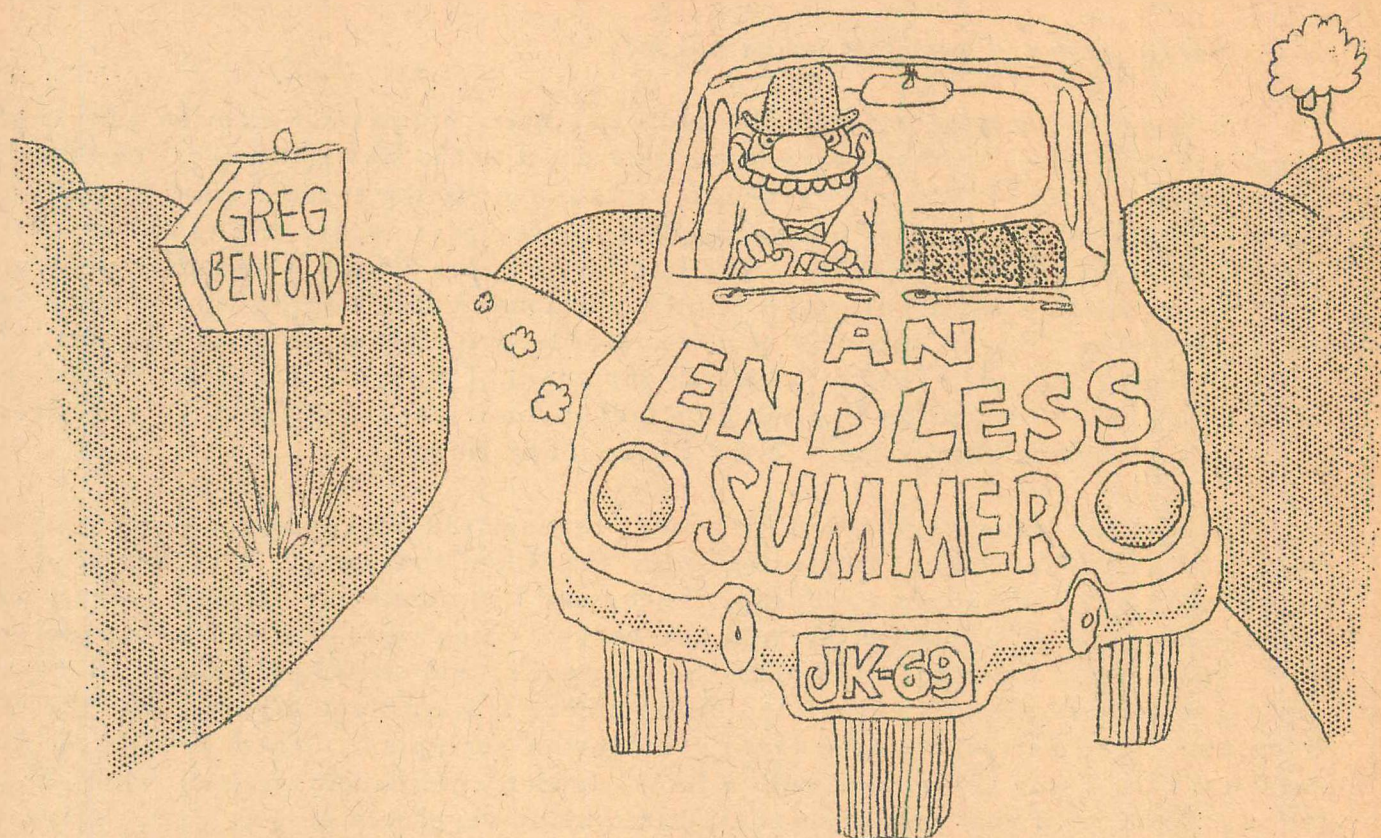


DOORWAY

DOORWAY is the FAPazine of Greg Benford (1458 Entrada Verde, Alamo, Ca). It is produced for the May 1970 FAPA mailing and a few select friends. Mimeography by Arnie Katz, mimeographer by appointment to the House of Benford.



At 8 AM Saturday, June 28th, 1969, our charter flight landed at Gatwick airport outside London. Joan and I were exhausted; the flight had been delayed a full day and we'd waited it out. We were taking a full six weeks to tour the British Isles.

