

Contabile

3rd-5th February 1989
The Chequers Hotel, Newbury

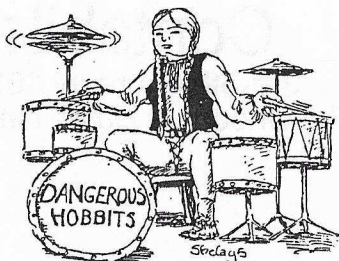
How it all happened.....

Well, there was this con in Liverpool, see? And, like, it had a filk concert, not to mention a REAL FILK ITEM on the programme. So this bunch of filkers sat down in the bar after the filk workshop and started writing this incredibly silly filk. Not only that, but they had the gall to stand up at the end of the filk concert and do it. Now this filk song, well, it, like, named names: one of the names was up there singing it, so that was OK, but the other one wasn't, and, when the song was over, *most* of them saw her coming and legged it, sharpish-like. All except the ringleader, who stood there looking dumb. He looked even dumber when this hand landed on his collar, and a voice said:

"Is everyone enjoying themselves?". Now that wasn't so bad, but then she said, "Who thinks it's time we had a filk con?" and "Who thinks I should be Guest of Honour?" and by then he could see it coming, and wasn't at all surprised when she told him to run it, in front of 200 people so there was no getting away.

Not being totally dumb, he rounded up his loyal comrades who'd legged it (leastways, the ones he could catch) and told them how there was going to be a con committee, and they were on it. Not only that, but the Guest of Honour decided that seeing it was her idea she was going to be on the committee too, just to see fair play and all that. Then there was much telephoning of hotels and explaining of "filk" to all and sundry, not to mention collecting of money, 'cause, you see, the Guest of Honour decided that it was lonely being a Guest of Honour on her own, what with the committee saying they weren't going to let her do any work and all, so she had an idea. When the committee had said 'yes', she told them that they ought to have another Guest of Honour from America, and that they should give her all their loose change every time they saw her, so that they could afford to buy an aeroplane ticket for this other Guest of Honour, because America was a long way away.

And then everyone began running around in little circles doing things, except for the chairman who tried very hard not to do anything at all that someone else could do, but didn't succeed, so that was alright. And they got members, and more members, and people had ideas for programme items, and they got more members and more money, and then they had enough to buy the aeroplane ticket, because the other Guest of Honour had said, yes, she'd come, so that was alright too. Then it got to being January, and nearly February, and everyone (even the chairman) ran round in even smaller circles so everyone could see how busy they were and how for sure it would have to be a really good convention cause everyone was so busy they didn't even have time to punctuate their sentences properly



Meet the Committee

Mike Whitaker

A man with a large and well-padded shoulder, a smaller but much less well-padded neck and the sense to say "Pardon?" in the face of crisis. At least that's what he claims; we all think he forgot to turn up his hearing aid. Besides playing for a living with computers and persuading postmen to deliver mail to him, Mike also edits *Anor*, the Cambridge Tolkien Society's newsletter, and so was lumbered with producing the high class document you are even now reading. As chairman of this con he is of course to be used by all members as target practise, but care should be taken as he is bringing a tame barbarian vet for protection.

Rhodri James

Well, when you share a flat with the Chairman, there's really no escape is there? I mean, where else would the con office be? — and someone's got to be membership secretary. Rhodri's committee job entails ripping open letters, recording the contents in some mysterious and arcane filing system known only to him and referred to by everyone else as "the heap", and passing the money onto S. Linton Holdings Ltd. His real job involves ripping open IBM PC clones, juggling with the contents and resealing them in the hope that the end result will allow him to use the machine for what he wants.

Steve Linton

Life's a funny thing, you know. You run loads of cons, even an Eastercon, and what happens? A pile of filkers tell you you're on their committee because you know all about cons, that's what. And then they notice that you're a Maths Ph.D. student, so they give you all their money to count. Still, as Treasurer, Steve was so confident of the success of the con that he skived off skiing, with the Membership Secretary, the week beforehand. Unfortunately we had to come back... In his spare time, Steve combines being mistaken for a Maths don with not being mistaken as the Godfather of the Trinity Mafia.

