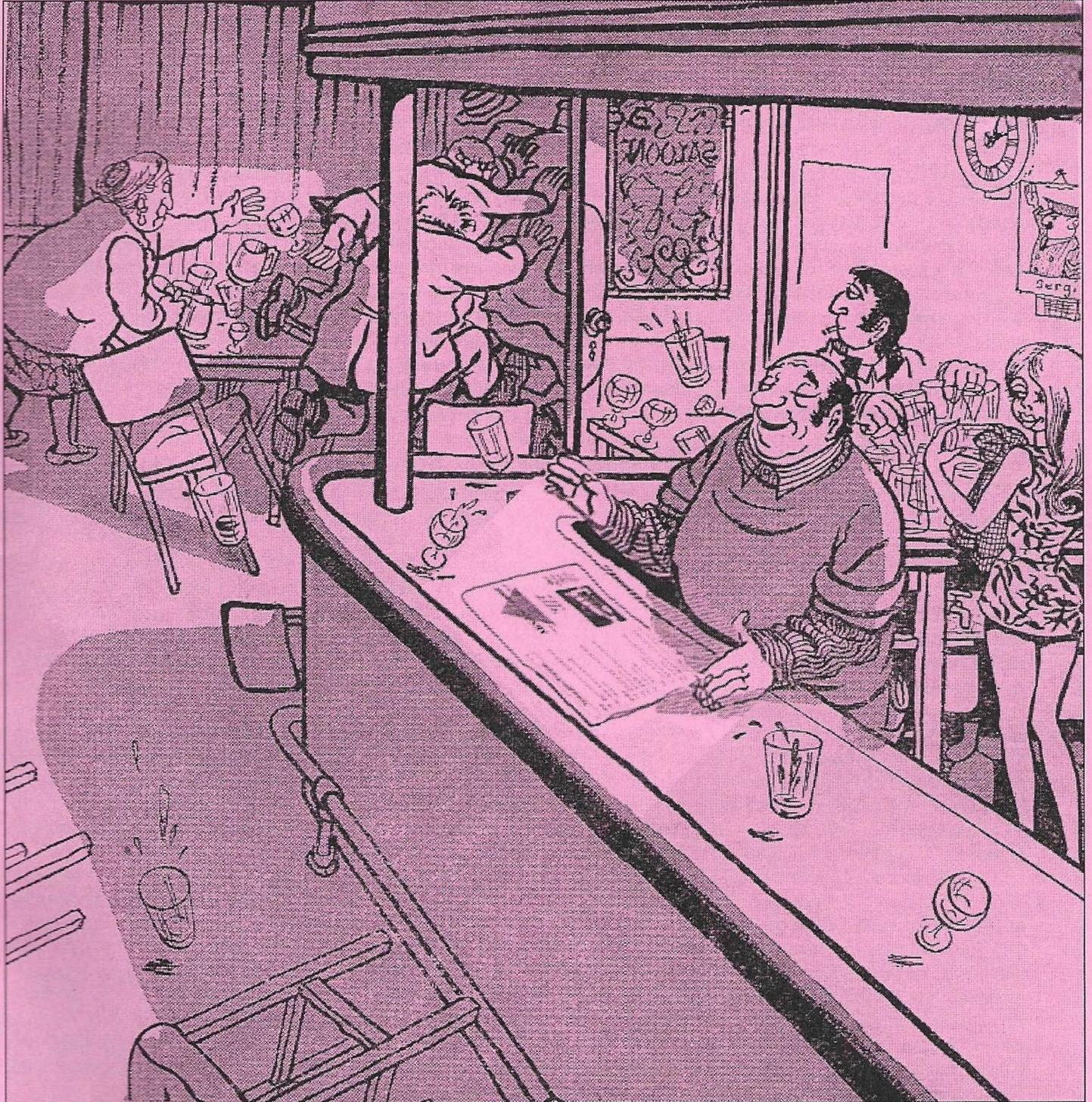


"Goshwowboyohboy, this must be the fannish Motherlode!" – Anders Holstrom, LoC



"I only said we had a science fiction convention starting this afternoon"

Burnham-on-Sea welcomes 'MiSdemeanour', February 1994

– With the usual apologies to 'Giles'

INSIDE: The MiSFiTs and the MiScons – feature with Ann Green, Martin Tudor, Catherine Pickersgill & Paul Vincent; 'The Invisible Fan' by Dan Morgan; 'Archie Mercer, the Neofan's friend' by Jim Linwood; and more.



PROLAPSE

This is *Prolapse* 10, produced in the strange far-future world of 2008 by Peter Weston, 53 Wyvern Road, Sutton Coldfield, B74 2PS. Not so much 'old stuff' this time, Lilian, because we've zipped back up to the present-day (well, 1994 anyway), but don't let this deter our more mature readers from sending LoCs and reminiscences to me at pr.weston@btinternet.com. To keep tradition alive this is a 'Paper First' fanzine, but I'll also send out a pdf on request, and the issue will go onto the *eFanzines* website a month after copies have been posted out. *Prolapse* travels the time-stream to explore the many aspects of British SF fan-history. Chief Researcher: Greg Pickersgill. Assistant Deputy Researcher (1st class): Mark Plummer.

"*Prolapse* is Fabulous Stuff; what you were intended to publish all along" – Bruce Gillespie, LoC

Mind you, in the old days stencils didn't blow-up in your face, not even 'Swallow' brand. The worst that could happen is when all the 'o's would fall out or you'd get a wrinkle or tear on the drum. But with this issue I've experienced what might be called a 'worst case' computer crash; a total catastrophic failure with no apparent cause. And frustratingly, it happened the evening I'd finished the entire issue, was just checking page-numbers before putting it onto disc and *wallop*, silently, without any fuss, the lights went out. From then onwards it was a tale of dashed hopes; first the man at the computer shop told me he could put my hard drive unit into his machine and copy my files from that, but it turned out to be blank. He ran a data-retrieval programme and produced 600 Mb of Word files – but the vast majority turned out to be corrupted and unreadable. So it was 'goodbye' old computer, 'so long' to my saved e-mails, and back to picking-up the pieces as best I could.

Fortunately I had transferred the raw material for this issue onto my laptop in early January, but the whole thing has had to be re-formatted, pictures, headings, the lot, and the 'Melting Pot' re-created in its entirety, even to the point of my having to ask people to re-send their e-mail LoCs. And this is the second time I've written this editorial. So all in all it's cost me two weeks and a great deal of frustration, and hammered home the message: 'back-up every night' – it can happen to you!

I said up there that we were keeping tradition alive – and what could be more old-time fannish than to start an issue with a tale of woe about repro. problems!

I was a bit disappointed with the response....

....to my Unified Grand Theory of British Fandom last time, which explained just about everything that happened in our microcosm during the 1950s. I said it was all about rivalry between the London fans and everyone else, overtly in the 'Bloody Provincials' clash between London & Manchester in 1953/54 but continuing more covertly as the decade progressed, driven by the unvoiced realisation that London fandom was slowly dying on its feet.

Well, I might be right and I might be wrong but no-one showed a lot of interest either way, which is a pity because I don't get chance to put forward ground-breaking theories every day of the week! So please let me know what you think. In the meantime I'd like to take it a bit further, picking up on my comment where I said that "the London Circle conspicuously failed to support the impromptu 1957 Kettering event, and the same thing happened with both the 1958 & 1959 Eastercons, all run entirely by 'provincials' with minimal participation by Londoners." The reality may simply be that by the late fifties *there were almost no Londoners left!*

Let's play with those numbers again. Back with the London Eastercon in 1952 Vinç Clarke's *SFN* listed 197 members by name and location, of whom 99 (50%) were 'local' with 20 'unknown'. Assuming 75% attendance, that gives a total figure of 150 present, of whom around 75 would be 'local' if the same percentage applied (probably an under-estimate since Londoners had shorter distances to travel). Contrast this with the 1960 convention in the capital, *after* the formation of the BSFA to boost fandom, which had just 93 attendees of whom (by my analysis) only 34 (36%) were locals (with a further 13 of uncertain location). Quite clearly, London fans had dwindled in numbers over the intervening years. And if you want to take it even further, my analysis shows that out of those 34, only 19 were 'old' Londoners, active before 1955.

There's a fair bit of supposition in there but I think it's supported by published accounts of the times. For instance, in *Orion* #21 there's a revealing article by Ken Bulmer (which I shall be running in a later issue), in which he said, "For most of 1958 we had talked about the disease attacking London SF enthusiasts", and went on to describe the way in which he and Ted Tubb had tried to rejuvenate the moribund London Circle. In a slightly later fanzine, *Fans & Ethics*, Vinç Clarke notes that the LC had managed to scrape-up 45 paid-up members in six months. This is in rough agreement with my estimates, especially when we understand that a good many in this total – possibly a majority – were 'new' London fans. people like Ella Parker, George Locke, Ted Forsyth, Jim Groves, Mike Moorcock and the secretary herself, Sandra Hall, all of whom had entered fandom only recently. So many of the old-timers – big names like Ken Chapman, Fred Brown, Wally Gillings, Frank Cooper, and so on, had quietly faded away, along with most of the 'professionals' – Bill Temple, Arthur Clarke, Sam Youd, John Wyndham, Peter Phillips, Bert Campbell, Syd Bounds etc, who had once enriched the London meetings.

As I wrote last time, the period 1959-60 is an absolute watershed that saw the end of the old era, the final collapse of the London Circle and Inchmery, and the rise of the SF Club of London and the 'Kingdon Road' crew. With a little luck and some digging by the Chief Researcher we'll be able to explore this transition more fully in the future.

More about St Fantony

Despite the hollow groaning noises uttering from a surprising number of *Prolapsers* I'll press ahead with a little more information about the Noble Order, following our conclusions last time that it was all really a bit of a joke – in Eric Bentcliffe's words 'A Grand Fannish Jape'. But while researching the article I was a bit frustrated at being unable to find any pictures from the St Fantony ceremony at *Loncon II* in 1965, even though I was sure someone, somewhere, must have taken photographs at the time. An appeal on the fannish e-lists produced no result other than fairly cold trails leading to Frank Dietz and Ben Jason, and even the U.S. Seneschal, Dave Kyle has kept his head firmly below the parapets.

Fortunately a call to another old pal, Tom Schlueck in Hanover, produced a result. Tom went through his old albums (something he has been promising to do for the last four years) and came up with nine precious images of Eric Jones and his Knights in action, showing the final evolution of their outfits in the eight years that had passed since the previous large-scale outing. Again, we'll have to leave these pictures for another issue, but in the meantime some unexpected light has been cast on another unanswered question from the previous issue; when exactly *was* the last British ceremony?

I said that my guess would be the 1974 *Tynecon* for which Keith Freeman and Stan Nuttall produced their 'History' and Eric Bentcliffe & Norman Shorrocks put out an impressive first issue of *Blazon*, the 'St Fantony fanzine'. Now, from the depths of my surviving correspondence file I've unearthed a 2003 e-mail from good old Rog Peyton, who wrote:

"I wondered why the two of us – and a select few others – were never inducted into St Fantony. Then I discovered the truth. A member of St Fantony broke silence and gave me some information about a meeting of the Knights back in the mid 70s, just a few hours after the meeting in question.

"Both our names were put forward and got a resounding approval, but one member, claiming to know us both very well, told the others we would not be interested, that we both thought St Fantony was not for us and that it would be better not to ask us. The rest of the St Fantony people took heed of that and our names were withdrawn. That person was Eddie Jones. I never spoke to Eddie about his thoughts, and in fact this message to you is the first time I've mentioned it to anyone (except Arline) since that evening. I can't remember which convention it was at – Chester? Newcastle? Certainly a 'northern' con. It was one of the very last inductions ever held if I remember correctly."

Why Eddie Jones should have believed that about Rog and I will forever remain a mystery but he was completely wrong – at the time we would have both been delighted to have been inducted into the Order. So did this meeting indeed take place at *Tynecon*? Was there a ceremony? Were any new Knights inducted? Surely someone must remember!

Goodbye, Ken Slater

While writing this editorial in a hotel room in Boston (for *Boskone*) I heard the news of Ken Slater's death on Saturday night, 16th February, just six weeks after his 90th birthday. Hastily scrapping whatever else I wanted to say, I'm going to turn the rest of this space into a short and inadequate tribute.

Let's put it into perspective, fans. This is a man who started reading science fiction before the term had even been invented. As Ken tells it, "When I was eight my grandfather was dying and I was shuffled off to various relatives and friends. The friends had children somewhat older than me, and among their reading material was a gynomous annual stuffed with stories. The one about exploring Mars – or maybe it was Venus – grabbed my attention." And so a fan was born, in early 1926 by my reckoning, coincidentally just about the same time as the birth of *Amazing Stories*.

By 1945 Captain Ken Slater was stationed at an army camp near Cambridge, guarding PoWs, and in his spare time he started writing to other SF fans and trading for hard-to-find books & magazines at a time when currency restrictions meant that you could not buy American publications. The first issue of his *Operation Fantast* newsletter appeared in 1947, which quickly grew into a 'Handbook' which told you everything you could possibly want to know about science fiction. By 1950 Ken had enrolled some 800 people, worldwide, in a massive trading and news operation, and as we all know, when he left the army in 1954 he turned his hobby into his business. Along the way Ken started one national SF organisation (the Science Fantasy Society in 1948) saved the BSFA from oblivion in 1967, ran the 1963 Eastercon and provided backing for a half-dozen more, sold books and magazines for over fifty years and generally devoted his life to the cause of science fiction.

Greg Pickersgill summed-up the first reactions so many of us felt on hearing the news:-

"You could say that without Ken Slater none of us in the UK would be fans at all, which might be a bit of a stretch but when you consider exactly how many things Ken was involved with from the 1940s onwards it's not that much of an exaggeration. It's definitely true that he had a huge influence on my own early life as an SF reader, and another one decades later when I really got to grips with a set of *Operation Fantast* and understood his importance beyond being merely – merely! – a bookseller. A few memories:-

"– I'm about sixteen, living almost as far from Wisbech as you can get and still be on the island, sending in a job application for a position at Fantast (Medway) Limited, after Ken mentioned in a catalogue that he needed staff. I actually got a polite refusal. Which was probably the best thing for everyone!

"– The first book I ever bought at a con was Dick's THE ZAP GUN, from Ken, at Buxton 1968. From a really small, cramped little sales table totally surrounded by fans. I still have that copy.

"– Being asked to give an appreciation of KFS in the book-room at the end of the 2005 worldcon, to mark his retirement from bookselling, and doing fairly well at it until the man himself spoke up and loudly insisted that he most definitely wasn't retiring and what was all this about anyway? I managed, I think, to turn it into a generalised tribute to Ken, but not without a certain amount of gear shifting and embarrassment all round.

"And apparently he still hadn't retired as of last week!"

I started buying books from Fantast (Medway) Ltd in the early part of 1963, after the legendary Cliff Teague gave me one of Ken's duplicated monthly lists. From then on I was a regular postal shopper, and met him at my first convention, *RePetercon* in 1964. He was slightly intimidating; "a big man with a penetrating stare and fierce eyebrows." (*Stars...*)

Just a few weeks ago I was privileged to be invited to celebrate Ken Slater's ninetieth birthday (on 27 December 2007). As ever, Ken's daughter Susie made the arrangements, and the event took place at a hotel near Downham Market (not the easiest place to get to on a Sunday). But using fannish ingenuity a good number of Ken's pals made the effort and joined family members for the big day, and I feel sure we are all so glad that we had this final opportunity to 'see him off' in style. Ken had a long life, a good life, he kept in touch with friends all over the world and above everything he had something in which he truly believed. We should all be so lucky.

On the following page you will see some photographs which Susie has kindly sent me to illustrate the life and times of Captain Kenneth F. Slater. Perhaps next time I will run the photo-page I had compiled from the birthday pictures.

Goodbye, Ken Slater, 1917-2008

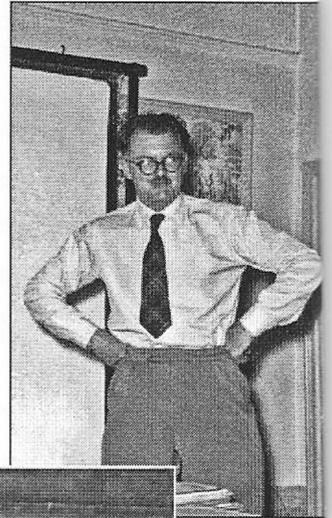


Above: Captain K.F. Slater, stationed at an Army camp near Cambridge in 1945-46.

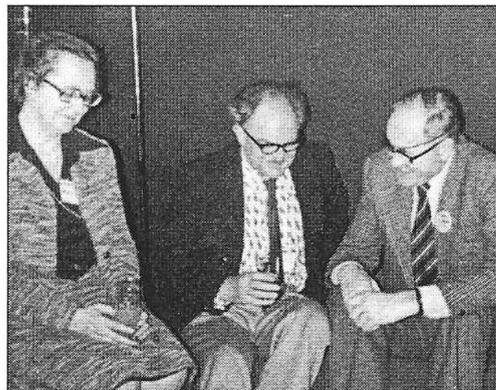
Below; with Joyce, who rashly came to one of the dances at the camp!
Right: with son Michael. 1952



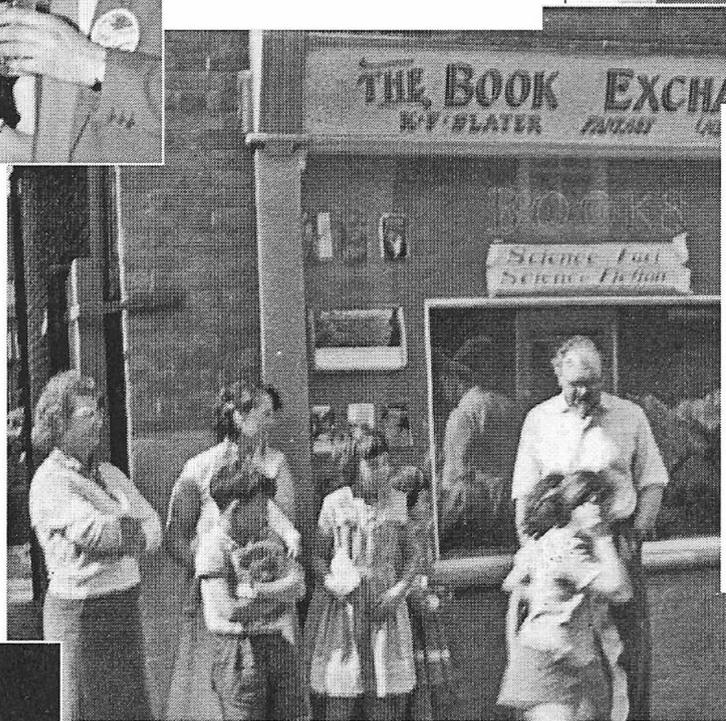
Right; at the 1957 London worldcon.



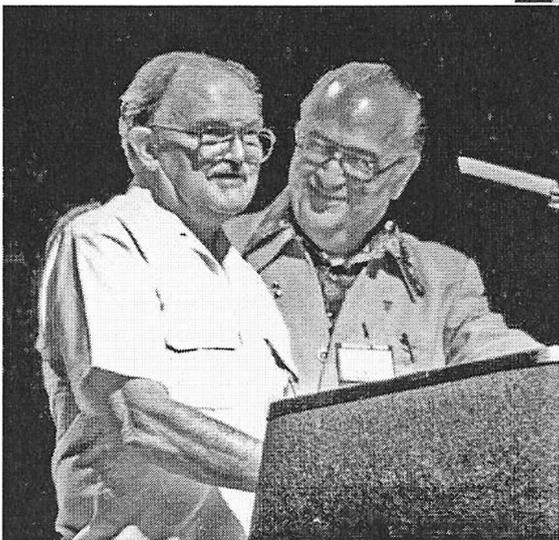
Left: Ken with goatee, as Chairman of the 1963 *Bullcon*, at room party with Joyce, Gill Adams & Phil Rogers, and Ian MacAulay at rear.



Above; With Joyce, and Jim White, at the *Glasgow Albacon*, 1980



Left: outside bookshop in Wisbech, around 1960, with Joyce, Ina Shorrock and her children Roy, Janet & Linda, and with young Susie Slater on the right.



Left: Forry Ackerman presents Ken with the 'Big Heart' Award at *Intersection*, 1995.



Right; Still selling books! With Ina Shorrock & Ron Bennett at *Intersection*, 2005



In the first issue of the revived *Prolapse* (#3) I wrote about the ‘Birmingham Renaissance’ of 1983, aimed at bringing new fanr-ish life to the BSFG, and went on to describe the subsequent ‘Counter-Reformation’ after the sercons regained control of the group. Unfortunately, about this time I was called away to run a door-handle factory but the spirit of trufandom smouldered on in the Midlands, bursting into full flame in the early nineties when, as Martin describes, the ringleaders tore-up the Rule Book and organised the successful *MiScon* series of conventions. It’s taken a while to get this piece out of Martin; please ignore the bloodstains on his picture! (pw)

Let’s run a convention!

By Martin Tudor

Illos by Dave Hicks

Original design for the MiSFITs badge, by Steve Green. His photo (colour)



In the March 1984 edition of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group’s monthly *Newsletter* the following curious entries appeared, without explanation, in the ‘Births & Deaths’ column:

Deaths: It was a long time ago in a bar far, far away, Solihull actually. Amid a mob of disharmonious drunks a weird chemical reaction was taking place, stranger even than life’s first bubble in the primeval (no I’m not talking about the first course at the Christmas Party...) Thus came the Solihull Group, and now – three years, 13 fanzines and innumerable hangovers later, I emerge to record its death. No, I’m not crying... it’s just that Paul Vincent’s poked me in the eye to hijack the spotlight...

Births: ... and lo, even as the last spark died in the glowing embers of the SSFG funeral pyre, something stirred. Something glistening, mewling. A babe, born from the settling ashes. It emits its first words – “Gimme a drink!” Ah, truly a misfit born. As befits the birth of this grimy poor man’s phoenix, the Christening will be a splendid affair – a celebration of the child’s first words. His acolytes intone the ritual rejoinder: “Be there or be Square”.

The following pages of the newsletter were a bit more informative, featuring, as they did, a two-page Cath Easthope comic strip which depicted the destruction of the ‘General Wolfe’ public house by a nuclear explosion while a tableful of misfits continued drinking – the banner headline read “NOTHING stops a MiSFITs meeting!” Beneath the headline interested parties were urged to attend the first meeting at the ‘General Wolfe’ on Friday 30th of March 1984.

But for the true birth of the MiSFITs we have to go back to a ‘meeting’ of the ‘BSFG’s Informal, Informal’ in February of 1984, where Paul Vincent and Martin Tudor were sitting, alone, in the ‘General Wolfe’ bemoaning the apathy of other Brum Group members. This was to be the last of either of the two monthly ‘informal’ group meetings; yet another casualty of BSFG indifference. (Along with summer outings, theatre trips, APA-B, the BSFG fanzine, the annual float in the Lord Mayor’s Procession, beer and skittle nights and anything else that involved the participants doing anything other than sit vacantly in the audience listening to the latest big name guest speaker...)

Bored with dropping (increasingly obvious) hints that his glass was empty and had been for some minutes now, Tudor declared that what was needed was a totally new SF group, independent of the BSFG, totally informal, meeting on a more convenient night in order to attract fans from elsewhere in the country. It needed to have a name which covered the widest possible geographical catchment area. The meetings needed to be held in a central location, easily accessible by all forms of public transport, a place which was cosy and comfortable, but didn’t become over-crowded. “In fact,” he said, “this place would be perfect, it has good beer and lots of room and as it’s located in the Aston Arts Triangle the group could be called the Triangle... that’ll make it stand out from all those Groups, Clubs, Societies and the London SF Circle. As the Midlands used to be the centre of the old kingdom of Mercia we could call it the ‘Mercian Science Fiction Triangle!’”

“Oh...” said Vincent, “is it my round?”

Having refreshed their respective centres of creativity, the two settled down to formulate the structure (or lack thereof) of the new group. The last king of Mercia was Egbert, so they decided that Vincent would be the Chief Big Egg, with Tudor as Deputy Chief Big Egg and, to complete the triangle, Steve Green would continue in his role as ‘Fandom’s Favourite Fan’ (copyright Alan Dorey, 1984). The meetings would be held on the last Friday of each month (thus avoiding clashes with the One Tun and BSFG formal meetings) in the ‘General Wolfe’. There would be no guest speakers, no formal meetings; the purpose would purely be to get-together and have a good time – in the same way as did the late-lamented Solihull SF Group. (The SSFG had died because of the inconvenient distance most of its active members had to travel to get to the meetings). There would be no committee meetings and no democratic crap here. Any decisions would be made by the ruling triumvirate or whichever of them was sober enough to make a decision (this move successfully disenfranchised Mr Green for many years).

The MiSFITs proved a great success, with anything from 10 to 20 people turning up for each meeting, until late 1986 when a combination of factors interrupted its run. The first blow came with the decision of Birmingham City Council and Aston University to demolish the 'General Wolfe' to make room for a much needed grass verge. The second (and more destructive) factor was the in-group fighting and feuding which broke out between many of the earlier members and the subsequent partition of the Chief Big Egg. (These events may well be detailed in a future *Prolapse*, but they involve the strip-o-gram for Rob Holdstock at *Novacon 14* and the Concrete Overcoat Award ("CUFF") to *Novacon 15*'s chairman Phil Probert...) limped along for a few more months, attended only occasionally by more than one of the original triumvirate, before folding completely.



The young Tony Berry, in the early eighties.
Photo by John Harvey

Early in 1987, when the dust and acrimony surrounding the earlier MiSFITs had died down and most of the more troublesome elements had moved on, Martin Tudor and Steve Green, having found another perfect venue – the 'Lamp Tavern' – re-launched the group, on an invitation-only basis. A year or so later, Green's attendance having become increasingly irregular, with William McCabe having been barred for having thrown up dramatically into a pint glass and in several other places, and with the 'Lamp' becoming seriously over-crowded, Tudor decided to move the meetings to another, more convenient (for him) venue, the 'Old Smithy' on Winson Green Road.

