

THEN AGAIN

A UK Fanhistory
Reader 1930-1979



ROB HANSEN
& VINCE CLARKE

THEN Again

A UK Fanhistory Reader 1930-1979

Edited by Rob Hansen and A. Vincent Clarke

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Cover photograph from the A. Vincent Clarke collection, taken at the 1951 Festiventon. Ted Carnell speaking at far left; Forrest J Ackerman at front right.

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Publisher's Note

Introduction

Rob Hansen

As many things do, it began with Greg Pickersgill.

Both of us had recently acquired a copy of Luis Ortiz's *The Science Fiction Fanzine Reader* (Nonstop Press, 2019) and had been discussing it favourably. Greg was inspired enough to contemplate a UK version of the book but wasn't sure there was enough of the right sort of material to put together such a volume. I disagreed, but rather than argue the point I quickly assembled pieces covering our first three decades and presented these to him as proof that he was wrong.

Which is when I realised our perceptions of Ortiz's book were at odds.

Where I'd seen a volume whose chosen articles had been arranged in roughly chronological sequence to tell the story of north American fandom, Greg had seen an anthology of the best fanzine writing from the period covered. However, having understood where I was coming from he encouraged me to run with the idea and flesh out what I'd shown him, hence this volume. So what we have here is not an anthology of the best writing from each of the decades in question – fine idea though that is – but rather the best informative writing *about* each of them. What this means in practice is that pieces about aspects of each decade are just as likely to have been written later as during the decade itself.

The reason I was able to so quickly assemble something to present to Greg was that I still had all the photocopies Vince Clarke had sent me when I was working on the original fanzine version of *THEN* back in the late '80s/early '90s and he was my chief researcher. Vince is responsible for finding over half the pieces collected in this volume, which is why he gets a co-editor credit two decades after his passing. Vince dug out most of the pieces covering the first three decades, and me the following two, but I realised what I had wasn't quite enough to make a book and so have spent the past few months ferreting out what I needed to round out this volume.

As its name suggests, *THEN Again* is intended as a companion volume to *THEN*, one in which the story of the first half-century of SF fandom in the UK is told by others. As to what is and isn't included, that's largely a matter

both of what was available and what I could find. I was careful to ensure England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland were all represented, yet Wales isn't. This is ironic given that Dave Langford, Greg Pickersgill, and I are all Welsh, but the sad fact is that I could find no discrete articles of any substance about such as, say, the Cymrades of the 1950s or the Newport group of the late 1970s and 1980s. This despite me being a founder member of the latter. Which also explains why groups you may think should be included in this volume aren't. If they didn't write an informative and substantial enough piece about their origins, or if they did and I don't know about it – I'm not omniscient – then it isn't here. You may also wonder why some of the best fan writers of the period covered don't appear. For example, I'd like to have included Leroy Kettle and Belfast's Bob Shaw in *THEN Again* but neither wrote anything suitable for inclusion. So it goes. Having said which, choosing from what is available was an interesting exercise. Several items that made the grade initially were later replaced by others that better covered their subject matter, while deciding the running order of the contents was a juggling act and it wasn't finalised until very late in the day.

In the piece that opens this volume and sets the tone for it, Walt Willis envisioned the creation of a history of UK fandom by accretion. He saw a series of articles being written incorporating reprints of old material that, when collected together, would form that fanhistory. More or less. *THEN Again* probably isn't quite what he had in mind but it does suggest a way forward in assembling a history of fandom for the period after that covered by *THEN*. If no-one feels up to writing and producing something as densely researched, *THEN Again* provides what I hope is an alternate model.

My thanks go to Greg for the initial inspiration, Vince for finding so many of the pieces herein, John D. Berry for the title, Pat Charnock for careful proofreading and, as always, to Dave Langford for his patience, his suggestions and his perseverance in transforming all this material into a finished ebook.

Rob Hansen, July 2019

1. The Immortal Teacup (1952)

Walter A. Willis

My copy of *The Immortal Storm* arrived yesterday. I took it to work with me and about eleven o'clock, I glanced at the first page; at three o'clock I was reading the last one. In between, there were, presumably, two bus rides and a meal but I hardly noticed them. This is a magnificent work of Moskowitz's. It is worthy to rank with the *Fancylopedia*, and I have no higher praise. It's so good I'm thanking my stars I never intended to emulate it; because I don't think I could. Moskowitz had his memory to help him – he was there. I have only a few cubic feet of old fanzines. Moskowitz must have had the whole work in notes before he wrote the first page; I have only the vaguest idea of some parts of my subject – so far. In a way, these articles are my notes. You will accompany me in investigating the fascinating history of British fandom, and when all the articles are written, it will then be possible for anyone of you to extract a Moskowitz type history from them.

I'll try to keep the series in chronological order, so that it will be easy to follow, and when I come to a period of which my knowledge is still not complete, I'll mark time by inserting a biography, while I try to unearth some more old fanzines. These biographies will be another difference between this work and the *Storm*. If Moskowitz's work has a fault, I think it is a tendency to lay too much stress on organisations and movements and eras, and not enough on personalities. Fans are fandom. This is especially true in Britain, where many of the founder fans of twenty years ago are still not only alive but active. The editors Gillings and Carnell. The writers, William F. Temple, D.R. Smith, and Arthur Clarke. Even Harry Turner, the greatest mimeo artist of all time, still illustrates for *New Worlds*, as he illustrated for the fanzine of the same name and the same editor of 13 years ago. Even the fans who have dropped out did so only after many years of constant activity, and the best of the current fans have been active for a long, long time. There are no novae in British fandom.

Again, in British fandom there has been little of the fan politics, which makes such fascinating reading in the *Storm*, and few of those fierce feuds. Whether this is due to the fact that British fans always have been of an age

averaging about seven years older than their American counterparts, or whether it's just the national character, I don't know, but British fandom has always been steadier, and more sober than American fandom. Nowadays they seem to have even grown out of the need of organisation. There was a time when a British fan organisation was so strong that it was almost absorbing American fandom. But, there is now no British fan organisation at all, though there is plenty of fan magazine activity. There always has been. So, in place of the stark drama of the struggles for power in the *Storm*, I can offer you some of the best amateur journalism that has ever been written, by some of the most interesting people who ever fanned.

The Teacup will take the form of an Introduction, the History and an appendix of biographical sketches. Each episode of the History will be illustrated by quotations from old fanzines. So will the biographies, but there will also be original autobiographical material, when I can get it. This is part of the introduction, and there will be more of it, where it fits in with each installment, so that each article will be as far as possible complete in itself. So if this thing ever attains the status of the *Storm*, it will be an easy matter to combine the fragments. But before the introduction in that imaginary bound volume, there should be one of those things in italics, something in the nature of a justification for the very existence of fandom, a statement of faith. I think I've found the very thing. It made a big impression at the time, but I don't know that it has ever been reprinted. I do know it deserves to be. I offer you Bill Temple's famous letter from the 36th issue of *VOM*.

Halloween 1944
Italian Front

Dear 4e,

I've just re-read the April *VOM*, which means reading it for the first time properly. My first "reading" was a hasty skim through in the press of other business, a business dealing with bangs of varying intensities. But now I've been stranded with no reading material other than this *VoM*. So I re-read and re-re-read it, and your contributors would be flattered to know just how much consideration I gave to their every point. And there were plenty of points. But the only one I'll comment on now is this business of making the final break with fandom.

I guess most fans who have kept it up for 10 years or more

now must often have come to the point of impatience where fandom is felt to be an incubus from which one must free oneself. Consider: the average fan has many other interests: music, poetry, philosophy, some branch of practical science, active politics, active sex, beer, baseball, sleep, for instance, and the time he can give to them is limited firstly by his bread'n butter job and secondly by fandom. And the greatest of these is fandom. Oh, the big, big bundle of long, long letters always to answer; the articles demanded by far-away editors; the stacks of not-so-good fan-mags to decode from near-illegibility, the endless (illegible adjective) arguments about religion, the storms in tea-cups over nudes, the vapourings about the New World by children who don't even understand the character of the Old, the feuds and bickerings of "he said that I said that they said... and who *paid* for it all in the end? I leave it to your imagination" style, and the strain to keep abreast of current gags and Slan Plans and follow Wilsey-Nilsey "speling" (no one wishes to keep abreast of current stf. these days – does anyone read it at all?) and be patient with cartoon jokes about robots! My old Flatmate, Ego Clarke, once the most enthusiastic fan I knew, I now notice has finally stepped from under with characteristic decision, using a logic-tight argument against *VOM* nudes as his lever. I cannot but agree with the argument. If you cannot employ Varga or Turner don't give us these appalling substitutes. Even sauciness needs a certain flair to be brought off successfully, and none of these show it – not even the flock of rump-branded little girls belonging to the K-Ranch. Taste is what is lacking (especially in that infantile conception, the circus freak, with tripod legs and udder things too). I'm not pretending no nudes is good news, but please think of academy walls rather than latrine walls.

But a break with fandom is not just a break with these rather wearisome things I have listed above. It is a break with a whole world, a whole structure of romantic associations inhabited by old, known friends of affinitive outlook. And they are a rare group, these friends: I have travelled over 12,000 miles recently & met hundreds of new people, but I have met no one else who had that outlook or would not be lost and bewildered if put amid the group. This is not to say that I haven't made friends – life-long friends, I

believe, in some cases – of many witty, amusing and intelligent & knowledgeable people. I have only to read “Alert” to see that you have made alert of new friends too, and perhaps are becoming conscious for the first time of the world existing outside stf. These people outside call that “reality.” It is the place we are supposed to be hiding from with our heads in the sands of stf.

When we come up against the hard “realities” of life our stf. nonsense is supposed to be knocked out of us, and we put away childish things and become men. “I have grown out of fandom...” Actually in most cases these words mean the fellow has grown out of the more juvenile aspects of fandom: all the above list, and the badges and fancy-dress ups at conventions and such. I’m sorry for he who really has grown out of – which means grown away from – the fan outlook. There’s nothing in that hard, real outer-world that is not enhanced and rose-lit and made wondrous by the cosmic view: every sunset may be made more significant when thoughts are aroused about Martian and Venusian sunsets or “The Further Vision” in Wells’ *Time Machine*; every new discovery of science means so much more when the practised eye sees also the possibilities arising from it; the moon is not just a lantern in the night sky: it is a challenge; the stars are not pin-pricks on paintings: they are parts of the key to the whole universe if they can only be examined and fitted together; music is not a pastime; it is a wordless, universal language; the great novels, e.g. *War & Peace*, are not something apart: they are attempts to see mankind whole, to classify it, to put it in relation with Time Past & Time to Come; even sitting in our little family groups around the fire, we are not just Pop & Mom & the kids: we are fellow travellers and explorers through Time and Space and the mysteries therein. Do I sound out of touch with reality: I have known reality. Once I lived on bread and jam alone because I could afford nothing else, and walked miles to save car fares. I worked for 10 years at the Stock Exchange and saw the ways of wealth. I have been in the richest and poorest houses. In the Army I have grown intimate with all types of people from miners, labourers, slaughterhouse-men to professional soldiers, musicians, college men & boxers. I have watched these men in peril of death and I have seen them die, not always

pleasantly or easily. I have been near enough to death myself more times than I can remember. I have known life at its greatest discomfort in water-logged fox-holes for months at Anzio, soaked in the unceasing rain with no hope of drying, hungry, freezing, and constantly shelled, bombed, machine-gunned and mortared for make-weight. In these conditions I have striven to write books and lost them. And re-written them painfully and lost them again. I have known utter loneliness and also the heart-warming comfort of gatherings of friends. I know what love, marriage, and parenthood is like, and what it is like to be separated from these things year after year, and what it is like to lose a son. I've crossed all the seas except the so-called Pacific, lived with Arabs, studied the teeming life in the very sower of civilization, the Nile Valley, gazed and wondered at the Sphinx and the Pyramids, crossed the Western Desert, fought through Tunisia, lived in Sicilian farmhouses on the slopes of Etna, travelled far and wide in Italy, seeing Naples and not dying, and witnessing Vesuvius in no pleasant mood, wandered the streets of dead Pompeii, seen the Grandeur That Was Rome, the Grandeur That Is St. Peter's, the anything-but-Grandeur that is the Italian peasant's home. Consider one evening not so long ago. I had just seen the Noel Coward film *This Happy Breed*. It was London in the raw, an actual slice of the real London I knew so well. I carried this environment into the Rome Opera House with me. There I saw an Italian opera with a largely Italian audience. My view passed from the Cockney's eyes to the dark brown Italian ones. I saw as they. After the opera the orchestra played Tchaikovsky's "Pathetique" Symphony. Now I saw Life & Death through the eyes of that great sentimental Russian. After that I got into intimate conversation with the fellow next to me. A lively talkative Hawaiian from Honolulu. He described his home-life so well and with such imagination that I spent the next half-hour in Honolulu. Join the Army and See the World!

All this sounds a bit melodramatic. I only want to prove that stf. is not just a bolthole for people escaping from life. I have lived a fair amount, and stf. has lost none of its essential meaning through that experience. To me the imagination is somewhere nearer the heart of things than "reality." Said Flecker: "Without

vision, the people perish...” The fan outlook is my idea of vision. I want to keep in contact with fans. Without strings of 4e puns, Bob Tucker’s inspired lunacy, the keen analysis of Speer, the good nature of the hardworking Morojo, the Rabelaisian (?) jocularly of Les Croutch, the immensely readable efforts of the Daughertys and Widners and many others – Lord; how ordinary life would become!

As one who several times nearly went with last lingering, longing looks, and would no doubt have soon done so had it not been for this evening alone with *VOM* and the meditation arising from same, I swear to you, 4e, who yourself are standing with one foot in Fort MacArthur and the other roughly in the direction of the LASFS, I am separating from the Separatist Movement!

Science Fiction Digest #5 (January 1952, ed. Henry Burwell)

The 1930s

2. The Clamorous Dreamers (1954) Walter Gillings

Just to keep the record straight, let us admit that the first organisation of science fiction readers in Great Britain would seem to have been the Science Fiction Association which had its headquarters at Hayes, Middlesex, as far back as 1927.* My records, however, do not reveal how long it lasted, what it achieved, or even what it set out to achieve – if anything. I know that it claimed to have produced what must surely have been the first British fan magazine, titled *Fantasia*; but the first I heard of either fan club or magazine was when one of its erstwhile officers sought my advice on how to go about publishing a journal which might serve to keep the organisation together if it could be revived.

* 1927 date for birth of Hayes group later revealed to be a hoax. – Rob Hansen

That was, if I recall correctly, in 1931, when I was secretary of the Ilford Science Literary Circle, which had set out to achieve much but accomplished very little for precisely the same reason – it just couldn't whip up enough enthusiasm. It did consider launching a journal, but abandoned the idea as pointless since there was so little potential readership and, anyway, its activities were amply chronicled in the local press. Its records show that, commencing in October 1930, it held regular weekly meetings, 37 in all, until it broke up in the summer of '31 never to resume its chatty, informal occasions. At best it had no more than a dozen members, not all of whom could be called s-f fans; and it never came very near to its avowed object of popularising s-f through a national association. Still, it did obtain for its lofty ambitions a good deal of publicity, and by other means inspired similar efforts by fans in other areas who felt the same urge to propagate science-fiction.

The publicity was simple; indeed, inevitable. I was by then in the throes of my first year's training as a reporter on the *Ilford Recorder*, where I had fortuitously found an opening after several vain attempts to storm the citadels

of journalism. I got the chance on the strength of the promise shown by an amateur magazine, laboriously produced in handwriting and ink-drawing while I was still at school, where I first developed an aspiration towards the editorial chair while exhibiting, at the same time, a certain flair for s-f writing. It was in this select publication, which had a circulation of ten, that I authored a serial entitled “2000 A.D.,” inspired by some articles in *The Mechanical Age* of 1925-6 (to which, be it noted, I gave due acknowledgment). Like so many of my early works, it was never completed: the *Merry-go-round Magazine* came to a stop after seven issues, just when my hero had managed to establish radio contact with Mars.

Ever since I had feasted, at nine years old, on a George Goodchild serial in the *Children’s Newspaper* concerning “The Message from Space” and a cosmic crisis in which the Martians saved mankind from asphyxiation, I had always had a yen for such imaginative excursions. But, 30 years ago, they were all too rare, at least in my experience. The only other thing of the kind I can recall relishing, in between the comparative boredom of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, is what must have been Burroughs’ *At the Earth’s Core*, serialised in a boys’ paper. Later, however, I went through the normal stages of the Nelson Lee Library and Boys Magazine, in which I particularly recall a thrilling tale, well advertised on the hoardings, in which robots went to war – possibly because that also moved me to attempt an unconscious plagiarism, which was soon abandoned.

The wireless fantasies which enthralled me, as I sat beside a crystal set with headphones flattening my ears, were another formative influence. The first broadcast of Capek’s *R.U.R.* in 1927, with Ernest Milton and Grizelda Hervey (still going strong) as the robot Adam and Eve, is especially memorable. As for the films, it was in that same year I sat spellbound as I watched the lovely Brigitte Helm transformed into an automaton in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*, while the book by Thea von Harbou was to be had from Woolworth’s for sixpence. It was natural, considering all this, that the itch to write which had possessed me since infancy should produce something more than usually fantastic, even before I had heard of Hugo Gernsback; and the tremendous effect of my studied reading of Wells’ masterly romances remains only too obvious in my laborious typing, at intervals in my office boy duties, of an intended novel which I still have by me after 25 years – unfinished.

But, in spite of the opportunities for authorship they offered the veriest

amateur through essay competitions and story contests, my discovery of *Amazing* and *Wonder Stories* only sublimated my literary aspirations into a single, passionate ambition – to edit a British s-f magazine. I didn't particularly want to write science-fiction, though in those days I had no doubts about my abilities. Unaccountably, in one so young and inexperienced, I had set my heart on becoming a magazine editor; and here was a field which fascinated me and remained uncultivated in this country. It was necessary, therefore, to create a demand for s-f of the sort that was being produced in America, so that in due course some British publisher might be persuaded to enlist my specialised knowledge in (unreadable) for it.

So the plan grew in my mind; not at once, but gradually, over the course of the next few years. Remember, I was only 18, with one foot not yet securely placed on the bottom rung of the journalistic ladder. But something of the idea must have been behind my resolve to propagate s-f, induced in me by Gernsback, besides my earnest belief in its intrinsic qualities upon which he was always sermonising. It was not enough to try – quite ineffectually, for the most part – to communicate my enthusiasm to my more studious friends (who had usually succumbed to Edgar Wallace) and to my sweetheart (soon to be my long-suffering wife), whom I first lured, I remember, with Dr Keller's "A Biological Experiment", complete with Paul's picture of babies growing in great glass spheres.

And so to the larger effort, with the sympathetic aid of my new-found comrade in s-f, Len Kippin. He was several years my senior, already married, a commercial-traveller, with a sense of humour which bubbled in him constantly, and an interest in amateur radio. He was rather less in earnest about s-f than I, but he thoroughly enjoyed the magazines he came across on his travels and critically appraised the ideas they presented. Among them were some copies of Gernsback's *Radio News* and *Science & Invention*, and a few tattered copies of *Weird Tales* which had filtered through – the first I had seen of this publication, and the last I wanted to see after sampling some of the puerile stuff it was printing at that time. I had had my fill of LeFanu, Blackwood and other exponents of the creepy story, represented in the local library; and although his sole contribution to *Amazing*, "The Colour Out of Space", left an indelible impression, it was not until many years had passed that I fell beneath the spell of Lovecraft. Nor, evidently, did I find the contributions of Edmond Hamilton, which *Weird* was featuring consistently in competition with *Amazing* and *Wonder*, as acceptable as "The Comet

Doom” or “The Other Side of the Moon”. But Kippin took it all in his stride chuckling, and stowed it all away in his collection.

It was a “letter to the Editor” in the *Ilford Recorder*, carefully written and inserted by myself (with the full sanction of my indulgent Chief) that announced to the world the proposed formation of our Science Literary Circle, which was to offer readers with similar tastes “the opportunity of becoming familiar with more recent examples of scientifiction.” The response was hardly overwhelming; besides the Kippins and myself, there were only five at the first meeting, including the middle-aged couple who, without quite realising what it was all about, were willing to lend their front parlour so long as we contrived to enliven their Monday evenings. But the rest were already familiar with the magazines from which we decided to read stories aloud and proceed to discuss them and any topic they might suggest.

So we disposed of “The Thought Machine” of Ammianus Macellinus; “The Moon Strollers”, by J. Rogers Ullrich; Dr. Miles J. Breuer’s “The Gostak and the Doshes”; Capt. S.P. Meek’s “Futility” and other tales by such as Walter Rateley, G. Peyton Wertenbaker, Bob Olson, Raymond Z. Gallun, and the Schachner-Zagat combination, several of which still linger in my memory. The arguments which ensued upon these readings, if not the stories themselves, provided me with copy for my paper which I enjoyed producing under such headings as:

WAR WON WITH SMELLS – – Yeast Soldiers Shot from Guns; or:
BEFOGGING FIGURES – Incomprehensible Depths of Space.

It was such a change from reporting the dry-as-dust speeches of Councillors on parish-pump affairs, or praising the pitiful efforts of Miss So-and-so’s pupils at a Town Hall dancing display – events of the sort I was doomed to chronicle week after week for several years in my progression towards the more exciting realms of suburban activity.

Dr. David H. Keller’s tale of “The Yeast Men” actually touched off a piece in the leader column, where my watchful Editor observed acutely that: “Although born to blush unseen, the Ilford Science Literary Circle is not wasting its sweetness on the desert air.” Altogether, in the nine months of its existence, I filled in a good eight of the Recorder’s capacious columns with accounts of its deliberations; which, considering its membership, was a pretty good quota of publicity. Not the least prominent among these write-ups was an initial splurge on the “ambitious project” of our NEW LITERARY MOVEMENT, in which chairman Kippin was purported to have described

the thriving state of s-f in America, for the benefit of the uninformed. It also held out a challenge to those who would call us cranks: “We are always encountering sceptical people who seem to regard us as having peculiar and rather offensive literary tastes, but we are all unanimous in that although our favourite type of story looks.... fantastic at first sight, there is nothing more entertaining, instructive and thought-provoking.....” etcetera.

A later article on SCIENTIFUNCTION IN ILFORD also reviewed the history of the “American Literature That is Popular in England”, mentioning all the magazines by name and once more reiterating (despite the heading) our “aim to popularise science-fiction so that publishers and authors on this side of the Atlantic may pay more heed to its development.” This report concluded, more-or-less truthfully: “Large quantities of leaflets have been issued... all over London, and circular letters have been sent to English readers advising them of the formation of the new movement, the novelty of which cannot be over-estimated. The existence of the Ilford Circle is now widely known, but the suggestion of forming similar clubs in other districts has met with but little response up to the present.”

The leaflets were a subtle move. They were printed slips addressed “To English Readers” informing them of our effort to further s-f and appealing to all in sympathy to communicate with me, as secretary. Kippin took them on his journeys and, whenever he found back-numbers of s-f magazines on sale, coerced the shopkeeper or stallholder into slipping them between the pages. Meanwhile, I typed and despatched a stock letter to English readers whose names and addresses appeared in the correspondence columns, explaining our purpose more fully and urging them to follow our lead. Although hinting at the “tremendous possibilities” in store, this epistle did not attempt to conceal our realisation of what we were up against.

“The Briton, we feel, is invariably antagonistic towards American magazine literature and to anything scientifically speculative. It is, however, hoped that this prejudice will be eliminated by the concerted action of all who are genuinely interested in this type of literature, and that a thriving national society will be evolved for its popularisation. May we ask you to support us in this and organise a similar circle, in your district?”

In an attempt to spread the germ, I myself procured the publication in my own local paper at Leytonstone, where I was still resident, of a letter similar to that which had initiated the Ilford Circle. But the trick was not to be repeated; there was no response. More encouraging results came from the

announcement of our activities in *Wonder Stories*, which reprinted in its March '31 issue the send-off the *Recorder* had given us. Before we had the satisfaction of seeing the letter in print I heard from three well-wishers in America, two of them s-f writers. Edward E. Chappelow, who had organised an Amateur Scientific Club in Chicago; the other, one of s-f's three woman writers; Lilith Lorraine, who now runs, the Avalon World Arts Academy at Rogers, Kansas, and publishes the poetry magazine, *Different*.

At that time Miss Lorraine still lived at Corpus Christi, in Texas, which her Grandfather had helped to found and where her husband owned a couple of ranches and she was interested in launching her own s-f magazine – in England, if she could be assured of its success in a country to which, it appeared, she intended to come very soon. Her object in writing to me, in fact, was to ascertain if there was any existing market for s-f here and what I thought of the chances of such a venture. No wonder I recorded in the Circle's minutes: "It was anticipated that great things might evolve from this unusual enquiry"!

The resultant correspondence did not last long however. To a woman of 37 (though I did not know her age, then; nor that she was married) my earnest affirmations must have sounded much too eager. Anyway, after pronouncing her views on the standardisation of American s-f and declaring her more expansive policy for any magazine she might establish, she postponed the whole business for two years, while soliciting from me contributions for a poetry magazine she was editing; whereupon my enthusiasm, and my hopes, waned. Two years, to an impatient youth of 19, was too long; and I was never gone much on poetry anyway.

New Futurian #2 (Summer 1954, ed. J. Michael Rosenblum)

3. The First Decade (1970s)

Les Johnson

My career as a Science Fiction fan began nearly fifty years ago, and this was in the traditional manner for British fans by picking up a “remainder” copy of *Amazing Stories* at Woolworth’s – in my own case, this was the issue dated August 1928 containing Part 1 of *The Skylark of Space* by E.E. Smith. I could hardly have picked a better issue with which to start! This was early 1930 while I was still attending school at St. Francis Xavier’s College, Liverpool; the October 1929 issue of *Science Wonder Stories* was my next discovery, after which I came across *Amazing Stories Quarterly*, *Science Wonder Quarterly*, and *Astounding Stories of Super-Science*, as it was then called.

Ten hectic years were to elapse before I was to join the Royal Air Force as a Wireless (not Radio!) Mechanic in July 1940; and 1940 was the year in those young days which seemed to epitomise all that Future that we were seeking.

A letter from one John Russell Fearn with an address in Blackpool in the March 1931 issue of *Amazing Stories* started the ball rolling, and by a strange coincidence the March 1931 issue of *Wonder Stories* contained a letter from one Walter H. Gillings, asking British readers of the magazine to organise “Science-Fiction Circles” in all districts “so that a thriving national society for the promotion of scientific literature will gradually be evolved.”

By the time he died in September 1960 at the comparatively early age of 52 years, John Russell Fearn was to become the author of nearly 200 novels and an equal number of short stories. And Walter Gillings was to become the editor of *Tales of Wonder*, the first British Science Fiction magazine.

However, the efforts of Wally Gillings and myself in 1931 to found a national Science Fiction Society came to nothing, but our paths were to cross once again when in October 1933, P.E. Cleator and myself were instrumental in founding the British Interplanetary Society.

The unexpected spin-off following the foundation of the B.I.S. was that through the contacts I accumulated as the first Hon. Secretary of the Society, the world of British Science Fiction (such as it was then) which had not responded to the efforts of Walter and myself in 1931, experienced a sudden

violent motivation.

It is a strange thing that people who were interested in interplanetary travel were not necessarily interested in Science Fiction; more credibly, those who were interested in Science Fiction were interested in interplanetary travel, and thus, like spaceships gravitating towards a Black Hole, they came to me as Hon. Secretary of the newly-formed Society: P.E. Cleator – September 21st 1933; Arthur C. Clarke – July 30th 1934; Eric Frank Russell – August 25th 1934; Walter H. Gillings – September 14th 1934 (renewed acquaintance!); Edward John Carnell – December 30th 1935; G. Ken Chapman – July 28th 1936; William F. Temple – August 15th 1936.

John F. Burke and Dave McIlwain (Charles Eric Maine) both then resident in Liverpool, called at my home, and other names too numerous to mention made their presences felt – all previously more or less isolated devotees of the new cult of Science-Fiction, then spelt with a hyphen. Of course, it was I who went to P.E. Cleator as it happened, but the remainder gravitated to the fold. It appears that what I had started, more than an interplanetary society, was a Science Fiction movement; I had unwittingly succeeded where in 1931 Walter and myself had failed.

The expansion of the B.I.S. continued until by the end of 1936 it became evident to many of the Council Members at the Liverpool Headquarters that any future the Society may have rested on its transfer to the Metropolis, London; this view unhappily was not shared by the President, P.E. Cleator, or the Vice-President, Colin Askham.

However, with the consent of the majority of the Council, I sponsored the formation of a London Branch at the end of 1936, and the Headquarters were transferred in 1937; this left me more free time to pursue my Science Fiction activities, including the development of the pre-War Science-Fiction Association.

The foundation of the London Branch of the Society and the transfer of the Headquarters crystallised the Science Fiction element in the B.I.S. into the formation of a London Branch of the Science-Fiction Association, which held its Inaugural Meeting on Sunday afternoon, October 3rd 1937.

Visits were exchanged between members of Branches in Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, and London; there was even a Branch formed in Los Angeles – all the “L”s we called them.

Following a day trip from London to Liverpool on Sunday August 27th 1937, by train, Ted Carnell and myself got together to form “The Science-

Fiction Service” for the world-wide supply of Science Fiction books and magazines by mail order; all this was part-time activity on the part of each of us, as I was a Clerk in the Liverpool Education Offices (from which I retired in May 1974 at the age of 60 years), and Ted was then employed in the Printing Department of Gamages Stores in London.

In the meantime, in the early days of his writing career, Eric Frank Russell and myself had collaborated in producing “Seeker Of Tomorrow”, published in the July 1937 issue of *Astounding Stories*, “Eternal Rediffusion” (rejected pre-War by all the Science Fiction magazines, but published many years later) and “Mind Metallic” (which we never completed).

Unfortunately, in the midst of all these interesting and worthwhile activities, September 3rd 1939 arrived and we all had to dive for cover. Hitler’s War scattered us all over the globe, and by the time July 1940 arrived, I found myself volunteering to join the Royal Air Force as a Wireless Mechanic; Eric Frank Russell found himself serving in a similar capacity. He was posted to Limavedy in Northern Ireland, while I served in England, North Africa, Italy, Corsica, and the South of France.

This lasted until my return to England just before Christmas 1945, with demobilisation pending, and my first move was to circularise my old Science Fiction associates in order to announce my return; this included Leslie V. Heald who lived about ten miles away from me, and who in June 1939 had taken over from me the editorship of *Science-Fantasy Review*.

Science-Fantasy Review, dubbed “The Science-Fiction Newspaper”, was published every other Monday on behalf of the Liverpool Branch of the Science-Fiction Association; the first two issues, which I edited, consisted of two quarto-sized duplicated sheets, with double columns on each page and even edges to both typed columns. It was composed, edited, typed, duplicated, assembled, stapled, enveloped, and mailed all in one evening. Cost 1½d per copy, post free!

The first two issues were dated May 15th and May 29th 1939, and Associate Editors were J.F. Burke, E.O. Ducker, and L.V. Heald. With Issue No.3, Les Heald took over as Editor, and in fact the early years of the War saw Ron Holmes producing an abbreviated version known as *Science Fantasy Review’s War Digest*.

excerpted opening section of *The Story of Outlands* (mid-1970s, undated, ed. Steve Holland)

4. Grandpaw's Photo Album (1943) Ted Carnell

For a long time now we've been toying with the idea of writing some of our reminiscences of fandom. Glancing at our photo album releases a torrent of memories, and we find that they centre on the birth of fandom in this country and the people who helped build fandom. Looking back over the past seven years and reviewing some of the things we all did may be of interest to you, and will certainly bring to the newer fans a clearer picture of events.

We plan to use this feature regularly each issue – that is, *if you are interested*.

1936 B.I.S.

A snooty half plate pic graces the first page of our album, entitled “First Meeting of London Branch, British Interplanetary Society. October 23, 1936.” If you think that the BIS has little or nothing to do with science-fiction and fandom then you're very much mistaken, because it was through the formation of that London Branch that the followers of stf in London first got together.

As we remember that meeting, after six years, it was held in Prof A.M. Low's office in Piccadilly, and amongst some twenty members present were Wally Gillings, later to become editor of *Tales of Wonder*, Arthur Clarke, still an ardent pioneer of the spaceways, and ourselves. Shortly before the meeting began a quiet fellow snuck into the office and whispered earnestly to Walt – we thought it was the cops or the insurance man – but it turned out to be just a science fiction fan who wasn't very interested in rocketry. He wouldn't even stay to have his photo taken, but dashed off after making some arrangements with Walt. His name was Ken G. Chapman. The meeting snored to its inevitable finale (all BIS meetings used to give us a headache – the jargon was so flighty!) and the fans moved to an adjacent cafe to thrash out weightier problems like the latest *Astounding*. We had the October issue

with Brown's cover for Ray Gallun's "Godson of Almarlu". (That was a lousy issue, by the way).

So, we adjourned to this joint, and Walt dashed off copy appertaining to the "greatest ever" futuristic meeting, and rushed it by phone to Associated Press. Then we sat back and decided that it was time we had some sort of London fan group instead of these haphazard meetings. But nothing was done about it at the time.

1937 Leeds Convention

On January 3rd 1937 the Leeds Chapter of *Wonder's* Science Fiction League held Britain's first science fiction Convention. It had been called mainly to decide on a proper fan organisation for this country and many fans and authors all over the country had promised to attend. We met Walt Gillings and Art Clarke at St. Pancras Station late at night and caught the mail train to Leeds. En route we picked up Maurice Hanson at Leicester – the four of us arriving at Leeds in the dismal small hours around 4.00 a.m. The station looked like something from Wells' *Things To Come*, only they'd gone! Actually the station was still being built, although it looked as though it had been hit by a coupla thousand pounders. Maybe we just caught a brief glimpse into the future. We were met by Harold Gottliffe and whisked away to the Clubroom, where unknown individuals mysteriously delivered breakfast. We can still remember those beans even now. But that Clubroom really had something. It was as comfortable as any large single room could be, which had been fitted out by the ingenuity of the members, and we remember Michael Rosenblum giving us a conducted tour round the book-wracks – sorry – but they were an eyeopener to ordinary fan who hadn't had the yen to make a collection.

Around noon Eric Frank Russell and Les Johnson arrived from Liverpool, and Michael Rosenblum devoted quite a time to taking pix. There's one in our album of the usual three Walt, Art and ourselves, and another of Eric Russell.

The main business of the day ironed itself out in the afternoon when the jam session was held at some hall in the city. Everyone made speeches, plenty of ideas and suggestions floated around, an Association was formed. The last we remember of the meeting was sneaking off into a private sanctum, lighting a gas fire, and dropping off to sleep utterly worn out. But,

as we remember, they *did* form the Science Fiction Association, and the noose was drawn a little tighter round our lily-white throats.

That original meeting really started the ball rolling in, this country, and from it all the fan clubs (all four of 'em), evolved and owed allegiance. They were the four Hells. Leeds, Liverpool, London and Leicester.

1937 Les Johnson

Pictures of individuals associate themselves into experiences, and there are a long chain centred round Les, who was another of the original pioneers of fandom in this country. After much correspondence we first met Les accompanied by Eric Russell one evening at Euston Station, late in 1935.

They had been doing the rounds in Town, had met Prof. Low and various other people, and were then on their way to see Wally Gillings at Ilford We tagged along with them, and listened to the gabfest which ensued at Walt's place. It was quite an eye-opener, as we hadn't had anything to do with fans in the flesh – in fact we hardly knew what they were talking about half the time.

Except that it was the beginning of some friendships that have lasted right up until now, that first meeting is a little hazy. It was the beginning of our wanderings – many times afterwards, right up until the war broke out, we were to do the trip to Liverpool often.

Subsequent pix of Les and ourselves taken in 1937 are at the time when the germs of the idea for the “Science Fiction Service” were first formed. Yet another great event in fandom although we weren't to know it at the time – but from the clients of the old SERVICE scores of new fans were made, and are still being made. Their names are legion.

There remains a vivid memory of a stf meeting in Liverpool, held at the office of the SERVICE on one of those many trips we paid to Liverpool. Now I think back on it, it was one of the grandest meetings we ever attended – although we can't remember anything startling that happened – except a gabfest.

May those days of meetings come again before very long.

Sands of Time #8 (January 1943, ed. Ted Carnell)

5. The Immortal Teacup: Further Sips (1952)

Walter A. Willis

1930-1936 The First Fans – The First Fanzine – The Rise of Northern Fandom – The Beginning of London Fandom

One day in 1927, a 15 year old schoolboy called Walter Gillings came upon a peculiar American magazine called *Amazing Stories*, the March 1927 issue, to be exact, featuring The Green Splotches. This tiny seed of corn did not fall on stony ground. Almost immediately the boy who was to become the most influential figure in British s-f began producing little amateur magazines featuring amateur s-f, anticipating the first American fanzine by more than two years. In 1930 he started the first known British fan group, “The Ilford Science Literary Circle”, and was agitating in publishing circles for a British prozine. In both these efforts he was too far ahead of his time and for a few years, his interest subsided.

Gillings had more to contend with than the natural conservatism of publishers. In the 1930s ships coming from America to Britain carried a lot of ballast in the form of waste paper. For some reason, this paper consisted mostly of remaindered copies of s-f prozines which were sold in Woolworths all over the country at five cents a copy. Naturally home publishers assumed that this competition spoiled their own prospects and the first British prozine had to wait 'til British fandom organised itself to fight for one.

With a branch of Woolworths in every large town, there must have been thousands of people reading s-f pulps every month – I still vividly remember myself going without my lunch and walking home from school with armsful of *ASF* – and it was only a matter of time before they got together. The process was catalysed by the founding of the British Interplanetary Society, in Liverpool, in October 1933, and by the Science Fiction League, introduced in the May 1934 *Wonder*. By 1936, the BIS had members all over the country and there were chapters of the League in Leeds, Nuneaton, Glasgow, Barnsley and Belfast. British fandom was steadily reaching critical mass.

Then, in March 1936, a fanzine appeared. Its name was *Novae Terrae*, and the editors were Maurice Hanson and Denis Jacques, of the Nuneaton

SFL. They must have prided themselves on having published the first extra-American fanzine little knowing that their distinction was being stolen under their very noses – literally. While they were hard at work on their fourth issue, a fanzine arrived from New Zealand, published on February 16th. Having carved for themselves this tiny niche in the hall of fame, New Zealand fandom promptly collapsed, never to be heard of again.

Novae Terrae, on the other hand, published 29 issues before it was translated into Ted Carnell's *New Worlds* in January 1939. In those 35 months it made history. Carnell himself appeared as early as the second issue, in which he began a long and sensational career as a fan columnist with a report on the Hornig-Wollheim/Sykora feuds, for which he had to apologise to everyone, in the fourth issue. Carnell was at that time well known to American fandom, but had not met any English fans. That omission was soon to be repaired. Early in 1936, he got a letter from Les Johnson of Liverpool saying that he and Eric Frank Russell were coming to London on business and perhaps they might see Carnell. Eagerly, he intercepted them at the railway station, and tagged along with them to Gillings home, where he listened spellbound to exciting news of a proposed British prozine, and a printed fanzine – news which he promptly passed on in *Novae Terrae*. Of the four who met here for the first time, Gillings was to become Britain's first prozine editor, and to remain #1 fan for many years, until supplanted by Carnell. Johnson was constantly active for the next 15 years, and thru his dealing business, (S.F. Service) was to bring more people into fandom than anyone until Ken Slater (and, incidentally, if anyone recalls my 1951 LonCon Report, was the Liverpool Master of Mimeography, who saved the Convention Programme) and Eric Frank Russell is *the* Eric Frank Russell, still half in and half out of fandom.

In its sixth issue, *Novae Terrae* published its first contribution from an American fan. It was an article by Ackerman about Esperanto, and the controversy it caused is covered very fully – maybe more fully than it deserves – in *The Immortal Storm*. Moskowitz says that Ackerman became unpopular in England on account of this but, really, I don't see how anyone could have harboured much of a grudge against him, after this disarming tailpiece to his reply:

“In conclusion, just want to warn any other fans reading this – English or otherwise – who for real or imaginary reasons dislike me, that they'd better watch out 'Cause Ackerman's a ferocious

fellow. I go out to KILL my enemies by making friends of them.”

In England, at least, he carried out this threat perfectly.

Novae Terrae published 9 issues, in the remainder of 1936, and grew immensely in influence, but the editors were only a small group in a small town, and the real leadership passed to Leeds, home of the biggest and most active S.F.L. chapter in the country. They were now producing a mimeo'd bulletin of their own, they had a permanent clubroom open day and night, and they were making plans for a national Convention. To the north of them, the Barnsley, Glasgow and Belfast chapters showed no life. To the south, there was no organised activity at all beyond Nuneaton. The entire south of England, containing half the population of the country, seemed to have only two active fans. And Gillings was engaged in a grim struggle with publishing firms, and far too busy to intervene in fandom. The position of the Leeds-Nuneaton axis seemed unchallengeable. It would have seemed incredible that within a year, the Leeds group would quickly have split – the Nuneaton group dissolved – the Liverpool group reduced in importance and that London fandom would not only be publishing *Novae Terrae*, but would also be building the most powerful fan organisation the world has yet seen.

And yet, the portents were there, and could have been seen in Carnell's columns. Each of the blows that shook the foundations of Northern fandom was forecast by him with deadly accuracy. It may have been because he was working busily behind the scenes to deliver them, but more probably that he had his ear fixed very firmly to the ground. The Liverpool group was the first to fall. In August Carnell had reported a movement to transfer the BIS headquarters to London and at an historic meeting in Professor Low's office in Piccadilly that October, the deed was done. One Arthur C. Clarke, an old-time B.I.S. member, was appointed treasurer. After the meeting, Clarke, Carnell and Gillings adjourned to a nearby cafe and London fandom was born.

1937-1939 The First Convention – The Decline of Northern Fandom – The Science Fiction Association – The First Br. Prozine – The Golden Age of London Fandom

The world's first Science Fiction Convention was held in Leeds on January 3, 1937. Moskowitz gives that honor to the New York-Philadelphia meeting of October 1936, but that was merely a regional conference. The Leeds event was truly a national convention, and every important fan in

Britain was there, except leading fan journalist D.R. Smith of Nuneaton who, like Harry Warner, could never be tempted out of his home town. The visitors included Hanson of *Novae Terrae*, Johnson and Russell from Liverpool and Gillings, Carnell and Clarke from London. At the convention it was agreed to form a new national fan organisation, the Science Fiction Association. The head was Meyer of Leeds, the headquarters of the organisation were to be in Leeds, and *Novae Terrae* was to become its official organ. This was the very pinnacle of Leeds' achievement, and almost immediately it began to topple. Rosenblum and other important Leeds fans seceded from the SFA, rather than sever their connections with the American fan organisations, and within a few weeks Gillings was to bring immense prestige to London, by producing the first issue of his *Scientifiction* – The British Fantasy Review. And during the rest of 1937 London fandom continued to grow. In September the death knell sounded for the Nuneaton group as Hanson moved to London taking his mimeograph with him. Without him the Nuneaton group faded away, leaving only D.R. Smith as a lone wolf, and the October *Novae Terrae* appeared under the joint editorship of Hanson, Carnell, and Clarke.

Duly heralded by Carnell, a London branch of the S.F.A. was formed, with more founding members than the entire fan population of Leeds; and Carnell was already suggesting that the next convention be held in London. It was. And at it, the executive of the SFA was formally transferred to an all London committee.

Meanwhile, Gillings had been frantically active. His professionally printed fanzine had served its purpose of convincing a publisher that there was a market for a British prozine and that Gillings was the man to edit it. *Tales of Wonder* duly appeared, and was well received by fandom. The publishers, however, were not quite so happy about it and there was a delay of nine months before the second issue came out. When it did, the publishers promised to go on a quarterly schedule and Gillings promptly abandoned his fanzine for his prozine. *Scientifiction* was taken over by the SFA, who combined it with their year old *Tomorrow*, which at once went professionally printed.

With this the SFA reached an incredible peak of activity. In addition to *Science Fantasy* and *Novae Terrae*, they were publishing a British Science Fiction Bibliography, and two other fanzines – *Amateur Science Stories* and *Science Fiction Gazette* – and supplying their members with numerous services. Their total membership was well over 200 and Wollheim was

suggesting that American fandom join the SFA en masse in default of a worthwhile American fan organisation. London was the fan centre of the world. It was as if a whole city of fans had suddenly gone nova.

Having become the centre of gravity of British fandom, London became its centre of levity. *Novae Terrae* became the world's first *Quandry*-type fanzine. The influence of its new co-editors became obvious almost at once. Hanson had tended to pomposity in his editorials but it was soon taken out of him, and for the first time *Novae Terrae* began to print the type of material we expect from a good humorous fanzine today – satire – personalities – wit – parodies – and general fannish humor. When William F. Temple joined the editorial staff halfway thru 1938, *Novae Terrae* had in him and Arthur Clarke the most brilliant editorial board of any fanzine ever published, or likely to be. It is a pity that much of the material in *Novae Terrae* isn't suitable for quoting – because it is buried in reviews of forgotten films or books – or skits on half-forgotten stories or fans but I will pick out a few pieces as an appendix to this article:

From *Novae Terrae* (April 1938)

Prelude to the Conquest of Space

By Arthur C. (Ego) Clarke
I shot a rocket into the air,
It fell to earth I know not where,
But 50 grammes of T.N.T.,
Exploded in the Rectory.

I shot a rocket into space,
Towards the full moon's beckoning face,
And was rewarded for my pains,
By blowing up the Sea of Rains.

I shot a rocket into the air,
But notwithstanding all my care,
Five hundred tons of dynamite,
Blew San Francisco out of sight.

From *Novae Terrae* August 1938, Second Anniversary Issue. (Excerpt from

D.R. Smith's story "In The Grand Manner")

Something glittered on the alien blue-green sward not fifty yards from the ship. Intensely intrigued, all rushed to it.

"Why, its only a cogwheel" cried Madeleine. Steve gave her a glance from which love and respect were conspicuously absent.

"A left hand helical mitre gear" he said, with emphasis on the last word. "Involute tooth form, helix angle about twelve, ground after hardening." he went on didactically.

"What does all this mean?" cried Madeleine hysterically. Steve regarded her irritably.

"It means I know more about gears than you do."

[Walt ends with "The British Fan #7: William F. Temple by Arthur C. Clarke" from *Novae Terrae* (January 1939), which has been omitted here. – Rob Hansen]

first published as "The Immortal Teacup #3" in *Science Fiction Digest* #7 (September 1952, ed. Henry Burwell)

6. Leeds Leads (1953)

J. Michael Rosenblum

In the beginning was the Science Fiction League! There had been one or two other short lived local groups, and Letters to the Editor had enabled a few fans' names to become more widely known but it was the announcement of the S.F.L. which seemed to crystallise fandom into being. It was *Wonder Stories* (before it became *Thrilling*) which started the League at the instigation of Charles D. Hornig and the blessing of Hugo Gernsback; more with the idea of having a reader's section than of organising an independent fandom.

Now, in Leeds at that time there was a gentleman who got things done. And immediately he read of the formation of the League in the latest "remainder" to come over, he gathered up three of his school friends to form the necessary quorum – after which they were never heard of again by fandom – and applied for recognition as a Chapter of the League. This was granted on April 1st. 1935 and Douglas W.F. Mayer was appointed Director of his one-man branch. But Mayer's speedy action resulted in Leeds being Chapter number seventeen of the Science Fiction League and the first non-American Chapter. And from this fortuitous commencement, began the tradition that LEEDS should Lead in fandom's affairs.

Once the fact of the existence of a Leeds Chapter was published in *Wonder Stories*, some eight or nine hitherto solitary enthusiasts congregated and made a real society up. Actually I think I was the first to get to Mayer's house, tho' a chappie called Dyson had written first. Poor Dyson died about a year later as the result of an accident. Anyrate there we were gradually adapting ourselves into a real organisation. During the next eighteen months a library was built up, a clubroom acquired, officers appointed and correspondence contact made with fellow spirits in Britain and USA. Other local Chapters of the SFL grew up in Belfast, Glasgow and most notably in Nuneaton. In 1936, Maurice Hanson and Denny Jacques of this latter Chapter began to issue a fan-magazine with the title of *Novae Terrae*. By the end of 1936 we in Leeds had decided to organise a meeting of stf. fans and so in January 1937 the first Convention to be held in these islands took place. It

was there that I met Wally Gillings, Ted Carnell, Arthur Clarke, Eric Russell and Leslie Johnson for the first time.

This convention it was which decided to form a British fantasy organisation and chose the name of the Science Fiction Association. Coming just at the period when the original impetus from Wonder Stories had run down, the SFA fell heir to much of the work done by the SFL and was soon a success throughout the world and indeed the premier organisation of fandom of the period.

When the SFA was formed the arrangement had been that the Leeds group should do the actual running of the Society. But this idea turned out to have the seeds of discord hidden within and two schools of thought developed. One held that only the managing of the SFA mattered and that the members of the group should conform to the instructions of the SFA officials as nominated by the formation convention, even if such officials were out of conformity with the constitution of the group – as Mayer was by then; whilst the opposing viewpoint was that the group was an autonomous body, entitled to run itself as its members wished, and that if need be the official positions could be re-arranged within the Leeds group by free election. The conflict was brief and the upshot decisive – management left Leeds and was taken over by London fans; the first group withered away, and the second group retreated within itself and went on quite happily with a purely local existence. By now the date was June 1937; and the Leeds group, now neither precisely SFL (though it still used the name) or SFA, continued placidly until the lights of civilisation went out – September 1939.

In 1938 the idea of a club journal was mooted and several issues of a “Bulletin” were circulated to members. Then three members together purchased a printing press and general circulation was tried for two issues, but a mere bulletin was not enough and it was decided to start a general magazine. During a discussion at a meeting on the name for the proposed magazine the term *Futurian* was evolved – I proudly claim a large part of the parenthood. This nomenclature as a synonym for stf fan soon gained great fame; as a group in New York were then searching for a suitable title for themselves and seized it with great avidity. These people, led by D.A. Wollheim, Frederik Pohl and J.B. Michel, gave a special twist to the meaning which still remains amongst American fandom, but in Australia the term enjoys its original meaning and there have been Futurians in that country since 1939 and still are.

Came 1939, and within one month there was no Leeds group. Of the four executives one was a Territorial who was immediately called up; one joined the RAMC, being a qualified chemist and three weeks later was the youngest sergeant at his depot by 12 years; and a third was stranded outside Britain where he had been when war was declared. Your scribe was the fourth. And the rank and file gradually became another type of rank and file. Our numbers had stayed steady at around the dozen; a hard core of eight and a constant joining of new members who drifted away in ones and were replaced by others. The average age by 1939 was 19 to 21.

Fandom throughout Britain was stunned by the war. But after a few months there were attempts at contact. Chain newsletters were the first symptom, notably a series organised by Arthur C. Clarke. The SFA was in cold storage and fandom was in a state of complete anarchy. There had been a number of fan magazines in production and these gradually tailed off at longer and longer intervals. Rock bottom was reached when the attenuated wartime version of Liverpool's *Science Fantasy Review* was offered to me. I had by then put out some four issues of a one sheet *Pseudo-Futurian* and so I combined the two as the *Futurian War Digest*, with a nickname (as was then the fashion) of Fido. Once fandom realised that Fido was reasonably dependable the co-operation was terrific and extremely heartwarming, and Fido became a focal point and nucleus, as well as a clearing house for questions and information. In its way it approximated to *Operation Fantast* of today. As Captain Slater has since found out, the load was too heavy for one person to cope with; and at my suggestion a wartime, loosely knit organisation was created under the title of British Fantasy Society. E.J. Carnell was Chairman, D.R. Smith the secretary whilst I held the sort of omnibus position of Director. The BFS filled a need and was as successful as circumstances permitted. It ran till the outbreak of peace and then folded as had been decided from the first. Since then we have had no overall organisation in fandom, possibly because *Operation Fantast* gives an organisational centre and local groups are now fulfilling the need for social meetings.

There is the story in rough outline. One day it may be written in full as part of the history of fandom

Orbit #1 (September/October 1953, ed. George Gibson)

7. The Saga of the Flat (1970) William F. Temple

Early in 1938 I was flat-hunting in London. I called on a friend who inhabited the world's tiniest bed-sitter, in Norfolk Square, Paddington. He had an even tinier radio, but no shelf room, so stowed it in a cupboard at the foot of his too-short divan. Hunched on the divan, he regulated the sound volume by opening or closing the cupboard door with his foot. Arthur C. Clarke was ever resourceful.

A blown-up photo of one half of the Moon covered one wall. The other hemisphere covered the opposite wall. Arthur would lie in bed studying the territory he intended to help conquer.

Maybe his love of space travel was boosted by claustrophobia in Paddington. We were both members of the British Interplanetary Society and also the Science-Fiction Association, were keen on music and wanted to write pro sf. So I suggested we shared a flat – a spacious one.

We found it at 88 Grays Inn Road. Four rooms, plus etceteras, on two floors, looking out on Grays Inn. Virginia Woolf lived around the corner but never introduced herself. We furnished it, made our own bookshelves for our considerable libraries – I still have all those shelves.

The huge Moon-photo dominated our Den wall, as the Moon itself dominated our thoughts. No. 88 became the HQ of the BIS, which gathered there to discuss ways and means of reaching those lunar Mares. Among the regulars, R.A. Smith, whose fine interplanetary drawings illustrated Arthur's earlier space books. And Val Cleaver, later in charge of Britain's Blue Streak rocket.

Also Maurice Hanson, living in a Bloomsbury bed-sitter, editing Britain's first fanzine, *Novae Terrae*. We invited him to share the Flat. He came, carrying his typewriter. A spool fell off and dragged behind him on 30ft of ribbon. There were trams in Grays Inn Road in those days. He crossed in front of one. It churned over the ribbon. We shut our eyes. We knew he'd never let go of that precious typewriter. He'd rather be dragged along behind the tram. But somehow he escaped entanglement and walked on as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

So No. 88 became the editorial offices of *Novae Terrae* too, with Arthur and me as assistant editors. Often in the small hours the three of us would be fighting a temperamental duplicator to produce *NT* or the *BIS Bulletin*. Or getting out copy for the *BIS Journal*, which depicted detailed plans of our proposed Moonship, so similar in the event to the Apollo vehicle. (A proud moment when my own tatty copies of that Journal were shown on TV that momentous week when the “giant leap” was made.)

The *BIS* constructed instruments for its Moonship too. An inertia-governed altimeter which we tested on the Chancery Lane Underground escalators. And a navigational instrument which we demonstrated 100% successfully at the Science Museum to impressed yet patronising (we were cranks, you see) newspaper reporters. In January, 1970, Maurice and I were in the Geological Museum, just a stone’s throw from the spot where we’d argued that it was possible to reach the Moon. We gazed at the chunk of Moon rock Neil Armstrong had brought back and voiced the same thought:

“If only we’d had a time machine then and taken those reporters 31 years into the future....”

BIS meetings alternated with Thursday gatherings of sf fans, a tradition still carried on at the nearby Globe. Only then they were weekly, not monthly. And our pub was the Red Bull, next door. They tended to split into two factions: the teetotallers, headed by Arthur and Maurice, who stayed in the Flat for the meeting; and the others, including John Carnell. Ken Chapman, Frank Arnold, and myself who found liquor in the Red Bull heightened discussion. At chucking out time both parties merged again in the Flat for supper and talk until the last trains went.

One night we returning revellers found the stairs to the Flat barred by a heavy table and other Flat furniture, with Arthur & Co. armed with mops and brooms prepared to keep the drunks out. We stormed the barricade. Thanks to some smart rapier play by Carnell and his rolled umbrella, we broke through. After all, the Flat was ours too – it was everybody’s.

We staged revenge. We sent Arthur out for the fish and chips, and fixed a booby trap over the door. When he entered, a large tin tea-tray fell on his head. He didn’t turn a hair – and in those days he *had* hair.

The fish and chip suppers were a ritual. Even the elegant John Wyndham (then John Beynon Harris) would eat them with us out of newspaper. Alas, he departed from us last year but many of the old crew are still around and have become sf authors themselves since: Syd Bounds, Eric

Williams, Sam (John Christopher) Youd. Then there were the visitors from Ultima Thule (Liverpool) like John Burke, who does those Pan “Book of the Film” paperbacks these days, and Dave McIlwain, since known as Charles Eric Maine, whose *The Mind of Mr. Soames* has just been filmed. And a character named Eric Frank Russell....

Merry days, but there was a shadow over them. In my Editorial for the January 1939 *BIS Journal* I wrote:

“Life is overcrowded and uncertain today, and people are inclined to gather the rosebuds while they may under the threat of an approaching storm of war.”

The storm broke. Maurice was conscripted and John Carnell took over his *Novae Terrae*, called it *New Worlds...* and began a new era in British sf.

I married in haste but have never repented at leisure. We lived at the Flat. Arthur ignored the war and began writing his first novel, called *Raymond*. He’d burn the midnight oil working at it, then burst into our bedroom in the small hours to declaim to us some passage of pure genius he’d just penned. Later it became *Against the Fall of Night*. Later again, *The City and the Stars*. He’ll never finish re-writing it.

But soon the RAF claimed him, and the Army me, and we had to leave the Flat. Then the bombs came....

When I was demobbed I returned to the scene. The Flat had been in the centre of a terrace. Now its inner walls had become outer walls. Everything adjacent had been bombed out of existence, including the pub and the fish and chip shop. The Red Bull had gone forever: it was never re-built. And in a sense the Flat has gone forever too – only a flat is there now.

In another sense they will both live as long as we have memories.

Vision of Tomorrow #9 (June 1970, ed. Phil Harbottle)

The 1940s

8. *The Fantast* (1952) Harry Warner Jr.

Occasionally a fanzine appears which attracts much favourable comment but doesn't make a sensation. It bobs up for issue after issue, vanishes after a couple of years, and only then, its true worth is recognised. Something like this happened in the case of *The Fantast*. It was the most literate fanzine of its day but it had the misfortune to exist at a time when American fanzines were big, splashy, controversial, and noisy. Soon after C.S. Youd finally decided that he was taking time for *The Fantast* which could be applied better to more serious things, the finest serious fanzine before Langley Searles' went out of existence.

The Fantast was published in England during the first couple of years of World War Two. Youd was a young fellow who combined a quiet sense of humour with the intelligence and vast stores of information about everything which so many upper middle class Britishers possess. *The Fantast* appealed to me in particular because of its staid format. Pictures were scarce, margins were narrow, white space was almost non-existent, in defiance of all the rules of eye-temptation. This austere format not only conserved the priceless mimeograph paper that was so scarce in war-time England; it also fitted ideally the subject matter of *The Fantast*. The magazine wasn't stuffy, and it didn't require specialised knowledge in any field to enjoy its contents, but you were forced to pay attention while you read, and distracting pictures or fancy headings would have been unsuitable. I know that I kept wishing I had the courage to make Spaceways a little more bare in this fashion.

I find a dozen issues of *The Fantast* in a large manila envelope in my attic, and there were probably a few more that I didn't sort into this file. They look very much alike. They all arrived in the same shade of brown wrappers, folded once, usually stamped by the Baltimore customs house. A person who had never known the personality and delights of *The Fantast* would never have the heart to look through such a file. Fortunately, there are still some people around who remember its merits; witness the reprinting of "The Road to Fame" in the FAPA at the present time.

Superficially, much of the material seemed at first glance to be as dull as

the wrappers. Witness the first sentence of D.R. Smith's little story, "It's a Devil", from the sixth issue: "The two men plodded over the moor towards the rocky hills might, from their ancient and tattered garments, have been tramps, but the rope slung from the shoulders of the first, and the rucksack on the back of the second, proclaimed their true status as rock-climbers." That reads like a murky, 19th century opening of a novel. But Smith managed to retain that style, and yet complete his story in a single page – a sardonic account of how the dead souls who used to leave slippery things lying around on mountainsides are forced to spend their time in hell making mountains steeper and rougher for the living. Smith was one of *Fantast's* most prolific contributors. He usually turned out just about one page of concentrated fact or fiction. From the third issue, here are some of his thoughts on the use of words in science fiction stories:

"Words are crude tools for the writer of fantasy to work with because words are so essentially commonplace. Most of them have been invented to describe the more-or-less ordinary article or action, and words that in themselves appeal to the imagination are limited. In fact the films and the sensational press have so woefully misused our stock of rich, flamboyant adjectives that they have become almost meaningless. Some writers surmount this difficulty by digging out abstruse and half-obsolete words, with fatal results in the hands of the poorly skilled. The fair way out is to use commonplace words skilfully, which is called style. Style consists of the meticulous selection of the right words to fit accurately and with the right rhythm the scene, action or emotion described... Magazine fiction... is a sort of soporific for the eyes, which might otherwise be unacceptable while eating or travelling or listening to the wireless. It must not make any demands on the mind, since this is otherwise engaged and must not be distracted, and so the style adopted is that of a ten-year old child describing the last film it saw. At the moment editors are hampered by the lack of authors capable of writing down to this standard, and so even *Amazing* occasionally features a collection of words that approximates to a story."

Don't get the impression that *Fantast* was so literate that it was stuffy. It had the sense of proportion and humour that is essential for any fan publication. Even the mighty-minded Smith occasionally descended to the level of idle speculation, dropping for brief intervals his weighty pronouncements. Witness, from the sixth issue, his defence of tea-leaf fortune-telling:

“The untouched tea-leaves in the bottom of a person’s cup obviously owe their arrangement to the manner in which he has drained the cup, which in turn depends on the character of the man, the size of his mouth, and other variables. From his character and his position in life – which later will also influence the disposition of the tea-leaves, as, for example, a person of the lower class will try to eat them, a person of my class will leave them well-placed for throwing in the fire, and a well-brought-up gentleman will leave them carelessly-placed ready for the slop basin – from these two influences his probable future is determined. The rules used in fortune telling by this means naturally give the fortune straight away, the process of inductive reasoning being incorporated in those rules so that the most unintelligent person can apply them.”

The Fantast is the only fanzine in my memory to review a book that treats of the Life of Christ in a worlds-of-if fashion. This is Bernard Newman’s *Hosanna*. Charles Rowlands reviewed this little-known book, which shows what might have happened if Christ had taken the wrong course and turned his powers to military and political purposes. In *Hosanna*, Christ’s personality leads the Jews to drive the Romans from the land for a time, but the Romans re-conquer Jerusalem, Christ is crucified – and centuries later, the world has been converted to the Mohammedan religion.

The Fantast also contained some of the best poetry published in fanzines around this time. Not great poetry; most of it was experimental stuff by people like John Michel and Eric Hopkins, who were imitating other experimental stuff, or glowingly romantic lyrics by Youd himself, which had nothing to say in a pleasant sort of way. Typical of the quality of *Fantast*’s poetry might be this short one by Harold Gottliffe:

No more we’ll sing –
for who could fill with praise
Or joy, or gladness the resounding air?
All this belongs to the unselfish days
Of savage hearts and nights untouched by care.
Those days are gone, and in their place we find
– Selfish and civilised and racked with pain –
The Era of the Ruled and Ordered Mind;
And long within her grave has Saki lain,

A long succession of uneasy days,
Mechanical and Useful, form a ring
Round which we march in timeless prison way
The rhythm of our steps? No more we'll sing.

Now a very odd thing happened, about two-thirds of the way through *Fantast's* existence. It changed editors, and no one would have realised it, without the information that was put down in black and white in the publication. Douglas Webster took over, when Youd went into the armed forces. Youd proceeded to produce some of the best writing about the war that I've seen anywhere, and Webster continued to grind out fascinatingly plain-looking *Fantasts*, just as Youd had done. The magazine had taken on such a personality of its own that it maintained its circle of writers and readers under the older, less enthusiastic Webster's direction.

Youd has had a few stories published in the prozines since the war, and won a prize for a novel. I don't know where he is now or what he is doing. John Burke's biographical notes in the 12th issue of *The Fantast* might sum him up:

“With a great deal of talent, Mr Youd may never become the writer he deserves to be because of his lack of application and his inability to make up his mind as to what to do with his life; he is less likely to succeed than many of his acquaintances with inferior taste and few talents, but more determination....When Sam decides what the purpose of living is, he will bring to bear an acute mind and a wide general knowledge acquired through his manifold activities that will insure his success.”

Opus #2 (February 1952, ed. Max Keasler)

9. Down with Fan Humour (1943) Francis T. Laney

The literature of fandom teems with allegedly comic articles and stories – some entire fanzines are devoted exclusively to the silly side of things. Even crudely drawn cartoons have been allowed space in some issues – as though we were all juvenile followers of the Buck Rogers funny books. An outsider looking through a representative stack of fanzines could not fail to be unfavorably impressed – and could scarcely be expected to be attracted by so apparently frothy a hobby. Fans generally speaking are fairly intelligent, reasonably serious people (judging from my own contacts) and it is a source of never-failing amazement to me that so large a proportion of so many fanzines is devoted to labored attempts to make us laugh.

In late years, the cult of silliness and asininity has been growing by leaps and bounds among the general population, and it is not surprising to see a reflection in fan circles. The “kidder” and the “wisecracker” have become national heroes; every night, millions of Americans sit spellbound, listening to some inane radio comedian. Jokes and humor obviously have their place in a well-balanced life, but it is pathological when *nothing* can be taken seriously, when *everything* must be twisted and distorted into something to laugh at – this condition is, I suspect, merely one facet of the wide-spread insanity that grips mankind. The walls of a madhouse ring with pointless laughter.

I freely admit that humorous fantasy has a legitimate place in literature (cf. Thorne Smith), but it so happens that of all types of writing, humour is one of the hardest to compose adequately. Serious writing can vary greatly in quality without completely repulsing the reader, but humour must be well-nigh perfect. It is too easy for the would-be humorist to be obscure, in poor taste, silly – or to commit any one of a hundred other faults – and in any of these cases, the product is definitely unfunny. Amateurs, being proportionately less skilled, are all the more likely to lay an egg. In fact, I can offhand think of but one intentionally comic piece of fan writing that struck me as being definitely funny: Art Widner’s “Saved By A Pill” in a recent

issue of Canada's *Light* – though of course there are belly-laughs to be found in some purportedly serious items.

Our hobby of reading, collecting, and writing about stf and fantasy is not furthered by pseudo-humorous accounts of fanventions, fantrips, and the like, entertaining though they may be. A good fanzine should not be entirely ephemeral – fiction; verse; serious articles dealing with various phases of bibliography, biography, criticism, discussion forums, arguments – and of course, moderately sane accounts of fan doings. Please don't get the idea that I am a humorless and solemn old sour-puss, with no appreciation of the lighter side of life. I enjoy a good joke just as much as the next fellow, and my laugh is loud and frequent. I merely assert that fan humour is NOT good humour, and, even if it were, that there is no legitimate place for it in fanzines.

I have noticed that you British fans have developed quite a tendency to ape the alleged "humour" of American fanzines – even in some cases reprinting humorous items verbatim. Generally speaking, the British fanzines I've seen so far display a decidedly sane and level-headed approach, and it is my sincere hope that you Britons will keep your magazines serious. If you must imitate or reprint from America, refrain from the giddy items disgracing so many of our publications. Some things should be allowed to moulder into oblivion.

Futurian War Digest #30 (August 1943, ed. J. Michael Rosenblum)

10. Three Fandoms in England (1942) Doug Webster

All fandom is divided into three parts; at least, in England it is. The fact seems little realised on either side of the Atlantic. Which is a pity, since it leads to some interesting conclusions and, I think, a much better conception of just how British fandom works and how individuals are grouped and react according to class. Wherefore step to one side brethren, and allow me to spread myself.

I shall call them the First, Second, and Third Fandoms, after the method of (I think) Speer. It's not an accurate description, but it is a very handy one. I believe that it was Michael Rosenblum who first drew my attention to the distinctions, though I'd been mooning about it vaguely for some while before.

First Fandom is comprised of those described – sometimes accurately – as the real Old-Timers. Carnell, Chapman, Gillings, Temple, Johnson, Russell, Clarke, and so on. The men who started the SFA and, what is more important, are so temperamentally disposed as to put in all the work to keep the SFA – and the BIS and so on – steaming ahead. They have been reading stf for God knows how long. *I don't know how long.* Far too long, I should say. Most of them still read it, and many of them – this is a significant point, for we are considering England, not USA – still read all of every promag they can lay hands on, and regard science-fiction as a sort of ritual rather than as bed-time reading or comic-relief. They are, on the average, in the late twenties in age, they are much given to drinking beer, singing songs, and being merry, which is Good. They do not like fighting or harsh words; the more extreme support this war, as they would support any war, unquestionably; the less extreme think more deeply and are saddened; they support the war too; many of them write science-fiction stories, or edit science-fiction magazines, or run science-fiction services; most of them do not understand Poetry and are rendered uncomfortable by any exhibition of consideration about politics or interest in the Arts; which is Bad.

These are the old-timers, a rough and merry crowd. Here is Second

Fandom, and ArtWithACapitalA.

In Second Fandom are Webster and others. The others are much more important than Webster; because I've never been nor had any desire to be a Famous Fan. They number amongst them Youd, Burke, McIlwain, Hopkins, Medhurst, Rathbone, Turner, Smith, Needham, and a few others. These gentry are among the most conceited in fandom, and rightly so, of course. They look with intelligence and almost a secret contempt on First and Third Fandoms; just what the latter think of them would be rather interesting to know. Those in Second Fandom are almost of an age; just now they range from 19 to, say 22 – or perhaps 24 if you include Hanson and Smith.

