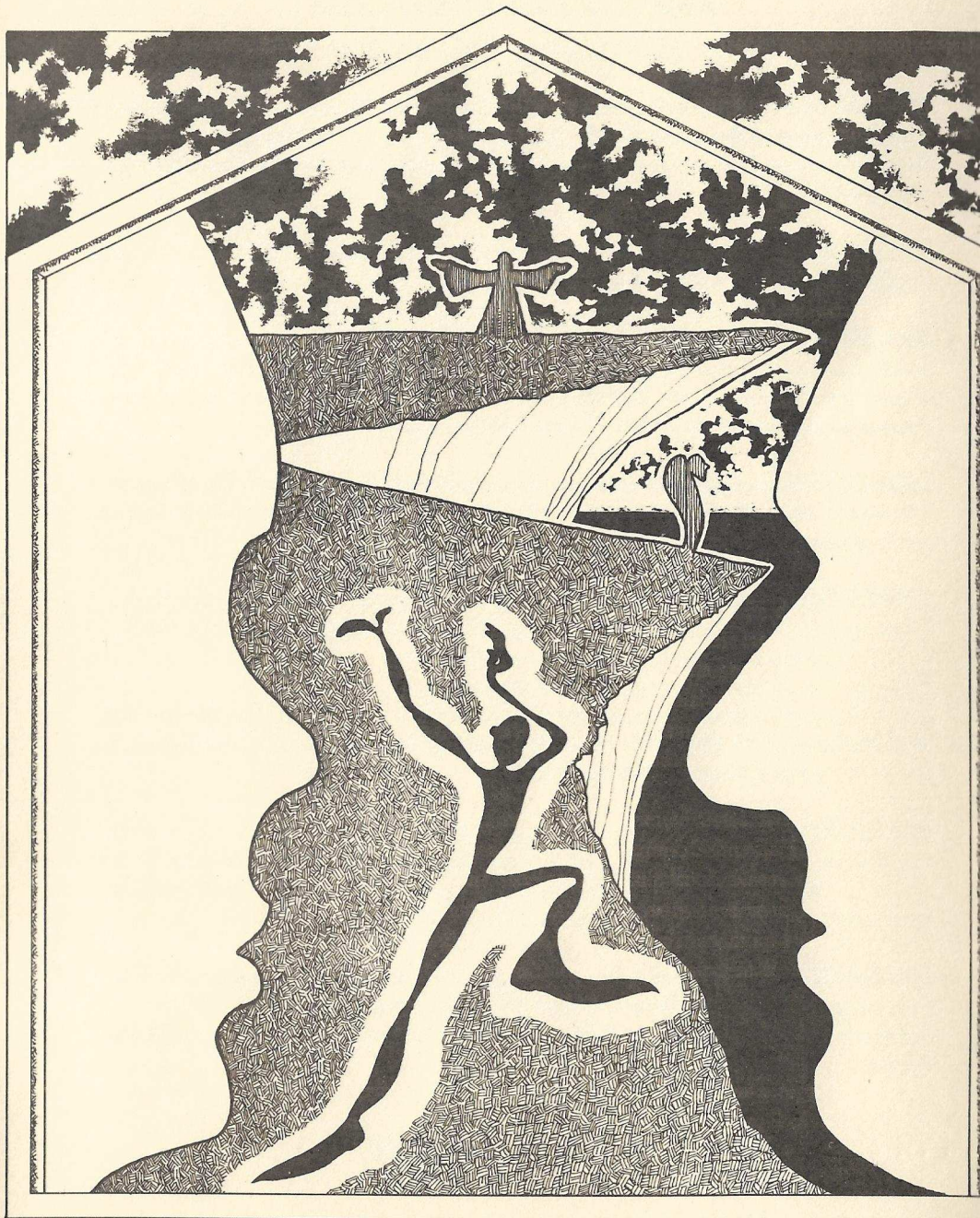


NOVACON 24

Progress Report Three



NOVACON 24

Guest of Honour : Graham Joyce

Royal Angus Hotel, Birmingham

Friday 4th to Sunday 6th November 1994

COMMITTEE : Richard Standage is chair with Carol Morton doing Registrations; Helena Bowles as Treasurer; Sarah Freakley has taken on the Programme; Chris Murphy in charge of Ops; Tony Morton on Publications and Martin Tudor liaising with the hotel.

