

# BRITISH SF CONVENTIONS

## Volume 1: 1937-1951



edited by  
**ROB HANSEN**

# British SF Conventions

**Volume 1: 1937-1951**

**compiled by Rob Hansen**

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*Cover photo:* from Festivention (1951) showing the editors of six of the seven fanzines then being published in the UK. From left to right: Mike Tealby (*Wonder*), Derek Pickles (*Phantasmagoria*), Fred Robinson (*Straight Up*), Walt Willis (*Slant*), Bob Foster (*Sludge*), Vince Clarke and Ken Bulmer (*Science Fantasy News*). From the Vince Clarke collection. Photographer unknown but perhaps Mavis Pickles.

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# Foreword

When talking about conventions (or conferences – the terms were used interchangeably early on) it's first necessary to define what constitutes a convention as opposed to a simple get-together. On this point I've always been clear: a convention is an organized gathering planned and announced beforehand *as a convention*. If this wasn't the case then, to repeat an example I've used before, a gathering I attended in London in the late 1970s or early 1980s, that people from all over the country travelled to, one where along with all the socializing British Science Fiction Association business was discussed and sorted out along with details of the following year's Eastercon, would easily qualify. It doesn't because it was announced and organized beforehand as a two day party, one attended by the most active UK fans of the day, including those then running the BSFA and organizing the next Eastercon. Declaring it a convention retroactively, or even while it was happening, would not make it one. Which brings us to an event some claim was the world's first science fiction convention. I refer of course to the Vril-Ya Bazaar and Fête of 1891.

Held in London's Royal Albert Hall on March 5th to 7th of that year, during the reign of Queen Victoria, the Vril-Ya Bazaar and Fête has been described thus:

Exotic imagery adorned the walls, and winged creatures hung from the ceiling; even the attendees themselves got in on the fun, ditching their regular clothes for peculiar costumes. In addition to the elaborate displays, there was much for them to do and admire: There were booths laden with merchandise, sold by women in colourful gowns and eccentric ensembles, as well as quirky activities inspired by one of the era's most popular science fiction tales.

The Vril-Ya Bazaar and Fête, a charity fundraiser and fair, was... dedicated to one eccentric work of imagination: Edward Bulwer-Lytton's hit novel *Vril: The Power of The Coming Race*.

[1]

This bears superficial similarities to an SF convention, but no more than that.

Claims that it's "widely regarded" as the first science fiction con are spurious and only ever made by those who know nothing about science fiction conventions and their associated culture. Since it wasn't the start of something but rather a dead-end that led nowhere, it's little more than an interesting curiosity. To consider it a true SF convention is akin to regarding any stories prior to Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein* to be true science fiction simply because they incorporate fantastic elements.

Amateur magazines containing journalism and fiction have been around for centuries but these are not generally considered to be fanzines because SF conventions and fanzines (not to mention the word "fanzine" itself) are the product of an organized fandom that grew out of the letter columns of the SF pulps beginning with *Amazing Stories*, whose initial issue wasn't published until April 1926. The first event in the world to be planned and announced beforehand as a convention by members of that organized fandom was held in Leeds on Sunday 3rd January, 1937, and was hence the first science fiction convention. Our first true national SF organization, the Science Fiction Association, was formed there, and the 1938 and 1939 conventions, both held in London, were its AGMs. With the outbreak of war in September 1939 the SFA was suspended for the duration. It never returned.

Surprisingly, there were five conventions organized, announced, and held in the UK during World War Two despite travel under wartime conditions being a difficult and sometimes dangerous affair. For example, the train taking Cardiff fan Terry Overton to one of those conventions pulled out of the station during an air raid as bombs rained down on his (and my) home city. The NORCONS were only cons in the most basic of senses but 1944's Eastercon was the most ambitious convention the UK had ever seen, as you will discover.

Given the paucity of accounts covering these conventions, there is necessarily some repetition of material already published in *Homefront*, my book covering UK fandom's activities during World War Two. This is unavoidable. The relevant chapters in this ebook are 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15 – the first, second and last here expanded with newly discovered material.

The first postwar UK convention, 1948's WHITCON, is the one all "Eastercons" are now numbered from despite being held at Whitsun, as the next few would also be, Eastercon having become the default collective name for our annual national convention. The first two conventions of the 1950s close out this first volume, yet neither was a national convention.

FESTIVENTION was the first international convention to be held in the UK, and NECON our first postwar regional convention.

None of the conventions covered in this volume were residential. That is, people travelling in from elsewhere or otherwise wishing to stay overnight in the city in question had to make their own arrangements, usually either staying with local fans or in bed-and-breakfasts.

The cover photo (Vince Clarke collection, photographer unknown but possibly Mavis Pickles) was taken at FESTIVENTION – hence the sign – and features the editors of six of the seven fanzines then being published in the UK (*Operation Fantast*'s Ken Slater was not at that convention). From L-to-R they are Mike Tealby (*Wonder*), Derek Pickles (*Phantasmagoria*), Fred Robinson (*Straight Up*), Walt Willis (*Slant*), Bob Foster (*Sludge*), Vince Clarke and Ken Bulmer (*Science Fantasy News*).

As always thanks are due to Dave Langford for turning the files I send him into an actual book, and for so much more; to Greg Pickersgill for his help, and to Pat Charnock for heroic proofreading.

– Rob Hansen, April 2023

[1]

<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/646499/fi-sci-fi-convention-vril-ya-bazaar>



Vril-Ya Bazaar and Fête programme book (1891)



**1937**

# 1: Coming Together

## Early Meetings and Leeds, 3 January 1937

### Ted Carnell:

For a long time now we've been toying with the idea of writing some of our reminiscences of fandom. Glancing at our photo album releases a torrent of memories, and we find that they centre on the birth of fandom in this country and the people who helped build fandom. Looking back over the past seven years and reviewing some of the things we all did may be of interest to you, and will certainly bring to the newer fans a clearer picture of events.

Pictures of individuals associate themselves into experiences, and there are a long chain centred round Les [Johnson], who was another of the original pioneers of fandom in this country. After much correspondence we first met Les accompanied by Eric Russell one evening at Euston Station, late in 1935. They had been doing the rounds in Town, had met Prof. Low and various other people, and were then on their way to see Wally Gillings at Ilford. We tagged along with them, and listened to the gabfest which ensued at Walt's place. It was quite an eye-opener, as we hadn't had anything to do with fans in the flesh – in fact we hardly knew what they were talking about half the time.

Except that it was the beginning of some friendships that have lasted right up until now, that first meeting is a little hazy. It was the beginning of our wanderings – many times afterwards, right up until the war broke out, we were to do the trip to Liverpool often.

Subsequent pix of Les and ourselves taken in 1937 are at the time when the germs of the idea for the "Science Fiction Service" were first formed. Yet another great event in fandom although we weren't to know it at the time – but from the clients of the old Service scores of new fans were made, and are still being made. Their names are legion.

*Founded by Les Johnson and Ted Carnell in 1937, the Science-Fiction Service was the first SF book-selling business in Britain. In 1938, it moved to city centre premises on Houghton Street, which*

*also became home to meetings of the Liverpool SFA group.*

There remains a vivid memory of a stf meeting in Liverpool, held at the office of the Service on one of those many trips we paid to Liverpool. Now I think back on it, it was one of the grandest meetings we ever attended – although we can't remember anything startling that happened – except a gabfest.

May those days of meetings come again before very long.

A snooty half plate pic graces the first page of our album, entitled “First Meeting of London Branch, British Interplanetary Society. October 23, 1936.” If you think that the BIS has little or nothing to do with science-fiction and fandom then you're very much mistaken, because it was through the formation of that London Branch that the followers of stf in London first got together.

As we remember that meeting, after six years, it was held in Prof A.M. Low's office in Piccadilly, and amongst some twenty members present were Wally Gillings, later to become editor of *Tales of Wonder*, Arthur Clarke, still an ardent pioneer of the spaceway, and ourselves. Shortly before the meeting began a quiet fellow snuck into the office and whispered earnestly to Walt – we thought it was the cops or the insurance man – but it turned out to be just a science fiction fan who wasn't very interested in rocketry. He wouldn't even stay to have his photo taken, but dashed off after making some arrangements with Walt. His name was Ken G. Chapman.

The meeting snored to its inevitable finale (all BIS meetings used to give us a headache – the jargon was so flighty!) and the fans moved to an adjacent cafe to thrash out weightier problems like the latest *Astounding*. We had the October issue with Brown's cover for Ray Gallun's “Godson of Almarlu”. (That was a lousy issue, by the way.) So, we adjourned to this joint, and Walt dashed off copy appertaining to the “greatest ever” futuristic meeting, and rushed it by phone to Associated Press. Then we sat back and decided that it was time we had some sort of London fan group instead of these haphazard meetings. But nothing was done about it at the time.

On January 3rd 1937 the Leeds Chapter of *Wonder's* Science Fiction League held Britain's first science fiction Convention. It had been called mainly to decide on a proper fan organization for this country and many fans and authors all over the country had promised to attend. We met Walt Gillings and Art Clarke at St. Pancras Station late at night and caught the mail train to Leeds. En route we picked up Maurice Hanson at Leicester – the

four of us arriving at Leeds in the dismal small hours around 4:00 a.m. The station looked like something from Wells's *Things to Come*, only they'd gone! Actually the station was still being built, although it looked as though it had been hit by a coupla thousand pounders. Maybe we just caught a brief glimpse into the future.

We were met by Harold Gottliffe and whisked away to the Clubroom, where unknown individuals mysteriously delivered breakfast. We can still remember those beans even now. But that Clubroom really had something. It was as comfortable as any large single room could be which had been fitted out by the ingenuity of the members, and we remember Michael Rosenblum giving us a conducted tour round the book-wracks – sorry – but they were an eyeopener to ordinary fan who hadn't had the yen to make a collection.

Around noon Eric Frank Russell and Les Johnson arrived from Liverpool, and Michael Rosenblum devoted quite a time to taking pix. There's one in our album of the usual three Walt, Art and ourselves, and another of Eric Russell.

The main business of the day ironed itself out in the afternoon when the jam session was held at some hall in the city. Everyone made speeches, plenty of ideas and suggestions floated around, an Association was formed. The last we remember of the meeting was sneaking off into a private sanctum, lighting a gas fire, and dropping off to sleep utterly worn out. But, as we remember, they did form the Science Fiction Association, and the noose was drawn a little tighter round our lily-white throats.

That original meeting really started the ball rolling in this country, and from it all the fan clubs (all four of 'em), evolved and owed allegiance. They were the four Hells. Leeds, Liverpool, London and Leicester.

*For this to make sense you need to know that Londoners usually pronounced hells as 'ells. Also, the pre-con Nuneaton SFL became the post-con Leicester SFA. Maurice Hanson had always lived in Leicester rather than nearby Nuneaton anyway, and possibly a change in numbers with the weight of membership shifting in favour of Leicester provided an excuse for the renaming. As for how many showed up, early convention literature unfortunately did not contain lists of those who attended. The fourteen names below are those who get a mention in the souvenir booklet, which claims that around twenty attended.*

- George Airey (Leeds)
- Ted Carnell (London)
- Arthur C. Clarke (London)
- Walter Gillings (Ilford)
- Harold Gottliffe (Leeds)
- Albert Griffiths (Bradford)
- Maurice K. Hanson (Nuneaton)
- Les Johnson (Liverpool)
- Douglas Mayer (Leeds)
- A. Miller (Leeds)
- J. Michael Rosenblum (Leeds)
- Eric Frank Russell (Liverpool)
- B. Saffer (Leeds)
- Herbert Warnes (Leeds)

Photos taken at the con feature twelve of the above, but no one not so named.

– *Sands of Time* #8 (April 1943, ed. Ted Carnell)

## **2. The Official Report Leeds, 3 January 1937**

### **SOUVENIR REPORT of the FIRST BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION CONFERENCE:**

The Conference, General View  
The Conference, Morning Session  
The Conference, Afternoon Session  
The Science Fiction Association  
Professor Low's Message  
J.R. Fearn's Message  
The Science Fiction Association

Published: January 1937. EDITOR: Douglas W.F. Mayer

Price: 1/- In the U.S.A. 35 cents

This booklet is published under the auspices of the LEEDS SCIENCE  
FICTION LEAGUE, 9 Brunswick Terrace, Leeds 2.

We have pleasure in acknowledging:

The loan of the printing apparatus by Mr. Airey.  
The printing etc. of the booklet by Mr. H. Warnes  
and the assistance of other members of Leeds S.F.L.

### **The Conference — General Views —**

On Sunday, January 3rd.1937, the first – but, we hope, not the last – British Science Fiction Conference was held in the Theosophical Hall, Leeds. Approximately twenty fans or authors attended. Speeches were given in the morning by prominent persons attending, and in the afternoon, discussions ensued on ways and means of improving British science fiction.

The organizing of the Conference commenced during September 1936, and in the following month, D.W.F. Mayer was appointed Conference

Secretary. Fans all over the country were circularized and notified of the event. Notices of the Conference were printed in fan magazines in England and America, and the Conference attracted so much attention in this country that a notice appeared in the columns of that high class journal *Armchair Science*, which, we think, is that magazine's first reference to science-fiction.

In the last fortnight before the Conference, several delegates were unfortunately obliged to cancel their decisions to attend, due to attacks of influenza or other illnesses, but at last the great day came and passed, and the long-awaited event proved an unqualified success.

The Conference has been held, and a British Science Fiction organization has resulted. When and where will the next Conference be held? What will it produce? For the answer to these questions, we must wait for the future, or the present of a time-travelling machine.

## **The Conference — Morning Session —**

The Conference commenced punctually at 10:30 a.m. The Chairman (Mr. Herbert Warnes) opened the proceedings by reading a few short rules for the guidance of speakers, then called upon Mr. D.W.F. Mayer to read messages to the delegates, which had been received from Prof. A.M. Low, Prof. W. Olaf Stapledon, the Oklahoma Scientifiction Association, John Russell Fearn, Festus Pragnell, and H.G. Wells.

Following this, Mr. Walter H. Gillings gave a talk in which he outlined his efforts to get a science-fiction magazine published in England. He described how, after pestering numerous publishers with dummy copies, authors' MSS etc., he had at last, in January 1936, persuaded G. Newnes Ltd. to consider the subject in fine detail. After he, and several British authors, however, had spent much time and money, in discussing and solving the various problems with Newnes's representative, the scheme had collapsed in December last, and he was now negotiating with another Company which, in the course of a month or so, might be expected to produce a trial copy, selling at 1/-, of a journal entitled *Tales of Wonder*. For the benefit of authors, he mentioned that the magazine would pay for stories at the rate of 10/6d per thousand words.

In conclusion, he stated that one of the reasons why Newnes had given up the idea was that into this country there is being dumped each month

hundreds of tons of American pulp magazines which come over as waste paper. This includes numerous two-month-old copies of science-fiction magazines, all those books are sorted and distributed to “remainder” shops throughout the country where they are sold for 3d or 4d each. There is no possible method of finding the sales figures of these books, which must be enormous, but Newnes feared that the competition they set up would be too great.

Mr. E.J. Carnell then rose to say a few words in connection with the present activities of American fans, and pointed out that many, instead of working together for the good of science-fiction, did nothing but “sling mud” at each other, and work for their own individual welfare and glorification. After giving many interesting, and sometimes, amusing, anecdotes, Mr. Carnell concluded, and made way for Mr. A.C. Clarke, who described how a branch of the British Interplanetary Society had been formed in London, mentioning some of its activities to date, and giving an indication of what it hopes to accomplish.

The next speaker was Mr. M.K. Hanson who informed those present of how the Nuneaton Science Fiction League, of which he is Director, had developed, and gave an account of its activities. He also said a few words about the chapter publication *Nova Terrae* (New Worlds), and described how it is produced.

Finally, Mr. Gillings rose again to pay a tribute to *Nova Terrae*, and to give a brief account of his high class, printed journal *Scientifiction*, which would make its appearance within the course of a few weeks. He pointed out that there was room for both magazines, as the editorial policy would be different, and hoped that they would both work together in catering for the wants of Fans.

The meeting then adjourned for lunch, the time being 12:45 p.m.

## **The Conference — Afternoon Session —**

With the commencement of the afternoon session at 2:30 p.m., the conference proper started. Mr. Mayer proposed “that a British, non-commercial organization should be formed to further Science-fiction in this Country”. This was seconded by Mr. Carnell and passed unanimously. Mr. Mayer then proposed “that one of the objects of this society should be to



constitute a definite connection and to stimulate co-operation between British science-fiction groups, fans, and authors”. This was seconded by Mr. Gillings, and passed unanimously.

The third proposal was “that the society should exert influence on authors, publishers etc”. This was seconded by Mr. G.A. Airey. Mr. Gillings objected and said that authors did not require influencing, but enquired how publishers, who were “difficult nuts to crack”, could be influenced. Mr. Mayer read a letter from Festus Pragnell describing how the latter had exerted influence on Philip Allan & Co., then Mr. Carnell proposed an amended motion – “that this society should encourage publishers to pay more attention to Science-fiction”. This was seconded by Mr. J.M. Rosenblum and, Mr. Mayer having withdrawn his motion, passed unanimously.

Following this, it was proposed by Mr. Mayer that the society should stimulate public interest in contemporary scientific ideas and assist where possible, in the furtherance of these ideas. This was seconded by Mr. B. Saffer, and passed unanimously.

The question of who should be President of the society was now raised. One suggestion was that H.G. Wells should be asked, but Mr. Gillings stated that he did not think that Wells cared much for modern science-fiction, and that he would probably decline. Mr. L.J. Johnson pointed out that Wells is still writing science fiction, and mentioned *Things to Come*. A vote was taken, and the proposal in favour of Wells defeated. A discussion followed, during which the names of Prof. Low and Prof. Stapledon were suggested. Mr. E.F. Russell then proposed Mr. Mayer, but the latter immediately declined. Mr. Gillings made several further suggestions, which received little support, until Mr. L.J. Johnson proposed that the matter be shelved until later in the day, this motion being passed.

Mr. Mayer then proposed “that various groups should act as executive officials”. This was seconded by Mr. Saffer. Mr. Gillings said that the scheme was impractical, and the motion was defeated. Mr. Gillings therefore proposed that one or two of the leading Leeds fans should be executive officials, so that they could all work together. This was seconded by Mr. M.K. Hanson, and passed unanimously.

Following this, Mr. Mayer proposed that *Nova Terrae* should become the official journal of the society, it being sent to each member, and that an additional bulletin should be published quarterly. This arrangement meeting with Mr. Hanson’s approval, and being seconded by Mr. A. Miller, was

passed, after some discussion, unanimously.

Mr. Mayer's next proposals were:

That all British groups should break away from American Societies and become branches of the new organization. (Seconded by Mr. Airey).

That groups of three or more members should be formed into branches of the association, with a Chairman at its head, each branch being given a free hand in internal affairs, but sending a short report each month to the Secretary (Seconded by Mr. A. Griffiths).

These were passed unanimously.

A further proposal was that, as the membership of the society grew, arrangements should be made with publishers for discounts to members. Mr. Russell said this would make the society appear a money-grubbing organization and pointed out that a discount of a penny or two was scarcely worth considering. The motion was defeated.

The question of subscription was now raised. Mr. Mayer proposed 2/6d per annum, Mr. Russell proposed 3/6d per annum, and Mr. Johnson proposed 5/- per annum or 1/6d per quarter. Mr. Johnson's proposal was carried. Mr. Carnell then suggested that the society should not be confined to British persons, but should open to anyone. This was seconded by Mr. Miller and passed. After this, a long discussion followed, during which various proposed names for the society were considered. Eventually, the name THE SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION suggested by Mr. Russell, was passed by a majority vote.

The next topic was that of executive officials, a topic which had been postponed earlier. Mr. Johnson put forward a motion, seconded by Mr. H. Gottliffe, that the President should be an active member. Mr. Gillings however, suggested that an author should be asked to occupy this position. A ballot being taken, the first place was found to have been secured by both Mr. H. Warnes and Mr. Mayer. A further vote failing to clarify the situation, it was eventually decided that Mr. Mayer should be Secretary, with Mr. Warnes assisting, and that the question of President should be reconsidered after the society had been formed for some time.

Other points settled about the association were (a) that note-paper and badges should be issued later if there were any demand for them and (b) that in all correspondence connected with the society, all letters requiring answers should contain stamped-addressed envelopes.

Mr. L.J. Johnson was now called upon to say a few words about the

British Interplanetary Society. This he did admirably, giving an account of its formation in 1933, its early difficulties, its meetings, its publications, its relations with other societies, position at present, and its hopes and ambitions for the future.

Following this, Mr. Russell rose to give his views on British science-fiction. "A science-fiction READER," he said, "is one who buys his magazine for 1/- at a proper book shop, reads it, and passes it on to a friend or throws it away. A science-fiction FAN," he continued, "is one who waits two months, goes and buys a copy for 4d. at a 'remainder' stall, thereby benefiting the publisher not even a cent, scans through it in a hurry, then writes letters telling the publisher how to publish, the printer how to print, the artist how to draw, the editor how to edit, and the authors how to write."

Continuing on this topic, Mr. Russell made an appeal to all British fans to buy their copies from leading bookstalls or agencies for 1/-, and not to buy "remainders". Bookstall purchasing, he pointed out, would give publishers a true idea of the demand for science-fiction in this country, and would help to financially support the magazine, thus ensuring a better production, and a prompt payment to authors.

Mr. Russell's speech over, an informal discussion on various aspects of science-fiction followed, then the first British Science Fiction Conference came to a conclusion at 6:00 p.m.

## **The Science Fiction Association**

The following points in connection with the above were settled at the Conference:

The name of the society shall be THE SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION. It shall exist to further science fiction in the British Isles. This society shall constitute a definite connection, and stimulate co-operation, between British science fiction groups, fans, and authors. The society shall encourage publishers to pay more attention to science fiction. The society shall stimulate public interest in contemporary scientific ideas and assist, where possible, in the furtherance of these ideas. The official journal of the society will be *Nova Terrae*, published by Mr. M.K. Hanson and Mr. D.A. Jacques. In addition to the above, a quarterly *Bulletin* will be published. A group of three or more members may be formed into a Branch of the Association, with a Chairman at its head, being given a free hand in internal

affairs, but sending a monthly report to the Secretary. The subscription shall be 5/- per year, or 1/6d. per quarter. The Secretary will be Mr. Douglas W.F. Mayer, who shall be assisted by Mr. Herbert Warnes. N.B. A Treasurer has since been appointed. He is Mr. G.A. Airey, also of Leeds. The membership of the Association is open to all, see over....

FOR FULL DETAILS AND ALL PARTICULARS PLEASE CONSULT WITH

The Secretary,  
THE SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION,  
9, Brunswick Terrace,  
LEEDS 2.

...and every British fan is invited to join. On the day of the Conference, four fans joined and paid a year's subscription, namely, Messrs. E.F. Russell, A. Clarke, L.J. Johnson and W.H. Gillings. Numerous other fans have since joined and YOU are invited to join at once, by sending a Postal Order for 5/- or 1/6d (depending on whether you prefer to pay yearly or quarterly) to the Treasurer, 9 Brunswick Terrace, Leeds 2. A Membership form will be sent in return, and copies of *Nova Terrae* (monthly) and the *Bulletin* (quarterly) will be sent as soon as they are published. Other benefits will be added as the society develops. COME ON, JOIN NOW.

*The following announcement appeared in the January issue of Armchair Science:*

This month there will be held in the Theosophical Hall, Leeds, under the auspices of the Leeds Science Fiction League, a conference of British Science-Fiction fans and authors. Science Fiction is fiction developed round a scientific background: it suggests new theories and inventions, and by weaving an imaginative tale around them, indicates the possible outcome of such developments. The tales of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and *The Murchison Mystery* by Prof. A.M. Low, are examples of scientific fiction.

There exists today in Great Britain a growing number of enthusiastic readers of this type of literature, and the forthcoming conference is being arranged to develop their interests, and to arrange for co-operation in the formation of groups, and to discuss with authors and publishers the lines on which to proceed.

YOU CAN FORM YOUR OWN GROUP OR BRANCH OF THE

SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION WRITE NOW FOR FULL PARTICULARS, TO THE SECRETARY, SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION HEADQUARTERS, 9 Brunswick Terrace, LEEDS, 2.

## **Professor Low's Message**

The following message was received from Prof. A.M. Low, the noted British scientist, and author of the science-fiction stories *Space*, *The Murchison Mystery\**, etc.

---

*\* His novel Adrift in the Stratosphere (1937) had been serialized in the boys' SF magazine Scoops as Space in 1934. The other book's full title is Mars Breaks Through; or, The Great Murchison Mystery (1937). [Ed.]*

I consider that a meeting of this kind is of immense interest and that it has a very definite scientific value. In the academic world people are inclined to attach too much importance to what we call facts, They forget that on Tuesday morning the facts of Monday are often found to be lies.

In the past, medical men have stated that 60 m.p.h. would be fatal to the heart, mathematicians have proved the utter impossibility of heavier-than-air machines and in the world of medicine the changes that have taken place are even more sensational.

Much of the difficulty of invention might be avoided if there were less prejudice in the world and if people realized the importance of preparing for tomorrow when we who live today will be the poor ignorant savages of history.

Science-fiction is often inaccurate, but if writers will try to keep within the bounds of logic I think they are safe in saying that nothing is impossible which can be conceived by the mind of man. I doubt if even interplanetary travel is stranger than would aeroplanes have seemed to those who lived in ancient Greece; while it is only the accident of time which has prevented our having gramophone records of the Sermon on the Mount. The wonders of things to come must far exceed anything in History.

I wish every success to the meeting and only hope that the day may come when we will look back to these flights of fancy and find that they are even true enough to please the League of Nations. A good motto for such a Conference might be "What is good enough for today is much too bad for tomorrow".

## John Russell Fearn's Message

The following are excerpts from "Views on Science Fiction" by J.R. Fearn, which was written as a message to Conference delegates.

It is a thousand pities that we cannot have science fiction in this country, off our own bat, but maybe our esteemed friend Walter Gillings will lay the foundations of such a magazine with his proposed *Scientifiction*. It is up to us to support him with might and main.

There is not enough CHANCE taken in the project of launching a stf magazine. The public is there but the publishers are chary of attempting to exploit the field. That there is a public is testified to by the circulation of *Scoops* before its untimely demise, and the constant use of stf in *Passing Show*\* and in the form of various books. To the commendable efforts of Harris, Pragnell and Herbert all praise is due. These three are doing their utmost to popularize this type of literature in this country. Good luck to them.

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\* Another magazine of the time, not genre-specific. [Ed.]

American stf, in my experience, is easier to write than English and permits more sensational latitude. It would seem that one is permitted, in American stf, to roam through a scientific extravaganza without restriction. Sensation and new ideas go hand in hand and the combination of the two produces a vivid and colourful type of fiction that appeals to all who love the unusual.... As to my own stories, I have little to say. I write them – and I enjoy writing them, and I believe it is the type of yarn like "Mathematica" that appeals to me the best of all. Even so I believe that stf authors will get better and better because of the different styles needed for *Astounding* and *Thrilling Wonder*. The one balances the other: there is a union which was formerly missing.

Some readers have been bemoaning the fact that we have never quite got back to the 1930 level. This always seems to me rather an odd observation. Though 1930 was the supposed peak year of stf, has not *Astounding* brought to us, since its inception, far more modern and and vivid science fiction than ever existed before? Their thought-variant\* scheme has provided us with theories never before heard of or conjectured. For instance – Wandrei's "Colossus", Hamilton's "Eternal Cycle", Ziska's superb "Succubus" (which I shall always consider the greatest story I ever had the pleasure of reading). No, 1930 was good – for 1930. But now we are in 1937 and in seven years

we have gone a long way along the road.

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*\* A term used in Astounding for idea-centred stories as distinct from traditional pulp action-adventure. [Ed.]*

Science fiction today has definitely fallen into three groups – in America anyhow. First, the theoretical new theory side; second, the rip-roaring death defying thrills of space and time, and third, the quieter type of thoughtful science fiction, approaching more closely than any other the type we need in this country. I refer, of course, to *Amazing Stories*. Every time I pick up *Amazing Stories* it makes me weep to think that we cannot squeeze a similar magazine out of our own publishers.

In conclusion, may I thank the Leeds Science Fiction League for organizing this Conference, and wish you all immense prosperity in the coming year, complete with good science fiction, special rocket planes to bring them to you, together with a private time-space machine in your own back gardens.

**The Conference Motto:**

“What’s good enough for today is much too bad for tomorrow”

**A Correction:**

When reading *Nova Terrae* in preceding pages, please substitute *Novae Terrae*. Sorry Mr. Hanson – my error – H.W.

*Scans of this report were supplied by Andy Sawyer of the Science Fiction Foundation, to whom many thanks. The contents page indicates there should have been a further sheet to the publication containing pages 15 and 16. While the rear sheet could have come loose and fallen off at some point – not uncommon among old fanzines – the fact that both copies in the Foundation’s possession finish with page 14 suggests that these may not in fact exist.*

## 3. Other Reports

### Leeds, 3 January 1937

*These contain little not covered in the Official Souvenir Report, but that first convention was an event of sufficient historical importance that I feel all contemporary accounts should be included here.*

**Walter H. Gillings:**

#### NEW BODY TO BOOST SCIENCE FICTION

##### Fans In Conference At Leeds

An independent body to promote scientific fiction, with groups throughout the country, is expected to evolve from the first conference of British fantasy fans, held at Leeds on Sunday, January 3rd. Organizers were local Chapter of the Science Fiction League, organization of *Wonder Stories* readers started by Gernsback in 1934, which also has Chapters at Nuneaton, Glasgow, Belfast and Barnsley. Fans and authors in all parts of England were invited to attend, to discuss ways and means to improve their lot.

Though the idea was first received with enthusiasm on all sides, only six journeyed to Leeds for the meeting: E.J. Carnell, A.C. Clarke and W.H. Gillings from London; L.J. Johnson and E.F. Russell from Liverpool; M.K. Hanson from Nuneaton. Visitors were guests of Leeds SFL at their clubroom in Brunswick Terrace. Conference was held in Theosophical Hall and divided into two sessions.

##### Prof. Low's Interest

Henry Warnes, Director, Leeds SFL, presided, with Douglas Mayer (conference secretary), who read messages from prominent science fictionists applauding the meeting's objects. Prof. A.M. Low, editor, *Armchair Science*, wrote:

"I consider a meeting of this kind of immense interest and definite scientific value. Science fiction is often inaccurate, but if writers will try to keep within the bounds of logic I think they are safe in saying that nothing is impossible which can be conceived by the



mind of man. The wonders of things to come must far exceed anything in history. I wish success to the meeting and hope the day may come when we will look back to these flights of fancy and find they are true....”

### Fearn Confesses

John Russell Fearn, sending greetings from Brighton, regretted failure of chary publishers to realize the scope in science fiction; pointed to recent encroachment of fantasy in England as promising better days, and praised other British authors for their efforts in this direction. He confessed he found it easier to write for U.S. than for British market, since American style gave more scope for sensationalism. Festus Pragnell, from Southampton, sent a long message tracing the growth of fantasy from ancient fable and legend; emphasized that modern science fiction expressed spirit of the future.

### Mushroom Magazines

Morning session was devoted to talks by visiting fans of activities in their particular sphere. Walter H. Gillings, editor, *Scientifiction*, told of his efforts to persuade publishers to produce a fantasy magazine, reported failure of negotiations with Newnes, following similar experience with Odhams Press; but held out hope of success elsewhere. Fans, however, must not expect a British *Astounding Stories*. Science fiction had been so neglected that England would have to start at the beginning with simple themes.

Edward J. Carnell, English correspondent to U.S. fan magazines, showed how these were springing up like mushrooms all over America; said only three of world's 25 were printed [*i.e. typeset rather than mimeo etc.*]. Also referred to petty squabbles occurring between U.S. fan groups; warned British fans to avoid such bitter rivalry, and reported progress of new London branch of the British Interplanetary Society.

Arthur C. Clarke, ex-Taunton fan, also spoke of the work to establish the new branch, of which he is treasurer; said members were anxious to embark on practical research shortly. Maurice K. Hanson, co-editor, *Novae Terrae*, told a sad story of inactivity in Nuneaton, where apart from production of the official journal, members' interests were confined to borrowing books from the Chapter library.

### Wanted – A President

Afternoon was spent considering proposals made by Leeds SFL for a non-commercial organization to further science fiction in England and

stimulate co-operation between fans, authors and groups. It was decided that a body should be formed called The Science Fiction Association, without British designation, whose objects would be to encourage publishers to pay more attention to scientifiction and to stimulate public interest in scientific ideas. Intentions are to invite existing SFL Chapters to become branches of the new organization and to encourage formation of other groups throughout the country, which will be given a free hand in internal affairs. Suggestions that various functions be allotted to different groups were withdrawn following opposition by visiting fans, who proposed that Leeds should be central group and temporary headquarters. This was agreed.

Proposal that H.G. Wells be asked to become Association's President was abandoned after discussion. Other names put forward were A.M. Low, Aldous Huxley, W. Olaf Stapledon, John Beynon Harris. Suggestion was that remaining British authors be appointed Fellows after election of President. Another was that a prominent fan should be President. Vote was taken, but no decision arrived at, and it was finally agreed to leave the matter in abeyance until other groups were formed and Constitution of the new body drawn up.

#### Author Attacks Fans

Afterwards, the Liverpool delegates also addressed the conference. L.J. Johnson, secretary at BIS headquarters, related events since formation of the Society until recent resignation of President P.E. Cleator; also outlined present state of rocketry abroad. Eric F. Russell condemned the custom of fans to wait until U.S. magazines were available at remainder prices instead of buying current issues; urged his hearers to support agitation to stop sale of remainders, which were reason why Newnes would not publish a similar magazine. Required circulation was 30,000, whereas fans buying new copies of the three U.S. magazines was only 1,000. Telling of his efforts at authorship, Mr. Russell declared scientifiction was simplest of all mediums to write, since it offered free rein to the imagination, without regard for scientific accuracy. Fearn, he thought, was following the correct course by ignoring scientific facts, but was criticized because he lacked plausibility. [1]

#### **Maurice K. Hanson:**

With this issue *Novae Terrae* becomes the official organ of the Science Fiction Association... a direct outcome of the Science Fiction Conference.

*It had previously been the official organ of Chapter 22 of the Science Fiction League, the Nuneaton group. Besides Hanson its*

*most famous member was D.R. Smith, whose fannish career would long outlast its demise.*

Little of importance could be said about the business transacted at the first British Science Fiction Conference held in Leeds on January 3rd. this year, that has not already been admirably epitomized in the booklet compiled by the Leeds branch of the newly formed Science Fiction Association. Most readers will know of Prof. Low's motto and message, Daniel McPhail's encouraging words, John Russell Fearn's opinion that science fiction is better in 1936 than in 1930 and that he enjoys writing science fiction especially such stories as "Mathematica", Festus Pragnell's comprehensive message and H.G. Wells's succinct remarks.

Walter Gillings's account of the apparently unequal struggle he has waging been for science fiction in this country, Ted Carnell's account of the struggle of fandom in the U.S.A., Arthur Clarke's remarks on the finances of interplanetary societies in general and the London branch of the British Interplanetary Society in particular, the writer's remarks on the Nuneaton group and *Novae Terrae*, and in the afternoon Leslie Johnson's most detailed account of the development of the British Interplanetary Society, and Eric Russell's pleasant if provocative distinction between fan and reader – all these will probably be familiar to the reader.

The decisions embarked on with respect to the Science Fiction Association appear elsewhere in this issue though tribute should be paid to Mr. Meyer's indefatigable manner of proposal in the numerous factors dealt with.

There are, of course, numerous matters of minor importance: the not inappropriate notice festooning the walls of the Theosophical Hall wherein the Conference was held – "There is no religion higher than truth", the coming to light of such facts as remaindered science fiction magazines are shipped here as waste paper and that the British Interplanetary Society held its first meeting on a Friday 13th., the hour or so devoted to the art of the raconteur after the conference proper, the sombre aspect of Leeds at 6 a.m. on a Sunday morning – but these are, after all, of small import.

It would be hard to close, however, without reference to the achievement of the Leeds group in the establishment of their permanent headquarters which must be a scientific landmark of the country and without being grateful for their organization of the conference and their hospitality, etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. [2]

[1] *Scientifiction* #1 (January 1937, ed. Walter Gillings)

[2] *Novae Terrae* #10 (February 1937, ed. Maurice Hanson)

## 4. The Philadelphia Excursion 22 October 1936

*The Vril-Ya Bazaar and Fête was not the only event with a shaky claim to being the first science fiction convention, as Fred Patten explains:*

I wasn't even born until after the second Worldcon was held. But I've been doing a lot of reading in Forry Ackerman's fanzines of the 1930s for an article on the history of the LASFS (Los Angeles Science Fiction Society, started 1934), so I think I can offer some pretty knowledgeable comments on how SF conventions got started. The British fans should definitely get all the credit. We all know that fandom was very tiny during the 1930s, but fans today may not realize how much contact there was between British and American fan. There was a lot, especially among the fanzine publishers and letterhacks. Most of the most-active American fans of the mid-1930s seem to have regularly traded with British fanzine publishers. Ted Carnell, one of the leading British fans, wrote columns of British pro and fan news for more than one American fanzine. Well, all during 1936 the British fanzines and Carnell's columns in the American fanzines were full of news about the SF convention that they were planning for January 1937. A lot of it was wishful dreaming – how they hoped that H.G. Wells might attend, and so forth – but they talked about it constantly.

By contrast, the October 1936 convention in Philadelphia was apparently a spur-of-the-moment idea of Donald Wollheim's. The gathering itself had been set up in advance, but it was simply a get-together between New York and Philadelphia fans – more of a day's outing than anything else. The New York fans checked with the Philadelphia fans to make sure that October 22nd would be a convenient date to visit, and five of them made the trip. It's true that Moskowitz in *The Immortal Storm* says that this meeting came about because Wollheim got the idea of holding a fan convention. But, from reading the fanzine accounts written by the attendees themselves, I got the impression that it wasn't until they were already gathered in Milton Rothman's home in Philadelphia that Wollheim got the idea of calling their gathering a convention, and appointing Fred Pohl to be the Secretary and

send out press releases to all the fanzines about what a great convention they'd just had. The others went along with the idea because it seemed like a fun thing to do. More importantly, Wollheim proposed that they follow this up with a real convention as soon as possible. The New York fans took charge of this and it was the ISA\*-organized "Second Eastern Convention" in New York City in February 1937. It was at this second convention that Wollheim proposed that fans begin planning for a really big convention to be held simultaneously with the 1939 World's Fair. So you can draw a direct line from the October 1936 gathering at Rothman's home to the creation of the Worldcon. Yet that October 1936 gathering didn't take place until American fans had been smothered for months in news about the big SF convention that was going to take place in England in January 1937. So I certainly think that British fans deserve credit for establishing the atmosphere in which Wollheim's impromptu declaration of a small fannish outing as a convention was treated seriously.

