

Cloud Chamber 164

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Can it really be nine years since I published a *Cloud Chamber*? No, it's closer to ten: #163 was a bit of a cheat (a huge list of *Encyclopedia of SF* entries by or rewritten by me) and the last "real" issue was #162 in 2010. Where does the time go?

Life has seemed a lot bleaker since my oldest friend Martin Hoare died in 2019. Our old Oxford college, Brasenose, asked me to write about him for its yearly alumni magazine *The Brazen Nose*, and although I couldn't include all the fannish memories I hope the result is recognizable as our Martin.

Martin Hoare was born in South Wales in April 1952. At Oxford (Physics, 1970) he was one of those who took full advantage of the puny computers then available: his program for analysing the statistics of one of the more tedious Physics course practicals, a fat pack of punched cards for the battered IBM 1130 in the Nuclear Physics building, was kindly shared with contemporaries. After graduation Martin began a career in computing, first with ICL and later working on hotel booking databases for Hoskyns Group. One spare-time project that affected many people was the 1980s Imagelink, conceived by and developed with Dermot Dobson of the Radcliffe Infirmary. This pre-Internet system – hardware by Dobson, software by Hoare – allowed X-rays and other medical imagery to be quickly shared across the phone lines with remote hospitals and consultants, without the actual films or (worse) the patients needing to make hasty cross-country journeys. "ImLink" was adopted by the NHS, initially in Oxford, and according to a paper published in *The Lancet* spared 37 of a sample 100 head-injury cases from unnecessary hospital transfer. Later versions took advantage of increasing Internet access and continued to save lives.

Martin was also widely known through his numerous hobbies. These included amateur radio as G8VWJ; a fondness for real ale that led to activity in CAMRA and regular involvement in beer festivals both in the UK and on the Continent, to which he was a regular traveller; helping organize fireworks displays, with home-made electronic firing systems and musical synchronization; cookery and making such preserves as marmalade and pickled onions under the byline Doris Panda, his glove-puppet *alter ego*; and organizing volunteer-run, as distinct from commercial, science fiction conventions. He co-chaired the 1984 and 2002 British national SF events and worked on a great many others: more, it's thought, than any other individual. Among his regular roles were providing and operating public address systems, organizing real-ale bars or fireworks, looking after security, and general troubleshooting. At home, his many collections included a substantial library of science fiction, though because he was so recklessly generous with his time and expertise he only rarely found the opportunity to relax with a book. A long-established SF trophy called the Doc Weir Award, traditionally given to unsung heroes who work behind the scenes for the benefit of others, was presented to Martin in 2015.

Besides these unacademic interests, Martin somehow found time for an Open University course in tax law. This was driven by long-standing annoyance with HMRC [*the UK tax people*],

whose unreasonable demands he successfully challenged in court, representing himself. He went on to take an LLB degree in 2013, "just for interest".

Martin died on 26 July 2019 after infection following an operation for bowel cancer. He had married three times and was divorced twice, surviving his third wife Jean by exactly twenty years. There are no children. At the World Science Fiction Convention held in Dublin in August 2019 – where he was to have been bar manager – the main bar was renamed Martin's in his honour, and toasts were drunk.

The Brazen Nose Volume 53, 2018-2019

Although from time to time I keep thinking it would be good to go to the pub with Martin and then remembering the two reasons why not, Hazel and I haven't suffered too much during the lockdown in this plague year. *Ansible* continues monthly as an in-house operation, with the envelope-stuffing that once traditionally took place just before a pub lunch now being done at our own dining table and followed by a cunningly simulated pub lunch. Things I'd never before bought online: cheese, wine, pickled onions, more cheese, discounted postage stamps (sold by an outfit that buys the stocks of bankrupt philatelic dealers – many thanks to Esther MacCallum-Stewart for that tip), and, now I come to think of it, still more cheese. There's an eBay vendor who advertises 1.25Kg lumps and keeps customers happy by actually sending 1.44Kg of Double Gloucester or 1.65Kg of Red Leicester. With these already crowding the fridge, my downfall came with the overstocked Cornish Cheese Company's desperation offer of *five whole kilograms* of their 'mature' Cornish Blue at a knock-down price. Boy, is it mature, and continuing to mature slightly faster than I can eat it....

