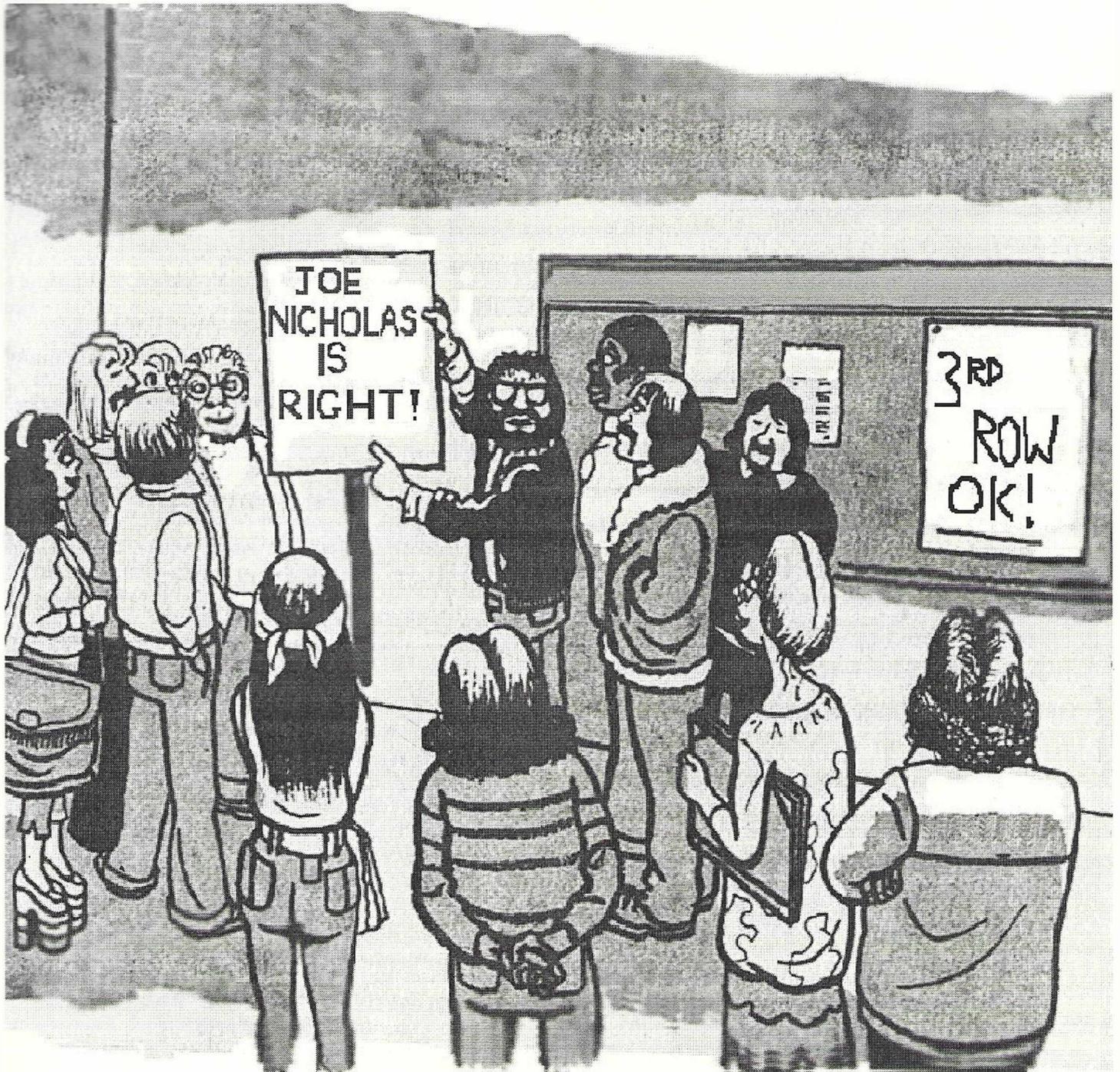


"I sometimes wonder what happened to people who used to be in fandom" – Chris Priest, LoC



"Right, we'll show them which 'cohort' is 'dominant' now!"

(Joseph Nicholas suggested "The growth and ramification of fandom....from the perspective of one who sees the fall from dominance of their fannish cohort... might look like fragmentation")

See Editorial - *with apologies to 'Giles'*



PROLAPSE

This is *Prolapse 6*, completed in April 2007 immediately after *Contemplation* (because I was always told only neos hand-out their fanzines at a convention) by Peter Weston at 53 Wyvern Road, Sutton Coldfield, B74 2PS. UK. That address has seen more use lately with interesting packages arriving from all over, but it's still a lot quicker to use the hot-line for those LoCs: pr.weston@btinternet.com. Once again we're 'Paper First'; this issue will go onto *eFanzines* a month after printed copies have been posted out. *Prolapse* is a Time-Travelling Fanzine, covering the many & varied aspects of British SF fan-history.

"If you keep this up for long enough you'll be able to become nostalgic about something I can remember." – Mark Plummer, LoC

Last time round Joseph Nicholas took me to task, saying I was looking at things from the perspective of one who 'sees the fall from dominance of their fannish cohort', whatever that means. 'There is no one history of fandom', he declared firmly. Leaving aside the sociological buzz-words, I actually do understand his point. It was made (much more politely) in a long letter from our friend Kari, wearing her professional historian hat. She says -

'I feel obliged to observe that the two of you seem to be using that slippery H word in different senses – and that Joseph is closer to the one that I would tend to adopt in my professional life. Peter, I suspect, is talking about what used to be called traditional – and is now usually called narrative – history: that is, the recitation of facts or of events accepted as basically factual. To take a very simple example: the year 1066 saw the death of Edward the Confessor, the assumption of the crown by Harold Godwinsson, an invasion to claim it by Harold's brother Swegen and his ally Harald Hardrada, king of Norway, which Harold foiled at the battle of Stamford Bridge; followed by another invasion, by William of Normandy, leading to another battle, Hastings, which Harold lost, leaving William as the new king. This happened, then that happened, and these were the people involved. The problem is – and this, I think is what Joseph is arguing – is that there is another dimension to all this. The above *is* certainly history, and it is this kind of skeleton of events and people that gives us the basics. However, it is not the absolute story (and, IMHO, there can be no absolute story, because the historian will never have all the information – the most she can have is all the available information). I outlined what happened in 1066 above, but I didn't say why, or how. ...

'We have a reasonable amount of good primary source evidence for the events of 1066, and these agree on the events, more or less, but they do not agree at all on the why and the how – or even, sometimes, on the who. The Normans have one set of interpretations, the Anglo-Saxons another, the Norwegians a third and so on. And they are all equally valid as evidence. They tell us a huge amount about what people believed, how they justified their actions, how they behaved, how they saw one another, and what they wanted posterity to know.

'As Joseph said, there can be many histories, depending upon what evidence is used. The historian is left looking at all these different witness statements and trying to find a line – or a series of lines – through them from which to construct an improved understanding of what happened and how and why. To date, I have never yet seen anyone deny that the Battle of Hastings occurred, but – all using the same evidence – there remain a variety of different accounts of how and why it happened. I suspect the same is true in fandom.'

I'm thrashing around with this issue because it bears directly upon the differing receptions given to Rob Hansen's THEN – his 'history-in-progress of British science fiction fandom'. I'd better state my own position up-front; I'm an unashamed enthusiast, I think it's a terrific piece of work. I remember what it was like in the mid-sixties when we existed in a state of total ignorance about what had gone before; it took nearly two years of hard fanning before I even *heard* about something as fundamental as THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR (arguably a source-document for anyone wanting to appreciate fanzine fandom). The important British fanzines had crashed and burned, the older fans had gaffiated or retreated (it seemed) to the protective laager of St Fantony, and there was simply nowhere to turn for help. (In The Book I describe what a sad joke the BSFA's Fanzine Foundation had become by this time). When Rog Peyton and I bid for the 1971 Eastercon we didn't even know how many cons had been held before, because no-one had kept track! (I asked Ken Bulmer, who came up with his famous list entirely from memory). We were the fannish generation without a past. It wasn't until the early seventies when Peter Roberts started poking around in dark corners, that some of the back-story started to emerge.

So in that context I think we're incredibly lucky that circumstances came together to give us THEN. Think about it for a minute – it just so happened that in 1986-7, Rob Hansen, still a relatively new fan (his debut is described in this issue) became sufficiently interested in fan-history that, with the help of Vince Clarke, he was able to put together a half-size booklet, 'The Story So Far' as a fan-room publication for the *Conspiracy* worldcon. Fortunately for everyone Rob had become friendly with Vince, a *really* old-time fan who had returned from a 25-year spell of gafia only a short time before, and they lived sufficiently close enough to be able to spend time going through Vince's memories and his fanzine collection which (fortunately again) he hadn't junked when he quit fandom back in 1961. The booklet was well received, but Rob felt it was inadequate and he began a programme of further research which led – in only six months – to publication of the first 42-page instalment of THEN. The second section followed after another six months, and two more over the next four years, a total of 280 pages carrying the story through to the end of the 1970s. Rob has since put the whole thing onto a web-site, with revisions, and emphasises again that it is still (and probably always will be) 'a work in progress'.

It takes a fair bit of dedication to keep beaver-ing away at a project like that for five years in your spare time. Even the small amount of research I've carried out for *Prolapse* has been immensely time-consuming, and I can't imagine the feat of organisation it took to assemble a coherent narrative from so many and varied sources. Only the rare combination of youthful energy with age and experience made THEN possible; Vince never would have done it by himself, Rob never *could*

have done it without Vince. And as a result we have a chronology (I'm avoiding that troublesome word 'history') which takes us from the very beginning of SF fandom in this country through more than 50 years of events and occasions. It's not perfect. I do agree that the presentation can be improved, but I don't think it misses much and I'm not aware of important errors. I find it extremely useful, and look into it almost every time I want to write something about British fan-history.

Yes, Kari's (and Joseph's) point is a good one, but we need that framework before we can do anything else. If we can get that right, get our narrative, or chronology as accurate as we can make it, using the most generally accepted and understood rationale and then we might be able to go forward and look at different interpretations of events in British fan-history. Faced with a total void it was necessary to establish the basic facts, so far as possible, and that, I think, is what Rob Hansen has done with THEN. Other would-be fan-historians can now speculate about cause-&-effect, or propose alternative explanations, as I'm hoping to do in a small way with *Prolapse* – for instance, by considering other viewpoints on the formation of the BSFA, as we've done in the last two issues.

So what sort of reaction has THEN received from fandom? At *Corflu* this February I was helping to conduct the auction, and while waiting my turn at bat I started leafing through a thick yellow publication I hadn't seen before. It was *Deliverance*, a collection of fan-writing by D. West, published in 1995. (I have to make a confession – I was totally 'off' fanzine fandom for nearly twenty years, and so missed quite a lot). There's some very interesting stuff in there (D. has subsequently sent me a copy), but my attention was caught by his piece 'Then and Now', reprinted from Steve Green & Martin Tudor's *Critical Wave* (1989).

Don West considers the first two instalments, and says, "does the Hansen effort provide (or even seem likely to provide at some future completion date) a full, true and meaningful account of British fandom? The blunt answer is; no, it does not. It may as well be firmly stated at the outset that what Rob Hansen's work provides is not a history but a lopsided, disorganised, biased and incomplete ragbag collection of rather less than half the materials on which a genuine history might be based. The intention may be honest, but the execution is so deeply flawed that the end-product gives a picture of the past which at best is extremely suspect and at worst amounts to falsification."

And so on, for 6½ A4 pages of criticism and vituperation; some good points and a great deal of wind. As the late Tom Perry once said of another assault by Don, "The vehemence of the attack interests me more than anything he has to say." And, you know, it reminds me of a little story.

Many years ago I used to work in marketing for a division of the Gateshead-based engineering group Clarke Chapman. The various divisions were supervised by a Group Marketing Manager who used to zip around the country in the company jet, giving presentations and promising to carry out various grand schemes, one of which was to be a complete market analysis of business opportunities available for each division. After a year or two of this, one of the divisions decided they urgently needed to know the potential size of the market for their dockyard cranes, or something like that, so they did the work themselves and got the results they wanted. The top man should have been delighted – after all, the task had been carried out successfully – but he wasn't pleased at all. They had stolen his thunder. "You haven't done it properly," he complained petulantly, "If I'd done it, it would have been a much better job."

But, of course, he *hadn't* done it. He never *would* have done it. The silly man would have been much wiser to have complimented his people on their initiative, and if he really had any useful suggestions for improvement, to have pointed them out tactfully and made sure they were incorporated in the finished document. As indeed, Don could have done with Rob Hansen's THEN. The important thing is that a necessary job has *actually been done*, a framework has been erected, and now we should collectively be helping to improve it and fill in the gaps. To quote Kari again:-

'I haven't read Rob Hansen's book, but knowing Rob a little, I suspect he wrote it using as much evidence as he could assemble, both written and oral, and with the greatest care and attention to both his sources and his interpretation.'

Well, I haven't been entirely fair to Don West here, although he has more space to state his criticisms in the Melting Pot (Page 32). He's clearly in a position to be of immense assistance with the project, and I really do hope he will help Rob to improve and fine-tune this chronology. Meanwhile, as I said in #4, we're going to continue trawling around in the backwaters of British fan-history, trying to put a bit of flesh on those old bones. As Don himself correctly notes, "*Prolapse* is not intended to provide any sort of definitive historical picture... and (is) just having fun with a few interesting bits and pieces." But, hopefully, we *will* be trying to present some analysis and interpretation of events (as I tried to do with my *Brumcon* report in #4) along with all those stories about people getting drunk and falling out of windows.

And now for something completely different...

I visited Ted Tubb recently, who was kind enough to give me his set of convention programme books, all in beautiful condition. That meant I suddenly had duplicates in many cases, since for some time I've been collecting these for my ABC ('Archive of British Conventions' – of which more on another occasion). So, I offered them to Mark & Claire, well-known for their interest in ancient artefacts, and the following dialogue resulted:-

Mark: "Those convention publications are really rather interesting. And here's something you might like to ponder. Have a look at any recent Eastercon souvenir book and the list of past Eastercons. The GOH for Buxton '68 is always shown as Ken Bulmer. Now take a look at the Buxton publications and tell me, don't you think Steve Stiles should be listed as a GOH too? It seems to me quite clear that as well as being TAFF delegate he was formally designated as a Fan GOH as well, yet this detail seems to have failed to make it onto any of the early lists to which I have access, and hasn't been picked up by either the Hansen revisions of 1989 or the McMurray revisions of 1999.

"Looking at the few early '80s souvenir books we have, none show any fan guests at all prior to Ethel Lindsay at Worcester, and while subsequent iterations have added a few (e.g. Ken Slater at *Brumcon*) Steve has remained distinctly off-list as far as I can see. Actually, here's something I don't know: you introduced a list in '71 which gave year, venue, and convention name but *not* guests, but by the 1980s guests were included on the listing. So when and by whom were the guests added to that listing?"

PW: "I checked on the GoH listings, which appear to have originated in 1977 for the Coventry Eastercon, run by the Bram group. Pauline Morgan did a brief article titled '40 years on' and expanded the previous list to include GoHs – everyone since seems to have simply copied her. However, your findings will doubtless prompt a revision. That will make Steve Stiles the first separate Fan GoH at a British con, I think; that's in addition to a regular GoH (which Ken Slater was in 1959, so that doesn't count). Pity, because I thought I'd created the concept in 1971 with Ethel Lindsay."

Mark: "And indeed, it makes you wonder whether there were any other pre-71 examples. The thing is that, as far as I can see, through to about 1989 every successive Eastercon simply added the new convention on the bottom of the list started by you and expanded by Pauline. In 1989 Rob Hansen 'discovered' Kettering '57 and declassified *Festiventation* and so everybody carried on from *his* revised list. And then in 1999 Pat McMurray added further revisions, mainly to guests – including Ken as guest in '59 – but still didn't pick up on Steve despite the fact that it's actually quite clear that he was a Fan GOH from even a cursory glance at the publications. I don't know if you remember but *Convoy* had said that they intended the TAFF delegate to be fan GOH at this year's Eastercon and I thought at the time that it was unusual, and indeed uncharacteristically fannish for this day and age. I can only think of one other convention which made the TAFF delegate their fan GOH and that was the *Albacon* attended by Avedon (meaning that until 1997 she was the only person to have been fan GOH at two Eastercons, a list that now includes Dave Langford and indeed you).

PW: I've been doing a little more digging into convention books. You're right, except for the 1984 *Seacon*, which omitted all Fan GoHs from the list. This can't have been accidental – I presume somebody decided they weren't 'important' enough to be noted. The names were restored again in 1985, then it appears that Rob gave the whole thing a once-over in 1989 and added obscure names like Lyell Crane as Fan GoH for 1951, as well as Don Ford – the TAFF-man – in 1960. And in case you're wondering, they didn't make a lot of fuss over us in those days – here's my 'special' badge from the 1974 *Tynecon*! (Remind me; why was Avedon FGoH twice?)



No expense spared! – someone on the committee wrote-in 'Fan Guest of Honour'. The 'Ratfan Hero' note was added by Leroy Kettle, presumably because I helped with their bid for 1975.

Mark: Avedon was fan GOH at the '83 Eastercon – on her TAFF trip – and again in 1989, at the first Jersey Eastercon, where she shared fan guest honours with Rob Hansen. The listing in the 2006 souvenir book shows no guest for the 1949 London convention. In fact, it quite specifically says 'none' and not 'unknown' as stated for Kettering III and IV. However, in *Science Fantasy News* #4 (also 1949) there's an article by Vince which says that Bill Temple was GoH that year, and this is backed up by Rob's THEN: 'Over Easter 1949, the warmest Easter anyone could remember, some 70 SF fans assembled in the upper room of The Lord Raglan on St. Martins le Grand for the *Loncon*, the first convention of the new SFS. GoH was Bill Temple, and as usual the proceedings were fairly serious.' It's kind of amazing what we've forgotten – or rather, not forgotten, but simply failed to record in the correct place...

Let's have another go at the BSFA...

While reading-up on the 1975 *Seacon* I was reminded all over again how close the BSFA came to being disbanded that year. At *Tynecon* it had been reported that at least 1200 people had enquired about membership, following mention in the new *Science Fiction Monthly*. But they were never answered, and neither was anyone else since the Secretary went completely to ground soon after his election. Malcolm Edwards had already resigned from editorship of *Vector* after two successful years with his last 'double' issue in Spring 1974, and it would be eighteen months before another issue appeared. Then came the news that the long-incommunicado librarian's house had burnt down, along with the complete BSFA magazine library (stored in a sheep byrne, would you believe! I always thought this was an unlikely story but since he lived in the wilds of Scotland no-one was ever able to check, so far as I'm aware. And I bet it wasn't insured, either).

After months of frustration the Company Secretary, Graham Poole, resigned in September 1974. Still nothing was heard from the BSFA until the following March, when Poole announced that 'John Brunner is resigning as Chairman. It is quite likely that the BSFA will be wound-up after the AGM this Easter at *Seacon*. I've recently heard from the Registrar that the Annual Return I completed over six months ago hasn't yet been submitted... (which) contravenes the Companies Act.' It wasn't wound-up, however, because no official AGM was held; instead an unofficial discussion took place under the chairmanship of John Brunner. Peter Nicholls described the scene in his convention report (See Page 11):-

"I was disappointed at the general attitude of the meeting, which was, "Let bygones be bygones, and let's act constructively." I had hoped for a Sunday morning blood-letting, appropriate for the Easter period. I bayed for revenge, but not even Malcolm Edwards would support me. However, the meeting was efficiently conducted by John Brunner, who is superb at this sort of thing. He dealt firmly with the hysteria of George Hay ("I can't say too much yet, but I've been negotiating with the Institute of Contemporary Arts whose only desire is to give the BSFA three galleries, two free secretaries, and exclusive use of the printing facilities...") and Ted Tubb, leonine and insane, who shouted hoarse words to the effect of "Fuck the members and fuck the legalities and let's *do* something." (He never said what).

"The BSFA Council was invited to meet again in John Brunner's room and several quite sensible suggestions were made, but not the most sensible of all, which would be to let the BSFA go into suspended animation until such time as there is evidence that at least five known competents really want and are able to resuscitate it. I heard that John Brunner and Ted Tubb had a fight after I left. It must have been an even match. I'm sorry I missed it."

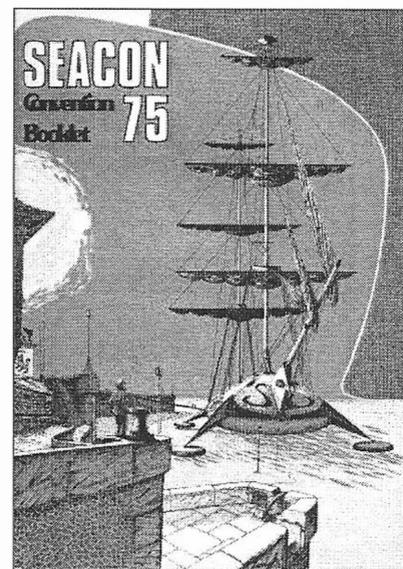
So, at the eleventh hour, a few brave souls agreed to make a final attempt to put the BSFA back on the road. 'Is it worth it?' asked Darroll Pardoe in *Checkpoint*. The feeling of many in fandom had already been summed up by Peter Roberts, when he wrote what seemed like an obituary in *Egg* 9 (Feb '75): 'The BSFA was a tedious organisation which rarely generated any great interest or excitement. It hung around British fandom for sixteen years and its history can best be summed up as a series of trivial disasters. At times individual fans wasted their talents in heroic efforts to bring the thing to life; but it was moribund from birth.' //

(With acknowledgements to THEN for the above information)

Logically enough, the title 'Seacon' was first coined by Seattle for their 1961 worldcon, but more recently it has been used no less than four times by British fandom for various conventions, only two of which were held on the coast, the others about as far away from the sea as you can get in this little island. How the first of our *Seacons* came about is an illuminating tale which I'll tell as a preamble to our feature this issue.....

A convention called 'Seacon' (in a city called Coventry)

Cover by Andrew
Stephenson



I recollect Saturday afternoon at *Tynecon*, sitting on the floor at the back of the hall with Greg and Roy and joining in the collective moaning about the dismal prospect of next year's convention being run by the Manchester people in a students' Hall of Residence. We didn't know of any other bids. The *Mancon* proposal had only been sprung upon us after we arrived in Newcastle and it sounded awful; none of us had much confidence in their chairman, Peter Presford, whose only claim to fame had been several appallingly-written issues of his fanzine, *Malfunction*. From somewhere amidst our simmering discontent an alternative slowly surfaced.

Afterwards, Graham Charnock claimed responsibility in his usual laconic way, "Of course, it was all my fault. I happened to pick up a rival flyer and in a moment of boredom substituted an alternative committee. Greg Pickersgill smacked his forehead dramatically, fell over and said in a slurred voice 'Why didn't I think of that!' Roy Kettle couldn't contain his enthusiasm – he had to be woken up. Chris Priest offered a number of sage and considered comments such as, 'Can I be Guest of Honour?' Malcolm Edwards simply sat there with a wry smile on his face knowing this was his moment of glory so long as he did absolutely nothing." (*Wrinkled Shrew*, 1974)

In reality a group coalesced which included the Ratfans (Pat & Graham Charnock, Greg & Roy, Malcolm & Christine Edwards, John Piggott, John Brosnan and Rob Holdstock) plus Peter Roberts and Andrew Stephenson, and with 'moral support' from me. I couldn't do more – they didn't WANT me to do more – because that weekend with Malcolm and Peter I was announcing a bid for a British worldcon in Brighton in 1979. In fact, it had immediately crossed their minds that running an Eastercon would be jolly good experience for the much bigger job a few years down the line. And even though they had no hotel in prospect the name 'Seacon '75' emerged fully-formed when someone – I suspect Andrew – enthused about how wonderful it would be to hold a convention at the seaside. After all, there were bound to be lots of suitable hotels on the South coast in places like Bournemouth, weren't there?