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\* *International Scientific Association, an early SF group or club operating mainly through correspondence. [Ed.]*

On the other hand, Wollheim certainly deserves the credit for following through with a second and other conventions, including the Worldcon (even if, due to the fan politics of the day, he didn't end up in charge of it). If he hadn't, it would be a joke to call that October 1936 gathering a convention. But because of Wollheim's follow-up work, it's impossible to just dismiss the claim – although, by rights, the October 1936 gathering should be considered as just the initial planning session for the real first American SF convention. (Yes, attendance at the October 1936 Philadelphia gathering was limited to those listed in *The Immortal Storm*, plus John Baltadonis. Fred Pohl has/had a group photograph that was taken of the whole "convention".) [1]

*Fred Patten was a member of LASFS, the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. Dave Kyle, one of the New Yorkers who took part in that visit to a Philadelphia fan's home in 1936, had this to say about it later:*

There is much merit to the claim that Leeds on January 3, 1937, and not Philadelphia in the autumn of 1936, was the site of the first science fiction convention, because the Philadelphia convention started as an intercity visit by New York City fans, whereas the Leeds event had been planned and

advertised for all of Britain. [2]

[1] *File 770* #50 (December 1984, ed. Mike  
Glyer)

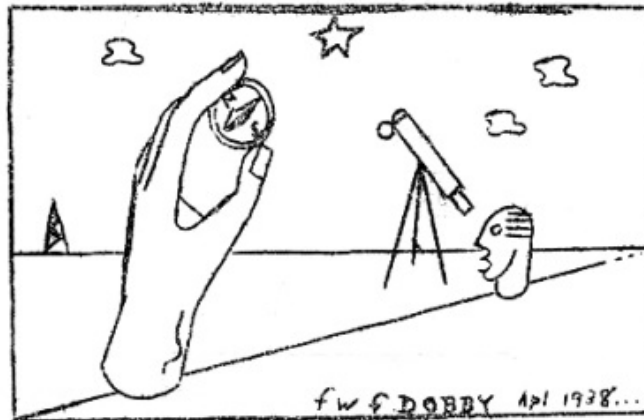
[2] *Mimosa* #14 (August 1993, ed. Richard  
and Nicki Lynch)

# 1938

## SCIENCE-FICTION ASSOCIATION

### SECOND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & CONVENTION

OFFICIAL PROGRAMME & AGENDA



CONVENTION OFFICIALS.

Chairman.

Mr. Kenneth G. Chapman.

M.C.

Mr. Edward J. Carnell.

Stewards.

Messrs. S.L. Birchby, Arthur C. Clarke, Leslie Smith & E.C. Williams.

*The Second Convention Programme Book (1938)*



## 5. The Second Convention London, 10 April 1938

The Second Convention (it was never referred to at the time by any other name) was held in the Ancient Order of Druid's Memorial Hall on London's Lamb's Conduit Street, on April 10th, 1938. This was about 150 yards from 88 Gray's Inn Road aka "The Flat", later to be the celebrated abode of Arthur C. Clarke and Bill Temple – who would take up residence there in June – and Maurice K. Hanson.

### **Known Attendees:**

- Ted Carnell
- Ken G. Chapman
- Arthur C. Clarke
- Frank Dobby
- I.O. Evans
- John Russell Fearn (GoH)
- Vic Gillard
- Walter Gillings
- Albert Griffiths
- Maurice K. Hanson
- John Beynon Harris
- Benson Herbert
- Ron Holmes
- Arthur Janser
- Les Johnson
- E.G. Lane
- Professor A.M. Low
- Doug Mayer
- Dave McIlwain
- Leslie Smith
- Bill Temple
- Fred Tozer
- Harry Turner

- Bert Warnes
- Eric Williams

There were 43 people present, but these are the only names we can be sure of. Fred Tozer was a school friend of Harry Turner's from Manchester.

Many years later, Ron Holmes recalled:

“Druids Hall... had a fine set-piece of a stone altar and lights which could simulate the dawn. The main feature was a lecture by Prof. A.M. Low. However, my most vivid memory was arriving at Euston with Dave McIlwain (Charles Eric Maine) where we were to meet Sam Youd\* (John Christopher) for the first time, where the crowd was so dense that Dave had to wave over his head the symbol of recognition – a copy of *Weird Tales* with a nude Brundage cover.” [1]

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*\* A slip of the memory. In response to THEN, Sam Youd wrote to Rob Hansen: “I was never a visitor to the Flat – in mid-teens I couldn't afford the fare from Hampshire to London. My first trip was a special one, to the '39 convention, and I had to leave before the end to catch my train back.” [Ed.]*

Below is the Programme Booklet or, to give it its actual title, “The Science Fiction Association Second Annual General Meeting & Convention Official Programme & Agenda”. This was a four-page booklet that did what it says in that overlong name. The cover artist was Frank Dobby of Leeds SFA. (Scan of original publication courtesy of Greg Pickersgill.)

## **MESSAGE OF GREETING.**

SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION.  
(LONDON BRANCH).  
LAMB'S CONDUIT STREET  
LONDON, W.C.1  
April, 10th, 1938.

Friends,

Having been honoured with the venue of the 1938 Convention of the Science Fiction Association, the London Branch Officials and Members wish to signally express their sincerest hopes that every one of our visitors will spend a thoroughly enjoyable Convention Day in this city.

We trust that we shall have the opportunity of extending to everyone of

you, our sincere hospitality and also that you will all be sufficiently well pleased with our efforts, to come again to some later event when the occasion should arise.

We wish to set down our heartiest greetings to everyone, be you visitors, friends or members – authors, enthusiasts or merely casual readers of science fiction, and we ask you to remember that it is our most earnest wish that you shall enjoy an entirely happy and entertaining time here today.

GOOD LUCK, AND GOOD SCIENCE FICTION!

From the SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION.

(London Branch).

## **“FROM OVER THE POND”**

“Undoubtedly the fans in England are now the most ardent in the world, not excepting even America. – With all best wishes to the Science Fiction Association” – Raymond A. Palmer, of *Amazing Stories*.

“The publishers of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, the editorial staff, and myself, join in extending our best wishes for the success of your forthcoming Second Convention.” – Leo Margulies, Managing Editor of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*.

“I send my congratulations.” – John D. Clark, Ph.D.

“I wish you every bit of success.” – Oliver Saari.

“I wish you would deliver my message to the forthcoming assembly.” – John Victor Peterson.

## **“PROGRAMME AND AGENDA”**

Afternoon Session

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

OPENING ADDRESS. Delivered by the Chairman.

THE REPORTS.

The Executive Committee’s Report. Presented by the Executive Secretary.

The Financial Report. Presented by the Honorary Treasurer.

The Report on *Novae Terrae*. Presented by the Editor.

The Library Report. Presented by the Librarian.

The Leeds Branch Report. Presented by the Leeds Branch Chairman.

The London Branch Report. Presented by the London Branch Chairman.

THE CONSTITUTION. Proposed and explained, on the Council’s

behalf, by the Council Chairman.

THE BALLOT FOR THE PRESIDENT. The Nominations dealt with by the Executive Secretary.

THE ASSOCIATION EMBLEM. The various proposals, submitted for your selection by the Executive Sec'y.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING CONCLUDED.

Evening Session.

THE CONVENTION.

OPENING ADDRESS. Delivered by the Chairman.

THE EVENING'S SPEAKERS.

Mr. LESLIE J. JOHNSON. "Search For Tomorrow".

Mr. BENSON HERBERT.

Mr. JOHN RUSSELL FEARN.

Mr. I.O. EVANS. "Science Fiction and Science Progress".

Professor A.M. LOW.

Mr. WALTER H. GILLINGS.

THE EXECUTIVE HEADQUARTERS ALTERATION. Explained by the Executive Secretary.

THE CONVENTION CONCLUDED.

Please note that the evening's speakers may not speak in the above order.

"I believe the Association one day will be a really great 'affair'." "I am proud of my S.F.A. membership –" – Professor A.M. Low.

"I sincerely trust that the Convention will be a big success." – Mr. Maurice G. Hugli.

"Best Wishes to the continued success of the Science Fiction Association." – Mr. K.J. Thorn, Atlas Publishing & Distr. Co. Ltd.

"I am greatly looking forward to the occasion." – Mr. I.O. Evans.

"I shall be most pleased to attend this gathering –" – Mr. George A.

Final.

"Will you be good enough to convey to those present, my kindest regards, and my hope that their meeting will be in every way successful?" – Mr. Eric Frank Russell.

"I am very disappointed I can't be there –" – Mr. Charles F. Hall.

"I am looking forward eagerly to the Convention!" – Leslie J. Johnson.

"All my good wishes come to you –" – Mr. W.P. Cockcroft.

“I shall be with you in spirit if not, unfortunately, in the flesh.” – Mr. Sam Youd.

“An historical day in the annals of the S.F.A.” – Mr. Eric C. Williams.

“I wish you every success –” – Mr. E.G. Lane.

“Here’s my best wishes for the meeting, and I sincerely hope that it goes over ‘big’.” – Mr. J.I. Stephenson.

“My best wishes for the future of the S.F.A. are sent to all.” – Mr. Norman T. Barrett.

etc., etc., etc.

[1] *NESFiG Newsletter #9* (April 1976, ed. Alan Isaacson and Brian Rouse)

## 6. Personality Parade London, 10 April 1938

### **Maurice K. Hanson:**

We are pleased to announce that this event, held in London on April 10th last, was an unparalleled success, being attended by 43 delegates including Prof. A.M. Low, John Russell Fearn, Benson Herbert, Walter H. Gillings, I.O. Evans, John Beynon Harris, William F. Temple, Leslie J. Johnson, etc. A special official souvenir report of the Convention will be issued during May, Price 6d. Applications should be made to Headquarters as soon as possible. In brief, the following is a report of the Proceedings:

“The afternoon session was attended by members only being the Association’s Annual General Meeting. The Chairman called for reports from various officials including the Treasury Report, which disclosed a Balance in Hand of £1.14.6d [*ie. £1.73, or about £150 in today’s money*]. Next followed a discussion on the Constitution, and after some minor alterations the constitution as proposed by the Council was adopted by the meeting. Next came the ballot for the President. The evening session, Convention proper, consisted of addresses by Leslie J. Johnson, Professor A.M. Low, Benson Herbert, I.O. Evans, John Russell Fearn, Walter H. Gillings and Douglas Meyer, all of which will be fully reported in the official souvenir report. The Convention was followed by a social supper when the London Branch members entertained delegates.”

### **Ted Carnell:**

A short report of the Convention [*appears above*], so herewith are some of the highlights not recorded. To those of you who were not present we tender our regrets, and trust that distance being no object, we shall see you next year.

First pleasant surprise came when Ken Chapman, Les Johnson and I arrived at noon (by the Sun) in the form of a cable from our Los Angeles friends sending good wishes and okaying the Constitution. This seemed to set us right for the day. Shortly after lunch the eight Leeds fellows arrived

followed by Harry Turner and friend Tozer from Manchester. It was then a continual procession of greetings and reunions.

It was my first meeting with both *Novae Terrae* artists, and although I endeavoured a cover war similar to Brown v. Wesso, I failed owing to strong friendship ties between them. Harry Turner brought some great drawings along, topping his last *NT* cover, but the look in Frank Dobby's glassy eye at evening's close spelt still greater pics from Leeds.

The arrival of Professor A.M. Low, John Russell Fearn, Benson Herbert, John Beynon Harris and Walt Gillings in the evening brought a new note to the growing friendly spirit.....and here's where I take all my hats off to Mr. Fearn. Criticism of his stories both here and abroad have created a false impression of him, but when he arose and delivered his speech to the evening gathering I altered my previous opinions. John is a personality unto himself, and his speech was the surprise of the day. He gave a concentrated news-digest gleaned from his contacts with Julius Schwartz, Ray Palmer and others in U.S.A., and surprised with the statement that *Amazing* will shortly go monthly. Viva! Directly answering his many critics, he mentioned that he writes under various pseudonyms as well, AND THESE STORIES ARE WELL LIKED. "Which goes to prove" he said, "that it's the name that gets the slating and not the story." And he's right too. Strangely enough though, and ((this)) I forgot to point out to John, his stories under the pseudonyms I know he writes under, are far better than those written under his own name. This doesn't only apply to John as I found several US authors' works appear better when written under another name.

Unfortunately nothing could prevail upon John Beynon Harris to address the gathering, he being of a retiring nature, but I noticed that he and Will Temple were comparing notes during the supper, and assume that something startling may come from Will in the near future.

Wally Gillings was continuously besieged by various people – were they trying to sell mss or were they showering congratulations on *Tales of Wonder*? I noted that Arthur Janser of the BIS was hurriedly running through his many synopses – and we had to tear him away by force. Another conference took place between Wally, Les Johnson, Ken and I concerning Wally's *Scientifiction*, but nothing came of it. At the moment tentative plans are the *STF* will be merged with the new printed *Tomorrow* by Doug Mayer. You may gather by this that Wally finds it impossible to continue his fine mag now that *ToW* is quarterly.

A point worth noting was that when fixing arrangements for the Convention we impressed upon Bob the Barman that there would be no drunks in the party – there wasn't – but Bob himself was the nearest!

Professor A.M. Low's speech was outstanding and his presence too, and I don't think that we could have anyone better as President of the SFA. I know from a private conversation with the Prof. that he is extremely delighted to be the apex of the SFA.

Doug Mayer also gave us a big surprise with a fine oratorical display. He called it "Psychology" but I fancy it was a British slant upon America's Michelism. Benson Herbert also found great favour with everyone and it was fine to have him with us this year.

One surprise we had planned unfortunately fell short. We had hoped to have Mervyn Evans, recently of Denver, Colorado, with us. Mervyn, who is a close friend of Olon Wiggins of Denver, has been living in this country for some months, but we didn't receive his address in time for him to make arrangements to get to London on the Sunday.

My greatest enjoyment was in the pleasure evident upon the faces of our younger members and friends present, while listening to the "big shots". It was well worth all the trouble in making the necessary arrangements to see the thrills they derived from the Convention.

Let's make it a bigger one next year. [1]

[1] *Novae Terrae* #28 (April 1938, ed. Maurice Hanson)



# **7. The Official Report London, 10 April 1938**

## **The Science Fiction Association**

### **SECOND CONVENTION AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

held in the A.O.D. Memorial Hall, Lamb's Conduit Street, London W.C.1. on  
April 10th, 1938

Convention Chairman: Ken G. Chapman

Master of Ceremonies: E.J. Carnell

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Cover Design by H.E. Turner

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I.O. Evans, Walter H. Gillings

John Russell Fearn

The Memory of a Supper

Messages From Overseas

Impressions

Compiled by:

Maurice K. Hanson, in collaboration with Ken G. Chapman and Eric C.

Williams

### **Explanatory**

Within a few pages an attempt has been made to capture the spirit that pervaded the second conference of British science-fiction readers and with the reagent of recorded speeches to polymerize it into a plastic form which might be moulded into a permanent record.

The formal business of the afternoon session which constituted the

annual general meeting of the Science Fiction Association has been briefly mentioned. A precis of the speeches of the majority of the evening's speakers has been included. This condensation can scarcely do the originals justice, but the attempt has been made to convey their essence. One speech, perhaps the one of greatest general interest to readers, has been included in full, and comprehensive extracts given from another, of scarcely lesser interest.

There has been included as well an impression written with a pen dipped in alcohol, apparently, of the informal supper held after the evening session, which many enjoyed, as well as any other part of the proceedings. Extracts from messages from enthusiasts, writers and publishers, to the Convention also appear, and there has just been room for a few of the impressions that the gathering made upon individual conveners.

Little more can be done but hope that the reader will find the result edifying, and reflect upon the next stage of the progress of the S.F.A. from a theosophical hall in Leeds to the shadow of Stonehenge in Bloomsbury.

*This is a reference to the large papier-mâché replica that was a centrepiece of Druid's Hall.*

## **Report of the Afternoon Session**

After the various S.F.A. visitors had arrived and introductions had been effected, the whole assembly adjourned to the room where the meeting was to be held. This was the "temple" of the local branch of the Ancient Order of Druids, suitably disguised with dim lights and the conveners were appreciably impressed by the bizarre surroundings. The Chairman and the M.C. took the table facing the assembly, and the meeting was declared open.

The Chairman, Mr. K.G. Chapman, in his opening speech welcomed the many visitors and asked their indulgence for the first session of the Convention in which the business of the Annual General Meeting of the S.F.A. had to be carried out. This was commenced with the Secretarial report of the Association, given by Mr. D.W.F. Mayer.

It took the form of a chronological table of the various steps taken in the building up of the organization from the first British Convention on January 3rd 1937, and concluded with mention of the change of Headquarters from Leeds to London. The S.F.A. was portrayed as an ever-spreading network of fans linked together in growing harmony, and confidence was expressed in the future career of the Association.

*While it's understandable that this was an image they wanted to project, things in Leeds had been anything but harmonious over the previous nine months. As described in Then, the formation of the SFA had led to a split in the group that precipitated the HQ moving to London.*

Mr. E.J. Carnell, who was elected Treasurer some few months before the Convention took place, read a report on the financial position of the S.F.A. and disclosed a pleasantly solvent position. The Library Report from Mr. E.C. Williams followed, which dealt with the slow but steady way the Library was being built up largely with the aid of members in Leeds and London. At that date more than a hundred books had been accumulated and the Library Fund showed a balance in hand of 10/-. [*Ten shillings, or fifty pence – around £44 in today's money.*]

Mr. Warnes, when called upon as Chairman of the Leeds Branch of the Association to give a report of the activities of that Branch, admirably side-stepped the responsibility by saying that better reports than he could deliver were printed each month in *Novae Terrae*. However, he mentioned the interesting and profound debates that were held each month; and dwelt for a few minutes upon the other side of their Branch activities – that connected with the producing of *Tomorrow*, *Amateur Science Stories* etc.

Mr. Chapman, Chairman of the London branch, in his report pointed out the increasing spheres of activity of this Branch and stated that the change in Headquarters of the Association would not mean any slackening of the interest in it that had characterized the Leeds control. He concluded with the earnest wish that all provincial members would some day find their way to a London Branch meeting.

After a few minutes break, the session was resumed with the matter of the Constitution.

Copies of the proposed Constitution were distributed. and the proposed form was discussed clause by clause. After some discussion then and a certain amount of amendment, the matter was settled to the satisfaction of the assembly and work has now been put in hand on the production of copies of the finalized form which will be circulated to all S.F.A. members in due course.

The subject of an Association emblem was brought up by Mr. Mayer and he exhibited several designs already submitted, though no definite decision on the subject was arrived at.

The final consideration for the afternoon session was the ballot for President of the Association. The nominations were John Russell Fearn, Walter Gillings, John Beynon Harris, and Professor A.M. Low. Each member recorded his vote in a secret ballot, resulting in the election of Professor A.M. Low.

The afternoon session was then adjourned.

## **Evening Session**

### **Professor A.M. Low**

was the first speaker in the evening session, and he expressed first of all his interest in scientific fiction as an amateur author and remarked that he hoped to learn a lot from the professional authors present. He further remarked upon the honour he felt at being invited to the Convention, and would, he said, gladly have acted as door-keeper.

In a witty and absorbing speech he elaborated some of the reasons for his interest in science-fiction; in it he saw a valuable instrument for eliminating stupidity and prejudice and he recalled in this connection an occasion when before the war the newspapers announced that he had made television possible he had received dozens of letters telling him not to be ridiculous! Science-fiction prepared the mind for the unexpected so that it could be appreciated that, for instance, it was only an accident of time that we had no gramophone record of the Sermon on the Mount. Furthermore it did valuable work in depicting the horrors of future warfare, though he expressed the interesting sidelight that war is often a stimulant to human progress in that it drives man to the maximum of his powers.

Upon completion of his speech Professor Low received a great ovation.

### **Leslie J. Johnson**

gave a topical and interesting discourse of Man's everlasting search for something better in life, his continual search for tomorrow. In this epoch Mr. Johnson elaborated the ideas that had formed the basis of his story "Seekers of Tomorrow" which, as is well known, met with wide acclaim. The speech is published verbatim in the current issue of, appropriately enough, *Tomorrow*, and it would be ungrateful to give here extracts which may be much better appreciated in their original full context.

### **I.O. Evans**

discussed the evolution of science-fiction. He mentioned the early

interplanetary fantasies of Lucian and dwelt at some length upon the remarkable works of Francis and Roger Bacon; one of the inventions the latter claimed to have made, he stated, was a device a few inches long with which men could easily escape from any prison. This seemed to indicate researches in the 4th dimension, though it appears it didn't enable Bacon himself to avoid imprisonment in his later life.

Mr. Evans continued with his appreciation of the part played by the work of Poe, Verne and Wells in the history of science-fiction and concluded with a plea for authors to pay more attention to sociological elements in stories. Far too often stories contained characters, of planets and times different from our own, who acted in all ways as we do. You would not expect to find Venerians wearing a bathing costume at all, much less the conventional terrestrial kind that most authors would dress them in without hesitation. Women, too, he considered had been neglected a rightful place in science-fiction. (Professor Low endorsed this idea by remarking that he had no doubt whatever that hundreds of years hence men would look at a lump of jelly, bald, and with inches-thick glasses, and say to each other "Isn't she lovely?" – Laughter!)

### **Walter H. Gillings**

traced very fully the experiences he had met with in trying to persuade various publishers to consider the idea of a British science-fiction magazine. He described how, after pestering numerous publishers with dummy copies of magazines, authors' manuscripts, etc., he had in January 1935 persuaded G. Newnes Ltd. to consider the subject in detail. After he and several British authors, however, had spent much time and money in discussing and solving various problems with Newnes's representative, the scheme had collapsed in December 1936. Further liberal expenditure of time and energy did finally result in the first issue of *Tales of Wonder*, the success of which everyone knows. Mr. Gillings also made interesting mention of an organization for science-fiction enthusiasts that he had initiated as far back as 1929 with the co-operation of Leslie Johnson – the Science-Literary Circle, which had a successful career, being addressed on one occasion by the British author J.M. Walsh.

*Over the years Gillings made several erroneous statements about his earliest days as a fan, but it's startling to see he was getting this stuff wrong so soon after the events occurred. He and Len Kippin*

*started the Ilford Science Literary Circle – the UK’s first SF group – in October 1930. This in turn inspired Les Johnson to start the Universal Science Circle in Liverpool. However, these remained strictly local groups and were not part of a larger organization. Britain would not get a truly national association until the formation of the SFA in January 1937. J.M. Walsh addressed the Ilford group on 20th July 1931, a meeting reported in The Ilford Recorder.*

### **Douglas W.F. Mayer**

in a very forceful speech drew attention to the conception now being discussed amongst fans of science-fiction as a sociological benefactor. He contended that science-fiction for science-fiction’s sake was a very poor motto and a rather useless idea. Rather, he considered, fans should unite to develop the very real force of science-fiction as a world-enlightenment movement, to point out the advantages of a social system in which the new knowledge of science was devoted to the happiness of all.

### **Benson Herbert** (verbatim speech)

Firstly, I would like to express my great enthusiasm for the results which the S.F.A. and other similar associations have accomplished in a comparatively short time.

Men of all ages and countries have written forms of science-fiction, but popular science-fiction on a large scale is purely a product of the 20th Century. Like all of you, I have read countless stories which have sullied the name of science-fiction, I have been disheartened by them. Because of them I have sometimes given up science-fiction in despair for months at a time. Then I come across a genuine specimen of the type and suddenly I feel the same old thrill which I experienced when a schoolboy on turning over the pages of the Meccano Mag I was first introduced to stories of the future. All fans have felt this thrill, the feeling that we are standing on the brink of a new era in human development. Science-fiction has given us a new faculty, it has brought to our attention the vast unexplored depths existing within our own minds. I believe that science-fiction together with other experimental forms of literature is a revolutionary movement symptomatic of the age. The thoughts that motivate writers seem to proceed in cycles. Interest alternately widens and narrows. The metaphysicals of the 17th century reacted against the established modes of the previous age; restlessly they sought out new

paths in science and in other branches of thought.

Similarly in the 19th century, the romantics reacted against the established commonplaces of the “age of reason”; and now the symbolists, the surrealists, and we ourselves are reacting against the habits of thought of the Victorians, in so far as they judged the world to be ruled by the laws of ballistics and common-sense. I think the restless analytical spirit of the 20th century has much in common with that of the metaphysicals. “The new Philosophy calls all in doubt” wrote Donne in 1611. We can repeat the same words with much greater cause for cynicism when we remember how hardly a decade passes now without some startling revolution in theoretical science. Science-fictioneers in particular take great delight in calling even Einstein in doubt, and in the mountains of published magazines we have enough theories to construct several hundred entirely distinct universes!

From the beginning the staple diet of science-fiction fans has been tales of the future. Why is this? I fancy the answer will bring to light an instinct which perhaps has not yet been fully recognized. We enjoy more leisure than men of a previous age, more time in which to think of the nature of time itself, the most fascinating problem which the universe has given us to solve. Personally I have always been tormented by this puzzle. Time will not let me alone. I cannot grasp it though I realize my whole being is bound up with it. I’m certain that I’m normal in this respect because of the popularity of time-travel tales and the endless discussions about time in the readers departments of the magazines. I think it is good for authors to try and understand the workings of this time-defeating instinct, if they wish to make profit from it in their stories. I welcome anything which helps me to defeat time. J.W. Dunne’s theory of the Serial Universe helps me to do this, so does good swing music with its careful avoidance of natural rhythm. But neither of these help me so much as science-fiction. A good writer can bridge a gap of a thousand years with a few deft words; our instinct is thus satisfied, we have conquered time, our imagination for a moment is freed from its lifetime burden; we return to the world refreshed but the effect is far more than one of mere escape; if it were that and no more very few of us would have troubled to attend this meeting.

When we lay down this hypothetical story we see the world with new eyes. For a while, perhaps, being conscious of time at two widely-separated points, we see objects as they really are, extending into the past and the future. Instead of a meagre and deceptive cross-section we observe the world

as a four-dimensional whole. It needs an imaginative effort and nothing can bring it about so effectively as imaginative fiction.

This restless urge towards the future, this instinct to which science-fiction appeals I propose to call by the concise German word *Zukunftsstreben*. *Zukunftsstreben* is the motive of 20th century life. It has invaded our books, our cinemas, our architecture, our social life, even our politics. It has arisen through our intelligence waking up to new wonders of science, and as intelligence is likely to go on expanding I think the instinct will remain with us. Therefore I do not fear that science-fiction is a passing craze. In other words there's a future for the story of the future.

Is any one type of story better than another? I reckon not. Any story which captures the imagination and appeals to the *Zukunftsstreben* is good science-fiction. It is wrong to make a rigid distinction between good art and fiction for the masses. All good fiction should have a wide appeal. Any copy of *Astounding Stories* contains one story at least as good as the early, cruder, efforts of Wells. Why then, may one ask, has Wells found a permanent form for his work while other writers have to be content with pulps? Simply because Wells made his name in the days when few writers were competing in that style. Now the field is full of new writers all clamouring to be heard. The mere mass of modern output makes the existence of the pulp mag imperative.

Cheapness in itself has nothing to do with merit. Cheapness and mass production are no more than further signs of the age. Shakespeare himself would have said that the best art should have the widest appeal, should be popular, and therefore cheap. The radio brings the cheapest possible entertainment to every home but no one would condemn it for that reason alone. An author is a fool if he despises the popular magazine. "The purpose of a writer is to be read", said Johnson – and to have a story marked 1/9 on every bookstall is better than having it marked 8/6 if it is hidden away on the shelves of the town library. Even Wells has allowed his *The Shape of Things to Come* to appear in two volumes of a 6d series.

How would I define a bad science fiction story? Apart from questions of style, I would point to bad science as the worst fault. Be as imaginative as you please but don't run counter to established facts. Give us fantasy not falsity. Theories can be thrown to the winds, but facts are sure things. I have no objection to that much-maligned force-ray so frequently used in fantasy magazines, even if it acts through the 11th dimension and turns people into



stone; but I sigh with despair when a writer talks of the difficulty of walking on Neptune because it is sixteen times as heavy as the earth, which is rubbish since gravity on Neptune is just three-quarters that on earth; or when he confuses velocity and acceleration.

Is there a higher proportion of bad stories being published now than in the good old days? I think not. Firstly, the author has less excuse now than ever before for ignorance of scientific facts and principles, if only because of the numerous scientific articles in the magazines. Secondly it is growing increasingly difficult to hoodwink the reader by stringing together a number of pseudo-scientific phrases and calling the result a story. Authors are relying more and more upon the appeal of action and character. All this is to the good. The most effective story is one which strikes a balance between fantasy, action, and character. In the old days a good, scientific idea was enough to make a story. Now we are less liable to be thrilled by fantasy on its own account. Science-fiction is leaving its childhood behind. Consequently authors are compelled to write better and shift the balance somewhat from the science to the fiction. While we have such writers as Thomas Calvert McClary and Arthur J. Burks we need not fear that science-fiction will fall into disrepute.

I defined Zukunftsstreben as a sign of increasing intelligence. Of course, the Zukunftsstreben instinct is more fully developed in the States than in this England. The inference is obvious. It is the duty of this Association to develop Zukunftsstreben in this country to the level it has reached in America, in other words to educate the masses out of the lethargy which is the English heritage. We are the goad which must drive the British cow to wider pastures. In this I am certain we shall succeed.

**John Russell Fearn** (extracts from his speech)

Since I was not present at the last Convention in Leeds I've no means of knowing whether this one is an advancement or not. Being in the capital of the world it ought to be – and those fans and enthusiasts who have not turned up can never any longer convince us of their real love of scientific progress.

As to myself I see no particular reason why I should be made the guest of honour at this meeting. I can only assume it is because I've told more lies in print than anyone else. Bernard Shaw has said that the real test of a writer is his ability to tell untruths convincingly. By this I don't mean to imply that science-fiction is all untruths – basically, that is the exact opposite of its fundamentals – but story writing in any form is the trick of telling lies so well

that an Editor believes them. Prolificity of output depends, of course, on how much time one has to write. For my own part I do nothing else except write yarns – save of course for the time I spend in cinemas, writing letters, making amateur films of Blackpool, being secretary-chairman to a writer's circle and duplicating all my work in new stories under a different name. Otherwise, my time is pretty much my own.

I've been asked numberless times to tell my critics what I think of them. I haven't done so for one very good reason – they're not worth it! Here and there a really accurate criticism comes up and I read it with interest, but the blah-blah of dozens of fans is so much drivel. Just the same, I like it to go on, because so long as there's a row about me – good or bad – I'm being noticed. When nobody says anything I shall start to really worry.

I do admit that the science in some of my yarns has been haywire, particularly "The Blue Infinity", which got out by mistake more than by design. But remember I've never been trained as a scientist. I started off in the cotton trade and didn't know an atom from a football. All I've done I've learned for myself and the parts that went screwy were through actual lack of knowledge only saved, I presume, by story interest. One writer said recently that the Fearn of 1933 is not the Fearn of 1937; the methods are so improved. I only hope he's right. All the same, you critics, the editors can't all be wrong. *Amazing*, *Astounding*, and *Thrilling Wonder* take my work almost without rejection so who is wrong? The Editors, the author, or the critics. I'm trying my best and with that I'm satisfied. And since trying my best fills my bank with honest dollars I don't care....

The sorest point of criticism seems to be "Mathematica" or rather, as some would have it, "The Voyage of the Adding Machine". If it was so screwy I ask the critic who makes the assertion to write 28,000 words disproving what I said. He won't manage it, because, no matter how strange it appeared, it was the best and most logical story I ever wrote. As a matter of fact a headmaster in a Surrey school wrote saying he was going to use it to express in words, instead of figures, the basic principles of mathematics.

All literature, even as all life, must evolve. Present day literature is at saturation point. The demands of film and radio, and shortly television, have produced more than reason can provide. In 1926 science-fiction first appeared in a regular form. In those dozen years it's had its ups and downs but it has definitely survived; that very survival through the worst stages of its career proves that it will go on to greater strengths in the future. We have

the added advantage that science-fiction is backed up by a world increasing science around us. Television will give it another upheav; three dimensional colour films will do it again, and in two years these will be with us to stay... Films – and I see every one that comes along – are getting increasingly poor. The old pivots of love, crime, musicals are falling to pieces, worn to shreds. The horror film, the first babbling effort to transmit science-fiction, has been banned throughout the U.S.A. and Britain, and rightly, for from it has emerged the more sensible type of science-fiction in the form of *Things to Come*, *Night Key*, *Man Who Made Diamonds*, *King Solomon's Mines*; and though you may not see it my way, Walt Disney has paved the way to pure fantasy with his *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Now other producers are taking his cue and using fantasy for their ends. *Lost Horizon* was a gem in a wilderness, and others like that are coming. The one flaw that science-fiction film producers still have to master is the old elementary one of the “man who conquered the world” theme. They always think a guy must rule the world if he's a scientist; *Night Key* showed that a scientist can have humanity and not seek these things. A year ago a *Night Key* or *Lost Horizon* would have been unknown; that they are here now is proof of the growth of science-fiction knowledge.

Then again, because of this, writers are bound to see for themselves in time the vast fields of open conquest there are in fantasy, idealism and science. The present upheaval of risqué dramas, crazy comedies, sex triangles and other bunk, will dry themselves up. There remains only one field open for new exploration – fantasy! And the next five years in literature and films will see enormous developments in this field on both sides of the Atlantic. Exactly how I haven't the time to tell, but it will certainly come about. At present the old ideas, the primary ideas that started the great science-fiction racket of today, are the only things producers are going on. Later they'll look further, and when they do science-fiction will be as well acknowledged, if not more so, than all the sex-drivel ever written!

*At this point in the souvenir booklet Bill Temple's humorous “The Diary of a Supper” appeared, correctly titled though wrongly listed as “The Memory of a Supper” in the contents list reproduced above. This has been omitted here since it can be found in Temple at the Bar, the collection of his fanwriting available both for free download and in a printed edition from Ansible Editions.*

## Messages from Overseas

On the subject of the Convention Dr. John D. Clark wrote from Philadelphia:

“I send my congratulations. Science-fiction is new, but it will, I think, grow in time to an important branch of literature. Not important, perhaps, in the educational sense – for education cannot be sugar-coated – but important in the opportunities it will give to imaginative writers, and in the enjoyment which it will, I hope, give to imaginative readers.”

Leo Margulies, editor director of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, wrote:

“The publishers of *T.W.S.*, the editorial staff and myself join in extending our best wishes for the success of your Convention. I have been following with great interest the work of your English writers – John Russell Fearn, Eric Frank Russell, Polton Cross, P.A. Cleator and Benson Herbert. Some day I would like to meet them all personally instead of just across the Editorial desk. I have yet to see a group so responsive to the activities of a foreign magazine, so vitally concerned about its policies, as are the members of the S.F.A.”

Raymond A. Palmer, now editor of *Amazing Stories*, wrote from Chicago:

“I am very much interested in the activities of your Association and would be very pleased to keep in touch with your group. Undoubtedly the fans in England are now the most ardent in the world, not excepting even America.”

Astronaut Dr. Otto Steinitz wrote from Berlin:

“I beg you to give your members my best wishes, and say that I am always interested in all questions of science-fiction, especially the technical.”

Oliver Saari wrote from Minneapolis:

“I wish you every bit of success with your Convention. I should like nothing better than being present in person, but there is a small matter of several thousand miles and the fact that rocket transports haven’t yet been invented. So I’ll just say ‘hello’ from far off Minnesota and let it go at that.”

The author of “Martyrs Don’t Mind Dying” etc., John Victor Peterson, wrote from New England:

“Have you ever stopped to realize that in us, the promoters of interest in future science, rests the future peace and happiness of the world? Science – intelligent Science, properly applied – will one day be the panacea of all human life. And to that glorious end we must all dedicate ourselves, that our children and their children even to the nth generation may arise and extol man’s transcendental glory to the farthest stars.”

And finally, perhaps the most vivid message of all, separated temporally from the Convention by only a few hours, the cable – from the Los Angeles S.F.A. branch:

“Salutations! Congratulations! Constitution all X”

## **Impressions**

Various visitors at the Convention have been good enough to write saying how the event impressed them.

of I.O. Evans

Recognizing as I do the value of science-fiction not merely as an art form, but as a direct influence towards social and scientific progress, I was impressed by the recent Convention. The members were obviously enthusiastic for their subject and had given it original thought. I was glad to meet and exchange ideas with other SF enthusiasts.

of E.G. Lane

I much enjoyed the day and the novel surroundings of the place of meeting gave one the impression that Time had either moved forward or backwards. It was good to meet in the flesh fellow members who previously had been names only.

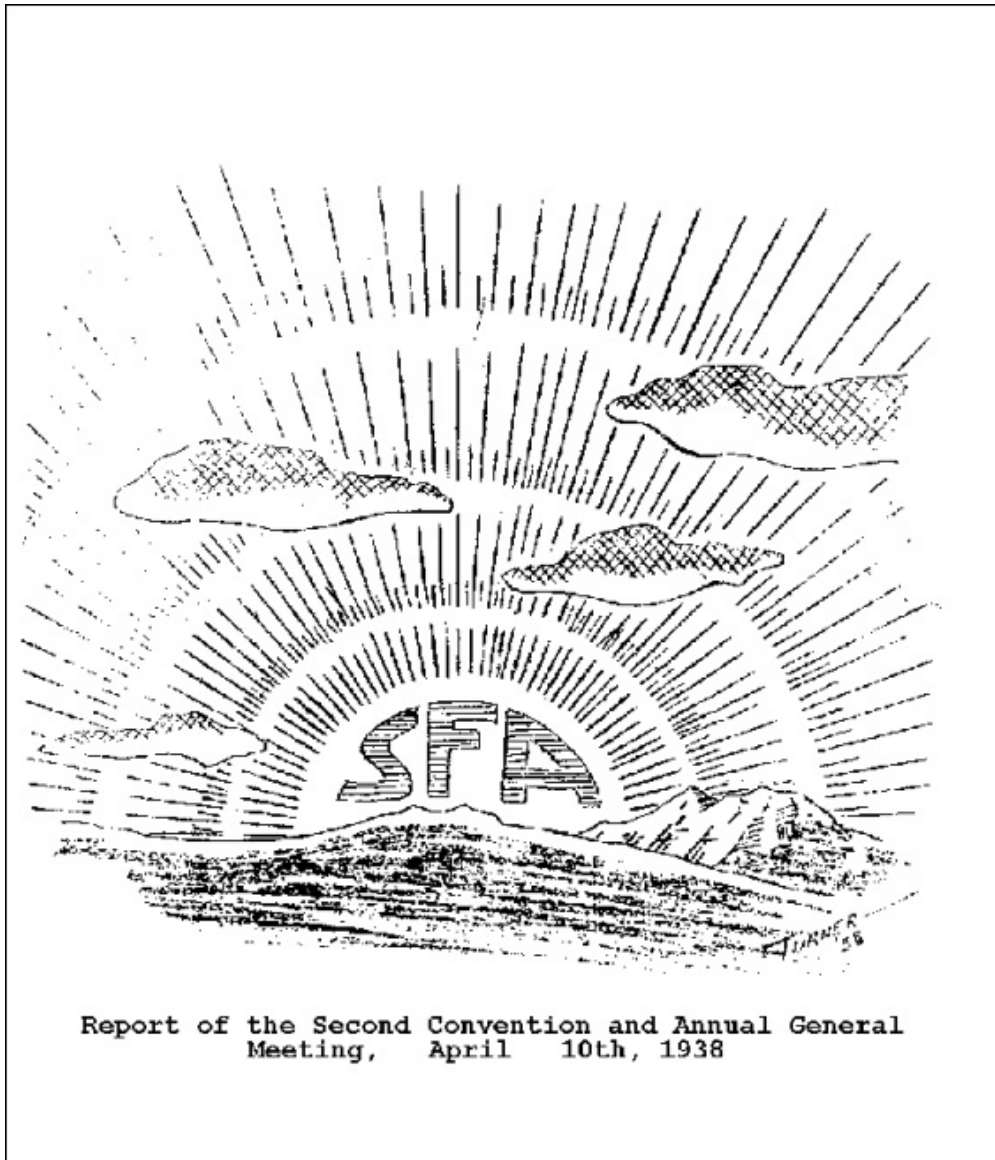
of L.J. Johnson

My most pleasant memory is in having met old friends and acquaintances in mental substance to those formerly but names. I was impressed by the hall’s mystic atmosphere almost under the

shadow of Stonehenge. Prof. Low's stimulating wit, John Russell Fearn essentially practical, and Douglas Mayer surprisingly oratorical.

of Benson Herbert

I was greatly impressed by the large attendance and the air of enthusiasm. For the first time I realized we are becoming an influential body. The happy omen of *Tales of Wonder* No. 2, the presence of Professor Low and Mr. Fearn combined to make the occasion most memorable.



