Pupils evidence bundle

**Evidence 1**

It was claimed by the British colonists (1890s) eager to annex Kingdom of Benin in order to get at its riches and open a trading route for themselves that 'No white man has been allowed to go any distance away from the Ethiope River;’ and that the Oba  ‘had kept the Whiteman away from his people.’; and therefore not much was known about the kingdom.

**Evidence 2**

**On dangerous hearsay**
Sir John Kirk a government representative to the Niger coast interviewed by a reporter on Jan 14 1897 regarding the Benin Massacre confirmed that he personally knew nothing about the Benin king, except what he heard from merchants, and that was exactly what he had read in the press, namely that the king stops all trade to Benin, will allow no white trader to enter his district and was constantly having executions. He continued by saying that he had heard not from people who were likely to exaggerate, but from people who had been there and described what they saw, that there were dead bodies and remains of executions lying about the town.

So far, we know that the Whiteman was not allowed into The Kingdom of Benin, therefore  the merchants being referred to must have been other natives and according to newspaper articles on possible survivors from the Benin Massacre and according to the views of many people of Liverpool ‘Account of the African natives cannot be relied upon as they constantly are only able to give accounts of what they thought might have taken place, and not what actually happened ( (The Guardian 1821-2000; Date: Jan 14, 1897; Section: None; Page 5 '

**Evidence 3**

A king receives a message from representatives of a Queen of another country, saying ‘We are coming to visit you’.

The king duly replies, 'The time you plan to visit me is inconvenient as I will be heavily involved in a festival to honour my ancestors, please can you wait a couple of days after this and I shall receive you with open arms'.

The Queen's representative send back another message; ‘You do not understand, we are bringing you presents from our queen' The King still insist, ‘Please hold on for a few days.’

In spite of this, Acting General Consul Philips along with eight other British officials decide that they could not to be kept waiting by an African King, and in any case, the king wouldn’t   dare attack the Great Queen's representatives, they immediately embark on the prerilous journey taking 250 African carriers with them . All along the route, they are told repeatedly that Benin soldiers are preparing for war should they step on their soil, countless people and other chiefs beg Consul Philip and his officials to wait in Gwato for a couple more days until the ceremonies are over but he refuses and charges ahead; thus deliberately stepping into a war zone he was very aware of from the various reports he had received.

**Evidence 4: The British did not know what a rainforest was. They called it bush.**

In Benin Expedition by Captain Reginald Bacon (1863- 1947) he says 'Our column marched through the bush about two miles in length..' he further describes 'Imagine this forest stocked with trees of great height, with a dense foliage overhead, with smaller trees interspersed between these monster products of vegetable growth to fill up the gaps. Imagine between all these trees an undergrowth of rubber trees, shrubs, palms, and creepers, so thick that the eye could never penetrate more than ten yards, and often not even five. Imagine the fact that you might easily walk for an hour without seeing the sun overhead, and only at times get a glimmer of a sunbeam across the path, and you have an elementary conception of the bush country of Benin.’

**Evidence 5: Lied about human sacrifice**

These stories they related back home to the press and peoples of Great Britain who did not know that the King never orders human sacrifices as he was not the high priest; that human sacrifices was a big deal that could not be taken lightly, that no one in their right mind would boast about such a thing to foreigners, that leaving dead bodies about the town would have scared the living daylights out of the citizens who would have rebelled against the King and his high priest.  Dead bodies smell and carry deadly diseases when they decompose (within 24 hours in hot climates).

**Evidence 6: They tricked the Oba and his chiefs to sign a treaty**

To put things in real perspective, Mr J.H Swainson based in Benin at that time and an agent of Mr. James Pinnock of Liverpool told Reuter’s Liverpool representative on Jan 13th 1897 that before the treaty of 1892 was signed, the king had kept himself and the then Captain Gallwey waiting for two days whilst he deliberated and made enquiries about their intention and appropriate response to this. Mr Swainson then went to say that the king had sent for him as he was known to His Majesty to ask him all about Captain Gallwey, and whether he should see him. His Majesty trusting Mr Swainson’s word, saw the Captain the very next day signing the treaty in front of hundreds of people who knew and trusted the same Mr Swainson on account of he lived amongst them and so could be regarded as a brother. The king and his people deny signing this treaty. Fact: they could not read the words of the treaty.

<http://waado.org/UrhoboHistory/NigerDelta/ColonialTreaties/ItsekiriTreaties/1884Treaty.html>

**Evidence 7: The Benin Massacre**

**So what do we know about the expedition, who authorised it and why?**

Mr Philips, Acting Consul General had just taken over the administration of the protectorate from Captain Gallwey. It was no secret around the coast that he was planning a peaceful mission to Benin, in fact ‘the men were full of it, and anxious to learn something of the place.’ Mrs Boiaragon giving news of her husband’s survival in an interview, stated on the reason why the party had gone to Benin as ‘Mr. Philip the Deputy Commissioner and Consul General for the Niger Coast Protectorate, was very anxious to see the city, which had been described as abounding in curiosities;’, she added that she had also gathered from the letter from her husband that Mr Philips might have had the additional object of meeting the king with a view to opening up commercial relations. He had obviously instigated other men to come along with him.

