

YANDRO



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A YELLOW PAPER ON THE COULSONS TO NEWCASTLE FUND

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This is a special issue; those copies not going to regular subscribers will be priced higher than normal and the proceeds donated to TAFF and DUFF.

ERRATA

JWC, page 14, bottom: prams, not trams.

RSC page 4, across from 1110: should be "impressed mostly by the hat, but partly by the fact that I knew what Puckle guns were" (phrase left out)

ADDENDA, RSC: I failed to mention my reaction to the Brighton Royal Pavilion, which was that it reminded me irresistibly of an oversized American movie theater (the kind called "movie palaces") of the 1920s and 1930s. Same pseudo-oriental decor, only more of it and in even worse taste. (I loved it.)

Also, in his fanzine Eric Bentcliffe says it was Bob Shaw who introduced the notables at the "Meet the Celebrities" party. My notes say Aldiss, and I wouldn't think that Shaw could have been that dull if he tried, but Eric knows British authors better than I do. So it's barely possible that I erred.

T H E R E A N D B A C K A G A I N

by RSC

I expect Juanita heard of the scheme first, but my first encounter with it came at Maroon in 1978, when Paula Smith, Devra Langsam, and Juanita came up to my huckster table and Devra asked if we were going to Brighton.

"No."

"Well, will you go if we pay your way?"

"What?"

At which point Paula explained that she and Steve Simmons wanted to start a Coulsons to Newcastle Fund (she said they hadn't been able to work in a pun if they said "To Brighton"), if Juanita and I approved.

Naturally, we approved. We did not, however, immediately start making plans to go. I was extremely flattered. (After all, what had we ever done for Paula but take over her bed the first time we met and make her sleep on the floor? We'd introduced Steve to Midwestern fandom, but not everyone would consider that a blessing.) But however nice it was of Paula and Steve, it wouldn't really come to anything. They'd undoubtedly raise some money and eventually donate it to TAFF or DUFF when it wasn't enough, and that would be the end of it. Funds for two people take a lot more money than funds for one person.

So, we did not join Seacon, or make hotel arrangements, or do anything else in preparation for the trip. No point in wasting the money on memberships, or in wrangling with hotels. (This was my decision; whatever Juanita thought, she went along with it.)

But we kept getting these cheery notes from Paula, and the amount raised kept increasing, and I began to wonder if it might not be possible, after all. So in October 1978 I sent a check for two attending memberships to USAGent Tony Lewis. I still hadn't done anything about accommodations, and then at Chambanacon 1978 Ann Passovoy told us that Kelly and Polly Freas wanted us and the Passovoys to share a suite with them, and Polly would handle the reservations. (Polly wanted "her own filksing") and was presumably willing to put up with Bob Passovoy and me in order to get it.) That suited me; saved me the trouble of puzzling out the reservation form.

By early 1979, though, Polly was ill and the Freases weren't going. So in March I filled out the reservation form included with one of the early Progress Reports and mailed it to the Brighton Borough Council. However, either I misread the form or the Brighton Borough Council misread my American accent, and I received a letter from one Angus McLachlan of the Royal Albion Hotel, announcing that I had a reservation at that establishment, and I would be sharing a room with Mr. Edfe.

While I have nothing against Mr. Edfe, whoever he might be, I really prefer to share my room with Juanita, so I wrote again, apologetically (fans would be surprised how humble I can be in dealing with businesses; it's when the humbleness doesn't work that I get nasty) and got the reservation straightened out. On the little map enclosed with the Progress Report, the address of the Royal Albion didn't look all that far from the con hotel, and I was positively charmed by the name; how absolutely British it was! Couldn't be better for a poor but cynical American tourist.

By this time we had decided to stay two weeks, which was all the vacation time I had available (I had 3 weeks total, and one week was already earmarked for spending at a few US conventions). The other week we would presumably be centered in London, and I still had no hotel reservations for that period, but I wasn't worried. The devil would doubtless provide. We got our passports -- no trouble at all in a small town, I discovered. Walk up to the county clerk's office, make out an application, pay the fee, and the passports arrive in about a week. Getting the photos for them took more time; Juanita finally discovered a photographer's in nearby Marion that advertised passport photos and we got them there. Photographer had some quite up-to-date equipment which he apparently hadn't had all that much practice in using, but he produced eventually some photos which actually looked like us.

At some convention -- possibly Marcon 1979 -- Steve told us that we were going to fly Laker. We said the hell we were; my vacation time didn't allow for waiting a week at Heathrow to get a plane back, and that we'd pay the difference between Laker and an airline that accepted reservations. (At that time, Laker was suffering from severe overbooking; I have no idea what it's like today.) By this time, we were actually becoming convinced that we'd make the trip.

So Juanita went to a travel agency in Marion and arranged the flight. Originally the agency offered alternate plans; fly to New York, change planes (and airfields, from La Guardia to Kennedy) for the flight to London, or a direct 6 1/2 hour flight from Chicago. We took the Chicago flight, adding a flight from Indianapolis to Chicago because that way we could leave our car in John and Sandra Miesels' garage instead of having it unattended in an airport parking lot for two weeks. (That decision might have been a mistake, but more of that later...)

At Midwestcon 1979, Paula handed us a check for \$1000; the proceeds of the Fund. It paid for the airline tickets and left \$2 over to squander in Brighton, and I still was slightly shocked that they had actually done it.

A few final preparations; I bought a Polaroid camera just to make certain that I had some photos of the trip, in case something happened to the rolls of film for the other cameras between taking and getting back pictures. (I've had developers lose film, and the drugstore clerk who sold me some Polaroid film was telling me of a friend who had come back from Hawaii with 7 rolls of film without a picture in the lot because her camera shutter had malfunctioned.) As it happened, the Polaroid wasn't necessary and took rather poor pictures besides, but it was useful as insurance and made me feel better. Juanita got a luggage carrier which she will undoubtedly brag about in her section of the report; it turned out to be highly useful, unlike my camera.

Also, being a cautious type, I went to Dr. Dudgeon, our GP, to get a letter from him in case either of us got sick (we both take medicines which do not always mix well with whatever might be given for British diseases) and to cover the various prescription drugs we would have with us, if Customs got nasty. I herewith quote his letter in full:

"To Whom it may concern

From Charles A. Dudgeon, MD

Subject Mr. and Mrs. Robert Coulson

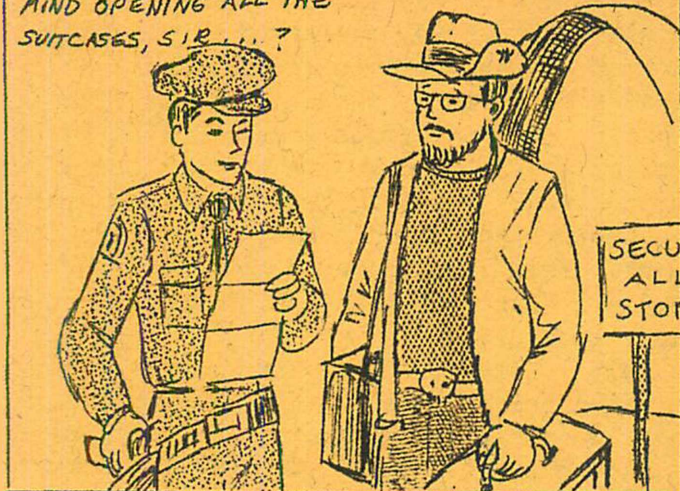
Above two subjects are carrying a very dangerous assortment of drugs. Both are incorrigible addicts. DON'T LET THEM IN THE COUNTRY. Put them back on the plane and send them to Havana, Cuba, immediately. Mr. Coulson is a diabetic and the sugar would be sure to get him, and Mrs. Coulson is looking for some background for a new novel involving Castro's assassination by men from space."

Isn't it nice to have helpful doctors nearby when you need one?

I also wrote several British fans and inquired about visiting them while we were in the London area.

None of them wanted us. Oh, they all had excuses of one sort or another, but it was plain to see what the real reason was. (Must say Roger Waddington had the best possible excuse; having somehow foreseen this eventuality, he had taken residence so far from London that we probably couldn't get to his home anyway.)

LETTER FROM YOUR PHYSICIAN, EH? WOULD YOU
MIND OPENING ALL THE
SUITCASES, SIR...?



Dave Piper finally took pity on us and said that despite severe reservations he was willing to have us at his house for the first night of our stay, but after that we'd have to go find a hotel; one night was all he could put up with us. Well, one takes what one can get; we at least had someplace to go the first day.

The British Tourist Council office in Chicago sent us various literature, I picked up some slightly out-of-date Fodor Travel Guides (they were on sale...) and Gene and Bev DeWeese presented us with a volume called ENGLAND ON \$15 A DAY. It was out-of-date, too, as far as the price mentioned, but turned out to be an extremely useful book.

Came the big day. Drove down to Miesels', cadged a free meal from Sandra, collected the packet of British currency John had picked up for me at his bank, and Sandra drove us to the airport. John had already left; his trip included visiting relatives in Austria before the convention.

I'm not particularly fond of flying; I keep wondering what happens if a cargo door comes off, or another plane is on a collision course, or... I wasn't notably cheered to discover that our transportation from Indianapolis to Chicago was a DC-10, either. But we arrived with nothing having fallen off the plane en route. We had a fairly long layover in Chicago, long enough for us to explore O'Hare airport a bit and get a couple of traveler's checks translated into British money, as well as find out where we had to go to board the transcontinental flight. (I should have obtained more British funds there; I got a better exchange rate at O'Hare than I ever did in England.)

The flight from O'Hare to Heathrow was via 747, which eased my mind a trifle (but not entirely). Due to time zones, we spent between 6 and 6 1/2 hours in the air, but arrived in London 12 hours after we started -- leaving at approximately 9:00 PM and arriving at approximately 9:00 AM. This meant a night with very little sleep, since I normally don't go to bed until midnight and wasn't at all sleepy during the early part of the flight. I did manage to doze a bit; I'm not sure Juanita even managed that.

So we arrived at Heathrow, somewhat the worse for wear from lack of sleep, at a too-early hour Thursday, August 16. Then came problems. Dave Piper had talked his wife Cath into meeting us at the airport. However, we didn't know what she looked like, and she had only a couple of photos to go on, and Heathrow is very big and very busy. We collected our luggage and walked down a ramp into the waiting area, scanning and being scanned by several thousand people on the other side of a rope barrier. No recognition on either side. We debated taking a cab, but that would have left Cath -- assuming she was there -- still hunting for us. We had noticed that personal messages were being broadcast over the P.A. system, so finally I left Juanita with the luggage, fought my way over to the announcer, stood in line for awhile, and asked that Cath be paged. No reply. I stood around a while longer, and nobody came up looking for me, though Linda Bushyager did stop by and say hello; she and a group were leaving immediately for Wales to visit the village where "The Prisoner" was filmed. Finally I went back to see Juanita and discuss taxis again; we were still at this when I heard myself being paged. I struggled back to the announcer's booth again; nobody there. Inquiries as to who had paged me; nothing. Finally I got in line to page Cath again when Linda yelled at me and I turned to see her pointing me out to Cath; she had noticed Cath desperately trying to match photos with faces.

After that, it was easy. Cath had brought her daughters Sara and Clare along, and they all guided us to a taxi stand and we rolled out to Ruislip. It was lovely to be there, all intact and not having to go anywhere for the moment. In the early afternoon we went to downtown Ruislip and did some shopping and I took some photos

of strange British businesses like chemist's shops and greengrocers. After which Juanita and I both lay down for a brief nap and stayed asleep for several hours until Dave came home from work and routed us out of bed to have dinner.

Friday we began our touring in general. We had several places we definitely wanted to see (chief among them being Stonehenge and Avebury). Juanita is a Tudor fan, and wanted to see various Tudor historical sites, so mostly I let her pick the places to visit. We started with St. Albans, which in addition to several medieval buildings boasts a Roman ruins. Cath gave us instructions on how to use the British transport system, and they were a big help. While the London Tube and British Rail are fantastic by American standards of public transit, they're so big that it helps to have someone who can tell you that in changing trains to "go to Hammersmith, change to opposite side, over the staircase, catch Rayner's Lane train." Everything is well marked in the stations and one can figure things out for one's self, but it's much easier with assistance. The visit to St. Albans took longer than we'd counted on because there had been a train wreck on the line and service was tied up. For an entire half-hour! Considering what a train wreck does to US rail lines, I was amazed. The Roman ruins were on the opposite side of town from the station, but it looked like a small town, so we decided to walk. What the map didn't show, however, was that the town is built on hills; by the time you add the vertical distance to the horizontal, the total is quite respectable. However, we did enjoy window-shopping, and I was particularly fascinated by a sign reading "Bespoke Tailor." (I assume this is quaint British for custom tailoring -- but I wouldn't bet on it.) The ruins were excessively ruined, but a brick wall almost 2000 years old is interesting enough by itself, and the place included a stretch of the original Watling Street, England's first trans-island highway.

Saturday the sky looked like rain, and we weren't enough accustomed to English weather to realize that the sky always looks like rain there. So we decided to put off the Stonehenge trip (anyway, we hadn't been able to find a tour that included both Stonehenge and Avebury) and visit the Tower of London instead. Dave insisted that I wear the Aussie campaign hat that Eric Lindsay got for me some years ago. I didn't really want to look all that conspicuous (I had brought the hat mostly for the convention), but finally agreed. Juanita knew -- but hadn't told me -- that the Tower is crammed with antique weapons and armor, and I loved it. We didn't see the Crown Jewels, neither of us considering that it would be worth the extra fee charged for them. (Juanita scorned them because they weren't Tudor, and I'm not all that thrilled by jewels of any sort.) The Aussie hat was an inspiration. Apparently the real guards at the Tower (as opposed to the Beefeaters, who are there mostly for show) are ex-army men, most of whom seemed to have fought somewhere next to an Australian unit. We got all sorts of additional information about the building and weaponry. (Possibly we'd have gained as much info from the informational cassettes they were renting, but quite possibly not, since we already knew most of the things about Tower history that the average tourist wants to hear. Or, to be honest, Juanita knew them; I'm not up on British history, though I've read enough about the weaponry.) One of the guards, impressed mostly by the fact that I knew what Puckle guns were, gave us practically a guided tour of his sector. (Yes, I admitted that I wasn't an Australian. He said that being an American was "almost as good".) Interesting that one of the original Tower doors, installed at the order of William the Conqueror, is still in place. It looks like it's had a very hard life, but it's moderately amazing that wood should hold up at all over that length of time.

Puckle guns? They're the world's first machine gun, and they were designed to fire round balls at Christians and



square ones at heathen. (Or possibly vice versa; I can never keep that part straight) Anyway, there are two of them in the Tower.

One thing that I didn't know until I came back and Mary Long asked me if the codpiece on Henry VIII's armor was still shiny. Seems there is or was a superstition that if a woman was barren, rubbing Henry's codpiece would make her conceive. (Considering Henry's own procreational problems, this seems odd in the extreme, but I suppose superstitions don't have to have any sense to them.) If Mary had told me in advance, I'd have checked.

Sunday we visited Elizabeth I's palace at Hampton Court. Less there of interest to me, but a lot to Juanita.

