

"Prolapse ... once again did its best to ruin a morning's work" – Chris Priest, LoC



"It's seven o'clock in the morning and our young friend wants to know if the latest Vargo Statten Magazine has come in yet!"

Follow George Locke's hunt for science fiction in 1950s London – With the usual apologies to 'Giles'

INSIDE: 'A Boy and his Bike' by George Locke; 'Forbidden Planet and other Creations' by Stan Nicholls; 'Think I'm Going Back' by Greg Pickersgill; **PLUS;** Peter Roberts, Chuck Connor, Brian Varley, and more.



PROLAPSE

This is *Prolapse* 11, mostly about 'science fiction' (you remember) brought to you by Peter Weston, 53 Wyvern Road, Sutton Coldfield, B74 2PS (Tel; 0121 354 6059). Once again we're breathing new life into some very old bones and I'm hoping you'll be motivated into sending a LoC and your reminiscences to me at pr.weston@btinternet.com. This remains a 'Paper First' fanzine but I'm e-mailing an increasing number of pdfs these days and the issue goes onto the *eFanzines* website (with coloured pictures, yet) a month after paper copies have been posted out. *Prolapse* travels the time-stream to explore British SF fan-history. Chief Researcher; Greg Pickersgill. Assistant Deputy Researcher (1st class); Mark Plummer.

"I opened the *Prolapse* envelope with quivering, salacious anticipation." – Ian Watson, LoC

While working on this issue (well, so I was watching *Run, Fat Boy, Run*, but I was *thinking* about doing some work, honest) Ian Sorensen called and was kind enough to advise me that at *Corflu* in Las Vegas it had just been announced that *Prolapse* had won the 'FAAN' Award for 'Best Fanzine'. Goshwow! At first I think Eileen was more pleased than I was because my initial reaction was mild disbelief that a convention dominated by American fanzine fans should have voted for something which a) hardly ever mentions America and b) only goes to a handful of U.S. readers (and rarely prints their LoCs, either). I suppose it shows that people do look at *Prolapse* on Bill's site after all, even though they never write to me about it. But now the news has sunk in and I AM very pleased, of course; while I produce this thing primarily for my own satisfaction and enjoyment rather than to win awards, it's always nice to be appreciated! My thanks to everyone who voted!

So no, I didn't go to *Corflu* after all. I'd looked forward to it for months but when push came to book I weighed-up all the other things which I ought to be doing at that time of year and mundanity won. Still, I did have a good time at the *Orbital* Eastercon which may seem surprising after my comments elsewhere about 'Big Tent' conventions – and *Orbital* was a very big tent indeed, with something like 1300 attending. It worked for me, partly because I was kept so busy. I was on six panels, starting with 'Reassessing Heinlein' (which drew a good audience in the main hall, though I noticed Malcolm Edwards sneaking out at the halfway mark) and going on with 'Save the Planet' in which to Joseph Nicholas' considerable surprise I kept agreeing with him (and that's a first). Then there was something called 'Crossing the Streams' where I was the Bad Guy who argued with Graham Sleight and everyone else that there *is* a fundamental difference between SF and fantasy and yes, it *does* matter. That one was recorded for *Vector* and I'm eagerly awaiting the transcript.

It also helped that just about everyone I wanted to see was there, enough of us (and enough fannish programming) so that we could get together in that room fourth floor (once we found it!) and talk about the BSFA and fanzines to our heart's content. As Keith Freeman said, the con worked because it was almost like a series of mini-cons under one roof. Extra bonuses for me came with the get-together of the *IntheBar* crowd in the hotel across the road on Saturday lunchtime and Gerry & Mali Webb's three-hour champagne party in their room on the Sunday, during the course of which I developed a novel and entirely useless *psi* power... but maybe I'll have room for that story next time.

After it was all over, Greg Pickersgill (who features large in this issue, and who is sometimes a Hard Man to Please) was musing that some of the con-reports he'd read about *Orbital* made it sound like "a whole load of things that apparently happened in some other country at the same time as I was at the convention." Greg went on to say that "the expectations and background of the average convention attendee at an Eastercon are now so outside our own (and I of course use 'our' as shorthand for 'me') that there's almost no point commenting on it, nor especially whinging about it. Fandom is conclusively a different place now and that's it. But the need remains; I'd love to go to even a 1970s-style convention again. Or even an early *Mexicon*, where SF and fandom were treated as one and the same, indivisible. I'd even be happy with a *MiScon* event (well, an early one anyway, before The Influx) where everyone did everything and there was a presumption that we were all interested in both SF and fandom. Is it possible to re-do any of that, albeit for a perhaps smaller and ever-shrinking audience? I even want Peter Weston to run or even licence his *ReRePeterPeterCon* just so us over-40s have somewhere to be in a warm puddle of shared enthusiasms."

Jim Linwood helpfully suggested, "There's always The George at Kettering. Is there still time to celebrate the 1958 *Cytricon IV*? I don't see why fans of an uncertain age should be excluded provided they dress-up in clothes of the period and can handle a zap gun."

And just like that, fans, it seems we're going to have a 50th anniversary celebration at Kettering. Eileen and I visited The George that same weekend and walked around consulting old photographs and trying to work out where so much fannish merriment had taken place. Some things have changed – the Devil's Kitchen has become the hotel reception area and it looks as if the original bar has recently been ripped-out. However the main con hall seems almost unaltered and I walked around touching the pillars in awe – this was where the BSFA was founded! But gosh, wasn't it small!

I've provisionally booked the two nights **Friday/Saturday 3-5th October**, the idea being (as with *ReRePetercon*) that we arrive on Friday afternoon, have a meal together that evening and spend Saturday doing fannish stuff, leaving on the Sunday. "Call it *Cytricon V*," I wrote, and automatically invited is "everyone who ever attended a Kettering event, and all those people who were around at the time but who somehow never got to Kettering. It's also open to more recent fans who understand the deep mythic significance of Kettering to fannish culture in Britain." Response has been good and if you're interested and haven't already signed-up, do get in touch with me RSN and I'll send you all the details. // PW 12/5/2008

LOOKING BACKWARD: Next issue is on London fandom, with Bruce Burn's epic 'The Wandering Ghu', his eye-witness account of arriving in Britain from New Zealand in 1960. There'll be reprint articles from Ken Bulmer and Arthur Thomson, and Greg Pickersgill's entry in the 'Forgotten Fans' series, this time featuring Alan Dodd – the 'Hermit of Hoddesdon'.

At the *Orbital* Eastercon Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer arranged a clever series of discussions with the titles 'It was 50 years ago today..' '...40 years ago..', and so on, to mark the 50th anniversary of the BSFA. I moderated the first session and we were a bit handicapped because (in the absence of Ina) we didn't actually *have* anyone on our panel who had been there in 1958, but nonetheless Rob Hansen, Jim Linwood and I bravely put forward our theories about how it all came about. Ad-libbing furiously, I said the surprising thing was that the BSFA hadn't taken off more rapidly than it did. And then someone mentioned the situation in 1974 when a notice in *Science Fiction Monthly* caused such a flood of enquiries that the membership secretary promptly went gafia. What was the difference? Greg Pickersgill was intrigued and started a discussion on the *wegenheim* e-list which led to some surprising conclusions.

'YOU should join the BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION!'

Greg & PW on the
'40 years ago'
panel. Photo by
Rob Hansen.



Greg wrote: "I was at a convention the other day, and it was not organised by the BSFA. (In some other slice of reality it was, but where did ours go wrong?). I was intently watching Peter Weston, see, as usual, and he was as usual being Peter on a panel, talking for all the world as if with authority about 1958 and the Ur-moment of the BSFA. It was all very interesting and we wondered, via PRW, exactly why the BSFA had never attracted large numbers of members. In the early days, we know from the membership lists, many if not most were arguably obligation or tithe members in much the same way that some of us buy *Foundation* today. Or belong to the BSFA come to that. They were mostly known fans, by and large, and while the membership did swell over the first few years there is no sign at all of there being at any point a Great Leap Forward as the thousands of SF readers (who we know existed because they were the paying customers for such as *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* and yea even unto the *Astounding* BRE, never mind the books) came to know of the BSFA's existence.

"This was odd enough once you think of it in those terms, but even odder still when one contrasts it with the situation that occurred in 1974 when *Science Fiction Monthly* appeared and soon carried notices about the BSFA, resulting in a membership flood that caused the incumbent official to flee in terror and bring about yet another of the BSFA's critical moments. The early years of the BSFA were odd enough once you think of it in those terms, but even odder still when one contrasts them with the situation that occurred in 1974.

"So I've been tunnelling into the past again. Now, *New Worlds* 72 of June 1958 carries an editorial about the formation of the BSFA, making it sound attractive if not irresistible. True, there is no actual ad for the org in that issue, and unfortunately E.J. Carnell omits to include a contact address in his write-up, but it's a start. Then in *NW-74*, Carnell includes the contact address of Eric Bentcliffe in his editorial, but there's no actual advertisement, a situation which is rectified after a fashion by a 'Sales and Wants' small ad in *NW-75* which earnestly insists 'YOU should join the BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION' with Bentcliffe's address attached.

"Aside from the occasional recurrence of this small-ad there is no reference to the BSFA in any *NW* up to number 79; indeed it is not even mentioned in Carnell's survey of 1958 in his editorial in *NW-79*, nor does a question regarding BSFA membership appear in the Reader Survey questionnaire in numbers 78 and 79. This is all quite enlightening in a depressing way, as some of us had sort-of assumed that the BSFA would have been talked and ad-ed up big in *New Worlds* at least, and the horrid truth shows just the opposite. There was no flood of members because no-one was encouraged (much) to join. Yes, an interested and encouraging editorial – one time – but as we well know, the message needs to be endlessly reinforced and people persuaded to engage with a new project of unknown vitality.

"However, outside the Carnell empire the situation is slightly sunnier. Scotland's *Nebula* has no mention of the newly-formed BSFA until it is mentioned in Willis' 'Fanorama' column, issue 32, July 1958. This is a positive write-up (albeit headed 'The End of Anarchy') and gives a contact address but no subscription information. There's no further editorial or feature mention of the BSFA but starting with issue 33 of August 1958 there is indeed a half-page advertisement for the BSFA headed 'A SOCIETY FOR YOU' which gives useful knowledge and a recommendation from editor Peter Hamilton. This recurs in several issues before the end of *Nebula* with issue 41, and one might say that while it has every appearance of being a space-filler and possibly not a true paid-for ad, it certainly shows Hamilton's heart as being in the right place.

"So, why then, exactly, did science fiction readers – SF magazine readers especially, who we know to have existed in some thousands – not rush to join the new BSFA? One theory has it that the £1 subscription was just too much, which seems crazy until you realise that's near as dammit a whole year's subscription to, for example, *Nebula*."

Mark Plummer replied: "I've been looking at the numbers again. The first BSFA membership list in October, 1958 has 69 members. Thirteen of these seem to have left next-to-no fannish footprint: I can't find out anything else about them beyond the fact that they were BSFA members, and nine of them had ceased to be members by June 1960, the date of the next list. Some of them were fairly early recruits (I. B. Hill of Edinburgh was member #19) but most have membership numbers in the 50s and 60s, which would fit with the idea that the early members were the established fans, the 'tithe' members, and after six months the BSFA was only just starting to reach the wider SF readership.

"That said, it doesn't follow that the remaining 56 members were all established fans at the time they joined. 'Doc' Weir (#49) came to fandom through the BSFA (didn't he?) and I guess there may be other names on the list whose fannish reputations -- such as they are -- post-date their BSFA memberships, people like Marcus Wigan (#55) who was one of the founders of the Oxford University group in 1962 and who I'd guess may have been a BSFA recruit to fandom.

"On the next list (June 1960) there are 97 members listed, with the highest membership number is 171, so presumably 102 people joined in the 20 months following October 1958. Or maybe not. The June 1960 list shows no membership numbers between 71 and 90 so does this represent a wave of people who joined in late '58 or early '59, just after the first list, who then lapsed after a year and thus never made it to the second, or were several numbers skipped for some reason? There are also several numbers missing in the 90s. Of the 69 initial members only 41 remained and a quick skim of the post-October 1958 recruits reveals 30-odd names that I don't recognise.

By May 1963 there are 149 members, although the highest membership number is 375 which suggests that 226 people had joined and lapsed in the Association's first five years if all the membership numbers were in fact used. Make that 227 because #1 had been recycled to Brian Aldiss by this point (replacing Dave Newman who was the original #1). Twenty-two of the original 69 are still around, but only 11 of the people who joined between October 1958 and June 1960.

"As regards the later situation with *Science Fiction Monthly*, could this be simply a matter of relative numbers? *SFM* had a circulation of 150,000 at its peak (according to *Locus*, according to Mike Ashley) which resulted in a reported 1,200 people enquiring about the BSFA (according to Graham Poole, according to Rob Hansen). So what was the circulation of *New Worlds* and *Nebula* in the late fifties? And indeed how many of the 1,200 *SFM* readers who enquired actually joined the BSFA? Or rather would have joined if anybody had answered their enquiries?

"I'm rather curious about the missing -- and presumably untraceable -- data-point which is the number of people who enquired about the BSFA c.1958-60 but didn't join. The small ads in *NW* didn't tell a prospective member much about the Association beyond how to contact it, so did lots of people write to Eric Bentcliffe and recoil in horror at how much it cost or did they simply not enquire? I have no real basis for saying this, but my bet is that they didn't enquire and that we're back to this old contention that most of the people who read SF aren't actually interested in any greater involvement with it."

Greg clarified one point: "A block of ten numbers (80-89) were allocated in the early days to a North American representative. It's not clear what happened to the 80-block, as none of those numbers were used despite some North American members appearing higher in the number sequence. By *Vector* #26 (May 1964) 208 members are listed, highest number allocated 455. The implication is that 236 people have come and gone since 1958. Something wrong here surely, with the BSFA if not my arithmetic. Very interestingly, relating to our thoughts on the response to advertising, there is a rather stunning Editorial by one Roger G. Peyton in *Vector* #28 of September 1964; referring to the upcoming sudden resignation 'for personal reasons' of BSFA secretary Rod Milner. Our man Roger says; -

'When Rod took over at Easter (1964) he had to answer about a dozen enquiries a week. Recently the BSFA placed an advertisement in the Science Fiction Book Club's monthly newsletter. Within the first three days after the advert appeared Rod received over 60 enquiries! That was three weeks ago. To date he has had just over 100 enquiries. Because of this glut we have had to put Charlie Winstone's address on the advert appearing this week in *Exchange & Mart*.'

"Eeeee, mind-boggling, eh! The imagery and supposition all that throws up!"

Jim Linwood agreed about the high cost: "I tended to think that cost was a major factor in deterring membership but recalled that the YSFRG (Young Science Fiction Readers Group), which had free membership, only attracted around 20 members from the ads Ted Carnell put in his publications. The rest of the membership came from fandom or the BSFA. Most of the teenage members' motivation was to contact fellow SF readers and add them to their social life."

Malcolm Edwards chipped in: "I can't instantly check what price the average paperback was in 1958, but up to the mid-1950s it was 1/6d. So maybe by 1958 it was 2/- (which was the price of the *Nova* magazines then). In which case BSFA adult membership was equivalent to the price of ten new paperbacks at face value. That's the equivalent of just under £70 in today's money -- quite a hefty sum."

This is where I came back in on the discussion; (**PW**) "I think my own experiences answer Greg's questions. First, I *was* one of those people who sent away for details of the BSFA, probably after seeing an ad in *Nebula* (circulation around 10,000 according to Mike Ashley, and already dead by the time I encountered it). Bad luck, I received *Vector* #5, probably THE worst possible issue for a newcomer, especially since my copy was so badly duplicated I could hardly read any of it -- it was probably a 'reject' that they sent out to non-members who enquired, with roller-marks all over the pages, that sort of thing, and so badly stapled that it came apart in a pile of loose pages. All I can say is that though I was desperate for anything to do with SF it didn't seem very relevant to me, and these people wanted 10/- from me (student membership) at a time when I was still at school and absolutely broke. So I didn't join. I bet a lot of others felt exactly the same way, and that's why the BSFA didn't take off very quickly.

"The second experience came in early 1974 when I was driving my family somewhere across the width of England -- god only knows why -- stopped at a shop in a little village in the middle of nowhere to buy something or other, and saw the first



Extremely rare picture of Rod Milner, at OMPACon 1973. Photo by Mike Meara.

issue of *SF Monthly*, out there in the wilds of East Anglia. Needless to say I bought it, and so did a hundred thousand other people, all with more money in their pockets than I'd had in 1960. So this time the BSFA got a lot more response – vastly bigger circulation, more affluent times.”

Greg was by now getting his teeth into all this, and decided to question some of the ‘accepted facts’ about the situation. “OK then, you know we're always making a Big Fucking Deal about the impact of *SF Monthly* on the BSFA, and how it caused the membership secretary of the time to flee in terror and almost bring the whole edifice down, etc, etc. Well, not so certain. I was just looking at some figures and attempting to establish a churn rate when I realised that the actual increase in membership numbers allocated between 1971 and 1976 was just 392. That's an average of 78 per year.

“Now, we don't know how many arrived in one sack after the first occasion *SFM* mentioned the BSFA but I would be surprised if it was more than a few dozen, as we must reasonably assume that much of that 392 was just the usual trickle of new members that would have arrived anyway over the course of five years. This, on the face of it, shows quite remarkable weediness on the part of the Membership Sec. of the day (whose name will soon be known, our agents are presently at work) in not coping with the interest. It also shows, perhaps, that we have willingly accepted some peculiar myth as fact. There was, perhaps, *no* overwhelming surge of *SFM* readers wanting to join-up.”

Mark, again: “Wasn't the problem more with the number of enquiries rather than the number of new members? THEN quotes Graham Poole: “At the convention [*Tynecon*] the news was released that at least 1200 people had up to then enquired after recent adverts for the BSFA appeared in *SFM*. ... Dave Tillston, apparently, for reasons only known to himself, decided he wasn't going to reply to any of the thousands of letters he'd received. The trouble was he didn't tell anyone of this and subsequent attempts to communicate... all proved negative.”

Greg: “Plum quite reasonably brings up the ghost of Graham Poole who was quoted in THEN, presumably for the lack of anything more authoritative. Now then, Poole was indeed Company Secretary of the BSFA at the time so might well have had the straight dope, but I dunno...”

“Let's see, this Dave Tillston character (who was the Membership secretary) is utterly unheard-of in fandom (unless the Plum can find something I am too short-sighted to observe) until he joins the BSFA as member 1285 in the early part of 1973 (see *Vector* 65, May-June 1973). By the next issue (#66, June-July 1973), he is listed as Membership Secretary, and still listed as such for V67/68 of Spring 1974. Then everything goes down the Swanee and in the next issue – late by a big margin – for Summer 1976 (# 69) he is replaced by Dave Symes.

“There's a fair bit of flannel about what went on in this period. I have a BSFA *Newsletter* #1 of August 1975 which tries to explain but without actually saying anything explicit. As you might imagine, officials variously abandoned their duties, heroic efforts were made, skin of teeth much employed, etc. As regards Dave Tillston, he appears to have shown up at the BSFA AGM for 1974 (at *Tynecon*, I assume?) and claimed that “he'd been inundated with queries about the *SF Monthly* advert but was coping.” However, it is also noted that shortly after Easter “Dave Tillston also became inoperative.” Along, unfortunately, with the then-Treasurer, one Roger Hensey.

“Now OK, I'm just making this up out of my own head and we do not presently have either Graham Poole or Dave Symes on hand to interrogate as to what they remember, but my feeling is that there were not actually either '1200' (Poole) or 'thousands' (Poole again) of queries via *SFM*. It just doesn't fit with what we know of the human nature of persons drawn to science fiction. There may indeed have been dozens, scores, as much as a hundred or so; the fact is that whatever number it was it was more than Dave Tillston, someone not deeply embedded in fandom and with no real sense of connected responsibility, was happy or prepared to deal with.”

Jim Linwood: “My drum-beating for the Kingston SF Group in *SFM* only attracted two enquiries – Janice Wiles (later Maule) and her friend. This is in an area of SW London in which *SFM* was on sale in every newsagents shop.”

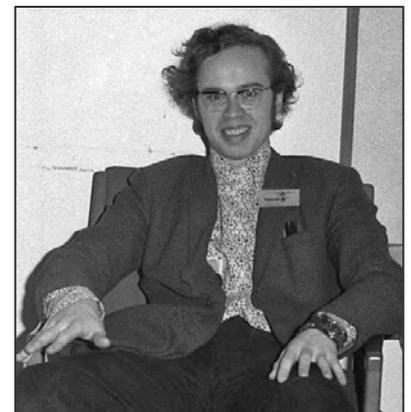
Mark: “Is this Dave Symes the same David Symes who was at this year's Eastercon, husband (I assume) of Fay Symes, sometimes contributor to the *Prolapse* letter column?”

Greg: “Well yeah. I knew Fay had written to *Prolapse* recently, so we were well on the trail there and I already had the ish out to remind myself. Mind you it's a bit unlucky I never thought about any of this a few days ago, as Dave and Fay were at the Eastercon! My other prospect is Graham Poole himself, who essentially dropped out of fandom a long time back. I have discovered via BT that he is still at his old address in Cheltenham. Shall have to buy some stamps then...”

“A sensible question about GraPo (who was very well known in British Isles fandom during the 70s) is when did he actually leave the set? I certainly don't recall him being about much in the late 1980s and definitely not the 90s, but I'd prefer not to embarrass myself by asserting in my 'letter' (is that the word?) that he hasn't been in evidence for thirty-odd years when in fact he was at the 2004 *Novacon*, or some-such.

(Signs of the times – Poole was much mocked by what might be called 'Ratfandom' for his overly sercon approach to so many things. “He's a bit of a Forgotten Fan really, suffering from being sercon and organisation-minded at a time when that was not fashionable. Not the greatest writer on earth, but he was persistent and methodical and pretty tireless in his promotion of SF and the BSFA. Perversely though, his fanzines are of much greater use in finding out what was actually happening than the kind that is full of knockabout laffs and endless anecdotes about, well, sod-all really. Well, I'm happy to admit I was wrong and that my world-view probably approximates his-then more than, oh, name one yourself, now.)

“I also have – unlikely as it seems – a possible contact with the fabulous Dave Tillston. It's an unusual name so I simply e-mailed one of the two who came up in web-searches and asked whether he'd ever had contact with the BSFA. My man said ‘Yes’, so I asked him (diplomatically, I hope) the relevant questions. No response yet, which could either mean he's still embarrassed by the whole thing, or that he actually is NOT 'our' Dave Tillston and instead is some herbert who likes to lead people on unnecessarily and has now been asked a question he can't waffle. Interesting eh?



GraPo at Tynecon, 1974. Photo by Mike Meara.

“Actually more important is why Chris Bursey (chairman) and Fred Hemmings suddenly abandoned their positions without explanation – but it does link to other things we're trying to understand. I feel quite strongly that this 'thousands of enquiries' thing has been grossly exaggerated, both at the time and over the years, and we've bought the idea uncritically and without thinking about it ever since. But will we ever really know?”

PW: “I'm surprised Graham Poole is back in Cheltenham – if you remember, he moved up here and lived within a mile of me in Sutton Coldfield during the early eighties. I think he was on the BSFG committee and all that.”

Steve Green: “Graham was on the committees of *Novacons 15-17* (1985-7) and I have a memory of him being involved with *Apa-B*, although I couldn't see his name in William McCabe's history of same in *Prolapse #3*.”

Greg: “Well, things dragged on a bit for almost a week after the events described above, and I sent this Dave Tillston character another message. To my genuine amazement I got a response within hours. According to him he actually disappeared from the BSFA-map more because of personal issues than anything else –

‘In 1974 I was 29 (now 61). I had to give up the role of Membership Secretary rather suddenly because I went through a rather bad divorce at that time, and the last thing on my mind was the BSFA. Rumours (which were all they were) that I had been overwhelmed by the secretarial duties and responses received were totally untrue. My children came first .. or should I say the loss of them did.’

“Which is certainly a fair enough reason for his abrupt disappearance, and no doubt a hell of a lot more valid one than anything that might be put up by Fred Hemmings, Chris Bursey, and a couple of other simultaneous absconders of the same period. Now we come to the exciting part –

‘If I recall correctly, there were over 300 enquiries/applications for membership. I think I dealt with about 70+ of those before other matters drew me away.’

“Right then, this puts it all more into perspective. Instead of the ‘1200’ or ‘thousands’ (both descriptions commonly attributed to Graham Poole and quoted in Hansen's THEN and elsewhere, and hitherto accepted as fact) we have a substantial but not overwhelming number of enquiries, a number that a stably functioning Membership Secretary should be able to cope with in time. Especially with appropriate assistance from other BSFA officials as necessary. But as noted above that assistance apparently wasn't on the cards for reasons that remain unclear still.