The first thing that stuck in my mind was the large number of three-wheeled cars. Neither of us remembered them from our trips through England before. I subsequently learned that they carry lower insurance rates because they maneuver better than four-wheelers and have fewer accidents. Throwing caution to the winds, we took an old-fashioned four-wheeler to Caterham, Surrey, where the parents of my sister-in-law Hilary live. Jim and Hilary and the Poisters were there, lounging around in a back yard that fit perfectly my memories of the archtypical English country garden. It was a warm day and the buzz of insects lazily drifting over the hedges almost lulled me to sleep. But no: I was enthused, England lay all about me; I wanted to go somewhere. Jim and Hilary took Joan and me on a double-decker bus ride to Croyden, where I bought a pair of rugged walking shoes. It is easy for an American, deceived by a similar (but by no means identical) language, to slip into thinking he is home again. England is not obviously foreign. Walking through the thronging streets, though, eventually takes on a strange cast; things are just a bit off, a little different, and after a few minutes I had forgotten all about comparisons with the US. Within a few days, in fact, I had trouble remembering just what American streets and shops were like.

On the way back to Caterham Jim and I stopped, and I had my first Guinness. I dislike American beer and won't drink it, but stout is another matter. Stouts are thick, black, and heavy, and usually sweet. Guinness, however, has an edge to it like iron, and I love it. In a pinch I will drink sweeter stouts, but I feel that lagers,

ales, and the rest are best left in the horse.

That evening we watched the BBC and I was quite impressed with the quality of the programming. The commentators didn't talk down to the views and even the dramatic programs didn't feel it was necessary to explain everything twice. Hilary's father teaches mathematics and is a puzzle fancier, so we spent awhile trying to solve his riddles and then playing scrabble. The fate of the game hinged on whether my word, "lox" (as in bagels) was legal. The English dictionary didn't carry it, but I was saved at the last moment by an appendix of newer words which gave the word as a short term for liquid oxygen. That ol' cultural gap again, I thought. I was astounded at the number of good things in the English high tea; if Americans instituted the practice, I'm sure the overweight problem in the US would be fierce.

The next few days were filled with hikes through the Surrey countryside, more stout, and an expedition out to Sissinghurst, the Nicholson home. The four of us stopped at a pub and had meat pies for lunch, and I immediately decided I would eat as many of them as I could in the next six weeks. They were tasty little concoctions of chicken, steak, or kidney baked on the premises, and costing 12¢ each. They went down well with stout and a fine, biting cider. I wish I could remember the name of the pub, because that was the last I ever saw of such pies. Whenever I ordered any thereafter I was confronted with a thick, leaden commercial pastry which engulfed a speck of meat, perhaps encased in a bland vegetable paste. Feh. After a few tries I gave up on meat pies, and Joan and I relied upon THE GOOD FOODS GUIDE, an indispensable index of the worthy restaurants in the British Isles. Every traveler should have one. The standards of the book are high, and the editor (Raymond Postgate) still holds out against frozen peas, dried fruits, and mandatory service charges. His rule of thumb for background music in restaurants is "The louder and more persistent... the worse the food will be." I've found this to be a virtually infallible dictum. The best rating the book can give is the C*, for "...those places which are not only individual and imaginative, but have also shown themselves exceptionally reliable over a period of time and not subject to uncertainties of temperament." There are currently 18 C* restaurants in the Isles, 7 in London. We managed to hit a fair number and were given the best meals of our lives. And yet the ratings didn't agree with our tastes totally, for the GUIDE seems to lean toward French touches rather than sound quality. The best Indian restaurant we found (The Akash, in Charing Cross Road) wasn't even listed in the GUIDE, and several of their C* restaurants did not come up to C or B restaurants. Still, I think the volume is a bargain at 25/- (\$2.74).

July 1 we drove into London with Jim and Hilary, checked into our hotel, and ate Chinese food. Then we separated for several weeks; Joan and I were on our own in London. My first adventure with the tube system impressed me -- it was simple, relatively clean, and direct. We surfaced at Charing Cross station and walked to the Sherlock Holmes Pub, wherein the master detective's livingroom is depicted. Around the walls are Holmes memorabilia, such as galleys from the original publications of the stories, props used in movies, etc; but otherwise it's an ordinary pub, somewhat better than the usual London type..

