

PROLAPSE

“I remain convinced that your contributors are really very lovely and un-argumentative people” – Flick, LoC



“James says you'll be getting in the next round then, begorrah”

Join us in celebrating the 60th anniversary of ‘Irish Fandom Day’
– *With the usual apologies to ‘Giles’*



PROLAPSE

This is *Prolapse* 8, special Irish Fandom issue, published on 26th August 2007 (and if you don't realise the significance of that date then you're not paying attention) by Peter Weston at 53 Wyvern Road, Sutton Coldfield, B74 2PS. I hope you'll like this number and suggest you e-mail your LoCs to me at pr.weston@btinternet.com. This is a 'Paper First' fanzine because I'm old-fashioned, but I'll gladly send you the pdf if you prefer, and this issue will go on *eFanzines* a month after printed copies have been posted out. *Prolapse* is a Time-Travelling Fanzine, covering the many and varied aspects of British SF fan-history. Chief Researcher: Greg Pickersgill. Assistant Deputy Researcher (2nd class): Mark Plummer. Jim Cawthorn cartoons this one from Dave Britton, reprinted with Jim's permission from Don Allen's 1950s fanzine, *Satellite*.

"Fandom sneaks in its dimly lit compound keeping warm as best it can, with the nervous awareness that there's nothing but cold darkness outside" – Peter Nicholls, LoC

Welcome to our celebration of the birth of Irish Fandom, something which – by the time you receive this issue – took place almost exactly ~~sixty~~ years ago. I don't mind telling you that it's been a scramble to meet the ~~deadline~~ even though James sent me his original piece (which put me on August alert) back in early May. But research takes time and besides all the usual tasks I've been ~~completely~~ side-tracked by distractions in the marvellous volume that is *Warhoon-28*. Most Prolapsers will already have their own copy but for the benefit of anyone who hasn't I'd better explain that it is a large-size (American quarto) book of over 600 pages professionally duplicated and bound in green Morocco leather, containing just about all the significant writing of Walt Willis – all over 400,000 words by my count.

It really is an incredible piece of work in every respect – by the editor, Dick Bergeron, who must have spent many months indexing and typing stencils, and by Walt Willis himself who could have hardly stopped scribbling in the 20 years during which he was arguably the finest fan-writer around. I'd forgotten just how much fascinating material is in here, including five beautifully-described reports on British conventions of the early fifties, absolute masterpieces of how-to-do it (when typical con-reps at the time were about what-we-had-for-dinner). Willis seems to have kept just about every scrap of correspondence in which he was ever involved, so as a result there are all sorts of interesting asides about both fans and professionals – Eric Frank Russell and Bob Silverberg are just two who come to mind, all recounted with wonderful good humour. It also contains THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR, which was always an absolute fannish 'must read' (although of course it may not ring quite so many bells now, in an age where duplicated fanzines represent obsolete technology).

Rather amazingly for something published back in 1978, a few copies of *Warhoon-28* remain available from NESFA Press and I do urge you to get it while you still can. Mark Olsen advises a price of \$30.00 and suggests you contact sales@nesfa.org to place an order and enquire about postage. While you're doing that you could also enquire about THE WHITE PAPERS, a more orthodox 400-page book from NESFA containing nine long pieces of fan-writing and ten stories, plus a long introduction from Walt Willis in which he says, "you were always a better person for reading a James White story. Without lecturing his readers he always made clear which was the right way to behave in any circumstances, and why." And this, I think, sums up the essential goodness of Jim White, a true gentleman who is sorely missed.

What of the third member of the trio, Bob Shaw? In this issue we reveal how Bob discovered Irish Fandom, a few years behind Jim White in both age and experience, but he quickly made up for this with his own body of fannish humour in his column 'The Glass Bushel' in *Hyphen*, soon followed by professional work. Again, Walt Willis attempted to sum-up Bob's outlook on life by saying, "it is this element of realism which I detect in Bob Shaw's writing and which I am tempted to identify as the missing element which industrial Belfast has to add to the rather airy-fairy Celtic tradition of literature." Surprisingly, Bob has fared less well than his companions in having his fan-material collected into permanent form; so far as I'm aware there are only the four A5-sized fan-published booklets 'The Best of the Bushel', 'The Eastercon Speeches', 'Serious Science' and 'A Load of Old BoSh'. Wouldn't it be a great idea if NESFA were able to pull together a companion volume to THE WHITE PAPERS with the best of Bob's fan-writings and short stories? Though from what I understand there might be problems in obtaining permission from the Shaw estate. If that's correct it would be a great pity.

Understandably, much of this current number has been taken over by response to John Hall's memoir last time about John & Marjorie Brunner, to an extent where I have a very real fear that we might be overdosing on John Brunner anecdotes and the lettercolumn has grown to what John Purcell calls 'Brobdingnagian' proportions. We also have some comments on Ken Bulmer's write-up of the 1959 'pilgrimage' to Cheltenham, and I need to add a small postscript to that particular story.

You'll probably recall that I put together the Cheltenham feature from four separate accounts by various participants, retrieved through fairly intensive burrowing through the fanzine mountain (and not a little luck) by the Chief Researcher. I'd also mentioned to Greg that it was surprising Archie Mercer hadn't written-up the weekend – he didn't usually miss an opportunity – but despite looking in all the obvious places, including Archie's OMPAZINES, the C.R. drew a blank. Then, on the very eve of publication he literally stumbled over Ivor Mayne's *Vert*, a slight and unprepossessing little fanzine, badly duplicated on pale green paper, which contained Archie's 'The Hamster in the High Street'. It fills-in a few more details to the story along with some nice bits of description: 'Barry (Bayley) is a young man with a permanent amiable expression, a shock of short hair and of rather less than average height, whose main claim to fame seems to have been an acceptance by the late lamented *Vargo Statten Magazine*. Tikki (Hall) is a sophisticated-looking young lady of some sixteen or so summers, which fact surprised me no end – I'd been expecting a child of twelve or so.' I just wish I had seen the article sooner!

Personally, I was quite fascinated with this tale of jousting and St Fantony, but it's clear that others weren't so keen. Peter Roberts, for instance, remarks, "I still wonder how a joke and a bit of fun in the 1950s remained such a conspicuous and off-putting feature of British conventions for more than ten years". Well, you'll see that I've made a few suggestions along the way as to why fans embraced this sort of spectacle, but I'm sure there'll be a lot more to say next time when we delve into the origins of St Fantony in its fiftieth anniversary year.

Those attendance figures again...

After my editorial in the last issue Mark Plummer and I began swapping e-mails full of 'heavyweight fan-historical ~~rising~~' (his words) on Peter Mabey's famous graph of falling convention attendances during the 1950s. You can skip all this number-crunching if you want, but to me these figures summarise the development of our entire convention sequence, and I think it's rather important that they are finally nailed-down for future reference.

Mark: An illustration of the low profile of the later *Cytricons* comes from Vin~~g~~ Clarke's *Science-Fantasy News* (Feb. 58). This carries what it describes as 'the first public news of the progress of preparations for the 1958 SF convention, one of the most closely kept secrets of modern fandom. Only 50 or so fans in close personal contact with the Liverpool group know the facts...' Hyperbole, I'm sure, but surely rooted in a generally low profile for the convention even amongst established fans, and suggesting to me that when you say that 'details were circulated through fanzines which were only going to the in-group, anyway' you might be being overly generous.

PW: Yes, and in the same issue it advises 'there is no programme as such...' and, 'the hall at The George will not be booked and anyone wishing to present an organised 'turn' should make arrangements with Dave Newman to hold same in the Basket Lounge.' No publications, either – you can see how all semblance of organisation had just slipped away.

Mark: You say that Peter Mabey's chart gives us 'accurate figures for con-attendance in the fifties' but I think that's too much of an assumption. Yes, it's *a* set of figures, but just because they're near-contemporaneous we don't know that they're accurate. Again from *SFN* (June 52), Vin~~g~~ gives 1952 convention attendance as '100+' which is vague, true, but to me implies a number substantially below the 187 quoted on Peter's graph. Rob Hansen describes the convention as 'apparently a fairly quiet affair' which is similarly hardly a precise description but I wonder how well it works as a depiction of what would have been – if Peter's figure is correct – biggest non-Worldcon convention until the early seventies.

PW: No, I tend to believe Peter. Vin~~g~~'s *SFN Supplement* lists 197 members of the 'Convention Society', although it's not clear if these are all attending members. And from his report it seems well-programmed and lively, so I think Rob might be wrong, for once, on that one. Let's play safe and apply the '75% rule' which gives us about 150 as attending members.

Mark: The figures for Eastercon attendance between 1952 and 1956 do indeed show a pattern of running down but I'm not convinced that we should be looking at them in isolation. I'm also curious as to why this chart starts in 1952. I think we can take the 1948 convention as a kind of Year Zero for British 'Eastercons', on the basis that the momentum built up from 1937 onwards was largely dissipated by the Second World War (and I say that without wishing to relegate the deadliest conflict in human history to the level of a minor fannish inconvenience) and the post-war conventions were pretty much starting again from scratch. According to THEN, the 1948 *Whitcon* attracted 50 people, while the 1949 event drew 70. There was no convention in 1950 – seemingly nobody got around to arranging it – and Rob doesn't cite a figure for attendance at the 1951 *Festivention*, but according to (once again) *Science-Fantasy News* (July 1951) that one drew 120.

PW: Ah, but that's disputed all over the place! *Fantasy Times* gave a figure of 150, Ken Slater's *Operation Fantast* says 'nearly 200', in the *Journal of SF* Ted Carnell says 'over 200', and then he states 'between 200-300' in *SF Newsletter*. So you can take your pick, but I favour a value of around 150, which might even be a little conservative.

Mark: What we have, then, is a fairly rapid rise in the late '40s and early '50s to a probable peak in 1952 and then a falling away again, which might be an indication that the aberration is more in the 51/52 figures. It's at least arguable that convention-going fandom expanded too rapidly in the early fifties and the reduced numbers at the Kettering conventions was more about things finding their natural level. A further, alternative, possibility: how much of the decline in numbers was due to the convention moving outside London?

PW: It was always much easier for fans, pros and casuals to drop-in upon a con held in the capital. Don't forget that the early cons (1948-1952) were 'daytime only' events, and admission was actually sold by means of 'day tickets'. This undoubtedly meant that some people would just come for one day only, or even for a few hours, and yet would still be included in the grand total. The 1953 con was the first con at which attendees stayed in the hotel, as a rule rather than the exception, although it would still have benefited from the 'London effect'. For the 1954 *Supermancon* there was a double-disincentive to any but the really keen types – fans had to travel to Manchester, then book into the hotel for the weekend, all of which would have carried significant costs in those days. And meals, of course, which were another expense.

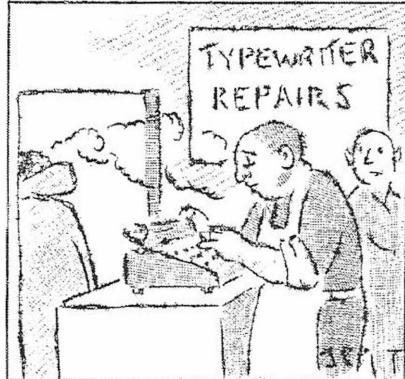
Mark: So we're dealing with several conceptual shifts: between '48 and '51 (first to go beyond an upstairs room in a pub); between '52 and '53 (the first residential convention); and again between '54 and '55 (the first to move out of London, and the first to take over an entire hotel).

PW: And don't forget the changing emphasis away from serious SF programming to a more fannish approach, starting after 1953. This would have tended to discourage the sercon-types from coming back another year – there was very little for them!

Mark: About the day tickets: if somebody came in on Saturday and came back on Sunday, might they have been double-counted, inflating the attendance figures?

PW: Well, maybe, but for both 1952 & 1954 we have a detailed list of members, not just total numbers. As the first post-war national con to be held in the 'provinces', *Supermancon* really did well to get as big an attendance as it did (THEN stated 150) so I think the Manchester people must have attracted quite a few local walk-ins.

Mark: Well, it might have been the first provincial convention in what we now think of as the Eastercon sequence, but *Supermancon* was actually the second Manchester convention: the first *Mancon*, in 1952, pulled 100 people (according to THEN) without a single Londoner turning-up (which caused no end of bad feeling).



It's that Editor bloke again – same old trouble, Worn-out letter 'I'

PW: Yes, but that only proves my point that the Manchester fans must have done a lot of publicity for their first *Mancon*, attracted a lot of local support, and clearly this helped them again the following year.

Mark: I agree that travel was more difficult and relatively costly in 1950s. If the convention had remained in the London area would earlier numbers have been sustained? Again looking at those figures from '48 onwards, a series of London cons had built up attendance (THEN notes that 'cosy fan/pro social relations in the capital meant that London events usually got free press in *New Worlds* and *Astounding*). but was that shift away in 1954 sufficient to deter those new recruits before they'd become hardened fans? As I understand it, at the end of *Supermancon* there were no bids for the 1955 convention so Ted Tubb literally decided that it would be back in London. However, at some later stage Dennis Cowen came forward on behalf of the Kettering group and offered to host the convention. What if that hadn't happened? Would a 1955 convention in London have brought back some of the attendees from 1951/52/53?

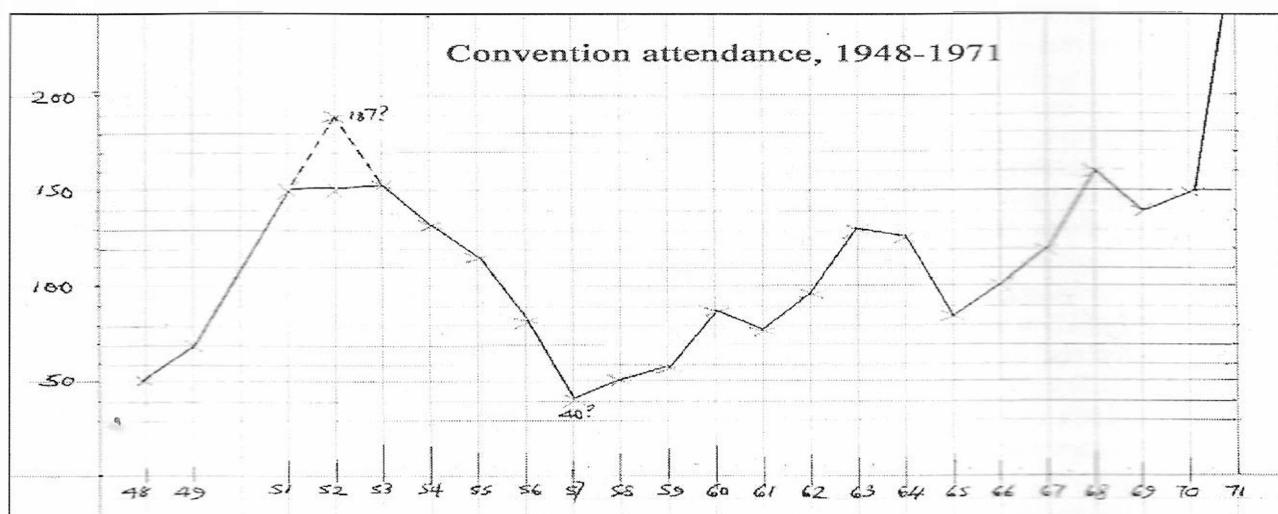
PW: Well, the first *Cytricon* still managed to attract 115, a figure agreed upon by both Peter Mabey and Rob Hansen, so they didn't do too badly. I come back to my original point that a lot depends upon the energy of a con-committee, and the way it promotes its event. Look how Ken Slater made things jump in 1963. Or how well we did in my year (1971).

Mark: And a final disingenuous thought on this. It's clear that some people – such as Vince Clarke with his 'Don't Sit There...' call-to-arms in *Zonic #6* – felt that Something Needed To Be Done to get more people into convention-going-fandom, which led to the formation of the BSFA. But equally perhaps there were some who didn't see this as necessary, who felt that the *Cytricons* had achieved the right level of sustainable attendance and the decline from previous years was just a thinning-out of only marginally interested fringe fans?

PW: I tend to think that British fandom panicked unnecessarily, and if they'd just publicised their conventions properly I don't think there would have been a problem. Hence no BSFA, of course. Even at that last Kettering event things were not quite as they seemed. My estimate of total attendance is 48 people; I arrived at that by noting the 36 names on Dave Newman's list in *Prodigal*, and then adding all the others who I definitely know were there, from reports and photographs in my possession. The interesting point is that I'm reasonably sure 18 of them were first-timers! So new-comers were somehow finding their way into fandom as they had always done, despite the lack of obvious recruiting channels.

Mark: Does this perhaps in any way map on to what's been happening with Eastercons over the last decade, with the Evangelicals pushing for bigger and more inclusive conventions to bring in young people to replace the old-and-greying fans – a big tent for a broad church – while there's a conservative strand saying, no, no, we don't want any more people... in fact we could stand to lose a few of the ones we've got, until we get down to just the hardcore, the true fans, those who appreciate the traditional ways?

PW: Don't try and get me in trouble again, Mark Plummer! And just like you wanted, I've constructed a graph which shows the full picture of convention attendance over a much longer period – 1948 to 1970, with a few guesses along the way.



1948: 50 (THEN)

1949: 70 (THEN)

1950: 150 (PW)

1951: 150 (197 supporting x 75%)

1952: 153 (Peter Mabey)

1953: 131 (Peter Mabey)

1954: 115 (THEN/Mabey)

1955: 80 (THEN/Mabey)

1956: 40 (informed guess)

1958: 49 (PW count)

1959: 56 (official count)

1960: 87 (PW count, in *Prolapse #6*)

1961: 77 (THEN)

1962: 94 (Skyrack/THEN)

1963: 130+ (THEN)

1964: 125 (Skyrack)

1965: 80+ (THEN)

1966: 100 (THEN)

1967: 120 (PW estimate*)

1968: 160 (THEN)

1969: 140 (PW estimate**)

1970: 150 (THEN***)

1971: 200 (official count)

* 162 in PR#4, x 75%

** 164 in PR#3, x 75%

*** 149 in Prog. Book.

LOOKING BACKWARD:

The next issue is our special 50th anniversary number celebrating both *Cytricon III*, the 'lost' Kettering convention (with the help of Tony Keen), and the origin of the Order of St Fantony, with source documents and photographs. We'll have the first instalment of 'The Real New Wave', Dick Ellingsworth's memoir of his early fannish days, together with another 'Forgotten Fan', this time a remembrance of Ella Parker by our New Zealand friend Bruce Burn. Space permitting I'm finally hoping to run Dan Morgan's 'The Invisible Fan', and letters, of course, lots of letters. But that part is up to you!

Here's a surprise – if I ever knew about 'Irish Fandom Day' it had long slipped my mind, but when James Bacon wrote this piece I realised it was good timing for us to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the founding of Irish Fandom. So, for this feature I'm reprinting several long-forgotten pieces together with some wonderful photographs, never before published, to give something of the flavour of the 'The Wheels of IF'. We go back to a very special time in fandom, a brief period when a talented, idiosyncratic trio produced some of our very finest fan-writing. Let's journey now, with James Bacon, to the very beginnings of that relationship. (pw)



Walter Gillings' magazine, *Fantasy*, August 1947, the direct ancestor of the Nova Science *Fantasy*.

'Some still care. Well, I do, anyway!'

By James Bacon

Today I found something of little significance to anyone else, but very significant to me, something that hopefully will strike a cord with you, dear prolapsed reader, in this year 2007.

I happened to call in to Fantasy Centre on the Holloway Road, a last outpost of how-it-used-to-be (and no longer is in today's world of Internet and high-speed activity). I highly recommend a visit; they always have books for me to read and coffee on a wet day. So I was chatting with Eric and Ted, and I'd found some books I wanted. I'd just about finished my browsing when I asked Ted in a nonchalant way (as I knew what the answer would be) if he had a copy of Walter Gillings' *Fantasy*. He quickly said 'No', frowned, placed a finger to his lips and went off making 'hmmm' and 'ahhm' sounds. This was unusual, the answer was usually a straight 'No' and that was that.

But this time he produced the three issues of Gillings' *Fantasy* and my heart skipped a tiny beat. I had never seen issue Number Three in the flesh. They were bundled together in a plastic bag, adorned with a collective price for the set.

At last, I was about to touch a copy of what started the whole thing, and although many of you may know the story, you know it from a different perspective. Things in Ireland fandom would have been so different without the original 'Wheels of IF', and it's a big 'if' whether the Irish Science Fiction association would have existed in the late 70's (never mind whether it would have come back from the dead in the late eighties without the patronage and support of the likes of James White, Harry Harrison, and Anne McCaffery).

As Walt Willis explains in his 'Autobiographical Notes' (from *Canfan* #25, June, 1955):

"One day in early 1947 I came across a copy of the American Edition of *Astounding Science Fiction* for January of that year in a second-hand bookshop. I was shocked to the core. The last time I had seen the American edition of a science fiction magazine was in 1939, and I had innocently assumed that the miserable little British quarterly reprint was all there was of it. It hadn't occurred to me that there could exist any fiend so black-hearted as to suppress any of it, no matter how great the wartime paper shortage. But here was the evidence of the crime. This magazine was monthly, had twice the wordage of the BRE, and had contained *serials*. Moreover this had been going on for years! Filled with a burning sense of injustice we embarked on a determined investigation of all the second-hand bookshops in Belfast. We didn't find any more *ASFs*, but we did find a copy of *Fantasy*, a short lived British pro-mag, containing a letter from a James White of Belfast.

"I wrote inviting him to come and see us, mentioning casually my large collection of British editions. We soon found James was the reason we had never found any other American ones in the second-hand bookshops. James had been living on their doorsteps for years. We regarded with awe and envy this wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. James and I joined forces, and for months our only interest was in furthering our collections. We wrote to all the dealers we could find and joined Ken Slater's *Operation Fantast*. At that time Ken was enclosing with his mailings various one-page fanzines from fans. By now James and I had read each other's collections, had want lists written in blood with all the dealers, and nothing left to do but gnaw our fingers. We got the idea of producing one of these fan magazines as part of our collecting. But we hadn't access to a typewriter or publishing equipment and after making enquiries from professional duplicators lost interest in the idea."

Willis goes into a little more detail in the first instalment of his autobiographical writings, 'Remember Me', in Richard Bergeron's massive *Warhoun 28*.

I wrote asking him to call, adding by way of bait that I had quite a few BRE *Astoundings*. He replied on the 25th a date now celebrated as Irish Fandom Day:

'Dear Mr. Willis, I received your letter this morning and am more than pleased to hear of another science fiction fan club. I am interested in *Astoundings* mostly and have a small collection of them, chiefly wartime British editions...'

Chiefly!! That meant he had at least one American edition. It might even be February 1947 with the second part of 'Now and Tomorrow'. We suggested a night and up he came. He turned out to be very tall, dark and gently mannered. He had not only a virtually complete file of BREs, but dozens and dozens of American editions. He was the reason we hadn't been able to find any in Belfast. He was the mysterious figure who had been in just a few minutes ago and bought them. Worked in the city-centre and spent his entire lunchtime combing the second-hand shops."

Walt found a little printing press in a chemist's shop, and before long he and James were hard at work on their *Slant* (a title chosen by sticking a pin in a dictionary). James was the Art Editor, perfecting two-cut artwork for both covers and interior. I have seen many originals of this artwork and it's a beauty to behold, and more so given the laborious nature of the work. James' writing in *Slant* began in issue 4 in the autumn of 1950, where on editorial [him] he inserted a link into Clive Jackson's comment column on page 16, [in brackets]:

'Many of Dr. Smith's All-American half-backs would be more at home fighting Indians with Winchester repeaters than they are chasing Boskonians with Lenses.' [These views on the great Smith are not those of the typesetter, J. White.]

Willis also wrote about the inaugural meeting in 'My Life in Fandom' which covers some ground, so it's no surprise that even as a neo I had heard about Irish Fandom Day, what would stem from this simple meeting, and about the way friends would play such an important part in everything that was Irish Fandom.

So when Ted Ball handed over that issue of *Fantasy #3*, it was wonderful at last to be able to read James White's clever words in print, and to read what kindled the flame. Here is the letter, complete with the editor's heading:-

Indeed?

"Russell's 'Relic' was, in my opinion the best story in your second issue. Others I liked, in order of preference were 'Fabrication', 'Castaway', and 'Haunted House'. The articles were very good, and the two new features, 'Readers' Analysis' and 'Viewpoints' are just what the doctor ordered.

"I like your idea of condensing 'Famous Fantasies' - but don't go as far back as Wells and Verne. When can we expect *Fantasy* monthly, or at least bimonthly? This waiting four months between issues is disheartening, to say the least.

- J. White, 29 Colinpark St., Belfast."

And with those few lines, it all started to happen. This year will see the sixtieth anniversary of Irish Fandom Day and one intend to recognise it with a drink and a thought for that day when letters were exchanged and some strange fate brought two men together, who seem to have had untold influence on many people and my own life, so much, from mentions in Ireland to fan-writing to TAFF, seems to be linked in some way to those pair.

I owe that letter more than gratitude, but at least I know where to pay my thanks.

Bacon, 10/5/2007

But about Madeleine?

James White was only 19 at the time of that historic meeting, Walt Willis was 28. But what about the original third member of the 'Irish Triangle', Madeleine? It's a romantic little story*, as Rob Hansen describes in *THEM*.

