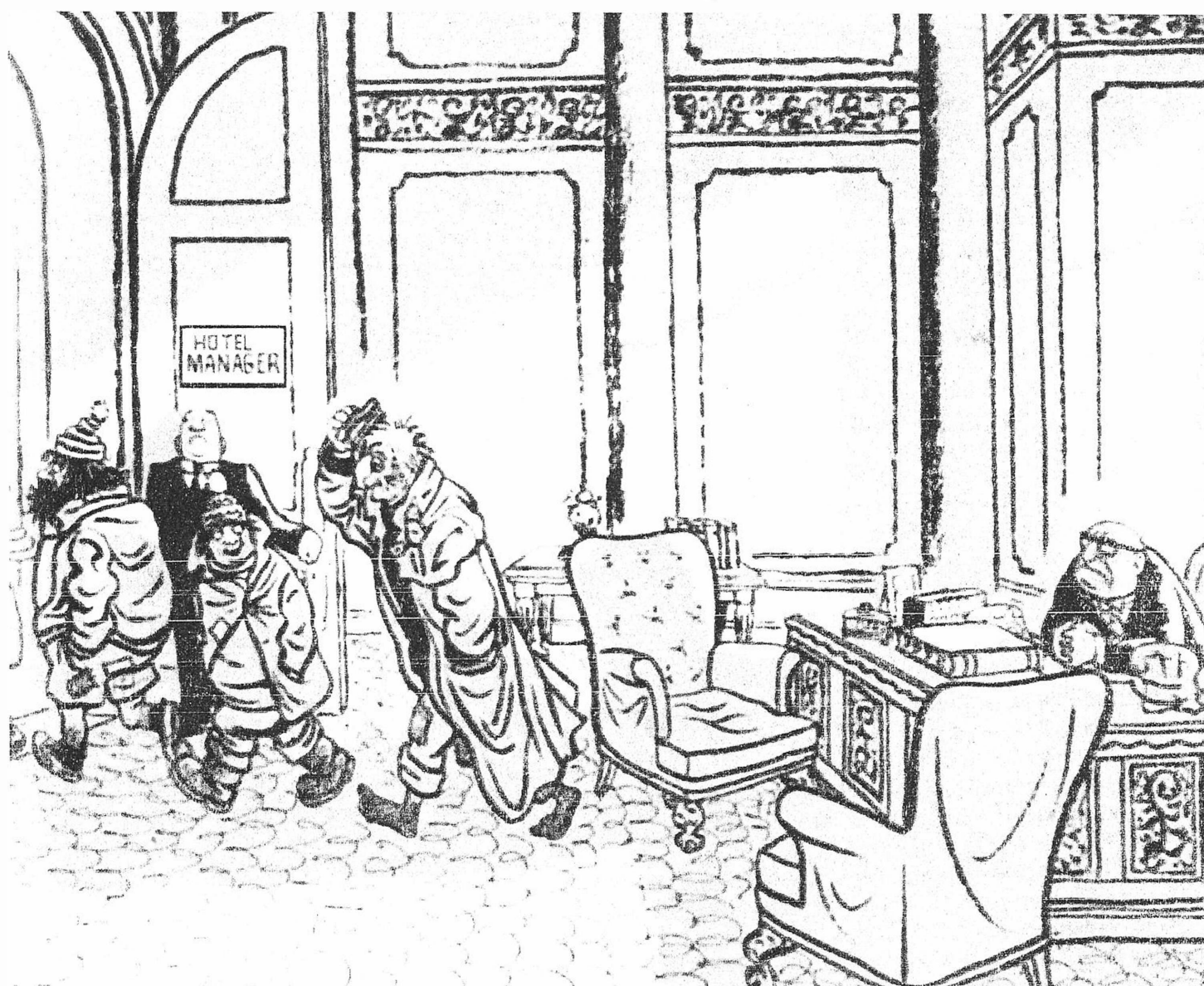


"I found it all fascinating. Sometimes horribly so...." – Paul Vincent



"I bet he wouldn't have said that if we had the BSFA behind us"

(In *Skyrack* 88 Ron Bennett mentioned "the tremendous weight of authority carried by the use of 'BSFA' headed notepaper in the approach to a hotel, speaker or publisher.")

See Editorial - with apologies to 'Giles'

INSIDE: 'Disappointment at Brumcon' – What went wrong at the first BSFA Convention? 'Weir Tales' – or 'Who was the Mystery Man in Birmingham?' **PLUS:** Steve Green; Joseph Nicholas; Ian Sorensen and more!



PROLAPSE

This is *Prolapse 4*, completed in December 2006 after a lapse of only six weeks (as David Redd says, you wait 23 years and then two come along) by Peter Weston at 53 Wyvern Road, Sutton Coldfield, B74 2PS, UK. That address may still occasionally be useful if you want to send me actual letters of comment or rare old SF magazines and pictures of Clevedon pier (thanks, Dave!) Otherwise use the hot-line: pr.weston@btinternet.com. This time we're Paper First; no disrespect to that nice Mr Burns but this one won't go onto eFanzines until the printed copies have been safely delivered; for now, 50 copies are going out to those who seem to want them. And I gratefully acknowledge my debt to the *wegenheim* e-list, where much of this material originally appeared.

"Hack away, save to file, whoosh into the vast emptiness that is the Net." – Lloyd Penney, EoC

By preference I'd perhaps rather not have used the word 'hack' but once you start taking linos you have to run them as they come otherwise there's no point. Still, Lloyd just about sums up my experience with electronic publishing last time, and I won't be doing things in quite the same way again. I spent a couple of weeks working on *Prolapse*, printed up some copies and posted them, and on the same afternoon sent off the Word Document to Bill. This turned out to be a major mistake because it meant that several people whose opinions I value very highly experienced the issue in – let's say – less than optimal circumstances.

First reaction came from Bruce Gillespie who said mildly that "the text of *Prolapse* has come through, but not many of the pics. I only have Adobe Acrobat 5 on this machine, which doesn't seem to like some of the material in the file." To which Ned Brooks commented, "I have the Version 6.0 Reader, and got a warning message when I opened the file, but the illos looked fine. Weston must be using some later version."

This irritated me for three quite separate reasons. First and least because I thought 'Weston' was a bit rude and dismissive when we're on the same e-list. Second, because the 'problem' wasn't really my fault – Bill had put my file into pdf format with his red-hot, up-to-the-minute version of Acrobat which some fans couldn't easily handle because they hadn't updated their software – and it meant they then went on to talk computer stuff rather than take much notice of the contents of the issue itself.

But it annoyed me most of all because Ned Brooks was writing as if I wasn't there, talking not to me but to the gallery. And that's the way it went on. I think this is the fundamental problem with electronic publishing – a fanzine should be an intensely personal experience between editor and recipient, and (apart from reviews) comments on that fanzine ought to be addressed *to the editor*, as they were in the good old days when fans wrote proper LoCs rather than prattling into the wind. As it was, I felt I'd lost all proprietorial rights and *Prolapse* might as well have appeared spontaneously on the web, to be glanced at briefly and instantly forgotten.

Digressing for a moment, another example of what I mean comes unwittingly from Chris Garcia, who was the first to send me an EoC on the webbed edition, and whom I am now going to take totally out of context. Chris said, I hope partly in jest:-

"Those Edwards' *Vector* columns that I read off eFanzines are all fantastic. It's one of those things that I am always surprised by when I log in to check what's new. Usually, it's that one of my zines has been posted, but sometimes it's material from the past that just keeps me reading for those ten minutes before I start writing another issue of *The Drink Tank*."

Or possibly he was being entirely serious – after all, Chris has produced over 100 issues in less than two years – but the point I'm making is that you can't do justice to *anything* in only ten minutes. Yet the sheer plenitude of material available on eFanzines alone is enough to swamp anyone who doesn't have the staying-power of Ted White, leading to the temptation just to scroll hastily through the pages of whatever has appeared since you last looked. No wonder even Earl Kemp's *el* gets so little response!

Anyway, things rapidly got worse with *Prolapse*. One of those whose opinions I care about is Greg Pickersgill, who had hit the same little technical difficulty. He said, "The first 'efanzine' I try to read in godknowshowlong and I can't. Well, I did struggle for a bit and found it all very unrewarding bordering on the uninteresting. However a printed copy arrived this morning and demonstrated that the medium does influence the message; it seems rather more engaging now. Though I do wonder about that letter-column – who fucking CARES what Joseph Nicholas thinks at any time, never mind twenty years ago? And who are some of those other people? Pointless filler – an old front-fighter like you Peter, I would have expected more determined editing. Personally I'd have preferred more PRW and less of everyone else."

My theory here is that Greg was so annoyed by the initial hiccup that by the time the paper copy arrived – later the same day! – his mind was made up, in which case I would have done far better to wait a bit before rushing onto the web (though a desire to get it out before *Novacon* was the main motivator here). I know the old adage is 'never complain, never explain', but I couldn't resist firing back:-

"Huh. Well, that makes it all worthwhile, Greg, it really does. There is no 'pointless filler' – bearing in mind the problems of presenting some very old letters in a way that makes sense, the whole issue was put together with a fair amount of thought to give a snapshot of what was happening in British fandom – and specifically Birmingham fandom – from 1983 onwards. The Joseph Nicholas thing is important because it beautifully illustrates the rather unpleasant attitudes of certain people at that time; an attitude which wasn't a million miles away from your position, if I'm not mistaken. William McCabe's piece was worth printing because it shows the whole thing through the eyes of an outsider, and Sandra's article was just a great piece of writing which documents her entry into fandom. If you didn't find it interesting that's fair enough, but at least credit me with knowing what I'm doing."

But of course, the reader is always right. If Greg found it 'unrewarding bordering on the uninteresting' then the likelihood is that his opinion was shared by a good number of others. As I typed the last few pages I remember thinking that it was all a bit arcane, that it wasn't going to have much appeal to people who weren't around in 1983, but the issue just seemed to come together as if it had a life of its own so I carried on regardless. It was conceived first and foremost as a vehicle for those ancient letters – and did you notice how beautifully Bob Shaw and Chuck Harris demonstrated the almost-Lost Art of writing a good LoC? Neither respondent knew anything about the subject matter in the previous issue but nonetheless they both managed to write something which was clever, amusing, and essentially timeless, by drawing from their own anecdotal stores. LoCing is first and foremost a Creative Writing exercise. End of lecture.

Anyway, those letters needed a preamble for them to make any sense, and an afterword to explain how the 'Birmingham Renaissance' fizzled out back into mediocrity. Sandra's article just fell into my hands as a result of a throwaway remark she made elsewhere, while the accidental discovery of William McCabe's diary was something I just couldn't ignore. OK, so that gave me two items essentially on the same subject but I went ahead because the interest was not so much in the evolution of APA-B itself as in the sub-text, in the personalities of the two authors themselves. William told the rather sad story of a lonely man who wandered into fandom looking for friends and who – twenty years later – still hasn't really broken through, while Sandra's account was of another neo who joined the APA and *flew*, as it were. Along the way both of them painted neat little cameos of other people (like Joy Hibbert), which is the sort of thing that puts meat onto the bare bones of fan-history. I threw in a couple of 'secret histories' for Dave Langford and it was done, just like that!

Time-travelling as a policy statement

All of which leads me to a policy decision on content as well as presentation; the previous *Prolapse* was unavoidably a time-travelling issue, and I think I'm going to carry on trawling around in the backwaters of British fan-history, even if this does rather limit my audience. Rob Hansen has done the hard work in recording facts and figures in his excellent *THEN*, and now – as Ian Sorensen says elsewhere in this issue – there's a need for eye-witness accounts of some of these events without the objective voiceover of the historian. I feel there's a certain fascination in exhuming these old bones, with many good stories so far left untold. It's also amazing what can be unearthed with some research and a little good luck.

For instance, a few months ago I was at the London pub-meeting at the 'Melton Mowbray' (which I'd been calling 'The Mince Pie' – I knew it had something to do with Brian Burgess!) when Roger Robinson called me over to view a new acquisition. This turned out to be a photo-album that had belonged to the late John Roles, one of the long-time stalwarts of the Liverpool Group. John – "a lovely man" in Ina Shorrocks's words – was an antiquarian book-dealer who was killed some five years ago during a violent break-in to his premises. Goodness knows where his album has been since then, presumably in the custody of relatives, but it came to light through a fortunate sequence of events involving Andy England of Fantasy Centre, and a non-fan friend who collects old photographs and who saw it on eBay. The album was bought for a pittance, sold to Andy, and then on to Roger.

We congregated around the book and gazed at it in wonder. I recognised some of the pictures and have many of them in my own archive, thanks to Bill Burns, Rob Hansen and time spent in sorting through Ina's shoeboxes. It was interesting to see that many prints from 1954 onwards were marked "P.A. West" – Peter West – a fan who was a photographer by trade, which accounts for the clarity of his pictures and the way they were shared around fandom; I guess he'd print lots of copies and send them to all the people involved. (Jim Linwood comments that Peter was an émigré from Nazi Germany who was famous for a day when he beat up the fascist leader, Colin Jordan, during a Trafalgar Square rally).

John's fannish career went right back to the early days of post-war conventions, and the first item was a panoramic view of the audience at the 1951 London *Festivention*. This amazing picture had been compiled



Peter West attacks John Roles, at Kettering, probably 1958. Dave Cohen in background, other three unknown (from Ina's shoebox)

by someone who had taken four consecutive photographs from exactly the same viewpoint, and had then carefully cut-&-pasted them together to make a strip over twelve inches wide. A quick examination revealed images of the early Bob Shaw and Jim White, with Forry Ackerman, Eddie Jones, John Carnell and a number of others I could easily identify. There were masses of pictures from the 'White Horse', from the 1952 London convention, and from the subsequent *Coroncon*, *Supermancon*, and the first two Kettering conventions. One view showed a demonstration of hypnosis on stage, with various fans looking bewildered, while John Brunner played guitar in the foreground!