I must say everyone seemed quite helpful to a pair of strangers -- even when the strangers were being rude, as when, at the Tower restaurant, Juanita and I couldn't hold down our merriment at seeing English tourists ordering a hamburger and then cutting it up, bun and all, with a knife and fork before eating it. Either they were carrying fastidiousness to the extreme, or they haven't quite caught on to hamburgers. (But it was mildly embarrassing, after we'd chortled over someone doing this some distance from us, to have the couple at the same table with us do the same thing.)

I cannot, incidentally, comment on English hamburgers. I didn't go to England to eat pseudo-American food; I got Cornish pasties and fish and chips and the like in public restaurants, and liked everything except a Yorkshire pudding I got in Brighton, -- the only taste it had was where part of it had been burnt.

But we got assistance in various places, including one man at a Tube station who showed Juanita how to defeat the candy machine, which was bent on keeping both her shilling and the candy. (He also made me feel better about my dislike of ever having to drive in London by saying he had been working in London for 10 or 12 years, and always left his car at Ealing and came the rest of the way on the Tube.)

Evenings we spent with the Pipers, talking, watching incomprehensible TV programmes, eating Cath's expert cooking, generally enjoying ourselves. One night they took us out to a "neighborhood club," which seems to be a private pub. We sat around and soaked up the ambiance for a while, before walking back to the house. I tried various British beers, since I particularly wanted to sample "bitter" and stout. (Neither one was to my taste.) I decided that lager was going to be my drink; it was closer to US beers, and was the only one served cold. (For any Englishmen reading: yes, I agree that serving beer cold destroys some of the flavor. I want some of the flavor destroyed. I am not a beer lover; I prefer to go direct from soft drinks to rum, rye, and tequila.)

Most of our tours started out with our walking from the Piper's house via a shortcut to the Ruislip Tube station. The first time, Sara and Clare went along to show us the way (and became entranced by a stray cat who was apparently living off handouts along the walkway). This gave us a chance to see and photograph some of the really fancy flower gardens in the front yards of various houses along the way. Lovely, and so terribly neat. (Though perhaps I'm reacting there to our own overgrown jungle of a yard.) We got quite well acquainted with the walkway and the Ruislip station; it began to feel like home. Dave mentioned that most of the people in his neighborhood owned their own houses because the rents were so high that it was cheaper to make installment payments. (Getting that way in places in this country, I hear, but not around our area.)

Dave announced that he was throwing us out Monday, so Sunday night we decided to take the Pipers out for a meal, letting Dave pick the restaurant, since we had no idea of where to go. After several hints that he was going to pick the highest-priced place in the area, we went to a nice, neighborhood family restaurant. Fine, until they brought the bill. The £5 per person for 6 people I could handle, even if we had expected to be able to get child's portions for Sara and Clare. But the little note at the bottom, adding a 10 percent "service charge" on the bill, finished me. That brought the total to £33, and I had only £31 in my billfold and hadn't brought along any extra traveler's checks. Juanita rescued me from visions of washing dishes by pointing out a sign on the door that said they accepted Visa. (Or Barclaycard, which is the British equivalent.) It was a very good meal, but the price, around \$75 in US money) seemed a bit higher than I'm used to. Typical for England,

though, probably even cheap, considering the quality. I did enjoy my dessert, which was "strawberry gatto." I had visions of a Mexican cat smothered in strawberries, but it turned out to be a sort of cake. Juanita speculated that it was originally "gateau."

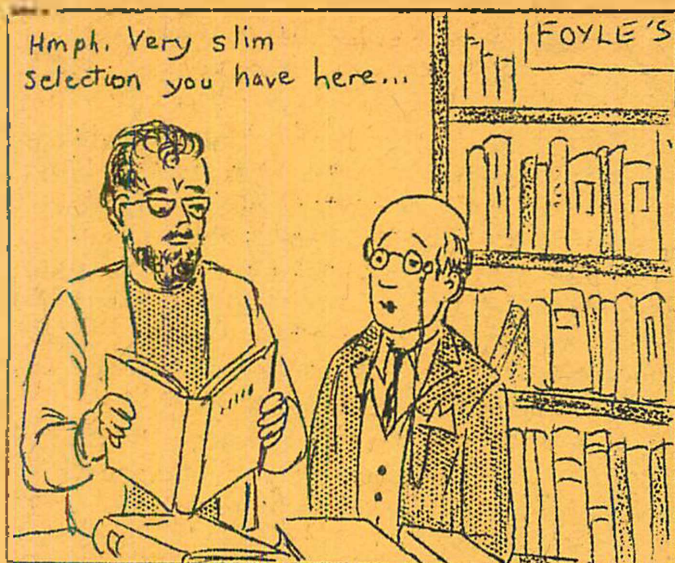
Late Sunday night we moved to the Merlyn Court Hotel, in Earl's Court, which we had picked out of the ENGLAND ON \$15 A DAY book. It wasn't quite that cheap; £13, or about \$30, per night. Bed and breakfast. It alerted us to the quaint British custom of locking the outside doors of a hotel and closing down at 6:00PM or so. (When I inquired about the rooms, I had been told that I would have to come in and pick up my keys -- and make a down payment -- ahead of time. So I had stopped off on our way back from the Tower on Saturday; one reason we picked the Earl's Court location was that it was on the part of the London Tube system that we had learned fairly well.) Cath wouldn't hear of us taking a taxi, and located a "hire car" driven apparently by the friend of a friend of a friend. It was somewhat disconcerting to be roaring into the heart of London without having the vaguest idea where we were going, but the driver knew his way around, and we arrived at Merlyn Court with no problems; my key worked the front door and everything.

Merlyn Court was a good, clean hotel, and Earl's Court seemed to be an area of students and immigrants. A fair number of Indian, Chinese, Pakistani, etc., restaurants in the area, a laundromat which was useful, and the hotel was only a couple of blocks from the Earl's Court Tube station. The breakfast part of the bed-and-was acceptable if not superb. Bathroom was not only down the hall but down half a flight of stairs, but we've had worse inconveniences than that. There was a notice in the room forbidding the hanging of laundry out the windows, but we had no idea of doing any such thing. Windows had no screens, but as there didn't seem to be any insects, it didn't matter. (This was one thing about England we found odd but pleasant; no insects. No flies, even where food was being prepared outdoors, no mosquitoes, no gnats, no ants, no bugs of any kind. I kept running into some sort of oversized sweat bee whenever I tried to eat fruit outdoors, but otherwise the entire island could have been insectless.)

Monday the 20th. We separated. Juanita had to go see her British publisher (big name author, you know). I had thought of looking up Robert Hale, Ltd., but decided against it, since they'd probably have a representative at the convention. (They didn't.) So I called John Miesel, who was in London by now, and we arranged to go bookshopping. John was at a hotel in the Holborn area, near the bookstores (picked for that reason, in fact), so I went to his hotel first to pick him up. Then we walked. Hit several bookstores, but were most interested in Foyle's, which advertises itself as "The World's Greatest Bookshop." It may be, in total quantity of books available, but its stock of history (except textbooks) and fiction of any sort is smaller than most US bookstores I've been in. I can get a lot more books pertaining to my interest (and get them much cheaper) in the Village Bookstore in Columbus, Ohio. I did pick up a few items for myself and a Christmas present for Gary Anderson -- and Foyles will ship books for one, which avoids the necessity of lugging them around for the rest of the trip. But on the whole, I think the store is overrated.

Naturally, when we left Pipers', we forgot something: my Aussie hat. Dave called us about it, and arranged to bring it along Monday when he went to work at New Zealand House. So after the bookshopping I went along there; it was close enough to the bookstores that I walked. (For one thing, I had a roundtrip Tube ticket to Holborn, meaning I would have to get back there for my return trip. Possibly I could have converted my ticket, but I wasn't enough at home on the Tube to try -- and it wasn't all that much of a walk, anyway.) One interesting fact about the English is that while they drive on the left, they seem to walk on either side of the walk that takes their fancy, unlike Americans who normally both drive and walk on the right. It makes walking through the London crowds an interesting event, especially when one's course is through Picadilly Circus in the heart of London. (Later, at the con, Jerry Elsmore informed me that in England, which side of the sidewalk you walk on depends on what school you went to. It seems as logical as a lot of British customs.)

Once at New Zealand House, Dave took me up to the observation deck on the roof. He said that when it was built, this was the tallest building in London, though since



then several other taller ones have sprung up. It gave a fine view of the city, the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square, various cathedrals, etc. (Naturally, I hadn't thought to bring a camera.)

On the way back I saw an American Express office and went in to cash some traveler's checks and one of the other patrons tried to buy my hat. (That hat made much more of a stir in England than it ever did in the US, Eric.)

By Monday night, we were in a bind over the projected Stonehenge trip. It had been threatening rain most of the time we had been in England, but had never actually rained much. The Worldcon started

on Wednesday, so Tuesday was it, rain or shine. And there was apparently no tour to Avebury, and I didn't want to try driving in London. So, we finally decided to rent a car at Heathrow, which was presumably outside of the worst London traffic. Roger Waddington had sent us a booklet on the British Highway Code well before our trip, and I found an excellent Philips' Touring Map of South-West England at a W.H. Smith newsstand not far from our hotel. I'd also picked up a street map of London there. Unfortunately, neither one included Heathrow or surroundings, but we could cross that bridge when we got to it. ENGLAND ON \$15 A DAY recommended E&P Self-Drive, and we had been fascinated by ads for Godfrey Davis rental cars, but one didn't answer and the other had no offices at Heathrow, so we made arrangements with Hertz. It was on the Tube out to Heathrow that I noticed a sign at Northfields station:

"WARNING TO PASSENGERS

DO NOT CROSS RAILS

IT TAKES HOURS TO UNTANGLE THEM."

Coupled with the "ON YOUR OWN HEAD BE IT" sign at Victoria Station, it gives one an odd idea of British officialdom.

Car rental was expensive, but no problem, and driving British-style was less of a problem than I'd feared. Keeping on the left side of the road was no trouble; gear shifting with the left hand was a problem only for the first few miles. The one recurring hangup was glancing at the rear view mirror; I was constantly glancing up and to the right, and finding nothing there. Then I would have to check traffic ahead before glancing up and left and finding the mirror. Hitting the windshield wipers instead of the turn signal was also a recurring nuisance, but that was the car design, not British Highway regs. It was all much easier because Juanita was watching road signs, and interpreting traffic signs with the aid of the Highway Code book. Roundabouts required a minor adjustment in driving, since they're only rarely encountered in the US, but I only took the wrong exit twice, and both times at places where we could turn around and get back on the correct road with a minor loss of time. Once we had wended our way out of Heathrow to the M3 (the M roads are equivalent of our freeways) there was no trouble at all. I was glad that I hadn't started out in London, though; this way, by the time I had to endure much city traffic, I had become used to the car. (Which, by the way, was a nice little Austin Allegro; a fine car to drive, though if we'd been carrying our luggage we'd have probably needed something bigger.)

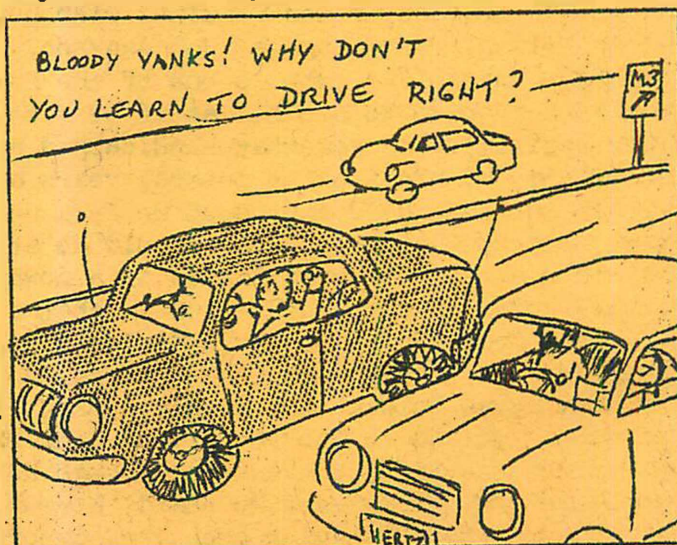
We didn't go to Salisbury but took the M3 and then 303 directly to Stonehenge. It's impressive, though mostly the impressiveness is that you're there. You can see the monuments just as well on TV, perhaps better. But if you like history, there it is, in big chunks, and you're right on the spot. (There is absolutely no occult aura about the place, though I suppose you might find one if you believed in it. For anyone who knows better than to believe it was erected or used by the Druids, what one gets is a sense of history.)

A curving road leads mostly north from Stonehenge, through the Salisbury Plain (which is still remarkably barren-looking on a road map), and the town of Devizes, to Avebury. Pretty country, and the only startling event was the sign saying "WARNING -- TANK CROSSING." We didn't see any tanks, and the map showed nothing in the area, but presumably it was a military proving ground. The road was as narrow as our Indiana back roads -- and no better paved -- but by then I was used to driving the car, though the fact that the road tended to be sunken a foot or so below the surrounding land was a bit nervous-making. If you had trouble, there was no place to pull off, on most of the route. (A pleasant surprise, however, was the speed at which we covered the map, which was much larger scale than we're used to in the US.)

Avebury was the single most impressive sight of the trip; far more impressive than Stonehenge. Partly, I think, because it's so big it can't be properly photographed, so it's never been the subject of TV shows. The rocks at Stonehenge are larger, but they're all in one small area, while the Avebury circle is almost a mile in circumference, and early Christian vandalism has ensured that one can't photograph more than a few stones at a time, unless one has an airplane at hand for aerial views. The Avebury ditch alone -- 25 feet deep after 5,000 years of silting up, originally it was closer to 50 feet deep, and dug out of the chalk with wooden shovels and deer antler picks -- is a breathtaking affair. The stones, if not as big as at Stonehenge, are still huge -- around 50 tons for the largest ones. Originally there were between 600 and 700 of them at the site; now only 76 are left. It's a ruin, but a vastly impressive one. The village of Avebury spills over into the circle, but doesn't spoil the effect; it provides an air of continuity. Man was here, man is here, man will be here. There used to be a main circle with two smaller circles inside it, and columns of stones leading to two other circles some distance away, and it's still so big that we didn't see all of it, though we walked around the main circle and looked at most of the rest. (Caution is advised in walking, as the area is a pasture. As an old farm boy, I managed to miss all the bovine souvenirs, but Juanita got so interested in photography that she stepped in a cow-pattie.) Unlike Stonehenge, the stones are not roped off; you can walk right up to them, and climb on them, if you feel like it. Several small boys did, while we were there. Nearby is the burial mound of Silbury Hill, and some excavated barrows, but we didn't see them. The guard at the museum told us to drive down the road a quarter-mile, park, and walk across the fields to Silbury, but we'd come along that road, there are no places to pull off, and I didn't feel like stopping a rented car on the road for an hour or so. Anyway, it was getting time to head back to Heathrow, to make sure of arriving before dark; I didn't like the idea of night driving on unfamiliar roads.

