

REPORT ON PROBABILITY N-1

A preliminary look at possible sites for Eastercon '89

London (Central)

The main disadvantages of London are that prices will inevitably be higher than at almost any other venue, and that Easter is less likely to be a slack period for the hotels (reducing our bargaining position). Furthermore, more people are going to commute to the con which means that we are less likely to fill the hotel (this may be an advantage in places like the London West where there is no nearby overflow hotel). In our favour are the excellent opportunities for increased publicity and attendance figures (I think we can expect at least 33% and possibly 50+% higher attendance - say around 2000 attending).

There are, of course, any number of hotels in London. However, the exigencies of size etc. have reduced the possibilities down to a bare few. So far, there has been no discrimination on grounds of cost, except for the Grosvenor which has a hall for 1800 but falls into the "very expensive" price bracket.

a) Crest/Russell - (West End)

One of the initial sites we looked at was the Bloomsbury area (down Southampton Row). There are enough beds in this area to hold a Worldcon without problems, but there is not a vast amount of function space. The best option seems to be a split site between the Bloomsbury Crest (hall for 1200) and the Hotel Russell (two medium sized halls and some small rooms). These two hotels are literally a stone's throw apart and do offer a good mix of facilities. The bad points are:

- i) They belong to different chains and so may prove difficult to deal with
- ii) We probably can't fill both (they have over 1000 beds between them)
- iii) Over-enthusiastic banqueting managing in the Russell who wants to keep the con within his chain (THF)
- iv) The large hall in the Crest may not be quite big enough (it's rated at about 1200)

Good points:

- i) If we end up with more people than expected, we can use function rooms in near-by hotels such as the Royal Imperial and the Bonnington
- ii) The two hotels seem to fit together well as regards rooms etc.

b) The London West - (Earls Court)

The London West has the great advantage of a single massive hall (seats 2000) which can be divided into six. This could provide space for bookroom or an alternative programme etc. (check time taken to move partitions - it may be possible to change the divisions between items) Tim has some interesting ideas for U and L-shaped halls. Otherwise, space is awkward (there are a number of small rooms and a place for an art show, there is also a medium-large room with a bar but no real alternative programme area).

Large foyer, restaurant and hotel pub would come in useful. Possible problems with space - there is only one other hotel in the near vicinity (the Lily) and that only has one hall (for 100 - could be used as a bookroom, but then the dealers would complain).

c) The Novotel - (Hammersmith)

This is less promising than we originally thought, the immense exhibition area listed in the Convention Guide apparently being a typo. From the large-scale floor plans which they kindly gave us, it looks as if the main hall is a bit too small for us while the exhibition area in the basement has lots of pillars interrupting the view. Still, we can keep this one in mind.

d) Other London sites

All the other sites in London appear to be either very expensive hotels or conference centres. Wembley conference centre would be a good site, but there don't seem to be enough beds in nearby hotels for it to be worth our while.

The Kensington Rainbow (a conference centre) has lots of nearby hotels and has a couple of reasonably sized halls. They claim to have a very flashy art deco colour

scheme (hence the name). It also has an immense exhibition area that we could use as a sort of open-plan fan-room, bar, foyer etc. (with minority interest chair circles in each corner). The idea being that you could drift from one thing to another without having to go through intervening passageways. Another bonus is that the Rainbow provides a suite of 3 or 4 rooms for conference organisers. Unfortunately, I suspect that the Rainbow will prove too expensive for us.

The Royal Lancaster Hotel looks as if it has the rooms we need, but I believe that it would be prohibitively expensive.

The Barbican would make a wonderful convention site (their information pack made me drool over the facilities - 3 cinemas!) but it must be very expensive and I don't think there are any hotels close by.

London (Heathrow)

On examining the hotels in the Heathrow area, we discovered that there was no large enough hall at any of the hotels. The best compromise would be a split site between the Excelsior and the Penta. This has the following disadvantages:

- i) Poor mix of facilities
- ii) Major road between the hotels with no easy means of crossing
- iii) Far too many beds (both hotels have in the region of 1000 beds)
- iv) Problems with permanent rooms reserved for airline staff

I think that just about winds it up for Heathrow (though there are supposed to be some new hotels being built around there). The only pity is that we couldn't use the Sheraton Skyline which has its own lagoon-shaped swimming pool in the centre of the hotel (with the cocktail bar on an island).

Bath

Bath sent their regrets that they didn't have the facilities. I guess this means that they really can't fit us in. Bath appears to be fairly low on large hotels with conference facilities. The only possibility

would involve using the public function space such as the Pump room which is probably not available.