It turned out that the prospect of *Mancon* was even less welcome than we had imagined, so much so that they withdrew their bid for 1975, leaving us to face a surprise Bristol bid from Keith Freeman (I never found out where that one came from, but if it had been publicised earlier we would probably have backed it all the way). *Seacon '75* won by a good majority but Manchester declared its intention of bidding again the following year, when no-one had the heart to block them a second time, and the eventual result was that the 1976 *Mancon* was every bit as ghastly as had been feared.



The Committee: John Brosnan, John Piggott, Pat Charnock, Peter Roberts, Graham Charnock, Rob Holdstock, Malcolm Edwards, Roy Kettle, Christine Edwards. Photo from *Seacon '75 Programme Book*. (Greg Pickersgill & Andrew Stephenson resigned at an early stage).

Meanwhile, within a month the *Seacon '75* committee had discovered that no, there weren't any suitable hotels at the seaside and ended up at the De Vere in Coventry, a good 100 miles inland. They justified the name as the 'South-East Area' convention, and it became the biggest Eastercon ever to that date, with 550 registered members.

Two years later Peter, Malcolm and I realised that was the only *possible* name for our worldcon (at the Brighton Metropole, by the seaside) which perforce had to be called *Seacon '79*.

Five years after that, the bid committee for the 1982 Eastercon decided to use that very same seaside hotel and cleverly thought of the name '*Channelcon*', which had never crossed our minds.

Two years after that the Eastercon returned to Brighton and finally got it right as just '*Seacon*', pure and simple. Until, that is, twenty years later when fandom in its infinite wisdom started the muddle all over again with *Seacon '03* at Hinckley – near Coventry. Don't ask me why!

Today, Rob Hansen is one of the leading authorities on British fan-history; his THEN is the 'Bible' in which I check my dates, my facts, and still occasionally stumble upon fascinating little details I've previously missed. These days Rob usually slips into London pub meetings late in the evening, sits in a remote corner and keeps a world-weary eye upon the antics of the youngsters, though he's pubbed his ish with the best of them. But like my hypothetical newcomer last time Rob went by himself to his first convention (though he was fortunate enough to pick a good one compared with, say, Mancon only a year later). This charming piece shows the young Hansen putting a first toe into the deeper waters of fandom. (*Cartoons by Dicky Howett from Seacon 75 Programme Book*)

Ah, Sweet Innocence!

By Rob Hansen



Rob in 1975
(his picture)

GOSHWOWBOYBOY!!

It was 28 March 1975, Good Friday; the Vietnam War was rushing to an end, Harold Wilson was Prime Minister, and Margaret Thatcher had just been elected leader of the opposition Conservative party. No-one expected her to amount to anything. It was an era of long hair and flared trousers, of glam rock and Kung Fu films. It was a time so long ago that most people thought Meryl Streep was a throat infection, and so far, far away that Britain's hottest pop group was the Bay City Rollers.

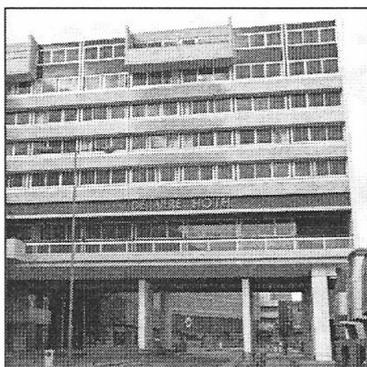
The Bay City Rollers, who as their name suggests were a Scottish band, were at the top of the pop music chart having ousted Telly Savalas. No, seriously. Their number one hit single, 'Bye Bye Baby', was the latest in a series of vacuously bouncy songs that had spawned a fanatical following of screaming, tartan-clad girls and led to ludicrous comparisons with The Beatles. The lyrics of 'Bye Bye Baby' were unforgettable, sticking in the memory with the tenacity of superglue:

Bye bye baby, baby bye bye,
Bye bye baby bye bye,
Bye bye baby, don't make me cry,
Bye baby, baby bye bye. (repeat ad nauseum)

How anyone of my generation can have the nerve to sneer at today's pop music I'll never know. Thank God punk was waiting in the wings!

Still, the unimaginable horrors of the Vietnam War and the Bay City Rollers were far from my mind on that Good Friday as I packed for a weekend at *Seacon 75*, the annual Eastercon, Britain's national science fiction convention and my first ever. I was a beardless youth of 20, clean-limbed and eagle-eyed (it would be another year before I started wearing glasses), a virgin and, so far as I knew, the only SF fan in Cardiff, Wales.

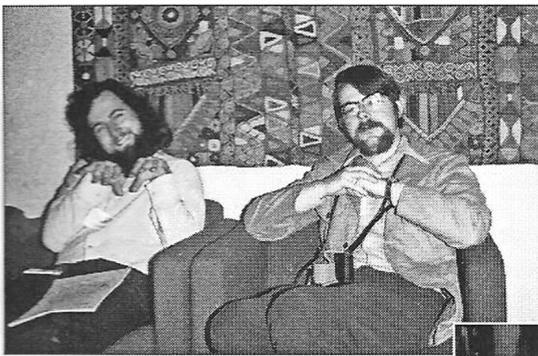
I set off for Coventry armed with a change of clothes, youthful enthusiasm, and great hopes. In my wallet was a packet of condoms (3), because you never knew. *I* certainly didn't, anyway. I should've taken a box of Kleenex instead. The condoms stayed in my wallet until they eventually expired. I gave them a decent Christian burial. Naturally, I was careful to take along a number of my SF short stories with me, just in case I got to meet any magazine editors at *Seacon*. One of them was a deeply original tale about the last two survivors of a spaceship that crashes on a paradise planet, and not 'til the end of the story do you learn that their names are Adam and Eve. What discerning editor could've resisted such ground-breaking stuff? Wealth and fame as an SF author lay just around the corner. It still does.



The De Vere – built over a bus station! Photo: Sam Long

The De Vere hotel was a shocking place. Literally. A modernish hotel with well-appointed rooms, the De Vere had the worst static electricity problem I've ever encountered. Walking just a few feet along its carpeted corridors built up enough charge to cause an audible '*crack*' as you discharged it on the next metal surface or person you touched. The brass handrails on the stairs were a particular favourite. 'Bye, Bye, Baby' may have been at number one, but heard far more often in the De Vere that weekend was the catchy: '*Crack*'. "Arrgh, shit!"

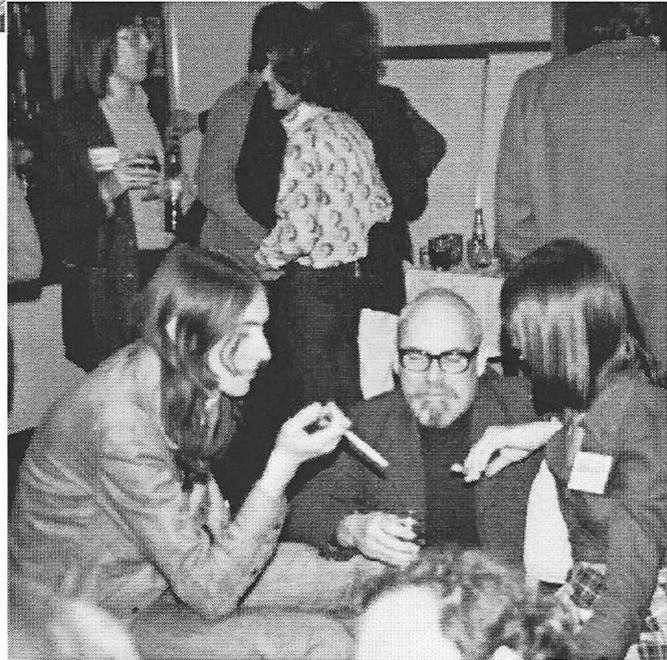
As a first-timer who knew no-one else at the con I had taken the committee's advice and allowed them to set me up sharing a room with another first-timer so there would be at least one person there I could talk with. He was Welsh, wore glasses, and had thinning hair and an acne-scarred face. He was also elderly – he had to be all of 30 – and smoked smelly French cigarettes. Try as I might I can't recall his name, but he was pleasant enough and we got on all right. I only ever saw him again at one other con after this. I wonder what happened to him?



Right, Peter Roberts at the bar, with (in the foreground) Mike Glicksohn, Rob Jackson, Harry & Irene Bell. Photo: Sam Long



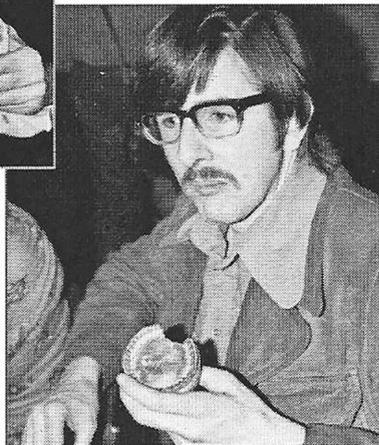
Above: Bernie Peck & Mike Meara, (Photo from Mike). Below: Val & Terry Jeeves, (Photo by Sam Long)



Below: 1/2R shows off his embroidery! Photo: Sam Long



Above: Chris Priest talks to Harry Harrison; in background, Malcolm Edwards & Chris Fowler. Photo: Sam Long.



Above: Brian Burgess says, 'Pork pies, anyone?' Right, I decide this might not have been such a good idea! Photos: Sam Long Far right: Peggy White, Dave Kyle, Jim White & John Steward on Coventry Station Photo: Lars-Olov Strandberg



Greg ① McKerrill ③ & ④ Mike & Pat Meara ④ Jan Maule ⑥ Holger Müller ⑦ Bernie Peck ⑧ Dave Rowe ⑨ The Pardoes ⑩ Terry Jeeves ⑪ Rob Jackson ⑫ Mike Glicksohn ⑬ Sheryl Birkhead ⑭ Janice ⑮ Peter Roberts, Chmn ⑯ John Laqott

Dumping my luggage in the room, I dashed downstairs ('Crack! "Arrgh, shit!"), picked up my registration pack, and settled myself into a chair to read it all straight through. As I read I peered over the top of my programme book at the hustle and bustle of the convention, and at the large number of people who greeted each other enthusiastically, laughed and joked together, and who were clearly well-acquainted. I envied them their obvious sense of community without in any way feeling deliberately excluded from it. This would not be true of a later generation.

In 1973 many wondered where all the Hippies had gone, a question answered for me the instant I entered the convention hall and saw the audience. This was where I would spend most of the weekend, religiously attending all the programme items and hanging on every word uttered from the stage even, God help me, those of Gerry Webb on 'The Feasibility of Interstellar Communication' when what I really needed was information on the feasibility of interpersonal communication with others at *Seacon*. Pausing only for snacks and toilet breaks, I sat through hours of films, panels, and the puzzling ritual whereby various celebrities were announced from the stage by Peter Nicholls, even though most were in the bar. None of this was made any more intelligible by the underpowered microphones, which were to cause problems all weekend. Eventually, I made my own way to the bar and soaked up the atmosphere myself for a few hours, having a drink with my roommate before crashing out.

As an impoverished trainee draughtsman my finances were tight so I was up bright and early on Saturday to make sure I didn't miss the breakfast included in the cost of the room. Then it was straight into the con hall and a showing of Stephen Spielberg's 'Duel', a very impressive debut feature from the director of the year's most successful film, 'Jaws'. This was followed by a Tom Shippey talk and then by lunch which I ate at the Wimpey near the hotel, as I would all my non-breakfast meals. This was in the days before the Wimpey chain decided to become an imitation of McDonald's, and they still served their wonderfully odd selection of meals, most of which included something called a 'bender' (which, in anticipation of the puzzlement this will cause younger and foreign fans, I won't explain). These are now as one with Tyre and Ninevah, but I can't be the only fan of my generation who remembers them with a sneaking affection.

Back at the De Vere, I found myself sharing a lift with the godlike figure of the convention chairman. I couldn't restrain myself.

"Great convention!" I enthused, drawing on my vast experience in such matters.

"Mmmm," he agreed, looking at me warily.

"I'm really enjoying myself!" I added, desperate to impress and grinning inanely.

"Mmmm," he said, beginning to look alarmed. I was about to add to my incisive critical analysis of *Seacon* but the doors opened and, with a quick nod, he fled.

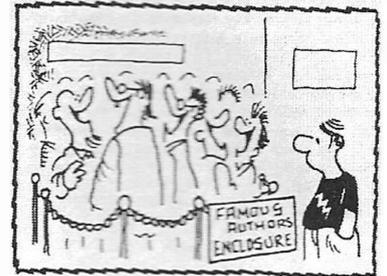
This was how I met Malcolm Edwards.

After Harry Harrison had barked and growled his way through his Guest of Honour speech (I'd originally signed up for *Seacon* because Michael Moorcock was GoH, MM then being my favourite author, but he dropped out), I made my way to the bookroom where he and Christopher Priest were signing copies of their books, and bought one by each to be suitably inscribed. This was exciting stuff to me then. Real science fiction writers had signed copies of their books for me! Goshwowboyoboy!!

Not being by nature a particularly shy person, I frequently fell into conversation with other people during the course of the convention, including another first-timer I got chatting to in the book room that afternoon when both of us were browsing. This meeting would be the most significant part of *Seacon* for me, and an electrifying experience. When we introduced ourselves and shook hands for the first time it was as if a current passed between us. In fact, one did. 'Crack! "Arrgh, shit!" we cried in unison.

His name was Paul Kincaid, and he was a postgraduate majoring in Sexual Frustration at nearby Warwick University. Everyone else had gone home for the holiday but Paul had decided to stay on at his campus flat over Easter and commute to the con. (Anything was better than staying there listening to the radio playing 'Bye, Bye, Baby' over and over.) Paul had glasses, a slight speech impediment ("the late show" came out as "fellate show"), straight black hair, and a sharp, spiky beard that gave him the appearance of someone engaged in oral sex with a hedgehog. We hit it off immediately, and went to most of the day's remaining programme items together.

The final event of the day, at 10.15pm, was the Fancy Dress Parade. Back then this wasn't the slick masquerade dominated by dedicated costumers it's since become but more of an excuse for a bit of fun. Some entrants portrayed characters from novels (such as the blue-skinned guy who, despite obvious efforts to wash the stuff off, remained blue for the rest of the con – that'll teach him to use emulsion), but more numerous and enjoyable were the jokers. Those I remember Pat Charnock (the master of ceremonies, in hot pants) introducing were the guy who had painted his face red and his nose yellow ("A boil" she said), and the person in a loose rubber suit that covered him completely; Pat said ("Introducing the De Vere's proposed solution to the static problem.")



'A sharp, spiky beard' – Paul Kincaid, photo from Rob.



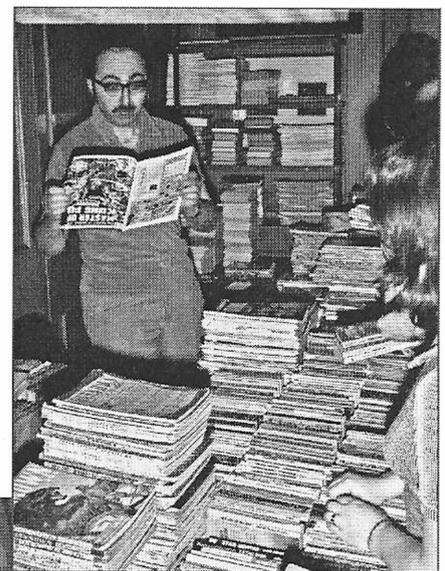
Solution to the static problem - Who was he?
Photo: Sam Long



Peter Egg Roberts



Left; Peter Roberts (resplendent in green tweed) at Banquet with Sheila Holdstock. Above: Eric & Beryl Bentcliffe. Photos; Sam Long.



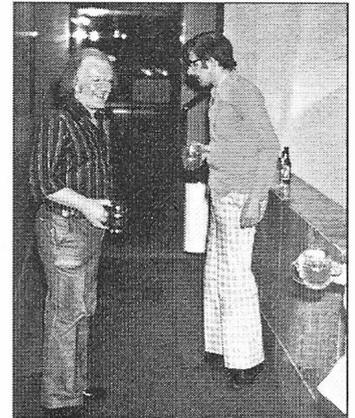
Right; Ron Bennett's tables, photo; Mike Meara



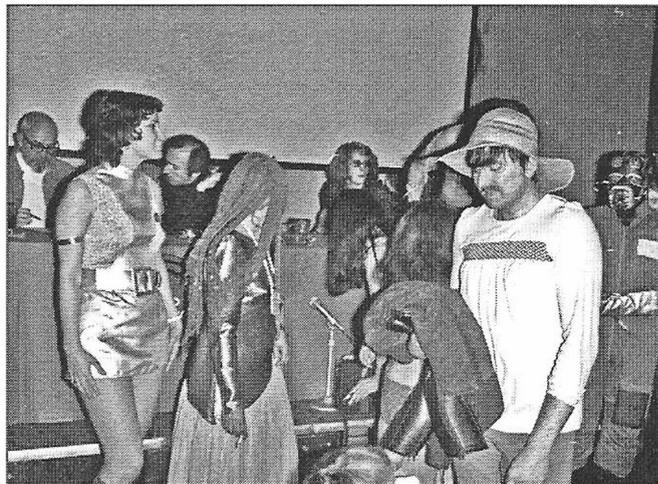
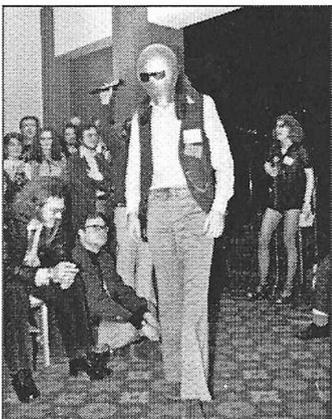
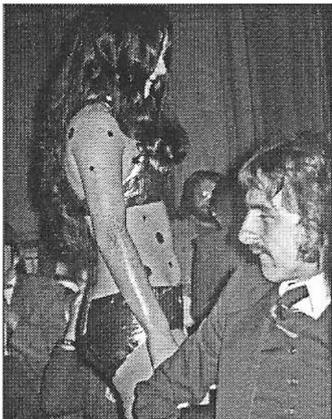
Above: Ethel Lindsay (Sam Long). Below: Hazel Reynolds & Dave Holmes (Lars-Olov Strandberg). Bottom: 'Who'? - mystery man in Fancy Dress, Pat Charnock in hot pants is the compere. (Sam Long)



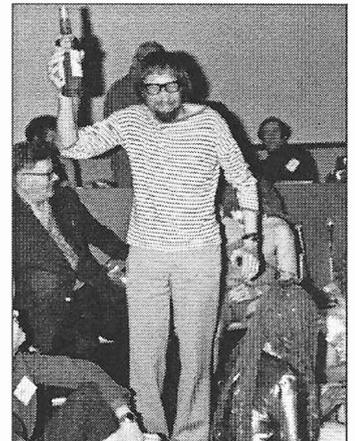
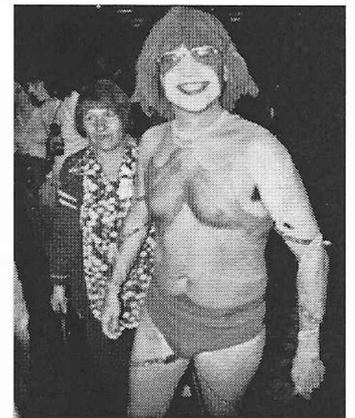
Above: Coral Jackson makes a triumphant entry in bubble wrap. Behind is Helen McCarthy in silver bikini. Tony Edwards & Roy Kettle in audience. Photo: Sam Long



Above: Rog & PW at the Stair Party (Photo; PW). Below, Vera Johnson, & Jan Howard Finner as 'The Boil', maybe; Bottom, Ramblin' Jake wins a prize, (Photos: Sam Long)



Above; Waiting the judging; Mystery Woman in silver, moustached man in green wig & dress, Fred Hemmings in straw hat, and man in rubber suit. Judges were Harry Harrison, Judy Blish (not shown), Mervyn Barrett, & Pat Charnock. Photo; Mike Meara.





Also (and this one seems so unlikely that it may well be an example of False Memory Syndrome on my part), con chairman Malcolm Edwards, who appeared wearing short trousers and pulling a fake toilet along on a piece of string ("A Boy and his Bog!" – M.C.). Hilarious stuff! What a shame people take fancy dress so seriously these days.

I was up early again the next morning in order not to miss breakfast, which I ate alone. There wasn't too much going on when I'd finished and wandered into the convention areas so, Paul having been detained at his university lodgings by an urgent appointment with a box of Kleenex, I decided to take in the film. Now, over the years I've suspended disbelief enough to be able to enjoy movies featuring giant ants, giant spiders, giant apes, and the like, but there was no way I was going to feel at all spooked by the monsters this film, 'Night of the Lepus', had to offer. I'm sorry, but giant bunny rabbits just aren't menacing!

In the wake of this angora atrocity, and while waiting for Paul to show up, my wanderings took me upstairs ('Crack'. "Arrgh, shit!") to the fandom room where a variety of fanzines were on sale. I sniffed dismissively at tatty mimeographed items with names like *Wrinkled Shrew*, *Egg*, and *Checkpoint* and decided to invest 25p in an obviously superior lithographed production put out by the University Science Fiction Group and featuring fiction by people with names like Langford and Smith. And this is why the first fanzine I ever owned a copy of was *Sfinx*. Ah, missed opportunities!

Later that morning, Paul and I voted for next year's Eastercon to be held in Manchester. We made our decision after much agonising and careful weighing up of alternatives and ultimately based it on two things: 1) Manchester was Paul's home town, and 2) there was no other bid.

The best item of the afternoon session was 'Time Travellers Among Us', one of Bob Shaw's celebrated Serious Scientific Talks. This was a delight, with Bob delivering his 'thesis' in an expressionless deadpan that could have put many a professional comedian to shame, its internal logic rendering the jokes even more hilarious. The audience loved it, most getting into the spirit of the thing in the Q and A session afterwards where Bob demonstrated just how fast he could think on his feet.

"Mr Shaw," asked one questioner, "does drinking aid time travel?"
 "Yes," he replied, "if you drink a bottle of Scotch, the next thing you know it's the following morning."



Deadpan delivery from Dr Bob! Photo: Sam Long



'I'm telling you fans, get into computers now, they're going to be really big in the future!'
 Photo: Bill Buras

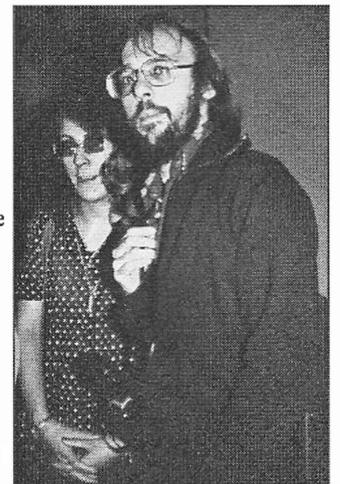
That evening, not being able to afford the banquet, Paul and I ate at Wimpey's before returning to the hotel and settling into the deep, comfortable armchairs in the first floor bar. We took this opportunity to read stories the other had written, and as I read his I couldn't resist glancing over frequently in an effort to see if he was enjoying my tales. "So what did you think?" I asked when he finished reading. "This is great stuff!" he lied. I think he'd just read the Adam and Eve story.