We took a different road back, going through the edge of Savernake Forest; more nice scenery, but anti-climactic after Avebury. (Some day I am going back there, given enough time and a little money. I've seen Stonehenge, and once is enough, but I want to spend at least one full day at Avebury.) I'd worried a bit about finding Heathrow since the map didn't include it, but all we had to do was follow signs, right to the correct car-rental agency. Best-marked airport I've ever seen.

Wednesday it was pack up everything, haul it down to the Earl's Court Tube station, ride to Victoria Station (enormous place), and take British Rail to Brighton. No real problems, and interesting scenery along the tracks. I even saw one US-style isolated farmhouse; the only one I saw while we were in England. I thought we could haul the luggage from the Brighton station to the Royal Albion; it didn't look that far on the map, and downhill at that. Juanita persuaded me to take a taxi, luckily for us. The Albion cost about \$70 a day, which seemed excessive, but it was a fair hotel; older and



going downhill, but still reasonably good. We had lucked out and got a corner room, giving us a good view of both the Palace Pier and the cliffs to the east. The floor tilted appreciably and the doors were no longer at right angles to it, but it was a nice big room.

The hotel was also close to the Royal Pavillion, closer to it, in fact, than it was to the con hotel, the Metropole. Wednesday afternoon we walked along the beach to the Metropole, registered for the convention, and then wandered around town a bit, getting groceries in Churchill Square, and walking through The Lanes on the way back to the Royal Albion. (The Lanes are, the tourist brochure says, all that is left of the original Brighton fishing village. Currently they are devoted to tourist businesses: coin shops, antique stores, fancy clothing, etc.) Groceries were required because of my habit of eating in my hotel room during cons -- we weren't doing it this time entirely because of outrageous British restaurant prices. (For that matter, the grocery prices were pretty high in themselves.) Also, since there obviously wasn't going to be any diet pop available at the con, we needed to provide our own. (In the event, there mostly wasn't anything provided at the con except beer, which one paid for at the bar, and beer has too many calories in it for me to drink very much.)

That evening we went back to the Metropole for the parties, which were, as usual, conducted only in the hotel lobby and the various hotel bars. There was no con suite and very few US-style parties during the convention. Met the Swedish contingent and talked some time to Roger Sjölander and Anders Bellis. Went on into a bar and found Ron Bennett, who bought me a drink, and then talked a bit with Ron, Horst Grimm, and D. West. Joyce Scrivner introduced me to Simone Walsh and Dave Langford and his wife. Saw Rob Jackson briefly and had a long talk with someone who turned out to be Bob Welling from Elkhart, Indiana. 3000 miles of flying to meet someone who lives 75 miles away. John Collick was staggering around passing out copies of his fanzine; he gave me two, and had to be discouraged from giving me 5 or 6 more, until he eventually passed out himself. I made a note to avoid him in the future (and have succeeded admirably, I may say). I don't go to cons to be pestered by drunks.

Thursday the 23rd was cloudy, after having rained in the night; apparently standard weather for Brighton. (The only variation was when it was cloudy in the night and rained during the day.) We were there for the opening speeches Thursday -- unfortunately, we were there well ahead of time for the opening speeches and got our first taste of the English penchant for loud and not very good rock music. Finally the canned noise shut up and we got live bagpipers, which were much more to my taste (though I was a little croggled at hearing "Muss i Denn" on bagpipes.) The usual speeches (mercifully short) by Pete Weston, Brian Aldiss, Fritz Leiber, Harry Bell, and Bob Shaw. Unimpressive. Then we were released and I headed for the huckster room -- where I spent a large part of the daylight hours of the con from there on. Also explored the fan room, a nice large function room with a bar, places for people hawking fanzines or giving away convention announcement sheets, and the inevitable rock music. Talked at various times to Dave Cobbledick, James White, Joanne Burger, Simone Walsh (and traded fanzines with her), Boyd Raeburn, Peter Roberts, Bob Tucker, Midge Reitan, Terry Hughes, Rob Jackson, Pete and Anita Presford (and their daughter), and Eric Bentcliffe (who is one of the few British fans I know from years back; I was as delighted to see him as if he'd been my brother). Traded insults with Greg Pickersgill; I was somewhat handicapped as he seemed to recall precisely what I'd said about him and his fanzine several years ago, which I certainly didn't. All I could recall was that he'd impressed me as a somewhat immature jackass, and I'm sure he's grown out of that by now; he should be at the very least a mature jackass by this time. Walked back to the Royal Albion in a downpour and had to change clothes -- and shoes -- before going back to the Metropole that evening. Got into a long chat with Marty Helgesen in the hotel lobby. Marion Bradley was heading up to open the SFWA room and invited us -- mostly Juanita -- along, so we went up with Marion, Tanith Lee, Diana Paxson, Steve Goldin, and Kathleen Sky. I didn't stay long but drifted off to other parties. Talked to Bob Tucker and John Miesel. Dave Piper showed up; I gather this was about his first convention, though he's been in fanzine fandom long enough to get a reputation. Met Steve McDonald, Norman Shorroock, and John Branan (who said something about YANDRO having been very important to Australian fandom, which was nice of

himmm though I don't believe a word of it.) Talked to Terry Hughes, Bentcliffe, Pete Presford, Joyce Scrivner and Stan Schmidt. I was wearing my National Rifle Association T-shirt in the hopes of outraging some of the anti-gun British fans; instead the shirt got me into a conversation with Hugh Mascetti, a member of the British NRA. (Not too profitable, since British riflemen must belong to target-shooting clubs and generally take their shooting quite seriously, while I don't shoot in competition, do a fair amount of hunting, and pot targets informally in my back yard. Not enough similarities in background to make for a comfortable party chat.)

At every con, I manage to do something dumb; this one I outdid myself. Not only did I manage to be totally inane when I was talking to Simone Walsh, but when John Brunner came over to shake hands I had to look at his name badge to see who it was. (I put this down to a form of culture shock; I was automatically looking at nametags because I didn't expect to recognize the speaker. But Brunner, of all people; I've not only corresponded with him, but I've met him at a couple of US cons.)

Readers may have noticed that there has been very little in this report about program items. Quite correct; I normally attend very few program items. They're an invention of the devil to keep fans out of the huckster room where they belong. However, as a paid guest I felt the need to actually see something of the formal convention, and besides there were several items on Friday that I wanted to see. I started off with a speech by Peter Dickinson on dragons, which was so fascinating that I bought his book on the subject as soon as I could find one. Not only was the speech funny, but Dickinson had beautiful stage presence which enhanced the delivery. Then there was a panel by Marion Bradley, Anne McCaffrey, A.B. Chandler, and Larry Niven which I listened to -- on series writing, the program book says. (The program book also says the panel came just before Dickinson's speech.) That afternoon there was to be a speech by R.L. Fanthorpe, and since I own some of his variously-pseudonymed Badger books and had heard from Billy Pettit that he is a fascinating person in real life, I went to see it. It was quite possibly the high point of the con program for me (certainly it and the Dickinson speech were the two top items, though I'd hate to say which of the two I liked more). Fanthorpe did not take his writing seriously (nobody else took it seriously, God knows, but sometimes authors have strange ideas about their brainchildren) and gave a perfectly hilarious illustrated talk about what it was like to work for a publisher who expected an author to turn out a novel per week. The title, "How To Write 50 SF Books In 8 Years In Your Spare Time," sums it up. (Spare time because he was attending university at the time, and paying for it by his writings.) Including little items such as his mother was running a secretarial school at the time, so Fanthorpe talked his books into dictaphones and the students were assigned to do transcriptions. And since he didn't have anything to refer to while he invented the later chapters, one book might have two or three different student transcribers, and the publisher never bothered to check for quality (but always checked for wordage, because they were paying by the word), some horrendous errors crept into the books. Not just eyes changing color and that sort of thing -- someone who died in Chapter 4 might be alive and well again by Chapter 9. Lovely talk, all of it; I'd really like to get either a tape or a transcription of it. (Don't need either for Dickinson, since I have his book, FLIGHT OF DRAGONS.)

Somewhere between morning and afternoon programs we bought more groceries; John Miesel came along and added some groceries of his own and we all lunched in our room. Then on the way back to the Metropole we met Freff and walked along with him. I was struck by the fact that he looks much like John Hartford (though I admit, nobody agreed with me).

At this point I was wearing my Bob Tucker T-shirt with a jacket over it; I could if necessary leap into a phone booth, whip off the jacket, and become Captain Smoooth.

Met Manly Wade Wellman in the afternoon; he was giving an autograph party in the huckster's room. Another American I had to go to England to meet.

Tried out the ENGLAND ON \$15 A DAY book again, since one of the restaurants listed in it, Fort's Old Steine, was catty-cornered across the street from the Royal Albion. The book proved right again; good food, quite inexpensive for England. (Small portions, though.) John Miesel came along with us that time.

Then back to the Metropole for the "Meet the Celebrities" party. We found a table and Eric Bentscliffe found us, and when he learned that we hadn't yet been able to locate Ethel Lindsay, he offered to find her for us. While he was looking, the program item started. Brian Aldiss did the introductions and made them one of the most boring spectacles of the con. If I hadn't been waiting for Ethel, I'd have walked out in the middle of one of his alleged jokes. Finally, after the introduction of an incredible number of so-called celebrities (at least a third of whom I'd never heard of), and the ignoring of a few others like Stanley Schmidt, the introductions were over and anyone who wanted to talk to the notables presumably could. Except that at that moment the band broke into extremely loud rock music, making conversation well-nigh impossible. (The program said the band would play after a 2-hour period of intros and conversation, but evidently nobody told the band this.) The reaction of one of the younger British fans to comments on this was that "It's a British tradition and anyone who doesn't like it can leave." Aside from being a bit hard on people who wanted to meet celebrities as the program said they could, and the fact that anyone who does something solely because of tradition is a blithering idiot, none of the British fans we talked to later liked the idea either, but were too polite to say so. I wasn't too polite, though I wasn't quite as outraged as Jerry Pournelle, who stormed out of the room in one of the biggest huffs I've seen in years. Of course, I didn't want to meet the celebrities; I could meet them any time. And I didn't expect anyone to want to meet me. I was just waiting, not too patiently, for Eric to haul Ethel up to the table. Which he did, eventually. Ethel and I shouted at each other for a few minutes before deciding it was a lost cause, exchanging room numbers (and hotels, since neither of us were staying at the Metropole) and leaving.

So I wandered around awhile. Met Jennifer Dye, who was working as a gopher and who seemed to know me. I tried desperately to conceal the fact that I couldn't remember her -- an amusing act, since as far as I have figured out since, I'd never met her before, either in person or via mail. (Which is certainly my loss; she was one of the pleasanter people I met at the con.) Talked to Devra Langsam, Paula Smith, Janet Hunt, Dave Rowe, and met Martin P. Tee, who seems to be a Welsh crony of Mascetti's. Finally met Eileen Aitken; Gary Anderson had told Eileen to be sure and look us up, and told us about her, but finding one person at the con was a problem (as I'd discovered with Ethel). Eileen, Juanita, Beth Friedman, Gregg Palmer, and Marty Helgesen went off to open a filksing. That's Juanita's part of the report, though I might mention that at one point I offered to get drinks for the group and when I came back the entire filksing had disappeared. I looked for it for a couple of hours (eventually downing the drinks myself so they wouldn't go to waste and I wouldn't have to carry them, or at least not in my hands). I finally did find the group, about the time it was breaking up, and we went back to the Royal Albion about 2:00 AM. At this point the general Bank Holiday crowd was appearing in Brighton, and it was very drunk out.

Saturday the 25th opened for me with a very professional de Camp speech on Conan. (Well, actually it opened with breakfast and then a walk to the Metropole, but...) After which I spent more time in the huckster room (my favorite haunt during the day) where I bought some books off Ron Bennett, met his wife, and talked to Bentscliffe and John Foyster, and met Nick Shears, whom I'd corresponded with briefly when he was living in South Africa. Marty Helgesen and I went to hear Tucker's speech, which was -- as expected -- quite funny. Then Juanita and I walked back to the Royal Albion in the rain, as usual. While we were drying off we watched a parade going by underneath our hotel windows. I have no idea what it celebrated, but it included floats from various Brighton activities; Scouting, Lifeguard & Rescue, etc., and various businesses and industries. Several bands, all thumping drums and tramping solemnly by in the rain. The whole thing was about the style -- and quality -- of the opening of the 4-H Fair in Hartford City. Fascinating. I tried a few pictures, which didn't come out too well as the floats were too close under the windows. Saying the hell with the rain, we took a taxi to the Metropole. Went up to the Scandinavian bidding party and on into the SFWA suite (which were in the same general area, to the discomfiture of SFWA; numerous other people also wandered from one party to the other, and neglected the notice that you were supposed to pay for your drinks

at SFWA.)

Someone explained to me that the hotel attitude toward liquor was behind the strange -- to Americans -- party setups. Briefly, you could bring liquor into the hotel for your own party if you paid a "corkage fee," which was the amount of profit the hotel would get on each bottle of liquor if it was sold at the hotel bar. Naturally, this put liquor at parties out of the reach of the average fan group -- and incensed people who were trying to recoup their enormous expenses when party-goers didn't ante up and feed the kitty. So private parties didn't have drinks and most of the action was at the bars.

We talked to Marion, C.J. Cherryh, Karen Anderson, and met Takumi Shibano and his wife. Later, back in the bar, Eric Bentcliffe found Jim Cawthorn for us. (Without Eric, our con would have been much less of a success. I was having no luck finding Ethel Lindsay, though I had met her before and had a vague idea of her appearance; and I had no idea of what Jim looked like and would never have discovered him on my own, though he had been a YANDRO illustrator for years.)

This was masquerade night. I didn't get into the queue for photos because I hate standing in line, and the masquerade was good enough but not exceptional. I did later get to congratulate Kathy Bushman Sanders on winning "Best of Show" (though she should be used to that by now, she's done it often enough at US cons). This time the filksing was more the normal US type, though not normal midwestern singers. The US group (Juanita, Eileen, Beth, Gregg, and Vera Johnson) was mixed with British fans James Campbell, Graham England, Gytha North, Stephen somebody, and the pro group "Alien Dream." This time I stayed for most of the sing, and thoroughly enjoyed myself -- particularly with Campbell's singing, since he not only has a good voice but sang more patriotic Scots ballads than I knew existed.

Sunday morning we visited the Brighton Pavilion; I'll let Juanita handle that. Around noon, we met Dave Kyle and Phil Harbottle as we were coming into the con hotel. My first meeting with Phil, though we once published a long and very dull article by him in YANDRO. Listened to Bob Shaw's humorous speech, and talked briefly with a British couple who were attending their first convention. (Her name was Margaret Thorpe; I never got his. Seemed like people who would be nice to know, but naturally I never saw them again.) We had lunch with Tucker, John Miesel, Devra Langsam, and Dainis Bisenieks, at a little (and not too good) restaurant next to the hotel. Interesting, at least. Ran into Barbi Johnson in the afternoon; first time we'd seen her in years. And Joyce Scrivner presented me with a nametag that Denny Lien had commissioned for me from Rotsler. Suitably gory; I've been wearing it to most cons since then. Talked for some time to Freff, or listened to Freff; he was performing Godzilla Carols and other such examples of Serious Art.