Tudor and Vincent had originally launched the MiSFITs with heady aims such as emulating the Void Boys and Irish Fandom (having had their heads filled with such stuff by Pete Weston, who loaned them his fanzine collection). But things didn't really come together until some years after Vincent had gaffiated, when Tudor's house at 121 Cape Hill (affectionately known as the 'Gestemmer Graveyard' due to the large number of duplicators which collapsed and died there) inadvertently turned into a 'Slan Shack'.

Having been sacked by the Post Office, Tudor had been forced to take in more lodgers to pay the mortgage, eventually ending up with Tony Berry, Helena Bowles and Richard Standage. All fans, all MiSFITs, it was no wonder the mythologising continued apace, with them all attending and/or working on *Novacon* and other con committees, hosting various con-com and BSFG committee meetings at the house, attending monthly BSFG meetings, monthly MiSFITs meetings, hosting numerous collation sessions at the house and, of course, popping down the pub together in between... And producing *Empties*, *Eyeballs in the Sky*, *Critical Wave*, *Brum Group News*, along with numerous apazines, fanzines and Progress Reports.

It was inevitable really that the conversation would constantly return to the possibility of hosting a MiSFITs convention. But, given their very particular demands, it seemed unlikely they would ever find a suitable venue:

- a small hotel sleeping around 40 (but no more than 60)
- serving several real ales as standard
- serving cheap "bar food" as standard
- one good sized (50-100 theatre style) function room
- a pool table, a dart board, etc - for tournaments

Who could imagine that they would eventually discover a venue that met all those criteria as well as having its own brewery on site and its own skittle alley! But that came later...

The MiSFITs continued to flourish at the 'Old Smithy' until, in 1989, Tudor moved to London, passing the mantle of Deputy Chief Big Egg to Tony Berry. The MiSFITs stumbled along for a few months more at the 'Old Smithy' before Berry unilaterally decided to move to a new venue – the 'Wagon and Horses' in Oldbury (as more and more MiSFITs were looking for food of an evening as well as beer). This venue had the added bonus of supplying a large and varied menu of excellent food, in addition to an even wider variety of truly excellent real ale. By now meetings had changed to the second Friday of the month and, for the most part, were well attended with at times 20 to 30 people turning up (at others just four...).

Since the demise of the *Silicons* (and more recently *Rubicon*) Berry had become steadily more determined to find a small, comfortable hotel which served real ale, in order to run a *Silicon*-style convention. This idea tied-in nicely with the plan for a MiSFITs con, but having scoured the Midlands in vain, his dream seemed destined to remain a subject of wistful discussion in the 'Wagon'.

Then in May of 1993, Tudor (who had now returned to the Midlands from London), Richard Standage and Helena Bowles, were conducting a 'Good Beer Guide' directed tour of Somerset and parts south-west, and stumbled across the 'Royal Clarence Hotel' in Burnham-on-Sea (so named because like Southend it isn't on the coast). They paused a day longer than they intended – just to make sure of the quality of the beer – then rushed back to Oldbury to inform Berry of their discovery, and *MiSdemeanour* was born...

Having been talking about the possibility of such a con for nearly 10 years the quartet of Berry, Bowles, Standage and Tudor had a fairly clear idea of how they wanted to run this 'relaxacon'. First and foremost they wanted a central theme or hook to hang the convention around, so that the con would have a clear identity of its own. Unanimously the quartet agreed on the 'Trial and Execution of Steven John Green', an event which would allow them to solicit participation from the con members in the form of evidence for and against the accused.

The defendant stood accused of the following specific charges:

- Leading a young and impressionable fan, one Martin Tudor, astray by plying him with drink and, having succeeded in inducing an unaccustomed state of inebriation in that fan, convincing him to produce a bi-monthly newszine, which has destroyed that fan's health, drained his pocket and cost him his job.

- Luring one Bernadette Evans into fandom and thereby turning a previously solicitous, dedicated and conscientious housewife and mother into a conrunning, workaholic fiend.
- Introducing one Simon Ounsley to fandom and on to the downhill path which led to the boy becoming a shadow of his former self.
- Introducing Lilian Edwards to fandom which has resulted in the bankruptcy of innumerable fans as they sought to meet her insatiable demands for refreshments when cornered at convention bars.
- Wearing a silly hair style and beard which has caused undue offence to fans too numerous to mention, but in particular, style-guru Dave Holmes.
- Being unable to imbibe three or four Hosepipes (bottle of Guinness, large brandy and bottle of barley wine) without causing undue destruction. In the incident in question the Accused threw a certain fan through the front door of Martin Tudor's mother's house. (It was closed at the time.)

In addition to the above the defendant also stands accused of such general charges as:

- Pomposity unbecoming a fan (other than Tim Illingworth).
- An inability to open his oracular orifice without inserting a certain pedular appendage.
- Blatant sexism.
- Overt political correctness.
- An inability to imbibe alcohol without endangering nearby empty shoes.

(An excerpt from 'Fandom versus Steve John Green: Notes for the Jury', published for *MiSdemeanour*, February 1994. In addition Green stood accused of numerous charges specified in a number of "sworn statements from his alleged victims" which were also reproduced.)

This item would be the central programme item on Saturday afternoon and once Green was found guilty (you didn't really think there was any chance he'd get off?) he could be executed by Birmingham's own Ray Bradbury (a member of the Magic Circle). But the key to the quartet's vision of a *MiScon* was 'participation'. In order to achieve this they decided:

- It had to be invitation only, restricted to 60 people, so that everyone had time to get to know (or at least chat with) everyone else (unfortunately this rule was relaxed for the third con, which caused problems, more of which later).
- People were automatically entered for all the tournaments – they had to complete a form to opt out. (With the appropriate of loss of face if they did so.)
- Attendance at all programme items was compulsory/expected, (with appropriate of loss of face if they didn't show).
- It had to be based on *Silicon*-style "fun-engineering" (setting up the right people, in the right situations, but allowing flexibility).
- The key note programme item (the Trial) would be deliberately unscripted to allow for inventive improvisation.
- The Programme was as Berry declared, to 'start at the crack of noon', with long breaks to be scheduled between programme items to allow people time to participate in all the tournaments which were to be policed by Stephen Tudor and his team of enforcers!
- Borrowing from the *Mexicons*, wherever possible, the audience to be seated around tables facing the stage (cabaret-style, rather than theatre-style) to encourage relaxed participation, with those on 'stage' also seated comfortably.

Crucial to their idea of a *MiSFITs*-style relaxacon was the quartet's decision to limit the amount of work by the committee. To this end progress reports were minimal and the con book was merely a collection of photocopied "sworn statements" from (Green's) alleged victims. This had the added advantage of allowing the committee to keep the membership price exceptionally low. Also, wherever possible, the programme was delegated to others – with the Sheffield SF Group enlisted to organise the Silly Game, Dave Cox the Pub Quiz, Paul Kincaid and Maureen Speller the Serious SF Item, Greg Pickersgill to host the debate/forum and Martin Tudor's youngest brother Stephen being roped-in to run the Tournaments.

The *MiSdemeanour* Programme was sparse but eventful:

Friday

- 9.00pm 'Hello from Us', followed by Dave Cox's 'Great Audience Participation SF Quiz'.
 11.30pm Fandurance – silly game hosted by the Sheffield Group.
 Followed by videos.

Saturday

- 12noon 'There is no point reading SF any more' a discussion with Paul Kincaid and Maureen Speller.
 2.30pm The Trial of Steve Green.
 6.30pm 'Crystal Balls' - a slimmed-down (honest) version of the game from *Novacon 23*.
 9.00pm The Skittles Tournament
 Followed by yet more videos.

Sunday

- 12noon Tony Berry's Famous Film Quiz.
 2.30pm Fannish Forum – Greg Pickersgill hosts a discussion on a weighty topic.
 5.00pm Presentation of Prizes.
 6.00pm Charades – an old favourite for those in a party mood. Presented by Helena Bowles
 Followed by some solid drinking, and maybe more videos, or perhaps a people's disco.

All in all *MiSdemeanour* worked very well, and highlights included the debut as a policeman in the Trial by Adam Clarke, the young son of Solihull's own infamous Kev Clarke (co-creator of the Concrete Overcoat Fan Fund and accomplice of Green's on many a stomach-churning silly game at *Novacon*); Pete Weston, appearing for the defence, declaring of Steve

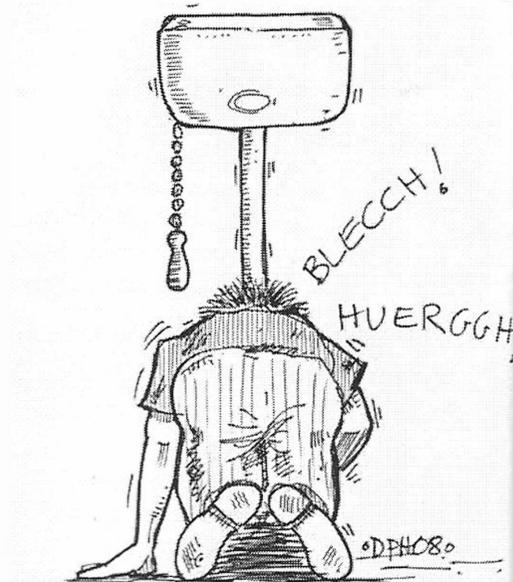
Green "He means well he's never done me no harm!"; Steve, following his execution, sticking an "H" on his head (*a la* 'Red Dwarf') and being refused service at the hotel's bar, "Sorry sir, we don't serve Holograms here!".

There was also the titanic battle of wills (and strength) in the pool match between Catherine McAulay and Eileen Weston (look if you can't pot your ball you just move the table, any fool knows that...). But the main highlight of the con was not just dragging Dave Hicks out of semi-gafiation but also inspiring him to start producing artwork and pubbing his ish again!

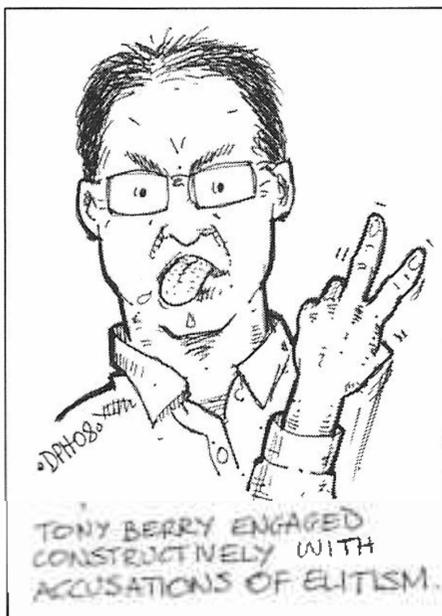
Flushed with the success of the first *MiScon* in 1994, Berry, Bowles, Standage and Tudor organised a second in 1995, *MiSconstrued*, which followed the popular Trial and Execution of Steve Green with the far more controversial Canonisation of Greg Pickersgill.

Around the same time, early in 1995, the *MiSFITs*' regular monthly venue was changed from the 'Wagon' to the 'Bellefield Inn' on Winson Street in Smethwick. The move was forced on the *MiSFITs* because of the increasing popularity of (and lack of room in) the 'Wagon'. Unfortunately the new venue, (although ideal in many ways – good cheap food, good beer and loads of room), was plagued with problems.

First, due to the perversity of the Birmingham Magistrates there were endless problems with the renewal of its licence – which forced it to remain closed throughout most of the summer. When it finally reopened the licensee, in a misguided attempt to attract lost custom, installed an allegedly 'live', Brummie Country & Western singer on Friday nights (seemed half-dead to us!). The *MiSFITs* swiftly retreated to the over-crowded (but comparatively) quieter 'Wagon'.



"...MAIN HIGHLIGHT WAS DRAGGING DAVE HICKS OUT OF SEMI-GAFIATION..."



Although *MiSdemeanour* had been a great success as far as those who had organised and attended it were concerned, it did attract the expected accusations of elitism because of the 'invitation only' policy. But this was swiftly addressed by Berry, in his customary diplomatic manner, in the first PR for *MiSconstrued*:

'Once again, this con is invitation-only. Some people have accused us of elitism because of this, but, despite it being the wrong word to use (there's nothing particularly elite about us!) part of Fun Engineering is picking the right bunch of people to go to the party. Size is another factor; when the con has only 50 or 60 members in a relatively small space they need to be like-minded, if you see what I mean. Why am I droning on trying to justify all this? Damned if I know. Look, if you don't get invited it's because we hate your guts, okay?'

Again the quartet invited participation from members for the key note item of the 'Canonisation of the Blessed Gregory Pickersgill', by explaining the Canonisation Process in the Progress Reports and inviting witnesses to testify of Miracles, while the Devil's Advocate requested testimony from those who felt the Blessed Gregory was unfit for sainthood. The Papal Inquiry proved a popular event with stunning performances from Mike Siddall as the Devil's Advocate (with a posing pouch that will never be forgotten) and Pope Chris Murphy (with his teddy bear...).

With this second *MiScon*, however, one of the prime ideas of the originators had already begun to slip with the committee being forced to produce extra programme items themselves, with Berry writing and presenting the Quiz and Bowles and Standage having to organise and run the Silly Games item. (The latter of these was to have the unfortunate side effect of Standage and Bowles annoying Eileen Weston, who held a grudge against Mr Berry for many years after... He having made the mistake of trying to act as peacemaker, not a role he is best-suited to...)



Steve, Martin, & Lucy Huntzinger take a stroll in Birmingham in 1984. (Photo origin unknown)

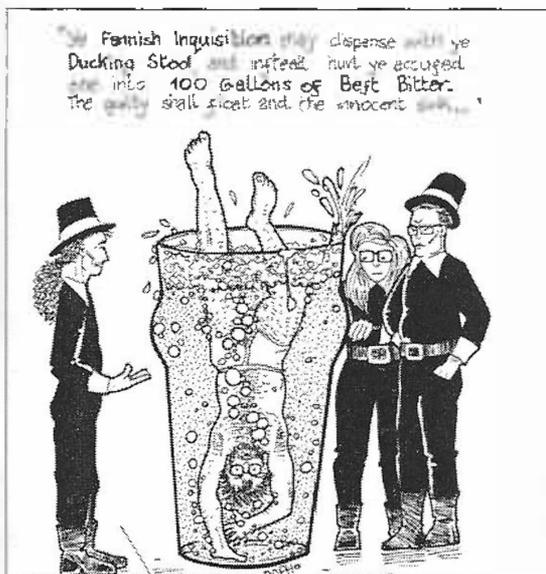
Originally the *MiSFITs* were going to take a year off from con-running in 1996, as *Attitude: the Convention* was scheduled for the same February slot. But as *Attitude's* con hotel deal fell through the *MiSFITs* agreed to step into the gap with *MiS-saigon* and the 'Witch Trial of Martin Joseph Tudor'.

By now the reputation of the *MiScons* had spread and take-up was fast, the committee were soon in the unenviable position of splitting up a couple (Pat & Vernon Brown) if they stuck rigidly to their previous membership ceiling of 60, not to mention excluding half their programme participants who hadn't registered in time! So they were forced to extend the membership to 77. Due to the number of new faces the committee published 'A Beginners Guide to *MiS-saigon*' in PR#2:

'Arrive at Royal Clarence Hotel, Burnham-on-Sea (so named because like Southend it isn't) – enter Hotel from front entrance via the forecourt car park, turn left into bar, buy a committee member and yourself a drink (each), relax, chat. Eventually decide you should register with the hotel where you are staying. If this is the Clarence exit the bar the way you came in, turn right and report to Hotel Reception. If you are staying elsewhere consult your map of Burnham, buy a committee member and yourself a drink (each) and sip yours while you plan your best route – you'll have to drink quickly though, as there aren't many choices of routes in Burnham: a 15 minute brisk walk will take you from one end of the town to the other.

'Having dropped your luggage off and returned to the bar from your hotel room buy a committee member and yourself a drink (each) and try to summon the energy to collect your badge from the convention table. Relax, chat, buy a committee member and yourself another drink (each). Decide you had better collect your badge, exit the bar the way you entered walk straight ahead and discover another, smaller, bar. Buy a committee member and yourself another drink (each) and wander over to the glass doors at the far side of the bar, open the glass doors and enter the Programme Room, collect your badge and programme from the table and return to the bar, buy a committee member and yourself another drink (each).

'Return to the larger bar and walk to the far side, turn left and check the tournament notices to see who you should be playing. Apologise to



Trial by Submersion – but what if he drinks it?

The second progress report for *MiS-saigon* announced that 'the current management' of *MiScon* were stepping down after this, the third, *MiScon* as they unanimously agreed that to run a fourth *MiScon* themselves would be a mistake. However, the series of conventions would resume from February 1998 under new management. Alas this was not to be – as the 'new blood' were side-tracked by other interests...

But during the course of researching material for this article the old quartet, having chatted at length about *MiScons* amongst themselves and with attendees from the cons, and having read through all the old publications and watched Dave Cox's videos of the second and third, have become enthusiastic all over again. The monthly *MiSFiTs* meetings been re-launched with a few new young members – namely Maggie and Danny Standage Bowles and Heloise Tudor – 'MiSFiTs: The New Generation!' At both the new monthly meetings and at rain-drenched summer barbecues conversations have often turned to the possibility of a fourth *MiScon*, over 10 years on.

Never say never again, and of course if there was a fourth *MiScon*, there is only one possible name for it – the committee had always said that if they did a fourth *MiScon* it would be a *MiStake*...

- Martin Tudor, 2008

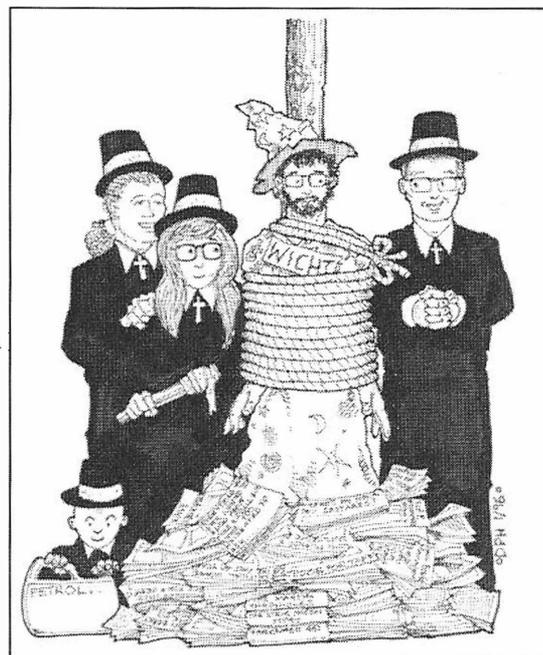


The Arrest of Martin Tudor on suspicion of witchcraft (wonder how they knew?).

Stephen Tudor for being late and buy him, your opponent and yourself a drink (each). Play your game(s). Read your programme. Discover you just have time to buy a committee member and yourself a drink(each) before the first programme item. Take part in programme; buy a committee member and yourself another drink(each); chat; drink; play pool/darts/skittles; drink. Repeat process throughout the weekend, pausing only to order some of the wonderful, cheap food from the bar (menus state the times the food is available)and, even more occasionally, to sleep. Have fun.'

Unfortunately it was found that the increased number of attendees at the con diluted the atmosphere, causing a fragmentation which hadn't been present at the first two *MiScons*. People split off into their usual con-cliques instead of mixing, as they had at the first two

But *MiS-saigon* was by no means a disaster, merely the weakest of the three. Highlights including Dave Hicks' magnificent cover illustrations on the progress reports, which were reprinted on the cover of the 'Trial Notes'; Maureen Kincaid Speller trying to interrogate Pete Weston while he scooted around the hall on 'the comfy chair'; Helena Bowles causing bruises and complaints from witnesses as she over-enthusiastically beat them with her 'soft' cushions, and so on.



The Burning; "Um.. Martin, old pal.. we forgot the matches and seeing as you're the only smoker I was wondering if you could spare a light..."

My thanks to Chris Murphy & John Harvey for video recordings of the second two *MiScons*, sadly too dark to reproduce well in this format (pw).



Ann in 1992. Her photo

Back in 1994 I was clinging onto fandom by my fingernails, getting increasingly disenchanted with conventions which seemed to be growing steadily bigger but at the same time less involving. So for me the *MiScons* were a revelation – less than fifty people confined in one room for the weekend, forced to drink local beer (the ‘Old Slug’ porter was particularly efficacious) and to *talk* to one another. Well, that’s what it’s all about really, isn’t it? Many new friendships were made and old ones renewed at this nineties equivalent of those intimate Kettering conventions. Ann Green’s previously-unpublished account was written at the time for her fanzine *Ormolu*, with contemporary details from Catherine Pickersgill’s report in *Attitude* #1 and new material from Paul Vincent. (pw)

‘MiSdemeanour – The best damn relaxacon I’ve been to for years’

By Ann Green

(with interjections by Catherine
Pickersgill & Paul Vincent)

Illos by Dave Hicks



FRIDAY

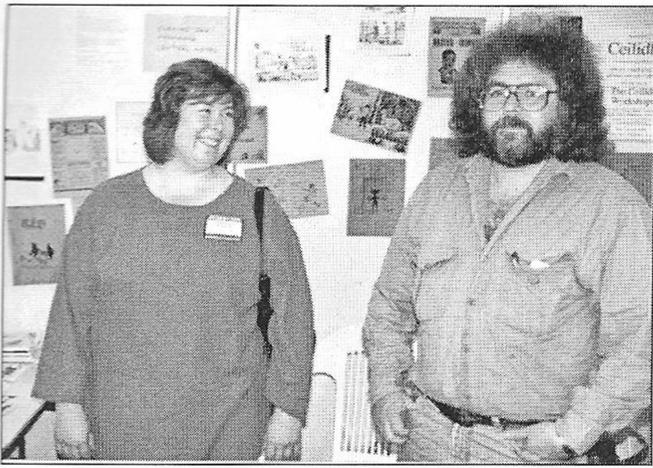
Ann: I’ve always had a soft spot for the seaside in winter; most of the really tacky tourist venues have shut up shop and the place can get back to being just another town which just happens to have a lot of water in front of it. I get the impression that Burnham-on-Sea is like that all year round. And yet somehow this sleepy little Somerset town played host to the best damn relaxacon I’ve been to for years.

The weekend started on just the right note with a long overdue reunion with Paul Vincent; we’ve been friends for more than ten years but we hadn’t seen each other for a huge chunk of that. Paul had taken us up on our offer of a lift to the con and when he arrived at our house we fell into conversation as if we’d only seen each other last week. He even pretended not to mind when he was subjected to our two dogs screeching in his ear as we drove them to the kennel on the way to the motorway.

Two hours later we pulled up on the forecourt of the Royal Clarence Hotel which, given the number of club and society plaques on the wall, formed the cultural hub of the town. For weeks Martin Tudor had rattled on about how good this place was: great food, great beer, great venue for a small convention etc. It didn’t take long for us to realise that he hadn’t been telling any porkies – this was the place all good fans go to when they die! The manager was obviously glad of some off-season custom, and the staff went out of their way throughout the whole weekend to ensure we were as comfortable as possible. The main bar area was cosy with large tables and plenty of seating, and the bar itself was stocked to the gills with more real ales than you could shake a stick at. Even better, the beer prices were positively pre-war – (pre-Falkland war I’ll grant you), but when did you last get a pint of really decent ale for £1?

Catherine: I love arriving at a convention hotel. The anticipation builds as I park the car, take the bags to the room, and descend to the bar. Who will be there? Oh boy, where’s that first drink! And the First Fan this time is John Dallman. We meet him just outside the hotel. He’s off round the corner, carrying his bag Like Little Orphan Annie. Is he expelled, and so soon? No, he’s off to the overflow. So we get booked in, and head off to our room. The landlord looks very serious, really quite fierce. He escorts us up a flight of stairs, along a glass-walled corridor that shows all the stars of the heavens beaming down on us, and the constellations of South Wales sparkling across the Bristol Channel. Up another flight of stairs, and realise that the landlord is of the jolly school, and that looking fierce is a local custom. We unpack quickly, brush our hair and wash our hands as we were taught, phone home to check on Greg’s Pa, and descend to the bar. And who do I see but Dave Langford and bless you Dave, mine’s a pint.

Ann: We joined Martin and Tony Berry to begin depleting the hotel’s beer supplies. There’s nothing like a drink unwind after a motorway journey: however uneventful the trip I will always be of the opinion that any machine capable of reaching seventy miles per hour is the work of the devil, especially on motorways where ‘cavalier’ refers less to a make of car than to the attitude of too many drivers. The group grew with the addition of Bernie Evans, Maureen Speller, and Paul Kincaid; all of whom seemed to share the same burning desire to relax and get down to some serious hedonism. The conversation turned to the impending Trial of Steve Green for his crimes against fandom, when Martin went to fetch some collated copies of the evidence – all fourteen pages of it!



Catherine & Greg the way they were – actually, at the 1995 *Intersection* worldcon. Photo from Greg.

In keeping with the best traditions of British justice the executioner had already been booked, even though somebody opined that Steve may be misguided but he wasn't really evil. From there and probably via tales of Steve doing strange things into peoples' shoes, we got onto the subject of staying with fans and what their houses were like. Maureen said that she'd been rather unnerved on waking up at the Pickersgills' to find herself scrutinised by one of their cats peering down from the top of the wardrobe. It was generally agreed that this was infinitely preferable to leaving the arms of Morpheus only to find Greg peering down on you from a piece of furniture.

Soon John and Eve Harvey turned up. Never having had much to do with them before I found them to be excellent company – but this was the tone throughout *Misdemeanour*, everyone was determined to have a good time and I think they probably succeeded. Maybe it was the atmosphere or the size of the con or even the cheap beer, whatever it was that made this convention work so well, if you could bottle it you'd make a fortune!

