

## **Visit to Bristol**

### **Babafemi A. Badejo, Ph.D**

My first time of visiting Bristol, England was on May 14, 2019. It was a dinner visit with my bosom friend Tayo Eboda to meet with our former Mathematics teacher at Ijebu-Ode Grammar School, Mr. Tony Finch. A multi-talented teacher who taught Mathematics, Add Maths, French as part of being a polyglot. I remember that he was comfortable in too many languages that included Polish, German etc. By the time he was leaving Ijebu-Ode in June 1970 to travel for 6 months before proceeding to Saudi Arabia, he had taught himself Arabic. Subsequently settling in Malaysia, he added Malay to his many European languages. The last time I met younger Tony Finch with a lot of beard was in 1975 in England when I got to meet his parents, sister and friends. For Tayo, it was 1970.

But Tony Finch was more than just a teacher in my case. I had, in 1967 requested that he be my school father. He accepted. He also was in many ways one of my benefactors. He opened my mind to critical thinking as I questioned so many things that my contemporaries accepted as given. Materially, he supported my parents in paying my tuition in advance and my dad, my mum and my maternal uncle struggled and paid back gradually. So, I didn't have to miss classes for failure to pay school fees on time.

In addition, he took me on a good number of his travels to Republic of Dahomey as Republic of Benin was known those days. The downward trend for Nigeria had started and many of the expatriates went across the border to buy basic needs, including tyres, etc. The civil war had started and the Electricity Corporation of Nigeria (ECN) as NEPA was known then before NEPA, itself became PHCN and uncountable names today as grabbers deceived into believing that privatization would give us electricity in abundance. Like other State entities that were and are still being grabbed or yet to be sold as promised by presidential candidate Atiku Abubakar and his friends with respect to NNPC, it has been the same downward spiral that is buoyed by subsidies from our oil wealth, which oil itself is catastrophically being grabbed through blocs that allow all sorts of cabals to share in billions of dollars as many Nigerians go hungry. These billionaires can hardly point to what problems of society they solved that concentrated wealth in their hands. Ask them what they have done to make Forbes list? Unlike Gates, Bezos and Oprah, they can only respond that it is the act of God ooooooooooh.

I travelled with Mr. Finch widely in Western and Mid-Western Nigeria. We did some of these in his Volkswagen WAS 235 at a stage. The Volkswagen Beetle was a great car. I chose it as my first car when some of my mates were buying bigger cars. General Yakubu Gowon thought that we could manage the franchise and develop into building our needs from the German technology. But some of those who ran it aground are still alive pontificating on anti-corruption with no-one asking about the past.

And when Mr. Finch decided that he was moving out of Nigeria, he bought a Mobylete. This development did not halt our traveling zeal. We had free access to UAC guest houses from his relationships. UAC itself is now a shadow of itself and lost the glory of a major conglomerate that is older than Nigeria having started as Royal Niger Company. Its Nigerian managers crippled it. And some claim the answer to the Nigerian economy is privatization.

We reminisced about the civil war and late Odumegwu Ojukwu. He had, with Tai Solarin (one of our unsung heroes because today we only worship thieves with money and not idealists who sacrificed a lot for a just Nigeria), visited Eastern Nigeria or if you like Biafra to provide humanitarian support. Have we learnt anything from that war? What ideals could be pointed to as guiding us away from our self-destruction tendencies when the rest of the world, (of course outside of Africa), are moving in leaps and bounds? I

guess we can collectively reflect. Today, people juggle for power to appropriate national patrimony instead of offering service to compatriots.

We didn't bother delving too much into the problems of Nigeria as we had about one hour forty-five minutes maximum on the ground. We decided to tackle our Italian meal of Mushroom soup and Sole fish. We reminisced about Ijebu-Ode Grammar School of the late 1960s. There was discipline those days. No teacher dares to flog or make difficult kids cut grass these days. Mr. Finch wanted to know if his two-room apartment was still standing. I noted that it was a shadow of itself when I visited the school with Sesan Ekisola in 2018. We reminisced about some of the dedicated teachers of those days. He informed us about our science/biology teacher Mr. MacFarlane being weak in Surrey, England. We talked of the Indian Goan couple-the Anthonys with husband teaching physics and wife mathematics. Mr. Finch regretted that he lost contact with Col. Olu Juwape who he travelled with a lot before Juwape joined the education corps of the Nigerian Army. We remembered Mr. Lawrence Akinyede - "Dr. Law" who was a guru in geography. Among students, he remembered names like late Alfred Gbodimowo from my own Odoenlu town, Eribake from Ikala, Shadare Dadeolu, Kunle Odumade and Olusesan Ekisola with the latter 3 being my classmates who also related with Anthony John Finch.

If we missed the last train, it would be catastrophic. So, despondent we dragged the older friend of ours off the table and walked across to the train station towards London without knowing when we'll get to bed after a long day.