Gytha North

About a maid I'll sing a song... OFFICIAL NOTICE: GYTHA IS NOT, REPEAT NOT A COMMITTEE MEMBER AT THIS POINT, SHE IS A GUEST OF HONOUR! IF YOU SEE HER DOING ANY WORK, STOP HER IMMEDIATELY. WE WILL NOTIFY YOUR NEXT OF KIN. Besides her work as a Sybil Serpent and invertebrate organiser of anything and anyone in sight, Aunt Gytha is also the tamer of a kitten that is by turns cute and curious, especially about sleepers.

Richard the Rampant

Star of backstage, off-screen and Toon™ scenario, Richard is a mild and inoffensive person who accidentally got left out of the slander in the PR. If I'm nice enough to him now he might even not set the Vik on me. At any rate, Richard is the official con loudener of noises, brightener of lights and expert on all things technical. In other words, any explosions are entirely his fault. During the day, he spends his time being organised by Gytha.

Rafe Culpin

This man is the official committee worrier, and has spent many a happy hour thinking

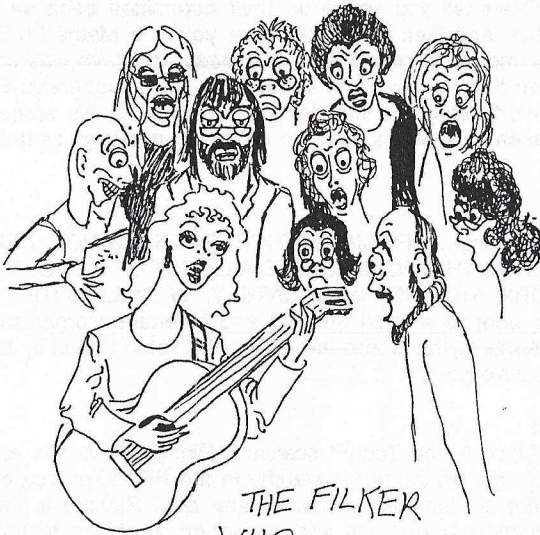
of the worst possible things that might happen to a convention. With a bit of luck none of them will happen, but if they do he'll be able to say "I told you so!" As well as holding down his daytime job accounting for computers, Rafe not only single-handedly founded the filk pub meetings in the One Tun, Farringdon on the last Friday of each month, but is also the Keeper of the Book In Which All Is Written (i.e. Editor of WIGGLE).

Valerie Housden

Val is the committee member who did not run around in small circles, but instead sat down and worked out who should be running round in small circles on the day. Then she phoned them up and got them into practise. In other words, she organised the programme, which is why if you see any of the committee in two places at once you can safely blame it on the triple vodka. Val works in the real world as an accountant, but didn't tell anyone this until after we had saddled Steve with being the Treasurer.

Phil Allcock

A man of many guises, famed for his ability to nick other people's songs and distort them beyond all recognition (at least, the original writers won't admit to them any more), Phil(k) is in charge of nicking ideas for us. What he doesn't know... but that would be telling. When he isn't running around in small circles chasing badge machines or writing other people's songs, Phil plays with computers for G.E.C. and makes outrageous suggestions for the future of aviation as we don't know it.



THE FILKER
WHO
SANG ON KEY!

DS WITH APOLOGIES TO H.M. BATEMAN

Leslie Fish by Lawrence Dean

"...And today our fragile flesh and steel
Have laid their hands on a vaster wheel
With all of the stars to know..."

Leslie Fish — Hope Eyrie

If I'd been asked about Leslie Fish prior to Conspiracy last year, I would have probably have said "Pardon?" or "Who?" For it wasn't until Conspiracy that I first set eyes on any American folk tapes and realised just how far ahead of us they were. After hearing some of Leslie's songs on two compilation tapes I bought myself there, it wasn't long before I'd added all of Leslie's own tapes to my collection (thanks to 'Sign of the Dragon'). These were 'Skybound' (1982), 'The Undertaker's Horse' (1985), 'Cold Iron' (1986) and 'Chickasaw Mountain' (1986). I was also fortunate enough to obtain a copy of the beautifully illustrated **Cold Iron** songbook. I was hooked.