When the banquet had finished, we and the other paupers were allowed into the Fairfax Suite for the awards and presentations ceremony. Toastmaster Peter Weston, whose name I recognised from his articles in *Science Fiction Monthly* (which I read from cover-to-cover every month), thanked the committee and the Guest of Honour, Harry Harrison; the committee thanked Peter Weston, Harry Harrison, and each other; then Harrison concluded by barking and growling his thanks to Peter Weston, the individual committee members, other guests, hotel catering staff, his parents, his chair, the table, his drink, his knife and fork....

The final event of the evening was the dance, and oh the women, the women – where the hell were the women?! Men outnumbered women at *Seacon* by five to one (I counted the registrations in the programme book) and those that were there all seemed to be with boyfriend or husbands. As it happens I

enjoy dancing enough that I'm prepared to dance alone if I have to, so I did. Music for the dance was provided by the Burlingtons, a band led by committee member Graham Charnock who surveyed his audience with the cool disdain of one who has edited an issue of *New Worlds* and who knows he'll shortly be appearing on a record album with Michael Moorcock. This would be deleted with indecent swiftness. Seeing that he was taking requests I asked for 'Bye Bye Baby'. Charnock recoiled in horror which, him being so cool, translated as raised eyebrows.

And that was more or less it. The night wore on and I wore out, but I can't say as I found out what it was all about. Still, as I left for home the next morning, the hotel having bid me farewell in its own special way ('Crack'. "Arrgh, shit!"), I was filled with the wondrousness of what I'd just experienced (nothing quite compares with your first con) and suffused with love for my fellow man. Just *how* suffused I was you'll appreciate when I tell you that I even managed to smile tolerantly when the guy sitting next to me on the train back to Cardiff turned his radio on. Even 'Bye, Bye Baby' couldn't spoil my mood. //



Incredibly cool Graham Charnock, with Pat.
 Photo: Lars-Olov Strandberg.

Australian-born writer and editor Peter Nicholls was just 32 when he became the first Administrator of the newly-formed Science Fiction Foundation in 1971, and his influence was critical in shaping the direction in which the Foundation would go, along with its journal of the same title. By the time of *Seacon* 75 Peter was riding high, knew pretty much everyone in the SF field, and his famous con-report gives a glimpse of what Rob Hansen missed and what was *really* going-on!

The Inward Circles of Hell

By Peter Nicholls



Photo: Sam Long

In the small hours of the (Sunday) morning, feeling cheerful, sober and low-key, I emerged onto the main stairway of the hotel to find utter chaos reigning. All the drunks had congregated on the sixth floor landing for a stair party. There was Tom Shippey, looking considerably less donnish than usual, who clutched my arm and fixed me with an Ancient Mariner gaze, and intoned hypnotically: "First I had whisky and then I had peach brandy and then I had vodka and then I had plum brandy and then I had malt whisky and then. . ." before his eyes glazed over and he forgot what he was saying.

And there was the terrible Leroy Kettle. Let me set the scene. Just before, as I was walking along the corridor to the landing (the fireproof doors cutting off all the noise from the as-yet-unimagined stair party) I had been speaking thus with my companion, X.

X: "I'm not sure it's a very good idea to be seen in your company. There may be unpleasantness if Y finds out."

Me: "Well, we're only talking, and anyway there doesn't seem to be anyone around, and everyone's very relaxed and informal at conventions, and everybody's too busy with their own affairs to take any notice of other people, and anyway, I'm famous for the shyness and propriety of my behaviour."

This argument was premature, to say the least. Just then we debouched onto the landing, where the aforementioned fifty drunks were congregated, and no sooner had old Shippey finished his recitation than my dear friend Leroy began shouting, leaning close to X and breathing whisky fumes straight into her face, "There's old Nicholls! He's evil! Everybody knows about Nicholls. You stay away from him love! He's evil! Did you get any, Nicholls? You watch him, love!" All X's fears realised within ten seconds in one drunken diatribe. Thank you, Leroy, I'll do the same for you one day.

The drunks continued to move randomly backwards and forwards in an alcoholic travesty of Brownian motion. One well-known fan, soberer than most and looking smooth, was charming young ladies. Every time I looked, it was a different lady. His leer was fixed, glittering and obscene – really dirty. His polo neck was immaculately white as ever. Rog Peyton's technique was more primitive. It consisted of bull-like snorts and bear hugs, but it seemed to be working okay. Gerry Webb's right eye was swivelling in independent circles. Brian Lewis was wearing the knowing Cockney smile of an eel vendor. Sheila Holdstock's eyes (a trifle unfocussed) were glinting prettily and dangerously. My companion had gone off to bed (alone) by now, and I was tempted to have a friendly word with young Sheila, but I didn't dare, not after Leroy Kettle's scoop *Novacon* exposures in *True Rat*. Thanks again, Leroy. You're a real buddy. He proved it just then by coming up and kissing me passionately. Chrissy Atkinson came up and kissed me too. I valued Chrissy's kiss more, taking it as an emblem of friendship from a nice girl who, I once thought, looked upon me with fannish scorn and contempt. Leroy's kiss, of course, was just old-fashioned lust.

Overwhelmed by all this action on the sixth floor landing, I began to walk spiralling down the stairs. With every successive landing it was like entering a yet more inward circle of Dante's Hell. The circle of the Drunkards was followed by a circle of Limbo, where aimless neofans trudged in passive circles, seeking a way out to the great unreachable room party in the sky, which no-one could locate. The next circle was the circle of the Sleepers. Picking my way through them, I spiralled down through the circle of the Failed Gamblers, commiserating with one another about the difficulty of filling inside straights. Further down was the circle of the Lost. They sat, unreachable in their desolation, crooning to themselves, "I need a woman." The pain and anguish of it all was too much to bear. (I hope you cheered up later, Merv.) I feared to descend to the lowest of all the circles, half-expecting to meet the Horned One himself, haunches sunk in ice, endlessly chewing on the body of some long-damned fan, perhaps George Hay. In practice, showing that dramatic metaphors don't always work out, the only people at the bottom were Peter Roberts and Karel Thole, apparently sober, talking intelligently about Art in apparent ignorance of the fact that it was 4 a.m. and life and hell.

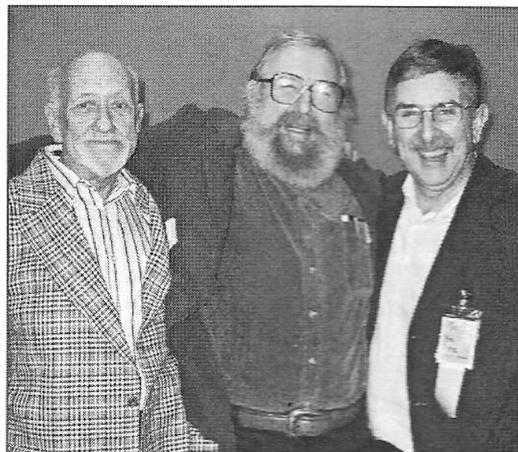
I stomped back up the stairs again towards the comparative paradise (well, purgatory perhaps) of a lonely bed, performing a well-executed end-run around the outstretched arms of Simone Walsh on the sixth floor. Simone's reflexes, normally admirable, couldn't cope with the wings on my ankles, flapping in total panic at what Pickersgill might say, or worse, do, if he found me talking to her. My bedroom was on the seventh and top floor, where the committee had exiled me along with all the other undesirables. I didn't mind. I slept the sleep of the just." //

This extract from Peter's report originally appeared in *Wrinkled Shrew* #4, edited by Pat Charnock. Peter now writes, "At the time I thought my *Seacon* report was quite funny, but now it makes me writhe with embarrassment. It's coarse, sexist, self-obsessed, and exuding the unmistakable sweaty boastful bluster of the person with Low Self Esteem. I can only plead that I'd had too many drugs that I wasn't used to at *Seacon*, and the resulting sense of nervously paranoid euphoria hadn't quite worn off when I wrote the report. I was struck, by the way, at my use in two different areas of the con report of the word 'Parkinsonian' to describe myself. Clairvoyance fit to rival a Van Vogt hero's!"

Back in October 1964 I'd just produced the sixth issue of my fanzine *Zenith*, later to become *Speculation*, when my life was suddenly enlivened by a hugely long letter from Mike Moorcock (it made four pages in the next issue) in which he vigorously defended his outlook on science fiction. In retrospect this was the opening shot of the whole 'New Wave' controversy which rumbled on for several years in *Speculation*, not least in the nine further articles, letters and columns Mike wrote for the magazine. Unfortunately, however, tempers became a little frayed towards the end and we parted company after 1970, only to meet up quite unexpectedly this year in Texas when Mike dropped in on the *Corflu* fanzine convention. Since then we seem to have had a lot of catching-up to do, and I'm pleased to see that Mike still writes long, fascinating letters.....

A Letter from Mike Moorcock Or, 'I Remember Fandom'

Together Again! – Earl Kemp, Mike & PW at *Corflu*. Photo from Earl.



Dear Pete,

"Much as I hate to disagree with my mate Ron Bennett, who was one of the fans I liked and admired most in fandom and who remained a good friend over all these years, I actually disliked Doc Weir. I found him a boring know-all and a control freak. But then I also liked John Brunner, so you work it out. I don't think it was the younger fans who created the Doc Weird Award but a small cadre including Bobby Wilde, Ella Parker and my former fiancée Sandra Hall and others who had very decided views as to how the BSFA should be run. I fear the BSFA committee (or whoever was running the 'Doc' Weir Award) was actually guilty of rigging the vote at one convention, which is probably fair enough since if they hadn't Charles Platt would have won the award for the nicest person in fandom.

"At Bristol in 1967 the votes were packed even more thoroughly than in Florida in more recent years, by the likes of Graham Hall, myself and a whole bunch of – well – younger fans – so many being involved (you had to be an official attendee to vote) that ONLY Charles could have won. Imagine our surprise and chagrin when the winner was announced and it wasn't our guy (*Doreen Parker – PW*). This was almost as bad as those who tore up the votes for Ken Bulmer in order to ensure Brian Aldiss became Hon. President of the BSFA, because they felt that Brian would be a better figurehead and spokesperson – which goes some way towards explaining the reason for forming the BSFA and for printing *Vector* in what was intended to be a posher format than a regular mimeoed fanzine. We were tired of being represented by the press and on TV as nutters in beanies who believed in flying saucers and so on.

"As I recall, the BSFA was founded (like the SFWA later) largely in reaction to that popular image of SF and its fans in the media. I think, for instance, that Ron's job as a smart, well-educated teacher was to present this 'respectable' face to the press. It wasn't the first time Ron had been pushed forward as our eloquent front man.

"I have to admit that, though Ken Bulmer was a great friend (and surely now the best person to name a popularity contest for! The Bulmer Award sounds pretty good to me...) Brian presented the kind of image we were trying to promote. If a rift developed between groups of fans it was exemplified in 1967 at the Brighton Arts Festival when a panel made up of the likes of philosopher A.J. 'Freddy' Ayer, Michael Kustow (director of the ICA), myself, Ballard, Aldiss, Disch, Sladek, Edward Lucy Smith and George MacBeth (both poets – George was also a BBC producer who interviewed me, Judy Merrill



Riding high: Edward Lucie-Smith, Mike, Brian Aldiss, Mike Kustow, and J.C. Ballard, at the Brighton Arts Festival, 1967

and Ballard for Radio Three) and several more people well-known in the general media were accused from the floor by Ted Tubb, Ella Parker and others of 'corrupting' SF. Joining them was Richard Hamilton, the pop artist, who berated us for taking SF away from rockets and robots. Mike Kustow reacted by saying he'd encountered something like this when director of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. He called it 'the anxious ownership syndrome' – Shakespearians of the old school had been up in arms over new interpretations of their bard.

"That was also where Brian, Tom Disch and I insisted on getting in the Black Maria when the cops were called by a barmy publican. Cops knew the publican was in the wrong, but we insisted on being arrested. Anthon Hayden Guest was another arrestee. Etonian, (but from a family of posh commies). 'Come on, sir,' says the Inspector, 'I can see you're a gentleman...' 'Oh, really?' says AHG in cut-glass

accents. 'How do you see that, officer?' Altogether a ridiculous farce. Brian and I stuck it out in the BM until the cops begged us to leave the van and return to the pub... In this case their sympathies were pretty much with us and not the landlord. They could tell we weren't drunks making trouble and if he hadn't been so damned rude – 'Out!' he kept shouting, 'Out!' (We were sitting in a gallery which, it turned out, he was worried wouldn't support that many people. If he'd merely said 'Sorry, gents, this bit of the pub's a bit wobbly, so for all our sakes I'd be grateful if you'd sit somewhere else...' or words to that effect – we'd have moved. We were on our first beer. Also Brighton police are very respectful of 'posh' people and had no idea to whom we were connected. I disapproved of Tom Disch throwing his gin and tonic in the crotch of the Inspector, since we had nothing against the police, who were simply doing a job they knew to be a waste of their time.

"For all this argument, my relationship with fans and fandom didn't change much, I continued to go to the Globe and stay friends with the people I'd known for a decade or more. Any differences we had about reading preferences never spoiled our friendship and I never forgot how kind people like Atom, Vince Clarke, Ethel Lindsay and all the others had been when I first met them and I frequently went to cons so that I could meet them, even though it became increasingly awkward as pros and fans tended to split into different room parties and the old camaraderie and egalitarianism vanished. I found myself besieged by young Elric fans and autograph hunters when I was trying to have a quiet drink with old friends. Generally, I stayed in the fan parties. In fact I only continued going to cons after, say, 1965 in order to see old mates I might not otherwise meet. I should never have gone to the 1970 London convention, where the Brunner/glass incident occurred. Was far too drunk when I arrived...

"Originally, in the mid-fifties, I began publishing fanzines with no idea that others were doing the same. My first amateur mag was *Outlaws Own*, done in as many copies you could get decipherable carbons out of, when I was nine. It was named after Richmal Crompton's William's gang magazine. It had an SF serial by me and everything else by me, I think. I'd done quite a few issues of *Book Collectors News* and *Burroughsania* before I realised that there were others out there. I think Jim Cawthorn alerted me to the existence of fandom. Then I visited the Globe and became friends with Atom, who lived near me in South London. Atom and Jim improved the look of my zines no end! I was able to get paid work for both on *Tarzan Adventures* when I got the job in 1956! I never stopped publishing sercon zines but also began to do fannish zines, publishing fan fiction and features by myself and others. I think my last issue was in 1962 with *Ergo Ego*, when I was 22. I also, of course, contributed to various other fanzines. Then along came the 'New Wave' as Jim Linwood christened fans like Weston and Platt, who published sercon zines, reflecting the desire to debate the literary possibilities of SF, even if most of them had at least begun by disapproving of the changes I'd brought to *New Worlds*.

"It was probably fair to say that we were confused as to what we expected from SF and SF fandom at that time. I continued to enjoy the company of friends like Ron Bennett, Eric Bentcliffe, Terry Jeeves, Alan Dodd (of *Camber*), the Shorrocks and the fans who wanted conventions to be parties, mostly, and brag games, St Fantasy, etc., and remained good friends with older, more conventional SF writers like Ted Tubb, Ken Bulmer, Bob Shaw, Syd Bounds, James White, while publishing fiction that often felt at odds with what they preferred to do. It didn't stop me publishing some of them, of course. And some, like Bob, did some of their best work in more innovative forms. My relations with Don Wollheim remained cordial, in general, though I continued to be critical of people like him, who would be fine in a one on one relationship and then call me a 'pseudo-intellectual' in public. It's something that would still bother me. I'm happy to say, though, that Don and I settled our differences and while I criticised his publishing of John Norman we remained on good terms until he died.

"Lang Jones and I regularly attended Ella's meetings in Kilburn and actively sought out and found a club house when the SF Club of London was formed. Disagreements continued to plague the SFCoL and the club house was never taken (imagine what it would be worth in real estate now – it was in Notting Hill, incredibly cheap). Fans continued to contribute graphics, features, reviews and stories to *New Worlds*, just as they had done for me when I was running *Tarzan Adventures*.

"Although I helped to found the BSFA, I soon backed away from the politics which, I now know, seem inevitable to such a venture. I had no idea that the BSFA had so little to do with running conventions or that it failed so singularly to do what it had been set up to do. I was co-opted to edit *Vector* at one stage and remember being surprised at what I considered the amateurism of those involved – you probably recall the issue which was printed on such a small paper size in such miniscule type that it could only be read easily with a magnifying glass. Ironically, it had some fairly fannish contributions. I took over from Bobby Wild and don't think I was ever officially an editor. I seem to recall that I paid for quite a lot of the printing myself in an effort to improve things. Nobody else seemed bothered about the impression we were making. Sandra Hall might remember more of this period. I think I remember collating at least one issue of *Vector* at a party in Sandra's grandmother's flat in North End Road, Olympia, at that time.

"Peter West married Sandra, who was Bobby's friend (they had met in the WAAFs). As I said, she'd been my fiancée for a while. One day he came round to see me to ask how he could woo and win her. I told him just to go and do it and he did and then they were engaged! I last saw her in Brighton when I was doing a signing at the Worldcon (I think). Not sure she gave me an address or, indeed, if she's still married to him. Lang Jones might know. He was their neighbour in Ealing for a while. Glad I wound up with Linda and not Sandra, though. Sandy was what she called a 'qualified witch'. I knew she was a qualified Something. Perfectly nice woman, but barmy as they come.



Nice-looking issue for Spring, 1960, but actual size was only 4 1/4" x 6 1/2", reduced from foolscap, making it almost impossible to read without a magnifying glass!

I was working for Fleetway and had by then introduced Ted Tubb, Ken Bulmer, Syd Bounds, Jim Cawthorn, Barry Busby and a few others as contributors to various publications there. I also got a staff job for Pete Taylor who rather typically flunked it, believing he couldn't deliver (he had serious problems of what we came to call self-esteem). Dick Ellingsworth's father had written to me at *TA* accusing me of having disgusting designs on his son (I hardly drew anything on Dick, drunk or sober – maybe the odd game of noughts and crosses, the occasional 'Willis is Ghod' slogan, but no more). Dick, too, had written for *TA*. If I'd gone on much longer, the whole of fandom would have been writing for Fleetway. Even Brian Burgess would have had a meat pie column in *Catering Weekly*.

"I went in to the 1957 Loncon with Ballard and Wyndham. As luck would have it, a guy in a propeller beanie with a zap-gun water pistol came up to a guy in front of us and said 'You're zapped!' Wyndham gulped and headed for the bar. Ballard turned on his heel and left. I just kept on keeping on. He told me later he'd expected a bunch of French-style existentialists all discussing the latest ideas in science and medicine. That would probably have made others turn on THEIR heels... Ted Tubb looked his usual dashing self. I learned all I knew about auctioneering from Ted... and selling 'Adana' printing machines, for that matter. He worked just around the corner from me when I was doing *Tarzan Adventures*. I was in Brook Street and he was in Grays Inn Road. I used to drop in and listen to him selling machines. I once invented a whole district of London by 'stretching' the area between GIR and Hatton Garden and popping it in there as Brookgate. The really funny thing was that some who read the book in question (*KING OF THE CITY*) then spoke of 'Brookgate' as if they'd known it all their lives.



London worldcon. 1957: "Pete Taylor with the 'mum in his teeth'. We'd obviously been doing our Russian pieces. 'We Met On The Steps of a Moscow Latrine' and 'Home, Home in Siberia'... No memory of it, but that's my super-kazoo just visible, too." (Photo: from Ina Shorrock, who maintains Mike is wearing a lampshade she brought all the way from Liverpool!)

"Do you remember the pictures and report of the London worldcon in *Tarzan Adventure*? I had our resident photographer, the ancient Sammy Samuels, take a whole bunch of pics I ran as a double page spread. Well, you wouldn't remember them, obviously, but I wonder if they're on a site anywhere? Not sure I have the issue – I gave all my copies of *TA* away to sick kids circa 1960. Have gathered a few since, but I'm sure not that one. Some Burroughs fan might have it, done, of course late-ish 1957. In fact that whole run is full of fannish contributions – Bobby Wilde, Ken Bulmer, Syd Bounds, Ron Bennett and so on. What a funny looking kid I was in that photo. Can't believe anyone took me seriously!

"Other memories have few dates – all late 50s to mid 60s: Peterborough Woolworth's, busy Saturday, Aldiss booming 'Make way for Mr Moorcock! Make way for Mr Moorcock!' as we headed for the meat-pie counter (yes, they had one) and grandly purchased all their available pies. We planned to profit from the venture but the pies later disappeared (Tom Boardman as usual, wandering off or sleeping on duty). We later found

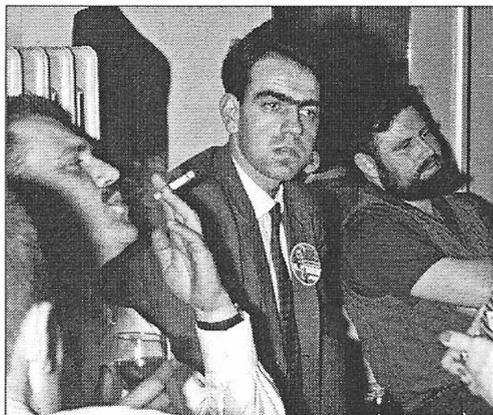
Brian Burgess asleep in the lobby, his face covered in tell-tale crumbs. Of course, he denied it.

"Then there was the terrible ketchup fight in Yarmouth, which destroyed my new suede jacket (I later had to cook and eat it). As Aldiss, Harrison, Boardman and I staggered back to the hotel people stared at us in horror. 'You need help!' someone cried. We shrugged off the insult. Then, seeing ourselves for the first time in the big mirror in the gents, we collapsed in laughter. We looked as if we'd been bloodied in some hideous accident. Just the chaps to put a respectable face on science fiction...! Harry and Tom were somewhat embarrassed and didn't join in with the same – um – relish...

"At the 1965 Birmingham convention we locked Charles Platt in a wardrobe and lowered it face down then sat on it so he began to suffocate. Tom Boardman flunked the deed at the last moment. "It's my room," he wailed, "I'll get the blame!" I thought it a bit soft of him at the time but reluctantly got off the wardrobe. Charles later went to walk drunkenly on a long balcony several stories up, insulting all and sundry as he swayed many feet above the street. Again, nobody had the guts to push him off. I thought Charles got himself out onto the balcony, though we might have encouraged him. As you can see, I was already a little confused in my attitude to Charles even then. I'm pretty sure it was me drew the curtains, though. I had earlier suggested he come in since he WAS very drunk. When he wouldn't, I didn't want to see him die. I might have been involved as a witness, after all...

Terry Pratchett writes, "My famously unreliable memory believes that we were on the fourth floor of the Midland Hotel. Platt was rowing with somebody unknown to us – we were neos, remember – and suddenly several guys grabbed him, opened the window and pushed him out. Presumably they'd ascertained that outside was a wide ledge with a dinky little railing, but you never know. The window was shut and the curtains drawn on his screams of 'You bastards', and then the glass was shattered as he tried to break back in. At this point, recalling that the hotel security was a man like a wall in a suit, we surmised that this would be a good time to go and buy a Brian Burgess pork pie. I've checked this with Dave Busby, who was also there as an innocent bystander, and I'd be surprised if Ed James wasn't also. It was mentioned in at least one fanzine afterwards, because I was credited with saying 'I moved so fast you could see where I had been, outlined in vacuum.'"

