

DECEMBER 1990

*Myf Hodgkin visited Bo from October 21 for 3 weeks. On her return, she reported back to the committee and gave us this account of her experiences:-*

It had taken Myf as long to get from Lungi airport to Freetown as it had taken her to get from Gatwick to Lungi! She was met by Raymond and his brother and Mrs Tarawali, who hinted to talk about a scheme for scout visits, and she eventually got to bed at 2.30 am. They were up at 6.30 to get to the bus, but there were no buses because of the petrol shortage, public transport does not run, only private operators who can afford to buy at back market prices. They eventually found a private minibus going to Bo and Kenema at the Shell depot and arrived in Bo at 3 pm that afternoon.

The first week she stayed with Joe and Rose Taylor. People started to find out that she had arrived and dropped in to see her. Appointments were made for the mornings and - evenings to avoid the intense heat of the mid afternoon and she started going round visiting the schools. Then on her first Saturday when enjoyed a meal with Regina Baion and Sam Stevens.

Regina, being the theatre sister at the Bo Government Hospital, took Myf there and showed her round. At the time they were preparing for a major operation and were "scrubbing up". No running water, of course. Myf felt that they were performing

With equipment that a field dressing station would turn their noses up at and it made her feel so angry at the inequality of it. The patient also has to pay for everything, every square inch of gauze they use, every pill, and if you run out of money and you don't pay, you die. The hospital equipment that we send is absolutely vital, as long as we can get it there!

At the end of the first week Myf transferred to the Training College and stayed with Mohammed Lapia and his family, where Mohammed is the Registrar. This was a very pleasant stay, during which there was a visit to a traditional village called Towama where she was introduced to the chief and shown round. (Later in her stay, Myf was also able to visit Mamboma, which had links with us in the past, where she was welcomed by Simeon Museray and where she met the school children there).

The College was very sparse and only had electricity for two hours a day in the evenings for students to study. There was no running water. She met the Principle and spoke to an assembly of the students.

Myf then stayed with Raymond James and his family in their house on the compound at the Bo commercial Secondary School. She was impressed with Raymond's school; the teachers knew what the Link was about and they asked the most perceptive questions.

She also visited Christ the King School, but there were only a few staff who had a free period, but she had the chance to address the whole school. They were all very keen to have pen friends.

At Ahmaddiyah School the staff were less interested than the students. The 6th form had some good questions for her and they were highly amused when told that corporal punishment is now illegal in Britain and also that polygamy was illegal!

She was very impressed with a visit to 'SLOIC' the Sierra Leone Opportunities Industrialisation Centre, a U. S. aided training centre for children who had not been able to complete their secondary schooling. Here they had courses in building construction, vehicle maintenance, office skills such as typing, shorthand and book-keeping, etc, and approved to do a very good job. In fact, Raymond's wife had been trained there and has now secretary at the Medical Research Council.

The teaching situation in the state schools was a cause for concern. They were again two months behind with their pay and most teachers cannot teach more than a four day week, since they have to go off and cultivate their farms or do whatever they can to survive. On the last Friday when Raymond went into the school there were only 20 out of the 40 teaching staff there for that reason.

Myf also had the opportunity of seeing the spring well, although she felt that it had not been fully completed to the original

specifications. However, the well was completely contained in its concrete surround and the hygiene was undoubtedly better, but it was still possible to get access to the water from above and put a dirty bucket in it!

There was one major meeting and Myf was very impressed that 40 people attended, because it was so difficult for them to turn out after their day's work and with the other activities they needed to be doing to survive. The thing that pleased them was the fact that someone had bothered to come and see the problems that they had got and to provide some bit of moral support and show solidarity with them. This is something we should really take note of. This was basically an OWL general meeting with their own agenda at which Myf was just one of the contributors. They were very concerned that we had not been able to continue sending them supplies and Myf was able to explain the breakdown in the shipping at the present time and how we were negotiating for more paper from the suppliers. Another item on the agenda was Johannes Mahler's pending trip as their representative to the Zimbabwe Linking Conference for southern partners.

Then finally at the end of her stay there was the farewell party, which was a delightful experience and very enjoyable evening. Myf made the point that a visit to Sierra Leone is not easy for anyone who goes. It is physically demanding: the food is fine - rice, fish, sauces, cassava, potato leaves, palm oil, but the extensive walking everywhere in the heat is hard work!