

It's been a while since I last ran the Forgotten Fans feature (#12, on Alan Dodd) which is a pity because it rather gets to the heart of what *Relapse* is about – documenting the lives of our predecessors, those people who created and sustained SF fandom in this country. This hasn't exactly been for want of trying – for a long time I've had candidates like Ron Bennett, Eric Bentcliffe, Mal Ashworth and Vince Clarke in my sights and have been looking for biographers. With D. R. Smith however, we go back much further in time to someone I never knew (though have a vague memory of trying to contact him in the mid-sixties). Rob Hansen's interest was sparked by an accident of fate – in an on-line search Smith's niece, Kate Crooks, found his name mentioned in Rob's THEN, and subsequently provided photographs and background information which helped to make this article possible. – pw [Nov. 2013]

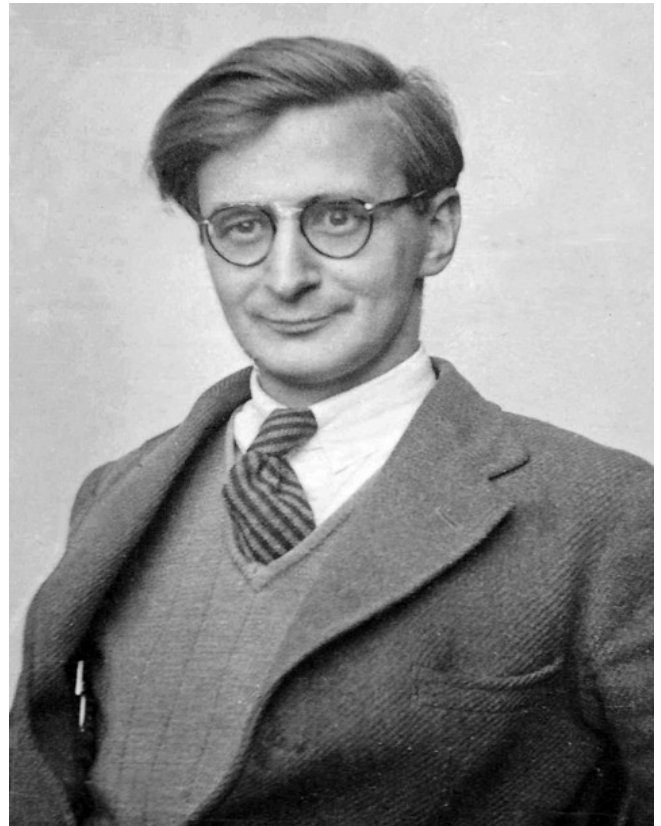
Forgotten Fans #6

D.R SMITH

– The Sage of Nuneaton

By Rob Hansen

Donald Raymond Smith, sometimes known as the 'Hermit' because of his reluctance to meet other fans. Photo from late forties, courtesy of Kate Crooks.



Delve into the early decades of British fandom and you can't go far without coming across the name of D. R. Smith. Sam Youd championed him, and Vince Clarke would later describe him as "a sort of eofannish D. West" – another Donald also better known by his initial!

Smith had a regular column in our first fanzine and quickly became what would be known in later parlance as a BNF, or Big Name fan – one of our first. Yet he was also famously reclusive, never attending conventions or visiting other fans, which led some to conclude he did not in fact exist, that he was a pen name under which another fan felt able to be more acerbic than when using their real name. So who was he, this Donald Raymond Smith, the so-called Sage of Nuneaton, and where did he come from?

When the Nuneaton branch of the Science Fiction League – chapter 22 – was formed in 1935 (see my article 'The Rise and Fall of Leeds Fandom' last issue), they held their inaugural meeting at the 89 Long Shoot home of member Denny Jacques, as later reported:

"On June 7th, 1935 the Nuneaton Chapter of the Science Fiction League was given Charter by Headquarters, in future to be known as Chapter Twenty-Two, with Charter members, Dennis Jacques, First-Class SFL No. 737, (Assistant Director), J.E. Barnes, SFL No.926, M. Crowley, SFL No. 927, P. W. Buckerfield, SFL No 928, and Maurice K. Hanson, First-Class SFL No. 738, (Director). "Since then the course of the Chapter has run, no doubt, in much the same way as many others. Chronologically accomplished facts run in the order – Chapter Meetings, Chapter Library, science fiction survey, and *Novae Terrae*. The first official meeting took place on June 26th when hazy plans were clarified and made concrete.

