

stranger in John Foyster
stranger lands GUFF 1979

Illustrated by Elizabeth Darling

Seek On! Seek On!

What images evoke most accurately the spirit of SEACON, I wonder? Is it, as my chapter title hints, drawing its inspiration from Philip José Farmer's tiny gem, best to imagine SEACON as a voyage to the edge of the Earth, to a point at which some travellers at least toppled over into the infinite depths of space and were lost for ever? Perhaps, rather, it's more appropriate to think of the doggerel associated with that demmed elusive Pimpernel? And then, having at last found the object of our search, we might beat swords against shields and, with Xenophon's troops shout 'Thalassa! Thalassa!'

When I began the journey down to Brighton from London with Chris Priest, such lit'r'y images were far from

my mind. It was, after all, early in the morning.

And the traffic south from London, though less dense than I had experienced when being piloted around by Robin Johnson, was still formidable. (Although I didn't take the lit'r'y opportunity to do some Bunburying then, I is intended) it did seem to go on for ever.

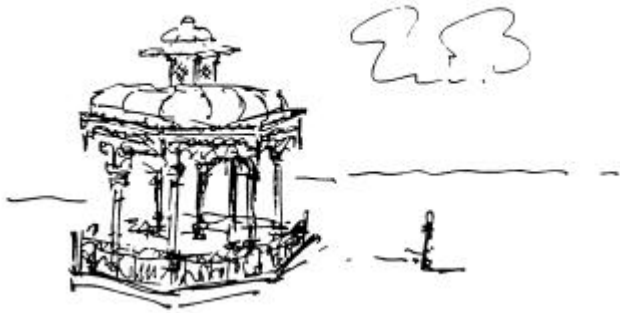
Before we reached the stage of driving in the countryside (which I, in my naïveté, had thought we would be doing most of the time, but which in fact, subjectively, seemed to begin only when we were halfway to Brighton) it seemed to me that Chris had to deal with every possible obstruction to normal automotion (and some which, if not impossible, were at least highly

unlikely — such as the middle-aged cove on the penny-farthing bicycle who weaved elegantly past us before we were much south of the Thames).

If we move to the entirely subjective — and this is, after all, a report about a science fiction convention, so one must begin to practise early — it seems to me now that after emerging from the last shrouds of London we passed through one small village — about which Chris made some laudatory remark — and then, rocketting down the sort of highway which can be found almost anywhere in the Western world (although the landscape, where it could be glimpsed, was unAustralianly green) for a few minutes, we arrived in Brighton.

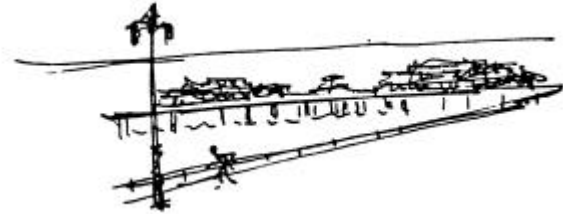
There was at least one moment of choice, I recall, when a highway sign under the forbidding instruction 'Get In Lane' offered the choice of Brighton or Pease Pottage; hot or cold was not specified.

It cannot have been so swift, and were there really grey clouds, as my failing memory insists? Brighton itself, so much a mixture of light and shadow, cast so much of a spell over me that I find myself almost able to contemplate going through London to get there (but fortunately this is not necessary, since one may go direct from Gatwick).



Brighton seemed then a wonderful site for a convention, and still does. While the centres of large metropolises have more facilities — perhaps more than one wants — the fact is that a holiday resort is (at least in theory and sometimes in practice) better prepared overall to look after the interests of visitors. But Brighton was also very much like St Kilda, Melbourne, then

my home town, and perhaps that helped a lot.



Meanwhile, back in Chris's car, we drew up at the Metropole.

Well, we would have if there had been room to do so. In fact Chris slowed somewhat, looking for a place to park, and as we passed the entrance, he took one hand off the steering-wheel (I'm sensitive about this sort of thing, you may recall) and, gesturing at a crowd of about 70 people entering the hotel, said with

some awe, 'Look! There's Norman Spinrad'.

I didn't feel I was in a position to argue.

When we did park — not very far from that entrance, to tell the truth — Chris unloaded his baggage from the boot (er, trunk) while I left mine for later dropping off. Entering the hotel was easy — and excellent practice for those times later in the convention (around say 3 a.m.) when the person-traffic density dropped to a similar level.

I think Chris had no trouble registering. I think I did. I know there was some hesitation about some aspect of it all, but it wasn't at all serious. That was the last peaceful moment of the convention, except for

those moments when I was asleep standing up.

For although I wasn't yet to know it, I had not arrived in England sufficiently early to have recovered by the time of the convention. But we shall leave this disgraceful episode for its proper (or improper) place.