"It all began on a rainy afternoon towards the end of World War II when Willis and the girl he'd been dating for a year, Madeleine Bryan, took shelter in a newsagent's. Only when they reached simultaneously for the same copy of a BRE *Astounding* did each realise that the other read SF. "I think I first realised his intentions were honourable when he let me have the novelette first", Madeleine later remarked of that day. They married in 1945 and bought an old property in Belfast at 77 Upper Newtownards Road, that would eventually be christened 'Oblique House' and would become one of the most famous fannish addresses of all time."

* A tale only matched by Ina and Norman Shorrock; they had been seeing each other for six months before Ina happened to spot a copy of *Astounding* in Norman's pocket. They were both fans but hadn't dared mentioned it! From that day on there was no looking back.

No account of Irish Fandom would be complete without mention of Bob Shaw, who made contact with Walt Willis some three years after James White. Once again Rob Hansen sets the scene:-

"In the Autumn of 1950 Walt Willis visited England, taking the boat to Liverpool where he visited Eric Frank Russell, and then going on to Leicester to stay with a fan called Mike Tealby, editor of *Wonder*. Here Willis made a note of the name of an unknown Belfast fan who had written to Tealby, the then-British agent for *Operation Fantast*, enquiring whether there were any other fans in that city.

"On 10th October the Belfast fan showed up at Oblique House. (Willis later wrote, "The Belfast Triangle is... now a quadrilateral"). A 19-year-old, this newcomer turned out to be an artist and a writer, and keen to get involved with fandom - all in all a valuable addition to Irish Fandom. He went on to produce what are probably the most famous of all the *Slant* contents, the much-reprinted 'Fanmanship Lectures', which tell how to achieve Big Name Fan status by means of various Machiavellian techniques. His name was Bob Shaw."

Bob described this epic meeting in the *Supermancon* 'Combozine' in 1954, together with two little stories which demonstrate his taste for puns. The illustrations are unsigned but possibly done by Bob himself:- (pw)

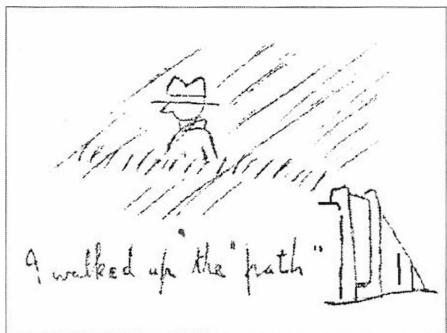
The Willis Way

By Bob Shaw

The young Bob Shaw
- aged 20, at the 1951
Festivention. Photo
by Georges Gallet
from the John Roles
album.



In the otherwise fair city of Belfast there is a long, gloomy track called the Upper Newtownards Road. It is lined with large, gloomy houses, and in the largest and gloomiest of the lot resides Walt Willis. The first time I ever stood outside the Willis garden gate in the rain and stared at the impenetrable wall of grass and weeds that constituted Walt's lawn I wondered whether or not I should go home. Many are the times since that I have laughed at myself for having those doubts - of course I should have gone home.



I opened the gate and stepped inside (here I might add that just inside the gateway of 170 is a cleverly-positioned hole, roughly six inches deep, which is always kept full of muddy water). A few hours later I stood on the doorstep ringing the bell and the bottoms of my trousers, after a safari up the garden 'path' - having got safari I didn't want to go back.

I rang the bell again,
I rang the bell fiercely.

I rang the bell and knocked the door simultaneously, and then both at once, I hurled myself at the door, kicking it, ringing the bell, thumping with my fists and banging my head against the knocker. Just as I fell back, bleeding and exhausted, a very pretty girl opened the door and said, "I thought I heard somebody knocking."

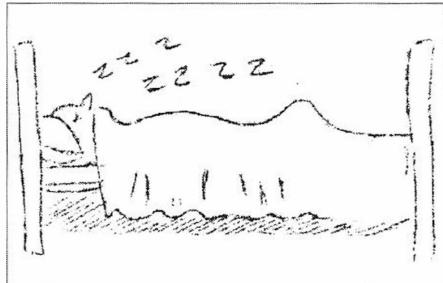
It was while in this state of despair that I first met... Willis the man.... and I've been that way ever since. Let us proceed to deal with his personal appearance. Walt's favourite apparel consists of an old, well-patched windcheater, and an old, well-patched pair of trousers, and an old, well-patched pair of carpet slippers. He also wears an old face, but Walt's hasn't a patch on it.

The only other salient points about his appearance are that he stands very far from the razor when shaving and that his comb must have had pyrhorrea. As you may have noted, he is very careless about his dress, about his meals, about everything except books. He is even careless about money - careless about how he gets it! Which brings me to the account of how.....

Willis, James and I find another Bob

We were out for a walk along one of the pleasant avenues that surprisingly abound near Walt's house. As usual the talk was on a very high plane - oxygen masks, and the Nebular Hypothesis or something. Probably something.

"The mind of the average man," said Walt, "is so *mundane*." James and I agreed whole-heartedly. Just then, reflecting the afternoon sunlight, I saw a piece of tinfoil that looked surprisingly like a shilling. I slowed down, just in case, and at the same time began distracting James's attention from the footpath ahead. It WAS a shilling!



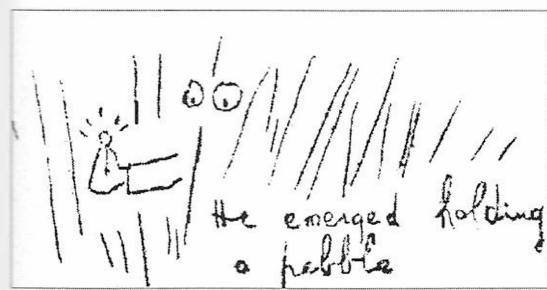
By this time we were almost at a standstill. James was beginning to look a bit puzzled at the sudden change of pace. I kept my eye on him as I tensed my muscles for the spring – Walt I had ruled out, as he was still talking about how our thoughts must be elevated above the grind of modern existence. Throwing restraint to the winds I let out a triumphant cry and sprang. My hand closed over Walt's fist. He stood up and looked at me reproachfully. Shamefaced, I continued the walk.

"The mind of modern man," said Walt, "is so *mercenary*."

Willis mows the lawn

We were sitting doing practically nothing. I was reading a copy of *Planet*. I like reading *Planet* because it gives me a pleasant feeling that I could earn money writing SF. Suddenly, Walt jumped up. "I'm going to mow the lawn," he said. James and I looked suitably impressed, we all tripped down the stairs (one of the stair rods is loose), and bounced out into the afternoon sunlight.

Walt disappeared around the side of his house, and came back trailing a large lawnmower behind him. He looked rather startled when he saw James and I draped comfortably on the rug on the step – I think he expected us to help. As an associate editor, I don't mind acting as a sort of censor and cutting down his corn, but I draw the line at cutting down his grass.



Giving us a disgusted look, he trundled the lawnmower up to where the 'lawn' began. The mower mounted the grass and weeds and bounced along the tangled mass several inches above the ground. Approximately four pieces of grass about half-an-inch long popped into the tin. Walt stopped shoving. He mopped away some perspiration and glared at the place where there should have been a clean-cut swathe. Suddenly, he gave a cry and dived into the mass, and emerged holding a small pebble about a quarter of an inch in diameter.

"Very nearly broke the mower on that," he exclaimed, with the air of an expert. "I doubt if it would be safe to do any mower work"

This sounded rather feeble to us. James asked me whether I thought Walt had planted the stone there. I replied that I thought even Walt would know that stones don't grow, and that it was probably a residue from 'Space Raid'. This was a game that had developed when James remarked that the measuring cup out of

* And there the story abruptly stops... but for a reason. Bob's piece appeared in the *Supermancon* 'Combozine' as part of a 4-page insert, supposedly taken from Issue 20 of the quarterly fanzine, *Nirvana*, edited by Ken Bulmer with assistance from Dave Newman and Vine Clarke. There's an impressive contents list of great material by important contributors, and advance news of the forthcoming 'super-size fifth anniversary issue' which would contain photographs, checklists, and so on. But also a stern warning – that 'contributions and subscriptions are by *invitation only* and we regret that we cannot supply past or future copies of *Nirvana* under any circumstances. Please do not ask us... a refusal might embarrass.'

This might seem a little stern but that's because it was all a HOAX! *Nirvana* saw just one issue – in August 1949, but Ken had clearly persuaded Bob Shaw to go along with the deception. Was that story ever concluded. I wonder? (pw)

Bob returned to the tale of his origins in *Hyphen-23*, November 1959, from which the excerpt below is taken. Inevitably a few details differ from the earlier account but it certainly seems that the Willis household really ~~did~~ need a new door-bell! (pw)

From 'THE HISTORY OF IRISH FANDOM' – Part 4, by Bob Shaw

What I needed was some way of flashing back to the events so that I could write a little series of vignettes about them. Having so decided I seized my TV set, spot-welded a few busbars and things and then, using a soldering iron sold to me by Don Channing, I hooked in a desk calendar and one of those little pencil-sharpener globes of the world.

Come with me now as I warm up my time-viewer. I will focus it on the night I entered Irish Fandom; using the mechanical calendar and then selecting Walt Willis' house on the globe I'll tune in on that great occasion. As I recall, I was looking pretty sharp that night; I distinctly remember I was on top form at making puns and jokes too. I must have made an excellent impression on Walt...ah, the picture is forming now. Here we are late in 1950 outside Oblique House.

Aaarrggghhh! Something must be wrong. Who is that weird-looking being with the shabby old raincoat munching a bag of chips as he walks up the path? Okay, I'll keep quiet and let you hear what happens...

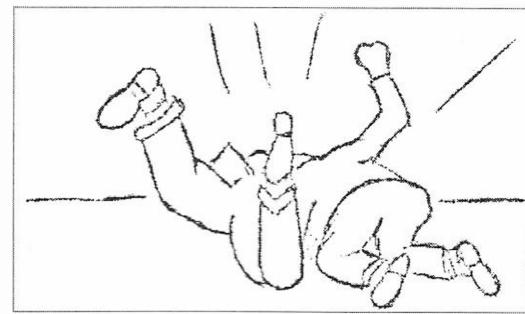
The dimly-seen figure halts at the front door, peers at the number and then finishes his chips, showing that he is both thrifty and clean by chewing up the bag to extract any vinegar and salt that may have been absorbed into it, and then carefully licking his fingers. Next he rings the doorbell and waits. Next he knocks the knocker and waits. Next he rings the bell and knocks the knocker at the same time and waits. Next he rings, knocks, kicks and bangs his head against the door and waits. Finally, bruised and beaten, he turns away from the unresponsive door and begins to shamble off down the path when suddenly the door is flung open and a tall figure is limned in yellow light from inside.

"Did you knock?" Walt Willis says.

Overawed, the shabby figure goes, "I.. I ...that is if... washed my hair last night.... I hope..."

"You must be Bob Shaw," Walt says. "I got your name from Ken Slater. Won't you come in?"

Still emitting inarticulate sounds the shabby figure enters the house. Two or three hours go by, during which he is seen briefly at the windows, excitedly waving handfuls of science fiction magazines and sandwiches, talking rapidly, describing orbits and spaceship trajectories with his hands. He looks ecstatically happy. He is. — Bob Shaw



In 1953 the Willises were visited by Bea Mahaffey who was on her way to the *Coroncon*, via a circuitous route through Ireland. Bea was Managing Editor of the Chicago-based magazine, *Other Worlds*, who had met Walt during his visit to the *Chicon* the previous year, while James White had recently scaled the heights by selling a story to *Astounding*. James subsequently wrote a long report of the 'BeaCon' for *Hyphen-4* (reprinted in THE WHITE PAPERS) and it's safe to say that he was well and truly 'smitten'! Anyway, after many adventures they finally arrived by ferry in Liverpool, after which these delightful pictures were taken... (pw)

Postscript to the BeaCon

By Walt Willis*



Shortly an enormous black car loomed up, driven, appropriately enough, by vile huckster Frank Mooney of SFService. We all got in and strolled about the interior, until we arrived at a sleazy cafeteria which was all Liverpool had to offer at this hour of the morning. Breakfast was over and the waitress was polishing the table with a dirty rag and a black look, when Eric Frank Russell made his entrance.

He stepped immediately into his natural niche as life and soul of the party, greeting Bea with the remark that while in his writing career he had often said what he would like to do to pro editors, he'd never imagined it could be a pleasure: and proceeded thus outrageously to skate on the thin ice on the brink of bad taste without once putting his foot in it. Larger than life and a great deal more interesting, he manages to set the standards in any company in which he finds himself.

But at one point he took time off from good-humouredly insulting everyone present and warning Bea against the Londoners to tell the plot of an as yet-unpublished story. It was one of those warmly human short stories of his which show Russell, beneath his bluff exterior, to be one of the most sensitive writers in the SF field, and he told it so well that we all felt we only needed to have learned shorthand to be sure of a *Galaxy* cheque. Even the people at an adjoining table stopped talking to listen and when he had finished there was the moment of silence which is the supreme tribute to an artist.

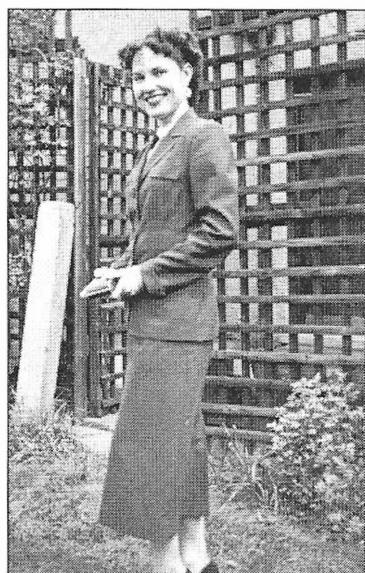
After breakfast EFR drove us to Chester, passing through about ten feet of Wales just so Bea could say she'd 'done' it, then back to his house for a magnificent lunch, and then down to the station where we said goodbye to the hospitable Liverpudlians.

It was a relief train and we had a carriage to ourselves for the whole of that golden journey to London. We talked and laughed and sang the whole way except when we were reminiscing nostalgically (already) about the trip around Ireland. James found the key of his room at Portballintrae which he'd forgotten to hand in, and carried out an investiture of Bea with the number plate, as with the Legion of Honour, not forgetting the most trivial detail of punctilio, and, carried away, proposed to her several more times.

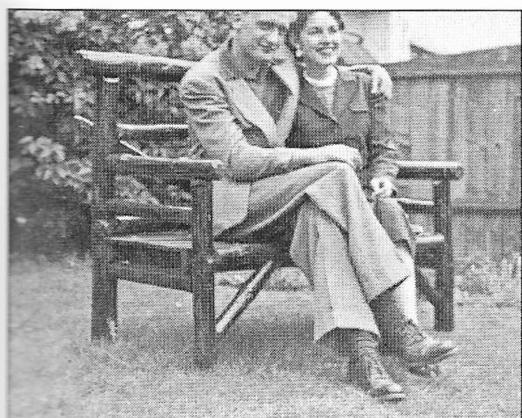
Next time she'll know to bring a suitcase of rejection slips.



Above, Bea, Madeleine and EFR – presumably in the Great Man's garden at Heswall, Wirral.



Above, Editor Bea, and Writer James, discussing SF plot-lines, maybe?



Left, Walt & Bea.
Right, at Chester railway station.

Photos previously unpublished, from Norman Shorrock's album.

* An extract from Willis' *Coroncon* report, from Warhoo-28.



In 1957 Bob Shaw was married and in Canada, but John Berry had joined Irish Fandom. John was a policeman, and tales of his 'Goon Defective Agency' were soon pouring from his pen. Although John was not present himself at the London worldcon that year the GDA had agents among the audience, as this account describes:

James White, Super-Villain

By Wally Weber *



St. Fantony is far from being the only select group in fandom, however. The Goon Detective Agency is not to be slighted, and they, too, were at the Convention in force. And, as it turned out, it was a fortunate thing they were. It was the very first session had taken place during which the official gavel had changed hands. By sheer chance I happened to be staying the same room with Art Thompson when Stephen Schultheis burst in to announce that the gavel had been stolen and that the GDA had been put on the case to recover it. In a moment Art Thompson disappeared from the group to discuss it with other members of the GDA.

The next afternoon, at the luncheon, James White asked me whether I was for the GDA or against it. Now I don't admit from a distance of 6,000 miles that I am pro-Goon, and that I have been a character in a Goon story written by Busby, but you must understand that I was starving there, within easy reaching distance of White's powerful hands. Twisting my fingers, I answered, "Goon? What's that?" The tension in the atmosphere lightened and fans all the way down relaxed. White then informed me that he was anti-Goon. Even then, I could have made a great contribution to the GDA had I put a few simple facts together, but unfortunately all I could think about was the roast duck that never came. I sometimes feel that if the roast duck had arrived when it should have, the terrible scene that was to come about later that evening could have been avoided.



It was at the 8.30 p.m. session, during which the Achievement Awards were to be given out, that the terrible thing happened. The time for the event to start had come and passed, the audience was assembled and waiting for action occurred on the stage. Finally Ted Carnell appeared and regrettably announced the theft of the gavel and that the presentation of the achievement awards would have to wait, for they would have no official standing without the official gavel.

But just as he was about to leave the stage the voice of the GDA came from the rear of the room, "Don't move! We've got you covered!"

It was James White who started out of his seat clutching a briefcase and wearing a panicky look as only a person like James White can wear. Gunfire sounded from the rear of the room and White bolted for the side exit. Schultheis suddenly appeared in it, cutting off his escape. White tried the only avenue of escape left to him — the stage exit. But he was caught in Thompson's and Schultheis's crossfire. In a tragic moment he expired at the feet of Ted Carnell. Then quickly the GDA opened White's briefcase and handed its contents to Mr Carnell, and withdrew from the scene, taking their left-over corpse with them.



Left: Coolly, Ted Carnell uses the gavel to restore order before presenting the 1957 Achievement Awards ('Hugos').



Left: Would-be Bogart-lookalike Steven Schultheis & James White in happier times.

Right: The sad remains of super-villain James White lie on the convention floor, as Arthur Thomson prepares to finish him off with a plonker-gun.

Photos from Norman Shorrock.



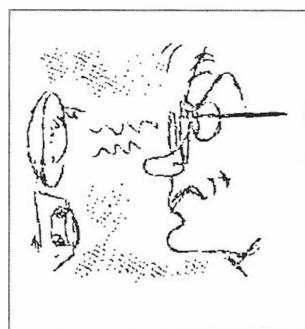
rites: "A report rang out from the back of the hall where Goon Arthur Thomson dressed in Mal Ashworth's military uniform fired a shot from a blank cartridge pistol borrowed from Shel Deretchin. The first shot was the cue for me to jump into the air. Immediately Arthur shouted, "Stop, James White, vile pro and agent of Angon!" I snarled, pulled out the pistol and Boyd Raeburn and returned fire, retreating down the centre aisle with my briefcase bashed to my side. In the space of the hall the firing was incredibly loud and dramatic. There was an instant's shocked silence, then mingled boos arose as those present chose sides in the battle.

"I retreated slowly to the foot of the stage, then Steve Schultheis came blasting out from a side door. Caught in the crossfire, I snarled, sneered, and spat (I was out of ammunition by this time), then staggered, reeled, and collapsed belly on the floor... after having dusted a section with my handkerchief... with my head resting on the brief-case. Thomson dashed up, made a phoney little speech about the GDA always winning, and plonkered me on the forehead to knock me off." (Excerpt & ATomillos from *Hyphen-19*, reprinted in THE WHITE PAPERS, p 310-311)

And this wasn't the end of James White's thrilling adventures during *Loncon*. Earlier, he had heard John W. Campbell, no less, expounding on his theories on psionics, about which regular readers of *Astounding* were probably already slightly over-familiar. But was the Great Editor missing a new psi-power, one literally right under his nose?

Psneeronics – A New Science of the Mind

By Wally Weber*



Since James White seems to be showing up in so many different places in this report, it might be well to describe that gentleman and lead into his part in what might well be the most important development to occur during the convention.

James White is a large man with clean-cut features and a generally handsome look to him. His face is truly a fascinating thing. From the nose down it is perpetually happy. As far as his mouth is concerned, the world is a beautiful enjoyable place in which nothing can possibly go wrong. From his eyes up, however, things are entirely different. His eyes and forehead are forever worried. There is disaster ahead at every moment – a Goon lurking behind every corner. Most alarming of all (so the top part of his face seems to indicate) his mouth is down there below, ignoring the whole terrible situation. Psychologically he tends to follow the attitude of his eyes and be very concerned about the various events occurring about him. It is probable that he, more than any other fan involved, feels the full terrible responsibility of having developed a science that may mark the end of mankind as we know it.

PSNEERONICS! The science of the sneer. The basic rules were developed late Sunday night by James White, who had recently recovered from his violent death of Saturday evening and was in search of a revenge weapon, and Bob Silverberg, who had a natural talent for sneering and had been developing it as an art form. Together they contrived a method by which an ordinary sneer could gather energy over a period of milliseconds and then be released by a detonating snap of the fingers and directed by a focus of eye beams. Before they had come to realize the staggering destructive power of their discovery they had gone too far to stop.

Mal Ashworth had done into some basic research on the matter, and Walt Willis was soon filling in the gaps in the basic theory. The Projected Psneer was added to the diabolic techniques for increasing the range of the psneer. Use of the Double Psneer (sneering with both sides of the mouth simultaneously) to increase the amplitude of the psneer on detonation was developed, although it turned out that one had to possess a mouth like Silverberg's in order to accomplish it. Defenses against the psneer were sought and found. (Crossing the eyes nullifies the psneer, but it is impossible to direct a counter-psneer unless the eyes are focussed. Another problem to be solved.)

By Monday morning, even I was caught up in the race to perfect the psneer, although by then we were beginning to realise the extent of this monster we were loosing on our fellow man. We even had reason to believe that past civilisations superior to our own had been destroyed by sneers being amplified into psneers and detonated. But even so, there is no turning back. We must continue to strive forward. We must develop the Intercontinental Ballistic Psneer before Russia!



Left: Mal Ashworth, James White, Wally Weber & Ellis Mills perfect the psneer.
(Photo: Norman Shorrock)

Right: Mal & James deliver the psuper psneer that broke the camera!
(Photo: Wally Weber)



James writes: "Wally Weber arrived, complete with camera and asked what we were doing. We told him it was a new and subtle weapon we were developing, and he said he would like to photograph it. We psneered at full strength, in unison, into his flash. Wally collapsed in a heap on the floor. Struggling weakly to his feet he held his camera to his ear and shook it gently. 'Hah', he said sadly, 'Subtle? Rattle rattle. Subtle. Hah hah.' We explained it all to Bob Silverberg later and he solemnly avowed his intention of selling it to Campbell." (Excerpt & A Tomillo from *Hyphen-19*, reprinted in THE WHITE PAPERS, p. 317)

* These two items are reprinted from Wally Weber's privately-printed *Loncon Report*, 1957.

Peter Hall's long memoir last time described the home-life of the Brunners in the early seventies, but John Brunner was a complex man and there's a lot more to his story. In this feature I've assembled various different perspectives from people who knew him much better than I ever did:- (pw)

Remembering John Brunner

JB at the 1981
Yorcon-2
Photo by Terry
Jeeves



Peter Nicholls (*from Peter's LoC on #7*)

John Hall's account of life at the Brunners when they lived on Hampstead Heath was one of the things in *Apocalypse* that discomfited me. The parties held there he describes well, and accurately. (I think I went to at least four of them.) He also describes Marjorie Brunner interestingly, but I have to say, rather him than me. I found the Brunners' marriage awful, not because I despise open marriages as such, but because both John and Marjorie were so unctuously predatory. And it seemed you quite often had to like both at once. I still remember Tom Disch reminiscing about one thing to be invited to go to bed with John, but to go to bed with Marjorie too... well, really!"

Marjorie was intelligent, admirably determined not to surrender to an ageing process that made her look vastly older than John), but really flaky, too. And she smelled like ashtray that hadn't been emptied for two weeks. I can't see that this relationship can have done John Hall much good, and I thought that his account of the relationship ended with unhappiness, as if he's never been able to forgive what was done to him at the age of 23 by a dangerous predator, even 35 years later.

As to John, the First Law of Brunner studies is: most of the stories told about Brunner are true, both the positive and the anti-. He was sensitive, intelligent, kindly, outgoing, intensely private, narcissistic, pompous, likeable and cruel. And very often boring. But not always. And I appreciated the way he remained civil and friendly even after the somewhat abrupt way I sometimes terminated our conversations. The thing is, I think on balance that I both liked and admired him. A bit. But I never talk to him for more than twenty minutes at a time. However, he was courageous and hardworking.

I was one of the group at the Glasgow worldcon in 1995, who got together shortly after the news broke that John had died in hospital after falling ill in his bedroom upstairs in the main con hotel. The group met to discuss how John should be memorialised at the convention. Brian Aldiss was there. I know that Brian and I, along with a great many others who had known John for many years, had deep reservations about him. He may have been occasionally intolerable and a bit of a bastard. But he was OUR bastard. There was a consensus that Bob Silverberg, a tactful and articulate man, should deliver a eulogy to John as part of the Hugo Ceremony evening. And he did it very well and movingly, without deleting all reference to John's social shortcomings.

Incidentally, there is a small error in the caption to one of your photographs (page 1). The attractive woman alleged by Hall to be a mistress of John Brunner was Jeni Couzyn, not Jerri Couzyn. Jeni was a South African poet, and quite distinguished. She published four books at least with Heinemann, and received a couple of UK Arts Council grants. I have her 1978 collection entitled *HOUSE OF CHANGES*, which contains a rather good, Dickian SF poem, 'Do Androids Dream'. I don't remember and perhaps never knew whether or not she had been Brunner's mistress, but for a brief period she was mine.

