

⑥ The pseudo-serious Convertible Bus ⑥

Thank you driver for getting me here



Just to show that sometimes I really actually live up to this fanzine's title, I'm going to talk about buses. I've just discovered that the 1st class stamps issued this May have a selection of old buses on them. One of these (third from left above) is a 1970s Manchester Corporation bus operating on the number 53 service. That's the bus route I used to get to school.¹ I don't know what that means, but it makes me feel ... strange. (The same bus route has also been immortalized in verse by Les Barker, of whom some fans may know. I first encountered him through a reading that a number of fans went to from Protoplasm back in, erm, don't remember, but early 1990s seems likely.)



And the talk gets so topical

On election day, as I walked through Weybridge, there appeared to be a sign identifying an ice-cream van as a polling station. Sadly I was without a camera, so could not document this. Nor did I walk up and say, 'I'll have a "99" and a Labour government, please.'

But of the story of me and Michael Portillo I shall say nothing, as otherwise Claire Brialey will use it as an excuse for her and Mark not to produce another *Parakeet*.

Six weeks later, and it's bye bye Michael, bye bye Jeffrey. Sometimes (though not often) life is sweet. I was highly amused to discover that the average age of the people who will be voting for the next Tory leader is 65 (though conceivably this may just be in Northampton). A party member was interviewed, and said, 'what's important is which of the candidates is most likely to return all the voters lost to Labour and the Liberal Democrats. It's a close call.' Well, I'd like to advance the alternative theory that,

¹ Sad, I know, but I can also tell you that it's the very type of bus I used to get – my clearest memory of them is that *everything* rattled.

no, it isn't. Ten out of ten for getting the issue right, but minus millions for not spotting that only one candidate fits the bill in that respect, and that ain't Iain Duncan Who.² But then, as the Archer scandal shows, this is a party that has always been prone to self-delusion. I still remember Anne Widdicombe's comments when the perjury scandal first broke and he had to drop out of the mayoral race: 'Well, Jeffrey told us there were no more skeletons in his closet, and we believed him.' *Why?* This is Jeffrey Archer we're talking about, not John Craven.

Next, please? Miss Widdicombe?



♥ Death is a cold lasagne ♥

For the background to this tale, I must take you through the mists of time to the early months of 1995. At the time I was working in Belfast, and all of a sudden discovered that when I went to bed I couldn't get to sleep because my heart was beating at an unusually high rate and irregularly. Naturally, this led to a visit to the doctor's (though being a bloke, of course I put this off as long as possible).

Of my subsequent adventures in the cardiac wards of Belfast and Bath, people collapsing and dying around me, and how the boredom rapidly leads to salacious thoughts about the nurses and eventually makes it impossible even to spend time reading, I have written elsewhere.³ Suffice to say for now, after several months of false starts, eventually I was put on medication that controlled the arrhythmia and tachycardia. Then I went to China for a year (taking a large supply of medication with me), came back to the south-east of England, and thanks to my usual utter lack of organization, didn't get linked up with a new GP and ran out of medication. But no problem. The symptoms didn't return after I stopped taking the medication, and since I didn't like the idea of being on medication for life, which at the time I left Belfast seemed the best thing on offer, I didn't worry too much. Nor, when I finally got around to registering with a local practice, did they when I told them. Great. Sorted.

Until this spring.

Early this year I started to notice, especially at night, that my heartbeat was irregular again. (I don't think the irregularity strikes at night particularly more than at other times of the day, but that's when, in the absence of other distractions, it's most noticeable.) Then, one very hot Sunday in June, as I was walking home after a bit of Sunday shopping, I had what I quaintly informed my work colleagues the next day

² This joke is nicked off Gyles Brandreth, not a man whose wit and wisdom (or pullovers) I usually admire, but this one just fits so perfectly. (Unlike the pullovers.)

³ In the pages of *B-APA*, the comics apa I have been, on and off, a member of since 1990. Anyone interested in seeing what I wrote – tough! I don't have easy access to that stuff at the moment.

was 'a funny turn'.

Have you ever experienced your heart not pumping enough oxygen to your brain? I have, and it ain't fun. I'm not sure I can describe it adequately, but most people have experienced a faintness after getting up too quickly. Well, this is like that, only much more intense. You get a pounding sensation in your head, your vision clouds and you seem to be looking down an indistinct tunnel, and your senses generally recede. Then, usually, the feeling recedes and you are left with nothing but a faint feeling and a dull headache. My earliest memory of this is sitting in the front of class at school, and finding myself even more detached from what was going on around me that was usually the case, until I registered the teacher asking if I was all right. In retrospect, I wonder if this was a very early signal of my heart problems, as the clearest diagnosis I've been given is that it's the result of a birth defect.

