

“Somewhere in the wilds of Sutton Coldfield is a bit of the past that has decided to secede from now where the Singularity is progressing on schedule.” – Bob Parkinson, LoC



“Tell me, Bruce, don’t you sometimes miss New Zealand?”

See Bruce Burn’s adventures in 1960s London – *With the usual apologies to ‘Giles’*

INSIDE: ‘The Wandering Ghu’ by Bruce Burn; ‘The Last Hurrah of the Elsie Horde’ by Ken Bulmer; ‘Ice-Cold in SE1.’ by Arthur Thomson; ‘Alan Dodd, the Hermit of Hoddesdon’ by Greg Pickersgill; AND MORE.



PROLAPSE

This is *Prolapse 12*, ploughing remorselessly on with our exploration of British fan-history, and brought to you by Peter Weston, 53 Wyvern Road, Sutton Coldfield, B74 2PS (Tel: 0121 354 6059). This time we're lifting the veil of time from long-forgotten London fandom, which I hope will send you rushing to your typewriter (sorry, word-processor) to write to me at pr.weston@btinternet.com. As ever, this is a 'Paper First' fanzine but I'm e-mailing more and more pdfs (especially overseas to avoid extortionate postal charges) and the issue goes onto the *eFanzines* website (in colour, don't forget) a month after paper copies have been posted out. Chief Researcher; Greg Pickersgill. Valuable help from lots and lots of people!

"There's a real buzz of energy coming from [*Prolapse*], quite at variance with the advanced ages of some of the participants." – Sandra Bond, LoC

You find some fascinating stuff in old fanzines. Back in 1958 TAFF was already getting people excited with Chuck Harris fulminating in his OMPazine about the despicable practice, as he saw it, of potential candidates actually soliciting people to act as their nominators rather than waiting politely to be asked. Goodness knows what he'd have made of Mario Bosnyak! Then there's Britain's forgotten award – the 'Bob Richardson Memorial Award for Best Heroic Fantasy Costume(s)', presented only twice – at the 1965 *Loncon* to Ian & Betty Peters and their son Euan as 'Red Martians', and again in 1966 to Ted Tubb for his 'villainous spaceman' outfit (*Skyrack 83 & 88*). What happened to that one, then?

Or to take another example, here's a bit of brazen conceit from H.P. 'Sandy' Sanderson, who said in *Aporrhēta #2* (August 1958), "The BSFA was formed at Kettering by a group of fans who were not really representative of British fandom." Meaning, I suppose, that HE wasn't involved – and to which I imagine those people from all over the country who had spent six hours bringing the Association into existence would have answered, "Cheek!", especially since it looks as if Sanderson and the other Inchmery characters deliberately stayed away from the two later Kettering cons because they were organised by the 'bloody provincials'.

Isn't that interesting! But these are only three of the distractions which Greg and I have come across while we've been piecing-together the stories of London fandom and Alan Dodd. And sometimes it's felt as if we were following a series of widely-scattered clues in some sort of complicated detective mystery. Here's a typical bit of dialogue:-

"Greg, I've done it again – I read something, quite recently, and now I can't remember where I saw it! What I'm after is the account of Ella's troubles with the cancellation of the hotel booking, two days before the 1960 *Loncon*. I know there's a summary in THEN, but somewhere I've seen a more detailed account – by Ella herself, I think, of the conversations she had with the management. My best guess is *Orion 23*, but I don't have it here."

"Right then, there's a long editorial in *Orion 25* (not 23) that covers the period leading up to the 1960 Eastercon. The relevant bits are interspersed with a running account of other activities of the time. Are you happy if I send you suitably trimmed jpegs of scans? – it's a bit too much to OCR." [Eight pages came through in quick succession].

"Wow! That's a lot more than I remember! Maybe I skipped through it last time. You'll notice Ella says Alan Dodd was at one of those evening sessions... and she says that Ted Forsyth was taking photographs, so my very next task is to write to Ted asking if he still has those 1960 negatives... doubtful, but you never know!"

Next day I sent Greg the message, 'ALAN DODD FOUND!'; "I just realised I already had some 1960 pictures, in one of those envelopes from Ina's shoe-box, and a few of them were actually taken *at* the party described in *Orion-25*! I can identify everybody except two people with Don Ford. I'm guessing that the younger one is Sture Sedolin, so does that mean the genial slob in the chair is the elusive Alan...? Now how can we prove this, one way or the other? Almost everyone else at that party is no longer with us, except for Ted Forsyth... here I go!"

"Fantastic! Yes, I think you're correct that the left hand man is indeed Dodd! Obviously I have only seen – years ago – the bit of video from John Harvey, but even then I thought Dodd looked like the British actor Neville Smith, and you can see – more or less – the resemblance here, even with the subject a lot younger. And, moreover, the man in question most definitely resembles the caricatures of Dodd that George Metzger did for *Camber*. See the scan attached."

"Bingo! Ted doesn't think he has any pictures but he's confirmed that IS Alan Dodd. Isn't the internet wonderful! Now we have a picture to go with your biography. And not that we really need any more 'proof', but in Don Ford's TAFF Report he mentions that Alan kept his overcoat on all night at Ella's party – and sure enough, the picture I sent shows our suspect wearing an overcoat. Wonder what happened to Don Ford's pictures?" [Rich Lynch answered that one for me!]

(Later) "Greg, look at this panel from *Tarzan Adventures* where 'Uncle Alan' appears. George Locke dug out the issue for me and sent an image – which he took with his digital camera, bless him, since he doesn't have a scanner."

"Bloody hell, it even looks like Alan Dodd. How did Moorcock manage that, I wonder?"

"Well, Mike was writing English captions for an existing Spanish comic-strip, so I suppose he tried to give names of people he knew to characters who had some sort of resemblance to them."

"But Mike Moorcock wasn't at that party. So how did he know what Dodd looked like?"

And so it went on, back and forth, while Greg's Dodd piece steadily grew from two old e-mails into a 9500-word *tour-de-force*, causing me to add four extra pages to the issue and cut short this editorial. The word now is KETTERING – *Cytricon V* will be held on 3-5th October and is open to anyone who appreciates the deep mythic significance of Kettering to fannish culture in Britain (details on Greg's web-site; <http://www.gostak.org.uk/KETT08a.htm>). The next issue may be slightly delayed in consequence but will be a special Kettering number with photographs and reports from our roving correspondents. After that... Chuck Connor has done a new chapter of THEN, carrying it into the early eighties, George Locke and John Eggeling remember their Great West Country Book-Hunt, Sandra Bond is writing 'A Requiem for Nebula', and Bob Parkinson has traced the origins of British fandom... lots more history to explore yet, fans! // PW, 11/8/2008

In *Prolapse #10* I wrote about the dire state of London fandom in the late fifties, and to prove my point here's a revealing little commentary by Sandy Sanderson. This, along with the following pieces makes an extended preamble to Bruce Burn's article later in the issue, giving a summary of events in the two years before Bruce's arrival (and about which he was mercifully unaware). At the start of our story Sandy was lodging with Joy and Vinç Clarke in their Inchmery Road flat in Catford, south-east London, a location which had become one of the main centres of fannish activity in the capital. This item was part of a column in Ron Bennett's *Ploy*, and shortly afterwards Sandy began his own monthly fanzine titled *Aporrheta* (from the Greek, 'esoteric doctrines') of which much more will be heard. (pw)

'How it was' – #1; 'What's in a Name?'

By H.P. 'Sandy' Sanderson,
Ploy 11, (ed. Ron Bennett)
March 1958.

'At the Pub of the Universe' as it used to be portrayed in *New Worlds*; Lew Mordecai was the obliging landlord who actually liked SF fans!



When Lew Mordecai left 'The White Horse Tavern' to take over 'The Globe Tavern' in late 1953, the fans in the London area went with him. The fact that they had made a bad mistake has been slowly dawning on them for the past twelve months, culminating in a feeling around about the time of the '57 worldcon that 'something-had-to-be-done'.

The convention itself gave the Globe a reprieve. On August 15th, just over three weeks before the event, there were more people in the bar than had been at Kettering earlier in the year. On August 22nd it was about the same, and on August 29th there were approximately 60 fans all told. On the convention weekend, September 5th, you couldn't move and it was quite impossible to count heads. At one time there was a considerable overflow in the street outside. After the convention the number dropped to 50-60, and a week later after the Americans left, to about 20-30. The situation is now back to normal. And what is 'normal'? Well about one week in five something strange happens and there appear to be fans all over the place – almost like the days of the old White Horse again. But on the other four weeks....

From 6.00pm to 7.30 there might be as many as four old fans together, all of whom have reached the stage where they have nothing new to say to each other. With them you may (or may not) find a couple or three youngsters who are unfortunately not very interesting and have none of the tradition of fandom, being apparently under the impression that it came into being around about the time that they discovered it. Against the bar are two – maybe three – professionals, with the odd camp-follower tagging along. You'd think everyone was desperately acting out a part in a play written by a foreigner whose idea of British behaviour was that nobody spoke to anyone else until they had been properly introduced. These people, with the exception of the youngsters, have known each other for years, but obviously their original introductions were not sufficiently proper. Around 7.30 a few more might come in, but as they do some go out – generally the pros, with or without camp-followers, on their way to eat. The conversation remains static.

There is a lot of concern in British fandom at the moment about the absence of new blood. Well, new fans visiting the Globe for the first time are not likely to stay long unless they happen to call on the one good night in five. And even then they'd probably only stay until that had been followed by two or three boring ones. 'The Globe' might be a fine name for a fan meeting place, having both literary and SF connotations, but the name is not the place. Anyone know of an alternative?

And there you have it... young fans are 'unfortunately not very interesting' and are 'not likely to stay long', attitudes that perhaps said rather more about Sanderson than about Globe meetings themselves. We previously noted his comment about the Kettering convention (*Cytricon III*) which helped to confirm our estimate that only about 30 had attended the Easter event that year. (pw)

Joy Clarke, Sandy Sanderson and Vince Clarke, outside the door of the original fan-den at No. 7, Inchmery Road. This incredibly rare colour image has recently been scanned by Bill Burns from Joy Clarke's photo-album. Bill says, "It's just a tiny print, about 3" x 2", and looks like it's printed on plastic – I've never seen anything quite like it."



Fortunately, despite the gloom (and Sanderson's negative view of newcomers) occasionally there would be a flash of the old magic and the Globe would cast its spell to bring someone new into fandom. In his OMPazine Ken Bulmer described a 'First Contact' which would have dramatic long-term results. ... (pw)



'How it was' – #2; 'Just Simmering'

By Ken Bulmer,
Steam, Vol. 4, No.3. Summer 1958

Ken & Pam
Bulmer, early
fifties.
Photo; Ethel
Lindsay



I was sitting in the Globe one evening earlier in the year, which had been the habitual sort of affair – desultory conversations, sporadic forays to the snooker tables and spasmodic drinking – and was just about thinking about going home when the two girls who had been sitting by themselves most of the evening attracted my attention. Lew had spun Brian Burgess some yarn about them being SF readers but nobody believed that; they didn't look it.

Now – I have been bitten before. In all my pristine purity I have accosted strange men and women and asked them why they had come to the Globe and could it be because they were interested in science fiction? Usually, if the husband didn't threaten to call the landlord or the woman didn't angle for a drink, they looked at me blankly. I admit I'm an odd sort of specimen (genius, you know), but this sort of thing becomes a little tiresome after a time. So I looked at these two and pondered. No-one else had taken a blind bit of interest in them. Would I, this time, be really carpeted? I mean, two girls, on their own? So, I deployed a little of the old Bulmer cunning. I started to yell at Pamela to get her coat on 'cos we were going home. I stood beside these two strangers, talking to Pamela, and in my own stupid way sort-of included them in the conversation and popped the question.

"We've been sitting here all evening," they said, "wondering if we'd come to the right place. We didn't like to interrupt the conversations, you're all friends – how wrong can you get? – and we were just about to go home thoroughly fed up." So, after apologising, I began to talk about SF. (I haven't lost the knack; Ted Tubb and I often discuss SF). I found out that only one was really interested and she'd had to make large-scale arrangements to attend. I told her who the odd pros were at the bar. Did she want to acquire any mags? Yes. Harry Clements was just on his way out with a pile under his arm. I stopped him. The lot were sold. Ron Buckmaster came over and began a conversation. Others drifted in. By the time I'd prised Pamela free the girls were in the swing.

You, some of you, met one of them at Kettering. Ella Parker. She'll make a useful addition to the London Circle.

First recorded image of Ella Parker, at *Cytricon IV*, Easter 1958. Ella is at the back, between Archie Mercer and Bobbie Wilde. Strange to think that at this time she probably knew almost no-one! (The Bulmers were visiting the Willises in Belfast.)



Talk about additions to the group... the first date below is significant, both for the birth of the 'new' London Circle and because on the following day Sanderson announced that 'Inchmery is Four', with the arrival of baby Nicola Belle Clarke. By this date the trio had moved to a larger flat, further out at New Cross, but the happy event barely slowed the pace of fanac and *Aporrhēta* was appearing most months. And they continued to be vocal about their local fandom, insisting things were done in **their** way. (pw)



'How it was' – #3. Inchmery Fan Diary

By H.P. 'Sandy' Sanderson,
Aporrhēta

18/12/58

Went down to the Globe in the evening. It was a fabulous meeting: Ted Tubb and Ken Bulmer were in great form, and before my very eyes, they did something I would not have thought possible, they ORGANISED the London Circle! For the first time in its existence the circle has a membership fee (1/- per month) and a regular meeting time (first Thursday in each month). The enthusiasm for this innovation was quite fantastic. I understand the idea originated with Ron and Daphne Buckmaster, and since something had to be done to stop the rot at the Globe, it is a good one.

It feels strange though to think that one can now point out people as being 'official' members of the London Circle. Oh yes, the membership stood at over 30 when Vince and I left. Next meetings are on Jan 1st and Feb 5th, though there is nothing to stop members turning up every Thursday. (*Aporrhēta* # 7, January 1959)

19/3/59

A 'business' meeting had been called. We got there in time to find that although it had not been stated the purpose of the meeting was to get approval of those present regarding the use of the club funds – including the donation received from the States. After a great deal of effort, and against strong opposition, Inchmery was able to push through the point that since the money from the U.S. had been received on behalf of the larger group known as the LC that had existed prior to formation of the current dues-paying LC in December, 1958, it could not be disposed of by the smaller group. [Sanderson had been Treasurer of *Loncon*] It was agreed that a meeting of ALL interested parties – those that could be reached – would be called for April 2nd, and that a majority vote would be binding. We feel strongly that the American donation should be used for something concrete – a club-room, for example – that would best show our appreciation. We didn't fancy going back to Don Ford and saying, 'thanks for the money, we had a damned good party with it the other night'.

In some ways it was rather funny – Ted Tubb was very keen to have a vote taken there and then of the twenty or so people present, and in the end I had to slip the Ace down from my sleeve and point out that it wasn't a proper business meeting of the LC because at least one dues-paying member had not been notified of it – Ethel Lindsay. Even then it took five minutes or so searching through Charlie Duncombe's books to convince him. (*Aporrhēta* #10, April 1959)

2/4/59

First Thursday of the month – and accordingly Globe night for the London Circle. As readers of *Apē 10* will remember, this was the meeting Inchmery had had to fight for – the meeting we had wanted in order to get the LC on a proper footing. As soon as we arrived we realised that our action had been completely vindicated. There were some 48 members present, about 45 of whom became dues-paying during the night. This was more than twice the number that had been present on March 19th... even Arthur C, Clarke had made a brief appearance... though it must be admitted that this was purely fortuitous and had no connection with the leaflets Vince had sent out. The meeting went well. There was a 100% vote in favour of an official body calling itself the London Circle, and an annual membership fee of 5/- was proposed and passed with one member opposing – by accident. A Committee of seven was then voted in – Ted Tubb was elected Chairman by popular acclaim – he had printed up membership cards prior to the meeting and must have worked pretty hard on them. Charlie Duncombe was elected Treasurer; Sandra Hall, Secretary; Pete Taylor, Publicity; – and Vinç, Ken Bulmer and Ella Parker as members without specific office.

With a properly elected Treasurer I started to make arrangements to hand over the cash I'd been holding for the LC. The meeting then split up into two sections, with the Committee going off to discuss a club-zine and various other items. I think the most amusing point of the evening came with the election of the last two committee members. I forget who it was that proposed Joy (Vinç had already been elected), then somebody proposed Jimmy Ratigan (Dorothy, probably) and Jimmy, who had been working his way round to a nice central spot near the Chairman, ruined his chances by getting up to insist that husbands and wives could not both be on the committee. A lot of people could see his point of view, but it was hardly – well, gentlemanly is perhaps the word. Atom leaned over to me and whispered "Do you think this could be made grounds for divorce?" Anyway, the LC now has a committee, a membership fee, and a regular meeting time – the first Thursday of each month at the Globe. (*Aporrhēta* #11, May-June 1959).

Most of us probably remember Ken Bulmer & Ted Tubb entirely as ‘professionals’, not realising what an active role they played during the fifties as FANS, first and foremost. In this piece Ken outlines the thinking behind their creation of the ‘new’ London Circle and gives us a glimpse of some earlier history. It’s also apparent that the Inchmery group had not been involved in the initial rejuvenation but they wanted to maintain their influence on events and insisted on making their presence felt... (pw)

‘How it Was’ – #4 The Last Hurrah of the Elsie Horde*

By Ken Bulmer
Orion 22, (ed. Ella Parker)
Spring 1960

In the *Globe* about
1957, with Ted Tubb
and bored-looking
femme-fan, with
Sandy Sanderson in
uniform.
Photo from the Joy
Clarke album.



The London Circle came into existence in 1946 and was the first SF group to form in Great Britain after the war. Since that date great things have been achieved but some of the momentum has gone and the wheels have slowed. Not wishing to see an institution die that had given us a great deal of pleasure, Ted Tubb and I, together with Pamela and with other freely-given help, put into effect a scheme which we had discussed for the best part of a year.

For most of 1958 we had talked privately about the disease attacking London SF enthusiasts, so that when the meeting of 18th December attracted the usual large Christmas gathering, which we had anticipated, we were ready. I stood up and announced that from now on the London Circle would meet officially on the first Thursday in every month, (but the usual Thursday gathering would still continue). The idea was obvious; to bring together friends on a night they knew they would meet, without the chance that the meeting would be poorly attended. Ted Tubb then called for a shilling a head. Enthusiasm was by this time mounting headily and the silver made a lively ringing on the bar table. Just then, as it were to finalise the plans, Charlie Duncombe, long time treasurer, walked in after a prolonged absence caused through personal reasons. He was welcomed back rather like the Prodigal and was immediately requested to take charge of the cash collected.

We were pleased to see a good turnout at the meeting on January 1st; and Ted and I decided that the question of officers could advantageously be left until later; this decision was strengthened by the jollity going on in the bar. These two measures (the once-a-month regular meeting and the token cash sub), seemed to be the catalyst that had put a new spirit into the LC. It was decided that the Circle should make a pilgrimage to Cheltenham over the Whitsun holidays. Sandra Hall was asked to arrange this. She agreed and then, being willing to undertake the work, took over the position of secretary to the Circle. Much help was also given by Jim and Dorothy Ratigan and Rog Rogers. The meeting of March 5th saw £1 advances being paid for the Cheltenham affair, and a special meeting for the 19th of March was called to discuss the Cheltenham journey and any other business that might arise.¹

Now, at this point, if nothing else had been achieved apart from what Ted and I had done, I would have been happy. An old-time LC'er who walked in with the sad knowledge of the grimness of the latter-day *Globe* would have been astonished at the atmosphere of jollity, enthusiasm and comradeship that had not been seen in years, apart from exceptional meetings during con-time. This was *THE GLOBE*, very much as we had visualised it when we made our plans. But, there was more. Having once put our shoulders to the rocket tubes, as it were, we had to blast on.

Ivor Mayne announced that he intended to produce a fanzine, and I wrote a piece about the LC which when it appears will no doubt seem very much dated. One basic assumption existed, that we had to guide ourselves by our own progress; follow up a success and write off a failure. There are many old LC'ers still living in London. We had to assume that as they now showed no flicker of interest and hadn't been to the *Globe* in years, we could not therefore allow the sentimental thought of them to cloud our decisions for the current active members. As of 18-12-58 the London Circle consisted of those people willing to come up once a month and take part in the group activity (drinking and talking mainly). We knew that once we were rolling any old members who were still interested would come along, although it'd be a reasonably fair statement to say that if you don't attend the *Globe* at Christmas you are far gone in gafia. If old members didn't come along – and too, if they were so far out of touch that they didn't hear – then they weren't interested. Scouts out on intervening Thursdays genned-up all comers. We were after an active and enthusiastic circle.

But the meeting of 19 March, after much discussion, achieved nothing. In agreement with an expressed point of view [from Inchmery – PW] it was decided that the meeting should not conclude any business as all the membership had not been properly circulated. This was fair enough and Vinç Clarke was instructed to send out a note to all members telling them that a meeting was called for 8-30 pm, on 2nd April, 1959. This he did with his usual efficiency.

You are all probably aware of Parkinson's Law. Well, the fannish law that I have long supported is that one or two bods will get things done; committees yak and create failures. I am well aware that committees could run smoothly (and in

* Ken's original title was 'Interim Report on the Elsie Horde' but I liked mine better!

rare instances have), but the sad fact is that in fandom they seldom do. One well-known example of this elementary fannish law was the way Vinç and I started OMPA. We put this through ourselves and made a success of it from the word go. Ted Tubb and I had now followed similar, though less drastic methods in rejuvenating the LC. So I looked forward to 2nd April with mixed feelings. The appeal for attendance brought out about another half dozen bods, and now we could say, quite definitely – word used as intended – that these people *were* the London Circle.

To shift back in time to get the perspective right; Vinç had issued a leaflet called 'Move' on 6th August, 1958, stating that he was looking for a club-room and that he wanted help. I believe that this help was pretty niggardly; I know Pamela offered our old sitting room suite, and we contributed 10/- cash, plus 2/6& or so subs, we also promised an immediate £5 on the day the room was found. Vince had stated that he, Sandy Sanderson and Joy Clarke intended to dictate all policy for six months, and it does just occur to me that this strong dictatorial (and I think, justifiable) attitude was not appreciated generally. From that day to this no smell of a club-room has materialised.

In addition, money was involved. Ah, sweet scent of filthy lucre! From its first convention after the war the London Circle had built up a steadily growing fund. I always refer to this as the LC war-chest. London held cons in 1938, 41, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53, & 1957. The first two in time and the last were not held under the auspices of the LC – the rest were. The London fen put their hands into their pockets – at that time slender purses were *de rigueur* – and money accrued from donations and con proceeds, although no regular subscriptions were ever taken. In addition to this, money flowed in when Vince and Joy organised *Cytricon II*, although I understand that most of this was obtained on the assumption that it was going to be used for the London Worldcon.

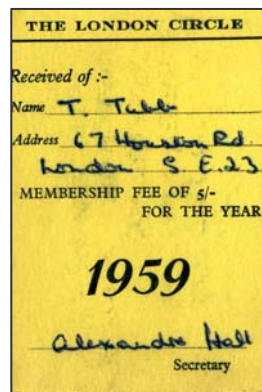
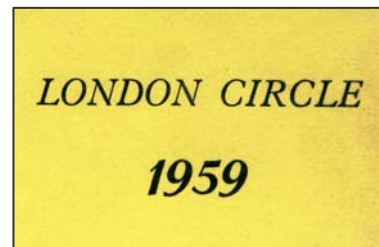
The LC war-chest, held by Charlie, had been spent from time to time in various ways. A five-pound float went on entertainment at the Manchester con in 1954 – surely a worthy object for club funds? A leaflet was produced when the Elsie Horde had to defend themselves against traducers. There was a ballet. And preliminary expenses of various *Loncons*. Things like that. All the rest of the money, around £35 was lost at the 15th World Convention. Far be it for me at this moment to lay blame where it is surely deserved (blush you guilty!) but the LC cash had gone down the drain. Although the LC thought this a pretty poor show, officially they did nothing; it had been used and lost, and that was that. However, Don Ford and a *Midwestcon* rallied round and collected £27-10-0d which was sent to Ted Carnell. He passed this cash to Sandy Sanderson, acting accountant for the World Convention. The meeting of 2nd April, 1959 at the Globe, decided overwhelmingly that Sandy should hand this cash over to the LC Treasurer, Charlie Duncombe.

It is sad to have to report that some newer members of the LC now believe that this money should be used at once, to 'do something'. Of course, having lost it once, and having it returned by a miracle, we will take good care to safeguard it now, and we shall carry on in a rational way, allocating the cash as and where it will do the most good. One good scheme much promoted, is to use some of the LC cash to support a clubroom; but until this clubroom is settled on a sound basis no parts of the LC funds should be lost to it. Once we can go ahead confidently, all the resources of the new LC will be behind the project. Here it might be pertinent to remark that if the LC decided to spend this £27-10-0d on a monster beano, I feel that Don Ford and the Midwest con would fully understand and appreciate this – and curse that they couldn't be there! It so happens that we have more ambitious plans in mind.

This 2nd April meeting also decided to elect themselves a committee. Charlie Duncombe was confirmed in his post as treasurer, as was Sandra Hall, secretary. Subs had been set, for the time being at least, at 5/-, and yellow membership cards were issued. Voting was by upraised arm – and the hand that topped the arm had to be clutching a yellow membership card for the vote to be counted. Ah me, for the fine fannish days of yore! (more on that later). Seven members were needed for the committee. Ted Tubb then stood and said that Vinç ought to be on the committee, and this was agreed. It was proposed that we ought to have a Publicity Officer, and Pete Taylor's name was put forward. Arthur Thomson then proposed Joy Clarke. On a show of hands, 22-23 voted for Pete, and 12-13 voted for Joy. This left two places on the committee yet to be filled (I'd been bunged-on somewhere along the line). Four names came up, Jim Ratigan, Ella Parker, Rog Rogers and Ted Tubb. When the waving arms had been disentangled, Ella and Ted were on. I declined the job of chairman and Ted was nobbled for that position.²

This little cameo has been given to indicate the truly democratic way the LC is now being run. The seven members of the committee then went into a huddle and I introduced George Locke as the man willing to undertake editorship of the official news sheet. This ought to be out soon after Whitsun. Harking back to my comment earlier; this current officialdom – however reckless of procedural rules it may be – is a sign of less fannish times than of yore.³ Still, as Ted and I pointed out when we began this rejuvenation of the London Circle, the LC had sunk to its past low level of apathy on a steady diet of anarchism. We can but try a drop of systematic oil in the wheels; we've nothing to lose.

If you just cast a prying eye at the Los Angeles group, the Cincinnati group and one or two others, you will see that you can be really fannish – more so, in fact – with a little cohesion of organisation than without. If I thought the LC could revert to the great days of circa 1950-51-52 without somebody doing what Ted and I have done – well, then, I'd be around with a rolled up copy of *Hyphen* for a gun, call in the GDA and Harris, Harris, Snoopwhistle and Harris, the Bulmer Aqueous Vapour Company, saw frenziedly at Courtney's boat, hail Fort Mudge, and generally faan 'em all into life. I'd even give them a write up in *Nirvana*!⁴



1. Strangely, no mention was made of the Easter *Brumcon* – very few Londoners turned up, and absolutely NO professionals.

