

LONCON (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 name 'Ragcon', it was the first con run under the auspices of the newly-formed Science Fantasy Society.



The Lord Raglan pub on St. Martin-le-Grand, two minutes walk from St. Paul's Underground station, in 2010. It was the venue for the second post-war British convention on Easter Saturday, April 16th, 1949

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...



Bill Temple, Arthur C. Clarke, John Newman.

- [THE LONCON PROGRAMME BOOK](#)

Known attendees:

Frank Arnold	Ian Cumming	G.G. Hillman	W.R. Simmonds
Norman Ashfield	Ron Deacon	Terry Jeeves	(?) Syme
Peter Bell	John Dee	Ken Johnson	Bill Temple (GoH)
Daphne Bradley	J.D. Doggett	Harry Kay	Ted Tubb
Fred Brown	Don Doughty	Peter Martin	Norman Weedall
Ron Buckmaster	Charlie Duncombe	John Newman	F.H. Wilkes
Ken Bulmer	Frank Fears	Terry Overton	Arthur Williams
Jimmy Burch	Kerry Gaulder	Owen Plumridge	Adrian Wilson
Jim Cawthorn	Walter Gillings	Derek Pickles	G. White
Ken Chapman	Ron Gillings	Sandy Sandfield	W. Wright
Arthur C. Clarke	Peter Hawkins	K. Salter	A.J. Young
Vince Clarke	A.F. Hillman	T.H. Scoles	

In his report, 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.



Peter Hawkins, unknown, Jim Burch, Kerry Gaulder, Owen Plumridge, outside The Lord Raglan.

From FANTASY REVIEW No. 15 (Summer 1949) ed. Walter Gillings:

THE "LONCON"

TABOO OR NOT TABOO ?

A Bad Day for Magazine Editors

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,

* 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.

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 s-f 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.

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 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."

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

** 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."

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 publicising 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 s-f 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 s-f 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 to-day, 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 s-f in literature rather than its scientific or political significance. Agreeing, author Clarke doubted if anyone ever believed the purpose of s-f 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.

From SCIENCE FANTASY NEWS No. 3 (June 1949) ed. Vince Clarke for the SFS:

SFS ANNOUNCEMENTS

As most of our readers will know, it is the custom to issue a souvenir booklet after an s-f 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 co-operate, 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.

LONCON 1949

Owen D. Plumridge

The second post-war British s-f 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 organisation 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 s-f 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 humourous 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'!

[HOME](#)