*Second Convention Report (1938)*

**1939**



## 8. The Third Convention London, 21 May 1939

The Third Convention, like the Second Convention before it, was held in the Ancient Order of Druid's Memorial Hall on London's Lamb's Conduit Street, on 21st May 1939. It was announced in *Science Fantasy Review* #1 (May 1939, ed. Les Johnson et al.):

The SFA Convention will be held on Sunday, May 21st, in the Hall of the Ancient Order of Druids, London. Apart from the usual happy reunions of fans from all over the country, there will be discussions on the big changes in the Executive Council, which are undoubtedly necessary, to supersede the old "system" whereby most of the work devolved upon one person, the Secretary, G.K. Chapman.

Although full details are, unfortunately still not forthcoming, it is presumed that the general programme will follow the same lines as last year – general business and reunion during the afternoon; talks by SF celebrities after tea.

Among prominent people present will be leading science-fiction authors and editors in this country, with the exception of Eric Frank Russell, who is on his way to USA, and (don't believe it, but we've heard) John Russell Fearn, who was so caustic about others who could not attend!

The AOD Hall is in Lamb's Conduit Street, near High Holborn and not very far from Euston Station. Cheap trips are run from most large provincial centres, so roll up, fans, to the best Convention ever!

AOD Memorial Hall would be destroyed in a German bombing raid on 10th May 1941.

### **Known attendees:**

- Frank Arnold
- G.W. Axworthy

- John F. Burke
- Ted Carnell
- Ken G. Chapman
- Arthur C. Clarke
- Eddie Ducker
- John(?) Edwards
- George Ellis
- D.J. Foster
- Walter Gillings
- L.V. Heald
- Phil Hetherington
- Ron Holmes
- Eric Hopkins
- Maurice Hugi
- Harry Kay
- Prof. A.M. Low
- Dave McIlwain
- Eric Needham
- W.J. Passingham
- Mr. Rookes
- Bill Temple
- Frank Wilson
- C.S. Youd
- Harry Turner

There were reportedly around forty people present, but these are the only names we can be sure of.

**Ted Carnell:**

CONVENTION PARADE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Sunny morn after cloudy night before – must be forty odd other fans scattered about the country who feel as tired as I do after yesterday’s (May 21) London Convention, for many of them who had to return to the Provinces couldn’t have reached home much before the milk.

Physical reaction – throat like a rasp, voice like a bag of rusty nails (two tones below normal), kaleidoscopic eyesight, pumpkin head (not normal), and a backache like none of your business. Mental reaction – to Hades with the aches and pains, it was a swell turnout.

Strange how easy it is to build up a mental pic of distant fans, simply by corresponding with them, reading their articles and/or publications. Can clairvoyantly read their characters by their thoughts. Stranger still how unlike those mental images they turn out to be when eventually met in the raw.

Had previously met the two Liverpool song-birds Dave McBurke and John McIlwain, but still can't place which is which, names or faces. I had four tries at hitting correctly, but each time they answered with a kind of Flotsam and Jetsam chorus "I'm Johnny, I'm Davy, go fall in a plate of gravy" so I gave it up as a bad job. John, (or perhaps it's Dave), is the tall guy, six feet of sandy nothingness, and Dave (or is it John) is the one with the Hulbertlike jaw. (ED – The mug's wrong)

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*\* Jack Hulbert (1892-1978) was a contemporary film actor with (see photo at IMDb) a big jaw. [Ed.]*

Having successfully unravelled that problem, I was introduced in rapid succession to Frank Wilson, Southport; Phil Hetherington, Northumberland; Ronnie Holmes and Eddie Ducker, Liverpool, and then made fourteen guesses at the next face in line with my eyesight. The mystery cleared with a flourish of a pile of *Fantasts*. It was CSYoud from Hampshire. I forgot to personally compliment Sam on the production of his new fanmag, so I'm doing it here, and hope that he will continue to bring it out as often as he can.

However, NONE OF THE FANS were at all how I imagined they would be – Heaven only knows what they thought I would be like, but I can well imagine their surprise and disappointment.

I paid a rapid visit to the Flat, to collect The Gang, and found George Ellis and Eric Needham of Manchester browsing on the carpet, what's left of it. A vision of Librarian Harry Kay staggering along under a two-ton payload of books was the next reminder that this was The Day. Back at the joint, G.W. Axworthy of Portsmouth, Mr. Rookes of Axminster, Charnock L.V. Walsby Heald, the Jekyll and Hyde of Liverpool, and most of the London crowd had arrived.

Afternoon session was enlivened by Art Clarke's competition between a team of Londoners versus a team of Provincial members, in a general knowledge questionnaire. The out-of-towners won by two points, but the cat-calls and barracking from the audience drowned any attempt at seriousness.

During the interval, several groups formed, the main one being centred around Walt Gillings, always a drawing card at any gathering...Bill Temple fainted when I bought him a lemonade...Maurice Hugi will faint when he

reads this, because I have forgotten to mention him yet. How could I forget such a trivial thing? Other authors arriving then were D.J. Foster, and Mr. Edwards, whose initials and correct name I have forgotten. (ED – John, we think?)

W.J. Passingham and Professor Low arrived almost at the same time. Professor Low mentioned to me that he hadn't a single thing ready to speak about, but gave us a 40 minute interesting talk upon many ideas and inventions, Mr. Passingham also was devoid of notes, but he very quickly worked out some while other speakers were talking, and delivered some very useful advice to would-be authors.

I've often sighed at the thought of our Los Angeles friends having the privilege of sharing quite famous authors at their gatherings. I'm afraid that I have become so accustomed to the friendliness of our own celebrities that I have almost ceased to look upon them as such. Both Prof. Low and Mr. Passingham are genuinely interested in stf, and it was quite evident that they thoroughly enjoyed their evening with us. Professor Low overstaying his time by nearly an hour.

Of the other new authors we met for the first time, several joined the Association, as well as a number of new London visitors enrolling also.

It is almost impossible to catalogue the course of events during the Supper. The constantly shifting people, the discussions, the interesting items Mr. Passingham was telling Ken and I, but above all the general air of enjoyment that was prevalent throughout the entire proceedings was a fitting setting to what was literally my swan song to active fandom. As from the Convention and this column, I am dropping out of the over-active side of fandom and becoming just another London fan. *New Worlds* will continue to appear, as already stated, quarterly, and I shall of course still be present to upset the regular London meetings.

With fandom well on the up-grade in this country, I hope, SFA members will support Sam Youd's new fanmag *Fantast*. (ED – We back that – see page 2 for details) Both the *Fantast* and *Satellite* have our best wishes – but they want YOUR SUPPORT, Material and contributions – you know where to send them.

Until the next convention... Adios. [1]

### **Fantacynic (Sam Youd):**

CONVENTIONTIME AT FANOPOLIS \*

By devious routes and in all things from aeroplane to perambulator a

little over forty fans converged on Fanopolis for the Annual Convention. No credence should be placed in the rumour now prevalent that Manchester and Leeds members commandeered a tube train and went off; ostensibly ghoulish hunting, but actually in an attempt to undermine the House of Commons. Phillip S. Hetherington, a devoted Tory, is particularly annoyed about this low statement which is so typical of the lying tittle-tattle spread by our more juvenile members... blah... blah... blah...

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\* "*Fanopolis*" is the title of (and his report contains allusions to) the piece of allegorical fan-fiction by Sam Youd reprinted in *Faan Fiction 1930-2020*, which is available both for free download and in a printed edition from Ansible Editions. [Ed.]

Under the austere beautiful arch of Euston Station, Youd of Simpsire found the Liverpool contingent. He complains that, although he asked for a mark of identification to be shown, the ostentatious waving of a dozen or so Brundage covers and the singing of "Here Come the Men with the Jive" was carrying things a little too far. On the way to Lambs Conduit Street, Frank Wilson mentioned that his typing had gone to pieces *lately*. His correspondents first ascertained that he was not joking, and then dumped him in a phone booth labelled "I.R.A. Bomb. Hold under water for ten minutes". There are things before which the strongest mind must quail.

Despite having two guides who "knew the way by heart", the Liverpool party eventually reached haven to find that no-one else had yet arrived. Someone with more loquacity than common sense showed Macinpain an organ and the rest hastily retired. When he had put his feet through the innards, however, a return was made.

Some hours later business was commenced. At least, plans were presented during intervals between personal attacks on J.F. Burke and personal attacks on the *Satellite*. While our younger members gazed on in open admiration. Congratulations to Mr. Chapman on sinking his dignity and letting various people know what he thought of them! This looks like being fun!

After Ted Carnell had bribed those members still awake, the accounts were passed and the Library report given. This disclosed that we have now almost complete sets of Edgar Allen Poe, Ethel M. Dell and false teeth, together with 3½d. in cash and a photograph of Wollheim. This last was raffled, after which the Library fund amounted to 5¾d. and ½ cent. We hear that the lucky winner is some relation to Mr. Ripley.

The interval is notable only for the facts that someone preferred Fearn to Taine, and Bill Temple made a successful attempt to prove the old adage about a stomach only holding three pints utterly wrong. To Mr. Tucker I might mention that Temple's capacity for beer is not a sign of adolescence, but one of the Wonders of the World.

We had Celebrities. Dear Old Celebrities! Mr. Heald and Mr. Hugi attacking modern science-fiction; Mr. Gillings attacking American-science-fiction; Dr. Low attacking science-fiction in general. The "more juvenile and excitable members" sat back in awe, remembering the afternoon appeal to regard bad science-fiction as non-existent. I think their bewilderment was pardonable.

Just about then our Ambitious Poet had to return to darkest Simpshire. He has since told me that he was sorry to leave so early because of a question he wanted to lay before the Committee. The question is: "Can worms ride bicycles?" Strange as it may seem, there are people who hold that worms can *not* ride bicycles – these being the inevitable opponents to science progress and Professor Low's scheme for murder by rocket. They argue from the point that since no worm bicycles have been invented, worms cannot ride them. I will not point out the obvious fallacy.

When the last Celebrity had finally snuffed out, things happened. First, it was noticed that some cowled figures were mingling with the Fans, these were discovered to be Druids who had got lost in a warp, and the A.O.D. for Stonehenge. A sacrifice was demanded, as John Russell Fearn was unfortunately absent and Dr. Low had cleared off. Arthur Clarke was chosen. His entrails were found to reveal that it would be hot and dry with a deep depression over 88 Gray's Inn Road \*\*. We then adjourned for eats and found that Fantaspoet had taken back with him 50% of the Library and 75% of the food. Legal proceedings are in process.

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*\*\* Address of "The Flat", the legendary abode of Arthur C. Clarke, Bill Temple, and Maurice K. Hanson. It was at the time the HQ for both the Science Fiction Association and the British Interplanetary Society. [Ed.]*

Instead, we wandered off to Gray's Inn Road and ate A.C.C.'s supper. After all, since that neat bit of knifery on the part of the Arch-Druid (he doesn't like Fearn either, by the way) he had nowhere to put it. Bill Temple asked if he could have the unused stomach, to build onto his own for the greater consumption of alcoholic liquor. The other consumers objected to this strongly as an unfair advantage.

Eventually the time came for departing, though Portsmouthite Mr. British-Citizen-minus-a-meal (Axworthy), had to be driven out with ray-guns. In the early hours of the morning the little twinkling stars gazed limpidly down on scattered groups of fans stolidly tramping home, busless and tramless. Who said “Blast Conventions, anyway”? [1]

### **Les Johnson:**

#### FAN CLANS GATHERING CONVENTION SUCCESS

British fandom scored another outstanding triumph with the success of the third SFA Convention held in London. An imposing array of celebrities, very strong Provincial representation and great enthusiasm marked the occasion.

The afternoon session, given over to the Association’s private business was quickly and satisfactorily dealt with, several changes in the personnel of the Executive receiving confirmation. It was hoped on all sides that accelerated progress would result. Professor Low was again elected President, the other nomination being Walter H. Gillings, Editor of *Tales of Wonder*.

Evening provided the highlight of the proceedings. A crowded platform gave the large gathering of members and friends (including several ladies) over three hours varied entertainment, such well-known personalities as Professor Low, W.J. Passingham, author of several SF serials, and W.H. Gillings giving addresses, while M.G. Hugi and Charnock Walsby – SF authors Ted Carnell, SFA Treasurer, BIS Clarke and F.J. Arnold – leading fans – added congratulations.

The three main speakers each asked for a more moderate policy than is being pursued at present in USA, pleading for plausible rather than fantastic stories.

Professor Low opened the proceedings by pointing out that SF repelled the ordinary English public by asking them to believe what they deemed to be impossible; yet if we gave them more familiar everyday objects and associations we could build up SF story interest quite as intriguing and yet far more plausible than the spate of yarns we have today. Until this step were taken SF would make no material advance in this country.

W.H. Gillings pursued the same point, although not prepared to go as far as Prof. Low. Yet he admitted the public had to be weaned on simple stories before we could attempt to approach the high level of 1930. He sincerely

hoped we would never deteriorate to the level of present US stories and promised to do his utmost to keep *Tales of Wonder* on the right path.

W.J. Passingham followed up with the view that the average SF yarn was little better than a fairy tale, because it was just as impossible. To put over fiction at all you must be convincing and accurate, So he insisted SF should be this also, giving personal examples from his own experience to prove his point. He suggested that as editors knew their public best the only way to be a successful writer was to write to [2]

*The text ends here in mid-sentence.*

## EDITORIAL

K.G. Chapman, former Executive Secretary, dropped a bombshell at the 1939 Convention by revealing that recent changes in SFA personnel were precipitated by backbiting and insulting remarks freely indulged in by certain members.

Officials had no objection to honest criticism, but recent methods made it impossible for them to continue as before.

This position is strongly deprecated by *S-F Review*. If honest opinions cannot be aired without becoming objectionable, personal and vindictive and then developing into an underground whispering campaign there is something wrong somewhere – either in the SFA itself or its members. Criticisms, yes; but insults, no!

*SFR* will exert its right to criticize. It will do so without fear or favour, whenever truth is discovered that ought to be made public we shall endeavour to do so no matter how unpleasant it may be; that is our duty to SF fans, authors and editors; and if any of our remarks may seem on occasion to tend towards personal insult we tender our apologies for such is not the policy of the Editor even though it may be that of certain contributors – or would-be contributors. Comment, too, we shall make but always in the interest of Truth and our Search for a Better Tomorrow.

But calumny we abhor together with its employers; we know a few axioms concerning those to whom it is not pleasant to listen, and whose writings do not make easy reading. Our principles forbid us revealing their names. [2]

## **Les Heald:**

1940 LIVERPOOL'S TURN?

Liverpool was the best represented provincial branch at the Convention,



no less than six members making the journey to the metropolis. This showing very strongly supports our claim to run the next Convention, and if we do achieve that honour all in our power will be done to make it the best ever.

Merseyside possesses much fine talent, the cream of which we hope to rope in for the fans' entertainment. [3]

*It was not to be. With the outbreak of World War Two and national survival taking precedence over everything else, four years were to pass before another SF convention was held in Britain, and Liverpool would not finally host the national convention until half a century after this.*

[1] *The Satellite* (June 1939, Vol 2 No 6, ed. John F. Burke)

[2] *Science Fantasy Review* #2 (May 1939, ed. Les Johnson for Liverpool SFA)

[3] *Science Fantasy Review* #3 (June 1939, ed. Les Heald for Liverpool SFA)

# 1943



*Midvention Programme Book (1943)*

# 9. The Midvention Programme Booklet Leicester, 23-26 April 1943

**Mike Rosenblum:**

SALUTATIONS AND GREETINGS TO THE ASSEMBLED  
FANTASTS!

Firstly, I take this opportunity of conveying my best wishes to those fans who manage to 'make' the Midland Convention, and also to the greater number who will only be able to be present in spirit, and amongst whom I perforce have to be numbered. May the Midvention be a thorough success in every way!

We have come together because of a mutual interest in scientific fantasy! How is it that we should develop this interest at all; and even so, that we should desire to come together, by correspondence, in the pages of both professional and amateur publications, and not least, in person? Surely this widespread urge is the great why and wherefore of fandom which has agitated its corporate mind ever since the organism arose.

Yet whatever the cause – and most of us have interesting theories thereabout – the obvious fact remains that in fandom we have something absolutely unique, a closely-knit and yet worldwide group of intelligent people drawn from all sources and with many outside interests in politics, science, art, and culture, looking progressively towards a future bright with hope.

For whatever our different philosophies of life may be, the very essence of our interest in fantasy is a strong disinclination to remain immersed in the slough of today. Some of us merely project our imaginations, others wish to help form the future and have a hand in the world of tomorrow.

But throughout our ranks there exists a deep camaraderie which is itself one of the most remarkable of phenomena, and this comradeship is surely something worthwhile, something we should endeavour to retain as fully as possible during our corporate existence.

So let us develop a spirit of give and take, reinforce the friendship-making of fandom, welcome newcomers to our ranks with enthusiasm, and

be pleased and proud to be amongst the community of science-fiction fans, of which the outside form of the British section is the British Fantasy Society.

**Roy Rowland Johnson:**

“SALVETE!”

The first thing to do is to extend a cordial welcome to all those who are attending the “Midvention”, and to wish “better luck next time” to those fans who are not with us.

I don’t know, as I type this, whether our Convention will be a big, or a small, affair. I am hoping for the former, but suspect the latter.

Travelling is difficult, holidays are difficult, lodgings are difficult, everything is difficult nowadays, and it is not to be wondered at that comparatively few fans have been able to support this Convention at all. I’m willing to bet that most of those who attend will have overcome greater difficulties than the Chosen One\* who was given the award at the Denvention, two years ago.

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*\* The 1941 Denver Worldcon gave out Denvention Medals in various fannish categories. To quote Fancyclopedia 3, “An additional ‘Difficulty Prize’ of \$25 was awarded to Allen Class as the attendee who overcame the greatest obstacles in order to be there; he had hitchhiked from Ohio to Denver!” [Ed.]*

We on the Committee have had a pretty tough job to do – especially in finding accommodation for the visitors, and in finding a suitable hall for the Convention. However, we have finally succeeded, and thus, barring unforeseen eventualities, in the next few days, we can say that the “Midvention” is a practical success.

The programme is a varied one – but we think and hope that it is one which will be suited to the likes of Homo Essefanus. We want you to take part in everything, and to feel when you leave that you have had a darned good time – we will do our best to see that you do feel that way.

Finally, from all at the “Midvention”, we would like to send...

GREETINGS, TO ALL FANS, EVERYWHERE!!

**Midvention Committee:**

R.R. Johnson (Director)

Don Houston, A.W. Gardner, Art. Williams, Ralph E. Orme, J. Michael Rosenblum

SUB-COMMITTEE (Birmingham):

Tom Hughes, Art. Busby

MIDVENTION BOOKLET, etc:

Art. Williams.

## **Programme of the Midvention**

FRIDAY. APRIL 23rd;

“OPEN DAY”. No organized program with visitors arriving at all times of the day. Possibly some music of some kind, almost certainly some informal discussions. Meals waiting for fans as they arrive.

SATURDAY. APRIL 24th;

A.M.

9:30 – 10:30;

Opening ceremonies and short speeches of welcome by RRJ and committee members.

10:35 – 12:30;

Games, recreation, etc. etc.

P.M.

12:30 – 2:00;

Lunch (At an outside cafe.)

2:10 – 3:30;

Two main speeches, one by the Director of the Committee.....

3:35 – 5:00; Non-sciencefictional Brains Trust.

5:00 – 6:00; Tea (At an outside cafe.)

6:15 – 8:00: Debate – subject not yet chosen.

8:00 – 10:00; Informal discussions, games and recreation, music, time for snacks, etc...

SUNDAY. APRIL 25th:

A.M.

9:30 – 10:00;

Informal discussions, etc. etc.

10:00 – 11:00;

Lecture – subject and lecturer not yet chosen.

11:05 – 12:30:

Auction, and sale of Raffle tickets.

P.M.

12:30 – 2:00;

Lunch in the Convention Hall.

2:05 – 3:45;

Science-fictional Brains Trust.

3:50 – 4:30;

Acting of short scene and duel from the *Warlord of Mars* by E.R. Burroughs.

4:35 – 5:00;

Music – “Warsaw Concerto”, Polonaise in A Major, also a selection of swing, jazz etc, Prelude in C Sharp Minor.

5:00 – 6:00;

Tea in the Convention Hall.

6:05 – 7:30;

Photographs and Autographs of visiting fans, plus informal discussions.

7:30 – 9:30;

General discussions on any topics advanced by fans.

MONDAY. APRIL 26TH;

Irregular departures, informal discussions, etc, but Farewell Lunch in the Convention Hall from twelve-thirty to two-thirty.

•

On behalf of British Fandom,

THE BRITISH FANTASY SOCIETY wishes to emphasize its great debt of gratitude to those American fellow spirits who have been so kindly sending material for our enjoyment.

And in particular to those generous souls –

FORREST JAMES ACKERMAN (Hollywood)

MOROJO (Myrtle R. Douglas) (Los Angeles)

JOHN MEYER CUNNINGHAM (Beaumont Texas) – founder and organizer of the British Science Fiction War Relief Society.

E. EVERETT EVANS (Battle Creek, Mich.)

Capt. PAUL J. SEARLES (Homestead, Pa.)

ARTHUR (Bob) TUCKER (Bloomington, Ill.)

BILL EVANS

JOE GIBSON (Albuquerque, New Mex.)

for the many favours we have received at their hands. We are most grateful for this proof of solidarity within the fantasy movement and consider that it strongly stresses the closely-knit, intimate and friendly atmosphere existing between fellow fantasts all over the globe, mebbe soon throughout the Galaxy!

TED CARNELL (President)

J. MICHAEL ROSENBLUM (Director)

D.R. SMITH (Secretary)

•

The BRITISH FANTASY SOCIETY extends its fraternal salutations to its sister fantasy organizations:

The NATIONAL FANTASY FAN FEDERATION (of the US.), and its regional sections:

The ILLINOIS FANTASY FAN FEDERATION,

The INDIANA FANTASY FAN FEDERATION,

The MICHIGAN FANTASY FAN FEDERATION,

The OHIO FANTASY FAN FEDERATION,

as well as

The MINNEAPOLIS FANTASY SOCIETY,

The LOS ANGELES SCIENCE FANTASY SOCIETY,

The STRANGER CLUB of Boston, Mass.,

The GALACTIC ROAMERS of Battle Creek, Mich.,

The PHILADELPHIA SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY,

The FUTURIAN SOCIETY OF NEW YORK,

The SOLAROID CLUB, of Westwood, N.J.,

The GOLDEN GATE FUTURIAN SOCIETY,

The WESTERN PENNA SCIENCE FICTIONEERS,

The SCIENCE FICTION FORUM (New York),

The COSMIC CLUB OF INDIANA,

The "WINDY CITY WAMPIRES" (Chicago),

The FUTURIAN FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA,

The CANADIAN AMATEUR PRESS ASSOCIATION,

The FANTASY AMATEUR PRESS ASSOCIATION,

and any other societies inadvertently omitted.

## **[BFS] Members up to April the First, 1943:**

Ackerman, Forrest J.	(4)
Aiken, J.K. Ph.D.	(49)
Banks, J.W.	(29)
Bulmer, H.K.	(F21)
Busby, A.W.	(31)
Briston, J.	(35)
Beach, S.A.	(47)
Burke, J.F.	(F56)
Brown, F.C.	(60)
Burton, H.S.	(65)
Baker, C.A.	(72)
Brewer, G.H.	(71)
Carnell, E.J.	(40)
Chittock, R.	(F45)
Cunningham, J.M.	(USA, F3)
Chadwick, K.	(57)
Doyle, J.P.	(66)
Doughty, D.J.	(F35)
Diggins, R.	(63)
Ellis, P.	(6)
Ellis, H.J.	(44)
Forster, C.R.	(16)
Gardiner, D.W.	(22)
Gibson, J.	(32)
Gillings, W.H.	(62)
Gibson, W.R.	(CAN., F36)
Gardner, A.W.	(24)
Gottliffe, H.	(F37)
Gibson, Dr. W.A.	(23)
Gibs, F.W.	(27)
Goodie, F.	(50)



Houston, D.	(10)
Hughes, T.	(26)
Hanson, M.K.	(15)
Hawkins, P.	(33)
Hooker, R.	(17)
Holbrow, G.L.	(67)
Holmes, R.	(69)
Johnson, R.R.	(33)
Johnson, K.	(20)
Knott, P.	(30)
Lewis, B.	(14)
Lane, R.	(7)
Longton, A.	(46)
Lord, M.F.	(F68)
McDonald, E.	(9)
Moss, E.	(3)
Miles, A.H.	(42)
Miller, J.	(F59)
Medhurst, R.G., B.Sc.	(70)
Norcott, W.L.	(54)
Norton, A.H.	(61)
Orme, R.E.	(18)
Overton, T.E.	(5)
Parr, J.F.	(F19)
Parker, E.F.	(48)
Patterson, E.F.	(F53)
Rosenblum, J.M.	(1)
Ridgeway, A.J.	(55)
Skeel, A.G.	(34)
Smith, D.R.	(11)
Silburn, R.J.	(41)
Strange, T.	(28)
Tucker, D.	(8)

Temple, W.F.	(F13)
Vinter, I.M.	(64)
Williams, E.C.	(F??)
Williams, A.F.	(58)
Ward, F.W.	(12)
Walton, V.S.	(51)
Wiggins, J.R.	(52)

(F – in the forces.)

**Associates:**

Arnold, F.E.  
 Birchby, S.L.  
 Bounds, S.  
 Bradbury, R.  
 Brookes, H.  
 Chibbett, H.S.W.  
 Clarke, A.V.  
 Clarke, A.C.  
 Craig, J.C.  
 Capers, W.  
 Cartwright, C.  
 Dewick, A.  
 Eadie, M.F.  
 Folkes, R.S.  
 Fishwick, R.  
 Gillot, J.E.  
 Gascoigne, A.  
 Greenfield, J.  
 Hopkins, E.C.  
 McIlwain, D.  
 Morgan, J.  
 Needham, E.S.  
 Pope, R.B.

Pitman, A.R.  
Robb, O.  
Russell, E.F.  
Ragatzy, A.  
Salmond, A.  
Sadler, D.  
Sandfield, B.L.  
Slack, D.  
Skelton, W.  
Sprigg, T.S.  
Thompson, E.A.  
Vella, H.  
Youd, C.S.  
Turner, H.E.  
Webster, D.W.L.

## **Hello, Midvention!**

Hearty Greetings and Good Wishes from

THE COSMOS CLUB – (Anglo-fandom’s newest galaxy)

Producers of –

*Beyond* – the amateur fantasy magazine. *Cosmic Cuts* – Cosmos Club’s news organ

...The strongest local group in England. (Two dozen members – maybe more by now!)

@@@@@@@

The Cosmopolitans take this opportunity of saying a very large Hello indeed to all friends at home and across the Great Water.

## **To All Fans Everywhere!**

Live near Teddington? It’s 30 mins. from Waterloo by Train. An outsize welcome awaits you at any meeting of the Cosmos Club you’re able to “make”. The Secretary will reply pronto to all letters, giving you the latest news on what’s going on....

Secretary – E. Frank Parker, 6, Greytiles, Queen’s Road, Teddington,

Middlesex.

Wing      Commander

T. STANHOPE SPRIGG



R.A.F.

Founder and formerly Editor of

**FANTASY**  
THRILLING SCIENCE FICTION

SENDS

SINCERE GREETINGS

to Readers and Contributors and

Best Wishes for the Great Success of

the

• MIDVENTION •

*Midvention Programme Book (1943) advert*

# 10. Midvention Leicester, 23-26 April 1943

*Mailed out with Futurian War Digest #24 (November 1942, ed. Mike Rosenblum) was something called Midlands Science-Fiction Convention from Roy Rowland Johnson. I have been unable to locate a copy of this. It was unnumbered, but a second flyer with the same title and numbered #1 went out with FWD #25 in January 1943 . It's what we would now label a Progress Report:*

## **Spring 1943**

### PRELIMINARY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

R.R. Johnson, Leicester; Donald Houston, Northampton;  
A.F. Williams, London; J. M. Rosenblum, Leeds;  
R.E. Orme, Coventry; A.W. Gardner, Warwick.

## **Report No. 1.**

A committee, consisting of the six fans mentioned above, was formed soon after the first notice last November. Numerous suggestions were brought forth in the first chain-letter, and votes were given on several matters requiring immediate attention.

Birmingham has been chosen as the city in which the Midvention will be held. Two fans residing there have already been asked to form a small sub-committee, to attend to purely local matters.

The actual date has not yet been decided, but it will probably be between the middle of March and the middle of May – Easter, perhaps.

All fans who a) know they can and will attend, and b) think they might attend, are requested to inform RRJohnson as soon as possible – a post-card will suffice. This is urgent, so please co-operate.

Considerable attention was paid in the committee's chain-letter to the question of finances – obviously an affair such as a convention cannot be accomplished without some expenses. For the moment 5/- (or more if the person feels he can afford it) should be enough – this from each fan who will certainly be attending. Fans will be informed when this should be payed [*sic*]

– it probably won't be until a couple of weeks or so before the actual meetings.

That's all for this time – ideas, suggestions, criticisms, help. etc. etc., are very desirable and very much needed. All fans are invited to co-operate in the fullest possible manner.

Midvention in Spring. See you all in Birmingham!!

Regards from the COMMITTEE

*A further flyer Midlands Science-Fiction Convention #2 was mailed out with FWD #26 (February 1943), and #3 with FWD #27 (March 1943), but again no copies of these can be located.*

### **Prologue (Harry Turner):**

During February, Marion passes on news that has reached her of plans for a convention – the Midvention – proposed by the recently formed British Fantasy Society, to be held in Birmingham over Easter. Apparently arrangements have been largely left to Arthur Busby and Tom Hughes, as fans on the spot, and when we next meet I find them despondent over what they regard as unrealistic demands.

“All we've gotta do is find a hall to hold fifty fans for three nights, and accommodation for visitors!” moaned Art, calling down maledictions on the scheme's sponsor. “With this bloody war on it's practically impossible to find any halls available locally.”

I sympathize, but as my radio course is nearing its end and I expect to be posted elsewhere by the RAF before the end of the month, there's little by way of practical assistance that I can offer, and I leave Art and Tom with their problems. Right now I have my own preoccupations, with practical tests and assessments at the college, and a big question mark hanging over my future movements.

I guess that deep down I don't hold with the efforts of the BFS to organize fandom at this time. I grant that the Science Fiction Association served a useful function in its day, keeping fans and fan groups in touch all over Britain and providing useful contacts with US fandom, but after its demise when war broke out in Europe, fans continued to maintain those links despite all the inevitable wartime restrictions. And here we are in 1943, and thanks to the efforts of individual fans, several newsletters and fanmags flourish, generous American fans help by donating SF mags and supplies of

much-needed usable paper for faneds, and all in all there seems little need to divert time and energy to running an essentially superfluous institution like the BFS.

Much later I hear from Arthur that con plans have been scaled down, and the venue moved to Leicester... in the event some fourteen fans get together and make the Midvention a wartime success. [1]

## **THE REPORT – Roy Rowland Johnson**

*All non-indented material in the rest of this chapter is by Johnson, who takes up the tale again after the indented quotations from Bert Lewis and others.*

Greetings, to everyone from the Midvention! It's a pity you could not all have been there. (Why should we be the only ones to suffer?!)

The Midvention, be it known, was finally held not in Birmingham but in Leicester. Despite considerable efforts under difficult conditions on the part of Arthur Busby and Tom Hughes – for which we would like to thank them both sincerely – a convention in Birmingham was found, at the last moment, to be hopeless. The city was immediately changed to Leicester, where the poor unsuspecting Director had to take on the job of sub-committee, and by an equal amount of hard work and good luck managed to get something ready for Easter. The difficulties which piled in were overcome, and by April 22nd, everything was ready.

Friday the 23rd was comparatively quiet. Only B.H. Edwards (“Eddie”) from Bristol was expected, but bookleteer Arthur Williams arrived just as I was about to go to the station to meet him, so we both went.

Most of day was spent carrying auction stuff down to the hall, consuming food and, of course, talking. We talked until midnight, in fact, in Eddie's room at the Belmont Hotel (where most of the visitors stayed).

On Saturday I arose at the ghastly hour of 5:15 a.m. to receive the day's first arrivals, Bert Lewis and – guess who! – That Man Holmes.

### **Bert Lewis:**

Most of the regular fans were either in the forces or on war work, but some young fans in Leicester had enough time to organize a convention. Luckily, this event was held in summer, on a Saturday. I managed to get a spot of leave and travelled to Leicester by rail. It was an overnight journey with two changes of

train – each of these changes involved a long wait. Due to the rationing, no food was available on the journey. I was met at the station at 8 a.m. by the young organizer who took me back to his home where his mother cooked me a very welcome breakfast. This gesture can only really be appreciated by someone who has been through war time rationing. [2]

We collected Art and Eddie after breakfast, and made our way to the hall. There, Art showed a considerable interest, and Ron a considerable skill, in the use of the sword – there were two there ready for the ill-fated excerpt from the *Warlord of Mars*.

Terry Overton, Arthur Gardner, Don Houston, Peter Knott, Arthur Busby, and Tom Hughes arrived at various times during the morning – or did these last two come after lunch? I'm not quite certain.

**Terry Overton:**

Left home 9:00 p.m. Good Friday; left Cardiff (in an air raid, by the way) at 11:05 p.m., and thence fairly comfortably to Gloucester arriving approx. 1:00 a.m. Easter Saturday. At 2:30 I was still there. At 2:45 I caught a train scheduled for the wilds of the North. For some reason or other we failed to follow the usual route, journeying instead via the Welsh border counties.

Much to my surprise we were not very late in getting to Brum, where my journey would have ended but for the fact that the Midvention had just been transferred to Leicester. And so I went on. Got to Burton an hour late but this was O.K. as I'd had two hours to wait and as it was the bookstall opened soon after, so my time was occupied for quite a while.

By some miracle I ultimately got to Leicester a quarter of an hour early. RRJ had promised to meet me so I sat down.

Kimberley Road is easy to find if you know where to look. I didn't. Again, the way from the station is all uphill and my suitcase was heavy. For my own sake I will skip what happened until I got to the Convention Hall where I was assured they had gone. (I had grave doubts.)

I found myself ultimately in a room which, being stacked with pro and fan mags, was I presumed my destination. There was but one person present, who upon my entering leapt to his feet. He was



Bert Lewis.

Later I met the rest, did a good deal of book hunting, collected in a good few magazines from sundry sources and resigned from my position as co-ed on *Colossus* due to differences between my conception of editorial policy and D.H.'s. All was performed in a very friendly manner. [3]

We decided to depart somewhat from the programme: preliminary speeches and ceremonies were run together immediately after lunch, followed by the auction – which was definitely the high-spot of the convention. The main donors were Douglas Webster, Michael Rosenblum and Terry Overton. The main buyer was Peter Knott from Northampton, who spent about 30/-.

Ron Holmes, as auctioneer, put up a very good show indeed – he managed to get, for instance, 5/2d for a portfolio of Finlay illustrations given by DWLW, 6/3d for a model duralumin space-ship, given by RRJ.

**Bert Lewis:**

The “con” was to be held in a small room in the local school, courtesy of a friend of the organizer. As was to be expected, only 15 to 20 fans managed to attend. We did a lot of talking and the organizer produced a fencing sword and imitated John Carter of Burroughs’s Martian Trilogy.

It was good fun but the highlight of the event was still to come. As in present day conventions, the auction of S.F. items aroused a great deal of interest. It consisted mainly of books and American Science Fiction Magazines. In spite of the low attendance these were quickly snapped up. The final item, though, provoked the greatest interest. It was a shining metal model of a spaceship made by the organizer’s father who was an engineer at the local works. The bidding was keen even though wages and pocket-money were low at the time. When the bidding reached two pounds I began to despair. Then it went up to two guineas; an absolute fortune in those days. I raised it to two pounds five shillings and prayed. Luckily it was just enough and I clinched it. As it was all metal it was very heavy but its beauty outweighed any fault. [2]

Tea followed the auction at 5:00 p.m., and with it the first departure – that of Peter Knott.

The evening session was taken up, mainly, with two items, first of which was a short musical programme. There were some very fine Caruso recordings of Wagnerian operas, besides the three pieces listed on the programme. The swing jazz, or whatever it is, was provided by the versatile Mr. Holmes at the piano. Arthur Gardner, at the organ, and RRJ at the piano, also tried the B flat Minor Piano concerto of Tchaikowsky, but since neither could play their respective instruments, the result was not over-encouraging...

Then came the debate. *Mr. Lewis* (to drop into the parlance of the debating-room) proposed that “there should be no precise line of demarcation between SF and Fantasy”; *Mr. Overton* opposed the motion. Both speakers presented their sides of the question but no one seemed to have a clear idea even in his own mind as to whether there should be a line of demarcation or not, and we seemed to be arguing at cross-purposes for most of the time.

We all saw Bert Lewis, Arthur Busby, and Tom Hughes to the station, and then the rest of us just killed time.

Ron Holmes, who went to a dance, became involved in an amusing – and almost embarrassing – incident, to which he fleetingly referred in his own sheet last month, and the full story of which will doubtless be told elsewhere, at some time or other.

The first session on Sunday saw quite an amount of fencing, in lieu of the Warlord scene, which could not be produced after all. Ron Holmes – who incidentally is about 6' 1" – is a really good fencer; I wouldn't mind facing him fully armoured and padded, preferably using épées, but we used naked sabres – weapons, not sporting equipment....

**Ron Holmes:**

Roy Johnson and I had never met, but we were both swordsmen of a sort so it seemed to be a good idea to have a bout. We were to enact a scene from *Warlord of Mars*, he to be John Carter and I Tars Tarkas. The casting being that way because I was taller. In the event, when we came to practice, he produced real sabres for us to use. He was very much smaller than I (I'm over six foot) and wore glasses. I did not think he looked the part very much, but when we practised I could see that I had the superior weight and strength of arm and eventually I decided not to go on practising because I thought it was dangerous. He was rather disappointed. [4]

During the rest of the morning, we had the non-stfical Brains Trust. From one question the fact emerged that Ron Holmes is an anarchist, Art Williams socialist, Terry Overton conservative, Don Houston sensible enough to have no definite views yet, and RRJ – see elsewhere!

We managed to squeeze in the second auction before lunch. George Ellis – who with Ron Lane had just arrived from Manchester – then paid 10/6d. for the *FFM*.

Lunch was taken at 108 Kimberley Road since no cafés were open, and then Ron Holmes departed – or, rather, “made a departure”! We were sorry to lose him.

Just before lunch, I forgot to mention we took several photographs, some of which we hope to be able to include with this report. 'Nuff said!

The science-fictional Brain Trust – and I use the singular “Brain” advisedly – came in the afternoon. Don Houston put up a good show, but it was Terry Overton who shone, possessing as he does an almost fantastically, ridiculously detailed knowledge of back-numbers of mags, etc. – and what a memory that must require.

Tea was taken, like lunch, at 108 Kimberley Road, since it was impossible to have it either in the hall or at a café, and afterwards we wandered around town, first seeing off the first arrival, Arthur F. Williams. Eventually we all congregated at the Johnson homestead, where cards, darts, etc. became the order of the day.

