

# **SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM IN MELBOURNE**

## **AS I REMEMBER IT - PART ONE**

**BY**

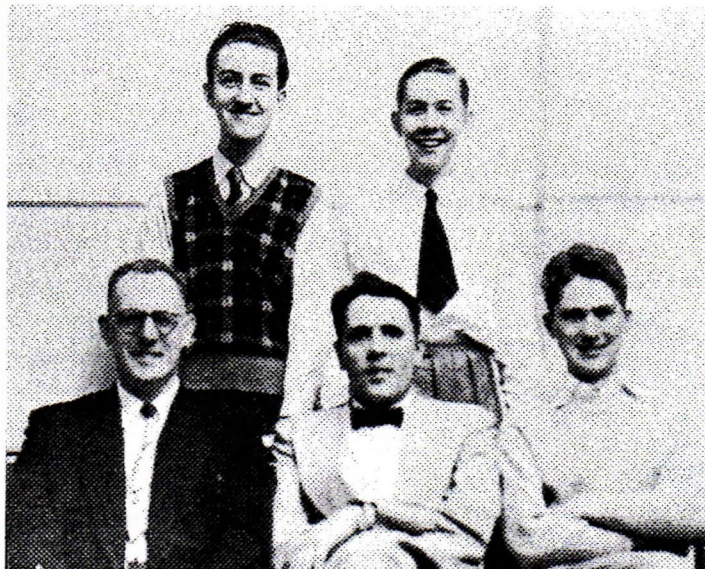
**MERV BINNS**

**Fandom to '53**

by  
Marsh McClennan  
and  
Bob McCubbin

### **Merv's Memories**

My personal  
memoirs  
of the  
Melbourne SF Club  
1952 - 1970



**1950s Fans**

*Top: Merv Binns, Dick Jenssen*

*Front: Bob McCubbin, Bert Chandler, Race Mathews*



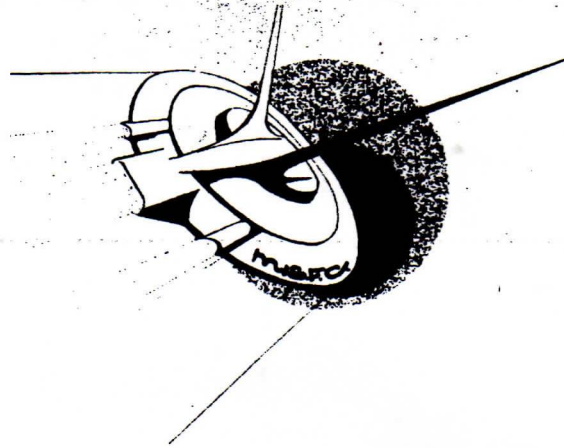
**1960s Fans**

*John Bangsund, Leigh Edmonds, Lee Harding, John Foyster,  
Tony Thomas, Merv Binns, Paul Stevens*

**ALAN STEWART**

# MERV'S MEMORIES

## The Melbourne SF Club History of Melbourne SF Fandom



### Part One

*I have made a number of attempts to record my memories of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club since its beginning but my memory let me down and I put it off. The sequence of events and the details I may have talked about previously in print and in interviews, such as at the Aussiecon 3 FanHistoricon panels, were in many cases inaccurate and in fact some things on reflection I think my mind may have dreamed up. However I started going through my bound volumes of the original club magazine, *ETHERLINE*, in which the club chairman Bob McCubbin gave a report in each issue of the club meetings and other events, and other sources such as fanzines and convention booklets. I also found a copy of Sydney fan Shayne McCormack's zine *SOMETHING ELSE 4*, in which in 1974 I gave her an interview and consequently a verbal history of the MSFC. Being 27 years ago my memory was fresher and using that as a base I have been able to supplement my memories.*

*In one issue of *ETHERLINE* I found an article in two parts by Marsh McLennan and Bob McCubbin about Melbourne fandom before the MSF Club or 'Group' as we called it then, and the very early period of its operation. That has not only helped me a lot to put that time into perspective, but I have decided to include this article at the beginning of this publication. The editor, Ian Crozier, ceased producing *ETHERLINE* in 1959 and finding further details of club activities from then on proved difficult. I have done the best I could, but remember this is just how I recall things. If somebody like historian Leigh Edmonds wants to do an oral history of Melbourne, even Australian SF fandom, sometime in the future, perhaps a fuller story may be told.*

*I have asked other fans who were involved with the resurgence of Australian fandom which began in Melbourne in the mid 1960s, to briefly tell their side of it, and club members to tell me what happened to the club after leaving Space Age Books premises in the 1970s. I want to talk about the people, the conventions, the fanzines, the artists etc., and chronicle as much as possible of the history of Melbourne fandom, not just the club, in this publication or in future columns in my personal zine *THE RUBBISH BIN(NS)* or in *THYME*. So let's get on with it and celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, and this missive I hope will be a souvenir of that event and the record of a social phenomenon called science fiction fandom.*

M.B.

## SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM IN MELBOURNE Up to 1953

Reprinted from: ETHERLINE 3/9/1953

### SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM IN MELBOURNE

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By Marshall McLennan and Bob McCubbin.

#### PHASE ONE

First, I must acknowledge the assistance given in compiling this report by Marshall McLennan, and to a lesser degree Warwick Hockley. The first phase is entirely due to Marshall, corroboratory evidence being supplied by Warwick. Marshall speaks: Early science fiction really started for me when I chanced to buy, in 1928, a copy of AMAZING STORIES containing "Skylark". This was, for me, a milestone, as it has gained for me over the years a rich experience of stories in both magazines and books. Best of all, there has been that warmer interest of friends both in person and by correspondence. I recall Walter Gillings of England, who wrote to me up to the war. His "SCIENTIFUNCTION", the British Fantasy Review fan mag, later became "TOMORROW".

After subscribing to FANTASY MAGAZINE, SCIENTISNAPS and other magazines for some time, I wrote to ASTOUNDING in 1935. This brought many replies, and a few requests for information. I was able to supply FANTASY NEWS with half-page "fills" of Melbourne news, published on 4/12/38 and 26/2/39. I still correspond with Harry Warner Jr. of SPACEWAYS. Sam Moskowitz had me write a page and a half titled "Life of a Scientifictionist from Down Under" for his fan inag NEW FANDOM. George Gatter, still corresponding, wrote a story for Gernsback's last WONDER STORIES, and has not yet been paid for it! Clinton Cardwell - a very good letter-writer to this day - is a negro. Fans come in all shapes, colours and sizes! To many overseas editors Melbourne was news, and fan mags poured in.

About this time, contact was made with other fans in Melbourne, notably Warwick Hockley, Don Tuck and E.A. Taylor. Irregular meetings at home before and during the war years maintained the interest in science fiction. Hockley and Taylor produced their "Melbourne Bulletin" in September 1940. It ran to seven pages, giving news and views, titbits and jottings. About the same time, Don Tuck produced "Pro-fan" which was really good. Don and I had many good yarns at odd times.

There were times of dead calm in science fiction, then Sydney fans would send letters and magazines. War work meant long hours of shift-work but every time Don Tuck would hit Melbourne from Tasmania or Adelaide, I would get a cheery letter arranging a meeting. I would reply "Come on over between shifts and wake me up." On one occasion, a bunch of fellows from Sydney made a rowdy entrance, talked vociferously for an hour, then raced off to get the train back to Sydney.

My experience of stf has had some highlights, and mountain-top experiences - the greatest being the formation of a Group in Melbourne. Gone are the frantic searches for back numbers (Oh yeah, say our completist collectors!). Today we have slick tales that have made many friends - for stf - and  
Marshall McLennan



## PHASE TWO

On my return from overseas, I commenced to buy such stf as was available in the Melbourne bookshops. The amount was strictly limited, and it's discovery involved much hunting. One day, while I was browsing in McGill's News Agency, I saw a young chap (Race Mathews) looking at a copy of AMAZING. Having read that issue, I said to him, "Are you interested in that sort of stuff?" When he blushingly admitted the fact, we exchanged names, then moved on to Hanley's, as Race had heard of a sale of second-hand magazines. We purchased so many of the stf magazines, that the proprietor, who had limited them to eight per person, nearly had a fit. This contact led to us exchanging visits to each other's home and cross-lending books. Casual contacts in various booksellers led to the addition of Dick Jenssen, Leo Harding, Marshall McLennan and Gordon Kirby to the group.



Bob McCubbin pictured in  
*Australasian Post*

For some time, this nucleus used the homes of Race Mathews, Marshall McLennan and myself for monthly meetings and some further contacts were made, until the numbers rose to a dozen. Bill Veney came over from Sydney, and met the assembled fans at Race's home. Bill suggested a tighter organization. That night, the Melbourne Science-Fiction Group was born. Although it was urged by Bill to form a-iron-clad organization, with office-bearers, rules, records and annual subs, this was not the type of association desired by the assembled fans, and Bill's high pressure salesmanship was unavailing. The Group was formed with five convenors, McCubbin, Mathews, Jenssen, McLennan and Kirby, with McCubbin as prime mover. This was my first meeting with Mervyn Binns, who later, when weaned from his spiritualistic interests, became a valued member of the Group, due firstly to his professional side of bookselling, and later to his keen interest in AFPA. The home-and-home meetings continued, but, after arrangements had been made with McGills to insert advertising material in all stf material sold over their counter, the membership grew rapidly, and, after some search, a new venue was found, and the meetings were held fortnightly.

On August 14th., 1952, we held our first meeting in Val's Coffee Lounge. Five turned up, one table. By November, we had spread over the whole west end of the Lounge, as many as twenty-nine fans being present at one time. However, though sex can be ignored when it raises its ugly head on a cover, the odd characters frequenting Val's soon made it imperative that we move to a more healthy position. Introverts and extroverts we may be, but perverts never.