Staying at home a lot has given me plenty of time to work on the never-ending chores of the *Encyclopedia of SF* and still further books and ebooks published by my own doomed enterprise Ansible Editions. 2020 titles sold for corrupt personal gain (with actual royalties paid to the authors' estates) are the very fat *Beyond the Outposts: Essays on SF and Fantasy 1955-1996* by Algis Budrys and the rather slim *Puff Love* by John Sladek, an offbeat detective story which was his last-written novel. The publishing world was apparently not ready for a reluctant amateur sleuth saddled with a chimpanzee sidekick. See ae.ansible.uk. Meanwhile the latest free ebooks at the TAFF website – taff.org.uk – are *Homefront: Fandom in the UK 1939-1945* edited by Rob Hansen (April), a big fanthology of wartime writing; *A Budrys Miscellany: Occasional Writing 1954-2000* by Algis Budrys (May), comprising a whole lot of material that didn't make it into *Beyond the Outposts*; *The Full Glass Bushel* by Bob Shaw (July), at last bringing together all his "Glass Bushel" columns plus further fanwriting for the legendary *Hyphen*; and *Slow Pint Glass* (forthcoming as I write), a huge compendium of Bob's other fanzine work. Rob Jackson is my co-editor for all three Shaw volumes. It's been exhausting but great fun. Here by way of teaser is my draft introduction to that latest collection:

The overall scope of *Slow Pint Glass* can be easily defined as fanwriting by Bob Shaw – other than the many times reprinted *The Enchanted Duplicator* (1954, with Walt Willis) – not already collected in our ebooks *The Serious Scientific Talks* (November 2019) and *The Full Glass Bushel* (July 2020). Ask Mummy to draw the pretty Venn diagram for you.

As Rob Jackson noted in his introduction to the previous ebook in this series, *The Full Glass Bushel*, Bob Shaw never wrote a formal autobiography but provided the makings of one in all the gently comic reminiscences that he published as fanzine articles found in that collection. There are many more such snippets from personal life in this new compilation, *Slow Pint Glass*, building up a larger – perhaps even 3-D – picture of this much-loved author and fan. (Or maybe that should read "fan and author".) Appreciative readers can have fun connecting the

dots. Sometimes an aside in one piece is illuminated by another: for example, a mysterious reference in the “Quotes and Nuggets” section to working on comic strips for an editor in Copenhagen is explained at length in “Mickey Mouse Works”.

Most of the humorists for which Bob shows admiration in the articles that follow – Patrick Campbell, Stephen Leacock, S.J. Perelman, James Thurber, Mark Twain – cultivated an air of bemusement at the vagaries of the weird world we live in. This was an attitude that Bob himself could always carry off brilliantly. What other writer, struggling with deadlines, would find himself fatally distracted by a noisy invasion of hot air balloons? Or be a fascinated eye-witness on the utterly memorable night when Brian Aldiss broke the bed? Or, in a perfectly ordinary visit to the loo at an SF convention, become entangled in the embarrassing toils of the Penis Fly Trap? See “The Writer’s Year”, “Once Upon a Tyne” and “Wetfoot in the Head” respectively.

Besides the many autobiographical fragments, there are excursions into other fanwriting genres. “The Fansmanship Lectures” and their much later follow-up “The Two-Year Warning” are creative pastiche, re-imagining the fiendish one-upping ploys of Stephen Potter’s *Gamesmanship* and *Lifemanship* for the world of fandom. There is some fan-fiction, in the old sense of fiction about fans that elaborates on their mythic personas, including a couple of contributions to the shared world of John Berry’s Goon Defective Agency which rise above the general unfunniness (at least according to me) of that milieu. Several appreciations of fellow fans and authors combine admiration and even love with leg-pulling. For a change of pace there’s a handful of straight SF reviews – some written for *Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction* in its earlier and livelier years before the pall of academia descended – and these reveal much about Bob’s personal tastes in SF and feelings about how the genre works. Not to mention a Thoggish ability to pinpoint bad writing: I for one, ever since reading a particular review here, have restrained myself from writing sound effects like *Stomp. Stomp. Stomp. Clop-loppetty-clop*. Further selections include letters, recipes, genial silliness, and the entire content of Bob’s only solo fanzine, the 1990 *Perspex Parrot* – which reads very like one of the finer multi-subject “Glass Bushel” columns.

Several of the 1950s articles and stories collected here are steeped in the mythos of contemporary Irish Fandom, of which Bob was a key member: that is, one of the Wheels of IF. His introduction to James White’s “The Exorcists of IF” (a *tour de force* of seriocomic fanwriting first published in 1975) includes a nostalgic potted history of IF and its Wheels, and with great magnanimity doesn’t even mention that James’s classic tale of a fannish haunting had been anticipated – with the same house plagued by the same spirits – in Bob’s own “A Chance of a Ghost” (1957).