More recently, I've been able to add to my growing collection and a tape by Leslie with The Dehorn Crew. So now, with all of the information I possess on Leslie, in the form of sleeve notes and potted biographies, spread out in front of me, I feel I am in a position to write informatively about her.

Let's start with the easy bit, then, and quote from the bio of Leslie which appears in the **Cold Iron** songbook.

"Leslie Fish was, according to her own report, born in a dull suburb in New Jersey, to dull parents, and attended dulls schools until graduating from a dull high school — after which she swore she'd lead a life of high adventure, and that she has done. She was heavily involved in the civil rights and anti-war movements, made her living as a professional folksinger and railroad worker in Chicago, and has been active for many years as a union organizer for the I.W.W. — the "Wobblies". A firm anarchist, she visited Berkley in 1982, and within a year left Chicago for California, where she somehow felt she fit in. She's a published science fiction author and member of the Science Fiction Writers of America, and a prolific writer of SF folk music — folk — which she sings and plays on Monster (her twelve-string guitar) whenever she can find suitable rabble to rouse."

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Needless to say, Leslie will most assuredly find at Contabile an audience ready and willing to be roused.

In 1975, Leslie Fish and others formed The Dehorn Crew, as the band of the Chicago Branch of the Industrial Workers of the World. They recorded two albums: 'Folksongs for Folks who Ain't Even Been Yet' (1976) and 'Solar Sailors' (1977). Mention has been made of Leslie's guitar, but the words used to describe it in the booklet which accompanies 'Solar Sailors' are too good to miss: "... a cantakerous twelve string which she affectionately calls 'Monster' and coaxes some incredible licks out of." In 1987, Leslie reformed The Dehorn Crew in a new incarnation and they released a tape of fresh material entitled 'It's sister Jenny's turn to throw the bomb'.

A devoted fan of Star Trek, many of Leslie's early songs took as their subject the

Starship Enterprise and its crew, including that ever-popular filk standard 'Banned from Argo', which several filkers have since seen fit to write their own altered versions of.

There are many of Leslie's songs which I would count among my own favourite filksongs, and these include: 'Toast for Unkown Heroes', 'Iron Mistress', 'Thoughts on Strange Vistors', 'Transport - 18', 'Space Hero', 'Pride of Chanur', 'Swamp Gas', 'Vengeance is Mine', 'Kraken', and the indisputable classic 'Hope Eyrie', which I've taken the liberty of quoting a few lines from at the beginning of this piece. She has also produced some excellent songs in collaboration with lyric writer Mercedes Lackey, and two outstanding tapes consisting of songs she has written to Rudyard Kipling's original verse.

As a professionally published writer of SF, she has had stories included in each of C. J. Cherryh's **Merovingen Nights** anthologies.



Gytha North by Colin Fine

There is a disappointing tendency in all of us to put things in categories. Worse, we make judgements based on the categories: "That's not science fiction!" "No, I don't listen to rock." We often put people into categories as well, and nowhere more so than among fans. Such and such a person is a mediafan, a truefan, a gaming fan etc.

From time to time you meet somebody who defies these compartments. Gytha North is one. To some she is - and will always be - a media fan; though if you visit her house you will find more books than in some bookshops. To others she is a dealer - and even then there are categories, because she deals in pewter and pottery, badges and jewellery, rather than books and comics. To others Gytha is Captain Fancy-Dress, or That Woman in the Outrageous Costume, or She Who Must Be Obeyed (particularly on Con Committees). It is rumoured that in her diurnal life she is a Sybil Serpent at the Department of Stealth and Total Obscurity. We honour her in her aspect as The Filker.

But Gytha subsumes and transcends all these. What she is is Furi. Whether singing, looking striking, drinking, viking or anything else-ing, Gytha is Gytha - and good to be with.

Gone are the days when filking did not happen at British cons unless Gytha was there to lead. But it was her enthusiasm, her enjoyment, and her basso voice that got it all going here. Listen to Gytha sing when you get the chance - and make sure you catch some of her own songs. But even more, enjoy her company when you get the chance - it'll be worth it.