Monday morning saw the departure of B.H. Edwards, and the remaining few just wandered around Leicester, finally drifting back to the hall where discussions and music soon took up the remaining time before lunch, which, minus Terry Overton who caught the 12:55 train to Cardiff, we took as usual at 108 – necessitating a longish walk which yours truly protested against vigorously. (Being as lazy physically as JFParr says he is morally!)

The afternoon was spent in much the same way, Don Houston and I going into conference over the new mag *Phoenix* (formerly *Colossus*), which may or may not see the light of day. Arthur Gardner left us then, catching the 'bus to Warwick just outside the hall.

With only four of us there, the whole place seemed dead. We had the devil of a time clearing up – Ron Holmes had hidden numerous copies of the *Fantast Reclining Torso!* – and, at 5:30 p.m., left the hall for the last time.

Bug-eyed monsters, and *Weird Tales*, came up, I remember, during and after tea. Ron and George left just after eight. Don departed next morning –

Tuesday, 27th – and I came back to the station feeling somehow depressed. I went into a fit of melancholy for about three hours.

I don't know whether to call the convention a success or not. There were only about fourteen visitors, and that naturally seriously hampered our activities. The programme wasn't strictly adhered to either. Moreover, several of the visitors could only stay a short time. But everyone seemed to have an enjoyable time; all had the pleasure of meeting others of their ilk, too, and for this alone, the convention was worth-while for whatever "Radcliffe" may say, fans are darned good fellows, and meeting them is a very great pleasure.

Farewell, then, to everyone, from the Midvention.

– *Midvention Report* (1943, d/w *Futurian War Digest* #?)

### **Postscript (2003) – Roy (Rowland) Johnson:**

I have just had an amazing, and perhaps a disturbing, experience. Surfing idly through eBay last evening, I came across some offers of *Astounding Science Fiction*. I did not bid, but it set my mind back to long ago when I used to read SF, and on impulse, not expecting anything, I asked Google for "Midvention". You can imagine my surprise when the very first item referred to the 1943 Leicester Midvention I organized, along with my own name (R. Rowland Johnson in those days – an affectation which amused me at the time, I can't imagine why).

Damme, anyone in the world can now discover, utterly obscure though I was and am, that in the middle years of WWII I was in Leicester, and Manchester, and Leeds, and climbing Pendle Hill. Perhaps more embarrassing (though it amused my wife) was the account of the little swashbuckling Ron Holmes and I indulged in at the Midvention. (For the record: I went on to captain my college fencing team, and I believe that by that time I would have caused friend Ron some problems, strong wrist or not. It is true that I produced real sabres: fencing equipment was very difficult to come by during the war, and friends and I used to go to junk shops to buy old army sabres, bayonets, whatever, with which we practised enthusiastically. This explains why I still have a scar on my right thumb, the result of using an old French bayonet with no guard, and another near the bottom of the thumb, the result of making a pig-awful attempt at a stop-hit.)

An unrelated point: at the time of the Midvention I was busy working (though not much) for my School Certificate (approx. = G.C.E.), at the then

Wyggeston Grammar School. One of my contemporaries – as, later, at University College, Leicester, for a year before he went up to Cambridge – was David Attenborough.

I am amused to recall, from those schooldays, that a physics master predicted with some irritation the career I would have ahead of me. He had some cause for being irritated, since instead of attending to his waffling about gold-leaf electroscopes or whatever, I was sitting at the back of the lab reading – the *Futurian War Digest*. It was when he saw the title that he said he could give me a digest of my future – as a road-sweeper. I took some satisfaction from eventually gaining more and better degrees than he had ever thought of. [5]

[1] “How I Missed the 1943 Midvention”,  
1998 (his website)

[2] Article, “Kimota” website, 1989

[3] *Galaxy* #7 (July 1943, ed. Overton)

[4] Letter to Rob Hansen

[5] Email to Rob Hansen, 17 November 2003

# 1944



*Eastercon Programme Book (1944)*

# 11. The First Norcon Manchester, 1-3 January 1944

Fans arranged gatherings whenever possible throughout the war years, but most of these were not conventions, as Ron Holmes noted:

The get-together at Michael's mother's cottage near Pendle Hill, Lancs, [over Easter 1943] could only be included if the term Convention is reduced to mean "fans visiting from other towns". Michael was there of course, and the two Rons from Manchester, and Rita and I cycled over from Liverpool. Two days were spent chatting and climbing up Pendle Hill and that was that. Fandom was held together for the rest of the war through the good offices of individual fans who put effort into the British Fantasy Society on a postal basis, but it was not to die. [1]

Nevertheless, a small convention was to be organized over the New Year's holiday:

## Letters between Harry and Marion Turner

### Harry, 25 November 1943:

Thanks for the letters you forwarded: one was from Ron Lane about a forthcoming convention at the New Year. I'd like to spend a day at it if some of the old crowd arrive, but doubt if I can manage it.

### Harry, 4 December 1943:

Have you got those copies of *Tomorrow* sorted out for the Convention stint? ...put say a dozen copies of each issue on one side. Also are those *Astronauts* and *BIS Journals* knocking around: they'll perhaps make someone happy at the con.

### Marion, 6 December 1943:

What a visitation last night – at 7:30 the doorbell rang and in walked Mike Rosenblum, Ron Lane and two other fans. Lots of discussion about the con... seems that six people have promised to come and they also expect two Americans and a Canadian.

## The Announcement

This issue of *Futurian War Digest* brings news and details of forthcoming outstanding events in Anglolfandom – meetings taking place in New Year and Easter 1944.

The New Year Meeting is to be of a somewhat more informal character, and has been arranged to take place in Manchester, thus enabling fans in the North of England to have a rally. Ron Lane (22 Beresford Road, Longsight, Manchester 13) who is in charge of arrangements, wishes to say:

Will all those who have intentions of attending (or any possibility thereof) please notify me. I must have some idea of the number of attendants as soon as possible, and accommodation necessary. THIS IS IMPORTANT. A number of possible attendees will have received a notice from either JMR or myself, if you were not included, we apologize sincerely. There are three requests I wish to make:

1. Will anyone who has anything suitable for an auction bring or send it on.
2. Will anyone who has anything of interest to his fellow fans send it along – if required it will be returned. We plan an exhibition of fan work and want it to be as great a success as possible.
3. Will anyone who has, or can obtain a film, send it along – preferably panchromatic.

An international flavour will be imparted by the attendance of Norman (Gus) Willmorth, representing the US Army, Los Angeles Science Fantasy Soc., and Amerifandom in general, whilst compatriot John Millard of Jackson, Mich., and Toronto does the same for the Galactic Roamers, RCAF, and Amerifandom too. It is hoped that Bob Gibson can drop in, on behalf of Canadian Fandom and the Canadian Army. Other people who have already expressed their intention of being present include; Ron Holmes, Roy Johnson, Peter Knott, Arthur Williams, Ron Bradbury, George Ellis, Don Houston, J.M. Rosenblum and Ron Lane. We hope that this list will be doubled or trebled in the near future.

All people informing Mr. Lane of their desire to attend, will be forwarded fullest details and instructions (including a plan of Manchester) at a later date when all arrangements have been made. A programme has been provisionally



arranged to include various discussions, Brains Trust, stf quiz bee, auction and excursions. This is the first formal stf gathering to take place in the North of England since January 1937 – let’s make it a good one. [2]

## **The Report**

### **Gus Willmorth:**

The occasion of the Norcon was on January 1st to the 3rd, at the city of Manchester. Attendance was eight. Joyous good will and fun were multitudinous.

It all started, strenuously. There I was with a suitcase and a typewriter; both heavy. Then it was that the gods of war decreed that there would be no liberty run into town that night. Quite evidently, I would have to walk the eight miles into town unless I was fortunate enough to hitch a ride. After the first few miles I was picked up and deposited at the Red Cross club, where I passed the night.

Early on the morning of the 30th I boarded a train for Lancaster and Roy Rowland Johnson, reading on the way a delightful little tale of Leprechauns and Irish gods, called *The Crock of Gold*. At Johnson’s residence there was Art Gardner up from Warwick way to see Johnson. Unfortunately, he was unable to attend the Norcon – a common disability. Later in the evening, we met Pete Corbisley, who due to the fact that five pounds were not immediately procurable, was unable to attend the Norcon.

After staying the night at Johnson’s, we took off for Manchester.

We arrived in the city about ten o’clock, amidst a shower of rain, and about an hour and a half ahead of schedule. Consequently there was no one at the station to meet us. However, we had one of those maps that fans hold conventions about – may Ghu protect us from such things in the next reincarnation. Trusting wholeheartedly to the instructions nevertheless, we boarded a bus and headed for the cafe where the Norcon was to be held. Following some difficulty, we arrived. After getting settled we proceeded on to Ron Lane’s residence. We waited for some time before someone told us that the tram from here did not go by Dickinson Street. After more difficulty we finally arrived at Ron’s home, [*where*] we found that he and J. Michael Rosenblum had gone to have some tea and meet us.

When they returned, the evening was, as usual, spent teaing and fanning in the accustomed manner. [3]

Most of the attendants at the Norcon arrived on the evening of December 31,

1943, including such English fans as Michael Rosenblum from Leeds, Roy Rowland Johnson from Leicester, Ron Holmes and Rita James from Liverpool, and Gus Willmorth from Los Angeles. Of the three Manchesterians present there were Ron Lane, Ron Bradbury, and George Ellis. Aside from the usual midnight sessions of talkery nothing of importance occurred on the eve of the gathering.

The next day, the first [*of the con*], dawned amidst a drizzle of rain and those at the Hotel Avondale Rest House fared forth to the Lane house where things were to happen. After fanning until 1 a.m. the previous night, Ron Bradbury, George Ellis, Ron Lane, Mike Rosenblum, Roy Johnson, and myself joined Ron Holmes and Rita James – and formed the Norcon. The morning was spent in getting acquainted.

Around eleven, Ellis and myself went to Exchange station to meet John Millard. Nor any Pete Nott who might have been coming. The train was two hours late, however, so the fans toured the cafes and the downtown section of Manchester.

It was decided at the meeting to make an official booklet as there had been no provision made for recording the happening of the Norcon. So the Willmorth typer was pressed into service, and stencils were produced. The Lane sitting room, already littered with various fan articles, now became a veritable printer's heaven, with paper and talk flying in all directions. A running account of the events was set in progress.

After tea the rush and bustle of publishing broke off and we mounted a bus to the nearby zoo and playground where the monkeys (of course), snakes, and other queer animals were given a treat, and where the dance floor was tried.

On the return from the zoo, the Harry Turner residence was visited where Marion Turner gave us welcome and regretted that spouse Harry was not at home. [3]

### **Marion Turner:**

On Saturday night the conference arrived... I was startled because in my depression I'd clean forgotten it. Luckily the flat was fairly tidy and there was a fire on, so I squeezed them all in there and loaded them with *Astronauts* and *Tomorrows*. The purpose of the visit was to borrow a stapling machine! The flat was thoroughly examined and even the ornaments and pictures came in for a few comments, so don't be surprised if a description appears in the convention reports. There was one fan immersed in the ballet section of the

library, along with his girl-friend (or wife?) – a tall fair chap with a faint stammer, who seemed to have come from Birmingham and said you'd promised him a copy of the Penguin Ballet about a year ago... Did you give that to Ron, or have we still got two copies? There was also an American who sat on the table and studied Low's cartoons, not saying very much. Mike Rosenblum had enough to say for the whole gang though... They were going over to Ron Lane's for tea and had to buzz off after a short stay and after I'd assured them that there was no chance of you turning up. [4]

**Gus Willmorth:**

It seems that Harry had intended to be but the RAF saw fit to move the artist over the New year, so that he was unable to get away. [3]

**Harry Turner:**

It had been decided that I was needed at Cranwell and I travelled up there over the New Year. Hope this isn't an unpropitious start to the New Year. Didn't enjoy travelling up here on New Year's day instead of dashing to Manchester. I got thy last letter on Friday, just in time, and it was a depressing thought to know you'd still be hoping to see me and would be busy getting ready for the weekend.

No lockers here at the moment, so can't unpack. It's cold here... the only difference between sleeping in the hut or out in the open, is that inside you're at least out of the draft. The cold seeps through the blankets at night so we insert our ground sheets between the top two blankets: it's hard on ventilation but at least stops some warmth leaking away.

I imagine the fair-haired bloke would be Ron Holmes – but don't know who the girl-friend is. [Rita James.] Don't remember ever threatening to give him the Penguin *Ballet* – I'm sure I gave the spare to Ron Lane. [5]

**Gus Willmorth:**

The day ended with more midnight convening in the hotel rooms.

Sunday brought the main business of the meeting. Late at night the booklet was completed. There was a fan quiz, a contest between the three Manchester fans and three of the "L" fans with Mike Rosenblum popping the questions and Rita James keeping score. The outsiders captured the honours by the margin of a few slim points. After the afternoon tea, the auction consisting of several originals, books, and magazines, was held. The price of the highest single item was brought from Ron Lane for the latest or rather last issue of *Unknown*, supplied to the auction by Willmorth through the auspices

of the LASFS. The highest single buyer was Willmorth who acquired most of the originals and books, with Johnson coming second with a heavy monopoly of the mags. Rosenblum secured a double spread “Orban”. After the auction the *Norcon Booklet* was put to bed and a Brain Trust was instituted during the throes of which Ron Holmes and girl had to leave to catch the train for Liverpool. George Ellis left for fire-watching. Roy Johnson in his boyish enthusiasm did physical assault on the person of Ron Lane’s sister, Joan, dragging her under the mistletoe repeatedly to reap the fruits of kisses, if any. Finally we loaded all with packets of this and that as acquired from the auction, and including the Willmorth typer. [3]

**Joan Lane:**

I have never before in all my young life seen a more varied congregation. There were those who sat in corners, waiting to have food passed to them; there were those who blindly grabbed, and hoped no one would censor them. No sooner had they arrived than the place was in an uproar. It was impossible to either enter or leave a room without seeing fans, stumbling over fans, treading on fans... for to add to the pristine confusion, fans themselves sprawled engagingly on the floor, preferring this natural environment when playing cards. And then the assembled people decided to have a little music... I don’t know if you have ever heard Tauber singing “Vienna, City of My Dreams” to the accompaniment of a piano upon which Yellow Tie was playing hot jive. I have, and I suspect the neighbours have too, if the hints dropped later were any criterion.

After the convention had broken up on the Sunday evening it was noticed by the family which bore the onslaught of the fans upon their (usually) peaceful abode, that the mascot of the house – that is to say the dog “Rusty” – was in a state of nervous collapse, and ever since those never-to-be-forgotten days, she has been found hiding in various dark and secluded corners of the house, poor thing.

I may add that I am on the verge of becoming a fan MYSELF despite the dissuasion of my brother who never had a friend to warn him!!! [6]

**Gus Willmorth:**

Monday, Mike and Gus flipped into downtown Manchester book-hunting and both picked up several items. Rosenblum was assisted off for Leeds by Johnson and Willmorth, who then returned to the university where that day Lane was undergoing exams. After tea these three retired to the

station with luggage and once more everyone went after books. After the departure of Johnson and Willmorth I rather imagine Lane heaved a sigh of relief and went home. [3]

### **J. Michael Rosenblum:**

The meeting held at Manchester over New Year can rightly be said to have been a success in every way, although the actual number of participants was somewhat more meagre than anticipated. But even this had its bright side, as the party of eight was just a nice “fit” into the hospitable Lane household where the actual deliberations occurred. Roll of those present includes Gus Willmorth of Los Angeles , Ron Holmes and Rita James of Liverpool, Roy Johnson of Leicester, your editor and Messrs Rons Lane and Bradbury and George Ellis of Manchester. As yet no explanation of the non-arrival of Hugh J Ellis, John Millard and Peter Knott – all expected – has arrived but service contingencies are suspected. Unfortunate circumstances prevented the attendance of Ken Chadwick, Art Williams and Peter Corbishley. Activities included the usual gabfest, brains trust, stf quiz, visit to the Belle Vue Zoo and Pleasure Ground, a call on Marion Turner and inspection of Harry’s books, games of Solo!, music – piano and gramophone, and the intermittent production of a Norcon Booklet. A limited number of copies of this are available on application to JMR at 3d each, postfree. The traditional auction also took place, netting the sum of £2 16/-. Probably fuller accounts of the proceedings, apart from that in the booklet which is by way of a blow-by-blow description, will be supplied by other attendees. Great enthusiasm was shown for further meetings and the conference decided to support the meeting at London (Easter) and Leicester (Midsummer) as well as an informal weekend in the country at Nelson, Lancs, if such can be arranged at Whitsuntide. Accommodation for this will however be limited – apply early. [7]

### **Postscript**

Despite sitting one of his exams the morning after the Norcon, Ron Lane has been successful in obtaining his MPS – precisely a year before the earliest time he could have sat for it, according to pre-war rules. Good work Ron and congratulations.... Ron is following the example set by Derek Gardiner and persuading his sister to take his place in the BFS. [7]

[1] *NESFiG Newsletter #9* (April 1976, ed.

- Alan Isaacson and Brian Rouse)
- [2] *Futurian War Digest* #32 (December 1943, ed. J. Michael Rosenblum)
- [3] Gus Willmorth report edited together from those in *Nebula* #23 (January 1944, ed. Larry Shaw) and *Fan Slants* #2 (February 1944, ed. Mel Brown)
- [4] Letter from Marion Turner to Harry Turner, 3 January 1944
- [5] Letter from Harry Turner to Marion Turner, 6 January 1944
- [6] Joan Lane in *Futurian War Digest* #33 (February 1944, ed. J. Michael Rosenblum)
- [7] *Futurian War Digest* #33 (February 1944, ed. J. Michael Rosenblum)

## **12. The 1944 Eastercon London, 8-10 April 1944**

The 1944 Eastercon was organized by Teddington's Cosmos Club (CSC), the largest active fan group in the country during this period and, alongside *Futurian War Digest* and the British Fantasy Society, one of the three pillars of wartime British fandom.

In December 1943, the CSC revealed their plans for a convention the following year, with the single-sheet *Convention Extra* in both *Cosmic Cuts* #5 and in Parker's *Lamppost* #1, one of the "litter" of accompanying small fanzines that rode out with *Futurian War Digest* #32 that same month. The relevant pages in *Lamppost* were also pages 9 and 10 of *Cosmic Cuts* #5 and so presumably a deliberate print overrun.

**BRITAIN'S GREATEST FAN GET TOGETHER!! it announced: EASTER CONFERENCE AT COSMOPOLIS!**

Here it is! This is big news, and this is a potential conventionee reading it! Mark it now and mark it well, for you'll hate yourself if later on you find you haven't.

There is to be a Science Fiction Convention in this country next year, a real, honest-to-goodness Convention, in the acknowledged style of the best Conventions. A sure and certain Convention – a Convention that will live in your memory long after the recollection of lesser fan events has faded.

**COSMOS CLUB AS HOST**

Make no mistake. These are not "tentative plans", subject to drastic alteration at the last moment. Teddington's Cosmos Club is assuming the task of organizing this Convention, and it will positively take place, when and where advance notices have said it will.

Easter 1944 is the date to remember. London and its environs is the locale. And the Convention will be spread over three days, Easter Saturday, Sunday, and Monday.

The rest of that first side was taken up with hyperbole, but on the reverse was

the projected programme for the Eastercon, which was as follows:

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## **Saturday**

2 p.m.

Assembly, roll-call, introductions – Waterloo Station, London: News Theatre\*, Platform 1, The Charing Cross Road. 'Nuff said.

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*\* From <https://londonist.com/2016/05/secrets-of-waterloo>: “In 1934, the Waterloo News Cinema opened on the concourse of Waterloo station, next to what is now platform 1. A similar cinema had opened at Victoria station the year before. News bulletins were shown on a loop throughout the day, with cartoons shown in later years. In the 1960s it was renamed the Classic Cinema Waterloo, and screened old Hollywood classics. The Waterloo cinema closed in 1970 but wasn't demolished until 1988.” [Ed.]*

5 p.m.

Tea (ready arranged) – at London teashop. Visit to News Theatre (Disney week) or informal Convention conferences.

7:30 p.m.

Chinese dinner (ready arranged) at a London restaurant. Eminent guests will speak.

Adjournment.

## **Sunday – “A Day in Cosmopolis”**

All Sunday's events will take place at Teddington (35 mins by train from Waterloo, or about 1 hr. from Marylebone or Paddington on 27A bus). The Convention Hall is at Shirley's Cafe, Teddington, close to Teddington Station and next to Clarence Hotel Bus stop.

10:30 a.m.

Assembly, Convention address – the President

Followed by:–

Film Show (including the amateur CSC film and silent fantasy films)

Musical recital (Bach, Mozart, Sibelius and Beethoven)

Auction

Debate

Speeches

Lunch and tea arranged.



## Monday

Informal events  
Farewell party.

— AND THE COST

All meals and entertainment mentioned in the Programme are included in the Convention Fees. Fans will entail no extra cost other than travelling expenses and (if necessary) bed and breakfast charges.

Full Programme Saturday to Monday 15/-

Saturday only 7/6

Sunday only 7/6

REMEMBER THE DATES: SATURDAY APRIL 8th, SUNDAY  
APRIL 9th, MONDAY APRIL 10th.

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The pampered fans of today complain when the con programme is split between adjacent hotels rather than all under one roof. One can only imagine how they would react at the prospect of a thirty-five minute train ride between venues.

The second *Convention Extra* rode out with *Lamppost* #2 in *Futurian War Digest* #33 (February 1944). This reported that Arthur Williams would be producing a convention booklet and that there would be a Fantasy Museum at the convention, display items for which would be gratefully received. However, the big news concerned the “eminent speakers”:

“Mr. Walter Gillings, ex-Editor of *Tales of Wonder* and Director of Utopian Publications Ltd., has agreed to act as Convention President, and will open the Sunday morning session with a Presidential Address. And, circumstances [permitting], the Guest Speaker at the Convention dinner will be none other than the distinguished Professor A.M. Low.”

The third and final issue of *Lamppost* went out with *Futurian War Digest* #34 (April 1944), its front page consisting of a map of how to get to the convention. This appears to have been sized for American quarto paper. Sadly, it was printed on UK quarto and so ran off the bottom of the page. Not that this appears to have deterred anyone.

On Saturday, April 8th, E. Frank Parker and the con's Organizing Secretary Dr John K. Aiken set off from Teddington by train to meet fans at the agreed meeting place on Waterloo's platform 1. Unfortunately, they encountered a problem. As Aiken related in his report in *Futurian War Digest* #35 (June 1944):

“Aiken and Frank Parker arrive at Waterloo without tickets and are detained by officials. In the distance they see hordes of conventioners, tho' avoid their gaze. Eventually they are permitted to leave the platform. Gathering of the fans: Syd Bounds (Kingston), Hal Chibbett (Bowes Park N.11), George Ellis (Manchester), Bruce Gaffron, Fred Goodier, Gordon Holbrow (Teddington), Ron Lane (Manchester), Arthur Hillman (Newport, Mon.), Peter Hawkins (Surbiton), Don Houston (Letchworth), John Millard (RCAF, Jackson, Mich.), Dennis Tucker (High Wycombe) and Arthur Williams (Camberwell) have accumulated. Attempts are made to read the Con booklet, which Hawkins has spent the whole previous day in duplicating, but although the cover is fine the paper inside too bad and the attempts are swiftly abandoned. (The quiz which was particularly illegible is to be reprinted.) Everyone worries because Gus does not appear (it is later learned that all leave is cancelled in his area).”

The Gus referred to here is American fan Norman “Gus” Willmorth, who was an ex-director of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. When America entered the war after Pearl Harbour and Americans began being posted to Britain, it was inevitable that some of these would be fans and that they would seek out their British counterparts. Willmorth arrived on these shores in August 1943 as a corporal assigned to an American ordnance supply depot “somewhere in Britain”. In *Futurian War Digest* #31 (October 1943), editor J. Michael Rosenblum had reported:

“Contact betwixt the respective fandoms of USA and England in person has at last been effected. By a short head, Norman ‘Gus’ Willmorth beat John Millard in saying hello to Anglolfandom. The noble Angeleno made a visit to Teddington and the Cosmos Club in August and met some nine of the members who thought highly of the American ambassador, a feeling which appeared to be duplicated. Shortly afterward Johnnie Millard of Jackson, Michigan

dropped a line to JMR saying that at last he could spend a weekend in Leeds.”

So ubiquitous was Willmorth to become at British fan gatherings up and down the land in the following months that the absence of this friendly figure in his American uniform was keenly felt. While those at the convention would not have known why Gus could not be there, we certainly do. This was April 1944, and all leave in his area had been cancelled in preparation for the D-Day invasion. Rosenblum himself was another notable by his absence, but he had travelled down to London in February to visit the Cosmos Club and meet with other London-area fans. From his account of this meeting (which can be found in the *Homefront* chapter “February 1944: Fans Galore!”) it’s clear that while the Blitz was long over, occasional bombing raids on the capital were still a hazard the con attendees would have been aware of. Fortunately, the V2 had yet to start hitting Britain. The first of these would not arrive until 8th September 1944, when it would land on Staveley Road in Chiswick, some miles from both Teddington and Central London.

Having gathered at Waterloo, the group listed above then made their way to Charing Cross Road to scour the many bookshops it then contained (here in the present, it’s now down to its last few). No great finds were reported, the shops presumably having already been well picked-over by local fans. At 4:30 p.m. everyone moved to the Coventry Street Corner House, the London tearoom first announced as having been booked for the purpose in the original programme.

The Corner Houses were a chain of tearooms run by J. Lyons & Co., and the Coventry Street one had been the first. This was located on the junction of Coventry Street (north side) and Rupert Street and opened in 1909, eventually closing in 1970. (The building now houses “Planet Hollywood”.) Corner Houses offered reliable meals in clean and attractive surroundings. Their waitresses, known as “nippies”, became London icons in their smart black and white uniforms. The Corner Houses were rather more impressive than the term “tearoom” might suggest. Here’s a description (from <http://www.kzwp.com/lyons/cornerhouses.htm>):

“The Corner Houses were huge restaurants on four or five levels and each Corner House employed something like 400 staff. Each floor had its own restaurant style and all had orchestras playing to the diners almost continuously throughout the day and evening. At

one time they were open 24 hours. The ground floor was usually taken up by a large Food Hall where many speciality products from the Corner House kitchens could be bought. Items such as hams, cakes, pastries, hand-made chocolates, fruit from the Empire, wines, cheeses, flowers and much more. There were hair dressing salons, telephone booths, theatre booking agencies and a food delivery service to any address in London, twice a day. Meals and snacks were priced to meet most pockets. There were three Corner Houses in London, situated at Coventry Street, Strand and Tottenham Court Road.”

Though the Eastercon attendees were probably unaware of it, the Coventry Street Corner House was famous in gay circles throughout Britain as a welcoming venue where male homosexuals could meet socially at a time when their behaviour was criminalized. Also, of course, a J. Lyons teashop (not a full-size Corner House) at 36/38 New Oxford Street was where the tradition of London fans meeting in town on Thursdays that continues today in the first-Thursday pub meetings first got started.

At the Coventry Street Corner House, the others were joined by new arrivals Michael Lord (“looking magnificent enough to be his namesake of the Admiralty”), Tommy Bullet, and the Ouseleys of the Stoke-on-Trent group, which was believed to be the only active fan group in the country before the Cosmos Club made themselves known to wider fandom. Some were unimpressed by the food on offer, however, Manchester fans expressing surprise that Londoners could keep alive on such fare and retiring to recuperate in a nearby park. Ah, that old North-South sniping! Not everyone was seated in one session, as CSC member Gordon Holbrow discovered after spending too long in Charing Cross Road and missing the main assembly for tea:

“This teaches me because, when I do report to a fan wearing a red rosette in his buttonhole at the Coventry Street Corner House, I get put in charge of the second party. It seemed really wonderful how the whole of London had converged on that Corner House. I charge my little party into the throng and almost at once lose it. I feed myself and report back to the fan with the rosette wearing a sheepish grin on my face and say, ‘I’ve lost my party’. He forgives me and gives me another batch and hopes I do better next time.

This party is bound for a Disney show and it is not to my credit that we get there. A French ATS causes a little diversionary marching but, as I've already said, we get to the News Theatre.”

The Disney programme at the Cameo News Theatre at 307 Regent Street was the next item on the agenda and this started at 5:30 p.m. The Disney film *Fantasia* had been a big hit with fans of the day and seen multiple times by many of them, but in this instance the programme on offer was Disney Short Subjects.

As the name implies, News Theatres had been established primarily for the showing of newsreels such as those by British Pathe over here and the *March of Time* series in the US, though these were also shown before the main feature in other cinemas up through the 1960s. The Cameo itself underwent various changes of name over the years, finally ceasing to be a cinema in April 1980. It was taken back into use by the Polytechnic of Central London (today known as the University of Westminster) for use as a lecture hall and performance space, and the canopy over the former cinema entrance removed.

Following their cinema visit, the fans decamped to a pub in Greek Street. As for the party Holbrow was in charge of:

“Again it is not through my efforts that we arrive there safely. For one thing a couple of WAACs happen to pass the cinema on our exit. Then Johnny Millard knows the way to Greek Street. I decided that Johnny Millard was a fine guy, mainly because he told me to avoid a drink known as a black and tan.”

The pub was the Pillars of Hercules, right next door to the restaurant at 8 Greek Street where the evening meal had been booked. As John Millard wrote:

“About 6 or 7 of us – Art Williams, Ron Lane, Dennis Tucker, Gordon Holbrow, Fred Goodier – spent the rest of the time to dinner at the pub next to the Shanghai Restaurant drinking a few glasses of beer. Finally, about 7 p.m. and 3 pints later we retired to the sidewalk (pavement) outside where the rest of the party had congregated – Wally Gillings and wife had joined the party by now. Wally was editor of *Tales of Wonder* and one of the first fans I met here in England at the time of my first visit to the home of

JMR. So up the stairs of the Shanghai Restaurant for dinner, where a Chinese dinner was served to us. Us being about 23 or 4. A very good meal too; I'll leave it to you who know about Chinese meals."

The restaurant is no longer there and if it still survives has presumably long since moved south to Gerrard Street – now designated London's Chinatown – and doubtless changed its name several times, too. Here's Holbrow on the meal:

"The dinner is a three-cornered match between Tommy Bullet, Mike Lord and myself. The end – an enormous pile of empty plates."

And here's Aiken:

"Some participants perform prodigies of eating, despite the theory that the soup is nothing but an aquarium. They become completely surrounded by piles of empty dishes. Others hang back delicately, valuing their stomachs. Scotch Ale is brought in an enormous jug, and is imbibed. Professor Low, unable to be present under military exigencies, sends the gathering his love. Names are signed in wax (stencil). Deveraux, Gillings and Aiken decide that everyone must take everything much more seriously."

Walter Gillings was famously concerned that fans should be serious and present a responsible face to the world, a view which would form part of his speech in Teddington the following day. With Professor A.M. Low unable to attend, no one gave an after-dinner speech. According to Millard, the stencil signing alluded to by Aiken was the final act of the evening:

"One of the last things we did before the day's activity came to an end was to sign a stencil which Peter Hawkins, I believe it was, started around the dinner table. The day's activities ended about 9:45 p.m. (D.B.S.T.) Things finish early over here you know, and tomorrow the Convention is to continue at Teddington."

D.B.S.T. was of course Double British Summer Time. During World War Two, double summer time (two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time) was introduced and replaced ordinary summer time. During the winter, clocks were kept one hour ahead of GMT.

Looking at a map, it's clear the organizers had deliberately chosen

venues for Saturday's activities that were close together. Clustered in a small area bounded by Regent Street to the West, Charing Cross Road to the East, Oxford Street to the North, and Coventry Street/Leicester Square to the South, the distance between those venues could be quickly and easily covered on foot.

The following day in Teddington started, at 10 a.m., much as it still does for anyone running a convention, as Aiken records:

“Prodigious fetching and carrying by one and all. Shirley's (Teddington café housing Sunday's sessions) disappears beneath a wave of auction items and electrical apparatus. This latter turns out to be useless, doing nothing but emit loud indelicate noises, and keeping a mobile fuse-mending squad constantly in action.”

While all this preparation was going on, fans were already converging on them. As Millard relates, with what may be the most exact timings ever to appear in a con report:

“I was up by 8:00 a.m., had breakfast by 8:45 a.m. and was at Waterloo station by 9:35 a.m. for a train that was due to leave at 10:22 a.m. About 9:55 a.m. A.F. Hillman arrived, at about 10:21 a.m. Wally Gillings showed up, so we climbed aboard the train and landed at Teddington, which is south west of London, about 10:50. We made our way to Shirley's Cafe, just about a block from the Railroad Station, in the door and up the stairs where most of the gang was ahead of us. We gab for a while on this and that...”

Aiken again:

“Gascoigne, Gatland, Gomberg and Sandfield (wearing a tie of a totally new primary colour) are newcomers. Swing discussions rage. Hawkins appears with duplicated dinner-signatures. Ellis reads *Captain Future*, undisturbed.”

From which it would appear this was Lawrence Sandfield's first convention. As well as all this conversation, those present also admired the display area designated the “Fantasy Museum”. Original artwork by Harry Turner and by Morey; the manuscript of “The Smile of the Sphinx” (“It's the cat's whiskers,” says Hawkins) and other *Tales of Wonder* contributions; first issues; old books and the complete files of *Beyond* and *Cosmic Cuts* were on

view.

At noon the programme proper begins with an item described by Millard thus:

“First on the program was a ‘Brains Trust’ (sort of an ‘Information Please’). Those taking part were Dr J.K. Aiken, Wally Gillings and Peter Hawkins – as the brains, and E. Frank Parker as the Chief Custodian of questions.”

What those questions were has gone unrecorded, but of the item Aiken writes:

“... the questioners maintain a high intellectual level except for typographical trouble leading to moonstuck fans, and ribaldry about Millard’s socks.”

I have no idea what this might mean and an editorial aside in the report in *FWD* (“A peculiarity of American servicemen is their rolled-down gents’ natty half-hose – can someone tell us the reason?”) has left me none the wiser. Incidentally, when reading these old accounts it seems odd at first that Millard is consistently referred to as being American when he was in fact Canadian and serving with the Royal Canadian Air Force at the time. Here’s Taral Wayne’s later profile of him in *Toronto the Ghood*:

“November 1917 brought with it an advance Christmas present for the Millards of Toronto, in the form of one John L. Millard, now a six foot, blue-eyed ‘old time’ fan. The family moved to Michigan in 1919, so that when young John turned to science fiction in the late thirties he naturally gravitated to the circle of acolytes about Doc Smith. Becoming active at the Chicon in 1940, he helped organize the Galactic Roamers in January of the following year. The GR’s later became famous as the group that helped Doc Smith with his ‘Lensman’ series. After attending the Denvention in ’42 John joined the RCAF, serving with distinction in both Canada and England.”

As Tony Keen has pointed out:

“Actually, it’s not that unreasonable to describe as American someone who had lived 22 of their 26 years in the United States. And it is entirely accurate for someone writing in 1944 to describe



Millard as part of US fandom, as at that point all of Millard's fanac appears to have been in the US, and it seems that he made no contact with Canadian fandom before 1947."

As the final question was put to the Brains Trust so the sound of cutlery was heard from downstairs. This led to it being answered by the panellists in what Aiken refers to as "monosyllabic unison" and everyone then immediately trooping downstairs for lunch. "Proper Food?" asks someone anxiously. It is. At this point in the war, when food was rationed, this was a reasonable concern, but it appears the CSC had somehow managed to arrange a real meal.

Here's Millard:

"After the meal had been successfully done away with and several cups of tea had been drunk by everyone, we sat and listened to a speech by Wally Gillings. In the Programme it was listed as a Presidential Address, but as to what he was President of I don't know."

According to Aiken:

"Gillings performs the prodigious feat of keeping large numbers of fans silent and attentive for half an hour while he discusses the possible future and functions of fandom and fan writings, emphasizing the need for an attitude at once more serious and more broadminded. He outlines the kind of professional magazine he hopes will appear in Britain after the war, and suggests the *Beyonds* as training-grounds for its authors. It is up to fans, he says, to show that stf is worth while and can really foster achievement. (The high-spot of the con.)"

After Gillings' speech had concluded, people sat around talking for another hour or so. At 3:30 p.m. everyone trooped back upstairs for the first session of the auction. Frank Parker was the auctioneer and things initially got off to a slow start, though bidding picked up as the session progressed. What was on offer consisted mostly of American prozines, a few BRE\* *Astoundings*, and some original illustrations by Harry Turner. The magazines all fetched good prices, particularly copies of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, but Aiken reports a "surprising lack of enthusiasm for original drawings and manuscripts as against magazines". This is a pattern that would hold true for

future cons, and it would be some years before British fans started to show a proper interest in original artwork.

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*\* British Reprint Editions of Astounding, unsatisfactory for various reasons including the omission of fan-friendly departments such as the “Brass Tacks” letter column. [See chapter 20.](#) [Ed.]*

There was a half-hour tea-break from 5 p.m. – mainly, it appears, to allow Parker’s throat to recover – and then the auction resumed. Of this session Aiken writes:

“More auction – top price (10/-) paid for complete file of *Scoops*; the *FFM* of 10/6 fame does well again (8/6). Only a half-dozen items turned in. Ellis gets his *Captain Futures*. Curiously no British Reprint Editions are left. A spare *Beyond* does well.”

The film programme started at 6:30 p.m. with an item much loved by the Teddington fans:

“The *Cosmos Club* film, now patched and scratched almost beyond belief, plays all its tricks: it breaks, the reel falls off, the sprockets go haywire and finally the projector lamp blows. But Millard is a match for it; there is a spare lamp and after he has whirled it through in well under bogey the remaining films are almost hitch-free. The shorts (*Pioneer Mickey*, the puppet film, and the *Popeye*) are tops, *Monster of the Loch* being a little cryptic and dated.”

This was the final formal part of the convention. As most of the convention prepared to move to nearby pub The King’s Arms (now called The Clock House) they were joined by Gordon Holbrow who had finally managed to make it to the con after having had two bicycles fall apart beneath him during the day. Those that needed to get home headed for the train station, Mike Lord and Dennis Tucker leading the way. The “informal events” and “farewell party” that were originally announced for Monday do not appear to have happened, the convention ending on Sunday. John Millard sums up:

“So everything wound up at 8:30 p.m., but a social gathering was to continue at The Kings Arms and was to include some elbow bending. But as a few of us had to catch a train we didn’t go (shame!) and returned to London or our various abodes.

“Personally, the Convention was a great success. It was not easy to put on such an event and still get away with it the way

things are over here, especially in regard to food and transport. The committee did a real good job. They should be congratulated.”

In *Futurian War Digest* #35, Aiken said:

“In conclusion, the Committee would like to thank the participants (and in particular the President, for his generous sacrifice of a placid weekend) and the donors of auction items, for all they did to make the Con. a success. They announce that they propose to issue a souvenir booklet of higher quality than the illegible Programme: as to the proceeds (not so large as they would have been if that lamp hadn’t blown!), a proportion will go to a Future Convention Fund. One further announcement: the Debate (‘Man is not a free-agent’) postponed for lack of time, will have been held at Shirley’s on May 13.”