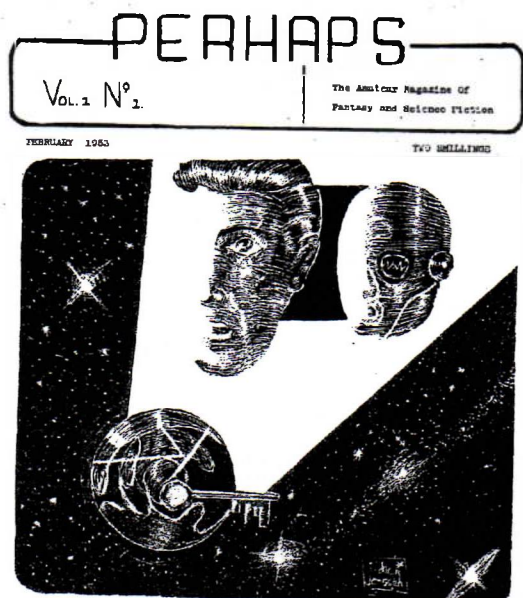
Keith McLelland. located a room at the Oddfellows Hall, 50 Latrobe St., Melbourne, and late in November, we moved in. In the new location, we had the room to ourselves, and could lay out sale and swap material in different sections. Dan Bicknell brought his movie projector along and entertained us with trade and classroom films of interest on various occasions. We obtained permission to keep the library on the premises, and this soon became a feature of the meetings. At various times, visits from A. Bertram Chandler, Don Tuck, Douglas NicholsoMike McGuinness, Bill Veney, & Rex Moyer. May I extend a hearty welcome to all country, interstate and. overseas fans?

In February, 1953, we decided to meet weekly, and have met every Thursday night since. Various sub-groups have begun publishing fanmags, & this will be dealt with in a later paragraph. At present, I am acting as Chairman to conduct a brief formal session, delivering news of general interest, introducing guests and new members, keeping an attendance record, and. collecting the cash to pay the

rent. We now have 58 names on the roll, all of them resident in Melbourne, but the usual attendance is about 15. Roughly 10 of these are regulars and are serving the Group on the various committees.

The library consists of novels, pocket books and magazines, donated by Melbourne, country & interstate fans, to whom we again give many thanks. Under the able control of Mervyn Binns, the Library is going very smoothly. At the present time, all the regular members have exhausted its possibilities, but new members find it of great interest. A new supply of material is due soon from England. The Sydney Futurian Society also deserves our thanks for its assistance.

For many of the Group, the major interest is publishing. Mervyn Binns, Dick Jenssen, Race Mathews, Leo Harding and Ian Crozier formed Amateur Fantasy Publications of Australia (hereinafter referred to as AFPA), and by pooling resources, purchased a duplicator and supplies. One of AFPA's first good deeds was to relieve me of my News-letter which, although a labor of love, was becoming a temporal and financial burden. It was completely remodelled, reconstituted, and published by Ian Crozier under the title of ETHERLINE. It is now published fortnightly at 6d. per copy. It is a financially sound venture, containing news & notes from local and global sources. Believe me, Ian got quite a shock when my news-letter was dumped in his lap, but, to date, the 11 issues have shown an increasing coverage and improvement in technique.



Leo Harding and Dick Jenssen are responsible for PERHAPS, of which Nos. 1 & 2 have appeared. No. 1 appeared in February, 1953, and was of 28 pages, mimeographed, and with a Jenssen photo-lith cover. It showed distinct evidences of its amateur origin, and was criticized rather severely in certain quarters. No. 2 appeared in May, 1953, and showed that many lessons had been learned. Spelling and stencil cutting were both much better, the issue contained 48 pages, and was photolithoed on front and back covers. The contents were mainly science fiction. Meanwhile, Race Mathews was busy with his brain-child, christened BACCHANALIA and this was identical in format with PERHAPS, but was devoted to fantasy. This ran to 30 unnumbered pages mimeographed on yellow paper, and No. 1 appeared on April 26th, 1953. No. 2 is due shortly. Both PERHAPS and BACCHANALIA are bi-monthly. Appearing on alternate months, they are intended to be complimentary. Leo Harding on June 30th came to light with WASTEBASKET. The editorial slogan is "We print

what others throw away", and, in the first two issues, he has certainly succeeded in living down to his slogan. Bruce Heron and Kevin Wheelahan are associate editors of the new publication, QUESTION MARK, which has just appeared.

This will bring the total of AFPA mags to 5. Since the formation of the organization, Kevin Wheelahan has become a full member, and Keith McLelland has been made an honorary member. Whatever you send to AFPA, it will be published.

This account is fairly concise and comprehensive, and, for the benefit of the man who will be asked to write the next chapter, is complete to July 31st, 1953.

Bob McCubbin.

## MELBOURNE SF FANDOM AS I REMEMBER IT

By Merv Binns

*Bob McCubbin, in his 1953 invitation for "the next man" to continue the memoirs of the early days of the MSFC, no doubt was expecting someone to take up the challenge in a subsequent issue of ETHERLINE, not 49 years later as I am attempting to do now with the less than flawless clarity of hindsight.*

In my first job, employed by booksellers McGills Newsagency, I had actually discovered the name of the literature that had commandeered my imagination. It was SCIENCE FICTION! I was reading magazines such as *Astounding* which I had never seen before and discovering a whole new world. Then one day one of my customers, Bob McCubbin, came into McGills and asked me if I would like to meet some other SF readers who were forming a club. Wow! To actually talk to people who also appreciated what I was reading was an irresistible idea, which despite my shy and introverted attitude I could not resist. (What Bob was referring to in my "spiritualistic interests" I have no idea). In fact it was to be an event that would influence me profoundly for the rest of my life. I did not have any friends and my whole social life revolved around going to the movies, or visiting relatives with my parents, so meeting other people who shared my interests was great and many of the people I met then have remained my friends ever since. It is too long ago for me to remember the exact details, and I will just cover what ever my old mind can dredge up of the following years. It may not be 100% correct but I hope friends reading this will fill in some gaps and correct my errors.

First of all I think I went to Race Mathews' home in Hampton, a Southern Melbourne suburb, where I met for Race for the first time, Dick Jenssen, Leo(Lee) Harding, Bob McCubbin and a fellow who I believe was a librarian, Gordon Kirby, and others in this group. That was apparently not the first meeting of the interested fans I realise now after reading Bob McCubbin's article. I don't recall

attending any following meetings in any detail apart from a couple at Bob's home. I vaguely remember the meetings at Val's coffee lounge in Swanston Street, Melbourne and to an innocent young man, the rather different customers we saw there. (Incidentally our early member Val Morton was not the proprietor of the establishment!) Those very early meetings obviously took place in 1952. The move to the Oddfellows Hall, in Latrobe Street, Melbourne, at the back of the Russell Street Police Headquarters, came in 1953 and it was welcome. Rather an appropriate place, some wag was wont to mention. We met in a small room in the basement and Bob brought in an aluminium trunk that was made for him when he was in Japan with the occupation forces there after the war, in which we put the library books.

I was very interested to learn in Bob's article that the original founders of the group said that they did not want to make it a formal organisation, which explains why we were referred to as a group rather than club. When everything fell into my lap in later years I continued to call the "group" the club, as that is what it always was to me and that has stuck, but it was never formally organised in my time, partly because it was pointless and I and the few regular members were not into such formalities. Although some attempts were made to bring limited organisation into it with an agenda and discussions and such, but little if anything came of that. We came to putting our efforts into the club magazine and providing books for members to borrow from the library. In the 1960s however attempts were made to try and formalise things again, but all that fell in a heap, as some people apparently did not like the rather grotty atmosphere of the room above McGill's store, and started meeting elsewhere. The NOVA MOB, an informal association of SF writers and readers which regularly discusses SF topics to this day, came into existence in 1970, and as far as I know they were never officially organised either. Reading reports on the rowdy Sydney SF club, The Futurian Society, meetings and the conventions in the 1950s in *ETHERLINE*, indicate to me that they were a bit too organised and perhaps in those early days Bob McCubbin and all of us did not want to see that happen here.

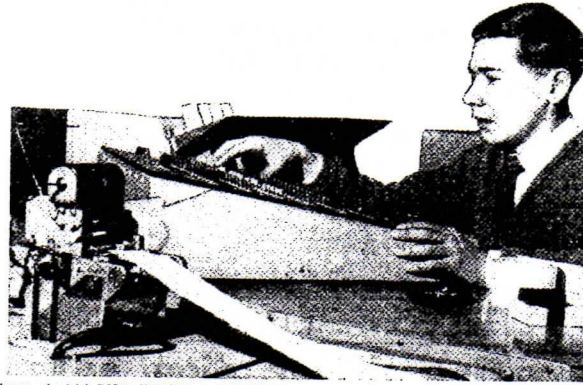


Val Morton, Ian and Judy Crozier, Tony Santos, and Bridesmaids - c. 1954

Amongst the the members of the Group whom I do remember well is of course Ian Crozier. We became close friends at the time working on the club zine *ETHERLINE* and I visited his home in Caulfield often. In due course I attended his wedding to his wife Judy along with other club members. Helena and I spent a few days with Ian and Judy in 1999, in Bright, where they now live. Tony Santos I found out later was the son of a commercial flower grower whom my florist and nurseryman father met when buying stock in the Victoria Market. Tony used to borrow his father's big old truck and thought nothing of taking people home from movie shows, usually way out of his way. I remember one night the gear stick came right out of the box and we drove home all the way in low gear. Tony loved playing chess. Don Latimer, a tall fair personable guy, we found out was a bookbinder and he was soon getting lots of business from members and the club library. His work will be found still in sf collections throughout fandom.

Race Mathews I had thought was not seen much in the club after the very early days, but Bob's reports in *Etherline* tell me otherwise. Race attended many club meetings in 1953, sometimes accompanied by his lady friend Geraldine McKeown, and meanwhile he was working on his fanzine *BACCHANALIA*. The couple did according to one report, also attend the meeting we had with interstate fans in Albury and Canberra. He did a stint in National Service in 1954, as did Dick Jenssen and I (in 1953). Race became Gunner R. Mathews, in the 14th National Service Battalion at Puckapunyal in January 1954. We did not see much of Race when he went bush as

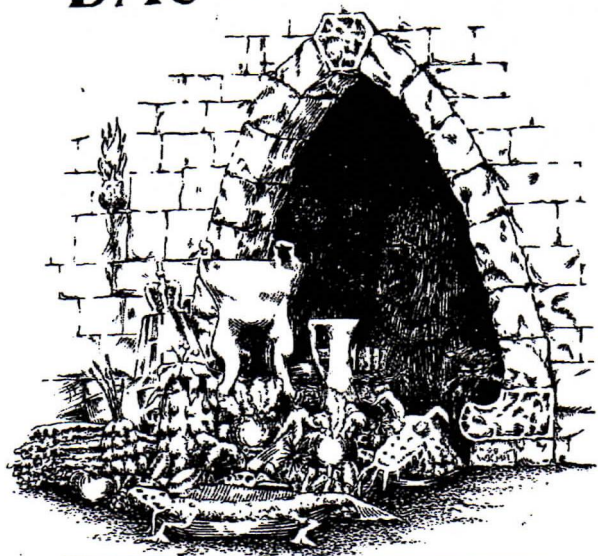
as a fledgling school teacher. Dick Jenssen was a university physics graduate who became involved with the setting up of CSIRAC, one of the first computers here, eventually finding himself in the Meteorology Department at Melbourne University.