"I remember Yarmouth for another reason. Lang and I spent Good Friday at my place congratulating ourselves that we'd matured sufficiently to summon the strength to break the Easter con-habit. By midnight we were on the milk train to Yarmouth, arriving before 6am to find the hotel closed. So we went and slept on the beach where Lang developed a bad cold which was with him the whole weekend so that he slept away the con on various chairs. Later, he slept on John Brunner's bed while I found myself listening to John congratulate himself on various career moves and diplomatic meetings with publishers. I tried, from a genuine sense of friendship, to point out that he was deluded. Whereupon, he explained rationally exactly where I was wrong. It was my last go at being frank with someone whose interests I genuinely had at heart. I've never known anyone to make so many mistakes and be so pompous about it at the same time. He wasn't nearly as rude as he seemed and could be very kind to young fans. Just a total nerd with a better disguise and education than most of us. Pooter to the life. He never knew who his real friends were. Keith Roberts had a similar way of rationalising matters



Phil Rogers, Lang Jones, Archie Mercer at the 1963 Ballcon. Photo: Bruce Burn

and grew equally paranoid in his last years, blaming his career's collapse on the nicest people who had done most to help him. Keith accused Lang Jones, who is the most ethical and honest person I've ever known, of stealing his artwork, and that was the last straw for me. In the end he blamed the doctors for the gangrene which killed him.

"I still correspond with Lang, who is inclined to disappear for months as a correspondent and remains possibly the most absent-minded person I know. He's still as amiable and pleasant as ever. I wonder if he still has the stencils for that 'lost' *Tensor*. He probably won't know. Yes, he's a councillor – got in on the huge anti-Thatcher vote for a ward he never expected to win and has been on the council ever since. At least one of his kids still lives at home (Pauline died tragically young of cancer) and he has a wonderful Bengal cat. Like a little leopard. An heir to Ollie the Cucumber Fiend. Ever heard of a cat that was addicted to squash? He's still writing music. Seriously serious stuff. His setting for Peake's *Rhyme of the Flying Bomb* was wonderfully moving and so hard to play he had to

simplify it for the first class modern concert pianist who was engaged to play the piano part. Linda was amazed at the beauty and complexity of his music when she first went to a performance. In a lighter vein, he played on the demo for my *The Entropy Tango*. Nobody ever expects someone so easy-going and self-deprecating to be so brilliant.

"Before any of that, I remember a trip to Liverpool with various members of the London group. We went up the newly built M1, I think. On Saturday evening we were in a pub across from a venue Bill Harry had already mentioned in his column for my music fanzine, *Rambler*. He was very enthusiastic about this local band he was talking up in *Mersey Beat*. He'd even published some nonsense doggerel by one of the group's members. 'You must come and see this group,' he insisted. 'They're amazingly good.'

"'Bugger off Bill,' I said. 'I'm tired of having to hear those awful fake American groups you're always going on about.' And that, of course, is how I never got to hear 'The Beatles' in the Cavern...

As for the Knights of St Fantony, I was disappointed that I was never elected to that noble Order. But I do remember London's official challenge to the Cheltenham knights and what befell me as Official Wizard, complete with pointy hat and false beard. I'd rather draw a veil over that event, which led me to cause two tourist buses to crash in what I dimly recall was Bourton-on-the-Water. No serious injuries, but a stupid thing to have done. I remember Ted Tubb and Bob Richardson beating the crap out of one another's armour AND bodies, fighting seriously for the hand of Sandra Hall. They were covered in heavy bruises by the end of the fight in which they tired in true gladiatorial fashion until they could hardly swing a sword or a mace. In the end, I feel rather guilty to admit, Sandra left with me... The Wizard usually gets the girl in real life.



The Mighty Tubb swings his axe against his brave little opponent! Photo: from Keith Freeman



Top: Peter West, Sandra Hall, Keith Freeman, Ella Parker, Archie Mercer, Ken Bulmer, Pam Bulmer, Lawrence Sandfield, Doc Weir, Pete Taylor, Audrey Eversfield, John Humphries, Frank Herbert, George Locke, Jim Ratigan. Bottom: Mike Moorcock, Bob Richardson, Eric Jones, Tikki Hall, Ted Tubb, Bill Gray, Barry Bayley, Bobbie (Wilde) Gray, Margaret Jones, Ivor Mayne. Photo: from Keith Freeman, at Bourton-on-Water day-trip.

"That's a tremendous picture, Pete. Made my day. I'd forgotten so many of us had gone. Pete Taylor (in typical pose...), Barry Bayley. Bobby with that foot doctor she married (Gray, I suppose). Tikki Hall, Sandra's sister, who was still at school and with whom I was originally going out until she went back to school and Sandra moved in. I got a very sharp letter from Tikki telling me not to be fickle. Saw her last in 1980. She was somewhat bitter because she had wound up looking after first their grandmother (who had pretty much raised them) and then her own mother, whom she'd made contact with after many years. Her marriages had foundered and from seeming to be the prettiest, favoured child, she had wound up taking on all the family responsibilities. I had the impression she and Sandra weren't on especially good terms. She might



The Joust at Cheltenham: Ted & Mike, Ken Bulmer, Bob Parkinson, Eric Jones, Keith Freeman, Bobbie Gray, and Jim Rattigan. Photo: from Keith Freeman.

“Oh, and of course that is the fight I recorded. Looks like Ted’s saying he’ll slip me ten bob if I see that Richardson takes a fall... What’s currently baffling me is that I don’t recognise that guitar I had in the Bourton picture! Wonder if it was mine or just borrowed – NO! Eurcka! I took it with me to Sweden and hocked it in order to get some money when I was hitch-hiking home. Dave Harvey (now a much admired academic) got it out of hock and offered it back to me when he returned to England. I told him he could keep it and as far as I know he still has it. Think it might have been an Epiphone. First Epiphone I owned.

“(Later) my memory’s wrong about Cheltenham. I took up with Sandra a bit later. I was seeing Tikki, her half-sister, at that point. But Sandra started making a play for me when Tikki was back at school and like a fool (I think) I found myself going out with her, etc, etc. I broke up with her. She gave me my ring back. I threw it back at her and she ‘disdained to take it’ – though I learned later from Tikki that Sandra spent the best part of a day hunting for it after I’d gone. A narrow escape, I thought.

“You wonder why Pete Taylor was called ‘LaFarge’. I remember that we used to speak French to one another in Soho, where I think we originally met. We were all keen on the existentialists and watched a lot of French films of all kinds. As I remember it, there was a tiny cinema in Tottenham Court Road which showed nothing but foreign films, mainly French. My best friends in those days were Barry Bayley and Pete Taylor whose nickname in the coffee bars and skiffle cellars of Soho was ‘LaFarge’. He bore an uncanny resemblance to the horse-faced hero of dozens of French comedies, Fernandel. Sometimes we would convince gullible tourists looking for sin and thrills in ‘drug-crazed Soho, where sex was cheap and plentiful’ that Pete was the great comedian, star of the ‘Don Camillo’ movies and so on, who preferred to be known as ‘Monsieur LaFarge’. (I think we took the nickname out of the blue, probably for Madame LaFarge, who knitted beside the guillotine). Pete could take off every droll expression of Fernandel and would even sign autographs. It was commonly done. My own role was often that of Michael FitzMichael, true descendant by direct line of Brian Borhu and the royal kings of Ireland. I knew a lot of Fenian songs (some in fact learned via Belfast fandom) and began singing them in a pub a block up the road from ‘The Gyre and Gimble’, one of our regular hangouts. ‘The Green Man’, I think it was. A favourite pub of Irish workers, who encouraged me to sing ‘The Old Fenian Gun’ and ‘Kevin Barry’. Whether they believed me or not, I’m not now sure, but they bought me drinks and joined in the choruses.

“Pete died alone in 1986, while I was away in the States. A heart attack, apparently. A sad death for such a great entertainer and affectionate friend, though I can imagine he wasn’t much fun to live with all the time, being a mixture of nervous anxiety, bursts of temper and inappropriate comic turns when his loved ones needed him to be serious. He left a wife, Norma, and two very nice children. He died before they could really get to know him. I think Alan Bale and his wife are still in touch with Norma. I believe Pete worked in Alan’s bookshop from time to time. The last photos of him I have are posted on my *Moorcock’s Miscellany* website. Charlie Smith, who brought Lang Jones into fandom, then disappeared – a very nice bloke – was one of the members of ‘Group 65’ which originally intended to make a film (‘The Adventures of the Dead Astronaut’) for the 1965 Worldcon. Pat Kearney, Ivor Mayne, Elizabeth Blethen, Lang and myself were involved.

Clare Peake, Mervyn’s daughter, was our female lead. Pete was our male protagonist. Not a million miles from a story of mine, published around the same time, as ‘The Real Life Mr Newman’. There were disagreements, as seems almost inevitable, and Pat and Ivor decanted with the film. We decided to make a record instead – ‘Suddenly It’s the Bellyflops!’ This got as far as acetate stage. We planned to take orders at the Con, but needless to say got too drunk to do much about it. The acetate still exists (I think Lang has it) and various tapes float to the surface every now and then.

Left: Mike and Pete Taylor conduct a conversation via trenchcoat. At rear is Ivor Mayne, producer. The youngster looking out of the frame to the right is Terry Pratchett. Photo: *Moorcock’s Miscellany*



"The only person I've ever had to punch was during the making of that record, when Charles Platt got drunk and obnoxious and refused to leave his own house. He made a run at me and I kept my promise to punch him if he wouldn't sober up and do what he'd agreed to do. He lunged at me and I thumped him. Oddly, the only other time I ever struck someone, again more in sorrow than in anger, was Charles on another occasion. He was starved for attention, I think, and he would nuzzle at you until he got your attention. I first met him at Carnell's office where he disapproved of my 'mod' clothes and I believe said so in his fanzine. He's also one of the few people, if not the only one, whom I ever refused to speak to. Too many attacks – I felt he was seeing me as a father figure and expecting too much from me. I eventually suggested we stop seeing one another for a while. This upset him. After his flat burned (with me in it, barely escaping) we lost all the back numbers of *New Worlds* he'd 'rescued' from Hilary's basement where they'd been perfectly safe, of course. I think he blamed me for the fire, though the fire brigade thought otherwise. For some years he continued to send me long, accusatory letters, which I didn't read (though Linda did) but in recent years he has been in touch, saying how he regrets his behaviour in those days. In the end I suggested he get a blow-up rubber Moorcock doll he could do what he liked with in the privacy of his own home, but in recent years he has been in touch, saying how he regrets his behaviour in those days I'm glad we're no longer on bad terms. I was glad that we were able to bury the hatchet. As art editor of *New Worlds* he was extremely influential, his design methods being copied by many publishers for a long time afterwards. I'm sorry he never fulfilled all his promise, and made so many enemies. He contributed a great deal. These days he works for a cryogenics firm, freezing the heads of people hoping for immortality.

"Lang's still writing very good modern music and is on the council of his local borough. He's had a great deal of tragedy in his life. His wife Pauline, whom he met at Ella Parker's, died of cancer and then his long-time lady friend, whom he met a few years later, also died of cancer. Somewhat ironic in that Lang was discharged from the Horse Guards after he contracted Hodgkins Disease and at the time was one of very few people to be operated on and recover. A sweet bloke still, with a couple of grandchildren. I'm still close friends with Mike Butterworth (whom Charles brought to *NW* originally) and Dave Britton, who publishes some splendidly produced books in Manchester, including the finest-ever edition of *A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS*, Richardson's *THE EXPLOITS OF ENGELBRECHT* (with all the original illustrations) and Skene's *MONSIEUR ZENITH, THE ALBINO*, a strong influence on you-know-who. I also still see Chuck Partington. Barry Bayley still lives in Donnington where he originally returned to look after his dying mother. Circumstances were such that he never got to leave. We published two long 'conversations' – reminiscence about the old days – on the excellent *Fantastic Metropolis* website.

"When I heard Graham was dying of cirrhosis I was breaking up with my second wife, Jill, so I went to see if I could help him in Los Angeles, where he was in very bad shape but continuing to drink (much of this was in my book *Letters from Hollywood*). And that's where I met my current wife Linda, who was between jobs (she's an academic librarian) and working for Harlan Ellison (her main job was to lose at pool to him). We've been together 28 years this year. I have three children, three grand-children and am very proud of all of them. I've lost touch with both Hilary, my first wife, and Jill, my second. Jill remarried Robert Calvert, who fronted 'Hawkwind' and whose stand-in I saw myself as! When Robert was carted off to the Priory, I did his job until he was able to return. I did some session work on two of his albums, including the wonderful 'Lucky Leif and the Longships', which Brian Eno produced. Robert, tragically, died of heart failure at a very early age. I think Jill still lives on the South-East coast somewhere. Hilary had several 'straight' best-sellers but doesn't seem to publish much, these days.

"It was great to see everyone, especially you and Graham Charnock (one third of 'The Deep Fix') in Austin the other day. I suggested we could start going out as a Deep Fix tribute band... It was good to meet Earl again after forty years or so. I still prefer small fan cons to the monsters they have become, these days, and hope we'll be able to meet up again when the con comes to a venue near where I live. We currently spend our time between Texas and Paris, with a month or two in Northern California (Marin) most years. I see a few fans in Berkeley, including Dick and Pat Lupoff. I had some toes amputated after a fem-pop bypass failed to unblock an artery and that foot continues to give me trouble, though I'm otherwise in very good health. Our house in Texas is a beautiful old place, built in 1865/6 by Texas's only Confederate Governor who didn't do badly for himself during Reconstruction. Surrounding countryside is like the Cotswolds only with sixteen kinds of deadly snakes, and buzzards frequently perch disconcertingly on our roof. Feels like an omen, I must say. We bought it because it has very high ceilings, perfect for bookshelves (and vultures). Now we have so many books we either have to sell them with the house or stay put. We have a beautiful place in coastal Spain we hardly use these days because of all its stairs – it's vertical – so we're putting it on the market and will probably buy another place in France, mostly so I can be near my children, who all live in London.

"I've just done my piece (on Kit Carson and the conquest of the Southwest) for the *Guardian*. Ironically, too, that the new editor of *The Spectator* and the lit editor of *The Telegraph* are both keen readers of SF and comics. Phillip Hensher, lead critic of *The Spec*, has read a lot more SF than I have. Changing times, Pete. Maybe the BSFA did some good, after all. Much looking forward to 'Life with the Brunners'. Hope it isn't too hard on them. Did I tell you that he wouldn't send me an mss of *STAND ON ZANZIBAR* but made me come round to his flat in Froggnal and spend all bloody day reading it while he hovered. I got a decent lunch from Marjorie, though. John once rang me to inform me that Tom Disch was working for the CIA. The reason for this was that John was recently back from Turkey and discovered that some of his film was fogged *AFTER TOM HAD VISITED HIM!!!!* There could, John said, only be one reason... Endless tales. Would have been necessary to invent him.

"So that's it, in a coconut shell. Surviving pretty well. Still writing the odd fantasy or SF story when asked, mostly doing non-genre work, these days, or recycling old books in posh new editions! Not a lot has changed. I'm older, probably no wiser, and, as Linda told a reader at a recent signing who asked if I had a private and public persona, what you see is what you get. She's gone to bed now and I suppose I'd better do the same. Thanks again for *Prolapse*. I hope this LoC ensures me a free copy of the next ish. The whole purpose of LoCs, of course. It's a great fanzine. I read every word. Then reread it all again. Nice to see Jim Linwood's still around. And that Dick Ellingsworth's re-emerged.

"All very best, Pete! As ever, Mike." (7th March 2007)

Now, this may at first seem boring but it answers a question which has been repeatedly asked in the last two issues; why do we have a British fan-achievement award named after 'Doc' Weir, who was only in fandom for a relatively short time and didn't actually do that much? Well, it seems it was all a bit of a muddle, really, and it continued to be a long-running muddle for the next twenty years. In consequence a thick file of correspondence accumulated, recently passed to me by Rob Hansen, and without comment I've extracted the highlights below (heavily abridged for reasons of space). The whole thing serves as an object lesson to anyone who might consider starting some sort of continuing Award-scheme – and to put things into perspective, multiply the 1962 sums quoted by a factor of 30, at least, to equate to modern values.

The Doc Weir File

A story of Good Intentions



'Doc' Weir at the 1959
Brumcon, age 53. He
died two years later.

From: John Phillifent to Peter Mabey (BSFA Librarian), 15th March, 1961

"I've just had the sad news about the death of Doc Weir... But I feel this is where we of the BSFA can do something more than just offer condolences. I have reason to believe that Doc wasn't any too well-off. I know that he was bothered about being retired as an invalid because he wouldn't have much of a pension as his teaching years were mostly abroad, and didn't count. I should imagine he was insured, but I doubt if it would be much.

"I'm not suggesting charity, even if we were in a position to hand it out, or his widow willing to accept. But we know that Doc had a fine collection of SF and related literature. I happen to know that his wife is not a fan. So, unless she means to keep his books out of sentiment, they are going to be disposed of to a dealer.

"I suggest it should be possible for us, the BSFA, to make a bid. It would need someone preferably known to Mrs Weir, and someone who knows a bit about books... plus the authority to bid for us. It won't be a tremendous amount, I know, but I think we could offer far more than she would get from a dealer. In this way we could do her a bit of good, preserve a fine collection, and, incidentally, do a bit of good for our library, too. It might even run to an auctioning-off of the more rare items towards a fund for Mrs Weir." (Note: This letter was not passed to Archie Mercer until January 1970).

From: Archie Mercer (BSFA Treasurer) to Eric Jones (friend of the Weir family), 19th October 1961

"I hope you don't mind my enquiring after a matter that I know is of the most delicate, but as ad-hoc Treasurer of the Doc Weir Memorial Fund I'm beginning to wonder what the situation is from your end. I haven't heard a thing since Easter and feel somewhat in the dark about it all."

From: Archie Mercer to Ina Shorrock, (BSFA Chairman), Terry Jeeves (Vice Chairman), Peter Mabey (Librarian), Eric Jones (interested party), 2nd December 1961

"This is the circular that is about to be circulated, through Ken Slater's catalogue and *Skyrack* for a start, *Vector* and other things later. My idea is to saturate the home market in the hope that enough can be raised from within these crowded isles." (Attached is a circular produced by Ken Cheslin and headed, 'A Memorial Fund', stating that at the Easter convention (*Lexicon*) 'a Fund was launched with the object of raising sufficient money to purchase the relevant part of Doc's collection... or if the scheme proved impossible, used to commemorate Doc in appropriate fashion, probably by purchase of books from outside sources. It is estimated that at least £50.00 will be required to bring the project to fruition.')

From Archie Mercer to Ina Shorrock, Terry Jeeves, Peter Mabey, 8th & 17th December 1961

"Snafu. Ken Slater, having previously agreed to help distribute the Doc Weir Fund circular, now (having seen it) writes to say it's like, up the creek. Most of the stuff he's already bought from the Estate according to instructions Doc left, and he says it wasn't worth *our* bothering about, anyway. Anything of any special value Doc had previously bought from Ken... I prefer Terry's No. 1 suggestion (to wait until the next AGM and then put proposals on the subject to the Committee). As against this, however, the Doc Weir Fund's precise connection with the BSFA – and thus with the AGM – is still somewhat vague. The *Skyrack* copies (of the circular) are the only ones to have already gone out to the public. It's rather a lot to expect people to give to a cause with a Purpose to be Agreed Upon At Some Later Date."

From: Archie Mercer to Ken Bulmer, 1st February 1962

"...Right now the Fund is looking for a Cause, as it were. Suggestions so far include buying something in the way of quality books for a Memorial Collection, and donating it to Mrs Weir, in varying proportions... Where you come in is in the matter of the London Circle funds. As you will remember, last Easter you (on behalf of the London O) offered these funds to the BSFA to assist the Doc Weir project. As things are now, it looks as if the target will have to depend on the amount of available money rather than the other way around. To that end I should be glad to know precisely how much is involved, or who I should contact for such information. (Charlie Duncombe?) PS: I realise this comes in the middle of moving, coping with a new baby, etc. Sorry for the awkward timing."

From Ken Bulmer to Archie Mercer, 12th April 1962

"... I'd completely forgotten about the Weir Fund in view of the absence of any words from anyone about it in the months following the Gloucester con, and quite frankly, was attempting with some regret to withdraw from fandom. Then the new London people led by Ella Parker asked us about the old London O money. They felt it was lying about doing nothing when they could put it to good use in a number of ways, not least in financing the London convention and possible

worldcon. By 'us' I mean Ted Tubb and myself. This seemed to me a good opportunity to get shot of responsibility for the cash... I felt acutely aware that I was still the president, chairman, what-have-you, of the London O, which had never been wound-up. All we had done, if you recall, was to call a halt to the excessively official London O 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 O activity. The new people are now going ahead on their own lines and I am glad to see new blood taking over. So I wrote to Charlie Duncombe, asking for the cash, and he, on my instructions, sent it to Ted Tubb as the new interim Treasurer. Your letter reviving the old question of the Weir Fund then came as an embarrassment...

"I shall not be at the con this year but it wouldn't surprise me in the least if Ted turned up unexpectedly. Ted has a great and fine feeling for fandom and although at times his methods of expressing this strike a jarring note to heads-in-the-clouds dreamers, he is one fan who I believe really values fandom, and I deplore the denigration and scorn that has come his way over the years. He now has the cash and as far as I can see it is in good hands."

From Ted Tubb to Archie Mercer, 14th April 1962

"As I understood it, at the con last year Ken Bulmer offered the London Circle money to help buy the Doc Weir library in order to save it from the hands of the hucksters. This was the understanding of others in these 'ere parts. At a meeting here recently the question was discussed with the following result; it was obvious that the question of helping to buy the library was academic – there was no longer any library to buy. As the library wasn't being purchased the offer made by Ken was automatically washed out. Never, and I was there at the time, was the money offered for any other purpose."

From Archie Mercer to Ken Bulmer, 28th April 1962, copy to Ted Tubb

"The Doc Weir Fund ended up – barring any minor last-minute accretions – with some £14-odd in hand. The whole subject was thrashed out at Harrogate and the various possibilities boiled down to two – set up an Award, or turn it all over to Mrs Weir. The idea of buying special books for the Library was not popular with anyone – not even with the Librarian – and so was dropped. The two final ideas were put to the vote at the AGM and the Award won by a substantial margin.

"The scheme, then, is that a trophy be presented annually to 'the person (fan) voted the person one would most like to see win the said Award' (Ken Cheslin's definition). The Award will be kept centrally, with the winner's name engraved on it, and the winner will have a scroll to keep. It will be called something on the lines of 'The Doc Weir Recognition Award', any fan will be eligible to receive it, and voting will be restricted (probably) to con attendees.

"This should see some sort of good result from something that has been rather a mess since its inception. The terms of Doc's will could not have been foreseen, of course, but nobody has been able to pin-down responsibility for the idea getting around that there was a fabulous library worth saving – it was just a general impression. Another general impression was that Eric Jones would in the fullness of time have been initiating negotiations with Mrs Weir. This impression, unfortunately, was not shared by Eric himself. So the original plan sort of quietly folded up on itself and collapsed."

From Terry Jeeves (new BSFA Chairman) to Archie Mercer, 11th May 1962

"I have circularised the committee with a request for anyone who will carry out the actual purchase of the Weir Award, or with contacts who can do same. Wanted: 1. Statue, 2. Plaque, 3. Shield, in that order, value c. £15.

"Re; the 1962 con. Ron has been billed £9 over cancellations. I instructed him to pay up, then bill those responsible. If they don't cough up the BSFA will cover the loss. I feel this way we not only avoid getting any bad name as an Association, but we also give confidence to con-organisers that we back them all we can."

From Archie Mercer to Terry Jeeves, 19th May 1962

"I'll willingly pass the balance and the records to Jill Adams (BSFA Treasurer) if it's OK with her. The current BSFA committee seems to have adopted the Fund, anyway – which is more than the last one seemed capable of doing. Me, I have no contacts suitable for this sort of thing. As a point of interest, Ken Cheslin has sent me a bit of paper with four rough sketches on it. I favour the drinking-horn one, but I was under the impression that successive winners' names would be engraved on, not just written on a card. 1962 con; you reassure me. I'm glad to hear it. To my mind that's part of the purpose of these *being* BSFA funds in the first place, for them to be available for such eventualities as this."