We stayed in London for twelve days. We did the usual museum and historical sights bit, and most of them proved quite worth seeing, even if it was the second time

for both of us. I particularly liked the Indian and Arabic exhibits in the Victoria and Albert Museum -- they've incredibly delicate artwork there -- and the British Museum. The reading room at the British Museum is world-reknowned, of course, since regiments of famous scholars have researched their magnum opuses there. Marx wiled away years in one of the stiff-backed chairs, books stacked around him. I got us in past the usual hours by flashing my accademic credentials, and got a fifteen minute tour of the place. The echo is quite pronounced. The idea of all that reading material just beck and call away was fantastic -- but I didn't check anything out. It takes a week or two to get a card. In all, the vast halls crammed with remnants of history impressed Joan and I with the advantages of having an Empire. One can casually pick up the treasures of millenea, cart them home, and charge tourists to see them forever. (But in all justice, most worthwhile museums in England are free.)

We liked The Gay Hussar, a small Soho restaurant, and went there often. Soho isn't the den of vice that English mysteries make out; in fact it resembles the seamier side of San Francisco quite a bit. I'm not surprised Tony Boucher was disappointed in it. I saw a prostitute or two, books shops that once were called "off-color" and men wearing lipstick, etc., but not much more. (But then, I only wandered through the streets.) Several times we'd be cutting through Soho and note a knot of men who subsequently proved to be playing blackjack or the old shell game, on a portable table the host carried with him. He was an instant gambler, making his margin in this street game that lasted only until his spotter saw a bobby coming. Every time I saw one of these gentlemen stop and set up his table, he was instantly surrounded, so I suppose the gaming urge runs deep in the English blood.

The first Thursday in July we went to Hatton Gardens and met the sf crowd at the Globe pub. It was great fun. I met D.F. Marks, Merv Barrett, Arthur Gillings, and many others for the first time. John Brunner asked us out to lunch but we never could arrange a time. Ethel Lindsay appeared and we traded news of our respective neighborhoods. I still wasn't accustomed to British drinking habits -- when the pub closed at 11pm I at first couldn't believe it. To top it off there was a tube strike that day and the busses back to our hotel few and packed. Merv and his girl lived out our way, so we walked most of the distance together. At last we caught a bus, so jammed that I never could reach the conductor to pay him before our stop came up.

The next day, July 4, we walked across Kensington Gardens to Imperial College of London University. Just across from the Albert Hall we walked into a filming crew for "Run A Crooked Mile" and may or may not appear in the background of the movie whenever it comes out. It was interesting to watch the crew go through several takes. The director would mumble something to his assistant, who in turn would run over to the actors (they were doing a persuit scene) and say something like "Look more worried." and "Glance over your shoulder a bit." After the final take the lead actor walking across the street amongst us onlookers and made his way to an insolently opulent limousine, where he sat in the front seat and pretended to go to sleep. When I see actors on the set they never look like real people to me -- this one was well known, I'm sure, but I never remember their names -- because they're tanned, well-groomed and generally have such an air of well being that they look positively outre.

Imperial College is primarily scientific and I had a pleasant time being shown around their experiments and talking with some of the theoreticians. I went there several days. For lunch we ate in a much touted restaurant that sounded like the punchline in a Chinese dirty joke. But the Lee Ho Fook was decidedly below the San Francisco level for Chinese food, and that was our first encounter with a discrepancy in the GOOD FOOD GUIDE. We eventually concluded that Chinese food in the Isles isn't up to snuff. In Westminster I searched out Newton's tomb and stared at it for awhile. There is a feeling of enormity in the monuments of England, and since I'm a bit of a history buff, I lap up that sort of thing.

The next day gave a decided contrast. Joan and I walked a few blocks to Hyde Park and over to the Cock Pit, where the Rolling Stones and lesser rock groups were playing for free. There were hundreds of thousands there and Jagger was a dot prancing around in front of other dots holding guitars. Good, though. The hip types were crashing in the middle of Piccadilly Circus, on the concrete, the whole summer. We occasionally passed through there late at night and would marvel at the oasis of bodies stretched out asleep amid torrents of traffic on both sides. Other hip meccas like Saville Row, where the Beatles record, were drawing fair-sized crowds that shuffled by, mouths agape, hoping to catch a glimpse of Lennon or Harrison. We were among them, naturally.

We spent a Sunday with Arthur Thomson and his daughter Heather. He took us to Petticoat Lane, the cockney marketplace, where I bought a bobby's cape for \$6. We separated for a few hours for logistic reasons, whereupon Joan and I had a fine lunch at the Akash. Midway through the meal, nine sloe-eyed Indian girls came in, atwitter at the novelty of being out sans escort, and the head waiter proceeded to dominate them totally, badgering them into ordering what he thought good, etc. With us, though, he was quite diffident. It was an interesting illustration of cultural differences. We spent some hours in the Imperial War Museum -- my principal memory is amazement that the V2's were so damn small. Arthur picked us up and we went to Ethel Lindsay's for a tasty high tea, then to a pub for more serious matters. Arthur is one of the fastest minds I've ever met, equipped with a wit that would make Bob Shaw blink (and probably has). Ethel is of the same stripe, and at times that evening I felt as though I had mistakenly blundered into an alternate universe whose inhabitants thought three times as fast as Earthlings. They asked about the widespread comic book orientation of US fandom now, and I read them the opening lines of my four volume epic poem, The Love Song of F Towner Laney:

In the rooms they came and went,
Speaking together of Clark Kent.