There were later Chapter meetings at intervals – these consisting largely of discussion and planning – followed by the foundation of the Chapter Library. The nucleus of this (consisting of odd magazines presented by members) gradually developed. into today's product, (helped. very much by the presentation of three or four dozen magazines dating back to 1930 by newcomer D. R. Smith, SFL No. 1199.)"

As for how he came to be a member of Nuneaton SFL, here's Smith himself:-¹

"Born 1917. Obtained first introduction to scientific fiction in *The Modern Boy*, soon after being introduced to Yankee scientification by a remainder copy of a very early *Astounding*, the third of the Clayton series. Flung it derisively on to the fire. Some months later purchased a copy of *Amazing*; it fully converted me, so that scientification became my favourite form of reading.

"In 1935, shortly after commencing work as an apprentice engineer, I tried to ride through a rapidly approaching bus on my cycle. Whilst laid up with the resultant broken wrist heard of Nuneaton chapter of the S.F.L. Penned laboriously, with my left hand, a joking note to a member of it. Maurice K. Hanson replied and thus brought me into the ranks of stf fans, amongst whom I have blundered happily along. Am a jig-and-tool draughtsman at present. Hobbies; reading, writing, and rock-climbing."

Smith started his apprenticeship on 24th October 1934, his 17th birthday, having already passed his Higher School Certificate (the equivalent of 'A' Levels). He had won a scholarship to his grammar school and another one for his apprenticeship at Alfred Herbert Ltd. He and Hanson would have met for the first time a few months earlier.

Hanson was born a year after Smith and had gone to the same school. This was where their first meeting took place, as Smith later recalled when reminiscing about the earliest UK publication that might be considered an SF magazine of sorts:

"I do remember *Scoops*. I never read it – except for part of one issue which I filched from Maurice Hanson during the end-of-term idleness at the close of my school career – my first indication, incidentally, that there was another reader of science-fiction within fifty miles, but I do remember it."²

The two would become life-long friends.

Left: "Hobbies include rock-climbing," he said. Photo from around 1940, courtesy of Kate Crooks.



Above: Enigmatic smile from Maurice Hanson in January 1937 at the first convention in Leeds.

In March 1936 the Nuneaton group put out the first issue of *Novae Terrae*. Edited by Hanson and Jacques it was the UK's first true fanzine. It would see twenty-nine issues in total, and Smith would have a contribution in all but two of them. He made his initial appearance as a columnist in issue #2 the following month with 'Alas, Poor Einstein', which attacked the many crimes committed against the theory of relativity by pulp writers of the time, some of them quite prominent. It served notice that he was no respecter of reputations, and demonstrated how acerbic he could be. This was the first anyone had heard of Smith, the above report on their inaugural meeting appearing in *NT* #3.

Just how far he was prepared to go can be seen by his contribution to issue #4: 'Hymn of Hate No.1 – Joe W. Skidmore', a scathing attack on a writer he considered guilty of shoddy work. The target of Hymn of Hate No.2 in the following issue was John Russell Fearn, which led to an apology in issue #6:

"John Russell Fearn has objected to the wording of the first and last two paragraphs of 'Hymn of Hate, No.2'. I am sorry that these should appear to be direct personalities, such being far from the plan of the article, which was intended as a general story criticism. Naturally, I offer full apology for anything in this article that can be taken in any

way as a reflection on the personal or professional character of Mr. Fearn”.

Smith was back on the attack in #7 when he tore into 'Ackermanese', Forry Ackerman's assault on the language, in 'Hands Off English'. Ackerman was given right of reply and his response duly appeared in #9. The first of Smith's magazine reviews appeared in #8. These would increasingly form the bulk of his contributions to *Novae Terrae*, though he often had an additional article in the fanzine too.

On 3rd January 1937, the world's first science fiction convention was held in Leeds. It was here that a national organisation – the Science Fiction Association – was formed. Hanson was the only member of the Nuneaton group to attend. He returned from the convention with the news that *Novae Terrae* was no longer the journal of Nuneaton SFL but would henceforth be the national organ of the SFA. This change was duly announced in *Novae Terrae* #10. The group also changed its name from Nuneaton SFL to Leicester SFA, the only time I know of that a UK fan group has changed its geographical allegiance.