The history of fandom of all these young men is very similar. They started reading stf in the early 30's – I, for instance, find that I probably first read magazine fantasy in 1928 or 1929, and the American brand about '32 or '33. On the whole, they gave it up again about '39 or '40. Having read it on and off for some years, and sneered at it well-nigh continuously, they were unworried by the lack of war-time stf and only glanced at such magazines as came into their hands. They came into organised fandom with the SFA in '36 or '37, and among them have edited quite a few fanmags – the best that England has produced. Second Fandom, however, has another God – Art – to which it pays obeisance in many forms. It doesn't worry about what becomes of the SFA or *Astounding* but it is concerned with where the world's going and why, and how better it could be steered on its way. It is composed of serious young men, introverts all, and the serious young men are equipped with hot tempers, not a little command of language, fiery pens, a very great confidence in themselves, a conceit that tells them they are in a small measure acquainted with culture and capable of producing work a damn sight better than their fellow fans. They write novels and Poems and all sorts of stories, and they listen to good music and read intellectual books. All of which is a Good Thing or a Bad Thing, according to how you look at it. Third Fandom, again, is not confined to such narrow limits of age. On the whole, its members have appeared in fandom or even have started reading stf only since the beginning of the war. Ages range from Houston, at 14, to Busby at 23, the preponderance being somewhere below military age.

It seems to me that they are much nearer in temperament and general character to First than to Second Fandom. They are the ones who would carry on the SFA, if need be, and they would hardly be given to writing novels. They read the magazines avidly insofar as they can lay hands on them, and

will cluster round this new society, BFFF or British Fantasy Society or whatever it may eventually be called. I haven't been able to fathom any reason for its being formed in the first place, other than that it should be a means whereby the newer fans – as George Medhurst sardonically calls them – are brought into contact and given the chance to cooperate; just as others were brought into contact by the forming of the SFA. Which is a reasonable enough idea.

That, then, is the outline. As I said, the conclusions are interesting, for in considering the writing or career of any particular fan you can first slip him into his category, roughly or exactly, and thereby obtain a much fuller idea of why he carries on as he does. Naturally, the members of each Fandom are fairly intimate and there's a good deal of herd feeling and mass opinion.

Of course, it must be emphasised that the characteristics I've mentioned are only means, and group characteristics. Individuals within each Fandom may diverge partly or completely in several instances. Then again, you'd expect a certain number of fans to be borderline cases or not easily fitted into one or another Fandom. Thus, Michael Rosenblum places himself between First and Second Fandoms, and others, such as Maurice Hanson, D.R. Smith, Sid Birchby, and Ego Clarke, might be similarly placed. And then Edwin Macdonald, who's some 17 years old and a comparative newcomer, is yet temperamentally more inclined to Second than to Third Fandom. And Ron Holmes, who by virtue of his age and stage of fan experience might be thought to fall into Second Fandom, is really at home only in the Third. To take an instance illustrating what I say: A couple of days ago, March 21st, *Voice of the Imagi-Nation* dropped in, and I glanced at portions of a letter from R. George Medhurst, a shining light in Second Fandom. Says RGM:

“On this side of the Atlantic, we've completely demolished the legend of *The Skylark of Space*. This unfortunate opus is universally rejected, from Sam Youd, to the Bibliophan, with Donald Raymond Smith maintaining an uncomfortable silence.”

This is not strictly true. In point of fact, Second Fandom in a mass rejects an E.E. Smith story as something unpleasant, ridiculous and childish. Smith, on the outskirts, has at one time or another spoken in favour of his namesake; but being prudent maintains his peace in the face of unanswerable arguments. But in First Fandom, among Ted Carnell and Ken Chapman, you will find several who gobble up Smith at face value. They take the things, perhaps,

less seriously, and don't ask for adult fare where they know they can't get it. And Third Fandom seethes with Smith fans: for all fans, in the lush of their virgin years, are hypnotised... by the great names. So that here, as elsewhere, you can the more easily explain, and more fully understand, an individual's actions and opinions by reference to his group. A man is known by the company he keeps. After a while it becomes a fascinating game, and you can spend whole days turning out analyses of screwy behaviour. However, should a case ever defeat you, baffled and desperate, you always know my address. Or if you don't, you ought to.

Spaceways #30 (September 1942, ed. Harry Warner Jr.)

11. Immanent Worlds (1973)

James Parkhill-Rathbone

I met George Medhurst in London during the war. In those days he lived in Finborough Road, in the sub-basement. He was thin, and wore spectacles. His collection of SF magazines was so precious that he kept them in a glazed bookcase and, as he showed them to me, one at a time, he wiped both sides of the paper covers with a duster, so that I felt I could hardly open them without soiling them in some way with my eyes. When he shook hands he extended a limp flipper. Solemnly one shook this: it was fundamentally unshakeable but one did one's best. In fandom we called him Snaghurst, or The Snag – I have forgotten why. I remember the back of his head as he put his precious collection away, wiping each one again. I admit I had a vision of a stray bomb falling and blowing the whole thing up, and of the Snag blowing away the brick dust with pursed lips, frantically digging down, duster in hand. He was not somebody one forgot easily.

The point of all this is that I lived between Edinburgh and my birthplace, Gourock, and I don't remember meeting any fans at all until the beginning of the war. My isolation in Edinburgh caused a spate of unhappy letters to descend upon fans south of the border, and this outpouring only ceased for a short time with periodical holidays in Gourock. Even then, it was only with a particularly illiterate letter printed in Dr. Sloane's *Amazing Stories* – I have forgotten when, but in the late thirties – that I found fandom at all. It was possible to travel even then; but I never had any money and, I realise now, was happier in my ivory tower than I might have been out of it. I met John F. Burke in 1942 (I think) when I was looking after spastic children in a home in Worcestershire, and he seemed quite different to the Johnny Burke I had written to some years before that, and Sam Youd, whom I met in the Hatton Garden pub for the first time, but after the war. Again I had the sense of never really having known him: he was different, this editor of the best fanmag there was, from my imagined friend. *Fantast* had a richness, a kind of heavy feel to it. Sometimes it was funny.

In Edinburgh I lived with my granny in an odd-shaped tenement overlooking the old Flodden wall. The room where I produced my own

magazine, called *Macabre*, of which I think there were only two copies since the gelatine had no idea of what was expected of it, contained a red plush sofa with chairs to match and a polished mahogany table upon which was set a china and ormolu erection my father had brought back from Germany. My typewriter, a Blick, had had to be cleared of birdseed before it worked, and cost me a hard-earned two and sixpence, from a junk man. It became difficult to produce the magazine with the typewriter on the table, because the vase in the middle insisted on trembling towards the brink of destruction. One took those risks in those days.

Before that, well it is all shot through with sunlight and pale colour, like a pointilliste painting. Michael Rosenblum produced a printed fanmag, I remember, some of the pages in green ink. He was undoubtedly the one fan who proved to be well, whoever it was I thought I was writing to. It seems we are all tough nowadays and so on. But then, if one was a dreamer, and there is no doubt I was, one appreciated kindness, and Michael was kind. I met him in Leeds in 1941 (I think), and saw the Adana he used for his fanmag.

My entire adolescence was consumed in putting together what I now see as a kind of human engineering: I thought that if things worked as well as did machines, then they could always be improved and no emotion lost on politics (which I have always considered to be peculiarly comic.) I was an anarchist in the sense that it seemed to me that one's mind contained a legal system. It never occurred to me that there might exist wilfulness, waywardness. Never having had much, I thought that since most people could live on very little, it would take very little persuasion to begin to run the kind of technological society where the technology evolved from people's needs, and to an extent their aspirations. It seemed quite natural for "man" to wish to explore the universe and I was interested technically in rocket motors and space travel. My letters must have been very dull.

Ordinary life, as my friend William Gerhardie keeps pointing out, is quite fantastic. My rather tenuous friendship with fans of the thirties, through letters, were the product of my own illusions as to what other people were like. I was particularly interested in Le Corbusier, and exchanged letters with him, and a lot of what I thought of as "the future" was concerned with machines and architecture. I think it is quite possible that this was so for many thirties fans also. Thus when I lived in Gidea Park I used often to visit a housing estate where there had been an architectural competition and some "futuristic" houses built, and I had this feeling that the future was actually

happening. When the news reels showed Herr Tilling with his “rocket post” I had the same feeling. Most of all when, having read H.G. Wells’ *The Shape of Things to Come* for the umpteenth time, I actually saw the film, I thought everything would gradually merge into that world, because it made sense – and I thought that human beings were motivated by sense. I never disregarded sensibility either: the future had to be wanted by human beings, and could not be imposed upon them.

I wonder if, in a very rough way, this was what fans thought in the thirties: probably not. But the thoughts were in the air.

In the late forties I was living on a small sailing boat and had not heard from fans for a long time. I was working for a book printer, mostly as a proof-reader, and acquiring some kind of order for my thoughts. I had already met Mrs. Virginia Woolf and I suppose I was already thinking of myself as a writer. Nevertheless the worlds of SF are contingent upon the other worlds. I made some films, or scripted them, and some years later I met John Burke when he was Chief Script Editor for Twentieth Century Fox. He still read SF, but could no longer be called, I think, a Fan.

As a publisher’s editor and a writer of fairly long standing I am both amused and exasperated at the way in which authors make a mystery of themselves, or seem to appear to know so much about human beings that they cannot accept another one without deep probing. Fundamentally, they don’t seem interested in the human beings who are their material. SF authors, most of them, are of the opinion that their plots are the most important things for them, and to some extent this lack of curiosity is probably excusable. But the others: they will discuss most things except writing or anything that calls for mutual discussion. There’s also, as it seems to me, a kind of “small talk” key of entry, which includes knowing a few fairly sexy jokes, speaking in a “sophisticated” way. As I remember, fans of the thirties could approach their SF authors more directly – but those fans who became SF authors have all the marks I have mentioned, or some equivalent. The effect is of a bland, effective closed shop – which, in addition, has a moat round it and the drawbridge up. It is also markedly comical, especially nowadays, when all the pioneering work has been done. The modern SF writer does no more than respond with his skill to the demands of the market, and what he sells is mostly hotted up emotion about some burning issue of the day.

Blunt #2 (November 1973, ed. Mary & Bob Smith and Dave Rowe)

12. War Stories (1943-1945)

Ted Carnell

i) Gullible's Travels

Over 30,000 miles in eight months of travel is the latest achievement of your Sandsman; we knelt in homage to the first rain and fog we have seen in almost that length of time. The last rainstorm we had the pleasure of shower-bathing in was the clash of three mighty electrical storms somewhere in the Indian Ocean near the Equator. Since then it has been very stormy for the Nazi's and Italians, to our lasting satisfaction.

To our regret we never quite caught up with Sphinky Temple – we arrived in Cairo only to find that he had moved on to the Tunis area a month before; we moved from Sicily into Italy to find that he had followed us into Sicily; and now we have left Italy we hear that he has arrived in our footprints there and is probably chasing the tedeschi still further back. Of other fans in the Middle East we saw and heard little, although we had some amazing meetings with non-stf people we knew from the old home town, and many were the carousels on looted Italian wine.

March full moon found us sweltering in the heat of the tropics somewhere off Freetown, Sierra Leone. The long weeks of idleness with nothing to read produced from three of us a naval game taking six hours or more to play. The game became the craze of the ship, and seems to have spread throughout Fleet circles, for when we reached a North African port a few months ago we found that it was being played by Officers and Men there complete to the final details of rules. (Patent applied for).

At this time, too, we undertook to edit and produce a 4-page ship's newspaper every other day. "Tropical Times" became quite a success during our 8-week voyage, and we wrote several controversial articles anent astronautics, ghosts and telepathy which raised local storms. Astronautics was hotly debated in the Officers' Lounge and we finally had to give a lecture to some 200 of them, explaining the simpler more fundamental principles – our brain couldn't go deeper than that, not having the depth that Pilot Officer Clarke has. Needless to say that the old bogey of whether a rocket could work

in space or not cropped up, and many bets have been placed upon our proof or disproof of the fact.

The full moon in April was under idyllic conditions – it shone across the outline of Table Mountain, Cape Town, while we were delving in a variety of second-hand bookstalls loaded down with pro mags – loan only, as the supply had been stopped from USA. May saw us watching a movie show in an open-air cinema at Suez – it happened to be Disney’s “Fantasia” again, while June moon leered down at us from across the mountains in the heart of Syria. July illuminated the Sphinx and Pyramids under a mysterious light, and for fleeting moments of magic woven by the sonorous voice of an Egyptian guide we were transplanted back to the days of the Pharaohs.

July saw a different scene – the battle of Catania Plain in Sicily, with huge fires burning from the aerodrome; of cones of red flak floating skywards in the protection of our ports and beaches; the roar of artillery barrages, and the chatter of machine guns.

August brought almost a total eclipse of the moon, a calculated fact as we stealthily crept in on a commando raid on Messina, allowing us to get ashore under darkness only to be pinned down on a mile stretch of road for a whole day by German and Italian guns from the mainland.

September saw us again watching a movie, this time only a few miles behind 8th Army frontline in Southern Italy, with General Montgomery as guest of honour. So rapid have our movements been that the October full moon shone on us once again at a movie show, this time back in N. Africa.

Our return trip from Italy to N. Africa was marked by one of those mysteries of the sea, very common in warfare.

We crossed the Mediterranean in bad weather for small craft, and as dawn broke one morning we found we were some 5 miles off Cape Bon, Tunis. Away on our starboard quarter floated something which at first we took to be a U-boat, but upon closer examination turned out to be the broken stern of a US LCT, which had broken her back during the night owing to the rough sea. No sign of life came from her – only the US flag fluttered occasionally from its mast. Like pirates of old we boarded her, for there’s still prize money to be had for derelicts, as well as loot aboard.

The crew had gone overboard on the life rafts as far as we could make out. In their quarters a gold wrist watch still ticked away beside a bunk; everything was normal except for the foot of water slopping round the mess deck... and then we made a find. The February *ASF*, and one of Thorne

Smith's books, *The Glorious Pool*.

While the October full moon shone on us in N. Africa, the November one peered fitfully down upon us in the setting of our Editorial address.

As we flung back the roll-top desk a veritable flood of mags, letters and fanzines flooded out, which have taken many days to mull through. Now from the seeming chaos we view the changes that have taken place this year during our absence, and can perhaps give a survey from a fresh viewpoint. We welcomed the return to small size of *ASF* bemoaning the fact that the large size spoil the bookshelf, but more or less happy in the knowledge that we still have a complete file of the mag. So *Unknown* has gone? The last issue we had was Dec 1942. Presumably one or two more were published before it disappeared into its 4th-dimensional realm, from whence it came?

The first yarn we read was van Vogt's *The Weapon Makers*, and once again hand it to AE for a superb story, topped only by his earlier effort *Slan*. In our estimation *The Weapon Makers* far out-strips any of the old masterpieces of Smith, Williamson, Vincent, Simak, Cummings, etc. There is a forcefulness behind the writing and a beautiful layer of plot formation and characterisation.

We feel that we are so far behind the times with reading at the moment that it would be a waste of time to review or analyse any stories or issues. Later, perhaps if necessary. Meanwhile, there seems plenty of room for random thoughts, especially about fandom.

During our eight months absence we observe that the face of fandom has changed in Britain even more so; the signs have been evident for nearly two years that there will be a vast difference after the war – that British fans will not revert back to the same conditions as existed for them before 1939. We can predict the following, having mentally reviewed the situation, that the newer fans who have become known during the war years will be the leaders of the new fandom that will rise from the foundations they have been building since 1941. This is not a prediction that the older fans intend to fade out – many of them will return from their travels overseas and become just as active as previously, but, in the main, we feel that old-timers will want to take a back seat, although still retaining their interest in fandom and fantasy.

We take this view mainly because of the number of fans who have been married since the war began; many of them now having families, and their leisure time will be curtailed considerably in nursing the babies and keeping the wolf from the door in general. Also, we know of many fans who ardently

wish to crash the fiction markets, and we predict that they won't be able to continue fandom as they used to if they devote their spare time to writing. Fandom then will still be carried by the younger members, which is as it should be; for then the feeling that there is a ruling clique of older fans holding the reins will be abolished.

As for the revival of the Science Fiction Association and the continuance of the present British Fantasy Society, we can only speak as an observer and not as an authority, for the destiny of the former is in the hands of the Executive Committee, when they reform after the war. Our personal feelings in the matter is that much good could come from an amalgamation of the two, combining the best aspects of each and utilising to the full the connections that both have built up. That is for the future, however.

Many thanks to all of you who wrote us while we were away. Unfortunately no mail reached us from mid-August until our return here, so three months of correspondence will doubtless arrive sometime in 1944. A postal from Les Johnson somewhere near Algiers was received by us somewhere near Algiers! Despite 10 days of enquiry we failed to dig him up although we were probably only 5 miles from him.

We hear that Sphynxy Temple obtained some Verne books printed in Italian while in Sicily. Presumably he bought them with legitimate Military Money – the sucker! And we were there in the first throes of looting and couldn't find anything worth lifting in the book line, except some moth-eaten copies of *La Vie Parisienne*.

Sands of Time #10 (December 1943, ed. Ted Carnell)

ii) Eavesdropping in the E.T.O.

Ten years ago this column used to be called "Trans-Atlantic Commentary", and it was turned out for Mac's *Oklahoma News*, an interesting little privately-circulated maglet some of you may remember reading. Now Dan (Good Intentions) McPhail asks that I continue it along similar lines, but designed to suit his latest *Journal*. If you can take it, I'll keep giving it, buddies. Where we'll get to in our mental travels remains to be seen, for I've been around on three continents & oceans during my wartime travels and may be able to talk about places some of you are now stationed in.

This *G.I. Journal* idea of Mac's is a fine idea – one of the finest gestures a civilian pal can offer to his buddies in the Armed Forces, and I feel very

gratified that he has asked for a column from myself – the part that tickles me is that this will be read by some of his friends parked on atolls in the Pacific, as well as back-tracking to colleagues in the ETO, & being perused by G.I.s (and gals?) stationed in the US. I have the feeling that Mac has the basis for a world-wide news-sheet at least for the duration of the two wars.

Was it William Wordsworth who wrote the lovely lines “Oh to be in England now that April’s here”? No matter, somebody did, and the lines bring a nostalgia to my mind as I realise that I am once again in the England of Spring, of fields of waving daffodils and crocus beds nestling beneath the banks of hedges, sheltering from the blustering winds of March & April. Of the song of the birds as they prepare for their summer idyll and of the lush greenness of the grassy meadowlands after the winter snows and rain. All those are part of the England I love – somewhere tucked away in your mind there is a picture of your own particular home & countryside, probably far different to the Spring of England, but Spring just the same.

There is something so very hopeful about Spring. It is the growing up of the year – the opening out of all the hopes & promises that the year holds forth – and on the crest of this year’s Spring the tide of battle in Europe spreads all-engulfingly against the Nazis.

As I write this (to be read so many months later by you guys way out on the borders of Japan) the Allied armies are sweeping into Germany on all sides, and for the first time in six long weary years of war, the people are talking of the coming victory. Never doubting that victory would one day be ours, although once all we had was faith and courage in the belief that God would aid the righteous (has that not been proven now?), the people have never before talked about victory & the nearness of the end of the European war with such sureness and certainty.

After five and one half years of Service life the idea of the war suddenly ending (and it may well be over long before you read these lines), has come like a cold shower on a blistering hot day to myself, and where five odd years ago I was wondering and worrying over what my Army life would be like, I’m now wondering and worrying about how I will ever fit into civilian life once more. The thought is almost frightening, for I’ve grown to love the danger and excitement of my own particular job in this war, and the idea of returning to the humdrum routine of snatching a living from the busy metropolis of London is almost appalling. You’re going to find the difference too, Joe, when you get round to thinking along the same lines. Or maybe you

never quite fitted into this battle existence? If not, you have my sympathies, because unless you can adapt yourself to the vast change-over from a civilian to a professional killer, you can't have got the utmost atom of enjoyment out of Life.

Don't think, G.I. Joe, sweating it out on a burning coral island, that I'm just a chair-borne philanthropist airing my views, because I have just about run the gamut of battle (with the exception of killing Japs – a task I would relish at much as a good rat hunt on a sunny summer afternoon), from the first sickening breath of Death on a battlefield, and of seeing the awful maimed wrecks that close-quarter fighting can do to men, to being lost behind enemy lines, blown up in a minefield, being a pin point target for enemy artillery, attacked at sea by U-boats & planes, and, of course, the commonplace practise of killing the enemy. No, at the moment I'm resting up after a long session of fighting, so I don't think you'll refuse me the rest.

All I wish for you is that you too can get that well-earned rest back in that shady corner by the verandah, or out in the back-lot, watching the kids hammer a baseball round the vacant lot, or see the heat shimmer off Main Street on a blazing hot Western afternoon – or perhaps you're a city guy & like to doze off to sleep lulled by the ever-present murmur of a big city. Whichever it is, the sooner it comes the better pleased I'll be.

Maybe I'll be dropping in on a few of you island-dwellers in the near future – after all, it's our turn to play away from the home ground, so keep a lookout on the road to Tokyo – I've just dropped off the road to Berlin.

London, England – April

Mac's G.I. Journal (1945, ed. Dan McPhail)

13. Fido and Company (1961)

Sid Birchby

It is still looked back on with respect – the fanzine that held British fandom together during the war, and whose mailing supplements were written by fans like Ken Bulmer, Jonathan Burke, Ted Carnell and Sam Youd.

With affection, too. From the first issue, it was called “Fido”, and in due course the various inserts became “Fido’s Litter”. This device was intended to provide a publishing medium for any fan who wanted to say something in print under his own masthead, but who was hampered by wartime difficulties. A count of my files, from which several issues are missing, gives 106 of such fliers, made up of 23 different titles by 21 editors. Many of them are single sheets stapled into Fido, while others are separately stapled with distinctive formats. Fido began in October 1940, its ancestors being *The Futurian*, *The Pseudo-Futurian*, and the *Bulletin* of the Leeds Chapter of Gernsback’s Science-Fiction League. There were 39 issues, ending in March 1945, all under the same editorship. During this time, there was an almost complete turn-over of contributors, as the military call-up went on. At the start, the peacetime BNFs were still civilians: Burke, Hopkins, Turner and Youd, to name a few. By 1942, their places had been taken by fans who had had few, if any, pre-war contacts with fandom, such as Bulmer, Medhurst and Art Williams, and by 1945 most of the active fans had names unknown to Fido in 1942.

To its credit, Fido managed to reconcile all three groups, and to preserve fannish continuity without even one feud throughout the most disruptive five years in our history. This was because one or two fans decided at the outset that there was something in fandom worth keeping going, even if only as a light relief from the war.

Now it is time to talk of the editor, Michael Rosenblum. He alone of the pre-war fans carried on publishing throughout the war, and, like the Windmill Theatre, “never closed”. Partly this was because, as a pacifist, he was not called up in the Forces, but was put onto land-work, which meant that he did retain a little private life. For him, publishing Fido was an intellectual outlet from manual labour. It was also a useful distraction during air-raids, judging

by an interlineation dated December 1940:

“readfuturianwardigesttheonlyfanmagproducedinanairraidharktotho
segunsmymy”.

Douglas Webster of Aberdeen, also a Conscientious Objector working on the land, helped with Fido in many ways, from stencil-cutting to producing *The Gentlest Art*, one of the best of the litter. At times he was almost co-editor, and at least 50% of Fido’s reputation must be due to the teamwork between him and Michael.

Fido practiced tolerance and mature discussion, with editorial comment kept to a minimum and censorship, if any, unobtrusive. This last, in view of the many keen discussions on the war, war aims, and politics, was quite an achievement. I know of only one contributor who had to withdraw unsuitable material, and even that was at a time when Michael was being visited by the police to see if Fido was seditious, and prudence was obviously most prudent. Incidentally, the police inspector “wanted a description of fans, fandom and fantasy in one sentence for his notebook”. One wonders what he got.

As a FAPA member, Michael was well-known in the US, and most issues had as much American news as British. Often, too, they were duplicated on paper sent through the generosity of Ackerman, Walt Daugherty, Bob Tucker, and others, especially John Cunningham, organiser of the British SF War Relief Society. Thus there might be a back cover first used in *Le Zombie*, or a Denvention photo-page or an Anglo-US fan-photo sheet. The format was nominally quarto, but the US sheets were a bit larger, and some of the fliers a bit smaller, so that most issues had a wild look about them. Add to this that the layout suffered from cramming stencils to the limit, and it must be said that Fido was a mess. We should remember though, that this was wartime, and that both stencils and editorial time were hard to come by. The wonder is that Fido could keep on at all.

Michael was a fantasy bibliophile of no mean order, and the magazine became strong on book reviews and on essays about the fantasy field. Many of them, by such as Banks, Burke, Ferguson and Medhurst were of a very high standard. The same could not be said of some of the Litterzines, which were neofannish in the extreme. In fact, by January 1943, even Michael had to admit that the impetus of the mailing supplement idea was spent, and that thenceforward Fido would be developed in its own right with an emphasis on high-quality material.

And was it! Clarke on fantasy poetry! Burke's fan-profiles under the title "The Spirit of a New Age"; Banks, Ferguson, etc., on the weird and grotesque in literature no few lines can sum up the last two great years of Fido. Michael never pushed himself as a focal point, although that was what he became. As early as August 1941 he suggested that, rather than rely on Fido, which might have to fold at any time, the war being what it was, British fans should consider setting up a regular society. In July 1942, this was duly formed, with President Ted Carnell, Director Michael, and secretary D.R. Smith, and christened the British Fantasy Society. Its Bulletins were issued as parts of the mailing. D.R. Smith worked in a factory and was not liable to call-up; hence he could give time to the BFS where others could not. After the end of the war, and the end of Fido, he continued for a time to run the BFS almost single-handed.

Simultaneously with the BFS, the Fanarchists announced their existence. This group was comprised chiefly of Messrs Turner and Webster, and its activities consisted in stressing that they were not Organisation Men.

By the beginning of 1945, Fido was getting ready to fold. Between then, stencil-cutter Webster in Aberdeen, Editor Michael in Leeds and the nameless cover artist who knows where, had managed to get the volume and issue sequences completely snafued, and the final issue was not even dated. By internal evidence it seems to have been March 1945. In it Michael said that he could "no longer manage to put out any regular magazine", and urged British fans to set to and build up the BFS.

"Fandom," he said, "is a minute community or culture on its own, and hence not indispensably in need of a framework or organisation: which is what Fanarchists maintain; YET, once you want to get things done, there are only two possibilities: ...dictatorship or some variety of democratic organisation. So far, we have had a nice balance in Anglofandom, because for some reason I have been accepted as a focal point. This isn't going to apply any longer....my own future is now in a state of flux."

His appeal, as it turned out, was in vain. Quite a lot of post-war hopes turned sour, and this was one of them. As D.R. Smith wrote to me some time after the war, most fans, once demobbed, were too busy picking up the thread of their careers to support a society. But the strange period between the war's end and the fannish revival of the 50's is another story. We are here only to

pay a tribute to Michael and to Fido; both will always have a place in the annals of our microcosm.

Extracts from letter – Mike Rosenblum to S.L. Birchby Dec 1960 – having seen draft of article.

“..after looking through it, no objections come to mind at all... there is a suggestion of an introduction from me. Let me beg off, please – there is really nothing I can think of suitable to say and to me your article is a little embarrassing. I did a makeshift job that lots of people could have done better.”

Michael need feel no embarrassment. He did a good job on Fido, and no one could have done it better, under wartime circumstances. Re Censorship:

“The only refused material I can recall offhand was some rather frank discussion on sex. I personally had no objection to this sort of thing, but I felt that I simply couldn’t run it with Fido, because I knew how many 17, 16 and 15 year-olds were getting F – and I may say now that I did have two letters at different times from PARENTS of fans, objecting to their receiving it. So it seemed to me that it was necessary not to give any real reason for science-fiction-struck youngsters to be cut off from fandom.”

Smoke #5 (January 1961, ed. George Locke)

14. The Cosmos Club (1948)

Dr. John K. Aiken

Surely few who belonged to the “CSC” can look back on it without a good deal of nostalgic regret. Now that the war is over, things like it don't seem to happen.... and it provided so many good things, so many comic, sociable, stimulating, even melodramatic things: so much work was put into it by people with quite the normal amount of bone-idleness in their makeup: and all in the middle of a war which might have been quite sufficiently preoccupying! Why can't we do it now?

But to factual history rather than sentimental reminiscence. The founder was Frank Parker, who formed the Paint Research Station Science Fiction Library in 1940 as a modest magazine-chain designed to keep the staff (most of whom were in the NFS) from thinking too much about beer during the long and often dull duty-hours. Little can he have thought that, four years later, the club would not only be still in existence but issuing three magazines of its own and organising a national convention. Contempt, followed by interest and finally addiction, spread rapidly amongst the staff, about half of whom were finally enrolled. A monthly news-sheet was issued which ultimately grew into the celebrated *Cosmic Cuts*. Parker's original collection, so generously made available, became diminished and tattered with much use, and members began trying their hands at writing. In 1942 the full-size one-copy magazine *Beyond* began to appear quarterly and did so regularly for over two years, featuring the work of upwards of two dozen different authors and almost as many artists: as well as a bulk of fiction, including novelettes of 30,000 words or so, it contained poetry, articles (serious and otherwise) and a correspondence section which was justly famed for the quality of its mud and the force and aim with which this was slung. Several of the contributions have since appeared in print or been broadcast in this country. *Beyond* was at first edited (and typed and bound) jointly by Parker and Aiken until the former had to retire into pseudonymity as a result of attacks of a particularly unaesthetic character by certain authorities at the Paint Research Station, who had formed the opinion that science-fiction was good neither for science or morals. As a result of this attitude the club was at times almost an

underground movement, but like others such it thrived and grew strong on persecution (a high spot of this period being when Art Williams rang up the director of the Research Station one Saturday and asked him where the science-fiction meeting was to be held).

Somehow the organisation expanded beyond the confines of the Research Station, recruiting a galaxy of new talent, amongst whom Bruce Gaffron made an instant and enduring name for himself as an illustrator, Don Smith as a critic, and Peter Hawkins as a guy who thought Lovecraft a greater artist than Shakespeare and somehow had room in his cranium for a cubic mile of statistics about magazines. Renaming of the club became inevitable, the Memo Sheet became *Cosmic Cuts* and was, in those early and impoverished days, run off very sub rosa in the fire-watches of the night on the Research Station's rotary duplicator, a machine with a malignant and perverted sense of humour and a fondness for a kind of puree of paper and ink. Both of those traits left permanent wounds on the outlook of the editorial staff, working as they were amongst air raids and (far worse) under the shadow of detection. Gordon Holbrow eventually succeeded Parker as editor of *Cosmic Cuts* and infused it with highly individual wit; when less energetic interests claimed him, Dennis Tucker stepped into the breach and was still at work when the club finally disintegrated round him.

Meetings were held, were well-attended and of extreme variety, including film shows (with much trouble with sprockets and other intimacies of the projector), a seance (at which Benson Herbert performed prodigies of chicanery), an intelligence test, a homemade firework party, experiments on beer-divining (at the club's spiritual home, the King's Arms), water-divining (naturally a failure) and extra-sensory perception, fantasy music, debates, and a symposium of scientific papers (published in the Transactions of the club, a periodical whose success may be gauged from the fact that it ran no fewer than one issue). To commemorate the visit of Gus Willmorth a film was made – from the technical point of view easily the worst film ever produced in the whole history of the cinema, but an unfailing source of joy to members; frequently it would be called for twice or three times in an evening and, much-mended and long-suffering as it was, would run through its gamut of tricks: breaking, jamming, running partly upside down or backwards, or flooding the floor knee-deep with celluloid.

Munificent donations of magazines and books from Moroyo, Forrie Ackerman, John Cunningham, and other US fans kept the library going in the

lean years of '42 – '44 and built it up to a stage where it could hold its own with almost any collection in the country. The membership rose to over thirty, and in 1944 the club made its most ambitious and successful venture, sponsoring the Eastercon, lineal forerunner of this year's Whitcon, to which came delegations even from alien and barbaric Manchester.

Then, with the gradual dispersal of the more active members to the Forces, to other jobs, and to increasing domestic responsibilities, and with the growth of that sloth which is now almost nationwide so far as any non-essential activity is concerned, began the decline. Members could no longer screw themselves up to write for or even criticise the magazines; they could not decide whether they wished to attend meetings until it was too late; the treasurer could not bring himself to collect the new year's subscriptions; finally no one could be found to take on any of the club duties. The last issue of *Beyond* – No.10 – appeared, a year or so late, in the summer of 1946; No.11. is still on the stocks.

Tucker's issue of *Cosmic Cuts* towards the end of that year was the last dying flicker of club activity, describing meetings which had sunk to the level of pub-crawls and theatre-parties, pleasant enough but demanding no individual effort. The library (still available to the enquirer) dispersed in one direction, the files of *Beyond* (ditto) in another, the club's balance (not ditto) in a third. By 1947 the Cosmos Club was no more.

May I end with a plea? The Cosmos Club was abundantly worth while: it has to its credit a body of achievement which could never have been the outcome of casual social contacts. Organisation was necessary: the assumption of responsibilities, collecting of subscriptions, obtaining of premises, typing, duplicating, running of meetings. As one of those who did his share, I say again that it was worth it. What – apart from pure laziness – is stopping us from doing it now?

Whitcon Booklet (May 1948)

15. British Fandom During the War (1948)

D.R. Smith

In 1939 British fantasy fandom, considered as a body of persons dispersed throughout Great Britain, had been in existence about half a decade, and could already look back on a considerable history of squabbles and feuds. Even so, it had hardly acquired the stamina to survive under two cruel blows struck soon after – and as a direct result of – the declaration of war. The one which had the most real effect was inflicted by the Government who, acting with the characteristic speed and fervency of a British Government enforcing a sacrifice on a minority of voters, cut off the importation of American periodicals. Since to the average fan fantasy is inseparable from the gaudy covers of the pulp magazines (obtainable, in those happy far off days, at 3d per copy from the remainder stalls) this seemed like a sentence of death by starvation as far as his fannery was concerned. The shock possibly numbed him to the extent that the closing down of the Science Fiction Association by its Council who anticipated, somewhat prematurely but in the long run accurately, the disruption of normal life by bombs and calling-up papers, perhaps did not affect him as deeply as it should have done. And since, though a fan, he was also a human being, he was probably immersed in the universal feeling of glum resignation at the arrival of a long-expected disaster.

It would seem that it is possible to become accustomed to disaster, especially long-drawn out disasters, and fandom soon bounced back up to a peak again, especially as far as provincials were concerned. For these sequestered ones the fan-magazines provided, even in peace-time, much of the evidence that fandom existed and of the enjoyment of being a member of that body, and the closing down of the SFA had a negligible effect on fan-maggery. There was the best of them all, *Fantast*, just reaching its maturity in the hands of Sam Youd of Eastleigh; there was Johnny Burke's *Satellite* from Liverpool, presently joined by Harry Turner's *Zenith* and McIlwain's *Gargoyle* in the same county; and the small printed *Futurian* from Leeds reappeared in duplicated form as *Futurian War Digest* – Fido to you. They

were good, partly because of the amazing industry of the editors-printers-publishers-and-part-authors who brought them out with quite notable frequency, partly because of the considerable talent available. One is given to understand, for instance, that both Youd (who won a literary award last year) and Burke have had novels accepted for publication, that Douglas Webster – who continued “Fantast” after Youd had been called up, and raised it to dizzy heights – can now use the suffix M.A., and that the well-known hack of the time, D.R. Smith has turned bright green. And, of course, there was the absence of competition from the professional publications. It was a comparatively brief burst of glory, because the conscription of the editors did what the blitz could not, and cut the flower off at the roots, “Fido” continued to appear, concentrating on news mostly, its industrious editor, Michael Rosenblum, incorporating single and multiple sheets produced as their whimsey took them by other enthusiasts, some snatching brief moments out of military duties for the purpose. Even these began to fall away as total war ground the enthusiasts down. It was felt that the bonds which held fandom together were loosening, and Rosenblum resolved to draw them together.

The means he used to achieve this laudable aim was the creation of the British Fantasy Society, whose object was officially stated to be “To bring together for their common good persons interested in scientific or weird fantasy”, and which at once acquired a most valuable asset. Ever since the start of the war generous-hearted American fans had been sending parcels of fantasy pulps as free gifts to the exiled fans of Britain, and John Cunningham of Texas had organised a British Science-Fiction War Relief Society to further this noble aim. Forry Ackerman, Morojo, Bob Tucker, P.J. Searles, Walter Dunkelberger, Bill Watson and Joe Gibson were some of those concerned who received in return, the barren honour of being made Honorary Members of the BFS. The BSFWRS was flourishing long before the BFS. Jack Gibson being the English organiser, and he brought the collection into the BFS as the official library, with himself as librarian. It was by far the greatest single attraction of the society, and it was a great loss when Jack, suffering under prolonged attacks of illness, had to relinquish the post, and the library passed into less efficient hands.

For there was little else the BFS could do in any substantial way for its members, who were to exceed the hundred mark considerably. The bulletin was a matter of one or more sheets added to Fido, and its editor having none of the enthusiasm which had fired the fan-mag editors to such achievements,

will be remembered as consisting chiefly of (futile) appeals for volunteers to execute the various projects thought up by the Executive Committee or the Advisory Board.

A membership card and a Prospectus was issued to each new member, a gratifyingly high proportion of whom were new fans, contacted by other Service members. Minor conventions were held, members wandered round making contact with other members, and a cosmopolitan touch was introduced by the presence in our midst of American Service fans, and the Canadian Bob Gibson. Contact was made with the Cosmos Club of Teddington, a thriving band of enthusiasts, and the idea of their magazine *Beyond* – a bound collection of story manuscripts by amateur writers – appropriated and used to the extent of three BFS issues. Nobody expected much in the middle of a war, and their expectations were fully met.

The organisation was fundamentally unsound. The Executive Council consisting of President Gillings, Director Rosenblum, Secretary Smith (D.R.) and Treasurer Busby lived remote from each other and had to confer through circular letters, than which a more tedious and inefficient method could hardly be conceived. The other two will forgive me if I say that most of the actual work devolved on Michael and myself. I being both idle and unsocial this brought it down to Rosenblum. Michael had enthusiasm, energy and sociability, but he had been producing a fan-magazine for ten years, he maintained a huge correspondence with fans and book-collectors both here and in America, and his health began to deteriorate. Transfer of the library to Ron Holmes and Nigel Lindsay made an asset out of what had been for too long a liability, but the end of the war brought no signs of any fan resurgence in which the management of the BFS could be transferred to more lively, less-wearied hands, and the iniquitous Secretary put more honest enthusiasm into winding it up than he had put into any other activity. The British Fantasy Library continues the most useful part of the BFS much more efficiently than the BFS ever managed it, so the loss is by no means entire. Looking back on the whole affair, the most remarkable thing appears to be the tenacious hold on existence of such a puny, scattered, disunited body as fandom. Since a large proportion of fans cease to take any interest in pulp fantasy after a few years there has to be a constant influx of new members of the clan, yet such new members are not the result of anything except the pure chance of falling over some existing fan. Supplies of the pulp-magazines have been difficult to obtain for the last nine years even for the established fans – and there seems

no prospect of any improvement. Why is there still a fantasy fandom in Britain?

Whitcon Booklet (May 1948)

16. Thursday's Child (1949) Walter Gillings

Wednesday's child is full of woe,
Thursday's child has far to go...

The casual visitor to the "White Horse" hostelry in Fetter Lane, London, of a Thursday evening, is somewhat nonplussed to find that a horde of literary maniacs has apparently taken an option on the premises. The saloon bar is filled with a noisy crowd which seems to derive its high spirits as much from the gaudy-covered magazines and books littering the tables as from the glasses and bottles that barely find room between them. Not a Thursday night passes without some eager arm, reaching out for the latest *Astounding* or a copy of *Edison's Conquest of Mars*, knocks over somebody's beer, and there is a concerted scramble to save a pile of *Planet Stories* or the *Checklist of Fantastic Literature* from a soaking in the brew. Of light or brown ale, or lemonade (which doesn't have quite such a damaging effect on a handsome Bok jacket), there is plenty more to be had from the patient landlord. But the wondrous array of literature assembled here for mutual scrutiny is, for the most part, irreplaceable.

Several of the company are equipped with attaché cases; at least one totes a Gladstone bag, stuffed with rare books. Collector's items are examined, rejected, purchased, swapped, even borrowed. Everybody is fairly accommodating; they're all fantasy fans together. Not all the animated discussion is over the market value of books and mags. Around one table may proceed an argument over the merits of a new story, the whole of an author's output (especially Mr. Shaver's), or a magazine's changing policy. At another, science-fiction may be all but forgotten in the heat of a political debate, which may have arisen in course of examining an article by Olaf Stapledon in a philosophical journal. In a corner, a BIS enthusiast may be reviewing the Society's new lecture programme or exhibiting the latest colour pictures by Chesley Bonestell – more probably, both. In another corner, two indignant authors may be arguing with a hard-faced editor – or two indignant editors with a hard-faced author. That is, if it is still early in the evening. Later, the two editors may well be arguing with each other in the adjacent

bar, where a meeting of the directors of Nova Publications is in progress. Woe betide the stranger who has sought refuge there!

These Thursday evening gatherings of the so-called London Circle of fantasy fans have been, and still are, the focal point of all the post-war activity in the field of British fantasy-fiction – at least, as it is accepted by the fantasy fandom of these islands, and of the U.S.A. They began as a weekly get-together between John (Ted) Carnell, originator of *New Worlds*, and authors Frank Edward Arnold, William F. Temple, the late Maurice G. Hugi, and a few others whose work Carnell featured in the magazine launched by Pendulum Publications in July '46. In effect, they were friendly, out-of-the-office editorial conferences, with a strictly professional interest centring round the future development of fantasy-fiction in Britain.

A few old-timers, learning of the conclave, saw in it a chance to recapture the pleasant atmosphere of pre-war days, when those who formed the backbone of the movement of fantasy fandom – in particular, the leading lights of the Science Fiction Association – used to foregather in a pub in Grays Inn Road which fell victim to the blitz. So, the “White Horse” circle expanded; the business conference became more of a club meeting. Among the newcomers were some who carried news of Walter Gillings’ preparations for *Fantasy* as a successor to his *Tales of Wonder*. Why, they asked, shouldn’t he and his potential contributors be asked to swell the throng?

It was a ticklish question. Though always good friends and collaborators in any effort to promote British science fiction, before the war (and during it, as far as they could: each did a spell as president of the British Fantasy Society), Carnell and Gillings were now, on the face of it, hot competitors, each with his own publishers as backers. Though Gillings had started to lay his plans for *Fantasy* soon after leaving the Army in '43, paper shortage still prevented the mag. making a start when Carnell emerged, found his sponsor, and whipped up a first issue of *New Worlds* all in six months. Knowing their irascible “Grandpop” Gillings of old, a few thought he might respond to the invitation all too readily and bear down on the “White Horse”, swearing to make somebody pay dearly for pipping him at the post.

Everybody paid – but only when their turn came for another round of convivial drinking. Having joined the party with reasonably good grace, Gillings proceeded to smoke scores of Carnell’s cigarettes in a series of regular Thursday evening peace-makings which were to lead, in due course, to a truly collaborative effort on behalf of British science fiction.

Fantasy Review #13 (February 1949, ed. Walter Gillings)

17. *Operation Fantast* (1987)

Ken Slater

If you want to look for causes I suppose you could blame the design of the “official” cycle lamp that was issued to my unit (among others) when I was located at Wantage in Berkshire. The design included a shield that covered most of the lens when you required a very limited light; there was a screw that held the shield up and open but when in use on a bike the screw would work loose and the next jolt would reduce the amount of light emitted by the lamp from a full twenty-five glow-worm output to a very sick one-glow-worm rate. Blackout days, my friends. One such cut-out of illumination caused me to crash and complicate an injury I’d sustained a few months previously, and put me into hospital for the latter half of 1943. Then followed a long period of temporary posting, sick leaves, medical boards, and the like until in late 1945 the army put me through a short but intensive course in elementary book-keeping (they called it accountancy) and I finished up on the permanent (which means anything over six months) staff of a PoW (prisoner of war) camp as “Accounts Officer”. This posting was a pretty easy one, but one which gave me what in modern parlance would be called “unsocial hours of work”. Week-ends and evenings I’d be out with an assorted staff of Germans and Italian PoWs paying other prisoners, checking their “canteens” and the like.

Which meant that in the odd periods I had nothing much to do most of my fellow officers on the staff would be busy. So I found time to develop my few contacts with other SF addicts, a few of whom I’d contacted in various ways. Mostly in the course of efforts to obtain books and magazines.

As a result of correspondence with Ron Holmes and Nigel Lindsay of the British Fantasy Library the first issue of *Operation Fantast* came out in September 1947, as a “flyer” with the BFL’s Booklist. Ron Holmes was trying to get fans back into fanzine publishing, Nigel wanted to obtain new material for the Library, and dispose of surplus items. I was already deep into personal trading deals with various people both in UK and overseas, and seemed a likely person to help them both.

Over the next few years *Operation Fantast* grew into a very loosely

organised group of fans who all wanted to “do their own thing” in various ways, and found that *OF* offered a sort of umbrella or shield which enabled them to do these things. By modern standards membership was not very high – on a world-wide basis it peaked around the middle of 1950, with some 800 people; it had passed 500 in late 1949, when I had had to introduce a printed fanzine – the effort of producing it by hand on a duplicator was too great. The “membership” changed, but remained fairly constant between 600-700 until it folded in 1954. Numerically, this figure today represents the attendance at a fairly small convention, but by the standards applying then it must have included a pretty high proportion of the SF readers and fans who were prepared to make some effort to obtain the material they wanted to read – other than the effort of walking down to the corner shop.

Apart from the communications and fanzines which I produced – I see that in the first year of its existence I mailed out somewhat over 150 pages (either quarto or foolscap) of duplicated *OF* material – I also tried to enlist other fans in projects. Ted Carnell, either at a meeting at The White Horse or in a letter, mentioned the idea of reviving a convention; in the Jan 1948 Trading Supplement I was asking for interested fans to contact me, and passing the names along to Ted, and although I couldn’t get to it myself, I like to think that that 1948 Whitcon thus had a number of attendees who would not otherwise have got there. Some time earlier in 1947 E.C. Tubb (another Ted) had tried to get some organisation into British fandom, and had not been successful. There was strong opposition in the heart (collective) of British fandom. I also favoured organisation, and in *OF5* I published a short article by Ted titled “Co-operation”, and followed this with a series of letters which culminated in a meeting held 26th September 1948, hosted by Owen Plumridge in Mitcham, Surrey. Owen was going to be Treasurer of the proposed organisation, Frank Fears the Secretary, and Vince Clarke the editor. Apart from myself, others at the meeting were John Newman and Jim Clay. There was a later meeting at The White Horse on October 9th; and I see that in the December 1948 *OF* I announced the successful formation of the Science Fantasy Society, and named the officers, adding that henceforth I was only a member and that all communications should be sent to the appropriate officer. It says something for the staying power of the folk concerned that the “OO”* of the society, edited by Vince (who was joined by Ken Bulmer, when Ken started living in the Epicentre) continued publication for quite some time after the society folded.

* *Official Organ.*

Around the same time – same leave from Germany – I was setting up the *Operation Fantast* Library – mainly my own collection, with Mike Tealby, a stalwart supporter of *OF*, as the “Operator”. From the point of view of Joyce, this was not a good leave – she didn’t see much of me; and what she did see was largely spent in getting instruction from myself and Ted Carnell on how to work a hand-fed Emgee rotary duplicator. The library was to run from 1948 until 1954, first under Mike Tealby, later under Fred Fairless, and finally with paperbacks and magazines only by Alex Morrison in Ayrshire. There were also American, South African and Australian “libraries”, mostly supplied out of trading profits or by straightforward gifts from myself or other fans – I recall F. Edwin Counts shipped over a lot of stuff from the U.S., and most of it finished up in the BFL and the *OF* libraries, where it could do most good to most people. I could be wrong – there were several generous and helpful fans around in those days, and gifting things to other countries was common. The American and South African libraries received mostly British books and paperbacks – Henry Burwell was in charge of the American section of the *OF* Library in 1952, and Pearle Appleford ran the South African section – mostly paperbacks, owing to various problems shipping things out there. Australia and South Africa were the two most difficult countries with regard to importing of foreign books; even as “gifts” many items were liable to confiscation on political or moral grounds, and there were no guiding rules. Almost anything could be considered “subversive” by a customs official – from Orwell’s *1984* to Lewis’ *Alice* – and if you disagreed you might be able to go to court and prove otherwise – but that could be expensive. I particularly recall the Australian customs objected strongly to copies of *Weird Tales* with covers by Margaret Brundage....and the copies that vanished en route to Australian fans must now be worth a fortune if only one could discover the warehouse in which they were stored. Although in probability they were consigned to the flames after the statutory three months allowed for appeal, there is always the chance that some were overlooked....

Apart from the libraries, I suppose the most useful things to fans of that time were the Trading Bureau and the Contact Bureau. *OF* was prepared to sponsor almost any idea that might benefit fans – at various times people were offering clipping services (Derek Pickles’ idea) to book binding (Fred J. Robinson, who could get you three magazines bound into cloth for about 62p,

or in leather for 85p – and that included the gilt lettering of the title and issue numbers on the spine!), and various other things. Some of these were short lived, some took on a life of their own, like the Fantasy Art Society, which started with a suggestion that Alan Hunter took up, and turned into a group that continued after *Operation Fantast* itself had folded. I think it was some five or six years after the end of *OF* that someone (Harry Turner?) sent me the final files on the F.A.S.

The Trading Bureau was just that – a means of trading all around the known science-fantasy world for books and magazines. It seems simple enough, but what you have to realise is that back in the late forties and early fifties it was impossible to move money out of most countries. Practically every country would welcome foreign currency coming in, but none of them were prepared to let any of their own out. You can appreciate just how strong this ruling was when I tell you that if someone had sent me a postal order value more than 5/- (25p) while I was in Germany, this would have been confiscated if discovered in the mail. And let me tell you I was getting so much mail that I'm sure it came under close scrutiny. An officer in the R.E. told me – almost seriously – that when I moved station in Germany the local A.P.O.'s would also move a man over. So in the early days I listed what people wanted with a valuation that would be credited to anyone who traded the item in, and the material that was available for sale, and payments where necessary were made to the “operator” in the country of the purchaser. These funds were used to purchase and ship items needed that nobody had to trade in. Sounds very simple, but spread over several hundred active participants it could get terribly complicated. And some of the deals were complex, too. Getting an harmonica for someone in the USA and sending it to him for sundry copies of *Amazing* was simple – getting a German harmonica for someone in Canada, in exchange for a quantity of Canadian issues of *Startling* and other maps for some in Lanarkshire, who wanted them to trade for some Australian material, and finding something I could accept from the fan in Lanarkshire to settle the cost of the harmonica, was probably typical of some of the more complicated deals. Obtaining a cross-hatcher for some lathe and shipping it air-mail to Ron E Graham in Australia was about the most expensive – and the least connected to SF! I have an idea that setting up these deals today would get impossible; things seem to take so much longer. 4e Ackerman devised a method of communication that worked well, and which I copied. Back then you could actually write an airmail letter to Britain from

the USA, and it would be received within a week. In fact, not infrequently you could get a reply in a week! So if Forrest had something to tell me, something else to tell Carnell, and a couple of other people, he would type the names, addresses and messages on an air letter form, and mail the lot to me – I would cut the sheet into strips and mail them on. I took this idea up for myself, and with the speed of the mail then, it was fairly easy to set up quite complicated deals quickly. And often interest other people in the action at the same time... Today, I imagine that the telephone and the computer would do it all, faster and effectively. And impersonally. There is the key, I think, to the success of the operation, and the general post-war frenetic activity.

After I'd launched *OF* and started the Contact Bureau – operated by Mavis Pickles (sister of Derek, and herself only a borderline fan but interested in people) under who's name most of the *Operation Fantast* adverts appeared – we found enthusiasts appearing all over. The initial appearance of *OF* – joining the then existing British fanzine list which consisted of Walt Gillings' semi-pro *Fantasy Review* and the BFL's *Booklist* – seemed to spark off a steady stream of new fanzines, starting with Norman Ashfield's *The Alembic*, and I guess it would be fair to say “culminating” in Walter A. Willis' *Slant* and *Hyphen*. Fanzines appeared after Walt ceased publication, but I think his represent the apex of that period. All this output was very personal – fans all over had been starved for contact – quite apart from material to read; and also the war had caused a large cross-contact between people and cultures on a level that was that of the “ordinary” people. Britons and Americans had met before the war, yes – but they were usually the wealthy upper-crust; and science-fantasy was “pulp” literature – mass-produced for the masses, not for the elite. On the fan-contact level this was ordinary people with a leaning towards the fantastic getting in touch with other ordinary people with like tastes but slightly variant outlooks. The approach was on a personal level; even in the letter columns of the magazines this is apparent. Coupled with the sheer joy of survival, I guess. It was infectious, and bubbled all over.

Operation Fantast ended when I left the army. It was only then that it became apparent just how much of my army pay got lost in the shuffle supporting various schemes and projects. And the trading bureau, with relaxation of monetary controls, was becoming more of a straightforward buying and selling business, no longer a question of finding devious methods of moving things around the world and keeping all parties in the deal satisfied

(more or less!)

But I enjoyed it, I made a lot of good friends – many of whom I have subsequently met – and I’d probably do it all over again, given the opportunity... and the energy!

Frontier Crossings (1987 Worldcon Souvenir Book, ed. Rob Jackson)

Originally titled “A Military Approach to the Distribution of SF and Fantasy”

The 1950s

18. The Epicentre (1983)

A. Vincent Clarke

“One night at the Epicentre changed my whole view of fandom.”
– Walt Willis

In 1949 I left an eighteen-foot long grinding machine in a local factory to try selling books in Stoke Newington. This was a poor but bustling part of London three or four miles north of the City. Its chief claim to fame (if you can call it that) was that before the War Sir Oswald Mosley used to lead his Fascist “Blackshirts” through there in an endeavour to provoke – or possibly frighten – the local Jewish residents, of whom there were many. After the War, it became still more famous in a very restricted circle – ours – as being the home of the Fantasy Book Centre, where I was going to work.

The FBC wasn’t entirely devoted to s-f and fantasy. Half the shelves bore mundane literature, and there was a thriving under-the-counter lending library where, in that pre-enlightened age, Olympia Press books such as Lady Chatterley’s Lover and Frank Harris’s Life and Loves could be borrowed by literary devotees at a quid a time. But the main stock of the shop was Fantasy. We sent loads of British books to the US and received in return items from the specialist publishers – Fantasy Press, Gnome Press, and the like. FBC was unique in this country.

To work in such a business was, for a new Faan, a slightly commercialised dream of heaven, but there was a snag. The journey from Welling was long, tedious, uncertain and expensive. I looked around for a flat. I mentioned the problem at the weekly London Circle meeting at the White Horse in Fetter Lane, and some stand-in for the Fickle Finger of Fate said I hear that Ken Bulmer’s looking for someone to share his place. I was slightly awed. Although he was only a year older, Ken was at least a fan-generation before me, having published a fanzine in the early ’40’s. In ’49, I was still struggling with a flat-bed duplicator and the early issues of Science Fantasy News.

Ken wasn’t a regular visitor to the White Horse, but he did come that night, we were introduced, I discovered that Ken’s flat at 84 Drayton Park, Highbury, was about 2 miles from the FBC, and he didn’t mind sharing it

with someone with a sort of puppylike new love of fandom and fans. As it happened, the sharing started sooner than anticipated; losing the last train from London after a long and possibly drunken evening at the pub, I toiled along to the large, gloomy Victorian terraced No. 84 and woke Ken by throwing pebbles against his second-floor window....

Eventually I moved in, accompanied by books, magazines, a flat-bed duplicator, and lots of enthusiasm. This enthusiasm spread to Ken, who it seemed to me had been drifting along, wasting a lot of fannish potential by dreaming about becoming a pro. author. I wasn't running fiction in *SFN* then – it wasn't until much later that I published James White's first writing for a non-Belfast fanzine (hall!) – but Ken started writing for Walt Willis's *Slant* and generally became once more an active fan.

Our interests coincided with and complemented each others, so soon it seemed as though there was only one intensely active fan living at the flat, which I named the Epicentre, the centre of an earthquake, intending it to be a place around which Things Happened. In later years Walt Willis in a fit of pique called it the Dead Centre of London fandom, but I think he was just jealous. The gestalt Fan at the Epicentre I later detailed in Mal Ashworth's *Bem* as “lazy, untidy, intensely interested in s-f (it owned a complete collection of pre-war s-f 'zines and many related items), Napoleon, astronomy, Pogo Possum, motor-racing, ships, inventing games more complicated than chess, writing s-f, darts, and the *New Statesman* and *Nation*.”

The flat itself was reached by climbing several flights of increasingly murky-lit stairs until – if your strength and oxygen held out – you reached a landing where the passing years and coaldust – of which more later – had darkened everything to a featureless brown. Ahead of you was a dark brown kitchen door, which was once opened for several minutes when we had a gas leak, but usually opened and closed in a blur of motion, so that we could Keep the Heat In. For it was cold outside. It always seems colder than normal up there at the top of the house – I once came out of the kitchen behind that door and found myself waist-deep in cloud as steam condensed around me – but the temperature was due not to evil spirits or the altitude, but just the lack of central heating and the economics of the situation. Book shop assistants were traditionally poorly paid – the sheer pleasure of working with something you love is deemed to be sufficient – and Ken was a rep. for an ill-paying paper company. He took his job seriously. When letters came in and he got to

them ahead of me, he'd hold a page up to the light to examine the watermark, then tear off a small corner to examine the fibre... all this before reading the letter. So we lived in the kitchen with the oven on most of the time and no other heating – we couldn't afford it.

Several fan writers in the early Fifties tried describing the Epicentre and especially the kitchen, the scene of most social activities. Most, including Bob Shaw, found the magnitude – or maybe the sheer epic grandeur – of the place beyond their capabilities. It was, for instance, called “crowded”. You can't satisfy some people. There was this twelve-by-eight feet room, containing Ken and myself and three chairs – one for a typewriter. There was a table, the oven, sundry cupboards and shelves, a “dresser”, and yards of orange wire strung across the ceiling in an endeavour to pick up AFN (American Forces Network) which was for a period broadcasting *Dimension X*, a well-thought-of s-f series. I think there was a kitchen sink... yes, I'm pretty sure there was, as Chuck Harris was helping us wash up once and dropped a cup on to the duplicator... I was picking out china chips for months afterwards. Visitors to the flat had to sit on the table – if there wasn't a duplicator and piles of paper on it – or the oven, or the dresser, or, after clearing stacks of books, magazines and correspondence away, any other flat surface available. *Naturally* it got crowded when three or four fans decided to visit us at the same time.

We each had a bedroom, at either end of the landing, but we didn't have much spare space. Ken had a whole houseful of furniture – which he'd inherited – stored in those rooms, including dozens of plates, cups, saucers and other kitchen ware, most of the latter, except for the frying pans, being unused.

There was also a small room partitioned off my bedroom, which we named the Chamber of Horrors – it tended to have spiders and mice – which housed those parts of our collections not being currently read, old copies of *Vom* and *Nirvana*, books on Napoleon, back copies of the *New Statesman*, and the remnants of at least two libraries from defunct fan organisations, the Cosmos Club and the British Fantasy Society. Officially, *SFN* was the organ of the Science Fantasy Society, the only nation-wide s-f club in the country, and as the editor I fell heir to all these hoarded treasures, plus books and 'zines donated by Don Ford and other kindly US. fans to dollar-less UK s-f readers. We spent a lot of time looking for fans who would act as official librarians and take these treasures from us.

For, as time passed, fans were getting organised in various parts of the UK – Dave Cohen, Eric Bentcliffe and Terry Jeeves in the Manchester area, Norman Shorrock and John Roles and others in Liverpool, etc, etc., and contact with/filling the needs of/ neofans was being taken care of all over. Like the cheerfully anarchic London Circle itself, we, the only publishing fans in the London area, found organisation boring. True, I was in the happy position of being able to read the Bookseller and all the professional publisher's blurbs for mention of forthcoming s-f, and garner it for *SFN*, but fanning for fun was a lot more to our taste and we were envious of our unfettered correspondents such as the Belfast trio of Willis, White and Shaw, or Lee Hoffman in Georgia, or Roger Dard in Australia – etc etc.

In an endeavour to ease our fannish work, we expanded our hardware side, and the Epicentre soon had even more fanstuff; I bought another typewriter to replace the one my grandfather had given me in 1936 – it was old *then* – and Ken saw and bought a Rotary Cyclostyle, otherwise known as a No. 6 Gestetner Duplicator. Striving as I'd been with a flatbed, the No.6 amazed me with its technical innovations. Look! You turned this handle three times and it fed paper under the stencil-covered rollers to be printed! Quite often one sheet at a time, too! It was only recently that I saw this same machine illustrated in a book on duplicating published in 1917, but it was a good if cranky friend over the years and was recently used for green inked illos, in Terry Hill's *Microwave*. Still in use too is a 4' x 3' x 10" glass-fronted bookcase which we conveyed to the Epicentre on a bicycle.....

The Society was, of course, useful in finding a ready made readership of Convention literature; it contacted fans who contributed to the general good, such as one Paul Enever, who'd been the Treasurer of a British fan club (in Hayes, Middlesex) in 1932, and who later brought out one of the better of the mid-'50's fanzines, *Orion*; it enabled me to arrange a storm of letters to the publishers of the British Reprint Edition of *Astounding S-F* (now *Analog*) when they hiked their price by some absurd percentage, and it enabled me, personally, to attend some professional press shows of films such as *War of the Worlds* and *The Thing from Another World*. But the SFS was taking up valuable time. Time when we could, for instance, be inventing *The Game*.

This was a long, long time before *Dungeons and Dragons* – it was a long time before many things, including *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek* and satellites in orbit – but we felt the need for something more than just reading s-f, We wanted to *play* it. After an abortive attempt by Ken to update the old

“Battleship” game, which led to us sitting with our backs to each other for three evenings calling out strings of numbers, we decided that what we wanted was a board game to out-Monopoly Monopoly, involve interplanetary travel, be addictive and – you’ll notice this is put last because that’s how Us True Fans think, MAKE US LOTS OF MONEY. Ted Tubb – not at that time even a submitter of mss. to editors – joined in with great enthusiasm, as did Jim Ratigan, a fan whose ambitions to be an s-f artist died after he’d had a few covers on Nebula S-F in after years. With all this talent available, how could we fail? We spent hour after hour at the Epicentre constructing and discarding various boards and methods of playing.

We finally had a board showing elliptical orbits between planets in each corner of the board, with little cardboard spaceships plying between them bearing saleable goods and diminishing fuel. At least, that was the general idea. We tinkered and tinkered and stumbled off to our beds at 3am. on Sunday mornings – most sessions were held on weekends due to the sheer length of the Game – with our minds full of ways of uncomplicating the rules. Weekday evenings were sometimes devoted to planning new rules for the following weekend....

Time staggered on. Ken left the paper firm and became a rep. for a small company run by a mundane friend; the latter had invented a comprehensive copy-holder for typists. The world wasn’t ready for it; Ken had a difficult time. My own career – if you could call it that – also altered. Frank Cooper, a hollow-cheeked, gaunt middle-aged man who owned Fantasy Book Centre was a confirmed Marxist whose interest in s-f, I came to think, sprang from the number of stories which depicted either the joys or the horrors (1984) of a Communistic future. In a few short months he came to realise that my major interest in books, s-f and mundane, was in their contents, not their profit margin. He hived me off (“glorious opportunity”) to an acquaintance who’d made some quick money in real-estate – a somewhat dubious area in post-war years – and who wanted to improve his personal image by opening a chain of bookshops across London. Also, possibly to make another fortune by cornering the market in publisher’s remainders. My job was to go to the chosen site, arrange the windows and internal layout, train an assistant to the point of taking charge, then move on to another site. It was an offer I couldn’t refuse.

Frank Cooper did have one major effect on British s-f, as well as my own life. I introduced him to the London Circle just when publication of

Britain's only prozine, *New Worlds*, was in danger, and Frank's business knowledge helped to launch a fan-financed company which helped to keep the 'zine going for some time until it was absorbed into a professional firm. He was also instrumental in launching a short-lived "International Fantasy Award" which pre-dated the "Hugo".

So I trekked across London to work, and the journeys from the Epicentre became tiresome, but the contrast between the mundane world and the flat made it worth while. Aside from my friendship with Ken, the sheer ambience of the place was terrific. When they built Drayton Park, as I remarked once, it must have been a really high class slum, but it had gone downhill since. One reason was that one side of the road was bounded by a high wall, beyond which was acre after acre of coal interspersed with the railway lines which enabled it to be dumped nearly on our doorstep in the literal sense. Day and night, winter and summer, soft flurries of coaldust were blown over the wall against our windows – which were kept tightly closed. In fact, it was two years before I discovered that all the sash cords were rotted and broken. We kept warm, though. We also kept well-fed, after a fashion. Ken shopped on Saturdays for bacon, beans, sausages, tomatoes and other fryable items. Horrified by our reports of this diet, John Newman, who'd run the London 1948 Convention single-handed and contracted Nydahl's Disease, never actifanning again, came over one night a week for a time to bring us vegetables and other sources of Vitamin C, and to play chess after dinner. As we had Ken's supply of china to draw on, we worked out that it was time saving to do all our washing up on one day per week – usually Sunday morning, when there might be overnight guests to help. We couldn't make the wives of visiting fans see the beautiful logic of this.

We finally cut the throat of the SFS after consulting Ken Slater, whose baby it was, and whose tremendous contributions to post-war fandom are now overlooked. We kept on *SFN* as a private 'zine. Looking back on it, we may have offended some Obscure Ghods, as Things Happened for a few months with increasing rapidity. S-f started to boom. Some truly awful trash was published. Bert Campbell, editor of *Authentic SF* and Panther pocket books, said "I'm getting terribly amateur s-f submitted – why don't you two, with your knowledge of the field, have a go?" Ken was enthusiastic, I was less so. *More* time away from fanning? We went into that little Epicentre kitchen, produced a synopsis and first chapter which were approved, and finished 40,000 words, writing alternate chapters. It didn't seem to me to be

the basis of a career, but Ken had hopes.

At about this time the erstwhile estate agent tired of his bookshops and sold them to buy a hotel. I was out of a job, as was Ted Carnell, editor of *New Worlds* who also worked for the man. We attempted to interest a bank in loaning us cash to run our own shop. Our practically unrivalled knowledge of pro & fan worlds didn't impress them. We went to work for the same office stationers in the heart of London (and a quarter mile from that year's Con. Hotel, which was handy.) At the stationers I met a long term Communist who'd produced hundreds of duplicated 'zines, and obtained much valuable information which I circulated in a chain-'zine entitled *Duplicating Without Tears*. Ted Carnell left to work for the new publishers of *New Worlds*. The Communist got fired and left my life. I got fired, had a three-month try-out with a printing firm for whom Ted Tubb worked, and they didn't want to know, I decided that pro. writing was better than working for a living and didn't bother to look for another job.

So the Epicentre became the centre of my life, day and night. Ken and I wrote a second 40,000 worder (each taking one half of this epic), which also sold, but I couldn't satisfy myself on anything I wrote on my own. I did odd things – a fan column for a totally undistinguished s-f 'zine, bits and pieces – but fanning was fatally interesting; I was writing material for almost every fanzine in the country, and eventually won TAFF, which was hardly fair as I was practically fanning full time. If my savings had run out I might have buckled down to serious work, but I lived cheap. Even the fact that bits of the Epicentre ceilings had started to fall down (could it have been the vibration from the typewriter?) only added to the dream-like atmosphere in which I lived.

But reality started to break through. There was a regular Army Tech. Sergeant, fan Ron Buckmaster who'd married one of the first feminine British fans, Daphne [Bradley]. They'd met through fandom. Ron had a very pretty sister, Pamela. She was curious about these odd people, s-f fans, and Ron brought her to a London Circle meeting. Ken fell for her. In dumb sympathy more Epicentre ceiling fell – in fact, it became a running (or falling) gag as various people reported trouble with their own ceilings; you couldn't be a fan unless your ceiling was falling down. But Pamela didn't approve of the way we lived. Who would? It was obvious that with the ceilings up there and Pamela down here – or vice-versa – it was time for me to go. I moved back to Welling. The Epicentre episode lasted just under three

years.

Theme #1 (October 1983, ed. A. Vincent Clarke)

19. Fantasy Art Society (F.A.S.) (1973) Alan Hunter

To a handful of fans from the early fifties, these three letters will represent a grand, promising fan venture that flourished, alas, for a mere eighteen months. But to the vast majority of fandom, the Fantasy Art Society is an unknown fragment of fan history. My intention is to cast a little light on this forgotten episode.

It was born out of a correspondence between myself and Ken Slater. In the halcyon days of the early fifties, Captain Kenneth Slater, to give him his full title, was stationed with the British Forces of Occupation in Germany, and few fans of that era would not wish to join me now in thanking him for his help and assistance. Although he ran a trading centre, known as Operation Fantast, and published a fanzine of the same name, he would always find the time to give active support to any new fan venture. When I mentioned casually, in a letter, that I had been thinking of forming a group of amateur artists – that was enough. He immediately offered assistance and suggestions. And it was typical of him that he gave free advertising in his fanzine (which, incidentally, was all-litho and the widest circulated fanzine at that time) and offered free *Operation Fantast* subscriptions to anyone joining the F.A.S.

