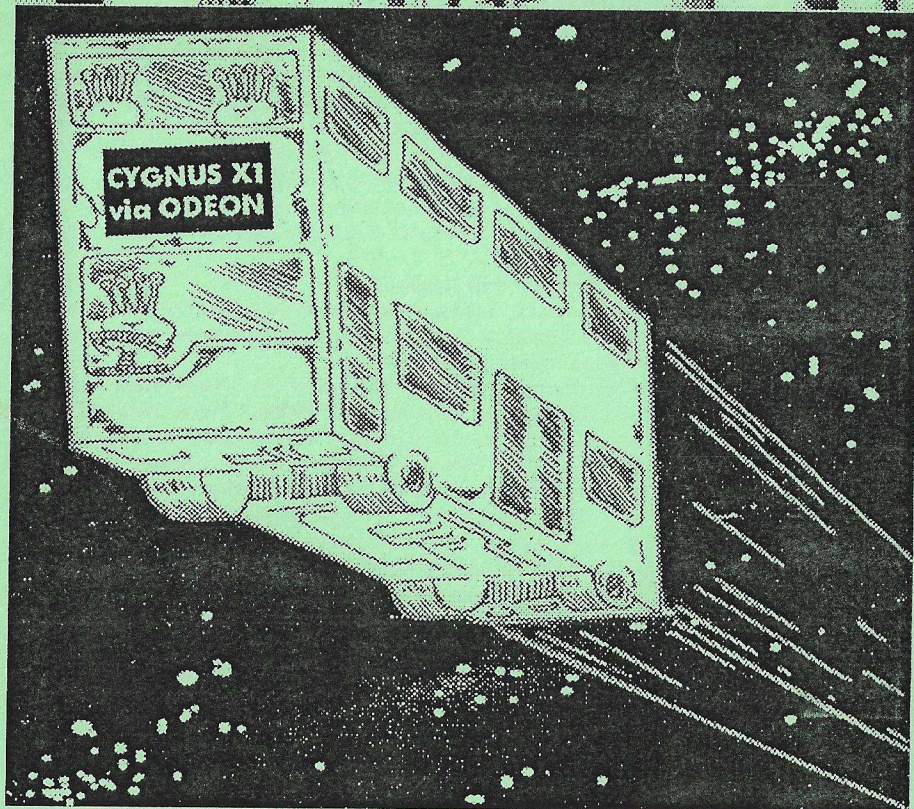


NOVACON 31



Progress Report #2

NOVACON 31

Date: 9th-11th November 2001.

Venue: The Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall,
(Junction10 on the M6).

Guest of Honour: Gwyneth Jones.

Membership & Enquiries: Attending membership costs £35 in advance and will cost £40 on the door. Postal registrations should be received by 27th October 2001, after this time please join on the door. Supporting membership costs £15.00 throughout.

Cheques/Postal Orders should be made payable to "Novacon 31" and sent with your completed form(s) to: **Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.** Further information is available at <http://www.novacon.org.uk>.

Room Rates: £32.00 per person per night for people sharing twin/double rooms and £45.00 pppn for single rooms (inclusive of full English breakfast). NB: Hotel booking forms, and deposits of one night's stay per person (£32 or £45), must be received by Steve Lawson no later than 30th September 2001. Cheques for room deposits should be made payable to "The Quality Hotel". Enquires regarding hotel bookings should be sent to Steve at the address above or to xl5@zoom.co.uk (tel: 0114-281-1572).

Advertising Rates: Advertising is welcome for both the next two Progress Reports and for the Programme Book. The rates are as follows (fan rates in brackets): Progress Reports - Professional £30.00 (£15.00) full page, £16.50 (£9.00) half page, £9.00 (£6.00) quarter page. Programme Book - Professional £75.00 (£35.00) full page, £40.00 (£17.50) half page, £20.00 (£10.50) quarter page.

Anyone interested in advertising should contact Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX (e-mail empties@breathemail.net).

Deadlines for camera-ready advertising copy are detailed below.

Deadlines: PR #3: 30th August 2001, to be mailed end September 2001.

Programme

Book: 25th September 2001, distributed at Novacon 31.

Book Room Rates: Tables will cost £15.00 each for the whole weekend. To book a table (or tables) you must be a member of the convention and complete and return the booking form enclosed with this Progress Report.

Committee: Tony Berry (Chairman), 68 Windsor Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B68 8PB, (morbius@zoom.co.uk); Cat Coast (Secretary), 1 St. Woolos Place, Newport, NP20 4GQ (little.jim@dial.pipex.com); David T. Cooper (Treasurer), 3 Yate Lane, Oxenhope, Keighley, West Yorks., BD22 9HL (elwher@ic24.net); Dave Hicks (Programme), postal address as Cat Coast's above, (or little.jim@dial.pipex.com); Steve Lawson (Registrations), 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ (xl5@zoom.co.uk); Alice Lawson (Operations) postal address as Steve Lawson's above (or fab@zoom.co.uk); Martin Tudor (Publications & Hotel Liaison), 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (empties@breathemail.net).

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CHAIRMAN'S PIECE by Tony Berry

Following hot on the heels of PR1, we have PR2. Things are progressing nicely with the hotel, and the convention programme is shaping up. Welcome aboard Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, who will be running the Dealers' room this year, and Ann Green, who will be Artshow supremo (with a little help from Steve – going to the bar and stuff). We need artwork to display and auction, both in traditional media and spiffy new CD ROM format. The CD Artshow will have a room all to itself.

By the time you get this the website should be updated (<http://www.novacon.org.uk>). Sorry about the delays here; we were late finding a hotel and then Pat McMurray said that he was unable to continue running the site. It will now be done by Dave Hicks and Alex McLintock. Thanks to all of them for technical wizardry.

CHAIRMAN'S NIGHTMARES

IT'S A POSTCARD FROM BALI .



#1 - The Treasurer...

This year is the 30th anniversary of Novacon and so we'd like to do a display of times past in the con area. If you have any photos of previous Novacons, especially the early ones, can you please contact me so that I can get this organised. Also any other stuff like old PRs, souvenirs, press cuttings etc would be welcome. You may also have noticed that it's 2001, so the convention ends on Sunday evening with the 2001: A Taste Odyssey Beer and Sausage & Mash Tasting. Not only strange and interesting beers this time, but different types of sausages and several kinds of mutilated spud. I hope you can stick around for this.

Lastly, congratulations to our Guest of Honour, Gwyneth Jones, on receiving the Richard Evans Award at Eastercon.

Explorers by Gwyneth Jones

When I was a very small child my big sister and I used to play at climbing Everest. It was 1954, the triumph of Hilary and Sherpa Tenzing was still news. (We didn't know Tenzing Norgay's personal name, the private identity of the native guide was not part of the story in those days). I was two, my sister was five. We climbed, roped together with the clothesline, along the hall, up the steep and narrow stairs to the landing, up to the dressing table in my parents' room, which was the summit. There were never many photographs of me at that time. I don't think there are any surviving now, though there's a picture of my sister as a toddler, with a big almost bald head and a silk dress with *real smocking*. The smocking was important: I remember regarding her baby dresses as a sign of first-child status.

I have a blurred sense of the physical presence of that child, me: a stout little girl with deep-set eyes, over-large brow, round cheeks, fair hair curling into a drake's tail at the nape. I have a *feeling* of climbing the stairs hand over hand, breathing hard, interested in the trapped grit and the scratchiness of the pile. I can't know if that's an original Everest expedition record. Recovering memory so ancient is like trying to retrieve DNA from old bones, it's well nigh impossible to be sure there has been no contamination. My mother tells me she used to find us climbing, and try to separate me from some of the expedition's baggage. I was laden, my big sister wasn't carrying a thing. Rosamund wouldn't allow it, and I defended her rights. "I'm the Sherpa, Mummy." I said. "I'm *supposed* to carry everything." My mother thinks this story is *killingly* funny. Me, I don't remember the exchange at all, but I still don't like being first or going first into anything. I cause jams in doorways when my minders try to usher me forward at literary events. I hurt the feelings of chivalrous gentlemen. It's

not that I'm not sensible of the honour. It's visceral: I'm a middle child, I don't *like* that vulnerable position. My shoulders itch for the knives.... It's funny that of we three sisters I'm the one who became the feminist, the dangerous radical, while the other two - trailblazers and rebels when I was conciliatory; always the *good* child - are fiercely traditional on the question of a woman's place in the scheme of things. My views make them furious so I avoid family confrontations on gender politics. I generally avoid confrontations, with anyone. But I don't change my mind. I'm not good at changing my mind.

I spent my childhood in an atmosphere of privilege. We were minor aristocracy in the parish of Mount Carmel, Blackley, Manchester. (You say it Blakeley, by the way. The day I met someone who didn't know that without being told was an epoch in my life). We had bookcases full of books: my father's small library of pocket edition French novels, *Lettres De Mon Moulin*; *Jacques Le Fataliste*; the Desert Fathers, Henry Morton's *In The Steps Of The Master*; Keats's collected poems in blue cloth, the engravings protected by delicate tissue paper. They were all old books, shabby books, many of them treasured finds from my mother's lifetime of grubbing in the Old Book Stalls on Shudehill in the centre of Manchester. (the city centre tiny and grubby then, still ravaged by WWII bomb damage; and all the magnificent Victorian civic buildings still blanketed in a dignified soot-black from coal smoke). We had a piano. (My parents scrimped and saved to waste years of music teaching fees. We children were marginally talented but superbly, invincibly lazy). We had a tape recorder, as soon as the first commercial reel-to-reel machines appeared (we tried to record our hamster's heartbeat). We had the first television in our street. We didn't have much money, especially not after my father's accident. But we knew who 'the poor' were and they definitely weren't us. I wasn't in the least perturbed by the fact that many of 'the poor' in our neighbourhood seemed to have a lot more cash than we did. That was the way it was supposed to be. Shabbiness, in the ideal world of my books, was the ultimate sign of being the people who don't have to prove anything to anyone. My childhood was *informed* - given its psychic structure - by the golden age of children's literature. I read *Swallows and Amazons*, and *Narnia*. I read Elfrida Vipont, Frances Hodgson-Burnett, William Mayne, E Nesbit, Antonia Forrester, Elinor Lyon, Geoffery Trease. I absorbed, without question, the ethos of the ideal English middle class family which pervades all of that fiction - a family that inhabits a misty historical period somewhere in the last decades of Empire: modestly well-bred, devoid of material aspirations, delighting in hardship, gentle but wary in their dealings with lesser mortals; full of casual erudition about famous explorers, sailing, falconry, mountain climbing....