Birmingham

I have been telephoned by a Mrs Shone representing the Birmingham NEC Metropole who appear fairly keen to have us (though they were unaware that Beccon was the 1987 British National Convention). We have been invited to look around the facilities (I suggested that Tim and Roger talk to Mrs Shone when they are looking at the site for Beccon). There have been reports that more accomodation is being built on the NEC site, which might improve things, but there is still the major problem of no local shops, restaurants etc. If Beccon flops then the NEC would be a bad place to bid for another con on the same site.

Other Birmingham sites are still very vague since no information has yet been received. If the new facilities in the centre of the city are ready, it might be possible to do a split site using the Grand and the Holiday Inn. I would favour doing research into this one to see if there is any chance of their getting this conference centre finished in the near future.

Bournemouth

Bournemouth looks quite nice, except that the Conference Centre is already booked for Easter 1989. It might be possible to do a con spread out over about six hotels, centred on the Moat House, but this seems to be a measure to be resorted to only if we get desperate.

Brighton

No matter what Tim thinks, I feel that the Brighton Metropole is a perfectly good place to hold Contrivance. It has the advantages that we will pick up a lot of memberships at the Worldcon and that we know a convention of reasonable size will fit there because it did so in 1984. The disadvantages are that some people think the Metropole has been used rather too often and that we may rattle around in it as Seacon '84 did. I believe we may be sufficiently larger than Seacon to fill up the holes - and we can learn from their mistakes! Furthermore, we could restrict ourselves to using only one or two of the exhibition halls and concentrate mainly on the hotel's own function space.

On the other hand, a number of people have said that they would not come to another Eastercon at the Metropole (especially only a year and a half after the Worldcon). Despite this we could end up having to use Brighton, in which case we would have to arrange some way of attracting the people who are bored by the site (any suggestions? sponsored orgies? a Regency revival theme?)

Bristol

Bristol is not really in the running. The only way to get the right facilities would be to use the University together with a fleet of buses to ferry people around town (also, see Warwick). I honestly don't think it's worth going any further here.

Cambridge

Cambridge sent me a pamphlet about their theatre cum conference centre which they are in the middle of re-vamping. Although it is big enough for a main hall, there seems to be no room for all the other things we need. Furthermore, I do not believe that there is enough hotel space in Cambridge for our purposes.

Channel Islands

Guernsey sent me their conference pack when they saw that we were interested in the South Coast. This could be very, very good. I especially liked the look of the Beau Sejour conference centre (halls - 1800, 1000, 450, 100 and some smaller ones) which is available free of charge. There are a number of hotels in easy walking distance of this conference centre (in fact, the whole island seems to be in easy walking distance of it).

Much the same goes for Jersey (who have offered to pay for one of us to come over and look at their facilities). Although the conference centre isn't so well suited (a 2100 and some small rooms - and I don't think this one's free) there are a couple of hotels that could do us.

Both of these are really very good venues, the only problem seems to be getting there. I have identified 4 possibilities:

- i) Scheduled plane - I have been given the figure of £79 as the fare to Jersey. If this is the standard

fare, we might be able to arrange a group discount but it is really a little too high for all except the Paul Dormers of this world

- ii) Chartered plane - I tried to look into this and couldn't get a quote from the charter company. The rates vary according to the type of plane etc. but it would have to be fairly small (prob. 130 seater max.) due to the size of the airfield. There might be problems with arranging this
- iii) Ferry - Standard rates are £55 per person during the week, £65 at weekends. I think we might get group discounts but this would have to be gone into in detail (Theatre and Concert Rail Club?)
- iv) Chartered boat (or ferry) - I think this is really one for Roger to answer! I am afraid though that Easter comes too early in 1989 for us to contemplate shipping hordes of fans around the Channel in anything too small

Unfortunately, the travelling costs would appear to make this venue much too expensive, both for us to organise and for fans to get to (though we might increase our European membership). Still, think of the money we could save with no VAT, duty free drink, cheap petrol, cheap food...

PS I have since asked around, and quite a number of people have said that they would be interested in going to the Channel Islands. However, we would probably lose the younger fans (who can't afford it) and neos/fringe-fans (who can't be bothered). There also wouldn't be many walk-ins.

Coventry

Coventry were some of the first people to write to us and seemed very keen. The De Vere Hotel was especially interested and pointed out that they had hosted several conventions before. They suggested that we use Coventry Sports Centre (right by the De Vere) for the main programme and spread the rest over the De Vere and the Leofric. This would provide about 600 beds and all the necessary function space, the rest could probably be accommodated in guest houses and the like. Given the use of the large hall at the sports centre, this one could be feasible. Against this is the fact that nobody really seems to like the De Vere and they aren't going to be too enthusiastic about having the programme in a sports centre.

