

Cytricon V

A Celebration of the
Kettering years



Guests of Honour:
Ina Shorrock & Peter Mabey



Fun and games at *Cytricon III* – illo by Dave
Jenrette, from cover of Ron Bennett's *Ploy #10*

at The George Hotel, Kettering
3rd - 5th October, 2008
The fiftieth anniversary year of *Cytricon IV*

Cytricon V

Cytricon V is a celebration of the Kettering years, four conventions which in their various ways changed the nature of British fandom forever. Here's a quick run-down of facts and figures:

Cytricon (informally known as the 'Blogcon')

8th-10th April (Easter), 1955.

Organised by: 'The Kettering Astronautical Society'

Committee: Bill Panter, chairman; Denny Cowan, Secretary; Joe Ayres, Treasurer; Al Lee, Publicity.

Publications: Two Progress Reports and a combined Programme Book/Combozine (which was reprinted in its entirety by the Convention Re-enactment Society for the *Paragon* fan-room, 2001).

Programme: Optimistic 2-day schedule most of which failed to happen due to gaffiation of London fan Stuart MacKenzie. Notable for LāSFāS tapera, 'The March of Slime' and the introduction of 'blog'.

Numbers: 115 attending (figure quoted by Peter Mabey/THEN, original source unknown).

Note: The London Circle had originally wanted to bring the 1955 convention back to London but the otherwise-unknown Kettering group was so enthusiastic that they were encouraged to go ahead. Nothing is known about them, before or after, although one photograph of Denny Cowan exists.

Cytricon II

30th March – 1st April (Easter) 1956

Organised by: The London Circle

Committee: No formal committee although Vince & Joy Clarke did publications, and others named include Ken & Pam Bulmer, Ted Tubb, Ted Carnell, Ken Slater, John Greengrass and Bruce Kidd.

Publications: Three Progress Reports and a combined Programme Book/Combozine.

Programme: Full 2-day schedule. Notable for London worldcon promotion meeting on Sunday p.m.

Numbers: 80 (figure quoted by Peter Mabey/THEN, but appears to be taken from list in Programme Book and so actual attending numbers may have been higher).

Note: Overseas visitors included Dave Kyle, Larry Shaw & Lee Hoffman Shaw (on honeymoon); Ellis Mills (US forces in Germany); Jan Jansen (Belgium); Anne Steul (Germany). Surprisingly, the local Kettering fans were not involved in any way, although Denny Cowan is said to have 'dropped in'.

Cytricon III

19th-21st April (Easter) 1957

Organised by: Dave Newman (Liverpool group)

Publications; None.

Programme: None, but notable for the 'Poleaxe Punch' party, and the first St Fantony ceremony on the Saturday night at which the Liverpool group were inducted wholesale into the Order.

Numbers; 30 attending by PW count. May have been 2/3 higher, (unconfirmed).

Note: Organised relatively late (Spring 1957) and announced in Dave Newman's fanzine *Natter*, which was circulated to all involved with *Loncon* later that year. Dave had hoped Kettering would be a useful get-together to resolve communication problems which had developed between Northern & Southern fans, but the London fans in particular stayed away, whether through penury or malice is unknown.

Cytricon IV

4th-7th April (Easter) 1958

Organised by: Dave Newman (Liverpool group)

Publications; None.

Programme: None, but notable for second 'Poleaxe Punch' party and for the Sunday afternoon discussion session (chaired by Dave Newman) which led to the formation of the BSFA.

Numbers: 52 attending, by PW count. May have been 2/3 higher, (unconfirmed).

Note; Again organised relatively late and called by Vince Clarke, "the best-kept secret in fandom", which may indicate lack of publicity. Again, for whatever reason few Londoners attended.

We also shouldn't forget the 'impromptu' Kettering Whit-weekend in 1960, and at least two St Fantony gatherings which took place at The George in the late 60s/early 70s.

Cytricon V is held under the joint auspices of The Convention Re-enactment Society (props: Claire Briailey & Mark Plummer), the Haverfordwest Science Fiction & Helmet-collecting Society (props; Greg & Catherine Pickersgill), and *Prolapse*, the fanzine of temporal regression.