Gytha's History of British Filk



I know that filking has been happening in Sercon and media fandom from almost the first days, but it used to be an occasional and very minority interest. I attended my first convention locally in Brighton in 1979 (Seacon) — I was as bright-eyed and bushy-tailed as any neo-fan. I popped in early and registered for myself and my man of the time, took a quick glance round then raced off home to change into something more appropriate (louder). I chatted to dozens of people, mostly American, and had a good time. Saturday night, after the masquerade, I found the filking and sang and sang and sang. I remember 'Song of the Shield Wall' and 'Woad' from that very first session. Sometime over this weekend you may hear 'Brighton Filksinging Report' by Tamar Lindsay, which was written at that convention.

I assumed that singing was a normal part of convention activity until the next con, where I couldn't find any. Luckily, I found a room party with an enthusiastic audience and sang all night. That was the start — soon, there were more singers: Colin Fine and Bruce Macdonald are the names that spring to mind from those early days. CamCon was the first con which had filking as part of the programme: that was where Mike Whitaker discovered filking, and where I discovered that I sang 'Breathalysed' in the same key as Lennon & McCartney wrote it (pure fluke). Like Topsy, filking just grew and grew. I am very proud of the new singers and writers, even when 'Aunty Gytha' seems to get into nine out of ten of the songs about filking. We have a good crowd of people who sing, write, play guitar or, occasionally, just listen.

'The Old Grey Wassail Test', the original British filk hymnal, arrived with a bit of help, and went out of print faster than I expected — a new print should be out by the time you read this. 'On Filkley Moor', book number 2, has more than twice as many songs, and more contributors. The first two tapes are finished, and now we have 'Contabile'. I am not sure what happens next, but I am sure it will be fun.



P.S. If you don't yet know me and want to catch me at the con, I'll be wearing something unusual, probably drinking and I expect to be singing a lot.



The Good Pub Guide to Newbury

Herein is the hard facts about the appalling state of the license trade in the town of Newbury.

Paul, Denzil and myself have personally visited each place listed, some of them more than once, and have come to the following conclusions. All the pubs were visited during the week (we're never here at weekends), so we can't say how things change on a Friday or Saturday night. Nearly all the ones we have given comment to have recently been renovated, changed managers, changed breweries, changed clientele or even managed to become interesting places to go for a drink.

Most of the pubs have silly dress regulations on their doors but we never saw these enforced (except in one case, The Snooty Fox, where they refused to serve Tracey because she was wearing her leather jacket). However they might enforce them at weekends.

The majority of places do the normal lunchtime "menu" rubbish, although one or two do make the effort to give their customers something better. Take-away vans can be found in Northbrook Street on an evening, two pizza houses, a MacDonalds, a doner kitchen, fish & chips shop, Chinese restaurants & take-aways and curry houses are all within 10 minutes walk. From the hotel to the furthest marked pub is only 3/4 of a kilometre. Beer prices averaged out at about £1.09, we don't know about lager prices as none of us were stupid enough to drink the stuff. Some pubs sell bottled Newquay steam beer.

The numbers refer to the numbered locations on the enclosed map.

1 CHEQUERS

They're stuck with this place anyway / restaurant / Courage & Ruddles / this was the most expensive pint in town at £1.16.

2 BACON ARMS (inn)

Another hotel, restaurant, bar, wine bar / Courage beers / small, cozy, busy.

3 CROSS KEYS

Moderate size / Ushers beer / possibly the last working man's pub in town / a place to go if all you want is a pint and can't be bothered going to anywhere more interesting.

4 BRUNOS "WINE BAR"?

Small, dingy / we didn't go into this one, but the last time I was in I was very unimpressed & only went in because it was open and I had to loose half an hour on a wintery Saturday while waiting for a show to start at the local arts workshop

5 CLOCK TOWER

Small / Loud music / Courage keg & Newcastle brown / Rocker/Biker pub with leather and scruff "de rigueur". Favourite haunt of the local constabulary at chuckie out time and quite often throughout a Friday and Saturday night. Bring your own band-aids.

6 MOMUMENT

Comfortable / Quiet / Halls beer, nice Burtons / Average age of clientele 30's.