So then, late on this Thursday morning (just to tie things down a little), I went around to check into the hotel arranged for me and Jennifer by Dave Langford.

Dave had done a masterful job: located on a little square behind the Metropole, the Churchill was small, practical, and not expensive. It was so close to the convention facilities that I believe it was quicker to move from

there than from hotel rooms within the Metropole.

Other minds almost as great as Dave's had come to the same conclusion with respect to suitability; Mike Glicksohn and Bob Tucker also stayed there, as their appearance one morning at breakfast forthrightly testified.

As for the convention itself — well, like all modern science fiction conventions, this was a gathering to which you go to meet friends and then can't find them. With 3200 fans running loose in several confined spaces — several? there were convention items in at least eight rooms, and the bars — it was obviously very difficult to find, at any given instant, any given individual (unless

she or he happened to be on a program item, in which case all you had to do was find the right room).

Looking for a given individual is only one approach to the problem, and plenty of people adopted the alternative of lying back and enjoying it, waiting for people to float past. However, I was, from time to time, definitely interested in meeting particular people, so let me give a couple of examples of what happened.

First, I was on the lookout for Ethel Lindsay from the start of the convention (Thursday afternoon): I finally found Ethel in the Fan Room on the Monday morning.

Second, I was told early on Friday morning that Annemarie Kindt, a fan from Holland, was looking out for me

(to talk about my then-current fanzine, *Chunder!*), and we finally met up at a dead-dog party on the Monday night. Those were my success stories; there were many people I hoped to meet and talk with, who were there, but who simply escaped my clutches.

You can use a simple rule to minimize agonizing about missed opportunities like this, and I would formulate it as a resolution never to say 'see you later' to anyone: grab them immediately and talk fast. I believe that in this way you can meet many people and enjoy yourself. I stress this because, immediately after returning from SEACON, I heard reports from both Australia and overseas that some attendees hadn't liked SEACON too well because they

hadn't been able to meet all the people they wanted to, or because they missed out on some program item they had rather fancied.

For me the point was not to meet 'em all, but to enjoy the ones you did meet.

Let's also set out clearly what won't be found in this description.

No one looks for news in a report like this, and there'll be no news here.

Nor will there be statistics about how many people attended what: well, almost — I've already mentioned that there were 3200 fans at the convention, and my other statistic is that the advertised gathering of gay fans drew just five attendees.

Difficult to believe, isn't it? Why, at the Melbourne Science Fiction Club on

any rainy winter's night in 196 ... but I digress.

Since there don't seem to have been any Terrible Incidents, there won't be any reporting of these. Instead this report will focus on ordinary everyday goings-on — the cricket match, the Jacqueline Lichtenberg Appreciation Society, and me attending a convention banquet.

But first, some remarkable stuff: something about the program. I saw quite a bit of the program (not heard, saw). I'm not capable of integrating what was going on within the program with what went on outside it, but I'll tie together the bits I can.

PROGRAMMED CONVENTION

By Way of Introduction

At Australian conventions the average passerby would be quite justified in believing me to be omnipresent. I attend convention programs in Australia for no reason I can discern — they bore me almost unceasingly — and the only things which can drive me away are the umpteenth repetition of a panel or speech on 'Comics and Science Fiction' or any panel whatsoever on 'media'. There's no explanation for this that I can think of, other than habit, but in that case it is a bad habit I should like to shed.

With such a background, and given that fandom had subscribed to get me to the convention, I should be able to present, in vast and almost certainly boring detail, a report on the SEACON program so accurate in its description of the minutiae of the event that no reader could help but wonder whether anything at all had been omitted. I am unable to report, alas (or perhaps, cheers), in that manner.

Of the several reasons for this the most compelling is that I simply did not attend very much of the convention programming. It's necessary at this point to take the trouble to mention that most of the time there were at least three separate program items running, and that when I write that I did not attend much of

the 'convention programming' I mean that most of the time I wasn't at any of the program items at all.

In the next section — rather chronological in structure — I shall describe what I was doing during most of the convention.

In this section I shall write more generally, starting by reporting my own bewilderment at my failure to turn up for so many program items.

No one could reasonably accuse me of being inordinately fond of reading science fiction nowadays; to put it bluntly, I read very little science fiction indeed. (This high resolve, I hasten to add, wasn't enough to prevent me quickly reading a Bob Tucker story in *Analog* while drafting this section, but *in general...*)

But I *am* interested in learning something about why I used to read science fiction, and about why other people read it. Amongst the most valuable sources for that information, obviously enough, are science fiction writers themselves, when they speak or write generally rather than particularly.

I admit that by and large they seem to prefer the latter, which I find extremely tedious, but there are occasions when a writer looks a little further and tries to describe her or his work in a wider context.