Lying on the musty carpet in the front parlour of my grandmother's house down in Blackley village, which was also my uncle John's bedroom (in this model labourer's cottage, where seven children shared the four rooms with their parents, where indoor sanitation never arrived; and my grandmother still kept hens in the yard when I was very small) I studied Mr Sherlock Holmes' adventures in damp, bound copies of the Strand magazine; and leafed through big blue volumes of Punch, which I only liked for the old-fashioned cartoons. I knew all the stories that the children in my library books knew, the same old jokes, the same great names. I followed the same code of behaviour. My experience seemed identical to theirs. I was very surprised when I reached Sussex University (which was at the time, the early seventies, a fashionable institution) and met the contemporary versions of my role models - the modestly gilded youths who might really, as children, have crewed the Swallow in their holidays from boarding school, or visited Narnia through the wardrobe in an empty room, in some labyrinthine country house. I was surprised because they didn't know me. They were puzzled by the fact that I didn't speak working-class heroine. My accent placed me - as accents did and still do in this country - but my idiom was bizarrely at odds with the obvious truth about my place in the British class structure. It was in those days that I learned to call myself 'poor' and 'working class', greatly to my parents' disgust - my parents, who knew what poverty was, and had fought against its evils all their lives. I knew myself that it was a nonsensical description. I have always had plenty to eat. I have always slept warm and dry (except when on adventures of my own choosing). I can read and write. But it was socially necessary. Periodically, since then, I find myself stumbling again into this uneasy position. Was I poor or was I rich, when I was a little girl? Shall I present myself as a goosegirl with a scholarship, or as a déclassé princess, a sort of Mancunian Tess of the D'Urbervilles? It depends very much on whom I'm talking to. I've met writers of my own age from the Indian subcontinent who have a curiously similar problem. We were raised in Manchester, in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, in our comfortable, scrubby lower middle class homes, on Marmite sandwiches, Huntley and Palmers biscuits, Bluebird Toffees, Johnners' cricket commentary, *Childrens' Favourites* on the radio, *Hancock's Half Hour*. We grew up clinging with childhood's deep affection to the rituals of an alien culture. Our psychic lives are built on a totally spurious sense of belonging; a whole history of false memories. It's strange, but in the end I find I like the compromise. A *real* 'sense of belonging' - of unearned and unassailable privilege - would be a serious embarrassment to me. A fake one is fine.

When we used to climb Mount Everest, my sister and I shared the back bedroom. It overlooked the small dank yard we called our back garden, with the coal shed and a brick-built outhouse, which held an outside toilet and a stone floored wash-house. These solid Edwardian terraced houses

were built before running water moved indoors: my mother remembered the regular "mangle clinics" at the local hospital, for the peculiar injuries inseparable from washing day. Rosamund taught me to stare at the light bulb on winter mornings, until when I looked away there were coloured horseshoes flying everywhere. We used to chase them and try to catch them in our slippers. She was a leopard, associated with the leopard in *Just So Stories* but lolloping instead of dignified. The leopard was always apologising for the mayhem it caused: *good grouch, it's in grouches*. When there were three of us she, as the oldest, moved into the tiny 'spare' room next to the bathroom, and my younger sister Jacinta and I shared the back room. I hated that. Life revolved around the obsessive constructions of string with which I tried to divide our separate territories - to no avail. All my attempts to keep the boundaries marked foundered on my sibling's conviction that anything I possessed was by definition desirable. Rosamund had never had that problem with me: it was very unfair. And Jacinta was ill, not chronically like me but in spectacular bursts. The night that she went down with mumps everybody rushed around and took her off to be comforted. They forgot about her bedding. I was left with an eiderdown full of vomit rolled over the end of my bed. I remember sitting shivering and looking at it in the half dark, utterly disgusted. It is a furious memory: *having nowhere to go, no space of my own*.

There was a drainpipe outside the window (there still is). On rainy windy nights, when everything out there was glistening black, I knelt and stared, (trying to pretend my sister didn't exist) at a vista of endless roofs, chimneys, red brick walls, stone cobbled alleys, glowing street lamps. I wanted to climb out in my pyjamas: down the pipe, over the gate, into the alley and off into the wild world. Wet darkness, slate roofs and cobbles. I put that odd image of freedom into my first published book. Typically, I trapped it in a story in which the girl escapes only *in order to learn better* and comes back to cope with everything. That's what happens when you cannibalise your fantasies into fiction. Resolution, storyteller's demon, gets at them and they're never the same.

Later still we three girls shared the big front room. Our parents moved into the back room and our brother, the boy, had a room of his own. I wonder if his unjust take-over still rankles Rosamund's breast? I expect it does. In her fiction and her journalism (she writes regularly for *Country Living*) my sister promotes the ancient tradition of man-worship. But she treats my brother like an honorary human being. I've never seen any sign of her worshipping *him*. I spent some important winters in that big room when I was eleven, twelve, thirteen. When I was ill I had it to myself all day, and I was ill for weeks at a time. I was famous for the recalcitrance of my bronchitis. The wall in the alcove where my bed used to be must still be covered - under several layers of wallpaper - with the giant crayoned cats I

drew in the winter I was twelve, when I succumbed to one of my fits while the room was being redecorated. The dressing table that had been the summit of Everest was still there. It survived until after I left for Sussex: smelling of old talcum powder, shorn of its triple-mirrors; the veneer coming away from its bulbous curved drawers. It was Utility furniture. No matter how battered, it would never surrender.

It's gone now. The only piece of furniture that remains from my first world is *Daddy's desk*, which used to stand in my parents' room when we were climbing Everest. It held the Italian picture book of Pinocchio, a printed book in which the words, most improperly, were not in print but in looping joined-up writing; and the French children's book of the same vintage *Fleure Du Coquelicot, L'Orgueilleuse*. There was a postcard from Assisi, grey cracks of age across the turquoise blue sky above the Basilica, cigarette cards bound in withered elastic bands; *British Trees In Winter*. There was a rent book from the flat my parents lived in when they were first married (the figures involved already awesomely small). Baby cards for the first born. Daddy's campaign medals... The campaign medals were not loved. They later migrated to the shoe-polishing drawer in the kitchen. Which was appropriate because the army's real gift to my father was his perfectionist skill in a range of domestic tasks: shoe polishing, boots scraping, potato peeling, beds made with knife-edge hospital corners. My father may have spent a *lot* of time, I deduced eventually, on punishment detail. But he didn't mind. He genuinely liked the work. I know this not only from the evidence of his beautiful skills, but because I had the same experience myself at my Convent Grammar School. I was always being thrown out of the ladylike Domestic Science classes and sent to work for the nuns in the proper kitchens next door. I was very happy there, scrubbing vast pans until they shone, while the sisters hulled the seeds out of glowing heaps of rosehips for the winter supply of rosehip syrup. Domestic skivying was the kind of obsessive, muscular work I could appreciate; and I loved the nuns. They loved me too. They forgot that I was being punished and could never understand why the Domestic Science teacher hated me with such passion. (They'd have had more sympathy for her if they'd ever tried to teach me to sew a *broderie anglaise* blouse).

My father was in Signals. We had a periscope from a German tank that he'd brought back from the desert, it was a splendid toy. He made sergeant six times (according to legend: remember, all of this is legend, with the same confused, partisan, romanticised relation to the past as any other recorded history); but never kept his stripes. "*Your father*" my mother used to say "*just was not army material. They tried hard to use him, because they could see he was worth something. But they couldn't.*"

My father met my mother on an anti-Franco march, so the story goes, when he was twenty-four and she was fourteen. She was a grammar school girl expected to go to Cambridge. (She didn't. She had decided that teaching little children was the most important work in the world. So she wanted to teach infants, and she wouldn't be persuaded out of it.) He was a garment cutter, and a trade unionist. When the war broke out my mother was evacuated from her teacher training college to Worth Priory in Sussex. She remembered and passed on to me a dream of beechwoods, wild-flowers; the secret curves of the green downs. In 1940 my father sent her a telegram Valentine's day greeting. She was hauled to the principal's office and it was solemnly read out to her. On Corpus Christi the traditional flower-decked altars were set out around the priory grounds. The girls thought they heard thunder and were afraid the flowers and the procession would be ruined: but an old monk said, no that's not thunder. That's the big guns in Flanders. I remember the sound from last time. The guns never stopped then, all those hot early summer weeks, night and day, getting closer. The Home Guard came to tell the girl students what to do in case of invasion. They were to carry pepperpots in their purses. If a German soldier attacked you, you were to shake the pepper in his eyes. My mother says she was terrified.

After Dunkirk the invasion threat was so real that the evacuees were sent back to Liverpool - just in time for the first big bombing raids. The Catholic Teacher Training College on Mount Pleasant wasn't far from Liverpool docks: not a healthy location. She was put on the train to Manchester in her night-dress once, after a night that had been so bad there was nowhere for the students to go, no clothes for them to wear; and no quicker way of letting parents know that their daughters were still alive. My father worked as a hospital orderly until he was conscripted. He never fired a shot in anger except that once, when he was guarding Italian prisoners in the desert - with 'one up the spout' as regulations required - he tripped and sent a rifle bullet through his colonel's tent. Luckily the colonel escaped unharmed. He learned Italian from his prisoners. It came in useful later when he headed north, to Sicily with a few friends (this is a Monty Python reference, by the way). He sent postcards from Italy, the Dolomites, Austria. He camped in the foothills of Vesuvius, and remembers they were not allowed to eat melons, because the fruit ripened lying in foul water and it would give you dysentery. He taught us Morse code, or tried to: we were too lazy. All I can remember is SOS: ditditdit dadada ditditdit. And you must always identify yourself at the start and end of any message: a/ways. Log on, log off. My mother still answers the phone by announcing her number, clearly and distinctly. I did the same myself for years and years until I was finally laughed out of it, but I was uneasy ever afterwards. It was a great relief to get an answering machine and revert to something like proper signals etiquette.

