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1964 SKYRACK POLL WINNER?



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I can't imagine anyone apart from myself following my RETURN OF THE NATIVE lifestory with avid interest and it was therefore only to be expected that when Elizabeth and I moved from Harrogate to Liverpool(via a goodly stay in London at the New ~~W~~ Parker Penitentiary) several fans and colleagues made little jokes about getting Beatle haircuts and ferries at the bottom of the garden. And in Liverpool neighbours and colleagues have asked me what I think of the place. Well, I'll sidestep that one just now and point out that not only have I been to Liverpool before but for a year I lived and worked here. We're now living not a mile away from where I lived and worked in 1955/6. Those were the days of the Kettering Conventions and fanzines like Eye, Triode, Bem, the Benford Void and the Enever Orion. OMPA was in its second year and our Association President, Pam Bulmer, had started her term of office with a visit to the Cleveland Worldcon. The OMPA membership roster boasted members like Don Allen, Mal Ashworth, John Brunner, Daphne Buckmaster, Ken and Pam Bulmer, Ving and Joy Clarke, Paul Enever, John Hall of Wimbledon, Chuck Harris, Ethel Lindsay and her uncle Nigel, Jim Marshall of Gestalt, Archie Mercer, Derek Pickles, Ken Potter, Dorothy Ratigan, John Roles, Sandy Sanderson, Norman Shorrock, Ken Slater, Fred Smith, Harry Turner, Mike Wallace, Norman Wansborough, Bobby Wilde, Walt Willis and Geoff Wincroft, with overseas representation from Chick Derry, Don Ford, John Hitchcock, Lee Hoffman, Jan Janson, Howie Lyons, Bob Pavlat, Lee Riddle, Willy Rombouts, Mike Schulzinger, Anna Steul, Charles Wells and Ted White. Quite a turnover we've had since those long ago days when Mercer's Day wasn't even invented.

About a year ago, I explained that I was hoping to get a place on a course at the University here and lo! here I am. The course is vastly intriguing, interesting and entertaining, though the pace of the work plus the intensity of treatment tends to become a little nerve-wracking at times. There is nobachelor degree in education in England(before I'm jumped on, I'll hasten to add that there is such a degree in Scotland)and before one can obtain a senior or Master's degree(should one want to do so of course), one has to obtain a Diploma in Education, for which educational status symbol I am at present knocking out my guts. The course is split into two main sections, the first of which looks into educational problems and new teaching methods and the second of which deals with child and educational psychology. In addition one presents a special study dissertation and I don't suppose it will come as any surprise to anyone who knows my interest in forms of assessment to learn that I am studying the various types of tests employed in some schools in and near Liverpool. Such tests are widely used all over the country to assess the progress of different children and also to assess their abilities in different subjects for these are not only I.Q. tests but include forms of assessment in such as reading, comprehension, spelling, etc.

Elizabeth and I have rented a house while we're in Liverpool and hope to be back in Harrogate around the beginning of August. Whereas I played chess for Liverpool during my previous stay here, I haven't exactly had the time at my disposal to take up this pastime again, though I have re-

turned to one former Liverpool interest, that of playing rugby. And after seven years out of the game, I'll willingly glide over that one.

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Waiter, waiter, there's a fly in my soup  
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Unlike Harrogate, Liverpool is not exactly a fannish backwater. The Liverpool SF Society, now known as the Liverpool Group, is of course still going strong, meeting in its Bold Street rooms every Monday evening. Here too, there has been a turn-over of membership. The McKays have dropped out, Dave Newman travelled south to near-oblivion some years ago. Geoff Collins and Bill Harrison (the original) are in Spain and even Pete Daniels is rarely heard of, being also out of the Merseyside Jazz Band. I've not heard of Dave Gardner for years. John Ashcroft works for the local paper but doesn't attend meetings. Pat and Frank Milnes live just outside Liverpool and are only just in contact and Bill Harry has passed on to higher things, being editor of Mersey Beat and a heady figure in the world of the Mersey sound. Stalwarts like the Shorrocks, John Roles, Norman Weedall and the Nuttals have been joined by John Humphries from Cheltenham and John Ramsey Campbell from Transylvania. John Owen is living somewhere near London and Eddie Jones would probably deserve a paragraph to himself. This quiet-mannered artist, the Club's barman, is, I think, the biggest name in Liverpool fandom and I tend to get the impression that, even with so much behind him in the field of sf professional and fan artwork, he is only a few steps up the ladder he will undoubtedly climb.