Receipt from Jill Adams (no letter), 20th August 1962

"Received from A.H. Mercer to date the total sum of £15.15.10d, representing the entire sum collected in connection with the Fund, to be disposed of as decided by the committee of the British Science Fiction Association."

We know that Jill bought a silver communion cup from a shop in Southampton, which was presented for the first time at the 1963 Peterborough convention, to Peter Mabey. There are no further papers in the file until 1967.

Circular from Archie Mercer to past recipients & interested parties, 11th June 1967

"Since 1962 the administration of the Award has been handled by a sort of ad-hoc arrangement between the BSFA committee and the appropriate convention committee, and all expenses have been borne by one or other of those bodies. Jill Adams and Phil Rogers have at various times arranged for the engraving of winners' names to be kept up to date. On two of the five occasions I have handled the paperwork arrangements, and in other years have helped to ensure that the committees of that year got the details right and stuck to the generally-agreed formulae all along the line.

"So far this system has worked. It is, nevertheless, basically a hit-or-miss arrangement and there is in fact nothing to ensure that (a) the Award *is* in fact awarded each year, and (b) that the traditions concerning such matters as voter-eligibility, ballot-secrecy, etc, are maintained. At the 1967 convention I made a few tentative enquiries as to the Award's actual status. At the BSFA AGM, Ken Slater (Vice Chairman, and at the time the Award's incumbent holder) ruled that it was *not* a BSFA responsibility. If this is so, then possibly it's a convention responsibility. But this has not been definitely established either. Voting-rights are by policy confined to convention members, therefore voting forms are distributed with con-literature, and the Award is presented at the con; on the other hand, the winner's Certificate is signed by the senior BSFA officer(s) available in his or their capacities, and the Award itself is a substitute for a once-hoped-for increment to the BSFA library.

"Thus the question of precisely who has the power to decide on any changes of policy, new precedents, etc, is therefore obscure. Likewise with the question of precisely who will do the paperwork each year. It has been suggested (Ken Bulmer) that following the TAFF system, the latest holder should administer the passing of the Award to his/her successor, and that present and past holders as a body should take full responsibility for any questions of policy, etc, that may arise.

"Therefore I *propose* that the past and present holders accept collective responsibility for the future administration of the Award, accountable to nobody else whatsoever. Irrespective of the above, I *hereby offer* to become the regular paperwork administrator for an indefinite period."

From Terry Jeeves (1965 winner) to Archie Mercer, 13th June 1967

"While I fail to agree with Ken Slater that the Doc Weir Award is not a BSFA responsibility, I do agree that it is a good idea to fix the operation more exactly. Anent KFS, one might itemise the fact that the BSFA collected for, organised, purchased the goblet and generally brought the Award into existence. It has usually financed the petty cash involved; the certificates were commissioned, produced and paid for by the BSFA... even these are signed before presentation by a pair of BSFA officials... has Ken forgotten how I got him to sign his own as BSFA Chairman?"

From Phil Rogers to Archie Mercer, 15th June 1967

"...I believe, but stand to be corrected, that Jill has been using the little left over after purchase of the goblet to cover insurance (I hope that she has, I would hate to think of it uninsured). As to the engraving, for some years now I have paid for this out of my own pocket. Frankly, if I hadn't it would have meant the winners paying for this themselves, as it is neither a BSFA nor con responsibility, and Jill was/is not holding sufficient funds for this. I am not complaining nor seeking a refund. With the exception of the year I had a box made to put it in, it has not cost me more than 15/- a time, and I have got a bit of quiet pleasure out of it. In any case, the only reason I can see for wanting it to be a BSFA or con matter, is the small matter of finance. Get around this, and who needs 'em? If either BSFA or current con-committee have to pay, then I can see them wanting a say in the matter, leading to more confusion and more work."

From Jill Adams to Archie Mercer, 22nd June 1967

"I never insured the Award. The goblet and first engraving used all of the £15 I was given. If it is insured I have no idea who did it or when.... As to the cost of engraving it wouldn't hurt the winner to pay for it, even I could afford that."

From Ken Bulmer to Archie Mercer, 30th June 1967

"You know, the BSFA has been acting lately like the porkies of Gadarene. They choose in open AGM at a con to divorce the con from themselves, and people like me thought the con would suffer. Then they circularise at great length to try to re-establish the status quo by different means. Then we hear they have an enormous loss and no cash and, just perhaps, the con would have helped them. Now, with money that was voted to the BSFA to buy a library for the BSFA, and with people involved with the BSFA at all levels, they turn around and calmly say that the perpetuation of Doc's memory is not a BSFA affair. If the BSFA has washed their hands of the affair, then the DWA Certificate should not be signed by a lackey of the BSFA. It should properly be signed by the last holder, or the elected chairman of your group, if you go so far as that. But to humbly approach the organisation that has spurned you to get them to authorise what you have done is ludicrous. Voting, too, is nothing to do with the BSFA, but as you say that has been a con matter, then the con still has that duty. Although 'duty' is a strong word. The con allows, I suppose, the DWA to go on. But engraving can't be cheap. It might be nice to get the con to take over responsibility for engraving, as I believe is done with the Hugos."

From Doreen Parker (BSFA Secretary) to Archie Mercer, 29th July 1967

"It wasn't realised until after the AGM (when all responsibility for the DWA was disclaimed) that the Award was in fact bought by the BSFA and there was some back-correspondence about it. Therefore Ken Slater would like to rescind his statement that it doesn't belong to the BSFA, but would also like it to be run on the lines stated, that is, three past holders to be responsible for its being where it should be, BSFA Treasury responsible for costs, and to let you be 'overlord'."

From Archie Mercer to Daphne Sewell (secretary, 1969 Oxford convention), 30th November 1968

"I think there's been a little slip-up. You remember my notice for the DWA for the con-newsletter? My text of the first paragraph said the Award was for 'a person chosen by the membership of the British Science Fiction Convention'. You've made that read '...British Science Fiction *Association* Limited'. Which is not only erroneous but is directly contradictory to the sense of what follows. This isn't all that ghastly a mistake of course. For the record, though, it has long been deemed better for the winner to be chosen by con members rather than Association members, simply because the former category has a damn sight better idea of the possible field of candidates. I'll try to clear up the ambiguity in my next publicity handout on the subject. I suppose you have no idea of the next con-bulletin deadline yet?"

From Daphne Sewell to Archie Mercer, 2nd February 1969

"...The Doc Weir notice cannot, unfortunately, be included in the *Bulletin* as this has been drafted out including as little as possible, even missing out important items we wanted in, to get it out as soon as possible. The main part of the *Bulletin* will be litho but as the list of names will be coming in up to the last moment, they will be on a duplicated insert sheet, and if I fit in the names judiciously I should be left with a page over, and I'll try and fit it in there."

From Archie Mercer to Daphne Sewell, 23 February 1969

"On Friday the *Bulletin* #3 arrived, and I acknowledge with thanks your inclusion of the piece on the DWA. However, in our copies there were no voting forms... You did receive them, I suppose? I sent them early in the month."

From Daphne Sewell to Archie Mercer, 4th March 1969

"...The Committee decided that the bulletin was already very fannish and that we would prefer the voting form to be handed out at the convention at the same time as people register – and in this way they would be sure of getting a form as

we had put it in their hands and it would not destroy the overall effect of our *Bulletin*, which was to get people to register for the convention. If however, you feel strongly about this, drop me a line and I will send the forms back to you."

From Archie Mercer to Daphne Sewell, 6th March 1969

"Whether or not I 'feel strongly' about the forms being sent out by post is beside the point. Since the Award was instituted, rule-of-thumb franchise has been all those who have registered for the annual con. Since it is impossible to tell in advance whether a given person actually will attend, postal distribution is necessary if all 'qualified' voters are to be given a chance to vote. By deciding unilaterally not to send out the forms with their final *Bulletin* the Galactic Fair committee has in effect tried to amend this system. It may consider it has the right to do this; in all courtesy I think they should have contacted me, as the administrator, first. As it is, I've got an extra and unnecessary job on my hands to make good the omission. (At least things are better than last year. Then, the concom didn't send out its final newsletter – or the one that should have carried the forms – at all and since they kept their mouths shut until it was too late, all postal votes were up the Swanee)."

From Archie Mercer to Doreen Parker, 1st April 1969

"...Beryl has been 'commissioned' to take the goblet to a silversmith's, to find out what the marks are. Jill Adams (who originally bought it) says she suspects they might be plate peeling-off – in which case (she says) we was diddled, as the thing was flogged as solid silver. Better not spread this around, I think..."

Circular from Archie Mercer to past recipients & interested parties, 12th July 1970

"Voting rights in the Doc Weir Award have always been tied specifically to convention membership. This was because at the time of the Award's creation, membership of the annual convention was a better index of 'fannish knowledgeability' than was, for instance, BSFA membership. This despite the Award's administration being answerable to the Association not the convention. Thus, each year the DWA has been publicised and voting forms distributed with convention literature, allowing postal voting to take place.

"Now, this may have been fine in theory when it was set up. In more recent years, however, with conventions getting larger and tending to incorporate fringe-groups that are not easily integrated into the 'fannish' mainstream, con-membership is no longer the handy criterion that it was in the past. At the same time as Administrator I have not always found the exclusive convention tie-in easy to work. It depends both on the goodwill and efficiency of the incumbent committee, and both have at various times been lacking.

"While there is absolutely no reason to suppose the 1971 con-committee is liable to follow previous bad precedents, in the interest of avoiding an annual headache I should like to see the voting-rights detached from con-membership and applied somehow else. BSFA membership is the obvious alternative, because names and addresses of members are regularly published and thus available for the Award's administrator to do-it-himself in emergency. Beryl suggested a slight compromise; that all BSFA members should be enfranchised, with a postal vote to use if necessary, and that in addition all *attendees* at the convention should have voting forms handed to them at the hotel. This would retain a certain convention tie-in, would facilitate postal distribution of forms, and would serve to bring in both a greater total vote than hitherto *and* a greater 'informed' vote. If there is no violent objection.... I propose to institute this system for the 1971 voting."

From Terry Jeeves to Archie Mercer, 23rd July 1970

"I agree with you over the new fringe attendees who lack both knowledge and interest... but they were interested enough in conventions to attend one... doesn't that qualify them for a vote? Really what I feel you are after, though you may not have realised it, is just what I would like to say, but know it isn't really right... namely that the vote should only be given to 'our' kind of fan. Which means that in our own little ways we are trying to devise a legal screen which will only admit to voting those who *are* our types. Your screen has a finer mesh than mine. Mine says 'those who show interest by attending a con' (I would exclude members who don't attend, that is, postal votes). Your screen says 'con members *could* be untrue fen... let's limit it to BSFA members who must be *trufen* to cough up that much lolly for the love of SF."

From Archie Mercer to Peter Mabey, 24th April 1973 (passing over the administration of the DWA)

"The hassle concerning precisely who should and/or should not be enfranchised is unlikely ever to be finally settled. Terry Jeeves continues to maintain the vote should be tied to the con with BSFA absentees excluded. Darroll Pardoe continues to maintain that somehow 'fans' should be more rigorously segregated from 'non-fans' for the occasion. Precisely which formula you settle for is, naturally, up to you."

Archie's system was used for 1971, 72, 73 & 74. There is no correspondence in the file, but for 1975 and thereafter, voting rights were defined as 'all who are present at the convention', with no votes allowed by post or to BSFA members.

From Eve Harvey (Chairman, 1982 Easter convention) to Peter Mabey, 31 March 1982

"As I explained in my earlier letter, the committee are very conscious of their responsibility in connection with any award that is either voted for, or presented during the official Awards ceremony. In the eyes of the majority of attendees these awards have the implicit 'seal of approval' of the convention and so they must not only be valid but must be *seen* to be valid. The Doc Weir Award has, in recent years, received a large amount of criticism from fandom in general and it was in an attempt to allay these criticisms that we made suggestions for alterations in the administration (a nomination system).

"... The committee decided unanimously that in its present format the Doc Weir Award could not be endorsed by the Easter Convention. Any award that is based on public votes *must* have public acceptability to retain its validity, and until some move is made to recognise and alleviate the qualms of fandom as a whole, we are forced into this decision. Thus, I am afraid that if you want to collect votes at *Channelcon* this will have to be done privately by yourself and the Award cannot be presented at the Official Awards Ceremony." //

Unsurprisingly, no Award was presented at the 1982 convention, nor in 1983, 1986, & 1988. The Award nearly died, but since 1989 it has once again been given every year to a worthy recipient.

Greg Pickersgill, of course, needs no introduction here; he's one of the reasons *Prolapse* exists, having brought me back into the fannish fold through his various e-mail discussion groups, and now, thanks to the incredible Haverfordwest Fanzine Repository he is undoubtedly our Chief Researcher. But if Greg has a weakness, it's his inability to collect just *one* of anything. No, if it's numbered he has to have them all...

Collectors Anonymous

Greg Pickersgill

No.4 in a continuing series of True Confessions

With PW & Catherine
at *Interaction 2005*
where Greg was
British Fan Goll
Photo: Ian Whates



I don't think I've ever bought anything I was embarrassed to admit to, or even by mistake, but I do have this rather large quantity of British SF Book Club editions....

A couple of years back Catherine moved part of the wall of boxes in the bedroom and in the freshly revealed bookshelves I rediscovered my SF Book Club collection. I had about a third of a set – maybe 120 books – and while riffling through them I had an idea... And in hardly any time I had put up a website about the SFBC and discovered that I was now the planetary expert on it. (Go to: <http://www.gostak.org.uk:80/sfbc/sfbcindex.htm>)

But you can't leave a job half done can you? Although I had most of the first 150 issues (the good ones, really) I was short about 50 percent of the total run. Which I just absolutely had to have, of course. Serious research and like that, now, not just completism oh no. Anyway, to cut a long story short book-dealer Andy Richards told me about a man in Buckingham who'd offered him a long run of SFBC. Andy had just sort of laughed as no British dealer would touch a load of SFBC as a gift. After a degree of faffing about involving eBay I paid the man £250 for the privilege of taking them away. A quite stunning amount of money, but I had a Plan.

Oh it was all very exciting opening the boxes (quite a lot of them really, taking up a startling amount of the living room) and examining the books and seeing which ones had different cover designs and whether there were any numbers in them – a crucial factor that – and were there any newsletters (alas no...the newsletters are the really important part really, where the history of SFBC is recorded; the books actually don't matter at all!) and then stacking them all up in order of issue and, well, looking at them a bit. And then doing the compare & contrast with the copies I already had so I could dispose of the duplicates.

And then contacting the two or three other SFBC collectors I knew and offering them the duplicates really cheap and being more than somewhat disappointed when they said they didn't want any. As the whole damned Plan had been predicated on making back at least a proportion of the buying-in price by selling the duplicates off again, and fast, this was a bit of a disaster. Bum. Anyway, I now have more SFBC books than I know what to do with. A complete set for Research, and quite a large number of duplicates that really have to go somewhere soon (there must be a bin down at the tip.... that is of course another story).

One especially foolish aspect of this is that I have ended up with some books that no-one in their right mind would ever want to have in their home; some of the later SFBC issues were just plain dire – I need mention only Patrick Wyatt's *IRISH ROSE* to give the flavour of the thing. One day, I have promised myself, I will wring out any tiny bits of useful SFBC-info from a lot of those crummy books and just throw them away, which is all they deserve. Actually, the worst and most embarrassing thing about this whole escapade is not the substantial amount of cash laid out for what is largely a load of junk (with some gems therein) but the horrible fact that ever since getting them I have not improved, upgraded, added to or expanded my SFBC web-pages by as much as a single pixel. Oh dear.

'Collectors Anonymous' was Malcolm Edwards' idea, who asked, 'What is your single most embarrassing collecting moment – the one where you knew that any reasonable outside observer would conclude that you had lost your marbles completely?' I'm now looking rather urgently for more guilty secrets – you really *can* remain anonymous – to be revealed in future issues of *Prolapse*.

LOOKING BACKWARD

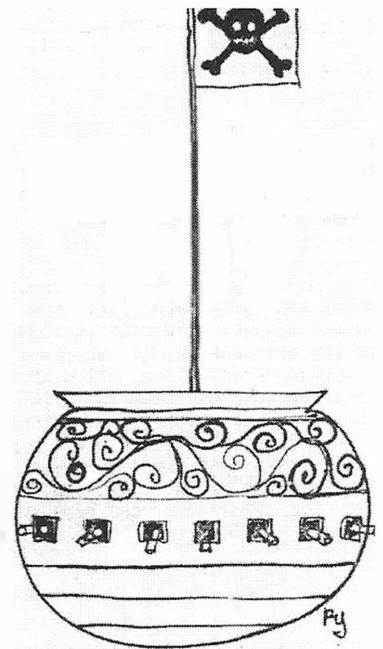
We have a treat next time, with John Hall's brilliant 'Up the Hill', his account of two years as a lodger with John & Marjorie Brunner. At 8000 words this pretty much fills the issue on its own, but I'm hoping to include the first part of Dick Ellingsworth's memoir of late-1950s fandom, together with Ken Bulmer's 'When Knights Were Old (and Tired)', a reprint from George Locke's *Smoke* which tells the full story of that epic weekend when London clashed with Cheltenham... For the future we have Dan Morgan's 'The Invisible Fan', his account of meeting various characters over a 55-year career, plus Ann Green's report on the 1994 *MiSdemeanour* convention and the Trial of Steve Green (does anyone have any picture of that guillotine sequence?). Then there's Ken Slater's 'House of Horrors' (his trip to the 1975 *BeNeLuxcon*); and the special 'Kettering 57' anniversary issue (with Tony Keen). Lots more in the pipeline, too. //

The Melting Pot

Or, 'Department of Engaged Response'

As Claire Brialey said in a bit I cut from her LoC, "what I really want to receive is not so much letters of comment, but letters of engaged response". Bang on target, that woman! So fire-off your own fannish projectiles, see if you can blow me out of the water for getting it wrong in the last issue. Editorial bits in italics *like this*, British spelling, and hopefully, a few new faces this time.

Illo from Pam Yates, recycled from *Speculation-22*



"I'm happy to participate in the orgy of vicarious recollection that you provide in *Prolapse*" – Fred Lerner, LoC

Dave Hardy

Dave@astroart.org

Hi Peter,

"What interested me most in this ish, not surprisingly, are the comments on *Brumcon*, and especially yours on the first page. After all, I *was* at *Brumcon* as a first-timer, with my friend Peter Hammerton, and one of the photos you have shows pretty well how we felt: sitting there like a couple of lemons. It probably says more than anything else about this, that I didn't attend another SF con until *SciCon* in 1970. . . It is a sad state of affairs that newcomers can feel left out like this. I think some people do try to welcome them to the fold – I know I do when I can – but undoubtedly it still goes on, and it isn't helping to bring new blood in. We 'enjoyed' the con in a sense, in that we liked SF and the people there, and the art on the walls (in my case – Pete's too, though only as a collector of magazines, etc.), and this was a place where everyone was, or should have been, on the same wavelength. At the same time we felt alienated, because we didn't really understand what was going on, the language that was being spoken (plurals like 'fen', etc., which had a kind of logic to it, of which we'd have liked to be a part), which was all obviously 'in' stuff, but nobody bothered to talk to us, ask us who we were, knew that I did SF/space art or appeared to care."

Two lemons?

Photo; from Ina Shorrocks



*Sorry, Dave, it had slipped my mind that you were a first-timer in 1959, and thanks for confirming my supposition that the con was off-putting to outsiders. But that year in particular, the organisers were in a bit of a *Catch-22* situation – they didn't know whether to go for sercon or fannish content, and whichever way would have upset somebody!*

Dick Ellingsworth

rwe@blueyonder.co.uk

Dear Peter,

"*Prolapse 5* — what can I say? For an old revenant like me, it's a vitalising tonic. Reaches the parts that other zines cannot reach. Let's start with the editorial, shall we? Your assertion that the 1960 London con was run by Ella Parker and Ethel Lindsay is not quite correct. Ella was certainly one of the organisers, along with Sandra Hall and (I think) Bobbie Wilde/ Gray. Ethel was roped in for various duties at the event but I'm pretty certain she wasn't involved in the organisation. And, despite the programme (or lack of it), I think most people who were there would agree that it was a success. The fact that it went ahead at all, after all the problems with hotels, was marvellous enough.

"It all revolves around why conventions are held in the first place. Realistically, not too many people are going to be recruited into fandom that way. The commitment, in terms of money and time, is too much unless you're already a convert. A large number of fans (myself among them) believed that conventions were for people who already knew each other, to get together and enjoy themselves. If you're looking to recruit new blood, as the BSFA was supposed to do, a better way would have been to organise displays and lectures in local libraries, maybe even organise a few evening classes. Conventions simply weren't the right medium for the job. You're right in that fandom was getting recruits irrespective of the BSFA. Despite being roped into various activities from time to time, I don't recall that I was ever a member. I don't think Don Geldart was, either, and there were quite a few others who either never joined or who let their subs lapse."



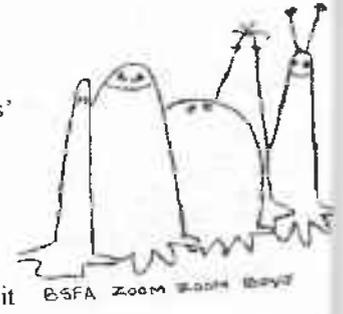
Dick, I stand corrected about Ethel, I meant Bobbie. And yes, those early cons were being run for people who already knew each other, but let's not forget that the BSFA was supposed to be recruiting people for conventions, not the other way round. For that to work, cons needed to have at least some SF-content, to help newcomers feel a bit more at home – right, Dave?

Jim Linwood

JLinwood@aol.com

Hi Peter,

"The list of programme items for the 1960 *Loncon* gives the impression of a Rotarians' convention. I remember it as a distinctly bohemian affair, possibly because it was held in London. There were also more young women of our age group (Penny Chandler, Tikwis Hall, Dot Hartwell and others) beginning to appear in fandom and at conventions around this time. The Youngfen spent much of the time in the nearby Fitzroy Tavern in Charlotte Street which had been the haunt of George Orwell and Dylan Thomas and had their photos on the wall to prove it. The landlord kept an enormous dog behind the bar which he claimed had played the title version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The only programme item I remember was the TAFF speeches: these were quite unusual as the candidates (Sandy Sanderson, Eric Bentcliffe and Mal Ashworth) were told that their speeches had to explain why the other two candidates and not they should win TAFF. When the convention ended on Easter Monday, a few of us took the current TAFF winner, Don Ford, to Trafalgar Square to witness the end of the annual anti-nuclear Aldermaston March. Most of us shared the views of the protesters but Ford claimed they were 'a bunch of goddamn Commies.'



"I have a copy of Sture Sedolin's *Cactus #5* from May 1960 which has a long *Loncon* report by Archie Mercer. Do you want a text scan? It's very detailed and I think he claimed at the time that he had mentioned all attendees, so if you count up the names....

"George Locke wondered why Atom portrayed him as a wheeled BEM. Simple; George was then what was known as a 'travelling giant' being in the army at the time (hence the corporal's stripe on the BEM) and sent to various colonial outposts. The term "Gang of Five" only arose recently when Ina's photos of *Brumcon 59* appeared showing the five of us (Locke/Rispin/Mayne/Jordan/myself) together on several prints."

