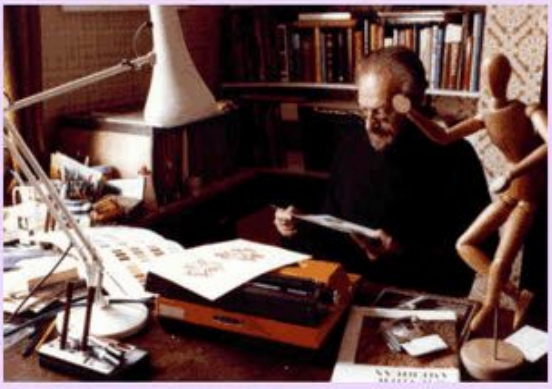



HARRY TURNER:
In His Own Words

1. Essays on aspects of a full life



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Other publications by, designed by & about Harry Turner:

- Triad Optical Illusions and How To Design Them (1978)
- Artwork & design for Enemy News and Lewisletter for the Wyndham Lewis Society and issues of the journal and specialist publications for the British Society of Russian Philately in the 1980s and 1990s
- Artwork & design for publications by Steve Sneyd's Hilltop Press
- The Triad Optical Illusions Coloring Book (2006)
- Harry Turner : An Artist In India [assembled by Philip Turner] (2009)
- The Observer's Guide to Harry Turner's Art [assembled by Philip Turner] (2012)
- Now & Then Revisited [facsimile edition] (2013)
- The Second Triad Optical Illusions Coloring Book completed by Philip Turner] (2013)
- The ART of the Impossible parts 1 & 2 (2019)

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Preface

I was looking for an old WordPerfect printed manual to check up on something when I found myself asking: "Why do I still have a copy of the manual for Dr Solomon's Anti-Virus for DOS?"

When I tugged the substantial ring-binder out of its substantial cardboard sleeve, all became clear. I found over three hundred A5 pages devoted to this very book, which is a collection of the essays and comments posted on my father's memorial website. But the bad news was that I was doing my manual scan in December 2019 and the revision date in the draft was only 2011.

My next question for myself was: "How long will it take to get the opus up to date by adding updates to the website and then all the other bits and pieces that still have to be added to the website?"

The good news, when I eventually found the draft's file on my PC, was that there had been a revision in 2013. Just seven years out of date, then, and I had been spending a lot of that time on creating *The Art of the Impossible*, a 2-part documentation of my late father's drawings of impossible objects, which explains why there was still stuff which had not yet been added to the website.

Advice to self: "Don't hold your breath, this is still going to take a fair bit of time."

SOME GROUNDWORK

Harry Turner was a man of words as well as an artist of considerable talent. There is a school exercise book of his in the Turner family archive, which reveals his talent for writing at an early age and his interest in the relatively new field of science fiction.

He was interested in astronomy as well as space travel, becoming a member of the Manchester Interplanetary Society locally and then the Junior Astronomical Association, which was founded in Glasgow by his wife-to-be Marion Eadie.

Harry contributed articles and design ideas to the journals of both societies, he provided artwork to SF fanzines of the day and he began to publish his own fanzine, *Zenith*; until the RAF claimed his services. By then, he come to appreciate music; particularly Classical music and jazz.

After the war, Harry sold artwork to commercial science fiction magazines and created another fanzine of his own *Now & Then*, with the legendary Eric S. Needham. There is a gap of a couple of decades in his involvement with SF fandom but he resumed his activities in the 1970s, providing articles and artwork to magazines, and memoirs to archivists such as Vincent Clarke and Rob Hansen.

Vinç Clarke's archives put Harry back in touch with material which he created in the early days of SF fandom, including illustrations in copies of fanzines which he had disarded when he gafiated at the end of the 1950s. Contributing to Rob

Hansen's definitive chronicle of SF fandom, *Then*, was one of the inspirations for Harry's series of memoirs about those past times.

Harry was an enthusiastic correspondent when letter-writing was still in fashion. The Turner archive contains an extensive collection of letters between Harry and Marion Eadie before their marriage, and between Harry and Marion Turner after the RAF sent Harry to India following the end of the war in Europe.

His correspondence with fellow SF fans Francis and Brian Varley, and his *Manchester Evening News* colleague Steve Sneyd, went on for decades. It became more exotic when Harry was able to exchange an electric typewriter for the design possibilities of a PC attached to a scanner and a colour printer.

This book contains an initial flavour of Harry's writings, reminiscences and correspondence. It is offered as a tribute to a great communicator. Part Two will follow in due course.

Philip Turner, February 2020

the cover shows H.T. in Leeds in 1938, H.T. in RAF uniform in India in 1945 or 1946, the Turner family wearing weird shades in the early 1950s – Marion and Harry above Philip, William and Robert, and H.T. in his home studio in 1978

Early Memories: Life in a vanished era

Harry Turner had a father with an unusual career—Barton Turner was an escapologist and illusionist, and a contemporary of Harry Houdini. As *The Great Deville*, he toured the music halls between more conventional jobs. Both were called Henry but neither ever used the name on his birth certificates. And the family name could well have been Edwards, the surname which appears on Barton's birth certificate. But his mother remarried as a widow with three young sons and the family became known as Turners.

Barton Turner married Lucy Parker in 1915 and had two children in the post-war period—Harry and Dorothy, who died at the young age of 14 early in 1936. Harry was an outstanding pupil at school and he had a talent for writing as well as painting. He developed a lifelong interest in astronomy and space travel during his teens and it was through the Junior Astronomical Association that Harry made the acquaintance (by letter) of his future wife: Marion Eadie, the niece of the Glasgow artist and book illustrator Robert Eadie, R.S.W.

The JAA was founded in 1933 with Marion Eadie as its president. She took on the job of editing *Urania*, the society's journal, when it was started in 1935. Harry Turner became a contributor and the society's treasurer and he redesigned the journal's cover. He and Marion met for the first time at the 1938 Empire Exhibition in Glasgow. They were both interested in outer space; the one in how to get there and the other in what is to be found 'out there'. They were married in 1942, just before Harry was called up for wartime service in the RAF.

Harry was fascinated by space travel and science fiction. He enjoyed the works of H.G Wells and Jules Verne and the fiction in imported American magazines like *Astounding Stories* and *Wonder* Stories. He was a particular admirer of the work of the artists Frank R. Paul in *Wonder Stories* and Elliott Dold in *Astounding Stories*. His favourite film of that era was *Things To Come*, Alexander Korda's 1936 version of the Wells story, which he was able to view again on DVD, and revive treasured memories, during his final year.

The Beginnings . . .

Been rewriting the early reminiscences, to try and get them in some sort of sequence, and perhaps add a few linking episodes. Long way to go yet, might do a piece on the household at my grandmother's house—it was pretty lively as my mother had five sisters and two brothers!

By the time I had any awareness of the scene, my grandfather had recently died, Harry had emigrated to Australia, Will had married and was working at Metro-Vicks, Dorothy had married, Jean and Hilda were abroad dancing with the Tiller Girls, Pat and Molly were still at home, as was my mother, Lucy, since my father was travelling the vaudeville circuit with his show, featuring himself as the Great Deville, illusionist, magician and escapologist extraordinaire...

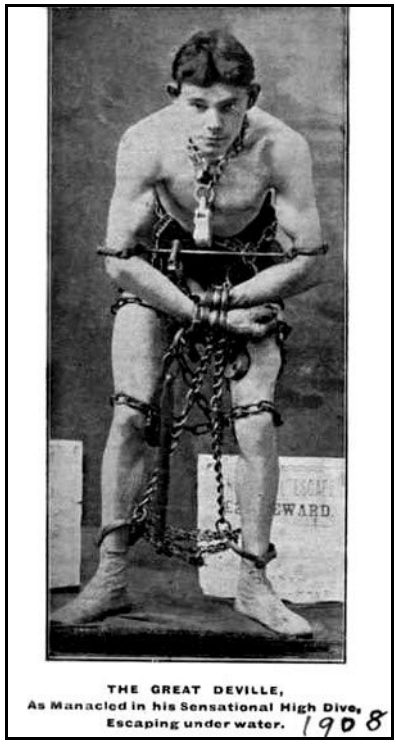
I have vague memories of my stay at St. Paul's infants' school, under the watchful eyes of my two younger aunts. and recall they performed in a Christmas party piece, and of later being taken to a Halle concert (where I recognised some of the music used at the party—but was disappointed because no one came on and did a dance to it!—which I later realised was from Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King").

I have some memories of travelling with my father on one of his tours of the northern music halls. Dad had two brothers; his elder brother, Percy, was a theatrical producer for much of his working life, and I suspect he may have prompted Barton to start his career in showbiz. I have vague memories of being taken on one of his tours in the late 20s, when he was working at Cockermouth. My strongest impression of rehearsals is the atmosphere, that faintly musty smell of vacated plush seats mingled with a hint of stale tobacco smoke, typical of empty unheated places of entertainment.

The memories might expand into a piece; can do an item on the mags and comics we read and swapped; enlarge on the paper planes paragraph; perhaps do a piece on the Bannon sisters, and Mona, the nurse's daughter, who lived lower down Brunswick Street. Wow, it floods out once you really start brooding about it... unfortunately in the form of lots of quirky disconnected details that raise yet more questions than answers. A bit like playing back a mangled tape and trying to make sense of the sound. Having all the letters from my stay in India makes resurrecting and expanding memories of that so much easier! ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, November 1996 / January 1997

The Great Deville



Just been watching a TV prog on Houdini, who was one of my old man's heroes; so much so that dad built up an act as an escapologist and illusionist and toured theatres and music halls before WW1. "The Great Deville" he called himself... (Alongside is one of his poctsards).

He formed a touring company after the war, and 1 have vague memories of being added to the entourage in my pre-schooldays. The main impression that survives is of empty theatres in the mornings, with the smell of frowsty upholstery and a lingering tang of stale tobacco smoke... I suspect I wasn't present at any evening performances.

Liked the stamp on your poctsard – didn't think the philatelic people still had a sense of humour after all the grotty designs they've been inflicting on us in recent years!

There's an amazing amount of stuff packed into that MIMOSA fanthology. Real nostalgia. Though I've acquired a copy of Marina Benjamin's Rocket Dreams - How the Space Age shaped our vision of a World beyond – which caught my eye in a recent TSP mailing – and she suggests that dreams of space exploration have gone awry since the lunar landings period, and become dreams of cyberspace on home computers and the Internet. I begin to wonder if I'm really an sf fan any more. Still, I'm only just halfway through: maybe later pages will restore my fading hopes and expectations.

Received a pile of ANSIBLEs from Dave Langford, with apologies for their belatedness... makes me realise what a fossilised fan I have become when I skip over these detailed reports of current fan activities. I owe Sue Jones a long letter and looked for inspiration in the copy of TORTOISE that's just arrived, but like you find myself a mite baffled by the foodie theme. Maybe I should tell her about The Great Deville...

to Steve Sneyd, 21st February 2003

The Parker Family

Ramsden Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, is listed in the index of our *A to Z*, but I'm damned if I could spot it on the map—anywhere near Turner Lane? You remind me that several more of the Parker family followed Harry to Australia. Harry rose to the dizzy height of Lord Mayor of Melbourne [well, Mayor of Ringwood, actually. Ed.] after the war.

After her stint with the Tiller Girls, my aunt Jean married into a wealthy family running an extensive wine business out there, and later carved out a career for herself in the directory publishing business. In fact, I was pressured, while in India, to join her in Australia when demobbed. The suggestion had its temptations, but I didn't feel I could leave Marion hanging on with a baby after all the time we'd already been apart.

Jean was childless and a somewhat domineering type, and I wasn't at all sure we'd hit it off if I took the plunge (she was already at loggerheads with Harry and his [prolific] family!). She eventually took a cousin of mine, Peter, under her wing and saw him through university there and into the legal profession. He had to assert himself and break loose finally, to lead his own life.

He came over for his mother's (my aunt Hilda) funeral and we talked a lot about the life there, confirming my feelings that I would not have settled easily into the relationship.

Though we might not be exchanging letters if I'd taken the plunge. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 23 November 1996

During the tidying up I came across a file with some of the ancient family photos which I might try out on the copier and see if the results are worth sending on. Mainly on my mother's side of the family... The family shop when my grandad was a wholesaler at Smithfield market.

There's several pics of Uncle Harry (Harry Ernest Parker) in full regalia as a Lance-corporal in the Gordon Highlanders with the BEF in France, wearing an impressive sheepskin jacket ! Most of these pics were passed over by my youngest aunt, Hilda, when I was trying to pick up on family details in the first flush of my retirement. Unfortunately, Hilda had a heart attack while I was in hospital for a hernia op, so I never caught up with all the background to fill up the holes in my patchy childhood memories.

I know my grandad, Barnes Ernest Parker, came to Manchester from Lincoln to marry Janet Hawes, and then must have returned to set up home, since there is a family group taken at Lincoln. The couple are surrounded by daughters Dorothy and Lucy (my mum), with William (complete with waistcoat and watchchain) in the middle. Grandad has Harry (in sailor suit) between his knees and Grandma has a

baby (my aunty Pat) on her knee.

Some time after that, the family moved to Manchester, and grandad became a wholesaler at Smithfield market and opened a greengrocer's shop in Crumpsall, some time before the WW1. I think the enterprise must have crumbled during the war years and that was when the family moved to Brunswick Street, and grandad ran an agency for the Britannic Assurance Company in the 20s...

My gran had at least three sisters: I distinctly remember one, Florrie, a bossy sort who was a frequent visitor to Brunswick Street. Lizzie married into the Pattreioux family, who operated a cigarette factory making several popular local brands. They issued several sets of cigarette cards—photographs of sportsmen: footballers, cricketers, speedway riders—and I was thrilled to get free sets of 'em all. And them was an Auntie Clara, whom I can remember from conversation but don't recall ever meeting.

I had good intentions at one time of doing some research in the records of Central Library, to try and track down family activities, but have never got round to it. The other surviving aunt died a few years after Hilda, but she cut herself off from the family and was not given to reminiscence, so I drew a blank there! ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, end December 1996

One of our Streets is Missing

I had occasion to consult the Manchester A to Z Street Guide the other day, flicking my eyes over the 'M's in the index. A couple of minutes later it dawned on me that I'd not noticed a Mawson Street in the listing, so I checked back. Definitely no Mawson Street. Gone. No hint of its presence on the street map, either. Yet it was there once, exists still in my childhood memories.

During the twenties to the start of the thirties I lived on Brunswick Street, which linked Ardwick Green crossroads with Oxford Road and the forbidding pile of Owens College. Our side of the street was an almost solid front of respectable Victorian terraced houses, ending in a cluster of shops at Temple Street, then continuing past the grimy bulk of St Paul's Church and school. On the opposite side of the street a busy row of shops served the neighbourhood.

The back yard of our house opened on to a narrow entry running the length of the block, shared by the houses along Mawson Street, and giving access to the back street. While Brunswick Street was a busy thoroughfare, with people shopping, trams regularly skimming by, the occasional motor or van mingling with the horse-drawn traffic, Mawson Street was narrow, cobbled and relatively traffic-free, apart from the occasional coal-cart delivering, midden-men collecting, or the donkey-stone man with his pony and cart in search of old clothes and rags.

Kids drifted to play and socialise in Mawson Street, attracted by the two corner

shops halfway along, a greengrocers where we bought fruit in season, and a sweet shop, a popular rendezvous, crammed with teeth-rotting delights like aniseed balls, Chicago bars, sherbert fizzes, liquorice sticks and braid, jelly babies and wine gums, chocolate drops, and all varieties of boiled sweets.

The pavements of Mawson Street were decorated by the laboriously chalked-out pitches of hop-scotch gamesters and the tribal signs of aspiring pavement artists, scuffed by the pattering feet and ropes of "one, two, three, a-larah" skipping girls, periodically washed clean by falling rain. The street provided a test ground where the lads demonstrated their expertise, scientifically folding paper aeroplanes and launching them in marathon competitions to see whose would glide the furthest.

The frustration of losing promising models in the gutter of someone's bay window occasionally drove us to the more open spaces of Ardwick Green or Whitworth Park, and on fine sunny days the distant expanse of Platt Fields. But by evening we'd be back in Mawson Street, gathered round the street gas lights, swapping comics, trading ciggy cards, and tormenting the girls as they swung round on ropes draped from the arms of the lamp-posts.

The residents of Mawson Street must have been a tolerant lot to put up with the antics and noise of our rowdy gang, largely without protest. Several of my pals lived on one side of the street: the Foster kids, Norman and his elder brother John, crippled hands each sporting only a little finger, whose dexterity amazed us; Harold, a mardy lad whose mum wouldn't let him out on dark evenings.

Halfway down the street, lived the prolific Cunningham family, eldest daughter Norah the redoubtable organiser of amateur dancing troupes featuring the junior Cunninghams, always to the fore in local parades and processions, and coach of youngest sister Peggy, regularly chosen as local May Queen. And on the Brunswick Street side of the entry, Cliff, the coloured lad, David with his vast collection of *Magnets* and Sexton Blake comics, inherited from an elder brother, Fatty Ward, whose father ran the sweet shop.

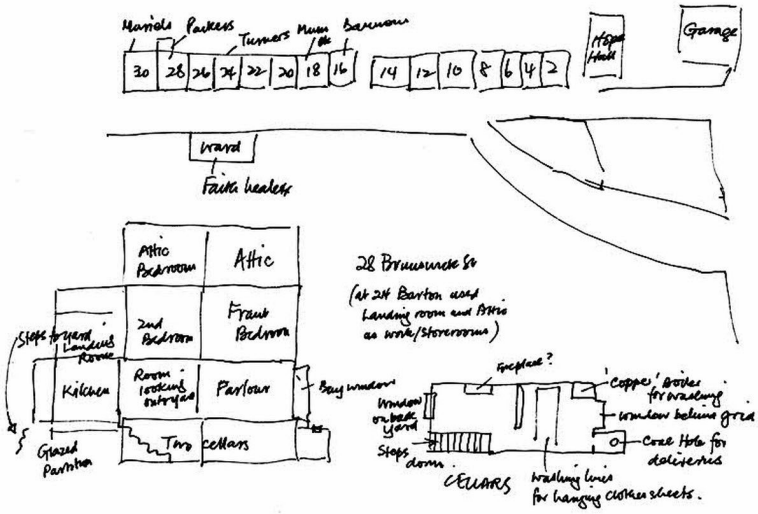
Oddly, I don't recall any kids living in the houses opposite, the stretch between the corner sweet shop and the redolent Moffatt's toffee factory next to the bank at the London Road end of the street. ■

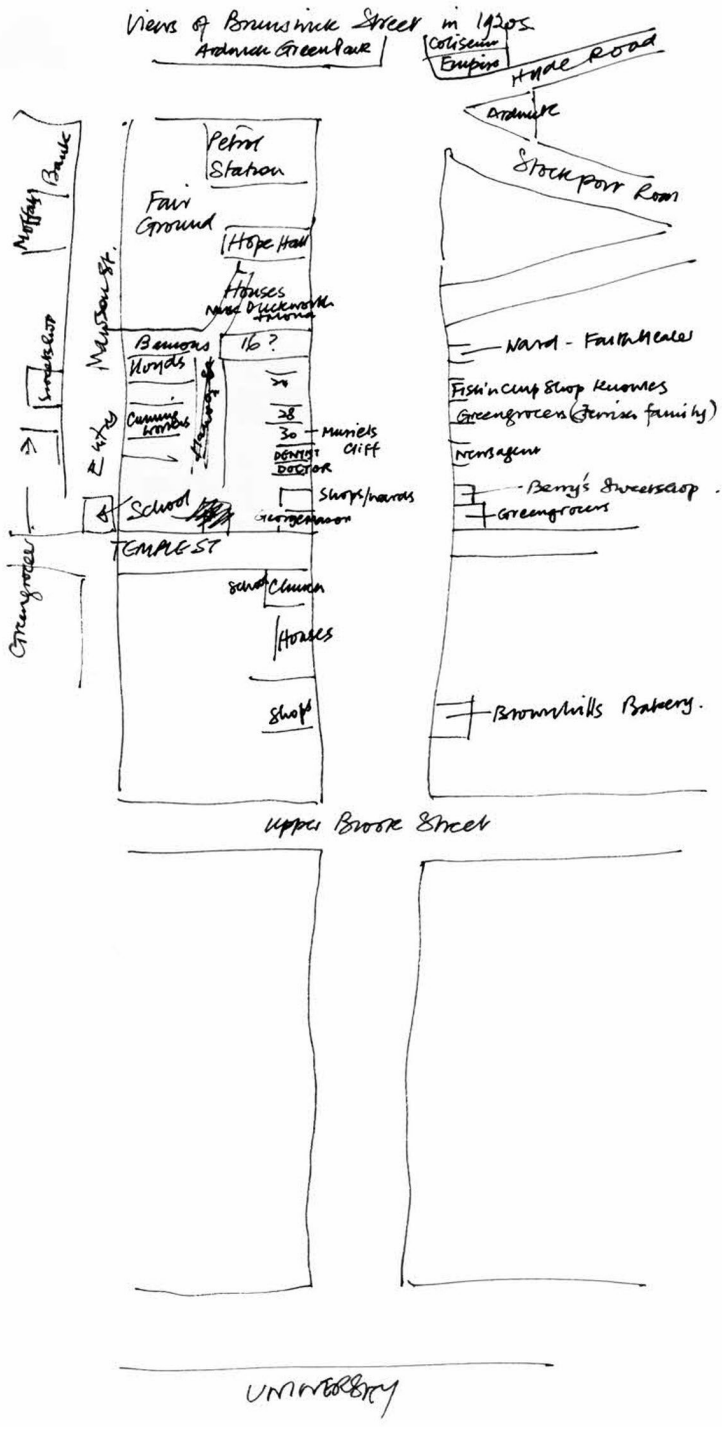
Afterthought

It strikes me that if the shortcomings of the current Manchester *A to Z* Street Guide can evoke such memories, there may be a market, in these heritage-conscious days, for a Manchester "As-It-Was" Street Guide. Wonder if I can interest any aspiring nostalgia-publisher out there ...

May 1997

[*below*: street maps drawn from memory by Harry Turner]




Views of Brunswick Street in 1930s
Arduan Greenbank
Coliseum
Empire
Hyde Road
Stockport Road
Petrol Station
Fair Ground
Hope Hall
Houses
Maisonette
Banners Hoods
16?
Cumming Knowles
Muriels Cliff
Doctor
Shops/rooms
School
TEMPLE ST
School Church
Houses
Shops
Nard - Fairhealers
Fish'n'chip Shop Knowles
Greengrocers (Jewish family)
Newsagent
Berry's Sweetshop
Greengrocers
Brownhills Bakery
Upper Brook Street
University

A Sunny Day in Brunswick Street

Walking along Brunswick Street to the university is always a slightly un-nerving process for me. Everything seems wrong: what I see today is at odds with the Brunswick Street I know and experienced.

I grew up in the Manchester of the 1920s, when the street presented an almost solid front of respectable Victorian terraced houses, stretching from the park at Ardwick Green to Owens College on Oxford Road, a facade interrupted only the the stone-built bulk of St. Paul's church on Temple Street corner and scat-tered cases of shops.

The tram lines ran along the centre of the street, with only the occasional motor car passing by, spreading the droppings from the horses which still drew most of the vehicles on the road.

I started life in my grandparents' house at number 28 before my family moved along to number 24. Memories of the tall red-brick houses are preserved for me in an intriguing photograph that has survived from those days.

On it, I gaze out, propped up on plumped-up pillows, from a sturdy boat of a pram, suspended on a well-sprung frame and giant wheels guaranteed to ride over the highest kerbstone without a jolt, equipped to cope with the worst that Manchester's weather can offer, with a folding hood and the optional extra of a basketwork umbrella holder conveniently located at the handle end.

The sun shone the day the photograph was taken; almost directly overhead, according to the underfoot shadows. I'm in the care of my two youngest aunts, schoolgirls in gingham dresses, with sturdy button-up boots and short socks, each topped by a huge white bow in their hair: Molly relaxed and holding on to the pram handle and Hilda, perhaps a little bored with posing, self-consciously stiff, arms at her sides.

Oddly, we don't seem to be the subject of the photograph, since our small group is relegated to the lower left-hand corner of the picture. What dominates the scene is the house: the vertical column of the lace-draped bay windows, with the obligatory aspidistra blocking the view into the front parlour, flanked on the right by an overgrown privet bush reaching up to the bedroom windowsill, and on the left by the front door, the house number prominently displayed in its semi-circular light, topped by a creeper ambitiously climbing roofward.

An iron railing separates the narrow front garden from the pavement, and the gate behind my aunts opens on to a flagstoned area with the coal-grid at its centre in front of four large steps up to the wide front door surmounted with a semi-circular fanlight bearing the house number. A brass plaque at the side of the door announces that this is *Britannic Assurance Co*.

The photographer must have positioned his camera on the opposite pavement, relying on a quiet period in passing traffic to capture this all-encompassing view. I know that behind him is one of the curiosities of Brunswick Street in those days--the premises of John Ward, a faith healer of some standing in the community.

He occupied one, or was it two houses, providing a temple of healing and a place for pilgrimage for the ailing and afflicted... and there was no shortage of them in the years following the first world war.

I recall the place vividly because it dominated our end of the street. The house front had been painted completely black and the name of John Ward and messages proclaiming his prowess and accomplishments as a "natural healer", with a list of esoteric diseases and ailments from which paying clients might expect to be cured by the application of "magnetic heat", ran in huge white letters over the entire surface.

In a gullible age, he attracted a large clientele and was one of the few residents able to travel in his own chauffeur-driven car. Hearsay reported remarkable cures of consumption, pneumonia and even blindness. It was common knowledge that before opening up on our street, he'd practised in nearby Bolton, home of the famous Bolton Wanderers team, where he was popular among players because he specialised in the treatment of the prevalent complaint of "loose cartilage".

The officially appointed doctor took umbrage at this invasion of his preserve and was said to have prevailed upon the team directors to boycott Ward's activities and ban him from treating any of the team. So the healer brought his talents to the metropolis and prospered.

I've never got around to checking on the performance records of Bolton Wanderers before and after John Ward's departure from the scene. I'd be interested to hear the results if some curious local historian were to do so. ■

May 1997

1929—The Year of the Keybangers

It were a luvly big key... a real smasher, at least three inches long.

--Eh, wheer did yer get that from then? asks Fatty Ward, deep envy in his voice.

Cliff smiles a knowing smile and carefully measures out the yellow powder, pours it carefully into the hollow shank of the key and prods it down firmly with a wire nail. We get all worked up, just watching him get ready. Boozer warns "don't overdo it" which maybe tempts Cliff to tip in a bit more mixture than he'd intended.

--That'll do fine, he crows, this bang'll blow yer bloody boots off!

He rams the nail home and gives the loaded assembly a trial whirl.

--Reet then. Stand back!

We retreat apprehensively to the gutter to give him all the room he needs. He stands poised, arm outstretched, the key swinging at the end of the string.

I count: wun... two... THREE !

Cliff wheels round smartly, the key flying in a fierce arc and clouting the wall.

--BOOOOM!

We reel back deafened. Cliff, dazed, stares flabbergasted at his shattered key. While the echoes still racket round Mawson Street, before even startled dogs begin to bark, a front door flies open and a nowty Pa McGinty charges out, taking advantage of our momentary confusion, clobbering us round the lug-holes with a smartly wielded rolled-up newspaper. We scarper down the back entry, pursued by ear-searing threats about what he'll do to us young buggers if he catches us round there again ...

Key-banging is all the rage this year. No one remembers when it started or who had the idea fust. One day we were doing all the usual boring things, the next everywun were scrabbling round in search of old keys, the sort with a hollow shank. And the local chemists did a brisk trade as kids queued to hand over their pocket money for small bags of sulphur and potassium chlorate.

The technique of key-banging is simple. One end of a piece of string is tied to the ring of the key, and t'other end fastened under the head of a round wire nail that slides into the key. The chemicals are mixed according to some preferred and closely-guarded secret formula, handed down by generations of key-bangers.

A small amount of the mixture is poked into the key shank, the nail pushed firmly into the key, and the string grasped so that the assembly can be freely whirled over your head.

When everyone in the gang has their keys primed, you find a brick wall--ideally the corner of a house, where you have a clear view, both ways, of any annoyed adults likely to appear--and take it in turn, standing there, to swing your key and whack it agin the wall, so that the impact explodes the mixture with a satisfying crack!

The winner isn't allus the wun making the loudest bang: anywun who damages

their key when they have a go, is disqualified. It needs a certain expertise both in mixing the charge and careful loading to keep your key intact yet get an explosion loud enuff to put yer amongst t'champions.

Repeated shocks eventually do in a favourite key, so there's a steady demand for replacements. We search through attics and cellars at home, offer to clear away neighbour's junk on the off-chance of a hoard of old keys turning up, chase the pony-and-truck of every passing scrap-metal collector and rag-bone merchant, haunt the garage workshop at the end of Mawson Street. We must have driven the neighbourhood barmy while t'craze lasted.

But reaction sets in. Soon we are nagged by us mums when complaints filter through from beseiged inhabitants of corner houses. Then we are nagged at school assemblies; dire warnings are issued, scary tales spread of exploding keys and injured swingers. Not that we let that put us off. The rot really sets in when the local chemists are got at. We call in, hoping to wheedle supplies from t'young lass behind counter, and the boss appears, demanding names and addresses as we turn tail and hop it.

Soon, even carefully hoarded chemicals run out... the supply of keys dries up. The craze dies. But just cracking conkers seems a dead tame pursuit after that. So if, by any chance, you say you've never seen an old-fashioned key of the sort we prized in them days, 'appen it's because we blew 'em all up. ■

May 1997

School in the Sky

Periodically I bump into other ex-pupils of St. Paul's Church School, once in Manchester's Temple Street, just round the corner from Mawson Street, now part of the demolished past. "Yeah, the one with the playground on the roof!" we chorus, recalling the unique architectural feature of that solid block of masonry, sited on the opposite side of the street to the parent church and infants' school buildings.

As I recall, the school was presided over by Miss Asquith, a grand-dame, tall, gaunt, broad-shouldered but motherly. On the ground floor Miss Scott, bespectacled, lips perpetually pursed, kept the junior class in order with the aid of an instrument, probably no longer seen in today's educational establishments, which I have always known as a 'clicker'. Its handle was surmounted by a wooden cone to which a flat strip of wood was firmly held by a rubber band.

The strip could be flicked with the thumb to produce a loud clicking noise, a sound that served to focus wandering minds on the task in hand. When a pupil drifted into a private dreamland, Miss Scott was not above giving the culprit a smart rap on the knuckles with her clicker to command instant attention.

Up above, on the way to the roof-top playground, Pop Hewitt reigned, a benevolent autocrat, cheery, roundfaced, balding, a plump Pickwickian character peering at the world through rimless pince-nez spectacles.

He had no problems keeping discipline in his class: he would joke and set the class laughing, but if the response threatened to get out of hand, his voice acquired an incisive edge that cut through any tomfoolery and immediately restored order. He favoured a whippy slim cane for punishment but, as I recall, rarely needed to use it apart from an occasional prod when correct answers were slow in forthcoming.

And then there was Mr. Slater. Looking back I feel sorry for him: he was not popular. Obviously teaching was not his chosen career--he was a decidedly unhappy man and it often showed. Short-tempered and sadistic, he had a scar, a permanent bruise across the bridge of his nose, feeding the legend that he had at one time been a boxer.

The cane he wielded, too frequently for our comfort, was thick and well-frayed at the end, usually delivered across the palm of the offender's outstretched hand, particularly painful when, by accident or design, the cane struck the joint of the thumb. Occasionally, on a good day, we were granted the optional punishment of writing lines, less distressing but eating into valuable private time; or we were set the more practical task of copying out interminable perms for Mr Slater's weekly pools coupon during our lunch hour. He left no stone unturned in his bid to escape from the job.

During my stay in Mr Slater's class, my auntie Jean who danced with the Tiller Girls came back from Paris bearing gifts. She gave my mother a statuette of the Hunchback of Notre Dame. "Rub his hump and make a wish, and your wish will come true", she told me. I thought about this after one particularly bad week with Mr Slater, and was tempted. I rubbed the hunchback furiously and wished hard, wished that something would take away Mr Slater and end his oppressive regime...

Come Monday, the impossible happened. Pop Hewitt took over the class: Mr Slater did not come in. He wasn't in Tuesday either, when we learned that he was not likely to be with us for some considerable time, having fallen and broken his leg during the weekend. When, exactly, my guilty conscience wondered.

The hunchback statuette was among my mother's possessions when she died.

I have it still and while I like to think I'm not superstitious, I've never ventured to invoke its powers since. ■

Alternative Fairy Tale Ending

Come Monday, the impossible happened. Pop Hewitt took over the class: Mr Slater did not come in. He didn't come in on Tuesday.

In fact we never saw him again.

It seems he'd apparently come into money.

A big pools win, we heard later. ■

May 1997

Peaceful Summertime

Peace did descend on Mawson Street periodically during the summer, when our thoughts were dominated by cricketing heroes Hobbs 'n' Sutcliffe and the record-breaking Aussie batsman Don Bradman.

We made life a misery for anyone expecting to take a short cut along the entry, where we were acting out test match thrills, with fielders strategically lurking in backyard doorways, and any exuberant batsman who knocked the ball into someone's backyard expected to climb over the wall to reclaim it. A practice effectively discouraged by some householders who let out their dogs so that most lost balls were chewed beyond redemption before being rescued... ■

May 1997

Bonny Night

It was in the late autumn, with Bonfire Night on the horizon, that our juvenile preoccupations imposed most strain on the equanimity of Mawson Street residents, though some of them took advantage of our enthusiasm to get rid of unmanageable items of junk that had probably been refused by the regular dustmen. For weeks before the event, we'd be collecting bonny wood and any combustible rubbish, scrounging cardboard, crates and packing straw from local shopkeepers.

Old newspapers, garden rubbish, it was a great chance for householders to have a clear-out. We'd hide this accumulation under cover, in back yard sheds, keeping

it dry and safe from marauding Temple Street or Mansfield Street gangs.

Once we were presented with a collapsing upholstered armchair, took turns sitting in it as the gang trundled it along the narrow back entry, jammed it in a back-yard doorway while arguing and pleading with a protesting parent-- aw, mum, it's only until bonny night...

Then word got round that someone's uncle was sawing up an old telegraph pole, and we struggled with a whopping big log, manhandling it down the back passage, easing it into a yard, until a parent came out to see what the fuss was all about and indignantly sent us packing elsewhere...

Someone else would donate a sagging mattress; we could always rely on the garage at the end of Mawson Street to give us some waste-oil--that soaked in nicely to convert the bedding into a cert of a firelighter. Insurance of successful ignition, even if the Manchester monsoon started on the night, as it often did.

And we worked with a will collecting a good stock of fireworks, scrounging old clothes to make a guy, dragging him round in a go-cart pestering the shoppers on Brunswick Street for pennies for the guy, haunting the queues at the Ardwick and Coliseum cinemas, cheerily chanting "Guy, guy, guy, Poke him in the eye, Hang him from a lamp post, And there let him die".

Then rushing to the newsagent to invest the proceeds in a mounting collection of rip-raps, Little Demon bangers, Fireflies, Serpents' Nests, a variety of rockets and showy display pieces like Golden Rains, Daisy Fountains, Mighty Atoms, Mount Vesuvius, and lots of Bengal Matches and sparklers.

On the day we usually were allowed out of school early and building up the bonfire was a communal effort. Any available dads supervised while the kids slaved to move all the combustibles from storage points into Mawson Street, and assembled them into a pyre in the middle of the street with the guy seated on top, keeping a few replenishments in reserve.

When dusk fell, out came the matches and the sparks were flying up to the rooftops in next to no time. Mums brought out trays of parkin and home-made treacle toffee, just to start things off, and toddlers were allowed the thrill of joining in, waving a few sparklers about before being packed off, protesting, to bed, a few lucky ones able to view the continuing excitements from a bedroom window. Then we could bring out the bangers and get down to the serious business of the evening, taking it in turns to light our showpieces.

I recall occasional calamities. Fireworks were stored in big biscuit tins to keep them dry and safe from stray sparks, but sooner or later someone would be howling because in the excitement they'd forgotten to put back the lid, the premature eruption of their treasures providing a side attraction, wreathing us in smoke and acrid fumes...

Or if we were too enthusiastic in stoking up the fire, a provoked housewife might yell from the doorstep that her front windows were cracking with the heat, and attempt to calm down the flames, and any unlucky revellers in the way, with a

wildly-aimed jugs of water.

But when the pyrotechnics died down, and we ran out of fuel for the fire, someone would hand out potatoes to be cooked in their jackets on the hot embers, and enjoyed with a dollop of melting marge, while parents supped tea, as a grand finale before we dispersed.

It strikes me that if the shortcomings of the current Manchester A to Z Street Guide can evoke such memories, there may be a market, in these heritage-conscious days, for a Manchester "As-it-Was" Street Guide. Wonder if I can interest any aspiring nostalgia-publisher out there... ■

May 1997

Employment, the Beginnings...

I'm told that jobs were scarce in Manchester during 1936. That was when my father joined the unemployed. Mother took in a lodger to help pay the bills, and I was expected to go out and earn my keep after completing a formal education at the local central school in the summer of that year. I promptly worked myself into and out of three jobs in almost as many weeks.

Months before I'd seen a nearby design and exhibition company advertising for apprentices to train in their display studios. I set my heart on getting in there C no routine office jobs for me, I decided. But by the time I was free to apply there mere no vacancies. To rub salt into the wound, well-meaning relatives at a family conference on my future showed deep disapproval of such a dodgy career; he needs a job in commerce, with solid prospects, they opined. So I was despatched, reluctantly, with an introduction to a firm in a dingy office block in the back streets of the city centre.

There was no difficulty in getting hired after I produced my gaudy Central School Certificate, printed in two colours, declaring that I had acquired distinctions in all ten subjects listed. I was to find it faintly embarrassing that this document proved such a sure-fire job lander, while the drabber School Cert and Matriculation certificates, representing somewhat higher standards of attainment, received scarcely a glance.

I spent the whole of one day at that first job, running errands, at everyone's beck and call, and departed that same afternoon after announcing they needn't expect me back. I was sent promptly to another city office.

Again there was no real job or prospect of training, and youthful arrogance had me marching out after only a few days. I tried a third place. It was no different, though this time I heeded my dad's advice and stuck it out to the end of the week, and drew a few shillings wages before declaring that I wasn't staying.

Shocked relatives washed their hands of me, my parents no doubt despaired.

I was left to seek my own salvation. If I couldn't break into the art world, I decided, then science offered more interesting prospects than boring commerce. I landed an interview with a chemical company in the industrial wastelands of Clayton [Anchor Chemical Co. Ltd.] and this time I was quite happy to let the CSE certificate exert its charm on the director sounding me out: it clinched the job.

That was when I met Harry Nelson, another young hopeful hired at the same time—I never checked if he too had brandished a fancy certificate—and we soon became firm friends. He intrigued me, his background was so different from mine.

He lived in Oldham, a place occupied by a large clan of Nelsons. In his spare time he was a musician, an accomplished trombone player who spent a goodly number of his free hours playing at dances with a local band. His brother was star player in the group, his dad and uncle handled bookings and transport, while his girl friend stood in as vocalist. He left me with the distinct impression that the Nelsons had the Oldham and district dance band scene all tied up.

He travelled to work at the chemical plant on a motor bike, swathed in a vast leather coat, fastened tightly over several undercoats on chilly days, with rubber waders anchored to brace buttons, large gauntlets, a leather helmet and rubber goggles. The routine of casting off all this gear on arrival kept us amused while we were busy shaving and grooming ourselves in the cloakroom, ensuring that we reported for duty meeting the high standards of appearance demanded from junior staff. Collars and ties and sober suits were the norm; pullovers and jerseys were frowned on.

One morning, Harry rushed in at the last minute, looking the worse for wear, confided that he'd had a hectic band engagement the previous evening, got to bed in the small hours, overslept, and had to dash to work without breakfast. We cherished a theory that Harry hung up all his travelling clobber overnight, so that he could just step into it each morning and button and zip it all up automatically. It seemed so that morning, because as he fought his way out of his protective cocoon and unwound a long woolly scarf from his neck, Eric gave a guffaw: "Hey, you've forgotten your collar and tie!"

Amid laughter, Harry clutched despairingly at his throat and sneaked a look in the mirror. In pre-war days, to prolong the working life of shirts, detachable collars were provided, held in place by back and front studs, so that a freshly laundered collar could be donned and suggest a clean shirt too. Having confirmed his state of undress, Harry promptly redonned his cycling gear and rushed out. We heard the sound of his bike starting up and off he zoomed.

"He's surely not going all the way home, is he?" asked Frank, incredulously, "there'll be a stink when he turns up late".

"There'd have been a stink if he rolled in minus collar and tie," we chorussed.

Sure enough when Harry returned, correctly attired, he was chewed up for arriving late without good reason, and had his pay docked that week. The bosses had the workers where they wanted them in those days.

Mind you, he'd already been in trouble for skipping an evening class at the technical school we attended, when there was a small matter of a conflicting dance date that got priority. The firm encouraged us all to study for an Institute of the Rubber Industry qualification, and paid for the classes. Rush-hour traffic and bus queues meant that there wasn't time for any of us to return home for tea after work on these tech nights.

We brought sandwiches and stayed on since the tech was only a few minutes walk away from the works. Eric brought in a portable record player and we listened to each other's records while brewing up and chatting over our grub. The nightwatchman left us to it, arranging his rounds so that he came and locked up after we'd departed.

One evening we were disturbed by a director who'd stayed late, and heard our recital as he passed down the corridor. Obviously he didn't think much of our choice of music since he told us that he'd bring in some real music for us to listen to, and he did.

Fat imitation-leather-bound, goldblocked volumes of D'Oyly Carte performances of Gilbert and Sullivan operas—complete operas spread over umpteen 78 discs.

Hypocrites that we were, we buttered him up and thanked him profusely, then the minute his back was turned shelved all our disagreements on the relative merits of popular music and the classics, to unite in expressing our loathing and contempt for Gilbert and bloody Sullivan. So only token sides ever got played, whenever the director was working late, or when his secretary flitted by within listening distance: we knew she'd report back if his records weren't on the turntable. We were nagged by the risk of damage to this priceless collection while in our possession, and it was a relief to return it at the end of term.

My general musical education had been innocently acquired from listening during the thirties to the records played by my several young aunts and their boyfriends in gran's house, and the light entertainment on the wireless. I became familiar with most of the dance bands of the day ... Carroll Gibbons and the Savoy Orpheans, Harry Roy, Jack Hylton, Bert Ambrose, Roy Fox, Nat Gonella and his Georgians, Henry Hall ("This is Henry Hall speaking" he used to assert as if there were some doubt). Most of them had a band within the band, a small group of musicians playing in a freer context.

The plummy tones of Carroll Gibbons would announce a number to be performed by his 'Playmates', the ebullient Harry Roy would join his Ragamuffins in novelty numbers like 'Dinner Music for a Pack of Hungry Cannibals' or 'Where did Robinson Crusoe go with Friday on Saturday Night?'. But the title didn't matter, somehow the music seemed more lively and interesting away from the constraints of the full band and their stock arrangements.

On our brief evening sessions at the chemical works I found myself listening more and more to the treasures from Harry's record collection. He was totally in love with the sound of the trombone. I sometimes wondered if he heard anything

else on the records he played. He brought American recordings featuring Kid Ory, Miff Mole with Red Nichols groups, Jack Teagarden, and sumptuous renditions of sentimental ballads by Tommy Dorsey which sent him into ecstasies.

My ears were opened by his enthusiasms: I can cheerfully date my interest in jazz as starting from this period. Discovering jazz was not a blinding revelation, hearing some hot lick that held me enthralled for evermore, but a stumbling appreciation that lurking in the ephemeralities of the popular music of the day was something of permanent worth.

Meanwhile my parents were relieved that I'd settled down in a job and contributing to the house-keeping, after my pyrotechnical start in the labour market. The relatives disdainfully kept their distance. I kept on drawing in my spare time and even started to sell small illustrations to *Tales of Wonder*, the first British sf mag to appear on the scene. When a rival magazine, *Fantasy*, appeared and showed interest in my artwork, I saw a career as a freelance illustrator opening up before me, and dreamed of escaping from the chemical works...

The outbreak of war upset all plans by providing unlooked-for opportunities of a new career in the armed forces for us all. Frank opted for the navy, the rest of our elite group preferred the RAF. Harry was called up before me: I enjoyed a brief reprieve when local records were destroyed in the 1940 Christmas blitz on Manchester.

I had been accepted as an instrument maker, but by the time I reached Padgate they decided my eyesight was not up to that meticulous trade and and I found myself reclassified as a wireless mechanic/operator and put on a course. The course took longer than I anticipated as I went on to become a radar mechanic, and I lost touch with Harry. I often wondered how he was making out.

When next I heard from Harry I was on an RAF radio course at Birmingham tech. He was at a repair section near Henlow, and had just been appointed 'duty trumpeter', being expected to make warning calls on his trumpet in the event of impending air raids or other emergencies. He was allowed time off to practice every afternoon in the bandroom. I bet he put heart and soul into those rehearsals in between taking extended breaks in a nearby cafe.

It was really no surprise when he wrote a few months later to say, smugly, that he was having the time of his life playing trombone in a touring RAF dance band. I was convinced that his dad and uncle would be looking after the engagements and transport, with his girl friend providing the vocals of course.

1999.

When I was 17 . . .

"This is going to be a great year," I thought as I stood freezing on the doorstep, clutching a lump of coal. In the distance the sound of the town hall clock striking midnight was overtaken by the sound of impatient revellers.

I gave the doorbell a ring. It was whipped open before the sound had died away and I was ushered in to the warmth of the kitchen party. Mother, father and Aunt Molly were there, drinking a toast, and the cat was enjoying the warmth of the oven built in to the massive cast iron range ...

When I Was 17 ...

... I went to life classes held at John Bold's studio down Grosvenor Street, on the way to the city centre. In those days the All Saints area of Manchester was something of a Bohemian stronghold, a haunt of artists, students from the nearby School of Art, and cultural layabouts. A place where visiting stage pros and entertainers found congenial digs.

John's studio was in one-time commercial premises, long abandoned by the garment-makers and since invaded by artists looking for low-rent airy studios. You entered from the street, climbed ill-lit flights of wide stone steps, crossed gloomy landings with smelly dustbins and over-flowing coal bunkers, up to the third floor.

John's room was large, the full width of the building, with tall windows on either side; a working room, with spartan furnishings, the model's dais beside a heavy iron stove, a screen across the end providing storage space for canvases and the paraphernalia of painting, and a small kitchen-cum-changing room.

The studio on the floor below was occupied by Miss Barbara Niven, a lady given to supporting worthy radical causes--and there were plenty of them in the thirties: marches and rallies for the unemployed, support for the hardpressed Spanish Republican government and the Interational Brigade, anti-Mosley demos.

The air of quiet concentration prevailing in John's studio as we attempted to catch the essentials of a pose would occasionally be broken by the noisy intrusion of vigorous debate below the floorboards. Often I would arrive to find the Niven landing cluttered with banners and placards, either stored in readiness for the next outing, or just dumped by returning marchers in the rush for refreshments. These props came in useful on windy wintry evenings when we surreptitiously borrowed a banner or two and blocked the draughts that whistled round John's entrance door to spare the model from goose-pimples.

Once I pounded up the stairs late, and bumped into a shadowy caller forcibly expressing frustration at Miss Niven's absence, to be informed by a chuckling John that I had just met the Reverend Étienne Watts, the notorious Red Vicar of nearby All Saints Church.

At home the results of my labours were occasionally scrutinised in a slightly

embarrassed silence. I recall returning one evening when my grandmother was visiting us, and being coaxed into opening up my portfolio. Gran studied my pencil sketches without comment, lips pursed, exchanging occasional glances with my mother.

"Don't the models wear *anything*—not even a wisp of tulle?" she asked finally.

I blushed, gathered up my work, and retreated to my room, aware of a ripple of laughter behind me as I closed the door. ■

When I Was 17 ...

... I discovered Jazz. For years I'd been a regular listener to broadcasts of British dance bands—Carrol Gibbons, Jack Hylton, Henry Hall, Roy Fox, Harry Roy, Nat Gonella. For me, discovering jazz wasn't a blinding revelation, hearing some hot lick that held me enthralled for evermore. Rather it was a growing appreciation that lurking in the sound of the popular entertainment of the day was something with real feeling.

My ears were, in large part, opened by the enthusiasm of a fellow-worker. Harry Nelson played trombone in his free hours in a working band and went off on occasional small group gigs. He lived for his music and he initiated me into the concept of improvisation, led me from Nat Gonella to Louis Armstrong and Fats Waller, to Johnny Dodds and Sidney Bechet.

As I recollect, Harry's brother also played in the band and some of his many relatives handled bookings and transport. At times, it sounded as though the Nelsons had the Oldham dance scene in the palm of their hands. ■

When I Was 17 ...

... I'd seen the Wells-Korda film *Things To Come* twenty-seven times and still thought it was marvellous despite the anachronism of the Space Gun. ■

When I Was 17 ...

... The Rector of Stiffkey was mauled and killed by Freddie the lion at Skegness Amusement Park. ■

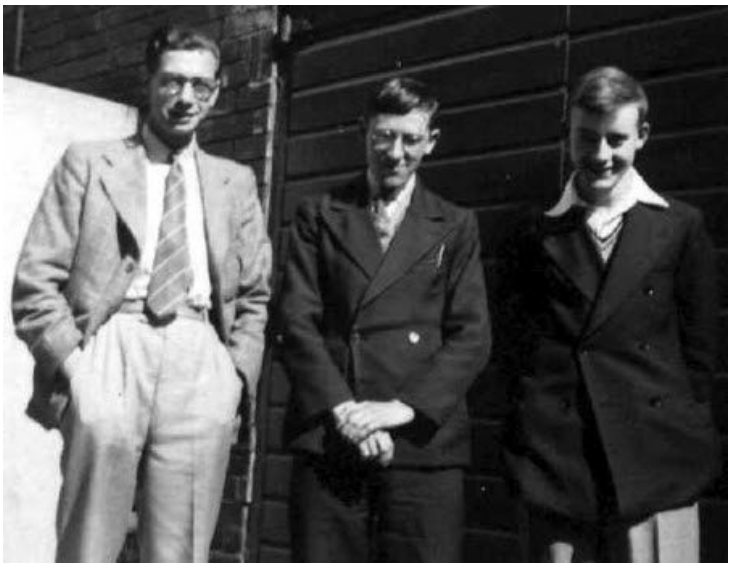
When I Was 17 ...

... I was an enthusiastic member of the Youth Hostels Association, as were several workmates, who accompanied me on regular weekend forays into the Peak district to recuperate from the pollution and tainted air of our workplace in Clayton.

Two or three weekends every month, we would make the dash from work with rucksacks and

supplies to London Road Station (Manchester)—scrounge off early from work on the Saturday morning, shoot to Hayfield, or Chinley and stop overnight at Bennetson Hall, or with Miss Booth, the warden, in the Goyt Valley. Even in the depths of winter, we would take trips over mount Famine when wind was whistling up our shorts and out of the back of our shirt collars. In those days the YHA was still a minority cause—you could usually get a bed at a hostel without booking (apart from holiday periods). ■

When I Was 17 ...



I gaze at the snapshot of my 17-year-old self—I recognize the lopsided grin, still with me, the gold-rimmed specs glinting in the sunlight, hands stuck firmly in the pockets of grey flannel trousers, a sports jacket which I recall as heather green, a grey striped tie borrowed from my father, hair brushed back, darker then, even a wave in it.

Alongside me are two friends of the time—George Ellis, serious of expression, bespectacled, hair slicked down, in a blue, double-breasted suit, and Eric Needham, grinning happily at the camera with open-necked shirt, pullover, and suit jacket and flannel pants. ■

CONTENTS

Science & Science Fiction: Rocketry and SF fandom

As a teenager, Harry was an enthusiastic member of the Manchester Interplanetary Society and the co-editor, then sole editor, of its journal, *The Astronaut*. The MIS has the honour to be the only amateur society ever to launch rockets from English soil; until its exploits attracted the unwelcome attention of the local police and provide the *Manchester Evening News*, the *News of the World*, the *Sunday Chronicle* and other newspapers with a shock-horror story.

Harry and his father were among those hauled into court to face the charged that "on or about the 27th day of March 1937 they unlawfully did manufacture a certain explosive they not being allowed by sections 4 and 39 of the Explosives Act 1875 to do so". Some of the others were also charged with "*unlawfully manufacturing a firework*".

A *Daily Mail* reporter was moved to join the society and provide its members with much needed legal help. The case was dismissed by the magistrates at the second hearing but the society's plans to move its activities to somewhere less public than Clayton Vale foundered when the owner of a remote farm in Glossop got cold feet and the funds available failed to match the society's ambitions.

In this pre-war period, Harry and fellow members of the MIS were in contact with science fiction fans in Leeds, Liverpool and London, and formal visits of one group of fans to another became regular events. Science fiction fandom grew from a purely local activity to one with a national following.

I recently picked up a remaindered copy of Arthur C. Clarke's *By Space Possessed*.
Glancing through a piece titled 'Memoirs of an Armchair Astronaut (Retired)', harking back to the thirties, I read: *"The actual building of rockets was frowned upon, for it would only result in police proceedings under the 1875 Explosives Act, as a group of experimenters in the north country has already proved."*
A comment that screamed out for an explanatory footnote, such as this piece, on the unusual case of *Rex v. The Manchester Interplanetary Society*

– Harry Turner

Rocket That Was Meant For A Planet Explodes In Manchester *And Police Say—"Stop It"*

I don't suppose many readers will remember that momentous front-page headline on the *Sunday Express*. Probably not many of you were around to read it, since it appeared on the issue dated 28 March 1937.

Foreground (left to right): Eric Burgess, Bill Heeley, Trevor Cusack Harry Turner

The story first broke in the stop-press column of the *Manchester Evening News* on the Saturday it happened. After absorbing the vital stop-press information *68 min Manchester C 2 Bolton W 1*, football fans discovered *Herbert Snelson (14), Fourth Avenue, Clayton, taken Ancoats Hospital injured exploding rocket Manchester Interplanetary Society contest at Clayton Vale.* Later editions carried the headline *THREE HIT AT ROCKET CONTEST* and ran a story filling nine column inches.

Next day the nationals took it up. Here's some of the *Sunday Express* story: *"Two people were slightly injured today when a rocket, fired during a demonstration at Clayton Vale, Manchester, exploded. They were Robert Snelson... and M.G.E. Wade, secretary of the Manchester Interplanetary Society,*

which promoted the demonstration. A cine cameraman was struck but was uninjured. The police stopped the demonstration... Manchester Interplanetary Society is a recently formed body aiming at the evolution of new types of rockets. The average age of the society's sixteen members is 17. The society was started by 16-year-old president Eric Burgess. Today's demonstration was the first of its kind."

The *Sunday Chronicle* [28th March, 1937] carried a dramatic photograph of one rocket leaving its launching rack, over the headline *MOON ROCKET STARTS BUT INJURES TWO*. It told much the same story as the *Express* but went on to mention: *"Prior to the display warning notices asked spectators to keep 300 feet away, but they were not observed..."* and concluded, ominously: *"Mr M.G.E. Wade, secretary of the society, stated last night that he had been requested to visit Inspector Smith of the Explosives Department at Manchester Town Hall on Monday"*.

The incident was still 'news' on Monday. The *Daily Mail* headline *INTERPLANETARY SOCIETY—MEETING ABANDONED AFTER ROCKET BURST* led into a story which quoted Eric Burgess as saying *"if it causes people to take us more seriously—then it may have been a good thing"*. And a hopeful comment from Malcolm Wade: *"I asked the detectives if we had broken any laws and they told us we had not"*.

The *Daily Herald* announced *ROCKETEER SAYS THE 'RACKET' WILL GO ON*, quoting Malcolm about the aims of the society: *"to experiment in the use of rockets for commercial purposes—and not for war... We are not just playing with fireworks. We have definite plans in mind, and all our experiments are the result of careful study"*. With the benefit of hindsight, I guess we were a little too high-minded with that "not for war" bit. Wernher von Braun didn't share such scruples and look where it got him.

The *Daily Express* featured two contrasting pictures. The 'before' picture showed member Bill Heeley posing with his aluminium rocket and launching

stand; the 'after' view was of onlooker schoolboy Herbert Snelson being helped off the field by plain-clothes policemen. While the *Manchester Guardian*'s laconic report concluded: *"The rocket which exploded was the sixth to be fired. The five others, although performing various capers, did not rise more than 20 feet from this planet"*.

Come Tuesday, the *Daily Dispatch*: *ROCKETEERS TO CONTINUE TO TRY FOR THE MOON*, telling how officials of the society had emerged from a meeting with Inspector Smith *"jubilant and full of enthusiasm for the future of their society, which aims ultimately at sending a rocket to the moon. The Inspector was very decent to us, said Wade. Our rockets, we were told, come under the Explosives Act, and we have been advised not to give any more rocket displays from our Clayton Vale arena for a few weeks. We have agreed. He added that a search would be made for a more suitable rocket-launching ground... In future, too, the design of the rockets would be submitted to the friendly scrutiny of Inspector Smith"*.

And that, we all hoped, was the end of that.

We were a trifle worried at the way our modest experiments had been inflated, in the highest traditions of British journalism, into supposed attempts to reach the moon and planets. Of course, the Wells-Korda film *Things to Come* was going the rounds at the time, but few people took the idea of space flight seriously and its mention usually provoked amusement or ridicule or both.

During the rest of that week, members were frequent visitors to the city News Theatre, on Oxford Street, where the local newsreel included a brief footage covering the incident. The thing that impressed me after repeated viewings, was that *all* the folk who'd chatted to us on the day, and shown interest in the society (being duly noted as potential members) turned out to be plain-clothes detectives.

So it was not entirely a surprise, after the press had forgotten the matter, that most members actively involved received summonses to appear at the City Police Court on May 14. The charge against me was that *"on or about the 27th day of March 1937 I unlawfully did manufacture a certain explosive you not being allowed by sections 4 and 39 of the Explosives Act 1875 to do so"*. And some of the others were also charged with *"unlawfully manufacturing a firework"*.

We had legal help (and obviously needed it !) through a *Daily Mail* reporter who had joined the society. The police prosecution treated the affair in a ponderous routine way, content to rest their case on the obvious facts. What saved us, I suspect, was that the case provided the magistrate with some light relief from more serious crime.

There was a wordy debate in the court about the definition of the word 'manufacture', touching on bows and arrows and home-made plum puddings in some zany way, and he showed a lively curiosity on the subject of rocket propulsion and space travel. The morning passed, the case was adjourned to an undefined date, and there we were, with the whole thing still hanging over our heads...