As well as pictures there were 'entrance tickets' to *Cytricon I*, with separate colours for Saturday and Sunday sessions. There was a long 1952 letter from Vince Clarke (I didn't know his first name was Aubrey!) and the original film posters and mock 'newspaper' produced for *'When the Earth Stood Still'* that year. And in there was John's membership card for LiG, with details of subscriptions and entrance charges to their 'Space Dive' clubroom (remarkably high, at two shillings per visit), with several views of the Dive and of the Liverpool Group's summer outing to the seaside.

Well, was that exciting or wasn't it? I certainly thought so. Perhaps because I am myself a veteran of the early 1960s I can emphasise with the people in these pictures, even those I never met. They were fans, just like ourselves, struggling to keep their interest in science fiction alive in a much more indifferent time, though paradoxically one in which the bonds of comradeship were probably a great deal stronger. I'm interested in their world precisely because it is all so small-scale, and because their struggles and their decisions led to our present-day fandom; you really can trace back the roots that far.

Vector celebrates 250th issue!

Now there's a headline no-one in 1958 would have expected to see written, given that the BSFA was the fourth attempt at founding a national fan organisation in this country and none of its predecessors lasted more than five minutes. But the anniversary has duly arrived and editor Niall Harrison, on the strength of those long-ago 'Malcolm Edwards' columns, asked me for a short article which I titled 'Origins.' I'd better not go into too many details here, although I don't suppose there'll be much overlap of readerships, except to say that I tried to pinpoint the moment when a society specifically set-up to promote 'fandom' accidentally became an organisation which thought it had a mission to promote and improve science fiction.

How strange that something created by fans at a convention, with the aim of recruiting more people into fandom and ensuring the continuation of the annual conventions, managed to end up with a constitution which avoided mention of either objective!

But worse than that, after just eight years the BSFA dissociated itself from having anything to do with convention organising, ducking out of one of the prime tasks with which it had originally been charged! This decision was taken at the AGM at the 1966 *Yarcon* and it's something I've never understood (and no-one else does, either, not even Rob Hansen). At this late date it's unclear who forced through the motion but I suspect it was Dave Barber, then-Treasurer, who was faced with an almost empty kitty due to the incompetence of Charlie Winstone and the ruinous costs of producing a printed *Vector* for the previous 18 months. His reasoning was probably that the Association had no real control over a con-committee but might in theory be liable for any debts it should run up; therefore the safest thing to do was to keep well clear of the whole business.

If you stop and think about it, this situation was utterly bizarre. The BSFA had just destroyed one of its main reasons for existence and no-one seemed to have noticed! It was a panic decision, and an unnecessary one. Conventions since 1959 had been held "under the auspices of the BSFA" which in practice meant very little except for having some public relations value (despite my cover cartoon, it *was* useful to claim the backing of an established body). So far as I know, no con-committee ever had any money troubles during those eight years, and it would have been instructive to see what would have happened if they had. There would have been no legal call upon the BSFA treasury – at worst, I suspect, the Association might have felt morally bound to 'help-out' as much as it could, but the responsibility would have remained firmly with the unfortunate individuals who had organised the convention in question. So Dave Barber really had nothing to worry about.

I think this decision weakened both the Association and fandom itself. For eight years the BSFA had been at the centre of things, maintaining the polite fiction that it was in some way 'responsible' for the annual convention, but at the same time providing a measure of order and continuity. Prospective bidders needed to put their case at a bidding session which was part of the BSFA's AGM, and only members had been eligible to vote on site-selection. You can argue against this if you want, but it was an easy way of defining 'who is the electorate?' on the general principle that if someone wasn't sufficiently interested to belong to the central body of science fiction fandom, then they weren't qualified to have an opinion about the next convention. After 1966 this useful distinction vanished, opening the door to the rapid fragmentation of fandom and for the BSFA to be gradually shoved out to the margins where it maintains a somewhat shadowy existence, ignored by many of the people who come to modern conventions and who neither know nor care about past history.

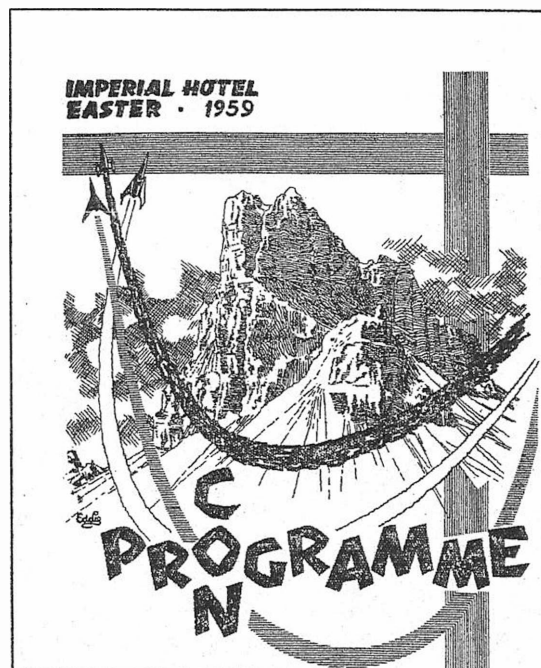
Personally, I think the BSFA should have seized the nettle, gone all the way and taken full responsibility for the National convention (in the same way the Constitution of the Brum Group charges it with maintaining *Novacon*). Not an easy prescription, but the BSFA might even have found it could make a useful income out of con-running! And all this is as good a lead-in as any to the main article this time....

The 1959 *Brumcon* wasn't called that until many years afterward; indeed, for a while after cons first came 'under the auspices of the BSFA' there seems to have been a reluctance to use jokey titles, perhaps because organisers sensed they needed to be a bit more 'serious' about science fiction, that they were engaged in a quest for 'respectability,' and that conventions from now onwards would be a 'shop-window' for SF fandom, rather than an annual reunion for the in-crowd. But old attitudes die hard and in some ways *Brumcon* wasn't quite the success that had been hoped-for...

Disappointment at Brumcon!

This was the first convention to be run under the nominal authority of the BSFA, so what went wrong?

My grateful thanks to Greg Pickersgill for providing the source material upon which this article is based.



I have a particular affection for the *Brumcon*, even though I wasn't there. Perhaps it's because it was held in my home town, in the familiar old Imperial Hotel where in a later period the Brum group met for fifteen years or more. But probably it's due to the 'might-have-been' aspect, because by Easter 1959 I'd already been reading SF magazines for more than two years and on that Saturday afternoon I guarantee I would have been searching for back-issues of *Astounding & Galaxy* at the city's 'Rag Market', no more than a quarter-mile away from the convention. If only I'd known! I would have been in there like a shot and would have discovered fandom nearly four years before I did. In that parallel universe other newcomers like Jim Linwood, Alan Rispin and George Locke would have been my contemporaries, and I would have found Ken Slater's table and been able to binge on science fiction! Of course, I was only sixteen, so I wonder what I would have made of it all....

This was the first convention that claimed to be run by the BSFA, and those in charge seem to have been aware that they needed to pull something a bit special out of the bag. However, they had a problem. Back in the early fifties it was all so simple – conventions seem to have been fairly earnest affairs for men in suits who sat and listened to speeches from other men in suits. But the emphasis had gradually changed over the years, particularly with the four Kettering events from 1955-58 which were much more 'fannish' – in other words, they were largely unprogrammed social gatherings where everyone concentrated on having a good time and never mind the science fictional stuff. Great fun – but it had made things very difficult for anyone new to enter fandom, with the result that attendances had crept steadily downwards from 150 in 1955 to less than 50 by 1958.

British Convention - Easter

Britain's 1959 science fiction Convention will be held over Easter, March 27th to 29th, at the Imperial Hotel, Temple Street, Birmingham 2 (200 yards from New Street and Snow Hill stations). Room rates are 27/6 and 30/- a night, including breakfast. Apply direct to the hotel for reservations.

Membership and entrance fee to the Convention is 12/6 (5/- British Science Fiction Association members) and applications should be made in advance to Mr. R. Richardson, 9 Courtiers Drive, Bishop's Cleeve, Gloucester.

Saturday, March 28th is reserved for amateur discussions and activities, Sunday the 29th for serious discussions. There will be a science fiction and fantasy art exhibition as well as the time-honoured auction of science fiction literature, plus many other items not yet finalised.

So the BSFA was formed to try to reverse this trend by advertising and promoting itself to a wider universe of science fiction readers, and the annual convention was potentially the Association's biggest attraction. So now, the organisers of *Brumcon* found they needed to try and turn back the clock to make their convention more accessible, more 'about science fiction'. But that proved to be easier said than done!

Let's take a look at the four-man con-committee. Terry Jeeves was chairman, and he readily admitted that he had stepped in because they couldn't find anyone else! However, I suspect this was in any case a fairly nominal position since after Ted Tubb's early resignation from editorship of *Vector*, Terry was already heavily involved as one-man editor and production team.

Unless otherwise noted, all pictures have come from Ina's famous shoe-boxes, and were originally taken by the two 'official' photographers at Brumcon, Eddie Jones (LiG) and Les Childs (Cheltenham). Obviously, reproduction by photocopying is not ideal, but in due course you'll see better results when this issue is posted on efanzines.

So Terry Jeeves already had more than enough on his hands and as far as I can tell his involvement was limited to giving the Chairman's welcome and running the quiz event at the start of the convention. The majority of the work seems to have been done by two people, these being Bob Richardson of the Cheltenham group, and Norman Shorrock of LiG. Bob is listed as being con Secretary but he also appears to have acted as Treasurer, since he prepared the accounts after the whole thing was over, and at one stage Eric Bentcliffe refers to him (incorrectly) as 'Chairman, Auctioneer, and Chief Worrier.'

Norman Shorrock had already been in fandom for ten years and was one of the founders of the Liverpool group. With Ina he was in the forefront of activity with LiG, making tape-recordings, films, and opening their house for frequent fannish get-togethers, but he seems to have had no previous part in running conventions. This year, though, Norman did both programme and programme book. And finally, Ron Bennett is listed as being responsible for publicity, perhaps slightly surprising since Ron was down on record as having opposed the creation of the BSFA and the entire school of thought which had suggested that without it fandom would die. Doubtless Ron did his best, though it's hard to see how he could have promoted the convention except through the fanzines. There was just one advertisement for the con in the March issue of *New Worlds*, probably too late to be of any real use.



Norman, Bob Richardson, and Ina arrive at Brumcon, all very smart in their 'St Fantony' blazers.

But *everything* had been left very late, since the first tentative reference to the convention didn't appear until the second (autumn) issue of *Vector*, circulated in October 1958, at which time no hotel had been found. Not until the third, winter issue does Terry Jeeves mention that Bob Richardson 'had returned to base with a pair of shoes with soles as thin as paper, bearing news of what may be a new fannish Mecca, the Imperial Hotel in Birmingham, with 80 bedrooms.' And after it was all over, Terry noted that 'the arrangements had been made in a hurry', Bob and Norman had to start from scratch, find a new hotel in a strange city...and then lay on a programme...all this in a very short time.'



Chairman Terry Jeeves admires Ina's legs in the upstairs lobby of the Imperial Hotel while Eddie Jones looks on approvingly. A 'mystery man' is in the background.

Just why things had been left so late is unclear, but I can visualise what might have happened. After Kettering I'm sure fans went away feeling pleased and happy that they now had an organisation to take charge of little details like running their conventions, something no-one had particularly wanted to do. The committee was kept busy with signing-up members, writing a constitution and producing *Vector* and it was probably well into the second half of the year when the realisation dawned in high places that the chairman, Dave Newman, had disappeared off the face of the Earth (or at least re-located to Bournemouth), but the BSFA had promised everyone that it would make the convention happen. So they *had* to do something!

By this time the executive committee was effectively down to two people, Eric Bentcliffe and Terry Jeeves, and their dialogue probably went rather like this:

"Terry, at this rate we're not going to *have* a convention next year! What will we tell them!"

"I know, Eric, but who can we possibly get to do it?"

"What about Norman Shorrock? He's run some good parties and he could get LiG to help."

"Great idea, Eric. Let's ask him to do the programme. And maybe we can get someone from Cheltenham, they're friendly with the Liverpool group. What about Bob Richardson?"

And so it was decided, and later, Eric refers to Norman and Bob as having been 'co-opted', whatever that may mean. But who exactly was going to come to the convention? Naturally, the BSFA hoped its recruiting efforts would pay off and that there would be a lot of new faces in Birmingham. How many? Well, the Association had nearly one hundred members, so surely it wouldn't be unreasonable to expect to see twenty, maybe thirty newcomers, perhaps? With this in mind they must have asked Norman to make sure he did a decent Programme Book, one which would present the event in the best possible light. Most previous con-committees hadn't bothered, sometimes producing only a folded single sheet, and it's doubtful whether the Kettering cons had issued any publications at all apart from 'combozines,' which were a fairly tatty sort of

'sampler' package from current fanzine editors. The only previous programme book of any consequence had been the superb *Supermancon* book, created by long-time fan Harry Turner, who was a commercial artist.

Fortunately, Norman Shorrock could match that by drafting in Eddie Jones, at the time starting to make a name for himself with his SF cover-paintings, and he was clearly able to call on the resources of a professional studio. The result was impressive, quarto-size with a dramatic cover and 34 inside pages which appear to have been electro-stencilled throughout (a very expensive option if you had to pay for it), which allowed use of plentiful display headings and cartoons. It was run-off by the Shorrock family – Ina told me at *Novacon* that she still remembers turning that handle! – and reproduction was absolutely perfect.



Mr Sercon (Ken) meets Mr Trufan (Eric Jones, Grand Master of the Order of St Fantony). Keith Freeman and Eric are in their 'Fanning Island' costumes! (Photo: from Keith)

The contents included a guide to the programme, a report from Eric Bentcliffe on the first year of the BSFA's existence, a 'welcome to newcomers' from Vince Clarke, and a six-page address from the Guest of Honour, Ken Slater. Oh, didn't I mention that Ken was the GoH? Well, not surprising, since the committee almost forgot to mention it as well, only crediting Ken on the title page and not giving him a spot on the programme. And of course there was no biographical information *about* Ken in the book, because they all knew him anyway, didn't they?

