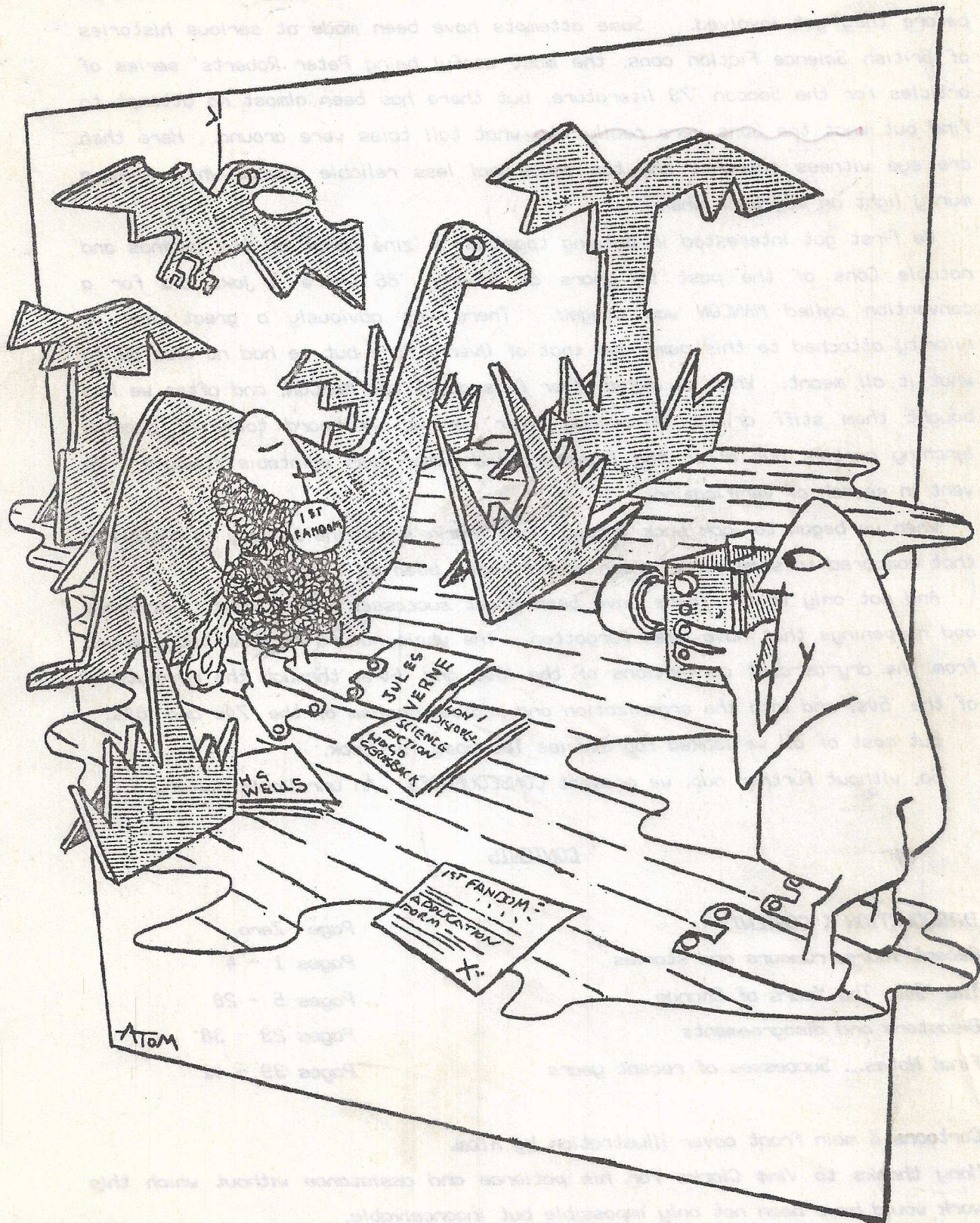


# CONSEQUENCES



AN UNRELIABLE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH SF CONVENTION.

Edited by James Steel and Bridget Wilkinson  
With a lot of Technical Assistance from Vin@ Clarke.

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *CONSEQUENCES*, being an investigation of the Mythology of Science Fiction Conventions. People have been running cons, attending cons, and writing about cons since 1937 and yet Present Day Fans have little idea of what went on before they got involved. Some attempts have been made at serious histories of British Science Fiction cons, the most useful being Peter Roberts' series of articles for the *Seacon '79* literature, but there has been almost no attempt to find out ~~what the cons were really like~~ what tall tales were around. Here then are eye witness accounts and the occasional less reliable source which shed a murky light on way back when...

We first got interested in putting together a 'zine about all the legends and notable Cons of the past 50 years at Albacon '86 where a joke bid for a convention called MANCON was staged. There was obviously a great deal of hilarity attached to this name and that of Owen's Park but we had no clue as to what it all meant. When we asked older fans about the MANCON, and after we had bought them stiff drinks to steady their nerves, we heard tales of ghosts, lynching parties out after the Chairman, and other less printable rumours. We went in search of verification.

When we began to look back through Vinç Clarke's Fanzine Library we discovered that compared to some cons Mancon hadn't really been all that bad ...

And not only that! There have been great successes in the past, incidents and happenings that have been forgotten. The whole nature of Cons has changed from the dry-as-dust conventions of the '30s and '40's, through the revolutions of the '50s, and into the organization and professionalism of the '70s and '80s.

But most of all we looked for Stories Too Good To Check.

So, without further ado, we present *CONSEQUENCES*. An unreliable History...

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*Cartoons & main front cover illustration by ATom.*

*Many thanks to Vinç Clarke for his patience and assistance without which this work would have been not only impossible but inconceivable.*

*Page Zero..*

## Snatches from the SILICONS.

This year's Silicon lived up to its name-particularity when it came to silly games. Fancy being asked to munch two dry crackers, blow a pingpong ball across the room with a straw, slaloming it round three ashtrays on the way, throw a dart and answer a question about skiffy (the higher the dartscore the easier the question), flap a kipper, wiggle a ring spanner round a bent wire loop which screams when the spanner touches it, being timed all the way with a 3-second penalty each time the wire shrieked-what an introduction to Silicons! ... Downing the crackers was the hardest part: you either took your time trying to be not totally disgusting, crunching them then failing to suck up enough saliva to swallow them down, then blowing out crumbs all round the course; or you used the Pickergill/Langford method of simply shoving them down the gullet ('But Dave always eats like that,' Hazel murmured). Only Pickergill (G.) spat the sodden remains out at the end... **Judith Hanna. (Ansible 29)**

Meanwhile, the often mentioned Greg Pickersgill was unwittingly scoring a small but satisfying triumph over suave and sensitive Ritchie Smith. Entering the bar, Greg spotted a plateful of well-filled sandwiches sitting on a table unattended. Poking them with his finger and finding the bread rather dry he decided they were abandoned. Thinking it a pity to let them go to waste he snatched one up and put it, whole, into his mouth. At this point Ritchie Smith arrived from the bar, evidently looking forward to his sandwiches and beer. Now, anyone else in the world would have said to Greg "Getcha dirty hands off me sandwiches, yer bugger," or something along those lines. Not Ritchie. To him, Greg is so much the scum of the earth, so much a typical product of the liberal middle classes, that he will not soil his lips with words to the little toad. Consequently he had to employ other means.

"Would you like one of MY snadwiches?" he loudly asked David Pringle who happened to be passing. David looked bewildered. Greg remained oblivious.

At this point I arrived on the scene, trying to organise a Friends in Space meeting. Seeing Greg still munching his accidentally stolen sandwich I understandably assumed the plateful was his and in an effort to get Greg to move took the sandwiches to the other side of the room. Ritchie's mouth fell open helplessly, whilst Greg, never one to pass up something for nothing, followed in my wake and polished off the remaining sandwiches. Defeated, and muttering about bourgeois exploitation, Ritchie slunk off into obscurity, never to be seen again.

**Chris Atkinson. (Start Breaking Up)**

## ALBACON '80

"At Glasgow Sheriff Court yesterday, Sgt. Hamish McPheet of the Strathclyde Constabulary, giving evidence in the trial of 120 delegates to a sci-fi convention held in Glasgow at Easter, accused of mobbing and rioting and attempting to lynch Robert P Shaw (25), chairman of the convention, said "On the evening of Monday 7 April, as I was proceeding along Douglas St, Glasgow, in a northerly direction (that is, towards big numbers), my attention was attracted by a riotous assembly exiting from the Albany Hotel where, I had reason to believe, a science fiction convention was ending. Upon closer investigation, I observed the chairman of the aforementioned convention being forcibly abducted from the hotel, whilst several unidentified persons sprayed him with a substance I later ascertained to be red dye. He was thereupon tied to an adjacent lamppost and a jet of water from a hotel fire hose was directed onto his person. I immediately summoned reinforcements, but the assembly dispersed into the hotel before they could arrive. I was unable to ascertain whether the ringleaders were delegates or members of the convention committee.

**Dave Langford.(Ansible 9)**

It was quite an 'effective' Opening, although after the majestic entry of the Pipe Band, the dimming of the lights, the spotlights focusing, I was expecting at Least Prince Charles, at the the very least one of the Corgies; Peter Weston was a little disappointment. Eric Bentcliffe (Valdo 5, 1979)

### SEACON '79... Reports from Ansible 2/3

...The only parts of the convention I saw that came even close to my expectations of professionalism were the exhibition from Dragon's Dream and the book room, which were professional. The rest of the con was amateur and looked it. No better, and in some cases worse, than a normal convention. Even the fan room looked as though someone had forgotten to wind it up....

If this was a Worldcon, the Americans are welcome to them. Dave Bridges.

...The hotel was dear. Hellish expensive, but obviously at least trying. And, after one night of slightly strong arm tactics, sensible about room parties. (Even then, compared to Skycon they were pussycats.)... Bob (Fake) Shaw.

Seacon was huge by British standards, of course, but almost the only times I noticed the vastness of its attendance were at the opening and closing ceremonies; sitting in the gallery above the main hall, looking down at the crowds and thinking "Christ! Thousands of them!" like a Battle of Britain fighter pilot encountering his first Luftwaffe air raid... Joseph Nicholas.

This being my very, very, very first con, I haven't much to compare it with---all the British fans I met said it was rather boring as cons go, while the US fans (Rich Coad, anyway---he's really British) said how bloody good it was & made US cons look like feminist rallies... Alan Mattingly.

I was one of the fancy Dress competitors. We gathered in Hall 2 at 7.30pm for the pre-judging and photographic session. After being allocated numbers, we were herded behind a curtain into a tiny triangular area. There were 60-70 people at least, in costumes ranging from scantily fragile to bulkily fragile, all trying to squeeze into the tiny space until their name was called. In fact we had to overflow into Hall 1---there was no way Katie and her 20ft wings could have fitted in there.... Lisonne Sutherland.

...Americans. I came to the con with a slightly nervous curiosity, after all that had been stated in zines beforehand about how different from us they were. I knew there were some I wanted to meet, whom I wanted to be more than just names: all were charming, especially the amazing Joyce Scrivener and Terry Hughes---a one-man justification of TAFF. However it was the ordinary American fan-in-the-con which was the revelation. They treat the convention like a holiday in the Mardi Gras sense---normal rules do not apply. Liberated women in appreciable numbers, a cheap and plentiful supply of the finer things in life and a cultivation of silliness (I remember the disappointment expressed that Phil Foglio did not wear his moose antlers for the Hugo awards) help, but where was the paranoia and drunken belligerence? Surely it is not possible to

### A Short History of British SF Cons

run a con without them. Perhaps again those liberated women make a difference and even Kevin Smith will agree that men don't exactly suffer. A final myth to dispose of---American authors are no more stand-offish than British. For every Pournelle there are several fans who (like Rob Holdstock) also write professionally, such as the Haldemans and the Eisensteins.

Mike Dickinson.

Rich Coad knew where we were going. My drink supply was low. My balance wasn't what it could have been, and we just *had* to find somewhere that resembled a room party.

"Gee, this place looks kinda neat." The door, already ajar, was breached like one running the four minute mile in ten seconds, and we fell on top of an untidy group of other people, each displaying a different stage of inebriation. Apart from Brian Parker, attempting to talk to a captive audience of Heady Matters, it looked well appointed---a nice long bench along one wall, a deep pile carpet, and three doors at one end. Large cans and bottles of booze appeared, and soon disappeared in the approved manner. Joe Nicholas also materialized from somewhere, so he was allocated a space in one corner just in case he lapsed into unconsciousness again.

"Where's the bog?" I somehow managed to splutter, realizing that my bladder was exerting far more pressure on my brain's decision-making process than was my craving for alcohol. An American female lying sprawled across the floor flapped ineffectively towards the three doors. "Great, which fucking door is it?" With a stunning display of logic, spiced with a fear of great embarrassment, I tried the first... and success. Bladder relieved, I staggered out again, only to see Joe fall out of the adjoining door with a similarly soporific smile upon his face. "There's two bogs in this room?" I said, marvelling at my powers of deduction. "Right on there chief." I then saw Mike Dickinson stagger into the third door. "Another bog?" Mike grinned as only drunks can. Bloody Hell! What an absolutely superb hotel room... lots of carpet... lots of room... three bogs... and can't even see the beds! And Christ... what bloody *huge* ash trays they've got in here! Even down to the instructions on how to incinerate cigarettes. Must be to help the Americans.

Peter Weston forced his way in later... this was it. The usual bit... "Can't have long-haired British fans terrorizing sleeping residents. Back to your own hotels... take a thousand lines and see me in the morning." But no... Weston was drunk too! And demanded a pen so that he could inscribe rude words on Joe's face... legs, arms, knees and handbag. "I've always wanted to do this!" he screamed anarchically---and there are photographs to prove it.

