

MY VISIT TO LEAMINGTON

Our flight for Britain in a Sierra Leone Airline plane left Lungi Airport on the 17th March, 1984 at 1.30 p.m. and we landed at Gatwick Airport at 7.35 p.m. Jane and Bob were there to receive Joseph, Odette and me.

My first experience after leaving the Airport building at Gatwick was the cold strong winds. After name difficulty in finding the car to take us to Leamington and after losing our way several times in Guildford and Reading, we finally arrived in Leamington at about 12.30 a.m. En route, we had a meal at Guildford. Our first lodging in Leamington was at the Knight's at 2 Gaveston Road. On arrival, Joseph, Odette and I went straight to bed and we were cold and extremely tired. We stayed with the Knight's from the 17th-20th March, 1984. We were well received and entertained during our stay.

On Sunday, 18th March, Jane took us for a drive around Leamington and to the Oxfam shop at Bath street where we got more clothes to get us warm. Sunday was very windy and cold and because of this, I woke up on Monday with an eye infection. This was one of my bitterest experience during my visit. We returned here at about 12.30 p.m. after a walk on the PARADE looking at shops. In the evening on Sunday we were each presented with a programme.

On Monday, 19th March, Alice, a worker at Oxfam centre, took us to the centre. Enroute, we visited a chemist where an eye drop was prescribed for my eyes. No body buys medicine in Britain without prescription. That was another of my experiences. We spent some time with Alice at the centre and we finally returned home for the day.

On Tuesday 20th March, Johannes Mallah, a Sierra Leonean student at Reading came to Leamington and we had a whole day with him. We had a very useful discussion with him concerning the future of the Link at both ends. Some of his ideas helped us greatly in the final drafting of the paper which I presented to the Leamington group of OWL. In the evening, Leamington county councillors treated us to a grand civic Reception at the town Hall. Councillor Peter Barton and his wife, Sally, were at the Hall at 8.30 p.m. to receive us. Councillor Barton gave a welcome speech to which I responded. We signed the visitors book and took photograph with Chairman Barton and his wife. The reception ended at 10.20 p.m.

On Wednesday, 31st March, I left the Knight's for the Laytons. This was the second family I stayed with. Jim is a teacher and his school, Campion, is linked with my school, Ahmadiyya Secondary School, Bo. I was warmly received by the Laytons. The same day I went to the Laytons I visited Campion school. I arrived at the school at 9.45 a.m. and was welcomed by Jim. We had an informal talk about the school and himself. The school was founded in 1963 and its roll is 1100 students of almost equal number of girls and boys. The pupils are of mixed races -Indians, Chinese, British Carribeans, etc. The school had 65 teachers and it is a sixth Form school. That same day Jane showed slides of Bo and its environment to 'A' level students and some teachers. The students were amazed about life in Bo. At the end of the slide show, I attended a second year music class with Jim. The kids were keen on getting pen-friends back in Bo. I gave some a few names and addresses. That same day I went to an 'A' Level Sociology class where I had an informal discussion with students about life in general in Sierra Leone. I went home with Jim. I visited Campion for 3 days.

On 22nd March, I went again to Campion School. The school starts at 9.05 a.m. and ends at 3.30 p.m. I attended an 'A' Level class in Bio-chemistry and I visited the school's library and spoke to the Librarian. I also listed some books which we needed in Bo and handed the list to Jim. There was a meeting with OWL group in Campion School. I gave the background, aims and objectives of OWL and a brief history of Ahmadiyya Secondary School, Bo. New members joined the Link. Later in the day, I gave help to two Sixth Form girls who were writing a project on Sierra Leone.

Friday, 23rd March, was my final day at Campion School. I met the Science Head of Department who showed me the various sections of his department. I looked at various equipments and books used for the teaching of science particularly to junior classes. I was impressed

with what was provided for the teaching of science. The Head of Department promised to help my school with science Equipments and books. I later addressed a Junior Geography class about life in Sierra Leone and they asked a lot of questions.

On the same day at 7.30 p.m. Jane, Odette, Joseph, Issa Koroma, a Sierra Leonean student from Hull and I attended a christian council meeting at Dale street. Issa was on a visit to me. At the end of the meeting, we went to a show later in the evening.