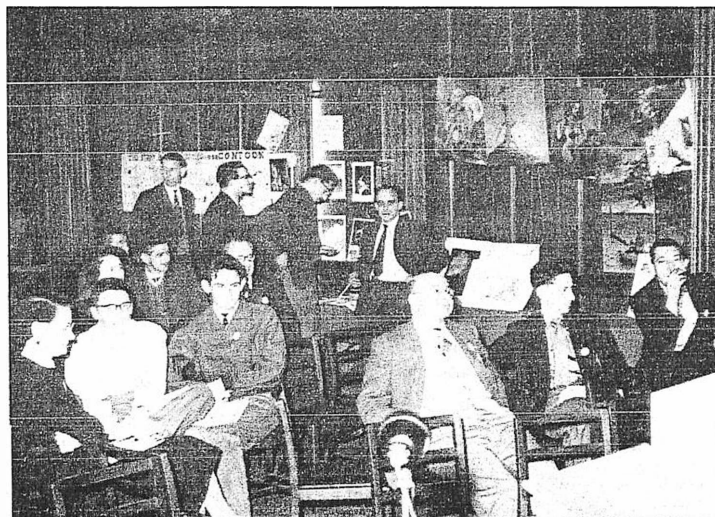
This is the first example of some slightly confused thinking about *Brumcon*. It was supposedly making an effort to cater for newcomers, but in practice the committee was continuing along the old track in which everyone knew everyone else. And why choose Ken Slater as the GoH in this year of all years? It's not that Ken didn't richly deserve the honour for all his work over the years, but if you really wanted

to appeal to SF readers from outside fandom, wouldn't it have been better to have chosen a science fiction writer as the Guest? What about Ted Tubb, already a well-known author and until recently editor of *Authentic*? Or Ken Bulmer? John Brunner? Ted Carnell? Perhaps they *were* asked, begged maybe, but they didn't turn up. All these professionals went to cons except – strangely – this year, and Ken Slater remarked afterwards that "the convention was notable for its total lack of 'pros' connected with the publishing/writing world." This made it very difficult for Norman Shorrock to arrange his 'serious' programme and represented probably the first failure of the *Brumcon* to achieve its objectives.

Another odd thing is Ken Slater's long article in the programme book. Titled 'Your Laundry Sir,' Ken used this opportunity to set out his views on the last ten years of British fandom. All through this period it is possible to see the existence of a well-mannered conflict between two rival attitudes, what we would today call the 'fannish' versus the 'sercon.' For most of that decade Ken had been on the losing side, running '*Operation Fantast*' almost as a one-man band, writing his review columns in *Nebula*, valiantly calling for a national organisation but gradually seeing the anarchic 'fannish' tendency take the ascendancy.

Now, with the establishment of the BSFA (in which he was to take a leading role) and with the perceived need to re-connect with the SF-reading public, Ken must have felt fully vindicated. It shows in his article, which says things like "You can't live in your own waste products" and "you can't coast uphill indefinitely", and he castigates "the esoteric mysteries.... like Proxyboo Services, The Goon Defective Agency, St Fantony, and so on," which Ken felt "were excellent ideas...but were apt to leave the newcomer cold – he wouldn't see the connection between these and science fiction, and no-one would bother to explain it to him."

Many of Ken's points are entirely valid but I can't help feeling this was an unsuitable place in which to publish them. The majority of people at the convention still dated from the fannish era and probably wouldn't have agreed, even if they had bothered to read such a long piece. If I'd gone along as sixteen-year-old I might have been totally baffled; I would have expected to see someone writing and talking about science fiction – which in fact was something Ken would have been perfectly capable of doing, if anyone had asked him!



The con hall – the Art Show and book tables were at the back of the room. Here, Ella Parker looks after her group of new boys, while Cheltenham fans Frank Herbert, Keith Freeman and Eric Jones stick closely together! Room hire was six guineas for the weekend!

So what about the programme itself? Here, the old attitudes had prevailed. In *Vector* #2 Bob Richardson had issued a little questionnaire, asking BSFA members to rank five different programme items in order of preference. The options he listed were:-

- * Fancy Dress/Masque Ball
- * Film Show (including films made by SF groups)
- * Hypnotism demonstration
- * Auction of books, magazines & artwork
- * Science fiction quiz or Brains Trust

If I had received this questionnaire I might have written back and asked, "Why not just talk about science fiction, then?" But this was something that early cons just couldn't seem to get right, not even at the 1957 London worldcon which was full of big-name writers who weren't asked to do anything. It's rather like the proverbial elephant in a crowded room which everyone knows is there, but no-one wants to mention. British fandom was like that so far as science fiction was concerned, totally aware of it, but totally inarticulate. And yet the opportunities were there for the Brumcon, even allowing for the absence of the professionals. They could have put Jeeves, Slater and Bentcliffe on a panel and talked about the British magazines and their problems, or about the possible Hugo contenders for 1959 and so on. But they don't seem to have thought of panel discussions, the fall-back option of modern conventions! And a lot of people were happy with things as they were; even first-timer Ivor Mayne delightedly exclaimed at the 'practically all-fannish programme.'

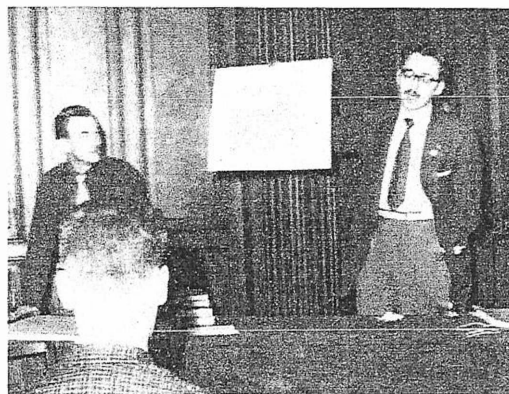
Many people had arrived for a get-together on the Friday evening, and as new-boy Brian Jordan recalls, "We got quite a shock, when we found the bar was to close early, in spite of promises it would open most of the night. Pete Taylor smuggled-in nine pounds' worth of drink under his coat and we went to his room for a party, way up at the top of the hotel, surrounded by mundane types. The hotel was large and rambling, and the manager had naively spread us all through it. We were joined by Dave Cohen, Ron Bennett, and Arthur (Doc) Weir, who saved the night by producing a corkscrew in a moment of great need."

The official opening was on the Saturday afternoon at 2.30 pm, followed by a quiz. But the main event was supposed to be a 'tea dance' with the 'International tea-drinking contest'. There's no evidence the 'dance' ever took place - it's not in any pictures or reports, and with a maximum of eight women present (and the men couldn't dance anyway) it was always going to be a non-starter! However, the tea-drinking contest was well supported and was won by the absurdly young Peter Davies who downed eleven cups, with an unknown effect upon his body-chemistry!

The convention adjourned until 7.30 for a TAFF resume from Ron Bennett, and a 'playlet' from the 'femme-fans of the London Circle,' in which Brian Burgess took part with green face and pipe-cleaner antennae as the pilot of a flying saucer who wanted to be refuelled with ... you guessed it... a cup of tea! Brian Jordan again: "The play was hopeless, but it was redeemed in part by the wonderful sight of Brian Burgess wearing tin-foil boots and green makeup on his face. Afterwards he made a tour of the public bar, much to the consternation of the customers."

At 9.00 Bob Richardson began the auction, helped by Ron Bennett. Brian was attracted by a complete set of *Authentic*, "They were Ted Tubb's office copies, going right back to the first issue," he said, "I bid ten bob for them but Bob refused to let them go for that. Later, Ina Shorrocks came to tell me that she'd talked him round. More probably, he didn't want to drag them back home with him. Lugging them back to Burnley in my suitcase nearly killed me. I slumped at the top of the station steps and wondered if I'd ever get up again. They must have added an extra stone to drag from Brum to Burnley in my (fortunately) expanding suitcase."

At this point 'Doc' Hammett of Stafford appeared with his incredibly pretty wife Joan (fans still fondly recalled her 'St Trinian's' outfit at the worldcon, 18 months earlier), en-route to their usual CND Easter march at Aldermaston. According to *Vector* #4, the 'Doc' bought a telescope (!) at the auction, and then they proceeded on their way, but pictures from several room-parties tell a different story.



Bob Richardson and Ron Bennett conduct the auction at Brumcon, here offering a piece of original artwork.



Peter Davies, Les Childs and Phil Rogers tackle yet another cup from the dreaded tea-urn. Only in Britain! Below, Paul & Joan Hammett, with Norman Weedall.



The final event of the evening was the Fancy Dress Party, though with such a small crowd there were few costumes. Keith Freeman turned up in fancy top and flowered skirt (!) and claimed this was "A carry-over from my previous RAF posting. Near to Christmas Island was another, even smaller – Fanning Island. So Eric Jones and I entered as Fanning Islanders, in the costume of the locals on 'Fanning Island'. Not, of course, to be confused with Fannish Islanders!" Ina Shorrocks and her friend Nancy Pooley came in even cheekier outfits as 'To Serve Man', with their midriffs marked "For the Use of LASFAS men only." The winner was Sandra Hall with long green gown, and green hair and face-paint as 'The Girl from Altair.' Rumour has it that Ken Slater's moustache mysteriously also turned green, but just then, according to Rob Hansen's account in *THEN*, "someone started to yell abuse at the female contestants, but he was eventually identified as a religious fanatic rather than a fan, and was ejected." That was it, officially, but parties continued until 4.00 am.



'To Serve Man' – cheeky outfits from Nancy & Ina. Below, Sandra Hall gets her teeth into Eric Bentcliffe.



Sunday events began at 11.30 am with the BSFA's Annual General Meeting, at which secretary Eric Bentcliffe reported that membership now stood at 112, and then went on to say that "Between 500 and 1000 members would be needed before the association became an effective force in Science Fiction [capitalisation from *Vector*]." No-one questioned this remarkable statement, asked Eric what this 'effective force' was expected to achieve, and exactly what did he mean in this context by 'Science Fiction.' It comes across to me as the same voice of the person who had drafted that slightly pretentious Constitution only a few months earlier, setting the BSFA onto a delusional path in which it imagined it had some influence over writers and publishers, which was never going to be the case.

He was also being unrealistic from a strictly practical point of view; in his valedictory column in *Vector* #4 he talks about the need for a large amount of free time and about his 'pile of unanswered letters', so how he expected to cope with those sorts of numbers is problematical to say the least. In fact, the retirement of Bentcliffe and Jeeves was to plunge the BSFA into the first of its perennial crises when new secretary (Doc Weir) and editor (Roberta Wild) both proved not to be up to their jobs.

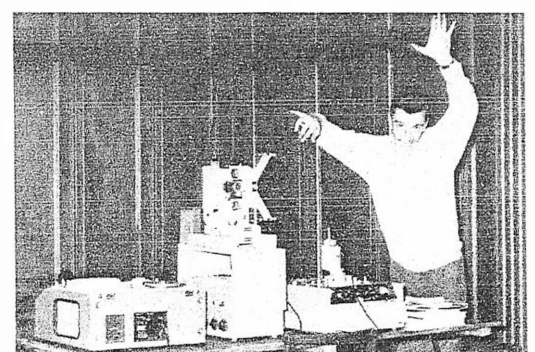
Following that, it was swiftly agreed that Ron Bennett would run a convention at Harrogate, (which he eventually did – three years later). A deal was done at Whitsun which would take the 1960 convention to London, thus inadvertently creating another time-bomb which would tick quietly away in the background – but that's another story!

After lunch, 'Doc' Weir from the Cheltenham club explained his theory about Atlantis, and that was it for the afternoon. Things resumed with another auction at 7.30pm, followed by a programme of 8mm amateur films, with Norman Shorrocks as projectionist. These included the Liverpool Group's 'May We Have the Pleasure?' Cheltenham's 'Kingdom of St Fantony' and Ted Carnell's film of the 1957 London worldcon, all, alas, now lost to us.

As Greg Pickersgill recently commented, "There's absolutely *no* SF content, hardly any program content there at all. There's less going on than you'd get in a single afternoon at a *Novacon*! We have more program than that at our mini-cons down at the pub. Incredible! Clearly not the Golden Age we sometimes think we're looking back on." And yes, he is correct from one point of view. If the objective really was to run a convention about science fiction with the aim of attracting SF readers into fandom, then *Bruncon* has to be regarded as a failure. I'm reminded of an instance only six years later when an elderly Scots gentleman, Mr David Marwick, turned up at the second *Bruncon* – which had a good deal more 'SF content' – and kept demanding; 'Why should this interest me?' and he obviously considered that it was the convention's job to keep him entertained for the weekend. If twenty or thirty like him had turned up, then Bob and Norman really *would* have been in trouble!



Eddie's illo for the LiG film made for the 1957 London worldcon. Below, Greg originally titled this one as 'Mad Theramin Player' but Ina said it was only Norm having a nervous breakdown!



And yet....if I'd been there I think I don't think it would have mattered, I would have loved every minute of it anyway. Yes, I wouldn't have understood everything that was going on, would have been disappointed not to have seen more about science fiction on the programme, but I would have recognised that at last I was in the company of like-minded people and that would have been enough. This is exactly what happened to those fortunate few who stepped through this particular doorway into fandom, as Jim Linwood recollects:-

"It was my first convention and I already assumed that *programme items* were a front for wild parties and orgies. I was disappointed but it was the socialising aspect that I remember quite well. The first attendees I bumped into were

Kens Slater and MacIntyre and I dumbly asked them 'Are you errr...fans?' I was then whisked-off to Ella Parker's room where she was welcoming the youngsters who'd come to the con via the BSFA; Ivor Mayne, who I already knew from the Globe and midnight tours of the Soho jazz clubs; Alan Rispin and Brian Jordan I'd corresponded with, but not met before, while George Locke (although no newcomer) made up the Gang of Five. There was something of a generation gap but Ella, Ron Bennett and the Shorrocks went out of their way to make us 'BSFA Zoom-Zoom Boys'* welcome." (*a term coined by Atom)

"The only programme items I remember are LiGs 'March of Slime' tape play, the Cheltenham Group's SF film and the Sunday night auction when Brian bought a set of *Authentic* because he wanted the one with Harness's 'The Rose'. I know I had a hangover on Monday morning. Mike Moorcock wasn't there but Pete Taylor was. I also met Ken Cheslin for the first time – he was there with his Stourbridge chums Mike Kilvert and Peter Davies."

