



NOVACON 50
PROGRESS REPORT 3



12 – 14th November 2021

Guests of Honour

**Chris Baker, Emma Newman, Claire North,
Christopher Priest**

The Annual Convention of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

COMMITTEE

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Logo/Website: Alex Storer
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A WORD FROM OUR CHAIRS

At time of writing it looks like we will actually be able to have an in-person convention and we cannot wait. After the last 18 -19 months, being able to see each other will make this a very special Novacon on top of it being our 50th birthday. We are planning a programme



The socially-distanced committee make plans for World Domination Novacon! *(Image from Thunderball)*

that will reflect Novacon including our two science talks and much more. More about the programme elsewhere in this PR.

One of the things we are doing is having a birthday party on Saturday night complete with cake and wine. It is a chance for people to dress up and get into the party mood. Not compulsory of course but for those who have missed getting their glad rags on this is your chance.

On Sunday evening there will be the traditional beer tasting and hot buffet. For the beer tasting we ask you to bring at least 3 bottles or cans of beer, the more interesting/weird the better. Alternatively, you can buy a beer badge from registration for £6. The food will be a buffet with a Mediterranean theme and vegetarian options will be available. Entrance to this is by ticket only, bought in advance from registration, price tbc.

There will be an Art Show as usual, but this year we have decided to hold a silent auction rather than an in-person one, so you just write your bids on the sheets provided. If we get enough books, we will also be holding a book auction at some point. This is usually a pretty informal late-night thing so people wake up the following morning with a large pile of books they can't remember buying.

Our Covid policy is on the website and reproduced later in this PR. Please take the time to read it. Although it is stricter than the government guidelines, we are taking these steps to make our members feel safer in attending the convention and hope you will all agree and understand that it is the right thing to do.

So all that is left now is to say we are looking forward to seeing you there.
Alice and Tony.

HOTEL & CONVENTION INFORMATION



As previously announced, Novacon 2021 will be at the Palace Hotel in Buxton Spa in the Peak District.

Time is marching on rapidly, so if you haven't booked your hotel room you don't have long left. To book, please fill in the hotel booking form and send it to the address on the form. The form can be downloaded from the website (www.novacon.org.uk/n50/). Once complete, send it to Steve Lawson at the address on the form as soon as possible for processing.

Rooms are £45 per person per night for a double/twin room
£60 per person for a single room.

Room rates include breakfast. There are also a limited number of family rooms (2 adults and 2 children) and a few accessible rooms. There is ramp access at the rear of the hotel for those with difficulty with steps. Please note if you have specific requirements, don't hesitate to contact the hotel directly at 0871 221 0253.



An improvement this year is that all the function rooms are on one floor (including the Art Room). The bars and toilets are also on the ground floor and there is plenty of lounge area.

The whole hotel is light and airy with high ceilings and some impressive decor. And a conservatory. And the longest



continuous wrought-iron bannister in Britain, or was it Europe? And possibly a ghost. There is a swimming pool

(open at time of last hotel visit) and gym/spa facilities (service may be limited so please contact hotel directly for more information).

Buxton itself is a thermal spa town, with lots of interesting buildings and places to visit for those who wish to venture outside the hotel. These include the Opera House, the Devonshire Dome (once the largest unsupported dome in the world), a restored Georgian crescent and the ornamental Pavilion Gardens. There are supermarkets nearby (Waitrose, Aldi & Sainsburys Local) and plenty of cafés and restaurants. More information can be found at www.visitbuxton.co.uk