The record itself is not significant. The material objects and the memories have been sifted like fossils in the rock beds: preserved or destroyed by purely mechanical processes. Somebody has cleared out the desk from time to time - tackling the first strata to present themselves with discrimination and then surrendering to inertia, throwing things out or stowing them back according to the convenience or otherwise of their size and shape; according to whether or not the waste bin was full. One could draw an image of the probability of a baby-card's survival - a swirl of false-coloured convergence determined by factors so slight and complex as to defy reason: randomness is complexity in disguise. When I was a child *science* was incapable of describing such ordinary events. At my school physics and chemistry were taught by men, which was already an admission of defeat in that proudly academic female world. And then, a male teacher who was teaching science at a girls' school in the sixties had abandoned hope on his own account. They were a miserable crew and our lessons in hard science were a painful farce. At best we wrote down manifest untruths about experiments that had failed to behave as they should. Any curiosity I had about how the world works (and I thought about such things a good deal, by natural inclination) had no place in the labs. Pure speculation only happened in religious lessons. Metaphysics was the nearest I came to understanding what sort of thing physics might be. Biology was the exception. It was taught by a woman, a large formidable woman in a vast greeny-black academic gown. I was good at Biology. There was nothing alluringly weird about it, no theories of everything. But I liked the way it fitted together, the nestling of shape on shape and function on function: nitrogen fixation, photosynthesis; the reproduction of seedless plants; haploid and diploid forms.

I climbed Everest when I was two. Before I was five I had become a member of the Clover Club. This was a select association. There were five of us: me and my sister and three other girls, the twins Josie and Clare and their little sister Christine, who were the children of a friend of my mother's and lived two streets away. My mother's friendship with Mrs Brunt was a friendship of circumstance more than like-mindedness or attraction. Ours was the same, and bound in hoops of steel as such connections are. We went to the same schools and the same church. We were allowed to play out on our own, on Rosamund's responsibility, until sunset on weekdays and all day Saturday if the weather was fine. We played make-believe games based on Narnia and on the first children's television dramas: *William Tell*, *Robin Hood*. We fought physical and painful battles with our enemies (broadly speaking, the children in our streets who were not going to pass a vital public exam called the eleven plus). I remember, in glimpses, that some of the fantasy games were *intense*. But above all we were explorers.

We made our first expeditions on an expanse of waste ground behind the houses opposite ours. It was known as *The Tip*. It was a desolation of rubble and twisted metal, drowned in rosebay willowherb and aromatic wormwood in the summer, naked heaps of builders' waste and smouldering rubbish in winter. Interesting fragments sometimes emerged from the wrack: charred pages of magazines with pictures of fat naked women in them. My part of Lancashire is a maze of wet grooves in damp moorland. In the valleys, if they're left wild, alders and black poplars and willows grow. In this valley Blackley village proper lay in the depths, with the ICI dyeworks and the Co-op biscuit factory its chief landmarks; and surrounded by the grim, packed streets that crawled out from the centre of Manchester. (When I was a child the slum housing in the Irk valley, that you'll find described in hideous detail in Friedrich Engels "The Condition of the Working Class in England" stopped just short of my familiar streets, surviving like an outworn infection in a milder form). *The Tip* occupied the slopes between the village and our houses, extending beyond *The Incinerator*, the rubbish-burning blockhouse whose foul red-brick chimney loomed large on the borders of our territory, into the scrap-metal stained swampy bed of a stream that ran into the river Irwell. Industry has been established in these valleys, where the water is pure and plentiful, since before the steam revolution. I suppose it was the water in the Irk and the Irwell that first encouraged the dye-works. In the days of the Clover Club *The ICI* was a vast monster that hissed and steamed and belched and stank, making the river run orange and green and blue; creating the most splendid, choking, terrible winter fogs. An expedition to *The Stinky Pipes* from our house was our first grand exploration. The Tip valley was perilous. It had an evil atmosphere. The houses that surrounded it were out of sight, the slopes were steep all round you; and it was very still. Even the plants were strange, at least we thought so. We were afraid of sinking into the iron-red swamp. We roped-up to cross it. Once we found the shell of a tortoise, minus its occupant. Once when I was five we thought we'd found a dead horse. The others sent me to investigate. In fact I volunteered, because I wanted to be called the bravey of the gang. It was a horsehair sofa someone had dumped. But it had presence: it frightened me.

For relaxation we went to Clover Wood, where another, relatively clean stream ran under Rochdale Road from the public park called Boggarthole Clough (a clough, pronounced cluff, is a wooded valley. When I realised there were people to whom that word sounded strange, it was another epoch). The pitiable children who were not explorers made cardboard-box slides on the red sandy hill that ran down to the stream. We liked to slide too, but we had better things to do. We built dams and camps and huts of old bricks, making a mortar out of red sand and water that was satisfyingly

realistic as long as it stayed wet. Later there was Damhead farm, two miles up the road towards Rochdale and Saddleworth moor (where the Moors Murderers were just then burying their victims). In those days this land was still quite rural. Sometimes we trekked out there on foot, sometimes we took the bus and didn't start being explorers until we got off. We were naturalists then, like Darwin on the Beagle. We collected specimens from the old mill pond: fresh water mussels, sticklebacks; we went in mortal terror of the big fat horse-leeches. We were archaeologists and dug up cows' teeth, we were thrilled if we spotted a rabbit. In June the meadows were full of buttercups and daisies and sorrel: gold and white and red. In September there were masses of blackberries. Sometimes the fields flooded, and we went rafting.

Whatever we were doing and wherever we went we carried rations, first aid, a torch and rope. We made maps. We had meetings in the wash-house, and kept up the Club logbook (not very well, we were too lazy). My sister made rules about the type of food that could be classed as rations. Anything smuggled from a meal was disqualified. We semi-stole, like Spartan boys: we took biscuits from the larder and handfuls of sultanas from the blue sugar-paper bags that came with the weekly grocery order from the Co-op. First aid was an aspirin bottle full of Dettol, and some clean rags. When we were older my Uncle John, my mother's youngest brother, took us on more ambitious expeditions. He introduced us to cooking outdoors, cold stews full of rock hard potatoes. There were plans for real camping with him, which never happened (to my relief). Once we made an expedition that took us the length of the Rochdale canal.

Our *zeitgeist* came from an ideal that was nostalgic from the moment of its creation. We were pretending to be the children in our library books: children in fictions invented by middle-aged men, who wrote to repair the damage that had been done to them by the British Middle Class childhood they described so lovingly. We enacted a failing culture's retreat into its dreamtime. We put on the masks and danced the dance of our powerful ancestors: Scott, Nansen, Cook, Darwin, Amundsen, Hilary, Shackleton. But while we enacted this mourning ritual we were living in a world where the great expedition was still in progress. We hated the signs of our species' territorial expansion, which we saw exclusively in terms of playgrounds robbed and despoiled. We saw no connection between this activity and our play. And yet it was the same adventure. There was still territory unmapped then, over all the horizons. One could go further and find more. My mother, who loved the future, believed that the expedition would never end. When we were on holiday in Arthur Ransome territory, in the English Lake District, she pointed out the towers of Windscale Nuclear Power Station*, and told us that the dragon had been tamed. It would work for us now. There would be more and more leisure and beauty, university

education and piano lessons for everyone, until we reached the stars: and still on, more and more.

She followed the Apollo programme passionately (though she didn't neglect the Russians, she was not partisan). In July 1969 we had an all-night party at my house. This was the pinnacle of teen-rebel wild dreams in Mount Carmel parish, and *it was my mother's idea*, which staggered our contemporaries. It was the strawberry season. In those days there were still seasonal gluts, they were dirt cheap and we had mounds of them. We had strawberry fights at midnight. By three am the survivors were lying comatose, wrapped in blankets. My mother went round shaking people awake: *you've got to see this, this is important*. So the explorers witnessed the event that seemed to be a beginning, and which we now feel as the final turning point, the beginning of an end. My friend Stan Robinson has written a story (it's in his collection *Remaking History*) in which securely established lunar colonists in an alternative near-future rehearse the twists of history, little right-turns instead of wrong, that made twenty-first century amateur dramatics on the moon possible. Stan's optimism moves and amazes me. I wish I thought it was that easy: a few nips and tucks to alter the whole massive weight of two million years, the territorial imperative on its pre-programmed mission to implode. I think of a different story, (call it the British variation) in which the truth about the situation becomes manifest not over painful decades but on that first trip itself. The dreadful mistakes that (as we watched among the squashed berries) nearly destroyed my mother's festival have not miraculously compounded themselves into success. The disaster has happened. There is no possibility of rescue. The shipwrecked mariners have survived their crash landing to endure, patiently, to the inevitable end. Somebody, doesn't matter who, records a last message: *it seems a pity, but I do not think I can talk more...* Imagine us all crouched around our televisions, listening to that and trying to make out the grainy blue images. Now that would be a true romance.