With this initial impetus, the F.A.S. was soon under way. Within a few months it had twenty-three members with such diverse occupations as a long-distance lorry driver, a chartered accountant, an ex-member of the Submarine Service, the owner of a Fantasy Bookshop and a brick-layer. It also included such people as Ken McIntyre – whose sad death gave birth to the Ken McIntyre Fantasy Award for Artwork – Bob Shaw, who was a promising amateur artist before he became bitten by the writing bug, and Terry Jeeves, whose fanzine *Erg* is currently celebrating its fifteenth year of publication. Although some of the members are around in Fandom, many disappeared and I often wonder what became of them.

For a mere 10/- (50p) per year, the F.A.S. offered many benefits to members. It had a lending library of art books, donated by the members themselves, portfolios of original drawings, a regular newsletter. Gerard

Quinn, then top pro fantasy artist in the British Isles (he lived in Belfast) doing covers and interiors for *New Worlds*, *Science-Fantasy*, *Nebula* as well as hard-cover publications, offered his services as art critic, willing to advise and constructively criticise the work of less experienced members.

Besides contacts with fanzine editors here and in America, many of whom began to feature the work of F.A.S. members, even the prozines began to take an interest. I became Art Editor of *Nebula*, commissioning members to illustrate the stories. No less than six F.A.S. members made their first professional appearance in this way. Also Pearsons, a large publisher at that time producing a monthly series of SF picture-strip books, contacted me for members to submit work for consideration. Two had roughs accepted and the finished strips commissioned.

During its brief history, the society completed two projects of its own – a Fantasy Calendar for 1953, containing drawings by six members, one to each two months, and a set of four bookmarkers. Individual members produced, for general sale, hand cast and painted fantasy bookends and ashtrays, a turned wood space-ship tablelamp, and sets of fantasy art photos.

With so much going for it, you must be wondering why the F.A.S. was so short lived. What went wrong? The answer, very simply and briefly, was *Everything*.

Nobody availed themselves of the library, yet it contained some excellent art books. The art portfolios vanished, each member claiming he had passed them on to someone else. Although members' work was appearing in an increasing number of American fanzines, some of these drawings also began to disappear. Fan editors are notoriously unpredictable, and as "agent" I was reluctant to continue sending drawings, many of them elaborate and painstaking, not knowing when or even if – they would be used.

Then Gerard Quinn resigned, due to pressure of work.

Following this, Peter Hamilton, editor of *Nebula*, began to commission artwork direct, no longer using me as art editor. Since *Nebula* was published in Scotland and I live on the South coast, this was a very logical move. When the "deadline" pressures built up just before each issue went to print, the postal delays became impracticable. At the same time, Pearsons announced they were discontinuing their SF strip publication, although the members had not progressed far beyond the "rough" stage.

The final blow came when the fantasy calender, with a printing of 500,

sold only 225 copies, involving a loss of over ♦20 which the F.A.S. funds were inadequate to meet.

So the society, although a bonny, bouncing baby, was strangled to death at an early age. But it was a crime that never made the Sunday newspapers – in fact, this is the first time the foul deed has even been mentioned in a fanzine.

Nothing succeeds, so the saying goes, like success. Conversely, I can assure you, nothing is forgotten quicker than a failure

R.I.P. the F.A.S.

Blunt #2 (November 1973, ed. Mary & Bob Smith, and Dave Rowe)

20. First Contact (1978)

Eric Bentcliffe

The year is 1949...the after-effects of World War Two are still affecting what passes for civilisation and your young, sercon hero is about to be released upon an unsuspecting fandom by the Royal Air Force, in which he served with considerable inconspicuousness; rising over a period of five years from the rank of Aircraftsman second-class to Aircraftsman first-class. His supreme accomplishment being the losing of two Lancaster night-bombers, and a Fairy Swordfish – but only on paper. He was, however, considered to be of sufficient worth to his country to be issued on demob. with a 5/- Warrant in case of re-mobilisation.

Part of those five years in the services had been spent reading, and looking for, science-fiction. Just how much time I'm not going to say, in case HMG decide they'd like their five bob back.... however, more time had been spent looking than reading, for there wasn't much s-f published at that time. Occasionally, I'd gleefully come across a dusty Wells or Burroughs hard-back on some market stall, but that was a rare moment. In fact, it wasn't until after I was demobbed that I discovered magazine science-fiction. This was in a rundown area of central Manchester where one could purchase such exotic items as "war-surplus" radios, black-market silk-stockings and off-the-ration-under-the-counter-chocolate; all very clandestinely, of course. I discovered, in a musty corner of what then passed for a (very) soft-porn shop, several copies of magazines called *Amazing*, *Startling*, and *Thrilling Wonder Stories* – they had probably been exchanged for the girlie-mags by U.S. Airmen from the nearby Burtonwood base. However, I wasn't worried about their antecedents... only how I could buy them on my weekly wage of £5.00 (before tax!) and still manage to eat and take the girl-friend to the pictures!

My dilemma was resolved when the shop-assistant casually remarked: "I lend those out for 2/6 a time....and when you bring one back you can borrow another." The shop was some seven miles from where I lived and could only be reached by a circuitous 'bus or tram journey, the latter being the cheaper but taking considerably longer; however, the trufan embryo didn't hesitate, its mental tendrils forced my hand to delve into my pocket and come out with

the then equivalent of 25 pence, and coerced my vocal chords into uttering, “Er, would it be all right if I took two, I live a long way away?”

It is difficult to convey to those used to walking into any bookshop, and seeing a display of science-fiction of all types, how this discovery affected me.... there was some juvenile s-f appearing in the (all writing) comics such as *Hotspur* (a serial called, I think, “Last Rocket to Venus”, ran for several of my formative years herein), and *Adventure*, but British magazine s-f was still in its infancy. It took three years for four issues of *New Worlds* to be published. Paperbacks hadn’t really been born, and the hard-back novel was rare, and expensive. Entering this shop, and discovering American s-f pulps, was almost like wandering into an undreamed of alternate time-stream.

The *Amazing Stories* I borrowed on that first foray into wonderland had as lead novel Rog Phillips’ “Starship to Sirius” – the sort of reading I’d been looking for for years. It was no literary masterpiece but, by ghod, it evoked my sense of wonder, and it had illustrations of spaceships “soaring” through the void and what I later realised were bug-eyed-monsters. Great stuff. But it was the letter-columns of these magazines that were the real eye-opener; somewhere, Out There, were other science-fiction readers. I was not alone! And they weren’t, apparently, just reading s-f they were publishing amateur magazines about it, forming clubs and associations to discuss it.

What happened to me after I found those magazines must parallel the entry into, the discovery of, science-fiction fandom by many fans of that period. It was several weeks after my initial discovery of the pulps before I took the fateful step that has me at this typer. I’d now visited the shop several times at eager intervals, and borrowed twenty or so well-worn but eminently readable s-f mags – I was even trying to get a job in Manchester so I would be nearer the source. Then, on my next excursion I came away with the issue of *Startling Stories* containing a novel by a new author, Arthur C. Clarke, called “Against the Fall of Night”. That was a story. That was also the end of my visits to that shop, because there was no way I was going to be denied the pleasure of re-reading it whenever I felt like it. For months thereafter, I answered the door with reluctance in case it was the shop-owner wanting his magazine back.

But how to get more magazines? I tried two methods, and both of them worked. I wrote a letter to *Amazing* asking if any Stateside s-f reader was interested in exchanging American s-f for British – it was now 1950, Wally Gillings’ first issue of *Science Fantasy* had appeared and *New Worlds* had

become a quarterly, so it looked as though I would have something to exchange. My letter was printed in the September '50 issue, and the result was *Astounding* – in more ways than one. Within weeks I started receiving s-f mags from all over the States. Some came from anonymous donors, or from people who just forgot to include their names and addresses; some came from censorious donors, who'd ripped off covers and torn out stories they didn't like – or didn't think were fit for my tender eyes (I'll never know which). Others were preceded by letters, such as the one from Neil R. Demeree in Washington, who wrote "I haven't any new s-f magazines I can send you, but I have an attic half-full of old *Astoundings* if you'd be willing to trade for these?" I haven't heard from Neil for years now and suspect he's moved, or even, passed away, but I will be forever grateful to him for letting me trade my "new mags" for his "old". His first consignment, incidentally, resulted in my receiving a request from H.M. Customs & Excise at Liverpool to quote my relevant import license. Neil had sent some forty issues in a huge cardboard box! Fortunately, my letter explaining that these were outdated publications of a sentimental value only sufficed to release them from bond. I must have hit them on a good day.

Many of the people who sent me magazines I never heard from again, even after I'd written them – possibly they were just clearing out unwanted reading matter. Others, like Dale R. Smith of Minneapolis were to be friends and correspondents for many years, and Dale I even got to meet when I had the good fortune to win TAFF in 1960. Most of them weren't fans, nor even collectors, but they had in common a very grateful Eric Bentcliffe. And many were very interesting people... particularly so to me, for at that time I'd seen a little of Germany and too much of Egypt, (courtesy of the R.A.F.) but knew little of the U.S.A., apart from the misinformation I'd gained from watching Hollywood movies.

However, it was my other attempt to get hold of science-fiction magazines that was to lead me into fandom. I'd come across, in one of the pulp letter-columns, information about a certain Captain K.F. Slater who was in charge of something called *Operation Fantast* in the British Army of the Rhine, and who had s-f magazines for sale. In retrospect, I'd be a damned sight cagier contacting something called *Operation Fantast* today, than I was then. It was a wonder I didn't find myself involved in some secret army project to relieve Mafeking, again! Such, fortunately, was not the case. *Operation Fantast* was something Capt. Ken Slater did in his spare time, and

it had many facets; he did sell magazines, but he also put out a regular amateur magazine featuring material about s-f and, also, operated a purely gratuitous contact-bureau putting s-f fans/readers in touch with one another.

If any one person (other than myself) is to blame for this article, that person has to be Ken. He put me in touch with A. Vincent (Vin©) Clarke and Ken Bulmer in London, who were publishing a news-zine called (appropriately) *S-F News*; and this led me to contact other fanzine publishers, and to subscribe to quite a number both here and in the States. Then, in late 1950, Ken Slater sent me the address of someone called Dave Cohen who lived closer to me than any other known fan – just the other side of Manchester. I would have gone to see Dave right away, but it would have entailed my passing the door of the shop I'd borrowed *Against the Fall of Night* from....so I wrote him instead.

Dave had already contacted, by letter, two other s-f readers in the Manchester area, Frank Richards and Taffy Williams, and when he replied to my letter he suggested that we all rendezvous at the Oxford Hotel in central Manchester one Sunday evening. This meeting took place (according to my hasty research) in late January of '51, and was quite remarkably pleasant. Most of you have had the experience, at one time or another, of suddenly realising that you are with kindred spirits and can actually discuss your shared interest. Since science-fiction in Britain was then a much denigrated literary media, this was perhaps the first time any of us had actually talked about it without encountering the legendary “pursed lip and curled eye” which mention of s-f usually inspired. We talked, mainly, about our favourite authors and stories but, inevitably, as the evening came to a close euphoria took over and we talked of how pleasant the evening had been, and how pleasant it would be to have a s-f club in Manchester so we could do it more often. We were all, you understand, veritable neos and did not realise that *Cosmic Minds* and *Compatibility* are two very different things

Dave suggested a venue; the Waterloo Hotel in Cheetham Hill which was close to his home and where he knew there was a suitable meeting-room. A suitably private meeting-room, for we'd realised a few minutes earlier that the Oxford was not such a place.... after some four hours of talking and drinking there realisation dawned that the Oxford was the local gathering place for the city's prostitutes. At first their casual smiles had been taken (in our euphoric state) as tacit approval of our discussions, and it was only after Dave had got into a long argument upon mention of the Fitzgerald

Contraction with a lady (?) who said she knew all about them.... that we came to realise we weren't quite on the same wavelength.

From this beginning came the Nor'west Science-Fantasy Club, and the gay (old meaning), abandoned life of an active fan of the fifties...

Waldo #4 (1978, ed. Eric Bentcliffe)

21. The Liverpool SF Society (1954)

Tom Owens and Dave Gardner

1. A Short History: Tom Owens

On Monday the 12th November 1951, we, the Liverpool Science-Fiction Society held our first meeting at the rear of the Milcross Book Shop. At that time we were not grouped under any name, but were just a number of fans who had met as a result of a Post Card sent to each of us by Jeff Espley, the founder of the Society.

Right from the beginning we all agreed upon the necessity of having our own clubroom. That was easier said than done however and it was fully two months before we were able to move to our present address. Temporarily we took up quarters over a cafe and in the interim got through a lot of business. In the main this business consisted of:

1/ Election of Club Officers, viz:

John Roles – Chairman.

Jeff Espley – Secretary.

Norman Shorrock – Treasurer.

2/ Club Motto:– “Thought, Time and Space.” and

3/ Club Badge:– This consists of an open book with our motto on one page and a large upright Null A on the other.

Monday January 7th saw us installed in our new H.Q. (we believe that we are the only S-F society in Great Britain who rent their own premises). During the following fortnight members were to be seen at all hours of the day and night, painting, decorating, hammering and CURSING etc!! Not only did we have to completely renovate the “Dive” but we also had to prepare it for our recruitment drive on the week commencing February the 10th. During this week the Gaumont were showing the then current *The Day The Earth Stood Still*. We arranged with the manager to display a number of Science Fiction books and covers in the Foyer, and in return we advertised the film at our premises. We had the walls of the Space Dive covered with S-F magazines,

for which display we are indebted to various members who placed parts of their extensive collections at the Society's disposal. In all there must have been about one thousand magazines gracing the now clean walls. In addition to this our Treasurer, Norman, constructed a model of a spaceship which stood 5' 4" in height, this, placed in a lunar setting contrived by another of our members looked extremely effective. Several other members volunteered to stand outside the Gaumont and hand out a leaflet explaining the Society's activities and aims.

We were surprisingly successful and as a result of our increased membership it was found necessary to re-elect our committee. We thought this desirable so as to allow the new members a say in the constitution of the Society.

The resulting committee is therefore as follows:—

Chairman:	Frank Milnes	
Treasurer:	Norman) assisted by Tom
	Shorrocks	Owen
Secretary:	Lewis Conway)
Librarian:	Trevor Dorman	
Vice Chairman:	John Roles.	

With recruiting week behind us, and the committee elected for the next twelve months, it seemed as if we could now enjoy a period of comparative quiet. Examination of the Society's accounts, however, told a sad story. The outlay for the paint and distemper to decorate 13A had made serious inroads into our funds and in order to avoid insolvency something had to be done – and quick:

All praise then to the now forgotten genius who thought up the idea of an Auction. Everybody was asked to bring whatever they thought was saleable and the goods would be put up for auction, with one third of the proceeds going to the funds. The response was little short of amazing. There were, for instance; sports coats, garden shears, gramophone records, electric fires, tea, sugar and milk. Jeff brought a crumb tray. There was also butter, jewellery and electric fittings, Jeff's crumb tray I have already mentioned. The Society benefited to the extent of £3:8:5d and everybody got something they wanted, e.g. Lewis got a crumb tray.

The last day of March marked our coming of age. Twenty-one weeks a

Society. We celebrated this in the approved manner at the Lisbon Grill, Victoria Street, and owing to our Secretary's final state, there is no entry in the minutes book for that week.

It was about that time that we decided we should take more interest in fandom than we had been doing to date. Accordingly John agreed to communicate with the various fanzines. Among others John chose *Slant* but up to now he has had only one issue of that excellent mag and has had to return that one. Owing to the demand that exists for *Slant*, it was the Editor's last copy. Dave, on the other hand, chose the promags and assailed the READER COLUMNS with letters inviting American fans stationed at the USAAF Base at Burton Wood to come up and see us sometime. This was a token repayment for American generosity in supplying British fandom with promags when they were hard to obtain over this side of the Atlantic.

After our 21st celebration came a lull. We now had time to enjoy and appreciate life as a group and indulge in group activities. Among these were:

1) A vote on the contents of each new issue of *Science Fantasy* and *New Worlds*. The results are correlated by Dave and sent to Editor Carnell. As can be seen from the letter section of the current *NW*, our ratings do not always agree with other fans.

2) Record playing of various sound tracks of futuristic films. (*Things to Come* and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* etc.)

3) Occasionally allowing Dave to read us one of his stories. Included among those he has already read to us is an article entitled "The Shaver Saga", which I hope to persuade Dave to offer for publication in *Space Diversions* sometime in the near future.

The last item of interest to record is the decision to publish *Space Diversions*. The L.S.F.S. are certainly bustlers. Two weeks after the decision was made to publish, I had a copy of *Space Diversions* No.1. in my hands.

Indeed it was only the hard work of my Co-Editor and Publishers that has made this mag. possible. Therefore what better way is there of closing this short history than to thank heartily all concerned in the production and distribution of

SPACE DIVERSIONS.

Space Diversions #1 and #2 (June/July 1952 & August 1952, ed.
Tom Owens & John Roles)

Additional reporting: Les Johnson

“We have our own Headquarters known as the Space Dave, (sorry – Space Dive) 13A, St. Vincent Street, Liverpool, and meetings are held there every Monday evening. Unfortunately, I’m not able to attend many meetings, because my wife won’t let me out on Mondays. The Space Dive is very well named, because one has to Dive down several flights of steps to enter its precincts, and once inside there’s certainly a lack of Space. But it’s very cosy, and with the help of Oxygen cylinders we’re usually able to survive in the smoke laden atmosphere.”

Space Diversions #1 (June/July 1952, ed. Tom Owens & John Roles)

Additional reporting: Dave Gardner

“The numbers on the Society’s books run to 22, plus three Hon. members: Eric Frank Russell, Ted Carnell and Forry Ackerman. Usually we have a turn out of about a dozen members each meeting, one of those days we may even have everybody there and that would mean that we really would have to see about new premises. As with the Manchester group, we were approached by the Manager of the Gaumont (TrocaDERO) Cinema, London Road. Les and Frank of the Milcross kindly lent some book-jackets and mags for a display in the foyer. Mock newspapers were also available to any who cared to pick one up, and both the Milcross and the Society had adverts on the back page of said paper. In the Society premises, which we had to decorate especially for the occasion, we had a display of S-F mags and art work, plus a five foot six model of a Space Ship built by Norman Shorrock. The mags numbered about 1,000 and succeeded in hiding most of the blotches on the walls, but what a job hanging those blessed things up. They all had to be bound in cellophane and then strung up on racks which were hanging from the ceiling. We told ourselves that it was a job which could be done in an hour but found to our sorrow that it took nearly all day Sunday to fix the place up. Well, we had some visitors and also brought in some new members to the Society so we can’t complain – except for one thing. We were all so busy arranging things and being on duty at the Dive the week that the film was showing – we didn’t see the reputed epic. Can’t anyone tell us the story or better still send

us round the reels for a private showing? I doubt if we'll ever look after film publicity again."

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Space Diversions #1 (June/July 1952, ed. Tom Owens & John Roles)

2. Two Years Later: Dave Gardner

The LSFS came into being through the courtesy of the Milcross addressograph plates and a handful of people who were interested enough to turn up and see what could be done about forming a club. We graduated from a cafe society in November, 1951, to the proud possessors of our own club room called the Space Dive in January, 1952. It was decided then that the Society should be completely informal, despite the fact that we had elected officers and voted in a set of rules and regulations.

Nobody's nose is put out of joint. No one pays the slightest attention to the chairman's calls to order; and the chairman wouldn't know what to do if anyone did. The resulting chaos is highly satisfactory.

Shortly after moving into the Society's premises it was suggested that the country members were entitled to a slight consideration, justified by the fact that they were helping to swell the coffers. It was decided that a "news letter" should be issued to keep them in touch with the happenings in Liverpool. The "news letter" grew up on us, and almost before we knew what was happening we found ourselves publishing a fanzine called *Space Diversions*, which *Authentic's* editor classifies as the top home-product in this field of publishing. Here in Liverpool we refrain from comment, but the praise is appreciated, and we cannot restrain from boasting that at least two items from our contents pages have now appeared in pro mags.

During this period of settling-in and settling the settling-in bills, the Society did some publicity work for one of the town cinemas when it was showing "The Day the Earth Stood Still." That means we arranged a display in the foyer of the cinema, as well as one at the Space Dive, and stood outside the cinema distributing hand-bills and "news" papers to those lucky Liverpudlians who were not busy with fan activities, and who could afford a few hours watching the film in comfort whilst we froze to the pavement outside. It is cold in Liverpool in February, a bitter wind sweeps in from the Mersey.

July last year found the LSFS searching for new premises. The Space Dive, which happened to be a cellar, was suddenly required by the owner, for – dare we say it? – storing bananas! Thrown on the streets with model space ships, paintings, a library, and part of a skeleton (its appearance is still a mystery), the members searched feverishly for new premises. From one pub to another the trail led, until at last, late in '53, we found a bar which appealed to all and hired a room for Monday night meetings somewhere above it. We are still there.

The Stork Hotel now houses the LSFS, and it is there that we now do our entertaining, talking and drinking.

It has been said that even Sf has been discussed at one or two of the meetings; certainly the talk ranges far and wide in its scope, and encompasses anything from art or religion to rockets and motorbikes. But parties are our strong point. We have never yet found an excuse not to have a party. We can always find an excuse to have a party. We are a friendly crowd. Nobody has yet been injured with an empty bottle – or a full one, though many have almost choked to death before a fast-emptying bottle could be dragged forcibly away from eager lips. These things are taken for granted, and no hangover has ever prevented plans for yet another “do”.

You see, we are a completely normal crowd of fans out to enjoy life and fanning. We hate nobody – or at least very few. We could gladly sever relations with anyone rash enough to suggest Liverpool should hold a convention one year. We are firmly decided that there shall be no convention in Liverpool until one of our members wins at least £75,000 on the pools. The chances of anything like that happening are fantastic, but not impossible. That is why we have stopped posting in coupons and filling in the “treble chance.” But should anything so dreadful as a fortune come into our hands we do know that the convention will be held on the Mersey aboard the Royal Iris. Who knows, one day there might be a Ferrycon. We hope not. We are lazy. Easy-going. We are cowards at heart. We would prefer to pull other people to pieces rather than be pulled to pieces ourselves. There is little fun in the latter!

Authentic SF #49 (September 1954)

22. Every Thursday of the Month (1970) Frank Arnold

One place where you will never hear about the so-called “generation gap”, so much written up and talked about in recent years, is the Globe Tavern, in London’s Hatton Garden, especially on the first Thursday of the month. Here the STF lovers of the world have been gathering regularly since 1953 and the founders of the whole thing, who started it all as long ago as 1937, are still well known figures among the newest recruits of the nineteen-seventies – just legally old enough, some of them, to consume intoxicating liquor on licenced premises.

When the first Science-fiction Association in Great Britain was founded shortly before World War II, its leading spirits were such men as Arthur C. Clarke, William F. Temple, John (Ted) Carnell and Walter H. (Wally) Gillings, then editor of *Tales of Wonder*. Clarke and Temple were also prominent in the British Interplanetary Society, and both these bodies had the same distinguished man for their president, viz: Professor Archibald Montgomery Low. This famous inventor, who had been a pioneer of television and guided missiles, was also a fervent propagator of the belief that science is good for us. We all shared that belief, and still do.

Our big ambition was to promote an all-British science fiction venture, giving scope to the new home-grown authors who were then coming forward. The ingredients were to hand in Gillings’s *Tales of Wonder*, a quarterly magazine of fiction, and its smart little ancillary *Scientifiction*, a bulletin of news and reviews. Plenty of good work was appearing in these productions and several new reputations were in the making, when the outbreak of war put a stop to magazines, associations and everything.

Throughout the six years of hostilities members of the former S.F.A. kept in touch, and when peace broke out in 1945 they were all still alive and physically undamaged. Early in 1946 a big reunion was held at the Shamrock in Fetter Lane. It was a cheerful and heartening occasion, from which two interesting developments emerged. First, the original committee of the S.F.A. was opposed to reviving it as a formal society with secretary, treasurer,

subscriptions and the rest of it. Secondly, a new magazine was needed to replace *Tales of Wonder*, a war casualty. This is where I came in.

A little while before the reunion I had joined a transient writers' circle somewhere in the depths of Soho, whence I encountered Stephen D. Frances, then a freelance publisher. Steve was an instant convert to STF and invited me to edit a series of booklets for him, beginning with a reprint of my own early stories. Very soon after, having read a few more copies of *Astounding* and *Galaxy*, he was on fire with enthusiasm for the new STF magazine which he intended to publish – and for which he had only the paper and the printers; no authors, no stories, nothing. By a happy coincidence Ted Carnell had just been demobbed, and I knew he had in his possession the dummy of a magazine which had been projected as long ago as 1940. The three of us got together over noggins, and thus *New Worlds* was born.

The meetings at the Shamrock grew bigger and bigger, and soon we had to move across the road to the greater spaces of the White Horse, which had a dining-room that was not used in the evening. From start to finish; seven years later, those meetings were crowded; noisy and full of activity. Fans had been suffering from SF-starvation for years, and now they were rushing to buy, sell and exchange at almost any cost. For Ted Carnell, with a real live magazine on his hands and only his spare time in which to work on it, every meeting was an editorial conference. It was a grand sight to see him expounding art and literature over the tankards to the bright-eyed hopefuls; and it is heartening to realise how many of them subsequently made good as authors or artists. And all the while the room was vibrating with talk, argument and discussion about SF

We had not been long at the White Horse when there was a change of landlord. The newcomer was one Lew Mordecai, man of the sea and reader of books. Lew soon made himself a leading member in the circle, not only as the official host but as “one of the Boys”. He became such an essential figure that when he left the White Horse in 1953 and went to the Globe in Hatton Garden (whence his father was once landlord) the whole company packed its traps and trooped round the corner to join him. But we are anticipating.

The year 1951 was the *annus mirabilis* of the circle. That Easter the first International Convention was held at the Royal Hotel in London, whence more than 150 fans from all over the country were joined by visitors from France, Holland, Sweden, Australia and the U.S.A, it was a lively affair, with plenty of speeches and jollifications, film shows, art exhibitions, book stands

and all the merry Convention paraphernalia not so familiar.

Highlights of the year were the appearances of two best-selling books, John Wyndham's *Day of the Triffids* and Arthur C. Clarke's *The Exploration of Space*. For John Wyndham – our old friend and idol John Beynon Harris, of the Gernsback magazines – this book was the beginning of a new and distinguished career as a novelist. For Clarke, already a rising author and journalist, the book enabled him to break through into his career as a globe-trotter, undersea explorer and inspired writer of fact and fiction. He was one of the first theorists, if not actually the first, to see the curious analogy between exploration under the sea and in outer space: both regions of airlessness.

A second International Convention was held in 1952, as successful as the first. Then in 1953 *New Worlds*, which had had difficult passages in its first seven years, was taken on by an established company and published on a regular basis, with Carnell as full-time editor. He has been an editor ever since, only leaving *New Worlds* in 1964 to produce *New Writings in SF* for another company. Meanwhile the original proprietor of *New Worlds*, Stephen D. Frances, had gradually withdrawn from most of his publishing interests to concentrate on his own novels. He first created the stories of “Hank Janson”, a trade name he later disposed of to others, and afterwards wrote under his own name novels that now sell in tens of millions.

Cypher #1 (June 1970, ed. James Goddard & Mike Sandow)
Originally published as “First Thursday of the Month – Part 1”

23. NEZFEZ (1955)

Don Allen & Alan Burns

The N.E.S.F.S. was born out of a letter by Don Allen to *Authentic*. A reply came from Ted Mason of Birtley, who volunteered to do some secretarial work, and the Society was practically in business. When Fred Fairless, of Hebburn-on-Tyne (who has almost all the science fiction mags in the world), came to be librarian our success was assured.

We meet the second Sunday in each month in the Lambton Arms, Chester-le-Street, at 3.30 p.m. We have a permanent secretary, a treasurer and librarian combined, and Don Allen. Don is well worth an article to himself. He's the baby of the club, and is silent only when asked to speak, but he more than makes up for it by his heroic flow of written words. He produces *Satellite*, our fanzine, and has the shoulders of a Hercules from cranking a duplicator. Force of circumstances, the need to eat and sleep, has caused him to cut *Satellite* to a quarterly, but when we get bigger we'll undoubtedly try to get Don a motor-driven machine. Democratically, the chairman is elected by the members at each meeting, and the meetings are quite orderly while the business is being dealt with. This must take all of three minutes. After that our librarian, having entrenched himself behind a barricade of books, systematically repels raiding parties who have not paid their shilling meeting fee and their shilling library fee. When the books borrowed have been returned and new ones issued, the meeting breaks up into little groups where science fiction is discussed. Anyone talking about anything else is severely reprimanded by being asked to design a faster – than – light drive.

On the whole the Society has a very active membership, though, alas, none of the gentle sex have so far appeared to grace its meetings. Members include the laboratory director of a leading paint firm, a press photographer and an expert in electronics. These three gentlemen give the meeting class, and a source of Information.

The library aforementioned is second to none, and the shilling fee for the use of it at each meeting goes to buy new books, of which we have now quite a collection. As we don't have a meeting place that we can lock up, the usual detritus of models, paintings and so forth has not accumulated, although the

suggestion of a display for the next local cinema so unlucky as to be showing a science-fiction film has shown that at least one of the members is a secret spaceship constructor.

In conclusion, anyone who cares to come along may do so, and the secretary is always delighted to hear from other societies and workers.

....Alan Burns

Founded in October, 1953, through the letters column of this magazine, the society boasts forty members, holds monthly meetings, has a library, a fanzine, a club room and plenty of good spirit. It was in October of last year when the first spark of the club originated. My letter in Projectiles asked for N.E. fen to write to me and said that we would try to form a club. One person wrote. He was Mr. G.E. Mason of Birtley. Yes, he was interested in a sf club and he would be only too willing to help out with the formation in any way he could. Little known to him at the time that he was going to scribe letter after letter to N.E. fen, to arrange meetings, and to be secretary of the proposed club!

From October, 1953, until March, 1954, Ted and I analysed the problem of how to form a club. Ted had contacted fifteen interested persons though over sixty letters were sent out to people known to be readers of sf – and now he wanted them all to get together. But they all lived at such remote places that most of them would have two or three hours of travelling before reaching Newcastle, the proposed place for the club to meet. This, then, was the turning point. The club was originally planned to be a Tyneside group, but no fen could be contacted in that area. Instead, fans from scattered places throughout the N.E. were made known. In February, Ted said something had to be done; we had fifteen members all waiting for something to happen. So while still on the hunt for a suitable meeting place, a chain-letter was sent round the members. Each member added a bit to it, stating his or her ideas of what the club should do. I recollect saying that I would help anybody who was keen on publishing a fanzine! Next thing I found myself pricing duplicators! From this point, February, 1954, I worked on the production of a fanzine, with not one little bit of knowledge how to produce one. Then, one day in March, I received word from Ted that he had found a meeting place. The Lambton Arms, Chester-le-Street, was the place, and still is, for that matter. So, one Friday night in the month of March, the fen of the N.E. finally got together. The customary formalities were held, a librarian was elected, Mr. Fred Fairless; a treasurer, again Fred was the boy... this time to

look after our money! And gallant Ted the secretary. Myself, the fanzine, publicity and printer of anything that needed printing. From then on we got to know each other, sorted out the true-fen, the mad ones, etc.... and so the club grew.

More members were roped in, this time from a place where before we couldn't find any, Tyneside. April saw the publication of *Science Fiction Satellite* No. 1 (now a mint copy), and the following month, No. 2. The club meets on the Second Sunday of every month in the smoking room of the Lambton Arms, Chester-le-Street, from 3.30 p.m. to 7.00 p.m. For the first half of the meeting the secretary, librarian, etc., give their reports. These, which are supposed to be formal, are always greeted with wise-cracks, and whoever holds the position of chairman usually goes crazy trying to restore order. At 5.00 p.m. everybody goes out to a local cafe for tea, and this is claimed to be the best part of the whole session – much to the sad plight of the cafe owner, of course. Afterwards the mob returns to the meeting room, full of fun and just itching for an opening to slip in a wise-crack. Any person can give a lecture at any time, and points for discussion are very much welcomed – likewise so are subscribers to *Satellite*. New members are always welcome, and they can write to the secretary for details or come along to a meeting. Remember – the second Sunday of every month.

On the 12th September Ted announced that he was resigning from his position of secretary and that the position was open to anyone who cared to fill it. The new secretary is Mr. Alan Burns, and all correspondence concerning the club, except anything concerning *Satellite*, should be sent to him.

At the meetings I guarantee that you will enjoy yourself. Mix in with the regulars, present your arguments and opinions, discuss the latest publications, help plan the future events for the club, have a pint or a coffee, whichever you prefer. But the main thing is to enjoy yourself, and you will, no matter who is there... what you do or how you do it, you will have a good time. That is what the NESFS is for, so that all the N.E. fen can get together now and then to natter, argue, raise steam, laugh and to have fun.

(Note: NEZFEZ is the local abbreviation for the North-East Science Fiction Society.)

...Don Allen

Authentic #53 (January 1955, ed. H.J. "Bert" Campbell)

24. The Road to Ghoodminton (1955-1956) Madeleine Willis

i) The Hostess with the Mostest (to put up with)

I had been reading science fiction since before I left school but the first other addict I ever met was a boy called Walter Willis. You may have heard of him. As a matter of fact we'd been going out together for nearly a year before we discovered this similarity between us.... I suppose we'd been too interested in the differences.... and it might have been longer if we hadn't taken shelter from the rain under the awning of a newsagent's shop. Suddenly we both dashed inside and found ourselves trying to buy the same copy of *Astounding*. There was only one copy left so we read it together and I think I first realised his intentions were honourable when he started to let me read the novelette first.

From then on the two of us haunted the second-hand book stalls in Smithfield together, instead of separately, for our favourite reading material in the U.S. editions. Far too often we were told – “There were plenty of those mags earlier in the week but they are all gone now”. It wasn't until Walter had got into touch with Ken Slater and – through him – science fiction fandom and James White, that we realised why the mags disappeared before we could get hold of them. Our half-day was on Saturday, whereas James was free on Wednesday afternoons. James was soon visiting us regularly, and we used to discuss science fiction.... just as fans were once supposed to do. We also discussed fanzines.... and one day when we had received Norman Ashfield's *Alembic* I uttered the momentous words: – “Why don't we publish a fanzine, I'm sure we could do better than that?” (Sorry, Norman). And thus *Slant* was born.

During the next few years I assisted Walter and James occasionally, but a printed fanzine entails so much sheer hard work that I was soon shunning the press room instead of rallying round and giving a hand at setting or

dissing the type.... well at least I know some of the technical terms.

After James and Walter had been working steadily for about two and a half hours I would take them up cups of tea and murmur encouragingly and perhaps slip-sheet if I couldn't get out of it gracefully. I also decided the colour scheme on some of the covers, and gave my opinion on the mss. sent in for *Slant*.

Soon after this I met my first femme-fan, a Mrs Douglas from Helen's Bay, who monopolised any conversation within a radius of fifty yards with her fervent admiration for *Fantastic Adventures* and *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. We, trufans all, preferred *Galaxy*, *Astounding* and *Startling Stories*... this, of course, before James started writing for *New Worlds*. When she wanted to exchange her copies of *Authentic* for some of the wartime *A.S.F.*, and tried to get Walter to print her fairy stories in *Slant* we rebelled, and I was detailed to take her to the cinema to get her out of the way. We eventually managed to get rid of her, but this experience made me less than enthusiastic to join the femme-fan club then being organised in the U.S.

With the advent of *Quandry*, Max Keasler's mags., etc., I became more interested in fandom. Since then I've been reading all the fanzines Walter receives – about five a week. Then meeting other fans at the Conventions (I attended my first Convention in 1951) and, having such likeable people to stay with us as Evelyn Smith, 4sj Ackerman, Vince Clarke, Bea Mahaffey, the Bulmers, and, *of course*, Chuck Harris, restored my belief that most fans are interesting, intelligent, and good company.

With the birth of *Hyphen* and the demise of *Slant* (unlamented in Belfast), acti-fanning became less arduous (Walter says the only difference is that he now does it all himself) and the twice weekly meetings gradually metamorphosed into social occasions. We had added Bob Shaw to our group and for a time we had a craze for Lexicon. It seems likely that the figures on the back of the old fanzine now in Sandy [Sanderson]'s possession refer to a game between Walter, Bob, and myself. Don't let Bob's high score fool you Sandy, the lowest score wins though Bob was the first to get a ten-letter word – Lexicon's Holy Grail.

Over the next few years other newcomers, George Charters, Sadie Shaw, Peggy Martin, and John Berry, came along, and were assimilated, bringing the group up to a total of eight. Although the acti-fans now had more time to enjoy themselves, this expansion brought a problem for me. How to carry refreshments up the three flights of stairs to the fan-attic? Most of the Irish

fans are enthusiastic tea drinkers. James has been known to drink seven cups of tea at a sitting; admittedly this was on an unusual occasion, when he had just escorted Bea Mahaffey across a couple of miles of moon-lit fields in Donegal. Even honorary Irish fans seem to share our liking for tea. When Chuck Harris was here at Xmas he was heard to complain offendedly that no one had offered him a fifth cup. I became tired of having to run down to the kitchen for more hot water or to brew more tea. At last I found a solution, or rather an outsize tea-pot, which holds twenty-two cups (of tea that is). Though there is still the problem of getting it *and* the tray upstairs. Walter suggested that we install a small lift and a speaking tube, a shout from me (in the kitchen) being the signal for the fans to haul on the ropes. James' suggestion is really worthy of the imagination of a pro-author (which of course he is). Briefly, it is that once a week a pound of tea be placed in the hot-water tank.

Our latest craze is Ghoodminton, and all of us are so eager to play that lots have to be drawn. My gambit is to announce that, as I will have to make the supper, I should play in the first group. I do *not* threaten to refuse to make tea at all!

Femizine #6 (April 1955, ed. "Joan Carr")

ii) Love All

Soon after Bob and Sadie Shaw came to live with us, Sadie decided to take up ghoomdinton. She and Bob used to sneak up to the attic when there was no one there for practice sessions, until one fan night Sadie announced that she was ready to play with the others. John volunteered to partner her. Their opponents were James and me.

John loves to play; at the prospect he quivers ecstatically with anticipation, his moustache crackling electrically. Sadie became worried lest she let him down and begged us to be easy on her. She also pointed out she would need a good bat. Now, John has a wonderful bat. He made it himself. He spent weeks looking for extra strong cardboard for it, and it has a loop of electrical flex attached to it for holding it onto his wrist so that his opponents won't be able to knock it out of his grasp.

Sadie smiled sweetly at him and said "Lend me your bat John."

John, dazed at the concept that people could ask to borrow his bat, handed it over somnambulistically. Then, returning to his senses, he

burrowed in the heap of bats which James and I had already picked over. He took the least flabby one and swished it with a dissatisfied air. The game began.

There was an unaccustomed grimace in John's expression, but his conduct was normal.

"For service!" he shouted, stamping his boots on the floor glancing to the right, smashing the shuttlecock onto the wall on the left, slapping the table with his bat, and shouting "UNPLAYABLE!!!" We had played with him before so we were comparatively unmoved. James whirled round to face the rebounding shuttle, caught it on his bat, and shook it down so that it would lean against his chest while he shot back to the wall to avoid John's slash at him. He curled up his lip in a sneer and hefted the shuttle up in the air. Just as he was uncoiling himself for a mighty smash, Sadie said, "Just a minute. I must take off my cardigan." James shuddered to a stop, swaying slightly, a study in arrested motion. Sadie said brightly, "Ready now." I think James may have been put off a little. He mis-hit, and the shuttlecock hit me on the back of the neck as I was leaning over the table poking John in the ribs with my bat to keep him at a distance. I looked round at him and he apologised, but we had lost and the others were to have first service. (0-0)

John handed the shuttle to Sadie with a courtly bow and she served. It wasn't a very hard service and I waited confidently for it to come off the wall. Instead it slithered down the wall like a snake. I couldn't get to it in time and we lost the point. (1-0)

"Wonderful service, Sadie," breathed John. Her next one angled upwards too sharply and hit the ceiling, which cost them the point. (1-1) John turned a reproachful look on her and said, "Oh Sadie". She was determined not to make the same mistake twice, but this time the service angled downwards and she had to do it again. After watching this happen three times running Bob could contain himself no longer. "Serve from the waist," he shouted. "But I am," answered Sadie with asperity. "No you're not," said Bob, "watch how Madeleine does it." This was the last straw. She darted over to him. "You'll have to make your own supper tonight," she said, tapping him smartly on the head with her bat. "Stop!" shouted Bob, "You're giving me flat dandruff!"

Sadie returned to the fray and this time served in the approved manner. James dealt with it summarily. (1-2) "Hit it harder," advised John. Sadie did so, and hit the ceiling again. (1-3) "Oh, Sadie," groaned John. She turned

towards him, but managed to restrain herself. Stamping her foot, she cried “I wish I were married to you for a minute.” Her next service was returned by James with such force that it bounced three feet off the floor. (1-4)

It was now my turn to serve, and as we were leading I felt magnanimous. I served gently to Sadie. She darted forward, caught the shuttle safely between her bat and her left hand (we had decided to waive the “no-holding” rule for her as well as George) and slammed it down ungratefully on our side of the court. (4-2)

Pulling myself together I served again as hard as I could. John jumped for it. The doors and windows rattled as he landed three feet away, but before he could clear it James had leaned over and negligently slapped the shuttle onto the floor. (5-2) The same thing happened next time and Sadie informed James that she hated him. (6-2) The next time John was a little quicker. He managed to get the edge of his bat under the shuttle before James put it away, and deflected it against the wall. He lunged at it again and it re-appeared rolling along the back of a large chair at the other end of the room. In a flash John was on it again and bore it triumphantly back. He slammed it down on our side of the court. (6-3) This time I served a cannon off the picture on the side wall and John slid to his knees in a vain effort to reach it. (7-3) “It’s past praying for, John,” we giggled.

(3-7) John now started to serve and in spite of our best efforts he reduced our lead to one. (7-8)

(8-7) It was now James’s turn. He has a good service too, but he is best when he is leaning over the table slapping the shuttle out of the opponent’s grasp. This infuriated Sadie, and once then she had the shuttle on her bat she took time out to tell him that she intended to buy the Stan Freiburg recording of “I Laughed At Your Wedding” and play it at his reception. (She didn’t, actually.) This prospect so enchanted her that she took her eye off the shuttle and James blew it off with a blast of air from a furiously fanned bat. John hurled himself at it with a despairing cry, but it had reached the floor. (12-8)

(8-12) Sadie was now to serve again. She rolled up her sleeves and took a firmer grip on her bat. John unshouldered his braces and moved closer to the table. Sadie served well, and we lost title point. (9-12)

She served again, and James flipped the shuttle back over her head. She ducked and caught it deftly, but hit it just out of court. (9-13) “Oh, Sadie,” said John. The next service hit the ceiling. (9-14) John had a beaten look but he said nothing.

She served again, and I knocked it in John's direction. He slammed it back and James trapped it. John leaned as far over the table as he could without actually falling over it, thrashing the air six inches in front of James. James took a terrific swing at the shuttle and it hit John on the face and bounced onto the table. John yelled with pain, but retained enough presence of mind to knock the still quivering shuttle onto the floor. (10-14) Sadie's final service came towards me. I hit it back over the net and John intercepted it. He turned to make for the safety of the wall, intending to return it at leisure in an unplayable manner. I seized my chance and John's braces, and hauled him back to within James's reach. He yelled for Sadie and she rescued him by smacking my arm. We lost the point. (11-14)

It was my service, and I was determined to increase our lead. However John was equally determined that we shouldn't. He stationed himself close to the table and as I served his bat flashed out in my path. (14-13) Twice the shuttle returned to our side, having travelled only about six inches. (14-14) I served harder still but John still blocked it. This time though he stopped my bat with his fingers. He dropped the bat from his numbed hand, held the hand between his thighs, and hopped about in agony. But even this didn't deter him. He took up the same position again and I had to vary my service.

I decided to give it height at the expense of pace, and serve to Sadie. Sadie collected it on her bat, but in dodging back from James she dropped it. (15-14) "Oh Sadie," said John. I next tried to serve high and hard, but I hit the ceiling and our scores were level as John took his turn at service. (15-15)

John really excelled himself and he and Sadie were ahead when James took over. (16-19) There was an air of tension in the room. James gritted his teeth and swung mightily. We won the next three points on service only. (19-19)

The game was now in the balance and the protagonists looked grim. Sadie met the shuttle as it rebounded from the wall, but she couldn't get back to the table quickly enough and James was able to knock the shuttle out of her grasp. (20-19)

"Oh Sadie," gasped John from the floor, where he had flung himself with such force that everything in the room rattled. This is a standard ploy of John's – it is his hope that the shuttlecock will land on him and thus be still in play.

The next point could be the final one. James hummed "Dragnet" as he prepared to serve. We all hung forward, ready to spring into action. The

shuttlecock arced in John's direction and he flung himself towards it. In midair he stopped, his arms flailing wildly and a look of consternation on his face. Then he was catapulted back to the door, against which he arrived with a dreadful thud. His braces had caught on the door knob. (21-19)

James and I danced in jubilation.

"Oh, John!" said Sadie.

Pamphrey #3 (October 1956, ed. Walt Willis for FAPA)

25. *Hyphen* (1975) Harry Warner Jr.

The most frustrating thing about writing these fan history books is the lack of space. *All Our Yesterdays* was the longest individual manuscript about fandom ever published, the next book dealing with the fifties will be at least as long, and still there's never enough room to consider fully many major topics.

For example: why has *Hyphen* gained such an extra-ordinary reputation, one that continues to grow many years since its last issue appeared? Obviously, it was a great fanzine, but that's not a sufficient explanation. Thousands of words could go into a full exploration of the reasons for *Hyphen's* place in the dizzy heights of the fanzine Olympus.

Since the next volume of fan history won't permit such detailed delving into every topic, I'd like to advance here a few theories and explode a couple of misconceptions about *Hyphen*.

There are really two aspects to *Hyphen's* reputation in fandom: one it acquired in life and one that has grown since its death. Fandom today contains only perhaps five per cent of the individuals who were active when *Hyphen* flourished, and most of its admirers today never saw an issue while it was current.

The overwhelming reasons for *Hyphen's* reputation was the basic one, the quality of the writing in it and magical way in which the illustrations meshed in spirit with the text. Willis himself and the other Irish fans who were frequent contributors formed a superbly literate, erudite, and good-hearted team of writers who had perfected the informal essay, or rather had restored it to the good health which it had enjoyed before it had been badly battered in the fanzine writing which predominated in the 1930s and 1940s. The standard of writing in *Hyphen* was so uniform and so superior to the very end that I actually experienced a pang of unhappiness when each of the last few issues arrived. They came at constantly increasing intervals, like the rattles from the throat of a dying man, and I experienced momentary gloom because these increasingly rare issues of *Hyphen* somehow symbolised remnants of civilisation in an otherwise deteriorating universe. The final

issues became painful reminders of the earlier times when there were several fanzines of nearly equal quality and taste appearing on both sides of the Atlantic.

But there must have been other causes for *Hyphen's* popularity. Maybe it benefited from the accident of its isolation. The 1950s were the years when fans first grew into the habit of visiting one another frequently, forming more and more local clubs, attending a half-dozen or so conventions every year. Before then, fans were fewer, auto-owning fans were scarce, and first the Depression, then World War Two had caused most fans to be isolated except in a few metropolises. Certain ideals get pulverised when fans begin to have numerous personal encounters with one another: we discover that other fans are unable to create in unrehearsed conversation the brilliant remarks that they include in their fanzines, they sometimes live like pigs and they may outstay their welcome as visitors. By the late 1950s there weren't many little-explored areas in fandom's geography, but Belfast was only known in imagination to most of us. *Hyphen*, along with other Irish fanzines of the period, benefited from the fact that we could paint Oblique House, John Berry's moustache, and ghoddminton competitions in whatever colours we pleased. The handful of North American fans who visited Willis found him personally as admirable as his fanzine, but the point is still valid. *Hyphen* was a survivor of the earlier days when fanzines had been the best known things about fans.

I think *Hyphen* may have attracted us as a symbol of the victory of fandom over prodom, too. Remember, the first Willis fanzine, *Slant*, had resembled a professional periodical by using letterpress reproduction, science fiction stories had been prominent among its contents, and some of them eventually sold to prozines. Willis, obviously gifted by nature with more ability to write professionally than nine out of ten fans who deserted fandom to write professional science fiction, not only remained a fan; he also discontinued *Slant* and substituted for it *Hyphen*, the most fannish of all fanzines. *Hyphen's* existence told us that not everyone was selling out at a penny per word less agent's percentage.

What's more, *Hyphen* was comfortable to the eye and to the fingers: never so thick that it required too much time to be read on the day of arrival, never so mint in condition upon arrival that you were afraid to open it lest you create the first wrinkle. It was mimeographed on medium quality paper, mailed without envelopes, and it arrived creased down the centre. I'm timid

about reading some of the magnificent fanzines published today simply because they look too perfect. And this brings me to one warning to anyone who may never have read an issue of *Hyphen*. If you're such an unfortunate neofan, don't feel disappointed when you finally decide to splurge out a year's savings on a few copies of it. It doesn't look at first glance nearly as good as it is.

One misconception I mentioned involved *Hyphen*'s reputation. Don't imagine that it enjoyed while it was alive quite the legendary reputation that it possesses today. It was on everyone's list of the ten best current fanzines. But many fans would have rated above *Hyphen* certain of its contemporaries. Today, *Hyphen* is probably the most sought-after of all fanzines, except among those who seek the extreme rarities and the earliest fanzines.

Anyone who praises *Hyphen* for its good influence on the fanzines which followed is throwing bouquets in the wrong direction. Maybe the opposite was true for logical reasons: very few fanzines were modelled after *Hyphen* because it was too good to be imitated.

But *Hyphen* as a whole never had a first-rate equivalent from any other fan's mimeograph, no more than any successors ever sprang up to fill the gaps left when such diverse fanzines as *VOM*, *Le Zombie*, and *Quandry* succumbed.

If anyone today feel in the mood to create a second *Hyphen* he shouldn't try to imitate it in any way at all. Instead, he should try to fill his fanzine with better writing than exists consistently in professional publications, maintain editorial control that is absolutely conditioned by what the editor wants to write and print, and blend seriousness with humour, trivia with philosophy. He won't publish another *Hyphen*, but his fanzine might attain a couple of decades from now much the same reputation that *Hyphen* enjoys today, for similar reasons.

Random #6 (February 1975, ed. Mike Gorra)

26. The Magnificent Flop (1954)

Walt Willis

The sun was shining on Manchester when Irish Fandom arrived. Before we could explain to the bewildered inhabitants what it was, we were met by Fred Robinson and Terry Jeeves, plenipotentiaries for Eric Bentcliffe, and escorted to the hotel. After everyone had fed their sensitive fannish faces we drifted along to the Convention Hall to make sure that everything was all right. It was... the public address system had just broken down. Pleased to see that all was proceeding on traditional lines we drifted out again and mounted guard on the front steps to look out for the motorised convoy of Londoners. After an hour or so the others – fake fans all – got tired of waiting and deserted their posts. I held my ground steadfastly, scanning the horizon with keen eyes and directing other strangers to Manchester to various places, and was eventually rewarded by the sight of a London taxicab tearing past loaded to the gunwales (the zapgunwales) with fans, the top layer consisting largely of Walter Gillings wearing a tropical pith helmet with a home-made aluminium propellor on top. My opinion of Gillings soared.

I waved and shouted at the taxi and it drew up at the next corner and began to disgorge an apparently inexhaustible supply of fans. I welcomed them to Manchester and helped them in with their luggage. I got no tip, except that Bert Campbell's motorbike had broken down outside Rugby and nothing had been heard of him since. This was so completely what might have been expected that nobody believed it for quite a while, and the Northerners obviously expected Bert to materialise in their midst at any moment. I think it was this, and not the official programme, which was responsible for the general air of expectancy throughout the Convention that any moment something might happen.

At precisely 11.30 I went along to the Convention Hall to see if the Londoners would carry out their secret plan to draw attention to the official starting time with a rocket take-off count. Judge of my horror to find some brash Northern neofan called Harry Turner getting up to declare the Convention open and calling for witnesses that it had started on time. Some of the older fans would have collapsed iron shock at this unheard-of breach of

hallowed tradition, had not Dave Cohen swiftly restored an atmosphere of security with a few ritual apologies and by failing to introduce half the notables present.

One of the apologies was that because of the failure of the public address system it was not going to be possible to start the proceedings with a rocket take-off count as the Manchester Group had planned.

After this the lunch break was declared. When we got back we were told that the Convention Hall had been moved from the First Floor to the Ground Floor. I assumed at first that the Manager had been warned about such conventions and had decided to move the Hall down a floor before this took place in the normal course of events, but in fact it turned out that his ignorance of Conventions was so blissful that he was only worried about his newly decorated walls being disfigured with sellotaped notices. He didn't seem to realise how lucky he was he still had walls. At any previous Convention the notices would have been fixed on with thumbtacks, nails or even daggers

However the gentlemanly Manchester fans had spent the entire lunch break moving everything from one hall to another, and were still running around in little circles uttering plaintive cries. My heart bled for them, and for future Convention Committees. This was another Mancon "first". Many terrible things have happened to Convention Committees, but having to move to another Hall in the middle of the Convention is a new and ghastly weapon in the armoury of Fate.

Among the exhibits now on display was a fullsize water-closet marked "Vargo Statten" and a roll of toilet paper with the same marking fixed to a placard reading "Cause & Cure." I took this to be another courteous London Circle gesture to the Guest of Honour on the lines of the "International Fantasy Award" they'd proposed to give him – a tiny gallows – but they and everyone else I asked disclaimed responsibility. I'd like to have been there when Vargo saw it – I wonder if he'd have been flushed.

After some more apologies, including one for the number of apologies, the afternoon sessions started a mere 55 minutes late. The first item was billed as "a talk on radio-activity by Frank Simpson". Most of us owe Frank an apology for not realising this was a sublimated thiotimoline type of hoax, but there was an excuse. The first stages of a Convention – in fact probably any stage of a Convention – is not the proper atmosphere for this rarefied type of humour. Poor Frank lost most of his audience during his deadpan

introduction, while he was still waxing enthusiastic about the table of elements. Norman Wansborough walked out in disgust, but the restiveness of the others manifested itself in another Mancon “first” – the passing of notes among the audience containing interlineation-type quotes and comments. I’m not sure whether it was Ken Potter or myself who started this, but the inspiration was probably Vince Clarke’s “quotecards” – small pieces of pasteboard bearing fannish messages which circulated all during the Convention. There were a thousand of them, with 100 different messages. Later Chuck Harris took to handing them gravely to passers-by in the street, sometimes with a muttered “Ghod bless you, Sir” and sometimes with a glance up and down the street and a finger pressed to the mouth. The rest of us lagged behind watching the victim’s reaction to such items of information as “I HAD A POCTSARCD FROM GHOD THIS MORNING – *Hyphen*”, or “BLOODY PROVINCIALS”. While we were walking around the square one evening he gave one to an old man sitting on some steps and the expression on the recipient’s face was so peculiar that we had to run after Chuck and find out what the card had said. It had been “DEFY THE DEROES WITH DIANETICS – Redd Boggs.” Another made a wonderfully appropriate appearance at the Chinese restaurant where we had lunch, just as our orders had arrived and we were staring at them in a wild surmise. It was “IF YOU DON’T WANT CROTTLED GREEPS, WHAT DID YOU ORDER THEM FOR? – Filler.” We left this one tucked inside the cellophane cover of the menu.

After a monologue by Geoff Lewis which went over very well in parts (the part nearest the speaker) we had the Medway Group’s offering. It suffered not only from the continued defection of the public address system but from the fact that the script and timing weren’t adequately adapted to the slower reaction time of a large audience. As last year, Tony Thorne was reduced to asking ruefully “Did anyone see that gag?” and it was no comfort to be interrupted two minutes later by a dazed shout of “My Ghod, I’ve seen it!” The slightest diffidence of the actors, though disarming, didn’t help either. Apparently to be funny in public you must above all have *authority*. Alistair Paterson for instance, who came next, made some of the feeblest jokes it has ever been my misfortune to be exposed to, but he produced them with such confidence that the audience was confidence-tricked into laughing.

He also made some good ones, like “I had some notes but I lost them, so I’ll just have to B natural” (this fell rather flat) and “The *Vargo Statten Mag*

has a circulation of over 50000; if you don't believe me I can show you the cancellations." And on the pocketbook situation, "Some of them are incredibly bad; perhaps the ones I don't publish aren't any better."

After this, a day early and put on without announcement so that I hadn't time to escape, came the play I had written; brilliantly performed on tape by the Liverpool Group, who also deserve credit for the parody of US commercial radio inserted in the middle. This playlet seems to have become a yearly chore of mine, and it's a very welcome one – I can now refuse to make speeches with a clear conscience. I made up my mind a couple of years ago that I'd never speak at a Convention again – there's no point in trying to change one's psychological make-up at my time of life, and I don't see any other reason why I should force myself to do something I dislike so much. I did it at Chicago and Los Angeles, where it was necessary, but that experience didn't make me like it any better. Any more than being successfully buried alive is a cure for claustrophobia.

Later there was a curious interlude when Cohen announced that the London Circle was now going to demonstrate how to put on a Convention. Nothing happened for a very long time and eventually most people got up and went out or stood around talking. Finally Ken Bulmer went to the microphone and announced calmly that "The London Circle, having thoroughly organised this Convention, now hand over to the Manchester Group." I didn't know quite what to make of this... whether it was deliberate sabotage or a piece of London Circle self-criticism.

The talk at tea-time was all about the startling news that the film show that evening was to be *Things to Come* – NOT *Metropolis*. Shocked murmurings were heard when the announcement was made. Small indignation meetings were held. Neofans staggered about white and trembling, their world crashing to ruins about their ears. Old fans shook their heads forebodingly. No good would come from this mad craze for novelty. A Convention without *Metropolis*! It was unthinkable. As Rick Dalton was heard to complain, "It should at least appear on the programme!"

But there was even worse to come. No one discovered that the show was illegal under a twenty-year-old statute, the films arrived safely, on time, and wound the right way, no one ran around asking the audience if anyone had a 35mm projector, the projector did not break down, the film was not put on backwards, or even upside down. In fact the whole showing went off without a single hitch. It was terrifying, like the end of the world.

Unable to stand the strain, many people went upstairs to parties. The London Circle had one for which the admission charge was ten shillings, but the passports you got for this were the best thing about it. There was nothing that you couldn't see at the seaside for free with a pair of binoculars. I thought of making love to my own wife, but I was afraid the London Circle might be shocked, so we went upstairs to the Liverpool party. Someone there had taken to heart the maxim that the recipe for a successful party is too many people in too small a room. It was the Black Hole of Calcutta... with zap guns. It was a wonderful party though, especially after John Roles and others had run amok with soda syphons and schwepped half of the people out. Sometime previous to this we'd gone down to have another look at the London Circle, but we still had the feeling we should have brought a portable keyhole with us to watch them through. Besides the party was supposed to be exclusive, but Burgess had been issued with a passport and Ken Potter had been turned away. We felt we were in the wrong place and went back to the more congenial Liverpool gathering until it was broken up by the night porter.

Many interesting incidents occurred that night which I cannot report here because of my innate sense of decency and my respect for the English libel laws. I'll report them in Oopsla instead. But I could mention the interesting affair of Burgess's entrails. These were several pounds of assorted livers, lights and other internal organs which Burgess had bought in London slightly too long ago, brought to the Convention, and deposited in Peter Hamilton's room for safe keeping. Unfortunately he had omitted to tell the occupant of the room about them and when Peter Hamilton found them he thoughtlessly threw them out of the window into the canal. Burgess came around later to collect them and was highly indignant at Peter for putting out his lights. He explained that he had intended to put them in Norman Shorrocks's bed. I am sorry to say however that this eminently reasonable explanation was not in accordance with the facts. Actually the entrails were part of the props for a highly secret item the London Circle proposed to put on tomorrow – a fake human sacrifice to culminate in Ted Tubb throwing entrails among the audience; just another of the wonderful London Circle ideas which when the time came they found they hadn't the guts to put on.

Next day, Sunday, everyone was awakened at some godly hour by an unearthly din from the bells of the cathedral across the road. Indignation was widespread, and Vince Clarke was heard to complain "Can't these bloody

Mancunians afford alarm clocks?” It was a Good Thing that the parties had been broken up fairly early in the morning, because it meant there was still some fight left in the conventioners. I came in towards the end of the fmz session to be told by George Charters that someone had objected to reprints of my stuff because it would discourage young fan writers. I made a grateful note of this argument to use against faneds who ask me for original material, but honestly, you young fans, don't let my example discourage you. I was like this even before I started fan writing.

After this came John Gunn, who went off quite well, and then John Russell Vargo Statten Fearn, whom George Charters had referred to as the Jest of Honour. He was interesting mainly because he was so disarmingly frank – but then he has so much to be frank about.

After this Ted Tubb began to take over the Convention. Little more was seen of the Convention Committee, and nothing of 11 of the 22 items listed on the official programme. Instead Tubb reigned supreme, first ad libbing his way through the remnants of Terry Jeeves' script for the mock trial of Bert Campbell – with good-humoured and often brilliant co-operation from Terry himself, who struck me as one of the nicest people there – and then winding up the Convention with a riotous series of monologues and interviews, including one with Norman Wansborough. Tubb was wonderful. It seems to me it would be worth the while of any Convention Committee to hire Ted Tubb along with the hall.

Among this glorious melange of Tubb-foolery there occurred one of the most extraordinary events I've ever known happen at a Convention. No one, it transpired, had the slightest intention of bidding for the next Convention site and it began to look very much as if the Supermancon would adjourn without anything having been decided. Tubb fixed that. In the space of about thirty seconds he called for nominations, heard none, announced that the next Convention would be held in London, and appointed Shirley Marriot to take subscriptions. All this, apparently, quite on his own initiative. However, the London Circle appeared to accept it as their destiny.

People had started to leave for trains quite early in the evening, and the usual post-mortem had started long before the Convention was scheduled to end. Dave Cohen and Eric Needham stood by the door with distraught faces and courageously asked representative fans what they had thought of the Convention. There was a startling unanimity in the replies. Every one that I heard was to the effect that the official programme had been a fiasco, but that

they, personally, had enjoyed the Convention.

That was what I had thought too, but there seemed to me to be more to it than that. Usually I don't express any opinion about the merits of Conventions because whether one enjoys it or not depends so largely on one own subjective impressions, but the Supermancon was such an extraordinary affair that I find myself getting all philosophical about it.

For instance, take the situation in British fandom just before it. Bitterness between one group of Northerners and another, hostility between both groups and the Londoners, tension between Hamilton and the London pro-editors, the Londoners full of diabolical plans to sabotage the Convention, the Northerners under a desperate compulsion to justify their contempt for London inefficiency. All this amid the greatest burst of British fanactivity since 1938. It seemed to be an explosive situation, one that would wreck British fandom. All the disenchantment, recriminations and bitterness which normally follow conventions would be magnified to cataclysmic proportions.

But instead the incredible happened. The opposing stresses met, surged brief and silently.... and dissipated themselves in an atmosphere of good humour. The Supermancon seems actually to have strengthened fandom, a thing which no Convention has ever done before.

Apparently the Supermancon Committee wrought this fannish miracle by staging the worst organised Convention fandom has yet seen. You can almost see a mystical symbolism in what happened. It was as if all the sins of British fandom – the smugness of the North, the malice of the South, the snobbery of the Old Guard – as if they were all expiated by the Supermancon Committee as they crucified themselves in the Grosvenor Hotel. The point was that they bore their agony in such a way as to demonstrate the inherent goodness of fan. If they had showed signs of bitterness pomposity in their ordeal things might have been very different. Instead they met every disaster with such informality and good humour that they won people's sympathy. In face of this sporting attitude the London Circle (though admittedly things might have been different if Bert Campbell had arrived on schedule) dropped their plans for sabotage. Not one of the fiendish plots hatched over the last nine months in Operation Armageddon was put into effect. The official programme was allowed to die peacefully by mutual consent.

It was the way it died that was important. Last year in London it lingered on in agony. People sat around, bored and irritated, waiting for life to be

pronounced extinct. This year people realised at quite an early stage that the official programme was already part of the pavement of Hell, and it was at this point in time that the British Convention completed the transition that had begun last year in the Bonnington. As I pointed out in *Initiative Inc* two years ago, American fans have long been accustomed to regarding the official programme as a sort of running buffet. But such was the force of tradition that English fans, as long as an official programme existed, would have felt compelled to sit around and watch it. When the official programme collapsed at Manchester, British fans were forced into the American style of Convention. They took to it like a duck to water, and I don't think we'll ever see the old "desultory lecture sessions" type of convention in Britain again.

The Supermancon Committee deserve credit for other things than committing suicide. They booked an almost ideal hotel – not too respectable, only slightly too big, and above all with plenty of lounges where people could talk, in a sort of perpetual party. The Liverpool Group also deserve a bouquet for their tour de force in booking a lounge for a late night party – a completely new development in convention techniques. But the very success of the Supermancon as a social event poses, it seems to me, a new problem for British Convention organisers. If everyone is enjoying themselves the way they learned to do at the Mancon, who's going to put on the official programme? The Supermancon will go down in fan history as a success only because all the reports will be written by actifans. What about the neofen who turned up to see the sort of thing that was advertised in the promags and went away disgusted? Either we're going to have two Conventions, one for ourselves and one for the public, or we've got to let the pros take over the official programme, and run it as a commercial proposition.

Hyphen #9 (July 1954, ed. Walt Willis and Chuck Harris)

27. North by Nor'west (1954)

Dave Cohen

There was a time at the beginning, when Manchester did have sunny weather, and strangely enough it was well within our lifetime. It was during this period that a Mancunian received sunstroke. Thus was born the idea of the formation of a science fiction club, the first post-war club outside of the London circle. He was, as many other S.F. readers are at the beginning, a sane, likeable chap, with no other idea than to get a few other S.F. readers together to talk S.F., but now the sorry story begins:

With all innocence in the world he enquired of one Ken Slater, who was then running Operation Fantast, if there were other keen readers in the local provinces, and if so, could he have their names. Meanwhile he had contacted one Eric Bentcliffe, and the idea of forming a club simmered between them. What an idea! It couldn't go wrong! They became firm friends, and much correspondence passed between them. Happy and congenial were their letters, talking S.F. and dreaming of a club. Eventually twelve addresses were received from Ken Slater. Happy day, now they could really get down to forming a Club. Each address was written to, each told about the dream. Then – the first taste of fandom. Only two answered. Still not downhearted, he answered the two letters. They were from A.E. (Taffy) Williams and Frank Richards. It was decided to meet at the Oxford Hotel. How excited he was awaiting the day! He couldn't work. He couldn't sleep.

The great day arrived! He collected all the mags he had, and checked up on his authors. They had never seen each other but there was no difficulty in finding each other – there was a certain air... Then occurred the most interesting session he had ever had, or had since. They actually talked S.F., he, Taffy, Eric, Frank. Time went too quickly.

It was decided that they must meet again and give the same opportunity to other S.F. enthusiasts. The N.S.F.C. began to take shape. A room was hired at the Waterloo Hotel, meetings to be held fortnightly on the Sunday evening. A policy formed – to introduce newcomers to this form of imaginative fiction; to welcome those already acquainted with S.F.; to popularise S.F. wherever possible. Everyone was welcomed.

Propaganda went out, fanzines – what few there were then – referred to the formation of an S.F. Club in Manchester, until eventually they were referred to as the “mushroom” by Walt Willis.

Announcements appeared in evening papers; members began to trickle in, until, within the first month, we had a round figure of twelve, including one female, Frances Evans. A name was given to the Club – it became the Nor’west Science-Fantasy Club. It was great fun in those days. The day the Club was visited by a reporter was one of tremendous excitement; he gave it quite a write-up, too.

Discussions were many and varied, from the unknown to space flight, from rocket ships to rocket projectiles, from gunpowder to atomics. Members were joining from many parts of Lancashire and Cheshire. One Norman Weedall came from as far as Liverpool; there was no Liverpool S.F. Society then.

Discussions became fast and furious, visits were arranged to various places of interest. The N.S.F.C. began to increase. The number of members present at each meeting was then between twenty-five and thirty. A library was formed, giving all members the opportunity of borrowing all kinds of mags, mainly American. They were then hard to get, and the only reprints then were Astounding and the great Unknown. British S.F. was few and far between. A printed fanzine was started and then dropped.

Members began to join from all parts of the U.K. until eventually it was decided that they – country members – should have something in return. A fanzine was planned.

Meanwhile, members were visiting, and having their first taste of, conventions. Then they had a shot at their own convention, the Mancon, a one-day success. Eighty to a hundred fans and professionals were present. Eventually, after many birth pains, their first fanzine was issued, then dropped through lack of facilities. Another attempt was made, a duplicator obtained, and out of the storm was born *Space Times*, edited by Eric Bentcliffe, published by Eric Jones.

Slowly a change of attitude became more noticeable; tempers were becoming frayed, keenness was diminishing, rules were made but just as quickly dropped, other interests were attempted, but still membership slackened off. The library was still attracting people, but now more S.F. was available and easier to obtain.

Only the keen enthusiasts now remained. Members attending had

dropped to twelve. Visits were made to the now-formed Liverpool S.F. Society and the visits were returned. Attendance showed a slight increase. Visits to the N.S.F.C. were made by Ken Slater, Lyell Crane, E.C.Tubb, and John Russell Fearn. Yet differences of opinion were becoming more pronounced. *Space Times* was becoming a headache. Changes kept being made in format and staff. Attending the Club meetings was almost becoming a duty rather than a pleasure. Yet, whatever was tried to regain the earlier interests, nothing proved entirely successful. It was becoming obvious that the N.S.F.C. had become too big – over a hundred members scattered throughout the U.K. and in the U.S.A. instead of being just a local Club. Something had to happen.