2. You'll notice this doesn't quite square with Sandy's earlier account of Joy being excluded from the committee.

3. I have a copy of the LC 'Constitution', which could be considered a bit of a sledgehammer to crack a very small nut!

4. Ken's long-running joke – *Nirvana* had only one issue, in Autumn 1949.

Alas for good intentions! The Cheltenham 'Pilgrimage' had been a great success (see *Prolapse #7*), as was the one-day 'Symposium' on 3rd October which had turned into a sort of 'mini-con', but all along the LC had been dogged by petty bickering and the latter event brought these differences to a head. (pw)

How it was - #5 Larry in the Corner

By Lawrence Sandfield
Northlight 7 (ed. Alan Burns)
November 1959

Lawrence
entertains the fans
at Kettering, 1958.
Photo; Norman
Shorrock's album.



The business meeting of Friday 16th October will remain in the memories of those who were there for quite a long while. First, we were few in number, which was bad enough. Then, after opening the meeting and asking for the reading of the minutes Ted Tubb asked Charles Duncombe to tell us the financial position, which revealed that there had been a net loss on the Symposium although not a bad one. During this, Charlie, being under the impression that £2-0-0d. spent by Vince Clarke had been spent on drink, said so, and his statement was refuted with far too much indignation by Joy. Charlie was under a misapprehension here and was corrected by Sandy Sanderson, who said that Vince had spent the money on food, hot dogs in fact.

After some more discussion Ted announced that Vince and Ella had resigned from the committee [at the Symposium – PW] and soon after he resigned himself. Ken Bulmer, vice chairman, took over. Here Joy Clarke attempted to read a letter from Vince in the first paragraph of which he stated that he had been 'insulted by the Chairman while in a drunken condition' and this was rightly shouted down by Ted as hearsay evidence. Ken then made a speech against a running fire of interference from Charlie until I raised my voice and made Charlie shut up. We decided to disband the present organisation and revert to first Thursdays. We have done it unconstitutionally, but as the constitution has been used by Inchmery to smash the London Circle constitution, we just couldn't care less. If Ted did in fact, insult Vince – as is alleged – then I haven't the faintest doubt that Vince deserved it, Ted doesn't insult people and mean it unless they do.

Inchmery Fandom has now left the London Circle following the disbanding of the committee, and those of us left have breathed a sigh of relief. The LC continue to meet at The Globe, Hatton Garden on the first Thursday of every month, and are a group of friendly fen with no central committee, but with two officers, Alexandra Hall, secretary, and Charles Duncombe, treasurer. These two are responsible for the disbursement of any moneys belonging to the London Circle and the raising of money to finance any LC projects, subject to the ascertained wishes of the group. The BSFA have finally decided that the 1960 con is to be held in London and Sandra Hall has charge of the organisation.

.....

[This is an extract from a longer report in which Sandfield itemised the various disruptions he considered had been caused by the Inchmery group, almost from the instigation of the 'new' London Circle. Ted Tubb subsequently commented, "A good article Larry, a nice bit of factual reporting", but this and a subsequent account in the following issue provoked a furious and disproportionate response. Vinç Clarke mailed out a long and convoluted document titled, 'Fandom and Ethics', as a result of which Sanderson gafiated completely after having been around since 1948, at least. He was not the only casualty since Ken Bulmer appears to have become disillusioned and much less active in fandom thereafter, while the London Circle more-or-less ceased to exist in any meaningful sense.

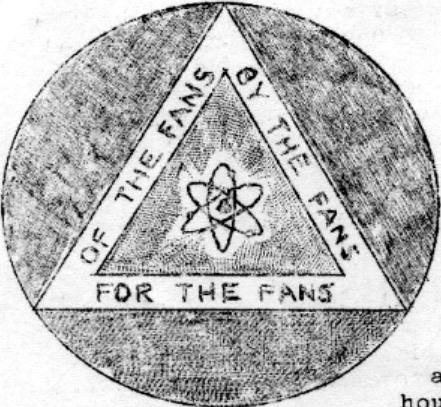
Prolapse 6 carried a quotation from Ken in the 'Doc Weir File' which now fits into context: "Quite frankly I was attempting with some regret to withdraw from fandom.... All we had done, if you recall, was to call a halt to the excessively official London Circle we'd started and which had been deliberately sabotaged by the Sandersons. Of course, the activity of that little trio had also driven the final nail into the coffin of old-time London Circle activity." (Page 18).

There is, though, another reason, quoted in the one-page December 1959 issue of Ken Bulmer's OMPazine, *Steam*:

"This issue of *Steam* is being edited by me, Pamela, and is being published for a very special reason. For once, I'm the custodian of the Bulmer reproduction processes, in more senses than one. We've always wanted a family, but have had to wait whilst Ken served a somewhat rickety apprenticeship to the craft of writing. Well he now has a small but we hope steady foothold and our long hoped-for plans look like coming to fruition on the 7th March next year, which is our seventh wedding anniversary – how's that for planning? We're both tremendously excited and delighted at being prospective parents and we do hope that no one will think we're being either rash or ostentatious in making a personal announcement. P.S. We add our personal recommendation to this particular method of reproducing fans rather than fanzines. Although the process is more lengthy, the results are vastly more original in every way and moreover the mechanics involved are infinitely more enjoyable and satisfying than turning a duplicator handle!"

This was in fact the final issue of *Steam* – no doubt the pressures of parenthood took priority from then onwards! – PW]

But it turned out that the October blow-up was not the end of organised fan-activity in London because with suspicious rapidity a new club was formed a week later to meet at the Inchmery address, as explained in this notice in the November, 1959 *Aporrëta*. In eighteen months Ella Parker had gone from being an outsider to editor of the popular fanzine *Orion* and now chairman of the new SFCoL. Greater glories were still to come... (pw)



THE SCIENCE FICTION CLUB OF LONDON

Friday, October 23rd, saw the formation of the third fan group in this city when a number of London fans held a meeting in a room made available at Inchmery. The first business session lasted an hour and at the end of that time we had an agreed constitution and five officers including Ella Parker as Chairwoman and Jim Groves, 29 Lathom Road, East Ham, London E6 as Secretary. Future business sessions will be limited to the same length of time and will be combined with social sessions. Meetings are twice a month. The Friday meeting helped to dispel the theory that a clubroom would not be popular because of drinking restrictions. Tea, coffee, biscuits and cake were served and despite the proximity of a pub, nobody wanted anything stronger. This is an active club, and tho' most members are concerned with the production of fanzines, we expect to branch out in the near future. Present plans include the formation of the first 8mm cine film unit in the London area, and group participation in future conventions with both films and tapes.

How it was - #6 The new SFCoL

Rob Hansen
THEN, Vol.2 Chapter 3:



On 3rd January 1960, at Inchmery, the Science Fiction Club of London held its fifth meeting (meetings were on the first and third Sundays of the month), and its first AGM. Apart from welcoming Paul Enever, whose first meeting this was, those present (Ella Parker, ATom, Vinç and Joy Clarke, Jim Groves, Sandy Sanderson, Ken and Irene Potter, and George Locke) elected officers for the year – Parker as Chair, Groves as Secretary, Sanderson as Treasurer, and Joy Clarke as Publicity Officer – and debated what the objectives of the club should be.

Two decisions were made: to search for a proper club-room (the long-time dream of London fans), and to publish a Combozine for the 1960 Eastercon. Combozines were a little like one-off apazines, or maybe clubzines, with each member contributing a set number of pages as his or her contribution. The first in Britain had been put out for *Supermancon* and featured a number of special two or four page versions of contemporary fanzines, bound together.



Above: Inside Inchmery with the SFCoL at the January meeting – Vinç shows their photo-album to Jim Groves and George Locke, while Sandy and Joy pose for the camera. (Bill Burns now has this album). Right; Vince & Joy open their post. Photos almost certainly by Ted Forsyth and provided by Joe Patrizio.

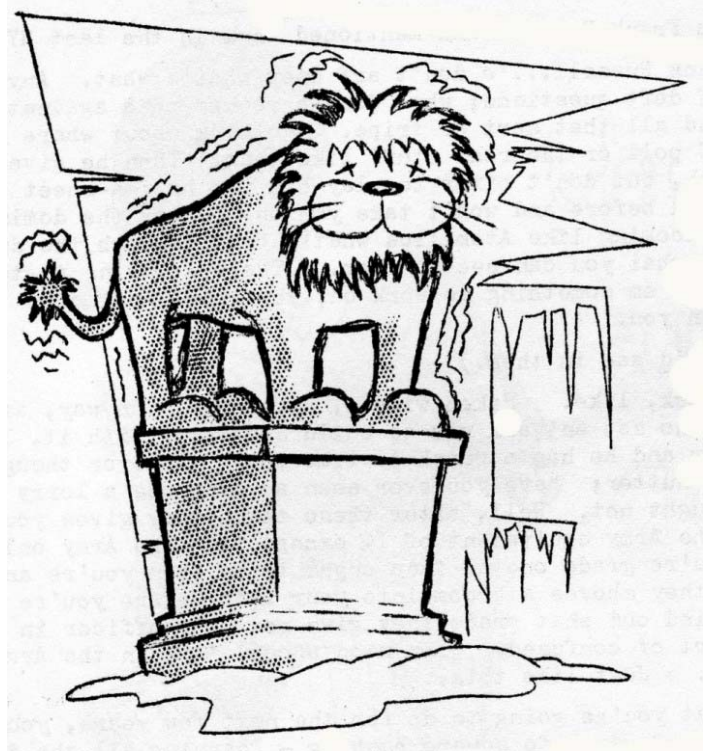
The new SFCoL didn't waste any time in tackling an endeavour that had been talked-about for years; the search for a club-room, a quest described here by Arthur Thomson (ATom), one member of the old London Circle who managed to have stayed clear of the squabbling of the previous months. Always friendly with Inchmery, he was also starting to develop a close working relationship with Ella Parker. Arthur was a great cartoonist but this piece shows he could be an entertaining writer as well. (pw)

How it was – #7 **Ice-Cold in S.E.I.**

By Arthur Thomson
SFCoL Combozine,
Easter 1960

**Extract from the minutes of the SFCoL
Sunday, 3rd January 1960.**

"...It is proposed that the members of the club meet at Waterloo Station on Saturday 9th January at 2.30pm. Objective is the search of the area around the Station for rooms that could be used as a club...."



Saturday was cold. Reports in the Sunday press said that it had been the coldest Saturday for years. They weren't kidding. About 1.30pm on Saturday the sky grew overcast and it began to snow. An icy wind blew the snow against the windows as I looked out of them in trepidation.

"Are you still going out in this?" my wife said.

I grinned weakly and nodded.

"You're crazy" she said.

Winding an extra scarf around my throat, I hitched the hot-water bottle further up under my coat and waved goodbye as bravely as I could. Outside the door I braced myself against the elements and went for the car. Inside the car I beat my fingers back into life against the steering column, started up the engine, and drove off towards Inchmery in a flurry of snow. I felt like an Arctic explorer. I felt like Hell.

Inchmery were pleased to see me. They hadn't known I was going to call for them and had been contemplating hiring a dog-sled team to take them to Waterloo. Cunningly, Vince had decided that he had a cold and should stay at home. We left him with Nicki on his lap, his feet under the bars of a large electric fire and a Cheshire-cat grin on the parts of his face visible above his beard.

The rallying point at Waterloo was just outside the station. In the forecourt near the entrance, mounted on a granite plinth, there's a large red stone lion. We were to meet under this. The three of us arrived to find nobody there except the lion, who was crouched miserably on the plinth, beating his paws together and brushing the snow out of his mane. We took up position under him to wait for the others. I decided to keep moving round in a small circle just in case I froze to the ground. Jimmy Groves (the club secretary) and George Locke arrived within a few minutes, followed by Ella Parker and a non-fan friend of the Potters called Don Geldart, who had travelled up from Hampshire to see the fun.

Whilst waiting for the Potters to turn up, I came in for a certain amount of ribald comment on the state of my nose. The Thomson nose, which is exceedingly blister-prone in the summer, was putting on its winter performance. From a normal pink colour it had run the gamut of the spectrum and now shone a bright blue-purple due to the cold. Ella Parker was much taken with it, and said so in her usual forthright manner, like, "Mighod, will you take a look at his conk!" I was too frozen by now to answer her back.

Finally, agreeing that discretion was the better part of valour, we fled to a nearby cafe to wait for the Potters, leaving a note with directions for them tucked in the railings under the lion, who had turned blue and was lying on his back with his feet in the air. The cafe was heavenly, it was warm. Everybody ordered hot tea or coffee and settled down to wait in comfort for the Potters, except for one fool who, after a few minutes, suggested a volunteer go out and look for them. Nobody else volunteered, so the idiot who made the suggestion had to go.

Outside, I buried my head further in my coat collar and trotted round to the lion. The Potters were there, stamping their feet and studying the note that had been left for them. I led them back to the cafe. To their credit they almost caught up with me on the way back.

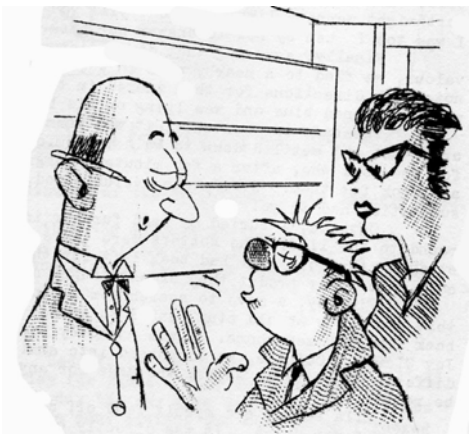
Finally, a move to search for a clubroom began. We decided that one of us should stay behind to gather in any reports that came back from the searchers. I was narrowly beaten to this position by Joy Clarke. Outside, we dispersed into small groups and went off down different streets to search the area for any empty rooms that might be rentable. Ella Parker and I went down the main road to an area known as Lower March. It was directly opposite the Old Vic Theatre, and as we passed the theatre I couldn't help thinking that the actors inside must be feeling pretty damn chilly in their tights that after-

noon. The buildings through Lower Marsh consisted of fairly old-type property with shops on the ground floor and rooms above, some with their own separate entrances. In the street itself there were market stalls. We started along the street craning our necks at the windows looking for any empty ones.

After we'd shivered our way down a third of the street we saw some rooms above a ladies lingerie shop. I prodded Ella through the door with instructions to ask about the place upstairs. Averting my eyes from the shop window full of such things as two-way-stretch nylon girdles in satin at 49/1ld, I stepped back to the pavement and waited. Ella disappeared inside the shop past the small window which showed several sizes of Fullform cup-fitting Freeflow brassieres in shell-pink, natural flesh, and ivory, at 23/6d.

I waited. The cold was still intense, my nose was still performing, and I felt wretched. Ella seemed to have been gone hours. Finally I went into the shop and, peering between certain garments (16/8d in sheer oyster, rose and shocking pink) I managed to attract her attention and get her out of the shop. Her excuse for staying so long was that she couldn't just walk in, ask about the rooms, and walk out again, which was why she happened to have these three parcels and would I carry them for her?

On we went down the road. Then, seeing another set of empty dusty windows, and as the shop below them was also empty, we crossed the road to the market stalls where several barrow boys were warming themselves round a blazing brazier on which they were piling broken wooden fruit-boxes. I wormed my way into a prominent position in front of the fire and, while Ella was asking about the place opposite, began breaking up more fruit-boxes and adding them to the fire. They told Ella that the empty place was owned by a shop a little way down the road, and we started off again. Before we had gone far the men came after us and took back their brazier from me.



At the shop they had pointed out we went in, and here's where I began to get worried about the whole affair. Ella went up to the manager of the shop who was standing to one side, mentally totting up the afternoon's profit. She calmly asked him if the rooms down the street were for rent, as we wished to hire somewhere for use as a club. Immediately, I saw the manager's eyes veil over as his mind swung into gear with an almost audible click. I saw right away what he was thinking. "A C*L*U*B!..... Drinking...Gambling. Wild Wimmen... GOINGS ON!" I felt I had to put him right. I stepped forward and tried to say "A LITERARY club, of course," but all I got out through my frozen lips was "A Litiwally clwub of cawse". His eyes took in my bright purple nose, and I could see him consigning me to some dipsomaniac ward. He shook his head and we trailed out of the shop, me trying to explain to Ella that I had wanted to help.

We trudged on down the street. By now, visions of the cafe where we had left Joy, full of warmth and endless cups of hot tea, were rising up to torment me. Ella seemed made of sterner stuff as she strode on, her head swivelling from side to side in the quest for empty windows. I slunk along beside her beating my hands under my arms and wondering just how badly one can get frostbite in Britain.

Finally we reached the end of the street. The last shop was open-fronted, and shelf after shelf of books were on display. It was the proverbial second-hand book shop and we both stopped to scan for SF. It was there, rows of it, new and second-hand. As Ella turned to take one last look up the street she received the final insult; a piece of grit from a chimney flew into her eye. I pulled her into the shop and tried to get it out. The proprietor came up to us, an old man swaddled in layers of overcoats and scarves. I finally got the grit out of Ella's eye and turned to ask him, forlornly, about the chances of an empty room in that locale. He gave the standard answer from any book-stall keeper to a fan's query "there were some yesterday but they're gone now." He went on to say that he would have let us have the rooms above his shop but they had been badly bombed during the war. Ella's eyes were streaming with tears from the grit, mine were the same from the cold, and the old man seeing two such sympathetic characters launched into his favourite war story about the day the bomb fell on his shop. We stood there, listening to him, the tears streaming down our faces, until finally he too began sniffing and blurbling at his own tale. We left him, a pitiful figure saddened by his memories.

Outside the shop we swung out of that street and wended our way back to the cafe where Joy was waiting. This road took us past a large block, of London County Council Offices, block after block of massive buildings. It was then I had my great idea!

We finally stumbled into the cafe and managed to get an order for hot tea out of our frozen lips. After thawing out slightly we were able to tell Joy our adventures and give her two addresses that might prove to be possibilities. On the third cup of tea I heard a faint pounding at the cafe door and opened it to admit the half-frozen bodies of Ken and Irene Potter. A few minutes later the rest of the crowd, Don Geldart, Sandy, George and Jimmy stumbled frozenly through the door. After everybody had thawed out, the Potters so much so they were busy tackling some horrendous concoction of fudge and cream disguised as a cake, we all reported to each other on our signal lack of success. When we started out we hadn't been too hopeful that a club-room would be found, but there's always the chance in a million, though this afternoon it hadn't come up. It was at this stage I broached my brainwave.

If, I expounded, we really wanted a club room in this area, it was ours for the taking. I pointed out of the cafe windows where the bulk of the LCC offices loomed. Why not, I said, make our way into these office blocks when they are working, and finding an empty room or two, just set up our duplicators and typers? Nobody would give us a second glance in such a place, full as it is of all those offices and thousands of people.

Somehow though, the idea didn't seem to jell, and in fact proved the last straw. As it was getting dark the final cup of tea was drunk, we gathered our coats and left the cafe. I drove Joy and Sandy back home then made for my own place at top speed. About nine o'clock that evening, as I lay in a steaming hot bath feeling the beautiful warmth seep through my frozen bones I reflected that we hadn't found rooms for the club, but we had made an important discovery that should be written into the rules... NEVER LOOK FOR A CLUB ROOM WHEN THE TEMPERATURE IS UNDER 75°F.

.....

They never did find a club-room and with less than a dozen members the SFCoL didn't need it anyway. Instead, from the 3rd April the club began meeting at Ella Parker's flat in Kilburn. This swiftly became another fannish Mecca but there was a big dark cloud on the near horizon. Nearly a year earlier Ken Bulmer had cheerfully committed the London Circle to run the 1960 convention, but now the LC had effectively disintegrated and Ella had felt duty-bound to get involved. And she found herself with a major problem.... (pw)

How it was - #8

'We *had* to have this hotel!'

By Ella Parker

Abridged from *ORION-25*

Ella and Arthur Thomson share a quiet minute at *Loncon*.
Photo; Norman Shorrock's album.



I had arranged with the manager at the convention hotel that on the Friday before Easter I would take the bookings from the fans and give them to him in a block. I'd told him to expect around fifty to sleep (!) with about the same number visiting the lounge we would be using for a Con hall. Our hotel (the Sandringham at Lancaster Gate) didn't have a licence for selling drinks but I was assured there were no objections to our bringing our own, provided they were kept to the bedrooms and our lounge; the hotel would even provide us with glasses! I figured it was best to be honest and told him that in all probability there would be very little actual *sleeping* done over the weekend as we only had this one chance, annually, to meet up and exchange talk and the like. To this he was also agreeable. I suppose I should have been suspicious, because every request I made was met with the bland promise, 'If we haven't got it we'll get it for you'. Things looked fine from where I was sitting.

I phoned the hotel on Friday to let them know I'd be down that day with the bookings. A woman's voice said, "I'm the owner, the man you saw was my brother who was standing in for me for a couple of days." I thought no more about it than that the least the brother could have done was to tell me it wasn't *his* hotel. He had assured me he'd be there himself over the holiday in order to help things run smoothly. As it turned out, he'd lied in his teeth.

When I arrived and had a cigarette well alight we got down to business. How many would we be? When was it for? For how long would we be there? Who exactly were we? It transpired that the hotel owner hadn't been advised on any of the detailed arrangements made on her behalf by the brother. This meant that every time I told her about something he had promised she dashed over to the phone and called him to query it. From the expostulations at our end I gathered the brother was unrepentantly telling her: "Yes, that's right, I did say that."

When the girl – she wasn't really much more than that – realised how far he'd gone in her name she did the honourable thing and agreed to accept the bookings. We had to make certain adjustments, but she was anxious for the good name of her hotel to do her best for us and I was only too willing to compromise with her on what I thought the gang would stand for, reminding myself all the time that there was only a week to go before the Convention and we *had* to have this hotel, there just wasn't time to find another. My pride took an awful beating that day.

I had another appointment with the hotel on Tuesday to give them the last of the bookings and to make sure all was as it should be. When I got to the hotel the owner introduced me to her mother who pinned me with a hard look and remarked: "Miss Parker, I don't like the sound of this party you have arranged for Easter. I don't like it at all. If my daughter takes my advice she'll cancel the whole thing." To say I was dismayed would be to understate the case, I was aghast. I'd already done diplomatic battle with the daughter and we'd reached some sort of working agreement but I could see this old battle-axe wasn't going to be easily persuaded; indeed, she wasn't going to be persuaded in any way if she could help it. I don't know if my face showed that I recognised defeat even before I'd begun fighting, but in spite of all my pleas she stuck to her guns. I must be fair and say that the daughter was on the verge of a right battle-royal with her mother, but the old woman over-rode her on every point. I wondered if perhaps Bobbie Gray could effect some sort of compromise with the old haybag so I asked permission to use the phone and called her. As I wasn't on the BSFA committee I had to let her know what had happened anyway. It was no-go. We were out! Forty-eight hours to the Convention and nowhere to go!

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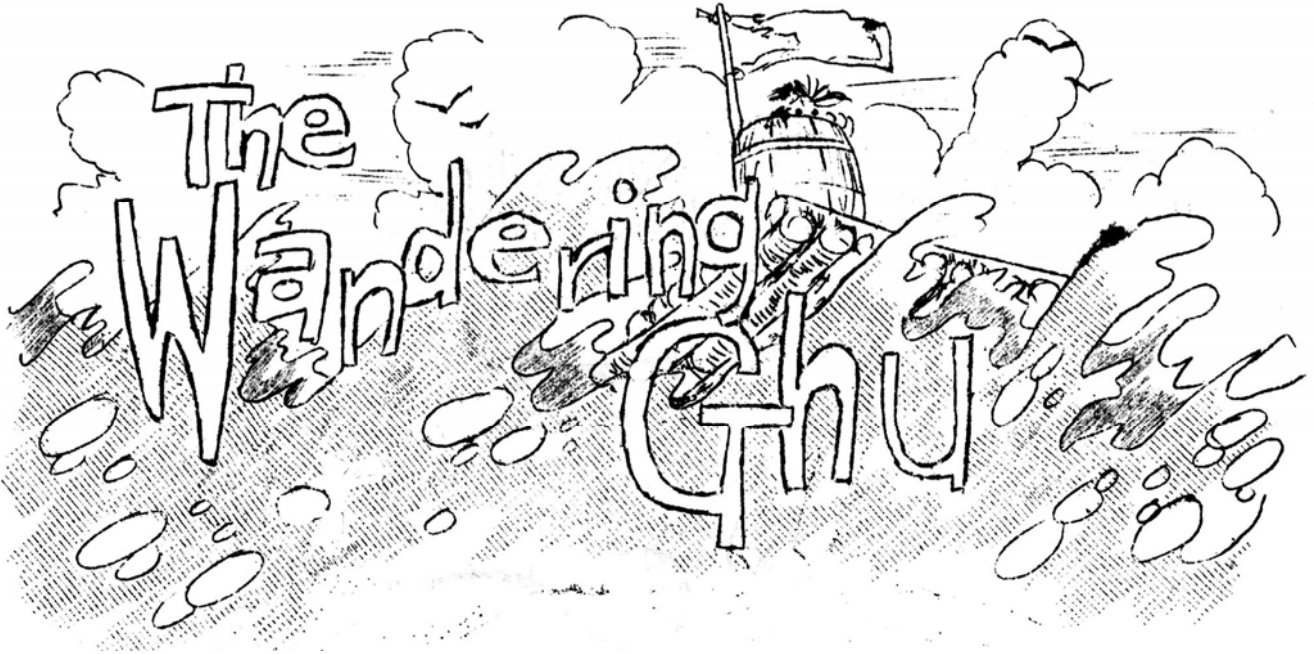
[Fans went very much cap-in-hand in those days, but after frantic searching Ella and Bobbie Wilde did find another hotel – the Kingsley in Bloomsbury – which was probably a much better bet. Ella herself spent most of the convention in bed, recovering from a particularly strenuous week spent duplicating the *Combozine* and entertaining visiting fans to all hours, (including Alan Dodd, his only known appearance) but at the con she increased her power-base by being elected BSFA secretary that year. But all was not well at Inchmery, the other centre of London fandom. On the evening of June 1st Joy Clarke told Vinç that she wanted to go to the United States with Sandy Sanderson and baby Nicki, This demand seemed to escalate rapidly into an detailing of all the things she didn't like about Vince, and a statement that she and Sanderson wanted to marry. Well, what do you do when something as earth-shattering as that happens? – yes, you put out a fanzine. Vinç actually sent out two circular letters about the break-up, the first on 5th June and the second on 1st July, after which he gafiated completely, not surfacing again until the early 1980s.

It was all very sad but in my opinion the fall of Inchmery was probably beneficial; they had been around for just too long, had been too determined to have their say, and Sanderson in particular had stirred-up all sorts of trouble. As Greg Pickersgill said, 'they seem to have reinforced all the bad qualities in each other'. So yes, it was the end of an era, but it allowed the new London fandom to take centre-stage. Now read on.... PW]



Young Bruce
– see below*

On August 28th, 1960 the 20-year-old Bruce Burn arrived at Southampton from New Zealand after a 40-day voyage on the steamer *Castel Felice*. As he says, “The fare was something like £250 for bunk and stowage in a 12-berth cabin in the bowels of the vessel; anything cheaper and they issued you with your own oar.” Bruce had already been an active member of OMPA for three years and he was fired by the urge to meet the people he’d come to know in fandom – and by the desire, normal for the times – of Kiwi Kids to visit Blighty before settling down to whatever they were going to do with their lives (“what we called the Great OE – Overseas Experience”). Bruce kept a journal throughout the voyage which afterwards he ran as instalments in his OMPAazine, *ParaFANalia*. Part 4 (below) appeared in the final issue; the following chapter has never previously been published. (pw)



By Bruce Burn

Part 4 – Landfall!