Paul: I was rather apprehensive as I entered the Royal Clarence Hotel. It had been a long time since I'd seen the faces attached to the many familiar names on the membership list. As far as I knew, those who remembered me at all would know me as the jerk who'd quit fandom immediately after the notorious Holdstock stripper-gram incident at the *Novacon 14* closing ceremony (there was actually no causal link between these two events). I'd sent Martin Tudor a rather snotty letter full of truth-obscuring justifications for my gafiation, which he'd printed in *Empties*, and I must admit even I hadn't liked the sound of the person who'd written that loc...

...yet there I sat, a couple of hours later, happily chatting to the Kincaid-Spellers about 'The Softback Preview', M.R. James, and whatever other topics came to mind. Names like Langford and Weston were happily reattached to faces. I drank another pint of the Clarence's excellent homebrew, steadily but slowly. I drank them all steadily but slowly, honest guv. A happy blur ensued. Followed by my latest bedtime in years. Whoops! A bit out of practice. Skip onwards to Saturday.

Catherine: I think there were about fifty people present over the weekend, and most of us were staying in the Royal Clarence Hotel. There's a large bar that leads into a games area, with a couple of pool tables and a dartboard. Everyone had been entered in the pool tournament, which gave me a considerable shock. In fact the programme was designed so that most items involved everybody, and this, I'm sure, was one of the things that made it all trot along so well. The

programme room was an enormous hall reached through a second bar. It had a central dance floor, which we didn't use for dancing, with tables and chairs set around the edge. It's much more enjoyable sitting around a table with your mates during a programme item, and the beer doesn't get kicked over. Leading off the hall was a skittle alley, which I didn't get to see, and still regret missing.

I have been going to conventions since 1980, and one of the great joys of *Misdemeanour* that will distinguish it forever in my mind, is all the Firsts it had for me. For instance, on Friday evening there was a quiz, and everyone, including me, was included (first First — do something at a con). The table I was on won (second First — go home with a little plastic trophy from a con. Pity it wasn't a bottle of wine). I found my long-lost twin that night; had Ann Green and I not bought our jumpers at the same shop we would never have recognised each other, and my life would have been greatly diminished.

Ann: The programme began with an audience-participation SF quiz in which groups of four (you might have needed to use the fingers of both hands to count some of the quartets, but no matter) wrote down the answers to the questions and then, as in school, passed them to another group to have them marked. It did me no harm whatsoever to be sitting at a table with Greg Pickersgill and Julian Headlong (plus Steve and Paul Vincent), as I think there were only about two answers that only I knew, and out of the whole set of questions I might have scraped about a quarter of the answers together on my own. However I didn't let reality get in the way of a good gloat when we eventually won, beating the pants off Pete Weston and Vernon Brown's table to boot.

Next up was a silly game between two teams, The Red Devils and the Green Yuccas. No prizes for guessing which team Steve and I were on – and no prizes for us either, as we lost this time. I don't think that the organisers of the game were altogether pleased with the way that the game worked out: maybe they were expecting something more frantic and silly, but I think that most people were too well-oiled to be too critical by this time anyway. At this point Friday fades out into a pleasant fug of alcohol and gossip and I think I crawled into bed around one-ish.

SATURDAY

Ann: After a good breakfast of cholesterol in most of its better forms we decided to brave the sea air and go for a walk along the esplanade. The morning was bright and cold, and Wales was a lilac ribbon between the estuary and the sky. I was mildly surprised to see that the beach was of ordinary sand, unlike Weston-Super-Mare a few miles up the coast of which I have childhood memories involving hordes of small children covered in mud from head to foot, like skinny white pigs with beach toys. Steve and I parted company with our co-walkers when they turned go down the slipway to the waters' edge, I had no desire to wreck my favourite black suede boots by getting sand or seawater on them, so we stood and watched them toddle off into the distance before crossing the road to the town centre.

To be honest the town wasn't a disappointment because I hadn't been expecting an awful lot from it. There was the statutory large supermarket built on the edge of town like an afterthought, a couple of pubs, a restaurant or two, and about six or seven shoe shops – do the locals have a Pam Wellsian shoe fetish, or is public transport crap in Burnham? There was a hippy shop which smelt seductively of incense and essential oils, where I bought a leather bracelet. I'd have bought a pair of purple and black boots with dolphins on them too, if they'd had any in a size six.

Catherine: On Saturday Greg and I went out to investigate Burnham-on-Sea, or more accurately to find the Post Office and post the latest *Rastus Johnson*. This boy is so keen. Burnham-on-Sea – it sounds quaint and old-fashioned, doesn't it? Rather like a quiet version of the Scarborough you'd imagine from the British Rail poster of a jolly old sailor. And it is indeed quiet. I bought an ice-cream in a little shop run by a gentleman-shopkeeper wearing a dust-coat. When did you last see a dust-coat? If I didn't waste my time reading old detective stories I wouldn't have even known what it was.

It's a pretty little town, with one main street and a promenade overlooking a wide beach and it gazes gently across the water at Barry Island. Along the sea front there are flat-roofed semi-detached houses with crenellated towers, and there is a little park with a wall around it to keep the salt-spray from the flowerbeds; nothing as lively as a bowling green and certainly no kiosks or Kiss-Me-Quick hats. There is a small arcade on the promenade, closed as we are out of season, with the remarkable message 'No punks or skinheads allowed inside' on the window. They had undoubtedly heard of them on the new-fangled television service and decided to take no chances.

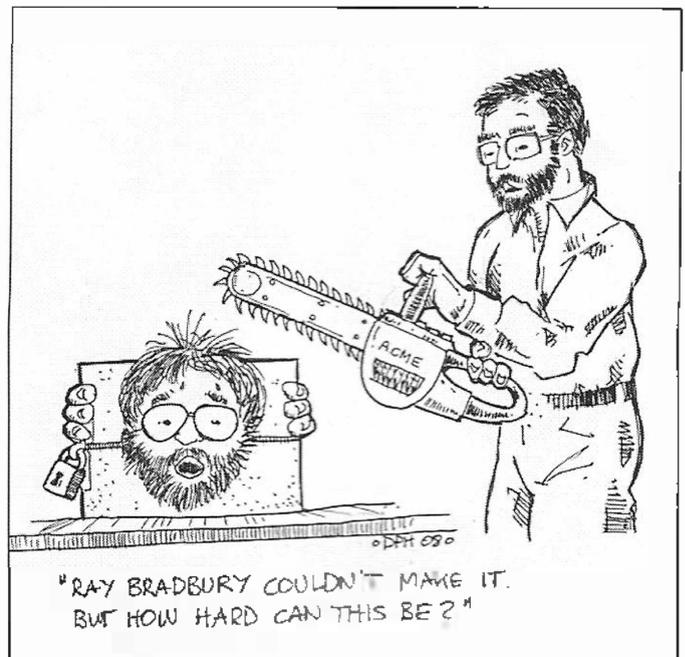
The town is blessed with a remainder bookshop with more interesting stock than most, and a second-hand book and record shop. The man who runs the remainder shop emigrated to Australia from Burnham, and returned some years later with an Australian wife, who now runs the second-hand bookshop. They stayed in the Royal Clarence while they looked for somewhere to live and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. See what kind of a place Burnham is, when you pass the time of day chatting in a bookshop?

Mmm, where are we. Oh yes, Saturday. That was the day I played pool with Eileen Weston. Most enjoyable. I've never before seen someone pick up a pool table, move it to a new position so that she didn't have to angle her cue up the wall, and set it down gently without moving any of the balls. I won this round and lost to Richard Standage, which seems rather unfair, as I am sure that Eileen would have thrashed him, and I'm sure he'd have enjoyed it.

Paul: The convention had an extensive programme of participatory events - quizzes, pool and darts tournaments, and even a skittles contest in the Clarence's fully-appointed skittle alley which, along with the hotel's attached microbrewery, gave the Clarence unique qualities as a con hotel. I do recall with pride that I got quite a long way in the pool tournament. In fact I believe I was the losing finalist. I faced Rob Hansen in the semis with much trepidation, believing him to be a demon with the cue, only to dispatch him fairly swiftly, much to our mutual amazement. Reality was re-established in the final, however, when Stephen Tudor – Martin's brother – revealed me as the fumbling bluffer I really was. Trust the Tudors to carry a ringer in their ranks, eh?

Ann: At lunchtime Kev and Mel Clarke turned up with their children, Adam and Kirsty. Kev had come down to take part in the trial that afternoon, and also to run the Crystal Balls game that evening. Now I know that you can't go to the seaside and not take your kids, and Kev's two are as well-behaved as it is possible to be at their age, but I still couldn't get the advertising jingle 'Don't need a mum, need a keeper with a gun..' out of my head.

Two thirty, and the main programme hall began to fill up with fans who had come to see justice meted out to Steve for his misdemeanours; I'm sure that all of the fifty-two attendees turned up for this item. Tony Berry was the Clerk of the Court, Catherine McAulay was Prosecuting Counsel,



and Pam Wells (she who has vowed never to share a table in a restaurant with Steve again – what chance did the boy stand?) was the Counsel for the Defence. The choice of Judge was inspired! Chris Murphy is a man who I'm led to believe has long harboured a desire to see Steve's head on the block. Their disagreement happened years ago, and although they sorted out a few differences before the trial (I think they decided it was all Alan Dorey's fault in the end) Chris still wore a smirk of unalloyed delight throughout the proceedings – even his teddy bear, 'The Judge's Friend' had a funny grin on his face.

Tony read out the charges. They ranged from the legendary (puking in Rob Hansen's shoes), to the heartless (abandoning Mike Siddall to the company of William McCabe at a *Novacon*), to the corruption of minors (our two dogs can't walk past an off-licence any more), to the anti-social (Reeking of Tapir Urine in a Genteel Cotswold Tea Shop [Don't even ask!]), and introducing a number of ordinary people to fandom who are now just shadows of their former selves. I felt it my duty to contribute to the case for the prosecution on the grounds that I could have gone to Eastercon on the insurance money if the trick went wrong!

Not surprisingly the defence hardly had a leg to stand on, comprising as it did of Peter Weston, Mr Blobby (aka Mike Abbott), and most oddly, Dave Wood, who said that he had found a great many excellent novels by Mr Green in his local library and he was inordinately fond of 'Brighton Rock'.

At one point Kev burst in, replete with trenchcoat and claimed to be 'Inspector Fixit of the West Midlands Seriously Criminal Squad', and accused the Accused of not being the Accused, but of being an impostor wearing a false pony tail and beard. He was accompanied by his five-year-old henchman 'Sergeant Spurious' who wore a sweet little bobbies' uniform, and who on the cue from his dad, tugged at said beard and pony tail and cried "It won't budge, Sir!"

Catherine: And then there was Steve Green's trial. Oh boy! The central element of the convention, and bless their cotton socks, they'd asked me to participate as prosecuting counsel. In fact everyone participated; Pam Wells, Chris Murphy, Tony Berry, Martin Tudor (as a private enquiry agent working on behalf of the prosecution to dig up disreputable facts about the defence witnesses) and Dave Langford sitting for the forces of truth and justice on the Press Benches. Everyone else was the jury, including the witnesses. And those poor witnesses, the courage they

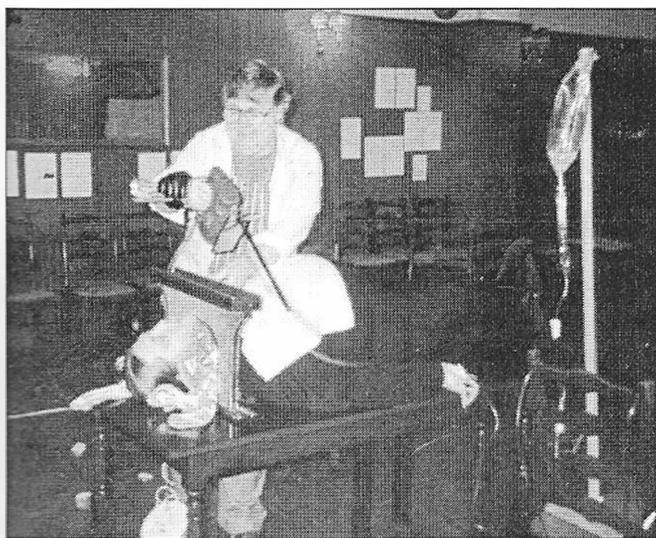
showed in sharing with us evidence of such depravity and corruption (except for those Mr Green paid to appear on his behalf, or so it was alleged).

The charges had been drawn up with a clarity and lack of ambiguity that would have shamed the Attorney General, were he capable of it. They included: leading Martin Tudor astray, luring Bernie Evans into fandom, wearing an offensive hair-style and beard, and endangering shoes. Testimony after testimony revealed this to be the appalling truth. Ann Green stood in the witness box and told us about Steve's inability to iron, and his odd beliefs: that toilets clean themselves and that cutlery is kept in the washing up bowl. Poor thing, she has nothing but the life assurance to look forward to. Greg testified on oath that he hadn't even been aware that Steve existed until it was brought to his notice at the trial. A sadly deluded Dave Wood appeared to believe that Steve Greene was the noted novelist and author of Brighton Rock.

It's hard for me to comment much on the trial because when you're up there you just react to the latest thing said, and don't retain much at all. I do remember that, about an hour after the verdict was brought in (Guilty, of course. What do you think?), I had a sudden insight that at least half of the witnesses I challenged were on my side, but we got the result we wanted in the end, so that's all right, as the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad used to say.

Ann: The audience was the jury and of course we found Steve guilty as sin, although most surprisingly the verdict was not unanimous. The Judge donned the black beer towel and sentenced the miscreant to be executed by being sawn in half. Court adjourned while we all went to the bar or for a pee – I came back to the hall quickly, because I had to know how the trick was to be performed: I'd spent many a sleepless hour wondering whether, if it went wrong my husband would be able to scream out in agony in time to stop the blade slicing through anything vital.

It didn't help my jitters any to see Ray Bradbury (the Brummie one) having difficulty fitting the frame around Steve's ample tummy, and so decided to chop his head off instead – especially as he was planning to do it with a Black-and-Decker power saw: let's face it, even with a padding of podge there's not much tissue between the major blood vessels in one's neck and the outside world. Certainly not enough to make screaming for the illusion to be stopped a viable proposition anyway! I was glad when Ray broke the rules of the Magic Circle and showed me how it was done, although he did cackle gleefully about not telling me all the things that could go wrong!



The Old Grey Executioner gets to work with his trusty Black & Decker. Photo; Chris Murphy

The 'Execution' was performed to a packed house with Ray in a theatrically blood-splattered butcher's apron. Standing by in full working uniform were nurses Helena Bowles and Richard Standage, along with a goodly amount of medical equipment (IVL, oxygen mask etc.) that one of them had obviously conned out of a rep (this WP does not have a symbol to denote the quizzical raise of an eyebrow...).

I proffered the little plastic airway thingy that I take with me when I travel, as the last time I did mouth-to-mouth I got a chest infection. However, none of the gear was needed fortunately – or unfortunately, depending on your viewpoint – as Ray pulled the stunt off without a hitch. Steve got up and asked if anybody had a strepsil, which drew a titter; although I noted that he neither nodded nor shook his head for the rest of the evening.

Catherine: Well, the verdict was given, the sentence passed, and it only remained for the ultimate penalty to be carried out, which was done most expeditiously and with great dexterity by the Old Grey Executioner himself, Ray Bradbury. Now *this* really was the centrepiece of the weekend, not the trial. Once upon a time there was a happy group of fans sitting round a table in a bar somewhere in the West Midlands. They were idly quaffing their beer and chatting about their various hobbies and interests when suddenly one of them said. "Let's execute Steve Green". I'm sure we've all thought of it, but this crew gets on and does it. And bless him, Steve lets them.

Imagine the final guillotine scene from A TALE OF TWO CITIES. No that won't work, fandom's *tricoteuse* wasn't there. Picture an old engraving of the dissection of a cadaver: the body laid out on a table, medical staff in attendance, and the audience ranged round staring with ghoulish fascination. Ray Bradbury comes forward and fits a flat-topped arch, like a little Arc de Triomphe, across Steve's neck. He lifts his Black and Decker saw and chops a stick of french bread into croutons. He places the blade into the arch, and grinning with extraordinary wickedness starts to cut. As the blade touches the side of his neck Steve looks mildly surprised and starts to say something, but Ray carries on. It's over in seconds. The head falls to the floor and bounces, I'm blinded by the jet of blood that bursts across the room from the final beat of his heart...

No? Well, I lie. Ray has sawn right across Steve's neck, and lifts out the blade. He removes the arch and Steve sits up. It's an impressive performance; Ray presents Steve with the gold badge that he gives to all his victims, and Martin Tudor sticks a silver 'H' on Steve's forehead. This has unfortunate consequences later on when the bar staff say that they while will consider serving the dead drunk they draw the line at serving the dead. The only person upset by Steve's execution was young Adam Clarke, who during the trial (and dressed as a police constable) had identified him as Lord Lucan. Quite unaccountably, Clarke jnr. regards Steve as some sort of benevolent uncle; I can't quite see it myself.

Ann: A little later on, Kev and Steve did a version of 'Crystal Balls', the game they ran at *Novacon*, and which the Angus staff are probably still clearing up after. This time they omitted the custard and the pork pies and adopted the aim of getting as much alcohol into Helena in as short a time as possible. She joined in manfully and wasn't fazed when the balloon from which she was drinking turned out to contain cider instead of beer. She barely avoided major injuries when she crashed to the floor after spinning twenty times around a broomstick before lurching towards the pint at the other end of the hall – which she drank. However, it was in the Yard of Ale contest that Helena showed her true potential (among other things). At *Novacon* a sou'wester had been provided to catch the drips; not so this time at



"I'm sorry, sir, but we don't serve dead people. It's unhygienic, you see." Poor Steve was refused service at the bar! Photo; Chris Murphy.

MiSdemeanour, she not only knocked a sizeable chunk off her time but soaked herself to the skin in the process. I have never seen alcohol hit anyone so hard so fast.

Now, I believe that the reasoning behind her subsequent actions was to compare the weight of her tee shirt with the weight of that of her competitor, i.e. the heavier of the garments would contain the most beer, and therefore penalty points could be fairly awarded. But given the way she peeled-off to reveal a black lace teddy containing a magnificent bosom before grabbing Kev and Steve in a vice-like grip, it could be said that she was trying to curry favour with the judges. Either way, and despite Helena's claims that she has more revealing items in her wardrobe, the male section of the audience looked most appreciative.

The rest of the evening was spent getting something to eat and saying goodbye to Kev and his family. Although I enjoyed their company I found myself thinking that in a perfect world, two-year-olds would come with an off-switch. And have you ever tried explaining the concept of the hologram to a five-year-old who wants to know why Uncle Steve has a large 'H' appended to his forehead?

SUNDAY

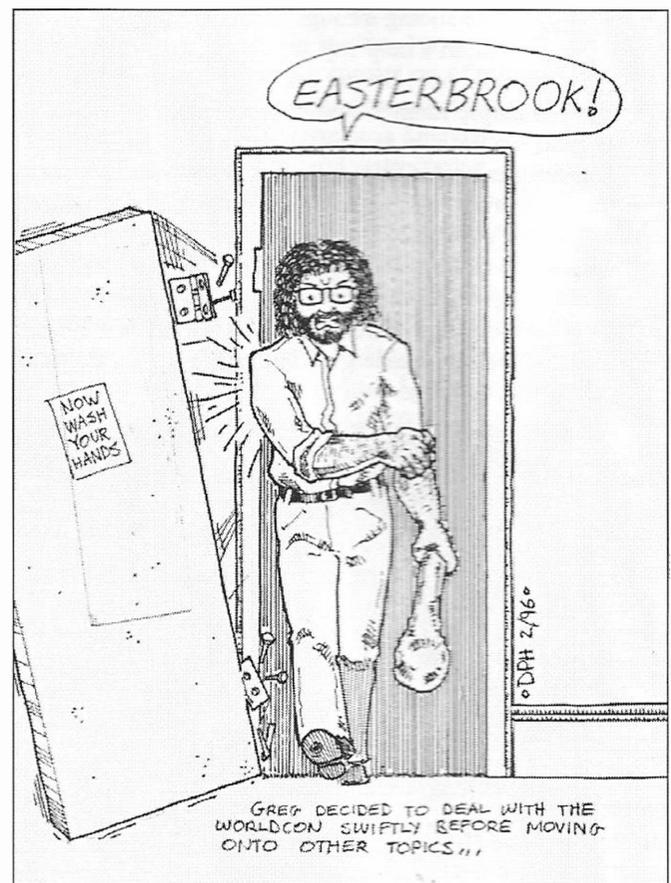
Paul: Sunday found con members happily lazing around the various bars and lounges. The editor of *Prolapse* held court before a pile of Sunday papers, smiling contentedly and formulating his 12-year production plan for the third issue of his 'zine. It was one of those special February days when summer seemed to have arrived five or six months early. I remember going for a walk with Pam Wells on Burnham beach, clad only in T-shirt and jeans, marvelling at the morning's warmth, and trying to fathom why the beach featured a small red hut on high stilts...

Catherine: I haven't told you much about the view from the Royal Clarence. The dining room on the first floor looks out across a view encompassing to your right, the island of Steep Holm rising, steeply, by comparison with Flat Holm, from the Bristol Channel. As your eyes pan across you can see Wales in the distance and, coming to the foreground, water, mud flats, more water, beach and promenade. On your left the coast of Somerset reaches out sharply almost to Wales, with soft hills of a misty purple and below them the white dice of a nuclear power station. Ah, this comes free with breakfast! The view after dark was extraordinarily beautiful: Cardiff twinkling and sparkling with that evocative yearning

distance can lend to a city, and the power station looking like Braque's Christmas tree.

Well, that morning I found out what I had missed on Saturday night: the skittles, and Greg trying out one of the subjects for his programme item. I'd really been looking forward to the skittles. Everyone (so it is reported) had a wonderful time. Bah! Greg's team won. Well, pooh! Local man Julian Headlong showed a superb mastery of the game, owing, he said, to a childhood dominated by skittles, the national sport of the County. However, a scurrilous rumour has circulated to the effect that Mr Headlong was seen sneaking into the skittle alley during the weekend to practise – I'm sure there's no truth in it. For his programme item Greg had put together a short list of topics to bring up, one of which was: 'Does Anyone Get Laid at Cons?' My spies report that Greg, Peter and Eileen Weston, Steve Green, Martin Tudor and Dave Langford all said, eyes wide with innocence. 'No, it's never happened to me'. Good grief, are we really going to believe that then, eh?

Ann: Three main things happened on Sunday: there was Tony Berry's film quiz, the closing ceremony, and Greg Pickersgill's Address to the Nation (well, to the convention anyway). The gist of what he said was that the *Intersection* committee were leaving it perilously late to pull-off a convention which wouldn't leave the rest of British fandom burned-out or with egg on its face, if it wasn't too late already. It seems that there is a certain tardiness of communication, not only between the convention and the rest of fandom but between most of the committee also. Add to this the shitty site and you have a recipe for disaster! I must admit that I have little care for worldcon politics – I'm not even sure if a worldcon is a real convention: they seem to be more of an exhibition or showcase really. I do want it to succeed, but I'm not expecting miracles.



This illo is actually from 1996 but the Glasgow worldcon was a hot topic at all three *MiScons*. In the end, of course Martin Easterbrook was the hero of the hour! (pw)

Greg got very passionate about it,* but I found myself a little saddened to see that although the audience could think of lots of things which were wrong, there weren't many bright ideas about what could be done to put it right – not that there was much faith in those in power to listen, even if there were.

I seem to remember the rest of Sunday evening was spent arguing with Catherine McAulay about Welsh politics (a nest of vipers if ever there was one) and marital rape. She maintained that in days of yore women were so likely to die in childbirth that intercourse couldn't possibly be consensual and was therefore rape. I reckoned that women well knew the score in terms of their survival of a confinement, and chose to be married and bear children because society held little for them outside this traditional role. Not a great choice I grant you. We had almost agreed to differ, which is quite something when you're as pissed as we were, when Steve waded in with his size tens and got all het up. I did try to suggest that this was a discussion and not a bout of WCW Wrestling but he'd already got his mouth all fired-up and his brain in hibernation, so I left him to it.

Paul: And so to the final evening. One last game of charades, then it was time for the closing ceremony. As the only 'founding father' of the MiSFITs to have ever gafiated, I was wheeled onstage in a wheelchair, swathed in blankets and attended by the gorgeous Helena Bowles, in full nurse's outfit. My feigned dithery shaking and trembling lips were not entirely feigned. Recalling young Mr. Grace from 'Are You Being Served', I croaked out a quavering "you've all done very well" as I bestowed a shaky benediction on the assembled membership. Oh well, it amused Martin and me.

MONDAY

Ann: Time enough after breakfast and before setting off to Brum to have another wander about the town. This time we found a tiny second-hand bookshop up a side-street which we'd missed the first time. Inside must have been every member of the con still in Burnham. The woman behind the counter was in paroxysms of delight and had probably sold more stock that weekend than in the previous year. I bought a copy of 'The Great British Songbook' by Kingsley Amis and James Cochrane – a wonderful find, it has all the words to all those old songs that people only ever know a snatch of, or the chorus of, like 'Camptown Races' or 'Danny Boy'.

The problem I now face is that now I know lots of words and no tunes, and as I neither read music nor play an instrument I suppose I'll have to listen to Val Doonican or some-such to learn the melodies. But who am I trying to kid? I couldn't carry a tune if it had handles – but at least I'm not alone in this failing as Martin Tudor demonstrated when he got his hands on the book in the bar of the hotel later on!

The other little gem I picked up was a copy of 'What a Young Woman Ought to Know' by Mary Wood-Allen, MD. Copyright 1913, it was first published in 1899 and is full of the most delightfully archaic advice: "the results of self-abuse are most disastrous. It destroys mental power and memory, it blotches the complexion, dulls the eye, takes away the strength, and may even cause insanity. It is a habit most difficult to overcome, and may not only last for years, but in its tendency be transmitted to one's children". But only if you do it properly...