On the 24th March, Rashid Ahmad of 9 Woodway Avenue, Hampton Magna collected me at the Laytons and we drove to his address where I met his wife and children. From there we went straight to the Ahmadiyya Mission at 792 Washwood Road, BS 2JL, Birmingham where I was received by the Missionary-in -charge and some Ahmadis. We held a lengthy discussion on the Mission work in Sierra Leone and its improvements and achievements after which I had lunch together with then. Mr. Daud engaged me later on in a discussion on the Messiah and his teaching. We left the Mission house at about 4.20 p.m. and drove through Birmingham to see places of interest like the Picketing junction, a tall round building where a bomb was planted by the IRA last Christmas, coloured and Black Residential Areas etc. Birmingham, Mr. Rashid told me, is the second largest city in Britain and in about 23 Miles in area, on our way to Hampton Magna, we went through Strafford, the birth place of Shakespeare, the Avon and Shakespeare Theatre. We left Strafford at about 7.30 p.m. and returned to Hampton Magna where the Missionary, Rashid and I had dinner. Rashid later took me back home at about 10.00 p.m. I was nicely treated by the Ahmadis of Birmingham particularly Rashid. He is a true friend and a Muslim.

On Sunday, 25th March, I visited Warwickshire college of Agriculture with Andrew Watts. At the college farm, I saw Goats, Pigs, cows and we made a round of the college and its workshop where Andrew works. It was raining heavily and cold. We had coffee at the workshop. I was highly impressed about the college and the things I saw. We returned to Leamington at 6.30 p.m.

On Monday, 26th March, I visited St. John's Middle School which wanted a link with B.T.C. Experimental School, Bo. I was driven to the school by the Head, Mr. Cape. Although my visit was a short one, I enjoyed my stay very much. I had coffee with the staff of 9 teachers and later gave a talk to classes six and seven pupils about life in Sierra Leone and Bo in particular. I received two souvenir booklets from Mr. Cape and a staff photograph. I also took pictures of the school. The school had 175 pupils on roll and is well equipped for its level.

On Tuesday, 27th March, Odette, Joseph and I were taken to coventry polytechnic by Dr. Phil Harris one time lecturer at Njala University College. He took us round the Polytechnic. We took pictures with his. At Coventry, we visited the old Cathedral bombed during the world war II and the newly built one. We later returned to Leamington to attend a teacher's seating at the Teacher's Centre 4.30 p.m. I returned home at 6.30 p.m.

Wednesday, 28th March, was another day for a visit to a school. Mr. Brain Austin who teaches at Alesford school took me to the school at 10.00 a.m. John Knight, Jane's husband, is the Deputy Head of the School. The school has a link with St. Andrews School, Bo. I spent the whole day at Alesford where I visited the Arts Room, Woodork section, Biology and, like Campion school, it is one of the most equipped schools in Warwickshire. At the end of day at Alesford Brain took me to his house where I met his wife, Janice, mother and 3 children. The Austins are very lovely people and they treated me nicely. I was very much at home. They have a family link with Mr. J.B. Taylor, C.K.C Be. After having dinner with them, Brain drove me home at about 9.00 p.m.

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Thursday, 29th March, ended my stay with the Layton's and I went over to stay with another family, the Begg's at 2 Clorendon Crescent. Chris is a self-employed Engineer while his wife Margaret is a Leamington county Councillor and also works as a volunteer at the Mid Warwickshire College of Education where Kombar Dumber, a Sierra Leonean and David, a Malawian, are students doing building. I spent most of my evenings with these two friends. They were nice and hospitable. In the evening of 29th John and Moira Holliday gave us a dinner at 6.30 p.m.

Friday, 30th March, was one of my free days. I went to do some shopping.