(First appeared in *paraFANalia* #11, August 1964)

Five pairs of rather bleary eyes were watching the ship as it gently approached the quay. On board, another pair of eyes was sleepily closed against the coming day. It was still early in the August morning, my mind sought a brief oblivion, and so my eyes closed to the view of another landfall. Such a seasoned traveller was I that the end of a journey was, to me, an inconvenient moment when trivia had to receive attention. Customs. Baggage. Last farewells. Trains. These were nuisances that had to be endured before my holiday could end and before my working holiday could begin, and I was single-mindedly concerned with suffering them. So single-mindedly that I had robbed myself of a wealth of enjoyment at what was for many a climactic moment as the *T.V. Castel Felice* berthed at Southampton. But no matter; the five bleary-eyed watchers were to provide a satisfying conclusion to the sea journey.

Someone woke me from my doze. It was Russ McIvor. “Hey Bruce, there are some blokes up there who don’t want you to land!” I sat up, startled from my snoozing.

* While this whole thing is somewhat of a miraculous survival from the past, that little introductory cameo has had a charmed life! I found it in the form of a single, faded 35mm colour neg tucked-in the pages of an issue of *ParaFANalia* which I’d borrowed from Greg’s fanzine archive. Bruce says it’s a frame from a movie the National Film Unit made about Puaa shell jewellery in 1957/58 or thereabouts. He was about 18 then, and the shot showed him being ‘a jolly good production assistant holding the clapper board up to identify a scene’. (pw)

“It’s true,” said Russ. “They’ve got placards up on the wharf.”

I grabbed my camera and followed Russ onto the promenade deck. “Where?”

He pointed to a loose group of men – eight or a dozen dreary figures standing aimlessly on the quay. I looked closely. No placards...

“Well, they had them a moment ago.”

Old neighbours from Sidcup? – No, I’d be able to recognise them, vaguely. Fans? That one over there, cloth cap, huge blue-ish overcoat, glasses, moustache, John Berry? No, he looks more like an Atomillo of Ron Bennett.... hmm, Ron knew I was coming to England. That fat one in the ragged raincoat... Archie Mercer?

“How many were there, Russ?”

“Oh, about five.” Five!

Someone on the quay yelled out “Bruce Burn” and I waved, and the bloke in the cloth cap waved, and the ragged raincoat fluttered an arm, and somehow there was a group of five very English-looking men waving and gazing up the steep side of the hull. I could guess the identities of two of the group but the other three looked just like people. By gesturing wildly to each other, we arranged to move towards the bow of the ship where there might be a chance to shout more than a hoarse ‘hallow’. But the cranes and the trolleys and the wharfies and the P.A. system confounded our attempts to do more than introduce ourselves.

I’d been right about the bloke in the cloth cap and blue overcoat. He was indeed Ron Bennett. The big gent in the ragged raincoat was Archie Mercer, as I’d thought.



‘Welcome to England!’ – Five bleary-eyed fans huddled on the quayside to greet Bruce. (His picture, colour)

The lean and handsome bloke between them turned out to be ‘Jhim’ Linwood who was a fellow member of OMPA, but the other two men on Ron's left were complete strangers. Of one, I thought, “He's bald, wears glasses, looks grim... George Charters?” ...but he was introduced as Ted Forsyth, a name which then meant nothing to me. The fifth member of the party looked studious, with deep careworn features. Who...? “Don Geldart,” yelled Ron Bennett, grinning and waving and nervously coughing. Gee, five fans to greet me!

A squall of rain weaved across the quay and the ship, and the fans retreated to shelter while I sought my various ship-board friends to wish them a final goodbye. Finding them amongst the hurley-burley movement of the crowd was not easy and after a while I returned to my cabin, wished the lads there good luck and staggered with my luggage up to the main gangway. Standing there, I was able to see more fellow-passengers than I'd been able to find in the crowd and all farewells were said during the hour of waiting before we were allowed ashore. Eventually, the voice of Noah on the P.A. system announced that we could proceed ashore and I thought, “Boy, now for some coffee with Ron and co.” How wrong I was!

From the gangway we were shepherded into a large ‘Overseas Passengers Terminal’ where our baggage had to be checked, prior to going through customs. Food and drink were made available to us, for a price, and I felt quite a thrill watching the considerate service of the women behind the counter. In New Zealand, when you ask for something like a ham sandwich, you either get one (with or without mustard) or the counter-hand says, “We haven't got any.”

My first impression of England's snack bars was that if you asked for that same ham sandwich you'd be asked in turn what you'd like on it, “Chow Chow, piccalilli, mustard, French mustard, tomato, lettuce, brown or white bread, love?” Marvellous! Especially that cheeky, friendly ‘love’ which sounded so much more pleasant than ‘sir’ or ‘mister’.

Another hour passed in this vast echoing hall, then we were permitted into the Customs shed, which meant I had to hump my baggage in a milling crowd about a hundred yards to a bench. A further announcement stated that people with their own transport arrangements would be dealt with first – the boat-train passengers would have some attention later. Since my ticket from N.Z. included the boat-train fare to London, I dumped my luggage and made for the far end of the shed where a press of people stood waiting for disembarking passengers.

It was a host of strangers, and faced with so many

people I felt shy of staring back at them through a high wire fence that kept them in England and outside of no-man's land. And then again, I wasn't sure that I'd be able to recognise any of my five welcomers at close range. I needn't have worried. A voice let out a strangled “Oi! I say! Here! Bruce!” all in one syllable. I looked again and there was Jim Linwood grinning at me over three jostling shoulders. He fought his way to the wire barrier and we shook hands.

“Welcome to England, mate. Archie and Don are over there. We've got a train ticket for you. How soon can you get out?”

Where? I couldn't see Archie or Don.

“Over there...” he waved vaguely, just as a well-dressed gentleman thrust his nose through the wire netting.

“Oh, this is Don Geldart.” Grin. Grin. “When can you get out?”

“Oh. Well, I've got a ticket on the boat train...” which explained everything. “You're all nuts coming down here!”

“Well, you won't need it,” said Don. Jim; “We've got your ticket already.”

“Alright, I'll see if I can get through customs.” I skipped away, found a porter, put my luggage before the startled gaze of a customs officer who put X wherever he could, then fixed his gaze upon my camera. Just for looking, he charged me £6.10.00, so I left it in bond and arranged to send the money down from London (I had just over two pounds cash in my pockets). The porter and I shoved my luggage onto a trolley; I said a few more goodbyes to nearby passengers, set off at a brisk pace behind the porter, and finally entered England.

Jim grabbed my typewriter and a bundle that contained *paraFANalia* #6; Archie took the haversack, I picked up my suitcase, Don Geldart carefully manhandled a miscellaneous bundle that fitted more or less into a large flax basket. We staggered to the big doors that led to what looked like a rather damp and dowdy world, found a clear area, dumped our loads and grinned at each other.

“Where to now?” asked Jim. “Ron and Ted have gone to warn Jill. Shall we go straight there, or to a pub for a quick one?”

“Where's the pub?”

Don chuckled, “There's one near the bus-depot”

So we set off, splashing over wide areas of tarmac and eventually into the dockside streets of Southampton, jumping puddles on the rough pavement, and after walking a mile or so through intermittent drizzle I entered my first English pub and drank my first pint of English bitter.

I can't remember which brew of beer it was, but I can remember that I was surprised at just how very flat the liquid was – no fizz at all – and how very tasty it was too. The biggest difference between New Zealand beers (which are vaguely like English light or mild ales) and English beers is that NZ ones are drinkable only so long as they are fizzy – and most Kiwi beer is chemically made too. English beers are so tasty they don't need to have fizz. Upon drinking my first beer, there in a nondescript pub in Southampton, I decided that maybe the fortune of The Wandering Ghu would prove true; that I would return home and publish the Perfect Fanzine only when I might have consumed twenty thousand beers! Yes, Pommie brew was that good.

I had barely caught my breath after downing my pint when we sent off again. This time we went directly to the bus depot and just reached the bus in time to whizz off to Jill's. I had no idea of who ‘Jill’ might be, but as we sat in the front seat upstairs on the bus Archie filled me in on

what was supposed to happen for the rest of the day. Apparently, someone had arranged for a 'Welcome Bruce Burn' party to be held the night before, since my ship was scheduled to arrive on the 27th August. But of course the ship just happened to arrive a day late, so the stalwart fans of London held the party without me and then Ron Bennett had gathered a few volunteers for the jaunt to Southampton on the following day.

Somehow, and in a rather sorry state, my five new friends had made the trip and while waiting for me to leave the ship they'd contacted Jill Adams, a local fan, who had offered us all shelter and food until the London train was due to leave.

Archie was still talking. Did I know Jill Adams? "No." "She's married, with a young daughter, who's another BSFA member – Jill, not the daughter. You'll like her."

I looked at a panorama to the right as the bus glided up a hill, such warm soft greens and browns and such a strangely blue-clouded sky.

"See that slate-blue sky?" said Jim, "Ron's been getting all his colour-slides with slate-blue over everything."

I thought, 'Over-exposure, under-exposure, old stock, lens-filter, emulsion rot, tommy rot!'

Red-tinted road surface... lovely. Warm-looking houses with small pebbles thrown on a concrete cover over the brick walls, and high close hedges round the gardens.

"Jim's from Nottingham, like Alan Sillitoe."

Jim grinned happily and Don smiled quietly as Archie filled me in.

Suddenly, someone recognised a landmark and we all squeezed down the narrow stairwell to the rear platform on the bus, grabbed a bundle each from the luggage space and then walked briskly over the road to one of those cosy-looking houses set back in its own garden. Don tapped on the front door, which quickly opened to reveal a thin gentleman and a little girl, who were identified as John Adams and his daughter Penny. We were all made welcome, tea and cakes were thrust into our hands, and chairs pushed beneath our slowly collapsing forms.

So we sat and talked for a couple of hours and I had a chance to take closer stock of my new found acquaintances. First, everyone looked a little pale and tired – which wasn't surprising after the night before – and their clothes and even their expressions tended to look a little dowdy and wan. This, I'm sure, was partly due to the fact that for the preceding few weeks I had been assaulted on all sides by bright colours and suntans, but nevertheless my



Ron Bennett
– 'his big smile and effacing spectacles gave him the look of a sprouted-up schoolboy'
Photo from Keith Freeman.

impression remained that people in England do look pale and colourless in almost every aspect.

Their expressions are invariably unreadable and somewhat reserved and because of this it's very easy to ignore individuals in England (especially in the cities). Generally, their complexions are either creamy or near-white – unhealthy-looking anyway – and this was something a little new to me. And the colours of their clothing are normally somewhat subdued – soft colours, like the countryside around, with browns and blues, or like the towns they live in with greys and blacks and just a suggestion of brighter colours in women's shoes and handbags and men's socks and hat-band gimmicks.

Eventually, Ted, Ron, and our hostess, Jill Adams, arrived back from their fruitless expedition into town (they'd been looking for us).

"Well, Bruce, English fandom rescues you from some of our dangerous English customs," said Ron, with a curious inflection on each word that made the simple sentence sound like an over-rehearsed proclamation in a play. He spoke with an accent that gave his words a friendly touch – even with a bad pun. His big smile and effacing spectacles gave him the look of a sprouted-up schoolboy and his whole body seemed to register excitement beneath the bulky overcoat.

More coffee was dished up by Jill. She is a young housewife who had first burst on the fannish scene at the London World Convention in 1957. She is a vivacious person with a bright personality, and I felt that she would have liked to have still been in London, rather than in the far smaller town of Southampton. Of course, she was born a Londoner, and she quite obviously got a kick out of having so many fans under her roof, so her frustration at living in a fan-less provincial town was quite understandable. She was a kind and considerate hostess who worried that none of her unexpected visitors seemed very hungry. But, with sausages and sandwiches and many cups of tea, we all sat about talking of many things; Ron's slate-blue colour photographs. Husband John's hobby. Penny's numerous jigsaw puzzles. First Impressions of Blighty. The Welcome Bruce Party, food, and lots of other things until it was time to leave. To the last minute we were loathe to go, but go we did in a sudden rush for a bus that sped us to the railway station.

During the bus ride Ron briefly brought me up to date with a few things. First, did I want to stay in OMPA?

"Yes, of course."



Jill (more properly 'Gillian') Adams with Dave Cohen, Bob Richardson & Ken McIntyre. 1958. Photo from Terry Jeeves' album.

“Well, send a magazine immediately to Daphne Buckmaster, the Association Editor, for the almost-due mailing.

“I was planning to; the bundle Jim has is *paraFANalia* #6.”

“Good – send it tomorrow, she'll have it on Tuesday or Wednesday.”

Did I know Ella Parker?

“Who?” “Ella Parker.” “No.”

“You'll meet her later, then.” “Oh.”

“With Inchmery bust up, Ella is the focal point of London fandom. She held last night's party for you. Ted here is one of her BSFA Friday-nighters.”

“Friday-nighters?”

“You'll learn. Don's a Sergeant in the Army. He met Ken Potter in Cyprus and became a fan.”

Grin at Don, trying also to look at views of Southampton spread outside the starboard side of the bus. Amazing; all the houses look as if they'd grown where they stand, so ordered and neat... similar houses everywhere, same pitch to all the roofs... the grass and trees look as if they're allowed to grow in spaces specially set aside for them, unlike N.Z. where the buildings and roads look as if they've been allowed to rest temporarily in the countryside.

At the station more pushing as we squeezed aboard a very crowded train. We pushed through packed carriages where people stood or sat in the corridors until we found a relatively empty luggage compartment which we immediately commandeered. Archie reclined on a heap of baggage and quietly fell asleep. The other five of us spread out on the floor of the carriage. With a few introductory and self-effacing remarks, Ron produced a pack of cards. I pretended not to notice them as he riffled them under my nose – after all, Ron's reputation as a card player had already spread to the far ends of the earth.

But Ron is a determined character. He said “Hearts?” and Don, Ted, and Jim nodded fatalistically, and drew small change from their pockets. I tried to avoid what was, I felt sure, a disastrous fate by admitting my ignorance of card games, but Ron kept on saying things like “Oh, we won't play for money...It's not gambling” and so I joined the circle.

And, to Ron's credit, I must say that the game was not a gambling one. It could be, just as one can make a gamble out of anything, but the way he played Hearts made it simply a point-amassing game. Luck came my way once I got the idea behind the game and so by the end of the journey I felt content at having given Ron 'Maverick' Bennett a run for his ~~money~~ points by coming second to him in the tallying up. From their actions during the game, some insight might have been gained as to the characters of the fans in the carriage, Ron, quick and humbly confident; Jim, nervous and impulsively decisive; Ted dour and determined; Don, quiet and thoughtful. Archie, at odd times would stir and wake up and regale us with his feelings of complete disinterest in games.

We reached our London terminal station and the party broke up once more. Archie left to find his way to Ella Parker's, Jim made tracks for the nearest hitching area going north, and the rest of us stumbled onto another platform. I had wondered for some time how I would travel from this station to my uncle's house in East Sheen. Uncle Eric's instructions to me had been clear, but of course I'd somehow mislaid the letter containing them. But I needn't have worried – good ol' Ron had mapped out a route across London via an intimate relationship between buses, underground railways, and dark streets.

Eventually, we sat on the top deck of a No. 33 bus

and passed through some of the jumble of suburban London. Red-brick houses, small walled-in front gardens, grey pavements, black damp-looking roadways between two, three, or more stories of dirty red bricks and ugly grey concrete. Occasionally, a little relief in the form of colourful trees or shrubbery, but numerous advertisement hoardings supplied most of the colour to the streets. Dusk was beginning to fall – that wonderfully long dusk that England enjoys – and this probably had something to do with the dismal appearance of the streets.

So, under Ron's expert guidance, we reached our destination; a quiet two-storey house in Temple Sheen Road. Our banging on the front door succeeded only in raising a neighbour who told us that nobody was home except ‘the old woman’ (my grandmother) and that Eric (my uncle) would not be back for an hour or so. However, Eric had told her that I would arrive on this day and so she happily took custody of my various packages.

Ron, Don and Ted seized me and made tracks for a restaurant. After all, they'd not eaten for about seven hours. Then, filled with steak they dragged me into the depths below London and we made our rapid, bewildering way to the North Western suburb of London called Kilburn and the home of Ella Parker.

Part 5 – Life in a Focal Centre

(Previously unpublished)

Dusk had well and truly fallen by the time we emerged from the Underground. A brisk walk over the hump of a bridge, past a buttressed public house with all its dark lights and noises, over a zebra crossing and onto a darker side street...this was Canterbury Road. We stopped outside a shop. At least, I thought it was a shop. The sign above the large front window said CONTINENTAL BUTCHERS, but there was a door to one side of the shop and it was to this that Ron Bennett led me. With a fiendish gleam in his eyes, he produced a key and fitted it in the lock of the door.

“You go up first, Bruce, give her a surprise.”

The door opened into a dark and narrow hallway and directly onto some stairs that creaked underfoot. Up two flights of these, then a landing. Ron whispered from behind me: “Ooop”, and so ooop I went: past two doors and onto some creakier and shakier stairs. Another landing and two doors. Another glance behind revealed Ron Bennett and others miming knocking on the door in front of me. So....

Timidly, I tapped on one of the panels in the grey door. The faint murmur inside the room faded away; encouraged by this I reached for the key that was in the lock. Suddenly the door was wrenched open, and a voice snarled “It's not locked!” I put my case on the floor, pushed at the door, which was still open only a crack, and shyly entered the room.

Receding from me was a fawn-coloured garment over white legs and bedroom slippers, the whole vision topped by wild dark hair. A second person reclined on a bed across the room, thin face and shining spectacles and cigarette a-drooping. Red linoleum covered the floor, and brown-patterned wallpaper ringed the room. I almost tripped over a large box beside the entrance, so I opened the door wide. The dark-haired person turned and plumped herself into a chair, surprise gradually showing through her stern expression.

“Well you might as well come in,” she muttered in a loud voice. She was clearly embarrassed, but she did sound pretty fed-up about something.



“Well you might as well come in,” she muttered in a loud voice. A slightly later picture showing Ella, and (top to bottom); Joe Patrizio, Jim Groves, Ted Forsyth, and Bruce Burn himself. Photo from Eric Bentcliffe’s album.

“But this, **this** is Bruce Burn!” cried the man on the bed, leaping to his feet, waving his arms in the air, excitement contorting his previously lethargic figure.

I smiled shyly, blushing, feeling a right twerp. I shuffled my feet.

The woman made a sour face. “Well, I’ve waited so long, I don’t care anymore,” she said, picking up a large mug of tea and drinking deeply.

Ron, Don, and Ted crushed through the doorway behind me, grinning madly and happy about something. Everyone began yelling and laughing. I saw a familiar figure sitting quietly behind the door and started to move towards the silent Archie Mercer, but Ron began to introduce people.

“This is Arthur Thomson and this is Ella Parker.”

I said an ineffectual, belated “Hello”, apologised for my lateness, had a tot of whisky put into my hand, and sat down in a big wooden armchair near Don Geldart. I felt I needed to get to grips with the situation.

The whole scene was something new to me. Before that day I had known only young fans. Mervyn Barrett had been Kiwifandom’s Elder, and at 27 he was seven years my senior when I left New Zealand. But the two biggest names in British fandom were obviously ten years older. This might seem a small thing, but it caused me to have doubts about my mixing with the fannish crowd. It seemed to me that with such an age difference we would be worlds apart.



Bruce and Don Geldart take tea in Ella Parker’s flat. Photo from Eric Bentcliffe’s album

And somehow I knew that my approach to fandom would differ from that of the people around me. This was just a notion, but it did add to my discomfort.

Here’s another view of the scene. It comes from *Orion 26*, published by Ella Parker. She tells of the ‘Welcome Bruce Burn’ Party (which I had apparently missed) and its aftermath:

With the exception of Jimmy Groves who wanted to stay on and meet Bruce after having attended his party and all, Archie was the first of the bunch who had gone to Southampton to come back. He was full of the good time they’d had and of the hospitality given them by Jill Adams who lives down there. I’m glad she was able to take part even if not for long in some of the fannish goings on. Enjoy it, Jill? Archie had a train to catch for home and sleep. Fed but unrested he went his way with still no sign of Burn, though Archie assured me he had indeed landed.

Remarkably negligent these immigration fellows!

Arthur returned unexpectedly. As he put it, “I’ve stayed up all night to meet Bruce Burn and I’m gonna see Bruce Burn!” Jimmy finally had to go home and hadn’t been gone very long before Ted showed up. He told us that Ron had gone with Bruce to drop off his bags and they would probably be at my place by 7.30 p.m.

I was loafing on the bed trying without much interest to read the Sunday papers which had so far lain unopened. Right then I felt I couldn’t care less if Bruce turned up at all. We’d spent two hectic nights preparing for him; all our ploys had come to naught, and I was tired, so it was something of an anti-climax when the door opened and Ron escorted a bewildered and apologetic Bruce in to us.

We did our best to make him feel one of us. Arthur asked him where the hell he’d been. I, intending to prove that whatever the boys had told him wasn’t true and I was so hospitable, gave him a man-sized tot of whisky, and generally fussed round him. He drank it uncomplainingly and it was only weeks after he told me he can’t stand the stuff, he prefers beer! Oh well, serve him right.

Nobody stayed late that night; they were all too tired for much in the way of fannish wit or chatter.

Apart from anything else, that suggests Archie should find other places to sit instead of behind doors! Indeed, the evening was a quiet one, once the yelling of greetings was over. And, as I was soon to learn, if talk flags in a gathering of fans, a party dies on its feet. No music filled the gaps in conversations; rarely did booze smooth the flow of ideas or the tag- game of wooing enliven the proceedings.

Where were the casks of foaming Blog I had heard about? Where were the Little Richard fans, the diggers of Merseysippiside jazz? Where were the ladies with obscure minds and obvious intentions?

During my first few days in London Don Geldart kindly showed me around the city. ***This was the huge and ancient great city of London!*** I gazed in awe, looking at everything for the first time, and it was wonderful. Strange how familiarity would cause it all to look different later, when I had become more accustomed to the scene. But it was very good of Don to spend so many hours foot-slogging around the crowded pavements with someone he’d barely met. As Ken Potter was wont to explain, “Don’s not like most Sergeants in the British Army.”

It’s easy to say that Don appears a nervous but kindly person, that he’s a born worrier, but a boon companion. These things were obvious, but less obvious was that he was like a fish out of water while he was in the army.



Don Geldart at Bullcon, Peterborough in 1963. Photo by Bruce

His honesty as an individual was too great to allow him refuge in the established hierarchy of the army. He wasn't a bully but he was somewhat of a perfectionist. On the first day of September 1960, Don took me to the Globe. Little of the night now comes back to recall, but notes in my diary and in *Skyrack* – Ron Bennett's fannish newsletter – say that in addition to Ron, Don, and myself, Iris and Ted Tubb were there, along with Irene and Ken Potter, Brian Burgess, Michael Moorcock, and a Canadian fan on a European Tour, Bob Gibson. No doubt several other local fans were present, but their names escape me.

However, since some people were fairly regular attendees at The Globe, let's imagine that they were also present. People like Dick Ellingsworth, Pat Kearney, John Brunner, and Barry Bayley. With a good deal of license I can show you what a typical visit to the Globe was like while I was in London.

If you arrive early, about seven o'clock, you'd probably walk into an empty or sparsely-occupied bar. Actually, the first thing you'd notice would be the double-doors that lead you from the street into the bar-room. Whether this device was in emulation of a space-ship air-lock, or a wind and weather baffle is hard to decide, but it was an awkward manoeuvre to get between them.

Once through the obstacles you'd welcome the warmth of the thickly-carpeted room. Small red-covered lamps lit the walls where they were fastened, and lighting in the bar itself illuminated the body of the room. Seven or eight tables, round and about knee-height, were scattered about the available space, and comfortable red-upholstered chairs were grouped with them.

Along two walls were benches, comfortably upholstered, part of the bar filled what might have been the third wall, and the fourth wall bore a coat-stand, a table, two



The Globe, early sixties; Barry Bayley standing at left with Dick Ellingsworth & Pat Kearney. Mike Moorcock is on the right, talking to unknown. Photo by Bruce Burn.

chairs, and one seemingly permanent incumbent. The last was an old man who was some sort of caretaker in a nearby building. Since the Globe is in Hatton Gardens, surrounded by many of Britain's jewellery businesses, I sometimes wondered what the old man took care of!

But let's imagine I've arrived at the Globe on a typical rainy evening, at about 8.30, and I've navigated the imitation air-lock. Over to my right: those people sitting grouped around a couple of tables near the corner, see 'em? They're fans. The two young men sitting behind a pile of books are Pat Kearney and Dick Ellingsworth. Pat is the fair-haired one, very pale face. Dick's the sallow one, laughing at a self-destructing joke and twitching nervously.



Mike Moorcock in action, Bullcon 1963. Photo by Bruce

Next to him is Mike Moorcock, wearing a brown suede jacket and smoking a long cigarette through a just slightly-dishevelled Raleigh beard. Sitting on the bench seats nearby are Ella Parker (the one in the brown coat and sharp-cornered glasses), Irene Potter, making a rare appearance in the pub, and next to her is Jim Groves, a short slight young man with heavy glasses and a very serious expression. Hovering around them all is Brian Burgess, a large-footed fan of considerable girth and height. At a nearby table are John Brunner, who looks dapper no matter what he wears, Ron Bennett, brow furrowed and glasses opaque as he maintains a neutral argument with his companions, and Bob Gibson, who looks vaguely uncomfortable among strangers.

I take off my duffle-coat and hang it on the coat-stand, where it can drip along with the coats and brollies of other Globetrotters. The caretaker sits in his accustomed seat; hands curled around a glass of stout, and winks a rheumy eye at me. "Ahhaha" he says, or words to that effect, from a fragile smile. "Keeping all right?" I ask, then turn to the bar. If there's a pound in my pocket I'll ask the white-jacketed barman for a cider and stout, a meady brew, but more usually I ask for draught bitter or Red Barrel, both products of the company that owns the Globe. Meanwhile, I grin and nod to the people in the room, and possibly join the group at the bar.

Ken Potter is there, pint in one hand, jacket open, other hand in pocket, in his Irish Playwright stance with his head tilted back slightly, and his feet spread. Good sense and idealism are his words, along with great humour, fascinating originality, thunderingly wide reading. He's talking to George Locke, Iris and Ted Tubb, and Ivor Mayne leans attentively nearby.

"Drama breaks life down to important facets just like cubism," Ken might be saying. "Many plays are based on one thought or feeling." Iris and Ted would smile in their



Ted Tubb, Ken Potter, and Bruce get together in Ella's Penitentiary (note the wallpaper!). Photo by Bruce Burn.

thoughtful ways, George would stand on the sides of his feet, nod his head, and Ivor would hover over an idea. "Yes, yes," he'd say, "Ianesco shows this in 'The Chairs'."

Quietly I withdraw. Theatre is a practical sport for me; theories of stagecraft and playwriting are sideline activities.

I mix into the Kearney-Ellingsworth-Moorcock group, looking for dirty books. Pat has a remarkably virtuous passion for subterranean scribblings and erotic literature. His collection of joyful writings would blond the hair of a Lord Chamberlain. Dick shares some of this passion and also has a worshipful respect for Edgar Rice Burroughs. Dick is in many ways a Moorcock acolyte. His hero is the dashing MJM, writer of swashbuckling tales of fantasy. Dick is a nervy bloke: his hands shake, he eyes the world in a hurried, startled glance, and even his voice seems to shiver as his asthmatic lungs feed his larynx.

The third of this triumvirate, Mike, is a Pose. In all the time I knew him I never did find out if his affectations *are* him, or just a surface, although I strongly suspect that mannerisms he once adopted for defence in company have become so instinctive as to have become him.

"Ah, noble Bruce from the Yaler worlds," he says, throwing a glance at Dick who would follow the lead of the master: "Wine and wenchies are elsewhere, but booze with us Ned." Or words to such effect.

