

**WHEN A VICTIM OF CRIME REFUSED POLICE
ASSISTANCE: THE CASE OF A NIGERIAN IMMIGRANT
IN LONDON, 1937-38**

By

Kemi Rotimi, PhD

[Paper read at the 25th Annual Conference of the Police History Society, UK, held at Holiday Inn, Padworth, Reading West, 17-19 September 2010]

This is the story of a Nigerian immigrant who fell victim of confidence tricksters in London in 1937 but when the police waded into the case, the victim bluntly refused to co-operate with the investigation and thereby allowed the criminals to evade justice. The financial losses suffered by the victim led to loss of schooling by the three children he brought into the country; depression, indebtedness, and gambles with weird business proposals in a determined bid to rebuild his fortunes. He never made it and when a bold was made to rescue him from Nigeria, he snubbed it and literally disappeared.

Stephen Norapalmer Arthur-Worrey was a Nigerian businessman who had made some fortune from tin and gold mining in Jos, Nigeria before the mid-1930s. He had only elementary schooling and had been a petty trader in his home region in one of the Southern Provinces. In 1930, he went to the Northern Provinces and took up mining. He was the registered lessee of 'a certain amount of tin and gold mining land.' In April 1937, at the age of 44, he decided to emigrate to the United Kingdom amid reservations by his family members and friends in Nigeria apparently because he was 'a man of rather weak intellect who [was] liable to be duped.'

He had high hopes on the good life in England both for himself and his three sons that he took along. The eldest among the sons was only aged 9. He was also accompa-

nied by a Mr E.S. Wilkey, described as 'a gentleman of colour' who was his employee. Before he left Nigeria, he had reportedly 'expressed his intention of being presented to Their Majesties.' This unreasonable quest for social relevance turned out to be the beginning of his ordeal and ruin.

Upon arrival in London, he took up residence at 62 Camden Road, Camden Town, N.W.1. He moved fast on his

agenda for his children by enrolling them in an elite school, King's College, St. Leonard's-on-Sea. In a letter to Home the police officers apprehended them, querying his relations in Nigeria, dated 10 June 1937, Arthur-

Worrey gleefully reported that the school was exclusive to children of 'the Nobles of this city'; it had no other black children except his own! The education of his children in the school would lead to the betterment of the 'Black race'. But dreams die first. By the end of that year, the children were out of that school for inability to pay. How did Arthur-Worrey come by impecuniosity and grief?

On 12 June 1937, Detective Inspector John Junkin of the CID, New Scotland Yard interviewed Mr E. S. Wilkey [Arthur-Worrey's employee] on the instruction of Chief Inspector Rees following a report Wilkey had lodged about two men, officially described as 'confidence tricksters' who were alleged to have defrauded Mr Arthur-Worrey. Mr Arthur-Worrey had met one of the suspects, Anthony Bushell, a 'motor driver' about five weeks before. Aged 39, Bushell lived at 384A Camden Road. Bushell later introduced Arthur-Worrey to his brother-in-law, Otto Arthur Dumas, a clerk, aged 36 and who lived at 2 Pownall Gardens, Hounslow. Both men had promised to introduce Arthur-Worrey to members of the Royal Family and had skimmed £400 off him. Bushell and Dumas had also prevailed upon Arthur-Worrey to 'enter the Imperial Nursing Home at 64 Holland Park W. and have a facial operation to remove his tribal scars'. This was to make him 'more presentable for introduction to Royalty'.

Mr Wilkey was apparently motivated to report to the police because the fears of Arthur-Worrey's relations in Nigeria about his emigration were not only being borne out but he was also losing his mind. What with the hostile posture he had assumed towards Wilkey since the two tricksters had taken hold of him. And what was worse, the two men were planning to remove Arthur-Worrey from the Nursing Home 'to an unknown destination'.

DI John Junkin, accompanied by PC Crerar went to the Nursing Home where they, fortuitously met Bushell and Dumas pleading with the surgeon, Viscount de la Vatine, to discharge Arthur-Worrey as 'they had a place out of London where he could peacefully recover from the operation.' The surgeon, yet unaware of the identity of the police officers, disengaged them because 'he did not like the look of the two men'.