Liverpool seems to have its share of visitors, too. BSFA Chairman and current TAFF candidate Phil Rogers is a fairly regular weekend visitor and since Elizabeth and I got settled in here we've had a couple of visits from very welcome fan faces. The first to arrive was Alan Rispin, who threw up a pretty good job in London to take on a degree course at Newcastle University, which should keep him in near-poverty for the next three years. I'd given Alan hitch-hiking instructions and he arrived late one Friday evening and we sat around half the night drinking coffee and discussing our respective courses. On the Saturday afternoon we followed the mundane Merseyside crowds and went over to Goodison Park to see last season's football champions, Everton play Chelsea. This game was notable for the fact that the referee collapsed in the middle of the game, but for little else. On the Sunday we went over to Arnot Way to see the ~~Maggie~~ Shorrocks Seven, John Roles and Eddie and played brag and chummy until last-bus time. When we returned to Newcastle Road we continued the session between ourselves.

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What do you expect for the money? The Beatles?  
.....

(NLS)

The second fannish visitor we've had was an exceptionally welcome one for I'd not previously met him. A couple of weeks ago I had just settled down to watching The Dick Powell Theatre when the doorbell rang and I found standing on the doorstep, that answer to the Shetland maiden's prayer, Fred Hunter. This was indeed a surprise. As is now common knowledge, Fred was touring England to do some survey or other for the local paper for which he works. We sat around, television naturally forgotten, discussing just about everything it is possible for fans to discuss. Fred turned out to be a very astute brag player too, taking over four shillings from me (how many dollars for a Shetland pound note yourself!). Fred had managed to call in, during

his tour, on several English fans, including Terry Jeeves and Ken Cheslin. We made arrangements to look up Roy Kay and the Shorrocks the following evening and Fred returned to his hotel somewhere getting on for one. A wild and very enjoyable evening indeed. We made arrangements for him to come over the following evening after his day's work. This he did, having first got lost following my directions to get over here from the far side of Liverpool where he was on business. We had thought of going over to the Wirral after dinner but during an afternoon lecture I'd landed myself the job of writing up a discussion group report for the following day and bang went my free evening. So Fred went off himself. I couldn't give him directions on how to get to Roy's in Birkenhead, so he was eager to report later that he'd found Craven Street with ease. He got back around midnight after having chalked up another visit on his fan round. The following morning I was due out at Halewood on a visit to a new school there (a goodly portion of the course demands our visiting different schools for various reasons) and kindly ran me out there in his car before setting off into the centre of Liverpool where he was due to look up the LiG's two city businessmen, Norman Shorrocks and John Roles. I heard later that he had missed Norman but had caught John in his bookshop. So ended a couple of very enjoyable visits from fans I can really call friends and who I trust I'll see much more of in the future. I know that it is more likely that I'll see more of Alan, as I have done in the past, but while Fred holds down this particular job, it seems pretty likely that he will turn up on the doorstep some time again. The only thing is that I hope he keeps an eye on our address changes. I'd hate him to call in Liverpool while we're over in Harrogate!

