

The D'Oliveira Affair Revisited for Cricket Society (Nov 14 2013)

I'd like to start with a confession. I'm a truth junkie. Knowing the who, the what, the where and the when run second to knowing the how and, above all, the why.

I'm also a beauty junkie. I became a journalist not just because I wanted to write about what I loved, but because I wanted to do whatever I could to make what I loved better. And what better aspiration can there be for a lover of watching sport than for it to improve on reality.

Which means being more fun, more stimulating and yes, more beautiful, but above all being fairer. But the thing about the D'Oliveira Affair, even after 45 years, is that while we know the essence of the what and the where and even the why, we still don't know, not definitively, the who or the how. In good part this is because there is no public record of what happened at Lord's on the night of August 27 1968 – or, rather, what was said.

That's partly why the D'Oliveira Affair has obsessed me like no other sporting story. But only partly. The overriding reason is the importance of this chapter in sporting history and the impact it had on the wider world. That's why I want to know every last bit of what happened, what really happened. I want my children to know; I want my students to know; I want posterity to know. I also know I am almost certainly doomed to failure in my quest, but that won't stop me doing what Curtis Mayfield urged those fighting the good fight to do – to keep on keeping on. That's why, in my latest book, *Touchlines and Floodlights: A Brief History of Spectator Sport*, which should be in the clutches of your friendly Amazon sometime next year, I have devoted a fairly vast amount of space to this enduring morality tale.

And that's why I can't resist quoting, for the umpteenth time, that splendid bloke, terrific batsman and master of the postmodern malapropism, Ted Dexter:

"I come down on the side of honesty, a good honest piece of bungling by good honest men."

Thus did the sometime England captain and one-time prospective Tory MP famously characterise the most divisive and important selection meeting in sporting history, which took place on that hot August night, finishing in the wee small hours of the following day. More recently, in the *Sunday Telegraph*, the political columnist Kevin Myers delivered much the same verdict, except that he described the original omission of Basil D'Oliveira from the MCC party to tour South Africa in the winter of 1968-69 as “cretinous”. In 2003, *Observer Sports Monthly* denounced that oversight as one of its “Ten Worst Sporting Decisions”. But were they all far too generous?

History tells us D'Oliveira was summoned as a replacement for the injured Tom Cartwright three weeks later – a decision that owed nothing to cricketing logic: the former was a batting all-rounder, the latter a bowling all-rounder; whereupon Prime Minister John Vorster - fuelled, apparently, by a few glasses of brandy - denounced the touring party as “the team of the Anti-Apartheid Movement” and MCC cancelled the tour, fuelling the sports boycott that ultimately did so much to bring down one of the most despicable regimes of modern times. Not for nothing would Nelson Mandela convey his heartfelt thanks to “Dolly”, who passed away two years ago.

That estimable British film director Stephen Frears – whose latest work, *Philomena*, about the horrors of the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland, is merely the latest evidence of his love of a noble cause - is currently trying to bring this classic political espionage thriller to the screen. Even more than *Bodyline*, this is assuredly the cricketing tale that demands to be filmed.

It had everything: an underdog's battle to beat seemingly insurmountable odds, indefensible prejudice, race, class, Empire and Third World, spies and bribes, a *deus ex machina* to warm the coldest cockles and a stoical hero to match Gary Cooper in *High Noon*. Over the last few weeks I've been trying like buggery to find out more from the producer, Andy Harries, but, for now, why not let our imaginations run wild. Denzel Washington in the lead...Michael Gambon as

Vorster...Kevin Spacey as Colin Cowdrey...Sir Anthony Hopkins as Cartwright...Old Father Time as Himself. The problem, of course, is that the jigsaw lies resolutely incomplete.

For all the decades of denial, the question still demands answering, begs answering: was D'Oliveira's initial non-selection politically motivated? Indeed, could the same be said of his demotion to 12th man for the Lord's Test two months earlier, a pivotal chapter all too often ignored by historians? Such is the evidence, the reply in both instances should have a strictly rhetorical, distinctly Jewish bent: "How could it not?"

