

Song Title: A Tale with a Tune. (I Shot the Sheriff – Eric Clapton 1984)

During the 1980s and 90s I wrote for several consumer magazines in my spare time. Mostly it involved converting press releases into news items and reviewing educational computer games with my children, all from the comfort of my home. Very occasionally I was dispatched abroad. One such trip was to Antigua & Barbuda in February 1998 for Geographical Magazine (not to be confused with National Geographic) to report on a plan to turn its Guiana Island into a luxury Asian Village holiday resort (supposedly to save Americans the bother of flying to the Far East) with multi-million pound houses, a mega yacht marina and expensive restaurants. This would have involved destroying mangroves, installing a huge desalination plant and swathes of fake grass laid for golf courses. Unfortunately (well the whole idea was unfortunate for the natural habitat) a Welsh couple, Taffy and Bonny Bufton, had been the sole occupants, living very, very basically on the island for 32 years, being paid by the government to tend the fallow deer, and were under the impression that they owned it. The government passed an Act of Parliament (the Bufton Resettlement Act 1997) to get them off the island and give them a house and stipend for life. They didn't like that idea so stayed put. The Prime Minister's brother, Vere Bird Jnr, was supposedly acting for the Buftons but Taffy thought he had betrayed them so he slipped off the island and shot him. Not dead though. Taffy got arrested and Mrs B went to make sure he was ok, and hey presto the island was vacated. This happened just before I arrived in Antigua.

I was met by a driver called Brian in an official mini bus. My meeting with the Minister for Culture, Tourism and Health and Asian Resort financiers and developers left me feeling hugely sceptical about the viability of the plan, not to mention the ecological issues. The officials took me to visit the heavily guarded island - a jungle of insects, wild life and overgrowth. I was bitten and scratched to pieces. I also managed to meet the Buftons, by now unhappily living in the government provided house, who told me their side of the story.

Brian secretly arranged for me to meet a group of people opposed to the development at the offices of the Daily Observer newspaper. They told me that it was all an elaborate money laundering scam. It was, but took many years to uncover the extent of it. My story never got published as it was too controversial.

One evening I went up to Shirley Heights Lookout to listen to a 12 piece steel band playing in the fabulous Caribbean warm evening air while watching the sun set. Shirley Heights overlooks the 'Crossroads' rehab centre set up by the brilliant Eric Clapton. I have chosen 'I shot the sheriff' as it seems appropriate to the story.