

Doctor Who Celebration

Report by Richard Holliss

Every summer for over ten years the BBC has held an exhibition of *Doctor Who* props and costumes at Longleat in Wiltshire, the stately home of the Marquess of Bath. It seemed therefore that here was an ideal place with its spacious gardens and huge parking facilities for a special convention to be housed, celebrating twenty years of the worlds most famous space traveller. Months of planning led to the event which culminated in two full days, the 3rd and 4th of April, 1983 and gate attendances totalled 70,000 people.

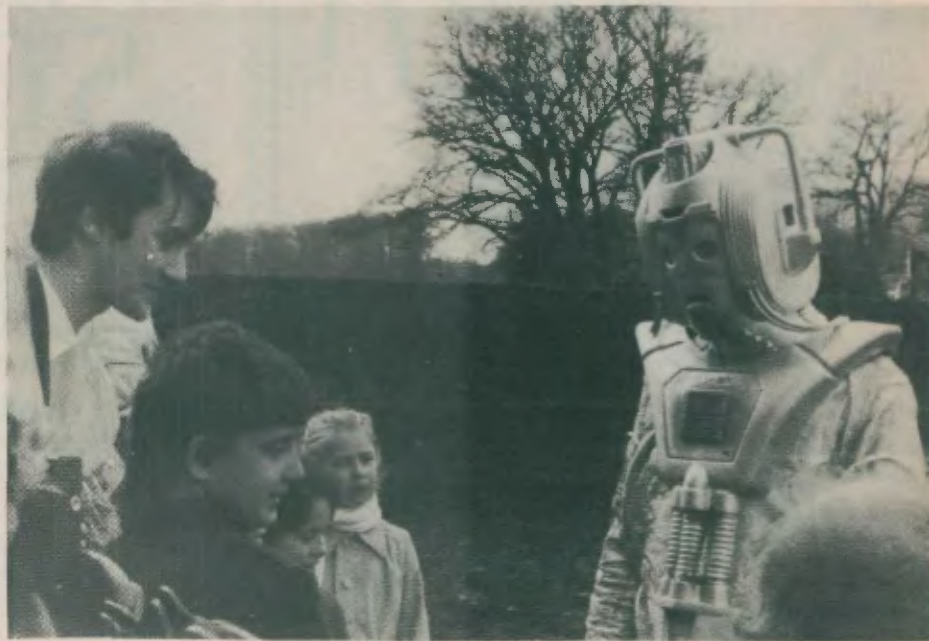
On arriving by car on the Sunday morning, the queues into Longleat were already extending back into the main roads around the Estate. However the efficiency of the gate attendants meant a reasonably speedy entry into the park and as you drove down the hill towards the house, you caught your first glimpse of the convention nestled behind a row of hedges and flanked by an already enormous queue of people. It immediately became obvious that the whole event looked a little squashed, even if the Cybermen, Daleks and dummy figure of Peter Davison at the entrance were well over life-size.

After parking in what seemed like aisle number 354 and row 48, it wasn't difficult to join the throng of people already heading into the Gardens. The programme book available in the ticket tent for 50p, gave a detailed map on the back cover showing the various attractions imperative to the *Doctor Who* fan. BBC Costume tents, Studio Sets and Merchandising areas were squeezed together, dwarfed on one side by the house and on the other by the half-mile lake.

Unfortunately the BBC had overlooked one very important point - the number of people who turned up. The tickets had originally been advertised through the post anything up to a couple of months beforehand but a lot of people had preferred to leave it to the weekend in case of bad weather and, as it was bright sunshine and blue sky, they arrived in droves.

Suddenly it was discovered that unlike the Doctor's TARDIS, which is much larger on the inside than on the outside, the crowds had swelled beyond a comfortable capacity. Queues were growing and most attractions, even when you finally reached them, were so packed it was impossible to have a good look round. Further ticket sales were suspended, which began to upset a lot of people and there were some angry scenes.