Greg Pickersgill

When it changed

1958. That's fifty years ago. Almost as long as I have been alive. Longer than I have been intelligent, and longer than I have been calling myself a science fiction fan. Things were different then. And I don't mean just the demob suits and arguing about Elvis.

Fandom existed, in a form that we would recognise, and that many of us would love. But looked back on from now it seems a world away, on the other side of a huge divide. And that divide isn't just time, but the fact that Kettering in 1958 is arguably the moment that fandom stopped being one-all, all-one, and became something entirely other. The bizarre part is that the divide was unwittingly engineered by SF fans themselves in a last-ditch bid to preserve that which they felt important.

In 1958, as we all know Professor, the BSFA was born. Which was a Good Thing. Depending on how you look at it. Fandom before the BSFA was in a bit of a mess, staggering around in circles perhaps too fascinated with the scent of its own bottom. Far too many fans had taken far too seriously the idea – originally a joke, who knows? – that 'real fans don't read SF'. Well, they did of course but they pretended not to and there was little or no manifestation of the fundamental stuff of science fiction fandom in fanzines and conventions. Rather than being the glue that held fandom together SF had become a sort of excuse that was dispensed lightly and quickly so that the good stuff of drinking, flirting and squirting could be got on with pronto.

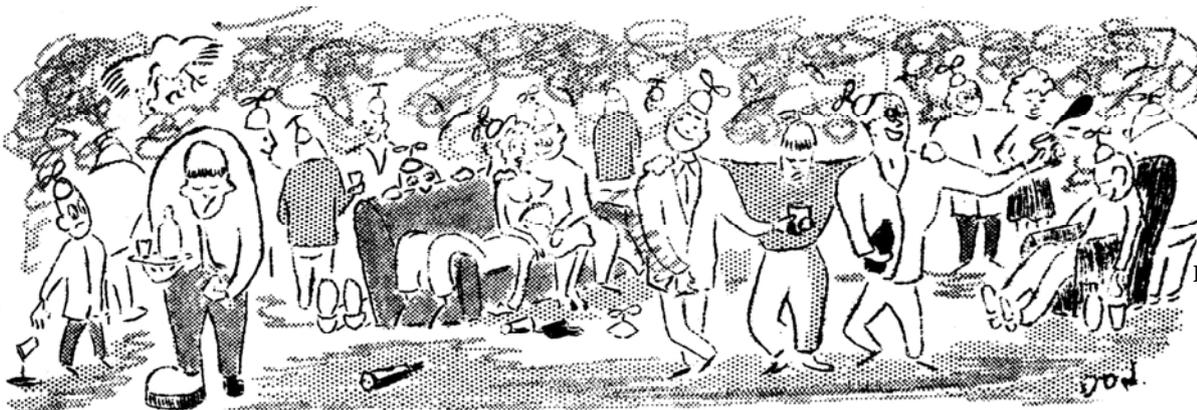
While this was all good fun for those involved – and truly who among us would refuse an evening so? – there was very little to appeal to any prospective Jo Fann whose main concern was a serious conversation about time and space as explored in the newest issue of *Nebula*. To put it in simple terms, fandom was dying out because SF fans weren't contacting it, or were alienated by what they found if they did.

The BSFA was the Big Idea to fix this, quite blatantly instituted with the express purpose of recruiting new blood for fandom. Well, that was a great idea while it lasted, but it didn't. With startling rapidity fandom fractionated out into at least two spheres of activity, the BSFA and everyone else. As no less an observer than Walter Willis put it "This situation was starkly illustrated at that BSFA meeting after one of the founder members remarked casually and unguardedly that the purpose of the BSFA was to recruit new members to fandom. A storm of protest made it clear that this was not the purpose of the BSFA at all. Fandom as we knew it was to them a useless excrescence, our fanzines incomprehensible and irrelevant. They were fandom." And so it has remained to this day.

And that was just the start. Ten years later 'Star Trek' fandom arrived, followed by 'Star Wars' fans barely a decade later, and by that time there were so many 'fandoms' that no-one could engage with them all even if they wanted to.

The Kettering conventions were hardly bigger than anyone's decent weekend party, the cumulative attendance of all four could have fitted into a classic-era *Novacon* (which of course didn't exist then – there was just the one convention, who could want for – or even afford – more?) and despite the usual ideological differences (what relevance to fandom does this 'jazz' stuff have?) it was a time when fans banded together in a loose defensive posture against the scorn of the world outside. Now, it's different, the mundanes have taken over, science fiction ideas, concepts, attitudes and feelings are commonplace, even the idea of fandom and fanzines is an ordinary.