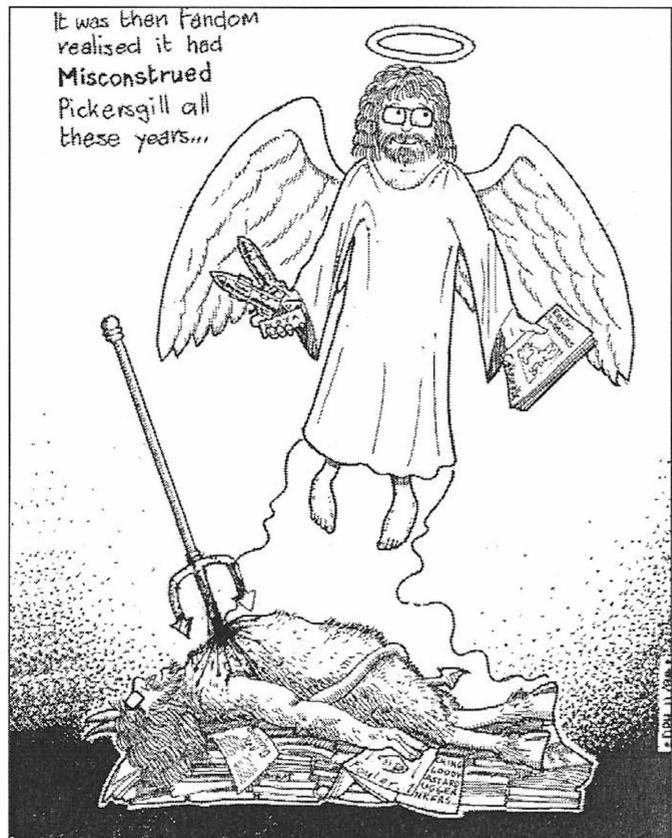
* One comment I particularly remember was, "We're sitting here like f****g rabbits in the headlights and this thing is bearing down on us and is going to squash us flat." (pw)

In there also is a great amount of fairly solid advice on diet, exercise, the avoidance of diseases and menstruation – including a section on how to make your own sanitary towels. I'm afraid I did the childish thing and looked for the section on sex only to find that there wasn't one. Then it hit me, the author was talking to young girls who had no business knowing about sex until they had a wedding ring on their finger – perhaps Catherine had a point after all.

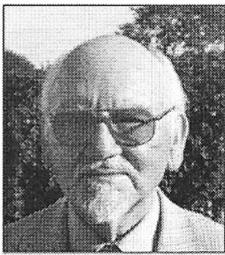
We left for home about half-past three, stopping on the outskirts of Burnham to get some petrol which, unfortunately gave us a kangaroo rather than a tiger in the tank so that by the time we got back to the Midlands the car was jolting and coughing like a consumptive at a dusting competition. All in all, *MisDemeanour* was an unqualified success. As a weekend of thoroughly fannish hedonism, I think it'll be a long time before it is bettered!

Paul: On Monday morning, as we sat around pretending we didn't have to go home, I spoke with Martin Tudor and Tony Berry, telling them what a fantastic weekend I'd had, and only half-heartedly resisting their attempts to rope me onto the committee of the next *MiScon*. As John Lennon said, however, life is what happens while you're making other plans. Just before *MisDemeanour* I'd learned that an old friend had recently separated from her husband, and was in need of friendship. By the end of the year we were a well-established "item", and there seemed little time for anything else in my life (we've now been married for over eight years). Illness prevented our attending the next *MiScon*, and my nascent re-linking with fandom never really developed. But I'm so glad I attended *MisDemeanour*, it was definitely one of my favourite three cons of all time, and possibly the very best.

Catherine: Then someone said, "Let's do it again". So that's the plan. Think up a hook for a small convention, some central event or theme that will bind it all into a weekend of fun and mild debauchery. And then book the Royal Clarence Hotel, Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset.



And what a theme for 1995 – the Canonisation of the Blessed Gregory!



Dan in 2007. his photo

I first met Dan Morgan and his glamorous wife Georgie at Oxford in 1969, although I think by that time he was already writing the occasional piece for *Speculation*. This was at the height of all the 'new wave' hoo-rah and Dan bravely went on to Ted Carnell's pro-panel to tussle with Judith Merrill and make the point that for all the hype, there was really nothing very unconventional about the material being published in Mike Moorcock's *New Worlds*. All water under the bridge, now, but it's interesting to see how far back Dan's SF roots actually go, as he explains in this piece he dashed off nearly a year ago *cough*. (pw)

The Fan Who Never Was

By Dan Morgan

Dan addresses the 1952 London con, presumably on the strength of his sale to *New Worlds*, while Ted Tubb officiates.

Photo: from the Eric Bentcliffe album



I've never been much of a one for nostalgia – which I take it is what *Prolapse* is largely about. I've always preferred to look forward rather than back, although at my age there can't be that much forward to come. In my active writing time I used to keep detailed journals which are still around somewhere, but I'm writing this off the top of my head and the chronology may hence be pretty ropey. I got involved in science fiction first at an early age as a reader and later as a writer, with my first story published in *New Worlds* in 1952.

My first contact with fandom was at the *Festvention* in 1951 at the Royal Hotel in Russell Square. Ted Taylor and I attended and it was quite a shock to my system. There were all these people, most of whom seemed to be interested in anything but science fiction. So what were they doing at an SF convention? You see, temperamentally I have always been a writer – and writers, on the whole, aren't particularly good mixers. In fact, they're usually at their happiest closeted in a room with their (in those days) typewriters, tapping away and living happily inside their own skulls.

I finally came to realise that science fiction fans on the other hand are usually in it for the social side rather than the literary. Nothing wrong with that, of course, and I met a lot of nice people at conventions including (much later) my dear Doreen (Rogers) and her inner circle, who were a kind of portable fiesta. The whole crowd visited for a holiday with Georgie and me in Spain and we had a whale of a time. Why does that conjure up a vision of Doreen in her black bathing costume sitting beside the Costacabana Club pool with a fag in one hand and a glass of brandy in the other? Anyway, we had a lot of fun and drank a lot of booze, and no harm was done (except to our livers).

I went to both the 1952 and 1953 London conventions, and at the latter we were addressed by the very weird L Ron Hubbard, who made claims to have been the pilot of the plane that dropped the A-Bomb on Hiroshima. That can't be true, can it? There was also another guy who was living out in Ceylon with Arthur C. Clarke, but I can't remember his name. Maybe the whole thing was a dream.

Hubbard really was a very strange guy, with eyes that were straight out of a horror movie and a pock-marked face. But he wrote some pretty good science fiction in his time, before he went completely round the twist with Dianetics, which later became Scientology. My old mate, the late Ted Taylor and I were very involved in that for a while, so maybe I was slightly out of touch with reality.

As far as regular conventions were concerned, it was more important to me to meet some of the people with whom I really had a common interest like Ted Carnell, Syd Bounds, Ken Bulmer, John Brunner – these were people who were really involved, and doing something worthwhile



Was this the man who dropped the Bomb on Hiroshima? Well, no, actually! Hubbard at *Coroncon*, 1953. Photo by Terry Jeeves



Dan and John Brunner entertain the fans at a late-night party at *Cytricon II*, 1956. Photo: Norman Shorrock.

as far as I was concerned. I met John at the 1956 con in Kettering when he was very young. He seemed to me like a sixth former, full of enthusiasm, and quite rightly because he had just recently sold his first story to *Astounding*.

Ken Bulmer was a wonderful, witty guy. He attended a Writers' summer school at Swanwick with John Hynam (Kippax) and me. I shall always remember the three of us walking into a darkened cinema in Nottingham one afternoon at a hushed, sombre moment in the film and Ken saying in a stage whisper: "Have they shot the sheriff yet?"

At the summer school itself, he made a speciality of shocking the rest of the congregation (which consisted of a very high percentage of lady Romantic Novelists of both sexes) with his pithy comments – delivered over the mouthpiece of his beloved pipe. There was no malice in the man – he was just good fun. Kippax was another character altogether, he had a manic enthusiasm that enabled him to turn out reams of stuff, including a radio series for Wilfred Pickles (for God's sake!). He had a loud, schoolteacher's voice and liked nothing better than to address the assembled company, whilst at the same time looking at his own reflection in a mirror. He was also a fair guitar player (left handed) and we used to take our instruments to the summer school, and sitting like two finely-balanced bookends, play in one of the lounges in the evenings.

For me it all went pear-shaped when I had to abandon *la vida de padre* in Spain and come back to the UK to salvage the moribund family clothing firm. I always used to joke with Ted Carnell that I was trying to write my way at



"Like two finely-balanced bookends" – John Kippax & Dan with their guitars at summer school, 1954. Dan's photo.

out of the menswear business – but it wasn't really a joke all – I meant it! Menswear was never the way I wanted to go. I would have succeeded, too – if all the stuff I wrote had sold as well as *GUITAR* – which notched up 300,000 copies. Science fiction (well my science fiction at least) just didn't sell in those quantities.

I remember meeting Michael Moorcock for the first time – this must have been at the 1957 London worldcon. He was quite young and an enthusiastic fan and I remember him showing us a fanzine that he was publishing. I have a vague memory of meeting him again at a London event sometime around 1961 in a hotel on Shaftesbury Avenue, which I seem to think was not exactly a Con but a meeting of writers, there couldn't have been more than about 30 of us there. Also in 1961 at the Gloucester *LXIcon* I found myself on a panel rubbing shoulders with Kingsley Amis. He was impossibly glamorous at that time, wearing as I remember a beautifully tailored beige jacket – a far cry from the shambling alcoholic he ended up as, poor guy. He came along with Brian Aldiss, as I remember.

After that, encouraged by a film producer who originally got in touch with me about my *GUITAR* book, I got into script writing. That involved me in 18 months of writing endless revisions of the script, meeting agents and various film entrepreneurs including Dennis Waterman, who liked the script, but then went on to make another film entirely. I can't help but feeling a certain satisfaction that the film was a real turkey and he lost a bundle. Serves the bugger right for not recognising my genius!

The script really wasn't bad by the time I'd finished polishing it, but it sits on a shelf in my office as I write this – a monument to my gullibility and the eternal Eastern Promise of the Film business. My advice to any young writer who may find himself approached by a film producer is: DON'T GET INVOLVED! You're more likely to win the National Lottery. If there's any money offered (which is unlikely) take it and run! And never work for nothing.

Immersed in the menswear business I was dragged back from gafiadom by an invitation to be GOH at the Birmingham *Novacon* convention in 1975. I enjoyed that greatly and I've still got the memorial engraved tankard somewhere in my scattered effects. The only thing that marred the occasion slightly was the fact that Phil Rogers chose the afternoon of my GOH speech to go into town to do some shopping. Well, maybe he was right...

My other great passion has always been music and the guitar of course – so it's hardly surprising that feeling slightly disillusioned about the writing game around this point I gradually found my way back into music. I found out that despite Rock 'n Roll and all that crap there was still work around for a guitar player who could read music and had a feeling for Jazz. EVEN BETTER, there were no rejection slips for music – you went along, did the gig, and got paid – mostly in cash. Imagine that, getting paid to enjoy yourself!

My own guitar hero has always been the Gipsy Jazz of Django Reinhardt. Django died in 1952, but he's even better known now than he was in his prime and jazz manouche is thriving worldwide. I've attended 14 of the annual Django Reinhardt Festivals which are held at Samois Sur Seine, near Fontainebleau at the end of June each year, and the crowds get bigger each time with people from all over the world attending.

At the moment I'm working on a CD tentatively titled *DJANGO'S MUSIC* with my duo partner Steve Rodda, who lives in Lincoln. I'll send you an mp3 file of one of the numbers, if you like – you might like to include it as a musical supplement to the email version of *Prolapse*.

-- Dan Morgan, 2007



Jim in 2004. Photo:
Bill Burns

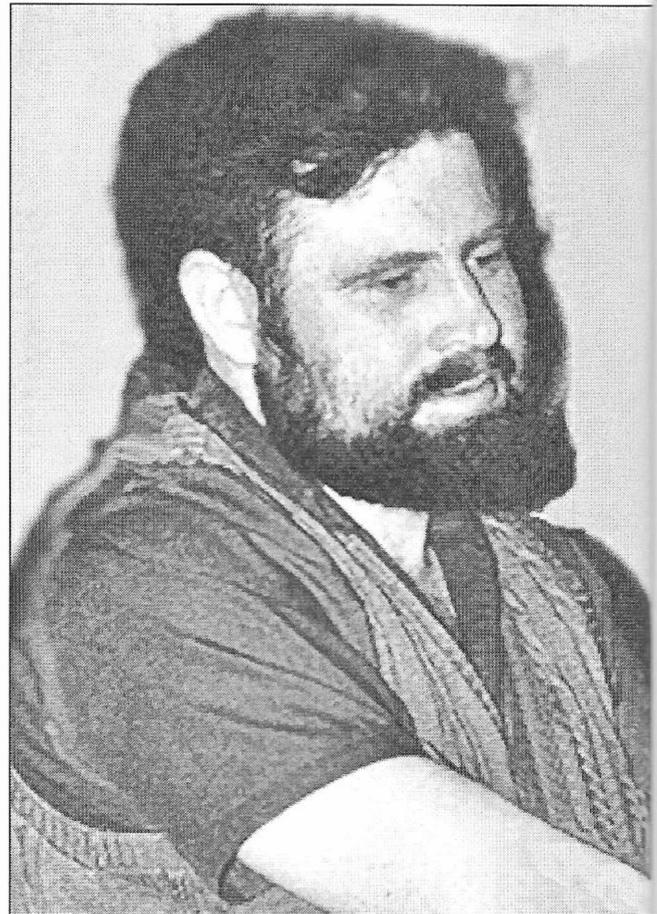
When I entered fandom in the fannish desert of 1963/64 Archie Mercer was one of the Biggest-Name fans around. He edited *Vector*, knew everybody, and willingly engaged in interminable correspondence with the newest of newcomers like Charles Platt, Chris Priest and me. Archie managed an encouraging LoC on my awful *Zenith* #1, tactfully tried to calm down Charles, and was generally a sort of spiritual adviser and father-confessor to the whole of the 'New Wave' in fandom. He ran my book-review column in *Zenith* #9-12 (with Beryl Henley) under the clever title 'Double Booking' until I began to feel he was a bit stuck in second gear and found more exciting reviewers. As British fandom revived in the late sixties Archie began to seem more and more a relic of an earlier age and I lost contact after his last full convention weekend in 1970, although he made a brief, unhappy appearance at the Bristol *OMPACon* in 1973. (pw)

Forgotten Fans #4 Archie Mercer, the neofan's friend

Or, 'I remember Archie'

By Jim Linwood

Archie, aged 38 and looking pensive at the 1963 *Bullcon*, in the green shirt & sleeveless jumper which was his regular attire from 1958 to 1965, at least.
Photo: Bruce Burn (colour)



1 - The Caravan Years

As I remember it, I first met Archie Mercer at North Hykeham railway station, just south of Lincoln, in 1957. Archie was my nearest fannish neighbour and the first fan I ever met. We were both members of OMPA (the Off-Trails Magazine Publishers' Association) and had been corresponding for a while before I plucked up the courage to suggest a meeting. I was surprised to find that he was, to me, almost middle-aged – 30 at least and therefore twice my age – I had previously assumed that most fans were in their 20's. He was podgy, beardless and with a mass of black hair looking not unlike Tony Hancock. Archie was wearing his trademark sleeveless jumper and green shirt which accompanied him wherever he went.

All that I knew of Archie's life outside fandom was that he was born into a middle-class family in the south of England. He had served in the army during the war and was stationed in Brussels in 1945. His younger brother Sam recently told me that Archie was born at Castleton's Oak Cottage, Biddenden, Kent on 14 May 1925 and named after their mother's brother, Lt. Archibald Henry Mercer, who had

been killed in action in France exactly to the day 10 years earlier. As children, Archie and Sam led a nomadic life moving house to Orpington, Chadwell Heath, Dorchester Poole, Mill Hill, the London Caravan Camp, Hendon Whetstone and back to Orpington at the height of the V weapon blitz in 1944.

Sam didn't know why his parents led such a lifestyle sometimes living in caravans around London. Their father was a driving instructor and I suspect the family was hit by the 30's depression

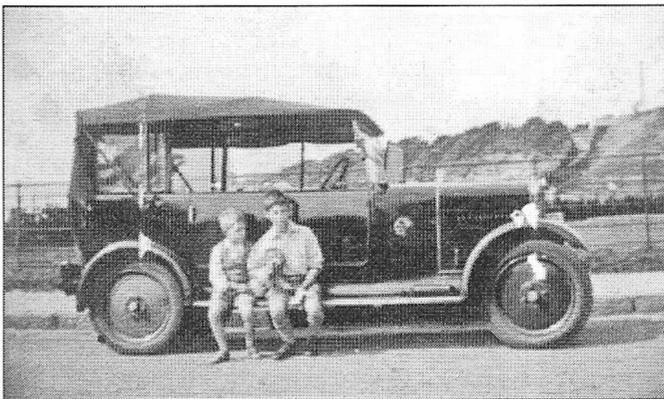
According to Sam, Archie was fond of conferring nicknames on all and sundry, human or otherwise: "The first family car which we both remember, a Lea-Francis Tourer became known as 'The Clanker'. The next one, a 1922 Morris Cowley, reddish brown in colour, became 'Ros Wo'. The last one, a 1937 Ford 8 became 'Roderic(k) Dha'.

Archie carried this habit over to his fanac, making play on words with various names such as 'Twisher' Platt (from Zenna Henderson's 'The People' stories), and rendering his own name as 'Ah Chee', something which was taken up by others, notably by Ron Bennett.



Above; Archie's birthplace. Castleton's Oak Cottage, Biddenden, Kent.

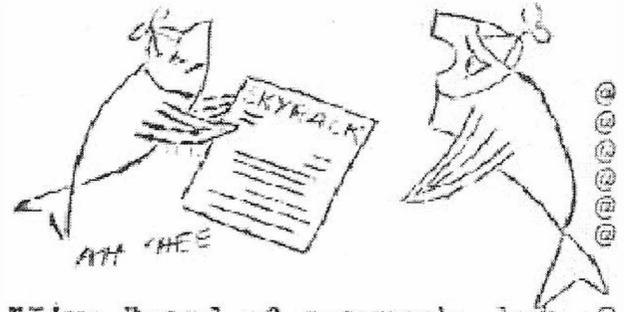
Left; Sam & Archie, on the beach at Southbourne, 1932. Photos from Sam Mercer.



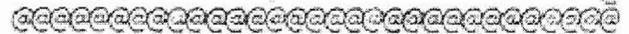
Above; Sam and Archie with the family car, probably the Lea-Francis Tourer, around 1935. Below; The Mercer family by their caravan, c. 1938. Photos from Sam Mercer.



Archie discovered fandom around 1952 when he lived in Chiswick and had written critical letters to Peter Hamilton's *Nebula*. In 1953 he moved to North Hykeham to work as an accountant in Ley's Malleable Ironworks. In 1954 he was a founder member of OMPA and regularly produced his fanzine *Archive* with its fishy cartoon creations, the Trufin.



"I've heard of seawrack, but this is ridiculous."



When Archie was the OMPA OE he gave the 31st of April 1957 as a mailing deadline. In response OMPA President, Walt Willis, proclaimed:

"I have noticed that in past years there has been a lot of trouble in various parts of the world on the first of May, on account of labour parades and Communist demonstrations. So this year I rule that there shall be no first of May. Instead the day following the 30th April shall now be known as the 31st April and shall be succeeded without interruption by the 2nd May. Instead of May Day, the new date shall be known as Mercer's Day, in honour of our infallible association editor, who has so intelligently anticipated my wishes."

Consequently, May Day is celebrated throughout Fandom as 'Mercer's Day'.

Archie frequently referred to his fanac as being written "in the shadow of the Malleable Ironworks": Leys Malleable Iron & Steel Alloy Works which had been belching out smoke over the peaceful, rural hamlet of North Hykeham since the turn of the century. In fact he lived in a large caravan site near to the iron works which partly housed some of the factory's workforce. The estate's address was 434 Newark Road (the former Roman road Fosse Way) and Archie's caravan was No.4 out of around 50.

The site is now Beckhead Mobile Home Park and the present manager, Malcolm Carlisle (who was a boy at the time), remembers: "When he arrived in 1953 with his caravan we had only just decided to become a caravan site and so the roads were new (Power Station Ash) and the ground was still soft. His caravan became bogged down and the tow vehicle was unable to move it. My father asked if he had anything heavy inside the caravan which could be removed. Archie said he had some 78 rpm records which were heavy so a piece of newspaper was placed on the ground outside the door and a large pile of records was removed onto the paper (the pile required two trips to make because of the weight and was about half a metre high). This enabled progress to continue for a short while and a short distance until it became stuck again. The process was repeated at least three more times until the caravan was in place. At this point my father looked inside the door and was amazed to see at least as many records still in the caravan."

When I mentioned Archie's Humanist beliefs it reminded Malcolm of an incident shortly after he 'touched down' in the park:

"My father was involved in a total loss of his workshop and store here on the park due to a large fire. We had lost all of our tools, machinery and an Austin A30 van along with several hundred chickens in the shed. My father was hospitalised and it was Christmas.

"The incident occurred a few days later – Mum had told another resident that we had lost everything in the fire and were in debt because of the cost of the lost chickens and tools which were not insured at that time, being a new venture with no spare income and costs incurred for the setting up of the caravan park. Archie knocked on our door and said that he was sorry to hear of our misfortune and then went on to explain that he needed a new roof on his caravan.

"Mum was quite cross to think that his only concern was his roof – particularly as my father was in a very bad way (stayed in hospital for 6 weeks). While she was trying to cope with her feelings about his roof he produced an envelope and said 'The roof will probably cost me about £150 so I'll pay for it now' – adding that it would do anytime in the summer if Dad was able. That act of kindness suddenly came into focus when I heard of his Humanist beliefs – hence why I can understand his actions. It certainly explains his act of kindness. The roof was duly replaced in the summer."

Archie owned his caravan which was a small, shabby 2-wheeler fed by electric mains and Calor gas cylinders. It had the luxury of its own wooden, outside toilet in which Ella Parker, when visiting Archie, laddered her stockings on its broken seat. Ella was shocked at his life-style – this from someone who lived in a cold water tenement flat with a shared toilet.

The toilets on Archie's site were emptied on a weekly basis by the Council into a brown tanker known as the 'Dilly Cart'. The whole site was served by three water stand-pipes. On entering the caravan the word 'Tardis' would have come to mind had Doctor Who been on TV back then. Somehow among the bunk, sink, cooker and cupboard fixtures, Archie had managed to accommodate his personal possessions: books, magazines, fanzines, records, record player, radio, typewriter and a flatbed duplicator. Luckily, considering the space a ladder would take up, the only food on offer was baked beans and Mars bars. To zap flies searching in vain for a good feed, Archie packed a red water pistol space gun.

When Mike Wallace visited the caravan in 1955, Archie offered him the following cordon bleu menu: "Beans, bread and beans, and bread and butter and beans. There is also the special banquet course consisting of fried bread and beans. We sometimes have plaice on the menu but the shop is shut on Sundays." Not surprisingly this diet led to Archie putting on weight, and some years later he decided to make an attempt to lose it. Never one for half-measures he stopped eating altogether, and with quiet satisfaction noted his steady loss of weight in his OMPazine, until one day he passed out and woke up in hospital.

Archie had an interesting collection of 78s and the recently introduced vinyl LPs and EPs, mostly traditional jazz: Louis Armstrong, Kid Ory, Bunk Johnson, Chris Barber and Ken Colyer. The exceptions were several 78s of the Boston Pops Orchestra and the Jimmy Shand Scottish country dance band. I was into Stan Kenton and Gerry Mulligan so naturally regarded him as a mouldy fig but he did have some records by the likes of Lead Belly, imported from the States, which kindled my life-long interest in the blues.

His literary collection consisted of the current SF mags, *Lilliput*, *MAD* magazine, novels by Thorne Smith and



Above: Corporal Mercer in St James' Park, 1947. *Below:* The North Hykeham Caravan site c.1953. *Bottom:* Archie with dog & trusty motor scooter, outside his caravan at North Hykeham, 1954. Photos from Sam Mercer.



Tolkein, and Penguin editions of classical writers such as Apuleius, Plautus and Virgil. The magazines had brown wrapping-paper dust covers, the insides of which contained pin-up girl photos cut and pasted from *Reveille* and *Tit-Bits*.

"Well, where do you keep yours?" Archie asked when I raised a quizzical eyebrow.

For the first time I was exposed to Archie's awful punning which I took to be the highest form of fannish humour. I imagined that fannish giants like Willis, Shaw Berry and Harris stood around at convention hotel bars, each out-doing each other with devastating puns. Archie treated me to an alternative punning version of 'Earthman Comes Home' in which Blish's space-bound New York City was populated entirely by hipsters. They would continually spit

Dizzy on their record players and a religious recluse was the loneliest-monk in the city. Archie's humour didn't stop at puns as he burst into song with his version of a Presley hit of the time:

'You ain'- nothing but a werewolf
Howlin' all the time
You ain't nothing but a werewolf
Howlin' all the time
Well, you ain't never caught a vampire
And you ain't no Frankenstein.'

I left the Mercertorial caravan with a generous loan of records and fanzines including a copy of Vinç Clarke's 'Duplicating Without Tears' which I took as Archie's hint that I must do better. I didn't think Archie was odd in any way – it was people who didn't dig jazz and didn't read SF who were odd.

When Archie became the first BSFA Treasurer in 1958 the caravan became the financial centre of British fandom, to which members sent their annual subscription of £1 – a large sum in those days when the average adult weekly wage was less than £8. In a 1959 article in *Orion 21* Archie defended the high subscription fees: "One fairly fundamental detail concerns the level of the annual subscriptions. This was fixed at Kettering at £1 for full membership and 10/- for associates (under 18 or overseas memberships), however many fen think this is too high – including plenty who have nevertheless paid it.

"The principle argument in favour of having comparatively high subscriptions is that any society that wants to do anything worthwhile can hardly take any other course. I'm not, myself, entirely in agreement with this as a long-term policy – nevertheless we have to provide members with something in return for their subscriptions, and it stands to reason that £1 per person will go a lot further than 10/- for each of two people, leaving furthermore a bigger proportion over for what is ultimately the Association's main purpose and reason for existence – the hunt for new members, and then the demonstration to them of what fandom has to offer. In other words, to recruit more specimens of congenial humanity to fill out the diminishing ranks of what we generally recognise as fandom."