As Bushell and Dumas were about to leave the Nursing Home the police officers apprehended them, querying them about their business with Arthur-Worrey. The ac-

cused 'took up a haughty injured air' and retorted that it was no business of the police officers'. They were further asked to 'explain the constant recent drain on Mr Arthur-Worrey's banking account'. They were subsequently taken to the Notting Hill Police Station by PC Crerar. DI Junkin returned to Arthur-Worrey on his sick bed for interactions. To the officer's shock, Arthur-Worrey refused to discuss Bushell and Dumas because 'he had the utmost faith in them and in addition to assisting him in meeting influential people they were also helping him in negotiating for the disposal of his mines in Nigeria'. Not even the entreaties of the medical staff that Arthur-Worrey should cooperate with the police could make him budge. He had become obsessed with his desire 'to meet His Majesty the King.' And only Bushell and Dumas were capable of bringing about the introduction. For proof, Arthur-Worrey handed the police officer a copy of a letter purportedly written and sent to HM's Secretary by the two men.

The debt of gratitude that Arthur-Worrey owed to these mind-bending confidence tricksters is amply reflected in his letter of 10 June 1937 to his Nigerian relations referred to earlier. The surgery and post-operative nursing which had cost him £72.10.0d were money well spent because he was now wearing a new look without tribal marks, indeed his face had become 'young nice smooth shining'. He was overwhelmed by the fact that the surgery had been performed by Viscount de la Vatine, 'the ex-part Doctor in the world I ever seen'. He was mystified at the fact of the local anaesthesia that had made him feel no pain, and remain conscious, while the operation lasted. He requested that portions of his letter relating to the surgery and his new looks be publicised 'as a sort of circular to all individual friends...brethren both south and northern Nigeria to enable them to know me when they shall see me.'

He pleaded for understanding on his long silence in communicating with people at home which he attributed to 'too many appointments and invitation card from The High Noble in the city and Country.' The convalescence in the Nursing Home had therefore afforded him the opportunity to write. In signing off, he wrote thus: 'I remain, Yours brethren, Friend, wife, and sisters, S.N. Arthurworrey'.

Back to DI Junkin. Frustrated by Arthur-Worrey, Junkins sought information from Bushell and Dumas who had

been detained. They declined to make statements but informed Junkin that their intentions were perfectly honest; that they had indeed sent the letter requesting meeting with HRM to HM's Secretary and that 'they had a relation in the employ of H.R.H. The Duke of Gloucester who was prompting them on the best methods of approaching members of the Royal Family.' They also asserted that they were in touch with 'reliable firms' in the city with a view to negotiating for the sale of the property in Nigeria. When pressed for details they declined to give them and when questioned as to motive prompting their efforts, they stated that they hoped to gain a commission in the event of the property being sold.

Bushell and Dumas were eventually released from police custody because a search at the Criminal Record Office proved negative while the police hoped that Arthur-Worrey might change his mind and cooperate with police investigation. In a note to the Superintendent, dated 14 June 1937, Chief Inspector J. Sharpe remarked that the case appeared 'to have all the elements of fraud' but regretted that the victim was adamant and had refused 'point blank to acquaint police with anything which may assist us in assisting himself'.

SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS

It would appear that apart from the police, Mr E. S. Wilkey, Arthur-Worrey's employee had also lodged a report with the Colonial Office about his plight. The Colonial Office referred the petition to the police for investigation. In a letter dated 22 June 1937, the office of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis sent the report of DI Junkin to the Colonial Office. In a bid to probe Arthur-Worrey's antecedents in Nigeria, the Colonial Office interacted with the Governor of Nigeria, Sir Bernard H. Bourdillon. In a letter dated 19 February 1938, Governor Bourdillon conveyed the anxieties of the relations of Arthur-Worrey about his whereabouts and welfare because they had lost contact with him since they got his letter of 10 June 1937. He traced Arthur-Worrey's roots in Nigeria, his education and business endeavours before his ill-fated adventure in the United Kingdom. He ended by importuning the Colonial Office to intensify efforts at tracing Arthur-Worrey.