In a bizarre sense we won, everyone got the point, but no-one knows where the idea came from. In truth none of that was the doing of the BSFA, but Kettering was when it changed.



Illo by
Don Allen
from
Satellite.

Peter with Nancy
Pooley on a Cheltenham
visit to Ina's house,
about 1960. Who's that
snogging with Frank
Herbert, I wonder?
(Photo from Simone
Restall)



Peter Mabey - one of the Backroom Boys

That reference is of course from Francis Spufford's super little book, one that should be required reading for all SF fans. Subtitled 'The Return of the British Boffin' it tells how Britain has produced those patient, inspired characters who've come up with some of our greatest scientific and technical ideas. And without knowing a great deal about Peter Mabey's real-world life I get the feeling that he's been one of those boffins, working away in backrooms on truly ground-breaking stuff.

It's like that in fandom, too; Peter has been around for a long time but because he's a steady, conscientious, reliable sort of chap he's not the sort that usually attracts attention. Thank goodness he received the Doc Weir Award – the first one presented, in 1963 – for his sterling work in organising the BSFA library in 1958 and then running it from the Cheltenham basement for the next five years.

He began reading SF pulps at school in 1938, rapidly moving up to H. G. Wells and on to other things. Ken Slater put him in touch with Eric Jones in 1955 and he was one of the first to join the new Cheltenham Circle, just too late for the first *Cytricon*, although he subsequently produced his famous 'chart', published in *Sidereal* and recently exhumed in *Prolapse-7*, which suggested that the downward trend in convention attendances would go into negative figures by 1957!

Happily, these rumours of fandom's demise were exaggerated although due to family reasons Peter missed Kettering and the first St Fantony ceremony in 1957. He had been very much involved in the months beforehand in helping Eric Jones and Bob Richardson create the entire mythos, and was able to take part in the second and somewhat grander ceremony at the London worldcon a few months later.

When the BSFA was formed in 1958 (according to Bobbie Wilde's report) Peter was one of the two Cheltenham fans appointed as librarians for the new Association. They must have had a great time in that cellar, shuffling the books and magazines, talking science fiction and sharing diverse memories of their war-time experiences; Eric had been in flying boats, Bob was a naval officer on midget submarines and Peter had gone to the Royal Aircraft Establishment for a crash course in structural engineering, working on such things as seats for troop transports. I get the feeling that they were advocates of the Campbellian tradition of SF, coming from Science/technology backgrounds rather than from the Arts/literary stream which is more common today.

A Maths graduate himself, Peter was looking for a job in computing as early as 1946 before moving instead into aerospace with Gloster Aircraft. He went into the structures department – called the Stress Office – developing Meteor, the first British jet-fighter (the tail unit was unsatisfactory, and a new one had to be designed). He gained experience on Ferranti's PEGASUS computer, the biggest in world at the time, and eventually became department head in 1962 with the title of 'Chief Stress-man'. He then went on to the Hawker Advanced Projects Group and spent time on a Mach-5 hypersonic ramjet, using a concept "which NASA still haven't got to work 45 years later". After that Peter tried for a job at CERN and was invited there for an interview, but they were "looking for a better mathematician than me". In 1966 he finally got into computing full-time and joined STC as 'Computer Consultant', his skill being "an ability to pick up a language sufficiently quickly to be pretty good at debugging".

Unfortunately, all this meant leaving Cheltenham but at least his new location meant he was able to attend meetings of the SF Club of London, usually meeting at Courage House, Ethel Lindsay's Nurses' Home in Surbiton. And that led naturally (and unavoidably, if I know Ella!) into the job of Publicity Officer for the second London worldcon in 1965. This saw the third major outing for St Fantony, and Peter was Master of the Rolls at the induction ceremony that year, a position he has held for subsequent initiations. He has rarely missed an Eastercon and can always be found in the science-oriented programme topics.

// (pw, with help from g&cp)

Ina Shorrock - fannish superwoman!



“I was in love with Ina,” sighed Jim Linwood. “We all were.”

