

The great singer, actor and Civil Rights campaigner Paul Robeson visited the North-east of England numerous times in the 1940's and 1950's. On one occasion he was given an open top bus procession round Newcastle City Centre. Here is an eyewitness account from someone who heard Paul Robeson sing in Newcastle in the late 1950's and had the privilege of meeting the great man.

### Happy Memories

During my long life (now aged 85), I have had a variety of experiences, visited many beautiful places in our wonderful world and met some exceptional people.

One unforgettable event took place on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1958, in Newcastle's City Hall, where I attended many concerts.

The highlight for me was the one where PAUL ROBESON was the soloist. He was a mighty man in many respects, whose voice I had only known from the radio and gramophone.

With his accompanist, Laurence Brown, the huge audience (I was seated behind Robeson), were treated to a variety of songs, (both serious and secular from all over the world). These included "Ol' Man River" from "Show Boat" (when he took the lead), "Ma Curly Headed Baby", "Shortnin' Bread", "Let My People Go" and "Joe Hill", which was new to me.

After this moving concert, my father wrote to Paul Robeson, as always a fan, expressed his appreciation and asked if a record could be obtained here. Months passed, then a postcard arrived with Paul's photo signed and saying, "Thank you – I will make the record."

This card and my record are my treasured possessions.

Later I had a visit to Stratford where I attended a performance of Othello in the Festival Theatre. Paul Robeson (the only black man in the cast), took the lead and Sam Wannamaker was Iago – an unforgettable event.

Apart from being a fine singer and actor, Paul Robeson was well-known as an athlete, lawyer and social activist, all over the world. He was a big influence for PEACE and freedom for many oppressed peoples and suffered for the stand he took for the Civil Rights movement.

Best known as a son of an escaped slave, he was eventually honoured by many and in the words of the actor Sydney Poitier, "when Paul Robeson died, it marked the passing of a magnificent giant, whose presence among us conferred nobility on us all."

It was a great privilege for me to have met him and later read details of his life story. Certainly 'My Hero'.

Margaret Stevenson