Young physicist DICK JENSSSEN feed CSIRAC information 'on the tape, foreground) in a weather forecasting experiment at the University. The CSIRAC "works" cover the whole of a wall. From the SUN newspaper, September 22, 1958

Keith (Rhoderic) McLelland was an artist and designer and he started supplying Ian Crozier with illustrations for *ETHERLINE* and continued doing artwork for me and other people for years to come. We regretfully lost him to a spinal cancer in October 1990.

# BACCHANALIA



Number TWO DECEMBER, 1956

Artwork by Keith McLelland

It seems that lots of people did turn up at early meetings of the club in The Oddfellows Hall in the first year and later, but in many cases did not become regular members and some may not have ever been seen there again. There was little room and if you did not play chess that was it, just the library and auctions of books and magazines. Many visitors in the very early days of the group, such as those from clubs interstate, I have completely forgotten, but I could not forget the visit of British author A. Bertram Chandler, whose photo with some of the founding members of the then MSFG appears on the cover of this Special Issue.



Don Tuck c. 1975

I had a lot to do with Don Tuck over the years, buying and selling books to or from him. He was then living in Tasmania and he was working on his *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy* for which he was awarded a Hugo in 1975. We we have met a few times over the years. Don now lives in Lilydale, Victoria. I know Doug Nicholson, having sold him books and we have met a few times at conventions and such over the years. But the other guys Bob mentions I regret are only familiar names.

I always had a good mailing list for club circulars and such even though a lot of these people did not attend club meetings.

Many SF readers came to club meetings. Some continued to attend but many did not, including some potential fem fans, but none stuck until the 1960s when some were regular borrowers of books from the library, which incidentally did become almost the major reason for the club's existence for some years. A few women fans such as Betty Garbett turned up at meetings over the first year or two, according to Bob's reports, but I have forgotten most of them, though a few continued to buy and borrow books from the Library for years to come. One fem fan who did stick was Margaret Duce (Helena Roberts Binns) who first heard about the MSFC as a teenager, in a roundabout way through correspondence with New Zealand fan Mervyn Barrett. The first club member she met was Ian Crozier, who visited her in the fifties on a trip to the Victorian country town Alexandra, where she lived. She started sending Ian illustrations for *ETHERLINE* even before she came down to the big smoke. She did come to the club meetings when she came down to study in Melbourne in 1958, and became a worthy chess opponent for Tony Santos and others, when chess was a very popular part of club activities. While studying art at RMIT she found other interests in due course, but meanwhile she developed friendships with other club members such as John Foyster, Keith McLelland, Chris Bennie and New Zealander Merv Barrett, that endured.

Reading Bob's article in *ETHERLINE* tells me things that I had entirely forgotten, and the same for his meeting reports in following issues. He mentions the names of people that are familiar yet I cannot bring their faces to mind such as Neil Merilees, Eric LaMotte, Bruce Heron, Joan Day, Dick Davies and Larry Jones. Many people Bob mentions I remember by name only, or only vaguely, such as Eric La Motte and John Eyre, but others such as Harry Williams (who appeared in our OLYMPICON convention play) and petrol head Remo Parlanti who went up to a meeting we had with interstate fans in Albury and Canberra and then off to the car races at Bathurst, I do remember. Film screenings were held at Harry Williams' home



but I have no recollections of those and I have not seen him since those early days. Larry Jones who was another actor in our convention play, was an avid game player and regularly had friends he had met at the club to his home to play cards and chess.

Dan Bicknell though, who Bob reports put on movie shows for us in the room at the Oddfellows hall and at his and other members homes, including Val Morton's and mine I do remember well. I do not remember meeting Dan again in over forty years, but then again I have known so many people through the club or as customers in my shop Space Age Books, many of whom may have had some association with the club. Val has remained a long time friend. He did some professional work as a projectionist, he reminded me recently, and also ran the projector for us. We did buy our own projector in due course. So screening movies for members was a regular occurrence over the next twenty years or so. Besides the movie screening at members homes including mine, Harry Williams, Jack Keating and others we also had some at bookbinder Don Latimer's home in Strathmore. Don offered his services to the club library and members at a cut rate and he did a superb job, with many of his volumes still turning up in collections. We had social gatherings at other members homes including Ian Crozier's, where sometimes it was just chess, conversation and supper, and at other times movies.

The club magazine *ETHERLINE* was born when Lee (Leo) Harding, Ian Crozier, Dick Jenssen and I formed AMATEUR FANTASY PUBLICATIONS to publish our fanzines. Bob had been sending out a club circular to members early on, but *Etherline* took on that responsibility and included Bob's reports. Lee I think started out to be the editor of *ETHERLINE* but Lee and Ian could not see eye to eye and when I came home after army service in 1953, Lee had pulled out and concentrated on his zine *PERHAPS*. He was at that stage running a photographic service in the Dandenongs and I do not recall seeing him at many meetings after the early days. So Ian finished up as editor for the next six years or more, while I did all the printing at my home, learning to use a second hand Roneo



duplicator that we purchased and getting ink all over the place in the process. Then again literacy was not my strong point nor typing, so I was the obvious handle turner. Meanwhile Lee and Dick Jenssen produced a typical fanzine of the time called *PERHAPS* under the AFPA heading. They in fact did three issues over the following year or two. That is when we first saw the potential artistic talent of "Ditmar" (Dick). Race Mathews in the meantime was working on his classy fanzine titled *BACCHANALIA* and our resident artist, Keith (Roderick) McLelland, who was already doing artwork for *ETHERLINE*, did some wonderful fineline illustrations, including a great cover illustration. Other fans such as Margaret Duce (Helena Roberts), Dick Jenssen, Don Latimer and even I provided cover illustrations.

Bob McCubbin did the club reports for each issue of *ETHERLINE*, while other people did artwork, reviews and articles. Ian contacted various interstate fans such as Roger Dard, Don Tuck (whose *Author Story Listing* was a feature collectors appreciated), Bill Veney and others in due course, and had reports from other clubs and both originals and reprints of articles and news from people such as Robert Bloch, Bob Silvberberg, Forry Ackerman, Ken Slater (Operation Fantast), William

F. Temple and other overseas fans. We had lists of all the SF&F books released in Melbourne, mainly what I came across as a bookseller at McGills. Ian often published material referring to Arthur C. Clarke, with reprints from American zines, reports of his visit to Melbourne and numerous reports from Frank Bryning in Brisbane about Clarke's time there and at the Barrier Reef. I remember radio technician Kevin Wheelahan who produced the zine *QUESTION MARK* under the AFPA banner, which received good locs from all over. I have not seen Kevin ever since, although I believe he became a solicitor. AFPA by the way stood for Amateur Fantasy Publications and Ian even had the name registered, which we dreamed up quite early in the piece. I think Lee and Dick dropped out, but Kevin Wheelahan and Bruce Heron according to the reports became members later.

Ian in fact had a good rapport with American fanzine publishers, was able to reprint some great stuff from American zines and carried on a tradition of our Australian contact with American fandom that had gone on for many years. My late business partner in Space Age Books, Sydney fan Ron Graham, I discovered in later years had written to one of the pulp magazines in the 1930s, as had Melbourne fan Marsh McLennan, which entitled them to be members of an elite fan group called *First Fandom*. Other Australian fans such as Bill Veney and Roger Dard, who I must admit are not that well known to me, I believe had contact with American fandom long before the MSFC and perhaps even before Sydney Fandom and the Futurian Society became organised. So our American connection had not started in the 1960s, leading to our first world convention in 1975, but long before. Don Tuck in Tasmania had long been corresponding with fans in the USA while working on his *Science Fiction & Fantasy Encyclopedia*.

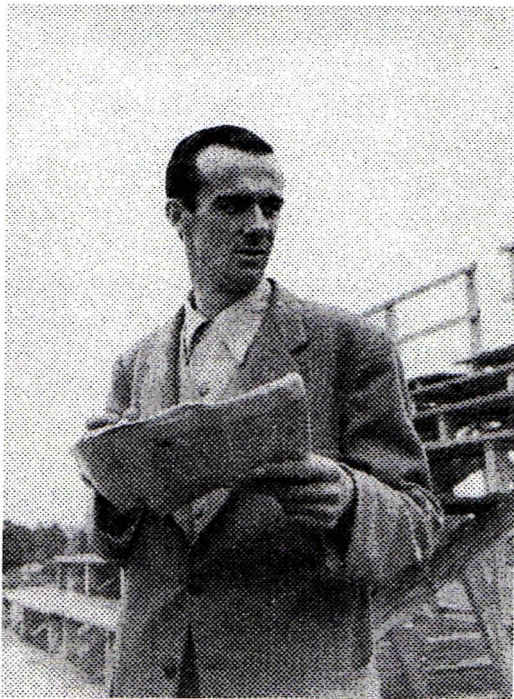
Ian Crozier attended the the Second National Australian SF Convention in Sydney in 1953. He came back and told us all about it and we wanted to hold one also. We met some of the Sydney fans at a get-together in Albury which Ian called the Riverina Conference, in August 1953. People who attended included Graham Stone, MikeMcGuinness, Brian Finch, Nick Solnsteff, Loralie Giles, Lyall

Crane, Race Mathews, Geraldine McKeown, Bob McCubbin, Ian Crozier and me, and Albury fan John O'Shaugnessy, who looked after us while we were there. At any rate the Albury affair was a nice opportunity for Sydney and Melbourne fandom to meet for the first time and get to know each other.

Sydney fans we learned had already been organised since the late 1940s, they had run two sf conventions and another one was coming up in 1954, but I was unaware that fans from Sydney and other parts of Australia, including Brisbane, South Australia and Canberra had visited the Melbourne SF Group in our early days, or as with most things, I have just forgotten. I made my first plane trip, with Bob McCubbin, in a DC4 I think, (our friend, and historian who is knowledgeable about such things, Leigh Edmonds would probably know what planes were in use on the interstate flights then), to Sydney to attend that convention in 1954. Again my memory escapes me and I cannot remember anything about the con program, but I do know that bookseller Dave Cohen was at odds with the organisers and was not allowed to sell books in the con area itself. I remember that it was great seeing Sydney for the first time and meeting fans from all over, but I remember very little about the con itself at all. I guess there was just too much for my adolescent mind to absorb. I went on a pub crawl with Doug Nicholson and others, and I remember very little else apart from drinking terrible Sydney beer in a smoke filled-room while Bob and Graham Stone had an earnest discussion. I also remember that I got lost after leaving a meeting of a Sydney sf club, but a taxi took me back to my hotel room in Potts Point. My parents came up by Pioneer tourist bus and I went back with them to home in Melbourne around the coast road, after visiting the Blue Mountains and Jenolan Caves.