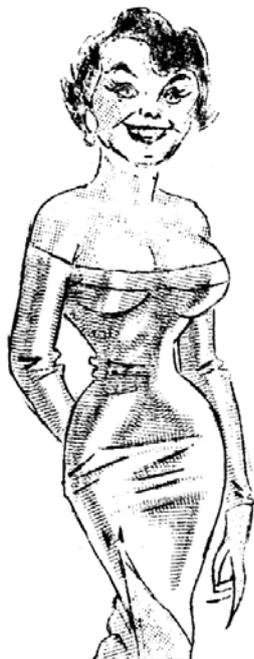
And who could have blamed them? Lovely Ina, Hostess with the Mostest, was the ever-smiling heart of the Liverpool group and she was at the very centre of British fandom all through the fifties and sixties.

In 1947 Ina Picken was nineteen and already a secret SF reader when she went to a neighbour’s party and amazingly – because he lived on the Birkenhead side of the Mersey – she met Norman. Was it love at first sight? Well, maybe, but after they’d been courting for six months the romance literally took off when she saw a copy of *Astounding* in his sports-coat pocket. Wow! – they *both* read science fiction! “After that I had to marry him, for his collection,” Ina said.

The river was but a minor obstacle and after work Norman would come across on the tube (you forgot Liverpool had an Underground, didn’t you?) and Ina would meet him at the station. One time he had a nose-bleed and was late and while Ina was pacing back and forward outside the station she was told by another female to “push off, this is *my* pitch!”

They married in 1950 and moved the collection into a little flat on Norman’s side of the river, and soon afterwards various dodgy characters started to turn up who he’d met on his trips to Frank Milnes’ Milcross bookshop, people like Les Johnson and Norman Weedall. So Ina was in the Liverpool Science Fiction Society from the start, when it was formed in November 1951, throwing her first fan-party for the group that Christmas despite having given birth to daughter Janet earlier that year.

After that came their first con in 1952, decorating the Space Dive, more parties, and an unending stream of visitors from all parts of British fandom and beyond, most of whom spent the night on Ina’s floor. She was our first costumer as a Bergey girl at the 1954 *Supermancon* (see above, with the Fred Smith Monster). She was a Space Warrior Woman at *Cytricon*, and she wore a coat of green paint as a Krishnan in 1956. In a scene for the LāSFāS film ‘May We Have The Pleasure’ (shown at the first London worldcon) the camera zoomed-in on Ina lying in a bubble-bath; “It’s no good, love,” said Norman after a tricky bit of filming, “we’ll have to have that top off.”



So, all round good sport, yes, but to mention a more serious side Ina did her time as effectively the first chairman of the BSFA, for two years, 1960-62 (Dave Newman was elected in 1958 but gafiated without striking a blow), something she may tell us about on Saturday. And, of course, she carried on reading *Astounding*.

What else? Oh, I forgot to mention the other four children (Linda, Alan, Roy and Gavin) who somehow managed to arrive despite the Shorrock’s busy social life. And the damson gin (already a legend when I entered fandom) which would be teleported into Shorrock room parties in innumerable plastic containers.

Ina was knighted a Lady of St Fantony at the very first initiation at Kettering in 1957, she won the ‘Doc Weir’ Award in 1976 (about ten years late!), and a special ‘Nova’ Award at *Novacon 33* for ‘Fifty Years in Fandom’.

Sadly, Norman passed away in 1999 but Ina has hardly missed an Eastercon and she still gophers most years. Unbelievably, however, she has never before been asked to be Guest of Honour. Well, we can put that right. Here’s to you Ina, Fannish Superwoman!

Unscrambling the Omelette

- or, The Quest for Kettering Past

You'll have noticed the four 'photo-panels' at *Cytricon V*, and I'd like to explain where they came from and how I was able to put the pictures into some sort of order. Let me say first that it took a while; those boards have been about five years in the making. But working with those photos has given me a lot of fun!

Not so long ago I knew almost nothing about the *Cytricons*. Neither did anyone else. For nearly thirty years we'd even forgotten there *was* a con in 1957 (Ken Bulmer's mistake) until Rob Hansen proved that yes, some fans did get together that Easter, despite the London worldcon later the same year. How could we ever have doubted it? So much evidence, one way or other, once you actually look for it. But the point of course is that for a long time no-one did.