Suddenly a woman burst into the room. "Bloody hell... this is a private room party! You can only come in if you've got gallons of drink and six sex-starved women outside." "Oh my god... who are all you nuts? Can't you read the bloody notice on the door? This is the Ladies' Powder Room!"

So now we knew.

Alan Dorey.

.....A few fans, euphoric from Seacon, are murmuring of '86 or '87 and adding in low tones that Malcolm Edwards wouldn't make a bad chairman...

Dave Langford. (Ansible 2/3)

...fallout from the Great Fan Room disaster: absurdly sited miles from anywhere (reportedly at the hotel's insistence), it was vast, hollow and inhospitable, qualities which might have been overcome by dynamic organization. No organization whatever was visible and even the bar closed after a bit, never to return. It seems that overall, in trying to provide a programme which would have served a Worldcon of four times the size, the committee got over-ambitious.

Other niggles: security was handed over to the loonies and thugs calling themselves the 42nd Squadron, who amused themselves by treating con members as morons with criminal tendencies, and helped to enliven conversation by shouting at the tops of their voices into walkie-talkies (christened 'wallyphones' by Chris Hughes) which an earlier committee decision had determined would be issued only to selected, responsible members of the committee proper. (I enjoyed seeing security overseer H. Mascetti demonstrate the power of the communications network. "Seacon 4 to ops, Seacon 4 to ops," he said in clipped professional tones. "When Colin Fine calls in can you please ask him to go to room 506 at once." Efficiently, across the intervening ether, came the clipped professional reply: "Fuck off, we've got enough troubles of our own without worrying about yours.") To be fair, there were Problems Of Security all right: somewhere out in Brighton a gang of badge forgers was at work; and sixty or so were siezed in a pub - it was fascinating to hear John Brunner, smooth and impossible to disbelieve, explain exactly how the wholly false rumour of forged badges had sprouted: a triumph of Keeping One's Cool in the face of the fact that Martin Hoare (co-Chair) had five minutes previously told me all about the sixty forgeries nabbed... The famous 42nd were however mysteriously invisible for the most serious incident, an invasion of three drunken and badgeless wallies looking for a fun punch-up (one kept explaining how many times he'd been done for GBH): a mighty, spontaneous wave of 100+ ordinary fans-in-the-street edged the disturbance out of the foyer into the night without casualties (Bob Jewett, hero of the hour, got knocked over and yr editor had his face tweaked, but by and large it made you Proud To Be A Fan). To do justice to the famous 42nd, though, they were firm to the point of brutality when it came to smallish persons whose clearly displayed badges they didn't happen to notice: ask committee member Martin Tudor to show you his bruises.

Dave Langford (Ansible 39, 1984)

Yorcon.

Try Our Futuristic Cocktails, it said over the hotel bar. GALACTICA SPACE-WALKER Pernod/Parfait Amour: £1.60. EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL ENERGISER Blue Curcoa/Grenadine/Lemonade: £1.20. No prizes for guessing there'd been a Trekcon there the week before. In no time at all the notice vanished in a wave of fannish revulsion, though Roz Kaveney thought Someone Should At Least Try One Of Them...

I kept an eye open for Scottish fans wearing SEE LEEDS AND DIE badges (as promised by Fake Bob Shaw) but none were in evidence. (I was hoping to catch the moment when they worked.) However, one body was brought back to the hotel by the Police, who apparently instinctively knew that anybody gound lying in a City Centre gutter clutching a half-empty bottle of Southern Comfort must belong to the convention. D. Vest. (Ansible 18)

Extracts From  
A Short History of British Conventions.  
by Peter Roberts.

On Sunday , January 3rd, 1937, some twenty sf fans assembled in the Theosophical Hall , Leeds, for the very first organized science fiction con anywhere. The idea has obviously spread since then and in Britain alone dozens of sf conventions have been held in the last fifty years.

The three pre-war conventions appear to have been pretty solemn affairs. SF fandom itself had only come into being a few years earlier and the first local groups weren't formed till 1936, the same year as the publication of the first British fanzine, Novae Terrae. Sf itself barely existed outside the pulps and science fiction was no more than a strange minority interest, ignored by most authors and publishers and with no guaranteed future. Pre-war fandom was thus anxious to establish itself and was enthusiastic over anything remotely connected with SF and the future; it would have been surprising, therefore, if these first conventions had been anything other than formal.

The 1937 convention was organised by the Leeds Chapter of the Science Fiction League, an international association sponsored by Hugo Gernsback and Wonder stories (other chapters over here were in Nuneaton, Glasgow, Belfast, and Barnsley!). Most of the attendees were local; but six prominent fans made the journey from other parts of Britain: Ted (John) Carnell, Arthur C. Clarke, and Walter Gillings from London; Leslie Johnson and Eric Frank Russell from Liverpool; and Maurice Hanson from Nuneaton. The convention opened at 10.30am and messages were read from Professor A.M. Low, Dr Olaf Stapledon , H.G. Wells, John Russell Fearn, Festus Pragnell, and Oklahoma Scientifiction Association. Visiting fans then gave talks: Walter Gillings on the possibilities of a British SF magazine ("Fans must not expect a British Astounding Stories. SF has been so neglected that England will have to start at the beginning with simple themes."); Ted Carnell on international fandom and fanzines (the latter "springing up like mushrooms", no less than 25 being produced around the world); Arthur C. Clarke (described only as an "ex-Taunton fan") talked on the British Interplanetary Society; and Maurice Hanson "told a sad story of inactivity in Nuneaton". After a break for lunch the convention met to create a new organization, the Science Fiction Association, "whose objects would be to encourage publishers to pay more attention to scientifiction and to stimulate public interest in scientific ideas." There was some squabbling over who should be President, with H.G. Wells supporters arguing against champions of Aldous Huxley, and others (no decision was reached). To round off the day, Leslie Johnson "outlined the present state of rocketry abroad" and Eric Frank Russell "declared that scientifiction was the simplest of all mediums to write."

The first convention must have been a success, because another was organised the following year, this time by the newly formed SFA. On April

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10th, 1938, forty fans turned up at the Ancient Order of Druids Memorial Institute in London; the programme opened at 4:00pm with the AGM of the SFA, including official reports from around the country and the election of a new president (Prof. A.M. Low). After an interval the evening session began with messages of greeting to the con, followed by speeches from Leslie Johnson, Benson Herbert, Professor Low, I.O. Evans, John Russell Fearn, Walter Gillings, and Douglas Mayer. The Convention then retired for supper. It all sounds depressingly dull, but William F. Temple's account of the alcoholic aftermath (in the company of fans such as Ted Carnell, Arthur C. Clarke, and John (Wyndham) Harris) suggests that the event was not entirely solemn and sober. Temple's SFA supper ended up over the platform at London Bridge station and conventions were already becoming more interesting.

Peter Roberts (1979, part of the Seacon '79 literature)

The 1937 convention was organized by the Leeds Chapter of the Science Fiction League, an international association sponsored by Hugo Gernsback and Yonkers stories under chapters over here in America, Britain, and elsewhere. Most of the attendees were local, but six prominent fans made the journey from other parts of Britain: Ted Carnell, Arthur C. Clarke, and Walter Gillings from London; Leslie Johnson and Eric Frank Russell from Liverpool; and Maurice Heron from Huddersfield. The convention opened at 10:30am and messages were read from Professor A.M. Low, Dr. G.H. Stapanian, H.G. Wells, John Russell Fearn, Leslie Johnson, and Walter Gillings. Visiting fans then gave talks: Walter Gillings on the possibilities of a British SF magazine; "Fans meet and greet a British SF magazine"; and Eric Frank Russell on the future of the British SF magazine. It will have to start at the beginning with simple themes, the international language and literature (the latter comprising up like newspapers) no less than to being produced around the world; Arthur C. Clarke described only as an "ex-terminator fan" talked on the British SF magazine; and Maurice Heron "told a sad story of inactivity in Huddersfield." After a lunch the convention met to create a new organization, the Science Fiction Association, whose objects would be to encourage publishers to pay more attention to scientific and to stimulate public interest in scientific ideas. There was some squabbling over who should be president with H.G. Wells supporters arguing against changing of Aldous Huxley and others (no decision was reached). To round off the day Leslie Johnson outlined the present state of literary SF and Eric Frank Russell "declared that scientific SF was the staple of all science fiction writers."

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THE SCIENCE-FICTION ASSOCIATION

SECOND CONVENTION AND GENERAL MEETING

Will Take Place At

THE "A.O.D." MEMORIAL HALL,  
LAMB'S CONDUIT STREET, HOLBORN,  
LONDON, W.C.1.

On April 10th, 1938. Commencing at 4 p.m.

(Organized by Edward J. Carnell and Ken G. Chapman)  
Under the auspices of the London S.F.A.

The undermentioned are a few of the distinguished s-f personalities who have promised to attend:-

- Mr. JOHN RUSSELL FEARN, Author of "Mathematica" etc.
- Professor A.M.Low, Author, and editor of "Armchair Science"
- Mr. BENSON HERBERT, Author of "The Perfect World" etc.
- Mr. LESLIE J. JOHNSON, Author of "Seeker of Tomorrow".
- Mr. DOUGLAS W.F. MAAYER, Editor of "Amateur Science Stories".
- Mr. I.O. EVANS, Author of "World of Tomorrow", etc.
- Mr. H.S.W. CHIBBETT, Secretary of "The Probe".
- Mr. MAURICE K. HANSON, Editor of "Novae Terrae".
- Mr. ARTHUR C. CLARKE, Author of "Travel by Wire" etc.
- Mr. WALTER H. GILLINGS, Editor of "Tales of Wonder" etc.
- Mr. WILLIAM F. TEMPLE, Author of "Lunar Lilliput" etc.
- Mr. H.E. TURNER, Sec'y. of the Manchester Interpl. Socy.
- Mr. A. JANSER, Librarian of the Brit. Interpl. Socy.
- Mr. HERBERT WARNES, Chairman of the Leeds SFA.
- Mr. ERIC C. WILLIAMS, Author of "The Venus Vein" etc.
- Mr. SIDNEY L. BIRCHBY, Mr. G.A. AIREY, Mr. V.H. GILLARD,
- Mr. LESLIE SMITH, Mr. GEORGE A. FINAL etc. etc. etc.

All SFA members and friends are specially requested to attend this important convocation.

The SFA cordially invites any and every author, editor, reader, publisher or enthusiast of science-fiction.

Be sure you take advantage of this unique opportunity of meeting Britain's science-fiction personalities.

Full Particulars from: Ken G. Chapman, ...

(Novae Terrae March 1938)

The reports were similarly dry...

### 1938 Convention

First pleasant surprise came when Ken Chapman, Les Johnson and I arrived at noon (by the sun) in the form of a cable from our Los Angeles friends sending good wishes and okaying the Constitution. This seemed to set us right for the day. Shortly after lunch the eight Leeds fellows arrived followed by Harry Turner and friend Tozer from Manchester. It was then a continual procession of greetings and reunions... The arrival of Professor A.M. Low, John Russel Fearn, Benson Herbert, John Benyon Harris and Walt Gillings in the evening brought a new note to the growing friendly spirit...

Unfortunately nothing could prevail upon John Benyon Harris to address the gathering, he being of a retiring nature, but I noticed that he and Will Temple were comparing notes during the supper, and presume that something startling may come from Will in the near future...

A point worth noting was that when fixing arrangements for the convention we impressed upon Bob the barman that there would be no drunks in the party -- there wasn't -- but Bob himself was the nearest!...

My greatest enjoyment was in the pleasure evident upon the faces of our younger members and friends present, while listening to the "big shots". It was well worth all the trouble in making the necessary arrangements to see the thrills they derived from the Convention.

Let's make it a bigger one next year.

Ted Carnell. (Novae Terrae April 1938)

There seems to have been very little change between 1936 and 1951 (the Second World War just could have had something to do with this...). In contrast '51 to '55 saw a total upheaval in fandom. The 1951 Festival Convention appears to have been a very serious affair by current standards, but by 1955... Well, read for yourself!

#### 1951 Festival Convention

On Saturday and Sunday, May 12th and 13th, and during the evenings of the 10th, 11th and 14th, the largest and most successful science-fiction Convention ever held in this country entertained and exhausted over 120 London fans and visitors from all parts of the British Isles and overseas.....

Saturday at the 'Royal Hotel' brought a dizzy round of activities and personalities. The Convention was opened by its chairman Ted Carnell, Editor of 'New Worlds'; Walter Gillings, 'grandpop' of British pulp s-f followed with a gloomy speech anent the present boom, which he thought would die as on previous occasions; famous American fan Forrest J. Ackerman (4e) cheered guests up with a detailed and interesting survey of s-f in the States, and Bill Temple brought the roof down with his speech on 'S-F Serial Writing', which involved reading the synopsis of what Bill alleged was a special serial, and in which he and Arthur C. (ego) Clarke crossed space in a giant onion, propelled by its mitogenic rays. (!)

The roof was hastily put on again, ready to be brought down again by the hastily organised and totally uh-rehearsed 'S-F Soap-Opera Company' in a 15 minute s-f skit on a 'hero and heroine marooned on a desert planet' theme. A much needed tea-break followed, giving guests an opportunity to slake their thirsts and to examine the items of fantasy art decorating the walls, and the many tables of books and magazines.....

Buffet/dinner break followed, and the last sessions began with a discussion on the 'B.B.C. and Science Fantasy'. John Keir Cross, B.B.C. producer gave a very interesting talk on his endeavours to introduce s-f into the B.B.C., and he was followed by Arthur C. Clarke, who spoke of the possibilities of televised fantasy, and related his own experiences during his tele-talks on interplanetary flight....