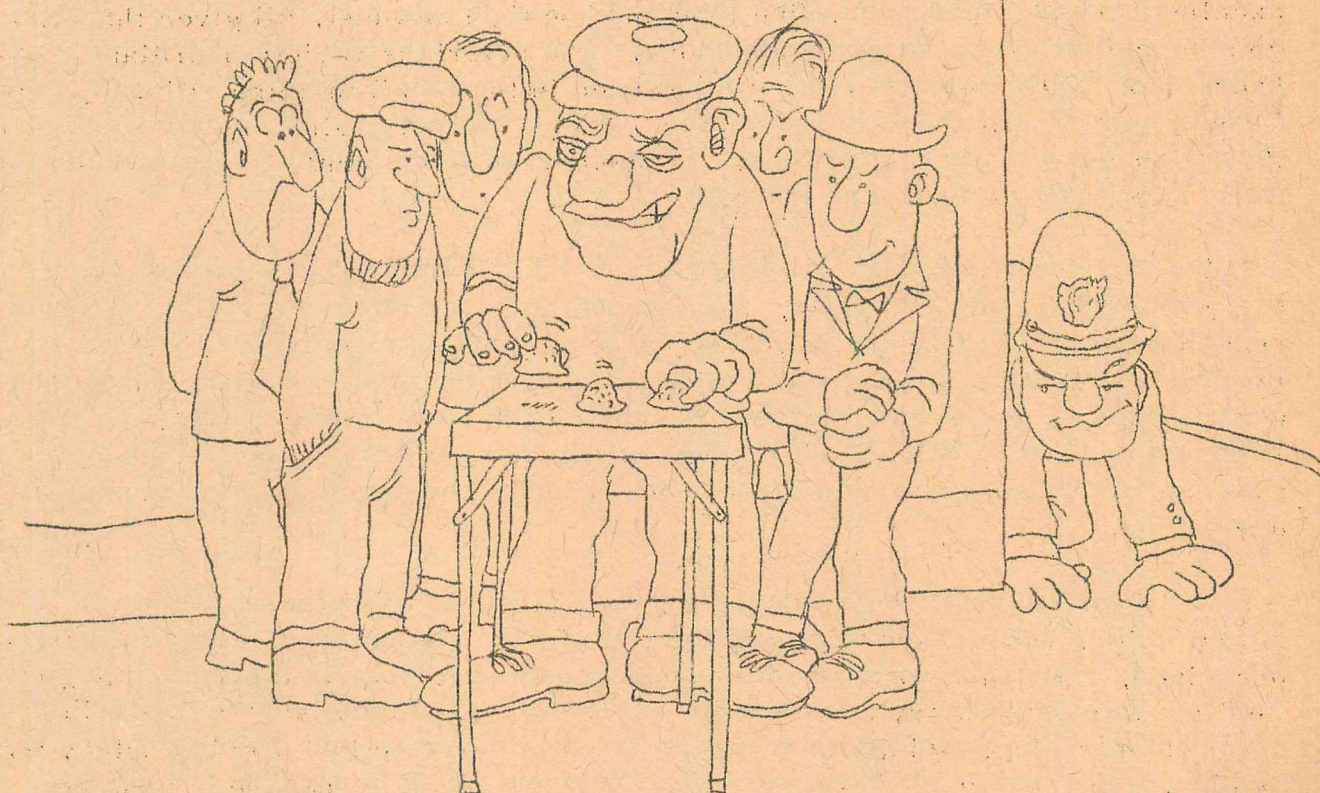
Arthur was putting away scotch, Joan and Ethel their sherries, and myself Guinness and ciders; but it occurred to me that to the British, Americans probably qualify well enough as alcoholics, but not as drinkers. The American standard is hard liquor poured down the gullet at a high rate until the well-known "alky high" is induced. Britons go at this more slowly, stretching things out through an entire evening so that every available second of pub time is used. You can throw back quite a lot of bitter in an evening, and I think the lower alcohol level of the drinks makes for a better atmosphere in the British watering holes.