At some point in the afternoon we walked out on the Palace Pier, just to say we'd been. The resemblance to a rather sleazy midwestern carnival out of the 1930s was impressive. I notice the non-violent British go in for shooting galleries -- there were three in this one not too large area -- and a game consisting of moving around remote-controlled toy tanks and slaughtering your fellow players. Have there been any psychological studies on this aspect of British mentality? We had already been somewhat appalled by the Brighton beach, which consists of washed gravel, too soft to walk on and too hard to lie down in. No wonder the British go to Spain -- or Miami -- for their holidays.

I didn't bother going to the Hugo Presentations, having little or no interest in any of the nominees. John Miesel reported the winners to me later. I alternated between the filksing and the bars, talking to various people and once getting into an actual conversation with Elizabeth Pearse.

Monday the 27th was the final day. Bruce Pelz was selling Rotsler nametags in the fan room. He made several suggestions of badges to present to Filthy Pierre, but I didn't buy any; I'm not around Pierre enough to gratuitously insult him, at least as long as he can be ignored. I did buy one for Eric Bentcliffe; I hope he eventually got it, since I had to leave it with Phil Rogers. (Eric, who spent a fair share of the con finding people for us, wasn't to be found himself when I wanted him.)

People were leaving by noon. We had a long conversation in the lobby with James Campbell, Gytha North, and Marty Helgesen, said goodbye to Dave Piper, bought a few last items in the huckster room, and talked to Ron Bennett, and made arrangements to have dinner with Ethel Lindsay and a group.

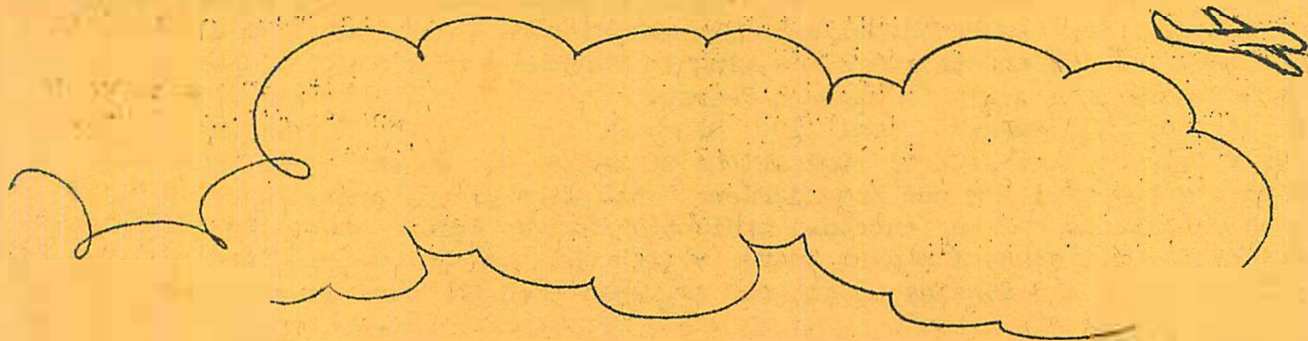
We went back to our hotel for lunch. And antique show was setting up in the lounge; we wandered in and looked around, but found nothing much of interest (though I think I bought an old postcard for Kay Anderson). Back to the Metropole, saying goodbyes to Campbell, "Alien Dream," and Freff. Jim Cawthorn insisted on giving us a painting "in return for YANDRO." I think we got the best of that deal. Ethel introduced us to Ken Bulmer, and we had dinner with Ethel and Doreen Rogers. (See Juanita's story.)

Back to the hotel and desultory conversation at a dead-dog party with Ethel, Doreen, Phil Rogers, James and Peggy White, Peter Mabey, Jerry Elsmore, Henry Leonard, and his wife whose name I never got. One of the better conversations I had during the con, in fact.

Tuesday the 28th, and time to go home. We had figured on an early start to take care of any possible delays; we had to get a cab to the Brighton railroad station, train to Victoria, Tube to Heathrow, and plane home. We counted on waking up early and did; we were up at 4:20AM, and in the hotel lobby by 5:30. Didn't have to call a cab; there was a driver waiting in the lobby, and before we figured out that he was actually waiting for someone else, he had half our luggage in his cab. Well, what the hell; if he didn't care -- and he obviously didn't -- we didn't either. So we got to the station early. Somewhat to our embarrassment, as we were waiting for the train, another American fan showed up, complaining that someone had stolen his cab. Said he'd left a wakeup call with the hotel (a mistake we hadn't made) and that they had called him when the cab arrived and before he could get dressed, packed and down to the lobby, the cab had left with another party. Ah well; he did make it. Naturally, since we'd left ourselves plenty of time, we got to Heathrow at 9:00 AM to find that checking-in time for our flight began at 10:30. Visited the duty-free shops, but even there the prices seemed higher than we'd pay for similar items at home. Stood around a lot. Finally got checked in and boarded at 11:30. Plane wouldn't take off until 12:30PM, but at least we could sit down in the interim. At 12:30 they announced that the Heathrow fueling system had failed and we couldn't take off until they got to us with tank trucks. So we sat some more. Finally got off at 2:55, after we'd been on the plane for 3 1/2 hours. (Tank trucks never did get to us; they got the automatic fueling system fixed, instead.)

Had some nice views of Greenland on the way over and arrived at Chicago at 5:00PM local time (11:00PM London time). Due to the delay, TWA was eager to assist passengers. Normally we'd have had to carry our luggage to the American terminal for the flight to Indianapolis, but TWA was happy to do it for us, to keep us from missing our connection. (Since we had scheduled a 5-hour layover, we had plenty of time, but we didn't tell them.) Got to Indianapolis after being up over 24 hours, and I was ready to head home. However, the crowning blow: the Pinto wouldn't start. We grumpily (on my part, anyway) went to bed on Miesels' couch.

We got the car fixed the next day and got home about 3:00 PM Wednesday. Spent the rest of that day resting. I worked Thursday, and we left for Nasfic in Louisville Thursday night. But that's another convention.



A FEW GENERAL REFLECTIONS

(That I didn't find a place for in the narrative):

It was rather hard to find purely British food, even in a grocery. The apples were either Granny Smith variety from South Africa or Golden Delicious from France. (I opted for the Granny Smiths, giving rise to several mutters from Dave Piper about bloody rich Americans, since the Delicious were cheaper.) I was interested to note recently in our local newspaper an item about the new variety of apple, the Granny Smith, which was becoming so successful in the U.S. Fish seemed to be from the Scandinavian countries. Butter was from New Zealand. Tea from Ceylon.

The bed-and-breakfast type hotel tends to cut parties short, since the breakfast that's included in the bill is served around 8:00 to 9:00 AM (7:30 to 9:30 AM at the Royal Albion Hotel). Barbarous hours for a fan who has in the US style stayed up until 5:00 AM, but considering the cost of everything, only a very wealthy fan can afford to ignore the prepaid meal. We certainly couldn't.

British coins don't fit into American coin purses.

At some point I visited the philatelists' corner of the Brighton Post Office; it reminded me of a Peter Sellers routine ("That's off, dear."). The British P.O. doesn't seem geared for stamp collectors.

And taxis seem the same the world over. I was amused at the way the fare went up the longer we were in Brighton. Coming from the railroad station to the hotel, the fare was 50p. From the hotel to the station at the end of our stay, it was £1.25. Our first trip via taxi from the Royal Albion to the Metropole (when it was raining) cost 50p. By the end of the holiday it was up to £1.00. (We started taking cabs more by the end of our stay because there were a lot of drunks loose on the streets -- walking and driving, though mostly walking. Late at night, it was annoying.)

[[Addenda by JWC: Unlike Merlyn Court, the Royal Albion was too fashionable to give us a key to the front door. For that, and late fannish arrivals in the early morning, they relied on a porter. However we did get an extra key, which was to insert in a coin-operated "drink dispensing machine". Without the key, available only to paying hotel patrons, the machine wouldn't work, money or not.

And The Lanes, the narrow little warren of old fishing village streets in Brighton, produces some questions. Like how to maneuver past another pedestrian while you're in The Lanes and you both are carrying umbrellas. Answer: very carefully. There are private residences and shops opening directly off these wildly curving, three-foot-wide "streets", too, which leads to wonderment -- how do they get furniture, say, anything bulkier than a chair or longer than a meter stick, in? Maybe they bring in pieces of lumber and assemble it once the smaller fragments are actually turned sideways and inserted through the tiny doors.

The most hilarious part, to me, of R.L. Fanthorpe's speech on how he wrote all those awful books by talking onto dictaphone tapes was that he'd amble along for one tape or two, then realize the deadline was upon him and talk faster and faster -- causing near riots among the secretarial students who had to transcribe them: nobody wanted the later tapes. "Unfair, unfair! Her tape's slower than mine!"]

Overall, it was a lovely trip, and we're eternally grateful to Paula and Steve for originating and handling the Fund, to Dave, Cath, Clare, and Sara Piper for putting up with us for three days, to the contributors for paying the plane fare (the least pleasant and most necessary part of the trip), and to John and Sandra Miesel and Eric Bentcliffe for much appreciated assistance. (And the information books provided by the DeWeeses and Roger Waddington were a big help, too.) From both of us -- thanks.

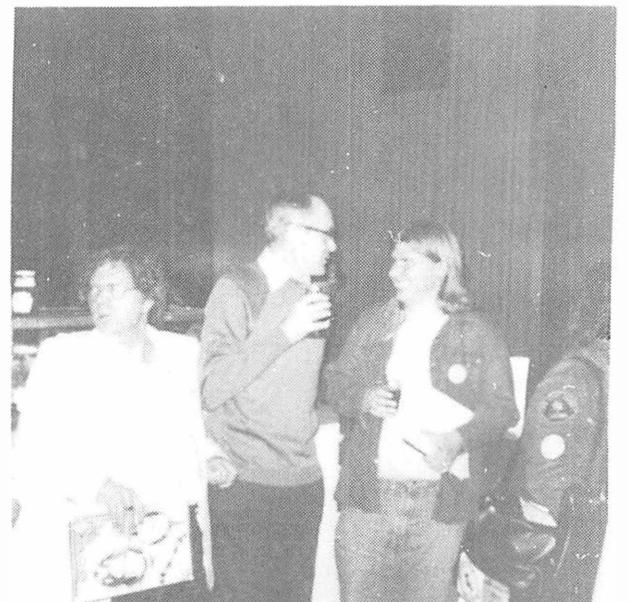
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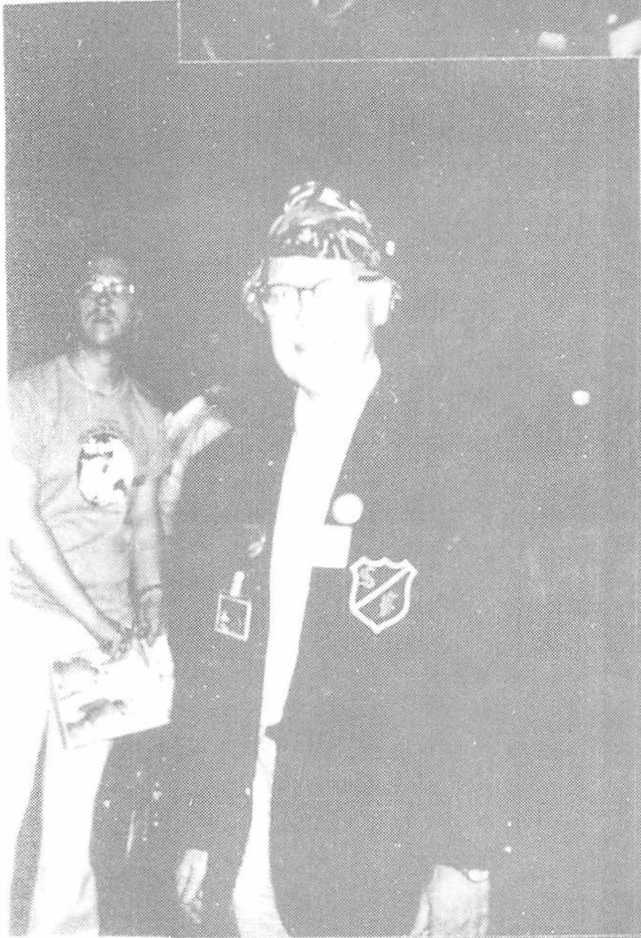
- SHEET 1 = (front cover) Stonehenge
- SHEET 2 = Dave and Cath Piper, with daughters Sara and Clare
Ruislip Station, where most of our tourist trips began.
Tower of London -- White Tower, which is the central keep.
One of the narrower Brighton streets near our hotel.
Our hotel, and Brighton Beach, taken from Palace Pier (arrow
marks our hotel room).
The bidet that entranced Juanita.
- SHEET 3 = Roman tile mosaic at St. Albans museum
Sign in Victoria Station
Stonehenge -- heel stone.
Tower of London -- Traitor's Gate.
- SHEET 4 = Avebury -- the "Barber" stone.
Avebury -- Ditch. Note stones in left bank of ditch, showing
relative size.
Stonehenge.
- SHEET 5 = Robert L. Fanthorpe (center), who loves being photographed.
Bob Shaw, who endures it.
Jamaican fan and pro Steve McDonald.
Swedish fan Roger Sjölander.
Takumi Shibano and wife.
International conference: Boyd Raeburn (Canada), James White (U.K.),
Terry Hughes (U.S.A.).
- SHEET 6 = The big Filksing: Martin Shough of Alien Dream, unknown, Buck
Coulson (standing), unknown (back to camera), Eileen Aitken,
unknown, Gregg Palmer, Vera Johnson, Beth Friedman.
Hal Clement.
First filksing attempts: Gregg Palmer (back to camera), Eileen
Aitken, Juanita Coulson, Beth Friedman (behind Juanita).
Tanith Lee.
- SHEET 7 = Ken Bulmer talking to Wendayne and Forry Ackerman.
Ken Slater of Fantast (Medway) Ltd.
Manly Wade Wellman.
Freff, looking for the ice cubes.
Jim Cawthorn.
Dorzen Rogers and Ethel Lindsay
- SHEET 8 = Bacoover -- Avebury, part of the main circle of stones.