The S-F Soap Opera Company' then showed the B.B.C. how it should be done in 'Who Goes Where', a wilder and, if possible, even funnier skit than the previous effort, with a cast consisting of Audrey Lovett, Fred Brown, H. Ken Bulmer, Ted Carnell, Charles Duncombe and Ted Tubb. This play was recorded, so may be heard again at s-f gatherings in the future.

The last item of the day was a showing of the 'Lost World', a film based on A. Conan Doyle's famous fantasy of a South American land in which dinosaurs and pterodactyls still exist. Made in 1925 and starring Wallace Beery and Bessie Love, the film was naturally silent, but by clever manipulation of gramophone records ('Night on Bare Mountain', 'Rite of Spring', etc.), and of the volume control, Bill Temple and Arthur C. Clarke managed a very appropriate accompaniment. Fan Kerry Gaulder was the extremely able projectionist....

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After the Sunday afternoon tea-break, Mrs Wendayne Ackerman gave a very interesting lecture on the psychiatric science of 'Dianetics', founded by fantasy author L. Ron Hubbard (who also writes under the names of Rene Layfayette and Kurt Von Rachen in the s-f field). Dianetics has been the cause of a good deal of controversy in the U.S. since 'Astounding S-F' made the first public announcements last year (see this June's British Reprint Ed.), especially as some American magazines have included 'ASF' in their generally strong criticism of Dianetics and Hubbard. British fans will have an opportunity to decide its merits for themselves soon, as Hubbard's 'handbook' will soon be reprinted here....

Sunday ended with a film show, consisting of various 'shorts' lent by Arthur C. Clarke and '4e'. Notable shots were those taken by a rocket from above the atmosphere, and another of a V-2 exploding during take-off (in colour, too!), and those in '4e's' fan-made fragments of a trip to the Moon and of pseudo-weird (and really hilarious) happenings in a haunted house. '4e' also had a reel from an un-identified German s-f film showing a rocket taking off from Earth (from a huge viaduct), and making a rather abrupt descent on the Moon.

On Monday, May 14th, a party of fans under the guidance of live-wire Manchester enthusiast Dave Cohen penetrated the unknown hinterland of the South Bank Exhibition, and those that managed to fight their way out in time, with others to the number of 40 assembled in the 'Havelock' pub in Gray's Inn Road that night.....not, we noticed, with mixed feelings, so much to talk about the exhilarating/exhausting goings-on of the last few days, as to talk about the 1952 Convention....which is, we suppose, about the biggest compliment that they could have paid the 'Festival Convention' of '51.

Vinç Clarke (S-F News 8, 1951)

*Most people agreed that the FestivalCon had been a great success and the LondonCon of the next year appears to have gone off with no major hitch.*

*However....*

Extracts from:

The  
CORONCON

or THROUGH DARKEST ENGLAND  
BURNING THE CANDLE AT BOTH ENDS

...The convention next morning was due to start at 11am, and we took care and a taxi to arrive shortly afterwards so that in the event of its actually starting on time we should be on hand to carry out those who had fainted from the shock. But all was well ---at 11.30 Ron Buckmaster was still asking everyone if they had seen the microphone. Evidently someone, probably a Northerner, had taken the mike out of the convention already. Someone suggested he should call for its return over the PA system. While the committee were mulling over this we all milled around to the strain of Stan Kenton records.

At 11.43 precisely Chairman Fred Brown apologised for the delay. He offered no explanation, and nobody expected one. He also announced the last minute cancellation of the showing of 'Destination Moon', due to the London County Council's unexpected objection to the showing of inflammable 35mm film in unlicensed theatres. Evidently the Government had sneaked through the Cinematograph Act of 1909 without informing the Convention Committee.

He also read a postcard from Peter Hamilton regretting that he might not be able to be present. Since Peter was actually standing just under the Chairman's nose, it looked as if he had delivered the postcard himself to save postage. Fred also announced the cancellation of the Junior Fanatics play, adding rather tactlessly that something better would be substituted.

This, incidentally, was the first convention I've been at where there was a special item listed in the official programme as "announcements of unavoidable changes". A wise precaution, and one which I hope portends a new era of more realistic programme booklets. Perhaps we shall one day have a really accurate printed programme scheduling such normal features of the average Convention as 'unavoidable delay', 'breakdown of PA system', 'confusion', 'collapse of Chairman', 'utter chaos' and 'Committee blind drunk'.

After all this excitement we adjourned for a nice restful lunch interval, during which we watched James and Chuck trying to trap one another in a wildly revolving door, James and Chuck having a running gunfight with waterpistols in Southampton Row, and a film company shooting a crime melodrama in a side street. James and Chuck were much the best, we thought. Then back to the Bonnington for the introduction of notables...

...Carnell then made the first public mention of the fund that had been started by an American fan group to bring a certain English fan to the Philcon. The fan in question had been unable to go after all and Don Ford and the Cincinnati group had generously thrown the offer open to any other British fan we chose who could risk having to pay most of the cost himself. Carnell didn't disclose the English fan's name but I see no harm in saying

## A Short History of British SF Cons

it was Norman Ashfield, who hasn't been active in fandom for quite a while but who has evidently kept up his correspondence with his friend Don Ford....

After this came the play by the Junior Fanatics, the Committee evidently having been unable to get something better after all. The production suffered somewhat from under-rehearsal, the hero living in Lancaster and the heroine in Bournemouth and neither having very strong voices, and it rather lacked the polish and brilliance we have all come to associate with Seventh Fandom. There were also some slight difficulties at first due to them having forgotten their own lines, but with a fine spirit of co-operation they soon overcame this by reading each other's. The heroine was a new fan called Shirley Marriott who looks like a brunette BRB of Lee Hoffman. She has the same first name too, but I'm afraid I never found how much further the resemblance went; these younger fans keep very much together and don't mix with us old has-BNFs.

Dave Cohen followed with an address on what was wrong with the London Circle and was so convincing that Chuck Harris changed his London Circle badge to a Belfast one before he had even finished. One of Cohen's accusations was that the Londoners didn't support the last Mancon and in his speech of rebuttal Brown promptly put his foot in it right up to the neck by saying he didn't know about the Mancon. Since the last London Convention had been virtually knee-deep in Mancon propaganda, this was an unfortunate defence. Bentcliffe asked with deceptive politeness whether Brown hadn't seen the notices.. Brown pulled the ground in on top of him by saying, too craftily, that he hadn't been up to the White Horse much during that period. Bentcliffe patiently pointed out that the notices in question had been in the Convention Hall and that Northern speakers there had publicly asked for support and been given to understand they would get it. Angry murmurings from Northerners in the audience confirmed this...

I didn't hurry my flock back from the tea interval...I'd noticed something called WHISKERS in the programme and I didn't want to be in at the death. This was a thing I'd started while recovering from pneumonia, been too weak to finish, and had passed on to the London Circle to show that at least I'd tried. When I realised they were going to put it on just as it was, my only consolation was that people never listen to plays done over the PA system, when there are no actors visible to receive either applause or tomatoes. But when we did arrive, about half way through, I was astonished to find that they were not only listening, but laughing in some of the right places. I stood savouring this entirely new form of egoboo and realising that I'd overlooked two things: the fact that audience reaction time is slower than that of readers, so that poor jokes go over well, and the fact that there are some very talented actors in the London Circle. The piece was done superbly well, especially by Bill Temple as Winston Churchill and by Bert Campbell as Bert Campbell, this last a particularly fine piece of type casting.

Walt Willis. (1953) (Reprinted from Warhoon 28)

A bloody provincial at the Coroncon.

SHAMBOLIC..... A word especially devised to describe the 1953, London Convention, and it was indeed an utter shambles, the disinterested attitude of various individuals within the London Circle typified the whole proceedings. What our overseas visitors thought of British Fandom as illustrated by this monumental dirge remains to be seen, but the reports, soft pedalled though they be, should deflate the egos of certain Londoners. I noticed in particular that Jesse Floyd, one of the U.S. fans present, was unseen throughout the main proceedings. Intuition???

A few congratulations are due however. Thank you to William Temple for a dryly humorous speech, which unfortunately set too high a standard for the following speakers in 'Authors Give You A Piece Of Their Minds!' Thanks also, to Walt Willis for 'Whiskers', a witty item about Campbell's beard. The rest of Saturday's programme was a flop and the least said the better.

Sunday. A scheduled 11 o'clock start was delayed until 2.30 (no reason given for this delay, or apologies tendered) at which time Ted Carnell, with the assistance of Bert Campbell started the ball rolling with a goonish five minutes. After this we were cheered by the appearance of Ted Tubb, but all in vain, letters between editors Carnell and Campbell were made incoherent, but whether this was the fault of the material or of Ted, I should hate to hazard a guess. This, apart from the International Fantasy Award, was the sum total of the morning and afternoon programmes. So, we went to tea whilst Fred Brown struggled valiantly to produce an evening programme.

At five o'clock the Medway Group got under way in the small hall and we were amused for half an hour by their concoctions. Now came the climax, three bright spots in a row. First, the guest editors session, at which Ron Hubbard put in an appearance and a few words. This was followed by a bit of lunacy "Lecture From The B.I.S.", then finally a ballet "First Man On Mars", which was exceedingly funny, but alas too short. Dorothy Rattigan must be given credit for a very natural piece of acting (I wonder if it was acting?). This to all intents and purposes ended the convention, there was an auction, (conducted by anyone who felt like it), in which reprint edition fans could build up a good collection cheaply, but this was of slight interest to most. Surely that stack of reprint mags could have been traded in for a few decent mags. Why did Messrs, Carnell, Tubb and Campbell have such a preponderance of programme space???, after all, they are pro. authors and editors, not actors.

Finally, a personal note to Bert Campbell. While Bea Mahaffey was chatting to a group of Northern Fans in the "White Horse", you were heard to say, "For god's sake, rescue her from those bloody provincials"... Manners, not ignorance maketh man, Mr. Campbell, perhaps this remark comes from the same generous heart which offers a sub to your reprint mag in exchange for a 5,000 word story???. Nevertheless, should you be prepared to 'honour' the Supermancon next year with your presence, I can guarantee we are civilised enough to overlook your babblings and accord you at least, a polite welcome. Brian Varley (Space Times, 1953)

## CORONCON

...was greatly tickled by the lecture given by two BIS 'scientists' who were rigged up as conventional absent-minded professors. Bert Campbell went into a spiel about a new system of propulsion they had discovered utilising light. A blackboard was found and HJC proceeded to outline the equations of the technique. This took some time and eventually we arrived at BISTO/OXO=SOUP. Meanwhile the other character had been heaving stuff out of a suitcase and rigging it up on the table: a length of board, a mirror, a space ship, loads of paper (I suspect that this was the SFNews that Vince Clarke should have issued in January!). The demonstration was then given. The ship was placed on the board, with the mirror behind; when a light was shone on to the mirror the ship promptly took off. Very clever bit of faking...you couldn't see the elastic band... always supposing that there was one. Delving deeper into his bag, Bert started to produce some more paper, when the other character nudged him and pointed down at the audience. "Russians!" they hollered, promptly stuffed everything into the bag and vanished...

...Two hours and several bottles later, the second porter appeared on the scene. He was a man of mettle. After partaking of our whisky he still asked us in dulcet tones, to "make less row". On his departure we decided that we should go elsewhere to give free vent to our feelings. And so we held the first ROOFCON. An hotel roof is the ideal site for a future convention we found; ready-made disposal chutes in the shape of chimney pots are invaluable. During this session notes of movements and "where to find us" were inserted under Bea Mahaffey's door. Next morning she informed us that they will provide Shaver with material for at least a dozen novels. Paul Sowerby. (Astroneer 1, 1953)

...As the evening drew on plans were being made in every corner for smoke-filled rooms. The biggest seemed to be organised by the Liverpool group and most of the actifen had been invited. Finally the Con proper broke up -in fact it just disintegrated fan by fan. Not being able to remember which room the party was being held in I made my way upstairs with ears attuned ready to catch fannish remarks to lead me to the room. Eventually I located the noise, and having practically forced the door, I found myself jammed into a small hotel room about 15\*10 occupied by over 20 fan not counting the furniture. The fact that I'd gotten into the wrong party didn't worry me much as I soon found a whisky bottle, and, failing to locate a glass, I discovered a weird looking piece of pottery that I assume was a flower vase; (at least I hope it was a flower vase), anyway, the whisky tasted good.

Just about every leading fan apart from the Liverpool and Manchester groups was in the room somewhere and about a dozen different conversations were being carried on simultaneously. This was not to last unfortunately, as an official knock sounded on the door and a voice announced "Night Porter -- will you please go to your rooms." I wonder what he would have said had he seen how many were inside; he'd probably have thought it was an orgy.

Fred J. Robinson (Camber 2, 1953)



## London Conventions.

The Coroncon was the biggest flop ever held, the program was puerile and with a few exceptions completely lacking in entertainment value. If, after organising two previous 'major' conventions this is the best that the London Circle can do, I advise them to retire into the shell of inactivity which residence they occupy at other times than Whitsun...AND STAY THERE. There was no lack of talent at the Coroncon, but little or no attempt was made to take advantage of this fact. Instance. L. Ron Hubbard gave a very brief talk on S-F..surely he could have been persuaded to give instead on on the subject of..DIANETICS! I am not a student of this subject, yet it is a very controversial one and could have provided a very interesting and thought-provoking half-hour.

The Coroncon did, of course, have occasional bright spots. Bill Temple's short, but very humorous, talk, the speeches of Nic Oosterbaan and Peter Hamilton in 'Guest Editor's Address'. The paper read out by the ex-UNESCO Science Editor, Maurice Goldsmith in the same feature, and, of course,.. "WHISKERS".