In November the CSC did publish that souvenir booklet, *Eastercon 1944*, a 14-page commemoration of the convention edited by Bruce Gaffron that was the primary source for this chapter. After the war, John Millard became a significant figure in Canadian fandom, going on to chair the 1973 Worldcon, TORCON 2. Almost thirty years after the event, he reminisced about the 1944 Eastercon in *Checkpoint* #45:

I spent almost three years in Britain during World War II and met a large number of sf fans: Douglas Webster, Michael Rosenblum, Frank Parker, Walter Gillings, and others. I also attended the 1944 Eastercon in London and Teddington. I remember that we first met at Waterloo Station and then went into the City to attend a Newsreel Cinema near Piccadilly Circus which was showing Disney cartoons. After that we went to a Youngers pub in Greek Street and later to a Chinese restaurant next door for a bang-up meal. On Easter Sunday I met Walt Gillings at Waterloo Station and we rode out to Teddington for the day’s bash at Shirley’s cafe. I met fans like A.F. Williams (“The Camberwell Miracle”), Bruce Gaffron, someone by the name of L. Hawkins, F. Goodier, K.W. Gaitard, Michael Lord, Dennis Tucker, A.G. Gascoigne, Syd Bounds, George Ellis, A.F. Hillman, Don Houston, and Gordon Holbrow, plus some others whose names I can’t read; they’re all in my autograph book that I kept during my years in Britain. It was a

typical fannish convention, enjoyed by all.

Looking back on the convention from the twenty-first century, the thing that most impresses about it is that it happened at all. The other wartime cons were small affairs, but the 1944 Eastercon was as full and complete a convention as any that had been seen in Britain to that point. Organizing and running it under wartime conditions was a magnificent achievement. Both it and those responsible for it, the Cosmos Club, deserve to be better remembered and more celebrated than they have been. [1]

**J. Michael Rosenblum:**

Badly delayed by the interference of doodle-bugs [*V-1 flying bombs*], the souvenir booklet of the EASTERCON 1944 has made its appearance at last. A 14 page booklet, illustrated and printed by Bruce Gaffron (11 Erridge Rd, Merton Park, SW 19), it is a neat and worthy remembrance of the London Meeting earlier this year, organized by Teddington's Cosmos Club. The contents consist of a report of the Presidential Address by Walter H. Gillings, in the best parliamentary manner; J.K. Aiken's Convention Diary, or blow by blow commentary; Gordon Holbrow Goes Bang (his report) and Johnny Canuck's (J.F. Millard's) Review. Also included is the Convention Quiz; without answers to my dismay. The whole enlivened by bonny little sketches giving someone's opinion on the proceedings. Distribution system unknown to me but no charge appears to be visible. [2]

[1] *Relapse* #16 (February 2010, ed. Peter Weston)

[2] *Futurian War Digest* #38 (December 1944, ed. J. Michael Rosenblum)

## 13. Hunting the Past

### Rob Hansen:

During the day on New Year's Eve 2008, when more sensible folk were already starting to get merry, I made a field trip to Teddington, armed with the map E. Frank Parker had sketched for *Lamppost #3*. A bit of googling a few weeks back had revealed, to my surprise, that the Paint Research Station was still where it had been since the 1930s so I figured I'd take some photos of that and see what else on Frank's little map still survived. To my great disappointment, the Paint Research Station – or the Paint Research Association as it became – were derelict and boarded up. I was several years too late (I later learned it had moved to a new site in 2005)! I snapped some pics anyway, but what a disappointment.

An even closer near-miss came with the King's Arms, where the Cosmos Club would repair for alcoholic refreshment. There was a King's Head on the road indicated on Parker's map, but it was a bit too far along. Closer to where the pub should've been was one called The Clock House but of the King's Arms there was no sign. Of course, when going through those local history books I came across a photo of the King's Arms and discovered it's the pub now called the Clock House, but too late to call in for a quick pint, alas. Googling it later, I learned it had reopened as The Clock House on December 1st, a mere four weeks before my visit.

Still, these disappointments were more than offset by the discovery that the building where the Cosmos Club actually held their regular meetings, and where the 1944 Eastercon was held, still existed. It was not called "Shirley's Cafe" anymore of course – it was now "Spivak Chemist" – but it was clearly the same building. Parker's map instructs people to go right on upstairs when they get there because that's where the convention is. I hadn't been able to visualize this, but when you see it, it's obvious how this worked. The stairs were still visible in the front of the shop and they lead up to a hall – presumably extra dining space at the time – that would easily accommodate forty or so people.

Those currently running it had no idea what the building had been used for in the 1940s, so I did some checking in local history books at a local library just to be sure it was the right building. My recent tribulations in

locating the site of the Globe (see *Prolapse* #13) had given me reason to be wary in this regard. A photo from the early twentieth century in one book showed the Clarence Hotel – now called the Park – and that section of Park Road looking pretty much as it does now. There were no buildings demolished between then and now that could have been alternate candidates for Shirley’s Cafe. I found another photo that shows how the front of the shop had looked before it became Spivak, but it wasn’t until I phoned the Local History section at Richmond Old Town Hall that I got confirmation the building had definitely been a cafe in the 1940s – run by a Mrs Eleanor Anderson in 1940, apparently – but no actual confirmation of name, alas. Still, I don’t think there’s any doubt this was the building. Which made it the oldest venue at which a con was held in the south that was still standing!

One year and two days later it was Saturday 2nd January 2010, and I was once again making a field trip in connection with the 1944 Eastercon. Odd to think of a visit to Central London as a field trip but that’s precisely what it was. I exited the Underground at Piccadilly Circus and walked along Coventry Street until I came to the junction with Rupert Street. The building on one of those two facing corners was once the Coventry Street Corner House. Above street level they look much the same as they would’ve through most of the twentieth century so a websearch should turn up an image to let me figure out which one it is. Which it did.

Then it was over to Greek Street to seek out the pub mentioned in the con reports. Gordon Holbrow described this as being on the corner of Greek Street. There were three pubs on the street, two of them on corners. The candidates were The Three Greyhounds and The Coach & Horses. This latter pub would later be the favoured watering hole of actors, writers and musicians such as Jeffrey Bernard, George Melly, Lucien Freud, and *Doctor Who* actor Tom Baker, and was then where the fortnightly editorial lunch of *Private Eye* was held. Naturally, I hoped this will turn out to be the pub, but took photos of both for if/when I uncovered which it was.

Next, since I was in town anyway, I ambled over to Lincoln’s Inn Fields and took several pictures of the bandstand in the park there. This was where the 1941 gathering of fans later dubbed “Bombcon” took place (see *1957: The First London Worldcon*), so I wanted these for my archive. Trouble is, there were sawn off stumps of an earlier structure visible in the floor so this was probably not the original bandstand but a replacement. While I was pondering this, it suddenly occurred to me that I was no more than a ten

minute walk away from Holborn Library and that it might be worth seeing if they're open and checking out Greek Street in their local history archives. They were, and a few minutes with a microfilm reader scrolling through old directories gave me an address for the Shanghai Restaurant – 8 Greek Street – that put it next door to the third pub on the street, The Pillars of Hercules. Since that pub was not on a corner, this puzzled me.

Nevertheless I trudged back over to Greek Street to take more photos. Turns out The Pillars of Hercules was kind of on a corner. The upper storeys were built over what I had taken to be an alley running down the side of the pub at ground level but which turned out to be designated a street despite being barely wide enough to allow a single car to squeeze past it. What had been the Shanghai restaurant in 1944 was now a shop imaginatively named “SHOP”. (Perhaps it sold generic products.)

Photos taken, I headed home where a websearch I really should have done before setting out gave me an address on Regent Street for the Cameo News Theatre. With the addresses of all the venues to hand I could now study a map and see for the first time just why the Eastercon's organizers chose them. That's the cool thing about this sort of research; it gives you a glimpse into what those guys were thinking, all those years ago.

– *Relapse* #16 (February 2010, ed. Peter  
Weston)

## 14. The Midventionette Leicester, 1-3 September 1944

(This report is compiled largely from the personal reactions of the various slen present, which were written down during the Con. No one person is writing throughout, but the report is presented in the third person from the viewpoint of a hypothetical omni-present attendant.)

The convention more or less began with the arrival of Gus Willmorth, on Friday, September 1st, at 10:00 p.m. Talking, eating, and the sorting of auction stuff took most of the time until 2:30 a.m., when Gus and RRJ crept stealthily downstairs in search of beer RRJ had cached. Unfortunately, parents or said 2-R know what slen were, and had taken steps to remove the beer. Ginger wine was consumed, with sporadic outbursts of baffled rage. Merits of English and American beer were discussed. (Both slen being experts on the subject...)

Gus and RRJ arose next morning to find Arthur W. Gardner pounding (figuratively) on the door-bell. Though presenting an appearance more suitable for a Vomaiden\*, RRJ was not deterred, and music ensued – Liszt's 10th Hungarian Rhapsody, I believe.

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\* A telescoping of "VOM maiden", that fanzine being notorious for drawings of naked ladies. [Ed.]

The three wandered into town armed with Gus's booklist and fifteen of the Johnson's forty-two Library tickets. (Two is the official quota but I used to work at said Library.) Books were procured, and the three musketeers swam through an almost Mancunian downpour to the inevitable second-hand book-shop. AWG and RRJ were staggered by the following transaction in high finance:–

GUS: How much for that edition of Fraser's *Golden Bough*?

GUY: £7-10-0.

GUS: Sold.

More swimming, to the restaurant where semi-slan Boris Parker was to be picked up. Naturally, he wasn't present – turned up some time later at "Homewood" (abode of Johnson), where the other three had congregated. Cast-iron arrangements by phone to meet semi-slan Tony Anticoni resulted in



his being completely excluded from the day's action, and the four slen made their way to the gymnasium of the YMCA.

There, an impromptu duel was staged (supposedly from a Burroughs epic) between a first-class YMCA fencer, one George Wearn, and RRJ, now a fencing instructor. Blood flowed freely, and when the duel was over the slen refused all challenges thrown out to them by the two swordsmen. George Wearn, who is of Tarzanish build and an amateur weight-lifter, demonstrated how to lift a couple of tons (or so it seemed) above his head. Surprise came when Gus quite easily duplicated his feats!

In the meantime, Ralph Orme had arrived, no doubt swearing volubly under his breath at RRJ, who in his letters had given directions the result of which was that Ralph had to travel over most of Leicester before he found the others.

After the strong men had finished, and thanks given to GW (who has no connection with slandom), tea was taken. Apparently ((No, *definitely* BVP & RRJ)), Johnson and Parker are well-known denizens of the restaurant, for during lunch and tea there was much lively repartee with the waitresses.

The first stop after tea was the hotel where the out-of-town slen were to stay. Thence, to "Homewood" once more. Music, supper, discussions, work on this report, and what have you, ensued.

It was resolved that on the morrow the slen should *convene very early* at "Homewood", for the auction – RRJ was most insistent about this, and set 9:30 a.m. as the latest time.

Boris Parker arrived at [*unreadable*] to find Johnson just dressing, and the other three rolled up at 10:15!

The auction was not over-successful, on account of the dearth of bidders. Gus was the main auctioneer, and under the circumstances he did a very good job. Ralph Orme was the main buyer, contributing 8/10d towards the total of 25/6d. Several items, including the exquisite Wallace Smith portfolio, were deemed too good for our small auction and were put forward until the next large convention.

Lunch followed, and on returning from the restaurant, Gus, Ralph, and RRJ consumed four and a half pints of beer: Gus had to be dragged forcibly from the bar – we have photographic evidence, which we hope to be able to include with this report. [*They didn't.*] A few outstanding items were auctioned off by RRJ, and then the fun started.

The music session was scheduled for the afternoon, and it is regretted

that Keith Gayton, brilliant Leicester pianist whose talents approach virtuosity, was unable to be present, owing to a rehearsal of the Leicester Symphony orchestra with which, at the age of sixteen, he plays frequently. His performance was to have been the high-spot of the programme, and we were very sorry he could not attend – though he visited RRJ during the following week and played superbly.

However, Boris Parker, a good dance band pianist in his own right, was present, and the two other guests – Bill Gutteridge, an even better jive pianist than Boris, and a clarinetist to boot, and “Viv” Green, a trumpeter – soon arrived, followed by Tony Anticoni, who unfortunately could not bring his drum-kit through the rain.

The convention degenerated – or ascended? – into a jam-session. Clarinet, trumpet; piano; trumpet and four hands on piano; solo piano; we had them all, in a really solid jive session. The otherwise respectable neighbourhood certainly rocked that day! With the non-appearance of Keith Gayton, the classical section was almost non-existent – RRJ did manage to play on the “pianola” the 1st movement of Schumann’s A Minor piano concerto, but that was all. It was, principally, J-I-V-E!!!

After said jive had been attended to, and the comparatively tame item of tea gotten over, more photographs were taken, and then the meeting broke up. Ralph’s LNER train, Arthur’s ’bus, and Gus’s LWS train all left in quick succession; the musicians had already departed; and Tony and RRJ were left to clear things up, which they did by playing darts at “Homewood”, after first visiting the notorious “Dover Castle”, favourite haunt of beer-drinking YMCA members.

Tony departed at 10 p.m., and the con was officially over, just two days after it had begun. From the point of view of size, it was not over-successful: six slen attended, plus two musicians and the fencer. But, as usual, it was extremely enjoyable. Slen *always* manage to have a good time when they’re together, and the one advantage of a small, informal meeting is that everyone gets to know everyone else, and at no time does any attendant feel “out of it”.

So we conclude with a report of success: and best wishes to the New Year convention – may our meetings never grow less!

– *Report of the Midventionette* (September 1944, distributed with *Fido*)

# **15. Norcon II**

## **Leeds, 29 December 1944 to 1 January 1945**

*The first news of a second NORCON came in J. Michael Rosenblum's Futurian War Digest #37, published in October 1944:*

'NOTHER NORCON or HOW ABOUT THIS YEAR?

Plans are again being laid for a New Year Meet, somewhere in the North of England. An ad hoc committee has more or less appointed itself to explore the possibilities and create plans, consisting of Messrs R.B. Johns, Lane and Ellis, Holmes and Art Williams, Ken Chadwick and JMR. As for place the three possibles are Leicester, Manchester or Leeds and tentative plans are being considered at each. So far both Leeds and Manchester have two votes each so that expression of opinion of probable attendees will help to definitely decide. Full details will be included in the next issue of *Fido*, due out December 1st. though it is possible a special sheet will be issued previously.

In any case will all people who hope to come (including forces fans) please drop a line to JMR and be sure to include: whether almost definitely attending, what accommodation is required, vote re place, and suggestions for programme etc. If held in Leeds two suggestions are a visit to a local pantomime and a tour round the world-famous Quarry Hill flats in Leeds. The usual talks, Brains Trust, auction and quiz will of course be included and the date is December 29th (Friday) to January 1st (Monday). [1]

*By the following issue in December plans had firmed up:*

YOU, TOO, can be at a meeting! Not quite as dramatic as that portrayed above, perhaps, but an enjoyable break in the monotony of a year or so of lone "fanning". Anyrate here are the latest details.

This year's NORCON will be held at Leeds from Friday Dec 29th to Monday Jan 1st. If there is any chance of you coming, write at once to J.M. Rosenblum, 4 Grange Terrace, Leeds 7. If you don't get in touch quickly there is little chance of booking hotel accommodation in a bloc. Gus

Willmorth, Eric Hopkins, Allan Miles, Ron Lane, George Ellis, JMR, Ken Chadwick, John Millard are all almost certain to be present. Non-attendees can show interest by donating material to the auction, to be sent c/o JMR, which has already a number of items from Claude Degler including some original illustrations, a copy of the Wallace Smith portfolio donated by Gus, and the Lovecraft "Weird Shadow over Innsmouth" from Paul Searles. The programme has not been finally fixed yet so suggestions are still welcome. Business sessions will be held at the Dick Sheppard Centre, Leeds, and receptions at 4 Grange Terrace. [1]

### **Norcon Report – D.R. Smith**

This, the second such event, proved to be quite successful within its necessarily limited scope. Fourteen fans attended altogether: Ron Holmes and Rita James of Liverpool, Ron Lane, Ron Bradbury, and George Ellis of Manchester, Norman ("Gus") Willmorth of Los Angeles, Edwin MacDonald of Inverness, Joyce Fairbairn (Sheffield-at-the-moment), Roy Johnson and Ken Chadwick from Leicester, Brenda Gabrielle Lee, Miriam Harris, Arthur Harris, and J.M. Rosenblum of Leeds; but the maximum on any day was thirteen, Edwin MacDonald substituting for Joyce Fairbairn on the Sunday, and vicky verky on Saturday.

The initial gathering was on the evening of Friday, Dec. 29th, at 4 Grange Terrace, known the world over as the residence of Michael Rosenblum, for the purpose, one presumes, of talk about this and that. Such too one ascribes as the purpose of the Saturday Morning assembly, but the afternoon started with a swing by a visit to the world's largest block of flats – Quarry Hill Flats, Leeds (American papers please copy). Passing from the sublime to the ridiculous, the party proceeded to the cinema to be regaled with a revival of *Hoppity Goes to Town*. The inner man then standing in need of refreshment, dinner was taken at a hotel where no exception was made to there being thirteen at table, and the day concluded with a quiz in which Leeds, incorporating for the nonce Los Angeles (!), proved superior to the intellectual combination of the rest of Great Britain.

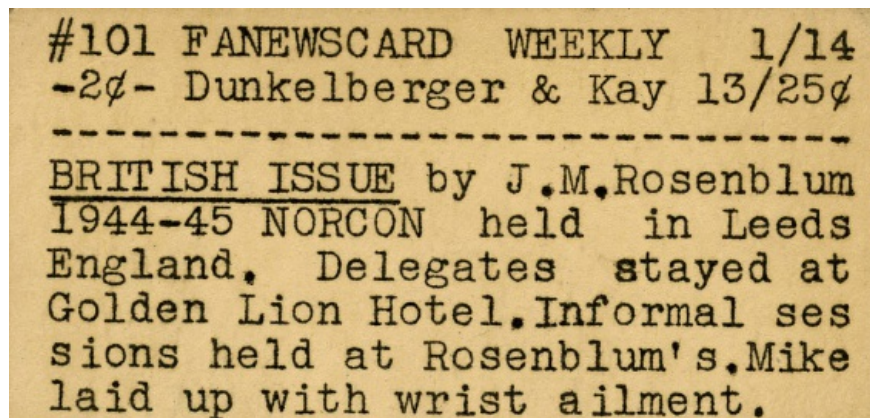
On Sunday morning and afternoon, sessions were held at the Dick Sheppard Centre. At these it was decided to advocate a Midvention for Easter (get your excuses ready, Smithy!). The question of what to do with the financial surplus resulting from auctions and whatnot at Conventions was raised, and settled by deciding to establish a pool for such monies, the

eventual hoard to be used for some major purpose such as promoting a super postwar convention, or for establishing the central library scheme (as mentioned in previous *Bulletins*). Ron Holmes was elected treasurer. The auction itself realized nearly £3, against which is approximately 10/- costs, making quite an initial contribution to the kitty. Recent prozines, especially *Amazing Stories*, were something of a drug on the market, but considerable interest was shown in books. The evening was spent at Grange Terrace tapering off from the main doings of the day with chatter, games, and this-and-that generally.

We are indebted to Michael Rosenblum for the above facts, scrawled down as best he could in spite of his fibrositis still persisting. I'm sure all will join me in wishing Michael complete recovery in the near future – if only for purely selfish reasons! [2]

[1] *Futurian War Digest* #37 (October 1944, ed. J. Michael Rosenblum)

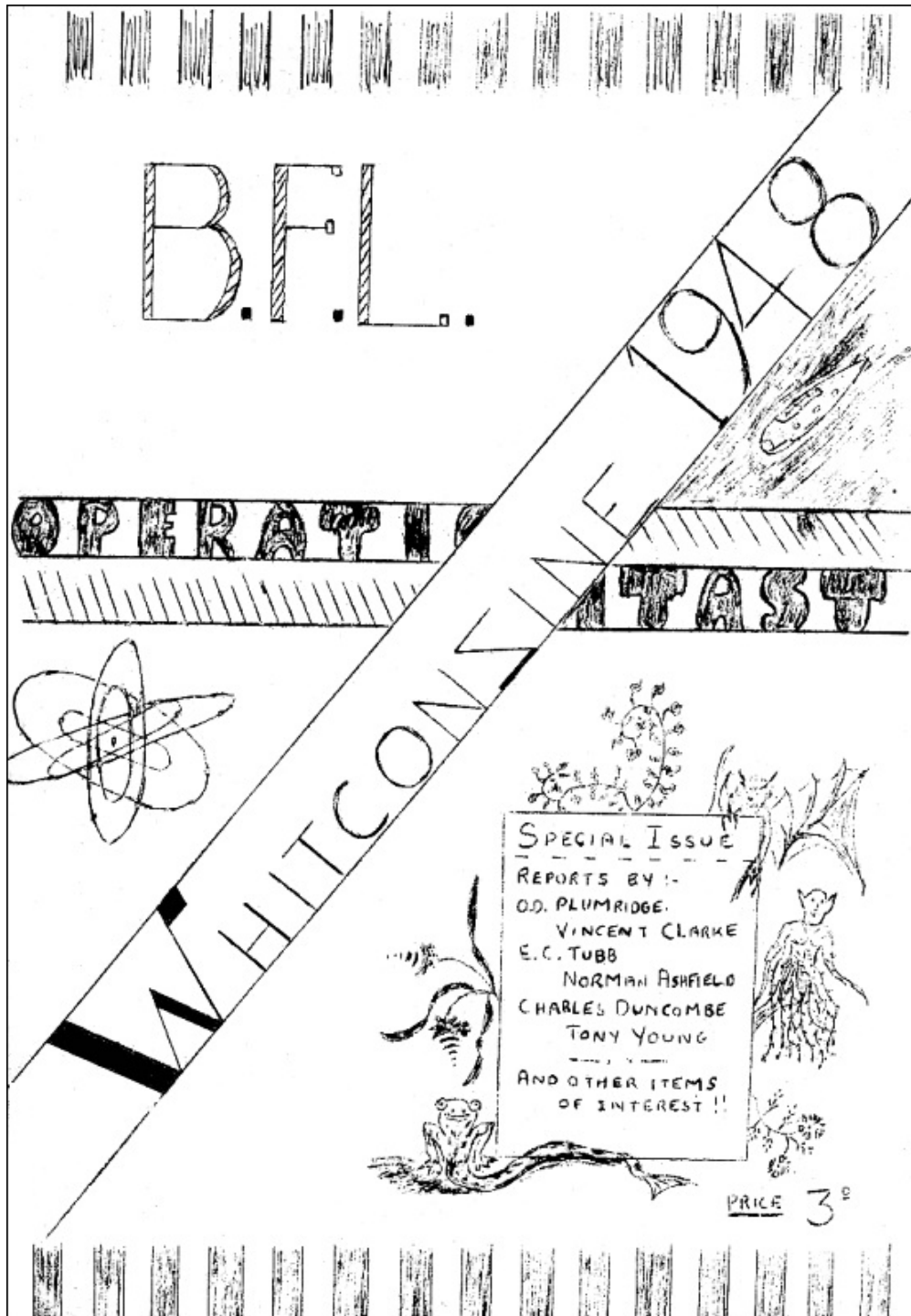
[2] *BFS Bulletin* #20 (January 1945, ed. D.R. Smith)



#101 FANEWSCARD WEEKLY 1/14  
-2¢- Dunkelberger & Kay 13/25¢  
-----  
BRITISH ISSUE by J.M. Rosenblum  
1944-45 NORCON held in Leeds  
England. Delegates stayed at  
Golden Lion Hotel. Informal ses  
sions held at Rosenblum's. Mike  
laid up with wrist ailment.

*US Fanewscard coverage, 14 January 1945*

1948



*Whitconzine (1948)*

## 16. Whitcon London, 15 May 1948

The Whitcon of 1948 was held on Saturday May 15th in a room above the White Horse pub – home of the London Circle. It was the first post-war British SF convention and is the one that our national conventions are numbered from. It lasted a single day and was organized by a single person: John Newman, late of the by this point defunct Cosmos Club.

At the time of the Whitcon, Britain only had Ken Slater's Operation Fantast, the British Fantasy Library, and the Cosmos Club Library to serve as any sort of rallying point for fans nationally. The BFL and CCL were primarily postal book and magazine lending libraries and were departments that had survived the demise of the British Fantasy Society and Cosmos Club respectively. Import and currency restrictions made acquiring American books and magazines a difficult prospect and gave such libraries an importance often not appreciated by fans of later eras.

The Whitconzine and the Whitcon Booklet were published after the con and between them contain pretty much everything we know about the convention. Interestingly, the Whitconzine was published "by Operation Fantast for the BFL". However, what this meant in practice is not clear.

This account of the convention has been edited together from the accounts they contain. The one in the Whitcon Booklet was unsigned, alas. Bill Temple's humorous report, "Caught in a Convention", appears in the collection of his fanwriting *Temple at the Bar* and has not been included here.

£1 in 1948 is equivalent to around £45 today.

### Known Attendees:

- M.E. Allen
- Frank Arnold
- Norman Ashfield
- V.W. Barker(?)
- Syd Bounds
- Daphne Bradley
- Fred Brown



- Ron Buckmaster
- Jim Burch
- Ted Carnell
- Irene Carnell
- A. Bertram Chandler
- Joan Chandler
- Ken Chapman
- Joan Chapman
- Harold Chibbett
- Arthur C. Clarke
- Vince Clarke
- Jimmy Clay
- Ron Deacon
- Alan Devereaux
- J.D. Doggett
- Don Doughty
- Don Doughty's fiancée
- Charles Duncombe
- Mrs R. Duncombe
- D.J. Fabian
- Frank Fears
- Kerry Gaulder
- Walter Gillings
- Madeline "Madge" Gillings
- Ron Gillings
- Peter Hawkins
- Eric Hopkins
- Terry Jeeves
- Ken Johnson
- E.F. Newman
- John Newman
- Terry Overton
- Owen Plumridge
- Sandy Sandfield
- D. Sandman
- (?) Syms
- Bill Temple

- Joan Temple
- Ted Tubb
- Tony Young
- E.J. Webb
- Eric Williams
- G.F. White

This list has been gleaned from the two publications. There are also references to “Speedy” and “Dave”. Whether these are two more attendees or merely nicknames for a couple of those named above is unknown. There are 50 signatures of congoers on the inside front page of the Whitcon Booklet – several of them unreadable, alas. One of those names – George Whitley – was a pen-name of Bertram Chandler, so we can only be sure that 49 people attended.

## **Prologue**

### **Anonymous:**

When the British Fantasy Society died through lack of interest London fans came together and formed the “London Circle”. The first meeting was at Fred Brown’s house, and the later ones at a room in the “White Horse” in Fetter Lane. From a small gathering of a dozen or so this group grew and now about twenty fans meet regularly every Thursday evening.

The London Circle was and is successful due to its lack of formality, absence of cliques and air of friendliness. The activities of this group are many and varied, whilst regular attendees include the editors of several fantasy magazines, many writers and artists, and well known fans and collectors. They are in contact with fans in many parts of the world and obtain the latest magazines and books. They organized the Whitcon at very short notice.

The first science-fiction and fantasy Convention to be held in Great Britain since 1944. What would it be like? Who would be there? Would it be successful? Such were the thoughts of dozens of fans as Whit Saturday approached. Fans from all over the country came; fans from all over the world sent their congratulations. British fandom was not yet dead. [1]

### **Vince Clarke:**

There must have been something in the efficiency of prayer, for Saturday May 15th, the day of the Whitcon, brought just the weather that we

wanted – a clear sky, a blazing sun, and a temperature up in the 70s.

After a cheerful busy morning, packing books, mags, want lists, etc., I had an early dinner, entrained for central London, and arrived outside Leicester Square Underground Station punctually at half past two. I met collector-dealer Fred Brown at the entrance, and we descended into the depths. A psychic aura and a feeling of tension in one corner of the booking hall indicated the presence of either deros or fans, and on going over we were greeted by John Newman, Convention Organizer, and fans Jimmy Clay and Jim Burch. Some fans had already departed on book-hunting and exploration trips, so after the arrival of two more fans who were strangers to us, they, Jim Burch, and myself went out into the sunshine of Charing Cross Road to commence our own tour of the bookshops; Fred went off to the pictures, preferably to see *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*; and the other two stayed to meet late arrivals.

Except for the book of a play, *The Brain*, which Jim Burch found, we encountered no really “off-trail” items, and Foyles, which we penetrated in the company of author-fan Syd Bounds, who had joined us half-way along the road, also proved barren although we got some amusement from finding such titles as *The Outsider*, *Out of the Silence*, *The Red Planet*, *Darkness and the Dawn*, etc., all of which were strictly non-fantasy. Five o’clock found a gradually increasing group outside Lyons Corner House, including Newman and Clay again, Peter Hawkins, and so many new faces that I quite lost track of names. Fourteen of us sat down at adjoining tables for tea, and SF fan/British Interplanetary Society member Frank Fears brought in another half-dozen later. [2]

**Anonymous:**

2:30. The first contingent of fans met at Leicester Square station where London fans were waiting to conduct them around the bookshops in Charing Cross Road. Another party left to visit the Science Museum, where they spent the afternoon pressing buttons and watching the wheels go round.

3:00. At the second meeting place, outside Lyons Corner House, at Tottenham Court Road, the parties were met by other fans, and treasures acquired in the bookshops were displayed. The fans had tea before they went on to the main meeting, at the White Horse in Fetter Lane. [1]

**Vince Clarke:**

As we finished tea, we made our way, in small parties, to the White

Horse, venue of the London Circle meetings, where the saloon bar gradually filled with chattering fans, whose clamour temporarily drowned the incessant ringing of a bell in a nearby office, which might have been sounding in celebration, but was probably a short-circuited burglar alarm.

It was amazing how many fans not connected with the Circle turned up – far too many to meet individually. The feminine element was there, represented by fanette Miss Bradley of Chatham, the wives of Carnell, Chapman, Chandler, Duncombe, Gillings, and Temple, and the fiancée of Don Doughty, who is to be married next month, and who was thus introduced to the strange company her husband-to-be keeps for the first time. Another first-timer was Ronnie Gillings, Walter's son, who is quite an enthusiastic fan.

At half-past six, with the bell still ringing, we trooped upstairs to a prepared room. Striking decoration was provided by originals of *Tales of Wonder* covers arranged around the walls, several advertising posters of horror films, originals from *New Worlds*, and other fantastic illustrations. At the back, a piano and table were covered with a quantity of mags, books, and illustrations for the auction; whilst in various corners, other small tables bore current mags lent by Newman and Bounds, various oddities such as old fan mags and an old *Chums* with an SF cover, and a number of *Fantasy Reviews*, and propaganda thereof. [2]

**Anonymous:**

The Meeting Room... was liberally decorated with dozens of original covers and illustrations. A long table was covered with books and another table held copies of all the latest magazines, for exhibition only. The outstanding exhibit was Dr. Aiken's typed magazine *Beyond*. [1]

*This was the single-copy fanzine produced by Cosmos Club members during the war, that copy being passed from person to person.*

**Vince Clarke:**

Stretching down one side of the room were the buffet tables, laden with various kinds of sandwiches, cakes and tarts.

The five or six rows of chairs were soon filled, and Walter Gillings took his seat as Chairman flanked by Chandler, Carnell, Newman and A.C. Clarke.

Mr. Gillings opened the proceedings by giving a brief resume of the

various fan gatherings that had taken place in this country, and of the growth of the London Circle into a regular weekly meeting. He then introduced authors Chandler, Temple and Clarke, and mentioned that the latter had a number of stories coming in future *Astoundings*.

He expressed pleasure at seeing so many present, not only the old fans, some of whom had attended the pre-war meetings, but a number of new faces also. There had been some talk of starting a new fan association, and he thought that it was, in general, up to the new fans to show what they could do. The question would be brought up for discussion later in the evening if there was time for it.

John Newman then read out the names of fans who, although unable to attend personally, had sent good wishes and donations, with special mention of Lt. Ken Slater, now in Germany, who had sent £2 to buy drinks all round (Loud cheers, which again drowned the bell.) Ted Carnell then took the floor, and started by recalling the difference between the first SF convention held in this country and the present one. He and Walter Gillings had gone to Leeds to attend it, in the SFA Clubroom there, in the backroom of an already condemned house! (Laughter). War had broken up fan activity in this country, and Ted struck a graver note as he mentioned some of the missing fans, including Sid Birchby, now a regular soldier living in Africa, and the late Maurice Hugi. "Fans Abroad" led to the subject of the "Big Pond Fund". This had been started by American fans for the purpose of providing the passage money for an English representative to attend the last World S-F Convention in the States. Unfortunately, only half the money required was collected in time, and the fund had been held over. If fans were interested in having a representative, picked by themselves, at next year's convention, he thought that some sign should be made, or cash collected so far would be diverted elsewhere. This again called for discussion, later.

Giving what was, to some, the first news of the cessation of *New Worlds*, Ted said that S-F publishing had been very lucky in this country. It was obvious what had been wrong with *Scoops*, the first SF publication; the publishers of *Tales of Wonder* had been unable to develop it as Editor Gillings wanted, and it had been finished by the War, as had the pre-war *Fantasy*, whose editor had only read a few of the contemporary magazines, and lacked the necessary knowledge of its background history.

Post-war, the publishers' reluctance to expend some of their diminished paper quotation on *Fantasy* had ended it. Pendulum, the publishers of *New*

*Worlds*, had other publications and a subsidiary company which failed, and caused the company's bankruptcy.

*N.W.* itself, after a poor start, improved so much as to oversell its third issue before printing and many more copies could have been sold. At the moment, however, no publisher could be approached concerning a new SF magazine.

Ted then went on to give what is probably the biggest news since *T.O.W.* first started. [2]

**Anonymous:**

Because of the paper situation, he could not approach any other publisher to take over *New Worlds*. But only a few days before he had been discussing with Mr. Gillings, Mr. Ken Chapman and Mr. Eric Williams the possibility of forming their own company to continue publication of the magazine, and they had practically agreed upon this step. It would not require a great deal of capital; it was felt that they would have the full support of the fans, and they were considering how they could afford them the opportunity of participating in the enterprise, which would ensure the continued development of fantasy-fiction in this country.

Mr. Carnell was instantly bombarded with questions by fans who wanted further information of the proposed company. The Chairman said the details had not yet been worked out; there were many difficulties to be overcome, and the whole success of the magazine depended upon proper distribution.

But he had decided – and he thought Mr. Carnell would agree with him, after his experience – that they were wasting their time trying to interest British publishers in the proper development of fantasy-fiction, and if other people interested in an idea (such as the Communists), could establish their own publication and make it grow, why not fantasy fans? The idea had been at the back of his mind for many years, but it was only now that they had been forced to consider it seriously as the only way out of the present deadlock. He had started *Fantasy Review*, not only to keep readers informed of all developments such as *Fantasy* and *New Worlds*, but partly in anticipation of the situation now confronting them. [1]

**Vince Clarke:**

While emphasizing that the project was still very nebulous, it had been suggested that a company be formed, with 20,000 x 5/- shares available to

fans. Ted saw no reason why, if the BRE *ASF*, sold 20,000 copies per issue, another magazine couldn't be a success. The gathering was too informal for a business discussion, but he would like to get the fans reaction to the proposal after the buffet break. Ted here answered some questions concerning probable sales (judging from *New Worlds*, should be good); the stories held (too English for the States); the shares (single ones would be available); and various minor questions.

He then finished with a few words about books, which he said were very awkward to get. *Triplanetary* had started coming in, apparently advancing from the West, as he had letters telling of its arrival only from the West Country so far, but *Without Sorcery* was held up by a printer's strike.

Walter Gillings then spoke very enthusiastically of the new project, although emphasizing that it was still very much in a preliminary stage. It was about time the fans ran their own mag! [2]

**Anonymous:**

The Chairman then introduced Mr. Arthur C. Clarke, Council member of the B.I.S., who gave an interesting talk on "Science Fiction and Astronautics" in which he considered whether SF had been a good or a bad thing, for the space-travel movement. He recalled that many of the earliest organizers and supporters of the Society were science fiction readers interested in the philosophical and sociological aspects of space-flight; the first secretary, Leslie Johnson, was an active SF fan. Today, with a much bigger membership, such people were in a 20% minority. Of the whole membership, there was a very small number which would not touch SF with a barge-pole; there was a larger group which read it surreptitiously and didn't like to talk about it, and many more who read and discussed it openly and didn't give a damn what the rest thought. These SF fans were to be found among both technical and non-technical members.

He went on to trace the spread of interplanetary ideas through the stories of Verne and others, and to show how serious students of astronautics, such as the Germans, later used SF to propagate their notions. In that respect, SF had been of great service to the movement; indeed it was practically a law that people were interested in the science through SF. He had been inclined to question the value of some of its less desirable specimens, but people had been forced to take even *Flash Gordon* seriously after the developments of the last few years.

“So, though we cannot altogether dismiss SF without a stain on its character, it seems evident that astronautics would never have reached the stage of development it now has if it hadn’t been for science fiction, which has done much to break down the psychological barriers which are still hampering our progress.” [1]

**Vince Clarke:**

Arthur recalled an incident of an eminent mathematician who had attended a B.I.S. conference with a suitcase bulging with what were presumed to be technical papers, but which had later been revealed to contain a number of *Wonder Stories* (Laughter). Although bad, and juvenile SF, such as Buck Rogers, etc., had cast a shadow on American rocket research, in particular, on the whole, although there were stains on its character, SF had done good in breaking down psychological barriers of opposition to astronautics. In future, interplanetary SF would have to be more factual, owing to the technical advance in the theory of space flight.

John Newman then announced that more notice would be given of the next convention, and plans would be started about Xmas-time.

Instead of the money from the auction going to the Cosmos Club (Library?), as originally intended, it had been suggested that it be put into the Big Pond Fund instead. A show of hands was called for, and an overwhelming majority voted for the suggestion. This, again, would be discussed afterwards. It was proposed that an outing in Kew Gardens should take place the next afternoon, and anyone who cared to come would be welcome in his house in the evening. A CONVENTION BOOKLET was to be prepared, and everyone present would receive a copy. If we would all sign our names on the paper by the door, the signatures would be incorporated in the booklet. In finishing, thanks were given to Messrs. Gillings, Carnell, and Chapman for distributing convention details.

Ken Chapman then proposed a vote of thanks to John for organizing the con, which was carried amid cheers and clappings. [2]

**Anonymous:**

The meeting then broke up to drink the health of Ken Slater, who had sent two pounds to buy everyone a drink. Attention was then turned to the food, plenty of which was available. Even the combined efforts of all present could not cope with the quantities which had been supplied. Animated groups gathered round the bar downstairs, the buffet and the auction table. [1]



### **Vince Clarke:**

The tables were surrounded by hungry fans, and a constant stream trudged down stairs to get Ken Slater's round, and a few of their own. The bell was still ringing, but it had become an ordinary background noise now. Fans were sitting and standing all over the place, eating, drinking, talking, meeting old and new friends, etc.

Frank Fears was trying to get Miss Bradley to join the B.I.S.

Whitstable fan Tony Young was trying to draw some sketches, but everyone kept roving. Some of us got a glimpse of the fabulous *Weird Tales* No. 1, owned by Fred Brown. Ken Johnson, North-country fan, who had come down without making arrangements for the night was being promised a bed by Jim Clay.

Dozens of conversations were going on at once.

And, in time, hunger and thirst assuaged, the chairs were gathered in a huge semicircle around one corner of the room, and the auction commenced. Ted Tubb, assisted by Plumridge and Sandfield, was the auctioneer, and he scored a great success, causing much amusement with his urging of the bidding and various wisecracks.