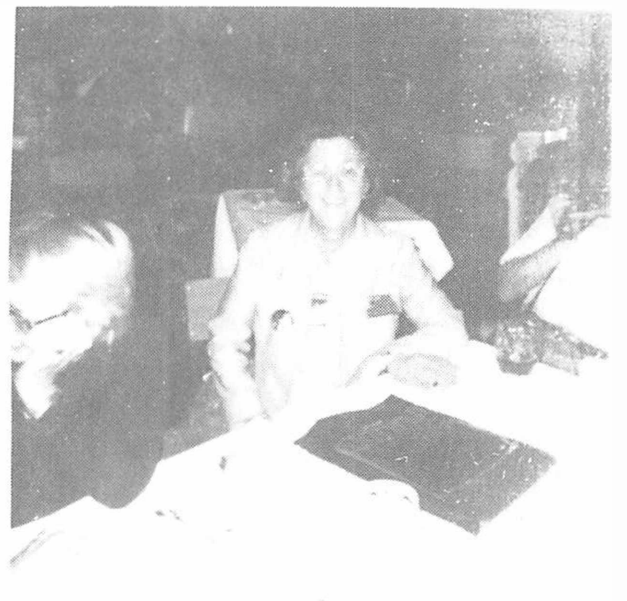
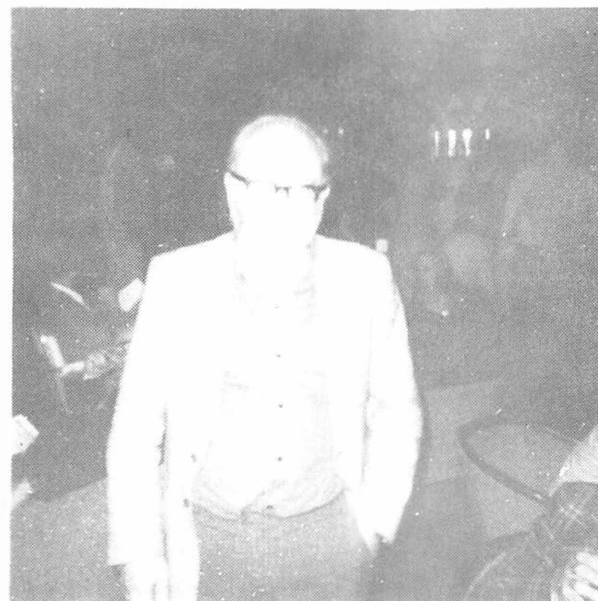












The Yellow Brick Road Goes Transatlantic

by

JWC

Even while our fantastic trip to England and Seacon was taking place, I kept h having this feeling that none of it was real. It seemed like a mixture of dream and wonderful reality. Any moment now, I expect someone to tell me I did dream it all. But until the bubble bursts, I'll gleefully cherish the memories and try to share them, and try, also, not to duplicate too many of the things Buck covers in his reminiscences.

It's all Paula Smith's and Steve Simmons' fault, of course. Blame them. When they first proposed the crazy scheme, I could temporarily cover my shock and confusion by saying the decision depended on Buck, since his vacation time is a lot less flexible than mine. Even though we agreed we would go -- if they got enough funds -- and agreed, too, how sweet they were to cook up this kooky idea, we didn't think it would ever, really happen.

Then, over the months, it dawned on us they were going to pull it off. Paula twisted who knows how many arms. Steve sacrificed -- or promised not to sacrifice -- his precious beard during however many fannish auctions. They grinned and nagged and kept reminding us as the time and the cons crept by that we'd better get moving, because the tickets were indeed heading our way.

So, just in case, I sat down with the friendly travel agent who'd engineered a flawless trip to Minicon and another to the West Coast and back for us. We went over schedules, juggling like mad, trying to get things to fit in around Buck's limited vacation time. There is no easy way to get from where we are to where Seacon was. Flights from Indiana end up at LaGuardia, and I knew white-knuckle-flyer Buck would shudder at that cross-Manhattan chopper hop to Kennedy. (The agent did find a connection from Newark, on a 707, which croggled us both, since neither of us realized any airline was still using those to fly the Atlantic.) Eventually we picked an American Airlines jump to O'Hare and a direct flight from Chicago to Heathrow. The agent chewed on her headset a bit before making the reservations, then opted to give us a very wide window at O'Hare coming back, to allow for snags in Customs. It seemed like a lengthy layover when we were planning it, but it proved to be blessed foresight before the adventure was over.

Paula and Steve kept nagging, so I got busy on other fronts. I read up on traveling abroad. Travel light, it said. That doesn't work if you have a co-editor who wants to tota along piles of Yandros to distribute to British fans while we're in the Isles. (The extra weight didn't put us over the luggage allowance, but it almost put us over our allowance, of heftability.) I bought a collapsible suitcase to cope with possible excess souvenirs, some snap-on shoulder strap anchors, a tote bag with a folding umbrella as an accessory, some "sensible" shoes for all the walking and sight-seeing I might be doing (if the trip did actually take place), and I found a monster-sized, very expandable purse for \$1 at a flea market (the type that's big enough to double as a baby suitcase while still passing itself off as a "handbag"). And I bought a wheelie. World travelers call these "schleppers," but since I'm neither East Coast nor Jewish, that term doesn't fit in my memory banks very well. A handy little device that tilts up on its nose while hauling luggage and trundles along

rapidly on two wheels is a wheelie, right? The model wasn't as heavy duty as it could have been, but it took a beating and survived and paid for itself dozens of times over. Plus it would fold up and slip into the carry-on tote, a process which left numerous other passengers looking on enviously, I noted.

I dithered over what clothes to pack. August, yes. But it's Britain, not the Midwest. Yes, but there's the Gulf Stream. The smartest decision I made was to take a warm, bulky sweater. The dumbest was to wear those "sensible" shoes. The second smartest was to also take some comfortable, well-broken-in sandals. Buck's smartest was to take his Aussie campaign hat, but read his section for details on that.

And finally, incredibly, it all came together. Paula and Steve, smirking with a "we told you so" air, gave us the check and wished us bon voyage. And there we were at Weir Cook (otherwise known as Indianapolis International Airport), waving good-bye to Sandra Miesel (one more generous help-along friend and a free lift to the airport), turning our heavy luggage over to the skycap, going through security, checking in at the AA lounge for seats in non-smoking. The trip that couldn't be happening was happening. The dream was on, and I was wide awake.

Buck was glowering unhappily at a DC10 parked outside the lounge window. By the time we were settling in our seats, other passengers were contributing graveyard humor, wondering if we should offer to loan the crew rubber bands to tie the engines onto their mounts securely. But before I could develop any nerves about the bird we were riding, I was paged and asked to go back to the boarding tunnel access. We're minutes away from the tunnel retracting and leaving port time, and I figure I'm going to turn into a pumpkin before I ever get to be Cinderella. What now? What it was was my camera. During the Chinese fire drill at the security station, I'd forgotten to retrieve my camera after having the attendants hand-check it rather than put it through the X-ray machines. Luckily, my ID is taped on the camera, and somehow, with computers, I assume, AA reunited me and the Minolta before we took off. I felt very sheepish, but also elated. It was an auspicious launch omen, as if fate were promising that no matter how I goofed up, a guardian angel was going to straighten matters out.

At least most of the time.

DC10s are remarkably quiet, once they're aloft. Of course, they'd be even quieter without engines, I suppose. However. We wondered why AA used such a big plane for the puddlejump from Nap to O'Hare. The flight was destined, eventually, for Phoenix, but not on that plane; there was an announcement that passengers going on the rest of the way would have to deplane and board another at Chicago. That didn't concern us, though. We were going in another direction, and somewhat further.

There was time to kill at O'Hare, enough to check through the heavy luggage and stack the small carry-on stuff on the wheelie and go off exploring and shopping and generally gear up, psychologically, for the long haul. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was in the initial stages of a bad case of the stupids. We walked, a lot, at O'Hare. But no problem. The wheelie worked fine. We ran all our errands, got to the TWA lounge with time to spare. All aboard a big beautiful 747 and up, and away, flying into the terminator, heading for Great Britain.

The 747 crews on both our flights seemed to be the creme de la creme of TWA. It's amazing that a craft that immense can bank and climb so smoothly. Superb piloting.

Since we had no interest in the in-flight movie (SAME TIME NEXT YEAR) and wanted space to stretch, I'd asked for seats by the bulkhead. But the last of those were taken and we got the fairly roomy two-seater space just behind that one instead. For the sake of the boy in the seat ahead, I'm glad he did get that legroom; he must have been about 6'5" and had to get up and work the kinks out regularly, reaching the ceiling with no difficulty at all. He'd have been in agony, folded up into a regulation close-quarters seat. We were near the heads, which gave opportunity for a lot of people-watching, one of my favorite sports. And I noticed that the in-flight films-- visible edge-on in our cabin and at the far front of the next cabin forward as well -- weren't quite in synch. Plus if you looked back at the projector you could see the image reversed, but not upside down, which I found interesting.

I don't sleep well while I'm sitting up, and I don't sleep on planes, period. Al-

though I like to fly, I have an atavistic sense that I'm Needed ~~for~~ ~~for~~ to provide juju to make sure everything keeps working. (Maybe by flapping my arms in a crisis.) So I stayed awake throughout the flight, keyed up, now and then reading or working cryptograms or crosswords, people-watching, etc. And the attack of stupids went into high gear. I left the "sensible" oxfords on my feet. I knew better. My only excuse is that I was too busy anticipating what lay ahead and sent my brain out to lunch. By the time it dawned on me that things were pooling up, painfully, downstairs, the damage was done. I ended up with very sore big toes, slowly turning purple, for the duration of the vacation. Next time, if there ever is one, I'll paste a reminder on my forehead so everyone can prevent my being such a dummy about that again.

We'd ordered the diabetic meals for that flight, which was a mistake. There's nothing wrong with the food, but I fear TWA's nutritionist has a strange idea of what constitutes a diabetic meal. That one had three times as much protein as it should have and less than half the carbohydrate exchanges required.

The other blink-maker in the refreshments happened about 2/3rds of the way over The Pond. I presume we had, in TWA's terms, moved into England's sphere of influence. When the attendant came around spotting still-awake types and asking if anyone wanted anything, I ordered a Tab. The reading light was off, so I wasn't aware until I took a sip of the thing that there was something in it. No, not liquor, not without my paying for it, you bet. I switched on the light and discovered a sliver of dead lime bobbing around in the little plastic glass. Perhaps this is TWA's sly technique to prepare the unwary Amurrican for the British custom of inserting pieces of citrus in liquids which do not blend with them, not to Amurrican taste buds. I can assure you, Tab and lime slices don't go together at all well. Even after I'd fished out the green corpse, the flavor lingered. Gak.

Daylight. The service manager announced that we were coming in over Wales. We rubbernecked, enjoying the neat little farm areas and patches of fluffy clouds, and planes. Lots of planes. Heathrow has casual and/or cocky flight controllers. They don't maintain nearly the separation of air space we're used to on domestic flights. Nervous making. The scenery below, as we headed for London, alternated between charming rustic and industrial grimy. And we made progress so fast. Our first proof of what a tiny island this is. After a while, the scenery started looking very familiar. Exceedingly so. Turn. Turn again. Again. Circling. Around and around. Obviously we're in a holding pattern. Once more I began to wonder if the dream were being cancelled and we weren't going to get there after all.

But we did. And very smooth landing it was, too. We are here! We let the thundering herd exit first, since we'd arrived a bit early and figured Cath Piper wouldn't be at the terminal yet to meet us. Plus we had Customs to go through. At both Heathrow and O'Hare, as you arrive, you walk through some of the least attractive parts of the airports. Utter grunge. However, as we later found out, at both terminals, as you're leaving, everything is clean and brightly painted and the walls are lined with cheery posters inviting you to enjoy your stay. It does not compute, to put it mildly.

No problems at Customs. Probably we looked too hickish to be smugglers, and already Buck's Aussie hat was getting fond stares.

I got to people-watch some more -- and there are a lot of people to watch at Heathrow, indeed -- while Buck went through a ships-that-pass-in-the-day routine trying to make connections with Cath Piper and the girls. When we finally were all together, Cath suggested possible methods for getting out to their house in Ruislip, making the bus sound slow and dreary and a taxi quick and neat. We thought, when we snapped at the latter, that we would be paying. We weren't. Cath wouldn't let us. It was but the first of an incredible number of kindnesses and generosityes the Pipers would be showing us. If there is an international award for fine hospitality in fandom, the Pipers win it. No contest.

Outside the house on Cranley Drive, there was an amusing welcoming poster, and another welcoming runner upstairs on the bed, both hand-drawn by Dave and Clare and Sara. (Not only did Dave and Cath open their house to two people they'd never met, but they insisted, to our chagrin, on turning over their own bedroom for our use. They kept saying they'd just bought this fold-out couch and wanted to try out its sleeping



qualities. But we knew that it was all a sham. They're incomparable hosts, despite all Dave's carrying on about what a pair of pests we were and when were we going to leave, hmm?)

Cranley Drive and the Piper house are lovely. The entire neighborhood is a picture book illustration come to life. I kept thinking of the houses as "cottages," though they aren't. (When you live in a two-storey behemoth of a Midwestern farmhouse, British single-family dwellings do seem cute and cottage-ish.) Most of the houses had oriel windows facing the sidewalk and many were decorated with pebble dash. Nearly all were colorfully painted. The streets were narrow, gently curving, and very clean. Round post boxes -- just

like in British movies! -- stood on the kerb. Beautiful flower beds were everywhere. There was a special tight-little-island quality to those flower beds, too. The blooms were gorgeous and meticulously cared-for, but quite hemmed in. I got the impression that if a bloom dared to escape outside the brick or flagstone border, it would be beaten to death with a hoe as an example warning the others not to rebel. I took lots of pictures for my mother and other flower-lovers back home, and lots for myself to remember lovely Ruislip by. Later on, we'd come across parts of London that weren't quite so attractive. Ruislip was very much a high point, and splendid place to begin. Cath and Dave and the girls made it all go so comfortable, removing our remaining uncertainties at being strangers in a strange land.

It was morning in England, when we got to the Pipers', so we relaxed in the backyard garden, admiring the flowers and the girls' pet turtle, sipping cold Tab (and no lime, hallelujah!). Later we took a leisurely stroll down to some local shops. By now I'd unpacked my sandals and was giving my poor feet a rest from those "sensible" shoes. I admired guitars at a music shop while Buck checked over the tapes, and we soaked up the movie set come-to-life atmosphere of the little shopping area. I had my first encounter, at a greengrocer's, with the British custom of not providing bags for your purchases. For a small amount, that's no trouble; I have a string bag to carry groceries in, and I usually took my commodious tote along, too. Still, it was a noticeable cultural difference. I've lived in places where a grocery was within easy, daily walking distance. But like a lot of Americans, I now live a 16-mile round trip from the nearest food supply. I can either waste gas running back and forth every day, or I can make a once-a-week trip -- and what I buy then won't fit in a string bag, or twenty of them. Different strokes on different sides of the ocean. Trying to explain distances -- "You drove all the way out to Stonehenge?!" (about as far, for us, as to Indianapolis and back) -- and non-existent long-range public transport in the US doesn't seem possible. We knew, intellectually, how small England was. Emotionally, it takes adjustment. I suspect the reverse is true, and British advice on how Americans could solve their "petrol" problem by relying more on public transport seems to prove it.

That first night, we wallowed in luxury, laid-back, gobbling Cath's terrific cooking. Thanks to her, we thought, for a while, that all those horror stories about British food were foul calumnies. The food at Chez Piper, along with everything else, is great. Elsewhere in Blighty, though...the verdict varied, widely. It's a pity Cath's expertise isn't in use throughout the island.

Evenings were homey. Talking fan stuff with Dave, plotting itineraries for the next day's tourism with Cath, helping the girls identify stamps, puzzling over British sit-coms and sports programs. (British sports programmers are sadists. Some TV nets were on strike and so was the Times, so when Dave was watching a tape of a football that had been played earlier one day, he didn't know who'd won, though the announcers did...and wouldn't tell.) Having Pipers' to come home to after a hard day's

touristing was the best of all possible worlds for two innocents abroad.