“So it might then appear that Dave Tillston was perhaps at fault in not admitting that he was unable to cope with the influx of membership enquiries, but should not be blamed as his reasons deserve sympathy rather than criticism. Now, we can add to this some information from Fay Symes, who Was There in every sense (if you're following this narrative closely you will remember that Dave Symes took over as Membership Secretary when Dave Tillston vanished).”

Fay: “In November 1974 I read an article in *SFM* about an SF convention that mentioned the BSFA, with either an advert or at least the address of the BSFA, because I immediately wrote to ask about membership and also asked about contacting SF pen-friends. In October 1975 I had a letter from David (Symes, they were as yet unconnected), saying he'd taken over as membership secretary and my letter was amongst those he had inherited from the previous secretary who had given up the job. He asked if I would like to correspond with him, and we met in November 1975 after he'd come back from the *Novacon*. The rest is history.

“I have searched a certain box in the loft, and can quote this extract from his letter to me dated October 1975:

‘Recently the BSFA was in chaos, the previous officers had let things slide until a special AGM was held in London in June, and a few foolish people including myself, offered to pick up the pieces and create order out of the chaos. (We are succeeding.) I gained possession of a large bundle of unanswered letters from all over the place, including yours to Keith Freeman, dated 17-11-74.’

“It's fascinating how these legends develop about things that were actually quite different. David thinks the bundle of letters was not that large, and after contacting them all, most of them didn't reply.”

Dave Symes: “I can't remember much of the minutia pre-1975, but as far as I can remember from that year *SFM* was given an airing and review on a late afternoon Radio 2 programme, which led to a big (but temporary) increase in the sales of *SFM*, the consequence of which was an increase in queries about the BSFA. I have no knowledge of how Dave Tillston handled this or actually how many extra enquires there were. When I came into the picture I inherited a bundle of enquiries, (obviously have no idea how many now) but it wasn't that massive.

“I wrote to all the enquirers, apologising for the delay (some of the letters had been unanswered for quite a while) and a couple took up membership, one or two replied that because of the mess-up they wouldn't bother, and the rest didn't answer my letters at all. Again I have no direct memory of vast numbers of new enquiries or even folks actually paying for subscriptions *en-masse*.”

Greg: “So then, that's all very interesting isn't it? If you've been paying attention all along the whole point of this line of enquiry was not to find fault with any particular BSFA functionary, or even the committee *en masse* at a specific time, but to find some proof of the generally believed 'fact' that with the onset of *Science Fiction Monthly* in 1974, and various mentions and advertisements for the BSFA therein (and I have to say here I am simply taking on faith the assertion that there actually *were* adverts for the BSFA in *SFM*, I have not yet located and examined my set) there was a huge upsurge in both enquiries and actual memberships of the BSFA.

“This whole point spring-boarded from the knowledge that despite the fact that the BSFA was both advertised and sympathetically written up in the British SF magazines from its inception in 1958 there was NO apparent surge of membership at any time, even though the combined readership of such as *New Worlds & Nebula* was probably not enormously short of that of *SFM*. The assumption has been that Something Happened in the *SFM*-era, either an actual cultural change or simply the apparent popularity and widespread distribution of *SFM* that caused the huge surge in interest in the BSFA. That has been bolstered in our perceptions by the repeated assertion that there were 'thousands' of enquiries.

“In fact it appears that Nothing Much Happened. There was a bulge in enquiries, but nothing that couldn't have been dealt with in normal circumstances, and in fact from Dave Symes' memory it seems that all the enquiries actually *were* dealt with anyway, resulting in a net membership increase of Not Much.

“So really we're back where we started in a sense, except that the perceived wisdom and the histories need to be amended somewhat, and with a reminder that we ought to rely on the evidence of our own experience which tells us pretty plainly that while a lot of people read science fiction (or, in the case of *SFM*, like to look at sci-fi pictures) most of them actually have little or no interest in science fiction at all.”

Andy Sawyer: “Once again, Greg, you turn out to be a Great Man in Audience and Fandom Studies! I can confirm that at least *one* of the enquiries was answered in the end, because that was me. From memory, I got a photocopied *Vector* which must have been better than the earlier issue Peter received when he enquired years earlier, because I joined and plummeted down the slippery path. But it's good to have a myth debunked even if it leaves us, as you say, back where we started. (Though I would be interested to know if SF readers are any more reluctant than any other readers in wanting to read *about* the stuff they like to read.) Considering that there isn't much of a fandom in any other form, I wonder if it isn't the case that virtually no-one is interested in reading about what they read, and a comparatively larger proportion of SF readers actually do find this interesting. Astute readers will of course realise that this, too, leaves us back where we started.”

Greg had an afterthought; “One thing I did fail to indicate was what if any the actual change in BSFA numbers was in the relevant period; in the list published on my web-page I had only figures for 1971 & 1976. I have now rooted through my newly-acquired stack of BSFA papers (ex-Keith Freeman and Rob Jackson) and have located another list, for 1973, produced immediately before Dave Tillston took over as Membership Secretary.

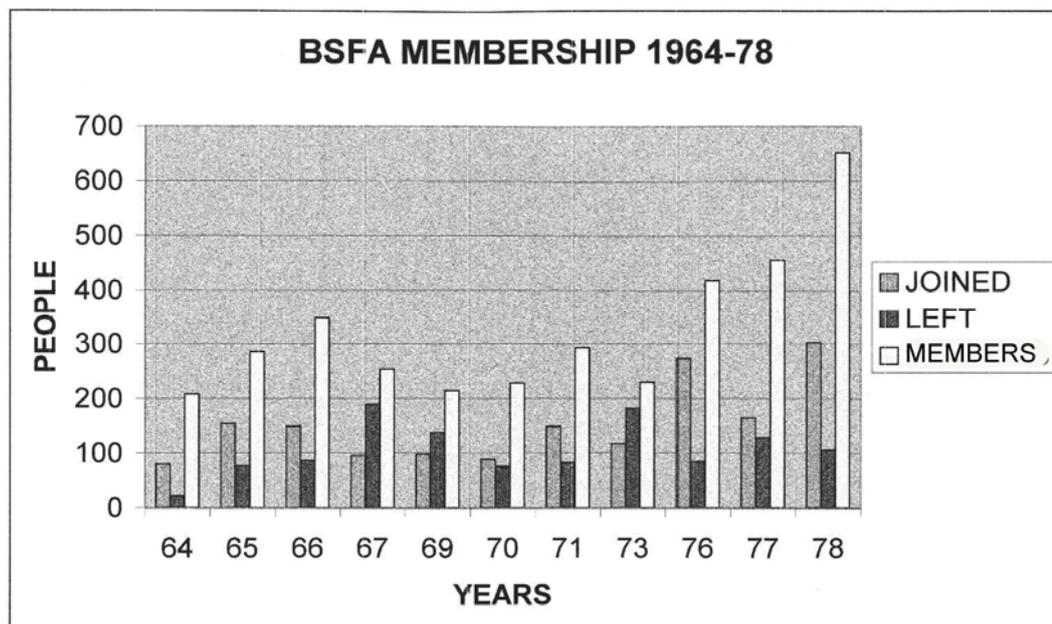
1971 - 294 members, highest number allocated is 1192
 1973 - 230 members, highest number allocated is 1306
 1976 - 419 members, highest number allocated is 1584

“Anyway, as you can see there were 392 new members over that five-year period, but at the end of it the actual membership had only increased by 125. So in really simple terms we could say 267 people came and went during that period. Which may not be at all sound as a statistical analysis and certainly doesn't take into account the number of enquiries not followed-up by actual membership.”

Malcolm Edwards wrote: “Well, I love a good statistic, so I've spent a few minutes with this, taking the numbers from Greg's BSFA web-site (<http://www.gostak.co.uk/bsfarchive/BSFA1.htm>). I've taken as the starting point the 1964 membership of 208, high number 455. Everything before that seems to be confused by blocks of 'reserved' numbers.

“In 1965/6 membership was 286, high number 610. This means 155 new members had joined (610 minus 455), but the membership had only gone up by 78 (286 minus 208), which means that 77 of the members in 1964 had left (155 minus 78). That means 37% of the membership had not renewed (77 is 37% of 208).

“Okay, that's the basis for the following calculations; [which for clarity I've put into a bar-chart - PW]



You can see the effect of the 'bad' years, when the BSFA fell to pieces (1967-69, & 1973-74), where the 'left' column is higher than the 'joined' column. Vice-versa occurred in 'good' years (1965-66 & 1976-onwards) when the association seemed to be delivering what the members expected. - PW

“By my calculations the average ‘churn rate’ per year (the percentage of members who drop out) has been around 35% of the membership, which I guess is more-or-less expectable. What's slightly surprising is that the highest rate of retention by far comes at the end of this sequence, when the overall membership is at its highest. I would have predicted the opposite: that when it was a very small membership it would be more dedicated, ‘hard core’, and therefore more stable – and when it was higher it would attract a more transient membership. But perhaps this reflects the greater level of service the BSFA was by then offering in terms of the regularity and number of its publications. In summary, over the whole 14-year period, 1546 people joined the BSFA, but the membership only went up by 444.”

Greg: “I keep reading that last line with ever more mounting incredulity. And something else I'd like to know is when exactly the BSFA stopped issuing membership lists? I have no idea if I am missing any, but the latest I have date from the middle-80s, and I feel reasonably sure none have been produced since then. Data Protection Act or something? Someone

must know. Well, you'd think, but getting that sort of information out of the BSFA is more difficult than you'd imagine. Anyone here got any secret knowledge they'd care to share? Or actual post-1980 lists, which would be even better. I do have a recent (as in last year) printout of the current BSFA membership (as used for the mailing labels), which if I remember rightly came to just short of 600 persons. It took about a year to reach 150 members; that means that the BSFA has expanded fourfold in fifty years. Is that something to be proud of or what?"

Dave Langford: "I think the finger is pointing at me. There came a time when the BSFA committee (a term which here means Maureen Kincaid Speller) decided it wanted direct control over the membership database, and Keith Freeman -- who for ages had been obligingly keeping the records on the mighty Reading U. computer facilities -- provided the list on disk. This was, as I remember, in 1994. Since Ansible Information had done a lot of work with 'Clipper' database apps for a client, I ran up a simple program to manage the list, which they used for quite a few years. So I still have a snapshot of BSFA membership circa 1994, with 859 records in the database."

Keith Freeman: "The Data Protection Act could indeed have been the reason for stopping publication of membership lists. My memory of when I was keeping the list is that it rose, at one point, to over a thousand -- but then dropped back again. The bi-monthly collating etc session I still remember (with horror -- but we managed to have a good laugh while doing them). My 'data base' was a collection of punched cards (two per member) that was pushed through the mainframe with a suitably written program to produce the mailing labels, and a list could have easily been produced. This was then transferred out of my hands and, I suspect, has gone through several forms since. The data I passed to Dave had some 'strange' figures on it (other than the membership number and date renewal due). That was a geographical code -- I could put in a location and get a list of members within a given radius of that point. My idea was to be able to put local fans in touch with each other (especially new members) -- but I don't think the idea was ever exploited."

PW: "What's coming out of all this for me is that the BSFA was running as hard as it could to stand still. I think the top priority should have been to address that terribly high rate of attrition. What is the point of advertising for new members if you're losing them almost as fast (and sometimes faster) than they come in? Maybe the committee should have talked to some of the lost souls, to see where the association failed to live up to their expectations -- and then DONE something about it! We can probably guess the reasons; poor value for money, not giving members what they really wanted, lack of personal contact, etc. The best we can probably hope for is that some of those drop-outs did at least get the general idea that there was a fandom out there, (hopefully) realised they didn't need the BSFA to hold their hand, and went on independently."

"We're back to something I wrote in an earlier editorial, that right from the beginning the BSFA has suffered from a lamentable *confusion of purpose*. Although started by fans to get new people into fandom (and specifically to attend conventions), it became burdened with pretentious and unrealistic aims which it never had any chance of achieving. It wasn't there to help new writers break into professional sales, it had no hope of improving the standard of science fiction, it was ludicrous even to think it could in some way 'represent' the SF field to the Press and outside world."

"What I said in *Prolapse #5* was that a word was missing from the title. I suggested 'Enthusiasts', but perhaps even better, 'Readers'. As the 'British Science Fiction Readers Association' it would all have been so much more straightforward -- just provide the things readers want -- news and reviews of books and magazines and information about where to get them; lists of books for sale, contact details for booksellers, overseas pen-pals (very useful for swapping books), that sort of thing. The library was a wonderful asset, if it had been marketed properly, and maybe the committee could have approached publishers, distributors, etc, to set-up special 'offers' and discounts to make membership a positive asset. Science fiction was hard to find until the seventies, especially imported material, and I bet more people would have remained members if they had been getting this sort of basic, helpful service. Not easy, I know, but how DO other hobby-organisations keep their members happy?"

"And yes, Greg, the BSFRA should also have promoted conventions, local groups and fanzines (particularly of the more sercon titles) because these are ways of encouraging members to meet and contact one another. And of course it should have hung on to the sponsorship of conventions for all sorts of reasons, not least because they're money-spinners."

Greg: "Yet despite everything I believe that the BSFA has had a fundamental influence on the way UK fandom developed over the last fifty years, so trying to understand what the BSFA intended to be, what it actually became, and whether or not it succeeded on its own terms is important as well. Part of that is getting an understanding of how the BSFA grew -- or failed to grow. Were its apparent aims congruent with or unrelated to the wants of the typical SF reader, or to the typical SF fan? Why don't all British fans, brought together by an enthusiasm for science fiction, belong to the BSFA as a matter of principle? Indeed, how many 'fans' would there have been without the BSFA? It must seem quite fantastic to anyone in North America who is familiar only with the N3F that many of us here are more than happy to engage seriously with any aspect of the BSFA. It has been a fundamental part of the British SF culture since 1958, even though some people (usually self-regarding 'fannish' fans, and yes I was once as guilty as the others) prefer to pretend otherwise."

"And a related observation, formed from having rooted through a lot of BSFA publications over the last few weeks; all those fans who whinge on periodically about wanting a good sercon fanzine about science fiction with lots of good reviews and stimulating articles and all that have of course been wilfully overlooking the BSFA all along. Why so, we wonder? For all its periodic -- regular, even -- faults, the level of good material in *Vector* has been pretty high over the years. Or am I just making the mistake of thinking that fans are interested in science fiction?"

"One final thing -- does anyone have a clue as to when the current BSFA origin-myth, came into use?"

"In 1958 a group of leading authors, publishers, booksellers and fans decided that Britain needed an organisation to encourage science fiction in every form. They set out to create an international forum that would bring together everyone interested in science fiction -- and they succeeded."

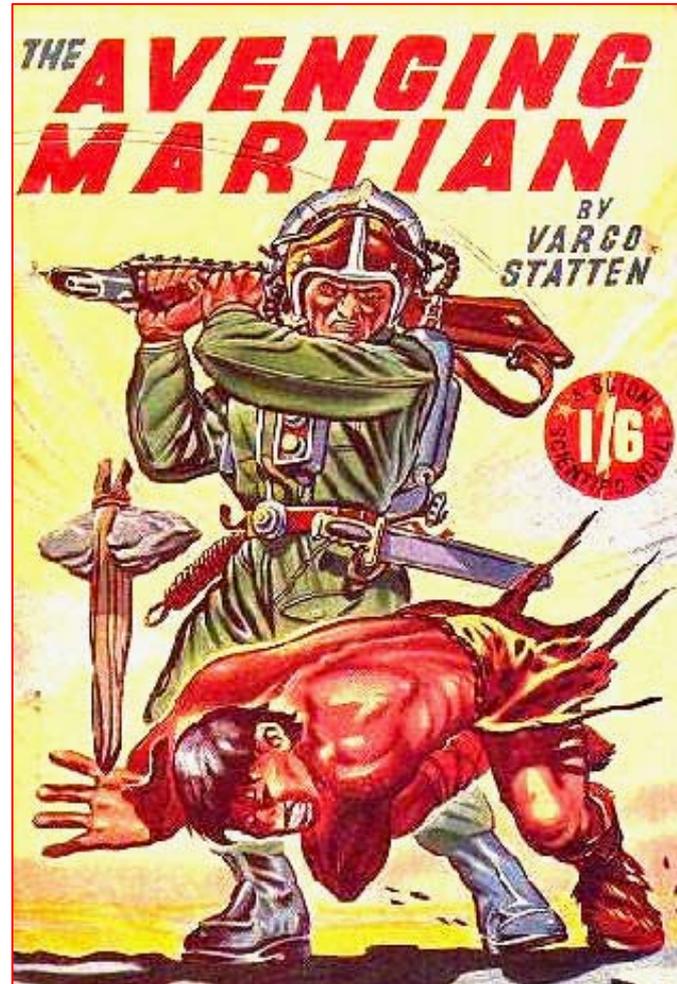
"It's part of the current self-image, but dates back to the 1980s at least. I'm interested because if looked at critically it is fantastically wrong and misleading. I'd like to know who actually wrote it. Current contender is, believe it or not, Audrey Walton of *Wadazine* fame." //

[My thanks to everyone who participated in this exchange -- PW]



George in 1957

Back in the old days the one thing fans had in common was their experience of hunting for SF in grubby second-hand shops and on market stalls. In Birmingham the legendary Cliff Teague did almost nothing else, roaming the junkshops of Ladypool Road with his battered cardboard suitcase, trading and wrangling to build his precious Collection. Sometimes he went further afield, hitch-hiking down to The Smoke on mysterious weekend excursions to return triumphant with new acquisitions – Ace Doubles and copies of *Planet Stories* and so on – at which the rest of us could only grit our teeth in envy. But someone else had been playing that game, and in this article George Locke reveals some of the mysterious places which Cliff must have visited!



George wondered how he would be able to understand all the sophisticated scientific speculations implicit in books like these!

A Boy and his Bike – or, Searching for Science Fiction in 1950s London

By George Locke

THIS BATCH of reminiscences revolves round the sources of science fiction in London in the 1950s, especially magazines and paperbacks of American origin, and how they – the paperback exchange shops – influenced the development of specialty fantasy dealers to come. The core of these reminiscences is a name which popped up recently in *Prolapse* – Alan Bale. But it'll take me a while to reach him.

I was born in 1936 and lived, during the war, near Coulsdon, a little south-west of London. Then, in the late 1940s, my parents and I moved to Crawley (midway to Brighton), although I still commuted to school in Clapham Junction. A couple of years later we returned to London, to occupy a flat near Chelsea Bridge. Half a century on, I can only pin down a Crawley date by reference to a book in my collection – Vargo Statten's *THE AVENGING MARTIAN* (1951).

It was while I was in Crawley that I became an avid SF reader. One Christmas my mother bought for me a paperback of Burroughs' *TARZAN AT THE EARTH'S CORE*. I was so captivated that I went out and bought, one by one, the rest of that 1/6 (later 2/-) Tarzan series of paperbacks, mainly from the W. H. Smith bookstall at Clapham Junction. What better occupation while waiting for a train than to browse that stall, festooned with the



Typical station bookstall in the Fifties – this one was at Waverley Station, Edinburgh. Rog Peyton met Cliff Teague when he was working at a similar station stand at Birmingham New Street during the early sixties.

But although I enjoyed the occasional Hank Janson, my developing true love didn't lie there. When I finished the Tarzan series I kept eyeing the SF on display at Clapham Junction. I picked the books up, one by one, but for a long time something stopped me from investing my pocket money in a specimen. The reason is still clear in my mind. Believe it or not, the words 'science fiction' put me off. I was having trouble at school distinguishing test tubes from Bunsen burners; how would I be able to understand all the sophisticated scientific speculations implicit in those books?

At last I took the plunge and invested 1/6 in *THE AVENGING MARTIAN*. And whaddaya know? I loved it. I understood every word. It was simplicity itself! And I was hooked. I had to buy and read every one of those lurid SF paperbacks, those of the immediate past as well as the current ones. Most of them – back numbers – weren't to be found on the railway stalls. So while in Crawley it was on my bike to visit East Grinstead and Horsham (and even Brighton on a couple of occasions). And when, in about 1952 we moved to London, it was across that city I went on my bike on my obsessive quest to track down those back numbers. I know I gathered together complete sets of Vargo Statten, *Authentic* (which then featured novels of a similar kind and length) and other 'mushroom publishers' SF paperbacks. I didn't bother then much with magazines, since I preferred the novel form to the short story, but that didn't prevent me from browsing them at the bookstalls. And I kept returning to an ad. on the back cover of *New Worlds* for a shop called 'The Fantasy Book Centre'.

It was, as far as I know, the first retail shop specialising in SF and fantasy to be set up in London. The shop was located in north-east London, in Stoke Newington, and it was inevitable that, as soon as I saved enough pocket money, that I would make my way there, using my bike or a number 73 bus. It was run by Frank Cooper (of whom I'm afraid I have no memories at all) and Leslie Flood.

As well as dealing in new and second-hand SF, it also ran a rental library. At some time during the early 1950s the FBC opened a more central branch in Sicilian Avenue, in Bloomsbury. It was run by Les Flood, who later used the title of 'Books and Music'; as time went by Les concentrated more and more on music and the SF book side of the business faded, probably at the same time as he developed the E. J. Carnell literary agency, which he acquired after Ted Carnell had died. Even so, his operation outlasted the original Stoke Newington business.

gaudy covers of Westerns (which never attracted me), American-style gangsters (such as Hank Janson), and science fiction (specially that of the King of science fiction writers, Vargo Statten). And also to read while waiting, bits and pieces from the S. Evelyn Thomas series of 'Laughs' books (several featuring covers by Giles, who seems to have made a recent come-back in *Prolapse!*)

Many of the kids at school were avid readers, especially of the Yankee gangster yarns. Hank Janson's *THE JANE WITH GREEN EYES* was especially praised by my peers, and I must admit that when I read it myself, the hints of soft-corn pornography it delivered were satisfactorily stimulating. Although I wasn't aware of it at the time, these gangster stories, so vivid to us, were cheap imitations of the real thing, the American crime stories of Chandler, Hammett and many others. That didn't stop the teachers from exhorting us against the perils of American fiction to such an extent that they instilled in me a sense that it was of poor literary quality and had to be avoided at all costs. The book that really turned the class on, though, was a real Yankee gangster – a fat Signet paperback called *THE HOODS*. That was made many years later into the Robert de Niro flick 'Once Upon a Time in America', and held up well to re-reading when the film came out.

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The FBC regularly took the inside back cover of *New Worlds* – indeed, it was the registered address of Nova Publications. This ad. is from #23, May 1954, and is the first mention of the Holborn shop.



Presentation of the International Fantasy Award for 1952 to Arthur C. Clarke for his book, THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE. From left, Frank Cooper, John Carnell, Clarke, G. Ken Chapman and Leslie Flood. (Photo from Les Flood)

An aside – in which George digresses to research the origins of the Fantasy Book Centre....

‘T’WAS A NIGHT before Christmas, and your faithful Trufan was masquerading as the Filthy Huckster, shivering in his shop at 27 Cecil Court. A fierce north-east wind howled through the court. I had some olde SF paperbacks on my rack outside. The wind coalesced into a miniature whirlwind, which picked up one of those paperbacks – something by Gill Hunt called TERRA! I raced outside to catch it – too late; a hirsute gent flogging the *Big Issue* had snatched it up. Well, good luck to him and Merry Christmas and all that jazz!

There was still an hour to go before I could close the doors for the holiday. I shivered some, and then had a brainwave. Downstairs in my hovel-like office I had a set of Wally Gillings’ printed fanzine of the late 1940s, *Fantasy Review*; all 18 numbers. I started to browse through them, looking for references to the old Fantasy Book Centre. In number 11, October/November 1948, I found the first reference – a half page ad for ‘Fantasy Magazine Library’, The Bookshop, 25 Stoke Newington Road, London N16. It was offering a library lending service and was the second such to offer its services in that magazine. The first had been for an outfit called ‘Fantasy Library’, a postal service operating from Bickley, in Kent and offering “All new American science fiction and fantasy on loan”. That Kentish operation had first advertised in number 9, for June/July 1948.

Number 12 repeated the Stoke Newington ad, but dropped the Kentish one; perhaps the Kentish firm had evolved into the Stoke Newington one; I have no way of knowing.

Number 13, February/March 1949, published an article on the genesis of Nova Publications. One of the prime movers of the enterprise and its first secretary was ex-RAF officer Frank A. Cooper, described as proprietor of Peach Cooper Libraries, whose “subscribers showed a distinct hankering for fantasy-fiction”. The first address of Nova Publications was also at 25 Stoke Newington Road, and the issue also featured an ad for The Fantasy Bookshop (Frank A. Cooper), now a retail bookshop as well as a rental library.