*Not disparaging Rotary conventions, are you Jim? Mind you, not much happens and they're full of old men – just like *Novacon!* George will be grateful for that simple explanation of the 'wheeled BEM', and I've found a few more of Atom's BEMS in the 'Combozine' Ella produced for that 1960 convention, including those above and opposite. And yes, I did count up all the names mentioned by Archie and the grand total is 93 (including himself) – more than I'd thought, although quite a few people only popped-in for an hour or two, and a lot were old-timers brought out of the woodwork because it was in London. Archie only mentions three newcomers as having specifically been brought in by the BSFA, so my point last time (that cons grew without the BSFA) is still valid, I think. As for Sture Sedolin, here's someone with the inside story....*

John-Henri Holmberg

john-henri@replik.se

Dear Editor,

"The inspiring cover on your latest issue awakens perhaps not fond, but certainly weird memories of distant childhood. Yes, I remember Sture Sedolin, along with the other living giants of early 1960s Swedish fandom. And I can well imagine that he may have stood out a bit when visiting fandom-oriented British fans. In fact, he stood out even among Swedish sercon fans. When I published my first fanzine in 1962, I mailed copies to the very few people whose addresses had been published in the prozine *Häpna!* fan column during the last two or three years.

"Swedish fandom had come into existence when *Häpna!* was launched in 1954, and for a while had been quite active; after only 11 fanzine issues published in 1954 and as few in 1955, there was an increase to 27 in 1956; 28 in 1957, 1958 reached 50 and 1959 surpassed it with 51. Then came a decline, to 39 issues in 1960, 24 in 1961 and a mere 19 in 1962. Largely, Swedish fandom had burned itself out in in-fighting, feuds and absurdly grandiose but entirely impractical projects. The first Swedish convention, *Luncon* in August 1956, had been followed by two in Stockholm, in 1957 and 1958, but there was no real 1959 convention, only a sad gathering of perhaps a dozen fans in the town where 17-year-old Alvar Appeltofft lived, and that meeting presaged the demise of the Science Fiction Union Scandinavia, of which he had been president, secretary, and official editor. Everyone was disgusted at the SFUS, after spending two years squabbling about it and about Appeltofft's weird schemes to bring science fiction to the masses via advertising folders handed out to all high school students in the country (never printed), arranging letters-to-the-editor campaigns to promote SF in the national daily newspapers (almost none were published), and overseeing fanzine publishing and local club meetings (most folded).

"One of the few defenders of these plans was Sture Sedolin, as he was then known (it was a pen name, his real name being Carl A. Hällström), who was only a year older than Appeltofft. Sture lived in the Stockholm suburb of Vällingby, and had entered fandom in 1956, shortly afterward publishing his first fanzine, *Super*, which after a few issues was combined with Norwegian Roar Ringdahl's *Fantasi* to become *Super-Fantasi*, for a couple of issues hailed as the best to have been published in Sweden. In 1958, he went on to become the first news-fanzine publisher in the country, launching the purportedly but never quite weekly *SF-fronten*, which then changed its name to *SF Times* after Sture had come into contact with the Taurasis who published the US newszine *Science Fiction Times*. The Swedish 'edition', as it was called in those guileless days, was quite similar to the American original and contained endless listings of next month's prozine contents on Ace paperbacks, as well as extremely brief reviews and news about movies which seldom were put into production. But Sture also wanted a larger context than miniscule Swedish fandom, and so started the English-language *Cactus*, which for a while was a fairly decent and even vaguely fannish fanzine, although I always suspected that this last was more of an indication of his declining interest in SF and fandom than of any real fannish inclinations.

"For he was a very serious and constructive fan indeed, and became in many ways my first mentor in fandom. Like I said, I mailed that first fanzine issue to the half-dozen addresses I had found in the more recent issues of *Häpna!*, and most of them responded in the way most of us might respond to an obviously very young neo's unexpected first appearance via fanzine: they wrote enthusiastic, encouraging and very kind letters. One of them, Lars-Olov Strandberg, as I detailed in my essay on him for the *Interaction* program book, started phoning to invite me to club meetings. One turned up at my door.



'Does anyone want to talk science fiction?'

This was in early spring, 1963, and the first I knew of it was when my mother came to fetch me, since I had a visitor – a strange man wearing slippers. This last made an indelible impression on both my parents, since Sture never wore anything else during those first years: always slippers, even in the snow. But apart from that he was dark-haired and thin, he gave me old fanzines and agreed to print mine on his Gestetner, and for years I would travel by bus and subway to his small apartment on Stockholm's south side, carrying my cut stencils and bags of printing paper, Sture would print my issues and meanwhile I'd sit somewhere and read from his huge collection of fifties fanzines.

"By the time I knew him, he retained little interest either in fandom or science fiction; his other great passions, for the big band era jazz and for old-time movies, had superseded his earlier enthusiasms and his record and film collection was already huge. In time, he became a record producer, currently he is completing a day-by-day account of the career of Tommy Dorsey. And that, perhaps, indicates something of his mindset; Sture had no patience with fannish fans or those interested in fandom for its own sake. While science fiction was still his main interest, he expected fans to collect it, talk about it, know everything about it and when writing, either write it or write about it. A lone voice crying in the wilderness, not only at the 1960 Eastercon but in Swedish fandom as well.

"What I saw of 1960s British fandom was peculiar indeed, but I suppose this was mostly due to random chance. Sture's main correspondent in England was Alan Dodd, and he put me in contact with him; I corresponded dutifully for a few years with Alan, and I believe it was he who also introduced me to my second British correspondent, Peter Singleton, whose handwritten and very long letters detailed the SF he read, interspaced with brief mentions of his various tries at escaping from the mental ward where he was held. I still recall vividly one letter which arrived after a couple of weeks' silence; Peter apologised for not having written, but told me that this was because he had finally managed to escape, but had been foolish enough to break into a chemist's in order to steal prescription medicines, had been apprehended while still in the shop, and then had been placed in a padded cell for quite some time on his return to the asylum (Whittingham), and so had not been allowed to continue his fanac.

"I suspect that these correspondents gave my fourteen- and fifteen-year old self a peculiar and perhaps not entirely fair image of British fandom; so did the few new fanzines I got from England, many published by Philip Harbottle, whose name alone made me suspect him to be a hoax. In fact, not until a person called Peter Weston turned up did I begin to believe that there might be sane and interesting people in British fandom, which I suppose is one of the main reasons that my first trips to meet English-speaking fans were to far-off America, not as would have been both easier and cheaper to next-door Britain. Which is another reason to appreciate *Prolapse*, with its perhaps a bit-belated, but nevertheless welcome news that there actually were active, normal, interesting and talented fans in England during those years when I exchanged letters with Peter Singleton in his locked and padded room and instead dreamt of Towner Hall and the Bherkeley Bhoys."

Now let's get this right, J-H; you were a fourteen-year-old boy and a strange man came to the door, took you back to his flat and gave you odd magazines to read... then you started to correspond with a hermit and a homicidal maniac... I take it your parents were pretty liberal-minded, then? Seriously, this answers a lot; I always did wonder how you managed to know so much about Terry Carr so early, at a time when I'd never even heard of him – you had help!

Chris Priest

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Hi, Pete,

"I came into fandom through the BSFA, but these things are never the straightforward cause and effect that people with neat minds like to think. I was a solitary SF reader, totally unaware of fandom or cons or the BSFA, or anything. My only knowledge of SF was the paperbacks I bought. One of those was "Penguin SF", edited by Brian Aldiss. On the blurb it said he was President of the BSFA. I imagined there must be a headquarters somewhere in the UK, perhaps on the scale of the United Nations building in New York, to which Mr Aldiss turned up daily in a limo. A few weeks later the London *Evening News* published a review of a new novel by John Christopher. It was one of those really irritating reviews where the reviewer's ignorance is blatant. I can't remember exactly what it said, but it was along the lines of 'This is terrific stuff, unlike the rest of science fiction, which is of course complete crap.' I seethed quietly, but a couple of days later they printed a letter from Brian Aldiss, pointing out the idiocy of the remark. I was pleased to see it and the newspaper printed Brian's address, so I wrote to him. His reply was friendly, and he gave me Ella Parker's address as membership sec of the BSFA. Much followed from that, and it was my way in ... so for those who in the early 1960s saw the BSFA as a way of recruiting new people to fandom, they can count me as one. Except, I know in reality that it was just a matter of time and happenstance before I got hooked. For instance, in 1962 when I contacted Brian, I didn't realize that SF magazines still existed (they didn't sell them in the bookshops where I used to go). A few weeks later, though, I was regularly reading *New Worlds*, *Galaxy*, *F&SF*, etc. Contact through any of those would also have led directly to fandom.

"Like you, I sometimes wonder what happened to people who used to be in fandom. At my first Eastercon (in 1964) I got friendly with a guy named Terry Bull. He seemed a well-known fan, to the extent there were jokes about him. (Ron Bennett: "Don't make Terry Bull jokes about his name", etc.) At one point we walked down the road together and had lunch somewhere. He seemed well in with lots of people. I don't think he went to any more conventions after that, and I haven't heard anyone mention him in years. (Something I said? Something he ate?) There was another Terry there that year: Terry Pratchett. Whatever happened to him?"

Good old Brian! I wonder what would happen these days if some little enthusiast wrote to a well-known writer – well, you wouldn't find the address in a newspaper, for a start. Probably get a form-letter back giving details of their web-site and inviting you to join the fan-club. Although Ken Macleod is a BSFA member and he'd probably do the decent thing!

Chris, from
Chris, 2007

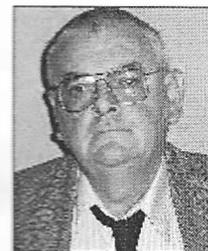


John Hall

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While I was reading out the last issue, far sooner than I expected, John sent me the *Brum*. I was amazed and delighted; it's absolutely terrific, hilariously funny but also a thoughtful, perceptive and respectful memoir about a couple living an unconventional life. I congratulated John on a fine achievement, and suggested life would seem empty now that he'd finally finished...

John in professional mode! Photo: from John



Dear Peter,

"Thank you for your concern about the possible emptiness of my life following the completion of that MS, but I could only wish it were true. Once I knew you were back from Texas, I kind of thought I had better get my ass in gear and finish the damn thing, and I have put back one or two sets of accounts, etc. as a result, a thing only economically possible at this time of year. Now I must get on with those, plus finish the next Moonhead release (a philanthropic enterprise of a record label. I produce CDs of mixed and mashed, mainly instrumental and mostly electronic music. They are wildly unpopular but nevertheless have a small devoted following, although me being me I'd probably produce them if no one heard them at all) and start hanging the drum for *Motorway Dreamer #4*. I can only dream of feeling empty.

"Tony flew in for one night of 'fabulous mythical Tynecon' and that was for Lisa Conesa's poetry soiree, for which it appears Sam Long was mysteriously but fortuitously absent, so no visual record survives of the sartorial shipwreck that was reckoned as one of its attributes. But looking at the pictures of Judy Blish's 'Wizard of Ozimov' I'm not sure that we could have been that bad. I was never keen on the fancy dress items at Cons (I eventually became un-keen on Cons in Toto) and I can see why. Tony is a very nice person, and I'm sure everyone had a good time. If no one made much comment, I suspect it was due to the widespread aversion to dressing up. I agree that in the light of the fashions of the day, that was perverse. But old miserable bastard that I am, I think I'd be the same today. John-Henri Holmberg's tale was very entertaining, but I can honestly say I've never suffered from collecting mania that bad. I'll refrain from pointing and laughing at the LoC writers pic's this time. There must be pictures of Holdstock and the stripper; offer money, Peter. That'll bring them out of the woodwork."

Paul Vincent

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Dear Peter,

"Many thanks for *Prolapse #5*, the highlight of which was undoubtedly the retrospective on 'The Wizard of Ozimov'. To think: had I started my con-going a couple of years earlier, and had I not 'settled' for hanging around *Novacons* for umpteen years before finally trying an Eastercon, I might have witnessed this wonderful fannish presentation! The photos brought it all vividly to life, so I'm looking forward to seeing the online version in all its technicolour glory. The nearest equivalent to 'Ozimov' that I can recall from the mid-70s to early-80s, were Ian Sorenson's folk-esque rock operas, beginning, I think, with 'Neo'. I think 'Neo' was probably premiered at a *Novacon*, though I can't recall which one. Indeed, I don't recall actually witnessing it myself, since I was probably propping-up the bar, out of respect for the con-hall allergy which kept me away from so many program items in those days.

"The only related item I can ever recall participating in was the Brum Group Christmas party in 1983, upstairs at the Imperial Hotel. I believe Bob Shaw was our guest for the evening, sandworms (tasting, of course, just like chicken) were on the menu, and postprandial entertainment took the form of a musical medley, delivered with maximum gusto and minimal talent by that famous trio of inebriates, Green, Tudor and Vincent. Take one parodic variation on 'Anything Goes', penned by S. Green, take three beer-sodden BSFG-ers with quarter-octave vocal ranges, rehearse them for all of five minutes, and you have the sad spectacle of the three of us trying vainly to entertain the assembled BSFG-plus-guests by bellowing out:-

'Columnists who once used better words,
Now only use four-letter words
From start to close,
When slagging the pros.

'Now Brum you see is the place for me,
And the BSFG is the place to be.
For all we do, we do fannishly,
From our heads down to our toes.

'And so just one month after Novacon,
We're out to show what everybody knows:
Any Drink Goes!'



Not the terrible trio of Green, Tudor & Vincent but a warm-up by another lot of Singing Idiots the month previous, at *Novacon-13*; Steve Green, John Wilkes & Steve Lawson. (Ian Sorenson master-minded the affair and is just off-picture). Photo: Arnold Akien

"Even the affable Bob Shaw, normally the most generous of fellows, muttered something about it needing more rehearsal. Never again! So why did I find myself part of a formation-drinking team at *Novacon 14*, less than two years later, drinking in synchronisation to the 'Dance Of The Cygnets from Swan Lake'? So much for never again! No wonder I gaffiated! Anyway, Peter, another splendid *Prolapse*. *Mojo* magazine has a regular feature (called 'Eyewitness', I think), where they take a significant event in Pop Music history from the last 60 years, interview as many eyewitnesses as possible, and edit it into a shifting chronological account of the event, complete with photos. It's always been a great, grass-roots way of retelling these events and *Prolapse* is now established as doing the same for UK fan-history. A brilliant, stimulating read!"

That was my valedictory Party, Paul, at the end of my year as Chairman. I dressed up in a Father Christmas outfit and gave everyone a parcel of gift-wrapped SF paperbacks. The main dish was 'Roast Suckling Sandworm' (actually cuts of pork), which I persuaded the chef to arrange in great coils on a huge silver platter, and carry into the room to general consternation!

John Dallman

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Peter,

"Fannish history, being a collection of personal histories, needs some personal connection before it's really interesting. And your mighty null-A mind, scanning through the light cones of the past and future, picked exactly the right moment in the *Prolapse* you sent me.

"Back at my first Eastercon, in the too-recent-for-interest 1980, 1/2r spent an hour or so telling a few new fans about the fannish tradition, including 'The Wizard of Ozimov', although I don't think he used that title. It was well done: *Albacon* 80 had lots of energy and action, but wasn't all that strongly connected to the past. Averaged with *Yorcon* II the following year, it was probably about right, but that wasn't something that we *Seacon* '79 recruits could know or understand at the time. The essence of the show – the cowardly lion, Anne McCaffrey and Judy Blish – stayed with me, and today it came flooding back. There's just enough personal connection for it to be evocative, and enough distance to see the skinny youth playing the Tin Faned, older now, as the writer who found MYTHAGO WOOD lurking in his subconscious. The odd thing is that I spent time talking to Brian Hampton at that convention, too, and he never mentioned the show.

"What was Giles doing drawing the hotel bar at Hinkley, anyway?

Yes, it did look a bit like the 'Snooty Fox', or whatever they call that bar now. Lastish's cover was actually assembled from bits of four different Giles cartoons, plus the little man from a recent Daily Mail. I could visualise the idea so clearly in my mind that I became really frustrated that I was unable to draw it. Dave Hicks, where are you!

Mark Plummer

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Peter,

"The new *Prolapse* was a little confusing by virtue of its familiarity. In part this was because I'd seen working copies of several of the pages – including the cover – at *Corflu* where we'd also spoken about some of the contents, all of which meant that it didn't seem entirely new. But also... that look: about 30-odd pages, A3 folded to A4, yellow cover. We still have a small pile of copies of the last *Banana Wings* sitting in a heap in the living room (the printer gave us about twenty more than we asked for) and I am having to be careful to ensure that *Prolapse* #5 doesn't disappear into our own back-issue storage system. True, your cover is a stronger shade of yellow – more virulent – but all the same...

"Yes, I wonder about those people who show up once at a convention, pub meeting or other fannish gathering and are never seen again. When we started the Croydon group – or at least an iteration of a Croydon group – in the late 1980s (which of course barely counts as fan history at all) we were listed in the local free newspaper and occasionally new faces would show up. Ours was only an SF group in the sense that it was a bunch of fans who met regularly in a pub, and the talk was of SF and fandom to the extent only that they were common interests. A few people came and stayed; others appeared once, seemed vaguely discomfited by scurrilous convention gossip when we could have been talking about the science in Greg Bear novels or the latest incarnation of *Star Trek*, and were never seen again.

"There is, obviously, little we can learn from these people because they're never seen again. We could, I guess, use the web to try to track down D K Fawcett (BSFA member # 64) to ask him (always assuming it was in fact a bloke) why he seemingly never felt inclined to return to an SF convention after 1959. I've done a quick search and he may be the chap who gets cited in lots of Australian scientific papers about agriculture – Bruce Gillespie's an Australian, so perhaps they know one another – or maybe he's the man out near Bath who wanted to put up a barn in 2000. We could even hire a private detective. Nearer to home, though, I can think of a couple of people (one of whom is Yvonne Rowse) who went to a convention (1988?) and then didn't return for many years, so perhaps that's the best we can do to find out what seems to be a turnoff for newcomers and even then it assumes one person's reaction is somehow typical.

"I've been thinking over the 'Wizard of Ozimov' thing and whether I'd ever heard of it before. Obviously I had – I've read THEN more than once – but for it didn't really stick in my mind. There's probably *pages* about it in *The Book*, too, isn't there? It's all generally interesting, although I wonder about its legacy of Am-Dram performances at conventions. Rob Holdstock says 'it inspired mini-theatricals at Eastercons in later years' which may be alluding to events in the second half of the seventies and the early eighties which I never saw, but if it indirectly inspired some of the more recent convention 'mini-theatricals' then I'm not sure it's necessarily anything to be proud of. These performances so often have the air of fans attempting to duplicate the work of professionals who are backed by extensive technical resources, and to do so equipped only with a cardboard box and some enthusiasm. But then here's me playing at amateur magazines so what would I know?

"All this early days of the BSFA stuff is fascinating and we may well want to tap you for some involvement in the programme at next year's Eastercon where the BSFA will be fifty years old. It's certainly interesting to see the evolution of intent between the original Kettering '58 motion and the constitution as framed by Eric Bentcliffe and Terry Jeeves. I'm not sure I agree with Vince Clarke, though that their wording has the sense that the BSFA exists 'to improve the standard of science fiction'. The phrase that was used is 'encourage the reading, writing and publishing of good literature of this class' and it seems to me about recognising and drawing attention to the good stuff, something which I would imagine the BSFA aspires to do to this day without necessarily thinking that it has any 'serious' influence over writers and publishers. Granted it's not at all about sucking people into fandom, but neither is it as hubristically over-optimist as Vince seemed to think.

"I am flattered indeed that in making the point about the name I end up echoing a person as eminent as yourself. And I think it remains an issue. I'm sure the modern BSFA attracts people who see it as our equivalent of SFWA, and to be honest the BSFA hasn't exactly discouraged this as anybody's money is good. Ken MacLeod remarked, jokingly, at an Eastercon that once he'd started publishing SF he'd joined the BSFA: 'Get the job, join the union.' Others, however, seem to take the same stance only do so a little more literally. I've argued the point over the BSFA's writers' magazine *Focus* on several occasions, as personally I don't believe the BSFA is an SF writers' organisation. Sadly – well, I think it's sad – the BSFA 2007-style seems further away from fandom than ever before (though *Vector* #250 was pretty damn good, I thought).

Seacon '79 recruit!
Photo from John



"I am envious of your roster of letter-writers, and indeed there's plenty of stuff to comment on within the pages of 'The Melting Pot' alone, but I'll just pick up on John Hall who notes Eric Mayer's position on writing letters to those ezines he reads – that he feels no sense of *obligation* to write to them. I'm sure that's entirely reasonable, but don't we all want to receive letters written because the writer was *inspired*? It's one of the reasons why I've never used that check-box thing on a fanzine to indicate those recipients who need to do something to stay on the mailing list. Mostly I'm not interested in a letter written under those circumstances. And anyway, I prefer to keep people in suspense about that..."

"But *Prolapse* just genuinely inspires a response. It's all truly interesting and engaging to the extent that I'd be happier to see more of any element of it – letters, articles, editorial matter – whilst not wanting to do so at the expense of anything else. You'll just have to do more, and bigger, *Prolapses*, Peter. So it's good, but it's also something of which I want to be a part. I can't offer any first-hand experiences of *Yarcon* or whatever, although if you keep this up for long enough you'll be able to become nostalgic about something I *can* remember. I'd also like to see more people like me involved, by which I mean fans of my generation – and sorry, for these purposes this excludes you – because it is a publication with contemporary relevance and not just a bunch of old blokes sitting around trying to remember how things were when they were young. Keep on keeping on, Peter. Get a scene going. And if anybody doesn't like it... well, they can go off and start their own seventy-seven year-old tradition."

Kind words, Mark! The yellow cover was accidental – my new printer called round to the house with a 'proof' with a yellow card cover, and was so helpful I just told him to go ahead without stopping to realise that we've collectively rather over-used that colour lately. No, nothing about 'Ozimov' in The Book; that would have gone into the Missing Chapter I didn't have time to write – on the seventies conventions, 1972-76. And I am trying to get fans of your generation involved but it's hard going... As for my suggestion about the name 'BSFEA' – 'British Science Fiction Enthusiasts Association', well, not everyone thinks it was such a good idea –

Joseph Nicholas

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Peter,

"—and it would probably have lasted all of five minutes before the, er, 'enthusiasts' decided that they didn't want to be organised with a chair, a minutes secretary, et al. Recall the repeated attempts by the so-called London Circle to establish a formal structure for itself, never to get further than people paying over a membership subscription before merrily going off to do their own thing just as they'd done innumerable times before. I'm edging into counter-factuality here, I know, but I suspect that if the BSFA as-we-know-it hadn't tried to strike out in a new direction, to attempt to engage potential fans who were interested in the pure quill of science fiction rather than (say) hypnotism demonstrations, it would have lasted just about as long as those abortive London Circle affairs.

"Thank you for *Prolapse 5*. I read it with interest, but don't have much to say by way of response, having missed the 1974 Eastercon because I didn't encounter fandom until the late summer of that year – although I recall hearing reminiscences and reading encomia about *Tynecon* all through the 1970s. I would not be at all surprised to find the letter column of your next issue full of similar testimonials...(as used to be in the 1970s, one reason people were still talking about *Tynecon* several years later was that the Gannets wouldn't stop talking about it).

"I see that I have been quoted on the cover, but in such a way as to entirely change my meaning. Extracted from their context, my words appear as an endorsement; read within their context, it's clear that they express (at the very least) a degree of doubt about your view of fandom's history. I recall that you once said, some 23 or 24 years ago, in response to a similar comment from me about a 'pulled quote' from a letter, that to extract a line in this fashion and provide it with a new context was a Fine Old Fannish Tradition, but I'd contend that to treat parts of an argument as capable of such independent disassembly is to pretend that they have no intrinsic relationship to each other, which is Just Plain Daft"

OK, then call it the BSFRA – 'British Science Fiction Readers' Association'. Either way, that would have been a more honest and straightforward description of the new organisation. Ironically, it didn't intend to 'strike out in a new direction' – that was an accidental by-product of the ruse. Regarding the front-cover lino last time, that was another bit of irony – that's the whole point of lino. Anyone thinking you were endorsing the product would swiftly discover otherwise when they read your LoC, then they'd look back at the cover lino and see the humour there. As for the London Circle, among the papers Ted Tubb recently gave me was a typed copy of their 'Constitution', not dated, but prepared for adoption at a special meeting on 2nd April, 1959. Yet by October the club had collapsed and the SF Club of London had instantly taken its place. The story is told in more detail in Rob Hansen's THEN.... and speaking of which....