Over the past decade I have tried to locate and connect the missing pieces. No story has fascinated or exercised this journalist more. Indeed, I tackled the topic a few years ago for this very august society. As revealed on that occasion, my chief discovery - confirmed to me by the former anti-apartheid campaigner turned Labour MP Peter Hain, whose son was coached by Cartwright in Wales - was that the withdrawal of Cartwright, one of the very few professional cricketers ever to wear his socialist heart on his sleeve, was motivated less by injury than by his disapproval of apartheid.

When I addressed the Cricket Society that night, I mentioned a letter I had written to Doug Insole, who had chaired that fateful selection meeting, putting it to him my pet theory: that despite top-scoring with 87 in the second innings during England's defeat in that summer's opening Ashes Test at Old Trafford, D'Oliveira was dropped for the Lord's Test for expressly political reasons. A number of South African grandees and cricket officials were present for that match; the way I saw it, and still see it, picking him for that match would have sent out all the wrong signals. Put simply, the English cricket establishment valued its relations with South Africa higher than the cause of human justice. In his handwritten reply, unsurprisingly, Insole vehemently denied such a suggestion. In making such an allegation, after all, I was accusing him of putting relations with South Africa ahead of the retrieval of the Ashes.

It was during that Lord's Test that Insole introduced Wilfred Isaacs – an influential figure in South African cricket with strong links to MCC – to D'Oliveira in the home dressing room, where Dolly accepted Isaac's offer of hospitality if he were to tour South Africa. A few weeks later, Isaacs informed the South African press that D'Oliveira would not be selected for that winter's tour. Yet come September, Isaacs denied discussing his selection with any MCC officials.

Tonight, I want to dig a bit deeper, focusing primarily on the recollections of two honourable men, Insole and the other key surviving English witness, Donald Carr, then MCC assistant secretary. Originally, I had hoped that Richard Evans, my former student at the University of Brighton, would be here with me tonight. For his splendid MA thesis, *The D'Oliveira Affair Reopened*, researched and written in 2012, he pulled off the not inconsiderable coup of interviewing Insole and Carr.

A year or so ago, I had made my own futile attempt to further matters, inviting John Carr, Donald's son and now one of the ECB's leading behind-the-sceners, to lunch in St John's Wood. John and I had known each other during his playing days, and occasionally been in touch since, but I still felt the need to be a bit secretive when I made the date. The purpose, as I eventually told him, was to ask him whether he would be willing to encourage his father to reveal a bit more, on the basis that he owed it to posterity. John was nice enough about it but proffered the deadeast of dead bats. All he would say was that the matter had barely if ever arisen in the Carr household, and that he didn't believe for a second that his father was hiding anything.

Admittedly, perhaps unsurprisingly, neither Carr Sr nor Insole, both loyal servants of English cricket, has been keen to advance the story. For all the thrusting of journalists such as myself and Evans, parrying has become their stock in trade. Insole's understandable reluctance to go into any depth since 1968 can be traced to his unnerving experience the previous year, when he

candidly admitted that he disagreed with MCC's decision to choose Colin Cowdrey over Brian Close as captain of the tour to West Indies; Carr's relative silence can be attributed to the fact that he would have been responsible for taking the minutes during that selection meeting, minutes that have never been seen since. That's what I was trying to get from John Carr: did he know whether any were actually taken? Or had they been destroyed? He pleaded complete ignorance.

Nevertheless, for all that their advanced years may have clouded their memories, Insole and Carr's recollections are worthy of consideration, if only in terms of joining more of those dots. That they contradict each other on at least one occasion does little to diminish one's suspicions that conspiracy was afoot.

I also want to avail you of a lengthy and rewarding conversation I had with Barry Knight, the man who replaced D'Oliveira at Lord's, as well as the unpublished recollections of my friend and sometime pressbox colleague, the late Trevor Chesterfield, an admirable, feisty New Zealander who had fought in Vietnam and by 1968 was working as a journalist for the *Pretoria News*.

First, though, I would like to touch briefly on a question raised by Bruce Murray and Christopher Merrett in their admirable and trenchant book *Caught Behind: race and politics in Springbok cricket*, published in 2004: *why* did D'Oliveira want to come to South Africa in the winter of 1968? As Vishnu Padayachee put it when reviewing the book, did he feel that going there would exert pressure on the regime? "Or that he owed it to his supporters, especially Cape Coloureds, among whom he was reputed to be very popular? The Anti-Apartheid Movement view, which Murray and Merrett report on, is that while the MCC/England should not have been endorsing apartheid by going to South Africa in the first place, their initial decision not to select D'Oliveira was in effect bringing apartheid principles into selection."