However, those lucky enough to be in the Garden were oblivious to the outside world as they mingled with celebrities and bought overpriced goods. In fact the only way a visitor would know that his fellow man was experiencing problems in seek-



ing admission, was when the voice of K-9, magnificently handled by actor John Leeson, rang out over the heads of the multitude requesting that the unfortunate fans outside visit the house instead or go boating or take a train ride or do anything, rather than try getting into the *Doctor Who Celebration*. The cinema was screening the *Dalek Invasion Earth* story from the William Hartnell era.

Already a certain number were queuing outside the Orangery for the first autograph session. Elizabeth Sladen who played Sarah-Jane Smith during the Jon Pertwee era, Carole Ann Ford, the first ever companion for *Doctor Who* and John Nathan-Turner, the producer, were the first to wield pens for the happy masses.

The Merchandise tent was also the home of the auction where a massive number of *Doctor Who* props sat waiting to fall under the auctioneer's hammer. There was everything imaginable from *Eldrad's*

Head from *The Hand of Fear* to K-9's whistle.

The BBC were present in full force with a Costume and Make-up Tent and a display of Visual Effects. These included beasts and monsters from *Doctor Who*, photo-displays of explosions, bizarre head-dresses and the usual array of paintings and drawings describing every minute detail of how an alien is created for the show. Other exhibits included spacecraft and weapons from *Blake's 7*, Marvin the paranoid android from *Hitchhikers* and, one of my personal favourites, a Triffid from the series *The Day of the Triffids*.

Opposite the Make-up tent was *Bessie*, the car that John Pertwee's Earthbound Doctor drove during the third reincarnation of the character. On the second day however, *Bessie* was moved outside the Gardens to the front of the house so that people could pose for photographs and thus amuse the waiting lines of visitors hoping to gain entrance.



Hidden behind the Topiary was the BBC's mobile Radiophonic Workshop where Dick Mills demonstrated some of the marvellous sound effects created for a single episode of *Doctor Who* and other BBC programmes. This was one event that it was easy to gain access to; perhaps its technical theme was too much for the majority of visitors.

From here I fought my way into the Forum Tent to listen to the first of many panel discussions. At one end of the tent was a raised platform on which stood a table and assorted chairs and microphones.

As John Nathan-Turner introduced the first panel, each actor stepped from out of the Tardis which the BBC has erected behind the table. Looking decidedly battered from its very much terrestrial journey down the M4 motorway, it courageously stood in front of its admiring fans, doors opening on cue. The guests included, apart from the producer himself, Carole Ann Ford, Elizabeth



Sladen and John Leeson, the voice of K-9.

During these panels, producer John Nathan-Turner revealed some information about *The Five Doctors*, the *Doctor Who Special* scheduled for an autumn screening. "The cast will include," he began. There was tension throughout the tent, every ear strained to hear the next word. "Jon Pertwee, Patrick Troughton, Peter Davison, Elizabeth Sladen, Nicholas Courtney, Carole Ann Ford, John Leeson, Wendy Padbury, Frazer Hines, Carolyn John, Richard Franklin, Philip Latham, Diana Sheridan and Richard Hurndell who will be playing the part of the William Hartnell Doctor."

"There will be unused material of Tom Baker and Lalla Ward from the story *Shada* but, apart from that, I'm not saying any more." Although he did add, due to one further question regarding Tom Baker's absence from the role, that it was due to the actor being unavailable for recording.

Meanwhile, the auction had got underway and it seemed appropriate to have a look at exactly what the people were bidding for. Everyone was handed an official looking list of props covering four sheets of paper. I was just amazed how the BBC had kept it all so secure over the years. Some items went back as far as the Patrick Troughton era. By the time I reached the tent, a large number of fans had already gathered and Jon Pertwee was in full swing as guest auctioneer. This was my first glimpse of the third Doctor and the present *Worzel Gummidge*.