**What do we know about Mr Philips?**

He was a 33 year old solicitor  who had graduated ten years previously(1887); he was educated at Uppinham and Cambridge. After qualifying as a solicitor and working for sometime, he saw better openings for his career in the colonies, he therefore got a job as sheriff on the Gold Coast in 1891, a year later (1892), he was appointed Deputy Commissioner and Consul General in the Niger Coast Protectorate, when he went back to Britain on holiday, he informed his friends about how pleased he was about his prospects in the colonies. He was described as a man of physique, vigour and resource. Mr Philip was no doubt a very ambitious man who saw lots of prospects for himself on the West African coast and where better to prove himself than at sorting out a difficult local king.

**So what did happen?**  Different accounts were reported back to Britain:

A correspondent of the London ‘Evening News,’ telegraphing from Lagos at 3.15 on 21st Jan 1987 morning gave details of the Expedition to the king of Benin, as nine British officers, and 200 carriers (other accounts report 250); landing from canoes, the carriers with presents and clothing and food, were sent ahead, whilst the officers proceeded slowly. When ten miles had been covered the officers suddenly came to a narrow point where dead bodies were heaped up on the road. Whilst viewing these frightful spectacles, the officers were suddenly surrounded and attacked. , Messers Philips, Crawford, Elliot, Maling, Campbell, Gordon and Powis were killed. Captain Boiaragon and Mr locke though badly wounded, escaped into the bush.

In an interview on February 10, Mr Locke one of the survivors  reported ‘a place had been cleared in the bush, and the men, with guns, were lying down with the muzzles of their long flintlocks...’

*He reported attack in a clearing as opposed to a narrow road in the first account above it.*

**Evidence 8: Their sole intention was colonisation of Benin**

Whilst the Benin Kingdom relied on annual tributes from all neighbouring countries, allowing them their sovereignty; the British disbanded existing governing systems, replacing them with theirs, exploited local resources including people and selling ‘Made in Britain’ products back to them.

 Captain Alan Boisragon in his Book 'The Benin Massacre' said that all the neighbouring West African countries sent an annual subsidy or tribute to induce the king to keep the trade route open, the captain also acknowledged that: ‘The country (Kingdom of Benin), is rich in all kinds of produce, palm oil, Kernels, rubber, timber, kola nut etc’. Mr Moor, the Consul General, who accompanied the punitive expedition (Feb. 1897) in an interview with the Reuter's Special Service on January 16th 1897 in the Guardian newspaper publications, said; 'The military operation will lead to ‘... the opening up of trade routes which have so long been closed to European enterprise by the savage potentate'.

**Evidence 9: Benin was magnificent before the invasion**

Captain Alan Boisragon in his book The Benin Massacre (1898) in the history of Benin account states: ‘Benin seems to have been a kingdom from time immemorial, anyway from before, its discovery by the Portuguese, somewhere at the end of the fourteenth or beginning of the fifteenth century. By their discoveries, the Portuguese for a long time had all the benefits to be obtained by trade from West Africa. They were followed some time after by the Dutch and Swedes.’ In 1553, when the first British Captain Pinteado and others visited the King’s Court,, they were accorded a most friendly welcome by the king, who spoke in Portuguese to them offering them favourable trading terms.

All these visitors described Benin as a magnificent city.

Description of Benin started to change when the British intentions turned from trading to colonisation. The King now becomes ‘Savage Potentate’ and Benin City full of decapitated bodies of human sacrifice.

**Evidence 10: The British were brutal**

Now, picture the scenes in this Guardian publication of Mar 29, 1897: West Coast of Africa. The Niger Expedition. ‘If any hostility was shown towards the British, then the place was taken, and probably destroyed. This occurred several times during the march, but the officer who gave the information did not remember how many towns and villages were thus destroyed, nor could he give the number of natives who fell in the fighting on the side of the enemy. The maxim, however, made terrible havoc in their ranks. It was the custom of the enemy to carry off their dead, or as many of them as they could take up in their flight, and bury them at once. This made it impossible to obtain anything like an accurate idea of the number killed.

According to newspaper report; (Guardian Sep. 16, 1897) The Benin Massacre, Trial of The King. ‘Sir Ralph Moor, the Consul General, is trying the King of Benin at Benin. Two of the chiefs have been convicted and shot. Their bodies were hung up to 24 hours.’ No respect was shown to the chiefs.

**Evidence 11**

BENIN – THE CITY OF BLOOD BY COMMANDER R. H. BACON, R. N. Intelligence Officer to the expedition, 1897,

Blood was everywhere; smeared over bronzes, ivory, and even the walls, and spoke the history of that awful city in a clearer way than writing ever could. Pg. 89
***This was only around the alters of the shrines which Captain Bacon referred to as the Juju houses. It is inconceivable that blood would have been smeared over people’s houses; exaggeration is most likely the case here.***

See photograph of their looted booty from the Benin Punitive Expedition in Google search.