D'Oliveira's thinking about South Africa at the time was more than a little puzzling, contended Padayachee. According to Peter Osborne, author of a rightly acclaimed study of the D'Oliveira Affair (to which Murray's industrious rummaging through the archives in Pretoria contributed weightily), he had been "very deeply interested" by the much-chronicled offer – albeit well after the fact - made shortly after that Lord's Test by Tienie Oosthuizen, a director of Rothmans, to take up a post with the South African Sports Foundation as a coach for coloured South African cricketers. Not until the following month did Oosthuizen give up.

"It would not have taken more than a call (say, to the Anti-Apartheid Movement)," reasons Padayachee, for D'Oliveira "to establish that despite its so-called autonomy the Sports Foundation was in reality a front organisation of the apartheid-state." Although the offer amounted to a handsome £40,000 (and it is worth reminding ourselves that cricketers of that era were not by any stretch of the imagination well paid), he would only be paid if he took up the post immediately and thus made himself unavailable for the tour to South Africa – which was, of course, the hope of those financing the 10-year contract. Some, moreover, would argue that in agreeing to coach coloureds only, he would scarcely have been in much of a position to break down racial boundaries.

There is no way we can establish with any certainty what D'Oliveira was thinking at the time. If nothing else, we must assume his mind was in a state of considerable confusion. It is abundantly clear that he wanted to further his career; nor was he a political animal. That £40,000, moreover, would have done much to secure his family's future. Yet as he told the *Sunday Mirror* nearly 30 years later, the incentive to return to his native land was overpowering: he wanted, as he put it, "to prove that I could bat and that people from the black and coloured community, whatever

you like to call it, know how to conduct themselves.”¹ Whether this was a retrospective view, moulded down the years, is open to conjecture.

And so to our witnesses. “There had been close ties with South Africa over the years and we knew their cricket administrators very well,” Insole told Evans. “MCC knew that supporting them might cause problems but they were determined to do it.”²

Did MCC insist that continued sporting interaction, not alienation, could challenge apartheid? “Undoubtedly, yes,” declared Insole. “The ‘potential problem’ had always been there ever since he came [to England],” he continued. “It didn’t become an overt, obvious problem until he scored the runs in the last Test match.”³ There are two ways of responding to this. Either Insole was being naïve – most unlikely - or wilfully disingenuous.

What clearly still rankles with Insole is the assumption that the tour selectors were guilty of political bias. “People kept talking about public school toffs and all that jazz,” he told Evans. “Well, Peter May went to a public school, no-one else did. I certainly didn’t, [Alec] Bedser didn’t, Don Kenyon didn’t, Les Ames certainly didn’t. Any aspect of the whole thing that might appear to point to the fact that there was political bias was dragged up whether accurate or not.” A fair point. On the other hand, prejudice is hardly confined to the public schools.

Insole offered Evans perhaps the most revealing unseen snapshot of that selection meeting when he admitted that, contrary to his assurances to D’Oliveira, captain Cowdrey did not advocate the

² Interview with the writer at Insole’s house in Chingford, 4 April 2012.

³ Interview with the writer, 4 April 2012.

Worcestershire player's cause. "He didn't say 'I must have Dolly – he's key to my side,'" said Insole.⁴ Cowdrey and his Kent clubmate Ames, the tour manager, "certainly didn't push for him and they were very hesitant, and didn't back him on that score at all".⁵ Insole conceded, furthermore, that Cowdrey was well within his rights to sway any close decisions. "If you've got a lot of people in contention who are of roughly comparable talents," he reasoned, "then at that point whoever the captain wants has a big say in the matter."

No less intriguingly, Insole also insisted that, while it might have been "in the back of people's minds", no mention was made at the meeting of D'Oliveira's quest for alcoholic consolation during his first MCC tour to the Caribbean the previous winter, when he had turned to the bottle in response to the pressure he was feeling; this purported shortcoming has often been touted as a factor in his original omission from the South African tour party.