The Melbourne SF Group members then agreed that we should run a convention but in between times we made a trip to Albury and Canberra, where we met fans from Sydney, Brisbane and South Australia. Ian Crozier and Bob then went up to Sydney and put in a bid to run the National Australian SF Convention in 1956. By now Sydney fandom I believe was experiencing some bitter rivalry, later to break up almost completely, and many Sydney fans were apparently very happy that

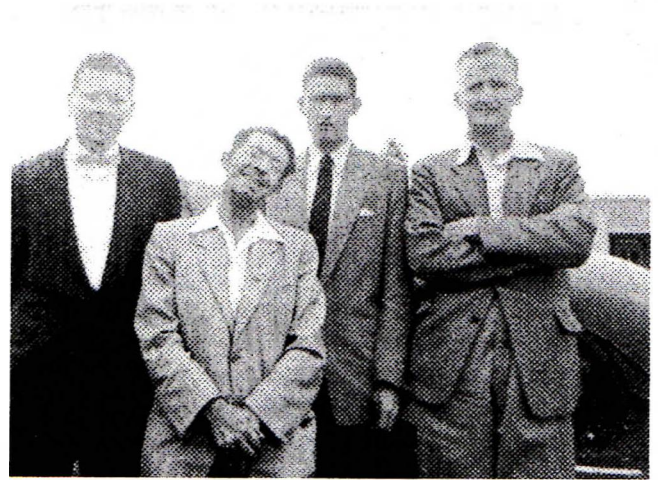
we wanted to run a Natcon. Perhaps just to get it away from the conflict going on there, and obviously because of that rivalry and their absolute disgust with SF fandom in general, only a few in due course gave us the real support by attending our con. So the members of the 3rd Australian National SF Convention in Sydney in 1954 voted to let us run the 5th in Melbourne in 1956, but the 4th in 1955 was the last in Sydney until 1970, indicating how long it took for the wounds to heal and the skeletons to be buried.



Ian Crozier in Canberra

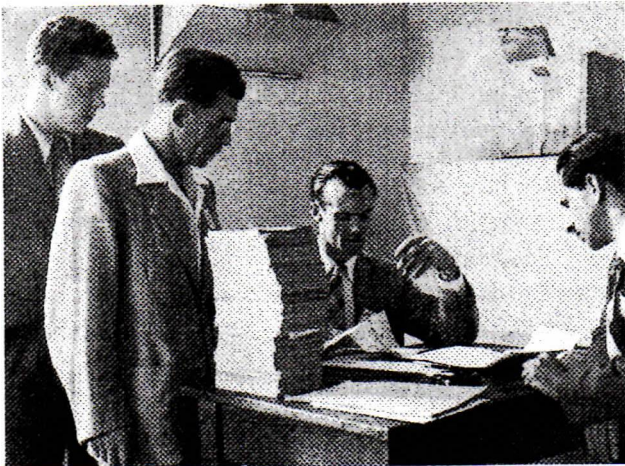
As a prelude to the first Melbourne SF con and as a chance for more Sydney and Melbourne fans to get to know each other, we got together in Canberra. Jack Keating from the MSFC drove bookbinder fan Don Latimer and me up to the capital city. We joined Pat Burke, Kevin Dillon, Vol and Laura Molesworth, Fred Frederikson, Mike Baldwin, Doug Nicholson, Bill Hubble and Lloyd Fisher from Sydney and from Melbourne Barry Salgram, Graham Lyell, Bob and Molly McCubbin, Val Morton, and Keith McLelland. We also met Canberra fans Geoff Bennett, Ken Jones and Arthur Porter. I personally remained friends with Kevin Dillon in particular, I met him at numerous conventions in later years and he even helped me close down my bookshop Space Age Books in 1985. I had little contact with any of the other Sydney fans

at that conference if at all, apart from Doug Nicholson who became a customer and I sent my zines to him until we lost contact years back. By the way, has anybody seen Kevin Dillon recently?



Canberra - Jack Keating (second left), Don Latimer (far right) and Sydney fans

As it was Melbourne's Olympic Games year in 1956, we called our convention *OLYMPICON*. It was held at the Richmond Town Hall, due largely to the fact that school teacher Bob McCubbin was teaching in the Richmond area, was known to the council and was thus able to secure its use. Our Guest of Honor was author Frank Bryning, who was born in Melbourne but by then living in Queensland. He brought along Melbourne man Bernard Cronin, better known as author Eric North. About 80 people attended over the two day weekend. We staged a play written by Sydney fan and author Norma Hemming who also acted in the play. Other actors included Jack Keating, Graham Lyell, Larry Jones, Harry Williams, Barry Salgram, Brig Young and John McKerchner, the last two of whom I think were actors rather than sf fans who were roped in. Other members helped behind the scenes. Jack Keating and I did the sound effects on a record player given to me by Lee Harding, which later turned up in Space Age Books. Some of the timber used to build the set was later partly used to build bookshelves for the MSFC library. I arranged a lot of displays depicting SF books, movies, authors and art, with a lot of original sketches and paintings from the British magazine *New Worlds*, sent to us by the editor Ted Carnell. Most were auctioned and



Barry Salgram, Jack Keating, Ian Crozier and Tony Santos running the OLYMPICAN auction

caused spirited bidding. The movie programme included *The Five Thousand Fingers of Dr T and Five*. Speakers included Guest of Honor Frank Bryning, author Wynne Whiteford and journalist Harvey Blanks. There were actually 147 memberships paid, including non-attending, from almost every Australian State, the United States, including Jack Williamson and Forrest J. Ackerman (numbers 1 and 2 members on the list), United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada. Though a number of Sydney fans took supporting memberships, it was a shame that more did not attend, with Norma Hemming being one that did, and another I think was Brian Finch. But all in all our first and modest little SF convention went quite well.



Barry Salgram, Norma Hemming, Graham Lyell, Jack Keating, Larry Jones, Brig Young and John McKerchner. Inset Harry Williams. Play by Norma Hemming.

Bob had been corresponding with Science Fiction author A. Bertram Chandler in England and when

Bert, as a merchant ship's officer, visited Australia he made contact with fans in Sydney, Don Tuck in Tasmania and with us in Melbourne. He apparently liked the place so much he decided to emigrate and settled in Sydney, where he eventually did the bulk of his writing. Fans in Australia enjoyed his company and humour for some years to come. I think he may have been responsible for putting Bob in touch with Arthur C. Clarke although Bob may have also been corresponding with him direct. When Clarke visited Melbourne in December 1954, on the way to the Great Barrier Reef, (a trip which resulted in a couple of books), the MSFC members had the pleasure of meeting him and having dinner with him, (and getting him to sign our books of course), before farewelling him on the cruiseship the *Oriana*. Frank Bryning sent Ian Crozier reports of Clarke's meeting with the Brisbane fans during his stay in Queensland, which were included in *Etherline*. Our association with Clarke has endured, in that I published reports from him in my zine *AUSTRALIAN SF NEWS* in the 1970s. Russell Blackford and Nova Mob friends organised an sf dicussion and telephone link with Clarke last year (appropriately, 2001).

The early club members who in due course became pros themselves in the sf writing field included Damien Broderick, writer and literary critic, Lee Harding, and Wynne Whiteford. Of course Melbourne fandom has fostered others since. John Bangsund while working for Cassells publishers, in the 1960s "discovered" award-winning mainstream novelist George Turner. He found that George was an sf fan and induced him to write about sf and eventually write the stuff himself, and he became one of our most revered SF authors and critics. Not that George was ever actually a member of the MSFC though I guess that I like to look upon all Melbourne science fiction people as "members of Melbourne sf fandom". John Foyster's sf novel *Ossian's Ride* was published in the 1960s. Paul Collins' writing and publishing ventures encouraged other authors such as Jack Wodhams and David Lake from Queensland, Russell Blackford, Keith Taylor and not to forget Bert Chandler and local author and artist Rowena Cory, who has had great success lately under the name of Corey Daniels. Lucy Sussex and Sean McMullen being a great examples of most recent success by Melbourne fans. Today authors all

over Australia have broken into the field with their SF and in particular fantasy.

Getting back to the early days of the MSFC, or Group as it was still called, the meetings developed more into a social club, with people playing cards, chess and even darts. Any discussions of sf, books we had read and fan activities were conducted on a very informal basis. We had to leave the Oddfellows Hall in 1955 and we had started looking for more permanent premises. I suggested having meetings at my home and we did have some get-togethers there in our large garage, which I had turned into an office-come-workroom, but we agreed that it was too far for people to come. On July 8th, 1955 I turned 21 and I invited all the club members to my party which my parents had organised in a hall in Preston, near where we lived. I was given a tape recorder as a present by my parents and at a get-together later at my home I remember a lot of drunken singing being recorded on it by Tony, myself and others. The Club gave me a watch suitably encribed which is still in going order, and I bring it out occasionally when my more up-to-date timepiece runs out of batteries, though needless to say it does not keep good time now.

Ian Crozier arranged for us to meet in an upstairs room of his customs agent employer's office building in Lennox Street, Richmond. It was rather cramped, but after all, what else was new, though we managed to put in some book shelves and card tables for the chess playing. Occasionally informal discussions took place such as to who was the best writer of short sf stories, Ray Bradbury or Theodore Sturgeon, and of course we talked to one another about what we were reading, but not in any organised fashion. On reflection I think that was a pity but as far as I can remember the members did not want or expect it. Books were reviewed of course in the club zine. The convention organising was also in full swing at that time.

A group of a dozen or more of us attended a screening of the great sf movie *FORBIDDEN PLANET* at the then Metro Malvern when it was first released, but I do not recall any other such excursions in the early days, although a whole team of us went to see *2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY* when it was released in later years.