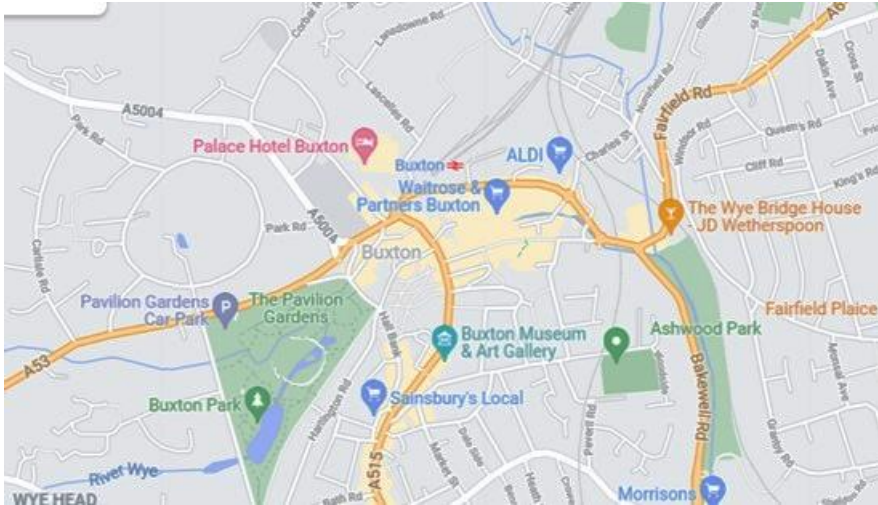
HOW TO GET THERE

The Palace Hotel Buxton is in the centre of Buxton, just off the A53. For those travelling by car, the hotel address is Palace Road, Buxton, SK17 9AG.

From Birmingham it is about a 2-hour drive by car, about 1 hour 15 minutes from central Manchester, and around 1 hour from Sheffield, Stoke or Derby.

If you are travelling by car the hotel has an on-site car park, which is normally chargeable but we have negotiated free parking. There are 180 parking spaces and 10 disabled.

If you are travelling by public transport, the hotel was the original railway hotel, so it is a short 3-minute walk from Buxton Train Station to the hotel.



From Birmingham, rail travel usually involves two changes, Cross Country line to Stockport then Northern Line to Buxton. Alternatively, you can change at Macclesfield, then catch the 58 bus to Buxton. There are bus stops located on the A53. There is a direct trainline (Northern Line) from Manchester to Buxton. From Sheffield, it appears that a bus service may be the quickest public transport option but please check for your individual circumstances, as the best options/route will vary depending on time of day and delays between connections.

NOTES FROM A BURNING AGE – Claire North

North's latest is part spy novel, part future war novel, with plenty of religion and philosophy in places. This is a step up from her previous novels, more subtle and requiring a little more reader effort.

Its setting is central and eastern Europe and perhaps the Middle East in a wonderfully imagined dystopian future maybe a few generations or a couple of centuries after we've ruined the world (in that Burning Age). The names of countries and cities have changed slightly, so that Vien is presumably Vienna, Damasc is Damascus and Maze may be Macedonia. There's the Ube River (the Danube). But there's also a strong Far Eastern element to the

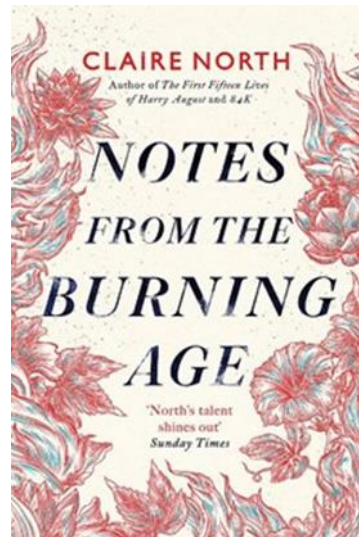
personal names, food and philosophy of these people. Rus is Russia, while Britain and America scarcely rate a mention. I've always loved North's descriptions of place and those are better than ever here.

It's narrated throughout by Ven, whom we meet as a boy, as a young man and as a middle-aged or elderly man. His life goes from bad to worse to much worse, with just a few brighter moments. He does, though, throughout all his woes, maintain his equanimity and fatalism, due mainly to his training by the church.

