

BEAUFORT HILL MALE CHOIR

The Street Singers of 1926

In 1926, at the height of the Great Depression a number of Beaufort Male Choir members decided to undertake a street singing tour of the West Country to raise money to enable cobblers to buy leather to make shoes for destitute children in Beaufort and the surrounding area. Luckily, the accompanist Irving Davies kept a personal diary of the tour and this is his account.

The Street Singers of 1926

Presented to Mrs Hubert Palmer

Hello there- Mrs Palmer.

This is a true and accurate account of the experiences encountered by members of The Beaufort Hill Male Voice Party (which was conducted by Mr Edwin Herbert) in connection with their street-singing mission in various localities of Somersetshire, England to raise funds to help relieve the distress resulting from the long and bitter strike of the coalminers in 1926.

It is compiled by W. Irvine Davies (who was the party accompanist) as a result of his keeping a daily record of events and who is the only surviving member of the group of men who undertook this mission.

A special memory of my two good friends, Hubert and Oscar.

Introduction

Beaufort a village located in the northern extremity of the western valley, Monmouthshire, South Wales, and deep in the heart of the coal mining community was, together with other towns and villages, suffering acute (sic) distress as a direct result of the miners strike.

The effects were giving cause for great concern especially in respect of that entirely innocent section, namely – the children.

It was this fact more than any other which caused members of the Beaufort Hill Male Voice Party to volunteer their services to the local Distress Committee, to do open air singing in order to accrue funds. This suggestion for such an undertaking having come from the party chairman – Mr Hubert Davies.

Some of the Sunday School premises in the village had been placed at the disposal of the Distress Committee during week days only, and in these children's boots and shoes were being repaired by local cobblers, this service being rendered free of charge, but money was needed to purchase leather etc.

The party was advanced the sum of ten pounds from the Boot and Shoe Fund, to meet the initial expense of travelling to the city of Bristol, it having been decided that the area of operation was to be various parts of Somersetshire.

At this time I was the accompanist for the party, and having been temporarily laid off from my work at the Ebbw Vale General Offices through depression of trade, I was able to play my small part with the others in this unforgettable and worthy mission.

The experiences encountered were very varied, many being extremely amusing, while others

proved sad and serious.

I trust they will prove interesting to one and all with the added hope that- never again in human society will such missions be deemed necessary.

Members of the Beaufort Hill Male Voice Party who played their part, being –

Messrs.

Hubert Davies – Chairman

Alfred Davies – Secretary

Lewis Palmer – Treasurer

Hubert Palmer

Oscar Maynard

John Davies (King)

Joe Davies (Cricketer)

Ben Evans

Harry Davies

John Chislette

John Jones (Fitzroy)

Joe Bull

W. Irvine Davies (Accompanist)

Mr Edwin Herbert (Conductor) being self employed was unable to travel with us, but he would come along when a concert was arranged. Mr Richard Davies acted as his understudy.

The experiences of the mission

On the morning of May 15th 1926, thirteen members (Chairman Hubert Davies having already gone) assembled on the platform of the Ebbw Vale Great Western Railway station to await the arrival of the train which was to transport us to the city of Bristol.

We left Ebbw Vale at 7am, changed trains at Newport, then it was via the Severn Tunnel to Bristol where we arrived at 11.30am.

Leaving Stapleton Road station, we got to the street, where at a store we purchased a few loaves of bread, a supply of cheese, and bottles of pop. There at the roadside we enjoyed our first meal of the mission.

Of the ten pounds (initial advance) we now had just three pounds left.

Immediately following the meal we commenced the task of street-singing, and of a truth, it was by no means an easy one.

In one of the side streets we had formed a circle and were singing, two of our number being busy knocking upon doors soliciting financial help. It was then that an elderly lady approached us and handed one of the members a shilling, also a small flower pot which contained a fern plant. We understood the monetary gift, but as for the flower pot, this completely baffled us. Thanks was (sic) expressed but no questions were asked.

However, during the remainder of that day, every time we gathered around to sing that flower pot was placed on the ground, in the centre of the ring, in the hope that it's presence would bring us a degree of good luck.

On arrival at the district of Old Market, we got into contact with folk at the Labour Hall, and they were instrumental in securing accommodation for ten of our number at various houses in the locality.

Proceeding to the Bedminster district we spent the remaining hours until 8pm street-singing, and it proved very rewarding. Possibly the magic of the flower pot had worked.

Now it was time for ten fortunate fellows to head for their respective quarters, the remaining four, Hubert Palmer, Oscar Maynard, Joe Davies and myself received a half crown with which to find accommodation.