Ian Levine who had prepared the programme notes was on hand to help out. "What am I bid for Lot Number 10," Pertwee began. "The headgear for Sutekh's servant from the story *Pyramids of Mars*?" As if totally confused by what he had just said he continued "Do you all know what I'm talking about?" Everybody nodded. "I don't know what I'm talking about, although it is from a Tom Baker episode, isn't it?" Levine also nodded. Pertwee looked at it once more and then spat poitely at the floor.

The bidding started at around £5.00 but soon rose to the final sale price of £29.00.

"Sold to the lady on my right, the lady jumping about like a Mexican bean." *Doctor Who* fans become very excited at auctions. Lot 11 was the Cyberleader's Head from *The Tomb of the Cybermen*, an early Patrick Troughton story. "Off we go," said Pertwee "Thirty Pounds to start." The bids rose fast and furious, a number of children in the crowd pocketed their five pound notes yet again in disappointment. We all watched helplessly as these great BBC papier mache artifacts filtered to the overseas visitors, another part of the great British Heritage lost abroad. "Fifty, Sixty, One Hundred Pounds." Pertwee shouted excitedly. Hands began to dart up and down at an alarming rate. "One Hundred and Forty, Fifty, Sixty -" Pertwee continued. "Two Hundred and Forty going once -" Panic set in on the face of Mr Levine. "Can you remind them," he whispered, forgetting the microphone was still switched on. "It's the only Cyber Helmet, the only one of its kind?" Feeling a little sorry for that poor individual, poised, pen in hand, ready to write out a cheque for £240, Pertwee ignored him. "They know what it is. Sold for Two Hundred and Forty Pounds to a chap from Australia." It certainly wasn't that warm in the auction tent but the fan from Down Under had been sweating buckets and looked very relieved when he finally got his hands on the only Cyberleader Helmet in existence.

Other items to be sold included; a Nimon head minus a horn to Mike Lake, one of the directors of Titan Distributors and organiser of the Merchandise Tent's best display; an Ice Warrior claw; some *Blake's 7* costumes and Tom Baker's coat, rumoured to have fetched £850.

It was announced that Patrick Troughton had arrived, so the next port of call was the panel discussion: to hear his views on the character he played. On the way to the Forum tent, it was very difficult to stop myself from having my photograph

taken standing next to another BBC TARDIS. Although it did set me wondering, which was the real one, the one here on the tennis court or the one in the tent. Any illusions I once had were being shattered one at a time.

Patrick Troughton has been in the acting profession since 1938 and took over as the Doctor from William Hartnell in 1966, his first adventure featuring everyone's favourite villains - the Daleks. As these metallic pepper pots were still commanding a cult following amongst the tv audience, Troughton's character took a back seat in the proceedings but as the series progressed he established a personality all of his own.

Troughton began by relating how he got the part of *Doctor Who*. "I was in Ireland making a film, when I received a phone call from the BBC Head of Drama asking me to consider the part of *Doctor Who*. I didn't fancy it at all but they insisted and each time the phone rang the money went up. I knew it would be difficult to follow Billy (William Hartnell) and because of this I was convinced the new series wouldn't last more than six weeks." At this point he paused and glanced at the faces of the eager fans from around the world. "Shows how wrong I can be," he smiled. "It was decided that I would approach the character in a rather clownish way. I had a wig which made me look like H. H. Marx, so I took it down to the make-up department and put it on. Anneke Wills and Michael Craze, who were at that time the Doctor's resident companions Polly and Ben took one look and said 'Oh no, we're not going on with you looking like that.' I don't blame them really, it must have looked most strange. So it was scrapped. This was at the time of the Beatles, so my new hairstyle was fashioned on a Beatle haircut."

Troughton spoke of the great affection for the character he played for three seasons. "The serious parts had to be dead serious, you had to be scared, but a kind of comedy element crept in allowing the younger children to cope with the scenes of terror and fear, as long as you didn't send it up."