The renewed search for Arthur-Worrey warranted the writing of a second report by DI Junkin dated 26 March 1938. It would appear that upon his discharge from the hospital

in 1937 he could no longer afford the rent for his accommodation in Camden Town. He began to squat with a Mr G. C. Johnson of 55 Talma Road, Brixton. Johnson had later accompanied him to the police to lodge a complaint against Wilkey, his former employee whom he accused of 'wrongfully detaining his motor car.' But when again the police offered to assist Mr Arthur-Worrey in making application for process against Wilkey he did not avail himself of [their] services.'

On 17 March 1938, DI Junkin 'located Arthur-Worrey in Bed No. 8, C.2 Ward, Dulwich Hospital' where he had been admitted since the 15th, 'suffering from bronchial pneumonia.' If Arthur-Worrey was physically sick, his children were emotionally disturbed. DI Junkin learnt that the boys had been removed from King's College; two of them were resettled in the 'Sussex Road, L.C.C. School, Brixton School, Brixton.' Arthur-Worrey disclosed that the cost of sending the boys to the elite King's College was 'too much for him', so they had not returned there since the Christmas vacation in 1937.

Aside the demotion in status, the children's daily living conditions were appalling. They too were squatters with their father was in hospital because Johnson was 'absent all day'. They obtained meals from a Mrs Coles of 59 Talma Road, wife of a railwayman who their father had paid 'about £5 since 15th December, 1937' which the police considered 'a totally inadequate sum'.

DI Junkin had also interacted with Arthur-Worrey's bankers, the British Bank of West Africa located at 37 Gracechurch Street E.C.3 and had learnt from the manager, Grahame Child, that he had 'only £20' in his account. The manager had implored the police officer 'to obtain Mr Arthur-Worrey's permission to cable to Nigeria and have sufficient funds deposited in the bank's branch in Warri [his home town], to defray cost of his and his boys return passage.'

Arthur-Worrey's dream of greatness had not all evaporated. So, returning to Nigeria was not on the cards for him. Even on his sick bed, he told the police officer that he was in 'possession of certain papers relating to the formation of a company to deal with his property in Nigeria' which was 'the subject of a dispute between him and Wilkey' but he was 'more convinced than ever, despite advice and warnings from his bank manager, that his negotiations would be completed in the City.' It was from the proceeds from the disposal of his Nigerian assets that Arthur-Worrey hoped to settle his mounting indebtedness to G.C. Johnson for accommodation; Mrs Coles for the upkeep of his children and to travel to Germany for medical attention from 'specialists in chest ailments.' Whereas he told DI Junkin that he would return to Nigeria after he had been cured of his chest ailment, the officer noted that Arthur-Worrey had 'confidentially told other persons that he [had] not the slightest intention of ever returning home.' Junkin's report was forwarded to the office of the Secretary of State by the office of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on 31 March 1938.

Arthur-Worrey's illusion of grandeur did not abate even amidst observable misery afflicting him and his children. All this is reflected in a third report on his saga written by DI Junkin on 31 May 1938. Junkin visited him in his squat-ter residence on Talma Road, Brixton after he had been discharged from his second hospitalisation. Junkin found

the children in threadbare clothes but their father claimed that he had enough funds for their needs. It would appear

Mrs Coles had disengaged from feeding the children on credit because their father reported that he had taken over

cooking for them. They were still attending the local schools.

Arthur-Worrey intimated to Junkin that negotiations to form a new company to deal with his property in Nigeria were nearing completion, 'but when asked for details he became evasive.' Junkin had to resort to further interactions with his bankers. The manager, Grahame Child, raised new worries about Arthur-Worrey's financial health. From a lowly credit base of £20 in March, the man had sunk to the depth of an overdraft of £3 which the manager hoped would be redeemed from the sale of 'a recent consignment of tin which had arrived at Liverpool from his mines in Nigeria' and which would fetch about £15 or £16.

