with Waller during their editorial task and, despite being Muslim, they became members of the church choir and attended the National School in the old Chapel. It is known that they constructed at least two replica African huts to show interested parties where Livingstone had died². One of these huts was for some time in the garden of the vicarage in Leytonstone; another was created for the youngest of Livingstone's daughters, Anna Mary, who had barely seen her father in life. One example was situated in the grounds of James 'Paraffin' Young's house in the Scottish Highlands and Anna Mary called it 'a little model'. In Fig.2, the hut depicted does not look very much scaled down. Used as the frontispiece to 'The Last Journals', and with mature trees visible outside the publisher's cropping marks, this is the 'Leytonstone hut'.

Fig.1 Leytonstone Church, Essex, Vestry House Museum, London Borough of Waltham Forest

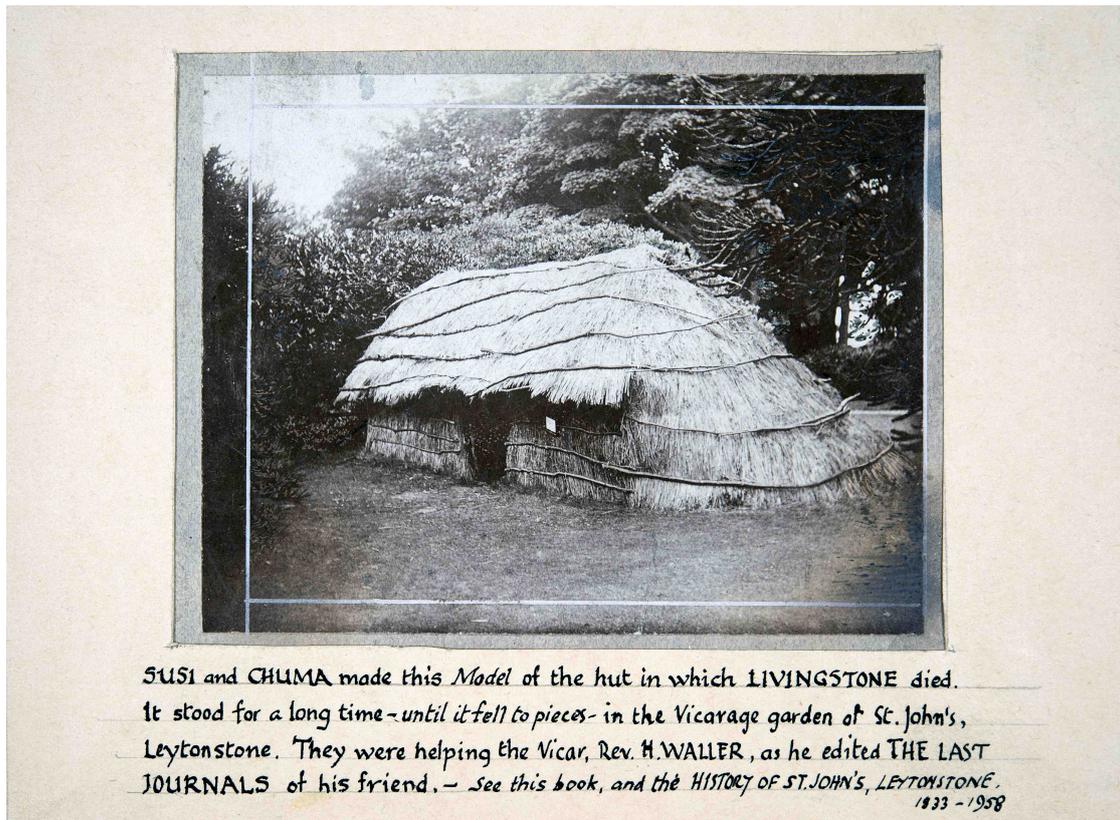


Fig 2. Model of the Hut in which David Livingstone Died. Council for World Mission archive, SOAS Library © Council for World Mission, CWM/LMS/Livingstone Pictures/Box 1, file 6

Chuma and Susi's sojourn in Britain was a not long one. They left no personal records of their impressions, but it is believed that before the end of the year that saw the publication of the book they had asked to return to Africa. In what they had achieved whilst in Britain, however, they arguably helped lay the foundations for a new resurgence in interest in missionary work and its future success.