However in the early days we were screening 16mm movies ourselves at members' homes. Then we became established above McGill's Newsagency's store, showing movies became a major part of the clubs activities. In the 1950s groups of members attended the Melbourne Astronomical Observatory, which was another our activities. An sf club was formed by Jack Bristowe based at Upwey in the Dandenong Mountains area and a group of us made a trip there and we discovered that the meetings in Jack's lounge room were more or less parallel to our own, with games and discussion on the agenda. Wynne Whiteford took off to America early in 1957 and we did not see him again for quite a long time, and we were planning another convention.



Bob McCubbin, Larry Jones, Graham Lyell and Barry Salgram in Jack Bristowe's garden at Upwey.

It appears that we were still having meetings in Lennox Street Richmond prior to our second convention, MELCON in 1958. The advent of Sputnik seemed to be creating a new interest in SF. Bob Smith was stationed at Puckapunyal and we saw him at the club meetings occasionally. Author Nigel Jackson was providing stories and poems for *ETHERLINE* with gusto. On January 8th 1958 Margaret Duce made her first visit to the club with a friend. Sergeant Dick Jenssen was doing his National Service. The second Melbourne SF Convention, the Sixth National Australian, MELCON kicked off over Easter 1958. The first day's proceedings took place again in the Richmond Town Hall and the second day took the form of a barbecue sponsored by the Mountain Science Fiction Group, at Jack Bristowe's home. There was a total membership of 98, with 45 the most attending at a given time.

MELCON was the then fresh-faced 16-year-old John Foyster's first convention.

By this time Ian Crozier was becoming more tied up with business and was obviously becoming tired of producing *ETHERLINE*. So issue number 100 in October 1958 was almost the last, but after a few months we saw Ian's last issue, Number 101, undated, in I think early 1959. Bob McCubbin was posted to a country school and he did not take much interest in the club after that. The interest in the MSFC was beginning to deteriorate but I was determined to keep things going. It is hard for me to remember just what exactly did happen from this period. There were no club adverts in the later issues of *E*, so I do not know where we were still meeting, but there was a period at my place after we left Ian Crozier's office building, when he changed jobs. People came and borrowed books from the library at 4 Myrtle Grove, and we had a few film shows there. Following that, we used an upstairs room in St. James' Building in Little Collins Street.



Chess players and the library in the St. James' Building

It was pretty small and somebody had to run downstairs periodically when the bell rang and let a member in. It was very cramped and you had to be careful coming into the room, because the dartboard was on the back of the door. I tried to keep in touch with people with my book lists and club circulars, and *ETHERLINE* did not appear again until Leigh Edmunds helped me put out some issues in 1967 and 1968. One hundred issues of a fanzine, newszine or otherwise, in those days was quite an achievement. Leigh went on to do four issues before he got stuck into his own numerous zines. I did produce the *AUSTRALIAN SF NEWSLETTER* after IJC's

*ETHERLINE*'s demise, and I was glad to have Leigh Edmunds do some *Es*, but by then the club was changing dramatically and a whole new fandom in Melbourne was being born.

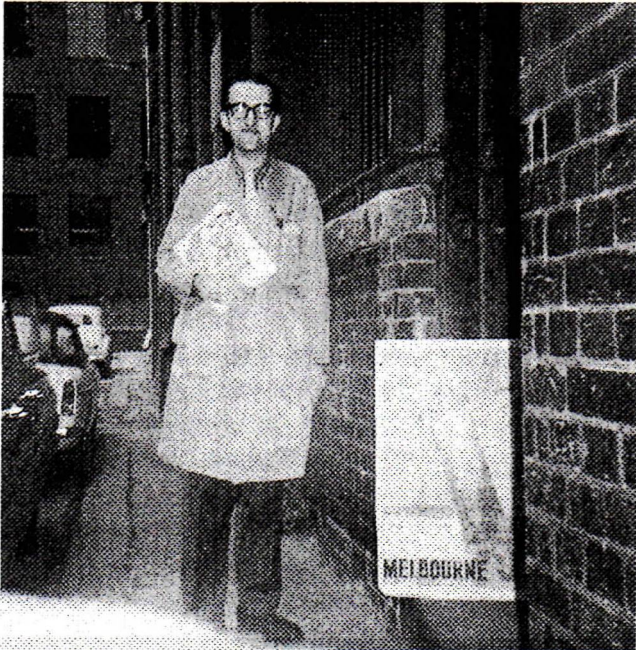


Merv and the duplicator at 4 Myrtle Grove, Preston

I am a little confused over the sequence of the moves and events from 1958 until we moved into the top floor of McGill's store. We spent a relatively short time in the small office in the St James' Building, but again I was determined to keep the club going, somehow. I found another office in McKillop Street in the city where we had a few meetings and kept the duplicator. I remember turning up there one lunch time to find John Foyster using the old Roneo to print one of his fanzines. There appeared to be more ink on John and the wall of the room, than on the stencils. He later inherited that old machine when John Bangsund gave us another Roneo of slightly younger vintage, which incidentally may still work, but getting stencils, ink and in particular suitable paper for it has curtailed my use of it for some years now. Having no room for it either, I will have to let it go. I don't just want to send it to the tip. It would be nice if someone could give it a good home, if only for sentimental reasons. It has seen a lot of service to Melbourne fandom in general and the MSFC in particular.

I must admit at this stage that I have been jumping all over the place with this narrative, mainly because my memory simply is letting me down and I just drop things in as I think of them. The fact is there were not many spectacular things happening between MELCON in 1958 and in the early 1960s,

although friendships were most definitely forged, and members were socialising away from the club.



The MSFC chief cook and bottle-washer outside the entrance to McGills store and the upstairs clubroom in Somerset Place, Melbourne

After leaving the room in McKillop Street, Melbourne, around late 1959 or early 1960, we moved to Somerset Place, following my request to my employees, McGills Newsagency, to allow me to use the top floor of their storeroom building for the club.

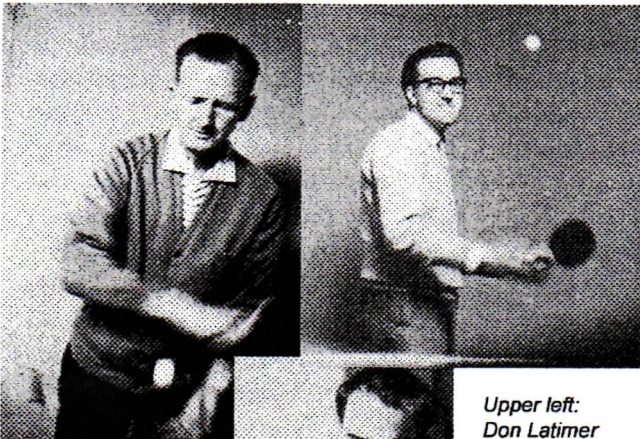


Table tennis players



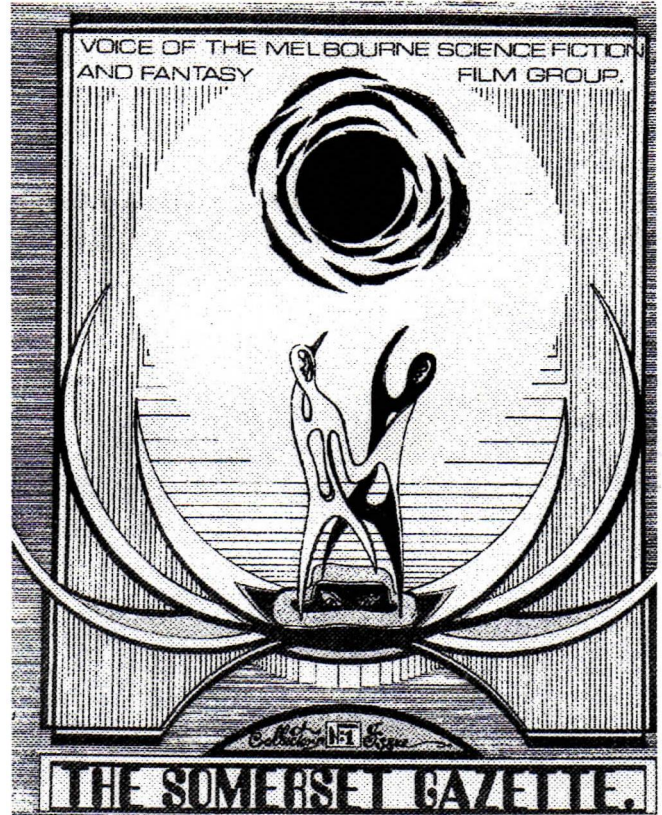
Upper left:  
Don Latimer

Upper right:  
Merv Binns

Left:  
John Straede

Not wanting to knock back a little rent, they agreed and we got stuck into painting the place and putting

up shelves and such. Various people helped but I can't remember who apart from John Breden, who was definitely one of the painters.



Tony Santos, who was still around then, but later succumbed to his chronic asthma problems, donated a large sideboard in which we could store stuff and a large dining room table, which we put masonite on and used to play a table tennis. We later added a refrigerator and small oven. I built more rough bookshelves and really got stuck into enlarging the library. A guy who was good with wood working, but whose name I have no idea of now, built some very solid shelving for us, which I reckon the club is still using now. Some of the old members such as Don Latimer and Dick Jensen came along and played table tennis (Dick becoming our club champion), and a small revival of the club was taking place. Bill Wright – a prolific producer of fanzines then and now, Bruno Kautzner - a keen table tennis player, Noel Kerr - a movie buff and comics fan who I believe was introduced by John Breden and came to edit the club magazine *The Somerset Gazette*, Cedric Rowley – the legendary fixer of anything electronic, John Straede, Peter House, Leigh Edmonds, John Litchen, Dave Sofar

and Peter Kemp, an old friend of Race Mathews who had first turned up with him in the early '50s, just to mention a few - and the man who became my right hand man, Paul Stevens, all became regular attendees of the club meetings and film shows during the first half of the 1960s. We started showing movies again with Kiwi Merv Barrett doing some of the projection work. It was probably my efforts to get new members by putting slips in the SF at McGills, that more people were making enquiries about the club.



From left: Chris Bennie, Jill Dudding, Keith McLelland, Margaret Duce and John Foyster at Margaret's 21st birthday party 21st December 1962

Somehow I missed out on attending Helena's (Margaret Duce) 21st birthday party in 1962, but club attendees Keith McLelland, Merv Barrett, his friend Jill Dudding, Chris Bennie and John Foyster all didn't. This makes me aware however that people were meeting each other if not at the MSFC itself, but had come in contact with one another because of SF fandom's existence. Leigh Edmonds became friends with Paul Stevens and they shared a flat for a while, then with John Bangsund and his then wife Diane. John having been told of the club's existence by Lee Harding. I know now that John Foyster was an active fan in that he was in contact with lots of other fans interstate and overseas and he was a catalyst, somebody who was making things happen that I was not aware. Bruce Gillespie I believe became aware of the club in the mid '60s.