STAFF : Mike Siddall, responsible for the Bookroom (contact on 0229 462417); John Harold who will arrange the Artshow.

MEMBERSHIP and ENQUIRIES : This will cost £25 until 1st October when postal memberships close, then £30 on the door. Carol Morton (14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS Tel: 0384 825386) is the person to send your cheques to and will try to answer any convention enquiries.

ROOM RATES : Twin/Double rooms will be £29.95 (per person) and Single rooms £34.95 per night. Booking forms **MUST** be returned to Carol Morton by 20th September to guarantee a room in the Angus.

ADVERTISING RATES : Advertising is welcome for the Programme Book at the following rates: (Professional) £40 full page, £25 half page, £15 quarter page; (Fan) £22.50 full page, £12.50 half page, £7.50 quarter page.

Advertisement on the back cover has been taken up.

Anyone interested should approach Tony Morton at 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS (0384 825386). Deadline for camera ready advertising copy for the Programme Book is 24th September.

BOOKROOM RATES : Tables will cost £15 for a six foot table for the whole weekend however, if you are allocated a smaller four foot table the cost will be £10. To book a table you must be a member of the convention and fill in and return your booking form (which is included with this PR).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS : Our thanks go to Graham Joyce for his article, Tim Groome for the cover art, Tony Berry for the Novas article Chris and Pauline Morgan for their notice on the Writers Workshop (and agreeing to do it) and Helena Bowles for the reviews.

SEE YOU AT THE CON!

CHAIRMAN'S BIT

Richard Standage

Welcome to PR3, our last update before the convention itself gets going. If you look carefully at all the loose sheets that have just fallen on to your lap you'll notice a flyer for signing up not only for the Beer and Sausage Tasting, but also a Balti Banquet that we have planned for the Saturday night. If you have never experienced this West Midlands speciality dish before I heartily recommend that you return the form as soon as possible as we need a minimum of 80 people to make it viable. If you are an experienced balti eater then come along as well and impress every one with your knowledge and naan bread dexterity.

The Beer and Sausage Tasting is also a must. The emphasis this year is on Birmingham and Black Country real ales and plentiful supplies are guaranteed. Book now.

While you are sending this sheet back to Carol, please don't forget your hotel booking form if you haven't already done so (see statutory nag below).

That's all for now, see you at the con.

Registrations

Carol Morton

As Richard says above time for the statutory nag. In PR2 I asked you (if you hadn't already) to return your hotel booking forms, some of you did, most however did not. Once again I am sending out a booking form to those of you out there that I have not yet received a form from, so if you've not found an hotel booking form in the envelope with this PR then I've already had yours, so don't panic!! If you have any doubts phone me (before 9 pm please) and I'll set your mind at rest.

We, the committee, had been trying to get the hotel to agree to a balti banquet on the Saturday night of the con. Trying in vain we thought, but a new contact at the hotel, in the form of the General Manager, has agreed to this and we now proudly present said banquet for the bargain price of £6.50. There is a drawback however, places are limited so you will find with this PR a booking form, fill it in and return it to me with a cheque for £6.50 by 1 October 1994 at the latest.

Hard on the heels of last year's beer tasting we have another beer tasting based this time on local beers brewed in the Midlands (more about this event elsewhere in the PR). This year we have included a sausage tasting too! This will cost £4.00 and will include vegetarian sausages. So if you wish to attend fill in the booking form enclosed and send it back to me with a cheque for £4.00.

If you want to attend both events it will only cost you £10.00, again fill in the form and return it to me with a cheque for £10.00 by 1 October 1994.