7 LION

Recently rebuilt / Moderate size / normally busy / good, well kept Wadworths, Tanglefoot, Oldtimer, Farmers Glory, 6X / Silly and tasty menu / dress regulation only applied in extreme cases from what we've seen / An atmospheric (man made) pub.

8 CAPTAINS TABLE

Cramped / Bland Courage best / Video juke box / Clientele either juvenile or paralytic.

9 WAGON & HORSES

Spacious (as I remember it's got three bars, although we only tried one) / Courage beer Best & Directors / when we were in the place was deserted, the staff nearly outnumbered the customers. However at weekends the place is full (as in elbow room not available) of the local 4th, 5th, 6th formers and USAF personnel from Greenham.

10 HATCHET

Fairly spacious restaurant pub / Ushers beer / I'm really a yuppie but I'm slumming tonight clientele.

11 QUEENS HEAD

Hotel restaurant / Courage beers / small bar / "period theme"

12 THE CHARLES

Two small bars / Courage beers / busy town local

13 SNOOTY FOX

Recently renovated / Avoid unless you like lager (louts and all) / Bouncers / Flashing disco lights and generic rock muzak. / Don't know what the beer was like, we couldn't stand the place long enough to find out. We left because they refused to serve us (someone was committing the heinous crime of wearing a fringed leather jacket).

14 BRICKLAYERS

Spacious, comfortable / quiet (well as quiet as any town pub can be) with velour plush and Greek statues / Courage beers

15 CATHERINE WHEEL

Moderate size / Courage beers / busy on Saturday afternoons

16 THE COOPERS

Small / Courage beers / I have difficulty in telling when this place is open; for three years I thought that it was closed awaiting demolition.

17 THE DOLPHIN

Two bars, each of moderate size / Courage beers and a pool table

18 THE NAGS HEAD

Two small bars / Courage beers.

19 THE RED HOUSE

Smallish (as in knock the dining room, the lobby and the living room into one, put up a counter and get a licence) / free house / Archers village & Marstons pedigree / bar billiards / normally busy / tends to use its over 21's only rule to keep out obvious underage types.

20 THE RAILWAY

Smallish, pleasant / Morlands beer / The last time I went in here they had a no rucksacks, hitchhikers, travellers, anyone having political views in any way opposed to the lady with the screechy voice rule; which they enforced! All of which I thought rather odd as it's on the main road through town and it's the nearest place to the station.

21 THE RISING SUN

Didn't go in this one / Courage / looks small / idyllic setting (the middle of a car park)

For beer & a reasonable atmosphere, we in a totally unbiased (honest) manner recommend the Lion and the Red House. The Monument is a nice pub for peace and quiet, the Clock Tower the place for noise, the rest of the places are, on the whole, basic brewery owned town pubs.

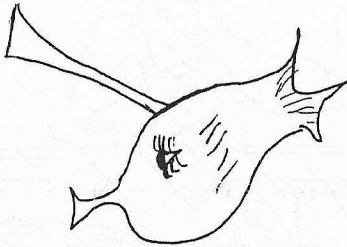
Roxxburgh the mis-spelt

Taping Policy

A lot of people bring recording Walkman-type tapers to filkings to produce their own recordings. This is perfectly welcome at **Contabile** as long as the following points are observed:

- 1) Such tapes should be for personal use only, not for giving out or selling multiple copies.
- 2) Please respect the performer's wishes if they ask that a song not be taped, for whatever reason.
- 3) Please remember that the performance is for the enjoyment of those present; not for your taper, and keep your taping as unobtrusive as possible. In particular:
 - Don't push microphones into people's faces or at their instruments.
 - Don't keep leaning forward to adjust the taper. If you put it out in front near the singer, it should be left there until the end of the song.
 - Don't jump in and demand details of a song immediately before or after every song.
 - Don't form a barrier of tapers round a shy or inexperienced singer.

Please remember that this is a filk convention, for people who want to perform and listen to music: as such, the committee would appreciate it if people refrained from behaviour likely to spoil other people's enjoyment, particularly talking during performances. Don't make us ask you to shut up or move elsewhere – you won't like it, and neither will we. Equally, just because the words to someone's song are in 'Wassail Test' or 'On Filkely Moor', that doesn't imply a licence to 'assist' a solo performance.



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For Gytha