We'd been busy in the interim looking for a more private spot where we could continue to experiment. An isolated stone building out on the moors near Glossop seemed ideal. With Philip Cleator's book *Rockets Through Space* as our Bible, a few copies of American Rocket Society and British Interplanetary Society publications, awareness of the past experiments of Robert Goddard, of the work of the German Interplanetary Society, and imaginations filled with lots of science fiction, we were brim full of enthusiasm.

Ambitiously, we planned to dig safety trenches, install proving and launching stands, establish an observatory and meteorological station, erect a wind rotor to drive a generator and supply our power needs... Minor details like lack of funds, resources and know-how, never seemed to distract us in those exciting days.

Then back we went to court. The magistrate was assured that we had no intention of making fireworks or giving pyrotechnic displays, and we foreswore the use of certain chemicals in future experiments.

The case was dismissed, but our grandiose plans for the future received a distinct set back when the farmer offering to rent us the stone hut on the moors suddenly and mysteriously lost all interest in the venture...

And that's the way it was for us pioneers of space flight. ■

FOOTNOTES TO FANDOM #1...

This piece was originally written for a column, "Midnight Shakes the Memory", published in Harry Bell's *TOCSIN*, March 1977. Reprinted a decade later in "Embryonic Journey, a collection of fanzine articles from 1937-1987"produced for the Leeds CONception, 1987, and included in the Claire Brialey/Mark Plummer zine *BANANA WINGS* #10, 1998.

A ROCKETRY REVELATION

A Brief Chronicle of the Manchester Interplanetary Society

The Manchester Interplanetary Society was inaugurated on June 9th 1936, by a small group of rocketry enthusiasts, with its aim being the forwarding of the science of astronautics for commercial use, by experimentation or other means.

The first meeting of the society was held a week later on June 16th, when communication was established with the majority of the astronautical societies, and plans drawn for a loxygen-petrol rocket-motor. (Loxygen is the recognised abbreviation for Liquid-Oxygen; Ed.) Preparations were made for its construction, when it was learned that the use of liquid fuels in England was surrounded by such formidable obstacles as to render their use practically impossible for experimental purposes. Letters to the government proved of no avail, and reluctantly the project had to be abandoned. Members' activities were diverted to powder fuels as the only means of carrying on practical research.

Mr. E. Burgess, the President, had been experimenting with small powder rockets some eighteen months previous to the society's formation, and his experience had given him a good knowledge of the fundamental principles of rocket flight. Consequently early research was mainly conducted by Mr. Burgess and was divided into various sections, such as methods of launching, fin design and parachute release devices.

Research meetings were held in September and December 1936 and March 1937, at which rockets of varying design were tested with varying success. A small two-step rocket fired at the December meeting proved highly successful despite the fact that it travelled straight into the gale, demonstrating that this type of rocket is quite practicable. From the trajectory and duration of flight, it is estimated that the second step attained a velocity of 120 m.p,h, travelling at a height of 300 to 350 feet, AGAINST a high wind.

During the months of September to December 1936 some 30 to 40 experimental rockets were tested, One big disadgantage of the use of fins was the large area of resistance, compared with the body of the rocket, against any opposing wind. If fired on a fairly windy day, the rockets would deviate from a vertical course and turn into the wind. One line of future research will be the study of methods to stablise a rocket in flight without the aid of fins.

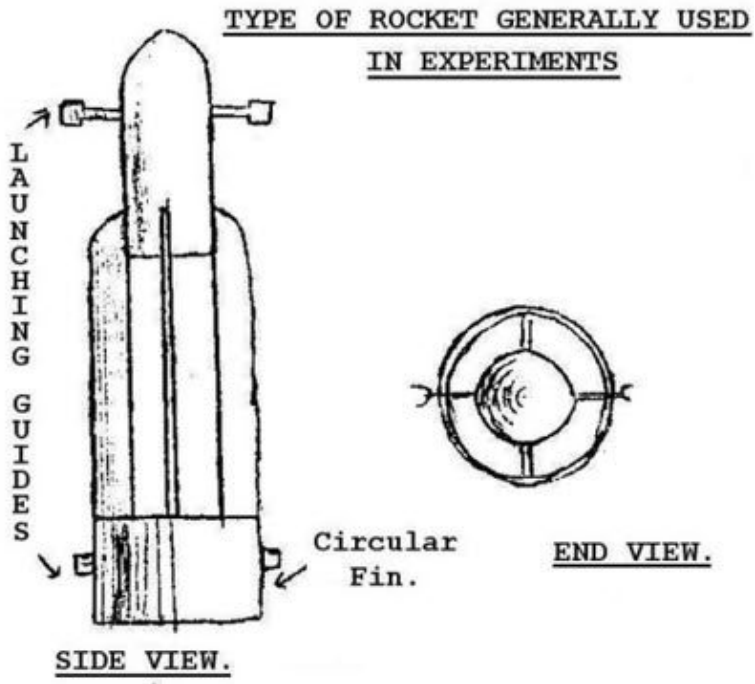
However, at the March meeting we discovered that even powder fuels are surrounded with many petty limitations as to their use, and friction ensued with the police, upsetting all future plans for research. Activities were suspended for several weeks, but fortunately the charges of contravening the Explosives Act of 1875 were dismissed.

April saw the issue of the society's journal THE ASTRONAUT. Due to this and

the publicity gained from the past few weeks, the membership began to swell. At present in a duplicated form, THE ASTRONAUT will be printed after the October issue.

The following month, May, the President visted M. Robert Esnault-Pelterie, returning from Paris with renewed enthusiasm.

Then in July, Headquarters were transferred from Ashton New Road to Longford Place, Manchester, where a regular meeting room was established. The Annual General Meeting was held on July 10th the first transatlantic member enrolled in August and now activities are chiefly concentrated upon the publication of the journal. It would be injudicious at this stage to mention anything of future research beyond the fact that the greater part will undoubtably be carried out by the proving-stand method. ■



[First published in *Tomorrow* No. 3 (1937), the journal of the Science Fiction Association, 5 Florist Street, Leeds 2.]

Take One: London Con 1938

Thinking back, 1938 seems to have been a key year in my early fannish career. After Leeds, I went down to the London convention, a gathering held in a hall owned by the Ancient Order of Druids. (It had an inner sanctum with concealed lighting and impressive papier-mache Stonehenge decor). About 50 fans attended and it was my first chance to meet the London fans—Wally Gillings, Editor of Tales of Wonder, Bill Temple, Ted Carnell, Eric Williams, Ken Chapman and Frank Arnold among them.

Professor A. M. Low was guest of honour or chairman or something equally important; he was a good front-man at the time, being 'one of the most vigorous personalities in modern Science'. Or so he described himself at the head of his regular column in Armchair Science, which he happened to edit. A dedicated self-publicist, indefatigable populariser of popular science, and author of a few abysmal sf stories and serials.

My only other memory of the official programme is that I.O. Evans was demonstrating his extensive knowledge of all sf written prior to 1938, and Wally Gillings spent a considerable time relating his never-ending struggle with British publishers to open up the magazine market.

I spent a lot of time arguing with Benson Herbert (who recently surfaced in a TV documentary as a psychic investigator) and a fellow artist from Leeds (whose name now eludes me) about surrealisam, then currently attracting attention as a way-out and controversial art form in the British press. And I had a pleasant time investigating the resources of the SFA book-lending library, a seeming vast collection in those days when you had to really search out your science fiction.

This con was also the AGM of the SFA and the influx of members from the provinces to live in the Big City enabled the London branch to vote away the power from Leeds and establish London as HQ. Two of these members were Arthur Clarke, from Taunton, and Maurice Hanson, who left a thriving sf group in Nuneaton (one of the earliest British centres of fanac).

I returned home in a euphoric state, rounded up the local fans and formed a Manchester SFA branch. ■

Take Two: The Flat 1938

That night I stay in the studio working into the small hours, listening to the thin sound of a transistor radio with fading batteries. As the local radio stations die on me one by one, I range over the dial in search of music.

From the irritating babble of foreign newscasts a distant station slides out of a heterodyning whine, gains sudden volume and clarity, a tinny clangorous sound that abruptly carries me into the past.., to 1938 and a flat at 88 Grays Inn Road. The Flat, fan-centre and London residence of Arthur Clarke and Bill Temple.

Earlier that year I'd attended my first convention and started on a fannish career as an illustrator. I'd been asked to do cover designs for Novae Terrae, bulletin of the Science Fiction Association, then edited by Maurice Hanson, with assistance from Arthur and Bill.

I was a self-taught artist and the early sf pulp mags were my first text books. I admired Elliot Dold above all illustrators of the late twenties and thirties—his style seemed so essentially suited to sf, and far beyond anything of which I was capable at the time.

So I guess I pinched most of my early tricks from the ubiquitous Frank R. Paul. (And had to unlearn 'em later!) Thus my inexpert attentions to the first stencil reduced it to flapping ribbons, but somehow the trio got it on to duplicator and coaxed a cover from it.

I am a fast learner. I abandoned the lethal print cutter misguidedly supplied by Maurice and made myself sane styluses, found some wheel-pens, and practiced diligently. The next cover presented fewer problems. And so it was as a member of the editorial team that I found myself invited down to see the production of the current issue of NT.

I arrived one wet weekend at the end of October to be met by Maurice and escorted round to the Flat. Panting up several flights of stairs we had trouble squeezing round the door into a room where Arthur, Bill and several helpers, were busy operating the duplicator. Cramped was not the word—legend has it that Arthur once rashly ventured into the room wearing a double-breasted suit and got jarrmed between the walls.

What still sticks in my mind is that the noise of fanactivity was drowned by a blockbusting cacophony from the gramophone. It sounded exciting and futuristic (I wasn't sufficiently sophisticated then to describe it as 'avant-garde').

The short playing time of 78s had its advantages and when I got chance between repeats, I asked what it was. With an ecstatic gleam in his specs, Arthur revealed that it was Steel Foundry, a symphonic poem by one Alexander Vasilievich Mossolov.

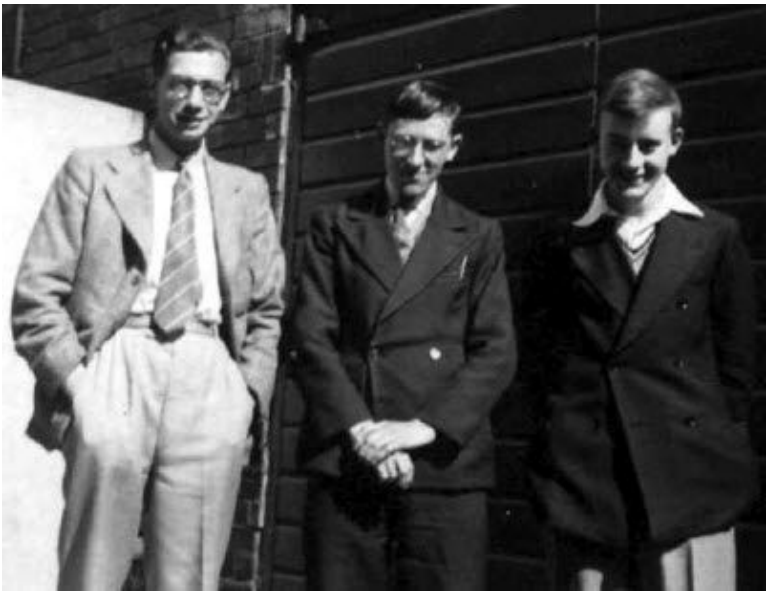
I was impressed; though later I discovered that the music of this composer had earned him the disapproval of Soviet authorities as 'formalistically depraved', and

that he had been under attack for defects of character and drunkenness.

And here I am, some forty years later, unexpectedly listening to that very same piece... ■

(revised for Harry Bell, 29th March 1978)

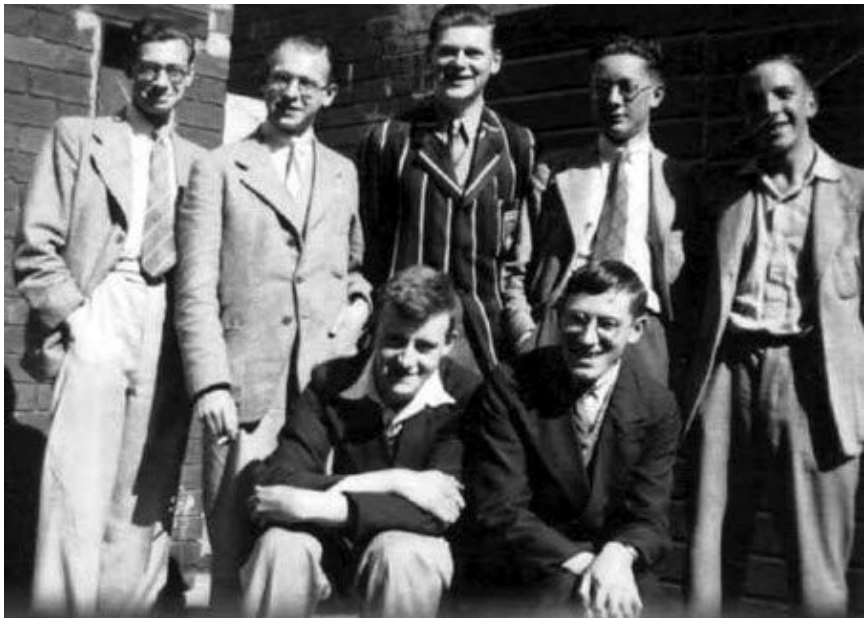
Take Three: Leeds 1938



I'm looking at two snapshots. Age has imbued them with a faint tinge of sepia. On one, smirking self-consciously beside Eric Needham and George Ellis, stands my 17-year-old self.

The three of us, as representatives of Manchester fandom, had travelled to Leeds one fine day in 1938. And there we were, at the clubroom—headquarters of the recently formed Science Fiction Association—meeting the leading lights of Leeds fandom.

The event is too far behind me now to be more than a blurred memory of faces and figures, of climbing flights of stairs to an above-shop room, walls covered with a profusion of paintings, of sitting in a creaky cane chair... But I still remember the thrill of making personal contact with other fans, the enthusiasm, the excited chat and argument, a deep sense of fulfilment.



Even then, Leeds was a long-established meeting place for sf fans. Back in 1935, the first British chapter of the Wonder Stories-inspired Science Fiction League had been formed there, and in the year before our visit the first ever British national fan convention had been held in Leeds. A frew weeks hence, a second convention was planned to take place in London, and the SFA seat of power was destined to drift away from the provinces.

But on this warm Saturday afternoon, aware only of the present, we all trooped down into the yard at the back of the clubhouse, and posed in the spring sunshine. And on my souvenir of that long-lost day in 1938 a happy group smiles at the camera, Eric and George sit at the front while I hover with our hosts: Vic Gillard, Doug Mayer, Harry Warnes and Doug Airey.

There's a face missing; Albert Griffiths, one of the mainstays of Leeds fandom at that time, but I guess someone had to hold the camera. ■

Take Four: SFA trip to Manchester

I have a couple of sheets of official SFA notepaper, brown with age, held toqether with a rusting paper clip, fron the 'Executive Headquarters & Council Offices'. An expert could detect Arthur Clarke's smudged fingerprints on them somewhere. The letter is dated 22 May 1938 and addressed 'To our Friends of the new Manchester Branch'.

It was brought up by Arthur and Maurice for the official opening of the branch

in the attic clubroom at my home. A very select gathering, only eight or nine of us. Arthur complimented my mother on the meal she dished up, and she never ceased to remind me of that fact, years after, every time Arthur was mentioned on radio or TV.

[*Editor's Note :* I also had the benefit of my grandmother's memories of Arthur Clarke. P.H.T.]

I think it's worth quoting something of the letter to try and recreate the dedicated spirit of those days:

'...Whilst we send this message by the hand of two Officials from the Association's Headquarters, we wish to initially take the opportunity of expressing our disappointment that we cannot all be with you...'

'We would be serving no useful purpose here if we were to discuss the merits of our favourite form of literature, or the enjoyment derived from the perusal of it, but we do think that you will find, now that you have an Association Branch in your fair City, that your science-fiction will mean a lot more to you. You will no longer be an individual who reads a queer kind of magazine and has strange notions and ideas, alien to the ordinary layman. Now you will be in the company of others with coincidental tastes and who think along similar lines to you, yourself.'

'You will no longer have to sit down to write a lengthy letter and await an answer if you wish to make contact with others of your particular zest and perception—you will find these people at your local Branch.'

'There you will read, discuss, debate and, mayhap, write science-fiction, you will imbibe fantasy and go away from your meetings with a feeling of satisfaction that it is impossible to obtain other than by direct contact with persons with sympathetic apprehension of your ideas. You will, as we have said above, enjoy your science-fiction more.'

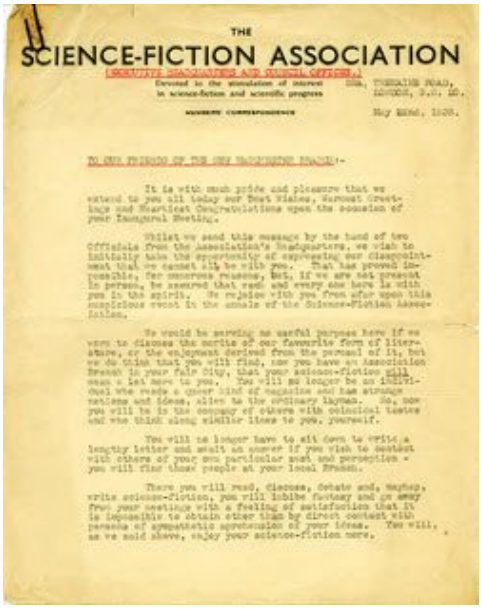
'We say, with all due pride, that you could not belong to any more dignified or distinguished Association connected with science-fiction, were you to go to the utmost ends of this little speck of cosmic dust we call, Earth....'

And so on and so on. I think that letter was influential in directing my later fannish activities.

War broke out, the SFA folded.

And such is fan's ingratitude to fan, that when efforts were made a year or so later to impose another organization on fandom, I found myself ganging up with Doug Webster in a fanarchist revolt against the organisation men. We lost out, of course, but that's another story... ■

(Published in Harry Bell's *Tocsin/Kamikaze*, 1978)



THE
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Devoted to the stimulation of interest in science-fiction and scientific progress

THE
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1938

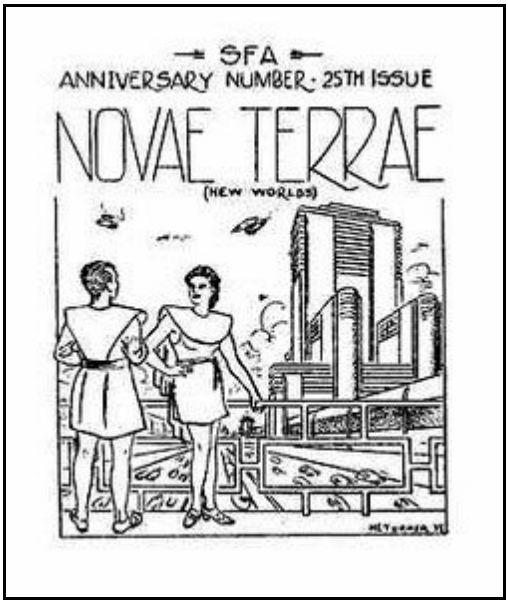
A YEAR TO REMEMBER

THE YEAR IN WHICH BRITISH SF FANDOM FOUND ITS FEET

It was a truly crowded year for me. I visited Leeds SFA HQ during March, together with fellow Manchester fan Stan Davies, I visited Liverpool, I attending the second national convention of the British Science Fiction Association in London, I was drawing covers for *Novae Terrae*, the monthly journal of the Science Fiction Association...

In Leeds, I made the acquaintance of Frank Dobby among the resident fans, finding a common interest in Surrealism; then a hot topic after the Surrealist exhibition of 1938 when Dali nearly suffocated in his diving suit...

We were also lucky to meet Maurice Hanson, up from London with Ken Chapman. As I'd already been roped in by Maurice to provide some cover designs for *Novae Terrae*, which he edited, we had lots to talk about.



1938 was the year when control of the Science Fiction Association passed from Leeds to London, on the occasion of the first national fan convention held in London on April 10th at the AOD Hall. I travelled down with Fred Tozer for the great occasion, and took a bundle of artwork.

There had been no *Journal* published that year, partly because the design plans for the British Interplanetary Society Cellular-Step Spaceship were still being finalised, and partly because of the need to build up an Experimental Research Fund.

But there was some compensation for those unable to join in the heady delights of London meetings, in the form of monthly Bulletins, produced by those indefatigable publishers of the SFA organ. *Novae Terrae*—Clarke, Temple and Hanson—who took over the editorial and publicity duties from Ted Carnell.

It was intended to carry more popular material of general interest to provincial members, who seemed neglected. News of the BIS spaceship design appeared later in the year, when the Society got all the publicity it could handle over the impracticality of its design.

The outbreak of war terminated all activities of the Society.

Group at the home of R.A. Smith, in Chingford , then HQ of the British Interplanetary Society, on Sunday 17 July 1938. left to right: J.H. Edwards, Eric Burgess, Harry Turner, Guest of Honour Midshipman Robert C. Truax, USN, R.A. Smith, Maurice Hanson & Arthur C. Clarke

I met Bob Truax back in July 1938 when he was guest speaker at a London meeting of the British Interplanetary Society. At that time I was secretary of the Manchester Interplanetary Society and he was Midshipman Robert C. Truax of the US Navy, conveniently over here on a training cruise, and raring to tell us about recent research work with rocket motors he'd carried out at the experimental station on Chesapeake Bay. He turned up in uniform, smart, confident, in his early twenties, bringing data and equipment, and bowling us over with his know-how and infectious enthusiasm.

At that time Britain lagged behind when it came to serious support for rocketry and the prospect of space travel. While extensive work had been carried out by groups in Europe and the States during the twenties and thirties, practical experimental work here was hindered by a law dating back to 1875, which effectively prohibited any rocket tests by members of the general public.

The British Interplanetary Society cautiously confined its activities to theoretical matters, so it was exhilarating to hear from Bob about the advantages of training at the Annapolis Academy, with machine-shop facilities on hand, and being able to indulge his strictly do-it-yourself approach to rocket motor design problems.

As one of a group of enthusiastic teenagers captivated by the idea of space travel, who formed the Manchester Interplanetary Society, I found myself on the wrong side of the law when we organised a meeting in 1937 to launch several experimental models of rockets built by members.

One of the rockets exploded on launch. and we promptly found that our

audience included several plain clothes detectives from the Explosives department of the local police authority. I mentioned this to Bob, and he laughed and confessed that when he was a boy in Alameda, California, he and a fellow Buck Rogers fan fired solid fuel test models of their own design. and most had exploded, but there had been no repercussions.

When he won an appointment to the Naval Academy, where there was access to shop machinery, he spent all his time out of classes working in the machine shop. He'd been able to make a variety of thrust chambers, using liquid fuels. and test them out at the naval experimental station and found he'd made progress. None of them exploded.

He told the meeting in detail of his research on cooling problems, kept the experts happy by answering questions on refractory linings used to line exhaust nozzles, and emphasised that nearly all the equipment was hand-built or adapted from whatever he could lay his hands on at the time. I came away from the meeting impressed by this pragmatic approach to problems.

I was not entirely surprised, some 35 years later, to hear that Bob Truax was the moving spirit and technical backing for Evel Knievel's projected death-defying leap by rocket across the Snake River canyon. ■

from the Guardian, 22 May 1999

GRAND CANYON JUMP
– Evel Knievel's son breaks record

Robbie Knievel, son of the motorcycle daredevil Evel Knievel, became the first person to jump the Grand Canyon on a motorbike when he cleared a 60-metre (200ft) chasm to break his own distance record. Officials said Knievel travelled 68.4 metres (228ft), beating the record he set in the early 1990s by 1.5 metres. He crossed the canyon at its narrowest point, 600 metres above the floor at the Hualapai Indian reservation.
Knievel, 37, careered off the ramp on landing but was not seriously injured.... His father wanted to jump the Grand Canyon but failed to get permission from the park authorities.

written in 2005

Frank Arnold

Thanx incidentally for the Outworlds with the Frank Arnold biog. Some time back, Vinç waved an early draft of this Dave Rowe piece in my direction, so it's interesting to see the final piece. Frank was not one of my favourite fans – we didn't hit it off when I first met him at the 1938 con, and I can't say I ever warmed to him on later contacts. Partly a matter of the North/South divide (even in those days:) because he got my back up with his loudmouthed patronising attitude to visiting fans. And in later years he annoyed me with his sycophantic defence of all that Ted Carnell ever did... So, in a sense, this revealing portrait of Dave's backs up my early prejudice.

Frank was one of those folk who talk at you: I never felt there was any two-way communication. I think Dave is too charitable. The reported reaction of FA playing shove 'apenny with Arthur Clarke's treasure trove is typical. But I shall go on no longer... I shall preserve the piece for its historical interest, as you remark.

to Fran & Brian Varley, 27th November 1993

CONTENTS

The War Years : Part I—SF Fandom and into the RAF

With wife-to-be Marion's help, Harry began to publish *Zenith*, his own science fiction fan magazine, in the early 1940s. When he registered for military service in at the end of 1940, he was surprised to find that he had A1 vision, even though he always wore glasses. His actual call-up was postponed several times because Hitler's Luftwaffe kept bombing the RAF's records, but it did happen in 1942; in nice time to sabotage and hasten Harry and Marion's wedding plans.

After basic training at RAF Padgate and a radio course at Birmingham College of Technology, Harry was posted in February of 1943 to the radio school at RAF Yatesbury, where he found at least one familiar face. Harry had met Arthur C. Clarke, the science and science fiction writer, on trips to visit London's SF fans, and Arthur Clarke had visited Harry's home in Longsight, Manchester, the HQ of the Manchester Interplanetary Society.

Two years of training disrupted both family and fannish life for Harry. In 1945, the training in England ended. So did the war, but the RAF had further plans for Harry Turner and his fellow radar technicians...

On pubbing my first ish...

The events I am about to describe took place well over half a century ago, a period that bridges several fannish generations. So far as I can check the details are accurate, but I won't vouch for everything. As Marcel Duchamp has remarked, *"it is curious to note to what an extent memory is unfaithful, even for the most important periods of one's life. That, indeed, explains the delightful fantasy of history."*

Of course, he said it in French, but I guess it's true in any language...

– Harry Turner

"Send me more, with extra bottums!"

– Eric Frank Russell's comment on the cover design for *ZENITH* #2 . . .

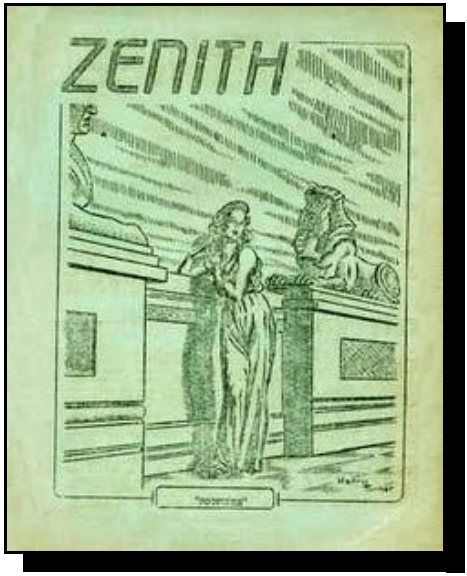
ZENITH—A Brief History

I guess my prime urge in putting out ZENITH during the early war years was the opportunity to do more illustration work. I'd acquired a certain expertise hand-cutting designs directly on to stencils since my first involvement with fan pubbing way back in 1937. That was when I began to do cover stencils for the Science Fiction Association monthly mag NOVAE TERRAE, in the days when it was produced and edited by Maurice Hanson, with help from Bill Temple and Arthur Clarke, in London.

I recall that Maurice provided me with a fiendishly sharp print trimmer to cut my first design on to stencil, and I had great difficulty in keeping the shreds hanging together in one piece for its return. Somehow or other, Maurice managed to duplicate it, but I promptly made myself some more efficient styluses, acquired wheel pens to create tint effects, and found out the hard way how to use them to best effect. I picked up tips from stencilled artwork in the many US fanzines that reached me, and was soon doing regular work for several of the early British mags—including Liverpool fan John Burke's SATELLITE, and THE FANTAST, first edited by Sam Youd in Eastleigh and later, when he was conscripted, taken over by Doug Webster in Aberdeen.

Most British fanzines of the time offered pages of unrelieved typed text: I wanted to see more use of graphics, spurred on by the example of US editors making full use of aids such as lettering-guides, tint plates, photo-stencils... items that, alas, were difficult to come by in wartime Britain!

So much for ambitions. When I decided to produce ZENITH in 1941 I was fortunate in my contacts: contributors included names still familiar to most fans today—Arthur C. Clarke, Bill Temple, John 'Ted' Carnell, Sam Youd, Eric Frank Russell—and many yesteryear fans who deserve mention in any fannish chronicles—Doug Webster, D.R. Smith, John Burke, Maurice Hanson, Sid Birchby, Eric Hopkins, Don Doughty, John 'Zeus' Craig, Edwin Macdonald, J.E. Rennison... they provided a stream of short stories, articles, poems and lively letters of comment.



Cover of the first issue, August 1941.

I had help from my wife-to-be, Marion Eadie (promptly promoted to co-editor), who wrote several satirical pieces and

stories, and typed many of the stencils—at the cost of much juggling with word spacing, ZENITH boasted justified margins. And I had lots of fun finding what limits there were to printing art work drawn direct on to flimsy war-time wax-coated stencils.

The first issue of ZENITH appeared in August 1941, a year when British fanzines were becoming scarce as faneds disappeared into the armed forces, and it proved increasingly difficult to lay hands on paper and supplies of duplicating materials.

My own venture into fan-pubbing owed much to the enthusiasm of Mike Rosenblum, then issuing FUTURIAN WAR DIGEST (affectionally referred to as FIDO) to keep fanac alive during the early war years, following the winding up of the Science Fiction Association.

Most actifans of the period were involved in some way with FIDO, sending in letters and news, and occasional duplicated sheets or material that Mike and Doug Webster would print for them, often on paper generously donated by American fans.

Mike periodically collated all the sheets that happened to be on hand and mailed them out to fans at home and in the forces. I recall sending in a few stencils of a proto-ZENITH for inclusion in Mike's mailings, before I acquired a duplicator of my own, inherited a stock of "surplus" green quarto duplicating paper, and promptly decided it was high time I did my own thing.

The Mighty Roneo 2A in action – note the "economy" stencil on the ink pad!

Describing this event at a later date, fellow-Mancunian fan Eric Needham remarked... "Fans old enough to remember when ZENITH first appeared will recall that a war had broken out.... Patriotic appeals were launched for scrap metal, and great dumps of rusty machinery appeared everywhere. I do not claim there is any connection.... but this is the time that Harry acquired his 1913 Model 2a Roneo duplicator, a purely palaeotechnic device, lavish in its use of ornamental cast-iron, that qualifies for the title of being an upright grand."

While I wouldn't swear to the accuracy of Eric's dating, since he was an expert on all things primitive and mechanical, I take it on trust. While in my possession (and it went on printing fanzines until the late fifties, which is perhaps a sort of record), the machine never worked as the makers intended.

The original inking mechanism appeared to consist of a roller supposed to force ink through a perforated zinc drum covered by several thicknesses of fabric, over which the stencil was placed. However, this roller proved immovable in operation, never making contact with the drum at any time.

The method of inking recommended to me by the original owner (and looking back I suspect he must have been one of von Däniken's astronauts moulding the shape of fandom to come) was to slosh ink on to the blanket with a paintbrush before putting on the stencil.

It required some practice to judge the correct amount of ink required: too liberal an application flooded the stencil, too sparing a dose gave patchy results. Persistence and experience eventually enabled me to assess all the variables involved—size of paintbrush, consistency of ink, room temperature, the height of the Heaviside layer—and the inking routine became automatic.

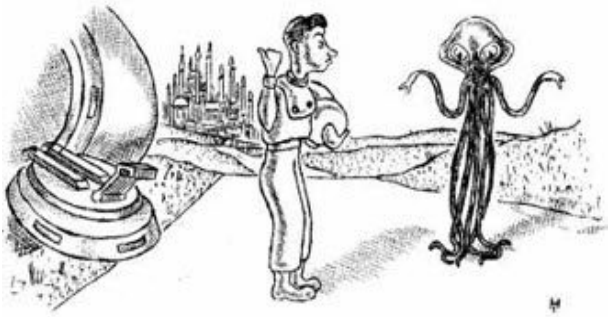
On a good day, I could guarantee to print 20 to 25 sheets before having to lift the stencil and apply more ink. As the machine was not an automatic feeder, sheets of paper had to be carefully positioned for feeding individually. And for various reasons (like being a perfectionist) I used to slip-sheet. All this may strike contemporary fans as a slow and tedious way of producing a fanzine; indeed it was.

But this heap of junk had one great advantage over more sophisticated gear. It could do multi-colour printing in a single operation and in perfect register by exploiting the defects of the system. Because of the unorthodox method of inking, it was an easy matter to paint selected areas of the blanket with different coloured inks, so that when a sheet was run through it finished up with, say, a red heading, black text, and a green illustration.

All in one go—in register every time. And it was so simple to do. The only thing that needed watching was to check that the colours did not spread and merge beyond the area you wanted; but areas could be sharply defined when inking by outlining each colour when applying the black ink. (In later issues of ZENITH,

I realised that this effect of merging colours could be exploited in illustrations to create unusual effects, again without the need for several separate colour runs). Years later I was still being asked how it was done, but the truth never seemed to convince questioners!

There was an additional hazard to inking. This was a time of extreme economy—stencils were hard to come by (money too for that matter) and many fan publishers, like myself, snipped off the lower unused portion of foolscap stencils and replaced it in operation with a piece of backing sheet, which kept the ink at bay long enough for the usual run of around 100 copies. Salvaged bits of stencil could then be stuck together with gummed paper, Sellotape, (and a lot of faith), to provide extra pages; the constant threat of disintegration whenever the stencil was lifted for reinking all added to the excitement... But enough of technical matters.



"Sorry, I'm a stranger round here myself."

This cartoon in #2 prompted Eric Frank Russell to comment: "Sketch inside the cover is a flop. It's okay you drawing yourself as a space-rover, but the other guy is a very poor pic of Arthur Clarke. Surely you could have drawn Ego better than that ?"

As the war dragged on, meetings at my home became sporadic as Manchester fans disappeared into the forces—I lost touch with some of the regulars—Stan Davis, Fred Tozer, Bill Shelton. My turn to register came early in December 1940; as call-up usually followed a month or so after, I hastily travelled up to Glasgow to spend Christmas with Marion.

The over-night return journey home by rail seemed interminable. The train kept stopping at deserted stations—eventually a guard came round to tell us that Manchester had been blitzed for two nights running, and trains had to be rerouted, crawling round while emergency services tried to restore some order in the smoking city. We eventually got off the train, to find there were no trams or buses running. I walked home through chaos, past a damaged barracks and the still-smoking ruins of the Ardwick cinema, and finally scrambled round several bomb craters close to home, relieved to find the house still standing and my parents shattered by the experience...

Come the end of January, I had a note informing me that records had been destroyed in the blitz and enclosing new forms for me to complete. After this temporary reprieve I steeled myself for a prompt call-up. During February, Arthur Clarke, at Colwyn Bay expecting his call-up papers, started to circulate a chain-letter, FAN MAIL, (and when Marion and I decided to become engaged it made front-page news in an early issue). When Arthur went into the RAF in April, Sam Youd continued to circulate the chain-letter.

The weeks passed and I was surprised to still be clinging on to my civilian status. Then I was requested to fill in another set of forms following heavy air raids in May (I began to suspect a German plot to keep me out of the forces) in July. After which, Marion decided to come down to work in Manchester.

Eric Needham reported to the RAF in August 41. I was surprised at lingering on, until I had a note advising that records had been destroyed in the Xmas blitz on Manchester in 1940... and I'd have to re-register. A long wait followed, and then a further note to say records had been destroyed in another blitz... Began to think that Hitler was going to extraordinary lengths to prevent me joining in the fray.

I fancy ZENITH was the first British fanzine to offer nudes as a regular feature. I

had a bulging portfolio of sketches made at life classes in the studio of Manchester artist John Bold, so it was inevitable that some of the results were translated on to stencil and appeared in ZENITH. They were among the items provoking the most comments, ranging from Eric Frank Russell's response to the cover of the second issue: *"Ah, she beautiful, she ravishing! I kees 'er—vat you call heem? —'er bottum! Send me more, with extra bottums",* to Bill Temple's complaint in a later issue: "You are doing an unkind and thoughtless thing ... in continually sending these nudes to an impressionable, sex-starved soldier, and may have to answer for the consequences".

Page illo, Study. from ZENITH #4, February 1942. Forrest J. Ackerman commented: "Do U noe, I have xrpted that reclining rarebit... & put her on the wall amongst originals and fotos. The only piece of fanmag art to be so honored..."

As I recall, Forry Ackerman was then featuring VoMaidens in the Los Angeles SF Club fanzine *Voice of the Imagination*... He was impressed by *Study* in ZENITH#4 and wrote asking me to contribute to his series, and mailed several stencils—state-of-the-art blue nylon films which were a delight to work on after the ageing relics available here. So *Study 2* was diverted to 4SJ, to bring the encouraging response:

"The stencilovely ... Just wait'll we get our ink on her. I scarcely can wait to roll her into the bed! (Hey, I'm talking about cranking copys into the mimeo container, of corse... don't get me rong!). Vomaiden Portfolios have been discontinued til the spirit inspires me again but your grand fantasyren will be featured in the next (#23) VOM."

(I was reminded of this wartime exchange when more than fifty years later, Art Widner was moved to repro the VOM pic in his zine YHOS #54, with a few kind words of praise).

Five issues were published between August 1941 and April 1942. A sixth issue was prepared and almost ready for production when Fate intervened. The RAF sent me my call-up papers, with impeccable timing, just as Marion and I decided to get wed. In the subsequent confusion, ZENITH#6 languished on stencil for several months. Somehow, on the odd occasions when I managed to get out of camp and dash back home for a weekend with Marion, we never seemed to find time for fanac. When up-and-coming Manchester fan Ron Lane decided to pub his own ish, I accepted the inevitable and, to help out, passed over the material planned for ZENITH.

Illustration for Marion F. Eadie's story "The Gateway of Atem" in Zenith #4

Years later, in 1953, there was an ill-fated attempt at revival when Derek Pickles talked me into trying again. By this time I had access to a Multilith machine, was able to indulge in printing offset litho, with hand-drawn plates and multicolour; all the facilities were there but the support was not forthcoming. And I guess my ideas had changed in the intervening years, drastically, and the project foundered.

■ Back cover of ZENITH #5, printed in two colours.

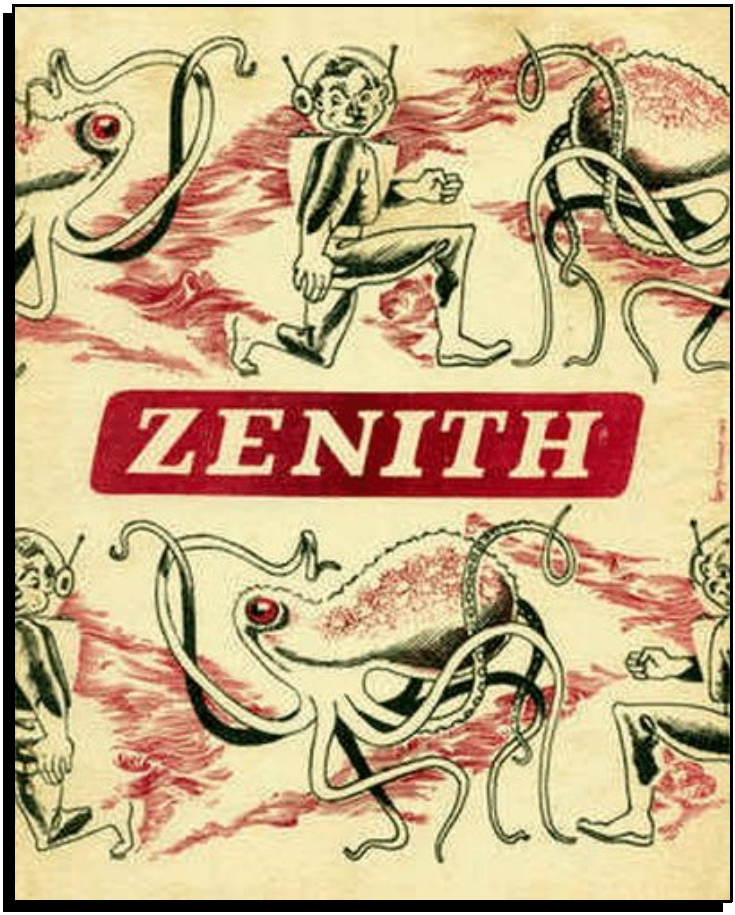
Even more years later, in 1973, I was persuaded, after a period of gafiation, to return to the fold, and attend the Bristolcon. There, in a dealer's catalogue I picked up, I read:

"ZENITH (Ed by Harry Turner) numbers 1 - 5 (8/41; 10/41; 12/41; 2/42; 4/42). VG condition. Edited by a leading artist for the prewar British SF magazines. Zenith is an early example of the often beautiful effects an artist can achieve in one or more

colours with only the mimeograph stencil as a 'canvas' (before the days of electronic aids). These five issues include much artwork by Turner, including full-page illustrations inspired by Coleridge and Poe, a poem and an SF short story 'Impetus' by C.S. Youd (John Christopher) and an Arthur C. Clarke short SF story 'The Awakening'. **£12.50** / $30.00."

It seemed that a file of wartime ZENITHs had become a collector's item: I kicked myself for not hanging on to several complete runs of the mag as an investment for my old age (like now).

ZENITH was sent out for free to anyone interested—and it reached American and Aussie fandom as well as home fandom despite wartime upsets—with a nominal price for anyone so foolish as to insist on paying: but I don't recall anyone did.

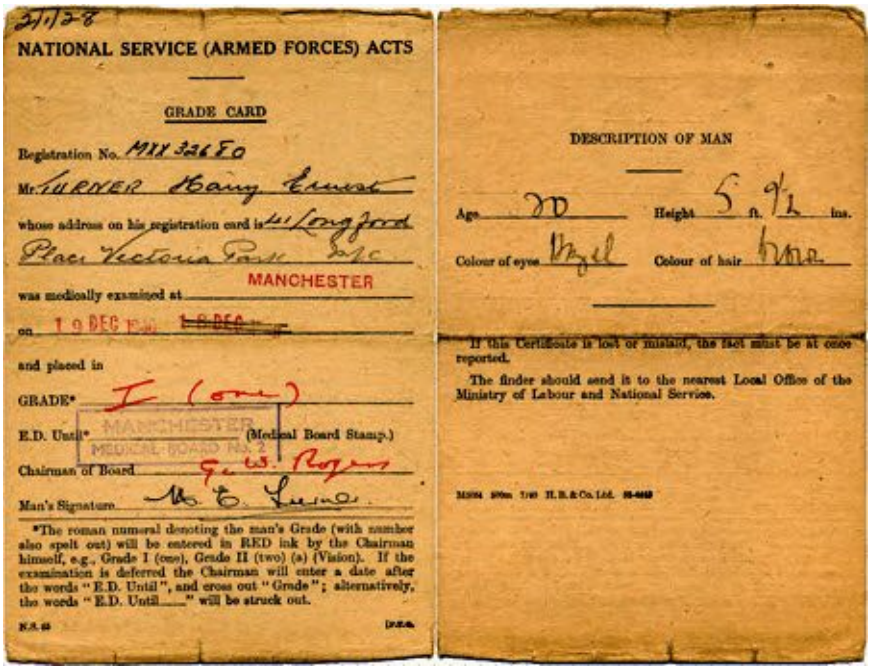


Front cover ZENITH, June 1953 / original drawn direct on to offset litho plates and printed in red and black.

August 1999. An earlier version appeared in WARK *#6 (February 1976)*

The Rise, and Decline, of Fanarchy in the Face of Events

I register for military service at the end of 1940, have a medical on December 19th to find myself passed with grade A vision, despite specs worn to correct myopia, and duly accepted as fit for service in the Royal Air Force.



NATIONAL SERVICE (ARMED FORCES) ACTS

GRADE CARD

Registration No. MIX 326 E 0

Mr. TURNER Harry Ernest

whose address on his registration card is 41 Longford Place Victoria Park Mc

was medically examined at MANCHESTER

on 19 DEC 19[illegible] 18 DEC

and placed in

GRADE* I (one)

E.D. Until* (Medical Board Stamp.)

MANCHESTER MEDICAL BOARD No. 2

Chairman of Board G. W. Rogers

Man's Signature H. E. Turner

*The roman numeral denoting the man's Grade (with number also spelt out) will be entered in RED ink by the Chairman himself, e.g., Grade I (one), Grade II (two) (a) (Vision). If the examination is deferred the Chairman will enter a date after the words "E.D. Until", and cross out "Grade"; alternatively, the words "E.D. Until....." will be struck out.

DESCRIPTION OF MAN

Age 20 Height 5 ft. 9½ ins.

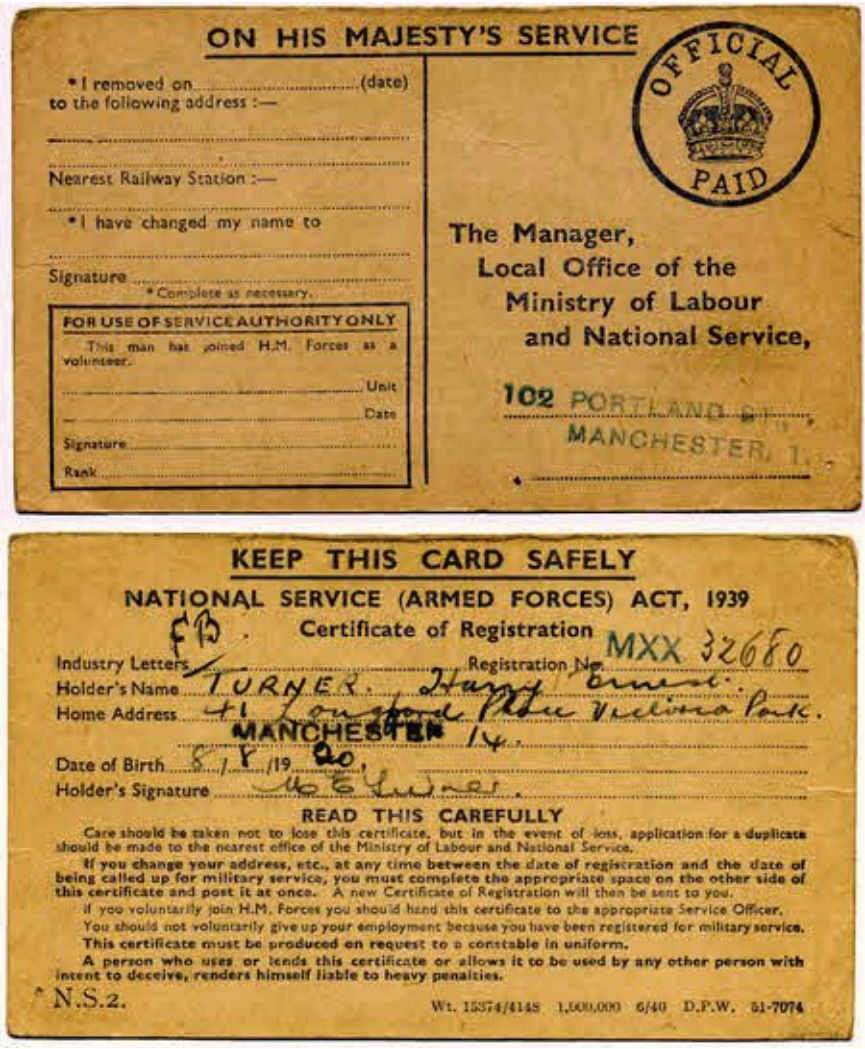
Colour of eyes Hzl Colour of hair Brn

If this Certificate is lost or mislaid, the fact must be at once reported.

The finder should send it to the nearest Local Office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service.

Most people are being called up within a month of receiving a medical, so I resign myself to going early next year. Which concentrates my mind on the Christmas holidays and the possibility of a visit to Glasgow to see Marion. I'd worked a week during my "summer holiday"; in return the firm now promise me an extended Christmas break—five days if I'm lucky, from Saturday the 21st through to Christmas Day.

Too bad I have to report back on Boxing Day morning, but I find there will be an overnight train from Manchester to Glasgow on the Friday night and one back on Wednesday night, which means I can spend the full five days in Marion's company, if she wangles extra time off.



ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE

OFFICIAL PAID

* I removed on ..... (date)
to the following address :—

.....

.....

Nearest Railway Station :—

.....

* I have changed my name to

.....

Signature .....

* Complete as necessary.

FOR USE OF SERVICE AUTHORITY ONLY

This man has joined H.M. Forces as a volunteer.

..... Unit

..... Date

Signature .....

Rank .....

The Manager,
Local Office of the
Ministry of Labour
and National Service,

102 PORTLAND ST.,
MANCHESTER, 1.

KEEP THIS CARD SAFELY

NATIONAL SERVICE (ARMED FORCES) ACT, 1939

Certificate of Registration

Industry Letters FB. Registration No. MXX 32680

Holder's Name TURNER. Harry Ernest.

Home Address 41 Longford Place Victoria Park.
MANCHESTER 14.

Date of Birth 5/1/1920.

Holder's Signature H E Turner.

READ THIS CAREFULLY

Care should be taken not to lose this certificate, but in the event of loss, application for a duplicate should be made to the nearest office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service.

If you change your address, etc., at any time between the date of registration and the date of being called up for military service, you must complete the appropriate space on the other side of this certificate and post it at once. A new Certificate of Registration will then be sent to you.

If you voluntarily join H.M. Forces you should hand this certificate to the appropriate Service Officer.

You should not voluntarily give up your employment because you have been registered for military service.

This certificate must be produced on request to a constable in uniform.

A person who uses or lends this certificate or allows it to be used by any other person with intent to deceive, renders himself liable to heavy penalties.

N.S.2.

Wt. 15374/4148 1,000,000 6/40 D.P.W. 61-7074

A run of air raid warnings at home earlier in the month means I spend considerable time in the shelter, and correspondence tends to be scribbled by hand. Then things ease off, and during the lull, I catch the 1.10 am train from London Road Station as planned, arriving, after a tedious journey, at a wintry Glasgow, in the early hours of Saturday morning. I get a warm welcome at Burnbank Terrace; Marion has managed extra time off over the holiday period, and we have the whole five days together.

We catch up with news about friends, stencil pages for the next issue of Urania, the Junior Astronomical Association magazine, talk about books, play records, go to a concert, talk some more, visit T.L. Macdonald, head of the BAA Lunar Section... altogether a thoroughly enjoyable time.

I doze fitfully on the journey home, vaguely aware that the train is merely crawling along between frequent stops. After some eight hours we have only reached Wigan; something is obviously amiss. We linger in the dark deserted station for an age before, with a sudden jolt, the journey is resumed at a snail's pace.

Marion F. Eadie and Harry Turner snapped by T.L. Mcdonald in Glasgow, Christmas 1940

Rambling through sidings and following a decidedly circuitous route, we steam tardily into London Road Station, to discover that the Luftwaffe blitzed Manchester and Salford on the two nights of Sunday and Monday December 22 and 23, laying waste the city centre with high-explosive and incendiary bombs.

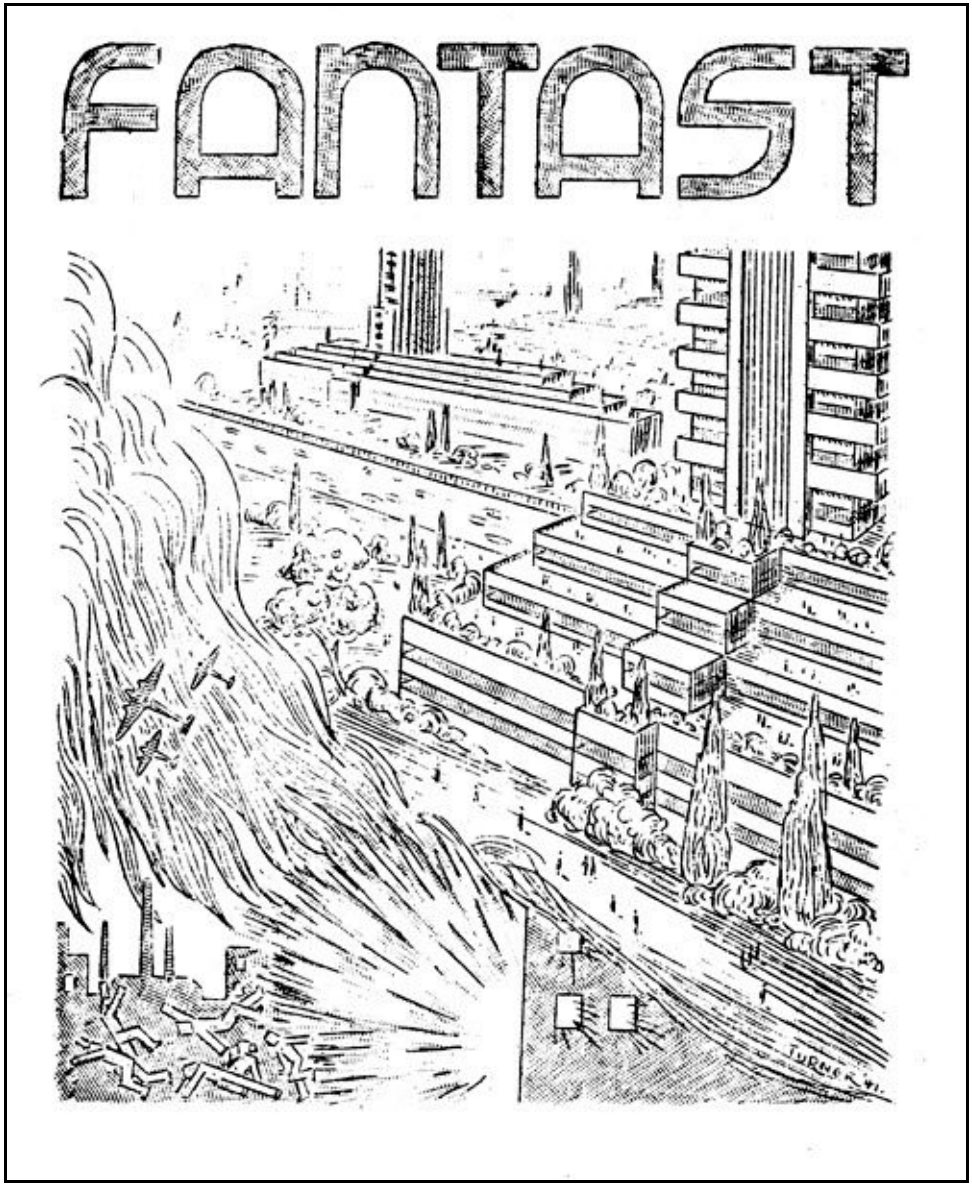
[From *Manchester*, Alan Kidd, 1993; pp. 193-4] The Manchester blitz undoubtedly destroyed much of the Victorian character of the central business district. The devastation permanently disfigured the face of Manchester. For three nights prior to Christmas 1940 the Luftwaffe dropped their incendiary bombs. Before dawn on Christmas Eve, after a second night of aerial bombardment, the whole city was lit by the inferno that ignited the magnificent warehouses of Portland Street and Mosley Street... the fire services could not cope and the Royal Engineers had been called in to blast fire breaks.

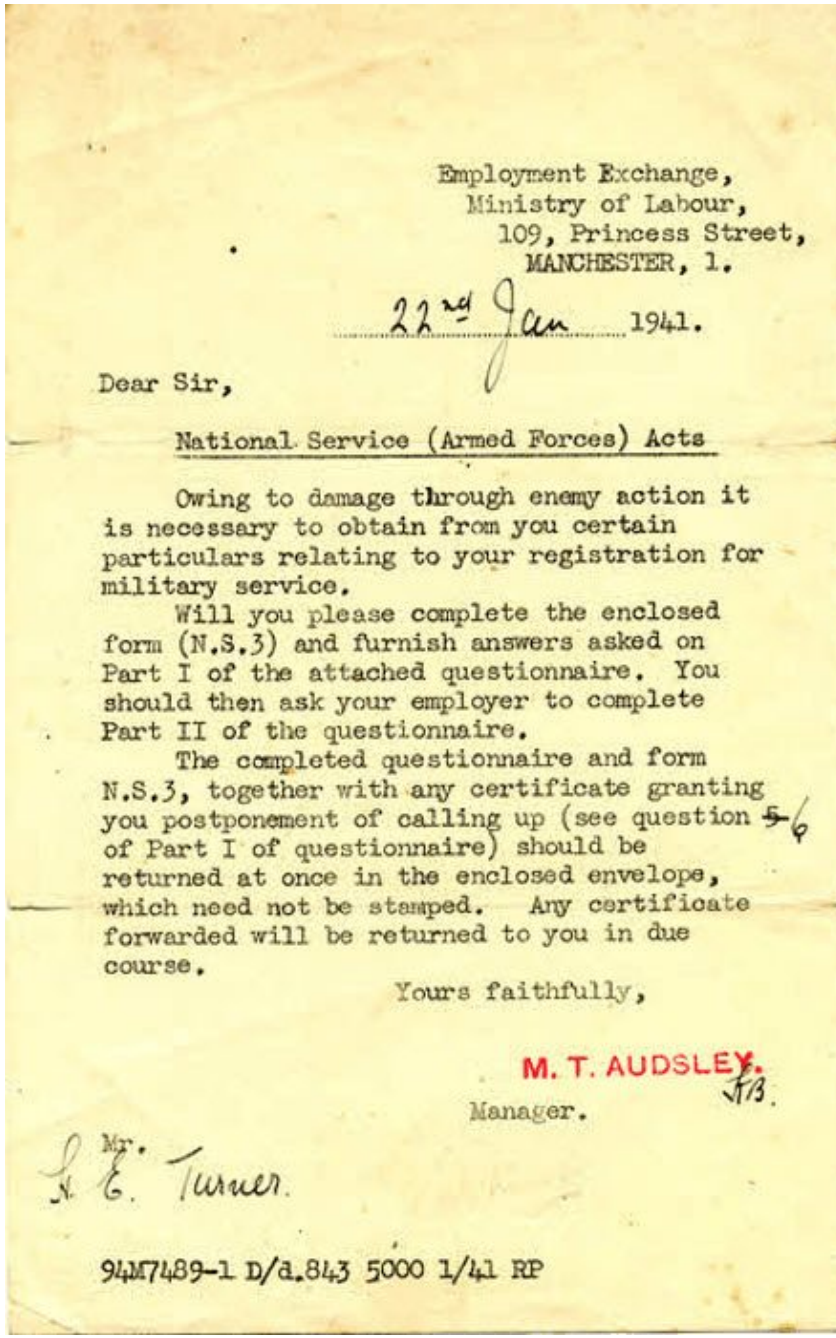
Much of the old Market Place had been hit the previous night. Within a mile of Albert Square, 165 warehouses, 150 offices, five banks and 200 other business premises were destroyed or severely damaged.