Saturday, 31st March, Joseph, Odette and I were detailed for a B.B.C. World Service Interview at Bush House in London. I travelled to London with Messer Rashid and Ghafoor who were also to host me. On our way to London we had a stop over at slough to visit a British Ahmadi, Mr. Nasir Ward. We had lunch at his house and he joined us on our trip to London. We got to London and then to Bush House. Jane, Joseph and Odette had also arrived but Rayland Buck who was to interview us was not at work. So Sunday, 1st April, was agreed for the interview. The others had to return to Leamington because of lodging problems and I had to stay behind for the interview. Messers Rashid, Ward, Ghafoor and I went to Ahmadiyya Mission at Gressen Hall where we spent the night. I did not meet the Imam of London Mosque that day because of a heavy schedule but we were, however, received and lodged by the Assistant Imam of the Mosque. In the morning on 1st April, I met the Imam of London Mosque who gave me a hearty welcome. We had a lengthy discussion on OWL and its activities and about Ahmadiyya Mission in Sierra Leone. I was well treated during my stay with them. The Imam later sent an envelope for me through Mr. Rashid. I am very grateful for all that they did for me. Rashid, Ghafoor and I later in the afternoon went to Bush House again for the interview. Buck was there to receive us and the interview took place as planned after which we went back to the Ahmadiyya Mission House for lunch. We finally left London for Leamington at about 5.30 p.m. Enroute to Leamington we passed through Windoor ( I saw the castle, the Queen's official Residence), Eton College, Slough and Oxford. ( The University with over 22 buildings each a separate department or college). We arrived in Leamington at 9.55 p.m. While in London I visited the House of Parliament, Picadilly Circus, Buckingham Palace, Harods, River Thames and Hyde Park. I saw the changing of the Guards at Buckingham Palace and 10, Downing street, the official Residence of the British Prime Minister. London was very expensive as compared to the suburban Towns and villages.

On Monday, 2nd April, I attended a Teacher's meeting with county councillors at 2.15 p.m. at Shire Hall and an Oxfam Campaign Group meeting at 8.30 p.m. at 4 Freeman's Close, Leamington. Four main topics were discussed at the Teacher's Meeting which Bob Crowther and I attended. They were:

1. Introduction of T.V.E.I.
2. The effect of falling rolls on the curriculum at Primary and Secondary school level.
3. Inadequate and Incompetent Teacher - what Leamington Education Authority can do about it.
4. Implications of the " White Paper " on job training.

The seating had a big impact on me in that I saw how the Education Authorities in Britain sit with teachers to plan the future education of the children and to find solutions to educational problems which in lacking in Sierra Leone.

The Oxfam Campaign Group Meeting was based more on questions and answers- a kind of fact finding meeting. I was asked a lot of questions and I did my best to provide answers to them. The questions asked were centered around the following:

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1. Health facilities in Bo.
2. Educational facilities and organisations.
3. Agriculture.
4. The use of traditional Medicine in treatment.
5. Primary Health care programmes.
6. The status of Teachers in Sierra Leone.

I left the meeting at 10.20 p.m. and the Campaign Group members remained for further discussion.

On Tuesday, 3rd April, Jane took us to Coventry where Joseph, Odette, Jane and I had an interview with a Local Radio called " Mercia Sounds". We returned to Leamington after the interview at 2.30 p.m. to meet Strafford College students and to have an interview with a local press, the " Courier". I gave a talk on Sierra Leone to the Strafford college students while Odette and Joseph were interviewed by press. Both engagements took place simultaneously at the Third World Information Centre at Bath Street, Leamington.

On 4th April, I visited Milverton Combine School at Rugby Rugby Road, Leamington. I was met on arrival at the school by Bob Crowther, a Teacher, who introduced me to the head, Mr. Smith. Bob had once visited Sierra Leone and his school is linked with Methodist school, Bo. From the interaction of the pupils, it appeared that Bob has been doing marvellous job by letting the kids knew more about Sierra Leone and Methodist School. There was growing awareness of the link in the school probably because of Bob's visit. I attended the school's assembly at 10.30 a.m. All pupils were sitted on the floor singing very nice song. The Head gave them a sermon after which I gave a talk on Sierra Leone and its educational organisation. I later went to a 4th year class where the pupils asked me questions on life in Sierra Leone.

On the 5th April, I made a visit to Alcester school which is linked with Mambona school. Ann Parker, who has once visited Sierra Leone with Bob Crowther, is the Head of the School. She drove me to the school and took me round the school and also places of interest in the town. The teachers and pupils at the school were very friendly. The school keeps kids from 4-7 years after which they attend other schools. It is a kind of nursery school. I had lunch with the kids and attended their classes. Ann and I left Alcester at the end of the School day to return to Leamington. Enroute, we went through Strafford. This was my second visit to Strafford and we went to places of interest an before. I took a lot of pictures. After having coffee in a restaurant at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre we left Strafferd at about 5.45 p.m. We got to Leamington and Ann took as to her house where we had a nice dinner and refreshment. My visit to Alcester- and Milverton broadened ay knowledge about school organisation at various levels and stages. The pupils in Alcester were as keen as those in Milverton combined school and I really enjoyed my stay with then. I went home at 8.30 p.m.

