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Kaye Whiteman obituary (Died 17 May 2014)

(At Friends' School 1947 to 1952 – YG 53)

Journalist who witnessed and documented key moments in modern African history



For many years, Kaye Whiteman edited West Africa magazine. Photograph: Gerald Mclean

The journalist and editor Kaye Whiteman, who has died aged 78, possessed a remarkable knowledge of Africa, its peoples and those who governed them. He met most of the key African leaders from the period of decolonisation and independence, both English- and French-speaking, and was in touch with many of those involved in public service throughout the continent.

His area of particular expertise was west Africa, and above all Nigeria. He first went there and to nearby Ghana in 1964 as the deputy editor of the weekly West Africa magazine. He returned to Ghana the following year to cover the summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which he described in his article Ghana at 50 in Africa Today (March 2007) as "an African event of unrivalled spectacle, when all Africa came to pay tribute to the great pioneer of independence", a reference to [Kwame Nkrumah](#), Ghana's first president. Kaye also reported on the Nigerian civil war of 1967-70 for the Times, witnessing the surrender of the Biafran general Philip Effiong to General Yakubu Gowon.

In 1973 he went to Brussels, as a senior information officer for the European commission, dealing with development issues, especially in Africa. In the meantime, the ownership of West Africa magazine moved from Britain to Nigeria, and in 1982 Kaye succeeded David Williams as editor, later becoming editor-in-chief and general manager.

He edited a commemorative volume about the magazine, *West Africa Over 75 Years: Selections from the Raw Material of History* (1993). Perhaps his biggest career regret was that he could not prevent the demise of the journal when the Daily Times of Nigeria and the Nigerian government could no longer sustain it. Kaye got the Ghanaian government, through the Graphic Corporation, the country's largest publishing outfit, to buy it in 1999, but it closed in 2005.

For the Commonwealth Secretariat in London Kaye served under Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the secretary general, as director of information (1999-2000). Then he was in Lagos as a media adviser (2001-02), particularly to the newly introduced newspaper [BusinessDay](#), for which he also wrote a regular column.

From 2003 he continued to advise BusinessDay from London, and wrote *Lagos: A Cultural and Literary History* (2012). The former BBC correspondent Elizabeth Blunt described it as "an extended love letter to the city", capturing its residents' "spirit of cantankerous defiance" and "the mutability of the physical city ... its characteristic mixture of brutality and exhilaration".

For the April/May 2014 Nigeria at 100 edition of *Africa Today*, Kaye wrote about Sir Frederick, later Lord, Lugard, who amalgamated the Northern and Southern Nigerian protectorates in 1914 and served as governor general for the first five years of the combined territory of Nigeria. Kaye was a contributing editor of *Africa Today* from 2002 onwards, and covered several G8 and Commonwealth summit meetings for it. He was one of the first people I consulted when I was about to launch the monthly in 1995 and his advice got us off to a good start. Through *Africa Today*, we shared the challenge of publishing in Africa for a global readership. This June's edition contains an article by Kaye on EU/Africa relations. He was an expert on this area, and co-edited with [Adekeye Adebajo](#) the collection of essays *The EU and Africa: From Eurafrique to Afro-Europa* (2012).

When I was chairman of the London management committee of the Commonwealth Journalists Association and he was editor of *West Africa*, he took a strong interest in the organisation's activities. At the start of this year he visited newspaper editors in Lagos to encourage them to re-establish its Nigerian branch.

Born in Hadley Wood, north London, Kaye was the son of George and Mary Whiteman, a Quaker couple. George worked at the organisation's head office, Friends' House, and was a journalist himself, the editor of the *Antique Collector* magazine. Kaye was brought up in Saffron Walden, Essex, where he went to the Friends' school, and showed a flair for geography and music. He then went to [Bootham school](#), another Quaker establishment, in York.

In his youth he was a great lover of the movies and an obsessive collector of film adverts from newspapers, which he would stick in albums. He retained a fine singing voice into later life.

Kaye was a conscientious objector when it came to national service and instead worked for the Friends' Ambulance Unit (1954-55). At Queen's College, Oxford, he gained a history degree (1956-59). While at Oxford he developed an interest in Africa and was particularly fascinated by the process of decolonisation. His first job after graduating was as a journalist

on a trade journal called Building Materials, and he also wrote for the weekly newspaper The Sphere. In 1963 he joined the staff of West Africa magazine.

In London, Kaye was a research associate at the Centre of African Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and a trustee of the Africa Centre in London. He was a researcher with Chatham House, using the resources of the Royal Institute of International Affairs to embark on a history of Africa, and he contributed obituaries to this newspaper.

Kaye married Marva McGeary, from Barbados, in 1963. She survives him, along with their son, Simon.

Kayode Soyinka

Anthony Adeloje writes: Soft-spoken and always courteous, Kaye Whiteman knew the importance of all types of communication in increasing understanding and co-operation. He was usually in Lagos at some point in each of the last 50 years to cover events or visit friends, to whom he was accordingly known as "Lagos Boy". His integrity as a journalist was greatly respected in west Africa. In London, he was a regular visitor to the Nigerian High Commission, and pleased to be taking part in a discussion to mark the country's centenary earlier this year that reflected its openness to voices from elsewhere.

In 1995 he invited me to write for West Africa magazine on how the internet could be harnessed for rural areas, schools and libraries. Ten years later, as the High Commission's librarian, I organised an exhibition of rare books and documents outlining Nigeria's journey. Kaye convinced me of the importance of making historical context clear. Not the least aspect of his cultural awareness was his love of Nigerian cuisine – he could readily identify dishes from all over the country.

- Martin Kaye Whiteman, journalist and editor, born 9 March 1936; died 17 May 2014