It was obvious that sooner or later someone was going to ask a question relating to the upcoming special. Everybody wanted to know if Troughton had found it difficult recreating the role as *Doctor Who* after so many years. "I fell into it straight away," he replied happily. He stopped to ask John Nathan-Turner the title. "Ah yes, *The Five Doctors* and we were all excited at being together again. In fact I met up with Frazer Hines recently and we had a good giggle." (Hines you may remember played Troughton's number one companion, Jamie) "He used to wear khaki shorts under his kilt because he was always shy about climbing up ladders."

Taking a well earned break from the Forum tent, I dropped in to see the display of *Doctor Who* Studio Sets. Apart from the TARDIS interior and the Chameleon robot which creaked into life giving the audience the feeling that something tremendous was about to occur, the most interesting sets on view were those from the forthcoming special and as everybody in the know was keeping the story well under wraps, it was going to be the only glimpse of what was to come.

Back in the Forum tent, the panel discussion had already started with guests from the seventh season of *Doctor Who*: Richard Franklin, Nicholas Courtney and the third doctor himself, Jon Pertwee. This was probably one of the most enjoyable of all the panel forums, there was a marvellous feeling of companionship between the actors present and they spoke of the series as if it were yesterday.

Feeling quite exhausted as the day drew to a close, I left the sanctuary of the *Doctor Who Celebration* and returned to the hotel. On Monday morning the gates at Longleat were opened an hour earlier than advertised. Somehow the BBC must have hoped that it would prevent congestion compared to the day before. It



didn't. By mid-morning thousands of people had again turned up. However the Press, who must have been thoroughly tired out trying to write articles on the previous day's events, hardly put in an appearance at all and so the poor lady in charge of the press room looked very lonely sitting in her large empty office, her only company being a plate of cold quiche and a pile of press kits.

The ticket booth opened with renewed enthusiasm but closed less than four hours later.

Feeling somewhat refreshed I once again braved the Orangery, this time to collect Peter Davison's autograph for *Starburst*. I was just in time; the present Timelord was to be seen scuttling over to the Forum tent for the next session. Managing to get ahead of him I caught the last few minutes of a discussion with Heather Hartnell, the widow of the first Doctor. Heather was a charming person and the *Who* fans paid her great respect by asking many sensible questions relating to her late husband's portrayal of their hero. She told how William Hartnell had been too busy to appear in the Dalek films but how he had thoroughly enjoyed himself working on the tv series.

It was then that John Nathan-Turner announced the arrival of the present Doctor and his companions, Mark Strickson, Janet Fielding, Anthony Ainley, the Black Guardian himself Valentine Dyal, Sarah Sutton and of course Peter Davison. Valentine Dyal, the man in black, laughed demoniacally at the crowd and Anthony Ainley, the Master, followed suit, though not quite as demoniacally. Janet Fielding was asked what her most embarrassing moment was in the series. "Wearing that tight costume," she replied "And having to struggle with some lepers whilst wearing it." How strange that would have sounded, I thought, if it was heard out of context.

When asked about his own character in *Doctor Who*, Mark Strickson said that Turlough was in two minds as to whose side he was on, the Master's or the Doctor's. It seems that we've all got to wait until the next season to discover the outcome. Valentine Dyal was challenged on his attitude to Life, the Universe and Everything, to which he replied, "I haven't got the faintest idea but I'm deep in thought about it. The Master wants to rule the Universe, I just want the chaos." It was obvious the guests were a little more than relieved when the forum finally came to a close, they had looked far from relaxed on stage.

Outside, Ed Stewart had arrived with a mass of BBC microphones and was leaping out of bushes chatting with the visitors.

Dropping into the auction tent, I was pleased to see that Jon Pertwee was back in harness and that people were bidding as heavily as before. One particular item of interest was the *Skagra's Book*, totally unreadable but the only one in existence. As the back of the tent had been rolled up to accommodate the audience, someone squeezed behind a tent flap became the lucky recipient. Suddenly it was announced that Tom Baker had arrived. "What, he's here?" Pertwee asked, looking somewhat surprised. A cheer went up and a mass exodus took place for his first destination, an autograph session in the Orangery. And sure enough seated amid the rubber plants was that infectious grin and mop of curly hair.