Yet Carr, by contrast, places a major onus on D'Oliveira's "thoroughly bad tour of the West Indies"⁶:

*I would say the original decision was made on the basis of cricketing ability but it all looked so awful. I think I believed, or was talked into believing, that it was all on cricketing grounds. There had been so much chatter about it. I think there were people high up in the cricketing hierarchy in England who were talking a lot about it and knew what the possibilities could be."*⁷

When Evans asked him whether political elements were aired, Carr replied: "I think they were. There was the odd person who brought up those sorts of things but I don't think the political

⁴ Interview with the writer, 4 April 2012.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Interview with the writer, 23 March 2012.

⁷ Interview with the writer, 2007.

aspects were the ultimate reason why the decision was made.”⁸ He may have been “talked into believing” that the decision was ultimately a cricketing one, but if political considerations were aired then all the evidence suggests they were allowed to influence D’Oliveira’s non-selection.⁹ “People were aware of what might happen [politically],” added Carr. “It’s a very difficult thing to say that it’s purely on cricketing grounds when you’re aware of what might be the final outcome.”¹⁰ When Evans put it to him that the political aspects must have been a weighty factor in the selection process, Carr, who admitted that his memory is sometimes foggy, responded: “It might have, yeah. It was a very mixed-up situation.”¹¹ He also suggested that the D’Oliveira debate took up a large part of the discussion: ‘I’m pretty sure it did. Some meetings went on a long, long time but that was to be an unusual end time [around 2am].’¹²

For his part, Insole acknowledged he was “very anxious to make sure [politics] didn’t become a consideration, but you can’t just clear it out of people’s minds”.¹³ Not that that stopped him trying.

“[Political considerations] were mentioned,” he recalled, “because they were there. And that’s when I said, ‘Let’s forget about the bloody politics, let’s forget about South Africa and let’s pick a team for Australia [where conditions were similar]. We’ve had all this argy-bargy and advice, let’s forget it all and get down to picking a cricket team.’” As far as I’m concerned that’s what we did.”¹⁴

⁸ Interview with the writer, 17 January 2012.

⁹ Interview with the writer, 2007.

¹⁰ Interview with the writer, 17 January 2012.

¹¹ *ibid.* Carr reminisces, however, with complete clarity, the moment he walked into the dressing room before the third Victory Test of 1945 as a schoolboy wonder. But who would begrudge or question an old man recalling the moment he shared a dressing room with his childhood hero – the legendary Wally Hammond.

¹² Interview with the writer, 23 March 2012

¹³ Interview with the writer, 4 April 2012.

¹⁴ *ibid.* Parenthesises added to original.

When Evans interviewed him for an undergraduate assignment in 2007, Carr conceded that the “fearful” affair was “not very well handled” and that he believed D’Oliveira “deserved his place in the side”.¹⁵ Speaking more recently, after D’Oliveira’s death, Carr said: “Was the decision based on cricketing reasons? I think so. The ‘Dolly’ business was particularly difficult, probably wrong. It was a decision that I’m pretty sure was a genuine decision, no messing around. But other people didn’t see it that way.”¹⁶

A strong sense of doubt still lingers, despite Carr being present at the selection meeting. He hinted at the cause for suspicion: “There might have been a lot of talk outside that meeting. I think only two, three or four major people within the MCC dealt with the political side of things. There was Billy Griffith, Gubby Allen, Doug Insole and possibly Sir Alec Douglas-Home who would have probably been involved.”¹⁷

As Evans notes, it is the inclusion of Insole’s name that fascinates. Insole, however, categorically denied any such involvement outside the committee room. Carr, by contrast, appears sympathetic with the view of the 1969 *Wisden*, which asserted that the selectors had acted without strong political and racial motives; but that it was “hard” to believe they “were impervious to political influences”.¹⁸

Both Insole and Carr hinted to Evans that there was a noticeable divide between the selectors and the senior MCC officials. “Despite the selectors forming part of the full MCC Committee,

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Interview with the writer, 17 January 2012.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ M. Melford, “The D’Oliveira Case” in N. Preston (ed), *Wisden Cricketers Almanack*, 1969

Insole recalls that in selection meetings ‘the MCC had their own representation. They were the guardians’.¹⁹ Carr recollects:

*The people involved in selection were mostly duly aligned to the concerns of cricketing ability, certainly those who were particularly responsible – the four selectors were four blokes interested in cricket. The other three or so (Allen, Griffith and Gilligan) were particularly aware, dare I say, of reactions from South Africa.*²⁰

To which, Evans argued, “one can only render [the view] that Carr agrees that the MCC ‘guardians’ believed D’Oliveira should not travel to South Africa, regardless of whether his form warranted inclusion or not. Although they supposedly did not get involved in selection matters, Allen et al had the right to veto any [players] they deemed would damage the reputation of the MCC, which they exercised through the debarring of Barry Knight, who had a complicated private life, and the sacking of Brian Close as captain.²¹ Allen [however] did not deem D’Oliveira an unsuitable tourist in the same fashion.”