I must mention the organised religion of this world. It's multi-theistic, the gods being known as the kakuy, resembling giant animals of different type, including wolf, bear, squid and combinations. Some people, including Ven, see them occasionally. But they seem to ignore humanity and do nothing to help or hinder the progress of the world. The priests are known as Medj and there are temples and shrines in all areas. Not everybody is a believer and there is no compulsion to believe. It is a very pacific and rather passive religion that preaches (as does the novel) conservation and ecological preservation.

The setting is a world largely devoid of metal and hydrocarbons. Solar and wind power are widely used; cars are mostly electric. The height of technology are the inkstones, small computers that seem to have been standardised, so presumably there's no great technological innovation, though various authorities are trying desperately to recover the ruinous lost technology of the past.

This brings us to the plot, where Ven is employed by the Brotherhood (a political movement of growing importance) as a translator of old texts in different languages because that's



something at which he excels. His boss is Georg, a brilliant strategist and one of the leading lights of the Brotherhood. And I must stress that this is also a novel of action.

The opening scene shows Ven as a boy of eight playing in the local forest with Vae, a girl of his own age and Yue, Vae's twelve-year-old sister, when a forest fire and flood devastate the area. Ven sees a kakuy burnt to death (but can gods die?). Vae is drowned. Ven and Yue go away from the rural area to train and study. Will they ever meet again? This is a scene of great importance to the rest of the novel.

So we have here a considerable achievement by a major writer, showing how many fascinating characters interact, think and suffer against an amazing futuristic backdrop. *Chris Morgan Advance reading copy provided by Orbit.*

ORIGINAL FLYER FOR NOVACON 1

NOVACON

NOVACON I - 13/14th November, 1971

Guest-of-Honour: James White

What a marvellous idea! A whole new series of science fiction conventions held in that dead, November time of year.

Vernon Brown and the Aston University SF Group have planned a lively 2-day convention in Birmingham, backed by experience of the Worcester EASTERCON. For a quite modest cost you can spend a full weekend at the very first NOVACON.

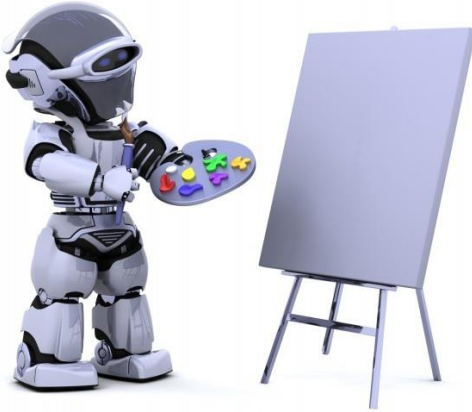
A full programme is planned and at least 100 people are expected. Don't forget, Birmingham is only 95 minutes by rail from London, Manchester and Liverpool!

The Imperial Hotel, in the centre of the city, has been reserved for the event and will offer special reduced-rate accommodation. If you wish, you need only stay the one, Saturday, night, though many will obviously arrive on Friday evening. (The hotel has 2 bars, restaurant, snack bar, and German beer-cellar.)

Join now: send 50p for registration and progress reports, to the chairman:-

Vernon Brown, Room 623, University of Aston, Birmingham.

PR3 NOVACON ART SHOW



Oh yes there will be an art show and this will be a great Novacon Art Show.

What's different? In our regal hotel in Buxton, the art show will be in the thick of it on the **GROUND FLOOR!** We have windows and we have direct access

from the car park to our room which is **HUGE!** We have been very spoiled. The Art Show will also be located beside the Dealers' room which is also a fabulous space.

Novacon 50 has a lot of catching up and celebrating to do. Amongst our illustrious list of artists we have **Fangorn** as our Artist Guest of Honour and we will have a special display of his work. Recently we lost a dear friend, **Ed Buckley**. Ed was involved in so much of fandom but we knew him first and foremost as an artist – a very talented artist – and we will miss his presence in so many ways. We would like to honour Ed in some manner in our art show perhaps by way of a memory board or a display of his art. We are open to ideas for this which can be e-mailed to us: artshow@Novacon

And, finally We will be offering our usual mixture of originals, limited editions and prints and other interesting items. What will be different is the way we offer them for sale. There will be an option for instant sales and a Silent Auction for artists who prefer an auction.