So there you are, I'll see you all at the con, happy form filling in!

REALITY

Graham Joyce

Reality. This is a much more difficult subject to joke about than either dreams or illusions, the subjects of previous PR musings. Mainly because I don't know what it is.

There are some things about the nature of reality of which I am, however, quite certain. That is, the dice are shaved, the cards are marked and the wheel is rigged. Even the unassailable computerised random number generator has a bug in the system. Question is, how did the bug get there?

Conduct the following experiment : hold a mirror in your right hand, and another mirror in your left. Now slowly - very slowly, because this is dangerous - bring the reflecting planes of each mirror together until they are touching, mirror to mirror. The incredible and astonishing thing about this experiment is that absolutely nothing happens. It's obvious to anyone that when the mirrors touch, the actualisation of infinite reflections should create a cataclysmic explosion, a white-out of unthinkable intensity. Even if the explosion is only in the mind of the beholder. Yet the fact is that there was an explosion. Your mind, overloaded by reality, shut it out.

Oh, come off it. Stop thinking scientifically. Where's that going to get you? All right, consider reality as like one of those gestalt pictures where you see the profile of two faces turned towards each other, and then you look again and, no, it's a vase. Of course it's both, and it depends on the observer switching background and foreground.

But it's not that simple either. Because I don't trust the artist who drew that picture. The artist distorted reality, just to make the visual trick work. So I don't trust artists, just as I don't trust writers. Writers and artists are all cheats and fraudsters and confidence tricksters and mirror-workers when it comes to reality. What a bunch of liars! These are the last people I'd go to if I wanted to know about reality. No, that's not quite true : I'd go to them before I'd go to scientists and priests.

Reality, when it emerges from a story, does so not from the words themselves, but from some pattern emerging between the words. The reality you are trying to communicate in a story is like a photograph developing in a chemical bath, and all the words, images and scenes are just the chemicals.

Weird tales, stories of the supernatural, fantasy and science fiction present a perspective on polymorphous reality as creditable as any so-called 'realism' or 'naturalism', because the reader is engaging with an approximation of reality behind the obvious. It's not just a matter of suspending disbelief, either. It is never a condition of reading this type of fiction that you have to dispense with intelligent scepticism. The reader consents to join in an exploration beyond an apparent absurdity, because along with the author, the reader believes a more wondrous perspective on reality may be revealed.

Dreams are real things. Fictions are real things. How we choose to let them influence us is up for grabs. We select our reality from a number of possible realities, and act accordingly; or we have it selected for us.

My own interest in dreams, virtual reality, witchcraft, hauntings, hallucinations, delusional systems and so on all go back to the (probably naive) idea that altered states of reality exist and that by accessing them we can get a glimpse of the bigger picture. I say this view may be naive because if there is a bigger picture to be seen, I suspect we fashion it as we go, and that it can change with every blink. But when we come back, some of the glittering fallout from what we saw stays on us.

Actually, I'm addicted to that fallout, that reality-dust. It was first pushed me, behind the bike-sheds at school when I was a teenager, in the form an SF paperback. It was FAHRENHEIT 451. A book about books. Two mirrors come together. I've been hooked ever since.

WRITERS WORKSHOP

At this year's Novacon, Chris and Pauline Morgan are running a workshop for would-be SF writers. This will take the form of a 2- or 3-hour criticism session (probably late on the Saturday afternoon) in which a small number of stories will be constructively discussed. It won't be an open programme item; only those people with stories under discussion will be present.

A few ground rules :

- (a) you must be a member of Novacon 24
- (b) it doesn't matter whether you've had fiction published or not
- (c) you must book a place on the workshop as soon as possible
- (d) you must send Chris and Pauline a copy of your story or chapter to arrive by 1st October at the latest. The copy must be very clearly typed or word-processed on A4 paper (double-spaced lines, wide margins, one side of the paper only, black on white; no draft-quality dot matrix rubbish).