We came back to our hotel early that night to rest, for early next morn we took

the train to Oxford. It's a charming spot, suitable encrusted with history and contains as well one of the finest restaurants I've ever known: the Restaurant Elizabeth. Everything brought to our table was either done precisely as we like it or was a very welcome surprise. It's across the street from Christ College and redolent with atmosphere. Oxford comprises a very old core of colleges surrounded by the newer housing and industry. Still, the university area remains the sort of place where, strolling on the geometrically flat lawns one can overhear sentences like "It seems to me Mr. Longwith, that the great problem of education is to train the moral perceptions, not merely to discipline the appetites." Charming.

Back to London for a few days. The best plays we saw during our entire vacation were "Conduct Unbecoming" and the one-man tour de force "Brief Lives." These were the high points in a playbill as varied as I'd remembered. London is the stage center of the world. "Conduct Unbecoming" particularly is a blend of humor, character, and suspense concerning a British regiment in India. There is not a line wasted in this play and the question of just who the lunatic loose in the regiment might be is enough to nail the most blasé in their seats. See this if it ever circulates.

The evening of July 12 we went back to the Sherlock Holmes Pub with Jim and Hilary and stepped into an amazing coincidence: we met two other couples we knew from La Jolla, California, who'd just dropped by to soak up some atmosphere. This chance meeting gave a touch of home amongst the damp cobblestones of Scotland Yard, and just the right send off for the trip to Ireland.



KINNEY

We went through Bath and stayed overnight there. Dress outside London is more modest, but still quite daring by American standards. I wondered at the time if the legendary coolness of Englishmen meant that the girls there had to show more and entice openly to provoke interest. Certainly some of the girls I saw in London would provoke small scale rioting in parts of the USA. We missed eating at the famous Hole in the Wall restaurant in Bath, for it was closed, but we did enjoy an afternoon in the warm sun near the Bath Brass Band that kept up a series of 1890-style music. I went to sleep and woke up slowly, thinking I was dreaming. The clusters of reclining chairs, glasses of lemonade and utter quiet of the background (few cars) made Bath like something from another age. We did the usual things too, such as sipping water from the Roman Baths (terrible). The guide implied that recent research pointed to a subterranean radioactive source for the hot water that surfaces at Bath. It is difficult for me to believe in such a concentration of natural uranium or radium, but perhaps so.

The next day, July 14, rail took us to Bangor, Wales. This was very close to the scene of Prince Charles' investiture and appropriately we went to the flicks that evening and saw a film of the occasion, along with "Carry on Camping," an arch-typical example of workmanlike low humor. On this evening I indulged myself in two meals from sheer hunger -- the day on the train had been more tiring than I'd thought. It was pleasant to be able to stop in at a small INdian restaurant after the films and have a biriyani. I will miss that.

We crossed to Dublin by ferry. Southern Ireland is full of contrasts; we found excellent lodgings and poor, fine food and boeuf de sawdust, all given the same recommendation by our trusty guidebooks. The notorious gaiety of Ireland rests on a bedrock of Celtic depression that we sensed in the small farming villages. I think I would hate to live there in the winter, when it not only rains more but is colder; they must get awfully moody then. Altogether we liked Southern Ireland, but not as well as England or Northern Ireland.

We met Ian MacAuley, ex-co-editor of HYPHEN and now a professor of physics at Trinity University in Dublin. Ian is another in the fannish mold we've come to know through HYPHEN; quick-witted, light of heart, and generous. He took us to lunch in the faculty commons and there, amongst the smell of steak and kidney pie (which I love) I decided to write an sf short story set in a British university when I returned to the US. There was enough atmosphere in that room to support a novel. I almost expected to see senile dons sitting about and knocking back bottles of Founder's Port.

We spent the next week driving through Eire. It was pleasant, though we both caught colds, and we took the opportunity to rest, sleep, read, and generally restore ourselves. The pace we'd maintained in London was clearly too much for a full six weeks. In quiet country guesthouses we watched the moon landing, including one commentator who gushingly confided to the world that he had been "struck by the landing, quite struck." Even ex-Vice President Nixon's speeches, long known for their inverse Midas effect, failed to taint the day. Later in Belfast, Bob Shaw remarked that when Armstrong said "there's something interesting in the bottom of this crater" and was then called away, he was sure it was a statue of Arthur Clarke they'd found and were just hushing it up.