1941

2 Feb Had word from Arthur (at Colwyn Bay) who is circulating a chain-letter, Fan Dance, five carbon copies are sent to five fans to fill in any news and then pass on to the next on the list. The sheets eventually return to Arthur, who writes a resume on the next set of letters he circulates. And so on. Linking a score of fans.

9 Feb Drawing Fantast cover—futurist landscape rising out of blitz. Used on March issue: ish also has *Creed of an Atheist*.


FANTAST



Employment Exchange,
Ministry of Labour,
109, Princess Street,
MANCHESTER, 1.

22nd Jan 1941.

Dear Sir,

National Service (Armed Forces) Acts

Owing to damage through enemy action it is necessary to obtain from you certain particulars relating to your registration for military service.

Will you please complete the enclosed form (N.S.3) and furnish answers asked on Part I of the attached questionnaire. You should then ask your employer to complete Part II of the questionnaire.

The completed questionnaire and form N.S.3, together with any certificate granting you postponement of calling up (see question 5-6 of Part I of questionnaire) should be returned at once in the enclosed envelope, which need not be stamped. Any certificate forwarded will be returned to you in due course.

Yours faithfully,

M. T. AUDSLEY.
Manager.

Mr. H. E. Turner.

94M7489-1 D/d.843 5000 1/41 RP

The Luftwaffe bombs Harry Turner's registration records but he hasn't been forgotten!

19 Feb Our romance front page news on Arthur's Fan Mail. FIDO for March 1941 also congratulates HT & MFE on engagement.

April Arthur's call-up to RAF—Sam Youd will continue Fan Mail

July... report of my meeting Ron Lane recently

2 August Eric Needham reported to RAF Padgate.

Letter 4 August: enjoyable weekend at Burke residence. Talkative weekend! See Sam's article in November Fantast for more details...

August FIDO... Mike asks about forming a Futurian Society of Great Britain? First ish of Zenith out mid-August. Marion decides to get a job in Manchester and is actively co-opted on to Zenith editorial team.

21 September... informal London get-together, and some talk about reviving SFA

18 October ... informal get-together in Manchester at which Mike tried to rouse support for new fan organisation but met with much opposition, sparking off first stirrings of the Fanarchist movement... There've been reports in Doug Webster's Fantast that ex-officials of the SFA resisted the attempt of Mike Rosenblum to form the new organisation on the grounds that it will only confuse matters when they revive the older organisation after the war... In view of the splits in Leeds fandom and the London take-over in the early days of the SFA, it strikes several fans that this is just another struggle between control-freaks. The reaction of Marion and me, and folk like Doug Webster and Edwin Macdonald, and John Burke was to oppose all efforts to organise British fans: we were in favour of the existing free and loose relationship, a state of fanarchy.

1942

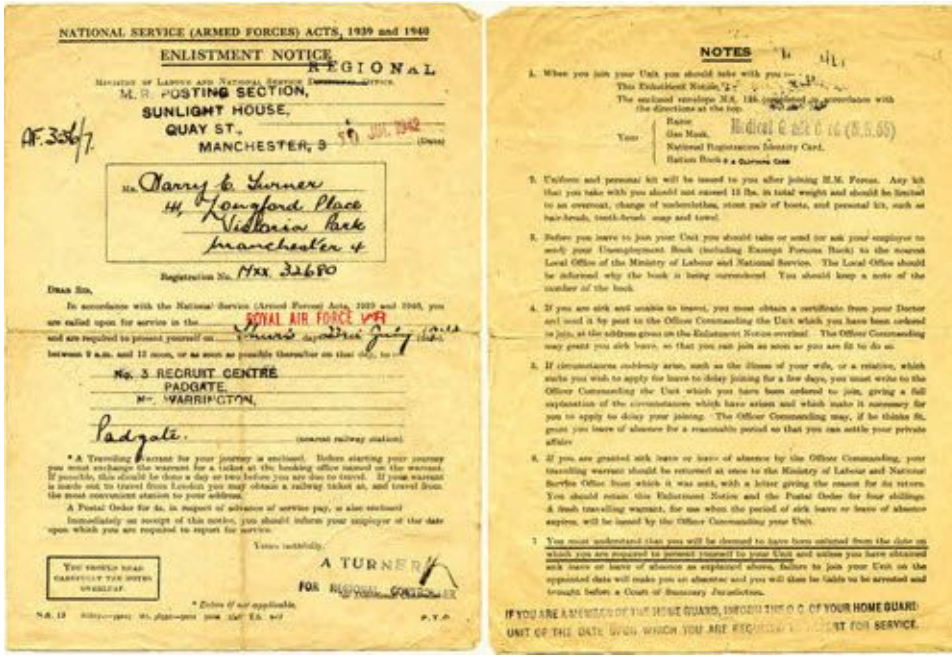
Feb 42 Zenith 4 issued—Ted Carnell's Sands of Time review.

Fantast July 42—Eric Needham's In Search of a Sage reports that for DRS to describe his residence as being in Nuneaton is exaggerating slightly. "He lives in a small row of houses miles from anywhere" (This visit was in February). Also comments about exSFA officials noted above. And BOYCOTT ads... etc.

July 42 FIDO... editorial announces that BFS commences operations from 1 July. Goes on about "Fantarchy", suggesting it might be incorporated as a sort of opposition...

Stop press dept reviews Zenith 5 (April) Londonletter mentions plans to have London visit Sid, Doug, MFE & HT McIlwain... June Z well in hand, and enlarged anniversary issue planned for August...
Guess we got that little too complacent: my call-up has been deferred so long it begins to seem as if it'll never happen.
We plan to get married in July, date tentatively fixed for 25th(?) Then disaster strikes when my call-up papers arrive for that date.
Hastily switch plans get married on 18th before I go into RAF.

Letter from Marion 26 July... Web & Sid call and learn I've been whipped away, and hopes of London visit now dashed. ■



NATIONAL SERVICE (ARMED FORCES) ACTS, 1939 and 1940

ENLISTMENT NOTICE

REGIONAL

M.R. POSTING SECTION,
SUNLIGHT HOUSE,
QUAY ST.,
MANCHESTER, 3

AF.326/7.

Mr. Harry G. Turner
41, Longford Place
Victoria Park
Manchester 4

Registration No. MXX 32690

Dear Sir,

In accordance with the National Service (Armed Forces) Acts, 1939 and 1940, you are called upon for service in the ROYAL AIR FORCE WR and are required to present yourself at ... on Thurs. 30th July 1942 between 9 a.m. and 12 noon, or as soon as possible thereafter on that day, to

No. 3 RECRUIT CENTRE
PADGATE,
Nr. WARRINGTON,

Padgate. (nearest railway station).

* A Travelling Warrant for your journey is enclosed. Before starting your journey you must exchange the warrant for a ticket at the booking office named on the warrant. If possible, this should be done a day or two before you are due to travel. If your warrant is made out to travel from London you may obtain a railway ticket at, and travel from, the most convenient station to your address.

A Postal Order for 4s. in respect of advance of service pay, is also enclosed.

Immediately on receipt of this notice, you should inform your employer of the date upon which you are required to report for service.

Yours faithfully,

A TURNER

FOR REGIONAL COMMISSIONER

YOU SHOULD READ CAREFULLY THE NOTES OVERLEAF.

* Delete if not applicable.

P.T.O.

NOTES

1. When you join your Unit you should take with you the following:—
This Enlistment Notice.
The enclosed envelope M.S. 14b, completed in accordance with the directions at the top.
Your Ration Book, Gas Mask, National Registration Identity Card, Medical Card (B.S.S.65), Clothing Card.

2. Uniform and personal kit will be issued to you after joining H.M. Forces. Any kit that you take with you should not exceed 35 lbs. in total weight and should be limited to an overcoat, change of underclothes, stout pair of boots, and personal kit, such as hair-brush, tooth-brush, soap and towel.

3. Before you leave to join your Unit you should take or send for any employer to send your Unemployment Book (including Exempt Persons Book) to the nearest Local Office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service. The Local Office should be informed why the book is being surrendered. You should keep a note of the number of the book.

4. If you are sick and unable to travel, you must obtain a certificate from your Doctor and send it by post to the Officer Commanding the Unit which you have been ordered to join, at the address given on the Enlistment Notice overleaf. The Officer Commanding may grant you sick leave, so that you can join as soon as you are fit to do so.

5. If circumstances suddenly arise, such as the illness of your wife, or a relative, which make you wish to apply for leave to delay joining for a few days, you must write to the Officer Commanding the Unit which you have been ordered to join, giving a full explanation of the circumstances which have arisen and which make it necessary for you to apply to delay your joining. The Officer Commanding may, if he thinks fit, grant you leave of absence for a reasonable period so that you can settle your private affairs.

6. If you are granted sick leave or leave of absence by the Officer Commanding, your travelling warrant should be returned at once to the Ministry of Labour and National Service Office from which it was sent, with a letter giving the reason for its return. You should retain this Enlistment Notice and the Postal Order for four shillings. A fresh travelling warrant, for use when the period of sick leave or leave of absence expires, will be issued by the Officer Commanding your Unit.

7. You must understand that you will be deemed to have been enlisted from the date on which you are required to present yourself to your Unit and unless you have obtained sick leave or leave of absence as explained above, failure to join your Unit on the appointed date will make you an absentee and you will then be liable to be arrested and brought before a Court of Summary Jurisdiction.

IF YOU ARE A MEMBER OF THE HOME GUARD, INFORM THE O.C. OF YOUR HOME GUARD UNIT OF THE DATE UPON WHICH YOU ARE REQUIRED TO REPORT FOR SERVICE.

The RAF sabotages the wedding plans

Lost Memories & Speeding Time

Got another batch of Futurian War Digests from Vinç's archives and am currently seeking out snippets that may be useful in writing up the period. Forgotten about an SFA reunion held at our house in October 1941 – I remembered the Webster called around that time, but there was also a get-together with John Burke, Mike Rosenblum, Ron Lane, Julian Parr and Doug, plus Marion and self, as well. Interesting.

Erik Needham (this must have been the period when he adopted the more exotic spelling!) had reported to RAF Padgate in August of that year, went to Filey for training; I was expecting to follow him but had a reprieve when the local records office was hit in the May blitz, and it took them ages to get around to reregistering me for call-up.

Eric Frank Russell went into the RAF at this time and Sam Youd was whisked into the Royal Corps of Signals, as was Ken Bulmer. The ranks were getting depleted, hut it didn't stop Mike complaining that fans weren't returning the chain-letters he sent out about forming another fan society. Hard to imagine there was a war going on out there when you read thru some of these mags... Surprised myself with some of the Fide covers I did but completely (and mercifully) forgotten in ensuing years.

[I've] managed to finish a piece on impressions of Bombay, despite the busy weekend, for Jim's initial [Literary evening] class. While I feel I'm winning there, other things have been piling up – more fanzines from Vinç, for example. I'd mentioned to him that I was convinced I'd done several covers for Space-Times apart from the Christmas-stocking-&-plastic-spacenen one but he said he knew of no others.

Then out of the blue Greg Pickersgill sent him some surplus fanzines, including a green&brown covered ST, with plant-men carrying off a lady astronaut and zapping the hero, so that shook his confidence and he's now on the lookout for more. As always, I remembered this one when I saw it, but wonder how many I've still forgotten; I seem to have been more prolific than memory reckons.

Still waiting for final approval of the proofs of the LEWISLETTER from the Toronto-resident author. And Steve has just sent me the finished version of AE: The Seven Wonders of the Universe poem reprint booklet I've been working on for him. Oh yes, and that Transcaucasian Railway Post hock has seen print at last. So I've things to catch up with and letters to write...

No bloody wonder time seems to speed by.

to Fran & Brian Varley, 1990s

How I missed the 1943 Midvention

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 sympathise, 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 organise 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 1942, 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.

There've been reports in Doug Webster's *Fantast* that ex-officials of the SFA resisted the attempt of Mike Rosenblum to form the new organisation on the grounds that it will only confuse matters when they revive the older organisation after the war... In view of the splits in Leeds fandom and the London take-over in the early days of the SFA, it strikes several fans that this is just another struggle between control-freaks.

The reaction of Marion and me, and folk like Doug Webster and Edwin Macdonald, and John Burke is to oppose all efforts to "organise" British fans: we are in favour of the existing free and loose relationship, a state of fanarchy. ■

"*Time is what keeps everything from happening at once.*"—Bob Bloch

Initiation into the RAF reveals that one person's Meaningful Coincidence is just another's Acausal Connection

When the Royal Air Force conscripts me to help defend the British Empire from the threat of German nazism in the darker days of the war, I report with other recruits to Padgate, an RAF camp near Warrington, where I part company with civilian niceties. Kitted out with an ill-fitting uniform and bits of equipment I am bundled off to the east coast seaside resort of Redcar to undergo basic training in military etiquette.

At Redcar, Harry Turner 2nd from left in middle row

There we are billeted in rows of empty terraced houses commandeered between High Street and the Promenade. Nineteen of us are crammed into a neglected residence in Henry Street, with just room for beds and our kit, and left to cope with an erratic water supply, broken washbasin, light switches dangling dangerously from walls, and a shortage of light bulbs. Hectoring corporals and sergeants attempt our rapid transformation from weedy civilians to models of military efficiency through the rigours of exercise, drill, and naked threats of personal violence. We are marched and wheeled in untidy formation on the promenade, initiated into the intricacies of arms drill, sent off on gruelling route marches in full gear, providing a diversion for the few bored but resolute holidaymakers who struggle in from Teeside despite wartime travel restrictions.

It is a hot dry summer and as a relief from the sweaty parades we are given the freedom of the deserted beaches for physical training sessions and high-spirited games, all indulged under the envious eyes of watching civilians. They are restrained from joining us by the vicious coils of a barbed-wire barrier piled up to deter attempts at seaborne invasion.

The fact that our squad is based in Henry Street seems of little moment until the day I venture round the corner and discover myself in Turner Street. Suddenly it becomes an amazing coincidence that I should be moved right across the British Isles to finish up on a spot where adjacent streets echo my name: Henry Turner. At a time when we are having all individuality battered out of us, it strikes me as an event that just has to hint at some deep hidden significance.

For days after, I bore my mates regularly during desultory conversations at breaks in the NAAFI canteen, worrying about this profound coincidence, but few are impressed.

Of course, in that far-off time I am unaware of synchronicity, a term introduced by the Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung to describe a "meaningful coincidence", which he prefers to think of as an "acausal connection" rather than the result of cause and effect.

We tend to seek a cause for every effect, but Jung maintains that this ingrained belief in causality only creates intellectual difficulties, because it makes it seem unthinkable that causeless events can happen.

Out of the blue, you may think of an acquaintance you've not heard from for ages, and then the phone rings, and guess who it turns out to be... Or you learn a new word—like "synchronicity" perhaps—and suddenly it begins to catch your eye in every paper, magazine and book you happen to pick up. Apparently life is full of such surprising coincidences.

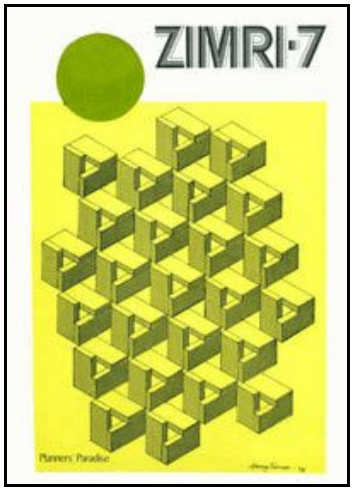
Some scientists now tell us that while cause and effect tie together many events in our world, there are also events which happen for no apparent reason at all. According to quantum theory, reality as we know it is the result of mutual interaction between the objective world and subjective observers.

While cause and effect set up certain resonances and patterns in time, synchronicity arranges those resonances in step with one another, a complex pattern of events that characterises life as, somewhat bewildered, we live through it.

Thus, in 1973, during an exhibition devoted to illusion in art and nature at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, I did some work for a competition seeking new examples of optical illusions. Months later, when I raided the accumulated sketches for ideas for paintings, I found I had overlooked the potential of an accidentally misdrawn geometrical figure.

From it, I was able to devise an isometric structure that looked convincingly three-dimensio-nal on paper though, logically, it defied realisation as a solid object. I developed this paradoxical figure in a series of drawings, one of which was snapped up by fanzine editor Lisa Conesa as a cover design for Zimri. She also

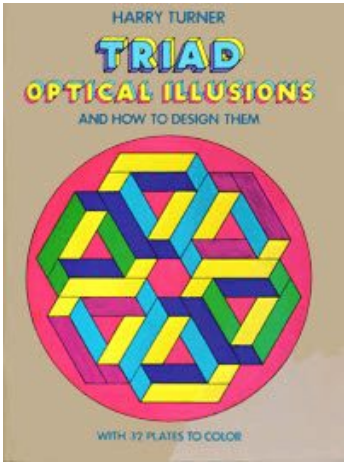
prevailed upon me to write an article explaining my chance discovery. And that seemed the end of that.



A year later, a letter arrived from Howard Lyons, a Canadian fan with whom I'd long been out of touch, and I enclosed a copy of the magazine article with my reply. It was not until early 1976 that Howard, an amateur magician in his spare time, wrote to say that he'd passed a copy of the article to a fellow member of the Magic Circle, Martin Gardner.

Gardner, then editing the Scientific American, expressed an interest in seeing more examples of my 'impossible objects', and I was happy to oblige since the idea had developed into an infallible method of generating infinite patterns.

A mention in his column and the reproduction of some drawing must have caught the eye of the president of Dover Books in New York, who wrote asking if I'd be interested in producing a book of 'impossible object' drawings.



In next to no time, all my proposals had been accepted and I was busy working on the project. I guess the concept of cause and effect is deeply ingrained in my thinking since, on publication of the book, I found myself expressing my appreciation to the editor, my Canadian friend, Martin Gardner and the Dover president as a dedication, as prime movers in the fact that my ideas saw print.

But I also recognise that, lurking in the chain of events related here, there are just too many happy coincidences to be ignored. ■

Initiation Take 2

After producing that New Year card, I was tempted to take the story of my initiation into the RAF back to the days when I first registered and had a medical—that goes back to December 1940, when call-up usually came about a month after the medical. I spent Christmas at Glasgow with Marion, arriving back to find that Manchester had been blitzed for a couple of nights in my absence...

Rereading letters from the period to try and get the facts in order, I realise that from then on I led a charmed life. My records were destroyed in the blitz so I

belatedly fill in another set of details some months later, and prepare again for the inevitable. Manchester had another blitz in May 1941. Yeah, you guessed it: my records were destroyed. I fill in yet another set of forms and grit my teeth, but nothing happens.

Nothing happened for so long that I began to think I had a Guardian up there looking after me. Marion, meanwhile, owing to the problematic transport situation, decided to come and live in Manchester and got a job in the local transport offices, and that was when *Zenith* prospered, when Mike got illusions of grandeur and wanted to form another national fan club, and Fanarchy reared its rational head.

I was working at a chemical plant at that time, and began to assume that my continued delay in call-up was largely due to that fact. Come mid-1942, we decided to get married. My call-up papers promptly arrived for the same date we had decided to go to the registry office, so as there was no hope of delaying call-up on compassionate, or even passionate, grounds after all that delay, we brought the ceremony forward a week before I was due to leave for Padgate. Such is the skeletal framework in which I have to fit the story of the rise and fall of Fanarchy in wartime fandom.

Wow, almost enough material there to write a novel, I guess. But I shall restrain myself for the nonce. Anyway, it's got me started on some writing again. Hot drinks time, and your comment on the adhesive properties raises memories of momentous struggles when I first came out of hospital with the Bovril habit. I found the only way to get easy access to the mixture was to soak and wash the plastic lid free of all remnants of the extract, and ensure the bottle-top has a good wipe. Once done, and the earlier the better, all struggle ceases as thereafter the lid comes off like a dream. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 06 January 1997

Sounds of Music in the Midlands

Harry Turner is in the 2nd row from the front sitting, 2nd from right

"After my initial training period, I was sent on a six-month radio course at Birmingham College of Technology and early in 1943, half-a-dozen of us were despatched to Yatesbury for training on radar gear. We were in civvy billets, and the group tended to split up into classes. The RAF HQ was an office in the centre of Brum, housing the C.O. and a small staff, so official parades were few & far between.

"It was all very relaxed for wartime. There were no forms available for weekend passes—we each wrote out a copy of the official form to be signed by the C.O., and the idea was that they were collected in after each trip. In practice, I think everyone kept the handwritten passes when they left Brum—if you were on a 'crafty' and had to cross the bridge linking platforms at New Street station, they were handy to wave at curious SP patrols.

"Looking over the group in the end-of-course class photo, I could remember most of the faces, even if several names have now eluded me, but I couldn't place the bloke who towers over Tubby on the left of the pic [3rd from left]. Alas, this is the most badly faded part of the photo, but I do seem to detect a certain resemblance to the photo in the obituary for Air Commodore Frank Padfield (d. 2004/01/15).

"Can it be that he was on that Brum course with me before arriving at Yatesbury? Wow! Long live synchronicity..."

Fresh from my square-bashing initiation the RAF despatches me to Birmingham College of Technology for a basic radio course. It's a welcome breather to return to big city life after exile in the back of beyond; even wartime Brum has its

attractions, and I can't believe my luck at exchanging the rigours of our last derelict quarters for the fleshpots of civvy billets in downtown Edgbaston. I promptly contact a local fan I know, Arthur Busby, currently serving in the National Fire Service, and still at home.

One damp chilly evening later Arthur guides me through the blackout for a fan-meet with Tom Hughes. Tom lives alone in a solid Victorian suburban residence. He's a mite older than me, an enthusiastic collector of science fiction since the late twenties, and proves to have a more practical bent than most of us young dreamers. Ushered in out of the raw autumnal atmosphere, thawing out with mugs of hot cocoa, we find he's been converting a monumental-sized mahogany display cabinet, picked up cheap, into a magnificent bookcase, occupying most of one wall. I think of the clutter of books piled in cartons around the room back home and feel quite envious. We chat as we help him rehouse his library, an extensive collection of fantasy and sf, well-thumbed text books, and cherished files of American pulp mags: vintage copies of *Amazing*, *Wonder* and *Astounding Stories*, treasure trove for any devotee of the genre.

I am inclined to linger, drooling, over this feast. Then Arthur lets slip about my musical interests. Tom grins and beckons us into an adjoining room. It is filled with his record collection: hundreds of 78s, in cardboard sleeves, neatly stacked and filed in metal racks for easy access. The top of the nearby sideboard is occupied by the chassis of a five-valve amplifier and assorted transformers, linked to a gramophone turntable perched perilously on a chair seat, and to a solid-looking box housing the loudspeaker, sited in front of the chimney-piece. A toolbox crammed with soldering-iron, pliers and assorted tools, coils of wire and a miscellany of spare electrical components, conveniently props up copies of technical periodicals on the floor.

It seems that Tom is an enthusiast who spurns the low standards and compromises of mass-produced wind-up portable gramophones or the glossy veneered boomy radiograms of the day, and aspires to using the latest technology to coax the highest quality sound from his carefully-groomed shellac records. He is one of a rare breed (rarer even than sf fans) and proudly gives us a run-down on the merits of his home-built state-of-the-art reproducing equipment. He switches on: the valves flush and glow with life.

In the pause while the system warms up he asks "What d'you fancy?", waving a hand at the confusingly large choice of records spread before us. We peer at the labels. Tom's taste in music seems catholic, the emphasis on orchestral works; we leave it to him. He starts off with some ballet music by Tchaikovsky, and the room fills with enchanting sounds. He needs no further prompting but has another record out of its envelope as fast as the first finishes. Perhaps my only criticism is that the volume control seems to range from loud to louder; the place fairly vibrates under the impact of a climax from the full orchestra. Fortunately, the dead weight of all that shellac stored on the racks, while no doubt straining the floor

joists, effectively damps any unwanted resonances generated while the system is operational. Conversation ceases completely when the music is in full blast—you just listen. Momentarily I wonder how Tom gets on with his neighbours. He cheerily assures me that they are stone deaf.

In between records we debate briefly the finer points of the art: whether to use metal needles that wear out the record groove with repeated playings, or fibre thorns that preserve the record but clutter up the groove as they disintegrate in use; what angle the needle should preserve as the playing head is lowered on to the disc; the relative merits of different classes of amplifiers. Arthur remains aloof from the discussion; I guess he's heard it all before.

For our final record of the evening, I put in a request for Liszt's *Dante Sonata*, a piece which evokes fond memories of visits to view the Sadlers Wells Ballet with Marion. He turns the volume right up and motions us back into the library, leaving the connecting door ajar so, he explains, we can hear the music "in better perspective". We agree that it certainly adds to the ambience...

I walk back to my billet late that night, mind awash with music, a ready convert to Tom's aspirations of high fidelity sound. At the college next day, I astound the tutor with a galvanised interest in the course, hound him relentlessly for practical details of achieving good sound reproduction, file it all away for the day when the war is over and I can, hopefully, begin to catch up with the good things of life. ■

Hitching, December 1942: Manchester to Birmingham

It was a surprise when the very first lorry I thumbed pulled up, a milk lorry that went through Knutsford. We picked up a fellow-traveller, making for Cosford camp, outside Wolverhampton, who commented on the dearth of traffic—it seemed we'd chosen a bad day for hitching lifts.

We ambled along the main road after our transport turned off into a farm, and peace descended over the countryside. Just as we ran out of conversation there was the welcome sound of approaching traffic from behind us. This time it was an RAF vehicle, with a 60-ft trailer holding a wingless bomber.

I found a padded seat in one of the gunner positions, and had a very comfortable ride. Soon there were half a dozen of us occupying strategic positions in the fuselage, out of the way of drafts and the occasional downpour of rain. The miles zipped painlessly by and we arrived in Stafford shortly after 2 pm.

Having got halfway to our destination in so short a space of time, we were optimistic, hanging about hopefully between short walks, but no further vehicle materialised. We decided to set out walking to Cannock, about ten miles off. We toiled on until an RAF van pulled up alongside us and gave us a bumpy but welcome lift for about seven miles before it had to turn off the main road to get to a drome.

We continued walking, reaching Cannock about 4.15, in time to board a bus about to depart to Wolverhampton. We passed nothing on the road and commented on our luck in catching that generous lift to Stafford and speculated on how far we'd have progressed if we'd missed it. By which time we'd arrived in a dusky Wolverhampton and parted company.

I gave up any thoughts of hitching and went in search of a Birmingham-bound bus, arriving in Five Ways just as it was getting really dark. ■

"SAUSAGE TOWN PLAN TOWED IN A HOLE"

■That outrageous headline in *The Guardian* of 13 June 1988, and the story of a community project "to revive the old Wiltshire sausage town of Calne", roused fading memories. Calne happened to be the nearest village to the wartime RAF Yatesbury camp which sprawled along the Chippenham-Marlborough road to within walking distance of the Avebury Stones. In those days, the economic mainstay of Calne was the mighty Harris sausage, pie & bacon factory, now demolished. But in wartime Harris's prospered and their products figured prominently in the daily menus of the Yatesbury canteen.

Their bacon and bangers relieved the monotony of a diet otherwise based on baked beans; their pork pies proved to be a delicacy that satisfied trencherman and gourmet alike... noble-size pies, freshly baked, with a glazed crusty pastry that melted in the mouth and a succulent spicy solid meat filling. A treat I sorely missed when I moved on in my RAF career.

Even now, decades later, I feel the digestive juices flowing with the memory of coming off night duty, marching with the squad along the mile or so separating technical site and main camp, to invade the canteen in the early hours before the rest of the camp stirred and tuck into freshly-delivered Harris's pies, cut into generous slices, supplemented with tomatoes and bowls of Original Branston pickle...

It was one of the supreme consolations of life in trying times.

After completing a lengthy radio course at Birmingham College of Technology, enjoying the comfort of civvy billets, I was among those posted, at the end of February 1943, to Yatesbury Radio School, in deepest Wiltshire, to continue working on more hush-hush developments...

Months before, while training at Redcar, I'd had a postcard from Arthur Clarke, then stationed at Yatesbury. I wondered if he was still here. I had a fleeting glimpse of a corporal who was his double, in charge of a squad that marched past me while I was being pushed around in those first few days, but adjusting to camp routines, familiarising myself with the geography of the place, and then being put on a night shift, meant that several days passed before I was able to track him down.

He was billeted in a block of huts not far from my quarters and when we did meet, all our spare time that morning was spent exchanging news. Enquiring after Marion and the demise of the Junior Astronomical Association, he announced that he's giving a talk on rocket propulsion at a camp meeting at the end of the month. He seemed well-organised, had his typewriter with him and, looking to the future, kept a file of all potential British Interplanetary Society members he met. Taking me into the store room of the hut, he thrust a small telescope through the drawn blackout curtain to project an image of the sun on the opposite wall. There was a large sunspot group visible which we studied with interest until the sun disappeared behind a drainpipe.

Harry Turner [back row, 3rd from right] and his class at Yatesbury Radio School, 1943

That afternoon he gave a gramophone concert—Elgar, Walton, Dvorak, Borodin—in the camp recreation room, and roped me in to help with the records. We had two turntables, so that we were able to fade-in the 78 discs, avoiding the usual pause for the turning-over of record sides, and giving a welcome continuity to the music. We carried on playing records long after the audience had departed. After the rich musical life of Birmingham I thought that it would be dead here, but the officer in charge of the camp is musically minded so we get record concerts every Tuesday and Sunday evening.

Our later meetings were sporadic owing to the vagaries of changing duty shifts. But in the weeks that passed, music provided a welcome break in routine, between technical training and the inevitable grind of admin 'bull' and fatigues. I became aware that a significant proportion of the instructors happened to be performing musicians, discreetly retained from the stream of trainees passing through the school to become mainstays of the resident station orchestra. I commented on this when writing home to Marion:

Last night I went down to the music circle with Arthur... as well as the gramophone concerts, there's a station orchestra (with several ex-members of the BBC Symphony) which plays occasionally. When we got back to the huts Arthur left me with his telescope while he went for a shower. I had to balance the tube against the doorpost and crane my neck to get a peek at Jupiter before searching for the comet, which I picked up eventually... Evidently Arthur is a familiar figure hereabouts, since several passersby in the darkness made cracks like 'old Rocket Clarke up to his tricks again'. Which reminds me to ask if you'll bring along any new copies of the Scientific American *when we get together. Arthur would like to see 'em as he's not been able to get hold of any copies for ages.*

Marion's reply included mention of a steady stream of *Astonishing Stories* that had been arriving at home from an anonymous source; she didn't rate the contents very highly. We suspected that they were a tongue-in-cheek contribution from Doug Webster. When I mentioned this to Arthur it turned out he'd been starved of current sf also. I hastily wrote to Marion to say that I'd found a way of disposing of the pulp-mags, and to send them on before Arthur changed his mind.

Arthur was a keen member of the current affairs discussion group run on the camp under the watchful eye of the welfare officer. Around the time I arrived a series of talks on the postwar world was planned, with speakers including Ellen Wilkinson, the Labour politician, Ivan Maisky, Soviet Ambassador in London, and Winant, a US diplomat. I was also introduced to an independent discussion group—held in the neutral territory of the YMCA hut to evade the control of the welfare officer—run by an ardent marxist who was also planning a wall newspaper. Arthur had been inveigled into writing a series of science articles for this and, as he'd given me a glowing testimonial as an artist, I soon found myself designing headings and doing cartoons for the page displays. But time for these diversions was restricted by the demands of working on the night shift.

When eventually I switched on to a day shift things didn't improve. The big advantage of night working was that you dodged daytime routine fatigues; now my name started appearing on duty lists. One boring chore was lighting the heating stoves in the instruction huts on the tech site early in the mornings... I doubt if any chimney pipes had been cleaned out since the huts were first built; the fires never drew, and smoke billowed out of every crack and crevice until the stoves began to glow. It didn't help that we had to collect the wood for kindling the day before, from an old chalet nearby, wood that was absolutely green and damp as a wet blanket, so that initial efforts at fire-raising merely carbonised the surface layer before the wood went out... We needed lots of paper to dry out the wood and start it burning before there was any hope of starting combustion of the near fire-proof coke provided as fuel.

Scrounging around for the thin wartime dailies that were our main source of

reading matter conflicted with the urgent need to hoard copies to cover newly-polished floors prior to weekly hut inspections. Fortunately two Canadians billetted in our hut received papers regularly from home, big 100-page weekend issues with umpteen pages of comics. Slow progress in coaxing recalcitrant stoves to working temperatures was eased by being able to catch up with the adventures of Little Orphan Annie, the Gumps, Bringing Up Father, the Katzenjammer Kids, and other familiar friends of younger days. But fatigues tended to expand to fill the time available, as I complained in a letter at the month end:

Not only were we fire-lighting on Monday but had to go on parade early for a session slinging rifles about, and then a PT period heaving heavy logs around. By the time I got to the Radio School for instruction I was worn out. Most of the class were yawning and dozing off during the lectures. After all that, on my return to the main camp, I was put on guard duty that night. So I was glad to get to the music circle for a change and a rest last evening. Arthur was in charge again, so I gave him a lift with the records though unfortunately one of the pick-ups had been damaged and we had to manage with a single turntable, so it was a bit more stop and go than usual without the fading-in of sides. After all my recent exertions I tended to doze off now and again. However, Arthur has a habit of turning up the volume until the sound waves almost knock you over... which kept me alert enough to cope with record changes. Needless to say all requests from the front rows to turn down the volume were ignored...

It was a welcome break to be excused fatigues after a series of inoculations for something-or-other, but I promptly lost interest in life with a throbbing arm and the sight of fellow-sufferers agonising around me. The music circle was cancelled as concert pianist Marjorie Few, who had been playing with the London Philharmonic at nearby Marlborough, was persuaded to give a recital at the station theatre before returning to London. I decided not to go, still feeling groggy from the inoculations, but Arthur came in, panting, all enthusiasm, to collect me. So I went, enjoyed Beethoven, Rachmaninov, Chopin, and Liszt and felt all the better for it...

Arthur's talk on rocket propulsion was due the following Wednesday, and I was invited to write an unbiased report for the wall-newspaper—by Arthur himself. He drew a big audience, mainly technical people, and spent most of the time answering questions from the floor. There were arguments raging all over the camp for weeks after the event, with 'Spaceship' Clarke being regarded as a genius or a complete nut-case!

Shortly after, around mid-April, Arthur was told he'd be sent on an officer training course in a matter of a week or so. We were both kept busy trying to catch up with each other's reading material before parting. I described the frantic activity to Marion:

Spent most of this evening waiting for a haircut, and reading The Glass Giant of Palomar *in a hurry before Arthur departs. When I called on him, I found him lying on his bed with sf mags on one side, the book on Lowell propped up in front of him, and the* Scientific Americans *buried under some laundry at the other side. He picked up an* Astonishing*, flicked through the pages briefly and then heaved it into his locker, seized the Lowell book and started to career through it at the rate of sixty pages a minute. Then with an impatient snort he dug out one of the* Scientific Americans *from under the pile of clothes and started to skim through Russell's article. Inadvertently he knocked over a pile of letters, cursed, leaned over to stop the avalanche, caught sight of me at the door, beamed heartily and explained that he'd just finished Russell's article and thought it particularly good! He tickles me; he's so impetuous, always in a devil of a rush to do innumerable things. Strangely enough, he does seem to get a lot done—or at least leaves that impression.*

I called on him one evening a short time later, to be treated to the spectacle of him packing. He had three large suitcases and his kitbag spread over the floor, kept whipping things out of one and into another, only to change his mind and reverse the process a few seconds later. The whole process was slowed down by the discovery of forgotten things at the bottom of the cases. We carried on a conversation separated by a mounting pile of Arthur's possessions. Eventually he disappeared behind it altogether, though I could hear him cussing mildly in between exchanges of opinion. I left him to it and crept back to my hut. When I met up with him in the canteen at supper, he was immersed in a book of war verse; apparently packing had been suspended after he unearthed this treasure.

I began to wonder if he would ever get away, but was able to report to Marion towards the end of the month:

I managed to skip through the rest of The Glass Giant of Palomar *in time to pass it back—sad that the war has held up further progress after most of the difficulties had been surmounted. The money spent on experiments with fused quartz for the mirror was enough to have bought the 60" Yerkes telescope and equipment, yet the experiments weren't successful. Hale's efforts at getting money to back the 60", 100" and 200" telescopes certainly would sound well-nigh incredible in a novel. The BIS could do with engaging the services of someone with Hale's persuasiveness... Arthur has departed. He came dashing in just as I was breakfasting in bed this morning. He's going to Cosford, near Wolverhampton, for the next six weeks, but has no idea where he'll go from there. He did have hopes of returning here when he'd got his commission but apparently the prospect is remote...*

As a parting gift, Arthur returned all the copies of *Astonishing*. Fortunately an orderly corporal spotted them on a duty visit, eagerly asked to be put on the 'waiting list', and eventually carted them all away. At least they found a good home!

Leisure activities seemed to fall apart after Arthur's departure. The music circle went into decline when all musical forces were mobilised by the commanding officer for a production of a Gilbert & Sullivan opera; the guiding genius behind the wall newspaper was posted and couldn't find a replacement editor; a new welfare officer resolutely cracked down on the more extreme political elements of the discussion group... But I had my head down, coping with the last few weeks of my technical course.

When I came up for air I was a qualified ground-radar mechanic. I expected a prompt posting to one of the coastal radar sites, but instead was switched to the permanent staff at Yatesbury, to spend the rest of that year carrying out maintenance on equipment at the technical site. ■

Take 2: One way out... (1943)

As I recall, Arthur's bid for a commission was tied up with the hope of getting through as a technical officer, with the promise of joining the boffins working on radar developments—at RAF Malvern, I think. It was all basics and training at the Yatesbury school, a long way removed from the experimental work that was currently going on, and Arthur had ambitions to twist radar techniques to space navigation even then!

After Arthur's departure from Yatesbury, the CO organised productions of some Gilbert and Sullivan opera, which dominated all Music Group activities, and thus ensured my absence. So the discussion group tended to take prominence as a ding-dong battle started up between Stalinists (officially tolerated, as the USSR was our ally) and the Trotskyists (anathema to officialdom, natch).

Both sides ganged up on a very junior officer supposed to keep an eye on our activities and report back to the Welfare Officer, since we were operating in the neutral area of the YMCA. The leading Trot occupied the next bedspace to mine, and had a locker full of subversive literature as well as an extensive library of 4th International paperbacks. After the debates and fights had gone on unchecked for some time, Frank was stricken down with 'flu and spent some time in the camp hospital, after which he was granted some sick leave.

I'd just come off the night shift and was in bed the morning he was due to go, when there was a visit from the Orderly Sergeant who announced that Frank would have to have a kit inspection before he put his possessions in store. When Frank was halfway through laying out his stuff on the bed in approved fashion, the camp CO arrived, with a small entourage including the Welfare officer.

Frank started to apologise for not having his kit ready, but was then requested to open his locker. The CO then had a field-day, ordering the sergeant to remove all the books and literature. Frank, ever the barrackroom lawyer, insisted on having a list of everything that was confiscated...

Eventually, he got off on leave. However, on his return he was promptly posted to St. Athan, and a month or so after that, I had a letter from him saying he was back in civvy street, having been given an honorable discharge from the RAF, and was now stirring up industrial unrest... Got all his papers back, too! All this in 1943, too. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 8 July 1988

Melville

INSTEAD OF CATCHING UP with some expected and long-delayed leave at the end of a freezing January, I find myself reporting for a gunnery course. I am working on ground radar, moving around small RAF installations on the east coast. Life has been made uncomfortable for us recently by enemy fighters tagging, undetected, behind returning bombers in the early morning hours, then sneaking down to shoot up the cluster of huts and telltale aerial masts of operational sites.

We miss the RAF Regiment, formed to protect airfields and installations, but moved to Europe after D-Day. Technicians are now expected to deal with these surprise calls by manning spare Browning guns, salvaged from wrecked bombers and hastily rigged up at strategic points. In view of our amateur status as gunners, we are despatched at discreet intervals to train on a range near Langham, on the Norfolk coast. My name's just come up.

Freezing white mist smothers the countryside the day I travel down to Peterborough. There's a long wait until the connecting train steams off at a snail's pace, lingering at every hamlet along the way before sliding to a halt at Thursford station, nearest stop to the camp. A score or so airmen jump down and assemble on the platform, to be greeted by a muffled-up WAAF driver and escorted to a covered lorry in the station yard.

—Stow yer gear lads, while I finish me tea, she calls, disappearing into the warmth and light of the station office where she is being entertained by a sociable porter. We wait impatiently in the growing dusk until she eventually clambers into the cab. The engine, which has been quietly ticking over, promptly sputters and dies. The petrol tank has run dry; by the time it's refilled, the engine has cooled

and refuses to restart. Grumbling, we disembark and for a hectic period, slipping in the snow, push the lorry up and down the yard in a fruitless effort to get it going. A voice suggests the driver phone for another lorry before we all freeze to bloody death.

Obstinately, she insists we push the vehicle on to the road to see if it will start on the downhill slope. After fruitless argument, a few pragmatists shunt the truck out of the yard, only to get stuck on the level crossing. They promptly announce they are pissed off and will do no more. A wit suggests they only have to wait for the next train to dislodge the stalled transport. At this the WAAF panics, pleads for one last effort. A concerted heave skates the lorry safely on to the road, amid wild cheers, just as the gates begin to close for an approaching train.

But the engine remains stubbornly dead. In desperation the driver phones the camp from the station office but nothing can be done until another lorry is due to pass the station later. Most of our party promptly disappear with the WAAF in search of a pub, which she swears is only a mile down the road. When the relief vehicle arrives, it is already well filled, and once the baggage is loaded there is scarcely room for us to squeeze on. We abandon the pubcrawlers to their carousing.

Langham is a dispersed camp, with isolated huts and sites scattered every few miles along the way. A godforsaken dump attest the inmates as our truck crawls cautiously along the icy road, dropping people off in the darkness near their billets. On arrival at the orderly room we are welcomed with grub and hot drinks before being led to our quarters, an empty Nissen hut huddled in the corner of a desolate field. Lighting the solitary oil lamp reveals a token scuttle of fireproof RAF coke beside a cold stove, but after manhandling all the kit nobody has the energy to try and light a fire at so late an hour.

We make up our beds but the blankets provided are worn and thin, offering little comfort against the all-pervading chill. In desperation we roll ourselves in the blankets fully clothed, and are dozing fitfully when the rest of the party staggers in at some unholy hour, singing cheerily, bringing a blast of frigid air and provoking howls of protest from those abed.

A vigorous banging on the corrugated iron wall of the hut rouses us next morning. Gray light filters through the blackout over the end windows and it seems colder than ever. After a painful icy-water shave in semi-darkness, I coax a dull gleam on muddied boots, bestow a token rub on the brass buttons of my greatcoat, and hope I'll get by on parade. My rumpled uniform is hidden under the coat—I pray the creases will drop out in time.

We look a sorry lot lined up outside the hut for cursory inspection by a sarcastic sergeant-instructor. A hard-bitten regular of dour countenance and upright bearing, he views us with open contempt as we shuffle into formation before marching down to the cookhouse. Over breakfast the consensus is that Sergeant Melville looks a mean bastard.

—You can wipe that smile off yer face, he calls out. I glance round to see who has caused offence.
—I'm talking to you, yer supercilious sod.
He's glaring at me. I'm told when my mind wanders during moments of boredom a seraphic smile creeps on my face, a smile that disciplinarians invariably interpret as dumb insolence. I hastily try to cover up with a serious frown.
—Just watch it, laddy, comes the dark warning as we move off to the armoury.

The whole of that first day is spent stripping down a Browning gun, then reassembling it, following the sergeant's lead in the ritual of the naming of the parts, chanting in unison: this 'ere is the sear, this 'ere is the sear spring, this 'ere is the sear spring retainer, this ere is the sear spring retainer keeper... And on and on until every bit and piece has been named and its precise location memorised. Then everyone has to perform the ritual solo. Melville is persistent and impatient, harshly correcting faulty memories and fumbling fingers. After all the parroting, the litany stays with you for ever.

By the time Melville releases us to the glacial comfort of our billet someone has scrounged some old newspapers, another salvaged a broken packing case from a rubbish dump. A fire is lit in the stove, pieces of coke dropped in and coaxed to a glow. We huddle round, grateful for the warmth, heat some water, make a brew, and later are able to wash in comparative comfort. Sleep comes easier that night.

Next morning things improve as a watery sun creeps out of the clouds, though the sergeant's craggy face remains bleak as he marches us down to the beach. Twin Browning guns, mounted on a swivelling frame, are positioned in a sandbagged post on the shoreline. An ancient biplane drones over the sea, towing a drogue for our practice. Melville spends most of the day putting us through the routines of sighting and guiding the unloaded guns to follow the drogue as it passes through the firing arc.

We return the following day, handling live ammunition, working in couples, one manning the gun, the other checking and feeding the ammo belts. Basically, all that Melville demands is that the gunner faces the aircraft as it approaches on its run, sights on the drogue and follows it, firing the guns as it moves across, but ceasing well before the tail of the plane is in danger of being shot off. As a precaution, your mate slaps you on the back as warning when this crucial part of the traverse is reached.

It doesn't work so well in practice. Some gunners seem dazed by the heavy pounding of the guns, trigger-fingers become inextricably locked so the guns continue to blaze away despite frantic back-slapping. Then Melville curses forcefully and fluently, manhandles the culprit off the guns and hurls him to the ground before any damage is done. This happens several times—a nerve-wracking spectacle when you are standing by, stamping your feet in the cold, waiting your turn.

Melville looks drawn, chewing his lower lip as each lunatic goes up to the firing

bay. I'd had problems the day before, when my metal-rimmed specs kept snagging the padded gun sight. Firing live ammunition brings fresh problems. I align the drogue in the sights all right, but the moment I start firing, the violent recoil hammers my face into the padding with such force that my specs frame is moulded round my skull, the lenses press on my eyes and effectively blind me. So I automatically stop firing in good time, with no danger to the volunteer pilot up aloft, out of an urgent need to bend my specs back into shape before the plane makes its return run. Prepared to be bollocked by Melville I step back into the group, am surprised instead to hear a terse word of approval for 'good control'.

I watch him as the session drags on, tense and taut, eyes momentarily rising heavenwards at some fresh gaffe by a trainee. As a raw and reluctant recruit to the wartime RAF I formed a low opinion of n.c.o.s in charge of drill, weapon training and assault courses. Sadists all, I decided. Then later, experience made me realise just what these people had to contend with: what Melville faced as a matter of daily routine.

I recall instructors on the practice ranges, coping with nervous idiots with semi-paralysed arms who weakly lob live grenades too close for comfort or in a dread moment, agitatedly drop them in the throwing bay after pulling out the priming pin, disaster averted only by the prompt reflex disposal of the threat by an alert instructor. I begin to feel some grudging respect for the sergeant as he makes us double back along the frozen lane to the camp at the end of that afternoon.

Our relationship with Melville remains distant. He bullies us for the rest of the week on that lonely range on the seashore. Protected by the sergeants aggressive way with incompetents, the pilot happily survives our murderous attentions. When we mark the end of the course with a half-hearted booze-up, Melville ignores our invitation to attend. He obviously sees little to celebrate faced with the prospect of yet another squad of incompetents arriving the following week.

Back at the radar site, I am still pressing for action on the matter of overdue leave when my course report filters through.

—See you've been recommended as a Browning instructor, grins the orderly room corporal, handing me a slip of paper.

—You must be joking!

But he isn't, though I suspect that Melville had his tongue stuck firmly in his cheek when he signed that chit... ■

Melville Explained

Did I ever look as though I was cast for the role of Browning instructor? I guess 'Melville' put that on all his reports in the hope that he might find someone to take his place at Langham... My qualification seemed forgotten when I was posted overseas shortly after that episode. Fortunately.

Can't actually remember the sergeant's name after all this time, but for some reason a fragment of Herbie Read came to mind "Melville fell/forty fathoms Melville fell" when I was casting for a name, so Melville he became. It was after I finished that I remembered that one of the corporals in our billet was called Melville—a white-faced, Liverpudlian of limited vocabulary, who made the words 'fuckin' and 'whorin' work hard for him in conversation, so much so that after a while they just didn't register with the listener.

I recall we had a version of *Deep in the heart of Texas*, sung by the hut choir after extended NAAFI celebrations, which had a verse for every member of the hut by name, with the refrain 'on Melville's fucking bed-space' replacing that of the original.

The only bit that now comes to mind is: 'It was Osbaldeston/ who pissed in the mess-tin/ on Melville's fucking bedspace'—the gent named having once been the worse the wear, and got out of bed in the dark, lost his way to the ablutions, found his way to Melville's locker, opened the door and let it go, then found his way back to bed; the dread crime was not discovered until Melville went to get his mess-tin to go for breakfast...

Most of the verses perpetuated some such escapade. Don't ask me about my verse—it is mercifully erased from my memory. Melville, I seem to remember, was an electrician who worked in the radio school, a firm believer in the legend that exposure to the micro-radiation from the big transmitters made you temporarily sterile, and used to lie on top of the amplifier end before he disappeared on a crafty weekend home.

When I think back to the power of same of that old gear, it's a wonder he wasn't cooked. As a snap check that you were transmitting, mechanics used to hold a thumb-nail near aerial leads: a crackling blue spark meant that it was working (and usually meant a hole in your thumbnail).

However, this practice was discouraged after some mechanics tried it when a faulty condenser meant that they got a hefty DC charge running through them with fatal results. Thereafter, all testing had to be done with a neon at the end of a wooden stick....

I haven't written that episode yet—not sure what reception it would have with the respectable lady writers at Jim Burns' writing class. ■

(December 1993)

More Memories: Ingoldmells, Ingoldmells . . .

1944, A double anniversary of a tug-of-war year between matrimony and the R.A.F.

During the TV news recently, a map flashed on the screen showing the location of Ingoldmells, which roused an old RAF memory. There used to be a wartime radar station in that vicinity, whose name began a popular ditty among radar mechs on convivial occasions... sung to the tune of "Jingle Bells" it reeled off the names of a galaxy of coastal stations, starting thiswise:

"Ingoldmells, Ingoldmells,
Gaitnip I and II,
Dimlington to Beachy Head,
And Stoke Holy Joe"...

The list was never-ending (we radar mechs were a well-travelled/pushed-around lot) and, in retrospect, I guess the detailed and rash listing of all these secret establishments would have been a gift to any spy within hearing distance !

Indeed, looking back on those fraught times, I am astounded by how "easy-going" security often was—during 1944, I met an American science fiction fan over here with the US forces; we got together in Lincoln, and he and his mate returned with me to Cranwell camp, where they stayed over the weekend in our hut, sleeping in beds temporarily vacated by people on leave, feeding with us in the canteen and generally using camp facilities.

But on one queried their presence in all that time. ■

to Peter Ashford, May 2004

Lincolnshire, 1937

Well, I hope that some of your queries about what fans wore in 1937 were answered when you saw the snapshots I sent in for "Embryonic Journey". As Arthur Clarke celebrated his 20th birthday that year, you'll have to try a few years earlier to catch him in short pants... The big question now, as raised by Mal Ashworth, seems to be why Ego was the only fan wearing an overcoat at the Con.

North Kelsey looks really isolated on the map – I wonder which little blob of black you live in – and I guess it is when the snow comes down. There's a lot of countryside around you and it looks pretty flat. My memories of Lincolnshire, dating back to a wartime stay at Cranwell, are that it's big & flat & covered with air fields. Happen you don't have all those air fields now, which is as well if you go driving around in all these giant vehicles.

There were occasional happy fannish times at Cranwell. I met up with several American fans in the services including Gus Willmorth, who spent a few days in our billet on one occasion without any queries from the security police. But most of the time I seem to have spent all my 'spare' time sloping off home on crafty weekends, hitching a lift on stray RAF lorries (there were a lot of 'em on the roads carting mangled bombers for cannibalisation) or falling back on the services of the LNERailway and the mighty Lincolnshire Road Car Company.

I recall one occasion, when the raids had been frequent and trains delayed, a mighty swarm of RAF types surrounded the Lincoln depot of the LRCC way after the time had passed for the last bus out, and a lonely inspector was arguing with a rowdy mob clamouring to get back to the various camps before lights out, protesting that he couldn't get the drivers.

He eventually retreated in the face of the opposition. The buses were occupied, volunteer drivers found and a convoy set off along the winding Lincolnshire roads, dropping off troops as they passed a camp. I often wondered where those buses finished up, and whether they got back to the depot. ■

to David Bell, 20/02/1987, printed in his zine The Eagle of the North

Thoughts on Guns

Thanks for Eagle, in which I find myself cast in the unexpected role of Muse... I too find myself annoyed by the obscenity of pasteurised TV violence offered as entertainment. where jokers like the A-Team randomly spray automatic weapons to create havoc with the environment without, apparently, any corresponding effect on its inhabitants.

My experience with Sten guns was that they were dodgy things to handle; mass-

produced to low standards. In India, after VJ Day, we used them to go hunting – the occasional peafowl was a welcome addition to rations – and safety catches and rate-of-firing catches were so susceptible to mishandling, that the 'hunters' were often in more danger than the prey.

As a raw & reluctant wartime recruit to the RAF, I hated handling weapons and had a low opinion of n.c.o.s in charge of weapon training & assault courses. (I did modify that attitude in the ensuing years when I realised just what these n.c.o.s had to contend with – especially in the practice ranges, coping with nervous idiots with semi-paralytic arms who lobbed live grenades too close for comfort, or even in the heat of the moment dropped grenades in the throwing bay immediately after pulling out the priming pin.)

My later service experience of small-arms was limited since I became a radar mechanic, though while at Cranwell, doing maintenance at the radio school, I had a few uncomfortable experiences when we were visited by German fighters several times in the early morning hours. They dodged the radar defences by tagging behind a flight of returning bombers, and then dived down and used the approach road to do a firing run on the cluster of huts and aerial masts at the technical site.

Some Browning guns were hastily rigged up at strategic points to try and cope with these surprise calls, and we had to report for extra defence duties. In view of our amateur status as Browning gunners, we were sent on individual courses for a week at a range at Langham in Norfolk. I was rereading some of the letters I sent home at the time and see that my turn came at the end of January when there was a thick white mist everywhere on the morning of my departure from Cranwell. (Typical Lincolnshire weather ?)

That played havoc with the train service, but left me with a few free hours in Peterborough, waiting for connexions. Apparently I met another bloke on the way to the course who flogged me a 7/6d book token for 5 bob (the token was a gift and he needed the money more than books he said). So I acquired three Penguins, and still had sixpence change, as they say.

The next train went straight through to Thursford, the nearest stop but started 35 minutes late and stopped at every hamlet en route. We shivered in an unheated compartment & watched the desolate snow-covered landscape creep past until darkness descended. There were a score or so RAF types, plus kit, already on the platform when we arrived.

A large RAF lorry eventually arrived and we all piled into the back, then waited for half an hour before the WAAF driver decided to start for the camp. The engine, which had been ticking over all this time, promptly spluttered and conked out. The cause appeared to be an empty petrol tank, though by the time the tank had been filled, the engine had cooled down and wouldn't restart. So we spent the next half-hour manhandling the blasted lorry up & down the station yard in a fruitless effort to get it started.

We suggested she rang up for another lorry, but with all the uncomplimentary

remarks flying, around our driver turned obstinate and insisted we try to push the van on to the road to run down a hill see if that would get the engine running. So we shoved the thing out of the station yard and got stuck on the level crossing – it took ages to manoeuvre it on to the road, with complications when the gates tried to close on us for an approaching train!

Our efforts proved unavailing, so our WAAF got on the phone. It turned out that no transport was available but hopefully another lorry might be passing later.

After a hurried consultation, half a dozen of us stopped to unload all the kit from the broken down lorry, while the rest set out in search of a pub, a mile or so along the road. This was around 9.30 pm. Fifteen minutes later a lorry rolled up, crowded with bods going to Langham. We squeezed ourselves and all the gear aboard, and decided that that the pubcrawlers could be collected later.

We were told that the camp was only 5 miles from the station – it seemed more like 60 with the lorry crawling at a snail's pace because of mist and icy roads. Langham is a 'dispersed' camp which means that there are bits of it every few miles – a godforsaken hole...

We arrived at the office, signed on, and thankfully had some supper and hot drinks before being shown to our quarters; a damp, chilly, empty Nissen hut with a solitary stove in the centre, and a small supply of coke under the snow outside. Our blankets are worn-thin things after the full-sized issue at Cranwell – we slept in our clothes to avoid the all-pervading chill, after the other wanderers turned up around midnight.

The next day was spent pulling Brownings to pieces, an art which I had already acquired at Cranwell, so things were not too bad. Maybe this place would not be so off-putting in the summer; we were fed up with the lousy weather and the inevitable bull of a course – my boots and buttons had not gleamed so brightly since my Redcar days.

I still have memories of the ritual "naming of the parts"...

> "This 'ere is the sear, this 'ere is the sear spring, this 'ere is the sear spring retainer, this 'ere is the sear spring retainer keeper..."

It sticks with you forever, like your service number, after all the parrotting. Fortunately, the weather cleared up when we were due to go on the beach practice ranges, and we had some sunshine, though the outlook remained bleak and wintry.

Some brave pilot was found to fly an ancient biplane towing a drogue at which we were encouraged to fire live ammunition. I was wearing issue metal-rimed specs in those days, and as the gun fired, the recoil pushed my head into the padded sight with such force that I finished up half-blind because my specs were wrapped closely to my skull's contours.

We were supposed to fire over a limited arc, your mate slapping you on the back once the target had passed these limits, so you stopped fire. I usually stopped in good time because of the urgent need to bend my specs back into shape again

before continuing. But some blokes got so trigger-happy they went on firing despite being clouted vigorously, and had to be dragged bodily from the gun by a fantic instructor, before they shot off the tail-plane of the receding plane.

Like you say, the ultimate responsibility lies with the person who pulls the trigger.

Sorry about all the wartime reminiscences. Blame it on Mal Ashworth and the CONception. I was encouraged to read through old letters in search of fannish items and found myself catching up with wartime experiences that I'd half forgotten. Oh yes, and when the report on my course came through, I was recommended as a gunnery instructor. It took me a long while to live that down. But enough... ■

to David Bell, 12 April 1987

Never volunteer . . .