Jim was hooked, obviously, and so were the rest of the 'Gang of Five'. So was Ken Cheslin, who rushed back home and started SADO – the Stourbridge & District Circle, which soon recruited Dave Hale and Darroll Pardoe. In all, the *Brumcon* had attracted about a dozen newcomers, almost all of whom came back for further doses of conventioning. Sounding surprised, Ron Bennett commented in the first issue of *Skyrack*: 'Several new faces were present, all of whom have been brought into fandom by the BSFA. Nor were these newcomers 'stuffy', as might have been expected. They were most interesting to talk to and fitted in well'

They certainly did! Here's Brian Jordan's account of his Saturday night adventures: "The clearest memory I have is wandering round the corridors with Jim and Alan. After a while, everyone went down into the con-hall. People there were spread too thinly for much to be going on, so Jim, Alan, Ivor, Archie (Mercer) and I went up to the top floor, and down the fire-escape onto the roof. We wandered round drinking brandy and gin, but couldn't find any skylights to drop the bottles through. We found an open door which led to the second floor. Back inside, we stood in an empty room for about an hour discussing religion and like that, and the night ended with Alan and me sitting in Ken Slater's room, sleepily sipping whisky and listening to Ken and the Shorrocks discussing cyclic changes in dance music....and so to bed."

In the car going back to Cheltenham Keith Freeman said: "The party last night was great.... I could have carried on all night for another 30 minutes or so." To the amusement of the others he then slept the rest of the way home.

But *Brumcon* was a big disappointment to the organisers. Eric Bentcliffe reported, 'Total membership was 60, and 56 people actually attended the con. These were not the sort of numbers we were hoping for, but were comparable with recent British cons.' Well yes, Eric, but this first BSFA convention had expected to do a lot better than that. The influx of new recruits had been almost exactly balanced by an equal number of defections – the Londoners in particular, perhaps not liking the sound of 'Birmingham' and the fannish types put off by the prospect of a potentially sercon weekend.

So there we have it, three operational failures but total success in the only area that really mattered; being able to welcome new fans into the community. *Brumcon* was the first of the modern conventions and it set the scene for everything that would follow. It even made a profit; a surplus of £14.8s.4d on a total income of £41.18s.8d.



'Drink this, lad' – wicked older fans corrupt innocent neo-fan Ivor Mayne in late-night room party!



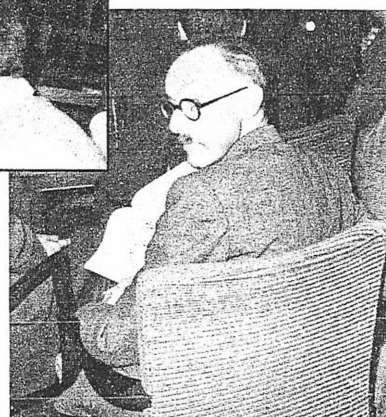
The Gang of Five – Linwood, Mayne, Locke & Jordan, with Alan Rispin sitting behind, at programme item. Below: two more first-timers, David Hardy with his friend Peter Hammerton from Lincoln, in front of the Art display.



I posted some *Brumcon* pictures on our secret e-list and asked various people if they could confirm who among them was Arthur 'Doc' Weir, for whom the annual British Fanmanship Award is named. Peter Mabey, George Locke, Ken Slater, even Ina, they were all hopeless and after a false start it was finally Keith Freeman, Brian Jordan and David Hardy who confirmed the ID, along with some other, circumstantial evidence. But this did start another interesting little discussion rolling, which I've shuffled into order and edited slightly, below. (*Clever title by Malcolm Edwards.*)



*Delivering his
'Atlantis' lecture
at Brumcon*



"I should recognise Doc Weir, dammit, I slept with him! (in the *most* innocent of ways - Eric & Margaret had one spare bedroom with a double bed in it.... Doc Weir and I ended up staying there one night)." – Keith Freeman

'The Mystery Man in Birmingham' or – 'Weir Tales'

Ken Slater: "I *can* remember things about Doc Weir – I just can't remember what he looked like. I've seen that photograph (the 'false start' picture) before, and although it is vaguely familiar, so are pictures of umpteen other folk. My memory and thought processes don't operate on "pictures". I had to consider it from a different point of view: did the person in the picture look like one who would tie your hands behind your back, then loop the tie to a chair (or table), stand back with a grin and say "Get away from that!"? I think "No" is a fair answer. But I can still remember how to do the trick (escape from the loops) and *that* Weir was a topologist with lots of stunts with lengths of cord. But what did he look like? Don't ask me."

Bill Burns: "I'd like to add these pictures to my Doc Weir web-page – who's the photographer?"

PW: "Bill, these are from a large file of Brumcon pictures that came from Ina's shoebox. The 1959 programme book listed two 'official' photographers, these being Les Childs (Cheltenham) and Eddie Jones (Liverpool). I used to think most of Ina's pictures came from Eddie, but for various reasons now believe they were a set sent to Norman by Les Childs as a way of saying 'thank you' for organising the convention.

Ron Bennett: "Having been indoc(weir)trinated into a certain thought, suspect the speaker in the photo might actually be Doc Weir. I honestly don't know, but the chances are that it is. I think. Maybe. I'm absolutely certain that this is a great help. Having looked closely at the picture, I'm more inclined to lean (as one does when inclined) towards Doc Weir than Jack Wilson, whom (a) I don't remember wearing glasses and (b) I don't remember his giving any sort of talk."

PW: "This really does appear to be Doc Weir. But don't you think it slightly bizarre that fandom thought Doc Weir such a great fan that an Award was named in his honour, yet no-one even seems to know what he looked like! Whereas everyone remembers J. Michael Rosenblum, for example. There's a moral there, somewhere."

Malcolm Edwards: "He seems to be just about the only British fan who nobody can remember, which is just wonderfully ironic given that he is one of only two with an award set up specifically to preserve his memory (the other being Ken MacIntyre). But even back in the 1970s nobody seemed to know anything about Doc Weir. Maybe it's time to rename the award after somebody who people *do* remember. As there are no fewer than seven past recipients on this list, by my count – Ken, me, Peter, Greg, Roger, Mark, Bill, in order – we can convene a committee, declare a quorum, and enact a decision..."

Bill: "The Award Formerly Known As Doc Weir... But what would you call it now? Most of the deserving names from our fannish youth are probably equally unknown to current Eastercon attendees."

Ted White: "Someone who is dead. That gives you a number of good names: ATom, Vince Clarke, Chuck Harris, Walt Willis, Bob Shaw..."

Rog Peyton: "Malcolm's notion of renaming the Award is a good one which I would certainly back – the 'Mike Rosenblum' Award would honour someone who was active in fandom for well over 30 years and who deserves some kind of permanent memorial. While not wanting to detract from the activities of Doc Weir, he was active in fandom for only 3 or 4 years. In all honesty, if it weren't for the Doc Weir Award itself, would anyone remember him? Apparently not, as no-one seems to remember what he looked like. And what actually did he **do**? Mike Rosenblum's activities are well-documented and even without an award, most fans remember him or have heard of him or know his work in fandom. On the other hand, the Award was started to preserve Doc Weir's memory – and it has certainly succeeded in that."

Jim Linwood: "I remember Doc Weir quite clearly at Birmingham and the subsequent 1960 London con, as well as corresponding with him until his death. I'm not sure what the original terms of reference for the Award were but I thought it was for unsung, behind-the-scenes work in promoting science-fiction and fandom. If there is to be recognition of outstanding fannish activity by a British fan, I'd nominate the Willis Award – but how many out there know who Walt was, these days?"

Greg Pickersgill: "I feel that Malcolm's suggestion is at least in part mischievous – but nonetheless I find I am rather in agreement with it. I know next to nothing about Doc Weir even though I have read much of what he had published in fanzines (primarily *Vector*, and frankly not particularly interesting or memorable stuff) and the Pardoe-produced *Memorial Anthology* which is not a wonderful or informative thing. So overall I'm inclined to say that despite Jim's later remarks I really don't see any particular importance in commemorating him.

"I'm much more inclined to go along with a Michael Rosenblum Award, as JMR was really someone who did a hell of a whole lot for British fandom and SF for a long time. He's someone I very much regret being too young and stupid to engage with. His fan work is of considerable significance still, and he was a collector of some importance (and it is unfortunate that his collection is now with son Howard, who appears to have only the vaguest idea of what to do with it). And it also occurs to me that a Ken Slater award for support of British science fiction fandom would be something."

PW: "Sounds good to me! I agree with Greg and immediately thought of the 'J. Michael Rosenblum Award', which has a nice ring to it. But if we were really serious, we'd have to consider other worthy contenders, of whom Ken Slater simply HAS to be the one person who has done more than anything to hold British fandom together over the years. But we'd never get away with it. Would we?"

Mark Plummer: "By my count there are twelve previous winners who are dead, plus a couple more who to the best of my knowledge have completely dropped off the map. I suggest that the mechanism for a change would be some sort of consensus amongst the twenty-nine or so surviving winners, so fifteen or thereabouts for a majority and, as Malcolm says, there are seven of them here. Having just counted up the names in the 2006 Eastercon programme book I see that, counting this year's, there have been 40 presentations so far so arguably, if we want to make a change, now's a good round number for a break-point. Also there's a recent precedent for renaming an award in that the Worldcon's 'Big Heart' has just been renamed the 'Forry Ackerman' or something like that.

"As to how many people know or care about the DWA, I think it usually attracts somewhere in the order of 50-100 votes. This year's turnout was within that range. The fact that they vote doesn't necessarily mean that they care all that much what the Award is called and indeed why – but how many people wandering around a typical early twenty-first century Worldcon are wondering who this Hugo bloke was...?"

Malcolm: "Mischievous, moi? Well, yes, it's true, but if you think about it for more than two minutes it does seem incontestably a good idea, and how could anybody possibly object, at this point, to renaming it 'the Ken Slater

Award', though maybe this is a presumptuous suggestion. But I long ago swore off any future involvement in fan politics of any kind, and that's one promise I am definitely not going back on."

Ken: "Anent the general discussion, the 'Award' was I believe originated by the BSFA, in which case the rest of us shud keep our sticky little fingers orf it, uh? 'Doc' Weir did a lot of unheralded work, particularly as the first secretary of the BSFA in its initial guise, and the purpose of the Award was to recognise each year some person who had done "sterling work" (lift that bale, etc) for the general benefit of British fandom without obvious recognition. To be honest when I qualified I would never have voted for me, I could hardly have considered myself "unrecognised", but I gathered I clicked "for past services". Admittedly in the early days of the Award it was a blatant 'fix' - when the voting papers were handed out, or at some time during the course of the con, you were not infrequently given a suggestion that you should vote for X who had done this, that and the other. Mostly because people running conventions knew who were the invisible and nameless helpers, and 'popular vote' was a self-defeating way to award the "unknown helper". And regretfully many con-attendees didn't have a clue. Then, today, nor do I, in more ways than one."

Greg: "In the *Skyrack* webbing project (see www.gostak.co.uk/skyrack/index.htm) I found the flyer put out by Ken Cheslin with *Skyrack* 40, which states pretty clearly that:

"The suggestion was made that it would be a worthwhile offering to purchase the relevant portion of Doc's collection, thus saving it from probable dispersal. Accordingly, a fund was launched with the object of raising sufficient money to offer Mrs Weir a fair price for the items required. These would then be administered by the British Science Fiction Association's library as a special Memorial Collection."

Malcolm: "The single most interesting sentence I've yet come across in all the issues of *Skyrack* that Greg has made available is this one, from #30 (March 1961) which is part of Ron Bennett's obituary notice:-

"At last year's (1960) London Convention, Doc read a paper on the works of Karel Capek, of whom he had been a devotee and friend."

"Now, Capek died on Christmas Day 1938 (I believe he starved himself to death on realising that the Western allies had abandoned Czechoslovakia to the Nazis). So what were the circumstances under which Doc Weir was a friend of his? All you read in fanzines was that he was a good guy, older than most fans, but very knowledgeable. Time to turn detective. If you do a Google Advanced Search with 'Arthur Rose Weir' as the exact search and 'Capek' in the top line, the only result is a Czech journal, which appears to have a pretty detailed article about Weir (1906-1961 - so much younger than people seem to have thought him). Unfortunately I don't know any Czechs or Czech speakers. Can anyone take this further?

"Incidentally, the flyer with SKYRACK 40 says that he had the initials A.P.I.C. after his name, which Google suggests is most probably the Association for Professionals in Infection Control. Which at least suggests what he was a Doctor of..."

PW: "Gosh, Malcolm, if we'd only discovered this a few weeks earlier, I could have helped. Have just come back from Prague and we had a lovely lady guide, who I'm sure would have been pleased to assist, IF I'd taken her name. However, there is a Plan B; my daughter Alison hangs around in the EU in Brussels and will undoubtedly know (or can locate) a Czech-speaker. So let me have the link to that paper, and we'll see what can be done.

Malcolm: Very quickly, before I vanish into a busy day. Here is the link, the piece is on p.77:-

<http://209.85.129.104/search?q=cache:vAGOTyYv-fkI:www.uochb.cas.cz/Bulletin/bulletin371/bulletin371.pdf+capek+%22arthur+rose+weir%22&hl=en&gl=uk&ct=clink&cd=1>

PW: "OK, Malcolm, link forwarded to Alison for decoding, though she's in Moscow at the moment (just called to say the place looks like a giant building site) on EU business. She does get around a bit! I meant to congratulate you earlier on that brilliant bit of detective work. So Doc Weir was only 55 when he died, probably only 53 when those Brumcon pictures were taken? Gosh, he looked ten years older than that. I suppose it comes from working in Pest Control (Doc Weir was a rat-catcher? Doesn't sound right, somehow!)"

Malcolm: "Hang on, he was a member of the Association for Professionals in Infection Control. I think that's a bit more elevated than being a rat-catcher!"

Mike Lowrey: "The Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology, Inc. (APIC) is a multi-disciplinary, voluntary, international organization. APIC promotes wellness and prevents illness and infection world-wide by advancing health care epidemiology through education, collaboration, research, practice, and credentialing."