At SEACON there were many writers who might be likely to do this, and amongst the writers were several whose works I particularly admired — writers of some of the first science

fiction stories I ever read, for example, such as Pohl and Bester and Sheckley and Sturgeon.

Yet I made no real attempt to hear what they had to say, and there was only one writer whose contribution to the convention I made a point of attending (and I've never read any of his fiction).

This convention was not, in other words, one at which I advanced my understanding of science fiction or its contexts.

So what did I do?

Let's start with a list of the convention items which I attended — a rough list, admittedly.

Opening, two or three 'business meetings' (who counts when you're having fun?), two fan panels, one

author's speech, one banquet and Hugo Awards ceremony.

(The attendance at the banquet will be staggering to Australian readers, since I have not attended a convention banquet in Australia since 1972 — and that one with great reluctance. But I have photographic evidence of this indiscretion — Helena Roberts has thoughtfully passed on to me a shot of Anne McCaffrey's back just after I had presented her with a Ditmar for *The White Dragon*. You can tell that the award was designed and executed by Sydney fans because the Southern Cross is upside down. I've only seen one other photograph of myself in regular gear at SEACON — a Linda Bushyager candid of Susan Wood, Eric Bentcliffe and me exhibiting

exceptional quantities of international camaraderie and goodwill.)

Oh yes, I did attend part of the closing ceremony, but I left partway through owing to a sudden attack of boredom. A description of the opening is useful as an introduction to the kind of thing we all had to endure.

I had actually been warned about the opening — the rumours referred to a pipe band. This didn't seem very likely, but it was. The main room for the convention, identified in various places as 'Hall 1', had seats for about 1200 people, and there were very few occasions on which every seat was filled.

The opening ceremony was close to being one of them.

There was a gallery above this hall, and that is where I found myself lurking — by choice. This enabled me to take closer pictures without getting in other people's way.

Not too many other fans followed this pattern of behaviour, I noted. The lights went down over the main room, and there was a slide show reprise of the logos of recent worldcons, unsurprisingly followed by the SEACON logo. Chairman Pete Weston ran the show so far as the opening was concerned, and I thought he handled it well, up to a point.

He said a few words, introduced a Guest of Honour (Brian Aldiss), said a few more words, introduced another Guest (Fritz Leiber), said a few more words, introduced another Guest

(Harry Bell), said a few more words, introduced a Toastmaster (Bob Shaw) — and at this point I began to wonder where it was all going to end, if at all.

I'm not sure how the Honourees felt either. They seemed happy enough at the time. But most of my photographs show Peter R. Weston with his mouth open.

The SEACON committee had worked out how to end it all; they had arranged to have the Guests escorted from the stage by some nineteenth-century bathing beauties, which was about as good a finale as any under the circumstances.

Somewhere in all this the highland band did wander in, made noises which might with some imagination be called 'tunes', and generally played at

being toy soldiers. As you might gather from the foregoing I am a subscriber to the view that 'military' and 'music' are words which sit together uneasily — about as uneasily as sitting next to Filthy Pierre with his squeezebox.

Having mentioned the Guests of Honour, who really are the important people at the convention, I ought to comment now on their activities during the convention. I'll start with Brian Aldiss because I have most to say about him.

He was, along with those I've already mentioned, an author of some of the first science fiction stories I read which I recognized as sf. At any rate, I had very much liked Aldiss when he visited Australia in 1978, and I looked forward to seeing him again.

As it turned out, we did little more than say 'hullo' to each other at SEACON, and while I regret this I have to report that this was mainly because of Aldiss's immense success as a Guest of Honour.

As I've indicated above, I didn't sit through all of any GoH speeches, so I can't overwhelm you with titbits from a magnificent speech by Brian Aldiss. What I can say is that, as many readers of these words will know, Brian Aldiss is very gregarious, and in a Guest of Honour at a large convention this is a marvellous trait.

Aldiss was everywhere and always seeking to meet people, and often he was to be seen surrounded by eager listeners (he's not afraid to bend an ear, but he doesn't mind listening

occasionally), in halls, in passages, in bars, and even on the floor (admittedly in the bar, but seated on the floor, not lying on it).

I gather that his GoH speech was splendid, and his banquet endeavours were certainly tolerable. In short he seemed to me, and here I think back to my own efforts as a convention organizer, to be the kind of guest of honour one *wants* to have, independent of fame or fortune as a writer. He was an excellent choice, from all points of view.

I did not meet Fritz Lieber, but from second-hand reports I gather he acquitted himself well as a GoH. Harry Bell was rather quieter (at least to this observer) but he was also very busy,

and was often to be found in the fan room.

Bob Shaw's greatest performance was probably neither as Toastmaster nor as MC for the Hugo presentations, but as a speaker in his own right. He filled the main hall, which is more than any of the panels of famous science fiction writers could do.

But now the convention in more detail.

Thursday

Along with many others I attended the opening ceremonies.