Since I tracked down the whereabouts of Church Farm after first making your acquaintance, those little black blobs on the map of Lincolnshire have gradually begun to be transformed into a mental landscape after the revelations of goings-on in North Kelsey that have appeared in *TEOTN* over the past few months.

I imagine most conscripted folk in the forces endorsed the 'never volunteer' principle. But most times, when services above and beyond the call of duty were demanded, we were not given any options about 'volunteering'. There were always means of making you volunteer, like the threat of all sorts of 'orrible consequences if you didn't volunteer.

With me, I had problems whenever admin people found I had 'artistic talent'. Thus in one camp I soon found myself unwillingly scaling a large water tower with the object of painting a vast "Salute the Soldier" savings campaign poster. At another, I was co-opted to help out a WAAF Tracer in the Radio School, who couldn't keep up with the demand for drawings of circuit diagrams for instructional purposes.

We really got that drawing office organised; one of the few times when volunteering brought some personal benefits; because we caught up with the backlog of work and got so far ahead of demand (without telling the admin office, natch) that we were able to take time off and get out of camp for a while. One of us stayed in the drawing office to cover up while the other sloped off. We got too organised, of course; we'd worked up to disappearing on long crafty weekend visits home and were planning longer periods of unofficial absence when I got a posting overseas. But it was good while it lasted!

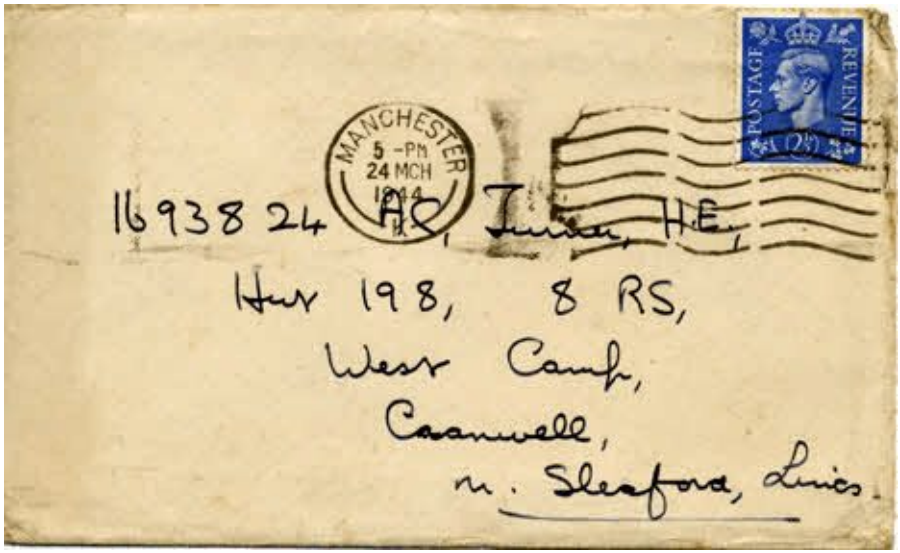
Which reminds me that while in India, at a transit camp, waiting for a posting after a stay in hospital, I got so bored that I rashly volunteered when a call came for 'ticket & sign-writers'. I expected that a few posters were wanted, but it turned out that the job was painting scenery and making props for the play *Rope***. The

camp CO was keen on amateur dramatics, and had organised the show in Bombay, so four of us were shipped out to a small makeshift theatre and left to get on with it after brief instructions from the local ENSA wallah.

I remember assembling a ramshackle box to hold the body from an old packing case and canvas, and doing a great job of painting the graining so that it looked like real wood off-stage. The ENSA bloke was so thrilled with our efforts that he promised to wangle us on to his staff permanently. Inevitably my expected posting promptly came up and I was despatched far from the fleshpots of Bombay... ■

to David Bell, 24 July 1987

** *Rope* by Patrick Hamilton is a gruesome thriller based loosely on the Leopold and Loeb murder case. Two students murder a fellow student as an expression of their supposed intellectual superiority. They hide his body in a chest then hold a party for the deceased's friends and family, using the chest as a table for a buffet.



Envelopes from letters sent to Harry Turner at RAF Cranwell in 1944 (above) and in 1945 (below). Note the Victory cancellation on the May 1945 letter.

"Crafties"

Your suggestion that the station pic could be Peterborough sounds likely: that angled platform roof didn't fit in with my memories of the old M/cr and L'pool stations. During my stay at wartime Cranwell, I spent considerable time changing trains at Peterborough station, but no memory of its geography remains, probably because nothing ever happened beyond the usual delays.

It was different with other stations: a fair number of trips home during RAF service were "crafties", without a pass, dodging off when there was a convenient gap in duties, and from hearsay you got to know which stations were haunted by Special Police, and ways of dodging their attentions. Like at London Road (as it was before it became Piccadilly),

I recall that if it was an unofficial journey, it was essential to dodge through the barrier, get out on to the approach, and whizz down a circular staircase that used to be there, opening on to London Road, before any passing military police noticed I hadn't got my respirator, and wanted to see my pass. (If you tried to get out of camp with your respirator, the guardroom wanted to check you had a pass). What a complicated life it was...

And I have vivid memories of old B'ham New Street, with all the platforms connected by a central bridge, swarming with SPs looking out for dodgy travellers. When I was stationed there on a radio course (and in civvy billets) we used to take great pleasure in keeping the SF's busy checking our ID as we walked across, in the hope that it gave someone on a "crafty" chance to dodge past undetected.

Yet there were some stations, like Sheffield, that were extensively used by AWOL

rail travellers crossing the Pennines without any hindrance: I often wondered if some authorities deliberately turned a blind eye to a certain amount of undercover travel.

What the hell got me started on that bit of Memory Lane? Oh yes, your photo. Your suggestion that the photographer was Eric the Bent seems likely, as he was close to the Shorrocks in those days, and likely to be one of the party. Right, so that's sorted until any facts to the contrary turn up! All, there's still that fella in the trilby... ■

to Brian Varley, October 1998

CONTENTS

The War Years : Part II—With the RAF in India

The RAF eventually sent Harry to India as a radar technician as an alternative to 'enjoying' the doubtful delights of early parenthood following the birth of his first son, Philip, in May of 1945. The whole thing seems to have started off as a great adventure, which turned sour when the gang reached India and found that even though the war with Japan was over, they were still required to assemble and operate top secret and temperamental radar equipment, which would never be used.

In India, Harry discovered the paintings and poetry of Amrita Sher-Gil, who was the inspiration for a character in one of Salman Rushdie's novels. Some of Harry's photographs have been used to illustrate this volume. The watercolour sketches which he made in India, and the drawings and paintings which they inspired back in England, have been collected in a separate volume.**

The machinations of the post-war Labour government kept Harry and his colleagues stuck Out East (where the RAF famously went on strike over the slow pace of repatriation) until well into 1946. But they did get home eventually.

** Harry Turner: An Artist In India, published by Farrago Books, 2009

1. No Pleasure Cruise

We travel up by train from Blackpool to Clydebank, to be herded on to our vessel in the fading light of the summer evening. In the general turmoil, strait-jacketed in full gear, juggling bulky kitbag over one shoulder, rifle slipping off the other, preoccupied with dodging the kitbag bobbing in front as we scramble from the dockside up metal gangways to the main deck, I don't get a clear view of the ship.

Just a glimpse of weathered crusting grey paint and large patches of rust, an impression that it's a small boat for a long voyage. Then we are harassed by flustered n.c.o.s attempting to impose order on the chaos, split into small groups, sent clattering below decks to stash guns in the armoury, collect life-jackets and hammocks in their place.

Bolstered by these new acquisitions, we lumber along ill-lit narrow passages, bouncing off unseen projections, tripping over unexpected doorway sills, in search of our quarters. All we've been told so far is that we've boarded a Dutch cargo vessel converted to duty as troop carrier —name sounds like the 'Boissevane' but don't ask me to spell it—while a delicate silence prevails about our destination. Though on that point most of us feel that the lectures endured before embarking on this trip, touching on the perils of jungle warfare and ways of dealing with fiendish Japanese booby-traps, must be relevant.

Scuttling down confined stairways, subdued by the fact that we're well below the waterline, we emerge into what has once been a cargo hold. Now it's roofed over by wide rectangular hollow metal beams, just about head high, carrying ventilation ducting, electrical wiring and sundry bits of hardware and piping, the space that's left intended as storage for kitbags and gear. Rows of long tables with solid wooden benches are fixed across the floor on either side of the central gangway. This is where we eat and sleep for the duration of the voyage.

Gratefully I ease out of constricting webbing and small packs, heft my kitbag into the nearest beam, wedging it with respirator, tin hat and other trappings to stop it rolling out, and find that the life-jacket provides a comfortable cushion on the hard bench while I get my breath back. Taking advantage of the lull, the deprived bring out carefully hoarded dimps and light up. A corporal promptly sticks his head round the entrance, sniffs, and bawls out the smokers before giving us a few practical tips on the secure slinging of hammocks between the beams, over the tables, at nights.

He also hands out duties: I find myself among the orderlies allotted to the sergeants' mess deck, to cart meals from the galley, clear away, keep the place tidy, and do anything else they think up, a job that I'm doomed with until our arrival at foreign shores. As we sit around, talk, and weigh up our new surroundings, more squads come staggering through the rear doorway, noisily re-enacting our

pantomime of settling in. The place begins to feel cramped and confined. I dream that night of being Jonah in the whale, with company.

At breakfast next day I claim a corner at the gangway end of the table. Seated next to me is Nick, a quiet character with a ready smile. We became acquainted while struggling to master wayward hammocks last night, though I have a conviction I've met him some place before. Sitting opposite is an older man, listening, amused, to our earnest exchanges about proxy votes in the imminent general election and debate about how far votes from overseas troops will affect the results, just waiting to chip in. He introduces himself as Jack, turns out to be a fellow left-winger.

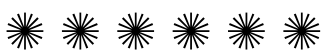
Out of the blue he asks "Are you two brothers ?" and seems surprised at our denials. Then I realise why Nick looks so familiar to me; we have more in common than metal-rimmed specs and a drastic RAF short-back-and-sides—facially and in build we are look-alikes, though Nick can give me perhaps an inch in height. It turns out that we are both in our mid-20s, while Jack admits to 39. We are aghast that anyone so ancient should be posted overseas at this stage in the war; Jack agrees vehemently.

The first few days afloat are lost in relentless time-filling routines. Fatigues, lifeboat drills, physical training, medical checks, lectures, inspections, more fatigues, near total distraction while we struggle to get our sea-legs. At sea for the first time in my short life, I find the sight of a vast watery sheet stretching to far horizons impressive, am intrigued by the infinite patterns traced out by the foam of the ship's passage and the endlessly shifting hues of the sea as the day changes. But it soon begins to pall. Then we slip out of a calm but cheerless Bay of Biscay to round Gibraltar in darkness, awake to find ourselves in the Med, sea and sky a stunning cobalt blue, the sun warm and bright. Our spirits soar with the temperature.

An easing of routines means we get more time to ourselves, though this is no pleasure cruise even if the war in Europe has just ended. We are deprived of news of the outside world by an imposed radio silence. The few books I brought with me are long read, and it's impossible to get anything from the ship's library, which was emptied early in the voyage and nothing ever returned. The ship today has laundry festooned from every available support, fluttering over decks littered with pallid sun-worshippers. In the evening some enthusiasts are moved to put on a show, a spontaneous slap-dash affair that goes down well with all who manage to get within earshot.

There's no peace, no escape from the eternal noise of people talking, arguing, shouting, singing; tannoy speakers ceaselessly blare out orders and instructions; every loose bit of metal on board rattles in sympathy with the ever-present vibration of the ship's engines. It's worse below decks where the mechanical rumble is amplified in the enclosed space and, despite the hissing of over-worked ventilators, it's stuffy and claustrophobic.

Any break in the monotony is welcomed: dolphins leaping alongside, the passing of a fishing vessel, an ethereal coastline glimpsed on the horizon, all provoke a rush to the rails. When we pass an island, amateur navigators drag out tatty maps, relate guestimates of speed with the passing of time to decide that it's Pantelleria.



There is excitement aboard when we pause at Port Said to refuel and take on fresh grub before entering the Suez Canal, but no one is allowed off ship, and a welcoming fleet of bumboats, loaded with fruit and other temptations, is routed by a crew member with a well-aimed waterhose. We stare disconsolately from our isolation across the docks toward modern-looking buildings and dream of a half-forgotten past life spent on dry land. The only scenery in our immediate vicinity is a pipeline and some artificial-looking palm trees, more like a shoddy film set than the real thing.

When we start down the Canal, it is at a leisurely pace; even so, we create a miniature tidal wave in our wake that races and tumbles along, threatening to wash down the built-up side banks. The whole landscape has a certain technicolor intensity and brilliance under the glare of the sun, red weathered sandstone hills on the one side, flat dusty desolation on the other, while the yellow sandy bottom turns the shallow canal water to a luminous grass green.

We glide sedately toward the Great Bitter Lake, passing isolated military sites on the bank, whose inmates gather to cheer us on, exchange insults, tell us we're going the wrong way. . .

Once we invade the tropical waters of the land-locked Red Sea we long to return to the pleasant dry heat of the Canal and Gulf of Suez. The oppressive humidity here saps both patience and resolve. To crowd into our submarine quarters for meals is like being immersed in a tank of warm water; with temperatures shooting into the upper 80s, groaning ventilators do little to ease matters. Up on deck where we listlessly parade clad only in shorts, obligatory life-jackets hooked over one shoulder, it's only marginally better.

The surface of the sluggish sea, sparkling with fragmented reflections of the overhead sun, heaves and radiates heat like molten metal, looks solid enough to walk on. Some of us are near mad enough to jump overboard and try it.

At night there is a general exodus to sleep on the hard boards of the open deck, stretched out on blankets, life-jackets a convenient pillow. Before dawn crackling flashes of lightning precipitate showers of warm rain; though it's still pitch black I know I have to rise to start fatigues —we are cheated of half an hour's sleep now and again just to catch up with time as we travel east—and take a short cut through the recreation room, stumbling over recumbent semi-nude bodies to get below decks.

I grin as Jack's definition of a recreation room comes to mind: a room set aside for the recreation of the troops, but closed in the morning for cleaning, closed in the afternoon for briefing lectures, closed in the evening while the welfare committee deliberates, and used as sleeping quarters in between times.

I start my daily stint between the cooks' galley and sergeants' mess and realise that I have at last become inured to the smells, grease and scurrying cockroaches. Later I try to keep a straight face at hearing heartfelt complaints from Nick and Jack who are among sleepers caught out by the crew zealously hosing down the decks as part of early morning routine. Being on fatigues has advantages after all; hope they get their blankets dry.

We round the tip of Arabia, visible through the haze as distant pink hills slashed by mauve shadows, and the weather freshens as we move down the Gulf of Aden. At first the change is a welcome relief, then the going gets rough as we run into the monsoon winds of the Arabian Sea.

The ship develops a leisurely roll that introduces an element of hazard to meal times, when full tea urns tend to slide gracefully along the tilting table top, scattering plates and cutlery. Occasionally, insecurely stored kitbags roll out of overhead racks on to the diners below.

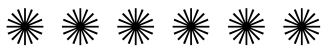
It's worse at night. Each table has a set of metal utensils for bringing food from the galley—vast pans for morning porridge, bulky urns for tea, an assortment of metal jugs and bowls—usually stacked against the side walls when not in use. Now the rolling has reached the point that sends these dishes careering across the floor between the tables to the opposite wall and, after a brief pause, tosses them, clattering, back the way they came, creating an unending racket that makes for a restless night.

I am with Nick measuring the degree of roll as the ship sways from side to side by noting the fluctuating level of the contents of a half-empty bottle of brown sauce laid on its side on a table, when Jack comes down from the decks looking decidedly queasy. He shows no immediate interest in our experiment, but hastily slings his hammock and clambers into it. Once isolated from the ship's motion, he recovers enough to suggest that if we're such bloody keen scientists we should get up on deck and see things at first hand.

We go, staggering along the gangway as the floor alternately rises under our feet and then disconcertingly falls away. All portholes on the upper decks are clamped shut, and we begin to entertain doubts about venturing out on to the apparently deserted deck. We don't stay long; the view is awesome. The horizon zooms heavenwards while the ship seems bent on diving into the deeps in free fall, rolling askew as it slides over the water, then the bows heave toward the sky as the horizon abruptly drops out of sight...

We hastily turn about and struggle down to the bowels of the ship, giving Jack the grim satisfaction of seeing us crawl into our hammocks to recover. At such moments you appreciate what a boon to humankind, especially travellers on the

high seas, the hammock can be. You lie back and the world sways and swings about you: your hammock becomes the only stable point in an insecure and very fluid universe.



It is when the winds die down and some calm descends and people drift back on to the decks that the rumours begin. If all the reported sightings are to be believed, then the Arabian Sea is swarming with Japanese submarines, though I never meet anyone who has actually seen one. In the broad light of day it's easy to dismiss it all as imagination and suggestion.

Waking at dead of night brings the thought that it's just possible there's a genuine sighting buried in the hearsay. Brooding over the distance and convoluted route between hammock and deck, I rate my chances of surviving a torpedo attack as pretty low. I drift off to sleep again swearing that if I succeed in setting my feet on dry land I shall never go to sea again.

Eighteen days after setting out from the Clyde, I go on deck after taking the sergeants their early morning cuppas to find that we are surrounded by fishing boats, with a city skyline looming out of the mists. The word "Bombay" passes round and the rails are soon crowded with people attracted from below decks, all obviously as relieved as I am to have survived the threat of the Jap underwater navy. A request via the tannoy for everyone to return to stations is cheerfully ignored in the excitement.

The announcer gets stroppy, sternly declares that this is an order and must, repeat must, be obeyed immediately. By the time we are allowed back on deck, shouldering re-issued rifles and weighed down with our possessions, the ship is at the dockside, where a military band braves the steadily falling monsoon rain to serenade us with an unappreciated welcome.

We disembark, to assemble in the shelter of a vast shed. Over my shoulder I catch a final view of our ship, now a scruffy disappointment against other vessels in the harbour, as we shuffle through the downpour to clamber aboard a convoy of covered trucks.

One of the drivers waves a damp newspaper and shouts that Labour have won the general election, but we are too wet and miserable to do more than register that fact as we depart in a shower of spray to the RAF transit camp at Worli. ■

2. Bombay Blues

Don't see much of the city, peering from the shelter of a dripping canopy as the convoy speeds through the monsoon downpour. Glimpses of tall modern buildings

along the seafront; glimpses of well-stocked shops and ritzy cinemas as we swing into wide streets; glimpses of cross-roads turned into lakes, of unlucky pedestrians caught in the spray of our passage.

Then we're skirting industrial sprawl and shanty towns, rumbling along a coast road, grey-brown sea heaving and foaming over the rocks, horizon lost in mist, to be dumped at Worli, RAF transit camp north of Bombay, where new arrivals are sorted and posted to units further east. So much for cosy expectations of an India of sunshine and unchanging blue skies...

The sun breaks through next day, rapidly burning away the morning mists while we swelter in the long, concrete-floored billets with wooden shutters flapping in the window spaces, laying out our kit for an official inspection after the long sea trip. Our beds are native-made charpoys, just four legs and a frame of roughly finished wood with crude tenon joints, over which rope is woven as a support. But they're comfortable after weeks of hammocks and hard decks... We've each been issued with a canvas durry, blankets and sheets, an additional burden to the kit we shall take along on our travels. And we have to put up mosquito nets each night: more for practice than practical use.

Endless parades, fatigues and guard duties effectively confine us to camp, what little free time we have taken up binding about the stodgy cookhouse grub, intrusive flies, malodorous latrines, and our frequent intestinal upsets. Our numbers are depleted by daily postings to active service units, or banishment to sick bay as dysentery strikes. So when Nick, Jack and I find we have some useful free time, it seems reward enough for surviving the first few days of our stay. We celebrate by grabbing passes and dash off to sample the delights of Bombay.

There's a dearth of military transport, no hope of thumbing a lift. Joining the mob at the bus stop, we fight our way on the first arrival, a double-decker with an open top which has Nick wondering if it was designed that way, or merely encountered a low bridge. Conductors top and bottom vainly try to control the influx of intending passengers until matters are resolved by the driver, who starts with a lurch that effectively dislodges surplus travellers from the platform. Delivered to the terminus we are besieged by begging urchins until a tram arrives going the rest of the way to the city centre. It hums along shakily, occasionally losing its trolley as it sways round the bends.

Mingling with the crowds in one of the main shopping streets, we savour the relaxed atmosphere of war-time Bombay. It's late afternoon and most of the shops are shut or shutting.

To escape the persistence of pedlars flashing trays of souvenirs under our noses we nip into a book shop where I am dazzled by the display of art books, with many out of print items long unobtainable at home. Zealous assistants shadow me round the shelves, look sceptical when told I am merely browsing, continue discreet surveillance under the pretext of rearranging perfectly arranged displays.

In the face of these unwelcome attentions and Nick and Jack's growing

impatience, I retreat, swearing to return when I get my hands on some back-pay.

Wending our way through the traffic—hooting buses and clanging trams, impatient cars and loitering victorias, tinkling cyclists and, sublimely indifferent to the turmoil around them, sacred cows—we cross the wide road to sit awhile under the palm trees on one of the many open grassed spaces, content to watch the rush pass by. During this breather we are accosted by eleven kids anxious to brush our shoes, a further seven armed with cans of metal-polish determined to put a sparkle on our cap badges, refuse six offers of matches, turn down a hopeful coconut vendor only to succumb to two visits from a banana-wallah, and then get a straight demand for an anna from a young bibi toting a baby on her hip.

"Hey," says Nick, "I think there's a queue forming!"

We disengage ourselves, move on.

Wandering away from the Westernised façades of modern business blocks, we pass an impressive building with huge Assyrian bulls from a past age carved on either side of an impressive gateway with the bold notice "*Temple for Parsees only*", plunge into narrow streets where the shops become open arcades or holes in the wall, crammed with merchandise—souvenirs, clothes, carpets, foods and spices. Street operators tempt us with flashy gold watches and jewellery, and for a space we are followed by a belligerent character determined to sell us a bullwhip or a murderous-looking cosh, who laughs ominously when told we don't need one... We realise then that it is dark and we are lost.

By the time we find our way back to the arcades of a main street, we have to pick our way past the prostrate wrapped forms of folk already settled down for the night on the hard pavements. Once we get our bearings we make a beeline for one of the Services canteens, a haven where the memsahibs of Bombay condescendingly do their bit for the war effort by providing refreshment for the passing trooper. Settled in comfortably, we are tempted to linger, and emerge to find that most public transport has ceased. We need to dash to Churchgate station, conveniently near, to catch the electric train if we are to get back to base before passes expire.

Once at Worli we can't face the long walk to the camp from the station and decide, after a brief haggle over the fare, to ride back in the luxury of a horse-drawn victoria. The carriage upholstery is redolent of horse-dung, its springing creaks ominously under our combined weight. The half-starved nag momentarily strains to overcome the inertia, starts off at a smart canter, thinks better of it and settles for a modest walking pace despite the urgings of restive passengers. Another overloaded victoria catches up, threatens to overtake us.

Pride stung, our driver responds to the challenge by suddenly flicking his whip with a biting crack that startles his steed into a ponderous gallop and we career into the lead. Wild shouts from our rival greet this move and a race is on. It's *Ben-Hur* in slow-motion; the cabs sway wildly along the ill-lit track in imminent danger of collision. We hang on, fearful of being pitched out of our speeding chariot.

The madness ends abruptly; both horses, exhausted by this uncalled-for exertion, snort mightily and promptly give up the struggle. While the drivers maintain a facesaving show of cracking whips, the excitement is over: the last stretch of our journey resumed at a decorous pace. Safely delivered to the camp gates with minutes to spare before passes expire we totter through the darkness to our billets...

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After being confined to camp for several days I escape early one afternoon moved by an ambition to see an Indian film, an epic from the *Bhagavad Gita*, recommended by several of the bearers as having a straightforward storyline and lots of singing and dancing to distract me from the Hindi dialogue. Once in Bombay, finding the cinema proves not so simple; my detailed instructions fail me. Lost, I give up and just mooch around exploring generally, returning in time to take pot luck at the camp cinema, where they're showing *Russian Story*, an American-produced miscellany of sequences from Soviet film classics—*Alexander Nevsky*, *Peter the Great*, *Battleship Potemkin*, *Lenin in October*—and contemporary newsreels telling the story of Russia's fight against oppression.

The Indians scattered through the audience seem very enthusiastic: Lenin and Stalin spark a round of applause whenever they appear. At the end of the film when the national anthem is played, members of the forces are obliged to stand to attention, while the locals blithely file out chattering. An argument sparks at the end of the row between a soldier and a flashing-eyed Indian; hard to tell whether the BOR is indignant because the anthem has been ignored, or if he's been jostled when the Indian attempted to pass, but the movement of the exiting crowd prises them apart before matters become serious.

In the foyer, a few people linger round a bookstall set up by the Friends of the Soviet Union. I strike up a conversation with the two Indians in charge, come away with an invitation to visit their HQ in Bombay and the address of the local Communist Party, where I'm assured I'll meet writers and artists. I hope the instructions on how to get there are more reliable than those I received when I set out for that elusive cinema... ■

3. Bangalore: First Impressions

In the general post-VJ Day confusion there is a drop in demand for ground radar mechanics and I am sent to an RAF station at Adgodi, on the outskirts of Bangalore in South India, for retraining to service airborne radar gear.

It is pleasant to meet up with several acquaintances among the new intake, but

when we report to the orderly room to check on the course, an indifferent admin type tells us there are no vacancies for late arrivals. Nor, he adds, are there enough of us to justify setting up a second course. So we settle in and await developments: Jack is still here, due for a posting, and I'm lucky enough to grab a spare bed in his hut, so we can compare notes on our travels.

They find ways of keeping us occupied while our fate is decided. Sent to sort and clear away some long-dismantled aerial mast sections, we need help to manhandle the big wooden frames, and have first to assemble a portable derrick. The components of this have been rashly dumped in the open for several months, so it is not altogether surprising that when we try to lift the wooden spars, they crumble to powder, leaving us clutching the metal bits at the ends, while hordes of termites scurry away over our feet. A closer look at the aerial frames reveals that they are in no better shape.

Anxious to please our masters, we collect all the metal fittings, solemnly present them to the technical stores, with a token bag of wood dust and a few inadvertently crushed termites. I bet that buggers up their inventory. We are in no hurry to leave this place. It's the cool season in South India: steady sunshine, day temperature around the eighties, the nights refreshingly cool. I spend my spare time catching up with my sunbathing.

The camp is within walking distance of the military cantonment area of Bangalore, centre of No.2 Army Command in India. The place crawls with military police determined to ensure that strict army standards of dress are observed at all times by BORs (British Other Ranks), and that no one wanders into the rest of the city, declared out of bounds to all servicemen. Fortunately the RAF proves more relaxed about these things.

There are only a few permanent staff at Adgodi camp; most of the inmates, like me, are just passing through, wanderers between small technical units, unused to the tighter discipline of large camps and installations. In off-duty hours, we are given the privilege of exchanging uniform for civilian dress when we leave camp. Having acquired a mahogany sun tan, I acquire an outrageously multi-coloured shirt to go with it, pose as a civilian and wander out of the cantonment with impunity, despite suspicious glares from officious MPs, to mingle with the general populace.

The out-of-bounds situation is largely the result of recent civil unrest. The 'Quit India' movement has a strong following here, yet I find the locals decidedly friendly on these excursions. I visit several cinemas to see Indian films—mainly naive but lively musicals—and the people I sit amongst regard it as a novelty to have a European in the audience. Once convinced of my interest, there's no stopping volunteers explaining plot and dialogue, filling me in with gossip about stars and directors, recommending other films to see.

After being regaled by my glowing accounts of these trips, Jack decides to put things on an official basis. He persuades a friendly Indian flight-sergeant, a

member of the camp permanent staff, to organise an official goodwill tour of the city. Local patriotism succeeds in getting permission to ignore out-of-bounds restrictions, and rustles up transport too. We drive off one morning, a party of twenty, on a guided tour.

Bangalore proves to be a pleasant open garden city with wide tree-lined roads and parks in the central area. We start our tour at the science colleges in and around Cubbon Park, visiting the physics, radiology, spectroscopy and radio laboratories, largely endowed by enlightened ruling princes. It is a sharp contrast when we move to the older part of the city, round the market, where the party spreads out to sample the attractions of the hole-in-the-wall shops in the narrow winding crowded streets. This suits me fine as I want to visit an address in the locality, passed on when in Bombay; it is the local communist party branch, where I'm told I'll find cultural as well as political links.

Jack accompanies me, but we are soon confused by the erratic numbering along the streets, until we realise that the apparent lack of continuity at intersections is because the numbering of buildings runs off the main street, round quiet alleyways and back. When eventually we track down my given address, the premises are shuttered and seem deserted. We knock several times without result, then just as we are about to retreat the door opens a crack, and a dimly-glimpsed figure informs us that we are at the something-or-other manufacturing company, and they are closed.

Maybe we are adrift... maybe we should have a password... I recall seeing local newspaper reports of knife attacks on sellers of left-wing papers in the area. But the conversation comes to a dead end as the door is firmly shut in our faces.

We decide to call it a day, rejoin the tour in time to hear our enthusiastic guide saying that all that existed of Bangalore in the sixteenth century was a mud-brick fort and a small bull temple built by Kempe Gowda, chieftain and founder of Mysore state. During the eighteenth century when Hyder Ali and his son Tipoo Sultan rose to power in Mysore, the fort was rebuilt in stone, only to be demolished during the wars with the British.

We move along to inspect the remains of the old fort: it is not very impressive. A part of the wall has been restored but only, apparently, to accommodate a large notice proclaiming that "*Through this breach the British launched their final assault...*"

We clamber on to the sagging ramparts then descend to peer into the gloom of an evil-smelling dungeon. A plaque over the ornamental doorway informs visitors "*Here were confined Captain (afterwards) Sir David Baird and many others prior to their release in March 1785*". The chronicles of the British Raj relate that Captain Baird was incarcerated for four years during the wars with Hyder Ali and the French, but returned a few years after his release, having risen to the rank of major-general. After roundly defeating the opposition he promptly demolished the stone fort.

Honour satisfied, he departed for Egypt and clobbered the French forces there, called at South Africa where he wrested the Cape of Good hope from the Dutch, and then went to Spain, where his luck ran out. He lost an arm at Corunna, and was retired after receiving the thanks of a grateful Parliament.

Our tour moves on to the Bull Temple, in the south of the city. When the ghari pulls up we are met by hosts of cheering kids, streaming from all directions. Someone spots the vintage brownie box camera sported by one of our group and asks him to take photographs of a huge floral decoration that has been made up for a procession. Itinerant photographers process prints on the spot for clients; the kids expect the same service, and are visibly disappointed when snaps are taken but no prints immediately forthcoming. But we reach the temple without incident, a remnant of the crowd still vigorously cheering in blithe ignorance of this lapse on our part.

We slip off footwear in the courtyard: inside the temple, it is cool and dark after the brilliant sunlight. As eyes adapt we become aware of the huge black stone seated bull that towers above us, gleaming in the light of a few oil lamps—Nandi, sacred mount of the god Siva, some fifteen feet high and twenty long, impressive, menacing even. The place fills up with children, there are festoons of flowers and paper decorations everywhere in readiness for the festival.

We give some coins as an offering and are presented with heavy-scented champak blossom. (I carry mine back to the billet and lay it on top of my mosquito net for the night, doze off drenched by its perfume. Next morning it is gone, swiped by some marauding monkey, but its fragrant presence lingers).

We investigate one of the four watchtowers erected by Kempe Gowda to mark the boundaries of his township, now adorned by a multilingual plaque announcing this fact. Then, to round off a crowded day, linger a while at Lal Bagh, gardens laid out by Hyder Ali and Tipoo Sultan in the eighteenth century, landscaped in the Mughal manner with trees, lotus ponds and lakes, and a miraculous abundance of red roses.

It is a consoling thought that even while rampaging revengefully round flattening everything in sight, Sir David had, sensibly, decided to spare this haven for posterity. ■

4. Interlude: Bangalore Military Hospital

I am enjoying my stay in Bangalore: it provides compensations for the depressing news of delays in demobilisation. But it doesn't last—I collapse with a fever and lose all interest in life. The RAF medic promptly diagnoses malaria, whips me into sick quarters, doses me with mepacrine, a malaria-suppressant with the unfortunate side effect of turning one's skin bright yellow. But I am past caring. I shiver and sweat it out for a week, by which time the doc abandons his initial diag-

nosis, panics, despatches me to the isolation wing of the Bangalore Military Hospital as a suspect typhoid case.

Once there, I am thrust into a strait-jacket of a bed and exhorted not to get up under any circumstances. Firmly embraced by crisp starched unrelenting sheets, I can't budge anyway. They rob me of more blood than I feel I can spare, for obscure but necessary tests, promptly put me on a strict starvation diet.

Private Mula materialises at the ward entrance on this first day of my incarceration. A tall, thin, dark-skinned Tamil, with shaven head and a prized pair of clonky army-issue boots, he is sweeper, bottle and bedpan bringer, odd-job man about the ward, his title a convenient contraction of an impressive multisyllabic Tamil name to save hospital time.

At this first encounter I am treated to an impressive sweeping salute, a broad grin, a deafening "Good morning—sahib!" It becomes a morning ritual for the rest of my stay. A cheery soul, he chuckles at secret thoughts as he progresses along the ward. He speaks little Urdu and less English; the Anglo-Indian orderlies, Italian POW helpers, and the patients speak little or no Tamil, resulting in some cryptic exchanges. On occasion we stretch sign language to its limits attempting extended conversations.

"War finis," Private Mula asserts with an all-embracing wave of his hand, "English sahibs go: you sahib, you sahib, all go. Tig hai. Leave army." Then with a shake of his head, "India no good." We try to find out if he has any family. £Father sleep, mother sleep, sister sleep," he declaims, then adds "Nay missus!", marching off to the accompaniment of one of his deep belly laughs.

Only when my temperature chart looks less like a cross-section of the Alps am I allowed up, content to collapse on a hard seat at the bedside. A welcome letter from Jack proves to be a farewell note explaining that he'd been unable to penetrate the defences of the isolation ward to visit me, and had dumped my kit in the camp stores for fumigation. He's now posted to Transport Command at Delhi; "Think of the Taj by moonlight and a graceful maiden clad in a diaphanous sari..." he drools, and I wonder if he's pinched my copy of the Kama Sutra. I realise that with all the upsets I've not written to Marion for the past fortnight. Now my last unfinished letter is securely locked up with my kit in Adgodi stores.

A calorie-conscious sister takes over day duty in the ward and promotes me to a relaxed diet. Breakfast, pigeon-size poached egg and two delicate slivers of bread with butter scraped on, then off; lunch, two teaspoons of minced chicken, ditto reconstituted potato, occasionally followed by a gesture of ice-cream, and maybe fruit; tea, four Marmite-smeared slivers of bread; dinner, same as lunch only less so. Initially, this regimen suffices. When rude health returns the interval between dinner and breakfast seems an eternity. Desperation forces me to join in the general bribery of passing orderlies with free-issue cigarettes, as exchange for an irregular supplement of porridge, biscuits and fruit. And once—oh ecstasy!—an illicit helping of steak and chips. Most of this contraband is consumed in the

evening when mosquito nets are lowered over beds and the ward lights dimmed for the night.

This renewing interest in life makes me appreciate the extent of my confinement. Our ward is an interior room, windowless, where little sound reaches us from the corridor. One of my immediate neighbours is an older man, prostrate and incommunicative since his arrival; on the other side is a BOR recovering from a dose of typhoid who has developed pneumonia and gets a penicillin shot every few hours. Passing teams of doctors continue to prod and probe me or extract blood samples for culture tests, and once I am wheeled out for an x-ray though no one explains why. In between these medical routines, I exchange a few quiet words with the BOR about our ailments then, inevitably, about demob and the question of how long. Otherwise I am left to stare at the blank glossy hygienic wall opposite or doze fitfully waiting for the next interruption.

One day I wake to find that a visiting angel with a sense of humour has left a selection from the hospital library on my table. *Nicer to Stay in Bed*, *Three Fevers* and *Death in the Ward* are avidly devoured in next to no time flat. I then devote considerable energy trying to convey to one of the friendlier Italian helpers that I prefer novels to thrillers or Westerns. He returns with solid classics like *Kenilworth*, *Barnaby Rudge*, *Dr Jeckyll & Mr Hyde*, and, inevitably for India, lots of Dornford Yates. I never fathom out why Yates enjoys such popularity among the sahibs and memsahibs; he just sets my teeth on edge. For a period life is brightened by occasional volumes of Thurber, Forester and Greene that come my way; then the selection degenerates.

Boredom is relieved by a sister bearing an armful of American free-issue-to-the-troops paperbacks: Hemingway's short stories, Ogden Nash, Linklater's *Juan in China*, and a *Pocket Mystery Reader* with Saki, Leacock, Wodehouse, Waugh and Poe, plus an article by Rex Stout in which he proves that Doctor Watson is actually Holmes's wife—a convincing thesis it seems, supported by quotations transforming Watson from a mere woman, a possible mistress, to establish her as Mrs Holmes. (Marion is sceptical when I pass on this spicy snippet in a letter). And M.R. James's *Ghost Stories* with this revealing passage:

"*Those who spend the greater part of their time in reading or writing books are.... apt to take particular notice of accumulations of books when they come across them. They will not pass a stall, a shop, or even a bedroom shelf without reading some title, and if they find themselves in an unfamiliar library, no host need trouble further about their entertainment.*"

A fellow soul, Mr James, I think, and promptly make a note of the words to quote on a suitable occasion.

I don't know how I could have survived my stay at the BMH without books. Then a batch of mail following me across the continent catches up: long-awaited news from home—Marion still doesn't know I'm in hospital!—a clutter of American fanmags, a letter from long-silent correspondent John Craig updating me on his

travels across Europe with the army. He writes from "a charming little German village called Neubeckem in Westphalia" after a protracted stay in Italy waiting to join a Jugoslavian operation that was aborted, and a visit to Rome.

Routine is upset one morning by the non-appearance of Private Mula. The sister on duty confides that he'd complained about a stomach upset and she'd told him to take a 'number 9' pill. Before she could stop him, Mula had gulped down several tablets, no doubt convinced that the bigger the dose the faster his recovery.

He returns in the evening, looking shaken and a shadow of his usual ebullient self. We sympathise and he points to his belly, bunches his fist to indicate extreme anguish, looks woebegone, weakly says "Oh sahibs... bedpan!", holds up six fingers. Our minds boggle.

Eventually I am taken off diet, ravenously consume everything edible put before me, begin to feel my old self, and am transferred to a bed on the veranda, overlooking the gardens. While I miss the companionship of Private Mula, it is a relief to gaze on the outside world again, enjoy fresh air and sunshine, to exercise wasted limbs. Inside there are too many reminders that I am in a military hospital. One day I am bawled out for not leaping smartly to attention and saluting as the Matron and her entourage sweep through the ward.

I escape court-martial and prompt execution only when the ward sister explains to the Glowering Presence that I am a lowly form of RAF life that the army has misguidedly taken in... It occurs to me that a more valid argument would be that in my emaciated condition, pajama pants are liable to drop under the stress of saluting. I arrange to be absent or in bed when visiting rank sails majestically past my bed on future visits.

Still, things are now more cheerful, apart from the fact that my hair has started to come out in handfuls. Sister regales us with jovial tales of typhoid patients leaving hospital with pates like shiny billiard balls, then relents and tries to console us with the thought of all the money we'll save on haircuts. I am promised a bath, dream of a palatial tiled bathroom where I can soak in lashings of hot water, as a change to the usual cold shower. Alas, I finish up in a cramped galvanised tub, knees bumping against chin, the water tepid.

A short while later I am discharged though it is still not clear what bug attacked my system. I disappear into statistics as just another 'UDF', an undiagnosed fever case. I must look a rum sight when I move into the army convalescent hostel in Bangalore cantonment for a fortnight's stay.

My weight has slipped from the usual 160 pounds to a mere 112, my bush jacket flaps on my shoulders, my belt needs a new notch to provide adequate support for shorts. Thanks to the combined effects of a fading suntan and the sallow afterglow of mepacrine, I look decidedly jaundiced. The good news is that my hair now only comes out in combfuls.

When first I venture out of the hostel, on tottery legs, I am almost blown over by the wind of a passing cyclist. A portly RAMC officer pulls up and after one glimpse

of my wasted frame is moved to ask how I like Bangalore after Burma. I feel a fraud, but it seems a shame to waste his obvious sympathy.

"Much better", I mumble. ■

5. "Snooty Ooty"

St. John's Convalescent Hostel in Bangalore is run by the Red Cross in the person of Mrs Gabe, who mothers us all. Determined to keep our minds off the services during our stay—sound therapy!—she provides civvy clothes for us to wear. No one rousts us out of bed in a morning, we eat at tables set for four, with tablecloths and serviettes, and have the use of an extensive library, games room, radio and wind-up gramophone for entertainment.

Despite these relaxations, some odd characters persist on parading round the hostel in full uniform. From the first day of my stay I settle myself at a table with three other victims of the strict regimen of the BMH, all determined to regain lost weight. The bearers soon learn to ask "Second help?" before removing empty plates, and we are dubbed the "wuffing table".

I stagger out after lunch into boiling hot sunshine, hugging what shade I can on the mile walk into town. Down to basic shirt, shorts and sandals I pass many staid locals sweating it out in European suits, complete with neckties, and wonder how they survive. Dodging the livestock that wanders unhindered and nibbling at any surviving greenery, I resist the blandishments of rickshaw wallahs, and take refuge from the sun in the bookshops open along the street. I linger a while browsing over stacks of new Penguins on the shelves, to emerge with Nat Gubbins' *Over the Fence*, Isherwood's *Mr Norris*, a volume of *New Yorker Profiles*, and a great prize, an American hardback of Dorothy Parker poems.

I return to the hostel with my treasures, rest creaking joints on the lawn, have tea, and natter with other inmates until dusk and foraging skeeters drive us in for a hearty dinner. I play a few records while catching up with a long letter to Marion in the evening, seated at a desk ablaze with a spray of scarlet blooms on one side and a pile of jigsaw puzzles of episodes in the life of the Buddha on the other. I drop off to sleep that night feeling that life has resurned again after a period of suspended animation in the hospital.

It is a couple of days later before I find the energy to venture as far as Adgodi camp. Lifts are scarce and I walk most of the way, but it proves worth the effort: when I report to the RAF sick quarters for my medical discharge, the doc glances at my papers and after one look at my wasted frame promptly puts me down for three week's sick leave. When I go to collect a few items from my kit I am further cheered by the sight of an accumulation of mail.

I pester the WVS office for gen on places where I can spend this leave. Mysore is conveniently near but, alas, currently out-of-bounds because of outbreaks of

plague. An enthusiastic recommendation from behind the counter favours the Nilgiris—the Blue Mountains—as an alternative: I am torn between the attractions of a hostel at Kotagiri ("scenic beauties, hidden among tea plantations, walks, good bus services to other hill stations") and one at Wellington ("convenient for Ootacamund, Coonoor, a playground of the British Raj").

For the outlay of a few rupees a day, either place sounds great, and my trip to Adgodi revealed that back-pay now amounts to some 500 rupees. I complete a lengthy application form for processing by the admin people, which requires final approval of the commanding officer before arrangements can be got under way. I guess I can wait; at least the wheels are set in motion.

Months before, with the thought of time hanging heavy in the post-conflict era, I'd enrolled on a London-based correspondence course for the forces on the topic of 'modern art'.

Owing to my travels and mail delays, progress to date has been erratic, but in the restful atmosphere of St John's I diligently catch up with things. I find there's a well-stocked library in nearby Cubbon Park, well-stocked with books on Western art and after routine form filling and payment of an entrance fee, subscription and deposit am admitted as a member.

With this resource at my disposal my assignments seem less daunting, and I am soon glibly explaining why Millet is a greater realist than Giotto, comparing the painting of Monet and Matisse, writing an essay on the logic of cubism, and having to admit that I have much to learn on the subject. I am often scribbling notes long after everyone else has retired to bed, and find myself talking to Mrs Gabe about my preoccupations.

It seems she knew Matthew Smith—has a painting of his, presently tucked away protected from damp during the monsoon period.

I latch on to a local weekly journal, *Mysindia*, with lively political and literary articles and comment. One issue carries an article on Amrita Sher-Gil, an Indian artist who died a few years ago; the black-and-white reproductions of her paintings indicate a forceful talent.

Most of the contemporary Indian art I'd seen in Bombay was academic, westernised and boring, but sight of Sher-Gil's work stirs my interest. I wander into the local publishing office to contact the author of the article, Jag Mohan. He is a journalist working in Madras, and my enthusiastic letter of enquiry prompts a three-page reply that is the start of a correspondence discussing Amrita Sher-Gil and contemporary Indian artists in general.

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My stay at the hostel ends too soon and I return reluctantly to RAF reality at Adgodi camp. I find the place in turmoil: the radar school staff are in the process of moving their gear down to Ceylon, to make room for an Educational & Vocational

Training centre catering for those shortly due for demob. After years in the forces we apparently need brainwashing before we can be safely returned to Civvy Street. Or it could just be another desperate distraction to keep us occupied in the vacuum created by the end of the war. I maintain a low profile, find myself an undemanding job in the drawing office, undemanding in that nobody wants any drawings doing anyway.

Happily my leave pass materialises and provides temporary escape from the confusion. I dash into Bangalore for last-minute shopping, acquire a few tubes of watercolour and a grotty sketch pad of local manufacture, in the hopes of doing some painting, and send off two bulging food parcels to relieve the ration situation at home: tea, butter, dried fruit, and a large tin of marmalade. This last item has been hanging around in my kitbag for some time.

The routine camp breakfast held few attractions—stodgy porridge followed by baked beans on toast are not a very appetising start to facing the heat of the day—so when we spotted these tins on sale, Jack, Doug and I promptly voted toast and marmalade would be a pleasant change in our diet.

We each invested in a tin, opened the first one and shared it, to dispose of the contents before they had chance to deteriorate. We were into the second tin when I was whipped into hospital, and Jack and Doug posted to other stations; so now I am left with the third unopened tin, too big for me to tackle solus...

I shake the dust of Adgodi off my chappals and depart in high glee to the city station to catch the train to Wellington. It leaves at dusk. I am alone in a secondclass compartment with upholstered seats but poor lighting. Unable to read I settle under a blanket and doze fitfully until the sun crawls back over the horizon. By then the train is well out on the plains, among palms and paddy fields; vague black masses ahead gradually resolve into mountains, their tops smothered in cloud.

On arrival at Mettupalayam, the terminus of the broad-gauge main line, I supervise the transfer of my bundles to the small-gauge 'Blue Mountain Express', a six-coach train pushed by a sturdy little engine, to complete the trip up the towering rain-forest covered slopes of the Nilgiris, to Wellington. To describe this journey as spectacular would be an understatement.

We crawl up steep gradients aided by a ratchet track, hugging the mountainside, pass through fairy caves and grottos, ride over magnificent waterfalls on flimsy bridges, catch occasional glimpses of a crazily-angled horizon through damp, drifting clouds. Below us, Mettapalyam becomes an insignificant patch on the landscape, shrinking as we climb.

Dazed by the heady grandeur, I dismount at Wellington station to find there's no transport to the hostel. But there are plenty of porters looking for custom; a couple grab my kitbag, bedroll and well-filled tin trunk, hoist them on their heads and jog their way to my destination. I follow them empty-handed; I hate playing this 'burra sahib' role, striding along while older, smaller men carry my burdens, but I've been

in India long enough to realise that if you try to buck the system you rob someone of their livelihood.

The holiday home, 'Windermere', proves to be an imposing residence, run by a Salvation Army 'colonel' and his family, and hordes of servants. It has a commanding view of Wellington and the mountains on either side. Bags of scope for painting, I glee.

The company here is congenial and I soon settle in. Accommodation proves to be excellent: a comfortable bed (and no need to bother with mossie nets), plumbing and sanitation superior to anything I've encountered in the Raj so far, and meeting rooms with large open grates for crackling wood fires on cool evenings.

Mornings start with breakfast in bed, and the general fare provided is varied, well-cooked and plentiful. Mind you, there is a small price to pay: being hosted by the Sally Army means that you join in a brief session of hymn-singing after dinner, led by the colonel, in good voice but tone deaf.

We rise to the spirit of the occasion, throw out the lifeline with great gusto and promise to be there when they call the roll up yonder. Occasionally harmonium, the colonel, and assembly stray out of phase, with exquisitely dire results.

Next day I discard my uniform and don my civvies, my shirt-of-many-colours. An army sergeant across the table from me lifts his arms to shield his eyes from the sight: we'd exchanged wry glances during the hymn singing of the previous evening, nearly busting from suppressed mirth, and in next to no time flat we exchange our life stories to date.

Derek hails from Macclesfield and is currently stationed at the hospital at nearby Coimbatore. We join in exploring the locality in between my sketching expeditions.

I find painting in watercolours has its problems: the sun rises high, bright and hot in a clear purple-blue sky at these altitudes, my brush dries out almost before it touches the paper, the limited range of paints I have never approaches the subleties of the lush green vegetation—verdant grasslands, tea plantations, shady groves of blue-green wattle and silvery eucalyptus—and the earth is bright red, or is it just the contrast with the prevalent greens that makes it so? My eyes, used to the muted tones of a northern clime, find it hard to come to grips with such raw tropical hues.

Ootacamund, generally referred to as Ooty, a nostalgic survival from the heyday of the British Raj, buildings all neat terracotta and white stone trim, neatly set among rolling grasslands, has to be seen to be believed. We gawp at The Club, where the rules of snooker were invented; listen to high falutin' tales of the Ooty Hunt (chasing jackals in lieu of foxes); post letters home in tall scarlet painted cast-iron pillarboxes embellished with the Royal Arms and the VR cypher; retire to a nearby canteen to enjoy toasted crumpets.

The whole area proves to be pleasant country in which to walk, explore and, on occasion, get lost. I do it all in changing company: Derek disappears back on duty

too soon, but I enjoy meeting other exiles and a surprising number of local folk willing to linger and chat. I never realised I could be so gregarious.

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I'd not made a reservation for the return trip; there didn't seem any need. When I descend, late in the afternoon, on the scenic railway—a trip just as breathtaking as the ascent—Mettupalayam seems largely deserted, which is unusual for an Indian station. I find an empty compartment on the train with a sticker on the door claiming it to be reserved for two officers, and settle in there. There's room for eight, so I figure they can't object.

This view is shared by a couple travelling to Coimbatore, the next station, who also pile in with their luggage. Inevitably, a transport sergeant then appears, checking reservations, and brusquely tells us to clear out. Since he doesn't return, and there's no sign of the two officers, we stay put. Shortly before the train is due to depart an orderly dashes up and changes the sticker on the door.

Curious, I have a quick look: "LAC Turner & Four Mental Cases" it reads. Coincidence or joke? Uneasily, we decide to await developments... there are none, and the train sets off on time.

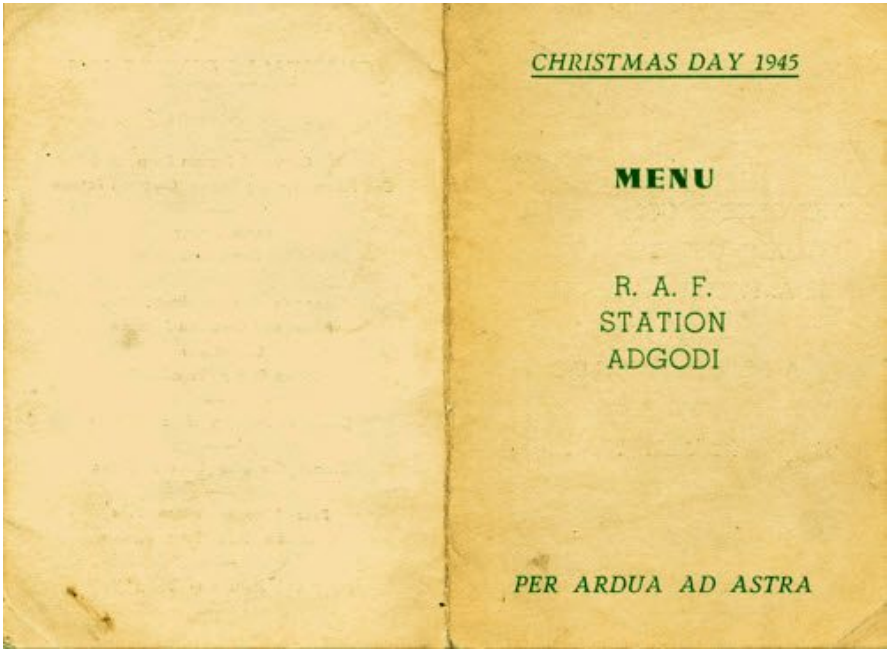
After the couple leave the train, I settle down and doze off, only to be roused during the night by a weird chanting in the adjoining compartment, accompanied by a banging and scraping on the dividing partition. Things quieten down for a while, only to start up more violently. Sounds as though the lunatics have boarded the train after all: I felt a momentary sympathy with LAC Turner trying to cope with them. When I wake next morning, well before the train is due to steam into Bangalore City station all is peaceful, and I just hope my noisy neighbours have already alighted at a station en route.

There's no difficulty in scrounging a lift back to Adgodi, where I settle in a conveniently empty hut, roust out the admin types in the orderly room to check on demob news, rescue a pile of redirected mail, and realise, suddenly, that in a fortnight it will be Christmas. My peace is shattered by the arrival of a rowdy contingent from Ceylon, destined for the first EVT instructors course, who take over the rest of the beds in the hut.

Seems that apart from the scenery, Ceylon is not a good place to be: things cost four times Indian prices, and all they could send home during their stay was tea, since everything else has to be imported. I find myself elected as a guide on forays seeking bargains in the Bangalore bazaars. It passes the time to the unseasonal Christmas celebrations, when bearers, sweepers, car- and fruit-wallahs, indeed all the casual workers on the station bestow floral garlands on us and hopefully stand back for "Krismuss bakshish".

A very traditional Christmas dinner is laid on by the RAF with a free issue of local bottled beer—a very tepid brew. In the hot sunshine I find it hard to work up any

enthusiasm, and retire vainly trying to remember what snow was like... and wondering how the folks are coping back home, and if my parcels arrived in time.... ■

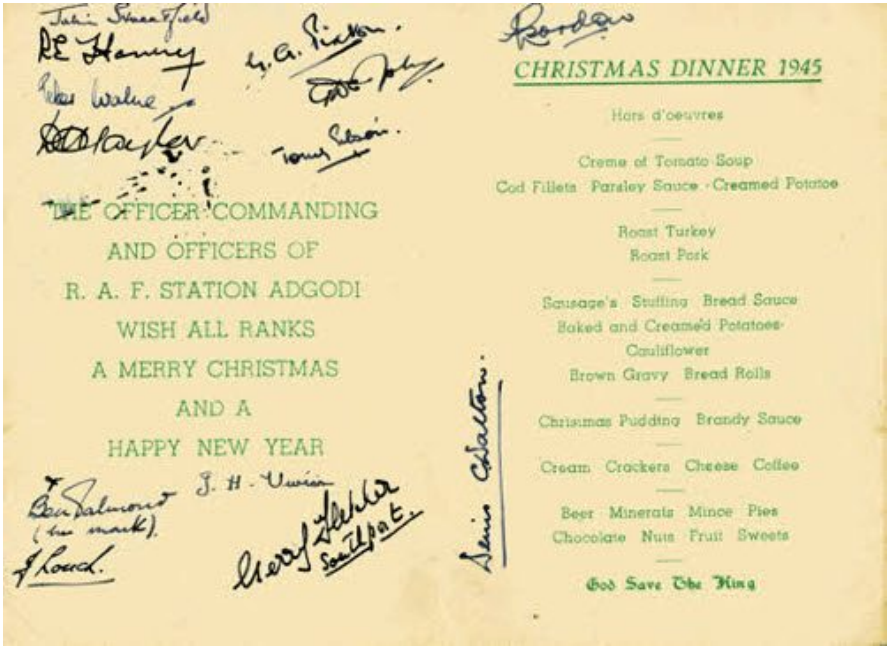


CHRISTMAS DAY 1945

MENU

R. A. F.
STATION
ADGODI

PER ARDUA AD ASTRA



THE OFFICER COMMANDING
AND OFFICERS OF
R. A. F. STATION ADGODI
WISH ALL RANKS
A MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A
HAPPY NEW YEAR

CHRISTMAS DINNER 1945

Hors d'oeuvres

Creme of Tomato Soup
Cod Fillets Parsley Sauce Creamed Potatoes

Roast Turkey
Roast Pork

Sausages Stuffing Bread Sauce
Baked and Creamed Potatoes
Cauliflower
Brown Gravy Bread Rolls

Christmas Pudding Brandy Sauce

Cream Crackers Cheese Coffee

Beer Minerals Mince Pies
Chocolate Nuts Fruit Sweets

God Save The King

6. Purandhar Fort

The new year starts with me directed to yet another muster of wandering radar mechs. After a long and leisurely train journey steaming along the Western Ghats I arrive in Poona late in the afternoon, stagger out of the station with my gear and manage to thumb a lift on one of the passing trucks bound for the drome.

My advent is badly timed. Everyone is in a state of jitters this day owing to a visit by Field-Marshal Lord Wavell, Viceroy of India, and the wining and dining are still in progress. I am brushed out of the way behind the guardroom door, a scruffy blot on all the spit and polish summoned up for the great occasion.

By the time the Great Man and his vast retinue are safely disposed of, departing in the direction of Bombay in a long cavalcade, I emerge as a minor irritant after a tiring day.

They are uncertain where to send me: it states quite clearly on my papers that I am to join 145 Air Ministry Experimental Station, but after a long debate among guardroom personnel it seems that only a couple of clerks have heard of the unit, and one of them is convinced that it has already been disbanded.

I'm not worried by this news, since all I want is a bed for the night, the rest can be sorted out later. Then someone recalls that several other radar mechs arrived that morning, in the middle of the bullshitting prior to the Viceroy's visit, who'd been dumped in a hut on the outer fringes of the camp, far away from the ceremonial area. I am despatched to this billet to see if the inmates can cast any light on my posting.

Things brighten up as soon as I stagger over the threshold with my kit and am greeted by familiar faces. I find a bedspace next to that of Nick whom I've not seen since we parted at Worli, shortly after arrival in India. He's changed somewhat: had his head shaved so I can't resist commenting on the shortest crew-cut I've ever seen. In return, he complains that I've grown so thin he keeps losing sight of me when I turn sideways on.