Ken: "Look, Doc Weir taught at a girl's college somewhere near Westonbirt in Gloucestershire, he taught 'mathematics' (like one plus one makes two, not four and a flipping half). When I went there after his death to

purchase his 'collection' there was little of interest to me, it was largely 'technical' books, and what few I looked at seemed to be obscure topological and associated scientific treatises. They may have included works on epidemiology and vectors of infection spread and distribution, or the life of the roach, and he was probably a member of a number of societies and associations. I am and you probably are. But just because you are a member of, say, the National Trust doesn't mean you go around with a hammer and nails repairing fences surrounding the properties. But there is an arboretum near there, maybe he was interested in the control of tree infestations, or vermin like the grey squirrel?

"But all this is just getting in the way of the original query. Why was he so noted that an award was named after him? I think we have established enough to draw the conclusion that he was a fan, that he did quite a bit of work, but the naming of the award was probably the result of a vociferous minority pushing for their choice in a "Well, we want it, but what shall we call it?" discussion. I know there had been mutterings about acknowledging work done by "unrecognised" stalwarts for a year or two; I do not remember being involved in setting it up, so cannot offer any firm information."

Greg: "From what Ken says there was NO collection as we might understand or expect it to be, so then Part 2 of the Plan must have gone into action, as mentioned in the same flyer: 'If for any reason the scheme proved impossible, the money would be otherwise used to commemorate Doc in appropriate fashion, probably by the purchase of books from outside sources.'

"But it was turned into an actual 'award' instead. Fascinating! One of the many revelatory things I have found in reading through these issues of *Skyrack* is that Weir contributed a lot more written material to fanzines than I thought he had. Not all of it actually terribly interesting once found and examined, it has to be said, but there nevertheless. From this rather distant vantage point I am inclined to go along with your idea that it was a 'vociferous minority' – perhaps younger fans who saw in Doc Weir something of the teacher or mentor they might have liked to have had – who were most interested in promoting the award commemorating him. Well, they could have chosen worse. We all could. Imagine the 'Graham Hall Award', for example, mentioning someone of whom I once had an unreasonably high opinion."

Jim: "In correspondence, Doc told me he had taught chemistry. Of course, that may have been at another school, or as well as maths. One of his pupils was the granddaughter or grand-niece of H. G. Wells."

Greg: "I have made contact with a fan from the Czech Republic, Jan Vanek, jr, who I met at the Glasgow worldcon, and who to my horror seemed to think I was most famous for that stupid little line about *Viridiana* every damned fool keeps quoting.

"Anyway Jan is a good sort of fellow nevertheless and a bit of a BNF on the Continent it seems, and has given an outline of the section from the website Malcolm found relating to Doc Weir: -

"It is a brief biography from the chemical point of view (mostly you can follow at least the names and dates, right?): apparently Weir got his PhD in Czechoslovakia in the 1930s, learning Czech and marrying a niece of Prague's mayor; in the UK during the war he taught at a boarding school founded by the Czechoslovak government in exile for children of exiles and evacuated to UK shortly before the war – the article seems to be written by one of his students, among who he was a favourite. In the penultimate paragraph, Weir's being 'an agile member of a SF readers' club BSFA' is mentioned.

"Wow, that's new then. Almost as amazing as the note in *Skyrack* 65, about the DWA being a 'BSFA Award.' Bet they don't want to know about it now..."

Claire Brialey: "It's for things like this, really, that the BSFA keeps me and Mark as Old Farts in Residence, or whatever it is we are. I understand that the trophy still officially belongs to the BSFA, although I can't recall if it still appears in the list of assets in the annual accounts. It is something of a technicality, although it has been cited from time to time as one of the reasons why *Eastercons* (or anyone else) couldn't just change or give up on the award without consulting the BSFA first, and more to the point, that the DWA trophy doesn't 'belong' to any one *Eastercon*."

Mark: "I think it was depreciated out several years ago. I remember querying this with the treasurer at the time – the Award is worth several hundred pounds, I believe – but was told that it was only an accounting convention."

PW (In conclusion): So there we are, fans, Doc Weir is a Mystery Man no longer. And thanks to the efforts of Greg and Malcolm we probably know more about him now than anyone in fandom ever did during the brief period when he was active in the Cheltenham Circle. As Ron Bennett said, 'he was probably the most learned personality on the British fan scene ... always cheerful and full of an enviable vitality. Doc will be remembered in fan circles for ... his qualities of sincerity and mixing socially without being condescending.'

"If anyone's interest in SF is sufficiently strong, then they will want to meet other fans and will actively search them out." – Rog Peyton

Last issue William McCabe complained that "if there was any 'co-operation' (in producing contributions for APA-B) I never heard of it." Steve Green disagreed and tells us this merry tale of fannish life in the Green household:

Printers Inc.

Or, Trapped in a Fanzine Factory

By Steve Green

I'm not entirely certain how I became the default mimeographer for many of the fanzines published under the nebulous label of the 'Birmingham Renaissance' but I suspect it began when I agreed to print Lesley Ward's *Dumble in the Works* in early 1984. I owned a Gestetner 466 and had already produced several fanzines for both Apa-B and the Solihull SF Group, the latter of which Lesley belonged to; she'd also been a witness at Ann's and my wedding the previous December, an event she decided to commemorate with a spoof convention report, so it would have been churlish to refuse.

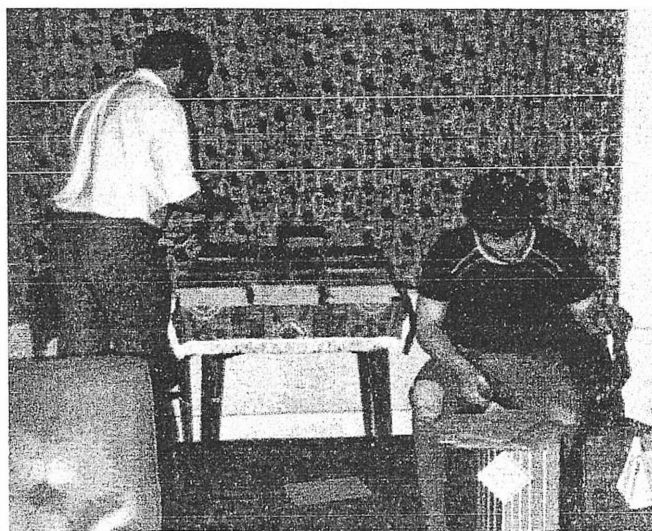
Word spread. Tony Berry turned up with the stencils for his latest *Eyeballs in the Sky* and several boxes of Crowley duplicator paper. This was easily the most exquisite print medium I ever worked with, sucking ink off the drum but never smudging the following sheets, a far cry from the blue paper I'd bought in bulk for *Novacon* progress reports.¹

Next along was Paul Vincent, who'd already established himself as one of the Brum Group's rising stars with his first *Abdump*. Somehow (and it wasn't from me, honestly), Paul had gained the impression that the most appropriate way to express his gratitude was to present me with a bottle of Southern Comfort along with his stencils. A new *Abdump* was duly stacked into boxes prior to collation, and we cracked the bottle to toast the evening's efforts.

By the time Martin Tudor dropped by with the necessities for another *Empties* (now reaching well outside APA-B, its original stomping grounds), the Southern Comfort had become a fannish tradition, much like anything else within our ranks which happens more than once. Better yet, the drinking sessions afterwards, in the back bedroom I'd converted into an upstairs lounge-cum-office, proved tremendously fertile occasions to discuss our plans for *Novacon 14*.²

All went swimmingly, until the evening Martin and I made the cardinal error of pouring ourselves a glass or two *before* finishing the print-run. Those of you with copies of the early *Empties* can now entertain yourselves by discovering which issue contains an upside-down page (we've both managed to excise it out from our memories of the occasion, such as remains).

Sadly, the old 466 eventually cranked its last, shortly after producing the first edition of *Critical Wave*.³ Fortunately, I'd been lucky enough to replace it with a less advanced (but perfectly adequate) Gestetner 360, rescued during an office springclean at my then-employers. It's this replacement machine which currently sits on the workbench in my garage, perhaps awaiting the day I dust it off and get back into the groove. Hell, if *Prolapse* can reappear after twenty years...



Martin and Steve hard at work with no sign of bottle.
Photo by Ann Green, October 1987

¹ The order was increased significantly to accommodate the publishing plans of myself, Martin Tudor and Paul Vincent, which is why many of the wider-circulation 'Renaissance' fanzines seemed to have a fixation with the colour blue. I was still using the residue for the early issues of *Gaijin*, a full decade later, and I suspect there's still a ream or two somewhere around here.

² Convenient as it might be to blame certain aspects of the *Novacon 14* closing ceremony on intoxicated brainstorming, I feel duty-bound to point out those decisions were made by an apparently sober committee shortly after Martin had to step down due to pressure of work at the Post Office.

³ This is possibly the first instance of what Martin and I soon dubbed "The Curse of *Wave*". Each time, we'd be thrust to the brink of disaster, then allowed to drag ourselves back into penury. But that's a story for another time.

The Melting Pot

Or, 'Department of Creative Writing'

- Come on fans, you **can** do it!

Irresistible editorial interjections in italics, like this.



"God, up there in a dirty moustache?" – Harry Harrison*

Joseph Nicholas

josephn@globalnet.co.uk

Dear Peter

"Via a notification not convenient to describe, I have been alerted to the fact that the third issue of *Prolapse* has been posted to Bill Burns's *e-fanzines* website, a mere 23 years after the second appeared."

"Hmm. Well. Not altogether thrilled to see a pair of 23-year-old letters of mine in there: they're so old, the subject is so inconsequential, and so weiter, that I wouldn't have bothered had I been you. But then of course you had (Doubtless still have) a different perspective on the subject than I did; and perhaps these ancient letters of mine do fit to some degree with the other 23-year-old letters you publish.

"But I do object pretty strongly to your assertion that the kind of behaviour characteristic of 1970s fandom was 'the verbal equivalent of modern-day, so-called 'happy slapping', where passers-by are liable to be attacked for no particular reason except 'to amuse' the perpetrator'. This comparison is nonsense, because it is not a comparison of like with like. A verbal insult is entirely verbal, and inflicts no physical harm. Happy slapping is intended to deliberately inflict physical harm, and to pretend that the two are in any way 'equivalent' is to perpetrate a category error of astounding dimensions. In fact, I'd say that to try to equate the two is an indication of some confusion in the mind of the person doing the equating."

No, Joseph, your earlier letters were far from 'inconsequential', they were spot-on for my purpose, which was to show some of the attitudes current in British fandom in the early eighties. At the time they gave me a new perspective on what was going on, and for that I was grateful.

In your own words last time you used the phrase, "the insult intended to amuse", and I don't think you realise (you never have realised) just how much hurt a verbal insult sometimes CAN inflict; not physical pain but genuine mental anguish. So I consider my analogy to be absolutely valid. Good try with that last line, by the way, but compared with past performance it was a mere parting shot; you have mellowed!

Rich Coad,

richcoad@comcast.net

Dear Pete,

"Joseph Nicholas' patronizing view of Mike Ashley being 'addicted to the production of meaningless checklists' made me laugh seeing as how Mike has turned this rather obsessive behaviour into some really excellent reference works on SF magazines.

The Tymn and Ashley *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Weird Fiction Magazines* is worth every penny of its hefty price and is a genuine delight to delve into from time to time. It's also a sign of how times, or people, change that Joseph would describe calling someone a "boring simple-minded cretin" as a mild insult meant jocularly but we *did* all write and say things like that back when we were young and arrogant. Stupid, really, since if Joseph called me a boring simple-minded cretin I'd have known where he was coming from but others who were not part of the mid-to-late 70's British fan scene might well have taken it at face value. I suppose that Joseph will feel somewhat embarrassed by having these ancient letters dredged up but wotthehell we all have done silly things in our past unless we really **are** boring simple-minded cretins. (cont)



Photo: Ian Sorensen



Photo: by PW at Corflu 2005

* Harry's rejoinder to Fred Pohl's controversial talk at the 1972 *Chessmancon* (in *Speculation*-32), this was itself a clever take from the last line of L. Ron Hubbard's short novel, *TYPEWRITER IN THE SKY* from the 1940 *Unknown*. See, Joseph, these interlineations can sometimes take on a whole new life (and meaning) of their own!

"William McCabe and Sandra Bond manage to succinctly encapsulate exactly why I've never been tremendously interested in APAs or SF clubs. The petty politicking and bickering just seems all too exasperating – even from a remove of 20 years and 6,000 miles. And apazines in general strike me as being done in order to make the author/editor feel like they are part of a small elite. Even then the effort put into most apazines seems remarkably small. I suppose the same criticism could be levelled at some of the e-lists I am in so it's probably an indefensible position. The one club that has really impressed me is NESFA, which undoubtedly has much of the same dreariness I associate with these formal organizations, but has the saving grace of having started NESFA Press which is publishing a remarkably good series of SF classics."

Rich, I've never belonged to an APA for more than five minute, mainly because they seem such an unnecessarily complicated way of publishing a fanzine. But in its original incarnation APA-B was a bit different, see below.

Jim Linwood
JLinwood@aol.com

Photo: in
The Florence
Nightingale,
2005



Hi Peter,

"The Nicholas Letters were curious. The Joseph I knew in the 70s was affable, intelligent, conversational and his recent appearance in a fannish e-group shows that he remains so. But in these letters he comes over as an arrogant twat, out to give offence with the excuse that it is part of 'the normal give-and-take of the fannish round.' This, and other fan-history items in *Prolapse*, suggests that 80's Britfandom wasn't a very pleasant place to be and I'm glad I wasn't around then.

"Reading William McCabe's piece, I thought you had created another 'Malcolm Edwards'. The clues were all there: insulting oneself to throw readers off-track, the deadpan, mundane style which throws up some funny observations; and who would keep a diary spanning seven years about the activities of the Brummies, to be published twenty years later? Rog Peyton has assured me that both you and William have been seen in the same room together but that doesn't mean that the piece isn't a very clever hoax. And Sandra's piece was a fascinating piece of fanhistory and should have been longer. I hope she contributes similar items to future ishs."