At 11.30pm, after searching a wide area, we found ourselves near Bristol Bridge, feeling very weary and tired. Hubert was leaning against a lamp standard very nearly asleep, when on the scene appeared a policeman, who said – 'Isn't it about time you fellows found a bed' to which Oscar replied – 'Sir, that's just what we've been looking for, but we've had no luck'. He was told who we were, and what we were doing. Then he said 'Fellows will you please follow me'. Leading us around a corner nearby, he knocked on the door of an eating house. The proprietor appeared and he was told the whole story, and of our need. 'Oh yes, I can put you all up for the night, the charge will be five shillings per head for bed and breakfast'. 'Thanks very much' says Oscar 'Come on boys, lets go up on the downs and sleep for nothing'.

We were asked by the man in blue what our financial status was. Hubert gave him the answer 'Ten bob between the four of us'.

'Oh well' says the proprietor – 'ten bob it will be'.

We expressed our thanks to the policeman, then went inside to enjoy a very welcome cup of tea.

A few minutes later we went upstairs for a much needed night's rest.

To our horror we were soon made aware of the fact that company other than human was present, also the church clock which towered up outside the window rendered an aria every half hour. Such conditions made the night uncomfortable and disturbing, however we were obliged to make the best of things. Going down to breakfast next morning we found a slice of bread on each of our plates, plus cups of tea.

We came to the conclusion that this was to comprise our breakfast because of the reduced charge. After eating the bread and drinking the tea, our previous conclusion was proved utterly unfounded. Before us was placed bacon and eggs, with another supply of bread and tea. After enjoying a most delightful breakfast no mention was made of our night's discomfort, just words of sincere thanks for his kindness.

We then left to meet the rest of the fellows at Tramway Centre.

Once again we visited the Bedminster district. After doing street-singing there for a few hours, we made for the Wills Tobacco factory, arriving just as the employees were leaving for lunch. Our efforts proved very rewarding. We partook of a light and inexpensive lunch, then caught the 2pm train to Clevedon. On arriving at Yatton Junction we were obliged to change, and was (sic) informed that the next train to Clevedon would be leaving at 4.10pm. This meant a wait in Yatton of about one and a half hours.

In order to make the fullest use of this waiting period, we decided to try our luck with some singing in the town. Just outside the railway station we saw a very large house located in quite extensive grounds.

We gathered around at the gateway entrance and sang three choruses, namely 'The Sailors Chorus', 'In Absence' and 'In the Sweet By and By' after which Hubert Palmer proceeded up the driveway to the door of the house. After knocking, the door was opened by a maid.

When he returned he related what had taken place.

The maid on being told it was a miner's choir from South Wales singing to help relieve the distress asked Hubert to wait while she went to see the master. On getting back she says 'The master says you are to clear off the premises immediately'. At that moment the master himself appeared on the scene, carrying in his hand a riding crop. Brandishing this before Hubert's face, he said – 'Clear off from here. You should be ashamed of yourselves. Why aren't you down the pit getting out the coal? Do you know, I have twenty men idle through you miners, so be off with you'?

This was a really terrific onslaught of words, in fact, far more than Hubert was able to withstand without comment. Keeping a watchful eye on that riding crop, and placing himself at a respectable distance, he said 'Do you know, it's a great wonder to me that you have twenty men working for you, with a face like that. Good day, and thanks for nothing'.

We did a little singing in the main street, and while doing so a lady named Mrs Leach invited us into her home and supplied us with a lovely tea. After expressing our thanks and gratitude, we continued singing until it was time to return to the railway station.

Financially we were about fifteen shillings better off.

We arrived in Clevedon at 4.45pm and commenced singing immediately, our first stand being in the centre of town known as 'The Triangle'. Here our efforts were greatly appreciated and highly rewarding.

Mr Robinson who owned a restaurant asked us into his establishment to partake of our second tea of the day. Also a gentleman who kept a fish and chip shop made us promise to accept his invitation to supper later that evening.

During our street-singing we were informed that a large women's meeting of the British Legion was in progress at Legion headquarters. We decided to pay them a visit to ask permission to sing to the assembly. Our request was granted. Both choral and individual items were rendered. Our efforts were well received, for which we got the proceeds of a collection which was taken up amounting to the sum of thirty shillings, for which our treasurer, Mr Lewis Palmer, expressed grateful thanks.

As we were about to leave one of those present happened to notice the badge that was in the lapel of Mr Hubert Davies's coat. Asking what it represented, Hubert replied – 'It represents the political organisation with which I am associated, namely the Labour Party'.