The conversation continues like that for a short while, or maybe Pat will start talking of Henry Miller or surrealistic movies, or Dick might state the case for fantastic literature once again, or Mike might talk of Mike, or I might jabber about myself. On this level, I well remember one of the best squelches ever put upon me. One day, I was gabbling, running-at-the-mouth about the odd and what I thought were interesting things that had recently happened to me, when I realised I'd broken one of the most sacrosanct of rules for social conduct. I was telling Mike a story for the second time. Embarrassed, I stopped talking and Mike turned and smiled paternally at me: "Poor Bruce; nothing ever happens to you."

Mike had this gift for creating a formal air of informality. Like few other people I have known, he could give the impression, while sitting in a fireside circle of friends, that he had just stepped down from a throne; that he was the mayor sitting in on someone else's committee; the managing-director attending a staff party. It was an amazing achievement to project such an air, and he sustained it through all the time I knew him: even when he appeared on the edge of nervous exhaustion there was a hint that he was stage-manager of the situation.

In a way there was no such person as Mike

Moorcock. The creature who walked along Holborn singing eight bar blues, or sat fingering his moustache while telling a tale of sly wit, or said things like "If I knew this was to be an informal party I'd have worn a tie" when he arrived at a party of mine wearing a neat suit, a waistcoat, a cigarette holder, and a cravat with pin; this immaculate creature with its romantic beard and regal banter was a gesture. A grand gesture. Goodness knows the reason for the gesture: perhaps some fat boy with a tender soul once needed a facade to buffer contact with the everyday world, and the facade had grown thicker, suffocating the soul. Maybe. But I doubt if reasons have much to do with gestures anyway.

In comes Pete Taylor, the image of a successful junior executive, straight to Mike. They are after all old buddies. We'll leave them joshing and gesturing alongside of the acolyte Dick and the bookish Pat, and meet another group of people.

Ella Parker says, "Oi! About time you said hullo to us." And with grins Irene Potter, Jim Groves, and Ted Forsyth move along the bench to make room for me.

This quartet will be considerably more concerned with realities than the foursome I've just left. Ella: forthright, clear-thinking, straight-laced, and downright motherly. Irene: wistful and earthy and cheerily sentimental. Jim: quiet and secluded, filled with benevolence to mankind. Ted Forsyth, in manner and appearance, always made me think of computers and cybernetic machines and such. His glasses and premature baldness probably played a large part in this impression, but his clipped speech and rapid, machine-like movements added to it.

Where talk among the Kearney-Ellingsworth-Moorcock-Taylor group might be either airy-fairy folderol or about the subtle things of life, talk in this other quartet would normally be the basic stuff of good conversation: personalities and events. People would be discussed, happenings would be planned, and the elements of science fiction itself would be invoked. If satisfaction comes of knowing something has been done or will be done, then these people were satisfying to talk with, and what they presented to the world were the normal veneers demanded in the name of courtesy.

Not that they sat around like stuffed dummies. Jim's loud laugh and conversational "ha-ha" would punctuate his talk as he might raise a finger in the air to command his audience. Ella's face with its strong Scottish mouth and smooth city skin would show anything from wild exasperation to comic disgust, or she might whoop with laughter at some apt gag. Ted Forsyth was perhaps more subdued than anyone, but he might on an impulse do some commanding thing like crushing your hand in a handshake, or (as he did once at a party in the Pen) performing a gymnastic stunt like balancing on his hands.

Attendance was very poor on these first Thursdays of each month when I arrived in London. It improved during the next year, but became thoroughly unpredictable in 1962 when London fandom seemed to split into factions. The scene I'm describing in this chapter might have come from the best months of 1961, when two or three dozen fans and friends might meet in The Globe.

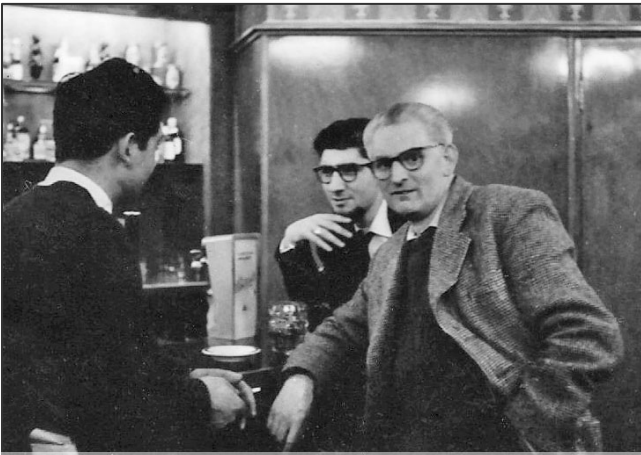
The bar-room is pleasantly filled with that comfortable feeling of comradeship as the evening draws far too quickly to a close. Sometime or other I'll talk to most of the people present, but thinking back over all the many trips I made to the Globe, I can't single out any particular incident, conversation, or night as being more important than any others. Oh, except perhaps briefly meeting Arthur Clarke on one occasion.



Ken Potter's 'grinning, talking, shining face' in the Globe, Spring 1963. Photo by Bruce Burn.

However, when thinking of those boozy evenings, I always recall Ken Potter's grinning, talking, shining face with his ramshackle suit and tie and pipe all seemingly enervated by Great Thoughts and Witty Badinage. Yes, to me, Ken Potter probably more than anything else is the personification of the spirit of trufandom, and the appropriate setting for him is, of course, the Globe. Or indeed any warm friendly place that sells bitter ale.

Other people who frequented the Globe while I was in England include Ethel Lindsay, Arthur Thomson (Atom), and eventually Alan Rispin, Diane Goulding, and Bette Woodhead. I was delighted to meet Syd Bounds there, who I had previously thought of as an oooold time pro. Syd turned out to be a very active present-day pro, although he wasn't writing much science fiction; mainly comic book scripts and teenagers' stories (they pay better than SF). Like darn near all writers in England, Syd worked part-time in a factory or some such because writing is too unreliable a source of income. But to me, Sydney J. Bounds was a name like Ted Tubb or Ken Bulmer or Vargo Statten, that represented British Science Fiction of the fifties and sixties.



In the Globe with Syd Bounds, right, Maxim Jakubowski at rear, and unknown on left. Photo by Bruce Burn.

Mention of comic books reminds me: during my first trip to the Globe, Mike Moorcock filled me in on what the market would want if I could turn my hand to writing comic book scripts, and offered to put me in touch with the editor for Fleetway Publications. This is my chance to thank Mike for that kind gesture.

Back to the story. George Locke, lanky loose-limbed pharmacist, who I believe now gets by as an antiquarian and book dealer, was another fairly regular Globetrotter once his army service was finished with. Bill Temple, florid-complexioned oooold time pro also made several appearances, as did Jim Linwood, Peter Mabey, and

a few others whose names I've forgotten or misplaced. Still, except for rare occasions when visiting fans might cause a special showing or when that magical 'something' was in the air, most Globe evenings became just ordinary gabfests with booze and an eleven o'clock closedown. Nothing wrong with that, except... what happened to one's sense of wonder?

It may be that things seen from afar have added lustre. "Distance lends enchantment to the view." Reports and descriptive essays, simply because they miss out all the trivia of daily affairs, might inadvertently make simple events seem more potent. A finer focus in the attention of a writer may cause a reader to gain an unbalanced appreciation of described events.

Rather like attendance at great theatre: not all the performance is great when put into context with the rest of the occasion, the traffic jams, the parking problems, the walking through dreary streets to reach the theatre, the stashing of wet coats and umbrellas, the finding of seats, buying of programmes, the sheer pressure of so many people gathered in one auditorium, the coughing when the performance begins, the late-comers clambering over your knees to gain their seats, the noisy lolly-paper in the row behind you, the annoying stray spotlight that catches your eye, the lost line of dialogue, the unfortunate sight-lines if you seat is not dead-centre to the stage, the complete break of dramatic continuity during intervals, all work against the appreciation you might have of the stage performance.

So it is with glamorous gatherings in distant places. From afar they may have a romantic enchantment, but seen closer they may be quite mundane in character. And, hey, *bon mots* may not issue from the mouths of the assembly to order. There is an ordinariness to much of life which we must learn to accept.

I found much of wonder and enchantment in London after travelling halfway round the world to see it all, but it's true that much of my time there was spent on the edge of boring routine. Like travelling on the Underground. What an exciting prospect! To travel on a transport system developed over so many years, that speeds you from astonishing panoramas such as The Tower of London to the amazing squalor of Balham, the lurid glamour of Piccadilly Circus, or the surprising rustic scenes along the canals near Regents Park or Richmond Great Park. This is to see great sights. But try travelling the same rails in the crowded commuter trains on cold winter mornings with standing-room-only where people are packed like upright sardines in the often hot air of a railway carriage, all wrapped for walking on the streets. There's little glamour in that!

But without the everyday for comparison, the wonderful would lose its wonder, so I'm grateful I was able to see the city from all aspects. The Glory and the gorbliney. The Regal and the ridiculous. The beauty and the bland.

Eventually, I was to live and work for much of the next two and a half years in London. I worked and lived like anyone else, and soon lost the feeling of being any sort of tourist. I'm grateful, even though the cost was high in terms of hard lessons learned and opportunities neglected back home. So, in the end I did things on my working holiday that I could never have done had I stayed home. Living in that distant place called London was an enchantment of its own, and its magic bewitched me all the time.

– Bruce Burn, 1964 & 2008

Bruce attended three Eastercons then went home in mid-1963. Ella Parker went on to edit *Vector*, join OMPA, and chair *Loncon II* in 1965. See Bruce's biography of Ella in *Prolapse #9* (pw)

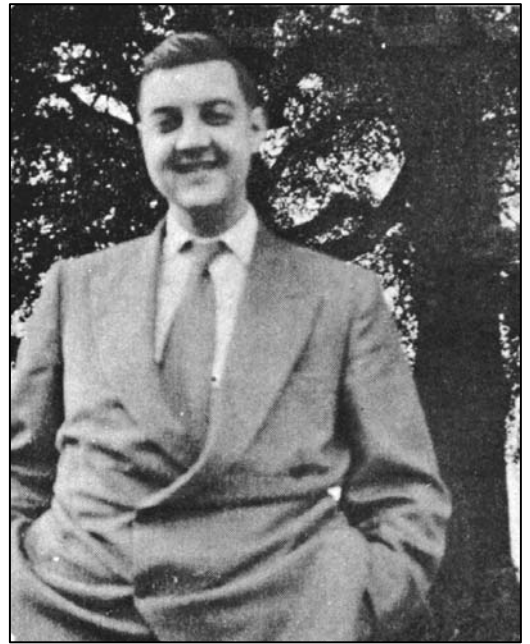
Bruce Burn met many fans in the London area, even the mysterious Alan Dodd although he had to track him down to his lair. In nearly fifteen years of activity Dodd made only one recorded appearance at a fan-gathering and generally avoided personal contact with fans. He was so totally and conspicuously absent from fan-life that many people were convinced he was a hoax (an impression fostered by a couple of fandom's practical jokers). But he was real enough, and Greg Pickersgill has tried hard to find the man behind the mask. (pw)

Forgotten Fans #5

Alan Dodd, the Hermit of Hoddesdon

By Greg Pickersgill

An incredibly rare
picture of our man,
from Bruce Pelz's
Profanity #6, 1958



All scans by Greg unless otherwise noted.

Once upon a time Peter Weston and I were discussing fans who had dropped-off the radar of fame, who had fallen out of the back of the conventional fan-histories, and of course Alan Dodd's name came up. In our original exchange Peter had taken a perhaps-consensus view that Dodd had been 'a bit of a loser', saying that 'this might give a picture of an extreme case of fannish anomie (to use a Joseph Nicholas type of term), an example to us all of what can happen if you don't get some sort of a life!' I was keen to oppose that, and wrote in an e-mail; –

"Well, I wouldn't dare to claim I understand exactly what someone means by 'fannish anomie', but I would be inclined to say that whatever happened to Alan Dodd it wasn't that he 'didn't have a life'. As far as I can recall from the perhaps dozen or so phone conversations I had with him, he actually did lots of stuff, and regularly travelled to Spain and Portugal with friends, apparently as a hand on photo-shoots. Almost certainly soft- or hard-porn, though he was a bit cagey about that. He was, it seems, well known amongst cine-philés, too, and had a substantial collection of movie memorabilia.

"An assessment based on him being some sort of reclusive failed fan who had nothing to occupy his mind and time would I think be far off the mark. The problem would be proving it, as so far as I know there is nothing in print to support this, and my memory of those conversations is poor.

"It is true, however, that he was sometimes in poor health and was perennially short of cash, to the degree that he sometimes couldn't pay utility bills or get basic house-maintenance done. But to claim that fandom was to blame, even tangentially, would be frankly ludicrous."

Peter prevailed upon me, in that regretful but firm tone he takes with people he perceives as 'staff', to write a profile of Dodd. I was easily convinced. There's a school of thought (of which I may indeed be the only member) that Alan Dodd deserves a comprehensive portrait. Let's see.

My interest in Dodd isn't simply because some of the earliest fanzines I acquired back in 1968 were issues of his fanzine *Camber*. He's not a great fan-writer by any stretch of the imagination, and apart from his legendary absence from the well-lit stage of fannish performance he scarcely figures in any of the stories of fandom past. I don't know; all I can say is that there may be something about him that reminds me of me. I'm fascinated by Alan Dodd; every time I started to write this article I found myself stopping, thinking I don't know enough, I need to do more research, I want to know what was really going on. Who was that masked man?

And that was the problem with Peter's request. There was no straight road to the centre of Alan Dodd. The best and only course was a roundabout one which included visiting not only his own fanzines, but many other fanzines of the period 1952-70 in search of hints, indications, traces of who he was and what his enthusiasms and interests were. This wasn't simply a setting-out of the fannish career of someone who serially did things that caused something else to happen – Dodd wasn't that sort of character at all, not a project-leader, trend-setter, mood-swayer – but virtually a biography. Good grief! That's an awful lot of research. If nothing else it requires paging through hundreds of fanzines published between 1950 and 1970. A truly terrifying prospect. Do I have so much time in my life, is it worth it?

To find Alan Dodd we must first roll back to Fred J. Robinson of Cardiff. In 1952 Robinson published the first issue of *Camber*, a manifestation of an ambitious idea to unite and motivate fans in Wales and the West of England in the face of a very London-centric fandom. *Camber* was a good little fanzine, and is notable for a long, detailed report by Robinson of the 1953 *Coroncon* in its second issue. Fred was an enthusiastic fan and rather good writer who also published five issues of *Straight Up*, a substantial personal-zine. Alas, like so many risings in the West it was all doomed to failure, not by the gathering of Celtic Twilight but by Robinson's other enthusiasms. Two issues of *Camber* were published, and it seemed to disappear. Robinson definitely did.

Enter Alan Dodd. He seems to have been completely unknown before this point. In *Eye-3* (December 1954) there is a fanzine review column by Vince Clarke, in which *Camber-3* – the first Dodd issue – is reviewed, and Vince refers to Alan as ‘a heretofore unknown personality in active fandom’. Given that Vince Clarke was at the top of his game at the time and knew everyone and everything, I believe we must accept that Dodd had done nothing at all before taking over the title, not so much as even a tiny WAHF. My best guess is that he found his way into Ken Slater’s system somehow, and became a subscriber to *Camber* and other fanzines as a result of notices in *Operation Fantast*. But he was clearly an enthusiastic reader of *Camber* and was in contact with Fred Robinson. More than a year after *Camber*’s second issue a third appeared under Dodd’s editorship, dated December 1954. There was no detailed explanation of this reappearance or change of editorship in the fanzine itself, but an article in Ron Bennett’s *Ploy-4* of September 1955 told the tale, although there is some confusion over the time elapsed and it all actually happened much faster than Dodd seemed to remember –

‘.....there had been a short interval since the last issue had come out. About two years I think. Well, having displayed a great interest in the former two issues I wrote to editor Fred Robinson to find out how things were getting on. In his usual and amiably prompt manner Fred soon replied. Six months later. ... He admitted finding it rather hard going to get the zine out single-handed and he suggested I become co-editor with him. So I agreed. Months passed. ... he (Robinson) with all due honesty mentioned that his other hobbies of photography and women were drawing him away from fandom so much that he could not bring himself back to the task of putting out another issue. The flame of interest that had kept him going through fanzines like *Straight Up* and *Camber* had finally died.’

Robinson suggested that Dodd, who would have been around twenty at the time (according to an aside in *Ploy* he was born in 1933, ‘the year before John Dillinger was shot’) should take over the fanzine altogether and Dodd eventually received ‘the parcel that was *Camber*. I inherited a hundred or so unused stencils which didn’t fit the Roneo 500 I use, a few of Orma McCormick’s poems, four typed stencils (also a different size), a few oddments of stories and a couple of old O.F. lists. I then became the sole owner of *Camber*, complete with a sub-list of gafia-riddled fans and characters who had insisted on sending Fred subs up to issue 17, which means I’ve got to get out at least 15 issues before succumbing to gafia myself.’

He set about creating the third issue, using the leftovers from the Robinson era along with his own writing. It was nothing really out of the ordinary, and perhaps lacking the editorial spirit of Robinson, though did have some unusual and striking illustrations by U.S. fan Lars Bourne and perhaps the first public appearance of future horror-superstar Brian Lumley’s poetry in print. From that beginning Dodd went on to produce a total of twelve much-improved issues between 1954 and 1964, ending with issue 14, thus leaving some subscribers still in want. Dodd hadn’t appeared in *Camber* until assuming editorship in 1954 with issue 3. Even then there’s not much fanfare, and absolutely no personal information is included except for the familiar Hoddesdon address at which he lived until his death. He made none of the usual new-fan explanations of himself in his first issue, but he was obviously familiar with, even though not generally known to, fandom by this time. However Dodd’s penchant for Hollywood fantasy asserts itself already with enthusiastic film-reviews of *The Bowery Boys meet the Monsters and Them*.

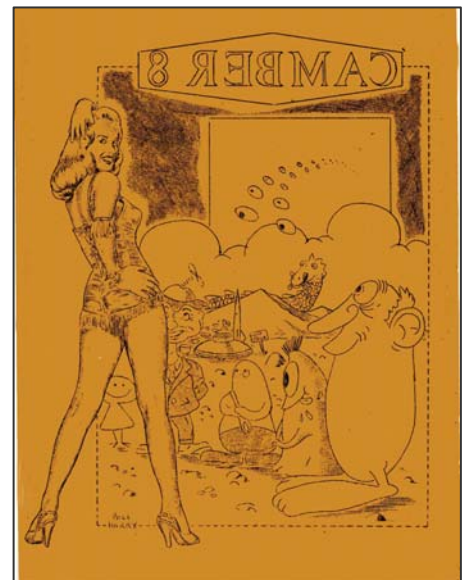
Camber-4 is much as the previous issue, but better. A good fanzine review column by Dodd shows that he is certainly familiar with fandom and getting a lot of fanzines in trade, but otherwise there’s not a trace of his personality except for his enthusiasms manifesting in the choice of material. Number 5 is again an improvement, with a startlingly large and informative fanzine review section by Dodd, and a lot of material by well-known fans from the UK and US. In the letter-column Alan more than once refers to the poor pay of British conscripts doing National Service, with particular reference to the disparity between the pay of an RAF airman as opposed to his USAF equivalent. As Dodd would have been in his mid-20s at this time it is reasonable to suppose that he had done National Service in the Air Force, and hadn’t enjoyed it very much.

There’s also a fascinating aside that places Dodd on holiday in Kent on 24th August 1955, when he was witness to the end of a tragic affair in which USAF Airman Napoleon Green, based at Manston, shot a number of other servicemen on the base and after a pursuit which included an exchange of gunfire with USAF police, shot and killed himself on Broadstairs beach. Dodd says that while it was happening he thought it was part of a film in progress. The influence of Hollywood indeed...

The sixth issue continued as before, undated as usual, with virtually no personal material by Dodd, who otherwise writes quite interestingly and entertainingly. Once again there was material by many prominent fans of the day, including Dean Grennell, Greg Benford, John Berry, Terry Carr and Ron Ellik. In terms of its contributors *Camber* is certainly not a second-string fanzine as many have assumed in hindsight.

Camber-7 (undated) gives a small contra-indication to the perceived wisdom of Dodd’s reclusive habits – he has met US fan Dave Jenrette, then in the UK as a USAF AOB (aerial observer-navigator bombardier) based at Sculthorpe in Norfolk. It is the only instance in the entire run of *Camber* where Dodd refers to actually meeting another fan.

In early 1957 the editorial in *Camber-8* had a brief rant on a favourite topic – the value of money. Incensed by a TV interview with designer Norman Hartnell who asserted that ‘Art is beyond guineas’, Dodd has an outburst about the cost of fanzines with the clear implication that his (indeed anyone’s) investment in their fan-activity should be better valued. Then, after the 1957 London worldcon, *Camber-9* appeared, in which the convention is mentioned only because Dodd says he wasn’t there, and that (as has often proved to be the case) it appeared to have killed-off British fandom – “Everybody in British fandom died after the Worldcon – people just didn’t seem to write to each other any more.”



Clever ‘girlie’ cover by Bill Harry who was doing artwork for many of the British fanzines at this time.

Camber-10 & 11, (1958-59) while being good issues, as usual contained little personal material except for a few paragraphs on a trip Dodd had made to Spain. Issue 12 has the Dave Prosser cover¹ remembered with a distinct dart of terror by everyone who has really looked at it, and inside Dodd's editorial blames the lateness of the issue on his endless round of correspondence, citing recent long letters from Arizona, Australia, New Jersey, Turkey, Illinois, Germany, Oklahoma, and Essex. And all this before there was even enough electricity in the world to power the internet! Also in this issue Dodd comprehensively criticises the film *PSYCHO*, and runs an 'interview' with Robert Bloch about the book and the film, derived from an exchange of letters.

Camber-13 didn't appear until 1962 and again Dodd retains his anonymity while at the same time producing a good issue, this time including for the first time a George Metzger comic strip produced via 'Xerox' via Mike Deckinger. It's really quite amazing that although Dodd remains as shadowy a figure in his fanzine as when he started in 1953, *Camber* has a distinct character in itself with an emphasis on rather good and usually well-reproduced artwork (when done on Dodd's duplicator, and often hand-stencilled by Jim Cawthorn), along with Dodd's enthusiasm for film which in one sense or another features in every issue.

Number 14 of June, 1964 is the final issue and Dodd's editorial begins with a complaint about how unrewarding producing a fanzine can be when the amount of response doesn't match the work and money invested. He also criticises conventions, odd for someone who never attended one in Britain; –

'One of these years conventions are going to become a whole-time card-playing convention without any pretence at having to be connected with science fiction. In fact I am sure there are certain fans who would be quite happy to start, continue, and end the Easter convention with a pack of cards. So be it. But why pretend it has anything to do with science fiction?' That's unusual in that it is a rare statement about the actual state of British fandom, and perhaps is a specific dig at the famously brag-playing Ron Bennett, with whom Dodd had a serious falling-out four years earlier despite their obvious friendship in the 1950s. He clearly was able to carry a grudge some distance! It's also an odd assertion because by 1964 conventions were making a gradual climb-back from the purely social events of the late 1950s. But as a non-attender, Dodd may well have been unaware of that.

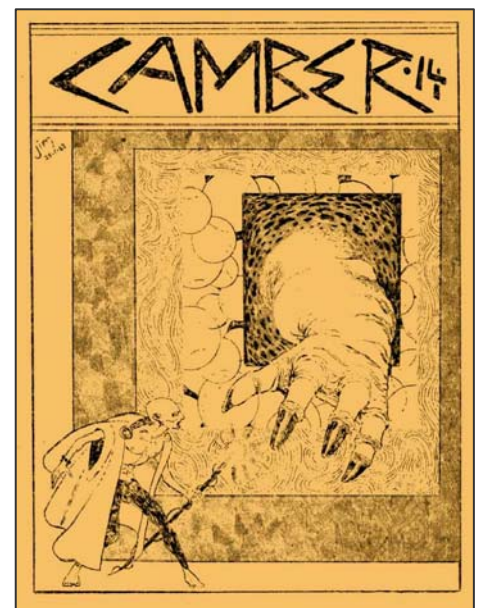
In the same editorial is a paragraph of comment on new British fanzines including *Zenith* – 'Of Peter Weston I can only say we have the most astute businessman in British fandom, who not only has solved the problem of getting free books for review but actually manages to get commercial advertisers to pay for advertising in his fanzine! His ingenuity knows no bounds!' The issue is also notable for a short but detailed article by Michael Moorcock on the genesis of the 'Elric' stories. The final paragraph of the issue includes, 'And so the last lines of the last stencil. I hope the issue receives a little more enthusiasm than last time.' Perhaps it did not, despite its qualities.²

In any event Alan Dodd published no further fanzines of any kind. His articles and letters continued to appear for a little longer in some of the fanzines of the mid-sixties (*Zenith*, *Alien*, etc) and then he appeared to vanish without trace and by the time I entered fandom in 1967 he was more famous as the legendary Hermit of Hoddesdon than anything else, his fan-activity being largely forgotten and over-written by the activities of the New-Wavers such as Weston and Platt.

For all its faults *Camber* was a distinctive fanzine worth investigating (Dodd was never a particularly good writer himself, for example, even though a lot of his subject-matter deserved better). The artwork in later issues by people like George Metzger, James Cawthorn (a very frequent contributor), and several others was often surprisingly good and remains more attractive than most fanzine artwork of the day. Even a comparative fan-hack-artist like US fan Dave Prosser managed to contribute a startlingly scary cover for *Camber-12*. Dodd was able to acquire a lot of interesting artwork, but it was sometimes let down by unreliable reproduction, even when he tried to do his contributors justice by using what he referred to as 'Xerox' for some art pages (at some considerable expense, apparently via Mike Deckinger in the U.S.), but this primitive photocopying seemed to backfire with large amounts of solarisation (losing solid black areas) and lack of contrast that worked against the presentation.



Camber-12, cover by Dave Prosser. Everyone seems to agree that this was a really frightening cover, despite the poor reproduction. (Some Photoshop work has been done by pw)



Camber-14, the final issue, June 1964. Cover by Jim Cawthorn.

1. From my personal experience of Roneos I can say that Dodd's machine wasn't up to handling the solid black areas of this illustration, where a Gestetner silk-screen would have produced a far better result. All known copies of this cover are equally bad.
2. Back in 1964 Charles Platt and I corresponded furiously with Alan Dodd – like Archie Mercer he was the 'neofan's friend', and in turn I think he was encouraged to a new lease of life by the vigour of the 'New Wave'. So when he announced that he was working on a new issue of *Camber* – a fanzine we'd never seen – we eagerly looked forward to something special. In the event it seemed very dated, a relic of an earlier age, and it sank without trace, already outclassed by 'personality-plus' zines like Platt's *Beyond*.

Dodd had produced some other titles over the years; a single issue of the fanzine-review *Take-Off* in the mid-50s, the *Camber Art Folio*, and the unusually titled *Females, Fact, Fable, Fiction, Fantasy and Fairy Tale* in the early 1960s, a fanzine consisting completely of rather odd soft-core 'glamour' art by British SF author John Rackham.³ He also contributed to many other fanzines in the Britain, Europe and the USA, often with pieces on the films and cinema-related subjects which seemed to be his main interest. For instance, in March 1956 he started a column for *Yandro* under the title 'Dodderings' which ran (according to Harry Warner in *A WEALTH OF FABLE*) 'for a record thirty consecutive instalments'. However, since that would only take us up to late 1958 and some columns appeared as late as 1963, that can't be entirely correct.