These however were but small oases in a vast desert of dismal and long drawn-out features. One wonders if the many scripts so carelessly 'Lost' by the members of the Committee were even worse than the ones which were (unfortunately) found.

To finish on a brighter note, although the convention failed as an Entertainment, it still provided a handy bar in which one could drown ones sorrows, and a hotel with a roof admirably suited for a bottle party.....

Eric Bentcliffe.....

Looking through the various articles, columns etc, before printing, it seems that it would be both a waste of paper and space for me to expound my views of the Coroncon, for they are, in the main , sympathetic to Eric's Editorial and the other Coroncon comments.

That the Con was a flop is without doubt my view too. Surely the Committee could see the way things were going on the Saturday, and why they did not try to make a better show on Sunday completely baffles me. But the fact is that they didn't, and it is too late now to 'save face' by pushing the blame over onto the "audience". If the London Circle want to monopolise the Main Convention of the year, then they should give ample proof that they are able to do so and this year they did anything but that. Furthermore, why is it that they object to the Con being held elsewhere? Is it because they are afraid of losing the 'limelight'--their little bit of 'fanac'? Or are they so badly off that they cannot afford the rail fare to other parts of the Country? It would appear from the attendance at the Mancon this was just the case.

Personally, I fail to see what is wrong with the methods adopted in the U.S. regarding conventions. A different con site each year and no 'ifs or but's'! As the majority of people attending the Convention in London are resident in or near London, this would entail a postal vote to all fandom each year....Expensive?... You can't tell me that Conventions run at a loss... Eric Jones.....(Space Times, May 1953)

## THE INNER PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTIONS

The main impression that I took home from the Chicon, is that we in Britain won't really know what a convention is until we engage a hotel for it. In London we have as much, and more, talent for an official programme as the whole of America and the only thing that prevents our cons from being the mad and glorious affairs that the U.S. ones are, is the fact that we give up at 11pm., when the convention should only be starting.....I don't mean that we should have drunken orgies in hotel rooms, but that people who want to talk should have somewhere to go, instead of being restricted to odd moments between items on the official programme, or standing in a crowded bar.

I visualise the ideal set-up as something like this. The Con. proper is held in a place like the Royal Hotel room, with a lobby outside where people can talk and nip in now and again to see what's going on.

This we have got.

But in addition we need to have a place nearby where people can spend the night in revelry, publishing sessions, or even sleep. This is the sort of thing conventions are for. The real reason people come to them is to get to know the people they've only known as names.

When the opportunities for this are there, as in the US, you find that the active fans virtually ignore the official convention altogether, and the success of a convention is judged, not by the merits of the programme but by how well the arrangements facilitated informal get-togethers.

At the ideal Convention, the pros and the active fans, the core of the convention, would be accommodated in a small hotel where they can be hosts to others. With this sort of arrangement you find that the convention quickly attains the sort of organic unity we know only in the closing sessions. It gathers momentum from day to day instead of, as with ours, being merely a couple of desultory lecture sessions.

The "sober Englishmen" aspect is a myth; as is that of the US fan "going absolutely mad". I saw no more drunkenness at the Chicon than at a London con, no helicopter beanies or water pistols at all except at the Masquerade Ball, and no more wildness than you would expect at a Convention several times bigger than anything we have had. These things are exaggerated because they make interesting reading. generally, U.S. fans are much like ourselves, except that they are more "fannish". Hard to define, but I suppose I mean more enthusiastic, more informal, more individualistic, more proud of being fans than we are. It makes them easier to talk to and get along with than most of the people you meet at London, whose knowledge of the vast lore and traditions of fandom is limited to Operation Fantast and a couple of insular fanmags, and who are maybe slightly ashamed of being 'fans' and self-conscious and inhibited about it. Trouble is, we lack the common cultural matrix that US fans share. Most US fans know far more about the history of even our fandom than some of us! If we get together more maybe we'll find we're a lot more fun!

\*I don't want to give the impression that US actifans totally ignore the official programme. they don't. When there is something they want to hear, they roll along in their dozens. What I do mean is that they are choosy.

They regard the programme as something going on downstairs, which they can take or leave alone as they like, a sort of running buffet.

Walt Willis. (Space Diversions 6, 1953)

Conventions and convention running were beginning to suffer problems by '54. It began to look as if Fandom might split into small groups of feuding fans based in different corners of the country. Chaos and bad feelings seemed to reign supreme.

After the fiasco of the Coroncon the Manchester Fans won the Easter Convention bid for '54. There was a certain amount of resentment from Southern Fans about this and a feud between London and the North began to develop in which the London Circle felt that a serious and constructive (s&c) programme, as opposed to a "Fannish" one, would be no real fun for anybody.

Terrified by such a prospect the London Circle pooled their talents to make sure that, should the SuperManCon prove to be too serious an affair, they would add a little interest to the convention.

They laid their plans accordingly...

Selected extracts from:

#### OPERATION ARMAGEDDON

Produced by A. Vincent Clarke...

"A plan to brighten up the Supermancon...without the co-operation of the Manchester group..."(Newman)

...The project was first discussed on Coronation night at a party given by Ted Tubb. Later, on his return from the AVCON in Belfast, Vinç Clarke announced to certain members of the London Circle that Item 6 on the Business Sessions there had been "In secret Sessions. Proposals for brightening up the Mancon." Serious and constructive ideas had been forthcoming.

It was then announced that the Woolwich Science Fiction and Vargo Statten Appreciation Society had also discussed the subject, and it was decided to pool talents in an ANARCHS INTERPLAN project to be known as OPERATION ARMAGEDDON...

...Some notice must be given to the possibility that, although this project is and must be kept in the spirit of good clean fannish fun (or words to that effect), the Mancon Committee's ideas of good clean fannish fun may differ in important respects from ours, and it's not impossible that they might stalk out in a body and high dudgeon after a few hours of OPERATION ARMAGEDDON in action. We must be prepared to carry out some part of a semi-official programme as well as any 'set pieces' by the Circle which will be expected of it and which will be included in the official Supermancon programme and freely discussed with the Mancunians...

The following ideas were discussed at the first meeting. Please refer to number and letter designations when writing, and KEEP THIS BULLETIN!

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1. Fake programmes. Several ideas were discussed, and the final product will require a good deal of work and probably cash. Initially, possibilities are:

(a) a parody of the actual programme, if there will be enough time between its publication date and the Con. The parody would have to be a better job of work, which might be difficult in a short time. Tentatively only.

(b) a fake programme, and the biggest 'prestige' job possible..photolith? engraving?...card-bound?...silver-tasseled?..etc. To be circulated to fandom about zero minus 14 days. Likely to be impressive but expensive.

(c) a fake programme, messily hektographed (preferably) or duplicated, issued at roughly zero minus 4 weeks, followed approx. two weeks later by a second fake indignantly denouncing the first and offering another and deadly serious programme...with, as we don't want to reduce membership to ourselves and the Supermancon committee, a 'give-away' item on the back, such as "Come to the Mancon, financed by the London Circle", or similar. This second programme would be a well done job.

1c is definitely fiendish, & altho. not needing more physical work than 1b, calls for extra gags as well as a (serious sounding) parody.

ACTION: Please indicate choice, ideas, alternatives, etc.

2. ... (b) Suggested we have printed or engraved (?) cards to be given to all and sundry at the Con. Visiting cards bearing the insulting/fannish messages, such as "I'm a London Circle member, who the hell are you?" and "A.E. Van Vogt, California, USA" and "I like Vargo Statten" etc etc.

(c) Small skull & crossbones stickers for putting on glasses/bottles left unattended...

(g) Paper bags printed "IN CASE OF SICKNESS...MANCON COMMITTEE" to be pinned on backs of seats.

ACTION: Ideas, offers of printing services (no hurry).

3. (a) Costume. Beards will be worn. 'Committee' badges, if it doesn't mean too much involvement of innocent bystanders (opinions?). Costume hats or dresses for the all night party? (This can probably be left to the open preparations) special London Circle emblems...White Horse emblems in button-holes. Hand-painted s-f ties?

(b) If not too bulky, items emphasising Mancunian weather, to be worn when entering hall...macs, umbrellas, frogman's flippers, etc. Any war-surplus life-belts, rubber dinghys, etc. available? (Idea..inflatable rubber belts painted and fashioned to look like regulation lifebelts with 'SUPERMANCON '54 lettered on them)

(c) Waterpistols. is there a gadget for simulating squeaky shoes? Other items...toy trumpets, banners, special costume for Shirley Marriot (?), playing cards, etc etc. will be mentioned under separate headings. Jokes involving the discomfiture of the audience..stink bombs, etc. must be barred. Our object is the brighten things up, not to wreck the joint....

5. (a) Mancunians have an idea that Convention time-keeping is easy. Suggested that 1 minute before advertised atarting time, Charlie Duncombe (surrounded by us) yells "Minus 60" and gives the seconds count on "Minus 50, 40", etc. The last 5 seconds chanted by all Londoners, and on "Zero" a starting pistol or similar is fired. (Or a less loud noise...comments?)

## A Short History of British SF Cons

(b).. On the second day, alarm clocks mark zero hour. Suggested everyone brings one, conceals it on self or in bag, pre-sets it accurately...

7. (a) Dave Newman will be supplying chemicals for making explosive paste, smoke-producing chemicals, explosive top-hats, etc. Also wanted in this line...explosive cigarettes, 'snowflake' producing pellets, etc. etc.

Suggestions wanted. Nothing fatal tho...

9. (a) At some dull interval during programme, LC'ers form chairs in circle, start playing cards.

(b) Halfway through sessions, fan at doorway asks in loud stage whisper "Has anything happened yet?" Fan in front row turns, whispers "No, nothing."

(c) A Londoner (Ted Carnell) gets up and pleads for Mancon Committee.. "Young, inexperienced, not very sure of themselves....etc etc."

(d) During a selected speech, row of Londoners sit with blown up balloon in one hand and a large pin/needle/bodkin in the other. Not doing anything, but the psychological effect should be tremendous...

11 One of the wilder ideas...during a dull moment Shirley Marriot or another femme fan rushes into the hall in a torn, dishevelled dress and a state of great excitement, screaming, and when the centre of attention, lets go with a crack such as "The sun's shining outside!", or "The strain of waiting for something to happen..it's too much", or "Flying saucers!"

12 Londoners wear 'Committee' badges, and issue alarming reports to neo-fen.."Yes, it'll be a good Con if the Treasurer comes back", or "Are you staying to see the magic lantern?", or "Toilet? Haven't you got any control?", or "Oh, the Committee resigned this morning..I'm a substitute".

13 Suggested that all London feminine fans wear green wigs, all males beards. (See 3a) Fancy dress would be interesting..a covey of LCers dressed as Space Guards would be picturesque, and useful too...bodyguards for fen undertaking disapproved of activity, ease of identification and prestige value, able to carry water pistols openly, morale value, etc etc...

16 Efforts are made to get at least two of the Committee drunk.

17 One of the wilder ideas..that a small rotary duplicator and a portable typer are taken to the hall, and a blow by blow accounting of the Con. is published on the premises. An opportunity for a couple of hard-working characters to win undying egoboo. (If decided upon, full size newspaper placards can be prepared beforehand announcing various details which will be 'news')...

20 Jim Ratigan and self have been investigating mask situation for use during fancy dress parades or any other time. A number of grotesque masks can be papier-maché, we can go to town on the effect. Anyone had any experience? I'd be inclined to experiment with flesh-coloured rubber from ordinary toy balloons...

22 (a) Phase 1 Five minutes after the beginning of the Guest of Honour's speech, a live mouse is liberated.

Phase 2 Girlish screams, cries of 'Rat!', all the London Circle women climb on chairs.

Phase 3 'Hunt the rat'

Phase 4 Lull. Then Dot or Daphne faint.

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Phase 5 Chaos. "Give her air!"--rush to open all windows, "brandy!"-- towel flapping---indignant speech by husband about 'verminous hall', 'wife in delicate condition' (this need not be strictly true) ((Ta))

Phase 6 Law and order prevail. GoH. carries on with his speech.

Phase 7 Release second mouse.

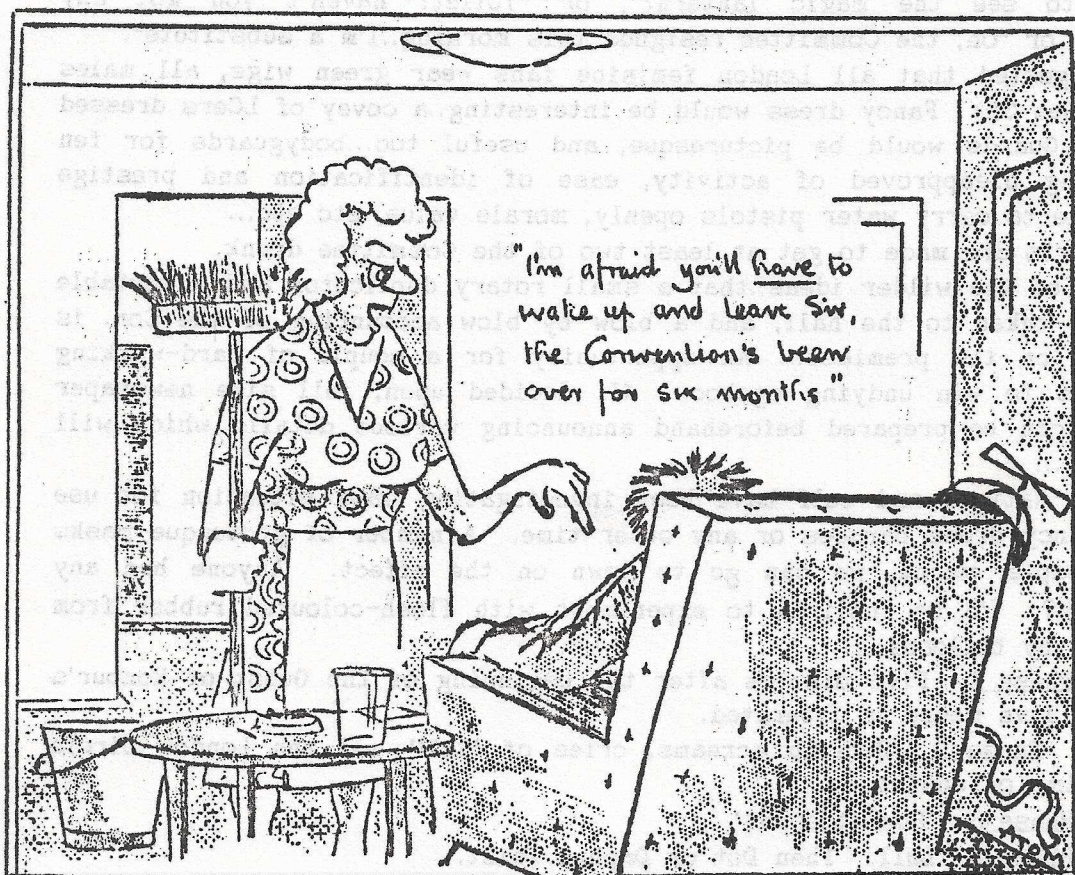
Note The mice could be salvaged and freed later at the homes of various Manfans...