Number 16, for Autumn 1949, carried the first ad for the Fantasy Book Centre, at the Stoke Newington address. The ad also declared that it was the sole European representative of Gnome Press. (Preceding numbers of *Fantasy Review* were stiff with ads from other European agents for the specialty SF publishers – G. Ken Chapman Ltd for Arkham House, and E. J. Carnell for Shasta, Prime Press, etc.)

Number 17, Winter 1949/50, had a half-page ad for FBC, offering books, magazines and a library service. But nowhere in my set could I find any mention of Les Flood; he presumably came on board the FBC in the early 1950s. And it would seem that the first specialty SF bookshop in London evolved out of a rental library – I wonder who the “Peach” of the original Peach Cooper Libraries was...



Brian Aldiss & Les Flood outside the Fantasy Book Centre with two unknown ladies, mid-fifties. (Could that be Lee Hoffman?) The Italianate columns & terracotta tiles can just be seen, along with the overhead signs. (Photo; Les Flood)

There was no way I could afford to buy those new, so my strategy was to pester the life out of the FBC so that I could buy their battered ex-library copies at, if I remember rightly, 3/- each. Thus I was able to read the *Lensman* series. In those days only a handful of SF novels were being reprinted as paperbacks in the UK. And Harman's Library also had those American hardbacks which I was eventually able to buy after they'd done the rounds of their readers.

But it was the Yankee magazines I really wanted mostly – and I did not want the emasculated British reprint editions; I wanted the originals. The trouble was, they weren't readily available in Britain – SF or any other genre. Nor were magazines like *Confidential* or any of the comics, especially my favourites, *Mad* and *Panic*.

There were no restrictions on importing those magazines, except one, and that the most important of all – paying for them. Exchange controls prevented any importer from being able to send sterling out of the UK, and those controls lasted I think until the early 1960s, at least.* Even in the 1970s paying for American books was a mite difficult, which led me, when I started *Ferret Fantasy*, to obtaining an American account (which I still use, on occasion). Credit cards were in their infancy, and as for electronic cash transfers and the like – no such thing.

However there was nothing to prevent bartering from taking place, and those wanting to import magazines and comics developed American sources of one kind and another. One or two firms, like Dell's of Bradford, set themselves up as dealers in old SF and fantasy, selling books to American collectors in order to raise sufficient funds in US dollars to enable them to pay for the American magazines and comics they wanted to import. The first transaction of any size I was involved in as a dealer, in the early 1970s, was buying the residual stock of Dell's old fantasy and SF books which had been languishing in a warehouse ever since the exchange restrictions had been lifted and they could stop dealing in old books. But that's getting ahead of things again.

Back in the early 1950s I had only the FBC and Harman's library to keep my habit fed – until I was introduced to the Popular Book Centre in Shepherd's Bush. And that is really where fandom began, for me, although I didn't know it at the time, of course. I remember reaching that fabulous place after a longish bike-ride, and being stunned by the colourful shop window festooned with all kinds of magazines and comics, the like of which I'd never seen before in such numbers. And when I went in I was greeted by the firm's Saturday-only employee. We started to chat about SF, I told him I was keen on magazines, and he asked me whether I was trying to complete my file of *Astounding*.

The PBC's Saturday-man turned out to be Arthur Sellings, a British SF writer who had just begun to crack the better-paying American magazines, notably *Galaxy*. His real name was Arthur Ley; he used his wife's maiden name as his by-line. His day-job, as it were, was dealing in antiquarian books and curiously enough he traded under the name Gladys Ley! It was really down to Arthur that I became interested in Victorian SF, which led eventually to my making my living out of 19th and early 20th century genre fiction. Thus, he was my mentor in more ways than one.

Britain in the mid-20th century was still a nation of book borrowers rather than book buyers. The fiction-reading public not only fed its habit from the public libraries, but also from rental libraries, both major chains such as W. H. Smith and Boots, and small independents. I'm not sure when Smith's libraries ceased to operate, but those run by Boots were still around in the 1960s. A large number of independent rental libraries were also scattered around. Although most of them were killed off during the war, a few had survived into the 1950s and even the 1960s. I was never a book borrower, but a book buyer, so I didn't go to the rental libraries very often. In fact, only one stands out in my mind – Harman's, somewhere in north-east London, in the same general area as the Fantasy Book Centre.

The most captivating aspect of the FBC ads were the books; they not only offered the latest UK hardbacks, at 8/6 or thereabouts, they also offered American imports, especially those of the specialty publishers like Fantasy Press, Gnome Press and FPCI. Their usual price was 21/6, this being the UK equivalent of the \$3.00 cover price.

*[How did the FBC and Chapman manage to import their hardbacks, I wonder? I can only imagine they worked a barter-system too; or maybe they managed to get the occasional licence to send money abroad – it wasn't totally impossible, as I discovered myself in 1959. See 'Stars...' page 31. – PW]

In my opinion the Popular Book Centre was a major innovator in retailing. Recognising that many people didn't want to buy their books and magazines outright, but simply wanted to read them, they instituted a policy of 'half-price credit on return' against a future purchase. This was in effect a variant on the rental library system, but whereas the libraries handled hard-covers the PBC specialised in paperbacks and magazines. The clever bit of the scheme lay in the word 'credit', which meant that the firm never, ever, bought the titles back.

The books and magazines themselves were adorned (or defaced, according to your point of view) with two stamps – a big one which bore the name, address and other shop details, and a small one in which was written the price (usually only a tiny bit less than the full retail price, despite the often battered condition of the book). If the punter brought the book back (and there were no time limits, unlike for the libraries, and you were welcome to keep the book if you so desired), he would be allowed half-price towards the next book he took. If he brought in suitable books not purchased from the PBC he would be allowed credit on those, but a much smaller percentage. Thus, in theory at least, the firm wouldn't ever again have to put its hand in its pocket for stock.

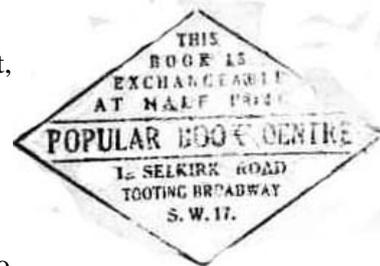
But the wares which were most in demand by the punters were of course the American magazines and comics. And there the transatlantic barter system was used. Although I got to know the PBC pretty well, working for them on Saturdays and during school and college holiday periods, I was, quite rightly, never party to how the firm obtained its American goods. The only thing I remember was a source with the curious name of Ub Iwerks, who lived in California. I gathered that he was the PBC's main source of supply, but what he received from the PBC in return I never discovered, although I did pick up a suggestion that it was vintage cars. If that was correct, then the PBC would have acquired some serious chunks of credit! It was only many years later than I discovered that Ub Iwerks was in fact a big name in the Walt Disney organisation; I suspect that if I spent some time on the google box I'd learn the truth about his vintage car activities.*

PBC was owned by Danny Grout and Stan Fletcher, two affable, more or less rotund individuals who had evidently started by operating a similar business in Brighton before moving to London. The Shepherd's Bush shop thrived to such an extent that within a few years there were several PBC shops scattered throughout London. The first branch to open was in Clapham Junction, near the summit of Lavender Hill, and the manager of that shop was a young, slightly built man called Alan Bale who was a keen reader and collector of SF. We became friends and, to some extent, rivals.

My most vivid memory of that period – and for the first time I can put a date to it – came in 1956, during the summer, when I was working in the Tooting branch of the PBC during my college holiday. A few years earlier Alfred Bester had caused a big stir with *THE DEMOLISHED MAN*, and his next novel was awaited with great eagerness, not only by SF fans, but by the magazine publishers themselves. For a while the epic was going to be serialised by *F&SF*, then by *Galaxy*. But while the negotiations were still continuing, the UK hardcover firm of Sidgwick & Jackson beat them all to the punch by producing it as the book *TIGER, TIGER*.

Both Alan and I urged Danny Grout to buy copies for our respective shops: "It'll be a huge success!" He did so with some reluctance. His reluctance turned into a state of being seriously pissed-off when, a week or two later, he discovered that both our copies were still sitting, un-bought, in their respective windows. Little did he know that they only stayed in the windows over-night; as soon as we opened the shops in the morning, out they'd come while we continued to read them, and re-read them!

It was through the PBC that I was introduced to fandom, Arthur Sellings taking me along to the Globe on a Thursday night. A little later Alan Bale also went to the Globe. The SF writer A. Bertram Chandler and his wife Joan had been regulars, but by the time Alan and I came onto the scene the family had broken up, ship's captain Chandler having sailed away to Australia. Joan was still coming to the Globe, often with her daughter Penny. Joan sometimes brought some books along to sell, and I remember buying several Theodore Sturgeon presentation copies signed to Chandler which still have pride of place in my collection. (One, *VENUS EQUILATERAL*, was presented by George O. Smith to Sturgeon, who in turn presented it to Chandler). In due course, Alan courted Penny, and they were married in 1960. Sadly, Joan passed away on 29th April this year.



Mother-in-Law? Legend has it that Joan Newman was the model for the cover painting on the Autumn 1952 *Science-Fantasy*.

* [I tried it; there are any number of references! Iwerks apparently animated virtually every frame of the very first Mickey Mouse cartoon, 'Plane Crazy' (1928). And years later he developed the technology that allowed for the combination of animation and live-action in Disney classics such as *The Three Caballeros*, *Song of the South*, and *Mary Poppins*. In fact, Iwerks won two Academy Awards for his work with Disney. With all that going on you wouldn't have thought he had time for trading paperbacks with some minor outfit in London! – PW]

It occurs to me when thinking about it that the majority of the SF shops in London in the late 1950s and early 1960s had their foundations in the Thursday evening fan meetings at the Globe. Maybe a few words about the Globe at the time might be in order here. Firstly, and most germane to this article – the meetings were a kind of marketplace. Several SF fans of the day, of a collecting bent, regularly brought books along to sell or swap, old books as well as modern ones. Fred C. Brown was perhaps the most active. He had been attending meetings at the Globe (and its predecessor, the White Horse) pretty much since they began, and one of the things I looked forward to was Fred's arrival on his motor-bike from the wilds of Essex. He was close friends with G. Ken Chapman, the leading specialist in antiquarian SF and fantasy, who operated from private premises in Norwood. As far as I recall I never saw him at the Globe but he could well have attended earlier meetings before phasing out of that scene. Fred probably regularly acquired books for Chapman, who had developed a network of 'runners' who scoured the bookshops of Britain for old fantasy on Chapman's behalf.

For a short time I also ran old books to Chapman to exchange for SF pulp magazines; I remember Chapman used to allow me credit of 3/- each. I've no idea, today, what books they were – whether some were rubbish but others rarities; I suspect a mixture of both. But when I learned of Dick Witter, who dealt in old SF from Staten Island and offered me a flat rate of \$3 each for my old books I'm afraid that I shifted my book-running allegiance. Eventually Dick evolved into the major book wholesaler in the SF field and was the prime source of supply for the later British specialty SF dealers who sprang up in the 1970s.



At The Globe in 1956. From left; (unknown), Pam Bulmer, Sam Youd, unknown, Daphne Buckmaster. Brian Burgess and Ted Tubb are at the bar, Fred Brown is between Pam and Sam and slightly to the rear. Vince Clarke (with beard) at table, with Ethel Lindsay (smoking). Others are unknown. Photo by Ellis Mill, provided by Rob Hansen from Ethel Lindsay's album.

A word about Fred Brown, who was one of the nicest people you could hope to meet. As a book collector, however, he had a couple of quirks. The first was that he loved to construct dust-jackets for his books, and would create colourful montages (which included cuttings from the original jackets themselves). Modern collectors, obsessed as they are with jackets in their original condition, would throw up their hands in horror at Fred's artistic efforts. These were, however, simple to spot, unlike the results of Fred's other quirk.

I remember popping into Bell, Book & Radmall, the cutting-edge dealers in Modern First Editions in Cecil Court, and John Bell proudly handing me a couple of Arkham House first editions signed 'Clark Ashton Smith'. I took one look at them and said: "Those signatures aren't genuine. They're fakes." And I explained that Fred Brown had the habit, when he had a copy of a book inscribed by the author, of copying that signature into other books by the same author. Fred's handwriting style was very distinctive and his 'signatures' usually so different from the genuine ones that anyone familiar with his handwriting would recognise them immediately. But there might well be unrecognised examples drifting round the world of SF even today. I don't think Fred ever intended to deceive anyone by deliberately forging those signatures; he just liked to write the authors' names in their books. But two or three owners down the line, when all provenance has been forgotten - be warned!

One of the books I acquired at the Globe was a first edition of Bill Temple's THE FOUR-SIDED TRIANGLE, an inscribed presentation copy to someone called 'Ron'. I have no idea, now, who I bought it from. But many years later, looking at the book again, it clicked: 'Ron' was really 'Lou' – Lou Mordecai, the landlord of The White Horse. When Lou moved from the White Horse to the Globe, fandom had followed him.

The success of the Popular Book Centre enterprise led inevitably to some imitators, two of which were started by ex-PBC employees. The first, and most successful, was Plus Books, started by Arthur Sellings himself. I remember that after he opened the first branch of Plus Books, Stan and Danny became distinctly cool towards me. Eventually, I asked why.

“You told Arthur all about Ub Iwerks.”

My jaw dropped. I coughed out my own version of ‘It wasn’t me, guv’: “I works? I’ve no idea what his details are. He’s only a name to me. Arthur must have gotten the full SP from someone else.”

They believed me, and relations warmed up again, but by then my interests had moved on; I was no longer interested in paperbacks and magazines, so I rarely visited the PBC again. I guess to some extent I had defected to Plus Books where I was able to bend Arthur’s ears with my ambitions to become an SF writer. His first shop was on the Caledonian Road, at the King’s Cross end, and two or three other branches were opened, including one in Merton in South London. I remember reading, a couple of years ago, some reminiscences by a current SF practitioner about the Merton shop. I believe Arthur had one or more partners in the enterprise, and when he died of a heart attack at the age of 46, his widow Gladys was somehow left out in the cold. (She was older than Arthur, went to Australia, I believe, and has long since passed away without any children). I attended Arthur’s funeral, and among the mourners were Les Flood and Bill Temple. Arthur and Bill were close friends.

A few years ago, Bill’s widow Joan sold Ferret Fantasy some books from his library and the remaining archive of his manuscripts (the bulk had gone to America ten years earlier). Among that material I found a long series of letters from Arthur to Bill (with carbon copies of Bill’s replies). The main sequence covered 1963 to 1968 and it provides a fascinating insight into the world of SF (and fandom). I describe the collection in the bibliography of my own collection, *A SPECTRUM OF FANTASY* (Vol. III), and quoted a long extract about their reactions to the film ‘2001: A Space Odyssey’.

Incidentally, without wishing to advertise (okay, so I *do* wish to advertise!), one of the manuscripts Ferret acquired from Bill’s archive was the unpublished comic novel about the life that he, Arthur C. Clarke and Maurice Hansen lived in their prototype Slan Shack in the late 1930s. Ferret published that novel in hardback (with other stuff) as *88 GRAYS INN ROAD*; copies are still available at £25 each.

But back to bookstores.

The other imitation of Popular Book Centre was opened in Chiswick by Alan Bale under the title of Premier Book Centres. I don’t think Alan ran it for too many years, but can’t be sure; by then my tastes in books had retreated to 19th century hardcovers, and I rarely went near the PBC and similar shops. I suspect that Alan didn’t find the shop sufficiently rewarding. He might have been passionate about SF, but he also had an even greater passion – Japanese swords. He quickly became renowned as an expert in that potentially very lucrative field, and about once every ten years I would run into him at auction sales when books were being sold at the same time as sales which had Japanese swords. While writing this article, I managed to contact Alan, and he seemed to be amiably agreeable to having a chat some time about the good old fannish days. Remind me to follow that up....

Although I have to say that Alan made no huge impact on the world of SF bookselling, he left a huge legacy. He had a kid working for him at his shop in Chiswick – a lad by the name of Derek Stokes. As soon as he had learned the ropes of the book trade, Derek, who liked to be known as ‘Bram’ Stokes, opened up an SF and Fantasy shop called ‘Dark They Were and Golden Eyed’, in Berwick Street Market in Soho; and the rest is history.

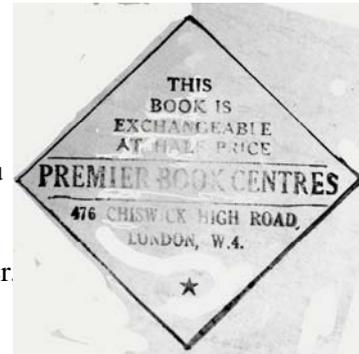
Talking of Soho, it was then, as I’m sure it is now, London’s centre for the smutty book trade. And during the fifties and sixties it was the only place where you could find such classics of both that and our genres as William Burroughs’ *THE NAKED LUNCH* and *NOVA EXPRESS*. One of the Globe habitués, a young man called Patrick Kearney, was as keen on The Olympia Press and William B. as another Michael Moorcock, was on Edgar Rice. Paddy, as I remember we used to call him, had as healthy an addiction to collecting as many of us, and eventually did what all good collectors should do – published a bibliography of his main quarry. In his book* about The Olympia Press he prints a splendid, anecdotal introduction which not only talks about the Popular Book Centre, but a similar shop in West London. This shop, run by someone that Paddy calls ‘Sammy’ (but who was really Alan Bale), might have some SF on the counter but its under-the-counter fare was strictly hardcore. Paddy describes his frequent trips to Paris and running bagfuls of the *TRAVELLER’S COMPANION* and other paperbacks to the West London shop. [*see www.Amazon.com for ‘The Paris Olympia Press’]



Arthur Sellings, from *New Worlds* #49, July 1956



Above; Alan Bale in the early 1960s. Photo from Ramsey Campbell.



Another Globe attendee had his roots more firmly planted in Paris: Maxim Jakubowski. Like Kearney, his interests moved away from SF. Although I gather that he too, imported Olympia Press books, supplying them to folk like J. G. Ballard (as I remember reading, somewhere), he became deeply involved in the world of mystery fiction, especially the *noir* practitioners inspired by and following on from Chandler and Hammett, such as Jim Thompson. Although his activities were more on the editing side he eventually opened a specialty bookshop, around the time when 'The Forbidden Planet' was formed. Called 'Murder One', it was tucked somewhere in the hinterland between New Oxford Street and Shaftesbury Avenue.

When, a year or three later, it moved to larger premises in a new block on Charing Cross Road, he added a large SF section in the basement. Andy Richards, a collector who had started a mail-order business called 'Cold Tonnage Books' specialising in SF and fantasy, provided the large second-hand element of the SF section. The set-up was very successful, but a couple of years ago Maxim moved across the street to a smaller shop, and there was no longer any room for a dedicated SF section. But this is jumping ahead.

We're talking about the early 1970s now, when the explosion of SF specialty shops in London really took off. The following remarks are based purely on memory, and I may not have got the order of events quite right. By then I had started to deal, part-time (I was a sub-editor on *The Pharmaceutical Journal*) in old SF and fantasy, and formed a partnership with John Eggeling, whom I'd met at the Globe. We called ourselves 'Atvatabar Book Service', and stayed together for about a year before we went our separate ways, John to go into the business full-time while I continued dealing as a hobby, calling myself Ferret Fantasy.

By this time, two other SF fans and Globe habitués, Ted Ball and Dave Gibson, also got together to set up as SF book dealers. I first encountered their business tucked away in the basement of one of the antique markets in the Portobello Road. They didn't stay there long – perhaps for only a few weeks. They then moved to a shop near the Notting Hill Gate end of Portobello Road, became associated with Stan Nicholls, and operated for a while as, I think, 'Bookends'. (I'm sure that Stan can fill you in with the details of that enterprise; I was merely a [very] occasional customer – a spectator from afar, as it were.) I believe that for a short time, John Eggeling also joined the 'Bookends' enterprise.

Anyway, within a year or three, all these folk had started their own businesses. Ted and Dave opened a shop in the Kensal Rise area and called themselves 'Fantasy Centre'. (The original Fantasy Book Centre had by this time disappeared completely). Ted and Dave were in the Kensal Rise shop for a year or two before finding larger premises in Holloway Road, where the Fantasy Centre is still in business. John Eggeling, meanwhile, had opened a shop in Dulwich as 'Phantasmagoria Books'.

Bram Stokes' 'Dark They Were and Golden Eyed' operated from the Berwick Street for a few years, becoming heavily oriented towards comics before moving to larger premises, also in Soho. The impression I have is that they over-stretched themselves, for within two or three years they had ceased to trade. Meanwhile, Stan Nicholls and Mike Lake had opened 'The Forbidden Planet', in New Oxford Street, concentrating on newer material – comics, graphic novels, all that sort of thing.

Where all these enterprises were (and in some cases still are) concerned, I was really a spectator from afar, so am unable to provide any insights. As I said, 'Fantasy Centre' is still in business and still concentrates on the second-hand and collectors' market (Dave Gibson retired many years ago, and Erik Arthur is now Ted Ball's partner). 'Forbidden Planet' has moved to the end of Shaftesbury Avenue and still seems to be thriving. John Eggeling relinquished his shop many years ago and started dealing mail-order in old fiction generally. I haven't heard from him for nearly a decade but I am told that he is still in business.

The paperback exchange shops are nearly all gone now, although Alan Bale tells me that Popular Book Centre still operates a shop in the Victoria area. None of the newer specialty SF and fantasy shops, even those handling large numbers of paperbacks, adopted the 'half price credit on return' theme; perhaps that particular marketing tactic, a child of post-war austerity, withered on the vine of an increasingly prosperous (on paper at least) Britain from the 1970s.

And me? Now, significantly into my seventies, I've just opened, for the first time, a street-level bookshop. I must be mad – but I keep telling myself that it's a chance to shift forty-year's worth of accumulated stock. So why do I keep buying? Because that's where the fun lies. Selling is boring – and in these days of the internet – not as easy as it used to be. //



Pat Kearney at *Bullcon*, 1963. Photo by Bruce Burn.



Ted Ball in 1964. Photo by Dick Howett.

– George Locke, 2008

George's fascinating booklet, *SCIENTIFUNCTION DAYS IN MANHATTAN* describes his trip to New York to attend the auction of Sam Moskowitz's collection. Rich with descriptions and anecdotes of interest to a book collector, it is available at £25.00. Also available is his 3-volume work, *A SPECTRUM OF FANTASY*, an in-depth exploration of his massive collection of early SF and fantasy, including fanzines. Contact George for these and other titles at: george_locke@hotmail.com

And here's a more recent look at the magical world of the second-hand SF bookshops. Well, 'recent' is a relative term; this is actually two separate articles bolted-together, the first having appeared in the August 1977 issue of Greg's fanzine, *Stop Breaking Down*. The second part was written in 2000 for the *Memory Hole* mailing list, and as Greg comments, "it's amazing as it shows how little my writing style has changed over the years." The combined piece appeared in *Easter Wine*, a fanthology produced by Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer for *Seacon '03*, and while I wouldn't normally run something so recently reprinted elsewhere, this is so spot-on apposite that I just couldn't resist!

THINK I'M GOING BACK

By Greg Pickersgill

A while ago I did something which was pretty much as near to a holy pilgrimage as anything I've ever done. Simone and I just so happened to be rooting about in Tooting, which is a much better name than the rather dull and almost completely uninteresting area of London it is attached to deserves. It's part of the rough, grubby, nasty, and downright bloody miserable part of London South of the Thames. We'd gone there deliberately, working on the principle that such 'quaint' little backwaters often have whole rows of second-hand shops in which one might, one day, pick up for a purely nominal fee whole runs of *Weird Tales* or *Science Fiction Monthly*, or complete mint sets of Lemon Pipers singles or Troggs albums. You know, typical collector's fantasy.

Anyway there we were, rooting, finding nothing but typical outer-suburban cheap and nasty remaindered-goods shops or places selling real junk, not the classy esoteric rubbish we were after. Wandering down the road we found ourselves in a place called Colliers Wood, which isn't a wood at all, but a horrid windswept plain containing one of the most far-flung Underground stations and a lot of nondescript light industrial sites. Anyway, something turned over in my mind at the sight of the Colliers Wood street-sign, so at my urging we plodded on through the light drizzle and driving wind, around corners and over long-abandoned canal bridges until magically, and for the nth time proving that I'm Right at least 75% of the time about 75% of things, Colliers Wood High Street transmuted before our very eyes into Merton High Street.

And sure enough, right ahead, was number 19 Merton High Street, a name and number which could well raise memories in people who first got into buying lots of SF in the middle sixties, particularly if I add that the whole address is actually 19 Abbey Parade, Merton High Street. Yeah, right, that Leroy Kettle over there; it is in fact the home of PLUS BOOKS mail order operation, the outfit you first discovered (along with Les Johnson of Liverpool) when you searched frantically for SF pushers in the book/magazine section of *Exchange & Mart*.