'Ishts'? Not sure that's allowed, Jim, even in Prolapse. Watch out or I'll be tempted to start using the fannish "h" again and then we'll all be sorry! Yes, British fanzine fandom did seem to turn to the 'Dark Side' in the early eighties and like you, it's probably as well that I missed it. Glad you liked Sandra's piece, and I have to confess I asked her to shorten it by 400 words or so, to make room for the illos from a well-known Midlands fan-artist which in the end failed to appear. As for William, he is very real, as Paul explains:

Paul Vincent
prvincent@gmail.co

Photo: from
Paul, 2005



Dear Peter,

"What I found disturbing was that I had NO recollection whatsoever of the events I referred to in my 1983 letter. Who the hell was Ian Hastie? Even after reviewing your account, it's all gone from my memory. Obviously that area of my brain has imploded, probably in self-defence. All I need now is for Martin Tudor to write *his* account of those times. He always did interpret fandom for me better than I could!

"And where did that account of APA-B by the fuckwitted William A McCabe spring from? To know he's still around is depressing enough, without reading his typically skewed account of the time, full of barbed references to how the big boys wouldn't let him play with them. Oh god, don't let *those* memories come flooding back! I'd rather stick to replaying my treasured memory of Greg telling WAM to 'fuck off or I will kill you' at *Twentycon* in 1990. Ah, *that's* better!"

Paul, that's not like you, just then you sounded like someone from the Angry Eighties! As Sandra noted, William was - and is - a 'social leper' but I found it oddly fascinating and a bit sad to read his naive account of events which were happening just outside his ability to comprehend. I don't think his remarks were 'barbed' but merely innocent. Sometimes fandom is a cruel place - and I'm not joking. If you read it carefully you'll see William's diary is the story of a desperately lonely person who joined a science fiction group to try and make friends - only to find the people there wouldn't speak to him, either.

Paul again, later

"Yes, maybe I was uncharacteristically harsh in my comments about WAM, but one set of memories that are still vivid are the numerous occasions when I found his carping negativity spoilt my enjoyment of otherwise convivial evenings at 'The General Wolfe,' in the days of Brum Group Informal Informals and, later, the MiSFITs. Somehow I could never just ignore him, or laugh off his strange worldview. He got under my skin. And evidently still does! Obviously it takes two to tango, and it was probably a case of my personality defects rubbing against his, but... enough, enough - it *was* 20-odd years ago, after all.



"See, I do exist!" – William at recent BSFG meeting. Photo: David Hardy

"For what it's worth, my memory of the Brum Group "Informal informal" was that it never did actually have anything to do with the Brum Group. A small group of friends, initially myself, Martin Tudor and Steve Green, simply fancied gathering together in the city centre a bit more often than the two existing BSFG meetings. In a moment of transcendental inspiration, we realised we didn't need to do this under the aegis of the BSFG after all. We'd just tell our pals a regular date (last Friday of the month) and venue (the 'General Wolfe' – lop a couple of letters off the first word and *there* was a sfnal pub name!), and then any fans passing through could be sure of a cheery, beery welcome.

"We jokingly referred to this initially as the BSFG "informal informal", but realised this might lead to some BSFGers misguidedly thinking the meeting had some kind of official status. So Martin came up with the notion of the Mercian Science Fiction Triangle, or MiSFiTs as the flawed acronym had it. So if William felt at the time that nobody was keeping him posted about these meetings, well, I can't really comment, since we thought everyone in our circle of acquaintances knew the simple formula.

"But then I gafiated quite soon after *Novacon 14* - in retrospect I don't think my nerves were made for the stress of being on a concom, and I should never have let myself be talked into it (I was treasurer). Who knows, maybe if I'd shunned concomdom, I'd now be handing out the centenary *Abdump* number 100 at *Novacon 36*, instead of sitting at home wondering how the hell it manages to be exactly 22 years since I last attended a full-size convention. Of course I broke cover briefly at the BSFG's *Twentycon* in 1991, and *MiSdemeanour* in 1994, but 22 years absence sounds more imposing! Odd to see my address listed as my parent's house - I've moved twice since then, and it's now just my Dad's house.

"Sandra Bond's excellent piece brought back varied memories of Joy Hibbert. I fully understand how Joy managed to rub so many people up the wrong way, with her forthright, heart-on-sleeve views whose off-the-cuff nature often came over as wrong-headed. And maybe they were. She could certainly seem unbudging and humourless. But somehow, I always got on well with her, and certainly found more frivolity and humour there than met many people's eyes. And yes, before anyone mentions it, she *did* indeed grope me at Steve Green's party in 1984, but that was just part of the oddly bantering relationship we seemed to have whenever we met. Strange, since she never became a particularly close friend of mine. We just seemed to hit it off."

Paul, what happened to make Novacon-14 so traumatic that you gafiated and Steve won't talk about it? I think we should be told. And does anyone have any pictures of Rob Holdstock's "presentation" (other than Rob himself, of course, and I doubt if he'll want to volunteer it)?

Rob Hansen

rob@fiawol.demon.co.uk

Peter,

"Thanks for *Prolapse #3*. I hope we don't have as long a wait for the next issue. Being devoted almost entirely to the story of APA-B/The Organisation makes this of prime interest to anyone intending to write a history of UK fandom from 1980 to the present (not me - I've done my time) and, given my own interest in that direction, to me.

"Ah, Joy Hibbert! They say you shouldn't speak ill of the dead, but why not? What are they going to do about it? Like you, I found her thoroughly unpleasant. At least her bovine incomprehension when faced with irony could be amusing, particularly when you consider someone so humourless ending up with that particular name. I may still have a cartoon of her I did for a never-published issue of *Crank!* around here somewhere, though I'm not sure where. I don't recall the outburst Sandra Bond attributes to me, but I've no reason to doubt its veracity. Not the worst example of my mishearing something, I'm sure, but still mildly embarrassing.

"Reading the lettercolumn was a wistful experience - all those people who are no longer with us. And if Malcolm wants to know what to do with those stencils... well he could always xerox them, OCR the copies, then put what he has written on a website, either someone else's or his own if he has one. There are all manner of people who'd be only too happy to host a 'lost' issue of *Tappen*, however incomplete."

"And speaking of websites, which we weren't, will you be working up an online version of *Prolapse*, perhaps with photos, links to the web-pages of every LoC-er and contributor, maybe even an interactive 'Pin the Magic Pudding on Malcolm Edwards' game? We're in the future now, Peter - more Phil Dick than Robert Heinlein, I know - and this is the way to go."

Ah, Rob, if only I could, but I don't have the technology, not unless Bill comes over next year and shows me how. But even then, I wonder - my editorial remarks still apply, and while the web is wonderfully convenient in all the ways you suggest, it doesn't actually produce the community involvement I'm looking for.

Photo: by PW in the 'Barley Mow'. 2003



David Redd
dave_redd@hotmail.com

Photo: by PW
December 2003



Dear Peter,

"Thanks for the *Prolapse*; a welcome surprise, although perhaps you should change the title now, since any pro activity of yours is even further away than your previous fanzine. On the APA Saga, excellent pieces from William and Sandra, very evocative of the times. A third instalment coming up to date would be the icing on the cake since I never did sort out *The Organisation* and *Pieces of Eight* in my head, not that the rest of the world would be too fascinated, I suspect.

"A more mouth-watering prospect (oh, locating an ancient fanzine I can use the ancient clichés) is the possible re-animation of *Tappen* #6 from the slab where its undead corpse has lain all these years. And – a real long shot – has Malcolm's 1983 archive also released the unfinished short story he brought to the Milford SF Writers' Conference that year? I live in hopes. Malcolm (who made an excellent barperson as you might imagine) brought his 'After-Images' to Milford 1982 and that was his *Interzone* story; although he was in the *Interzone* collective at the time the story stood on its merits, being good enough for any editor to grab instantly, and it's a pity he stopped writing.

"Milford" is the annual week-long UK workshop at which published writers bring, read and comment on work in preparation. The website is presently hosted by writer Ian Creasey; rather like the magazine "Science Fiction Adventures" the Milford Conference began in the USA and gained a British edition which continued long after the USA original died. I think James and Judy Blish started it here; currently Liz Williams does sterling work keeping it going. See the home page at: www.iancreasey.com/milford/index.htm

"I attended several workshops, two of which Malcolm also attended, but as for remembering details.... If you think the memories are in my head you underestimate the quantities of alcohol which professionals can put away. We would take over a hotel at Milford-on-Sea for a week, and serve ourselves at the bar on the honour system, writing chits which the bemused staff would total up at the end. And you expect anecdotes?"

I'm familiar with Milford, David, and remember back in 1973 when the Blishes were looking for their venue; (turns out there are literally dozens of 'Milfords' in the UK). By coincidence I'd just attended a marketing course at a crumbling stately pile called Ingestre Hall, at Milford in Shropshire, which I thought might be a possibility, especially since there was a good pub nearby. Serendipity seemed complete when I went into the village shop to send a postcard to Jim Blish, and discovered that the local postmark was 'Weston'! However, they wisely chose the place on the South coast instead, much nicer with those great sea views. And as I'm sure you know, really, 'Pieces of Eight' was the re-title for 'Frank's APA' – the one Rog joined instead of APA-B.

Lloyd Penney
penneys@allstream.net

Photo:
Betty Klein-
Lebbink.



Dear Peter,

"A mere 23 years have gone by in the blink of an eye, and there you are with another issue of *Prolapse*. I must admit, in an effort to make you feel even older, that 1983 is about the time I got into fanzines. Indeed so much has changed in 23 years. Yes, you have to buy computer, software, internet access, etc., but I cannot count the money I didn't have to spend on paper, envelopes and stamps. Hack away, save to file, whoosh into the vast emptiness that is the Net. Will we eventually see *Tappen* 6? As a stenciled 'zine on twiltone or as an c-file?

"When I first jumped into the fanzine fray, my initial neo-ish interest was trampled upon by some who felt that if I didn't know about certain things already, they weren't going to tell me about them. 'Keep them in the dark' was the attitude, I suppose. In spite of these negative influences I did get some positives in the form of Marc Ortlieb and his fine zine *Q36*, and Mike Glycer with good feedback in *File 770*. Also, Mike Wallis and Mike Glicksohn were around to give me direction. I think for the most part we have done away with gratuitous insults in fanzine fandom, but there are still a few who will be nice to your face, but rip you apart in print.

"Is that a photo of a young Ian Sorensen on page 10? I met an older Ian Sorensen at *Corflu* this year, and had a fine time with him. He came across as a bit sharp-tongued but Yvonne told me that if you give as good as you get, he'll respect you, and I did, and he did. I met Lucy Huntzinger only once, and that was at, of all things, a Star Trek convention right here in Toronto. I keep seeing more familiar names, like Joy Hibbert, who sent me her fanzine, and Tommy Ferguson, who lived in Toronto for a short time, and started up the tradition of fannish pub-nights here. There's Christina Lake and Peter-Fred Thompson, at least I think that's his last name... I guess some of those names go back in fandom a little further than I thought."

Lloyd, a long while ago Peter Thompson was a schoolboy who lived across the road and used to help me print my fanzines. He always looked incredibly doubtful about the whole thing, but a few years later he went off to university, joined an SF group, and started turning up at conventions. So I suppose ultimately I am to blame! As for that Sorensen chap, he's definitely a bad 'un, 'spawn of the devil', some say (just look at his e-address!)....

Ian Sorensen
ian@soren.demon.co.uk

Photo: by PW,
at Paragon-2



Hi Peter,

"One of the things that I mentioned to you at *Novacon* was how well *Prolapse* reflected the editor, in terms of content but also the 'voice' that came off the page. You have obviously developed your writing style over the years to work as your mouthpiece – and we all know what a mouth you have! The style is discursive but clearly directed to the issues you want to explore. I think my favourite bit was the way you were unable to stop yourself butting into Billy's diary entries to 'set him straight'. It will be interesting to see if any of the other people involved feel a similar need to set **you** straight, in a third version of events.

"In your recounting of the BSFG revival I notice you missed out the Glasgow insurgency of 1984 when Mike Molloy and I joined the BSFG with an eye to eventually getting on the *Novacon* committee and steering it toward the true convention path being trail-blazed by *Albacons*: multi-stream programme, big name guests, massive local publicity and less of that 'fannish stuff,' whatever that was. If the coup had been successful then the whole *Novacon 15* debacle could have been avoided, or, at least, made into a much bigger and better mess.

"In many ways the whole zine reminded me of what Rob Hansen's *Now* wasn't: an eye-witness account of events in one small part of British fandom without the objective voiceover of the historian. Perhaps you should take up the torch from Rob and become the UK's Joe Siclari?"

*Hardly 'butting in' Ian, just a few foot-notes; you wouldn't want me not to correct errors of fact in William's piece, would you? I didn't want to ask him to change the article itself, preferring to maintain its natural innocence. As for the Scottish Plot, gosh, you could have brought to bear all the expertise that gave us the 'Speculation' Convention in 1991 – for which I still haven't forgiven you for pinching my title without so much as a by-your-leave. Rob's THEN is a work of genuine scholarship which has given us our basic timeline, recorded the facts and figures, and now we can start to extract the personal stories which lie behind those methodical chapters. Which, with your help, is what I want to do with *Prolapse*, of course.*

Steve Green
steve@planetnetworks.co.uk

Sketch;
Ann Green



Hi Peter,

"There was a curious synergy tonight, as I re-read *Prolapse-3* whilst absent-mindedly watching *National Lampoon's Animal House* on cable, given this and director John Landis' subsequent project *The Blues Brothers* were pretty much the only videos ever on tap whenever hardcore members of the Brum Group and MiSFiTs staggered back to Martin Tudor's infamous Cape Hill bolthole in the early 1980s. I have no idea if Martin ever managed to watch *TBB* through to its conclusion, as he usually crashed out on his leather recliner and left me to stay up until the closing frames (to Landis' credit, I still enjoy both movies and told him so when we crossed paths around 10 years ago).