(b) Add to this suggestion; rat could be imaginative...arrange LCers in zig-zag pattern through audience, at a signal have them raise excited cries, jump on chairs, etc., in turn, to denote passage of rat (Might even get a nmass hallucination)

LATEST NEWS. Harry Turner, Mancon publicity director, interviewed in London, suggest of fancy dress show made to him, little information extracted. Brian Varley, Treasurer, arrives 'for life', will remain Treasurer, cynical view of Mancon, full report next issue.

Vinç Clarke (Operation Armageddon, 1954)

Of course not all of these plans were either accepted or put into practice. Some plotting went on before the Con, but in the event the Con itself rendered such plans unnecessary. The scale of the problems at the SuperManCon surpassed anything that had gone before, and helped change fandom completely.



## THE MAGNIFICENT FLOP

At precisely 11:30 I went along to the convention hall to see if the Londoners would carry out their secret plan to draw attention to the official starting time with a rocket take-off count. Judge of my horror to find some brash Northern Neofan called Harry Turner getting up to declare the Convention open and calling for witnesses that it had started on time. Some of the older fans would have collapsed from shock at this unheard of breach of hallowed tradition, had not Dave Cohen swiftly restored an atmosphere of security with a few ritual apologies and by failing to introduce half the notables present.

One of the apologies was that because of the failure of the public address system it was not going to be possible to start the proceedings with a rocket take-off count as the Manchester Group had planned.

After this the lunch break was declared. When we got back we were told that the Convention Hall had been moved from the First Floor to the Ground Floor. I assumed at first that the Manager had been warned about SF conventions and had decided to move the Hall down a floor before this took place in the normal course of events, but in fact it turned out that his ignorance of Conventions was so blissful that he was only worrying about his newly decorated walls being disfigured with cello-taped notices. He didn't seem to realise how lucky he was he still had walls. At any previous Convention the notices would have been fixed on with thumbtacks, nails, or even daggers.

However the gentlemanly Manchester fans had spent the entire lunch break moving everything from one hall to the other, and were still running around in little circles uttering plaintive cries. My heart bled for them, and for future convention committees. This was another Mancon 'First'. Many terrible things have happened to convention committees, but having to move to another Hall in the middle of the Convention is a new and ghastly weapon in the armoury of Fate...

Later there was a curious interlude when Cohen announced that the London Circle was now going to demonstrate how to put on a Convention. Nothing happened for a very long time and eventually most people got up and went or stood around talking. Finally Ken Bulmer went to the microphone and announced calmly that "The London Circle, having thoroughly organised the Convention, now hand over to the Manchester Group." I didn't know quite what to make of this...whether it was deliberate sabotage or a piece of London Circle Self-Criticism...

Next day, Sunday... Ted Tubb began to take over the convention. Little more was seen of the Convention Committee, and nothing of 11 of the 22 items listed on the official programme. Instead Tubb reigned supreme, first ad-libbing his way through the remnants of Terry Jeeves' script for the mock trial of Bert Campbell---with goodhumoured and often brilliant co-operation from Terry himself, who struck me as one of the nicest people there---and then winding up with a riotous series of monologues and interviews... Tubb was wonderful. It seems to me it would be worth the while of any convention committee to hire Ted Tubb along with the Hall...

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People started to leave for trains quite early in the evening, and the usual post mortem had started long before the Convention was scheduled to end. Dave Cohen and Eric Needham stood by the door with distraught faces and courageously asked representative fans what they had thought of the convention. There was a startling unanimity in the replies. Everyone that I heard was to the effect that the official programme had been a fiasco but that they personally had enjoyed the Convention.

That was what I thought too, but there seemed to be more to it than that. Usually I don't express any opinion on the merits of Conventions because whether one enjoys it or not depends so largely on one's own subjective impressions, but the Supermancon was such an extraordinary affair that I find myself getting all philosophical about it.

For instance, take the situation in British Fandom just before it. Bitterness between one group of Northerners and another, hostility between both groups and the Londoners, tension between Hamilton and the London pro-editors, the Londoners full of Diabolical plans to sabotage the convention, the Northerners under a desperate compulsion to justify their contempt for London Inefficiency. All this amid the greatest burst of British Fanactivity since 1938. It seemed to be an explosive situation, one that would wreck British Fandom. All the disenchantment, recriminations and bitterness which normally follow conventions would be magnified to cataclysmic proportions.

But instead the incredible happened. The opposing stresses met, surged briefly and silently...and dissipated themselves in an attitude of good humour. The Supermancon seems actually to have strengthened Fandom, a thing which no convention has ever done before.

Apparently the Supermancon committee wrought this fannish miracle by staging the worst organised Convention fandom has yet seen. You can almost see a mystical symbolism in what happened. It was as if all the sins of British Fandom---the smugness of the North, the malice of the South, the snobbery of the Old Guard---as if they were all expiated by the Supermancon committee as they crucified themselves in the Grosvenor Hotel. The point was that they bore their agony in such a way as to demonstrate the inherent goodness of fen. If they had shown signs of bitterness or pomposity in their ordeal things might have been different. Instead they met every disaster with such informality and good humour that they won peoples sympathy. In the face of this sporting attitude the London Circle... dropped their plans for sabotage. Not one of the fiendish plots hatched over the last nine months in Operation Armageddon was put into effect. The Official Programme was allowed to die peacefully by mutual consent.

WALT WILLIS (Hyphen 9, July 1954)



Of course, there were other views of the convention. Vinç Clarke's report, GRUNCH GOES TO A CONVENTION, helps fill in some gaps and gives another explanation for OPERATION ARMAGEDDON's failure to be put into practice.

#### SUPERMANCON '54

... Clutching a beautifully cold glass I spoke to three fans I knew and two I'd only met at conventions, but before I could even finish the glass the hotel manager or somebody came up to us and asked us if we'd change the venue of the Con to another room. He couldn't find any of the Committee. Six months before this would have been a London Circle dream come true; the Manchester Group, madly keen on getting the Con themselves in spite of our warnings, had so disparaged London that we'd set up OPERATION ARMAGEDDON... We'd been so sure that they'd have a too carefully organised fuggheaded s & c programme that we'd thought up a succession of ghlorious ideas; these ranged from...well, 6(c) hektographing a messy and cornily humourous programme and distributing it in the name of the Con committee a couple of months before the actual date, then following it up a week later with a coldly indignant well-mimeod leaflet castigating the previous one and setting forth an utterly boring programme that would have disgusted even our hypothetical Northerners -- also, of course, with the Mancon committee imprint... from this to... well, 23(a), getting a large ball of string and in the middle of a sercon talk to go around measuring lengths. Not anything specific -- just lengths. ("We must get our reports accurate".) This finally involving encircling the audience half-a-dozen times....

We were going to be sure that everyone had fun...except, perhaps, the committee, but as time went on the Mancunians were so obviously disintegrating under the strain ("You mean Bentcliffe has resigned already?"), that we threw out the pre-con ideas and just waited on the actual event. Being asked to change the venue within ten minutes of arriving at the place was so outrageous -- if the Manchester boys had come in during it there would have been a pitched battle -- that we just clutched our glasses tighter and indicated that we 'no speakee Mancunian'. The manager went off looking bewildered. It was good practice for him considering what was coming later.

They were holding a meeting of some sort in one of the large rooms... there was a voice reciting chemical formulae, so I went up to my room and had a wash and came down to find the bar had closed. I don't know what the hell sort of a Convention these people thought they were running, closing bars like that, but I sat down in the lounge away from the yakking in the hall and started listening to a neo-faned who wanted something -- I'm not sure what -- and then the doors of the hall burst open and a 7th fanderer bounded out crying "The London Circle have taken over the Convention! The London Circle have taken over the Convention!" and as this was way ahead of schedule I went inside the hall (for the first time) and found the boys doing something wild and extempore on the platform... I

think they were advocating holding future Conventions in places beginning with 'B' because it was the initial of Bheer...

A London Group was, as usual, on the platform when I got back again, in a skit on preparing for a Convention. That was the outward design, anyway, but our idea had been to elevate it into a huge religious revival for GNU, with Bert and Ted Tubb leading the con into a mass outburst of Extasy (spelt like that), Brian Burgess to be sacrificed, and a few personable virgins from the audience to be invited up to do something or other...I forget what, but it involved the gradual disappearance of the LC and the virgins back to the hotel rooms. Owing to the non-appearance of Bert, the fact that the incense would have been too overpowering in the small hall and various other reasons, but mostly worry over Bert, this item was cut short. Everyone drifted from the stage and went to the rear of the hall to make bets as to how long the audience would sit and wait. After a time people were chatting quite freely to each other and a suitable atmosphere of camaraderie had been established, and we handed the Convention back to the Committee again. They refused to take the hint, though, and the programme went on....

"While talking to the Hall Porter on the Monday morning, I discovered that the hotel management had undergone a valuable(?) object lesson in the perils of acting host to a Convention.

"It appeared that on the Saturday a zealous type at the Reception Desk had counted all the people (?) coming in to the Con...it also appeared that the same zealous type had counted all the people going out of the Con. This was a very good thing from the statistical point of view and, doubtless, provided the basis for a number of interesting and esoteric calculations about 'pints of beer per capita' and things like that. However, in an ecstasy of enthusiasm and the small hours of Sunday morning somebody decided to correlate these figures with the number of rooms booked by Conventioneers. Alarm and despondency immediately became rife (or whatever it is they do when they're fooling their cats.) A brief glance at the appended (and neatly tabulated) statement should indicate why:-

Incoming Conventioneers	100 plus
Outgoing Conventioneers	25 odd (very)
therefore	
Residue remaining in hotel =	75 approx
but,	
Number of persons for whom	
rooms booked	= 30 or thereabouts.
this results in,	

**ALARM AND DESPONDENCY.**

Q.E.D.

Vinc Clarke (Hyphen 9, 1954)

Following the disasters of the Coroncon and the Supermancon there were no more attempts at serious programmes. The British Fans, united now, went out to hold a convention just like the ones they had heard about in the US. Of course cons weren't really like that in the US, the reports were exaggerated, but the British fans didn't know that. They went ahead and tried to live the fantasy.

They succeeded too....

#### KETTERING 1955

...The scene here in the bar lounge was picturesque in the extreme. Everyone seemed to be wearing helicopter beanies, all home made and each more picturesque than the next.. Sheila wore hers, a double prop job, through the streets of Kettering without attracting more than cursory attention... which is a commentary on women's hats. Eric Jones's was by far the most imposing, incorporating as it did a radar antenna, several Van Der Graff generators and a spaceship complete with launching bowl..He didn't so much wear it as shelter beneath it.. During the official program Terry Jeeves lit a small fire under the spaceship. it presented a most imposing sight but Eric Jones remained oblivious, even when Burgess came up from the back of the hall and extinguished the conflagration with his zap gun.

The presence of all these helicopter beanies...far more than can be seen at a dozen American Conventions...was fascinating to the fan historian. The helicopter beanie was first introduced to fandom by Ray Nelson and (I think) George Young many years ago, but they've never been conventional headgear in America as they are now in British Fandom, and the owe their currency, it seems to me, solely because of their convenience as a recognisable symbol for fan artists--mainly Lee Hoffman. As with Conventions themselves, British fandom is acting out what US fandom only dreams...

...I went back to the Lounge, where I had the privilege to be present at the most historic intervention of a Night Porter in Convention annals. He shambled onto the scene at 2.45am. We had been making a fair amount of noise and were prepared for the usual retribution to overtake us.. Everyone had practically thrown themselves out before he opened his mouth. When he did we could scarcely bring ourselves to believe what he was saying, but eventually it seeped into our numbed brains that the unthinkable was happening. there was no reproving reference to "complaints" from that mysterious horde of antifans who furtively follow us from Convention hotel to Convention hotel spoiling our innocent fun by selfishly trying to sleep. There was no Message From The Manager. No tactless reference to the lateness of the hour. No sinister suggestions about non-residents. Instead the man was talking about science fiction! He was a fan...at least of the BBC program Journey Into Space. Actually he looked more like a Weird Tales fan--in fact he looked like a weird tale--but Boris, as he came to be called, was a very fine fellow.. There was a proposal that he be appointed Official Night Porter to British Conventions and be provided with his own travelling coffin...