We dash into Poona to celebrate our reunion in what remains of the evening, filling in the details of our separate lives, drinking a special toast to Jack, the 'old feller', who'd written to us both to say that he's on his way to Bombay with demob group 26, in search of a troopship home...

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The RAF ghari, a battered 2-ton Bedford open truck, rattles over the rough ghat road, trailing a long plume of fine ochre dust in the still morning air. There are eight of us crammed in the back with a load of supplies, perched on bedrolls and

kitbags, scorching under the hot January sun and grateful for the slight breeze of our passage.

The base camp at Poona is some thirty miles behind us. Directly ahead, looming large as we approach, is our destination, a massive twin-peaked hill, ringed with the ruins of Purandhar fort. This relic of past Maratha wars with the Mogul invaders of the 17th century, today occupied by the British Raj, is the newly established centre of the GEE navigational radar system in the Western Ghats.

When the road abruptly comes to an end in a clearing, the oppressive bulk of Purandhar blots out most of the sky. Our ghari slows, circles leisurely and pulls up at the foot of a narrow track that corkscrews up the hillside at an alarming angle. Piling out, we gratefully stretch cramped limbs, circulate a waterbottle, rinse dust from parched mouths before starting to unload our gear.

A jeep comes bouncing down the hill, horn blaring in welcome. Since it has room for only two people and their baggage on each trip, transfer to the domestic site, located on a spur a third of the way up the hill, proves a lengthy business. Our driver, obviously well-practiced in negotiating the four-wheel-drive on the hairpin bends, zooms up with breathtaking confidence.

I cling to a vibrating seat with one hand, restrain shifting kit with the other, momentarily close my eyes as spinning wheels seem to hang over the void as we reverse on tight corners. It is a relief when we level out, skid past a large water tank, and pull up outside a stone-built bungalow, to be our quarters for the next week or so.

Purandhar fort

Later that afternoon, showered, fed, and relaxed in clean clothes, we sit on a cool veranda, gazing across the Western Ghats—rugged undulating waves of dusty grays, browns and yellow ochres, shimmering and disappearing into the heat haze.

The wind keens through the roof tiles, providing a sound effect that adds to the general impression of having strayed on to the film set of *Lost Horizon*.

In the evening a pep talk from the officer commanding tells us we are pioneers establishing the GEE navigational chain across India, with operational stations sited north and south of Purandhar, and installations starting up around Delhi and Calcutta, all part of a master plan to provide radar guidance for an airlift through to Japan.

To Japan? It seems that the end of the war is a glitch too minor to cancel the whole shebang and save British tax-payers' money. Sensing a lack of enthusiasm among his audience, the CO dismisses us before awkward non-technical questions can be asked.

Purandhar fort – the peaks

The following morning we are escorted up to the technical site, perched on top of one of the peaks of Purandhar, some 4800 feet above sea-level. The place can be reached only on foot, along a track that rambles through the ruins of the old fort, then toils over steep slopes to a last sheer stretch. Here footholds have been carved into the rock and a rope handrail provides a welcome boost, the work of Madrasi sappers who heaved all the apparatus along the route, plus the component parts of a Nissen hut to house it, and then assembled it all, with a 70-foot portable aerial mast, on top. No mean feat.

Once there, we shiver in the chill breeze and, despite the attractions of the awe-inspiring view with a close-up look at the apparently deserted Hindu temple that occupies the opposite peak, are glad to crowd into the shelter of the hut. We are given a general picture of routines, ask questions about the gear, enjoy some hands-on experience. The afternoon passes quickly.

The descent seems easier going but leaves little time to linger and explore the

fortifications before dusk. It is only when settling back from a welcome meal that we realise that welfare arrangements have not caught up with this Shangri-la—no books or recreational facilities on offer here. The only diversion proves to be a tiny general store and cafe opened by an enterprising Portuguese Indian on occasional evenings.

This is not one of them. We also learn that our movements are restricted. Parts of the site are out of bounds because internees are still held there and non-fraternisation is the order of the day.

In off-duty moments during our stay we clamber up the shrubby terrain to visit the ruins, one of a complex of hill forts built in the Deccan some three hundred years ago, when the legendary Maratha leader Shivaji defied the might of Aurangzeb, the last of the Moghul emperors.

We never manage to make a full circuit of the blackened stone curtain walls that wind round the hill for more than twenty miles, with six rugged bastions guarding the remains of the three main gates. Long stretches are remarkably well preserved, while other sections have almost disappeared. The builders of our present domestic quarters, sometime last century, obviously pillaged the fortifications as a source of ready-to-hand construction material.

But these preoccupations with India's martial past are terminated with the news that we are to be sent to Mahableshwar, a hill station some fifty miles south, to receive detailed instruction on GEE operation at the 'slave' station established there. ■

7. Mahableshwar Days

There's no room for us on the regular supply wagon on the morning of our departure, so a spare truck is found for us to follow in, taking only essentials for a ten-day stay at Mahableshwar, leaving the rest of our kit in store at Purandhar fort. The supply ghari sets off early while we are still sorting ourselves out; we pile aboard our transport and speed in hot pursuit.

It's a rough ride. The hillside road is unsurfaced, all bends, and our lightly loaded vehicle bounces and sways alarmingly; we cling on and pray. When we do catch up our driver persistently hugs the tail of the leading truck so that we are

enveloped, spluttering and spitting, in its trailing cloud of dust. It requires much cursing and banging on the cab roof to persuade him to drop back to a sensible distance and give us a breather. In the open truck there's no escaping the sun, already high in a clear sky, and the flying dust clings to sweaty skins and shirts.

There are other hazards, like the occasional bullock cart approaching from the opposite direction. Faced by the furious clatter of our approaching vehicles, bullocks tend to lower obstinate heads and stay put in the middle of the narrow road, despite the prods of panicking peasants. Miraculously we get by.

We turn west off the Satara road, rumble through Wai with its roadside temples on to Panchgani, a hill station of pleasant aspect. Picking their way round a busy market our vehicles slow down to manoeuvre past a convoy of supercilious camels, belching and farting prodigiously as they pad along the crowded thoroughfare. Then we are out in open country again, climbing a road that finishes up at Government House, in the heart of the Mahableshwar plateau.

In the palmy days of the British Raj, back last century, Mahableshwar was chosen as the hill station where the Governor of Bombay and his retinue would spend the summer, to escape the heat and oppressive humidity of Bombay. In its heyday Government House must have been impressive; it is in a sadly dilapidated state when we arrive. Before the RAF took it over, the place had been HQ for the army's jungle and mountain warfare training unit and allowed to go to rack and ruin.

Flower bowls and bird baths in the grounds are toppled and broken; a ceremonial cannon, minus a wheel, rusts alongside a solitary cannonball on the overgrown lawns; the roof of the two-storey building is damaged, window frames broken, paint peeling. Inside, the stairways are decorated with "building unsafe" notices, and we are warned not to venture upstairs because of rotting floors.

Surprisingly, we get a chilly reception from the 'permanent' staff, a tight little community trained as a group in England and recently flown directly here. We are viewed askance as wild intruders, a disruptive element. Pete, the flying officer in charge, who has moved straight from university into the RAF, proves to be a technical man, interested only in the equipment, content to leave the chores of camp organisation and admin to his medical orderly, a youth obviously in love with the idea of authority, who insists that the bearers address him as "Doctor Sahib".

We immediately fall out with him on arrival when he proposes inoculating us with everything in the book. Since we were updated with essential jabs before Christmas we protest vociferously until he backs down, and our relations remain strained for the rest of our stay.

We are left to find temporary quarters among the many empty rooms in the residence. The only furnishings provided are charpoys. There are no inside lavatories: we use a makeshift structure outside, very basic, communal, but open to the fresh air. Power for lighting is provided by a diesel generator, with frequent shutdowns. However there is a shower and, miracle of miracles, an occasional supply of hot water for washing.

Viewing our sweaty, grimy group impatiently queueing to sluice off the red dust that smothers us after the last stage of the journey, a line from an Alun Lewis poem surfaces in my mind: *High on the ghat the new turned soil is red*. He'd obviously visited the Maratha ghats and I'd read that he spent time on an army jungle warfare course. It could have been here.

Taking a hint from soot-blackened fireplaces we decide to follow the example of previous occupants and light a communal fire to brighten up cool evenings and enable us to brew up. We seek a bearer from the locals; one likely applicant, short and cheery, looks 15 but says he is 25, hands us a batch of dog-eared testimonials, one of which reads: "*I have employed Fakir Mohammed as a bearer for three months. He is honest and intelligent, but lazy*." We hire him on the spot.

It seems our medic has charge of catering, and is being cheerfully ripped off by suppliers; the grub is poor after Purandhar standards, yet we are expected to pay extra for messing. To add insult to injury our tormentor has banned all char and fruit wallahs from calling, on the grounds of "maintaining hygiene". Our bearer is promptly set to smuggle in illicit supplies and boost our morale.

The GEE course gets off to a bad start. Around nine each morning a ghari collects and dumps us at the technical site at Wilson Point, the highest spot of the plateau. A dozen of us squeeze into the cramped cabin, our instructor mumbles into his beard, quoting heavily from an SD (all operational manuals for radar equipment are classified as 'secret documents', hence referred to as 'ess-dees'), with his finger tracing out key points on circuit diagrams visible only to a few privileged viewers at the front.

This goes on for over an hour and those on the fringes of the group derive little benefit, lose interest and pass the time thumbing through old copies of *Picture Post*, or catching up with Jane's exploits in stray copies of the *Mirror* lying around. Then we hang about for half an hour or so before the truck returns to collect us for return to billets. During one of these waits, our instructor apologetically confesses that he'd only received four days' training on the equipment before being shipped to India.

Things do not improve in the afternoons, when we are due to practice morse—essential to communications between master and slave stations. Initially, only three bods admit to any expertise, but when it comes down to brass tacks it turns out that only Nick and myself are ignorant of the morse alphabet. So while the rest of the class rattle keys to varying effect, we sit and look suitably dumb. This always surprises instructors—we seem to get a different bloke each session—who say they can't teach us anything until we know the alphabet.

One expert confides that the average person has to hear every letter about 40,000 times before he recognises it without great effort, by which stage he will be able to read about twenty words a minute. That sounds as though we may be here for a long time. And after all this mental strain we are returned to our expert with his nose glued in the SD.

While we don't learn a great deal with this regimen, natural curiosity prompts us to skim through the SD in occasional quiet periods until we have grasped the basics. Though we do lack a certain involvement: after all, the GEE chain is not yet operational, and if it does ever start up, its main purpose is to assist air-trooping, which has practically ceased anyway. So what is the point? This bolshie attitude seeps through to our leader.

Pete decides that the dumb trainees are spending too much time scrounging around, and announces that he will give us all a test. However, his preocupation with the equipment proves his undoing. He has a pet theory about the frequency jumps that occur when tuning the transmitter—as he succinctly puts it, "when you turn the knob it goes *wuff* one way and *wuff-wuff* the other way—why?", and then can't resist expounding his own ideas almost before you draw breath to reply.

Thereafter you need only nod your head at discreet intervals, drop an occasional "well... yes" in token agreement, and you pass. We pass.

Back at Government House, life is convivial despite the lack of amenities and mail. Our bearer keeps us supplied with kindling for the fire and one day drags in a hefty gnarled log. With no way of reducing this to convenient chunks for fuel, we take the easy way out and just stick one end in the fireplace, pushing the log forward periodically as it is consumed. It burns very slowly, with help, but conveniently extinguishes itself as the fire dies down during the night.

It becomes a semi-permanent fixture and is dubbed the "Epstein Log" by an inmate who insists that its deformed contours remind him of one of Jacob's sculptures. One charpoy, sited almost on top of the fireplace, miraculously escapes being ignited each night when we brew up. One of its legs is broken and lashed to the frame insecurely with rope, collapsing whenever an absentminded card-player sits on the end of the bed. It is marked down as the next source of fuel should the Epstein Log ever burn up, and currently occupied by Alfred, a long-time pal of Nick.

They were stationed together in the Shetlands and one evening Alf regales us with hair-raising tales of their predicament the night the 200-foot CH-aerial mast was blown down in a storm, and goes into lurid detail of how Toothless Teresa got in the family way... I am never quite certain if the two events were related...

Mercifully, the arrival of the ration-run ghari from Poona spares us from further harrowing revelations by bringing up-to-date copies of the *News of the World*, specially printed in India for free distribution to the forces, with all the latest scandal from home—the *Brunette in the Flat* case, the doings of Lord Snell and his rompworthy girl-friend—plus a pile of magazines of several months vintage salvaged and sent by the good memsahibs of Poona. Long-delayed mail should have arrived from Purandhar but didn't owing to a transport breakdown.

We don't get much chance to explore the locality during the first few days of our stay, but skip a morse session to visit the nearby bazaar. The place is just returning to life, to the sound of massed sewing machines rattling out cheap shirts, after its

closure last year when there were some cases of plague, the belated news of which had panicked our medic into his aborted mass-inoculation scheme. There is not a great deal on offer, but at least it is an opportunity to brush up bargaining techniques.

We find one vendor with supplies of genuine Cadbury chocolate bars and despite extortionate prices being asked initially we clear his stock, retiring with our booty to a small hotel by the side of the Yenna Lake that serves iced coffee and biscuits. Later, rummaging through a shelf of decaying books on offer, I find a tatty but intact copy of a guide, *Pocket Book of Mahableshwar & Panchgani*, with 3 maps, by N.M. Dastur, which despite passages of purple prose on local beauty spots, looks useful, even if a trifle out of date.

Curiosity drives me to ignore the warnings against venturing up on to the first floor of Government House, and I find myself a pleasant retreat in an airy room with French windows opening on to a balcony with a view across the plateau toward the coastal plain. Several distant promontories are visible, stretching out from the jungle covering; I find them named on Mr Dastur's maps, and am seized by a mad urge to explore them.

On our first free weekend, Nick scrounges some K-ration packs and we set out for the day, determined to reach Lodwick Point, a weathered spur within walking distance that seems a natural lookout over the rugged grandeur of the Western Ghats. Despite, or because of, the detailed maps in the guide, it proves easy to get lost in the maze of tracks and paths that tunnel through the wilder areas of jungle. Mr Dastur's book carries warnings of panthers and wild pigs, but doubtless they have been eliminated by generations of Great White Hunters on visits to Government House.

We don't encounter anything more threatening than noisy pea-fowl, the occasional group of monkeys moving through the tree tops, or a scampering grey tree rat. When eventually we break clear of the undergrowth and out into the open space of the escarpment, it makes all the sweat and toil worthwhile. We follow a rough path running across scorched grasses that ends at a massive rocky outcrop, hanging, brooding, high over the Koyana valley.

Wedging ourselves among the crannies we revel in a grand panoramic view of the ghats, extending down to the coastal plain and the sea some thirty miles distant. A cooling breeze sweeps up the mountainside, an updraught that creates little 'wind devils', sends them careering along the path, sucking up dust and debris several feet above the ground until they lose momentum and collapse.

It is a spot I return to several times, filling several pages in my sketchbook in an effort to preserve something of the heady beauty of the landscape. According to Mr Dasur's guide there are several spectacular waterfalls from the plateau during the monsoon season. We are here at the wrong time—when I visit the downfall area of Chinaman's Waterfall and Dhobi Fall, they are dried-up apologies, mere token trickles of water seeping between the rocks.

It is possible to clamber down the hillside a fair way, dodging thorn bushes and clumps of cactus, before the final drop, where there are superlative views of the valley and its narrow cultivated area, a verdant strip running through the parched plain, gradually rising to wooded slopes, then a bare vertical face of stratified rock. I struggle to capture the scene as my sketchbook flutters in the perpetual updraught.

There are other problems at the Yenna Lake in the centre of Mahableshwar. For a time it is one of my favourite haunts for sketching. Workers operate flimsy contraptions lifting water from the lake to spill into irrigation channels running through extensive fruit beds. The local women wash clothes at the water's edge, beating hell out of the laundry on flat dhobi stones. An eye-catching colourful scene, but gradually all work comes to a halt and I realise that my subjects are as much interested in me as I am in them. I reluctantly return to landscape painting.

Back at Government House, I find a table and some chairs among the litter upstairs and convert my retreat into a studio of sorts, where I can paint undisturbed in my free time. One late afternoon, sketching a view of the Koyana valley from the balcony, I try to capture the effect of the setting sun as the atmospheric haze softens and magnifies its ruddy disc. The sea is visible as an intense luminous pink band stretching across the horizon beyond the fading outline of the hills. When the rapidly fading light makes it impossible to continue painting, my interest is captured and held by a huge sun spot visible to one side of the vast disc. I watch it until the sun sinks into the obscuring haze.

Some of the long-delayed mail catches up with us eventually. Marion writes to say she is confused by getting batches of letters out of sequence, and finds my recent movements obscure. I guess that makes two of us; I also feel a mite disorientated after the past couple of eventful months. ■

7b. The Great Revolt

The technical site at Wilson Point is our contact with the outside world. We are hearing strange reports of RAF stations taking action in protest at the dilatory demob; intercepted messages suggest that unrest is widespread and growing. We seek clarification from Poona, to be told that all the big RAF stations and camps are involved in a spontaneous revolt against the prospect of having to hang on here doing little useful work for another twelve months before general demob becomes effective. Poona permanent staff are on the brink of joining in, except for the accounts section who are nobly working on long enough to ensure that everyone is paid before they take action. A gesture we all appreciate.

We are dazed by the news, though there's little we can do that will affect the situation in our present isolation; Nick climbs the aerial mast to hang a token red handkerchief as a gesture, but otherwise life goes on much as usual. There's some

speculation about the official reaction to the revolt, fears expressed that the army will be called in to sort things. Which could be nasty. But so far it seems all quiet on the ground and we just hope the protest will provoke some positive results.

To be continued . . . ■

8. Pokhari Ghat Pastorale

It's the day of the Great Escape —half a dozen trainees are to transfer from the Wilson Point site to the companion GEE station at Pokhari Ghat, in the wilderness some sixty miles north of Poona. We make a quick departure, piling on to a ration-run truck returning to Poona base camp in the afternoon, with a promise that our long-withheld kit will be sent on from Purandhar Fort.

In the event everyone's kit arrives at Poona except mine. We set out for Pokhari Ghat during the morning, with me still moaning about my missing gear, the truck driving along the main Bombay road before branching off on to a convoluted route, rough-surfaced and pot-holed, twisting and climbing up high into the ghats.

It's a parched deserted landscape we travel through. There are occasional signs of cultivation along the valley bottoms, but after several months with little or no rainfall the grass that spreads over low-lying areas and creeps up the hillsides is sun-scorched, a sere and yellow waste broken only by dark-green smudges where isolated trees and shrubs still cling to dust-smothered foliage.

Wedged uncomfortably between packages, we gaze over the tail of our transport, Greenie already brooding over his next meal, Joskins beefing about mail delays, Nark Harris bemoaning the pending ban on sending food parcels home, Alan up-dating his personal vendetta with the Labour government over the vexed question of postponement of the home leave he's legally entitled to after four years overseas war service, even if the time has largely been spent dodging falling coconuts in Ceylon. Nick, perched above us on a tall packing case, maintains an aloof silence, having heard it all before.

The ancient truck labours up yet another bend. Nick points ahead from his vantage point, yelling "We've arrived!", his voice almost lost in the sound of a protesting engine and creaking suspension. We turn to glimpse a large shed and a cluster of Nissen huts at the foot of a hill, still some way off, with the gash of a recently made path leading up to an operations unit and radar aerial tower on its crown.

The track levels out, the truck picks up speed. In minutes we pass through a barbed-wire perimeter fence to pull up on a cleared area alongside the shed. A cheery crowd of helpers rushes to unload supplies and pass down our gear, greeting us warmly as we stamp about easing cramped limbs after the journey.

The general atmosphere is so friendly that we all immediately feel at home, and our first meal in the small cookhouse is voted by Greenie to be a decided

improvement on the poor catering we endured at Mahableshwar. Though we are put to the test next day when told that the station football team and supporters are due to depart for a match with the Wilson Point team, and find ourselves expected to keep the transmitter operational while they're all away.

We make a token protest about the sudden responsibility and us knowing sweet fa about the equipment after misinstruction at Mahableshwar. Our fears are swept aside with assurances that it never goes wrong. Despite misgivings, we wave them on their way, expressing the devout hope that they beat hell out of our late oppressors. Which they do, to our intense satisfaction, and our enforced spell of duty goes without a hitch, as promised.

A few days later, I scrounge a lift into Poona in search of my still-missing kit and in need of medical attention. A blister on the tip of my right index finger, the result of over-enthusiastic plucking of my improvised bedrope-stringed bass during impromptu music sessions at Wilson Point, has defied DIY first aid and turned septic. The medic lances it, covers the digit with a massive fingerstall and tells me I'd better stay the rest of the week, so he can check on progress. This conveniently gives me time to concentrate on tracking down my missing kit.

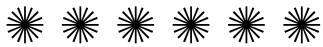
It turns up in a store where it has been locked away by a security-minded erk, then promptly forgotten. I have time to dash around the shops in the town to make up a couple of food parcels to supplement family rations back home, and post them before the ban comes into force. After that I'm short of funds and there's not much more I can do; it's payday tomorrow at Pokhari Ghat but I won't be there to collect it.

A further disincentive to action is that the temperature here is soaring into the nineties, even hotter than Bombay and Calcutta, according to the papers. Moving out of the shade into the sun is like walking into a furnace blast and immediately invites the restless attentions of clouds of hyperactive pestiferous flies. It cools off slightly in the evenings, when I wander over to the air transit camp where the lucky few travelling home by plane depart, all part of the RAF site but separated from our section by a two-and-a-half mile walk along the air strip.

It's a model camp with a canteen run on help-yourself lines, clean and well-kept, and boasts two small air-conditioned free cinemas, with a change of programme every night. I indulge myself, linger to watch James Mason and Ann Todd in *The Seventh Veil*, and return the following night for the Hope-Crosby-Lamour *Road to Utopia*.

When I go for a check-up, it seems my finger hasn't responded to treatment. I avert my gaze from the bloody sight of a freely wielded scalpel removing layers of mortified flesh, and am relieved that enough remains for another fingerstall to be put in place, with an assurance that this time everything will be all right. So I return to Pokhari Ghat, taking with me a large accumulation of mail that has been delayed because of bad flying weather over the Persian Gulf. The hut is very quiet that evening as everyone concentrates on catching up with family matters.

Next morning I'm introduced to a mobile shower installed outside the hut by Nick and Greenie during my absence. Finding a spare battered galvanised bucket, they drilled innumerable holes in one side immediately under the lip, fastened a rope to the handle so that the bucket, after being filled two-thirds full of water, may be raised over a handy tree branch. Another cord attached to the front enables the bather to tilt the bucket judiciously, so that the water sloshes through the holes. With a little practice the water descends at an effective rate where you expect it. Given the general lack of local washing facilities it is sheer luxury to be able to take a refreshingly cool shower on a hot day.



We are not overworked here. Thanks to the number of operators and mechanics now in the camp, even continuous running of the transmitter on test does not make inordinate demands on our time. The days pass uneventfully until rumours of an impending visit by the GEE Chain commanding officer induce a certain tension into our relaxed work schedule. Our man-in-charge decides that the practical but slap-dash arrangements need to be smartened up, and henceforth all due maintenance will be meticulously carried out.

It seems that the diesel generators, on which we rely for power, have received little attention since coming into operation a couple of months back, following the service maxim that if it's working, don't bugger it up. Nick usually enjoys messing about with diesels, but he's been sent to Poona to take the place of the factotum, recently demobbed, who looked after the GEE Chain office. So I find myself, with Joskins, given the job of making up for any past neglect.

We carry out routine checks strictly as per manual, but when we get down to cleaning there are no rags to be had—I suspect they've been pinched by transport staff. We make do with some old empty sacks left lying around from the time the site was built. While they remove the worst of the muck off the generators, they leave fresh deposits of powdered cement and hemp fluff sticking to most surfaces.

We sacrifice some scruffy items of personal underwear, soak them in paraffin, and go over everything again. Both operational and standby units look the better for our attentions. A grateful officer, dazzled by the polished brasswork and gleaning paint, above all relieved that everything is still working, grants us the reward of a work-free day at some time in the future.

The new shower is put to extensive use to get rid of the muck that has been transferred to our persons with this task. Hard scrubbing gets us clean but fails noticeably in the area of personal freshness. Despite all our efforts, we exude a persistent sickly-sweet aroma of diesel fuel, and noses tend to twitch in our proximity. I fancy we'll be kept out of sniffing range when the commanding officer arrives...

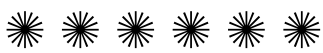
When the inspection does materialise I happen to be back in Poona, seeing the

doc about my finger. I am able to scrounge a lift in on the big articulated lorry and trailer, used for heavier equipment, which is due for a service at the depot. It's a vehicle that's awkward to manoeuver on the tighter bends, but we make good time travelling down the ghat stretch and are soon bowling cheerily along the main road, with Phil vocalising at the wheel.

Then disaster strikes: Clouds of steam belch out of the bonnet and the engine clatters noisily. Pulling up at the roadside for a quick check reveals that the radiator is bone dry. Phil swears and departs in search of water, leaving me turning the engine so the pistons don't seize up.

A nearby army depot help us out, but the water leaks out of the radiator as fast as it's poured in and Phil decides that the radiator bottom has cracked and is ready to drop off. I dash over to the depot, phone Nick, and request a tow into base. All we can do is squat at the roadside cursing our luck until rescued late that afternoon. I miss my medical appointment.

Fortunately Nick is able to wangle me into the surgery the following day when I learn that all has gone well. My fingernail has fallen off, the top of my finger looks curiously shrivelled, but an amused medic assures me it will soon be back to normal.



I return to Pokhari a couple of days later. The artic is still being serviced, if not scrapped, and I get a lift with Sammy, one of the Indian Air Force cooks, on the back of an open 3-tonner diverted to the ration run. A high wind is blowing, raising clouds of fine dust that obscure the sun. Rolling along the Bombay road we see a 'dust demon' in the distance, a murky column charging across the plain. It approaches the road, racing parallel with it for a stretch, a threatening pillar over thirty feet high and five feet across, then veers erratically away. The dust clouds worsen as we turn on to the ghat road and we are forced to abandon the back of the lorry and squeeze in the cabin, alongside Jack, who is having a job keeping his windscreen clear.

Within sight of the camp the truck judders to a halt. Jack gets out and impatiently strips and cleans a dust-clogged carburetter and during the pause the wind abruptly drops, the dust gradually settles. By the time we roll alongside the cookhouse the sun has emerged in all its glory.

Jack is a regular driver on the ration run, a goodnatured guy always ready to help out others despite his continual toubles with the worn-out transport. Like the time when Joe, one of our operators shortly due for demob, had done some last-minute shopping in Poona and bought an ice-cream mixer to take home. On hearing this, Jack swiftly negotiates with a mate in stores and a large slab of ice, well wrapped in sacking for insulation, is smuggled in with the rations. Fortunately, this is one trip when Jack suffers no breakdowns or delays, so a sizeable chunk of

ice survives the journey and is delivered to the cookhouse. Jack having tipped off the cook in advance, a supply of cornflour custard has been saved from dinner preparations. By general consent it is decided there and then to convert it into ice-cream, both as a working test of the mixer and a farewell celebration for Joe.

Everyone herds into the small cookhouse for the occasion. The ice is broken and, after pranksters are restrained from dropping bits down people's pants, put into the machine. There is no shortage of volunteers to do the cranking. The first batch of ice cream is consumed as soon as ready, though there isn't enough to go round. A second batch of cornflour mixture hastily made by Barry the cook takes ages to cool before production can be resumed, but the ice-cream is eventually wuffed, amid appreciative comments, by the rest of the gang, and Joe's ice cream maker voted a great success.

There are still fragments of unmelted ice, and rather than see the remains of the cornflour go to waste, Barry proposes that we round off the evening with a final batch. Carried away by enthusiasm and our newly-acquired expertise, we crank away merrily to produce a really cold and solid batch. But folk have been yawning and drifting away to their beds. By the time this last offering is declared fit for consumption, most of the surrounding huts have already dowsed their lights and the cookhouse is empty apart from Joe, Jack, Barrie, Greenie, Joskins and me. So we sit and manfully try to dispose of the whole treat between us... It's good we decide, the best yet, really creamy and chilly, though it did seem a waste to be scoffing it after midnight rather than enjoying it in the heat of the afternoon. But there are limits, we can't manage it all. We take the remains with us to our separate huts to create mayhem by dropping it down the necks of peaceful sleepers.

Surprisingly, there are no ill-effects next day, either from over-consumption of ice-cream or the late-night punch-ups. When Joe departs for Bombay, complete with ice-cream mixer, in search of that troopship home, he leaves a pleasant memory behind him. ■

9. Night Thoughts from Pokhari Ghat

It's 3am and I don't feel the least bit dopey though I've been on duty since six o'clock. I tramped up to the tech site early to help the other mechanic, Dave, track down a reported intermittent fault plaguing the standby transmitter. Intermittent faults can be a bastard; the only sure way of eliminating them is a time-consuming systematic checkout of circuits.

By the time we'd located the cause of this elusive malfunction supper was ready. When we tossed up for turns as relief operator, unlucky me gets landed with the middle watch from 1.30am on.

Curling under a blanket for a brief kip, I'm shaken awake a mere instant after my head hits the pillow. A grinning Arthur Cox, the operator sharing the watch, hands

me a mug of hot black coffee as a peace offering. “All quiet so far,” he calls as I stumble outside for a quick leak, and after due contemplation of the night sky with its spread of unfamiliar constellations, I return to find him already stretched out, unconscious, on the bed.

I focus my muddled thoughts on routine checks, settling down before the set sipping my drink, dumbly gazing at the glowing screen set in a facade of flicking meters, indicator lights, and a multiplicity of knobs and switches. Valve-cooling fans hiss, shudder and moan; relays and contacts chatter and click in ordered sequence; overhead the persistent hum of the extractor fans rises in pitch to a sporadic howl of indignant protest at the invading backdraft of hill-top breezes. I don the headphones to muffle the din.

Operating this GEE equipment isn’t a job calling for much initiative. On aircraft detection gear the operator has to be alert for new echoes appearing with each sweep of the beam around the screen display, to plot and check known echoes. On this navigational set-up it’s largely a matter of keeping an eye on pulses from the master and slave stations displayed on the screen, of ensuring they’re locked in position, making quick adjustments should they start to drift along the trace.

It borders on the monotonous. You can write letters or read between times on the small desk fronting the set, but if you do succumb to boredom and doze off, sooner or later a harsh dah-di-dah-dit-dah rasps in your ears to jerk you awake—our contact with Purandhar Fort station is the morse key: a relentless master.

Still, I enjoy being on duty at night. Back in Blighty it’s spring, here it’s the hot season. During the day the transmitter hut is a furnace, heat beating down from the sun-baked iron roof, extractor fans useless when the outside temperature rises to the 90s. Sweat runs into smarting eyes as you bend over the set; tiny mango flies hovering at nose tip become irritating out-of-focus jigging black dots.

Absentmindedly you scratch prickly-heat bumps raw or flap a futile hand at flying bloodsuckers attracted by the trickling perspiration on your back. But at night all that changes. A welcome breeze stirs and cools the air over the hills; at last the roof fans can do their job efficiently, keep the temperature in the hut at an equable level. There’s an absence of airborne pests. It’s bliss to feel fresh and cool.... real cool. This, plus all the black coffee, contributes to a state of wakefulness.

The room looks a tip. The units of the standby set we’ve been probing are still in disarray on the workbench, with a jumble of tools and test gear. On a shelf along the opposite wall a few well-read paperbacks and out-of-date British newspapers are scattered next to the electric heater and a kettle topped up with water ready to brew more coffee so I can rouse Dave with the good news that it’s his turn to take over. A pile of plates and cutlery with the remains of our suppers is festooned with empty K-ration coffee packs.

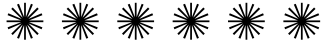
A foraging mouse appears at the aerial-feeder duct in the roof over the shelf, its nose twitching in the direction of the grease-congealed crockery. I scrape my

sandals over the floor to scare it off, but it holds its ground, fixing me with a beady stare as it debates whether to risk a quick dash to the tempting plates. I flick a match in its direction. It skips nimbly to one side, smartly fields the wooden splint, disappears back up the duct with its booty.

Seconds tick away into minutes... minutes yawn into hours. It's not so bad when the spare set's functional. Unofficially, it's a good shortwave receiver, though the wavebands are usually cluttered with a cacophony of American radio hams when all you want is the solace of a BBC station.

Last time I listened in, we had an entertaining spell eavesdropping on a guy in Manila sharing spicy details of his love life with a ham in San Francisco, lost him, then picked up a loudmouth in the vicinity of Michigan, boasting of his output strength—"Yeah, ten watts: least that's what it ses on the licence... haw-haw-haw!"—and claiming to have picked up a bomber station transmitting from Rangoon.

Pity we couldn't transmit to let him know that he was being received loud and clear by the GEE station at Pokhari ghat, in the middle of nowhere, India.



In the middle of nowhere... well, the story goes that the ideal site chosen by the boffins for this radar station proved to be completely inaccessible, that we're now esconced on the second-best choice, somewhere in the wilderness of the Koringi range, north of Poona. Large-scale maps are not available so I've still not sorted out the exact location. It's probably an official secret anyway.

We've visited Manchar, a populated spot to the west, foraged east as far as the huddle of buildings that's Bhimashankar, and regularly run our water bowser south to suck up supplies from pools that could be the dried-up bed of the Bhima river. And that's as close as I can get a fix.

The local part of the road—well, dirt track, to be accurate—was scraped specially to reach our hill site. It merges into what, with more justification, may be termed a road, which then traverses five ghats, winding tortuously in the process, doubling back on itself occasionally, so that the sense of direction becomes confused. Yet there are no practical problems getting to Poona.

You just follow the road down, grinding through dirt and potholes, until you come out on the Bombay-Poona road, turn left, and there's a clear run through to the RAF supply depot. Easy. Or it would be if our clapped-out transport wasn't forever breaking down. ■

10. Farewell Pokhari

I happen to be on duty at the time, sorting out the morse from the crackle in my headphones, all concentration, laboriously scrawling on the message pad:

ALL GEE STATIONS INDIA
CLOSING 25 MAY

As the sense sinks in I do a double-take, ask for confirmation, find I got it right first time. Then I have difficulty convincing Bert, the operator sharing the watch, that I'm not pulling his leg. On phoning the signal down to the domestic site I meet with further incredulity and hang up asking myself why folk are so reluctant to accept good news when it finally arrives after an unduly long wait.

Almost immediately the handset jangles again. I leave it for Bert to answer. "Yessir," he says obsequiously, "I'll put him on now," passing the phone while his spare hand makes a cutting gesture across his jugular.

Obviously the duty clerk has had difficulties with the officer in charge, who is now quizzing me closely, leaving me wondering if I've been taken for a ride. When our relief takes over we traipse down to the cookhouse, only to find that Phil the duty driver, just back from Poona with the weekly rations and all the latest gen, has already clinched the matter.

"The radar officer at Poona drome was hoppin' mad about this order to close down all units," he reports. "Complains that all transmitters are working, all his bloody kites have just been fitted with the latest GEE navigational gear, and now he won't be able to try it out. Almost in tears he was. Says it's crazy to stop when the monsoon is bringing bad flying weather." He grimaces. "Hope the bugger doesn't make 'em change their minds-I don't fancy doing this run up the ghats when the rainy season sets in."

Our small isolated outpost, official designation 146 Air Ministry Experimental Station, is stuck in the wilderness of the Western Ghats north of Poona, and depends on motor transport for supplies. It's a key part of a long-range navigational network originally designed to guide Allied planes across India to a belligerent Japan.

Although overtaken by events like atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Japanese surrender, the installation has been completed to plan but only recently become operational.

For the whole of its brief existence it has basked in scorching sunshine, and after a short stay you tend to take this for granted. But there are signs of change; isolated grey cumulus occasionally drift overhead and gradually descend until by evening our hilltop site is enveloped in dank mist. Then the early morning sun boils it all away and we roast as usual.

The clouds return, sudden fierce breezes massing them, black and threatening, high over the ghat valleys. Flickering sheet lightning and grumbling thunder herald a monsoon burst, a torrential downpour that has everyone scrambling for cover. For an unremitting three hours the deluge beats a wild tattoo on the corrugated-iron roofs of the Nissen huts, forces a fine spray through every crevice until it's as damp inside as out.

We nearly have a casualty that day. Climbing back full from the river bed, the water bowser is overtaken by the storm. The ghat road becomes a mudstream, the sluggish bowser skids at a bend, avoids rolling down the hillside but ends up in a ditch. Its bedraggled crew is pinned down until the duty lorry from Poona rescues them, hauls the bowser back on the road and tows it to camp. No wonder Phil voices misgivings.

Next day the sun is back, blazing down from a clear sky and, despite the soaking, the landscape looks as parched as ever. Yet there is a difference. We've grown used to an horizon lost in permanent haze, but now the atmosphere is clean, every particle of dust washed out by the downpour.

The distant ghat hills look nearer, are sharply defined, crystal clear, like the restored detail of a painting from which obscuring varnish has been wiped. In the valleys the farmers are preparing for the monsoon. Columns of smoke rise during the day and fires are visible at night where the ground is being cleared, the burnt yellowed grassland slowly transformed as ploughing turns over the brown soil.

News of our imminent closure has surprising repercussions, like jolting the welfare officer at Poona into belated awareness of our existence. After months of neglect we are presented with morale-boosting largesse-games equipment, lots of books, and a brand-new portable wind-up gramophone with a large box of records. I join rowdy music-lovers investigating the box.

Alan has a broad grin of delight on his face as he rummages. "Sheesh... real swing bands! Benny and Woody, Artie Shaw, Harry James...," he drools, stacking them on the table. "Hey, Greenie, here's a couple of Spike Jones and his City Slickers." Dizzy Brown digs in while Alan gloats over his discoveries, "Not to forget Basie and Duke," he comments.

I notice he discreetly separates a few discards and raise my eyebrows in query.

"Don't ask!" he shudders.

Curiosity roused, I glance at the top label. The name Vera Lynn stares back at me.

An impromptu concert is held that very afternoon, most of the off-duty camp inmates turning out to form a noisy but appreciative audience, lounging on chairs and beds dragged out of nearby huts. For a few hours the happy sound of music sets feet tapping, and brings a mood of relaxation broken only momentarily when, by accident or design, the strains of *We'll Meet Again* ring out. Amid catcalls and whistles of protest, the disc is promptly whipped off the turntable. A brief but solemn ceremony is held when the concert ends at which the record of the

"Forces' Sweetheart" is ritually shattered and cast down the hillside for the vultures.

Obviously anxious to get back to the comforts of Poona base camp, our officer in charge sets a party of mechanics to work, dead on schedule, reducing the framework of the tall aerial tower to its component parts. Others start in on essential paperwork, worrying through huge lists of RAF reference numbers and obscure descriptions, checking spares in stock against the inventory, a task simplified by a forward-looking benefactor who seems to have provided us with everything in duplicate.

Once the mast has been converted into neatly stacked piles of dipoles, spars and assorted fittings, the demolition team transfers its attentions to the ops block, stripping fixtures, taking apart the transmitter and standby units, ready for crating. The hilltop clearing fills with stuff to be moved down to the domestic site, but there's no sign of a gang of coolies we were promised would be sent to take over at this point in the operation. In desperation, the o.i.c. bribes some of the local villagers to join the workforce.

Everything has to be manhandled, and it proves no easy task manoeuvering some of the heavier bulky items down the steep path, when loose soil slides from under feet striving for purchase and the rate of descent unavoidably accelerates. Having made several trips festooned with weighty coils of cables and connections, struggling to maintain balance, glad to dump my burdens and get a breather before scrambling for another load, it amazes me to see what some of the helpers can carry.

It takes two of us to lift part of a telescopic aerial array on to Babu's shoulders, yet he resolutely insists on staggering down with it solo, a feat that earns him cheers and whistles of encouragement as we all knock off from our labours to marvel at his erratic but successful descent.

The tech site is cleared and deserted by the time the sky clouds over again. We are distracted by spectacular displays of sheet and fork lightning but while adjoining valleys are drenched, our hill stays dry. Though we are plagued by a sudden proliferation of insect life. Wherever you walk, what at first glance looks like puffs of dust raised by flapping sandals turns out to be countless crawling juvenile crickets hopping frantically out of the way. Glossy beetles dash purposefully round rocks on which lizards still bask.

Our quarters are invaded by centipedes and clouds of flying ants, joined after dark by so many moths and beetles on the wing that we are forced to put mossie nets over the beds in self-defence. And after 'lights out' we find the gloom relieved by the winking glow of innumerable fireflies. To counter this invasion the huts are sprayed with DDT and there is a temporary but welcome respite: no prying ants invading kitbags, no little mango flies jigging up and down at nose tip. Though the persistent flies that haunt the cookhouse seem to lick up DDT with relish. Happen they'll regret it later.

The general demob programme grinds away behind all this activity, tardily

whittling down our numbers, until I find myself left in charge of the working party. Forced to extend my limited command of Urdu, swotting up basic phrases each night to try out the next day, I provoke much merriment amongst the hired help. Fortunately bakshish an occasional hand-out of cigarettes, or spare K-rations works wonders, and despite trouble with transport, and increasing bad weather, all the technical gear is transferred safely to Poona stores.

We prepare to follow it, but the inevitable signal postponing the closing date of the camp then arrives, creating general gloom, closely followed by another signal posting Alan and me down south to Bangalore for a course. We don't argue, but pack our kit, glad to shake the mud of Pokhari off our sandals and enjoy some dry sunny weather for a couple of weeks.

There is the usual mix-up at Bangalore: we arrive in the middle of a course and have to hang around waiting for the start of the next. Just as we finish, fortuitously, my demob number comes up, so I return to Poona merely to get my documents cleared before joining the queues waiting for the next boat home.

Travelling down the ghats to Bombay, there is a steady downpour of rain, an unusual coolness. Once scorched yellow slopes are now vividly green with new growth: waterfalls bounding down the rocks and through the dense vegetation look from a distance like giant snail trails.

As the train descends to the flooded paddy fields of the coastal plain, I wonder when everyone got away from the camp, almost wish I could have a last look at a transformed Pokhari Ghat: the dried-up waterfalls will be restored, all the isolated pools in the Bhima river will be united in a raging torrent, the sunsets will be spectacular... And the once dusty ghat roads will be muddy and impassable, comes a final sobering thought. ■

11. Just One Of Those Days... (The day my demob group came up...)

When the 16th day of July 1946 dawns, I am in South India, my demobilisation imminent, at an RAF camp on the outskirts of Bangalore, attending a brief EVT course doing commercial art. Tuition is rudimentary as might be expected, since Educational and Vocational Training is largely a token gesture by the military authorities, an improvised recognition of the need to transform trained killers back into domesticated civilians, prior to release from the armed forces and shipment home to their loved ones. Having absorbed all that the course has to offer, I'm left with a day to fill before reporting back to my unit up north, near Poona.

We're free to leave camp but have been warned to stay clear of the old part of town, where the post office building in Crescent Road is surrounded by armed guards in anticipation of a demonstration.

A widespread strike by Indian postal workers has already brought business to a standstill in several major cities. I wander out into the sunshine away from potential trouble, to the east of the town, to make some sketches of an ancient Dravidian temple at Ulsoor Tank.

Such expeditions always attract an audience. A small, curious group gradually hems me in, until there is scarcely elbow room to work. Whenever I look up from my drawing pad to gaze at some elusive detail, all eyes follow mine, then drop back to the page, studying intently every mark my pencil makes; except for one youngster at my left, who just stares disconcertingly into my face the whole time.

On my right, an enthusiastic watcher takes charge of proceedings, admonishing newcomers who stroll up and block the view, sending them round to the rear of the group. There is a lively exchange of comment in between sketches.

A nearby church is pointed out to me: why, I'm asked, don't I write that in my book instead of this boring old temple ? Or I'm told that there's a nice new building down the road, a hospital, much more interesting.

Then the complete put-down: a pitying enquiry... why not get a camera instead of doing all this hard work ?

The sun is overhead; it's hot and sticky. I wriggle through my interrogators and retreat to the shade of a nearby coffee house, content to watch Bangalore languorously pass by while I cool off under flapping ceiling fans, sip iced coffee laced with cream from a tall glass, and chew salted fat cashew nuts from a dish thoughtfully left on the table to encourage repeat orders.

I return to camp that afternoon in a contented mood, pack my kit and collect a travel warrant for the return journey to Poona on the early morning train the following day.


R.A.F. Form 2520A
AIRMAN

152802

ROYAL AIR FORCE
SERVICE AND RELEASE BOOK

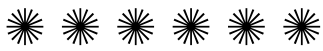
Rank AIRCRAFTSMAN FIRST CLASS
Service Number 1693824
Surname TURNER
Initials H E
Class of Release "A"
Age and Service Group No. 44

The hut is deserted but some benefactor has left a few recent copies of the *Daily Mirror*, mailed from home, on the table.

I am catching up with the exploits of Jane, the forces favourite cartoon strip, when whooping, hollering inmates return to tell me that radar mechs in the mid-40s demob groups are due to report to Bombay by August 6th, ready for the trip home.

It's now almost a year since VJ Day and the official end of hostilities in the Far East, and I seem to have been waiting for this news so long that I suspect a leg-pull.

They drag me round to the orderly room notice board where the signal is pinned up, and make me read it out loud before I believe it. And even then it takes a while to sink in.



When the war ended, we were told that priorities for demobilisation and return to Britain would be determined by a simple formula, balancing age and length of war service. So in the autumn of 1945, a 25-year-old airman with four years war service as a radar mechanic behind me, I find I'm placed in demob group 44, while the first lucky sods allowed to head for Bombay and a troopship home are placed way down in the 20s group.

Complications soon set in. The powers-that-be start to drag up imponderables like "essential technical qualifications" and "exigencies of the service" to delay key groups; in other words you will only get demobbed as and when it suits them. The subsequent delays that result do not go down well among enlisted men left with little useful work to do as military routines become increasingly redundant.

By the New Year, the rate of demobilisation proves so tardy and manifestly unfair that protest strikes in RAF camps spread spontaneously throughout India and South-east Asia. The speed and success of the revolt owes much to the fact that disaffected troops control all essential communications.

Censorship of forces mail was stopped some months before, which probably explains why the military authorities seem so completely out of touch with the mood of the lower ranks, and at a loss how to cope with such sweeping insubordination.

But the government back home gets the message, and the word "mutiny" is tacitly avoided.

It is probably a matter of deep relief when the strikers, having given vent to their feelings, voluntarily return to normal duties at the end of January. Some belligerent face-saving statements come from the Air Ministry, several courts-martial are held, a few scapegoats sentenced. Matters are discussed in Parliament, though not reported very extensively in the British press, and most of the military sentences are duly quashed.

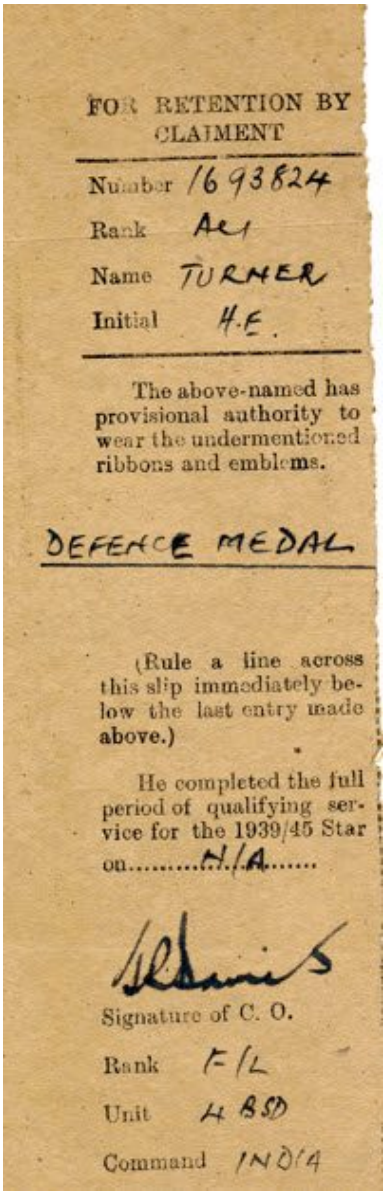
For a brief spell it seems that positive action is being taken to improve matters; then, amid vague talk of the world-wide shortage of shipping space, inertia takes over again.

But now, for us lucky few, our time has come. Escape and freedom beckon. We spend that evening in the NAAFI canteen in riotous celebration. The 16th of July 1946 is firmly established in my mind as a day I shall long remember.

However... with the benefit of hindsight, I realise that more happened that day than the events I've set down. While we whoop it up the members of the South Indian rail unions meet, determined to show fraternal support for the struggling postalworkers, and vote to strike in sympathy.

Next morning, frail, hangovered, all ready to catch a train that is to be the symbolic start of my journey home, it is a distinct shock to find that the railway system of South India has ground to a halt overnight.

Which makes the 17th of July 1946 pretty memorable for me, too. But I guess I'll have to save the story of how that day's problems are resolved for another occasion. ■



FOR RETENTION BY CLAIMENT

Number 1693824
Rank Aci
Name TURNER
Initial H.E.

The above-named has provisional authority to wear the undermentioned ribbons and emblems.

DEFENCE MEDAL

(Rule a line across this slip immediately below the last entry made above.)

He completed the full period of qualifying service for the 1939/45 Star on N/A

Signature of C. O.
Rank F/L
Unit H BSD
Command IND/4

[Compiler's note: Curiously, this item was published in the Fiction Supplement to Andy Robson's zine *Krax* #36 (1999)]

Progress Report

I've had comments on the piece covering the trip out to India from a mixed bag of contacts and am quite pleased with its effect. It was an episode not covered in the correspondence of the time, mainly because of censorship; there were scattered references in letters after censorship ended, which I had to piece together and relate, and dimming memories.

Surprisingly, it all came out in a piece after being let to simmer in the subconscious for a while. I've worried it a bit here and there after the class reading [in Jim Burns' writing classes] but feel relatively happy with the final version. Am still a trifle baffled why this period of my life presents itself in more glaring detail than most others, especially the recent past. Vinç [Clarke] finds it "particularly astonishing" that I have a recollection of continuous events when his "own memories are of a few high points, interspersed with years of mixed loathing and boredom."

All in all, I'm encouraged to complete the saga of strange doings at Pokhari Ghat as our small band withered away, and closure and the monsoon came nearer. But I must get Vinç to follow up outstanding items for the 1938 epic now that he's suddenly digging for me! ■

An alternative account of Harry Turner's time in India was published in Hazel Ashworth's fanzine *Lip* #6 in September 1991.

"... Time drags. Our dwindling enthusiasm has been further dampened by a revived monsoon. While a mere 5 inches fell on Sunday, local reports estimate that 10 inches fell on Monday, which we are told is a record for these parts... India may be a land of colour but at the moment the dominating colour is

grey. The horizon is lost in a dreary mist: a grey-brown heavy sea batters the rocks, the wind lashes the rain in furious fits of spray across the hut roof, and it drains off in a steady curtain to form a muddy moat...

Inside, it's almost as wet as out with a continual drizzle penetrating the roof thatch, and blowing through the ill-fitting window shutters. Everything is damp, clammy and musty. Was woken the other night by a drip penetrating the mosquito-net and bouncing off my nose on to the pillow; had to crawl out and suspend my cape over the top of everything, and try to snatch a few more hours sleep before it all collapsed... Next day we were cheered with the news that the Japanese surrender has been confirmed in a radio broadcast..."

from a letter home, August 1945

In the immediate post-Hiroshima period, fannish survivors in Britain were resuming contacts and piecing together a shattered fandom. But there were many fans still far from home, with no immediate hopes of getting back. I was one of them.

The autumn of 1945 found me, a redundant RAF radar mechanic, stranded on the vast sub-continent of India, still a gem in the Crown of the British Empire. The authorities seemed nonplussed by the suddenness of Japan's collapse after the atom-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The outbreak of peace convinced grumbling 'civilians in uniform' that their continued presence here had lost any point, and military routines wilted. The question increasingly asked was: "When do I get home—and out ?"

Priorities for demob and return to Britain were to be determined by a simple formula, juggling age and length of service. Then we were told that the resulting figure was subject to manipulation by the powers-that-be with imponderables such as 'essential technical qualifications' and—inevitably!—'the exigencies of the service'. In other words, you will be demobbed when They say so. As a 25-year-old airman with, at that date, four years war service as a radar mech, my demob group was 44. Hard luck! Currently, a few lucky sods in the 20s group were heading for Bombay and a troopship home. There were rumours that the release of radar technicians would be subject to delay, which augured a long wait for me. In response to anxious questions from Marion about why I'm hanging on in India when I could be more useful at home, I could only write:

"The announcement that only 28s will be demobbed by next June (1946) seems odd to me. If they can get rid of the 20s by, say, December, then six months is a helluva long time to spend over a mere eight groups. I only hope this announcement is intended to counteract the false optimism of newspaper reports—you can imagine the reception the news got out here! Especially on top of the suggestion to release groups at home before their overseas counterparts. Demob is a very sore point among the troops here."

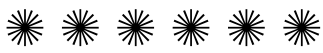
And to back this up I snipped a few cuttings from the letter columns of SEAC, the forces newspaper in South East Asia Command, and stuffed 'em in the envelope...

> "Because SEAC is a medium through which the authorities may know our minds, I write to emphasise that the 'provisional' programme of releases gives little ground for satisfaction to men in groups 30 to 40. RAF men are aghast at the thought that, even though the war is over, another 12 to 18 months will go by before they are likely to be demobilised..."

> "The airman has already seen considerable differentiation between various trades within the RAF groups. Now he sees his own service lagging woefully behind the Army and Navy..."

> "I am a cook, and like other cooks, clerks, nursing orderlies, etc., my demob is delayed because there are no bods to fill our places... the only time a cook is ever thought of is when a man is hungry. In the RAF are thousands of men in redundant trades, also hundreds of young bloods in air crews, some of whom have never been on one operation, yet they are still paid to charp it off [lie on their beds] day after day. Let them be put in the trades that are needed."

Signs of paranoia there! I'd have loved to read the letters that didn't get into print. The rumbling went on unceasingly...



In the general confusion I was posted to an RAF station at Adgodi, near Bangalore, in South India, for retraining to service airborne radar gear. On arrival it was pleasant to be greeted by familiar faces; mates from the voyage out here, months ago, passing acquaintances from the dysentery-ridden transit camp at Worli, where new arrivals were dispersed to operational signals units. We'd plenty to jaw about, catching up with each other's travels; when we finally call round to the orderly room to ask about the course we're told that it's already under way, and that there are no vacancies for us late arrivals. And—added our informant, an indifferent admin type—there weren't enough of us to justify setting up a second course. We wondered why we'd bothered to come.

They found ways of keeping us occupied while they decided what to do with us. Sent to clear away some long-dismantled aerial mast sections, we had to assemble a portable derrick to help manhandle the big wooden frames. Someone, rashly, had dumped the parts in the open for several months. When we tried to lift the wooden spars they crumbled to powder, leaving us clutching the metal bits while hordes of termites scurried away over our feet. The aerial frames were in no better

shape. But anxious to please, we collected the metal fittings and solemnly presented them to the stores with a token bag of wood dust. And a few crushed termites.

We were in no hurry to leave. It was the cool season in South India: steady sunshine with the day temperature around 80 degrees, and cool nights. I devoted myself to catching up with my sunbathing.

The camp was within walking distance of the military cantonment area of Bangalore, which was the centre of No.2 Army Command in India. The place crawled with military police determined to ensure that strict army standards of dress were observed at all times by BORs (British Other Ranks) and that no one wandered into the rest of the city, which was out of bounds to all servicemen. Fortunately, the RAF was a little more relaxed about these things. There were only a few permanent staff at Adgodi: most of the inmates, like me, were just passing through, wanderers between small technical units, away from the discipline of the large camps and installations. In off-duty hours we were allowed the privilege of getting out of uniform and able to leave camp wearing 'civvies'. I acquired an outrageously multicoloured shirt, and being the proud possessor of an all-over mahogany tan, found that I could pose as a civilian and wander out of the cantonment with impunity and, despite the suspicious glare of officious MPs, mingle with the general populace.

The out-of-bounds situation was largely the result of recent civil unrest. The 'Quit India' movement had a strong following here; yet I found the natives decidedly friendly on these excursions. I visited several cinemas to see Indian films—mainly naive but lively musicals—and the people I sat next to regarded it as a novelty to have a European in the audience. Once convinced of my interest, there was no stopping volunteers explaining plot and dialogue, filling me in with gossip about the stars and news of the directors, recommendations for other films to see... great fun! Returning from one of these expeditions I was intrigued to find myself at a crossroads where some diligent sign-poster had put out-of-bounds notices at each of the four roads. A surrealist triumph or expectation of descending paratroops ?

After being regaled by my accounts of these trips, Jack bearded a friendly Indian flight-sergeant at the camp and asked if an official tour of the sights could be arranged. Local patriotism triumphed, and he not only got permission to ignore out-of-bounds restrictions, but rustled up transport too, and we drove off, a party of twenty, for a half-day tour.

Bangalore then was a relatively modern city, with wide tree-lined roads and parks in the central area. We started our tour round the science colleges, visiting the physics, radiology, spectroscopy and radio laboratories, then moved to the older part of the city, round the market, where there were still narrow winding streets. The party spread out to sample the attractions of the hole-inthe-wall shops, which suited me as I wanted to visit an address in the locality, passed on to me when in Bombay. It was the local communist party branch, where I'd been told I'd find

cultural, as well as political links. Jack came with me but we were soon confused by the erratic numbering on the streets until we tumbled to the fact that the lack of continuity at intersections was because the numbering of the buildings ran off the main street, round the alleyways, and back. When eventually we tracked down my address, the premises were shuttered up and seemed deserted.

We knocked on the door several times without result; just as we were about to retreat, the door opened a crack, and a dimly glimpsed personage informed us that we were at the something-or-other manufacturing company, and they were closed. Maybe we were adrift... maybe we should have had a password... conversation reached a dead end and the door was firmly closed in our faces.

We rejoined the party in time to hear our enthusiastic guide saying that all that existed of Bangalore in the 16th century was a mud-brick fort and a small bull temple, built by Kempe Gowda, chieftain and founder of Mysore state. During the 18th century when Hyder Ali and his son, Tipoo Sultan, rose to power in Mysore, the fort was rebuilt in stone, only to be demolished during the wars with the British. We moved along to inspect the remains of the old fort: it was not very impressive. A part of the wall had been restored but only, apparently, to accommodate a large notice proclaiming "Through this breach the British launched their final assault..."