In the December mailing I included a copy of the survey sheet I've been distributing amongst different teachers I know and I'm very grateful to the teachers who filled in sheets for me, amongst them Terry Jeeves, who circulated his own school staff for their opinions. In addition (at the time of writing) Ken Cheslin, Archie Mercer, Colin Freeman, Norman Shorrocks and Dick Schultz also filled in the questionnaire and sent in their answers, though Dick didn't quite get hold of the idea of the marking scheme and marked answers on a strict right-wrong basis. Several fans have asked me what this thing is all about. Here goes with the explanation:

As I said somewhere a page or so back, I'm studying different testing materials used in various schools. It is my contention that some of the tests are somewhat inaccurate. This is not to say that the inaccuracies are major ones or that, by implication, all tests suffer from these inaccuracies. It depends, naturally enough, on the test. And those amongst you who happen to be parents please don't get the idea that your child's teachers don't know what they are doing when they test your child's abilities or that the selection tests for grammar school places (the 11 plus) suffer from any inaccuracies as a result of reading this; such would probably be far from the truth. Especially so as the test under discussion is a most unusual one. This particular test attempts to assess objectively answers which depend normally on subjective interpretation. I should imagine that each and every one of us have had the experience at school when we have handed in what we thought was a pretty good composition and the mark we have received for that piece of work has disappointed us somewhat; or again, we all have our own ideas as to what constitutes a good science fiction story, yet I'm pretty certain that if I quoted any particular story there would be a great amount of variety in the opinions of say fifty people as to the merits of that story. An example which immediately springs to mind is naturally any Ray Bradbury story which

I might regard favourably. I'm certain that Terry Jeeves would hardly rate it as highly, to say the least. Many tests try to eliminate subjective judgment of this type by a strictly right or wrong answer, such as, to quote from an intelligence test:

HAND IS TO ARM AS FOOT IS TO ( HEAD/ ARM / LEG / TOENAIL )

The answer, I hope, is "leg" and it seems obvious that any other answer would be wrong. The test in question contains one section of ten questions in which the testee has to change the order of words in a sentence, beginning in a slightly different fashion with words not originally presented, without changing the meaning of the sentence. It seems very obvious that such answers would depend on the opinion of the marker and in my special study on testing I wished to make the point that possibly this particular test fell between two stools and was more subjective than it pretended to be. Obviously, I could not make this point if every marker agreed about every answer and frankly the only way to prove the point one way or the other was to sound out various different qualified markers, qualified in as much as they are themselves teachers who possibly might themselves, in favourable circumstances, be given this test to mark in its entirety. The results of the survey have been somewhat amazing. Of 35 returns so far received, the marking went as follows:

1. (Mary's salary) was to dear for Mary - 35 returns with no marks
- 2...was not anave - 2 with 2 marks, 14 with 1 mark and 19 with no marks.
- 3...could not afford to join the tennis club - 6 with 1 mark, 29 with none.
- 4...was not enough to join the tennis club - 9, 24 and 2.
- 5...was to join the tennis club - 35 returns with no marks.
- 6...wasn't another so she can't join the tennis club - 5 with 1, 30 with none.
- 7...was so poor that she could not afford to be a member of the tennis club  
- 30 with 2, 5 with 1.
- 8...was not enough to join the tennis club with - 8, 21 and 6
- 9...was not high so she could not afford to go to the tennis club - 22, 12, 1.
- 10...did not give allowance for luxurys so she could not afford to join the  
tennis club - 23 with 2, 12 with 1
- 11...was low so she could not afford to join the tennis club - 31, 4, 0.
- 12...was very little so she could not afford to join the tennis club - 39, 6, 0.
- 13...would not pay to join the tennis club - 4 with 2, 16 with 1, 15 with 0.