## A Short History of British SF Cons

The Official Program began next day at 2.18pm with a 50 cycle hum on the PA system and speeches by Ted Carnell and Bert Campbell. I hear that Denny Cowen had attempted to start it at the advertised time of 11am, but no one was there to appreciate this whimsical gesture...

At lunchtime that day the hotel manager had laid on lunch for fifty at 8/6 per head (or at least per person.) At one o'clock the vast organisation had completed its preparations and stood ready to swing into action. Six waiters stood poised for zero hour, sworn to deal with the mad rush of starving fans or go down beneath their feet. By two o'clock six fans had appeared, the rest of them by this time finishing their fish and chips in cheap cafes. Denny Cowen didn't seem at all worried. he said the Manager had asked him for advice on how many he should provide for at lunch. 75? 100? "Well," said Denny thoughtfully, "I think you could safely allow for about six. Maybe seven. Or, if you want to take a chance, perhaps even eight." The Manager was incredulous. there were over a hundred people there; surely most of them would want lunch. "Not," said Denny firmly, "at 8/6 a throw." And so it turned out. I didn't have lunch there myself, but I hear the service was pretty good...

Some time during the afternoon word had been spread by runners through the various lounges that War of the Worlds was going to be shown that evening. My Ghod, we thought, the Official Program walks again. I dropped in about half an hour after it had started to make sure that the Martians hadn't found out about Alka Sektzer, and discovered the makings of an even worse catastrophe. Someone had decided to help defend Terra against the alien hordes with his little zapgun. apparently these high class silvered screens are allergic to water and the maddened operator had called in the Manager complaining that his screen had been ruined and his projector was in imminent danger. He said he would cancel the show if he wasn't afraid the audience would riot. I assured him he needn't worry about that and if he'd explained the position to them there'd be no more trouble. Then after discussing it with Vinc I told him we'd lift a collection to pay for the damage to the screen. I got Bill Panter to make the announcement and the film show went on without further incident. During the interval Vinc and I went round with beanies and collected £2:12/3. the operator settled happily for £1:10 and of the remainder 10/- went to TAFF and the balance in gratuities to the hotel staff.

Some people said afterwards that the people who did the damage should have paid for it, but I don't see how it could have been done in practice. I took the collection from the main culprit, a professional man with a University degree, and he only gave me 2/6 and was far more concerned about his confiscated zapgun than anything else. Besides until recently zapguns have been quite *comme il faut* at British Conventions and in a convivial atmosphere anyone can be forgiven for failing to take into account the possibility that a film screen may be something other than an ordinary white sheet.

All the same the incident could have ruined the Convention, and it seems to be the general opinion among leaders of fannish thought that the zapgun should be outlawed. It had its uses in the dry-as-dust British Convention of a few years back, but we all know how to enjoy ourselves now

## A Short History of British SF Cons

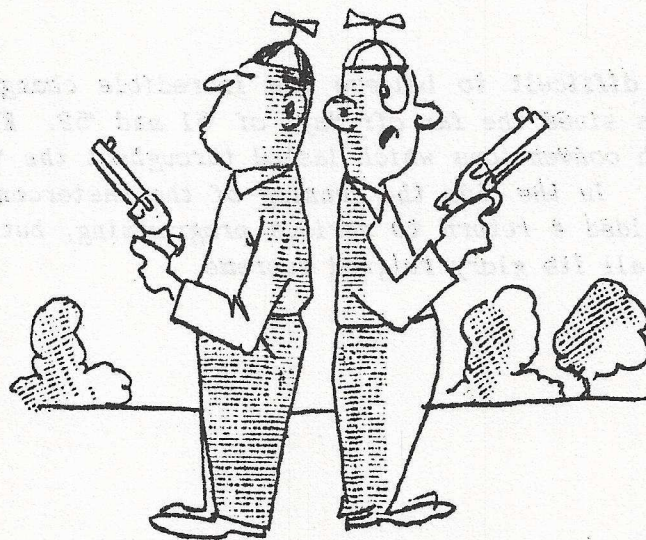
without mechanical aids to informality. Many of the actifans left them behind in 1954 and hardly any BNFs toted them at Kettering. The trend will probably continue.

There was some speculation next morning as to what would take its place. Ken Slater was demonstrating a potato gun, but one hates to think what fannish ingenuity might develop from this. Bombs loaded with cold mashed potatoes, bazookas firing half a stone at a time, french fried shrapnel, long range rocket missiles...maybe even guided potatoes, with electronic eyes. A horrible thought. Mal Ashworth and Ken Bulmer came up with the best idea---a double-barreled shotgun with one barrel loaded with tar and the other with feathers. It could be used for running people out of fandom...such as thoughtless zappers....

...Sunday passed in a happy blur and then there was the usual mad rush round saying goodbye to people. Not as many as usual this time, because it seemed that all our friends were coming to see us off. There were the Bulmers, Vinç and Joy, Mal and Sheila, and Eric Bentcliffe. Even Eric Needham, who had just arrived on his motorbike. (The one with the wide handlebars, of which he had been heard to say "It's a good bike, but rather susceptible to forked lightning.") I hear him asking Chuck for a light for his cigarette. Chuck obliged, saying: "A light from Chuck Harris! Light an eternal flame from it or something." Eventually Madeleine, Chuck, Arthur and me, accompanied by our entourage, arrived at the platform and the train came in. We said out last goodbyes and started to clamber on. Suddenly the air was filled with confetti. Every one of them had been clutching a handful of it all the way from the hotel.

Madeleine and I leaned out of the carriage window dripping confetti---technicolour dandruff, as Bob Shaw calls it--laughing and waving goodbye. As the train moved off Ken Bulmer shouted, "Give our love to your children when you get home!"

Walt Willis. (Hyphen, 1955)



"There should be something in the rules about ties in a TAFF election"

*Reports of the '55 Kettering Con were uniformly good. This was the first real Fannish British convention and set the pace for future cons.*

#### KETTERING 1955

By now the walls of the hall were covered with adverts for various fanzines, prozines and BLOG! Chairs, books, tables were all buried in quote cards. Archie Mercer distributed the largest amount of quote cards, he must have had thousands, other cards came from the Liverpool boys but these were mostly adverts for their tape-recording which they were putting on at three-thirty sponsored by BLOG, an imaginary product that 'caught on' better than I think was expected. The barmen in the American Bar put up an advert for the stuff saying that BLOG would shortly be on sale and I did hear that the regular customers of the hotel had actually been enquiring about it and when it was to be on sale? The barmen and waiters were right in the groove of things and played along fine answering all enquiries saying that BLOG would be on sale soon! Yes indeed, a real tru-fannish place, the manager was delighted with everything and the barmen even went as far as getting their own zapp guns. BLOG adverts were all over the hotel and so were Archie's quote cards. I pinned up ads for Satellite on every available place I could find.

The con hall at two pm was a most fannish scene indeed, zapp gun duels were being held, pros were talking in groups, beanies bobbing up and down, fen chasing femmes, Burgess jerking about... oh yes Burgess had a lovely hat, a bit unconventional maybe, but very attractive(?). This hat was one of those Alpine type with a fifteen inch feather stuck in it, the hat was green and the feather white, and he wore it the whole weekend except when somebody took it from him and emptied his zapp gun in it!  
Don Allen...(Satellite 6, 1955)

*it is difficult to believe the incredible change which had come over conventions since the far off days of '51 and '52. Kettering set a standard for British conventions which lasted throughout the '50s and was remembered long after. In the '60s the running of the Eastercon was given to the BSFA which heralded a return to serious programming, but for that brief moment Fandom in all its glory reigned supreme.*

## DISASTERS

*Sometimes things just won't go right. The only barrier between any Con and disaster is the humour and ability of the committee but there are times when the best laid plans of mice and men....*

*Things rarely run smoothly when you're trying to arrange a Con, but the problems Con committees face nowadays are nothing to some of those faced by Ella Parker in 1960...*

Eastercon 1960

...I had also agreed to do the bookings for the hotel. I had arranged with the hotel manager at which the Convention was to be held, that I would take the bookings from the fen and give them to him in a block. I'd told him to expect around 50 to sleep(!) with about the same number visiting the lounge we would use for a Conhall. The hotel didn't have a licence for selling drinks but I was assured there were no objections to our bringing our own in provided they were kept to the bedrooms and our lounge; the hotel would even provide us with glasses! I figured it was best to be honest and told him that in all probability there would be very little actual sleeping done over the weekend as we only had this one chance, annually, to meet up and exchange talk and the like. To this he was also agreeable. I suppose I should have been suspicious, because every demand I made on behalf of the Convention was met with a bland promise: "If we haven't got it we'll get it for you." Things looked fine from where I was sitting.

I phoned the hotel on Friday to let them know I'd be down that day with the bookings I had. A woman's voice said: "I'm the owner, the man you saw was my brother who was standing in for me for a couple of days." I thought no more about it than that the least the brother could have done was to tell me it wasn't his hotel. He had assured me he'd be there himself over the holiday in order to help things run smoothly. As it turned out, he'd lied in his teeth.

When I arrived and had a cigarette well alight we got down to business. How many would we be? When was it for? For how long would we be there? What exactly were we? (alright chum, you try and answer that one!). It transpired that the hotel owner hadn't been advised on any of the detailed arrangements made on her and the hotel's behalf by her brother. This meant that every time I told her about something else her brother had promised would be done or obtained for us she dashed over to the phone and called him to query it. From the expostulations at our end I gathered the brother was unrepentantly telling her "Yes, that's right, I did say that." When the girl - she wasn't really much more than that - realised how far he'd gone in her name she did the honourable thing and agreed to accept the bookings. We had to make certain adjustments... I was only too willing to compromise with her on what I thought the gang would stand for; reminding myself all the time that there was only a week to go before the Convention and we had

## A Short History of British SF Cons

to have this hotel, there just wasn't time to find another. My pride took an awful beating that day...

...I had an appointment with the hotel that day to give them the last of the bookings and to make sure all was as it should be...

When I got to the hotel the owner introduced me to her mother who looked as if she was on the point of leaving, she was putting on her hat. Instead of going out she pinned me with a hard look and remarked: "Miss Parker, I don't like the sound of this party you have arranged for Easter. I don't like it at all. If my daughter takes my advice she'll cancel the whole thing." To say I was dismayed would be to understate the case. I was aghast. I'd already done diplomatic battle with the daughter and we'd reached some sort of working agreement but I could see this old battle-axe wasn't going to be easily persuaded; indeed, she wasn't going to be persuaded in any way if she could help it. I don't know if my face showed that I recognised defeat even before I'd begun fighting, but in spite of all my pleas she stuck to her guns. I must be fair and say that the daughter was on the verge of a right battle with her mother, in order to honour her word that she would have us there. The old woman over-rode her on every point. I wondered if perhaps Bobbie Gray could effect some sort of compromise with the old haybag so I asked permission to use the phone and called her. As I wasn't on the BSFA committee I had to let her know what had happened anyway.

It was no go. We were out!

48 hours to the Convention and nowhere to go!

Ella Parker. (Orion 25, 1960)

Despite this they managed to find another Hotel to take the convention. The 1960 EasterCon carried on... which is more than can be said for our next example.

Of all the conventions that have been planned and run over the last fifty years a special mention as 'Least Successful Con' must go to ...

### The Great Torquay ConVacation

as an example of what can happen to a con in the face of sustained apathy. It cannot be called a Great Fannish Disaster simply because there was nobody there for a disaster to happen to.

The Torquay ConVacation was planned last year as a combined vacation and unorganised convention. I selected two hotels and the fans had to make their own reservations. Eric Bentcliffe (who originated the idea) was the first one to book, and after extensive advertising a second fan booked.... Mike Wallace. Later, Eric had to cancel so that left poor old Mike on his own, and he had to put it off 'til a month later...

Nigel Lindsay (Schnerdlites 4, 1955)



In 1976, as a reaction against the plushness and formality of the De Vere Hotel in Coventry, where Seacon had been held in 1975, Mancon 5 was proposed. It was supposed to be a revolution in EasterCons, held in a Student Hall of Residence, the now infamous Owens Park. The promises of cheap accomodation, good food and 'exclusive' use of all facilities during the Con won Mancon the Bid

Even before the event people were somewhat wary of Owens Park (as reported by Peter Nicholls in *Wrinkled Shrew* 4).

I missed the boring Manchester bid, where everybody sullenly agreed that it was O.K. to have a convention next year in a teenage Borstal rather than a nice comfy hotel.

Nor were these suspicions ungrounded. The Mancon at Owens Park turned out to be one of the worst fannish disasters of recent years.

...We eventually reached Owens Park and first impressions were not favourable. Entering the main con area we saw registration set up on the right; to the immediate left was the staircase leading to the con hall. Beyond the staircase the area to the right opened out into the lounge. There were a lot of people milling around. I felt immediately, irrationally edgy; I had always been aware that a campus con would seem spartan and unwelcoming, but it was still unsettling to be confronted with the actuality...

...We realised that all was not normally what one expects when the barmaid first of all took away Pat Charnock's glass before she had finished her drink, and then turned off the lights in the part of the lounge we were sitting in. Most of us had been ready for an early night, but after this unsubtle hint that our presence was less than welcome we sat tight for another hour and a half...Finally we sickened of it all and went back to the hotel. Bed at 1.30. An average start...

On the way back (from lunch on Friday) we had a fine view of the forbidding bulk of Owens Park towering above the surrounding buildings. It looked remarkably like a modern prison - "The first maximum-security convention hotel", said Greg.