Friday, 6th April, was a big day when we had our Sierra Leonean Evening at Town Hall, Leamington Spa. John Holliday and I got to the Hall at 7.00 p.m. to receive guests together with Councillor Barton and Sally Barton. About 250 people of all nationality attended the evening. The Sierra Leone High commissioner in London was represented by Mr. Kamara, Education Attache to the High Commission. We were treated to music by a group in London led by a chap called Tigie. The type of music provided by then was appealing and not typical of Sierra Leonean music. We, however, resorted to playing a recorded cassette of Amie Kallon which was provided by Bob. The evening wan informal, chairman Barton and John Holliday gave speeches to which I responded. There was a lot of Booze, Sierra Leonean feed and socialisation. A lot of people were met but briefly. The evening ended at 10.30 p.m. and it was continued at Gill Cottril's house.

On the 7th April, there was a meeting of OWL/Leamington and OWL/Bo. Johanness, Francis Kaikai and Khalilu were present. The meeting was at Ken Hall's house. After a brief introduction by John Holliday, Chairman, OWL/Leamington I presented a paper on behalf of OWL/Bo, which was followed by discussion. The 5 recommendations I made were accepted by OWL/Leamington and also other important requests made. OWL/Leamintgen granted us £100.00 for our "Resource Centre" in Bo, My thanks to Ken and Margaret Hall for hosting us and providing us with lunch during break.

The meeting ended at 2.30 p.m.

On Sunday, 8th April, Komba Dumbar, Odette, Andrew, a Zambian and I visited a farm near Radford. The farm was owned by the Antrobus who had worked on it for past 80 years. The farm had all modern amenities such as electricity, water supply, etc. We were nicely received by Ann whose brother joined us later. They were a hard-working family from what I learnt during our tour of the farm. Ann and Mrs. Antrobus later treated us to coffee and snacks. We were given gifts of the " young Farmers Club" jerseys each. We left the farm at about 5.30 p.m. for Leamington.

On Monday, 9th May, I ended my stay with the Beggs and I came over to stay with Moira and John Holliday. Before my official stay with them, the Hollidays had had a long association with me. They had invited me to dinner and drinks even when I stayed with my earlier hosts. I was very much at home at the Hollidays and I enjoyed every bit of my stay with. John was fatherly while Moira was motherly. That same Monday Jane and I went to Swanick in Derbyshire to attend an Oxfam Conference which lasted from the 9th - 11th April. I was the only Sierra Leonean at the Conference. Other participants were mainly British people or people of British Nationality. The Conference was educative at every stage since it dealt with Third World Problems and how to solve them. I was able to understand how Oxfam raises its fund and how it operates all over the world. I was privileged to meet Oxfam's chairman and Director and other officials of Oxfam. There was a lot of discussion with theme people about OWL and its activities. I addressed a cross section of the delegates in a workshop on " Linking ". This address was followed by questions and discussions. Participants in the end, gave their support to " Linking " and to OWL in particular. Highlights of the Conference included speeches, workshops, slide shown and pictorials. There was a Drama the second night in which people like Guy Stinger, Oxfam Director, featured. This was immediately followed by a Disco Night show which was attended by all delegates, both young and old. There was a lot of fun and enjoyment. The conference ended on the 11th April with a speech by Guy Sringer, the outgoing Oxfam Director. Jane and I returned on 11th April to Leamington for yet another Radio interview. This time it was B.B.C. correspondent who interviewed Odette, Joseph , Jane and I for a documentary on B.B.C..4. The interview took place at the Third World Information Centre at Bath Street, Leamington. I went home at 6.00 p.m. and in the evening I went to David and Komba.

