

CONVENTIONS

OR
BEA'S BREAKFAST

a conreport on the 1953 London Convention by Ken F. Slater

It only took me 564 hours to get to the Convention, and I arrived later than I expected, at about twenty six hours driving, six and a half fooling around on the boat, drinking cocoa, and the rest of the time fairly evenly divided between arguments with Customs Officials at the frontiers, eating sandwiches at roadside, and sleeping in various places. I was glad to arrive....

Pros comments made to me by other attendees, and from comments I overheard but which were not intended for me, I gathered that some of the folk were disappointed. I must admit to similar expressions myself during the proceedings, but in retrospect I find I enjoyed everything and every moment. Let me explain. I was unhappy, periodically, when the programme broke down - but the feeling lasted at most but a few moments, for I promptly found myself engaged in conversation (sometimes serious, usually wacky) with someone who until then had been but a name on the foot of a letter. I'll deal with the odd breakdowns later, and for the moment just record to the best of my recollection what happened (to me - not necessarily to others!).

I was agreeably surprised to find Charlie Duncombe doing the honours as door-keeper, cash extractor, and ticket issuer. I did not get past the door for at least half-an-hour - not because Charlie had any difficulty in getting the cash out of me, but because I did not see him for about three years and we had some back talk to get done. Other folk turned up whilst I was there, including Ernest Hargreaves who recently left BAOB, and an American gentleman (I regret I've forgotten what name he gave, but he's a relative of G. M. Carr), and I passed words with "an all".

The official item on the programme was running late, and the Junior Fanatics, due to put on a play, were getting worried. Not about being late on, but because they hadn't got the necessary props, and because they didn't know their lines. A word to the JP - with Shirley down at Southampton, Dave and Ken up in Lancaster, and so on, attempting a play with no chance of a rehearsal was a very PHEILISH task. I'm told you flopped, and I'm sorry to hear it.... but....

So far I'd not been into the hall proper, and I was just about to enter when I tripped over a strip of dried, leathery, reddish stuff which was crawling out. This crawled out to be the tongue of Ted Tubbs. Shocked by this terrible sight I retired to room in an attempt to allay the consternation it had caused me. I took the tongue (Ted attached) with me.

When we returned not only had the JP's play concluded, but Dave Cohen's comments on the London Circle were also ended and an interlude was in action. This "interlude" kept cropping up... it seemed to be one of the main features, although it was not mentioned on the programme so far as I could see. I found the Medway stand at the back of the hall, with Brian Lewis and Tony Hoopes and sundry other Medwayites in charge, and after an examination of their very excellent display of all kinds of fan-work - charts of the solar system, plaster wall-panels, paintings, models, photographs, table lamps... - we adjourned for tea. Service in the hotel was very slow, and after that tea-seal I ate outside the hotel. Tony and I attempted to discuss business during the tea - and on other occasions later - but not with any great success. Time & Events & People kept pressing us....

Back in the hall we found we'd arrived late for the next item - the invasion of London by Bert Campbell's beard, written by Walt Willis and read through the microphones by sundry folks. If the first half was as good as the last half, it must have been one of the most amusing things, and I'm sorry I missed it's opening. Maybe Walt will print it in Slant or Hyphen or one of his other outlets?

Somewhere along this period I was introduced to Bea Mahaffey. No explosion took place. Bea, I thought, was charming, nice, quiet, decorative - and so much in demand that I never managed to say more than half-a-dozen words to her! I don't suppose she noticed, tho. Other folk I met in one and two and half-dozen packages. Nic Coester - bean from Holland, literary agent and editor of PLANET. He (like most folk I met for the first time) was nothing like any visualisation of his. Somehow, I'd pictured him as "big". In actuality I was wrong - but after a conversation with him I realised I had it right otherwise - Nic is "big". Also, as folk who heard his address on Sunday know, he is honest. Although he is a "fan", he has taken s-f into his business because he hopes "to cash in on it". Good for you, Nic! Peter Campbell of O.P.'s "GG" and the Lakeland S-W Org - and Peter Hamilton of NEBULA S-F; both quiet unassuming individuals with soft, pleasant voices - neither of them at all the type of positive, assertive, opinionated man one would expect from their respective and prod. publications. Alex Morrison, Dave Cohen, Frank Milne, Eric Bentscliffe, Ron Beason, Norman Shorrocks, David Gardner, Fred Robinson, Dennis Gifford, Chuck Harris.... well, I'm sure someone will publish a list of who was present at the con, so why should I bother?