Joan and I bought quite a few clothes in Dublin. There's a surprising variety in the shops there and I found quite well-tailored jackets that cost a fraction of what they would in the USA. By far the best treat in touring Eire was the Guinness. In the British Isles the Guinness is not quite up to the standard of the original Dublin product (the imported product sold for fantastic prices in the USA is hardly recognizable), so I drank as much as I could whilst in Eire. We topped off the week of indulgence by visiting the Guinness brewery in Dublin, and an incredible tour it was. Aromas assailed us from every side; pure grainy hops, deep malt, full-bodied yeast. The legendary Tasting Room you reach at the end of the tour is unfortunately only that. I've heard that in better days large tankards of Guinness were dispensed with a casual flourish, but in these dark times only little children's mugs of the stuff are given out, and with only one refill I was only able to put down a quart in the time allowed.

We went straight from the Guinness brewery to the express train for Belfast, and emerged a few hours later to be swept up by the Willises. They drove us by John Berry's home, but John was out on a special police call since the riots were just then subsiding. All our stay nothing very much happened, but within a week after Belfast was again the scene of violent demonstrations, and sometime after that the British troops moved in. Anglophiles such as myself tend to think of the British Isles as places of calm and peace, so the entire Northern Ireland problem seemed positively outre. From the Willises I gathered that the view of the more reasonable heads on the Protestant side is that the Catholics in the streets were trying to assume the mantle of the repressed and revolutionary, a clothing style that has become quite popular of late with the media. Walter blames the outbreaks on a long history of separate schools and hospitals and a general isolation of the two cultures.

With such weighty matters in the air one of our first acts the next day was catching a "Star Trek" rerun. We stayed at the Willis manse in Donaghadee and watched Ellison's "The City on the Edge of Forever" on their color tv. Color is better in the Isles because there are more lines on the screen. The medium can only go so far, though; after watching "Star Trek" we bandied about the notion of getting up a letter-writing campaign to get it taken off.

Irish Fandom is, of course, an utter gas. Every member is witty and individual. Carol, the Willis daughter, is now a lovely quiet young woman. Brian is an energetic and intelligent boy. And the Wheels of IF are formidable. In some ways Irish Fandom is so renowned, its members of legendary, that it is difficult to see them as ordinary human beings. I had read of James White for over a decade in Hyphen, so it was gratifying to at last meet the quiet, urbane author. It is not true that he drives a cadillac, though he certainly looks as if he should. George Charters is agreeable and friendly, with a talent for sideays puns. The Shaws are a team of Sexy Sadie (a la the Beatles) and Wholesome Bob. In fact Bob is as open-faced as a half-made sandwich, so much so that the monstrosously funny things he says almost slip by unnoticed in the smooth flow of conversation.

One evening Irish Fandom came for high tea, which at the Willises is practically stratospheric, and we watched a tv version of M. R. James' "Oh whistle, and I'll Come To You, My Lad" a famous ghost story. It was quite well done and led me to

read all James' short stories later. We also spent some time on a question I'd devised a few days before: Would you trade one day of life for literary immortality? It's a question that separates people by their aspirations. I noticed that men and women tend to take different sides.

Walter took us in to see the Irish Parliament, with which we were quite impressed. Government there seems to have most aspects of a private men's club rather than the impersonal civil servant atmosphere we have in the USA. It is comforting, now, to think of Willis sitting in on tense sessions of Parliament, giving specialist legal advice when asked.

We left Belfast, after a warm breakfast of Madeleine's, on July 29. We took the ferry across to Scotland and a train to Edinburgh. Scotland was relaxing and charming though Edinburgh was very crowded. It seemed as though every undergraduate female in the western hemisphere had descended upon the Edinburgh hotels and taken all the rooms, for next day they clogged the streets. We found a remarkably comfortable guest house, ate haggis, and saw the town castle -- ie, we were tourists. Most people we met in England regard Edinburgh as a dull town, but we found many charming aspects to it -- among them, Cosmos' the best Italian restaurant I've ever known -- and left regretfully on the express train for London. This train averaged about 65 miles per hour, a lesson to American urban planners.

London was goodbye. We saw "Son et Lumae" at St. Paul's, browsed the bookstores, visited the British Museum again, saw plays. It was like spending a long weekend with an old friend. Before taking the Victoria Station train out to the airport I had a last Guinness, full of that end-of-vacation fatigue that still couldn't restrain my impulse to try and memorize everything, remember it all. I react to the end of any journey that way. Even as our plane took off I was impressed anew with the scenic sheep lolling about the florid fields. And I knew we would be back.

---Greg Benford

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