

FOURTH PERTINENCE

Perpetrated by Archie Mercer of 10 Lower Church Lane, St. Michael's, Bristol BS2 8BA in the United Kingdom, during the month of August 1969. Proofread by Beryl Mercer. E&OE.

ANY ATTEMPT AT grouping letter-excerpts under subject-headings has now been gaily abandoned, and each letter is simply ploughed merrily into as it comes.

MARTIN PITT One thunk only: it occurs to me that we have really no idea just how many people want what sort of standard of accommodation at a Con. I don't know of any survey that has been taken amongst fans anywhere on this subject, and it is surely something that should be discovered before any general plans on the subject of Con places can be discussed with any background other than opinion. It may possibly be that the majority of people interested in attending Conventions can afford to pay £15-20 for a weekend: they may even want to. In this case, people like me - who could raise £5 but not £10, and who would be willing to sleep on the floor to save the £5 - must assume our rightful place as a wayward minority and only receive consideration as such. If on the other hand there is a secret conspiracy of millionaire fans who expect the best and are willing to pay for it whether or not anyone else can, then again the majority should be more favoured to the unfortunate detriment of the minority. Both of these are extremes, but it would be interesting as well as constructive to discover how near the middle the truth lies (can truth lie?).

It seems to me that this is one valuable service the BSFA could perform since it has a regular mailing list to at least some noticeable proportion of interested people: the sample may not be statistically perfect, but at least it is available: it would be reasonably cheap to insert some form of survey sheet in a regular mailing, and hope for some reasonably large percentage of answers. Such a sheet could also be included with one of the larger circulation fanzines, if it is felt that the number of extra replies would warrant this.

Should poverty prove to be the rule rather than the exception, we should start looking for some cheap hostel by a church hall within 100 yards of a Hilton.

(Postal polls amongst sf fans are notoriously poorly-supported. For best results, such a poll should be handed-out at a Con - though concurrent distribution with a B.S.F.A. mailing and with a fanzine would give more people a chance to participate. If somebody - Santos for example - was to draw up such a form, I'd try to organise its production and distribution around Easter 1970, assuming that the Con Committee has no objection. I would also here like to emphasise that the "majority" and "minority" you mention have this much in common; they want to meet each other. AM)

GRAY BOAK Surely the main point is the separation of the BSFA from fandom (or vice versa). These suggestions about fanzine reviews (Gerald Bishop), follow-up Welcome Committees (Audrey Walton) Hospitality Rooms at Cons (Ethel Lindsay) are what is needed. Bring the BSFA and fandom together, and all these problems about Conventions will disappear - you are attacking a symptom not a cause.

Fandom began the BSFA, but has now largely deserted it (see Ethel's comments in the latest SCOTTISHE) probably because the BSFA does not provide value for money - despite what Keith Freeman says. It certainly doesn't provide me with sufficient value for my money: I stay a member because I am a fuzzy-minded idealist with more money than sense - I think that "a B.S.F. Something" is a Good Idea. But the BSFA is so dull. PERTINENCE is the first truly interesting item to come from it since I joined three years ago. (Oh, the occasional item in

VECTOR - recently much improved - but VECTOR does nothing that better fanzines ((SPEC, SFR, etc.)) don't do already.

In truth, the BSFA is nothing. Neither what Chris Priest and Bob Rickard want - an official spokesman for SF: nor what Gerald Bishop seems to want - a springboard into fandom. Its uses for the latter were shown up by Audrey Walton's letter. However, both viewpoints are desirable, and probably attainable, given time. The "respectablization" of the BSFA is in good hands with Mike Kenward as editor of VECTOR. The growth into fandom must be shared with a change of outlook in fandom itself.

If there was some excitement in being a member of the BSFA (as there must be in such societies as PEN, BIS etc.) then this would happen. If the BSFA was to do something - anything - then absent fans would rush to join. It wouldn't have to be anything outstandingly expensive: a general release of PERTINENCE might start something. A recruiting drive could be the spark: begin liaison with fandom, produce the much talked-about but unseen BSFA anthology, produce an introductory booklet - hell, reprint the N3F's - mix well and watch the rush.