Later, back in the Forum tent, Tom Baker put in an appearance on the podium with John Leeson. It was obvious from their apparent rapport with each other that the two actors worked well together. The first question to Tom Baker was very 'journalistic'. "Why did you leave the series?" His answer was, of course, very diplomatic. It had been immediately noticeable to the audience the speed with which Baker made his entrance, well before John Nathan-Turner had an opportunity to introduce him.

"It wasn't so much that I left," he began. "I was pushed, I was pushed by Anthony Ainley." He smiled. "Actually

I think I left because I couldn't cope with all the happiness. I felt that it was time to let someone else have a go, though in some ways I do miss it." Some members of the audience were curious to know why Tom Baker was not appearing in the *Special*. "Well I've been pretty busy, there was also a certain amount of timidity on my part. A feeling that perhaps I should leave it as it was."

When asked about his portrayal of the Doctor and its comedy element, Baker acted somewhat surprised. "Comedy" he replied "I can't spell comedy. When I got the job as the Doctor, the BBC let me sign the contract before I even knew what I was going to do. In fact most of the time I didn't quite know what was going on. It was mostly a question of spontaneity, predictability. The hero always coming down on the moral side, so I didn't pry into the scripts as long as I won. By fair means if possible or by foul means if necessary."

Apart from questions relating to the Doctor and K-9, a lot of people were anxious to know where the famous scarf idea had come from. "We found a woman to knit it for us," Baker said. "She was so happy to be working for the BBC that she used all the wool we gave her. It gradually got longer and longer until it filled the room." He didn't deny, however, the number of times that it managed to trip him up.

When someone foolishly asked who his favourite Doctor was, apart from himself, Baker, suspecting that his audience were luring him into a trick answer, quickly replied, "I don't understand that question and I'm not the slightest bit interested." As if wishing to participate in mass suicide, another fan asked which of the Doctor's companions had been his favourite? "I think that if you had read the popular press, you'd have guessed. Next question." No-one brought up the subject again.

To round off his first meeting with the audience, Baker reminisced on some of the problems encountered when working on *Doctor Who*. "I remember one time heading for a door at top speed which this seaman failed to open, so I came in underneath it like a letter. These sea fellows found this a terrific wheeze and there was me with no skin on my lips or nose." To finish with, he thumbed at the TARDIS behind him and, as if to convey more to the audience that he had at first pretended to, he said. "Two people in the TARDIS and it's crowded. Don't believe everything you see on television."

At this point he rose to his feet amidst thunderous applause and welcomed autograph hunters to the stage. Observing all this, if I were asked to sum up Tom Baker's attitude to the role of the Doctor then I would have to say that from his varied answers and witty asides he enjoyed playing the part at the time and he had turned up in the middle of Wiltshire on that particular day because, like a professional actor, he knew that his fans were anxious to meet him. He owed them that much but, on a deeply personal level, Tom Baker had put the character of the Doctor well and truly behind him.

It was by now late into the afternoon, even the dedicated few were heading for the exit. The auction was over, the Merchandise Tent resembling a wasteland after a Dalek invasion. In another part of the Garden a prop TARDIS finally gave in under the strain of the weekend's guests and the roof fell off. A postcard of Carole Ann Ford lay in the dust, dropped during a stampede earlier in the day. John Nathan-Turner wished everybody a safe journey home and thanked them for coming. My last glimpse of Longleat from the front gate, gave the casual passerby the impression that nothing had happened at all. But for many this weekend had been one to remember and whatever regrets the BBC may have had, or the letters of complaint that may have since flooded in about its pitfalls, it was obvious to even the most hardened critic that there would never be a *Doctor Who Celebration* quite like it again.