I probably met her at the Brunners', but it may have been at *Tynecon*, an interesting convention held in April 1974. It was a dark period for me. I had become very depressed at the break-up with my American partner Pamela, a relationship which had lasted almost six years. (It was partly because I had been aggressively critical of her taking up transcendental meditation. She subsequently hooked up with the *Mysteries*'s secretary, John Windsor.) Incidentally, Pamela died earlier this year; she was too young for that.

Anyway, back in May 1974 my depression was so deep that everything golden I touched turned to lead, as if I was some appalling reverse King Midas. Jeni dubbed me The Ashman, because I could see only dust and ashes and I was unbearable to be with because my condition was contagious, and I infected other people with my grey cynicism. She took me for a holiday on the Yorkshire Moors where every night she briskly withheld all sexual favours and forced me to take twenty-kilometre walks every day. This brutal behaviour successfully turned me around and the cure began, but I never forgave her for being right. Later in the year she found for me, and forced me into, a very nice flat between Tufnell Park and Highgate, where I lived until the end of 1982. So I'm grateful to Jeni on several counts. //

— Peter Nicholls

Chris Priest (*from Chris' LoC on #7*)

I knew the Brunners pretty well from about 1970 onwards, and John Hall's description of them rings true. They were difficult and uneasy company. I used to say that the condition of being in John Brunner's company was that no matter what the circumstances he would always find a way of embarrassing you.

One occasion from many: at one of your *Speculation* conferences, I gave a talk about a terrible novel by Poul Anderson, called TAU ZERO. It was the first time I had ever spoken in public about SF, and was feeling nervous, uncertain and definitely not at all confident. I mentioned the title of the novel several times, always pronouncing the first word 'Tow' to rhyme with 'Cow'. I struggled through to the end, and when the chairman (you?) asked for questions, Brunner popped up. He thought it would be helpful, he remarked in his most seriously irritating voice, to point out that according to [some erudite source which only he knew] the word 'Tau' should be pronounced 'Taff'. Well, thanks for that John! I certainly found that really helpful. It also stopped anyone else asking any questions. (It was also incorrect.)

However, I owe them a lot, and you can't be around someone for 25 years without being aware of all the complexities and contradictions of an extraordinary man like him. As John Hall says, John Brunner often became a comprehensible human being late in the evenings, and I had several good conversations with him.

There's one I remember in particular, when Brunner and I stayed up talking until about 3:00 am. There was no swagger from him at all that night, no showing off, no tantrums, no attempts to cut me down to size, no cringe-worthy bursts of ego ... all that uniquely horrible Brunner stuff. We talked shop, ideas, swapped memories, told jokes, played music, drank wine. I remember thinking how much I wished I could pull back the wall and reveal this relaxed and normal John Brunner to the people who only saw him in his full pomp at conventions.

Marjorie was a different kind of problem to her friends, but I'm glad to report that for me having to have sex with her wasn't one of them. I do remember on one occasion that she and John came to my apartment in Harrow, and at some point in the evening she lost her temper with me. She gradually descended into gibbering craziness. John helped things along no end by trying to soothe her. 'Poppet, calm down!' he said in the voice that he normally used on his dogs. 'Sweetie, I'm warning you!' (Much more besides.) Finally, Marjorie went completely bonkers, fell face-down on my carpet, pulled up the edge of it and tried to eat it! (Not a word of exaggeration.)

At this John sort of swept her up in his arms, carried her bodily out of the building, and drove her away into the night in his famous open-top roadster. The next morning, at about 9:00 am, John rang me up in full oleaginous mode. 'So sorry we had to dash away early last night. We did enjoy the evening, but we were both tired and wanted to grab an early night.' A week later we were back on their invite list. The evening in Harrow was never mentioned again.

The micro-skirted young woman in the photograph with John was Jeni (not Jerri) Couzyn. She was (and still is) a South-African born poet whom John had adopted as a protégée (his word for it), and whom he took to one convention and several parties. She was present during the notorious glass-throwing incident, which I still think was a terrible thing to happen, a definite low point in British fandom's story.

By the way, I never, EVER referred to James Blish as 'Jimmy'. A chill of horror strikes me at the very thought. //

— Chris Priest

John-Henri Holmberg

John Hall's piece was fascinating and – even though I realise the phrase may sound strange – made a lot of sense, particularly to someone who saw John and Marjorie only very occasionally.

Actually I had rather a bad start with John. Over the May 1st weekend in 1972, he was guest of honour at the Swedish national convention, that year held in Stockholm and rather unoriginally dubbed *SF-72*, although its logo, designed by Eddie Jones, was pretty neat. This was one of the Stockholm cons of the period I did not chair (I had done that, alone or with a co-chairman, in 1968 and 1970, and would do it again in 1974 and 1976), but I was some kind of committee consultant, and one of the things I was asked to do was to write the profile of John Brunner for the convention programme book.

In my defence, I will say that I suggested to the main convention committee, who had after all decided to invite John Brunner, that they should present him themselves, as in all honesty I was not a great fan of his. But when they said that they wanted me to do it anyway, I was young enough to be flattered, stupid enough to agree, and arrogant enough to tell them that at any rate I would say just what I thought. They, on their part, were young and stupid enough to agree. And so I wrote a piece on John Brunner, and they printed it in the programme book, and although I did say that he was a quite interesting writer, and that a few of his novels were certainly worth reading, I also said that I thought him a too often pedestrian writer, and not too impressive a stylist even though style obviously was something he felt deeply about since he so often put it before content. And a few other not terribly complimentary things as well.

This was uncalled for, and snotty, and I regret it with feeling now. What I had not anticipated, nor anyone else as far as I know, was that after I went with one of the convention chairmen to meet John Brunner at the airport and we sat in the cab back to town, John was given a copy of the programme book, quickly found the presentation of him, read it, and stared rather venomously at us both. "You wrote this", he said to me. "And you printed it", he said to the convention co-chairman. "Now tell me why you asked me to come here." As I said, not an auspicious start to any acquaintanceship.

Though it did get a little better. John Brunner charmed everyone at the convention. He spoke eloquently

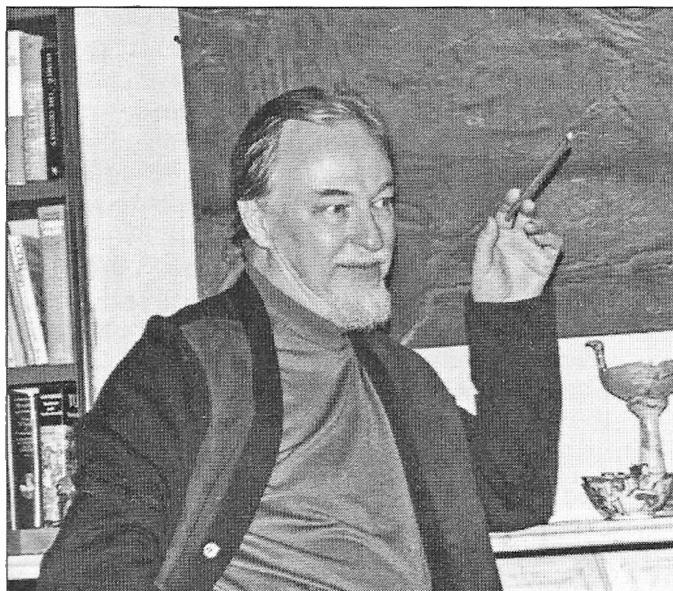
and at length about everything, gave an excellent speech, sat up talking to fans the night long, always dressed in his weird and unflattering dinner jacket of glittering red lame. After the first frost had begun to melt slightly, he did point out that if we ever wanted to play a similar prank on any other author, we should first check his background to see if he might be able to read Swedish. John, he said, had lived for the greater part of a year in Sweden sometime in the late 1950s or early 1960s, when he had had a relationship with a Swedish woman, and picked up enough of the language to at least make out when he wasn't being flattered in print. I was impressed, in addition to learning never to accept an invitation to write about guests of honour unless I was able to be honestly and entirely positive.

A few weeks later I met John again, at the first Eurocon in Trieste, where he was accompanied both by Marjorie and Della, and spent quite a lot of time with both of them, though very little with John. Della was beautiful and quite amused by the reactions she got from virtually all males who saw her; some of them she teased actively with a weird ploy. During the convention, she carried around a hardbound book of poetry, and occasionally she asked some admirer to take a look at her book and tell her what he thought of it. It invariably fell open to the page where she had glued a large nude photo of herself.

But in all honesty, I share none of John Hall's intimate memories of Marjorie, nor was I propositioned by Della. (If this is the kind of fanzine where we are supposed to Tell All, the one who did proposition me at the Trieste Eurocon was Charlotte Franke, then wife of German author Herbert W. Franke... but that's an entirely different story.) In retrospect, though, John's essay does confirm the suspicions I held even at the time concerning the almost tangible tension you felt in Trieste when in the company of the Brunners.

Their hotel suite was fairly large, with a small bedroom where Marjorie slept, a sitting room and a larger bedroom which John shared with Della. Marjorie made many jokes about this arrangement. Neither John nor Della seemed amused, nor, in fact, Marjorie, who to me sounded more bitter than happy about it all.

And perhaps a year later, when I arrived in London to find that I had to wait an hour to get into my hotel room and walked out in the street, I ran straight into John Brunner when I rounded a corner. Then he was at his heyday,



JB in the late 80s, probably at his South Petherton, Somerset home.
Photo by Dave Wood

brimming over with pride at his novels, awards, travels and conquests. Perhaps being an insignificant fan from a far-off country made him less stiffly formal than he almost always was; he talked exuberantly about his plans, his success, his many translations. Much later, when Marjorie had died and he talked about having to close-off parts of his house since he was strained to meet the costs of heating it now that his work was no longer in print, I remembered him sadly as he was then.

More than a decade later, I spent half of an American worldcon talking to Marjorie, who by that time must have been in her mid-sixties. She was sarcastic, funny, full of anecdotes and quite mean in her opinions of both authors and fans; probably the funniest moment was when we were listening to a panel on space habitats, where enthusiastic members in the audience applauded Gerard O'Neill's idea of permanent space colonies and the discussion quickly turned into a question of how soon we could all move there.

Suddenly Marjorie started laughing so hard she almost fell off her chair, choking, and pointed to the doors; I staggered out with her, and in the hallway she roared with laughter, finally got her breath back, and said, "Did you see those fatties in there, John-Henri? They want to go live in space, but there isn't a single one of them who could even be lifted by a rocket ship!"

Like almost everyone else, I last met John at the Glasgow convention where he died. I did talk to him for perhaps a half hour in the art show room, and was sad to see him so forlorn, wandering the halls and claiming that nobody even knew who he was. By that time he seemed to have forgotten my unflattering introduction of him; he seemed tragically grateful that someone at least knew who he was and what he had accomplished.

Not too much substance, I suspect. But you do lead me down the lane of fannish memories, again and again.//

John-Henri Holmberg

Harry Harrison

I found John Hall's Brunner piece an interesting look into the sexual activities of the British writer. I must say, in all honesty, that it is not that different in content and variety from the social interactions of the American writers. And, no, I shall not expand upon that point.

What I found more interesting was Brunner on Brunner in the publicity leaflet John wrote about himself. The only other example of this was a PR plug written by Harlan Ellison about himself. Self-serving egoboo? Or Freudian insecurity?

My personal grumble about John is literary; *theft* to put it bluntly.

I always had an easy-going relationship with the Brunners. I stayed in their flat once in Frogna when funds were short. The only memory I had of the stay was coming back from the bog and passing the open door to John's study. Writers are fascinated by the mechanics of other writers. There were bookshelves above John's typewriter. What volumes of research, dictionaries, grammars, did John use? I peeked. The shelves were filled with dups of his novel THE ATLANTIC ABOMINATION. Interesting...

In return for their hospitality Joan and I put them up when they were touring Denmark in a van plugging CND. We had just moved into a house in Bistrup and had not furnished it completely yet. The Brunners had the empty sitting room to spread out their sleeping bags. I quite understood when Joan asked them one morning to kindly save their sexual activities until after dark; the children played in the garden just outside the large, undraped

window of the room and had some interesting questions. It seemed a rational request.

My pique with John was more of a writerly, creative one. I was working on the first draft of my novel MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM! at the time of their visit. In the evening, over drinks, the conversation turned naturally to the topic of overpopulation. I was steeped in the subject and John was a good listener. Then they left and I went back to work.

I must admit that I was not enthused when, some months later, I received my monthly copy of *New Worlds*. In it was the first part of a serial by John, 'Put down this Earth'. About the perils of overpopulation. Well... you can't copyright an idea. But my book was the very first, fiction or non-fiction, to point out the danger of overpopulation in the near future. I was pipped at the post. I never knew until now, (courtesy of Pete's research) that this novel appeared in a paperback. I went on working on my own novel which was eight years in development, finished it, and MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM! was published in 1966.

Then John wrote another novel about overpopulation, he was surely getting mileage out of my idea—and this one was published in book form in 1968 in the US and Britain.

STAND ON ZANZIBAR; Idea and story by Harrison; writing technique by John dos Passos. Credit or acknowledgement not given to either.

Am I being petty or mean-minded? I don't think so. He who steals my purse steals trash. He who lifts my original ideas steals something far more valuable.

I never mentioned this to John. But I never turned my back to him – or discussed my work with him – ever again. //

– Harry Harrison

Mike Moorcock

Jimmy Ballard and I used to toss a coin as to who would have to go to his 'at homes' that particular month. John said we could have an enjoyable time *sans* alcohol and was very proud how everyone became so cheerful at the at-homes, not knowing several of us, me included, took flasks to slip in the coffee. Those in the know bee-lined for those with the flasks!

I was actually fond of John, as one can be of people who are their own worst enemies. Both Jimmy and I felt obliged to support John when others didn't, but he COULD be horribly pompous, as at the time he accused me of throwing a glass at him when I wasn't even in the hall. It was non-fan Mike Dempsey, a good friend of mine, who drunkenly got irritated with him and yelled "How dare you compare your tenth rate verse with that of Tom Disch!" before throwing the glass. Brunner's version was that the glass was flung at the lady poet also on stage (Jeni Couzyn) and he stepped in front of it to save her.

He didn't speak to me for three years after that and selfishly I made no further attempt to heal the rift, which meant Jimmy had to do all the at-homes. This could be why I don't remember much about John Hall's account. I suspect he was staying there when John and I weren't on speaking terms.

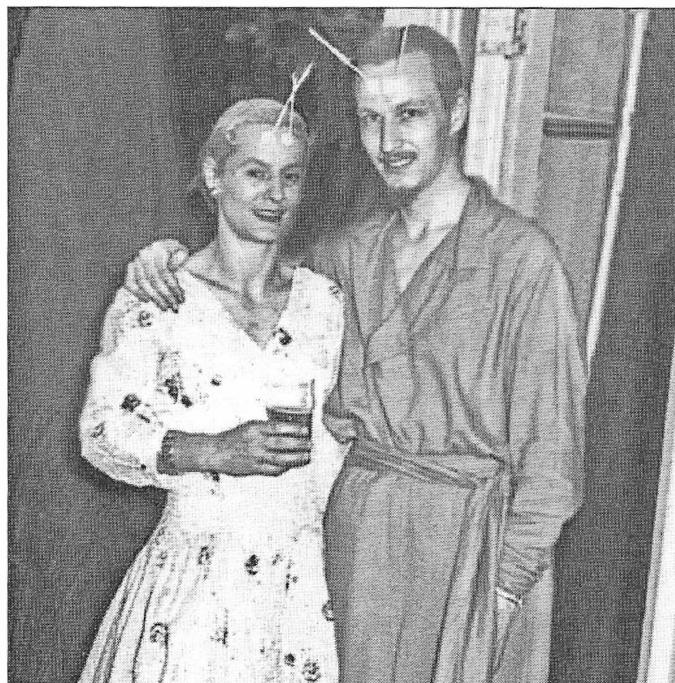
I do remember one Whitsun, I think it was, Graham Hall and a couple of other people and I were invited and couldn't easily get out of it, but we stopped off at Hampstead Heath, where the fair was in full swing and I asked a couple of young ladies (well, young whores, actually) if they'd like to come along with us. John was always strong on the common people and it seemed fair to

take a pair of them along so they could have the benefit of meeting a strong egalitarian and he could meet some people he and Marjorie might not usually bump into.

For some reason, John didn't take to the young women as much as I'd hoped and they quickly grew bored. They disappeared to powder their noses and a little later made an excuse and left. Marjorie rang me the next day suggesting that 'my girl friends' had slipped into her bedroom and pinched some of her jewellery, including a family heirloom. I felt bad about it and never invited a working person to the Brunner's again.

You could never be absolutely sure about such things, since accusations came readily to both of them. He informed me that Tom Disch was working for the CIA, since Tom went to Turkey once. Later, after John had returned from Turkey and had taken some pictures, he said Tom came to visit him and after he left SOME OF THE PHOTOS WERE FOGGED. I can't imagine what logic allowed him to think that. Washington calls Operative Disch; 'pop round to Parliament Hill Fields and open Brunner's camera to fog those pictures he took of Hagia Sophia'!

Colin Greenland once asked John's Chinese bride why she'd married him (she clearly disliked him) and she replied in broken English, 'I was in Poland. He was my way out of Poland.' A sad bugger, all in all. Again, I was inclined to feel sorry for him.



Krishna couple at the 1957 London worldcon
Photo from Norman Shorrock

At the 1957 London worldcon John and Marjorie wore L. Sprague de Camp 'Krishna' costumes, with antennae and green skins. I remember seeing them a week or so later and the green dye still hadn't come out. Dedication, that. You forget what a handsome woman Marjorie was. Although she was inclined to get squiffy and argumentative with people whose politics she didn't like, she was a nice woman. I remember probably one of my last phone calls with her to Somerset when I'd heard John was ill or depressed and I was sympathising. "It can't be any fun for him," I said. "Him!" she said. "No fun for him! I'm going nuts down here having to listen to him moan about how terrible his life is."

Earlier, he was the first SF writer to be approached by an editor at Penguin to write them two SF novels a year, at a very decent advance which would be paid to him

regularly, much as Aldous Huxley's publisher had offered him a similar deal. I think it was one of the highest advances an SF writer had ever been offered. John decided he could do even better and went off to find another publisher who would give him more money. Needless to say, as most of us could have guessed, Penguin heard about this and withdrew their offer.

This was fairly typical. Time after time he stepped in to conduct a deal on his own, and time after time he succeeded in pissing-off the publisher. I tried to talk to him about this, but he didn't want to know. He'd always tell me he was captain of his own fate and had a firm hand on the tiller, and that I didn't know what I was talking about. Eventually, I gave up.

John probably WOULD have invited you to his 'evenings' – he was actually very hospitable to young fans in London. Mike Harrison, for instance, who lived near him, tells how John liked to come round and play chess, but hated to lose. Phil Meadley, who wasn't a fan but a good friend of Mike's (and still is of mine – published a book with Dave's Savoy firm – A TEA-DANCE AT SAVOY) was horribly hung-over one morning when John came around. Phil has an enormous IQ but looks like death after a bender..

Phil came stumbling back out on his way to the bathroom. "How would you like a game?" asked John. "Yeah, okay" mumbled the wrecked Meadley. John moved. Phil moved. John moved. Phil moved – "Um, checkmate, I think." And stumbled on to the bathroom leaving a gasping Brunner. John had been known, when losing to me, to say "Let me get us a glass of wine...." and 'accidentally' knock over the board as he got up. "Oh, well, sorry Mike, let's call it a draw, OK?" Nobody had time to play chess with John.

Brian and Harry hated John and were constantly bad-mouthing him. I told some Brunner stories of my own, but one night at Harry's house begged off, saying it felt like bullying, but they wouldn't stop. I believe that amount of bad-mouthing harmed John's professional career. Helped John wreck it, if you like, since it could be fairly argued he was doing such a good job on his own. I've nothing against bad-mouthing authors you don't like between friends, as it were, but draw the line at doing it in public, especially when it's likely to be overheard by publishers. There's a difference between a bit of scurrilous gossip and actually harming someone's ability to make a living.

Marjorie, incidentally, knew how bad an impression John made and sometimes tried to mitigate it. But he made so many bad decisions he essentially stopped himself earning a living. He left a couple of books based on his own life which were horrendously bad. One seemed obsessed with lady's knickers. Women were described almost wholly in terms of their drawers. I wonder what happened to them (the books, that is)? Maybe Li has them.

I had a copy of one for a while. I'd offered to publish it with Compact – until I read it. Then I had to get out of it. Couldn't believe someone who could often write so well could also write so badly! I wimped. Told him Compact thought the book was too long and wanted to cut it by half. Of course, he was upset and withdrew the book.

Harry H's theory about John was that he'd read-up on how to be a writer – wear velvet jacket, cultivate goatee, live in Hampstead. I think John made a serious mistake moving out of London, but then I think he simply wasn't earning enough to keep going. He put a lot of hope in a book set on the Mississippi river boats in the 19th century. His ear for colloquial American was awful, so I can't see him doing particularly well with it in the U.S. I remember

THE BRINK, his anti-H-bomb book where he had Americans calling one another 'Mac' in the way we call people 'mate'. Poor bugger made almost every wrong move it was possible to make

And then there were the orgies (which Ballard and I managed to escape from more than once, though Jimmy saw Marjorie from time to time). *Oi veh!* It was a relief when John moved to Somerset (and started making enemies down there as I learned from mutual acquaintances in the music world). One year we concocted a terrible plan to get out of a party there by telling him we were all coming in Ballard's car – Sladek and his wife, us, Jimmy and Claire etc. – and then having Ballard's car 'break-down on the way'. Wicked, really.

My life's been very conventional compared to John's. I never went past four in a bed at once – logistics being a strong reason and my feeling that nothing was perverse as long as you didn't have to get out of bed to do it. His bedroom used to be lined with 'Sexology' books and Jimmy and I used to speculate about various people in various poses trying to turn to Page 56 at the same time. There was a proposed six-some with John, Marjorie and the Brets, me and Hilary. I'm feeling a little stiff, said Mr Bret (I've forgotten their first names). Must be infantile paralysis, I said. Eeek! We made an excuse and left. Not for the first or last time.

All that said, I still think John's virtues outweighed his vices. I continued to enthuse about his best work (including his fantasy books which I thought could be excellent, including his 'Society of Time' stories). He was another writer kept going by Don Wollheim (like Barry Bayley). Once Wollheim stopped being an editor at DAW, it was pretty much the end of John's regular income. Great shame. I really did have a soft spot for him and made an effort to try to get publishers to take some of his out-of-print work but even then he alienated people. ■■■ – Mike Moorcock

Ramsey Campbell

(Last issue I noted that John Brunner was kind to some people – usually new writers like David Redd, Chris Priest and Ramsey Campbell – even though he might have been pretty rotten to the rest of us. As if to prove the point Ramsey sent this piece, which also casts light on John Brunner's sad final years. It originally appeared in the online series of his column *Ramsey Campbell, Probably* at (now defunct) www.thespook.com, and is reprinted from the collection RAMSEY CAMPBELL, PROBABLY – pw)

My first encounter with John was not long after my entry into both fandom and being published. Pat Kearney, my first publisher (in his fanzine *Goudy*), took it upon himself to introduce me to authors he knew at my first convention, held at Easter 1962 in Harrogate. Such was my sense of my own lowness that E. C. Tubb and Michael Moorcock struck me as possessing the stature of Easter Island statues. Having been advised that I wrote in the manner of Lovecraft, Mike leaned down from the height and boomed that he didn't like him.

Perhaps such encounters provoked me into drinking even more beer, only to deliver myself of the various results into the sink in my room that night, en-suite bathrooms being a thing of the future for fandom. The results were waiting to confront me the next day, and had to be poked doggedly down the plughole with a souvenir convention pencil before I reeled forth from the room. A vast Chinese lunch proved to be a fine aid to recuperation. I don't think

pallid Campbell in his sombre suit and nondescript shirt and tie and (as August Derleth had it) beetling horn-rimmed spectacles met John Brunner in Harrogate, but soon I did.



Ramsey at
Buxton,
1968.
Photo: Stan
Nicholls

Years passed: not many – maybe only one. Word circulated that I had a book to my name. Science fiction conventions were yet to admit panels on horror to their programmes, but I found myself invited onto a panel of new writers at an Eastercon. Who were the other red-faced gawky victims? Perhaps someone may recall more about this than I do, though Lord protect us from a photograph. All I remember is that the moderator of the panel was John Brunner. I believe I was already aware of him. He was at the height of his extended youth, urbane, satyr-bearded, keen-eyed, with a voice so clear and precise that, along with his pedagogical manner, it struck terror into at least one member of the panel. Can he really have asked where we got our ideas?

I'm sure that's an impression my mind tried to erect in retrospect as a defence. I suppose he enquired into our working methods, and I babbled in response that in order to generate a tale I went either for a walk or to the toilet, true enough then. "One way or another," I declared with the unconscious humour of the desperate, "I produce something." I'm glad to say that is the extent of my memory, except for a sense of having imitated a sack of potatoes in my chair for the rest of the interminable event.

No doubt I slunk away from it as swiftly as I could, though I seem to remember John telling me – it would have to have been with a good deal of kindness – that I'd done well, or some such phrase. I imagine. I avoided him thereafter as the loftiest witness of my ignominious performance, but not too many years later I realised he was at least an acquaintance.