This reply was evidently not to the liking of the lady in question who said 'If this fact had been known previously, there is the probability your request to sing would have been denied.'

We left without any further comment, and proceeded to our friend's fish and chip shop to be his guests for supper.

It was really lovely- before leaving he received very grateful and sincere thanks.

Our efforts in Clevedon had been highly productive.

We left at 9.30pm to return to Bristol.

Unfortunately the hospitality of the previous night was not available to the ten members, so we were all obliged to seek accommodation. Once again we searched diligently but unsuccessfully, and at midnight there we were in a faggot and pea shop in Old Market, feeling very disconsolate.

Harry Davies volunteered to go out and try his luck. Fifteen minutes later he returned and we could see by his face that something had happened. He said 'There's a fellow outside who told me he felt sure we could get lodging at the place where he stays'. 'Bring the fellow in' was the chorus of us all. The young man confirmed his statement to Harry, adding it was at St Michael's Hill, which he said was about a fifteen minute walk away. Without further ado we were on our way.

The time passed – fifteen, twenty, thirty minutes, and we began to get concerned. Anyway, a few minutes later, after climbing the 'Christmas Steps' we came to St Michael's Hill, and nearly at the top we found ourselves standing at the door of a house on the left hand side called 'Fernbank'.

The young man knocked and the door was opened by an elderly lady to whom he said 'Ma, fourteen miners from South Wales. Can you put them up?'

It was a great disappointment when we heard her say 'Only one vacant bed I have'.

At this point brother Oscar intervened to say – 'Ma, if you will only allow us to come in and sit on chairs, or even on the floor. Anything will do because we are all dead beat'.

Whether it was Oscar's appealing personality or just a matter of sheer sympathy it is hard to say, anyway we were all asked to go inside, and she promised to make things as comfortable as possible for us.

Richard Davies, Lewis Palmer and John Jones, the three eldest members, occupied the solitary bed, while the rest of us slept in chairs, on the top of the table, while some got down on the floor. Fact was – we were indoors, and we felt extremely grateful. The day had been long and tiring, so all enjoyed a good night's rest.

Next morning our landlady Mrs Cotterall had prepared a lovely breakfast for us, and we were informed that, if we cared to return, she would endeavour to make things much more comfortable for us. The charge would be two shillings and sixpence per head for bed and breakfast.

Her great kindness, and the reasonableness of the charge impelled us to say – we'll be back

Following breakfast we held a meeting to plan the day's programme. We decided to do some singing in the vicinity of the docks. After making a few pitches we had the pleasure of going aboard the destroyers, where we sang a few choruses for the crews. A while later, we again caught the employees of Wills tobacco factory as they were leaving for lunch. Although this was the second occasion, the support we got was wonderful.

While looking in the window of a restaurant which was advertising 'Hot Lunches for Half a Crown' a young man came out and said 'If you are looking for a good meal this is the place to get one'. Treasurer Lewis Palmer explained to him who we were and what we were doing, also adding 'The advertisement in the window is very appealing, but one shilling per head is the limit of our expenditure for a meal'. The young man said 'I already know who you are, and what you are doing because just a short while ago I heard you singing. Oh come on in. Everything will be alright. You won't regret it. I'm just going to order mine, so let's go'.

Do you know, somehow or other we found ourselves seated with (sic) inside that restaurant. We enjoyed a delicious meal, after which I noticed our treasurer, Lewis Palmer, was figuring out the cost. The young man also noticed this whereupon he rose to say – 'Mr Treasurer, don't you worry about that side of the matter – this is my treat, and I hope you have all enjoyed it.

He settled the entire bill which amounted to – one pound, seventeen shillings and sixpence. Fourteen of us – plus himself.

We thanked him sincerely. Then wishing us good luck and God speed in our endeavours, our Good Samaritan friend went on his way, never realising that his kind and generous act would be placed on record.

What a wonderful experience to remember.

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Leaving the restaurant we set off to catch the train to the country village of Pill, just a few miles outside Bristol. Here we did street-singing during which another outstanding act of kindness and generosity was performed, this time by an elderly lady.

Coming up to one of the collectors she took out her purse, and emptied its entire contents into his hand. It amounted to the sum of nine pence. He thanked her but felt to accept all she had would be quite wrong. It was only after much persuasion that she agreed to take back sixpence, while he retained three pence.

To me, this was the incident of the Widow and the Mite being repeated.