Well, out in the rain whole waves of nostalgia swept over me. Apart from being a regular mail-order customer I had actually once visited the shop, a Big Deal as I'd lived 250 miles away at the time. I can hardly remember when; '69 perhaps, maybe '68 or before. But visit it I had done and with great profit too, coming away with two big boxes of stuff including whole years of *Amazing* and *Fantastic* and generally filling lotsa gaps in my collection. Spent about £15, which was a Lot in those days. I must have been quite young too, as I remember the bloke in the shop making some sarcastic remarks about how his mother wouldn't "have allowed him to waste so much money on a load of trash". I remember making some feeble rationale at the time, and feeling obscurely guilty about the whole self-indulgent transaction.

Back in the running world the shop looked just the same; same flaking yellow paint, same rundown, desolate street, same grey sky lowering over the oddly small building (South London buildings are short, hardly ever over two stories), even the same crossing that I unthinkingly ran across joyfully bearing my sci-fi booty on that long ago day. I was almost run down by a van driven by a young black guy, who pulled up so sharply he was almost hit by three cars himself. He wasn't happy about it.

So after dithering a bit we went in. Somehow incredibly it was just the same. Racks of romances, westerns, glamour mags (as they so quaintly label them), comics, and right ahead, just where it was before, the SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY CORNER, labelled in letters just that big. Fantastic. I was amazed. Just like I'd never been away. There's a great feeling of permanence and stability comes over you at times like that, gives you the feeling that you actually know what is going on, and that everything will work out alright after all. Knockout! And stap me if it wasn't the same feller running the shop too; bit balder, his remaining hair a bit longer, a bit paunchier (I let comparisons with Roger Peyton, purveyor of Fantastick Literatchur to the Gentry cross my mind) but himself nevertheless. Even as I rooted through the racks my mind raced through possible scenarios; "Hi, I'm the kid who came in here years ago and spent a lot and you said..." or even a line I'd seriously considered on that long ago day when I almost truly believed that anyone doing such a public work as selling SF would be only too pleased to meet his customers and bandy a little repartee and reminiscence with them: "Hello, I'm G.F. Pickersgill, of The Pines, Haylett Lane, Merlins Bridge, Haverfordwest, Pembs, and I send you orders every fortnight".

Naive and foolish okay, and I never tried it either time, but maybe as Simone said when I explained the thought to her (in a voice just loud enough for the Man to hear, just in case he was listening and could be entranced by my memories too – truly, I am starry-eyed to the last) just about anyone would remember a name and address like that, even decades later. However, he wasn't listening and didn't care even if he was, and there wasn't even much worth buying. Good things can't last.

I bought a few things; a copy of the passably rare Philip Dick collection A HANDFUL OF DARKNESS which I gave to Malcolm Edwards as a bribe for something I've long since forgotten so it can't have worked, a copy of *New Worlds* 72 which I later discovered I'd already got, *Science Fantasy* 22 which I did not have and was a true find, and the latest issue of *Fantastic* which I got more for old times sake than anything else as it was as dull an issue as usual these days. No sets of *Weird Tales*, not even a decent clutch of Ziff-Davis Amazings. Even the porn section wasn't worth more than a quarter of an hour's casual glance. Still, it was nice, good memories are hard to find.

This next bit was written on the 23rd November 2000 for the Memory Hole Mailing List and is really a continuation of the same story, even though the events detailed actually happened BEFORE those recounted in the SBD piece. It's a Stephen R Baxter world.....

On Wed, 22 Nov 2000 15:08:03 EST, Jhim Linwood wrote:

> Bill's daughter married London fan Alan Bale and they lived -with
> their baby over the Chiswick High Street branch of the Premier
> Book Centre in the 60's which he managed with the assistance
> of Bram Stokes who went on to higher things. Anyone know what
> happened to Alan?

Incredible as it may seem, the name Alan Bale is seldom far from my upper consciousness. When I was a young and serious SF reader and collector, back in the old days when hardly any SF existed and you just bought everything on the off-chance it was worth reading, I was a big fan of Premier Book Centres. I'm sure I was totally unaware that they were part of a chain (no matter how short) but somehow I'd come across an announcement that they were doing US-import SF by mail order from the Chiswick address. All this is over thirty years ago now but I still have vivid memories of getting their regular (duplicated on foolscap) lists with all those authors and publishers (Piers Anthony! Ballantine!) that you just didn't see in the shops round Merlin's Bridge. Hah, you didn't see them in the shops anywhere on the island at that time, probably.

I'd spend hours reading and re-reading those lists, making endless tick-marks and corrections as I worked out how to balance what I Absolutely Must Have against the actual pitiful sum of money available. Then the endless agonising wait for the package to be delivered, rushing out to the garage every morning to check (we did things differently back there and then!) until it actually arrived.

Wow, you can't believe how New and Alien it all seemed; US paperbacks seemed to be made of different stuff to your standard British Corgi or Panther, with brighter covers (not necessarily better – the Panthers of the mid-Sixties with the 'melted glass' covers and the Penguin Surrealist-detail series are still design classics), tighter binding, even the paper felt different. And that's not even getting into the sheer wonderment and novelty of knowing I'm reading something new and rare. The idea that I was into something that very few people in the British Isles were party to might have been slightly illusory, but also somehow powerful; way back then I used to be a determined proselytiser for SF but at the same time there was something peculiarly fascinating about being possibly the only person in Wales with a copy of CHTHON or whatever. Daft.

Anyway, there seemed to be a very personal hand at work on the other end – there'd be occasional notes and information tagged onto catalogues or with packages. I felt I was dealing with a fellow fan in some way. (At much the same time as all this I was also buying books from the mail-order arm of Plus Books, just like PBC a second-hand book & magazine shop chain with an import SF line but I never got the co-conspirator feel I got from Premier Book Centre.)

Anyway, time went on and at my second convention in Oxford in 1969 (*Galactic Fair!* Gerry Webb! John Brunner! – and Joe Mugnaini's animation 'HEAT OF TEN THOUSAND SUNS, one of the most remarkable short films I've ever seen – whatever happened to it?) I met Roy Kettle. Had I But Known, indeed.... However it all seemed quite wonderful at the time, especially as he was also a PBC customer. Wow, commonality! To cut to the chase this all led to my one and only visit to the shop.

I'd gone up to Coventry where Kettle was at university and stayed with him for a couple of weeks (this

should have proved quickly enough that we didn't have that much in common or even an awful lot of friendship, but somehow we both persisted with the illusion for far too many years thereafter) and one of the things we did was take a day trip to London specifically to go to the PBC.

When we eventually got to Chiswick High Road the shop was shut. This seemed disastrous – neither of us had had enough sense to phone ahead and check on opening times. For some reason that eludes me to this day we endlessly hung around outside rather than simply going to a nearby pub and coming back to check occasionally. Probably lack of money, if the truth be told. It seemed to be hours before anything happened and then this rather fannish-looking type (glasses, untidy, you know...) wandered along aimlessly and opened up. Alan Bale.

I'd love to be able to recount the next hour or so in detail but I can't. All I can recall is sifting through masses of books and magazines of all kinds, endlessly computing how much I could afford to buy, and exchanging comments about books and so on with both Kettle and Bale. Two things stand out – the first haunts me to this day. In a pile of boxes along one side of the shop was what Alan claimed was an almost complete set of *Weird Tales*. I opened a couple and was appropriately amazed – these were things you only read about if you lived in West Wales – it seemed almost beyond understanding that anyone would actually be selling them, they were so rare.

It transpired that Alan wanted £75 for the lot – a fantastic sum of money in those days, well over a month's salary for most people. But at the time my brain almost exploded with the sheer cheapness of it, the fact that you could get them at all, the chances of borrowing, stealing, selling something, to get that 75 quid.... All came to nothing, of course, but I lived a dozen complex scenarios in my head within two minutes of him saying how much he wanted for them. Anyway, I bought a bagful of *Fantasy & Science Fiction* and some other recent magazines and was bloody glad to get them, and we left.

The other thing I recall about Alan was that he was seriously interested in Japanese culture, particularly the samurai (something of a common thing at the time – one-time fan and present Fortean BNF Bob Rickard was also a Japanophile). Alan though seemed to be taking it seriously to the point of wanting to emigrate to Japan, in those days a fairly unusual concept as there was still a certain suspicion of the Japanese due to the Second War, and all of the disparaging beliefs that accompanied that; even Honda motorcycles were viewed with deep suspicion, and there was no concept at all of the coming Japanese domination in electronics!

I met Alan a couple of times after that at conventions (a couple of *Novacons* in the very early Seventies, maybe also *Eastercon 22* at Worcester in 1971) – we weren't friends or anything but he was a pleasant and interesting person. I'm sure that he did say he positively intended going to Japan with his family but as to whether that happened I don't know. Like Jim Linwood I'd certainly like to know what happened to him – for a while he was important in my life.

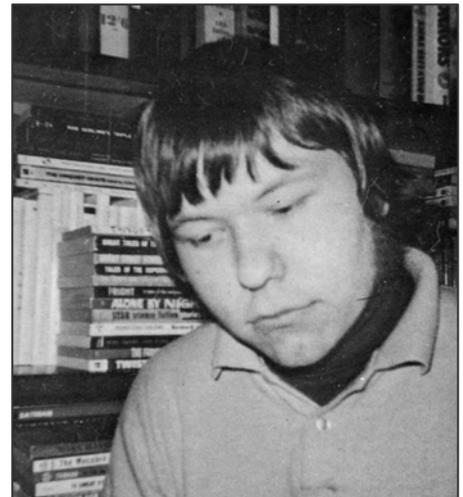
As to why he often comes to mind these days, well, apart from my usual wallowing in nostalgia for the Good Old Days of being a neofan and that fabulous Back When SF was a rare and prized thing, I pass down the Chiswick High Road surprisingly often. Catherine's sister lives in Chiswick and when we visit we drive down the High Road and I invariably try to remember and locate that once-important shop. It doesn't help that I can't remember the number (386? 485?) but anyway it's probably a coffee shop today, Chiswick's become that kind of place. // – Greg Pickersgill

In the Fifties & Sixties the specialist London bookshops were pretty much hole-in-the-wall affairs, catering to a few SF nuts like George Locke, Cliff Teague and Greg Pickersgill. But did they miss an opportunity? Could real money be made out of selling science fiction? With growing affluence, the increasing popularity of fantasy and the arrival of TV/film spin-offs the rules of the game suddenly changed and the first person to spot the emergence of this new market was on to a very good thing indeed....

‘Forbidden Planet and other creations....’

By Stan Nicholls

Stan in 1968; photo from *Gothique*.



There are a few points in George Locke’s interesting piece I’d like to enlarge upon, as well as adding some observations of my own. First, although his article is concerned with the London specialist bookshop scene, honourable mention should be made of several SF dealers who fall outside its remit geographically but who deserve to be acknowledged as pioneers in the field. I’m thinking of Ken Slater for Operation Fantast, and later Fantast (Medway) in Wisbech; there should also be recognition of G. Ken Chapman, of Norwood, the British distributor of Arkham House books. These and a handful of others were influential people who helped inspire the London specialists who followed them; and let’s not forget Rog Peyton with Birmingham’s Andromeda Books, the longest-running SF bookshop in the country until its demise a couple of years ago.

As George rightly notes, one of the first shops that can properly be called an SF specialist was run by Leslie Flood. Les, who sadly died recently after retiring to Spain, was trading as Books and Music in Sicilian Avenue, Holborn when I discovered him in the early ‘60s. By then the shop was definitely more ‘Music’ than ‘Books’, with the SF stock dwindling in favour of the more lucrative vinyl side of the business. Les’s change of career to literary agent, when he took over the late Ted Carnell’s agency, sealed the shop’s fate. It became a sandwich bar.

There were a few other places in London apart from Books and Music where science fiction could be found before the advent of the true specialist shops in the mid to late ‘60s. They weren’t science fiction stockists as such, but they did carry a wider range than the average bookshop. A principal example was Newport Books in Newport Court, a pedestrian alleyway – rather seedy in those days – connecting Charing Cross Road and Gerrard Street in Soho. Its mainstay was soft porn and general paperbacks. But it also had a good selection of SF books and magazines. I visited it almost every week and it was where I picked up current issues of *Analog*, *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Amazing*, *Fantastic*, *Galaxy*, *If*, etc, which weren’t otherwise easy to find. It was also a good place to buy American monster magazines, like Forry Ackerman’s *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and *Spacemen*, for which I had a passion at the time. Newport Books was run by a little old white-haired lady, who was quite nice when you got to know her but who had a steely side to her nature (no doubt a necessary quality when dealing with some of the denizens of Soho).

The Popular Books and Premier Books chains were probably the most visible source of SF although their practice of rubber-stamping their often tatty stock made them more attractive to casual readers than collectors.* Premier Books, owned by Alan Bale, another significant figure in the history of British SF retailing, played an important role in paving the way for the wave of specialist shops that were on the horizon.

Alan was quite open about the fact that he launched his first Premier Books shop, in Chiswick, in imitation of the Popular Books chain. He offered a wide selection of used SF in the Chiswick shop but his innovation was to import new American science fiction and fantasy paperbacks. As far as I know, his was the first shop to do it. I remember that he stocked the Lancer editions of Robert E. Howard’s *Conan* books with Frank Frazetta covers, and it was the only place you could get them. The Chiswick shop was successful enough that he opened a second in Camden Town, North London, close to where I lived. The person he employed to manage it was someone who would have a key role in the development of the specialist shops, Derek Stokes.

* [In Birmingham there was a so-called ‘exchange’ shop on the Moseley Road/Belgrave Road corner where the owner thought a good way of identifying his stock was to paste the inside cover to the contents page, thus completely ruining the book or magazine, as Cliff once pointed out to him in no uncertain terms before being thrown out of the shop! – PW]



Bram Stokes at Sci-con, 1970. Photo from Bill Burns.

Derek ('Bram') Stokes got a taste for fantastic literature in his teens when illness confined him to bed for a year. Someone brought him some science fiction books to fill the time and he spent that year devouring novels and British reprint pulp magazines. Later, when he was fit and able to hunt for more of the same for himself, he was frustrated by the lack of supply. Managing the Camden Town Premier Books he found that he wasn't alone – there were plenty of potential customers for science fiction. So he quit and started his own business which was originally called 'The Vault of Horror'.

This was a mail-order business based in a spare room of a tumbledown house owned by one of Derek's friends in Camden Town. It began trading on 1st January 1967. I know that because I was his first customer. A couple of minutes after midnight, in the middle of a party, I bought an item from him for 15/-. As I was the first customer, and it was New Year and we were full of conviviality and cheer and the item *was* rather over-priced, I asked him if he could manage a discount. He said no. Derek was always a sharp operator.

Before that year was out he had moved the business to a lock-up garage in Baron's Court, West London. Not long after he found a tiny shop in Bedfordbury, a back street in Covent Garden. He also changed the name of the company to 'Dark They Were and Golden Eyed', a reference from one of Ray Bradbury's Martian stories.

In 1971 I left my first job with a library export company (where one of the other employees was Jill Mason, later to become Jill Armstrong-Bridges), and opened my own bookshop 'Bookends' in Bayswater, just on the border with Notting Hill Gate. I did this in partnership with someone called Richard Lawton who wasn't really an SF enthusiast (he was a Hatton Garden silversmith). Later we were joined by Steve Moore, best known as a scriptwriter for British comics and for his association with *Fortean Times*. Bookends was a general bookstore with a particular interest in science fiction.



John Eggeling in 1969. Photo by Bill Burns.

Later, we converted the shop's basement into a sales area and let it to John Eggeling, who I think had either just ended his partnership with George Locke (as Atvatabar Books) or was still loosely associated with him. John traded as 'Bookends Science Fiction Service' although his business and ours were quite separate, and he sold stock both in the shop and by mail order. This suited us as it meant we could offer customers a much better selection of science fiction, and the rent was an additional, welcome source of income. The following year John went into partnership with Ted Ball and Dave Gibson and they moved into our rapidly filling basement too, trading as 'Fantasy Centre'.

Bookends was fun but no great financial success, and we gave it up in late 1973. Before then, John, Ted and Dave had dissolved their own partnership and gone their different ways. Ted and Dave, retaining the Fantasy Centre name, moved to their own shop in Kensal Rise. Eventually they shifted to premises in the Holloway Road where the business still operates (though I understand it may soon be closing, or migrating to the net, in the face of a rent review that will almost certainly result in a massive increase, this being London).

John secured a place in Dulwich and traded there as 'Phantasmagoria Books' for a number of years. These days he runs a mail order business, 'Todmorden Books', with his wife Judith in Lancashire.

Dark They Were had become very successful in the little shop in Bedfordbury. (An interesting aside is that Derek Stokes let a young comics fan use the shop's hand-cranked duplicator to produce his first fanzine on the premises. That fan was Nick Landau, who with others would have a profound effect on future events. But more on that in a moment.) Having outgrown Bedfordbury, by 1973 Derek had moved to a larger shop in Berwick Street market, Soho. He was someone who had an almost uncanny ability to make money, and he deserves credit for spotting and exploiting a niche market. What he lacked, or had no particular interest in, was the organisational aspects – the little details like keeping accounts, stock control and paying taxes. But he did know a fusspot when he saw one and asked me to work for him as his manager, and later, Company Secretary.

An amusing, some would say surprising, fact about the Berwick Street shop was that the landlords were the Salvation Army. Surprising because they owned most of the buildings in the block where Dark They Were was situated, and it was one of the few business there you might call respectable. Many of the others were sex shops or strip clubs, and a lot of the flats above were occupied by what were euphemistically known as 'working girls'. I recall a conversation about this with an agent from the



The Bedfordbury shop today – still a specialist business! Photo by Bill Burns.

Sally Army. He muttered something about “Using the Devil’s money to fight the Devil’s work”. Hmm. Anyway, Berwick Street soon became too small and Derek decided on another move, to a shop in St Anne’s Court, between Wardour Street and Dean Street, at the heart of Soho. The shop was big, new, shiny and very expensive. These overheads were almost certainly an important factor in the eventual closure of DTWAGE.

While I was working there Derek took on Mike Lake as another employee. Mike, a dedicated comics enthusiast, was obsessed with the idea of opening his own specialist shop. He wanted to call it ‘Forbidden Planet’. After I left DTWAGE in 1977 I was approached by Mike, who had quit Derek’s employ before me. He’d formed a partnership with the aforementioned Nick Landau and Mike Luckman, who had previously been a teacher. They wanted to start two businesses – the Forbidden Planet shop, and Titan Distributors, a wholesaler supplying American imported stock to the many comics shops springing up around the country. They asked me to manage the shop. Lake, Landau and Luckman were comics fans and movie enthusiasts. They knew next to nothing about science fiction literature and had read little if any of it. As they saw the core of the shop being SF books and wanted an experienced manager, they needed someone like me. But while they lacked knowledge of the science fiction field they had something practically nobody else in the burgeoning specialist shops possessed – business degrees – Nick Landau in particular, who’d studied marketing and retail psychology. They were determined to put SF bookselling on a professional footing.



Nick Landau today. Photo: Forbidden Planet website

All they had at that point was a garage in Shepherd’s Bush where we worked for the first couple of months. It was so crowded with stock that when it rained we tossed a coin for who had to stand outside and get wet. But then a shop was found in Denmark Street, or Tin Pan Alley as it’s still known, a centre of the London music industry, off Charing Cross Road. Paul Hudson, another one-time DTWAGE employee, was taken on to run the comics department. The owners wanted to open with a bang and asked me to come up with a star guest for the launch. I suggested Philip Jose Farmer. So we brought him and his wife Bette over for a week. THE MAGIC LABYRINTH – the latest volume in the Riverworld Series – had just been published in the U.S. and we imported as many copies as we could lay our hands on. The book, and the launch, went like a bomb.

Phil and Bette Farmer were charming and I was besotted with being able to spend time with one of my SF heroes. During that week we visited a cemetery in south London to find the tomb of one of *Farmer’s* heroes, the Victorian explorer and Riverworld-protagonist Sir Richard Burton. The tomb is extraordinary; a stone version of an Arabian tent. There’s an iron ladder that takes you to a window on the roof. You can look down into the tomb and make out the coffins of Burton and his wife lying side by side, with a small ornate table between bearing an Arabic coffee pot and cups. The cemetery was neglected and very overgrown and the tomb was in disrepair. Phil Farmer was disappointed at the state of it. We managed to arrange an interview with him for *The Times*, where he mentioned the sorry state of Burton’s resting place. That helped start a campaign which led to the tomb’s renovation.

Forbidden Planet was a success from day one. It even weathered a glitch in its second or third month when HM Customs & Excise seized one of our shipments of books from America because somebody had anonymously informed them that it contained pornography. I wouldn’t speculate on who that might have been. There was a kind of Klondike gold rush atmosphere in those early years when the specialist SF and comic shops were mushrooming in London and jockeying for trade. A certain level of mischief wasn’t unknown.

The immediate popularity of Forbidden Planet – and competition from several other, small SF and comics shops that popped up shortly after in central London, all short-lived – increased pressure on Dark They Were, which was struggling with its high outgoings. DTWAGE’s customers were deserting it for FP, or at least splitting their spending between the two. One reason was that cash-flow problems meant DTWAGE had trouble acquiring stock, particularly from America. Another problem was more intrinsic. Without wishing to sound unkind the fact is that service standards were less than perfect. Perhaps this was because of having a monopoly for so long, but Derek’s temperament may also have been a factor. He could be abrasive, and some of his staff adopted the boss’ example so that there was a culture in the shop that tended to take customers for granted.*

That’s perilous in any business and particularly for a specialist, which doesn’t have an inexhaustible pool of customers to draw on. It certainly acted as a recruiting sergeant for Forbidden Planet. In those early days many people told us how pleased they were that there was an alternative. That was an aspect DTWAGE could have done something about and it was a shame they didn’t. But they were in a tail-spin. Less than a year later, mired in debt, the shop closed. Dark They Were was a pathfinder and deserved a better fate. There was room enough for both it and FP and competition could have benefited the customers of each. Derek Stokes had the chutzpah to go into SF retailing in a big way and was well rewarded for a decade or more – at the shop’s height he was a millionaire on paper. It was a pity he lost it all. After the shop folded he moved to Lancaster where he now pursues other interests.

* [I’ll say! When I called in a few times at Berwick Street in the early seventies on my occasional trips to London I could hardly get a word out of Bram Stokes – surly little brute, I thought, and the kids helping him were worse. – PW]

With no major competitors Forbidden Planet grew ever more successful. We followed Philip Farmer with a series of other events featuring authors, artists and filmmakers, including an appearance by the cast of *Star Wars*, and Douglas Adams' first signing. Something happened in relation to one of those events which none of us will ever forget. We had arranged to have the main writers and artists of the comic *2000AD* for a Saturday signing, and at about 4.00 am that morning I got a call from the police. They said there had been an incident and they needed to get into the shop. All they'd tell me was that it had something to do with a fire. There had been a fire, but not in the shop. Behind Denmark Street is a mews; in those days it would more accurately have been described as an alley, a dingy muggers' paradise lined with lock-up garages. Among other things, it was the place where all those grubby hot dog stands that used to infest the West End were stored. It also housed an illegal drinking den that catered for South American immigrants.

We didn't even know the place existed though it was just a few yards from Forbidden Planet's back door. It operated at night, and discreetly. Somebody with a grudge had fire-bombed it. The club was crowded at the time and there was only one exit. Over thirty people were trapped inside and burnt to death. It was the biggest peacetime massacre in the city's history. The paramedics ran out of body bags and had to use FP's plastic rubbish sacks to wrap the corpses. It was too late to cancel the *2000AD* signing, so we had hundreds of comic-book fans, some dressed in costume, having their comics signed at the front of the shop while outside the open back door the charred bodies were lined up. A putrid smell of burnt timber, and worse, lingered for days. Who said bookselling's a genteel profession?

In 1980, Forbidden Planet opened a branch in New York, on the corner of Broadway and 42nd Street. I helped get it started and worked there on and off for its first few months of business. Back home, in 1981, the owners were moving towards another ambition and planning the launch of Titan Books. It was primarily intended as a publisher of comic-book anthologies and graphic novels. They were also thinking of publishing non-graphic material, and I put forward the idea of writing a non-fiction book about *The Hitch-Hikers' Guide to the Galaxy*. Nick Landau, who was heading the publishing arm, was keen and I started compiling notes for what would have been my first book. In the event, I never wrote it. The project was passed on to Neil Gaiman and DON'T PANIC! became *his* first book; and he made a much better job of it than I could have done at the time. I didn't write it because I left Forbidden Planet. I'd had enough of working for other people. All I was really interested in being was a writer, and I only got into bookselling in the first place to be in the business in some way. Maybe I thought I'd absorb something by being surrounded by books. Some sort of osmosis. But time was going on, my life was passing by. I wanted to get on with it.