On 12th April Joseph and I went to Coventry on an engagement with the Social Services Department We visited a workshop where mentally retarded people work. Their main work was the packing of assorted manufactured products such as nails, brushes screws, toothpastes, Golf club tops, etc. Time meant nothing to these people and the only punishment when they mis-behave is to ask them not to return to work the next day. Some did not take that lightly. They are paid £4.00 a week and a bus ticket is provided to take them to and from work. Some stayed with their relatives. They are provided with lunch at 75p. and with music and games. Our guide then took us to an old peoples home where the average for age entrance is 85. These people were well cared for by the state. I saw an old lady's room with many dolls because she treasures them, looking back on her life as a child. There was a lengthy discussion on how the Home is run after which we had a tour of the Home and later lunch. It was amazing to see old people of over 80 able to move about and do things for themselves although a few were on wheel chairs or clutches. We lastly visited a children's Home which is provided for children. The children were provided with food, games and are even taught by a well-trained and qualified staff who had gone through a 4 year intensive training programme. One difficulty, the lady in-charge of the Old People House told us was to re-house some people who definitely refuse to be re-housed if they are to leave their pets behind. They preferred staying in deplorable housing conditions with their pets. Jane took us back to Leamington in the day. In the evening John Holliday took Joseph, Odette, Moira and I to Strafford to watch " The Merchant of Venice " show at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. It was a 3+ hours show and it ended at 11.30 p.m. The show was nice and the Actors and Actresses did their best in playing their parts well. We returned to Leamington at about 12.00 a.m.

On Friday, 13th April, John Holliday, took us again on a trip to Birmingham and, Worcester. In Birmingham we went to a predominantly black and coloured Residential Area and then to the University. We were met and taken on a conducted tour of the University by a lady Professor in charge of the African Study centre. We had lunch at the University restaurant after which we went to the library at the centre where to my greatest disappointment there were a handful of materials on Sierra Leone. We later left the library and drove to Worcester where we visited Worcester Cathedral built in 1084. It was a marvellous piece of Architectural work considering the time of construction. There were tombs of many notables including King George V. We left Worcester and returned to Leamington passing through Alcester and Stratford.

On the same day, a farewell party was organised by OWL/Leamington at John Holliday's House. Many members came to say farewell to us and to have their last talk with us. It was a grand party and there was a lot of food and drinks, more than enough for everybody. Gifts, photographs and presents were given to us. Champion School's OWL co-ordinator, Jim Layton, presented two pictures drawn by the sixth Form Students, a cartoon of assorted pens, pencils and crayons and a purse of 100.00. I thanked him and the school for the gesture. The money was left so that science Equipments will be bought for Ahmadiyya Secondary school. The pictures and pens were presented to the Principal on my return to Sierra Leone.

Saturday, 14th April, was used for packing and sorting out things for our return to Sierra Leone on the 15th April. The day was sunny which reminded me of my beloved Sierra Leone soon to return to. Later in the evening Joseph, Komba, David, Sheila and I had a lovely nightout. There was dancing and a lot of fun. We returned home to rest for our journey on Sunday.

On Sunday, 15th April, we left Leamington at 4.00 p.m. for Gatwick in two cars as we had a lot of luggage to take back with us.

Joseph, Bob, Sheila and Jane drove in Bob's car while Komba, David, Andrew and I went in Jane's car. Ann and Odette travelled to London by train. We arrived at Gatwick about 7.30 p.m. while others arrived later. The sorting out of the luggage at Gatwick gave us a lot of headache as additional luggage from friends materialised at the same time. With Jane's help and the kind gesture of the Airport officials, we finally succeeded in getting the luggage through. I did not like the inconvenience and I was greatly disappointed. This having been done and having passed through custom and Immigration officials, we went to the waiting room for our flight. It was delayed for an hour and we finally left Gatwick at 12.00 a.m. It was a night flight and I did not sleep. We landed at Lungi at 5.15 a.m. on Monday, 16th April, 1984. We went through the formalities at the Airport with the help of friends and relatives who were there to receive us. We crossed over to Targrin in Freetown and I travelled straight to Bo as I had Insulin to be delivered to Dr. Gibson while Joseph and Odette stayed the night in Freetown. I arrived in Bo at 12.30 p.m. and after having delivered the insulin, I took a taxi home. My wife and children were happy to receive me although my son was ill throughout my visit to Britain.

My general impression about the visit is that it was a huge success. Our programme was successful at every stage. A lot of people were met and friends were made although briefly. A lot of experiences were also gained. I was highly impressed with the educational organisation and the equipments provided in the schools I visited. The families, I stayed with were very nice, kind and hospitable. OWL was given a lot of publicity through the press, radio interviews, meetings, visits and conferences resulting in the formation of more links and the support of the Leamington county council and Oxfam to the Link. By and large, the visit was well programmed and necessary as a lot of misconceptions about issues were ironed out to the delight of OWL/Leamington and Bo. I wish to thank all those who helped in one way or the other to make our visit a success. I wish also to thank the families with whom I stayed and the county Councillors for whatever they did for us.

B.T. Smith.