We hope that this will allow attendees who are not around all weekend the opportunity to purchase a piece and take it away. In addition, this frees up programme space on Sunday afternoon and gives more time for the art show to be open. This doesn't mean

this is the format forever but Novacon 50 was inevitably going to have some changes.

Looking forward to seeing you in November. *John and Serena*

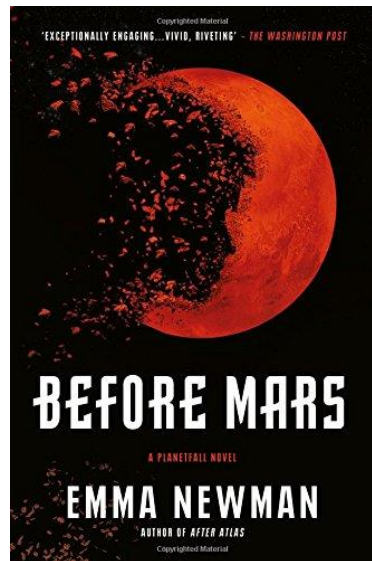
ART SHOW

If you want to show your art it is free to convention members, but you will need to reserve space. So, contact us to discuss what you need and so that we can do a little planning. If you have any questions related to the art show, please contact Serena or Tony.

BEFORE MARS – EMMA NEWMAN

Although listed as the third in the *Planetfall* series, BEFORE MARS can be enjoyed without having read the previous two books (PLANETFALL and AFTER ATLAS) as they all take place in different locations and with different characters. At the time of this review, I have read PLANETFALL but had not yet read AFTER ATLAS and did not feel I was missing any vital information. PLANETFALL looked at the first extrasolar colony, founded by a group of true believers led by a visionary, Suh-Mi. BEFORE MARS

is set forty years after that first expedition departed and where people are hoping that a time-locked capsule they left behind will divulge the secret technology of the first spaceship. Earth is mainly run by giant corporations where people have few rights and most people connect directly by a chip in their brain to corporate systems, entertainment and the equivalent of the Internet.



BEFORE MARS is told from the first-person perspective of Anna Kubrin, as she arrives at the Mars base. The base has a longstanding crew of four people plus the base AI, Principia. A qualified geologist, Anna has been sent unwillingly to Mars base by its multimillionaire owner, Stefan Gabor mainly to paint the Martian landscape as his pet vanity project. During her long solo journey, she has used “immersives” (full sensory recordings which can be hard to distinguish from reality) including memories of her partner and son back on Earth. When she arrives, she feels an eerie familiarity with the location and the other workers. As she faces hostility and tension from her new colleagues, things start to not add up. Is there something hidden going on at the base or is it her own paranoid mind playing tricks on her due to a combination of guilt at leaving her family and “immersion psychosis” where a person can no longer separate reality from the fiction of immersive stories?

The first novel PLANETFALL was different from much contemporary SF in firstly, its extrapolation of the use of 3D printing technology and also for having a protagonist who was concealing a mental health issue, something that is rarely touched on in most SF or Fantasy. Again, in BEFORE MARS, the author is not afraid to give us another protagonist who has flaws and a back history which will make her unsympathetic to some readers. The author has excelled at writing a complex character with a finely defined internal voice. As this is a first-person story we see less of the inner motivations and thoughts of the other characters, but they are still realistic and the reasons for their differing relationships and reactions to newcomer Anna feel very credible.