Our sightseeing time was severely rationed. There was an urge, once we'd been handed the gift of a lifetime like that, to rush around and try to see Everything. But we knew that was impossible, even if we'd been twenty years younger and had weeks to play with. So we picked a few sites from the top of our list and made wistful plans that someday, maybe, we could come back and take in a few more.

The persistent threat of rain convinced us to delay, for the time being, our most-wanted jaunt out to Stonehenge and Avebury. (Eventually, we learned that British "rain," with rare exceptions, amounts to what hoosiers call a drizzle or a shower, little more than a nuisance that messes up your glasses and camera lens. We only went through one classic US Midwestern style duck-drowner, and that was after we'd arrived in Brighton. But when we were in Ruislip, the sky looked threatening, so we trimmed plans to fit it.) So Friday it was off to St. Albans, noted by Geoffrey of Monmouth, famous for Roman ruins and medieval and Tudor history.

Clare and Sara escorted us to the Tube station, to show us the way down the nice brick-walled public footpath and up and over the bridge and down again into the station proper. I took more pictures of exotic flora along the way, juggling my umbrella and camera. Along the way, too, I got to admire the gall of a sleek black and white cat working a con game on the soft-hearted local animal lovers; he'd convinced Sara and Clare he was a starving waif, to the extent they brought him saucers of milk, which really just provided a snack in between assorted field mice and squirrels, since he was fattening up nicely off the game along the railroad right-of-way. Outrageous faker.

The Ruislip station reminded me of train stations in Mid-American towns, back when the trains actually ran in the US. The interior was dim, a little dusty, and very utilitarian, accommodating little more than a ticket booth, a vendor's stand for gum, tissues, newspapers, etc., and a few benches. We didn't get a chance to look the place over, because the train rolled in right on time.

There's no way an American can compliment the British enough on the London transport system and British Rail. British fans shrugged off the praise and complained that operations were very shoddy compared to what they used to be. In which case the Tube must have formerly resembled a matter transmitter. It was simply marvelous. Seating was more than adequate. Cars were spic 'n span compared to the last American railcar I rode. Each car contained several route maps, clearly marked, in case you'd lost your own pocket version of the route. You could figure out exactly where you were with ease, where to get off, where to change to another line. And the names of the lines themselves reeked of romance! Picadilly. Northern Bakerloo. Jubilee. And the station names! Straight out of Heyer and Sherlock Holmes and Victorian and Edwardian novels. Great! Sadly, the wonderful system just wouldn't work in the US, not with the distances involved. But for a tidy island, it's splendid, and it made it possible for us to see so much more than we expected to.

To get to St. Albans we had to transfer to British Rail at St. Pancras, where there was a short delay. British passengers were quite put out about it. But from all indications it was the kind of problem that would have disabled Amtrak for a week, not less than an hour. The brief wait gave us a chance to explore a W.H. Smith store and grab a snack -- our first taste of Cornish pasty. Interesting, but not a patch on Cath's cooking. Then the PA said the delay was over, and, amid grumbles from other passengers of "it's about time," we set off north.

This gave us an insight into what fan Ron Bennett had mentioned years ago during his TART trip to the US -- that parts of



the Midwestern US reminded him very much of British countryside. Both are quite lush and green, even in August, very brushy, lots of trees, low rolling hills, profusions of weeds and wildflowers growing in the hedgerows and railroad embankments. What was noticeably different was the style of farming out in that open country. No farmsteads at all. No country lanes or private gates or rural mailboxes. European, centuries-old style farming, and exotic to our eyes.

St. Albans, too, was intriguing, a fascinating combination of old and new. The train station area and the goods in the shops were modern, but the town itself is older than even Amerind Indian mound cultures. Friday seemed to be the main shopping day for St. Albans and the place was jammed. The effect was contemporary urban chaos in the middle of a medieval city. The streets are twisting, incredibly narrow, high kerbed, surveyed by a wandering cow, apparently, and a bunch of these crooked lanes -- thronged with people and little British cars and trucks -- all met in St. Albans' "square," in front of a stone-faced old church. You know you're no longer in the U.S. when...

We followed the maps past the shopping core to the old Abbey. Unfortunately that was under repair, roof-tree-high in scaffolding and workmen and signs warning tourists to watch out for falling paintbuckets. So we just admired the exterior and I took some photos of the ancient gravestones in the cemetery adjacent to the churchyard. Then it was through the archway into the old school -- more history in the flesh! er...the stone. Down the hill to a lovely miniature lake and on up into the park surrounding the Roman wall of Verulamium. It kept drizzling, off and on. Up with the umbrella. Down with the umbrella. On with the lens cap. Off with the lens cap. But I did manage to get some pictures of the wall and the remains of the gate to Watling Street. The park area is, oddly (except for the Roman wall, of course), very Midwestern US in appearance -- lots of tall, thickly leafed trees, what sounded like jays shrieking in the underbrush, air very humid, though cool. Reminded us of taking a hike in an Indiana park in April, not August. Gulf Stream or not, those higher degrees of latitude do make a difference.

We followed the path along the wall and past the lake, watching water birds cadging handouts from other tourists, and went to the museum. For a bit, we thought we'd get in free. We and a Japanese tourist waited in the foyer, and when nobody came out to sell admission we shrugged and started inside. At that point an attendant erupted from a hidden office, demanding ten pence apiece.

The museum was quite interesting to us. We certainly don't get Roman mosaics and Roman British coin mint artifacts around the archaeo digs in our neck of the globe. After we'd toured the exhibits Buck wanted to buy some postcards and replica coins at the attendant's counter. (He was present, now, at least, not hiding.) While I was browsing through some booklets about the dig, I heard the attendant telling Buck airily, "Oh, yes, sir, we've got two kinds of replica coins -- the Emperor Nero and the Emperor Demetrius." Now admittedly Roman history isn't my strong point, but ...Demetrius? And his gladiators, no doubt. Sounded like a rock group. The coin was a replica of a coin from the reign of Domitian, naturally. Somehow I don't think that attendant was too up on the museum and the era he was fronting for.

My feet, helped by the open-toed sandals, had held up fairly well through all the walking. In the U.S., I consider myself a pretty good foot-user, willing to walk when some other fans are wilting and wanting to ride. But in England I'm a novice, particularly when my feet are paying the price for my in-flight stupidity. It was nice to get back to the Pipers', sit around in slippers, look up the waterfowl we'd seen that day and find out what they were, and plot where we were going the next day.

The Tower. Buck claimed he wasn't much interested in London scenery, except for book stores, and he was going along on these jaunts to be companionable. However, I was pretty sure he was going to like The Tower. I was sure I was going to like it, too, and I certainly did. The Tube makes arriving there spectacular. The stop is Tower Hill, and it definitely is. As you come to the top of the stairs, there's the Tower, right across the street from you, in all its stony magnificence. We had to dodge some sewer construction and cross with the light, and there we were.

Time factor decreed we had to take a break before doing the tour in order to feed Buck's diabetic habit. So we went to the restaurant and souvenir plaza next to the Tower. The souvenirs were, sad to say, rip-off specials. There are good souve-

nirs to be found in England, but just as you'd do around an American tourist-trap, you have to hunt for them. Government signs advertised the eatery as a cafeteria, but it was an ordinary restaurant. The waitress, though, was extraordinary. She had to be hostess, waitress, do her own busing, and probably part of the cooking for as many as twenty tables. Understandably, she was short tempered and taking no guff. To handle the heavy flow of customers, she was insisting people double up, and wasn't shy about chering out anyone who didn't cooperate. She was awesome, and a marvel. Pity the food wasn't up to her abilities. The sausage looked like bratwurst, but it didn't taste like it; one of the three was inedible, in fact. The onions were greasy and the potato mash was, mercifully, tasteless. Buck said his fish and chips were eh. Later on he found out even those were a very inferior grade of what Britain can do.

A stop at the comfort station was in order before we went through the Tower security cordon. In the Ladies' I became an eyewitness at a happening. To begin with, English public Johns have full-length doors, which is new and exotic to Midwestern visitors. (I wonder what happens when, as must inevitably occur, a kiddie locks herself in? In the US, you tell the kid to crawl out under the door. Not in Blighty.) And British public-place toilet paper is not to be believed, or used, not more than once if you value your anatomy. I admired British fortitude, if they use that stuff regularly. I made sure, after one such adventure, to always have lots of kleenex with me when venturing into those necessities.

The Tower is a popular tourist mecca, of course, and tour buses were disgorging armies of British and foreign sightseers. And most of them had the same idea we had, take care of business before tackling the serious matter of seeing the Tower. In charge of the Ladies' madhouse is a Cockney matron. She's big and brawny and redheaded and addresses everyone, baby or beldame, as "Luv." And despite prominent signs announcing this is a public john and no gratuity is required, she's got her hand out. She's running around, checking the stalls for cleanliness or bombs before letting anyone in, forcibly ejecting a poor German woman from a stall reserved for children (I sympathized with the German, since nowhere on the sign did it say "kinder" and the woman obviously spoke no English). And then a few busloads of teachers and emotionally disturbed girls arrived, and things disintegrated. The matron finally threw up her hands and told us to go ahead and use the stalls without her approval, get blown up, see if she cared. Instead she concentrated on her true love -- waylaying everyone and browbeating them into washing their hands, with stern lectures on sanitation. It was absolutely hilarious -- at least if you weren't in a desperate hurry, it was.

After that experience, I thought the Tower might be an anti-climax, but it wasn't. We got our usual reaction of bemused startlement at the security check; Buck carries apples in his camera case (very few restaurants provide unsugared fruit, we've discovered from years of trying to find same), which isn't the normal thing they find in a camera case, but isn't grenades or plastique, either.

The first thing we came to, after entering the Tower, was Traitor's Gate. Elizabeth Tudor, sent to the Tower by her sister, afraid she'll never leave there alive, sitting down on the watergate steps, in the rain, until she's coaxed inside by the warders. Ann Boleyn, knowing she'll never leave the Tower alive, arriving by Traitor's Gate. And all the other famous historical figures, fortunate and otherwise, who came through this portal. And I'm standing here, taking photos of it!

The arrow slits and battlements and all were starting to interest Buck, and by the time we got to the cannon and the Fusiliers' museum and headed for the super armory that is the White Tower, he was sold. In this case, playing escort turned out to be a lot of fun, as I'd known it would. ("You'll like it, trust me...") I enjoyed those, too, plus the historical ambience of standing near the spot where the block was. The block is gone, either rotted or removed to frustrate vandals. But placards explain how many people met their fate on that bloody spot, names to write history with.

(Buck picked up some postcards from the Tower and later on Bob and Anne Passovoy recounted that when a card arrived for them Hawkeye saw the photo of the axe and the headsman's block and said, "Oh, we got a card from Buck," before ever reading the message on the other side. My husband, the stereotype.)

The Tower was cheap to get into, too, compared to most British prices. There was a tendency to see a price and mentally figure it up in American terms and think "Not so bad." Belatedly, you'd realize you needed to double the amount and then some to calculate what you were really paying.

After touring the fortress we walked along the Tower moat and the Thames. The water's been dammed up -- terrorists are a constant threat -- and it's no longer possible to take a punt right up to Traitor's Gate. But we still could get the historical ambiance strongly. We took pictures of the bridge and river traffic and admired a modern cruise ship across the way, moored to what we thought was a destroyer. But Dave Piper told us the military ship was a mothballed battle cruiser and open for tours. If we'd known about it in time, we might have gone over the bridge, but probably not. Time was the most precious, and lacking, commodity we had.

Next day we took British Rail to Hampton Court, another Tudor relic. Except for the Guards' room, with its gorgeous wall displays of weaponry, I think Buck was bored with that one. I was a trifle disappointed myself, since so much of the feeling of Henry and Ann Boleyn and Elizabeth I is gone, swept away in the Reformation. The furnishings nearly all date from the Restoration. And this was the one tourist attraction we encountered where some guards forbade taking pictures. The men on duty were casual and just said "don't let us see you taking pictures, please, and we'll look the other way." (Difficult to ignore, with Buck's noisy polaroid, but they managed all the same.) One woman guard, however, was quite officious and I was afraid she was going to confiscate my film, for a moment. There are no signs posted, incidentally, warning you not to take pictures, so it was all a bit strange. Plus the things I wanted to photograph aren't available in the slides or souvenir books sold by the government shop at Hampton Court. As far as I can tell, the ruling is just to be obnoxious to visitors.

But the grape arbor and the fantastic gardens and the tennis court and the Lion Gate are still there, anyway, genuine leftovers from the Tudor era. (I must say it's disconcerting to see trucks -- pardon me, articulated lorries -- rumbling past the busy modern street just beyond the historic Lion Gate, though.)

We ate lunch at the Hampton Court cafeteria. More not-up-to-Cath's-standards and overpriced food. And one of the ubiquitous fruit bees put in an appearance as soon as Buck opened his camera case to take out an apple. Every place he did that, even at Avebury, one of these bees -- where there were no other insects at all -- would show up all bright-eyed and bushy tailed, volunteering to act as a fruit inspector at Britain's port of entry.

I'd rather hoped to take the boat ride down the Thames to Greenwich, retracing one of Elizabeth's routes. But time and the threatening weather once again intervened. Next time, maybe.

The Thames is a mild disappointment, on an emotional level. Intellectually, for all one's reading, you know it's not the Mississippi for impressiveness. Yet I subconsciously expected it to be. At Hampton Court it's no bigger than White River at Muncie or Anderson, Indiana, and, psychologically, I wanted it to be much wider and deeper. Ah well.

That was the evening we and the Pipers all went out to a nice Ruislip restaurant for supper. And that cooking did compare with Cath's. Very nice establishment. I was glad my mother had sometimes referred to avocados as "alligator pears," because that was the only non-seafood offering on the appetizers, and I would have been stuck without that info. Like the rest of the meal, the avocado was small but tasty, a feast for the eyes as well as the palate.

Buck detailed the momentary panic when we thought we were going to run short of cash to pay the tab. But as it turned out, we would have had enough anyway, for an unexpected reason. We'd all stuffed ourselves and were sitting chatting, waiting for desserts while the girls chased a last few french fries around their plates. That's when Sara lifted a french fry and announced in tones of delighted discovery, "Oh, look, Mum, a beetle!" Not John or Ringo. A tiny moribund, but quite neatly so, bug.

Cath was quite annoyed. She's worked in fancy food preparation and thought this was Not The Thing at an alleged top local restaurant. The waitress apologized abject-

ly and whisked the offending plate away. (Sara was done with it, anyway, even before having made her find.) More members of the staff came and apologized, all wondering how such a terrible thing could have happened and insisting the food was freshly prepared. Privately, we and the Pipers agreed the poor beetle did, indeed, look freshly dead and not icky at all. And obviously Sara wasn't at all upset by the incident, which moved it from the category of outrage to amusing nuisance. When Dave started saying he thought this sort of thing demanded a reduction in the tab, Sara got worried, fearing that'd mean she wouldn't get any dessert. Once we'd promised her we wouldn't raise a howl until after dessert, she was fine. Nothing wrong with her appetite at all. When Dave raised the point, the management cooperated nicely, and we would have had some cash to spare even so.