I have described these above, but not the fact that everything fizzled out, leaving the audience sitting around waiting for something to happen and

eventually wandering off uncertainly. This was hardly encouraging, and I did the same thing.

In fact, I didn't attend any more of the afternoon program, unless I attended the preliminary business session. That evening there was an 'advance presentation' of THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK and, from the back of the balcony, I could see that Gary Kurtz answered questions afterwards.

(What I call the balcony (and the hotel called the gallery) will be mentioned often in this report. The simple explanation for this is that it was adjacent to the fan room, where I spent most of my time.)

I don't recall anything striking being said...

Friday

This was a big day for me. Time has thoughtfully wiped from my data storage banks any details of what Terry Hughes and I might have said at a panel on TAFF and GUFF at noon in the fan room.

I must have taken time out to eat after that, because I then went to two items in a row. Well, they were in the same room.

'Call My Bluff' was an only average panel game with pros vs. fans; it filled in time rather than standing up by itself.

The following item, R. Lionel Fanthorpe talking about 'How To Write 150 SF Books in 8 Years in your

Spare Time', would have been the highlight of any convention, I think. But while the Norfolk Room was modestly full, it was a very small room, and not many people were there to share my delight. Some, I realize, do not warm to Fanthorpe's story anyway.



Fanthorpe

Fanthorpe is a forceful speaker who is rather modest about the quality of the science fiction he produced as a hack in his earlier days. Hiding under a

blanket, Fanthorpe would dictate his novels into a tape recorder, pausing only to change tapes and pass the completed tape across to one member of his small army of typists.

As he thus had to keep in mind all the plot elements, and was unable to check easily when he wasn't sure of a detail, there were occasional plot hiccups, such as a killed-off character reappearing late in a novel because the author had forgotten about his earlier demise.

Such an arrangement can lead to considerable productivity (as Fanthorpe's talk's title indicates), but such blatantly hack-like activity could easily affront those concerned to maintain skiffy's lit'r'y image. Distanced as I am from such

obsessions, it was easy for me to enjoy Fanthorpe's frankness about his intentions and problems in writing so much.

Alas, however, he later talked about his current S&S work, which he was flogging unmercifully at the convention.

This was, he averred, quite unlike his earlier work — painstakingly written, carefully plotted. Chocka with literary merit you might say. Except if you happened to read it, I suspect.

This late-discovered pretension ruined the whole effect for me.

Saturday

Awful day. Dominated by the Fancy Dress Parade.

Dressing up is not a major part of my life, and getting into fancy gear for a science fiction convention must be just about the bottom on my list of priorities. But it was part of paying my dues, in this case.

I'll write about the early part of the day later, when I get away from the convention program. Not that I got to much of the convention program anyway.

I wanted to go to several items that day, mostly in the Fan Room, where all sorts of wonderful people were scheduled to talk about fannish things between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

But I only passed briefly through there, usually searching for missing members of the Australian group for the accursed Fancy Dress Parade.

I was able to listen to enough of GoH Brian Aldiss's speech to recognize it as a worked-up revision of his 1978 UNICON IV speech in Melbourne. It was good in 1979, just as it had been the previous year.

The early afternoon was spent trying to help Sue Pagram get all the Australians into a small hotel room to do some planning, and even to try to get most of the costumes there as well. When that was completed, Mervyn Binns and I went off to the infamous Gollancz party — of which more later.

But afterwards, back at the convention, we spent a lot of time 'during' the Fancy Dress Parade standing around in confined spaces (almost, one might say, one confined

space) with far too many people as garishly costumed as we were.

In some cases costumes assured that the wearers would not become overheated, but more rather than fewer SEACON costumes required wearing stuff that got bloody hot after the first couple of hours, so that wilting was very much in favour by the time some of us got out there and strutted our stuff.

The Australian group (Justin Ackroyd, Alex Wasiliew, Mervyn Binns, George Turner, Cherry Wilder, Bruce Barnes, Chris Johnston, Jeff Harris, Sue Pagram, David Grigg and your modest — and in this case long-suffering — reporter) wore an assortment of costumes from Cordwainer Smith's Instrumentality

stories and were basically there to plug Sydney's bid for the 1983 Worldcon, which was done at the end of the presentation.

Cherry had come across from West Germany, while Jeff Harris, from Adelaide, was the only other non-Melburnian in the group.

(The bidders from Sydney seemed to believe that actually fronting to promote their own bid was beneath their dignity, and their bid was accordingly rewarded.)

As it happened, the Scandinavians were mounting one of their perennial hapless bids at the same time, and they scrounged up an anti-Australian promo at the end of the parade which succeeded in alienating a few more potential supporters of their own bid.