Came September, 1953, when plans were being prepared for creating the Supermancon, and it was then decided that the N.S.F.C. would go out with flying colours while making a great success of the Supermancon, after which the N.S.F.C. would no longer exist in its present form. An informal get-together like the London circle seemed to be the answer – a few enthusiasts meeting together, welcoming any other fan who popped in at the chosen site.

Came the Supermancon – The Magnificent Flop, as quoted by Walt Willis. The N.S.F.C. apparently wasn't going out as hoped, with flying colours. Still, the previous idea was followed up, a search for a suitable pub for the informal get-togethers was made. The Thatched House was found. We have now arrived up-to-date. Are these informal sessions the answer? No subs, pop in when you like, and get together every Sunday evening, no officialdom. The future will show. "The Manchester Circle" has been born. How long will it live? Will this be a happier reign of the Manchester and District Fans? It is hoped so. The London Circle has been going a long time.

When in Manchester visit the Thatched House, any and every Sunday in the back room. You'll find it in Newmarket Place, behind the *Manchester News Offices*, Cross Street, off Market Street. Everyone welcomed.

Authentic SF #50 (October 1954)

28. The Life of TAFF (1957) Walt Willis

Like so many things in fandom, it all started with Forry Ackerman. He was not, as some people think, the first person to conceive the idea of bringing a fan across the Atlantic, but it started with him all the same. As far as I know, it was like this.

British fandom, once strong and highly organized, was in a bad way during the war. Fans, in service or bombed out, had lost touch with one another; there was virtually no native stf being published and supplies from America were cut off; duplicating paper, ink and stencils were scarce; collections were being handed over as scrap paper or burned, by landladies or the Luftwaffe. British fandom might have been obliterated altogether if it hadn't been for two fans – Mike Rosenblum of Leeds and Forry Ackerman of Los Angeles. Through the worst days of the war Mike kept publishing his *Futurian War Digest* and Forry helped him, and other fans, with unsolicited gifts of prozines, fanzines, stencils and even paper. And his own fanzine, *VOM*, was a vital link between British fans in the forces and their friends.

Forry's services to British fans were so remarkable that it became a tradition in British fandom, one that has only recently been forgotten, that his name should be included in all lists of British fans, and that he should be an honorary subscriber to all British fanzines and a charter member of all British fan organizations. Toward the end of the war, some British fans suggested that their gratitude should be shown in some more concrete way – to wit, by bringing Forry over to England after the war.

Whether from diffidence or from knowledge of the comparative poverty of most British fans, Forry declined the offer before it came to anything, and when he did make his visit in 1951, it was at his own expense. But the idea must have taken root with him, because shortly after the end of the war, Forry himself started a movement, which he called the Big Pond Fund, to bring an English fan to the States. He devoted an immense amount of time and trouble to this project, but despite all his efforts, all the Fund amounted to after three years was a mere \$127, much of it contributed by Forry himself under assumed names. Basically, the trouble was that American fandom in general

was not really interested in British fans. None of them had made any real impact on US fandom, and the two fandoms were more or less self contained. Ted Carnell did attend the Convention in 1950, but he had to pay most of the cost himself.

And this, I suppose, is where I come in. At the time I entered fandom, at the end of 1946, British fandom was practically dead – there were only two active fans in the whole country – and it was very hard to arouse any response from the scattered survivors of wartime and pre-war fandom. I found myself increasingly drawn to American fandom and in a year or so the zine I was publishing at the time, *Slant*, had a much bigger circulation in America than in Britain. I was in effect more of an American fan than an English one.

The position had its problems. From where I sat I could see two separate fandoms, both full of things the other would enjoy; both with defects that the other could remedy and virtues that could compliment each other. Looking at the situation like this, it seemed to me that it would be better for everyone if the two fandoms were brought more together, so that each could reinforce the other and everyone have twice as much fun. If there's been one constant aim in my fan life ever since, that's been it.

I tried to further it in several ways... pushing the circulation of US fanzines in Britain, etc.... but as it turned out the most momentous step I took was offering to write a monthly column for the new US fanzine, *Quandry*. I started an odd practice of writing up British conventions and fan doings in this column (“The Harp That Once Or Twice”) with the double idea of interesting Americans in British fandom and encouraging British fans to subscribe to *Quandry*, if only to see their own names. The column was a big success, so much so that by the publication of *Quandry* #13, Shelby Vick had started an abortive movement to bring me over for the Nolacon, in 1951. The con was only a few weeks away by that time, and of course the scheme had no chance. I wrote it off as a bit of fannish nonsense, a generous but impractical gesture. I thought the same when Shelby revived his scheme after the Nolacon, this time to bring me to the Chicon in 1952. But after a few months it seemed that money was actually being contributed and that most of the active fans of the day were helping, by publishing special issues in aid of the Fund, etc. As I suppose most of you know, Shelby's fund actually succeeded; enough money was raised to pay my fare both ways, the Chicon Committee offered me free accommodation during the convention, and I

actually did go to America. The full story of that wonderful trip is told in *The Harp Stateside*, just published.

When I got back I was of course silently resolved to try and pay back fandom's generosity by helping other fans to have the same wonderful experience. It seemed to me that if this opportunity was known to be available as a sort of Ultimate Award, it would be a terrific incentive to good fanactivity, an inspiration to every neofan. And unlike an ordinary Award, it would give pleasure not only to the recipient, but to the people who made it possible, for they could share his experience by reading his accounts of it. And, of course, since anyone who wanted to go would have to make himself known on both sides of the Atlantic, it would encourage the integration of British and American fandom, which I wanted to see.

The opportunity came at the next British convention, in May 1953. A letter had been received from Don Ford and the Cincinnati Group saying that they had raised some money to help bring over a British fan, Norman Ashfield, who was a friend of theirs. Norman hadn't been able to come, so Ford's group had sportingly offered the money to any other British fan we cared to name. During the next interval, I convened an informal meeting of about a dozen leading English fans. Having sounded a few possibles, we agreed it wasn't practicable to send anyone over that year. I then proposed that, subject to the approval of the Cincinnati Group, the money be made the nucleus of a Two-Way Transatlantic Fan Fund which would be used not only to send British fans to America, but to bring American fans over to Britain. This proposal was unanimously agreed upon, and I was delegated the job of arranging the administrative details, elections, etc., as far as the British end was concerned.

The fund was introduced to fandom at large in *Hyphen #4*, and in that and the following issues I put my proposals before fandom for approval, so that the election procedure would be agreed upon before the voting started. The proposals were principally that minimum qualifications should be laid down for voters, including that they should have made a certain minimum contribution to the Fund, that fans on both sides of the Atlantic should be entitled to vote, and that each voter should be allowed to give alternate preferences, to prevent split votes and confusion should candidates withdraw in the course of the election, but only one vote per person, etc., etc.

All these proposals were agreed to more or less unanimously, and the first election was held for a British fan to go to San Francisco in 1955.

Privately I didn't think that enough money could be contributed in the time, but I figured the election would bring publicity and do no harm. As it turned out, quite a large sum was collected, but the winner of the election, Vinç Clarke, couldn't go for private reasons and the runner-up, James White, decided to forego the opportunity and let the Fund be carried over until next year. I had added a questionnaire to the ballot form to find out the wishes of the contributors in event of a situation like this, and they voted as follows:

Vote again for a British fan to attend the next US con	244
Bring a US fan to the next British Convention	243
Offer the money to Candidate #3	90

(Incidentally, the overwhelming majority of the voters in this election were British fans.)

As you can see, this was virtually a tie between the first two alternatives, so I made the next election an open one; that is, fans on either side of the Atlantic could be nominated. As it happened, however, only British candidates were put forward, the Americans evidently feeling that the Britishers shouldn't be done out of their turn. This election was won easily by Ken Bulmer; there was now enough money in the Fund for the two-way boat fare; and we started to try and arrange a passage.

We ran into tremendous difficulties, and in the end all Ken could get was a berth on a cargo boat with an uncertain sailing schedule. So uncertain, in fact, that in July Ken got a telegram that the sailing date had been advanced to the 25th of that month. The Bulmers rose to the occasion and travelled overnight to Dublin. Madeleine and I and Chuck Harris, who was staying with us at the time, took the train down to Dublin to see them off and took photographs of the historic occasion. Then we went back to Belfast and airmailed a hastily mimeographed appeal to a dozen or so prominent East Coast fans. It was headed URGENT, and read:

“On Monday evening, the 25th July, the dream of the Transatlantic Fan Fund became a reality. The successful candidate, Ken Bulmer, along with his wife Pamela, sailed for America on a tramp steamer, the M.V. *Inishowen Head*... belonging to the "Head Line" of Belfast. The ship sailed from Dublin and Madeleine and ourselves went down there for the day to see them off. We all lolled about St. Stephen's Green for awhile after lunch and then went down to the docks, a confusion of cranes, trucks, shouting seamen and seagulls.

We holed up in the Bulmers' cabin talking for a couple of hours... probably the largest number of fans ever in the same boat... while they changed hawsers in mid-scream, and then we had to get off. ("Ask that man in the peaked cap if he knows a good place to stow away." -crh) Later, in the warm calm of a summer evening in Dublin, the ship sailed out on its long journey round the Irish coast and across the Atlantic.

"It's just an ordinary tramp steamer with accommodation for perhaps half a dozen passengers – half a dozen small passengers – but the Bulmers' cabin seemed nice and the ship looked as if it might last out the voyage. The Bulmers were happy and excited, but naturally a bit tired and worried. They'd had to leave London on a few hours' notice and travel overnight, and had spent the last few days in a hectic rush to get ready. This was because the sailing date of the ship was suddenly brought forward by more than two weeks on account of a large scale dock strike. They knew that if they missed this sailing, there'd be little prospect of another one, and that it would be a bad blow to the Transfanfund if everything fell through at this stage. But the result of this bolt from the blue from the shipping company is that through no fault of their own Ken and Pamela will be arriving in the States three weeks early, with very little money, no arrangements made for their accommodation until the Convention, and possibly even no one to meet them when they arrive in Baltimore.

"That's why we're writing this. We're airmailing it to representative fans in Baltimore and the surrounding area in the hope that we might find somebody who will be able to help – perhaps by meeting the boat, or offering accommodation for a night or two, or helping with transport or something. It's pretty rough landing in a strange country where you know nobody, and we are hoping that fans will rally round and help them both to Cleveland. The Bulmers have done all they can... they're probably the only tourists who ever brought tinned food to America... but they're not rich (both of them gave up their jobs to make this trip) and the Transfanfund only covers the trip to the States."

As it turned out, the only problem the Bulmers had was which invitation to accept. Their visit was an immense success, and a fine advertisement for

TAFF.

Seeing Ken and Pamela in that little boat in Dublin ready to sail for America had been a great moment for me, but my real ultimate ambition was to see an American fan brought over to a British convention. There was no doubt that this must be the next item on the TAFF program. I made the preliminary arrangements for the election, and then handed over to Don Ford. The election for 1956 was won by Lee Hoffman, but she got married to Larry Shaw before the polling closed and the newly married couple made the trip at their own expense. The runner-up, Forry Ackerman, also waived his right to the money and it was carried over to 1957. This election is now in progress.

I myself resigned from the TAFF administration early this year, and handed over to Ken Bulmer. Among other reasons, it seemed to me a good idea to set the precedent that each successful TAFF candidate should prepare the way for his successor. TAFF is now as firmly established as any fan organization is likely to be, and while there have recently been disagreements on points of method and procedure, there is no reason why they shouldn't be discussed and settled in a friendly manner as they have in the past. None of those concerned have anything but the best interests of fandom at heart, and all they differ about is the best way TAFF can serve them.

(Note: I'm adding here a note of just what these disagreements are, in case Bob feels the readers in general would like to know.) /*Bob does feel they would.* [RSC](#)/

The first concerns the qualifications of voters and candidates. One school of thought believes that there must be a verifiable definition of a fan for TAFF purposes, to prevent frauds and abuses, and that this definition must be based on evidence of some participation, however slight, in fanzines. The argument is that TAFF's purpose is to encourage more and better fanactivity, and fanzines are the only link between fans separated geographically: a person who has not sufficient interest in fandom as a whole to have ever written a letter of comment to a fan zine cannot have the knowledge of fans outside his own group to vote properly nor the qualifications to represent them. The other school of thought, however, says that this attitude is too legalistic and that many people who have no interest in fanzines are good fans and shouldn't be disenfranchised.

The other is about the counting of votes. The method in the elections held by me had been to allow each voter to name first, second, and third preferences, to give a more accurate reflection of opinion, but to permit a

voter to “plump” for a candidate by not using his second and third votes. Don Ford evidently misunderstood this and allowed people to vote one candidate in first, second and third places, thereby in practice accepting two votes for the same candidate from the same voter. This didn’t come to light until he published his own ballot form, the one used in previous elections having been drafted by me. Don now feels that having used this method of counting in the last election and having announced he was going to use it in this one, he cannot very well change it now. Against this his opponents argue that he is not being asked to change the method of voting, only the method of counting; and that the method he proposes to use is wrong and will upset the balance of the election by tending to give more weight to the votes of those who only know one candidate than to those who are discriminating.

Yandro #50 (March 1957, ed. Buck and Juanita Coulson)

Notes: crh = Chuck Harris; RSC = Robert S. (“Buck”) Coulson.

29. *Nirvana*, The Ultimate Fanzine (1994)

A. Vincent Clarke

In 1949, full of dewy-eyed neo-fannish enthusiasm, I went to share an apartment with Ken Bulmer, which we named The Epicentre. Ken had edited seven or eight issues of Star Parade, a small fanzine distributed with the Rosenblum Futurian War Digest (“Fido”), way back in 1941. Now, in 1949, it appeared that the editorial fires still smouldered behind the Bulmer brow. He also wanted to experiment. For years Ken had stored away a flat-bed duplicator, which had survived the wartime blitz of a warehouse and had been given to him by the salvage men. Would it work? Just before I went to share The Epicentre, Ken produced another fanzine.

Nirvana No. 1, Autumn ’49, was not, it must be admitted, the sort of fanzine which you grabbed from the postman’s hand. It consisted of three quarto (10" x 8") sheets, duplicated in faint blue. It had a heavily symbolic cover by Arthur Williams (man holding atomic symbol in left hand, micrometer in right, background of war – soldiers in gas masks with war planes on one side, futuristic homes and rocket ships on the other), and it was termed a “Nostalgic Publication”. This was apparently because Ken had gathered together a 1943 article on the real value of sf by a mundane friend, a page and a bit of a barbarian-type poem (“Axes Against Akkag”), a shorter poem written by Ken while soldiering in Italy in 1945, and a poem by Jack Curtis reprinted from *Unique*, a ’38 U.S. fanzine.

Truthfully, the best thing about Ken’s fanzine was the title, but he launched about 50 copies on an unfeeling world, and sat back waiting for the LoCs, though we didn’t call them that in those days.

And waited...

And waited...

Each day the coal-dust dappled mats of The Epicentre were scanned – in vain. It was as if *Nirvana* had dropped into some other dimension, as if it had attained the cessation of individual existence of its title.

And, at long last, a letter! Genuine evidence that the pillar-box hadn’t contained a space warp. It was from Walt Willis. But Walt was the most

active and respected fan in the British Isles, a sort of Harry Warner Jr. squared. If you didn't receive a letter from Willis, you were dead and didn't know it.

Ken shrugged. He'd used up the odd remnants of wartime fanning, satisfied his curiosity about the duplicator, and quenched his personal fanned ambitions. *Nirvana* was dead. In fact, apart from a marvellous run of a zine called *Steam* in the future OMPA, Ken didn't edit another sf fanzine, but helped me considerably in co-editing and publishing. In later years he even distributed his TAFF trip report over various fanzines, instead of publishing it himself.

And yet... and yet... It was a lovely title. It was such a pity to scrap it.

Now, forty-five years later, I honestly can't remember who started the myth. It was probably Walter. But in correspondence, we started to refer to *Nirvana* as if it was still being published: "Have to end this letter now – got to polish up an article for *Nirvana*", and: "The *Nirvana* critic in the latest ish says..." etc.

Soon, the odd reference to *Nirvana* started to appear in fanzines. The myth started rolling: "Why didn't you receive *Nirvana*? Well, we're sorry, but the circulation is strictly limited – the top fans and some professionals get it. We'll put your name down, and if someone dies..."

Ken and Walter also started advertising a "*Nirvana* seal of approval – send a small amount of cash and you'd receive one of the better fanzines of the day, as approved." But not, of course, *Nirvana* itself.

Nirvana survived for years. It was not exactly a hoax, because its quasi-existence was blatantly obvious, at least to hardened fans, but it was part of the accumulated myth which made '50s fandom a marvellous place in which to play. And if some neofans actually believed in it, then it would only spur them on to become bigger, more active fans, and to be included on the *Nirvana* subscription list.

It all started, as noted above, in late '49. In 1954, the second Manchester SF Convention was held, the SuperManCon, which, with the exception of the '57 London Worldcon, was the outstanding British convention of the '50s. Like most '50s cons, the committee published a combozine. This custom, borrowed (as always) from the U.S., was for examples of their output to be solicited from all the current fan editors, and these pages were then bound with the programme and distributed to all attendees.

This was something which *Nirvana* couldn't miss. Ken and I and

another fan, Dave Newman, got together and produced four pages of *Nirvana* Vol.5 No.4, Issue 20. It was as carefully produced as we could make it, with an index (running to page 56), an editorial (“It is with no little gratification that we can, on the eve of the publication of our 5th anniversary issue...”) and three pages of contents. The latter consisted of a single page E.C. “Ted” Tubb story and two pages from an article on Walter Willis by Bob Shaw, which it nearly broke my heart to curtail in mid-flight – in fact, mid-sentence.

There was also a boxed “explanation”... “As a token of goodwill, the first 4 pages of this issue of *Nirvana* will therefore be duplicated in a single colour... contributions and subscriptions are by invitation only, and we regret that we cannot supply past or future copies of *Nirvana* under any other circumstances. Please do not ask us... a refusal might embarrass.”

It appears in the combozine in all its right-hand-justified glory – a mighty feat in itself in those non-computerised days – and stands up well amongst *Space Times*, *Space Diversions*, *BEM*, an advert for *Femizine* (the all-female fanzine), and other outstanding fanzines of the period which had sent samples.

What I didn’t know until many years later was that in the 1960s, Ted Tubb took the tiny short story he’d contributed to *Nirvana* 20, embellished it a little, and sold it – an interesting addition to that short list of fanzine stories which have seen professional publication. It also gave *Nirvana* the distinction of having 100% of its fiction in that category.

Through the later ’50s, references to *Nirvana* continued to pop up here and there, until in 1959, *Fancylopedia 2* pricked the bubble: “It has, I hear, never previously been explicitly revealed as a hoax.”

Mimosa #16 (December 1994, ed. Dick & Nicki Lynch)

30. Now & Then (1976)

Harry Turner

I made one of my periodic returns to fandom around 1953 when, together with Eric Needham, I joined a group of Manchester-based fen calling themselves the Nor'West Science Fantasy Club. Names that come to mind are Eric Bentcliffe, Sandy Sanderson, Frances Evans, Brian Varley, Paul Sowerby and Dave Cohen. I recall that I was promptly asked to resuscitate the club fanzine, *Astroneer*, and produced the second (and last?) issue, filling it with material left in my files and items begged from Eric Needham, decorating it with a 2-colour auto-litho cover. Eric and I were also co-opted on to the committee for that controversial con of 1954, the SuperMancon – which proved a traumatic experience. I retired, with my family, to the peaceful little village of Romiley to recover – there were no fans living in the vicinity! Eric soon became a regular visitor mainly, I suspect, so he could get a free read at the kids' comics.

There was a fad raging in American fandom for improbable clubs with long-winded titles – I think it was the Elves, Gnomes & Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder & Marching Society that started it all off. We decided to join in and became Founder Fathers of the Romiley Fan Veterans & Scottish Dancing Society. (The last bit being a reference to the fact that most of our fanning was done when Eric joined me to keep an eye on the kids while Marion dodged the household chores to participate in the local Scottish folk dancing). We printed membership cards and promptly enrolled all fannish visitors and a few far-off correspondents...

That same year the Offtrail Magazine Publishers' Association appeared. Eric has written this about the event:

“... a yearning appeared on Harry's face to publish a fanmag again and deep in the heart of London plans were being pushed forward for a thing called OMPA, which prospect appealed to me not in the least. Yet I wrote an article about Jonah, gave him a pome, a few cockeyed notes, and left him to his dreams. One Saturday night he wandered round with a pink sheet of *Now & Then*. I was horrified. He had published my name as well.”

That first Proceedings of the RFV&SDS was a plain utility issue, a foolscap sheet folded to 8" x 6½" format, explaining about the formation of the Society and giving brief biographies of its Founders, presenting Eric's material in a casual way, with no illoes or embellishments. The response it evoked in the mailing seemed out of relation to its size. It made Eric overcome his horror and join in the fun in earnest. He had a unique flair for writing in a surrealist vein (remember this was the era of the Goons), mingling simple accounts of everyday experience with references to sf and its authors, philosophical speculation mixed with technological know-how, scientific prejudice alongside Fortean dogma, and blending fact and fiction in such a way that readers distrusted the facts and believed the fictions...

We had fun compiling the second issue and it duly appeared in the November OMPA mailing as ten pages of buff paper offcuts, measuring about 9" square, which we stapled in the top lefthand corner. Oddly, no one made the obvious comment. They seemed distracted by the contents: an account of a family fishing expedition to Marple canal provided Eric with a lead into his tale of the Magnetic Crayfish and his research into ferrolobotomy; a visit from Derek Pickles and Frances Evans prompted Eric to tell a bedtime story of Tarquin the Dragon, whose health was ruined when he consumed a Mother Superior, an elderly virgin of such low calorific value that his thermal output was reduced below safety point; I told of a visit to Tresco Orchards, home of Pam and Ken Bulmer, and gave my version of the Incident of Hither Green Station, which provoked much dispute in OMPA elsewhere. There were other items, but the real sparking point of the whole issue was the inclusion of several advertising jingles for WIDOWER'S WONDERFUL PRODUCTS. It all started with this:

Socrates died by his own hand,
Imagine what that means...
A whole life wasted – he never tasted
WIDOWER'S WONDERFUL BEANS!

Eric was getting sick of a diet of Bachelor's beans at the time, I was working in advertising, and we spent long hours discussing the techniques of persuasion. So Eric began to develop the theme:

Darwin sought the source of man
In terms of links and crossages...
Achieved it, no doubt, but he lived without

WIDOWER'S WONDERFUL SAUSAGES

And another one from the same issue:

Perhaps your child has his mother's eyes
But appearances can be deceptive.
Undoubted maternity – but as for paternity
WIDOWER'S – are unable to offer any assistance.

By this time members of the RFV&SDS included fans such as the Bulmers, Ina and Norman Shorrock, Madeleine and Walt Willis, Bob Shaw, James White, Eric Bentcliffe, Terry Jeeves, Frances and Brian Varley, Sandy Sanderson, Wally Gillings, Sid Birchby, Nigel Lindsay and our number increased with each issue of *N&T*. By the third issue, Pat Patterson, of Canadian Derelict fandom fame, had contributed some of her inimitable artwork. (She later married Howard Lyons, a member who, possibly to this day, suspected that Eric Needham was one of my pseudonyms). And we appointed Bob Bloch head of the Weyauwega (Wisconsin) branch of Widower's Wonderful Warehouses Inc in return for copywriting activities for WIDOWER'S WONDERFUL PRODUCTS.

This third issue of *N&T* appeared in more conventional format – 12 quarto pages, duplicated in two colours – but the contents were zanier. Eric's account of his efforts to demonstrate the efficacy of WIDOWER'S WART REMOVER (in minimum 100 gallon drums) by producing wartless toads, introduced readers to the mysteries of his flat and its many indispensable Adjuncts to Gracious Living – his home-made TV-Hi-Fi-AM/FM-Radiogram-cum-Washer-and-Batterycharger, the snake venom distillery, the Nuremburg Maiden, the Black Widow Spiders (for removing dead flies from lampshades), and Algy. He told of the Mangrove Swamp behind 10 Carlton Avenue, of his search for frogs in the Cheshire countryside to test out Charles Fort's theories, his purchase of a Giant Frog which turned out to be a Princess – 600 years old, alas.

Our fame spread outside the confines of OMPA. We found ourselves deluged with requests for back issues, and with jingles for Widower's. From both sides of the Atlantic. So we had to produce a "reprint" issue combining all the material produced to date in one mag, and to help newcomers start on an equal footing with existing readers we added a glossary to explain the more esoteric aspects of our activities. Here's a sample entry:

MANGROVE SWAMP: The garden had long been neglected before we took over. An ambitious project of reclamation was planned and launched in 1954 to transform sterile clay into fertile loam. Having faith in the miracles wrought by Modern Science, we decided to use a soil-conditioner called Krilium. Inevitably there was a drawback. This new Wonder Material had to be used when the ground was dry. The wet summer reduced the garden to a swamp. We despaired. But Eric held out hope. It was a matter of ecology, he said, and the application of the principles of Enlightened Empiricism. Co-operate with, rather than fight against, nature; the obvious things to grow were plants that thrived in a swampish environment – mangroves, for instance. The plan proved highly successful.

With this special reprint issue, *N&T* became a regular fanzine with an audience both here and in the States. We were encouraged by the feedback we got in the way of letters and contributions and it remained a fun-zine, produced as and when the inclination was there, and sent for free. We didn't want passive customers who paid but added nothing to the exchange.

Issue 4 was decorated by Pat (Patterson) Lyons and reported our first Annual General Meeting with fans from Belfast, Glasgow, and the outer wastes of Stockport present, and mentioned a move to merge all active fan-groups into a national society to be known as the Romiley, Torbay & London Scottish Dancing Society, Lampshade Makers, Happy Fan Veterans & Promiscuous Snogging Society, with HQ at Belfast. This was a reference to the many groups that arose from OMPA's ranks during the year... Eric got on to a Sherlock Holmes kick and told of the case of the copper-plated kitten (sub-titled Holmes's Only Failure), and then returned to the Mangrove Swamp and the world's only Trombone Orchid. Chuck Harris, Archie Mercer, and Jan Jansen joined the ranks of the industrious Widower's copywriters, Jan's contribution being in Flemish, no less.

By issue 5 we'd expanded to 22 pages. There was a sequel to the Holmes story; an interlineation in an earlier issue "Remember the Alamo" inspired Eric to write a poem with that title; John Berry reported on a bloodthirsty Ghodium battle in which I was involved on a visit to Oblique House (complete with signed statement certifying that the piece had *not* been written by Eric); Eric explained his solution to the problem of disposing of dead flies in lampshades and revealed how it landed him in a

life-and-death struggle with a Galactic Lensworm. In passing he also introduced another of his Indispensable Adjuncts to Gracious Living: the BNF, or Bronze Nude Figure. Apart from being ornamental, this also served to indicate external temperature, having two brass spheres retained in place by clips of metal of a different thermal-expansion coefficient. If on rising in the morning Eric found the brass spheres had contracted sufficiently to fall out of the clips, he knew it was cold enough to freeze the balls off a BNF, and didn't go to work. Being a window-cleaner by trade, he was able to indulge himself in this way. And the flood of comment we received burst through into a lettercol.

N&T 6 was a Halloween number, dated November 1955, and starred the Fabulous Frances on the cover, and a thrilling, chilling account of the exorcising of a ghost accidentally electro-chemically deposited on the interior of Eric's Nuremburg Maiden; the inside story of the machinations of the fiendish Nigel "Spider" Lindsay, undercover agent for the fanarchist Romiley Fan Dancing Society, who trained candies to run amok and ruin an evening at the local picture palace for me and Marion; Eric bemoaning the difficulties of bachelor existence, and his reaction to a vampire extolling the virtues of drinking fresh blood from the throat of a young virtuous woman – and its far-reaching consequences... And his modern re-telling of the legend of the Old Javelin-seller from *Tales of the Romiley Pilgrims*. It's only short. Would you like to hear it in full?

Legend has it that the old Javelin Seller sat outside the railway station of Romiley, crying his wares. At his call, "Javelins: Fine javelins! Indispensable Adjuncts to gracious javelining!" the good housewives flocked around to buy, for he sold the finest javelins in all Romiley. One day there came to Romiley the Man with the Luminous Bloodstream who desired a javelin and asked the Javelin Seller for a free trial, to which the Javelin Seller assented. Taking a fine specimen, the Man with the Luminous Bloodstream hurled it far up the road, where it stuck in the back of a Stockport bus. The bus drove away and took the javelin with it. "Give me my gold!" cried the Javelin Seller. "But I have no javelin!" answered the Man with the Luminous Bloodstream, walking away. At which the Javelin Seller was distraught and, binding his javelins to his breast with a length of ship's hawser, drowned himself in the Marple Canal, and now his ghost haunts Romiley evermore....

That same issue saw the promotion of Rory Faulkner (Ancient Matriarch of Remote California) to head the Lonely Hearts Department of the mag, and Walt Willis complained that on waking up he found he'd forgotten the Alamo, and asked "What can I do for this attack of alamnesia?"

To help him out, we made the next issue a "Grand ALAMO MEMORIAL Number" with a stencilled cover pic of the fort, which to my later surprise looked just like a photo sent by Dick Eney, except for a CROCKETT HOTEL sign looming over the gateway: And Dean Grennell, Authority on Arms & Ammunition, gave us the lowdown on the unimpressiveness of Fort Alamo. Gregg Calkins asked leading questions about the lady on the previous cover; Vernon McCain and Walt Willis crossed typewriters over Bob Bloch and Ghodhood; Eric expounded on "Enlightened Empiricism", the mind-shattering philosophy, (or was it just the philosophy of a shattered mind?), and baffled us with home-spun paradoxes and puzzles. John Berry contributed the saga of the Willis Matter Transmitter, with decorations by Atom. And after a few more thoughts on the application of Enlightened Empiricism, Eric went on to tell of his problems disposing of six drums of WIDOWER'S HIGH-VELOCITY HAIR RESTORER, and the complications of burying a dead vampire in the Mangrove Swamp and creating a Vampire Tree. And how he destroyed the menace with a super-charged poltergeist but ruined his plans to use up the hair restorer... The issue was dated June 1956 and stretched to 28 pages. It was later than promised – and I guess it was beginning to become a labour to produce.

So six months passed before we got around to producing another *N&T*. This took the form of a special Ergonomics Symposium, and was dedicated to Don R. Smith, a fan of twenty years vintage who said he had never heard of ergonomics. So we brought ergonomics to fandom. We have a practical application in the form of the Needham-Jeeves Agoniometer, and provided a case history of the development of this obscure device through the various stages of technology. We later did a case history on the Window-cleaners' Groiner, an even obscurer device. As the sole authority on Erotic Ergonomics, Eric took a look at American and British marital habits. There was an Ergonomic Pomp, an Ergonomic Crossword, an excerpt from the Autobiography of an Ergonomist, and items dealing with ergonomics in relation to SF writing, criticism, warfare and fandom. And the inevitable question – Whither Ergonomics? Most of the artwork in this ish was by Pat

Lyons. Some of the early enthusiasm had evaporated; my spare time diminished and Eric and I met less frequently and for some reason this issue wasn't completely distributed.

But another issue was planned, and we had material from Bob Bloch, Dean Grennell and Paul Enever for what was to be a Homes & Gardens number. Additionally, because we had so many Widower's jingles in the files from enthusiasts everywhere, I designed a Grand Catalogue of Widower's Wonderful Products to use them all up. I remember doing a dummy layout for this last item. But events conspired against us, and apathy prevailed. Eric seemed to fall out with most of his acquaintances, and I got more and more involved with the mundane world. Finally, Eric packed his bags and disappeared. It was time to give up, so I collected the remaining copies of *N&T* 8 and sent them to Ken Bulmer to use as a spoof reprint from the legendary fanzine *Nirvana*. And most of the material for the non-appearing *N&T* 9 was posted to other faneds... And I retired, once again, from fandom.

Wark #7 (July 1976, ed. Rosemary Pardoe)

31. I Remember Me (1996-1997)

Walter A. Willis

I discovered Arthur Thomson the way the Law of Gravity discovered Isaac Newton. One day in October 1954, as I was sitting under a deadline for *Hyphen* 11, the apple fell on me in the shape of a handwritten letter from a strange address in London. There was, as I remember, nothing particularly striking about the letter itself, just a subscription to *Hyphen*, but the writer had, as a mere afterthought apparently, scribbled a little drawing at the bottom, and another on the back of the envelope.

I can at least claim the credit for recognising genius when it comes up and hits me in the eye. After years of headshaking over the laboured drawing and threadbare ideas of most fan artists, my old eyes popped out of their worn sockets at the sight of this easy fluent style and the original sense of humour that it seemed so perfectly to express. I replied by return of post, full of enthusiasm; I didn't even wait to get home from work, but wrote from the office, so I don't have a copy of the letter. And I don't even have Arthur's letter, either, because I sent it back to him to do the cartoon properly; it appeared in *Hyphen* 11 – page 23, if anyone wants to gaze in awe at the first explosion of ATom in fandom.

Arthur's second letter arrived in an enormous envelope containing two big drawing books filled with cartoons, and great sheaves of loose pages. He told me later that when he got my letter, he sat down and did about 30 drawings straight off, thereby proving that for generating energy in fans, egoboo has carbohydrates beaten to a frazzle.

I also learned (from six handwritten pages of ruled foolscap) that he was already experimenting with stencils, which a friend at work had run off for him, and that...

“I'm Scotch myself, born and bred. Came to London about 1931. So I'm not a mercurial unworldly crazy Scotchman (wife's English, a steadying influence) and whiskey is my Ghod (scotch of course). But my grandfather came from Northern Ireland (could we be related, huh?). Not me and my grandfather... oh, you've got it.”

Later, on 29th November, Arthur wrote to report his first meeting with Chuck Harris.

“Well, I think the visit to Chuck’s was a success. We hit it off together from the word go. Chuck is one of the nicest fellows I’ve met and I think we can become firm friends. I’ll say again, we really got on well. Going to meet him in London Saturday and have a look at Gestetners.

“When Chuck found out that I can write and draw with either hand, he almost chained me up to the Gestetner with a pile of stencils to work on.”

Later:

“Met Chuck up London Saturday morning, and we tromped round town, gazing in Gestetner office windows; that was all we could do as the damn places were closed. So we went and had something to eat and a good natter. We got on terrifically. We just seemed to blend in with each other. I think we shall probably combine and become a “gestalt”.

“Through reading most fanzines for the past year in a few months, I’ve sort of caught up with fandom and now I seem to be waiting with my tongue hanging out, for things happening. Can’t wait for “Ketcon”, can’t wait to do more stuff for *Hyphen*, can’t wait to meet other fans. I must be bitten pretty badly by the virus.

“Notice how my writing gets worse. I am doing this at work, and keeping my head swivelling about for the foreman.”

It can’t have been long after this that Arthur was deputed by his mates to approach the management about some dispute. He was so impressive that the management put him in charge. This is one of the episodes I had in mind when writing *The Enchanted Convention*, which is basically about how fannish skills can help in the mundane world.

I was going to go on about the arrival on the scene of John Berry, but I came across this letter from John Brunner. It sets out his relationship with fandom. The story to which he refers, “The Watchers”, had appeared in my fanzine, *Slant*. It was John’s first published work.

Pilot Officer J.K.H. Brunner Royal Air Force Bletchley

Dear Walt,

Nice to see you again, even if it was only at odd moments [at the convention] throughout the day and night. I meant to say quite a

lot of things to you, chiefly apologies for not writing in such a long time, and inquiries as to whether this Aussie publication was going to use “The Watchers” after all, but still more mostly to say the hell with that letter of mine to you a while ago which got into *Hyphen* where it had no real reason to be, because it’ll take me months to live that down.

I seem to recall that in it I was arguing that the divorcing of sf and fandom was a Bad Thing. Walt, I was nuts. Sf is a good excuse and that’s all. I’ve seen the light, I’m saved. I can only blame the Air Force and a bad attack of rationalization for my earlier and indiscreet statements.

This weekend has reminded me of what I’d forgotten – that there are people in the world who are sane enough to be crazy. I wish to Ghod I could find the time and the money to get right up to my neck in fandom and then duck my head. It’s like finding a friend after hating the world for twenty years; it just feels right – and it took this weekend to wake me up to it.

In ’52, when I was dabbling my toe in fandom, I was a kid fresh out of school. I’d written “Thou Good and Faithful” and hadn’t got to worry about selling something else for pocket money until it ran out. But fresh out of school and missing my few close friends, I was feeling unsociable more than somewhat. The Air Force has made me hate the world more still. In between, I’ve tried to find a niche I could fit into in jazz fandom – but there’s nothing in jazz fandom that I can find that even approximates to Fandom with a capital F. I’ve been called an intellectual masquerading as a lowbrow. Not true: I know my erudition shows sometimes, but it’s part of me as I am and not an acquired, deliberate gloss, and nowhere, barring fandom, is there a place where I believe I can be me.

I think I ought to fit after all, despite everything; I think I’ve been trying to exist in my intellect too long, and it can’t be done. Next January, I get out of this insane rat-race, and then I am going to spend a year at home writing (if I make 500 pounds out of it that year I shall go on) and fanning. I like fans. I feel that for too long I’ve been trying to live on an intellectual level way beyond my years. But that’s bound to be a pretense any way you look at it. I’m

tired of it, and I know it, and I think that at long last I may really be starting to grow up. Congratulate me on my first birthday.

You know, this is rapidly becoming a soul-searching expose (“The Truth About Brunner”). Hell with it all – and fen, you have been warned. I’m getting in.

I see that on the 23rd of March 1954, I was confiding my inmost thoughts to Chuck Harris on the question of nationality:

You know, I think [Vernon] McCain had something there when he talked about this part of Ireland inducing schizophrenia. Can you imagine what it’s like to be torn always between two rival patriotisms? Three, rather. Ireland, Ulster (which has a national mythos of its own), and England. We accept English standards of conduct and find ourselves supporting them in cricket test matches and so on, and yet we’re ambivalent about them. The ones we have experience of here, of course, are the ruling classes, the hunting and shooting types, and a more obnoxious crowd of bastards you never met, and yet you’ve got to respect them. There’s a curious mixture of hate, envy, and amusement in the Irish attitude to them, and even I feel a vague inherited sense of inferiority when speaking to someone who talks like Vince [Clarke].

Then, on the other hand, we like to think of ourselves as Irish, and we appreciate Irish folk music, etc. Yet we reject unity with the rest of the country because they are dupes of the RC Church. We could build up a national mythos on Ulster itself – the Cuchulain saga and so on – if it weren’t for the fact that we know quite well that we are descendants of the Plantationists who drove those people out. Many people here dispose of the problem by frankly claiming allegiance to Scotland.

This country is a godawful mess of contradictions.

One thing though. Belfast girls are not only more highly sexed than Southern drabs – we have the highest illegitimate birth rate in the British Isles – they are the best looking ones I have found anywhere. That’s counting America. I’ve never been anywhere else where you can walk through the city just admiring the scenery walking by.

In a postcard no bigger than a man’s hand there now appeared on the horizon

the first Englishman to manifest himself in Irish Fandom:

5th July, 1954
31, Campbell Park Avenue
Belfast

Dear Mr. Willis,

I would be obliged if you would kindly forward to the above address the latest copy of *Hyphen*, which I note is mentioned in *Authentic Science Fiction* No. 46. I enclose PO for 1s 9d, including 3d postage.

Yours,

John E. Berry

The first thing I did was to look up the address in the Belfast Street Directory, of which there was a copy in my office. I noted that the occupier of the address given was a policeman, and a small warning bell rang. (I had recently fallen for a hoax by Vince Clarke in which he sent over Mike Wilson to represent himself as a neofan.) However, my office was empowered to send for police files and within a couple of days I had before me the file on Constable John E. Berry. It disclosed nothing suspicious about him, so I invited him to call at Oblique House. He turned out to be friendly, congenial, and enthusiastic, so I invited him to come again the next night there was a regular meeting of Irish Fandom. Again, he proved very congenial and I reported on the new acquisition to *Hyphen* co-editor Chuck Harris, who responded prophetically...

Berry sounds all right. I'm already wondering what he'll turn out to be a genius at. It would shake fandom rigid if a wheel of IF turned out to be just mediocre.

I was also breaking the news to Dean Grennell...

We now have a new member of Irish Fandom, and a prolific one. The third time he came up here he produced a top drawer fannish type article which will be in the next *Hyphen*, and he's written enough for the next two issues already and shows no sign of slowing down. His latest project is a series of studies of the Old Guard of Irish Fandom. (He has uncanny powers of observation and also I learned today has been in the habit of taking notes of the conversation here when he gets home.) We think it would be

egotistical to publish them in *Hyphen*. Would you like them for Grue? Oh, the name of this latter day genius is John Berry.

Mimosa #18 & #20 (May 1996 & May 1997, ed. Rich & Nicki Lynch)

32. A Brief History of OMPA (1959)

A. Vincent Clarke

In the advertising world it would have been called a brainstorming session. It began in the late afternoon of Saturday, June 19th, 1954, and carried on into the cool of a beautiful summer evening. When it had finished, Ken Bulmer and I had roughed out the plans for the first British s.f. fan publisher's association.

It's hard to say what was the catalyst which finally acted on this particular project. The atmosphere was right: British fandom was on its feet in a burst of activity which made this, the year of the SuperManCon, a small Golden Age. Numerous fans were interested in publishing, and the s.f. professional 'zines were bringing in new faces, throughout the year. I think it was Ken who decided that now was the moment for launching into reality the dream of years, and I think it was myself who, after various euphonious titles had been tried out for a couple of hours, suggested that echo of a trombone, OMPA. It would, we thought, disperse any stuffiness about the introduction of an association with a real Constitution into the happily anarchic fandom of the time... and moreover, it ran trippingly off the tongue.

We jotted down names, and finally decided that we could safely set the number of members at 25, with a membership fee of 6/- per year. We circulated British fandom with a couple of leaflets, which included a proposed Constitution based on the U.S. FAPA, and were stunned by the response. The first Constitution still showed 25 members, but, by sending out the three spare copies that we had of each 'zine, plus keeping back each member's own 'zine from his mailing, we were able to accommodate 29 members on the first mailing, and still had a waiting list of four! This caused our Chuck Harris, who had been bullied into being the first Treasurer, considerable embarrassment. One member, John Roles, hadn't believed that we would reach the original 25, notified us within a week of mailing date that he wanted to join, and actually sent his 'zines in on the very morning when all the rest were spread out on the floor of my parent's house, being sorted. I can still remember the hearty handshake Ken & I exchanged when we had

finally staggered down to the local post office with two large suitcases full of OMPAazines... a wonderful moment.

The second Mailing saw the number of members at 35, the waiting list at 2, and a hasty last-minute revision upping the total of membership to 37. The third mailing kept the membership total at that, showed 36 members, a waiting list of 7, and announced that 45 would be eligible to join. This total was reached by Mailing 7, and has not since altered. The initial fee of 6/- showed rather better planning, continuing until the 19th Mailing, when the present 7/- rate came into force.

The Association rapidly attained most of its initial aims: it afforded a publishing ground for those unwilling or unable to bring out a subzine or who didn't want to contribute to other people's zines; it increased contact with the States: was a ready-made roll-call of the most active fans in the country; started discussions and had fun. In only one of its objectives as initially visualised was there a lack of fulfilment. It had been thought that the small circulation would give members scope to experiment with various duplicating and artistic techniques on a suitable scale, but only John Roles really took advantage of this with a series of experimental covers and the never-to-be-forgotten edible Christmas Card of the first year.

The first year also saw at least 3 memorable magazines from sheer length are unlikely to appear in any "Best of OMPA" but which some might consider reprinting in entirety: *Willis Discovers America*, *My First Real Convention* (Ashworth) & *Through Darkest Ireland* (Harris). Distribution of the 4th mailing was held up by a railwaymen's strike which also dislocated postal services, & a meeting of OMPA members at the convention in Kettering originated the now-annual event.

The second year opened with an all-female Committee – and a hoax *Off Trails* by Archie Mercer which nearly gave the Bulmers, then in the States, heart failure when they first opened the mailing. This TAFF visit resulted in a great increase in the American representation in OMPA: by the end of the year there were ten US members with 5 more on the waiting list. The year also saw some fantastically well-produced 'zines by Ted White, a Jules Verne appreciation 'zine from John Roles & Norman Shorrocks which included a near-complete set of stamps commemorating Verne, and the first Bennett Fan Directory.

The third year was significant for the Presidential messages in *Off Trails* for Walt Willis held that office. Using his Presidential powers he created

Mercer's Day April 31st, when Archie, then Official Editor, set that as a deadline. The year was also noted for the inclusion of the out-dated but still interesting *Cinvention Memory Book* contributed as a non-credit gift by Don Ford, a copy of *Science Fiction Five Yearly* (L. Shaw) and many other items which will eventually make their appearance in an *Ompanthology*... a project already mooted but not yet brought to realisation.

The fourth year started with the first sale of old OMPA spare zines, and the introduction by John Roles, then Official Editor, of a new method of numbering members (O.T.13). During this year, a number of changes were mooted in the Constitution, but failed to obtain the necessary number of votes: whether this was because of the essentially satisfactory nature of the initial Constitution or the apathy of the members is a debatable point. The year did see some monstrously large mailings, mostly due to the US membership who comprised over a quarter of the total. Such items as Bill Evans' 58-page *Remembrance of Things Past*, Bob Pavlat's 25-page *Fanzine Index* and similar offerings helped swell the total, tho' new British publishing fan Bobbie Wild probably ran away with the year's honours in material publishing with 93 pages!

The fifth year started with a waiting list of 17 and finished with a waiting list of 21, which seems to show that OMPA is now as firmly established as any fannish institution can hope to be. After the record-breaking total of 422 pages in the complete 16th mailing, the two following mailings seemed somewhat small, but the total picked up again at the end of the year. A number of arguments and discussions made OMPA a lively place for those who found in fandom some principles or ways of thought which seemed to be in need of support or criticism. The year also saw British fans in the minority in the membership list for the first time.

The fifth year ended with several Projects on the verge of realisation: this index for one, an OMPA anthology for another. The latter will be the first time the co-operation of members will have been asked for in the actual creation of a magazine and it is to be hoped that the result will justify further ventures of this nature.

In these pages you will find the bare record of OMPA. Those who have been active in it will know how much more it has contained, and look forward with eagerness to the second five years.

APathy (1959, ed. Joy Clarke)

33. *Femizine* and the Joan Carr Hoax (1956)

Various

Pamela Bulmer:

This issue of *Femizine* is unique in Fandom. It represents the culmination of three years of careful planning.

Like all people who do not exist, Joan W. Carr relied for her genuine acceptance as a real person on her existence as a separate entity with a decided personality of her own. How well Sandy succeeded in giving birth to and rearing Joan is evidenced by the very real sense of loss which will be felt by everyone who knew her, when they hear the news. The truth is indeed so staggering that many people will find it difficult to believe that the news is not in itself a hoax – a hoax of a hoax. My first reaction was shock – the kind of shock you get with a letter giving news of a bereavement. I didn't know Joan, in fact I had never corresponded with her and I didn't know Sandy either so there was no reason for me to suspect. The mannish tinge to her personality was not very strange, bearing in mind that she was a Sergeant and to me this type of masculinity has always seemed insincere. Fortunately for the successful development of the hoax. Ethel was able to spot this inconsistency and with her help Sandy was able to correct it. The moment of shock soon passed, to be followed by astonished incredulity, and then by howls of laughter.

Before presenting to you the full story behind Joan W. Carr, I should like to express appreciation to Frances Evans and Ethel Lindsay, without whose help Sandy's hoax would have been only too short lived. Is there perhaps some significance in the fact that it was a man – one who was in at the beginning – who let the truth leak out? I cannot help feeling that it is a pity those concerned missed the fun which we and I'm sure Harry Turner too – had from keeping quiet.

Ladies, Gentlemen and Fans: The editor of *Femizine* is proud to present to you a unique Fannish epic – the Death of an Ego:

Jokers Wild

Sandy Sanderson

It's all Tucker's fault, of course –

I first became involved in fandom in May '52 when I wandered into the '52 Convention an innocent and came out a neofan. Shortly afterwards I joined the Manchester fanclub (the NSFC as it was then) and soon became one of the mainstays of the group. Needless to say this wasn't due to any fannish ability I had developed. It was just that there were only about six active members all told. Before I even knew what fandom was all about I found myself on the committee of the first Mancon, which took place in October '52 – and that brings me back to Tucker.

There was this stack of old fanzines to be auctioned, see? And I had to have a look through them and find out about the Tucker Death Hoax. That was the real beginning of the matter; but it wasn't until a month later that I put my thoughts into words. I was standing in front of the mirror at the time – my favourite position and one I invariably adopt whenever I wish to speak to myself –

“About this business of fannish hoaxes,” I said. “They seem to be quite a normal part of fanning. If you want to get ahead get a hoax”

“Who, me?” I said. “Don't be stupid. I don't know enough about fandom yet. Besides, take this business of Tucker. It can be *awkward*, to say the least.”

“But that's just the point!” I said. “I've been thinking about it. Now, a death hoax is easy to start but difficult to stop. And it's already been done a couple of times. You want something different. Something with a twist. Don't decrease fandom – increase it!”

“If you think I'm going to desert bachelordom in the cause of fandom you can go...”

“I don't mean that, you idiot. I mean *invent* a fan. Make one up!”

So I invented Joan W. Carr.

Joan was a peculiar mixture. A typewriter, paper and carbons, a bottle of green ink and a broad-nibbed pen, an assortment of photographs borrowed from a young cousin, and my own mental agility.

She had to be a woman rather than a man, partly because it was more difficult and would better show the extent of my success, and partly because in the beginning I only intended to hoax the NSFC, all of whom (with one

exception) were men. For a long time I thought the name came to me in a flash of inspiration, but now I'm not so certain. The initials were already familiar to fandom, and stuck down somewhere in my subconscious mind there must have been many references to Carr Biscuits, Carr Mill (my cousin's address in St. Helens) and a firm with Carr in its title having a block of offices next to a bus stop I frequented very often in Manchester. As for the things I was able to do with the name, *Carrtoon*, Trolley Carr Fandom, JoCa, etc., well, I just couldn't have been *that* inspired! The "W" was the queerest part of it. Only when I was asked what it stood for did I realise how few feminine names there are beginning with W. I never did decide which one of the few to use....

The background was all planned, and the future developments mapped out, when I hit the first snag. It couldn't be done in the U.K. There were far too many groups in far too many towns, and even an accommodation address would soon have become suspect if Joan never turned up at any conventions or club meetings. Possibly some fan would make her a surprise visit – and be surprised himself. Because of this the whole idea was shelved.

And then a month or so before the '53 convention as my first year in fandom was drawing to a close, the War Office informed me that I would shortly be taking up residence in the Middle East for three years. Immediately I saw my chance. If Joan couldn't be created – couldn't be made *real* in those three years, she never would. And she had to become *real*. She had to live. Joan wasn't going to be just another pen-name, to be used alongside or in place of my own. She was going to be a definite separate entity.

In the short time left at my disposal the original plans were amended to cover the new situation, and one of the amendments brought a second person into the plot. As I would be away from fannish contacts I thought it best to have someone on the spot who could keep me informed of the progress I was, or was not, making. The choice wasn't a difficult one. The only people I knew really well were those in the NSFC. The hoax was aimed at the men so that ruled them out instantly. There was only one active femme, Frances Evans, and as I also considered her to be one of the few people I knew then with the mental approach necessary fully to appreciate the hoax, I told her all about it.

That I had made the correct choice was demonstrated immediately. The plot I outlined to Frances included the rather far-fetched idea of me meeting Joan, becoming engaged after six months, marrying her after eighteen, and returning to the U.K with an addition to the family after three. Frances said

one word: “Presents” – and I abandoned these ideas straight away. I don’t know how right Frances was in her suggestion that some fans would almost certainly buy presents for Joan and I; but even in those days I felt such a possibility would be well in keeping with the spirit of fandom. I rather liked the idea of fooling people – but not to that extent. It wouldn’t have been very funny. The plans were changed again and I had to be content with letting it be known that Joan and I would probably be married on our return to England.

Time passed quickly then – embarkation leave – the convention – and before I knew it I was into my second year in fandom and Joan was about to start her first. I said that Joan’s development had been planned, and so it had, but you know what generally happens to plans in fandom. The first few months spent in Egypt went by steadily enough. In several letters I made references to another sergeant I had met, a girl in the WRAC who was interested in science fiction. Copies of fanzines arrived, *Space Times*, *Astroneer* and *Zenith*, and after commenting on them I remarked that I would pass them over to Joan. Joan wrote her first few letters and the fun began.

Those letters. They were all typed, of course, and the signature was done in a now familiar shade of green ink in a backhand slope. Joan never actually “wrote” anything, and yet only one fan ever remarked on this during the three years – and he only thought of it quite recently. I’ve always been thankful for the fannish habit of using a typewriter whenever possible! The style of those early letters was quite definitely neo-fanistic, on the basis that few people ever come into fandom with a fully developed style. Remember, Joan was not merely an extension of me but a new person. At an early stage in her correspondence she was faced with a request for photographs and this was one of the items I hadn’t planned for. The situation was quickly put right with the aid of a cousin of mine who answered my cry for help by giving me permission to use photos of her. At this time my cousin was only seventeen, but she was a pretty and well developed girl and I had no difficulty in passing her off as Joan, age twenty one. In fact, interest in Joan quickened because of the photographs. Which just goes to prove something or other.

In the short time I had been in fandom there had been no chance for anyone to discover my many interests outside of science fiction. Meetings held once a fortnight don’t give a great deal of scope even though several of us did become well acquainted. As a result I was able to pass these interests to Joan and she became the one who quoted many authors, who talked about music and poetry and philosophy and semantics. It all helped to create the

personality that was later to “shine through the pages of *Femizine*.”

After the first few months had passed I found I was playing the part of Joan “by ear”, meeting each crisis as it occurred. The carefully thought out plans were abandoned altogether. There was, for instance, the Case of the Missing Letter. The mail for Joan was always taken across to the Mess and I collected it there when no one was looking. One day a letter arrived when I was on a twenty-four hour guard, and since I was not able to collect it someone returned it to the Post Room. Unfortunately the officer in charge of the Post Room happened to be a captain in the WRAC. She saw the letter and took it to Ladysmith Barracks, the camp in which all WRAC in the area were housed. Naturally addressee couldn't be traced and from there the letter went to the WRAC Records Office in England. By this time I had discovered what had happened and I waited in dread for someone to write and say they'd had a letter back marked “No Such Person” or something like that. Fortune smiled on me, however, and Brian Varley (for it was one of his letters) wrote to Joan to say he'd had a letter returned with a note saying that Sgt. Carr couldn't be traced because her Army number wasn't quoted. Brian and Joan were able to laugh over the stupidity of the Army and all was well. It appears that Brian's letter had been opened, to find the address of the sender, and I often wonder about the effect it must have had on the WRAC Records Officer....

After this narrow escape I brought the Post Room staff into the plot and the mail came and went fairly smoothly. No doubt my actions caused quite a lot of comment amongst my companions – I'm certain they considered me to be mad – but to the best of my knowledge they didn't think me queer – for which I was very grateful! Joan was rather an expensive hoax, especially with regard to mail. When she was going strongly it only meant an addition of one to every other fan's list of correspondents, but it more than doubled mine. Believe me, it was well worth it.

As 1954 got under way the problem of leave in England occupied most of my mind. When I first went overseas I had not known about the leave scheme but once I did know it was unthinkable that I should not take advantage of it. And here is another funny thing. I flew home on leave three times. The third doesn't count; but on both of the other two occasions I was able to spend six to seven weeks in England without Joan and without anyone commenting on it. In 1954 the excuse was that Joan had been on leave to Cyprus for the previous Christmas and couldn't get leave again in time for

the Convention. The arrangements for mail were quite simple – all Joan’s incoming letters were re-directed to my house address in Manchester and I then typed replies, signed them, placed them in stamped addressed envelopes (air mail, naturally) and sealed the envelopes. Several of these were then placed in a larger envelope which was sent to a friend in the Post Room at Maida Camp. He opened this as soon as it arrived and mailed the contents either back to England or to America etc. In this way several fans received letters from Joan in Egypt at a time when they knew I was in England.

Shortly before the 54 Convention the question of an all-female fanzine had come up. Several letters had passed between Frances, Ethel Lindsay and Joan, and finally it was decided that something should be done. Without really thinking about the possible consequences I undertook to edit such a fanzine and *Femizine* was born. Ethel had been writing to Joan for some time and she had no idea then of the truth. The first issue of *Fez* appeared at the 54 S.M.Con and though it wasn’t particularly good it caused quite a lot of comment.

My leave came to an end and I went back to Egypt and Joan. Joan’s second year in fandom (my third) was one of unchecked growth and it wasn’t long before I found myself well and truly out of my depth. I don’t know quite how it happened; but I suddenly found I had a Frankenstein monster on my hands. *Femizine* got into its stride and proved to be surprisingly popular. The number of letters received increased after each issue until a fifty percent return was achieved on a 200 copy issue. Fanzines came flooding in and the OMPA mailings also. *Omnibus* was born for OMPA – and while all this was going on I still had to keep my own activities going under my own name. Naturally, these were cut down as much as possible but I couldn’t drop them all. As a final twist, Joan began to receive requests for material for other fanzines, and some of these requests had to be filled. I don’t mind admitting that several times I felt like climbing up a wall; but Joan wouldn’t let me. This creature I had created was controlling my every move!

Ethel had proved to be so enthusiastic about *Fez* that Frances and I decided it was only fair to bring her into the plot, and shortly after my leave Frances told her the full story. I don’t think Ethel will object now if I underline the unexpected success I’d had in making Joan *live* by telling you that she was glad to hear about the hoax. Apparently she had grown to dislike Joan as a rather bossy young woman who was, in her opinion, quite the wrong person for me to become attached to! This reaction should have

warned me of what was to come, but it didn't. The next twelve months simply rushed past and my creation soon began to be too much for me. *Femizine* speeded up Joan's development as a fan and brought her into contact with many people who had never heard of Sanderson. The three way correspondence between Ethel, Frances and I degenerated to a series of short notes scribbled out whenever something new occurred, and this was decidedly not a good thing. The development of Joan as a person in her own right, tho', is best traced in the pages of *Femizine* itself.

There were many highlights during this period. Ron Bennett had a friend who had been stationed in Maida Camp and knew there were no WRAC living there. This necessitated hurried explanations about Joan travelling from Ladysmith Barracks and back each day to work in Maida, and Ron was satisfied. But I think the most memorable event of all at least from my point of view, was the part Joan began to play in fannish epics, like Vince Clarke's Pantomime Cinderella and the Liverpool tape productions.

When the 55 convention came up Joan was unable to attend because she was in the process of moving to Cyprus with a part of the office. This time the mail became more involved – incoming from Egypt to England, outgoing from England to Cyprus to England. However, the arrangements held well. While I was in England, Ethel, Frances and I spent quite a lot of time trying to decide what to do with this rather frightening creature who threatened us all, and in the end it was decided to make *Fez* a really all-female fanzine by having Joan withdraw from it completely and ask Pamela Bulmer to take over the reins. It was the best thing we could think of at the time. In any case it was definitely too much for one person to do and my spare time was rapidly disappearing.

I went back to Egypt for a week and then to Cyprus, and Joan's third and final year began. Things happened and for one reason or another, including downright laziness, I only completed the stencils for the seventh *Fez* and mailed them to Pamela (who had agreed to takeover from Joan) as she was leaving for America. Vince and Joy Clarke produced the issue and then there was a halt in Joan's activities that has lasted until now. It wasn't long before I was blaming myself for this and suddenly the whole picture clicked into place. Joan had been too successful, she was too real. What had started three years ago as a funny hoax against a dozen people had now become something that might amuse a few people but might equally hurt others. It was now something that would effect all of fandom and not just a

dozen people. There appeared to be only one solution to the problem – Joan had to go GAFIA before I returned to England again. She had to fade from the fannish scene and no one would ever know that she had never existed. The stage was re-set, Joan became more and more inactive, answered fewer letters, acknowledged receipt of fewer fanzines, even though they continued to pour in. I became more active under my own name and argued with Joan about her attitude in OMPA etc. Two issues of *Omnibus* were prepared in which I announced that Joan and I were no longer on speaking terms and it looked as though she might easily slip into that limbo of all forgotten fans. True, I had increased the number of fans who knew the secret by telling Dean Grennell, but then he had been such a friend I felt it necessary for him to know the truth. Pamela had to be told, naturally, and at this point I must admit I've used Pamela pretty badly over this and her reaction to the hoax, amusement coupled with a certain amount of admiration at the completeness of it all made me appreciate her more – she could easily have been terribly annoyed, and rightly so. But then, she has a sense of humour, thank heaven! I hope the rest of you have....

I intended further to increase the number in the secret to six by telling Brian Varley when I was back in England for good; but that was definitely the limit. Ah, the best laid schemes of mice and men.

Ron Bennett had thought up a hoax, something on the lines of inventing a wife for himself, and by one of those strange coincidences he'd chosen Joan as the name of this non-existent female. He happened to mention this at a gathering of fans in Manchester attended by Dave Cohen (who didn't know the secret) and Cyril Evans (who did). Cyril said something about this sort of hoax having been done before and apparently it wasn't long before Ron had the full story out of him. When I heard about this I didn't know what Ron would do with this information; but it seemed the truth couldn't be hidden after all.

The '56 Convention came along and the situation was, to say the least, somewhat fantastic. There were people who knew, tho' not very many, people who had heard rumours but refused to believe them because Joan was so real to them, and people who didn't know but must have felt that Something was Going On. Well, now you all know, and I wonder what the reaction will be.

It is possible that one or two fans might now turn round and say that they knew all the time, but don't you believe them! Apart from those I have

mentioned who knew, plus Pamela's husband Ken, there is only one person who can say he knew, Harry Turner. Harry has never revealed his knowledge and it is possible that I'm mistaken; but he has always given me the impression of knowing. If he wants to make the claim, then I'll allow it. As for the rest, well, I still have complete files of the letters Joan received together with copies of her replies.....! They range from the early ones in which Joan was warned about me to the latest wherein it was said that Joan must be a woman because she couldn't spell! These letters, or parts thereof, will appear eventually in *Omnibus*, the SF clubzine, as part of a further detailed biography of the "girl" who has been described as "the most important femme-fan of this period."

Shucks, I blush.

Pamela Bulmer:

You know the real test of a sense of humour is whether you can laugh at yourself. Visitors to the Globe just prior to the Convention will have noticed the signature of "Joan W. Carr". No – it wasn't a forgery and most of those present met her – or should I say him. Disbelief of the obvious and acceptance that "Sandy's pulling your leg", as I explained, surprised me even then.

Now, to carry the story on, to add another dimension and round out the picture as it stands this Spring of 1956, we have another of the conspirators to give her narrative.

Ethel Lindsay:

Ethel Lindsay, the level-headed balance-wheel (?) of the whole project, writes:

The first letter I ever had from Sandy was full of admonitory advice. I couldn't have guessed from that, though, what lay in the future. Still, it was a hint, now that I can look back on it. I was a neo-fan then, still thrilled at the sudden rush of mail; now, if at least one letter a day does not arrive, I begin to wonder if no one loves me any more. Then one day a letter arrived from Joan. At the time I was delighted at the appearance of another femme fan, the only other I knew was Frances Evans. Frances and I had been discussing trying to count us all, and putting each other in touch. She first proposed the

idea of a fanzine of our own. I wrote off to Joan mentioning this. Back by return came a full fledged scheme to produce one, with herself as editor and I as her assistant. I felt a bit miffed about this on Frances' behalf, as her idea had been more or less lifted from her. Especially as she admitted to some disappointment, still the sly witch did not tell me that she knew the truth about Joan.

The first issue of *Fez* appeared at the Mancon, I met Frances and Sandy there for the first time too. A firm friendship was struck up, which was just as well considering the following events. Sandy gravely produced a rather hazy looking photograph of Joan. This was duly admired by all and sundry, and sniffed at by me. Yes, I was already critical of Joan. Her letters were becoming more and more dictatorial. Shortly after Sandy returned to the Middle East I must have produced the first growl of "No wonder they made her a sergeant." I also wrote Joan a letter telling her what a nice guy I thought Sandy was and how lucky she was! Joan smugly wrote back to say she thought so too... I might be tempted to hide these facts, only I know the cad will be publishing all Joan's correspondence some day.

While on my summer holidays that year I visited Paul Hammet and arranged to meet Frances there. Paul entertained us royally, but he had to leave for an hour to attend to his surgery. Leaving us to amuse ourselves in the usual way, (the bottles were on the mantelshelf) he went. He was no sooner out the door than Frances said that she had something to tell me, but that I was not to be annoyed at her, as, honest, it wasn't her fault! Then quietly she said: "There isn't any Joan, it's only Sandy." After the first moment of shock, I began to laugh, ejaculating at intervals: "The fiend! The little brat! Oh, if I get my hands on him!" finishing up with: "It's a good job he's in the Middle East!" then began to have horrible thoughts of some of the letters I had written, and confessed I was glad there wasn't any Joan as I had begun to dislike her as a bossy type of female battle-axe. When Paul came back he must have thought us a more than ordinarily hilarious crew, as every time I looked at Frances I started to giggle. It seemed that Sandy had a conscience of sorts for he had wanted to tell me himself, but lacked the nerve and so got Frances to do it.

Among other things (such as threats of mayhem) that I wrote to him, were some hints on how to make Joan sound more feminine and neo-fannish. It was shortly after this that H.J.C. produced his famous review of *Fez*. This had the effect of throwing me into a real panic, in my job I could not afford

such publicity. The other femme fans rallied to our side, and defended us stoutly. They did all they could to help, and began to take a real pride in *Fez*. That was when my troubles really started. I had been thinking and talking of Joan as a separate personality, I always called her “darling Joan” in the way a woman does when she doesn’t really mean it. I really had her disassociated in my own mind entirely from Sandy. However, I began to wake up to the fact that I could not expect the rest of fandom to feel the same way. I began to worry about what they would say when the news came out. At the same time so did Frances, who asked me if I ever woke up in a cold sweat thinking about it. Yes, I did. We communicated our fears to Sandy, who at first was inclined to pooh-pooh them, on the grounds that all fans can laugh at a hoax. Then he too began to wonder just what the femme fans would say: we thought up all sorts of ideas. Eventually we came up with the bright one of throwing *Fez* open to males as well. I was deputed to put this idea up to them at the first Kettering convention. So Frances and I invited some of them along to our bedroom and brought the suggestion up. It was no good. They turned the idea down cold, wanted us to stick to women alone. After they had gone Frances and I sat and looked at each other in dismay. “I feel sick,” she said. “I think we had better emigrate,” I replied. We got hold of Sandy as soon as we could and told him firmly that, in one way or another, this monster Joan was going to have to be killed off.

So it was planned. Sandy and Joan were to fall out, Joan was to go gafia, and disappear from fandom, *Fez* was to be handed over to the femme fans. It meant Sandy giving up all his egoboo until at least some time after. Still, all that went up the spout the day Cyril Evans let out the news to Ron Bennett. So then we wanted to get the news out in *Fez* first, and fully expected to see Ron beat us to it in his *Ompazine*. Pamela and I watched the mailing with bated breath. The strangest thing had happened, though – nothing came out. Only rumours, no one seemed to know what to believe, and some evidently thought it was a double hoax! Amid all this confusion, we breathed a little easier and went ahead with our plans, which all the social activity surrounding the con and our overseas guests had thrown a little behind schedule.

This, though, is the truth and the whole truth. One day Sandy will publish all Joan’s letters and further details will be revealed. I can no longer remember all I wrote to her, and await that publication with some trepidation. Do You?

Pamela Bulmer:

Keeping the hoax going presented interesting and sometimes chilling moments, too. As, for instance:

The time was Easter – Good Friday evening. The place Walter’s room in the Royal Hotel, Kettering. I suppose there were about a dozen people in the room and there was a great deal of excitement as everyone was discussing the rumour of the Joan Carr hoax. The leak had originally come from Cyril Evans to Ron Bennett and we had been hoping desperately that he would keep his mouth shut and enjoy the joke as we were doing. “You’re going to look awfully silly, if it’s true, Pamela.” I heard Joy’s words above the hectic babble of voices. Odd incidences were being brought to mind. I daren’t look at anyone but at the same time I daren’t look away it would be too obvious. I contrived to look interested without seeming perturbed, I wondered if I looked as hot and bothered as I felt. Somehow I had to stop the conversation. Looking at Ken was no good – he was himself endeavouring, to strike up another conversation which would eclipse this one. Slowly a jumble of words edged their way into my mind and, studying the marble mantelpiece intently, I took a deep breath and looked round, “I think it’s most unkind of you all” I lowered my eyes and looked uneasy “Sandy’s obviously very cut up about Joan. Can’t you see he’s trying to cover up – I don’t think we should be discussing his private affairs”. There was one of those awkward little silences before Bobby laughed “Obviously wearing his heart on his sleeve.” I blessed her silently, and to my intense relief the chatter resumed on another topic. I felt very tired.

Finally, to round out the story on the Home Front here is the girl who guided Sandy in his first hesitant steps in establishing the femininity of Joan, Frances Evans.