Back at the con events were in disarray. Owing to the concom's failure to inform people of when they were scheduled to appear (presumably the fault of programme-organiser Chuck Partington) the participants in the con's first 'live' event (a fannish panel) were not to be found. It was postponed. Great start. Something else was rearranged (I suppose) in its place, but I didn't really notice what it was...

After the banquet was the Fancy Dress. this was a bit of late programme-shuffling, because there wasn't originally a fancy dress parade scheduled. That was a move I, for one, quite approved of, because although some masochistic streak always draws me to watch I really think fancy dress parades are dreadful. Unfortunately the Mancon concom hadn't actually said they weren't going to have one. Admittedly their progress reports said nothing about one, but since their Progress Reports hardly said anything about anything, a number of people reasonably assumed there would be one and prepared their costumes accordingly. To me it seems that if you decide to

## A Short History of British SF Cons

discontinue something that is a long-established Eastercon tradition it seems elementary sense to tell people.

We'd been talking to Peter Weston about fancy dress parades, and he compared the parade at the Washington Worldcon he'd attended as TAFF delegate with the feeble apologies for costumes which many people (with honourable exceptions) get away with over here. Roy Kettle summed it up; "American women coming naked and our fucking idiots coming with cardboard boxes on their heads". When Vernon Brown came into the hall with a cardboard box on his head it all came home to me, though he was in fact part of a quite reasonable presentation based on Creatures of Light and Darkness. The only other entrant I recall was Brian Ameringen as Count Dracula ("Vampire with a wooden brain," said Kettle). Afterwards there was a special presentation featuring two young ladies from Birmingham who had better remain nameless as I can only remember Pauline Dugate's name. They danced on stage waving immense bosoms in a way that made the first three rows duck on every downswing. Several people were enthralled...

Then we ran out of ways of passing the time. There was nothing to do except go back to the hotel and go to bed. This was the Sunday night of the con, when conventions are supposed to reach a climax of socialising and parties. Undoubtedly the inhospitable and uncomfortable surroundings contributed greatly to its failure, as well as the thoughtless programming. I think I can safely mention the Sunday night dance at Seacon - as I had nothing directly to do with organising it - and the parties that followed it, as well as the tremendous party at Tynescon in '74 as truly great endings to conventions. Mancon merely petered out. An appropriate end.  
Malcolm Edwards(Stop Breaking Down No.3, 1976)



The first thing that struck me about the Owens Park campus was its open, rambling, decentralized nature--fine for students to walk and talk, yes, but for fans? Fans, used to having everything under one roof, easily accessible by lifts or stairs? Um... The rooms were stark and functional. Very functional; there wasn't even a socket for my razor (which had me kneeling on the floor the next morning, running the razor across my chin and earning some very odd looks from whoever was up at the time). Great, I thought, searching desperately for a 13 amp socket and finding instead the combined bathroom/shower/toilet area, which was even more functional--- the only thing between you taking a shower and someone else going for a pee was a thin plastic curtain. Wonderful...

Breakfast was awful. It made a valiant attempt to at least look like food, but that was the closest it was ever going to come to actually being food. The egg looked like something that a toad might have once sicked up, but I ate it anyway. After all, I'd paid for it, hadn't I? I lingered over my coffee, even going so far as to have a second and third cup - not because it was good coffee, but because there was sod-all else to do..

The bar eventually opened, and the con programme lurched off to a late and shaky start. The day just seemed to grind along without actually involving me in any way, although everywhere I looked, there were people doing things. The con organisation was nonexistent; I, and presumably everyone else, hoped that this would be a transitory phenomenon, but the weekend was to prove otherwise...all in all, I felt somehow very bored that afternoon.

But salvation was at hand. Yes, it was football time, and so Gannets, Rats, spectators and assorted hangers-on and camp-followers trooped out of the gates of Owens Park and along to the nearby Bit of Green Space to do battle for the Vector MacGroon Memorial Trophy (cunningly disguised as Malcolm Edwards' con badge). The pitch was laid out, coats were laid as goal posts, play began... and Ratfan Dynamo were 3-0 up in some five minutes flat when a uniformed official with shoulder tabs that said "Recreation Police" arrived and told us we couldn't play there

In vain did Rob Jackson protest. "We're only staying at the university for the weekend," he said. "For a science fiction convention..."

You could see the policeman's eyes light up from half a mile away. "Science fiction?" he breathed, awestruck, "Wow..." But it didn't do us any good, mainly because the bye-laws were against us, so we had to start again on a real full-sized pitch over the other side of the park. Not that all of us were actually in favour of discounting the existing score, you understand---it was all Edwards' doing, all his fault...

We played fifteen minutes each way, and felt exhausted when it was all over. Ten minutes into the first half referee Bob Shaw suddenly realized that Ian Maule was playing for the Rats and not the Gannet Flyers...

I almost collided with Rob Holdstock to score a goal, but it was disallowed on a technicality...

Leroy Kettle leaped up and down and screamed with rage when the ball was taken away from him...

## A Short History of British SF Cons

Greg Pickersgill became confused between Graham Charnock and a Gannet whose name badge I couldn't read in the race for the ball, both of whom were wearing almost identical trousers, both rolled up to show almost identical legs...

The final score was 2-2, and the Vector MacGroon Memorial Trophy remained unclaimed.

Some indeterminate time later that evening I found myself in the bar waiting for Eric Bentcliffe to formally open the con and introduce the personalities, meanwhile watching fans continue to arrive. And arrive. And arrive. I caught sight of a con badge reading 600- something and gave an inward shudder....

Today was going to be different, I decided, as I ground through the morning rituals of cleansing and purification before descending to find that a large notice had been posted at the breakfast counter---you could have either fruit juice or cereal, but not both. I took both anyway, and subsequently discovered that the toast had a consistency not unlike that of a paving slab. Which might or might not have been some form of minor retribution for my greed, I'm not sure...

The con hall was predictably crowded for Bob Shaw's talk. Entitled "The Return of the Backyard Spaceship", it was ostensibly about alternative technology but actually concerned itself with the building of a starship powered by the results of a hyperactive brewery. Rob Jackson later secured the rights to publication in the next Maya and looked inordinately pleased with himself thereafter (presumably creating an upsurge of jealousy amongst every other faned present)...

Don't ask me what new stunt the Owens Park catering staff pulled off for breakfast; I missed it. I even missed the BSFA AGM, I got up so late...

What puzzled Gra Poole and I was where everyone went at lunchtime. Why, there were nigh on seven hundred people here half an hour ago; surely there weren't that many cafes and Chinese takeaways around were there?

The bar seemed almost empty, with odd groups seated here and there engaged in desultory chatter.

Sunday was turning out to be an enormous drag...

It came home to me then just how unimaginative the programme was. It hadn't enthralled me when I first looked at it on Thursday evening, and it was doing even less for me now. The only alternative to the con hall was the bar; what was wrong with the alternative programming that had proved such a success at SEACON: But then maybe it was just as well that the MANCON committee hadn't tried to organize two programmes; they were having enough trouble keeping one going, as the gaps between each item accumulated to build up, by that evening, a colossal overrun of about two hours on the times given in the programme...

AFTERTHOUGHTS Nobody can possibly pretend it was a memorable con. Perhaps memorable in all the wrong ways---terrible organization, awful accomodation, repulsive food, the general air of inefficiency nurtured by the committee who were never around when you wanted them---but maybe it would be better for us all if we just agreed to forget it and make sure there is never another campus con in our lifetimes.

Joseph Nicholas.(Wrinkled Shrew 6, 1976)

*Most people agreed with this opinion.*

... People were largely in the dark about the con 'til they arrived. We didn't know what the area surrounding the campus was like; we got a map where a motorway which actually runs westward is drawn as heading northeasterly... and rare indeed is the con where the best food on sale inside the con building is Brian Burgess' meat pies.

Rob Jackson (Maya 11, 1976)

*However, not all reports of the convention were bad. Apparently the success or failure of Mancon 5 depends entirely on what you compare it with. I have heard some Fans who were Neos at the time saying that they enjoyed it, and one who returned found things just as he remembered them...*

### The Revenant

Walt Willis

...Apart from that everything was just right, instantly and comfortingly familiar, even down to the traditional complaints about the programme and the accommodation. Both seemed to me reassuringly normal.

The programme for instance was in every respect, foreseen and otherwise, exactly the sort of thing I was accustomed to. There were of course a few developments, as was only to be expected. The print of Metropolis had apparently finally worn out completely, to be replaced by a variety of highly coloured modern plastic substitutes. And in my day professionals did not dare to read extracts from their works instead of making a speech, not even John Russell Fearn. I assured Harry Turner that the title of Silverberg's turn was just one of Bob's gags, and told the author himself that I was looking forward to his readings from selected editorials of Spaceship. But lo, Bob actually did hold the audience transfixed with readings from his own pro works, just like Charles Dickens used to wow the Victorians. (You understand I don't actually remember that.) All except me, that is. I cannot bear to be read to, finding it rather like walking with one's shoelaces tied together, and left the hall as inconspicuously as possible while Bob was pausing for breath.

As for the accommodation, it was quite adequate for us simple Irish Peasant folk, and there was the additional and unparalleled luxury of having one's own coffee-making arrangements to hand. The fact that everything was actually there as promised impressed me with its awesome efficiency. Had fandom changed that much? However the presence of unmistakable crottled greeps in the dining hall fare reassured me, as did the traditional complaint from an American about the lack of showers. (It seems they have finally given up asking for iced water.)...

It did seem to me however that the concourse was too small and there were too few seats. If I stand for a long time in one place it sometimes happens that I fall down unconscious, causing consternation in the vicinity and interrupting in most cases the conversational flow of the person I was talking

to.... Several times I had to leave interesting groups to find a seat, hoping someone would follow me.

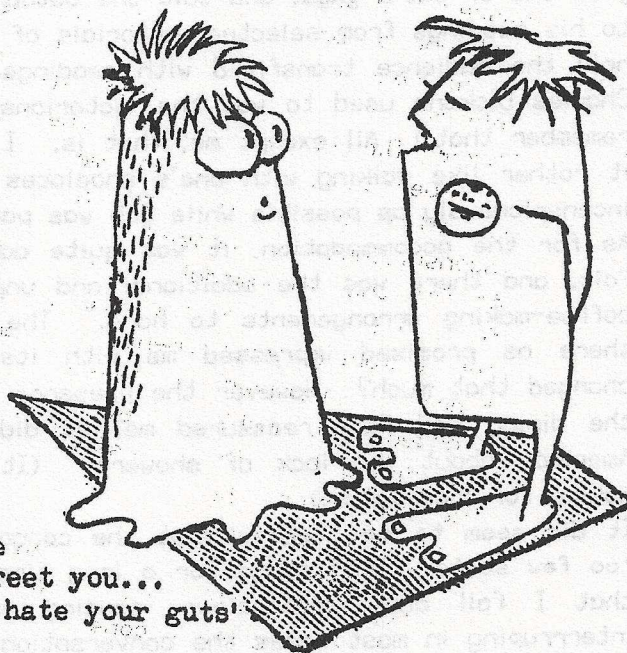
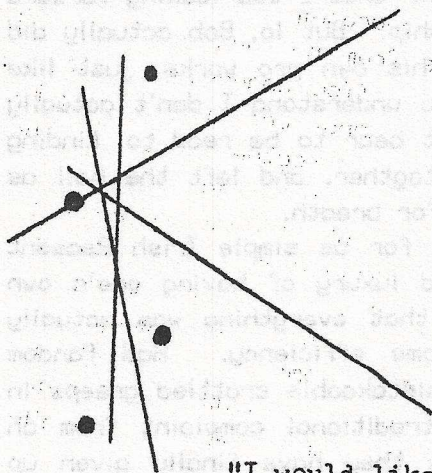
It also seemed to me that the rooms were too small for the sort of room party which most people like, and that they led accordingly either to the formation of a Black Hole or to an uncontrollable expansion of the space-time continuum. It's interesting how the nature of a convention is determined by the physical configuration of the environment, as the layout of housing developments affect community spirit and vandalism, and the way things are nowadays it's only a matter of time before some lucky post-graduate gets a research grant to study the phenomenon.

As for fans themselves, it was clear that they were more prosperous nowadays. It also seemed to me that in general they were more literate, more congenial, more courteous and more homogeneous. I noticed no signs of the old polarisation of North/South or fan/pro or any of the other cleavages which used to be so noticeable. It also seemed to me that there was more contact with US fandom, which was something I had always tried to bring about, and I was delighted to see TAFF still going strong...

It was even stranger and more poignant that I had to go to Manchester to meet for the first time two young Belfast fans from opposite sides of the barricades.

Finally, I was struck by the fact that convention bidding had become so polished and sophisticated, like a Presidential nomination convention, and more so than I had seen in America itself. I wondered if, once again, British fandom had unwittingly outstripped the Americans. This happened once before, the first time British fandom ran a convention in a hotel, with room parties and everything. On that occasion British fandom tried to imitate American fandom, but what they imitated was a convention as idealised in fanzine convention reports, with the result that they had a convention better than anything ever seen in America.

Walt Willis (Maya 11, 1976)



"I would like to let you know that as a member of the Welcomittee, I greet you... but personally, I hate your guts!"

Within modern British fandom Mancon 5 is still the archetypal 'bad con', Albacon '86 even saw a Mancon joke bid. No subsequent British convention has gained quite the reputation that Mancon has although Skycon, the '78 Eastercon at Heathrow, made a valiant attempt. At Skycon the hotel took its money at the start of the Con and then seemed to make every attempt to get rid of the fans, with uncooperative management, some room parties being closed down and fans tossed into the street, and other parties being gatecrashed by aircrew looking for 'entertainment'.

Still, some other cons had narrow escapes. For a while it looked as if Albacon 2, the Eastercon for '83, would not take place at all...