When I was five my parents took us on our first holiday to the English Lakes, where they'd spent their honeymoon. Then and for years later we children pored over the maps in the Swallow and Amazons books, without managing to work out that Ransome's lake was neither Windermere - where we stayed - nor Coniston, the next lake along to the west; but a combination of the two. While we doggedly struggled to identify fictional landmarks in the real world, I fell passionately in love. Like a prince in a fairytale I had fallen in love with a picture, and loved the picture's original on sight. At home in Manchester I fell in love with a row of black poplars that stood opposite the church of Our Lady Of Mount Carmel where we went to Mass on Sunday. They had ropey, knotted black trunks like hanks of tarry twine. Their leaves were yellow and heartshaped, in spring their

masses of purplish catkins fell and drifted in the roadside puddles. The day they were cut down I was as heart-broken as I will ever be in my life: *my aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled; quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun, are felled, are all felled.* I fell in love with places and living things, desperately and hopelessly in love, long before I was considered old enough to be interested in boys. This is the fate of imaginative girl-children who are protected from what people call the facts of life. Emotional pathways are opened to other stimuli, a deep and over-subtle understanding of *passion* develops too soon. By the time I emerged, at fifteen or sixteen, from the segregation that I'd accepted without the slightest resistance, I was incapable of finding courtship rituals romantic *You buy me this, I let you do that.* It made sense, fair enough, supposing I wanted to go to the cinema; or venture into one of the many situations where an unaccompanied female would be uncomfortable. But only a fool (thought I) would get sentimental over such blatant self-interested horse-trading. I would grow up bemused by the whole role that that is said to be feminine.

I wasn't, however, an easy convert to feminism. My mother, my sisters, the teachers at my schools, had been telling me what to do all my life. When I eventually met the women's movement, I was not impressed by the revelation that *women are powerful.* I did not hate my mother, or fear to "become her". Far from it! But I did not agree that women were more gentle, more wise or morally superior creatures. This was not my experience, for whom women had been most of the world. When I was young I could say, along with many women of my generation, single-sex educated, taught to aspire without limit, just like boys: *I don't know much harm of men. I never had much to do with them. But women have oppressed me plenty...* When we were explorers we didn't play with boys, though we fought a campaign or two with those boys who were not going to pass the eleven plus exam. We were enacting supposedly masculine fantasies, but that didn't worry us in the least. In the golden age, between two world wars, misogyny was not a big feature in children's fiction. Nobody ever called Captain Nancy Blackett maladjusted, because she liked to wear shorts and was the captain of her own ship. Nobody in the books ever cheeked Mate Susan either: or showed anything but respect for her domestic arts and steely control over the commissariat. When I was thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, I grieved over the metamorphosis that I believed was inevitable. I believed that one day (my periods had started, without having any effect on my mind, but I supposed it would happen soon) I would turn into a woman. But I never did. It was too late for me to change. The wiring was no longer malleable. The ideals of the story books - courage, wit, achievement, endurance, pugnacity, the devotion to adventure - were mine forever. It was too late to become a girl, I had no desire to be a boy. I had to be a person.

I continue to resist the culture of feminism, whenever it slides into gender nationalism - which is all the time. I can't share the resentment of the oppressed, I have no childhood memories of wounding misogyny. I found out plenty about wounding misogyny later; and I'm still learning. But childhood is what matters, and in my childhood I learned to be neither a girl nor a boy. I do not feel *my self* to be either 'male' or 'female'. I feel *my self* to be an explorer, an artist, a fantasist. What I learned, maybe the most deeply imprinted lesson, was displacement. If we are defined as Plato thought by what we desire: by what we lack - an idea that resonates enticingly with the emerging sciences of life, the vital lock and key relation of the shapes of things to come - then the black poplars have something to do with it; and Lake Windermere; and the gleaming, cold rainy night outside my bedroom window. I am what I lack. I am what I long for and cannot have. I am the thing that knows it is separate. I begin to think that displacement - having no place to call your own - is consciousness itself.

It's all gone now. Windermere is a playground for the masses. And good luck to them, by the way, but I won't be sorry when they decide to take themselves off somewhere virtual for their fun. My Blackley playgrounds have vanished under housing development: even the dreadful valley of the tip. The Incinerator is no more. The ICI European dyeworks, our majestic neighbour, is no more. Childhood illness makes writers out of people who spend too many formative weeks lying in bed, becoming addicted to idleness and isolation. Maybe the ICI made an artist out of me. I've returned the favour unconsciously I'm sure, many times. More than once I have consciously made art out of the ICI, transmuting *The Stinky Pipes* into tragedy or comic backdrop... I wonder if the people who live in the new houses in the tip valley ever feel uneasy; and how long before the swamp reasserts itself in seeping walls and mouldering timbers? I wonder how it feels to be someone whose first world did not disappear. Someone for whom the streets and paths and trees and rivers remain as they were, who has to squeeze an adult self into the territories of childhood. It would have been no use for me to promise, as so many artists have promised, never to leave my beloved home. The places left me.

When I was two I climbed Everest. When I was eight I climbed Kanchenjunga, the mountain the Swallows and Amazons tackle in their great climbing expedition in the book called *Swallowdale*. This should have been Coniston Old Man, but the debatable fictional geography allowed us to make it Wansfell Pike, a miniature Matterhorn that conveniently rises right above the streets of Ambleside, our regular holiday town. When I was fifteen, on the last and greatest expedition of the Clover Club (reduced to me and our beloved leader, my big sister), I climbed Hellvellyn and tackled Striding Edge in a blizzard. I discovered, particularly

on an awesome forced march over the Black Sail pass and through Ennerdale Forest and back in the same day, that I was no longer weak. I was capable of hiking twenty odd hard mountain miles in vile conditions; and getting up and doing it again next day; and the next. I was capable of it. But I did not like it. On that expedition I decided it was time for the Ethiopian to move into different spots, no matter what the leopard thought of the idea.

The first mountain I climbed after climbing Everest up our stairs was Wansfell Pike. The first journey I made as an independent traveller was when I was eleven, and took the train alone from Manchester Piccadilly to visit my Auntie May in Heald Green, a genteel suburb to the south of the city. I was wearing my mother's idea of eye-catching best clothes for a young girl: a blue wool cape with green and blue plaid trim and a matching deer-stalker hat. I was a short, plump, pasty child with mousy hair, National Health spectacles and a habitually, comically preoccupied expression. I felt, with justice I believe, that eye-catching was the last thing a person like me wanted in their clothes. But explorers don't argue. They endure the burdens of social life, and make escape plans. I rode back from my visit in the dusk, alone on a train for the second time in my life. One day, I promised myself, I will be on a train like this, *but it will be in Sumatra*. I kept the promise. My next mountains after the Clover Club's last expedition were in the tropics. Gunung Batur, Bromo, Kinabalu. Beautiful Arjuna, who defeated us. One day - one night - fifteen years after my first lone train ride, I put down Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, which I had bought on a second hand bookstall in Singapore. I got up from my place in our first class compartment (it was First Class only, on the night train from Panjang to Perembulih) and went down to the end of the carriage. The door was open. I watched a light-painted rectangle of wet greenness, banana fronds and palms rushing by. But I was elsewhere, remembering.

I have never escaped. The world is too small, and there are too many people. Any time that I've struck wildly out into trackless jungle - which has happened, quite literally, rather often - it has been to find myself stumbling into somebody's back yard, and to be instantly surrounded by people who might as well be my relatives, offering me tea and forcing me - in the nicest possible way - to make polite conversation. Like the girl in my story, I have to accept the constraints of resolution. This is the end the music demands, this is the way it has to be. My mother's great expedition ended in July 1969 (or at least it seems to have ended: one should always remember that *anything can happen*). Territorial expansion is over, the whole planet is our campground. There are no more manly adventures into the unknown - only the women and children searching ever farther afield for water and fuel, in the desolation that surrounds our fires. But there is still room, within the mediaeval envelope that once more hems us in. There

are worlds opening with dazzling complexity in the interstices of the cramped design. I tell myself that we were *explorers*. An explorer is an emissary, not a colonist or pioneer or an invader. Explorers don't set out to sever themselves, to go and never come back. They remain bound to the past, to the people and the places at the start of their journey. They go to find whatever there is to be found; and return to tell the tale. I can still do that. I cannot return into the urban countryside where I grew up. But I can still explore, and tell the story of what I have found.

At home in Manchester there's a picture of a jungle scene, executed in powder paint on dark, coarse sugar paper, now crumbling with age. It used to be framed on the wall above the kitchen door until the frame started to fall apart. I believe that I truly remember painting that picture. I was six. I stood in front of my easel in the art room in my prep school, St Joseph's Convent Blackley (long gone) and laid those long, wiggly yellow petals of the giant daisy in the foreground, smoothly onto the paper. I remember deciding to add the small kangaroo who flies through the upper air with such elan, paws tucked protectively around the joey in her pouch... A memory is a living thing, holding within itself the history of its own evolution. The original of any experience of the world is buried in the heart of its most complex development. Whenever I put my hands on these keys, to devise a sentence with pleasure and care, the thread reels out unbroken: the little girl who painted the jungle lifts her brush again. I am the child I was.

** Windscale: aka, Sellafield. (to protect the vulnerable, we change the name, right?)*

[This essay first appeared in SFEye, ed. Steve Brown, issue 15 Fall 1997, and is reproduced here from Gwyneth's web site at <http://www.homeusers.prestel.co.uk/dreamer/>.]

PROGRAMME by Dave Hicks

Right, first off, the auctions: Since Easter, I've been pinned in corners by different people wanting to extend them, reschedule them, compress them, breath fresh life into them or kill them, burn the bodies and piss on the ashes. I'm not going to win here, am I? Indeed, feelings are clearly running so high in some quarters that I'm now contemplating some sort of debate about the purpose and running of auctions at conventions in general and Novacon in particular is in order.

What *sort* of convention is Novacon these days, anyway? I hope to look at it from the perspective of the early cons. How has it changed? Did anyone really expect it to make it to number thirty one? Was it really *any different* in fandom back then? And will it go on for another thirty years? From the imaginary perspective of the future, how will this year's convention appear? By then, will we download the whole convention experience, hangovers included, through virtual reality? More seriously, will the hotel trade want anything to do with us in 2032?

Beyond the convention experience there's the little matter of science fiction. What are you reading these days? Time was, it'd be the same as me, but that's increasingly unlikely as the number of new books published and old books available increases exponentially and fandom spreads across broader cultural bases. So what do we have, as SF fans, in common any more?