His fondness for puns even worse than Bob Shaw's helped to humanise him, as did his inviting me to join him and his wife Marjorie for breakfast at a later Eastercon – Buxton, I believe it was, in 1968. We talked about his novel, STAND ON ZANZIBAR, which later won the Hugo Award, and a mention of the influence of John dos Passos on its method led Marjorie and me into a discussion of that writer. "Yes, yes, dear," John intervened, perhaps with a laugh "but we're talking about *me*."

One suspects that he may have been a difficult person to live with. Show us a writer who isn't, comes the cry. Well, maybe, but with John it was sometimes public. Jenny still recalls hearing him snap from the stage at yet another convention, "If my wife is in the audience can she bring me my drink, please?" A female fan whose anonymity I shall respect stayed overnight at the Brunners'

house and found John proposing to share her bed. "It's all right," he assured her, "Marjorie knows." Before long much of British fandom did, but it only added to John's reputation, based on his often turning up at conventions with yet another younger woman, generally darker-skinned than he. Perhaps this was literary research, since he wrote several effective novels from the viewpoint of Max Curfew, a black South African.

I mentioned his puns above, for which he also had a reputation, and not only in English – at Eurocons he translated his own speeches and joked in the other language too. (He was one of the very few people of my acquaintance who I believe understood all the elusive allusions of Nabokov's ADA.) His English puns were often the kind one saw coming but couldn't avoid, and John rarely committed them to print. I do have a postcard from him dated 13 February 1989, however:

'I hit on a title the other day which I have no use for but might serve you for a horror or terror collection. And I can't bear to sequester unshared puns... A STEP IN THE FRIGHT DIRECTION? If you use it, I'll settle for credit* and a few copies for my shelf. (Did I mean that? Shouldn't I have said myself? No, I'm still too sober to start slurring my syllables...)'

*And the inclusion of something by me!

On the other side of the postcard, and on the rest of the correspondence I received from him, John has stamped a quote from Heine: "Where books are burned, in the end people too get burned." By now – indeed, years earlier – our relationship had rearranged itself, when he became another of the science fiction writers I invited into NEW TERRORS (or, as Marc Laidlaw retitled it, *Newt Errors*). John sent me a tale from a series which had run in *The Magazine of F&SF*, this one having been rejected as too bleak, I think.

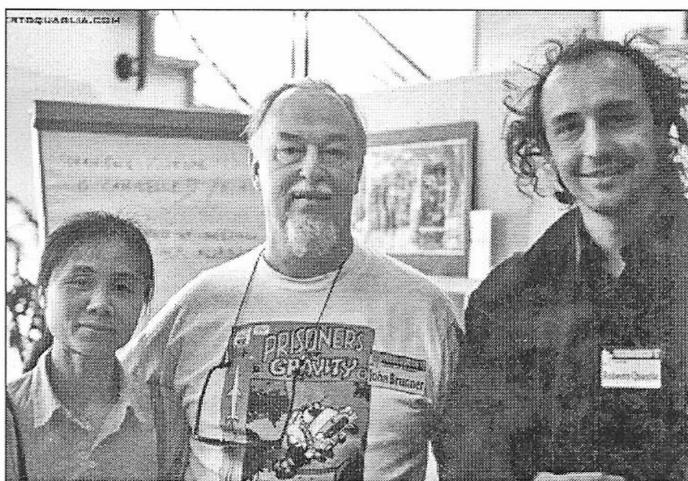
That was the general reaction to a later story, 'The Clerks of Domesday', which I grabbed for FINE FRIGHTS. It wasn't then apparent to me that I was one of the few editors still publishing his work, and I only gradually became aware of the desperation he was concealing whenever we met at subsequent science fiction conventions and he enquired whether I was buying for any new horror anthologies. His situation was that virtually all his books – fifty of them? Sixty? More? – were out of print, and nobody wanted to revive them.

In some of my darker moments I imagine I resemble poor Frank Belknap Long in destroying whatever talent I may once have had while convincing myself I'm improving as a writer; at others I'm afraid I may end up like John. A prominent British fantasy and science fiction editor told me how saddened he was not to be able to re-publish John's backlist, but sympathy pays no bills. Recently the same editor has been sad about me. It's grimly ironic that John should have viewed horror fiction as the route to take when it was already starting to collapse under the weight of too much rubbish, and I feel both complimented and dismayed that in an interview he said my tales had helped him see the genre could be used for social comment.

That had been his aim for much of his career, and perhaps too few readers wanted it, for all that it had earned him a Hugo. Perhaps his curse was that he was able to see and to foresee the worst – he was fond of recalling that one of his tales had predicted computer viruses – and had no patience with readers who complained about fiction that showed what was wrong but failed to tell them what to do about it. His books tended to be didactic, but other science fiction writers lecture their readers more relentlessly and

have hordes come back for more. Maybe the secret of those writers is to be right-wing.

John – the composer of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's marching song – would never have pretended about that or, I believe, anything else. Some fans may have been daunted by the breadth of his learning. (Our daughter once commented that John was the only person she knew who would have told us over dinner how many Popes were named Urban. This was in a Portuguese restaurant on Jersey, where he also gravely informed a waiter who asked us if we'd enjoyed the food that the Portuguese had been too busy creating Henry the Navigator to excel in their cuisine.)



John Brunner with Li-Yi and Roberto Quaglia at the 1992 Eurocon at Freudenstadt, Germany. Photo © Roberto Quaglia.

Nevertheless he did his best to keep some of himself to himself, even though his private state was worsening. Marjorie had died, to be succeeded by an Oriental lady, Li-Yi, and their relationship was so volatile it sometimes revealed itself in public spats. His blood pressure was mounting. For a while he used cannabis to keep it down, only to find that smoking the drug began to bring panic as an inevitable side effect. He was prescribed other medication, but I understand from friends we had in common that the unwanted effects were at least as bad. In 1994 I had two late-night calls from him. Some of the content remains too personal to set down here.

In the first call he describes himself as living in a horror story. His voice is slow and shaky, and he seems to have difficulty in remembering his phone number. "I would love to hear from friends," he finishes. "I'm scared." I admit that when I played back the tape the next day I didn't respond, having decided, however cravenly, that he might be embarrassed to acknowledge the call. The same went for the later message, where his voice is far more slurred. "John Brunner is living through a genuine horror story," he says, and much else before "Ramsey, I am terrified. I'm desperate. I must have help."

I was by no means alone in receiving such calls, and I gather those of his friends who lived closer intervened as best they could. He still maintained his public persona when he was able, and was in witty evidence at conventions. But it was at one such – the 1995 Worldcon in Glasgow – that he suffered a heart attack at a party for members of Science Fiction Writers of America. The next day he was dead.

I wish I could say that his work lives on, and I suppose it does, at least in second-hand catalogues and on collectors' shelves (though at his last conventions he had started to despair of the dealers' rooms, from which books were being ousted by all sorts of less literate stuff). But *Waterstone's Guide to Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror*

(published by easily the most enterprising British bookshop chain) lists a solitary book by John in print, STAND ON ZANZIBAR. It's far short of a fitting memorial. *Weird Tales* celebrated him by showcasing his work in a special issue not many years before his death, and I know that pleased him.

Perhaps his work will be revived in an edition aimed at the cognoscenti, as the short fiction of Dick and Sturgeon has been. But oh that all the writers who deserve it should be supported when they need it! A fantasy, I know, and unworthy of John. I recommend my readers to seek out his tales of fantasy instead. He wrote some good ones. //

– Ramsey Campbell

John Brunner on John Brunner

We have a rare instance of John being self-analytical, in a letter his 20-year-old persona wrote to Walt Willis, immediately after the 1954 *Supermancon**:-

"...the hell with that letter of mine to you a while ago which got into Hyphen. I seem to recall arguing in it 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 – and I mean that almost literally..."

"This weekend reminded me of what I'd forgotten – that there are people in the world who are sane enough to be crazy. I let go – I forget what the hell people could think and say and do to me, and I feel so much better I could cry, except that I don't want to rust the typer. I wish to Ghod I could find the time and the money to get right up to the 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.

"...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 – intellect is the wrong word but you catch on – and it can't be done. Next January I get out of this insane rat race of the RAF, and then I'm going to spend a year at home writing – if I can make £500 out of it in that year I shall go on – and fanning.

"I like fans. I feel that for too long I've been trying to live at an intellectual level way beyond my years because at first, especially at school, I was beyond my age group. But that's bound to be pretence 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."

Walt added, "A lot of people are going to be surprised to hear that the writer of that letter was John Brunner. I hope John doesn't mind me quoting from it, but I don't think it can do anything but improve people's opinion of him."

John was at *Cyricon I & II* in 1955/56 and enjoyed both conventions. But after that he seems to have reverted to his old ways, if we can judge by inference from a remark made by Willis in my 1965 *Zenith* (in reply to an uncomplimentary remark from Ron Bennett), "I wouldn't be surprised to hear that he reads aloud everything I write with a sneering expression and a John Brunner accent."

Something happened to throw John back onto the wrong track. I think it was meeting Marjorie. (pw)

* from *Hyphen-9*, and reprinted in *Banana Wings-10*, 1998

I only ever met Eric Jones once, at *Yarcon* in 1966, where the hotel required us all to eat in their dining room and by some accident I was placed next to Eric and his wife Margaret, Big-Name Fans who otherwise I would never have had the nerve to approach. I was just a busy little neo who knew nothing of his past deeds but despite that Eric was very kind and I think we could have become good friends. Unfortunately he died relatively soon afterwards so I never did get to know him. But I've lately come to admire Eric for his enthusiasm and energy, and to appreciate the things he did for fandom. And do you know something? – everybody seemed to *love* him! (pw)

Forgotten Fans #2

Eric Jones, Gentleman of Fandom

By Keith Freeman

Eric in flamboyant shirt at *LXIcon*.
Behind him are John Owen, Audrey Eversfield, Margaret Jones, Stan Nuttall and Norman Weedall.
Photo from Norman Shorrock.



When I joined the RAF I also joined a postal SF library – one of their catalogues had, on the back page, a list of ‘fanzines’. I didn’t really know what these strange creatures were but, more by luck than judgement, I wrote away for a copy of *Triode* from Eric Bentcliffe. This, as well as being my first step on the slippery slopes of fandom, got me into correspondence with Eric B. In early 1957 he invited me to join him at a get-together he was having with Eric Jones. For various reasons I turned down this invitation, but less than a month later I found myself posted to an RAF camp on the outskirts of Gloucester – a very short distance from Cheltenham. I phoned Eric one evening to enquire about the Cheltenham Circle and was immediately invited to a meeting (at Eric and Margaret’s house).

Being a shy 19 year-old I walked past the door of 44 Barbridge Road a couple of times before working up the courage to go and knock. Those who have known Eric will not be surprised to learn I was not only put completely at my ease but made to feel so at home that ‘44’ became a second home to me. I didn’t realise at the time – indeed I’ve only just found out – that the Cheltenham Circle had been in existence for not much more than a year, but I quickly realised Eric was the leading light in it. Eric and Margaret along with Peter Mabey had previously tried, and failed, to run the ‘West Country SF Group’. Giving up on that, in 1956 they had entered a stand into the Cheltenham Hobbies Exhibition in the Town Hall and, with the new members they ensnared, they became the Cheltenham Science Fiction Circle (CSFC).

The CSFC actually met, then, in a room over a pub – but the meeting I first went to was plotting out (literally) the ‘history’ of St Fantony. Eric had been window-shopping in Cheltenham and had seen a display of made-to-order blazer badges containing (in theory) the wearer’s initials. At once he saw the possibilities of getting blazer badges with S/F on them – and then only had to flesh out a suitable *raison d’être* in order to buy and dish them out to fans who had been instrumental in keeping fandom alive in Britain.

The Liverpool Group had previously honoured such fen by making them ex-Chairmen of LaSFaS and Eric obviously saw this as a way of repaying them... Ideas were batted to and fro with Audrey Eversfield taking shorthand notes. There was some hilarity when she revealed that “the good burghers of Cheltenham”, in her shorthand, became “the good buggers of Cheltenham” – however, such red herrings were discarded for the ‘true’ story to be written. Eric, in his usual manner, encouraged the ideas that flowed and at the same time controlled the situation so we didn’t fly off into unnecessary side-tracks (well, not too far off, anyway).

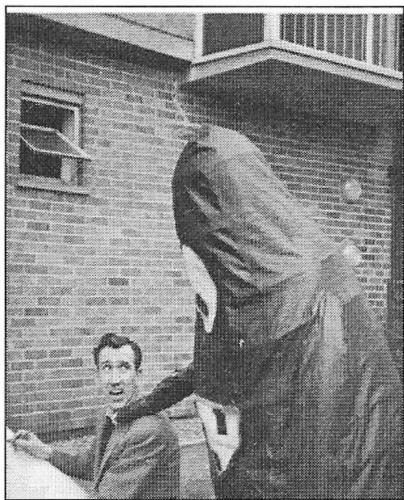
I knew little of Eric’s past – other than his wartime service in the RAF (461 Squadron, Coastal Command) flying as an engineer on Sunderland flying boats (I once found him very excited having found a reference in a book to the only U-boat sinking his aircraft was credited with). Well before my time he’d been at the 1951 *Festivention* and had produced (and later, co-edited) Eric Bentcliffe’s *Space Times*. Moving to Cheltenham from the London area in the early fifties he’d joined George Whiting’s WCSFG and kept it going when George went abroad, then later edited *Sidereal*, at first the ‘official’ fanzine of the group and then of the CSFC. He formed ‘Triode Publications’ (with Eric Bentcliffe and Terry Jeeves) in 1954 and produced a booklet on con-going titled *Con-Science*, before the three became co-editors of the fanzine, *Triode* (although Eric had to drop out after the first issue, possibly because of his work commitments).



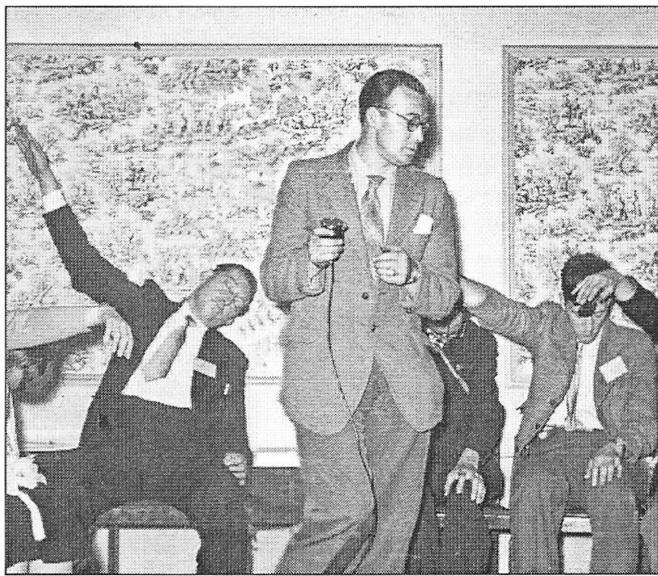
Above: Was this the first meeting of the *Triode* team? Eric Jones, Eric Bentcliffe & Terry Jeeves, at the 1951 Festivention in London. Photo from Terry Jeeves.



Above: The only picture of Eric's Cosmic Beanie, (with Mal Ashworth & zap guns), a picture which made the front page of the local Kettering newspaper! (from the John Roles album)



Eric's BEM at Kettering, 1956: *Left*, (to Arthur Thomson): "I hear you've been making fun of my relatives". *Centre*; "Ah... lunch!" *Right*: Eric stands by while Bentcliffe & Jeeves try to wrest Brian Varley and his bottle from the clutches of the BEM, probably with Dave Newman inside.
Photos from Terry Jeeves.



Below: Being hypnotised at Loncon 57. Regular convention performer Harry Powers puts Eric (and George Locke, right) into a trance. Photo from Norman Shorrock.



The Liverpool group and others arrive for the Grand Opening of the clubrooms on February 24th, 1959. (I was told by ex-member Geoff Winterman that the notice was eventually replaced by an illuminated sign!) Photo by Terry Jeeves

At the time I knew Eric he was working for GCHQ, and hence didn't talk of his work. He was, however, only too willing to talk about his interest in SF and the 'computer' kit he'd got from America and built, which played tic-tac-toe – or rather was *supposed* to play tic-tac-toe; in practice it cheated...

Earlier, Eric had constructed the beanie to end all beanies for the first Kettering Con in 1955 – described thus by Walt Willis (possibly with slight hyperbole):

'Eric Jones's was by far the most imposing, incorporating as it did a radar antenna, several Van der Graaf generators and a spaceship complete with launching bowl. He didn't so much wear it as shelter beneath it. During the official programme Terry Jeeves lit a small fire under the spaceship. It presented a most imposing sight but Eric remained oblivious even when Burgess came up from the back of the hall and extinguished the conflagration with his zapgun.'

The following year (1956) Eric constructed a BEM for the Fancy Dress event, a full-size creature with single glaring eye that lumbered round the convention to general mirth. This was the year that Eric gamely volunteered to be a subject at the hypnosis demonstration, the first item on the official programme. Eric said afterwards, "Apparently I went under quite fast, and to those who have never been hypnotised I can assure you that it is a weird experience – but nothing to be scared about – not to have full conscious control over one's actions but at the same time being aware of all that is going on. The effect of the final suggestion that I should stop smoking had an effect for four hours afterwards... it would probably have lasted longer had I been anywhere but at a con."

And in 1957 Eric built a 'proper' Hieronymous psionic machine from the information in *Astounding*, which was tried out by various members of the CSFC, including myself, with no reportable success! He also built the alternative version of the Hieronymous machine wherein the circuits were printed (and I mean printed – as in lines on paper – not to be confused with modern day 'printed circuits'). Later that year he took both models along to the London worldcon and took part in a psionics programme item with John W. Campbell.

From that first evening I shamelessly visited '44' on every opportunity... reading the stories in Eric's US-edition *Astoundings* that hadn't been in the BRE copies I had, socialising with (mainly) Eric, Margaret and Audrey Eversfield. Encouraged to go to Kettering for the 1957 Con I chose to go back to my parents for Easter ('young' and 'stupid' are the words that come to mind). Because I wasn't going to the Con I became the 'model' for the initiates into the Order of St Fantony – suffering the attempts at pinning on the badges (I still have the scars to prove this). Margaret made the costumes, though I'm sure even here Eric had a lot of input. Although I wasn't there to see it, the ceremony was apparently very well received and a beefed-up version was commissioned to be performed at the 1957 London Worldcon with the wholesale induction of ten new 'Knights'.

I did help, in a very small way, with the film ('All this Grass is Chiming Bells' – a strange title, based on F.G.Rayer's story of that name in *Sidereal-3*) that the Cheltenham Circle was making as another contribution to the forthcoming Worldcon in London... once again Eric was the leader, but he allowed and encouraged everyone to contribute and although he was the director he was never dictatorial. And at Loncon Eric again volunteered for the obligatory hypnotism session, being instructed to draw a cat and perform other tasks while deep under the influence!

Several months before the Worldcon I was whisked away from Gloucester to sit on a desert island in the middle of the Pacific and watch H-bombs being tested – but fondly remember the (audio) tape Eric made (with the help of others) and sent to me around Christmas... partly fannish and partly the sounds of church bells, and a description of snow and carols – a very welcome change from the broiling sun and sand. This was but one aspect of his thoughtfulness and kindness.

Which reminds me that another of Eric's interests was music and sound recording – he was a member of the local record society, although more interested in tape recorders than gramophones. I suspect that it was through this society that Eric became involved in interviewing people of local interest on tape for broadcasting on a local hospital in-house radio system. (He also did a fannish 'tapera' titled 'TYPO').

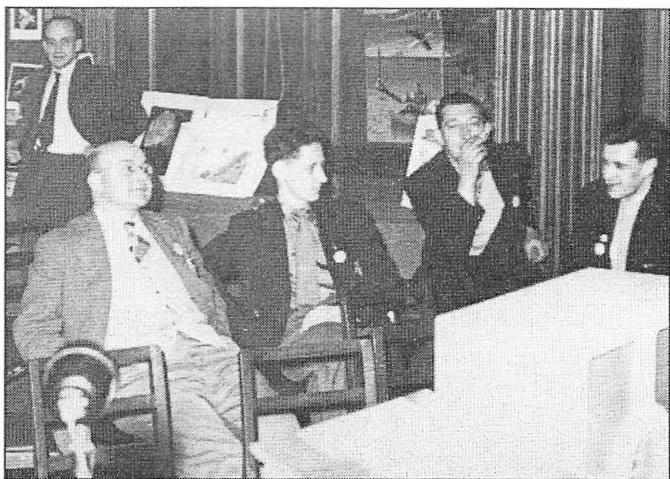
After about ten months I returned to the UK – but not as near to Cheltenham as I'd have wished. Now my visits were less often and only at weekends – arriving late Friday evenings and leaving very late Sunday nights. This generally meant they were only social as, by now, the Cheltenham Circle had its own premises and meetings, of course, were not held at weekends.

Although I don't know for sure I suspect, again, Eric was instrumental in getting these premises. There were four rooms (plus kitchen and toilet) that should have been let as a basement flat – only they had been declared unfit for human habitation. Thus for a very cheap rent the CSFC became the proud possessors of a club-house which they redecorated and made 'habitable' (although as part of the conditions of renting no-one was allowed to sleep there overnight). This was the focal point for the visit of the London Circle which Mike Moorcock described in the last *Prolapse*.

I did, however, obtain leave and was present for the Cheltenham Literary Festival where I manned the Cheltenham SF Circle's stall during the times the other members were at work and managed to get in to hear Doc Weir, talking on his theories of Atlantis. Again, although I might have done a little of the work Eric was the driving force and organiser.

At Easter in 1959 I made my way to Cheltenham and from there Eric and I were driven by Frank Herbert (the bank manager rather than the author!) to the Birmingham Eastercon. I walked into the con hall with Eric – and because of this was immediately accepted and absorbed into his group of friends (who constituted virtually everyone who was attending).

Two years later I was proud to be the treasurer of the Gloucester Con (*LXICon*), where Eric was the Chairman, main organiser and motivator. He devised much of the programme and pulled off a master-stroke by getting Kingsley Amis as GoH, through the good services of Brian Aldiss. For the first time at a British con there were programme items on the Friday evening, and to Eric's complete surprise he was brought up on stage by Eric Bentcliffe to be the subject of a 'spoof' version of 'This is Your Life', full of corny jokes like his building a 14-ton duplicator out of scrounged aircraft parts while in the RAF – Bruce Burn still has the script!



In good company – Keith's first convention, Brumcon in 1959, with Frank Herbert, Eric, & Norman Shorrock. Photo from Norman.



Taken by surprise at LXIcon! – Eric had expected Terry Jeeves to be the 'victim' for 'This is Your Life'! Photo by Norman Shorrock.

In 1962 Eric's first lieutenant, Bob Richardson, died suddenly and his loss was keenly felt by the whole Cheltenham group. But undeterred, Eric again donned his Grand Master's robes for a revival of 'St Fantony' at Loncon II in 1965, at which a further ten fans were inducted into the order, and once more the following year at Farcon when four more 'Knights' were created. 1966 was also the year that Eric stood for TAFF, coming second to Tom Schluck.

My friendship with Eric and Margaret stayed strong until the dreadful day he died. Shortly before his death in January 1967 I visited '44' when he was home from hospital. I walked down to the shops with him... he explained how he'd had a blood-clot in his brain but the doctors had 'blasted' it apart. I never knew if he believed this or went along with the fabrication for the sake of Margaret – who knew (as I did) that the tumour he was suffering from was terminal... I believe it was the latter, Eric was far too intelligent not to have guessed what was wrong with him. He was only in his late forties.

So, Peter Weston, asked me to write about Eric (and I seem to have written more about myself). I can only say that Eric was one of the most amiable, pleasant and intelligent people I've ever met; I never heard a bad word spoken about him, and yet he's become one of the 'forgotten fans'. Thinking about it, I suddenly realised that I've known many people who come up with ideas; Eric not only came up with ideas but almost invariably he saw them through to fruition – and this made him an extraordinary man to my mind. I still miss him...
– Keith Freeman /

Postscript by PW:

I've taken a look at *Sidereal* and some of the other fanzines with which Eric Jones was involved, and don't think he was really much more of a fanzine fan. He wrote very little himself and that was mostly snippets of popular science rather than anything more personal, although he was a bit of an artist – he did most of the illos in *Sidereal*, scratched onto wax stencil as was the way at the time. Eric was more of a social fan; after 1951 he missed only one British convention (*Supermancon*, through ill-health) and as Keith shows, he was an organiser and a very *practical* sort of person. But I suspect he took the loss of Bob Richardson quite badly, because quite soon afterwards the beloved clubroom had to be given up at the beginning of 1963, and that seems to have been the end of the local group. I'm a little surprised that Eric didn't get involved with the creation of the BSFA – he was at the founding meeting in 1958, and he would have been a perfect choice for Chairman during the early sixties, especially since for some years the CSFC (under Peter Mabey's supervision) played such a vital role in maintaining the BSFA's library in their basement headquarters – which included books, magazines and fanzines.



I might have met Eric on one occasion in 1965, when several of the Cheltenham fans attended the first meeting of Tony Walsh's new Bristol group on 25th September. As it happened, that month Rog Peyton and I had arranged an overnight visit to see Archie Mercer and print an issue of my fanzine on his Gestetner, but Archie being Archie, he didn't bother to tell us about the new BaD group, so we came the weekend before and had a pretty boring time. Another lost opportunity!