Maximum length 5000 words. If it's a chapter it should be chapter 1. SF or fantasy only.

- (e) you must be prepared to read and comment on the pieces written by the other members of the workshop; all pieces will be photocopied and sent round to all participants as soon after 1st October as possible.

Numbers will be very limited; if you're interested, please get in touch with Chris and Pauline Morgan at 321 Sarehole Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 0AL. For further information, you can phone them on 021-777-2777.

DARK SISTER

Reviewed by Helena Bowles

With his second book Joyce has been accused of having written a feminist novel. What this actually means in translation is that Joyce has achieved what is possibly the most difficult and rare skill available to a writer :- that of seeing the world through the eyes of a member of the opposite sex. With assurance and compassion he has created a character who springs from the pages as a real woman and a clearly realised human being. This is an achievement that cannot be too strongly stressed.

Maggie is a traditionally married mother of two young children. Her husband, Alex, is loving but emotionally distanced, wrapped up in his work as an archaeologist. Their hitherto stable marriage is threatened by the discovery, in an old fireplace, of a Victorian diary. The diary is that of a herbalist/witch, haunted by her powers Maggie becomes fascinated with the diary and starts working with herbs with good results. This hobby brings her into contact with the world outside her family at the same time that pressures are being brought upon her marriage from within. During this period she meets Ash, the gentle, supportive manager of an occult/herb shop who in turn introduces her to Old Liz, the eccentric but wise old woman who performs an oracular function for Maggie.

With Maggie's growing knowledge and power Joyce picks up the theme of responsibility from his first novel. Maggie's powers in the Craft are of benefit to her only until she forgets the Craft's cardinal rule : that of the threefold return upon the worker. Whilst she aims only for knowledge or to help, Maggie's experiments are successful. She makes a love philtre to aid her marriage (unwittingly destroyed by Alex in a fit of anger and jealousy over her new interests). She makes an ointment to cure her son's conjunctivitis. She goes 'flying' to gain knowledge of her husband's infidelity, a dangerous practise but one that leaves her ultimately unscathed. The knowledge, however, is put to poor use. Even Ash is dismayed by some of her actions. "A wrong path," he tells her upon discovering ligatures tied to wish impotence upon Alex. Finally when Maggie attempts shape shifting in order to gain power over Alex she is seriously hurt and suffers a breakdown.

Throughout the novel the mythical nature of womanhood underlies the real female characters and the archetype of the triple goddess is threaded throughout the plot. Maggie herself represents the mother/lover aspect of the deity, the fertile one. Old Liz is the wise crone and Maggie's daughter Amy is the intuitive virginal aspect. These three forms however have only ever been part of the story. The Goddess incorporates both good and evil and each of the three aspects casts its own shadow, has its own 'dark sister'. Old Liz is shadowed by the hag who 'overlooks' Maggie's son, Sam. Maggie is shadowed by the fears of the diarist and by her own dark side. It is left to Amy to protect Sam from the other strong theme of the mythos - that of the sacrifice of the Goddess's son.

As the sexual aspect of the Goddess, Maggie's actions are often concerned with sexuality and its power. A growing sexual confidence that shocks her husband accompanies her growing powers. Her incorporation of the creation/devouring powers of the Goddess is illustrated by her ability to give potency to Ash and take it from Alex. As in DREAMSIDE Joyce acknowledges the power of sexuality giving a strong thread of eroticism that runs through all three of his novels.

In DARK SISTER Joyce continues his acknowledgement of female power having created a powerful and disturbing novel that in my opinion is his most skilled to date.