After a few *Wonders* at small prices, Gillings and Carnell ran the bidding up to 24/- for *House on the Borderland*, before Wally was struck with a sudden doubt as to whether or not he already had a copy; and Carnell secured it. After a few more mags at low prices, a set of *Amazing* containing *Skylark of Space* fetched the price of the book – 16/6. There was also some high bidding for two *F.F.M.*'s containing *Face in the Abyss* and *Snake Mother* and they eventually went for 10/-. After a June '48 *Amazing* (a time-machine fetched this book, said Ted), some *Weird Tales* (don't bother about the stories, look at the cover!) and an *Astounding* with the first instalment of *Skylark of Valeron* (Technical comment of "Quite unsound" from A.C. Clarke anent the space-ship cover), a mixed bunch, including a *Marvel Science Stories*, stopped the bell – at least, that's what Ted put its ending down to. Time was growing short, and the tempo speeded. Two P.B.s (*Ship of Ishtar*) were followed by *Lo!*, followed by Padgett's detective story *The Brass Ring* (I haven't read it, says Ted, but it's excellent paper), and *War of the Worlds* (Anyone got a small boy that they want to bring up the right way?). *The Time Stream* caused a three-cornered match between bibliophiles Chapman, Syms, and Carnell, the latter securing it.

Then a number of small lots, growing larger in size, then an original

nude (the female being accompanied by a pensive-looking python) drew a number of ribald remarks, including Carnell's "Anyone got a small boy -?", it became apparent that British fans set far less value on originals than do their American counterparts, and the sole *T.O.W.* cover original offered was bought by Gillings while he was trying to boost bidding. An original, unpublished manuscript by Chandler, and some originals from *New Worlds* also had few bids, and as a final item, Ted displayed a pile of Carnell's pre-war fan-mag *New Worlds*, and on calling out "6d each, the No 4 that didn't come out!" was immediately mobbed by a dozen fans amid much laughter, and emerged without a single copy in less than two minutes. [1]

### **Ted Tubb:**

Auctioneering can be great fun – if you are not the auctioneer – but having been beguiled into promising that if there should be an auction I would preside, I became it.

Now auctions as a rule are pretty grim affairs. All the friends of the club, society, what have you... send along anything they can't sell, and the rest of the troupe divide their time between making stupid bids and praying that they won't get stuck with the stuff. The auctioneer meanwhile shouts himself hoarse, tells uncounted lies about the quality of the stuff he has to offer, and feels like a barker at a fair.

When it comes to persuading fans to part with money it is even more of a task. Passing a camel thru the eye of a needle is a modest afternoon's sport compared with selling a fan something he may not need. And at this kind of auction, you can bet your life that everyone has been offered the goods at cut price long before. This time the change was so great as to be unbelievable.

First the quantity of the goods was equalled only by their quality. Lying heaped up on a great table were items that would make many a hardened fan drool with delight and envy; *The Skylark of Space* in its original magazines was there. *The Time Stream* rubbed shoulders with *Slan* and many other brand new volumes, many of them donated by American Fans for the Big Pond Fund. Early *Amazings*, *Astoundings*, *Science Wonder Stories*, lay intimately with late *Fantastic Adventures*, *Weirds*, and other recent magazines. The amount was stupendous, books, original illustrations, even manuscripts and fan mags dating back to the ark, all were there and all without any reserve price, and all for the good of the cause.

I felt a tinge of misgiving. It seemed impossible that all of it could be auctioned off at reasonable prices, but there was no way out, the thing had to

be done. Fortifying myself with a couple of strong assistants, plenty of small change, and a modest supply of tonsil juice, the fun began.

At first with many a quip and sally, mostly at my expense, the massed fans tentatively began the bidding. Then, as things grew serious and the choicer items made an appearance, the banter died, and stern looks, grim expressions, and a reckless raising of bids made an appearance. Opening with a couple of rarer items to attract attention, I switched to late *Amazings*, and believe it or not they needed little pushing. Soon the two assistants were weaving among the audience collecting cash, and without their assistance the thing would have been impossible. Even as it was an hour and a half was not time to clear the table, and certainly not enough to do justice to each item. Towards the end of the evening group sales of books and mags had to be introduced, and even with this device we beat the deadline by only minutes.

As time was short bids had to be swift. There was little time for persuasion. This led to several fans bidding at the same time, and one fan even went so far as to raise his own bid twice against no opposition. We thought it kinder to leave him in ignorance of his error.

Several amusing instances arose. Offering a lurid illustration of a peerless woman neck and neck with a snake, a dry voice suggested that it would serve to “bring a small boy up the right way”. The suggestion was adopted and some small boy is certainly going to be lucky. It was a dream woman. One fan having run out of cash offered himself as a bond servant if he could but have *The Ship of Ishtar*. Luckily for him there were two copies of that famed work. The majority, knowing that this was the best chance that they would ever get, plunged recklessly into the housekeeping money and paid up like heroes. Fortunately there were few wives present.

The whole thing was a great success. Where there had been a great pile of mags etc., we were left with a great pile of cash. This was transmutation at its best, and all who gave mags, books, illustrations, etc., can rest assured that they did not give them in vain. Those who bought them know that the cash they paid will be wisely used for the Big Pond Fund and this I think was well-worth the temporary loss of voice, the vivid dreams of snakes... not women... and the bitter disappointment I suffered at having sold all those wonderful items, and getting nothing for myself. The next time, though, if there is a next time, I’ll have a stooge in the audience. [1]

### **Vince Clarke:**

It was too late for the discussions now – past ten and the White Horse

had to be vacated by half past, so the convention slowly broke up, with many “for the road”, and John Newman received everybody’s congratulations. It was generally agreed that another couple of hours could easily have been used up, but as it was, the questions raised will have to be settled by post and at the London Circle.

Half a dozen of us went off to a cafe for a cup of coffee and a final chat, and I finally tip-toed indoors in the small hours, tired, but well satisfied that, although so many British SF mags have died, fandom, at least, is alive and growing! [2]

**Charlie Duncombe:**

On Sunday, John Newman turned up at Kew Gardens with Syd Bounds and Sandy Sandfield. Had he known, his entourage could have been increased 100%, for Vincent Clarke, Daphne, and Speedy turned up, but could not find the others. [2]

[1] *The Whitcon Booklet*

[2] *The Whitconzine*

# 17. Matters Arising

## London, 15 May 1948

### **John Newman:**

The Whitcon was definitely a success and showed Anglo-fans that fandom in Britain is still alive. In spite of the absence of a National Club (or because of it) the fans flocked together and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

It was evident that at the next Convention a whole afternoon or evening must be devoted to the Auction and another afternoon or evening to a general discussion.

The reaction of overseas fans who knew of the Whitcon was spontaneous and generous, showing the strong ties between fans throughout the World.

Apparently there is a desire for a fan club on a Nation Wide basis amongst the younger and out-of-town fans but many of the older fans, who had seen such clubs collapse were not so enthusiastic. There is a definite need for a fan magazine to keep fans who live away from other fans in touch with one another. Perhaps *Operation Fantast* will fill this need.

It is possible that the recent ban on American magazines will induce enthusiasm for fan publications, as it has done in Canada. Already the Canadians have three new fan magazines and probably there are more to come.

The articles on various fan organizations in this country\* may help some of the younger fans not to make the mistakes their predecessors made. [1]

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\* In The Whitcon Book, and reprinted in the free ebook *Then Again*. [Ed.]

### **Norman Ashfield:**

Firstly, let me say that the whole show was well organized by John Newman, but that next time it would be better to share out the work in "committee" fashion, in order that one man should not bear all the brunt. It must have been some job, and hats off to John. Secondly, need I say that we all enjoyed every minute of it? Thirdly, it would appear that the programme developed into something a bit larger than we had time for. That was the fault of the enthusiastic fen who kept us all talking. So lets have more time next time.

DON'T CUT THE PROGRAMME! I've lost my number, but the next, and I think, the most important item, is the magazine publishing scheme. This is something that must be seriously considered! Not that our four esteemed friends won't give it very serious consideration, but we must all help. If plans come to a stage where definite proposals can be made, do you want to be "in" on it? Think it over, and when you have made your mind up, and have anything to contribute in the way of ideas, I recommend you write Ted. At the same time, give him an idea of how many shares you want. Then there is the point, returning to the actual WHITCON, of earlier notice to fen. I understand that this will be given next time. For out-of-towners, accommodation must be considered. A couple of people to check up on hotels, and arrange room bookings, at rates which could be published, would be very useful, and lots more folk would attend, I am sure. Can some social activity be organized? When we know the approximate number of people attending, how about hiring a small hall for a dance, or something. Not casting any nasturtiums on the last Con., but as we were so well to the fore, lets try and enlarge a bit. Lets make it a real "do". Lets invite a couple of newspapers to give us a write up. A little publicity would not be a bad thing. We might get a few thousand more into the fold! [2]

**Ted Tubb:**

**1. THE NEED FOR ORGANIZATION**

The WHITCON, if it did nothing else, proved the need for some form of organization between fans in this country. It was a remarkable achievement that so large a gathering was assembled at such short notice, by the unaided efforts of one man. This was our secretary, John Newman, and but for him there would have been no convention.

Fifty fans assembled for the get together, and fifty is hardly representative of the vast majority of lovers of science fiction who would no doubt have liked to attend but who had no way of knowing that a convention had been proposed and was under way. How could they know? Who was to tell them? And how can such a state of affairs be avoided in the future? WE have no organization at present to which science fiction lovers can turn for information, help, and the obtaining of social contacts. We need one. We want one. But of those who want such a club how many will take an active part in founding one? It has been the curse of such organizations in the past that fans who want them, who are all for them, will not stir themselves to get

them. It is not for the older fans, those who have passed the first enthusiastic stage of clubbing together, to take the lead. These fans have done all that already. Who can blame them if they now are content to let others, the younger readers, have their chance? Nothing succeeds like success, and, unfortunately, nothing fails like failure. The record of past organizations has been one of failure. Have the new fans, the newcomers into the field, anything new to offer? ENTHUSIASM is not enough. It is necessary, we will never organize without it, but something more is needed. The glamour of seeing your name in print, via a fan mag. The organizing of regular meetings. The enjoyable conversations across a table; these are not sufficient to found an organization capable of living beyond its originators. And unless a strong groundwork is laid, then the club is doomed to failure.

The Atlas publication of *ASF* sells something like 20,000 issues, This means that 20,000 people buy and read it. They buy it because they like it. How many of those people are interested enough in science fiction to want to delve deeper into it? Even a conservative estimate of 5% gives a thousand readers who would like to share the benefits of organized fandom. The need is there, the potential members are there – who will supply the organization to cater for them?

All regular fans will join such an organization. Fans are friendly folk. They like to meet others to whom they can talk and be understood. They have proved this in the past. Every roll of members of every organization that has existed, shows much the same membership, but this is not enough. Most fans now know each other. I am talking about the older ones, those who have drifted into contact with each other over the years, it is for the others, the newcomers, that the desperate need for organization is apparent.

Take the case of the reader of about twenty years of age. When the war came he was eleven, and with it came the end of the cheap “remainder issues” from America. These cheap issues formed the most fertile field for the recruiting of new fans; how many of us found science-fiction through them? The young fan however did not have that opportunity. He probably obtained a reprint edition. I like *Astounding Science Fiction*, yet I would hesitate to recommend it to any new reader. The policy of *ASF* is hardly one which would appeal to any youngster still fresh from Wells and Verne.

If he surmounts this obstacle, then what? He can only get the reprint editions. He may not even know that there are other mags. He can hardly have any inkling of the great amount of his favourite reading there is lying in

either one of the two libraries, he has no way of knowing that he has something like twenty years of magazines to catch up with. Even if he does happen to bump into a fan, obtain *Fantasy Review*, or get hold of a catalogue, will that help him? Books at 15/- and 16/6 are a little beyond a man of twenty's pocket. So are back issues at anything from 2/6 to 8/- a time. And how is he to know if such issues are worth it?

The result is that he becomes one of the vast horde of reprint readers. He cannot develop because he just does not know how. The brief experience with the two post war British mags has shown the great demand for fiction of this type. Letters of enthusiasm, of praise, poured into the editorial departments. What would have happened if the mags had continued is hard to say, all we can say is that the readers are there, but that there is no way to help them.

Any enthusiastic, sincere, hard working group of fans could fill a great need, but do not think it would be all plain sailing. The things that a well organized group of fans could do are remarkable, the COSMOS CLUB proved that, but may I end with one plea? Do not start to organize if you cannot make a good job of it. We have had too many failures, we cannot afford more. The need is there, the fans are there; if you want a club nothing can stop you, but make it a good one.

How about it, eh? [1]

## 2. THE BIG POND FUND

By a majority vote it was decided at the Whitcon that all money raised, above that needed for expenses, should go into the Big Pond Fund. But what is the Big Pond Fund?

Some time ago a group of American fans decided it would be a good idea if a fan from England (i.e., Britain) could be present at one of the big conventions. They circulated the idea, began collecting the passage money. Things died down a bit, especially as we in England appeared to receive the idea with indifference. It was not wholly our fault. Owing to the lack of any organization, the news was slow in getting round. Many fans had heard vaguely of the Fund, but imagined that it had been dropped, was a rumour, or a totally American concern. Ted Carnell, who had been chosen by the Americans as the one they'd like to meet, put the matter plainly at the Whitcon. After the initial spurt by the Americans, it was up to us to show that we really appreciated the gesture, and to show it in concrete form. We did.

Gus Willmorth, August Derleth and others had sent across several books



to be auctioned (some haven't arrived yet), the money thus raised to be earmarked for the Fund. The books were placed with the rest of the material to be auctioned, and they fetched very good prices. The total sum raised for the fund after all necessary expenses had been met was the nice figure of \$50. It was quite a good effort, when it's remembered that the gathering numbered about fifty, and there were other heavy expenses.

The lucky fan – he need not necessarily be Ted Carnell, who may not be able to make it – will probably be en route next year. Whoever it is, we know he'll be assured of a warm welcome. In effect our ambassador to the American convention of fandom, he will have a heavy responsibility. It would be a poor gesture on our part if we did not at least meet the American gesture of friendship to the best of our capabilities. [2]

[1] *The Whitcon Booklet*

[2] *The Whitconzine*

**1949**



*Loncon Programme Book (1949)*

# 18. The Loncon Programme Book London, 16 April 1949

*From internal evidence – urging people that it's still not too late to join – this appears to have been published and distributed before the convention, presumably with a mailing of the recently-formed Science Fantasy Society.*

## **Lonconews**

The room that has been booked for the Loncon is of ample size, and fans who missed the leaflets circulated earlier in the year, or who failed to book by the given dates, can still attend.

We would still like a few days notice, if possible, though, so that sufficient catering can be arranged. Please pass the word around to everyone you know who would like to come!

The Loncon Committee are thinking of asking for some commission from British Railways, owing to the increased rail traffic due to the Convention! SFS Area Secretary Peter Hall and a friend of his will probably be the furthest travelled visitors... they are coming from Glasgow!

Arthur Hillman and Terry Overton are travelling from Newport; Ken Johnson from Stoke-on-Trent; Norman Weedall from Liverpool; Derek Pickles from Bradford; Adrian Wilson and friend from Chandlersford, Hants; T. Scoles from Portsmouth, A/c Cawthorn from the RAF in Norfolk.... London Circle fans should consider themselves very lucky – they have only a ten-minute walk from their usual meeting place at the White Horse!

We are fixing up some of the non-London fans with accommodation on Saturday night. If any other long-distance visitors would like us to arrange this for them, will they write in to the Secretary as soon as possible. We can't promise anything in luxury-hotel style, but we'll do our best!

And we'll still be glad to hear from other kindly London fans with a bed to spare at Easter.....

Unless asked for, no definite arrangements are being made for a meeting on the Sunday until the actual Convention.

## **The Loncon**

The Committee have hired a large room for the Convention at the Lord Raglan, 61 St. Martin Le Grand, and the “Loncon” will be held there on Easter Saturday, April the 16th. Any enquiries should be addressed to Vincent Clarke at 16 Wendover Way, Welling, Kent.

## **Programme**

3:00 – 3:30

Informal discussions and introductions.

3:30 – 4:00

The Chairman, Mr. Gillings, will open the meeting and review the field of fantasy and science fiction.

Frank Fears, Secretary of the S.F.S. will give a short report on the Society and its future. A statement of the Society’s funds will also be made.

Vincent Clarke, Editor of the *S.F.N.*, will give a brief account of progress made with British fanmags.

Ted Carnell, Editor of *New Worlds*, is to give a talk on *New Worlds* and his coming trip to the States to attend their Convention this September.

4:00 – 4:30

A general discussion on the above items will then take place. Comments, constructive criticisms and suggestions are wanted from all fans.

4:30 – 5:00

“Sandy” Sandfield will act as Question Master in a game of Twenty Questions. Volunteers are needed for the team. Prizes will be awarded for correct solutions, the prize winner then allowing another fan to take his place.

5:00 – 5:30

A bar will be available in the Convention room from 5:00 onwards.

5:30 – 6:00

A motion will be moved that “It is the opinion of this Convention that adherence to rigid editorial policies is detrimental to the proper development of fantasy fiction and it recommends that magazine editors should allow more scope for the free expression of ideas irrespective of their deviations from traditional taboos.” The motion will be debated and a majority vote taken. Alternate or additional propositions of a constructive character, preferably appertaining to the activities of fandom, are invited. Those prepared to put

forward such motions should notify the Convention Secretary Vincent Clarke before April the 9th.

6:30 – 7:00

We are still waiting for a bright idea. Can you let us have one before April the 9th?

7:00 – 8:00

The running buffet will be available from 7:00 onwards. Coffee will follow.

8:00 – 10:00

The Auction. Charles Duncombe is to act as auctioneer-in-chief.

The auction is the traditional way of ending the Convention and of paying incidental expenses. We hope that you will all assist us by bringing along or sending us a couple of magazines or books that you no longer require. How about that old set of *Astoundings* you'd forgotten? That copy of *The Outsider and Others*?

### **Odd Notes**

The Lord Raglan is near St. Paul's Cathedral and St. Paul's station on the Central Line. See map on the back page. If you get lost ring up the pub and we will send a search party out for you. The Lord Raglan is open at 11:30 and on Saturdays a cold lunch counter is open. Members of the Convention committee will be in the Lord Raglan from 12:00 in case you wish to be along early and buy them a beer.

Don't forget the auction.....

### **More Odd Notes**

Convention visitors who would like to go sight-seeing, book-hunting, etc. on Saturday before the Convention should write in to the Secretary, and if enough London Circle fans can be found to act as guides, details will be sent around in the week before Easter.

Re bookhunting: Tottenham Court Rd Underground Station is at the end of the book-hunter's Mecca, Charing Cross Rd, and is on the same line, (Central) as St Pauls. Chancery Lane station, for the White Horse, is between the two.

Aldersgate Underground station, also conveniently near the Lord Raglan, is on the Metropolitan Line.

Bus Routes. The No 4 Finsbury Park/Clapham Common bus is the only

one that goes through St, Martin Le Grand, but a number stop in the vicinity of St Pauls station. These include No 7, serving Paddington and Liverpool St. stations, No 7a, Paddington and London Bridge, 17 London Bridge, and No's 8, 22, 23 and 25b.

Trolley buses Nos 543, 555, 665 and 677 pass the top end of Aldersgate St.

Photographer fans should note that we hope to run a picture-section in the *Lonconzine*, the souvenir booklet of the Loncon. Besides the fans there are plenty of other interesting ruins in the vicinity, as well as St Pauls, Guildhall and other photogenic objects.

### **Join the Science Fantasy Society!**

*Note – Aldersgate station on the Metropolitan Line of the London Underground was later renamed “Aldersgate and Barbican”, and is now just “Barbican”.*

# 19. Loncon

## London, 16 April 1949

Presented below are two convention reports that contain pretty much everything we know about the 1949 UK national convention. At one time appearing in convention listings under the unfortunate and erroneous name “Ragcon”, it was the first con run under the auspices of the Science Fantasy Society.

By Easter 1949 British fandom was gradually stirring from its post-war torpor and the first signs of renewed activity could be seen. As well as the SFS, the previous twelve months had witnessed the launch of a new fanzine in the form of Walt Willis’s *Slant*. It was a slow start, but it was a start...

### Known Attendees:

- Frank Arnold
- Norman Ashfield
- Peter Bell
- Daphne Bradley
- Fred Brown
- Ron Buckmaster
- Ken Bulmer
- Jimmy Burch
- Jim Cawthorn
- Ken Chapman
- Arthur C. Clarke
- Vince Clarke
- Ian Cumming
- Ron Deacon
- John Dee
- J.D. Doggett
- Don Doughty
- Charlie Duncombe
- Frank Fears
- Kerry Gaulder

- Walter Gillings
- Ron Gillings
- Peter Hawkins
- A.F. Hillman
- G.G. Hillman
- Terry Jeeves
- Ken Johnson
- Harry Kay
- Peter Martin
- John Newman
- Terry Overton
- Owen Plumridge
- Derek Pickles
- Sandy Sandfield
- K. Salter
- T.H. Scoles
- W.R. Simmonds
- (?) Syms
- Bill Temple (GoH)
- Ted Tubb
- Norman Weedall
- F.H. Wilkes
- Arthur Williams
- Adrian Wilson
- G. White
- W. Wright
- A.J. Young

In his report below, Owen Plumridge mentions that “fans attended the Convention from Glasgow, Newport, Stoke-on-Trent.” Out of the 60-70 who reportedly attended, these are the only names we can be sure of, alas. These have been gleaned from both the reports and a sheet of convention signatures.

### **Walter Gillings:**

It was the warmest Easter ever known. The famous shadow of St. Paul’s might have been a sanctuary from the fierce sun which beat down on St. Martins le Grand, had it not been as good as deserted. The windows of the upper room of “The Raglan”, usual haunt of busy City men, were open to



admit a slight breeze. But the atmosphere was still heated: some seventy fans were assembled for the “Loncon”, first Convention of the new British Science Fantasy Society, and were earnestly discussing a vexatious topic – the editorial policies of their favourite magazines.

The scathing comments directed at science fiction editors in general, and one or two in particular, were not entirely serious in intent, however. The resolution before the conference, condemning adherence to rigid policies as detrimental to the proper development of fantasy, had been cooked up by the Committee especially to provide an opportunity for visiting fans to air their pet peeves. This much Chairman Walter Gillings admitted, hardly expecting that the mover of the resolution, story-writer William F. Temple, would fire most of his broadside at him.

He also had to take the blame when the motion was attacked, by those both for and against it, as semantically misleading as van Vogt’s *World of Null-A*; and when he tried to clarify its grandiose phrases, was further assailed for exceeding his prerogative by interpreting the issue he confessed to having broached in intentionally loose terms. But at least two-thirds of the assembly finally gathered sufficient drift of the resolution to vote on it, with the result that almost three times as many showed their disapproval of editorial taboos as were prepared to accept what editors were pleased to give them in accordance with their particular policies.

As Guest of Honour, author Temple took full advantage of the privilege to indulge in some typically plain speaking laced with the ironic humour he infuses into his writings\*. Having been practically shanghaied into the limelight he had successfully avoided for years, he delivered a withering impeachment of the editor who had presented his first work in *Tales of Wonder* and who now sat helpless beside him. In lauding him by way of introduction, Chairman Gillings had reminded the meeting that the rising star Editor Merwin had boosted in *Thrilling Wonder* was no newcomer to science fiction any more than Arthur C. Clarke, who sat patiently beside his old stablemate, Temple, prepared to lend weight to the assault on all editors who tended to become hidebound. Far from expressing undying gratitude to the man who had published his “The Smile of the Sphinx” and other early stories, ten years before, Temple depicted Gillings as a conservative satyr who had declined to accept anything which did not conform with his conception of what a British public unfamiliar with magazine SF could appreciate. Instead of encouraging new ideas, he had presented an endless

succession of “menaces”, in spite of the fact that “The Sphinx”. which he had experimented with dubiously, had proved quite popular. With the post-war *Fantasy*, he prepared to pursue much the same course, but it had only lasted three issues – and no wonder, Temple added grimly.

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\* Especially those in fan magazines. In *Novae Terrae*, progenitor of *New Worlds*, he lampooned his friends of pre-war days in a series on “The British Fan in His Natural Haunt”. Following last year’s “Whitcon” he reported on it in a souvenir booklet in a way that had everybody in fits. [*Footnote in original*]

He then proceeded to blister the revived *New Worlds*, a copy of which reposed beneath a vase of daffodils on the table before him, Editor John Carnell (“I don’t know why he calls himself John – his real name is Ted”) was not present to defend the charge, which he had half-anticipated, levelled by Temple at the sameness of its contents: he was down with vaccination fever following early preparations for his trip to the U.S. to attend the World Science Fiction Convention. But Temple was merciless. All but one of the stories, he pointed out, was about deep space or space-ships, and reading between the lines, he saw the same thing happening in the next issue.\*\* Once again they were going to be deprived of a really liberal magazine; yet this was an enterprise in which British fandom was actively interested, and he urged them “not to let him get away with it.”

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\*\* He omitted to mention Editor Carnell’s “warning” to readers that *New Worlds* would “from time to time experiment with different types of stories, ever pursuing a policy of publishing the best British science fiction available.” [*Footnote in original*]

While venting most of his spleen upon home products, Temple kept a harsh word or two for the American magazines, whose editors he dismissed as mere cogs in a machine, at the same time crediting them with a certain amount of elasticity. “They swing from one direction to another, every now and again, so that it’s difficult for the poor author to keep pace with their changing moods. Editors as a whole are extremists; they don’t have a balanced view at all. Actually, their job should be to pick the best of what the authors offer, not demand that they write this or that kind of story to suit their own ideas of what readers want.”

Seeking to justify editorial policies, R.A.F. officer Harry Kaye, who had thrashed out such matters with Temple before in the days of the S.F.A., contrasted the thoughtful, adult content of *Astounding* with the “guff and bilge” of *Amazing* and *Planet Stories*, while stressing the necessity of

catering for an audience of regular readers who would keep the magazine running whatever the type of stories it featured. Editors, he considered, might experiment here and there, but were wise to keep within definite bounds if they wished to maintain subscriptions.

Seconding the motion, author Clarke admitted the wisdom of a consistent editorial policy, so long as it did not become rigid. He declined to dispute the right of an editor to edit, but objected to “the policy of having a policy for policy’s sake.” If after reading a magazine for a year you could not distinguish one issue from another, it was obvious that its policy had become too set. He thought *Astounding* had become so stereotyped that the stories left no impression in the mind; whereas *Thrilling Wonder* had developed a much wider field – enabling him to sell to Editor Merwin such a story as “Against the Fall of Night”, after its rejection by Campbell. “Even a good policy may turn out to be a bad one if it lasts too long,” he decided.

Supporting Lieutenant Kaye was R.A.F. recruit Kerry Gaulder, also lately recruited to fandom, who argued that editors were completely at the mercy of their authors. In defence of Gillings, he pointed out that in the days of *Tales of Wonder* the “menace” story was still the fashion; it was not until the ’40-’45 period that stories became more varied in theme. He doubted if there had yet been a magazine with a truly rigid policy (cries of “Oh!” from anti-*Amazing* fans with the *Shaver Mystery* in mind); though he admitted of rigid cover policies, in which connection he looked forward to the overthrow of Mr. Bergey.

While commending *Astounding* for having developed a type of story which deserved to rank with the best of literature in other fields, combined with an intelligent appeal which put it in a class by itself, he conceded that *Startling* and *Wonder*, with their intermediate policies, had presented some good material which did not require much effort to appreciate. Of late, however, *Astounding* had lost whatever policy it had, which was why it had degenerated and its authors had run dry of new ideas. “What we need today is not more or less policy, but more authors with more fertility.”

An animated discussion opened with the argument that absence of a clear-cut policy only left the reader bewildered; whether intelligent or not, he needed a guide to a magazine’s contents, or he would be reluctant to buy. Resenting the dismissal of *Planet Stories* as “just a rag”, a loyal reader pointed out that it had featured many of Ray Bradbury’s prime pieces. An oldster who had been reading science fiction since the days of Frank Reade

announced that he would oppose any editorial policy which attempted to educate him: he read for amusement only. The final contention was that any new trends which might better fantasy-fiction were inevitably restrained by a too tight hold on editorial reins; and after some argument over the terms of the resolution, it was carried by an overwhelming majority.

#### SCIENCE OR LITERATURE?

Reports on the progress of the Science Fantasy Society were presented by Secretary Frank Fears, Committee-man A. Vincent Clarke, and Treasurer Owen Plumridge. These led to a desultory debate on the approach it should adopt in pursuing its objectives, which had been defined in a seven-point policy of its own on its inauguration. Most pertinent of these points are the encouragement of all fan efforts in the shape of news-sheets and “fanzines”, the promotion of international correspondence, the fostering of local groups in five main areas, and the publicizing of fantasy-fiction to effect its recognition “as a separate form of literature.”

The cue for the discussion emanated, in the first place, from Chairman Gillings, who in his introductory address had urged the new Society to set out with clear ideas of the purpose for its existence, if they wanted it to avoid the fate which had overtaken its forebears. What they had to decide, he thought, was whether they were going to make more science fiction fans or concentrate on the improvement of SF for those who were already able to appreciate its better forms.

Member Arthur Williams suggested that if they were to lay down some object consistent with their own attitude towards the application of science itself. they might clarify their own ideas as well as make their purpose clear to potential members. This brought up the question of whether SF was best propagated in the old Gernsbackian manner, as “sugar-coated science”, or merely as a specially intriguing form of literature – a form which, it seemed to the critics, might reasonably succeed to the position occupied by the detective story today, suggesting that its virtues lay more in its capacity to provide relaxation than education.

Member B.L. Sandfield found ready support for his contention that the society should be concerned with the place of SF in literature rather than its scientific or political significance. Agreeing, author Clarke doubted if anyone ever believed the purpose of SF was to spread science, and held that it was justified in defying science so long as it qualified as literature.

Finally, Member Williams contented himself with an admonition to the

committee to keep the matter of the Society's aims well in mind as they proceeded. Whereupon the delegates broke up to inspect the tasty collector's items displayed on all sides for auction later; while those who felt inclined indulged in a bout of "Twenty Questions" with objects selected from the annals of fantasy and "Sandy" Sandfield as Question Master. The hall echoed to the stentorian bellow of Charles Duncombe when, in due course, he discharged the duties of auctioneer, assisted by Ted Tubb. [1]

### **Vince Clarke:**

#### SFS ANNOUNCEMENTS

As most of our readers will know, it is the custom to issue a souvenir booklet after an SF Convention, giving details and various personal reports from the fans who attended. It was the intention of the LONCON Committee to publish a *Lonconzine* booklet after the event, costs being met from the proceeds of the auction.

Unfortunately, although funds were adequate, there have been so few reports received from the LONCON members (in spite of the time that has elapsed) that the Committee feel that the small amount of material on hand does not justify issuing the 'zine.

The LONCON Committee would like to thank those fans who did cooperate, and to express regret to those who were unable to attend but who would have liked a more personal report than is printed in this issue of *SFN*, which is being sent to all those LONCON members whose addresses we have.

### **Owen D. Plumridge**

The second post-war British SF Convention was held at the Lord Raglan, in Aldersgate St., the City, on Easter Saturday, April 16th. Over 60 people attended, and all agreed that the meeting was enjoyable and a great success.

The weather was fine and warm, and early arrivals congregated in the Bar. When, after some refreshments, they went up to the large meeting room, they found an attractive display of books, magazines, dust-jackets and fantasy illustrations (most of the last two items being from bibliophile Fred Brown's collection), which were arranged on tables against the walls. There were also fanzines, old and new, and of course – a great attraction – a large number of magazines and books given for the auction.

At 3:45, the chairman, Walter Gillings, Editor of *Fantasy Review*, opened the proceedings, accompanied on the platform by authors Bill Temple

and Arthur Clarke, Secretary of the SFS Frank Fears, Treasurer Plumridge, and *SFNews* Editor Vincent Clarke, who was also Convention Secretary.

Mr. Gillings announced, to the general regret, that Ted Carnell, Editor of *New Worlds*, was unable to attend, owing to illness. He had been vaccinated in preparation for his trip to the World S-F Convention in the US, and had contracted vaccine fever. Their employment had prevented the attendance of Peter Phillips and Bertram Chandler (the latter was on the High Seas somewhere between Aden and this country), and John Beynon had previous commitments. Author Edward Frank Arnold was present, however, and so, he added with a smile, were Geoffrey Giles and Thomas Sheridan, which amused those of the audience who knew the identity behind the names of these *Fantasy Review* critics.

Mr. Gillings then introduced Bill Temple, the Guest of Honour, and went on to give some account of Bill's achievements in science-fiction writing, which included a forthcoming novel. He then proceeded to review the general field of science-fantasy writing, with particular reference to developments in Gt. Britain since the last Convention.

Frank Fears then reported on the foundation and objects of the Science Fantasy Society, and gave general details of the organization for the benefit of the non-members present. He pointed out that many new members were needed in order that the service and usefulness of the Society might continue to expand.

Owen Plumridge, Treasurer of the SFS, gave a brief statement on the SFS finances, which showed the Society to be healthily solvent. The subscription had been fixed at 5/- per annum, and the balance of 2/6d from founder-members would be asked for later in the year, taking their membership to the end of '49. The subscriptions of new members would date for twelve months from their entry into the Society.

Vincent Clarke reported on the difficulties encountered and progress made in the preparation and publication of the *SFNews* and other associated fanzines, with a brief survey of what had already been done in this field. Thanks to the generosity of Ken Slater, founder of the SFS, a rotary duplicator had been loaned to the Society, which should lead to a steady improvement in future SFS publications, and greater output. New contributors were always welcome in *SFNews* and other fanzines.

A discussion followed, questions being asked by Arthur Williams and others in the audience on various aspects of the SFS and the fantasy field in

general. After these had been answered from the platform, the Chairman spoke, in place of Ted Carnell, on the advent of *New Worlds* No 4, the first professional British magazine to be published by a company whose editorial staff, board and shareholders were all SF devotees.

The Chairman concluded at 5 o'clock, when the bar downstairs opened, and there was an interval for refreshments and general conversation. In addition, a small market in magazines and books was being conducted in one corner, and it was therefore against strong competition that a game of 20 Questions was started by Laurence (Sandy) Sandfield, who acted as Question Master. The teams, who were volunteers from the audience, had to guess at such fantastic objects as the "Moon Pool", a "zwilnik", the Question Master's tie, and "Count Dracula", the audience being kept informed by large cards held up by young Ronnie Gillings. Miss Daphne Bradley, Derek Pickles and Ted Tubb won small prizes.

The next item was a debate, on the motion that: "It is the opinion of this Convention that adherence to rigid editorial policies is detrimental to the proper development of fantasy fiction, and it recommends that magazine editors should allow more scope for the free expression of ideas, irrespective of their deviations from traditional taboos."

This was proposed by Bill Temple, seconded by Arthur C. Clarke, and opposed by Harry Kay, seconded by Kerry Gaulder. Starting with a highly humorous and successful speech by Temple the debate produced some excellent impromptu addresses by all concerned, even though the original subject was sometimes neglected, if not totally forgotten. After various members of the audience had spoken, mostly for the opposition, the Chairman summed up and a vote was taken, which showed the motion passed by 27 votes to 10, with some abstentions.

Buffet break followed, and it was not until after 8 o'clock that the last part of the proceedings started – the Auction. Charles Duncombe opened as Auctioneer, relieved by Ted Tubb, who was followed by Sandy Sandfield. There were more magazines, but not so many books, as at the last Convention, and therefore bidding kept fairly low, but even so a sum of nearly £12 was raised for SFS funds.

Fans attended the Convention from Glasgow, Newport, Stoke-on-Trent, Bradford and many other parts of the country; some dropped in for only a few minutes, just to see how things were going; others stayed until the Convention finally broke up at half past ten, but it is to be hoped that they all

enjoyed the proceedings as much as your reporter, who is now looking forward to – the “Third Annual”! [2]

[1] *Fantasy Review* #15 (Summer 1949, ed. Walter Gillings)

[2] *Science Fantasy News* (June 1949, ed. Vince Clarke)



## 20. The Cincinnati Effect

*After much effort, particularly by Forrest J Ackerman, the Big Pond Fund – the first ever international fan fund – succeeded in bringing Ted Carnell across the Atlantic in 1949 to attend the Worldcon, which was held that year in Cincinnati. He travelled over on the ocean liner Queen Elizabeth. Sadly, he never wrote a trip report. Published after the con was the Convention Memory Book which contained a piece by Vince Clarke. Though not a convention report I'm including it here because it describes the state of UK fandom going into the 1950s and sums up our history to that point.*

One of the first casualties of the last war was the British Science Fiction Association, officered by active enthusiasts, Ted Carnell, Ken Chapman, Eric Williams, and others whose names are as familiar in U.S. SF circles as they are in their own country. The S.F.A. formed a focal point for all British fan activity for some time prior to 1939. Its dissolution left half-a-dozen fanzine editors striving to maintain contact between their readers – readers whose addresses altered with remarkable rapidity as they were called up and transferred from one part of the country to another, or who, after the first year, were “bombed out”. One by one these fanzines ceased as their active spirits were mobilized, or found that longer hours of work permitted them little leisure to wander in the gaudy worlds of the now rare SF magazines. The fictional *Final Blackout*\* did not seem too far from the reality that slashed with steel and fire across the imagination.

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\* By L. Ron Hubbard. [Ed.]

If one excepts the Cosmos Club, a South West London organization with only local membership but with strong connections in the U.S. which enabled it to build up a large library from the generous gifts of American fans, the only link uniting the British fans in wartime was Mike Rosenblum's fanzine *Futurian War Digest*, affectionately nicknamed *Fido*. Through miracles of hard work, *Fido* was produced throughout the war; sometimes on paper sent across by U.S. fanzine editors, so that one would turn a page and be confronted with the cover of *VoM* or *Le Zombie*. Sometimes it included

one- or two-page zines from other British fans, the collection being aptly named “Fido’s Litter”.

*Fido* enabled the active fans to keep in touch, welcomed many newcomers who had been contacted by serving fans up and down the country. *Fido* eventually ceased, to take thereafter a prominent place in our fan-history, but before it did so its readers formed the British Fantasy Society. Although equipped with a large library, much of which WAS donated by the U.S. British Science Fiction War Relief Society, which had already helped the Cosmos Club, the BFS could do little in the period of re-adjustment following the end of the war, and was soon wound up, although the library was still active, and after many vicissitudes is still functioning.

The Cosmos Club was disbanded, and its library went into storage, but another group was then in existence. The London Circle was no formal body, but a group of fans who met (and still meet) once a week at the White Horse Tavern in the heart of London. It was at these weekly meetings that *New Worlds* was re-born as a fan-financed publication.

When in 1948 Capt. Ken Slater felt that there was a need for a country-wide organization of fans again, it was members of the London Circle who formed the Central Committee of the Science Fantasy Society.

This rather lengthy preamble is necessary to give an idea of the state of British fandom with which we on this Committee have been confronted. We can learn from the mistakes and mishaps of our predecessors. We number amongst our members long-standing fans who have belonged to all of the organizations mentioned here. But we face a problem that has no precedent.

During the war the only SF prozine available here was the British Reprint Edition of *Astounding*. It may have made hundreds of new readers of SF who are eager for each issue, *but it did not make fans as we understand the term*. You in the States may not realize the tremendous effect produced by the readers’ letters departments in the various prozines. It informs the readers that they are not alone in their enthusiasm for this strange branch of literature. It enables those with that inward urge to be “actifans”, to get together. It produces, if you like, a feeling of comradeship. Over here, the BRE did not contain a reprint of any of the departments such as the “Brass Tacks” section, and the reader without contacts remained on his own unless by some lucky chance he met someone who knew of *Fido* or the S.F.S.

Every week, we in the S.F.S. are contacting people who have been avid SF readers for years, but have no idea that there exists any common ground

on which they can meet other readers, to exchange news and views with them, or to try their hands at writing SF for the fanzines as a prelude to writing for the pro's. *Science Fantasy Review* (of which we are extremely proud), has had advertisements in the few British prozines that have appeared during the last three years, and some enthusiasts have been contacted, but beyond that there has been nothing to bridge the gap.