The 'Dodderings' columns (like much of his published fan-writing) are usually short (a page and a bit at best), and contain little other than observations on the mundane rather than the SF world, such as the advent of commercial television or the introduction into the UK of Coca Cola. Except of course for the inevitable film-comments. The columns have the air of being extracts from letters rather than purpose-built pieces of fan-writing and they usually tell us little about Dodd except to infer that despite being an SF fan he is somewhat conservative in his tastes and is not as averse to petty criminality as he ought to be, such as evading paying his TV licence by hiding his TV aerials. Quite reprehensible and somewhat shaming, really. Perhaps not what we really wanted to know.

The one thing that Dodd was famous for by the late 1960s when I first engaged with fandom was that he was apparently a recluse. It was still said he was 'Non-Existent Alan Dodd', whose very presence among us was arguable. Actually that was just so much fannish mythmaking, as by the late 1960s Dodd was indisputably real, but too often in fandom the myth is preferable to the reality.

There's no question though that Dodd did not socialise so easily or determinedly as many other British fans. He's on record several times as finding socialising difficult, being ill at ease in large groups. That's probably why he didn't go to conventions or other fan-gatherings, even though he was quite obviously on excellent terms with many fans via letters, which we know he wrote prolifically.

But equally well there's evidence that he may have been able to relate comparatively easily to people outside fandom; there is perhaps a clue here, from a 'Dodderings' column in *Yandro-121*, February 1963; it records a long coach-trip Dodd makes to Greece; "I flew to Ostend, Belgium, and picked up the coach there together with a party of people – quite the nicest group I've travelled with – including a number of young people, something you don't normally get because the cost is out of their reach." Is this a hint that Dodd was not necessarily reclusive, didn't really have much trouble with people, and was indeed sometimes – often? – quite at ease in company? But there's a lot of difference between being at ease with strangers one may never meet again, as opposed to other fans, who are to a large extent much closer acquaintances, more in the realm of fellow-workers, with whom one might not easily share one's true self.

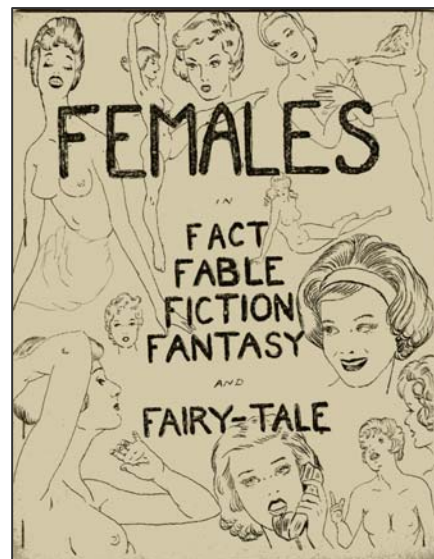
Contrary to legend Dodd did indeed meet other fans, though not always on his own terms. Visitors occasionally arrived unheralded at 77 Stanstead Road, as he describes in his *Yandro* column for January 1957:

'...Whenever I am not calm, immaculate or prepared, whenever I am at my most thoroughly disreputable, my most untidiest, most filthiest, most unkempt, most relaxed; it is then I GET VISITORS. You see this has happened to me – TWICE.

'The first time I was totally unprepared. A buzz on the door, a flash of rucksack and white crash helmet and Ron Bennett had arrived. And me a total mess, too. However I did have a slight edge on Ron who had been up all night hitch-hiking. You see.....he looked as bad as I did! That's what comes of attending these Antwerp conventions (30 July 1955). However I still think I lost on the encounter, for he insisted on dragging me out into the middle of Stanstead Road and TAKING MY PHOTOGRAPH! I mean to say – you feel such a fool standing in the middle of the street in bedroom slippers, don't you?

'You would think this might have prepared me for any further visitors. You would think I might have taken a lesson from that experience, but no, not me. I just sailed calmly along in my own sweet way. Dozens of lovely, unwashed, unshaven, uncombed Sundays. Then the buzzer on the door went. I shot off that couch like a rocket and crouched cautiously near the window. Parked over on the corner was a veritable colossus of a car which dwarfed most of the other few vehicles in sight. This was the first time I'd ever seen a vivid pastel-green American Ford in Hoddesdon.... It could only be Dave Jenrette. He and his wife Rusty had just collected their pet gargantua from the docks in Southampton and after spending the night in London were on their way north, heading for their home.

'I insisted upon flopping out of the house in my slippers and examining the (to me) mammoth Ford, close up. "This is the cheapest model you can get," informed Dave, opening the door and making me wonder what the expensive ones looked like. I gazed at a giant of an engine ("that is one of the smallest engines") suspended in mid-air with nothing between it and the road. I even got a free demonstration as we drove 'round the block' except there wasn't a block and when we reached a dead-end street with a turning circle at the end obviously not designed to take Detroit cars, Rusty made Dave back up and finally we reached the house again. He dropped me at the front gate and asked if I could get in the front door which I'd left wedged ajar when we went out. I said it was okay. Then I went over to open the door. I was locked out.'



'Girlie' cover by John Rackham for his rather odd 'glamour art' fanzine.

3. On the *wegenheim* e-list, Greg remarked, "It's pretty incredible that this was the same John Rackham whose rather poor fiction barely acknowledges the existence of women!" To which John Boston replied, "Sometimes Rackham did acknowledge their existence and one might wish he hadn't." John then went on to summarise his story 'Blink' from *New Worlds-106* (May 1961), which is a mild sort of S&M fantasy. I added that "John Rackham might have had some serious problems with male/female relationships!"

The meeting with Jenrette had strange consequences. In *Grue-29* (April 1958), Dean Grennell wrote, 'I was more than a little shocked to read in Dave Jenrette's magazine (*Quelle Horreurs*) that Alan Dodd was a hoax and did not exist [see opposite]. Supposedly he was a fabrication of Ron Bennett and the Jenrettes, I found this hard to believe because I've had quite a correspondence with Alan off and on, and his letters were quite unlike the occasional note I've had from Bennett or those of Jenrette's. I mentioned this to Buck Coulson for whose magazine (*Yandro*) Alan produces a regular column.

'Buck Coulson wrote back on 11 Oct 57:-

'Probably most of your letter will get answered in *Yandro*, but a complete explanation of the 'Dodd Hoax' would take up more room than we can spare. Actually, my solution of the problem is mostly deduction, as Jenrette didn't tell me just why he published the 'hoax', but I think I can make a good guess. First, Dodd is an actual person. A few British fans have met him – Bennett, Chuck Harris, and the Jenrettes. The thing is, he seems to be painfully shy.... apparently the Jenrettes invited him up to see them, first; he kept making excuses for not coming, until they gave up and descended on him. Which is apparently the only way he can be seen – one has to run him to earth, so to speak.

'When London got the worldcon, Dodd began making all sorts of excuses as to why he couldn't attend – in fact, he had a new excuse in every letter, until Bennett provided him with a good one by making a few acid comments about the hotel picked as a con-site. The actual fact seems to be that he was afraid of encountering that many strangers (even when he knows people very well via letter, he seems frightened at the thought of meeting them in person). So there was a sort of unofficial 'get Dodd to the Con' group formed... the Jenrettes wrote me to put on all the pressure I could, and Bennett did his best to persuade him. (Rusty Jenrette seems to feel that Dodd would become better-adjusted if he actually met a few more people – or at least, a few fans).

'The 'Dodd Hoax' in *QH* was, I think, a last desperate effort at blackmailing him into attending the con – which didn't work. This is part guesswork, but Indifandom contains a personality much like Dodd's in James Adams ("Go to the Midwestcon? With all those people?") so I'm pretty sure my guessing is right. And you notice that the final 'proof' of the hoax was the item that Dodd "won't be at the Worldcon".'

THE ULTIMATE CAMBER (*Quelles Horreurs-5*)

EDITORIAL;- Take a deep draught of your favourite drink before reading on. It may come as a shock to you to learn that this issue of *Camber* is the last. We feel it has been losing its appeal and its irregular appearance does not make for sustained interest.

The Alan Dodd you know is three fans; Ron Bennett, and Lee and Dave Jenrette. Although the hoax personality we perpetrated has become well-known in fandom in its – his – own right, we have decided to reveal all. The three of us – known as Alan Dodd, Ltd – met for the first time in Kettering and decided that Alan Dodd was a bore. *Camber* is too much work. It's no longer FUN. Dave is pubbing *QH* and Rusty (Lee) is busily engaged in producing a happy event. Ron's finally made *FAPA* and has had some eyestrain problems. Ron will continue to publish *Ploy* and help on *New Futurian*.

And, people are getting suspicious. Many have commented on the fact that 'Alan Dodd' has never been to a con, while the only fan who have met him are – strangely enough – the Jenrettes and Bennett. Here's a quote from Eric Bentcliffe's *Triode*;

'*Camber* has rather a peculiar atmosphere about it this-ish, it's as if it can't quite make out whether to be a British-type fanzine or an American-type. Don't ask me to define these imponderables... I just get the impression that this is a UK zine catering for American tastes rather than the tastes of all fankind.'

At Kettering, Eric bought Dodd, Ltd, their dinners and this is the first official announcement that, because of this, he automatically became the first honorary member of Dodd, Ltd. Congrats, Eric!

Well, where does this leave us? No more *Camber* and subscription money will be returned as soon as possible. We have a lot of material we may use in *QH* or *Ploy*, but no more *Camber*. And thanks to Aunt Louise of 77 Stanstead Road for helping out. Anyone still doubting that 'Alan Dodd' is a hoax? Look for him at the London worldcon, then. Hoddesdon is only 24 miles from London and if Dodd were real he would surely attend...

The above appeared in Dave Jenrette's *Quelles Horreurs-5*, undated but billed as a 'London Pre-Convention Issue' and published at some time in Spring/Summer 1957. Dave said, confusingly "this is *QH* #4 (I mean 5) instead of being #4. We have an excuse. #4 will be the literary satire issue. Production has fallen down; in addition, Ron Bennett carried off one of our literary satires for *Ploy*."

This confirms that Bennett (a well-known trickster) was in on the hoax, and you can see why Dodd might have been a bit 'off' fans; he had been hospitable to Messrs Bennett & Jenrette, and they repaid him by taking the Mickey (here and in *Ploy*) and causing him some trouble. I mean, saying that *Camber* was finished and that subs would be returned is a bit of a dirty trick, even in jest. Did this colour his attitude towards Ron Bennett for the future, making him all too ready to take offence when the time came, I wonder? – pw

- Thanks to Rob Hansen for finding this rare fanzine and scanning accordingly.

It's not obvious whether all this caused any kind of a rift between Dodd and Jenrette, but there was definitely a later outbreak of enmity between Dodd and Ron Bennett. In the early 1950s Dodd and Bennett had been distinctly friendly, and Dodd had duplicated issues of Bennett's *Ploy*. But everything changed for the worse on what is possibly the only occasion that we know for certain that Dodd appeared at a fannish gathering.

But before that rather unfortunate event Dodd met Jean and Annie Linard, two of a very few well-known French fans, on a visit to London. This was written up for Sture Sedolin's *Cactus-4* of 1960, and is remarkable as it was an instance of three fans who rarely ever met other fans getting together, with no other fans to witness the event. And in fact Jean and Annie Linard met up with Dodd because of, rather than in spite of, his aversion to fannish socialising. Jean Linard had been a popular fan-writer, letter-writer and tape-correspondent with many fans worldwide, but had been stricken with a serious illness, and had been on a long visit, part convalescence, with non-fannish friends in London. As Dodd puts it in *Cactus-4*;

“As he was officially convalescing he did not want to get involved with a lot of well meaning and kindly fans whose whirl of activity was the opposite of what the doctor had ordered. So – regretfully, he didn’t meet any. However just a few days before he left England he sent me a letter asking if we could meet, knowing that since people don’t think I exist anyway, I wouldn’t be likely to drown him in a welter of other people.”

A sensible choice given the circumstances. Dodd and the Linards seem to have had a pleasant time out in London that day in February 1960 and Dodd ends his report saying, “I was genuinely sorry to see him go, above all the fans I have met Jean is the one who matches in person the personality I have grown to like through his many, many letters in the past years, and if the Swedish fans I hope to meet this year in the summer turn out to be only half as nice then it should be a momentous holiday indeed.”

An expression perhaps of the endless problem of fans in reality being rather less engaging, or at least materially different, than the personas they create in print. Dodd is hardly the only one to have been disappointed thus, and one wonders whether some earlier similar but unknown event triggered his disinclination to enter into what might optimistically be called the merry fannish whirl. Unfortunately we know nothing so far about the holiday in Sweden to which he refers, though we certainly do know that he met up with Sture Sedolin in London soon afterwards, so probably did in Sweden also. Did he even attend a Swedish convention, perhaps?



Alan Dodd, Sture Sedolin and Don Ford in Ella’s flat, Wednesday 13th April, 1960. A keen photographer, Don came loaded-up with equipment. Photo from Norman Shorrock’s album.

The Bennett incident happened three months later on the night of Wednesday 13th April, 1960, when Ella Parker hosted a party in her flat to welcome the TAFF-man, Don Ford. Bennett had turned-up the night before and was staying over, and in *Orion-25* Ella describes Dodd’s arrival:

‘I opened the door and greeted two fen I’d never met before, Sture Sedolin and Alan Dodd! I had no preconceived ideas of what Sture would look like apart from the fact that he was young. He’s of average height, slender, pale of face and very quiet. He was here for a week and in all that time I don’t think he once initiated a conversation. He answered when spoken to, otherwise he sat with his nose in a fanzine. On the other hand, I thought I knew exactly how Alan would look. He would be fairly short, very slim, with dark hair and a rosy complexion, also quite young and exuberant. I was wrong on every count. Instead, this was someone almost as tall as Don Ford, well built, round, chubby face and hair that borders on the brown, but doesn’t quite make it, quietly spoken and slightly nervous in mien.’

Apart from that exclamation mark Ella shows no apparent surprise – perhaps she didn’t realise that this was Dodd’s first public appearance in over eight years of fan-activity. She certainly didn’t seem to notice any quarrel, and neither did Don Ford, as he commented in his subsequent TAFF Report:-

‘Alan Dodd & Sture Sedolin sat off in the corner of the room from the rest of us. Alan Dodd was rather quiet and left a bit early. He never took off his overcoat and always seemed poised on his chair ready to leave instantly. Sture Sedolin is a fan from Sweden who has been active in fanzine publishing, but I never could get much conversation out of him. In fact, after Alan Dodd left, Sture sat off by himself, apart from the group. I thought he was simply shy, but was told a few days later that he seemed to get that way when the group he was with didn’t do just whatever he wanted to do.’

But in Sedolin’s fanzine, *Cactus-5* (May 1960), Dodd gave a different version of the evening:-

‘We found Ella Parker’s place and donning oxygen masks we ventured to the heights of Ella’s room where decorating the chairs were two fans I know quite well – Alan Rispin and Brian Jordan – later these were added to by Ron Bennett and Don Ford from Ohio, surely the largest American fan ever built! I knew things were supposed to be bigger in America but this was ridiculous – he must have been at least 6’ 6” and when he left the room, it was empty – when he was inside it was full! Later still – by a few minutes – a further visitor or two arrived, Bobbie Wilde and a distinguished gentleman, elegantly dressed and extremely well-mannered, dark glasses, sober suit and rather like a professional doctor or dentist. He was elected to open a can of peanuts – which seemed sacrilege on finding out afterwards it was none other than William F. Temple, author of countless stories including *THE FOUR SIDED TRIANGLE*. I trust science fiction is really as prosperous as Mr Temple appears.

‘I found in fact during this rare appearance of yours truly only one disturbing influence – Ron Bennett. It may be that I am unduly sensitive perhaps, but I felt Bennett was going out of his way to make me feel uncomfortable all evening and it would seem that the true spirit of fandom he once had has left him.

‘Bennett-1960 is snide, insulting, rather unpleasant and in a number of incidents downright rude and I am surprised on reflection that no one else at the party mentioned it. No doubt they were too polite, but this is precisely one of the reasons I never attend conventions. I had by letter been having an argument with Bennett regarding his news-zine *Skyrack* – I pointed out that after the demise of the ill fated *Contact* there wasn’t any place in my book for another ‘pay only’ news-zine in this part of the world. This is my opinion and I stick by it but I don’t consider it was a subject to bring up and mention in the company of others who aren’t interested in personal arguments of this nature.

'Needless to say, Bennett did have the poor taste to bring this up. His remark, "I suppose there are more fans in this room than you've ever met before" struck me as a sneer, and when Sture remarked he never paid for fanzines but got *Skyrack*, Bennett told him in no uncertain terms that the only reason he got it was because he traded a news-zine – the last word emphasised no doubt for my benefit, as I don't publish a news-zine. Since Sture had a copy of *Fanac* with him we taxed Bennett with Ron Ellik's amusing jibe at Bennett's 'scrubby little sheet' – which Bennett didn't seem to appreciate judging by the way he turned his back on the rest of us and played cards with Alan Rispin. No doubt if the next convention is held in a gambling casino it will be far more appropriate for Bennett.

'Like I said, it may be me. But there we are, I consider it a flagrant display of bad manners in the company of other people and unforgivable on the part of a fan who used to be one of the nicest ones you could know-- in the past. Having already paid out 5/- for a nomination subscription to TAFF I do not expect to be asked for more money for it on a Wednesday evening, when I was not due to get paid till the next Friday. I did have a little money with me and paid up a further half crown for TAFF which apparently wasn't enough in Bennett's opinion, he seems totally incapable of realising that at that time of the week there ARE people who are short of money. He may not be – but I damn well am, and I resent strongly any references to my lack of it too! Needless to say there will now exist a void between me and Bennett and his scrubby little sheet and I'll go back to the fans who have time to BE fans without being snide.'

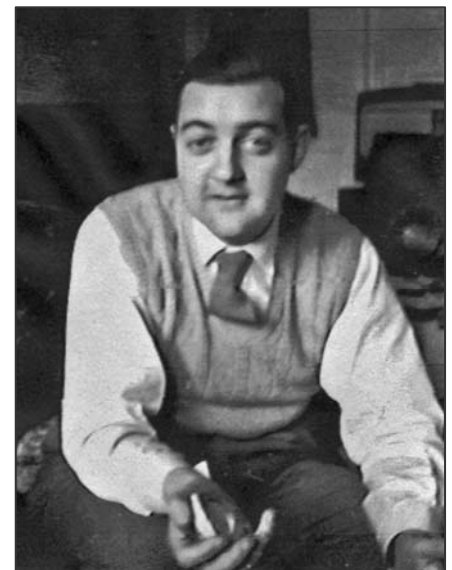
Ron Bennett himself was apparently oblivious to this disastrous personality-clash, writing only in *Skyrack-18* (May 1960); 'At the party Ella threw for Don, surprise and welcome guests were Bill Temple and nonexistent Alan Dodd.' However there's a hint to the otherwise when in *Skyrack-19* he reviewed *Cactus-5* and noted; 'Alan Dodd writes on a day in London (are you sure that when I spilled water on the stairs, Alan, it wasn't a deliberate attempt to have you slip on them?)'. And in a letter to *Cactus-6* he says "It's pleasant to see Alan Dodd writing on something where he isn't merely rehashing over movie plots. I've noticed from one or two items that he's been improving recently. Of course, he's entirely right when he says 'Bennett-1960 is snide, insulting, and rather unpleasant and...downright rude.' What I fail absolutely to understand is why Alan limited this description to 1960?" No effort at rapprochement from Ron Bennett there, then.

Dodd's letter in the same issue of Sedolin's *Cactus* includes this; "Dorothy and Jim (Ratigan) didn't like my article about Bennett being rude? Well – I thought he was rude to YOU too – turning his back on you, refusing to answer your questions about 'crummy sheet' – very discourteous, considering he was a visitor and you were the guest in someone else's house. So I thought he treated you badly as well. But maybe you didn't appreciate from what he was saying what was going on. I just took offence at it myself." Hard to tell really whether Dodd was more upset about Bennett's apparent unpleasantness towards himself or Bennett's attitude generally. And of course impossible at this remove to know whether Bennett was actually being snotty or whether it was that unfortunate fannish perennial, misplaced humour. Sedolin seems to have been unaffected by Bennett's snideness, as an enthusiastic review of *Skyrack* appears in the same issue.

And later in 1960 Alan had one final fannish visitor⁴ so far as we know, as Bruce Burn describes:

"I bought a Lambretta motor scooter while I was living at one of the houses owned by the Overseas Visitors Club for a few weeks during the first couple of months after arriving in the UK in 1960. I did a few longish trips to Windsor Castle, to the Potters when they moved to Roydon, and to Sidcup (where I was born) to see our old next door neighbours. Some time in late December, 1960, I rode the machine to visit Vince Clarke, and at some time in November I dropped in on Alan Dodd! Late August I had written to him, apparently, suggesting just such a visit, and he'd replied early September, suggesting because he had an unpredictable job and couldn't be sure when he'd be home, he might try to find a suitable break in work to get up to London and visit me there. Well, it was two months later that I drove my Lambretta into the wilds of Hoddesdon.

"And that's how I got to take his photo while his Mum kindly made us a nice cup of tea with biscuits and tiny sandwiches while we sat and chatted in the front parlour. Not a sign of porn to be seen. Just nice lace doilies on the tables in a rather small room. I'm not sure but I think we had a look at his collection of fanzines and books. Then, after three or four hours, it was time for me to hit the road again and head back to Balham, where I rented a bed-sit in the same house where Ted Forsyth and Joe Patrizio lived."



Alan Dodd at home, November 1960.
Photo by Bruce Burn.

Decades later, in 1994, when I was starting the now-defunct *Memory Hole* fanzine redistribution project I sent out a circular to a number of gafiated or otherwise vanished fans. Some were essentially unresponsive bordering on rude, but others were keen to help – including, incredibly, Alan Dodd. I'd taken his address from a then-recent issue of the U.S. fanzine *Stefantasy*. He was still at 77 Stanstead Road, an address familiar to those of us who'd read *Camber*, and he responded quite enthusiastically. It turned out he had several boxfuls of fanzines that he'd been hanging on to for years, wondering whether anyone would ever want them. He would have had more, he said, but the garden shed where he had stored many of his fanzines had burned down a couple of years previously. (That was only one of many Dodd asides that were never fully explained, and the first hint that he was not entirely, well, The Usual.)

I was rather pleased by this. My own first encounter with Dodd – via his residual fan-activity rather than direct – had been in 1968 when bits of the BSFA fanzine library were being sold off by Birmingham fan Charlie Winstone. I was a new fan, very keen, and bought as much as I could afford. Amongst the issues of *Hyphen*, *Bastion*, and the rest I also selected several later issues of *Camber*.

4. I tried! In early December 1964 I was hitch-hiking to London to see Chris Priest and was dropped-off in Hoddesdon at about 5.30 in the evening. I found the house and knocked on the door, but Alan wasn't home – although I did meet his mother! - pw

It wasn't a top-tier fanzine, but it was a 'name' and I soon saw there was certainly a style and character there. I had been especially taken with the 'Dodd's Fan-Dome' stories written and illustrated by U.S. artist George Metzger; fantastic tales of a sort of beatnik-hangout operated by a larger-than-life Dodd in which all kinds of unusual characters acted out bizarre storylines, often only notionally related to fandom at all. Maybe that was really what I had expected, hoped, that fandom would be like.

Anyway, after my first letter to Dodd in the 1994 we had a fairly cheerful telephone acquaintanceship for a while – and every so often I'd send Alan £10 to cover the postage and he'd send me a carton of fanzines. He was obviously very short of money – he said he hadn't been in full-time employment for some years, and was always sounding vaguely distressed about domestic bills and the general cost of basic living, something we commiserated with each other about endlessly and with feeling.

The fanzines he sent were invariably interesting – lots of issues of *Yandro* in particular as he had been UK Agent for many years. Many other second-division U.S. fanzines too, most of them barely known in the UK despite the fact that Dodd appeared listed as British Agent in many. Most importantly, all the issues of *Camber* that were missing from my own set! It's all a bit vague now, ten years later, but there were very many useful additions to the *Memory Hole* archive collection and a lot of good stuff that has been passed on to other fanzine enthusiasts over the years. Getting those boxes was always a genuine delight.

At some point Alan mentioned that he was interested in selling-off the bulk of his SF collection, and I put him in touch with Andy Richards of Cold Tonnage Books who took a trip to Hoddesdon to view and offer. I'd filled Andy in on the privileged nature of this expedition – after all, so far as I knew no other member of the British SF community had seen Dodd for the best part of forty years. Take notes, I said, You Are the Camera, the Eyes and Ears of Fandom – what is Alan Dodd really like?

A couple of days later Andy phoned me, and his voice was stricken. He was genuinely shocked by what he found. Alan Dodd, it appeared, lived in a very small and very run-down terraced house; he had no inside toilet or bathroom, maybe not even running water, and the lighting was, to say the least, minimal. On almost every flat surface were books, periodicals, or boxes containing same. The stairway was essentially blocked by more cartons of Stuff.

Alan's SF collection turned out to be in a couple of large wardrobes in the bedroom, but even after negotiating what was obviously a dangerous stairway Andy found there was not actually enough room (or light) in the bedroom to get out the SF collection and examine it. Most of the books and magazines seemed to have been wrapped in newspaper years previously and had apparently been in the boxes for a long time. Andy eventually made some kind of vague provisional offer, open to increase after he'd actually taken away and valued the books, but Dodd had taken offence and didn't want to know. Apparently he didn't believe that, for example, British reprint magazines are as valueless as they generally are, no matter what condition they were in.

Anyway, Andy called me in a state of genuine concern; a nice well-brought-up boy living in decent circumstances as he is, this was like encountering a pocket of the Third World to him, and he asked me time and time again whether Alan Dodd had any friends or family or whatever, and maybe Social Services ought to be contacted, and so on. I reassured him by saying that in my contact with Alan he'd seemed quite well balanced, if indeed cash-poor, but apparently he'd been a bit vague and uncommunicative with Andy who'd been left somewhat concerned as to Dodd's mental well-being.

I interceded with all this sales stuff and eventually convinced Alan that not only was Andy not going to cheat him but also that he'd be a damned sight better-off with a thousand pounds or so in his pocket rather than a mass of books and magazines he had no real interest in, even if he was getting less for them than he'd expected or wanted. Alan then told me that he'd had some serious problems with a dealer in the film memorabilia field who'd made him a hopelessly low offer for a substantial collection of cinema books, magazines and film-stills, and he was extremely apprehensive of dealers as a result. But in this case all ended well, as Alan got a bundle of cash and Andy got some good stock, as on proper examination it turned out there were a fair number of scarce British hard-covers from the Fifties, in very good condition.

Other things I discovered about Alan Dodd during our infrequent phone conversations were that despite his poverty he occasionally took trips abroad; this all turned out to be by the goodwill of friends of his who worked in the (probably) soft-core sex industry, doing photo-shoots for the British mass-market sex magazines. (Which made me wonder just what was in some of those myriad other boxes, and wish for a rather greater disposable income than I had at the time...). Anyway, he'd occasionally flit-off to Portugal or wherever, probably on the staff as 'temporary film-loader' or something. These trips seemed to be about the only thing he genuinely looked forward to in life, and given the reported state of his surroundings I can understand it.