As all this talking seemed to have worked up - strangely - a hunger so about eight (or was it ten?) of us drifted by a very indirect route to PLATONIA's, one of the recommended eating places. We marched in under the door labelled "PLATONIA", and then marched out. It was self-service. We marched in next door which was surprisingly also labelled "PLATONIA" and wasn't self-service. Dave Cohen and his cohort of one, Eric Bentscliffe, were along, but I can't remember who else - mostly Northern folk, I think. Brian Varley certainly was - this was the first time I suggested to him it would be a good idea, if he were to ask me for a 7/6 sub to SPACR-TIMES. It wasn't until the third time I suggested this - a day later - that he finally got wise and DID ask me for the money.

Having struck up a friendship with the waitress (I'll not take the obvious pun, and say what a friendship it was) Dave Cohen got around to ordering some food. Dave's needs satisfied, the rest of us had a turn. In due time we paid the bill, and returned by an equally devious route to the hotel. The bar was open when we finally got back....

Which perhaps accounts for the fact that I have no clear recollection of the rest of the day's proceedings. Sundry DD's were consumed. Ted Carnell bought me one which the barman kindly poured into Ted's glass - it turns to be on the committee. I other people bought me one - I bought one - Bea Mahaffey declined. I - Bill Temple told me he didn't like my punctuation - I told Bill I didn't like his recent s-f yarn, even when I read it the first time in OW - and so time passed. A session was arranged in Frank Milne's room, No. 326. Other sessions were arranged. Walt Willis came to my room to discuss the question of sending someone to the Philadelphia this year, and also to advise me to advise Frank that Bea, Madeline, and I had decided to go. Walt and I spent so long talking that by the time I got to 326 Frank was already on the houseful-telephone asking where Walt was. The room was pretty crammed, with Bill Temple, Norman Shorrocks, Norman Weedall, James White, John Rol-es, Eric Bentscliffe & Jones, Terry Jeeves, and of course Frank.

There may have been other people - under the bed, for instance - but I can't remember. Walt & Madeline arrived about 1 a.m. - without Bea who had been swept off her feet by Campbell's beard, and carried off to a session over at Ron's Daphne Buckmaster's place. If Bert comes to the London in '54 we have a wire cage erected, to keep him from being heard in. It gets damaged! Apparently Walt and folk had just been cast out of their room by a night porter - in room 326 we delayed this until 1.30 - and then moved to room 327. But this only stopped the snoring forces for about 20 minutes, and then we split up, one party going to the roof and Frank, Terry, and I taking an offensive line and going down to infiltrate thru to the en-

emy High Command. By dint of steady pressure we managed to hold up the enemy until 2.30 (losing one member, Terry, who was thrown into the open wastes) but then an armistice was signed and we retired to join the main ROOPCOB body and report that the best we'd been able to manage was an unconditional surrender - with reservations to be taken in another hotel if we didn't like it!

I went to bed, and read Dave Gardner's symposium, SEX A N D SARDIN IN SCIENCE FICTION. The effort was completely wasted, for in the morning I couldn't read it for a word of it. Having read it, I suggest you scrounge a copy if you have any interest in the matter at all. All points of view are admirably expounded by various experts on science-fiction. I don't know their qualifications on the "sex and sadism" part, but they all appear to have a pretty wide experience!