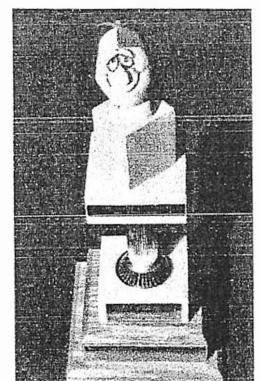
"Regarding the comments on *Novacon-15*, I noted this in Ian Sorensen's editorial for *Conrunner-4*:-

"...the comment on everyone's lips was that *Novacon-15* had been the best for years. This says much about the state of *Novacons* these days. Being a newcomer to them (*N-11* being my first) I don't feel qualified to speak on the subject of the good old *Novacons* of yore but I do think that the current level of disorganisation (example from last year: the film projectors had not been booked on the day the convention started) and the lack of direction is going to rebound on the Brum group who keep it going for the sake of the cash it generates: one year it will simply make a whopping great loss. I have no idea what led to Martin Tudor declining the honour of chairing *Novacon-16* and Tony Berry taking it on, but I see that as another danger signal. Conventions should not be run because they have to be; they should run because somebody has got some good ideas and wants to try them out.

"I'm sure Tony has some really great ideas, and wish him well. He did what was necessary at the infamous closing ceremony of *N-15* when Phill Probert walked off, and he has been around long enough to know the score. It really depends on the team he assembles round him. I'm tempted to volunteer just to see if *Novacon* can be jolted into a new lease of life. It seemed to me that *N-13*, which was largely the work of "outsiders" was the best one of late."

"I have to correct Ian on that last point. The committee members on *Novacon-13* included me, Phill, Eunice and Paul, all BSFG regulars, plus occasional visitor Dave Haden (then living in Stratford); that's five of the nine. It's also hardly surprising Martin would be reluctant to chair *Novacon-16*, given he'd previously had to resign from the *Novacon-14* committee due to pressure of work and wasn't involved with *Novacon-15*.

"Here's the infamous COFF Award trophy (or rather, the third in a series designed by Kevin Clarke, the first having been accidentally dumped by hotel staff and the second probably retained by recipient Bob [Fake] Shaw; this is the version presented to Phill Probert at *Novacon 15*, photographed by Peter Wright."



Darroll Pardoe

pardos@globalnet.co.uk

Photo;
Darroll,
2005



Hi Peter.

"Thanks for sending me *Prolapse*-3. I'd pretty much forgotten APA-B so it brought back some memories. I seem to have joined with the first mailing in May 1983 and put through eight issues of *Endless Highway*, the last being in February 1984 when I guess I dropped out; I never survived into the Organisation era.

"I don't know why Sandra suggests I was 'trading on my origins in Stourbridge fandom' – apart from my being an Ancient Brummie, Ro and I were regular attendees at the BSFG in the late 70s and early 80s. We used to visit my parents in Stourbridge once a month and arrange things so that it was the same weekend as the BSFG. (That all stopped when my mum died and my dad moved away to Great Witley, so I presume we stopped going to the BSFG at the same time). It was a natural step to join APA-B when it started.

"Judging from my mailing comments in *Endless Highway* the APA-B mailings must have been a really curate's egg mixture of stuff. I suppose with people like Eunice and Joy on board they couldn't help but be. The comparison I made at the time was not with APA-L but with APA-F (the Fanoclast apa which was collated on meeting nights – Ro and I were present at a collating session in 1976). Much the same I guess."

True, Darroll, I made my comparison with APA-L purely because it was the first of the two (I think) and the one with which I was most familiar. The great thing about APA-B was that we had a definite purpose; we were trying to suck-in Brum Group members, some of whom had been festering on the fringes for years, into the world of fanzine publishing; the monthly collation/distribution sessions were a way to get them talking to each other, doing things together, and taking a bit more interest in fandom as a whole. It worked, too, for a time, and if I could have stayed on longer as Chairman I would have bust a gut to keep the APA within the local group. And have I told you that these days you're looking like Father Christmas?

Steve Jeffery

Peeverel@aol.com

Photo
by Steve



Hi Peter,

"*Prolapse* is a weird little time-warp of a fanzine. I mean, a letter column that dates back to 1983 (about a half dozen years before I discovered fandom). Even *Steam Engine Time* will have to go some to beat that. And it doesn't really feel much has changed (or perhaps it's that timebinding thing again). The first thing to strike home, though, is those people in the lettercolumn who are no longer with us. That sets you back a bit. A letter from Bosh, art by Atom. It's why dipping back into the archive of the *Pieces of Eight* APA is a bit painful at times, despite the insurgent irreverence and sense of fun of some of the mailings from those times. I was also, briefly, a couple of times in *The Organisation*, but I don't think those dates coincide with your history (this was after it mutated from APA-B). I think it was in Tommy Ferguson's tenure as administrator, but time and gafia drove me into the arms of Maureen's *Acnestis* APA, although that hasn't seen a print issue for over a year now.

"I recently commented to Claire that one of reasons why she no longer sees evidence of much of a community in fanzines (UK fanzines anyway) in the way she gets from reading old fanzines, is that there don't seem to be any review columns anymore. When this was mentioned at that *Novacon* panel, James Bacon, bless him, immediately grabbed the stick by the wrong end and waved it around wildly by offering to collect fanzines and send them to the BSFA. Which misses the point. A listing in *Matrix* does not a community make unless fanzines and fanzine editors start talking to each other again, and one way to do this is to review and comment on each others' fanzines. But maybe that was such a 1990s thing to do?"

Totally agree, Steve. When I was a young 'un, every fan-editor was keenly aware of every other title and we expected reviews in places like Skyrack and Haverings, as well as in the BSFA Vector if we were lucky and in other places too. Maybe we'll see the evolution of a two-tier system, with a number of limited-circulation print fanzines that will attract letters, carry reviews, and rebuild a community, while the on-line things... don't.

James Bacon

piglet@indigo.ie

Picture;
see below!



James certainly has entered into the spirit of this retro-fandom thing, being the only one to send me a genuine, old-fashioned hand-written LoC through the post (in an envelope franked 'Dublin'). Of course I then had to try and read his handwriting...

Dear Peter

"*Prolapse* somehow transcended the 23-year time-difference quite beautifully. Normally I read old 'zines out of context, with a certain degree of removal from the

situation. This felt fresh, maybe because mentally I knew that you had just produced it, but also because you seemed to do a very good job of selecting and introducing them in such a way as to be accessible to me. In 1983 I was nine. I loved comics, Spike Milligan's war memories, and a variety of movies. So I am very far removed from an awareness of those actual situations, predicaments and relationships.



"I think for me the letters were the best part. Bob Shaw was amazing, what a boon! I loved his comments about drink. My goodness, even I would never contemplate providing beer for a trip! I am impressed by your endeavour. It was such a pleasure to read letters from Chuck Harris, Terry Carr, Lee Hoffman – look, they were all good! A great selection. I was amused to see you're shadow-boxing with Joseph Nicholas and pleased to say that my opinion of his letters would be the same in 1983 as in 2006, although he seems to have been much harsher then; it's a shame so much negativity pervades what at times are valid points.

"The only thing I find surprising is that Steve Green, who you portray as very dynamic, was the same person who made his feelings audible when Hayley Marsden announced a Birmingham venue for her Eastercon bid. Surely, Brum fandom would welcome a move to their backyard? And isn't Marston Green no further away from everything than the Walsall Quality Hotel? Perhaps I should bear in mind that I too may become closed to the ideas of someone youthful and enthusiastic deciding they could achieve something I would not countenance. Of course, fans are clever people but sometimes we all judge too quickly. "

Forgive me, James, but I couldn't resist using that little line-drawing on the previous page. It's not you, of course but the columnist Jon Henley from The Guardian (I only buy it for Polly Toynbee), but I was struck by the resemblance! And Steve wasn't objecting to a newcomer as such but Steve knows as well as I do that the Birmingham Metropole site is totally unsuitable for a convention; we just about got away with it in 1987 but since then it's gone up-market as a Hilton, more used to expense-account business visitors to the NEC rather than scruffy SF fans. And goodness only knows what sort of room-rates they'd want to charge us! Running an Eastercon is a major undertaking – we don't want another disaster!

Mark Plummer

mark@fishlifter.demon.co.uk

Photo; at
Paragon-2,
2005



When you're co-editing a big, bi-monthly, multiple-Nova-winning fanzine it can't leave much time for anything else, so I was delighted to hear from Mark, and promised to "reciprocate with Banana Wings." On reflection, that sounded altogether too unpleasant so I just sent him an EoC instead.

Dear Peter,

"I thought I'd write to thank you for sending the reborn *Prolapse*. And in real traditional hard-copy too. So it's a little embarrassing to concede that, umm, I'd already downloaded a copy from efanazines – and printed it out as well, before I'd read your instructions, in a non-canonical but I think rather fetching shade of lilac. I will of course treasure the pukka, genuine through-the-mail copy, while making secret plans to sell my unusual colour-variant on eBay.

"I don't know if I ever told you this, but while *Prolapse* Series One was well before my time, fannishly speaking, copies of both issues did pass briefly through my hands in 1998. The Leeds *Corflu* was playing host to one of those Great Gregorian Fanzine Giveaways (the like of which we will never see again, oh no), and Maureen Speller moved faster than me to seize the two copies of *Prolapse* and indeed a pair of issues of your earlier *Nexus*. Maureen generously allowed me to read them before squirreling them away and you might be pleased to know that when she and Paul passed most of their fanzine collection along to us a couple of years ago the *Prolapses* and *Nexuses* were not included. Maureen happily divested herself of no-account crudzines like *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk*, *Blat* and *Trap Door*, but it seems there is still a place in Folkstone for a pair of *Prolapses*.

"Now with *Prolapse-3* you're almost publishing stuff about a period I can remember. Well, I was actually around albeit at one remove for much of the timeframe of William and Sandra's APA-B memoirs and I even knew some of the participants back then, and probably know a few more now. But to me it rather comes over like reading an account of a party I attended, and then suddenly discovering the truth about all the stuff that was going on in one of the other rooms – you know, the spare bedroom on the first floor where you were never actually went but there was a lot of strange banging going on and the following morning you noticed that somebody seemed to have scratched the dressing table and left an embarrassing stain on the duvet cover.

"And then there's those Joseph letters, and 'the insult intended to wound ... and the insult intended to amuse.' The other week some of us were debating – which probably makes it sound excessively grand – the matter of the 'emoticon.' Liam Proven is a great believer in them, and claims they're pretty much essential to e-mail communication. Everybody else disagreed. Liam's argument, if I have this right, is basically that e-mail is in many respects more akin to conversation and thus needs some feature to replicate the non-verbal aspects of face to face contact. I might refer to you as a 'fool' in conversation – well, not *you* obviously, Peter, you being all eminent and everything – and the tone of my voice and perhaps my expression would convey whether I meant

it as a serious putdown or was merely suggesting that you were being a bit daft; and so, says Liam, the responsible e-mailer in the same position might append a little smiley face thus :) after his or her comment to make clear the light-hearted intent.

"I remain unconvinced by this, possibly labouring under the flawed belief that I can convey subtleties and nuance through... thingies... what do you call them... yes, *words*, but maybe Liam has a point. After all, if only Joseph had said of Mike Ashley that he was a 'boring simple-minded cretin :)' then all subsequent confusion would have been eliminated. I was thinking that maybe I could explain all this to Joseph, but on second thoughts perhaps I'll let you do it."

Thanks Mark, I'll let you know how I get on. I suspect Joseph would consider emoticons to be entirely trivial, as indeed do I. But 'Nexuses'? Surely not! How about Nexii? No, that's not right, either... anybody know any Latin? (And through superb production here's one person who might... if he hasn't forgotten it all!)

Andy Sawyer

A.P.Sawyer@liverpool.ac.uk

Andy with
friends!
(Photo from
Andy)



Dear Peter,

"Reading through William McCabe's piece on Apa-B/The Organisation made me wonder why bits of it were so familiar the first time round. Then I remembered – cripes, I was a member of The Organisation, I'm sure! I can't quite remember, and all the relevant paper is in the garage, but I'm sure Chuck Connor recruited me and I was a member for a while, although probably not a very active one. I must look things up – this is a part of my life of which I have only vague memories, although I remember enjoying some of the mailings and being quite enthusiastic about it all. How very odd – it's made me realise what a job you must have had compiling your book, as I've been trying to think what year it was Chuck pulled me into all of this, and failing miserably. The only thing to do is to brave the garage!

"By the way, you're not the only person to confuse the two Mike Ashleys. About this time I put out one of my very few fanzines – only a couple of dozen copies, I recall, sent to people who I had particular contacts with. One of them went to one of the Michael Ashleys, who sent a puzzled letter wondering why I'd sent it to him. It was clear that I'd sent it to the wrong Ashley.

"But **which**? That's been bugging me for ages. It must have been the real Mike Ashley I sent it to, as I knew him far less well as a fan-writer then, and the fake Mike Ashley was producing some interesting self-revelation stuff that fascinated me at the time. But I must have picked up his address somewhere and confused the two. Unless the fake Mike Ashley was giving me the brush-off, of course. Ah, the mysteries of the past!"

Tell me about it, Andy! But all you're doing is forgetting stuff – everyone does that. Much worse is the dreaded False Memory Syndrome, where you're absolutely sure something happened at particular time and place, only to be proven completely wrong by evidence to the contrary. Jim Linwood was convinced that Ted Tubb did the auction at Brumcon – but Ted wasn't there. Chris Priest was equally certain he saw a 'St Fantony' ceremony at Repetercon in 1964 but he was remembering the worldcon eighteen months later. And so on.

Chris Garcia

garcia@computerhistory.org

Photo: Natasha
Levitan



Superfan Chris was first off the mark with an EoC – which arrived within 12 hours of the last issue going up on the eFanzines site. I met Chris last year at Corflu and he took Bill Burns and I on a fascinating tour of the Computer Museum, near San Jose (see my 'Stargazing' column#5 on trufen.net). We might have seen Chris at Eastercon next year if the TAFF race hadn't been cancelled along with the con. Here he is with a bit of the memory from the 1950s UNIVAC-1 computer wrapped round his head...