A few weeks later I attended a meeting of the embryonic Lincoln Interplanetary Society, held in Archie's caravan. LIS began in the mid-50s when a few space enthusiasts met in Pete Hammerton's house to talk about SF, space travel, astronomy and flying saucers – the usual fannish fare. In 1960 the name of the society was changed to the Lincoln Astronomical Society to attract a more conservative membership who believed all this space travel stuff was nonsense. By 1982 the Society had its own observatory, which was opened by Patrick Moore, and equipped with a 12" Newtonian reflector telescope.

Apart from Archie, the only Society members at the caravan meeting were its founder Pete Hammerton and Vic Curtis. When the conversation turned to jazz, Vic leapt out of his seat when I mentioned Stan Kenton and shook me firmly by the hand – I had made a new friend. Vic was slightly older than me and was also an engineering apprentice. He was a big modern-jazz fan and a trombonist in a local band in the style of Kai Winding. Like me, he was also a Ray Bradbury fan and, more importantly, knew a girl who read SF. On another occasion I visited Vic's home in South Hykeham and he foolishly let me play drums in one of his band's jam sessions.

The Society was the inspiration for Archie's 138-page duplicated fannish *roman à clef*, 'The Meadows of



Above: The Ironworks Staff Party, Christmas, 1953. **Below:** A meeting of the Lincoln Interplanetary Society, c.1957. **Top row:** David Swift, Vic Curtis, Eddie Parczuk, Archie Mercer, Gill Arden, John Tyblewski. **Centre:** Fay Shaw, Peter Hammerton. Photo courtesy of the Lincoln Astronomical Society website.



Fantasy' (subtitled 'The Story of a Golden Age') published in 1965, concerning the activities of the 'Thisbury and District Science Fiction Circle'. The novel is divided into fourteen 'Chapisodes' and, although its major characters are fictitious, many prominent fannish figures are mentioned by name or cryptically. The novel's Dramatis Personae include:

KING BEN OF RONAGATE – Ron Bennett
QUEEN PAREL OF KILBURNIA – Ella Parker
KING NOROCK AND QUEEN NAROCK OF
THE CURIOUS KINGDOM OF LIG – Norman &
Ina Shorrocks
THE ARCHDUKE OF MERCIA – Archie
THE LORD LANRI SPIN – Alan Rispin.
JIMLIN OF THE WOOD – Jim Linwood

After Archie died in 1998, Chris Priest recalled in *Ansible* that: "Archie wrote a novel about fandom called 'The Meadows of Fantasy', which I must have read in about 1965/66. It was a little tentative at the beginning, but as I remember it the thing developed quickly into a real novel, with a brisk plot, good handling of clef characters and some well observed satire."

When I started attending conventions in 1959 I discovered that there were two Archies. There was the amusing Archie who was the fun-character and foremost intelligence in a small group of four or five fans, and there was a shy, withdrawn Archie who was always on the periphery of large gatherings. He was the odd-man-out at conventions, with a sad expression and an equally sad collection of badges on his jumper.

In a response to a negative report of the 1964 Peterborough convention by Charles Platt, Archie wrote:

"I'm not sure how to deal with your convention report. You sound as if you're walking round with a perpetual chip – or, rather about half a tree – on your shoulder. I never wrote a report of my first convention – though it would have been even less favourable to its subjects, had it been written. Nor on my second, nor yet on my third – which was the first one I really enjoyed."

Archie's first con was *Supermancon* in 1953, after which he attended every Eastercon until 1971, missing only the 1957 *Loncon*. Despite his remote location throughout the fifties he somehow managed to get to almost every major fan-gathering in Liverpool, Cheltenham, and elsewhere.

Chris Priest became aware of Archie's shyness when he first met him at *Repetercon*: "I knew Archie first by his writing. He was editing for the BSFA at the time, and was one of the few established fans who took a tolerant and indeed indulgent line on the unruly young fans – me and Charles Platt in particular – then emerging. He was an amusing correspondent, too. But Archie was one of those fans who acquitted himself best by the written word, presumably because of his immense personal shyness; at conventions he tended to stand around in a smelly old green shirt, and utter one embarrassingly awful pun after another. I used to dread what people might think of him, who had not seen how witty and eloquent his writing could be."

It was an odd sort of shyness, as Archie could be extraordinarily assertive at times. One Saturday he paid the Nottingham fan group, the 'Nottfen', a visit and along with Bob Parkinson, John Dyke and I went into a self-service cafeteria for lunch. As we were queuing, a group of latter-day Teddy Boys pushed past us to the front. While the rest

of us were resigned to the yobbery, Archie confronted the youths and ordered them to the back of the queue – where they sheepishly went.

I discovered another side of Archie one Saturday after Alan Rispin and I had spent a day with him. After unsuccessfully trying to thumb a lift back to Nottingham, we returned to the caravan. An alarmed Archie let us back in – a knocking on the caravan door after dark could mean trouble. We found that he had a large model castle on his bed and several toy soldiers engaged in a siege. Archie shyly explained that all the tin soldiers had names, life histories and engaged in combat according to strict rules. I thought it bizarre at the time but now acknowledge Archie as a pioneer of role-playing games.

In 1961, Archie started to grow a beard, then a comparative rarity in British fandom (I can only think of Vinç Clarke, Mike Moorcock, Bob Parkinson, Ken Bulmer, John Brunner, Bruce Burn and Alan Rispin having beards this early in the 60s) and as unusual as a UFO sighting in the mundane world. In June 1962 he celebrated its first birthday by going into a Lincoln photo booth and producing scores of snaps which he mailed out to fandom at large.



2 – Bristol

In 1962, the Ironworks gave Archie the sack for refusing to remove his beard. He left his North Hyckham caravan and moved to 70 Worrall Road, Clifton, Bristol. He now had more room for his increasing fannish obligations including a year's stint as editor of *Vector* and also the long-running BSFA *Bulletin*. In both the 1963 and 1964 *Skyrack* poll, readers voted Archie the Leading Fan Personality of the year. Also in 1964, he became second recipient of the Doc Weir Award for fannish popularity and general distinction.

There seemed to be no women in Archie's life until he met Beryl Henley in the mid-60s. However, he did develop a crush on Youngfan Valerie Purnell who was almost half his age. In his report on the 1963 Peterborough convention (*Bulcon*) in *Les Spinge 11* Archie wrote an open love letter, describing her thus:

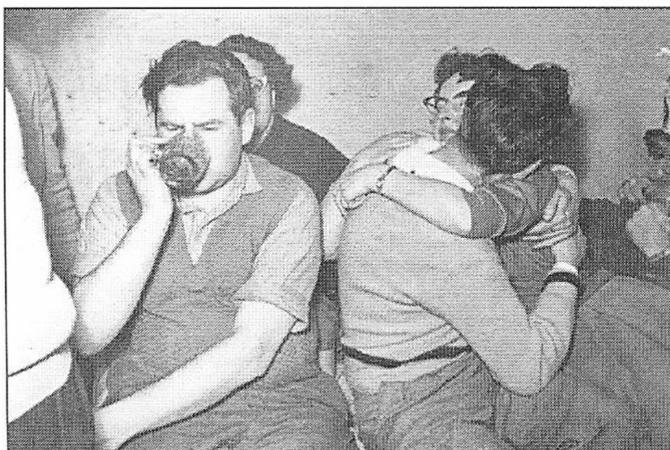
"Val is a rather striking hybrid. To describe her in a nutshell (if she'd fit) one could almost say that a cosmetic face hides a cosmic mind. Outwardly she is every bit the typical late-teenage *femme fatale* such as one sees on every street corner any week-end. Once one gets talking to her however, it soon becomes apparent that she's anything but – it's just that for some reason (possibly protective coloration) she likes to look one. Her face may not be her own; her mind certainly is her own."

Val mentioned a cupidic Archie in her poem about the convention in the same issue of *Les Spinge*:

'Say, who remembers
A small plastic gun that
Fired a sucker dart? Well, Archie Mercer stuck
The said dart on my bag, and said,
"There you are,
Grow your own Phallic Symbol".
Thanks Archie.
But what shall I do with it?'



Above; In the bar at *Cytricon I*, 1955, the first convention Archie really enjoyed. Below, Uncomfortable at a room party at *Cytricon IV*, 1958. Ella Parker can be seen behind Archie – it was her first con. Photos; from Norman Shorrock.





Above: Valerie Purnell at a corridor party at Bullcon, 1963. Mike Moorcock and Lang Jones later played noughts and crosses on her legs (in fishnets). Photo by Bruce Burn (colour).

Val lived in Gosport and got in touch with me via the Young Science Fiction Readers' Group when she was 17. She became a close friend of my wife-to-be, Marion Lansdale, and they attended their first con at Harrogate in 1962.

Peter Weston recalls a trip he and Rog Peyton made to see Archie in 1965*:

"One of the funniest things (in retrospect) about my early days in fandom was visiting Archie. Both Rog and I had been corresponding heavily with him, and we thought Archie was probably the biggest BNF around in the UK (at a time when only he, Terry Jeeves and Ethel Lindsay were still pubbing anything). Certainly his letters were full of wit, puns and erudition, and I had a mental picture of a sort of lean and languid, Oscar Wilde-like aesthete, vastly more experienced and refined than we little Brummie neofans.

"Anyway, I needed to get *Zenith* #10 duplicated, so in September 1965 we arranged to go down to Bristol to run it off on Archie's machine. We went one Saturday in my old Ford Popular, quite a slog in those pre-motorway days, and found our way to Archie's flat by early afternoon. It was in Clifton, quite a nice area of Bristol, with big old houses just starting to look scruffy. The flat was one-room, downstairs at the front of the house, with a little shared kitchenette next door and (I presume) some access to bathroom facilities. All I remember is that there was no hot water!

"I'd met Archie briefly a couple of times before at cons, but hadn't spent a great deal of time with him. He was tall, turning to fat, with huge dark beard and moustache,



The Worrall Road house today, not much changed except in 1965 there was a front garden rather than parking-space. Photo from Chris Bell, Bristol fan extraordinaire!

wearing a) grey-green open-neck shirt; b) grey-green V-neck neck pullover; c) grey baggy trousers and d) open-toe leather sandals. This, we learned, was his only outfit. He had one spare of everything to allow for washing, and he kept one tie in his desk at work, which he put on in the morning and took off at night to keep within limits of mundane expectations. Archie didn't go in for appearance. Or comfort – the flat had a few bits of furniture, mostly wooden orange-boxes painted green in which he kept his fanzine collection – and a camp-bed on which, later, I spent a restless and painful night, while Rog tried to sleep in an armchair.

"Within five minutes we had completely run out of conversation and Rog was giving me sideways glances as if to say 'How are we going to put up with this until the morning?'" Archie turned out to be one of these people who can write a masterly long letter, where there's plenty of time to think it through and make allusions, but in person he was hopeless! Faced with a barrage of obscure puns, we couldn't cope. And it turned out that Archie didn't really keep up with current SF, so that closed down that topic. We made small talk about the BSFA, ran off my pages on full automatic, and I think we wandered around Bristol for a bit before we returned for 'tea'.

"I still remember Rog's face. He liked good food even then, and had asked Archie to 'get something in' for the evening. Archie had interpreted that to mean triple helpings of all the stuff he normally ate – peanuts and crisps, and some Kit-Kat bars. Rog was aghast! 'Where's the food?' he said. 'This is it', said Archie. I don't know why we didn't simply go out and get a meal, or even fish and chips, but we didn't. And, of course, Archie didn't have a television, so we played 'Ludo'. It was one of the longest evenings of my life, and we couldn't wait to finish printing and get away next morning, stopping for an early lunch at the famous 'Lunar' Chinese restaurant in Park Street that some years later became a focus for Tony Walsh's BaD Group.

"Later, of course, I realised that Archie specialised in corresponding with neofans, and he really was very good at it, encouraging lots of people hovering on the edge of fandom. But once you got into it a bit, it somehow seemed that it was Archie who was on the edges; at least it was that way for me. I think he lived his life in his head, and his novel, 'The Meadows of Fantasy' represents the ideal world he would have liked to live in. Certainly, it was a fortunate day when he met Beryl Henley, who was the one person in the world who just seemed to mesh perfectly with Archie – so much so that after a few years they found they didn't need fandom any more."

Beryl Henley moved into Worrall Road in 1965 and, although Beryl changed her name to Mercer, they were not married until 1972. After a couple of changes of address they eventually moved to 10 Lower Church Lane, Bristol around 1969.

Beryl had found fandom by answering a notice Peter Weston had placed in the newsletter of the Science Fiction Book Club seeking members for the embryonic Brum Group. She was the same age as Archie, already married with two sons and living in Redditch. When she subsequently joined the BSFA she began to make contact with fandom in general and started corresponding with Archie. She believed in reincarnation, was a Scientologist and also a witch in a local coven. She soon became an

* This is described in 'Stars...' Pages 127-128, but almost unbelievably I got some of the details wrong in The Book and so welcome the chance to put matters right here. See the 'Stars Supplement' on the eFanzines site (pw)



Top: Archie & Beryl at *Brumcon*, 1965, with Charlie Winstone and Doreen Parker. Photo; Norman Shorrock. Below; Sharing a cigarillo at *Yarcon*, 1966. The glum young chap on the right is an earlier incarnation of your editor. Photo; Peter Mabey



immensely popular figure in Anglofandom through her fanzine *Link* and organising ability, particularly (along with Archie) in shoring-up PaDs, the BSFA's Printing and Distribution Service, before its final demise in 1967.

Archie and Beryl were first points of contact for many late-60s neofans including John Hall: "He it was who pointed me in the direction of fandom, and I think gave me addresses of other fans – one of them being Mary Reed, whose best friend* Julia I married eventually, others being people like Chas Legg, Keith Bridges and such – these are names off the top of my head. Directly or indirectly, it was via Archie that I am in fandom at all. I even became his and Beryl's accountant (that happened in the late 1970s), so I stayed in touch with all things Mercer long after he had dropped from Fannish view – although I'm pretty sure he stayed active in the Tolkien Society for much longer.

"He was always kind to me, and I very much regret to say that I wasn't always kind to him. I'm sure in your researches so far you have come across many examples of how pedantic and generally anal he could be – and I wasn't very forgiving. If you multiply that by most of us, he took a great deal of abuse, and he didn't care for it. He didn't like *Fouler* or the other Ratzines, he thought our humour puerile, he disliked our liberal use of Anglo Saxon (so we used it all the more) and so we were not on his Xmas card list as a group, although individually some of us stayed in contact however distantly."

A different Archie emerged when he began sharing his life with Beryl, as Greg Pickersgill recalls:

"When I was a real neofan I had a lot of correspondence and contact with the Mercers, primarily Beryl. This was mainly because of their association with the BSFA, and partly because at that time the BaD group was going well. I stayed at their place in Lower Church Lane several times.

"It was always Beryl who was most forthcoming in every sense. She was the one who made the effort to contact and inform new fans like myself. I found Archie appeared stand-offish and difficult to talk to, even about things that we might apparently have common interest in. I guess putting two fairly shy and socially awkward people (me and him) together was not really going to work, was it?

"I always felt though that he was ill at ease with the world as it had become. He was apparently offended by things – in fandom, music, and SF – that I thought were perfectly normal and in fact good and appropriate. (Though now I'd like to go back and inform myself of the realities of some of those foolish notions). And perhaps he was out of step with the times. Maybe that's what happened really, he withdrew from fandom into the sole company of Beryl who didn't perhaps challenge his comfort zone as much as she could have done. (Well of course she probably felt the same way about things as he did!)

"It does seem correct, though, that from soon after their relationship began he became less and less of a force in fandom. What I am most embarrassed by now though is how casually I discarded my admittedly-tenuous relationship with them as soon as I met people like Roy Kettle. One wonders how big a mistake was made."

Greg recalls that Archie was not his favourite fan at the time they were both concurrently active:

"It is obvious to see why in retrospect he was rather against the 'modern age'. I also understand now that it was me (and the rest of the younger fans of the time) who were more in the wrong than he was. As time went on I most certainly realised he had been much more important in fandom than I had grasped before, and, too, that he was a much better writer than I'd understood. Maybe that was because when I encountered him – post 1968 – he'd more or less given up fanning. Or at least didn't have the enthusiasm he once had. I wonder whether Beryl's influence was a factor there?"

Not long before Archie died, Greg sent him a short letter outlining his new found appreciation: "particularly praising 'The Meadows of Fantasy' which I had just encountered for the first time and was honestly very taken with. His response – a short note saying, effectively, 'Well, I knew that all along'. Can't blame him really"

In 1968 Archie became the British Agent for the Tolkien Society of America and put out a newsletter for British members, *Middle Earthworm*. As a nod to one of his favourite novels, he later changed the name in 1976 to *Five and Future Worm*

3 – Cornwall

One story has it that in 1971 Beryl believed that she was being haunted by the spirit of a coven member who had committed suicide and wanted Beryl to join her. She persuaded Archie to give up his job and move to Helston in Cornwall where, she believed, she would be safe from the evil spirit. They were married at Helston Registry Office on May 13th, 1972. Following the move, Archie ceased most fannish activity apart from the Tolkien newsletter which ran until 1981.

John Hall thought "the move to Cornwall was a bit ill-advised, in that it was much tougher for both him and

Beryl to survive financially than they had planned on when they left Bristol, and a lot of this revolved around how far they were from anything – work, shops etc. (this got worse during the eighties). So he had less free time generally, and what free time he did have he was keener on spending with his Archaeological and Humanist friends who were more local and who he could go down the pub with, whereas fandom *et al* was all miles away and he saw them once in a blue moon.

“It’s a shame he didn’t live to see the e- Fandom we have now – he would have enjoyed participating on the lists – probably more *Trufen* than *inthebar*. But Beryl might not have approved – she became parsimonious, to say the least, and she wasn’t keen on computers as they were then, and likely would have worried about the electricity bill or something.”

When asked in 1989 to contribute to an article about BSFA pioneers in the 150th issue of *Vector*, Archie wrote:

“Some time in the late 1960s the BSFA died, and I was satisfied that it was clinically dead. A couple of years later some well-meaning people tried to revivify the corpse. A zombie, however, is still a zombie.”

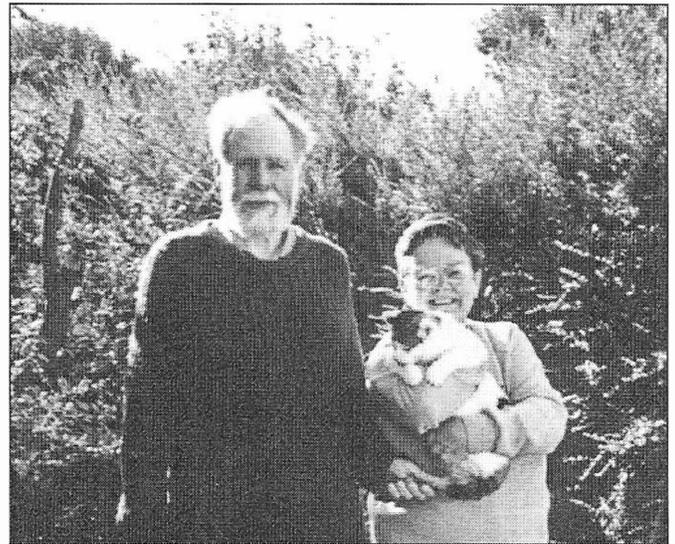
This may have been a reference to the schism that occurred between the BSFA and fandom culminating in the auctioning-off of the Fanzine Foundation at the Chester convention in 1972. John Hall’s impression was that “his own fannish generation sort-of gafiated – and the BSFA was affected by that, and he may have felt dumped on. The BSFA fanzine-library episode displeased him mightily, I remember – years afterward when Julia and I visited him and Beryl in Cornwall, he thundered on *in extenso* about that.”

Doreen Rogers recalls: “They went to learn Cornish archaeology. In 1967 Archie had won a car in a competition (a pale blue Triumph Herald) and they used to go on digs. When the car was finished he brought a van and put a bed in it. Beryl went on with the digs until her arthritis became too bad. They seemed happy together – Beryl told me Archie wasn’t terribly interested in the sexual side of marriage after the first glow, but she said they could talk to each other all the time and neither of them missed conventions.”

Archie became a Field Officer with the Cornwall Archaeological Society, organising monthly walks and outings for members. The current Society secretary, Sue Ealey, remembers: “This he did with great enthusiasm, until ill-health forced him to hand over to Chris Riding in 1996, even then he would still come on trips driven by a friend and walk arm-in-arm with other members of the group, and when looking at structures/features ask someone to guide his hand over them.

“He attended many CAS events towards the end travelling by bus on dark November nights to attend lectures at the Royal Cornwall Museum. He led field-walking events including the Penryn by-pass, where he greeted everyone’s finds with enthusiasm and expertise. He was wonderful with young people, encouraging their interest in archaeology. Beryl kept in the background but after Archie’s death attended our lectures and donated his archaeological books to the society to be sold to raise funds. He has been greatly missed by many of us.”

In 1991 Archie became another founder member, this time of the Cornish Humanists. John, another member, told me: “As editor of the Cornwall Humanist newsletter I always looked forward to his witty letters, although, at times, I thought I’d signed up to a correspondence course on ‘English, and the use of’. I couldn’t get away with even the tiniest little comma out of place. He was also a member of



Archie, Beryl and their dog, ‘Chloe’, in their garden in 1988. Photo from Beryl (colour).

more than ten other groups and associations including the Royal Institute of Cornwall, the Cornwall Archaeological Society, and the West of England Steam-Engine Society, where he would act as a marshal. The older he got the more eccentric he became.

“Archie was a very active member of the CAS, he organised field walking sessions and received occasional letters about planning matters from people who knew of his interest. He took part in the Society’s Megalithic Project 1984-86 and wrote and researched a report into the Four Burrows ancient monument 1985 including diagrams. The report is placed with others in The Megalithic Project, housed in the Royal Cornwall Museum (not yet available to the public as it is being worked on).

“They both had very sharp minds. Beryl was a member of MENSA, and they both had a keen sense of humour. They played with the English language and its idiosyncrasies and were continually firing jokes at each other – and anyone else who happened to be in earshot.

“She was a bit of a paradox when it came to Humanism. Although she was quite strong in her opposition to religion, she did believe in reincarnation. In fact she was convinced, and was quite happy to try and convince others, that she had previous lives. She would happily tell you that she had been a French soldier. She also insists that she went down with the *Titanic*. On many occasions she was heard to say, ‘Next time I come back, I’m coming back as a man – or I’m not coming back at all’. She would come out with stories of the villages that disappear into thin air. Probably because of her interest in science fiction she believed in parallel worlds and different time scales. Not the sort of thing you would expect a Humanist to believe in. But that’s Humanism.”

Archie died in March 1998 after several years of ill health. His ashes were scattered over the Neolithic site at Carn Brea, near Redruth, which he used to visit every summer solstice. Beryl died in October 2003. The Humanists planted two commemorative trees, a copper beech, chosen by Beryl, for Archie, and an oak for Beryl.

- Jim Linwood 2007.

Many thanks to Malcolm Carlisle, John Hall, John Henley, Judy McCloughlin, Sam Mercer, Greg Pickersgill, Doreen Rogers, Peter Weston, the [Lincoln Astronomical Society](#), the [Cornwall Archaeological Society](#) and the [Cornish Humanists](#) for their help with this article.

The Melting Pot

Yes, we're all in this together, and the temperature may get a little hot!

We'll cheerfully boil-up royalty (the pros), commoners (the fans) and even editors if we can get them, Malcolm.

My interjections in *italics* and [brackets] in the usual way.



Illustration by Pam Yates, from *Speculation* #20

“What is it so compelling about *Prolapse?*” – Brian Aldiss, LoC

*This time we'll let the pros stew for awhile and start with one of the elder statesman of British fandom who I've lured away from another paper fanzine. Fred says he started reading SF in 1936, discovered fandom in 1952, gaffiated at the beginning of the Sixties and returned in 1995, sparked by *Intersection*.*

Fred Smith
f.smith50@ntl
world.com

Dear Peter,

I enjoyed practically everything in this issue (#6) but must say that I enjoyed even more the history of Irish fandom that you had in #8, mainly because I've been in Oblique House, bought fanzines and a few prozines from Walt (the well-known huxter!), played Ghoddminton with Berry, Bob Shaw and Chuck Harris and enjoyed food and drink provided by Madeleine. That was a lo-o-ong time ago!

It was in the Summer of 1955 (Mighod! 52 years ago!) that I had the pleasure of visiting Oblique House. How this came about was that I had met Walt, Madeleine, et al at the *Supermaroon* the previous year and, on the strength of that, plus my sub to *Slant* and then *Hyphen* (from #1), I was emboldened to suggest that my wife Betty and I might call during our summer holiday. We were planning a trip to Dalkey, a small seaside town immediately south of Dublin, involving an overnight ferry crossing from Glasgow to Belfast followed by a train journey to Dublin, so it seemed an ideal time for a brief visit.

The Willises were, of course, the most generous of hosts, willing to greet any old stray fans that happened to darken their door, and I was much taken by Walt's reply saying they would love to have us. What was even more warming, when the ferry docked at Belfast around 7 a.m. there was Walt with Chuck Harris and the Morris Minor waiting for us at the dockside, having got up at 6 a.m.! This was the first time I had met Chuck and hadn't known, of course, that he was stone deaf. Worse, at that time he hadn't yet learned to lip-read and so everything said had to be written down. (Incidentally, he looked exactly like the Atom cartoons, with the slicked back straight hair and the bulging eyes which didn't quite protrude through his glasses). Walt, on the other hand, while tall and good-looking enough, wasn't quite the godlike figure portrayed by Atom. Also, it turned out that he was extremely quiet (and quiet-spoken) and this, combined with Chuch's deafness, tended to make conversation in the car somewhat stilted. Could also be the reason why brash Americans in *The Harp Stateside* might have found it difficult to understand WAW's accent, and it also accounts for his reported terror of public speaking.