The picture shows Margaret with Eric and Frank Herbert, in the Walshes front room.
(Photo by Peter Mabey)

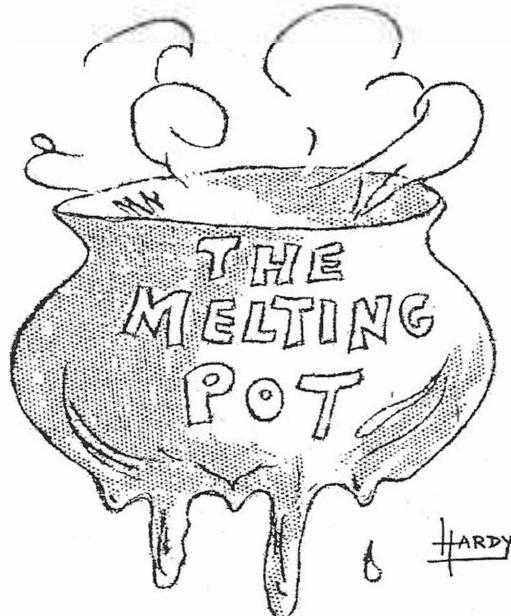
Right; Atom's BEM for Eric Jones – note the beanie, psi machine and cheerful grin!



The Melting Pot

Too hot to handle – or maybe just glowing in the dark?

We'll need to keep stoking the blaze for *Prolapse* to stay warm this winter, so throw in the anecdotes, toss in the stories, and don't worry too much if your ears start to burn!



- Illo by David Hardy, <http://www.astroart.org/> (*see below)

"Discovering it on the doormat I was instantly seduced from the sercon path (although having read John Hall's fascinating memoir I should perhaps be more careful about how I use terms like 'seduced')" – Claire Brialey, LoC

By now you'll have seen the longer responses to John Hall's article on the Brunners, but there's a lot more comment to follow. Ian Watson knew John well, and adds a few details to the story:

Ian Watson

ianwatson@cix.co.uk

Dear Peter,

"I read John Hall on Life with the Brunners with fascinated enjoyment, since I only got to know them after they'd moved to Somerset, although then I came to know them pretty well and we even spent Christmases together, alternating for a few years between South Petherton and South Northants. I'm sure John and Marjorie told me that they met through a small ad placed by one of them in the personal column of a newspaper, rather than on a CND march; but who knows? They always seemed to me, not least when touring Europe in their bright yellow Triumph Stag, distinctly like King Babar and Queen Celeste processing through their domains. At least in my mind the Stag was Gollancz yellow. The trouble is that the Brunner anecdotes, which I can dramatise in John's voice if I'm talking to people, tend to be about his crazier conduct leading up to the whole Lee Yi caper, but written down cold they may just make him seem ridiculous, rather than a person of, hmm, stature; which I don't want to do because he was a good friend."

Ian, at Paragon-2

Photo by Ian Whates



Bruce Burn

bburn@xtra.co.nz

Hello Peter,

"I was very impressed with the latest issue of *Prolapse*. It has a substantial feel about it, reflecting the forty pages bulk, the space-cramming small print, and the weighty issues rambling throughout it. Some of those issues are even of a fannish nature!"

Embarrassed!

Photo from Bruce



"The argument between your view that there is intrinsic value (and therefore interest) in looking back at fannish history and John Hall's view that the past has no nostalgia for him in no way offers a threat to the purpose in producing such a fanzine as *Prolapse*, despite what you suggest in your editorial. It's not really a question of right and wrong; it's simply a matter of whether *Prolapse* and/or nostalgia serves some useful purpose. Simply filling people's appetite for stories of the past or of their own younger days is sufficient reason alone, but Setting The Record Straight is another very good one. Or, Getting The Right Perspective, or Sharing The Perceptions Of Others, or even Seeing Ourselves As Others See Us, are all valid reasons for delving into the past. In a way, John is right: people were different in the fifties; and that's why you're right: the differences are what make it interesting to look back at those times."

"Thanks for the reprint of Ken Bulmer's article, and all the added-on bits and photos. I missed all that when it occurred, although was involved in a foray from London to Cheltenham or somewhere very like it, and certainly got involved in the Gloucester affray the following year. But I remember well the strange look that came to the eyes of those who had been on the original trip. A light of medieval madness switched on in them. Perhaps they'd stood around and watched Tubb beat and slash at the pulp of others, and had some of the nostalgia John Hall can't find. This one little bloke didn't have the opportunity to stand and watch; I was thrust into the arena with all the other poor suckers, and if you got within the twenty-foot range of Tubb's flashing blade you tended to have tender memories of the event!"

* The title illo has a long history; Dave Hardy drew for it me on the back of an envelope while we were in a bus, on our way to the Brum group barbecue in the Malverns, back in August 1983! It originally appeared shortly afterwards in *Prolapse-2*.

"There must be a point we can reach where reminiscences can become a little... well, embarrassing. That was my feeling while reading some of the John Hall article about Life with the Brunners. This was a ramble with the reminiscences indeed! The rambling tended to be more like a roam around a wine vat as John trod on any grapes of happy memory and squeezed dry the last un-burst bubble of delight. It was shock-horror tell-it-all journalism which attempts to leave no illusions. Most of us have written or read such material. I know I have. But when the subject matter is people we do or did know, the level of destruction rises considerably. There must be a commensurate level of embarrassment or annoyance on the part of the people written about, although no doubt some of them might enjoy providing material for the voyeurism of others.

"But, I finished the piece with something of an unpleasant feeling in the pit of my stomach. I didn't know the individuals described all that well. I remember meeting John a few times, but only very superficially. I've spoken with other old fans and we all have our opinions of John, but essentially I felt he was highly self-absorbed when I met him ten years before the period covered in this article, and since no doubt I was self-absorbed myself there wasn't much point in doing more than smiling and nodding and looking somewhere else for my next drink. Still, reading John Hall's recollections did make me feel little embarrassed. No. Worse than that. A lot embarrassed."

Thanks, Bruce, and I'm sorry to embarrass you. Now, this next character is never embarrassed, Not even when I catch him posting his response on the weg e-list rather than doing the decent thing and sending me a proper LoC. With so many Prolapsers on that list I don't usually do a straight reprint - what would be the point? - but Earl assures me he's seen the error of his ways and has added a bit of sauce 'for the taste of it', so I'll stretch a point... and he does tell a good story!

Earl Kemp
earlkemp@citlink.net
Peter,

Earl as Ming the Merciless on a good day.
Composition by Bill Burns



"Because of the advance hype, I couldn't resist doing the same thing the others have done. skip all that boring Weston stuff and get right to the down and dirty...Uncle Johnny's sordid tale about balling Brunner's wife...repeatedly. I am surprised, though, Peter, that you'd take the chance of incurring Ted White's wrath over purveying filth of this sort before a tender fannish audience. If you keep it up long enough (no pun intended) I might even get around to writing you a torrid tidbit myself.

"I encountered John Brunner a few times but not at all in the same manner as did John Hall. And I had the very same initial reaction to him as Hall wrote about when he said, 'a lot of people I suppose, found him initially a bit too mannered.' I knew who he was by reputation, of course, and not Johnny's version of his reputation, but I had never met him. Beyond that the details are very hazy indeed. It would have to have been before Johnny's involvement with the Brunners, mid- to late-1950s, when we first met.

"Brunner arrived in Chicago without the usual set-up arrangements whereby he would have been plugged into some type of whirlwind tour of All Things Fannish And Required. This was SOP in fandom in those days. Anyone of any significance SF-wise would have been covered rather extensively in advance contact to make sure every possible i was dotted and t crossed, and this would have been done through antique snail mail. Ella Parker got it. Ethel Lindsay got it. Arthur Clarke got it. Hell, even the very undeserving and ever-popular Robert Heinlein got it...and every pro worth his salt that ever passed through Chicago en route to somewhere nice.

"Not so John Brunner, who just appeared, without preamble or apparent reason...to land into a private fan party. My memory, hazy as it is, says this was not a convention-related party but could well have been a pre- or post-convention party as Brunner was en route to or from that convention. Anyway, there he was, extremely too mannered as Uncle Johnny said, dressed and groomed like a Hollywood refugee, sitting alone in the corner, unapproachable, and looking real good. Because he was unexpected, nothing was in place to cater to him. He was also so elegant as to shame most of the partygoers who were intimidated to even speak to him. And, when he did speak, he sounded real good...that inevitable British thing that sounds so damned good and indisputably correct regardless of whatever is being said at the moment...it just comes out gorgeous. You could take the raunchiest hooker from Soho and Fair-Lady her up into convincing the average American that she was really at least Royal if not something a bit higher. That was Brunner at that first encounter...too good to be true, or real for that matter.

"I met Brunner again, in London, a year or so later when I was being towed along behind Ella Parker to see Michael Moorcock or Ted Carnell or A Tom...and Brunner remembered me. I never met Marjorie as far as I know, and certainly never had the pleasure of...well, Johnny can vouch for the ecstasy of it all. If my memory of those times and events is a bit cloudy, there is much reason for that being so. At the time I was torn between two quite different worlds, the sleaze-book world where I was employed and the SF fandom family I had temporarily left behind. My sleaze-book contemporaries would meet annual at the Frankfort Book Fair where I had close friends from Paris, Amsterdam, London, and especially Frankfort and, during those wild nights of abandon we would party like there was no tomorrow.

"High among them were my London buddies...the editors and art department workers from Charles Skilton's 'Luxo Press'...and that's where the crossover back to SF fandom happened. Ella Parker was an employee of Skilton's, probably the sleaziest of sleaze-book publishers in the UK at the time.

"I had to choose between running off with Ella for a couple of underground train changes to some SF party ongoing way across town where people sat around, gossiped, and occasionally had a cocktail or two, or go with my sleaze-book contemporaries. Trust me, not one of the SF fans I met of that period showed any evidence of drugs or shared any. On the other hand, the artsy-fartsy book editors and illustrators didn't know how to not share really good drugs in abundance.

"It was, after all, the 1960s and London was certainly the swinging pinnacle of urban living. It was Austin Powers 7/24 with strobe lights and deafening sounds. It was all wrapped up in style and fashion and clothes that felt awful but looked good. The gang I ran with, every night it seemed, would go to night clubs where there were loud bands playing and lots of floozies flocking and we would sit around those club tables chain-smoking joints and doing coke lines right off the tabletop until we couldn't do any more. And back to work the next morning as if they had all – including me – had a good night's sleep.

"Who would you have gone with, Peter? Me or Ella...?"

"I envy Johnny for having had this experience so early in his life...the traditional Benjamin Franklin advice thing about every young man should have an older woman for a lover. It was surely my ideal that unfortunately never happened especially when I needed it the most. I also agree with Johnny and his attitudes about sex and sexuality and the necessity of exercising both vigorously and frequently.

"Move over, Johnny...my turn!

"When I was well into middle age I was fortunate enough to have a very talented lover less than half my age. She was a showgirl (a stripper, a tit-shaker, a pole dancer). I was the old man of porno already...been there done that...but still with a few special fantasies held in reserve for the right time, the right person, or crowd...tucked away deep inside. Some of them so dark I didn't even dare take them out to look at myself for fear of going totally bonkers. Anyway, she took it upon herself to work all of those fantasies out of my head and into reality, regardless of the number of players... and we did, a number of times, until we finally got them right and I was finally convinced that all of my erotic dreams had been adequately fulfilled. And she got me to agree to that position aloud.

"Then she said, 'Thank God, now it's time to start working on mine.' And we did, and that could well be your next sordid tale for Relapsing Peter. We were together for eight unbelievably orgasmic years during which she gave me more than any other lover I have ever known, and took from me less. In my thoughts, she will always be my No. 1 Fan...."

You lucky devil, Earl! And in answer to your question, of course I would have chosen to go off with Ella and the fans. That's because my heart is pure and I am stupid. (Rotsler illo from Jim Linwood, via Earl & el). But back to the Brunners – not everyone knew about their unconventional life-style:

Ted Tubb
London SE23 2RL
Dear Peter,

"John Hall's piece was a novelty in more senses than one. A brilliant depiction of John and Marjorie Brunner, both of whom I thought I knew quite well but obviously didn't. In essence, Hall has opened a door to give us a glimpse of a fandom which I never suspected. A small commune – a basic slan-shack, which would have been the envy of the majority and which revealed an episode in his life which few can match. Congratulations on having published it.

"More for the piece on Dave Newman, who I also knew well; I tried to look him up when, later, I was working in Bournemouth, but the B&B I understood he was running was closed, and he and his wife had vanished.

"As for myself – if of any interest – I've taken an intense dislike to modern technology. Computers and the sadistic bastards who write the instruction manuals, which ensure you can never make them operate as they should. But that's my problem. Yours is to try and make the next *Prolapse* even better than number seven – a hard task, but I bet you can do it!"

Thanks, Ted. A slan-shack but not as we know it! And now I feel we really ought to say a bit more about John Brunner the Writer. David Redd started the ball rolling last time, as a result of which Mike Moorcock directed me to an interview by Ian Covell. (It's not available on a web-site, but Ian will probably send it to you, if you ask him nicely). Anyway, we've been swapping a few e-mails, with the following result. No picture, though, as Ian says he'd break the camera!

Ian Covell
iancovell2003@ntlworld.com
Dear Peter,

"I've downloaded the latest issue, and there's some great stuff... I had heard about the Brunners, but the emphasis is on 'heard'; nobody was ever quite this explicit about the situation. Personally I always think this adds to an understanding of the author, and of the genre.

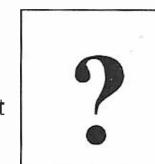
"I met John Brunner in 1975 (at a convention bar) and he seemed as you say. This was during his accidentally-drugged phase (in the early 1970s, he was put on a prescription drug for some physical ailment, and was on it for years. But it turned out to be completely the *wrong* drug, whose side-effects included depression and other symptoms like slow reactions and an overall tiredness). Can't give chapter and verse, but I remember him saying he felt a lot better after he came off the drug, which, you will note, was in effect when he was writing much longer books at much longer intervals, and then virtually stopped before beginning the climb upward in the late seventies. I interviewed him (by postal-tape) in January 1978, and sometimes think that I just caught him as he began that climb.

"I was nervous of requesting the interview but I really DID like many of his books, and couldn't NOT try it. That he responded at such length was amazing and that he replied to my request for a couple of follow-ups was even more amazing. Don't know why it worked, but it did. Granted I had by then read dozens of Brunner books and liked the great majority of them to various degrees (the bitter crop of the early 70s were probably too much on my mind), so could formulate what I still think are interesting questions, but Brunner could certainly have slapped me down for my misinterpretations, though he never did. Believe me on 'kind-hearted': apart from a couple of deep sighs, he answered not only my questions, but my follow-ups, and forgave me a lot (I think you can FEEL his exasperation at times; you can certainly hear it).

"My favourites are SHOCKWAVE RIDER: of course, and I also liked THE JAGGED ORBIT but (as I believe I unhappily made clear to him) I thought ZANZIBAR and SHEEP and the like were almost too dismal to read. For me, the delights were the books from 1953 or so (THE WANTON OF ARGUS) through to the mid-60s with occasional ones in late 60s/early 70s (like JAGGED/ SHOCKWAVE) and then the revised stuff he did for DAW [the brilliant POLYMATH, etc]. He also wrote one of the best fantasy sequences of all time – THE TRAVELLER IN BLACK, but was probably a bit too 'down to Earth' to go wild with the genre; clever and funny at times ('I Solation /You nification')... I believe that 'Catch a Falling



Ted, in February 2007
Photo by PW



a Vance-like fantasy and a PW [sic] was reprinted or slightly expanded as THE 100TH MILLENIUM (Ace, 1959) and was probably revised for a later Ace appearance back under the title CATCH A FALLING STAR.

"I think STAND ON ZANZIBAR, and THE SHEEP LOOK UP will stand the test of time for some readers – but not prophecies; Brunner tried to include as many extrapolations as he could, but nothing is so out of date as an alternate-future. THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER, a lengthy but good book, will probably be remembered for its prophetic use of worms and viruses, and some vague overtones of 'the web' – Hearing Aid is still a good idea, and the ending (everyone gets the info) remains so radical that governments more than anyone else should fear this book. THE JAGGED ORBIT with its ultimate-paranoia and racial segregation is again one of those I shouldn't like, but do."

"Though I have stripped my collection, I believe he wrote at least a dozen books that will stand the test of time. Not those he *thought* would be worthy (as any author ever got his own books 'right?') but certainly some."

There's a fair bit more about John Brunner further on, but since this has somehow turned into the Science Fiction section, let's leave the rest of Chris Priest's LoC from the point where he said (Page 17), "By the way, I never, EVER referred to James Blish as 'Jimmy'. A chill of horror strikes me at the very thought".

Chris Priest

christopherpriest@tiscali.co.uk

Dear Pete,

"I can assure you that no one ever called Blish 'Jimmy'. Certainly not me. One or two of his closer friends called him 'Jim', but I wasn't in that rarefied circle. I never liked him. I found him too self-consciously intellectual, but when you actually went into what he was saying (when you could unravel the arguments) it never amounted to much, and was usually deeply subjective in nature. He went to several Milford Conferences in England, and he used to dominate the workshops with his hectoring, repetitive and inappropriate comments. Just about every day he used to go on and on about what he called 'said-bookisms' (you know, those synonyms used by writers for 'he said' ... she expostulated, he gritted, they hissed, and so on).

"After the first Milford I was so annoyed with him that when I went home I took one of his books down from the shelf and within a minute I had found about twenty said-bookisms of his own. (Including a classic – he said with an eyebrow.) He was a dissatisfied, ill man when he was in England, who traded heavily on his past as a writer, was critical of people who were actually working at new material, and the only thing he was doing was writing Star Trek novelisations. In fact he invented the whole bloody world of Star Trek spin-offs. That's his true legacy.

"Not Jimmy, no. And although I believe Ballard calls himself Jimmy, and some people call him that, I've never somehow been able to. It just doesn't seem to fit, does it? Anyway, I don't ever recall seeing Blish at the Brunners' place. Come to that, I don't even remember seeing John Hall there ... although I didn't go regularly or frequently to their house.

"I keep trying to think up fannish anecdotes for you, but the cupboard is bare. The real problem is forgetfulness! But much of what I do remember has been adequately covered by you or Rob Hansen. Surely you must have heard of my Inverse Rule of Fannish Anecdotes? It boils down to the fact that ordinary things happen to fans, but because they happen to fans they are invested in some mysterious way with fannishness, and thus become The Stuff Of Legend. I remember one particular evening at a pub in Kingston, a meeting of the Surrey Limpwrists. After an ordinary evening in the pub we were all getting ready to go home, when Rob Hansen dropped his key-ring behind a radiator. Many different attempts to retrieve the keys then followed, people putting their arms down behind the radiator, prodding with umbrellas, and so on. In the end someone managed to grab the keys, and we all went home. Driving along I thought: 'My God, I was there when fannish history was made! How long before someone writes that up in a fanzine?' Sure enough, I saw it within two or three weeks. I can't remember who wrote it up -- maybe it was Rob himself. Maybe not."

*Hmm, I think you're being a tiny bit unkind to James Blish, Chris, though I did recently dare to disagree with his review of ROGUE MOON in an article for Rich Coad's new sercon fanzine, *'Sense of Wonder Stories'*. Meanwhile, here's David Redd, slightly demob happy (he's just retired), to open things up a bit:*

David Redd,

dave_redd@hotmail.com

Dear Peter,

"Almost too much to take in here – you never let up with the goodies, right from the traditional first-sentence, "Why thish is late." (In contrast to the Banana Twins, who seem to have neglected this particular fannish tradition in recent times.)

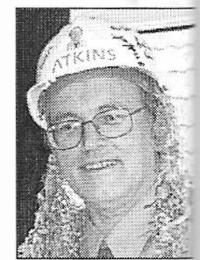
"The Fifties were a rich period, emerged from wartime but still full of people reaching out for better things. Your plaint, "I want to put my name on the visitors' wall" echoes the feelings I used to get reading old TWS and SS lettercols – a wonderful world in there, and how do I get to it? (I know your Chief Researcher felt the same way.) The 'mushroom jungle' of Fifties original paperbacks is similarly fascinating, once you latch on to the main characters (Stephen Frances, Jack Trevor Story, JR Fearn, Bill Howard Baker, etc.) but only peripheral to SF. But I do agree with the call for coverage of more recent decades – the Fifties may only seem more fascinating because memory gaps give so many more mysteries to be solved.

"When Knights Were Old And Tired" is a lovely collation, far better than just reprinting Ken Bulmer's piece intact (and no disrespect to Ken intended there), with great interaction and tailpieces. I certainly wasn't depressed! I sympathise with the Willis view, in that I would've hated being at the trial-and-execution part of *Misdeemeanour*, for example, but his reaction makes a nice O. Henry twist at the end. An aside on the London Clubhouse: I think lots of people tried hard to make it work, and if they could have found a flat to contain both facilities and a couple of permanent fannish SF residents to pay the rent it might have happened. If I remember Charles Platt correctly, Mike Moorcock and Lang Jones were the last to have a serious go at the clubhouse idea, but gave up due to continued apathy. (Around the time when I was looking for London digs too...)

Stuff of Legend?
Photo from Roger Robinson, 2003



Demob happy?
Photo from David



"John Hall: what can I say? An instant classic, thirty years in the making and worth every second. I believe every word. Well, the spirit of every word. And as a 'condensed novel' it probably works better than a full-length book would have done. Brilliant. Lots in the letters – you have a query on mine so I'll have to skim the rest. Brian Aldiss is dead right about the importance of Mike Moorcock's *New Worlds* – although the times were a-changing as you say (especially in Cele Goldsmith's *Amazing*, some terrific editing there). To this reader and would-be writer the phase-change between the dying Nova SF magazines and the first Moorcock issue was like the cut between bone tool and space plane in 2001. Fifties SF died right there, although the corpse never quite stopped moving. Perhaps the long continuity of fandom has blurred the impact of the new *New Worlds*?"

"Complete digression here. Your mention of *Festivention* (1951) had sent me to THEN initially to educate myself about the con's true nature, (proving Rob Hansen's worth yet again) and I noticed mention of the Festival of Britain 'Skylon,' a symbolic tower seemingly inspired by the Trylon or Trilon of 1939 New York. Where did the word Skylon come from? It has been used for various futuristic restaurants, etc, since, but nothing before the Fifties, so I'd guess it came from 'sky-high pylon' or some similar, when planning the Festival of Britain held in 1951. The only prior use of 'skylon' I've found is in Fritz Leiber's 1950 story from *Future* entitled 'Martians, Keep Out!' in which skylons are 100-storey buildings. Obviously the idea was in the idea...but why did Leiber use that exact word? Not a query for *Prolapse*, but for your other fanzine..."

"That comment applies to my last bit too I suppose. You queried my mention of William F Temple last time. I should have remembered from one of our bar conversations that you'd confessed to a lack of knowledge/interest re Temple. Briefly, both Brunner and Temple tried to live the fannish dream of being a full-time SF writer, both tried to aim high and both got beaten down by the marketplace. Temple's periods of full-time writing and retreats to paid employment are detailed by Mike Ashley in *Foundation 55*, sad reading at times.

"Temple was perhaps more conscious of style than anyone in UK SF until Brian Aldiss, and you can see from the superiority of his novel SHOOT AT THE MOON over its magazine original that given freedom he could rewrite for quality. However, the market wouldn't let him. For me the nadir of commercialism's effect was his expansion of the interesting parable 'A Trek to Na-Abiza' into the shortish novel THE THREE SUNS OF AMARA by swiftly inserting wedges of dead hackwork; the additional material simply diluted and destroyed the impact of the story. Again, sad. But the man had to eat.

"I saw a parallel to this in John Brunner's slow fall from an award-winning field leader back to a virtually penniless journeyman, beginning at or not long after the period which John Hall describes so vividly. THE SHEEP LOOK UP didn't add to his reputation. THE CRUCIBLE OF TIME didn't win a Hugo. STEAMBOATS ON THE RIVER and the Max Curfew stories didn't break him out to mainstream money. If earlier novels such as TO CONQUER CHAOS had been promising but not yet at the top of his ability, his later attempts at SF novels (or the parts I've seen) seem to have been too tired and grey to show him at his best. I'm sure that the years of pushing out too many words for too little money robbed us of any late flowering in Brunner's work. As similar forces robbed us what Temple might have written.

"Which is all a long way from the interests of *Prolapse*, I know. But, you did ask..."

David, I missed Foundation-55, and am almost entirely unfamiliar with Temple's adult work. But I cut my teeth on his three juveniles - the 'Martin Magnus' series, which were better written than most boys' books but suffered from dreadful plotting, and I remember his 'The Two Shadows', a story anthologised somewhere or other back in the fifties. If you're correct, it sounds as if Bill Temple was one of the forgotten trail-blazers of modern science fiction.

Jim Linwood

JLinwood@aol.com

Dear Peter,

"Many Thanks for *Prolapse Weekly*. John Hall's piece on the Brunner's was the highlight of the issue. Perhaps it isn't obvious from my photo, but the Brunner's Nassington Road house is now rather rundown (at least from the state of the exterior) – the sort of place local Councils acquire to house the homeless, parolees and drug addicts. I was half expecting Pinter's caretaker to come out of the front door. This often happens when large houses are converted into flats and the freeholder shirks on maintenance. The Brunners only lived two stops away on the North London Line, but they never invited the Kingdon Road mob over for the sort of orgies John describes taking place a decade later. We did occasionally frequent the Magdala pub at the bottom of Nassington Road which was infamous for being where Ruth Ellis, the last woman to hang in the UK, shot her lover, David Blakely, in 1955.

