



The Seventy Sixth issue of a sort-of letter substitute, kinda thing. Maybe weekly, maybe not. Available from:

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Convivial Convention Report by James Bacon

Following of from the negative reports in this fanzine and others, that Irish conventions have had of late, From Mecon To P-Con, I thought that it might be a good idea to look at what made a good convention good. Using the James Shields system, I shall now analyse Convivial.

1. Before The Convention

I noticed people manning a dealer table in Victorian Garb at Seacon 3, the 2003 Eastercon, and this immediately caught my eye. This was the committee, who were out in force, fifteen months ahead of their convention, promoting it.

They had a clear cut VISION of what they wanted to do, it was straightforward and simple. A FUN convention with a VICTORIAN theme. How easy is that.

A Vision is what a committee need, its no good saying 'we're having a con' it needs to be more than that, it needs to have enthusiasm, be a dream, something the committee will drive for and something people will buy into.

I saw them again, many times at other conventions. They had adverts and mentions in various zines, their website was good, but their flyering was better. They realised that a website is an island, and pressing the flesh is always the best way to get people along to a con.

2. The Hotel

The Central Hotel in Glasgow is a good venue; it has a nice selection of rooms, and is very easy to get to, being on top of the main Glasgow Railway station. The building itself, for me, exudes a feeling of Grandeur and is a good con venue. There were stairs or lifts involved, but it felt fairly close together. The hotel were good to the committee, they never threw non-residents out, they never checked for room cards, they served beer till 5am, they didn't stop room parties and I had no problems. The Bar was quiet which meant there was always space for Fans to gather and chat, and the dinner was good too, especially the potatoes.

3. The Attendance

The committee had mentioned that they had a target of around 120 people, and that they would stop when they had that many. I think they got close to that, and on Friday evening they broke even. There was a good mix, many people who I didn't know, and a good number of well known fans.

4. Facilities

I never bothered with food in the hotel, except on the Saturday at the Dinner. There was no shortage of places to go to eat, and although I am loath to leave a con hotel, it was just a few moments to any number of food venues, which was good.

5. Guests

There were no guests. This is not a bad thing at all and follows on from previous 'fun' conventions such as Wombat and the Incon's. Professionals in the SF business do add something to a convention especially if there is a lack of Imagination on the part of the committee, or if there is a general bankruptness about the programme.

BUT it's been proved again and again, that you don't need an SF guest to have a good time, and I am quite sure, that authors probably don't mind.

6. Programme

The programme was excellent. Using their Vision, the committee came up with a considerable amount of unique ideas, and saw other ideas stolen, moulded and changed into their vision. This is so important and really made the convention.

Every programme item went as planned, the items required were always there to make it happen, whether it be dirigibles or guttering or corsets or call my bluff answers.

The amount of planning and work that went in was paid back in spades. A train set for Christ's sakes, they had all their equipment, prepped and ready to rock. I understand the committee all took the week before off to accrue items, this seems realistic.

A willingness to try something new, to attempt things that others may scoff at, to sit down and actively create programme ideas, this is what makes a good convention bloody good. It's too easy having a Fantasy vs SF panel, and so fucking boring. It's too easy getting opinionated and really crap authors to waffle about shite. It's too easy just to invite a load of guests and reckon that it will suffice. No one bothers to count how many people are sitting in the room, but they should.

RULE ONE of any programme item at a convention for every committee should be: WOULD I go to this item, WOULD I be annoyed if I had to Miss it, DO I smile when I think of this because I know I'd like it, and therefore hopefully everyone else will. Admittedly at bigger cons, there are always things that need to be catered for, that one may have distaste for, but if the majority feel this way, that's good.

Too many committees have panel items 'for the membership'. It's terribly patronising and shows in the atrocious programming. Its no good getting an old Worldcon programme and stealing ideas, that no one knows will work.

It's a bad thing when the committee hang out in the bar, or in the registration area, avoiding programme items, it showed that the whole of the Convivial committee were vying to get to each panel item.

I applaud people who go to other conventions and who then steal a good idea. I would prefer if they twisted that idea to their own vision, rather than copy it directly, but this is good. If it works go with it. I love when I see totally new ideas, engaging the people attending and getting them involved. I love to hear laughter and applause. There is nothing better than walking into a programme room and having to find somewhere to sit, for lack of chairs.

That was convivial.

7. Evenings

The evening atmosphere was excellent. This was mostly to do with the committee's excellent idea of introducing gambling to fans. (Its being stolen as I write). The Ceildhe was good, the disco was quiet but that was because the tables, cards and absinthe were popular. There were gatherings in the corridors, a decent number of room parties and I reckon a Mí-Higné time was had.

8. The Committee

The committee always seemed in total control They really worked well. They had the air of the Seacon committee about them, totally relaxed, everything according to plan, and chuffed that people were enjoying themselves.

The committee had delegated to a number of people and this worked well, and all those who had such tasks passed onto them, were not only able, but completed the jobs with a certain gusto and enthusiasm.

The committee were worried that they would not break even, this was a motivator, to drive memberships and to make the convention good.

They are to be applauded, but more, they should be looked at, and aspired too. This is how you run a small fun convention, in my humble, but well experienced at this sort of thing, opinion....

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Add to this the recent dropping of Chunga 11 through my letter box (alas not Banana wings this time) and my fannish energies have been given another lease of Life. I'll be writing more on the Chunga effect in the next issue. Also some personal stuff, as always, lots of stuff on recent trips to Paris and London and even some SF stuff.

A quick burst of a few issues and then I'm off back to work, studies and real life. So it goes. See you soon. Keep up to date on the blog, [Visit Tommy's Blog](#) and I'll see you all again RSN. Tommy.