We clambered on to the 'sagging ramparts then descended to peer into the gloom of a smelly dungeon; a plaque over the ornamental doorway informed visitors that "here were confined Captain (afterwards) Sir David Baird and many others prior to their release in March 1785". The chronicles of the British Raj relate that Captain Baird was incarcerated for four years during the wars with Hyder Ali and the French.

He returned a few years after his release, having risen to the rank of major-general, roundly defeated the opposition and promptly demolished the stone fort. Honour satisfied, he departed for Egypt and clobbered the French forces, called at South Africa where he wrested the Cape of Good Hope from the Dutch, and then went to Spain, where his luck ran out. He lost an arm at the battle of Corunna, and after receiving the thanks of a grateful parliament, he retired.

But I digress...

Next on our itinerary was the Bull temple, to the south of the city. When the ghari pulled up and we descended, hosts of cheering kids came streaming from all directions. Someone spotted the vintage Brownie box camera sported by one of our members and wanted him to take photographs of a huge floral piece they'd just made up for a procession.

Itinerant photographers here process prints on the spot for clients; the kids expected the same service, and were visibly disappointed when snaps were taken but no prints immediately forthcoming. But we reached the temple without incident with a remnant of the crowd still cheering in blithe ignorance of this disappointment.

We slipped off our footwear in the courtyard: it was cool and dark inside the temple after the brilliant sunlight. As our eyes adapted we became aware of a huge black stone seated bull towering above us, gleaming in the light of a few oil lamps—Nandi, the sacred mount of the god Siva. Some 15 feet high and 20 feet long, it was impressive, menacing even.

The place filled with the children, everywhere were festoons of flowers and paper decorations in readiness for the festival. We gave some coins as an offering and were presented with heavy-scented champak blossoms. (I carried mine back to the billet and laid it on top of my mosquito net for the night, and dozed off drenched by its perfume. Next morning it was gone, swiped by some marauding monkey, but its presence lingered).

We investigated one of the four watchtowers erected by Kempe Gowda to mark the boundaries of his township, deciding that the multilingual plaque announcing this fact must have been a much later addition. To round off a crowded day, we lingered at Lal Bagh, gardens laid out by Hyder Ali and Tipoo Sultan in the 18th century, landscaped in the Mughal manner with trees, lotus ponds and lakes, and an abundance of red roses. Sensibly, Sir David had spared this for posterity.

✳ ✳ ✳ ✳ ✳ ✳

I was enjoying my stay in Bangalore. It provided some compensations for the depressing news of delays on the demob front. But it wasn't to last—I collapsed with a fever and lost all interest in life. The camp medic promptly diagnosed malaria, whipped me into sick quarters and dosed me with mepacrine tablets, a malaria-suppressant with a side effect that turned one's skin bright yellow. But I was past caring. I shivered and sweated it out for a week, by which time the doc abandoned his initial diagnosis, panicked, and despatched me to the isolation.wing of the Bangalore Military Hospital as a suspect typhoid case...

Once there, I was thrust into a strait-jacket of a bed and exhorted not to get up under any circumstances. Firmly embraced by crisp starched unrelenting sheets, I couldn't budge anyway. They robbed me of more blood than I felt I could spare, for obscure tests. Then I was put on a strict starvation diet.

Private Mule materialised at the ward entrance on this first day of my incarceration. A tall, thin, dark-skinned Tamil, with shaven head and a prized pair of clonky army-issue boots, he was sweeper, bottle and bedpan bringer, and odd-job man about the ward.

At this first encounter I was treated to an impressive sweeping salute, a broad grin and a deafening "Good morning—sahib!", and it became a morning ritual for the rest of my stay. A cheery soul, he laffed heartily at secret thoughts as he progressed along the ward. He spoke little Urdu and less English; the Anglo-Indian orderlies,Italian POW helpers, and the patients spoke little or no Tamil, which resulted in some cryptic exchanges.

On occasion we stretched sign language to its limits on attempted longer conversations.

"War finis", Mr Mule asserted frequently, "English sahibs go. You sahib, you sahib, all go, tig hai. Leave army", and with a shaking of the head, "India no good". When we tried to find out if he had any family, he declaimed "Father sleep, mother sleep, sister sleep", then added, "Nay missus", and marched of to the accompaniment of one of his deep belly laffs.

Only when my temperature chart looked less like a cross-section of the Alps was I allowed up, content to collapse on a hard seat at the side of the bed. A welcome letter from Jack proved to be a farewell note explaining that he'd been unable to penetrate the defences of the isolation ward to visit me, and had put my kit in the camp stores for fumigation. He'd been posted to Transport Command at Delhi : "Think of the Taj by moonlight and a graceful maiden clad in a diaphanous sari..." he drooled, and I wondered if he'd pinched my copy of the Kama Sutra. The thought flitted into my mind that I'd not written to Marion over the past fortnight; my last unfinished letter was now securely locked up with my kit in Adgodi stores.

The great day came when my nutritional intake was stepped up. A new calorie-conscious sister took over day duty in the ward, and I was promoted to a relaxed diet: breakfast, pigeon-size poached egg with two delicate slivers of bread with butter scraped on, and off; lunch, two teaspoonfuls of minced chicken, ditto reconstituted potato, occasionally followed by a gesture of ice-cream, and maybe fruit; tea, four Marmite-smeared slivers of bread; dinner, same as lunch, only less so.

Initially, this regimen sufficed, but rude health returned and the interval between dinner and breakfast seemed an eternity. In desperation, I joined in the general bribery of passing orderlies with free-issue cigarettes, to obtain an irregular supplement of porridge, biscuits and fruit. Once even—oh ecstasy!—an illicit helping of steak and chips. Most of this contraband was consumed in the evening, when mosquito nets were lowered over beds and the ward lights dimmed for the night.

A renewed interest in life made me appreciate the extent of my confinement. Our ward was an interior room, windowless, where little sound reached us from the corridor. One of my immediate neighbours was an older man, prostrate and incommunicative since his arrival; on my other side was a BOR just recovering from a dose of typhoid who had developed pneumonia and needed a dose of penicillin every few hours.

Passing teams of doctors continued to prod and probe me and extract blood samples for culture tests, and once I was wheeled out for an x-ray though no one seemed to know why. In between these medical routines, I exchanged a few quiet words with the BOR about our ailments and, inevitably, about demob and the question of how long. Otherwise, I tended to stare at the blank glossy hygienic wall opposite, dozed fitfully, and waited for the next interruption.

One of those timeless days I woke to find that a visiting angel had left some books from the hospital library on my table. The titles included Nicer to Stay in Bed, Three Fevers and Death in the Ward (honest!) and were avidly devoured in next to no time flat. I then devoted considerable energy trying to convey to one of the friendlier Italian helpers that I didn't want thrillers or Westerns, but serious novels, science fiction even. He played safe, returning with copies of Collins 'Classics'—solid reading like Kenilworth, Barnaby Rudge, Dr Jeckyll & Mr Hyde and The Sleeper Awakes—and, inevitably in India, lots of Dornford Yates. I never fathomed out why Dornford Yates enjoyed the popularity he did among the sahibs and memsahibs: he just set my teeth on edge. By way of relief, occasional volumes of Thurber, Forester and Greene came my way. Thereafter the selection degenerated...

Boredom was relieved by one of the sisters bearing an armful of American free-issue-to-the-troops paperbacks: Hemingway's short stories, Ogden Nash, Linklater's Juan in China, and a Pocket Mystery Reader with Saki, Leacock, Wodehouse, Waugh and Poe, plus an article by Rex Stout in which he proved that Dr Watson was actually Holmes' wife—a convincing thesis it seemed, supported by quotations transforming Watson from a mere woman, a possible mistress, to establish that she actually was Mrs Holmes. (Marion was sceptical when I passed on this spicy snippet). And M.R. James's Ghost Stories in which I came across this revealing passage:

> "Those who spend the greater part of their time in reading or writing books are .... apt to take particular notice of accumulations of books when they come across them. They will not pass a stall, a shop, or even a bedroom shelf without reading some title, and if they find themselves in an unfamiliar library, no host need trouble further about their entertainment."

A fellow soul, Mr James, I thought; and promptly made a note of the words to quote in some future article.

I don't know how I could have survived my stay at the BMH without books. Then a batch of the mail following me across the continent caught up: long-awaited news from home—Marion still doesn't know I'm in hospital!—a clutter of fanmags, including some VOMs from Forrie Ackerman which provoked peculiar looks from one of the sisters who tidied up my locker that day. And a letter from long-silent fan John 'Zeus' Craig updating me on his travels across Europe. He wrote from a "charming little German village called Neubeckem in Westphalia", after a protracted stay in Italy waiting to join a Jugoslavian operation that was aborted, and then moving up through France to Germany:

> "I see the censorship still is (or was) operating in your area, so you can't tell me exactly where you are... I gather it is in India. Give me Europe every

time....saw some excellent art exhibitions in Rome, including a modern art show with some original di Chiricos which impressed me no end."

I almost had a relapse in envy.

✳ ✳ ✳ ✳ ✳ ✳

Routine was upset one morning by the non-appearance of Mr Mula. The sister on duty confided that he'd complained about a stomach upset and she'd told him to take a 'number 9' pill. Mule promptly swallowed several before he could be stopped; no doubt in the conviction it would speed his recovery. He made an appearance in the evening, looking somewhat shaken and a shadow of his usual ebullient self. We sympathised. He pointed to his belly, bunched his fingers to indicate anguish, looked woebegone, and weakly said "Oh, sahibs...bedpan!" and held up siz fingers. Our minds boggled.

Eventually I was taken off diet, ravenously consuming everything put before me. I began to feel my old self. As a sign of progress I was transferred to a bed on the veranda, overlooking the gardens. It was a relief to see the outside world again, to enjoy fresh air and sunshine, to exercise wasted limbs. Inside, there were too many reminders that I was in a military hospital.

I was balled out for not leaping smartly to attention and saluting as the matron and her entourage swept past my bed one day. I escaped court-martial and prompt execution only when the ward sister explained to the Glowering Presence that I was a low form of RAF life that the army had misguidedly taken in... I thought a more valid argument would be that in my emaciated condition, pajama pants were liable to drop under the stress of saluting. I made a note to be absent or in bed when visiting rank sails majestically through the ward in future.

Still, things were decidedly more cheerful except that my hair started to come out in handfuls, Sister regaled us hair-losers with jovial tales of typhoid patients leaving hospital with pates like shiny billiard balls, then tried to console us with the thought of all the money we'd save on haircuts.

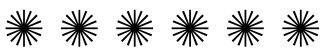
I was promised a bath, and dreamed of a palatial tiled bathroom and soaking in a roomy bath with lashings of hot water, as a change from the usual cold shower. Alas, the bath proved to be a cramped galvanised container, my knees bumped against my chin when I tried to fit in, and the water was lukewarm.

A short while after, I was discharged but they never decided what bug got into my system —just another 'UDF" (undiagnosed fever) case. When I moved into the army convalescent hostel in Bangalore cantonment for a fortnight, I guess I must have looked a rum sight.

My weight had slipped from the usual 160 pounds to a mere 112; my bush jacket flapped on my shoulders and had to make a new notch in my belt to support my shorts. And thanks to the combined effect of mepacrine and a fading

suntan I looked distinctly jaundiced. The good news was that my my hair now only came out in combfuls.

The first day I strolled out of the hostel on tottery legs I was nearly blown over by the wind of a passing cyclist, a portly RAMC officer, who after one look at me was moved to ask how I liked Bangalore after Burma. I felt a fraud, but mumbled "much better" as he rode on. It seemed a shame to waste his obvious sympathy...



St John's convalescent hostel was run by the Red Cross in the person of Mrs Gabe, who mothered us all. Determined to keep our minds off the services during our stay—sound therapy!—she provided civvy clothes for us to wear. We ate at tables set for four, with tablecloths and serviettes. No one rousted you out of bed in a morning. And for entertainment there was an extensive library, games room, radio, and wind-up gramophone.

From the first day of my stay, I found myself at a table with three other victims of the strict regimen of the BMH, determined to regain lost weight. All the bearers soon learned to ask "Second help?" before removing empty plates, and we were dubbed the "wuffing table". I staggered out after lunch into boiling hot sunshine and hugged what shade there was on the mile walk into town.

I was down to basic shirt, shorts and sandals but passed many staid locals fully clad in European suits, complete with ties, sweating heartily; I wondered how they survived. And despite the relaxations in dress, there were some characters who insisted in parading round the hostel in full uniform. Odd.

Dodging the livestock that wandered the street unhindered, nibbling at any surviving greenery, resisting the blandishments of rickshaw wallahs, I called in a few bookshops. They all seemed to be pushing the novels of Dornford Yates.

When aching limbs called for a rest I found an Indian coffee house, and retired into its shade and the welcome cool of flapping ceiling fans, content to watch Bangalore pass by while I chewed fat cashew nuts and sipped tall glasses of iced coffee laced with cream. Revived, I discovered a store with stacks of new Penguins on its shelves.

I lingered awhile browsing but came away with Nat Gubbins' Over the Fence, Isherwood's Mr Norris, a volume of New Yorker Profiles, and an American hardback of Dorothy Parker poems. By the time I returned to the hostel with these treasures, I'd worked up an appetite for tea...

Creaking joints were rested on the lawn, and I read and nattered with other inmates until dusk and foraging skeeters drove us in for a hearty dinner. A box of records, discovered in a corner of the lounge, offered escape from the usual banalities and dance music on the radio, and I enjoyed them while catching up with a long letter to Marion, seated at a writing desk ablaze with a spray of scarlet blooms on one side and a pile of jigsaw puzzles of episodes in the life of the

Buddha on the other. I dropped off to sleep that night feeling that life had returned again after a period of suspended animation in the hospital.

It was a day or so later before I found the energy to venture in the direction of Adgodi. Lifts were scarce and I walked most of the way. But it was worth the efforts : when I reported to the RAF sick quarters for my medical discharge, the doc glanced at my papers and after one look at my wasted frame promptly put me down for 21 days sick leave. When I went to check out a few needed items from my kit, I was further cheered by the news that radar mechs up to group 25 were due for release early in December. I returned to the hostel in jubilant mood with a fat wad of accumulated mail from home.

My outings were cut short when the weather turned dull and showery, with a chill wind.. But sunshine returned and I pestered the WVS office for gen on places where I could spend my leave. Mysore was conveniently near, but alas, it was currently out of bounds because of outbreaks of plague.

An enthusiastic recommendation from behind the counter suggested the Nilgiris—the Blue Mountains—as an alternative: I was torn between the attractions of a hostel at Kotagiri (scenic beauties, hidden among tea plantations, walks, good bus services 'to other towns) and one at Wellington (convenient for Ootacamund, Coonoor, and other stamping grounds of the Victorian Raj).

For a few rupees a day, either place sounded great—and my trip to Adgodi revealed that back-pay amounted to some 500 rupees. No direct booking though; application involved filling up a lengthy form for processing by the admin people, and final approval by the CO, before arrangements could be got under way. I could wait.

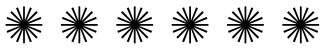
Months before, with the thought of time hanging heavy, I'd started a correspondence course for the forces on the topic of 'modern art'. Owing to my travels and mail delays, my progress to date on the course had been erratic. In the restful atmosphere of St John's I diligently caught up with things, explaining glibly why Millet is a greater realist than Giotto, comparing the painting of Monet and Matisse, writing an essay on cubism, and realising how little I really knew on the subject. I found a well-stocked library in nearby Cubbon Park with an enlighted collection of books on Western art, and after much paperwork and payment of entrance fee, subscription and deposit became a member.

With these resources at my disposal my assignments seemed less daunting. I was often scribbling notes long after everyone else had retreated to bed, and found myself talking to Mrs Gabe about art and artists. She had known Matthew Smith—had a painting of his, presently tucked away protected from damp during the monsoon period.

I became hooked on a weekly journal, Mysindia, published locally, with sensible political and literary articles and comment, and a lively book review section. An article by Jag Mohan on an Indian artist who died a few years before—Amrita Sher-Gil—excited my attention. Most of the contemporary Indian work I'd seen in

Bombay was academic, westernised and boring. The reproductions of Sher-Gils' work left much to be desired but indicated a forceful talent—sort of Gauguin through Indian eyes—that demanded investigation.

I wandered into the local publishing office in search of Jag Mohan, and they passed on his address (he lived in Madras). My enthusiastic letter of enquiry prompted a 3-page account of modern Indian artists of note and the promise of another letter to follow with some reproductions.He also gave me the address of the Punjab Literary League who had published a memorial issue of their journal in tribute to Sher-Gil. I wrote off for it. I was impatient to hear more about her.



I quitted the hostel most reluctantly and returned to RAF reality at Adgodi. I found the place in turmoil: the radar unit was disbanding and moving down to Ceylon and the place was being converted to an Educational & Vocational Training centre. After years in the forces we apparently needed brainwashing before we could be safely returned to Civvy Street. Or it could have been another desperate distraction to keep us occupied until released.

I kept a low profile and found myself an undemanding job in the drawing office, undemanding in that nobody wanted any drawings doing anyway. Happily, my leave pass materialised in the middle of the confusion. I dashed to Bangalore for last-minute shopping, acquiring a grotty sketchpad of local manufacture and a few tubes of water colour, in anticipation of doing some sketching, and sent off two bulging food parcels home to supplement the rations over Christmas.

I shook the dust of Adgodi off my chappals and departed in high glee with all my gear to the train to the hills. It left at dusk. I was alone in a second class compartment with upholstered seats but lighting that discouraged reading, so I settled under a blanket and dozed fitfully until the sun crawled over the horizon. Now the train was well out on to the plains, among palms and paddy fields; black masses on the horizon gradually resolved into mountains, their tops smothered in cloud.

At Mettupalayam, the terminus of the broad-gauge main line, under the shadow of the towering rain-forest covered slopes of the Nilgiris, I transferred to the small-gauge 'Blue Mountain Express', a six-coach train pushed by a sturdy little engine to complete the trip up to Wellington. To say that the next part of the journey was spectacular would be an understatement.

We crawled up steep gradients aided by a rachet track, hugged the mountain-side, passing through fairy caves and grottos, rode over magnificent waterfalls on flimsy-looking bridges, passed through damp drifting clouds, the wild angle of our climb and the height imposing strange perspectives on to the landscape. Below us, Mettupalayam became an insignificant patch that shrank as we climbed. Breathtaking.

Dazed after all this heady grandeur, I dismounted at Wellington station to find that there was no transport to the hotel. But there were plenty of porters jostling for custom: a couple grabbed my kitbag, bedroll and well-filled tin trunk, hoisted them on their heads and jogged their way to my destination. I followed them empty-handed: I hated playing this role of the 'burra sahib', striding along while older, smaller men carried my burdens, but I'd been in India long enough to realise that if you try to buck the system you rob someone of their livelihood.

The holiday home was an imposing residence, run by a Salvation Army 'colonel' and his family, aided by hordes of servants. With mountains on either side, it had a commanding view of Wellington. Bags of scope for painting I thought, happily. Accommodation was excellent: plumbing and sanitation superior to anything I'd encountered in the Raj so far, comfortable beds (and no need to bother with mossie nets at this height), and large open grates in the meeting rooms for wood fires on cool evenings

Mornings started with breakfast in bed, and at the rest of the day's meals food was varied, well-cooked and plentiful. I started to put on weight. Mind you, there was a small price to pay: being hosted by the Sally Army meant that after the evening meal you were expected to join in a brief session of hymn singing, led by the colonel, in good voice but, alas, tone deaf. We all rose to the spirit of the occasion. I threw out the lifeline and promised to be there when they called the roll up yonder, with great gusto. Occasionally harmonium, the colonel, and the assembly got out of phase with exquisitely dire results...

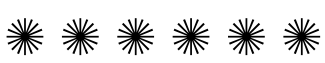
After that first day, I donned my civvies with my shirt of many colours. An army sergeant across the table from me winced and lifted his arms to shield his eyes from the sight: we'd exchanged wry glances, nearly busting from suppressed mirth, during the hymn singing of the previous evening, and in next to no time flat we were exchanging life stories. Derek came from Macclesfield and was currently stationed at the hospital in nearby Coimbatore. Friendship bloomed and we explored the locality together for a few days in between painting expeditions.

The sun rises high and bright in a purple-blue sky: at an altitude of 7,500 feet the sunshine is pure ultra-violet and I took to wearing my bush hat for shade and protection on these outings. Watercolour painting had its problems—a brush charged with colour dried out almost before it touched the paper, and my limited range of pigments seemed inadequate to render the subtleties of the greens in the lush vegetation. Verdant grasslands, tea plantations, shady groves of blue-green wattle and silvery eucalyptus. And the earth was bright red—or was it just the stark contrast with the prevalent greens that made it so? My eyes, long used to the muted tones of a northern clime, found it hard to come to grips with raw tropical hues.

Ootacamund, universally referred to as Ooty, merited a visit as a survival from the heyday of the British Raj, buildings all neat terracotta and white stone trim, neatly set among rolling grasslands. We gawped at The Club, where the rules of

snooker were invented; listened to highfalutin' tales of the Ooty Hunt (it chased jackals in lieu of foxes); posted letters in tall scarlet pillar-boxes embellished with the royal arms and the VR cypher. Overwhelmed by these evocative surroundings, we retired to a nearby canteen to sample the toasted crumpets.

The whole area proved to be pleasant country in which to walk, explore and, on occasion, get lost. I did it all in changing company: Derek went back on duty, and I enjoyed meeting other exiles, and a surprising number of local folk willing to linger and chat. I never realised that I could be so gregarious.



I'd not made a reservation for the return trip; there didn't seem any need. When I descended on the scenic railway, finding it just as breathtaking as my ascent, Mettupalayam was deserted, which is unusual for an Indian station. I found an empty compartment on the train with a sticker on the door claiming it was reserved for two officers, and settled in there. There was room for eight, so I figured they couldn't object. This view was shared by a couple travelling to the next station, who also piled in with their luggage.

Inevitably a transport sergeant then appeared, checking reservations, and told us to clear out. Since he didn't return, and there was no sign of the two officers, we stayed put. At the last minute someone came and changed the sticker on the door. We had a quick look. "LAC Turner & Four Mental Cases" it read. Co-incidence or joke? Uneasily, we decided to await developments. There were none, and the train set off on time.

After my companions departed at Coimbatore, I settled down and dozed off, only to be roused in the night by a weird chanting in the adjoining compartment, accompanied by a banging and scraping on the dividing partition. After a while things quietened down, only to start up more violently. It sounded as though the lunatics had boarded the train after all; I felt sorry for LAC Turner trying to cope with them. Next morning I woke up well before the train steamed into Bangalore City station but my noisy neighbours had already alighted during the night and all was peaceful.

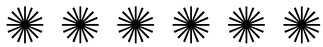
I scrounged a lift back to Adgodi, settled in a conveniently empty hut, rousted out the admin types to check on demob news, rescued a pile of redirected mail and realised, suddenly, that in a fortnight it would be Christmas! My peace was shattered by the arrival of a, gang from Ceylon, destined for the EVT instructors course.

Apart from the demob situation, their main gripe was that Ceylon had not been so good, apart from the scenery. Things cost four times Indian prices; all they could send home was tea, since everything else had to be imported and couldn't be sent out again. I helped solve their problems by becoming self-appointed guide to bargains in the bazaars. It passed the time.

Christmas came and went.

By way of celebration, bearers, sweepers, char- and fruit-wallahs, all the casual workers on the station bestowed floral garlands on us and then stood back for "Krismuss bakshish". Despite the unseasonal weather, a very traditional Christmas dinner was laid on by the RAF with a free issue of local bottled beer—tepid, of course.

In the hot sunshine I found it hard to work up any enthusiasm, retired from the celebrations and tried to remember what snow was like... and wondered how the folks were coping back home, and if my parcels had arrived in time.



The new year found me homing in on yet another reunion of wandering radar mechs. This time we converged on Poona. I arrived late in the afternoon after a long and leisurely train journey up the Western Ghats. I staggered out of the station with my gear and managed to thumb a lift on one of the passing trucks bound for the drome.

My advent was badly timed. Everyone was in a state of jitters that day owing to a visit by Field-Marshal Lord Wavell, Viceroy of India, and the wining and dining were still in progress. I was brushed out of the way behind the guardroom door, a scruffy blot on all the spit and polish summoned up for the great occasion. By the time the Great Man and his vast retinue had been safely, disposed of, departing in the direction of Bombay in a long cavalcade, I emerged as a minor irritant after a tiring day. Nobody knew where to send me.

It stated quite clearly on my papers that I was to join 145 Air Ministry Experimental Station, but after a long debate among guardroom personnel it seemed that only a couple of people had heard of the unit, and one of them was convinced that it was already disbanded. I wasn't really worried: all I wanted was a bed, and they could sort out the rest next day.

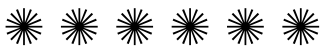
Then someone recalled that several other mechanics had arrived that morning, in the middle of the intensive bullshitting preparatory to the Viceroy's visit, who'd been dumped in a hut on the outer fringes of the camp, far away from the ceremonial area. I was despatched to 'this billet to see if they could cast any light on my destination.

Things brightened up as soon as I staggered into the hut with my kit, to be greeted by several familiar faces. I found a bed space next to Nick whom I'd not seen since we parted at Worli, six months before.

He'd changed slightly: he'd had his head shaved, and I remarked on the shortest crew cut I'd ever seen. In return, he complained that he kept losing sight of me when I turned sideways on—despite the weight I'd regained after the good living of the past few weeks.

We dashed out into Poona to celebrate our reunion in what remained of the

evening, and drank a special toast to Jack, the 'old man' of our gang, demob group 26, who'd written to tell us that he was on his way to Bombay in search of a troopship home...



The RAF ghari, a battered 2-ton Bedford open truck, rattled over the rough ghat road, trailing a plume of fine ochre dust in the still morning air. There were eight of us crammed in the back with a load of.supplies, perched on bedrolls and kitbags, scorching under the hot January sun and grateful for the slight breeze of our passage.

The base camp at Poona lay some thirty miles behind us; directly ahead, looming larger as we approached, was our destination—a massive twin-peaked hill, ringed with the ruins of Purandhar fort, relic of past Maratha wars with the Moghul invaders in the 17th century, occupied today by the British Raj and the newly established GEE navigational radar centre in the Western Ghats.

When the oppressive bulk of Purandhar blotted out most of the sky, the road abruptly came to an end in a clearing. Our ghari slowed, circling leisurely to pull up at the foot of a narrow track that corkscrewed up the hillside at an alarming angle. Piling out, we stretched cramped limbs and circulated a waterbottle, rinsing the dust from dry mouths before starting to unload our gear.

A jeep came bouncing down the hill, horn blaring, its driver yelling a cheery welcome. Since there was room for only two people and their baggage on each trip, transfer to the domestic site, located on a spur about a third of the way up the hill, proved a lengthy business. Our driver, obviously well-practiced in negotiating the 4-wheel-drive on the hairpin bends, zoomed up with breathtaking confidence.

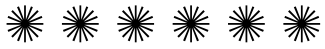
I clung to a vibrating seat with one hand, restrained shifting kit with the other, momentarily closed my eyes as spinning wheels seemed to hang over the void reversing on tight corners. It was a relief when we levelled out, skidded past a large water tank and pulled up outside a stone-built bungalow, to be our quarters for the next week.

Later that afternoon, showered, fed, and relaxed in clean clothes, we sat on a cool veranda, gazing out over the Western Ghats: rugged undulating waves of dusty grays, browns and yellow ochres, shimmering and disappearing into the heat haze. We were impressed. The wind keened through the roof tiles providing a sound effect that added to the impression of having strayed on to the set of Lost Horizon.

A pep talk in the evening from the officer commanding impressed upon us that we were pioneers establishing the GEE chain across India: operational stations sited north and south of Purandhar, and installations starting up around Delhi and Calcutta, part of a masterplan of navigational radar for an airlift right through to Japan. To Japan? It seemed that the end of the war was a glitch too minor to

cancel the whole shebang and save the tax-payers' money. Sensing a lack of enthusiasm among his audience, the CO dismissed us before awkward non-technical questions could be asked.

It had been a long day. We slept on it.



The following morning we were escorted to the technical site, perched on one of the peaks of Purandhar, some 4800 feet above sea-level. The place could only be reached on foot; at first the track rambled through the ruins of the old fort, then toiled over steep slopes to a last sheer stretch. Here footholds were carved out of the rock and a rope handrail provided a welcome boost, the work of the Madrasi sappers who heaved all the apparatus along the route, plus the component parts of a Nissen hut to house it, and then assembled it all, with a 70-foot portable aerial mast, on top. No mean feat.

Once up, we shivered in the chill breeze, and despite the attractions of the awe-inspiring view and a close-up look at the apparently deserted Hindu temple that occupied the opposite peak, were glad to crowd into the shelter of the Nut. We were given a general picture of routines, asked questions, got some hands-on experience. The afternoon passed quickly.

The descent was easier going but left little time to linger and explore the fortifications before dusk. Only after a welcome meal did we realise that welfare arrangements had not caught up with our Shangri-la: no books or recreation facilities here, the only diversion was a tiny general store and cafe opened by an enterprising Portuguese Indian on occasional evenings. This was not one of them of course. We also find that parts of the site were out of bounds because internees were still kept there and strict non-fraternisation was the order of the day.

During our stay we clambered up the shrubby terrain several times to visit the ruins but never managed to make a full circuit of the black stone curtain walls that wound round the hill for more than twenty miles, with six hefty bastions guarding the remains of the three main gates.

Sections were in surprisingly good nick, other stretches had almost disappeared. The builders of our present quarters, sometime last century, had obviously used the fortifications as a ready-to-hand source of materials.

The fortifications date back to the early 17th century. In 1665 the Rajput general Jai Singh asserted Moghul authority in the area and forced the Maratha leader Sivaji to sign a peace treaty at Purandhar, and surrender many of the forts he occupied in the locality.

Five years later Sivaji became a local hero by sacking the port of Surat, regaining control of the hill forts and, by devious means, freeing his territory of Moghul domination. And Purandhar was the scene for the settlement between the British and the Marathas in 1776.

Our preoccupations with India's martial past were terminated by the news that we were to move to Mahableshwar, some 50 miles to the south, to get, detailed instruction. on GEE operation at the 'slave' station there. There was no room on the regular supply truck so a spare open truck was rustled up for us to follow in, just taking essentials for a ten-day stay and leaving our kit in store at Purandhar.

The supply truck set off early in the morning while we were still sorting ourselves out: we piled aboard our transport and followed in hot pursuit. It was a rough ride: the hillside road was all curves and unsurfaced, so the lightly-loaded vehicle bounced and swayed alarmingly. We just clung on and prayed. Eventually we caught up, our driver hanging close on the tail of the leading truck so that we were enveloped in its trailing dust cloud.

Banging heartily on the roof of his cab, we eventually persuaded him to drop back, leaving us spluttering and spitting out dust and shaking out our clothes. Fortunately, the higher we climbed up the ghats the less dust there was to disturb, but there were other hazards. Like bullock carts coming in the opposite direction. Bullocks display an obstinate urge to stay put in the middle of the narrow road... But we survived.

We turned west off the Satara road, through Wai, a place of impressive temples and a lively market, then rumbled through Panchgani, a hill station of pleasant aspect, with only twenty miles to go along a level road that finished up at Government House in the heart of the Mahableshwar plateau.

Back in the 19th century, in the palmy days of the Raj, Mahableshwar was chosen as the hill station where the Governor of Bombay and his retinue would spend the summer, to escape the heat and humidity of Bombay. In its heyday Government House must have been impressive: it was in a pretty dilapidated state When we arrived. Before the RAF took it over, the place had been HQ for the army's jungle and mountain warfare training unit—which probably did little to stem the rot.

Flower bowls and bird baths in the grouds were broken and neglected; a ceremonial cannon, minus a wheel, rusted alongside a solitary cannonball in the overgrown grass; the roof of the two-storey building was damaged, window frames broken, paint peeling. Inside, it was the same story: stairways had 'Building Unsafe' notices and we were warned not to, use the upstairs rooms because the floors were rotting.

We got a cold reception from the 'permanent staff'. Everyone here had flown over from England recently. Pete the young flying-officer in charge was a technical man, interested only in the equipment. He left all the admin and organisation to a medical orderly, who was in love with the idea of being in charge. We fell out with him straight off, and christened him 'The Adjutant' to his evident annoyance. He made the bearers call him 'Doctor Sahib', which they did while cheerfully ripping him off on catering arrangements.

The grub was poor after Purandhar standards, yet we were asked to pay extra

each week for messing. Adding insult to injury, the Adjutant took it on himself to ban all char and fruit-wallahs from calling, on the grounds of 'maintaining hygiene'. Feelings ran high when he wanted to inoculate us for everything in the book. Since most of us had been updated with essential jabs before Christmas, we protested vociferously until he backed down.

We were left to make our own quarters among the empty rooms. The only furnishings were charpoys—the standard Indian wooden bed-frame with ropes stretched across for support. There was a cold shower, a limited supply of hot water, but no inside lavatories. We used a temporary structure outside; very basic, communal, and open to the fresh air... A diesel generator supplied the power for lighting, with occasional failures.

We took a hint from soot-blackened fireplaces and decided to follow the example of previous occupants and light a fire to brighten the evenings and brew up. We sought a bearer: one likely applicant was short, cheery, said he was 25 but looked 15, and handed us a batch of dog-eared testimonials, one of which read: "I have employed Fakir Mohammed as a bearer for three months. He is intelligent and honest, but lazy".

We hired him on the spot and he proved a useful ally in subsequent tussles with the Adjutant's restrictive regime. We had a visit from the nursing orderly when we were settled in, enjoying chat and charpoy-bashing. He wanted to explain that he wasn't going to jab us after all, but just had to say that 'officially'... He got some bleak looks and left.

Not surprisingly, our instruction on GEE was ill-organised. Each morning at 9 a ghari took us to the technical site at Wilson Point, the highest spot of the plateau, some 4500 feet up. A dozen of us squeezed into the cramped cabin; our instructor mumbled into his beard, quoting heavily from an SD (all operational manuals for radar equipment were classified as secret documents, referred to as 'ess-dees'), with his finger tracing out key points on circuit diagrams visible only to privileged viewers at the front.

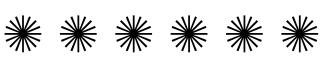
This went on for an hour or so—those on the fringes who got no benefit usually finished up casting through old copies of Post lying around, or catching up with Jane's exploits in out-of-date Mirrors. Then we had to hang around for an hour or so before the truck collected us again. During this interval our tutor revealed that he'd only had a 4-day course on GEE before his overseas posting!

We were to start off each afternoon practicing morse. Initially, only three bods admitted any expertise: when it came to brass tacks it turned out that only Nick and me were ignorant of the morse alphabet. So while the rest of the class were busy rattling their keys, we sat and looked suitably dumb.This always surprised the instructors—we seemed to get a different bloke each session—who said they couldn't teach us anything until we knew the alphabet. We weren't worried! After that, for the rest of the afternoon, we were back to the bloke with his nose glued in the SD.

We didn't learn a great deal in this way but natural curiosity prompted us to skim through the SD in quiet periods and grasp the basics. But we lacked any involvement: after all the chain wasn't operational, and if ever it did start up its main aim was to assist air-trooping, which had almost ceased. So what was the point?

Our attitude must have seeped through. Later on, Pete thought that the 'dumb trainees' were spending too much time scrounging round, and decided to give us a test. However, his preoccupation with the equipment proved his undoing. He had a pet theory about the frequency jumps that occur when tuning up the transmitter: as he succinctly put it "as you turn the knob it goes wuff one way, and wuff-wuff the other way. Why?" and then couldn't resist expounding his theories almost before you'd drawn breath to reply. Thereafter you nodded your head at discreet intervals, dropped an occasional "well... yes" in agreement, and you passed.

I passed.



Back at Government House, things were almost convivial despite the lack of amenities. Shorty our bearer kept us supplied with kindling for the fire, and appeared one day dragging in a hefty gnarled log. With no way of reducing this to usable chunks, we took the.easy way out and stuck one end in the fireplace and pushed it forward periodically as it was consumed. It burned slowly, with help, but conveniently extinguished itself as the fire died down during the night.

It seemed a permanent fixture and was dubbed the 'Epstein Log' by an inmate who insisted that its deformed contours reminded him of Jacob's sculptures. One charpoy sited almost on top of the fire miraculously escaped being burnt each night when we were brewing up: one leg was broken and lashed on insecurely with rope but collapsed whenever some absent-minded card-player sat on it.

It was marked down as the next fuel source when, if ever, the Epstein Log burned up. Its occupant was an old pal of Nick, going back to the time they were stationed in the Shetlands. We were regaled with hair-raising tales of the night the 200-foot CH aerial mast was blown down, with lurid details of how Toothless Teresa got in the family way... I never did sort out whether the two events were related.

Mercifully, the arrival of the ration-run ghari from Poona spared us from further harrowing revelations by bringing up-to-date copies of the News of the World, specially printed over here for free distribution to the forces, with all the latest scandal from home—the Brunette in the Flat case, and the doings of Lord Snell and his 'romp-worthy' girl friend—plus a pile of salvaged magazines of several months' vintage, in which I was tickled to find an article by Wally Gillings on the atom and rocket flight. Long delayed mail should have arrived from Purandhar but didn't, owing to a breakdown.

We didn't get much chance to explore the locality during those first few days of our stay, but skipped a few boring morse sessions, to visit the bazaar. The place was just returning to life, to the sound of massed sewing machines rattling out cheap shirts, after being closed down last, year when there was an outbreak of plague—belated news of which had obviously panicked the Adjutant into his proposal for mass inoculations.

There was not a great deal on offer, but classes were disrupted one day by the news that an entrepreneur had turned up with a supply of real Cadbury chocolate bars. Despite the extortionate prices we cleared out his Stock. And rummaging through a motley collection of decaying books on offer, I picked up a tatty but intact copy of a guide which, despite passages of purple prose, looked useful, if perhaps out of date: "Pocket Book of Mahabaleshwar & Panchgani, with 3 maps, by N.M. Dastur".

My curiosity ignored the warnings against venturing up on to the first floor of Government House and I found a pleasant retreat in an airy room with French windows and a balcony looking right across the plateau towards the coastal plain. I could see several distant promontaries stretching out from the jungle covering, which I was able to identify from Mr Dastur's maps and I was seized by a mad urge to explore them. On our first free weekend,

Nick scrounged some K-ration packs and we set out for the day, determined to reach Lodwick Point, a weathered spur that was within walking distance and seemed a natural lookout on all the rugged grandeur. Despite (or because of) the detailed maps in the guide, it proved easy to get lost in the maze of tracks and paths that tunnelled through the wilder areas of jungle. Mr Dastur's book carried warnings of panthers and wild pigs but doubtless they had been eliminated by generations of Big White Hunters visiting Government House.

We didn't encounter anything more dangerous than the occasional group of monkeys moving through the tree tops or a scampering tree-rat, the large bushy-tailed Indian grey squirrel. There were abundant noisy pea-fowl, and colourful butterflies were everywhere. When we did eventually break clear of the undergrowth to the open space of the escarpment, it made all the sweat and effort worthwhile.

A rough path ran through scorched grass to end on a massive rocky outcrop that hung, brooding, high over the Koyana valley. We wedged ourselves in among the crannies and wallowed in the grand panoramic view of the ghats stretching down to the sea, some thirty miles off.

We lingered there a long while, cooling off in the breeze that swept up the mountainside, an updraft creating little wind devils that careered along the path, sucking up dust and debris several feet above the ground until they lost momentum and collapsed.I realised how Mr Dastur must have struggled finding words to describe the heady beauty of the landscape. I returned several times and filled pages in my sketchbook in an effort to retain something of the memory.

During the monsoon season there were several spectacular waterfalls from the

plateau according to Mr. Dasur. We were here at the wrong time: when I visited the downfall area of Chinaman's Waterfall and Dhobi Fall, they were dried-up apologies, with a token trickle of water seeping between the rocks.

It was possible to clamber down the hillside a fair way, dodging thorn bushes and clumps of cactus, before the final drop, wheretherewere superlative views of the valley with its narrow cultivated area, a verdant strip running through the parched plain, gradually rising to wooded slopes, and the bare vertical face of stratified rock. I struggled to capture the scene as my sketchbook fluttered in the perpetual updraft.

There were other problems at the Yenna Lake in the centre of Mahableshwar. For a time it was a favourite haunt. Workers operated flimsy contraptions that lifted water from the lake to spill into irrigation channels running through extensive fruit beds; the local women washed clothes at the water's edge, beating hell out of the laundry on the flat dhobi stones. All very colourful and eye-catching. But I soon found that my subjects were as much interested in me as I was in them. I went back to landscape painting:

When I located a table and some chairs in the litter upstairs at Government House, I converted my retreat into a studio of sorts. I could paint there undisturbed. One afternoon when I lingered late painting a view of the Koyana valley from the balcony, I tried to capture the effect of the setting sun as the atmospheric haze softened and magnified its ruddy disc.

The sea was visible as a luminous pink band stretching across the horizon beyond the fading outline of the hills. Then I lost interest in struggling to paint in the rapidly fading light: there was a huge sun spot visible to one side of the disc. I watched it until the sun sank into the obscuring haze.

Some mail got through to us eventually, and a long silence settled over the place while the letters were read. Marion wrote to say she was confused by getting batches of letters out of sequence and found my recent movements obscure. That made two of us: I certainly seemed to have crammed rather a lot into a short period of time. My efforts to catch up with the modern art correspondence course while in Bangalore brought a letter from the tutor returning my assignments: "I hope you won't mind if I quote a few encouraging lines from your answers in a French broadcast to Canada next month—we are not allowed to give names, so it will never be held against you..."

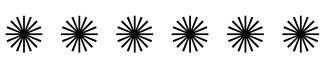
Fame at last, of a sort, but alas a reminder that there was no hope of doing any more work on the course until I was posted from Mahableshwar and reunited with my kit, still in store at Purandhar. The ghastly thought crossed my mind that I might be transferred to the permanent staff here: I considered the prospect with mixed feelings.

The technical site was our main contact with the outside world, and we were getting strange reports of RAF stations taking action in protest about the dilatory demob; intercepted radio messages suggested that the unrest was widespread and

growing. We sought clarification from Poona, to be told that all the big RAF stations and camps were involved in a spontaneous revolt against the prospect of having to hang on here for another twelve months or so before general demob became effective. Poona permanent staff were about to join in, but the accounts section were nobly working on for a while to ensure that everyone was paid before they took action. A gesture we all appreciated.

We were in a daze at the news. There's little we can do that will affect the situation in our present isolation; Nick climbed the aerial mast to hang a token red handkerchief, but life goes on much as usual, apart from the hectic debates about where it will all lead. There'd been some speculation about the official reaction to the revolt, some fears that the army would be called in to sort things. That could be nasty. But so far it seemed quiet on the ground and we all hoped that this latest move would provoke some positive results...

It's unbelievable: fancy the bloody RAF going on strike! ■



More Memories: A Dearth of Maps

Had a note from the India Tourist Office saying that they 'only provide tourist information and are unable to send historical details of the places you have asked about'. However, they've recommended *Forts & Fortifications In India* by A.P. Singh, and *The Forts of India* by Virginia Fass, and passed on the address of 'Books from India'. No mention of maps though, alas.

Purandhar was used as a 'master' station for the Gee radar chain in the Western Ghats, and I spent several weeks there before departing on a tour of the various 'slave' stations in the vicinity. Purandhar fortifications were halfway up a twin-peaked hill; we were limited on one side that had been used as a convalescent depot before the RAF moved in, a black-stone edifice that looked out over the ghats and was immediately Shangri-la.

Most of the site was out-of-bounds as internees were kept up there during the war, and fraternisation was forbidden. There was a Hindu temple on one peak, and we had a Nissen hut and aerial as the technical site on the other. It was almost a mountaineering training course to get up there; usually one volunteered for a 24-hour stint of duty, to minimise the effort of getting up and down. But it was easy to see how the Marathas enjoyed being top dog from such vantage points. My geography of the area was confused at the time. Forty odd years later, it's even more confused and just to get my bearings, I must try and locate a map.

The roads from Pune (I bow to current usage) were eligible to appear on a map – though the surfaced stretches were short enough – and the names of the various

areas in which the radar sites were sited were definite enough. Alas, the only other place that appears on the maps consulted is Mahabaleshwar, which used to be the hill station refuge of the Bombay governor during the hot season.

This was on the edge of the ghats; from the vfantage point of several rocky outcrops you could watch the sun go down, in the clear post-monsoon sky, until there was a glaming line of reflection stretching momentarily along the horizon – I think we were about 30 miles from the sea. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 9 Feb 1989

The library located a copy of the Virginia Fass book, *The Forts of India* (Collins, 1986), definitely a picture book for reinforced coffee tables, but worth dipping into. There's a short chapter on the Maratha forts, with some pictures of Purandar and adjacent places, and more details of Shivaji's exploits against the Mughals, but I get the impression that they don't attract so many tourists as the more picturesque structures further north, and are not so accessible to the casual tourist. All in all, a pricey book at £30 but worth looking at if you get it through the library system.

Was amused to read in one of the travel books I've been referring to that the highest point at Mahableshwar, Arthur's Point, was used as HQ for a jungle training course by the army in WW2 – our later occupation with the Gee chain equipment is ignored! So that's another reason why I should get my bit of history on paper before it's completely forgotten. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 22 April 1989

VJ Memories

Day-dreaming the other day about a VJ-Day reunion with some of the folk I got to know in India... Nick Cropper and Jack Loveman I met on the boat going over, and our paths kept crossing thereafter.

Dizzy Brown spent most of our time together in the Western Ghats arguing about the respective merits of Haydn and Beethoven – this at a time when relative obscurity prevailed about the bulk of Haydn's music. I'd dearly love to compare notes with Dizzy after the great Haydn revival of the 60s;

Alan Chandler, youthful Tory, who played clarinet and had a wind-up portable gramophone and a surprising number of big band swing 78s, who helped to make the wilderness tolerable;

Dave 'Joskins' McLaren, innocent abroad, who listened to all our tall stories and had his leg pulled unmercifully;

Julian Streatfield who was a classical pianist, and took time off to go on a Buddhist pilgrimage to the Temple of the Tooth when he was in Ceylon;

Derek Massey, one-time farmer, who shared a leave spent in the Nilgiris, the

Blue Mountains of the Southern Ghats...

And lots more: it would have been a big party! The sobering thought is that two of the most welcome people—Jack and Derek—would now be ninetyish. Gulp. Perhaps I'd better just go on remembering them as I knew them.

The temptation is to think of those five years in the RAF as lost time, wasted time. And yet I find my memories increasingly dominated by the experience. Which explains why I still have an urge to reminisce and pin down a few more details. ■

to the Varleys, VJ Day 1995

Surviving in India

The trouble with India is not the heat but the humidity. I was lucky in that most of the camps I was at were up in the hills, where you get dry heat, and a cooling off period during the night. The main problem was keeping an eye on the length of time you were exposed to the sun, especially in the Nilgiris, some 6,000ft up, where the sunshine seemed pure ultra-violet... But I enjoy dry heat, and can be relatively lively up to the 80s, but admit to wilting somewhat when temperatures occasionally soared into the 90s.

However, at sea-level, places like Bombay and Madras, you sweat something terrible because of the humidity: I just had to learn to slow down, and amble, instead of charging around as used to be my wont. I tan easily, and that helps; if you're blonde and fair-skinned it could be hell. Prickly-heat, an itchy goose-pimply rash turned on by abused sweat-glands, was a common complaint that just had to be put up with, like the common cold.

Once I acquired my tan, I never had any problems with prickly-heat. But it was never very pleasant being out and active, and sweating profusely, and the more you drank, the more you sweated. There was no let up at night as it didn't cool off and you woke in sweat-soaked sheets. if you were fortunate enough to be able to get a cold shower, you never seemed to be able to get dry, because you started sweating again with the exertion of wielding a towel. I have a decided conviction that I was meant to live in a warmer clime than prevails in North-East Cheshire. ■

to the Varleys, 29 July 1996

The Great RAF Strike

Riffling thru the RTimes I see there's a "Secret History" prog on C4 on Thursday evening purporting to reveal all about the Great RAF Strike of 1946... Wow, that I must watch! (Funny, no-one came to interview me...).

It's certainly taken long enough for the matter to be publicly aired... 50 bloody years on. Though they should have screened it back in January to catch the exact anniversary.

Most folk seemed to think I was leg-pulling whenever I reminisced about the RAF strike; it's about time the official silence on the matter was broken. ■

That prog about the RAF Strike certainly struck responsive chords all over the place; the memories really came flooding back. I touched on the matter in "Just one of those days...", which I fancy I passed on to you, and there are other passing references in a piece about my stay at Mahableshwar, at the time of the strike.

I fancy I'll be doing a piece solely devoted to the mess-up of demob arrangements and the feeling that we'd been conveniently forgotten and left out of calculations when the Far East war ended so abruptly.

Amused that one commentator referred to Worli transit camp, as spelt, despite the ex-forces speakers calling it "Wurli", as actually pronounced; one way of sorting out those that have suffered! Typical cat-and-mouse treatment, dragging the poor bastards accused of being ringleaders off the gangplank as they were hopefully getting on the troopship after being through the court-martial.

There was talk at the time about getting the army in to sort us out; in most of the large camps, the armoury was locked up or emptied by the strikers, just in case things turned nasty. On the whole, I thought this prog a fairly objective view of the prevailing situation—just a pity it's taken fifty years to make public the "commie plot" talk and the dodgy "special branch" activities and treatment of Cymbalist and the other so-called ringleaders.

I found an early draft (no need to return) of Indian reminiscences that saw print in a fanzine years ago, quoting references to the demob situation and some reactions to the strike. When I started, I think I hoped to keep the preocupation with demob groups/dates as a constant background factor. But it became overlong for that. Then I found myself carried away by certain incidents and the whole thing became fragmented.

Now I'm in the process of gradually linking together the fragments... On and off... ■

to the Varleys, August 1996

A Good Holiday?

As regards the RAF Strike, it started from general resentment at the slow pace of demob, when increasingly people were left kicking their heels, as the military effort ran down.

The original promise that demob priorities would be established by age and length of service was soon distorted because all sorts of stipulations were made about retaining technical tradesmen, and people in jobs like nursing or catering,

found they were classed as essential, and pushed back in the queue, while others, e.g. newly-trained air crews, with no active service but completely redundant with the end of the war, were being demobbed early.

Then it became apparent that the army and navy had a faster rate of demob than the RAF, so things really started to fizz.

The old colonial regimes faced up to demands for independence once the fighting had stopped, and there was talk that the RAF would be used to fight the "terrorists" in SE Asia. Which was when it all blew up, and folk refused to go on parade or salute officers in several of the bigger camps; thanks to the teleprinter network and radio stations being operated by the people striking, they had control of communications, and the word, and action, spread fast...

Matters were complicated by some isolated units of the Indian Air Force and Navy also taking action; that was hailed as mutiny and put down forcibly. There was some talk of the army being sent into RAF stations, but there were so many people involved, technically civilian conscripts, it was not a likely proposition, which was why the word "strike" was used instead of "mutiny" (except for a few diehards who wanted to use a bit of force and start setting examples...).

This was in January 1946. And it was all over by the end of the month, with promises that demob would be speeded up.

I doubt if it made any difference in the long run. There were no airlifts in those days (except for the privileged few), and all transport was by sea. A few groups got home quicker following the upset, and then things slowed up again because of the shortage of shipping space. I was hanging about Bombay for ages after my group had reported there for embarkation, and didn't get back and demobbed until the end of November 1946.

I have a memory of finally escaping from the demob camp, in blue sports coat and gray flannels (all the decent suits in my size had long gone by the time I got kilted out), arriving at Victoria Station and joining a bus queue, where my tan was balefully eyed by an aged couple in front of me, and a loud voice grumpily commented that "some buggers can afford to have a good holiday".

A remark that rankles still. ■

to the Varleys, Summer 1996

Sweltering!

Alistair Cooke dwelt on the soaring temperatures across the US the other week and reminded me of a visit to the RAF base camp at Poona when prevailing noon temperatures were in the upper 90s—walking out of a building into the sunlight was like walking into a blast furnace.

I spent several blissful afternoons haunting the air-conditioned mini-cinema at

the nearby aerodrome (free to RAF personnel and, mercifully, with a daily change of programme!). ■

to Brian Varley, July 1999

Illustrated Radar Mech

Been brooding over those radar books you left—guess I found the Nissen book, and the Latham, Stobbs et al recollections most of interest. My RAF years in this country were spent on CH and CHL sites as a ground radar mechanic; when I went to India we trained on mobile gear, but after VJ-Day were switched to manning the Gee navigation chain stations being established in the vicinity of Poona and Delhi.

Most of the now unemployed ground-mechs scattered over the country were gathered. and. pushed through GEE courses at 51 Radio School at Adgodi, outside Bangalore. (It was more like a reunion party, as I met up again with folk I'd known in Blighty, and others who'd been on the boat coming over. We radar-mechs were a relatively small select bunch). The "course" proved a shambles; as the war was over we were more concerned with the progress of demob and getting home, so most of us found it hard to work up any interest.

That was when I caught a fever—the RAF doc initially treated me for malaria, then panicked and sent me to Bangalore Army Hospital as a suspect typhoid case. While I was confined, most of my mates were shipped up to man the Delhi chain I eventually emerged from hospital with the recorded fact that I'd had a UDF (undiagnosed fever). Wow!

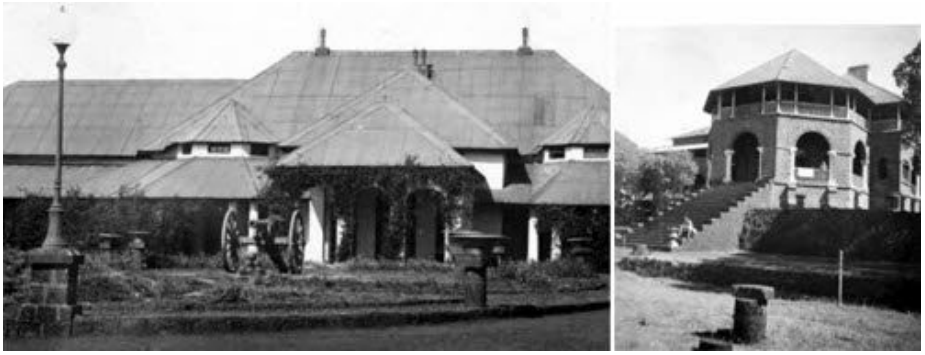
After a pleasant spell in a convalescent hostel in Bangalore, I reported back to Adgodi and to my amazement was given a fortnight's sick leave by the RAF doc —which was spent exploring the Nilgiris, tramping round Ootacamund, Coonoor, Wellington and other fleshpots of the old British Raj.

After celebrating Christmas (1945) at Adgodi, learnt that the Radio School was to be transferred to Ceylon, and that I'm posted to 145 AMES at Poona to work on the GEE chain. I travelled up, arriving at the 'drome in the middle of an official visit by Lord Wavell, and had to hang about the guardroom until his departure. There was some confusion—some thought 145 AMES had been disbanded, most were unaware of its existence—eventually I was sent to a billet on the outskirts of the camp where some stray radar mechs were temporarily housed..

Fortunately I met up with several acquaintances, also bound for the 145 unit, at Purundhar Fort, a hill-site some twenty miles south of Poona. We were wafted out next day, given a pep talk by the CO at Purundhar, impressing us that we were pioneers getting the navigational chain working in India, but his audience didn't share his enthusiasm.

In due course we travelled a further sixty miles south to Mahableshwar plateau, where we took up residence in Government House, one-time retreat of the Governor of Bombay, during the coastal hot season. However the place had been

in use for years as a jungle-training school by the army, and was in an advanced state of neglect: stairways blocked by 'Building Unsafe' placards, and the upstairs floor out-of-bounds because floors were liable to collapse. There were no lavatories: we used temporary latrines put up out-of-doors.



Government House, Mahableshwar

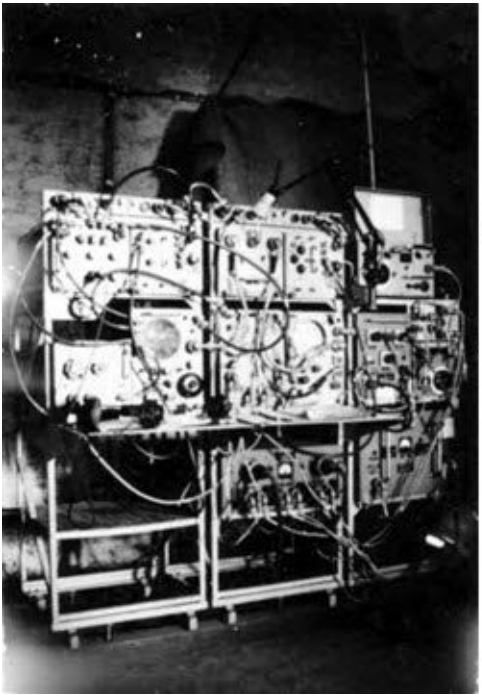
The course was also something of a shambles, being run by people newly arrived from England., who didn't seem very familiar with the gear anyway, who lectured us with their noses stuck in an SD. At the start the classes were crammed., and then absenteeism became the order of the day, as our gang found it more rewarding exploring the jungles of Mahableshwar...

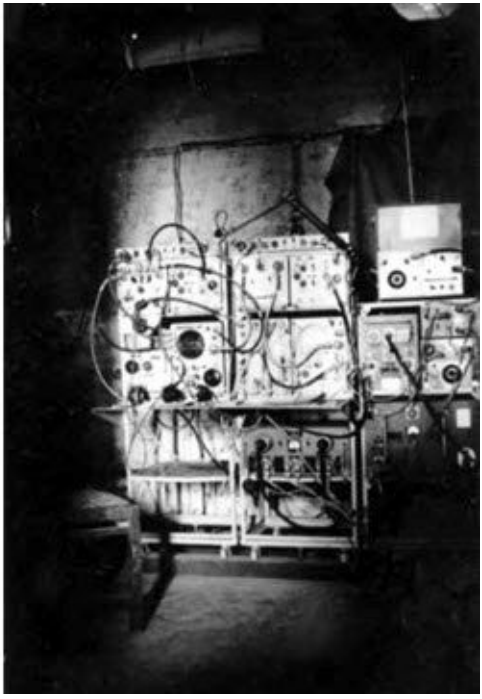
Came the day when we were finally shifted back to Poona, allegedly trained, and then sent on to Pokhari Ghat, where we learnt about the equipment the hard way, by just being left to keep it working.Prompted to dig out a few pics taken in India (mainly with unsophisticated Brownie box cameras !)...

Pokhari Ghat radar camp, domestic site

Above (*previous page*) is a pre-monsoon view of the domestic site from the track leading up to the tech site of the Gee chain installation at Pokhari Ghat, up in the hills well north of Poona. Not recommended as a holiday trip. Here are a few views taken on the way up...