Anyway, the costumed ones I saw later that night were all thoroughly exhausted by it. (Good old RLF took part in the fancy dress parade with the same sort of good humour he had shown the previous day when discussing his writing career — at least in the early stages. But then armour does get warm faster than some other kinds of costume.)

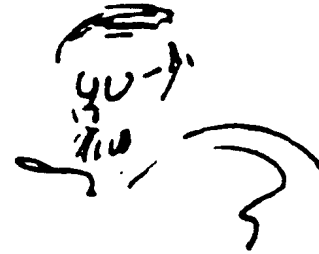
Sunday

Despite the efforts of the previous day, I managed to get to the business meeting the next morning at 9.30, although good sense should have warned me that nothing good would come of it.

Nothing did.

The rest of the earlier part of the day was spent lounging around in the fan program room, listening as much as possible to people like Harry Bell and Peter Roberts and Joseph Nicholas and Mike Glicksohn explaining more about fandom than one would really want to hear on a Sunday, but in an entertaining way, every now and then making use of that delightful propinquity of convention arrangements which allowed one to sneak back into the mundane world of Serious Science Fiction and listen — ever so briefly from the balcony — to heavyweight panels with titles like ‘A Literature of Imagination’ or heavyweight speeches (for example Alfred Bester on ‘The Failures of

Science Fiction’ — the poor man was only given an hour).



Alfred Bester

But Sunday was also the day of the Banquet, and I don't have many opportunities to report on banquets. I'm not a fan of banquets, and suspect that I never will be.

But one of the punishments inflicted on people like GUFF winners is recognition at things like banquets. Thus I was offered a free meal (provided I sat at the top table) and, having paid £7.50 for fish and chips the night I went out with Nils Dalgaard, Ellen Pederson, and Erik Swiatek, I accepted gratefully.

(I realize that I've now introduced a non-program element, but I shall return to the further adventures of this group later: in fact much later, in 1982, Nils formed part of an international rat pack that drifted around the Eurocon at Mönchengladbach...)

The alternative, after all, was to go out and enjoy myself, or perhaps to attend the banquet as a paying

member and have to sit at the Australian table with boring conversationalists like Bill Rotsler.

You'll note, from the copy of the menu reproduced opposite, that rubber chicken was not available. This didn't mean that there was no discussion of the food.

From the Australian/Rotsler table, for example, a celebratory and somewhat gaudy shard of criticism was rescued. For my part, I was seated between Roy Kettle and Peter Roberts, two of the funniest people in British

SEACON '79

37th World Science Fiction Convention

BANQUET

6.30 for 7.00 pm, Sunday 26th August 1979
Winter Gardens Ballroom, Hotel Metropole, Brighton

MENU

Cornets de Saumon Fumé Joinville
(Cornets of Smoked Salmon with Prawns)

Queue de Boeuf Claire au Madère
(Clear Ox Tail Soup with Madeira)

Paillettes au Chester
(Cheese Straws)

Aloyau de Boeuf Mexicaine
(Sirloin of Beef with Onions, Capsicums
and Mushrooms in a rich red wine sauce)

Petits Pois à la Menthe
(Minted Garden Peas)

Pommes Olivette
(Small Olive-shaped Roast Potatoes)

Yacherin aux Framboises
(Meringue and Cream Gâteau with Raspberries)

Café
(Coffee)

fandom, in my opinion, and certainly just what one needs to keep one's mind off what one is eating.

As it happens, we somehow got the idea of rating each course on a 1 — 10 scale. This disease spread along the table to Bob Tucker, who communicated it (in a manner I'd rather not describe) to the group table in front of him (junior OMNI executives, I believe).

Overall, I think our ratings would have been quite objective had it not been for Peter Roberts being a vegetarian and insisting on his ratings for plates of grass-like courses being included in the overall scheme.

Peter wasn't the only person eating grass-like substances at the banquet, as we discovered when, after having

waited more than a few moments after the omnivores had been fed, Peter discreetly inquired about the arrangements for vegetarians.

‘Don't worry, sir. there are 43 similar gentlemen here tonight’, the waiter whispered loudly.

Those within hearing distance chuckled and looked around for another 43 orange-suited longhairs... Of course, when Peter's ‘food’ arrived it was of the grass-like nature referred to above. But at least we were able, all through the evening, as one after another of these culinary disasters was served up to Peter, to reassure him that 43 others were going through similar agonies.



Peter Robert G

The virtues associated with collective suffering didn't seem to appeal to him at all.

The interesting conversations were — for me at least — just within earshot, but they were regularly interrupted by speeches (none of them too long or too bad).

In addition, Robin Johnson had arranged for some Australian stfnal awards to be presented during the banquet, and I had to make a short

speech myself while presenting a Ditmar to Anne McCaffrey.



To ensure that banquetees didn't burn their mouths while eating, the meal had been designed so that the waiters and waitresses marched in and out at regular intervals, a regularity not disturbed by even the dropping of a tray of plates.