By this point Smith was starting to get noticed in America and as well as reprints of his *Novae Terrae* columns, Claire P. Beck's *Critic* also started carrying new work by him. August 1937 saw the demise of the Leicester/Nuneaton group. During that month Hanson moved to London with his duplicator, and without him the group soon faded away, leaving only Smith as resident active fan. So it was that the October *Novae Terrae* appeared under the joint editorship of Hanson, Carnell, and Arthur Clarke, the first issue published in London. Smith continued as a regular contributor.

In July 1939 Maurice Hanson was called up. He appears to have been the first British fan to be conscripted into the armed forces. Since British fandom at this point was composed almost entirely of young men, its members all found themselves eligible for call-up to the armed forces. Some like Mike Rosenblum chose to be conscientious objectors, some like George Airey were deemed medically unfit, but most were duly called up and served their time in uniform in various capacities. (I hope to have a piece on the WWII service of UK fans in a future *Relapse*.)

Unlike most of his fannish contemporaries, Smith was not called up when war was declared in September 1939. As a draughtsman designing machine tools he was more important to the war effort where he was rather than toting a gun, his job being designated a 'reserved occupation'.³

While Smith did not visit other fans they did occasionally seek him out, as Erik Needham did in February 1942, as reported in *FWD*:

“Home on 14 days leave, Erik Needham of Manchester, now in the RAF, found time to drop us a few lines and let us know that he is still alive. When last we heard from him he was at Preston, or near there, but now he tells us that he was able to drop in and see Nuneaton's Donald Raymond Smith last month. We understand a full report of the proceedings will be in the next *Fantast*.”⁴

Which indeed it was:

“One wintry day, having a 36-hour pass, I went to B'ham to spend the evening skating. After a night at the YMCA I hitch-hiked in ankle-deep snow which had fallen during the night, to Coventry to view the bomb damage. The ruins were bad enough, but did not compare with Liverpool and London's East End. However, sloshing about in the snow I beheld a bus bearing the legend 'NUNEATON' and in

a moment of – well, call it inspiration, decided to call on D. R. Smith.

“Arriving with sodden boots at Church Road I felt that for Do Ray to describe his dwelling as Nuneaton was exaggerating slightly. He lives, with his mother, brother and sister, in a small row of houses miles from anywhere, on what is, to my city-bred mind, a bleak depressing stretch of uninviting, uninhabited country. Here, truly, is a haven for hermits.

“Not knowing the number, I made enquiries and was rather astonished to discover that in a row of five houses, four of the families were of the clan Smith. Of course, I found the wrong three first. When I pounded morosely on the door of No.13, I was confronted upon its opening by a tall, well built, good looking bloke of about 27. This was not D.R. Smith, but his big brother Leslie.

“Leslie invited me in and indicated his brother submerged in an armchair. Here, at last, I found the Sage of Nuneaton. So all these rumours about DRS being the pseudonym of a famous fan are shattered, dissolved. I located DRS. I spoke to him, even borrowed books from him. Indisputably, he is real.

“As DW ((Doug Webster, editor of *Fantast*)) wants this article to be short, I can only dwell on DRS, and so must only mention in passing the rest of the family. Leslie I have already mentioned, but his sister Freda, I haven't. She's about 18 years old, seems to be a non-fan, and is treated shamefully by both Les and Don. Mrs Smith is a really likeable old lady, and is one of the only two women fans I have ever met, the other one being John Russell Fearn's mother. I must thank her in these lines for those delicious tea-buns and the way she coped with my intrusion. Many thanks, Mrs Smith, and I certainly hope to meet you again some happier time.

“D.R. is perhaps the most typical fan I have ever encountered. Formerly the prize was divided between Arthur Clarke and Maurice Hanson, but D.R. is even more fannish than those two, which is saying something... He wears spectacles and a preoccupied look. Affects unconventional clothes. His hair, a rich mouse in colour, dangles limply over his forehead, and the general contour of his face is longish-oval. Runs to about 5ft 10ins in height, and moderately well-built, possibly 150lbs.