Rob Hansen

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Peter,

"I've always regretted I didn't find fandom a year earlier and get to go to *Tynecon*. So, naturally, I had no first-hand knowledge of things such as 'The Wizard of Ozimov'. You do a good job here of piecing together the recollections of those who took part, producing the sort of interesting and eclectic article I enjoy in *Prolapse*. It's not actually that much of a miracle that the Doc Weir correspondence file ended up with me. At the time I was writing THEN, Vince Clarke put out the call for research material and all manner of strange and interesting stuff turned up. Not everything, of course – people have assumed the visitors book from the Globe, with all those historic signatures in it, must have come my way but, alas, it didn't – but quite a few bits and pieces. I shall dig out some other examples for you in future.

"You said, 'British fandom has run in a continuous stream since 1930 or so and its story, as told by Rob Hansen's THEN, is the only 'legitimate history' of SF fandom in this country'. Well, I tried to be as conscientious as I could in tracing the line from 1930 to 1980-ish, and the view of major events and conflicts presented is more-or-less the consensus view of

fans of the era as gleaned from contemporary sources, but that's not to say that different interpretations of some events than those I present couldn't be equally valid. I tried to be fair and present both sides of any argument, but there are instances where I was hampered by lack of source material. I'm thinking specifically of UK fandom's first major feud, the schism that occurred in Leeds fandom in the 1930s. In that instance, and in specific response to THEN, Sam Moskowitz wrote a piece in *Fantasy Commentator* giving the other side of the story. I've been meaning to incorporate some of that info in a new draft of the 1930s section for years, but have yet to get around to it."

David Redd

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Dear Peter,

"Thanks for *Prolapse #5*. From my viewpoint on the sidelines it looks good, though possibly partisan in spots. Partisan? You may be right to query this term, used when I was thinking of your BSFA discussions. 'Evident personal bias towards sercon written fandom' might have been nearer the mark. That said, you're probably as conscientious and fair-minded a commentator on fandom as I've ever helped prop up a bar. During my infrequent peeks at Worldcon, Eastercon, Novacon, etc, I've seen whole universes of other fannish activity going on (with a continuity of decades); they're very far from my own sercon written interests, but I'm aware they're major interests for other people. 'Fandom is just a front for filkers and costumers' sort of thing – my point is that their inputs into fannish twists and turns tend to be regarded as minimal and I suspect 'tain't so. Not that I want to go any further into this..."

Now that's an interesting point, David. Fan-history is usually written by the fanzine 'cohort' not because it was ever 'dominant' but because, well, that's what we do, while the con-runners are running around organising and the other types are doing their thing – which isn't writing. And it's always been that way – for instance, we have very little written accounts about the activities of the Liverpool group, since by-and-large they were more interested in social events, making films and so on. The extreme case is the first Birmingham group which existed for six years (1949-55) but left almost no traces because its members don't appear to have ever written for fanzines, or corresponded with anyone outside the city.

Robert Lichtman

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Hi Peter,

"George Locke speaks of the "sercon vs. fannish" dichotomy as though it was something that happened only in the early '50s and is now all patched up and no longer an issue. As a matter of fact, there *are* still people beating that dead horse. The most extreme of these is probably Norm Metcalf, who rails on in his apazines about such matters. He did this most recently in his January SAPSzine, and I can offer no better commentary on it than to quote a couple of my mailing comments in my April SAPSzine (and as you might guess from reading them, the SAPS members I'm quoting were reacting to Norm's trashing of Harry Warner Jr.'s fan-history books in the October mailing):

"(A comment to Wrai Ballard:) "To Metcalf you write, 'If Harry Warner's books are a list disguised as a story it was a damned good story... He had an awfully wide field to cover and if someone else can do a better history I'd like to see it.' That's my take on Harry's fan-history books, too. Norm is just creebing because to him the history of fandom is only about yammering on about science fiction to the exclusion of everything else (i.e., the human element, humour, etc.)"

"(A comment to Rocky Willson:) "To Norm you write, 'I was unaware that there was much dissent about Harry Warner Jr.'s history of fandom. When others didn't disagree with him, I naturally presumed they agreed with his reporting. It appears I was wrong.' Not at all— Norm paints a much more negative view of Harry's fan-history than anyone else, summarized in this mailing's *Resin* where he writes that 'apparently Harry had little knowledge of science-fiction fandom. He put far more time and effort into pseudo-fandom than he did into science-fiction fandom.' What Norm means by 'pseudo-fandom' is *anything* that appears in a fanzine or is discussed by fans either in small gatherings or at conventions that isn't strictly about science-fiction. By his lights, nearly everything that appears in SAPS is a manifestation of 'pseudo-fandom' and we are mostly all 'pseudo-fans.' It makes me wonder why Norm has remained a member of SAPS all these years given his views; we can't be very nourishing."

*Gosh, that name takes me back a bit – Norm Metcalf's *New Frontiers* was one of the two half-size offset-printed sercon fanzines that set me on the road to perdition, back in 1963, though he never participated in *Speculation*. I didn't know he was still around (or SAPS, either). But I wonder how Norm squared his world-view with *Warhoon*, which had some of the very best serious commentary about SF, yet was eminently fannish? And it's interesting to see that Harry Warner's 'histories' are attracting the same sort of criticisms as are being levelled at Rob Hansen.*

Steve Jefferey

Peveerel@aol.com

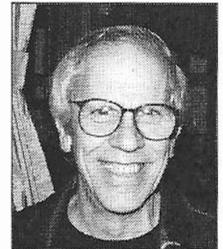
Hi Peter,

"The *Tynecon* convention report, and the notes on production and script of 'The Wizard of Ozimov' was entertaining. I'd never have recognized ½R (nor a cardboard silver surfer Rob Holdstock as the 'Tin Fan') from the photos, if they hadn't been captioned.

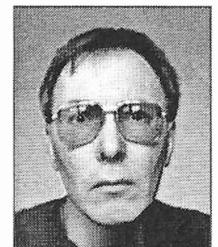
"Dick Ellingworth must have been well ahead of the curve on computer-assisted fanzine production if he was using a laser printer in the '80s (though he doesn't say which end of the '80s). Like him, I was sneaking floppy disks into work to print out pages on the office dot-matrix and on a couple of times on the IBM daisywheel (but not often; the latter was so noisy it even came with its own soundproof enclosure.)

"One the things I most remember about one of the first Eastercons I attended at the Adelphi was when Avedon Carol grabbed me to take me to the ops room to meet Vinç Clarke, running off copies of the con newsletter. In one part of the room copy was being typed into hi-tech PCs and pages printed off as laser copy, which was then e-stencilled and run off on an

Just a pseudo-fan?
Photo by Carol Carr



Now this is scary!
Photo: from Steve



ancient computer. Creating the room was like walking back in time through 50 years of reprographics technology. This weird time-warped mismatch aspect of [fanzine] fandom always appealed to me as something almost inherently SF-nal in itself. But then, I've never been at the cutting edge of technology myself. My parents bought us a microwave oven for Xmas last year, the first time we've ever owned one (it still only gets used for emergency defrosting or re-warming innumerable cups of coffee that go cold), and while I'm typing this on a new XP machine, I'm trying to resurrect a 1999 Pentium II PC in the spare room. (As a rebuild job, it came without any documentation, which is proving to be an interesting archeological exercise on the Internet, a sort of *Time Team* for computer geeks.)

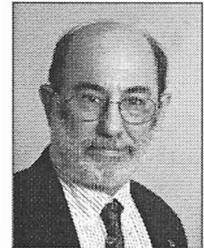
I have to say, re John Hall's loc, that from that photo I don't fancy me very much. And I remember, you chose that one as the better (or less scary) of the two I sent. Perhaps it was a mistake to shave off the beard. I'm not quite sure why I had the sudden urge to do that. I think it was the point that I looked in the mirror one day at the alarming amount of white in my beard and saw a scary resemblance to my father. And no, John, I only do electro 80s nights in the privacy of my front room. (Though even there, you're a decade out either way, as my current MP3 selection morphs between Gorillaz, Frank Zappa, *Moss and Yon*. Mostly because I still haven't fully worked out how to change it.)"

Fred Lerner

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Dear Peter,

Travelling Jant!
Photo from Fred



"Thanks for *Prolapse #5* (and its predecessors). Like Ted White, I feel like 'an onlooker, a by-stander', as I've had little experience of British fandom in the period of which you and your contributors are writing. Other than a few British fanzines – I've got a couple of issues of *Speculation* in my files, and I was once briefly a member of OMPA – my first real connection with British fandom was a by-product of the Heidelberg Worldcon bid. As one of that bid's American supporters I got into correspondence with Bert Mennar, who was involved on the British side. An untimely change of jobs prevented me from attending that convention, but the introduction of a cheap youth fare the following year induced me to buy a plane ticket to London. At November I mentioned my forthcoming trip to Dave Kyle, who was at that time living in England, and he asked me if I would be attending *Novacon*. I hadn't heard of it, but the dates worked out, so I attended the first British regional convention (or so it was described) and wrote a brief account which was published in *Locus*. I enjoyed myself thoroughly – enough so that I entered a bid to hold *Novacon 2* in Teaneck, New Jersey, where I was then living. And I still remember the affectionate tone in which Cliff James White described a millipede that he had encountered socially.

"On that three-week trip I visited the Mercers in Helston, Cornwall, attended a Thursday evening pub session at The Globe in Hotten Garden, and got interviewed by George Hay on his 'Star Gazers' radio programme. I also attended a Gaelic church service in Stormoway, ate Indian food in Aberdeen, and visited Kipling's school at Westward Ho! – it was an eclectic trip, and I enjoyed it thoroughly. (And I'm please to report that on my two subsequent visits to Britain I found my way to other fannish meetings – including one on rather a grand scale in Glasgow a couple of years ago.)"

Joe Patrizio

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Peter,

Come in, number 25!
Photo from Joe



"You're right, of course, to say that the BSFA was brought into being to promote fandom, but this isn't really shown in the early *Vectors*. How could it be? I joined because I was interested in SF, I didn't know that such a thing as fandom existed, but when I found it I felt that I'd come home. When I applied to join the BSFA, I thought I was joining a large (or at least large-ish) organization – the first membership list (in issue 2) shows my membership number as 25 and the full membership at that time as being 69 (Doc Weir was 49). Not that any of this matters, but I have a thing about numbers. Anyway, once I'd joined, the fanzines started to flow – and I was hooked. Whether or not the BSFA was a success in providing a steady flow of new fans, I don't know, but it certainly found a few during the time that I know of. And if it is going to celebrate its 50th year in 2008 it's difficult to say that it failed. It was certainly a success for me: no BSFA, no fandom for me. Without fandom, I wouldn't have met Anne and got married, so I wouldn't now have my children and grandchildren – but it's not what I signed up for at the time.

"I never met Doc Weir, although I corresponded with him for a couple of years (I think I still have his letters somewhere). During that time, he kept telling me that he was very ill and might not last long; he sounded strong on paper so I didn't pay much attention. We were to meet at *Lexicon*, but he died before getting there. One thing about him was that he was prolific. He seemed to be writing letters to everybody, and all the UK finz seemed to have something of his in them. He said he taught maths in a girls' school, but I reckon he must have done fannish things in class or perhaps he just didn't sleep.

"I'm not entirely convinced by your argument that the fans of the 50s and 60s were less well-educated than later fans. Not that I went round asking people what qualifications they had, but I do know that Ted Forsyth had a BSc and an MSc when he went to London, and that Chris Miller was at Oxford, but I'm not sure that this actually means very much. You don't have to have a degree to be articulate. It also strikes me that *some* of the problems could have been simply practical. Correcting a mistake when typing on to a stencil is a much different thing to bashing stuff out on a computer (tell me about it, I hear you say). I'm not prepared to go to war over this, I just think you're being a little unfair, perhaps – if you'd just said that later fans were better writers..... Your comment about *Vector* being little more than a low-grade fanzine is pretty well the case (some issues weren't as interesting as a low grade fanzine)."

*Joe, I remember Pam Bulmer saying that before about 1970 almost all fans hadn't been to university, and after that date almost all fans had done so. Those extra years of education (particularly in Arts subjects) did make a difference, and the general level of writing, and ability to express oneself, did improve dramatically in the early 1970s, on both sercon and fannish levels. Of course, there were always some good, competent writers, of whom Willis was the most notable, but the early *Vectors* make you squirm. So clunky, inarticulate, crude. Oddly, Ella Parker seems to have been one of the better*

writers; you can sense her personality coming through in her pieces, though she's not generally known as a fan-writer. It's nothing to do with computers, either – the standard improved very rapidly in the seventies, witness the brilliance of the 'Golden Age' fan-writers of the period 1973-76, people like the Charnocks, Kettle, Roberts, and all the rest. They were still using the old technology, but they just seemed so much better able to express themselves than writers of a decade earlier.

Claire Brialey

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Hi Peter,

'Oh Claire!'

by Sue Mason



“And on the subject of active engagement with fanzines – another starting point for my letter could have been the two items that caught my attention in #4 in the first place, arising in parallel from your first two articles in that issue: the stated motivation for the involvement of the BSFA in running the national convention, and the remit of the Doc Weir Award. These aren't entirely lost and arcane knowledge now, but they are some way removed from what many people who are now often involved with, and feel some attachment to, the British national science fiction convention think it's all about. As with the evolution of language – which I frequently rail against in my prematurely grumpy old way – there's an argument that if the contemporary majority of people think something is a certain way, that's what it has become and there's nothing we can or should do to prevent that. In a slightly contrary fashion, I don't wholly disagree with this view – if we don't allow, or indeed encourage, things to change then we merely create stagnation – but what is some recognition that change *has* occurred, that things have not always been the way they are now, that the way they used to be should have some value and interest to people who are engaged with their current incarnations, and that the way *they* think things are and should be now is not the One True Way forever since it will also be subject to the forces of future change. I won't entertain for more than a momentary daydream that this means I have pulled off the sleight of LOC of agreeing with both you and Joseph Nicholas...

“These days I think many people believe that the Doc Weir Award is given for 'unsung hero' status within the Eastercon itself, leaving out all the effort that people may be putting in for the benefit of fandom through, for instance, other conventions, fan meetings, the fan funds, the Science Fiction Foundation, the BSFA, online communities, publications and doubtless other things. There's also a partial acceptance – which I tend to subscribe to, although I'm finding it as hard as ever to articulate other why – that these days, no matter how much fannish endeavour someone may still be putting in, if they have previously won a fan fund, been a convention's fan Guest of Honour or been recognised in some other way (like winning an award) for at least some of what they do, they have had their thanks-from-a-grateful-fandom and should be discounted for the purposes of the Doc Weir, which should remain the province of people who continue to do most of their work behind the scenes. This extends, logically, to convention committee members, who are publicly identified and thanked at the events they run; if you're looking for potential Doc Weir recipients, you're more likely to find them at convention staff level. Personally, I would also ideally be looking for them to be doing more than just running conventions, to avoid the sense that the DWA is simply an award for diligent con-running.

“Every now and again someone will raise the spectre of the need for a British national convention constitution and an accompanying annual business meeting to play with it, a suggestion which – despite, or perhaps because of, all my professional bureaucratic skills and experience in framing legal instruments – makes me want to lay waste to small towns. (It's not that I think, as Kevin Standlee suggests, that WSFS has vast centralised power and saps independence; my concern is that it saps energy, encouraging people to get interested in the governance structure for an event rather than in the event itself. It's traditional in Britain not to have a constitution, after all; and I don't think that's just because we couldn't agree on one, but because of the time and effort it would divert into getting it 'right' – and then tinkering with it when it swiftly proved not to be quite right after all – when there's no single 'right' way to run our conventions nor any need to look for one.)

“In the (smouldering) suburbs of this discussion, someone will suggest that what we need instead is some sort of national organisation that will provide continuity for the Eastercon, and the BSFA will inevitably be mentioned among the pre-existing contenders. At that stage someone else will denounce the very idea of the BSFA having *anything* to do with the Eastercon. None of the usual suspects usually strike me as being very fan-historically minded, so I have always assumed that this conviction, for whatever reason it is held, is rooted in something other than a firm belief in the ineffable rightness of the 1966 decision; this is just as likely to be a suspicion that the BSFA could not find its figurative arse with both (equally figurative) hands and a map, as a general distaste for the sercon – or, if you prefer, non-fannish – direction the BSFA seems to have been pursuing for much of its life. But I could be wrong. Despite general appearances that those striking such attitudes are also a bit challenged in the arse-location department, it could be that they think we must abide by the decisions of our fannish forebears purely out of respect for tradition.

“As Mark commented in his letter, it's also the case that every now and again someone within the BSFA gets temporary enthusiasm for the idea of collective con-running; fortunately this mood usually passes quickly. I should add that, given the way the Eastercon is now popularly expected to be a multi-media extravaganza for many hundreds of SF fans, the BSFA *would* be both quite unsuitable and quite unwilling to take on any of the responsibility for actually running it. As a holder of the ring for continuity, if one is really needed, it appeals to my own fan-historical sense (and avoids the need for any new organisation to be set up and argued about), but in practice I think too much time has passed for many people in either the BSFA or the Eastercon to appreciate and value the connection.

“For me, the nature of the BSFA is the really Big Issue in both #4 and #5. (I'll leave its actual remit on one side; I suspect you're right about names having power, but this has to remain a road not taken.) Since I got involved with the BSFA in the mid-90s, it's seemed to me that there remains a contradiction within the organisation: many of the people who keep the BSFA going are SF fans – they may be other things as well, but they identify as fans – but the majority of the members aren't, and can't be made interested in embracing our idea of fandom. Indeed, many of the non-fan members, often including a vocal minority of the people running the BSFA, actively reject fandom because they want their science fiction organisation to be more professional, more critical, more respectable, less social and less cliquey than they perceive fandom to be. (They may

not object to it being *fan* provided it's not 'fannish'.) I'm generalising, and thus maybe missing the precise views of any specific contemporary members who want to stay away from the fannish. But the conflict set out in the passage you quoted from THEN is alive and well in the BSFA today, 49 years after its inception.

"As an *sf fan living in Britain*, once I became convinced that the BSFA would have me and wasn't too serious for the likes of me, it seemed wholly logical that I should become a member and indeed help to keep it going; it was the opportunity to help out, and the feeling that I could do something useful for the organisation rather than being a passive consumer, that eventually proved to me that the BSFA was my sort of thing after all. But as well as the many BSFA members who are *not fans*, there are many British fans who are not BSFA members; that's always struck me as just as much of a contradiction. Many British fans of my generation and a little earlier (the past 20-25 years, in effect) seem to feel that the BSFA is for newcomers to fandom and, once you've found fandom and your own sources of conversation about SF – or your own fannish niche in which you never need to talk about SF again – you don't need the BSFA.

"And now? Well, when I joined the BSFA, I turned to *Vector* for serious discussion of science fiction and to *Matrix* for information about what was going on: in book publishing, in cinema, on TV, in magazines even, at conventions and in fandom generally, and within the BSFA itself. (I rarely turned to *Focus*, I'm afraid, being not very engaged with the craft of writing fiction or poetry and wholly uninterested in getting published professionally myself.) This is not to say that *Matrix* and *Focus* aren't good magazines, and I accept the many reasons that *Matrix* can't continue as an effective newszine, but I now feel that I'm not the target audience for either; *Vector* is the only BSFA magazine that feels as though it's for me these days, and it's a great magazine about SF but still doesn't quite speak to me as an active member of SF fandom.

"My own experience in becoming a thus-active member of SF fandom chimes with the view expressed by others that if you go to your first convention with some people you already know, you are more likely to enjoy it and thus to go to another con. However, that experience also suggests to me that there is a risk that a fan who has come to the convention with people with whom they are already comfortable will not need to attempt to get to know anyone else. I've always enjoyed conventions, but it took a combination of many of my original friends deciding that they'd found other outlets for their leisure time and money and finding a niche behind a fan table in the dealers' room for me to have both the motivation and the opportunity to talk to many new people."

So what you're saying, Claire, is that nothing changes? In which case, isn't it about time the BSFA was plunged into another crisis; you know, censor vanishes with all the files and Vector doesn't appear for a year; Treasurer gets his sums wrong and runs out of money. Library burns down (oops, that's been done). Have we really gone past Darroll's 'roller-coaster ride'?

Ramsey Campbell

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"Another splendid issue, Peter! It made me nostalgic for events I never experienced, but it also reminded me that the BSFA – or more specifically, Peter Mabey – could be held responsible for starting my career as a writer. I think it may have been in early 1961 that Peter, then the BSFA librarian, noticed that two members in particular borrowed issues of *Weird Tales* from the library, and put us in touch. The second weirdling was Pat Kearney, who soon learned as we corresponded that I'd written Lovecraft imitations. He published one in his fanzine *Goudy*, illustrated by Eddie Jones, and Betty Kujawa suggested I show the tales to August Derleth. I did, and eventually received a vigorous editorial letter from him. Another fan turns pro..."

"Pat Kearney also went on to publish professionally. He was always passionately opposed to censorship – he may well have influenced me in that regard – and wrote about (for instance) *Naked Lunch* in his fanzine when the Olympia Press edition of the book had to be smuggled in from Paris. Later he wrote a bibliography of Olympia Press, and I imagine he was delighted that it was published with the famous tasteful green cover. Here's his web site: <http://www.sonic.net/~patk/>"

Nostalgic? Photo
from Ramsey.



D. West

16 Rockville Drive, Embsay, Skipton, BD23 6NX.

Dear Peter,

"I could say a great deal on the subject of fan history, but at this point it seems more sensible just to refer you to my 1989 article 'Then and Now'. This reviewed the first two volumes of Rob Hansen's THEN. Parts 3 and 4 were slightly better in some respects, but on the whole my article's criticisms can be taken as applying to the complete work. I certainly don't agree with your description (in P#4) of THEN as "a work of genuine scholarship". THEN does contain a great many miscellaneous facts and is useful in that it provides a chronological outline of parts of fan history, but it does very little at all to explain what fandom is really about, or how and why it came to develop in the way it did. It is a partial and impressionistic portrait which blurs or omits a great many relevant details. 'Genuine scholarship' if it means anything at all, means attempting to establish all the knowable facts relating to the chosen subject. For instance: in each year, how many fanzines were published? How many issues, how many pages, who published most? How many fans were active? How many conventions took place, with how many attendees? And so on. (There's quite a long list.)

"These are questions of ascertainable *fact*, not opinion, and they are the foundations on which any real history is built. One would not necessarily include all this purely statistical material in the main text (though it would be useful to have it available as a separate volume - THE FAN BOOK OF FACTS) but any serious historian would certainly make every effort to find out these things. Unfortunately it is apparent that the Hansen research effort fell a long way short of this ideal.

"Well, understandable enough, since (as my article acknowledges) there's an awful lot of raw material to process. However, the end result is that THEN is 'History' only in the sense that a Hollywood costume drama is 'History': it presents a series of events in narrative form, but only from a single viewpoint and showing only a selection of surface appearances. The audience is left to make of it what they can. THEN takes far too much for granted. It blithely disregards the fact that the second basic principle for Historians (after the fairly obvious 'Invent nothing') is 'Assume nothing'.