Somerset Place ushered in a new era for the club, but meanwhile I will talk about....

The library! While in Japan with the occupation forces after the 1939/45 war, Bob McCubbin had an aluminium luggage trunk made. He lent it to the club while we were in Latrobe Street, to store the few books and magazines that members had donated. When we moved to Richmond, we built some shelves and who else would have become librarian but the resident bookseller, me. The library steadily grew over the years as I added donations, review books and books I purchased mainly from overseas. I wrote to Fantast Medway in England, which was run by another ex-army occupation man, Ken Slater. He had I believe made friends with American fans while in Germany and so built up a means of getting American books and magazines that British fans and the few Aussie fans that knew about the service, could not buy normally. The club or service he started called Fantast Medway is not operating under that banner now, but I believe Ken and his family are still selling books through the mail.

An advert in the Fantast zine gave me contacts in the USA and I obtained a lot of hard-cover books from a guy in Philadelphia, Remsen T. Schenck, who was an industrial chemist and had worked on the Manhattan Project. So by the time my employers, McGills, agreed to let us move in, the library had grown quite a lot and was still growing. A contact in Canada sold me about twenty years of American *ASTOUNDINGS* and I had purchased a lot of second-hand pulps that were brought into McGills very early in the piece. The library eventually became virtually the "whole" club. Many members who were attending meetings early in the 60s went off in other directions. Some members just came in, grabbed some books and went. But we had so few members by then, as we moved on into the 1960s, it was a battle to get enough attendance donations in to pay the rent. Despite Paul Stevens and my efforts the regular meetings of the club were falling off, the rent was becoming difficult to pay and something had to be done. So I started getting books in, from the USA mainly, for people to purchase. Doing lists and taking orders, to provide funds to keep the club in existence, but it was the movie screenings that in due



course kept the club going. So for what seemed like an eternity I spent many years doing that and just being the " head cook and bottle washer". My endeavours to keep the club afloat took up most of my time and I had little or no social life. As I have noted elsewhere, other members developed associations with members of the opposite sex, but it took forty years for me to eventually team up with my wife Helena, who I initially met in the club in 1958. Meanwhile a new fan population was growing in the 1960s. People who did not see much point in attending the club as it was then, were meeting elsewhere, producing fanzines and in contact with fans interstate and overseas. But I was there every week and I was still working for McGills, so I guess I was in the position of being able to pass on information and people could contact one another through me. This situation of course continued right through my whole career as a bookseller and fan but to the largest degree during the lead-up to AUSSIECON ONE World SF Convention.



Noel Kerr and Dick Jenssen at one of the film nights

SF fandom was growing but the MSFC was going off in another direction. Some fans I knew were quite adamant that screening movies had nothing to do with sf fandom, but don't forget that the era of *2001: A SPACE ODDYSEY*, *STAR TREK* and other visual sf had dawned, and *STAR WARS* was to make an even bigger impact. They were to create a whole new interest in sf in general, which eventually led to a new generation becoming interested in sf books and forming clubs. Movies, as you may have noted, had always been a part of th MSFC and became even a bigger part right through the 1960s years in McGill's store. Many of the early members of the club were not around the club by

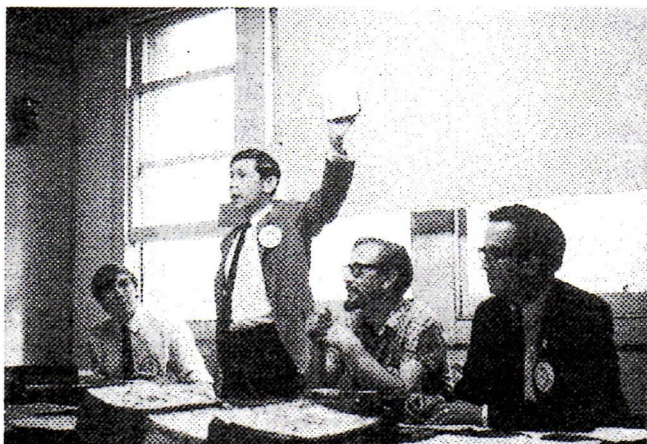
the early sixties and many people came and went during that period and I certainly cannot remember them all. Ian Crozier and Bob McCubbin, the power houses of the early days of the club, had gafiated, although I believe Bob McCubbin kept in contact with fan friends via the mails until he passed on in the mid 1970s. Dave Sofar, who joined the club in the 1960s and who usually managed to turn up on Thursday nights at the clubroom in Somerset Place, passed on due to cancer related illness, rather ironically as he worked for the medical radio isotope laboratory, which produced material to treat cancer. My now wife, Margaret Duce (Helena Roberts Binns), attended meetings and many social gatherings with club members such as Keith McLelland and Merv Barrett in the late fifties and early sixties, but after that she did not attend the club meetings again until later in the sixties, when she turned up with her husband Kelvin Roberts. Later she changed her name to Helena. I might add that we did not have many woman members and the ones we did see were usually library borrowers only, bought books from the club and some remained as customers of mine during the Space Age years and later.

However things changed to some degree when we started having regular movies shows in the clubrooms. We had bought a movie projector in the 1950s which our inimitable handyman Cedric Rowly operated and often had to repair, until we purchased a better one. We continued the habit of borrowing films from the State Film Centre which we began in the 1950s. Movies made by the innovative Canadian Film Board, NASA, cartoons, documentaries and many classic films from the silent era, plus more recent features from the film distributors' libraries. We constructed a permanent screen of masonite and by the late 1960s we even had 35mm projectors, which eventually led to the closure of the clubrooms and the lowest ebb of the club itself. Though fandom had never been more alive in Melbourne and indeed Australia by this time.

But I have got a bit ahead of myself. The infamous Paul J. Stevens turned up about 1963 and helped me with the film screenings and generally running the club. We did our best to keep the club alive with the movie screenings. These movie shows became

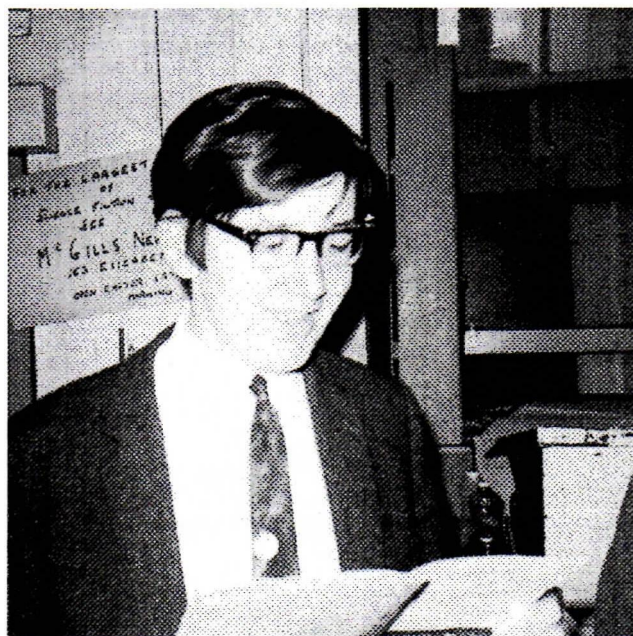
very popular, with up to fifty people turning up some nights, most not even sf club members; some were members' wives and girl friends, others just movie fans. Only half a dozen people or less were turning up to regular sf club meetings. Consequently Paul and I decided to form as an adjunct to the MSFC, the Fantasy Film Society and we induced people to join it and membership of the MSFC was kept separate. The Film Society paid its way and it did what Paul and I had intended and that was help cover the rent of the room. It carried on right into the 1970s, when we were able to promote it via Space Age Books.

But as I have already pointed out, fandom away from the club was rapidly growing and people such as John Foyster I believe wanted to help the club become more active and get more members. Incidentally I only discovered by reading a booklet that John handed out at the FanHistoricon Panels at AUSSIECON 3, covering a brief bit of Australian fan history, that he had been active in the field since the late 1950s. He had been in contact with Sydney fans and attended a convention there very early in the piece. By the mid 1960s he was involved with other active fans, not connected to the MSFC in Melbourne, and other places for that matter and I believe that we can largely thank John and people whom he brought into and back into the fandom fold, for the renewed interest in getting the club organised in the mid sixties. John Bangsund, Leigh Edmonds and our old friend Lee Harding and friends such as John Bangsund's then wife Dianne, Tony Thomas, Paul Stevens and others were roped into endeavouring to get the club going properly.



7th Australian National Convention

In 1966 John Foyster, assisted by John Bangsund, Lee Harding and quite a few others including me, organised the first Australian sf convention to be held since 1958, the 7th Australian Science Fiction Convention and it was to mark the rebirth of science fiction fandom in Australia. It was held in the clubroom itself and was a great success. Up to 100 people attended over the two days, which was a lot more than we should have had in the room. Attendees included John Baxter home from England, Charles Highams, Robin Johnson, Ron Graham and Bob Smith, among others. Bob helped with the auction. My patience with the club was wearing thin and we can thank John for initiating this burst of activity that not only started fandom rolling in Melbourne but Australia also. It was followed by two more, in 1968 and 1969, all of which led to the first in Sydney for fifteen years in 1970 and our bid for the World Con in 1975.



Leigh Edmonds in the clubrooms

The 1968 one was referred to as a "conference" rather than convention as it was intended to be on a pretty small scale, but what's in a name and it was still a convention to me. It was organised by John Bangsund and Diane, with help from Bill Wright, Dick Jenssen, John Breden, Tony Thomas, Paul Stevens and myself. It started off in the Somerset Place clubroom on the first and second days, a small hall in Boronia on the Sunday and back to the club for movies on Monday. Quite a few fans from interstate attended, including an ailing Pat Terry.



Jack Wodhams GoH 8th Natcon 1968

Queensland Jack Wodhams was the GoH. They gave me an award for "Outstanding Services to the Melbourne SF Club", which was a big surprise to me but certainly helped a lot receiving it as an acknowledgement of the time and effort I had put in. Our movie program included the French film *La Jete*, which was remade more recently as *Twelve Monkeys*. Leigh Edmond's *Etherline II #5* gave a good con report, with pieces by Bernie Bernhouse, Paul Stevens, Diane Bangsund, Leigh Edmonds and myself.