Whilst 3D printing was a major focus of the first novel, time has moved on (both in the series and the real world) and this whilst still present is not as prominent. Instead it is the debate about how autonomous our minds can be when everyone is connected and how much we can trust what our senses are telling us. However, if this all feels a bit heavy reading, it is far from it. There is a good developing plotline and the balance between Anna’s internal musings and the events on Mars offset well

against each other. This is excellent SF and this author goes from strength to strength. Her work is intelligent, profound, empathic and still entertaining. Also, she deserves immense kudos for her bravery in using her own experiences with post-natal depression to illuminate and elicit sympathy for her protagonist. Highly recommended.

Carol Goodwin

PROGRAMME BIT

As I write it's only six weeks until Novacon 50, and the programme is coming together well. It's traditional, here in Progress Report Three, for us to give you a foretaste of the heavenly banquet which is the Novacon Programme, by describing how Friday evening is going to play out with a few teasers for the remainder of the weekend.

Friday

Opening ceremony – 6pm

In which the committee hold forth and introduces the GoHs (& points out past GoHs).

Desert Island Books

In which the traditional Friday evening item is split due to a magnificent profusion of GoHs. Each session will feature two GoHs who have been asked to pick the four books they would take with them to a desert island and tell us why.

Desert Island Books 1 – 6.30pm

Chris Baker (Fangorn) & Catherine Webb (Claire North).

Desert Island Books 2 – 8pm

Christopher Priest and Emma Newman.

Friday party/Novacon Book Launch

Following on from Desert Island books - In which a book is launched, alcohol is imbibed and fans talk nonsense.

Saturday and Sunday

There will be the customary science talks, discussion panels and of course four Guest of Honour interviews. There will also be some extra contributions from Guests of Honour (to be announced) and an expanded Off Piste programme.

In particular, to celebrate Novacon's big birthday we will be having a party on Saturday night. We would like to invite people to stand up (or not) and tell us about their memories of Novacons past. Please think about what you might like to share with the party.

There will also be Saturday evening poetry reading. All those members who would like to participate are encouraged to bring poems, written by themselves, preferably paper copies rather than depending on memory or iphones. All poets will be very welcome.

Yvonne Rowse

THE STOOG

Novacon 50 are excited to host the UK Premiere of the film, THE STOOG, based on a story by Christopher Priest. With a bit of luck, and subject to Covid travel restrictions between the USA and UK, we may also be joined by the film's director, Rogelio Fojo

As Chris Priest says on his website, "This has been showing at film festivals around the world for the last year or so, bravely masking up and mixing freely. It has gained a huge amount of attention in those socially distanced circles, but I can say it has been picking up awards and commendations everywhere it goes. Looking at the array of award bouquets, below, I am amazed, impressed and very pleased by the persistence of the producers. The festival circuit can be a hard road to travel, but they have done well in these socially constricted times.

The film runs for a mere twenty minutes, but it packs a lot into that brief time. It is an essay on stage magic and was for me when I wrote the original short story a kind of ironic commentary on and footnote to THE PRESTIGE. The story can be found in my recent collection EPISODES, but that really does not give even a



hint of the way it has been widened and enriched by director Rogelio Fojo. He has come up with real mystery, good surprises, excellent music and several moments of beauty. In the opening credits there is a classic sleight of hand, filmed in close-up from below: you see every move the illusionist makes, yet will still be baffled by it. Full credit goes to Fojo and his team.”

A short teaser video can be found on the Novacon website (<https://www.novacon.org.uk/n50/stooge.php>) We are very much looking forward to showing it to a new audience.

DEALERS TABLES

We have decided this year to offer a special membership rate for Dealers of £25. This is for one person per booking and tables remain at £20 each.

Although Porcupine Books won't have a table at the convention Brian Ameringen has said that if anyone orders from his website (www.porcupinebooks.co.uk) he will bring their order with him, thereby saving the customer hundreds of pounds in postage.

CONVENTION TABLES

These are free to anyone who is running a convention. Contact Tony for reservations.