Sometimes, however, the feeling takes longer to recede than normal. This only happened to me once when I was in Belfast, when I suddenly passed out completely for an instant, and came to to find myself falling towards the door jamb. Twenty minutes later, I was in the back of an ambulance being fed oxygen.

To return to June 2001, as I approached my flat I felt myself becoming faint, and losing touch with my senses. The feeling passed swiftly, and I continued on my way inside, hurrying enough to get inside before it happened again, but not enough to actually make matters worse.

What I should have done at this point was lie down and have a nice long rest, but being the pig-stupid idiot that I am, I thought I'd just set my washing machine going first. As I was doing this, I had another 'turn' of the growing faint but not actually fainting sort. Never mind, I thought, I'm almost finished loading the machine up, and I won't have another one before I'm done. I'll sit down properly after that.

The next thing to penetrate my consciousness was the sound of rattling crockery as I reached out to steady myself on the kitchen surface. Looking around I saw that the funny little ball that you put the washing liquid in (what *do* they call that?) was lying out of the kitchen door on the living room carpet. For some reason (my recollection of events is understandably hazy) I went out of the kitchen. When I came back, as my senses returned, I saw what I'd managed to miss before, that I'd also knocked over the washing liquid bottle, and there was washing liquid all over the kitchen.

Clearly I had to rest. On the other hand, of course, I couldn't leave the kitchen in this state, and it wasn't till after twenty minutes of clearing up the kitchen as best I could, that I could sit down to rest in front of the latest *Buffy* box set. The episode, which I hadn't seen before, turned out to be 'Out Of My Mind'. Yes, *Buffy* fans, the episode where Riley's heartrate gets out of control. This sort of uncontrolled irony has been happening to me *a lot* recently.

Next day I went to my new GP (me having moved again recently) and got myself put back on the medication. I feel lot better for it, though further tests and a visit to a cardiologist will follow. And let's

keep this in proportion – I'm not going to suddenly drop down dead in the immediate future. (In case anyone was hoping I would.)

So what brought this arrhythmia back after nearly three clear years? Judging by people's previous comments, stress is likely to be a popular theory. Well, the last few months have been pretty stressful in lots of ways – for one thing since April I've been doing 2½ people's jobs. But last year was pretty stressful as well, so much so that at times I collapsed in a sobbing heap of despair, and the heart problem didn't come back then. In any case, when it started, back in '95, I was in arguably one of the least stressful periods of my life since, well, since whenever. So I'm not sure I buy that.

It would be a nice moralistic end to this story to suggest that something like this would make me sit up and take stock, that a brush with mortality, however tenuous, would cause me to reconsider the way I live my life. Sadly, the evidence is against it. My reactions to previous encounters with mortality, my father's early death, discovering that I could be genetically prone to the colonic cancer that killed him, the deaths of three grandparents, a friend being diagnosed with MS, suggest that I shall remain the same old useless fuckwit I've always been, trapped in recurring patterns of behaviour.⁴ As The Eagles once said, "Ain't it funny how you knew life didn't change things."



That's one for you, nineteen for me

Mrs Doyle doing adverts for the Inland Revenue? To me this is a bit like discovering that Paul McCartney thinks that taking marijuana is a bit stupid. Oh right, that's happened as well, hasn't it? Another illusion lost ...



This fanzine supports ConteXXt (in Cheltenham) for the 2002 Unicon.⁵



The Convertible Bus No. 6 – one-sheet fanzines are the way of the future! – is less overtly fannish than recent issues, but more than you needed to know, from **Tony Keen, 15 Heathbridge, Heathbridge Approach, Brooklands Road, Weybridge, Surrey, KT13 0UN** (though Novacon and the BSFA ignore my CoA communications). Step away from the metaphor. E-mail: **keentony@hotmail.com**. The Convertible Bus, only a short train and tram journey away from being a Croydon fanzine. And that's close enough. August 2001. This issue's blue is almost.

⁴ Not to mention drowning in my own self-pity.

⁵ It could hardly not, since I volunteered – *volunteered* mind you – to be on the bid committee. What was I thinking? (Bridget and Simon, don't take this bit too seriously.)