Around the same time FP's comics manager Paul Hudson also left and started a shop called Comics Showcase, first in Covent Garden and then Charing Cross Road. Comics Showcase lasted until two or three years ago. I think it was another victim of those notorious rent reviews. Paul's assistant at FP, Josh Palmano, did likewise and opened Gosh!, a comics shop in Great Russell Street, which is still trading. (Yes, I know – it's Russian dolls.)

Most of what I know about the specialist shops in general, and Forbidden Planet in particular since 1981 is based on second and third-hand knowledge. FP moved to larger premises in New Oxford Street, and expanded into a chain, mainly by acquisition – it took over existing specialist shops that got into financial trouble and turned them into branches, often employing their previous owners as managers. It saw off various rivals, including a competitor in Cambridge Circus, in the Charing Cross Road. (Offhand I can't recall its name. Paperback Hut? In any event it lasted only a year or two.) FP had a stake in Maxim Jakubowski's crime bookshop 'Murder One' in the same street; and moved its own London flagship to a megastore in Shaftesbury Avenue. But its path wasn't entirely smooth.

The three L's who founded this empire – Lake, Landau and Luckman – were quite different personalities. In the early days when everyone was frantically busy building the business that didn't have the chance to show itself too much. By the '90s, when things calmed down a bit, their differences started to surface. It's not possible to go into detail about what happened due to an element of secrecy surrounding events and legal restrictions on what can be said, but in short, the trio fell out and the partnership broke up. There was a costly legal dispute about ownership of the company and who had the right to use its name. Part of it was hived-off as a settlement but the upshot was that Forbidden Planet as it exists today is essentially Nick Landau's business, reputedly in harness with foreign investors.

Along the way, Forbidden Planet became something other than a science fiction specialist *per se*, in the sense of being primarily a retailer of SF literature. Some argue that it never really was, and regard it as a glorified toy shop. The truth is that no shop could survive, let alone prosper, selling nothing but genre books. FP always made much more money selling comics and merchandising than books. They simply wouldn't be here if they didn't. With independent bookshops going out of business at the rate of between one and three a week – and at an even higher rate in the United States – and with specialists particularly suffering, it would be a brave man or woman who tried opening an SF bookshop these days. The only real opportunities now are on the Internet, the mail order conduit of the 21st Century.

Those of us of a certain age have witnessed the conception, birth and maturity of the specialist science fiction shops. Now we might be watching them die. //

– Stan Nicholls, 2008

The Melting Pot

Do we have some visitors from Elsewhere this time?

I like to see an occasional stranger drop in, it helps to keep the pot simmering nicely!
My interjections in *italics* and [brackets] in the usual way.



Illo from Tony Glynn, with my thanks!

“One of the more alarming things about *Prolapse* is the sense it sometimes gives you that people you used to know have been transformed by time into extras from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*” – Peter Nicholls, LoC

Almost the very first people I came to know in fandom outside Birmingham were Tony & Simone Walsh, in Bristol. Tony is no longer with us, alas, but Simone still keeps in occasional touch;

Simone Restall
therestalls2@btinternet.com



Simone in 2008, her picture.

Dear Peter,

Thanks for the fanzine – it's very readable – and it's strange reading it as an ‘outsider’. I have tried to think of what I could say about Archie Mercer, and not a lot comes to mind. He was someone Tony and I saw quite a lot of in our early days in the West – I must have first met him at the first Peterborough convention. I know we used to visit Worrall Road whilst we were still living in Bridgwater, and Archie visited us there too – and that was 1963! I seem to recall tea and Garibaldi biscuits by way of hospitality and being fascinated by the green-painted orange boxes housing most of his possessions.

I used to write to Beryl when she still lived in Redditch and we lived in Bristol, and met her on her trips to Bristol to see Archie. Although Tony didn't approve, I drove to Beryl's house in Redditch and helped her to move out. I don't remember precisely when they moved to Cotham, but I remember that huge mansion in which they had a flat, with the mystery window showing on the outside, with no trace of it inside! I spent quite a bit of time round there because I liked them as a couple – Beryl was so lively. She must have made such a difference to Archie's life. The mention of her membership of Mensa made me smile because she spent hours swatting up on Mensa Tests, she was so determined to get in! It's horrifying to think that I know I went to their place at the bottom of St Michael's Hill in Bristol, and can remember the alley-way outside, but not the interior of their place. I regret losing touch with them, but from what is said in *Prolapse*, they didn't really want to keep in touch with fandom anyway.

As you can see Peter, I have nothing interesting to say about them, although Archie, Alan Rispin, Linda Crowe (prior to being Rispin), Don Geldart, baby Sarah, Tony and I went on a trip to Woolacombe once, we have a photo somewhere of us all sitting in the sand dunes looking like the last survivors on earth. We stopped off at Watersmeet near Lynmouth on the way, and for some reason Linda decided to wash her hair in the icy fast-running waters. I'd lead a sheltered life and was very impressed at such spontaneous behaviour – I would have needed a towel and some ‘products’ before I would have done that!

The BaD Group was founded by Tony and Archie – they put fliers in SF library books and Graham Boak, Brian Hampton, Peter Roberts – or am I making that up? – Dave Chopping and a couple of others from RAF Locking, plus Mike Scantlebury and his mate, was it Bruce Chatwin (?) found fandom via that route. I used to listen to them having wonderful discussions and being quite unused to such people, sat there trying to think of something interesting to say, but I could never get a word in edgeways.

How did I meet Tony? I was working on the reception area of Evershed & Vignoles on the North Circular Road, and I remember the doors rattled, I looked up, and this man approached and said “My name is Mr Walsh and I have come to work here”. I remember thinking, “Gosh, he will always be Mr Walsh” – he seemed so grown-up and in control. Anyway, he started to come and chat to me on the reception desk, and although I was only just turned 18 and he was 31, (I always appeared older than I was) he asked me out. I was madly impressed by him because he had a car – I think it was an Austin A30. He was lodging with George Locke at the time in Chelsea Bridge Road. I had just moved out from living with my Dad and had gone into a bed-sit in Ealing. This was in September 1962. We got married in February 1963. Really silly with hindsight, because I was so naive, and we hardly knew each other – but Tony had taken the job with Evershed's because they had promised him he could work in their Bradford office. Tony had always wanted to live near the Liverpool Group – he was very keen to be part of LiG, although at that time Bradford was the closest we could get. I became pregnant soon after we married, so he took a job in Bridgwater with the Nuclear Authority, and it provided a cheap house as part of the deal.



*Tony in 1965.
Photo by Dave Barber.*



John Roles in 1958.
Photo from
Ina Shorrock.

The lure of LiG is why we eventually ended up living in Bebington. I went to Birkenhead Tech for a year and did a Secretarial Course (it was a posh course, shorthand, typing, business studies, English etc., and some of us ended up with a LCC Private Secretary's Cert.). Sadly, it was the end of Tony and me, that second attempt at living Ooop North (ish). After many emotional upheavals, I had a really settled life and job in Bristol when Tony decided we should move to Cheshire – he was happy there, but I wasn't.

We were there for a couple of years or maybe a bit more. You know the Sheila's Wheels advert with those ladies in pink? Well, one of them is Emma Robbins, who Sarah went to school with in Bebington – she is the sister of Kate Robbins, the comedienne, who is Paul McCartney's cousin. It was always a standing joke with us, when ever Sarah asked if Emma could come to play, we would always say, "Not THE Emma Robbins?" It used to drive Sarah mad! Oh cruel parents!

There was a lot of socialising with Norman, Ina and the kids, John Ramsey and Jenny, her Mum, Eddie Jones and Marsha (both of whom I liked very much – they saved my sanity!), Norman Weedall, John Roles (what a sweet person), and Marje Edwards and her husband Tony. We made a funny (well, we thought so!) movie – most of the stars of it are now sadly deceased – Norman, my Tony, Eddie etc., but apparently Harry Nadler's widow has it, and nobody can communicate with her. My late sister was in one scene, and I desperately wanted a copy of it to show my Mum before she died, but it was not to be.

Not like Tony to do that pompous 'Mr Walsh' thing, Simone, because we both know he wasn't like that. Perhaps he was nervous at starting a new job (though obviously not too nervous to chat-up the office girls)! Tony was a smashing chap and I was sad when he left fandom, even sadder that he blamed it for his troubles. I wish he was around now. We still have your Minutes Book from the BaD group, by the way, though you gave it up after the first three meetings. And Peter Roberts wasn't a founder-member; he, says "It was certainly 1967 when I first met Archie and joined the Bristol Group, just a few months after the Bristol convention. Tony and Simone were at the first meeting I attended in Archie's Bedminster basement flat, together with a pre-toddlng Sarah Walsh." Well, here's our man Himself...

Peter Roberts
P.Roberts@kew.org



Peter in 2006 at
the 'Florence
Nightingale'.
Photo by PW

Dear Peter,

Thanks to everyone for your Get Well Soon cards. After several months of terror and despair, I have now recovered from the St Fantony issue and am ready once again to join battle with the Deros.

Jim Linwood's excellent account of Archie Mercer reveals far more about his background and interests than I ever gathered when I knew him in the Bristol & District SF Group. I never realized, or maybe I've just forgotten, that he was interested and even expert in Archaeology – though the pun must have been too obvious for him to resist. But now I think about it, I recall that he and Beryl visited me when I had a summer job unearthing mediaeval middens in Launceston Castle. That must have been 1969, so they were already putting ancient monuments and Cornwall together a couple of years before their move. Judging by the photo of Beryl and pet, they certainly became 'more eccentric' in later years if they thought Chloe was a dog.

Archie was the first fan I ever met when as a nervous schoolboy I knocked on the door of his basement flat in Bedminster, expecting goodness-knows-what from the world of science fiction. Whatever it was, it probably wasn't Archie, orange crates, and fistfuls of old OMPazines. But Archie was friendly in his own awkward way, certainly informal (I think I was wearing a suit in the expectation of lectures), and generous with his time and possessions. I tried as a teenager to reciprocate by lending him records that he must, poor man, have really hated – though I think he did like 'The Minotaur's Song' and 'Alice's Restaurant'. I liked Al Stewart. That must have been a long time ago.

I could have sworn Archie won a red Hillman Imp in an OXO competition in 1969, but here's Doreen Rogers saying it was a blue Triumph Herald in 1967. Am I reinventing the past in strange and pointless ways?

Or maybe the past is changing anyway? I recently rediscovered a comic book I bought as a nine-year-old kid on holiday in France. A wonderful 1950s vision of a Gallic future of *agents de l'espace* and alien designer chic, with every frame linked by the drifting smoke of a smouldering Gauloise. Idly, I tried the name of the comic in Google and discovered that my evocatively French Rick Random was not only British, but written by *Prolapse's* very own Harry Harrison. That's surely not possible. I was planning to type in 'Dan Dare', but now I'm too scared...

Chris Priest is right that 'Bill Golding' has more than a touch of false matey-ness about it, though if Ballard can be called Jimmy I suppose Golding could be called Billie, even if that sounds more like a tap-dancer than a writer. Of course some writers' names don't sound like writers' names anyway. I recently got caught up in a novelists-you-must-read conversation and casually asked if anyone had come across an author called David Lawrence? No? Wrote a novel about game-keeping. How about Clive Lewis? Anyone got an inkling?

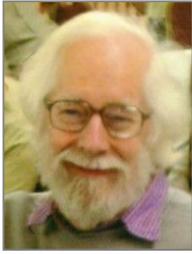


Chloe the dog!
Beryl's picture

I am envious of Tom Shippey's having actually read OMPHALOS, though I suspect the underlying idea may have been more intriguing than the book itself. Wasn't Gosse actually helping Darwin by collecting and sending him seashells or some-such that supported evolutionary theory – and didn't that in part provoke his crisis of conscience? Or was it orchids? Or maybe a blue Triumph Herald – and Harry Harrison after all?

Deep thoughts indeed, Peter. What most worries me is that 'Chloe the dog' caption on the Mercers' picture last time. Darroll Pardoe also spotted my error. Where did it come from? I copied the word 'dog' from somewhere, I swear, without really looking at the picture (which is clearly of a black-&-white cat), but from where? Beryl's original letter maybe? But of one thing I am certain; Archie's car WAS a pale blue Triumph Herald. I once had to follow it (very slowly) for miles!

Darroll Pardoe
pardos@globalnet.co.uk



*Darroll in 2006.
His photo*

Dear Peter,

I first started getting Ken Slater's mimeo'd catalogues at the beginning of 1960, shortly after I'd paid my first visit to Ken Cheslin. Ken's front room at that time was an Aladdin's cave of old pulp magazines, Gnome Press hardbacks and other goodies – he'd spent a goodly chunk of his accident compensation money buying stuff from the Fantast Medway catalogue, and the 16-year old me was mightily impressed, and immediately asked where he had got them from. I couldn't command the financial resources Cheslin did, but for several years I was a constant customer of Ken Slater. I bought a lot of Ace Doubles from him, for instance. I first met Ken at the *LXICon* in 1961. He was the only dealer there, I recall (which was probably the case at most of the early 1960s Eastercons). You're right, he was a bit intimidating at first meeting – but only for the first minute or two.

Do you remember, Peter, how on the way back from *Yarcon* in 1966 we detoured to pass by the Fantast HQ, and were astonished to find a little street-corner newsagent's shop, rather than the grander establishment I think we'd expected?

Archie Mercer – now there was a one-off. But he was kind to new fans, and encouraged my first forays into fandom. Ro and I visited Archie and Beryl early in 1970 in Bristol – I do remember being unimpressed with the minimal furniture and the catering arrangements! That was the time when Archie was positively disengaging himself from SF fandom, and also the time when Ro and I were actively involved in running the (British) Tolkien Society. I'm pretty sure Archie had nothing to do with the TS – I don't think he was even a member. *Middle Earthworm* was entirely Archie's own creation. It wasn't a newszine, and it had nothing to do with the TS (British or American). It was basically a letter-zine, a vehicle for him and others to discuss Middle Earth (and later on, expanded into other fantasy worlds, hence the name change) – Ro contributed letters to it quite frequently. As time went on Archie used it more and more to grumble about things he didn't like. The one that sticks in my mind is the way he moaned on (on many occasions) about the iniquity of the British copyright law, which obliged him to despatch six copies of each issue to the Copyright Receipt Office. That really got up his nose.

Yes, Darroll, how well I recall that agonisingly journey back from Great Yarmouth, six long hours with Charlie Winstone grieving in the back seat. Didn't you take a picture of us outside Ken Slater's shop?

Fred Lerner
Fred.Lerner@Dartmouth.EDU



Fred in 2005. His photo.

Dear Peter,

Prolapse #10 was especially interesting to me because of Jim Linwood's article about Archie Mercer. I got to know the Mercers through our mutual involvement with the Heidelberg worldcon bid, and also through our mutual friend Ed Meskys. Except for David and Ruth Kyle, who at the time were living in England, they were the only British fans with whom I had any contact beyond the pages of fanzines.

I never made it to Heidelberg but in the fall of 1971 I took advantage of cheap airfares to make a three-week pilgrimage to Great Britain. In addition to visiting Kipling's school at Westward Ho! and attending a Gaelic church service at Stornoway and looking in on the very first *Novacon*, I journeyed to far Cornwall to visit the Mercers. "By bus this morning from Bideford to Plymouth, past nearly every sheep in Devonshire", I wrote in my pocket notebook. A train took me from Plymouth to Redruth, then back onto a bus to Helston. We spent the evening in conversation, joined by a young Cornish couple whom they knew. I don't remember much about their home, save for a vague recollection that it was a semi-detached or terrace house – and that the bath and toilet were in separate rooms, an arrangement I had never before encountered.

The next day, after feeding me 'a true Cornish pasty for lunch', Beryl took me for a walk around Helston. The local pub wasn't brewing beer that day, alas, but the churchyard was open for business. Under Beryl's guidance I pressed a St Michael's stone that was inscribed with an ancient Celtic cross. Her explanation of why I should do this involved Ley lines, my introduction to that concept. More conversation with Archie and Beryl that evening: I remember some of Beryl's anecdotes about her experiences in Scotland during the war, though if we discussed anything blatantly fannish I can't recall it thirty-six years later. And the next morning they put me on the bus to Penzance.

I remember that visit as a pleasant interlude during my wanderings about Britain, my first home visit to anyone outside North America. The Mercers were excellent hosts, and no more eccentric than the American fans with whom I was familiar. I was disappointed not to see them at *Novacon*, though I had no reason to expect them to be there; and we didn't stay in contact after I returned home. I'm pleased to hear that they are commemorated on the Cornish landscape, for one memory that remained with me was of their abiding love for their adopted country.

David Redd
dave_redd@hotmail.com



Dear Peter,

I sympathise with your computer crash – I recall finishing a piece for *Rastus Johnson's Cakewalk*, stretching my leg and kicking the power plug from its socket.... but your problems were much worse. Says a lot for your determination that there's little trace of the problems and the agony in *P10* itself. Thanks for sticking with it! Restoring the layout with pictures, etc., was very worthwhile of course, even down to the little decorations in the 'Melting Pot'. For instance, alongside Mike Moorcock's brilliant letter (for a man who according to the *Telegraph* still "turns out two million words a year" his prose is amazing) you have the two little *New Worlds* covers reminding us that Mike pulled together some absolutely incredible launch issues. With you, every picture really does tell a story.

Good long whatever-happened-to on Archie Mercer, thanks Jim. Met Archie in Bristol with similar, though shorter experience to yourself. A query: did Beryl really find fandom from a SFBC/Brum group notice? In the September 1956 *Astounding* BRE she had a reader's letter in which she described herself as thirty, and a regular reader of *ASF* and other SF mags since her early teens. As far as I know the

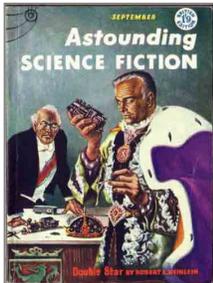


Earliest picture of Beryl – late 1963.
Photo by Dick Howett

ASF BRE never printed UK letters – except this one (instead of forwarding it to Campbell). *Somebody* there cared enough about SF to slip in occasional notices/capsule reviews of books from UK publishers, and to put UK publishers' names in with the USA details in some 'Reference Library' reviews (not always accurately, once confusing a children's book with a US 'Golden Atom' revival). Who *was* that masked man? And did Beryl really have no contact with fandom for another decade? Just wondering.

Anyway, great issue again. Everything terrific; I still dislike the trial-and-execution part of *MiSdemeanour* but the article on it was excellent – and, computer troubles notwithstanding, excellently produced. For me, you could only have bettered it by putting the videos on the e-zine (and an mp3 of Dan Morgan to soundtrack the rest!) Oh well, I'm racing ahead of the technology here... Thanks!

Now this is really quite amazing, David, because as you say, the BRE was normally entirely reprinted, with absolutely NO original editorial content. But just this once the unknown editor broke the rules – I suspect he had an odd page to fill and Beryl's letter came at just the right time (the rest of the page is filled with a subscription plug). The letter doesn't appear in any U.S. issue, but just imagine the parallel universe that might have branched-off if someone in British fandom had written to Beryl in 1956. Eric Jones, say, who was looking for members for his new Cheltenham group (and Redditch isn't that far away). Beryl might have been at Kettering in 1957 and the London worldcon, become a Big-Name Fan long before our Brum Group was started, and met Archie as a young(er) man. Here's the letter:



A good issue! – the BRE for September 1956
Photo; Dave Wood's 'Atlas Mystery' site – see efanzines.com

Dear Mr. Campbell:

I am a thirty-year-old housewife, mother of two small sons, and a part-time journalist. I have been a regular reader of A.S.F., plus all the other S-F magazines I could lay hands on, since my early teens but this is my first letter to an editor. I confess that the scientific jargon employed by some authors usually floors me—and some of the letters you receive and publish make my hair stand on end, both with appalled fright at my own abysmal ignorance and awed admiration at their erudition. However, it doesn't depress me: I even waded through your editorials on Aristotelian logic, and got a headache for my pains!

To get down to "Brass Tacks." First; my warmest congratulations to Freas for his brilliant illustrations for "Clerical Error" in the July issue. When, in unsuspecting innocence and interest, I turned over to page 71, I fairly yelled in fright! Hell's teeth, Mr. Freas, did you *have* to make David Storm leap out at me like that without even a warning Boo? Secondly, with reference to your editorial: Yes please, Mr. Campbell, let's have all the gen you can lay hands on concerning the "science" of psionics. Who cares about the apparent impossibilities, the irrevelances, the points that don't jell? How long is it since aviation was an utter impossibility? I am a firm believer in the dictum "*the impossible we do at once, miracles take a little longer.*" I am also beginning to believe that there is no such thing as an impossibility. Are not all things possible with God?

So never mind the scoffers, the hecklers, the doubting Thomases—give us the lot, the wheat and the chaff. Let those of us who are interested sort it out for ourselves. If there are any 20th Century equivalents of St. Teresa of Avila levitating all over the place, I, for one, want to know about them.

Shoot the works, Mr. Campbell!—Beryl Henley, 28 Poplar Road, Redditch, Worcestershire, England.

Chris Priest
christopherpriest@gmx.com



Chris at Ken Slater's 90th. Photo by Leigh Kennedy.

Dear Pete,

Ah. Archie and Beryl. I was really interested by Jim Linwood's memoir of them. I can't add much more to the fragment of mine that Jim quotes in his essay, other than to add that of all the people I met in fandom in the early 1960s, Archie Mercer was by a long stretch the most disappointing in person. I realize now, hindsight being the wonderful thing it is, that he must have been cripplingly shy, a lonely and inadequate man who found a sort of secure emotional home in fandom.

Towards the end of the 1960s, it would have been, Graham Hall and I drove down to visit the Mercers at their house in Clifton, Bristol. We took them out for a meal and a few drinks (for Graham a lot of drinks, alas) then went back to their place. The Mercers sort of disappeared into their own room, leaving Graham and me in their fantastically untidy living room, staring at each other and wondering what to do next. There was no spare room, no spare beds, not even a mattress or two. I slept in a chair (although 'slept' is an exaggeration), and Graham crashed on the floor. We were both awake early, full of cramps and aches and pains. Out of inescapable British politeness, we felt we should wait for the Mercers to emerge, so we sat around in this horrible, semi-furnished room, littered with old fanzines and decaying stencils, for a couple of hours. There was no food in the kitchen (or not food you would eat, unless insane), nor even anything to make tea or coffee. The Mercers slumbered on and on. In the end, halfway through the morning, Graham and I fled and went to a café for some grub. We didn't see the Mercers again, and in fact I never had any contact with them at all after that. They went down to Cornwall, swore publicly that they would never again cross the Tamar, and almost at once went off everyone's radar. They were friends whom I simply didn't know at all well.

Time to pack it in about John Brunner, I think? Apart from saying that this month's *SFX* magazine has an enthusiastic article about STAND ON ZANZIBAR, written by Geoff Ryman. Speaking of ZANZIBAR, I read the book in its original manuscript for Gollancz. At the time, I was living in a damp basement flat in Fulham, sharing with Graham Charnock and two other guys. The fun we had! Well, not much, in reality. But Gollancz sent the MS of ZANZIBAR to me for reading, then phoned me three weeks

later to ask why I hadn't yet sent in my report. In fact, the package had never been delivered to the flat, and all this was news to me. I told them that, and the next morning walked down to the local mail sorting office to see what might have happened.

The staff at the sorting office found the package, and handed it to me. The huge and unwieldy parcel had more or less exploded in transit, and loose pages were flapping out of the brown paper, sliding around, rather bent and damaged-looking. I took it back to the flat, and straightened the thing out -- miraculously, not a page of it was missing, and none of it had been torn or made unreadable. It turned out that what I had been sent was the top-copy manuscript. In these days of PDF files and computer printers, the concept of a top-copy manuscript has been more or less lost forever, but although of course every typewritten book had to have a top copy somewhere it was fairly unusual in 1967 to see one as a submission. Most of the manuscripts I was sent by Gollancz were either carbon copies or photocopies (or if it was an American book, a printed copy of the US edition), but ZANZIBAR was the original. In fact, the final page of the novel is called something like 'A Message from our Sponsor'. I no longer seem to have a copy of the book so I can't quote exactly, but there John Brunner describes some physical aspects of the book, including a note of the make of typing paper which he had used. I remember holding up that exact page to the light and reading the watermark, to confirm its veracity.

I returned the manuscript in the usual way (in spite of my writing them what I remember was a positive report, Gollancz didn't buy the book and it was published in the end by, I think, Macdonald), and forty years later I imagine that top copy must now be something of a real collector's item.