From our Guest Of Honour, Gwyneth Jones, came a whole bunch of ideas. The one I seized upon immediately was: Reviews – Who Needs Them? Can you really trust the good ones or are they all just by the writer's buddies? Is harsh criticism and invective fair, or entertainment in its own right? We'll be asking from the perspective of the writer, the academic, the critic and the fan.

With her Ann Halam hat on, Gwyneth also suggested we look at 'Young Blood'. Teenagers crop up so often in SF, both in books marketed at a younger audience and in the adult work. From gifted but naïve protagonists to streetwise, prematurely aged survivors they're a regular choice for writers. It's the age when most of us 'got' SF, too.

Keith Roberts died recently. Paul Kincaid put it to me that it would be a shame for the author of *Pavanne* to pass unremarked at any British convention, and I agree. I'd quite like to get a panel up to 'do' a few authors alongside him, and anyone willing to have a crack at G K Chesterton would be particularly welcome, and if there's anyone whose work *you* feel is overdue for an airing then get in touch.

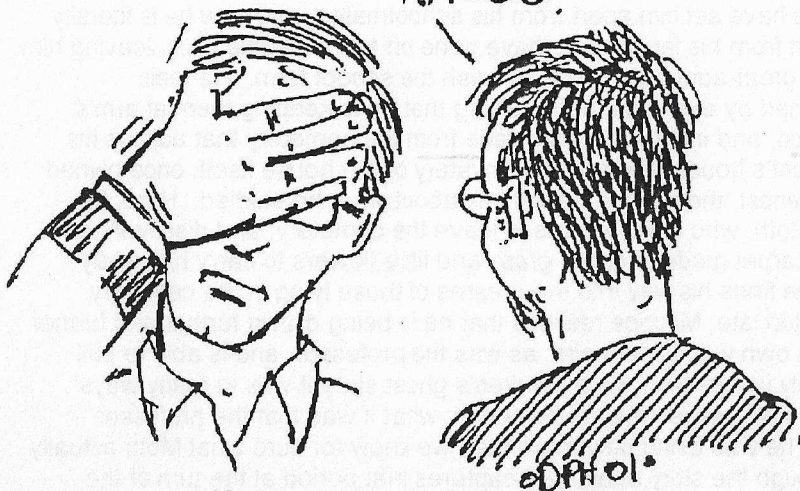
We always have an art show at Novacon, like we always have a books dealers' room. But while half the weekend can be spent discussing the merits of the books, what they say to us, the ideas they spark off. The art frequently appears, is auctioned, and disappears again. Maybe to fans SF is a medium of ideas, but to many people it's a *look*. After the controversy of the Turner Prize nominee who was 'inspired' by an SF book cover we'll ask why even the most accomplished SF artists are still seen as inhabitants of a genre ghetto when the writers have broken out.

For your Saturday night bopping requirements we've got John Harvey's band JACK O' HERTS back again. John *really* does play a mean kazoo.

There will be more to come, I don't think Gwyneth's done yet by a long chalk, but if you've any thoughts on what you'd like to see, or even *do* at this year's Novacon, contact me at little.jim@dial.pipex.com (or at 1 St. Woolos Place, Newport, NP20 4GQ). Now it's time to twist some arms...

CHAIRMAN'S NIGHTMARES

"... AND FOR SATURDAY NIGHT'S DISCO
I HEAR JOHN HARVEY PLAYS A MEAN
KAZOO!"



#2 - Programme...

'TRUE MAGIC ... , WITH MATERIAL THINGS': THE FICTION OF ANN HALAM by Maureen Kincaid Speller

I can't remember when I discovered that Ann Halam was really Gwyneth Jones. I already knew their individual works, having systematically read my way through Oxford's Central Children's Library and discovered the four spiky, not-really-fantasy-but-somehow-they-feel-right novels of Gwyneth A. Jones, and two gems from Ann Halam, *The Alder Tree* and *Ally Ally Aster*. Whether I'd have made the connection without being told, I don't know ... at that point book jackets weren't as profligate with the facts as they are nowadays. I doubt I'd have made the connection simply from subject matter. Gwyneth Jones' novels were realist novels, with a whiff of the magical about them, whereas Ann Halam seemed to be working inwards from the fantastic end of the narrative spectrum. *The Alder Tree* featured a genuine Oriental, logic-chopping dragon in disguise, while *Ally, Ally, Aster* (1981) included an ice elemental who seemed to be a distant relative of Hans Christian Andersen's Snow Queen. Between these and Gwyneth Jones' four novels, it was clear that here was a writer who knew how to write a great story but who, like all my favourite 'children's' writers, wasn't going to stick to the well-worn narrative paths.

As if to confirm this, along came *King Death's Garden: A Ghost Story* (1986). Maurice is not exactly the stuff of heroes. His asthma and allergies have set him apart from his schoolmates, and now he is literally set apart from his family, who have gone off to the Middle East, leaving him with his great-aunt, Ada Drew, to finish the school term. He feels abandoned by everyone, not realising that he is keeping them at arm's length too, and instead draws solace from the cemetery that adjoins his great-aunt's house, and from the mystery of the house itself, once owned by a scientist, though no one will talk about what he studied. Here, he meets Moth, who never seems to leave the cemetery, and discovers a 'magic carpet made of green grass and little flowers to carry him away' where he finds his way into the dreams of those lying in the cemetery. Almost too late, Maurice realises that he is being drawn further and further from his own world into theirs, as was the professor, and is able to pull back only just in time. As a children's ghost story it was in many ways unorthodox – we're never quite certain what it was that the professor thought he was doing, any more than we know for sure what Moth actually is, although the story beautifully captures that period at the turn of the twentieth century, when respectable scientists dabbled in the psychic, to the dismay of their strait-laced colleagues – but it was a deeply satisfying book to read. Having recently reread it, I notice now what I didn't see then,

namely hints here and there of M.R. James, the quintessential English ghost story writer, but another whose ghost stories were not quite what they seemed.

After *King Death's Garden* came what might perhaps be a change of direction for Ann Halam. The Inland trilogy as it's officially known, comprising *The Daymaker*, (1987), *Transformations*, (1988), and *The Skybreaker* (1990) might be science fiction, and then again it might not be. In Inland, the time of the machines is past, and with its passing, power, literal power, has been replaced by the power of magic. But this magic is not a solitary or self-indulgent pastime, at least not here; it's magic rooted in an agreement called the Covenant, a recognition of the process of give and take within the world, between all things, living and non-living. Animals are slaughtered for food and for their skins, crops are grown, picked and eaten, but respect for their lives is fundamental to the Covenant. And while it is administered by the Coveners, it is nevertheless the responsibility of all who participate in the Covenant. There are, of course, many different ways of interpreting this, as Zanne, the heroine of the trilogy, finds out during the course of her adventures in Inland and beyond, and each in its way is valid. However, the one thing that is clear to all is that the time of the machines, powered by the Daybreakers (think 'power station') is over, once and for all.

Which is unfortunate for Zanne as, from an early age, she has been fascinated by machinery. Inland still has machinery – looms and waterwheels and such like – but as Zanne comes to understand her world, she mourns the loss of the 'makers' that once existed. When she stumbles on a cache of old machines, she finds that her Covening talent sees them as 'alive' in the same way as she sees the life in everything else. Her talent can animate the machines temporarily but only at a terrible cost to herself and those around her. After a disastrous episode in which she almost destroys the valley in which she lives, Zanne is sent to Hillen Coven to learn to harness her talents. After a second and even more disastrous experiment with the 'makers' Zanne sets out to find the Daymaker, little more than a legend she once heard about.

At this point, the story is balanced beautifully and it's difficult to decide which way it might go. From our twentieth century viewpoint, it might seem 'obvious' that Zanne's affinity with machinery will lead her to resurrect the Daymaker and bring electrical power back into the world, for after all, is this not what science fiction is all about. Zanne herself is not sure of what she should be doing. Her love of the 'makers' is leading her towards this end, believing as she does that the power of the Daymaker, unlike that of the Covenant, will not upset the balance of the world. However, her 'choice' journey shows her that things are much more complex than she supposed,

and while the consequences aren't as clear-cut as her dealings with the Covenant might seem to be, they are nevertheless as far-reaching. And thus, eventually, Zanne makes her peace with the Covenant, and accepts that she will use her magical talent to shut down the machines, once and for all.

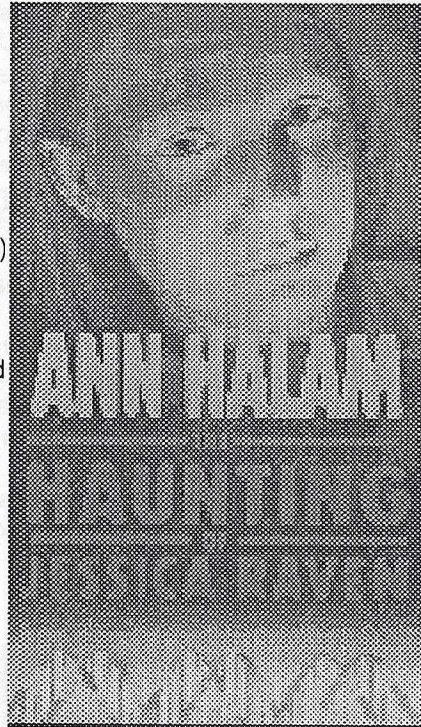
Transformations, the second in the trilogy, sees Zanne, by now famous, on the road incognito, searching for another Daymaker in the mountains of Minith. Zanne is from a strict Covenant background – her early encounters with the seemingly decadent urban dwellers of Inland had shocked her deeply – but the Covenanters of Minith are appallingly rigid in their beliefs, having stripped the Covenant of all its joy in life twisting it to explain and to conceal the dreadful tragedy which has befallen their community, its young people poisoned by what we recognise as a dump of by-products from nuclear power. Even when Zanne offers them a solution to the problem, they reject it

The Skybreaker takes Zanne beyond Inland, to Magia, a country where magic has become the prerogative of the noble, while those of low birth who practise magic are persecuted as witches. Here, Lady Monkshood, the Great Mage, uses the magic of the country, on behalf of its people, through their king, Temias, and uses it without question. Gradually, Zanne comes to realise that Monkshood is using it for her own purposes, rather than for the common weal, and that she is endeavouring to build a skybreaker, a rocket. Ironically, it is not, as she believes, separate from the magic of her country but actually a part of it. Again, the Covenant exists, in a distorted, almost unrecognisable form, and the will of the people of Magia resides within the construction. To send the rocket out of the world will destroy the world itself. This, however, is one machine that Zanne cannot shut down, and resolution comes from an unexpected source at the very last moment.