BRIAN ALDISS Thanks for PERTINENCE 3, with its tonic reminder that the roads of fandom are paved with good intentions. My prediction is that the BSFA will remain perpetually rocky, and its officials over-ambitious and over-taxed, as long as it stays under-manned, under-subscribed, and under suspicion for betraying its original noble declaration (penned by Mike Moorcock, I believe). But I promise to stand on the sidelines and cheer you !

(Penned by Dave Newman as a matter of fact. AM)

TED TUBE Without meaning to be rude it seems to me that Pertinence is busy flogging a dead horse. Comments on the BSFA all boil down to an essential and inescapable fact; - a lot needs to be done but who the hell is going to do it ?

Suggestions are handy things to have but only as long as they are remotely workable. Without criticising them individually shouldn't we sort them out into the practical and the impractical ? Such as; -

Things we (The BSFA) are doing.

Things we should be doing.

Things it would be nice if we could do.

Things that we can't do under the present situation.

We know what the BSFA is doing - very little to hold new members, less to hold old ones (cut out loyalty and the rest and just why should an old-timer cough up 30/- a year ?).

Things we should be doing are stated in the original aims of the society - first to build an image and so get official recognition from various communication media. Radio, television, the publishing houses, newspapers etc. With all this Apollo stuff who has even thought of approaching us for a valuation ? Who even considers the BSFA a 'voice of authority' ? Just think of some of the clangers dropped in various SF plays - galaxies, planets, solar systems and universes all mixed up as one and the same. We could and should be writing letters to newspapers, etc., pointing out these bricks. Hell, surely our knowledge of the field is worth something ?

Social contacts are noted by their absence. No small groups have, as far as I know, been formed. The incidence of new and active fans is low. So not everyone wants to be a fan or be considered as such - fine, but what are we doing to cater to them ? Personally I think that the appellation 'fan' should not be used in the official organ. It simply isn't adult, isn't 'responsible', isn't a thing to appeal to anyone who knows nothing about 'fandom'. Fandom is an 'in-group', all right for those who know about it, all wrong for those who don't.

We've got a library - push it. We've got a world-wide system of contacts - push it. We know all about the early days of SF and can both teach and correct errors in plays etc. Push it. We should be having far more meetings than the once-a-year con that isn't even run by the BSFA. Not large meetings and forget the room-parties etc.; people don't come to a con for a booze-up (not new members anyway) and what does it do to the image? That's right. We're trying to be serious, damn it!

As for weeping in our beer about younger fen who can't afford to travel to here and there - what the hell has that to do with the BSFA? Everyone has problems. Are we supposed to gear everything down to the lowest poverty-level? So we have our next con in a street somewhere? Or can anyone think of anything cheaper than that? And who is holding a gun to their heads? If they can't afford it they don't go - and maybe we wouldn't get so many things being stolen at Cons as we do now (I'm down a briefcase and contents pinched at the Randolph - others lost cash and other gear) - and I won't relate the disgust of the manager at the 'Free-loaders'. I was, in a way, responsible for them. Maybe you'd like to explain them away. I couldn't.

So strike out talk of 'free cons' which we can't run under present circumstances. And follow-up committees, and more art work we can't pay for, and story competitions which have no place and no reason when professional mags run such competitions all the time - if you win you get paid and published, and professional editors who have no objection to 'editing' but point blank refuse to 'publish' as well.

No, Archie, if we had the necessary bods willing and eager and able to help we'd solve most of our problems. While we try to be all things to all men there's only one way we can go.

Under and out.

Sometimes I wonder why we just don't do that and save a lot of sweat.

(Regarding your classification-project for suggestions - it sounds like a case for another "poll", because no two people's versions would probably be identical. And re freeloaders at Cons - the cheaper the hotel, the fewer people will try to freeload. The Randolph was the most expensive Eastercon hotel ever - and even normally fairly "respectable" fans were freeloading there! AM)

JOHN MARSHALL In most amateur organisations apathetic members are in the majority and so supply the bulk of any organisation's revenue. So long as they get their magazines and news letters they happily (or reasonably happily) pay their subscriptions. While it would be a good thing if they took an active part in the running of the organisations, without them the whole issue would come to a grinding halt for the want of cash.