It seemed like eternity, but the banquet was eventually over and we were ushered into our R*E*S*E*R*V*E*D S*E*A*T*S almost close up for the Hugo Awards.

Not even Bob Shaw could pump much life into this dreary parade. So far as I was concerned, the big deal was seeing some people I would not otherwise have recognized, although by this time some judicious peeking at the formal program items had given me the chance to see and hear most of the professional writers at SEACON. Who got Hugo Awards in 1979 is now only an interesting bit of history.

Monday

Praise Be!

Apart from being scheduled to appear on a fan panel at 11 a.m. to discuss a generality of fannish things, I could forget about the formal program and concentrate on the other aspects of SEACON, the ones I'm about to describe — people, parties, and Brighton itself.

It's a natural enough progression, since the convention slowly wound down during the day, through an extended dead-dog party that night to a late-morning return to London on the train which truly was part of the convention since Ellen Pederson and Nils Dalgaard were on the same train and the convention finally ended for us when we parted from them near Carnaby Street in the early afternoon of 28th August.

(In a sense it kept going for a couple of days for, much to our surprise in a city as big as London, later that week we talked briefly and separately on street corners with Susan Wood and Bert Chandler.)

UNPROGRAMMED CONVENTION

One takes away such a variety of impressions from a convention that it is truly difficult to order, in any rational way, the encounters which occur.

It's for this reason, I believe, that so many writers about conventions fall back on a diary form, or else settle for an approach much more akin to random impressions than they would willingly admit.

I know that as soon as I contemplate imposing an order I shy away from almost every possibility. The people I visited after the convention — the Langfords, Pam Boal, Peter Roberts, and Eric

Bentcliffe (and the various London-based fans) — I can, I think, safely deal with in a later chapter.

But as soon as I write that I realize how much fun it was to spend most of a night wandering from party to party with Eric Bentcliffe.

Eric was one of my first contacts with British fandom, and the issues of TRIODE I received were fanzines which impressed me with the quality of their reproduction as much as with the quality of illustrations and articles.

I believe that TRIODE was unexcelled anywhere in the world of mimeo fanzines for the former, and amongst the contenders for the latter.

But that's not what I really expected to write about here; it's just one of those things which happens

when I start to think about Eric. I'll write about my visit to his home later.

I talked briefly with some other old fans from the past: Ken Slater, who sold me sf magazines as long ago as 1957, and Ron Bennett, whose crime was much greater, for he sold me old fanzines.

They were both in the book-flogging business at the convention, and I reveled in the thought that here at least one might recapture the spirit of the past.

It was good to see them both at last, even if we didn't talk for long. Moving on to recapturing the past in a more prosaic way, it was at SEACON that I was at last to complete my collection of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* (from 1947 onwards) by buying the

25th Annish. One day, sadly, I suppose I shall be forced to read it.

Ken Bulmer was someone I hadn't expected to talk to at all. But one night in a bar we more or less accosted one another briefly: his life, like that of Ted Tubb, seems to me to have been one in which a substantial talent was ground down by the volume of work necessary to provide a reasonable living.

It's easy to say that I would have liked to have talked to him for much longer — I would have — but the same applied to many of the other British fans and writers to whom no more than a distant 'hello' was feasible.

As I indicated earlier, it took most of the convention for Ethel Lindsay and John Foyster to meet; once again, as was so often the case, we didn't

have a chance to talk for long, and this exemplified the painful truth that fanzine publishers — indeed, fans in general — need more time than one visit with one another.

What's really needed is a full cultural exchange program, not just a few weeks in another country. At present, all that Australian fans can do is make return visits, which I did briefly in 1982.

Bob Shaw I didn't talk to. I've traded fanzines for letters of comment with Bob, but the crowds around him were — as most people know — almost impossible to broach. He wasn't unapproachable, just unreachable.



Aldiss _____

Brian Aldiss was one of the most approachable Guests of Honour I have ever seen in action. I have described his participation above. What a

marvellous piece of PR work it was for science fiction conventions in general!

I wonder how many neofans were converted by this demonstration of friendliness by one of the world's best sf writers?

I've now rolled through a sample of British personalities in a summary sort of way. How about a party?



Mervyn Binns and I had been invited to the Gollancz party, as noted above. It was to be held in the Pavilion, which was quite a walk from the

Metropole, and ultimately the perils of this distance were revealed to me.

Mervyn and I didn't want to spend very long there, since we had to tog up for the evening's parade, but we did want to enjoy it. It was a thirsty walk, as Mervyn soon demonstrated, but it was worth while to see such a high density of pros in action.

I even spoke to some I hadn't expected to.

Back in 1977 I had managed, at a stormy sort of Nova Mob meeting, to offend Vonda McIntyre with an off-hand remark that it was a pity that American science fiction had not yet produced a writer with the literary sophistication of, say (some waving of hand), Mark Twain.