Frances Evans:

So Joan is dead! Ghod rest her soul. I was in at her birth, a puling masculine type girl sergeant. I watched her grow, with some little trepidation and a great deal of amusement, into a fully-fledged femme type. The trepidation was caused by the whole hearted acceptance of *Fez* by the femmes, by their pride in this “all female” venture. I prefer to pass over that and dwell on the endless source of amusement I had listening to certain fans discussing Joan.

One night Dave Cohen forced me to accept a bet on the certainty of Sandy's marriage to Joan. I said that I didn't think it would come off. Dave assured me that he knew something I didn't and that really it was a shame to take my money from me. And that reminds me. He hasn't paid me yet. Another time Machiavarley, on leave from London, sat in the Thatched House positively drooling in his beer at the thought of meeting Joan, as he put it – "in the FLESH." "Joan," he gloated, "will be out before Sandy, and all's fair in love and war. And," he confided, "from certain recent correspondence I've had with her I feel sure that even tho' she is a sergeant she'll be a very "amenable" type of girl. 'S'matter of fact, some of the sex and sadism she dishes out, some quite shocking coming from a woman." "Well," I parried, "that's probably 'cos she's in the Army." "Yeah!" he agreed.

The hoax grew and Sandy's parents had to know. They frequently entertained the Manchester fans and I must say they played their part magnificently. Sandy's mother was often told not to worry; that her future daughter in-law would make the ideal wife for her son. "It was inevitable," she was assured. "They have so many tastes in common."

And that's how it went. It wasn't hard for me to keep up the pretence, at times I believed in Joan's existence myself. Sandy, too, came more and more under her influence, so that at one time he practically disappeared from my consciousness and occupied only a very small part of his own. And, now that Joan has gone and I've only Sandy left, I can't help thinking he's not half as clever or humorous as "she" was.

Femizine #9 (May 1956, ed. Pamela Bulmer)

34. Conceiving the BSFA (1957-1958, 1996)

A. Vincent Clarke

i) Don't Sit There...

Once upon a time we used to say – *I used to say, frequently, – that if someone was of the fan type, he or she would find fandom, sooner or later. This sounded fine. It gave fandom a status half-way between Piccadilly Circus and the Catholic Church. Moreover, it eliminated any prospect of having actually to look out for recruits, proselytes and wanderers by the wayside. They would come, as filings to a magnet, to the Halls of the Blessed, and, after suitable probation, enter into BNFmanship.*

A look around the fanzine-fandom field of today discloses that even if this was anything more than a pious hope, it is no longer true. The new entrants to fandom are so few as to be practically invisible, and those who do survive the impact of no interest find an amorphous, spineless entity whose lack of cohesion must seem like deliberate obscurantism. There are few fanzines, they are getting fewer, and in them, with the exception of NuFu, there is very little to show the general underlying structure on which modern fandom is based. There is a general lack of bonhomie, a lacklustre don't-do-it-yourself spirit; the old guard have their own coteries, a perfectly natural development, but the newcomer must fight for recognition. Who can blame them if they find the struggle too hard?

This situation arises, as a natural consequence, from the happy-go-lucky years of the s-f boom. There were far more magazines on the market, and their publicity for fan affairs – Conventions, fanzines, meetings, letters-to-the-editor – brought in more names, more recruits, than any accidental contacts, any word-of-mouth introductions, could have done. It was suddenly easier to contact the foetal fan – the active-fan-in-embryo – and joyous, ebullient fanzines like *Quandry* and *Hyphen* flourished, looking to the past equally with the present and the future. There were enough new faces to make the discovery of the past exciting; fandom had been persisting for

years, it was sufficient in itself. Let fanarchy flourish, and laugh away any thought of an enduring structure in fandom. I did some laughing myself. Fandom was going to continue, breathless, exciting, a small culture but an ever widening one.

Those carefree years have left a legacy of a few remnants of dead and dying clubs, a few fanzines, an almost complete lack of contact between distant fan centres. *Contact* could have spun a network across fandom, to keep some unity which both the old-timer and the newcomer to fandom could grasp, but, without that, what is there? OMPA keeps the established fans united, though even here the lack of new blood is shown by the lack of partisanship on practically any issue raised. The World Convention should have been a recruiting site for fans – but fans were too anarchic to make any effort this year to present evidence that it would welcome newcomers to fanzine fandom.

Authentic S-F has folded, and killed another source of contact. By contact, I mean, printing a review of *your* fanzine (as it used to) or printing someone else's address that *you* could write to, to tell them about fandom. Yes, *you...* perhaps fandom, suffering from chronic anemia, drifts aimlessly, and a glance around will make it evident that any delusions of grandeur it may have that it will be voluntarily aided by enthusiastic groups of blood-donors are strictly on the far side of optimism.

It is evident that what we need is a new s-f fan society.

You needn't read any further if you don't agree with the general estimate of life in British fandom today that preceded this, because the following is based on the assumption that it's correct. It is also based on the assumption that Something Should Be Done About It; before dissenters drift away to their Ivory Towers I trust that they will write and let me know how they manage to be satisfied with Fandom as it droops today... that is, if it doesn't involve some Act Of Faith.

Why should I pick the Something That Should Be Done About It as a formation of a club? They've tried before, and they've failed. Fanarchy, disinterest, lack of time, money, gafia and fafia, have all contributed to the failures, and virtually all those reasons have contributed not once but many times to the break up of successive clubs, associations and societies.

The simple reason why a club is formed is the natural gregariousness of the s-f fan. By definition, these days and amongst ourselves, if you're a fan it is because you like to meet other fans, at Conventions, clubs, or through

correspondence. We do not call the man who reads s-f a fan, however big a collection he may have. Howard Keel, Kingsley Amis, Dr Oppenheimer and Bob Monkhouse, to pick four names from widely differing fields, we know to be s-f readers, and probably with their amount of income have amassed considerable reading matter. But, in the fan sense, they are not fans.

To the oldtimer, his personal contacts, his knowledge of fandom as a small facet of social culture, and perhaps his fanzine, all give him the sense of belonging, of being one of a group. Even those who criticised structures in fandom – and some of the critics constitute the backbone of fandom – still had that instinct to work together with others of like mind, for destruction if not construction.

The newcomer has none of this. He is the foreigner, the outsider knocking to come in, and the wide-open door can be more of a bar than a closed one with a notice of “Members Only”. If you are that simple (but how significant thing!), a Member, you have doubled your points of contact with strangers – common interest plus common Membership.

Psychologically, the existence of a club helps to increase contact between fandom and the foetalfan. Practically, the *knowledge* of the existence of a club is obviously a sign to the foetalfan that he is not alone in his enthusiasm. It cannot be argued that, on the side of a newcomer, a club can be anything but helpful.

Aside from the obvious advantage of new blood in the ranks, what advantage is there to the established fan? This is the rock on which so many societies have foundered, for at the start of a club the established fan has all the work, and, if he is active, will obviously be giving up some time on fan-affairs of major interest to undertake business which he probably forsook years before, when the first flush of proselytising faded. If he is running a subzine, he may obtain more subscribers and more help, but apart from that, what is there?

This is where we come down to brass tacks. If I, who have been in fandom 10 years, now advocate the resumption of a fan society in Britain, after at least 7 or 8 years when I’ve quite happily rolled along without giving the whole idea more than an occasional humorous thought, why do I do it?

Reason 1 arises from the task of issuing propaganda for the World Convention. However trufannish it may be to be a lone wolf, however much you cry that your individualism is enough in itself, when fan affairs impinge on the mundane world you are no more than a lone eccentric if you are not a

member of an organisation.

This independent existence is naturally quite sufficient for run-of-the-mill fan affairs. But you cut no ice with outsiders – and in particular, newspapers – if you point to a disorganised, if happy, chaos and say “That’s us... no, we’ve got no Secretary except the Convention Secretary, we’ve got no means of communication except the ordinary fan sitting down and writing to everyone he knows at his own expense. You’re interested in fandom, chum? But you don’t live near London, Liverpool, Cheltenham or Manchester? Then you’ve had it, except for writing letters. Who do you write to? Well, I can give you the names of some fanzine editors; they’ll probably be too busy publishing fanzines to write to you, and there’s only four or five, but they’ll be glad to send you their fanzines. What will the fanzines be about? Well, fan affairs, mostly. No, I’m sorry, I haven’t got time to stop and tell you about fandom and its history.”

We pulled in a lot of reporters at the World Con Press Conference, mostly because the headed notepaper gave us some status, but we didn’t have anything behind that with national interest. Of course, it’s anybody’s guess why so few reports appeared – the simultaneous holding of the British Association annual meeting probably took the limelight and engaged the attention of Science Reporters who might otherwise have played ball – but it made me at least sharply aware of our amateur status.

With the diminution of reports of fan affairs in the prozines, the only publicity channel for fandom as a whole, apart from Conventions, is the national press. You have to put up a front, however phony it is, to get any attention from it. A newspaper will give a minority group publicity for two main reasons: it has something to say relevant to current affairs which is likely to be of interest to the majority of its readers, or it’s so damn silly that it’ll amuse that same majority. Right now, science fiction is in an uneasy position between those two points of view, and, whether it matters to the established fan or not, a report or a published view poking fun at s-f and s-f fandom is not going to be attractive to the hesitant.

Allied to this is the attitude of papers to our field when something is printed in them, and brings us to Reason 2: cure of frustration. The saintly fan may like to suffer fools gladly, but even after all these years it still irks me to read ignorant references to s-f and fandom, snobbish reviews, the drivelling of columnists and the conceitedness of scientists who give authoritative opinions on s-f on the basis of having read half-a-dozen books. It must be an

unusually self-satisfied fan who has never wanted to write a blistering criticism of some printed rubbish, but unless an editor is in an unusually indulgent mood that letter, if written, will never pass the wastepaper basket. It's from a solitary crank. The same letter, on the headed note paper of a society, will receive... well, several hundred times as much attention – it depends on how big the editor thinks the society is.

Reason 3 is a selfish one, and should appeal to everyone. However large your interest is in the foetal fan, you will find the task of writing pages of elementary explanation on various facets of fandom boring. It's boring because it is damnably wasteful of time and energy. A few years ago there was a debate in British fandom about the usefulness of a BRE* of a *Fancyclopaedia*.... a history and dictionary of fandom. One was, in fact, started, but petered out in the usual spirit of "Well, if the newcomer's a Trufan he'll find out. Someone (else) will tell him all about it." Since then I, personally, must have felt the need for such a volume at least a dozen times. There is nothing whatsoever in British fandom which can be used as a general introduction to our small culture, yet it is of such primary importance to the inductance of a newcomer that it should be one of the first and most easily available documents in fandom, equal to the *Anglo-Fan Directory* and more basic than *The Enchanted Duplicator*.

* British Reprint Edition, as for some SF prozines. See [Afterword](#).

Reason 4 may be a purely personal one, but I'd like to spread it out for general observation. Given that having a club – any club – is better, even fractionally, than having no club, it is a perpetual challenge and an intellectual problem to set one up that will continue. I had my fingers somewhat burnt in my younger days in fandom by taking on a good deal more than I could handle in the matter of a society, but since then my viewpoint has changed. I can see that it is no use setting up a society in a burst of fannish enthusiasm and to expect a wave of enthusiasm to echo back from all and sundry like a revivalist meeting. The people who are competent to run the sort of society which will attain the objects already enumerated must be realists in relation to those goals.

There is no reason, of course, why such a course might not be entertaining as well as constructive; "serious and constructive" can remain a naughty name as far as I'm concerned. For instance, if mere numbers impress newspapers – and, obviously, they must and do – then there is no reason why

membership numbers shouldn't start at something like No. 15,624. If finance worries the organisers, there is no reason why it shouldn't be on a strictly practical basis – something on the order of membership plus one sheet of rules-cum-catalogue costing 6d, no further correspondence entered into without a stamped-addressed envelope... Directory for sale to members 1/- (or whatever Ron is charging)... list of clubs 2d, sample fanzines at cost plus postage... badge extra, printed paper extra, etc. Printed paper? This would be reserved for the use of Fellows (actifans)...etc. These things could be kicked around and beaten out a little; the major promise would be that such a society would not be an end in itself but would exist for specific purposes.

I'm not usually one to view-with-alarm and regard-with-dismay, but the creeping paralysis attending any constructive effort in British fandom is horrifying. For some years fans, busily constructing quotes, eras of fandom, styles of writing and other neat paper tricks in fanzines, have laughed to scorn or, worse, completely disregarded, any activity – with the honorable exception of TAFF – which will involve group participation and benefit fandom as a whole. It is not without significance that during the height of the last “Golden Age” of fan activity the Chicon, the World Convention for '52, was run by professionals and old-timers dating back to first fandom. The era of individualism and, to borrow a phrase from a larger field, personality worship, has been brilliant and satisfying to anyone who knows what outpourings of energy have attended individual effort. Fandom has been fun to be in and it still is, but in the pursuit of fun we have moved very far from our starting points.

Today the newcomer to the fan scene, the correspondent of a prozine who writes to enquire if anyone is interested in corresponding with him or forming a group, is not helped by the fact that *Quandry* was brilliant or *Slant* mature and humorous. It is only the brilliant who can run before they walk in fandom; the number of newcomers who catch the eye of the established BNF and are helped by him or her lessens in direct ratio to the enthusiasms of those BNFs – under the present system.

The point of this comparison is – is this type of patronage, benevolent but personal, satisfactory in relation to the present moribund interaction between fandom and the s-f reading public? Do we wait for the next boom and meanwhile welcome three BNFs per year while bidding farewell to half-a-dozen, or do we go out and get 'em? Is it beyond the powers of the geniuses of British fandom to look to the future in their own peculiar sphere?

I'd like to make it clear that what I'm advocating is not a society which could lead to a sharp division in British fandom analogous to the N3F and fanzine fandom in the States. Neither do I fancy a Society in which the officers knock themselves out in entertaining lazy nitwits who regard a fanzine as an amateur prozine. In the past I have heard fans who have attempted to go to the masses wail: "But they don't *want* to be actifans... no interest... won't join in... etc. etc." I've done some of it myself... and in this present article, in a way. As I see it, our present problems can be resolved by a loose organisation which will spread the news that there *is* a fandom, and sometimes in doing so strike a small blow for better criticism of s-f. If and when anyone expresses genuine interest, there should be readily available facilities for a more extensive and intensive induction.

I have, naturally, a few more ideas on the subject, but the foregoing should be sufficiently explanatory for the present. What I'm looking for is comment and suggestions – which will naturally receive publicity in a 'zine similar to this in the next OMPA mailing – and if you want to damn the thing root and crop go right ahead.

Zymic #6 (December 1957, ed. A. Vincent Clarke) for OMPA.

ii) My Ghod! They *Did* Something!

In *Zymic* 6, published in the December mailing, I appear to have struck a spark and started a conflagration. The case for Doing Something about the apathetic state of British fandom has certainly been put before, and I'm surprised that the response to "Don't Sit There..." has been so great; I feel like a man who has casually pushed a button and seen an ICBM take off with a *whoosh*.

The Liverpool group, and in particular Dave Newman and Norman Shorrocks, were so interested in the idea that they sent a tape along, filled with talk on the possibility of setting up a new Society. Their idea was for me to start off a tape discussion, which would then be circulated to those groups and interested fans who had recorders. This was before the Kettering Con., and I did suggest on this tape that it might be brought along to the Con. for the benefit of those without their own tapers. The three of us at No. 7 then found that, cash-wise, it was very imprudent of us to attend the Con. as we were confronted with the necessity of having to take an early holiday this year. Although disappointed, I felt that the tape would be a satisfactory

substitute for my opinions in any discussion that arose on the business of forming a society.

Unfortunately, the tape went astray at the last moment; it was sent by Walt Willis to Norman Shorrock during the week before the Con., and was accidentally sent to the wrong office at Norman's place. When the discussion was inaugurated at the Con. by Dave Newman (who is a Good Man), he managed to remember a number of my points and entered them into the discussion, which greatly pleased me when hearing the record of these sessions later. He then sent me back the original tape, *plus* those made at the Con., a total of about 6 hours listening time, and here am I under a moral (and fannish) obligation to report back to you what happened after I pushed that button.

Firstly, and most importantly, I'd like to place on record my personal appreciation of the magnificent way in which Dave Newman sponsored the discussion, kept it fairly firmly on the rails, acted as interlocutor and interpreter, and handled the whole thing with magnificent *elan* (which is not the name of a small deer in four letters.) A wonderful effort. As to the whole affair, I can understand why there was some slight apprehension in the personal messages to me which decorated the end of the tape and why Peter West and Ken McIntyre, among others, acted so mysteriously when we saw them at the Globe before I'd received the tapes. I do wish that the personal tape forming the first part of this zine had arrived at Kettering, as it might have saved some discussion of the subjects which were comparatively old-hat, but that's water under the bridge.

My own feelings are slightly mixed. To be perfectly honest, I would have preferred to see a Bureau as suggested formed, instead of an Association, but it's wonderful to see something done. As I said in the last *Zymic*, it cannot be argued that a Society will not benefit the neofan, and I think that the BSFA deserves support from everyone.

I, in a sense, straddle two types of fandom, the serious-and-constructive and the lightly-humorous, as do several OMPAites. There are, however, people whose fanning is always pretty serious, concerned mainly with s-f criticism and so on, and it's this type, rather than the new reader-cum-fan who are the natural basis for an organisation. I'm terrified that there should grow up any split between fanzine fans and the serious types (using fanzine fan in its present form as one who puts out a 'zine of a primarily light type). My own viewpoint is that s-f is interesting and absorbing, and I can discuss

most facets of it, but after a while it palls. This may seem impossible to those who've been reading for, say, 2, 3 or 5 years, but after 20.... Ghod!

If one is not to become bored, one has to look for other things in s-f, and that's where fanzine fandom presents a small microcosm of the outside world; fandom is gradually increasing its likeness to this outside world (as Sandy pointed out in his *Blunt*) tho' on an exceedingly small scale and that, for me, is where its fascination lies.

But there are people who can keep on reading s-f and do know of fanzine fandom but who for various reasons don't want to get mixed up in the fanzine field. We have, for instance, the Cheltenham group, who are busily evolving a type of fandom which is peculiarly their own, largely slanted towards ceremony because of an interest by some of its members in ceremony. I say good luck to them, but my own main interest in fandom is communication between fans, and if you're looking for definitions I call an active fan someone who not only attends a club and reads s-f but by some means does something to amuse or interest his fellow fans... that is, he's in contact with more fans than there are in his local group. (On putting this down on stencil it's occurred to me that fanzine fans will soon be in the position of the Press as it is in the mundane world, another analogy with the Outside; until recently one could be sure that one was writing for an audience composed mainly of other fanzine publishers.)

It's this factor of Communication which has bred many of the brighter fanzines, and the spirit of fanzine fandom, and has also given rise to the term of BNF. A Big-Name Fan to my way of thinking is not a great and lordly character and not snobbish, but he or she is a fan who is known to numbers of other fans. It doesn't matter what his character is, really, as long as he's *known*. The definition is given here not only to define my own feelings, but because the label can be a source of gratification, and it should be an inducement to a newcomer to fandom to enter into communication with other fans. (This is given as there seems to be some criticism of the use of the term at all.)

If someone is at all interested in fandom, then information on fandom in all its aspects should be available. The newcomer can be shown fanzines etc., but first of all the initial approach must be through s-f; what the newcomer becomes then is up to him.

L'pool say they are worried about the amount of support available from London. Well, the population of the Globe often dwindles until OMPAites

make up 50% of the visitors, and as far as I can see from the OMPA mailing *everyone* agrees that British fandom has come to a parlous state, everyone agrees that *something* should be done about it, and as far as I can see everyone agrees that a new Society would be one of the best possible answers.

The choices of Dave, Eric and Terry as officers are strongly approved. I was somewhat worried about the casual way the Treasurership was forced on Archie as a matter of comparative un-importance. If the Association is to be of any significance at all then its membership must reach the 500-1000 figure within a comparatively short time, and at £1 a time, with numerous channels of expenditure, this amount of lucre is going to be very important, especially as the accounting needs to be impeccably accurate. This is not in the same class as putting out a fanzine and not worrying (much) what the expenses are. Anyway, we'll see.

As for Ted, he's the obvious choice for editor of the journal for anyone unacquainted with the publishing statistics of fanzines, which applies to the majority of those present at Kettering. Considering the facts that he failed to publish anything during his year in OMPA (at a time when he was a full-time professional author), that he has never edited or published a fanzine on his own, and his total fan writing can hardly have exceeded the wordage of *this* zine alone, I can only hope that he'll buckle down to this particular job with more constructive effort than he's previously shown. At least he'll have a highly competent publisher.

I must say that I breathed a sigh of relief when Ted sprung to attack the possibility of myself doing an active chore in the Association. I prefer to freelance; I'm experimenting with various literary devices, am hoping to do some pro-writing, and am rather looking forward to the time when I'll have finished this particular report, finished the Presidency of OMPA, and will merely be committed to a *Hyphen* column. I would like to place on record, however, as Ted and one or two others seem to have misinterpreted my *Zymic* remarks, that I can't for the life of me see why one should be serious about s-f fandom other than its worth as a hobby. I'm ready to spend hours of time and most of my spare cash on s-f fandom, but to be serious in the sense of setting up an organisation to "improve the standard of s-f" strikes me as sheer egotism; s-f criticism, yes, but it's up to the pros to improve the output of the stuff itself. I'm for fandom first, and s-f second; so would you be if you'd been reading it since '36. I sincerely hope the BSFA won't forget it

originated at a “social” Con.

Zymic #7 (June 1958, ed. A. Vincent Clarke) for OMPA.

iii) Postscript: A Small Skirmish on the Borders of Mundania

It all happened just before Xmas, 1957, and why it happened at that late date I just don't know. It had been years since I'd had any passionate regard for science fiction. Fandom was a Way of Life. And yet, this paragraph in the prestigious Sunday newspaper, *The Observer*, irritated me.

It was in a column by a very respected film critic, C.A. Lejeune, and mentioned in passing details of the policy of the New Shakespeare Theatre in Liverpool. I don't know if the NST gave performances of Shakespeare and Ibsen and Tennessee Williams, but Miss Lejeune mentioned that on Sunday nights, they let their hair down and showed films to the New Shakespeare Film Society.

They retained, though, a strong sense of propriety. A brochure was issued giving policy and general rules, and one was quoted:

“There will be no war films in the present Hollywood-Pinewood sense of the word – or films of violence, horror, science-fiction or exaggerated sex.”

I don't remember if I had a mental query or two about “exaggerated sex”, but the thought of SF being included amongst the damned gave me, inexplicably, a sudden passionate desire to do something. So I hauled out the old typewriter, inserted a stencil, and wrote a general letter to a dozen or so friends. I quoted the pertinent paragraphs, said “this obviously calls for indignant letters”, and advised sending them to the NST via Miss Lejeune at the Observer.

I then spat on my palms, and did my own little bit.

“...I am not, of course, acquainted with the personnel of your Society. It may, for instance, consist exclusively of old ladies with strongly religious views, who would naturally tend to be critical of this particular sub-section of the Arts.

“Given, however, that your Society comprises a normal cross-section of those interested in the Cinema as an Art, like myself, I

must say that I can see nothing irreconcilable between this and an interest in science fiction, in print or on the screen. Your classification of science fiction with distasteful sensationalism is insulting... Do you really imagine that the stuff Hollywood (and, alas, this country) so often issues under the label of science fiction is unreservedly welcome..." etc., etc.

I then sat back and awaited results. I didn't have long to wait. John Brunner sent a copy of his letter virtually by return:

"...I am disturbed and annoyed to see that yet one more wholesale generalisation has been made about science-fiction. At the time of the purge of obscene literature in pocket-books a few years back, one grew accustomed to this sort of thing from back-street newsagents; to find it perpetuated in the leading Sunday newspaper is altogether another question..." etc., etc.

Archie Mercer, an active fan from the early 1950s to – as it turned out – the early 1980s, also contributed:

"...And then there are classics, such as *Things to Come*, which one would have thought was just the type of film to deserve showing to a serious cinematic society – surely to ban this sort of thing on the strength of *The Vampire from Umpteen Thousand Megacycles* is absurd..."

Sid Birchby, a pre-War fan, also had his say:

"...As one who has for thirty years been reading science fiction with no marked crumbling of morals, I find the association [with horror, etc.] odd... After all, the mere fact that a film deals with, say, a monster emerging from a flying saucer, does not make it 'science fiction', any more than a handful of classic allusions make *Titus Andronicus* a great play..." etc., etc.

Sid was sufficiently moved by the occasion to sign his letter to these snobs "B.Sc.Tech., A.M.I.C.E."

And there was distant thunder from Northern Ireland, from one Walter A. Willis:

"It is sad when Hollywood producers bill cheap horror films as 'science fiction', but it is alarming when a film society lets itself be

taken in. Your attitude is all too reminiscent of that of literary snobs to the film itself, twenty years ago...”

Other fans rallied around, including Ron Bennett and Manchester’s Dave Cohen. Ron was the only fan to get a direct reply from Miss Lejeune, possibly because he addressed her as “Mr.”:

“...Although the subject [of SF films] doesn’t fascinate me myself (perhaps because I’m a woman), I know what very wide appeal it has, and feel that the Wanamaker people [huh??] are misguided in putting a tabu (if in fact they have done so) on all films of this kind...” etc., etc.

And finally, there was a reply from the New Shakespeare Theatre Club itself, to all of the individuals who’d written to them via Miss Lejeune:

“...appreciate your kindness in making suggestions... The first General Meeting of the New Shakespeare Film Society was held yesterday, when the question of the content of films was briefly referred to and it was clearly the feeling of the meeting that each film would be judged on its merits... any serious science fiction film of good quality would not be excluded solely on account of its subject matter”

So that was the end of a tempest in a tea-cup. But – looking at the old APAzine from which most of the above was taken, I’ve had a few thoughts.

Sid’s use of those letters after his name...

John Brunner wrote on World Science Fiction Society-headed notepaper...

The triumphant result, puny though the struggle was, of concerted action...

And the fact that this occurred in November 1957.

It was the very next month that I wrote a rabble-rousing piece so stirring that at the next Convention, mid-1958, various fans, principally Terry Jeeves and Eric Bentcliffe, got together and formed the BSFA – the British Science Fiction Association. British fans then had the headed note-paper, the voice to represent them, the works. The BSFA is still going, after 37 years.

Is it possible that the original source, the straw which did the damage, that eventually led to formation of the BSFA, was the collective fuddy-duddies of the New Shakespeare Film Society?

Mimosa #18 (May 1996, ed. Rich & Nicki Lynch)

The 1960s

35. Foreword to *Through the Decades* (2019)

Rob Hansen

To succeed a national science fiction organisation needs a clearly stated purpose that fits with its times. In the case of our first, the pre-war Science Fiction Association (1937-39), it was to be an umbrella under which the country's few, thinly spread fans could come together and help promote the cause of science fiction, a widely disparaged genre read by weirdos who actually believed that man would one day set foot on the surface of the moon. The SFA was suspended following the start of World War II, but that conflict was to lead to the formation of another national organisation, the British Fantasy Society (1942-46). This has no connection to the current organisation of the same name, "fantasy" then being a catch-all term that encompassed science fiction and other forms of fantastic literature rather than just the particular genre the term later came to be associated with. The need for the BFS becomes obvious when you consider the desire of fans to stay in touch even when most were in uniform and spread across the European and Pacific theatres of war. The BFS just about succeeded in helping them do that, but after the war its purpose had gone and it faded away.

In 1948 yet another national organisation appeared, the Science Fantasy Society (1948-51). Created more because it was felt there should be such an organisation than with any very clear mission, the SFS was ill-conceived from the start and eventually sputtered out. So it was that from 1951 to the creation of the British Science Fiction Association in 1958 we had no national organisation in this country, and on the surface we appeared to be getting along just fine without one. During the 1950s the UK experienced a flowering of fannish activity and saw the appearance of what are widely considered by those familiar with them as some of the best fanzines British fandom ever produced. Yet all was not well. To appreciate why you have to understand the nature of fandom at that time.

If you get on a bus or a train nowadays the sight of someone reading an SF or fantasy novel is unremarkable (well, beyond the fact that they're reading a book rather than staring at their phone, at any rate), and our film

and TV screens are filled with the stuff, but it wasn't always that way. Back in the day being a fan of science fiction could be a very lonely affair, so discovering others who shared your enthusiasm for our beloved genre could be heady indeed. (Even now, forty years after it happened, I can still remember how I felt on attending my first convention and realising I had finally found my "tribe".) Not surprisingly, contacting other fans either in person or through the pages of fanzines usually led to an interest in fandom itself and, over time, the majority of fanzines became more concerned with fandom itself than with SF. This was particularly true in the 1950s. Anyone who has ever published a blog or taken part in online communities should understand the attraction in interacting with like-minded people and see how this could come about, and the pro/fan community that developed was fascinating. (As someone who wrote a 400 page, 228,000 word book covering the first fifty years of SF fandom in the UK, my own bias here should be obvious.) So long as the annual convention continued to focus on science fiction thus bringing new people into the fold this was fine. But, in the middle of the decade something happened.

Up through 1953 the annual convention always featured a formal programme centred on science fiction into which all present would dutifully troop, saving their partying for the evening. However, the following year all that changed. The programme at Manchester's Supermancon, the 1954 national convention, was such an organisational shambles that it eventually collapsed. Far from the disaster it could have been this proved to be the con's salvation, the chaos being so complete that both committee and attendees treated it as a joke. This marked the end of the traditional lecture-hall convention. From this point forward fans felt free to only attend those items that interested them and to spend the rest of their time socialising. However, this shift to a more social emphasis had a consequence that became apparent over the next few years: falling attendances. It was realised something needed to be done to reverse the decline and bring in new blood. Enter the BSFA.

The original constitution states that "it shall encourage the reading, writing and publishing of good literature in this class, shall assist and encourage contact between enthusiasts, shall provide liaison between its members and the SF profession, shall endeavour to present science fiction and associated art-forms to the Press and general public in an advantageous manner, and shall provide such amenities as may prove desirable for the use of members." Whether any small, amateur organisation could have achieved

all this at the time is debatable, but as a channel for recruitment the Association did its job.

Within a few years the decline had been arrested and numbers attending the Eastercon began to climb once more, helped by the fact that the convention was now explicitly tied to the BSFA. When bringing the Association into being, the fans of the time decided that though it would still be organised by groups of local fans as it had always been, the convention would henceforth be run under the auspices of the BSFA, and from 1959 to 1967 it was. Loncon, LXIcon, Roncon, Bullcon, Repetercon, Brumcon, Yarcon, and Briscon were the 1960, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, and 67 Eastercons respectively, but most of these were names they were given after the event, sometimes many years after. What they were called at the time and identified as such on badges and in convention literature was the British Science Fiction Association Convention of their particular year. As the face we presented to the world this gave the cons an imprint of respectability they might not have otherwise had, as did choosing as Guests of Honour people such as Edmund Crispin (BSFA member 171) and Kingsley Amis (BSFA member 224).

Despite collapsing in the mid-1970s the BSFA quickly bounced back, and within a few years was enjoying one of its most productive periods under the leadership of Alan Dorey thus proving it still had life in it.

And it's been with us ever since.

The BSFA eventually moved beyond its founders' original hopes for it, becoming the organisation we know today. In doing so has it also evolved with the times, adapting to what is now a vastly changed landscape to that in which it was originally created? That's for you to decide. What I do know is that in 2020 UK science fiction fandom will be ninety years old, the first meeting of our first local fan group having taken place in Ilford on 27th October 1930. The BSFA has been around for two thirds of that period and lasted an order of magnitude longer than any of its predecessors. This volume celebrates that remarkable achievement.

Through the Decades: Sixty Years of The BSFA (2019, ed. Alex Bardy)

36. Early Days (1981)

Roger Peyton

Arthur Sarsfield Ward was born in Ladywood (Birmingham suburb) in 1883. He's probably better known to you as Sax Rohmer, the creator of that mad scientific genius Dr Fu Manchu. 20 years later, John Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris was born in Edgbaston, less than a mile away from Sax Rohmer's birthplace. Tolkien spent many years in south Birmingham – an area that was, then, totally unspoilt by the industrial ravages in the north-west of Birmingham – and used much of it as the basis of Middle Earth in *The Hobbit*. Michael Coney was born and educated in Birmingham before moving to Canada. Up-and-coming fantasy writer Adrian Cole was born here and only moved south a couple of years ago. To my knowledge there is not, and never has been a science fiction writer who was born in Brum and stayed here! I give the above information not because it has anything to do with the BSFG but simply to record it here as part of the history of SF in Birmingham.

The first SF group in Birmingham was formed, as far as we can tell, in 1949. We've known there was an active group way back then but it was only recently we got any facts concerning this group. Alf Dean, a regular customer at Andromeda, revealed that he had been a member – his first contact was seeing a write-up in the old *Evening Despatch* stating that the Birmingham Science Fiction Circle had been formed and welcomed new members. Alongside the article was a photo of the organiser, Bert Barton, posing with an old pulp-mag. Needless to say, at the request of the reporter the magazine used sported a cover showing a half-clad female being menaced by an alien! (Reporters don't change much do they?)

The meetings of this early group were held in a pub somewhere in Digbeth and anything from 6 to 20 members would be present. The meetings were informal and were held weekly. Occasionally, the really keen members would organise a trip to London to coincide with the regular meetings at the White Horse where they would get the chance to speak to such famous authors as Arthur C Clarke, John Wyndham, John Christopher, etc.

The pub meetings ceased in 1953 and several members started meeting at each other's homes but gradually these petered out and the group folded in

1955.

During this time, of course, I was a young lad at school whose introduction to SF (not counting *Dan Dare*, *Journey Into Space*, etc) occurred in the last term when *The Time Machine* was required reading. Rapidly going through Wells, Wyndham and then onto Asimov, van Vogt, Heinlein, I suddenly found myself obtaining publishers' advance news and looking out for every new SF paperback to hit the shelves as well as mooching round market stalls and grotty back-street newsagents for out-of-print material.

So there I was, a real collector. I had the biggest SF collection in the world – well, was it likely that anyone had more than 192 books! Then someone burst my little bubble. Four Square books had announced publication of *The 27th Day* by John Mantley. On the publication day, a Thursday, I went round every book shop in Birmingham for a copy without luck. At 6.30 in the evening in desperation I remembered that there was a bookstall on New Street Station. Running all the way I got there just before they closed. No, they didn't have it either. Crushed, I was just turning away when the young lad behind the counter said, "Do you read much SF?" It turned out he also read SF (another one, here in Birmingham!) and he had a collection of just over 300 books. His name was Cliff Teague and we chatted until about nine o'clock that evening. We agreed to meet at his place the following Sunday afternoon, I could look through his collection and we'd plan how to get new members for the Group.

That meeting was sometime in the summer of 1961 – virtually 20 years since the start of the Group that grew into the present BSFG. That Sunday afternoon I was introduced to new SF books, SF magazines (I'd never noticed magazines in my travels) and to pineapple and melted ice-cream – Cliff's favourite meal.

Getting new members was a very slow process – the first was Dave Casey who became a hermit, never leaving his room at home even when his parents were rehoused – he just sat in his room, refusing to talk to anyone, re-reading his Eric Frank Russell books over and over again. Then came Mike Higgs who was more of a comic fan than an SF fan – he later became a professional cartoonist. King of the anthology collectors Jack Pickering followed but he gave it all up in favour of collecting antique pop-bottles. A few more came and disappeared. Then Tony Ventris-Field turned up at a meeting at the end of 1962. He was a reporter with the local *Erdington News* and we lost no time badgering him to get us some exposure in that paper. He

was all for it but there was a snag. His editor would only publicise local groups, i.e. specifically Erdington, not the greater Birmingham area. We weren't missing this chance so we quickly closed down the BSFG and started the Erdington SF Circle (for a few months, anyway). Little slips of advertising inserted in books at the local rag market and public libraries were quickly changed to the Erdington SF Circle to help cover up this gigantic con-trick. His editor was satisfied, the article was written, a photo was taken and the whole thing appeared on the centre of the front page of the first issue of 1963.

About 4 or 5 new members came in from that publicity but it was the little advertising slips in the rag market that brought us Pete Weston. Within a few months Pete had decided to do a fanzine, Cliff had attended his first convention, spending the night in a broom closet, several of us had joined the BSFA and the whole thing was looking good.

In early '64 Charlie Winstone, Ken Cheslin, Rod Milner and I took over four of the 5 positions on the BSFA committee. Ken had also volunteered to organise the following year's Easter convention and Mike Higgs, Charlie and I somehow ended up on that committee too.

For 2 years, the Brum Group virtually ran the BSFA. My life consisted of producing *Vector*, BSFA committee meetings, a convention committee interspersed with weekly Brum Group meetings. At the end of my two year stint I wanted a change and took up ten-pin bowling seriously. This later led (in a round about way) to joining the Young Conservatives, getting involved in their committee meetings, getting married, selling my collection of SF and then starting *Andromeda*. During this period the BSFG faltered to a halt – after we'd all come off the BSFA committee together, there seemed little to focus the Group's attention on.

Although I still attended conventions and read SF, other things became more important and it wasn't till 1970, when Pete and I took on the '71 Easter convention that I realised I'd missed out on many things happening in Birmingham. But others can fill in that gap.

BSFG Tenth Anniversary Souvenir Book (1981, ed. Rog Peyton)

37. The Wrong Sort of Fanzine (1977) Peter Weston

I've been re-reading the early issues of my own fanzines for the first time in years and you know, there can be few things more embarrassing. It was also a bit painful to see in retrospect where I went wrong.

The trouble was, back in 1963-64, we just didn't know any better, Charles Platt and I. There we were happily producing our misguided little crudzines with all the furious energy and goshwow enthusiasm of the newest of new fan-editors. It's the old, old pattern I suppose; everyone comes in at the bottom of the fannish heap and they only start to work their way up in the pecking order when they begin to learn something of what it's all about from Older and Wiser heads who've been that way before.

Only something went wrong, with us. All of a sudden everyone had gone into hiding.

Look, to show you what I mean just imagine how things might be if our current new generation Easthope, Ryan, McMahan, Adamson and so on – had arrived in fandom when the only titles being published were *Fanzine Fanatique* and *Malfunction*, with maybe an annual *Zimri* that might impress but would hardly be a dynamic, involving force.

Don't you think it might tend to foul-up their perspectives, give them some wrong ideas? Wouldn't they be tempted to think "there's not much to this fandom business, I can do better than that!" Without people like Kettle, Roberts, the Charnox and all our other skilful contemporary fanwriters the newcomers might take some time to discover for themselves all over again what the true values of fandom really were.

Because you see I think that's exactly what happened to us.

For when I began publishing I'd hardly seen another fanzine except for a couple of High Sercon U.S. titles which made a big impression on me as some sort of ultimate, far-distant goal to aim for. In practice I had so little idea of what I was doing that I fell for the same winning formula which nearly gave us *New Pembrokeshire Review* (an abortive fanzine Greg Pickersgill planned when he first got into fandom): amateur fiction, lists of

new books, plot-synopsis “reviews”, even some poetry. These days that sort of mixture rarely lasts more than five minutes because a new fan editor has so many more chances to sample more sophisticated fare and then to work out a successful formula for himself. Should he be a little slow then the League of Fanzine Reviewers is likely to send around their heavy gang to reinforce the lesson, and when occasionally someone absolutely hopeless shows up, well, there’s enough room now for him to thrash around on the fringes of British fandom without doing any harm.

I remember how wonderful it was to come in all dewy-eyed and fired-up with that urge to turn out your *Very Own* magazine. I don’t want to knock it because these days there aren’t all that many ways to be genuinely creative, and if you’ve got some boring old job in the civil service or are slogging through something really bleak like industrial chemistry, then finding fandom is rather like a drowning man clutching on to a life-saver. You get so overcome with the whole idea of doing something truly your own that you don’t worry too much about what you’re actually going to put in the thing until two or three issues have gone sailing out into that great big apathetic world out there; then slowly, painfully, you lick your wounds and start to think.

Only it wasn’t quite like that, for us.

I put out my poor little spirit-duplicated *Zenith* in exactly the same week Charles did his first *Point of View*. They looked quite similar; parallel evolution I suppose, but right from the start there was a fundamental difference in our attitudes. I hadn’t seen much of fandom but was already quite sure I loved it and wanted more. In my first-ever editorial I said:

“Our fledgling organisation (meaning the Brum Group) is determined to get into the world of deep-dyed fandom.”

But by contrast young Charles saw it otherwise. First he issued an advance publicity flier, in which he said:

“*Point of View* is NOT ‘just another fanzine’. It is an attempt to bring adult SF by amateurs to as wide an audience as possible. It is NOT a magazine that will be of primary interest only to hard-bitten fans...”

And so on. Then in his own maiden editorial he went on to argue a superficially convincing case for what he was doing, although it is one I now

believe to be based on completely wrong premises:

“According to what I have been told by editors of British fan-magazines it is very difficult to get someone to buy such a publication unless they already read it. Moreover the magazine will then refuse to pay for itself and the editor becomes something nearer a philanthropist, giving to the worthy cause of science fiction.

“This seems to me all wrong. But I think I have found part of the reason for lack of enthusiasm over ‘fanzines’ in the very nature of most of the ones I read. As a newcomer to ‘fan society’ I felt a completely uninitiated outsider when I looked at, for instance, *Les Spinge* magazine. This, I point out hastily, was through the fact that I was an outsider, not because the magazine was at fault. But it seemed the reason why a lot of people weren’t interested.

“So I have planned *Point of View* as a magazine as free as possible from ‘fannish’ terms, hoping that it will result in people not normally readers of a fan magazine reading this one.

“The material will be as good as I can make it, but won’t be revolutionary reading. It will, I hope, be different from that found in professional SF magazines only in its duplicated presentation and its lack of professional polish.”

There we have all sorts of wrong-headed ideas. The concern with “buying” and “paying”, when fan-editors have always spent money by the bucketful to finance their hobby-horses; the supposed “lack of enthusiasm” for fanzines which can only ever have existed in Charles’ own mind; the idea that a fanzine is no more than a poorly produced copy of a prozine.

The latter misconception is familiar enough, having shown up previously and on more than one occasion since Platt’s time. The American fan-critic Redd Boggs once called this fundamental confusion “pseudocampbellism”, and usually it is a stage that’s grown out of very quickly, with no lasting harm done. Two things made for trouble this time around, however. One was the peculiarly anaemic condition of fanzine fandom in 1963; the other was Platt’s own extraordinary drive and ambition.

In his editorial he mentions “editors of British fan-magazines” in a tone of voice which suggests he’d had a fair amount of contact with other fanzines before starting *PoV*. But I suspect this wasn’t entirely true, that Charles was

fudging for dramatic effect. I think it would be highly enlightening to know just what he had seen in the critical formative period during which he was making his plans. I doubt that he had seen much besides Cheslin's *Les Spinge* (which had apparently given us both mental indigestion). The one other title mentioned in his editorial is *Icarus*, a short-lived school magazine put out by a group of Nottingham sixth-formers, and significantly this too contained large amounts of amateur fiction.

Maybe I can boil down what I'm trying to say into a typically sweeping Cosmic Generalisation; just as a duck, so they say, tends to follow the first moving thing it sees when it opens its eyes, so does the budding fan tend to emulate the very first fanzine which makes an impression on his suddenly so-susceptible soul.

I'd been exposed to virulent serconism; Platt to an imitation prozine. Both bad examples, dammit! Was it this which caused the Platt Wars? This caused me to spend ten years of my life producing the wrong sort of fanzine?

Let's go back to *Point of View* for a moment. That first issue contained two short stories and the first installment of a serial; a "Fact. Dept", "Juvenile Dept", a crossword competition and a book review. Oh yes, with a Feghoot impersonation and a poem, "The Wreck of the Scoutship Hesperus". In the hands of someone of lesser ability the whole concept would have been laughable, an impossible undertaking doomed to immediate failure. But Charles had unusual determination, rare energy. The entire 28 pages, so far as I can tell, are filled with his own material and artwork under a variety of guises like "Brian Zugorski" and "Ed Fredericks". What's more, the fiction had some originality and flashes of wit, the graphics were crude but showed real flair. The whole mess actually had sufficient momentum to take on a shambling sort of pseudolife of its own.

Now this is where things really went wrong. For British fandom had run down into such a decrepit state that with so little else around there was hardly an example to which someone kindly disposed might have pointed and advised gently, "No, Charles, this is what it's all about." Had there been a *Maya*, a *Wrinkled Shrew*, something offering a more genuine outlet for true personal creativity, it might have made all the difference. But as I recall there wasn't much around other than Ethel Lindsay's *Scottishe*, Archie Mercer's slim OMPazines, and of course *Les Spinge*.

(At the time I was a bit annoyed that on all sides formerly great fanzine titles seemed to have bit the dust, both in Britain and the U.S. It was an all-

time low for fanac; *Warhoon*, *Cry*, *Void*, *Xero*, *VoM*, had all folded, as had *Aporrheta*, *Ploy*, and *Orion* over here. *Spinge* itself was changing format around this period, going from a peculiar sort of crudzine under Ken Cheslin into a big and impressive bi-annual showcase under Dave Hale. The only top fanzine title around, at least nominally, was *Hyphen*, but by this time it was coming out so rarely that it was nearly a year before I saw my first copy.)

So there we were, two eager young neos both busily beavering away in all the wrong directions. To older hands we must have seemed to have a lot in common, and it was Jim Linwood, even then writing the best reviews around, who first officially put a label on us and called us the “New Wave”.

I don’t have a copy of the January 1964 *Spinge* in which he lumped both titles together, pulled apart our early issues and ended to the effect that “only *Zenith* will develop into something like a normal fanzine.”

Ouch! It hurt at the time, even though Jim was point-for-point correct in everything he said; but then what faned has ever liked the truth?

But his review was counter-productive. In some parallel universe it might have caused Charles and I to realise the errors of our ways, to have acknowledged our deficiencies and politely thanked Jim for setting us right. In reality it wasn’t like that at all. I remember feeling hurt and rejected, turned away by the fandom I’d admired so much. As for Charles, he felt cold fury: I don’t think that’s too strong a description for it. This had confirmed his previous analysis of the situation and to him the first shots had been fired in a war!

I’ll get my part of the story out of the way before concentrating on C. Platt. You see, despite my early exposure to *Inside* and *New Frontiers*, I think that at first the young Weston could have been salvaged quite easily for fandom with a bit of encouragement and guidance. *Zenith 2* (really my first issue with a circulation outside the local group) is full of little interlineations, bits of my own writing and snippets I probably thought quite funny at the time. There’s even some comment on *Tensor*, a fanzine put out by Langdon Jones before he started to write science fiction, in which I said “more please on the tailless cat which inhabits the Jones household”, that seems to show I’d appreciated and enjoyed the low-key fannish approach.

But lacking guidance I turned my back on such frivolity, suffering from the Linwood review and resultant paranoia, the strong influence of Platt, and editorial advice from perceptive people like Leland Sapiro. In no time at all I was strait-jacketed into something I called “formality” under the impression I

had to hammer out all traces of human personality from a magazine dealing with anything so sacred as science fiction. There was also a little man from the Birmingham Mail who had fleeting contact with our group at the time, and he used to lecture me strongly about journalism, and how one should never use the first person pronoun. The result was that I began writing editorial sentences like:

“The Editor’s aversion to many of the average ‘fannish’ types of article or story makes *Zenith* into a magazine that attempts to avoid fannish contents and concentrate on SF as its field.”

I blush now to read pompous stuff like that, but at the time I must have been feeling persecuted from all sides and in sheer self-defence come up with the policy of stripping out all the chatty stuff of my first attempts in order to chase after the false glitter of Material About Science Fiction. And because I still didn’t really have much idea, those things I did print were mostly badly written and lacked any real value in an intellectual sense either. There is nothing easier to produce than a bad sercon fanzine.

So with only a few exceptions, here and there and mostly in the lettercolumn despite my attempts to impose order on an unruly mob of correspondents, the entire run of *Zenith*, up until it changed its name with the 14th issue, was a pretty worthless sort of fanzine. That it was twice nominated for a Hugo (in 1965 and 1966) says less about the magazine than about the level to which standards had dropped in those years.

Please don’t misunderstand and think I’m now shamelessly decrying the sort of critical material which is published these days in, say, *Foundation*, or imagine that I was deliberately doing something in which I had no real interest. It’s just that from the various facets of my involvement with SF fandom I’d chosen to concentrate on one in particular and in the light of subsequent experience I feel I picked an area which was not entirely satisfying, did not fulfil the basic need which had urged me to start publishing a fanzine in the first place.

Later on of course there were very real joys in doing *Speculation*, especially when I found a few contributors who really knew what they were talking about. In retrospect I realise that those impressive sercon journals like *Inside*, *Journal of SF* and so on, were really completely inarticulate and I believe that only in the late 1960s did fandom start to produce meaningful criticism in any quantity. Also, towards the end I’d started to find ways of

insinuating my own personality back into the issues, and there were many other rewards, both materially and in flattery.

There's a certain satisfaction in having the entire run of your fanzine committed to microfilm, for instance, but it doesn't compare with the warm glow I felt at a recent convention when Bob Shaw complimented me on a phrase in my first *Maya* column: "To see the Pleiades from a coalshed roof," he mused, "I like that."

And I used to get really irritated with the drawbacks of publishing a big sercon fanzine. Not just by the people who start conversations at conventions by asking "What's happened to the latest...", but by the whole image that goes with such a role. Chris Priest put his finger on it in 1966, just after he'd decided to be a Writer:

"You're wasting your time, Pete. You can't go on doing *Zenith* for ever. You see, in the world of SF you are well-known as a serious fan. This rather classes you in the earnest gang, who go around at conventions clasping SF books in their sweaty mitts and looking at authors with eyes full of awe. I know you're not like that, but it does tend to be your image."

Or more recently, Leigh Edmonds in his excellent DUFF Report, *Emu Tracks Over America*:

"It was an enlightening experience chatting to that horribly sercon person who had produced *Speculation* and finding that he was one of the finest fannish people I'd met in many years."

All along, you see, I've been faking it: loving the fannish side of fnz publishing, collecting scarce issues of Greg Benford and Ted White's *Void*, of *Hyphen*, spending all my money on a rare copy of *Fancylopedia II* at the 1965 Worldcon, even publishing a highly informal personalzine, *Nexus*, as early as June, 1964. This one worked by the simple expedient of printing long chunks of letters interspersed with editorial comments, rather in the vein of *Knockers from Neptune*. It was highly successful, great fun to do, but I killed it off in order to have more time to concentrate on the colder, "prestige" *Zenith*.

Well, that's my tangled story and I hope you haven't been too bored by it all. It took me a long time to sort myself out, but I'm not complaining because I was the lucky one of the pair. Poor old Charles Platt missed out

completely and never did find his true place in fandom, although I don't suppose he sees it quite like that himself, these days.

Although when every allowance is made, due consideration given to bad influences, I'm still left wondering whether I'm merely making excuses for him and that in the end it was after all largely his own fault.

It wasn't only that Charles' fanzine didn't fit and that British fandom was too run-down to offer convincing alternatives to him. More than that, Charles was thoroughly and completely intolerant of anything of which he didn't entirely approve. His letters were unrestrained in their criticisms, his comments in print made no concessions to other people's feelings. And he had an especially fine line in sarcastic vindictiveness which could chew up in short order anyone foolish enough to cross his path. In the end, few did.

It reminds me of an apt remark by, I think, Ethel Lindsay:

“Charles could never quite forgive fandom for starting without him.”

The early months of 1964 must have been disconcerting for anyone who'd been around before Platt and Weston burst upon the scene, because we both seemed to have “followers”, other young neos who just happened to have arrived at the same time and who also began to write and produce fanzines with scant regard for what had gone before. In Birmingham there was Rog Peyton, Charlie Winstone and Beryl Henley (later Mercer), while on his “side” Platt had Chris Priest, Dick Howett, Graham Hall, Peter White and one or two others who've long since faded away. All is illusion of course in fandom; there never was any united front to do anything in particular, but the very suddenness of this barbarian invasion prompted a wry comment from Walt Willis – and this is where he enters the story.

Walt had recently transferred his long-running column, “The Harp That Once or Twice”, away from the defunct *Warhoon* to a new fanzine, *Quark*, produced by somebody called Tom Perry. Remember him? For a while he was a glittering new star, though he didn't have any staying-power. However, in the June 1964 issue Walt contributed an amusing account of his experiences at the second Peterborough convention.

The piece began as a dream in which Walt was being persecuted by various horrible people, until he burst into tears and stood there in his pyjamas at a room party mumbling incoherently, “I know you all think I'm cold and stand-offish but I'm willing to be friends.”

Walt went on to say that something pretty traumatic must have happened at Easter to have given him a nightmare like that, and in his piece he then went on to describe an encounter with a newcomer at the convention:

“It was abruptly clear to me that he was not a neofan at all, he was a BNF in another fandom. What did that make me and my friends? What had we done?”

“Next morning at the annual general meeting of the BSFA it was quite clear what we had done. British fandom had been worried at the complete absence of channels of recruitment. Deliberately and in cold blood they had started a sercon organisation, sacrificing valuable fanning time to publish a sercon official organ, full of reviews of science fiction; in this bait was embedded a hook consisting of reviews of and reprints from fanzines.

“The policy had been spectacularly successful, because the membership of the BSFA was now in the hundreds and scores of them were at Peterborough. The only trouble was that while they seemed to have eaten the bait and grown fat on it, they had ignored the hook.

“The situation was starkly illustrated at that BSFA meeting after one of the founder members had remarked casually and unguardedly that the purpose of the BSFA was to recruit new members to fandom. A storm of protest made it clear that this was not the purpose of the BSFA at all. Fandom as we knew it was to them a useless excrescence, our fanzines incomprehensible and irrelevant. They were fandom.”

It's a very funny article but there's some bite to it; clearly Walt had been concerned at the lack of understanding which, he at least had detected between the Old and the New. He was among the first to spot the opening-up of this Generation Gap in British fandom and to his great credit he was the first to try and do something positive to close it; all the more unfortunate that the effort ultimately resulted in Walt's own gafiation.

Of course I didn't know anything about all this when Willis wrote to me in a letter dated 2nd April 1964, unsolicited and immediately after Easter, and said:

“I've been thinking over our letters of a while back and our all-too-

brief conversation during the Convention, when you flattered me by remembering the columns I used to do for *Nebula*. Would you like me to do a fanzine review column for *Zenith*?”

At the time I don't suppose the overjoyed young Weston would have stopped to wonder why the Top Fan of the day should want to contribute to a fairly turgid sercon fanzine. Looking back I imagine Walt had been considering the best medium he could use to try and do some bridge-building. It had to be one of the new titles, obviously; anything in an established fanzine would automatically be suspect. Maybe *Alien*? But that probably would have almost dismissed itself with its slant towards films and the macabre and its limited circulation outside Manchester. *Zenith*, with all its crudities, must have looked the best bet. It had a wide distribution, was regular, and the editor seemed to have had at least some previous interest in things fannish. It would have to do.

Although with the benefit of hindsight I beg to differ; I suspect Walt himself fell into the trap of lumping the “New Wave” together, neglecting our own rivalries. For Charles would clearly have regarded the awarding of such a prize as a particularly annoying bit of Weston one-upmanship and thus from the start would be looking for the chance to pounce on anything Willis might say. I'm tempted to suggest Walt would have better furthered his aims by going direct to the heart of the problem, as it were, by offering his column to Charles Platt himself. It would have got him into the walls of the main enemy stronghold and in a good position to whisper words of tolerance directly into Charles' ear.

As it was, Walt chose to spread a little sweetness and light by reviewing Platt's own fanzine in his first installment of the revived “Fanorama”, dated June 1964. It's an excellent review, and here are two snippets:

“The Convention Report is well-written enough to give a vivid mental picture of the reaction of a serious-minded and intelligent newcomer to his first convention, and I found it quite fascinating... not least in its resemblance to my own first convention report. There is the same ambivalent attitude of being in but not part of the Convention, and the same almost defensive readiness to attack what seems to be established authority.”

And in conclusion:

“Older fans cordially welcome fanzines like this, recognising them as essential for the continuation of fandom; it is just that after having published them themselves for years, they are surfeited with science fiction and talk of science fiction, and view these reincarnations of their former selves with a mixture of nostalgia and guilt. Not patronisingly, like students who have graduated, but like pensioners who have already done their part in the propagation of the species.”

Pretty fair, don't you think? Unfortunately it didn't seem to have any effect. Just here my musty file of old letters goes to pieces for a while – either I grew a bit lax in putting things away properly or the rats in the attic have had a field day – so I don't have any record of Platt's reaction. Also, since I was so busy being “formal”, I printed little of the response to Walt's piece in my following issue.

In *Zenith* 6 (September) a similar treatment was given to *Alien*; still it attracted little comment. The storm really broke over the Willis piece in the December issue.

This time Walt chose Beryl Henley's fanzine *Link*, billed as a humorous fanzine. “Unfortunately,” he said, “as it turned out it seemed as far as I was concerned to have one defect which was quite serious for such a publication. It wasn't funny.” He then spent two pages trying to analyse just why Beryl's humour hadn't succeeded for him, in the process demonstrating by example how humour should be treated and giving us some inkling of the efforts Walt had himself made over the previous 15 years of writing for fanzines. Reading it again I wonder whether anyone now would argue with his conclusions, including Beryl; but at the time, well, what faned has ever liked the truth?

Anyway, Beryl wrote to Walt saying how disappointed she was, C. Platt seized the opportunity he had been waiting for to lambast the Evil Willis, and Walt became so depressed by the whole business that in his “Fanorama” column in *Zenith* 8 he did not review any individual title but instead talked about the entire communications breakdown in British fandom:

“One of the reasons ‘Fanorama’ was disinterred from the vaults, is that it seemed to me there were emerging two standards of fanzine reviewing. There have always been two types of fanzines and there is room in fandom for both, but in England last year this looked like being forgotten... Before this situation got any worse I thought

it would be a good thing if someone would try and review both sets of fanzines honestly and objectively, judging them only by the standards of what they set out to achieve, I thought that as someone who had published both types I might make a go of it.

“Now, I’m beginning to wonder. It’s easy to write reviews that are all kindness, if you don’t mind wasting everyone’s time; and it’s easy to write honest reviews, if you don’t care about people’s feelings; but it’s hard to be both honest and kind. Unfortunately I do care about people’s feelings, and I have been brooding quite a bit recently about Beryl Henley, whose indignant letter you’ll find elsewhere in this issue along with ghod knows how many more.”

What was really happening was that some of the fannish newcomers were rather painfully beginning to discover the meaning of Standards: but as I said in my opening remarks the new generation had unfortunately arrived at a time when the overall level of quality and originality had reached an all-time low. Thus poor Walt was acting as mentor but was heavily outnumbered by his pupils and consequently was taking all their chafing and complaining upon his own shoulders.

I sometimes wish I’d helped him more myself than I did. His letters reflect his growing dismay and discouragement; maybe I could have made more positive efforts of my own to reassure him, rather than tattle on about all the picky little feuds that were by this time running between Platt and me. Above all I should not have printed the correspondence between Walt and Charles in the *Zenith* 8 lettercolumn.

It’s a little bit complicated, so follow carefully.

Walt did his final “Fanorama” column in December 1964, which appeared in my February/March issue. After doing the column – and before it was in print – he wrote to Charles privately; Walt sent to me a copy of his letters and of the reply:

“I wrote to Platt more or less asking what was biting him, and the enclosed correspondence resulted. I wouldn’t mind your printing my letter in the correspondence column. Sometimes I feel like writing off our friend as just a contentious little twit, but then again I feel there might be something there... if we can save him before he alienates all fandom. You notice he has already started on the Americans.”

On top of this huge pile of combustible material, Charles then sent me a LoC on the previous issue, and I chose to publish that rather than his private correspondence with Willis:

“Not long ago, and this you are welcome to print, I received a touching letter from good old Walt, saying how much he resented his reputation, how he enjoyed meeting neos at the Con who treated him as an equal, how he wished he could start over again under a pseudonym. Behind this falsest of false modesties however, I see the man has pathetically blatant delusions of grandeur. The superior, talking-down, aren't-I-fabulous first paragraph of 'Fanorama' is simply nauseating. No-one but a famous millionaire author can get away with pseudo-pseudo-muck like this.

“In addition to being an Authority on fanzines (a pretty microscopic field, but no doubt he's proud of it), Willis is an Authority on Humour, it seems. Well, after all, many people in Britain and the USA – perhaps even more than 500 – know about the legendary wit of Willis. So I was on the edge of my chair during his brilliant dissection of the least important piece of Beryl's fanzine. With skill and scalding sarcasm that left me breathless (with fury) Willis expertly tells us what's wrong with an ad lib line mentioned in a fannish description of a slapstick comedy. And then, by casual inference, Willis uses this to damn Beryl, the whole magazine, and all the other contributions in it. Can the inane high-handedness of this inflated-headed bigot be believed?”

And so on. It's all terribly unfair, distorted and deliberately hurtful. Don't forget that Platt wrote the above after having received two conciliatory letters from Willis, thus disposing of my own theory that all we had both needed, in the beginning, was a kindly helping hand. No, Charles had a mental make-up which saw enemies in every shadow, which regarded an offer of truce as an admission of weakness.

Here's Walt's second letter to Platt, actually written some little time before the LoC from which I've quoted above (my goodness, it certainly is complicated, isn't it: I do hope you've followed the trail this far):

“I've thought very carefully about what you say, but I still can't see how I could have expressed my opinions in any way which wouldn't have annoyed you.

“In *Quark*, for instance, I tried to convey the rather rueful amusement some of us older fans felt at suddenly becoming nonentities. This is quite compatible with the relief I felt at being able to attend a convention as an unknown fan. We all have mixed feelings about such things, being human. You for instance seem to regard older fans ambivalently, scorning them at one moment as irrelevant and the next treating them as some sort of established authority which must be challenged.

“I could reconcile myself to either type of hostility but it seems rather unfair to be getting both...

“In the *Link* review I expressed what you must admit to be a legitimate point of view, that here was a promising attempt at humour which failed in the writing, and tried to criticise it in a way which might be helpful. I have as it happens read and thought a great deal about the technique of writing humour but I won't go into that because you would say I was showing-off again. I would just ask you this. Am I not entitled as any fan to try my hand at literary criticism without having my character impugned?

“I would in all sincerity ask you to examine your own attitude with the intellectual honesty I believe you do possess. In particular I ask you to consider whether you might not be projecting your own feelings of hostility into what both of us write. Does it not seem even a little bit strange, for example, that when I attempt a documented piece of analysis of a piece of writing you feel I am being ‘bad-mannered and unkind’; but when you publicly say I have ‘pathetically false delusions of grandeur’ (a statement which you have since admitted was not justified and which incidentally is libellous) you feel this is just your ‘sense of fun’?

“One significant difference is that I criticised a piece of writing, while you criticised a person. Another is the implication that I have no feelings whereas Beryl has. There are others, and they all spring from subconscious assumptions of yours which might bear examination.”

Well, from then onwards it all goes downhill for all parties concerned. The very last letter I have from Walt is dated nearly a year later; it says, “As for the column, I felt less and less that I had anything to say to your readership. Not only had I gone off contemporary English fandom, apart from yourself,

but I no longer read contemporary science fiction.”

Not only had I managed to lose my star columnist but a valued friend had left fandom, making us all the poorer.

edited version of “Slice of Life” column, *Maya* #12/13 (January 1977, ed. Rob Jackson)

38. First Thursday of the Month (1970) Frank Arnold

By 1960 our weekly meetings had been reduced to monthlies. This was not through waning interest or declining numbers – it was merely that weekly attendances had become a bit of a strain, especially for those who had to travel distances; and with inflation now a part of national life, they were rather a strain on pockets as well. Having always met on a Thursday, we decided that the first Thursday of the month was as good as any other, and First Thursday of the month it has been ever since.

The Swingin' Sixties doddled along, and in the middle of them we had our second World Convention, the splendid affair at the Mount Royal Hotel near Marble Arch. All the names I dropped last time came along, accompanied this time by Fred and Carol Pohl, Jack and Blanche Williamson, Poul and Karen Anderson, Bob and Eleanor Bloch, Judith Merrill, Don Wollheim, Hans Stefan Santesson, etcetera, etcetera. John W. Campbell was here again in all his glory as speaker, debater and centre of interest, awards were presented and toasts were drunk. With gatherings at the Globe both before and after the Con, it was as good an international festivity as London has held at any time.

But soon after the Con there came an unhappy surprise – Lew Mordecai was leaving. He confided to a few old cronies that the Globe was a bit too big for him and his family, and after a holiday they were going to find a smaller place. He then gave me the Visitors' Book, and that volume is now one of the proudest possessions in my library.

Lew's departure was the end of an age, we had been meeting at the Globe for twelve years now, I reflected, and the place was world famous. Every SF fan on Earth knew that if he ever came to London there was at least one port of call whence he could find friends and a welcome. He knew when to come too – on the First Thursday of the month. Habit, I mused, is all important: if we go on meeting at the same place and at the same time all the year round, other people will know when and where to find us; and all new faces are as welcome as old faces.

But a new age was beginning and the new landlord, the jovial Eddy O'Reilly, was as good a successor to Lew as we could hope for. Then in December came another surprise, and a much pleasanter one. Two brisk young men, John Pye and Keith Matthew, rolled up from University College, London, and told us of the SF circle they had formed there. Several of us accepted their invitation to go along and speak to their gatherings, and it was refreshing to find another circle of SF interest besides our own. Since then, former University College men have been frequent visitors at the Globe – see what I mean by Younger Generations turning up!!

When I mentioned fans “from all over the world” I did not mean only the English-speaking parts of it. The first Italian visitor was Magda Palmeri, the girl from Rome who was studying English in London. She did not care much for SF but found the fans amusing, and came half a dozen times. Later there arrived Gian Paolo (“John Paul”) Cosseto, the man from Venice, who told us of a flourishing fandom in Italy, with nearly a thousand fans meeting regularly in Venice alone. Other Italian callers, like novelist Antonio Bellomi, have confirmed that SF is a lively branch of modern Italian literature.

Another summer brought three callers from Norway, John Bing, Ulf Rasmussen and Trygve Skanding, the latter a journalist. In the following year John Bing joined the Norwegian Radio, and came back again in August with his partner Tor-Age Bringsvaerd to make recordings of conversation and short talks for his programme.

The first party of fans from West Germany came over for the Worldcon of '57, but it was a couple of years later that Rolf Gammel and Jurgen Kramar, both of Pforzheim (near Stuttgart) arrived at the Globe. These lads were also football fans, I recollect, and I went with them to Stamford Bridge a couple of times, to see Stan Matthews in one game and Bert Trautmann in another. Tom Schluck's signature appears in the Worldcon list of 1965, but it is 1968 before we get the signatures of Klaus Dinges, Molly Auler, Waldemar Kunning, Walter Reinecke, Heinrich Arentz and Gary Klupfel, all in a row. From France came Max Jakubowski, the Parisian journalist who commutes periodically to London, and Jean-Pierre Moumon, the hawk eyed collector who can spot an SF book a mile off. But the native land of Jules Verne is still under-represented in modern fandom.

This unending procession of meetings, these comings and goings from the four corners of the world, have been observed and recognised by the

proprietors of the Globe. They anticipate our coming on First Thursdays, and in unobtrusive ways they put the saloon bar at our disposal and make us welcome. At times, people have asked me, in moments of disgruntlement, why we can't move to some other pub which might be cheaper, or more convenient, or something. I have protested that whatever advantages we might find in another place, there would be corresponding disadvantages; that we have spent all these years in making the Globe a world famous rendezvous, and if we went elsewhere we would have to start the process all over again, from the beginning. So we might just as well stay where we are, in a place where we are known and appreciated.

Which brings up the question: why consult me about it anyway? In recent years, of course, I have been introduced as the man with the Visitors' Book. And older habitués suddenly recall that they have seen my face hanging around the bar for longer than they can remember. "He's as old as the hills", they say, "He knows all about the circle – he's been coming here since the stone age" – or words to that effect. It is true that I am one of the few men from the original Grays Inn Road gang who still turns up regularly, the others being my old mates Ted Tubb and Syd Bounds, but they don't come so often. I have hardly missed a meeting at the White Horse or the Globe since about 1950, so I suppose I can call myself a sort of father of the house, like the old codger in the House of Commons. The Charmed Circle of the Globe has been pretty much a home, family and career to me for most of my adult life: I've been asked to tell this story several times before and will probably have to tell it many times again; for the Circle goes on forever and there will always be new chapters to add to the chronicle.

Cypher #2 (December 1970, ed. James Goddard & Mike Sandow)

39. Aliens of Manchester (1964) **Charles Partington & Harry Nadler**

=====ANNOUNCEMENT=====

The editors of *Alien* are aware of a lack of ACTIVE Sci-Fi interest in the North of England... and especially in the Manchester area. We couldn't join a SF Society if we wanted to... for the simple reason, there isn't one, and hasn't been since the early 1950's... so there is only one course left open to us... form a society of our own.

THE SALFORD SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY is the heading under which the proposed society will be run. We want to have our own headquarters, large enough for magazine production and film making, and for this we ask everyone with a keen interest in SF and Fantasy, who would like to help form a SF group with a difference, to contact us for details of a meeting. The meeting will be to discuss the lines upon which the society will be run. Exactly what these lines will be we cannot tell, yet. But we can be sure of one thing, to be as active a society as the resources of *Alien* and DELTA AMATEUR FILM GROUP will allow....

Alien #8 (April 1964, ed. Harry Nadler and others)

NSFFG: Northern Science Fiction & Fantasy Group, Report One. Charles Partington

The NSFFG was brought into being on Wednesday. 28th April 1964, and like most Societies, Groups and Organisations we had our teething troubles. Some of which are still with us.