Arthur-Worrey had also attempted to mesmerise his bankers with a draft prospectus of a company to be formed, 'styled "The Minna Gold and Tin Mining Company Limited"'. Grahame Child gave DI Junkin the names and addresses of three persons named as co-promoters of the said company apparently just so that Junkin could help

with background checks on them. The men were H. Warwick Edwards, Solicitor of 76 Cheapside, E.C.; Thaddeus E. Walker, [described as 'man of colour'], of 25 Lime Street, E.C.; and John George Barker, City Accountant, of 4 Greenhill Road, Harrow. There was nothing recorded in 'C.2. Registry' in respect of the three men, nor at City Police Headquarters, in respect of Edwards and Barker. But Walker had been 'the subject of City Police correspondence from 1914 to 1923' and was 'looked upon with suspicion.'

Thaddeus Emmanuel Walker was born in Jamaica in 1876 but emigrated to England in 1902 and had been involved with the 'promotion of companies.' But police records showed 'several complaints of unsatisfactory transactions... but in each case the officer reporting states there was no evidence to justify proceedings by police.' But he was not all-time lucky. On 1 February 1932, the Bow Street Police Court fined him '10/- or one day on each of three summonses for wilfully permitting default to be made in forwarding to the Registrar of Companies a copy of the annual returns for 1930, of the following companies of which he was a director: The Hildredth Gold Mines, Ltd; The Cuyuni River (British Guiana) Diamond and Gold Co., Co., Ltd.' The three companies were consequently struck off the register and dissolved in January 1934 'for failing to submit annual returns.'

DI Junkin reported that enquiries were continuing in respect of the unregistered 'Minna' company and the promoters.

In August 1938, a fourth report on the Arthur-Worrey saga was written, this time by Detective Sub-Inspector Charles Marjoram of the City of London Police. He had taken the investigation into the floating of the 'Minna' company an extra mile with the introduction of a fourth associate, Edmund David Button, 'an Estate Agent and Business Negotiator' of 60 Queen Victoria Street, E.C. who had been mentioned to him by the solicitor, H. Warwick Edwards.

Button claimed that he had been introduced to Arthur-Worrey by Thaddeus Emmanuel Walker. He had apparently been impressed by the documents that Arthur-Worrey had to show for his claims about being a mining businessman who had been producing gold and tin which

had been exported in fair quantities to England 'since 1921, and in addition that he also had considerable interests in other metalliferous mines and in rubber plantations, of which he was desirous to exploit to his advantage.' But Button was worried that imports from Arthur-Worrey's leases had been reduced apparently because his relations in Nigeria 'who [were] aware of his financial losses after his arrival here refusing to send any more supplies than is sufficient to realise enough money for his immediate necessities.'

Button provisionally agreed with Arthur-Worrey to form a 'private British company with a nominal capital of £75,000' to acquire the leases and provide working capital to install machinery and other equipment to develop the mines and his other interests 'under modern methods.' Button admitted he had had 'extreme difficulty in interesting any person or concern who would invest in the project'. But he was optimistic that a syndicate he had been negotiating with would advance the required capital. He would not however disclose the identities of the syndicate members. The proposed directors would be himself, Arthur-Worrey and one or more persons to be appointed by the syndicate. He assured DSI Marjoram that 'on no account [would] Thaddeus Emmanuel Walker, respecting whom he [had] received adverse reports as to his integrity, have any connection or interest in the company, should these negotiations materialise.' Arthur-Worrey's consideration for his leases would be 'an allotment of shares and possibly cash, the number and amount to be decided.'

DSI Marjoram would appear to have been taken in by the rosy picture painted by Button (against whom the City Police had no adverse reports) that he neglected to cross-reference with earlier police reports on the Arthur-Worrey saga the later submissions by Arthur-Worrey. One of them was that his three sons were attending King's College where they would 'remain and complete their education.' Button noted that the man 'impressed [him] as being very intelligent, astute and secretive...and whilst anxious to return to his native country, appeared determined to combine his Nigerian interests in this proposed company, thereby providing all the capital necessary to develop his properties and interests...and dispose of his produce at the most advantageous prices, which in the past he [had] been unable to obtain.' As usual, Marjoram's report was

sent through his superiors to H.M Secretary of State for the Colonies.