Post-Livingstone, doubts about the true worth of the territory for settlers were coming to a head. As a seasoned African traveller, Waller's opinions were heeded by those who wished to know what he felt was left of Livingstone's dream. Waller's strategy was to concentrate opinion on what had been achieved, but he did not shirk from the truth; yes, the country had been opened up and trade appeared possible now, but he refrained from fuelling the fires of optimism. Neither would Waller support fulfilment of Livingstone's vision of poor Christian working men of Scotland settling with their families in the highlands of Africa, and "by carrying on agriculture and other occupations civilise and elevate the natives around them." So it was gradually more widely documented that the highlands of the Zambesi valley were not "suitable for European Colonisation". This disquiet had its origins among the settlers themselves, in places where fatalistic idealism had been witnessed and reality could no longer be ignored. The *Nyasa News* of 1894 carried a report saying firmly that, "the fact of the matter is, the climatic and other conditions are not suited to such an experiment and past experience warns us not to attempt it." By now, even the most entrepreneurial spirit was fast learning that Africa's nature could be neither tamed nor anticipated. No explorer's carefully gathered meteorological data could be relied upon. Whether they had worked by making simple observations or had the later help of barographs and thermographs, these men, Livingstone included, were only able to record evidence in small pockets of time: long-term assessment was needed and lacking. For instance, it had become evident that a major stretch of wetland could, over a decades-worth of seasons, be 'a considerable body of bitter water' blessed with vertebrates and invertebrates, avian richness and hippopotami, then, for the duration of the next decade - or longer - be transformed into a desiccated stretch of dust, peppered with fish bones.



Fig 3. Agnes and Thomas Livingstone, Abdullah Susi, James Chuma and Rev Horace Waller at Newstead Abbey, Nottingham with the journals, maps and plans made by the late David Livingstone, 1874. Council for World Mission archive, SOAS Library © Council for World Mission, CWM/LMS/Livingstone Pictures/Box 1, file 8

Some places in present-day Malawi owe their names to the considerations of Livingstone's immediate followers² but many older names have been altered since political independence. In October 1875, however, Dr Laws and E. D. Young, the latter, and engineer who had been Dr Livingstone's Royal Navy captain on the *Pioneer*, sailed the first steam vessel to enter an African lake from the Shire River onto Lake Nyasa. When they did so, the momentousness of the occasion prompted the ship's company to assemble on deck and mark the moment with a chorus of *All Things Bright and Beautiful*. It was Laws and Young who charted the north end of the lake in the vessel the *Ilala*, naming the most outstanding physical features as they went. In doing so, they were punctilious and they did not forget David Livingstone's Leytonstone friend. Towering over what used to be known as Florence Bay in Malawi is the mountain the missionaries were to choose as the new, healthier location for Livingstonia Mission: the slopes of Mount Waller³.

¹ *Laws of Livingstonia*, The Blantyre Controversy

² Julie Davidson, *Looking for Mrs Livingstone*, Saint Andrew's Press, 2012

³ Horace Waller's papers are housed at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Some of his other letters are in private collections, however, there exists a letter in the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Belgium and this one is from another daughter, Agnes Livingstone (Fig.3). Writing from Edinburgh in early 1878, she refers to the 'grand failure' of Horace Waller's work on the Livingstone journals and expresses her anger at the refusal by the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) to accept his notes. British explorers before Livingstone had fought with the RGS to have their journals properly recognised and had met with repeated disappointment - John Ross and John Franklin of 'North-West Passage' fame to mention but two. Many, like Horace Waller, abandoned their appeals to the RGS and instead approached the publisher John Murray.

Author's note: The 'hut in which Dr Livingstone died' may be misleading. Very shortly following the Doctor's demise, Chuma, concealing his master's death, went to the local chief, Chitambo and asked if he might construct a hut a short distance away from the village. Permission was granted and a hut especially fortified against wild animals was built. It was within this new hut that Livingstone's servants, over the period of a few days, prepared his corpse for travel.

Recommended reading:

Tim Jeal's *Livingstone*. Originally published in 1973 by William Heinemann Ltd and updated in 1985 and 2013.

The commissioning of the Ilala and the launching on Lake Nyassa - Alan Drysdall: The Journal of the Rhodesian Study Circle Vol.65 No.3 (September 2015)