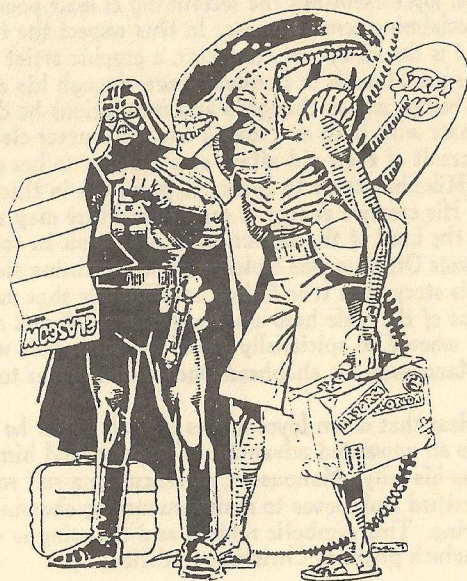
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HOUSE OF LOST DREAMS

Review by Helena Bowles

In *HOUSE OF LOST DREAMS* Joyce returns to classical archetypes for the impetus of his story. The whole novel is steeped in the mythology of classical Greece and in the archetype of the Goddess Artemis which here used in a far more ambiguous form than in *DARK SISTER*.

Mike and Kim Hanson have moved to a Greek island to find 'the life'. They rent a dilapidated house - 'The House of Lost Dreams', from a dubious Greek taxi driver named Lakis. The island is beautiful and they are happy. The different nature of Greek culture is explored and Kim particularly begins to make Greek friends. Trouble starts with the arrival of Kim's friend Nikki who, unknown to Kim, has had an affair with Mike in the past and is now fleeing her turbulent marriage not for the first time. These complications are watched over by Manoussos, a Greek shepherd, who knows the true story of what happened at the House of Lost Dreams many years before.

In this novel Joyce examines the reclaiming of male power, just as *DARK SISTER* looked at reclaiming female power. In this respect the two novels compliment each other. Mike is the viewpoint character, a graphic artist driven almost to breaking point by the pressures of work in London. Seen through his eyes the two women are slightly mysterious beings whose thoughts and motivations he does not understand, despite being intimate with both and loving one. It is never clear if his reaction of dislike for Nikki is a result of their old affair, or a reaction to her overt (and primarily verbal) feminism. Mike has come to Greece to paint but in this he is for a while less than successful. His creative energy is sapped and here may arise his interest in Orpheus who wooed the Lord of the Underworld with music in order to win his wife back. Nikki suggests Orpheus was looking for his feminine side. It is more likely in the terms of this story, that it is Mike's creative side that must be reclaimed through the old archetype of the male hero who must enter hell and arise after three days. A hell that begins when Kim spiritually leaves him and ends with his three days in the wilderness with Manoussos the shepherd who returns power to him.

It is made clear that when Joyce writes of male power he is not referring to conquest. Lakis makes an unwanted advance to Kim who send him running with a mark on his head to show his folly. Manoussos, representing a self sufficient and experienced male power is horrified and moves to make amends by showing Kim an old Turkish bath fed by a hot spring. This symbolic rebirth and cleansing is reminiscent of the ancient act of baptism which predates Christian tradition.

Manoussos has the power of sexual conquest in the power of one of the dances he know, he refuses to use it. This mystical power of dance belongs to the men and is handed down from father to son and from Manoussos to Mike. When Mike learns the dances he is taking part in a masculine tradition spreading back through history to the male dances developed to gain luck from the hunt or for other masculine endeavour. It removes the helplessness he has felt since Kim found out about his affair with Nikki. To learn the dance he lives only on olives and must leave behind alcohol and cigarettes, his crutches. The power and endurance must come from within himself alone.

This self reliance, the 'finding of oneself' is a common theme in novels by contemporary women. It is rare for a novel by a man to suggest that men may have lost something, something that could be regained in the traditions of 'less advanced' societies. Joyce shows a progressive view of male power that reflects the themes of his other novels. Power is nothing without responsibility.

Programme Notes

Sarah Freakley

As you by now know, the theme for this years programme is "Dreams and Illusions."

The Programme is still being finalised, but the highlights so far . . .