“Sorry, D.R., if this annoys you: DW asked for it! Don speaks in quick jerks, almost like a road drill, and also has an odd laugh which is a curious cross between a gurgle and a guffaw. Like most people in the Midlands, he has no appreciable accent. [Sid Birchby pointed out when he read this account, ‘it is significant that Erik the Needy is also a native of the Midlands’ - DW]. So there you are. Maybe D.R. will retaliate some day by letting you know what he thought of me.

“The little house is full of books. Books are everywhere and the few bookshelves are crammed. D.R. certainly varies his reading. His collection covers practically everything readable – fictional, classical, technical and pornographic. There were even some SF books there. He told me he had a collection and a typewriter, but I never got around to seeing them. Anyway, every fan has a collection and a typer, except me. I just have the typer.

“I stopped for dinner. And tea. With the family I discussed big cities and small towns, and at intervals tortured the family cat, a lordly monster, who remained lethargic and indifferent throughout it all. Never have I seen such a morose or apathetic mouser as the one at Smith's. With D.R. himself the discussion veered to fans, societies and

conventions, about all of which D.R. is slightly sceptical. Also told me how he was roped into sf, by once being in hospital, and whilst there reading a *Wonder Stories* announcing formation of the Nuneaton branch of the SFL.

“When I came away from No.13 I carried with me two of the latest *Astoundings*, the first two parts of ‘Second Stage Lensman’, and Aldous Huxley’s BRAVE NEW WORLD. As I rolled back to Wolverhampton on the bus, I felt almost at peace with the world.”



A lovely picture of the youthful Michael Rosenblum (right) from about this period, with Sam Youd in uniform and two unidentified fans, presumably in Leeds. Photo from JMR’s album, scanned by his son, Howard.

In mid-1942, a new national fan organisation came into existence: the British Fantasy Society (no relation to the current-day society of the same name). This was at the instigation of J. Michael Rosenblum whose fanzine *Futurian War Digest* (aka ‘Fido’) was one of the few things holding UK fandom together at that point. The organisation had first been mooted a year earlier, but it took a long time to put together. Smith would be the editor of its official organ, the *BFS Bulletin* for all 28 issues of its existence from July 1942 until its demise in 1946. As he later wrote, the object of the BFS..

“...was officially stated to be ‘To bring together for their common good persons interested in scientific or weird fantasy’, and which at once acquired a most valuable asset. Ever since the start, of the war generous-hearted American fans had been sending parcels of fantasy pulps as free gifts to the exiled fans of Britain, and John Cunningham of Texas had organised a British Science-Fiction War Relief Society to further this noble aim. Forry Ackerman, Morojo, Bob Tucker, P.J. Searles, Walter Dunkelburger, Bill Watson and Joe Gibson were some of those concerned who received in return, the barren honour of being made Honorary Members of the BFS.

“The BSFWRS was flourishing long before the BFS. Jack Gibson being the English organiser, and he brought the collection into the BFS as the official library, with himself as librarian. It was by far the greatest single attraction of the society, and it was a great loss when Jack, suffering under

prolonged attacks of illness, had to relinquish the post, and the library passed into less efficient hands.

“For there was little else the BFS could do in any substantial way for its members, who were to exceed the hundred mark considerably. The bulletin was a matter of one or more sheets added to Fido, and with its editor having none of the enthusiasm which had fired the fan-mag editors to such achievements, will be remembered as consisting chiefly of (futile) appeals for volunteers to execute the various projects thought up by the Executive Committee or the Advisory Board.

“A membership card and a Prospectus was issued to each new member, a gratifyingly high proportion of whom were new fans, contacted by other Service members. Minor conventions were held, members wandered round making contact with other members, and a cosmopolitan touch was introduced by the presence in our midst of American Service fans, and the Canadian Bob Gibson.

“Contact was made with the Cosmos Club of Teddington, a thriving band of enthusiasts, and the idea of their magazine *Beyond* – a bound collection of story manuscripts by amateur writers – appropriated and used to the extent of three BFS issues. Nobody expected much in the middle of a war, and their expectations were fully met.”