John Breden, Bill Wright, Dmitri Razuvaev, Gerald Carr, Merv, Paul Stevens, Kevin Dillon, John Brosnan at the 8th Australian SF Convention, Capri theatre, Murrumbeena

In 1969 we held the 8th Australian Natcon. On the first two days, Friday and Saturday, the con was held in the old clubroom again, but on the Sunday we held the movie program at the Capri Theatre in Murrumbeena. Some of the con committee again thought we had been concentrating too much on movies, but Paul Stevens and I insisted on a movie program. Lee Harding, who was beginning to make a big impression as an author, was the Guest of Honour.

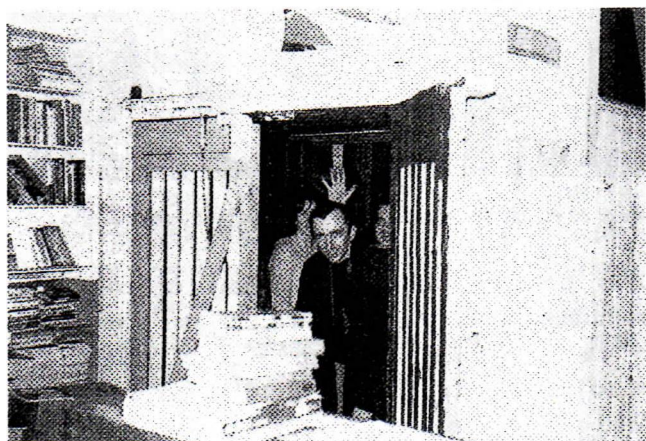


Ditmar as auctioneer, soliciting bids for a Margaret Duce painting

John Breden arranged a display of comic art including the work of Gerald Carr and a new strip by leading Sydney comic and sf artist Stanley Pitt, based on American author Alfred Bester's story *The Stars My Destination*. As great as Pitt's art was, including his strip *Silver Starr*, which was a tribute to Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon*, and his wonderful cover illustrations for the small Australian sf magazine published by Malian Press, the Gully Foyle strip was not picked up by a publisher. *Ditmar Awards* were first given. As to how they got to be called the Ditmars I was a little confused until I recently spoke to Dick Jenssen about it on the phone. Apparently what happened was Dick, Lee Harding, John Foyster, myself and possibly other people were sitting in the club on a hot afternoon trying to think of a name to give the awards to be given at the upcoming convention. We were all getting hot and bothered and when Dick suggested "Ditmars" it sounded good and we all said that will do. He said that he had an explanation worked out, but none of us actually asked him about it, which was that he was working on a

computer dubbed "Digital Integrating and Tabulating Mechanism for the Advancement of Research". And you can believe that if you like, but I do believe him when he says he only suggested it as a joke and fools that we were we took it seriously. The last word on this con was that Leigh Edmonds was commissioned at the business session to follow up on the possibilities of a bid for the World SF Convention for 1975.

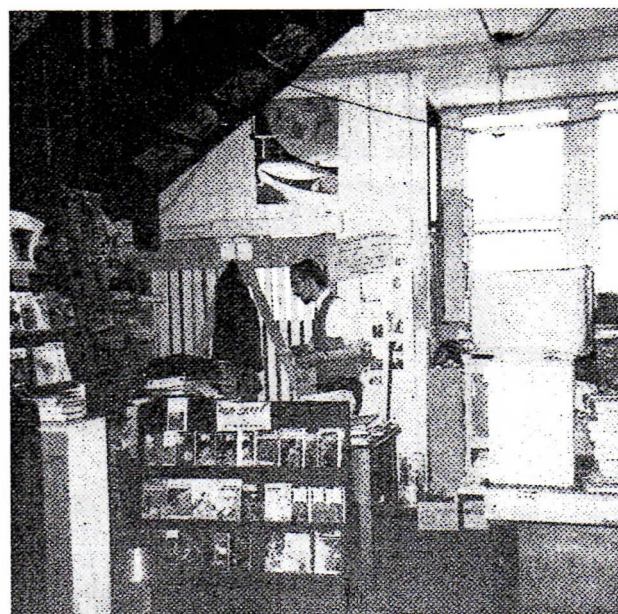
Although these conventions were successful in bringing fans together they did not help attendances at the club a great deal - apart, again, for the film shows. Maybe I myself was the reason for the failure of the club to attract members, with my insistence of keeping the club at 19 Somerset Place. People told me that they did not like the atmosphere of the room above McGill's store and I could not come up with a better alternative.



Mervyn Barret and John Straede (lurking) in The Lift

Yes, it was a grotty old building up on the second floor, early in the piece accessed by a rickety old hydraulic lift, but when the lift became one of the last two or three such contraptions still operating in the Melbourne city boundaries, the city council turned off the water. Cheryl Straede, who was unable to negotiate the stairs was carried up by her father and later club member John Straede. John and Cheryl eventually married and moved up to New South Wales, but we kept in touch ever since. Other fans met in the club, such as Myfanwy (then Foyster, John's sister), and Tony Thomas and later married. But I digress. The people who wanted to talk about sf, produce fanzines and such, met elsewhere and the Nova Mob came into being in

1970 and it still meets. The fanzine producing people got together with ANZAPA and I even had a few very brief issues of my zine *RUBBISH BIN(NS)* included. The great Bangsund fanzine producing era was in full swing, *AUSTRALIAN SF REVIEW* and all, with other fans such as Leigh Edmonds and Bruce Gillespie also very active in this field. Leigh is now a historian, produces a little zine for SAPS, while Bruce has become the champion fanzine producer of Australia in both quality and quantity. Foyster, John Bangsund and friends endeavoured to work with Paul Stevens and me to get the club going in the mid '60s, but quite simply people did not like the "place".



Paul Stevens in the "grotty" old club

However the Fantasy Film Society continued on. We got hold of some theatre seats courtesy of our projectionist Graham Shannon, who also borrowed some old 35mm projectors from his film collector and "picture show man" associate Harry Davidson. And we had some terrific nights. But all good things come to an end. One of the members was a professional projectionist, Len Jensen (NOT Dick) and when he saw us screening old nitrate films, which are very dangerous, especially screening them in a place like the clubroom, because they are highly inflammable, he had no choice but to get us closed down. Ironically there was a fire in McGill's store about five years or so later, and I was very pleased we were not there as we would have probably got the blame.

So in 1969 the club was forced to vacate 19 Somerset Place and we moved all the library and other junk out to Paul Stevens' and John Breden's flat, above a chemist shop, in Toorak Road, South Yarra. (Not far from Race Mathews' current abode.) We were there for about a year or more and people used to turn up to borrow books, play games and so forth. As I was not on hand all the time the library books started to disappear, but at least the club was still "alive". SF fandom in general was very much alive and Space Age Books was on the way, which with all the new interest in sf rapidly growing, university clubs starting, conventions being held here and in other states, was a very good time for a new SF bookshop to open. It was only in a small shop at first, but the back entrance led to a relatively spacious room and we started holding MSFC meetings there. They were pretty well a dead loss. As usual all the Melbourne fan activity was elsewhere and there was lots of it. Because I was running Space Age Book Shop I had no time now to run the club although I had tried to get more people to come to meetings above the little shop. When we moved up the street to the bigger premises three years later, we established the club library in the lunch room and slowly more people started going up there on Friday nights, when the shop was open. Over the next few years the membership grew and the members decided they needed their own bigger premises and my direct association with the club, which had been my whole life almost for twenty years or more, was decidedly reduced.

Since the club meets now in Brunswick, which is on the far opposite side of Melbourne from where I live with my wife Helena in Carnegie, it is not practical for us to get to club meetings, even though Space Age Books closed down just over fifteen years ago. We did get to the club's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary get-together though, as well as one or two other special event meetings, and were fortunate also to be able to be there for the MSFC's 50th anniversary on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May this year. It does give me great satisfaction that the Melbourne SF Club has continued all these years and although it more or less caused me a lot of heartache and ruled my life for many years, it also gave me a lot of pleasure because of the friends I have made and the conventions and events that I have taken part in

over the years, due to my association with science fiction and the MSFC.

Merv Binns

25/5/2002

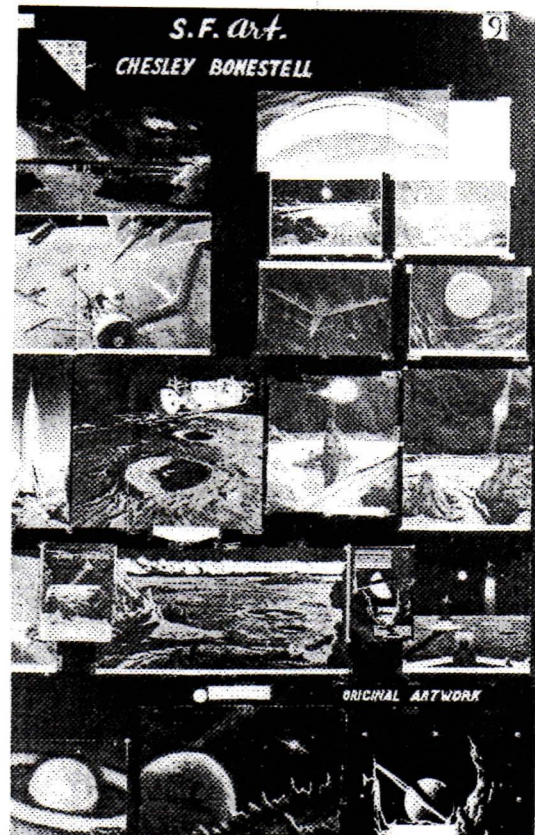
#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The photographs in this publication were taken by

Merv Binns  
Lee Harding  
Dick Jensen  
Merv Barrett  
Mike O'Brien  
and others....

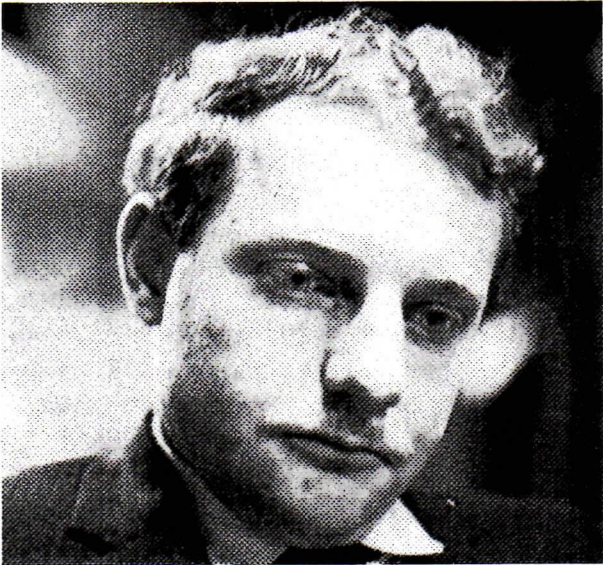
And we thank them all.