On Friday the Opening Ceremony at 7pm; followed by University Challenge - First Round. Then the 'main event' at 9.30 pm Joyce and Bradbury's Emporium of Dreams and Illusions

Saturday includes the Book Auction, with 'highlight one' Graham's GOH Speech at 3.30pm. 6.30 pm sees The Return of the All New Streamlined Silly Game. Then the second 'highlight at 8 pm with the BALTI BANQUET -see flier

Sunday begins with the usual 'Scientific Talk' -The Cutting Edge of Medical Technology, followed at 11.30 am by the Art Auction. At 5 pm the continuation of Novacon 23's hilarious Turkey Readings leads to the Awards Ceremony. Then ANOTHER highlight in the Beer and Sausage Tasting

So there you have it campers. Along with a smattering of FILMS and a LIVE BAND (Saturday night) the weekend is there for you to enjoy. I stress this is still only a PROVISIONAL Programme and is subject to change, especially if anyone has any really Amazing ideas. As usual any last minute suggestions on a postcard to Sarah Freakley, 63 Medina Road, Tyseley, Birmingham, B11 3SA. Tel 021-708-1773.

EXCLUSIVE OFFER TO MEMBERS OF NOVACON24

Join Novacon 25 now at £20

The 25th Novacon will be held in 1995 and promises to be something special.

FOUR Guests of Honour : BRIAN ALDISS, HARRY HARRISON, BOB SHAW and IAIN BANKS have all agreed to come celebrate the event.

A new, superb location with excellent facilities/function space and bar. Room rates have been negotiated at £20 per person per night for those sharing twin/double rooms, singles £40 pppn all inclusive of full English Breakfast.

The reason we need your support now is to secure this excellent hotel for our exclusive use and as a new hotel they require a deposit for us to do this.

Send cheques made payable to "NOVACON 25" to
CAROL MORTON, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS.

Queries/enquiries to TONY MORTON at the same address or telephone 0384 825386 (before 9pm, please)

This offer is only available to members of Novacon24

Join now and make '25 a celebration to remember.

NOVAS
Tony Berry

Here is the latest wad of fanzines to pass before my bleary eyes in recent weeks. As last year, I intend to publish as full a list as I can at the con in order to jog your failing memories. But for now...

Fanzines received since PR2 :

ANSIBLE #82-84. Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, RG1 5AU.

ATTITUDE #1. John Dallman, Flat 4, 27 Terront Road, London, N15 3AA.

BASILISK. Steve Green, 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ.

DRAGONS BREATH #6-9. Tony Lee, Zine Kat c/o SA Publishing, 13 Hazely Combe, Arreton, Isle of white, PO30 3AJ.

DREAMBERRY WINE. Mike Don, 233 Maine Road, Manchester, M14 7WG.

DRIVEL & DROOL #3. Mike D. Siddall, 133 Duke Street, Askan-in-Furness, Cumbria, LA16 7AE.

MORIARTY'S REVENGE #2. Dave Hicks, Top Flat, 8 Dyfrig Street, Pontcanna, Cardiff, CF1 9LR.

NEVER QUITE ARRIVING #2. Christina Lake, 12 Hatherley Road, Bishopston, Bristol, BS7 8QA.

PLATYPUS #4. Simon Ounsley, 25 Park Villa Court, Leeds, LS8 1EB.

RASTUS JOHNSONS CAKEWALK #6. Greg Pickersgill, 3 Bethany Row, Narberth Road, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, SA61 2XG.

SLUBBERDEGULLION #8. Nigel E. Richardson, 35 Cricketers Way, Kirkstall Lane, Headingley, Leeds LS5 3RI.

THE WRONG LEGGINS. Lillian Edwards, 39 Viewforth, Edinburgh, EH10 4JE.

All of the above are available for "the usual" which means in return for letter of comment, trade, article, or a large SAE. Enquiries about the Awards or a copy of the Rules (50p to cover copying and postage), contact Tony Berry at 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 4EP.