The first major problem was finding suitable accommodation. After many days of frantic searching we finally came up with what looked like the ideal place. A large room over a local fish and chip shop. We managed to swing a deal with the proprietor..... and we were in!

This was Heaven, a room of our own and all the fish and chips we could eat.

Came the first meeting... and our first problem. In that entire room there was not one stick of furniture, unless you can count the mantelpiece as such. So we sat around on the floor, using sheets of newspaper to protect us from the hard floorboards. I think I shall have the marks of that particular evening forever impressed upon my memory. Not to be discouraged, we organised a massive search for old chairs and tables. Their condition did not matter, so long as they could be sat in, or played cards on, they would do!

So let the ravages of time do their worst, we bought anything that would make our evenings at the club more comfortable. (Here I would like to make a point to all members. The room still lacks a lampshade, and the sight of that naked bulb staring down at me night after night is, to say the least, very disconcerting. WELL?) Anyway, the furniture began to flow in, all sorts of items that defy any attempt at description. The Secretary (Tom Holt) snapped up each priceless piece... and with a sick smile passed the bill on to our Treasurer (Tony Edwards) who subjected each article to a thorough examination and moaned about the “exorbitant price asked for antique furniture” and something about “they’d seen us coming!” and “What else could you expect in a Capitalistic country?” Still, somehow, we managed to survive the first week, indeed we did quite well for we managed to enlist the help of three new members (all girls) on only our second meeting! The Programme Sec., whom most of you know as Harry Nadler, lost no time in producing a detailed programme for the first month, including a weekly film show. Again, for about the sixth time the Treasurer disowned the NSFFG, but after a couple of beers and a few well chosen phrases we managed to make him see the “picture” as it were. The film shows went down very well and below you can see some of the titles we have shown during the past month.

The Creature from the Black Lagoon, The Lost World, Nosferatu, Bride of Frankenstein, The Mummy and so on. Our shows have been restricted to silent 8mm, but we are now moving onto sound and have booked the 16mm. version of *Rocket Ship X.M. and Flash Gordon and Escape Into Time*, for showing on the 26th of June 1964, and any reader of *Alien* who would like to come along can be sure of being made welcome.

On the 28th May we all paid a visit to Stockport Cine Society and entered three of our films in the annual competition. *Frankenstein's Xperiment* one of the films we made for the B.S.F.A. Convention was

awarded a cup for the “best story”, and it now graces a place of importance on the club room’s mantelpiece. Another bright idea that some member suggested was a wall identification chart, namely, a photo of each member (so that he or she can be recognised by a new member) and a small history of said person underneath.

Needless to say, it was soon given the nickname of “Rogues Gallery”.

Our room is now beginning to look like a sci-fi club room should. On the walls are hung pieces of artwork and original front covers, and what with a duplicator, a battery of typewriters, and God knows how much cine equipment, we are, at last, beginning to feel settled

Alien #9 (June 1964, ed. Harry Nadler and others)

NSFFG: Northern Science Fiction & Fantasy Group, Report Two. Charles Partington

I ended off the last report with the words, “just beginning to feel settled in.” I was of course alluding to our new club room, the one over the local fish and chip shop. Well we no longer occupy it. We have moved to a much more central position, almost in the heart of Manchester.

The new room, although smaller in actual size than the old, is in some ways more preferable. Firstly, we can use it any night of the week we wish, with no extra charge. A big thing in its favour (or so our Treasurer informs us). Secondly, we have our own key and can enter the room any time of the day or night. There was a plan put forward that we all live in, and therefore save fantastic amounts of cash with which to do things.... We never did find out exactly what, but the idea came to nothing anyway. And besides Ma is still the best cook!

However, before we moved out of our old clubroom, we did in fact take a great stride forward in progress and comfort. Yes, a member of the NSFFG Joyce Tarrent (long may her name be remembered) actually read the last report and delivered to our door a lampshade... EUREKA.... Now that’s what I call progress. Unfortunately, it took me the best part of three quarters of an hour to put the darn thing up. Still considering that the rest of the mob were hampering my efforts with their own style of cheering, laughing, and other verbal forms of encouragement that will not be mentioned here, I don’t think

I did too badly. Then just when I was relaxing in the glow of a good job well done, and that of the bulb in its lampshade, when in walks the Secretary who informs us, and I quote, “Right lads, we have a new club-room and we’re moving tonight!” Well I ask you.

We are still decorating the room with artwork and such taken from the walls of the old room. But our biggest problem, that of moving the furniture, was solved by the aid of two keen members and their vans. Thanks a million lads.

Alien #10 (August 1964, ed. Harry Nadler and others)

DSFFG: Delta Science Fantasy Film Group, Report Three. Harry Nadler

Yes, you read the heading correctly, that IS a letter “D” on the front end of our initials. Y’see, it went like this... We got to having one of our Monthly General Meetings and discussions were abounding as always. Then someone brought up THE point. Although we were running along quite happily under the heading of the NSFFG, showing films on Friday evenings, helping the *Alien* lot to assemble the magazine when it was ready, and of course scripting and shooting films, there was very little done that a science fiction group would be expected to do. No one used the library more than once a month, no one talked SF other than the... “did you read so and so in *Amazing?*”, in fact SF films were nearly always the most talked about subjects. Someone also pointed out that the Delta group and the NSFFG were almost one and the same thing, so what was the point of it running a “Ghost” group... all the members of the NSFFG were more interested in producing SF-ish films than anything else.

The decision was reached and Delta’s name took over that first letter, making the group the Delta Science Fantasy Film Group.

Everyone seems happy with the new arrangement, for apart from the title change there has been no other drastic alterations.

Chairman Chuck Partington however, has taken a rest and Tony the Edwards combined his treasurer’s job with that of Chairman. On the grounds of “If he can do two jobs – so can I...” Harry (Yours truly) Nadler has merged Programme Sec with Secretary and taken on the job of writing up reports for

Alien in the process. (Somehow I think I was tricked, I'm sure I can recall the Chairman doing this last time.)

Anyhow, after explaining what is what, on with the reporting. Two new members have arrived in the form of Peter Day and Bill Burns. We hope they can stick it out with us, but anyone who gets through the first week usually stays.

Alien #11 (October 1964, ed. Harry Nadler and others)

40. The London Club House (1964) Charles Platt

:: Not So Much a Dissolution, More A Way Of Life ::

For a long time (and this is, of course, purely my own personal opinion, as are all the other statements in this article that aren't direct quotes), Ella Parker's Friday meetings had been going down hill. The departure of the Kingdon Road mob prefaced a sad, inevitable trend. Some of the old regulars kept turning up every week – Ted Forsyth, Jim Groves, Desmond Squires, Peter Mabey, Norman Sherlock – but they contributed little, and did nothing to fill the gap left by the lagging attendance of people like Arthur Thomson and Pat Kearney.

A lot of new faces appeared: Peter White, myself, Terry Pratchett, Dave Busby, David Orme, Steve Moore; and the net result of all this was that the character of the meetings changed in two ways. Not only were they less lively, but the new faces were not old acquaintances of Ella Parker, were not interested, really, in discussions with older fans. Perhaps a little anti-socially, they preferred to use the Ella Parker meetings more as their own meeting place, and talk mainly amongst themselves. Bearing in mind the differences in fannish background and interests between newcomers and their hostess, this attitude cannot be wholly condemned, and generally the newcomers returned all gestures of hospitality or friendship extended to them.

Nevertheless, the change in character of the meetings must have influenced Ella Parker in her decision to put an end to them, with the added excuse that there was being too much damage caused. (A rather pathetic accusation: serving the quantity of tea and coffee, in red hot cups filled to the brim, that Ella Parker does, inevitably a small spillage will occur sooner or later). The date of the final meeting was fixed, and, because it was clear that no one fancied the alternative suggested of meeting in a hall at the bottom of Ella Parker's block of flats on a different weekday, a search was begun for a

proper club room.

The search for accommodation took five weeks and was the work of Lang Jones and Mike Moorcock. They spent a very large total sum of money on tube fares and advertising papers, and devoted considerable time to following up possibilities. As far as I know few if any people offered to help, and no one thanked them for their trouble.

In five weeks they discovered that for a small unfurnished room such as was required, agents were useless, and that the only answer was to study classified advertisements and newsagents' windows. Finally they came across the House.

It had basement, ground floor and two upper stories, with one room on each floor, plus a kitchen and lavatory. The rent was £4 a week, paid quarterly in advance, exclusive of rates, heating, etc. The occupier had to commit himself to paying the rent for 3 years.

There was a heady feeling of wild, exuberant enthusiasm at the Ella Parker meeting when the news was announced. London fandom, it seemed, was going to be united. Or was it?

By a strange off-chance, (perhaps Fate would be a better word), grand old fan Ted Tubb had happened to turn up. Apparently oblivious of the obvious connotations between the establishment of the club house and the establishment of the BSFA, he attempted, with quite a large degree of success, to take over command of the project. Seating himself before the legendary Ella Parker typewriter, the renowned author proceeded to hammer out a Club House Circular. It was full of wild claims, extravagant aims, distortion of facts. It was in some cases deliberately misleading. Mr Tubb spoke at length to the meeting of how easy it would be to finance the Club House Project (wasn't there, he confided, £230 left in the London Circle Funds??), how he'd put £210 into it himself, how Norman Sherlock was going to sell his motor scooter... I myself, I seem to remember, was so overcome by it all I offered to put in the money I got from selling two pianos. A committee was formed on the spot. As an afterthought, Lang Jones was invited in on it since hadn't he done some of the initial work, or something?

Of course, Ted Tubb wasn't the only disruptive element at that meeting. There were the usual platitudes from Norman Sherlock, the irrelevant discursions of Jim Groves, the tepid cynical sneering of Desmond Squires. Even after the Ted Tubb original circular had been denuded of some of its more extravagant claims, it was still not quite what Lang Jones or certain

other people on the “committee” had at first envisaged. In fact several people, on receiving it, thought it was a joke.

I duplicated 120 copies of the circular the next day, and sent them off to addresses culled from Ron Bennett’s Fan Directory and my own address book. I paid for the paper, ink and postage myself. It had struck me as being a little peculiar that I was the only volunteer to do the duplicating, especially bearing in mind the enthusiasm that had been expressed the previous night, but at the time this fact didn’t seem at all significant.

The next Friday, Miss Ella Parker told me off severely in her best schoolmistress fashion for not sending Des Squires a circular. She made it sound like an accusation that I had deliberately ignored the poor fellow. Somewhat taken aback at this unexpected and spontaneous vote of thanks at my spending four hours of my time on the Club House project, I pointed out that I couldn’t send circulars to people whose addresses I didn’t possess. This fact was grudgingly ignored, and Ella showed once again that she can’t even climb down gracefully.

I was beginning to learn more of London fandom.

During the next three or four weeks, Mike Moorcock made few appearances at Ella Parker meetings, and responded vaguely if at all to letters I sent enquiring about the project. At the meetings I was surprised to find general declining interest; I was the only person to ask about the developments regarding the club house, and the topic of conversation was soon dropped. This and the fact that Mike had declined to accept the money contributions of London fans present seemed to indicate that something had gone wrong.

Suspicious were confirmed when we were told that Mike hadn’t received sufficient response for him to feel happy about committing himself to that three year lease. He wanted about 35 donations before going ahead. We would have to send out some more circulars. This time, I was unable to do the work (and unwilling, after Ella’s response to the first lot), and there was a stony silence as all the big-hearted London fans sat fidgeting and hoping someone else would offer. In the end I typed the circular there and then, Ella ran it off on her duplicator, and we addressed them together. I was beginning to learn even more of London fandom.

A few more weeks passed.

I went to a meeting and found Ted Tubb there. Again, purely by chance, he had arrived at a significant point in the project; in this case, the end of it.

His outlook was completely reversed; this was the depressed, fed-up, bored, unconstructive Mr Tubb who wasted no time in communicating his feelings to everyone else. After a preliminary pessimistic warm-up, in which he and Ella Parker agreed that TAFF was doomed and that Group '65 was hopelessly impractical and therefore deserved no further contributions ("What's a shilling against a hundred quid?"), some other people arrived and we learned that because Mike Moorcock was unwilling to take on the responsibility the Club House project was officially over. We added the number of people in the room willing to contribute to the number of others who already had and came up with 28. At least half of the contributions had come from outside London.

"Ah well, that's that, then," said jocular Jim Groves, who can always be counted on for a reassuring platitude in times of stress. The drones commiserated with each other for a while over the project, suggesting possible reasons for its downfall ("It was hopelessly impractical," said Ted Tubb) and then forgot about it and talked of other things. Peter White and myself left in disgust. Somehow the whole meeting had been a pantomime, with each person there over-playing his characteristic words and actions to the point of caricature and farce. It was the first meeting Peter had attended for about a month. He didn't feel like going to any more.

There is something wrong with London. In the same way that there is no corporate feeling or affection for their city amongst Londoners, most fans care little for their society, as a whole. (Compare this to Liverpool and the LiG). If London fans weep, it is crocodile tears; if they help, it is by cheering someone on; if they support, it is with words, at the most money, but never by devoting time.

Even in the exceptions, like Mike Moorcock and Lang Jones, who generate intense enthusiasm for a project and spend time and money on it, there is something wrong. Why, for example, did Lang sit in (bemused? resentful?) silence during the wild meeting when Ted Tubb took over and the project was lifted out of his hands? Where did Mike's vast enthusiasm disappear to, and why? At the beginning, he was talking of taking a 7 year lease (we could always sub-let the property, it was worth far more than £4 a week), of how easily it could be furnished... and at the end, he seemed to have lost interest, continuing the project more out of duty than anything else.

Lang has suggested that when one has enough fans all in one place a "critical mass" is reached, followed by successive splits and feuds. Yet while

this may explain the fragmentation of London fandom, it doesn't explain the death of the Club House. The only answer lies in the character of London fans themselves, and always has done. One remembers Archie Mercer's reaction to London, and Vince Clarke's efforts to collect support for a club room.

Steve Moore, significantly the newest and youngest regular Ella Parker meeting-attendee, is the only one to have offered to perpetuate the meetings at his home. He lives at Woolwich, which is far enough away for London fans to complain about the distance and not bother to attend.

I looked around for a club room for a while, since no one else was going to, but, even though I found several promising hunting grounds, I decided there was little point in keeping together a group that was determined to fall apart.

What's the answer? As far as I can see, we need a fresh start. The prospect of having Friday meetings at a different place and seeing all the old dull faces gathered inanely together as usual is unbearable. So all I'll say is that, next February, when I'm established sharing a flat with some friends, anyone who cares to drop in on a Friday night will find me at home. If this builds into anything, fine. If it doesn't, there's no real loss; the greatest tragedy of all is that with the character of London fans, even if we did have a club house, there'd be no one willing to live there and help with the rent, no one willing to spend time decorating it, no one willing to donate furniture, and only a hard core of fans willing to support it at all.

What's the matter with people?

It's a bloody shame.

Garbistan #1 (December 1964, ed. Charles Platt)

41. The BAD Group (1967, 1991)

Various

i) BAD Beginnings

Tony Walsh

As a stripped-down, basic fact, the BAD Group came into existence on September 25th, 1965. At 9.p.m., to be precise, when the mob in the lounge of 61 Halsbury Road became, temporarily at least, an orderly meeting. Order lasted long enough to vote in a few rules, agree on a sub, and plan a party. What I thought a good omen was that both cohesion and business in hand lasted about the same time; a rare thing in fandom.

Not a night of mighty portent for the world, or even fandom, come to that, but I derived a good degree of satisfaction from it, for behind that stripped-down, basic fact was an ambition that had been frustrated far too long.

Ever since events had forced me to leave Cheltenham in 1960 I had hankered after regular lumps of fannish company. Conventions and fannish parties were not frequent enough for my liking. In fact my craving had, at one time, caused me to spend a holiday looking for a job in Liverpool. So when Simone and I settled into M & M (Marriage and Mortgage) in Bristol joining a group was an obvious step.

Archie had been in Bristol for three years before we made a landfall here, but had made very little contact with Bristolian fans simply because there weren't any (even now there's only one, and he's in Warwick!). Simone and I used to drop in on our way to and from Bridgwater which, I suppose, extends the group's history backwards a little, but they were not real meetings with subs and arguments and such. We three had naturally talked of starting a group, and when fortune slotted me into my niche with the Water Company, plans were plotted and quickly realised.

We invited the one Bristolian that Archie had contacted, some Air Force apprentices from nearby Locking, and lots of Cheltenham S.F. Circlers. Fourteen fans, neo and other, were at that first meeting, the atmosphere was informal, with people and bottles sitting easily on the carpet (we hadn't many

chairs), and as a launching it was enjoyable.

Of the fans who continued to attend subsequent meetings only Archie, Beryl, Simone and I are still attending. It was realised at the time that keeping up numbers would be the priority problem, and so we began to advertise our existence wherever we could do so cheaply. So, when the apprentices were posted away, membership was kept up by the new recruits. At present we have about a dozen regular attendees, and the number seems to be stuck around that level. Mainly because of the student portion who eventually pass on to other places. Bristolians just do not seem to be fannish types, the only two who ever followed up the ad in *New Worlds* never came back after the first visit. Alan Chorley, who attended every meeting from the start was the only local among us and now he has gone to University in Warwick.

It has been said that we are too inactive, and it is probably true. But it is difficult to plan any consistent activity when half the membership is away at vacation time. Nor have we the money. These two factors became obvious when we entered the mad world of amateur films. We had to buy cheap equipment which limited our scope, and planning scene-shooting was difficult because we never knew who would be present.

But despite the lack of definite activities the group does not appear about to collapse. The relaxed fortnightly meetings seem to be enough, for the moment at least. Perhaps sometime soon a new member will walk in and organise us into some thing dynamic, who knows? I for one would not object.

Anyway, we have got our Fan-Fawkes tradition launched, and if I have my way it'll be traditionally observed for a long time. So if you're over wandering in the West on Guy Fawkes Night, there is always a welcome.

Badinage #1 (February 1967, ed. Graham Boak)

ii) I've Got It – BAD! **Beryl Mercer**

In *Badinage* #1, Rob Johnson reported that “we voted Gray Boak editor while he wasn't looking.” I was looking, all right, when I was voted the new Chairman of the BAD Group – looking at a number of determined faces which obviously weren't going to take “No” for an answer...

“Archie...” I began weakly. “No,” he retaliated promptly, “I can't, I'm already Treasurer.” I bowed, as the saying says, to the inevitable.

After all, it's only fair. Tony and Simone have held meetings and mad parties in their home for around two years, and now that Archie and I have acquired the basement room of these premises, we are in a position to hold meetings without causing too much disturbance to our upstairs neighbours. Mind you, it's a rather small room; any meeting which is better-attended than usual is liable to find itself being conducted on two levels. There'll be some fans downstairs drinking and chatting, and others upstairs (directly above the basement room) playing records and inspecting the books and fanzines.

And when the Hampton party leaves in the Bond, Archie and I switch off all the lights, dash into the bedroom, and pretend that we're in bed and don't know a thing about the appalling row that's going on out in the street

Last Saturday (May 6th), the meeting split into two groups, as described above. The upstairs group, comprising Gray Boak, Brian Hampton, Peter Furness, Rob Johnson and myself, were listening to a Beatles' LP (*Hard Day's Night*). Brian suddenly decided, for no apparent reason – unless it was to terrify those who were under his feet – to jump up and down. The needle, infected by this fannish drollery, jumped on the record. Gray went to put it back again – and found that it had leaped nearly two tracks so Sarah, who was commuting between floors, then decided that she, too, wanted to jump – but she is slightly smaller than Brian, and the needle hopped only half a track.

Some of the members, when apprised of the change of venue and reins-holding, thought that Tony and Simone were gafiating. This is emphatically not true. Ser Anthony de Walshe, Knight of the Most Noble and Illustrious Order of St. Fantony, could not have been thus dubbed were he not a Trufan. Fannish corpuscles dance through his veins; the fannish spirit is distilled in his home-brewed wine and beer.

Recently I have been trying to persuade one of my work-mates – an 18 year-old youth who reads, among other things, EFR – to come to a meeting. “What do you do at these meetings?” he asked, not unreasonably.

“Er...” I replied brilliantly. How was I supposed to answer that? We talk about all kinds of things; we drink, we utter menacing threats to force somebody to go out and buy fish-and-chip suppers for everybody; we dream up wild schemes for *Badinage* – such as FATS; Gray pleads with everybody to go and see *Grand Prix*; Brian bemoans the latest catastrophe to the Bond; Sarah pinches her finger in the door and has to be comforted; I make and dispense a gallon of coffee; Archie drags subs out of unwilling pockets; somebody says, “Where is Charles Weaver / Jon-and-Bryn / Doug Edwards /

Dave Bailes tonight?” – and anybody who’s ever been to an informal meeting of any SF group, anywhere, will know how it goes.

And to anybody who *hasn’t* been to such a meeting, I’ll say what I finally said to my young colleague:

“Well, why don’t you come along and find out?”

He didn’t, though. At least, he hasn’t yet. Has anyone out there any ideas about attracting new talent to our group?

On second thoughts, perhaps you’d better not bother. After all, it is a very small room....

Badinage #2 (June 1967, ed. Graham Boak)

iii) Peter Roberts:

In 1967, I was still at school when I first knocked on the door of Archie & Beryl Mercer’s Bedminster basement flat and asked for the BAD SF Group. It was an archetypal First Contact story. An explorer mystified by alien beings... then gradually and insidiously being taken over by them.

I suspect that the ’67 Eastercon had been the high point of BAD Group activity. The fanzine, *Badinage*, was less than memorable... but as Arnie Katz said in a LoC, British fandom was at such a low point that it was a question of going from BAD to worse.

Group meetings alternated between the Walshes and the Mercers, and were inclined to be rather quiet... unless there were visitors from out of town, which there often were. The group packed up around September 1968, when Gray Boak left Bristol University and I left to go off to Keele. Thereafter, the few remaining fans in Bristol (including me, during university holidays) met together occasionally, mainly when overseas visitors were around: Bruce Pelz, Elliot Shorter, Ron Clarke, Masha Brown, Waldemar Kumming, Ed Reed, are a few I recall. By 1973, year of the Bristol OMPAcon, there were no fans left in Bristol at all.

(Letter to Rob Hansen, 18 August 1991)

42. SADO, the BSFG, and the Aston Group (1968, 1986) Darroll Pardoe and Peter Weston

Darroll Pardoe:

Towards the end of 1964 I started working for a PhD at Birmingham University and since this meant I was in Birmingham on a daily basis I became for the first time an active member of the BSFG – the original Birmingham Group, the Ancient Brummies. At the time the Group used to meet in Charlie Winstone's house in Erdington, where we crammed into the front room to play chess, read the latest fanzines and back issues of *Playboy*, and plot the destiny of fandom. We used to pay sixpence a meeting in subs to Charlie's mum for tea and biscuits. It all sounds rather homely, but in truth this was an organisation at the very centre of fandom in Britain. It was organising an Eastercon, and had taken over the direction both of the BSFA and of the only indigenous APA of those days, OMPA. I'd seen the rise to greatness of the Birmingham SF Group only from a distance and by the time I came to participate in person the Group was beginning its slow but inexorable decline, later hastened by the decision (which at the time seemed reasonable enough) to meet in a pub, the Old Contemptibles by Snow Hill Station. It all ended at a final meeting in 1967, attended only by Martin Pitt and myself, where we formally declared the BSFG extinct.

So there I was at the death, but in a way I saw how it all started too. To explain that I need to talk about SADO, the Stourbridge & District Science Fiction Circle. You wouldn't expect a little place like Stourbridge to have a thriving and dynamic SF group, and indeed there were never more than a handful of members – the formal existence of the organisation spanned only a couple of years. But SADO had an influence on the development of fandom in this country strangely disproportionate to its size. In the beginning it consisted of Ken Cheslin and a couple of his friends who'd walked into the 1959 Eastercon, which was held in the Imperial Hotel in Birmingham, a venue which in later years became all too familiar to fandom at large, but

which in 1959 was hosting its first convention. Ken and his mates became wildly enthusiastic about fandom and forthwith constituted themselves a local group and began to plan a fanzine. Nothing unusual so far, but in an attempt to broaden the membership Ken placed a small-ad in a prozine, *New Worlds*, which trawled in Dave Hale and myself. At that time Dave and I were eager devourers of all the SF we could lay our hands on, Badger Books and all, but in no way could we be called fans. So imagine our surprise when we opened up the new issue of *New Worlds* and saw Ken's ad. An SF group on our doorstep! (Ken lived, in fact, a mere half mile from Dave and I).

I can't remember what sort of animal we expected a science fiction circle to be – a kind of small-scale learned society, perhaps – but we got in touch with Ken and were immediately sucked into the mad world of fandom. In 1961 I went off to university and for the next three years played only a small role in Stourbridge activities, but as SADO faded the publishing team of Hale and Cheslin rose to prominence with *Les Spinge*, a blockbuster fanzine whose climb to glory culminated in the massive "Black *Spinge*", for which staples were quite inadequate: Ken Cheslin's Black & Decker was requisitioned to drill holes in the copies for heavy duty clamps! That last *Spinge* was a roll-call of British fandom – practically everyone who was then active could be found within its pages, and it finished Dave. He married soon after and disappeared from fandom for ever. But for four years or so, Stourbridge and Dave Hale were familiar names in fandom at large, and this was one way in which the old SADO had achieved a more than local significance, albeit mostly after its formal demise.

But I think there was a second and more important way in which Stourbridge fandom influenced the development and destiny of fandom in general. In the early sixties we in Stourbridge started to get visits from Birmingham people – people like Rog Peyton and Peter Weston, who nowadays are pretty well-known but then were fresh-faced young lads in their first encounter with fandom. The SADO firework party of November 1960 was a particularly seminal occasion. In no time at all, it seemed, the Brummies had gone off and done their own thing in the shape of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group. SADO was the seed which sparked the greater Brum Group into being, and helped it along by continuity and guidance in the shape of Ken Cheslin, who became a sort of father-confessor or guru to the new organisation. For a while, the BSFG was where it was all happening. Members came in to meetings from as far away as Banbury and

Lincolnshire; the Group maintained a regular presence at the Globe; its members ran the BSFA, OMPA and eventually the Eastercon. But of course it couldn't last.

BSFG Fifteencon Souvenir Book (1986)

Peter Weston:

I was joking, I thought, when I said last issue that Bob Rickard was the man who would, one day, revive the Birmingham Science Fiction Group.

It was therefore a little unsettling to find that he had actually done something about it (people aren't *like* that in fandom). The Group is not really the old Brum circle under new management, but is a sort of college – or university – discussion club. That is, Bob being a post-graduate student in Industrial Design at the University of Aston (yes... we have a number of Universities in Birmingham), he was able to attract the interest of a number of fellow students.

I've been along to a couple of meetings and was impressed to see how many were interested. Last week there were about 17-18 people sitting around talking science fiction. And things were never like this in my day. Rather than meet in draughty pubs under the nose of hostile landlords, or in the front rooms of members' homes, this lot use a ritzy lounge in the Students Union. There is a bar provided, comfortable chairs, warmth, privacy, and even a grant of £50 from the college!

Needless to say, this is the way to do things. But then, the other day a new chap came along and sat down for a while among the circle of chairs, and then said plaintively, "Well... now what do we do?" So it was explained to him that now we don't do anything except sit and talk about science fiction. And he pulled a face.

You know, I think this is a basic trouble with SF Groups. There's not much, on the face of it, that you can do except sit around and talk about stories which half of the others haven't read anyway. And I suspect this will pall after a couple of weeks. What is needed, I fear, is a spark of dynamic management and a lot of bullying.

Well, it's easy to talk and even easier to moan. So I sat and thought about the Problems of Science Fiction Groups, and came up with some suggestions. Please either use them, ignore them, or shoot them full of holes.

To begin with, a group needs a committee and an organisation, and a

strong chairman. A meeting should begin at a set time, and begin with a formal sort of opening – chairman (and others?) facing the group, behind a table or whatever. The idea is for some item of programme to be introduced. This is important – my idea is that a group should not just *sit* there!

An item of programme.... so easy to say, but what can it be? Well, speakers are always a good idea. In London, there are lots of people who might be approached – elsewhere there are difficulties. But still, a guest (author, critic, etc) might be invited. Or a discussion panel can be arranged, two or three members to discuss a book, author, theme... with lots of audience participation encouraged as much as possible. Or a film show. There's plenty of scope for ideas.

To be fair, this new Birmingham concern is finding its feet – and they have started to prepare a programme. (Each item, by the way, need not be long – the meeting can collapse into friendly chatter after half an hour or so, but formality does give a sense of *purpose* to an evening!) Other things that a group can do include starting a library, or a club magazine. Or, as the highly successful and active Manchester people have proved, amateur films are another good medium of activity. All these things give members an objective, and common interest.

These are my opinions, anyway. Obviously they apply to a science fiction club rather than a straight fan club. These opinions have been shaped, to a very large part, by experience in the Young Conservatives, where similar small groups of young people manage successfully with such formalities. Nothing is more miserable than a Y.C. meeting without a programme item.

But then, the Birmingham people don't really need my advice – I'm just a strange sort of visitor, an outsider who gives away lots of strange and incomprehensible duplicated magazines. As I say, they are working on a library, and have already contacted similar groups in other cities. I gather there are such societies in London, Oxford, and certainly in Manchester. The latter is reported to have 70 paid-up members, although these break down into 5 fans and 65 book-borrowers. Perhaps the BSFA could take it upon itself to encourage the formation of such groups at other Universities and colleges?

The Speculator at Large (Speculation, 27 January 1968, ed Peter Weston)

43. Back to the Roots (1976)

Peter Roberts

Eight years ago, just before Easter, I painfully and laboriously cranked out copies of *Mor-Farch* ready to be distributed at the Buxton Thirdmancon – my first fanzine, my first convention. It seems a hell of a long time ago now. Damn it, it is a long time ago. There's a nostalgic haze hanging over those days and I must confess my memory is muddled and vague. No matter; don't dispute the facts – I'll just tell it like it probably was.

First things first. I joined the BSFA back in 1966 and did little for a year or so, except organise a school sf society which might well hold some record for least-known sf group. We didn't do much; for a fee, members borrowed my books and read my copies of *Vector*. I didn't realize it then, but with a couple of dozen paid-up members the Clifton College Science Fiction Society was probably the largest fan group in Britain at the time. Hoo. Anyway, a year later I contacted the much smaller Bristol and District Group and started going to meetings. I remember I used to go straight from school during the first few months; a withdrawn figure, keeping to the corners, as silent as the grave, and wearing a nice grey suit – every inch the young businessman. Hardly anyone noticed me – just like at school. Then came the long-awaited release from the institution, and I decided I'd had enough of my drab, conservative existence. The first BaD Group meeting afterwards I went dressed in salmon-pink jeans, orange pajama jacket (embellished with dragons), fake rabbit-fur waistcoat, and a Yugoslav fez. Beryl Mercer called me an exhibitionist. It was a good meeting.

But back to fanzines. The Bristol Group occupied itself at that time with gossip, fannish visitors, the local chippie, and *Badinage*. I was given a copy of the second issue of this group fanzine when I first arrived, and watched in mixed awe and amazement as the third issue took form and finally appeared. With equal fascination I watched the incoming reaction. I still carry a clear picture of Gray Boak arriving at a meeting, seizing upon a copy of *Haverings*, tearing it open, and fearfully announcing "Let's see what Ethel has to say!" Fanediting seemed a grim and impressive job. There were locs too which were passed around, and fanzines in exchange. Fascinating. I read

my way through Archie Mercer's vast fanzine collection, even bought (by weight) stacks of old OMPazines from him, and thus gradually became immersed in the culture.

Meanwhile I was trying to get out of my shell and was writing to various people mentioned in the BSFA Bulletin's "Correspondents Wanted" column. Among them was Anne Gill who was already writing to a Welsh youth and neofan called Gregory Pickersgill. Ah, unkind fate, how strange.... Somehow Anne must have become confused about *Badinage*, because one day out of the blue a packet of manuscripts arrived from Pembrokeshire – articles, poems, fiction, even artwork – with a note saying "I understand you're intending to start a fanzine..."

Well, nobody told me.

I don't know what happened next. Really, I can't remember. The next thing I recall was buying a duplicator and soliciting contributions from members of the BaD Group and mundane friends. It's strange; an odd thing to forget. How did this? God only knows. It's missing, links like this that confirm my solipsist fear that the past is all faked, just a set of fictional memories planted on me yesterday – by an unimaginative hack-writer, at that.

The duplicator is real enough, though. I've still got it. £15 worth of ink-stained machinery lovingly known as a Gestetner 120 and formerly the property of Chippenham Dogs' Home. I watched it at work, brought it home, and then tried to operate it myself on the monkey-see, monkey-do principle. Yeah, well – clever little sods, monkeys.

It worked eventually, after a fashion. Keith Walker would have approved of the results – several lines were legible.

Surprisingly I was undeterred, and the fanzine began to take shape. Being utterly and unusually methodical we started with the cover. Who's we? Well, at that time I was working as a wages clerk and with me was an art student, Roger Woods. We talked a lot about The Fanzine, mostly out of boredom, and did a lot of ambitious planning. The cover was going to be pretty damn good – a Victorian illustration of walrus, cherubs, and fancy scrollwork, with a Gothic title in white, all on grey art paper. Roger did the drawing, I bought the paper and white ink. Right, you guessed. I've still got that expensive paper and dried-up tube of ink somewhere; musty mementoes of past dreams. We gave it a try, of course, but each page took about an hour's work and the result was dismally indifferent. So perish all grand ideas.

I think the title came from the cover. That's my excuse anyway. I

certainly remember spending lunch-hours in Bristol Public Library looking up “walrus” in various languages. I finally chose the Welsh version, more out of sentiment than sense, since no-one could pronounce the wretched thing. *Mor-Farch* – I suppose it was distinctive, in a clumsy sort of way.

Anyway, as to the contents of that first issue; they were an odd mixture of items – a few things I’d planned beforehand, a few pieces I’d solicited, a selection from the Pickersgill manuscript bank (I’ll print the rest of them someday if he ever gets uppity), plus a number of reviews and fillers. Don’t worry, I won’t go into every grubby detail – after all this time it’s a bit unsavoury to recall, for example, goshwow reviews of Eric Frank Russell space opera. Let’s leave some of the shabbier aspects of the past in peace and just unearth the worthier material. Yes; there was some. A piece called “The Unnatural Numbers”, for example, a strange fantasy of mathematics by Rob Johnson. Now there’s a fine writer lost to fandom, and an exuberant character too – the famous mad gibberer of Bristol fandom and sometime editor of *Badinage*. Gone. Gafiated. Whisked away by his five sisters (or was it six, he could never remember himself). And whatever happened to Greg Pickersgill? The original 1968 Welsh version, not your modern London fan of latterday wit and myth. Greg wrote fiction then, along with most British fanwriters – not as sercon as Gray Boak’s, not as abrasive as Bryn Fortey’s, not as promising as Chris Priest’s, but strange, lunatic stuff like “Smiths Burst”, a bizarre mixture of J.G. Ballard and Ronald Searle. And what else? A shrill editorial, on censorship, Gray Boak’s “The Delazny Intersection”, a checklist of *Impulse*, a short story by Tony Cottrell, best forgotten (though I hear he’s an up and coming theatre director nowadays) – remember, you heard of him first in *Mor-Farch*, and “The Lurker In The Loo”, a Lovecraft parody of mine which I’m still quite fond of. As far as illustrations went, Roger Woods did the cover and a rather grand illo for “The Lurker”, and I did the rest. Yes, me. Actually I started in fandom as an illustrator, though I’ve hardly advertised the fact, and my first fanac was a blotchy set of hand-cut drawings specially duplicated in a limited edition of three. I took them along proudly to a BaD Group meeting where they were completely ignored. Not at all put out by this I cut a few more for the first *Mor-Farch* and had some other drawings electrostencilled for later use. These were also ignored. The message got through to me; sic transit. Peter Roberts, fanartist.

The reaction to all this? Pretty good, as I recall; Ethel Lindsay liked the fanzine, as did Charles Platt. That’s what you call broad spectrum appeal – in

fact I could've been everybody's new protege if I'd played my cards right. So it goes. Others liked it too; "Much better than the majority of fanzines available at the same time, eg *Ruffcut*; *Son of New Futurian*, and even *Freewheelin'*." (Credit to Graham Boak for that all-time back-handed compliment, which I've only just noticed. I hope the mongs get you, Boak.)

Of course, you've got to remember that *Mor-Farch* appeared at a time of utter depression in British fanzines. After several years the Printing and Distributing Service was on its last legs and only the worst of the PaDszines were still kicking feebly. *Speculation* and *Phile* were the British fanzines at that time, easily the ones that most impressed me. Others? Well, the review column in *Mor-Farch* 1 lists *Oz*, *Ruffcut*, *Badinage*, and a German fanzine, Tom Schluck's *Sol* (worth a mention since it was the earliest fanzine in which my name appeared – Peter's first egoboo...). Beyond that there must have been *Erg* and *Scottishe*, and a handful of PaDszines and OMPAzines (*Xeron*, *Crabapple*, *Relativity?*). Well, anyway, quite honestly there wasn't much competition, even for a newcomer. Pity the neofans of today putting out their first issues – in 1968 a new British fanzine was an event in itself. Mind you, there weren't many readers then either – and most of them were sercons of the first order or PaDsziners doing their own incestuous thing. For nostalgia's sake let's look at the letter column of *Mor-Farch* 2 to see who read that first issue; Gray Boak, Graham Charnock, Bryn Fortey, Anne Gill, Graham Hall, Brian Hampton, Phil Harbottle, Poj Hough, Richard Labonte (Christ, did I send any abroad?), Barbara Mace, Jack Marsh, Archie Mercer, Hartley Patterson, Greg Pickersgill, Charles Platt, Mary Reed, and Mike Scantlebury. Surprisingly, nearly all are still around, even if some are at the furthest edges of contact. Only Anne Gill, Poj Hough, and Barbara Mace seem to have disappeared, and even they may be lurking somewhere, like Mike Scantlebury who recently turned up in Manchester. Perhaps fans stay active for longer than we give them credit for; two years is supposed to be the average fannish "life", though come to think of it I don't know where that oft-repeated observation ever came from.

Eight years ago, eh? Look, this nostalgia could go on for ever. *Mor-Farch* 1 cost 1/- plus 4d postage. Jesus. Greg Pickersgill was writing poetry. Christ. And I was seventeen.....

Enough.

I Can't Stand It '68

Greg Pickersgill

As that lovely boy Roberts didn't quite write enough to finish off the page, and as, after all, *MF* 1 was my own first fanac, I not only have reason but also opportunity to add to Peter's reminiscences. Even a few factual challenges; like for example I'm sure it was Beryl Mercer that told me Peter was going to publish a fanzine, and suggested I (who had been talking about doing one myself) cooperate with him. As it turned out he easily contrived to ignore all suggestions I should co-edit with him and I ended up as a mere contributor – even if I contributed almost half that issue. Though really it's all so long ago in fannish terms it might just as well be all lies anyway, and it's true that it isn't always a wise thing to rake up one's fannish youth. You might find yourself cringing to contemplate things like the review I wrote (and Peter published!) of *New Writings in SF 11* which consisted entirely of plot-summaries of each story. Gak. Though I must admit I still like “Smiths Burst” and an untitled pseudonymous poem in the same issue which quite impresses me for what it was; i.e. the creation of a sixteen-year-old provincial kid who thought he was going to be a big-deal writer.

In fact, looked back on objectively as possible *MF* 1 was an exceptionally good first issue, well laid-out and produced, with a pretty high standard of writing and thinking involved. As one might expect from someone who'd made an effort to study the best of recent fanzines before trying himself. In fact as a copy of *Phile*, which was in turn an imitation of *Beyond*, it was damned good.

Stop Breaking Down #1 (March 1976, ed. Greg Pickersgill)

44. Herts Fandom (1969) Graham Boak

This was to have been a longer paragraph, but the recent publication of *Crabapple* #7 renders most of what I was to say superfluous. If you don't read C/A – then you should. A short summary follows:

Born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1946

Bred in various areas of County Durham until 1965

Educated in Bristol 1965-1968

Encountered fandom in Bristol – the Bristol And District (BAD) SF Group headed by Tony Walsh – 1965

Attended three conventions to date: Yarcon, Briscon (as a singularly useless Committee member) and ThirdManCon.

Edited *Badinages* 1, 2 and 3, half-edited 4, assisted on 5.

Which brings you up to Summer 1968, the end of life as a student.

Now, had I been accepting a job in Worcestershire, it would've been a case of going from BAD to Worcs. However, I took one in St. Albans; being uprooted from Bristol to become a Herts transplant. Now you know where the title came from.

I am the sixth member of Herts Fandom – though rather more fannishly involved than the fifth member, Anne Gill. She is the only member I didn't know before I came, not that I've met her since, either. We were supposed to attend the same party but I missed it – I travelled home that weekend for convalescence. Brian informs me that she seems quite a friendly young lady, at present growing into fandom from her recent neo state.

Mary (Mushling) Reed is the fourth member, having recently moved in with her boyfriend Churl at Stevenage. Mary is too well-known to be praised here; suffice it to say that *Crabapple* is now back in production at last.

Brian rates number three, and is surnamed Hampton. Famed from BAD days with the Green Machine, a vociferous Bond three-wheeler, he too leeches on the British Aviation Industry. He works for Hawker Siddeley Aviation at Hatfield, just up the road from here. (Nearer my bedsitter than the HP works are, and I'm right below their – and our – runway approach!) I

don't know who arrived first, Churl or ½r, so I'll toss a coin – Churl is Charles (call me Chas) Legg, at present studying Psychology at one of the London Universities. Also known as Gandalf, he is editor of *Freewheelin* née *Entropy*, an ex-PaDSzine now flatbed duplicated with considerable loss of reproduction. A shame – it is by no means a bad fanzine.

½r is more respectably known as Arthur Cruttenden, well-known caravan dweller and first-name user. (I can insult him as much as I like now – he's sent my copy of Vance's *The Dying Earth* back) If he wishes to refer to me by a name I don't use he's welcome, but waking up in hospital to discover I'm someone else is taking things too far.

The last time Herts Fandom met in any number (5) was some thirty minutes before the Bond blew a tyre, hit a kerb and skated into the middle of the road – upside down. Two-and-a-half members were tucked (comparatively) safely inside, but we're all scarred now.

To be added to the list of Hertfordshire fans: Joe Patrizio. A fellow dweller in St. Albans, his address was passed to me by Peter Weston. So I got into touch, went a-visiting... and returned with a stack of Old Fanzines: *Shaggys*, *VOIDS*, *Retributions*..... Joe is a good guy – but he's made me miss a great number of buses!

Keith (Festerhead) Bridges is likely to return to Herts fandom in the near future, together with wife Jill and daughter Wanda. Then we'll combine with the BAD Group and take over fandom! With his arrival, Herts Fandom may yet obtain a duplicator – he is awaited.

In Enfield (Middlesex) lives John Quattromi, late of *Xeron*. In Broom (Bedfordshire) lives Pat Henderson, of the Tolkien Society of America. Both towns lie close to the borders their counties make with Hertfordshire.

There may well be an organised Herts Fandom yet.

Transplant #1 (August 1968, ed. Graham Boak)

LET IT HEREBY BE ANNOUNCED THAT HERTS. FANDOM WAS OFFICIALLY DECLARED ACTIVE AT ITS FOURTH INAUGURAL MEETING, HELD ON THE 10TH-11TH-12TH APRIL, THIS YEAR OF OUR LORD NINETEEN HUNDRED AND SIXTY NINE.

Just how it happened to work out that way, is quite a story.

Other meetings had been arranged: two at ½r's caravan, one at Dave James' party, but somehow there had never been enough fans present. At the con, a meeting was arranged with Gardner "Dozy" Dozois, American fan and

neo-author, who was to come up to Welwyn Friday evening. As he happened to be cuddling my sister at the time, they found it difficult to avoid inviting me. Mary and Chas decided that it would be a good time to return a few books which they owed me. Strangely, Keith and Jill found that they, too, would be in the area at much the same time. Like Topsy, it just growed.

“We’ll pick you up at 7 or so,” said Keith.

“Meet you at Welwyn Garden City at 8 or so,” said Gardner.

Come 7:20, no Bridges mobile. Welwyn G.C. is about an hour’s bus ride away, if I make the good connections. Ah well. Off to the bus. At Welwyn G.C. and no sign of Gardner. I waited for two trains, then moved on to Welwyn. Of course, he was already at the caravan. 9:15 Keith and Jill turned up, and demanded to know where I had been when they called.

Sometimes you just can’t win.

The evening was long, entertaining, and often unprintable. We even mentioned *SF* more than the ritual twice! (i.e. once at the beginning; once at the end.) After the Round Robin story petered out, leaving Keith Lord Bridges sitting on his rhinopotamous (there was some slight disagreement as to the exact nature of the beast) thundering downstairs with the handbrake full on, with the robot Yusily (known as Iris for short) trying to strangle him from the pillion seat, heading straight for a pit wherein lurked the evil Black Crut....phew! Ajax washes whiter. Anyway, after all this, someone suggested Herts Fandom.

“A quorum, a quorum!” they all cried, but ½r couldn’t get his ginger ball gun out in time. It was decided to call the beast The Herts. Science Fiction and Fantasy Fan Group, as Keith had already registered it under that name with Welwyn G.C. Council, in the hope of obtaining a “Social Support Grant” – or whatever the correct name is, anyway, it spells d-u-p-l-i-c-a-t-o-r.

In a rare moment of sanity, they elected me Chairman, though I prefer the term “King”. Also, Mary Reed became Secretary, Chas. Legg Treasurer, and Jill Bridges Catering Officer, the last being an obvious choice, as we will be holding Group meetings in the Bridges’ new house at Welwyn G.C. Full members are Hertfordshire dwellers active in the Group, associate members live elsewhere, but are active in Herts fandom, particular thought being given to fans in Bedfordshire and Middlesex. As I objected to a suggestion that the Group be retitled Herts, Beds, and Sex fandom – “..it’s the wrong image..” – it was unanimously agreed that power had gone to my head: and my appointment was audibly regretted.

Around four a.m., it was decided to call it a day. After such an original suggestion, Keith and Jill left; taking Mary, Chas, and I with them. Unfortunately, Stevenage is in the wrong direction, i.e., away from St. Albans. On the return journey, Keith was tiring visibly. So, I was dropped at the caravan.

Waking up the other three (½r, Gardner and the previously unmentioned Brian Hampton) I borrowed a patch of floor to sleep on, a coat to cover me, a foot-high pillow to crick my neck, and a fireplace to burrow into my back. The feathered Dawn chorus was heard by all.

Next day Keith, Jill, Gardner and I departed on a journey to Wembley, where Graham Charnock, *New Worlds* editor, writer and ex-faned, was deprived of his duplicator for a miserly sum, donated for the occasion by Brian. Thus *Phile* is truly dead, and shall be missed. The duplicator is the very one responsible for this magazine. Like, I was broke at the time, and had to borrow the money. Interest is being paid at the rate of one half-pint of beer per week.

After assisting a poor, petrol-starved Rover en route, I was abandoned at Patrizio Mansions to gather my resources. We were to meet again under the sign of the Goat, at Codicote, “Some time after nine...” they said.

Unfortunately.... no bus services at convenient time that evening – Codicote being at the back-end of nowhere. A quick (Quick? Ha! The exchange didn’t know the number, I didn’t know the number, the hotel/motel on the same site wouldn’t pass a message...) telephone call to ½r settled things. Meet at 8:20 in Welwyn. So I did. Not quite as easily as that, needless to say. A walk, then a hitch into St. A, a bus to Hatfield (it being a Green Line bus, of course it wouldn’t stop where I wanted to get off....luckily, I was able to bribe/persuade the driver otherwise) a walk, a hitch to Welwyn, a walk.... well, I made it with some time to spare. The bus, of course, was late.

So ½r and I went to the Goat at Codicote, and no-one was there. After a while Brian turned up, after going to the wrong part of the pub first, naturally. Then, some time later, les autres, Mary and Chas. It seems that we’d forgotten to inform them. Around 10 someone (Jill?) suggested that we all invite ourselves round to Pat Henderson’s place up in Biggleswade (if only to inform her of the honour of being the sole Associate Member of the Group). Some little distance away, it was, I pointed out. Late at night, too.

“Chicken!” came the chorus.

Stubborn, too. Fortunately I was massively outvoted – Keith threatened

to sit on me. (Please understand: I have every desire to see Pat. I merely thought that the best way to continue such occurrences was to pick a somewhat more suitable time!) So Jill and I telephoned to give warning. I was the only one who knew the number. Jill went along to make sure I *did* telephone. Despite her valiant attempt to stop me, by pressing button A before I was connected (which side was she on, anyway?) I did so, and Pat welcomed us all. So I was wrong – what else is new? I wasn't complaining.

Coffee in Broom Hall – a minor mansion split up into flats – is quite a way to pass the early hours. Not all had coffee – Pat also offered Bacardi. That'll be the last time she asks me to pour the drinks: my method is to pour enough to prevent anyone coming back for more later. Well, she shouldn't have used tumblers.

The end was anticlimactic. Back to the caravan, this time with Brian absent, I claimed a couch. It was too short and too narrow, my feet stuck out of the end, blankets spent the night keeping Gardner dozy on the floor, and that day I had been kept going on nothing more than coffee and Digestive biscuits. I don't even like Digestive biscuits. Sigh. Returning to St. A. that afternoon, the Patrizzios had departed, off to Cornwall for a week, and a slight drizzle was falling. Somehow it was apt.... but if only *all* Herts weekends were as fannish as that one.

Herts Fandom

MEMBER	GRADE	OFFICE
A. Graham Boak	Full	Chairman
Keith Bridges	Full	
Jill Bridges	Full	Catering Officer
Arthur G. Cruttenden	Full	
Brian J. Hampton	Full	
Patricia. A. Henderson	Associate	
Chas. R. Legg	Full	Treasurer
Mary. F. Reed	Full	Secretary
Gardner Dozois	Honorary	

Interim #1 (June 1969, ed. Graham Boak)

The 1970s

45. *Fouler* (2012) Greg Pickersgill

Fouler. What a wonderful idea. How lucky I was to meet up with Leroy Kettle instead of Peter Weston. Was I? Was fandom? I dunno. Would I have allowed my irritation and disenchantment with the docile furriness of late 1960s fandom to come out with such obvious spite if I had been left to my own devices – would I instead really have produced *New Pembrokeshire Review*, a bizarre amalgam of a school magazine, literary quarterly *Ambit* and Walt Willis' classic fanzine *Hyphen* instead of this “fart in the face of fandom” (as it said inside somewhere in *Fouler 2*)? No, probably not. I would have been too conscious of my desire to fit in with what I was beginning to think of as my Real Family, people I thought I shared attitudes, feelings and consciousness with. I would have been too conventional in the sense that I wanted to consciously emulate what I thought were the best qualities of fandom (see “-” again!) instead of being perceived by many as actively engaged in the process of tearing them down and throwing petrol on the ruins.

But I was easily persuaded that the sort of intellectual tearaway as personified by Kettle (another loner but one who deflected aggression with endless jokes and wordplay, frequently of a type designed to demean and belittle) was actually where it was all at. He was a student, too, when I met him, and that meant a lot to a Grammar School kid like me. I was sufficiently far away from it all in rural West Wales to believe that the Student Revolution actually meant something worth a damn, and I was a rather young very naive and easily influenced eighteen. Oh, I shouldn't criticise Kettle so much really, he was just being who he was (he certainly isn't like that any more) and it was my fault, I was looking for a role model, a big brother even, and he seemed closer to what I wanted than people like Peter Weston who just seemed so damned grown-up.

Anyway, Kettle and I had met at the 1969 Eastercon in Oxford, and for some bizarre reason I spent much of the early period believing he was Leroy Tanner, a pseudonym used by Harry Harrison for book reviews in *Amazing*. But we got on well, and spent the whole convention in each others' company

doing the sort of Big Kid stuff that a lot of people today think they invented for themselves at their first convention. We continued getting on very well with a huge level of correspondence; then in August 1970 he showed up unexpectedly at Merlins Bridge, and like Real Fans we put out a fanzine right here. Bits and pieces of it came from the files I had for NPR, others were written on the spot. If you read through it with care and sympathy you'll see there's actually a very uneasy conjunction of the somewhat sercon (me) and the wildly irreverent (Kettle). I'm sure we knew what we were doing at the time but it's not that clear now – half the point seemed to be to produce something that was anathema to everything the soft fandom of the day held dear; even the structure – foolscap, stapled at the lower right corner, reading back to front – was designed to annoy. What the hell did we think we were up to? No wonder the reviews were terrible, but I always felt they were critical for all the wrong reasons.

There was some good stuff in *Fouler 2* though; one piece I can single out for particular note is a poem called *Spin* by marginal-fan Richard Barycz. Deserves reprinting.

So how much impact did Leroy Kettle actually have on *Fouler*? Both a lot and a little. For most of the *Fouler* days I relied on him for material and approval; but the fact of the matter was that even though he was listed as “editor” he did little other than lettercolumn responses. Most of the Kettle material was in fact extracted by me from yards of jumbled text included with the substantial correspondence we were carrying on. It all felt very Beat generation at the time, like making sense of Kerouac or Burroughs from pieces of paper randomly strewn about the floor. Oh, he did contribute towards the costs – all of £2 an issue – but that's about it, and sometimes grudgingly. But I would be lying if I said that it was not his spirit, and worldview, that animated much of *Fouler*, even though with its tendency to fill the forepart of the fanzine with opaque little microfictions and absurd poetry the shade of *New Pembrokeshire Review* hung on still.

And why begin with *Fouler 2*, you wonder, why wasn't there an issue 1? Because we thought this was an enormously clever brilliant new idea that would shock and surprise the dull-witted fandom of the day. Oh we really were right up there along with the people who years later did *Second-Hand Wave* and all the bright young things of the 21st century. Little did we know of course, blinded by our own genius and ignorant of fanhistory as we were, that this little trick had been worked at least once before, most successfully

by Ron Bennett who launched his fanzine *Ploy* with issue 2 back in 1954, complete with internal references to the non-existent first-issue.

<http://www.gostak.org.uk/what/gregfanzine.htm> (2012)

46. Birmingham Rebirth (1972)

Peter Weston

A few years ago I came across a little paragraph which made me smile in one of those old British fanzines that existed under the shadow of *Hyphen* and which no-one seems to remember now. I think it may have appeared in *Space Diversions*, but if not it was certainly in one of the many similar fmz spawned in the early nineteen-fifties by various now-vanished fan groups up and down the country. The paragraph said something like this: “Now is the time for a really big recruiting drive to build up the membership of the plonkety-plonk Science Fiction Group.”

I smiled because in the light of the subsequent collapse of British fandom and the almost complete absence of this sort of tight local group throughout the sixties, that excited imperative from the past seemed ridiculous in its very suggestion that normal people could somehow be dragged in off the street and turned into fans. Yet now the wheel is turning full circle again and my current project is to do precisely that – for fans can be made, can’t they?

For the past year we have been running an experiment which may eventually produce a definitive answer to that question. The experiment is the resurrected Birmingham Sf Group, and it is based on the same hopeful theory which inspired the formation of the BSFA in 1958 – that discussing sf could serve as a bait to draw in readers who, after processing, would emerge as keen new fans. And in all fairness I must admit that this “bait” does provide a lot of enjoyment to those of us in the area who already consider ourselves fans.

The system works like this. We hire a large room at the much-loved Imperial Centre Hotel, and regularly on the third Friday of each month we have a meeting about sf. We may invite an author along, show a film, or have some sort of discussion panel (a recent one on *Star Trek* was particularly successful). After meetings Roger Peyton sells books and we all retire to a private bar where, thanks to an arrangement with the kindly Magistrates’ Court, we can drink and talk until midnight.

That is the visible part of the Plan; the rest involves a lot of work

through a proper Management Committee and a big effort to publicize the Group within the area and to attract new people into becoming members. This is where Vernon Brown is a key man, particularly since he is also responsible for a monthly newsletter which really must appear on time (during the week before a meeting). I originally produced this newsletter as a simple duplicated thing; but under Vernon's editorship it has grown into quite an attractive little fanzine; the purpose remains the same, however – to remind everyone of the forthcoming meeting and to encourage participation in Group affairs.

You can appreciate that all this is a lot more complicated than a simple Globe meeting, and some fans might find such a regimented arrangement not at all to their taste. Don't forget though that these aren't fans, and that Globe-type Groups have been tried here before, several times. Without London's supply of professionals and fannish visitors previous Groups have remained very small, ingrown affairs and have finally died. The theory this time is that newcomers want to do something more than sit and look at each other, and that a programme event breaks the ice for an evening as well as acts as an attraction.

The present society is something I thought about for years; but I didn't do much until the summer of last year after the Worcester Convention when we had reached a sort of high-point of fannish activity in the Midlands. As a project I've found it a lot more satisfying than almost any other in which I've been involved – certainly a lot more fun than organizing a convention or conference for instance, although I think *Speculation* remains my first love.

And so far we can chalk up a modest record of success – 14 or 15 meetings with a programme each time, the same number of newsletters, and average attendances that must number over 50 per meeting. At the last count we had 73 paid-up members and nearly as many “interested parties”, the majority of whom have been attracted since we began operations.

That does tend to prove one part of the theory – that for every sf fan there must be hundreds who read the stuff fervently, but who have never come into contact with other enthusiasts. The sort of people we want – and are getting – are not those who “read an sf book last week but I forgot who wrote it”, but the types who have kept a secret hoard in their attics for years, and who have been laughed at for their obsession, just like us. Honestly, that's what they say!

So far then we've pulled in a large crowd of keen sf readers; but lately

I'm getting rather apprehensive as the months roll by and they don't enter fandom. Perhaps you can lead a horse to water, but can't make him drink; for, despite the efforts made by Vernon and I to thrust all the latest news of fandom under their noses, our followers remain largely uninterested. Talk of the marvellous times had at Chester, that great new Peter Roberts fanzine, it all seems to leave them cold.

There are some honourable exceptions such as Stan Eling, Meg Palmer, and Hazel Reynolds, all of whom are infiltrating nicely into broader circles. There are others attracted by the Group like Tom Shippey, who will probably never be a true fan because he has too many other interests, but whose presence will be a big asset to *Speculation* at least, and perhaps to some future conventions.

The majority of real fans within the Birmingham Group remain the usual faces seen at every convention – and yet where did we come from? Rog Peyton, Martin Pitt, myself, from the previous attempt at organizing an sf circle; Jack Cohen and Bob Rickard from the Interregnum period; Vernon, Pauline, and a few good others from the Aston sf group (which must have been one of the most potent of all recruiting sources). Perhaps I'm looking for lasting results too quickly – for it is difficult to really enter fandom. How long does it take most people before they stop festering on the fringes?

In the meantime the second Novacon is on the horizon, we have a University course on sf this autumn which should attract yet more newcomers, and Fred Hemmings is hoping to get a lot of new Birmingham people to join next year's Eastercon. Then perhaps the final and most secret part of the Plan can be achieved, and Vernon and I can slip off the committee to become just members of the herd, watching those crazy, keen neofans organizing their local Group!

Checkpoint #21 (August 1972, ed. Peter Roberts)

47. New Irish Fandom (1990-1991)

James White and Tommy Ferguson

James White:

Bob Shaw was the founder of “New Irish Fandom”. The reason it came into being, as far as I can remember, was that with the Willis’s living in distant Donaghadee, me living in dodgy Andersonstown and the ailing George Charters not able to travel in often from Bangor, Bob was missing regular meetings with fans and decided that starting a new fan group was the answer. An old trick but it worked.

It was formed in the early '70's, I think and met in a succession of pubs. When we began to run short of beer money or the very young teetotal fans got uncomfortable we moved down the street to a cafe called THE MAPLE LEAF for sausages and chips or the like and stayed until closing time. The original members were fans who met in bookshops, as a result of Bob's work as a journalist or at UK conventions. They, and I'm vague on who joined first, were Jim and Ann Lavery (law student and teacher respectively); Frank McKeever (another teacher, an enthusiastic collector of SF and very active in local and international squash circles); Tony Moran (computer E01 with the civil service and karate expert, who shortly afterwards moved to Canada); a fan whose name I can't remember who was a food chemist in the mustard factory in Newry, and brought some stuff he had brewed himself to the Chester convention that made Verguutz taste like shandy; a free-lance journalist called Robert something; Jim Johnson, who worked in a library and at the time of joining was working on an epic fantasy, and Graham Andrews who was a bit of an all-round genius (civil service clerk, team-leader and consistent winner of pub quizzes, memory man on SF characters and films from the 30's on and appeared once in the Northern Ireland *Mastermind* heat, which he didn't win just to prove he wasn't a complete superman). Years later he married a nice Bangor girl called Agnes and moved to Brussels

where she has a very good job with the EEC.

(Letter to Rob Hansen, 23 May 1991)

Tommy Ferguson adds:

Frank McKeever is actually the longest attending person at the group. By his reckoning he first came along to the group in 1969; he added though that this group was an evolution from the older IF group of White, Willis, Shaw et al. He's adamant about the 1969 date and the fact that he was the first, of the current membership, to attend regularly. Also he was quite sure that there was a regular meeting for at least the previous two to three years before he first started to attend.

(Letter to Rob Hansen, 26 August 1990)

James White continues:

Three Army fans joined us for a while, two blokes and a woman soldier who was the girl-friend of one of them. The other one was married, I can't remember any of their names, and lived close to our place in Riverdale, in the adjoining Ladybrook estate. He was a clerk in the paymaster's office in Lisburn, and he and his wife came to visit us several times (Ye Ghods, in Andytown, and without even an armoured car!) but when The Situation began to deteriorate they were moved away to a safer district somewhere and we lost touch.

Around this time Bob, Sadie and the children moved to England, to a very nice place in Ulverston which was convenient to the shipbuilding firm (its name has gone, too) where he had landed a good PR job. Mainly due to Bob's absence, his humour and fatherly presence was greatly missed, and the fact that our wives and/or sweethearts worried when we went into the city centre at night where more and more pubs were being attacked, the numbers attending shrank to a handful. Republican extremists bombed Loyalist pubs and vice versa, and the pubs who didn't mind who they served were hit by both sides. Several different venues were used during the early years.

One of them we were asked to leave because of a disagreement between Graham Andrews and Robert something, who was a bit intense at times. It wasn't about anything normal like politics or religion, but an SF story. How

did you guess, I've forgotten the title. It wasn't a fight exactly because we got between and restrained them before blows were struck (they had made it up by the next week), but in doing so we knocked over a table and some chairs and were told by the management to meet somewhere else.

We moved to White's Tavern, Pottinger's Entry, (no relation) for a couple of years before moving again (the wooden benches were too uncomfortable) to a nice place in Queen's Arcade, and then moved back to White's because they were a bit snooty and the prices were too high. Fairly recently White's started having over-amplified singalongs and one could not hear oneself think, and the present venue is The Monaco in Lombard Street. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

A lot of the fans dropped away, but there was an influx of new members, well, a few, in January '81 as a result of a local WEA decision to give a ten-week series of classes on Science Fiction taught by, would you believe, me. There were 14 on the roll but only six or seven attended all the classes – the members of the existing fan group didn't attend, either figuring that they knew it all or should not embarrass teacher by sitting there making cracks. After class we went downstairs to the coffee bar and the other fans were usually waiting there to find out what had gone on and to proselytise for their fan group proper, or improper. As a result we got three new recruits who are with us to this day. They were/are Paul Campbell, who was later to bring out *Extro*, a really nice prozine which would have done well but for distribution problems, and who is still in local publishing; Jim Mallory, a lecturer in archaeology at Queen's University who leads digs all over Ulster, an American fan from California who gives Graham Andrews a run for his money where SF and old film questions are concerned, and a Person of Average Height (6' 4"), and Joe Nolan, an ex-shipyard worker among other things (now retired), a poet and local and Irish historian.

Around about this time (there's a cop-out phrase for absent-mindedness) "New Irish Fandom" as you call it became involved with the Dublin-based ISFA – the original one with patrons Anne McCaffrey, Harry Harrison and myself, not the recently resurrected one which ran Octocon '90, a Star Trek con and other SF events in the Dublin area. They instituted what they called the Aisling Award, a competition aimed at encouraging SF and fantasy writing throughout Ireland. The first year a Graham Andrews story won it, the second year Paul Campbell won and the third year Joe Nolan was runner-up so the Belfast fans considered themselves, rightly, to be no goats' toes.

Over the next few years the first ISFA went into decline and, when we moved to Portstewart seven years ago, the Belfast fans were soldiering on but with fewer people and meetings.

The last new recruit I know of was a young fan called Malachy Coney of the Talisman bookshop in Smithfield Market, Belfast. I met him when I was down for a hospital appointment, and he said that he had heard about the Belfast fan group meetings but had thought that he wouldn't be welcome until or unless he had been published! He is a fairly regular attender these days.

At present the group meets in the Monaco every other Thursday night, usually with Joe Nolan, Jim Mallory, Paul Campbell, Frank McKeever, Jim Johnson and Malachy Coney present, but not all on the same night. Sometimes Tommy Ferguson, Joe McNally and others from the Queen's University Belfast SF and Fantasy Association, who were responsible for running a couple of Nicons and a Unicon in the Students' Union there, and who have their own meetings and venue, come to the Monaco for the craic, and vice versa.

(Letter to Rob Hansen, 23 May 1991)

48. The Real Illusion (1977)

Rob Jackson

A surprisingly long time ago – October 1969, actually – an overweight ex-schoolboy, newly arrived at Oxford University to study medicine, wandered into the Freshmen’s Fair where university societies try to snare unsuspecting suckers into swelling their membership lists and thus their funds.

Me, in case you hadn’t guessed.

I was interested in Real Science Fiction in those days. Asimov and Clarke were the greatest, and Heinlein wasn’t bad either. Anything without spaceships in, or about silly stuff like telepathy, was fantasy and thus not worth reading, I reckoned. So when I came to the Oxford University Speculative Fiction Group stall and found prominent displays of Moorcock and (ugh!) Tolkien polluting their display of books by my heroes, I said it wasn’t all my kind of stuff and passed on.

But I kept reading, and two years later I was reading so much I couldn’t afford all the books I wanted. So after I’d drunkenly described this mind-blowing story, “The Nine Billion Names of God”, at a party only to have two of my audience chant with me in unison “one by one, without any fuss, the stars were going out,” and turn out to be officers of OUSFG, I thought – hell, at least they’ve got a library, it’ll be cheaper; and I went along. At first I was mousey quiet, staring silently and fixedly at the bookshelves even as my ears were straining to catch the latest Group gossip and chat about plans for the next issue of the Group’s fictionzine *Sfinx*. By then, being at Oxford had taught me to be more tolerant of other people’s opinions, so if people said *Lord of the Rings* and *Dune* and *Dragonflight* were good I gave them credit for possibly being right.

So I took my blinkers off, and read, and enjoyed. I also wrote a short-short which people enjoyed, then some other stories, and started going with the Group’s nucleus to the pub after meetings, and finished up helping with the first litho issue of *Sfinx* which Al Scott and Di Reed typed on a huge IBM. Kev Smith and I helped lay the camera copy out... and so on.

(Kev is now chairing an Eastercon. You never know what you’re letting yourself in for, do you?) In short, I had more fun than I’d had in three years at

Oxford, even though I'd always had plenty to do during those years.

One other little thing happened. Chris Morgan encouraged me to join the BSFA. Now, in the OUSFG's library, in a sort of pariah box, was a collection of fanzines, including some fannish ones which OUSFG members mentioned, if at all, in whispers. But when I joined the BSFA, out of devilment I ticked the box which said I was interested in fanzines. And I got some.* I received efforts by the youthful Greg Pickersgill and Roy Kettle – *Foulers* 2 and 3 – and John Piggott's *Turning Worm* 2, as well as some older ones such as the Roger Peyton-edited *Tangent* with, I remember, some *serious* Dicky Howett illustrations.

* Those must have been some sort of Good Old Days – people actually thought enough of the BSFA to hand over their spare fanzines for distribution to neos. Think what might have happened had I not seen those fanzines...

Most odd, I thought. It's not much to do with science fiction, though they do seem to be having fun; but you need to know them to get what they're on about. (A typical newcomer's reaction, I know now.) Greg and Roy seemed to be trying to shake somebody out of some sort of torpor and using lots of naughty words as if it were the most important thing in the world.

By the time I'd got these fanzines, and scratched my head over them (taking care to blow the dandruff off) it was time for me to leave Oxford and continue my medical education at home in Newcastle.

After six months' happy boozy sf and club talk at Oxford, I felt all lonely, sitting there at my grotty little portable typing more stories for *Sfinx*. I missed them at the OUSFG, and goddammit, they were 250 miles away: And I didn't know any sf folk up here... but wait a minute... With little hope I glanced through *Turning Worm* 2. Associate Editor and Slave, one Ian Maule, at an address nearby in Gosforth. They're not really sf folk, I thought – they don't talk about sf at all; but at least they seem fairly pleasant in print, if a little odd; not all grouses like that *Fouler* lot. And they probably do know *something* about sf.

So I decided to try ringing Ian Maule up.

Directory Enquiries.

“Sorry, sir, not under that initial.”

“It might be his father.”

“There aren't any Maules at that address... wait a minute. Did you say 59 Windsor Terrace? Is this lad's father an ex-policeman?”

I didn't know.

"Because there's a Doug Maule, a friend of mine, recently moved from Windsor Terrace to Forest Hall. Wait a minute; let me look up the recent numbers. 662622. Give my best wishes to Mr. Maule."