## ALBACON 2

Given the large degree of overlap in their committees the first reports reaching civilisation from the wild north of a split between con-chairman Blob Shaw (as he will hereinafter be called to avoid confusion with the real Bob Shaw) and the committee of FAIRCON, the Scottish regional convention, caused some concern over the implications for ALBACON. It looked as if the unthinkable could happen, as if ALBACON could collapse and leave us without an Eastercon for the first time since 1957 (though the first British convention was held forty five years ago the 1983 con marks the first unbroken quarter century run of Eastercons). It would be too late to reactivate METROCON and the chances of anyone else getting an alternative together at such short notice would be slight. A gloomy scenario. In the meantime ALBACON PR1 arrived and announced that Blob was no longer associated with the convention, there was no hint of further problems and all seemed well. However, as I was typing the preceeding... the phone rang and I listened in amazement as a Normally Reliable Source poured forth a strange and wondrous tale into my shocked and shell-like ear. What follows may well be scurrilous rumour-mongering of the sort practiced by the gutter-press (i.e. ANSIBLE), but my informant tells me that far from resigning from the ALBACON committee Blob considers that they have resigned from *him* and intends to go ahead with ALBACON on his own. If this is indeed the case it raises an interesting point and not one, so far as I'm aware, that is covered by any precedent. Namely: if a con committee splits, which fraction has a mandate to run the convention? Not having given the situation much thought, because it had never arisen prior to this, I suppose I would have said that the larger faction held the mandate, but is that necessarily so? There are no precedents or guidelines to follow - which brings to mind the old idea of an Eastercon Charter...and the old objections about there being no body capable of enforcing it. I suppose a system could be established to give the BSFA the role of arbiter in such a situation, but this wouldn't necessarily ensure an unbiased decision. In a case such as this fandom's anarchic nature may well work against it, and while I've no idea what the outcome will be I'll watch events unfold with interest. It looks as if my thoughts at the end of the last page were premature and that the 1983 Eastercon may not yet be out of the woods.

Rob Hanson. (Epsilon 12, 1982)

Quoth Bob (Shaw, fake): "Albacon II now hangs in the balance. Glasgow fandom can't do it without me... There'd better be some coming to heel damn quick or there'd better be a new Eastercon."

Bob deserves credit for starting and playing a major part in Glasgow's cons, and perhaps naturally he regards them as 'his' - you'll search in vain through his Albacon flyers and PR1 for any hint that Bob Jewett is and was chairman, though the name BOB SHAW always figures prominently. Hence a certain, er, dichotomy. Bob Jewett explains that the Albacon II committee, as seen bidding at Channelcon, is carrying on happily with the solitary exception of Bob Shaw: "We've got the hotel, the mailing list and the bank account all safe." PR1 was duly mailed with an added note saying that Bob Shaw had left the committee and that all communications bar hotel bookings should go to Albacon II c/o Doug McCallum,...., Albacon's general address as before. Bob Shaw, conversely, explains that the activities of (Bob Jewett's) rebellious "rump" committee make it unlikely that Albacon II will take place (he advises that Metrocon be revived - no possibility of this, folks), that he is trying to freeze the Albacon II bank account and has opened a further account for monies sent to Albacon c/o him... an unknown number of PR1s having been mailed with Bob's added note asking that all communications go to Bob Shaw. Oh dear. Jim Barker - to whom Bob recently offered the post of Albacon II chairman but who declined since Albacon II already has a chairman - reports that the 'Shaw Albacon' is a one-man show without support or approval from other Glasgow conrunning fans. Without Bob, Albacon II will be poorer - especially its publications - but Bob alone can't possibly cope with an Eastercon of the anticipated size.

Dave Langford. (Ansible 28)

*And as for the Con itself...*

The Unreal Bob Shaw's prophesies of doom and destruction for any event not organised by himself proved no truer than for any other Eastercon, and the committee showed that they couldn't hold a candle to the attendees for that Mindless Incompetence with which they'd been tagged. On Sunday night a lift full of three lifts-full of fans driven into suicidal ecstasy by the Brum Fan Room Party plummeted - well, 'descended rather hastily' - to the bottom of its shaft.

Mal Ashworth. (Ansible 33)

People carried on dancing, chatting and drinking until pretty late, when the party shut down due to a slight accident. It appears that a large contingent of idiot fandom had been holding a tightly packed lift party, and had managed to get 23 idiots into a lift "Max capacity 16 persons". This was on the fifth floor when someone arrived on the ground floor and called the lift, to be rewarded by a "WHEEEEEEEEEEE...\*\*CRASH\*\*" noise.

Martin Hoare arrived on the scene with the key, and opened the door to find a scene reminiscent of the film "Earthquake" - arm and leg pie on the floor of the lift and beer, (instead of blood), over everything. Total casualties: one sprained ankle, but it was thought safer to stop the party before anything else occurred...

The staff were extremely friendly, it's the only con I know of where the staff were looking for room parties at 4 a.m. to join in. (Apparently they were directed to the room where the local real ale brewery had installed a barrel, and had an excellent time.)

Chris Suslowicz (Abdump 2,1983)



But Cons can succeed, and do. The Mexican, in Newcastle in '84, was a great success. It was a Con with a Theme, unusually in this case Science Fiction, and it worked...

### THIS IS CACTUS COUNTRY

"You realize, " I said to the Southern Fuhrer some time after the con, "that if anyone else had put on a con with bloody great papier-mache cactuses all over the place, we'd be groaning about this being the ultimate degeneracy in fandom..."

"You could be right, at that," said Gregory.

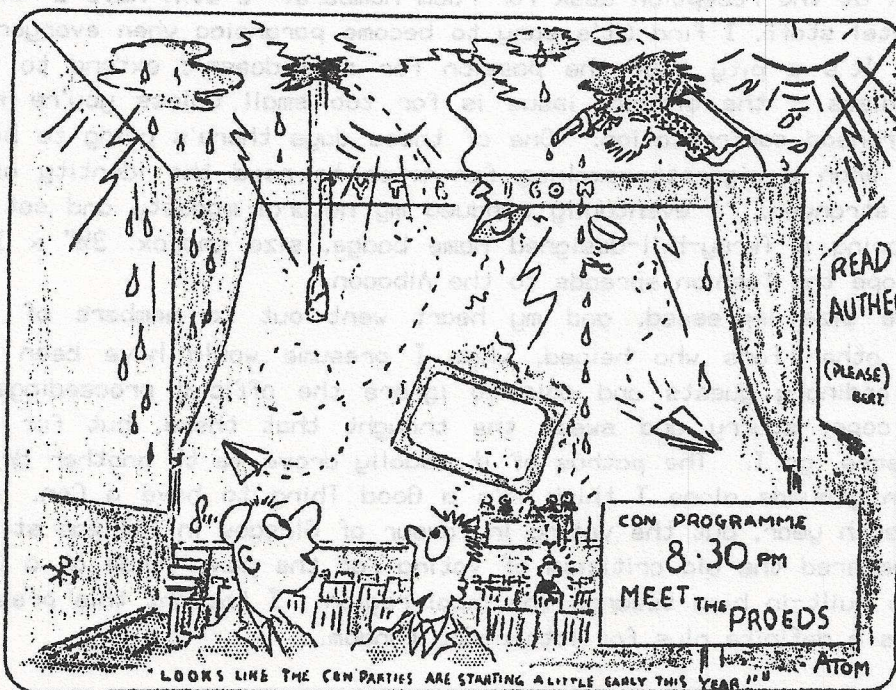
Degenerate it may have been, reactionary it probably was, but the Mexican seemed to these somewhat biased eyes to deliver the goods as promised...

...Surprise hero by acclamation was Alasdair Gray, a shambling figure in a greenish jersey, with a trufan's attitude to the demon drink (even Pickersgill Punch when the bar closed), who won everyone's heart by falling asleep on the con hall steps during the disco...

...Arch anti-hero was the Mysterious Kilted Scotsman, who appears causing trouble and devastation in pretty well all the accounts of the con. No space for full details, but you must hear how a certian TWP administrator found him asleep on a landing, made the traditional examination, and dashed away, face curdled with disgust...

...Russell Hoban sometimes seemed a little withdrawn; like a man with a secret. We found out what it was during Paul Kincaid's interview with Hoban: suddenly he drew out (from where? His shoulderbag?) a little automaton. this, he announced, was the original Mouse and his Child - then he set the two figures dancing. The hall was bewitched, silent and breathless; then at once alive with clapping... More applause for Geoff Ryman's dramatization of the Transmigration of Timothy Archer. a play at a con? we'd wondered. In the rehearsal time available? could it really work? It did. Bloody hell, it did, uniting everyone there for the whole evening...

Abi Frost. (Ansible 39, 1984)



As a final note on the changes that the decades have wrought I can only introduce the following. Vinø Clarke left fandom in '60 and came back in '81. In the intervening years a lot had changed...

A few notes on Easter 1982.

Friends and Gentlefen - On Easter weekend 1982 the ChannelCon was held at the Metropole Hotel, Brighton. A good time was had by all.

End of formal Con. report. Start of personal impression.

Wow.

I don't want to go in for too much of this combing-through-grey-beard-and-cackling-toothlessly stuff, but culturally I come straight from an era when the whole Con. was housed in a hall only slightly larger than the ChannelCon's Fan Room, and Brian Burgess wearing a Fu-Manchu mask was one of the high points of the Fancy Dress.

In the '50's, the book tables of the Dealers weren't set in the luxury of a separate room; if we could spare the space we put Ken Slater and Les Flood at tables on the perimeter of the audience and told them not to make a noise whilst the programme was running. The only Fantasy Games available were those being slowly and painfully invented by Ken Bulmer, Ted Tubb and myself - see BEM in the Historical Archives for details - except, of course, by certain couples of opposite gender at the Cons....but no, I mustn't shock the younger generation.

Next time, perhaps.

To me, the sheer size of the modern Con. is its most outstanding feature, like reading about mile-long spaceships when you're 16-years old. As with these monstrous constructs which, if I recall correctly, used to keep on descending through the reinforced concrete of a standard landing field down to the rock beneath, size has its drawbacks. I spent bits of three days looking for certain attendees at the Metropole, doing everything in human power except actually to ask at the reception desk for room numbers. I still have a '50's-fan fear of hotel staff; I find (it's easy to become paranoiac when everyone's against you). It's a pity that the passion for size doesn't extend to the identification discs - the official issue is far too small unless you're into forehead-to-forehead confrontation. One of these days there's going to be a nasty incident when a cigarette-smoking fan tries to read the identity of a bushy-bearded stranger. I eventually subdued my natural modesty and set an example by wearing a Terry-Hill-designed name badge, size approx. 3½" x 1½", and can only hope the fashion spreads to the Albacon.

Yes, the size impressed, and my heart went out to members of the Committee and other fans who helped, whom I presume would have been far happier being ordinary guests and able to ignore the official proceedings...I watched them cope, scurry and sweat the thought that there, but for the grace of 25 years, go I. The pathos of it usually drove me to another drink. On humanitarian grounds alone I think it's a Good Thing to have a Con. in a different area each year, but the voting in favour of Glasgow in '83 was still a shock. I remembered the old criticism of voting for the next venue at a Con. because of the built-in bias towards the local region. I thought this present open-mindedness a definite plus for latter-day fandom....

## A Short History of British SF Cons

I believe that there were a couple of Guests of Honour or something - hope they turned up.

As a fanzine fan I'd been looking forward to seeing the projected selection of current fanzines in the Fan Room; said exhibition didn't materialise, but there was some interesting material on offer, such as Christina Lake's MUSIC FROM A FIRE with chunks of those indefinables called personality and talent, and a small 1983 type 'zine called N.M.E.III...."This magazine was produced by Imperial College Science Fiction Society. Typed with Research Machine 380Z onto Dysan floppy disks. Printed out on Anderson and Jacobson printer onto A4 paper, copied down on Ubix and Cannon 5500 photocopiers. Lithoed in the Mines print unit, Imperial College." And it's got some fair, fannish, funny items.

I was also looking forward to picking up some old fanzines at the Con., in the auction, but due to the organisers apparently deciding that they would be of very minority interest, couldn't stay to bid as they were offered after the official end of the Con. I hope this wasn't an expression of the regard in which fanzines are held at these gatherings..... But minor disappointments apart, I had a terrific time and met some nice people. I suppose that, strictly speaking, my ideal Con. would have about 150 fanzine-type fans (and pro-fans) in attendance only, but facing the harsh realities of finance, the amounts of power that an attendance of 500+ can give to the Committee in relation to hotels, etc., I guess that the number present was just about right. congratulations to all concerned.

On the way home we passed a large country house smothered in clouds of smoke, seven or eight fire-engines in attendance in the entrance drive or on the road outside. After the Con. it seemed quite mundane.

Vinç Clarke. (Not Science Fantasy News 1, 1982)

*But if you still feel cynical about modern conventions seeing them as impersonal and overorganised, and long for a return to some 'Golden Age' of Science Fiction conventions, think again...*

...The consensus seems to be that Cymrucon 3 was less triffic than the first two. Famous iconoclast G.Pickersgill went further, as usual, with such phrases as 'fucking awful' and 'I went because I'd heard it turned the clock back to when cons were really good, but you can turn the clock back *too far* and when I saw all these cretins chasing each other with water-pistols...'. As usual; one convention, several hundred opinions.

Dave Langford (Ansible 36)

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" CHURCH, ANYBODY ? "

Any Profits (Fine Chance!) will go to Fans Across the World.  
If you know of any good stories and can write them down (or point us towards a 'zine in which they are already written down) please get in contact. Feuds, Retractions, Exaggerations and Vendettas to the same address. All material is © the original authors.

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