After that moan a couple of ideas. First, why not have an extra page tagged on to the Bulletin for correspondence? At the moment there is no regular outlet in which the membership in general can air their views; this I feel would be an ideal place. (Thanks! See plug in Bulletin 25 - which has had no response as yet... AM)

Second. Has the possibility of electing Honorary Members to the Assn, ever been brought up? It seems odd that some, or perhaps most, of the top British S.F. writers are not even in a small way connected with the Assn. (We already have honorary members. They are known as "Life Members", and are at present four in number. AM)

ETHEL LINDSAY Jill Adams:- She doesn't say what is a "pukka BSFA con". Does she really think that enough BSFA members are active enough to run a Con?

Chris Priest:- Expensive hotels do not have cheap halls in the London area. On

the contrary. One I investigated charged £100 per day.

Audrey Walton:- That you did not realise cons were going long before the BSFA started is, I think, a fault of the BSFA. It ought to give its members some history of fandom and the small part of it inhabited by the BSFA. This might inspire some members to help to make the BSFA more influential. Some history would also answer the queries of John Marshall. He would then understand that some con-committee people in the past "got" to be there by being talked into it.

Chris Priest (2):- Though I'm more interested in Archie's reply where he asks "What is the BSFA?" I can't remember how many years it's been running now but it sure must be ineffectual if someone as closely connected with it as Archie asks this question. (≠I know what the B.S.F.A. is for me: an association of like-minded people seeking more of their kind. Story competitions and professional awards are, to me, only important because other members, whose support we need, consider them so. About them per se (or whatever the Latin plural thereof may be) I couldn't care less. Is that possibly any clearer, Ethel? AM⇒)

Audrey Walton (2):- When Ella Parker was Sec every new membership was followed up by her by letter. Has this stopped? Seems a pity - it did bring in some who have stayed. But as for asking the membership what they want (Keith Freeman) I know she and, later, Joe Patrizio tried this many times with little success. (≠Doreen did it when she was Secretary. Beryl does too in modified form, ie, she sends a duplicated specimen letter with a written signature and any remarks specially for the individual that seem to suggest themselves. This does get some results, too. AM⇒)

David Piper:- Lawks! Why should he consult a solicitor? (≠Because they don't have Writers to the Signet in this country, I suppose! AM⇒)

These Perts have been extremely interesting; I hope they have also been useful to the BSFA.

What remains, it seems to me, is some unanswered questions:-

Does the BSFA want to have full control of conventions?

If it does - how would the officials propose to go about it?

If the BSFA does not want to have full control of conventions - then what are we discussing?

If it is the role of the BSFA in cons not run by it - then I don't see how it can ask more of the committee than time set aside for its AGM and facilities for recruiting.

One last question - why was the AGM this year closed to non-members? Was this helpful or unhelpful? (≠The "internal" part of the meeting has officially been closed to non-members for the past several years - though it's not always applied as strictly as it might be. The later, "open" part of the meeting, is closed to nobody whatsoever. AM⇒)

MARY REED A couple of points I would like to take up from this. Gerald Bishop's idea as to reviews of fnz being pubbed; the idea is good but (and I'm sure Rabbit will know this is not a personal attack) I don't think it would be fair to subsidise an existing fnz. One could, for example, say why not Ethel's HAVERINGS? If one was to go ahead with the idea, could not a new publication be begun - say, tacked on to the Bulletin? (≠Why indeed not HAVERINGS? In fact, the B.S.F.A. has recently bought from Ethel a supply of her latest issue for giving to new members who express interest in fanzines, and is planning on doing likewise with Peter "Rabbit's" CHECKPOINT. I don't see that this is at all unfair. If an adequate vehicle already exists, why not utilise it? AM⇒)

Who was it who suggested a little more humour in V? (P. is not to hand, sad to say, to check it up.) A good idea; I am reminded of the Vs under Archie's able editorship, which was when I first arrived in fandom. Perhaps not quite so

much humour, but a little injected into the scholarly V might do it a bit of good. It's well worth considering anyway, although of course the end decision would rest with Mike - and rightly too, says I !