Dear Peter,

"It's interesting to see the view looking back from today, but even better to project forward. What would 1983 fandom have had to say about the cancellation of the 2007 Eastercon? What would they have thought of the 1999 TAFF race? Who from 1983 would have thought that Harlan would grab Connie Willis' boob at the Hugos? (Actually, they might have seen that last one coming).

"Wow, there are a couple of really interesting folks in your lettercol. Honestly, it's that stuff from people whom I never had the chance to interact with that interests me the most. Terry Carr, Bob Shaw, these are the folks who I sadly didn't get a chance to read much during their lifetime.

"I've found several zines from the 1985-89 period that show computers first sneaking into zining. Kelly Turner's *Costumer's Quarterly* was the first I knew of that was all done on a computer (an early Mac, since I think Kelly worked for them) and it was really so very different from all the other zines I've seen from that era. It was much flashier, but at the same time, more modern. It's odd to think that people were still using mimeo when laser printers were available (and with cheap toner, too!)

"You know, I hardly get to read any Sandra Bond anymore. Since I'm not on most of the mailing lists, I don't get the pleasure of seeing her words out there. She writes a really good little piece here and it's another view of another time that I completely missed out on, being across an ocean and well into my little world of Northern California wrestling. I could have been doing a fanzine, but alas, it was not to be. I'm terribly excited to see what you give us next time, Peter. I only hope I won't have to wait 23 years for the next issue!"

'Zining' Chris? 'Costumer's Quarterly'? 'Northern California Wrestling'? Gosh, sometimes you Americans are just so weird!! And isn't San Jose in Southern California – do you commute?

David Hardy

Dave@astroart.org

Photo: by PW
at BSFG
meeting 2005



Hi Peter,

"Thanks for the copy of *Prolapse-3*. Makes interesting reading, especially the part from William. He doesn't say a lot (and when he does it takes three times longer than it should), and I had no idea that he was so active in the APA-side of fandom. I must admit that I never got involved myself, although I could see its attractions, but I was just too BUSY! I was particularly interested in the bit from 1987, where William mentions: 'There is a lot of talk about the early Amstrad word processors, BBC computers, and programs like Locoscript..' Here's the piece I wrote last year for the 400th *Brum Group News* which describes how I produced the *BGN* digitally – and not on any of the above, either!

"Although I joined the Brum Group in 1973, the earliest newsletters I can find are for 1979 (I was Chairman at that time), when it was edited by Ian Warner and Eddie Stachelski. Chris Morgan edited it during 1980 and '81, when it was taken over by Pauline Morgan. In 1983 Pauline took on Eunice Pearson as 'Assistant', and Eunice seems to have edited some issues by herself. (It's not easy to find this information, as there was no colophon in those days, or often even any names!) Graham Poole, previously Treasurer, became Editor for one year, 1984, Martin Tudor took over in February 1985, and Carol and/or Tony Morton took the reins in 1986-7.

"I took over the *Newsletter* from Tony and Carol in February 1988. Until then it had been put together in time-honoured fashion using typed material and scissors. I produced it using a 'desktop publishing' program on my Atari ST 520 (with 512k of RAM. – Yes, 'k!'), and promptly re-named it the *Brum Group News*, with a bold, metallic graphic typeface, which was used for a while by Martin Tudor when he took over in 1991.

"I introduced a cover illustration (dropped a year later in favour of details of the current month's speaker or programme), interior illos and column headers, a regular cartoon from Tim Groome, letter columns (which at times became quite animated), a regular report of last month's meeting (usually written by myself), a New Member panel, etc., as well as the usual reviews. There was of course no e-mail in those days, and most members didn't even have a computer, so all contributions (when there were any) had to be re-typed manually.

"To a very large extent the *BGN* became the closest equivalent to my own fanzine, and indeed I was reprimanded on one occasion for its perhaps somewhat personal and idiosyncratic nature by one Rog Peyton! But eventually, after my fourth year as Editor, I became rather disillusioned by the lack of contributions despite all my best efforts, and my final 'newsletter' in January 1991 took the form of a rather bitter one-A4-sheet containing all of the typos, poor spelling and grammar, bad layout and errors (including coffee-cup stains!) found in some other/older publications (not ours, of course. . .) I handed it over to Martin Tudor, who did a sterling job until passing the baton to Rog Peyton in February 2001. (I hope I haven't missed anyone; apologies if I have!)"

COLLECTORS ANONYMOUS – No.2 in a continuing series of true confessions:

"Hello, my name is David and I am addicted to book collecting. I can't pass a bookstore without going inside for a rummage, although my wife knows I don't actually read most of the books I acquire. I once approached a charity shop and saw four boxes of science fiction paperbacks that the shop staff had thrown onto the pavement for refuse collection that day. 'I'll have them' I said to the astonishment of the manageress. 'But you haven't looked at them,' she said. 'That's okay,' I said, and went for my car and loaded them. When I got home and opened the boxes I found that under the first couple of layers everything was mildewed and fell apart. After that, I always imagined the manageress was inwardly laughing her socks off as I passed by. However, there is an upside because one day she had a box of crime on the shop floor. I went through them and then offered five quid for the lot. 'Have you checked them?' she asked with a laugh. Oh, yes. This time I'd found some twenty pre-war crime novels, all first editions, half of which were Agatha Christie. They went to a collector for a pretty penny."

From a concept by Malcolm Edwards, who asked, "What is your single most embarrassing collecting moment – the one where you knew that any reasonable outside observer would conclude that you had lost your marbles completely?" Do please allow me to reveal your guilty secrets in future issues of *Prolapse*!

Dr Kari Maud
ambariel@ntlworld.com

Photo: from
Kari,



Dear Peter,

"Thank you for giving me a copy of *Prolapse-3*, which I read and enjoyed, and discovered was largely about people I turn out to know (which means I'm older than I think, and may be A Bad Thing). It's curious that in many ways 1983 is so close: I have no difficulty conjuring it at all – and yet there is, when I come to reflect on it, a huge tech lapse. We don't communicate in those ways any more, we don't hire coaches and take beer to the Malverns, we rarely meet in person, but we gossip on-line and in communities containing friends we have never seen. And yet it remains the same world, we maintain the same essentials.

"In 1983, I was 20, a student in her final year, worrying over medieval gift exchange and books. Yet I saw my fan friends at least once weekly and we assembled in warm, breathing clumps to mull over new books or long-established authors, we climbed up Cambridge Castle Hill to make the sun rise, and we went to conventions in a room-bursting wodge. And someone inevitably whinged that there was not enough cheese or floor (or whatever) and the organiser was unfairly blamed and there was sometimes fallout. And old feuds still sometimes split open their scars. The Celtic historian in me nods, and says, a little facetiously, 'Ah, territorial and clan warfare.' The tools have changed, but the texture remains the same. Some time in the early 90s Jane Carnall tried to recruit me to The Organisation. This must have been, I guess, after the events discussed by William and Sandra. I didn't join: I was – and still am – in *TWP*, I have a chronicle in Irish to edit, and, and.... But, William, I met you at *Mexicon 2*, and here I am in 2006, waving."

Keith Freeman
keithfreemanrbas@gmail.com

Photo: By PW,
at Re-Repetercon



Keith is a sadist, waiting until I had the lettercol all nicely set-up before sending an EoC which I couldn't ignore, making me choose between some savage cutting or adding yet another page. Guess what I did. And Keith completely agrees with me about Brumcon "Of course it was important - it was the first Con I attended!"

Hi Peter,

"Oh dear.... fandom seems to have long tentacles, and once you're ensnared it might appear to have let go... but not really. You, Peter, almost on your own, have dragged me screaming (YES!) and kicking back into semi-activity. First a con, then a discussion group and now fanzines.

"I don't think I got *Prolapse 2*... probably already well out of the loop by then, but *Prolapse-3* was squashed through the door and I fell on it avidly. One reason being that it took my mind of a fast approaching deadline... So, after looking enviously at the cover - I certainly wish my desk looked as tidy – I started in. I must admit I was a little scared, would it be fannish or sercon. To my relief it's definitely fannish.

"Joseph, being Joseph, brings back memories... of course he's still exactly the same. Insults are insults – not differentiated by fannish decades, but definitely differentiated by **intent**. An insult intended to amuse has to be thought out **very** carefully – otherwise it runs the danger of being taken as an insult to wound. Some egos are a lot more frail than others...

"The thing that horrified me about the letter column was the number of letters "from beyond the grave". Ethel Lindsay made a good point about Con **reports** seemingly to be fixated on how much beer was consumed. A case of a little goes a long way... Ethel, of course, wasn't **against** drinking. If I can tell a story...

"Ethel was raised to the ranks of the Knights of St Fantony (I know, I know, an organisation that, in the end, perhaps lived too long). We knew she'd been diagnosed with duodenal ulcers and wasn't drinking. So, we arranged it that her 'water from the well of St Fantony' wasn't the standard fire-water but tap water. She said, afterwards, that she looked at it and almost decided to refuse to drink it, then thought 'What the Hell' and swigged it back. Others coughed and spluttered due to the alcoholic content - she coughed and spluttered out of sheer shock !

"You're right - fandom needs a light-hearted raconteur of its history... you seem to be the self-elected (and successful) one to do it... Best of luck!"

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

Greg Pickersgill (again) "You'll be amused to know that I have gone through *Prolapse-3* a good two or three times since our last discussions, and of course I am now thinking there's a lot more to it! See, I told you! On the first reading through I just didn't grasp how many little interpolations you had in there. Now, reading with more attention, it makes a lot more sense. I actually enjoyed it last time round! What you say about the Nicholas letters may well be true, but it is going to have to get a lot colder for me to find the time to read them." **Ian Maule:** "The photo of Dave Langford on Page 9 is wrongly credited; it's one of a series I took at a Langford party many

years ago and developed and printed myself.” **Sandra Bond:** “I plead that my article was produced entirely at the coaxing of Mr Weston himself rather than being about a topic I would personally have found worth shoving into the spotlight for historical examination, and that when I wrote it, I had no idea that Uncle Pete was going to exhume William McCabe to go before me like John the Baptist, thus giving APA-B/The Organisation still more prominence.” **Dick Ellingsworth** (making a welcome return after a 35-year spell of gafia), “You can take the Mickey out of someone without being insulting. I recall a very serious young man at the 1960 London con, Sture Sedolin – I think he was Swedish – whose plaintive cry of ‘Does anybody want to talk science fiction?’ was used as a catch-phrase for some time after. Nobody would have dreamed of being rude to him, though, because he was such a nice bloke.” **Ted White**, who said “I got all the way through the letters; maybe I’ll get to finish it tomorrow. But, for, now, Good Ish, Peter.” (However, no further word was heard from Ted, which may be a bad omen). **Rog Peyton:** “Just sold a copy of STARS to the Cultural History department of the University of Turku in Finland!!!! I wonder what they’ll make of it?” **John Purcell:** “A wonderful way to pass along a bunch of information about the Birmingham SF Group during the mid-80s. Very informational and educational to someone like me who had little contact with British fandom during that stretch of time. Even though I know a little about the people involved – some names are more familiar than others since they loosed zines I produced during the mid-80s – it was like being a fly on the mantle, soaking in the doings of the group.” **John-Henri Holmberg:** “I thought your little fanzine was a truly Neat Thing – it’s really great that you’re making a comeback after all these years, and I look forward to all that will follow. And when a few days later the twelfth issue of *SF Five-Yearly* followed in my mailbox, I was for a few minutes truly and insanely on the verge of dipping into the boxes in the attic where I have a vague feeling of keeping the LoCs and illustrations and half-finished translations of faan fiction and other things which I only 18 years ago had intended for the 51st issue of my fannish fanzine *Gafiac*, the one that never got done after I moved 300 miles south and started a new job and got bogged down in mundane things.” **Kev Clarke**, who asked, “Was there a page without Steve Green’s name on it?” **Graham James**, who is “a little struck by some Birmingham-Leeds connections. Not least in relation to Prof Tom and Ashley junior. Ashley, as you point out was a Leeds student. At one Leeds Group meeting, Michael got into a rather heated exchange with Tom. At closing time we were still talking as we were leaving whereupon Tom picked Ashley up, pinned him against the wall and politely asked if he would like to repeat his comments. I believe he declined. It was good to see how the Professor maintained honest standards of debate. Given the *Prolapse* connections, you didn’t contract Tom to sort-out Ashley did you? Did you?” And finally, a note from **Jinnie the Perky Goth**, who said, “It is a bizarre experience to be reading about disastrous picnics that happened when I was only 2 years old and living with my family in Kent...”

Remember, Christmas or no Christmas, you can still write to me on the hotline, at pr.weston@btinternet.com

LOOKING BACKWARD

Highlight of the nextish will be ‘The Wizard of Ozimov,’ the script of Judy Blish’s epic production for the 1974 *Tynecon*, with comments from Judy, Andrew Stephenson, and other participants along with Sam Long’s long-lost photographs, retrieved by Bill Burns from an attic in Peoria. We’ve also discovered an unpublished issue of Ann Green’s *Ormolu* with her report on the 1994 ‘*MiSdemeanour*’, and Andrew Stephenson’s forgotten illos for THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR. Then we have Rob Hansen’s never-properly-published report on *Seacon ’75*, and John-Henri Holmberg’s autobiography of his early years – this one started as a small piece for ‘Collectors Anonymous’ and just grew and grew. I’m researching a feature titled ‘Femmfan Fatales,’ and have another in mind concerning the Willis-Slater feud (“Was Walt Willis the Charles Platt of his generation?” we ask). Finally, I’m still digging into a pile of material sent to me by Derek Pickles, which includes full runs of Mal Ashworth’s *BEM* and Derek’s own *Phantasmagoria*, plus a huge file of his letters going back into the early 1950s. Could be anything in there...!

WHY ARE YOU RECEIVING THIS ISSUE? Several possible reasons:

- ☐ You are a fannish hero (that’s you, Earl). But it would be nice to hear from you anyway.
- ☐ You’ve helped me with *Prolapse*, and it was much appreciated!
- ☐ You’re mentioned somewhere inside – are you really going to let me get away with it?
- ☒ I thought you might be interested – do please let me know what you think.
- ☐ You’re on the Danger List and need to do something if you want another issue!