After receiving splendid support in this small, village we caught a train to the seaside town of Portishead. Before commencing operations, we all took a stroll on the promenade, filling our lungs with sea air. Later while singing we were told that a meeting being held in the Assembly Hall might be worth a visit. We went, and were allowed to sing to those present, for which we received the proceeds of a collection which amounted to the sum of –twenty four shillings.

On this occasion there were no queries.

We found our landlady Mrs Cotterall had, as promised made things much more comfortable for us. An extra bed, in addition to other kinds of sleeping facilities.

Quite a big improvement.

Next morning we decided to operate in the area known as Bishopworth. Here we did a great amount of street-singing. After lunch, I made a point of noting how many times we gathered around to sing. From 1pm until 5.30pm we did so on sixty one occasions, each time we sang three choruses. One hundred and eighty-three choruses in four and a half hours.

Not a bad afternoon's work.

In this highly populated area our procedure was to pitch at the beginning, middle and end of each street. The people were ever so kind and generous. In addition to giving us their financial support, many would also bring out jugs of water, and occasionally cups of tea.

The warm weather and the effect of so much singing made these gifts of refreshment so acceptable.

In the evening we were relieved of further outdoor singing through having been accorded the privilege of singing at a concert in connection with the local branch of the Cooperative Wholesale Society. Once again we received the proceeds of a collection amounting to two pounds and seventeen shillings.

After a hard and tiring day, we returned to St. Michael's Hill to enjoy a good night's rest.

Next morning we did street-singing in the Clifton area, and in the afternoon in the vicinity of the suspension bridge. In this very residential part of Bristol, another memorable incident took place. Going up to the door of a very large home, we sang three choruses. In response to our knock, the door was opened by a young man who gave us five shillings. Thanking him we left, but just as we got to the gate, a young lady hailed us from the house with a request that we return and go inside. We entered a very large room which contained a full-sized billiard table, as was (sic) told to make ourselves comfortable and thoroughly at home. She pressed a bell on the wall, in response to which a maid appeared. She was requested to transform the billiard table into a dining table, and to lay tea for sixteen. When this was done, we joined the young lady and gentleman at the table and enjoyed a most delightful tea. There was a lively piano in the room, so after the meal we gave them a small concert of choral and individual items, with myself (sic) providing the accompaniment. This pleased them very much. As we were leaving the young lady handed Treasurer Lewis Palmer another five shillings, and expressed best wishes in all our endeavours. We thanked them both very much.

Upon reaching the other side of the street we made an enquiry as to who was residing there. We were told it was the young son of a coal-owner who had quite recently married the charming young lady.

This was indeed very heartening news, considering the previous incident in Yatton, when we were told to 'clear off the premises'.

Once again the day's labour proved very rewarding.

That night at Fernbank a very extraordinary and memorable experience.

Hubert, Oscar, Joe Davies and I were sleeping in the front room downstairs, Hubert and Joe in a three-quarter sized bed, with Oscar and I occupying a combination of couch and two chairs, which was positioned right beneath the window. At well past midnight, Oscar who was sleeping nearest the window with a start and shouted 'Boys-there's someone outside this window'.

We were all up like rockets.

We remained silent and listened but nothing more was seen or heard. I suggested to Oscar that I would sleep near the window, a suggestion he promptly agreed to.

I had hardly made myself comfortable when I too saw a face at the window. Nudging Oscar, I quietly whispered 'Oscar – there is someone outside'. Up he jumped, shouting 'I told you there was, but you all wouldn't believe me'. Once again we were all up. With Hubert making all kinds of suggestions.

Then we heard a knock on the front door, but no-one made a move. The knocking continued until we heard footsteps coming down the stairway. Peeping through the partially open door we saw it was Mrs Cotterall. We heard talking, then the sound of footsteps proceeding from the front door and down the hallway. We scampered back, then to our horror and surprise the room door was pushed open. It was indeed a very embarrassing situation, as we were all minus regular night attire, being clad in just our shirts.

Into the room came a young lady of about twenty-five years, in a most drunken condition. A bottle under one arm, and cigarettes dropping out of her handbag. Following her was Mrs Cotterall. Then to our surprise she said 'Is there anyone here who can play Come Back to Erin?' 'Oh yes' came the response from Hubert and Oscar-'Here he is!'

I was picked up and deposited on the piano stool, where rather reluctantly I commenced playing the required piece of music. Then the voice of our night visitor commenced singing (or to be more truthful) making a horrible noise.

No semblance of tune or time whatsoever.

This was heard by the contingent who were upstairs, who in a very short time appeared on the scene led by Mr John Jones.