Dover

I don't know why Dover even bothered sending us anything. They seem to be completely unsuited to our requirements (I think that the total function space in Dover is about 500 spread over 3-4 hotels)

Eastbourne

There are no hotels in Eastbourne with a large enough hall and the Eastbourne Local Authority said in their letter that they didn't think they had the facilities. However, it would be possible to have the main hall at either the Winter Gardens or the Congress Theatre and use the Grand Hotel (the De Vere chain) for the rest of the programme. Since the Grand has only about 300 beds, we would have to use other hotels as well (probably including the Cavendish as this is also a De Vere). The disadvantages:

- i) The Grand is a 5 star hotel and therefore likely to be both unusually expensive and difficult to reconcile to fannish habits
- ii) The Cavendish also has pretensions (e.g. they insist that jacket and tie be worn in the restaurant) and there may be problems with special Easter package tours
- iii) If Easter tours are a regular thing in Eastbourne, the Congress Theatre (or Winter Gardens) may be booked or the price higher than we want to pay
- iv) I don't think we are likely to get many walk-ins

The advantages:

- i) The Grand has some really superb facilities including an office for the use of conferences and one of the best equipped halls around. The whirlpool bath and heated swimming pool will have to be reserved for the committee...
- ii) We can keep a substantial proportion of the accommodation inside one chain
- iii) The Congress Theatre looks very flashy, and proper theatrical facilities could be a great advantage for things like the masquerade

This could make for an interesting convention, but I think that it might turn out to be rather unwieldy. I also feel that Eastbourne is generally less attractive than Brighton (I've heard it referred to as the resort where all the old colonels come to die and wheelchairs outnumber people) and would be less popular.

Gatwick

We examined the hotels in the Gatwick area and decided that this would be impossible. The two main hotels are on opposite sides of the airport and neither really has the function space we need. The only thing in Gatwick's favour is the biplane suspended in mid-air in the middle of the Hilton.

Harrogate

This is too far north for the present, but they sent a conference pack so here goes. Harrogate conference centre looks almost perfect. I understand why the bid for a con there in '87 was so enthusiastic. There are two large halls, one in a futuristic style, the other a traditional theatre. There are also smaller halls and a large hotel (with more function space) next door. None of this gets around the hazards that the '87 bid ran into (like no books to be sold on Sundays!). One to think long and hard about though if we go north of Birmingham.

Llandudno (Aberconwy)

Llandudno are a little too far to the north for us, but they sent a conference pack anyway. They have what seems to be an adequate conference centre and hundreds of hotels and guest houses. There have been party political conferences in Llandudno, so they must be big enough (though there may be licensing restrictions etc.). On the whole, I think this should be left until we are a good bit more desperate.

Reading

Not really a serious suggestion. There are two medium-large hotels with some function space, quite a long way apart, and some smaller ones. The only way to work this would be to use the Hexagon Theatre (familiar to TV snooker watchers) which is just behind the Ramada Hotel. We could also use the University for

some things, such as accomodation. (But see Warwick)

Southampton

Southampton does not really seem to be feasible. There are some smaller hotels but not the sort of thing we are looking for. The Guildhall could supply the large hall for the main programme, but I suspect that we would not fit comfortably.

Warwick

The University of Warwick sent me their brochure. It's quite nice and you could run an Eastercon on their campus, but somehow I don't think we would win against any sort of competition whatsoever. Furthermore, when I re-read the pamphlet I realised that because Easter is so early in 1989 the space isn't going to be available anyway! (which probably also cuts out all the other university sites such as Bristol and Reading).

SUMMARY

So far, it looks like Central London way out in front, the main problems being the cost of the rooms etc. Next I would place Brighton and Eastbourne with Birmingham and Coventry trailing some way behind. If someone discovers a cheap form of teleportation, then Guernsey/Jersey is also a front runner, otherwise I don't think we have any more serious contenders. If it turns out that none of the London sites are feasible, we may have to start looking at some of the places further north (such as Scarborough and Harrogate) that seem to have the right facilities.

We are going to have to have decided on the site by the beginning of November so that we can announce our bid at Novacon. However, we must allow 3 to 4 weeks beforehand to prepare and print flyers. We should also allow a couple of weeks (a month?) for arguing and haggling with the hotel(s). This puts us into early/middle September. I suggest that we consider no sites after the beginning of September and try to have reached a final decision (or at least an order of preference) by the 15th.

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