COVID POLICY AT NOVACON



The committee has reviewed the latest government advice and put in place the following guidelines. There are limits on what we can do. The hotel will have its way of operating and we will do everything reasonably practicable in the function spaces we control.

It has been a tough time since we last met and the committee have worked hard to try and make Novacon 50 as accessible and safe as possible so members feel confident in joining us to celebrate our big birthday. So please take these steps in the spirit they were intended and cooperate with us. Thanks.

What we are doing with the hotel:

- The Committee is working with the hotel to ensure good spacing in the programme room to allow for some social distancing.
- There will be a separate entrance and exit in dealers and art show.
- There will be sanitising stations around the hotel.
- All hotel staff will be double vaccinated.
- All programme rooms apart from main programme have windows that can be opened for air flow.
- Main programme room has high ceilings and fire escape doors that we can open for air flow.

What we need from you:

- We ask that all members are vaccinated where possible.
- We ask all members to take a lateral flow test prior to attending convention.
- Masks will be required while moving around the hotel but not whilst sitting in bar areas.
- Masks will be required in the main programme unless you are on the panel.
- Please do not host or attend room parties.
- Please do not attend if you think you have symptoms of COVID-19. Follow Government advice and stay safe.

Please note: that the hotel policy for staff is masking is voluntary. We cannot do anything about this; however all staff are double vaccinated. Also remember that the hotel bar is open to the public although the hotel does not expect that there will be any non-members. We are looking forward to seeing you all in November.

The Novacon 50 committee.

Useful links:

To obtain lateral flow tests: <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>

Government guidelines: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>



NOVA CON 50

MEMBERSHIP LIST OCTOBER 2021

1. Chris Baker
2. Emma Newman
3. Claire North
4. Chris Priest
5. Mike Carey
6. Chris Beckett
7. Tony Berry
8. Alice Lawson
9. Cat Coast
10. Carol Goodwin
11. John Harvey
12. Steve Lawson
13. Yvonne Rowse
14. Magdalen Standage-Bowles
15. Serena Culfeather
16. John Wilson
17. Noel Collyer
18. Marcus Rowland
19. Vernon Brown
20. Pat Brown
21. Neil Summerfield
22. Bridget Wilkinson
23. Julia Daly
24. John Bray
25. Mike Scott
26. Tim Kirk
27. Chris Bell
28. 1/2r
29. Claire Brialey
30. Mark Plummer
31. Margaret Austin
32. Martin Easterbrook
33. Dave Tompkins
34. Tim Stannard
35. Anne Woodford
36. Alan Woodford
37. Pete Wright
38. Anne Wright
39. Harpal Singh

40. James Odell
41. Jamie Scott
42. Dave Hardy
43. Christine Davidson
44. Michael Davidson
45. Harry Payne
46. Hal Payne
47. Omega
48. Jodie Payne
49. Julian Headlong
50. Roger Robinson
51. Paul Oldroyd
52. Chris Donaldson
53. Ian Sorensen
54. Ron Gemmell
55. Paul Dormer
56. MEG
57. Tim Broadribb
58. Dai Walters
59. Dave Hicks
60. Penny Hicks
62. Morag O'Neill
63. Adrian Snowdon
64. Hazel Ashworth West
65. Mary Peek
66. Bernard Peek
67. Niall Gordon
68. Sue Edwards
69. Douglas Spencer
70. Sally Rowse
71. Peter Wareham
72. Gwen Funnell
73. Barbara-Jane
74. Christina Lake
75. Doug Bell
76. Mark Meenan
77. Chris Stocks
78. Martin Smart
79. Melica Smith
80. Kate Solomon
81. Malcolm Davies
82. Chris Morgan
83. Pauline Morgan
84. Simon Beresford
85. Michael Abbott
86. Anne Wilson
87. Peter Harrow
88. Vanessa May
89. Laura Wheatly
90. Jim Walker
91. Rob Jackson
92. Steve Dunn
93. Alison Scott
94. Steven Cain
95. Brian Ameringen
96. Emjay Ameringen
97. Caroline Mullan
98. Roger Earnshaw
99. Sue Jones
100. Steve Jones
101. DC
102. AC
104. Giulia De Cesare
105. Steve Davies
106. William Armitage
107. Helen McCallum
108. Alison Buck
109. Peter Buck
110. Phil Nanson
111. Kari
112. Eira Short
113. Cuil Short