He soon got to grips with the situation by saying 'Miss- we would very much prefer your absence'. Whether it was his silver hair or his beaming countenance, I don't know. Anyway, without another word from anyone, she left the room. It was all over in a matter of minutes with everyone returning to their respective quarters.

Next morning at the breakfast table Oscar made an enquiry in respect to our night visitor. He got no reply from Mrs Cotterall but we did notice how perturbed she was. 'What's troubling you, Ma?' says Oscar, then we saw tears trickling down her cheeks.

Putting his arm around her shoulders he said 'Don't cry Ma- tell your old friend all about it.'

Summoning up sufficient courage, she said 'That young woman you saw last night is someone very near and dear to me. She arrived late last night, from where I don't know. I hadn't seen her for three years, and whether I shall see her again is a question I can't answer. At 5 o'clock this morning she was gone again. I feel so very sorry you were disturbed last night'.

What could we say in the light of such a sorrowful and heartbreaking experience.

After breakfast we caught the train and paid our second visit to Clevedon in order to complete the work we had started a few days earlier.

We sang all along the promenade, then we got up into the bandstand. Here to the crowd of people who had gathered, one of our number, Mr Richard Davies, the wonderful bass-baritone soloist from Beaufort Hill accomplished something very remarkable.

He sang the well known song 'Lead Kindly Light' composed by D.Pughe Evans, one which for many years he had sung at eisteddfodau throughout South Wales with great success. It was a remarkable rendering because, without the assistance of an accompanist, he kept perfect pitch right throughout this long and very beautiful sacred composition.

His singing so delighted the hearers that quite a large collection was forthcoming.

A truly wonderful accomplishment.

A short respite from duty, we went into the park, sat down by the lake and enjoyed some light refreshment.

Later during the afternoon we found a social gathering in progress where about one hundred children were being entertained to a free tea. We did not go inside the building, but rendered a few choruses below the window of the upstairs assembly room. Coins soon began to clatter to the ground, these falling from the hands of happy and smiling children, and the few adults who were present.

Quite a delightful and worthwhile experience.

On getting to 'The Triangle' we received invitations from various kind folk to stay in Clevedon overnight, invitations which we gratefully accepted. Lewis Palmer, John Chislette and I were the guests of Mrs. Harber, who resided on Pizy Avenue, quite near the sea front.

Next morning at the request of Mrs. Harber the entire company were gathered together and informed we were all going for a ramble along the coast which was to be followed by a picnic. This took place at a delightful spot overlooking the waters of the Bristol Channel. How lovely it was.

On getting back we expressed our grateful thanks to Mrs. Harber, and all those who had treated us so admirably.

It had cost us nothing.

We spent the remainder of the day street-singing, then at 7.30pm we caught the train back to Bristol.

Next morning we held a meeting at which it was decided to send the sum of ten pounds back to the Boot and Shoe Fund officials.

There was a knock on the front door which was opened by Mrs. Catherall. She informed us it was the curate of St. Aidan's Church, and he was desirous of speaking with us. After being shown into the room he told us he had been sent down by Vicar Rogers to ascertain

If we would accept an invitation to be his guests at the vicarage, as there were a number of matters he would like to discuss with us.

It took just a motion by Hubert, seconded by Oscar that we accept to settle the matter. We thanked him for his visit, and asked him to inform Vicar Rogers that we would be at the vicarage at 11.30am.

After concluding our meeting we travelled by bus, arrived on time and were (sic) greeted by Vicar and Mrs. Rogers. We were taken on a tour of inspection of the church and grounds, then returned to partake of a lovely lunch, to be followed by a round table conference.

The vicar expressed his fervent desire to help us as much as possible, in a way that would bring financial assistance without our having to do a great amount of open air singing.

Would we be prepared to join him at a meeting which he was due to address that evening near St. George's Park; secondly, would we sing a few choruses? Then came a request that we sing the next day (Sunday) at an afternoon meeting which he called Men's Parliament, and again at the evening church service. He told us the proceeds of the open air meeting, and the major portion of the Sunday meetings would be handed to Treasurer Lewis Palmer. We were pleased and delighted to accept all these kind suggestions.

He then enquired what we were paying for accommodation. He was informed it was two shillings and six pence per head for bed and breakfast. He said 'I can save you ten shillings a night by placing at your disposal the bell tent which I have on the lawn. This will accommodate four'. He suggested that four of the members use it for two nights which would save us the sum of one pound. This suggestion was also accepted (although we had no intention of it making any difference to Mrs. Cotterall our kind landlady.