John Burke was another leading fanzine writer and editor. Photo circa 1941 from Bronwen Burke

‘The Spirit of the New Age’ was a rather odd series of profiles of British fans by John F. Burke in which he attempted a deeper character analysis of his subjects. Here’s No.5 in the series, from *FWD* #34 (April 44), focussing on Smith:

“This is going to be awkward. It is more than somewhat presumptuous of me to attempt a biographical sketch of the aloof, secretive secretary of the British Fantasy Society.

“I have met Don thrice, corresponded with him, and fought with him, in columns of fan magazines, but although he has never been reticent with his opinions, he has never been communicative about himself. When it came to writing this study, I wrote and tried to coax a few details from him, but received only a refusal to divulge any ‘intimate secrets’ of his life, with a rhyme that sheds little light on his character:

‘Donald Raymond Smith
Was beloved of all his kith,
But he was never very well in
With many of his kin.’

“Having failed to produce any response, I tried to recall some little thing from our meetings that would help to start a train of thought. Don came to my rescue when I was stranded in a particularly awful army camp near Nuneaton.

He came over to collect me with his tandem, and probably does not realise even now how close I was to turning away in fear. Perhaps he hoped I would, and had brought the infernal machine along merely to scare me.

“If so, he failed; we wobbled a bit, I made apologetic noises and thought how contemptuous the back of Don's neck looked, and then we started on the long road to the Smith ancestral home. I was fed well, given several books of cartoons to read – these being considered about my intellectual standard – and later delighted by a recital of gramophone records that testified to an unsuspected musical taste in the retiring Mr. Smith.

“This brief respite from creativity was not my first meeting with the Sage of Nuneaton. We had chatted for a few hours in Birmingham several months previously. We met for a third time – well, not much. Don was fair, somewhat windblown, wore spectacles, and looked more good-humoured than I had expected. He will in my memory be clad in sports coat and, flannels forever, unless we come together at some future convention and he wears the flowing gown and wizard's peaked hat that suits his office.

“But that is unlikely. He says that he will not attend conventions. He discourages people from visiting him, and in his letters and articles has always sneered – yes, I say sneered – at fans. Unsociable? One of those unfortunates who cannot escape from the inexorable grip of fantasy, but endeavours to salvage his pride by making derogatory remarks about his fellow slaves?

“Nothing ready-made will fit the case. If I look back to the days when I first read the Smith articles in *Novae Terrae*, I can remember the feeling I then had of his being conceited; affected in style, and shallow. Time has altered that opinion; Sam Youd and I quarrelled over some of the prose poems by Smith in *Fantast*, particularly the purple ‘Oceana’, which was acclaimed by the devotees of gush as a minor masterpiece. I thought it bad then, and I think it bad now, but certain features of Don's style appeal to me more now than they did then.

“The name of Donald Raymond Smith will not, I feel confident, ever be known as that of one of the great creative writers of the world. He himself has no such ambitions, as far as I can judge. He would like to make as much money as P. G. Wodehouse, but that's not much help. I think he would make a good critic of the caustic, destructive kind – a minor James Agate. His phrasing is terse, and at his best he can produce delightful flashes of critical sensibility, but in anything long his style would suffer.

“Perhaps he was destined to be a journalist, but he is not interested in the ephemerae which must of necessity be the journalist's main concern. And perhaps he was destined to be no more than what he is, a jig-tool mechanic, dabbling in literature and music, admiring blood-and-beery writers like Hemingway, making a name for himself as a sardonic sage in a small group of adolescent fanatics.

“It's something for the psychologist: is Don a would-be mighty figure who can find no outlet for his desires in the larger world, and endeavours to build up a reputation among a few gullible readers of science fiction? It fits – he sees as few of these fans as possible because personal contact always destroys such illusions as the Sage of Nuneaton's reputation for wit and caustic criticism. Could be.

“It could be a lot of other things as well. What makes Don what he is? Was he dropped on his head when young? The shape of his head and features does not suggest it – at any rate, no more than those of any other fan.

“Work it out for yourself. He writes satires and vague fantasies, confesses to having written a science-fiction novel (kept well out of sight), likes the idea of strong men, shows no sign of liking women, beer, or cigarettes; would



Left: Sam Youd, first editor of *Fantast*, in August 1939. Photo from JMR's album, scanned by Howard Rosenblum



Right: Doug Webster, always a more urbane character than most fans of the day. He was editor of the final five issues of *Fantast*. Photo from JMR's album, scanned by Howard Rosenblum.

not like to pluck and clean a chicken, dislikes intellectuals, likes Wagner, James Thurber, David Langdon, climbing mountains . . .