Perhaps the most fascinating thing about Zanne's world is that it is not as static as it might at first appear. A fictional world like Inland, as described at the beginning of the trilogy, is most often presented as stagnant, and ripe for change – for without the need for change, there can theoretically be no narrative – but Halam's exploration of this world is much more delicate and complicated than that. On the one hand, she demonstrates that change happens constantly, as shown by the maintenance of the Covenant, through the continuous subtle adjustments of the Covenanters themselves, but also she forces her readers to ask why there should be dramatic changes when this world is vibrant, alive, though unwilling to embrace change for change's sake. Maintenance and adjustment doesn't necessarily have to be equated with stasis. If something is working well,

and working by the choice of the people involved with it, what need is there for radical change.

After the Inland trilogy came a series of stand-alone books, each with a supernatural theme, no two alike, as though Halam were exploring the boundaries of the genre, almost all of them, like *King Death's Garden*, rooted in a prosaic here-and-now setting, as if to point up how close we live alongside the supernatural world. *The Haunting of Jessica Raven* (1994) sees a teenage girl, Jessica, haunted by a teenage French boy she meets mysteriously while on holiday, who believes he has in some way betrayed a group of ragged children by losing their 'treasure', and more shockingly, by the children themselves. Back in London, she continues to meet him and while in his company is seemingly transported through time and space, experiencing his life. It might be that the stresses of family life – her older brother is seemingly terminally ill and household life revolves around him – have caused her to imagine this strange companion, except that her brother is eventually

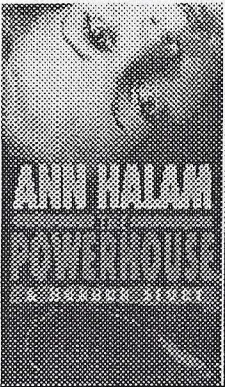


able to identify him as a man who once specialised in studying the disease from which he suffers, until he was accused of having collaborated with the Germans, whereupon he abandoned his work. Through Jessica's intervention, Jean Luc Batiste is able to return to his work.

By contrast, *The Fear Man* (1995) gives a new and unusual twist to the theme of the vampire, with an apparently ordinary family, Andrei, Elsa, Max and their mother, constantly on the move, rarely settling for long in one place, running from something, or someone. Although Andrei thinks it must be something to do with his father, supposedly long dead, the truth is far stranger than he could ever have imagined. Even vampires have family problems, it turns out. Andrei's mother left his father, a magician, after he beat her for refusing to surrender her power to him, and fears that he will track her down once again. Which is exactly what happens – except that an almost prosaic theme, a staple of teenage fiction, is given an amazing

spin because this family is anything but ordinary, and it makes a refreshing change from the general sweep of 'problem' novels.

Strong characterisation, not usually a feature of supernatural writing, is nevertheless a constant in Ann Halam's writing, a fact very evident in *The Powerhouse* (1997) and *Crying in the Dark* (1998). Both are traditional ghost stories, one with even the quintessential country cottage setting, but both are firmly set in the 1990s, one against a background of rock music, the other within a deeply aspirational post-Thatcherite family which moves to the country. In *The Powerhouse*, the group Hajetu finds what seems to be the perfect rehearsal space, an abandoned building, only to find it's about to become an arts centre. Nevertheless, they're allowed to share the space with a most unlikely installation artist, Sister Kathleen Dunne, and then discover that the Powerhouse is haunted by 'something', though not the ghost of a murdered girl as Maddy, one of the group, seems to imagine, though the spirit is certainly responsible for her death and for several others. Maddy has become the focus for the spirit, through her own obsession with the murdered girl, and it becomes difficult to disentangle the reality of her obsession from the possibility of an evil spirit actually existing in this industrial space. Has all of this been imagined, or is something else going on? Do ghosts attach themselves to troubled and unhappy people, or do troubled and unhappy people spontaneously conjure spirits?

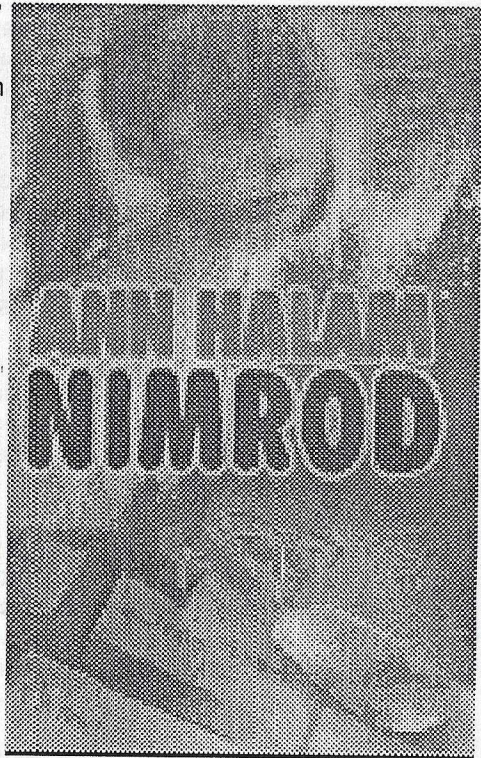


While *The Powerhouse* provides no unequivocal answers, *Crying in the Dark* moves closer towards this possibility. A modern reworking of Sheridan Le Fanu's classic 'Madam Crowl's Ghost', it focuses on Elinor Madison, an orphan who lives with her aunt and uncle and their family, and is very much resented by them. There is a mystery about her mother's

whereabouts, although it's claimed she's dead; meanwhile, Elinor is the family's scapegoat, unhappily playing Cinderella. A dreadful holiday in a haunted cottage, which the family decides to buy, leads to Lin experiencing visions of another child in a similar predicament to her own, persecuted by her family. It becomes ever more difficult for Lin to disentangle reality from, as she supposes, imagination, not helped by her family's treatment of her, and by the realisation that someone is stalking her. As one would expect from all the best fairy stories, Cinderella is of course rescued, but her visions also release the ghosts in the house when a lost child's body is finally rediscovered.

As if to balance this supernatural feat, *The N.I.M.R.O.D. Conspiracy* (1999) concerns itself much more with those who use the supernatural, spiritualism in particular, as a means to extract money from the gullible – a pastime as old as spiritualism itself – although here, Alan's mother is being preyed on in order that a gang of crooks can get at her boyfriend, a policeman. *Don't Open Your Eyes* (2000) tests the idea that the problem family next door might not be quite what it seems with the children less of a problem than their parents, until one of the children dies and is buried in a tomb which releases a malevolent spirit into the world. And in *The Shadow on the Stair* (2000) Joe's attempt to scare his father's girlfriend backfires just a little when he discovers that their flat really *is* haunted.

Throughout her stories, Ann Halam skilfully mixes the real and the maybe imagined. Her characters are the kind of children who pass the gate every day, on their way to and from school, with ordinary hopes, fears and aspirations, who do their best to deal with the supernatural world as they might deal with unruly siblings or difficult school friends. And because they are so firmly rooted in a world that is familiar and mostly comfortable, the intrusion of the supernatural is all the more shocking in most instances, and yet somehow more believable as a result. Equally, as the Inland trilogy shows, there can be a place for the supernatural in an



ordered and well-regulated society, not losing that sense of wonder in magic, even when it's commonplace. Whether you prefer the matter-of-fact magic of the Inland trilogy or the stark terror of *The Powerhouse* is entirely up to you, but either way, the writing of Ann Halam contains something to satisfy you.

2001: A TASTE ODYSSEY by Martin Tudor

What could be a more science fictional and appropriate way of celebrating 2001 than a mashed potato tasting session? *"They peel them with their shiny knives, and mash them..."*. So, on Sunday night (from 7pm) we will be combining the traditional beer tasting with a Sausage and Mash tasting! This will feature a selection of sausages and a choice of plain, Black Pudding or Cheddar mashed potato. Tickets for your Sausage and Mash Tasting (£5 per head) must be purchased in advance, either from Tony Berry at the address below or from the Novacon table before 5pm on Sunday of the con. (In addition, from 11pm-12am the hotel will be selling a late night snack of bacon rolls to help soak up the beer!)

This latest in a long series of Novacon Beer Tastings will be using the ever-popular BYOB (bring your own beer) format. To get the ball rolling the convention hopes to have a local beer on draught as well as a few interesting bottles - the rest is up to you!

To partake of the BEER, all you need to do is bring at least THREE bottles of your favourite British or foreign beer to the convention and check them in at the Novacon Registration desk when you arrive. In return you will receive a Technicolor "BEER BADGE" which will entitle you to drink the beer at the Tasting on Sunday. Alternatively, you can also take part in the Tasting by buying a BEER BADGE for £4.50 from Novacon Registration.

All Novacon members are welcome to attend the Tasting. The convention is supplying an assortment of exotic and/or unusual non-alcoholic drinks at the Tasting, which will be free to everyone, but only those with BEER BADGES will be entitled to drink the beer and only those with SAUSAGE & MASH TICKETS will be able to partake of that culinary delight.

For further information please contact the 2001: A Taste Odyssey organiser, Tony Berry at 68 Windsor Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B68 8PB, (morbius@zoom.co.uk).

[Please remember, although we have come to an arrangement with the Quality Hotel regarding the Beer Tasting, this does not extend to you bringing in your own supplies of drink elsewhere during the con. The Hotel can and will charge corkage to people smuggling food or drink into the hotel!]