Anyhow, when we arrived at 170 Upper Newtownards Road (without having to hack our way through the rumoured jungle of the front garden) there was this pretty, dark-haired girl, Madeleine awaiting us with a sumptuous breakfast all prepared. What with my own and my wife's shyness, however, chatting to Walt and Chuch continued to be rather awkward. Fortunately Madeleine proved more outgoing and helped until the arrival of Bob and Sadie Shaw livened things up and we could relax. A little later Walt took me up to the attic where I could inspect the magnificent Banister press on which *Slant* had been printed and browse through the stacks of prozines and fanzines on the shelves that covered one wall. He agreed to break up his FAPA mailings so that I might purchase some of the gems like *Masque*, *Horizons*, etc. So, when we continued on our holiday I was able to indulge myself with some of the classic fan writing of the early Fifties (Rotsler, Burbee, Boggs, Warner, etc.) while eating crab sandwiches in the pavilion on Killiney beach. It's not true, by the way, that Walt kept a cash register beside the attic door, like some have said, but you must remember that fans in those days were impoverished (like everyone else) and so a few pennies collected for old zines helped pay for paper, ink and stencils. Furthermore, unlike today, most general fanzines had cash subscribers.

John Berry arrived a bit later and, like Chuch, looked very like Atom's portraits. He was also considerably noisier than the rest of IF and much more extrovert, it seemed to me. A game of Ghoddminton was then proposed and I was instructed in the rules, which were practically non-existent.

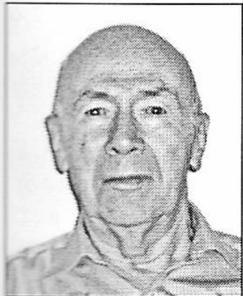


Photo: Fred, 2008

“Chuch, like John Berry, looked very like Atom's portraits”



Most no doubt know that it was played across a table-tennis net using a shuttlecock and squares of cardboard as bats. The sole object was to keep the shuttlecock from falling on the floor and everything else was allowed, including hitting your opponent with the bat! On a hot summer's afternoon, of course, the players, John, Bob, Chuch and I, were soon dripping with sweat and had to strip to the waist. Chuch also kept falling down on account of his deafness having affected his sense of balance. From what I remember we must have spent about ten hours there and at the end Walt again kindly ran us to the station to catch our train to Dublin. He had wanted us to wait till the evening to meet James White but we had to carry on, unfortunately, and it was years later before I managed to meet James (at a local convention) and induce him to autograph the last two issues of *Slant* (for which he had done the covers).

Thanks, Fred, for that story! But I think they went easy on you because Ghoodminton was more complex than they let on. After a game that Chuck Harris played on 6th July, 1954 the 'Governing Body' drew up a schedule of ten Rules which I have here if anyone's interested. And here's a forgotten gem – Bob Shaw's depiction of that epic match, between Messrs Harris, Berry, White & Willis (reprinted from Chuck's trip-report, 'Through Darkest Ireland with Knife, Fork & Spoon').



Of course, I couldn't resist running Fred's account past another survivor of those long-ago days at 170 Upper Newtownards Road. We all remember that address – I even drove past it once, long after Walt & Madeleine had moved on to greener pastures. Here's another story of Irish Fandom:

John Berry,
Hatfield



Hi, Peter,

Wow! the BoSh ghoodminton illo certainly brings back memories from 50 years ago. Yes, I recall Fred's visit and game, and herewith a ghoodminton memoir, absolutely true.

Games of ghoodminton at Oblique House certainly permitted tensions to be relieved, and I recall a technique I used, for example, if Bob Shaw, with an evil look on his normally-placid features, was holding the shuttlecock, preparing to smash it over the net. I would leap in the air aggressively, my constabulary boots crashing onto the floor, and shout at the top of my voice, authoritatively, "DROP IT".

He did so, initially, but later, when I tried the same technique, he dropped the shuttlecock, screamed an obscenity, leaned across the net and, most unsportingly, using the edge of the Charters'-manufactured heavy-duty bat, smashed it across the back of my right hand. Blood, grazing, bruising, numbness; I was really shocked at this revelation of a warlike BoSh. I was extremely friendly with him for several years, he was always delightful company, making superb puns in his quiet Irish accent.

One afternoon, a few weeks later, Madeleine Willis was entertaining guests for afternoon tea, the lounge being directly underneath the fan-attic. Suddenly, the ceiling disintegrated, cascading plaster-dust snow upon the ensemble. On my next visit, Walt, with a twinkle in his eyes, took me to the lounge, pointed to the ceiling where a five-foot-diameter gap showed the laths, slightly sagging.

"John," he said in his kindly soft voice, "I admit we all leap about playing ghoodminton, but perchance your heavy-duty police boots initiated the vibrations. Kindly remove them when we play in future."

Darroll Pardoe,
pardos@globalnet.
co.uk



Young Darroll in
1968. His photo.

Hi Peter,

Lilian's vision of fan-history (or any history for that matter) is a bit bleak. It *is* all gossip, in the end, of course. And naturally we will be most interested in the people and events we knew ourselves. But these can be illuminated by what went on before, and this is nicely illustrated by the stuff on St Fantony. I think you seem to have finally got to the bottom of what started it in the first place. I can believe in a ceremony intended (in the beginning) as a bit of fun. It should probably have stayed that way. The back stories invented (there's no kinder word) in later years by various people were presumably intended to serve their own agendas at the time, though I'm sure Ethel was just repeating what someone else told her.

And somebody has to compile the "list of historical facts in a row". This is as honourable a form of history as any other, and quite essential as a preliminary to any other sort of historical investigation. You need to start with the framework.

Nice piece on Ella Parker by Bruce Burn. I've often wondered what drove her from fandom into her lonely hermit life in her later years. I suspect we will never know. You say that "After *Loncon II* she held no more meetings" but I remember going to at least one meeting, presumably of the SFCOL, in the lounge/meeting room on the ground floor of Wm.Dunbar House while I was living in London in 1966-67.

Ah yes, Darroll, I'd forgotten that second series of meetings, much more formal than the old Friday night get-togethers in Ella's flat. Here's a note from Skyrack 86: 'Some 25 people turned up on Sunday 9th January [1966] to hear guest speaker John Brunner on 'The Fiction in Science Fiction,' a talk which was immediately snapped up by Michael Moorcock for New Worlds. The next meeting is at 4pm, Sunday, 13th February, when Frank Arnold will speak on 'Characterisation in SF'. A charge of 2/6d will be requested to help with the cost of rent and refreshments.' And here's a bit more info on Ella's situation:

Doreen Rogers
doreen_ellen.rogers
@virgin.net



Doreen, 2008. Her
photo.

Dear Peter,

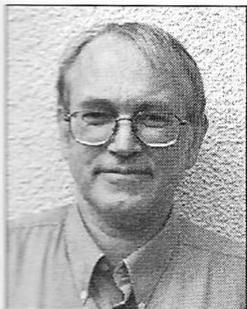
Ella Parker was more-or-less out of fandom when I joined. Ethel had been a close friend and sometimes fans would complain to Ethel about Ella's brusque manner. As Ethel told them, Ella was her own person and people should take her as she was. Ethel and Ella had been great friends but then Ella even stopped writing and she sent a Christmas card which was returned by a neighbour who said Ella had died several months previously.

Ethel told me that when Ella and Fred were united they were so happy together and then Fred died, and she never got over it emotionally. Also, Fred had a good job and helped Ella financially and Ella was too proud to tell the fans she couldn't afford to have them at her flat. By this time Ethel was in Carnoustie and tried to keep in touch with Ella to no avail. How sad.

I agree with Barry Bayley from Telford (just down the road – Hello Barry, do you know me? – if not contact me and I will give a meal and bore you with SF). I remember John and Marjorie with much fondness as did Phil (except when he was in the fancy dress as a slave girl, and came racing up to me – he said he'd had a pass made to him by Brunner, and when I said which one, he paled again and said 'both'!) – however this didn't spoil the friendship we seem to have had. I *adored* Marjorie, and both she and John were so kind to Trish who at the time was a very unhappy, introverted child. I liked his SHOCKWAVE RIDER at the time but couldn't read his other books, though Phil and enjoyed them.

My own take on this is that Ella didn't so much withdraw from fandom as find it had left her behind; you know how new people come in as soon as your back is turned! Ethel Lindsay herself had the same problem after the 1967 Bristol con. She said, "I sometimes had the feeling of being among strangers. In the past I have always been able to talk to fans from sixteen to sixty. That, I felt, no longer held good." ('Stars'... page 160). In Ethel's case, however, she carried on pubbing her ish right into the nineties and that kept her in at least partial contact with an evolving fandom.

David Redd
dave_redd@hot
mail.com



David in 2007.
His photo

Dear Peter,

We shouldn't prolong the Brunner material, I know, but... Sorry Sandra Bond, if I seemed to denigrate THE SHEEP LOOK UP. I only mentioned it as the tipping point where JKHB's remarkable upward trajectory over a decade had levelled-off and was about to turn downward. But Sandra makes a great point about it, reminding us that Brunner – the master at alienating publishers – managed to sell four excellent SF Big Novels at their natural lengths when the genre norm was only 60,000 words. Worth remembering.

And I'm glad Barry Bayley showed us John Brunner allowing himself to be human rather than trying to be God. Those problems of old age he describes – Brunner being sad, lonely, nervous – deserve sympathy. I've been clearing the attic of old family Christmas cards and I keep finding similar problems in the little notes. Georgie Thomas alone in deepest mid-Wales after her Roy's death, giving my mother directions for her house just in case we should ever be passing by. Edwin Davies coping alone with his adult but helpless daughter Selma ("simple" then, "special needs" now) and writing, "I am 80 now but want to hang on as long as I can for Selma." Harold Clark at a similar age with his wife Betty in a home: "I visit her 2 or 3 times a week but she doesn't recognise me."

These are my memories of what people wrote, close enough I think for you to see what happens to people getting old...and it was happening to John Brunner. No family support either, obviously. So I suspect Barry Bayley's thoughts on JKHB's "last day of his life" are spot-on; whatever else Brunner was, as a lifelong SF fan at a fan convention, he died at home.

Good point about 'no family support', David. We never hear about JB's parents; and if the family was as well-to-do as we understand ('Brunner Mond' became ICI) how come no money ever came John's way?

Bruce Burn
Burnbburn@xtra.co.nz



Bruce in 2004.
His photo

Dear Peter,

As usual, we're all a bit right and we're all a bit wrong over this sensitivity to 'kiss and tell' journalism. In the case of the John Hall memoir about rumpy times at the Brunners, he's quite correct in *Prolapse 9* to say many people take such gossipy documentary diligence in their stride, while others think it's all a bit embarrassing. However, I think he's wrong to suggest such reactions are linked to when a person may be born, or the social climates of the times. It's all to do with a person's sensitivities and how people react to a close perusal of the foibles of others. It's just a question of personal taste.

I don't enjoy prying into the private nonsense of another person's angst, just as I don't like pulling wings off butterflies or taking pleasure from another person's pain. Other people of what John calls 'that generation' have huge enjoyment in ripping wings off or laughing at misery, but I don't. Neither do lots of 'that generation'. Nothing to do with 'the War and National Service'. True, I was a child during WW2 in England, but I certainly never faced National Service. I do confess to having been brainwashed by the excellent creed that we kids were exposed to at Saturday Morning Flicks, which finished with a promise to 'leave the world a better place than how I find it.' But again, that's nothing to do with liking or not liking John's essay about the Brunner household.

John chooses a strange couple, to bracket me with Joe Patrizio. The one grew up in Edinburgh, the other in London and Wellington, each subject to very different social pressures and educational propaganda. I can't speak for Joe, but I know the usual reaction to 'such revelations (of sexual shenanigans)' was generally laughter where I grew up, and apart from young eager pubescent kids, no one had much time for prurience as John uses the term. Mind you, there's always someone who gets off from the silliness of such behaviour, and sadly the liberalism of fifty years ago has been perverted by those who crave excess when really enough should be enough.

Oh, how cruel the barb John uses, to label us who don't take joy in observing the weaknesses of others. We are, he says, 'uptight'. Not, I am sure, 'uptight' in its literal meaning of 'anxious', but 'uptight' as in 'morally moribund', or 'self-righteous'. The jargon of the sixties! At least he says he doesn't blame us for being so. How gracious. In a way I might take his epithet of 'uptight' as a compliment. It suggests we are not 'loose'. Just as well: loose things tend to come undone and fall apart.

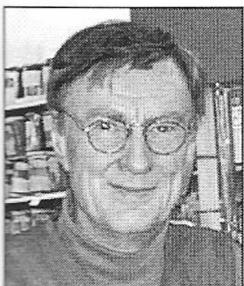
To explore these thoughts further, my opinion, for what little it may be worth, is that life certainly doesn't end with puberty, or the values of adolescence, or even the experiences and judgements of our most active years. We are better defined by what we do with what we have as our adult lives develop. That's the basis of the social urge to produce the next generation, and to nurture the ones beyond that.

Some Russian philosophers used to argue that a person is merely a vehicle for the propagation of their sex glands. I think that's silly, because a person is much more than the simple sum of all their parts, and no one part is more important than the whole. Since the only constant in our world appears to be change, many people might claim it behoves a person to always learn from their experiences, and move on. Eventually you might find an experience you can enjoy for a very long time, and that might be a place to stay. So what I'm trying to say to John is that most of us have grown through our childhood. We've gloried in the exuberance of adolescence. We've strengthened through the challenges of talent, of work, of family, of overcoming what life throws at us. We've moved on. What's passed is just the beginning of what's ahead. Worth a chuckle or a tear. Sometimes good for a reminisce. But let's move on.

Of course, we wouldn't be human to move on without leaving something to say we were there. What we really do is set a standard, and it seems wise and prudent to set a standard for excellence, not so much reflecting pride in our achievements but to urge descendents to achieve their own aims. It's called 'setting a good example' or 'leadership by example' and needs to be shown in a positive light. John's article, in my opinion, is of a type which shows an example all right, but it's of a negative sort, and because it has the nature of uncritical titillation, immature readers might be inclined to attempt to duplicate the activities rather than learn from the vicarious examples and move on. On to the resolution of their own goals and dreams in fulfilling their own potentials. These are some of the reasons that lead to my comment that reading John's article about bonking at the Brunners was itself an embarrassing experience.

Oh dear, Bruce, now you're making me feel awful! While I agree with you in not wishing to take pleasure in another's pain, I do have to confess that I laughed out loud at John Hall's revelations about 'Life with the Brunners'. It was just so funny-ridiculous. Whatever would we have done without JKHB? And here's yet another anecdote, from an old pal of mine who has recently re-surfaced:

Charles Platt
plattland@gmail.com



Charles, his photo.

Hello Peter,

I have devoured all your issues of *Prolapse* with fascination. I don't know if it's too late to throw in my own Brunner reminiscence, but here it is.

I admired John Brunner's courage in adversity, of which he seemed to have a limitless supply. The trouble was, he created the adversity – for example when he stood at his customary place at the bar each month at the science-fiction meetings at The Globe and distributed his self-promotional brochure, "About John Brunner," to anyone he met. It's really quite difficult to deal with a man who advertises himself with his own pre-printed sales pitch as soon as you start talking to him. He wanted respect as a serious writer, yet he promoted himself like a used-car salesman.

One evening in 1969 I was with my girlfriend Diane Lambert at Mike Moorcock's house when Mike received a call from John Brunner. John said that he had just received a phone call notifying him that he had won the Hugo award for his novel *STAND ON ZANZIBAR*, and he was throwing an impromptu party that very evening to celebrate his achievement. Would we like to attend?

We piled into my car, a Vauxhall Cresta with a two-tone white-and-yellow paint job, panoramic windshield, tail fins, and green leather upholstery, known affectionately by my friends as the Pimpmobile. I drove us all to Hampstead and found myself in heavy traffic around the Heath, where a fair had been set up, including the usual amusement rides and the kinds of people that fairs tend to attract. Moorcock recalls that he picked up a couple of hookers, but my memory is rather different. Half-drunk and looking for trouble (my usual state during this period, alas) I saw a couple of girls walking along the pavement, and cruised alongside with the driver's window open. "Hey there, would you like to come to a party?" I asked, doing my best imitation of a dirty old man, even though I was aged 24. "We're going to visit a man who's a famous writer."

To my utter astonishment, after some obligatory giggling and whispering between themselves, the girls said "yess." They must have been 17 or 18, and though they may have been dressed like hookers, they were just local kids looking for a good time.

We duly arrived with them at Brunner's Hampstead flat. Ever the gentleman, John didn't refuse them admission, although his shock-horror reaction was palpable, and Marjorie was not amused. The girls wandered around John's house and, for all I know, maybe they did steal some of Marjorie's jewellery, although we found this allegation quite implausible at the time. And in truth we didn't much care. This was during a period in which our Grand Mission to overthrow or at least infiltrate the literary establishment made us somewhat indifferent to people (such as John Brunner) whom we did not regard as fellow travellers.

Several other guests were present – Hampstead liberals, whose complacency did not sit well with us. John was playing some typically "nice" music, Simon and Garfunkle, which caused my girlfriend Diane to exclaim with derision, "Oooh, it's Pimple and Carbuncle!"

"So what music do *you* like?" one of the Hampstead set asked, supposedly with a polite smile, but with a vexed subtext suggesting that Diane's gross violation of acceptable social behaviour was being only because a good Hampstead liberal was honour-bound to be tolerant of even the most gauche member of society.

Diane rattled off a list of contemporary club bands. John Mayall, Clapton, the Who, Manfred Mann, Zoot Money. There was a strained silence. The Hampstead set didn't know any of these names. From their perspective we were an invasion from an alien, probably antagonistic, and not very civilised sub caste.

Mike has said subsequently that he liked John, but on this evening he expressed his affection in rather an odd way. When John gave a speech describing his pleasure at winning an award, there was an embarrassed silence, as there almost always was when John made a grossly self-promotional speech. Then Mike stood up and gave a speech of his own which basically reflected the tenor of Brunner's speech while upping it to a level of parody. "For years," he began, "success eluded this man." He listed John's many failed attempts to write books that would make money and advance his status. "But now, a new day is dawning. Finally he has been recognised." The clichés kept escalating. "So now, let's hear it for him. John – Hugo-Winner – Brunner!"

Mike sat down and there was another embarrassed silence, much longer than the first. The Hampstead liberals stared at us nonplussed. We had utterly trashed John's party, bringing in a couple of girls we had picked up from the street, wandering around the house with casual indifference, talking and laughing among ourselves with no attempt to socialize with the other guests, insulting their tastes, insulting our host, and generally acting like assholes on an evening which should have been one of the most grandiose in John's career.

Finally John mustered a response. "Well," he said, with a forced smile, "it's better than a slap in the face with a wet fish."

I saw this as a classic example of the way his narcissism brought out the worst in people. His arrogance was inexcusable, but the response he provoked was equally inexcusable. It was truly a lose-lose situation. Worse, his seeming imperviousness to criticism caused people to escalate their attempts to dent his arrogance. This never worked, because as he told me when I interviewed him for the profile I wrote in my book DREAM MAKERS, he had made a decision at some point in his past never to be "baited" by people. So, he presented himself as an immovable object, and thus provoked an irresistible onslaught.

In addition he was utterly transparent in his attempts at social climbing. When I contacted him to ask for an interview for my book of profiles, he blew me off in an insulting style that suggested he was far too important to bother with me. I wrote back listing some of the other people who had already agreed to be included in the book, ranging from Isaac Asimov to Ray Bradbury. I knew he would want to be a part of any venture which might bring him status by association, and sure enough I received an immediate trans-Atlantic phone call from him, inviting me to visit his home during my upcoming trip to England, and even offering to accommodate me overnight. "I wouldn't want to be left out of this one," he said. So there it was, spelled out with no attempt to be subtle about it.

Harlan Ellison often provoked a similar response among the British: "Arrogant bastard. Who does he think he is?" Really John would have done much better if he had relocated in the United States where self-promotion is better tolerated, but of course this was impossible, since from his effete British-liberal position the Americans were socio-politically unacceptable, guilty of racism, guilty of materialism, guilty of social inequality, guilty of military atrocities in Vietnam, and so on, and so forth, as if he had created his world-view entirely by reading editorials in *The Guardian*.

I regret many of my tactless, in-your-face dealings with others during the 1960s, but I don't feel many regrets toward John. He was very, very difficult to deal with politely.



JB in 1993. Photo by Robert Quaglia

Chris Priest
christopherpriest@tiscali.co.uk



Chris in 2008. PW
photo.

Hi Pete,

Thanks for the latest edition of *Old Folks' News*, with its wonderful photos of young men who are now old men, and old men who are older now, and the rest who are dead. No crime to be old or dead, of course. I was looking the other day at our wedding photos from 1988 ... a mere two decades ago, and about half of the guests in the photo have dropped off the twig since.

From Brian's letter: to be honest, I always did get the impression he and Harry loathed John Brunner. I still have that impression. I took part in a panel at the 2005 worldcon, a memorial for John, and it quickly became an anti-John anecdote-fest. Brian even took along one of his own Hugos, pretended it was John's, and made a joke about it. He carried it all the way from Oxford to Glasgow, and back again, for a joke at John's expense. Pre-meditated, or what? And his story in *P-9* about Brunner showing off in the Gents' lav. I think that's a bit infra dig, you know ... Brian wasn't even there to witness it. But suppose the story about the egotistical outburst is true as reported second-hand – literally, factually, absolutely true – hasn't Brian himself ever sloped-off for a quiet slash at a convention, only to have some bloody fool follow him into the bog and make "amusing" comments or ask silly questions? There was (no one believes this) an element of self-mockery in John Brunner. He was capable of laughing at himself. Perhaps he never saw the funny side of goatee beards or kaftans or open-top roadsters, but he knew a lot of people saw a ridiculous side in him, and he rather enjoyed that in his strange old way. Perhaps in the urinal incident witnessed by Ken Campbell, when some half-drunk fan started lobbing questions at Brunner while he was concentrating on lobbing a steady stream at the porcelain, perhaps John simply played along with the gag, as he might have seen it in that strange old way? Benefit of the doubt, I say.

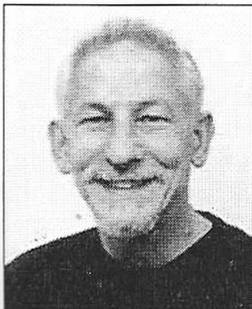
I think I can answer David Pringle's question about how often J. G. Ballard dropped in on the Brunner soirées, during 1970-71. It clashes with something Mike Moorcock said in an earlier issue of *Prolapse*, but it didn't seem worth commenting on at the time. Mike said that he and Ballard used to call in from time to time at the Brunners. That's not what I remember. That exact period was the closest I ever came to being a regular visitor to the Brunners' soirées. I didn't go to them all, but I certainly seem to have gone more often than most people. I should add that my then-wife was a musician. She and Marjorie had a lot in common, and that was why we went at all. Anyway, I can only recall seeing Ballard once at one of those evenings. I would certainly have spotted him if he'd been there at any other time, as he was then, and in some ways still is, the one SF writer I admire above all others. On the evening I'm remembering, Ballard was standing having a quiet conversation with someone in the non-smoking room. He stayed there most of the evening, and did not circulate much. He seemed ill at ease.

As for Mike ... well, my ironclad impression is that he was PNG at the Brunners' household. I only ever saw him there once, and that was at the old flat in Frognaal. He turned up one evening with Charles Platt in tow, who for some reason decided to play some noisy boogie-woogie on Marjorie's beautiful but frail concert grand. An unpleasant row broke out, with voices raised on both sides. I never saw Mike at the Brunners' again.

Sandra Bond asks what I do call Ballard, if I don't call him 'Jimmy'. The answer is the nervous grin from a distance she accurately guesses at. Incidentally, I didn't say I called him something else – I merely said that I always found the idea didn't fit, that the man who wrote the wonderful, enigmatic and endlessly intriguing J. G. Ballard stories was called 'Jimmy'. A 'Jimmy' is to me forever Clitheroe or Osmond or Saville ... a nickname fraught with familiarity and silliness. (In a similar way, I always winced whenever David Wingrove called William Golding 'Bill'. How does someone like our Dave get to call him 'Bill'?) Ballard and I do not know each other at all, but we have worked professionally together in the past. I've met him once or twice at parties and he has been invariably courteous and generous and amiable, but we make small-talk and go into innately English middle-class contortions as we both look for an escape from each other. I'd like to know him better, but I doubt I ever will.

And now for a true hero; Joe promised me a LoC in 2007 and one duly arrived, at 7.30p.m. on New Year's Eve. Now there's a man who believes in keeping a promise!

Joe Patrizio
joepatrizio@blueyonder.co.uk



Joe in 2004.
His photo

Hi Peter,

Your analysis of British fandom seems sound from my limited perspective. I moved to London in late 1959 or early 1960 and by that time the London Circle had gone and was rarely mentioned or discussed. Also, I can't remember any aggro between London fandom and non-London fandom, but then probably more than half of the SFCoL were from outside London, and most of them had had no involvement with the London Circle. At least, that's how I remember it.

Ella Parker, Forgotten Fan? How could that be? All in all, Bruce has pretty well got it right about Ella, but if you want a cool dispassionate analysis of her, don't come to me. I had (and still have) the greatest affection and respect for her. Sure, she was loud, brash and bossy, but she laughed a lot and was kindness personified. Ella was my first contact with fandom proper (i.e. not just the BSFA); her *Orion* was the first fanzine I received and the first I wrote for (again, discounting *Vector* – which wasn't a real fanzine anyway). I also have very fond memories of Fred, Ella's brother, who was (if possible) even kinder than she was; at the time, I thought that the world was a better place for his being in it.

I'm sure Bruce is right when he says that Ella felt that she had to nurture young fans, but I at least didn't feel that she was being protective. But then, perhaps I was just insensitive about that sort of thing (callow youth that I was). 'Rebelling' also seems a bit heavy, although I seem to remember a bit of tension occasionally when Mike Moorcock and some of his pals came to the Friday night gatherings. Don't get me wrong, there wasn't any blood on the floor but as I remember it discussions sometimes got a bit heated, and Ella didn't go for that too much.