“He has annoyed more people than I would care to annoy. John Russell Fearn threatened a libel action. Sam Youd, being one of Smith's most ardent disciples for many years, fell out with him because he showed no signs of sharing Sam's political view; Sam is like that. Doug Webster, I think, found the views of Smith too much to endure, probably because Don exhibited no social consciousness. We were all shocked at the name of D. R. Smith being entered in the B.F.S. rolls as secretary: the individualistic, unsociable D.R.S, notorious as the dead-end of letter chains, magazine chains; the lazy, annoying Smith! But there he is. It serves him right.

“So far Don and I have not had hard words. We quarrelled in fanmags before we began writing to one another, so perhaps that phase is over. Doubtless if I were a budding politician or a sociologist I would find him intolerable. As it is, I find him tolerable.

“No more than tolerable? Well, now”

In *FWD* #39 (Mar '45), the final issue, Smith reported that: “Remote fastnesses of Hartshill recently stormed by Edwin Macdonald in successful attempt to interview Hermit Smith – only fifth fan Smith has met. As Roy Johnson came over not many weeks ago I think I've seen my quota of fans for the year.”

Not so, as it turned out. In *BFS Bulletin* #22 (Jun '45), Smith told of Macdonald's return:

“Easter Sunday he reappeared in the company of Ron Lane, George Ellis and Don Houston. Big book-swap haggle between Ron and Edwin, Don Houston assisting, occupied the time pleasantly (well, it occupied the time) until a rather puzzled-at-what-they-had-come-for DRS escorted them to a 'bus, hotel accommodation having been

obtained at Leicester. Being there, they visited Roy Johnson on the following day.”

This was the first issue of the BFS *Bulletin* to appear following the demise of *Futurian War Digest*. It was a full eight pages, picking up the slack and, for a short while, taking the place of *FWD* as UK fandom's newszine of record. Sadly, it would not last long.

Writing in *The Whitcon Booklet* for the 1948 *Whitcon*, the first post-war British convention, Smith detailed the demise of the BFS: ⁵

“The organisation was fundamentally unsound. The Executive Council consisting of President Gillings, Director Rosenblum, Secretary Smith (D.R.) and Treasurer Busby lived remote from each other and had to confer through circular letters, than which a more tedious and inefficient method could hardly be conceived.

“The other two will forgive me if I say that most of the actual work devolved on Michael and myself. I being both idle and unsocial this brought it down to Rosenblum. Michael had enthusiasm, energy and sociability, but he had been producing a fan-magazine for ten years, he maintained a huge correspondence with fans and book-collectors both here and in America, and his health began to deteriorate.

“Transfer of the library to Ron Holmes and Nigel Lindsay made an asset out of what had been for too long a liability, but the end of the war brought no signs of any fan resurgence in which the management of the BFS could be transferred to more lively, less-wearied hands, and the iniquitous Secretary put more honest enthusiasm into winding it up than he had put into any other activity. The British Fantasy Library continues the most useful part of the BFS, much more efficiently than the BFS ever managed it, so the loss is by no means entire.

“Looking back on the whole affair, the most remarkable thing appears to be the tenacious hold on existence of such a puny, scattered, disunited body as fandom. Since a large proportion of fans cease to take any interest in pulp fantasy after a few years there has to be a constant influx of new members of the clan, yet such new members are not the result of anything except the pure chance of falling over some existing fan. Supplies of the pulp-magazines have been difficult to obtain for the last nine years even for the established fans – and there seems no prospect of any improvement. Why is there still a fantasy fandom in Britain?”

The situation Smith wrote about was certainly true. British fandom *was* at a low ebb in the immediate post-war period. Yet the first buds of new activity had begun to bloom, not least with this convention. It was the first in the country in four years. It is also the convention from which the modern Eastercon is numbered. Apart from the hiccup of missing 1950 and being replaced by a proto-Eurocon the following year, our national convention has enjoyed an unbroken run ever since.