The four tent dwellers were to be - Richard Davies, Ben Evans, Joe Davies – and myself. After tea, we accompanied the vicar to the open air meeting where we sang a number of choruses. During the course of his address he explained to the audience the work we were undertaking, and appealed for their generous support.

We got the proceeds of a collection amounting to two pounds and eight shillings.

The vicar returned to the vicarage while we took a stroll through the park. At 9pm the four set off for the vicarage, the remainder heading back to St. Michael's Hill.

After supper with vicar and Mrs. Rogers, the four of us were taken to our sleeping quarters, and found it to be very cosy and comfortable, four army stretchers and plenty of bed clothing. We were told breakfast would be at 8.30am. If we arose upon hearing the church bell at 8am it would give us nice time.

We promised to observe these instructions.

Bidding the vicar goodnight, we were soon enjoying a welcome night's rest.

Thinking I had heard the church bell next morning, I got up, dressed, and took a walk around the grounds. Getting back to the tent, all was quiet, the other three being still soundly asleep. I was about to give them a call, but felt it advisable to check the time. To my amazement found it was only 6.20am. What I had taken to be the church bell was in fact the bell on the workmen's tram which had passed by on the road the other side of the vicarage wall. I returned to bed.

We distinctly heard the right signal at 8am and presented ourselves for breakfast right on time.

After s stroll around the area in close proximity to the vicarage we attended morning service at the church.

In the afternoon we were joined by the other members and fulfilled our promise to sing at the Men's Parliament. This proved to be a free and easy meeting run on the line of religious discussion.

Returning to the vicarage we were all entertained to a lovely tea. Mrs. Rogers while preparing the meal had accidentally cut he finger with the bread knife. Mr. John Chislette, a very keen herbalist asked to see the finger, after which he went outside and returned with a leaf from one of the trees. Placing the leaf over the cut he then bandaged the finger and requested Mrs. Rogers to leave it like that until the next day.

We attended the evening church service, and sang three sacred choruses. Again vicar Rogers explained to the congregation the work we were engaged in and appealed for a generous financial response.

At the close of the service treasurer Lewis Palmer was handed the sum of- seven pounds, five shillings and two pence.

One pound, seven shillings and six pence the proceeds from the Men's Parliament service and five pounds, seventeen shillings and eight pence, the major portion of the collection at the church service.

This was indeed a wonderful help to the fund.

That night the same four took advantage of the bell tent accommodation and the next morning I experienced no difficulty in respect to the time.

We met the rest of the fellows and spent most of the day street-singing in the area surrounding the church, the support we received being most gratifying.

Mr. John Chislette paid a visit to the vicarage to see Mrs. Rogers regarding her finger. On his return he informed us – not a trace of the cut could be seen, and this fact was verified when we returned to the vicarage to spend out third night in the bell tent.

Next morning we left the vicarage, but not before we had, on behalf of all the party members expressed our very deep and sincere thanks for all they had done.

Vicar Rogers replied – the cause you represent is worthy of all the support possible, and it has been our joy and pleasure to help to the best of our ability.

Every blessing on the folks back home.

Two really wonderful persons, with their hearts in the right place. We were truly grateful.

We then set of to join the others at Fernbank, St Michael's Hill.

Mr Hubert Davies, our Chairman, caught the train to Swindon to see if that area was worthy of our attention.

We decided to do street-singing in the district directly above the Colston Hall.

Here our efforts proved most rewarding.

On his return from Swindon later in the day, Hubert informed us there didn't appear to be much prospect there but he thought a good place would be the city of Bath.

It was therefore decided that we go to Bath the next morning.

Before retiring that night Hubert related an experience while travelling back in the train from Swindon. The railway carriage was occupied by four people. A married couple – a young lady in her teens- and himself. During the journey the married couple were deeply concerning themselves with matters in respect of the mining problem, and their remarks about the South Wales miners left a very nasty taste in Hubert's mouth.

Knowing how untrue such remarks were, he allowed them to continue until the opportune moment came for him to intervene, and he did so in no uncertain manner. Addressing them he said – 'Pardon me, have you ever met a miner from South Wales?' 'No' was their reply. 'Well' said Hubert, 'You are experiencing the pleasure of looking at one at this very moment, and right now I am on my way to join another thirteen in Bristol. Do you know what we are doing? I will tell you. Singing in the streets to buy leather to put on the feet of little children. How much do you pay for a ton of coal?' The man replied 'Two pounds five shillings.' Well I'll tell you what we get for cutting a tone – four shillings. Would you like to try it for four shillings? We are not men of evil intent as you have inferred, but hard working and God-fearing people who desire a measure of fair play and justice, and a decent place in human society. There would be no want and distress in the Welsh valleys, if we were treated as human beings and not as machines'. (Note from the author- I like that part very much).