"I'm a bit puzzled by your statement that 'from the mid-sixties new recruits into fandom tended to be better educated...' The Old Guard's education was disrupted by the war and national service but it did include several professionals like Ron Bennett (teacher), George Locke (chemist) and Ted Forsyth (lecturer). The Youngfem of my generation were in the process of getting educated when we entered fandom and ended up with a pretty good score card: PhDs – Alan Rispin, Brian Jordan, Bob Parkinson, Darroll Pardoe & Jackie Bratten: MSc – Dave Hale & myself: BSc - Chris Miller, while Pat Kearney went on to write an erudite history of erotica. We were possibly the first fannish generation to whom higher education was an option and the mid-60s recruits had fully benefited from it.

"I was pleased to read Mike Kilvert's letter and learn that, contrary to my false memory syndrome, the Stourbridge Trio and Ella Parker attended the Kettering EasterCon in 1958. The caption to Mike's 'The first *Les Spinge*' photo is in error: the teenager in the middle is not Mike but myself. I visited Stourbridge fandom in 1959 after *BrumCon* and stayed at Mike's parent's house. The photo is also a rarity as it shows Ken's non-prosthetic hand just before his accident.

"I thought you'd done an excellent job collating the Cheltenham material but I must agree with Walt Willis' final word. Do you know that at the time of those events Sandra Hall worked in the occult Atlantis Bookshop in Museum Street, just a stone's throw from the London 1960 con hotel? The bookshop was founded by the writer Michael Houghton, a friend of Sister Crowley, and is still going strong. Ivor Mayne told me that Sandra was a certified witch."

Sorry Jim, it was my misunderstanding about the photo – to atone, I've blown-up that image of you in 1959. And, that was a sweeping generalisation about 'being better educated'. I suppose I was thinking of people like Platt, Priest, Peter Graham Hall, one or two others, who clearly had the edge on the older fans like Ethel, Vince, Bentcliffe, even my hero

Lucky Jim in 1959!
Photo by Mike Kilvert



~~Eric~~ Jones. Maybe I should have said 'early sixties' – though I was thinking about people who were fan-writers, and by-&-large your generation didn't do a great deal of that. When you read a lot of old fanzines, as I've been doing lately, it really jars to stumble over the sloppy, imprecise use of language, and so many bland little articles that manage to miss out all the interesting bits – descriptions, dialogue, and so on. No wonder Willis was so highly regarded. One of the worst was Ron Bennett, whose writing was so opaque that sometimes his meaning eluded me. I remember he wrote a letter about your review of Zenith, which at the time I interpreted as being another 'attack', but which I now think was meant to be supportive. But Eric had written it in such a peculiarly sarcastic way that we completely misunderstood him. Last issue's 'Forgotten Fan', Dan Newman, stands out head-&-shoulders above most of them; his Prodigal is a model of straightforward, clear expression.

Darroll Pardoe

pardos@globalnet.co.uk

Class of '62
Photo from Darroll

Hi Peter,

"Thanks for another fascinating issue. Chuck Connor's phrase 'complete and utter fandom' hit the nail right on the head as a description of Ken Cheslin. He was a totally disorganised person and yet managed to somehow muddle through and get things done, such as chairing a convention or running the BSFA. Did Ken ever produce a fanzine that wasn't completely scruffy? I don't think so, and yet his irrepressible sense of fun always used to shine through."

"The first issue of Les Spinge (seen exhibited in the photo Mike Kilvert sent) wasn't scruffy, though, and the clue is in Mike referring to it being 'returned from printing'. It was duplicated as a kindness by an estate agent fan (I think Ron Bennett and since they didn't know any better the SADO crew typed it up on sixmo stencils, so Ron ~~had to do it~~ retyped the whole thing and of course it looked quite neat because of that. Issue 2 was produced by Ken, and oh dear, it showed! When Dave Hale took over as production editor with issue 7 the appearance rapidly improved."

"Nice to get Mike Kilvert's reminiscences of SADO as it was before I knew it. Obviously it had been around a bit longer than I knew. Ken always told me (and I never had occasion to doubt what he said) that Briancon was pretty much the start of everything. It seems now that he was being a bit economical with the truth, for some reason. If Mike went into the army in February 1960 then Dave and I wouldn't have met him – that month was the occasion of our first visit to a SADO meeting. They met at Tony Hill's house. He had an old cottage in Amblecote and the assembled fans were Dave and I (who were only 16 at the time and still at school) plus Tony, Pete and Ken. The main event of the evening was a game of Galactic Trader, the SADO-invented and very vicious game based on James Blish's spindizzy stories. We wound up at around one in the morning, long after the buses stopped running, so we had a three-mile walk home. Dave and I being told fascinating anecdotes of fandom by Pete and Ken (who, we thought, must have seen it all, though of course they were relatively new fans themselves).

"Peter Mabey was being a bit naughty with his graph! To my eye, the plotted points look more like a straight line with a bit of scatter, which means that British fandom wouldn't have hit zero until 1959, so by the time of my first convention (1961) the attendance would have been an encouraging Minus-50 fans. I'm sure I remember there being some real fans there, but no doubt Prolapse will be getting round to talking about LXIcon before long..."

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John Hall

john.sila@virgin.net

Can't Hack It!
Photo from John

Dear Peter,

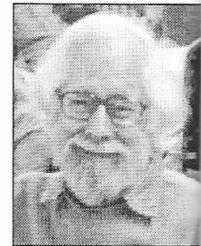
"Sorry that it's taken me so long, but I have now actually read the latest Prolapse – 800 words of it I didn't need to read (though I was pleased with the layout and photos, etc.) because I learnt to know them off by heart – and I strongly suspect I am in trouble. I wish mightily you had not bigged me up so much in #6. To find in the lettercol that the likes of Mike Moorcock and Brian Aldiss were looking forward to it, gives me a very trembly feeling in my nether parts – I just know someone is going to point out something that I have got wrong."

"Elsewhere, you quote me about the fifties. I think you only have to look at those young men in their suits, collars and ties to get the flavour of what I am talking about. Years later, I came across Ken Bulmer (whom I found a very nice bloke) & Ted Tubb (less so) and while their hair might have been longer, they were still dressed as if going to a British Legion dinner. You may think I should not criticise their dress sense, and in matters of fashion we are assuredly all victims, but I still maintain that that was because their values and outlook were different from those who came later."

"And then, I read all about this jousting stuff – and I just can't hack it. Heavens preserve us, fannish football teams were bad enough. No – call me what you like, I am more or less impervious – I cannot be associated, even by some distant historicity, with that. It's so Square, man!"

"Going back to the LoC's, I must say how much I agree with Mike Moorcock about the loss of optimism and freedom since the great days of Ace Specials – and so much else. But I'm still trying to turn things back around, in my own little way. I'm not going quietly!"

No, John, I still think you're wrong. A fan is a fan, and it doesn't have anything to do with how they dress. Back when I started we men still wore suits, collar and tie as normal convention-wear, and this didn't change until the early seventies. So what's it's the mental attitude that counts, as witness our 'Irish Fandom' feature – surely you can sense the kinship across the years between us, now, in 2007 and Jim & Walt back in 1947? And Ken Slater is living proof, 89 but still 19 at heart!



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Keith Freeman

kfreemarrbas@gmail.com

Hi Peter.

"I think you've stated an obvious but perhaps overlooked truth in your editorial – fandom was a much closer and more intimate society in the fifties and early sixties. Once you'd made friends with one he (or, far more rarely, she) introduced you (in an extremely informal manner usually) to their friends and, before you knew it, you were friends with half to three quarters of fandom (well British fandom – which is what I mean hereafter when I mention 'fandom'). Of course this didn't mean you liked everybody in fandom... but it was just large enough that you could avoid anyone you disliked most of the time."

There were old fans (Ken Slater, in my immature eyes) and young fans – but they mixed remarkably well. I'm not, by the way, trying to insult Ken here – as I said, to an 18-year-old he appeared to be of the same age group as my father... but his outlook on life was still that of a youngster (or is that insulting too?).

"I think what I'm trying to say is that there were cliques – but mostly they rubbed along with one another without serious feuding breaking out. There was also virtually no demarcation between 'filthy pros' and 'just fans' – a state of affairs that still prevailed (I'm glad to say) the last time I went to a Con."

"Then there was the published SF – or rather the *lack* of it. There were more magazines published than today (mostly in the USA) but new books were something to grab quickly and read, and then discuss with other fans (who almost certainly would also have read them). I know such things were almost looked down upon in the fanzines – but it happened.

"The other aspect was the local groups – and here I'm glad to see (and to be vividly reminded of) the London O's visit to Cheltenham. I had little (read, nothing) to do with the organisation of the event, but turned up at Eric & Margaret's just in time to rush out and get some material from which Margaret made me a costume. If I remember rightly I wore this cowl item with a Navy anti-flash mask, thus (I hoped) presenting anyone peering into the cowl with a faceless horror... I see I was labelled (by Bob) as the 'Inner Guard' and (by George) as the 'hooded figure of Death' – I thought I was 'other figure having spent a very short time making a costume'..."

"Oh yes, a lovely typo on page 7, "Most of the people we passed studiously avoided looking at us, although some of them watched us anxiously from the cover of their eyes." I assume that somewhere, 'corner' was converted to 'cover' – but what a picture it conjures up, the good folk of Cheltenham cowering behind their eyeballs... I wish I could draw! One point on Bob's write-up, I well remember Eric saying he'd extensively rewritten the Ceremony of Welcome due to its being *far* too close to a Masonic ceremony. I think his worry was that if any of the people there were Masons they might be upset. I don't think either Bob Richardson or Eric were Masons, though Bill Gray (who wrote the Ceremony) almost certainly was.

"Jousting (and St Fantony) was, I think, looked down upon by two groups – those who considered it a pale imitation of the American Society for Creative Anachronism and those who considered St Fantony an elitist in-group. I had little sympathy with either group at the time but am coming to see the second group did have some grounds – albeit I would have argued against their point of view. It's the same argument, now, that *all* children should pass exams – no failures. So exams become completely irrelevant. In the same way if every fan had been 'joined' as a Knight of St Fantony there would have been no honour for those chosen. You and I could both, of course, argue the merits of those people chosen and those not chosen... but that's a separate argument entirely.

"So we come to John Hall's description of the Brunner household. I can't say I knew John B well, but I certainly got on very well with him despite our differing views (CND etc). Marjorie I never knew well and doubt if I spoke more than a dozen words to her. John H's descriptions, however, have the ring of truth and certainly explain one or two things that I had noticed at Cons. One thing John H might be able to shed light on – at the time the Brunners moved, I heard that the reason was financial – selling the London house and buying the North Petherton one freed up a lot of cash... the problem of even successful SF authors not getting paid that well? But I must admit to being very surprised at your comments to David Redd about John being 'rude, arrogant, cold and repellent'. It's possible he came over to you like that from a mixture of shyness and a lack of empathy with what you were doing in *Speculation*... but I'm sure we'll agree to differ."

Keith, blame the typo on my OCR-programme; that's my excuse, anyway! What you say about fandom was undoubtedly true up to 1963-64 but then the sudden emergence of a lot of newcomers, at once, at a time when so many 'older' fans were exhausted, ended that happy state of affairs. Suddenly it was easier for the youngsters to stick together rather than be assimilated into the existing fan-culture; suddenly we had a 'generation gap', exacerbated by the destructive antics of Charles Platt and his pals which, in turn, probably caused the older fans to close ranks. St Fantony was in the end a casualty of this mutual suspicion, and we'll be looking at this next time in the '50th anniversary' number.*

Peter Sullivan

peter@burdonvale.co.uk

Hi Peter,

"I wanted to respond to John Hall's point, as raised in your editorial, about fans from the past being different. Your response is, 'If John was right there'd be absolutely no point in doing *Prolapse*. I'm not sure whether this is the right way around. Surely if they are different, they are a worthy and significant object of study, if only because of the differences? (I'm using 'they' here, but of course one of the strengths of *Prolapse* is that, in many cases, 'they' were 'us.' However, a 1979 Peter Weston or a 1963 Michael Moorcock is, for the purposes of this discussion, a different person from their 2007 equivalents. I think.)

"I suppose this is partly from my perspective as a 21st century fan. My science-fiction fandom has always been a culture of instant gratification, with e-mail, weblogs, fannish portals and *efanzines.com* being as significant as the traditional paper fanzine. All knowledge is contained not in fandom but in Google or Wikipedia. The practicalities of my fan activity are a world away from Walt Willis setting-up type for another page of *Slant* – or even of the postal games fanzines I used to stencil in the 1980s and 1990s.

"But, and this is where I am probably switching sides to agree with you again without really realising it, there is a shared commonality with the fans of the past. I want to know how they managed to be fannish without the (what I would

Faceless Horror!
Photo by Bill Burns



Instant gratification!
Photo from Peter



regard as essential) modern communication infrastructure. Part of this is the admiration for when being fannish was much more hard work – the ‘getting up in the middle of the night several hours before we went to bed’ syndrome, I suppose. But it’s also about checking that we aren’t missing a trick in our contemporary fannish activity, and missing out on things that could give us a bigger fannish buzz – such as producing and receiving paper fanzines.

“Of course, this is all really an excuse to mis-remember the Douglas Adams quote about the impact of time travel, and the consequent time tourism: ‘The past is a different country. They do things exactly the same there as well.’”

That’s my point, Peter – that there is indeed ‘a shared commonality with the fans of the past’. As for ‘instant gratification’, believe me, it used to be a LOT harder to get anything done – even a crudzine represented a major organisational triumph. But adversity bred a certain determination and maybe this ‘modern infrastructure’ makes it all a bit too easy to be ‘in fandom’ without actually leaving any tangible evidence of one’s passing ...

Paul Vincent

paul@kernow.freeserve.co.uk

Dear Peter,

“Many thanks for yet another eagerly-devoured issue of *Prolapse*. Mistaken or not, my impression was that US fanzines were always more inclined than UK zines to deal in matters of fan-history, certainly of the anecdotal, eyewitness variety. I found Rob Hansen’s *THEN* fascinating, but wished I could read more about all those events referred to briefly therein. And now, thanks to *Prolapse*, I’m getting my wish. I’ve no desire to engage with the debate about the relative merits of different approaches to history, from my perspective it’s reliably a damned fine read, and one which frequently gives me insights as to why certain individuals were well-known when I was around fandom, though they didn’t seem to be doing as ~~much~~ much at the time.

“I was delighted to see that Chuck Connor has resurfaced. I always loved reading ~~the news~~ of life in the Forces, whether in *Idomo* or in other people’s zines, and found him entertaining company on the one occasion when we met, at an *Albacon* in (I think) 1984. Following up on Chuck’s LoC, I well recall Terry Hill’s *Microwave*, which always seemed a pleasingly chaotic jumble of contemporary fandom (from a slightly out-of-mainstream perspective) and a style which suited much to the heyday of such as Tom and Vince Clarke. The resulting Kent Trufandom (an altogether more congenial KTF) had a welcoming, open friendliness about it that I found a refreshing contrast to the often more barbed, cut-and-thrust atmosphere of some other areas of early 80s fandom (though I enjoyed that, too). Plus they included, in the form of Elda Wheeler, one of the foci of my fannish lusts during that time.

“Speaking of lusts, I found John Hall’s ‘Running Up That Hill’ an absorbing ~~insight~~ into a far-off, more Bohemian time. Good grief, that sounded like a situation of terrifying emotional complexity and ~~resentment~~. Maybe it was just down to John’s choice of anecdotal snippets, but I came away with the impression there was a great deal of resentment, jealousy, and walking-on-eggshells, and precious little happiness going on there. Like many young chaps, when I entered fandom I always lived in hopes of, er, entering fandom, but I think if my libidinous ambitions had been satisfied in such a lurid manner, I’d have wound up as much scarred as sated. Scary stuff, but wonderfully told.”

Rob Hansen

rob@fiawol.demon.co.uk

Peter,

“In my *Seacon ’75* conrep in #6 I wrote about the first fans I encountered, and commented: ‘I envied them their obvious sense of community without feeling in any way deliberately excluded from it. This would not be true of a later generation.’ David Bratman picked up on this with some ~~surprise~~, and you express astonishment, saying ‘there’s rarely been a less tolerant time than the early-to-mid seventies, and if Rob really felt like that he must have been some sort of latter-day saint!’

“Resisting the temptation to make a joke about Mormons, I have to say ‘not really’. What you must remember is that people like the Rats, *et al* were the fannish generation before mine. Those of us who came in 1974/75 – people like me, Langford, Joseph Nicholas, Kevin Smith, the Harveys, etc, – slotted right in with them with none of the friction that has occurred during other substantial influxes. And I’m sure those I’ve mentioned would agree with me on this. It really was very easy to get involved then and I never, ever felt unwelcome.

“Incidentally, my *Seacon ’75* report was originally intended to be the first chapter in a larger memoir. I’d realised that the fandom of the 1980s was just too large and sprawling for me to do it justice – the thought of just gathering together the sheer amount of material I’d need made my head hurt – so I decided instead to back-up a few years and write a memoir as a companion piece to *THEN*. That way it would be the period as experienced by me, rather than an attempt to cover everything, and would also be much more anecdotal and, I hoped, humorous. I started the second part – covering *Mancon 5* – and have it around here somewhere, but I never got any further.

“As I’ve stated on many occasions, my primary impulse in writing *THEN* was a desire to figure out how all these things I’d read and enjoyed in old fanzines fit together, the basic relationships, and timeline that would make sense of it all, and I think I pretty much accomplished what I set out to do. It’s the first place to go to if you want to research the history of UK fandom, but it shouldn’t be the last. It can’t be all things to all people, and was never intended to be. Complaints by some that isn’t the history they want to see leave me as unmoved as ever, frankly.”

*So Rob, your induction into fandom was completely different to my experience in the 60s, more of a reversion to the time Keith Freeman describes. Why do you think that was? Maybe there was less of an age-difference between you and your predecessors? Maybe because the generation before you (the Raftans) were still very active (rather than moribund) when you came in, so you were sucked straight into a lively fandom with plenty of role-models? Certainly from my perspective you just suddenly appeared, fully-formed, as another one of the Rats – and I seem to recall you didn’t care for me very much at the time I’d love you to finish your *Mancon* story and – through inexperience, didn’t you have a minor run-in at that convention with Greg Pickersgill? Speaking of whom, I’m told this is only his eighth-ever LoC (Catherine’s count...)*

Terrified!
Photo by Paul



Not Savvy?
Photo by PW



Greg Pickersgill
Gregory@gostak.demon.co.uk
Hi Peter,

"*Prolapse* arrived here this morning and yes indeed I did start reading it before even opening all the other mail, which I knew included a copy of Deighton's FUNERAL IN BERLIN and a book on the battle for Goose Green, so there you are then. As usual you did a great job of assembling the info on the Cheltenham thing into a really excitingly interesting and absorbing article. That's really great fan-writing, in its way. Or perhaps great fan-researching. However, it is an enormous skill you have and I envy it!"

Great fan-researching, maybe?
Photo by Ian Whates
at Contemplation, 2007



"I think the Newman story is the real jewel in the crown of *Prolapse* so far. The only thing wrong with the article was that it could have been much longer! I'm now even more fascinated by this character and I keep wondering if he's still alive and alert somewhere. If only we had enough money to get a professional trace done on him. My intuition is that Newman may not necessarily have decided to grieve after his move to Bournemouth, but perhaps found setting himself up there so time-consuming (no job planned, as *Prodigal* implies) that he just lost touch with fandom altogether, and then because of failed responsibilities (like the BSFA) couldn't face returning. Particularly if he had no close fannish friends to assist a return."

"If there are any imperfections in layout showing in the printed copy they're not obvious, believe me. The whole product is very pleasingly done and generally it is a joy. I mean that. And I certainly don't think you have problems with your audience readership. Your letters are excellent and the general response seems both highly approving and engaged. All that is obvious to you of course. So don't let yourself be brought down even for a moment by stupid self-absorbed people who don't really constitute your intended readership anyway."

"Frankly I think you're being a bit optimistic in expecting a response from some of the people on your list. They're not fanzine fans or even really interested in the history of fandom. I understand the purpose of including them in order to give them the option of encountering new information, but honestly all this (meaning *Prolapse* and what we're on about in our exchange of emails) is utterly outside their sphere of experience or enthusiasm. When you and I were younger fans we – to varying degrees at varying times – understood and wanted to know the history of fandom, mainly because the fandom we inhabited was identifiably the same thing as what Bentcliffe and Jones were doing decades earlier. Now, people like the 'Third Row' fans have absolutely no points of identification with it or, frankly, us, except as a sort of peculiar relic of the past. In our more optimistic moments we may try to demonstrate why we think it's interesting or important, but they are NOT going to Get It."

Nice of you to say you liked my piece on Dave Newman, Greg, though it seems to have left almost everyone else cold. I went looking for Dave with the help of the '192' site and found six entries for 'David J. Newman' in the Bournemouth/Southampton area. I spoke to one chap and sent letters to the others, but with no success. A pity, because as you said, 'there is no statute of limitations on egoboo, so even if our man has had nothing to do with fandom for decades I'm sure he would be pleased to know he was remembered, and most favourably too.' Now, here's a rare Young Person:

Flick (or, 'Mrs Mike Scott')
flick@internet-fairy.org

See, I told you I'd get around to it!

Doing the Astral Pole
Dance at Interaction
Photo by PW



"I was very amused by the passage you quoted from Eric Jones in your Editorial: all of those things (no one collects SF any more, there are no active clubs nowadays, people refuse to leave London – or at least the south east – unless they really have to), and with the possible inclusion of The Greying Of Fandom, seem to be just as much bemoaned today!"

"The Brunner article was very interesting, and great fun: it reminded me a lot of some of the things that I read on *LiveJournal* (that's what the young people do instead of pubbing their ish). I have many friends in utterly dysfunctional polyamorous relationships, and that level of back-stabbing and competitiveness... Well, it's actually quite refreshingly sane. (That said, I also have a number of friends who manage to Make It Work: it's not for everyone, not even for some of the people who wish it were for them).

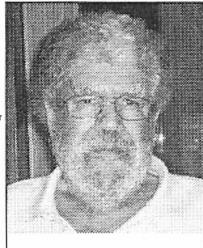
"I was boggled, at the start of your article, to read your age estimate for Dave Newman: from the first photo, I'd have put him in his late forties, not late twenties or early thirties as you do. However, this may have something to do with the fact that he looks an awful lot like my Grandfather who was, as is the way of things with grandparents, obviously never actually young. It really is a scary resemblance. I read later in the article that he was also a red-head: perhaps I should do some investigating into my Grandfather's history! Was he also known for his tap-dancing, I wonder?"

"Not one of the epic, multi-page letters that you've been printing, but yes: *Prolapse* is great fun, even though I've not a clue about most of the characters. The ones I have heard of are either Beloved Authors (you have a letter from ***!) or names I know only through your book. Please do keep on doing it, and sending it out to us young folk. I remain convinced that your contributors are really very lovely and un-argumentative people, so I'll look forward to seeing what you manage to turn this into, if you use it at all!"

*She's read my book! And likes *Prolapse*! You'll go far, young Flick. Another twenty-five years and a few grey hairs, and you'll be One of Us, complaining that the wicked youngsters of 2032 are all using this new-fangled telepathy!*

Peter Nicholls
pennich@bigpond.net.au
Dear Peter,

True Believer?
Photo from Peter



"Thanks for *Prolapse* 7, which I enjoyed even more than I expected, not least because it jogged my memory about fandom in the seventies (in sometimes uncomfortable ways), and induced some (not very) philosophical musing. I had intended beginning with the statement 'I was in fandom from 1971 to 1988', only to realise that this begged questions about fandom and history even larger and more philosophical than implied question that has run through the last two *Prolapses*.

"One philosophical question arises in part from various LoCs you published, especially Andy Sawyer's, which

suggested among other things that the 1200+ people who read *Science Fiction Monthly* and subsequently wrote to the BSFA were not thought of as 'fans' by existing members of fandom. They were regarded as only potential members of fandom, which is to argue, of course, that fandom is not a spiritual state, it is an organizational state. This seems harsh to me, even harsher than the answer to the smaller, more familiar and allied question, 'does membership of the BSFA itself confer membership of fandom?' Many of your readers, probably a majority, clearly think not.

"The Catholic Church, of course, is confronted by this sort of question all the time. Dante tells us, and for all I know the Catholic Church still believes it, that babies who die un-baptised do not go to Hell or to Heaven; they go to Limbo, which seems to be (or has been in the past) a fairly decent and not hellish sort of place, not nearly as bad as some con hotels. Similarly, I understand also that the Church allows the possibility of salvation for people who die without receiving the rite of Extreme Unction, provided that they have been pretty well behaved and couldn't reach a priest in time.

"In the light of this generosity, even from an organisation so generally regarded as the Catholic Church is, as being conservative and exclusivist, it ill-becomes fandom, or at least its secret masters, to metaphorically turn away true believers with a flaming sword just because they never had the chance to hook up with other true believers. Or perhaps they were just busy at the time, as I was when as a young academic and father I stumbled across the Melbourne Science Fiction Group behind Merv Binns' bookshop – Foyster, Bangsund, et al. – in the mid sixties, and did nothing much about it.)

"All this brooding results from my initial and somehow unsatisfying thought: that I joined fandom in 1971. Why did I not, rather, choose, say, 1952 as the year in which I saw the light on the road to Damascus? That was, I seem to recall, when I first read Asimov's collection I, ROBOT, and also, oddly enough, David Lindsay's VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS. These were life-changing experiences for a twelve-year-old. I prefer to suppose, therefore, that I was already in a spiritual state of fannishness in 1971, and that the accident of my meeting and relating to other fans in 1971 merely verified an existing condition. Perhaps, I went on to think, making 1971 my entry year to fandom was because I had not previously been a member of a self-elected GROUP. After all, there's no doubt I was a fan. You don't need to belong to a group of more than one to be a fan. I'd even had lunch with Michael Crichton by 1971, though fannishly, I hadn't wanted to.