Not that this was of direct importance to the hermit of Nuneaton. For him fanzines were where his fan-activity took place, and there were very few venues for such activity at the time. Nevertheless, he had some amateur fiction in Walt Willis' and James White's *Slant* #5 (Spring '51) and continued to write the occasional letter of comment.

Things picked up a few years later with the arrival of *Hyphen* – the successor to *Slant* – and Smith became a regular in the letter-column of its early issues. Here's an extract from a letter addressed to editor Willis in issue #7

(March 54) that casts some light on his antipathy towards conventions:

“It occurs to me that I have yet to acknowledge receipt of the January issue of *Hyphen*, and I naturally hasten to do so, representing as it does one of the few ties I still have to fandom. At times it does seem to me that I am drifting apart from something which has been a small part of my life for more years than I care to calculate (20) but then *Hyphen* arrives and I realise I am as deeply connected to the movement as I ever was.

“And this really is a super issue, for it contains one shining gleam of truth, one blinding glimpse of the obvious which has dispelled the horror and repugnance with which I tend to view people who attend conventions, as conventions are usually described, and has made me realise they are human beings like myself, and like the sort of people I like to be with.

“The secret of enjoying yourself is to gather together a few congenial friends and hide' you say, and I regard them as some of the most beautiful words I have seen in a fanzine in many a long year – preceded as they are by the almost equally beautiful disparagement of the conventional convention's 'enormous loud and drunken party.'

“Why has nobody dared to utter these lovely words before? Why have convention reporters (and I cannot exclude you from this category) persisted in emphasising the more revolting and disgusting side of the affair, so that Innocents like myself shrank from the shocking inanity of such goings on? I do not say that I shall rush off to attend conventions, the habit of years is too hard to break. But at least I know now that if I do accidentally meet with one I need not run screaming away.”

When Mike Rosenblum decided to publish a fanzine again after having been seduced into doing so as a result of joining the newly-formed Leeds SF Association (no relation to any pre-war group) he naturally put out the call from his Grosvenor Park home to all his old contributors. So it was that the first issue of *The New Futurian* (Spring '54) opened with a poem by Smith titled 'To Michael With Love':

'Happily examining my Christmas mail
One card I came across - 'twas yours Michael my friend,
Eagerly I opened it and perused the message therein,
But then, like Brandy Marlo, I gotten a red mist before my eyes,
O God! O Grosvenor Park!

"Am thinking of reviving the Futurian" it said,
And in language curt these two words added
"Co-operation requested" - no more, no please, and
what's more
The first and only message from your noble pen for years,
O God! O Grosvenor Park!

Now when I read this I was wroth and said "Bloody cheek!"
Am I this Rosenblum's dog that I should thus be ordered by
he,
Am I his servant, his slave, his clown, his performing ape,
If he addresses me thus how fares his wife?
O God! O Grosvenor Park!

Now I say to you Michael that I am a man of parts,
I have a position of command and when I say do thus
men obey,
I am also a man of possessions, having a car, a lathe, a set
of Encyclopaedia Britannica,
I am not one to run to heel at the lift of your finger,
O God! O Grosvenor Park!

Message Ends (Apologies to Samuel Butler)

In the following issue, which appeared that summer, he had an article titled 'How Dost Thou, Benedick?' fulminating against the prevalence of romance in modern magazine SF, particularly in the pages of *Galaxy*:

“As a hardened old bachelor myself I take a twilight view of this utter surrender of science fiction to the cherished female myth that men are so insatiably uxorious that they can't resist a good bust measurement. Is there anything so very incredible in a hero who has more important interests in life than slobbering over an attractive female?”

He concluded:

“The female audience would not exactly go a bundle on such a situation. They would deprecate it all the more because of its dangerous realism. But the female audience is catered for by masses of exclusively soppy magazines bulging with fiction based on the ridiculous proposition that the mating instinct is the only interesting or important thing in life. Let them therefore be – for once – unselfish and not insist on this sickly theme slurping over into science fiction. Let us return to the happy days of science fiction stories which were stag parties, not necking sessions.”

I wonder if Smith - who was by now 37 years old - modified these antediluvian attitudes later when he got married (to Margaret Strong) in 1966?



Left: Here's our man on holiday in France in August 1950. Photo from Kate Crooks

Right: Was this the reason for Maurice Hanson's enigmatic smile? Something awful had happened to his front teeth! Undated photo from JMR's album, scanned by Howard Rosenblum.



scientists who also garden, house-decorate and don't read science fiction.”