These must have been strange words to the couple, because a remarkable change took place. Harsh words were now being replaced by words of humble apology. They were not aware such conditions existed. The man said 'We are truly sorry for having spoken such cruel words. Will you please forgive us?' He took out his wallet, relieved it of a pound note and said-'Will you please accept this from two misguided and ill-informed persons?'

There is more to follow.

The young lady who had been listening intently to all that had been said, opened her handbag, and addressing Hubert said – ‘Sir, and will you please accept this small contribution from me?’ It was two half-crowns- five shillings.

Next morning we all caught the train to the city of Bath. On arrival we immediately commenced singing operations in the main thoroughfare, but in a short time we met members of a miner’s choir from Pontypridd, a town in the heart of the Rhondda Valley. We were advised by them to discontinue singing, their reason being – they had applied to the city authorities for permission to sing, but this had been denied them. They did not want to see us get into trouble. We thanked them. Nevertheless we decided to continue singing until we were stopped. Having not applied for permission, we felt this was the procedure to adopt.

We continued singing right along the main street where the business establishments and the folk out on a shopping expedition gave us excellent support.

One thing was very noticeable about the city- its cleanliness- you could nearly eat off the street. We got in touch with various folk who recommended addresses where we might get accommodation.

We all got fixed up.

Hubert Palmer and I stayed with a lady who lived near the market place.

A county cricket match was being played between the counties of Somersetshire and Derbyshire. We felt that singing to crowds would be less strenuous, also that the financial aspect would be improved.

We paid the admission charge of one shilling per head and entered the cricket ground. There was quite a good crowd on hand. We saw all that day’s play, because it was only during the lunch and tea intervals that we had the opportunity to do any singing. Each of these intervals lasted 30 minutes. While singing two of our number were busy taking up a collection. The venture proved well worth while in every respect. We enjoyed the cricket, and our singing brought forth splendid recompense.

Our treasurer was overjoyed to receive the sum of – nine pounds, fourteen shillings and seven pence.

Returning to the city after the game a very amusing incident took place.

Having received a little extra spending money from home, I decided upon trying a different brand of cigarette. Going into a tobacconist shop I noticed my two good friends, Hubert and Oscar in close attendance. They were waiting for me outside. I asked the young lady shop assistant what was the price of the Grey’s cigarettes. She replied – ‘They are one shilling and sixpence for a packet of twenty’. The she said ‘Are you singing with the choir?’ I replied ‘Yes, I am.’ In that case’ she went on ‘just give me nine pence and everything will be all right.’ Thanking her I left the shop to find my two good friends with their faces practically glued to the window. I said ‘Can you see what the price of Grey’s cigarettes are?’ ‘One and sixpence for twenty’ Hubert replied. ‘Well’ I said ‘I have just had twenty for nine pence’. Turning to Oscar he said ‘How much money have you got Oscar?’ ‘Only tuppence’ was his reply. ‘How much have you got?’ ‘Oh just a penny more than you’ was Hubert’s reply. ‘I know’ says Hubert, ‘let’s go in and see if she’ll give us five Woodbines for a penny’. In they went, but the ten Woodbines cost them four pence (not tuppence as they were hoping). Turning to me Oscar said ‘You must be better looking than we are!’

After a good laugh we joined the others to continue the work of street-singing.

On getting to the market place we found a political meeting was in progress. The crowd that had assembled was being addressed by a member of the Conservative party. We stayed to listen for a while, then the speaker issued a challenge to debate with any member of the audience who would have the privilege of choosing the subject of debate. He also stated that a collection would be taken, the proceeds of which would go to the winner of the debate, or to any worthy cause. This was an opportunity too good to pass up as far as our Chairman Mr Hubert Davies was

concerned.

Hubert, a wonderful orator and a very capable debater, immediately accepted the challenge. He was asked to go to the platform, then came the question – 'Sir, and what do you wish the subject to be?'

Hubert replied- 'Being a member of the coal mining profession the subject will be –The Coal Miner versus The Coal Owner'.

They were each to speak for fifteen minutes, and the winner would be decided according to the measure of applause from the audience.

The challenger was to speak first.

During the course of his remarks he made references which criticised the miners and held them responsible for the trouble and strife within the industry.

While he was speaking a few of our company assisted in taking up the collection.

At the close of his address the challenger received no more than mild applause.