A little while before that time I remember driving down to Bristol for a weekend fannish party at the Walshes' house. I gave a lift to Jim Groves, a fan from Essex I knew only marginally, but who wanted a ride. Of course, we talked a lot on the drive down, and one of the things he told me was that he had recently bought, at a convention auction, the top-copy manuscript of Brian Aldiss's first SF novel, NON-STOP. He seemed pretty proud of it, and deeply reluctant to lend it to me, as I instantly requested. He muttered something vague about letting me see it one day, but I don't think I ever met Jim Groves again and I certainly never saw the manuscript. Are you (or is anyone) in touch with him? If so, do tell him that if he still owns the manuscript I'd be interested to see it. I'd even be willing to buy the thing off him, for a reasonable price.

I still have most of my own manuscripts, incidentally, mainly because I've never found anyone, or any place, willing to take them away from me. I lost the top copy of INDOCTRINAIRE some thirty-five years ago: it was air-mailed to me by my US literary agent, but it must have burst its incompetently-wrapped papery bonds halfway across the Atlantic, and never made it back to me. Other than that one, I still have most of the manuscripts stashed away in a cupboard. What do other writers do with their old papers? I've never enquired. I don't collect mine, I just sort of accumulate them. I keep thinking they must have some kind of value, but if so I've never found a way of realising it.

Thanks Chris. You could always offer your manuscripts on eBay and some fanatic collectors will pay vast sums of money for them or, if you want to be more socially responsible, you could 'bequeath' your 'papers' to some University Library or another – and no doubt Andy Sawyer will be trying to get in touch with you in the next few minutes. Jim Groves emigrated to the US in 1966 and has never been heard of again. As for John Brunner, maybe I should call it a day but the stories still keep coming in – like this one.



Jim Groves in 1963.
Photo from Ethel
Lindsay's album.

Dear Peter,

While John Hall's account of life with the Brunners was interesting, it didn't excite much comment from me. The pieces in *Prolapse #8* are different, and from them emerges a consistent picture of this vain, pompous, insecure and ultimately miserable man. My own direct experiences of Brunner were limited, although I knew him a bit for 25 years and at my first convention (*Sci-con*, 1970) – awful confession time here – I took along my Doubleday first edition of *STAND ON ZANZIBAR*, bought at substantial expense from Alan Bale's shop in Chiswick High Road, to get it autographed. But I realised early on that a man who spoke in that measured, patronising way was not someone I particularly wanted to know, although the reason I started to go to SF conventions was to meet SF writers, all God-like figures to my mind. I never went to his parties, or to his house – wasn't invited, probably.

He was Chairman of the BSFA when I was editing *Vector*, and was always perfectly polite, and I believe sent a postcard-of-comment on every issue. In the early 1980s I went to a trio of Milford conferences, and he was at some of them (possibly all of them). He tried very hard to join in with the late night bar sessions, and I started to become aware that there was a different, easier-going, more likeable person locked inside the carapace of John Brunner, Author. But the carapace had hardened over the years into an unbreakable shell, and he was inside it.

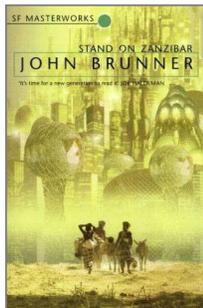
It's a pity your photos miss out that period in the early 1970s when, in the spirit of the times, he let his hair down, and for a while had ringlets.

But what's most interesting about Brunner is the curve of his career: from Ace Doubles, to being (in 1968-1970 or thereabouts) one of the most important and acclaimed writers in the genre, and then a fairly rapid slide into being a writer of almost incomprehensible crap. I know there was the medication, but even by 1970 he was publishing novels like *DOUBLE, DOUBLE*, which was (is) absolutely dreadful. Yet while I wouldn't necessarily want to go back and re-read *THE SQUARES OF THE CITY*, *STAND ON ZANZIBAR* or *THE JAGGED ORBIT*, he did seem at that time to be one of the key writers who was raising not only his own game to new heights, but also the genre's game. At those Milfords, the stories he brought along were embarrassingly poor on a word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence and paragraph-by-paragraph level, and ultimately made little sense.

Malcolm Edwards
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Malcolm at Brian
Aldiss' 80th
birthday in 2005.
Photo by PW



The Gollancz 'Masterworks' edition, 1999

I had even fewer dealings with him as a publisher, but he was famously difficult – sufficiently so to discourage me from trying. In the 1980s, when Gollancz was launching a paperback list and we needed to buy quite a lot of titles quickly, I put together a potential Brunner set of half a dozen or so, had them sitting on my shelf for a few weeks, and then thought No, life's too short. In my experience it's almost invariably a bad sign when a writer rejects the input of copy editors, and treats them as enemies, rather than allies. (OK, some copy editors are better than others, obviously, but their job is to help iron-out the egregious errors that even the best writers sometimes make.)

But John went one step further: not only were editors his enemies, so were typesetters and proof readers. I remember seeing the proofs he returned of one piece of work I was involved in: every typesetting error was not only corrected, it was accompanied by a marginal note sarcastically berating the poor printer for making such a stupid and ignorant mistake. No wonder nobody dealt with him who didn't have to. If he had still been alive I would have thought very seriously about whether or not to reprint STAND ON ZANZIBAR. I'd like to say I'd have risen above my misgivings and gone ahead, but I'm afraid it's more likely I wouldn't have.

Oh dear, this is awful, isn't it? Now you have me feeling sorry for poor old Brunner. Thank goodness he had a few loyal friends who stuck with him to the end...

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*Ian at Newcon-3.
Photo by Ian Whates*

Hi Peter,

Yes, I detected myself in the latest *Prolapse*, though by starting from the front rather than spotting that my name is an inch and a half from the tick on the back cover...

Joining in on the John Brunner reminiscence thing, I always found him to be a very gracious host when Judy and I and little Jessica and our cat of the time spent Christmases with John and Marjorie, and when we experienced a South Petherton Folk Festival. On two other occasions King Babar and his consort came to spend Christmas with us. This would have been in the late 1970s, possibly stretching into the early Eighties. I only recall John getting mildly miffed when we failed to empty a mini-barrel of excellent local ale (not mild, no pun intended) which he'd hospitably got in to the Square House. "If don't finish it, I'll have to pour the rest away!" But we were already full of beer (apart from little Jessica). The fact that I was due to drive back from Somerset did not, of course, enter into consideration back then.

Marjorie had trained the two dogs of the time, Domino and Vriskete, to behave excellently. No such luck after D and V died, and Marjorie too, when John acquired Cujo and Cujo, as I thought of them despite their being of a different breed from Stephen King's berserker. One visit by John and the two Cujos compelled us to lock them in a utility room to save our cat's life and prevent wreckage of the house. On another occasion John phoned from Cambridge to ask if he could stop overnight on the long route back to South Petherton. Cautiously I asked, "Are the dogs with you?"

"Of course they are," he said.

"Can you stop them from going upstairs in our place?"

"Of course not. Dogs will go anywhere."

"Well," said I, "this time I'm sorry but they'll have to go into the village doggerly overnight."

When John turned up, I greeted him at his car (a Lancia by then, I believe, to replace the yellow Triumph Stag) and asked, "Will you drive them to the doggerly?"

"No," he declared, "I'll walk. The poor creatures have been locked up in a car all day and now they'll have to be locked up overnight. I got them from the Queen's breeder - they're bred for beauty rather than behaviour."

I observed the glaring mad red baleful eyes of the Cujos. "Well, you just carry on down the road," I said, "and the doggerly's on your right. Ten minutes at most."

An hour passed. The sky darkened dramatically. Rain began to bucket. So I dashed to my car and drove down the road in search of John, whom I found standing rigidly at the roadside drenched in his deerstalker, dogs still attached to him.

"I have walked all the way out of this village," he proclaimed thunderously, "and the all the way back again without seeing any kennels!"

He happened to be standing directly across the road from a rather big sign saying Kennels. Mildly I indicated the sign.

"I must have been blinded by oncoming traffic!" he told me, which seemed strange in view of the general absence of cars on the road in question.

I waited while John delivered Cujo and Cujo to the doggerly.

When John got into my car, by way of accounting for not noticing the doggerly he said, "I should tell you I have been suffering psychotic episodes recently."

Aha. That explained it.

Perhaps to calm these episodes, he had taken up chain-smoking quite big cigars. Ensconced with a drink on our sofa backing on to a fireplace, which I'd blocked up to stop crows from falling down the chimney into the room, John lit up. His method of smoking cigars was unusual. He took a very deep drag, then, to vent the smoke, turned his head and blew a cloud into the fireplace, then immediately he took another vast drag, and so forth until the cigar was, quite rapidly, consumed. Then he lit another cigar.

Since each cloud immediately gusted back into the room, I explained to John that I'd blocked the bottom of the chimney; but to no avail – he continued turning his head after each intake, knowing that his etiquette was correct.

Hey, what's all this about? I was explaining that John was a gracious host and guest!

This space was reserved for a picture of 'The Square House' but I couldn't find one anywhere!

Arnold Akien
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Arnold at Novacon-34. Photo by PW.

Hi Peter,

That Article by John Hall had attained legendary status in Gannet Fandom LONG before I appeared in fandom, which was some time before YOUR WORLDCON. That really does deserve some sort of Portentous Script, and if there isn't a typeface called 'Portentous' there should be!

Which calls to mind advice that I received from Langford long, long ago during the run-up to the 1984 Eurocon – *Seacon '84*, the convention that Malcolm Edwards deeply disapproved of – that any word-processing package was good enough to learn the basics on, which in its turn generated admiring comments from Alan Dorey of 'You word-processed that letter didn't you?', and me to much more perceptive remarks to the primitive BBC computer that I used at work of ... 'Fu~#**ing WOD Star where has my Sodding Letter to many Cultural Attaches **cking Disappeared To?!!!'

I do have fond memories of the Brunners and well recall how I slept under John's Desk, which was a custom-made wooden battle-station of a thing that lived in his office, itself lined with manuscript boxes containing Work That He Was Proud Of, during a weekend visit to South Petherton for a *Seacon '84* committee meeting. Gerbish had got there first and bagged the comfy corner of John's office so I was left with under the desk. My chauffeur Martin Hoare and I had lingered in a pub on the outskirts of South Petherton for sustenance, a pub in which car-park someone had previously double-parked a herd of incontinent cows which did my boots No Good At All. Oddly enough once Martin and I had got inside we discovered that the food was good, the Beer was better and the whole place was cow-shit free, which was more than could be said for my boots.

Anyway, we were latecomers to The Square House and were greeted by John, who was concerned at my having been bounced about in the car – my spine was misbehaving itself and I was wearing a surgical collar – and deeply interested in this wonderful pub that Martin and I had discovered. Our host was not just interested but, with the speed of Clint Eastwood producing his colt 45, produced a notebook and a pen and took details from the uncannily sober Martin Hoare (who had been driving) of the location of the pub and much supplementary intelligence about cows and their place in the town-dweller's life ... which as far as I was concerned should be sliced into steaks and sizzling on a plate alongside chips.

John Brunner was a total professional as far as his craft went, down to his very notebook. Alas, he didn't match his craft skills with political skills and I gather that he alienated a lot of people that he could simply have worked around or avoided, which was odd since he was far more interested in politics and political structures than most fans. I suppose that he just couldn't apply himself to practical politics as it applied to his profession. His place – 'The Square House' – in South Petherton really was pretty remote and the very urban-metropolitan Brunners must have been VERY rare beasts thereabouts. Even given the Folk Festival they established and which was, I gather, pretty successful, John must have had trouble integrating his professional life with his personal life, insofar as the London literary publishing world seems to demand a sort of clannish, day-to-day social context of parties and lunches and so on that must have been hard to maintain once John was no longer part of the London scene.



'The crypt at St Martins-in-the-Field's in London was the atmospheric setting for the Hallowe'en launch of Kate Mosse's gripping new novel *SEPULCHRE*. L-R, Malcolm Edwards, Kate's son Felix, Kate Mosse, and Amanda Ross, Joint MD of Cactus TV.' (Orion website).

This was called to mind not only by *Prolapse* but also with my search for various out-of-print authors that led me to the Orion site by way of looking for whatever books might be in print by Patricia Finney. I have all of her books, but knew that she had been abroad in Spain for a couple of years and though not unheard of, maybe a bit distant from the London-based British literary world. And so remembering that some of Finney's novels were published by the Orion Publishing Group – Gods but they are BIG – I thought that I'd have a look at their site, and there was Malcolm!

GOSH WOW! – doesn't he look prosperous and also, pink, and isn't he looking down those women's neck lines? Or are his eyes fixed upon the jugulars of those tender young maidens? Just look at those fangs! Those women should be warned! But I digress, and who can blame me? I mean, just look at the girl on the right. Malcolm can't help but look and he knows that the camera is fixed upon him ... but such is his power in the publishing world he knows that he no longer needs to care what mere mortals might suspect. I wonder if you can get bottled Holy Water these days ... just the thing to have handy at publishers parties!

And talking of the dead, I met James Blish just once at a convention in Sunderland in 1973, though it wasn't called a 'convention' but rather

A 'festival' and that Festival produced an 'Anthology of science fiction and science fact' under which title was quoted Alfred Tennyson, 'For I dipt into the future...' and a couple of pages later we have 'Science fiction – a New Way of Expression' by one Peter Weston. Anyway, in conversation Blish invited me and another bloke present to call him 'Jim' and told us in the course of the conversation that all of the fan mail he had received over the years for his major works would fit into a couple of box files, whilst the mail received as a result of his *Star Trek* episodes filled an entire filing cabinet and were still piling up. A Good Man, Jim Blish, and very approachable – dunno where he got this reputation for aloofness. Indeed Jim was in his own way at least as supportive of newcomers as John Brunner. And mentioning Brunner...

I remember that some time in the 1980s I introduced a girl to JB at a room party and despite that girl being a little shy, John, good guy that he was, practically instantly invited her to lunch with him next day. After that lunch the girl said he was charming but that she was a bit worried since he had invited her to dinner that same night and ... wasn't he married? I told her that she was not to worry but was to tell him she had forgotten a prior dinner engagement with me, and really couldn't let me down and indeed she didn't, let me down that is ... I tell you I am Such a Bloody Paladin!

John Hall
john.sila@virgin.net



*John at Orbital
2008. Photo by Rob
Hansen.*

Dear Peter,

The stand-out feature was Jim Linwood's excellent piece on Archie Mercer. Jim's research should be commended – he must have spent weeks writing letters and e-mails and the result is a beautiful tribute to a fan who, as I have said elsewhere, never got the respect he was due. This is what *Prolapse* is for, mate. Very well done.

I once bought a Compact edition of one of Dan Morgan's works – I don't remember anything about it, but that the cover showed a Mephisto-like character not utterly unlike the photo of Mr Morgan himself that you reproduced on Page 16. I also remember GUITAR – which I hope he won't mind my saying wasn't quite as helpful as Bert Weedon's opus – but seeing as I still can't play guitar, that should not be taken as a definitive criticism. But I do wish he could find it in his heart to be a little less dismissive of Rock'n'Roll and all that crap.

I am very sorry to have upset Bruce Burn and Joe Patrizio. I did try to deflect their wrath, I remember, by apologising in advance and you, Peter, will recall that the real reason I singled them out, almost at random, was because we were analysing the difference between fans of one generation and the next. Our conclusion was that the war and National Service had made a big difference. I picked out Joe and Bruce, who had also expressed reservations about the Brunner piece, as examples that backed up my argument, but I accept that I was quite wrong to do so, and I apologise again. It was never my intention to be insulting, and I hope they will forgive me.

I think Bruce over-eggs his pudding more than somewhat, however, and in the process he appears to me to be making exactly the same mistake that Peter Nicholls made. It's at the point in his letter where he decides that I need to be told that life doesn't end at puberty or with the values of adolescence. Plainly enough offence has been taken all round and I am trying mightily not to take any more. In case I was not clear enough previously, let me say this again: nobody living under John Brunner's roof at that time was an adolescent, even if in Bruce's view, we behaved like such. To assume that we were acting out of adolescent values is to ignore the facts and miss the point. And for the record, if we are laughing at someone else's weaknesses, then it's my belief we are doing no more than laughing at ourselves. I think there is a bit of John Brunner in all of us – fortunately, only a bit, and written quite a lot smaller.

David Redd raises an important issue (here I am waffling-on about John Brunner again – I really should stop) about JB's relationship with his family. Audrey and I visited Greys Court, a National Trust property, near Henley-on-Thames last year. It was the home of Sir John Brunner of Brunner Mond. If you look on the map, it is only a very short distance from where 'our' John Brunner was born. I think there's a whole new story there, but I don't know what it is. I wonder, even, if JB might not have been illegitimate – but then who paid his school fees?

We were talking about this at Gerry Webb's Sunday-lunchtime champagne bash at the recent Eastercon, John, and Gerry promised to send me a LoC (which mysteriously hasn't arrived). In essence, I think he suggested that John's family had effectively cut him off because they strongly disapproved of him marrying Marjorie, mainly because this meant they wouldn't be having any grandchildren (Marjorie was already approaching 40). Maybe Gerry will tell us more if I keep on nagging at him!

Dear Peter,

D. West
North Yorks.



*D. West at home in
2006. Photo by Ian
Sorensen.*

Thanks for the several issues of *Prolapse*. Usual excuses for not responding sooner, e.g. I was too busy lying on the couch staring at the ceiling/watching Hong Kong videos/reading crime novels, etc, etc. It's a hard life.

I'm not surprised your 'Unified Grand Theory of British Fandom' received little response, since it does seem rather a drastic oversimplification. Sure, the London fans roused some hostility with their proprietorial arrogance about Eastercons, but apart from this I don't see much evidence of a regional split in the fandom of the fifties. All fan groups tend to regard themselves as the centre of the universe, but otherwise any differences are, as always, purely personal. The London fans quarrelled as much with each other as with the "bloody provincial" and were just as likely to be on friendly terms with non-Londoners, as some of your contributors have clearly indicated.

A much more plausible division would be between the (sercon) characters who thought fandom should be all about SF **and nothing else** and the (more fannish) people who wanted to bring in anything that happened to interest them (such as Jazz, for one example of the time) regardless of SF content. There may also have been some division between those who liked living in an SF ghetto and those who felt SF should take more notice of, and be part of, literature in general. (This was certainly true a few years later with the development of the 'New Wave', as you must remember very well.) But it's all rather complicated, with lots of overlapping possibilities. The one certainty is that your own theory is far too simplistic. In effect you are giving too much weight to what was only one factor among many.

Moving on to more modern times, I read the material on the Misfits' Burnham-on-Sea convention with interest but also with mixed emotions. I remember getting an invitation and feeling rather ambivalent about being one of the chosen few. Nice to be asked, but did I really want to be a member of such an exclusive club? Large conventions certainly don't appeal to me, but small ones can be equally off-putting in the way they tend to turn into mutual admiration sessions. (Gosh, here we all are – I'm wonderful, you're wonderful, we're all wonderful – what do we do now?)

A leavening of less complacent and more critical strangers does help to forestall the worst excesses of in-group smugness. I don't remember how much of the programme was revealed at the time, but the account here suggests that this too would have been not much to my taste. I dislike enforced jollity and compulsory participation. Sociability is, or should be, a voluntary matter and I like to attend conventions only on the basis that I can ignore the whole damn business any time I'm not in the mood. The Burnham



John Brunner at *Supermancon*, 1954, (the arm belongs to Daphne Buckmaster). Photo from Norman Shorrock.

notions of fun programming sound almost as clunky, laboured, heavy-handed and generally embarrassing as the Knights of St Fantasy orgies. (Yes, “You had to be there.” And blind drunk too, I should think.) Still, it’s all rather academic since at that time I was far too broke to go anywhere. I mention these reservations only as a reminder that tastes differ and not everyone loves the same sorts of fannish fun.

Perhaps tastes differed as far as John Brunner was concerned: some people couldn’t stand him while others quite liked him. I moved by degrees from the first group to the second as we became better acquainted. Eventually it dawned on me that Brunner was not so much conceited or arrogant as simply socially inept. He really had very little idea how to get on with other people. He could deal with one or two acquaintances, but faced with larger groups of comparative strangers he tended to fall back on his Public Speaking mode. Very articulate and quite impressive in its way, but not exactly endearing.

This fluency worked against him: people wrongly assumed that the flow of words meant he knew exactly what he was doing. But I think his occasional rudenesses were mainly due to sheer nervousness. Like anyone else faced with a social situation he couldn’t handle he tended to respond by being over-aggressive and generally coming on too strong. (Quite a few fans have been known to behave in the same way, though on a much coarser plane.) There was no real malice about it, and when more at ease with people he knew, he could be much more agreeable. Perhaps, as has been suggested, he did have social-climbing ambitions, but he was also often friendly and helpful to people (such as myself, the Ashworths, and Dave Wood) who could do nothing at all for his career. Altogether, the trite-but-true summing up has to be that he was his own worst enemy, the unlucky victim of too much too soon. He had a privileged upbringing, was a published author as a teenager, and (unlike most of us) never really experienced the chastening and educative effects of being a person of absolutely no importance. The kind of never-relaxed lifestyle described by John Hall probably didn’t help either. Still, he does deserve rather more credit, both as a writer and as a person, than some critics seem inclined to give him.

(Later, with a big packet of enclosures)

Here’s a selection from the (mostly) Bentcliffe correspondence in my possession, all identified and dated. Note the noble unselfishness and heroic devotion to historical accuracy with which I supply you with more evidence to support your damnfool theory. Truth is truth, and it does appear that you might have a case. Bah. Humbug.

Fancy you putting in a good word for John Brunner! If you don’t mind my saying, Don, you’re almost the last person I would have expected to be able to get on with JB, and to have become ‘better acquainted’ as you say. I wouldn’t have thought you’d have had anything in common which might have allowed any sort of conversation to become possible. Anyway, your comments are very perceptive and it makes me wish I’d tried a bit harder to get through to him. As for my ‘theory’, I hear what you say but still believe that one can best understand late-fifties fandom by considering the situation between London fans and everyone else. It was not so much a state of overt hostility, but that the Londoners realised the LC had run-down to an alarming state while elsewhere the ‘provincials’ seemed to be on the up-and-up. And they resented it. The letters you sent are a mixed bag but yes, several do suggest an underlying ‘us-&-them’ attitude. I shall doubtless make further capital out of this new ‘evidence’ in times to come!

Chuck Connor
chuck.connor@bluebottle.com



Chuck in the Falklands, 1982. His photo.

Dear Peter,

I won’t bore you rigid with the details, but needless to say it was one hell of a shock to come out of hospital, pick up P#10, and read of Ken Slater’s death. Back in the 1980s and 1990s when I was dropping in and out of various conventions I used to make a point of seeing if Ken was in the dealer’s room. Originally, at *Connote-8*, I had gone out into the charity shops and found a whole mass of Roneo and Gestetner supplies (inks still in twelve-pack cases, stencils, shader boards, stylii, etc.) Not being a Roneo fan I mentioned at the bar that evening I had some Roneo stuff to offload. Ken was interested, and in true Slater fashion he swapped me a load of old and battered pulp magazines – even he admitted they were nothing special, but to me they were more fun than ink I couldn’t use. In that collection was a copy of *Astounding* from 1947, which had a piece of fiction from Harry Warner Jr. So, whenever I was at later conventions I always made a point of seeing Ken, and on the last day I would see if he had any old and tatty pulps he didn’t want to take back with him. Believe me, we used to get an awful lot of old pulp magazines into a suitcase for 50p.

And seeing that Derek Pickles had also passed on, probably means I’m not going to be in the best of LoC-ing moods. Sadly, Derek and I lost contact around 2001. I smashed my knee and ankle up, and what with going in and out of surgery, I stopped sending him cassette tapes of obscure jazz artists. Never did get back in touch with him, which I now regret. He was always one for quick, sometimes dry humour – used to send pages of photocopied clippings with his letters and LoCs. And, of course, there’s his place in whatever Fannish Hall of Fame there might be, as the instigator of ‘the usual’.

I remember several trips to the MiSFiTs over the years – usually it was just a case of staying with Steve and Ann and getting hauled along for the ride – the pretence being either a birthday or anniversary, while the underlying motive, I suspect, was to drag some unsuspecting innocent (*viz moi*) into the round. Not sure why, but I always seemed to gravitate towards the Brums more than any other collection of fans. Odd, when you consider that you lot are nowhere near a decent dockyard or shipping lane, come to that.

Little Ann Green’s writing I remember well from *Ormolu* and I also remember the hints and mutterings over the years in regard to her con-rep. It’s nice to see it, augmented with Catherine’s, but also to see Paul Vincent in print again. I also remember thinking the same as yourself in regard to conventions and their growth, having seen them sort of spiral out of control (as it were) during the 1980s under what seemed to be the Bigger-Faster-Better-More failed-project manager syndrome. Mind you, 1994 was the year I got drafted to Gibraltar for a couple of years, which sort of took me out of the loop a little bit.