Osborne maintains that there was “at least one spy” in the room, “feeding information straight back to the South African Cricket Association, whence it was instantly passed back on to Vorster”.²² Carr and Insole reject this notion, though the latter bemoans that had “never been on a committee yet that doesn’t leak”.²³

One reason for Osborne’s conclusion is Wilfred Isaacs’ own forecast of who would make the team, but the “clinching evidence” was found in the South African National Archives in Pretoria.

¹⁹ Interview with the writer, 4 March 2012.

²⁰ Interview with writer, 23 March 2012.

²¹ In and out of the side during the 1960s, a marriage break-up and financial troubles meant that by 1968 Knight had contemplated suicide. It was later revealed that Knight had let articles to appear under his name without permission, which peeved the cricketing establishment.

²² P. Osborne, *Cricket and Conspiracy*, 195.

²³ Interview with the writer, 4 April 2012.

When D'Oliveira was left out of the initial party, Vorster contacted Arthur Coy, a leading South African Cricket Association official and chairman of selectors, to praise him on the resolution of "our respective problems".²⁴ Coy wrote back: "The inside story of the two final meetings held by M.C.C. I hope to have the privilege of telling you when the opportunity presents itself."²⁵

Whether the selectors were made aware of the Cobham, SACA or Oosthuizen exchanges or not, they knew full well that picking D'Oliveira would seriously undermine the prospects of the tour proceeding. Some if not all were privy to Douglas-Home's less-than-confident odds of 5-4 that the tour would commence if D'Oliveira was selected. Insole, furthermore, admits that there was "an assumption that the tour would go on because that's what happens with tours, but obviously there was a realisation that there was a possibility that it would be scrubbed".²⁶

When asked whether he was aware of the Cobham warning at the time of the selection meeting, Carr recalled: "I was vaguely aware of it," confirming that those in-the-know extended beyond Allen, Griffith and Gilligan – although he appeared more cautious when later questioned.²⁷

Which begets another question: Did the MCC "guardians" (the non-selectors), in a selection meeting so vital to English cricket and Anglo-South Africa relations in general, broaden their brief during this meeting? For if their views were aired, D'Oliveira's exclusion was almost a foregone conclusion. Moreover, would this explain why the minutes of that meeting have yet to be discovered - or were perhaps never written? "I probably wrote them," Carr confirmed to Evans in 2007. "I certainly don't know about them being missing."²⁸

²⁴ B. Murray and C. Merrett, *Caught Behind*, p. 90.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Interview with the writer, 4 April 1968.

²⁷ This writer found this information in an interview transcript from a conversation with Carr in 2007. However, in 2012, when asked whether he was privy to the Lord Cobham message prior to the meeting, Carr responded: 'I really can't be absolutely certain whether one was aware of things.' – Interview with the writer, 17 January 2012.

²⁸ Interview with the writer, 2007.

According to Insole, moreover, “The only input that Gubby Allen and Arthur Gilligan had on behalf of the MCC is that Barry Knight was not to be considered. Other than that, [there was] no interference whatsoever.”²⁹ That said, Insole also acknowledged to Evans that the idea that D’Oliveira might not have been able to cope with the prospective stresses of touring his homeland “might have been in the back of people’s minds”.³⁰

Of all the recollections elicited by Evans, one from Carr about the reason for D’Oliveira’s original exclusion sticks out: “It’s a very difficult thing to say that it’s purely on cricketing grounds when you’re aware of what might or might not be the final outcome”.³¹

What can we conclude from all this? That the advancing years have left Insole and Carr’s memories in a foggy, contradictory state? That Insole, in particular, loved cricket not wisely but too well? That Insole, ever mindful of the Close affair the previous summer, ever protective of his own – and the selectors’ - image, has convinced himself, against all the evidence, that D’Oliveira was omitted from the original party for solely cricketing reasons? Or that Peter Osborne, myself and everyone else who has ever questioned the motives for that selection see a conspiracy where none existed?