Helena and I wish to thank Dick Jensen for his help in scanning and formatting this publication for us.

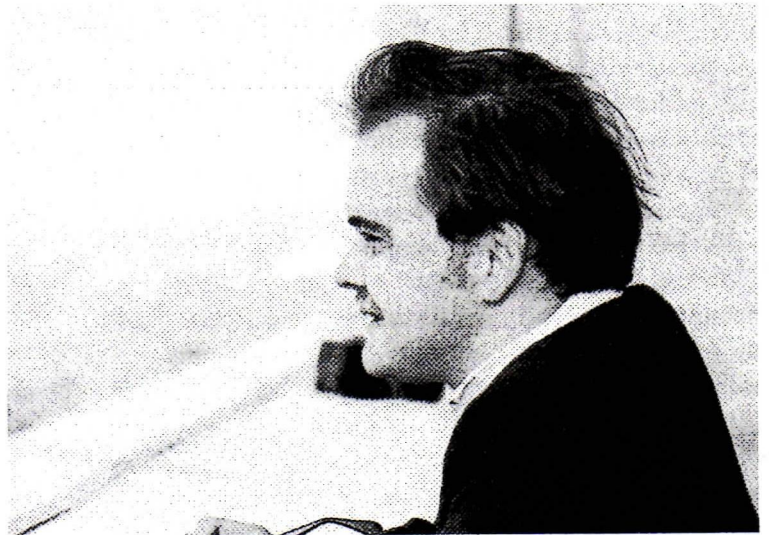


Part of my displays at OLYMPICON. MB

## Melbourne Science Fiction Club Stalwarts



*Above :Cedric Rowley*

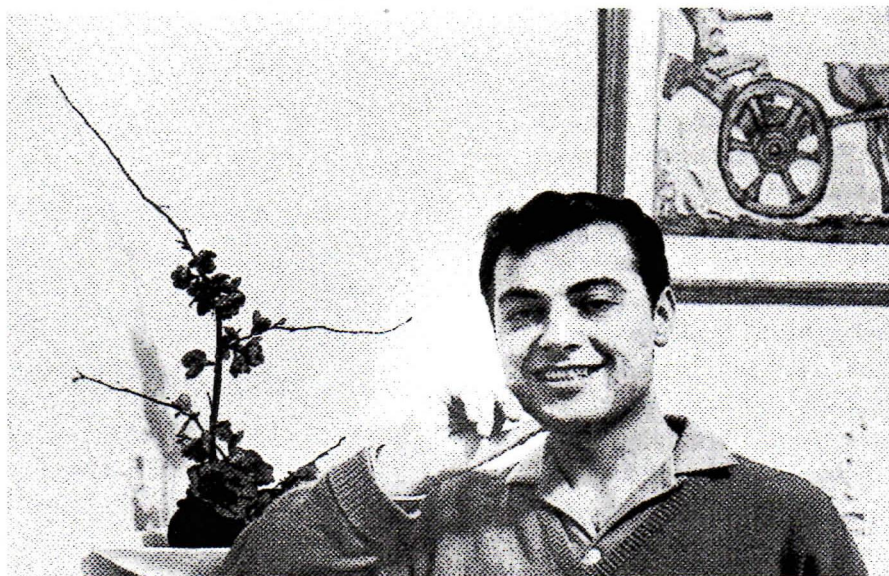


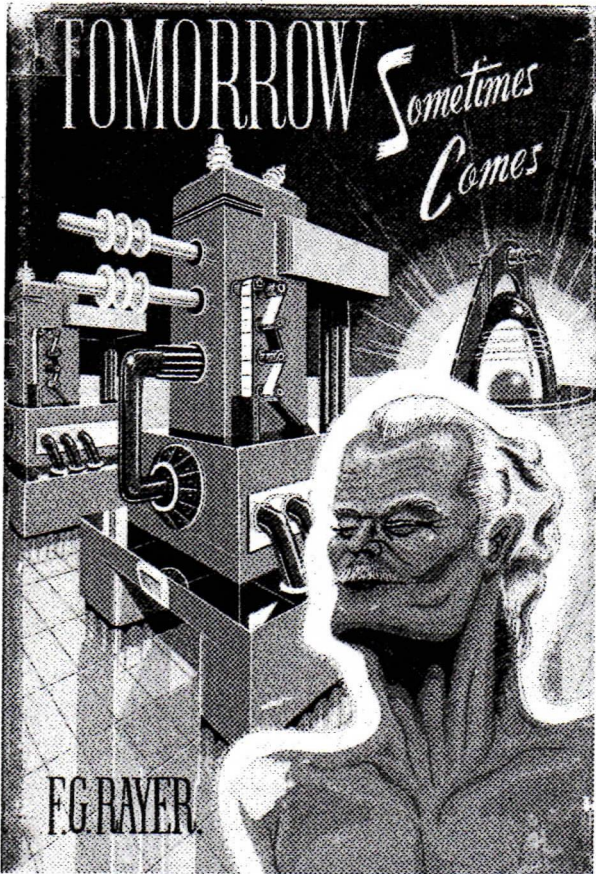
*Above :John Straede*

*Right: The late Dave Sofar*



*Right:  
Bruno Kautzner*



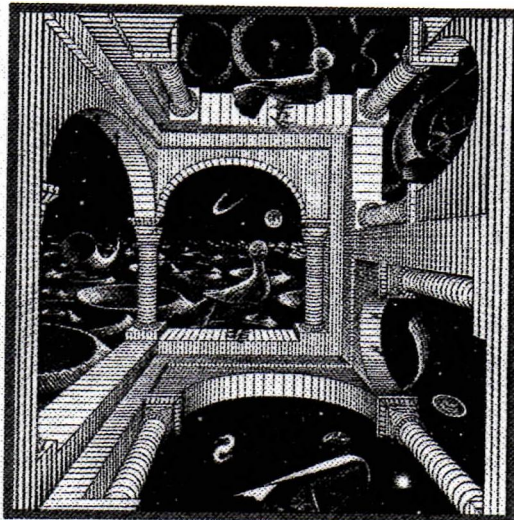


*One of the first novels added to  
the Club Library*

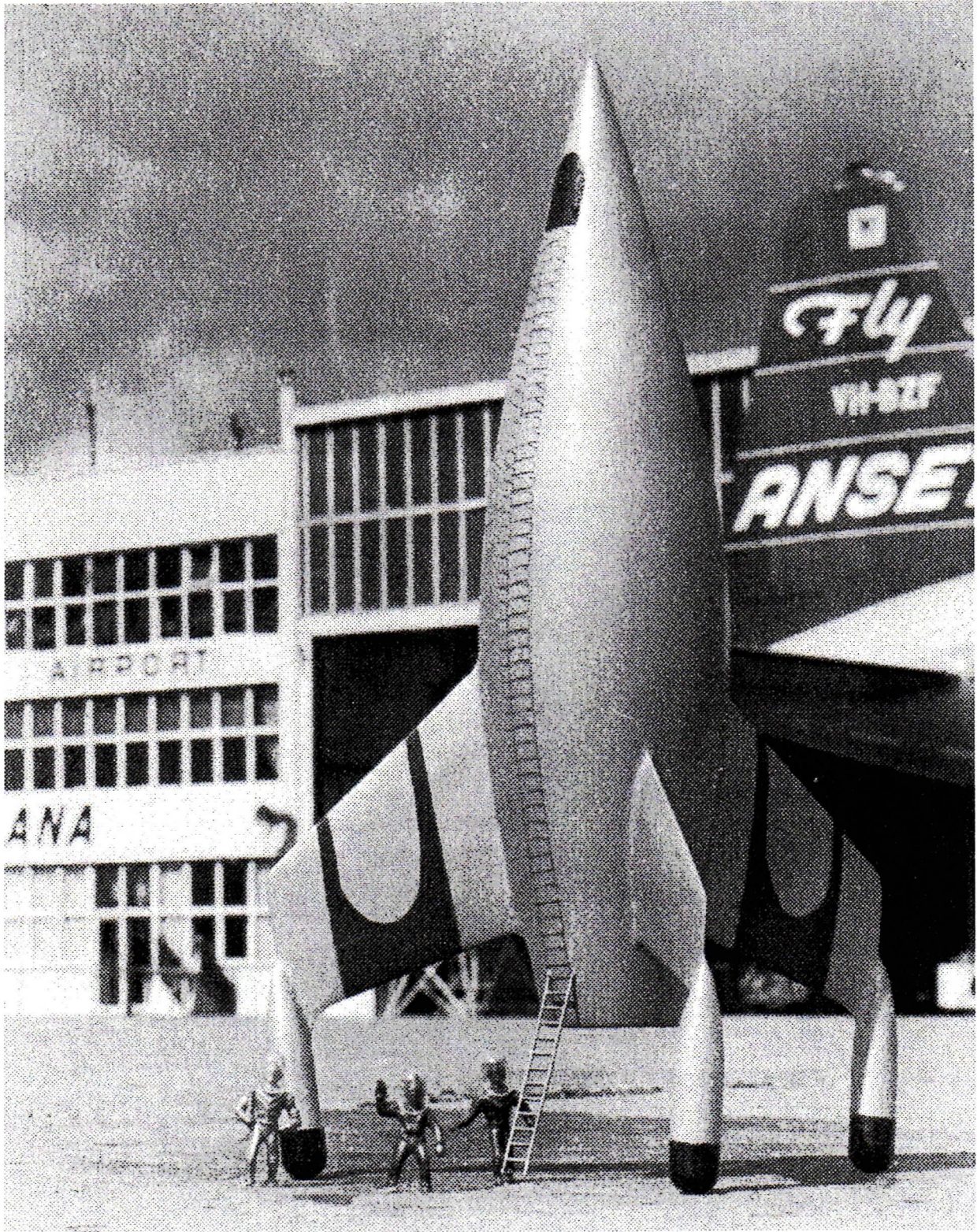
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