A second report, but the fifth on the saga, was prepared by the same DSI Marjoram on 30 December 1938. This was a more sober, truer reflection of the dire circumstances of the misadventurer Arthur-Worrey. Edmund Button had not only failed in his bid to mobilise capital for the proposed company, he had decided to 'have nothing further to do with the proposition'.

Following Button's new posture, Marjoram interacted with Arthur-Worrey at his Talma Road, Brixton residence where he saw that he and his sons resided 'under obviously straitened circumstances in this squalid house.' And the man seemed to have finally reconciled himself to the collapse of his dream of reactivating his business interests because 'no person or concern will advance capital for the acquisition of his leases.'

Contrary to what Arthur-Worrey had said about returning home a few months before, Marjoram was surprised that he 'expressed no intention of returning to his native country'. Indeed, he was annoyed that his bankers 'had sometime ago arranged for his passage home when he refused to go.' That was in September 1938 when the bank linked up with a foremost Nigerian traditional ruler, HRM Sir Ladapo Ademola II, the Alake of Abeokuta, who was a distant cousin of Arthur-Worrey's and a customer of the bank. On the monarch's instructions, a passage was booked for him and he was given a ticket and £10 pocket money. The bank later learnt that Arthur-Worrey had "cashed" the ticket and spent the proceeds."

Finally, the true status of Arthur-Worrey's business ventures in Nigeria was disclosed to the investigating police officer by Mr Child, the bank manager. He was the holder of 'certain leases on small scattered primitively worked tin mines in Nigeria...[and] other small trading interests' which in his absence had been managed by an agent. The fear was that the leases were likely to be surrendered because his 'embarrassed financial position' would make it difficult for him to continue to pay the rents. It was actually the bank that dissuaded Edmund Button from endeavouring to mobilise capital for the formation of a company that would have managed Arthur-Worrey's assets. This report was, like the others, passed up to the office of the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Further Research Questions

1. What eventually happened to Arthur-Worrey and his three sons?
2. Was Arthur-Worrey an innocent victim of crime? Or was he a misguided accomplice in his own ordeal?

Bibliography

National Archives, Kew, London. CO583/218/14, Miscellaneous Enquiries, New Scotland Yard: Mr Stephen Arthur Worrey of Jos, 1937.

William Biddlecombe, Surrey's first detective

Robert Bartlett MA

William Henry Biddlecombe the Head Constable of Godalming Borough Police and on the 1 January 1851 became Number 1 on the roll for the newly formed Surrey Constabulary with the position of superintendent. Aged 36, 5ft 10 tall Biddlecombe hailed from the Isle of Wight having served in the Hampshire Constabulary before moving to Godalming. He was to serve in the Surrey Constabulary until 1 May 1858 when he resigned to become the licensee of the Swan Inn at Chertsey, setting a trend followed by many an ex-police officer. There is no reference in the County Police Committee minutes for 1858 to Biddlecombe and why he left. It is not a surprise that this is the case as then, as now, police authorities were more concerned with finance, capital projects and the maintenance of the estate including sinking a well at Guildford police station. In addition to being a licensee who rented out horses and carriages, Biddlecombe became the clerk of the course at Chertsey race course and was to become a private detective again establishing a future trend being the first generation of ex-police officers to move into the security industry. Biddlecombe worked on some influential cases including being retained by Titchborne family to find the true identity of the claimant (Orton). Biddlecombe identified the true identity of the false claimant but was unable to convince Lord Onslow. (See below)

William Biddlecombe was a parish constable in Godalming, a very small borough police force where crime reports were reduced to nil and his expertise sought across Sussex and into Hampshire where he had previously served in the county constabulary. Biddlecombe's reputation ensured he was brought by the Frimley magistrates to the scene of the murder of the Reverent Hollest. There was no local police and the parish officials were in this case out of their depth and recognised that fact, not too proud to seek help. Working alongside Biddlecombe was a sergeant from the Metropolitan Police and an inspector from the Guildford Borough – in fact he was also the head constable. Godalming Borough Police were responsible for an area larger than the town and included villages as distant as Shere. Parish constables sometimes undertook duties for long periods for example James Sted-