

## **The Bunbury's 25<sup>th</sup> Birthday Ball. Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2011.**

### **Grosvenor House Hotel.**

*Special Report: Stephanie Lynne Thorburn.*

The Bunbury's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ball at Grosvenor House began industriously early for some of the founder members of the esteemed cricket club. Dr. David English secluded himself within the bar leading directly off the main warren, to the right of the Grosvenor lounge for some preliminary epicurean celebrations. Those arriving promptly to the anniversary party were entertained by David English's spirited anecdotes of unrivalled and unmistakable repartee, amidst an audience of his most faithful Bunbury dedictees. From memoirs of Saturday Night Fever, Evita and the legacy of RSO to the forthcoming premier of 'Fire In Babylon', David's unmistakable loquaciousness off the record reminiscences had already set the ball rolling as the VIP guests arrived, (the clock had only just reached 6pm and the night was still young). As we walked towards the reception in Court Suite, I was reassured that this would surely be a formidable evening!

The reception was absolutely burgeoning with affable music and sporting personalities – Andrew Flintoff towered above the entrance, with David English surrounded by the original 'EC X1' Bunbury players, including Dennis Waterman, Bill Wyman and Johnny Cousins, plus Jeff Thomson, who has now become a regular contributor to the Bunburys. The Bunbury veteran photographers David Betteridge and Keith Curtis captured some unique images of the reunion. In fact, there are many elements of the Bunburys experience that have reached legendary proportions. The internet has become a receptacle for the rare sessionography of 'The Bunbury Tails', a collectors' album recorded in 1992, comprising performances from the Bee Gees, Eric Clapton, George Harrison and Elton John. Such an exceptional line-up is practically fictional, yet in reality, artists of this caliber have consistently supported the Bunbury balls throughout the past five years at Grosvenor House. For the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the project, Eric Clapton and Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings performed anniversary style sets- a live recording of their concerts would have indeed provided a fitting follow-up to the 'Bunbury Tails' album.

I took my designated place at the table in the Great Room, with John Altman to my left and dedicated Bunbury Umpire John Hurst opposite. Chairman Naynesh Desai broke the night in with his thoughts on the occasion, confirming the sporting support of the England Ashes winning team at the Grosvenor, with affirmations from a seated Captain Andrew Strauss and Coach Andy Flower. Memoirs of 25 successful Bunbury ESCA festivals were followed by the arrival of Sir Tim Rice. Tim's recollections of the first release of RSO Records heralded some stellar company up onto the stage- David English, David Essex, Dennis Waterman, Bill Wyman, Eric Clapton and Freddie Flintoff were assembled in due course for some seminal memories of nostalgic Bunbury afternoons. David Essex talked of the excellent mixture of social elements in the Bunburys with cricket and the friends he has made. Bill Wyman recounted an innings with English, but omitted his tale of glory when he achieved a hat-trick at the Oval on Sky TV. Andrew Flintoff was rather overwhelmed and utilized some rhetorical skills of self-depreciation, whilst re-enforcing his respect for David English's youth cricket initiative and mentoring influence. The anniversary ball was actually in support of Andrew's *AF Foundation*, an organisation committed to improving child rehabilitation treatment and

physiotherapy in the UK. Other beneficiaries for the anniversary evening were Eric Clapton's *Crossroads Centre* in Antigua and the *English Schools' Cricket Association*.

David English and Eric Clapton made a collective attempt to recount the origins of Bunbury cricket, with David interjecting with a trip down memory lane toward the first match in 1987 featuring the Ripley Nomads versus the Eric Clapton X1 at Ripley Court School to an audience of 4,500. The EC X1 evolved into the Bunbury X1 and this led on to the infamous tale of Eric breaking his finger whilst fielding in the slips prior to a world tour and his subsequent mishap on the same afternoon, when he was stung on the other hand by a bumble bee! Annotated notes on all these incidental tales of the unexpected can be found within David English's notes for the birthday ball, the Bunbury's 1992 yearbook and also within the testimonials of his autobiography '*Confessions of a Dedicated Englishman*'.

The auction was a suitably impressive segment of the night, with MC Jonny Gould taking over from the capable, satirical Rory Bremner. Highlights included 'Country Pursuits' with Ian Botham- a proposition that roused much deliberation as the successful bidder required a valid shotgun license and insurance. The proposed occasion involved not only culling wildlife, but a day in North Yorkshire with fine hospitality, food, drink and luxurious accommodation; the lot raised £4,000. Private dining with Beefy and Freddie was another potentially evocative and provocative lot- the concept was for 10 guests to join Ian Botham and Andrew Flintoff at Gordon Ramsay's at Claridges, Mayfair for drinks and a stunning three course dinner, (to circumvent the alcoholic effects.) The lot was sold for a generous £16,000. A 'classic Eric Clapton guitar', a Fender strat signed and donated by EC raised £35,000. London's hottest sold out gigs, comprising the likes of Bon Jovi at Hyde Park and Clapton at the Royal Albert Hall was a popular lot selling for £5,000. A further epicurean temptation was on offer in the form of a House of Lords Dinner with Lord Archer, offering six guests the opportunity of a guided tour of the Lords, together with cocktails and a three course meal. This lot raised a modest £7,000. The final highlight was the Eric Clapton private box for his sold out date at the Royal Albert Hall on 17<sup>th</sup> May; the successful bid was £10,000, with the auction raising a marvelous £148,000 for the evening's beneficiaries.