Just about the last contact I had with Alan Dodd was in late 1996. He still had a load of fanzines to pass on, and because Catherine and I were due to meet British fan John Harvey (who lived barely ten minutes drive from Dodd) in Birmingham for a social event I suggested that John go to Hoddesdon and pick up



'Dodd's Fan-Dome' by George Metzger, A sort of fannish version of 'Rick's Place' in Casablanca. (Camber-13)



No. 77 Stanstead Road – a small terrace house, now clearly much-improved since Alan's day! Photo by John Harvey, 2008.

the fanzines for a transfer by car. Alan was surprisingly open to this – not what I'd expected at all – and John, briefed by me on the monumental rarity of the event he was about to participate in, eventually went around, fully tooled-up with a video camera!⁴ The short but revealing video-clip fully reinforced most of what I'd gathered – Stanstead Road was an undistinguished terrace, number 77 was a pretty dilapidated sample of it, there were obviously a lot of boxes in the Dodd hallway, and Alan himself gave every impression of being a rather shabby and careworn individual who nevertheless seemed quite friendly and genuinely amused by the idea of being videoed for the benefit of, if not fandom at large, then me at least. He looked (as far as I remember, not having seen the tape for ten years), rather like the British actor Neville Smith. A pretty average guy apparently in his fifties who could do with a hot bath and some new clothes. (Could be me, come to that...)

I sent Alan a letter of thanks for the fanzines, but didn't hear back from him. That December (1996) I sent him a note with a fiver enclosed (after all, even I was better off financially than he was) for a drink over the New Year, but again there was no response. What with the usual one-damned-thing-after-another I never did get around to having another go, which I came to very much regret. He seemed a nice guy, with no more than the usual-for-fandom possible personality issues. I liked him, from what I could see.

In early 2008, on Peter's prompting, I did a bit of research. I no longer had Dodd's phone number so did the 21st-Century thing and Googled him. Alas, the first new information I came across was an obituary. *Ansible-171* (October 2001) reported his death. I was shocked to realise I had totally failed to register this at the time. I then found a longer version of the story in a webbed edition of the US news-zine *File 770* (issue 140 for November 2001);–

Alan Dodd – An Appreciation by Mike Deckinger

'Alan Dodd died of natural causes on June 5, 2001 at his home in Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire, Great Britain, a suburb of London. The local Borough Council conducted a funeral on June 28, in which many local friends attended. He had no living relatives. Alan Dodd was a very active fan in the 50s and 60s, both as a contributor to other publications and as editor of his own fanzine, *Camber*. He earned the reputation of a hermit because he never appeared at any local club meetings, and only attended one convention (which he left halfway through). In later years, ill health and low funds forced him to curtail most of his activities, though he remained an avid letter-writer and had a keen interest in amateur photography. Alan Dodd achieved his greatest fame when Michael Moorcock christened him 'Uncle Alan Dodd' in a *Tarzan* comic book Moorcock serialized for a local newspaper.'

Which is as compact and (mostly) accurate a profile as you could expect, and certainly gives an end-point to his story. Alan would have been – if the 'John Dillinger' reference about him by Ron Bennett in *Ploy* is correct – 67 years old when he died. I made contact with Mike Deckinger and asked him how it was that he had known about Dodd's death when it had gone unnoticed (bar the *Ansible* crib from *F770*) in British fandom. Mike responded well and I have extracted the following quotes from his emails –

"I had known Alan Dodd, through correspondence, mainly air letters, since the early 60's. He sent me some issues of his fanzine and we corresponded up until his demise several years ago."

"Alan told me he had always been reclusive in fandom. He liked publishing and corresponding, but never had much interest in personal interaction. He only attended a few conventions and seemed unmoved by them."

"He worked for a city agency, possibly electrical, at a low pay scale. Both his parents died at an early age and he retained their home in Hoddesdon, Herts. It was a small house with primitive wiring which limited his use of electrical extensions. He also travelled primarily by bus, and was plagued by extremely poor service. After his mother's death he learned to drive her Volkswagen, and used it sporadically until it gave out."

"He gradually withdrew more into himself. He did get out on occasion, usually on cruises to photograph models, as part of a package deal. I know little more about these events. He had also struck up a friendly relationship with a local porn actress named 'Louise'. I think she was the only contact he had in later years."

"He also started drinking heavily, usually some potent wines. I don't think he ever became a 'raving drunk', as some over-indulgents will do, but the alcohol would knock him out for a half a day and he'd awake all stumbling and bleary. He was aware that the drink did him no good, but it appeared to be the only solace he had."

"... he was very bitter about his retirement and measly pension. He was even going to go through some legal entity to address his concerns, but I don't know that he ever did."

"After several months went by with nothing from him, I received a letter from a woman affiliated with local law enforcement. Someone had informed them that 'Mr. Dodd was unresponsive.' They went to his home, broke in, and found his body. He had been deceased for several days. She did not cite a cause of death but I'm convinced alcohol played a part."

"I was contacted, upon the discovery of his passing, because when his home was searched, they found my last air letter with my name and address. She asked if I knew of any close friends or relatives, but I was unable to comply."

"There isn't much else I can recall right now. I know he was a voracious reader and also was quite taken by cheesy SF films of the 50's and 60's. He had a number of contacts in fandom, and took special delight in being inserted by Mike Moorcock in one of his *Tarzan* comic strips, as 'Uncle Alan Dodd.'"

Prompted by that last I found that Dodd had written-up the 'Tarzan' incident for *Yandro* (November 1958):

'Mike Moorcock ... translates Tarzan strips from the Spanish edition... but of recent weeks has taken to the idea of replacing the names of the Tarzan characters with those of fans. No better illustration can be given than by quoting the actual balloons from *Tarzan Adventures-19*, one of the first issues in which this phenomenon makes its appearance:

'Entering their camp, Jim Caughran called to his bearers. "We're after a white savage", he said. Caughran and his men spread out in a semi-circle moving stealthily towards the camp of the apes. Here an ambush by the apes led by Tarzan occurs in which the apes are shot, Tarzan terrifies the bearers, and is himself shot at by the villainous Caughran who misses

4. Frustrating, isn't it! For the last six months John has been searching through a ten-year accumulation of VHS tapes for that elusive bit of footage, so far without success. - pw

and is suitably wiped the floor with by the ape-king. Scowling, Caughran obeyed but he was not beaten. Another plan was forming in his evil mind, to sell a girl at the nearby camp to slave-traders, to be exact. As she passed the two men, Lee Hoffman glanced suspiciously at them, her intuition telling her that they were up to no good. Arriving at the tent of Richard Ellington she told him of her fears that Caughran was plotting something. "We're safe enough," smiled Ellington, "we've enough arms to defend ourselves." But later that night Caughran gathered his ruffians about him and they sneaked towards the sleeping camp.

'It is here that I first began to take notice.

'Alan Dodd, the girl's uncle, was the first to be awakened. As one man covered him, the other ransacked the camp's money chest. Ingvi meanwhile (Ingvi is a sort of native guide by the way) snatched up Ellington's map-case while Caughran dealt with the kidnapping of Lee in person. At that moment Tarzan, deciding to inspect the camp, caught a glimpse of the natives leaving. Dodd rushed from his tent just as Tarzan entered the camp and without thinking took aim at the ape-man and fired. Tarzan appeared to fall but as Dodd came towards him he suddenly rose and grasped the man's gun hand. Dick Ellington dashed up, and thinking Tarzan was an enemy, hit him on the head knocking him out. Leaving Dodd to deal with Tarzan, Ellington rushed to Lee's tent ... "She's gone!"

"So it was you who ordered this raid," growled Dodd, "We know how to deal with people like you!"

'Somehow, it is this line above all that has stuck in my mind. I've been practicing saying it for weeks now, and satisfying though it may be to find yourself in a story of Bob Tucker's it is by no means as fascinating as to find yourself partaking in an illustrated comic strip!

I'd started asking around for memories of Dodd by this time and received this, from Pat Kearney via Jim Linwood –

"Alan Dodd. . . Yes, I corresponded with him for a long time and I seem to think he chided me over using Americanisms in my letters, affecting a style of writing that resembled that of Holden Caulfield and double-spacing my letters. He was a sort of one-man British equivalent of the Académie Française. He did a fanzine, with a one word title I believe – Camber? – at least one issue of which had wonderfully grotesque art by Dave Prosser. Whatever happened to Dave? I met Alan only once, outside the National Film Theatre where I'd gone to see *Triumph of the Will*. I can't remember whether Alan was there for the same film or not, but we'd arranged to meet in order for me to collect two reams of duplicating paper he was giving me in exchange for a somewhat battered and unattractive Samurai sword I'd acquired from somewhere. I doubt very much that travelling today on London Transport with a full-sized and unwrapped sword would be encouraged, nor would sitting with it in a crowded cinema."

That's amazing, as much for the fact that Kearney actually *met* Dodd as anything else, though it is peculiar that someone who obviously had an affection for Transatlantic things (see his many U.S. correspondents and fan-contacts) should affect to dislike Americanisms!

So what really do we know about Alan Dodd? Well, he may have met more European and Scandinavian fans than he did British ones. He appears to have had good friendly relations with Sture Sedolin, who attended the 1960 London convention and published the rather excellent English-language *Cactus* between 1959 and 1961. Sedolin is today better known as Carl A. Hallstrom, which appears to be his real name, and is something of a Big Name in mainstream-Ellingtonian jazz circles. Unfortunately when contacted re. Dodd he said, "Yes, I have many memories of Alan Dodd but am not prepared to share them", though he has been very helpful in other ways.

Alan Dodd was, as previously mentioned, UK agent for a large number of US and some European fanzines, and was a comparatively prolific fan-writer appearing in almost every fanzine of any note during the 1950s and 1960s, though rarely – to be honest, never - with the 'best thing in the issue'. He had a perverse enthusiasm for what I think are terrible Hollywood sci-fi and horror movies; he would contribute reviews of them to any fanzine at every opportunity, and was reputedly delighted that more serious fans were irked by his apparent lack of taste. He had, if a piece in *Aporrheta* is to be believed, an enthusiasm for professional wrestling, American at that, not even for familiar British TV favourites of the day like Jackie Pallo and Mick McManus. He was in his way a Travelling Giant, who in the 1950s and early 60s visited many countries across Western and Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and North Africa, at a time when that sort of travel was beyond the barrier for most British people. He lived in a small house crammed with stuff and things. He wrote, for British fanzine *Les Spinge*, the only fan-article I know of about the cartoon strip *4D JONES*. Unfortunately a not-very-good article. How distressingly typical of him.

Alan Dodd seems to have had a varied life, beset as it might have been with problems relating to the mundane. But even then he must have been making informed choices – such as spending the money he could perhaps have used in maintaining and improving his home on his overseas adventures, or even on his fan-activity. In fact judging by his complaints that that expenditure was undervalued it may be that he put more cash into his fanzine than he could really afford. We can only guess. It has to be said that having checked a respectable proportion of Dodd's fan-writing – though far from all of it – the one thing significantly absent is any real knowledge of the man himself. My initial fantasy of a biography founders for lack of hard information. The awful suspicion lurks that there may be nothing beneath the apparent, and my fascination is misplaced. Perhaps this rough sketch, inadequate as it may be, will inspire the revelations needed for a more detailed portrait. More research needs to be done.

– Greg Pickersgill, 2008 (with the invaluable assistance of Catherine Pickersgill and Peter Weston)



Scanned from *Tarzan Adventures* thanks to the kindness of George Locke.

The Melting Pot

Oh, there's some spellbinding stuff in the pot this time!

And while the girls toil and trouble, let's see what's bubbled-over from the lastish. Irresistible interjections in *italics* and *[brackets]* in the usual way.



Illo from Steve Jeffery, with my thanks. Other fan-artists feel free to submit your interpretations, please!

“So I thought, mustn't read the rest of *Prolapse* tonight, up to bed... Ninety minutes later, bleary-eyed, I looked up from the last page and realised you'd done it again.” – David Redd, LoC

Sandra Bond

sandra@ho-street.demon.co.uk



Sandra at Corflu, 2008. Photo by Gary Mattingly

Dear Peter

Thanks for *Prole 11*. I don't think you need be surprised at its appeal to FAAN award voters; many of them will no doubt have been British anyway, for it's not just *Corflu* members who get to vote, and in any event *Prole* possesses a genial atmosphere of people looking back on olden days of British fandom that's infectiously fun, and far removed from the dry-as-dust fan-historical tedium which I imagine the likes of Lilian Edwards believe it's full of. Their loss, not mine.

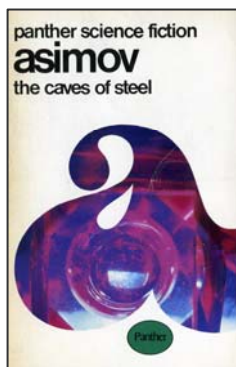
Steve Green is right when he recalls Graham Poole being in Apa-B in its early days; his apazine was called *Recyclotron* and was printed single-sided on the backs of scrap paper, behind (at least on some editions) leftover copies of covers from his 70s fanzine *Cyclotron*. And yes, he lived in Sutton Coldfield then, though in one issue he describes commuting to Elstree. Possibly Cheltenham was the parental home, since inherited?

In general I applaud the use of little photographs and graphics to enliven and clarify *Prole*, though I'm not sure statisticians would approve of the graph on page 7 where the x-axis treats gaps of one year, two years, and even three years as identical when it comes to spacing... The 'half price credit on return' second-hand book racket was still operative at least into the late 1980s when I used to patronise a stall on Bracknell market in Berkshire that dealt on exactly that principle; they often had a variety of interesting SF and some of my collection still has their little rubber stamps inside 'Exchangeable for half price credit at Stephens & Phillips Book Mart, Bracknell'. I also found a bookstore in Barnstaple, North Devon operating this system while on holiday one year around this time.

The reprint of Greg's 'Think I'm Going Back' reminds me that back in 1990 or so when I was an undergraduate in London, having recently been the recipient of largesse from Vince Clarke in the form of a duplicate run of *Stop Breaking Down* from his fanzine collection, I decided to combine fannishness with my long-term vague desire to travel the whole of the London underground by taking the Northern Line to South Wimbledon and visiting 19 Abbey Parade, Merton High Street to see what was there now. And hang me if it wasn't still Plus Books. I nosed around inside, but there didn't seem to be a great deal of science fiction or indeed much of interest at all. I did tell Greg of my exploit and as so often, he reacted with something like amused disbelief.

Greg is, of course, dead right about the Panther 'melted glass' covers being design classics. I guess it's a function of the golden age of SF being thirteen, but when it comes to SF paperback covers, I find it hard to resist the 1970s-80s Pan editions with the author's name in a silver panel, or indeed the Panther books of the time with those gloriously nobbly Chris Foss spaceships (and in many cases the simple, forename-less word 'asimov' emblazoned in lower case along the top of the cover). Penguin Books' SF of the time looked pretty spiff too, with covers by Adrian Chesterman that even succeeded in making Fred Hoyle's books look worth reading, and one of my favourite SF book covers of all time, ever, is Penguin's edition of Bester's *TIGER! TIGER!* with Chesterman's seedy Gully Foyle spaceman cover. Modern skiffy covers can't come near...

Bram Stokes, eh? Wonder what the 'other interests' are that he now pursues in Lancaster and whether he still has any SF contacts, or has left them all Boak-like in his wake? Of course the man predates me by years and I never met him but I don't think I can recall anyone writing a nice word about



Dobson Books once titled him 'Issac' Asimov!



**'Derik, Price of
Darkness'?**
Photo by Stan
Nicholls

him in fanzines. He was on the 1970 Eastercon committee, of course, and you know better than I what a flop that event was; when he had a go at bidding for another Eastercon in the late 70s and turning it into a multi-media circus, he found himself, as I recall, roundly defeated in voting by a more 'traditional' event. The anti-Stokes sentiment was strong enough to spur John Collick into producing what has to be one of the most peculiar fanzines ever, *Derik Prince of Fandom*, a cod-Shakespeare faan-fiction play in which Stokes gets killed off by people with names like Lord Gannet of Newcastle (who bore a suspicious resemblance to Rob Jackson), with interludes of wit from Dweste the clown...

The letter column is nothing less than superb this issue. I liked the neat way in which you made it clear that Simone Walsh as-was is now Simone Restall. Peter Roberts: everyone seemed to like Al Stewart around 1970. The thinking man's British Dylan. Roberts of all people should remember that Gray Boak's column in *Egg* was named 'Zero She Flies' after a Stewart album. Like many fans of that era, Stewart is still chugging away enjoyably if not quite so youthfully. It isn't just novelists who can sound wrong with their real first names attached; how many people would read verse by Tommy Eliot or Ted Cummings, or even Wystan Auden? As for the first names of SF authors, is it only me who finds it peculiar that Arnold Akien was invited to call James Blish 'Jim' whereas not only Mike Moorcock, but even Judy Blish herself, refer to the great man only as 'Blish'? Speaking of whom, an old copy of Pete Presford's *Malfunction* surfaced in my fanzine collection the other day featuring on the cover a Jeeves cartoon with two aliens, each with a blank speech-bubble; it appears to have been a contest at the 1971 Eastercon with the best captions winning a year's BSFA membership or some such prize. In Pete's version the aliens are saying to each other "Come out you Earthie bastard! -- I can't, I've got Judy Blish in here with me". I wonder what was the tale behind that?

Gosh! I have that September 1956 BRE *Astounding*; not only that but it was the first issue of *ASF* I ever owned. I found it in a bookshop in Kingston on Thames, I think, as a teenager, and pounced on it because it contained Robert Heinlein's DOUBLE STAR, which for some reason was always the hardest of his adult novels to find in paperback at the time. I was innocent enough not to know that such things as BRE existed, then, and also innocent enough to suffer grave disappointment when the novel turned out to be only one part of a serial. Has anyone with a larger run of the BREs ever checked through for other hidden items like this, I wonder?

Much talk about Archie Mercer and John Brunner still, of course, both positive and negative. So much for Damon Knight's contention that only a whole man can be an interesting enough person to write a successful book about; both Mercer and Brunner could make admirable characters in a novel (if not perhaps an SF novel) and it doesn't seem that either was a 'whole man' in the sense that I take Knight to have meant. The thought does occur that in many ways Brunner and Mercer were akin, two sides of one coin, and incomplete in similar ways though outwardly displaying them in different ones. I suppose that's fans for you, and I suspect that Brunner's 1950s statement about "I am a fan and I don't mind admitting it" was right on the nail. There but for the grace of god, as John Hall points out, go many of us, if not most... It's funny how many people keep saying "Should really stop talking about Brunner" and then seem unable to, and perhaps indicates what an unusual and fascinating person he must have been.

And bloody hell, you've got a letter out of D. West, another person with an unusual style in nomenclature (inter alia). I see that D takes a somewhat negative stance towards small conventions; all I can say is that at *Corflu* people were far too busy having fun and, in many cases, getting drunk and/or stoned together to indulge in the sort of mutual admiration session he deplors, and that other smaller conventions I recall have had similar themes (if not quite so much getting sercon). Doesn't D. like being admired? Is the fellow not human? It's not as if he hasn't been responsible for a goodly amount of fannish art and writing that well merits admiration. Also, it's entirely possible to admire something or someone and still be aware of faults and imperfections (of which D. assuredly has his share...), and not to descend into simple smugness and mutual idolatry. Also, conventions tend to be held in hotels, and hotels have rooms in which people stay, and you can always go hole-out in your room when not feeling sociable, as indeed I did at *Corflu* (and got ribbed for it by Alison Scott, to whom a resounding raspberry in this instance). Funny how West always provokes debate, isn't it? I actually agree with the vast majority of his comments as regards Brunner and general fannish social ineptness.

Brian Varley is the latest, but doubtless won't be the last, to recall the Widowers verses. British fandom of the 1950s, or at least, several of its most talented members (Vince Clarke being a fine example) tended to have a fondness for doggerel verse ('pomes' as Vince called them), and since they did most things well, they did doggerel equally as well. Having a limerick-like format around which almost any subject can be turned into a pome also encourages the readership to chip in and contribute its own, which is of course a good way to encourage letters of comment...

'No need to splurge on posh alcohol,
Though you may be a rich high-roller:
Better than wine or spirits fine
Is WIDOWER'S WONDERFUL COLA'.

You're quite right, Sandra, Robert Lichtman reminded me that in Trap Door 19 (still available on efanzines, advt.) he ran a clever little piece by Dave Langford, no less, who took Eric Needham's Widowers verses to their Outer Limits. It's funny to think of someone with that sort of talent being just a window-cleaner in Real Life. Needham that is, not Langdorf. And speaking of whom....



**Eric Needham by
Harry Turner (Now
& Then, #5)**

Dave Langford
ansible@cix.co.uk



Worried man?
Dave at Orbital.
Photo by
Rob Hansen.

Dear Peter,

Thanks muchly for egoboo on the *Trap Door* article that mentioned Widower's Wonderful Verses. Try these:

“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.”

In *Prolapse #11* I was vaguely relieved to see Mike Moorcock referring to the fan tradition of Archie Mercer's “horrible, smelly green shirt and pullover.” Archie himself used to make jokes about this sartorial elegance, I've been told – so it was most disconcerting that the obituary note in *Ansible-129* (April 1998) reportedly caused great offence to Beryl Mercer. After the usual terse details, I ran a brief appreciation from Chris Priest (which Jim Linwood quoted in his biography of Archie in *Prolapse #10*).

I didn't hear directly from Beryl Mercer, but Mary Reed responded: “Beryl is extremely (and I mean extremely) upset about the obit that Chris wrote. (I must admit I thought the remark about the smelly shirt was completely unworthy of a writer like Chris, and of course have now just seen it repeated in /SF Chronicle/, and it will doubtless turn up again). The thing is that there had been some ghastly run-in years ago between Chris and Archie (I do not know the details, but I understand legal action threats were bandied about) and of course bearing this in mind, it makes Chris look – well -- petty, you know? It has been years since I even saw Chris [...] and I thought when I read the obit that the Chris I recall would not have been so intentionally hurtful ...”

This seemed a bizarre over-reaction to a cheery fannish memoir. Chris too was baffled and mystified, not least because he couldn't imagine what the ‘legal action threats’ could possibly refer to. Could it be that Beryl had cut herself off from fandom for so long that she'd forgotten the very concept of friendly joshing? Mary too, maybe? Beryl made no response to reassurances (sent via Mary) that nothing but affection was intended, and that was the end of the episode.

Speaking of upset widows, I'm still waiting for LiYi Brunner to discover *Prolapse* on line. Judging from her response to one or two innocuous remarks in *Ansible*, this will plunge you into interesting times....

Which gives me a neat link to yet more stuff about John Brunner, and even better, to Alan Dodd and Ella Parker, from someone mentioned in Greg's piece yet who I haven't heard from for years, despite his being one of my very first fannish correspondents, back in 1963. Hello again, Mike!

Mike
Deckinger
mike2004@aol.



Mike in 2008, his
photo

Dear Peter,

All this talk of John Brunner, probing his foibles and shortcomings, is quite enlightening. I read Brunner's works exhaustively during his Ace Double stage and beyond. I had no concept of the main behind the name, and envisioned him as a thorough professional, skilled in his craft and on the verge of entering the mainstream with a shattering boom. Never really happened, although he came close with *STAND ON ZANZIBAR* and *THE JAGGED ORBIT*.

I finally had the opportunity to meet him at the 1969 Worldcon in Oakland CA. I found him to be quite approachable, not at all intimidating, and more than willing to discuss a prior novel, which I requested clarification on. (I can't recall which one). I was also impressed with his dapper demeanour and the consummate ease with which he attracted women. (During an introductory session, Robert Silverberg observed that he and Brunner were very much alike; they were the same age, began writing around the same time and...they were both married). The final proviso drew gusts of laughter from the assembled, since John Brunner had been spotted in the company of a different ravishing female each time he trod the convention carpeting.

In the early 60's, Alan Dodd introduced me to Arthur Sellings and his Plus Books. I had developed an interest in *Nebula*, *Authentic* and *Science Fantasy*, but had no source to secure them from. Sellings (his real name was ‘Arthur Ley’, and he chose the Sellings pseudonym because of Willy Ley's prominence at the time) sent me his stock at reasonable prices over a period of about a year. He also sent me his own books and offered some cogent commentary on his writing technique. A good man, who provided an invaluable service to me.

At one point, having been satiated by the flood of British SF magazines, I asked him to include something different. My intent was to secure other fiction magazines that might be prohibited from stateside distribution. He, quite understandably, misunderstood my ill-told request and bundled several pin-up magazines with the latest batch. The titles were *Spick* and *Beautiful Britons*, and while they revealed nothing more daring than chaste bathing-suited models, the local post office warned me that receiving such contraband was questionable, before reluctantly consigning them to my eager hands.

Ella Parker...Ella Parker. I had an infrequent correspondence with her. I gathered that she replied by mail only after all other obligations, no matter how trivial, had been attended to. Her mail was infrequent but always resonated with her personality. I was a *Cry* letterhack too, and that's how I first encountered her in print, dubbed by editor Wally Weber as “Ella Parker, SCoaW” (“Stupid Clod of a



John Rackham would
have approved!

Woman”). She revelled in the designation. I met her briefly at the Seattle Worldcon she attended in the early 60’s. In my presence and others she referred to somebody as a “bloody nuisance”. “I thought proper Britishers never use the term “bloody”, I chided. “Damn right they don’t.” she beamed with great pride. Somewhere I have a picture of Ella Parker I snapped at the *Seacon* in 1961, looking very trim and contrite. I also have a snapshot somewhere of diminutive Ethel Lindsay, positioned between the behemoths of Dick Eney and Ron Ellik.

We’ll look forward to your pictures, Mike. As for Spick & Span, those of us of a certain age fondly remember those titles, though they were strictly bra-&-pants pictures. The good stuff was in Kamera!

Rich Coad
richcoad@com
cast.net



*Rich at Orbital.
Photo by Rob
Hansen*

Peter, many thanks for continuing to send *Prolapse* despite a lack of direct response on my part. I do read and enjoy each issue although John Hall’s long hinted at tell-all about life with the Brunners was a definite high point. But that was two issues back, so onto issue 11.

The alternate fascination and dread that the BSFA seems to inspire in British fans strikes me as very different from anything here in the States. Only after knowing some friends for literally decades, for example, did I discover that they had once been members, and in at least one case an officer, of the National Fantasy Fan Federation. The N3F is, I suppose, the closest organisation in the US to the BSFA but I’ve really never heard anybody express even the slightest interest in what they are up to. It’s in a strange parallel universe of fandom where I suppose it matters to its members. They even have a web site with a link to an eFanzine (but not *eFanzines.com*) called *FanDominion* which looks pretty media-oriented rather like *Matrix* (although they do, at least, have an obituary for Jack Speer).

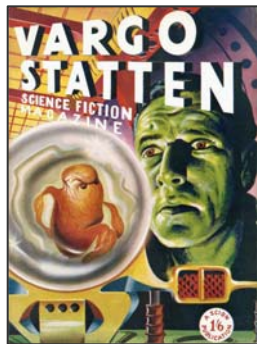
The BSFA did hit some nice heights when Malcolm was editing *Vector* but does the organization offer much to the SF reader or fan these days? Or has it all gone towards pandering to the hordes of sci-fi movie fans? And despite Chris Garcia’s very funny defence of movies in Catherine Pickersgill’s five-minute mini-panels at *Orbital* (“Movies freakin’ ROCK!”) I still would rather learn more about an author than an actor when choosing a magazine to read (although technical how-it-was-done articles about movie F/X have their own fascination). Anyway, despite the well researched conclusion drawn that it was divorce and not *SF Monthly* that nearly derailed the BSFA in 1974, I’d be willing to bet that ten years from now it is still a well-known fact that hordes of readers of *SF Monthly* overwhelmed the membership secretary and very nearly destroyed the organization.