The title of this report comes from breakfast on Sunday. In the morning I am, at the best of times, sub-human, and don't normally open my eyes until after the second cup of coffee. It is there - for quite simply to understand why I walked straight past sundry conventioners - including Bea - without even realising that an s-f con was being held in this hotel. But shortly by my left-rear I observed about half the hotel staff, who seemed to be in an argument about "bullock". Now, I'm always interested in money, and subtle material, but I thought it a bit thick to ask for gold for breakfast. Taking a slight interest, I realised that the table was occupied by Bea Mahaffey, Rita Kroner, and some male fan (or non-such). While Bea was thinking "Hell, the American has come out, and he says... what the heck does Bea think this is?" a waiter turned up with a bowl of "Bouillion". Leaving the rest of the matter (it was not a good one, anyway) I went out.... Soup for breakfast was the real end, for me! What a night Bea musta had!

Down in the hall I found Jeanne and Ted Thorne, Brian Lewis and a multitude (or COCOURSE) of Medway fans getting organised for their afternoon's entertainment. Tony and I adjourned in another - thwarted - attempt to talk business. Peter Hamilton arrived and went to talk about a "WED'S WED" of the British s-f world. Not only did he want - he did, I said there were two main snags; one, bearing of the cost, and two, who was who, anyway? We gathered quite a few other folk (once again, I don't recall just who was there, but Eric Bentscliffe, Frank Milne, Norman Shorrocks, and Peter Campbell were present most of the time, the JPs were represented, and sundry other folk had a say) and finally concluded that the first thing to do was decide who should be in.

The system to be used is: each fan group will draw up a list of people outside its own area with whom some of its members are at least nominally acquainted. All these lists will be sent in to me (Sackey), and by a process of elimination we'll get the lists cut to about fifty folk who are most infamous, well-known, or who give - or - their names into most things most often. We'll then try to get the essential data from them, and working two names to a page, produce a "WED'S WED"? Cost of this I frankly can't estimate, but to get some idea of how much we want - WILL YOU WANT ONE? At the same time, if individual folks like to send in lists of who should be included, I'll be glad to beget a few on separate sheets, and don't include in 'em the text of letter, however!

More milling around followed and I met Georges Gallet, who offloaded some books on me - Georges comes from France, of course, & is that country's leading fan-pro; then Dr. Paul Hammett of Malta, and Mr. Jack Curle of Grayson and Grayson (the latter are publishers, and not a place, of course), and then got into another session with Walt and Madeline, Chuck Harris, Frank Milne (seen to have seen more of Frank than anyone!) and unspecified other folks. This time we were concerned with the subject of TRANSLANTIC TRIPS. There was an invitation from the States (The Phila Phils) for a rap to attend this year's con which it was pretty clear we'd not be able to accept. Noone could get away from work, the army, airforce, ect. We tossed this back and forth, and round in circles, and finally came to some very carefully considered conclusions. As follows:

- 1) that it is a bit much to expect the American folk to meet all the expenses of these trips.
- 2) that we ought to retaliate somewhat.
- 3) that a fund for this purpose should be started.
- 4) that as whoever else will go, the representative of British fandom, he/she should be elected by British fandom.
- 5) that something ought to be done about it!

Electing ourselves an action committee, and co-opting at odd times the services of Ted Carnell, Fred Brown, and Vinz Clarke, we arrived at the following decisions:

- 1) a fund should be started (see list above), and that Treasurer of this fund (THE TRANSLANTIC FUND) should be Walter A. Willis.
- 2) that this fund should be used, as money is available, to send delegates to American conventions, and to invite delegates, from America and other places, to attend our conventions.
- 3) that the fund should be administered in so far as possible, be "elected" or "chosen" by the country sending them.

It being almost impossible to find anyone to go this year, & funds being difficult to get, the action committee effort should be made for 1954. The "election" drill for the British delegate to the USA will be as follows: YOU can send a nomination, NOW, to Walt Willis - and certainly not later than 31 August this year. You can nominate anyone you like - even yourself - but bear this in mind - it should be someone fairly well-known to both British and American fandom. I will compile the list of nominations, he receives down the order of popularity" list, and the send to other "name" fans short lists - these folk will then check whether the nominees, if finally elected, could attend (personal considerations, etc.). After the "can't possibly go" folk are deleted, the remainder will be published, and a final vote taken. This still has some "administrative" difficulty to be overcome - we don't want one person voting 25 times - but should be simple.