Dan Morgan – I can remember enjoying some of his novels – from the 1970s, I think. Three of us used to go to a place called Carr’s in Lowestoft when we were kids. Carr used to get in all sorts of magazines and books for exchange and trade – mainly from the Swedish and German trawlers – which were usually scattered around the front-to-middle of the shop. The SF and Fantasy stuff was not on public display but kept in a small storeroom. Dodgy European porn was, apparently, less offensive than SF novels. Then, of course, we discovered the 1970s pulps – aka the NEL back catalogue.

It’s also similar with Archie Mercer. I vaguely remember corresponding several times, though that was as far as we got. Later, when Pete Presford physically brought his old fanzines to me in Suffolk, I found copies of *Middle Earthworm*, and *Once and Future Worm*, along with something I think was called *Tales from the Brie?* I think they were all duplicated on foolscap paper – a size I used to use now and again when it came up in Millway Stationers sales lists.

Which brings me onto the LoCs, and I believe Mark Plummer’s comments about Lillian’s comments are, I think, missing the historical context/PoV I believe she’s writing from. As she has mentioned to some respect before, around the 1978-1982 there was a Copernican-style movement which expounded the belief that Fandom was not simply London-Centric, or even South-Centric – that places such as Scotland existed, and that they, too, could be a part of the whole.

Later on, during the 1980s, with the revival of Fifties fans into what was rapidly becoming a fractious Fandom (con-fans who had no desire to even consider reading a fanzine, apa fans who were content to just do their ish on a monthly basis, the rise of specialist conventions) there was a sudden reverence for all things Fifties, regardless. It was held up as the pinnacle of perfection, the perfect shining example which would never be bettered or recaptured. To question such was to bring down the wrath from on high – which I finally got pissed-off with, and so wrote several pieces basically asking for more forward-thinking in regard to (the-then) fanzine fandom of the time.

You, yourself, Peter, at the start of the *MiSdemeanour* piece, state you were becoming dissatisfied with conventions of the time and were hankering to a return to Kettering-style, low-number, single programme, ‘all fans together!’ – something that will never be recaptured without it generating a label of elitism, because by its very nature you will have to pick and choose if you limit things to a 50 or 60 or 80 membership upper limit. In fact, even you are saying that Kettering is perfection – it is an ideal to strive for – and that, in a way, denigrates what has come after which does not fit the Kettering design/plan.

As I was saying back in the Eighties and Nineties, the Fifties have their place, but they should never be venerated above all else and to the detriment of modern day fandom, because it will alienate new blood and cause stagnation. I know where Lillian is coming from – we both lived through it.

Hang on, Chuck, that’s a classic case of putting words into my mouth! All I said in my intro to the MiScon piece was that (for me) it was a ‘revelation’ to go to a small con, and that this was ‘a nineties equivalent of those intimate Kettering conventions’. That’s a long way from “hankering” after lost perfection! But I’m glad you mentioned Derek Pickles; in the first version of my editorial last time (before the computer crash) I gave him a lengthy obituary; sadly, it had to be replaced with one for Ken Slater, instead. Fortunately I had already sent on a few thoughts to Dave Langford which appeared in Ansible #247

Hello, dear,

The cover of #10 made me smile the first time, but when I looked at it again after reading, it made me laugh: I remember overhearing a pair of teenaged girls, arriving at the Hinckley Island Hotel on the Monday of an Eastercon. Looking confused, one turned to the other: “Who are all these people?” she asked. “I don’t know,” the other replied, “but they *smell*.”

So how would it have been in the days of Archie Mercer, and his single change of clothing that, presumably, wouldn’t have got changed over the course of the weekend? I rather shudder to think, but he seems to have been a strange man in any case, although perhaps not really so different from some of those, naming no names, that we see around fandom today. I’d never heard of him, but he does sound like both a wonderful and difficult person to have known, and had the strangest-looking dog I’ve ever seen (or should I blame that one on Peter?).

It was interesting to read that his wife Beryl was a Scientologist, particularly given that the previous article had already got me thinking along those lines with Dan Morgan’s comment that he and Ted Turner “were very much involved in that for a while,” although I’m not sure if he’s talking about Scientology or Dianetics when he says it. Either way, it made me pause: I’ve grown up thinking of Scientology as something that mad Californians try for a while and then grow out of (reading occasional articles about third-generation Scientologists is also something that makes me pause). Was it something that was common in UK fandom at the time? Have I, in fact, just hugely insulted some very quiet core of still-practicing fans? Peter, you should set your investigators on the trail. If you’re feeling particularly bold, you could include the UK aspects of Scientology’s invention, although on second thoughts, I’d hate to see you end up on their ‘Fair Game’ list, so maybe it would be better not to risk it....

Great con-rep by Ann Green, and others: they sound like they were a fun series of cons, although I think I might have found them a little small! Also like David Bratman’s WAHF comment: maybe I’ll try and get 1950s panel re-enactment on the programme for the next <plokta.con>?

Oh Flick, Surely you’re not suggesting that the star-begotten are a little careless in the personal hygiene stakes? As for Scientology/Dianetics, I’m not aware that we have ANY practising in British fandom these days, though it was once quite popular in the US, fans and pros together. In A.E. Van Vogt’s WAR AGAINST THE RULL (Not recommended!) the villain is the evil ‘Elron’, who by this time had turned away from his earlier version of Dianetics which Van Vogt (a mad old bat anyway) still believed in!



Derek Pickles at
Mexicon IV, 1991.
Photo by Rob
Hansen

Flick
[flick@internet-
fairy.org](mailto:flick@internet-fairy.org)



Flick as geisha at
Orbital. Photo by
Simon Bradshaw

Steve Stiles
swstiles@comcast.net



Steve at *Corflu*
2008 (above);
his photo.

Dear Peter,

Thanks for sending me another issue of *Prolapse*. I am interested in it for the fan/SF history, and some of the people covered in those articles are more than just names to me. But I haven't been as active in fandom as I'd like lately, thanks to my work schedule and commute. With time tight, fanac can become a matter of tight deadlines, which is not what I'm looking for in a hobby; hopefully my broad fannish horizons can widen up once I retire. Speaking of that, I'd like to go on a fanac sabbatical of sorts at some point in the near future; if I do retire I'll need to supplement my anaemic Social Security and with the clock ticking away I figure I'd better get cracking on some possible freelance projects now. It's also rather alluring to try some fresh new directions for a change; as much as I enjoy doing cartoons, I figure that I've turned out over 4500 of them during my tenure in fandom. There's a bit of a feeling of 'been there, done that,' (which I'll call my cartoon reprint one-shot fanzine for *Corflu*) while completely ignoring, say, the wonderful world of salt water aquariums and skydiving, both fields wide open for freelancing – particularly if I can tie them together somehow.

I haven't done more than skim #10 yet, but I have read #9 (and November seems so recent!) and had intended to comment on it if only in response to Bruce Burn's article on Ella Parker. This is important to me: on the wall of my fan den there is photograph of Ella hanging between Frank Zappa and Paul McCartney. This may seem odd, and there is no significance in that association, but Ella was undeniably a major influence on my life, one of the few people to have such an impact in the brief time when I first met her. When I first got into fandom, it was largely through Seattle's *Cry of the Nameless*, and Ella and I were both fairly active in *Cry's* letter column, where we were mildly teasing each other for a few issues. Not too long after that I got to meet her personally when she was passing through New York fandom and being feted by the Fanoclasts on her way to *SeaCon* in 1961.



Above, in the Parker Penitentiary. Photo by Fred Parker. Below; Harry Nadler & Bill Burns toil over the printing of the *Thirddmancon* programme book on an antique offset-litho press. Photo by Steve, 1968.



In 1961 I was still a teenager and, it may seem strange to some now, pretty much of a wallflower. Many of the fans I hung out with were older than I was by a vast three to six years, and I was very much aware of my own naivety and inadequacies in comparison to this vastly sophisticated bunch -- and they were, when you think about it: we're talking about people like Terry and Carol Carr, Ted and Sylvia White, Pete Graham, Lee Hoffman.... The list goes on and on. So I largely kept my lip zipped in hopes of getting by on drawing alone and in hopes that no one would discover that I was of that rarest of breeds, the Manhattan-born hayseed.

Ella noticed this at the welcoming party thrown for her at the Lupoffs – I think I was trying to be invisible in a corner nearest the door – and proceeded to light into me because of my obvious introversion. Now I don't think this was malicious on her part, but Ella had a humour style pretty much like Don Rickles', and we had been having a mock feud in the pages of *Cry*.... Like Rickles, her style was outrageous, infuriating, and highly funny; you found yourself torn between getting angry and doubling over in laughter, which was what happened with me. Ella completely broke through my shell and I began answering in kind. And, much to my own amazement, I found that I could keep up with her, that people were laughing with me, not at me....

She really tore that wall down for me. Ted White wrote about the incident, and to paraphrase him, "Steve hasn't been able to keep that flapping yap shut since then!" Thanks, Ella!

I came across some photos from the Buxton '68 convention; I'll try to scan them and send them on to you in a subsequent e-mail after I finish with this. After Buxton, back in London, I picked up this hideous little jacket on Carnaby Street (naturally). Here's Ella Parker, admiring" it – although she teased the hell out of me! I wore it a few times and then gave it away to some other sucker; taste aside, it was made of heavy material that chafed the back of my neck raw.

That's a very tasteful waistcoat (as we'd call it), Steve, especially in the colour version (bright red and gold.) And thanks for the Buxton pictures you sent through – one shows a unique combination of the St Fantony ceremony combined with the London Circle's jousting session. I sent the 'printing' picture to Bill Burns, who came out with a shock-horror revelation:

"Oh, that's brilliant! It was taken in Harry's tiny spare bedroom at Mesnefield Road, where all the duplicating was done until we bought the Multilith 1250, which lived in the equally tiny garage. I have no memory of Steve taking the photo, although I do remember hanging out with him at Harry's just before the con. While the beginning of Steve's TAFF report corresponds mostly with reality (except for 'Burns producing a cigarette and calmly lighting up' – I've never smoked in my life!), the rest is total fiction, of course."

*Steve's long-delayed TAFF Report ('Harrison Country') appeared last year at *Corflu*. See the TAFF web-site for details of availability.*

Jim Linwood
JLinwood@aol.com



*Jim at
ReRePetercon,
2004. Photo by Bill
Burns.*

Peter,

One event I failed to mention in my piece on Archie was the 1960 Whitsun mini-con in the George Hotel at Kettering about which George Locke wrote in *Skyrack 20*:

“Alan Rispin and Jim Linwood made a big splash in the Wickstead Park boating lake. The boat sank but was salvaged. Ella Parker was in stitches/staples. A local nightspot had us chipping our own ice out of the fridge. On the Saturday six fen (Ella, Jim, Alan, Bob, Archie and Jhim) went out in one boat, rowing round in circles (except for Ella. who never feuds). We dined at Ivy’s Cafe. They were disappointed because I’m not in the Royal Army Kettering Corps. The Slaters’ party arrived on Sunday. Various meetings were held by the BSFA, the 1961 Con-Committee and the ‘Young Fans’. Attendees were Ella Parker, Archie Mercer, Jim Groves, Jhim Linwood, Alan Rispin, Ted Forsyth, Bob Parkinson, Ken & Joyce Slater, Dave Eggleton and George Locke.”

A near-dozen of us just turned up at the George without booking in advance and had the place almost to ourselves with just Boris the waiter serving us in the evening. The first night we all bought booze at an off-licence and retired to Ella’s room to party. Archie had a bottle of Drambuie which, after a few sips, he decided he didn’t like it and passed the bottle to me saying, “Here, finish this off.” I’d never tasted liqueur before, thinking it was just a pleasantl-flavoured wine and the next morning I awoke with my first-ever hangover.

On the way back from the Battle of Wickstead Park (where George Locke and Ted Forsyth had overturned the boat containing Alan Rispin and myself), Ella spotted a large wooden sign on a gate next to the hotel: DAVID KYLE – VETERINARIAN. She looked at Alan and myself (still dripping wet from our ordeal on the lake) and demanded “I MUST HAVE THAT!” At night, Alan and I left the George and ripped the sign from the gate but on going back to the hotel found it was locked-up so we had to climb a high metal gate with spikes on the top, but delivered the sign to Ella un-emasculated. I think she gave the sign to Dave the following year when he came over to the Gloucester convention as I never saw it again.

It was also at the Minicon that the Youngfen were formed and I met Bob Parkinson for the first time, which led to the creation of the Nottingham SF Group – the NottFen.

Fighting, drunkenness and vandalism – that was Kettering 1960!

Thanks Jim, for that account of a little-known fannish event. We’re hoping that you, Alan, Ted & George will be re-enacting the Battle of the Boating Lake when we return to Kettering for Cytricon V!

Peter Mabey
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*Peter at
ReRePetercon.
Photo by Bill Burns.*

Dear Peter,

The main thing I wanted to write to you about was Ethel Lindsay’s Courage House meetings (for the SF Club of London), which were a more convenient centre than the Parker Pen for those of us south of the river. I’ve been trying to remember who were the regulars – I’m sure there was Lang Jones, and I think Keith Otter; probably the Varleys came occasionally, but there usually weren’t many more than half a dozen. It was as a result of attending these that I was persuaded to join the committee for the 1965 London Worldcon responsible for Publications).

This was a pretty traumatic experience, especially as after educating the manager of the chosen hotel in the requirements of fandom, he was promoted to another hotel, and we had to decide whether to stay with him or the hotel. We chose the former, as the new hotel promised all sorts of whizzy new features – such as CCTV from the con hall to the bedrooms (not actually operational till after the con, though.) Since then, I have resisted all efforts to persuade me on to a con committee – and I don’t think I even spoke to Ella again after it was all over.

Despite having known Archie Mercer for years, I only visited once – after the move to Cornwall, but don’t remember much about the visit except that it was just after the first series of ‘Hitchhiker’ was broadcast, and I was going to let him have the tape – but my machine had malfunctioned, so had to disappoint them. I can’t sign off without saying how much I shall miss Ken Slater – as it was through *Operation Fantast* that I met Eric Jones, and so was brought in to fandom; my life would have been totally different without him.

Gosh, Peter, this is something new – Loncon II (like its predecessor) switched hotels from the one first chosen. At last, I think we’ve hit upon something that’s not mentioned in Skyrack or THEN! I also owe Ted Forsyth an apology because last time I changed the date in his anecdote, thinking Ted was referring to the general panic when Ella lost her hotel 48 hours before the 1960 London Eastercon. But no, as Ted gently corrects me, he did indeed mean 1965. So where was that original hotel, I wonder? Peter?

Joe Patrizio
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*Joe in 2006. His
photo.*

Hi Peter,

Great article by Jim on Archie Mercer – brought back lots of memories. My abiding memory of Archie is his agonising over a penny discrepancy in the BSFA accounts when he was treasurer. Inexperienced as I was, I suggested that nobody would care about a penny, but he really worried away at it. Can’t remember whether he found it or not. I also remember having a somewhat protracted correspondence (and talks) with Beryl about Scientology. She insisted that she had out-of-body experiences (almost at will) and claimed to be ‘clear’. Having read (most) of Dianetics, I considered this to be nonsense and told her so. But our discussions, although heated, never became ugly and we always remained on good terms. She was a great person to be around.

The Melting Pot was its usual fascinating self. Mike Moorcock particularly interesting, of course, but lots of other good stuff. And one from Ted Forsyth!! Did you use the mating call of the greater spotted whatsit to lure him into your net? His one error was that I wasn’t editor of *Vector*, but secretary of the BSFA (but you knew that, didn’t you). He mentions meeting after 36 years and how I’d changed; I could say the same about him – but I’d be lying. He looked just the same after all those years – bastard!

Before I sign off, here's a story for you. We have a friend, Tim Hopkins, who we've known for more than 15 years, through volunteer work. When Arthur Clarke died somebody told us that Tim's dad had known him, and when we talked to him about it, it transpires that Eric Hopkins was a BIS member in London during the 30s and 40s and was almost certainly at gatherings with Bill Temple, Arthur and all the others. Tim also has a copy of *The Fantast* (Dec. 41, I think) with an article by his dad in it. I don't remember Bill mentioning anybody of that name, but he must have been around during the Grays Inn Road days. Anne contacted Sam Youd, who remembered him well (Eric had been godfather to Sam's oldest daughter). We've asked Tim to let us see *Fantast*, and I'll let you know if he does. Have you come across 'Eric Hopkins' in your search for the roots of British fandom? Please let me know if you have.

Sorry, Joe, never heard of him – but it's a small world isn't it, in which you, living in Edinburgh, have a friend who turns out to have family connections to pre-war London fandom. And in which 1950s fan Brian Varley, who has lived all over the UK, should turn up quite near to me in the West Midlands. Eileen and I recently visited Brian, who remarried after his wife Frances died in 1998, to find the Varleys now spend much of their time at bridge conventions. So he won't be at Kettering. But Brian hasn't forgotten fandom:

Brian Varley
brian@brianvarley.f2s.com



Brian in 2008. Slightly fuzzy photo due to poor camera work by PW

Dear Peter,

I found *Prolapse* an interesting read and was delighted to learn that some of my contemporaries in the '50's & '60's are still alive and kicking and some of them even more verbose. If Fandom did one thing for me it was to provide me with a few, but very precious, friends who I mainly kept to the end of their lives, Fran, of course, was one and Ethel Lindsay another. In fact I met Ethel for the first time at the *Supermancon* ('54 was it?) and was in touch with her until the day before she died. John Russell Fearn was the star guest and, indeed, John Brunner attended what I believe was his first con (he was generally considered a stuck-up snob by most of the people that I knew at that time). I recall Ethel saying to Fran (who was Frances Evans at that time, attending with her then-husband Cyril) that she was so pleased to find that there were other females in fandom other than herself. Glasgow it seems was then devoid of other women fans. Long after I was active in fandom I still wrote things for her because I suppose (a) she was very persuasive and (b) she was a very good friend to both Fran and I.

My other lifelong friend from those days was Harry Turner, the nearest thing to a polymath I ever knew. Harry is now well past 80 and finds continuing correspondence to be a burden, but we still exchange Xmas cards. I still have masses of his letters filed away simply because I can't bring myself to destroy them. Harry was fanning pre-war, doing covers for fanzines of that era, and I have a copy of *Critical Wave* from 1993 which includes a portfolio of his art.

I guess what is coming into clarity in my mind is whether *Prolapse* is recording the part played in Manchester fandom by Harry and his faithful collaborator Eric Needham. I do still have some copies of his fanzines *Zenith & Now and Then*, plus copies of *Space Times*, which were edited and printed by Harry in the early days. Eric's little advertising jingles for the vast range of 'Widower's Wonderful' products should not be lost altogether. Most of us at the time were trying to outdo Eric, but with little success. Try these:-

The Mona Lisa's secret smile
 Which hints of gay adventure
 Could be more daring, if she were wearing
 WIDOWER'S PORCELAIN DENTURES

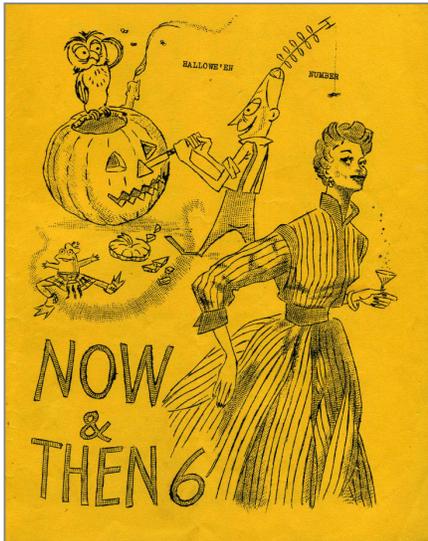
The Ancient Mariner, lost at sea
 Had almost given up hope.
 What washed this explorer safely ashore?
 A bar of WIDOWER'S SOAP

The same issue (*Now & Then* #6) contains a letter from Gramma Rory M. Faulkner, writing from 'Rancho Rigor Mortis' in California about his two long poems on Fan Love and Femme Love in #3, and addressing a warning to 'gal friends of this strato-beanied Don Juan':

When Eric vows platonic love
 Do not be led astray
 He means the tonic is for you
 For him, 'tis only play

As regards Manchester Fandom, I was there physically for around 18 months whilst on National Service, based in Manchester. It was there I met Sandy Sanderson and discovered a soul-mate SF-wise. He saw an ad in a Manchester paper for the NWSFC and asked if I'd go along with him. We went and the rest is history. After I was demobbed I returned to London but still acted as the Treasurer for the *Supermancon* from a series of addresses in and around London. I would honestly have thought that Dave Cohen was by far and away the most knowledgeable of the survivors of that day.

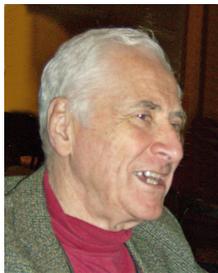
Great stuff, Brian! And I think we might be seeing more of those Wonderful Widower's products in future issues!



Above; Harry Turner's cover illo depicted Fran Evans at Hallowe'en. Below; Frances Evans & Brian Varley at Supermancon, 1954, Photo from Norman Shorrock.



Keith Freeman
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*Keith at Orbital.
Photo; Rob Hansen.*

*Below: Fred Smith
menaces Ina's friend
Pat Doolan in her
'Bergey girl' outfit
at Supermancon,
while Brian Lewis
leaps to the rescue!*

*Photo; Norman
Shorrocks*



Fred Smith
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*Fred in 2008.
His photo.*

Dear Peter,

My experiences at *Orbital* have confirmed my feeling that, for me, very large cons are not to my liking. I'll admit the multi-stream programming allowed me to feel much more at home in the small room where the 'fannish' goings-on went on but there were too many people wandering around a too big area for me. Sorry about mentioning something that happened such a short time ago – but it leads me on to Martin Tudor's reminiscences of the previously completely unknown (to me) *MiScon* conventions. The programmes were not, perhaps, a complete throwback to the cons I first started going to – but they did have that 'feel'. The clever use of the actual con report immediately after was a stroke of (dare I say it) editorial genius. Luckily, there seem to be moves afoot to organise (or mayhap disorganise) small cons as one-offs and get-togethers of various old farts ... a move I'm all for (with the proviso that I don't get involved in the organising!)

With Dan Morgan's (excellent) piece you seem to have gone even further back into fan-history – to a time we might even call the prehistoric age of fandom. If I could correct him (how dare I!) on one point. At *LXICon* Kingsley Amis was the GoH (first time, I believe, someone who was 'not one of us' was so honoured). Brian Aldiss was the go-between who approached Kingsley on behalf of the con-com. As GoH he hardly deserves the phrase, "He came along with Brian Aldiss, as I remember," which makes him sound like a mere attendee!

Jim Linwood has uncovered (or at any rate revealed) a lot of background to Archie Mercer that (far too late) helps me put my feelings for him in more perspective. I visited him and Beryl down in Cornwall a couple of times (I was down there on business) and they seemed relaxed and very happy. I think Archie was shy and the atmosphere at conventions didn't really suit him but a stubborn streak in him kept him coming and, I hope, the slights and ignorant behaviour of some fans never affected him too much.

Actually, about the move to Cornwall, the story Beryl told me was that they went there on holiday and fell in love with it. They motored down a hill into a village and knew this was the place for them. They went back to Bristol and started doing all that was necessary to move. The only part of the story that Beryl admitted was sad (for both of them) was that they could never find 'their' village again. Beryl's imagination, of course, provided the answer – it was the Cornish equivalent of Brigadoon...

Tony Glynn's line about Brian Lewis: "He died suddenly at the height of his powers." Well, I remember being in a bar at a con with Brian and some others and he was ogling some near-naked femme fans (in, or nearly out of, costumes), drinking away and smoking. He started telling us of his several heart attacks – how it was so relaxing when you had one – there was nothing you could do, and everyone else had to run around and do everything that was necessary. Someone asked if he should still be drinking, etc, (especially the 'etc') if he had a dicky heart? "I have a choice," he said, "I can live it up and die quick, or I can follow the doctor's orders and live unhappily ever after." (That's a paraphrase, of course, dredged from my unreliable memory). So I take exception to the "suddenly"!

I remember a chap named 'Brian' as a genial companion at the bar at various conventions into the late seventies, at least. However, (not having been a New Worlds fan) I didn't associate him with the 'Brian Lewis' who did the professional artwork, and was quite taken-aback when the penny finally dropped, about ten years late! He was one of the original zap-gun brigade at Supermancon, (along with Brian Varley and another wild character called Fred Smith)!