THE AVENGING MARTIAN clarifies much of the ‘As Others See Us’ comments in *Ansible*. The anti-SF prejudice seems much stronger and more firmly entrenched in British literary circles than in American. Seeing the covers for *Vargo Statten Magazine*, and the Badger Books that R. L. Fanthorpe churned out so quickly, it’s hardly surprising that people with literary pretences who remember these from their youth still think poorly of the whole field. Certainly there was a lot of bad American SF with ridiculously lurid covers even into the ‘50s but there were also the classier digests like *F&SF* and *Astounding* and *Galaxy* with covers that weren’t quite so horribly embarrassing. I suppose *New Worlds* and *Nebula* were the British counterweights to *VSM* and Badger but possibly they were too discreet. At least the island can claim to have produced many of the most literate practitioners of SF writing although how young Jim Ballard got his issues of *VSM* in Shanghai is a mystery to me.

I hope that Stan Nicholls is wrong about the imminent death of the specialist SF bookshop. The climate is certainly tough for all independent bookstores at the moment but I would expect a good specialist store, one with a really knowledgeable owner or buyer, could be the type of store that could survive the cost-cutting practices of Amazon.com and the huge retailers. In San Francisco both Borderlands Books (a pure SF/fantasy bookstore) and Kayo Books (primarily a collectible paperback bookstore) seem to thrive. I hope this isn’t an illusion as I’d hate to see either go.

Finally, I am stunned that Dark They Were... could have made Bram a paper millionaire even for a minute! It just seemed like a small shop which managed to marginally stay alive. I don’t recall any abrasive staff from the times I went there, just a woman who insisted on converting the decimal prices to £sd. I would desperately try to convert her 7/6 back to decimal money in my head before giving up and tossing her a pound and hoping I’d got the correct change. Once I learned that a shilling was 5p, I got a bit better.

Good point, Rich, that Vargo Statten together with Scion, Badger, Digit and the rest poisoned the waters for British science fiction. Nothing’s changed, though modern rubbish is now called ‘sci-fi’.



**Not exactly
Great Literature,
was it?**

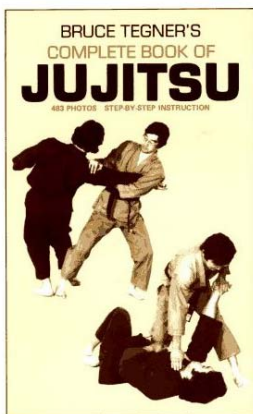
Hi Peter,

Thanks so much for gathering, editing and publishing the discussion of the BSFA from *wegenheim*, especially including the bar graph of membership trends. I followed this with a certain detached interest while it was unfolding – the detachment due, of course, to the BSFA only ever having been something that I was aware of but not participating in. One thing I don’t see here is how many are currently members. The organization’s website is either silent on the subject or has hidden it in some remote corner I couldn’t ferret out.

In this country the equivalent organization is the National Fantasy Fan Federation (N3F), started in 1941 and still barely extant today. I have its first official publication done by Art Widner in 1941, showing 65 members at the time. That’s more than it has now – according to something I read recently, it’s down to about 50 members of whom maybe a dozen or so are actually active in any detectable way. There’s been some discussion of whether it should shut down. At its peak in the late ‘40s and into the ‘50s I recall it had around 400 members, so it never reached the peaks the BSFA accomplished as shown on the bar graph.

**Robert
Lichtman**
robertlichtman@
yahoo.com





Don't upset mild-mannered Robert Lichtman – "these hands could kill".

By far my favourite piece in this issue is George Locke's 'A Boy and His Bike,' harking back to a means of transportation that served me well in my own early SF collecting forays back in the late '50s, even before getting involved in fandom in '58. At age 13 and 14 I was taking judo lessons at a dojo in Hollywood run by the late Bruce Tegner, a now largely forgotten 'famous' early populariser of the Asian martial arts. (Check out his *Wikipedia* entry. I have his 1960 book, *Bruce Tegner Method of Self-Defense: The Best of Judo, Jiu-Jitsu, Karate, Savate, Yawara, Aikido, Ate-Waza*, which is heavily illustrated with step-by-step instruction on various moves, and I recognize *everyone* in all the photos.) As much a draw for me as the lessons was the proximity afterwards of several bookstores in which much SF could be found. One of them was called Larsen's, and was a huge store on Hollywood Blvd. with what I thought of later as The Wall Of Prozines. I spent hours there reading Rog Phillips' "Clubhouse" columns before I discovered modern-day fandom.

I went to Hollywood via bus, but all my other SF expeditions were on my four-speed 'English racing' bike, not actually a competition vehicle but that's what they called them at the time. I had twin carry-baskets mounted over the rear wheel and went around on a regular route in a large radius around where I lived. At that time it was still relatively easy (and inexpensive) to score early digest-sized magazines, so eventually I had the first years of *F&SF* and *Galaxy* as well as some *Astoundings* (though I didn't like that magazine so much as a teenager as the others, finding it too stuffy, intellectual and pseudo-scientific). And I got some pulps, too, including a passing fascination with the Shaver Mystery that grew out of reading Phillips's columns in those *Amazings* I'd see at Larsen's. To summarise, I had the same sense of adventure and discovery that George relates here, albeit without actually working in any of these stores.

I wish George the best of luck with his new "street-level bookshop," and wish I could afford the £25 he's asking for *Scientifiction Days in Manhattan* – I'd love to read it, but at this point the equivalent of \$50 is daunting for a 'booklet,' however "fascinating."

Thanks for cobbling together Greg's two pieces into "Think I'm Going Back." I'd read both of them in their previous appearances (though not in the case of the first part, at the time that issue of *Stop Breaking Down* originally appeared, being fafia just then), and enjoyed another crack at them. And I agree that they do work well together. [*Actually that was done by Mark & Claire for 'Easter Wine'*]

Like Greg and the booklists, I also used to "spend hours reading and re-reading those lists, making endless tick-marks and corrections" in order to match desire with budget. I still do this with Bob Madle's occasional catalogues (though not the most recent ones devoted to expensive fanzines, where my marks were to calculate the total at his prices of the fanzines offered that I already had), and before that with the ones Ray Bowman of somewhere in Indiana (?) used to send out. I share Greg's lament-even-now over missing out on that "almost complete set of *Weird Tales*." Only £75 is indeed a cheap price for the lot, but of course in 1970 as a young man that *would* have been near-insurmountable for Greg. Imagine what that lot would go for now!

I'd never heard of Stan Nicholls before, but that didn't diminish my enjoyment of his article, even with its unhappy ending of the death of independent bookstores (let alone genre specialty shops) that affects us all these days. Most recently around here, Cody's in Berkeley folded in June. It was founded in 1956, had several locations through the years, and at its peak had an excellent SF section which was under the care and feeding of Pat Lupoff.

The difference is that the N3F is an organisation intended specifically to advance the interests of 'fandom', while the BSFA was always centred much more on 'science fiction', (even if this was meant to be a 'Trojan Horse') and has done rather better, it seems – current membership was announced at the June AGM to be about 600. As for those Weird Tales, we know what happened to them....

Alastair Durie
al.durie@tiscali.
co.uk



Alastair at Ken Slater's 90th birthday. Photo by pw.

Hi Peter!

Thank you very much for *Prolapse #11* which I enjoyed reading immensely. A couple of points arose from that reading which might amuse you.

First of all, on page 4 there's a reference to Marcus Wigan "who was one of the founders of the Oxford University Group in 1962". That intrigues me because I went up to Oxford in 1963 and promptly joined what I think was then called the Science Fiction Society. I, and a fellow Christ Church student John Priddle, found that the Society was completely moribund. So we renamed it the Oxford Union Speculative Fiction Group and carried on from there. One of the earliest uses of the word 'speculative' I would have thought. So it would be interesting to know who Marcus Wigan was and what his involvement was in 1962.

The other articles on Plus Books and the other shops in London brought back many happy memories. I used to go to the Merton shop quite a lot as I lived in South London. Over the years though the SF content got less and eventually I gave up going. But, whilst I was reading about Merton, I was racking my brains trying to remember the shop towards the Hammersmith flyover. Eventually that surfaced – Chiswick High Road. And then I read Greg's contribution about the *Weird Tales* collection being sold in the Chiswick High Road shop for £75, which he didn't buy. I think he was wrong on the price because I bought them and my memory was that the price was £300. It wasn't anything like a full run anyway, so far as I remember it went back to about 1928, but was still a great haul. However I didn't have the money to buy the lurid-covered *Horror Stories* and *Terror Tales* that he also had for sale. And my wife didn't approve of the covers, so that was that, even though they would probably have been a better buy than the *WTs*. When I chatted to Ted Ball about this last week he

thought that Alan had gone to a sale of Japanese swords and had found the *WT* and other mags as well and got them dirt cheap – maybe that was where the £75 figure came from.

Finally, about *Dark They Were* and *Golden Eyed*. Unless my memory is playing tricks on me I am sure that at one time they had a shop down the King's Road, almost at World's End, but not mentioned by anyone in the articles. I wonder if anyone else remembers that, or could correct me?

Thanks Alistair, but I expect you acquired those awful magazines long ago since your collection is (by rumour) the most complete in Britain. But we're all collectors at heart, aren't we Roy?

Dear Peter

It shouldn't have come as a shock that you ticked the box on the back of the latest *Prolapse* which said "It is with great reluctance that I am sending Eileen round to kick you in the balls for not responding to any of the last three issues, though I do hope it hurts". Anyway, in case her train hasn't left yet, here are a few lines.

I had meant to write to say what a terrific article Jim's was about Archie Mercer. It really evoked a sense of what life could be like in the 50s for many – perhaps particularly those who probably weren't amongst Macmillan's "most" people who had never had it so good – as well as being a vivid picture of Archie himself. After forgetting to write initially, I was only reminded when I was looking in my copy of Donald Day's *Index to Science Fiction Magazines 1926 – 1950* and saw Archie's signature on the front page. Something I'd known, but which hadn't exactly been at the centre of my thoughts for a few years. Whether the cover had become blotchy and stained by damp while owned by Archie I don't know, but it's otherwise in great condition. Just the thing to have in a caravan if there isn't much space for the magazines themselves.

Your themed issue on SF bookshops was one of your best. Though George Locke's enjoyable memories of 1950's London bookshops were a bit before my time, there was inevitably significant overlap with some of the people and places I bought books and magazines from in the 1960s. I'd forgotten, or possibly never really known, that the Fantasy Book Centre – which I visited as often as I could in Sicilian Avenue – had started in Stoke Newington. I see from an old *New Worlds* that FBS, at 52 Stoke Newington Road, was only a brisk 5 minutes walk from where I used to live in the mid 1970s, but presumably many more years away than that. A quick Google shows that it's now Studio Denise, a photography shop. No plaque visible on the wall. I'm not sure either that I'd registered that the *New Worlds* publishers, Nova Publications, were based at the same address until George mentioned it.

George didn't mention one of the places I used to visit in the 70s, though Stan's article did with a very nice description of it – Newport Books, off Charing Cross Road. It had a good stock of old British editions of American magazines, but the owner, unlike Les Flood at FBS, seemed to have no interest in SF and it was never clear to me how the shop got into selling them or even survived doing so.

Just round the corner from it, in Charing Cross Road, was one of those tiny London newsagents that crammed-in an astonishing number of different international magazines, papers and journals and which are now understandably fewer in number. But at that one, and the one opposite, you could always buy new issues of *Analog* and *Fantasy and Science Fiction* in a way that for some years you just haven't been able to in anything other than specialist shops.

I cut through Newport Court quite a lot these days on the way from Leicester Square Tube to one of the central London cinemas. Though the rest of the shops seem to form what an estate agent might call Chinatown Borders, Newport Books had become, until recently, a porn shop. I guess Newport Court was only seedy in Stan's time.

The first part of Greg's article brought back good memories, and not just because I'd read it before, as did the second. But "Had I But Known, indeed..." he says about me. What's that about, then? A little more Googling shows that Greg seems to be keener to recall our incompatibilities rather than the areas where we got on. Any relationship has both of course and it's a matter for him which he chooses to emphasise, though I recall a lot of good times as well. So it goes. We all regret things that we did, and might have been better doing differently, but Greg seems to regret things other people did. My main failing appears to be that I had the effrontery not to be you, Peter. Though obviously it got worse after such a bad start. Clearly if Greg hadn't met me he could have gone on to become the Mother Theresa of fandom and a saint in his own lifetime. Wait a minute...

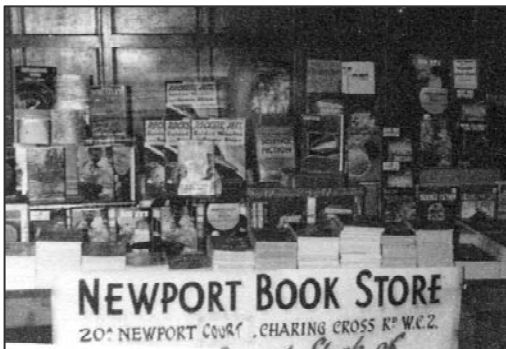
The trip to Premier Book Centre with the set of *Weird Tales* well outside our price range is something I recall pretty vividly too. Sadly, I didn't have a credit card – only introduced in Britain three years before anyway – until I started work a couple of years later. Even so, £75...

I used to get a lot of American-import SF books from Alan Bale and, looking back, had several different sources for buying SF. It was, as George pointed out, obviously difficult to get hold of books and magazines in the 1950s but it remained something a challenge for quite a while. The first SF magazine I ever had was a British reprint of *Fantasy and Science Fiction* which my parents had brought me back from London when they went there for a weekend (mainly to see *The Mousetrap*) and my very young sisters and I were left with my uncle. I also got a copy of Trollope's *Barchester Towers* which I didn't read. (Maybe, in a parallel universe, you publish a nostalgia fanzine about Trollope fandom

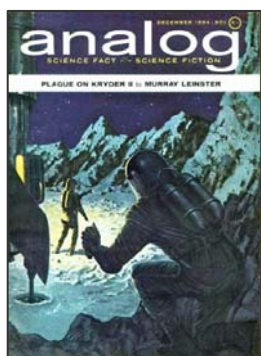
Leroy Kettle
roy.kettle@ntl
world.com



Roy at *Orbital*, 2008. Photo by Rob Hansen.



Roy visited in the seventies and Stan was there in the sixties, but this picture was taken at the London convention in 1952! Someone at that shop must have had a long-time interest in SF. Photo from Eric Bentcliffe's album.



“Almost the last of the large-sized issues.”

called *The Way We Lived Then.*) I’d have thought that that the contents of that copy of *F&SF* would have been burned into my mind but I have no idea which issue it was.

It started me looking for magazines, though, and the first I bought – when I was 15 – was *New Worlds-144*, Sept-Oct 1964, the third Compact issue, two after the one pictured on page 34 of *Prolapse* 10 (for which, as it happens, I bought the cover illustration Jim Cawthorn did in a convention auction some years later). I got it at a bookstall in Wolverhampton market and started buying, largely from there, other magazines, mainly Thorpe and Porter imported *Galaxy*, *If*, *Worlds of Tomorrow*, *Amazing* and *Fantastic* as well as Kyril Bonfiglioli’s Compact *Science Fantasy*. I guess that *F&SF* and *Analog* weren’t so readily available as imports and the British editions had stopped, because I went to W.H. Smith’s to see if I could order the American editions through them. The first ones I got were *F&SF* November 1964 and *Analog* December 1964, almost the last of the large-sized issues.

All this was absolute magic and a real revelation to me. These were where most new SF was being published, certainly the shorter work, and many of the better novels. And there were book reviews, interesting statistical analyses of reader responses in *Analog* which appealed to my inner geek, forecasts of future stories, letters, editorials, science articles, artwork. Wonderful stuff! And so much better than schoolwork.

I started buying SF from Ken Slater at around this time too, presumably picking up his Fantast (Medway) Ltd address from one of the magazines. A bit like Greg, when I thought I’d failed my O-levels I wrote to him asking if he had any jobs, no doubt thinking it was some vast emporium employing hordes of willing SF fans. Sensibly, he never replied.

A year or so after, at the local market bookstall, I glimpsed – simply supporting shelves containing a range of thrillers, romances and westerns – some interesting looking spines. Looking closer, I started lifting the shelves, tipping the non-SF novels off, until piles of magazines were visible. I saw they were old British Reprint Editions of *Astounding*, *Analog*, *F&SF*, *Galaxy* and *If* as well as Thorpe and Porter imports, Carnell *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* and *Nebulas*. Obviously not the most saleable of items for him – well, certainly not stored like that anyway. It was a wonder the stall owner was still selling new magazines if he’d ended up with so many old ones.

His understandable irritation stopped when he realised I wanted to buy everything he had, though he still seemed a bit niggled at having to find other ways of holding his shelves up. I asked if he had any more and he suggested his brother’s stall in the market at Bilston (now part of Wolverhampton, but then a separate town where I was born). I took a bus there and found another mass of different old issues. Among other things, I ended up with an almost complete run of *Nebula* as well as long runs of other magazines. Luckily, I’d got a summer job and could buy what I wanted at the price he was asking. My parents weren’t best pleased at the quantity though I think they were slightly relieved that I’d moved on from American import comics. Well, so they thought – I was actually still buying them as well.

Soon after that – and I can’t recall how it started – I began buying pulps such as *Thrilling Wonder*, *Starling*, 1940s *Astoundings* – from Ron Bennett in Singapore. I didn’t find it at all unusual that I was doing this – buying stuff from abroad is incredibly common now but pre-internet it was rare – but friends who were understanding of my collecting SF magazines were very puzzled as to why I’d go to the lengths and expense of buying them from so far away. A while later, it was because of this that I met Rob Holdstock who also used Ron’s mail order. A packet with some 1950’s magazines for Rob which had his address on one side and mine on the other arrived with me – a glitch in Ron’s otherwise excellent service. Casting temptation to one side – eventually and with difficulty – I sent them on to Rob with a letter. I wrote about all this in *Wrinkled Shrew*, I think, but one abiding memory is that Rob asked for a photo at some point, and all I had was one of me in a ten-pin bowling team. Later he told me he was saying “Please don’t be the geeky one with the black-rimmed glasses and polo-neck shirt, please, please.” But I was.

A short while later, and fed-up with the delay of several months in *Galaxy* and *If* arriving as T&P imports, I decided to subscribe. After some effort I got an international money order sent with a lot of uncertainty as to whether anything would turn up. But I received the April 1968 *If* – nice Vaughan Bode cover for a John Brunner novelette – and a similar *Galaxy*, about 6 months ahead of most other readers over here. I’d invented time travel.

Another source of books – and one I never really accounted for – was in the mid-late 60s in Wolverhampton. For some reason I went into a card shop – quite a straightforward and small Clintons-type outfit but not part of a chain – and found a back room that, as well as having British SF books, also had current imports from the likes of Ballantine, Belmont, Berkley, Pyramid and Lancer, though oddly nothing from Ace. No other books at all. I could get them mail order, of course, but it was just great to see them all lined up like in a specialist store where I could choose any I hadn’t got. How that shop ended up with them, and how the shop ended up, I’ve no idea. I know occasionally we all come across a second-hand bookshop with someone’s once cherished run of SFBC editions or magazine collections or whatever, but there seemed to be a few shops – apart from those run by specialist enthusiasts like Bram, George, Alan and Stan – which had decided to sell, or ended up selling, SF regularly in greater quantities than was usual at the time, like that shop and Newport Books. The internet allows much more niche selling but it seems an odd thing now looking back on some of those places. They might as well have been selling Trollope as far as I can see, though I’m very glad they weren’t.

Kettle, I hate you! In The Book, Page 38, I describe how two of us visited Wolverhampton in 1963 in search of science fiction, and found absolutely nothing. And yet just a year or two later you appear to have been falling over the stuff! T’aint fair, I tell you!



“it was just great to see them all lined up”
Illo by Jim Barker,
from ‘Stars...’

John Eggeling
todmordenbooks@ndirect.co.uk



*John in 2008.
Photo by Judith
Mansfield*

Dear Peter,

My thanks for the unexpected arrival of *Prolapse #11* on my doormat a few days ago. It was very welcome containing as it did many memories for me. George Locke's article reminded me how important the Popular Book Centre was to me in the early 1960s. I had moved from Scotland to Tottenham in North London in 1960 when I was 15 and was limited in my SF reading by whatever was in the local public library as there was no bookshop locally. It didn't take too long for me to read all that were available and I started to branch out by developing a taste for ghost stories and early blues recordings. Then a Popular Book Centre opened up five minutes' walk away from me.

At first I ignored it, I found the 'everything exchangeable at half price' slogan somewhat off-putting, then one day I walked in and was totally wowed – one section of the wall display was full of Ace SF titles by ERB and Kline, with their covers by Krenkel, and they looked absolutely amazing. My interest in SF was re-kindled and I would go into the shop two or three times a week to see what was new. A couple or so years later I went to University College, London and met John Pye who ran the college Science Fiction Society. It was John who introduced me to the London Circle meetings at the Globe where I met up with Frank Arnold, Ted Ball, George Locke, and 'Bram' Stokes, who further kindled my taste for the older SF. John Pye subsequently graduated, took up a job with Cable & Wireless somewhere on the South coast, and surfaced at the Globe every now and then for a year or two before he disappeared from my ken.



Frank Arnold, Wally Gillings, and new-boy Gerry Webb in the Globe, late-sixties. Photo scanned by Dave Rowe from Frank Arnold's album. Note the Visitors Book on the table!

I graduated as well, with a degree in a subject I'd lost all interest in, (is there anything more brain-numbing than Statistics?) and went through a longish period of unemployment before getting a job with George Bell, Publishers. However, before I took up that post Derek Stokes asked me if I'd be interested in working part-time at the Premier Book Centre in Camden Town. Alan Bale didn't really have his heart in the business and was devoting more time to the buying and selling of rare Japanese swords, so Derek was spending longer at the Chiswick shop which was more convenient for him. Unfortunately the Camden Town shop tended towards the lower end of the market and was maintained primarily by the sale of fetish books and magazines, mainly latex and domination, so although I can say I participated in one of the businesses mentioned in George Locke's article and saw lots of fantasy (of a sort) I sold very little in the way of SF while I was there.

Simone's letter reminded me of the book-hunting trip George Locke and I made to the West Country during which we stayed a night in Bristol with Simone and Tony, finding the time next day to visit a cider farm with them, as well as all the local bookshops (I can't remember anything about the books but I do remember Simone had just finished reading Terry Southern's *CANDY* so it was probably in 1969).

As to the two main articles, George and Stan both gave good accounts of the London SF bookshops in the 1950s to 1970s period, though they did underline for me how memories can vary. I was sure that Atvatar Book Service lasted more like three years than one, and some of Stan's reminiscences differ slightly from mine as well, but all the essential details were there.

It would be good to look at the UK SF book trade as a whole. What about the Liverpool scene? There was Millcross Book Service, and I know John Roles had an office-cum-shop in the 1960s in Liverpool at Berry's Buildings, where Norman Shorrocks dealt in stamps, but I'm unsure as to when he started dealing in books or if he ever specialised in SF. In the 1970's he moved to a run-down shop in the Waterloo area of Liverpool where I used to visit him fairly regularly (especially when he started selling off his early fanzines and SF pulps). That was terminated several years ago when John was brutally murdered by a psychotic postcard collector and the building set on fire, destroying John's Haggard collection but not the evidence of his killing (unfortunately not all memories are good)!

Fascinating, John! Naturally I sent your letter off to George, who was sufficiently motivated to dash-off another 3000 words about that book-hunting trip, which makes a nice follow-up article for another issue. What a man! The only thing still missing is a comment from Alan Bale, but I've not had a word from him. Maybe Japanese swords are still keeping him busy. But his influence goes marching on...

Jim Linwood
JLinwood@aol.com



**Jim at Orbital.
Photo by Rob
Hansen**

Dear Peter,

The pieces by George, Greg and Stan on London SF/Fantasy bookshops were outstanding and brought back a few book-hunting memories.

In Nottingham (and probably elsewhere in the country) we had 'sixpenny libraries' in newsagents and sweet shops. This consisted of a small rack full of professionally-bound former paperbacks with the front and back covers covered in clear plastic. Because of their uniform nature I assume that the books were supplied to the shops by a national provider. Most of the books were prole-feed westerns, romances or pulp fiction of the 'Lady Don't Fall Backwards' variety written in the Yank style by British authors like Darcy Glinto (Harold Kelly), James Handley Chase (René Brabazon Raymond), Hank Janson (Stephen Francis) and Peter Cheyney – who was the only one to use his real name. The libraries wouldn't loan these to minors but they were passed around at school and, as with George, they were a stable diet for me until I discovered Chandler and Hammett. 'Janson' even wrote a couple of SF titles (*ONE AGAINST TIME* and *THE UNSEEN ASSASSIN*) and turned up at the Globe a few times. When Francis stopped writing in the early 60s other writers, including Mike Moorcock, used the name.

A selection of the colourful novels with which Jim wasted his time back in the Fifties!



I never saw any Penguin or Pan books in the sixpenny libraries and the only SF books were usually the Scion titles by Vargo Statten or Volstead Gridban but the mid-50s saw the appearance of Tom Boardman's paperback line with such classics as WHAT MAD UNIVERSE. Sources of original American magazines were second-hand shops in places like Lincoln and Leicester near U.S. airbases.

Trips to London in the late 50's took me to the Fantasy Book Centre in Sicilian Avenue and Bob Ley's (Arthur Sellings) Plus Books in the Caledonian Road. The sign above the door to the Fantasy Book Centre had faded and Les Flood presided over a mainly popular record stock with a few US paperbacks and magazines plus EC comics in the small main part of the shop, whilst the basement housed a large library of hardbacks which were being sold off at ridiculously low prices (I picked up a copy of LIMBO 90 for 3/6). Plus Books was identical to any of the Popular Book Centres but had the advantage of a proprietor with whom you could have a chat about SF. There was also a shop well stocked with SF off Villiers Street, next to Charing Cross Station, run by a man who knew of the Globe and a few of its regulars.

When I finally settled in London in 1967, Alan Bale's Premier Bookshop in Chiswick was only a few minutes walk away from my flat at Kew Bridge. I'd known Alan briefly from my visits to the Globe some years earlier when he'd invited me to visit his stall/shop in Shepherd's Bush, an offer I regret not taking up. The place was a Popular Book Shop clone but, once I'd made myself known to Alan, he produced a locked wooden box from under the counter which contained all the latest paperbacks and magazines from the States selling at comparable prices to their British counterparts. I assume that there was another locked wooden box under the counter reserved for Pat Kearney! Bram Stokes wasn't completely independent by then as he still served behind the counter of the Chiswick shop – at least on Saturdays.

Unlike the friendly Alan, Stokes was a surly, unpleasant character. I once took several mint Ace Doubles that I'd bought elsewhere into the shop hoping for the usual generous exchange that Alan always gave. Stokes told me that he only accepted books previously bought or exchanged in the shop bearing the Premier stamp – if he told this to every customer, Alan's shop would have ended up full of dog-eared stinking paperbacks and magazines. Stokes' replacement was more genial, although once, when I collected the latest P. K. Dick, he informed me that he preferred "dragons to druggies" – a line I suspected he'd practiced delivering in front of a mirror. I later became a frequent customer of Dark They Were... but always detested Stokes' presence there.

Going through some old stuff a couple of years ago I came across an old plastic bag from a shop called Fantasy Inn/The Book Inn at 17 Charing Cross Road. I vaguely recalled visiting a basement shop at the Trafalgar Square-end of Charing Cross Road in the 80s and mentioned this on *wegenheim*, hoping to jog a few memories. The weggies recalled that the shop was run by someone called Ricky, assisted by Paul Gamble (aka 'Gamma') and Dave Hodson, and burnt down in a mysterious fire in 1992. A good deal of the stock smelling of smoke ended up in other book shops and the Fantasy Inn clientele moved up the road to Murder One.