Eric Clapton and Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings subsequently performed succinct concerts, providing a suitable pinnacle to the night. Eric Clapton and band were seemingly in their element in the run-up to Clapton's UK and Royal Albert Hall dates of spring/ summer 2011. EC delivered primarily a blues orientated show, comprising seven songs with a veteran band line-up featuring Steve Gadd on drums, Willie Weeks on bass, Chris Stainton and Tim Carmon on keys and the wonderful Michelle John and Sharon White on vocals. EC began with 'Key To The Highway', and the unmistakable 'Hoochie Coochie Man'. Undoubtedly, Eric's assured presence on Fender was pleasing to see as his concerts have now provided a rare treat at several Bunbury balls, "Who says this one need be the last?" declared Eric. (With any luck this Bunbury 25<sup>th</sup> ball will be like a quintessential Frank Sinatra style farewell!)

Clapton's set progressed toward some of his most revered hits including 'Wonderful Tonight' and Cream's version of Robert Johnson's 'Crossroads'. Johnson made a further appearance on the set list with 'Little Queen Of Spades' and Eric subsequently closed the night with a rousing rendition of 'Cocaine'. Bill Wyman and his Rhythm Kings were next to the stage following a skilled half-hour of hits with DJ Lora. Taking to the stage at the midnight hour, Bill and connoisseur friends offered a set

suffused with magic and a little nostalgia from his years with the Stones. The Rhythm Kings demonstrated a versatile range of musical genres from R & B to Rock 'n' Roll and Cajun- certainly a musical education. Opening with 'Do You Like Good Music?' and 'Chicken Shack Boogie', Bill soon gravitated to lead-vocals and bass on Clifton Chenier's 'All Night Long', before introducing his band. The talents of Andy Fairweather- Low and Beverley Skeete were prominent throughout the night, with wonderful versions of 'Harlem Shuffle', 'I Just Wanna Make Love to You' and 'Get Your Kicks On Route 66'. Beverley's vocals were simply outstanding and resonated well with Nina Simone's version of 'I Put a Spell on You', a song I am familiar with in the Rhythm Kings repertoire and I was certainly not disappointed. Two further consistent quality contributors to the R. Kings' onstage presence were Frank Mead on sax and founder R. King Terry Taylor on guitar- in fact all the musicians in Bill's band have unique personas, although there were notable musical textures reminiscent of Keith Richards and Chuck Berry during the course of their Bunbury party set! The night ultimately drew towards a satisfying conclusion with an unexpected rendition of the Stones 'Honky Tonk Women' in Rhythm Kings style as Bill Wyman and friends departed from the stage.

Tired, but happy and suitably humbled by the activities of this very special night, I made my way home with some unique memories. I am constantly reminded of the surreality of Dr. David English's success in so many domains; David manages to use his charismatic charm to convey his life achievements with grace and apparent ease. To date, 191 Bunbury 'old boys' have gone forward in their careers to First Class cricket and 54 have played for England including Michael Vaughan, Andrew Flintoff, Ian Bell and Paul Collingwood. David's contribution to youth cricket is certainly immense- he has also raised over £14 million for major charities with his Bunbury Cricket initiative. The origins of David's work however, definitely lie in his unconventional approach to sport and fund raising, due to his considerable experience in media and entertainment, (hence my testimonial feature 'Dr. David English and the RSO Legacy', remembering David's management and mentoring skills within Robert Stigwood's seminal Record company).

I would like to offer huge congratulations to Dr. David English CBE for his continuing unique work and sincere thanks of course to Fireball Management for their fine organization skills these past five years at the Bunbury Grosvenor House balls! Finally, thank you to Chairman Naynesh Desai for his patience and to all the wonderful Bunbury players from Eric Clapton and Bill Wyman to representatives of the England Cricket team whose skills have featured at Bunbury matches and the Grosvenor House dinners. I look forward to some further very special memories and matches this summer season, with forthcoming fixtures including the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary English School's Cricket Association Festival and the Eric Clapton X1 at Lords this September.

*Stephanie Lynne Thorburn, May 2011.*