Mercifully, the decision to close down was taken before the monsoon season really set in. The twisting "roads" were difficult enough to negotiate during the dry season—after a few monsoon downpours it was virtually impossible to manoeuvre the big articulated vehicles round some of the bends, and we had to rely on the smaller trucks for supplies. Our problems really began when we finally got the order to dismantle the tech site and all the heavier gear had to be packed and sent down to the base at Poona 'drome!

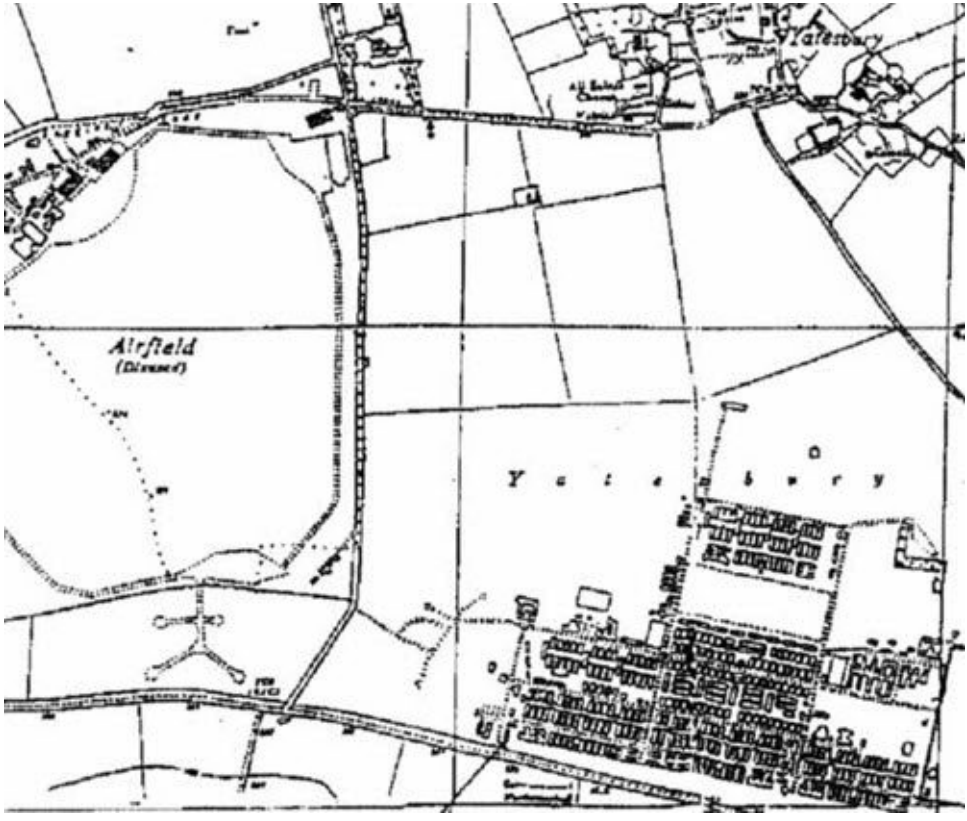




A couple of shots of the operating gear (*previous page*)—guess I wouldn't be able to find my way round it nowadays... even with a manual: still, the experience of servicing and keeping it operational, not to mention sweating over the diesel generators, prepared me in many ways for the hi-fi and computer eras to come!

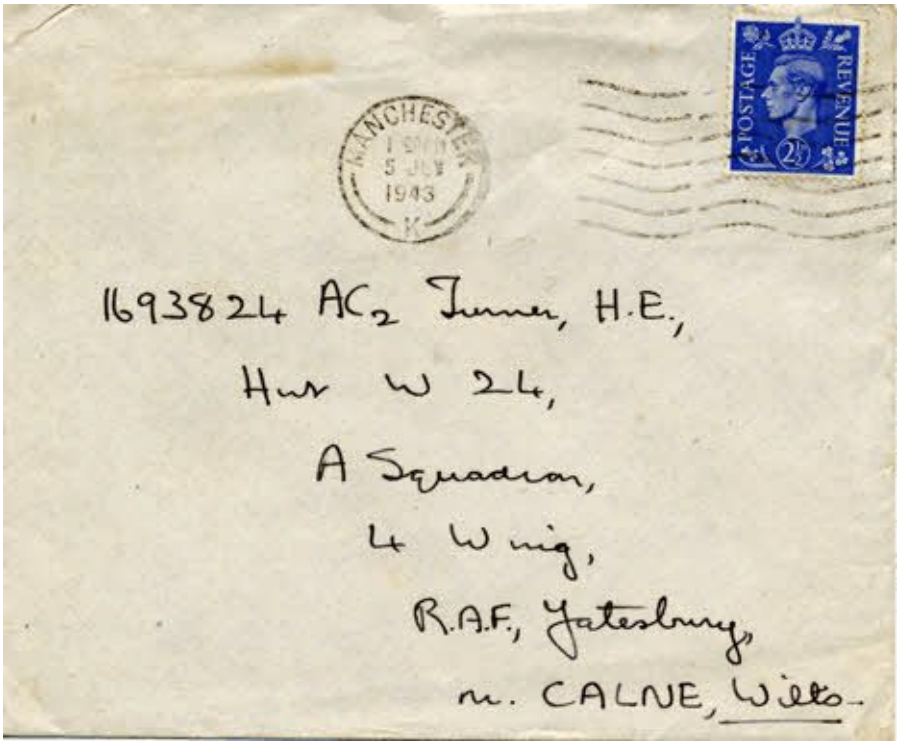
Was intrigued by some of the memories of the Yatesbury inhabitants in the Latham & Stobbs book... can't imagine how I was left out! I note there are a few passing references to Cranwell, though it doesn't get shown on the map. (A relic of wartime rivalry?) There's surprisingly little said about the transmitters—MB2 etc.—for most CH and CHL stations... (a bias to operational staff memories?)

I found them among the most impressive items of equipment. We were supposed to use a neon at the end of a stick to test if functioning; though it was easy to slip into the habit of applying a thumbnail near to a feeder cable to get a spark—apt to ping a hole in your nail—though this was verboten as one or two mechanics had been frizzled when the vast glass condensers filtering out radio waves developed a fault and the aerial cables were live....



RAF Yatesbury

Also made an enlargement of the map of Yatesbury (*previous page*)—my memory is befuddled by the passing of time; can't locate which hut I was occupying, though I know it was in the vicinity of Corporal Arthur Clarke's billet. We spent some time together before he departed on a course to get his commission, and I often helped him out at the turntable when he gave record (78s!) recitals at the music group in the NAAFI.



Was at Yatesbury from New Year 1943 first for the course, then spent a period doing routine maintenance at the technical site (which was some distance from the main camp), before being posted to Cranwell Radio School as a maintenance engineer. From there I toured a few coastal stations—Bempton, Little Dimlington, Easington, etc come to mind.

Gosh, you've really stirred up the memories... ■

to John Butterworth [former MEN colleague], September 2003

CONTENTS

Post-War Life, Fandom & Gafiation

Back in civilian life, Harry returned to his pre-war employer, the Anchor Chemical Company in Manchester, where he had worked as a rubber chemist. A talented artist, Harry used his skills as a designer and graphic artist to create and organized an advertising department. He continued to play an active part in the world of science fiction fandom. Two more sons, William then Robert, arrived to join Philip before the first half of the 20th century ran out.

A new job as Advertising Manager at Redfern's Rubber Works in Hyde (1949-58) prompted an eventual move to Romiley. The family arrived there in 1954, and Harry spent the next 54 years in Romiley, where he co-founded the *Romiley Fan Veterans & Scottish Dancing Society*. [Scottish dancing was Mrs. Turner's hobby and not something which Mr. Turner would ever have done!]

Romiley was also handy for walking expeditions in the Peak District. Or 'trudging', as his less willing offspring termed it. Harry was also active in Romiley's cultural life; he was a member of the Beeches Art Group and a popular performer at Romiley Music Group. He also created a legendary fanzine with Eric Needham: *Now & Then*; before opting to GIAFA (*get away from it all*, when applied to SF fandom).

The Junior Astronomical Society had played a part in Harry's pre-war life. Its successor claimed his and Marion's attention briefly in the post-war era, as the next item explains.

The JAA to JAS Missing Link

Dear Ian, [*no further info available on his identity, PHT*],

Ask a simple question & expect a confused answer. After briefly talking over your letter with Marion, I think the best way to avoid a tangled explanation is to put down a few statements of fact, in sequence, & then try to relate them to the present situation! So, here goes.

1. In the beginning was the Junior Astronomical Association, founded in the mid-thirties [1933] by Marion F. Eadie, under the patronage of Sir James Jeans. (Marion was Branch Secretary of the Glasgow branch of the BAA for several years before the war.)

2. Around 1937/8, the JAA formed an astronautical section, under pressure from Arthur Clarke & other members. I was a member of the Manchester Interplanetary Society at this time & became involved with the JAA as a result. Later, I helped out as cover designer for Urania, the JAA journal, and as treasurer.

3. In 1940 (I think) the JAA folded [1941] due to lack of funds & general problems of operating in wartime.

4. In 1942, Marion & I married. I merely introduce this "local interest" to anticipate confusion over names later!

5. In the early 1950's, Marion was contacted by Eric W. Turner of Basingstoke (no relation!) who was endeavouring to form a junior astronomical society and been informed by someone (Dr. J.G. Porter, I think) in the BAA of Marion's earlier venture. So far as we can establish the Junior Astronomical Society officially came into existence in 1953. Marion was on the Council, attended several meetings and typed stencils for the early journals, and generally helped to get things moving.

6. The first AGM was held in Chester on April 24th 1954, by which time Patrick Moore had moved in on the act, Dr. J.G. Porter had become patron of the Society, and there was a move to up-market the homely duplicated journal into a pseudo-BAA type journal. Eric Turner relinquished the Presidency to Ernest Noon, and became secretary.

7. Presumably, this society is still the one you refer to as the "modern" JAS?

Right. Having sorted out that, a few mysteries remain to be clarified.

I haven't any copies of mags I illustrated, so I can't check on any issues with letters – though it seems improbable that I would be linked with the JAS. Possibly it's a letter from Eric Turner seeking members? Though on rereading your letter I'm not clear if this is a letter published in the readers; letters pages, or an actual envelope or letter addressed to me. Maybe you can enlarge on that one!

I don't think I was involved with the JAS, apart possibly from helping out with some of the stencils for the journals – I have vague memories of a character called "JASper" that Eric Turner introduced as a decoration on the pages . . .

As a long shot, you might like to contact Eric Turner about these early days – last address (end of 1956!) was 9 Hill View Road Basingstoke – but as he's an FRAS, you can probably find him through the society.

I hope that sorts things out for you. I you want more info on the JAA then you'll have to coax Marion to reminisce about those pre-war days!

hand-written draft/copy of a letter, 10th May 1976

Female Fan Types

ROMPING THROUGH FANDOM WITH THE LITTLE WOMAN... by Henry Ernst

The Varley analysis of Fan Types is not complete without full info on Type 9—the Femme. Your original contributor in less than fair to this rare phenomenon when he regelates it to a single type. From my own, admittedly slight, experience I should be inclined to say that femmes fall into one or other of three categories and in deference to the original researcher I have labelled those Varley Types 9A, 9B & 9C.

Varley Type 9A—the "quiet-type" or QT: The QT is usually a single gal who feels "left out" at normal gatherings of humanity. When she discovers fandom and fans, instinct tells her that those poor goofs, lost in their fantastic imaginings, are easy meat. Fans who are kind to their mothers and gentle to animals (the Varley Type 2—Earnest Fans) tend to respond immediately to her air of wide-eyed innocence, and are soon singled out for attention.

With cautiously simulated interest she encourages some inexperienced fan to expound on his favourite theme. In his surprise and pleasure at having found a receptive and understanding audience, the poor guy talks himself into believing that the gal shares all his opinions and judgments on fandom and science-fiction, and gets around to the idea that she is destined to be his life-partner.

Once encouraged along this track, the fan is as good as lost... Having got her man, the QT usually loses interest in fandom and nags her husband about the late nights spent boozing at the fanclub. There are, however, instances on record where the QT has changed to a type 9B or 9C femme.

Varley Type 9B—the "centre-of-attraction-type" or COAT: The COAT is a gay wench, and may be married or still unattached. Her arrival means the rapid disorganisation of any meetings convened to discuss weighty programmes and plans. The gregarious types (male) immediately flock to her side to find solace in mild flirtation—new members are weighed up as potential admirers while the frowns of a disproving chairman are cheerfully ignored.

Conversation with the COAT, whatever its original impulse, contrives indirectly and with a certain archness to get around to more interesting subjects such as

"sex". The COAT revels in the unorthodoxy of fandom and consequently is more fun and not so dangerous as the QT.

Varley Type 9C—the "draged-in-against-my-will-type" or DIAMWT: The DIAMWT is usually married, and turns up to meetings merely to keep an eye on her husband and the COAT. She contrives to keep in the background and make herself generally aggreable, watching the proceedings with amused tolerance. Catch her in an unguarded moment, and you will recognise that distinct air of superciliousness that distinguishes the cat tribe.

These descriptions are not intended to be sharp portraits of persons likely to be met in fandom, but are of basic types All femmes combine characteristics of some or all categories, or pass from one category to another. While I have heard rumours that there are femmes who are interested in fan-activities as an end rather than a means, I cannot claim to have met them in person. Unless other researchers can produce direct evidence there seems no reason to extend the categories listed. ■

From *Space Times* Vol. 2 No. 5, (May 1953)

The Open-Ended Game

. . . a collation of inconsequential conversations for all who prefer a discourse of reason to exposure to works of art . . .

PRELUDE 1—Spring

We are hungry after a busy evening discussing plans for zimri.

I return from Nick's Grecian Grill with chicken and chips and Lisa pops the food, still wrapped, into the oven to keep warm while we clear the papers off the table.

– Hey, whatever happened to that article on art you promised? she asks out of the blue.

I blush. Long ago, when *Zimri* #4½ had just been mailed, I thought it a good idea to write an article about art, based on all the comments. Gaily I jotted down points for inclusion as they occurred to me, but as the list grew longer my enthusiasm waned. I never get around to finishing the job since there are always other things to do of more pressing urgency. Secretly, I hope Lisa will forget the whole thing.

No such luck.

– Well... I had a few doubts about it, I confess. My basic problem is that I'm not a writer, just a drop-out from the literate society, hating gratuitous verbalising and lacking the essential faith that everything can be explained in words...

Lisa raises her eyebrows: they disappear behind her fringe.

– But you can't think except in words, she asserts, and you can't express your

thoughts until you put them into words.

I try raising my eyebrows toward a receding hairline but don't make it.

– You may argue me into a corner occasionally, and make me admit that some things can only be expressed in words, but if there's any communication in art it's in terms of sharing ideas, feelings, and emotions in areas where words are inadequate... areas where the visual artist often works alongside the musician and mathematician.

I warm to the theme.

– There are so many possibilitities to be explored. Representation, describing appearances, is only one of them, and today it's perhaps the least challenging. Certainly in this century many Western artists have largely lost interest in the conventions of pictures that tell a story or record a scene, and discarded forms that imitate the visible world in favour of a non-objective world.

By invoking narrow, often irrelevant, standards and trying to impose them on an artist's work, critics only confuse the situation. Like, there's no point in demanding realism from the abstract, or literature from everything. There are many guiding standards and no one of them is necessarily right or best. So far as the artist is concerned it's an open-ended situation by all means try to figure out what the artist is aiming to achieve but, if you haven't a clue, then you can't decide if he's succeeded or even if the result was worth the effort. Art's there to be enjoyed not merely 'explained'. If you want to get inside a picture, then open your mind to the possibilities that the artist has explored and reported on. Be receptive, don't automatically reject the unfamiliar; let it grow on you, live with it for a while. Don't give in to the impulse to make instant judgments and evaluations that obscure what you see in front of you...

– Keep going, you're doing fine, encourages Lisa, taking notes. But let's get back to this idea of artists deserting appearances for abstraction.

– Well, it seems a general assumption in our literate society that there's a 'natural' way of seeing, that no training is required to 'see' a photograph which reproduces appearances. For a start, nearly everyone who's clicked a camera will agree that it is quite capable of recording things never even noticed in the viewfinder, often producing a print that is a travesty of the mental image the photographer wished to preserve. We have to learn to manipulate a camera to make the images it records approach the images we see.

The camera lens is undiscriminating; the eye, guided by the brain, is selective. To the eye, all things appear in focus simultaneously yet this is known to be an illusion created by the eye's ability to focus automatically and virtually instantly as it scans a scene in depth. We focus on something within our field of vision at each instant, but never on everything. To see at all, we've got to isolate and select in this way.

Retinal images are ambiguous, so we rely on all sorts of clues to resolve the ambiguities. In certain circumstances we can't tell whether an object is small and

near, or large and distant; whether an unevenly shaded area is hollow or protruding. We help out our imperfect vision with other sense impressions: sound, smell, taste, touch. The brain coordinates these impressions, combines them into subjective images and concepts, to be screened, edited and shaped, to a surprising degree, by our expectations, preferences and prejudices, our immediate wants and needs.

With such a complex process it's not surprising to find that cultural conditioning plays a part in determining what we see, and that non-literate cultures exist that have developed different ways of seeing to us. Thus Marshall McLuhan tells of the difficulties experienced when showing 'training' films in African villages. The adult audiences missed the intended point of many films because of the taken-for-granted conventions of literate culture that had gone into their making. The Africans tended to concentrate on irrelevant background incidents at the expense of the main 'story-line'; they needed perceptual training before they mastered the in-built visual conventions of the film to get the message.

In a similar way, many forms of non-objective art demand changes in the way people see: many people seem unable to separate the superficial decorative appeal of an abstract composition from its constructive significance. They are the visual equivalent of folk who—as Tom Lehrer puts it—like a tune they can hum... they appreciate the melodic element in music but can't grasp its polyphonic depth...

I break off, my nose twitching.

There's an acrid smell of scorching paper. During my monologue the oven has approached the crucial temperature of 451°f. With a yelp Lisa dashes to investigate, and returns plucking charred newsprint from our supper: in the panic, fortunately, the article is forgotten.

Smoked chicken has a distinctive flavour. Given time, I think I could even acquire a taste for it.

PRELUDE 2—Summer

I turn into Manley Road feeling at peace with the world. A voice yells my name, shattering my reverie. On the opposite side of the road Peter Presford is climbing into his van.

– Lisa's out, he informs me, can I give you a lift back into town?

The sun blazes down, the pavement is hot; I feel in no hurry to dash back to the dusty city centre. We chat briefly and then I wander on to the coolness of nearby Alexandra Park to pass the time until Lisa's return. It's pleasant near the lake. I whip off my shirt and stretch out on the grass to sunbathe and readSolaris. I'm eager to find how the novel (or at least its translation) compares with the film, which I'd recently seen in London. Vadim Yusov's photography made Tarkovsky's film an unforgettable experience for me, right from the opening sequence. Those Monet-like views of water, leaves and waving reeds, the woodlands and vibrant patterns

of sunlight; Kris awaking to see Hari, her head a glowing silhouette against the bright Solarian sky all golden russets, ochres, yellows and warm browns on white; one sudden zoom-in on the bulkheads of the station that momentarily converted the screen into a vast abstract, two great green expanses toning sharply to define a common edge, a keen vertical stroke hovering on the Golden Mean...

I lose myself halfway through the book before recalling the purpose of my trip.

Back at Manley Road I find Lisa cooling off in the garden, hiding behind huge sun goggles and a diminutive bikini.

– How's the article going? she promptly demands.

– In his Philosophy of Art Herbert Read recommends that the best preparation for a true appreciation of contemporary art is a study of the writings of Whitehead and Schrödinger. I just wondered if by any chance you have any of their volumes in your library, I improvise wildly... And then falter into silence before the inscrutable gaze of those damned black goggles.

Inwardly I vow to settle down and sort out all those scribbled notes the moment I get back to the studio.

PRELUDE 3—Autumn

Nick delicately skewers chunks of lamb as he prepares the kebabs.

– Eet ees all a matter of dunamei summetros, eh? he quips.

Nick is the only eating-house proprietor I know who is an authority on dynamic symmetry. Over the months, it has become the staple topic of our conversation, the way most folk exchange pleasantries about the weather. So far as I recall, it started when Bronowski's Ascent of Man series was being screened on TV and he'd been wandering around the magical isle of Samos, discoursing on Pythagoras' discovery of the mathematical basis of musical harmony and the fact that the right angle is something you turn four times to point the same way. Nick was all steamed up by this episode. In between tossing and turning burgers on the charcoal grill, spitting chickens, spreading relish on hot dogs, and stuffing vine leaves, he revealed that he too was born on Samos, and a devoted admirer of his compatriot Pythagorus, first genius and founder of Greek mathematics. It seemed I was the only immediate member of his clientele who shared this deep interest. Our friendship grew and blossomed.

I find that Nick really is an expert. We talk about early cultures whose arts and architecture are based on static symmetry, and the big breakthrough when the Greeks came to realise that there is a symmetry of growth and arrangement of plants, shells and the human skeleton. We join in deprecating the influence of Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, unsuccessful Roman architect, purveyor of false theories on the Greek tradition, and inspirer of pseudo-classical architecture. We discuss the golden section and whirling square rectangles. When lingual difficulties intrude, we scribble diagrams all over the counter menu—much to the disgust of Nick's

wife who has to search out another copy for impatient customers.

Tonight I am telling Nick about Jay Hambridge, self-styled American expert on dynamic symmetry and author of innumerable books on the subject published by Yale University. On a visit to the British Museum he found the marks of a compass on some unfinished Greek volutes, and realising their significance he was able to reconstruct the long-lost method of drawing an Ionic volute.

Nick's luxuriant moustaches curl in a faint sneer. I sense the gesture implies that Nick would have passed that information on to Jay without all the research and hard work. I hastily point out that Hambridge's discovery was made over sixty years ago. Nick promptly forgives him and starts off on one of his anecdotes while the kebabs sizzle.

It's a story from Didorus Siculus, a Sicilian Greek historian, about the sculptor Rhoecus, who served his apprenticeship swiping ideas from the ancient Egyptians and passed on his sculpting skills to his sons. Chips off the old block, these two. Telecles in Samos, and Theodorus in Ephesus, each carved half of a statue, and lo! when the two parts were brought together, they fitted so exactly that the statue appeared to be the work of one man.

When I regale Lisa with the story later, she is impressed.

– Maybe I should get Nick to write this ruddy article on art, she muses.

INTERLUDE—Winter

I like to keep up with what the younger generation of artists is doing. The Manchester Whitworth Gallery puts on a regular exhibition of work from colleges throughout Britain—the Young Contemporaries—and it's usually well worth a visit.

There's a decided element of the surreal abroad this year, not only in the works but in the titles. I tend to regard titles on works of art as superfluous except as a convenient means of identification, and the large proportion of works titled 'Untitled' shows that I am not alone in this prejudice. But I admire an apt title: 'I don't know, but it took a long time' seems to anticipate the obvious question.

There are a few exhibits here that provide an opportunity for audience participation, like opening boxes and switching on mechanisms. There's one item combining both activities near the gallery entrance. A young lady has opened the box but neglected to switch on the power, and is bent double peering into semi-gloom. Always ready to oblige, I lean over and close the switch. A red neon sign promply flickers into life inside the box.

ECHO it proclaims, and immediately a progression of ECHOs becomes visible, receding to infinity.

– That's good, announces Lisa (for it is indeed she) staggering back in amazement. Thank ghod you rescued me—I was beginning to get vertigo staring at a million images of me disappearing into the depths. How's it done?

I switch off and on again by way of demonstration.

– Two-way mirror at the front and another mirror behind the neon sign, I guess. When the sign lights up, the reflections keep battering between the mirrors.

We compare notes. Lisa hasn't been round all the rooms, and as it's my second visit I offer to give her a conducted tour then promptly get entangled in a maze of chicken wire hanging from the ceiling. It has a myriad tufts of green wool fastened all over it ('Just a little green' says the catalogue). When I realise it's an exhibit and not a man-trap, I stop thrashing about and extricate myself. Meanwhile there's a strangled squawk from Lisa, who's nearly tripped over a faintly obscene piece of soft sculpture on the floor ('Afterbirth'). An attendant hovers in a doorway, eyeing us suspiciously, but we are chuckling over other sculptures a laced boot whose toe-cap is metamorphosed into the corked neck of a bottle (titled 'Bootle', what else?), and a clenched fist inside a cracked glass jar ('Bottled Violence'). Like I say, the surrealists are out in force this year.

As we wander round the conversation turns to inspiration and creativity.

– It's a funny thing, but the present upsurge of interest in the creative process is largely due to the reaction to Sputnik in 1957. The US hawks panicked with the thought that their educational system might not be producing enough original scientists to maintain the American technological lead in the world. Before the war, creativity seemed to be regarded as an offshoot of genius, granted by nature and, like the weather, something we can do little about. But in the presence of the Soviet "threat", creativity could no longer be left to chance. Funds were made available to many workers in the field once government and military viewed research into creativity as their legitimate concern. So creativity isn't regarded with quite the same awe it once had. Now it's akin to problem-solving: an ability to play freely with concepts, ideas, and relationships, of recognising new and significant patterns and combinations. Fundamentally, there's little difference in the creative process, whether it's painting a picture, writing a poem, or formulating a scientific theory. A mathematician is often an abstract artist who hasn't cultivated the ability to express himself in a plastic material...

We wander into the last gallery, admiring a large black-and-white 'Car Pet' spread before us.

– Creation is a solitary experience. As an artist, I arrange or discover a problem and set out to solve it, and when I have the solution the basis of evaluation as to its 'rightness' is inside my mind. I <u>know</u> whether it's successful or not, whatever anyone else may say.

– That sounds a bit arrogant, Lisa chips in, and although I agree with you in part, aren't you forgetting something called 'communication'?

– No, the artist's sole concern is the act of creation, and at that time he's not concerned with other people's reactions.

We then become aware of a pleasant pulsation, an unobtrusive sound modulation that has gradually asserted itself at a conscious level, intruding on our conversation. It emanates from what at first glance appears to be a work bench,

with a beam across the top carrying a taut string, partly concealing an impressive assembly of electronic gear. We pause, entranced by the subtly manipulated vibrations.

– Lovely, enthuses Lisa, what's it called?

I consult the catalogue and read:

– 'Words fail me, that's why I made it'.

POSTLUDE—Spring, again

– So it just won't all fit in, mourns Lisa, glumly surveying the pile of material accumulated in the editorial in-tray. She sifts through it for the umpteenth time, ticking off the essential items on the list and the result comes out a 96-page zimri.

– I'll just have to be ruthless, she decides. Thinking of all the production problems and subsequent postal bill, I have to agree.

– And so far as your art article is concerned, there's no way I can see you managing to fit in those colour pages you've planned... Then there's the poetry booklet, and if I'm going to get zimri out in time for the con, well, this lot will have to be edited ruthlessly... Her violent gesture dislodges the pile of typescripts and confusion reigns as leaves flutter floorwards.

– I get your point, I concede as order is restored, but given more time...

– Christ, mutters Lisa fervently, eyes upturned to heaven.

– Given more time, I persist, the article would turn out to be a work of art in itself...

– STOP! says Lisa firmly. this is what I'll do. I'll print the bits and pieces you've written about writing the article, just to whet the readers' appetites, and promise them that you might, just might, get around to the actual article next issue. How does that grab you?

– You're the Editrix, is all I can say. Now, what about the rest of this stuff...■

From Lisa Conesa's *ZIMRI* #6, May 1974

Neurosis or "Old Fans Never Die . . ."

As I walk to the station in the morning with the sun low behind me, I notice that as I pass other commuters I stride a little more purposefully than most—I notice that my shadow, stretching ahead, long in the bright spring sunlight, I notice that my shadow is not so black as the shadows it passes.

Approaching people from behind I'm made aware that there's a softness about my shadow, a certain lack of intensity, of sharpness and definition, a greyness that is in marked contrast to the dense fuliginous shapes it passes by. The more people

I overtake, the more obvious this odd state of affairs becomes. Am I getting less opaque with age?

The train draws into the station. I crowd on with the rest and the worry is lost in the routine demands of the day.

✳ ✳ ✳ ✳ ✳ ✳

Today the sun is not shining. I have no shadow. Or worries. ■

for *Interim* (1975)

Con Art

My experience of con "art shows" in recent years is limited but I'm inclined to sympathise with your complaint that they are too narrowly concerned with graphics produced for commercial reproduction as book covers and illustrations—plus, hopeful imitations by those aspiring to join the ranks of the professionals.

This was good enough for the days of my youth, when cons were small in numbers and enthusiasm was all. But in these days of mass attendances and increased wordly sophistication, it just won't do. When I think of the excitement and pleasure to be found in the wider manifestations of art it just seems a. ridiculous restriction.

Is it the fault of the artists themselves? I know that many self-styled fan artists are concerned only with having their work reproduced as illustration or decoration, and appear to have little interest in pursuing other forms of artistic expression. It would be interesting to hear if Eddie Jones does do any work purely for his own amusement, without any thought of reproduction and the limitations it often imposes.

How many artists do you know who produce non-commercial work? Maybe there's too great a preoccupation with turning their talents into hard cash...to me, the besetting sin of our age is that of producing art to satisfy the market. (Though on reflection, it's been happening all the time). Okay, so one has to earn a living: but that doesn't stop me from painting and exploring ideas. without any thought about selling the end product. So far as I am. concerned, art is discovery not a means of earning money. (It's lonely out here, man!)

Are the con organisers, at fault? They can say, legitimately, that they just exhibit whatever work is submitted. But they tend to slavishly follow the pattern of past cons and show little understanding, imagination, or interest, and seem to give little direction so far as. the art show is concerned. Include, a paragraph in the pre-con handouts inviting fans to submit work, provide a room and a few display panels, and that's it: what's the next item on the agenda...

Unfortunately that's not it. Look at the sad results of this policy at the Mancon where the art show was crammed into two minuscule rooms, and visitors had to wriggle through a cramped maze of display panels where it was almost impossible to see the work in any comfort.

A few people put in a lot of work to mount the show, and I don't wish to belittle their efforts, but to me it seems so obvious that pictures are to be seen and therefore should be displayed with plenty of light and space around them, that I marvel that I have to mention it this way, Certainly future con committees who wish to mount a worthwhile art show should extend their horizons beyond commercial boundaries while giving some thought to adequate display facilities. And most of the newer hotels are used to conferences and offer display facilities.

Is it the fault of the fans? I suppose if they felt strongly about the cavalier treatment meted out to them, they'd protest.. If they don't, then it could be that they don't care—they'll just take what is put in front of them as part of the general entertainment, uncritically. In which case, you and I are wasting our time worrying about the situation:

My theory is that it all has to do with the British educational system which is preoccupied with verbal literacy. To be educated is to be able to read and write and in the process of learning one acquires a book-based mode of thinking linear and sequential—comes to believe that words can explain everything.

Visual imagery is relegated to a mere supporting role, providing pictures to embellish and decorate the words. Which is why so many fans equate art with illustration, or "realistic" pictures of times and places that the camera cannot reach. When your outlook has been truncated in this way, you are visually illiterate. And it amazes me that our society regards verbal illiteracy as a catastrophe, while visual illiteracy is hardly even recognised.

So most people (and fans) don't know anything about art but know what they like, and tend to stay on comfortably familiar ground. Which is why so many of those fans, who like to think of themselves as forward-looking and open-minded, prove to be conservative and reactionary when faced with current manifestations of art and throw around words like "pretentious" and mutter "pseud, pseud" in their beards, hoping to cover up the fact that visually they are a century behind the times...

[Oof! Take that, fandom: Actually, Harry, I'm sure we both realise that the prospect of a con art show ever really reflecting the trends of 20th century art is only slightly more remote than the same thing happening in our local art clubs, obsessed as they are with portraits, landscapes and still lifes, all rendered in a rather wishy-washy version of Impressionism. I'm inclined to agree with your final analysis of the situation: certainly, I was a victim of the system.

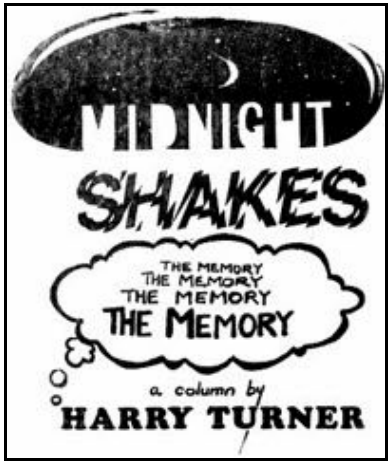
When I discovered a latent interest in painting and slowly caught up on what painters had been doing since the turn of the century, I was astonished that so much knowledge could have been hidden from me. Still, considering the fact that

it's only in recent years that sf writers have attempted to come to terms with. "avant garde" developments in writing, perhaps we shouldn't be too hard on our artists—hrb]

LoC to Harry Bell's fanzine Tocsin, *March 1977.*

Midnight Shakes The Memory, Take Five:

How To Stop Writing For Fanzines



It amazes me how some scraps of paper cling over the years. They refuse to be brushed away. Miraculously survive frequent clear-outs dictated by changing interests. Have a knack of sliding out of folders and envelopes to rot, quietly undisturbed, in the inaccessible areas of storage space.

I had a cruel clear-out when I gafiated in the late Fifties. Really drastic. I gave away a fanzine collection spanning the fannish generation back to the mid-thirties. I burned the accumulated fannish correspondence of years. I disposed of an SF mag collection with pulps that I'd acquired back in those distant days when unsold copies were shipped over to Britain as ballast, and ended up in the city market barrows of Manchester – and you could buy 'em for a mere 3d each. And not unnaturally, since resuming contact with fandom in the last few years, there are moments when I deeply regret that action.

Fortunately, I keep finding relics the escaped. Cuttings, odd pages from letters, snapshots, notes... preserved in a moment of enthusiasm and then lost and forgotten. Now and they they turn up, unexpectedly relevant.

Like this article by Charles Burbee, an American-fan-to-be-reckoned-with in the Forties, on *How to stop writing for fanzines*. The original has long since disappeared: the paper I hold in my hands is just a copy, handwritten at that. There's no note of a date but since it is in a fairly laboured italic script, I judge it to have been done in the days when I first diligently practised calligraphy—which puts it back in the Fifties. The article appeared in Bill Rotsler's FAPAzine *Masque*, and it still impresses me. I pass on two irresistible quotes:

'It breaks over you eventually—the realization that you are wasting too much damned time on writing for fanzines...'

'So after a while your brain will no longer turn out fannish ideas for articles and you are comparatively safe, unless you know someone like Willie Rotsler who is

such a fine fellow withal that it is difficult to refuse him when he asks for material. But you buckle down and say, the hell with you, Willie, don't you know I've stopped writing for fanzines? And so, by God, you write an article for *Masque* to show that you can stop writing articles any time you choose.'

Yeah, I *know* that feeling. ■

Published in Harry Bell's Kamikaze *[formerly* Tocsin*], March 1978*

DEAR LISA... WHEN IS THE NEXT ISSUE OF ZIMRI DUE?

An interim report from the one-time Zimri Art Editor

It is one of those scorching inactive weekends. Inhabitants and visitors sprawl out in the garden at 54 Manley Road, sipping cool drinks and engaging in desultory conversation. For one brief moment the subject of the next issue of Zimri is raised, dropped, and melts away like everything else in that lost red-hot summer.

I drop in on Lisa while she's busy preparing a Madras curry to an ancient and secret recipe.

- I was thinking about Zimri only the other day, she confides, wiping away a tear as she chops the onions.

I try to be helpful.

- If you leave onions in the fridge and freeze the essential oils then your eyes won't water when you start chopping.

- Gee, thanks for the good news, she wept, and lay off those sultanas... if you eat any more there'll be none left for the curry.

I take the hint and retire from the kitchen.

The curry is such a great success that Zimri is forgotten.

The keen breeze whispers the dried leaves along the footpath as .I walk up to the house. Lisa opens the door for me and promptly dashes back upstairs to the warmth of the flat.

We huddle round the fire, toast crumpets, and chat. A passing reference to Zimri evokes a brief snort.

- Too bloody cold even to think about it. . .

Comes a calm Saturday afternoon when the watery spring sunshine creeps timidly through the window and spreads cautiously across the floor. We are careful not to walk on its brittle radiance.

- Had a letter from Harry Bell, I venture.

- Oh yes?

- He asks when you hope to get around to Zimri...

- Soon, real soon, she promises earnestly.

- Another postal increase...we really ought to try and get out Zimri before it starts!
- I was sorting out the stuff in the folder only yesterday to see what's fit to publish, but I just can't put down this volume of Emily Dickenson's poems. I'll definitely do some editing next week. By the way, what's all this fuss about Illuminatus?

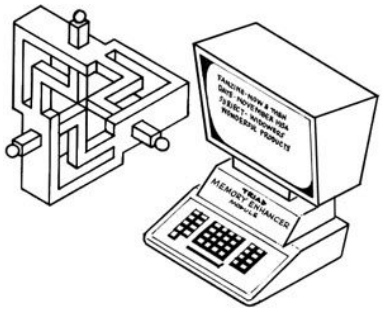
- How're you getting on with those three volumes of Illuminatus then?
- Slowly, slowly. I keep losing track of what it's all about and have to go back to the beginning again; but I'm up to page 50.
I do some mental arithmetic. Fifty pages in three weeks and 764 pages to go...jeez...that could mean another 45 weeks before she's finished!
- Any advance on Zimri, I counter.
- I told you I'm up to page 50.
- I said Zimri, not Illuminatus.
- Oh...

from The New Gwent Review *No. 3, Easter 1981,*
edited by Bryn Fortney & Lisa Conesa

Words on Widowers

NEW READERS START HERE

Triad Memory Enhancer Module
by Harry Turner



Triad Memory Enhancer Module
by Harry Turner

I was recuperating from a final eye operation, sight restored, grateful that I lived in the 20th century and the miracle was possible, and planning a vast scheme of reading and art projects to catch up with the enforced neglect of the past few years, when the phone rang.

" ... doing a fifties fanthology", announces Eric [Bentcliffe] from far-off Holmes Chapel. "How about some stuff from Now & Then—three, four pages long plus a batch of WIDOWER'S jingles. Something redolent of the times but not dated... not too many esoteric allusions, like..."

So much for my plans.

How do you reprint anything from a quarter-century old fanmag without hitting obscure references? As I recall, we had to publish a "Glossary of Esoteric Names, Words & Phrases" after the first three issues of N&T to help new readers catch up then... So you'll have to leap in at the deep end.

WIDOWER'S ADS first appeared in our second issue of *NOW & THEN*, the Proceedings of the RFV&SDS, published 16 November 1954 as a contribution to the second mailing of OMPA, the newly-launched Off-Trail Magazine Publishers Association. And a front-page interlineation hails the occasion by asking readers to "Please support our one and only advertiser".

As publishers we were both intrigued by the techniques of persuasion at this time. In my case, I had a job as advertising manager of a firm in a nearby town, so it may have been that some of my business preoccupations rubbed off on Eric, or it could just have been a latent entreprenoorial urge that sprang naturally from his unusual talents.

Whatever, I noticed that Eric started to pepper his contributions to the published proceedings of the RFV&SDS with gratuitous ads for deserving causes like the DOG'S HOME, publications that had met with approval, and even dead philosophers who provided him with inspiration and apt quotes.

So it was not altogether a surprise when on one of his regular weekend visits,

relaxing from arduous window-cleaning activities, Eric, contentedly sitting back reading the kids' comics after tucking into one of Marion's family nosh-ups, suddenly came up with an advertising jingle for a product that had kept him going all the previous week.

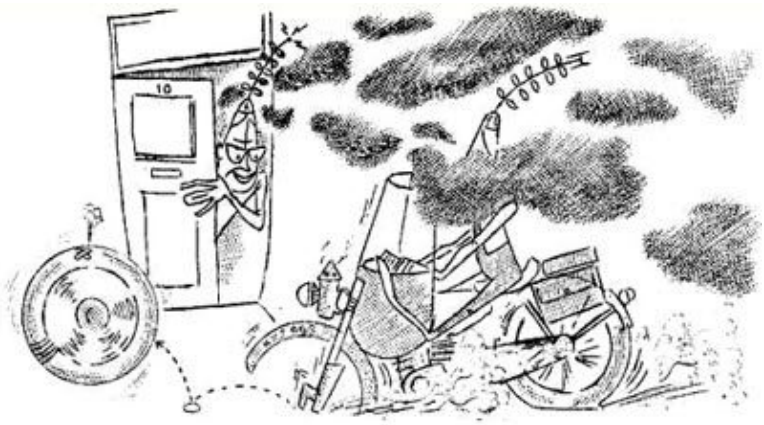
He complained that while rushed off his feet with overtime, he had no chance to shop, so all he found in his larder when he staggered home late for meals were a few tins of Batchelor's Baked Beans.

He'd been chomping them all week and confessed that he was now heartily sick of this diet, despite its high fibre content... His frustration worked itself out with this jingle... and one jingle led to another. (Researchers should note, and may find it significant, that with the odd exception, these initial jingles were all concerned with food.)

As it went against the grain to give a free advert to to an established brand name like Batchelor's, we cast about for a substitute and settled on "Widower's", and then the all-embracing, alliterative splendour of WIDOWER'S WONDERFUL PRODUCTS.

I used the results as fillers in N&T, and we found readers joining in with new jingles. There was a time when we had so many jingles on our hands that we had plans to produce a WIDOWER'S CATALOGUE... And in the third issue of N&T, Eric came up with the strange story of WIDOWER'S WART REMOVER.

[See the website. P.H.T.]



At this late stage I think it may be revealed that ads attributed to Pat Darrell in original copies of *Now & Then* were actually written by Eric. He invented this *alter ego* in the hope of encouraging other fannish copywriters to join in the promotion of the rapidly expanding range of Widower's Wonderful Products. As he pointed out:

"There are now 30 members of the RFV&SDS. To date we have had only Sid Birchby contributing... though we have published letters from the Bulmer love-

birds, the Lyons, and an old croaker called Robert Bloch, who has been around for some time now. You never know... the old croaker might write again (GENTLE HINT). He is Our Most Revered Member."

!The "old croaker" did write again, and was quoted (in part) in our fourth issue:

"*No, it wasn't my father who was associated with* Weird Tales *in the days of the Brundage covers. It was my grandfather. I am only 37, and never touch liquor except with my lips. By the way, I met Brundage in Chicago last November for the first time. So did Tucker. She wears falsies, I think. Tucker doesn't.*

Glad to get Now & Then *and I feel Dylan Thomas died too soon. He should have stuck around and seen the WIDOWER poems and then killed himself—with good reason*".

And he sent some Widower's jingles. In return for these copywriting activities he was swiftly appointed head of the Weyauwega (Wisconsin) branch of WIDOWER'S WONDERFUL WAREHOUSES INC. Another overseas correspondent almost joined the early ranks of the Widower's copywriters, but... Well, let Howard Lyons, of Toronto, explain himself:

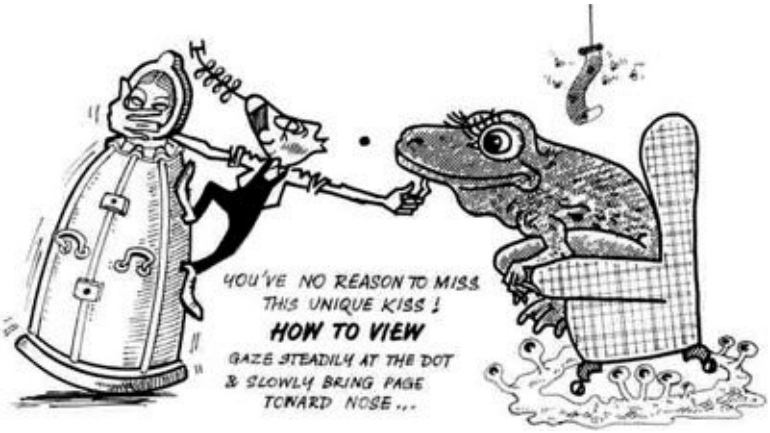
"*Dear Harry & Eric: I am not as yet convinced that one of you is not pseudo. But as Pat says:*

Fans think everybody is the same people

so I'll assume you're two different misfits and address this missive to both... Widower's as usual have the best commercials in the business. I have just wasted several moments working on one for WIDOWER'S WONDERFUL JOCKS but gave it up as below me."

The discovery of a copy of Robert Graves' *Greek Myths* provided Eric with inspiration for a further run of classically-based verses... Agamemnon &Iphigenia, Pluto, Apollo, were called into the service of Widower's Wonderful Products... and philosophers—Diogenes, the Greek Cynic, Archimedes, the mathematician...

And then there were the contributions from readers... Chuck Harris. Archie Mercer, Robert Bloch, Pat Darrell (an alias of Eric Needham), Jan Jansen of Antwerp, Dean Grennell, Ethel Lindsay...



THE FINAL CHAPTER

In August 1996, responding to a request about authorship of some Widower's verses, Archie Mercer contributed:

> The Receivers ought to ask a court
> (Whether High, Beth Din, or Consistory)
> To pin-point the brains behind these quatrains
> And solve WIDOWER'S FINAL MYSTERY.

He concluded that the verses in question weren't his and, therefore, probably by Eric Needham. In November, he added:

> "To change the subject somewhat, it has in the past occurred to me that the House of Widower may have been inspired by that Bachelor, known for its tinned peas and similar edible delights."

Harry Turner replied at the beginning of December:

> "Your linking of Widower's and Batchelors cheers me no end: I seem to waste a lot of energy putting down the myth that Widower's is based on a department store of that name that allegedly once existed in Manchester. Though if Chuck Harris is to be believed, he was deliberately misled on that detail by ESN Himself in one of his whimsical moments..."

APPENDIX: A list of Widower's Ads & Copywriters (Verses by ESN unless otherwise stated)

N&T Combined issue 1-3

Beans
Peas
Sausages [1]
Rhubarb
Marmalade
Patent Adhesive
Margarine
Lobster
Cocoa
Butter
[Contraceptive]
Trusses / Bob Bloch
Brassieres / Bob Bloch
Wart Remover
Rubber Solution
Pine Antiseptic
Electrical Blanket
H-section Girders
Fire Extinguisher
Flypaper
Lifting Appliance
Bulldozer
Vanishing Cream
Coffee Essence
Euthanatizer

Now & Then 4

Meat Pies
Sugar
Blister Ointment
Electric Kettle
Nylon Underwear
Chastity Belt / Chuck Harris
Combinations / Chuck Harris
Travelling Circus / Archie Mercer
Portable Fencing / Archie Mercer
Cygnet Ring / Archie Mercer
Xmas Pudding / Archie Mercer
Sausages [2] / Archie Mercer
Hammer & Sickle
Belt & Brassiere
Calico Drawers
Narcotics
Mustard Plasters
Doedelzak / Jan Jansen

Now & Then 5

Whalebone Stays
Copal Varnish
Pneumatic Falsies
Bloomers
Diapers / Bob Bloch
Pills / Bob Bloch
Asbestos Trousers / Bob Bloch
Porcelain Dentures
Piano Accordians
Soap
Cod Liver Oil
Sellofane Tape

Now & Then 6

Hallowe'en Lantern
Incinerator

Now & Then 7

Thermo-statue / Joy Clarke
Gliding Castors
Hair Restorer
Thimbles
Exportbier / Jan Jansen (?)

Now & Then 8

Breakfast Foods
Water Wings
Grain Elevator
Laundry Boilers

Grin 1

Corsets
Modesty Vest
Winterweight Knickers

Final Note:

When we gafiated in the late 50s, I passed all the Widower's material in hand, together with a layout for a projected Catalogue, over to Ethel Lindsay. Some of it ultimately appeared in:

BLETHERINGS 4 (1972)

Insulators / Chuck Harris
Rhubarb Wine / Dean A. Grennell
Elephant Holders / Archie Mercer
Depilator
Fertilizer
Safe Deposit
Laundry Boilers

BLETHERINGS 5 (May 1972)

Bread / Chuck Harris
Radar Scanner / Chuck Harris

I renewed contact with fandom early in 1972, and asked Ethel if she still had the catalogue layout and any more verses, but she couldn't find any relics at that date, alas.

from the surviving archives of the
Romiley Fan Veterans & Scottish Dancing Society...

to which may be added (for the modern era):

> How do you feel about a marvellous deal
> Which will always turn out just right?
> Don't leave the house, do a click with your mouse,
> At WIDOWER'S WONDERFUL WEBSITE.

Alternative line 3: Don't reach for a map, give your tablet a tap
alternative to tablet: smartphone

During a brief stay at a scholastic retreat near Mold, on the Welsh border, I met a party returned from a visit to the nearby Offa's Dyke. In a state of near ecstacy they described the deep feelings of the ancient past that assailed them on the site. Well, I thought, this I had better try for myself. I went. There indeed were the grassy dips and hollows that marked the earthwork but for me no deep feelings welled up from the springy turf. No all-pervading sense of history invaded my my mind.

It may be that you have to possess the right sort of imagination to be an archeologist. It's easy to enthuse over the obvious—the ruins of castles, cathedrals and monasteries, prehistoric sites like Stonehenge and Avebury, Roman remains such as Hadrian's Wall...

Though as far as the wall is concerned, when I visited Stacksteads I stared hard at places about which a guide waxed poetic but all that met my gaze were the inevitable grassy dips and hollows, which failed to come up to expectations, no matter how I fed my imagination with the glowing words.

I am consoled by the fact that even a writer of the calibre of Aldous Huxley shared my plight.

In his book *Beyond the Maxique Bay* he describes a visit to the classic Mayan site of Copan, in Honduras, in 1933. He dwells on the encroachment of time, and its allies in destruction—weather and vegetation—and the curious tricks they play on the works of men. They can destroy a city as an architectural and engineering unity, he wrote, yet spare its decorative detail. While great masses of masonry are buried or disrupted by the blind growth of vegetation, the statues, fragile pots and jewelry survive intact. At Copan he found all that remained of the great complex of platforms, pyramids, and sunken courtyards that once occupied the site, were a few mounds covered with trees, fragments of a wall, and rubbish heaps of stones.

"Buried under the mould, disintergrated by the thrusting roots of the tropical

vegetation, a sacred city of pure geometrical form once stood here... but toiling up and down through the scrub, among the fallen stones, I found it all but impossible to reconstruct in my imagination the Maya's huge embodiment of a mathematician's dream. I had read the writings of the archeologists and knew what sort of monument had been raised at Copan. But these almost shapeless burrows supplied my fancy with no visible foundations on which to rebuild the Maya's prodigious works."

Huxley's fear that buried Copan (bought in 1839 by the American explorer John Lloyd Stephens for a mere 50 dollars) was irrecoverable is now confounded by the sheer industry of archeologists. Today the site is revealed as one of the most highly organised architectural complexes to be found in the Maya area of Central America. The ball-game court is cleared and reconstructed. The great mass known as pyramid 26 is crowned with elegant buildings, reached by the impressive Great Hieroglyphic Stairway with a whole 'book' of 2,500 glyphs carved on the risers of it's 63 steps: the longest inscription found in Mayan territory.

The already ruined building known as Temple 22 was shattered by an earthquake after Huxley's visit. Now it has been meticulously restored on the basis of the careful records made by Alfred Maudslay during a visit in 1889. The many images of the Corn God found here have prompted some to call this the Temple of Agriculture: the magnificent sculptured entrance to the sanctuary is formed of a life-size figure on each side, squatting on giant death's heads and supporting a sky monster twisting in bizarre coils across the top. And throughout the site there are intricately carved stelae, larger than life-size figures, ornately robed and carrying ceremonial bars, imprisoned within a wealth of symbolic detail not yet clearly understood. One of the free-standing altars, with a dedicatory date of 776AD, shows 16 seated figures and appears to commemorate a congress of astronomers held at Copan on that date.

The art of Copan is distinctive for the way in which architecture and sculpture are integrated. Contemporary descriptions include words and phrases like "breathtaking", "mellow poetry", and "one of the loveliest of all Classic Maya ruins".

Maybe I should visit Stacksteads again just to see what they've been up to....

published in Terry Hill's zine MICROWAVE
(The fanzine for the literate Philistine) #4, 1983

Curried Cobra? No Thanks!

23 May 1990 - reasons for not doing articles...

Already caught up with several Kundera and Skvorcsky novels... Anita Desai's Baumgartner's Bombay (just to get me in the mood for Indian reminiscences) and Theroux's latest train travel epic—through China—Riding the Red Rooster. Amused by his account of meeting intellectuals who survived the Mao period, when he comments that their use of book titles "suggests that they might have read them in translation: Dickens' A STORY ABOUT TWO PLACES and DIFFICULT YEARS, Hawthorne's THE RED LETTER, Steinbeck's ANGRY GRAPES ..."

((And further response to my nagging for an article)) Still ploughing through wartime letters. It amazes me how a few words written so long ago can evoke memories with such clarity; just rereading the letters brings images flooding back, and scrappy memories suddenly flesh out and the whole scene is experienced once again. I'm getting more adept at this as I progress.

Forty three years ago, to the day ((6 June 1989)), I was supervising the dismantling of the Gee Radar station at Pokhari Ghat, when all the key gear had to be delivered to the Poona base depot before the monsoon broke, and the roads were made impassable. And I was panicking about being posted to some spot remote from Bombay just when my demob number came up... And all this is happening again parallel with contemporary upheavals in China, Iran, and Eastern Europe. All very unsettling.

((As part of the Editorial Nag I had mentioned to Harry that my father had been in India at around the same time he had, and had encountered a python under a settee he'd been sitting on at a Rest Camp; and I'm including the following anecdote just in case I don't get the article soon enough to include in this issue...))

We didn't have pythons under the setteee (I don't think we even had any settees!) but we had some Nasty Encounters with cobras in the wild. Indeed, one such occasion was at this camp I've mentioned, at Pokhari Ghat. We'd ventured through the barbed-wire defences on a hunting expedition, hoping to pot a peafowl for a change from the usual permutations of bully beef.

It was fairly open country in the hills, with clumps of low-growing bush and prickly pear type cacti. We'd taken our stens out -- they could be set to fire single shots, but were somewhat temperamental and apt to switch to automatic fire without warning. Someone saw a movement in the bushes and fired a shot to flush out any birds -- however he disturbed a king cobra, which reared up with inflated hood and scared the daylights out of him, and he let fly on automatic fire.

The cobra dived to the ground, and as they can move like an express train, there was an immediate retreat of the intrepid hunters back to camp -- we all got through the small gap in the barbed-wire outer perimeter and later found that hardly anyone had suffered a scratch.

Observed from a safe distance, the cobra wasn't moving. Some brave soul ventured out and reported that it was dead having been well-punctured by the panic blast. When we got it back to camp it measured almost five feet. No one ventured out of the rest of that day and we put up with bully beef for dinner. We didn't fancy curried cobra...

LoC to Hazel Ashworth's fanzine Lip *#6, September 1991*

Re: Fantasy Commentator bumper anniversary issue

Dear ALS,

Congratulations on your bumper anniversary issue, which Steve Sneyd has waved before my eyes. I'm prompted to comment on a few minor points raised by Sam Moskowitz's interesting summary of the emergence of organised, (and disorganised) fandom over here in the late thirties.

Just for the record, we finished up with at least six pre-war rocketry groups, since there was a split in the ranks of the Manchester Interplanetary Society before it merged with the British Interplanetary Society (see Tomorrow Vol. 2 No. 2, Summer 1938, p.5, P.E. Cleator, 'Interplanetary Parade'). The local publicity when the police took the MIS members to court after the accident at a 1937 meeting brought an influx of new members who were SF enthusiasts.

However, the then president and founder, Eric Burgess, viewed this influx of impractical dreamers with a certain antipathy (SF fans were often regarded as weirdos in those early days). Feeling outnumbered by SF fans, and sensing a dilution of strictly scientific aims, he and immediate friends withdrew to form a rival group, the Manchester Astronautical Association early in 1938. So I guess fans could be blamed for the proliferation of rocket societies at the time.

I'm dubious about Sam's belief that I.O. Evans "achieved considerable stature among fans" then. Despite the glowing references in Tomorrow to his book for juveniles, 'World of Tomorrow', published in 1933, I don't recollect ever seeing a copy; by 1938 it was probably an out-of-print collectors' piece and generally unavailable. Nor do I recall seeing the set of 'World of Tomorrow' cigarette cards, which must have been issued sometime in 1936 when the film 'Things to Come' was released. (I was a non-smoker and such minor aspects of SF were beneath my attention.)

To the younger fans, I.O. Evans was just part of a front presented to the outside world, a symbol of the respectability craved by the older generation of fans of the SFA committee. [Note: H.T. found an article by Evans, which he must have read at the time, with the title "Scientifiction" in a copy of Armchair Science for July 1937, which is preserved in the family archives. PHT]

Sam's comment that "cigarette cards were not uncommon in Britain at the time" is a wild understatement. Every schoolkid collected 'em, and had done for decades; swapping duplicates in an effort to complete sets was one of those essential activities of schooldays. Certainly as a youngster I'd accumulated cards avidly as a source of encyclopedic information, entertainment and esoteric knowledge, and still had a hoard of incomplete sets when I gave up childish pursuits (at the age of 16!) and turned to more adult and serious pursuits such as fanning...

So as far as the Leeds group split is concerned, I don't think it hinged on racial prejudice as Sam hints. I am prepared to take on trust the account by Bert Warnes, one of the original Leeds fans, that Rob Hansen included in the up-date of THEN 2 (1989) and regard the split as largely due to rivalry for leadership and consequent personal animosity between Doug Mayer and Mike Rosenblum.

My first contacts with Leeds fandom was a visit to Manchester by Harold Gottliffe. We met in the summer of 1937 and I started corresponding with Mike Rosenblum and joined the SFA—this was about the time the split developed in Leeds. By the time a group of Manchester fans visited the SFA HQ, the Doug Mayer group were in charge of SFA business. I wasn't aware of any anti-Jewish feeling at the time, though there was a certain personal antipathy. The group seems to have had a lot of casual members and I suppose it was inevitable that the Jewish members would support Mike's stand and several Mayer supporters were old school friends..

So far as the outside world was concerned, Mike had considerable standing as a collector and established SF fan, and I don't think the SFA-SFL split had much effect on his contacts with fans outside Leeds. When the Mayer faction faded out of fandom after the SFA folded with the outbreak of war, the Rosenblum faction moved in and effectively took over and tried to organise fandom again in the war years with the BFS. ■

notes for a letter to A. Langley Searles of Fantasy Commentator *(1990s)*

What it's all about

Back in 1937, when British sf fandom gathered under the banner of the Science Fiction Association, I joined and promptly found myself designing covers for the SFA journal, Novae Terrae, then edited by Maurice Hanson. I made myself some styluses, found a few wheelpens, practiced drawing direct on to wax stencils, and acquired a certain facility in this essentially limited artistic medium.

