

The Convertible Bus Annual Trip

... this year was to Hinckley.

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Eastercon ...

... was a strange but enjoyable experience. When I arrived in Hinckley, I came to the conclusion that the place was a desolate hole, and the taxi trip to the hotel suggested that this was in a desolate hole in a desolate hole. This did not bode well for the weekend, but once inside the hotel I perked up immediately. If one has to spend a con entirely cut off from the outside world, then why not do it in something that is clearly Crossroads Motel as designed by Tim Burton?

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Hanover Catalogue of the Strange

The most obvious strangeness was in the windows of tat. Every time I thought I had seen everything that they had to offer, I'd find something else, of utter hideousness like the Rovers Return teapot.

I can only scratch the surface of what I saw there (not least because the note book that I carefully wrote everything down in has chose this moment to vanish into thin air), but highlights included:

- ▶ The *pièce de résistance*, and one of the first things I saw that reduced me to fits of laughter, was Marilyn Monroe with a grass chicken on her head. It was never quite clear whether these came as a set or not. (According to other sources, one of these was labelled 'suitable for kitchen dressers' – presumably one leaves them around to frighten unsuspecting visitors.) I spent much of the next three days boring people to tears with 'You *must* see Marilyn Monroe with a chicken on her head'.



Marilyn Monroe with a chicken on her head¹

- ▶ The painting labelled 'Titanic (Small)'.
- ▶ The porcelain knight fighting the dragon with an expression on his face suggesting that his damsel in distress had just inserted her hand into a particularly uncomfortable orifice.
- ▶ The bust of a pharaoh labelled 'Egyptian woman'.
- ▶ The selection of religious tracts carefully placed so that they were the first thing you saw when leaving the gents toilets.

But such strangeness was not just restricted to the windows. The sign about switching on fans before lighting fires made it into the newsletter, so I shan't repeat it (oops, I just did), but there was also:

- ▶ The Village Shop, which presumably on the League of Gentlemen analogy was a Village Shop for Village People.

¹Okay, so it's not a great photo – what do you think this is, *Plokta*?

- The postcards of the sights of Hinckley on sale in the shop, all of which showed views of the hotel.
- The stagecoach in the Hansom Cab Museum, proudly displaying its destinations: London! Chester! Hinckley!
- The ducks on the pond, which seemed to be remote-controlled, moving about the water with no sign of actually being alive.
- The muzak piped out to the colonnade *outside* the main entrance.
- Never mind the ceiling mirrors reportedly in some of the hotel rooms (not, sadly, mine), what about the mirrors on the ceiling of *reception*, which suggest that they've had much more interesting meetings there than an sf convention.

This general sense of weirdness seemed to affect most of the fans there, with results such as:

- A remark drifting across the octagonal lounge: 'Good luck in your Quest for Milk!'
- Genuine exchange in the rehearsals for *20:01*. Dave Wake: 'Now, I want the choir to go off in pairs. How many of you are there?' Choir: 'Seven'. (I shall pass over Mark Slater's fortunately non-prophetic 'I've died too early, haven't I?')
- Me and my friends Simon and Graham falling about laughing over the convenience religion we invented, 'I can't believe it's not Buddha!' (Yes, we thought at the time it had been done before, but that didn't stop us getting much amusement out of it.)
- The valiant attempts in the disco to dance to a Fleetwood Mac track to which you simply *cannot dance*.
- A nameless Nova-award winning fanzine editor commenting that if someone used her fingernail clippings to clone from they'd end up with something short and nasty, and then realizing what a feed line this was.
- Eric Lindsay describing the group of people I was talking to at the time as 'smof-ing' – no disrespect to the others there at the time, but any conversation that in-

volves me is, I feel, *ipso facto* non-smof.

And that was just for starters. There's much talk about returning to Hinckley in the future. I'm not too sure about that – this is certainly a hotel that should be experienced once in your life, but twice? It just wouldn't be quite such a garden of new delights (but maybe there'll be a whole new set of tat by the time we return ...).

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Separated at Follycon

Having written the bit about appearing in *Parakeet* in the last *CB*, in which I mused on the possibility of people thinking I was a figment of Mark and Claire's imagination, it struck me while reading some of the material Mark wrote for Paragon how similar our writing styles actually are. I'm pretty sure this is coincidence, since we evolved those styles entirely independently, and I think it's entirely unconnected with the fact that Follycon was the first Eastercon for both of us (especially as we didn't actually meet for another eleven years).²

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Don't let it go to your head ...

Hey, I made the WAHF section of *Plokta*! My life is complete.

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The Convertible Bus No. 5 is a footnote in fanzine history (post-Paragon, post- but should have been pre-Second, coinciding with election) from the under-rated (apparently) **Tony Keen, 15 Heathbridge, Heathbridge Approach, Brooklands Road, Weybridge, Surrey, KT13 0UN**. Produced on the fab new laptop work's just given me. E-mail: keentony@hotmail.com. No thanks to the Inanimate Object Conspiracy. Apologies to everyone I bored silly at the con with these jokes. Kevin bloody Keegan. The Convertible Bus is not a Croydon fanzine, though it knows some fanzines that are. There's nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be.

I take it all back about Keegan.

²I am considering starting a rumour that I don't really exist and am in fact a pseudonym for Mark Plummer. Any alleged sightings of a 'Tony Keen' at cons should be treated with extreme scepticism.