THE NOVA AWARDS by Tony Berry

The Nova Awards are given for work in fanzines. There are three awards: Best Fanzine, Best Fan Writer and Best Fan Artist. All members of Novacon who are active in fandom can vote. For a fanzine to qualify, one or more issues must have been published between 1st October 2000 and 30th September 2001. For artists or writers to qualify, a piece of their work must have been published for the first time between those dates.

Listed below are fanzines which have come my way since PR1. They are available for "the usual", in other words a large SSAE, your own fanzine in trade or a letter of comment.

ADVERSE CAMBER, Yvonne Rowse, Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimpley, Worcs, DY12 1NP.

ANSIBLE #163-165. Dave Langford, 94 London Rd., Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU.

HEAD! #3. Doug Bell & Christina Lake, 12 Hatherley Rd, Bishopston, Bristol, BS7 8QA.

INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GARDENER #4. Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas, 15 Jansons Rd, Tottenham, London, N15 4JU.

PARAPHERNALIA. Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Rd, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA and Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Rd, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 6JE.

SHEBANG. Alison Freebairn, 41 Kendal Rd, East Kilbride, Scotland, G75 8QT.

THIS HERE #8. Nic Farey, c/o 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX.

XYSTER #24. Dave Wood, 1 Friary Close, Marine Hill, Clevedon, N. Somerset, BS21 7QA.

For further information, contact me at 68 Windsor Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B68 8PB. If you want a copy of the Nova Rules, please enclose 50p to cover copying and postage or check our web site at www.novacon.org.uk.

BOOK ROOM

If you wish to book tables in the Book Room please contact Steve Lawson at the address below. Tables cost £15 each for the weekend, the Book Room will be open from Saturday Morning until Sunday afternoon (although set up can begin on Friday evening).

For further information contact: Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ (e-mail xl5@zoom.co.uk or telephone 0114-281-1572).

OPERATIONS

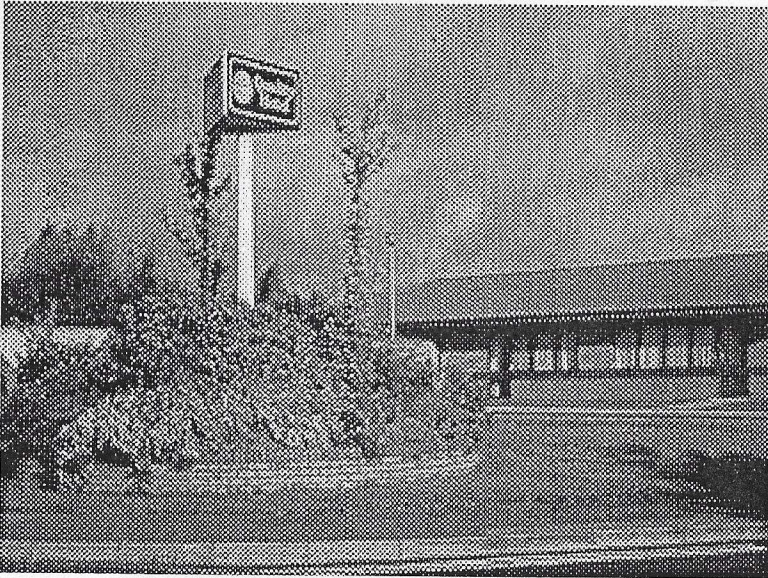
As we are sure you are aware Novacon, like most conventions in Britain, is run by volunteers and we can't have too many of them! So if you are willing to help out at the convention – anything from moving chairs to helping with tech ops or working on the programme, please contact our Ops Manager, Alice Lawson, at 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ (e-mail fab@zoom.co.uk).

HOTEL INFORMATION

The Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall is situated beside Junction 10 of the M6 – so access by road couldn't be easier. The nearest Railway Station is Walsall and the nearest Inter City Railway Station is Wolverhampton – full details about travel will appear in our third and final Progress Report.

The Quality has 150 twin/double rooms – no singles. Twin/doubles are £32 per person, per night (inclusive of full English breakfast). The General Manager has agreed that we can use 30 of these as singles at the special rate of £45 per person, per night (inclusive of full English breakfast). So if you want a single room complete the enclosed Hotel Booking form *now* – singles will be allocated on a strictly first come basis!

The Quality Hotel are holding *all* of their available rooms for us until 30th September 2001 – after which time they will start taking non-Novacon bookings. So you *must* get your bookings to Steve Lawson by that date.



Children under 5 will be accommodated free of charge, and children aged 5-12 will be charged £10 per night to include breakfast.

All residents will be able to enjoy full use of the Quality's Leisure Club, which comprises indoor heated swimming pool, spa-bath, sauna, solarium, and gymnasium.

For those who insist on a single but don't book in time there is an overflow nearby. This is a Travel *Inn* at Bentley Green (sorry, we said Travel *Lodge* in PR#1), ten minutes walk from the Quality Hotel (fifteen minutes back – as it is *up* hill on your way back!). Rooms there are currently £40.95 each, but if you are on a very tight budget it is worth bearing in mind that Travel Inn charge per room, rather than per person, and many of their rooms will accommodate up to two adults and two children under 16. The address for the Travel Inn is Bentley Green, Bentley Road North, Walsall, West Midlands, WS2 0WB, tel: 01922-724485 (www.travelinn.co.uk). It is next door to the Bentley Green Brewsters from Brewers Fayre (where Travel Inn's breakfasts are served – full English for £6, Continental breakfast £4).

For further information contact: Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ (e-mail xl5@zoom.co.uk or telephone 0114-281-1572).

CRECHE

We are looking into the possibility of running a crèche this year. If you are interested in using such a facility please contact Tony Berry at the address below.

Please let him know names and ages of the children who might be using the facility, along with any special requirements or other relevant information (allergies, special needs etc). Contact: Tony Berry (Chairman), 68 Windsor Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B68 8PB, (e-mail morbius@zoom.co.uk).

ART SHOW by Ann Green

This year's Art Show is being run by yours truly, Ann Green. If you're planning to show any work please contact me to let me know your display needs. If you'd like to help out in any way please get in touch either by contacting me beforehand or early at the Con. The Show is 'under new management' at a brand new venue so all help and advice is greatly appreciated. 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull B92 7LQ, 0121 706 0108 (if you get the answerphone leave a number) or e-mail neergnna@yahoo.co.uk

THE CD-ROM ART SHOW

Following the success of last year's innovative CD ROM Art Show we are again inviting contributions.

If you have work you wish to exhibit on CD-ROM or you know of someone who has, please contact Tony Berry, (Chairman), 68 Windsor Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B68 8PB, (morbius@zoom.co.uk).

NOVACON'S RNIB RAFFLE

As usual we will be selling raffle tickets to raise money for the Royal National Institute for the Blind's "Talking Books for the Blind Project". So, if you have anything you would like to donate as a prize for the raffle please contact Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (e-mail empties@breathemail.net).

Make sure you buy a ticket or two from Anne Woodford at the convention as well!

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION by Martin Tudor

Obviously full and detailed instructions on "How To Get There" featuring Road, Rail and Bus routes to the Quality Hotel in Bentley, Walsall will be published in our final Progress Report in September. Meanwhile, however, we thought a brief taster of what you can expect when you make your way to the Black Country in November might prove useful...

The Quality Hotel will be offering an interesting and varied convention menu in the Saddle Room Restaurant (next to the No 10 Bar) on a plate basis, you buy a plate and pile it high for a fiver (£5.00), desert will be available at each sitting for £1.50. Friday from 6pm to 7.30pm there will be a choice from a Hot Buffet selection (vegetarian or meat), or the Salad Bar with cold meat selection. From 9.30-11pm the Hotel will be offering the first of three themed selections with a choice of Balti/Curry dishes. Saturday lunch will feature the Salad Bar/Hot Buffet choice again from 12-2.30pm, and again from 6-7.30pm (both of these will be a fiver a plate). Saturday night will see the second of the themed selections, this time Tex-Mex, from 9.30-11pm, again at a fiver a plate. Sunday lunch will be a Carvery at £6.50 per head, from 1-2.30pm. From 7pm on Sunday night there is 2001: A Taste Odyssey Beer and Sausage & Mash Tasting – for which tickets will have to be purchased in advance at £5.00 per head. (Tickets entitle you to the sausage and mash, beer badges need to be acquired separately – please see the 2001: a Taste Odyssey article above). They'll be on sale at the con until 5pm. This will feature a selection of sausages and a choice of plain, Black Pudding or Cheddar mashed potato. From 11pm-12am the hotel will be selling a late night snack of bacon rolls to help soak up the beer!

If, however, you fancy eating out of the Hotel you will find yourself spoilt for choice. A few minutes walk down Bentley Mill Way (the road opposite the drive of the Quality Hotel) is the Showcase Cinema complex which has a Fatty Arbuckles (0121-568-6910), a Deep Pan Pizza (0121-568-8053), the Grosvenor Casino (01922-645222) and the highly recommended (by me) Cinnamon Club Indian restaurant (0121-568-6664, www.cinnamon-club.com).

Across the road from the Quality is the Lane Arms, which offers a wide range of standard Pub Grub along with the impressive, locally brewed Highgate & Walsall ales Golden Ale (3.7% abv), Saddlers (4.3%), Dark Mild (3.4%), occasionally Black Pig (4.4%) and the Special Winter Warmer – Old Ale (5.1%). Around the corner from the Lane Arms, on Bentley Road North, you'll find a late night off licence and a newsagents. While across from them, back on Wolverhampton Road West, there is a chip shop, the Greedy Pig café and Euro Curries Restaurant & Takeaway (where you can try a "Euro Balti – an original Balti cooked in a unique Euro style"! Call 01922-746786).

If you walk down the road beside the Lane Arms (Bentley Road North) you'll find the overflow hotel, the Travel Inn, next door to which is the family friendly Bentley Green Inn (01922-724485) a Brewsters from Brewers Fayre – which offers a *very* wide range of pub group and a reasonable selection of beers.