Chris Priest, who was present at that Nova Mob meeting, later indicated that Vonda was more than slightly upset by this innocent but accurate observation. During SEACON I had been proving to be invisible to the McIntyre gaze. At the Gollancz party, however....

Well, I occasionally wear brightish tee-shirts. If they're not brightish, they're occasionally political. And for this day I happened to choose my Emma Goldman T-shirt (see photograph above). When he observed this apparition Chris Priest, ever anxious to demonstrate his prognosticatory powers, averred that Vonda McIntyre would certainly talk to me that day.

And it was so.

Indeed, she positively bounced over to see me and, going even further, introduced me to a few other of the prominent women writers present, such as C. J. Cherryh and Suzy McKee Charnas (but not Jacqueline Lichtenberg). It was a pleasant ending to an unnecessary difference of opinion.

Otherwise, the Gollancz party was an opportunity to talk to a few writers in a non-crowded environment. (Hmm, after a few days in the Metropole, talking to anyone at all in a non-crowded environment was a blessing.)

As I remarked a few paragraphs ago, it had been a thirsty walk from the Metropole, and Mervyn Binns had been replenishing himself with

occasional glasses of champagne. In fact we made quite a routine of it — he drank and I talked.

After an hour or so I felt that it was time to get going and said so in blunt terms to Merv. He, however, insisted that it was time for one more drink. He prevailed.

Then we set off. Now while it is a thirsty walk from the Metropole to the Pavilion, I can now add one further item to your store of knowledge: it is a tiring walk from the Pavilion to the Metropole. This is especially true if, like Mervyn Binns, you have been drinking champagne quite quickly for an hour and a half.

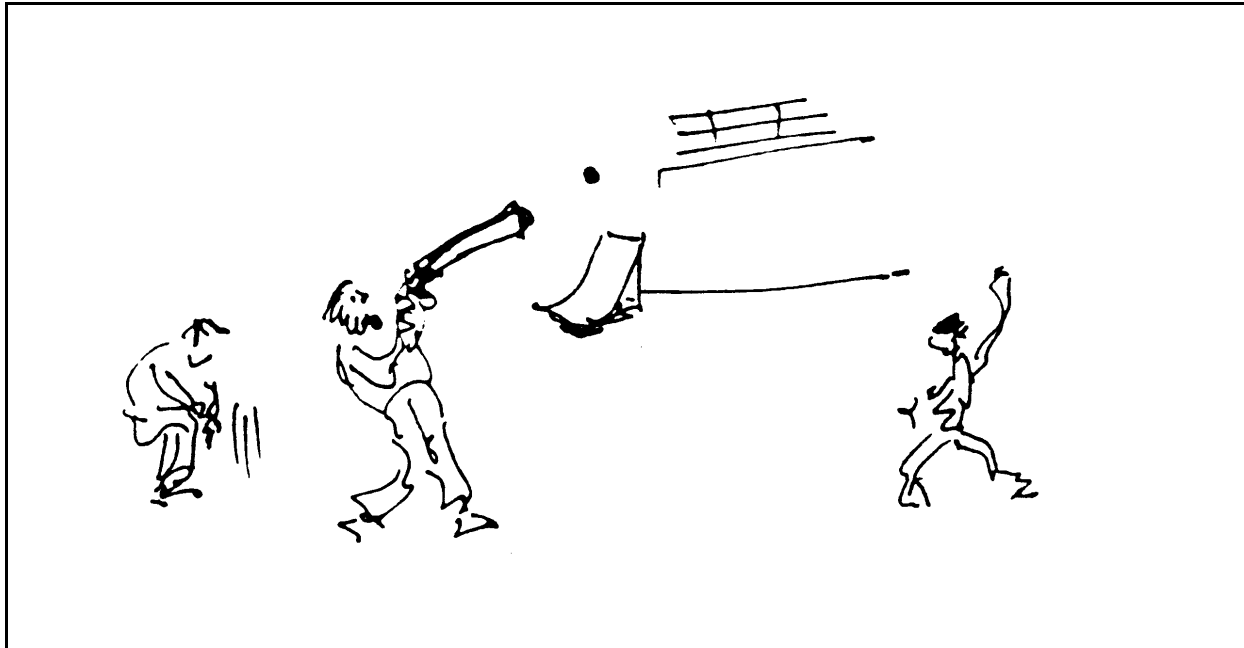
I may have been a little forceful in hurrying Merv along, but he really made life difficult by claiming that if

only I would let him lie down for a little while he'd feel much better. This seemed an unpromising possibility, in terms of ultimately reaching the Metropole, so I insisted on walking him (though not frog-marching him) all the way back to the hotel where we were able to sober him up partially by the time of the parade.