On the subject of the new fan: what has happened to the Welcommittee ? (It died - offhand, I'm not quite sure when. I think its main trouble was that longer-established members were not interested in participating, so the majority of Welcommittee folk were almost as "raw" as those they were assigned to welcome - and frequently very young as well. AM)†

To your query: to me the function of the BSFA is to bring together people who share the same interest - i.e. sf.

As regards advertising (raised in another letter): at present I'm sorting out with Mike about a poster advertising the BSFA, which the local library have agreed to display.

HARTLEY PATTERSON I ought to correct a reference by Bob Rickard to TechSFSoc: there is no contact at all between members, out of 115 about six actually talk about SF; we hold no meetings at all. This I might add is not through lack of enthusiasm among those who are interested. From our experience I should say that the vast majority of SF readers are only interested in reading books picked largely at random or by reading the blurbs on the cover or by recognising the author's name. They will not accept any 'amateur' advice on what to read (and that includes Speculation as well as me !). They read purely for entertainment.

The Bulletin now prints a list of all books published - but goodness me shouldn't this have been done before ? The only way to get SF books at most libraries is to order them, and the coverage in the national press is ludicrously small. I would suggest a straight list of all books published including reprints, divided into hardback and paperback, and placed in Vector (Bulletins are easy to lose). (Besides, the Bulletin is concerned with the members of the B.S.F.A. and its facilities for them, not with sf as such. That belongs in V. AM)†

The established member is presumably making use of the library, magazine chains etc. and relying on the BSFA to supply information about Conventions and other social functions. The problem with the latter is no doubt that at present the information has to be searched for (literary/scientific conferences with relevance to sf). If the BSFA was a well known and respected body this wouldn't be necessary - if. I hope the action of this year's convention in putting an SF conference and a fan convention under the same roof will be repeated.

The other basic aim of the BSFA when originally set up was I believe to act as a pressure group for the benefit of SF. As far as I know it has not done so. Publishers are willing to quote from Vector in their book blurbs - I found a reference to the anthology vote on the cover of the latest Aldiss collection. ((The Guardian this week said that Aldiss had been voted top British author by 'a recent convention'. ??)) The BSFA membership is undoubtedly representative of SF readers as a whole, and could be of great assistance to the publishers - pointing out American books unpublished in Britain for example. (The Association is in fact making suggestions to one publisher in this manner. At the publisher's specific request furthermore, and he is not himself a member. AM)†

But as has been pointed out our hard-working officials have enough to do already on the fan side of things. The Chris Priest idea for a paid Secretary should be looked into carefully.

Certainly the 'best of Pertinence' should be printed in Vector. The BSFA must not only be efficient; it must be seen to be efficient. The key thing is communication; the ordinary member must be encouraged to contribute in some way, if only by writing angry letters to Vector.

KEN CHESLIN There seems to be a band of opinion which sees the BSFA as the main body in the UK science fiction world, and who have ambitions for it along the lines of BIS.

They are entitled to their views. My opinion is that they take the BSFA and SF far too seriously.....perhaps because they take themselves too seriously..... and that they should cart the BSFA off into mundania, as they seem determined to do; and there lose themselves. Running their own cons, recruiting for their association, trying to become a 'respectable' sort of body which will be consulted like the BIS.

On the other hand true fandom should dissociate from this crazy juggernaut, perhaps set up a new body if needed, hold its own conventions, recruit its own members, and keep the hobby as a fun hobby, not to be ridden by it as some of the BSFA advocates seem to be.

BSFA.....is getting things out of proportion. (Judging by letters to Pert.....).

Another point....fancy SF fandom (?????) in this country being in such a state that you have to explain what OMPA is ?.. oOoOohhhhhhh ! Tragedy !