Forest Hall – all of half a mile from me!

Nervously I rang. There was indeed an Ian Maule there, and I could speak to him.

So if the Directory Enquiries man hadn't happened to know Ian's father, I might have just shrugged my shoulders and gone on typing stories, but later found a girlfriend or something and never thought of other sf fans again. Such are twists of fate...

Thus I met Gannetfandom. I went round to see Ian, and was awed to find that despite the fannish image of an uncaring attitude to sf, he was far better read than I was. (Still is.) As I discovered more and more about Gannetfandom and fannish fandom in general I found that it would be nearer the truth to say that sf is *a fact of life* for many; not ignored, it was just *there*. One didn't need to discuss it unless one felt like it. This contrasted markedly with the intense discussions at OUSFG meetings.

So there I was, a Gannetfan. The rest isn't history yet; but if I feel like it I may write about it sometime.

This all-too-brief summary of the twists of fortune which brought me to the path of Gannetfannish enthusiasm that has led me first to help organise Tynecon then to take over editing *Maya*, has a moral both for me personally and, I think, for fans in general.

For me, it points up my genesis. I'm a bit of an oddity – I have two sets of fannish roots, in Oxford and Newcastle. This has helped me to keep my breadth of interest – very important, I think: it shows in the way I try to reflect all aspects of sf fandom in *Maya*.

Lest you think I'm blowing my own trumpet too hard, I think there are disadvantages to a broad interest too – it reduces the intensity of vision and the degree of conviction one can sometimes bring to an argument. (See the last two issues' editorials about experience and differing points of view.) That's why people sometimes call me bland.

I'm getting very introspective here. Let's look outwards. The other good thing a series of differing perspectives has given me: continued stimulation and interest. By God, there's always something new in fandom, and it's interesting as hell!

If you stick to one single outlook you become stale (staring out of the same old window at the same old view?). That's the moral for fandom as a whole – indeed it can apply very well to outside interests too. Keep moving, keep finding new contacts, and you'll stay interested.

Maya #14 (June 1977, ed. Rob Jackson)

49. The Game of Rat and Worldcon (1979)

Kevin Smith

In the late Nineteen-sixties, by all reports, British fandom was friendly and nice and nine tenths dead. It was in dire need of a shake-up, and in 1970 it got one. The shaker was the fanzine *Fouler*, edited by Greg Pickersgill and Leroy Kettle. *Fouler* was a snarling, spitting, scratching, kicking, fighting, furious fanzine. It was definitely not nice. The first issue deliberately did everything wrong; for a start, it was Number 2. It also said that, “Those of you who suspect *Fouler* is a fart in the collective face of fandom are well on the scent.” Number 3 contained the single most memorable dismissal ever seen in a fanzine review, written by Greg Pickersgill about a fanzine it is probably better to forget.

“Jesus Christ I’m reading this bloody thing right now and I can’t believe it. It’s worthless. It gets Brit fandom a bad name it hardly deserves, bad as it is. Every copy ought to be sought out and burned, with ((the editor)) securely roped down in the middle of them. My fury knows no bounds.” (*Fouler* 3, October 1970)

Suitably amended, it made two more appearances, in the letter columns of later *Foulers*. Number 4 introduced the Blinding Pillar of Incandescence, “an award for idiot of the issue.” *Fouler* 7, appearing more than a year after 6, in 1972, was the last.

In *Fouler* 3 there appeared a certain advertisement (below). As an attempt to demolish the silly animal fandoms it was a failure. It merely added Ratfandom to the list. But as a statement of a fannish philosophy it found a great response among the new, young fans of the time. British fanwriting stopped being nice, becoming instead totally irreverent and brutally honest. After *Fouler*, all targets became acceptable ones, and if a fan showed himself to be a stupid cretin, British fandom would damn well tell him he was a fucking cretin.

AARDVARK FANDOM LIES GROVELLING IN THE GUTTER.
WOMBAT FANDOM NEVER ROSE FROM IT.
ARE YOU EMBARRASSED BY THE SELFCONSCIOUS TRIVIA OF
AARDVARKS? ARE YOU SICKENED BY THE BANALITY &
JUVENILITY OF WOMBATS?
DO YOU SEEK TO UPHOLD THE TRUE FANNISH TRADITIONS OF
BOOZING and LECHERY ????????

DOES DRINKING, PERVERSION, SEX, AND SELF-INDULGENCE
ATTRACT YOU MORE THAN COMMUNITY SINGING OR WEAK MINDED
INTELLECTUALISM?????????

IF IT DOES THEN YOU ARE A POTENTIAL

* RATFAN! *

AND YOU CAN JOIN THE NEW BREED OF THING RARING TO PUT
THE SHIT BACK INTO THE FAN. ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS:
know how to pick your nose in the eighty-nine different
positions delineated in "The Perfumed Nostril";
know and love the site of every VD clinic in Britain;
to have had at least one real or imaginary sexual
catastrophe resulting from alcoholic excess;
and to know at least three jokes depending on totally
unbelievable physical abnormalities for their value.

THAT ALL THERE IS TO IT!!!!!!!

IF YOU MEASURE UP TO ANY OF THOSE, OR LIE EFFECTIVELY
ENOUGH TO CONVINCING US YOU DO, THEN YOU TOO CAN BE A
R A T F A N.

JOIN NOW! SEEK SAFETY IN NUMBERS! SOON WE SHALL SCUTTLE
OUT OF THE URINALS AND BACK ALLEYS TO SLAUGHTER
SPINELESS AARDVARKS AND WOMBATS WHERE THEY LIE, NO
MATTER HOW THEY HIDE. NO PLASTIC FACADE OF DRUNKENNESS
OR PERVERSION WILL SHIELD THEM. WE SHALL MAKE THE WORLD
SAFE FOR ALL RATFANS!

KING RAT!

::::::::::::::::::

SPECIAL! Join now and at no extra cost you will receive
a cardboard replica of the Marquis de Sade's bathwater,
a genuine lump of Dylan Thomas' vomit, a flesh replica
of a phallic symbol, and something else too obscene to
mention! JOIN NOW. DETAILS TO KING RAT KETTLE, 21
CRANLEY GDNS, LONDON S.W.7

[NOTE: Offer closes 1975. No applications accepted thereafter – K.S.]

Just as Ratfandom and the generation of fans that grew up with it were ceasing to be the iconoclasts – becoming instead the icons, the fannish establishment – a new influence appeared. It was only small at first, and very different from the Rats. It began in November 1973, with Malcolm Edwards in his fanzine *Magic Pudding* – the first written announcement of an intended British Worldcon bid for the end of the Seventies...

“At the 1971 Eastercon, Pete Weston (then in the full flood of his not-so-Secret Master phase) tried to interest the assembled multitudes in the possibility of a British Worldcon bid for 1976. The reaction was, in general, fairly apathetic: there was a body of people who felt that such a bid might work against the Australians’ 1975 campaign, and that if the Aussies succeeded (as seemed probable, even then) there was zero chance of the convention being voted to an overseas site again the following year. There was also the prospective Stockholm bid for 1976. Anyway, with one thing and another, the whole thing was fairly quickly forgotten. And has remained forgotten.

“But let’s think about this. The first London Worldcon was in 1957, the second in 1965. Since then, we’ve had the Heicon in 1970. On this kind of schedule – and it’s none too crowded – we should be thinking about another British bid before the end of the decade. And if we want that to come about we should be starting to plan now.

“Well, I’m in the middle of an empire-building period right now, and this is one of the main things which has come to mind. When Christine and I went to stay with the Westons a few weekends ago, I mentioned it to Pete, and he waxed quite enthusiastic. I’ve mentioned it to one or two other fans since – Peter Roberts, Ian Williams, etc. – and the reaction has been much the same. It seems to me that, whereas in 1971 the time may not have been ripe, it very clearly is ripe now.

“Pete showed me the correspondence he’d had with a promising south coast hotel, and I’ve glanced around a bit since. It seems there are a number of potential suitable sites... they aren’t inexpensive, of course not, but by American standards they’re dirt cheap. But at present I think deciding the place is secondary. What is important is to decide – soon – if it’s something we want to do.

And I say ‘we’ advisedly. I may be an empire-builder, but I wouldn’t think of pursuing something like this without a good deal of support.

“Why would we want to hold a Worldcon anyway? Well, I’m not sure I can articulate an answer to that, beyond something of the ‘because it’s there’ variety. One of my personal motivations is that I want to go to a Worldcon, am never likely to get to the USA for one, and therefore have to resort to bringing the mountain to Mahomet. Otherwise, there is the fact that fandom is an international thing, strong in Britain and Europe, while the Worldcon tends to be primarily American. If there’s a suitable bid, it should go overseas at regular intervals; I’m sure almost all American fans would agree about this. But it won’t unless we do something about it.

“Now I know there’s a prospective Antwerp bid for 1978, and it would be foolish for two European contenders to cut each other’s throats. However, with the 1974 Eurocon fiasco, how much weight is a Belgian Worldcon bid going to carry? I suspect they may have lost too much ground to make up.

“At the moment this remains just a proposal. The prospective date is either 1978 or 1979, and I would appreciate your thoughts (particularly you American readers) on which date would fit in better with the usual rotation system. I’ve reserved some time at the Tynecon for a general discussion of the whole question (this is the item about which the last progress report was so reticent). And there now exists, after a fashion, a committee to promote the idea of a British Worldcon – present membership: Peter Roberts, Pete Weston, and me. Expressions of support will be very welcome.”

Since then, the Worldcon just grewed, occupying the attentions of more and more British fans until now there is hardly anyone of Seventies fandom who isn’t involved in some way – or so it seems.

The effects of Ratfandom were obvious and immediate; the result was Seventies fandom. Worldcon was more subtle. It was something in the back of everyone’s mind, festering away in the fannish subconscious, until this year when it suddenly turned into something real and imminent (although for the Seacon ’79 committee itself it had been real for much longer, one confidently assumes). The immediate effect has been a postponement of

fannish activity until Worldcon, or just after. But no-one knows what the long-term effects will be. Some fans have predicted the death of fandom as we know it, with Seventies fandom unable to cope any more. Others have predicted a fannish resurgence – Seventies fandom freed of its Old Man of the Seacon and everyone individually active and creative. It's likely that there will be a short period of exhaustion-induced apathy, but the Nineteen-eighties are an intriguing mystery, which is as it should be.

Mood 70 (1979, ed. Kevin Smith)

50. They're Closing Down the Globe (1974, 1983) Rob Holdstock

...and all the little fans didn't know what to do. Tall, slim, rugged fan me, target of abuse by all the short fat insecure fans, has been sussing out the various alternatives to the Globe. Part of an intrepid team of sharp-eyed, highly critical and sensitive people led by Frank Arnold, we have visited to date;

THE WHITE HORSE THE PRINTERS DEVIL

And I can tell you that though the Globe might be called the “scarface” of London pubs it does at least have a feeling of comfort and humility compared to at least one of those.

Take the White Horse. We filed from the Globe on the “two minute walk” promised by Frank Arnold who, as he led us up towards Holborn, was noticeably excited at the prospect of revisiting the first London Fan Gathering Place. We walked and walked... and myself and up-and-coming writers John Jarrold and Andrew Stephenson indulged in some harmless story-plotting. We'd each plotted a novel by the time our guide decided he'd missed the turning. Catching the bus at the end of the Pier we returned to London and found that a HUGE building had been built on a patch of waste land since the last Lon-Fans had gathered at the White Horse. This was the *Daily Mirror* Building, which we kicked as we filed up the narrow alleyway to the pub, which lies within 60 seconds of the Globe.

Frank did a double-take as we entered the plush, air-conditioned interior, “It used to be old and scruffy like the Globe,” he assured us as we sat and looked at the multicolored windows, sparkling bottles, and barman. It was small, cosy, respectable, expensive, need I say more? The old ghosts were not there to greet us. There was no youthful Lou Mordecai, walking through halls with a tray full of pints and beer-spattered *Authentic*s. There was no youthful Clarke, dribbling shandy down his British Interplanetary Society tie as he enthused about “satellites” and “monoliths” and how he one day hoped to go to Ceylon for a holiday.

There was just the coolness of the staff, the refined conversation of the few patrons, and the noisy babble of US as we voted thumbsdown and trooped out leaving perplexity and unfinished drinks. Shortly after Christmas we visited the PRINTERS DEVIL, the next pub along that same hidden alleyway. A “printers devil” by the way, was the poor bastard who would sort out the print for blocking up before the time of Linotype. He’d be initiated into the printing trade by having his face squirted with printers ink. With such combined responsibility and jokiness behind it the place should have been ideal for sf fans.

It was. I lounged in that bar and felt right at home. Mind you, I didn’t drink there, and so didn’t feel the pinch of the extra penny on a pint that the London University SF Society people, with us that night, seemed to feel of high importance in giving the place a thumbsdown.

But for that extra penny you got a long wide room, lotsa chairs, tables, corners to hide in, an overflow room at one end still comfortably within the gathering-place, two nude pictures, friendly service, nearness to tubes, a pub that was bright, clean, but not pompous.

I’m much afraid, however, that the youthful looking L.U. students, a mixture of grease and boobs with precious little attempt made at sensible conversation, have swayed the feeling away from the Printers Devil. After all, a penny a pint is sixpence more per night!

Impossible!

Ritblat/Grim News #2 (April 1974, ed. Greg Pickersgill)

Frank Arnold

When we heard that the Globe was to be demolished in a new scheme for the redevelopment of High Holborn, we took it as one hell of a blow. The unaccustomed mood of depression did not last long – one evening at the height of the crisis John and Marjorie Brunner strolled in, looking very pleased with things, and told us they had just had an excellent supper at the One Tun on Saffron Hill just around another corner, which might offer us our future rendezvous. So I took a party round to have a look, found it to be a spacious place, bigger than the Globe, with in addition a good nosherie at the end of the bar. To top it off there was a friendly welcome from the then landlords, Mr. and Mrs. Kelso. We made the affirmative decision right away, held our next First Thursday meeting at the Tun and have held them there

ever since.

(1983; published in *The Frank Arnold Papers*, 2017, ed. Rob
Hansen)

51. Leeds in the Seventies (1979)

John & Eve Harvey and Alan Dorey

SCENE – Late one September night in a front room, somewhere in Elthorne Avenue, a jaded Eve has just finished typing “Ghasbag”. Whilst lounging on the couch and drinking Southern Comfort (just ice please), that well-known slave driver John remarks, “I suppose we’d better do the editorial now.” Having revived Eve with a large Ricard (ice and water please), an air of nostalgia fills the room.

Do you remember that time years ago when you chalked up that notice on the blackboards in Leeds, Eve, and started the whole thing rolling?

Yes, little did I know it was going to end like this!

Perhaps we ought to elucidate. The blackboards in Leeds University, outside the students union, are a form of publicity for any meetings that are being held. One day whilst wandering past with my lunchtime pie and pint I spied a notice written in an unlikely scrawl...

Cheek!

... which I later learnt to be Eve’s, saying “Tonight inaugural meeting of Science Fiction Society”. Well, what more did I need! Off I went to find a motley crew sitting around saying, “well, let’s form a science fiction society” and who should be Secretary, but my little Evelyn.

You’ve jumped in a bit after the beginning there – we must go back to the start. Dave Pringle, our almost BNF, said to me one day in Leeds, “You like science fiction don’t you Eve” and I said “Yes” – that was *the* mistake. We decided to start a society which entailed going round the coffee lounge collecting 50 signatures from people who would be willing to support an sf society.

Even though they didn’t even know what it meant!

Agreed, but most people in the coffee lounge in the mornings are suffering from the night before. Our next step was to organise an inaugural meeting. The bureaucracy of the union was such that you couldn’t hire a

room in the union unless you were a society, and you couldn't be a society until you'd had an inaugural meeting and voted in the committee. So Catch 22 – I had to say that I was the Secretary of the society that hasn't been formed yet, can we have a room. And they gave us one! Dave was going to be honorary Chairman because he wasn't a member of the Union, I was conned into being Secretary because I could type and another girl, Nicky Hayes, was going to be Treasurer as she knew the ins and outs of the Union, being a novice union hack at the time. We sat around in this room looking at each other thinking gee, we're going to have a big meeting with just us three. And then the door opened and hordes came in...

Hordes? About 20!

But that was hordes to us. All these people wanted to have a society and we thought, great, we're onto a good thing here; put in a budget of £n million and got all of £30 to run the society. From there it snowballed to occasional meetings in the bar. We got together a library which hung out in boxes in my cellar and were brought around to every meeting.

Of course, this all happened at the end of our first year (1973). The next major event was at the beginning of the second year, and that was Bazaar Day. That is the highlight of the year when all the societies sit around in a hall trying to cajole freshers into joining their ridiculous clubs. Freshers, in their innocence, wander around enthusiastically paying 30p (as it was then) a time to join societies which they never bother with again, all of which works to the societies' advantage because they get a great amount of money from people!

I arrived at Bazaar Day...

All on your little own...

and there were all these people grabbing tables, putting up silly signs, playing records and there was me all on my own...

Ah...

with my little white sheets of paper...

Ahhh...

when this strange fella came up and said, "Are you Science Fiction?" That was John! We were the only two manning the tables at Bazaar Day and from there the scene was set, we were the two who did the work!

Yes, Secretary and Treasurer and everything else – we did the whole works. Much to our amazement, though, we managed to find 90 members over the two days of Bazaar Day, which boosted our finances no end. The

first term was spent running around trying to organize things and absolutely nothing happened. One thing we did manage, however, was a trip to Sunderland for the “Beyond This Horizon” writers’ weekend. Here we met our first authors!. Can you imagine the scene – Brian Aldiss wanders up to Dave Pringle, shakes his hand saying, “Oh, you’re David Pringle, I’ve heard of you”. Then we picked Dave up from the floor and had to revive him with a rather large drink. With an author/fan ratio of about 1:2 it was an excellent little gathering at which we met Chip Delany, Bob Shaw, Jim Blish, Brian Aldiss and many more. The major triumph of the next term was the inauguration of *Black Hole*.

Yes, somebody had the bright idea, I think it was Dave, always blame him!, of running a magazine. I said, “Oh, that sounds like a lot of work” thinking, once again that I’d get the typing.

Which you did.

Then, whilst I was lying on my sick bed in hospital, it was all arranged and was a fait accompli when I returned to the land of the living.

All you had left to do was the typing! It was funny though, that first meeting. We were all sitting around drinking (about six of us) trying to think of names. I’d like to wring the bloke’s neck who suggested *Black Hole*. In sheer desperation we accepted it after I’d gone through all sorts of silly suggestions such as *Flash Gordon Meets the Monster from the Red Planet*. Anyway, *Black Hole* was settled on. How we rue that day.

Oh, come on, big trees from little acorns grow and all that.

Well, nobody has ever said it was a stupid title, so I suppose it wasn’t too bad.

We did a lot of work for that magazine.

Yes, the first issues were really good fun. We had a caucus of about 6 people at the time who were interested enough to do some work. In the first issue we attempted to produce the magazine on ordinary stencils with hand-cut illos (calling them illustrations too!) dotted because we were told that this was the best way to get fine lines.

Unfortunately it didn’t quite work out. The union duplicating service printed off all our copies over the vacs and when we came back said, “Oh, by the way, the illustrations haven’t come out very well”. Too right, they were invisible! We were thinking of holding a competition to join the dots and guess what the illustration was to win a major prize – that died a death, all my good ideas seem to!

Those first issues were quite good fun really, cutting stencils apart, gluing them together. Every issue was a work of art! The joy of finding 30p a time electronic stencils and deciding we could mix electros and wax on the same page, thinking this was an innovation only to be told it's quite old hat really. The main trouble with that magazine was that we weren't in charge of the duplicating. We had to produce the stencils and then pass them over to the duplicating service for them to run them off. Now if anyone has ever used a duplicating service they'd realise that the people who work there don't care two hoots about whatever they're producing and if it's not coming out right, hard luck. So we used to get absolutely diabolical results from what were quite reasonable stencils really. We actually used to be able to sell copies then, these days they can't even give them away. Well, maybe that's being a bit hard. COME ON, BUCK UP *BLACK HOLE*.

The real highlight of the second year was Tynecon at which five of us went along, sat in a corner and thought oh, isn't it good but I wish we had the courage to speak to someone.

After that we started frantically writing around to authors asking them if they'd come and talk to us. Bob Shaw and Chip Delany both said yes, but they both chose the same day so we started a tradition by having both of them together – the Double Author Tradition.

When we knew that they were definitely coming, John and I spent weeks printing posters in our first attempts at silk screen printing – would you believe fountain pen ink and wallpaper paste! We put all these masterpieces round the union and got a massive audience of about 40 in the debating chamber which holds about 200 – we were optimistic in those days.

That was the biggest audience ever. Never to be repeated special offer. I still don't know to this day how we did it, but the meeting went off quite well really.

Except for the tannoy which they forgot to switch off. In the middle of the most interesting part of Bob and Chip's discourse you'd get a faint voice... "Is Joe Bloggs in the union..." It was funny at first, but we must admit that it was a bit embarrassing towards the end.

Yes, it was. I could have put my foot through that speaker!

Watch out Tarzan, John's on the rampage!

Ooh, get you!

After that the society trundled along. Bob Shaw started a tradition of coming over annually, for which we thank him. Audiences dwindled. Our

poster printing developed into a fine art with wallpaper paste and powder paint on the back of cheap wallpaper. We even progressed to the high echelons of photo-sensitive screens, developing them in a suitcase in the bedroom!

But it was the printing – we used to print them last thing at night and the posters were strewn all over the kitchen, into the living room, down the hall, drying! They didn't do much good though, for all the work we put into them.

No, unfortunately the membership was very apathetic. Several people used the library which ended up with about 1,000 books and magazines.

We even managed to move the library to a room in the Union annexe from your cellar.

Yes and painted the room, that was hilarious. It was the first time I'd touched a paint brush, so after careful instructions, John let me loose on the room. Once I'd got the hang of it I was having so much fun that I painted anything that didn't move out of my way, including the tap in the sink! At the beginning of the third year, on Bazaar Day again, we were very lucky and found Carol Gregory.

She helped transform the society in that year.

In that third year we didn't take such an active part – it ceased to be John and Eve's society. Unfortunately we had to do quite a bit of propping up because the caucus of people who were interested enough to put themselves out were all third years and therefore involved with finals. Unfortunately the society and the magazine are still suffering from that problem. This is the difficulty with university societies, though, they get a complete turnover every three years. But at least LUUSFS hasn't died a death.

No, it's amazing how it limps on.

To move on, John and I graduated, got married and came down to the big city to start life in the big bad world. Carol came down one weekend and said those dreaded words "Why don't we start a fanzine of our own?" So we, in a hasty moment said yes, let's. We sat down, decided on the layout and contents and *GHAS* (Gregory Harvey And Simmons) was born, using my maiden name because *GHAH* isn't quite as aesthetically pleasing as *GHAS* – it also makes it look as though there are more people involved!

Yes, that was a brainwave on the way round to the off-licence, most of my good ideas seem to arrive when there is alcohol in the vicinity!

GHAS #2 (September 1976, ed. Eve & John Harvey and others)

Alan Dorey:

The university SF society began operations in late 1973, and soon produced people like John and Eve Harvey and Dave Pringle. Their magazine, *Black Hole*, commenced operations after a suggestion from Lee Montgomerie, and was reasonably well established by the time Carol Gregory joined in 1975. There was a certain feeling of pioneering at this juncture, with many guest speakers and films being put on. The magazine went litho in December of that year, and it was in 1977 that Alan Dorey came into contact with them.

After attending the 1977 Eastercon, the small drinking sessions at the Victoria Hotel between Mike Dickinson, Dave Pringle and D. West were enlarged by the arrival of Carol Gregory, Kate Jeary and Alan Dorey, and it was here in November that the “bold” step to run the 1979 Easter convention was taken. Meetings began to grow, and the university group became a separate group as they too took in more and more members. Moves were made to find another pub in early 1978, and a temporary upheaval ensued as the Eagle was tried before settling on the West Riding, where a regular force of people turn up every Friday night. Folk from Manchester and Sheffield started turning up every now and again, and the “decision” was taken in early 1979 to turn the meeting on the last Friday of every month into a form of “Northern Tun” gathering. Fanzines proliferate, the many titles coming from the Leeds Group including *Adsum*, *Gross Encounters*, *Sirius*, *Procyon* (now *Entropy*), *Canopus*, *Daisnoid*, *Ocelot*, *O’Ryan* and the University’s *Black Hole*. This is quite apart from various one-off titles such as *Victor*, *Isaac Astral’s SF Weekly*, *Derik Prince of Fandom* and *Reflections*. So, all in all, you could say that the group is at the very least, active.

Yorcon Programme Book (Easter 1979)

52. Glasgow Fandom and Me (1980) Bob Shaw (the other one)

My few early childhood memories are for some reason bound up with space. I remember (just!) the sight of my mother holding up a newspaper and on it was that most incredible of sights, the far face of the Moon. Vague memories of the following Luna and Ranger Moonprobes follow, culminating with the first ever pictures “live from the Moon”, relayed back from Surveyor 1.

There was SF available to me, too. I read Asimov and Tolkien before I was ten, by virtue of my mother’s library tickets. Her tickets also were to aid me in the non-fiction department of the local library, where I shortly discovered that you could take out more books on the *facts* of spaceflight than on the fiction, at least each week! Thanks to some distant library committee I was firmly nurtured as not only an SF reader but also a spaceflight enthusiast.

Primary school memories are also linked with rocketry, for throughout them I was to be counted on to exhibit an interest in things science-fictional. For one reason or another my parents moved around a lot, so that although nominally English I became more familiar with Scotland. I was subjected, from the age of eight, to the tender cruelties of the public school system. What bizarre failure of the brain led my p&m to subject their only offspring to such a fate baffles me. Apart from the natural distancing effect of multiple moves across the length and breadth of Britain I was as a result of my schooling yet more isolated from the kids around me; being isolated, I retreated (or, perhaps, advanced!) into the worlds that those library books opened up for me....

When I finally discovered the seductive lure of second-hand books, and the gorgeous nuts-and-bolts magazines of the British Interplanetary Society the stage was set. I knew of fandom as a result of a flier that came my way through a years-old SF Book Club edition, in which the glories of the BSFA were praised. Apathy (and poverty) won out, and I didn’t become a member of that august assemblage.

In all respects, then, so far as I can see, I was a natural fan. If I’d been

introduced to fandom (let's say Faircon '65 took place...) at an earlier date than I think I'd have stuck with it, for, as with so many other fans it provided me with the peer group I never had. By the time that I had prospects of ready cash, in whatever small amounts, then the stage was already set; and with cash (in the form of a grant) came the possibility of actually meeting fans.

In 1973 the BIS popular magazine, *Spaceflight*, carried an article by a Scots researcher. At the footnote to that piece was a comment to the effect that the author was a member of a Scottish spaceflight group called ASTRA.

I wrote to the guy responsible for the article in question: Duncan Lunan. He wrote back, and told me all about the ASTRA. It turned out to be (at that time) an assemblage of two or three adults and half a dozen adolescents, all motivated by a more or less all-consuming interest in Space. And, SF. ASTRA had high opinions of itself and certain of the paltry few members, and for one reason or another was seen to embrace one daft idea after another. Yet it was fandom, being by then the only effective body of folk in Glasgow who knew anything of what fandom was about. Whether or not ASTRA gave a good showing for the rest of the genre's adherents may be doubted, but at least it was visible when I came seeking. And, for a while, it sufficed.

For years the Glasgow SF Circle had met, and had gradually become an extension of the purely Space group. Despite the somewhat strange and dogmatic views assumed by certain of the more voluble members, the SF Circle stumbled on for a few years after I first attended it. The advent of FOKT (and general falling-out between the SF lobby and ASTRA's ways) led finally to a decline, and eventual fall, of the SF Circle. But that was not to be for a couple of years.

Thanks to one of the stalwarts of the SF Circle, Jim Campbell, I heard of the world of cons and fanzines from a closer point than I'd yet managed to reach. It was at this time – early 1973 – that I made my first contribution to a fanzine, in the form of a cover for Jim Campbell's *Celtic Warrior*. When Duncan Lunan announced that he was to participate in the Beyond This Horizon festival in darkest Tyneside I was quick to take up the opportunity of going myself, and it was there that I met my first trufans.

Besides first coming across real, live authors (John Brunner, Bob Shaw, and probably others whose names I have forgotten) and listening with religious awe to their every word, there were a couple of fans present too. Eve Simmons and John Harvey, up from Leeds with some friends, and I think

just about as green as myself. There we sat, watching Jean-Luc Godawful's *Weekend* without the wit to go and get pissed as we should have. At Sunderland I was told that nearby Newcastle would host the 1974 Eastercon, Tynecon. Unsatisfactory (in retrospect) though the festival had been it did at least give me direct access to fandom. At last!

Throughout the Sunderland extravaganza I sat glued to the programme; by the time I next visited those parts I was less enchanted with the process of sitting, and was regularly to be found in the bar... Tynecon came across as a great event, well-run, etc, etc. Whether or not it was, I'm not too qualified to judge, it being my first con. Even so, from the general praise that attended it in later years I'm led to support the view that it was a good 'un.

Highlights of that weekend must have been talking to the soon-to-be-deceased James Blish; the "Yellow Brick Road" fancy dress item (has it been matched since?); and seeing the originals of various bits of artwork in the Art Show.

Tynecon saw my first introduction to another face of fandom. I was sat in a corridor with a group of older fans (not that much, you understand). But they certainly felt themselves to be the cognoscenti of life, the Universe, and fandom (James White has since explained to me that a cognoscenti is a type of basin!) and I made the capital error of enquiring about the function of the morrow's bidding session. Verbal abuse followed, the gist of which was that I was a filthy little neo, etc, etc, what right did I have, etc, etc, and so on. I'm sure you're all familiar with the attitude! That experience made me forever on the side of the newcomer to fandom, and whilst appreciating the feelings of the so-called established fans I've since then had a lot of sympathy for the neos!

Especially the ones with long blonde hair and defenceless blue eyes....

At Tynecon I discovered what they do when the programme ends; in later years I was to discover that the programme played little or no part in my enjoyment of cons at all! Which, I suppose, makes my involvement with the notoriously heavily-programmed Scottish cons something of an irony. I think that my feeling for the neos has much to do with it; whilst I might not, personally, wish to see much, if any, of the programme, I think that there should always be one for folk to retreat into...

Back in Glasgow I'd formed the University of Strathclyde Space and SF Society. It attracted grants, and shortly was running a bare programme of films and talk. It still survives to this day, although this year it has had almost

no programme to speak of, as many of the activists are no longer students. Still, from 1973 to 1980 it functioned in as close to a regular fashion as had ever been managed. S4 (as it was – and is – known) was not alone, for a fortnight or so after Tynecon the Friends of Kilgore Trout were formed.

I didn't have anything to do with the formation of FOKT (the Friends of Kilgore Trout), and was not to be numbered among the ranks of the founders. I did, however, turn up the next week, and shortly thereafter started to turn up every week.

At first, FOKT met in a real dive just down from Strathclyde University: the Dunrobin. Foul, it was. Don Malcolm brought his wife along one week, and I don't think he was allowed back for months! Apart from having a closed-off area for us to meet in, the place had no redeeming characteristics of any sort. From a wall-eyed barman to a hazardous gents', the place was a pit.

After the Dunrobin we tried to find a better pub, and settled on the Horseshoe Lounge in Drury Lane (no joke, folks!). Here was certainly a better pub but still there were problems. It was a city centre watering-hole, and as a result didn't need to offer anything bar velvet curtains and draught lager; a group of (at that time) abstemious book-readers in the corner did not follow on from a bunch of trendy fourteen-year old girls the week before with any sort of ease, and so it was decided to no longer meet at the Horseshoe.

FOKT ceased to meet for some weeks, and eventually I found what looked like the perfect site: The Andros.

What attracted us was its empty spaces, and the prospect of a downstairs room for the odd talk (there were still notions of having a programme, and Chris Boyce had actually produced one issue of a Kilgore Trout Newsletter!)

FOKT went from strength to strength at that time, and the tradition of going back to someone's house after the Pub shut started. At first, John Duffy or Ian Black had everyone back, even in the days of the Dunrobin. When I got a bedroom and sitting-room near the Andros Joyce and I also started to have folk back, and eventually things seemed to devolve wholly onto my shoulders.

ASTRA had been formed in the early sixties as a result of palace coups by Duncan Lunan and his friends within the ranks of the British Interplanetary Society (Scottish Branch). From a membership of over 100, with a good academic support, by 1975 they were down to half a dozen kids.

The general lack of appreciation of my many talents (that sounds

dreadful, but is in fact true) evinced by ASTRA led to a gradual split. Eventually in early 1976 it was to be complete. By that time ASTRA was, to my mind, in many respects no more than another flying-saucer group. The Glasgow SF Circle was essentially dead, and FOKT ascendant.

Rockcon Progress Report #1 (ed. Bob Shaw)

In 1978 the other (Glasgow) Bob Shaw chaired the first ever Scottish SF convention, FAIRCON '78. James White was Guest of Honour. The first Eastercon in Scotland, ALBACON, took place in 1980.

53. The Story of a Group (1976)

Sonya Porter

It was Christmas 1974 when I first began to think about starting my own Science Fiction Group. The BSFA seemed to have folded and although I knew a few people in fandom at that time, I felt isolated. What really brought things to a head was that I'd just finished reading *Rendezvous with Rama*, was still fuming at the ending and had no-one to thrash it out with. My husband, unfortunately, is quite uninterested in SF and at the age of 2 years, so was my daughter. So –

“Know what?” I said to Dave on Boxing Day, “I think I'll start my own SF club.”

“You're mad.”

“I know – but I'd like to try. Would you mind?”

“No.”

“It would probably mean my dashing off to a pub on or two evenings a month –?”

“O.K.”

“Probably be mostly fellers there –?”

“Lucky girl.”

Great, I thought. Women's Lib in action! But he's a pretty tolerant lad – put up with a lot for my SF addiction since we've been married.

Like a lot of fans, I discovered the fascination of space, time, e.t.'s and other worlds with Dan Dare in *The Eagle*; then I found H.G. Wells, ERB's Martian series, Rider Haggard's *She*; later there was Arthur C. Clarke, Hal Clement, James White...! And I was away! Although, until Dave and I married, I was a fairly average fan. I did read other sorts of literature too. But after we were married I started work in Kingston-on-Thames and huddled in a back street I discovered a Dickensian old bookshop with two long shelves of secondhand SF magazines. There were old *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Analog*, *Amazing Stories*, *New Worlds*, *Venture* – books I'd never heard of, let alone seen. Pandora's box! Many was the happy lunch hour I spent on the upper landing of that shop, perched atop their shaky stepladder, nose buried in SF gold; never realised it was the first step to fandom!

From then on I read nothing – but *nothing* – other than SF. Dave was very good about it – hauled home cartons of magazines for me. Didn't complain even when I found I couldn't bear to take them back for resale and the house began to look like the shop I was buying them from!

Later I had my small daughter Suzanne who, bless her, slept a good deal. This gave me a surprising amount of free time so I tried my hand at something I'd wanted to do for years – writing SF. But as I sank happily further into the SF quicksand I did occasionally wonder whether there might be even more to SF than writing and reading it. Then one morning I heard Philip Strick chatting on the radio programme *Today* about an SF lecture he'd given the previous evening. So I wrote to him through the BBC asking what else there was to do in SF, whether there were any clubs, regular lectures, etc. (I didn't know!). He kindly wrote back a long letter, telling me all about the BSFA. So I joined the Association, heard about the cons and discovered fandom! Lovely warm feeling of belonging!

And then the BSFA disappeared from view (luckily not for ever!) and there I was, lost and lonely again. But why wait for the BSFA, I thought. Why not start a club myself?

I wasn't sure how to go about it, so I began by asking for help. Through the BSFA I'd started corresponding with Graham Poole who I knew ran the Cheltenham SF Club and Graham had told me about Keith Freeman and his Reading Club. I wrote to both of them and they gave me a great deal of practical advice and the confidence to go ahead with my scheme.

Which was just as well. For organising an SF Club, I discovered, needs a good dash of perseverance and a growth of hard skin. Try organising a Yoga Club where people stand on their heads and everyone will say, how good for the figure; try to organise a club for the singing of medieval folk songs and they'll say, how clever. But try organising a club for the discussion of science fiction and the comment will be – how queer! Especially if you're a woman.

First, what was I going to call this queer club? Well, "club", I decided was out. I didn't want to frighten off prospective members with the thought of Subscriptions, Hon. Sec's and the possibility of being asked to *do* something! As I live in Woking (Surrey) I settled on "The Woking Science Fiction Discussion Group" which sounded fairly innocuous and described what I hoped we'd be doing.

The next thing was to find a place to meet. Having heard about the

London meetings at the Globe (and later at the One Tun), I'd already decided that a pub was the obvious place. I remembered that one of our local pubs had a small dining section at one end of the bar which isn't used much in the evenings. So I asked the landlord if it wouldn't be possible for a club to meet there once or twice a month.

He looked at me suspiciously. "What *type* of club?"

Staring him straight in the eye I said "Science Fiction".

"Oh," he replied, satisfied, "Flying saucers and things."

I didn't quibble. I needed his pub.

He then suggested meeting on a Wednesday as it was the quiet night of the week.

So now I had a place to meet and a regular day. By the time I'd got this far with my arrangements, it was February 1975 and I decided on Wednesday, 5th March for the first meeting, which would give me six weeks to drum up support.

Which meant advertising. Woking has a small free paper delivered door to door called *The Woking Review* and in it there's a "Leisure and Pleasure" page which carries details of local club meetings. So I went along to the paper offices and placed my advert: "Woking Science Fiction Discussion Group – 1st Meeting 5th March" etc.

The man who took it looked puzzled. "Odd hobby for a woman, isn't it?"

I didn't argue. The advert was free. If I'd hit him over the head with his typewriter he might not have wanted to accept it.

Next I went to the commercial newspaper for the Woking area, the *News and Mail*, and put the same advert (free again) in their "Diary" column.

"Shouldn't think there are many people around here who read that," said the girl behind the counter.

Then I made out some notices and got them pinned up in –

- Woking Library (they were quite decent about it, didn't even blink)
- a Woking bookshop (they were very decent about it, the chap there even admitted to reading SF sometimes)
- St. Johns Post Office (they were bewildered – "What's there to *discuss* about science fiction?")

Finally, I phoned my friends to see if they, their husbands, boyfriends,

general friends – *anyone!* – might be interested enough in science fiction to join a discussion group. Not much luck, but I did find one other girl, Peta, who volunteered to come along to the pub with me on the first evening.

And by the time Wednesday 5th March came along, I certainly needed Peta's moral support. I wouldn't have been surprised if Peta and I had sat there alone all evening. Snide remarks and raised eyebrows had worn down the confidence that Graham and Keith had given me. Perhaps the girl at the *News and Mail* had been right and we were the only SF fans in the area.

But we weren't.

Two fellers were already there when Peta and I arrived, ourselves half an hour early, which showed enthusiasm! Six more drifted in during the evening (but no more girls, which set the pattern), and by the end of the first meeting we were 10 strong. Marvellous! We got to know one another and our likes and dislikes in SF; I asked whether they wanted to keep it as a Group or whether they would prefer a more formal Club, and everyone decided to keep it as an informal group. We also decided to meet twice a month, on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays. And before we broke up for the evening, I suggested a subject (I believe it was the old chestnut "What is SF?") for discussion at the next meeting.

I kept the adverts running and the notices pinned up and also drafted a short report on the evening for the *News and Mail* to carry on its "A Meeting Took Place..." page (also free). This brought in more members and next time there were 15 of us, which, believe it or not, was a bit of a problem.

I'd thought we'd get perhaps half a dozen SF fans along to the meetings at most, and a couple of tables in the dining area at one end of the bar was fine for that. But with 15 it was more difficult. Even putting the tables together, we were too spread out for easy conversation. And there was the noise. If Wednesday was a quiet night at that pub, Saturday must have been a goldmine! We had to yell to make ourselves heard above the general bar conversation, the juke-box and the one armed bandit. Worst of all, the landlord had put a small pool table in the corner of the dining area and the inexpertly handled cue became a hazard to life, limb and drink.

As the meetings went on the numbers attending varied from 10 to 20, and on one occasion when the local Young Liberals descended on us, we were 36 in all. Conditions became impossible.

So I had to look for a new home for the group. I hunted around the local pubs with no success. In desperation, I was about to book a "dry" committee

room at the new plush Centre Halls in Woking, when I heard that the Prince of Wales – a pub at the very end of my road! – no longer used one of its bars. The landlord there was quite willing to let the group have it twice a month at no cost – as long as we drank, which we faithfully promised to do!

It's proved the ideal solution. We have the whole bar to ourselves and since it's cut off from the rest of the pub, there's no din to compete with; we don't have to fight off other customers to get our drinks, and best of all, we can show films.

For last autumn we were joined by Mick, who has his very own genuine 16mm film equipment and occasionally he brings along (free again!) old SF films such as *Project Moonbase*, *Flash Gordon*...!

Which brings me to – what do we actually *do* at the meetings? Well, we start by swapping books. Another of the members, Andy, keeps what we call the “library”, a couple of cardboard boxes filled with SF paperbacks. These he brings to each session and into them we put what books we feel we can bear to part with, taking out an equal number. Well, that's the theory, but it's surprising how the number of books in the library varies! Then we go on to discuss some aspect of SF – authors, books, theories (or maybe cars?). Mick brings his films along every six weeks or so. And just before Christmas, having discovered that Dave Kyle lives not far away at Weybridge, we invited him over for a talk about his career and the BSFA. Very interesting, that was. Thanks Dave!

Soon we may – just may – be going to try producing a fanzine. I haven't persuaded everyone that it's a good idea yet – I've only managed to sell one member on fandom so far. But I'm working on it! One problem, of course, would be money.

And that brings up the question of financing the group. It hasn't cost too much yet. We put 50p each in the kitty for drinks and so far the only other expense has been the cost of stamps and telephone calls to let the other members know about film nights or Dave Kyle's talk. For this I just pass around the hat. Trouble is, I swear they know when I'm going to ask for contributions because that session you can bet the number attending is way, way down!

The number of people at each meeting still varies greatly. As Graham Poole says in *Sfang* 1 (his special fanzine about forming a local group), there is a nucleus of members who come nearly every time (five from the original ten – Tony, Mike, Boris, Richard and me – and another five – Andy, Mick,

Tom, Ross and Dave), some who come occasionally (like Alan and Elke???) and then others who come once and never again! The number has been as high as 26 and as low as 4 (recently!). I hope it's just the winter which is keeping the number low at the moment, but I'm going to have another publicity drive in the spring. Maybe I'll get some more girls along this year – please?

Besides bringing in SF fans, the publicity I've done so far has had a couple of unexpected results. In September I was asked to give a talk on SF to the local Over 18's Club and a school teacher wrote asking the group to suggest suitable SF books for her pupils. That provoked quite an argument at the next meeting, but we felt quite honoured.

Though not everyone is so complimentary about the group.

One day last November I sat in a cafe, drinking my tea, bothering nobody and quietly reading the latest *Analog*. An old (very old) man sat opposite.

“What's that you're reading?”

“Science fiction.”

“Rubbish!”

“It's not – it's very good!”

“I was an M.A. At Cambridge. Taught a generation that really knew what literature was. And I say science fiction is rubbish!”

“Well, I run a science fiction discussion group, and there are about 20 of us who find it a mind-expanding and very satisfying literature.”

“All I can say is, you must be a lot of frustrated spinsters!”

So there you are – frustrated *spinsters* (?), clear-eyed visionaries of the future or just a bunch of ordinary people, sharing an interest and out for a convivial evening, that's us.

I'm sure there are other ways of forming an SF club and other things to do at the meetings (suggestions welcomed). But that's our group. If you're down our way, we meet at 8.00 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month at the Prince of Wales pub, Robin Hood Road, St. Johns, Woking, Surrey. We'd be glad to see you.

Probably be the only way I'll ever get to meet any of you fans out there.

The other evening I was feeling rather bored. Thought, there must be more to an SF life than this. So –

“Dave,” I said, “I think I'll go to MANCON this Easter.”

Dave looked straight at me. “Oh no you won't,” he said, “Not after what

you've been telling me goes on at those cons!"
So much for Women's Lib!

BSFA SF Yearbook 1976 (1976, ed. Alan & Elke Stewart)

54. The Reading SF Group (1977-1980)

Keith Freeman and Dave Langford

Keith Freeman

The Reading SF Group, which I helped start, is a university student group with outside members. The undergraduate members don't seem interested in anything other than the club, which I think boils down to the fan mentality. Take for instance David Dunford, a friend of mine who sometimes comes along to the club. He's interested in SF and enjoys talking but wouldn't go to a convention. I'm sure he'd enjoy a con but I can't convince him. I think anyone who enjoys sitting around and nattering couldn't help but enjoy a con.

We have the advantage that groups can do things individuals can't. We proved this in Reading where we produce *Matrix* and *Vector* for the BSFA. Without the other people who help in the collating, stapling, stuffing envelopes and so forth it would be a tremendous job for just two or three of us.

The experience of a university group is only there for a maximum of three years or so.

Matrix #12 (June 1977, ed. Tom A. Jones)

Which might be why, a couple of years later, the "outside members" were their own group:

Dave Langford

Little is known of the Reading SF Group, a group predictably devoted to Reading SF. Its activities are many. Keith Freeman reads SF in eastern Reading, I read it at the group's 22 Northumberland Avenue nerve-centre, and Martin and Liese Hoare read it in far-flung Pangbourne. Yet even this strenuous programme does not satisfy the members' blazing apathy, and the

group has become heavily involved in public-service work – a continuing quality check on the local Courage Directors Bitter. Keith Freeman works hard at not attending such gatherings, but he is a key member of the vital “Can I have some more cheap paper to produce *Twll-Ddu*?” subcommittee. (The ingeniously streamlined committee structure allows this subcommittee to meet by telephone – this concept may interest the BSFA, which is having more and more difficulty in squeezing its committee meetings into the Olympia centre.) RSFG’s weekly beer testings have often had an attendance in excess of three; featured speeches in 1978 included Martin Hoare on “How to Run the Computer Industry and Three Conventions Without Losing Weight”, Liese Hoare on “How to Run Martin”, Dave Langford on “The Care and Feeding of Rejection Slips”, and Hazel Langford on the wagon. We have also had stimulating open discussions on such contemporary problems as beer-purchase precedence, alcoholic poisoning and Peter Weston.

RSFG is perhaps unique in having no chairman or president, no constitution, no membership fee and a regular 100% turnout at major conventions. Plans for the 1976 group fanzine are steadily being abandoned. We hope to make the organisation still less formal as the membership continues to drop.

Matrix #22 (February 1979, ed. John & Eve Harvey)

Despite occasional resolves to move to another pub, these [*Reading pub meetings*] still take place on the third Thursday evening of each month in the lounge bar of the Osborne Arms. Time: 7.30 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. onwards. The place is reached by turning right out of Reading General Station (BR), left after the Alder Valley bus station just down the road, and walking a little way up the hill. Neophytes are welcome and may make themselves known to the group by making The Sign – placing a fiver on the bar and saying “What’s yours, Dave?” in ringing tones.

The Reading Group does not have a leader, a constitution, a formal procedure for debate or indeed anything much besides a title arbitrarily chosen for the convenience of Nominalist philosophers. The name of this title is called “Glomerule”. The title is called “The Title of the Reading SF (Reading) Group”. The title is... but this becomes derivative.

Matrix #33 (December 1979/January 1980, ed. Graham James)

55. A Message from Our Founder (1979) Chris Priest

Once upon a time I was met at an airport by a rabbi, and the rabbi was wearing a track-suit, and the track-suit had paint stains all over it. This was the earliest impression I had of our great former colony south-east of India, namely, Australia.

During the summer of 1977 I got a distinct impression that people were avoiding me. Why, I wondered, did people yawn when I talked about Australia, why did doors slam in my face when they saw my bush-hat and boomerang? Was I *really* going on about it as much as my friends (who had obviously seen too many Lifebuoy adverts) were claiming? In the end, I found I was boring even myself... so perhaps there was some truth in it all.

The fact is I had a terrific time in Australia, and I'm proud to be one of the small but growing band of Yanks and Pommies in the sf world who have made the long journey south. Bob Tucker, William Rotsler, Ursula Le Guin, Terry Carr, Bob Silverberg, Vonda McIntyre, Brian Aldiss are a few of the others. As far as I know, we all retain much the same sort of happy impression of the place... I had what I think of as the best time of my life down under. It's hard to say why, exactly... because it's true that Australia can offer little more than is readily available in Britain or the States, except perhaps the novelty of a different accent, and awe-inspiring scenery. I think that one of the strongest feelings I had out there was one of reassurance. When you fly from London, you pass through most of southern Asia, with the countries you visit briefly becoming progressively more alien and confusing: in the case of the flight I was on, Iran, India and Malaysia. Then, when you are least expecting it, you land in a place that looks like a cross between Torquay and Oxford Street, where the natives speak English (OK, a garbled form of English, I know, I know), and where they play cricket and watch Star Trek and drive on the left and collect old runs of *Astounding* and generally act in more-or-less comprehensible ways. There was also reassurance in the feeling that Australia is a *long way* from everywhere else, that if nuclear war broke out no one would get around to bombing the place until you'd had time

to dig a nice safe hole. And reassurance in the fact that it is so culturally old-fashioned; Melbourne in 1977 felt to me like London used to feel in 1967, a sense of things beginning to open up, and general health and prosperity... and girls wearing *mini-skirts* (which alone brought a few nostalgic tears to the eyes of this particular sexist pig).

And why should the science fiction world be interested in Australia? They've got nothing there we can't supply for ourselves. They've a few sf writers, and they've run a Worldcon, and they've got fandom, and they have feuds and alliances and monthly meetings, just like us. I must confess (and indeed, have hitherto made no secret of it) that before I made the trip I shared this feeling in some measure. Australia, considered in prospect, felt as if it was going to be a cultural and social suburb, one where the only possible difference would be that strangers in pubs would call you a Pommy bastard. I was wrong, and I grovel in abject apology for ever letting the notion occur to me. Not only did no one ever call me a Pommy bastard (and they didn't call me "cobber", either), but the whole time I was there I experienced a quite indescribable and intangible sense of *difference*, one which was all the more confusing for being overlaid with apparent similarities. Whatever the cause, I felt energized and inspirited by the visit in ways I hadn't felt since I first encountered fandom in 1962. Because they *are* just like us, in the sense that they read *New Worlds* and *Astounding* and *Hyphen* and *Vector*, and they have cons where boring people drone on about boring things on boring panels, and they have the other sort of cons where interesting people drink too much and become indiscreet and highly entertaining. Ok, they haven't got the Astral League, but they've got a Magic Pudding Club (or at least they had one while I was there), and they've got the Paul Stevens Show and the Golden Caterpillar Awards... and what amounts to a sort of parallel fannish tradition, where the differences became apparent because I was no part of them, but where the similarities also were apparent, because it was all unmistakably fannish.

(And in case anyone's interested, the art of sf writing has the same quality of difference/similarity. There is a certain amount of Australian sf which is derivative of Anglo-American writing... but there is also a new kind of Australian sf, practised most by the newer writers, naturally enough, where there is a new inwardness, a new sense of response to their own cultural/literary environment.)

Anyway, if you look back at those names I listed of visitors to Australia,

you'll see that most of them are of writers, not fans. (Though some of the writers do have fannish links.) During the first weekend I was in Australia there was a con, and during this I was struck by one of my occasional IDEAS. We've had TAFF for years, in which, as everyone in fandom knows, a fannish visit from or to Britain or America is paid for by fannish charity... and more recently DUFF has been in existence, in which fannish visits between America and Australia are arranged. It suddenly occurred to me that it was time the third side of the triangle was closed, and after a few minutes of non-sober reflection in the bar, GUFF was created by unanimous consent.

The Get Up and over Fan Fund was created with the specific intention of bringing an Australian fan to Britain for Seacon '79. After a few early hiccups, GUFF came into formal being, and, mostly because of the hard work and dedication of the two Administrators, Dave Langford in Britain and Leigh Edmonds in Australia, not only was sufficient money raised, but a clear winner was found. That winner was John Foyster, who is here at Seacon. Foyster was my own nomination for GUFF (based on the entirely unprejudiced fact that I have met neither of the other two candidates, Eric Lindsay and John Alderson), which gives me special pleasure in the fact of his win.

Which brings me back to the rabbi in the paint-smearred track-suit, for it was none other than he.

I'm at a loss to describe John objectively, because my knowledge of him before my Australian visit was minimal. I knew his writing through his work in *Australian Science Fiction Review*, where he went in for intelligent if idiosyncratic criticism of sf. Later, I read *JOE (The Journal of Omphalistic Epistemology)*, which was a sort of round-letter discussion fanzine about sf. I had heard he edited something called *BOF (Boys' Own Fanzine)*, in collaboration with Leigh Edmonds. And I knew he had been on the committees of various cons in Australia. What I didn't know was he looked like a rabbi.

Later, I heard him in action at the con... he goes in for a sort of sly fannish troublemaking, with a style and wittiness that gladdens the heart; he is an excellent extempore speaker. After the con, while I was drifting around on the fringes of fandom, I began to get to know him a little better. There are three things about him, events really, that I remember.

Firstly, he had the pleasant habit of taking me to bookshops; not the glossy, obvious bookshops, but the sort of hidden-away secondhand shops I

wouldn't have been able to find without either a much longer stay in Melbourne or a native to show the way. Secondly, he introduced me to friends of his outside the fannish world; although this perhaps sounds like an anti-fannish sentiment, it was actually something I appreciated a lot at the time. Thirdly, he showed me the true essence of Australia. We were waiting for a tram one hot evening in Swanston Street, a long straight road that runs through the centre of Melbourne on a roughly north-south line. Suddenly, John looked solemn. "This street," he said, "contains the very essence of All That Is Australia." I glanced around at the numerous Chinese restaurants (one of which we had just left), and said something smart, cynical, and unoriginal. "Listen you Pommy bastard," he said, contradicting what I said earlier, "I'm being serious. This street is symbolic of The Essence of Australia. There we have the Symbol of Australia's Past"... and he pointed towards the south, where on a small hill stands the Shrine of Remembrance, all Corinthian pillars and steadfast architecture. Duly sobered, I nodded with appropriate solemnity. "And there," said John, pointing towards the north, "we have the Symbol of Australia's Future." I looked, and at the other end of Swanston Street, almost as impressive in its own way, was Foster's brewery...

GUFF doesn't, or shouldn't, end with John Foyster's visit to Seacon. I'd like to think that his is the inaugural fannish trip between Australia and Britain, and that many more will follow in years to come. Don't let us allow it to wither away in indifference! It strikes me that the next opportunity for a GUFF trip could be in 1983, when Australia is bidding for the Worldcon. Then it will be our turn to send a British fan on a visit which, I can promise sincerely, will be highly enjoyable and eternally memorable. Here's what we have to do:

Support GUFF with cash. Treat it as a fannish charity on a par with TAFF and DUFF. Give freely... or donate auction-material whenever possible. Support the **Australia in '83** campaign. Join the Worldcon of 1981, and vote for Australia in '83. When the GUFF campaign begins, lobby for the chosen candidates, vote for your choice... and give freely.

And if Australia doesn't win the '83 bid, support GUFF anyway... because after all, a Worldcon is just a slightly better excuse for a trip, and there are numerous regional and national Australian cons which will do almost as well.

Meanwhile, make the effort to seek out John Foyster and make him feel

at home. If he calls you a Pommy bastard, what you have to do is call *him* a drongo (Australians don't like this), or alternatively, if you're the peace-loving type, buy him a drink (and we'll send out a gunboat later). Incidentally, if he doesn't look like a rabbi these days, don't blame me.

The Northern Guffblower #5 (August 1979, ed. Dave Langford)

56. APAs & Me (1981)

Greg Pickersgill

Well, is it a hard life? It's a hard life. Here I am only just a few hours ago got home from a tough day at the Filing Section and all I've had except for a plate of porkchops rice and corn is a lot of aggravation about when I'm going to get down and with it and do my apazine. This is because the small American I married recently is unreasonably keen on this rather contrived and confined form of fanac and has in some uncertain manner brainwashed me into thinking that the Time is Ripe for an apa to bloom into some sort of useful prominence in Britain once more. Oh yeah?

Actually almost all my fannish career has been involved with apa one way or another. Sporadically, true, but they've lurked on the further edges of my reach ever since I joined the BSFA (and discovered fandom – which was easy in those simpler days when fandom and the BSFA were essentially one and the same thing) in 1967. In those days OMPA – the Offtrails Magazine Publishing Association – was still quite a big deal and most British fans and some foreigners of any consequence were members. OMPA had been started back in the early Fifties and for about ten years had been well-patronised and the members put out some generally worthwhile stuff, but of course by the time I got to it everything was falling apart. Equally naturally at the time I made my first enquiries I ended up being far too idle to actually join and do something, so let the whole thing slide. A couple of years passed and OMPA's steady decline continued, until things got to the stage where all the comparatively talented people had either died, dropped out, or discovered real fun. By this time I was pretty well seated in fandom having done *Fouler* (which had put the shits up everyone, changed the face of fandom, made it what it is today etc) and all the "new" people who now formed the backbone (poor choice of word there) of OMPA were a species of peculiarly wimpy types with whom I was less than inclined to associate with at the best of times. Funnily enough these boy geniuses actually put on a convention – the 1973 Eastercon, called OMPACON – and unsurprisingly this was more or less the end of OMPA, which was gradually deserted by more and more people until the last I heard of it some years ago there was only David E

Bridges (who should have had more sense) and some other asshole left. The other asshole was probably Keith Walker, never far from a hopeless case. I'd sort of collided with OMPA one or two times more during this period, even tried to join once in a while, but sometimes it was even hard to find out who the Editor was. Still, I'm sure I'd never have done anything about it anyway.

Just like I never actually did anything about the other apa stuff I prodded at vaguely. Some time in 1971 I'd had a brain tumour or something and worked out in painstaking and extremely lengthy detail a constitution for an all-new revitalized invigorating British apa that would put the UK back to the head of the fanac class where it rightly belonged. I remember showing it to people like Leroy Kettle (a famous fan of the Seventies) and Robert Holdstock (later to become famous as the Cyrano de Bergerac of genitalia) and being bemused by their utter disinterest. Looking back on it now their reaction is more than usually explicable. Not only in those days was fandom still small enough to make apas pointless for all intents and purposes, but an apa which was designed more with internal politicking in mind than serious constructive fanac was hardly a worthwhile proposition. Indeed if my apa had got going the members would have spent more time blackballing each other, overthrowing the officials and generally causing internal unrest than anything else. You might say it was designed for instability. My own version of the Conservative government, foreseen years in advance, perhaps.

Anyway, I'd also shown my self-defeating document to a little fan called Ian Maule, so it was no surprise that as soon as he'd decided a decent interval had elapsed he started an apa of his own. This was the inspiringly-titled ROMPA – *Rival Offtrails* etc (Brilliant, eh?). This effort took as its jumping off point the idea that OMPA, which by some celestial oversight was still stumbling, was too rotten to convert from within so the only way of saving apadom in the UK was to start fresh. If “fresh” means actually preserving the name of the unfortunate predecessor in your title.... Maule was never too quick on subtlety. I actually got my name down for this, though I can't for the life of me remember whether I ever paid the pound or whatever the dues were. Once again I never actually *did* anything. At the time I was sort of between houses and living on floors and things in London so wasn't in any condition to get any level of worthwhile fanactivity done, and anyway, by this time I'd been converted to the idea that the only way of reviving apas was to get all the heavy talents around to join OMPA and working from within kick out all the old farts and generally spruce the joint up a bit. Of

course nothing came of that, either, but it was a bit smarter as an idea. Give a dog a bone, though; ROMPA actually did run for two or three mailings, which was more than any of my ideas did. Though their quality was, to say the least, variable.

Anyway, once that was over, in '75 or '76, the whole idea of apa work in a British context was further from my mind as, say, the notion that a worthwhile piece of literature might ever win a Hugo. Until recently. Linda, you see, has grown up fannishly with apa-work the way the average British fanzine fan has with orthodox fanzines, and her zeal is great. And being here all the time I get a lot of "encouragement" to participate. Not that I'm doing this entirely against my will; her reasonings as set out in her own *Smack*, is basically sound. The only trouble with it all is that it's dependent on all the right people joining in and doing the right sort of stuff. I don't think there's enough of a tradition of this in Britain, and truthfully I think it's all going to collapse one way or another.

But this time, at least, I've actually *done* something.

Staggerlee #1 (June 1981, ed. Greg Pickersgill for APA SF&F)

57. Ye History of Ye Surrey Limpwrists (1981) Janice Maule

Once upon a time, in a convention hotel far away, the idea which was to become The Surrey Limpwrists was conceived and named. The time has now come for the details to be made public and set down for posterity lest the truth should become even more obscured by time. Even now, many of the dates are uncertain but as far as possible all the facts herein reported are correct and have been verified by the Chief Limpwrist (excluding those altered by this writer in order to stir up dissension).

The convention in question was Silicon 3, that notoriously sercon event held in Newcastle, home of the Gannets. As a contrast to the usual programming of films, panels and discussions the organisers had dreamt up two novelty items – a game of Charades and a football competition. The Charades ended with a round wherein the participants had to mime various well-known fans. When Rob Hansen was given a card bearing the name of the fan he was to mime, he looked at it for a few seconds, thinking, and then struck a pose which can only be described as very limp-wristed and minced up and down in front of the audience. To all those who had observed the subject of this mime at breakfast that morning, sitting on an under-sized stool and reaching up to saw oh-so-languidly through his bacon the answer was at once apparent and a roar of “Joseph Nicholas” rent the air.

Later that day the convention set out en masse for the football competition, which was to be a 5-a-side knockout contest between four teams. Amazingly enough there were 20 players and they managed to sort themselves into four teams without difficulty. Now came the problem: names. After all, how can you cheer on a team if it doesn't have a name? Naturally, the Gannets named their side “The Gannets” and the expatriate Welshmen living in London called themselves “London Welsh”. The third team decided on the truly dynamic name of “Rag Bags”. What to call the team consisting of Alan Dorey, John Harvey, Rob Jackson, Joseph Nicholas and Ian Maule? Some bright spark realised that they all lived in Surrey. Alan then recalled Rob Hansen's earlier performance and suggested the name of

“The Surrey Limpwrists”.

The Surrey Limpwrists as a fan group was not born for several months, although those former members of Gannetfandom who now lived in London frequently mooted the idea of a regular meeting in London which would not suffer the problems experienced at the monthly meetings at the One Tun in central London. That particular pub has now become so well-known as a meeting place for SF fans that it becomes ludicrously overcrowded: it is impossible to have a quiet conversation and getting a drink involves a fight to get past the *Dr. Who* fans and the Trekkies clogging up the bar buying orange squash and coke.

It was at one such meeting early in 1979 that Ian, Joseph and I heard that Eve Harvey, now on the Seacon committee as Fan Room Organiser, had asked Kev Smith to edit a collection of the best British fan writing of the seventies, to be published in time for Seacon and financed by convention funds. This idea, as a means of publicising British fanwriting to the outside world, had first been put forward at Silicon 3 (yet again), by Roy Kettle, who wanted us to publish 3000 copies of *By British* so the committee could give a free copy to every member of Worldcon.

Of course, the three of us were thrilled to bits by the idea of our fanthology being swamped by thousands of freebies, possibly containing the same material. Through the intercession of Rob Jackson a meeting was arranged to allow both sides to discuss the potential problems in a more peaceful atmosphere.

A meeting was duly arranged and took place in the Railway Tavern, Surbiton. This pub had been sampled by a party of fans who gathered there for a quick drink a few weeks previously to while away an hour before attending Rob Jackson’s marriage to Coral Clarke at a church just down the road. The pub found favour for its selection of real ales and was noted for the future. It was conveniently located for all those participating in the fanthology argument so the meeting was a good opportunity to sample its wares in the evening. The discussion about the fanthologies was mercifully short, once it was established that the Seacon committee were not in favour of giving their version away to all-comers and that Kev thought his choice of articles would not overlap ours to any great extent. Then we got on to more serious matters such as whose round it was and wouldn’t this be a good place to have this regular meeting we keep talking about? Thus the original members of the Surrey Limpwrists were (in order of appearance on that

fateful night): Joseph Nicholas, Ian and I, Rob and Coral Jackson, Kev Smith and John and Eve Harvey.

Since then word has spread slowly and the Surrey Limpwrist have increased in numbers. At first we were accused of being elitist because we tried to avoid too much publicity in order to preserve the group at a manageable level. In practice, our South London location and frequent changes of date (and location) prevent any but the most determined fannish fan from catching up with us. In this fashion the Limpwrist have grown from the original 8 to the current 41 listed below. Yet something seemed to be missing – many plans were formulated over a few drinks yet none of them have yet come to fruition. What was lacking? Were we being held back by the name? After all, it was hardly the sort of name you emblazon on T-shirts. We did have some badges made up for Seacon, but they were generally overlooked since most of the people wearing them were also sporting much larger and brighter “I’m Backing Jackie” badges.

Suddenly all was revealed when *Janus* 15 arrived. Inside was a terrific article by Richard S. Russell entitled “Blue Sky and Red Tape” (the first 3 pages of a series) on how to start your very own fan group and how important it is to have the magic words *science fiction* in your group’s name and so on. In an attempt to match up to the highest standards of American fanac (and let’s face it, they did invent fandom and therefore know much more about it than we British) we instantly commissioned Kev Smith (Company Secretary to the British Science Fiction Association Ltd.) to write the Constitution of The Surrey Limpwrist. After many months we are now able to publish it and hope that particular notice of it will be taken by Rob & Coral Jackson, John & Eve Harvey, Joseph Nicholas, Kev Smith, Gaynor Smith, Brian Smith, Alan Dorey, Bruce Healey, Martin Easterbrook, Margaret Austin, Paul Kincaid, Simone Walsh, Brian Restall, Chris Evans, Chris Priest, Randall Flynn, Terry Hughes, Rich Coad, Mike Glicksohn, Mike & Pat Meara, Phil Palmer, Greg Pickersgill, Dave Cockfield, Dave & Hazel Langford, Andrew Stephenson, Tim Illingworth, Ritchie Smith, Annie Mullins, Mike Collins, Rob Holdstock, George Bonder, Andy Firth, Ian Robinson, Colin Fine, Rob Hansen and Ian & Janice Maule.

Nabu #9 (1981, ed. Ian Maule)

58. The Astral League (1976-1979) Various

The Manifesto

JOIN THE

AUSTRAL LEAUGE

FOR THE ONE TRUE WAY AND THE ANSWER TO THE UPSETS OF
THIS MODERN WORLD

This week it has once been hotter than ever before since they started. WHY IS IT SO HOT? The Authorities know but they are covering up and not telling why. This is the only conclusion we have after speaking to many people who know why. We will not name their names but they know ~~xx~~ who they are and are telling you because it is only fair to the British people to let them know what is going on.

Records kept in 1884 show that the world is ~~xx~~ getting much hotter, according to the Guinness book of records. This is an ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ undisputable fact. At the same time measurements of newly found Pulsers, ~~xxxxxx~~ otherwise called the famous Black Holes have found that the Earth may be falling into what is known by the Scientists as a Gravity Trough between then, $\frac{2}{3}$ thus causing big increases over the past many hundreds years.

MAKE NO MISTAKE! IT WILL GET HOTTER YET!

It has been proved by facts that in hot lands people are most inclined towards acts of violence and sadistic acts. In Ethiopia they cut off your hand if you are guilty, and many other atrocities are known to have happened and are told

about in your newspapers. Also there are more diseases like Leprosy and Malaria. We warn you that this will happen also in Britain if it gets much worse!

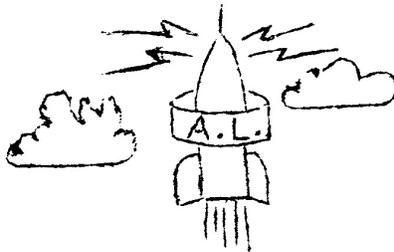
There is no answer for this the Authorities tell us, but you can protect yourself by joining the Austral League.

WHAT IS THE AUSTRAL LEAGUE!

The Austral League is based on the One True Way of our leader, the BoaK, who knows all. He will tell you how to save yourself, not with magic and black arts but with real Plans, available only if you write to the address below. The Church does not know and the Government is powerless to Prevent it. Only BoaK and the one true way of the Austral League can open up your eyes to those who would pull the wool over them. We do not make any profits and do not give our money either to so-called "Charities" who spend everything on chairs and typewriters. They do not even know the Chaos which would happen in Britain if these things go on.

We have many famous people in the Austral League many of whom you know and are pledged to help us not only with money for our Plans but by letting others know about the One True Way of BoaK. Some of them are on the radio and you will be hearing if you listen. This is just to prove we know what we are talking about and are not just another so-called "charity"

Send 50p Enrollment Fee now to THE AUSTRAL LEAGUE, c/o D. West, 48 Norman Street, Bingley, South Yorks, for membership and our real Plans on what to do in these Hours of Crisis.



Anonymous flyer (Easter 1976)

Sending 50p to D. West was the one constant theme in Astral League literature. BoaK, despite its curious resemblance to a contemporary fan's name, officially stood for Bearer or Bringer Of

All Knowledge. A later flyer for THE ASTRAL LEAUGE COLLAGE OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND TRUE FACTS offered degree courses in NODEAL PHRENOLOGY, ASTRAL HARMANY, ALTEAN MYSTOLOGY, COMPARATIVE ALIEN STUDIES and TRUE FACTS.