What keeps me clinging to that conspiracy theory are the recollections of my mate Trevor Chesterfield. Another key figure in the saga was Louis Duffus, South Africa’s pre-eminent

²⁹ Follow-up telephone interview with the writer, 20 September 2012.

³⁰ Telephone interview with the writer, 20 September 2012.

³¹ Interview with the writer, 2007 and 21 January 2012.

cricket writer, characterised by Chesterfield as “a white ant in the woodpile”. Duffus was in England that summer, covering the Ashes. Trevor’s suspicion, aroused by the cosy relationship between Gubby Allen and E W Swanton, Gubby’s biographer, was that it was Swanton, fed by Allen, who was the “spy” who communicated what went on in the selection meeting to South Africa. The background to this was the link between Swanton and Arthur Coy and the go-between to whom Coy fed information, his mate Duffus, who was himself a pal of Swanton’s.

Trevor first met Duffus in 1960 during the South African tour of England and again in 1963-64 when on tour of Australia as an extra hand needed to report for the Australian Associated Press.

It was while in Sydney 1963, Trevor told me in an email in 2007, that I realised to an extent Duffus was a racist when he refused to share a lift with a couple of African types (West Indians I think) who stepped in two floors from the ground and decided to take the stairs for reason of exercises. Earlier in that tour, I recall Garry Sobers scoring a nifty century against South Africa and Eddie Barlow and Peter Pollock were full of admiration - Duffus dismissed it and from memory, as a century [saying] “It is an innings quantified by moments of fortune and several fielding errors and he fed on missed chances. It isn't one to remember and of no genuine significance. Certainly Australia have more masterful batsmen in their ranks than this West Indian.” I do remember he was chided at dinner that night for his comments by Jack Fingleton. Yet when he was introduced to Sobers, [he] left you with the impression he did not enjoy shaking his hand, but played up the psychophant role. I know for a fact that both Duffus and Coy declined an invitation to a large function in London in 1960 because several West Indians (including Learie Constantine and Frank Worrell) would be present.

Shortly after D’Oliveira was finally dismissed for 158 in that final Test at The Oval, the phone rang in the office occupied by Geoffrey Howard, the Surrey secretary. The call came from John Vorster’s office in Pretoria. It was our pal Oosthuizen, who’d been trying to contact Billy Griffith, the MCC secretary. “I can’t get hold of him,” Oosthuizen told Howard, “so will you take a message to the selectors. Tell them that, if today’s centurion is picked, the tour will be

off.”³² That same afternoon, an extremely prescient prediction was filed to *The Guardian* by Duffus, whose history of cricket in the Republic, published by the SACA, would, tellingly, eschew any mention of black players. To him, D’Oliveira was “politically motivated and an opportunist with an axe to grind”. “If D’Oliveira is selected,” he wrote from The Oval, “South Africa are unlikely to host the MCC tour.”

Trevor Chesterfield wrote extensively about the D’Oliveira Affair, notably in his book about South Africa’s cricket captains. The following recollection did not appear in the final version:

Rumour surfaced from a surprising source in early May 1969, he wrote, that Dolly’s exclusion was deliberate. It came while making a visit to England, travelling on the Windsor Castle, a Union Castle Steamship... Two days out from Cape Town an acquaintance was made with a man who claimed he was Dave Burnsall, and a board member of South African Cricket Association, and said the SACA had a file in their Johannesburg offices referring to the case. The report, he said, had been prepared by Arthur Coy which had been seen by John Vorster, the South African Prime Minister. Contacted months later, Coy, denied such claims or that it was Burnsall who was a fellow passenger, although others on the ship knew him by that name.

“I remember the whole incident quite vividly,” Trevor subsequently told me, “as when I met Dave Burnsall in Johannesburg during the Australian tour, it was a totally different person, which ties in with what Coy told me. So who was the Burnsall I met on that voyage? But confirmation of the file was made by Charles Fortune [the journalist, broadcaster and early secretary of the South African Cricket Union] during a private discussion in 1992.”