It was the sort of thing that could have turned out badly. But thanks to Sara's aplomb and the civilized way everyone behaved, it worked out very well. The only bad part of that evening was that it was the last one we could spend with the Pipers. Along about 11PM the hire-car Cath had called zipped us away to Earl's Court, deeper into London, and we began a new stage of the once-in-a-lifetime trip.

By some standards, Merlyn Court Hotel might have been seedy and rundown. When we mentioned the rate we paid there, British fans instantly asked, anxiously, if the place had been clean. It was fine. We only wanted a place to crash and stash luggage for a couple of days, and it served admirably.

Monday, we set off on separate courses. I had some errands to run in other parts of London -- easy, thanks to the Tube -- and Buck wanted to bookstore crawl with John Miesel. That afternoon, I went shopping in Earl's Court. It's a collegiate, very cosmopolitan-flavored area, and there were numerous handy shops and restaurants within a few blocks of our hotel. I took my wheelee and my tote and stringbag and went hunting. By now we'd decided we were going to do a lot of brownbagging in our room, in London and at Brighton, thanks to the prices. (And it wasn't just us. Even the deCamps said they were going the same route and only eating out, at eyebrow raising British prices, on rare occasions.) I found another W.H.Smith store, with paperbacks and nice souvenir stuff and maps, which we were going to need. There was a camera store where I could replace a sick Minolta battery. And there were greengrocer's and baby supermarkets and bakeries galore. I also found a Chinese restaurant that offered carryouts and had my supper plans for the next couple of days all set. Not bad sweet and sour pork, though this business of six waiters for a restaurant the size of my kitchen, and orders that rise from the mysterious depths of a dumb waiter was all bemusing.

One of the purchases I made was a face cloth, since we found out the hard way that British hotels provide towels but no face cloths. I'd brought soap, but I hadn't known I'd need to provide something to apply it with. More cultural differences.

There were others. Earl's Court was a blur of local and foreign languages and dialects, and in one instance, at a bakery, I had to resort to the dumb tourist bit of holding out a handful of coins for the clerk to pick from, because I couldn't understand a word she said. But the British in line ahead of and behind me couldn't understand her, either! British fans told me they sometimes have the same trouble. Apparently those in-grown local dialects can spring up a few miles, or a few blocks, from one another, reducing the Queen's English to uselessness. Tight and complicated little island.

I found out laundromats in England charge about twice what they do in the US. About par, I was learning. And that British bacon should be eaten with a knife and fork (and used instead of salt on your eggs). And I found out about the rude British payphone system. Instead of depositing your money first, you dial and make contact, and then, while your party is brightly saying hello and introducing herself, this incredibly jarring B*R*A*P noise interrupts you and a cold voice commands that you deposit tuppence for however minutes, overriding conversation until you do. The British are obviously used to it. When the brap cuts out, there is your party, patiently beginning to repeat her original greeting. I say it's rude, and startling amid so much other obligatory British courtesy.

Tuesday we rented a car and drove out to Stonehenge and Avebury. Buck describes his reactions to the trip and many of mine are the same. Memories and impressions:



How easy it was to get to Hertz at Heathrow, with the courtesy van right outside the terminal door, and a woman driver who gave us helpful directions as to how to get onto the M3 highway later. Watching a foreign businessman MCP get his come-uppance. He raised a stink while we were waiting on our car, refusing to accept their deal of giving him a better car for the same rate as the out-of-stock one he had reserved. When he pounded the desk and demanded to see the manager, the little brunette trying to cope with him sighed and went back to the office, and this very chic, beautiful, and cool blonde came out to deal with the clod. Destroying his attack. He was geared to talk man-to-man and had no ammo to throw at Miss Gorgeous Efficiency of Heathrow. We

rather wished we could have stayed to watch and see if he accepted the bargain gracefully or went on to really make an ass of himself. But our car was ready, and off we headed to the west country.

Only later, thinking back, did we realize no one had asked if we knew how to drive manual shift. As it happens, we both can. But it could have been a shock for a US fan who didn't, being handed that car. Nice car. One of the most comfortable I've ridden in for some time. And the highway code book was easy to read, a life-saver in more ways than one. At least one, if Buck had been alone and needed to interpret a particular sign, he probably would have pulled over to check the book -- and the sign meant No Stopping on Roadway. Oddly, right-hand drive bothered me much more than it did Buck. Maybe that's because he's a lefty who was firmly switched as a kid, while I still think upside down and backwards.

Stonehenge is a mixed effect of "Gee, there it is!" and "Is that all there is?" It sits up on its rise, surrounded by open, grassy fields, looking naked and a teensy bit like it's a fake, built there by an amusement park contractor. And you come up on it, from the east, over a hill. There it is, like a staged picture postcard, right in front of you. No scenic turnout. British, being British, feel no frustration and stay neatly on the road, down the hill and into the car park. In the US you'd have wrecks all the way to the bottom of that slope as people tried to rubber-neck and snap pictures while still moving.

Stonehenge is windy and cold, even in August. I was glad I'd worn my sweater. We circumnavigated the roped-off stones, taking pictures from the outer ring, which is as close as you can go, now. It was the first nearly clear day we'd enjoyed in England, and fluffy little clouds scudded across the sun, making an interesting chase of light and shadow over the downs and the megaliths. I was waiting for a break in the light to take some photos when I heard a startling familiar, motorized sound. And out from the inner circle strolled a man in the British equivalent of a Park Dept. uniform -- wielding a weed wacker to trim up the "untidy" grass ringing the monument. I would have loved to have had a zoom lens. Talk about time binding. And talk about carrying neatness to an extreme. They mow the area, and burn off the messy clippings. Ranks up there with eating hamburgers and pizza with knife and fork. The British, they are a fascinating race.

As Buck says, the only way to see Stonehenge and Avebury is in that order. From the moment we pulled into the grassy, unpaved, uncommercialized car park at Avebury, some miles north of the more famous Stonehenge, we knew this was going to be different. Tourists in the handful, not by the busload. An entryway that's a cattle guard gate -- because the trail to the ancient stones at Avebury is a cow path, an in-use one, by both tourists and cows. No trimmed-away grass. No staged-for-the-tourists effect. The village sprawls across the main circle. Fences cut through

avenues of towering stones. Sheep and calves, as well as sightseers, wander amid the megaliths, scratching themselves. You can climb on the stones, pose right beside them, touch them. Happily, we saw no evidence that anyone was defacing them with graffiti. The site is tremendous, and we saw only a small portion of it. We want to go back, spend a day or several, sometime when my feet are in good shape and I've got good shoes -- and then I'll watch, more carefully, where I'm walking!

When we got back to London after that marvelous afternoon at Stonehenge and Avebury, we indeed felt like we were turning into pumpkins after having been at the ball. I'm tempted to make cracks about from the sublime to the ridiculous, since the next day we went down to Brighton...

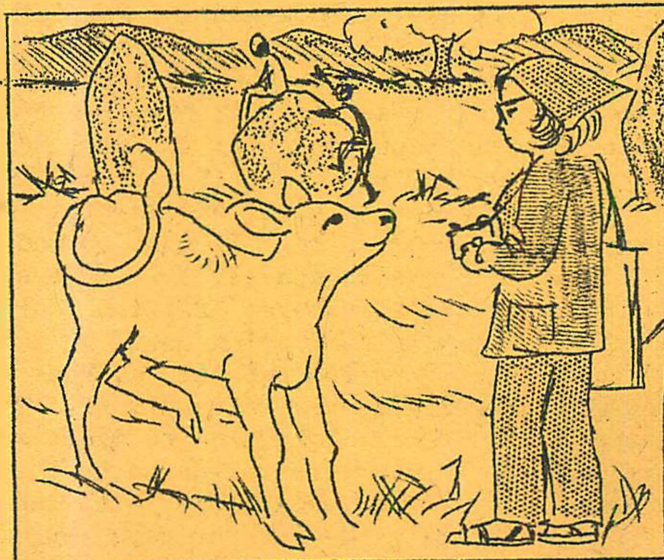
The trip to Brighton was more cultural fun. Spotting the pigeon warning poster in Victoria, and knowing I had to get a photo of that. The fairly crowded conditions on British Rail riding south -- holiday crowds, including one singing drunk. The other passengers could tell, with no difficulty at all, that we were Amurrican tourists, but they were patently embarrassed for all our hickish looks, that we should have to suffer through 90 proof bellowed versions of "Bless 'Em All," etc. He was the first stone-blind drunk we ran into in England, but we were going to see plenty more before the con was over -- and, for a wonder, very few of them were at the con.

I don't know if we lucked out or were being suckered as "rich American tourists" or not, but we got a magnificent room at the Royal Albion. Better view than any from the rooms I was in at the con hotel a few blocks down the street, certainly. A corner room view of the ocean and the cliffs and a ringside seat for parades and the Palace Pier and all. I suspect the room would have been awful in the winter, with all those windows and the wind whipping off the beach. It was cool, in August, but okay. And the appointments were elderly but quite nice. The dining room staff dressed in spiffy black with white aprons and caps. A fancy printed menu. All the tea and refills you wanted, and they served breakfast for two hours.

(I worried that we might be too much of a common touch. But I needn't have. Other Seacon overflowers were at the Royal Albion, too, and some of them were costume freaks. The morning one of them -- trim figure, very blonde -- came down to breakfast wearing a Fredericks of Hollywood jumpsuit converted into barbarian warrior maid shocker, held together, barely with lacings, I knew our JC Penneys and K Mart staid wouldn't rouse any ire at all, henceforth. The Royal Albion staff practically had apoplexy over that performance.)

Bed and breakfast was a problem for me, both at the hotel in Earl's Court and in Brighton. I'm not much of a breakfast eater at all. I'd just as soon skip it and catch brunch at noon. But in England you're paying for breakfast and feel you have to eat it or throw money away. If it were possible to take a room without the provided breakfast, I would. But it came in handy for Buck, who must eat to counteract the morning dose of insulin. And Royal Albion's food was pretty good. At least when we put the tea together ourselves, Buck didn't have trouble getting it black. Elsewhere in England, he raged a running war with waiters who splashed in the cream first and then gawked when he yelped that he didn't want that stuff contaminating it.

Fortunately, we both like tea, though we almost o.d.'d on it in England, since we couldn't obtain cold diet drinks anywhere. There was even an automatic tea, coffee, and instant soup maker in the room at the Royal Albion, though we were so dumb we couldn't make it work and a tolerant lady from the desk came up to show us how to work the gizmo on the walk sock-et. The staff were unfailingly helpful to these innocents abroad, from the desk clerks to the poor porter who'd hoped to



catch a few winks, and shot straight up, woken out of a sound sleep, when we came back from the con hotel in the wee hours and had to knock on the outer door of the Royal Albion in order to get in. (The man had been snoozing on the lobby sofa, and for a bit we thought we'd have to sleep on the kerb, since the lobby looked utterly dark until this startled form erupted out of the nest of chairs by the fireplace.)

One aspect of service fascinated us. I don't know whether it was peculiar to the Royal Albion or the practice throughout England. In the US, at a hotel or motel, chambermaids wheel around a cart containing everything they need. They stop at a room and, unless they've run out of towels or somesuch and have to come back later, they take care of everything in one trip. Not at the Royal Albion. As far as we could figure out, one maid goes the rounds of the floor and makes all the beds. Then she goes around again and empties all the wastebaskets. Around again to clean the bath. Again to replenish the towels. Again to stock the teamaker. And finally, as you're heading out for the con hotel in mid afternoon, she stops you and politely asks if it's okay if she "does" your room now. What's left is vacuuming the rug. To say the least, it strikes Amurricans used to homegrown chambermaids' work routine as highly inefficient. (But then you're paying the tip whether they're efficient or not, under the "service charge" system, so I guess it doesn't matter to them.)

Seacon was a monster con, as all worldcons are any more. It suffered from an increasingly common problem of the breed -- sheer inability to manage all these fans. The Concom had a message and replace-your-badge-if-you-lost-it room and an Operations Center on another level to organize gofers and so forth. But when a con's that size it simply can't be handled adequately by simple blackboard and note-writing. I'm surprised that fandom, with all of its available expertise, hasn't gone to some form of computerized central clearing -- a focal point where messages can be fed in and called up at a terminal by the party you're trying to contact typing in an inquiry. Another terminal with a running display of events, general announcements, etc. Seems like it'd take a huge load off the ConCom. And it might help the all-too-common bit that now inevitably accompanies worldcons -- rarely or never making contact with some of the people you've come thousands of miles to see. Often you only find out you were both at the same con after the con is over and you mention the fact to each other in correspondence, which is disappointing and frustrating.

I met a lot of the same fans Buck mentions, went to many of the same program items, and like him was entranced by Dickinson and Panthorpe. I spent a great deal of time in the art show, naturally; the anticipated mingling of very polished and painfully amateur, plus the eyebrow raiser of the commercial displays over at the other side of the room. I hadn't seen that at a US con since DC in '63, when the art show and hucksters' room had to share one area. Like a number of other fans, I was especially taken by the pseudo fossilized xeno skulls. The prices, considering the craftsmanship, were very reasonable and I wished I could have afforded one of those critter's head bones. Most fans were thinking the same, but even those who could afford them were saying "How would I get it home intact?" The artist's promises that he'd brought them all in safe-pack boxes may have persuaded a few. He mentioned that he'd often had this urge, when driving past La Brea, to toss a properly mottled and seemingly aged-for-aeons skull over the fence into the pits, and imagine what consternation it would cause when the archaeos dug it out. He claimed he hadn't succumbed to the temptation, yet. But if you read of an amazing find out there....

The Metropole con hotel was American-style, which meant the lobby was open all night -- and needud to be. It also seemed to be a handicapped person's nightmare, with forests of stairs and levels. I hope there were hidden elevators and ramps connecting all that, somewhere. British rent-a-fuzz kept asking to see fans' "tickets" or "passes," making some blink until we'd mentally translated that into "badges."

There were very few parties, as Buck noted, and from what we heard a lot of those that were staged were very closed door. That might have been blamed on the British liquor laws. But it might also be caste system. Maybe it was coincidence that some of the fan hucksters were relegated to the mezzanine and the main floor almost entirely given over to book exhibitors, with the pro exhibitors having the best spots. It didn't seem to be a case of you pays your money and first come first served, as at US

cons. Perhaps it's all part of Tradition -- as in Tradition being blamed for the peculiarity of having a Meet the Pros session to be followed by a Chat and Autograph party, save that on the last word of the intros the band, with full amps, launched into rock that forcibly drove most of the pros and their would-be admirers and autograph seekers from the premises.