The consequences are that not only are the majority of British fans over 25 years of age, when the average male devotes most of his time to family affairs and has no time to participate in "fanactivity", but there are less than a dozen under-20s known to us. The younger reader has grown up in an environment of BREs and he's frequently unaware that they *are* BREs and not a native product, or thinks that the reprint is the whole U.S. edition.

Thus at a time when many of us have lost the early flush of enthusiasm, and give mature appreciation to only the minority of published material, we not only have to contact the younger, pre-fan reader without the help of the prozines, but have to try and satisfy their demand for large quantities of science fantasy reading matter after they have found out that the pulps are not ephemeral things that appear for a couple of weeks and then vanish, but have a solid and interesting past.

Furthermore, we give them the (almost incredible!) news concerning the sudden growth of U.S. fantasy-book publishing, and this time there is not only the frustrative effect of the currency regulations, but the fact that the ordinary American SF novel costs twice as much as the average British novel. You in the States can get some of the idea of the effect by imagining SF to be double the price of any other fiction.

The obvious solution, that satisfies the requirements of not only the new but the old fans, is to have a large communal library; a magazine and book library, stocked and run with the minimum of expense for the readers. We have taken some steps towards this by combining the two ex-club libraries, but they were formed before the present boom in fantasy book publishing, and consequently contain few modern volumes.

Therefore the news of the Cinvention's most generous donation of \$150 to buy books for British fandom was breath-taking. It is impossible to think of a more helpful action toward us than this. We now have, with this help, a very solid basis on which to extend our present efforts to build a new active fandom, something to which we can direct the younger readers, and say: Here is a record of science-fantasy in the past, its history and many of its best

stories; here also is a record of present day achievement and the international unity of SF readers; and here, too, is not only pleasure, but inspiration for the future. Read this, review it, criticize it; then go and write, edit, publish!

Yes, Cinvention, you may have done a lot more than give us a great deal of pleasure and boost the morale of the “actifans”. We thank you for your gift on behalf of British fandom... and wonder what probable future British Bradbury or Campbell or Smith or Van Vogt will also look back with gratitude on Cinvention '49.

This was not be the only act of generosity Cincinnati fans were to show UK fans.

*There wasn't an SF convention in Britain during 1950 – apparently for no other reason than that no-one got round to organizing one – but 1951 would see something much more ambitious than a mere national convention....*

# 1951



*Festivention Programme Book (1951)*

# **21. The Festiventione Programme Book London, 11-12 May 1951**

*Note: Only those pages with editorial content are included here.  
Ads and greetings have been omitted.*

## **SCIENCE FICTION FESTIVAL CONVENTION**

### COMMITTEE:

Chairman: E.J. Carnell  
Treasurer: Charles Duncombe  
Secretary: A. Vincent Clarke  
Committee: Miss A. Lovett, F.E. Arnold, James Rattigan,  
H. Ken Bulmer, Fred Brown, Ted Tubb

The Committee welcomes you to the 1951 Science Fiction Festival Convention in the sincere hope that you will have as interesting (and enjoyable) a time here as they have had in preparing the event!

Science Fiction readers do not, on the whole, enjoy formality except perhaps, in the logic of their favourite literature. In keeping with these feelings, we have prepared the programme in a very loose form, and although the details laid out in our middle pages constitute a framework, we are definitely NOT guaranteeing strict adherence to it. It wouldn't be natural!

Our chief desires are (a) to give you the opportunity of meeting others with your particular (fantastic?) tastes in reading matter; (b) to give you an opportunity to voice your opinions on any aspect of the SF field that you think needs them; (c) to introduce to you various intelligent and entertaining people who are prominent in the SF field both in this country and abroad. Also, (d), to dispel any lingering suspicion that science fiction "fans" are figments of the imagination dreamed up by editors in an endeavour to fill up their letter columns; (e) to show that the "fans" are not semi-hysterical adolescents who buy the magazines and books for the sake of the lurid covers, but are intelligent people, one of whose aims is to see *good* science-fantasy recognized as an accepted (and acceptable) form of literature, ranking

with, if not above, the best in other fields; (f) to give you a chance of obtaining at one of the auctions, or from someone who has a spare copy, that 'zine or book that you've been searching for!

The remainder of the 200-odd reasons for holding this Convention will be issued as a separate booklet in the far... very far... future. Meanwhile, this Convention is for YOU...make yourself at home!

We give an especial welcome to our Guests of Honour, who between them have travelled some 13,000 miles in the last few weeks.

Forrest J. Ackerman and his wife Wendayne, of Los Angeles, Calif., USA, we told you about in Con. News 3, though "4e" is known to every British fan who has read an American "fanzine", particularly those of the early '40s. Now an authors' agent and fantasy film columnist, 4e is still prominent in the SF field after 15 years' activity.

Lyell Crane, lately of Toronto, Canada, is our third Guest of Honour. Editor of the *Interim News Letter*, Lyell has done much to promote international correspondence, for *I.N.L* is the organ of "Science Fiction International" and some idea of its scope can be seen from the fact that the current issue contains letters from England, the U.S., Netherlands, Ceylon, Malaya, B.A.O.R. [*British Army of the Rhine*], Australia and... many thanks, Lyell... news of this Convention and many other science-fictional events.

We also give a welcome to our many other guests from overseas, and hope to introduce them to you in the "International Session".

## **Saturday**

### FIRST SESSIONS

11 a.m.

Inauguration, introductions, etc.

12:30 a.m.

Lunch

### SECOND SESSIONS

2:00 p.m.

Chairman Ted Carnell opens sessions. Walter Gillings, editor of *Tales of Wonder, Fantasy, Science Fantasy* etc. talks on the growth of British science-fiction.

2:30 p.m.

Forrest J. Ackerman gives details of American SF publishing.

3:00 p.m.

Bill Temple opens a discussion on how to write serial science-fiction. We have no idea what will be discussed after the first five minutes.

3:45 p.m.

The S-F Soap-Opera Repertory Company presents *Life Can Be So Horrible*, a pulsating drama of life in the near future.

4:15 p.m.

Tea Break

### THIRD SESSIONS

5:00 p.m.

A recording made at the White Horse on the occasion of a newspaper interview will be played, and the original participants will carry on the discussion. Guests will be invited to give their opinions.

6:15 p.m.

Auction of fantasy books, magazines and illustrations. Auctioneers: Ted Tubb and Charles Duncombe.

7:00 p.m.

Buffet and Dinner break.

### FOURTH SESSIONS

8:00 p.m.

The B.B.C. and Science Fantasy... a symposium by BBC Producer John Keir Cross, Paul Capon, author of the current serial, *The Other Side of the Sun*, and Arthur C. Clarke, the Television astronautics expert.

8:30 p.m.

Guest Author Session

## **Sunday**

### FIRST SESSIONS

10:30 a.m.

Informal meeting

11 a.m.



Ted Carnell speaks on “*New Worlds* and the future”.

11:30 a.m.

Informal addresses from, we hope, YOU.

12:30 p.m.

Lunch

## SECOND SESSIONS

2:00 p.m.

International Discussion... our overseas guests tell us of the state of SF in their countries.

4:00 p.m.

Presentation of the International Fantasy Award for the best work in the field of science-fiction in 1950. This is the first of a series of annual awards for merit in the fields of SF writing and art, and is sponsored by the London Circle.

4:30

Tea Break

## THIRD SESSIONS

5:00

Mrs Wendayne Ackerman speaks on the new science of “Dianetics” (see British reprint *Astounding S-F* June '51).

5:30

Authors' Session... Messrs Arthur C. Clarke, Bill Temple, Frank Edward Arnold, and other SF authors discuss how to write it, how to sell it, and what they think of SF editors.

6:30 p.m.

Auction of books, magazines, and fantasy art. Auctioneers: Ted Tubb and C. Duncombe

7:00 p.m.

Buffet and Dinner Break

## FOURTH SESSIONS

8:00

Film show. We have several films on hand including *Lost World*, *Metropolis*, some rocket take-off shots lent by A.C. Clarke and some American shorts lent by F.J. Ackerman. Some will be shown on both nights, depending on their length and condition.

9:30

Finale.

GUESTS WHO WISH TO MAKE UP A PARTY TO VISIT THE FESTIVAL ON MONDAY PLEASE CONTACT THE SECRETARY.

## **Egoboo**

If, during the Convention, you are confronted by a wild-eyed figure waving a small booklet, it will probably be a “fanzine” editor. With the notable exception of Capt. Ken Slater, every fan who has published an amateur magazine in this country during the last five years will be present on at least one day; the entire publishing staff of the printed *Slant* (Walt and Madeleine Willis, Bob Shaw and James White); Mike Tealby of *Wonder*; Derek and Mavis Pickles of *Phantasmagoria*; Bob Foster of *Sludge*, A. Vincent Clarke of *Science Fiction News*; H. Ken Bulmer of *Nirvana*, and Norman Ashfield of *Alembic*.

All of them will be reporting the Convention in their magazines, but the *Convention Souvenir Booklet* also wants reporters! We’ve had a couple of offers, but we want more. Be a reporter! Grave or gay, we’re asking for them! See the Secretary or Chairman for details.

## **The Souvenir Booklet**

containing reports on the convention, photos, list of members, etc, will be made up and issued at some date in the near future. It will be a printed production.

Copies will be free to Convention Society members: there will be a small charge, dependent on the cost, to others.

If you wish to advertise in it, please inform the Secretary or Chairman, and when your “copy” is needed we will inform you.

Rates will probably be £1 per full page, and pro rata for smaller spaces.

*This was never actually published.*

This programme issued by A. Vincent Clarke and H. Ken Bulmer, 84 Drayton Park, Highbury, N.5. for the Convention Society.

## 22. Festivention London, 11-12 May 1951



*Festivention ticket (1951)*

The convention held in London in 1951 was not just a national convention but an *international* one, possibly the first truly international SF con in the world – Worldcons still being mainly North American affairs at this point – and a proto-Eurocon. The first most fans would have heard of the convention was during the editorial in Ken Slater’s *Operation Fantast #2* (June 1950):

...a European convention will be organized in London for 1951, to coincide with the Festival of Britain. Probable dates will be around Whitsun, but more definite information will come later. Guest of honour will be American author L. SPRAGUE de CAMP and many of those lonely souls, the continental fans, will be attending.

In the event, the guest of honour wasn’t L. Sprague de Camp. Ken concluded thus:

As a final note, may we suggest “EUCON” as a code name for this convention.

In his editorial the following issue, he wrote:

The venue is not yet settled, but will probably be in Bloomsbury, London. The title is not yet finally decided, but provisionally it will

be called the EUROPEAN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION.

In May 1951, Truman was in the White House, Clement Attlee was in 10 Downing Street, and the Korean War was still being fought. Named for the Festival of Britain, the 1951 International Science-Fiction Festival Convention, or FESTIVENTION as it's better known, was held in London primarily at the Royal Hotel, Russell Square (located a hundred yards or so from Russell Square Underground station) over the weekend of Thursday 10th May to Sunday 13th May, most attendees leaving at the end of each day for their homes and lodgings.

Total attendance at the convention was around the 200 mark. Some people only attended the Thursday and/or Friday sessions at the White Horse while some only attended the Saturday and Sunday sessions at the Royal Hotel.

The Convention Committee were:

Chairman: E.J. (Ted) Carnell  
Secretary: A. Vincent Clarke  
Treasurer: Charles Duncombe  
Committee: Audrey Lovett, H.Ken Bulmer  
Fred Brown, Ted Tubb  
Jim Rattigan, Frank Arnold  
Projectionist: Kerry Gaulder  
Wire Recording: Jim Burch  
Music: Records supplied by Arthur C. Clarke and Bill Temple

**Known Attendees:**

- Ben Abas
- Barbara Abas
- Ben Abas's brother
- Forry Ackerman
- Wendayne Ackerman
- Bruce Angrave
- Frank Arnold
- P.A. Astley
- B.A. Baker
- Eric Bentcliffe

- Sid Birchby
- John Birchby
- Leonard Borston(?)
- Fred Brown
- Daphne Buckmaster
- Ron Buckmaster
- Ken Bulmer
- Bert Campbell
- Mrs Campbell
- Paul Capon
- Ted Carnell
- M. Chambaz
- Mdm. Chambaz
- Ken Chapman
- George Charters
- Vince Clarke
- Arthur C. Clarke
- Dave Cohen
- Robert Conquest
- Mrs Conquest
- Michael Corper
- Lyell Crane
- John Keir Cross
- C. D'Alessio
- Rick Dalton
- Mimi Dalton
- Ron Deacon
- Phillip Duerr
- Charlie Duncombe
- Fred Fairless
- Frank Fears
- Bob Foster
- J. Fowler
- Les Flood
- Georges Gallet
- Kerry Gaulder
- W.A. Gibson

- Walter Gillings
- Dave Griffiths
- John Beynon Harris
- Mr. Hill
- George Hay
- Arthur Hillman
- Alan Hunter
- Joyce Hunter
- Lee Jacobs
- Les Johnson
- K.T. Johnstone
- Ralph A. Keyes
- John Kippax
- Max Leviten
- Audrey Lovett
- Prof. A.M. Low
- Colling Leybourn
- Daphne Mac?
- Doug Mayer
- Frank Milnes
- Lew Mordecai
- Dan Morgan
- Mrs Murray
- Sigvard Ostlund
- Mrs Ostlund
- Terry Overton
- Mary Patchett
- Peter Phillips
- Derek Pickles
- Mavis Pickles
- Owen Plumridge
- Ken Paynter
- Jim Rattigan
- Peter Ridley
- Fred Robinson
- J. Michael Rosenblum
- Alan Shalders

- C. Sharpe
- D. Sharpe
- Bob Shaw
- Walter Shaw
- Mike Tealby
- Bill Temple
- Tony Thorne
- Ted Tubb
- Norman Wansborough
- Norman Weedall
- A. Wenham
- R.V. Weston
- P.A. Weston
- James White
- A.E. “Taffy” Williams
- Walt Willis
- Madeleine Willis
- Sam Youd

The Royal Hotel has since been demolished and on the site now stands the Royal National Hotel.

The following report has been edited together from those written by a variety of people, in an effort to give as complete a picture of the convention as possible. From this point my own notes and bridging pieces are in italics.

## **Prologue:**

London, England, 27 April (CNS\*)

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*\* CNS was James V. Taurasi’s Cosmic News Service, repeatedly cited in his newszine as though it had the stature of AP or Reuters.*

Here’s the Convention news as it stands two weeks before the great event.

The Ackermans arrived in Liverpool this morning and, after spending a day with the Liverpool fans, will leave for London in the morning, Saturday, April 28th, by car, where a big session will be held in London’s White Horse Tavern to welcome them tomorrow night. They will then be staying with Ted Carnell for a while. Wendayne Ackerman is booked to give a series of dianetics lectures (or auditions), next week at Chelsea Town Hall. Lyell

Crane from Toronto is due to reach here in a few days, and Georges Gallet and party will be over from Paris. The Australians have already arrived, including one rocket expert from Woomera. The New Zealand fan is already in London. The Swedish and Dutch delegates arrive just prior to the Convention, and Lee Jacobs, representing the “Fantasy Veterans Association”, who was at the Norwescon last year, is now in the US Army and stationed at Versailles, France, will be coming over.

Amongst notables attending will be S. Fowler Wright; Paul Capon (whose latest book *The Other Side of the Sun* is being serialized on the radio); John Keir Cross (who scripted the radio play for him); plus all the British notable regular authors; bunches of British editors and pro publishers who are moving into the fantasy field this year; editor of the new *Science Fiction Fortnightly* magazine [*Bert Campbell*]; and fans from throughout the United Kingdom.

Several short fantasy films will be shown (four Ackerman is bringing), including the White Sands V-2 film, and a short on atomics. Possibly *Rocketship X-M* will be shown, *Metropolis* definitely. The whole of Sunday afternoon, May 13th, is devoted to an International session – this will be wire-recorded, plus the authors session the same day. Both will be edited and transcribed into records for re-sale, but we will try and work out a wire recording for the 1951 US Convention (if there is time).

*While some wire recording occurred, nothing more appears to have happened.*

The London office of United Press, NY, has already radioed an article to New York concerning the forthcoming con here. Three London newspapers are sending reporters – two already have material scheduled to appear in the press beforehand. All in all (plus photographers) the Convention will be well covered. It should be as good as any US World Convention.

The British *New Worlds* (now a bimonthly) #10 is being published on May 1st and will thus be out just in time for the Convention. Many original illustrations will be on show (and most of them will be auctioned). Arthur C. Clarke will be showing colour originals from his new book *The Exploration of Space*. The British fans and editors who have seen them agree that they are better than Bonestell for detail (four pieces will be in his book).

*Fantasy-Times* wishes the convention all the success possible. [1]

**Walt Willis:**



On the 8th of May the entire fan population of Ireland migrated to England for the First International Convention. One fifth of it flew over, but the other four – James White, Bob Shaw, my wife and myself – all of whom suffer rather badly from hand-to-mouth disease, went steerage on the boat.

[2]

### **George Charters:**

I think I was the only fan who flew to the Convention. As Confucius says, “Better be airsick for two hours than seasick for twenty-four.” Also I think I was the only one to get a room in the Royal Hotel – a purely fortuitous circumstance, by the way. However, for the first half-hour after the Viking lifted I was okay, but the steward served a light lunch, and having injudiciously partaken thereof, I very shortly began to fear that Short Bros. would be short one checker. I asked for a paper bag, and when the plane touched down I was able to give the lunch back to the steward. Coming back, I took two Kwell tablets and the old tum did no flip-flaps at all, at all.

On Thursday [10th May], I went to see the Changing of the Guard at the Palace; St. Paul’s; Tower of London; The British Museum, etc. The last named could do with a cleaning, it is a grim, forbidding pile. One can almost imagine that it actually does have a copy of the fabulous *Necronomicon*. Come to think of it there are quite a number of similar piles in London, which reminds me I saw Harley Street. And nearly every book-shop I saw had several prominently displayed copies of *How I Cured My Duodenal Ulcer*. In between times I wandered around High Holborn, Tottenham Court Road, Charing Cross, Fleet Street, the Strand, the Embankment, and so on. Somehow I got a great kick out of seeing places I’ve often read about. The greatest kick of all, however, was the morning I saw the Household Cavalry passing along the Strand in brilliant sunshine. I was fascinated.

Thursday night, about eight, I wandered down to the White Horse and was met by a terrific babble of noise. Definitely they are not the strong silent type, these London fans. Vince Clarke painlessly relieved me of 15/- and it was the following Sunday before I began to realize how they could do it all for so little. It was almost 10:30 before I dragged myself away. I went round again on Friday and got back to the Hotel at about eleven. You’ll see I was not an all-night member! I gather there were plenty of those, though. [3]

### **Vince Clarke:**

The final week before the Con. was a very busy period as last minute

arrangements took place, but eventually Thursday, May 10th saw a large crowd of visitors at the White Horse. Estimates vary, but there is little doubt that at least 60 were present, and probably about 90 passed through during the evening. Every now and then the Secretary, who had secured half-a-table in one corner, wormed his way through the crowd to pass out admission tickets to those who hadn't received them through the post, and the voice of Charlie Duncombe, our Treasurer, rose above the general high noise level as he extolled the merits of paying in advance.

Amongst the many overseas visitors present were the Ackermans and Lyell Crane, the Northern Irish fans, and Ben Abas, editor of Holland's now-defunct one and-only SF 'zine *Fantasia en Wetenschap* and his wife and brother from Holland. Professor A.M. Low, pre-war President of the "Science Fiction Association" looked in for a short time during the evening but said he was unable to attend during the weekend. Another well known figure from SFA times, Doctor W.A. Gibson of Scotland, was also there and at the main sessions.

Authors Clarke, Temple, Beynon Harris, Phillips, Bounds, Hay, Tubb, and Dave Griffiths were also present, if slightly crushed, giving some point to a pessimistic (optimistic?) fan's declaration that if Lew the Manager had doped the drinks English science fiction would have finished abruptly that night.

The Convention Committee retired to the Private Bar for their deliberations, eventually to leave the Secretary and Treasurer to official business and to rehearse the plays to be given during the weekend. These had been presented at U.S. Conventions, and had been sent over to Ted Carnell who had translated the more esoteric references into modern English S.F.ism. As it happened, various changes in the cast on that day caused a complete change over of parts, but at least the voices raised in a mystic chant contributed to the volume of fantastic sound that shook Fetter Lane. [4]

*The playlets Life Can Be Horrible and Who Goes Where?, the first to ever be staged at a British convention, had been written by Milton Rothman. Ted had presumably learned of them at the 1949 Worldcon in Cincinnati, which is where the pair would likely have first met (Rothman was over here briefly in 1945 while serving with US armed forces, but apart from visiting Mike Rosenblum in Leeds I've found no evidence that he had much contact with British fans). They were performed at Festiventation by a group of London Circle*

*fans who styled themselves “The SF Soap Opera Company”.*

**Lee Jacobs:**

Preliminary sessions were held at the White Horse Tavern, in London’s Fetter Lane. Beer, brandy, orange juice, and ginger-ale flowed freely and I seriously doubt that one more person could have entered – it was absolutely packed! [5]

**Friday 11th May**

**Clarke:**

Only (!) about 40 were present on Friday evening, leaving room for the entrance of Northern enthusiasts Mike Rosenblum, Max Leviten and Rick Dalton, *Phantasmagoria* editor Derek Pickles and his sister Mavis (who have said some hard... and disregarded... things about London fandom, and entered with a slightly hunted and wary look), old time fans D.W.F. Mayer and Sid Birchby, and Swedish fan Sigvard Ostlund and his wife....and many, many others. [6]

Artist Alan Hunter, who was there with his wife, was one of an interested group who discussed with Ted Carnell the cover of the next *New Worlds*, the original of which he had and which represented a startling departure from previous policy.

On both evenings, and especially on Thursday, the London Circle was present in force to meet visitors. [4]

**Derek Pickles:**

Of course one of the events of the trip to London was meeting Walt Willis (and his very charming wife), and of the *Slant* staff (if staff isn’t too serious a word), after seeing them in action in the White Horse and other hostelries, I now know why there are so many illustrations in *Slant*, it’s because of the fact that James White sticks to orange crushes and Walt and Bob don’t, obviously by the time they’re ready to start composing they can’t tell the p’s from the q’s.

Two of the great attractions at the meeting were, naturally, the beards of Alan Hunter and H.J. Campbell of *SFM\**. I (and Mavis) spent several days in Alan’s company, with him was his charming wife, Joyce, they are both extremely nice folk, and we only hope they could tell half of what we said in our not too broad Yorkshire. For accents, though, the Wild Irishmen took some beating, half the time we couldn’t tell a word they said, and the other

half only part of their conversation, but we got on very well in sign language.  
[7]

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\* Bert Campbell is remembered as a writer for and editor of *Authentic Science Fiction*, which launched in January 1951, becoming *Science Fiction Fortnightly* with issue #3 in February and then *Science Fiction Monthly* with #9 in May. Hence the reference to SFM above and *Fortnightly* in the following section. The title finally stabilized as *Authentic Science Fiction* with #13 in September.  
[Ed.]

### **Willis:**

Striking personalities included Alan Hunter and his beard. It suits him too, if not quite down to the ground. And Derek Pickles with his surprising size. I had expected a lot of Pickles, but not just in that way. I got quite a jar! I suppose it must have been the large economy size. (I know you never thought I would sink so low as to make puns about Derek's name. How little you know me.) But the biggest surprise was H.J. Campbell, editor of *Science Fiction Fortnightly*. His beard made Alan Hunter's look almost like five o'clock shadow, and the rest of his hair looked as if it was his ambition to become a Big Mane Fan. As far as I can see this magazine has more hair-raising possibilities than we ever imagined. Seriously, he seemed a very likeable and intelligent chap, and I felt a great deal of sympathy for him at times. Especially during one conversation he had at the White Horse, with a well-known author. Campbell asked him baldly (it must have been a difficult thing to do!) if he would write something for him. The author asked him who he was, though of course he already knew. Campbell explained that he edited *SFF*. "Must you?" said the author rudely. Down in the forest something stirred, but Campbell with an obvious effort smothered the crushing retort he was well capable of making, and listened patiently while the author, of whom I had hitherto held the highest personal opinion, explained exactly how many cents a word he could get for his stuff in America. He was nearly getting two black eyes per word in England.

Personally I thought Campbell should have been invited to speak at the Convention. It may be of course that he was, but refused, and certainly Ted Carnell was generous enough to pay him a well deserved tribute in his own speech. [7]

Bob Shaw and James White were carrying on an extraordinary conversation with Sigvard Ostlund from Sweden. James was doing a magnificent job of interpreting, considering the fact that he didn't know a single word of Swedish. It was pathetic to see poor Sigvard. All his life he

had been learning standard English to be able to talk with the people he was going to meet in England, and the first one he comes up against is Bob Shaw. However, every time Bob said something in that armour-plated brogue of his, James would repeat it very loudly and clearly and some vestige of the meaning would seep across. In the middle distance, Derek Pickles was telling people what he thought of the London Circle. Not far away the London Circle was saying what it thought of Derek Pickles. Weird electrical discharges leapt between the two clouds of blue haze. [2]

## **Saturday 12th May**

### **Ted Carnell:**

The sun streamed through the stained glass windows of one of the ballrooms of the Royal Hotel, London, on Saturday, May 12th, casting a kaleidoscope of colour upon the highly polished floor. Muralled pictures of puzzled Victorian ladies frowned down upon the oak paneling, now with futuristic art work of spaceships in flight, of alien monsters, and heroines in dire peril. In front of the Chairman's table, across from the clutter of cables, microphones, wire-recording equipment, camera and sound equipment, a half circle of red leather chairs formed a perimeter of comfort for the hundred and fifty to two hundred delegates representing eight countries, who were attending the first International Science Fiction Convention. Behind them, tastefully dressed out on tables along the walls were magnificent displays of fantasy books and magazines. Thus the setting for an historic moment in the annals of science fiction.

For, while the past eight American conventions have been termed "world" affairs, this was the first truly international gathering, with Britain host to some twenty delegates from seven countries, and the Committee responsible for the success of the enterprise had worked prodigiously to see that everything was in readiness for the great event.

The previous two evenings had seen as many as one hundred delegates, professional and amateur, getting acquainted at London's celebrated White Horse tavern off Fleet Street, so there was little reluctance or shyness upon the part of the conventioners as the opening speeches and addresses were dispensed with. [8]

### **Temple:**

Wally Gillings opened the proceedings – and damn nigh finished them – with a funeral oration over the dead body of science-fiction, bewailing that it,

or he, or anyone had ever been born. It was a tragic and powerful performance. He didn't have to play Hamlet with a false beard, like Alec Guinness, or with dyed hair, like Olivier. Wally *is* Hamlet. The times are always out of joint for him. There's always something rotten in the state of almost anything. How all occasions do inform against him! I feel the same way, but gosh – if I could only act like that! Well, he killed some of us off and the rest committed suicide, and he tripped away happily and the Convention continued. [10]

### **Bob Shaw:**

After the introduction, in which one heard so many names that one forgot the few that one already knew, the first item of the Convention proper was a few speeches to get everyone into an amiable frame of mind. Walter Gillings got up and attacked Bill Temple. Forry Ackerman got up and attacked D.R. Smith. D.R. Smith's deputy got up and attacked Forry Ackerman. Bill Temple got up and attacked Walter Gillings. When the debacle was over some of the younger fans had to be carried out and revived.

About four hours after the proceedings had started Willis, Bulmer, and Clarke arrived with the programme which let us know what we had been doing all morning. [7]

### **Willis:**

At the crack of 10 a.m. I went down to The Epicentre. This is the name of the apartment where Vince Clarke and Ken Bulmer camp among the debris of fifteen years of fanactivity. They call it the Epicentre because it is supposed to be the centre around which English fan activity revolves. I have been unkind enough once to refer to it as the dead centre, but I must admit that when anything is done by London fandom, it is done here. I had never really believed that fandom could be a way of life until I saw this place. It is a fan's paradise and a housewife's nightmare. Books, prozines, fanzines, letters, typewriters, mimeographs, stencils, artwork are heaped about in great mountain ranges. Behind them are presumably walls, but rumours that a floor has been seen once or twice must be discounted. Archaeological expeditions have definitely established that the Epicentre is built on a solid foundation of old fanzines, stretching from strata to strata down to the eternal fires of VOM.

On this morning I followed the dangerous trail into the inner fastness of the Epicentre with the idea of helping Vince Clarke to finish the Official

Programme. I found the Official Programme had nearly finished Vince. On the kitchen table was the big rotary duplicator (mimeograph, to you). It had stopped working. On the floor was a smaller rotary duplicator. It had never started working. In the next room was a flatbed mimeograph. It had never worked. It was like *The Revolt of the Machines*. On the left of the door a gas cooker was going full blast with the oven door open. Apparently none of the duplicators can be even expected to work unless the temperature of the room approaches that of the centre of the sun. On the right of the door, half way down a dangerous slope of fanzines, were a few battered stencils. That was the Official Programme. Amid this chaos crouched Vince Clarke, trying to intimidate one of the mimeographs with a screwdriver. Knowing nothing of mimeography I could do nothing for some time but hover about making encouraging noises. This I did to the best of my ability until I saw what Vince was trying to do and offered to take one of the machines into the other room and grapple with it.

At this point I walked two stalwart Liverpool fans, masters of mimeography. Subduing the great rotary machine with one terrible look, one of them made a few mystic passes over it, and turned the handle. Paper began to pass through it and emerge on the other side bearing decipherable marks. I hastily revived Vince by waving a copy of *Amazing* under his nose, and we all went into production. Although the Convention had already started, we had 200 copies of the 12 page Programme run off, collated and stapled by lunch time.

Meanwhile Ted Carnell had declared the Convention open. He began by introducing the more distinguished guests, keeping the most distinguished 'til last. Finally, after some unintelligible remarks about ointment and flies, he introduced me. Of course I wasn't there. Anyone who says that the round of applause came *after* that fact was noticed is a dirty liar, and probably in the pay of Ken Slater. I hope to have signed statements to prove it when my friends get the bandages off their fingernails.

I arrived on the scene during the Lunch interval. The Convention carried on as if nothing had happened – it was almost as if nothing had. I had come by subway, escorting the two Liverpool fans with all the savoir faire, and sore feet of a subway traveller of two days standing. And I do mean standing. Vince Clarke and Ken Bulmer brought up the rear in a van, an extraordinary vehicle which the automobile industry has begged me to refer to as a horseless carriage. Personally I think it was a last model sedan chair with the

arms broken off and a hole cut in the floorboards. We handed out the Programmes to those fen who had already arrived back from lunch or who just didn't eat. They were all very pleased to find out what they had been doing all morning.

Next William F. Temple was billed to speak on the technique of writing serial SF. Fortunately he did nothing of the sort, at which no one who knew him was in the least surprised. He seized the opportunity to strike a joyous blow in the Temple-Clarke feud which has been amusing British fandom for some 20 years. Arthur C. Clarke, incidentally, is a thin fair-haired nervous sort of chap, with a dashing manner. At least, every time I saw him he was dashing somewhere. I expect one of these days when he is particularly excited he'll reach escape velocity and that's the last we will see of him. He is nicknamed "Ego". Temple, on the other hand, is a small dark plumpish chap, very quiet spoken, and with a deadpan style of humour. The only flashes in the pan were when he looked up over his heavy glasses to see how some of the more subtle witticisms were going. Usually they went very well, especially when he touched on dianetics with a mention of "a womb with a view". I assure Rory Faulkner, who as far as I know first used this crack in Vernon McCain's Wastebasket, that Temple undoubtedly arrived at it independently. In his day the man was the most brilliant of fan journalists, and he could be so again today if he wanted to.

Temple's contribution took the form of a synopsis of a serial about the first space flight....

I was onto Temple for first fanzine rights as soon as I could get to him. But Lee Jacobs (curse him) got there first and it will appear in his FAPA zine. [2]

*Actually, it appeared in Rhodomagnetic Digest #17 (November 1951), and is included in the free downloadable Ansible Editions collection of Temple's fanwriting, Temple at the Bar, also available as a reasonably priced printed book.*

### **Vince Clarke:**

Bill Temple brought the roof down with his speech... The roof was hastily put on again, ready to be brought down again by the hastily organized and totally unrehearsed "S-F Soap-Opera Company" in a 15 minute SF skit on a "hero and heroine marooned on a desert planet" theme. A much needed tea-break followed, giving guests an opportunity to slake their thirst and to



examine the items of fantasy art decorating the walls, and the many tables of books and magazines.

Following the tea break, a recording made when the *Evening News* wrote a report on the White Horse was played, in which authors Clarke, Temple, Youd, Harris, editor Ted Carnell and others took part. A short discussion followed. [4]

**Willis:**

I don't think anyone listened to this except a fan called Terry Overton, who asked Clarke why he had said *The Moon Is Hell* was such a lousy book. There is a great disagreement among the Irish contingent as to what actually was said at this point, but I could have sworn that Clarke was so annoyed with Campbell he said he wasn't going to send him any more stories. But I must have been wrong, because nobody else remembers anything of the sort. Maybe Clarke said that Campbell would now be so annoyed with him that he wouldn't *accept* any of his stories. [2]

**Vince Clarke:**

Then came the first auction and numerous magazines and books were soon disposed of by wise-cracking auctioneer Ted Tubb, ably assisted by Charlie Duncombe. Ted (whose first pro. story appeared in the current *New Worlds*) is always in demand as auctioneer, for he is undoubtably the best, and funniest, SF auctioneer in this country, and even those who had no intention of buying took great enjoyment in sitting and listening.

Buffet/dinner break followed, which produced an enormous queue at the buffet tables. [4]

**Willis:**

According to the dictionary a "buffet" means a slap in the face, and that's just what this one was to us poor Irish immigrants who had been relying on it to help us live in London. Last time I was in London I lived on spaghetti because I found you could get more of it for your money than anything else. I ate so much spaghetti I came home with an Italian accent. Unfortunately I couldn't find any spaghetti dives near the convention hall, but in a way the buffet did save us money – after one look at it you never wanted to touch food again. Mind you I'm not saying a word against the catering arrangements at this hotel. It's just that it's the first one I've seen where they have a fifth place on the cruet stand for a stomach pump. [2]

**Michael Corper:**

At the British Festival Convention I met Lee Jacobs (Fan-Vets representative). When he discovered I speak Dutch, he mentioned that a few Dutch fans were over here, too. I soon contacted them, and what do you know? They were none other than fans Abas and his charming wife. Abas, you will remember, published the short-lived Dutch *Fantasia en Wetenschap* a few years back. Abas Sr published it; Abas Jr, whom I met, did the illustrations.

We had quite a long talk, during which [I learned] that the Abas couple had spent four long years separated from each other, in Japanese PoW camps in the Dutch East Indies. Abas told me how strange it was to hear a woman's voice again after all that time. [11]

*Michael Corper was for several years the British news reporter for Fantasy Times yet does not appear to have involved himself with organized fandom in this country.*

**Ted Carnell:**

During the evening session on the first day, just as the concealed lighting came on in the glass ceiling, author John Keir Cross, who adapted Paul Capon's recent book *The Other Side of the Sun* for B.B.C. serialization, discussed his efforts at interesting Broadcasting House in this type of story, and was followed by author Arthur C. Clarke, who gave a humorous account of his antics before the television cameras at Alexandra Palace in recent astronautic programmes. [8]

**Vince Clarke:**

The "S-F Soap Opera Company" then showed the B.B.C. how it should be done in "Who Goes Where", a wilder and, if possible, even funnier skit than the previous effort, with a cast consisting of Audrey Lovett, Fred Brown, H. Ken Bulmer, Ted Carnell, Charles Duncombe and Ted Tubb. This play was recorded, so may be heard again at SF gatherings in the future. [6]

Owing to the uncertainty of many people as to whether they could attend and address the Convention, the programme was inevitably a last-minute affair. Even then changes were made such as the "Guest Authors" session on Saturday, which had been reserved for S. Fowler Wright and I.O. Evans. In the event neither came, but as previous sessions had overrun their time there was no hiatus. [4]

The last item of the day was a showing of *The Lost World*, a film based

on A. Conan Doyle's famous fantasy of a South American land in which dinosaurs and pterodactyls still exist. Made in 1925 and starring Wallace Beery and Bessie Love, the film was naturally silent, but by clever manipulation of gramophone records ("Night on Bare Mountain", "Rite of Spring", etc), and of the volume control, Bill Temple and Arthur C. Clarke managed a very appropriate accompaniment. Fan Kerry Gaulder was the extremely able projectionist. [6]

**Willis:**

When I got back, feeling a little better (I think the trouble may have been something I didn't eat), there was a film show going on. There was supposed to have been a guest author's session at 8:30, but things were running so late everyone had forgotten there ever was such a thing as 8:30. Besides, there were no guest authors, which would have made things a little difficult. The show was of a silent version of *The Lost World*, a film about prehistoric monsters. It was a bit of a prehistoric monster itself. However, parts of it were quite good. For instance, there was a terrific battle between two great monsters who must have been all of 18 inches high. It was awe-inspiring. At one moment I thought one of them was actually going to knock a piece of plaster off the other. In the corner Arthur C. Clarke was busy jockeying discs for incidental music. Occasionally the reins slipped and the music sounded more accidental than incidental. A wild elephant stampede loses something of its effect when accompanied by a Viennese waltz. [2]

**Bob Shaw:**

A shortened, abridged, reduced version of excerpts from part of the film *The Lost World* was shown to a few members of the audience. The rest, being more than ten feet from the "screen", had no idea what was happening. When the lights were doused (about fifteen minutes after the film started) the fen with books etc. on display were seen anxiously edging closer to their collections. And very wise too! Ego Clarke looked after the musical accompaniment. I saw a very touching piece of spooning on the screen to the resounding strains of what sounded like the "Entry of the Gladiators". When Ego caught on, he switched records just in time for us to see a death struggle between two prehistoric monsters accompanied by some tender, romantically lilting music. It was great!

After it was all over a bespectacled young chap got up and after saying they had been let down, asked if anyone had a 9.5mm projector with him.

Strangely enough – nobody had! That was one thing I noticed about the Convention – nobody had any 9.5mm projectors with them. [7]

### **Temple:**

Arthur Clarke and I were detailed to find and fit appropriate gramophone record music to the silent film *Metropolis*, which had been procured and was to be shown. We had to go by our memories of the film, which were in fair shape, as we'd once had to provide a similar soundtrack to it before the war. The trouble was that we could remember the film but, not our original music programme. However, we fixed up a programme of modernistic and/or mechanistic music, took our heap of music along on the day, and found that at the last minute the film had been switched to *The Lost World*, about prehistoric monsters. Our music was a bit out of period but we were stuck with it, And so the allosaurus sparred with the triceratops, Professor Challenger fulminated, and the young lovers made eyes at each other – all to the impartial and deafening clangour of Mossolov's "Steel Foundry".