(=For the benefit of any peasants in the audience, I had better point out that the dots in Ken's letter are strictly his and not mine ! AM)=

DAVE PIPER I've enjoyed Pert. It's a stimulating and interesting experience for me to be in on something like this....perhaps my little niche would be in OMPA ? Could I join Beryl ? (=For the record, he now has done. AM)= The exchanging of ideas with a smallish group like this whilst perhaps not being particularly constructive does bring to light many points of view which is always good.

Seems to me the response to Perts 1 & 2 really proves my point about having a smaller, closer-knit and interested membership of the BSFA.

Ethel and others make some points about which I strongly disagree. The attitude seems to be that older Fans and the BSFA should put themselves out to stimulate interest and help the younger fans. Look, I'm old but not an old fan. Of SF yes, about 15 years and I was reading Willis in Nebula at the same time as Ethel...and look at us now. Anyway I reckon that neo fans and newcomers have got to work at it a little. I don't, and didn't, expect anyone to put themselves out to interest me in fandom and allied subjects....and over the years I just never bothered. I read Fanorama and HJCampbell's bits in 'Authentic' (had my first sub. to Authentic ...and that'll probably be a yardstick for the umpteenth number Fandom...(-Still not my dots ! AM)= who can remember Authentic) and saw BSFA ads now and again. And then suddenly I wrote to Slater for a list, saw that the future of Science Fantasy (my favourite magazine) was mentioned in Bennett's Skyrack and that started it all. My child goes hungry, my wife walks around in rags and the fanzines pile up. And I love'm. And I love fandom. But, the point is, I DID it, I wrote to people. I made the effort. (Of course, the thought does cross my mind that most of the people wished I hadn't....do they Archie ???) Anyone else can do the same.

Freeman also bears out, perhaps a little unwittingly, my point again. Pert. isn't destructive and perhaps not very constructive but it was, and is, something which is needed at this time. Exchanging of ideas is the thing. Vector should be such a Forum but isn't. The reason, laboured I realise almost beyond the point of endurance, is shown up by the circulation of Pert. Interest is the word. If nothing comes of the thing, and I doubt that anything concrete will... although if it IS published in Vector it MAY get a response from the general membership.....it's still served a useful and interesting purpose. It's sad that Vector doesn't.

To answer your question (page 5).. the basic purpose is not to seek prestige

for itself, and the SF field as a whole,,,for chrissakes Archie..if the field IS any good (and I reckon a small % IS of literary merit)..then that prestige will accrue. It may take some time. It will NOT be helped by a lot of goshwoyboy-ohboy BSFA members pushing our particular bag ! I can't see (see Chris's letter again) that 'if the BSFA expanded it would ultimately be to the good of the world of SF as a whole'. What good would it do ? He didn't explain. Wish he had ! I just can't see any point to it and his reference to 'an authoritative body' is invalid...who the hell, apart from people like us who read a very great deal, has heard of PEN, Crime-Writers Assn., Society of Authors etc. ? None, absolutely NONE (I've checked) of my friends have heard of these bodies. And I have a wide circle of friends. Do we need an authoritative body on SF in England ?! +shrug+

Rickard mentions that the BIS is quoted as an 'opinion in the Press'. Lucky old BIS !! The Press ! My God ! When SF starts getting large coverage in the press I'll really do my chocolate.

TERRY JEEVES Mary's point about how many people would have been at the Con were it not for the BSFA ? Well in the first place, the cons produced the BSFA and also I presume it works out that the BSFA is discovered by people attending cons. I'd say they're very much complementary activities.

I could go deeper into the mechanics of why I disagree with the BSFA sub and perks and services, but unless you intend to have a real discussion on these I'll knock off and get this in the mail. (I'd like to - also, I'm frantically trying to keep the size of PERTINENCE within reasonable bounds. See how it goes. AM)

ANDREW PORTER sends a lengthy letter giving comparable details about American sf conventions. For instance, he cites the annual Lunacon (a regional sf con put on by the Lunarians in New York) as being several times the size of Britain's national convention. From the details he gives about typical American hotel practices, our conditions are not strictly parallel in many ways, so I won't quote him direct. He also sent a newsletter, CONVENTION No. 1 ("News for Convention Planners" which seems to be a sort of PERTINENCE-type publication, rather better-organised and controlled from the centre but wherein anybody who has experience of running an SF convention, or wishes to draw on such experience, may have his say. Circulation is at Andrew's own discretion: if you are interested and think you might qualify for a sub (25¢ each or 5 for \$1) write to Andrew at 55 Pineapple St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201, U.S.A. This was AM speaking.