Hubert then mounted the platform to reply. I am not exaggerating in the slightest degree when I say that, after speaking for no more than five minutes it was noticed that the challenger was no longer with us, he having very quietly stolen away never to be seen by us again. Hubert continued to speak until his fifteen minutes of time had elapsed, and was greeted with a burst of applause and shouts of good luck.

The collection amounted to one pound, seven shillings and four pence. Quite a nice help on for the fund, and gained without hardly any effort apart from Hubert's outstanding and brilliant oratorical contribution.

That night we all returned to the same billets.

Next morning we once again decided to go where the crowd was. We paid an admission charge of six pence and attended a large fete and gala which was being held in Victoria Park. Quite a large number were in attendance and this suited our purpose splendidly. We gathered around to sing on a number of occasions getting excellent financial support for our efforts. Feeling in need of a short respite from duty Hubert announced a thirty minute period of relaxation. At the end of this period we were all to meet at the park gate. Oscar and I went strolling together during which a very amusing incident took place.

As we were walking along a very smartly dressed young lady passed by. Oscar, always ready for a bit of fun, commenced to whistle after she had gone about thirty yards. He no doubt thought she would turn around and walk back. To my horror this was just what she did. 'Great Scot' says Oscar, 'she's coming back. Come on 'let's sit down on this seat'. We did so, and I took a book from my pocket and pretended to read.

Very soon a head appears, over my shoulder, and a feminine voice said – 'What are you reading?' Immediately these words were spoken Oscar said 'Now then, two's company – three is none. I'll hurry along and find the others. Don't be long'.

Then he was gone in a flash, leaving me to tackle the situation single handed. By now the fair member of the opposite sex had seated herself beside me. I was completely at my wits end, but I did summon up sufficient courage to hold conversation. I explained to her who I was, and what we were doing, and she showed a very keen interest. I told her I was pleased to make her acquaintance, but wished it had been at a more convenient time. She was quite reasonable about the whole thing expressing her best wishes for the success of our work. She got up and we bade each other farewell and parted.

Hurrying on my way to find the others I happened to glance to my left and there trying to hide behind the trunk of a tree was Oscar. I said-'And what can you say you are doing there?' to which he replied – 'Well you see I thought it might be wise to keep my eye on you. Remember, you are the junior partner and under our care.'

After a jolly good laugh we were on our way and found the rest of the company waiting for us at the park gate.

Returning to the streets of the city we did a great amount of singing during which a fashionably dressed woman approached Mr. Lewis Palmer and said- 'You miners should be ashamed of yourselves. Instead of scrounging in the streets you should all be down the coal pit getting out the coal. You don't deserve help.'

As she continued this shower of abuse her top set of dentures kept dropping. Possibly she had run out of dental powder. Anyway our treasurer, always very quick in seizing an opportunity turned upon her and said – ‘Madam, do you know it would be a Godsend if those things were to drop down your throttle.’

This settled the matter. She turned on her heels and departed without saying another word. That evening we left Bath and returned to Bristol to wind up the mission.

Early next morning we bade farewell to our good friend and landlady Mrs. Cotterall Thanking her for the grand way she had looked after us. Tears were in her eyes.

We caught the 10.30am train from Stapleton Road and arrived back in Ebbw Vale at 2.45pm on June 3rd 1926.

We had been away for two weeks and five days.

In addition to the ten pounds which had been returned to the Boot and Shoe Fund Committee while we were away, the sum of forty pounds was turned over to them on our return home.

They were extremely grateful.

Our mission was at an end but very truthfully it had been an unforgettable experience.

The folk of Somersetshire had shown us great kindness and a high degree of generosity. Our deep and sincere thanks to one and all.

It will rank among the most outstanding of my personal experiences, and how proud I have always felt at having been highly privileged to play my small part in such a worthy undertaking and with such a wonderful company of my fellow men.

My wife Ev and I, when visiting Bristol four years later in 1930 to see a pantomime also enjoyed the pleasure of calling at Fernbank, St Michael's Hill.

Mrs. Cotterall was still alive and residing there.

How thrilled she was when I told her who I was.

We were taken on a tour of inspection, and found there was hardly any change in the layout.

After being entertained to a lovely fish tea, we sat and chatted about the many experiences of our stay in 1926. Her first question was- ‘How are my two boys- Hubert and Oscar?’

Oh yes, she knew the names alright.

I made bold to ask if she had seen or heard anything of her loved one since that memorable night visitation. ‘No’ she replied ‘I have neither seen or heard anything of her since that night’. What a tragedy.

How lovely it was seeing her again.