At Novacon 6: Peter Roberts

Graham & Pat Charnock held a room party on the Saturday night in celebration of Grah's 30th birthday. It was an enjoyable gathering, enlivened by the presence of a moribund pigeon on the windowsill and by the harmonious tones of The Astral Leauge Male Voice Choir, consisting of Pete Weston, Rob Holdstock, Andrew Stephenson, Malcolm Edwards, myself, and anyone else who could see the words. The Astral Leauge went on to dominate Sunday evening when its founder, Don West (Last Of The Old Ones), initiated new members with the help of a pole: the test consisted of entangling yourself with the pole and emerging again after a series of bizarre movements. I'm glad to say I proved rubbery enough to pass, as did Roy Kettle after he'd removed his stacked heels; Greg Pickersgill discovered he wasn't the correct shape for acrobatics, and Rob Holdstock, of course, broke the damn pole.

Checkpoint #76 (November 1976, ed. Peter Roberts)

What the Choir Sang

Oh Astral Leauge, oh Astral Leauge,
Oh Leauge it is of thee
I sing this song of Astral Praise
And Cosmic Harmonee.

The Astral Leauge shall overcome,
False BoaKs and foes shall flee,
And Astral Peace shall rule us all,
And Cosmic Harmonee.

When Dinosaurs did rule the earth
The Leauge was yet to be,

And now we stretch from Pole to Pole
In Cosmic Harmonee.

From Star to Star the Astral League
Is there for all to see –
Galactic Empires live in peace
And Cosmic Harmonee!

Twill-Ddu #5 (November 1976, ed. Dave Langford)

Secrets of the Pole: Dave Langford

Take a five-foot broom-pole. Take several drinks. Stand. Hold the pole horizontally before you, in both hands – hands a couple of feet apart, palms up, fingers curled round pole. The hands may optionally slide along the pole, but the grip must not alter throughout the ceremony. Lower the still-horizontal pole and step first with one foot and then with the other over the section of pole between your hands. The pole is now behind you: maintaining the grip, bring it back over your head until you are again holding it horizontally before you (though with uncomfortably twisted wrists, as you will find). This was the easy part. Now raise your right leg – “left” and “right” may be exchanged throughout the following if desired – and manoeuvre the right foot around the right-hand side of your right arm and back over the pole towards you. You should now feel less than comfortable. It only remains to duck your head under the pole and – still without releasing your deathlike grip on it – continue the motion so that your torso follows your head, and your whole right leg follows your right foot, through the hoop defined by arms and pole. In the penultimate position you find yourself standing shakily with the still-gripped pole passing between your legs. A backwards step with the left leg over the pole returns you to square one in a glow of triumph, fulfilment and Astral Mastery. Have another drink and spend four days in traction.

The most elementary Visualization of the Cosmic All reveals that the sticking-place of all this comes in the antepenultimate motion, as pole and right knee jam firmly against one another and further progress seems unwise, not to say impossible....

TAFF report chapter, *Warhoon #30* (September 1982, ed. Richard

Bergeron)

Further spinoffs were the momentous Astral Leauge Year Book 1977 (including Chris Priest's learned thesis "Static Gravity", later sold to Omni) and cassette tapes of rock songs such as The Astral Leauge's Golden Greats by Graham and Pat Charnock. "Astral's just another word for somewhere in the sky / And Leauge means something like Society ... / Feeling good is easy Lord, in fact it's guaranteed, / Feeling good will cost you 50p. / 50p for Cosmic Harmoneee!"

In the run-up to Seacon '79, the Brighton Worldcon, a certain US author's incautious request for a room to meet her fans, and revelation that she liked to guide new fans around the dealers' room, led to a splinter cult's satirical flyers and I'M BACKING JACKIE badges....

The Jacqueline Lichtenberg Appreciation Society

(affiliated to the Astral Leauge)

Join the J.L.A.S. today!

Jacqueline Lighenberg is coming to Britain! This author of a lot of important science fiction novels, some of them about Star Trek as you know, is to visit our humble shores! Not since David Gerrold told us the one about Harlan, not since Harlan himself stood on a box at the One Tun, not since Charlie Platt threw a custard pie at Ted White... not since any of these major fannish events has there been an equal to Jacqueline Lichtenberg's imminent arrival.

Her British fans are invited to *join the J.L.A.S. today* and stand up and be counted.

Jacqueline Lichtenstein, celebrated authoress of some novels, of which only one is about Star Trek, needs no introduction we know. Reknowned in American fandom and all ready a major celebrity, Jacquiline Lichtenberg is very good, very nice and a great author as you don't need to be told. Those In Control have not allowed her books to be published in Britain, which is a scandal and a disgrace and just proves things. Campaign for your right to read her! Who are the mandarins who censure what you read? Why are her books unpublishable here? Set things straight! *Join the J.L.A.S. today!*

Just send 50p to D. West, 48 Norman Street, Bingley, Yorks, which is the usual address. You will receive a bumper package of J.L.A.S. goodies, including:

- A BADGE, which has to be worn at Seacon.
- A free list of BOOKSELLERS who import one of her books.
- A list of APPROVED SF-WRITERS (compiled by J.L. herself in person)
- A copy of the AUTHORIZED J.L.A.S. MAGAZINE, including the following articles:
 - “The Sime Stories – What Are They All About?” by L.R.A. Kettle
 - “House of Zero – A Cognitive Approach to the Predictive Metaphysics of J. Lichtenberg” by Darko Suvin
 - “Jackie – A Personal Memoir” by Anne McCaffrey
 - “The First Twelve Months” a checklist by Gerald Bishop
 - Pictures! Reviews! A fan-letter!

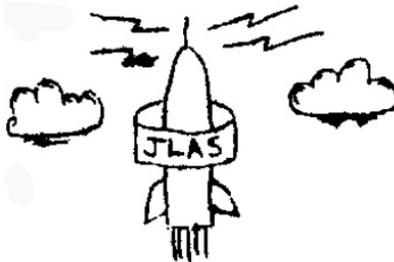
Dont forget – Jacueline Lichtenberg will be at Seacon and will be taking neofans on their usual tour of the book-room. *Only badge-wearers will be admitted.* (“I cannot remember the last time a bookroom was so interesting,” said Rob Jackson in Miami. “She pointed to books several times,” enthused Rog Peyton. “I have thrown away my truss, and have now read two books all the way through. Thanks, Jackie!” said Alexei Panshin.)

Wear your badge at all times!

Hands across the Galaxy!

Join the J.L.A.S. today!

just send 50p today to D.



(issued by the office of the BoaK)

Anonymous flyer (1979)

59. Seacon '79: The End of an Era (1979, 1993) Various

Mike Dickinson:

As grievously damaged braincells order themselves into some lumpish semblance of normality I must confess that I have just spent (Wednesday to Tuesday) the best week of my life. Some of the credit must go to the con committee, especially Peter Weston, whose new talent for pleasant silliness must be kept up, and the superbly organized Kevin Williams. The speakers also deserve credit, although I suspect that the only one I'll always remember is the saintlike Sturgeon, who spoke more good sense about important things than I've ever heard in so short a time. However, programme events are not vital to the life of the con: the people are, and I met more new people who were open, friendly and interesting than I could expect in a year's mundane activity. In fact I believe I have made several friends and if anyone can suggest a better way of passing a week than that he is welcome to his suggestion.

Of course I am referring to Americans. I came to the con with a slightly nervous curiosity, after all that had been stated in zines beforehand about how different from us they were. I knew there were some I wanted to meet, whom I wanted to be more than just names: all were charming, especially the amazing Joyce Scrivner and Terry Hughes – a one-man justification of TAFF. However it was the ordinary American fan-in-the-con which was the revelation. They treat the convention like a holiday in the Mardi Gras sense – normal rules do not apply. Liberated women in appreciable numbers, a cheap and plentiful supply of the finer things in life and a cultivation of silliness (I remember the disappointment expressed that Phil Foglio did not wear his moose antlers for the Hugo awards) help, but where was the paranoia and drunken belligerence? Surely it is not possible to run a con without them. Perhaps again those liberated women make a difference and even Kevin Smith will agree that men don't exactly suffer. A final myth to dispose of –

American authors are no more stand-offish than British. For every Pournelle there are several fans who (like Rob Holdstock) also write professionally, such as the Haldemans and the Eisensteins.

Thanks to the organizers, thanks to the people I met, especially thanks to the good fans of Chicago and Minneapolis: I'll see you there sometime. Let's do it again.

Kevin Smith:

What's to get excited about? You seen one Worldcon, you seen 'em all.

That may or not be true; it is highly irrelevant. Seacon '79 was my first Worldcon, so not for me the blasé, seen-it-all attitude of the experienced American Worldcon-goer. I've been to British cons, of course – since 1972 – and I've even chaired an Eastercon (Skycon in 1978), but the Worldcon was going to be different wasn't it? And I was all excited about it. So was most of British fandom.

It was going to be BIG, for one thing, and so it turned out. It was seven times as big as the previous biggie, Skycon.

There were going to be foreigners there, too. We've had foreigners before, but only in small, easy-to-handle numbers. At Seacon, we Brits were outnumbered by foreigners – about three to one.

It was going to be expensive – despite Mr Weston's protestations a couple of years ago. Expensive rooms, expensive booze, expensive food, and for a couple of days longer than British cons usually last. But by saving up for months beforehand and staying in a little hotel near the Metropole rather than at it, the wallet managed to stand the strain, just. Me too.

And the feel of it was going to be different. This was a Worldcon, damn it, not just any old British con! And there the predictions, or expectations fell apart. The feel of Seacon was not different; it was familiar. I felt at home.

So was the whole thing a waste of time and money, then? No, no, a thousand times no! The feel was fannish and familiar, but there were lots of new people who fitted in and contributed to it. Legendary American fans and unknown British neos – I was meeting both for the first time – added enough vitality to break up the established rounds of British fandom without ruining its fannish ambience. It was great, I tell you!

But don't ask me how life was outside the fanroom.

Dave Langford:

I enjoyed Seacon. This says startlingly little about the real quality of the con, since we vile elitist (etc, etc) fannish fans have strange and unfair resources to fall back on, no matter how newcomers may be suffering; however, the consensus seems to be that Seacon was good stuff. Little or no part in this was played by my programme appearances: a repeat of my megagenocide talk from Yorcon (now reprinted in *Drilkjis*) and a fanwriting panel. The latter I almost missed – I was punished for lateness by being handed the microphone and left alone for several subjective hours until my babblings died away utterly – while the former was immensely egoboosting since there was standing room only and even Peter Weston couldn't (he said) get in, while (if Leroy Kettle can be believed) there were fewer people in the main con hall than my little one. All this set me pretending to be a pro – remorselessly pouncing on copies of my book and signing them despite the owners' cries of protest – until overweening hubris led me to the SFWA suite and an attempt to sign up. Oh, they said. Oh, we never thought anyone from Britain would want to join. So we didn't bring any application forms; so there. I spent the rest of the con in the fan room; it felt just like an Eastercon, though somehow I missed all the traditional clashes with heavily-armed security. The gap was filled when, as I left the Metropole one night, I was searched on suspicion of harbouring stolen cameras. This still rankles (as does the distressing fact that I was fuller of whisky than witty repartee, and accepted the outrage in blank silence); however, Seacon felt precisely like a traditional UK con after that. The American accents were one hint that something bigger was happening Out There; another was the feeling of a vast echo-chamber in which the con's rumours were reverberating. To pass on a rumour in the fan-room was like shouting in some immense cavern: after a disconcerting long interval the echo returns, weirdly distorted by its reflections along all the halls and corridors of the Metropole. Thus the great "American Riffraff" story: if Joyce Scrivner has got it right, the phrase was used sotto voce by a "snooty British lady" as she informed US fan Jane Hawkins that this here party was by invitation only, and so on. By the time the rumour-mills had finished, the phrase was on the lips of Vonda McIntyre's publishers as they brutally hurled her from their select gathering; a security man was said to have spat "American riffraff" at Karen Anderson whilst barring her from the party where hubby Poul and the SFWA were

disporting themselves; “American Riffraff” badges sprouted like mushrooms; an international incident seemed imminent, but nothing much actually happened. Still wilder rumours were flying when the con was over: Charles Platt had denounced Chris Priest to SFWA as being responsible for mockery of their members via the Jacqueline Lichtenberg Appreciation Society! Jerry Pournelle had offered physical violence to Charles Platt! Marion Zimmer Bradley and others were working to have Chris Priest drummed out of SFWA! Ted White was to become editor of *Heavy Metal* at \$50,000 per annum! Greg Pickersgill and Simone Walsh had split up! *A Foundation* reviewer had changed sex!

It seemed that Seacon had distorted our sense of reality forever. All those post-con rumours proved to be true. Help.

Ansible #2/3 (September/October 1979, ed. Dave Langford)

Rob Hansen:

When SEACON finished on Monday it had lasted six days, twice as long as most British cons, but its close spelled an end to more than just a convention. In the weeks and months that followed it became clear that the Worldcon also marked the end of 70s fandom. In many ways the Worldcon was the culmination of all that had occurred in British fandom in the 1970s so it was not too surprising that some of those active since the early years of the decade, who would have dropped out of things even earlier in the normal course of events, should have hung on to make SEACON the climax of their time in fandom, while the event itself left those involved with it exhausted and apathetic about fandom. And so it came to an end. The era that had started with the advent of *Fouler* was now over. SEACON '79 had been the end of the gestalt that was 1970s British fandom.

THEN #4 (August 1993, ed. Rob Hansen)

Appendix

Coming from Behind – A Short History of British Fanzines in the Seventies (1979)

Joseph Nicholas

1. In the Beginning

As 1969 lurched towards its close, there could be little doubt that British fandom was feeling considerably less than healthy. Described as “apathetic” in certain quarters, it had in fact fallen prey to an almost all-encompassing mediocrity – a tone fostered and maintained by the somewhat juvenile (and in retrospect rather embarrassing) doctrine of sweetness, harmony and light to which everyone seemed to subscribe: a doctrine which held that everything was acceptable, nothing was damnable and that all fans were supposedly suffused by the warm inner-glow of universal friendship. This attitude was often summed up by the phrase “everything in the garden is lovely”, and perhaps most typified by Mary Reed’s *Crabapple*.

To be fair, one of the worst excesses of the latter half of the decade, the B.S.F.A.-instituted Printing and Distribution Service (PaDS), had at last faded away. It was a scheme whereby anyone who wanted to publish a fanzine – regardless of their literary, artistic and editorial abilities – needed only to churn out a pre-determined amount of wordage and then send it all away for stencilling and duplicating by a “central office” entirely unconnected with the editor of the fanzine in question; which (apart from causing all the fanzines so produced to look practically identical) meant that there was little or no critical control exercised over the material printed and standards consequently went into a sharp decline. In other words, you could be rejected absolutely *everywhere* but *still* get yourself published. The inevitable flood of dire and forgettable fanzines was only terminated when volunteers to run the operation could no longer be found; and there were few who regretted its demise.

But by that time there weren’t many good fanzines left. The best was probably Peter Weston’s internationally circulated, highly respected and

solidly sercon *Speculation*, which had been published on a regular quarterly basis since the mid-sixties and was to clock up no less than five final-ballot Hugo nominations before its eventual disappearance; while, judging by today's standards, the handful of remaining titles were really pitiful, and perhaps best forgotten. There had recently been two other contenders for top honours, but they had gone the way of all fanzines: Graham Charnock's somewhat avant-garde genzine *Phile*, which had folded as a result of his growing disenchantment with the then-current state of fandom, and *Mor-Farch*, an SF-oriented genzine edited by Peter Roberts, whose increasing disinterest in SF *per se* had led to its being "temporarily suspended" in favour of the planned *Egg*, aimed in part at sparking the fannish resurgence that – with the sercon boom that had characterised the mid to late sixties now running out of steam – he recognised as the only sure way of pulling fandom from the slough into which it had sunk.

As 1970 opened, therefore, things were looking grim – but, although nobody could possibly know it, the trough *was* bottoming out. The first issue of *Egg* came out in January, to general (if initially muted) acclaim, and in South Wales and Newcastle, other fans were also stirring themselves to action. Fandom was about to start moving up once again.

2. Up Against the Wall, Punks!

Stuck in a tiny village in an out-of-the-way corner of South Wales, Greg Pickersgill (barely out of his neohood) was feeling increasingly unhappy with the current state of fandom and – in conjunction with his close friend Roy Kettle, then working in London – increasingly determined to Do Something about it. The "something" in question was the jointly-edited *Fouler*, the first issue of which – published in June 1970 – was confusingly labelled *Fouler 2*: a badly laid-out, erratically duplicated and thoroughly tatty-looking ragbag of vulgar fiction and poetry, spiced with some extremely acerbic (for their time; in retrospect, they seem remarkably tame) comments about the current state of affairs. It was this latter aspect of the fanzine that caused people to sit up and take notice, actually provoking howls of outrage from certain older fans who seemed to be objecting more to the liberal use of four-letter words (not, in itself, a totally new thing) than to the fact that they were the targets of most of the insults.

But the reaction from others was more favourable, and the second, just

as bloody-minded, issue appeared a couple of months later, containing the first of Pickersgill's "killer" fanzine reviews, which were noticeably more involved and analytical than the apa-style mailing comments then being produced by almost everyone else. Doling out praise where he felt praise was due and stomping mercilessly on those he felt did not come up to scratch, he intended them as a spur to raise the standards of writing and editing, and provoked even more howls of outrage. And even more cries of enthusiasm from such early "converts" to the cause as Welshfan Bryn Fortey, rock fan John Hall and budding author Rob Holdstock: a cause which, with that same issue, acquired a most unexpected name.

There was then a tendency for British fanzines to identify themselves with unusual animals: for example, comics fan Dave Womack's short-lived *Viridiana* set itself up as the leading light of "Wombat Fandom", while Peter Roberts's *Egg* was subtitled "The Journal Of Aardvark Fandom". Pickersgill, searching for a rather more repellent name with which to satirise what he saw as a grisly and cretinous business, came up with the largely unpronounceable "axolotl", which was thankfully dumped in favour of Kettle's suggestion "rat". *Fouler* 3 contained a full-page "advert" for this new "club" which, requiring intimate knowledge of every V.D. clinic in Britain (among other things too ludicrous to mention) as a precondition for membership, was intended as just a one-off joke; but as such it was a failure. By the time of the 1971 Eastercon, those already associated with *Fouler* had found the label "Ratfan" to be well worth having (if only because of the sense of collective identity it gave them), with others also beginning to pick up on it – including Australian expatriate John Brosnan, a re-energised Graham Charnock and Cambridge undergraduate Malcolm Edwards, whose excellent sercon fanzine *Quicksilver* had by then seen two issues and was considered by many to be at least the equal of the longer-established *Speculation*.

It was, essentially, by its attitude that Ratfandom could be distinguished from the other fan groups of the time. Whereas most such groups seemed content to simply publish their fanzine(s), have their fun and not make waves, the Rats were united more by their desire for change and progress (although they had their fun as well, of course). They wanted nothing more nor less than a wholesale fannish renaissance, and were quite prepared to go on kicking and shouting until they got it. Then, too, they were not a geographical group: scattered across the southern half of the country, they usually met only at conventions and relied heavily on *Fouler* to keep them in touch in the

interim.

It was, however, almost inevitable that they would eventually gravitate towards some mutual centrepiece, and equally inevitable that London would be the venue (after all, jobs there paid more than anywhere else in the country). Everyone bar the soon-to-fa-fiate Fortey and Pickersgill himself was already living there when *Fouler 6* appeared in June 1971. It was the last issue to bear the Welsh editorial address, for later that same year Pickersgill joined the Civil Service and moved to London to share a flat with John Brosnan – as a result of which his fanac virtually ground to a halt, there being no need for him to publish a fanzine when the people with whom he most wished to communicate were living practically on his doorstep. Against all the odds, *Fouler 7* finally appeared in September 1972, and was very much the mixture as before – vulgar fiction and poetry, abrasive fanzine reviews and vituperative comments about fandom – but the fourteen-month hiatus and the changes that had been occurring elsewhere in fandom had served to blunt the immediacy and enthusiasm that had characterised the earlier issues.

But that was of little consequence: despite its soliciting of contributions for *Fouler 8*, it was actually the last issue; Pickersgill lapsed back into silence, not to return to publishing until early 1974.

3. Meanwhile, Back at the Pub

In the mid to late sixties, fan groups had been of great importance, but by 1970 there were only three of them left. Their contact with fanzine fandom had in any case fallen to a minimum: the Delta group in Manchester had taken up amateur movie-making, the Liverpool group had become an inner-directed social clique, and Hertsfandom was fading fast as its members moved away to other parts of the country. As with everything else, the mediocrity of the later sixties was responsible, and it was time for a revival.

The revival came from a most unexpected quarter: Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in the shape of a new group put together by neofan Ian Williams, and initially consisting of himself, comics fans Jim Marshall and Ian Penman, then-schoolboys Thom Penman (no relation) and Ritchie Smith, and degafiated late sixties fan Harry Bell, who had originally given it all up solely because of the North-East's dearth of social contact – all of whom contributed to the first issue of *Maya*, edited by Williams and published in September 1970. This, a bitty and somewhat incoherent fanzine with contents

that ranged from the sercon (the inevitable book reviews) to the fannish (a column by already established fan Gray Boak, who actually hailed from the North-East but was then living in London) and diabolical repro, would be judged a crudzine by today's standards but made quite an impact on the fandom of the time – not least because it woke people up to the fact that there was something lively happening in the Newcastle area. The response, although low, was encouraging enough for Williams to turn out a second, more controlled but unfortunately even more appallingly duplicated issue in time for the 1971 Eastercon.

The group had by then acquired a name: the Gannets, derived from the name of the pub in which they had recently begun holding their regular meetings – and which, strangely, it took Greg Pickersgill to suggest to them (in, despite its Silly Animal connotations, the same issue of *Fouler* that launched Ratfandom) before they actually adopted it. At that stage it didn't mean very much, probably because the group was too new to have acquired any kind of reputation (be it good or bad), but it was already obvious that its members were far less brash and much more conservative than their Ratfan counterparts, most of whom were of a similar age and of surprisingly similar ideas – not least in their desire for a resurgence in British fannish spirits, a resurgence in which *Maya* was soon to become one of the leading fanzines.

In late 1971, Ian Williams handed over its editorship to newer recruit Ian Maule, who promptly threw out all the serious stuff that Williams had collected for its third issue and set it off along a solidly fannish path, in the process demonstrating the importance of good layout and clean reproduction. In these latter respects Maule was greatly influenced by the American fanzines he'd seen and which, being considerably more fannish than anything Britain was then producing, had appealed to him rather more. Besides, he wanted to improve contacts between British and American fandom, and the publication of British material in an American format was probably a viable way of going about it.

Not everyone agreed with this policy, or even with the idea of increased international contact. Greg Pickersgill, for example, saw overseas fandom(s) as completely irrelevant (an attitude he holds virtually unchanged to this day), and there was indeed little part for them to play in the British renaissance. On the other hand, there could be little doubt that British fandom had become strikingly insular over the past few years, and it was perhaps high time it lost its widely-held image as a dull and stagnant backwater; and

furthermore the Gannets, in seeking to revive such contacts, were in fact sticking close to the main traditions of British fandom.

For better or worse, then, Maule's "new", revised *Maya* 3 appeared in time for the 1972 Eastercon, with the next two issues following in July and December of the same year. Although well received in all quarters, they were unfortunately marred by their distinct lack of editorial presence, and their overall tone can perhaps be best described as "antiseptic". In retrospect, of course, they now read much less well than they did at the time – but at the time they generated considerable prestige for Gannetfandom's by then rapidly rising star. Maule also found time to produce three issues of *Paranoid*, a slim fannish fanzine with contributions from Gannets, Rats, other British fans and even an American (Darrell Schweitzer, just in case you were wondering); and Ian Williams, not to be outdone, returned to the fray in November 1972 with the first issue of a personalzine, *Siddhartha*, published as the result of a boast that he could turn out a fanzine in only two weeks (for the record, it actually took him ten days and, despite the general excellence of his writing, it showed). And then, in October 1972, Maule introduced into the group a medic who had recently graduated from Oxford and moved back to Newcastle to begin his practical training – Rob Jackson, who was later to find himself cast in the role of their international figurehead.

But that was later. There had been other things happening elsewhere in fandom, and it's time we took a look at them.

4. Fanac, Fanac, Everywhere

Compartmentalising everything like this suggests that there was little or no contact between fans in different groups, which just wasn't the case; the Gannets and the Rats, for example, had been corresponding since their start, and later got to know each other in person as well. And then in mid-1971 a third group began to clamber its way up from obscurity: the Manchester and District (MaD) Group, with whom the Gannets were to get on remarkably well but whom the Rats were to virtually ignore. It never made the same impact on fandom as they – probably because its key members were older and more settled in their ways – and nor were its fanzines ever as influential but it did produce fanzines; and in the early seventies that counted for quite a lot.

Unfortunately, most of its fanzines were not particularly good. There

was *Hell*, edited by Brian Robinson and Paul Skelton, which saw frequent publication from late 1971 onwards (it had reached its eighth issue by the end of the next year and was perhaps most notable for its “serialisation” of Mike Meara’s “History of The Blues Guitar”); but although it was well received in most quarters of fandom, the Gannets and Rats found it somewhat lacklustre and pedestrian. There was also *Madcap*, a clubzine, and *Malfunction*, both edited by the group’s founder and mentor, Peter Presford, and both ruined by his apparent inability to write anything resembling a grammatically complete sentence. (They were, in fact, ultimately to cast a permanent blight upon the group as a whole.)

Lisa Conesa’s *Zimri*, however, was much better, more than compensating for the deficiencies of the other Manchester fanzines and winning almost immediate praise from fans and professionals alike. Perhaps not surprisingly, for it was a large, attractive, well-written genzine designed to appeal to a wide variety of tastes – though it was the very broadness of its editorial policy that prevented it from being as good as it might have been. Despite the supposed influence of her nominal co-editors (who changed with every issue, and included at one time or another Bryn Fortey, Phil Muldowney, Andrew Stephenson and Harry Turner), Conesa seemed to exercise little or no discretion in the selection of its contents, filling every issue to bursting point and having so much material left over that in mid-1972 she began publishing another fanzine, *Iseult* (initially co-edited with Alan Burns), just to keep up – and that suffered from the same all-inclusiveness as *Zimri*. Both fanzines were, in a word, bloated, requiring their readers to wade through all manner of dross to reach the two or three items of any real interest embedded therein.

But *Zimri* was successful, its dearth of editorial consistency notwithstanding; and it wasn’t the only quality British fanzine then beginning to make its presence felt. There was, for example, Peter Roberts’s previously-mentioned *Egg*, now the only remaining Bristol-based fanzine (the once-thriving Bristol group of the late sixties having suffered a similar fate to Hertsfandom) and the earliest-published fannish fanzine of the decade – despite which it somehow failed to set any lasting trends. This was perhaps due to its infrequency – after starting promisingly with three issues in 1970, there were only two each in 1971 and 1972, Roberts’s university studies being mainly to blame – and perhaps also due to his otherwise perfectly praiseworthy desire for increased British-American contact, which resulted in

Egg's adoption of an unfortunately bland international tone. Of greater relevance to the British fannish renaissance was his slim but frequent newszine *Checkpoint*, which saw two trial issues in April 1971 before commencing regular near-fortnightly publication (with occasional hiatuses enforced by his university exams) at the end of the same month, thus filling an important gap in British fanzine fandom.

Another fannish fanzine of the time was Gray Boak's *Cynic*, first published in mid-1970 and considerably more British in orientation than *Egg* – deliberately so since Boak, like Roberts before him, had also begun to feel the need for a fannish resurgence. This attempt at sparking it, however, fell inexplicably flat; despite struggling on through the first half of the decade, finally expiring with its ninth and last issue at the 1976 Eastercon, it somehow failed to catch on (although its continual infrequency of publication may well have been a prime cause). There was also fringe Ratfan John Piggott's *The Turning Worm*, which saw three issues during the course of 1972, the first two being personalzines full of accurate and pungent comments about fandom and fanzines and the third printing several outside contributions on the same topics, all to general acclaim; Mike and Pat Meara's amiable, if somewhat dull, genzine *Lurk*, whose first issue appeared just in time for the 1972 Eastercon; and others too numerous to mention here.

But what of the serconzines? Well, by the end of 1972 there weren't many of them left, and probably with good reason as previously mentioned, the sercon boom that had characterised the mid to late sixties was then running rapidly out of steam. Peter Weston's *Speculation* was still the acknowledged leader, but was also slipping steadily from its long-established quarterly schedule, seeing but three issues in 1971 and only two in 1972. An obvious rival for its crown was James Goddard's and Mike Sandow's *Cypher*, first published in 1970 and reaching its eighth issue by mid-1972, after which Sandow left and Goddard produced the ninth issue by himself; but despite the obvious enthusiasm of its editors, it always seemed to lack the flair necessary for complete success, and the changing mood of the times was probably against it in any case. There had earlier been Malcolm Edwards's *Quicksilver*, which had seen only two issues in late 1970 and early 1971 before his university finals and subsequent training for his job as a librarian had brought about its demise; but he returned to the fold as editor of the B.S.F.A.'s *Vector* at the 1972 Eastercon, his first issue coming as a revelation to almost everyone in fandom. Previously the work of whatever (usually

incompetent) unknowns the B.S.F.A. could manage to saddle with the job, Edwards was later to be regarded as the best editor *Vector* ever had, making it at last lively, regular and informative, and in the process gaining the forever-on-the-brink-of-collapse Association some much needed prestige.

But by the end of 1972, *Cypher*, *Speculation* and *Vector* were the only three remaining serconzines. Book reviews were still appearing in other fanzines, but the overall fannish trend was becoming increasingly obvious. It was indeed a renaissance.

5. And So On, And So On

The question in many people's minds must have been: "What next?" The slough of three years earlier might now be just a thankful memory, but did that mean standards could go on rising indefinitely? Well, no: 1973 was the year in which the rise seemed to slow down, or even come to a halt; and it turned out to be a transitional period in which everyone just kept on doing pretty much what they'd been doing previously. Perhaps the two most outstanding fanzines of the time were *Zimri*, still as successful (and as huge) as ever, and which was now more or less dissociated from the MaD group due to Lisa Conesa's own increasingly peripheral role in it; and *Blunt*, a new fanzine edited by Dave Rowe and Bob and Mary Smith. But while it was new, its editors weren't, and it was consequently free of the neoish cruddiness that usually smothers first issues, being instead a large, attractive, well-written fanzine with an unfortunately eclectic bent that tended to alienate much of its more fannish audience; and there were in any case only two issues before it folded as swiftly as it had come, due to Bob Smith's sudden redundancy and Dave Rowe's inability to pay for it himself.

There were no further issues of *Maya* during the year, Ian Maule having now joined a couple of overseas apas and devoting his energy to writing for them, although he did manage a fourth issue of *Paranoid* in time for the 1973 Eastercon and several issues of a slim personalzine, *Maule's Well*, later in the year. Ian Williams also published another two issues of *Siddhartha*, which were well received but marred by his hitherto-unnoticed tendency towards introspection and self-examination: it was a *personalzine* in the truest sense of the word, and many found its intensity more than a little unsettling. These were the only Gannet fanzines to appear in 1973, apart from the new groupzine, *Gannetscrapbook*; which, considering that most of the group was

then engaged in organising the 1974 Eastercon (Tynecon) was only to be expected. Fandom's greatest loss was John Piggott, who – despite the praise lavished on his *The Turning Worm* – gave it all up in favour of Diplomacy fandom (and a Diplomacy fanzine called *Ethil the Frog*, after an old Monty Python joke).

In London, the Rats were struggling to get it together again, with little success. Ideas for solo, duo and group fanzines came and went with astonishing regularity, *Buddy*, *Rat* and *Tales of the Filing-Section* being just some of the titles mooted and even, at one point, a fully-fledged publishing co-operative, to be called *Vug*. Towards the end of the year two personalzines finally saw the light of day: John Brosnan's *Scab* and Roy Kettle's *True Rat*, both of them humorous but both of them typifying the in-groupism to which the Rats were then prone. In the case of *Scab* – a scandalzine which preyed savagely on the foibles of Brosnan's buddies – this didn't matter, since its print-run was low and its circulation restricted; but in *True Rat*'s case it did. Kettle had already demonstrated his bladed wit in the series of "Convention Guide" one-shots satirising well-known fans and professionals he'd produced for the 1971, 1972 and 1973 Eastercons (and was also to produce for Tynecon), but now the jokes were too dependent on an intimate knowledge of the other Rats to be readily comprehensible to outsiders; and the response-rate was so low that the second issue didn't appear until mid-1974 (while *Scab* ran for five issues until early the same year, ceasing when Brosnan flew back to Australia to visit his relatives).

The serconzines were by now fading fast: *Speculation* 32 appeared in June 1973 and, despite winning the first-ever Nova Award as the best fanzine of the year, proved to be effectively the final issue (although Peter Weston was never to admit it, and did eventually distribute the final issue via *Maya*); and James Goddard's *Cypher*, now partially funded by the Arts Council – the first and last fanzine ever to receive such a grant – saw only one issue (the tenth) in the whole twelve month period. Only *Vector*, appearing on a quarterly basis for the first time in its life, was still going strong; but in the autumn it hit problems with its printers, the enforced 67/68 double issue – and Malcolm Edwards's last – being thus delayed until early 1974. Speaking of which...

6. Close the Doors, They're Coming in the Windows!

January 1974 saw the launching of New English Library's *SF Monthly*, a glossy, large-format poster magazine which lasted for just under two-and-a-half years and virtually destroyed fandom's previous status as a closed, semi-secret society. Its first issue contained a plug for Tynecon, with the result that the Tynecon membership went through the roof (it was the first Eastercon to have more than 500 members), while its second issue invited its readers to write away for copies of such fanzines as *Checkpoint*, *Speculation* and *Zimri*.

Fandom of course recoiled in horror – but in retrospect it appears that effect was considerably more beneficial than originally supposed. 1973 had, after all, been a pretty stagnant year and, if nothing else, the magazine gave fandom just the kick it needed to get moving again although the influx of new fans it caused wasn't as great as it might have been. That same first issue had also contained a plug for the B.S.F.A., which generated such a huge number of enquiries that its then membership secretary simply refused to answer them, bringing about the collapse of the Association itself* and leaving some two or three hundred potential "recruits" as ignorant of fandom as before (although many of them were later to make it to the 1975 Eastercon, also plugged in *SFM*, and push its membership through the roof as well).

* *Later investigations would reveal this wasn't exactly what happened – Rob Hansen.*

The explosion of cruddy neoish fanzines that everyone feared was thus delayed for over a year, and the first half of 1974 became in consequence an extension of 1973's transitional period, with the temporarily suspended fannish renaissance once again gathering momentum in the second half (whether that was in any way an exclusionist response to publicity is a moot point). Not that the first half of the year was without interest: Greg Pickersgill got back into the game with *Ritblat/Grim News*, which saw two issues in the months prior to Tynecon but then folded due to lack of response. Perhaps not surprisingly: although a considerably more controlled hellfire-and-damnation fanzine than *Fouler*, such an attitude was no longer relevant, most of the fans he'd been attacking then having since gafiated and there being no new targets to replace them. Moreover, its title was actually a compromise, *Grim News* being no more than a supplement intended to replace *Checkpoint*, which Peter Roberts, then living in London, had decided to fold. In the event, sixties fan Darroll Pardoe took over the newszine, thus robbing Pickersgill of his main reason for publishing again, and Roberts went on to produce the first of his "Little Gem Guides" to current fanzines, aimed in part at assisting the

SFM-introduced neos to find out that was what. Swiftly picking up *Ritblat*'s torch, however, came Graham and Pat Charnock's *Wrinkled Shrew*, a considerably more "mainstream" fannish fanzine which, despite seeing only two issues apiece in 1974 and 1975, soon won itself an enthusiastic audience amongst the wider fannish community.

Nor were they the only Rats to start publishing again; and from mid-1974 onwards there was a veritable wave of fanzines coming out of London. Malcolm Edwards finally entered the fannish stakes with *Magic Pudding*, a witty and enjoyable personalzine which he folded after only one issue to concentrate on writing sercon articles for *SFM* – amongst whose stable of fan-contributors were also counted Peter Weston and John Brosnan, the latter returning both from Australia and to fan-publishing with *Big Scab* (a larger but just as scurrilous version of the earlier *Scab*), one issue of which was so libellous it actually brought threats of legal action from two of its targets. Roy Kettle, determined to keep publishing, began pushing out further issues of *True Rat*, misfiring with the second by including two outside contributions but reverting to the personalzine format with subsequent issues: the third appeared in late 1974 with the double issue 4/5 and number 6 following in 1975, establishing him as Britain's leading fan-humorist (until the advent of Dave Langford in 1976, anyway). Peter Roberts (admittedly barely a Rat) published *Egg* – a fanzine now thankfully divested of its "Aardvark Fandom" tag – in August 1974, his first issue for over a year, with the ninth following in February 1975; and Graham Charnock, confirming everyone's suspicions that his wife Pat was actually the driving force behind *Wrinkled Shrew*, began publishing his own personalzine, *Vibrator*, in mid-1975.

But while the Rats were alive and healthy in respect of their fanzines, they were anything but as a group. Most of them – Greg being the only exception – were organising the 1975 Eastercon (Seacon), and in the long run that did them no good whatever: forced to abandon the anarchic "us-against-them" attitude that had held them together almost from the start in favour of a more respectable front, their internal cohesion began to slowly dissipate, with the result that by mid-1975 they had ceased to exist as a distinct social entity.

The Gannets, although flushed with the success of Tynecon, lay low for a while, recouping their energies, then began to re-surface with the North-East Science Fiction Group (NESFiG), a formal club aimed both at promoting serious discussion of S.F. and attracting new people into fandom – the most noticeable of these "new people" being Dave Cockfield whose

bloated genzine *Atropos* commenced irregular publication in late 1975, to a largely indifferent reception. By then, the already-established Gannets were publishing again; Ian Williams produced another two issues of his increasingly self-indulgent *Siddhartha* in the latter half of 1974 and then in mid-1975, claiming to be sick of personalzines, launched *Goblin's Grotto*, a supposedly traditional British genzine intended to show the SFM-introduced neos what fanzines could be like; but the response was minimal, causing him to slam out a deliberately cruddy sixth issue of *Siddhartha* to demonstrate what the alternative would be if response didn't improve. But fandom remained unmoved: the passage of time had rendered obsolete the tradition to which he was harking back and *Goblin's Grotto* eventually folded with its third issue in mid-1976, another issue of *Siddhartha* having appeared in March of that year. Meanwhile Harry Bell, previously known only as a fan-artist, had also shown up as a fanwriter in mid-1975 with a personalzine, *Grimling Bosch*, unfortunately short-lived; and newer Gannet Kevin Williams, who'd entered fandom shortly before Tynecon, published the first issue of his *Durfed* in early 1975

And there was of course *Maya*, the sixth issue of which appeared in the latter half of 1974 and which, in comparison with the previous three, was something of a disappointment. It was also Ian Maule's last; Rob Jackson took over its editorship and announced his intention of reverting to the original genzine format – a somewhat risky move, but Jackson circumvented the problem by going all out to increase its overseas circulation. His first issue appeared in time for the 1975 Eastercon, with his second and third following later that same year, each generating an immediate and enthusiastic response from a rapidly growing American audience which, faced with waning fannishness and booming serconism in its own country, was already looking to Britain for its fanzine sustenance. The “new” *Maya* won their unqualified praise and admiration, becoming by the end of the year the most widely-known and most popular British fanzine in the world.

The MaD group, previously a hotbed of fanac, seemed to be drifting into terminal ennui. *Hell 10* finally appeared in mid-1974, a year after the ninth, and then folded, Brian Robinson sinking slowly into gafia and Paul Skelton going on to produce the first issue of a personalzine, *Inferno*, shortly afterwards. it was perhaps the best-ever MaD fanzine but, although well-written, soon began to seem somewhat dull and repetitive. Mike and Pat Meara's *Lurk* folded with its seventh issue in early 1975, Mike publishing the

first issue of a long and wordy personalzine, *Knockers from Neptune*, later that year. *Zimri* continued as ever, tying with *Big Scab* for the 1974 Nova Award and publishing its eighth issue (which, due to an earlier quirk of numbering, was actually labelled as number 7) in mid-1975 and then falling silent until early 1976. Perhaps not surprisingly, for it was rooted in the same tradition as the previously mentioned *Goblin's Grotto* and although had at one time seemed a genuine trendsetter it was now becoming increasingly (and obviously) irrelevant to the fannish mainstream. Then, too, it had become a very self-conscious fanzine, its approach bordering closely on the pretentious and its style – especially with respect to its poetry – was often so overly mannered as to be almost unreadable.

And as for those *SFM*-introduced neos... in October 1974 Graham Poole, ex-company secretary of the BSFA, published the first issue of his personalzine *Spi*, aimed largely at them and dwelling upon possible ways of resurrecting the Association. To the surprise of all those who'd claimed it was no longer necessary and should remain defunct, the response was huge and enthusiastic, causing the letter column of the second issue (appearing in March 1975) to all but take over the rest of the fanzine, with the result that the first tentative moves to rescue the Association were made at the 1975 Eastercon and by the end of that year it was back in business – although the new editor of *Vector*, Chris Fowler, was nowhere near as good as Malcolm Edwards had been. However, *Vector* was by then the only extant serconzine, since *Cypher* had finally folded with its eleventh issue in mid-1974, in the process causing the near-demise of sercon fandom itself.

There were two further issues of *Spi* in 1975, each including a couple of outside contributions and each with a huge letter column, but by then the *SFM*-introduced neos were at last publishing their own fanzines – most of them fully as awful as expected, and some of them produced by people who hadn't even seen a fanzine before. Typical examples were John Collick's *Procyon*, Kevin Easthope's *Logo*, Richard McMahon's *Inverted Ear Trumpet*, Geoff Rippington's *Titan* and Paul Ryan's *Orion Express* (this last supposedly a personalzine but actually printing editor-authored fiction and poetry), to name those which survived their initial hammering; there was also *Parker's Patch*, edited by new “associate Ratfan” Brian Parker, which saw two issues in the latter half of 1975 and was generally well received.

Despite the large number of fuggheaded neos around, by the end of 1975 fandom was thriving again. The renaissance of earlier years had taken firm

root and the future seemed full of promise.

7. Promises, Promises

February 1976 saw Greg Pickersgill's third entry to publishing: *Stop Breaking Down*, an altogether cooler and more relaxed fanzine than *Ritblat* but one which nevertheless demonstrated that he hadn't lost his touch. British fandom's enthusiastic response to its first issue resulted in the second appearing only a couple of months later (just before the 1976 Eastercon, Mancon), after which Pickersgill's own enthusiasm seemed to ebb once again; the third didn't appear until July, with another hiatus delaying publication of the fourth until early 1977, and a third hiatus delaying the fifth until later that same year. It was in fact noticeable that, despite the liveliness of the fanzine itself, Pickersgill's commitment was not as strong as it had once been, and it was to wane steadily throughout the 1976-77 period, causing many people to wonder just how long his new fanzine would last. A little over two years, as it turned out; the sixth issue, appearing in March 1978, proved to be the last.

Pat Charnock's *Wrinkled Shrew* was still going strong, seeing two more issues in 1976 with Graham Charnock publishing another two issues of *Vibrator* in the first few months of the year in order to keep himself in touch. Despite its somewhat stretched publishing schedule *Wrinkled Shrew* had come to be regarded as a focal point fannish fanzine to which almost everyone seemed eager to contribute, its thriving letter column serving to bear out the point. But disaster struck it in early 1977: production of the huge 70-page seventh issue, possibly the best to date, so exhausted the Charnocks that – apart from a sixth and last issue of *Vibrator* which appeared shortly afterwards – they lapsed into inactivity, putting their much-respected focal point into cold storage for the next two years.

In the North-East, another focal point was already in being: Rob Jackson's *Maya*, which had seen only two issues apiece in 1976 and 1977 (the third of these four being the double issue 12/13 and the fourth a special all-British issue to plug the "Britain Is Fine In '79" bid at the 1977 Worldcon) but which many American fans had now come to regard as the apotheosis of British fanzines – although many British fans thought otherwise. It was in fact more of a focal point for American fans, their high opinion of it stemming in part from their unfortunately limited knowledge of

other British fanzines (a state of affairs that hasn't improved). Although *Maya* had begun to lose some of its more obvious genzine connotations (such as the book reviews), it was to remain more SF-oriented a fanzine than many of its contemporaries and was thus somewhat isolated from the British "mainstream" – an isolation not helped by its large international audience, which led it, like Peter Roberts's *Egg* before it, to adopt a curious blandness of tone and approach. It was perhaps because of this that Jackson and *Maya* scooped the US-organised and overwhelmingly US-dominated 1977 FAAn Awards for both best editor and best fanzine, respectively, with the fanzine later securing itself a place on the Hugo final ballot at the 1978 Worldcon.

But then *Maya* was almost the only fanzine the Gannets were still publishing, and certainly the only one with any regularity. Ian Williams managed an eighth issue of *Siddhartha* in mid-1977 but has been silent ever since; Harry Bell came back with *Tocsin*, using material left over from the last *Grimling Bosch*, in early 1977 and then ceased publishing for a year, resurfacing with *Kamikaze* (a renamed *Tocsin*) in early 1978 before lapsing into silence again; and Dave Cockfield finally allowed his slowly improving *Atropos* to fold after its fourth issue in mid-1977 (but without admitting that it had done so). The only other Gannet still active was Ian Maule, who had moved down to London in February 1975 and lapsed into semi-gafia via an involvement in fantasy wargaming; but in September of that year he published a fifth issue of *Paranoid* and then took over the editorship of *Checkpoint* from Darroll Pardoe, running it for nine rather poor issues before handing it back to Peter Roberts in the autumn of 1976; after which he went on to edit *Nabu*, which saw two somewhat lacklustre issues in 1977 before gradually perking up throughout 1978.

And back in London... apart from Greg Pickersgill's waning enthusiasm and the Charnocks' sudden collapse, other fans were also having problems. John Brosnan seemed to lose his touch: *Big Scab* had been replaced by *Scabby Tales*, supposedly just another version of the original scandalzine but a strangely muted one that saw only two issues (in late 1975 and early 1976) before folding; he has not published a fanzine since. Peter Roberts had published his tenth *Egg* in December 1975 but had then fallen silent until his resumption of *Checkpoint* a year later; but this was concurrent with his resignation from the Civil Service and move to Devon to live in unemployed splendour, and the newszine's publishing schedule became in consequence very irregular. And Roy Kettle, long-time star of the Rats, had transformed

True Rat into a fannish genzine with its eighth issue in mid-1976 – a move greeted with dismay by most of fandom, which had come to regard it as the perfect vehicle for his manic humour and now saw him being squeezed out in favour of articles by his buddies. Undeterred, Kettle published a ninth, similar issue in time for the 1977 Eastercon but then was quiescent for a year, reverting to the personalzine format for his special 1978 Eastercon (Skycon) issue, published solely because he was its fan Guest-of-Honour; after which silence descended once again, this time because his membership of the Seacon '79 committee precluded any written fanac.

Zimri 8 appeared just in time for the 1976 Eastercon, and proved to be the last issue; Lisa Conesa gafiated shortly afterwards, the MaD group itself falling apart a few months later as Peter Presford, then the only person holding it together, moved away to North Wales. The only Manchester fanzine left was Paul Shelton's *Inferno*, soon retitled *Small Friendly Dog*, which began to slip from its regular quarterly schedule in mid-1976 and whose fourteenth issue, published in early 1977, turned out to be the last for over a year. Mike Meara's *Knockers from Neptune* went into hibernation after its fifth issue in October 1976; Graham Poole's *Spi*, now a fully-fledged genzine, saw only two issues in 1976 before dying as a result of the amount of time he was then devoting to his various other interests (chief amongst them being the short-lived SF Writers' Bulletin: *Cyclotron*); and Dave Rowe, who'd re-entered the field in late 1975 with a fannish fanzine, *K*, and left it again after the third issue in mid-1976 when his co-editor, Bernie Peek, went off to college and he found that – as with the earlier *Blunt* – he couldn't afford to continue it alone.

In other words, the promise of late 1975 was not being fulfilled – at least, not by the older fans who, as 1976 turned into 1977, began to show signs that they might finally be burning out. Perhaps not without reason, considering that they had earlier formed the very backbone of the renaissance; but several of the new fans still appearing on the scene seemed not only quite *au fait* with the otherwise strong fannish mood of the time but also quite willing to continue the work begun by Roberts, Pickersgill and Maule – probably because those same “new fans” weren't as new as they first seemed, having been around on the fringes for long enough to know what was what, and in consequence they and their fanzines had a greater impact than the *SFM*-introduced neos and their fanzines. Perhaps the best of these “new” fans was Dave Langford, who entered fandom in late 1973 via the

Oxford University SF Group and whose idiosyncratic personalzine *Twll-Ddu* burst upon the world just before the 1976 Eastercon, another four issues appearing that same year and five more following in 1977. Langford's bizarrely polysyllabic style and his talent for picking up on the minor indiscretions of others soon won his fanzine a huge and enthusiastic audience – although it might never have appeared at all had not he and fellow Oxford-Group member Kevin Smith published the first issue of a somewhat esoteric and self-conscious genzine, *Drilkjis*, a month earlier, since the backs of its large number of rejected covers provided the basis for the first issue of *Twll-Ddu*. A second, noticeably less cliquey, issue of *Drilkjis* appeared in October 1976, after which it vanished into limbo for almost two years; but Kevin Smith kept going with a personalzine, *Dot*, in which his talent for parody and pastiche was later to be displayed to the full – a talent not apparent in the first issue, published at the same time as the second *Drilkjis*, but which came as a pleasant (if initially baffling) surprise when the second issue came out almost a year later. A third followed close on its heels, but then it disappeared into limbo. again.

And there were other talented new fans also bursting into print. David Bridges published the first issue of his personalzine *One-Off* (originally intended as just a one-shot) in time for the 1976 Eastercon, with another two issues following in the summer of the same year – after which he gave full rein to his idiotic sense of humour with the tinsel-bound “Christmas Special” produced in time for the 1977 Eastercon, and as a result the “real” fourth issue of *One-Off* didn't appear until several months later, almost a year after the third. Although well received, the fanzine was marred by the rather sprawling nature of Bridges's writing, a problem that each successive issue revealed as increasingly uncontrollable. Rob Hansen, on the other hand, was more controlled but initially less sure of himself: his *Epsilon* started life as an undistinguished personalzine in November 1976, included an outside contribution from Paul Kincaid in its second issue, published in mid-1977, and then reverted to the personalzine format for its considerably improved third issue, which appeared later that same year. There were also John and Eve Harvey, whose rather uncertain genzine *Ghas* saw two issues in 1976 and one at Easter 1977, the fourth not appearing until a year later; Don West, a fringe fan from way back who published one issue of a fanzine reviewzine, *Daisnaid*, in mid-1976 and then went on to write two mammoth fanzine review essays for *True Rat* 8 and *Wrinkled Shrew* 7 which, apart from

continuing and expanding on the challenge first issued by Greg Pickersgill in *Fouler*, are probably minor masterpieces of their type; and the otherwise fannish Mike Dickinson, whose decidedly unserious serconzine *Bar Trek* first saw the light of day in late 1976 but, despite its generally good reception, folded after its third issue in November 1977.

And speaking of serconzines with the demise of *Speculation* and *Cypher*, it had seemed as though sercon fandom itself had collapsed, but during the 1976-77 period it became apparent that it had instead only gone into hibernation, and was now being partially revitalised by the large number of *SFM*-introduced neos who had found fannish fandom not only impenetrable but also irrelevant to their needs. Their desire for serious discussion of SF was reflected in their fanzines, although most of this discussion was at best embarrassingly naive and superficial (a probable consequence of their apparent youth and inexperience) and their fanzines didn't survive long. One which did, and underwent great improvement throughout 1976, was Geoff Rippington's previously-mentioned *Titan* which, retitling itself *Arena* with its fifth issue in early 1977, began to shape up as the potential focal point of a new sercon generation – although its infrequency of publication (there was only one other issue in 1977) and the blandness of its critical approach conspired to rob it of the impact it might have had – *Titan/Arena* was now the only worthwhile alternative to the B.S.F.A.'s *Vector*.

The B.S.F.A., although it did virtually nothing for fanzines or, more importantly, fandom as a whole throughout the entire decade, deserves a more extensive mention at this point because it was during this period that the editors of its two main publications – Chris Fowler in respect of *Vector* and Tom Jones in respect of its newsletter *Bsfan* (later retitled *Matrix*) mounted what was in effect an attack on fannish fandom, portraying it as a collection of irresponsible louts more noted for their drunkenness than their interest in S.F.; an assertion that the Association's members, most of whom had little to do with fanzine fandom, were unable to disprove for themselves. It was almost as though it was being castigated for not coming to the B.S.F.A.'s aid back in 1974... and as a result there soon developed between the sercon and fannish sides of fandom a steadily deepening rift that, by mid-1977, had all but completely alienated them from each other.

It was, if anything, a portent of the things to come.

8. Sideways Towards the Millennium

Although most people kept publishing regardless, the period since the beginning of 1978 has been marked by the realisation that fannishness was at last running out of steam and that the post-*SFM* fannish fans, for all their energy and enthusiasm, were in fact the inheritors of a dead-ended and slowly stagnating tradition. Throughout 1978, in fact, a feeling of gloom and despondency settled across many fannish fanzines, with their editors – like Greg Pickersgill in the sixth and last *Stop Breaking Down* – expressing either active disinterest in the whole publishing scene or – like Rob Hansen in *Epsilons* 4 and 5 – wondering if the future might just belong to serconism after all.

As though to bear out Hansen's point, 1978 saw a sudden upsurge in the number of fanzines that, although not completely sercon, did evidence a strong interest in S.F. and, as a possible concomitant, an equally strong dislike of fannish fandom. Most of them are simply too dire to bother with, being more the product of neoish enthusiasm than anything else; but they attracted a great deal of support from a large number of like-minded people – which perhaps demonstrates that fannish fandom's time will indeed soon be at hand. It has, after all, been on the defensive for most of the period, its adherents expecting an outright sercon backlash at almost any time – a backlash that, with *Seacon* '79 looming ever closer, now seems dangerously imminent.

By and large, then, the last twenty months have been a rather confused and unhappy period for fannish fandom, and one too recent to chronicle with any objectivity. Overall, standards appear to have been slowly declining, despite occasional bursts of quality from some editors – such as Rob Hansen, the fourth and fifth issues of whose *Epsilon* (both appearing in 1978) were so good they made the previous three seem like the work of an entirely different person; but the sixth, published in early 1979, was a distinct disappointment. And also Ian Maule, whose *Nabu* saw four issues in 1978 (the first of them – number 3 – being easily the worst) and one at Easter 1979, each one of them an improvement over the previous but each dogged by the same noticeable lack of editorial presence that had characterised his earlier *Maya*.

Maya itself saw its fifteenth and final issue in the summer of 1978, although Jackson didn't admit that it was the last until Easter 1979, his involvement in the organisation of *Seacon* '79, marriage and lack of spare

cash to support its enormous circulation being the main causes of its demise. A more “mainstream” fannish fanzine, *Inca*, shortly replaced it... which made he and Maule the only Gannets still publishing regularly, although the fact that both of them were now living in London perhaps rendered the tag merely honorary. In an effort to prevent themselves from going completely down the river, the remaining “true” Gannets revived the long-defunct *Gannetscrapbook*, which had originally seen two issues (one good, one bad) in 1973 and which, although no less welcome than before, was prey to the same bittiness that seems to afflict all clubzines.

The Rats, like the Gannets, had also decayed into inactivity apart from a rather lacklustre issue of *Wrinkled Shrew* 8 from the Charnocks, rushed out in time for the 1979 Eastercon because they were its Fan Guests-of-Honour, the only one still publishing was Simone Walsh, Greg Pickersgill’s “other half”. Her *Seamonsters*, although the near-lineal descendant of *Stop Breaking Down* (its first issue, published in mid-1978, included material originally intended for *Stop Breaking Down* 7), was actually very different from it in both tone and content – and also failed to generate anything like the response *Stop Breaking Down* once received. The third issue of *Seamonsters* appeared in early 1979, but a fourth issue has not been seen at the time of writing.

As already intimated, other fanzines had been struck by a peculiar blight; even Dave Langford’s *Twll-Ddu* (which saw four issues in 1978 and one at Easter 1979) seemed to be having difficulty in finding the jokes it needed to keep going, (although the real source of the trouble may have been fandom as a whole rather than Langford himself; we’d all come to expect so much of him that for him to go on surpassing himself with every issue was just too much to ask). The real highlight of 1978 was Alan Dorey’s personalzine *Gross Encounters*, whose fourth issue secured it the Nova as the best fanzine of the year (one point ahead of Kevin Smith’s *Dot*) before it collapsed into mediocrity with its fifth issue in early 1979. It was different from other personalzines in that it had as an objective the removal of the then members of the B.S.F.A. Council who, although they’d now abandoned their earlier attacks on fannish fandom, Dorey felt were not doing enough for the Association; in which it was successful, as the coup d’etat mounted at its Easter 1979 A.G.M. showed – but whether those fannish fans who involved themselves in the power-grab did so as a form of subconscious insurance against the previously mentioned impending sercon backlash is a moot point.

Other new fanzines of the period included Paul Kincaid’s *Tripe Pickers*’

Journal (two issues, the first co-edited with late sixties Bristol fan Mike Scantlebury), Steev Higgins's scrappy genzine *Perihelion* (three issues), Graham James's and Simon Ounsley's equally scrappy dual personalzine *Ocelot* (one issue) and John Collick's *101 Ballooning Adventures That Thrilled the World*, a one-off personalzine. Of the "established" fanzines, *Dot* saw three issues (two in the latter half of 1978 and one at Easter 1979), *Egg* 11 appeared in mid-1978 (over two years after the tenth), and there were a further two issues of *Arena* (both 1978).

Since Easter 1979 things have been quiet with almost everyone working on the production of "special" – or at least larger-than-usual – issues intended for publication in time for the Worldcon. And afterwards...?

It's likely that, as with *SF Monthly* in 1974/75, there'll be another influx of new fans, who, as before, will find serconism more attractive than fannishness and who may well form the nucleus of a new sercon boom comparable to that of the mid-sixties – and who, as a "generation", are almost certain to be more vocal, and more enthusiastic, than fannish fandom has been of late. And not surprisingly: looking back over the decade, it's obvious that fannish fandom reached its highest peak of success in late 1975/early 1976 and has been in steady decline ever since – although it's arguable that, without the *SFM*-inspired influx, it might have continued to decline from its earlier, lower peak of late 1972. Whether or not the expected post-Worldcon influx will serve to kick it back into gear is at this point only a matter for conjecture, with the current general feeling being that it won't do anything of the kind but will instead topple fannish fandom from its long-held position of pre-eminence. Whatever happens, we can at least look forward to the – in the words of the old Chinese curse – "interesting times" ahead.

By British: a Fanthology of the 70s (1979, ed. Ian Maule & Joseph Nicholas)

This reflects what a number of people thought and felt at the time, although readers should not assume that the views expressed have remained constant over time.

– Joseph Nicholas, 2019.

Afterword: Fandom & Fanzines in the UK (1990s)

A. Vincent Clarke

I've been asked to write "on the development of SF fandom and SF fanzines in the UK". And the question is, do you want the long version or the short version? The long version is currently being handled by a fan called Rob Hansen, who has so far produced 272 pages of a fanzine called *THEN* and is up to the late '70s. So here's a sort of synopsis.

Popular science fiction has a long history, but a key point in its history is April 1926, when a Lithuanian immigrant in the States called Hugo Gernsback – which is why the major sf award is called a Hugo – started a magazine called *Amazing Stories*. Up to that time SF didn't really have an identity; even the very few books in the genre were known as "Wellsian scientific romances". Gernsback popularised the term "science fiction" and soon saw competitors in the field – *Wonder Stories* and *Astounding Stories of Super-Science* (yes!).

In those days sf magazines had letter columns, with the names and addresses of the readers who were enthusiastic enough to write in. These readers – fans – started to write to each other, and by mid-1930 the first fanzine was produced. At about the same time a cub reporter in Ilford called Walter Gillings started a series of meetings in private houses to discuss sf. Walter was blazingly enthusiastic, even managed to get reports of the meetings into his paper, and contacted other British fans. But no one managed to produce a fanzine other than a typed affair with carbon copies. In the States fanzines were being produced by hectograph (a reproducing process limited to about 50 copies), duplicator, and professional printing. No copiers, of course.

And in the beginning, fanzines were serious. Later fandom coined a word, "sercon", "serious and constructive", to describe this type, where stories were reviewed, the news of future sf magazines was headlined, authors were interviewed, etc. The process was helped along in the mid-'30s by *Wonder Stories*, which started a Science Fiction League that gave you "egoboo" (ego-boosting) in its pages if fans managed to pass a test involving

sf and science.

In those far-off days, we exported more goods to America than vice-versa, which meant that some ships came back with empty holds. One method of filling them (and I suppose keeping the ships stable) was with material such as out-of-date magazine returns from American publishers, at scrap paper prices. These magazines (and there were scores of types, not just sf) were distributed in this country by Woolworths and other stores – there were some shops which sold nothing else, including one in the middle of Plumstead High St. and three stalls in Woolwich market. This increased the number of British fans, and some branches of the Science Fiction League started in this country. One was in Nuneaton, Warwickshire, and they produced the first proper fanzine in this country on a duplicator.

There was a change coming over fanzines in both the US and here. Fans were interested in each other, and soon fandom was solidifying into the type of entity that is common today, where there are fanzines which are sercon, some entirely personal (named “personalzines” or “diaryzines”), some club zines, some mixtures.

Fanzines were the way the first fans got to know each other but soon, spurred on by the new-found solidarity which included the Science Fiction League, the first Conventions were held. There’s some dispute about this, the Americans claiming that the meeting of fans from two cities was the first, whereas the British advertised their first and had attendees to it at Leeds from all over the country. Attendance at both events was in the dozens.

In the late ’30s the Americans were responsible for the first sf APA – Amateur Publishing Association. It was an idea borrowed from mundane (ie. non-sf) sources. Each member produced a number of fanzines, sent them to an official editor, and at set intervals the editor would sort these out and send one of each title to every other member. The first sf APA was the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, FAPA, and is still in existence. Membership is currently 75, which means that each quarter you’re liable to get upwards of 30 fanzines in one bundle to read and comment upon.

Clubs also started in the USA, usually in members homes, but they were slow to start in Great Britain, and before they could get properly started the second world war began. This was nearly a knock-down blow for fandom, but as it happened one of the most enthusiastic fans was a chap named Michael Rosenblum, of Leeds. He was a conscientious objector who was able to work (in the fields) during the daytime and produce *Futurian War Digest*

at night. “Fido”, as it was called, stapled together not only Mike’s news but other fanzines, often single sheets, from other fans. This was “Fido’s Litter”. Duplicating materials were scarce, of course, and American fans helped by sending over pages which were “overs” – spares and sheets which had only been printed on one side – and these were incorporated into “Fido” with the blank sides used by Mike.

There was also a scheme by which American fans sent over sf zines to individual fans here, but the Government did permit a few magazines of different types to be printed, which were called BREs – British Reprint Editions. In the process these lost most illos (illustrations), serial stories, and various editorial features including readers’ letters. The latter circumstance meant that new British enthusiasts couldn’t get into touch unless they were lucky enough to run across an established fan by accident.

Just before the war started the UK broke away from the SF League (which in any case was in trouble) and began the SFA (Science Fiction Association), but this lapsed and when peace came there was no particular inclination to start afresh. A few fans did get together, however, and in London their venue was the White Horse in Fetter Lane, where they met every Thursday and which rapidly became known nationwide. Arthur C. Clarke wrote a book of short stories about this called *Tales from the White Hart*. Fans and authors – Arthur, John Wyndham and many others gathered there and in 1948 the first post-war Convention, a half-day affair, was held in a room above the White Horse bars. Attendance, including associated wives and girl friends, was fifty-one!

But there was something new on the scene. American book publishers suddenly discovered SF, some fans even started their own small publishing houses with their “demob” cash, and suddenly there was a “boom”. At first this consisted of reprinting stories from the magazines (including the many serials which UK fans had missed from the BREs), but soon original stories were accepted. John Wyndham, who had been toiling in American magazines since the early ’30s, suddenly found he had a best-seller on his hands, *The Day of the Triffids*.

On a smaller scale the boom spread to the UK, and fans felt that they’d never had it so good. Magazines still flourished for a time, some years seeing 30 or 40 different titles, British fans clubbed together and started a professional magazine, *New Worlds*, and the single Convention each year began to attract scores of fans. Clubs started in various centres as well as

London – Leeds, Liverpool, Glasgow, Bradford, etc. A loose group in Belfast, Walter Willis, James White and Bob Shaw, became known all over the fannish world for the sheer brilliance of their fanzine and the latter two eventually turned to full-time professional writing. During this period there were a number of fanzines (not all of them) which were virtually divorced from sf. The contributors had got to know each other because of their common background, but were more interested in writing about each other. Little mythologies sprang up, catch phrases, widely known “quotes”, nicknames, which became so complicated that in the late '50s a 160-page *Fancylopedia* was issued in the States with hundreds of fan definitions.

But earlier, in the mid-'50s, the sf publishing boom had petered out, and British fandom was getting short of new blood as magazines folded. Even *New Worlds* was sold to a professional publisher, although for some years the editors, such as Mike Moorcock, had been fans – Mike started his career with fanzines on Old Boys' Books and Tarzan. It was about time for British fandom to do something positive, and the BSFA – British Science Fiction Association – was started at a Convention in 1958. The original idea was to provide some sort of structure for fandom to which newcomers could refer instead of having just separate fanzines and clubs, and the eventual aim was to entice the newcomers into the fun-orientated fandom of the day, divorced from most sercon elements.

It didn't work out that way. By coincidence a number of prominent fans left fandom in 1960 for various reasons, and within a couple of years the idea that “real” fandom could be anything but sercon was disregarded by the BSFA. There were a few individual fans issuing fanzines, but on the whole the 1960's was dominated by the BSFA – they even held conventions – and the happy-go-lucky framework of '50s fans vanished.

But after some years a new factor entered the field. The number of sf magazines had dwindled, book publishing was limping, but suddenly the media stepped in. Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick produced *2001* (1968) amongst much controversy. Shortly afterwards TV joined in with futuristic adventures, the general public became aware of SF, and it received a tremendous jolt. Several popular histories of SF were published, and in 1976 a magazine called *Science Fiction Monthly*, which was created more-or-less to advertise a pocket book publisher, mentioned the BSFA address, and the latter was promptly swamped with so many applications from would-be members that the organisation was in serious danger of being overwhelmed

for a few weeks. And in 1977 the first of the *Star Wars* trilogy hit the cinema.

Fanzines and independent fanzine fandom also saw a revival. In the early '70s there were a number of brilliant fanzines published, most of them replete with the then-current popular satirical humour. Some fans delved, like archaeologists, into pre-'60s fandom, and again the idea that fandom was for fun, not just for serious endeavours, was prevalent

But there was to be another change. For a number of years, although many conventions were held all over the fannish world, a special World Convention has been held annually. The convention – in the other sense – has been that if there's one Con that you can afford to travel to and attend, then it's that year's World Convention, and U.S. World Cons have attracted up to 10,000 attendees. Several countries apart from the States have held them – in Britain they happen about once a decade.

At the end of the '70s, another World Con was held in Britain, at Brighton. The energies of many of the most active fans were devoted to this for a considerable time (World Cons take years of preparation), and after the Con, which attracted about 5,000 members, there was some sense of discontinuity. British fandom had at last to face the truth that fandom was too big to be treated as it had previously been, when everyone knew everyone else. Individual fans borrowed their office copiers to produce personalzines, a number of small APAs sprang up, some of them lasting. Reflecting the changes in society, an all-women's APA started, and is still flourishing. Small conventions were held all over, clubs began, and media fandom – with overriding interest in the fantasy products of the cinema and TV – published their own fanzines.

This helped along the fragmentation process as new fans started in with their own interests. The old original fandom, devoted to fanzines, still exists, with numbers probably approaching the 500 mark, though individual fanzines rarely have a circulation over 150/200. This is a world-wide network where, in the old sense, everyone still knows everyone else.

So in these days, you can do your own thing or you can lock into the old fanzine fandom. There are, of course, a number of cross-overs, but on the whole fandom is a lot less integrated than it ever was. If you get your name into the letter columns of a fanzine then you'll probably get fanzines from far and wide, because fan editors are always on the look out for new talent. But the days when the letter columns of professional magazines were eagerly scanned for new names are past. You may even have a science fiction reader

living next door. But fanzine fans, in the old sense, someone who does something active such as producing a fanzine or attending meetings, are few and far between.

1990s

Publisher's Note

The original release of *THEN Again* in August 2019 included “The Origins of TAFF” by Bob Madle from *Nebula* #39 (February 1959) edited by Peter Hamilton. It later emerged that the early history of TAFF had been covered at much greater length and in more detail by Walt Willis in “The Life of TAFF” from *Yandro* #50 (March 1957) edited by Buck and Juanita Coulson, parts of which Bob Madle seems to have paraphrased. For the January 2021 update of this ebook, the Walt Willis article was substituted; Bob Madle’s piece is preserved on the TAFF website.

The End

This free ebook is exclusive to the unofficial TAFF website at taff.org.uk. If you enjoy reading it, a donation to TAFF is a fine way to express your appreciation.

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