BRYN FORTEY I still think it would be a good thing if the BSFA could appoint a Liaison Officer from amongst its ranks to act in some form of advisory capacity between the BSFA and the con committee.

My previous suggestion that only BSFA members should be allowed on con committees was completely shattered this Easter at Oxford when no BSFA member could be found to make a bid for next year. But it would still be preferable, and might become more plausible if the membership could be considerably increased.

All of which leads into Chris Priest's planned expansion programme. It sounded good sense to me. I first found the BSFA through an advert in the old paperback sized NEW WORLDS. Adverts in paperback sf books could not fail, in my opinion, to increase the membership. And this, again in my opinion, is needed.

Once we've got 'em, how to keep 'em ? Chris also talked about a 'new image', and this is definitely needed, and badly. Just what or how I don't know, but like it or not the BSFA has got to try to become the recognised, authoritative sf body.

I am the only member resident in Newport in the current membership list, but I'm not the only science fiction reader here. I know quite a few, and have

canvassed amongst them on the BSFA's behalf - alas, I must admit, with no success. What can I tell them?

We receive irregular VECTORS and chatty bulletins. So I show them a few. Even the ones who have liked the fanzines they've seen have stated that the official organ of such as the BSFA should be something more than VECTOR.

What else? A magazine chain and lending library. The library arouses some interest, but a lot are only interested in novels so the mag chain offers no inducement. And so on....I've not drummed up one new member.

And when I've mentioned the wonderful world of Fandom to them, they're as sceptical as if I've promised Utopia.

Maybe I'm just a poor salesman, but instead of me convincing them to join, I always end up wondering just why I remain myself!

Some, I must add, have liked the idea of the proposed BSFA Anthology. It's the grander scale which seems to appeal.

A reborn TINGENT might help. If we had a membership large enough to support it.

ROY KETTLE (=in a letter to Beryl) I've recently been looking at Archie's 'Pertinences' - the ones he sent Audrey Walton. It was only a quick look but one idea I don't think I saw mentioned was getting book sellers to send out membership forms for (and details of) joining BSFA. If (say) Ken Slater (=he also lists others similar: AM) were to send out a form with all orders and lists for a week or so, then contact would be made with many people who are interested in S.F. but not necessarily BSFA members.

CIRCULATION Somewhat pruned from previous issues, to wit:

Jill Adams	Tom Boardman	Rik Dalton	Terry Jeeves
Brian Aldiss	Joe Bowman	Bryn Fortey	Gordon Johnson A.L.A.
Sid Birchby	John Brunner	Keith Freeman	Michael Kenward
Gerald Bishop	Ken Bulmer	Vic Hallett	Roy Kettle
Gray Boak	Ken Cheslin	John Hart	Bert Lewis
Ethel Lindsay	Harry Nadler	Andrew Porter	Michael Rosenblum
John Marshall	Doreen Parker	Chris Priest	Ken Slater
Beryl Mercer	Hartley Patterson	Mary Reed	Ted Tubb
Bruce Montgomery	David Piper	Bob Rickard	Tony Underwood
Dan Morgan	Martin Pitt	Phil Rogers	Audrey Walton

Also complimentaries for Ella Parker and Joe Patrizio who are mentioned somewhere herein, and any similar party I happen to notice.

Again, it occurs to me that none of the present Con Committee is on the mailing list. This is mainly because when PERTINENCE started they were neither on the Con Committee nor particularly active around the B.S.F.A. Sets of PERTINENCE will therefore be sent to Bill Burns, and possibly George Hay and Bram Stokes as well.

FIFTH PERTINENCE will probably appear just before the Christmas rush. Otherwise, not until after said rush. AM