

P E R T I N E N C E

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

INTRODUCTION This is not a B.S.F.A. publication. That is, it is neither "of" nor "for" the B.S.F.A. as such. It is, instead, a publication about the B.S.F.A., for various people who might reasonably be expected to take an intelligent interest in the affairs of the organisation concerned, most (though not all) of whom are currently still members.

I would like to make it absolutely clear that I, Archie Mercer, am entirely responsible for this broadside. I drafted it and am stencilling it, duplicating it, posting it and paying for it. Beryl is, of course, aware of it and of what it says, but where our opinions differ it represents my views, not hers. Also, it represents my personal views. The fact that I'm still involved in the administration of the B.S.F.A. is relevant only in that it helps me to have my facts both correct and up to date. On the grounds that he who pays the piper calls the tune, I have also hand-picked its initial circulation, which includes the entire Management Council and various other people.

This being the case, it is my hope that any non-recipient who happens to see anybody else's copy, or hears about it, will not feel in any way slighted. For that is not my intention. And in fact sufficient extra copies are being run off to allow for a reasonable amount of second-thought circulation. The basic rule of thumb which I am following is that it is being sent where I hope it may have most effect. In addition, it can be reliably anticipated that any feasible and constructive proposals, etc., that result from it will be published to the B.S.F.A. membership through official channels.

It is possible that some of those receiving this may think they recognise a cap somewhere herein that fits them. If so, it is equally possible that they may be right. I would point out, though, that:

- (a) there is not usually very much that one can do about the size of cap that fits one; in plain language, it's probably not your fault (and at least you've tried);
- (b) others have worn the selfsame cap before you;
- (c) I have probably in my time worn as many hats in the B.S.F.A. as anybody and you're perfectly at liberty to throw any of them back in my face if you wish; and
- (d) my avowed purpose here is to be constructive, and I trust that anything I say will be read in that light.

I hope that at least some of you will be sufficiently stimulated by this to reply in the same vein. It is my intention, depending of course on what response this provokes, to issue in due course one or more sequels wherein others besides myself can have their say. There is no need to limit the range of topics to those I've already brought up, either.

Thank you.

WE'VE GOT COMPANY Since the 6th of November 1967, The British Science Fiction Association Limited has been incorporated as a company limited by guarantee, under the number 921500.

The incorporation was put through in something of a hurry. A preliminary vote of the membership of the unincorporated Association was heavily in favour of

further steps of a generally exploratory nature being taken, and they were. Then somebody noticed a provision in the new Companies Act that steeply increased the fees as from October 27th 1967. Rather than risk having to pay the extra, the Committee decided to go ahead anyway.

The argument in favour of incorporation had been put to the membership at the time the vote was taken. The argument against it was slow in getting off the mark, and had not properly gathered weight until it was too late. I was myself preparing some sort of a campaign against the idea; being also (as I still am) editor of the B.S.F.A. Bulletin, though, I thought it best to proceed cautiously. Too cautiously, as it happened. Had there been more time, it is entirely possible (though not, I agree, necessarily probable) that the Association would have decided not to incorporate. But there was that deadline to beat... a highly delusive deadline, as it turned out. An unforeseen snag was hit when it was too late to turn back, with the result that the Association was after all not formally incorporated until after the deadline.

Not, to my mind, a particularly satisfactory beginning...

In a sense, of course, it's nobody's fault. Everybody concerned acted in entire good faith throughout, and the end-product is the Company. Nevertheless, it does occur to me that the fact that incorporation could be put through like that revealed a fatal flaw in the pre-incorporation set-up, thus paradoxically reinforcing the arguments of the incorporators!

As a technicality, the Association could naturally disincorporate again if it wished to. Since it couldn't expect to get its money back, and in fact would presumably have to pay out another whack for the privilege, this would however be a somewhat futile gesture. It is therefore, as I see it, up to us (meaning the entire membership, not just the B.S.F.A.'s share of this broadside's circulation,) to try to make the Company live up to the various claims that were originally made for it.

OBSERVING THE CONVENTIONS When the (unincorporated) B.S.F.A. was founded in 1958, it was generally agreed that the Association should have overall responsibility for the annual British S.F. convention in future. And in those early days, convention committees came flocking to place themselves under the Association's umbrella.

It is still widely accepted that this is how it should be, and in point of fact each annual convention committee is set up at the Association's A.G.M., under nominal Association auspices. The actual relationship between the B.S.F.A. and the convention committee, however, is by no means always as cordial as one might hope.

As I see it, the reason for this - or certainly a very important part of it - is that although the B.S.F.A. is nominally the senior party, the convention committee is actually in the stronger position. The dice are loaded in its favour from the start. The Association as a whole has to be seen to be producing continually - magazines, services, ideas - or be thought a failure. The convention committee, on the other hand, has in its year of existence to produce once and that's all. It can (and sometimes does) lie down on the job for months at a time and still come up with a successful convention at the end of it. During the year people may chafe a bit at the lack of news, but they have the date reserved in their personal calendars, and provided they receive some sort of confirmatory newsletter a month or even less beforehand they'll happily turn up anyway. The total membership of a British annual S.F. convention nowadays is broadly equivalent

to that of the B.S.F.A., the two memberships overlapping to a great extent without being by any means identical. And perhaps the most telling point of all: the annual convention is more important to its average registered member than is the B.S.F.A. to its average member. The convention is a high point in the year for those who attend, eagerly looked forward to from the time the previous one finishes, and for which they will happily set aside ten or twenty times the money that they are willing to spend on other B.S.F.A. matters during the year.