For an author increasingly under pressure to come up with entertaining fanzine pieces, Bob was rather good at avoiding repetition – though in the later Serious Scientific Talks he made a virtue of recycling terrible old gags and puns for audiences that craved to hear them again and again, as with the *Monty Python* Parrot Sketch. The tale of how Bob became a hockey reporter in “By a Specious Correspondent” reappears with variations in “BoShcon Non-Speech”; but as Dr Johnson very nearly put it, in a free-for-all audience Q&A session a man is not upon oath. Bob could hardly avoid reworking his solitary James Blish anecdote from “Allies in Sunderland” for a command performance at a Blish memorial evening (“Beer”); and it was only while preparing this ebook that I noticed that our man had managed to oblige yet another demanding editor by lifting a few paragraphs from “Bicycle to Betelgeuse” (1974) and surrounding them with a new framework as “What Is Science Fiction? My View” (1979). But such instances are relatively rare. Despite a weakness for certain favourite set-pieces like the

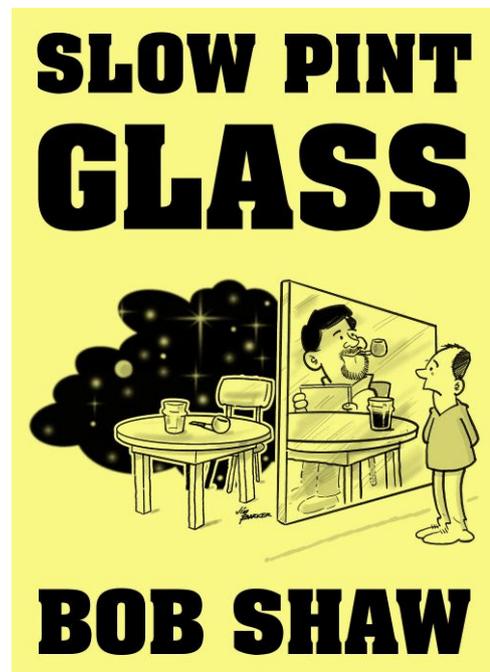
proper way to cook chips, Bob usually worked hard, perhaps too hard, to give the fans something new. The demand never let up. Fandom can sometimes be thoughtlessly cruel.

An interesting example of drastic reworking is the development of “BoSh Tosh IV” into “BoSh of Arabia” in accordance with the theory of fanzine articles put forward in “A Funny Thing Happened to Me on My Way to the Typewriter”. After cutting a mass of well-written but tangential travelogue material – the atmospheric Bahrain nightscape, the extreme temperature and humidity – Bob restructured the incidents around the double theme of Skyvan planes (bringing in a new and chuckle-worthy anecdote) and the faraway “rock which belongs to John Berry”, which becomes the opening teaser rather than appearing only near the end. Thematic rearrangement of the earlier chronological telling allows “BoSh of Arabia” to end with a wry fannish tagline rather than the first version’s report of a grim aftermath (here downplayed and relocated as an earlier aside). It’s instructive to compare these two pieces.

In *Slow Pint Glass* a few clarifying footnotes have been inserted, always signed [Ed.]. Other footnotes were part of the original article or were inserted by the relevant fanzine editor, as indicated. Back in the mimeo fanzine days when everything was typed on to stencils, the emphasized words and any book, film and fanzine titles might be underlined or (because underlining was a bother and slowed the typist) written ALL IN CAPITALS. These capitals have generally been changed to italics along with all the underlining, but they seem such a part of the flavour of the first two “Fansmanship Lectures” in Walt Willis’s *Slant* – heroically published in letterpress, with underlines not possible and apparently no italic font – that they’ve been left as they were. A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.

Here then is a huge cornucopia of fannish writing, not always for fanzines but always written for love rather than profit, by the late great Bob Shaw. In one of the pieces you will find below, he jokily suggested his own appropriate memorial:

Perhaps (paraphrasing Hancock in “The Blood Donor”) a simple little plaque saying: “He wroteth for others that others might be uplifted.”



Cover art for *Slow Pint Glass* by the great and good Jim Barker. Many helpers are credited in the ebook, with especial thanks going to Fanac.org for putting scans of so many old fanzines online. This issue of *Cloud Chamber* is produced for WOOOF 2020. Apparently my previous contribution to WOOOF was *Cloud Chamber 3 in, ahem, August 1979*. For all the back issues see ansible.uk/cc/.