"Anyway, Peter, you have the clout and seniority to do something about this. We need rules. The mathematical implication of what I've just said could be a rule, and legislated as such: 'Fandom is the set of all fans, providing there is more than one of them.' I'd be prepared to go further than this. I would argue that fandom is the set of all fans even if there IS only one of them. After all, to draw a useful comparison, few people would say that masturbation is sex. Sex may be more enjoyable if it involves more than one person, but the principle is the same, it's still sex. Anyway, it is now obvious to me that the condition of being a member of fandom isn't open-and-shut. Maybe fandom, I thought vaguely while reading *Prolapse*, is a spectrum stretching to infinity at either end.

"So when Rob Hansen writes a history of fandom, and when *Prolapse* publishes or re-publishes material that adds to our knowledge of that history, the most dubious bit is the word 'fandom', not the word 'fan'. And it's obvious that fan historians have thought about this, because they use a whole lot of slightly cumbersome terminology to define fandom more closely: fanzine fandom, con-running fandom, gaming fandom, media fandom and so on. There are all bona fide areas of fandom, but obviously, one feels, there is some sort of platonic or ideal fandom that lies behind all of them, something vast and cool, to which we all belong.

"My particular fandom came to be Ratsfandom in the seventies, during a period about which you say 'there has rarely been a less-tolerant time in British fandom than the early-to-mid seventies'. That sounds right to me. The ratfans, elitists all, weren't even tolerant with each other. They were a foul-mouthed, scurvy, drunken crowd, reminiscent of the Black Pearl's crew of un-dead in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. I was never completely sure who was actually a Ratfan and who wasn't, though Kettle, Brosnan, Holdstock, Edwards and Priest were fairly central. And the Charmox. But what about Fingersgill, the most frightening and scurvy of all? I think he must have been a ratfan too. What about Simone West? On the other hand, I don't especially remember John Hall as part of the group, though in his interesting Brunner piece he says he was.



"Anyway, ratfans were not notable for any live-and-let-live philosophy, and were particularly impatient with the supposedly fannish novels (such as St Fantony, mock battles, humming and swaying) of 50s early-singles fandom. Quite right, too. I was a mate of Ken Bulmer's, but I found his piece in #7 about fannish jousts to be slightly embarrassing and a bit tedious.

"When in 1971 I first started doing fannish things with other fans (which were mainly drinking and talking) I was a bit self-conscious about (a) being a little older than many of the fans whose company I enjoyed (I turned 32 around then), and (b) aware that I had entered fandom sideways because of my job running the Science Fiction Foundation, and hadn't worked my way up, scrubbing dishes or doing Whatever the fannish equivalent is of digging drains. I was astonished however, when Chris Priest accused me publicly of being a Fakefan for this reason, but looking back, I see his point. Anyway, after a while the question of whether or not I'd paid my dues sufficiently to be a BNF stopped mattering.

"By the time I won an Award as best fan-writer of the year in 1976 (can't remember now if it was the *Checkpoint* poll or *Nova* award or what) I was so immersed in fannishness that it had eaten me up. And I was happy to be eaten up.

By then almost my entire social life revolved around science fiction, and the great majority of my friends were fans or writers or both. (Even now, in 2007, when I'm part gafiated and with a dissolving brain, quite a bit of my life remains SF-nal.)

"For example, my relationships with women became largely focused on and initiated within fandom and SF generally. I was a bachelor for around a decade at this time, and over these years there were quite a few such relationships; they were seldom one-night stands or casual, and many made a successful transition into lasting friendship. Twenty-four years ago in 1983 I wedded one of these women, Clare Coney, and we remain cheerfully married today. So much for Malcolm Edwards who on hearing news of our engagement (which occurred three and a half weeks after we began going out together) first fainted, rather ostentatiously I thought, and then said 'I give it ten weeks, maximum'.

"Christopher Priest invited Clare to lunch, and proffered generous and helpful advice to her which could be synopsised

as 'Run! And run like Hell'. Apparently he made me sound like one of those loathsome horrors in stories like Arthur Machen's 'The Great God Pan'. Clare still retains a letter from Ian Watson, threatening to bite my ankles if I ever gave her a moment's unease. Anyway, Clare's and my house in Islington became a fairly regular locale for fannish parties. When I think of it, in addition to the other categories of fandom I mentioned before, Party Fandom is an important one, and the one to which my heart most truly belongs. When I took my new-ish wife and even more new-ish son Jack back to Australia to live, in 1988, I had to say goodbye to the fannish life I'd previously known in London, but Australia had a fandom of its own, though really I only joined one small and perhaps atypical part of it. This was the part that founded *Australian Science Fiction Review* (both first and second series), which sounds sercon, but they gave great parties too.

"I would quite like to be remembered in fannish history as the person who gave the big welcome party at the worldcon in Melbourne in 1999. Though it was officially a pro party, there were lots of fans there. It received an encomium from Robert Silverberg (this being the Jewish equivalent of a papal blessing) saying it was the greatest worldcon party since Toby Roxburgh's room party at *Seacon '79* (that's from memory, hope I got it right). More than 200 turned up, and it kicked on till at least 5 am. It was all extremely fannish, which raises the question, 'How does being an SF pro relate to being a fan?' [I define pros as people who make money – usually not much – out of SF, such as (i) SF writers, or (ii) writers about SF, or (iii) publishers, or (iv) agents, or (v) booksellers, or (vi) academics.] Which self-description do you suppose is more usual, 'I am a writer who is a fan' or 'I am a fan who is a writer'? I think giving the word 'fan' primacy may be the winner. I'm pretty sure Greg Benford, for example, would say fan first, writer second, as Bob Shaw used to. And wouldn't Rog Peyton claim to be fan first, bookseller second? Anyway, there is considerable overlap between fans and pros, and it's a mistake to talk about them as if they are as different as apples and oranges.

"To turn to another subject: it isn't possible to read all the loCs and other contributions to *Prolapse*, without feeling, for the five-hundredth time, 'There's something strange about SF fandom'. I think it's quite clear that fandom is a self-selected group with far greater than average intelligence. But that's not the whole story. We all know that rather a lot of SF fans are, er, a bit, how shall I put it...dysfunctional (though in lots of different ways). It's an almost palpable aura hovering round many *Prolapse* contributions. I now realise what I was too self-absorbed to realise back in the 1970s and 1980s, that I'm dysfunctional too. Fandom was (and perhaps still is – I'm not sure) a safe stronghold, a second home, very nearly a first home for some of us. I now understand how that shaped my life for good and ill, but mostly for good I think. I like being a part of an international community where I can be pretty sure of being generously treated by people I may never even have met, because whether or not we've met, we're still family.

"I know it's easy to sentimentalise this, and certainly fandom is very far from being all sweetness and light. Indeed many fannish feuds have become legendary, and lesser confrontations are commonplace. Michael Moorcock doesn't like me at all, for example, and I'm not all that crazy about him. But he is kind of family. To argue with Mike is a bit like sparring with an irascible aunt. Even, to take an extreme case, Brian Burgess, who always seemed to me a complete loon. But he belongs to the community too. So, for example, does Charles Platt, who always reminds me of the Tasmanian Devil character in the Bugs Bunny cartoons (but he's an excellent fanzine editor). You can't logically explain that sort of feeling of belonging in the same family as these frightening people, because it isn't really rational. It's some sort of ancient tribalism I suppose, mediated by our supposedly reptilian hind brains. Fandom shelters in its dimly lit compound keeping warm as best it can, with the nervous awareness that there's nothing but cold darkness outside.

"Anyway, I've gone on far too long. I just wanted to explain to you that your excellent fanzine got me thinking. Or what passes for thinking with me these days."

Thanks, Peter, you quite made my day! It's always a thrill to get a good, long, juicy letter, but especially so when it comes from an unexpected direction, from someone who's been out of touch for a long period. Yes, you parachuted into fandom and didn't have to work your way up. That was how we saw you, those of us who'd had to learn rather painfully what it was all about, who'd spent years discovering how to put a sercon fanzine together. Of course, you cheated – you were educated! But great to know you're so committed to fandom. I'm not so sure about this next chap....

Tom Shippey

tshippey@tiscali.co.uk

Dear Peter,

"I see from your last that David Bratman thinks that I have a grudge against trufans, and that this can only be explained by some personal slight. In the first place, I always thought I was a trufan, at least as I define them, people who hunger and thirst after science fiction. And in the second place, well, bear me out, Peter, am I a person readily, or even safely snubbable? What, by SF fans, not the most intimidating group on the planet?

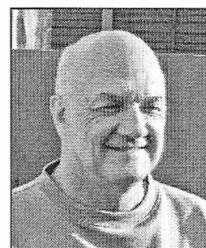
"I admit it has been tried. Naomi Mitchison, author of *MEMOIRS OF A SPACEWOMAN*, among much else, gave me the *grande dame* treatment many years ago at some non-SF event or other. But then I remarked how coincidental it was that she used to live at No. 11 Crick Road in North Oxford, while I lived in No. 10 – the two houses, in the eccentric N. Oxford numbering system, being next door, and for neither of them, as you can again confirm, would you get much or any change from three million dollars these days, pity I didn't hang on to no. 10. At this she blossomed, dropped the *de haut en bas* approach, and moved over to conversation-between-social-equals mode – which was if anything even more intimidating if you didn't happen to be born a Haldane or a Huxley. Josephine Saxton had a go at snubbing me at a *Novacon* many years ago as well. I forget what she said, but I know you remember what I said, which did indeed tremble on the very verge of courtesy.

"No, my idea of a trufan is someone who is genuinely devoted to science fiction. Why such people don't want to talk about it beats me. With my very low boredom threshold, I find conversations along the lines of "do you remember what old x did back at con y, God, that was funny" almost insanely tedious. For starters, it probably didn't happen, for nexters it probably wasn't funny, and for thirders, well, what the hell are we doing NOW?"

First I bite-off your head,
then I freeze it."



Safely snubbable?
Photo from Tom



"We may all end up reminiscing to ourselves in the old folks' home one day, but why anticipate that fate? The best thing about cons is people telling you about books you haven't read and why you should read them, as also buying them, and filling the gaps in your magazine collection. I remember several such incidents which really brightened my life. Conversation about matters related to SF, such as the present and future state of the world, is fine as well, and I have had several of them, often with Greg Benford, who also remembered one such conversation in your pages a while back. And sometimes one does get a new perspective on entirely different matters.

"I recall at the ICFA conference years ago (International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts) which have a tendency to turn into academic conferences, not conventions, if you don't watch out – when you and I were at a room party, seated on the floor, propped against the wall, and slowly sliding down it in increasingly comatose states, when we heard a Canadian voice say, "and then, of course, there's the bloody Frogs." At which we sat up, passed him the bottle, and asked him to tell us more, which he did, for ages, never repeating himself. Gave us a new view on Canadian politics right enough (we didn't in fact have an old one). Forget the lad's name: it was a very rustic one, like Appleyard or Stubblefield. But on the whole, at an SF con, you'd think SF was the best conversational vein, and it's been a disappointment to me that so many don't seem to want to pursue it. What are they, shy? Insecure? Afraid of being snubbed?

"Although I have to concede that if there's one thing more boring than listening to fans discussing probably mythical fannish history, it is listening to academics banging on about their probably equally mythical research. But then, you know why that is. It's because they're not trufans. They're just doing this as a career move, something which wasn't possible when I was a mere spratling of a junior assistant lecturer. No, the purpose of life is to read, write and talk about science fiction (oh well, all right, and fantasy as well). All else is secondary, though some of it, like metal bashing, mathematics, and medieval literature, is interesting secondary, and very plausibly related. I hope we can all agree on that."

Nice to see you, like Peter, answering the great philosophical questions of our time, Tom. But I'm desperately upset by your implied slight on my endeavours, because you think fan-history is boring. Here's a slightly different take on what it's all about:

Claire Brialey

craig.fishlifter@googlemail.com

Hi Peter,

"You wrote of the London-Cheltenham joust that made you yearn for more intimate days of fandom, 'This long-forgotten escapade was every bit as wacky as anything James Bacon might get up to in the present age.' and I wouldn't venture to disagree with that, although I worry vaguely if James will take that as a challenge and start building space armour, say, in his – or our – garage. However, there's an irony in that a number of other British fans in recent years have made similar remarks about such relatively innocuous events as Eastercon plays or fancy dress parades of decades past – just considering that in doing so they were refuting the puritanical anti-costume fun-loathing views of venerable fans like you. Personally, my own views on all this concur rather more with those quoted from Walt Willis, and indeed from John Hall and Lilian Edwards in the letter column. I have taken part in fancy dress contests at conventions, and even worn hall costumes on several occasions, but once I realised that this was not essential I was really rather relieved to stop.

[Sorry Claire, must quickly interrupt here; even in my notorious trufen rant-column I did actually slam fancy-dress as such; I think the reason I was so het up was not that I disapprove of fun, but that I felt we were alienated from it. Somehow it didn't seem connected to the core SF fan community but to be coming from outside it and the people who Eastercon was really for. If that makes any kind of sense.]

"Your #7 editorial note 'John Hall, Lilian Edwards, Eric Jones and Terry Jeeves...' was destined to continue '...went into a pub' and, being fans, that's probably all too likely although I boggle to consider what fannish occasion could have brought together such a drinking party. Anyway, I find myself in the slightly unfamiliar situation of defending Lilian against your (quite accurate) depiction of her initial dismissal of *Prolapse* as being 'all about the sex days'. And I don't say this only because Lilian did, in fact, become sufficiently engaged with the whole subject – apparently as a direct consequence of seeing *Prolapse* – that she volunteered to write for us her personal perception of the attraction of fan history, which is that it's mostly gossip. Nonetheless, Lilian hasn't written that article yet – unless she's placed it in a more Zeitgeisty fanzine than ours – and the central argument seems so relevant here that I'm prepared to give it a preview. This is just my understanding of her theory, though, and I may have missed some key points or nuances.

"Lilian's contention was that most people aren't interested in fan history until they realize that it's all about people they know, and indeed about things they may not previously have known about people they know. I think that this was coupled with the recognition noted before (and which we have in recent years observed in some of our long-standing fan friends): that once sufficient time has passed for fan history to be about things you remember yourself – and thus to some extent to be about you – it suddenly seems a whole lot more relevant.

"I don't dispute any of this, although I personally find the initial lack of interest understandable – surely anyone, encountering a community of like-minded people and learning that it has a distinctive history – would also want to know more about those like-minded people who had gone before us and what they did when they were in effect on themselves? You'll notice that this doesn't in itself dispute Lilian's main point that fan history is fascinating because it's about the actions and reactions of people, although part of her point may have been that most people will still not be interested in abstract gossip; there has to be a personal connection – as John Dallman noted in his letter in #6.

"One particular illustration of this approach arose at your own *Re-Repeteron* in 2004 – when we were all watching fan films from the 1960s. Apart from the potential poignancy of this being the only way in which some of the old crowd could be there, I was struck at the time by how fascinating gossip – or, if you prefer, an interest in people's personal interactions – can be even if you don't know all of the people involved. The commentary from the audience was particularly interesting in what it revealed to me ('They were having an affair at the time, of course'), even more so in what it revealed to other people there ('I never knew that! Why has no one ever told me that before?'), but perhaps ultimately in the way in which it united the group of people in that room and also linked all of us more closely with the group of people on the screen, only some of whom were their former selves.

"All of which just proves, I think, that *Prolapse* is very firmly rooted in its community. Yet despite your continual

assurances to Mark and others that fan history began yesterday and it's fine to examine, for instance, events within the last ten years, it doesn't seem to me that most people reading and responding to *Prolapse* are actually keen to do or see that. For those of us who were active during that period, particularly those of us who are actually interested in more distant fan history, it seems far too recent: it's very clearly within our own living memory and therefore surely everyone knows about it. We're also aware of our own inclination to talk about such things anyway, to the extent that those few *Prolapse* readers of more recent vintage can get the same experience by just sitting in a bar with us.

"And the majority of your respondents who are considerably more venerable seem unlikely to be interested, at least judging by what they're commenting on. Most fans seem engaged primarily with their own time and, in some cases, with what went before them; my perception is that many of your correspondents were less active during most of the 20-odd years of my own fannish experience, so although they may be interested in what happened when they were first involved and what had happened before that, anything after the mid-'80s represents a time when they were losing interest or which, again, just seems pretty recent by comparison. All that it might add is some news of what some of their old fan friends were doing while they were away – fan history as gossip, again."

"You stress repeatedly that *Prolapse* is not meant to be just about nostalgia, and I may be proved wrong when you eventually publish Ann Green's long-awaited con report of *Misemeanour* in 1994. I've had a sneak preview; it's a well-written and lively piece and although, or perhaps because, I missed the con I did find it both interesting in itself and regret-provoking that I wasn't there taking part, so maybe it will strike others in the same way. But what about anything more recent?"

"You mentioned 'stories ... about the post-Seacon generation, about the *Silicons*, and the *Mexicons* experiment'; but *Seacon* '79 was nearly thirty years ago, the *Silicons* were twenty to thirty years ago (1976 to 1984) and the *Mexicons* ran between 1974 and 1994, the same year as *Misemeanour*. Also, your reference to 'stories' seems to point your commission towards con reports and other people-focused 'gossip' articles rather than what you described in #6 as 'some analysis and interpretation of events ... along with all those stories about people getting drunk and falling out of windows'. Are there any hot topics from the past ten or even twenty years that would bear more serious examination in the way that you've looked at the BSFA (founded in 1958) or the Doc Weir Award (set up in 1963)? If you think I'm wrong, give me a choice of topics to research and I'll see whether I can make myself eat my words. But I think most people really engaging with *Prolapse* at the moment are focussed mostly on the 1950s, '60s and '70s."

"And I can see why. As Mark mentioned in a recent letter, we're particularly interested in many things to do with the formation of the BSFA at the moment since, of course, next year sees its 50th anniversary. Dave Newman's name had cropped up in various things I'd read from the 1950s – including many of those you cited – but I didn't have a complete picture of his path through, and apparently out of, fandom (all in about six years!) until now. I think these short biographical features are a really worthwhile addition to *Prolapse* and I hope to see more."

"Similarly I should add that I was very interested in 'The Doc Weir File' in #6. I was possibly unfairly amused by the way in which, the whole thing having got off to a false start under a false impression (which I had heard about but not seen confirmed by any actual evidence before), when it was finally decided to have an award the form of it was, in order of preference, a statue, a plaque, and a shield – and we ended up with a cup. (And a communion cup, at that; I never knew that before. How very fitting that it so frequently gets drunk-from by winners and their friends.) I remain of the opinion that, provided it encourages people to pay attention – to what's gone before and to what's important now – and to *think* about what we value in fandom, the Doc Weir Award is a Good Thing. I'm too well-rewarded for my own fan activity to ever win it and so, precisely because of that, it's safe to admit my regret that this is the case. I think it's a fabulous thing to win: when done right, it's about the unsought recognition of one's peers for something which adds value to other people's experience of the SF fan community. It's good to thank the people who deserve it."

Perhaps Lilian will write and explain her theory, and then we can argue about it! But, Claire, even accepting your contention that anything from the last twenty years is too recent, that still leaves a lot of ground to be covered, and my worry is that we're not covering it. (I've been holding back Ann's Miscon report for, er, technical reasons, haven't I, Martin?). But seriously, I'm open for stories (the word is used in the journalistic sense) from later periods – Leeds group, anyone? Maybe on 'Rise of the Con-Runners'? I'll even consider something about Scottish fandom! I began to think that perhaps those seventies & eighties fans just weren't up to the job, and then I started to hear from the Returned Ones:

Kev Williams
mkevinwilliams@hotmail.com
Dear Peter,

"I admire your energy and commitment! I guess we're alike in that in retirement we gotta keep going, keep the brain cells alive. I'm very busy with Young Enterprise in Surrey, hiking home and abroad, a music loop, and my old company's retirees' association. I have not really had any desire to get into fandom again. As you know I've stayed in touch with Harry and Dave Cockfield over the years, and occasionally Alun Harries – though he seems to have currently disappeared. In truth, I was never fully embedded in fandom, just lucky to be part of a talented and extremely active group, just as they reached their apogee. I was a good organiser – not really a good fannish fan, though I could hold my beer...most of the time!"

Gotta keep going!
Photo from Kev



"*Prolapse* 3 & 4, I'm afraid didn't make any connection with me, largely since I hardly knew a single soul mentioned (just a few of the locciers) – all way before my time in fandom. I recognise some of the names, but reading the articles was a little like watching a silent movie – I couldn't hear anything, if you know what I mean."

"*Prolapse* 7 however, was fascinating – most especially for the John Hall article (and the fascinating loc from Mike Moorcock – I was astounded how much in common were our youthful tastes in SF). It arrived on a noteworthy day, for none other than Harry Bell and Pat Mailer were visiting, and (after seeing the Royal Academy show) met up in town with a clique of SE Fans. Pat Charnock (Graham was 'indisposed'), Dave Langford, Ian Maule, Roy Kettle and Rob Jackson turned up at Harry's behest, and Dave Cockfield and his pal Shaun joined as well. I hadn't seen Dave (L), Pat or Ian for 20 years, and only seen Roy and Rob a couple of times at Harry's previous trips south. Harry is indeed a fannish social glue master."

"Having stood in the rain and traffic outside the Pillars of Hercules in Soho for two pints, and standing between the two deaf Daves (Dave C is deaf on the left), I was starting to get hoarse, so we all agreed to retire to the 'Greyhound' where we could drink in the dry and hear each other. Lubricated chat ensued in torrential quantities, barely interrupted by the arrival of food. Harry's issue of *Prolapse* 7 must've been lying on his doormat up north, because he was astounded when I told him that THE John Hall article was therein!

"Harry and I have a history on this subject. Harry had the original version of John's article and was itching to publish it – but being between fanzines, indolent and desirous to share the costs, suggested that he and I jointly edit a new fanzine, which would lead off with THE JOHN HALL ARTICLE. This was famous in Gannet circles, for its alleged (for none of us but Harry had read it) scurrilousness. Thus was *Out of the Blue* conceived, and we set to the first issue. "Errrr....can't seem to find the article" says Harry as we wrote and compiled. Undaunted, issues 1 through 5 of *OoB* appeared while Harry was still looking for his copy. I think there was an element of not wanting to find it – since in the mid '80's, the Brunners were still going strong, and I think Harry was a tad concerned at how they might react. More recently, having found it he sent it off to someone in the US, so I guess he was surprised when it appeared in *Prolapse*!

"John got the wrong Kev (not Smith), when he references this story in the prologue. Such has been my fate in fandom, to be mistaken as Kev Smith on more than one occasion. I'm sure he feels no better about it either! So to read this infamous article after all these years was really quite exciting. I have to say that it didn't disappoint. It was a remarkable story of a lifestyle that we might read about in the colour supplements, but at which dull, straight people like myself can only marvel. Well, maybe marvel is the wrong word. My memories of Marjorie Brunner recall one of Clive James similes: 'kissing her must have been like licking an ashtray'. Nevertheless, I really enjoyed the article, and in fact most of the issue."

Kev, what can I say? John Hall sent me his article in February and I promoted it in two issues, so I don't know why anyone should be surprised to see it in *Prolapse*. Here's another account of its earlier incarnations:

Roy Kettle

roy.kettle@ntlworld.com

Hi Peter,

"Thanks for *Prolapse* 7. And jolly good it was too. Like John Hall, I can't remember why I didn't publish his article 'Up On The Hill' some 30 years ago though I guess it was around the time that I didn't publish other articles including one by Charles Platt and illustrations such as Harry Bell's cover for *True Rat Ten* which recently found a home in *Bellissimo*. At least John didn't phone me weekly until I returned his MS. It took three weeks for me to give in to Charles when it became clear that the threatening phone calls from New York would never stop otherwise. I wasn't sure whether he hadn't kept even a dim version of it or if he was simply irritated that I hadn't published it immediately or if he simply got the same pleasure from warning me that people assumed he would from pulling wings off flies. I hadn't been keen on Charles' article as it happens but could bring myself to reject – or suggest improvements – something by someone so illustrious. This sort of thing was probably the main reason that, having foolishly moved from producing a personal fanzine to a general one, I stopped doing a fanzine – I was a crap editor and the effort of doing a fanzine which consequently contained occasional poor stuff by other people was too much.

"John's article wasn't one of those but I think it simply fell outside my pubbing days. It's not clear why I then passed the MS to Harry Bell – nor why Harry didn't publish it. I can't imagine it was fear of law suits. I should think that John Brunner's lawyers would have been kept pretty busy with slander and libel suits had he been so inclined. Even general anxieties like those John says Harry expressed seem unlikely to have prevented it being published – despite Harry being a pretty sensitive sort of guy, you know – and it does seem most likely to have been more for the sort of reasons I had – changes of mind, Gestetner elbow, important drinking to be done.

"I really enjoyed 'Running Up That Hill' which, even though I recall little exact detail from the original article, has clearly benefited from revision and expansion if not from more recent adoption of Buddhist principles by its author. I do recall some of the material from having been there or having heard it from John over the years and it seems as true as it can be and a lot of fun. I remember daring John to speak to JB, as he says, but I think it was a substitute for me doing it.