A similar fate happened to a book shop in Twickenham run by Marion Pitman. Over the years it became more and more decrepit and impossible to enter and browse. In 2000 the shop and the flat above burnt down. Ms. Pitman was re-housed and the block later redeveloped. It was only around the time of the fire that I became aware (via *Ansible*) of Marion's connections with fandom. She now sells books on-line from the Liverpool Road area of Reading and regularly attends UK conventions.

I was intrigued by George saying that the Popular Book Centre chain started in Brighton. In the North Lanes there is probably the original shop, now called 'Two Way Books' which is otherwise identical in every way to the PBCs. However, the best second-hand book shop in Brighton is the nearby one run by Oxfam – although George will strongly disagree with me there.

I wonder if that more 'genial' replacement in the Chiswick shop could have been John Eggeling (see above)? That's a great recollection of your misspent youth, Jim; in my case I only once tried to read a 'Hank Janson' novel, but gave up in disgust – not enough 'sense of wonder'! But I'm pleased you agreed with my description of Stokes as a 'surly little brute' – wonder what happened to him?

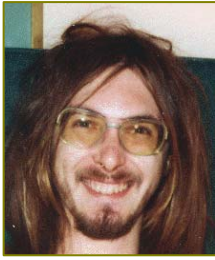


Above; Gamma's domain?



Where it all started? Still going strong in Brighton though no old *Astoundings* in stock!

Steve Jeffery
Srjeffery@aol.com



Steve in 1980
with mad hair.
His picture.

Dear Peter,

Dark They Were... in its later St Anne's Court incarnation, was the first real SF bookstore I encountered. Growing up in the cultural wilderness of Strood as I did, my collection (really, more of a random assemblage) had been gleaned from charity and s/h shops, W.H. Smith, and those discount bins of cheap pulp paperbacks in Woolworths (anyone else remember them?).

It may have been just after Stan's time, but during the late 80s we frequented three SF bookstores within the Oxford St./Charing X Road axis: FP, Murder One, and a bit further down past Cambridge Circus was The Fantasy Inn. In all three, science fiction was relegated to the basement, while comics, toys and assorted kitch were given pride of place on the ground floor. For some reason we managed to blag a discount at Fantasy Inn, which made it worth the walk until it closed, when a fire apparently destroyed the stock, and never reopened. I never did get to hear to full story behind that one.

I did want to respond to your comment about the BSFA's 'lamentable confusion of purpose' towards the end of 'YOU should Join the BSFA'. You mention, and probably rightly, that the BSFA is probably not going to have a significant impact in raising the standard of writing, at least at the pro level, but I feel it *can* exert an impact, through magazines, reviews and articles (particularly in *Vector*) in the reading and criticism of SF. You need only read half a dozen perceptive reviews in *Vector*, *Locus* or *Foundation* to question that naive uncritical fanboy enthusiasm for works where the hero and heroine are revealed at the end as Adam and Eve (yes, that includes you Philip Pullman), wonky science and "As you know, Professor" plot dumping. You might think, in these (post) modern techno-savvy times that such Turkey City Lexicon howlers were things of SF's juvenile past. That is, until you see the hash many mainstream writers make when they appropriate genre toys without reading the instructions.

'Twas ever thus, Steve. I remember comparing Anthony Burgess' much-acclaimed THE WANTING SEED unfavourably to Asimov's CAVES OF STEEL, though I'm sure Burgess had never heard of it.

Andy Sawyer
A.P.Sawyer@liverpool.ac.uk



A very smart Andy
in Kansas this
summer, where he
was presented with
the SFRA's
'Clareson' Award.

Dear Peter,

It's a bit of a shame that *Prolapse 11* appeared before I sent a LoC on *P10*, especially as I wanted to say how poignant it was to read the editorial matter about Ken Slater, who I know we all miss dreadfully. I can almost hear him as I type. I'm so sorry I wasn't able to get down to either his 90th birthday or his funeral.

I also thought that Jim Linwood had done a wonderful job on the piece on Archie Mercer, who I never knew except by name, but (and I know many people in fandom have heard this before) I appreciated when Beryl asked me to come down shortly after his death to take much of his book collection. I remember standing there and seeing his SF collection, his collection of LPs (Beryl mentioned a collection of fairground music which had already gone to a collector, but there was some fine early jazz), his local archaeology stuff, etc, etc, and it was that which crystallised what I beef on probably too much about, that it doesn't *matter*, really what people are interested in, you connect with them because they *have* an interest so can understand what drives other people to collect the bizarre things they do. OK, perhaps not barbed wire, in that instance cited by Greg somewhere way back, but generally. It's a shame I never knew that Beryl was a scientologist until *after* I made some snide remark about scientologists believing in crazy things, but she seemed to forgive me...

I also wanted to comment on the Dan Morgan piece: I know I had his book on the guitar, and I vaguely remember making some remark about him or his fiction in my letter-hack days, which I only say because a) I can't for the life of me remember what the context was, except that like many people who picked up the guitar book I never went on to become a guitar hero, but that wasn't his fault: I recall it was a pretty clear and useful book, and if I'd paid attention to it I would be a lot better player than I am now; and b) on the occasion of first reading that *Prolapse* piece I skimmed through the Morgan/Kippax space opera series which must have come out about the same time and thought that they were pretty good. They'd have made a fine TV series, I think; certainly several orders of magnitude above 'Space 1999'.

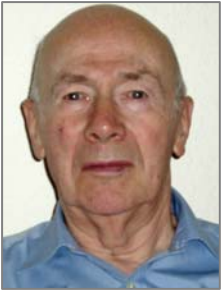
Like many, I guess, I luffed out loud at the cover of *P11*, which I'm skimming through at the moment – wasn't the original Giles cartoon something SF-nal? Was it *Eagle*? Again a terrific issue. The pieces by George and Stan answered a lot of those questions which have bugged me for ages. You never think to ask at the time, when you're buying books from a shop, how and why that shop came to be there. I used to go to Dark They Were... quite a lot when I lived in London; it was always something of an adventure and a sense that there was something going on in the larger scheme of things that I wasn't quite privy too. I guess that was fandom, although maybe it was just Life. But reading those pieces, suddenly a lot seemed to make sense. This was all a long time ago – the idea of specialist SF bookshops suddenly seems so damned arcane.

Maybe we could get a bigger picture. What about the modern Fantasy Centre – would Erik write something? Only Savoy books, in Manchester, are interested in really recording their history – and much of that centres around Lord Horror, which I can take or leave, but kind of prefer to leave (though defend the right of, etc, etc,) and the other scuffles with the obscenity laws – but there's a lot of lost history about and I really can't praise you enough, Peter, for getting down to recording it. And such great photos! I see Charles Platt has given his latest reminiscences to *The New York Review of Science Fiction*. You've started a trend, you have.

Actually that Giles cartoon was from 1979, when The Times re-appeared after the infamous 12-month Grunwick strike, and naturally the delivery boy wanted more cash to handle the extra papers! As for Charles' memoirs, he didn't offer them to me although I would have loved to have run them here.



Fred Smith
[f.smith50@ntl
world.com](mailto:f.smith50@ntlworld.com)



Fred in 2008, by
Fred

Eminence!

Many thanks for the *Time-Traveller #11* which, as usual, is fascinating and, of course, apologies for dragging my feet in replying – as usual.

George Locke's trawl of London booksellers in search of SF trips a lot of memories. I also had all eighteen issues of Walter Gillings's *Fantasy Review* with those wonderful ads for U.S. books from G. Ken Chapman and E.J. Carnell which had me drooling – and resentful that I couldn't afford them (at 19/6 each). And, of course, there was Ken Slater's column 'Among the Magazines' which introduced me to the delights of the post-war Thrilling Twins, *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and *Startling Stories*. George says that he bought his first SF book (THE AVENGING MARTIAN) in 1951. That was the year that I was living in London and paid a visit to the Fantasy Book Centre in Stoke Newington Road. I see that George was born in 1936. That was the year I started reading science fiction!

Turning to your wonderful lettercol, 'The Melting Pot', the photo of Harry Nadler and Bill Burns printing the *Thirddmancon* programme book (page 33) does indeed look like "an antique offset-litho press" but Bill Burns in the adjoining letter mentions a "1250 Multilith". Well, it doesn't look like a 1250, more like an 80 or, possibly, 50 model. The 1250 had a long, suction-fed, conveyor belt which carried the paper to the printing head, which isn't evident in the photo. I speak from experience because I sold the things at one time.

Was that coincidence your including a photo of the lovely Frances Evans on page 35 when I had mentioned on the very next page spiriting her away from Ted Tubb? Actually I had met Frances previously, in 1954 I think, when she and her then husband Cyril paid a visit to Glasgow to meet Ethel and some of the rest of us Newlanders. Have I forgotten, though, that she eventually married Brian Varley (whom I always think of as the varlet!).

Bill said, "Fred's quite right that the Thirddmancon printing machine is not a Multilith – after our success with that little one, Harry found a (very) used Multilith 1250 for a cheap price, and we installed it in his garage initially." Coincidence, Fred? I think not; the aim is for the lettercol to flow like a seamless tapestry (as Terry Wogan might say). This next one isn't here by accident, either.

Ted Forsyth
[Forsythted@aol.
com](mailto:Forsythted@aol.com)

Hi Peter,

Sorry for the tardy response, Mundania tends to take over. When *Prolapse 11* arrived I sat down and read it from cover to cover and as a result got way behind on the plans I had for that day! I thought your content was supposed to relate to reminiscences of SF and things faanish of the past. Do I detect a possible change of emphasis by your publishing of a 2009 photo of Gerald Bishop?



Brian & Frances at home (or maybe at Courage House), around 1960. Photo by Bruce Burn.

Re. Peter Mabey's comments on Courage House meetings, I can add Ian & Betty Peters and their young son Euan, Don Geldart, Bruce Burn & Pat Kearney. Ethel Lindsay was a Sister at the local eye hospital and on one occasion when her brother came to visit he happened to arrive just as an emergency ambulance was being unloaded. Ethel was in charge of the operation and her brother saw a side of her that he did not recognize as she ordered other staff about. Friends, relatives and working colleagues often have totally different view of a person. I think on one occasion, instead of meeting at Courage House, we met at Brian and Fran Varley's home. I had recently joined the World Record Club and took along an LP of the *Planets* suite. When Fran heard Mars being played she rushed into the room and said, "Turn up the volume and open the windows. Let the neighbours hear!"

George Locke's piece reminded me that, shortly after reaching London in early 1960, I too searched round for as many Popular Bookshops and their ilk that I could find. Unlike George I was not into collecting but simply wanted to get my hands on interesting reading material that I might not be able to get from any other source.

I deny all responsibility for what happened on the boating lake at Kettering! I may have been present in the same boat as George Locke but I think there was only one culprit that day! On Bruce Burn – a group of us were at the Penitentiary when it was mentioned that Bruce's ship was due to arrive in Southampton that day, and Ron Bennett suggested that we travel down to 'welcome' him off the boat. Somehow we managed to catch a suitable train, got to the dock before the passengers had disembarked, and stood waving placards with suitable slogans like 'Ban the Burn', and generally calling for his presence. Some of his fellow passengers passed on the message and Bruce soon appeared and before long we were back on the train, and what happened after will presumably be in his article.

And now here's another name from the early sixties – Bob was a member of the Cheltenham Circle, attended cons from 1960-63, and wrote for Speculation in the late sixties.

Bob Parkinson
[bobparkinson@
ntlworld.com](mailto:bobparkinson@ntlworld.com)

Dear Peter,

Starting with Jhim Linwood's e-mail coming to me cold out of forty years from a past I had largely forgotten, this whole episode has been a cross between Proust's "petite madelaines" and something out of *The Twilight Zone*. Somewhere, I feel, there has been a time-slip. (Coincidentally, I even discovered a channel on my cable-TV the other day doing *Twilight Zone* re-runs.)

I guess that I lost my main contact with fandom in the early 1970s, although I was attending the Milford Conferences up until my son was born, which puts the last gasp about 1980. Back there in the late 1960s and early 1970s I felt a very junior member of a group populated by established fans who



Bob at Ancient Greek site at Priene in Turkey. (Photo from Bob)

were MUCH older than me – so I find with amazement that the pages of *Prolapse* are populated with the same people that I knew then, and apparently doing very much the same things.

I even went back and examined *Prolapse* to see whether it had not come from some antique Gestetner maintained in that frozen moment of time, the technique having been honed to perfection by decades of practice. Somewhere in the wilds of – where? – Sutton Coldfield is a bit of the past that has decided to secede from now where the Singularity is progressing on schedule (we always knew that computers would take over one day – what we missed was that they didn't have to be more intelligent than us, and that it would not be one big machine in a bunker somewhere dictating to us but an electronic network that was everywhere!) But, be warned, some of this contact with the past seems to have come through the electronic network – clearly the machines have got their tendrils into this fading ghost world.

I particularly enjoyed Keith Freeman's reminiscence on Eric Jones in *Prolapse* #8 – again taking me back to a world that I had forgotten. I discovered the Cheltenham Science Fiction Circle (at a hobbies exhibition in the Town Hall as I remember) immediately before going off to University, so for most of the time I was on the fringes of the Circle (we called ourselves 'The Cheltenham Rim-Runners') – only getting to meetings when I was home on vacation. I remember the basement 'club house' with a 'St Fantony' mural in the main room. At the time it housed the BSFA library, which I spent one summer-vac cataloguing and attempting to read my way through at the same time.

And Eric and Margaret were always hospitable to visitors. It is the small things that come back. Eric, being a hi-fi fan in the days when you built your own, had decided that to get really good response across the range you needed a good solid base for the speakers, and had embedded his within 12-inch concrete drainpipe sections, tastefully decorated, and with a tweeter growing like a flower out of the top. I also have a story which I keep using which illustrates Future Shock and concerns Eric.

Bearing in mind Eric's area of expertise (electronics) and the fact that he was aware of on-going developments, as well as being an SF reader (and hence would not be expected to be conservative), I remember a conversation at the 1960 London Con in the bar in the evening when he was telling me about the future of electronics and what would become integrated circuits. He took an old-fashioned sixpence from his pocket and told me "in the future you will be able to get a whole amplifier on something that size!" I've used this as an example of how the most fantastical prediction can turn out conservative by a factor of – I'm not sure where it is now – a billion? I got a similar sensation about 1990 when I was talking with a group of youngsters in Bristol who were developing massively parallel microcomputers, and revealed that the first computer I had worked with filled a room and had 8kb of memory, and one of them corrected me by saying "you mean eight megabytes, don't you?"

As it happens, memories of SF fandom had been stimulated slightly earlier than Jim's e-mail. Last year I got inveigled into producing a history of the British Interplanetary Society. This year is our 75th anniversary – the book comes out this summer. It had appeared that some parts had already been written, and I originally volunteered to do the 1970's & 1980's which I had been involved in, but wound up doing the whole thing, and having to do some serious research. Anyway, in the course of hunting through the archives I came across a carbon copy of the memoirs of the very first Secretary of the BIS while it was still in Liverpool in the 1930s – one Leslie Joseph Johnson. And there, in the list of the small group that originally met at Phil Cleator's house to found the Society, was the name of Percival Norman Weedall (this is 1933). And I thought "I met him at the Shorrocks about 1960!"

In the pre-war period at least, science fiction and the BIS were closely linked, and another of the major players in the period was Eric Frank Russell. But then, by the time that I had got to page 96 of this manuscript I realized I was reading something else, for there I was reading about the pre-War Science-Fiction League, and the very first (at least, so Johnson claimed) Science Fiction Con ever held, on Sunday, January 7th 1937, in Leeds. Johnson notes "In spite of the fact that only six enthusiasts from outside the Leeds area attended, the Convention resulted in the formation of the pre-War 'Science Fiction Association.'" This pre-history of the BSFA will not be part of the BIS History, and maybe some part of it could be disentangled from Johnson's memoir (which I now have a photocopy of the carbon copy as preservation against total loss).

Well Bob, let me thank you here both for the LoC and for the article, which arrived here just a week afterwards. I guess you felt really motivated! It's a great piece of fan-history and as you said, "a fascinating glimpse into a vanished world". I'll run it as soon as possible in a future issue.

Rob Hansen
rob@fiawol.demon.co.uk

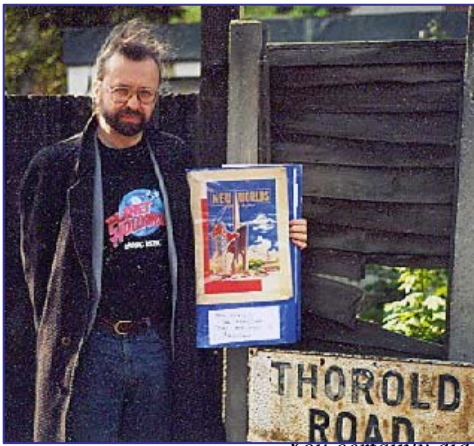


Dear Peter,

The piece I've so far enjoyed most this issue was the one on the BSFA. Great detective and archaeological work by all involved which I suppose shows that it still is possible to dig into matters from decades ago and overturn conventional wisdom. Certainly it has been an accepted truth for my entire time in fandom that a huge flood of enquiries from *SFM* readers brought about the collapse of the BSFA in 1974/5. Now it seems, not so much. I wonder where Graham Poole got that figure of 1200 from? Presumably he misinterpreted something he'd been told or misremembered when writing about it later. This is easily enough done, as you yourself demonstrate later this very issue when you wrote:

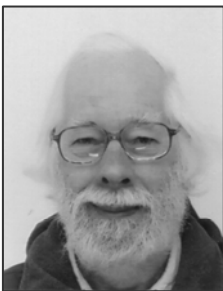
"At *Orbital* Rob Hansen confessed to having taken fannish visitors to view Wally Gillings' former residence in Ilford where British fandom started in 1930."

Not exactly. Yes, the house in 32 Thorold Road was indeed where the first meeting of the first ever UK fan group, the Ilford Science Literary Association, took place on 27th October 1930 and so



You certainly did – not much of the house in view, however. That's the cover of New Worlds #12, Winter 1951 – a nice piece of artwork, if you still have it. I still haven't gone to Cheltenham....

Darroll Pardoe
pardos@globalnet.co.uk



Bus-pass picture, from Darroll!

Hi Peter,

Another good issue. Attached is a recent picture of me, as requested. In fact, the one I had taken for my new-style bus pass.

First, the BSFA. I don't think a 'churn rate' of 35% is unreasonable for a society like the BSFA, where people may join without really knowing what the organisation is like or whether it suits them. A more hard-core hobby society will probably have a lower churn, because most new members will know more exactly what they're in for. I belong, for instance, to the Signalling Record Society (which you must admit will probably attract only the dedicated railway signalling fan) which has had 1850 members since it started in 1969, and which has a current membership of about 650. A much lower 'churn' than the BSFA. I also belong (to take a completely different example) to the Chester branch of the Samaritans. We have just over 100 members and the annual turnover is around 25% – but in this case there are no armchair members, everybody has to play an active part, or leave.

I last saw Graham Poole in 1991, in the street in Chester. He was on a family visit for the day, and we just happened to encounter him. I had the impression at that point that he'd completely lost interest in fandom.

Good reading about 1960s-70s book dealing in London. Nice to see Stan Nicholls writing on the subject. If I may quote from his introduction to Dave Sutton's excellent booklet 'On the fringe for thirty years: a history of horror in the British small press' (2000) – "The uncertain founding of specialist SF shops and mail order outfits was just beginning, a story worthy of a book in itself". Well, Stan hasn't produced a book here, but his nice meaty article is well worth having, and fills in a lot of gaps in my own knowledge. It's the sort of article that should be reprinted somewhere in fantasy/supernatural fiction fandom, whose current members seem to have little idea of where and how their fandom arose.

Bram Stokes was still working at Premier Books well beyond the time when he started his own business. Also, he was still trading from the room in Camden Town well past the end of 1967. Ro remembers visiting and buying from him there in the summer of 1968 (that was the day she had her accident, so she recalls the date very well). Maybe the lock-up garage was just for his overflow stock? He opened the DTWAGE shop in Bedfordbury I think in 1971. I called in one lunch-time (I was working in Theobalds Road in those days) and it was only a few days after he opened for business. He was still exploring the cellar, as I recall, and had a lot of stock around the place in unopened boxes. Given the size of central London rents nowadays, I'm surprised that a stamp shop could afford a location like that in 2008, even less than a SF/Fantasy shop.

Stourbridge market hall had one of those 50% credit on return places. You could often find rather tatty copies of old SF and fantasy books and magazines there at 3d or 6d. I often bought stuff from them, but never returned it for the credit!

I visited Les Flood's Sicilian Avenue shop once. It was 1959, and I used the opportunity of a school visit to the Natural History Museum in South Kensington. As soon as we got off the coach I absconded from the school trip and took the tube to Holborn Kingsway station. I think I was a bit disappointed with the small size of the shop, and even more that it was by that time almost all records and very little SF (just a few shelves in the basement). However I did complete my *Science Fantasy* collection by buying issues 1, 2 and 3 nicely bound together in hard covers. I also bought some other stuff, helped by the fact that it was only a few weeks past my 16th birthday and I'd saved (with this specific purpose in mind) all the money I'd received from aunts, etc. as presents.

By the time I was actually living in London in 1966-67 I think that the shop had gone. I remember going to look for it one day, and it wasn't there.

My memory of Fantasy Centre is a bit different. Jim Linwood said the library books were being 'sold-off at ridiculous prices' but in late 1963 when Ollie Harvey and I made our fruitless trip there were plenty of SF books in that basement, but all were priced in the upper stratosphere! Maybe we might have done better if Les Flood had been present instead of a couldn't-care-less kid. ('Stars...' Page 39)



Promotional logo for 'Dark They Were..', from Stan Nicholls.

John Clute
London



Photo from John's
home-page.

Dear Peter,

The *Prolapses* – thank you for them – make me feel, after almost 40 years in the UK, like a newcomer. Not a bad feeling, really.

The good thing is of course that I've come to know a lot of the participants in the 1950s/1960s world; and to realise, from the complexity and vividness of the memories being laid down here, that it is more than just threads of recollection that link people into their pasts.

Not to be pretentious, but hey: what it reminds me of is Proust, the extraordinary final paragraph of *Remembrance of Things Past/In Search of Lost Time*. I only have the old Stephen Hudson translation here, and it may be better (or what) in one of the new versions. Whatever, the central image is of stilts. That people, as they age, perch upon the living stilts of their pasts: as Marcel says: "I was terrified that my own were already so high beneath me and I did not think I was strong enough to retain for long a past that went back so far..." But we needn't all be afraid of the height, perhaps. Marcel goes on to say that the Time a person occupies is more important than the Space he takes up. That as we age we are "giants immersed in Time".

Or turtles all the way down. It's good to read this stuff.

Thanks John, glad you like it. But weren't you going to send me another John Brunner story?

WE ALSO HEARD FROM: And I really need another four more pages for letters; sorry to those I've had to omit.

Graham Bates writes, "Concerning the site of 'Dark They Were...' in Bedfordbury, the present owner (Rowan Baker) specialises in US stamps and, when I mentioned the previous history of the site to him, he found it hard to believe that not only books but also comics had been sold, bearing in mind the small size of the shop. I finally convinced him by giving him an early DWTAGE price-list!" And in an excellent LoC [more nextish] **Gerald Bishop** clarifies a technical term from last time, "*In vitro revivication* = putting the life back into glassware, by washing it = *glass-washer*. At an event such as a Beer Festival or a convention, if you give a fancy Bog-Latin title to the sad git who stands in a back room doing one of those silly but essential support jobs, they think they're doing something important - and the poseurs out front don't laugh at them". While **Flick** gave bookselling a full frontal: "I swore-off 'Forbidden Planet' a long time ago in favour of Nottingham's 'Page 45': the customer service in FP's Manchester branch was pitiful, and both the staff and the other customers always looked at me in a way that clearly said 'that person has... breasts! And not in a comic! That does not belong here!'"

Chris Garcia was incredulous; "I refuse to believe there were ever pay libraries. It just doesn't add up. As the son of a librarian, I can say that it doesn't make any sense." **Steve Green** fretted, "I really can't understand D. West's admission in *Prolapse #11* of "mixed emotions" over the *MiScons'* alleged elitism. Heck, it's not as though we covered-up the event's existence, forcing everyone to master a secret handshake before they could enter the Royal Clarence Hotel. As for "enforced jollity and compulsory participation", D. seems determined not to allow facts to get in the way of a good sneer. Hush-hush invitations, attendees herded into arcane rituals and sworn to secrecy; is he perhaps confusing fandom with the Freemasons?" And a confession from **Susie Haynes** (née **Slater**), "There I am, an outsider on the edge of fandom for about 45 years and I have never written a LoC.... Aaagh! – this is my first ... what does one say?" [All will be revealed next time]. **Jerry Kaufman** writes, "Nice to see a few younger faces in the lettercol – of course, some of the faces are of current Elders when they were young. Steve Stiles, in that fancy waistcoat (I would have called it a vest, myself) is frighteningly fresh-faced."

Ian Maule advised, "I noticed the reference to Fred Hemmings' 'disappearance'. This was probably in 1976 or perhaps 1977 when he moved within the civil service to the Science Research Council. The change meant selling his house and moving to Swindon. I don't think anyone heard from him after that. In a way, Fred seems very similar to Archie Mercer, at least in the living and catering aspects. Fred's house had beautifully built bookcases to house his extensive SF collection but the furniture was minimal and, on my one visit, there seemed to be a grave lack of food about the place." From Texas, **Mike Moorcock** reminisced affectionately about Arthur Sellings; "He was a good friend of mine who was going to lend me thirty quid the day he died. I have to assume that the strain must have brought on his heart attack. He was a huge admirer of H.L. Gold, and I think he sold many of his stories to *Galaxy*." **Stan Nicholls** sent me various promotional logos from both DTWAGE and *Forbidden Planet*, just too late for the last issue. "I have vast quantities of this stuff, stashed around the house in various places," he said, "not all easily accessible!" There's one on P.43, Stan and I'll fit-in others as I can.

Joe Patrizio enjoyed the lastish and wrote, "When I was BSFA secretary, the numbers applying for membership were pretty low; if I got 3 or 4 in a week, I'd had a busy time." **Simone Restall** sent a wonderful letter which I just couldn't fit in; [next time, promise]. **Greg Pickersgill** marvelled, "Damned fascinating letter-column certainly. Extraordinary collection of people. It all seems like a series of super little short articles of real substance. Do you edit much, or are your correspondents more coherent than the average LoC-er?" [Ah, that would be telling, Greg!] And **David Redd** applauded, "Just when I thought *Prolapse* couldn't get any better, you have not one, not two, but *three* pieces about trawling bookshops! Now *this* is what I call fan-writing. *P-11*... is heaven!" **Other comments** came in from David Bratman, Dave Britton, Dave Hardy, John Harvey, Terry Jeeves, Pat Kearney, Lloyd Penney, Lisa Tuttle, & Keith Walker. Thanks, all!

WHY ARE YOU RECEIVING A PAPER COPY? (Only 100 printed)

- ___ Master of the Universe, Lord of the Sevagram, please accept my humble offering.
- ___ In return for your help with this and/or previous issues; many thanks.
- ___ Your name is taken somewhere inside, if you can find it. And did we get things right?
- ___ This is a sample issue, you need to respond if you want another.
- ___ My finger is on the ejector button – you must Do Something RSN to avoid oblivion. (But see below)

Totally lacking inspiration? Don't despair, I'll gladly mail the pdf version on request (with colour pictures), my preferred option for overseas readers. And as always this issue goes onto the *eFanzines* web-site some four weeks after publication. Response is the name of the game; the *Prolapse* Project can only work through *your* memories of fannish times past.