114. Smuzz
115. Stan Nicholls
116. Anne Nicholls
117. John Dowd
118. Fran Dowd
119. Richard Standage
120. Helena Bowles
121. Nigel Rowe
122. Peter Wilkinson
123. David Langford
124. Sue Hobson
125. Philip Collins
126. Ian Warner
127. Henrick Palsson
128. Dominika Klimczak
129. Mike Richardson
130. Alexander Clarke
131. Kevan Grayson
132. Mark Yon
133. Susan Peak
134. Herman Ellingsen
135. David Cochrane
137. Pete Randall
138. Ian Maughan
139. Jackie Burns
140. Steve Rogerson
141. David Tamlyn
142. Stephen Cooper
143. Dave Lally
144. Wendy Smith
145. David Sherwood
146. Eleanor Winpenny
147. Nick Lakin
148. Michael Towers
149. Tony Rogers
150. Greg Pickersgill
151. Catherine Pickersgill
152. Gerry Webb
153. Mali Perera
154. John Richards
156. Jean Thompson
157. CL Gamble
158. Luke Smith
159. Tommy Ferguson
160. Neil Simpson
161. Angela Rosin
162. William Goodall
163. James Bacon
164. Eve Harvey
165. Alex Storer
166. Kevin Mortimer
167. Pat McMurray
168. Julie McMurray
169. Wendy Aldiss
170. Phil Greenaway
171. Michael Bernardi
172. Peter Young
173. Benjamas Young
174. Nicholas Whyte
175. Farah Mendlesohn
176. John Coxon
177. Arthur Chappell
178. Elaine Coates
179. Mark Slater
180. Robert Day
181. Garry Kilworth
182. Annette Kilworth
183. España Sheriff
184. John Bilton
185. Marguerite Smith
186. Jennie Jury
187. Simon Bradshaw

188. Siân Bradshaw
189. Helen Gould
190. Victor Gonzalez
191. John Coxon
192. Andrew Hobson
193. Teika Bellamy
195. Craig Meighan
196. Nick Mills
197. Allison Ewing
198. Alasdair Hepburn
200. Spike
201. Tom Becker
202. Emma King
203. David Weaver
204. Vincent Docherty
205. Amelia Nelson
206. Chris Jones
207. Chris Brooks
208. Christopher Berry
209. Katherine Dunford
210. David Craig
211. Colette Reap
212. Alan Bellingham
213. Michael Horsfield
214. Mary Horsfield
215. Bianca Greenhalgh
216. Charlie Sheppard
217. Steve Holloway
218. Jonathan Earl
219. Stephen Burr ridge
220. Meg MacDonald
221. Robert Newman
222. Hazel Newman
223. Laura Holloway
224. Alastair Reynolds
225. Peter Hamilton
226. Tej Turner
227. David Shannon
228. Bernardine Shannon
229. Lilian Edwards
230. Chris Murphy
231. Dave Brzeski
232. Jilly Paddock
233. Penny Hill
234. Esther MacCallum-Stewart
235. Ian McDonald
236. Roy Gray
237. Richard Edwards
238. Tony Cullen
239. Tessa Harrington
240. Tobes Valois
241. David Cooper
242. Jane Cooper
243. Lara Whall de-Leuw
244. Rogelio Fojo
245. Nick Hubble
246. Hayley Marsden
247. Ian Morley
249. Judy Perrin
250. Bill Burns
251. Mary Burns
252. Margaret Walty
254. Caroline Mersey