Bruce mentions being dumped-on for his description of Ella in one of his fanzines, and explains his position, which is fine. However, at the time the general perception was that he had accepted Ella's hospitality then made rude comments once he was away. I fully accept Bruce's explanation of what happened but that is definitely not the way it appeared at the time.

I'm glad you managed to get so many photos for the piece; they were real memory-joggers for me. My last memory of Ella is of her in bed waiting to watch QPR on Match of the Day on TV. I offered to tell her the score (which she had managed to avoid) but she suggested, in her typical way, that it might be bad for my health if I did so. When I think about it, I feel that she had a bit of a raw deal from me (and probably some of the other young fans who she gathered round her) who rather took her for granted. But I suppose that's how you treat family, and Ella was pretty well family at that time.

Some interesting points from Mike Moorcock's letter last time. He's more-or-less right when he says that Bill [Temple] expected much from the sale of FOUR-SIDED TRIANGLE to the film makers. It was a great disappointment, though and Bill was upset at the string-&-cardboard portrayal of the technology, which was laughable even for those days. Mike is further off the mark when he says that Bill died a very embittered person. Sure, he always believed that he deserved more recognition than he got, and he mostly blamed this on agents, but he was very contented in his final years. He was quite happy among his books and music, writing his letters (which was always his prime writing activity) and fussing about his cat. He was never the happiest man in the world but very embittered, no.

George Locke is too kind about my involvement in IPSO. Yes, I helped Ted [Forsyth] with the first (and perhaps the second) issue, but Ted deserves all the glory after that. In fact, after I'd missed a couple of mailings (too busy chasing Anne) he threw me out of IPSO. Pleading 15 years of friendship cut no ice – I was out. Hard man, Ted.

I suppose that I should now write a few words on John Hall's letter, although Bruce says it all in his answer (he sent me a copy). Anyway, back to JH. For a man who "will not suffer being patronised" he doesn't seem to mind patronising others, does he? I really do appreciate his forgiving me for my upbringing, opinions, and the like – he's so kind. Possibly he doesn't mean to be, but he is pretty insulting in his attributing reasons for our attitudes. Just because I was uncomfortable with John's article doesn't necessarily make me the sexually-repressed prig that he implies. I jotted down notes about being considerate of other people and all that arises from that, but decided that there was no point in taking this further. I believe it's got a lot to do with ego and I imagine John and I couldn't have a meaningful discussion on the subject. Bruce has put things much better than I could – just add "me too" to his letter.

Joe, I've recently read Bruce's account of his voyage to the UK in 1960, culminating in his meetings with London fandom, and I think I can see how he upset everyone! He didn't pull his punches but described people vividly, warts and all, which at the time must have been a great contrast to the generally bland fan-writing of the era. But I can also see there's absolutely no malice – Bruce was only 10 and perhaps a little naïve. Anyway, the final instalment of his memoirs in Prolapse #12 (acht) will certainly be an eye-opener! And now, just days after your letter, this message popped-up in my In-Box:

Ted Forsyth
Forsythted@aol.com

Peter,

I have known Joe Patrizio since we met in 1947 in the first year of secondary school in Edinburgh. We spent the next few years together learning/playing tennis, cricket, chess, photography and, of course, read lots of SF. Apart from the obvious Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle my SF began with copies of *Planet Stories* (I think) picked up from Woolworths, and occasional copies of *Unknown*. We found Volsted Gridban and Vargo Statten paperbacks in some local shop, and we began to get copies of *Astounding*, *Galaxy* and *New Worlds*. I joined the Science Fiction Book Club (and have recently given some of my remaining books to the local RSPB to sell at their Autumn Fair) and Joe got involved with the BSFA. Joe became ill and when I moved on to another school it was a year before he followed so to some extent our paths began to diverge.

I eventually went on to study Mechanical Engineering and after six years moved to a job in London where Ella Parker put me up for several months. I then found a flat near Clapham North tube station, with a Polish family, where I stayed for ten years (I think my inertia is rather large!). Joe eventually came to London and stayed with me for some time before deciding that he preferred the company of Anne Temple. At some stage (don't ask about dates - memory tends to get a bit hazy) Bruce Burn stayed at the same address. Joe and Anne moved to St Albans then up to Scotland and it was about 36 years before we met again. The young man I remembered as having a shock of black hair was now trying to become Santa Claus with hair as white as snow!

While Ella was involved with preparations for the '60 London Eastercon I arrived at her flat to hear that there had been a last minute problem with the hotel and that she had managed to get another one. But Arthur Thompson didn't know about it so I was given the job of travelling to Arthur's address with someone else whose name escapes me (I did say memory was hazy) and incurred the wrath of Ella when we spent some time examining a London map to find out where we were going. Even when we reached the right area we still had to ask for directions but did manage to get the message on to Arthur. (I think it was at the *Loncon* that I had a long conversation with Ron Bennett about random numbers and spent time tossing a coin carefully so that 90% of the time it came up heads, then altered the tossing so that it was different each time and the percentage came closer to 50%). While Joe was in London he was persuaded to become the Editor of *Vector* while I had my arm twisted to give Archie Mercer a rest from Treasurer and took over his job for a year. You have certainly triggered a few memories but they will probably sink below the surface again!



And now for the 'Mike Moorcock letter' – I've have called it a 'column' back in the old days. But who else do you know that can whack-out 2000+ words of fascinating fan/SF-history, just like that?

Mike Moorcock,
Texas

Dear Pete,

Oddly, I don't remember any rivalry with non-London fans, maybe because in 1955, around the time I came into fandom, many non-Londoners like Ron Bennett, Eric Bentcliffe and of course Jim Cawthorn were very kind to me when I started sending out *Burroughsania*. Arthur Thomson (Atom) who lived near me was also incredibly kind. But I remember no unpleasant remarks ever made against non-Londoners

I'm very sorry to have upset Bruce Burn. I really did feel defensive towards Ella and have to say I wrote the letter for her rather than 'against' him – as I recall, at Ethel's request. Ella was one of those 'difficult' women I've rather liked all my life. While I forget the substance of Bruce's remarks, I must have perceived them as 'ungentlemanly' but am happy to apologise to Bruce if my response seemed over the top. Equally, I'm sorry if my remarks concerning John Brunner's career were misleading.

Certainly I remember Brian trying to get Faber to publish John and I know from my own experience how John had a tendency to shoot himself in the foot. I remember the fireplace incident, and it could well have been me who burned the first book... It was all John's fault, really. He was the one who kept quoting that bit about 'when books are burnt people will be the next to burn' and I no doubt felt that someone had to get the ball rolling. (Jimmy Ballard, a great fan of Ray Bradbury, phoned me one day in great upset to inform me that Fahrenheit 451 WASN'T the temperature at which book paper burned!)

The Great JB book burning took place at the house Harry and Joan had in, I think, Beckenham. That was an evening full of incident in which none of us acquitted ourselves with complete decency and sobriety. The evening ended with Harry and I helping push-start Brian and Margaret's car while barely able to stand upright. I do agree with Brian that John was a frequent talking point, mostly because he WAS his own worst enemy and he fascinated many of us. I think Brian's absolutely right about John's 'dressing up' through insecurity, though I also remember Harry's insight. He thought John, when deciding to become a writer, went for the whole set – he went to live in Hampstead, bought himself a velvet (well, corduroy) jacket and grew a beard.

I only vaguely recall the incident in Birmingham which Brian remembers at the Midland Hotel, but it's true I know a bunch of Irish songs, both Republican and Unionist. I learned most of them from the Belfast Group! Including Bob Shaw. I was privileged, by the way, to publish the 'new' Bob Shaw in *New Worlds*, when he started writing fiction again. I remember how delighted I was to receive the first story he sent me. I was a big admirer and we got on very well. Therefore I was depressed to learn that so little of his work was now in print. He's not the only one whose books don't deserve this sort of obscurity, of course. I can think of many writers off the top of my head who aren't sufficiently represented, these days, including Barry Bayley, Tom Disch, John Sladek as well as an earlier generation of mostly US writers whose work has become overshadowed by that of Phil Dick, who founded much of his own work on the genre they helped create. I'm thinking of people like Kuttner and Kornbluth and Pohl.

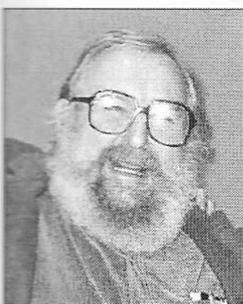
I have to praise the media-oriented magazine *DeathRay* for its feature, every month, which reminds its primarily young readership of the best work of earlier generations. Each month they interview an SF writer and feature reviews of books by writers like – yes – Bob Shaw, Brian Aldiss and John Brunner. The magazine is run by people who broke away from *SFX*, so they bring a lot of good popular-journalism experience to a magazine addressed to a mass audience and know how to 'sell' the likes of Bob Shaw to kids originally drawn to the magazine for its coverage of the latest TV SF and fantasy series. They don't publish fiction, but they're certainly doing more to help sell it than the average publisher or bookseller. It's a kind of practical idealism I like to see.

I should add that in fact *SFX* isn't entirely devoid of SF book reviews and, as well as running a regular column by Dave Langford, it also does an SF 'classic' review every month. Though you have to accept, if you're as old as most of us, that a 'classic' frequently seems to be a book which, according to one's faulty memory, came out about a week ago.

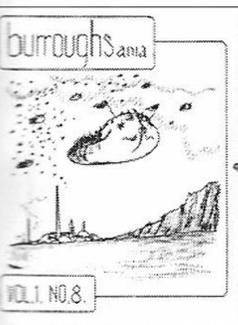
Didn't know I'd rechristened Richard Ellingsworth 'Dick' and I'm very sorry to hear he's unwell. Again, his piece brought back a lot of memories which otherwise I might never have reclaimed! I'm rather pleased that he was one of those brought to fandom through reading *Tarzan Adventures*. Of course, many people thought that all I did with *TA* when I became editor was to extend my previous fannish activities and get myself (and a bunch of other fans) paid for doing what we had up until then been doing for fun. [At this point I asked Mike how it was that he became editor at such a young age]

I thought I'd told the story here and there, but maybe only in conversation. I got the job through my fanzine, *Burroughsania*. I went to interview the editor of *Tarzan Adventures* (I no longer have the copy containing the interview – indeed, don't have any copies apart from one reproduction someone did) and frankly found him a disappointment. My interview was duly published, in which I said what a hack he seemed to be. I was 16, of course, and not very subtle. Sent him the finished copy and apparently he blew up. He was certainly very frosty to me thereafter. However, Alistair Graham, his assistant, and everyone else working there all thought it was very accurate and the bloke soon resigned and went back to working for *Gardening Times* or wherever it was he'd been working.

Alistair then became editor and immediately contacted me to ask for contributions. So, at 16, I began contributing articles on ERB's other characters such as John Carter, Carson of Venus and so on. Alistair was also a keen skiffler, playing banjo. We formed a skiffle group called 'The Flames', as I recall, and began rehearsing. Then Alistair asked me if I wanted the job of assistant editor. I wasn't sure. It seemed a big responsibility. He said 'Look, I'm planning to leave (he was taking his banjo to travel around the world) and if you accept the job of assistant, you'll be editor within six months'. So at 16 I



Mike at Corflu,
2007. PW photo.



Two issues of
Burroughsania;
Top cover by Atom,
bottom cover by Jim
Cawthorn.



joined *TA* as assistant. By the time Alistair left, I was 17 and sure enough became editor. (I had already begun commissioning work earlier but didn't really become editor until I was seventeen).

Gradually, I began to reduce the amount of comic strip in the magazine and add text until *TA* was about 50/50 text and strip. This put the running costs up (it cost more for original typesetting than for agency comics and, of course, I was paying more for original contributions, but since the circulation also rose significantly, the publisher didn't complain too much. Then our distributor, L. Miller of Hackney, who produced dozens of reprint titles (from both Italy and the USA) began to hit a crisis (I think the ban on US imports was lifted) and began 'bundling' *Tarzan* in with their own comics, but telling retailers that they didn't have *Tarzan* but DID have, say, *Rex Allen* or *Tim Holt* or one of their other Western titles, which had begun to fail. Or they substituted one of the Mick Anglo titles, like *Marvelman*.

Individual retailers hardly knew the difference but it meant we lost a lot of regular readers who were unable to buy *TA* and assumed it had folded, but we still had a relatively high circulation, compared to the other Miller titles. When Westworld, the publisher of *TA*, began to talk of reducing costs I left and soon joined *Sexton Blake Library* (I got THAT job via my defence of the revamped *SBL* in my non-SF 'Book Collectors News' fanzine), and on *Tarzan* an octogenarian called R.M. Samuels, who had been a sort of part-time assistant to me, took over.

He hated the fantasy and SF I'd been running and immediately began to replace it with 'good wholesome material for healthy-minded boys' so soon *TA* began to run pieces about the Royal Scot and how to build model aeroplanes, and he also wasn't selective about the artists he ran in the comic section (I'd used only the best of the artists) so that pretty soon *TA* lost its heart and what made it distinctive. I came into the office (by then I was working not far away at Fleetway) one day to notice Jim Cawthorn's artwork actually in his bin. Attached to it were the episodes of a serial I'd done for *TA*. 'Normal boys don't want that sort of rubbish' Samuels told me. I rescued the stuff and left.

In less than a year after I'd resigned, *TA* had folded. I seem to recall that I was still doing my 'translation' from Spanish plates of the Foster/Hogarth pre-war Sunday pages and using such names as Linwood, the Benford brothers and other young fans with whom I was in touch through our fanzines. This, too, was dropped by Sammy Samuels (whose byline was often Aremess or R.M.S.) who saw no difference between Foster's beautiful line and Rex Maxon's horribly crude representation of the Ape Man. This did at least demonstrate to me that a publication which had 'soul' (i.e. real engagement from editor and staff) almost always sold better than one which was just a journeyman job.

When I went to work on *Sexton Blake* I re-introduced the letter column and began to add features, to editor Bill Baker's approval, and again we saw a result in rising sales. When I took over *New Worlds* I did much the same thing – running more editorials, letter columns, features and so on – and again saw the circulation rise. The irony with *NW* in its first format under my editorship was that it was hit by a very similar problem to *TA* – the distributor was Miller's chief rival, Thorpe and Porter, and when they went bankrupt they took all the Gold publications down with them, including Compact Books (both *NW*, *Impulse* – as it had become – and the Compact SF list).

Our problems were never to do with circulation but always had their roots in distribution (or in W.H. Smug's case, refusal to distribute). There's a myth that *NW* 'died' because sales fell. Sales had always been healthy and growing, but Smiths really took against us after pressure from the press and Arts Council to resume distribution, and while they sent boxes out to their branches the branches were ordered not to display it and only sell copies if asked for it. This meant that after some months, where we thought we were sending out our normal numbers, we began to get unopened boxes back from those Smiths' branches. This was a huge blow to our finances which depended on receipts which normally came in some months after the title had been distributed.

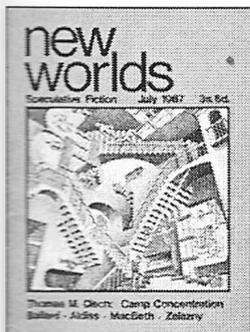
The role of the chains in making or breaking books and magazines has never been fully explored. My editor at Cape offered an astonishingly bitter tirade against the book chains the last time I saw him, earlier this year, saying that increasingly it becomes financially impossible to publish 'mid-list' writers because the chains demand larger and larger sums of money to display the books well and frequently refuse to take even a few copies for their stores. This also explains why so many good 'mid list' or backlist SF authors, such as the ones we've mentioned before, don't get to keep their work in print. It isn't only SF writers who suffer – it's true across the board.

Although I have my own differences with Malcolm Edwards at Orion, he has done more to find ways around this problem than any other major publisher I can think of. I'm in the happy position of being able to compare my sales and those of other writers in various countries, and where book chains scarcely exist (usually because there is still some sort of version of the Net Book Agreement in place) it's noticeable how many titles remain in print and sell consistently well. Many of us warned of the damage to independent booksellers and ultimately to publishers and to authors would result from the abolition of the NBA, and you wonder why I disagreed with you so strongly over the effect Maggie Thatcher's policies were going to have on the country.

They might have helped the corporations or, indeed, your business, but they were as ruinous to our culture as Reagan's were to the US. We find ourselves with a vulgarised and dumbed-down media, a considerable reduction in the variety of kinds of writing available to us, and public art galleries which depend on creating a sensation to bring in the customers. Even our supremacy in the theatre is seriously threatened by the withdrawal of subsidies which allowed producers to take risks they can never take, for instance on Broadway. To say nothing of the standardisation of commerce and culture resulting from the rise of corporate retailers at the expense of independents. Ahem, I think 'Bothered of Bournemouth (ret.)' has raised his ancient head again. Better give him his medicine and tuck him away for the night...

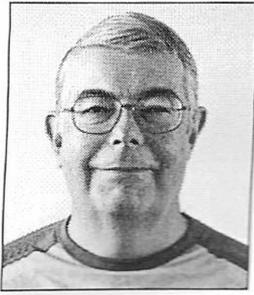


Top: The first Compact *New Worlds*, May-June 1964. Cover by Jim Cawthorn.



Below; the first large-size issue, July 1967. Cover by Escher.

Mike Meara
meara810@
btinternet.com



Mike in 2008. Gone is
the mustache, alas!
His photo.

Hi Peter,

Many thanks for a well-crafted (as always) issue on 1950s themes. Although this period is well before my time in fandom, I found plenty here to interest and entertain (with the one exception noted below, but I suppose we all have blind spots).

Good to hear about the Bob Shaw fan-writing collection; must try to get hold of a copy. Those little booklets published at Eastercons in the 1970s are among the few fan publications I kept when I disposed of my fanzine collection a while back. Someone in the lettercol was saying that whenever they read a piece of Bob's, they 'heard' it in their mind in Bob's own voice. Me too. Is it possible for those who heard him not to do this, I wonder? This thought brought to mind Bob's wonderful talks at various UK cons, and the recordings that I (and doubtless others) have of some of these and other convention programme items from those times. Surely I can't be the first person to think that the Internet is the ideal vehicle to store and share this resource? All these old recordings need is transcribing, their sound cleaning up as best as possible, and compressing to MP3 or similar, all of which is easily achievable today by the amateur. I was intending to do just this for my own archive, but it's a question of priorities. If I knew that others were interested in this idea, I could bump it up the list a bit.

Ah, St Fantony! Or rather, yeurghh, St Fantony!?!@!*&!?! As you can tell, I'm with Peter Roberts on this issue. I vaguely remember there was a St Fantony item at my first con, your very own Worcestercon, and I remember thinking even then, in my state of extreme neo-ism, "what the hell is all this nonsense about, and what has it got to do with fandom today?", or thoughts to that effect. My sense of vague irritation and embarrassment returned, stronger than ever, as I skip-read pp12-18. (I did try to read it properly, but got told off by Pat for wincing and squirming.) I accept that St Fantony is a valid part of fannish history, and that its value in the 1950s was perhaps different, and greater, than it was in the 1970s, but I hope that even its most ardent supporters would admit that it went on too long. Perhaps now that its birthday has been properly celebrated, it will do the decent thing and lie down and die. (You know that people are supposed to have anxiety dreams in which they're out on the street naked? In my anxiety dream I have to explain St Fantony to a non-fan, over and over again until they get it...and I always fail...)

As regards Kettering, I had heard of Dave Jenrette, probably from reading old fanzines, but always assumed he was a hoax: Dave Jenrette -> D Jenrette -> degenerate, geddit? Or is it just the way my mind worked in those days?

I see that John Brunner continues to dominate the lettercol; he would have liked that, I think. I must go on record here that I think John Hall's Brunner piece is the best thing I've seen in *Prolapse*, indeed one of the best pieces of fan-writing I can remember, beautifully written by John (as is his letter in #9). Thank you John, and thank you Peter for allowing us to share it.

Can I end with a supporting voice for a piece on Ratfandom? Take off that ridiculous beanie and get your cajoling hat on, Peter. This is an important part of my fandom, and because I was in awe (and indeed, somewhat afraid) of the Rats, I never got as close as I should have.

Well, Mike, no-one's bit on the idea of doing a Ratfan-retrospective. Greg isn't keen, and who else would dare? And what do you mean, 'ridiculous beanie'? As Andy Sawyer wrote to me recently 'when I was Young and Serious, the very thought of wearing a propeller beanie would have driven me amok with gibbering defence of my dignity. Now I am Middle-Aged and Frivolous, wearing a Liverpool Group beanie is an honour and a privilege.' As indeed it is.

Mark Plummer
mark.fishlifter@
googlemail.com



What I call a
'sensitive fannish
face' - Mark at
Novacon 37. Photo
by PW, beanie by
Ina Shorrock

Peter,

I know we've spoken before about the way that after you codified a list in 1971 it seems that nobody felt inclined to challenge the omission of the 1957 *Cytricon* until Rob tracked it down in the course of researching *Then* #2 and then revised the canonical list in the 1989 Eastercon souvenir book. As far as I can see there were at least five people - the Shorrocks, Archie Mercer, Terry Jeeves and Ted Tubb - who were both there in 1957 and members of the 1971 convention where your list first appeared, while a further ten or so members of Eastercon 22 had been reasonably active in the middle Fifties even if they seemingly weren't actually at *Cytricon III*.

Maybe this just demonstrates that nobody reads the articles in convention souvenir books, and indeed that modern fans are no less interested in the fannish past than their forebears. But it does at least suggest that Lilian's not hitting on a universal truth in her letter with its contention that, for her, fan history becomes interesting when it's about her and her contemporaries. It seems that none of those '57 veterans were all that curious when, in 1971, you set out to create an outline chronology of their fannish history - or if they were, then they weren't sufficiently motivated to call you or anybody else on the omission of the '57 convention which was then only fourteen years in the past.

Oh, and this is a detail possibly only of interest to you, me and Lilian - and maybe not even that many people - but I don't think I did imply that the decision of the 1983 Eastercon to make the TAFF delegate its fan guest of honour was somehow indicative of the *Albacon* committee 'making welcoming, nay, genuflecting, gestures to fannish fandom and fan funds'. I only mentioned *Albacon* to illustrate the point that the decision of the aborted *Convoy* to similarly honour the TAFF delegate in 2007 was, while not unprecedented, relatively unusual.

Still, if nothing else the misinterpretation has flushed out Lilian's explanation to why the *Albacon* committee made this decision. I'm slightly curious as to why they felt they had to have a fan guest of honour at all if those were the circumstances - they were, after all, bidding at *Channelcon* and that didn't have a fan guest - but still. I could take issue with a few more things in Lilian's letter - is anybody really arguing that just because it happened in the fifties it's important? - but I'll go back to Kettering for a moment. I suppose it's plausible that, as Tony theorises, Dick Eney took the idea that there were only

three *Cytricons* from *SFN* but surely he'd have been alive to the possibility that some British fannish events might have happened during that twenty-six month hiatus between issue #14 and #15? More likely, I think, that he asked a British fan, perhaps one of the Londoners who didn't attend and who had already forgotten about what was clearly a low-key event. *Fancy II* credits some British fans with advice and assistance: Willis, Charters, 'Inchmery Fandom', Harris... and John Roles, who was seemingly *at* *Cytricon III*. Presumably Dick didn't ask *him* about that particular entry.

The St Fantony stuff is a useful clarification – previously I'd been pretty much with Chuck Connor in the belief that 'the Knights were set up to greet people at conventions' – although I suspect that, for me, these ceremonies are more interesting to read about than actually experience. This is one bit of fandom's past for which I'm afraid I don't feel even a shred of false nostalgia.

Oh, and here's a thing. That photo of Don Ford on page 22 describes him as a 'fan GoH' of the 1960 convention. You may recall that a few months ago we were talking about the way that Steve Stiles had been given this designation in 1968 but the detail had somehow never been incorporated into the traditional convention programme book listing. You said then, 'That will make Steve Stiles the first separate Fan GoH at a British con, I think; that's in addition to the regular GoH (which Ken Slater was in 1959, so that doesn't count). Pity, because I thought I'd created the concept in 1971 with Ethel Lindsay.' Yet here's Don Ford being described as a fan GoH in 1960, and indeed he's so described in the recent programme book listings, too. A good example of how easy it is to overlook even the most obvious of research sources...

I think the reason the 1957 con was 'lost' is simply because so few people were there and – something Tony touched upon – it was so little reported. That's a minor mystery in itself. Considering that most of the major UK fanzine editors/writers were at Cytricon III – Bennett (Ploy), Bencliffe & Jeeves (Triode), Eric Jones, (Sidereal), Mercer, John Roles (Space Diversions) and Ken Slater – how was it that the only con-reps came from a fringe-fan and a visitor? Greg and I can find nothing else – though I am predicting that somewhere, some day we will unearth Archie Mercer's account of being knighted by St Fantony. He wrote about everything else and I can't believe he would have let this one go past without a mention!

Yes, I had at first missed the FGoH thing, though I did spot it when I began to look more closely at the 1960 con. Talking about obvious sources – I took a look at Don Ford's TAFF report which has some pretty good descriptions of fans of the era, including a bit about Dave Newman which I could have used if I'd thought of it before. Belatedly I realise that TAFF reports are great sources of information – for instance, Bob Madle's 1957 account is good on Loncon I, as is Steve Stiles' description of Buxton in 1968.

And another thing, I was re-reading Perihelion #4 the other day (as you do) when I spotted this note in Barry Hall's account of the 1958 Cytricon IV. He wrote, "We didn't find one person out of all the 48 attendees whom we didn't like." Since I'd previously counted heads and calculated a figure of 49 for that year (in P#8) I was pleasantly pleased to have my estimate unexpectedly confirmed.

Can we please lighten-up about St Fantony? Can't we simply take it as a splendid piece of theatre and fannish good-fellowship? I was really hoping my investigation might have made you look at it a bit more sympathetically – I even asked Jim Linwood if he'd changed his mind...