Thus, if a convention committee cares to tell the B.S.F.A. to go peddle its VECTORS, there isn't much the B.S.F.A. can do about it. Theoretically of course, the B.S.F.A. could disown an uppity convention committee and appoint another one with a brief to organise a rival convention elsewhere. Even if there was time to do this, neither of the two resulting conventions could necessarily count on even half the attendance that a single convention can - if only because some people would stay away from both events out of disgust, bewilderment, or disappointment. As a result both functions would probably run at a loss, and nobody would be the winner.

This is not a very palatable fact for the B.S.F.A. to have to be prepared to face from year to year. I don't like it myself in the least. In fact I sometimes wonder whether, if the B.S.F.A. cannot have undisputed control of the most important (in terms of people's actual valuation) of its nominal activities, it's worth there being a B.S.F.A. at all. (I always come round to the opinion that it is worth it, though not always very.)

What, then, is to be done about it? The only certain way in which it can be overcome is for the committee controlling the B.S.F.A. to handle the convention itself, with comparatively few co-opted assistants. This has been done on two occasions; in 1960 and again in 1965. It throws a lot of extra work on people who ought to have enough anyway, and their duties unconnected with the convention are thus liable to neglect. Another possible way would be for the B.S.F.A. to increase its membership and thus its influence to such an extent that its voice became the dominant one. However, since a larger Association might well lead to larger conventions, the problem might well grow with the Association.

Another possibility, requiring some good hard forethought each year, is for the B.S.F.A. to tie each convention committee down by a signed agreement under which each party undertook to do, and/or to refrain from doing, certain specific things. There are two obvious objections to this course. One is that the chosen convention committee might well refuse to sign the document. The other is that it might do these various things under protest, to the severe detriment of the personal relationships of those involved on both sides.

In the mean time, while the convention committees have the upper hand, the best the B.S.F.A. can probably do is to bow gracefully to circumstances and let each convention committee run its convention as it wishes. On the other hand the convention committee should show equal grace towards the B.S.F.A., afford it all reasonable facilities, and in particular should do nothing that might tend to injure the Association's good image or cause it to "lose face".

Another relevant matter concerning S.F. conventions - and this applies whoever runs them - is that the ideal location apparently doesn't exist - at least not in this country. Some attendees want a week-end of luxury, and are prepared to pay for it. Others, however much they may want it, are unable to afford it without over-reaching themselves. Most of us probably fall somewhere between the two extremes. But despite their vastly different requirements, these various people want to be together at the same time. And British hotels simply aren't

geared to cope.

What is really required is an establishment combining a luxury hotel and a youth hostel on the same licensed premises. I envisage maybe a three-storey block - no, say four, with beds on the three upper floors. The first floor would have full five-star luxury - private bathrooms and toilets, running chambermaids in every room, full room service when desired, and so on. The second floor would have private rooms, single and double, with less luxury and less facilities. The attic would have simply dormitories, do-it-yourself beds, and cold taps.

If it existed, and was big enough, I could see us coming back to it year after year. I'd probably be in a double room on the second floor.

Finally, this is as good a place as any to point out that the 1970 British S.F. convention, which will presumably be at Easter as usual, will be under a severe handicap. That year, as you have doubtless heard, an international S.F. convention is being held in Heidelberg, Western Germany, during the late summer. It is hoped that this will be officially the World S.F. Convention for that year; this, however, depends on how St. Louis votes this year, and irrespective of whether or not it becomes the Worldcon, Heidelberg is going ahead on a big enough scale to attract considerable attendance from this country.

Previous experience teaches us that a lot of people can only afford one convention per year. Thus, they will have to make a choice, and many will plump for the one at holiday time rather than the one at Easter. Thus whoever is organising the 1970 Easter "do" should remember to plan for a much-reduced attendance.

(Beryl and myself naturally hope to go to both. See you there ?)

PROVISIONAL DISTRIBUTION LIST

Beryl Mercer

Brian Aldiss	Jill Adams	Chas. Legg	David Piper	John Brunner
Tom Boardman	Gerald Bishop	Bert Lewis	Martin Pitt	Sid Birchby
Ken Bulmer	Joe Bowman	Chris Lockesley	Chris Priest	Eric Bent
Rik Dalton	Robert Cooper	Peter Mabey	Mary Reed	Cliff
Keith Freeman	Bryn Fortey	John Marshall	Bob Rickard	Ken Cheslin
John Hart	Michael Freeman	Colin Morris	Daphne Sewell	Terry Jeeves
Bruce Montgomery	Dav Garnett	Roy Mortimore	I. & N. Shorrock	Ella Parker
Dan Morgan	Vic Hallett	Jean Muggoch	Tony Sudbery	Ethel Lindsay
Doreen Parker	Harry Harrison	Phil Muldowney	Tony Underwood	
Phil Rogers	Frank Herbert	Ian McAulay	Audrey Walton	
Michael Rosenblum	Gordon Johnson	Keith Otter	Gerry Webb	
Ken Slater	Michael Kenward	Darroll Pardoe	Charlie Winstone	
Ted Tubb	Dave Kyle	Hartley Patterson	John Nash	