Only when I started collecting old fan-photographs in 2003 (initially for 'Stars..' but then as an end in itself) did I start to get a glimpse of the *Cytricons*. The first breakthrough came when Rob sent me a CD of pictures from Vince's and Ethel's albums, with twenty-odd images labelled 'Kettering, 1955-58'. He'd tried to date them with such facts as he could be sure of. For instance, any images showing Lee Hoffman and Larry Shaw had to be from 1956 (they came over on honeymoon). Those with the Inchmery crew had to be 1955 or 1956 because they didn't attend the later years. Neither did the Willises or Bulmers, come to that. And so on.

For two years this file sat on my computer without much change until one *Novacon* Ina gave me a shoebox crammed full of fannish photographs, more-or-less in random order. Not much identification, but plenty of clues; badges, for instance – round in 1955, rectangular in 1956, while hall decorations were another giveaway and notices about 'Blog' *have* to date from 1955! I also pestered Ina to put names to some of the faces and gradually those strangers started to come to life, none more so than Dave Newman.

I'd been intrigued by this smart-looking character with the Jimmy Edwards moustache who popped-up time and time again, but even Rob hadn't been able to identify him. Eventually Ina explained that he'd been one of the Liverpool gang, and after some delving into old fanzines (thanks to Greg) I found that Dave Newman had been a very busy chappie indeed. From his fanzine *Natter* I discovered that he'd arranged the later two *Cytricons*, and when Greg unearthed Dave's *Prodigal* we suddenly had a remarkably detailed account of how he pushed and prodded the BSFA into existence in 1958.

But I was still confused. Sometimes Dave had his trademark moustache, in other pictures he was clean-shaven. Which year was which? And in several prints he wore a mortar-board and gown to introduce the Liverpool group 'tapera' – but was that 1955 or 1956? The evidence remained contradictory.

By this time I had many more pictures – Ina gave me a complete album, Ted Carnell's grand-daughter sent some useful images, and Bill Burns scanned Joy Clarke's photos. By a stroke of luck Roger Robinson had acquired John Roles's old picture-album (which had turned up on eBay) and he let me borrow that, while Beryl Bentcliffe loaned me Eric's photo-collection. Still others came from Brian Burgess, via Greg. Many were duplicates – most Kettering pictures were taken either by Norman Shorrocks or (from 1956) Peter West, and were passed around the fan-community. Still a lot to identify, but I was getting good at it – I learned to recognise some fans from views of the backs of their heads! (Obsessive? Oh, I don't think so!)

Generally you can tell a lot by people's clothes. It's unlikely, isn't it, that anyone would wear exactly the same thing in different years (even the men, apart from Archie Mercer). The various dresses and coats worn by Ina, for instance, are a clear marker to the year, as are the Liverpool group's Fancy Dress outfits, while any Kettering picture of fans in St Fantony blazers just *has* to be from 1958 – think about it!

So gradually my 'mystery' pile shrank, though still with some puzzles. For instance, one view of Ted Carnell with Bert Campbell clearly came from 1955, but it also appeared to show Ella Parker. How did she get there, three years early? This one baffled me for ages until I discovered that 'Ella' was in fact someone called Irene Boothroyd, a near look-alike with the same dark hair and glasses.

And disappointments – I thought I had some great views of the 1957 punch-party, until on closer inspection one of them showed Terry Jeeves with a distinctive diamond-pattern tie, which showed up elsewhere on some 1958 shots. OK, this confirmed they threw punch-parties on two consecutive years but it also meant I didn't have a single picture from *Cytricon III*. Didn't anyone take a camera?

Terry himself came to the rescue with an album which was pure gold. Most of his pictures were unique, he'd taken them himself. He'd covered *Cytricon III*, bless him, with one precious shot of that first St Fantony ceremony. Checking his pictures against the three con-reps from that year gave me further clues and I realised that the one unknown face simply *had* to be the American fan Dave Jenrette.