Jim Linwood
JLinwood@aol.com

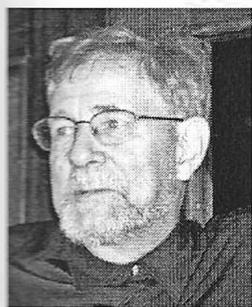
Peter,

No, you haven't changed my mind about St Fantony. I just took your article as an excellent piece of fan-history rather than a piece of proselytising – although your final paragraph shows ~~what~~ side you are on. As I've said before, I thought a joke between two fan groups got blown up to ridiculous proportions in later years, putting off newcomers like Pete Roberts and Chris Priest. It never really bothered me as I could escape to the bar at the first rustle of papier-mâché armour.

Tony Keen failed to mention one regular attendee of the Kettering conventions, Boris the night waiter. Attendees had christened him 'Boris' because of his resemblance to Lurch in the Addams Family cartoons. He had a slow, shambling gait and seemed to have suffered from injuries, possibly during the war. It turned out that Boris read SF and looked forward to the yearly gatherings – a big change from the usual boring Mid-England evenings in the 'George'. At the 1960 Whitsun minicon, Ella Parker committed the *gaffe* of forgetting that 'Boris' was an unflattering name said behind his back, calling out across the lounge "Boris, fetch me a double whiskey."

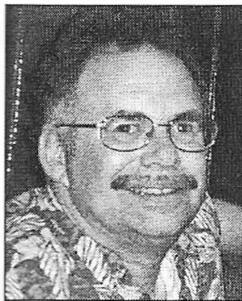
Dick Ellingsworth's time with the National Magazine Company wasn't wasted. When Marion moved into Kingdon Road he presented her with several 'Good Housekeeping' cookery booklets. Nearly two decades later our daughter, Eleanor, plundered the '50s style adverts for cookers and other domestic appliances to use as artwork in her punk-rock fanzine *Baby Bites Back*.

The line in Barry Bayley's letter "...Mike and I met an American called Gary who had started a world citizenship movement and was issuing his own passports" gave me a *déjà vu* moment. I'd been reading Sylvia Nasar's biography of the mathematician John Nash, 'A Beautiful Mind' (forget the otherwise-entertaining Russell Crowe film which is 90% fiction) in which Garry (sic) Davis is mentioned as a major influence on Nash. In 1948 Davis, an actor and ex-bomber pilot, walked into the American embassy in Paris and renounced his US citizenship and proclaimed himself "the first citizen of the world." He created his own 'world passport' and it was surprisingly accepted by many countries. He's still campaigning and has his own World Government website. In 1959, Nash's developing schizophrenia led him to unsuccessfully copy Davis's action in the American consulate in Geneva. According to Nasar, Nash was also a science fiction fan. When his future wife, Alicia, set her cap at him she took to sitting next to the SF collection in the MIT library to attract his attention.



Jim at Re-Repetercon, 2004. Photo by

Jerry Kaufman
JAKaufman@aol.com



Jerry in a Sparkbrook Balti, 2006. Photo by Kev Clarke

Peter,

Although people have published collections by Willis, Shaw and White, I don't believe anyone has taken material by these three, and by the other members and cohorts of the Wheels of IF to give a broader and more rounded picture of the group and its history. Sounds to me like potentially a very enjoyable book, as well as a lot of work, but I could see a great project. It would have to include material by George Charters John Berry, Chuch Harris, etc. It would have to range throughout the most active years of the group. It could include multiple reports of the same incidents. And so on. A real fan-historical project for someone other than me, of course.

Lilian says, "No wonder Ted and Greg and you like fan-history so much – it's usually about you!!" Despite the fact that I, too, like gossip, Lilian's theory can't explain why I found fan history interesting at the age of 17, when I first contacted fandom – attending cons, reading fnz, and discovering that a fellow-Cleveland resident, Charles Wells, had lived his youth in Savannah, Georgia, hobnobbing with Lee Hoffman. Charles had pubbed his own zines, been a long-time FAPA member, and owned a number of fannish Ur-texts. (Also, and to me incidentally, a professor of math at Case-Western Reserve University.)

I suppose that even though the fan thing had been going on long before I was born or before I discovered it, still most of the originals were still alive and part of the scene, or could be if they wanted. (As we know, a number of them wandered back into fandom – or, like Art Widner, dived back in.) So potentially I was reading not only about how it came to be, but also about people I had met or could meet. Today this is no longer true.

Take the letter from Tony Glynn. I know I too met Bea Mahaffey at one or two or three Ohio conventions. I lived in Cleveland, and attended *Marcons* in Columbus, and Midwestcons in Cincinnati starting in 1968. The *Marcon* in 1968 is, in fact, where I first met Suzle. I am also willing to say that I met Tony Glynn, too! The convention he refers to is most likely the second *Marcon* I attended, and the more I mumble his name, the more it seems familiar. Hello, Tony.

*Thanks, Jerry, but I suspect you're an exception in being interested in fan-history at a young age; I suppose that generally we need to reach more mature years before being terribly concerned about what has gone before. And I recently heard from Tony Glynn again, since I'd sent him a spare copy of *Triode* #2 (he did the covers for the issue). So Jerry, meet Tony:*

Tony Glynn
Southport



Tony at Mancon, 1976. Photo by Terry Jeeves.

Dear Peter,

I got a great kick out of the 1955 *Triode*, of which I had only vague memories, but so much came back as I read it – all those names, Mal Ashworth, Mike Wallace and, of course, Norman Wansborough. I wonder where they all are now.

Norman came in for a good deal of ribbing. I recall him putting forth a plan to raise funds. If I remember aright, vast amounts of cash would result from everyone selling off their old science-fiction mags and all British fandom could go off to the US to attend a convention. Well, it was something like that but, since it followed what were obviously the Wansborough Laws of economics (which I suspect even Wansborough himself didn't understand) it probably wouldn't work. At least, I never heard of anyone trying it.

Oh, and in the old *Triode* I noticed echoes of Vince Clarke's needle against Terry Jeeves, something I recollect from that time and which, I fear, coloured my view of Clarke. I think it was of a piece with the South v North animosity which was needless and which I could never understand. I suppose it reached its zenith with Bert Campbell's infamous "provincials" remark which raised northern hackles no end. Also, I noticed artwork by Brian Lewis whom I got to know much later when he was a very good professional artist. He died suddenly at the height of his powers.

And, looking back at *Triode*, I'm still somewhat amazed at all the energy, physical and mental, that went into producing it and so many other fanzines, and all of it in the spare time of the participants. Proof, I suppose, that fandom was indeed a way of life. *Prolapse* is valuable. One day, archaeologists will treasure it for its probing and recording that way of life which now belongs to another world.

Tony Keen
keentonyuk@yahoo.



Tony at Novacon 37. PW photo.

Dear Peter,

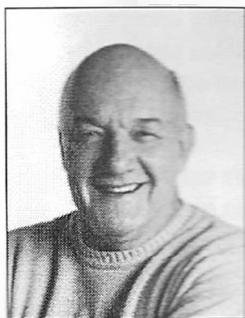
I've no problem whatsoever going along with your theory of rivalry in British fandom in the '50s. Indeed, it had already become clear to me as I was writing the Kettering piece that the 1957 Eastercon was a bone of contention between London and non-London fandoms, even before you found Ethel Lindsay's remarks. What I didn't have was the full information about the wider background to all of this.

I think Lilian Edwards is being a little bit unfair on Rob Hansen and the style of historiography it represents. For a start, Mark Plummer's comments don't derive from THEN, which doesn't cover the 1980 *Albacon* beyond noting that it won the bid in 1979. I presume Mark made the deduction simply from comparing a list of Eastercon guests and a list of TAFF winners. (Indeed, to be scrupulously fair, Mark doesn't say that the *Albacon* committee were acting out of fannish allegiance – that's what Lilian has inferred, though it's a reasonable inference.)

THEN is actually a rather less vanilla piece than Lilian gives Rob credit for – Rob does try to get behind the stories, as far as he can given the published accounts of the time. It's not perfect, but then an overview of this sort is bound to have omissions – all one can hope is that the omissions do not hide the true story excessively. That doesn't mean that this sort of account isn't worth doing – indeed, it is the bedrock upon which the more detailed accounts must found themselves. Also, whilst clearly a lot of fan history is gossip – the Brunner anecdotes in this issue's lettercol are a case in point – I don't believe it's true that this is all that fan history is.

Brilliant cover – your best use of a Giles cartoon yet.

Tom Shippey
tshippey@abc
global.net



Tom in 2005
His photo

Dear Peter,

I read Chris Priest's piece about James Blish, [in P#8] and thought I would put in my fading memories of him. I met him a few times when he and I were both in Oxford, probably brought together by Brian Aldiss. It must have been in the last three years of his life. Chris may be quite right about the way he used to dominate Milford Conference workshops, and the "said-bookisms" no doubt were highly annoying, but one thing I don't think he was, was pretentious. He really did know a lot, he thought it was important to know things, and I think it is, especially in science fiction.

It took me a long time to figure out A CASE OF CONSCIENCE, studded as it is with off-the-cuff references, but I remember going to the Bodleian Library and actually getting out Philip Gosse's crazy but logical fundamentalist work OMPHALOS, which was designed to beat Darwin to the punch and squash evolutionary theory before it got started. (Last time I mentioned this in print, it drew an angry letter from some guy at some place called Calvin College saying how could Gosse have tried to beat Darwin to the punch when the work hadn't been published, so let me say that according to legend some friends of Darwin circulated a précis of the work to selected biologists so as to get the scientific community organised before the trouble started: but they picked a wrong 'un with Gosse, who was horrified.)

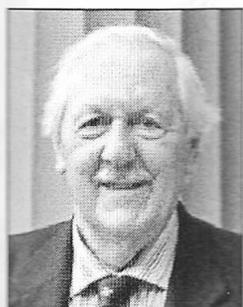
Anyway, for a while I thought Blish and I were the only people alive who'd read the book, but then he died – and now, I expect, it's probably been reissued in the USA and sold thousands of copies as the last word on intelligent design. But it was a strange and interesting read, and I'd never have known anything about it but for Blish. I was also very impressed by his historical novel DR MIRABILIS, about Roger Bacon, much of it written in Middle English. I'm not surprised it never became a best-seller, and Blish's insistence that it, 'Conscience', and the two occult fantasies should be read as a tetralogy is certainly not easy to follow. But no, I wouldn't say his work "never amounted to much," though I agree with Chris that it was "deeply subjective in nature," and often intensely personal.

Blish very much wanted to be buried within Oxford city limits, I think – can this possibly be true? My memory of this is not good – because he had an idea that he was indeed the reincarnation of Roger Bacon. Brian arranged, if I remember rightly and again perhaps I don't, for his ashes to be deposited in the graveyard of St Cross, burial space within Oxford city limits being pretty well unobtainable.

PS; I was joking when I wrote that OMPHALOS had probably been reissued, but I see it has, in 1998 and again in 2005. A first edition is on sale through Abebooks for \$1100. Something tells me this probably does NOT have anything to do with James Blish.

Thanks, Tom. When I first read the novella version of 'A Case of Conscience' in an 1953 I was awed by all the stuff about Original Sin and so on, and believed for many years that Blish must be a deeply religious man. He put across a totally alien world-view – and I don't mean that of the Libbians!

Brian Aldiss,
Oxford



Respectable picture
from Brian's website

Dear Pete,

Tom Shippey is right in all he says about Jim Blish. Indeed, he might have gone further. Blish was a great Anglophile. When Margaret and I went to New York, we stayed with Jim and Judy in their overheated apartment on Riverside Drive. Several cats lounging were about there, all named after the characters in one of Blish's favourite operas; I have forgotten which opera. Their owners were by then making plans to come and live in England. They arrived in Oxford. No doubt this was when Tom Shippey met them. I remember that we escorted them round All Souls College grounds with Charles Monteith, Jim's and my wonderful editor at Faber & Faber. We came upon a statue of Roger Bacon. Blish fell to his knees to do reverence to this early scientist.

I was tolerably familiar with Blish's 'Dr Mirabilis', having read through two early versions of this life of Roger Bacon for Faber. A main endeavour was to cut down on the passages in Latin, which the publishers, perhaps rightly, considered too numerous. Blish was best known for 'A Case of Conscience' – a palpable hit – centering round a Catholic priest. Some assumed that Blish was a Catholic but no, he was agnostic. This novel is regarded as the first in popular SF to introduce a religious theme. It contains, if I remember correctly, numerous quoted or references to James Joyce. Four or so novels eventually comprised 'Cities in Flight'. In his modesty, Blish claimed that they all grew from a four-page letter John W. Campbell had sent him.

Blish had attended Rutgers but, like a true autodidact, he could never have too many books. He fought a long battle against cancer of throat and tongue, a cancer that gradually ate into both his literary output and his existence. He would never give up cigars. I was in a taxi with him, smoking a brand of cigar, a Villiger, to which I was addicted; Blish was with me, having freshly emerged from hospital. He begged for 'just a puff'. I gave him the Villiger. He sucked avidly and juicily at it before handing it back. I was so squeamish I smoked no more of it. There was a night at a convention, possibly at Bristol, when Blish, John Jerrold and I sat up talking till dawn. John and I have never forgotten that night – and Blish had stamina enough then to do it. He liked to talk about the decline of the West, a subject now which seems more real than it did then.

He produced good and hard-hitting books of SF criticism, and some brilliant and learned short stories, among which is 'Common Time'. I include it in my 'Penguin SF Omnibus'. All the while, the cancer gained. Little common time was left to him.

He was dying in the ominously named Battle Hospital at Reading. When Margaret and I went to see him, Blish was lying in a bed bestrewn with books. I asked him what he was currently reading. He waved the book he was holding. "It's about Coleridge's philosophy. It's always been a mystery to me." As Tom rightly says, I managed to find a resting place for his ashes in St Cross graveyard. A young curate had gone round all the college cemeteries he could find, probing the earth with a rod. "They are three deep everywhere," he reported.

The urn containing Jim Blish's ashes lies near the grave of the author of "The Wind in the Willows", in sight of Magdalen College. I hope he is not displeased by that position. I loved and revered the man. It's a pleasure to have a chance to write about him.

What is it so compelling about *Prolapse*? Is it just that we are all getting older? In which case, Happy Ninetieth Birthday to Ken Slater of Operation Fantast!

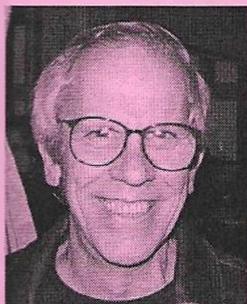
The latest issue made me think of SF writers I once knew who have died, leaving not a wrack behind. There was John Bolland, a smartly dressed guy with a charming wife (name forgotten, alas); who I met at *Loncon* in 1957. I used to meet him for a drink now and then. His most brilliant novel was *WHITE AUGUST*. The British dread was always of too much cold, not the Too Much Heat threat now facing us. John Gribbin, a popular science writer, produced *THE SIXTH WINTER* – a very powerful novel at the time. Good scenery, as I recall.

Bolland is dead. So is my closer pal, John Hynam, who generally wrote under the name of John Kippax. He used to visit me when I was down on my beam ends and living in one room in Paradise Square, Oxford. Kippax's writing scheme varied from mine. He wrote two million words per year, hoping that a few would stick. He lived in Peterborough, getting on badly with his wife but adoring his daughter. We all had our troubles. At last he hit the target! The BBC accepted a play of John's. Wilfred Pickles, then a big name, was to star in it.

John was delighted. He could now buy himself a new car, a Mini, and junk his old banger. He came down to Oxford to tell me all about it. Dear old boy, he drove recklessly out of a side road – we'd been drinking a bit – and was struck by a lorry on the main road. Killed instantly. I wonder how his daughter is doing. She'd be in her late fifties now, I'd guess.

All the best with your great success. We look forward to the hard cover.

Robert Lichtman
robertlichtman@
yahoo.com



Robert in 2006. His
photo

Hi, Peter –

As I've come to expect, *P#9* is another magnificent issue. At the end you write, "I know it's difficult for an overseas reader to make any meaningful comment on British fan-history." For the most part that's true, but that doesn't lessen my/our enjoyment of reading the fine details of what happened over there back in the day. For instance, in this issue I was particularly pleased with Bruce Burn's article on Ella Parker. I traded fanzines with her and wrote letters of comment to *Orion* that got me mentioned in her we-also-heard-from column quite a few times. And I recall meeting her at a LASFS meeting (or perhaps a party) when she was over here in 1961.

You write, "Once this current issue is out of the way I'm very tempted to re-make the entire feature"—that being the piece on the 'Cheltenham Pilgrimage'—"by adding all the extra material from Sandra Hall and Bobbie Wild from *Orion* #23, and while I can't do anything about the printed copies I can put it into the on-line version of *Prolapse* #7. So give me a week or two and then take a look if you're interested." For some reason I find this very disturbing. Even though the idea that one can revise an electronic fanzine has been floated any number of times, the prospect of it actually happening raises "issues" for us collectors. Will I go ahead and print out a revised #7 to go along with my hard copy? My personal jury is out on that one, although tending towards a "yes." (Looking at that issue on Bill Burns's site, it would appear you haven't done this—yet.)

I enjoyed reading all the material on Kettering 1957 and on the origins of St. Fantony, but of course as an American can add nothing—and also liked Dick Ellingsworth on "The real 'New Wave'." That it's "Part 1" bodes well for future issues. Carol and I both fantasised at the photo of Mike Moorcock at seventeen—we can see the bearded older guy with whom we're familiar (me just from photos, Carol from meeting him once upon a time) in the smooth face of this youth.

George Locke tells an entertaining story of "arm-twisting (and maybe neck-twisting as well)" to induce John Berry to give him John's copy of Earl Kemp's *Who Killed Science Fiction?* George also mentions IPSO. I was a member for the first four mailings and a subscriber to the later ones, and have a complete run of the apa in my files (not my original copies, of course) including the first two fliers. Saving George the trouble of finding his set of the mailings in his loft, here's a list of the assigned topics for the mailings (and while I'm at it, the page counts for each mailing):

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Fantasy apas (76) | 5. Sex & science fiction (58) |
| 2. lunatic fringes of SF & editorial influence (73) | 6. Progress (47) |
| 3. Time travel (78) | 7. fantasy worlds, publicity schemes, sex in SF |
| 4. The works of Robert A. Heinlein (86) | progress, becoming a professional writer (29) |

That final mailing was done over a year later than the penultimate one by Fred Patten in Los Angeles, and the multiple subjects reflect both a wrapping-up and the fact that (like lists these days) the mailings had a tendency to go "off topic."

And finally, Lloyd Penney wants to know when Bob Shaw lived in Canada. You refer him to *Hyphen*, and it was in the 16th issue, August 1956, the "Special Irish Issue," that Walt noted that Bob "emigrated to Canada early this year." In the January 1958 issue (No. 19) his address is given as 209 27th Avenue SE, Calgary. And in the 22nd issue (March 1959) Walt reports that Bob's back in Belfast.

Useful information, Robert. Your youthful features sometimes make me forget that you've been around longer than almost anyone! So Bob & Sadie stayed in Canada for less than three years – wonder what they thought of it – were they home-sick, I wonder? Remind me to investigate further. And no, I never did revise #7 on-line; after doing all the OCR work I realised that the extra bits didn't really add anything significant to the 'Cheltenham Pilgrimage' story. So worry no longer!

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

Brian Ameringen, who sent the silliest Xmas card last year; 'Baby cheeses' and 'a whey in the manger' indeed! While in *her* card **Hazel Ashworth** wrote, "*Prolapse* reminds me of *Xyster* – and I'm sure the late, great Dave Wood would've enjoyed what you're doing, too." More seriously, **John Boston** wrote, "I was a bit surprised at Harry Harrison's pique at John Brunner for allegedly swiping his idea of writing about overpopulation. I have read both of the novels in question within the last couple of years – Brunner's *THE DREAMING EARTH* and Harrison's *MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM!* Brunner's novel is a meretricious piece of wish-fulfilment in which overpopulation is not much more than a slogan, waved around to help account for a general social and political dysfunction that everybody would like to escape (and some do – that's the plot). Harrison's is a pretty substantial attempt to visualise what life in an unsustainably overcrowded metropolis might be like. I can't imagine the comparison between Brunner's and Harrison's novels would have occurred to many people at the time, and if it had, it would have been entirely to Harrison's credit. And **David Bratman** said "I love the Convention Re-enactment Society programme for Kettering. Seriously, I'd like to see those panels on major issues of 1950s SF. As articles I think writing them as if it really were the 1950s would be very amusing, but only a few people could carry that off effectively at a live panel. Still, a serious discussion of the changes in our perspective between then and now would be very rewarding."

Chris Garcia said mysteriously, "The personality articles in *Prolapse* are my favourite. This one on Ella Parker was great, but I was blown away by the photo of Charles Platt, who I've never seen in person, and the fact that he looks exactly like Rose. I mean, I've never met Rose, but I've seen photos and the two of them look exactly alike!" Who is Rose? And which of them should be most worried at the resemblance? Meanwhile, **Dave Hardy** tried flattery; "I don't have much in the way of specific comment this time, but I did just want to say, quite sincerely, that you're doing a fantastic job, together with the team of correspondents you seem to be assembling. This is turning out to be THE definitive record of early UK fandom, and will no doubt prove invaluable to future historians of the genre." **John Hertz** sent a baffling airmail letter, and **Anders Holström** was enthusiastic in a very Swedish way, "Goshwowboyohboy! – this must be the fannish Mother lode!" While **Terry Jeeves** remembered the Old Days: "I shared a room with Eric Jones at one con and left him in the bar when I turned in. I was woken by a strange scraping sound. There stood Eric Bentcliffe with Eric Jones at his feet. Eric B. had staggered up with EJ, he had propped-up EJ against the door, and the scraping noise had been EJ slowly subsiding. The surprising part was that EJ was over six feet tall and EB much less, so how he got EJ home has me beat!" **Steve Jeffery** recalled, "Just started reading Richard Ellingsworth's article and am immediately struck with half forgotten nostalgia. I used to go and watch the Saturday morning Flash Gordon/Buck Rogers matinees at the Charing Cross cinema as a nipper." While **Dave Langford** chuckled, "Just to let you know that someone notices these things ... I was pleased to see that good old line 'their screams are terrible to behold' in the very last paragraph of #9. Did you underline it specially in Rob Holdstock's copy?" **Don Malcolm** hinted at all sorts of interesting stories he can tell about British SF writers, and **Mark Olsen** wrote, "Even though I know most of the people only by reputation, the articles (and excellent LoCs afterwards) really do bring them alive."

Greg Pickersgill enthused, "*P* arrived on the same day as the new ish of the Jeff Hawke Club magazine and frankly I am hard put to say which is the greater achievement. I mean that very positively. Bill Rudling is putting an incredible amount of effort into preserving and explaining a genuine – but largely forgotten – highlight of British SF. And you are doing much the same in our world. And damned interesting and bloody good reading too. The bulk of the ish is totally engaging and an excellent assemblage of hard-won info. It really is the kind of thing that is going to be readable and interesting ten years or more from now. Unlike so many fanzines. Even ones I like." **Lloyd Penny** remarked, "If only Giles knew what his fine artwork was being used for...I suspect he'd laugh his head off. The usual granny in the cartoon asks a very pertinent question, and even if you answered it, she probably wouldn't understand". While **John Purcell** suggested, "I shall pass on comments about Ella Parker, except maybe that every fan group seems to have some kind of a mother hen who guides things along."

Andy Richards said "I read it cover to cover before Christmas and found it un-putdownable: I was with John and Judith Clute this morning and they were quite interested." So we'll see what happens there, then! And while **Andy Sawyer** sent a cheery Xmas card, **Lars-Olov Strandberg** wrote, "I like to hear about British fandom history. My first Eastercon was in 1968, and before that I went to *Loncon II* in 1965, so I have some memories of St. Fantasy and of the London group." and **Geri Sullivan** admitted, "*Prolapse* is utterly brilliant and I've been a total scum for not telling you so, with specifics. in reply to every issue." True, Geri, you said it! But **Peter Sullivan** has a good excuse, "Given that my own fannish history starts in the summer of 2005 (when a chance remark on a friend's weblog about the supplement to 'With Stars in My Eyes' led me to *efanzines.com*), I suppose I shouldn't feel that bad about not responding properly. Do you want to pre-book an article from me for *Prolapse 100* about the hidden history of the 2007 and 2008 TAFF races?" **Ted Tubb** wrote, "I'm saving the latest issue to read over Xmas – I've a feeling I'll be needing it," and **Lisa Tuttle** said that "although much of the appeal of reading fannish history is its gossip quotient, when well written it doesn't matter – I would happily read Bob Shaw or Walt Willis on the subject of lost keys, persistent door-knocking, or anything else." Welcome to **Brian Varley**, who hints at stories of the old Manchester group, while **Ian Watson** was in a frenzy after hearing about certain pictures at *Novacon-37*; "I opened the envelope with quivering, salacious anticipation, and immediately turned to page 3, only to turn all the other pages in a mounting frenzy in search of crystal-clear images of Rob H**** with a stripper. Alas, alas, no matter which way I turned innumerable photos or breathed on them hotly on the invisible ink principle, no way would they resolve themselves into what I sought. So either you were bribed to suppress these important icons of fannish history, or else you were threatened with an uprooted tree!" Alas, Ian, I couldn't hang that particular albatross around Rob's neck forever more, could I!

WHY ARE YOU RECEIVING THIS ISSUE?

- You are a fully paid-up BNF – though it would still be nice to hear from you.
- I'm grateful for your help with this and previous issues.
- Look carefully and you'll find your name. Now, did we get things right?
- This is a sample issue, you need to respond if you want more.
- The difficult one; you must Do Something RSN or this is your final issue of the paper edition.

The *Prolapse* Project needs your support in unearthing the story of British fandom, but I produce just 100 paper copies and have to make sure they go where they're most wanted. On request I will e-mail the pdf on publication (saving me exorbitant postage costs for overseas addresses) and the issue will go onto the *eFanzines* site some four weeks later.