Fan-historian?
Photo; Ian Sorensen



“Don't take all this too personally. I realise that *Prolapse* is not intended to provide any sort of definitive historical picture, and that you're just having fun with a few interesting bits and pieces. That's fair enough, and I quite enjoy the anecdotal approach, provided it doesn't get too reverential. All the same, I think you should try to keep things as grounded in hard fact as possible. A minor example: Darroll Pardoe mentions the smallness of 50s fandom and suggests that there were only '400 or so' names in Ron Bennett's *Directory of SF Fandom* and that this figure 'encompassed pretty well the whole of fandom world wide'. In return, you 'bet 400 names was a high estimate'. So, who's right and how small is small? Being curious, I dug out the old copies and did some counting.

	UK	Other (90% US)	Total	
1956:	135	264	399	(I don't have the 1960 edition
1957:	114	280	394	or the later issues to 1966.
1958:	88	341	429	Someone else will have to
1959:	89	404	493	supply those.)
1961:	104	403	507	

“I should think these are the most accurate figures for active fans we're likely to get. Bennett says that 'Fans who might be extremely active locally but who are not known outside their local group are not listed.' But he probably knew virtually all the UK fans of the time, so it's US fandom which is most likely to be underestimated. (But, come to think of it, your remark is somewhat ambiguous. Were you suggesting that Darroll Pardoe overestimated the number of people on the Bennett list, or that the Bennett list overestimated the world fan population?) Whatever, having some reasonably hard figures makes a nice change from the usual vague guesses.

“One thing I happened to notice was that Doc Weir didn't get a listing till 1959. Come 1961 he was gone again. So his visibility in British fandom was indeed short-lived. The first fanzine I ever received (Pete Mansfield's *Eldritch Dreamquest*) in, I think, 1961, had a Doc Weir article. It wasn't very good, and other examples of his work I've seen since were equally unimpressive. Similarly, the even more obscure Ken MacIntyre didn't seem much of an artist, certainly nowhere near as good as, say, Arthur Thomson or Jim Cawthorn. So the Doc Weir and Ken MacIntyre Awards always struck me as being commemorations of mediocrity, and as such scarcely worth bothering about. Whatever their other good points, Weir and MacIntyre were not shining examples of talent. Still, any choice of name based on past characters is likely to cause controversy, since it inevitably suggests that the award is associated with a particular viewpoint or set of values which some may see as outmoded or just plain wrong. Better to keep it neutral (e.g. the Novas) and then any argument will at least be restricted to the present merits of the winners and not get lost in a fog of fan-historical differences.”

Don, I've said my bit about THIEN earlier in this issue, but I'm happy to be proved wrong about the size of fandom in the 1950s. Not many other people would have had those 'Directories'. And it's fascinating to see how British fandom shrank between 1956 & 1958 while overseas fans grew in number during the same period – confirmation, if it were needed, of Peter Mabey's analysis in 1958 of the declining size of British conventions.

Tom Shippey

shippey@slu.edu

Dear Peter,

“Thanks for *Prolapse 4 & 5*. I've been reading them in a state of gentle bemusement, rather like Andy Sawyer's (in #4). The strange thing is I was obviously there, or thereabouts, or anyway not far off, for a lot of the events described, but either I missed them or I can't remember. One of the sad bits in your book *With Stars in my Eyes* was the final remark about Cliff Teague, clearly a fan hero in the 60s, but who by the 2000s had 'very little memory of the events described in this book.' Yes, well, me too. Where was I in Easter 1959? Not far away, indeed down the Pershore Road, walking distance from the Rag Market. But although no-one could have been a keener fan of SF (I'd taken to it early in 1958 with the January issue of *Astounding*, with the 'Citizen of the Galaxy' cover; I've just been over to the bookshelf and patted it affectionately), either I didn't know enough to trawl the Rag Market, or maybe I had no money, or I could have been exhausted – in those days we had school Saturday mornings as well as the other five days a week, and three hours homework a night on top. So when did I first encounter a fan event? When did you and I meet? Nothing clicks at all.

“I moved away from Brum in 1962, to Crieff, Perthshire, where there really wasn't any fan activity, believe me, but I was back in 1965. Somewhere round there I did start turning up to *Novacons*, and have never dropped out of SF since, though in the last fifteen years or so it's been US-based. But on the whole my view has probably been that of the Swedish fan you mention, Sture Sendolin. I just thought SF was more interesting than SF fans, who – despite their bluffing – rate pretty low on the drunkenness-and-debauchery scale. Even if they didn't, I still think SF is more interesting than anything else. It answers the question; 'what the **** is going to happen next?' and this looks more and more urgent all the time. Iain Banks has one of his characters put it nicely in his new non-SF novel: the guy says, *a propos* of the recent history-is-over, capitalist-democracy-has-won theory, “Bullshit. You ought to read more science fiction. Nobody who reads SF comes out with this crap about the end of history.” Well said, Iain, that's telling 'em!

“Anyway, so I'd be on the “sercon” side, which perhaps explains why I can't remember more than fragments about fandom (though, I repeat, I think I was often there). However, reading your accounts of it all, what strikes me is that the sercons really didn't play their cards very well. The BSFA Constitution which you quote has that bit about promoting 'good literature of this class'. The hell with that! Promote the bloody lot, let someone else worry about the 'good literature', there are academics paid to do that – and a damn poor job they make of it, by the way. And was Daphne Buckmaster right to say you'd got to have one or the other: either be “reputable ... serious ... impersonal ... formal”, or else recruit for fandom? Couldn't you recruit for fandom by concentrating on the one thing all fans have in common, namely, passion for SF? The sercons always seemed to have their eye on approval from some non-fan body, but I can't think who that would be. The Arts Council? Were they worried about 'reputability', whatever that may be? No, the purpose of fan organisations, especially

Unreconstructed Sercon Devil? Photo from Tom



when you and I were young, broke, and had limited access to anything, was to lend each other books and magazines. And to make recommendations, and give each other plot summaries, and sometimes add the encouragement which has made a few of that generation (like Terry Pratchett) the dominant creative figures of the next generation, seriously and even reputedly.

"Even some of the ones who didn't quite reach dominance – I heard from Mark Adlard not so long ago – well, they had a good time and they published a few books, and we did exchange a few ideas. I still remember Mark pointing out to me what a total ***** I'd made of reviewing his second or maybe third novel, for you actually – amazing what you don't see, I never forget that. But to me it was the SF that was interesting, not the reminiscing about who did what, especially as I bet they usually didn't. Behind all this I can't help thinking that the real misfortune – wasn't exactly a tragedy – was the failure to establish a British SF magazine. Back in the 50s and 60s, when you and I and John-Henri were sifting through piles of debris to find any SF at all, there was a British *Galaxy* and *Astounding*, and also *New Worlds* and *Nebula*, and others like *Science Fantasy*, where Terry Pratchett published his first story at the age of 13. But now? And why? After all, *Foundation* has kept going, edited by Edward James, another of that group and generation. You'd have thought a commercial magazine would have had a bigger potential audience, and a better chance of survival. Briefly, I think the sercons didn't play their cards right, see above, and the trufans – well, putting it kindly, there was always a tendency to form coteries, where if you hadn't been there at xxx, and you didn't know old yyy, well, who cares about you? Wretched neofan! No-one of any spirit is going to put up with that stuff, and you don't want to recruit people of no spirit, do you?"

But Tom, the sercon types were always heavily outnumbered; in the 1940s and 1950s mainly just Mike Rosenblum and Ken Slater, each with a few helpers. Both punched above their weight in spreading the sercon gospel and Ken in particular ran Operation Fantasi, which did exactly what you suggest – circulated books, magazines and information at a time when all three were hard to find. But they were swimming against the current, except for a fleeting instant when the BSFA was born, after which fandom swiftly lapsed back into its old ways. Compared with the sincerity and passion (your word) of earlier efforts I think the BSFA was in many ways a fake-sercon organisation, largely going through the motions without much conviction. As for SF magazines, did Ted Carnell really have to give up on New Worlds when he did? What if he'd found another publisher, or handed it over to Ken Bulmer or Ted Tubb...?

George Locke

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Last time we talked about John Roles of the Liverpool Group, killed five years ago by an intruder, and I asked fellow-bookseller George Locke to tell us a little more about him...

Dear Peter,

"Names in the last *Prolapse* bring back memories, which above all seems to be what the fanzine is about. John Roles was by far the better known. I don't remember exactly when I first met him, or where. It was probably during one of those fannish expeditions to Liverpool in the late 1950s to attend a party given by the Shorrocks. I have very fond, although fragmentary, memories of those affairs. The Shorrocks were surely one of the nicest families in all fandom. Norman, Ina, the children. If I close my eyes, I can still hear a 'Nelly the Elephant packed her trunk and said goodbye to the Shorrocks...' Ina, I'm sure.

"A mini-expedition on a Saturday afternoon with Ron Bennett, to watch a football match at Anfield. On the Kop. I remember taking away a souvenir from that match – maybe the most famous Liverpool footballing souvenir – the Hot Leg. Perhaps given to me by Ron as thanks for my parody of *Skyrack*, called *Skyhack*. The LiG itself, Norman and Ina, Eddie Jones, Norman Weedall and, of course, the quiet one, the genteel, gently humorous John Roles.

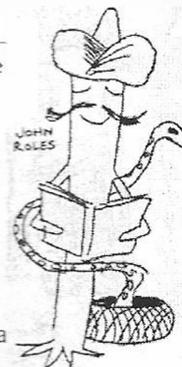
"I think I first encountered his fanzine work. I vividly remember a one-shot produced by Norman and John for one of the early mailings of OMPA. It was a booklet commemorating Jules Verne. Monaco had produced a set of postage stamps illustrating some of his books, and John, already a dealer in antiquarian books, and Norman, a dealer in stamps by profession, thought it would be a good idea to produce a booklet and illustrate each copy with a set of those stamps pasted in the appropriate places. I'm not sure how many were done – sufficient of course for the OMPA membership, which I believe was 45, plus a few extras, I suppose. It was too expensive to include the highest denomination stamp, 200 francs, so an enlarged photograph of that stamp was pasted onto the light blue card cover of the booklet. Even then my obsession with the minutiae of books was such that the use of a photograph rather than the real thing niggled at me. Many years later, during one of my visits to John's book store, I put matters right for my own copy of the Jules Verne booklet – I bought the 200 franc stamp from Norman.

"John's bookstore is what I, perhaps inevitably, remember most about him. I use the word 'store' rather than shop because, as far as I know, he never had a walk-in, street-level shop. He shared a first floor (or was it second floor?) large office premises in an old building in Liverpool with Norman, who dealt in stamps as 'Liverpool Stamp Sales'. We're now talking about the 1960s and 1970s.

"In the mid-sixties, my obsession with old books, and particularly old science fiction, had grown to such an extent that I was scouring the country in search of my prey. For several years I had a job as a sub-editor on the *Pharmaceutical Journal*, and I used to volunteer to cover boring Sunday conferences in the far reaches of the country so that I would have to stay in a hotel on Saturday night (and sometimes even Friday night), and get in some serious book-hunting on the Saturday. For a conference in the north-west of England, the main, logical, source of books was Halewood's in Preston (still operating today), but the real magnet was John's store. I remember tall stacks of books in two or three rooms, narrow aisles and the ambience of clutter common to all bookshops of the old, pre-internet, era. He had a few shelves devoted to olde fiction, and I always used to come away with a bag of goodies. John himself collected Rider Haggard, whose books he kept at home.

"John was forever travelling, and he loved the theatre. Indeed, he came to London on many occasions, to attend shows, and I remember running into him on more than one occasion in Charing Cross Road and Cecil Court as he scoured the shops while waiting for a matinee to start. And of course, he travelled on the continent, too. He loved Spain. He loved exploring. And on one occasion he came back with a little cache of Spanish plays he had excavated from some theatrical

John Roles BEM –
by Atom, from the
1960 *Combozine*



source in Madrid, some concerning Sherlock Holmes. He produced multiple copies of a pair of Spanish-composed plays, circa.1910, which featured not only Holmes, but Raffles as well. He offered me the tranche, and I bought the lot. By then, in the mid-seventies, I was dealing not only in olde SF but in crime fiction as well, and Sherlock Holmes was a good seller in those days. I was doing some small-press publishing, and thought it would be a great idea to have those two original plays translated into English and published under my own imprint. I employed Les Flood's daughter to do the translation, but unfortunately, being a literal translation it didn't read too well, so I postponed publication until I could do the necessary editing and polishing. Somehow, that never got done, and the typescripts surface once in a while to glare at me accusingly.

"Years earlier, in 1965, I went to a castle in the Bavarian township of Marquartstein to attend a convention. Dracula would have felt quite at home in this schloss (inevitably, the main activity in the convention was to get schlossed, mainly on a fannish German home-brew called Verguzz. This stuff, quite synthetic, was an evil shade of green. I took a bottle home. When the customs stopped me, I was very nervous – that bottle of booze was well in excess of the spirits allowance of the time. I muttered something vague about it being some sort of local stuff. Fortunately, the customs officer didn't know just how local. He opened the bottle. 'Oh, no, he's going to taste it,' I thought. But he didn't. He sniffed it, put the (already eroded) cork back, and said: 'Just a heavy wine', and let me through.

"But back to the schloss. What do any fans do in a convention hotel, apart from imbibing Verguzz? They explore the place, and what better place to explore than an old castle? John and I really got into exploring mode. We found ourselves up under the rafters, and what do you know? We found a pile of dusty old books. Among them were some beat-up old three-deckers, by an author called Baroness Tautphoeus. I'd never heard of her, and she certainly didn't write any science fiction, but even so, I was all for liberating them, as it were. John put his hand on my shoulder. 'No, George, it wouldn't be right.' He was quite correct, of course. I wonder if they're still there?"

Fay Symes

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Dear Peter,

"I knew I must be eccentric when I turned down two perfectly nice men in suits and married the long-haired, bearded membership secretary of the BSFA, who painted purple aliens and owned a car called Noddy.

"I had of course collected science fiction since the age of seven, and stood in the street collecting signatures to petition the BBC for a new 'Journey Into Space' radio serial when I was twelve – so I suppose the mould was already set. However I'd never imagined my honeymoon would be spent at a science fiction convention so notorious you only have to say 'Mancon 5' to elicit screams and groans. It was fun, really, despite the privations of Manchester's Owens Park halls of residence: the hard little single beds, the meagre breakfasts we had to queue for, the unisex cold showers and the disastrously delayed programming. My new husband kept rushing off to lament the horror of losing the entire BSFA magazine library in a garage fire, while I watched in awe as the famous Robert Silverberg read aloud from 'Dying Inside', and a wonderfully funny man called Bob Shaw talked about Yurin-8, a space ship powered by the greenhouse gasses produced by a large crew of non-stop beer drinkers – some of whom were obviously in training that very day in the bar.

"I thought all cons must be situated in equally dire accommodation, but I didn't care. I was hooked. Later that year we went to my first *Novacon* at the dear old Royal Angus, and I discovered that most cons were in proper hotels with real beds, lovely breakfasts and big cosy armchairs. All that and programmes that ran on time! I was in heaven. We had wobbly projected films, Jack Cohen talking about how to design aliens, and fancy dress for the disco. I made the red antennae to go with my Galactic Patrol catsuit, and wore them to every con for the next twenty years. Apparently I was only recognised when I put them on.

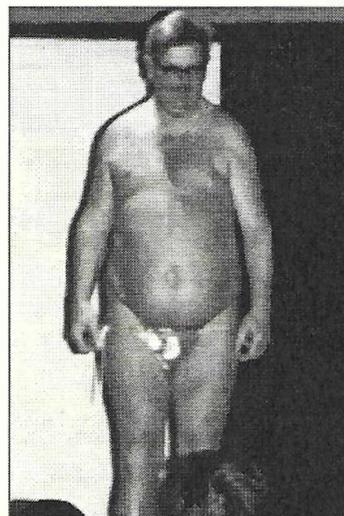
"I started keeping notes and giving conventions stars. *Mancon 5* had two (well, I didn't know any better then) but *Novacon 6* gained 4. Things were looking up. I don't know what happened to 1977 – we were probably too poor to go to any cons – but *Skycon*, at the Heathrow Hotel in 1978 made up for that. It's one of the few cons I awarded a full five stars for absolute perfection. Concorde was taking off and landing right outside our window, the fancy dress parade was won by a lady wearing nothing but red ribbon and sticky tape as Vampirella, (are there any photos?) and she was closely followed by Brain Burgess in nothing but a posing pouch. (I hope there aren't any photos!) Definitely nowhere to hide any of his pork pies. The projected films included the delightful 'Phantom of the Paradise' and a wonderfully wobbly and scratched copy of 'Plan Nine from Outer Space', which immediately became my favourite film. There's nothing to match those old days of convention films with not enough chairs and many of us sitting on the floor, all laughing at and heckling the films. My digitally restored DVD of Plan Nine may recall the fun we had, but it's not the same.

"1978 brought my second *Novacon*, this time at a Holiday Inn. It wasn't as good as my first. It covered three floors and according to my notes was apparently 'messy with a not very interesting programme', although the GOH Anne McCaffrey was a pleasure to meet. The redeeming feature was a showing of *Flesh Gordon*, the 'porno' version of dear old Flash, which has happy memories. On our first real date, David took me to the cinema to see '*Flesh Gordon*', because he'd already seen it and loved it as spoof SF – without ever considering that it might not be the kind of film to take a new girlfriend to see. Fortunately, I loved it, and it didn't occur to me either that it wasn't quite 'nice'. What's that they say about love being blind? My next con was *Seacon*, the World Con 1979, where we stayed by accident in a Brighton brothel with bed-bugs. More about that next time, if anyone's really interested ..."

Oh, but we are, Fay. Very much so! But I still can't quite believe that you've both been attending cons for so long and we've only just met... makes me feel very guilty!



You mentioned 'Flesh...'?
Or was it 'Flash' after all?
Photos: Lars-Olov Strandberg



WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

Brian Allen, who said, "Thanks for sending the jolly cartoon. Really this is a masterpiece in its dreadful way!" Tsk! – not exactly the response I was hoping for, Brian. So you won't be wanting the Brunner issue, then? **Dave Barber**, who explained "All my fannish memories seem to be associated with *Yarcon*. I could tell you the names of virtually all of the staff of the Royal who had any bearing on the con." **Barry Bayley**, who seems to have a time machine of his own since he commented on the next issue! **Greg Benford** who wrote, "Another fine issue that makes me long for the fandom of yore. On my letter you commented: *One of my fondest convention memories is of the Leeds Eastercon in 1985 when you joined me for breakfast with Tom Shippey and a rather left-wing colleague of his. We talked and talked ... One of the best argument discussion sessions I've ever had. Goodness only knows what it was all about!* I remember it well. The history blake argued against Thatcher, and you & I defended market economics. I recall you predicting that the UK would do far better economically for her reforms – which happens to have come true." Well, Greg, that won't make either of us very popular in some parts of fandom! **Judy Blish**, who wrote, "What fun. I received the zine and enjoyed it thoroughly, in an awe nostalgia-time sort of way. Seems like we were all so young!" Well, Judy we were! **Dave Britton**, who enclosed Savoy's latest, 500-page book 'Sieg Heil Iconographers' which I need to comment on next time. **Jim Cawthorn**, who remarked that "stencil-cutting now feels as remote as lettering on vellum by candle-light and sent an illo to prove it." **Dave Cohen**, now 86 but who was able to (almost) identify the 'unknown' in the picture on page 3, *Prolapse-4*, as "a member of the Manchester SF Group we called Paddy, the almost bald-headed one." **Keith Freeman** commented on the BSFA origins; "As far as Dave Newman is concerned, I know he was part of the Liverpool Group and keen at the very start of the BSFA. Having been elected Chairman he then promptly did a disappearing act. Hence he became the villain in the 'William Makepeace Harrison Saga'". **Chris Garcia**, who pleased me by saying, "That's an excellent cover. The style combined with the gag mixed in with the mood of the piece are all perfect reflections of what several folks I know used to feel when attending cons. I always manage to talk a little SF at every con, even *Corflu* (and you were there!). I really do think that talking SF during a con is a wonderful thing." **Harry Harrison**, who wrote, "I do admire your energy in getting out a fanzine... My first fanzine was hektographed. I look at what one can do now... And PLEASE let me see the Moorcock-Brunner issues. Life is filled with little pleasures." **Rob Jackson**, who explained why Coral was bubble-wrapped at the 1975 convention. **Terry Jeeves**, who confirmed, as I suspected: "As far as the change in the phrasing of the BSFA charter, I think that was due entirely to Eric Bentcliffe, I was too busy working on *Vector* and *Triode* plus other jobs. **Kari**, who confessed, "apologies for my failure to respond to #4. I blush to admit it, but my copy suffered a Serious Cat Incident before I'd had a chance to read it thoroughly." **Jerry Kaufman**, who in a long letter describes how the Seattle fans put on a performance of THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR in Bob Shaw's honour at *Norwestcon* in 1982. I'll try and use this next time, Jerry, Honest! **Tony Keen** who said, "The story you tell about your visit to the BAG, and how you might have felt at the first *Brumcon*, rings many bells." **Mike Kilvert**, who writes re SADO (next time, Mike). **Sam Long**, who sent an air-mail letter, "It's curious that, like Fay Symes, Mary Reed and I were also on honeymoon at the '76 *Mancon* and were not pleased with the dorm room we were assigned to." **Greg Pickersgill**, who mused, "You may think this sounds slightly mad, but as I sit here my predominant feeling is that it all seems familiar yet remote, something that I used to do rather than presently engage in." Well, that's easily cured, Greg! **John Purcell**, who thought "the Wizard of Ozimov was a lot of fun, even if I didn't catch all the in-references from the time. The background stories behind its creation and production really helped my enjoyment of reading the script." **Ken Slater**, who points out that "the dealer's room was in some ways the answer to the 'first timer' problem." **Peter Sullivan**, who sent a good letter and picture, both unfortunately squeezed-out, though he described his "feeling that I've come to fanzine fandom very late in the day. A bit like finally discovering a convention going on locally on Sunday night, just in time for the dead-dog party..." **Suzle Tomkins**, who explained how she became North America's biggest 'Giles' fan. **Harry Turner**, who said, sadly, that "I can't respond with some fannish stories as I had a stroke a couple of years back that blanked most of my memories of fannish times." **Ian Watson**, who reminisced: "I was particularly taken by John-Henri's nocturnal quest to disinter anything SF-nal from the great heap of rubbish. This reminds me of when, as a boy, a kindly soul gave me three lurid American horror comics, one of them featuring, I think, The Heap which came ashore from a lagoon to predate, and my subsequent fruitless attempts to find anything similar on Tyneside circa 1953." **Ian Williams**, who recalled, "despite being one of the five committee members of *Tyneside* I have absolutely no memory of 'The Wizard of Ozimov' though after 34 years I suppose that's hardly surprising. I do have a number of memories of the con itself which I regard as being one of the high points in my life so that's hardly surprising either. Looking back, I'm amazed that everything went so well, given that only five people had pretty much done everything between them. Moments like that, I almost start to believe there is a God." Don't let it get to you, Ian. Read more Dawkins.

WHY ARE YOU RECEIVING THIS ISSUE? Because:-

- You are a Godlike Figure, exempt from all normal rules (but it will be nice to hear from you, anyway)
- You have a Cosmic Mind and have helped me with *Prolapse* in some way
- You have a Sensitive Fannish Face and are mentioned somewhere inside – feel free to quibble!
- You undoubtedly have Broad Mental Horizons and I hope you might be interested – do let me know!
- Sorry, but Your Time is Up unless you do something Real Soon Now.

So what am I looking for? Your memories of times past, anecdotes, theories about fandom, old photographs from British conventions or fan-gatherings, vintage fannish artefacts, comments – sorry, Claire – engaged responses to this issue, or, if all else fails, half-a-dozen large 2nd-class stamps. And as a last resort, you can always view *Prolapse* on the eFanzines web-site.