Few people realized how difficult an evening Merv had that night. As a matter of fact, Mervyn Binns wasn't the only Australian to find it difficult to remain sober at crucial times. (Whether Al Fitzpatrick should be counted as an Australian, and whether he was ever sober during the convention, I leave to the judgment of those who monitored his movements more closely than I did.)

On the morning of the inaugural UK versus Australia fannish cricket match, so many Australians were unwell and

the 'Australian' team finally included members as tenuously linked with Godzone as Mike Glicksohn



unable to play for their country that

(justification: he had once visited

Australia, in 1975). The match itself was played on a pitch strange to Australians — a beach consisting of large pebbles (this undoubtedly explains the poor form of the few Australians actually in the team). Even Australian beach cricket is played in conditions superior to these.

It can't be denied, however, that the UK team was by far the better. Whether the result should have been declared a draw or not remains moot, but Mike Glicksohn and I should have received some award for best rugby tackle on a player moving between the wickets (an event imitated in an Alan Border testimonial match in 1993).

Apart from this event, Australians identified themselves as such only at a couple of times. There was a table in

the fan room selling and giving away material supporting Sydney for the 1983 World SF Convention, and there was always an Australian or two behind the desk. I did a couple of stints, and although there were many enquiries, most of the conversations seemed to be with other Australians, though some were only as 'Australian' as Robin Johnson.

The Australia in '83 room party was blessed with some of the worst Australian wine ever inflicted on fannish taste-buds (whether Australian or otherwise). I must take some responsibility for this, but the Australian Wine Centre in London — now, I trust, safely bankrupt — must take its share of the credit for locating this variously coloured vinegar which

was wholeheartedly rejected as representative by all Australians except those most desperately in need of alcohol.

I managed rather better on one other occasion when Jenny Bryce and I had lunch with Terry Carr and a few others. Earlier in the year, while visiting Australia, Terry had become aware of my potential as a selector of wine, despite my teetotal status.

At the lunch he had the good taste to keep a straight face when I suggested a particular wine from the wine list. This was, of course, before the Australia in '83 room party and the Botany Bay Red.

The best meals available were those at the Churchill — that is, the breakfasts. Near the bottom must have

been the meal with Ellen, Nils and Erik, which has been referred to above.

That was one of those lunches you have because it is pouring with rain and you want to sit down to eat with people and you don't look particularly carefully where you are going. The four of us had a fine time talking about science fiction and science fiction fandom, but fish and chips — bad fish and chips — shouldn't be one's most expensive meal at a convention.

Back to parties.

For example, Dave Hartwell had a party away from the Metropole (firm evidence of this is to emerge soon), and associated events suggest that it was early in the convention.

For what now seems like an age I stood in the centre of the room talking

to Joyce Scrivner and Dave Langford. Well, listening to Joyce Scrivner and Dave Langford.

To be blunt, which Joyce Scrivner is inclined to be, not listening to Joyce Scrivner and Dave Langford, for Joyce (I seem to recall) said to me 'John Foyster, you're asleep'. It took me quite a time to comprehend this, which indicated the probable truth of the statement.

When I was able to reply I agreed, and shortly thereafter I left the party and set off to go to bed. Hotels are large and treacherous things in Brighton (as a Mrs. Thatcher was soon to discover) and getting out of one of them, along the sidewalk, and into another, can consume a great amount of time.

The walk back in the cool night air (it was, I believe, around 2.00 a.m.) must have lifted my spirits somewhat because on reaching the Metropole I was easily persuaded by someone to go off to another party. I'm sure Eric Bentcliffe would not have done anything so callous, but I now recall no details of this other party.

Walking around Brighton by day was also possible, though one had to be careful about picking the day. If the day was fine, then it was pleasant to stroll about, and indeed there was one day when while out walking we came across, by chance, the folks going off to the Heyer Tea. It was a superbly fine day, and the costumed excellence fitted in well with the spirit of Brighton.

Brighton Rock was itself a desirable consumable (at least for people with sweet teeth like me), but it was really only when one got into the older section of Brighton — the part known as the Lanes, in particular — that the real extra-convention value of Brighton made itself clear. Though I'm not much of a window-shopper, this was plainly a fine place for it.

And worst of all — and I think this horror applies for almost every science fiction fan — there were a few second-hand bookshops.

I've slowly learned that these things are fine in one's own home town, but a deadly menace when at any great distance. Although it wasn't until we reached Bristol that I came across the breath-stopping sort of

bookshop, there was still enough to groan about here. Almost all of it could be resisted, but in one shop I found two secondhand copies of the microprint edition of *The Oxford Dictionary*.

This was too much to resist, and I bought the cheaper of the two (it still had all the words I needed), little realizing what contortions I would go through to get it back to Australia: one volume was cabin baggage as 'reasonable reading matter'.