We reckon the fund will need at least £200 to start with, & would be interested in seeing a millionaire or two. But all the work, postage, and so forth will be contributed free, and Walt & I kicked off the fund by auctioning a copy of the IFA award winner (non-fiction class) - LANGS BEYOND by L.Sprague de Camp and Willy Ley. This fetched 20/6 - someone got a bargain! Someone else contributed ER Smith's FIRST LANSMAN - I don't know who, and I don't know how much it fetched, but thanks anyway. Walt will have a record. I have a few more ideas for raising cash, but of course straightforward gifts will be appreciated - send any donations to Walt, please.

Following that session I was introduced to Rita Kroner, who gave me a message from Robert Bloch. I was at a start! I could not think up anything smart to say, so just had to go by saying "Who is this man Bloch?". Apart from receiving messages from the Menace of Milwaukee, which is a shock, Rita herself is a very breath-taking messenger.

Lunch happened around here. "Memory fails me again - Charlie Duncombe I think, Nic Coesterbean, Paul Hammett, and Dave McCornick I'm pretty sure - but there seemed to be a lot more of us than that! Back in time to find that H.V. Campbell, due to talk with Ted Carnell, was not present, and so into the INTERNATIONAL FANTASY AWARD - well, I've mentioned the non-fiction award, and CITY by Slank was the fiction winner. Neither of the winners being present, and the awards not being ready, not even a token award could be made; the proceedings were therefore a straightforward announcement with some opening remarks by Leo Flood, I guess who puts his heart, soul, blood and sweat into the IFA. I gathered that the fanciful things were dismal, and some later words - with Leo confirmed the fact that the IFA is a party, I'm sure, but feel that their contributions will be so slight that they'll be sneered at. Let me say this - in any voluntary organisation even a 2d stamp is welcome, and appreciated - provided you don't want a receipt. Even such a minor contribution will NOT be sneered at - it will be appreciated just as such as a few

pounds from some more fortunate member of fendas. Don't forget the widow's mite!

Following that some games started - I left the hall about half way thru, for some purpose I disremember, and in due course of time adjourned for tea. Just who went along this time is also forgotten - obviously, I should take a notebook, and make notes, or alternatively, I could just invent details. (Confidentially, I'm pretty sure that all the comments I've read must have been written by people with prodigious memories or more likely composed by invention out of necessity!)

Returning just in time to hear Nic Osterbean speaking on and in Holland I thoroughly appreciated his remarks about the "materialistic" Dutchman. Albeit, in my private dealings with Nic I've not found him so crassly commercial as he would pretend to be. He was followed by Maurice Goldsmith, and Bea Mahaffey, and L. Ron Hubbard - all of whom I missed. I had popped out of the hall again, for a few words with Bert Buckmaster, and with Bert Campbell who was in a poor state of health holding both hands and the Board in one of his hands. I stayed out to bid farewell to the American Gentlemen, (relative of GME aforementioned - I do apologise, but I just can't recall his name) and his wife (a sweet charming lady), son, and daughter. They were taking off for the coast - I hope they enjoyed it but the weather busted up the next day, so ????

Back inside a lecture was being given by two of the British Interplanetary Societies' brighter lights. This, complete with demonstration, was unfortunately unfinished, due to the advent of some Russian spies. An hilarious episode, which I for one enjoyed to the uttermost. A ballet followed this! Daphne Buckmaster and Dorothy Rattigan played, respectively, the parts of the Pirat Man on Mars, and the Martian Villian, with Fred Brown, Ron Buckmaster, Ted Tubb, and Charlie Duncombe forming a "charming female" chorus. I'll book straight thru to the asteroids, please! Another excellent it - on the lighter side - although I'm sure Ted had too much weight - or should invest in a stronger bra!