Now the point is not that anyone could give any particular number of marks to any one particular answer but that very few answers fall at all into any clearcut category. Only two answers were dismissed out of hand and five of the answers merited marks in all three sections of the 2-1-0 marking scheme. Which is somewhat fantastic. The originator of the test does state that where the marker is in doubt then an answer can be discussed amongst colleagues, but this is hardly fair, I feel. Apart from the fact that these differences in marks could have been scored by markers who were in absolutely no doubt whatsoever as to the validity of their own assessment, any staff-room discussion could introduce another danger. This is the "halo effect," the tendency to consider outside influences into an assessment. This may be seen from the answer number six above; the inclusion of the word "another" makes nonsense of the sentence. Indeed, this answer was given by a boy (these are actual answers recorded in one Liverpool school in November 1963. Of some sixty answers, these were chosen at random) who possesses an I.Q. of over 130 and who is certainly no slouch when it comes to academic work. To discuss his answer would very possibly lead to his other answers and his normal school work being related to this particular answer and what would undoubtedly be realised to be a very

careless mistake, but would it be fair to take into account his normal school record? And alternatively, would it be fair not to take it into account on an answer such as this? However, this is a very minor point. The prime consideration is that the test does not, in this particular section, exclude subjective assessment to any marked degree.

Surprisingly, the same test is also under fire in an entirely different matter. One section deals with a story about homing pigeons and testees have to fit suitable words into blank spaces in various sentences such as "Some pigeons have a mysterious power of \_\_\_\_\_ their way home." One such sentence reads "Once two men had a pigeon with them in an \_\_\_\_\_ which came down into the sea." I asked teachers whether they would allow each of the following words: aeroplane, airplane, plane, aircraft. The reason for these four words is that in this section of the test the marking key allows for alternative answers, providing they are given in the marking key. Any other word must be marked wrong. On the face of it, the decision here seems a very sensible one, but I am afraid that I am unable to follow the reasoning behind the alternatives actually listed in the key. The alternatives given are the first three words, aeroplane, airplane and plane. "Aeroplane" is obviously a good answer. "Airplane" is an unusual word: it is given in the Oxford Concise as being correct, but it is accepted by many teachers as being an Americanism (21 of the 35 teachers marked this word as wrong). "Plane" is a perfectly acceptable abbreviation, but in the test sentence the blank follows the word "an" so that the use of this abbreviation would be inaccurate, yet the test marking key lists it as correct in an English test for ten and eleven year old children! And the word "aircraft," a perfectly good word which would fit in the blank excellently is omitted from the marking key and is therefore, by implication, wrong. Two boys who took the test in November used the word "aircraft." Still, the position could be even more complicated I suppose. As Fred Hunter said when he was here, how would I have rated a boy who inserted the word "spaceship"?

Which brings me on to around 20 lines of quick fire comments on the December mailing. Bruce Burn was a little personal, to say the least, in Sizar and I believe that his remarks are being ably dealt with elsewhere so that I will be able to pass on to more pleasant ~~pp~~ topics. The bigger laugh I got from Sizar though was the remark about the heading on Off-Tracks always being present for anyone to read. It would have to be just this mailing that Editrix Ethel was so busy and rushed as to forget to put on the heading! Dick Eney, I appreciate your putting Ah, Sweet Idiocy through OMPA and I have read it before. Thanks muchly. Chuck Wells, one way to get through to the new Universities over here is to get hold of a copy of The Times Educational Supplement which lists vacancies every Friday, at 6d a throw. I'll gladly airmail you a copy if and when you so desire. Terry Jeeves is not exaggerating with those "notes to the teacher" he included in Erg. I've had "Dear Sir, I am sorry Danny had to go with me to my saler on webnesday to get lo chair, farm Mrs.F. XXXXXX." And "John as had cold and sore throat, Doctor say he can come to school now, will get sick for monday if wanted." And "I kept Andrew away from school yeslerday afternoon as I thought it would strain is other eye." The best howler I ever had was in a composition about a boy using his father's shaving kit while his parents were out. He cut himself and his mother returned and caught him in the act (I almost said "red-handed") and "she said it severed me right." Rosemary Hickey, your offering was, I'm happy to say, illegal. Or are my twice-over pages an accident? (I hope so!). "Grid-ban" was partly Fearn, partly Tubb and possibly partly others, a house name no less, John Baxter. Cecil sends his regards, Archie. -- Ron Bennett.