Out of the hotel and one mile to your *right* (down Wolverhampton Road West) you will find Willenhall (having passed a 24-hour Spar, the Red Lion pub, a drive-in McDonalds, the Sun Hing House chip shop and Chinese take-away and a couple of other Chinese, Indian and Pizza take-aways on your way). First, just outside Willenhall town centre, you'll come to the wonderful Ye Old Toll House restaurant – if you want to eat here you will have to book in advance, but it is worth it (01902-605575). I recommend the table d'hôte Menu – excellent value for money – it includes starter, sweet, cheese and biscuits, liqueur coffee and one bottle of wine between four and ranges from £17-£22 per head depending on your main course. Their daily specials feature the most amazing range of fish dishes!

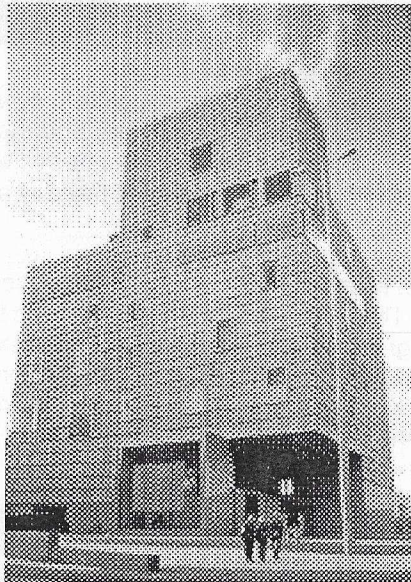
Just beyond the Toll House is the Jewel Balti Restaurant & Take-Away (cheap and friendly, unlicensed last time I was there so better check on 01902-605917), the Dale House Carvery (pleasant but basic carvery) and the local Wetherspoons the Malthouse (standard Wetherspoons love 'em or hate 'em, they're all pretty much the same) and Somerfield supermarket (which has a hot buffet counter). Willenhall also features the world famous Lock Museum (01902-634542). Perhaps our illustrious Chairman and Master Locksmith, Tony Berry, could be prevailed upon to run guided tours on Saturday ****OUCH!**** Or perhaps not.

Out of the Hotel and one mile to your *left* (over the M6) takes you into Walsall, which is home to a vast number of impressive Indian restaurants including Golden Moments (the *overall* winner of the Birmingham Evening Mail Restaurant for the Millennium Competition, tel. 01922-640363, <http://www.bite2enjoy.com/search2.asp>) which has amazing food and stunning *art deco* furnishings. As this PR went to press one of the Golden

Moment's chefs, Ramesh Bicu, was about to go up against five other chefs from Coventry, Derby, Stoke, Birmingham and Worcester in the regional heat of the national Curry Chef of the Year contest! Across the road from Golden Moments is Shimla Peppers – runner up in the Birmingham Evening Mail Restaurant for the Millennium Competition! Shimla's features a heated courtyard as well as sensational food (01922-640605).

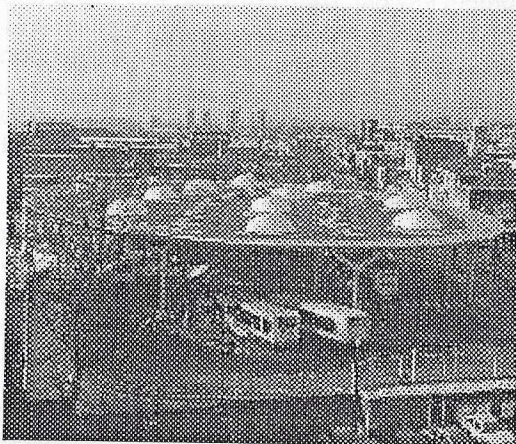
If you don't fancy Indian food I can recommend the Italian food at Sofia's in the Guildhall (01922-632223), the Cantonese at the Mayflower (01922-632612) and the wide range of pub food at the Hogshead (01922-616963). Further details of the many other restaurants in Walsall and surrounding area will appear in your Read Me Outside at the con, and I hear Spud U Like is very good value for money!

But what has Walsall to offer besides some amazing food? Well there's the famous £21 million New Art Gallery (01922-654400, www.artatwalsall.org.uk) featuring *not only* the Garman Ryan Collection (donated to Walsall by Lady Kathleen Garman, widow of sculptor Sir Jacob Epstein) but *Noddy Holder's voice* in the "speaking elevator"! There is the Walsall Leather Museum – Walsall being Britain's leather capital ("ooh, er, missus!"); the Jerome K. Jerome Birthplace Museum (Stratford may have Shakespeare and Birmingham its Tolkien connection, but Walsall was the birthplace of the author of "Three Men in a Boat" - impressed eh?) and the Birchills Canal Museum. All these places of interest plus the impressive Walsall general market in the town centre on Saturday and the largest Sunday market in the Midlands – out at Walsall FC's Bescot Stadium!



As previously mentioned, the Quality Hotel is situated beside Junction 10 of the M6, so by car it really *is* just a case of coming off the M6, turning into the Hotel drive and parking in the spacious car park! The Quality's prime location is just one mile from Walsall, one mile from Willenhall, five miles from Wolverhampton and twelve miles from Birmingham.

There is a Local Railway Station in Walsall (services to Wolverhampton and Birmingham) but the nearest Inter City Railway Station is in Wolverhampton – a ten minute taxi ride away. If you don't want to spend valuable beer money on a taxi the 529 bus from Wolverhampton Bus Station (across the road from the Railway Station) drops you right outside the Hotel, it is a 20-25 minute bus journey. The 529 was the first major route in the country to be completely serviced by gas powered vehicles (using Compressed Natural Gas) and most of the buses on the route are wheelchair-friendly, easy access buses with "kneeling suspension". These run every 6 minutes throughout the day and every 20 minutes during the evening.



Travel to and from Birmingham on public transport is so easy I do it twice a day! The 51 bus runs from Birmingham to Walsall every seven minutes throughout the day and every 20 minutes during the evening (a 35-40 minute journey) and you can transfer from the 51 (at Stand G) to the 529 (at Stand M) in Walsall's new £4.2 million "flying saucer" bus station (pictured above and below), from there it is just a five minute journey to the Hotel.



NOVACON 31
MEMBERS
on 21st June 2001:

1	Gwyneth Jones	48	George F. Ternent	99	Mike Damesick
2	Tony Berry	49	Linda Ternent	100	Amanda Baker
3	Dave Hicks	50	Peter Wareham	101	Ben Jeapes
4	Steve Lawson	51	Gwen Funnell	102	Krystyna Oborn
5	Martin Tudor	52	Simon Bradshaw	103	Dave Tompkins
6	David T. Cooper	53	Bridget Bradshaw	104	Doug Bell
7	Alice Lawson	54	Dave Hardy	105	Christina Lake
8	Cat Coast	55	Paul Dormer	106	Martin Smith
9	Sherrie Powell	56	Michael Abbott	107	Simon Dearn
10	Pat McMurray	57	Anne Wilson	108	Barbara-Jane
11	Steve Davies	58	Sue Edwards	109	David Laight
12	Giulia de Cesare	59	Paul Oldroyd	110	Robert Sneddon
13	Wendy Graham	60	Chris Donaldson	111	Nick Mills
14	Tony Keen	61	Simon Hovell	112	Sue Mason
15	David Thomas	62	Sue Oliver	113	Dave Langford
16	Peter Mabey	63	Neil Tomkinson	114	Lisanne Norman
17	Ina Shorrocks	64	Alison Tomkinson	115	MaryAnn
18	Yvonne Rowse	65	Eira Latham		Hollingsworth
19	Susan Francis	66	SMS	116	Richard James
20	Claire Brialey	67	Anne Woodford	117	Stuart Capewell
21	Mark Plummer	68	Alan Woodford	118	John Rowbottom
22	Bob Shaw	69	Erhard Leder	119	Colin P. Langeveld
23	Chris O'Shea	70	Steve Cooper	120	Peter Day
24	Caroline Mullan	71	Vincent Docherty	121	Peter Gwilliam
25	Brian Ameringen	72	Niall Gordon	122	Gabriel Jimi Jones
26	Roger Burton	73	Julian Headlong	123	Sheila Pover
	West	74	Mike Ford	124	Graham Cooling
27	Chris Bell	75	Adrian Snowdon	125	Billy Stirling
28	Arthur Cruttenden	76	Ian Sorensen	126	Di Lewis
29	Lynn Edwards	77	Stephen Dunn	127	Paul Kincaid
30	Chris Stocks	78	Ken Slater	128	Maureen Kincaid
31	Roger Robinson	79	Helen Hall		Speller
32	Tony Rogers	80	Gerry Webb	129	Alison Freebairn
33	Pauline Morgan	81	Mali Perera	130	Chris Murphy
34	Chris Morgan	82	Alan Webb	131	Jim Anderson
35	Caroline Loveridge	83	Roger Earnshaw	132	Barbara Weldman
36	Gavin Long	84	Tim Stannard	133	Farah Mendlesohn
37	Laura Wheatly	85	Neil Summerfield	134	Iain Banks
38	Alison Scott	86	Mike Siddall	135	B. A. Blackburn
39	Steven Cain	87	Margaret Austin	136	John Anderson
40	Noel Collyer	88	Martin	137	Diane Anderson
41	Sue Jones	89	Easterbrook	138	Richard Kennaway
42	Carol Morton	90	Andrew A. Adams	139	Tara Dowling-
43	Tony Morton	91	Anders Holmström		Hussey
44	Julie Faith Rigby	92	Steve Green	140	Jane Cooper
45	Alex McLintock	93	Ann Green	141	Debbie Custance
46	Vernon Brown	94	John Harvey	142	Heather
47	Pat Brown	95	Eve Harvey		McKiggan-Fee
		96	Tobes Valois	143	Steve Jeffery
		97	James Odell	144	Vikki Lee France
		98	Paul Treadaway		
			Mike Scott		