All this should have formed part of a dual programme, but a film show scheduled was cancelled, and after the initial introduction of the Medway Group in the lower hall, the announcement that L. Ron Hubbard would be talking in the upper hall caused the adjournment of the proceedings. I do feel the Medway folk hit a high spot tho. They opened up with Tony Thorne in the chair, and after a few witty words Tony proceeded with a show of items from the Medway Museum of Things Lost and Found. To anyone who has heard of (who has not?) that glorious work of modern art (?) THE POLITICAL PRISONER, the Medway's contribution to the same field of culture, THE FAN KID-INOZ, was really the tops! The other articles from the museum, in my opinion, were almost equally potent log-pullers. It's a pity to my thinking that their programme was not carried thru. Maybe we missed plenty!

The ballet was followed by the MYSTERY COMPETITION, and in turn this dissolved into the Auction. This latter was spoiled, in part, by the preponderance of BRE's that had come in for sale. But Fred Brown and Ted Tubb did excellent work selling stuff thru the aisle - I had a go myself, scorning the aisle and using my best parish ground voice. Charlie Duncombe, Bryan Barry, John Brunner, and Tony Thorne (among others) did yeoman service extracting the coins from the "lucky" customers. In all, I think everyone had a good time in this session - and some folks did get some bargain items. By the way, I DO NOT WANT ANYONE TO SEND ME ANY BRE'S FOR AT LEAST SIX MONTHS! With half-a-dozen 'em going at 3d or 6d, I'd look a muck buying 'em from you at 9d a time!

The buying audience slowly filtered away, and broke into a few small groups, and by about half-past eleven the hall was clear. I can't recall whether the chairman (Fred Brown) made his final address or not - I did not hear him - but I think everyone went away, wore or less happy.

A final glance at the wreckage, and then tea and biscuits with Peter Campbell, Nic Osterbean, Frank Milner, Alex Morrison, and Shirley Marriot, (plus two or three others) at the expense of Peter Hamilton. Followed by a quiet session of discussion in Peter's room. Shirley (who speaks six languages!) helped keep the conversation at a fairly high level, and we discussed the selling of shoes and sealing wax, directors and divans, the McGarthy outlook, what is wrong with the world, the jealousy of the British, the commercialism of the Dutch, and sundry other non-fan topics! Around half-past one we broke it up. Good night, and Gnu bless us!

Breakfast with Alex Morrison, followed by a call on Peter E. He was capable only of "What you want", followed by a anora, so Alex and I left him to it. A look round to see who else was up - Frank Milner was, Peter Campbell was. Vind Clarke arrived. I departed.

Then sort of summarise the events. A bit muddled, a bit distasteful. But so was I! Now - compliments -

To Dorothy Rattigan, for being at everyone's beck and call, and maintaining a smile throughout. To Charlie Duncombe, for refusing to repel any boarder, and extracting just dues from all comers. To Fred Brown, for holding together the shaken remnants of an "official programme". To Ron Buckmaster for producing interval music on any and all occasions. To Peter Robinson, for flash-lighting (and, I presume, photographing) anyone, anywhere, with or without provocation. To Ted Carrell, for the preservation of a calm, unburied, unbothered and pleasant manner, and a smile, all thru the hectic 2 days. To Jack Curle, for an excellent "telegram". To Ted Tubb, for an unbelievable capacity. To Bert Campbell, for a beard which forms a mainstay.

Then, thanks. To everyone who had a part in the show, for a hell of a lot of hard work - even the bits that did not come off. To everyone who attended, and enjoyed. To everyone who recognised that "M.P.S." on my lapel badge was sufficient introduction. To Sidgwick & Jackson, Grayson & Grayson, Nebula, Nova, and all the other folk who had stands for me to look at. To the hotel staff, who suffered - albeit not in silence!

And now some observations. Note, that these do not reflect - and are not intended to reflect - any adverse criticism of the London Committee. They are just dredged up as possible pointers for folk who may have to run 'ventions in the future....

1) Try to avoid having the "main springs" the same people all the time, on a con lasting more than one day. They want to have some fun as well - if they do, the things are apt to slip. If you can't find enough folk, then the active people must refrain from indulgence....