According to Trevor, the first of these was: “I think we have seen the start of the West Indianisation of South African cricket. I won't live to see it, but in 20 years’ time, the South African Test team will have at least someone as good as Malcolm Marshall, Viv Richards, or even

your dear friend Conrad Hunte. there will be no Garry Sobers; they come along once in a lifetime - not yours or mine, though.”

Fortune's second comment to Trevor strikes an even more resonant chord:

I wonder what Arthur Coy and his lot would have thought of today. They had a file as thick as a *Wisden* of the business. Ha. So much for the D'Oliveira affair. It hurt us all right, but in the long term it had to happen. The world game had to do without us until the politics were sorted out.

As part of my research, it was a pleasure to track down Barry Knight, the troubled Essex all-rounder who replaced D'Oliveira at Lord's and emigrated soon afterwards to Australia, where he gained a considerable reputation as a coach and mentored the young Allan Border - and remains to this day. His recollections of that fraught and complex summer were nothing if not illuminating. It is one of history's more fateful twists that, had he not hurt his ankle in a match at Leyton before that pivotal Oval Test, he would almost certainly have played ahead of D'Oliveira - which would have saved everybody a lot of trouble.

Was the circuit abuzz with D'Oliveira talk all summer, I wondered? “Not in the early part,” Knight recalled, “but as soon as he got that 158 at The Oval it was. God, we thought, that might cause problems – but how could they leave him out after that? We'd heard that Graeme Thomas, who had some Aboriginal or Asian blood, had had problems with hotels and the like in South Africa while touring there with Australia in 1964.”³³

When I asked Knight whether he had been surprised that D'Oliveira was dropped at Lord's, he seemed genuinely bemused. “I thought we both played!” he exclaimed. “I must have been surprised, yes. Nobody had a clue how old he was – him and Bill Alley. Think how good he'd

³³ Interview with author, 2008

have been had he played county cricket a few years earlier. He was a terrific batter who bowled a bit, like Dougie [Walters]. He kept it tight with those gentle outswingers but you never worried about him as a bowler. I never thought he was all that dangerous, and certainly not a first-change.” All the more reason to query Cowdrey’s use of him in that capacity at Old Trafford. Might it be that Cowdrey was intentionally trying to set D’Oliveira up to fail? “I can’t say,” Knight replied. “But it is unbelievable that he should have got Lawry and still bowled only seven overs in that second innings at Old Trafford.”

Knight came to know “Basil” very well. “You know something,” he told me, “I went to Richie Benaud’s flat once and he had a cat called Dolly. It ran the place.” In 1971, not long after Knight left England, Colin Milburn, Test career savagely ruined by a car crash that cost him an eye, brought a party of businessmen to Melbourne. One night they all went to see the singer Jose Feliciano at the plush Chevron Hotel. “I can still see Basil standing on a table with his silver belt, saying the Aussies were no good at cricket. He’d had a few. He wasn’t as good a drinker as me. Couldn’t hold it like me.

“A few nights later Colin came into the bar with his new eye. He said he wasn’t used to it and asked us to keep an eye on it and tell him if it was watering. When Basil told him he thought it was, Colin rubbed it and it came out, bounced on the bar, and into Basil’s glass. His face was a picture.”

When their paths crossed on the county circuit in 1968, Knight was unaware how deeply Dolly was suffering, how much he was keeping inside. Nor, he suspects, did many others. “There was no sense of that at all. He was the most laid-back bloke I’d ever known. He certainly never spoke about South Africa. All he seemed to want to do, from the moment he started playing for Worcester, was to make as many mates as possible. I don’t suppose he had a single enemy. Even Fred [Trueman] liked him!”

While still not in the public domain, the rumours about Vorster's communiqué had reached the dressing rooms. "We'd heard, certainly by then, that he'd said the team wouldn't be welcome there if Dolly was included. We thought the MCC didn't have the guts to pick him. When the party was first announced, I thought 'They're as weak as gnat's piss. They're kow-towing to Vorster.' The pros were revulsed. It was always them and us. We thought Robins was mad and Gubby Allen was a bleedin' snob. He was a bit of an idiot, a bit up himself. And Basil was one of us."

Hence the widespread delight around the shires as he progressed to that Oval hundred. "Pleased? Oh God, yes. For Basil, and because he was making it difficult for THEM at Lord's. That's got 'em, you thought."

But it hadn't really, had it?