Aside from a couple of letters, Smith's next contribution to *The New Futurian* appeared in issue #7 (Spring '57) and was a piece of amateur fiction written some years earlier. Smith's fannish career was now winding down. This appears to have been due at least in part to his recent acquisition of a house and the work that having such a property entailed.

He appeared in the letter-column of Daphne Buckmaster's *Espit* several times in the early 1960s, and was no more positive about fandom than he had been in the pages of *Hyphen* in 1954. Here he is in vol. 2. number 3 (Feb '61):

“I personally am very fond of SF but care very little for fandom. The illusion that fans are a race of homo superior is as old and as tedious as that other illusion that fans are hard-drinking, hard-loving, matey men of the world. Between them they account for my lack of interest in fandom.”

The last record of his fannish activity that has so far been found was a listing as a BSFA member on the 1965 Membership List. He does not appear on those for subsequent years. This may have been the end of Smith's association with fandom but he maintained his friendship with Maurice K. Hanson and the pair kept up a correspondence until it was ended by time and circumstance.⁶

Smith's niece Kate Crooks recently got in touch with me after finding mention of her uncle online in THEN, my history of British fandom. She explains what happened:

“Don kept the last letter he received from Maurice Hanson. It suggests that Hanson was working at Imperial College, but commuting from Kettering! I wonder if he was an administrator, rather than a lecturer, unless he went to university after WWII.”

A search of the Imperial College website reveals that to this day their Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering has a Maurice Hanson Prize, “for annual award to the student who produces the best performance in the written papers on the Advanced Course in Transport”.

Kate continues: “Don annotated Hanson's last letter 'died 12 May 1981 in lodgings in London', which fits in with the registration of his death in the June quarter of 1981 in the Kettering District; Hanson's home address was in Kettering, where he had been living since 1975, if not earlier.”

I checked with Imperial College and they revealed that Hanson was the librarian in their transport library. The prize was established in his memory in 1983 from money raised by friends and colleagues.

Don himself died on 24 Sept 1999, at his home in Coventry.

Looking back over Smith's time in fandom it's clear he was at his most active during his first dozen or so years in fandom - not an unusual pattern. What also becomes clear is the contribution he made to British fandom during the war.

It's often been said that J. Michael Rosenblum played a large part in keeping British fandom together during those dark days. This is true. It's also sometimes been said he was single-handedly responsible for doing so. This is not true. As secretary of the British Fantasy Society, D. R. Smith edited more than two dozen issues of its newsletter over a period of three years. When it came to keeping British fandom together, he was Mike Rosenblum's right-hand man

and deserves his share of the credit. Not a bad fannish legacy, all in all.

- Rob Hansen, April 2013.

Notes:

1. DRS's tale of how he found fandom was 'Fan Parade No.2' in *The Futurian* #3 (Jan 1939) ed. J. M. Rosenblum
2. *Scoops* anecdote from letter in *The New Futurian* #6 (Jan '57)
3. Kate Crooks says, "Don was very clever. He spent his entire career, from 1934 – 1982 at Alfred Herbert Ltd, becoming Chief Designer in 1964".
4. Eric/Erik Needham's account of his visit, originally titled 'In Search of a Sage', first appeared in *The Fantast* #14 (July 1942) ed. Doug Webster. Why Needham's forename is spelled differently at different points is unknown.
5. Smith quotes about the BFS taken from his article in the *Whitcon Booklet*. The *BFS Bulletin* can be found online at <http://efanzines.com/FWD/BFS.htm>. We're missing a few issues of this and other BFS publications. Scans of these would be gratefully received.
6. Checking with *Genesreunited* I discovered that Maurice Hanson was born in 1918 and that the middle initial, 'K', stood for the rather unusual 'Kimpton'. He is cited by the Natural History Museum as a 'plant collector'. Kate found Hanson's entry into the Civil Service in the *London Gazette* – Aug 1937 – Executive Class, "after open competition". She notes "Kimpton was his great-grandmother's maiden name; Maurice's grandfather was Mark Kimpton Hanson, and his father simply Kimpton Hanson. If only Don had thought of inviting some friends to his wedding I would have met him."