NOVACON 24'S BEER AND SAUSAGE TASTING

By Martin Tudor

It is difficult to top an event as successful as last year's Novacon International Beer Tasting, but we feel that is all the more reason to try. So on Sunday night we will again be staging a Beer Tasting, but this time we are concentrating on Real Ale brewed in the West Midlands and we have arranged with the Royal Angus for a Sausage Buffet to be served at the same time - with up to 10 varieties of sausage to be sampled (both meat and vegetable).

After very extensive, not to mention heated discussion your dedicated committee have decided on a short list of seven beers. The first two were easy, Aston Manor Brewery in Birmingham asked if we were interested in having two free firkins of their beer for the tasting and we said "Yes please!" So, we will have a firkin each of Organ Grinder (ABV 6%) and Ole Deadlies (ABV 4%) from Aston Manor.

The choice of the other five beers was a bit more difficult, but we eventually settled on Sarah Hughes' Original Dark Ruby Mild (ABV 6%) - a unanimous favourite, British Oak's Colonel Pickering's Porter (ABV 4.3%), Enville White (a tasty wheat beer, ABV 4.2%), Cameron's Strongarm (ABV 4%) and United Breweries Pitfield Dark Star (ABV 5%).

As this goes to press, we aren't certain that all of the above beers will be available, so our two chosen 'back-ups' are Enville's Gothic Ale (ABV 4.8%) and British Oak's Dungeon Draught (ABV 4.8%).

For details of how to book your place for the Beer and Sausage Tasting (and the Balti Banquet) see the flyer enclosed with this Progress Report. But remember, bookings **MUST** be received by 1st October.

Membership List as of 11 August 1994

129	Ian Stewart	141	Neil Tomkinson
130	Richard Van der Voort	142	Alison Tomkinson
131	Marion Van der Voort	143	Anne Woodford
132	John Dallman	144	Alan Woodford
133	Keith Oborn	145	Nigel Furlong
134	Christina Oborn	146	Fiona Stovold
135	Sherrie Powell	147	Carol Ann Green
136	Jim Champ	148	Jack Cohen
137	Richard Rampant	149	Greg Pickersgill
138	Simon R Green	150	Catherine McAulay
139	Mark Lowes	151	Kevin Anderson
140	Andy Sawyer	152	Susan Jones

HOW TO GET THERE

BY RAIL:-

Go out of the station and head for New Street. Go down the ramp into New Street and carry straight on up Corporation Street. Wander along until you find the stop for the 16 (can't be more specific because they keep moving the stop). The bus runs every seven to ten minutes or so in the day and after 7.00 pm, every twenty minutes. The Royal Angus is on St Chad's Queensway, near to the dental hospital, and opposite St Chad's Cathedral.

BY CAR:-

Leave the M6 at junction 6 and head for the city centre on the A38 (M) Aston Expressway. Carry on past the "End of Motorway" sign and just past Aston University the road bends round to the right. Get into the left-hand lane, because you want the next exit, signposted West Bromwich. As you leave the Expressway, you will see the Angus on your left. If you overshoot, get off at the next exit and go up and around the island back onto the A38 and try again!

BY COACH:-

Depending on which coach you get, you will be deposited either at Digbeth coach station, or in Colmore Row. From Digbeth, turn left out of the station's FRONT entrance and walk up the main road towards the Bull Ring. Just past St Martin's Church you will find the bus stop for the 16 which will take you to Snow Hill Station. Get up at this point and alight at Snow Hill Queensway. The Angus is diagonally opposite, but you will have to go under the underpass.

From Colmore Row, walk back along to Colmore Circus (you'll see the Wesleyan building: big, pink granite, turquoise glass). Turn left from Colmore Circus along Snow Hill and walk to St Chad's Circus. Look across to the cathedral on your right and the Angus is opposite that. Good news this year, a surface level crossing (Pelican crossing) has been put in between the Cathedral and Angus sides of the road, but if you get lost, ask either for St Chad's Cathedral or Snow Hill Station, which is close by.

The map enclosed will give you a vague idea of where you are going. If you get really desperate, phone the Angus on 236-4211 and they'll give directions.