(I like rock. I've even written fan columns devoted to rock, from my old-fogey viewpoint. I collect rock records. I wouldn't have minded, at all, listening to that band -- though they really shouldn't essay C&W or other excessively American rock, as they revealed their weaknesses most on those forms -- But Not Then. I hung around a great deal longer than most, trying to talk to the deCamps and other fans and pros. I tried to get in the spirit of thing, even though the programme-announced purposes of this item had gone out the doors and air ducts when the band started blaring. I even got up and clog danced with an enthusiastic southern fan who couldn't resist the British-flavored rendition of, I believe, Orange Blossom Special. But after that I gave up. By that time most of the people who'd come there hoping to meet other people for something other than a rock concert had left, too. A pity. The strange custom didn't offend me as it did a great number of the famous professionals and many fans. But it seemed like an unnecessary intrusion of mundania into fandom. When I mentioned this to British fans, they agreed that it was a nuisance but that British ConComs, in their terms, always did this, "Because it's expected as part of the entertainment." I explained that at American cons the fans themselves are considered to be the entertainment -- talking to them, meeting them, partying with them -- it seemed to be a radical concept. Do British ConComs really believe nobody will come if "all" they can do is talk to each other? Must a program item be anesthetized by inappropriate sound to spare fans the need to actually converse with one another? It is a very great puzzlement.)

So, I spent a lot of time in hallways, in the fan room, wincing at the intrusion of rock even there -- in a room supposedly set apart for fannish relaxation and conversation -- a bit of time in the SFWA suite, feeding the kitty so I could drink the tomato juice mixer. (I'm indifferent to liquor. I don't need my inhibitions lowered -- as anyone who's seen me at a filk can testify -- and I don't care for the taste of most of it, so why bear the expense?) A lot of the action was going on in the bar, which was mercifully unrock-musiced or even Muzaked, but was always so jammed getting a place to sit down was a gamble. Plus you were expected to swill it up, of course.

A note about that last. There are tons of jokes about British drinking habits and how Americans can't keep up with them. Well, my background is German-American. I grew up on German-American style beer. I like it. And thanks to body weight I can hold an incredible amount of alcohol with the only side effect being an occasional trip to the Ladies. However....why? German-American style beer is malty and brewed to be drunk cold and have plenty of flavor at that temperature. British beer is brewed differently, and, to my taste buds, is sour and ugh. And it doesn't quench your thirst at all. After two pints of German-American beer, or lager (and I had to fight to keep them from putting limes in the glasses; they were trying to sour up good German-style lager to suit their tastes, I think), the palate is eminently satisfied. Any more and the tongue just can't appreciate it. You might as well be drinking something soft, or water -- if you can find some cool water or ice to put in it. (Lots of luck.) So you see, it isn't that the British are such tremendous two-fisted drinkers. No. What they're really trying to do is quench their thirst, and you simply can't do it on warm beer.

Anyway, the lager went fast and diet drinks -- our normal fare -- were nonexistent. It made for dry talking and exorutiatingly hoarse filksings. But good filksings, once we got rolling. Eileen Aitken, from the Bay Area, and I had heard about each other through mutual friends. But thanks to the blackboard message system, we wasted much time trying to make contact. When we finally did, though, I found Eileen is one of these whirlwind get things done types and we were going to have a genuine filksing or bust. The first couple of nights, Filthy Pierre had monopolized a piano in an area off one of the bar rooms -- nearly getting himself strangled in his electronic harmonica cord, unbeknownst; many of the fans sitting in the bar were Scots,

and to say they took umbrage at Pierre's repeated renditions of "God Save the Queen" is putting it mildly. Since Pierre had that area staked out, Eileen went to ConCom Ops to find out if there was a place where we could hold an alternate Midwestern-style sing. (A recurrent problem even at American cons. Filksingers pay for a membership just like everyone else, but if any group gets ignored and kicked from pillar to post while others have rooms officially designated for their use, it's the filkers. Sigh.) They said a lower hallway off the meeting rooms was empty now. The resonance was fine. We started small but felt with enough music filtering up the stairs to the lobby we'd eventually attract dedicated listeners and other filkers. Instead, hotel security showed up.

In the US, they're square men in square brown suits. In Britain they wear grey. But they're still big and mean-looking. We'd have to move. We were disturbing patrons of the hotel. We stared around this absolutely empty hallway, listened to the babble upstairs in the lobby. Who were we disturbing? The rest of us were picking up, ready to concede defeat. Eileen wouldn't budge, demanding an answer. I thought we were going to end up in the Brighton slammer for the night. But finally Security confessed there was a casino in the Metropole basement, tucked out of sight -- right behind the wall we'd been leaning against. We couldn't hear the high rollers, but apparently they could hear us just fine, and were distracted out of their gambling minds.

Back to Ops. They finally dug up a meeting room that was then occupied by a Regency dance, just ending. By the time we got the blackboard message posted, it was too late to gather anyone for a real sing. So we agreed to meet the following nights, and did. British fans found us and said, in effect, "Oh, this is filksinging! What fun!" and joined in, to everyone's enjoyment. On later nights we had two ringleaders, Eileen and Vera Johnson, who's a veteran of numerous folk festivals. Lots of genuine folk and filk, lots of fine Scots ballads, SCA stuff, original sf material by Indrani and her accompanist, and a very fine time had by all. Buck noted the names, and I must say I was appalled, in retrospect, to realize the fine Scots filker, James Campbell, was one of the bruised-about costumers participating in the Free Amazon skit during the masquerade -- with real edged weapons clanging, and a stage crew that removed the "bodies" by dragging them the length of the runway and down the steps at the end; that marvelous voice, ricocheting his head off an exit stairs. Ouch.

The masquerade was about as varied, with equal highs and lows, as ones at American worldcons. A trifle smaller than ours, overall. Some very good costumes and skits and, unfortunately, some very bad stuff. In America we're inundated with Darth Vader and ST. In Britain Dr. Who is the hangup. I lost track of how many there were. But after the first one, let's say the novelty is gone, just as there is after the fifth Darth Vader or Mr. Spock imitation.

Much of the con blurs, one day into the next. Climbing stairs, listening to a wide variety of accents. Admiring art, looking over hucksters' stock, shushing loud talkers who insisted on clustering in the back of the main room while speeches and panels were going on on stage. Inside the hotel, mundania didn't intrude much, beyond the rock music and the gawking hotel staff.

Outside was a different story. Bank Holiday brought hordes of revelers and mundanes celebrating football matches and just a general excuse to get drunk. (When they're on the streets, steins in hand, at 9AM, you know it's drunk out.) There were walks along the ocean front and the "beach". The Lanes are advertised as the old fishing village, redone. The new fishing village seems to be dwellings lurking under the bridges and walkways along the gravelly shorefront. The place, understandably, reeks of fish. And there are all these British out-of-towners, sitting on the "beach" in their overcoats with their picnic baskets; they paid a fortune to come to Brighton for holiday, and even if it's bitter out there and they're courting pneumonia, they are by god going to Enjoy themselves. There are all the tourist trap stores along the few blocks from the Metropole to the Royal Albion. We got almost too well acquainted with them, walking back and forth every day. And there are the British, out taking in the sights, too. I was particularly fascinated by the babies; they were being wheeled along in their trams, in the rain, and almost completely encased in these little baby snoods -- everything waterproofwrapped except the small, wet, screwed-up

faces -- and all of the tikes looking very much as if they wondered what was so great about rain in the face, fresh air or not. Their parents, I noticed, were huddling beneath umbrellas, but baby got the full benefit of the downpour.

And there was indeed at least one downpour. Happened while we were walking back to our hotel one afternoon, of course. The clouds opened up and liked to washed us out onto the rocks. By the time we got to our room, we squished. Nothing for it but to strip and drape drenched clothing all over the non-damagable furnishings (but we didn't hang laundry out the window, as the hotel in Earl's Court had sternly warned against). The old fashioned steam radiator, the bathtub, the bidet...ah yes, the bidet. In years of reading about the things, I'd never expected to meet one in the, er, porcelain. But there was one in the bath at the Royal Albion. Gave such a continental, if quaint, flavor to the quarters. And it certainly looked odd with a soaking wet cardigan draped across its conveniences to dry.

That was the afternoon we were temporarily trapped while we dried out, and besides the weather was so terrible we didn't want to go anywhere anyway. We watched the parade and some TV -- excessively chauvinistic sports, with the announcer stereotyping each entrant in a dressage contest by nationality: the French rider was dashing but too frne-style, the Italian was impossibly flamboyant, the German was methodical but stodgy, the Dutch rider just slightly more tolerable, the Japanese rider wonderfully controlled but lacking a certain proper British artistry, and the British rider was double crossed by his too-young and ill-trained mount. And a, to us, very interesting documentary on ancient lead mines in upcountry England. It kept raining for quite a while, and at one point I was staring out at the seascape and noticed a couple of pieces of distant flotsam coming in on our side of the Palace Pier. The sky and the sea were rough and angry and dark and the air temperature was about 60 or less. Then one of the pieces of flotsam stood up and tried to hang ten -- in about six inch waves and no real surf at all. The other one stood up and tried it, too. After which they fell off and paddled back out to try to catch a good one. They wore scuba suits -- the only sensible aspect to the whole stunt. I was tempted to call the British version of the coast guard and tell them two nuts were out there trying to commit suicide under the guise of surfing. The British are a hardy -- and weird thinking -- race.

On the one sunny afternoon (it got up into the 70s!) we walked out on Palace Pier. I grew up next to a Midwestern carnival ground, and as far as I could tell the Pier and the tourist trap stores along the Brighton waterfront are part of the same "get yer red hot junk and sleaze right here!" package. The best entertainment was watching a couple of bikini-clad -- one male, one female -- swimmers perched on the rocks alongside the pier. The fully clad British crowd watched, too, in awe. Every so often the man or woman would dive into the obviously frigid water, emerge shrieking and blue, clamber up on the rocks and shudder until circulation returned to normal, then dive off again. As I say, weird.

And the other major non-Con entertainment at Brighton was Prinny's genuine Palace. The grounds were crawling with more fancy flowerbeds and exotic trees; more picture-taking for the people back home. The Palace itself is sterling proof that all Prinny's taste was in his big toe -- the gilded one with the miniature of a dragon painted on it. The decor is an explosion in a Chinese gold-leaf covered dragon factory, crossed with schlock East Indian, Hollywood version. We strolled along the paper runners -- "don't touch the kitsch" -- through the rooms, surrounded by marble and gold and carved dragons. Everywhere. Dripping from the chandeliers and the valances. Crawling along the footstools and carpets. Aghast, we'd exclaim, every so often, "My God, look at that!" then cringe in embarrassment, remembering we were guests in this country and it wasn't polite to make fun of a former ruler's excesses. But then we heard the staid British tourists behind and ahead of us: "Oh, my dear, would you ever look? Did you ever see anything so hideous? Ghastly! Simply awful!" It made us feel much better to find it wasn't just our unsophisticated colonial taste that made the Palace seem so dreadful. The only really admirable objects I saw in the entire monstrosity were some pale jade figurines in Mrs Fitzherbert's rooms; they must have felt woefully out of place amid the gilt.

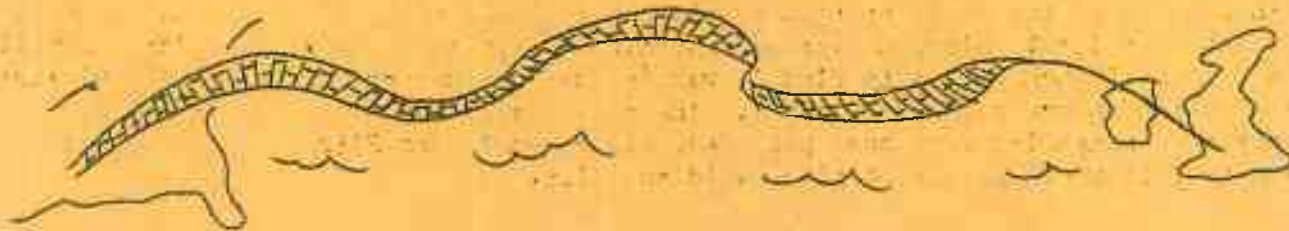
And all too soon, it was coming to an end. Last night. Eating out with Ethel Lindsay and Doreen Rogers. Ethel wanted Buck to have some real fish and chips. I was afraid I'd have to eat that, too. The only thing on the menu that wasn't seafood was pizza. I confused the waitress by asking for anything but seafood on it. She brought me a baby-sized pizza, a knife and fork, and on top of the pizza rested two curls of ham. I don't think the pizza has quite gone transatlantic fully, yet. But it was edible, and so was Buck's fish and chips.

Dead dog party: Saying goodbyes. Cinderella's glass slipper -- the one showing the purple big toes -- is developing cracks. Buck described our adventures in getting to Heathrow. And by this time the lack of sleep is beginning to close in on us -- and was going to get much, much worse. Himself, toting hordes of British coins for his collection, brass belt buckles, key chains, Aussie campaign badges et al triggered the security scan and had to be frisked. Security, in Britain and at O'Hare, were horrified when they unpacked our skillfully crammed-to-the-buckles cases, including the collapsible one, which was bulging with souvenirs by now, and then couldn't re-pack them the way I'd put them together. And once we got on board, Heathrow came up with that little surprise of the fuel pumping station having broken down. No drinks, not even soft drinks. Everything's locked up. I'd remembered to put on my houseslippers right away, this time, and we strolled the aisles, meeting other fans returning on the same flight, exchanging comments on the con, on Britain, and, like the other passengers, sourly guessing that the Concorde -- which looks like a mosquito with a broken nose, up close -- would get fueled first. (It did.) When two hours on the ground went past, one fan said his connecting flight in Chicago was right then taxiing for takeoff, and I began to be very happy that our travel agent had left us that wide window back in the States.

Finally, we were airborne. Three hours late. The snack, which was supposed to be supper, became an afternoon brunch. Then they ran the movie -- CHINA SYNDROME -- and I didn't care to rent headphones for that one, either; besides, Jane Fonda and Lemmon are easy to lipread, whenever I cared to bother. I couldn't sleep. But I needed to dream, and everything was becoming very unreal, a bit like the whole concept of the trip itself had been. When the movie ended, the Captain came on saying that was perfect timing; we'd been flying over clouds until then, but they'd broken, and if we'd look out the windows we'd see Greenland below, in blinding bright beautiful sunlight reflecting off the glaciers. Time binding, again. The oldest known rocks in the world, down there. And we were flying in a modern aircraft at 36,000 plus, and a week earlier we'd been roaming amid the megaliths of Avebury and Stonehenge and even more recently prowling Prinny's Palace from the Regency period, and attending the world sf con involved with the literature of the future.

And when we landed, we got towed by a baby tractor, just to show us who was boss. O'Hare, waiting for our connecting flight, was an utter blur. The AA flight to Nap was a commuter special, lots of businessmen with their attache cases. A comedown from the TWA yellow brick road traveling 747. The attendant said we would be flying to Nap at 90,000, but since we could see traffic lights on US 30 when we flew over it, I sort of doubt it. Chicago, at night, from the air, is beautiful. But not as beautiful as the Miesels were, waiting at the end of the tunnel at Weir's Cook's exit tunnel. We were shambling and groggy from lack of sleep and one stage away from sleep-walking. We'd turned back into pumpkins. But we'd really been to the ball -- an experience we will never forget, and for which we sincerely thank all the generous fans who made it possible.

And one day, real soon now, when we've recovered our insanity and rebuilt our bank account, maybe we'll do it again on our own hook.



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