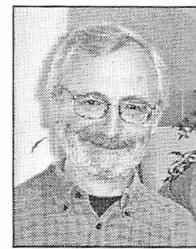
"I read a lot of JB's books. It's not meant to be disparaging to say that I wasn't particularly discriminating – you couldn't afford to be if you read SF – which might be why I quite liked some of JB's early Ace books (though I'm not confident that, despite its great title, *INTO THE SLAVE NEBULA* was amongst them – maybe John was even less discriminating than me). I really liked more of his mid- to late-60's novels. *NO FUTURE IN IT* was an excellent collection and 'Some Lapse of Time' a terrific short story. I also loved the 1966 *New Worlds* article he wrote about Philip Dick at a time when I was eager to get my hands on anything by or about him.

"There were things about JB, then, that I would have liked to respond personally to but couldn't. I didn't like or loathe him though you suggest these were the only emotions he inspired – he was reasonably tolerant the few times we spoke at cons or The Globe, which was pretty good going for me – but I don't find him particularly appealing for the sorts of relatively superficial reasons you and John mentioned.

"One convention Greg and I put out a convention one-off – *The Little-Read Stool Book* – which had some jokes in and poked fun at various people. We gave it out as widely as the wacky print run would allow and somehow JB got a copy. Later, we learned he said it was egregious. This was very exciting. Praise from an SF master! When I looked up egregious (I think Greg might have known already) I was even more excited and it gave us a title for the next version – *An Egregious Guide to Conventions*. At the time it seemed typically pretentious of JB not to call something he didn't like 'rubbish' or 'appalling' but to use a word I didn't know. Says more about me than him I suppose.

"John's brief description of his prolonged and varied sex with Marjorie in the bed-sitter was a mirror-image of mine isn't something I can verify. Recently I went past the house in Cranley Gardens where we used to live and I'm surprised anyone was capable of sex after climbing the stairs to what I was reminded was the fifth floor. John's diet of baked beans, milk, drugs and the occasional wart obviously had much going for it. The tiny rooms – split from a normal one – each had only a single bed, a gas ring, a wash basin and a space for clothes. There was little between the rooms other than wall paper, and the beds were on either side of that, but I never heard John and Marjorie. Maybe I've wiped those memories – I can think of many reasons why I might want to.

Threatening phone calls!
Photo from Lisa Tettle



"However, other details in the article are spot-on so those probably are too. John's 'The Mile Long Space Ship on the Moon' was a tale we can all only regret being unable to read. Leaving us helpless with mirth is an understatement for its effect and we were only told about it (albeit interminably). The description of my encounter with Luise White at the Brunners' is also accurate so far as it goes, including John's whole-body erection and subsequent ejaculation. I was very, very sick once after some dope that Luise gave me one New Year's Eve – I wasn't used to it at all, let alone after an evening's drinking, and I could feel myself actually turning green. The next day I was very sticky indeed. It might even have been some of the Brunner's home-grown dope but John was obviously made of tougher stuff than me if he got through a lot of it as well as his daily office quota of speed and amyl nitrate."

"When John moved to Stoke Newington, he ended up living with a group of non-fans, including friends of Kathleen who I eventually married. We still all meet up now and again and I think I'll copy John's article to them before the next time here next month. I'm sure it will make them laugh as much as me – there were some terrific anecdotes. I'm glad it was published now in a better context and as a better article than in the mid-70s. *Prolapse* is bringing out some great memories and writing."

Rob Jackson

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Dear Peter,

"I'll start at the end of your fanzine, which chronologically is the beginning. You briefly quote Ian Williams trying to remember whether the BSFA were involved at all with the *Tynecon* bid. Ian is right; they did try to persuade us to acknowledge them at the time, and I remember coming back and putting '25th BSFA Easter Convention' on at least one *Tynecon* publication – probably a Progress Report, I guess. However they did absolutely nothing to benefit the con itself as far as I can remember, and conversely didn't try to influence what we did or push us around at all. I still have various *Tynecon* files which might answer these questions, upstairs in the infamous attic – but at 11.40 pm it is a little antisocial to start operating deafening loft-ladders. Maybe tomorrow.

"Moving to the beginning of the zine, and your plea for info about *Silicons* and *Mexicons*. The first *Silicon* was held on August Bank Holiday 1976, and was organised at quite short notice after the first *Faancon* in Blackpool in February 1976. Gray Boak organised this. The *Faancon* had no programme at all, and I mainly remember walking along Blackpool promenade, and sitting in the bar playing Dungeons and Dragons. At that stage this was a very new phenomenon, and in these days of gigabyte-sized video games costing megabucks to develop, it may be difficult to believe that it was based on a dungeon which the dungeon-master drew out for himself with a pencil on graph paper.

"The Gannets collectively felt that there must be a happy medium between a con with no structure at all and one like Eastercon where it was so packed and busy that it was difficult to take in all the stimulation. Soon after that, we all experienced *Mancon 5*, where the Rats and Gannets at least had to make their own fun by going off and having a football match refereed by Bob Shaw. Which partly compensated for what was otherwise a pretty dire event.

"But by then, the ball was rolling for *Silicon* anyway. The first two were held over August Bank Holidays in 1976 and 1977 in a medium-sized hotel called the Imperial, on Jesmond Road, a main road in suburban Newcastle. The fifty-or-so attendees took up about half the hotel, so though the conventions were fun, I think they were less than perfect as we didn't have the whole hotel to ourselves. The programme certainly helped – it was basically purely fannish, fun, with just enough leavening of real SF to stop the brain cells from seizing up.

"For me, the 1978 and 1980 cons were the peak of fannish togetherness. These were the first two held in the Grosvenor, a hotel of just the right size and atmosphere, sleeping about 50 people so we could book the whole place. It had function rooms and a proprietor with a brilliant sense of fun who seemed to love having us. The sequence was of course interrupted by *Seacon 79* in the intervening August Bank Holiday. The programme didn't just feature quizzes and so on – there were also football matches and at least once a rocket launch, run by Kev Williams's mate Andy Firth.

"My memory from those cons is not all that crisp at this remove, though those files in the attic might help. What would be much better would be to get info from Harry Bell & Kev Williams. They were really, in my opinion, the main driving force behind the *Silicon* philosophy, and (along with Greg and one or two others) sparked the *Mexicon* ideal too. So if you want to know, ask them."

*Unfortunately I missed all but one of the *Silicons*, mainly because as a Daddy with three young children, I couldn't very well go tearing off to Newcastle (or anywhere else) on the Bank Holiday weekend. You know what it's like now, Rob. But here's someone who almost certainly did take part:*

Dr Peter Roberts

P.Roberts@rbgkew.org.uk

Good grief, Peter, what is going on?

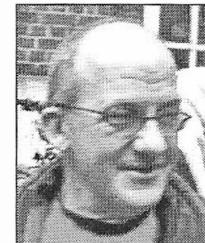
"Haven't you got a garden to dig, a pipe to puff, slippers to put on? I'm still meandering my way through one *Prolapse* when another one arrives. Hate those damn Deroes though, so I'd better shift myself and look lively, otherwise disintegrant charges will work out into neutralisation of man-matter growth through destructive will in the units of the life pattern, and we don't want any of that."

"Meanwhile, back in 1967, an innocent schoolboy stood outside the Bristol convention hotel and debated whether to go inside and mix it with Jack Vance, Phil Dick, Kurt Vonnegut, William Burroughs, and all the other science fictioneers. I chickened out, which is probably just as well. The reality of St Fantony, the Doc Weir Award, and the powers that didn't lie behind the BSFA was shocking enough for a newcomer a year later. 1968, you'll recall, was a radical year and SF was the radical medium for the radical message. So I turned up at Buxton – city of revolution – to be greeted by St Fantony members in blazers, and braces and ties, oh my. Jousting happened. A mere 40 years later, *Prolapse* sort-of explains it all – but I still wonder how a joke and a bit of fun in the 1950s remained such a conspicuous and off-putting feature of British conventions for more than ten years."

Tomorrow never comes!
Rob at Corflu (his photo)



For fear of Deroes!
Photo from Peter, 2004



"Splendid piece by John Hall. Reminds me that somewhere I may still have an EP of 'H Bombs Thunder', possibly rendered by the London Youth Choir – or maybe it disappeared years ago. Memo to look for it. 'Taxation of Lloyd's Underwriters' sounds a bit New Wave to me. Perhaps more magic realism than SF. My own contribution to the field is, of course, the strangely memorable 'Rhizoctonia-forming Fungi', currently bubbling under at number 2,443,073 on the Amazon Bestsellers chart.

"What terrifying photos from 1975. I see you put me on the same page as the Fancy Dress entrants, which is clearly all I deserved. What was I doing wearing a three-piece suit? (Blue, incidentally, not green – I guess age has faded us all.) I did buy it from Dr Who, however, in Burtons in Bristol. At least, Tom Baker appeared behind me whilst I was looking in the mirror and told me to buy it. I don't think it was a dream..."

Wonderful to hear from you again, Peter, after far too long. I'm sorry if you're struggling but I revived Prolapse largely by accident at a time when I needed something to do, last autumn, and discovered I'd struck gold. Ever since I've been rolling with the punch, every two months, but might slow-down a bit, now, just to give everyone chance to catch up.

Joe Patrizio

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Hi Peter,

"Although I found John Hall's Brunner article very interesting in parts, overall I didn't really like it. I feel that he couldn't make up his mind whether to write it as a straightforward information piece or as a novel (a sort of PEYTON PLACE meets LOOK BACK IN ANGER). And I couldn't really believe in the dialogue; was he sitting there, taking notes while all this was going on? All in all, I found it an uncomfortable read, but that could be more my fault than John Hall's – maybe, deep down I'm just jealous at not being there.

"As for John Brunner himself, I met him just a couple or so times, the most memorable being the first. This was on my first visit to The Globe (1959/60), and John and Marjorie were there too. When they found out I was in electronics and from Scotland they enthusiastically started to interrogate me about pirate radios. At that time a radical Scottish Home Rule group (maybe an SNP offshoot, but maybe not) had set up a pirate radio and was causing upset within the authorities. John and Marjorie were keen to get one going too and seemingly I was just the person to help them. But radio wasn't my subject and subversion didn't come until later. There's one other thing that struck me (later) about John: he was just two months older than I am, which I didn't know when I met him, but was so much more mature that I assumed he was around 10 years older. I'm not sure that this means anything at all, but I thought I would share it with you (as they say).

"On the other hand, I really enjoyed the Dave Newman piece. Mention of 'The March of Slime' reminded me of the London group's visit to Liverpool. About eight of us travelled up to see them (can't remember why) and had a great time. I remember it for being the first time I had been to a Chinese restaurant, for 'The March of Slime' itself, and for the wonderful Shorrock family. So I agree completely with your comment to Mark Plummer about the DWA until 1976; all can say is poor 1970s fans!

"In his letter, Bruce Burn gives the impression of a shy Colonial at LXICon; well, he believes this then his memory is really shot. When I knew him in London, 'shy' is not a word that would have got past him (yeah OK, he was a Colonial and we treated him as such). Anyway, when Bruce, Ted Forsyth, me and Don Clegg (I think) and perhaps somebody else (look who's talking about memory being shot) collected the armour from Ken Brunner, we had to take it home by public transport. Most of us just carried the stuff, but Bruce put a helmet on, and when we got to the station, strode up to the ticket kiosk and roared (yes he did) 'Jerusalem'. Without hesitation, and in a dead straight manner, the man in the kiosk said "Sorry, sir, we only go as far as High Barnet". By the way, while we're on the subject of LXICon (albeit tenuously), not only were Brian Aldiss and Kingsley Amis there, but Martin Amis was there, too (he was eleven at the time); so with a bit of precognition, I could have had three famous authors sign my programme!

"Finally, while I enjoy Prolapse so very much and always look forward to the next one, because I've had no contact with fandom for so long, I do get a bit depressed by the casual references to people I knew (either slightly or just by swapping fmz or suchlike) who have died. Ken Cheslin, for one, mentioned in this issue. I so enjoyed his stage and although we corresponded, I can't remember ever meeting him – of course, this could just mean that I don't remember ever meeting him.

"I wonder what John Hall meant by saying that people *were* different in the 50s? If he's being literal then there's no arguing, but it would be a pointless comment. It might be interesting to know what he *means*."

A good question, Joe, and if I can take a stab at putting words into John's mouth, I suspect he believes that just because the 50s fans looked old before their time, they didn't know how to have fun. I think he makes the mistake of judging them only by their appearance, by their double-breasted suits and straitened circumstances, and by comparison with his own parents. But that's exactly 180° wrong – as no less a figure than John Brunner says in this issue (Page 18), he discovered in fandom that 'there were people in the world who are sane enough to be crazy'. The fan-mentality was there, shining through the darkest clouds!

Andy Sawyer

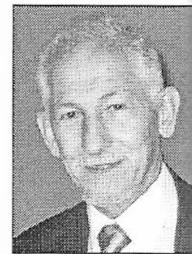
A.P.Sawyer@liverpool.ac.uk

Hi Peter,

"Re your editorial: I agree with John Hall when he writes about the 50s, 'people *not only* looked and dressed differently. I believe they *were* different.' But this also sparks a deeper interest – many of these 50s fans had lives with which ours can't compare (Bob Richardson/minature submarines during the war, for example) and when we look at the silly fifties games (like the St Fantony things) I'm reminded of two things – one, these were Grown Men (well, most of them) and two, there were far fewer opportunities to be Silly in public. Nowadays you'd join a Historical Re-Enactment Society or the Territorial Army and no-one would think the less of it.

"Back to John Hall – well, I never knew Marjorie Brunner so I don't know whether to marvel at his luck, or not. Fascinating reading, though. Although I only got to know John Brunner after Marjorie's death, and never at a level which

Just jealous?
Photo from Joe



would involve sharing in any of this, there have been enough hints and things-you-understand-in-hindsight to make it obvious that there were strange things going on in the Brunner household, and this makes things a lot clearer. How many will say 'But I knew this all along' I wonder? John seems to have polarised opinion – the recent posts on *Wegenheim* were illuminating; (Peter Sims mentioned Brunner's involvement in a badly-organised event in Chester, and I think it was the one where a local librarian had approached me for advice on who to ask to give talks. She later said to me that John had been appallingly rude to her).

"Actually those 60s-swinging days seem far, far, stranger than the further-ago 50s, or maybe it's because all these people were Having Fun with each other when I was stuck inside doing my homework and by the time I got the opportunity to come out and play it was all over. Or maybe Marjorie-equivalents were winking at me all the time and I was too young and straight-laced to notice . . . though I suspect not.

"But certainly something for the history-books. I wonder what would have been revealed if John had ever been prevailed upon to write his autobiography? And who was Marjorie, apart from the person who is revealed here? In many ways she seems a fascinating and completely enigmatic figure – forget the sexual stuff, there's something about her that I just don't get, much more than 'wife of John Brunner the science fiction writer'. Does anyone know how they met and what (apart maybe from the shared interest in odd sexual encounters) brought them together? Maybe there's something in Brunner's mainstream stuff like THE DAYS OF MARCH (which I still haven't read) that would give a clue?"

Well, some of your questions are answered in this ish, Andy. And I think your comment on 50s fans is important; while you couldn't be silly in public, fans found a way through their conventions. That explains the attractions of zap-guns, jousting, St Fantony, late-night room-parties and all the rest of it. Their craziness was a form of release, if you like, a reaction against their humdrum everyday environment (and in some cases their terrifying wartime experiences).

Mark Plummer

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Peter,

"This time around it's very much your editorial and the letters that really grab my attention. Not that there's anything wrong with the article content. The John Hall story of life in the Brunner *ménage-à-tout* (I sorta lost track a couple of times there) pretty much lived up to its advance billing. I didn't realise that Marjorie was that much older than John, but then I don't recall ever even seeing her, and while I had seen John around at conventions in the late '80s and early '90s and maybe spoke with him briefly a couple of times I certainly wouldn't claim to have known him. Based on those limited encounters, mind, I'm more inclined to your view ('rude, arrogant, cold and repellent') than David Redd's, although in my usual wishy-washy way I'd probably opt for a slightly milder string of adjectives. My strongest impression was that here was somebody with a strong and probably inflated sense of his celebrity status within the community.

"I can at least enlighten you on an historical detail in Ken Bulmer's account of the Cheltenham Safari. I'm far from an expert on fifties motoring, or indeed any kind of motoring, and like you I had no idea what a 'gaiter' might be in the context that it's used by Ken but I have the advantage of knowing a man who does know. My father worked as a garage mechanic at the time, and he tells me that a gaiter would be used to effect a repair in the days before tubeless tyres. Essentially – and if I have this right – the gaiter is fitted inside the tyre to stop the tube from bulging through the hole in the tyre itself.

"During this entirely uncharacteristic moment of family bonding over a technical point of motor mechanics we were initially unclear on why such a wheel would have to go on the front of the car – my father's view was that, if anything, it'd make more sense to put it on the back, as a gaiter-repaired tyre was more likely to blow again, and a blow-out on a back wheel is easier to deal with than a blow-out on the front – but I guess the car in question was very heavily-laden.

"But on the more substantial content of the article – and relating back to your editorial comment on the subject – while it's an interesting story to read and, yes, I'd like to have met some of these characters, I can't honestly say of this particular excursion that 'I'd love to have been there'. Maybe I'm just giving myself away as the kind of sercon devil that you suspected me to be, but this kind of thing is really a bit too frivolous for my taste."

Thanks for the motoring detail, Mark, also advised by Joe Patrizio. It reminds me I used to drive my old Ford Popular, c.1965, with re-cut tyres costing £7.10s.0d (still a week's wages) until they were banned a few years later as totally unsafe!

Peter Mabey

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Dear Peter,

"Ken Bulmer's piece about the London-Cheltenham joust brought back happy memories, whilst John Hall's account of life with the Brunners was something of a revelation, as at that time I mainly knew them from meetings at the London Film Festival. Also, I can confirm for Joe Patrizio that I was *not* at the '63 Con to receive the Doc Weir Award, as that was the year my father died, so I was staying with my mother over the Easter weekend.

"I've no copy of the script of the Cheltenham film – presumably it was put into the BSFA library there, so it ought to be at Liverpool now, unless it was one of the lost items. Production was with the aid of members of the Cheltenham Cine Society, the sound man being Peter Handford, later famed for his recordings of the last days of steam on the railways. I think Margaret Jones may have kept the film after Eric died, but wouldn't be surprised if she had discarded it some time after losing contact with fandom.

"I haven't been able to think of anything significant to add to Keith Freeman's article about Eric Jones, though I must mention that when he was working at GCHQ, the Director of the establishment was one Sir Eric Jones – so Googling for him may give the impression that his professional activities were rather more important than they actually were. The Official Secrets Act prevented us from discovering what he did there, though I remember that when I mentioned that Hawker Siddeley were considering getting an Atlas computer – a British design, and the world's most powerful at the time – he just smiled and said nothing. I think that GCHQ already had one then, and still wanted something more. Eric wasn't much older than me, so probably was only in his 40s when he died."

Wishy-washy?
Photo by Rob Jackson



WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

Barry Bayley, who said, "Thank you Bob Richardson – you're the only person ever to have praised my recorder playing! Haven't touched it for decades. Almost certainly lost the knack now (it calls for careful breathing). But to the Brunner content – in all the years I knew John, I had no idea he played the recorder too! I'm astounded. Bet he played it better than me as well." **Dave Britton** sent A SERIOUS LIFE by D.M. Mitchell, another superb book from Savoy Press, while **Chuck Conner** called me "a cad and a bounder" for cutting his LoC last time. Now I've failed him completely and Chuck says, "I feel betrayed, my fannish innocence trampled and bruised – cast aside like a used Kleenex in the bedroom of Life!" Never fear, Chuck, I have a Cunning Plan to get you egoboo! And **Malcolm Edwards** noted that "Among the photos on the *Interaction* CD is one of Marjorie Brunner by the riverboat at Heidelberg in 1970. She doesn't look as old to me now as she did back then, but I can still look at it through the eyes of a 21-year-old and think (re. John Hall's adventures): Oh. My. God."

Chris Garcia came in late, but said, "I printed a paper copy of *Prolapse*-7 to the Westercon Fanzine Lounge and it got read by a lot of folks." Thanks Chris. He also suggested that "Jeni Couzyn might be the hottest femmefan ever". **Steve Green** remembered John Brunner's death, "I'd tentatively arranged to interview Brunner for *Critical Wave*, and mentioned to Martin Tudor my surprise at discovering not a single Brunner novel remained in print in the UK. My co-editor seemed rather less taken aback, not because he didn't value the work, but from a conviction that the Great Author had pissed-off so many people over the years that publishers simply weren't interested in dealing with him. For his own part, Martin now found it impossible to read anything Brunner wrote, despite having been a massive fan of his early SF. It was a gloomy epitaph for what was once such a meteoric career." And **Dave Hardy** commented that, "It does make me realise how much I missed of SF fandom back in that period between going to the 1959 *Brumcon* and my next con, *SciCon* in 1970, and up to the point where I came back to Birmingham and joined the Brum Group (thanks to your card in Hall Green Library!) in 1973."

Penny Hill sighed, "Once again I feel nostalgic for a past I never knew." While **Kim Huett** wrote, "I've only been able to pick up #2 & #3 (of your 1965 fanzine, *Nexus*), but even those two issues are fascinating for the opportunity it allows for comparisons with *Prolapse*. Which you may think is an absurd exercise given the time-lapse between *Nexus*-then and *Prolapse*-now, but you might be surprised at the similarities in layout and organisation. Of course *Nexus* was rather more serious in topic than *Prolapse* is turning out to be and you argued rather more with Joe Patrizio back then, but none the less I can see a definite connection." **Terry Jeeves** noted, "I recall making the long journey to London and back in one day to attend a con in the White Horse, in 1948 or 1949. I would guesstimate about 40 fans attended. Only thing I remember was the continuous ringing of an alarm in a neighbouring jewellers shop." While **Steve Jeffery** commented, "part from faint boggling at things fans could get away with in days of yore – like hacking at each other with medieval weapons without having to fill in dozens of health and safety assessments – the other highlight was John Hall's 'Running Up that Hill', about his time in the more than somewhat odd and unconventional Brunner household. Some good pictures with this, from the rather Mephistophelean look at the 1957 *Loncon*, to the more dubious sartorial excess of velour suits and shiny polyester mullets in the 70s. I assume Jeni Couzyn was wearing a long feather boa in that picture, and fans (or just female ones) didn't once have fluffy tails."

Jerry Kaufman answered, "Yes, we have a Bogus Shield of Umor in our storeroom. We found a large Mask of Comedy (shiny purple on gold, on a die-cut piece of cardboard) at Display and Costume (the place to go in Seattle if you're raving a play) and glued straps to the back. And the Enchanted Duplicator, a pint-sized AB Dick drum duplicator, sits in our garage, providing a home to spiders. Very happy they are too." And **Dave Langford** wrote, "I do feel guilty that the trifling task of producing a slim *Ansible* each month seems to use up all my fannish energies. *Prolapse* is still enjoyed. The highlight of the latest was of course John Hall's article on life in the Brunner household – bizarrely fascinating stuff, all happening while I was still at college and knew little of the wider world. ('What is this 'open marriage' of which you speak, illogical Terran person?') I remember that we invited John Brunner to address the Oxford University SF Group in 1973 or thereabouts, and because we were all so awed by STAND ON ZANZIBAR we confidently expected him to be eight feet tall with lightnings playing perpetually about his head. In the event, he was not only John Brunner-sized but wearing his peculiar red (plum? puce?) velvet suit. It was a good talk, but certain illusions were nevertheless shattered." A disappearance **Robert Lichtman** said, "While I, too, would have been intrigued at a young age to encounter an attractive older woman interested in having sex with me in an ongoing fashion, the rest of what John Hall had to put up with would have eventually been wearing and something of a turn-off. And there weren't enough graphic details, as I'm sure Earl Kemp would agree, but I put that down to British reserve. Nonetheless, it was entertaining and well-written." And **Sam Long** advised, "Brunner was one of the few fans/pros to be in *Debretts*, or *Burke's Peerage*, since he was the scion of one of the founding families of ICI."

Lloyd Penney remarked mysteriously, "If you can get Randy Byers feeling positive about zines again, you've got something going. Getting him feeling negative about zines was a feat as well, don't know who carried that one off..." **John Purcell** wrote an excellent letter (for which I have no room, alas), but said, "the stories recommended in your zine are fleshing out my skeletal knowledge of British fandom, giving it a tactileness hitherto unknown, leaving finger-marks scratches on my scalp!" While **Alison Scott** commented, "This issue was particularly diverting, because only a few weeks ago I was sitting listening to the floor spots at England's trendiest folk club, the 'Magpie's Nest' in Islington. I fell into conversation with one of the few regulars at the club who's older than me – living legend Tom Paley. So imagine my surprise to open *Prolapse* and discover quite a different side to him." But **Mike Scott** was more picky, "I regret to be the one to point out to you that an article about the 1980s would still be about the old days – you'll need to stick to the 21st century in order to avoid that accusation."

WHY ARE YOU RECEIVING THIS ISSUE? Because:-

- You're a Star!
 You've helped me with *Prolapse* in some way and I'm grateful.
 Congratulations! You're mentioned inside.
 This is a sample issue, please let me know whether you enjoyed it and want to receive more.
 Oblivion looms unless you tell me you care.

Some lost souls have been consigned to the Caverns of the Deroes this time, making the mailing list a good bit shorter. I really do need YOUR support to keep *Prolapse* humming along, so please write if you can add to our collective knowledge of British fandom's long history. You don't need to LoC every issue but please do tell me if you're interested!