In the end I even managed to pin-down the Dave Newman mystery – it turned out the mortar-board pictures came from both 1955 *and* 1956. The first time he had a moustache; if you look closely you can see that in the second year he also had a beard – specially grown to go with his 'barbarian' outfit in the Fancy Dress. And the clean-shaven pictures? Easy! Dave habitually shaved-off his facial whiskers as a late-night stunt at most conventions. No wonder I was confused! //

– Peter Weston

Ina in slave-driving mood, maybe! Looks like a meeting to hand-over BSFA committee posts in 1962; Ted Forsyth was Treasurer, Terry Jeeves incoming Chairman, Bobbie Gray was incoming Vice-Chairman. Photo from Simone Restall.



Programme:

Greg is firmly of the belief that ‘the more programme the better’. While not quite going that far we do want to get your brains working, just a little bit, with these discussion events. Everything takes place on Saturday in the main hall/ ballroom:

10.00 a.m. - The Science Fiction of 1958

Claire Brialey leads a panel of ‘experts’ (Rog Peyton, Sandra Bond, & Jim Linwood) to talk about the red-hot titles of 1958. Was it a good year? Have 1958 stories become dated? Any real ‘classics’ in there? What were your favourite titles? (And don’t forget the short-stories).

11.00 a.m. Tea/Coffee

11.30 a.m. - The BSFA; was it a good idea?

Yes, we know, the BSFA was founded at Kettering to recruit for fandom. Now, fifty years later, Mark Plummer moderates a panel with Ina Shorrock, Keith Freeman and me, Peter Weston, to discuss the BSFA and its impact upon us as individuals and on British fandom generally. Was it necessary? Did it succeed in its original aims? Could things have worked out differently?

2.00 p.m. - Illustrated Fandom

With trusty laptop and projector I’ll be travelling into the past to show fans having fun in the Good Old Days. I’ve tried really hard to locate fannish films like the one from LāSFāS, ‘May We Have The Pleasure’, but without success; still, I’ll have clips from Dave Barber and Dicky Howett, and with a bit of luck a special surprise item.

3.00 p.m. Tea/Coffee

3.30 p.m. - How It Changed

Catherine Pickersgill will attempt to control a mixed panel comprising Peter Mabey (old-timer), Mike Scott (new boy), and Greg Pickersgill (class of '68), as they talk about British fandom, then and now; how it was and how it has changed over the years.

Dinner

Assemble from 6.30 p.m. (there is a bar). Evening meals will be served at 7.30 p.m. Layout will be circular tables seating up to ten people on each. The menu has been circulated and you should have **advised the hotel of your choices** when you checked-in. Cost is £17.50 per head, which will be added to your hotel bill so that on the night you only need pay for drinks. (pw)

Cytricon V)

The Celebrants:-

Doug Bell
Sandra Bond
Claire Brialey
John Dallman
Flick
Keith Freeman
Wendy Freeman
Steve Green
Rob Hansen
Eve Harvey
John Harvey
Susie Haynes
Christina Lake
Dave Langford
Jim Linwood
Marion Linwood
George Locke
Rita Locke

Peter Mabey
Mike Meara
Pat Meara
Anne Patrizio
Joe Patrizio
Rog Peyton
Catherine Pickersgill
Greg Pickersgill
Mark Plummer
David Redd
Andy Richards
Alan Rispin
Doreen Rogers
Mike Scott
Gavin Shorrock
Ina Shorrock
Eileen Weston
Peter Weston

Those who couldn't make it:-

Dave Barber
Bill & Mary Burns
Ramsey & Jenny Campbell
Dick Ellingsworth
Ted Forsyth
Dave Hale
Terry Jeeves
Brian Jordan
Tony Keen

Mike Moorcock
Darroll & Rosemary Pardoe
Bob Parkinson
Chris Priest
Andy Sawyer
Tony Thorne
Ted Tubb
Brian Varley
Gerry Webb

Those no longer with us:-

Too many to list, sadly. Our thoughts go out to old friends who are fanning no more, and in particular to two Kettering 'veterans' who passed away recently, Ron Bennett and Ken Slater, both of whom would have enlivened the proceedings immeasurably.

An Ode on which to end (courtesy Dave Langford)

"The fan elite," said Uncle Pete,
"Is much in need of bettering,
Which could be done by desperate fun
At WIDOWER'S WONDERFUL KETTERING."

"This enterprise will galvanise
A fading fannish nation,
By hatching lots of cosmic plots
For WIDOWER'S SECOND FOUNDATION."