2) Don't run a "dual" programme unless all the "dual" items are comparatively inconsequential (to the general eye, that is). For instance, if I ran an "O.P." item I should consider this inconsequential - except to O.P. members - and should hate to compete with a panel composed of de Camp, Temple, Bloch, Carrell and folk like that. Obviously, most O.P. folk would be torn between a desire to hear these folk, and a form of "patriotism" to O.P. If I were chairman, I'd be inclined to do what Tony did - throw in my hand, because I too would wish to hear the far more important - generally - item.

3) The longest time you can normally hold an audience for any ordinary speaker or panel, is around 45 minutes. Temperature, and other factors like comfort of seats, cake for variations, but that is a "safe" figure. If your audience have to wait for you to get under way, you'll lose their interest. That gives raise to several things. Avoid hitches so the audience don't have to wait - if the next item is not ready, have something in reserve, and don't - at all costs - have an unofficial interlude. Let the thing run out, either - your next speaker may ease out for a quick one - and you'll be caught that way, too! You'll always get one or two - usually who'll go on asking questions all night, given the chance. Squash him, gently but firmly, when time is up.

If anyone wants to know my authority for making such statements, well, I ran an army school for three years. That is a lot simpler - in many ways - than running a convention. Your audience, and your speakers, are under discipline - but certain factors remain the essential same. In the army school you can make the audience remain in their seats, quiet and apparently attentive, for two hours at a stretch listening to the same man talking on the same subject. But after the first hour not much is going to penetrate, no matter how amusingly it is put over. If you break, you must break for a set time, and resume on time. In the army your audience doesn't vanish if you keep 'em waiting, but they do get bored and disinterested. At a con - they'll vanish! Any questions?

But I gather the con next year will be at Manchester, an London don't feel quite up to it. I don't blame 'em - it is a thankless & heartbreaking task - especially when it gets to the third or fourth time! The Manchester folk will be fresh, for a really big con, & may profit by the London folks' experience if they care to ask....

The rest of this page I am leaving blank, for a specific purpose as you'll see when you turn over....

Best wishes, and see you at THE MANGON '54 - regrettably, I am informed that Willie has had to cancel TCHO'S FLOOF IN '54, owing to technical difficulties....

fantastically,
K. F. S.

Dear Folks, In my convention memories I have appealed for funds on behalf of THE TRANSATLANTIC FUND, and the INTERNATIONAL FANTASY AWARDS. To add point to my remarks, I'm asking it easy for you by supplying coupons for you to send in the money!

The first three are self-explanatory. The fourth may require a little explanation. I'm buying three copies of Arthur C. Clarke's new book, PROLUDE TO SPACE, published by Sidgwick and Jackson, and I'm going to ask Arthur to autograph them to three of you folk. Those three will be three of you who send in the fourth coupon to me. Your coupon will be acknowledged, and will be given a number which you will be told. (Multiple contributions will get multiple numbers). These numbers will be allowed in sequence of arrival of the coupons. Three numbers have already been requested from three fans, between 1 and 1,000. They have been sent to Walt Willis, and Walt is keeping 'em secret. On 1st September he will advise me of the numbers, and the books will go to the appropriate folk - if the number has not been used I win!

Coupon 1. To: Leo Flood, IFA, 52 Stoke Newington Road, LONDON, N 16.

Dear Leo, Herewith a small contribution to the International Fantasy Award funds, in response to your appeal. There is no need to acknowledge this.

Coupon 2. To: Walter A. Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Road, BELFAST, Northern Ireland.

Dear Walt, Herewith a small contribution to the TRANSATLANTIC FUND, to help send a British Fan to the USA for some convention in the future, and to help bring an American fan this way.

Coupon 3. To: Walter A. Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Road, BELFAST, Northern Ireland.

Dear Walt, As a BRITISH FAN to represent us at the 1954 Convention in the USA I would like to nominate:

(Block Letters please)
Signed:

Coupon 4. To: Capt. K. F. Slater, 13 Gp. R.P.C. B.A.O.R., 29, c/o GPO, England.

Dear Ken, Enclosed please find postage stamps value 6d/10d forwarded as a contribution to the TRANSATLANTIC FUND.

O.P.No. (Blocks)

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Editorial address: Capt. K.F. Slater, 13 Gp. R.P.C., BAOR, 29, c/o GPO, England.