As Arthur seemed to think "Steel Foundry" needn't ever be changed for another record during the film, there was little for me to do at the turntable. He suggested I went and sat in a corner and managed the volume control. I went. It was a dark corner. Ego hadn't mentioned that the platform ended suddenly there and the chair was perched on the edge of it. I sat down, and promptly went over backwards, and hit the floor in a shower of ashtrays, wires, abuse, and broken bones – all mine. It put "Steel Foundry" in the shade. On the screen a couple of monsters were having a fight at the time, and I was congratulated afterwards for my very sound sound effects. [10]

### **Vince Clarke:**

The formal programme ended about 10 p.m. and guests broke into a number of groups and sightseers who examined the tables on which books and magazines were displayed, and the numerous fantasy drawings which covered the walls. [4]

### **Lee Jacobs:**

There were two noticeable differences between the Festival Convention and its American counterpart. Smoke-filled rooms were almost non-existing in London due to the London Transportation System (Buses and Subways stop running at midnight), and the decentralization of Convention attendees because of the hotel shortage caused by the thousands of tourists viewing this

year's Festival of Britain. Forrie and Wendie Ackerman invited a few people to their room after the formal sessions in old American custom, but outside of this isolated case, Convention activities ceased at 11 p.m. [5]

**Willis:**

Nothing more of interest happened that night, except that on the subway home my wife, Madeleine, was left behind in the crush and got carried on to Shepherd's Bush. I went over to the down platform and hardly had I got there when she got off a train. It was like a matter duplicator. In fact, I still have an uneasy idea that there is another Madeleine roaming helplessly around Shepherd's Bush. [2]

**Sunday 13th May**

**Willis:**

At about 11 the next morning, Convention Time (this is about half an hour behind ordinary time and gets progressively later), Ted Carnell got up to speak about *New Worlds* and its future. Perhaps it was not his fault if he had to begin by talking about Walter Gillings and his past, but certainly the ghost of Gillings haunted the proceedings like an absent fiend. Gillings, as you know, was the editor of the British prozine *Science Fantasy* until he recently resigned for what were supposed to be reasons of health. There has always been, it seems, a certain amount of what we might call rivalry between Gillings and Carnell, even before the disagreements as to which of them should have gone to America under the Big Pond Fund as representative of British Fandom.

Towards the end of his speech he revealed that as an experiment in crass commercialism the next *NW* was going to feature a Beautiful Unclad Maiden on the cover. This threw the audience into a state of excitement bordering on torpor. Clarke got up and made a short and pungent speech to the effect that all this trying to pass SF off under a phony sexy front was all wrong. Were we or were we not trying to sell SF as SF. The time had come for us to stop apologizing for SF and take it to the people. This speech of Clarke's, while silently applauded by all true fans present, was the signal for a counterattack by the dealers and business men. One after another they got up and said that sexy covers sold magazines and that we would never get anywhere without them. It was fascinating to see a hundred fans who had probably spent the better part of their fan life pasting Earle Bergey, gradually come around to accepting the idea of having that hated type of cover on their own magazine.

The final note was struck, and held some twenty minutes, by an elder gentleman called Hill whom no one had ever heard of before. With a strong Australian accent and a wealth of gesture he told the audience that the only thing an editor had to go by was his net sales, that the audience was not representative readers, and that their opinions weren't worth a damn. The audience applauded him vigorously to show how well they could take criticism, and then filed out for lunch.

After lunch came the International Discussion. "Our overseas guests tell us of the state of SF in their countries." While the guests were being called to the rostrum I cowered in the shade of Derek Pickles, making a noise like an old overcoat, but Carnell mercilessly penetrated my disguise and summoned me to join the row on the dais. To give the man his due, he had warned me about this a couple of days ago. The prospect had been weighing on my mind ever since and I had been hoping it would fall through. I had pleaded with Carnell that I was terrified of public speaking, but he was quite adamant about it. (Incidentally, I wish he would use tastier boot polish.)

Reflecting that there was always the hope that an atomic war would start in the next hour, I sat and listened to the other speakers, mentally discarding every note I had made as I saw the way the discussion was going.

The symposium opened by Lyell Crane, whose interest in international fandom is so intense that it might almost be called vested. He sat down, having almost accidentally revealed one item of interest, that his co-editor Julian May, was a girl. [2]

### **Ted Carnell:**

Forrest J Ackerman, United States delegate, followed with a highly interesting and entertaining talk on how fandom in the States was coming more and more into its own, and how the executives of radio, TV, films, and publishing houses were turning more and more to fandom for their specialized knowledge in the field. George Gallet, from Paris, editor and journalist, whose name has been known for some 17 years to fandom, next spoke on the increasing interest in France and how he hopes to be publishing at least eight pocketbook novels a year by 1952.

Already published in France by him have been *Murder of the USA* and Hamilton's *The Star Kings*. These are being followed by *Vandals of the Void*, and *Stowaway to Mars*. Gallet stated that the French-reading public prefers the simpler action-packed story to the current American sociological and psychological story.

Holland was the next country represented, and Ben Abas, a commercial artist from Haarlem, revealed to the assembly that he and his father were responsible for the publishing of a science-fiction magazine in Holland which ran to four issues before they had to cease publication two years ago. He agreed with Gallet of France that unless one could read English-written magazines there was little chance of the field growing until some enterprising publisher produced translations of the better type of stories.

Sigvard Ostlund, representing Sweden, startled the assembly by informing them that a weekly science-fiction magazine had been running in Stockholm for some time, but that the publisher very often mixed detective and western fiction in the issues. Northern Ireland was represented by foremost fan Walter Willis, an enthusiastic amateur publisher from Belfast... [9]

*Willis's own view of those who preceded him was a bit different from that of Carnell....*

**Willis:**

The next speaker was Ackerman, who delivered another of his pleasant and intimate talks. Like everything Forry said, it was listened to with pleasure and interest.

To my relief, Carnell then jumped right across the Atlantic and called on Gallet from Paris. Georges brought a sheaf of notes to the microphone, and apologized for reading from them; he couldn't speak English very well. He talked about the French reprints of various American SF books and about his own projected French prozine.

Next, Ben Abas brought a sheaf of notes to the microphone and apologized for reading from them, but he couldn't speak English very well. He talked about a Dutch prozine.

Next, Sigvard Ostlund brought a sheaf of notes to the microphone and apologized for reading from them, but he couldn't speak English very well. He talked about a Swedish prozine.

Carnell then called on me. Having failed to similarize\* myself through the floor, I toyed desperately with the idea of bringing a sheaf of notes to the microphone and apologizing for not reading from them because I couldn't read. But in this probability-world I tottered to the microphone and told the Convention about the recent pocket-book in Gaelic. It didn't take very long, but I salved my conscience with the thought that the proceedings were

already behind schedule. No doubt the audience would think I could have made a brilliant oration lasting some hours if it hadn't been for my thoughtfulness and unselfishness. I sat down mid applause, some of which I'm afraid was left over from Carnell's introduction. [2]

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*\* In A.E. van Vogt's The World of Null-A, this verb means to teleport. [Ed.]*

### **Bob Shaw:**

I was so weak after the previous day's session that I was unable to crawl out of the mattress until nearly lunchtime. The first item which I was able to take an active interest in was the International Discussion. The overseas guests were asked to speak about the state of SF in their countries. Walt Willis got up to say a few words – and did just that. When he sat down (about 30 seconds after he got up) nobody would believe it was over. Then there was wild cheering. It was voted the best speech of the day. [7]

### **Walt Willis:**

My best friends tell me the speech was very good, but too short (bless their loyal hearts) and that it came over the PA system with a strong Irish accent. Since I have no trace of any accent at all I find this very difficult to understand, but my English friends (all of whom have atrocious English accents) say I always sound that way to them.

The convention rallied, and survived. Speeches by Wendayne Ackerman, Ken Paynter, Lee Jacobs, and Frank Edward Arnold, were listened to attentively by everyone except the last speaker who was still swimming around dazedly in a pool of his own sweat. [2]

### **Ted Carnell:**

Ken Paynter, recently from Sydney, Australia, was one of two “down under” delegates, and gave a humorous as well as an accurate account of the troubles and trials of Australian fans during the past few years. Ken was originally treasurer of the still-operating Sydney Futurians. His countryman, Alan Shalders, who did not speak during the discussion, is a rocket expert from Woomera on a two-year reciprocal exchange with the British rocket propulsion department.

Wendayne Ackerman, USA, then gave a summary of early and recent Germanic excursions into the fantasy field, and was followed by Frank Arnold, representing Britain, who covered the rest of the European continent with a fascinating and highly entertaining eulogy, proving that science-fiction



truly sprang from international sources. Lee Jacobs, another US delegate, who was stationed at Versailles, France, in the Signal Corp, had flown over specially for the Convention (he was at Portland last year, too), and gave a fine account of the number of technical men he knew who were active in fandom.

The piece-de-resistance of the entire Convention followed immediately after the international session. Unheralded and unannounced up to Convention time, and known only to a limited few, the 1951 International Fantasy Award was sprung upon an enthusiastic audience, who thundered applause and agreement at the decision of the London Circle to devise and present the equivalent of an "Oscar" to the author of the adjudged best fiction book of 1950 and one to the best technical book in the field. A panel of critics had been instituted two weeks prior to the Convention, and from their deliberations George R. Stewart was adjudged the fiction winner for his *Earth Abides*, and Chesley Bonestell and Willy Ley took the non-fiction award for their joint *Conquest of Space*.

The two awards, which it is hoped will be yearly, comprise a 12" spaceship resting its fins upon a mahogany base, with a beautiful global lighter attached. The fiction award will be in heavy Chromium plate, and the non-fiction award in a bronzed metal. The design was taken from the Bonestell cover on the March 1951 *Galaxy*, and it is hoped that the actual awards will be ready by the end of June for Forrie Ackerman to take back to USA with him and present to the winners.

Although the actual design has now passed the drawing board stage, it was impossible to have the awards ready for the Convention, so a beautiful replica was made, and this was presented at an inaugural ceremony presided over by G. Ken Chapman, to Forrie Ackerman who accepted the awards on behalf of his fellow countrymen. [9]

### **Willis:**

Forrie Ackerman made a short and graceful speech of acceptance, and mentioned that he felt very jealous. American fans had been talking about this sort of thing for years, and British fandom had gone ahead and done it. [2]

### **Ackerman:**

It will be remembered that a few years ago Ray Van Houten tried to set up an "Awards Committee" for science fiction, which didn't materialize

because of lack-of-support. Later the Hydra Club\* investigated the matter, but never got around to make any awards. Now the British fans have stolen the march on US fans by making the first awards. [5]

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\* *New York SF club, mostly of professionals, set up in 1947 by Lester del Rey, Dave Kyle and Frederik Pohl. [Ed.]*

### **Ted Carnell:**

The International Fantasy Award Fund has now been thrown open to anyone who wishes to donate contributions at any time during each year – it being intended that other branches of fantasy shall be admitted to the yearly “Oscar”. The London Circle have appointed Mr. Leslie Flood as their Treasurer, who states that the Fund will be a non-profit making affair, and that, for the time being he is using the editorial address of *New Worlds*.

A special letter has been designed, and the Committee of the Award Fund anticipate that by next year a number of prominent publishers will be contributing to the scheme, as well as organizations and other bodies prominent in science-fiction.

It will be noted that both award winners have had their books published in both Britain and USA, but all fantasy books from any countries will be eligible each year for entry in the award. Subscribers to the Fund will automatically be placed upon the adjudicating panel. [9]

### **Willis:**

After a break for afternoon tea, Wendayne Ackerman gave her talk about dianetics. It was listened to quietly, almost somnolently. This was mainly because Carnell when introducing her had explained very clearly and firmly that no discussion whatever would be allowed. The principal anti-dianeticians had already been warned about this and I suspect that some of them had had to be bound and gagged. Carnell gave one final glare around the Hall and then sat down on a box of gas bombs.

*An explanation for this can be found in Fantasy Times #125 (March 1951):*

A growing feeling of resentment against the injection of dianetics discussion into the activities of organized fandom began to make itself felt recently.

A public statement in this vein appeared as an editorial in Vol, 2, No, 3 of the *Rhodomagnetic Digest*, published by a group of fans

in Berkeley, California.

Taking exception specifically to the inclusion of dianetics discussion in the program of the forthcoming New Orleans Science Fiction Convention, the editorial writer said: "...I don't plan to go into the question, here, of whether dianetics is just another fad, or whether it is really the new hope of mankind. The question that does arise, is whether dianetics is science-fiction or not. I think that the dianetics followers... will insist that it is not fiction, and on this basis alone it should not merit more than an occasional mention in fan gatherings."

The editorial concludes: "John Campbell in the November *ASF*, in 'Brass Tacks', states that that magazine is not the place for dianetics reports. By the same token, a science-fiction convention is not the place for dianetics enthusiasts to gather and compare notes. If the Auditors, clears, and pre-clears want to have an annual gathering there is nothing to stop them, but, PLEASE, can't we keep the science-fiction conventions for science-fiction fans?"

Mrs. Ackerman, an attractive creature, began by reading a letter from Ray Bradbury to the Ackermans which if it is ever published, will ruin his reputation. I happen to know the truth about Ray Bradbury. In the course of negotiations between Proxy-Boo Ltd and Vernon McCain Incorporated, McCain revealed: "I do a bit of work for a chap named Bradbury who lives down in California and wants oh so badly to be a writer. He just hasn't what it takes, but I haven't the heart to tell him so. So I have him send me each story he writes, do a complete re-write and polish job on it, and then for 10 per cent commission I allow him to sell it under his own name. Not exactly ethical perhaps, but I like the boy. However, I do have trouble, since he has a remarkable lack of ingenuity in devising plots for his stories. He's always coming up with the same old thing. I've burned much midnite oil trying to put a new slant, some original viewpoint on that old 'deserted on Mars' plot he keeps sending me."

Wendayne then started on dianetics. This part of her speech went over most people's heads, mainly because their heads were practically on the floor. These were the anti-dianeticians who had to be silent but believed that sleep was a form of criticism. Wendayne paid a tribute first to Elron Hubbard, whom she described as a "masterful personality." I had little difficulty in equating this description with Laney's of him as a "loud mouth

braggart.” [2]

**Ted Carnell:**

The closing sessions of the two-day affair were even more convivial than any before. After a two-hour auction of books, magazines, and original art works, presided over by author E.C. Tubb as auctioneer, and another buffet supper, the audience settled down to an hour and a half’s enjoyment of a series of short fantasy films (London Films having kindly loaned a complete projector equipment for the occasion). Arthur Clarke presented a technicolor film on rockets which had been made in U.S.A., and Forrest Ackerman had brought four films from Hollywood – one a weird playlet enacted by members of the Los Angeles Fantasy Society; another entitled *Monsters of the Moon*, which had been salvaged from the cutting-room floor and the scraps fitted together to make a coherent fantasy by Bob Tucker of Bloomington, Illinois.

By popular request the visitors asked London to stage another Convention next year, and it seems almost certain after the success of the 1951 gathering, that London – after it gets over its aching back – will be only too pleased to start planning for an even bigger 1952 Convention. [8]

Throughout the two days a variety of speakers, mainly professional, had spoken on numerous subjects, from editing to writing, and two lively debates had raged from the auditorium. Unlike American conventions, the London one died a natural death after 11:00 p.m. owing to transportation difficulties, but numerous delegates who were staying in or near the Royal Hotel held private sessions. [9]

**Willis:**

In Forry’s hotel room we made Lee as comfortable as we could and distributed ourselves about the chairs and beds. I don’t remember much of what we talked about and indeed there wasn’t much time because Bill Temple and us three had to leave very soon to catch the last subway train. We were perfectly willing to walk the 5 or 6 miles to where we were staying, but we hadn’t the slightest idea of how to get there. In London we would go underground at one subway station and come up at another, and then we were all right, but we hadn’t the slightest idea what direction we had come from, nor what lay between.

I do remember all the same discussing with John Benyon Harris the retitling done by Wollheim on his story, “No Place Like Earth”. Wollheim

had changed this to “Tyrant and Slave Girl On Planet Venus”. I’d wondered what on planet earth Harris had thought about this, and apparently it wasn’t much. I remember, too, that Forry nearly disrupted the *Slant* staff by throwing on the bed between James White and Shaw a Dollens Portfolio, “for the *Slant* artist”. Since they were both artists an ugly scene was only averted by my generously taking custody of the portfolio and promising that they could both look at it as often as they liked. Such is my selfless devotion to my staff. I want *Slant* to be a happy magazine.

Far too soon we had to make a wild rush for the subway station. It was unlit when we arrived, the ticket booths were closed, and the elevators weren’t working. However, the stairs were, and we dashed down them faster than light, hoping to go backwards in time. All that happened was that my suitcase acquired infinite mass, but finally we arrived at a dim platform in the bowels of the earth. Not a motion was to be seen, only a dark figure pacing up and down in the distance. After ten minutes James decided to ask him if there was another train tonight. We saw him approach the stranger and engage him in animated conversation. After about twenty minutes he came back and told us that he didn’t know. Apparently however, he had told James the story of his life – people have a habit of doing this with James – and it turned out he came from Iceland. Bob said it was no wonder he was so familiar with James – he must be the one who has been getting all our mail. We once had a letter redirected from Iceland, you know. It was stamped “Try Ireland.” *Stamped*, you notice; it must be happening all the time.

Eventually a train came along. It must have been the last train very late or the first train very early. [2]

## **Monday 14th May**

### **Vince Clarke:**

On Monday, May 14th, a party of fans under the guidance of live-wire Manchester enthusiast Dave Cohen penetrated the unknown hinterland of the South Bank Exhibition.

Those that managed to fight their way out in time, with others to the number of 40, assembled in the Havelock pub in Grays Inn Road that night.....not, we noticed, with mixed feelings, so much to talk about the exhilarating/exhausting goings on of the last few days, as to talk about the 1952 Convention....which is, we suppose, about the biggest compliment that they could have paid the Festival Convention of ’51. [6]

## Willis:

Forry Ackerman was there of course, and us three, and Derek Pickles and Alan Hunter of *Phantasmagoria*, and Vince Clarke and Ken Bulmer and J.M. Rosenblum. All the chronic fans. I got some material from Rosenblum for my forthcoming history of British Fandom, “The Immortal Teacup”, and I had a long talk with Pickles about faneds’ problems.

Just before closing time we bought some bottles of Guinness and beer and soda water and took them up to the Epicentre. The soda water was for James, who made a beast of himself with the stuff in London. Glass after glass of the raw liquid he would toss down with wild abandon. I pointed out to him what dangerous stuff it was – after all, carbon monoxide will do for you in five minutes, and it’s only CO. Soda water is CO<sub>2</sub>, twice as bad.

When we got in we had a job at first to pry Bob away from a book he had found – *Of Worlds Beyond: the Science of Science Fiction Writing*. However he was forcibly restrained from dashing off a 100,000 word novel in van Vogt’s recommended 800 word episodes, and we talked well into the morning. It’s funny, but of all that I can only remember one piece of dialogue.

James: “Have you got your article for *Phantas* ready to see yet?”

Bob: “Only in crude and unintelligible form”.

James: “Well, they printed it that way last time.”

For some reason this seemed very funny at the time partly because Bob didn’t get the point at all, and partly because it was so unlike James. He is usually the straight man in the trio, a big quiet chap, though occasionally he does come off with some devastating remark. The three of us seem to have acquired somewhat of a reputation for wit at the Epicentre, though when we did say something we thought clever it never seemed to go down as well as the ordinary give and take of a *Slant* editorial conference. The truth is that we are not clever at all, but that this Irish accent we are supposed to have gives us a flying start. Actually Ken Bulmer and Vince Clarke are about the two most intelligent fans we have met yet, as well as the nicest. They make a wonderful combination. Ken (editor of *Nirvana*) is dark and impetuous of manner, with a wonderfully wacky sense of humour. I remember the time he invented the steam engine. We were all sitting in the kitchen before supper when the kettle started to boil. The lid jumped up and down at a tremendous rate. Ken looked at it for a while and then said thoughtfully, “You know, there must be a way to harness all that energy...” But probably that would

only sound funny if you had been there. Vince Clarke is tall and fairly thin, with a very round head. He looks like a rather distinguished toffee apple. He talks with a slow drawl but on paper he is pungent, and brilliant. His fanzine (*SF News*) contains some of the cleverest writing in fandom, very subtle and elusive, rather like my own stuff at times, only better. [2]

### **Ted Carnell:**

In retrospect, London's International Convention was as successful as any yet staged in North America, although it did not break any attendance records. Despite intense efforts by the Committee, and considerable interest by national press agencies and publishers, no publicity either before or after the Convention materialized. This was mainly owing to the convention being held on a national holiday, and it has been generally agreed that no publicity was better than adverse publicity.

A number of publishing houses interested in fantasy fiction had representatives present. Elaborate displays by both publishers and book dealers, plus panelled walls filled with original work, made colourful splashes against the setting. Author S. Fowler Wright, who was to have spoken, went to the wrong hotel, and subsequently didn't arrive.

The general consensus of opinion was that London should stage a yearly Convention, the city being better adapted for out-of-town delegates to reach than any other in the country. While the Committee at the moment say "Never again!" they will, undoubtedly, as soon as the back aches disappear, start planning for 1952. [9]

*More news was to follow on the IFA trophies and originally announced Guest of Honour L. Sprague de Camp, who finally made it to London some months after the convention....*

### **Postscript**

#### **Ted Carnell:**

Poul Anderson and his brother John signed the Visitors Book at the White Horse Tavern in July, and in September Catherine and Sprague de Camp put their marks. Londoners are delighted with them, and they appear to be enjoying themselves. A Carnell/de Camp exploration party toured the Tower of London.

The 1951 International Awards Trophies, now ready for dispatch to the USA, recently had an airing in the front shop window of Books and Careers,

ace bookshop in the swank West End area. They were surrounded by stf books (plus technical ones), and the only magazine aired was *New Worlds*.  
[12]

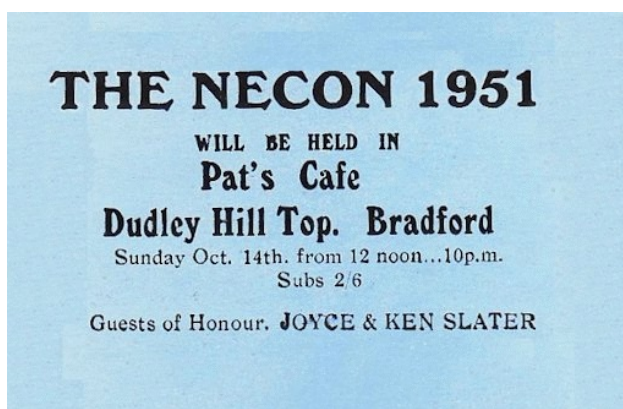
- [1] *Fantasy Times* #128 (April 1951, ed. James V. Taurasi)
- [2] *Quandry* #11-13 (June-August 1951, ed. Lee Hoffman)
- [3] *Operation Fantast* #9 (Summer 1951, ed. Ken Slater)
- [4] *A Preliminary Convention Report* (one-shot, 1951, ed. Vince Clarke)
- [5] *Fantasy Times* #130 (May 1951, ed. Taurasi)
- [6] *Science Fantasy News* #8 (July 1951, ed. Vince Clarke & Ken Bulmer)
- [7] *Phantasmagoria* #3 (Summer 1951, ed. Derek Pickles)
- [8] *New Worlds* #11 (Autumn 1951, ed. Ted Carnell)
- [9] *Journal of Science Fiction* #1 (Fall 1951)
- [10] *Hyphen* #1 (May 1952, ed. Walt Willis & Chuck Harris)
- [11] *Fantasy Times* #131 (June 1951, ed. Taurasi)
- [12] *Fantasy Times* #139 (October 1951, ed. Taurasi)

*A Preliminary Convention Report was supposed to be the precursor to a proper Souvenir Booklet, but there's no evidence one was ever actually produced.*

*The reports by Walt Willis and Bill Temple are available in their entirety in ebooks by those gentlemen and so have only been quoted from selectively here.*



## 23. Necon Bradford, 11 October 1951



*Necon ticket (1951)*

*The NECON – North of England CONvention – was the first postwar convention to be held outside London. Oddly, the flyer below claims at first that there had been no cons in the north since Leeds in 1937, but by the time you reach the bottom it correctly asserts that this will be the fourth Northern con. This is because the NORCONS were held in Manchester, considered to be in the North, while MIDVENTION and MIDVENTIONETTE were held in Leicester, which is considered to be in the midlands.*

### **THE NORTH EASTERN SCIENCE-FICTION CONFERENCE.**

A ONE DAY MEETING WILL BE HELD AT BRADFORD ON SUNDAY  
11th October 1951

WHY:

1/. Because there has not been a Convention in the North of England since before the war.

2/. The great majority of fans have not the time or money to spend on a trip to London.

3/. Until YOU'VE met other fen in the mass and talked, and listened, you haven't lived.

WHEN: On SUNDAY 14th October, 1951 – from 12 noon to 10 p.m. – (provisional times only, can and probably will run later).

WHERE: At “Pat’s Cafe”, DUDLEY HILL TOP, BRADFORD. A 2½d trolleybus ride from the centre of the town. Dudley Hill and Tong Cemetery trolleys stop across the road from the cafe, which has accommodation in the dining room for about 60, leaving enough room to wander about and for the displays. Buses from Halifax, Leeds, Wakefield etc. stop at the door. (The cafe has been provisionally booked, if however there are a great many more fans coming than we have allowed for we shall obtain a larger hall).

WHO WILL BE THERE: Guests of honour will be Joyce and Ken Slater of *Operation Fantast* fame, Dave Cohen and many other members of the Nor’ West SF Club of Manchester, Bert High from Stockton-on-Tees, Michael Rosenblum of Leeds, Max Leviten (of “DELLS of Bradford”), and many more, including the complete staff of *Phantasmagoria*.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN: There will be lots of talking, special addresses, and chatter between you fans. It is hoped to present *Metropolis* in the evening, but the films and their availability will not be known for a week or two yet. There will be displays of rare books and fanzines (kindly lent by Michael Rosenblum), displays of fan and pro art work, including many original illustrations from *New Worlds*.

COST: Will be 2/6d per head. For this you will receive all bulletins, a membership card, and a souvenir programme printed by the *Phantasmagoria* Press. Any profits will be used for the furtherance of fan-activities in the North of England.

Send in your membership 2/6d today to the Convention Treasurer, and please say if you will be coming so we can arrange things accordingly. Even if you can’t come, help make this fourth North of England Convention in 13 years a huge success by joining TODAY. Send to:

MAVIS PICKLES, 41 COMPTON STREET, DUDLEY HILL,  
BRADFORD, YORKS.

## Convention Members

- Terry Jeeves, Sheffield
- Lyell Crane, Canada %
- Connie Prophet, Stockport %
- E.R. James, Skipton
- Peter Windle, Batley

- Kenneth Potter, Lancaster
- Donald McCormick, Burnley
- Norman Wansborough, Trowbridge %
- C. Evans, Manchester
- Bill Jesson, Manchester
- Fred Fairless, Stockport
- Frank Richards, Manchester
- Ken Woodward, Stockport
- J. Mawson, Bradford
- Jack Sturgeon, Bradford
- Max Leviten, Leeds
- Leslie Cureton, Bradford
- Rik Dalton, Leeds
- Douglas Firth, Bradford
- Mr. J. Wilkinson, Bradford
- Alec Dicpetris, Bradford
- Mr. Scarr, Bradford
- K. Wharton, Bradford
- H. Newrick, Manchester
- Derek Pickles, Bradford
- Kenneth F. Slater, B.A.O.R.
- Alan Hunter, Bournemouth
- Peter Campbell, Windermere %
- D. Joyason, Wallasey %
- Walter A. Willis, Belfast %
- P.S. Hetherington, Chorley %
- Peter Sowerby, Manchester
- Eric Bentcliffe, Stockport
- Arthur Duell, Newcastle
- Bert High, Stockton-on-Tees
- Arnold Gibson, Batley
- G. Barstow, Doncaster (RAF) %
- H. Bourne, Mirfield %
- David Wood, Lancaster
- Mrs F. Evans, Manchester
- Dave Cohen, Manchester
- Norman Weedall, Liverpool

- A.E. Williams, Manchester
- E. Furness, Sheffield %
- Ron Schubert, Grimsby
- Marjorie. E. Harper, Bradford
- J. Michael Rosenblum, Leeds
- John C. Park, W. Australia
- Mrs Dalton, Leeds
- Donald Towers, Bradford
- Mrs J. Wilkinson, Bradford
- Mr. Jesson, Manchester
- W. Richards, Bradford
- Mr. Mosley, Bradford
- Mrs H. Newrick, Manchester
- Mavis E. Pickles, Bradford
- Ken Smith, Newcastle %
- Mrs Joyce Hunter, Bournemouth
- I. Tapping, Houghton-le-Spring
- Cyril Banks, Co Durham
- A.V. Clarke, London %
- Paul Juneau, New Orleans %

% = did not attend

### **Derek Pickles:**

We did not start off with any definite idea of holding a Convention as such, but merely a meeting for local fandom where they could meet, in company, Capt and Mrs K.F. Slater, who were visiting us for a few days. However the idea snowballed, and with remarkably little effort promises to attend were arriving from people as far apart as Liverpool and Newcastle, Lancaster and Grimsby. Over 150 leaflets were sent out to fans living within a radius of 100 miles and we were pleased to see 48 fen arrive on the day, a total which is remarkable when the weather and travelling conditions on a Sunday are considered. Unfortunately Mrs Slater could not attend, owing to the ill health of her mother and all present expressed their regrets that they could not meet her.

The first fen appeared around 11 a.m. and by noon there were around twenty people in the room. Arrangements were soon under way and the walls blossomed with artwork, advertisements, and notices; the tables around the

walls had displays of books, magazines, and gifts for the auction.

At 1 o'clock the Convention was formally opened by Derek Pickles, greetings from Eric Frank Russell, L Sprague de Camp and Vincent Clarke were read out. A report of the New Orleans Convention sent by Paul Juneau was read and was received with great interest and amusement. The Guest of Honour was then introduced and he gave a short talk on "The Definition of Fantasy" in which he criticized a definition made by August Derleth. In this talk Capt Slater suggested alternative definitions.

E.R. James then gave a short talk on his experiences with editors, titled "Letters from Editors", in which he quoted from letters he had received from Ted Carnell, Walter Gillings, and several American editors, criticizing work he had submitted to them.

Leslie Cureton gave a short but very balanced resume of the work on England by people who were studying Dianetics, and the results they had achieved. After these talks there was a general discussion of the whole field from the floor of the hall, when many interesting and thought provoking ideas were put forward.

At 3:30 a session of Twenty Questions was held; four teams came forward and the answers and guesses at the answers provided great amusement for the audience. The winners were given small prizes of magazines.

Then the auction was held, conducted with tremendous vigour, determination and wit by Capt. Slater. Total receipts were about £7, including the proceeds of the raffle of *Dreadful Sanctuary*.

After tea a mass visit was made to the exhibition\* by about 30 fen. Unfortunately many were unable to return to see the film as they had to catch early trains. All expressed their surprise at the scope and size of the displays.

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\* In Bradford Library as listed under *Our Thanks* below. [Ed.]

At 7 p.m. the film *Metropolis* was shown, a remarkably good copy of such an old film, and although on a very ancient 9.5 mm machine very clear and free from jerkiness. When the film ended there was a burst of loud and spontaneous applause from the audience. By now it was after 9 o'clock and most of the people still in the hall had to be making their way home. By 9:30 the hall was cleared and tidied, and the first postwar North of England Convention had ended.

OUR THANKS

To Eric Frank Russell who unable to attend sent best wishes, and enclosed a copy of *Dreadful Sanctuary* and an Orban illustration from *Astounding*.

To Ted Carnell who donated many drawings from *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*, without being asked and “regretted he could not send the cover painting”.

To Mr. H. Bilton the Bradford City Librarian, and Mr. MacDonald, Reference Department Librarian, for their very kind and helpful work in connection with the displays in the Bradford Public Library showcases of the FIRST public exhibition of Science Fiction and Fantasy literature in the British Isles.

To J. Michael Rosenblum for loaning from his immense collection and library many extremely rare and valuable books and magazines, and for the great deal of time and effort he put into arranging the Exhibition.

To Max Leviten (of Dell’s) for distributing leaflets to his customers and for loaning many current new books for the Exhibition.

To Mr. J. Wilkinson of Bradford Public Libraries, Bowling Branch, for arranging and displaying a small selection of books in his library during the week previous to the Convention.

To Alan Hunter for donating many of his drawings for the auction.

To the Nor’West Club for printing, without any charge, the tickets for the Convention.

To Bob Foster, for sending copies of his fanzine *Sludge* as gifts to people attending.

To the many people who gave, some anonymously, books and magazines for the auction.

To the fans who though unable to attend still sent subscriptions to us.

To the fans who attended, and, by their active and enthusiastic participation in the items on the programme, made this first postwar Northern Convention a great success.

### **Mavis Pickles:**

SECRETARY’S REPORT. There was a total membership of 62. The subscriptions and the proceeds of the auction were placed together and after the payments for leaflets, postage, incidental expenses, hire of the room, costs of the programme, and hiring of the film were made, a net profit of over £4 was in hand.

This money has been earmarked for use as payment of initial expenses

for the next Convention in Bradford, which, it is hoped, will take place this next September.

We would like to thank everyone who gave such enthusiastic support, both financial and material, which made this Convention such a resounding success.

Can we see YOU at the next?

### **Derek Pickles:**

#### THE BRADFORD SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION

This Association was founded by Bradford people who attended the Convention, and starting with four members at the first meeting in November, has grown now to sixteen paid members, and is recruiting more every meeting. There is a library of magazines and books, for which a very small charge is made, and it is hoped a club magazine will shortly appear.

Meetings are held every fortnight at a cafe in the centre of the city, and we extend a cordial welcome – to any fan who is passing through Bradford.

*All the preceding text used was taken from the Souvenir Convention Booklet issued after the convention. It consisted of two foolscap sheets folded in half to give eight pages. On the half of the back cover not reserved for the recipient's postal address was an ad for the seven fanzines then being published in the UK. Below is the only other report on the con known to exist. It first appeared in Quandry #16 (December 1951) ed. Lee Hoffman.*

### **Eric Bentcliffe:**

On Sunday, Oct 14th together with several fellow members of the Nor'west S-F Club, I sallied forth to Bradford, Yorkshire, home of the brave and Pickles. We expected to have difficulty finding the convention as none of us had been in Bradford before but on espying a groove in the sidewalk (Derek Pickles weighs some 17½ stone) followed it and found ourselves at Pat's Cafe wherein the Necon was held. The first person we met there was Bradford's most solid citizen. At first we thought he was the hall in which we were to meet August fandom, but when he moved we realized who it was. From behind Derek's person there appeared another person, medium height, dark studious looking with Operation Fantast tattooed in pale puce on his forehead. Could it be? It was. Ken Slater. In the ensuing conversation I found out how Ken can afford to publish *OF*. He's in the Royal Army Pay Corps.

Somewhere around one o'clock Necon commenced. Derek as organizer

opened proceedings, by reading letters and best wishes from fans who couldn't be there. He then introduced Ken Slater: everyone burst into cheers: if only the Harp had been there it would have brought tears to his tired old eyes. Next introduced was Mike Rosenblum, the only collector in Britain who still has money. Dave Cohen's turn came, followed by me. I stood up. Someone clapped. I stood up again. Then discovered that it was only Terry Jeeves trying to flog me some picture postcards. I sat down. Round the room Derek went introducing everyone. Bert High was there in his flying boots. Rick Dalton, Arthur Duell, and a host of other northern fans. Also present was John Park of Perth, Western Australia. Introductions over, Ken Slater took over and gave a talk on Definitions of Fantasy. A budding author, E.R. James spoke next on the subject of getting his stories published. Derek took over again to read a report on the Nolacon which sounded pretty hectic. After Derek had finished we found to our surprise that we had a Dianetics fan in our midst. He repeated some of Hubbard's claims.

Next item, and an excellent one, was timely SF questions. Teams of four took turns in having a go. Something queer came over me and when my turn came I actually got three out of three and won the latest Galaxy.

After adjourning for tea, we went to the Bradford Public Library where Derek and Mike Rosenblum had arranged an exhibition of SF and fantasy, a most amazing exhibition dating, believe it or not, from AD 300. Returning to the convention hall, we saw *Metropolis*.

A good time was had by all and we all hope to see one another again next year.

*There were no further Bradford conventions, with NECON proving to be a one-off. This was probably due to another northern convention taking its place the following year, one that Bentcliffe would help organize.*

*But that's a story for volume 2.*



# Appendix

# The International Fantasy Award

## Les Flood:

The reception given to the first International Awards – surprise item at the International Science Fiction Convention held in London last May – has ranged from enthusiastic acclaim through sharp criticism to dubious scepticism, and, in view of such a state of affairs, it is to be hoped that this brief outline of the aims and tasks of the Fantasy Award Committee, together with a résumé of its achievements to date, will serve to ally the interest and sympathy of all readers of fantasy and science-fiction, and to promote the active participation of those, including authors, publishers and reviewers, who have at heart the advancement of literary fantasy in all its aspects.

Literary awards have long been attractions for men and women of letters, and such plums as the Hawthornden Prize, the James Tait Black Memorial or the ultimate Nobel Prize for Literature, have set the crowning seal on the careers of famous authors. The Hollywood “Oscar” is a major event in the film world, and even the thriller writers of America chase their “Edgar”. What more natural, then, than to honour the best work of the year in the field of published fantasy? This has long been the happy hunting ground of the few enthusiasts, now widening into popular acclaim, in keeping with this modern age of scientific miracles and future aspirations?

Even so, the idea had not been put into practice when the birth of the International Fantasy Award combusted spontaneously, as it were, during a conversation among four habitués of the London Circle at the White Horse Tavern one Thursday evening in April 1951. The originators responsible for this apparently momentous contribution to fantasy recognition happened also to be directors of the British fantasy magazine publishers Nova Publications, namely John Beynon Harris, noted author; G. Ken Chapman, well-known aficionado and fantasy bookman; Frank A. Cooper, instigator of many active facets of British fantasy, and myself.

From that moment until the first public announcement at the Convention a few weeks later, development of the scheme was precipitous, and perhaps, from the superior viewpoint of subsequent scrutiny, somewhat incomplete. However it was felt that the first International Convention would be admirable for the inauguration of the Award, particularly as the winners of

the 1951 Awards both transpired to be Americans, and a renowned figure of the American fantasy world, Forrest J. Ackerman, would be present at the occasion to accept on behalf of his compatriots the practical evidence of the Awards. For the event, it was only possible in the time available to have ready a facsimile of the actual Award trophies. These were made later by an expert model-maker, and took the form of the traditional space-ship – chromium-plated and mounted on a polished oak plinth for the major fiction award, and bronze mounted on mahogany for the non-fiction award – complete with matching Ronson table lighters and suitably inscribed, the whole approximately 20 inches high. They were later on view at book centres in London, before being despatched to their future owners.

For the benefit of those to whom knowledge of the Fantasy Awards is quite new, I will repeat the results of the 1951 International Fantasy Awards. The prize for the best work of fiction, with a basis of fantasy, from a literary aspect and in accordance with the vote of the self-appointed selection committee, and published in 1950, was awarded to *Earth Abides*, by George R. Stewart of California, U.S.A. The book was first published in Great Britain by Victor Gollancz in 1950 although it had appeared in America the previous year from Random House, and therefore eligible in the opinion of the committee at that time. The prize for the best work of non-fiction, with a basis of fantasy, was given to Willy Ley's *The Conquest of Space*, in collaboration with artist Chesley Bonestell, both of U.S.A., which again, although first published in Great Britain in 1950 by Sidgwick & Jackson, had previously appeared in America from the Viking Press.

The International Fantasy Award was now a *fait accompli*. The enthusiastic reception of the scheme itself at the Convention, and the general recognition of the winners as unanimously meritorious – the international circumstances of the choices being extremely fortunate – proved ample recompense to the sponsors who had themselves undertaken the financing of the project – although subsequent donations from interested well-wishers are gratefully acknowledged. Publicity releases and photographs of the actual Awards were circulated to book and magazine publishers, literary periodicals, prominent personalities in the fantasy world, fans and amateur editors, as widely as possible in Britain and America.

– excerpted from his article in *New Worlds*  
#15, May 1952

## **The End**

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