Dear Peter,

All the items from your correspondents about John Brunner are fascinating. Somehow or other I also got the impression that he was arrogant, maybe because he had been an officer in the RAF when I was only a common 'erk'! Can't say whether I ever actually met the man but his fan-writings sounded big-headed. On the other hand Charles Platt and Mike Moorcock come across as rather boorish which would tend to make me more sympathetic to the memory of JKHB. Additionally, I don't care for their writing or what they did to *New Worlds*, or for the whole 'New Wave thing'. Philip K. Dick may have been claimed as one of that group but I would reckon he was a far better writer than that.

The rest of this issue is also very interesting, particularly Jim Linwood's long article about Archie Mercer. Archie and I discovered fandom at about the same time, of course, and we were both founder members of OMPA. I don't remember Jim in the organisation; possibly he joined after I had left. I'm sure he would have been a kindred spirit because of his love of modern jazz. Archie, on the other hand, was indeed a mouldy fig!

With regard to your "Unified Theory" of British Fandom in the Fifties I don't particularly recollect the great North/South divide mentioned, although I was aware of the 'bloody provincials' remark. Maybe our little Scottish group was so far north that we were completely outside the stramash! (There's a good Scots word for you!). I did make one visit to the Globe (was it?) back when the London Circle still met but all I can remember of that occasion was spiriting Frances Evans (co-editor of *Femizine*) away from the clutches of Ted Tubb!

(I asked Fred about his group and wondered if Don Malcolm had been involved).

As Rob Hansen notes in *THEN*, Ethel Lindsay first discovered Fandom through the pages of *Nebula* and this led to her joining our Glasgow group, the 'New Lands' club (named for 'Newlands', a



*Haemogoblin-3
with cover by Rod
MacLeod – an old
friend of Fred's*

district in Glasgow where David Page's parents had a rather elegant mansion). Apart from David and Ethel the other members were Matt Elder (who first brought us together), Alan Mackie, Brian Miller and me, later joined by Peter Hennessey and a few others. We met at David's and pretty soon (about 1953) decided to produce a fanzine, *Haemogoblin*, the first issue including material by Alan, Peter and me, illos by Brian, and even an article by Ken Slater!

It was entirely hand-printed by Alan, who then abandoned it as too much like work. I then 'acquired' the zine and duplicated a few more issues before gafiating myself. (I've never heard of Don Malcolm, by the way). The club was more of a social get-together of SF fans and, apart from that first ish of the zine, about the only thing we did as a club was to visit the editorial offices of *Nebula* once. Hope this fills in the background a bit.

Fred, I bought a big box of fanzines at Orbital – the remains of Ken Bulmer's collection – which included a couple of copies of Haemogoblin. Issue 2 (not dated but produced for the 6th OMPA mailing, December 1955) and #3 from June 1957 – quite a while after the club folded. This has a particularly impressive silk-screened cover in black and green (it may not come out so well in b&w print but looks great in the pdf version). It's a good little fanzine. As for Don Malcolm, he lives in Paisley, wrote stories for New Worlds in the late fifties and early sixties and attended cons into the eighties. Speaking of whom, here's a fascinating little note. Needless to say, Don, I want you to write more....

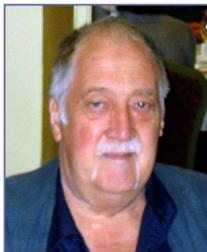
Don Malcolm,
Paisley

Dear Peter,

I haven't sent anything this time as you are evidently well-stocked. I have an album of photos; James White, Bob Shaw, Brian Aldiss, Harry Harrison, Gerard Quinn, taken in Jim's working loft, with Peggy, Sadie, and more. I remember Bob's working methods, *not* as related, our discussions on the government, his puns and other amusing stories, and my theory as to why he never won a Hugo for his SF, (controversial if nothing else). How I wish I'd had a recorder during our many conversations! It's only now that I realise just how lucky I was. I also have every letter and card sent to me over the years, including a John Carnell archive. It's obvious that I have a strong collecting gene!

How far to Paisley, I wonder? Only 300 miles... wonder how long it would take me to motor up there with my trusty laptop and scanner... you can't expect me to ignore that tempting bait, Don! Meanwhile, George Locke has really got the bit between his teeth after his magnum opus this time...

George Locke
[george_locke@
hotmail.com](mailto:george_locke@hotmail.com)



*George at his
London
bookshop, 2007.
Photo by PW*

Dear Peter,

Thanks for the latest *Prolapse*, fascinating as usual, and especially enjoyed Jim's piece on Archie Mercer. But I was especially interested in Mike Moorcock's letter, notably his summary of the history of his involvement with the weekly comic, *Tarzan Adventures*. I have a vivid memory of him conducting a bunch of us Globe-attendees to his office in Brooke Street (pretty much round the corner) and showing us round. I believe we were in a mellow condition, and may well have been singing a ditty whose only words I can now remember were 'We met on the steps of a Moscow latrine.'

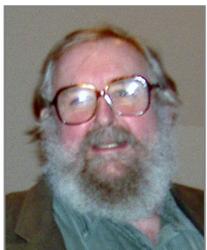
I don't deal in comics, and never have done, so I don't know where *TA* stands in terms of rarity or collectability, but about ten years ago I bought a long run from an auction sale in Norfolk. Present, if I remember rightly, was a complete run of the numbers edited by Mike. Although I'd bought the run for resale I kept a few in my own collection, as I am apt to do with bulk purchases – 22 in all. They include the complete series of 'Sojan' stories that Mike wrote, all illustrated by Jim Cawthorn.

It might be an idea if someone would do a spot of research into *TA* and produce a list of all the contributions by SF fans and other SF personalities of the day whom Mike managed to attract, and reveal who lay behind the various by-lines. Meanwhile, I've run through those 22 scattered numbers, from 1957 and 1958, and found a few things to whet a researcher's appetite.

As a footnote to my long article in your current issue I can report that Liverpool University Press have just issued a very much enlarged edition of Patrick J. Kearney's *The Paris Olympia Press*; £25 and a real bargain. The introduction amends the Soho dealer "Sammy", to whom Pat used to run books, to "a bookseller in West London". I'm glad you were able to confirm my strong suspicion that "Sammy" was indeed Alan Bale. The introduction also drops a couple of other fannish names. It would seem that the gentleman who first tried to interest Pat in the Olympia Press, through the medium of J. P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man* while they were rooming together in Paris, was none other than Don Geldart!

Who is Don Geldart? All will be revealed next time. George, being indefatigable, then went on to describe those issues of Tarzan Adventures, but on reflection decided to hold fire and to turn his notes into a follow-up article, which will be great fun if we can persuade our next correspondent to get involved!

Mike Moorcock,
Texas.



Dear Pete,

Chris Priest was wondering why someone would call William Golding 'Bill', and I answered "because Bill Golding said 'I'm Bill Golding'". Similarly, Jimmy Ballard's older friends called him 'Jimmy'. I rarely called Blish anything but Blish. Dave Langford passed on a piece of mine, done late 59 I'd guess. where I single out the likes of Blish and Aldiss for special praise but demanded a generally higher standard of writing based on character and social commentary. In it, Dave pointed out, I also came up with the term 'speculative fiction', to describe this new kind of fiction.

I said hadn't Heinlein coined the term first, and Dave said only as a substitute term for SF. I was rather pleased (I also mentioned Golding...) that I'd been saying much the same since then! Blish proved a disappointment after A CASE OF CONSCIENCE. Aldiss, right up to his wonderful HARM (2007), rarely disappoints.



Archie in full rig-out; we forgot to mention the shabby tweed jacket! Photo by Harry Nadler, at RePetercon 1964.

I think Charles Platt's anecdote about my rudeness at Brunner's has it about right, though I never *felt* much malice to John – but when he behaved pompously I have to admit I responded appropriately. We were on pretty good terms, though, in general. Chris Priest is right that I was PNG at the Brunner's but I have to say I cultivated this after Brunner (and Blish) were convinced I'd thrown that bloody glass which, I know, you told me about. My efforts to sort it out with Brunner, Blish and Priest, who were sitting together, caused me a further episode of irritability and I managed to keep being PNG for a couple of years. But I had known John since the mid-50s and had published some of his best work, which he understood. I might have been nasty to John, and Marjorie was certainly pissed-off that I'd let the young women (she called them whores) in to rob her -- though it was always moot – but I bow to Charles's experience here.

Jimmy Ballard's only social life after his wife Mary died was at the Brunner's in the early- to mid-sixties – until I'd introduced him to Claire, who had briefly been my girl-friend (see his moving memoir *MIRACLES OF LIFE* – which isn't all as I remember some things, but his accounts are fairly close to mine). Later, in the early 70s, Jimmy transferred his social life to Emma Tennant's, another ex-lady friend of mine, who gave 'soirees' at her Blenheim Crescent house. Before that, however, John's parties had been pretty lively. We were both blues fans and I met a bunch of my heroes at John's Hampstead place –including Sonny Terry and others.

I always greatly admired Dan Morgan's jazz guitar but do have to inform him that Rock and Roll is here to stay. There's plenty of room for everyone – my point, I think, about SF. What I always demanded was a greater level of ambition than was evident in most popular arts. I didn't care if it was jazz, rock or science fiction.

Jim Linwood's moving piece on Archie Mercer was the high point of the issue, I think. He recreated a whole picture of the man who so hated ties he wouldn't wear one to Sandra Hall's wedding – he wore the same horrible, smelly green shirt and pullover – to the point that Honey, Sandra's rather disapproving grandmother, wanted him thrown out. To Sandra's credit she defended Archie and refused to acknowledge Honey's complaint. Archie was incredibly kind – rather typically for that sort of introvert. Reading between the lines, a number of those guys who lived alone weren't the cleanest of people and were perhaps best enjoyed through their writing.

Tony Berry,
morbius@zoom.co.uk



Tony at *Novacons-36*. Photo by Ian Whates

Greetings,

Thanks for the latest *Prolapse* – as triffic as ever. Martin's article about the MiSFiTs and *MiScons* was especially entertaining. The ravages of time and alcohol have taken their toll on my memory and so it was good to re-live this bit of my fannish history, although the photos of me, Martin and Steve were a little frightening. Reading it all again, I thought, "You know, these were *good*, these are the sort of cons I'd like to go to!" I was suitably filled with egoboo. We were accused of elitism at the time by making them invitation-only, but as was shown with the third con, when you're in a small venue too many people makes it all less intimate and inclusive. Less fun. Besides, we were following the example of the *Silicons*.

As Martin says, over the years since *MiS-saigon*, whenever the Gang of Four got together and drank enough, conversation would inevitably turn to running another one. Sometimes our plans became over-ambitious, culminating in the idea of finding a venue in Bruges in Belgium, which as any trufan knows, is the beer capital of the world. Our megalomania foundered on the logistics of getting everyone over there, hiring a 60-seater coach, paying for the hotel etc. Maybe if one of us wins big on the Lottery....

A sad note after the piece on Ken Slater was the death of Ray Bradbury, who was shown in the *MiScon* article cutting off the head of Steve Green. He was a nice guy and stalwart of the Birmingham fannish scene. Certainly *Novacons* will never be the same without him. Actually, reading about how Ken introduced so many to SF reminded me of how I first met you. A long time ago, when I was still at school, you came and gave a talk on SF to the Coventry Astronomical Society, of which I was a member. Oh yes. Afterwards I came up to you and asked how I could get hold of a copy of Stapledon's *LAST AND FIRST MEN* (I had not yet discovered *Andromeda*), and you gave me Ken's details. Not *Andromeda's*. Maybe Rog would like to discuss this with you?

Good grief, Tony, that was a million years ago when I was on the Speakers' Panel for the British Association. I used to go around schools and social clubs giving talks, usually with a slide-projector, for which I was paid the princely sum of £5.00 per session. It helped to pay the mortgage, which was a real struggle back then. Fancy you remembering that! Now here's someone else from the Old Days...

Gerald Bishop,
gerbish@btinternet.com



Gerald in 2009, his photo

Dear Peter,

Just for fun, I've just Yahoo'd on 'Gerbish,Ye' and it came up with *Prolapse 5* and your article on *Tynecon 74*.... And the piccy of me from the days when I still had a full head of hair!

That photo was actually taken at the con, where I was using a borrowed tape recorder + a mixer hired from Panavision UK. I dimly recall 'The Wizard of Ozimov' with 1/2r, Wendy, Jim Blish & others. As you suggest, it was me on the tapes, though I can't recall how I was able to edit those cues.... unless it was done by post beforehand, or Judy brought along a master and I used a razor blade & sticky tape on it in my room. A lot of hectic hard work in rehearsal – as there was only the con itself where it could all come together – but fun to do.

I'm not sure if I taped the performance – the recorder was probably in use for the cues – but all my tapes of speeches and panels at *Easter-* and *Novacons* from the 70's and early 80's were passed on to Simon Bradshaw of the SFF a few years ago. He was going to transfer them to digital formats. I haven't heard from him as to whether he was successful and whether he was ever able to clean-up all the ambient noise and mains hum arising from the basic kit which was all that I could afford to buy to take to cons.

Around the same time I passed on the tapes I donated my library of SF books (approx, 120 shelf-feet of it) to Palacky University in The Czech Republic who wanted to set up a Library of 'ordinary genre' contemporary fiction in English. All my 'Badger' and similar crud titles which saw only one edition (and I'm not sure they deserved even that many), along with many standard works which didn't see any translated editions are now available to researchers in a non-English-speaking region where there's little chance of another copy being extant within 500 miles. I did warn them about the amount of shelving they'd need to cope with it, but they were delighted at the donation.

Since I gaffiated in the mid-80's I've spent most of the holiday time I used to book off for cons working at CAMRA Beer Festivals, mainly *in vitro* revivication but more latterly in other technical areas. If you'd care to use extract of the above as some form of LoC somewhere, please pass my Best Bishes on to the Geriatrifen who remember me...

Not sure what you mean by the last bit, Gerald (giving the kiss of life to drunks?) but great to hear from you again. You were a Hero at Worcester in 1971, working all night to check our films, and then all day to run the projection equipment! And now, one of our 'younger' readers concludes the lettercol...

Doug Bell
doug_bell@tiscali.co.uk



Doug Bell in Cornwall; his photo

Hi Peter,

I've been meaning to email you a couple of weeks ago but real life has intervened as it always does with fanac. It was great to catch up with you at Eastercon albeit briefly – I have taken the advice you gave me then, and I recently managed to find a copy of IN SEARCH OF WONDER through a re-seller on Amazon and am now thoroughly enjoying damon knight's reviews for the first time. A great piece of work, and one that has made me already draw up a list of some books I want to read, haven't read for a while or I seem to have lost!

Thanks for the latest copy of *Prolapse* which I devoured in one sitting. Although this ish was packed with fannish goodness, and contained one of the liveliest letter-columns I've read for a long time, the stand-out article for me was Jim Linwood's piece on 'forgotten fan' Archie Mercer.

I first came across Archie's name in the pages of THEN. Until then I had been living in Bristol more-or-less unaware that there had been an earlier generation of fans living there. Christina had hinted at a past history but I'd never felt that bothered up until that point to do much about it. However, discovering this hard but sketchy evidence made me feel there was some sort of a connection between fandom currently in Bristol and that of the past. I felt animated enough about this that later that summer I demanded the local SF group should mark the anniversary of when fandom first came to the city. The anniversary weekend came, and I managed to cajole enough people up to the famous circular 'Cock of the North' pub. Although out of the way and a bit run-down, I'd specifically chosen this pub to meet in as it was the closest one to Halsbury Road, where according to Tony Walsh in THEN the BaD group was founded. A good night was had by all, even though a couple of weeks later I had to admit to the group that I'd got the date wrong by a month. Never mind, next year we would do it properly...

That never happened. Within the year we'd moved to Cornwall for work reasons. Somewhere from the dark recesses of my brain I pulled out the fact that Archie and Beryl had made the leap from Bristol to Kernow some 30 years before. Again, that feeling of fannish-connectedness kicked in. Even though I didn't know the Mercers, in our early days south of the Tamar I took some comfort that other Bristol fans had done the same thing and had carved out a new life for themselves down here. So thanks, Peter, for publishing Jim's fine character piece. It really shed some light on one of the most interesting fans I never had a chance to know.

It gets to you like that, Doug! At Orbital Rob Hansen confessed to having taken fannish visitors to view Wally Gillings' former residence in Ilford, where British fandom started in 1930. And I have a hankering to go back to the basement flat where the old Cheltenham Circle once convened. Are we crazy, or what?

WE ALSO HEARD FROM: (At slightly more length, this time...)

John Berry wrote, "I must admit that living in Belfast in the fifties I was not really *au fait* with British fandom, except for visits by Chuck, Mal Ashworth, Eric Bentcliffe, etc, but avidly reading these pages has really put me in the picture. I now regret that I did not visit any GB conventions – Willis termed me a 'nonconpoop.' In fact, the only SF convention I attended was in Detroit in 59, where I was Fan Guest of Honour." **Dave Britton** sent photographs, and said, "It seems like only yesterday when I was corresponding with Alan Dodd, reading your *Speculation*, bemused by Platt's *Beyond*, and generally excited by all these strange people with enthusiasms that overlapped mine."

Judy Blish commented, "Funny that people thought Blish's work 'intensely personal' – he was (ostensibly) a worshiper of 'sovereign reason' and only rarely intended to allow the other side of his brain access to his typewriter (see 'Common Time' which he was half-proud and half-embarrassed about. As for religion, while much of his stuff was devoted to exploring issues of theological significance, at the same time his personal statement was, "If there is a God, I hate Him." Somebody should note somewhere that he was a Gemini and had two viewpoints about everything. Well, many things."

Bill Burns noted: "I enjoyed Jim's 'Forgotten Fans' piece on Archie Mercer. I must have met Archie at the 1965 *Brumcon*, and I visited him in Bristol a couple of months later. You may be wondering why I would travel almost 200 miles to see someone I hardly knew, but in fact I was in Bristol for a university admission interview. I also visited Birmingham (but missed you) and Leeds, where I ended up. So I met up with Archie after my interview – I don't remember if he had a phone and I called him, or if I just made my way to his flat – and we spent an hour or so chatting, then he ran me back to the station on his motor scooter. From the stories I've heard, it's just as well I wasn't there at mealtime!"

Ted Forsyth recalled *Loncon II*: "I particularly remember part of the Art Auction and an Eddie Jones gouache picture, 'At the Tips', illustrating a scene from Brian Aldiss' *HOTHOUSE*. Ted Tubb, in his usual manner, announced that the person who bought the picture would receive a kiss from Ethel Lindsay. Brian Burgess immediately began bidding so I joined

in and was successful. [*to Ethel's great relief? – PW*] The picture still hangs on my wall 43 years later (and I got the kiss!). That made me drag out my copy of the 'Atom Anthology', and flicking through the pages reminded me of the shredded state of stencils after Arthur had finished his attack on an illustration. What he handed to Ella for printing resembled a badly torn net curtain, but she usually managed to come up with the goods and do justice to Arthur's efforts. Watching Arthur at work on a stencil was almost frightening, but the end result was always worthwhile. I wonder what he would have done with the facilities we have now – colour, computer graphics, perhaps even a video version of an animated Atom Anthology!"

Jerry Kaufman said, "I found that Jim Linwood really brought Mercer to life. In some ways, and not always the best ways, Mercer reminded me of myself. I feel just that awkward at fan gatherings. (I'm skipping *Corflu* this year, and the awkwardness is one of the reasons. It affects me more some years than others.)" **Dave Langford** explained, "I expect various people have told you by now, but the mystery 'Rose' who is said to look like Charles Platt is his daughter, Rose Fox, who was mightily tickled to learn about bits of his notorious fan career from *Ansible*. Don't know whether she went on to read *The Book* or the on-line *Prolapse*! I met her when she visited London (with her chap) last year, and introduced her to Judith Clute. Later in the year Rose became Science Fiction/Fantasy/Horror reviews editor at *Publishers Weekly*, so it must be in the blood."

Robert Lichtman confessed, "It wasn't until Dan Morgan's autobiographical piece that the issue began to engage me. I particularly liked his comments about "the very weird L. Ron Hubbard", coupled with that photo in which his full-of-himself-ness shines through. And I also mused over Dan's reference to "lady Romantic Novelists of both sexes" at the summer writing school he went to with Ken Bulmer. But it's Jim Linwood's lovely long reminiscence of Archie Mercer that's the heart of the issue for me. I have no idea of what personal contact I may have had with him, but it was our mutual participation in OMPA that was probably our main connection. Though I'll confess that I've never been able to get interested in his faan fiction 'novel', *The Meadows of Fantasy*, despite a couple of tries. Has anyone else had the same difficulty?"

Peter Nicholls grumped, "One of the more alarming things about *Prolapse* is the sense it sometimes gives you that people you used to know have been transformed by time into extras from 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers'. I'm thinking especially of people with once known -- among many other things -- for short fuses, truculence, caustic put-downs and a general willingness to explode into armed warfare at a moment's notice. For example, from more-or-less my generation, Christopher Priest, Mike Moorcock and Charles Platt. Their reminiscences in *Prolapse* aren't like that. Who are these genial, good-natured, considerate pod people, graciously yarning? Thank God the body-snatchers don't seem to have reached Australia yet. I'm still as big a bastard as ever I was. (Well, not technically; I've dropped from 106 kilos to 79.5 kilos in the last year and a half, and feel a great deal better for it.)"

Lloyd Penney said, "It sounds like Archie Mercer was a fine man to know, even if he was a little hard to *get* to know. I see so much negativity in fandom which means I am delighted by anything positive – and Archie was one of those who were positive. He might have been awkward, but so were we all at some point, and some of us never lost that awkwardness. Good that he found Beryl; finding someone to share your life may pull you out of that awkward stage. I speak from experience."

Greg Pickersgill mused, "I've been re-reading *Prolapse*, and have slightly modified my feelings about Martin Tudor's piece. It isn't the best-written bit but it does have background info and invokes a lot of memories, particularly about *MiSc0n-3*, and the influx of 'foreigners', which really did change the texture of the convention for the worse. People like Kate and Malcolm Davies and the bulk of the Croydon group were more notable for their determined apartness than for their interest in engaging with the pre-existing pattern. Yes, even Mark and Claire. It was all different then. They changed, but the rest didn't; you know they still get criticised by the rest of the Croydon people for being too 'fannish'.

Charles Platt recalled, "I remember visiting Roy Kay. Such a nice guy, going mad living in his parent's two-up-two-down house in Liverpool. His parents sat and watched TV solidly for the entire evening, I mean without moving from their chairs. There was a commercial for Woodbine cigarettes, and Roy's father reached into his pocket, without looking away from the TV screen, took out his Woodbines, and lit one, like a robot receiving instructions from the advertiser. If you saw a scene like that in a movie, you'd think it was too clichéd to be real. No doubt fandom provided some relief to Roy, just as it provided relief to me while I was feeling suicidal at Cambridge University, before I dropped out. Perhaps when he escaped from his parents' home, he didn't need fandom so much any more."

Alison Scott made excuses: "I'm very sorry for being such a dismal correspondent. As you know I look forward to *Prolapse* eagerly and read it from cover to cover. I am sure that I ought to remember loads of fabulous anecdotes from the 1980s but I don't. I think it's possible I was drinking at the time. I also struggle because I tend to think that my recollections are very drab and mundane compared to others." **Peter Sullivan** speculated, "After all the fuss about John Scalzi, as a 'feelthy dirty pro' getting a Hugo fan-writer nomination last year, it would have been entertaining for Michael Moorcock to have got a nomination for his writing in both *Prolapse* and *eI* over the past year..." And in a paen to Nostalgia, **Ian Williams** recalled, "The letter from Charles Platt reminds me of the one and only time I met him, and only the second time I'd met other fans in the flesh, on my second London pub visit early in 1970. I'd already started talking to him like a normal person when Mary Reed told me who he was and I immediately blurted out that I'd enjoyed GARBAGE WORLD."

"*Prolapse* is an admirable and uplifting piece of work which clearly helps keep a lot of dodgy characters off the streets.

But I know me: send me a copy and it'll moulder unread for yonks." – Andrew Stephenson, LoC

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- You have top-of-the-range Gold Star BNF status, but I'm *still* hoping for a response!
- You helped with this and/or previous issues, and believe me, I'm grateful.
- Your name is somewhere inside; but as an exercise for the reader you'll need to find it.
- You're getting this as a sample. Please tell me what you think!
- I *hate* this; but you really need to Do Something RSN if you want to see further issues (but see below).

Don't despair, I'll gladly e-mail the pdf version on request (in glorious technicolour), especially recommended for overseas readers. And as usual this issue goes onto the *eFanzines* site some four weeks after publication. Remember, response is the whole essence of the Prolapse Project; the fanzine is nothing without **your** memories of fannish times past. So get writing!