That soon led to demands from the editors of other fanmags published in those early years, shoestring productions all, enthusiastically cranked out on decrepit duplicators—Fantast, started by Sam Youd, later taken over by Doug Webster; Satellite, edited by John Burke; Ted Carnell's New Worlds; then, during the early

war years, Mike Rosenblum's Futurian War Digest (FIDO).

While it was a struggle to get paper and other materials during wartime, by 1941 I had the urge to pub my own ish—Zenith—and dabble with multicolour mimeoing. (On a visit to Britain a few years back, Art Widner reminded me that in the '40s I'd also cut several stencils of VOMaidens for Forry Ackerman, which appeared in Voice of the Imagination). But this feverish activity halted abruptly when I was drafted into the RAF the year following.

The end of the war found me in India and owing to demob delays, I didn't get back to Britain until the end of 1946. The next few years were spent finding a new home and new job, and settling down to family life. So it was the early 50s before I drifted back into fandom, roped in by the local Manchester fan group to revivify their foundering fanzine, Astroneer. I had acess to a Multilith machine, and so the mag duly appeared with a natty lithoed two-colour cover. Which sparked requests from other faneds of the time, besides landing me with the job of producing a combozine for the SuperMancon in 1954.

That same year Vinç Clarke and Ken Bulmer founded Britain's first apa – OMPA (Off-trails Magazine Publisher's Association). Together with Eric Needham, I produced a sheet titled Now & Then, which soon blossomed into a regular general-circulation fanzine.

I gafiated during the sixties but found myself lured back to fandom in the seventies by Lisa Conesa, to collaborate in producing Zimri (described by Rob Hansen in his history of British fandom as "the most visually impressive British fanzine of the 1970s").

At the close of the decade I went gafia again, this time because of failing eyesight. It was a harrowing period: I had to undergo several eye operations over the next few years before my vision was restored.

Then in the 80s (by which time I had retired) Via Clarke encouraged me to take up fanzine illustrating again. So I was soon back providing covers and artwork for zines like Terry Hill's Microwave, John Owens' Shipyard Blues, Tom Sadler's TRF, Chuck Connors' Thingumybob and, more recently, the Plummer/ Brialey Banana Wings, and Sue Jones' Tortoise. Looking back, I guess that fandom, for me, equates with producing fanzines! ■

undated but 1990s

Looking A Long Way Back

Old Correspondence: Reading your editorial musings I can appreciate what a problem it must be for fans of your generation to attempt to sample the accumulation of sixty years or so of fans pubbing their ish. Even with the resources and guidance of those Master Archivists Vinç Clarke and Greg Pickersgill it could become a full-time (and perhaps not very rewarding) job.

You make me realise how it helps to be in at the start of these things. It was great when it all began, of course, since it was easy to keep track of the few fanmags published. And even during the war and immediate post-war years, shortages of paper and duplicator supplies necessarily restricted what could be published and circulated, so with a little determination fans could still keep up with all the stuff that appeared.

Courtesy of archivist Vinᶜ Clarke, I still periodically romp through those old zines: Novae Terrae, journal of the original Science Fiction Association, edited by Maurice Hanson, Bill Temple, Arthur Clarke and Ted Carnell, is of historical interest as well as carrying memories of many now-forgotten fans; Satellite and Fantast, variously edited by John Burke, Sam Youd and Doug Webster, revive old arguments between younger fans and SFA establishment of the day and cover the disorganised early war years; then Mike Rosenblum's Futurian War Digest or FIDO, with its "litter" of fannish newsheets, provided a prime focus of fanac during the darker years of the war.

I was involved with them all, providing a goodly number of cover designs and even moved to join in: my first zine, Zenith, started out in 1941. The only duplicator I could press into service was a battered relic, and rounding up paper and duplicating supplies was a matter of luck. Still, I like to think that the result was worth the effort.

letter dated 18 January 1997 in response to Banana Wings *#4*

Searching out the Beginnings

The Editors wrote: *Old fanzines are only unobtainable up to a point. !n the UK at least, archivists such as Vinc Clarke and Greg Pickersgill do a wonderful job of preserving old fanzines and making copies available to interested parties. There are also other older fans who are prepared to help out, folks like: Harry Turner of Romiley*

Reading your editorial musings I can appreciate what a problem it must be for fans of your generation to attempt to sample the accumulation of sixty years or so of fans pubbing their ish. Even with the resources and guidance of those Master Archivists Vinᶜ Clarke and Greg Pickersgill it could become a full-time (and perhaps not very rewarding) job.

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I was involved with them all, providing a goodly number of cover designs and even moved to join in: my first zine, *Zenith*, started out in 1941. The only duplicator I could press into service was a battered relic, and rounding up paper and duplicating supplies was a matter of luck.

Still, 1 like to think that the result was worth the effort *[[It was. The example I've seen still looks good]]* not many fanzines of the period could boast multicoloured illustrations! and five issues appeared before I was hauled away into the RAF.

LoC in the Claire Brialey/Mark Plummer zine
Banana Wings *#5, 1997*

Christmas Nostalgia 1997

DIGGING THROUGH THE FILES recently I came upon this timely example of a fanzine cover, designed and produced (in a hurry, natch) all of 44 years ago.

The design is printed in a cheery red ink on green-tinted quarto duplicator paper, and inspired by gifts lined up for the Junior Turners—a plastic "Rocket Bank" and a host of spacemen in solid plastic, complete with clear acrylic space-helmets, which were on offer at Woollies that year (I'd built a space station to house them).

The drawing was made with ink and crayon, directly on to an aluminium litho plate, and the sheets run off, after hours, on the Multilith machine housed in the ad department I was running at this time.

Space Times was a monthly fanzine published by the Nor'West Science Fantasy Club, based in Manchester. It owed its regular appearance initially to the efforts of

editors Eric Bentcliffe (in Stockport) and Eric Jones (in Cheltenham), supported by art editor Terry Jeeves (in Sheffield).

However, complications upset production during the autumn of 1953, when Eric Jones decided to retire from the team. Rescue came from an unexpected quarter—up and coming fan Stu Mackenzie in London offered to take over editing and printing, with assistance from Brian Varley, who had moved from the North to the Smoke...

Fannish relations between North and South became seriously strained during 1953, when fierce discussion raged about London's monopoly of the Eastercons. The editors of **Space Times** denounced the Coroncon as "the biggest flop ever", and then Authentic editor Bert Campbell stirred things up by referring to "those bloody provincials" when US guest Bea Mahaffey was chatting to Northern fans.

So it seemed at odds with the trend to find the mag of a Northern group being edited and produced by a Londoner. (Some hinted that an ambitious Stu saw it as an easy route to fannish popularity and winning a future TAFF trip to the US, but maybe that was a mite uncharitable!).

Space Times staggered on for several more issues though a promise by the editor that all future covers would be Multilithed did not, so far as I recall, materialise. But I remember the Christmas of 1953 because it heralded a welcome outbreak of Goodwill among Fen, and Manchester fandom even won the right to hold the next Eastercon. Later there were whispers of sabotage, threats to make the SuperMancon of 1954 a bloodbath of North-South rivalry. In the event it was so enjoyably disorganised that all hostilities were forgotten in the party spirit that prevailed.

produced by the Septuagenarian Fans Association™*, Xmas 1997*

Living With The GUP

After all I said about not taking up Maureen's invitation to re-read *The Count of Monte Cristo*, I foolishly thought the matter settled. Now am seduced by glowing comments in a recently received Folio Society prospectus for 1999. Hailed as their "major novel of the year" and illustrated by Russian artist Roman Pisarev ("work of unsurpassable technical virtuosity and unswerving fidelity to the romantic spirit of the book"), they say that their new edition of *Monte Cristo* is "destined to become one of the greatest illustrated books we have ever published". Wow! All my bibliophilic instincts are roused. I'm tempted, I'm sorely tempted...

Of course, even if I do buy it, it will, initially. finish up on the Great Unread Pile. And the problem of ever liquidating the GUP increasingly haunts my dreams in old age. Claire's `Too Many Books...' highlights the basic problem. In my case there was a complication in the late '70s, when my vision deteriorated drastically. I found

it increasingly difficult to use library facilities, and eventually was only able to read with great difficulty and a giant magnifying glass.

Some years later, after a series of operations, my sight was restored. With retirement on the horizon, I cheerfully assumed that it was merely a matter of time before I caught up with the vast backlog of reading that had piled up. Well, it's now thirteen years since I retired; I still acquire books, and the GUP persists. While I no longer entertain any serious hope that I'll ever catch up with myself, there is a certain consolation in knowing that if I need to check a fact, prompt a fading memory, seek inspiration, or look for entertainment, an appropriate volume is usually conveniently to hand.

– 8 SEPTEMBER 1998

LoC in Banana Wings *#12, 1998*

Time Bankruptcy

> "Not long ago a friend expounded to me on the recently-minted concept of *time bankruptcy*. He himself was time bankrupt, he admitted. You are time bankrupt when the amount of things you have acquired which you have to process - mainly books and opera recordings, in his case—cannot possibly be read or listened to in the time you have left to live."
>
> *James Meek writing in the Guardian 15 July 2000*

Dear Maureen / Bruce: Thanx for the copy of SET#1. Was interested in the listings of "Essentials", being curious to see what I've missed and how far I've slipped behind with reading these days compared with the experts... Find I come out moderately well from the Drummond and Kincaid listings, while scoring only occasional hits on those compiled by Schaefer, Kaufman & Whitmore. It seems I've a considerable leeway to make up, though reading James Meek's comment above after being drummed out of the Septuagenarian Fans Association following a recent birthday, I gaze around at the Great Unread Piles of (relatively) recently acquired books and worry about this impending threat of time bankruptcy.

For the rest, was most intrigued by the piece on rereading Olaf Stapledon. Am currently reading the Crossley biography which I picked up last year: was heartened by the account of NY fans rescuing Stapledon from US bureaucratic cold-war machinations during his 1949 visit. Still have a copy of the Pelican reissue of *Last & First Men* (that I rushed to buy in 1937) on my bookshelves and have been dipping into its pages, reviving memories. As a teenager I lapped it all up, no problems—this was real science-fiction, an awesome vision of humanity's future, a considerable step above the offerings of tile US pulps that I avidly sought and

collected at that time. And while *Starmaker*, regarded as a sequel to *L&FM*, was published that same year I guess it tended to be overshadowed by the appearance of Wells's *Star Begotten* which soon had susceptible sf fans of the clay dreaming that they were the Chosen, the star-begotten...

Last & First Men was such a vital part of of growing up into fandom, that I can't look at it now with quite the same detachment as Bruce Gillespie achieves.

In between times I have been attempting to answer occasional enquiries about Widower's Wonderful Products by recyling a less-than-sercon fanzine of the fifties. Regret that this is all I can offer you by way of return for *SET*.

Regards

PS: Now son Philip is tempting me to view a 7-CDRom box of all the issues of MAD to 1998. How am I fit it all in? Will adopting the Alfred E. Neuman Philosophy of "What, me worry?" be a sufficient counter to time bankruptcy?

letter to Steam Engine Time*, August 2000*

The Magic of Fandom

... it seems to me that sf fans should, by the very nature of their interest, be concerned with present and future trends. It's a matter of attitudes. In my young days, when sf fans were a decided minority, it was this sense of looking beyond the immediate problems and preoccupations, of shaping up to building a better future, that made us feel different, as a group, from the rest of the community. We looked up at the stars. Or something like that.

A little of the magic disappeared when my generation were thrust unwillingly into a world war. But the optimism of our outlook remained. I still have amused memories of Arthur Clarke acting as though all the radar developments were ultimately designed to promote space travel rather than to help detect and shoot down planes or bomb cities to destruction. In a crazy way, he was right, of course.

Can you imagine what it was like giving talks on space travel to a faintly incredulous audience at NAAFI discussion groups in the early years of the war? But there was always someone willing to listen and perhaps be inspired beyond the deep pessimism of the moment. And these were the sort of people who drifted into fandom in those days.

It's not a matter of being "avant garde" (whatever that is!) as of keeping alive a healthy curiousity and maintaining an attitude of scepticism against the "certainties" and accepted attitudes of today; of not closing one's mind in the face of accepted practices. The older generation of fans lived in a more stable atmosphere (which is no commendation for its perpetuation) than the present.

Nowadays, changes come about so rapidly, and the amount of available information has proliferated, that one can only steer an exciting course struggling to keep one's balance. To close one's mind in an effort to create a fictitious stability is retreat and escapism. ■

Every time I return to fandom, I find the historical background tends to be patchy: you are asked so many questions by obvious neofans, that you find yourself automatically talking down to someone who happens to be better informed, and your fading memories are confronted by the certitude of a fan who has but recently read the records and got the story straighter.

The 50s crowd swallowed the concept of fannish progress hook, line & sinker. They were involved with their own affairs and all prior fannish activity was seen as primitive struggles on the evolutionary path. My reaction was to shout about the freedom of Second Fandom – essentially, fanzine fandom – the days of Sally (Satellite), Fay (Fantast) and Zenith – but the Trufannish legends and allegories were in the ascendent and few fans wished to know.

I suppose Second Fandom was a transitional phase: the passage from sf fandom and the progress of science & the arts to a purely fannish tradition separated from its beginnings. When did the academic involvement with sf (and fanzines) begin? In the Sixties? I don't recall any signs of it in the 50s, but it was certainly one of the forces to be reckoned with in the 70s. ■

Footnotes to Fandom #5

Fannish Credentials

I recently unearthed an old exercise book, dating back to 1935 when I was 15 and still a pupil at Ducie Avenue Central school in Manchester. [still in the family archives, PHT] Re-reading an essay on "A Library of my own" is revealing... Right at the start, I mention that the type of literature I find appealing is "scientific fiction... often abbreviated to 'scientifiction' or 'science-fiction'", then struggle clumsily to define it: "stories which do not happen in reality, so being fictitious, and possessing scientific relations".

I hastily added the qualifier that: "not all stories having these two features, however, are science-fiction. Only by reading this type of fiction can one recognise genuine science-fiction", and supplied a few familiar author's names such as Wells, Verne, Burroughs, and others "less familiar in England but well known in America", such as Eando Binder, Laurence Manning, A. Hyatt Verrill and Dr. David H. Keller, who feature in the pages of the magazines Wonder Stories and Amazing Stories.

I describe the thrill of picking up several Wells volumes reduced from 3/6d to one shilling each in a book sale the previous Christmas, of buying cheap editions

of The Invisible Man, The Island of Dr. Moreau, and The Sleeper Awakes from Woolworths, of searching secondhand book shops for Burroughs' Martian books, I mention visits to the barrows in the city centre market for remaindered copies of Wonder Stories and Amazing Stories, and occasional Annuals, all of which, in later years, formed the nucleus of the SFA Manchester Branch library.

Surprisingly, perhaps, many of the volumes acquired in those far-off days still survive on my bookshelves.

The magazines are long gone, cleared out when I gafiated from fandom in the late 1950s (though a few were salvaged by son no. 1, who inherits my own hoarding instincts). ■

[right: copy by H.T. of Frank R. Paul cover artwork for Wonder Stories, February 1936, for his own bound version of the magazine]

Response to a request for artwork from Steve Green of *Critical Wave* for a portfolio, July/August 1993

Can this be a leg-pull ? I ask myself. It's true that I've another birthday due this coming weekend, which means that it's now 56 years since I did my first fanzine cover.

I'll assume your proposal is serious though the thought of putting a 'representative selection' into four pages... wow. No problems about sending samples of recent work for you to mull over. Going further hack is not so much a matter of selecting as making do with whatever comes to hand.

You may be disillusioned to hear that I do not have a vast archive of work turned out over the years. For a start, all the early work of the 30s, 40s was drawn direct on to stencil; there was no original artwork. So, all the material is buried in the mouldering fanzines such as have survived the years. Practically all I had passed out of my hands years ago.

Fortunately, the Heritage Fanzine Library, run by A. Vincent Clarke, has turned up some items for me. I present you with a few cleaned up prints.

Again, I did a fair amount of illustration for sf mags—mainly *Science-Fantasy* and *Nebula SF*—during the 50s. Publishers/editors rarely bothered to return artwork after use in those days, and the standard of reproduction in the mags doesn't give adequate photocopies. All I can lay hands on at present are some

items that had to be redone owing to editorial rewriting of a story (after I'd done the illustrations, natch) and some rare returns.

My hopes of earning a living as a freelance artist crumbled in the 60s in the face of impecunious sf publishers inability to pay a decent rate! As for later fanzine work, I've tried to pick a few items that will survive the somewhat drastic reduction they may face to fit on your four pages.

Look them over, and let me know if they meet your expectations.

Fandom first saw my artwork on the covers of Novae Terrae, monthly bulletin of the newly-formed Science Fiction Association, way back in 1937. Fifty plus years later, to my surprise, I still can't resist responding to pleas for artwork from fanzine editors.

My taste for sf was sparked in the late 20s, during visits to an uncle in whose library I discovered bound volumes of turn-of-the-century magazines like the Strand and Pearson's. I revelled in tales and serials by H.G. Wells, George Griffith, Conan Doyle, Cutcliffe Hyne and countless others; and the illustrations of invading Martians, prehistoric monsters and alien landscapes set me off drawing my own feeble versions.

Then I became an avid reader of American sf pulp mags, haunting Manchester's city centre market in search of remaindered copies of Amazing, Wonder and Astounding Stories, wide open to the influence the illustrators: the ubiquitous Frank R. Paul, Wesso and Elliot Dold.

In the art class at school I was largely left to my own devices, happily churning out fantastic drawings and paintings that dominated the displays of work on the artroom walls. When later I became involved in the first active stirrings of British sf fandom and found fanmag editors looking for artwork, I was only too happy to help out.

The fanmags of the 30s and 40s were shoestring productions, usually cranked out on decrepit duplicators. I made myself some styluses, found a few wheelpens, and practiced drawing direct on to wax stencils, acquiring a certain facility in this limited artistic medium.

Right through into the early years of the war, I was kept busy providing cover designs for fanmags like *Novae Terrae*, *Fantast*, *Satellite*, *New Worlds*, *Futurian War Digest*, and eventually published my own mag, *Zenith*. This burst of feverish activity ended When I was drafted into the RAF.

The outbreak of war also put a stop to dreams of earning my keep as a freelance illustrator. Back at the 1938 London fan convention I'd met Wally Gillings, editor of the new, struggling, British pro-mag, *Tales of Wonder*. Despite resistance from a cost-cutting publisher, Wally introduced small illustrations into the pages of the magazine, and I started to draw for him. When a rival mag, *Fantasy*, appeared I was asked to do work for that too. But it proved a very brief career!

This ambition revived in the 50s, when I spent several years illustrating British sf magazines, mainly *Science-Fantasy* and *Nebula SF*. But with a growing family and

a newly-acquired mortgage to support, I had to face the hard reality that the financial rewards of freelance were slight, and editors' tastes decidedly conservative. I settled for running a design studio for a regular income.

I still did graphics for editors of amateur magazines—their increasing use of litho printing offered my work more scope and better reproduction. But most of my spare time was devoted to painting and I showed work regularly with local art societies and in open exhibitions.

I became intrigued with perceptual anomalies and the wide diversity of 3-D illusions in flat geometrical patterns. Exploration of the inherent visual deficiencies of isometric drawing led me to a system for creating 'impossible figures', which in turn can be used to generate infinite paradoxical patterns, reminiscent of Islamic geometrical art.

I reckon I could cheerfully spend the next 50 years sorting out the ramifications of this development... ■

Footnotes to Fandom #6

Doug Webster, A Key Figure in Fandom

Remembered by Harry Turner in September 2004

"Doug Webster was a key figure in keeping fandom alive during those chaotic war years after the SFA folded. He helped out Mike Rosenblum with stencil-cutting and production of Futurian War Digest, as well as taking over publication of the fanzine Fantast when Sam Youd was called into the forces.

"He personally contacted many fans during occasional "hitch-hikes"—as per the item from the last Zenith I published before the RAF claimed me in 1942 [see the website]. On the other hand, he resisted efforts to create a new "official" fannish organisation in such disorganised times, with fans continually disappearing into the forces, and started the short-lived Fanarchist movement it started with me, Marion Eadie and Edwin Macdonald in support, but I guess it never really had chance to get under way in the prevailing conditions.

"By the time I returned from India for demob, and resumed contact with him, he'd abandoned fandom and was in London, concentrating on his academic career ..."

[Compiler's note: Doug Webster died in August, 2004. His "Web's Wanderings" article appeared in *Zenith* No. 5 (April 1942)]

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The Artist

Harry Turner was a rubber chemist at the Anchor Chemical Company in Manchester when the wartime RAF decided to turn him into a radar technician. After his demob, he returned to the Anchor, but he used his skills as a graphic designer to create an advertising department.

Concerns about the chemical plant's toxic environment led to a move to Redfern's Rubber Works in Hyde as the advertising manager. He was recruited by the Manchester Guardian & Evening News and he want on to become the manager of the Advertising and Promotion Department at the Evening News.

His career as an artist began conventionally with representational art; most often with a science fiction theme, and he brought back a collection of watercolours from his RAF posting to India. Harry began to experiment with abstract art in the 1960s. His interest in perceptual anomalies took him into the field of ambiguous objects, and experiments with the isometric system of drawing led to his development of the "Triad" and the creation of his own niche in the world of impossible objects.

Harry eventually achieved international recognition with his Triad designs. He is the author of *Triad Optical Illusions and how to design them*, which was published by Dover Publications of New York in 1978, and reissued in 2006 as a colouring book.

He did not resume his painting career when he had cataracts removed from both eyes in the early 1980s. He used his restored vision to continue with his Open University courses on art, to do graphic design work for the British Journal of Russian Philately and the Wyndham Lewis Society, and create an impressive body of Triad designs, some of which found homes in science fiction fanzines courtesy of editors in search of something new and different.

Harry delved into the world of computers in the middle 1990s and rapidly grew to appreciate the convenience of being able to create new artwork and print copies of scanned, earlier artwork on demand. His computer also simplified the flood of graphic design work, which he performed for friends and associates.

Art Explanations

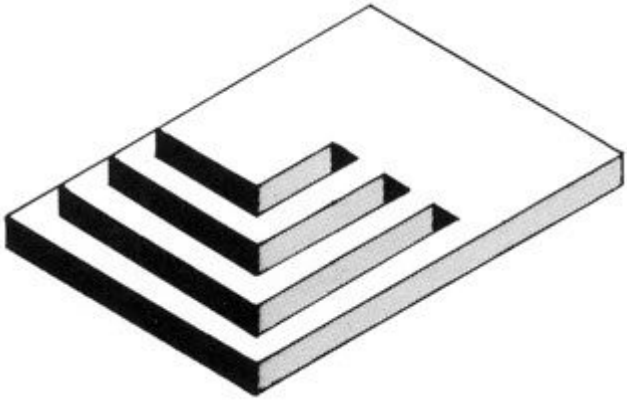
when I tell them that Bradford plays a vital role in the international arts scene, but it's true. Though if you've not heard of the Bradford International Print Biennale and are curious to see what it's all about, you'll have to wait until July 1976 for the next one. With my current interest in screen printing, I found the exhibition both a visual delight and a stimulating demonstration of contemporary print-making. So I am full of enthusiasm when I call on Lisa. Most of her possessions seem to be piled up outside the door of the flat but on negotiating the barricade I find she is not being evicted but merely succumbed to a mad impulse to paint her flat white... all over.

With a deft dab that covers the last few square centimetres of ceiling with white satin-finish vinyl, Lisa gracefully descends the steps, puts brush and paint tin in my hands, and suggests I start in on the walls while she brews up some coffee.

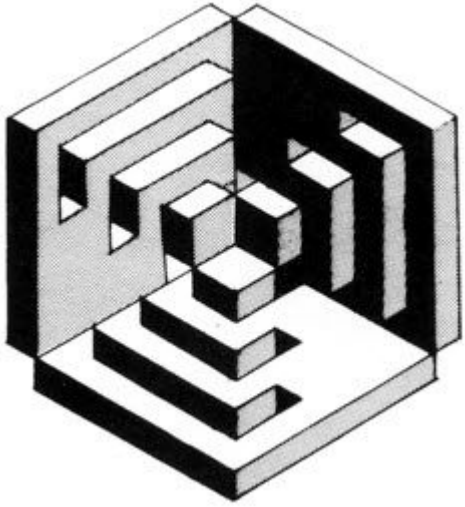
—How's the screen printing project going? She asks.

I mutter some excuse about plans being interrupted while I earn a living but admit that the visit to Bradford has sparked off a few ideas, which I proceed to daub on the unpainted part of the wall.

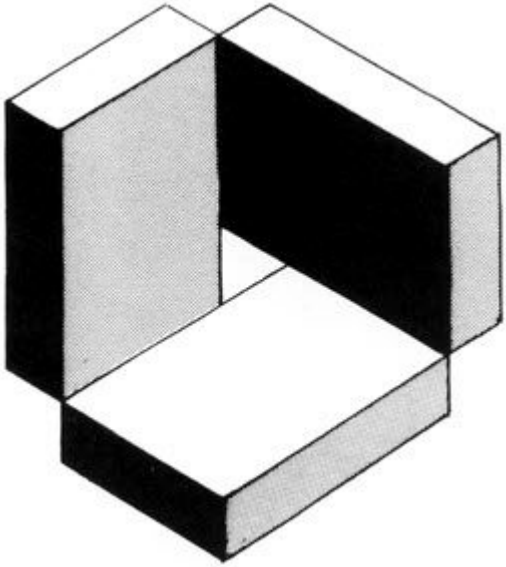
—Remember the flat ziggurat illusion I once drew? The one like this...



... where there appears to be steps at one end although the whole thing is obviously only the thickness of one step. I started playing about with it, using three of the figures to form a cube shape...



... and did a few variations, with the result that I decided to drop some of the detail to concentrate on the "pure" shape as a different illusion seemed to be emerging from these sketches. By making a "hole" in the centre of the slabs, I obtained a figure that looked 3-dimensional but obviously could not be realised as a solid object.

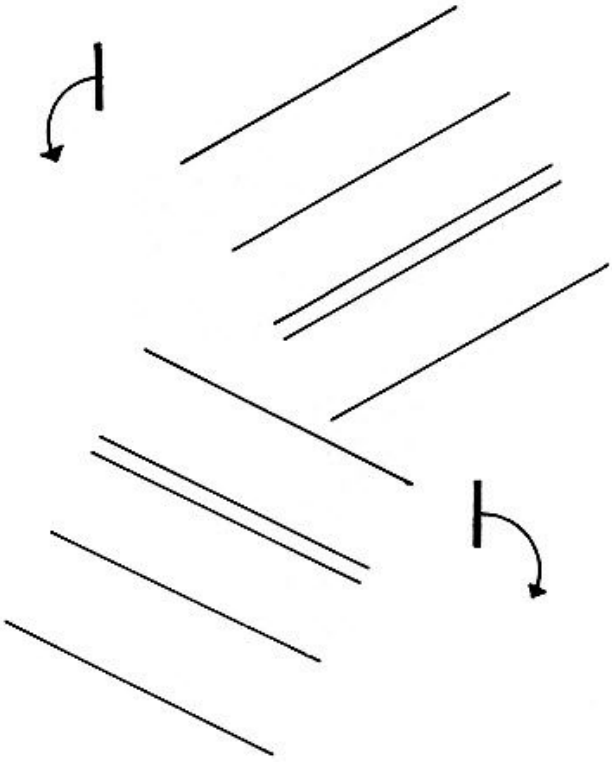


—Rubbish, says Lisa confidently; she picks up three paperbacks and tries to juggle them into appropriate positions, fails to do so, and retires baffled.

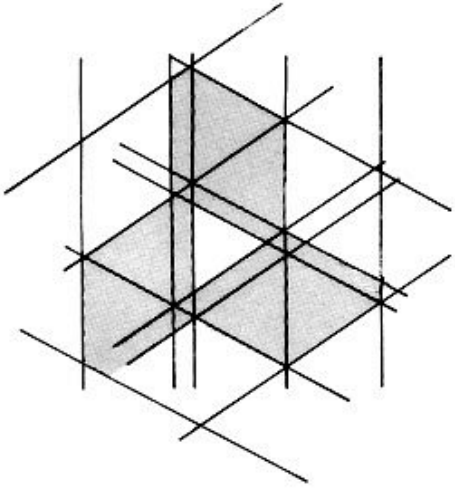
I warm to my theme.

—Let's begin on a simple basis. I draw five parallel lines, so...

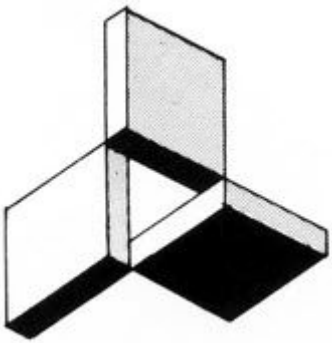
Then I rotate them through 120 degrees, first to the left, then to the right...



superimpose them, like this—and end up with a grid,

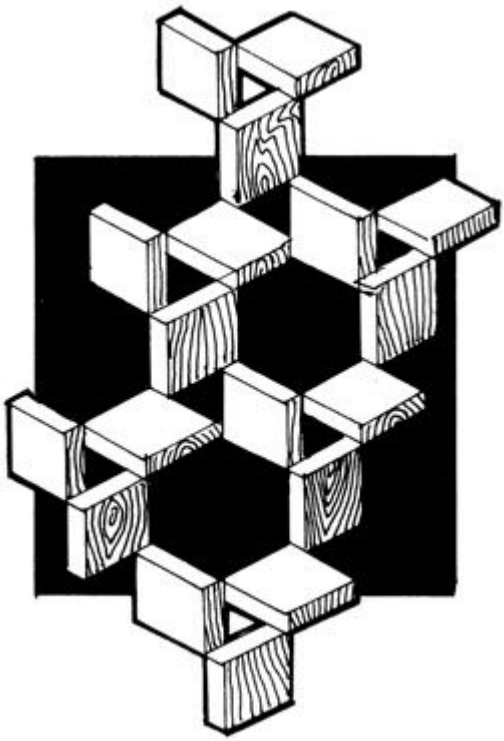


and hidden in there is this shape—our “impossible” object again...

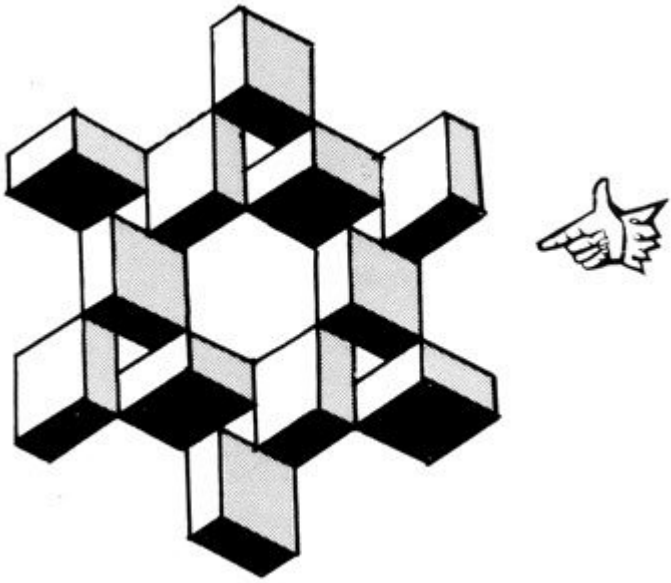


This provides us with a handy module that can be linked up in all sorts of ways, producing convincing 3-dimensional structures.

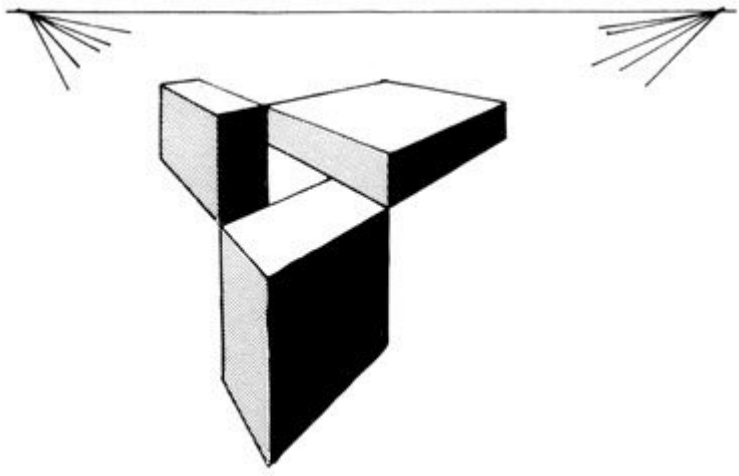
Like this unrealisable “Sculptural project”...



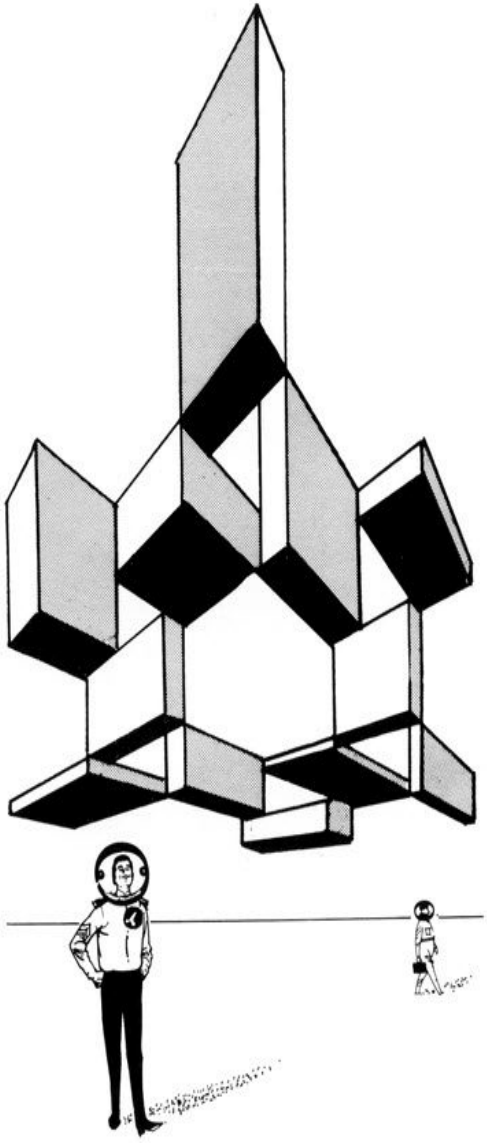
... or this “Space Platform”...



Oddly enough, the rules of perspective can be applied to these drawings and, if anything, make them even more impressively 3-dimensional...



Look what happens when we apply perspective distortion to the Platform...



I stand back proudly admiring my handiwork only to encounter a glare from Lisa. Belatedly, I realise that the length of the wall is filled with sketches.

—After all that doodling, it needs a second coat, she says sweetly.

Several hours later, the job is finished and—wow!—the result is dazzling. Suffering from what I hope is temporary snow-blindness, I grope my way to the door, stumble over the obstacles on the landing, trip downstairs, and depart...

—That's really great, I have to admit, confronted by Jo's latest adjunct to gracious living. It's a large print, a visual poem by the Japanese concrete poet Seiiki Niikuni.

—Well, nobody gets turned on by art so much as another artist, smiles Jo.

We'd been invited to eat at Jo Withisone's apartment. A privilege doled out to few, Lisa informs me. She filled me in about Jo's taste in furnishing her penthouse but omitted to mention that the lift would be out of order on the day we called. She's a writer and poet, pants Lisa as we toil up the stairs, and she's got a centrefold of Steve McQueen on the ceiling over her bed...

When we finally arrive, Jo's apartment proves warm and inviting. So does our hostess, looking exotic in something black and close-fitting. I pause momentarily, to take it all in and get my breath back, but Lisa pushes me impatiently over the threshold.

Reed mats and colourful cushions are scattered over the floor; a long, low table stands against a wall dominated by the large print. Simple but impressive—all that

Lisa had said, I admire it.

Jo laughs and explains the low-level living as just the result of bad planning. Like, she'd seen this table in a junk shop, decided it was ideal for her new abode, and then after it had been manhandled into the lift and unloaded on to the landing, she found there wasn't room to manoeuvre it through the apartment door.

The man, jokingly, suggested that the only way to get it in the room would be to saw off the legs. Jo, in desperation, did just that. When the truncated table was installed, she realised that there was no need to buy chairs. An economy that appealed to her.

And the large print really sets the seal on the Oriental-type decor.


—means 'touch' and the repetitions of the phonetic symbol show t delicacy of the art of touching, explains Jo, adding hastily, I got that out of the exhibition catalogue.

—I think it's fascinating the way he uses the ideograph to create a visual image that's appropriate to the meaning; a real visual poem, enthuses Lisa.

Jo serves a splendid meal: chicken breasts and mushrooms in sherry sauce, with Mandarin oranges, washed down with hock. She's puzzled to find the sherry sauce has an unexpected piquancy, but Lisa modestly claims credit for spiking it with gin.

Over coffee and Cointreau we drift back to the subject of art.

—Too few people enjoy direct confrontation with art, I throw out, because they're content to take it secondhand as reproductions in books, films and slides, and on TV. So much depends on the physical presence of a work of art—its scale and relationship with its surroundings, its material, texture, colour... Reproductions are just filtered viewpoints, a partial and distorted experience.

—¡Pero, hombre! explodes Jo, surely it doesn't matter what a work of art looks like; if it's a physical object it's just got to look like something. But no matter what form it takes, it always begins with an idea. That's the important thing in my mind. But an idea doesn't have to be given physical shape—an artist can express herself in any way. If she uses ideas that proceed from ideas about art then they are art and not literature... like Yoko Ono's advice: 'Use your blood to paint; keep painting until you faint; then keep painting until you die'. Then there's her idea of listening to the sound of a room breathing—at dawn, in the morning, in the evening, just before dawn. And bottling the smell of the room at each time as well.

Lisa decides she must try that herself. I hope she refers to the second proposition; the first sounds messy.

—We seem to be round to the subject of conceptual art and back to the presentday confusion about the nature of art, I say. Several artists believe they are already enough art objects in existence and feel no urge to add to the number. So they've abandoned the art object and regard anything they do as being art. Personally, I don't think that's the answer.

I welcome uncertainty because it leads to constant questioning, experiment, and discovery. And that's been the driving force of art in this century: a continuing

visual debate about what art is. We discard subject matter in the effort to escape the literary associations of the past and to disentangle the image from the words. Now the pendulum seems to be reversing and some artists are bringing back words again, replacing the art object with the documentation of an idea...

—That's only logical, interrupts Jo.

—Pursue logic to extremes and the result can be nonsense. The preoccupation with documentation logically follows on from the basic idea of action painting—the end product is not so much an art object as a direct record of the artist's creative processes. Logically, the work may be partly invisible to carry out the artist's intentions—like Duchamp's With Hidden Noise, a ball of string with a small object added and concealed inside: or even totally invisible, like Oldenburg's project for buried sculpture.

Take logic one step further, and the object doesn't need to be made; the creative act is the proposal itself. I deplore this in a way, yet have to admit that I wish some contemporary manifestations would stop just there. Like the proposal for the Otterlo Mastaba by Christo...

—Who? chorus Jo and Lisa.

—Christo. The guy who goes around packaging public buildings, wrapping up cliffs, and hanging plastic curtains across valleys. His latest project is the building of a mastaba, measuring 60 by 50 metres at the base, and rising to a height of over 50 metres, using 242,945 empty oil durms. He's actually had a feasibility study carried out on this monument to the oil sheikhs by the Ken R. White Company of Denver, Colorado. Maybe the project is held up by the oil crisis. I hope so.

—Reactionary, mutters Jo.

—It may sound a horror to you, chips in Lisa, but don't forget that Duchamp, all his life, tried to find an unaesthetic object, yet all his 'found objects', his 'readymades'—the urinal, the bicycle wheel, the bottle rack—became regarded as aesthetic objects just because he forced people to look at them outside their functional role.

—Right. If I says it's art, it is art. And people are still finding out that very thing. There's the N.E. THING COMPANY, formed by a group of artists in Vancouver during the 60s, who executed a series of landscapes by the simple process of putting up signs along country roads. First came the warning: YOU WILL SOON BE PASSING BY A 1/3 MILE N.E. THING CO. LANDSCAPE: START VIEWING. A little further on the motorist was informed: YOU ARE NOW IN THE MIDDLE OF THE N.E. THING CO. LANDSCAPE. And finally: STOP VIEWING.

I wonder how many people became aware of a landscape at which they really looked for the first time... Then there were Marjorie Strider's street pictures—she put up 30 empty picture frames along a street to create 'instant' art works, drawing the attention of people to different aspects of their environment. She did it twice in different streets but never discovered how successful she was, since most of the

frames were stolen by passers-by.

Seth Siegelaub is another believer in logic who started from this assumption that people rely largely on the secondary formation of reproductions of works of art and finished up organising the first art exhibition to exist in catalogue form only. He asked artists to provide a written description of the work they would have put in the exhibition, published the information in catalogue form, and that was it. No need to bother with the actual exhibition.

The catalogue was enough—certainly enough for those who would not have travelled in to see the show anyway! An artist with an idea will always find a way of expressing it, but I subscribe to the view of American art critic Harold Rosenberg that the artist is the product of his art.

Most artists develop ideas through unfocussed play in their chosen medium. Most of the art of our time has arisen out of ideas about art: cubism out of Cezanne's methods, action painting and much abstract expressionism out of the work done by Monet in his last years when his eyesight was failing. It is these accumulated insights, conflicts and disciplines of painting, of poetry, of music, that provide the artist with the means of self-development. And surely art's value today is that it gives the individual breathing space to realise himself in the face of increasing communal pressures and the restricting mass-behaviour of our society.

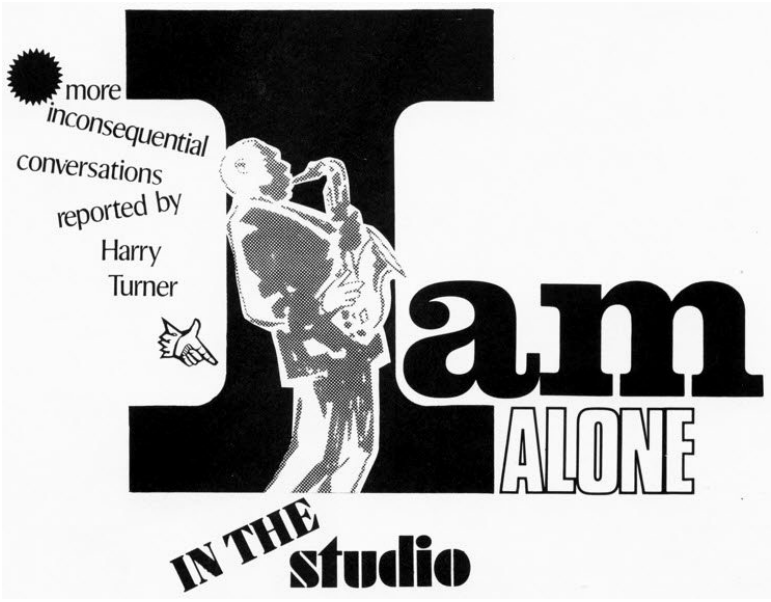
—You don't convince me, comments Jo when we prepare to depart. As someone said: One word is worth one-thousandth of a picture.

Lisa grins appreciatively at that. I feel outnumbered...

The artistic projects mentioned are all genuine. And they're detailed, among others, in a book by Lucy Lippard:

SIX YEARS: the dematerialisation of the art object 1966-1972.

Recommended reading!



and the alto sax of Charlie Parker wails torrendously from the newly installed bank of 50 drive-units in the wall-mounted loudspeaker enclosure. Lovely. Charlie's music has been one of my obsessions since first I heard him on record, way back in the days when the trad-bebop feud was raging amongst jazz fans. Before I heard Bird, jazz was simply happy-go-lucky music-making: the experience of Parker's music was an ear-opening experience and a mind-blowing revelation...

Contentedly, I flick the volume slide up a notch to drown the dismal thumping of protesting neighbours.

The last unison chorus fades and I realise that the desperate banging on the wall has been supplemented by a sharp rapping on the door. I investigate and find myself apologising to an indignant Jo Withisone, who has guided a wandering fan to the studio and been kept waiting on the doorstep. Introductions reveal that the wf is Joe Patrizio, with a few views to express on my non-article in the last Zimri.

—Harry, he starts the moment we sit down, you're right in saying that you don't need words to communicate—but you do need language. Maths, art, music, etc., are all languages.

—I recall that Edward Lucie-Smith once described modern art as an invented artificial language which is native to nobody, I comment, a sort of Esperanto which must be deliberately learned through hard study. I like that emotively off-putting "hard study" bit... Ted obviously intended the remark as a hard criticism of whatever he regards as "modern art", but surely it's a comment that applies to all periods and styles of art?

—Yeah, nods Joe, as you said some critics try to impose irrelevant standards on an artist's work, and end up condemning it. However, this sometimes operates the other way... And what annoys me right up to here, is the clap-trap spewed out to

"explain" a painting or a piece of music. If what you say is true—and I believe it is—the artist has used paint, music or whatever, because what he has to say cannot be said in words. Why then, oh why, must some idiot translate the untranslatable?

We drank to that.

—Of course, goes on Joe, as art is a language, I suppose we have got to learn it. But can we learn it? And have the artists any right to be angry with us if we can't?

—Not so long ago the American painter Jackson Pollock filled up large canvases with chaotic doodles that couldn't be regarded as paintings in the accepted sense. But in less than a decade they were not only accepted, but part and parcel of the mainstream of painting.

—Well, resumed Joe, personally I feel we learn the language by this sort of absorption—looking and listening—with just a little guidance from one who knows it.

Jo decides it's time she joined in.

—That's fine if you're in an environment conducive to looking and listening, and a guide is handy when needed. Like the way we learn our own language, of course: it starts so early that later on we aren't aware of the effort that was involved, or even of the way our thinking is coloured by the in-built cultural conditioning that is part of the process. One learns the rules in a way that often leaves you unaware of the rules —somehow it's all regarded as a 'natural' process. Until you start to learn another language and then the rules become obvious because they have to be consciously learned. Which is why it's best to live in a country while learning the language, rely on cultural immersion, absorption plus guidance, to achieve any sort of fluency.

—It's odd, I add to Jo's point, how people realise this so far as the spoken or written word is concerned. There's an awareness of the problems of illiteracy and an urge to tackle it. But there seems less awareness of the problem of 'visual illiteracy', and that is what I feel so concerned about.

—Let's get back to the critics explaining art to us, persists Joe. I can't accept that it can be explained because for me art by-passes the verbalizing critical faculties, and goes straight into the soul—for want of a better word. I can't explain why a piece of music or a painting moves me—but there is an excuse for me: I don't know the language. But I'm pretty sure that even Harry couldn't say why a particular piece of artwork gets through to him. You may be able to explain the cleverness or originality of it, but not why it twangs your insides...

I grunt agreement.

—That's exactly why I talked around an article in the last issue but never actually got around to doing it. And probably why Terry says about the last cover design: "I don't know what it is, but I like it". A comment I find at once gratifying and mystifying: was the image so obscure?

—What did start you off on it, asks Jo.

—Hard to say that in retrospect. I was intrigued by this anxious face peering backwards, with its Kafkaesque implications. It became a motif in an exercise prompted by comments made about colour printing at the Tynecon, and an urge to try the results of overprinting three transparent dyes in screen printing. Initially it was a visual thing—I mentally manipulated the Kafka image in terms of a basic grid of squares, with permutations of side and colour, and then it was a matter of translating it into practical terms of screen printing.

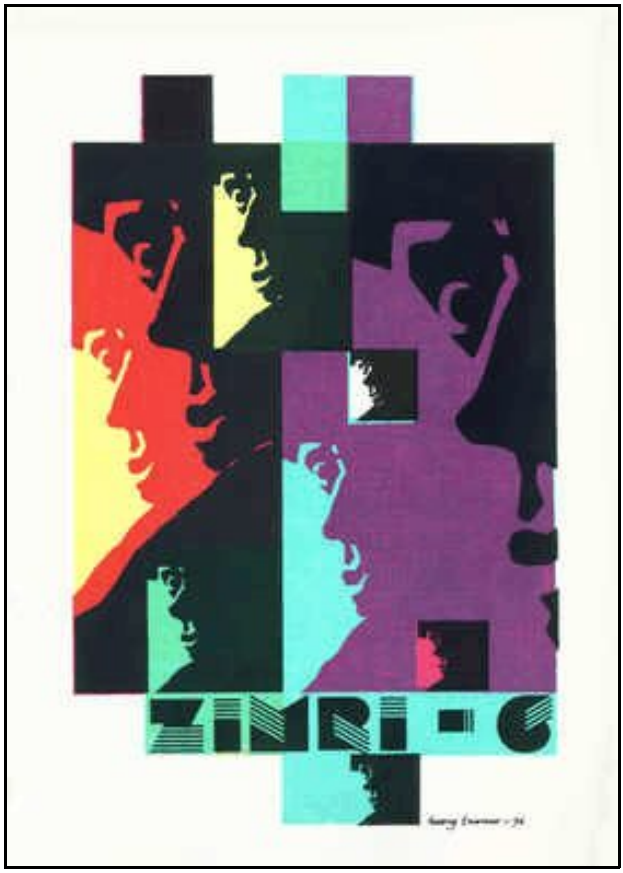
It was all sorted out at a non-verbal level, and it's impossible after the event to sift out the intuitive links that related the strands of the problem—under pressure of an editorial deadline I might add. If it has to have a title by way of explanation for some folk, I guess I'd call it Portrait of K, because to me it conveys something of the unease of the fugitive that is the essence of Kafka's Trial and Castle...

—But that's not the end of it, interrupts Jo. Lisa tells me that when mailing the last Zimri, she kept seeing the cover from different angles, and realised that the whole character changed with the viewpoint...

Turn it round so that the base of the image becomes the righthand side, and there's another eye staring at you.

—Wow, breathes Joe intrigued, The Accusers of K. Right?

—What's in a title, I grin.



Cover of Zimri #6, (1974), screen printed in yellow, red & cyan

(The remarks attributed to Joe Patrizio are lifted from his letter of comment: Jo Withisone's comments reported verbatim)

ART PRICES: Do they ever get that much?

Picked up an entry form for the Stockport Open Show for local artists while in the library building paying the rates. It's on around June-July and I had vague thoughts I might get round to putting in something until I realised there were vast entry fees and talk of 25% surcharge on sales, etc. You have to be serious about entering these days, obviously, no casual piling up of available canvases like what we used to. And I'm out of touch with prices: I am always aghast at the prices thrown about at current art shows – can't take them seriously.

I'd dearly love to know if they do sell anything at the prices demanded. Take the Art for Sale supplement that's reappeared (sponsored by Winsor & Newton, natch) in the weekend Guardian. All the paintings shown have "been chosen by a distinguished panel of artists and critics" it ses, adding that the painters all use W&N materials. And then open up to see an uninspired daub "oil on paper, 25ins x 33ins" priced at £630. I make that around £105 per sq.ft. Cheeky!

Or a picture of the Palace Theatre, size 35.6 cms x 25.4 cms (14" x 10") at £1020: which is over £1000 per sq.ft. – mind you, it is "oil on canvas board". Must be devilish expensive board is all I can say. All these Sotheby and Christies sales must be giving folk ideas. I can see I'll have to buck up my ideas on charges to compete with the younger generation...

I have several 60" x 40" canvases, adorned with impossible object constructions (but not, alas, painted in W&N pigments - mainly Rowneys, I think). Working on the basis of the last item I should be asking around £15,000 - £16,000, yes? Plus a premium for my advancing years and reputation, say £20,000 as a conservative estimate. Hmmm.

I have amassed a hefty file of cuttings on the modern art market, trying to make sense of some of the pricing. Recently acquired Peter Watson's From Manet to Manhattan: the rise of the modern art market, which I look forward to reading when I've got Powell out of the way. A few preliminary dips confirm that it's the agents and dealers that get the fat profits rather than the artists, alas, whose death seems an essential preliminary to the steep rise in value of their works.

It's a hard life.

Then I read in the Guardian of all these top businessmen awarding themselves inflated salaries and bloated pensions, which doesn't cheer me up. Nor does the report in today's Observer revealing that the Stockport district radon gas pollution level is around 100-200 bequerels per cubic metre, only equalled by Plymouth & Torquay, and exceeded by Truro. How come Stockport is in splendid isolation as a danger area all of a sudden? (Dudley is in a low-level area, so don't move).

Where did I put my RAF gasmask? ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 23/05/1993

Going Rate

I didn't say that I can get £20,000 for my canvases – only that's the logical asking price updated from yesteryear... So don't go increasing your insurance premium on your Turner yet. There was another 'Art for Sale' in the Weekend Guardian which provoked howls of disbelief at the breakfast table when prices were read out, and hoots of derision at the text accompanying the two 'Artist in Focus'.

And that was before we got to the political pages... ■

Letter to the Varleys, 24/06/1993

UNRESOLVED MATTER: The Mystery Of The Malevich Romanov

You know how it is when you suddenly notice an odd detail that has previously escaped you... It nags. It's there, blatantly on view, mocking you. So obvious that you marvel how you could possibly have overlooked it.

Take the case of the Malevich Romanov stamp... A chance discovery that has become an obsession with me this past few years. I've tried to raise the matter with the owners of the painting concerned, written to an art historian who refers to the work in one of his books, buttonholed people I know in the philatelic field, but all to no avail. All my efforts to resolve the mystery have met with an apathetic silence.

Obviously art historians are not interested in boring philatelic details, while philatelists are unconcerned about the niceties of art history.

It began for me in 1989, the year there was a major showing of the work of the Russian painter Kasimir Severinovich Malevich in Amsterdam. The works held by the Stedelijk Museum there were supplemented by a generous loan of Malevich's paintings and drawings from Soviet sources—the Leningrad Russian Museum and Moscow Tretiakov galleries—and, lacking only a few masterpieces hoarded in American art museums, it was virtually a retrospective exhibition.

Malevich was the painter who dominated the Russian avant-garde movement in the last years of Tsar Nicholas II, and during the revolution and civil war that followed. In that time he moved, logically and resolutely, through cubism and futurism toward total abstraction, reducing painting to pure form with his now-famous Black Square.

Malevich continued to play an active part in the Soviet cultural front line of the twenties but fell into disfavour during the Stalinist years, when "formalist tendencies" were denounced and Socialist Realism was all. It was not until the late seventies that a change of stance by the authorities permitted a revival of interest

in Malevich's art within the Soviet Union, and an unlocking of archival vaults. So the Amsterdam exhibition created an international stir.

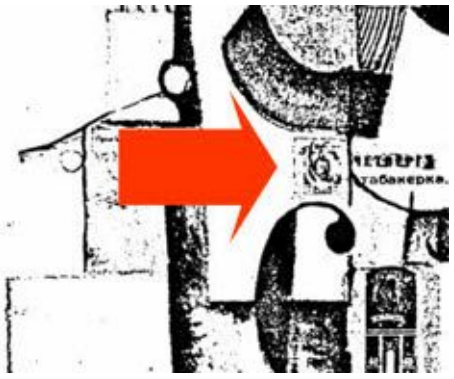
Unable to visit it, I obtained a copy of the lavishly illustrated catalogue, and relied on enthusiastic reports from a Dutch friend. He happens to edit the Journal of Russian Philately, for which I do production work.

During an exchange of letters, he complained of the absence of his favourite Malevich canvas—The Knife Grinder of 1912. This comment prompted me to check on other American-owned works missing from the show. One of these, of particular interest to philatelists, is a painting-collage of 1914, titled Soldier of the First Division, from a series of cubist-inspired works that Malevich produced before venturing into total abstraction.

The work currently hangs in the New York Museum of Modern Art and extends the ideas of Picasso and Braque's cubism of the period. Painted and actual objects are combined in a poetic proto-surrealist manner to evoke deeper meanings, with the images broken by large quadrilateral areas of flat pure colour that presage the sublimities of Malevich's suprematism.

There are dissociated representational details—a moustache, an ear, a medal, a bottle—mixed with newspaper cuttings bearing words in Cyrillic ('OPERA', 'THURSDAY', 'TOBACCO POUCH', and the name 'A. VASNETSOV', an artist of an earlier generation) and two objects stuck to the canvas: a thermometer and, bang in the middle of the canvas, a used 7 kopeck stamp, one of the special issues of 1913 commemorating the tercentenary of the ruling Romanov dynasty, bearing a portrait of Nicholas II, destined to be the last of the Tsars.

Over the years I've become familiar with several reproductions of Soldier of the First Division, but under the influence of my correspondence, I found myself viewing the illustrations a little more closely than heretofore. There is an excellent full-page monochrome print included in the study of Malevich by the Soviet art historian Larissa Zhadova, published in translation in East Germany in the late seventies, which shows the stamp to bear a heavy circular postal cancellation on the lefthand side. I mentally reviewed my library, convinced that I'd seen a full-colour reproduction somewhere.



Indeed I had: in John Milner's Russian Revolutionary Art, published in 1979. On comparing these two illustrations I spotted something completely unexpected. The colour version showed a stamp with a different postmark, a lighter cancellation centred toward the top right-hand corner of the stamp.

Odd, I mused, and turned to other reproductions. An old Tate Gallery catalogue included a small black and white illustration clearly showing the heavy left-hand postmark on the stamp. The lavish volume produced in the early '80s to accompany the world tour of the Costakis private collection of Russian avant-garde art had a reference to Malevich's painting being acquired by one V.D. Bobrov in the 1920s, and included a photograph of the work passed on to Costakis by Bobrov's widow.

This early photograph again shows the stamp with the heavy left-hand postmark. Which suggests that these reproductions show the actual stamp that Malevich pasted on to his canvas way back in 1914. So why does the colour transparency made in recent years from the work now hanging in New York show a completely different stamp?

My philatelic curiosity roused, I searched the literature for any reference to this discrepancy. So far as art historians are concerned, when you've seen one used Romanov stamp, you've seem 'em all, since no one had pounced on the change-over. I wrote to the curator of the New York Museum of Modern Art, enclosing photocopies of the two versions of the painting, asking if the replacement stamp was on the painting when it came into his possession, or if the substitution had been made at MOMA and, if the latter, was it intended as "renovation" or "restoration"? I received no reply or acknowledgement of my letter.

I recall that an earlier query some years before was also ignored. I presumed that the curator had been on a long vacation and my letter was buried in a pile of correspondence awaiting his attention. But now, I am wondering if it is museum policy not to respond to people asking awkward questions.

This silence prompted me to write to Dr. Milner at Newcastle University with the same information, drawing his attention to the fact that the illustration of Malevich's work in his book differed from the rest. He too did not deign to reply.

From the art historian's view the apparent loss of the original stamp must surely reduce claims to authenticity. If the actual stamp that Malevich peeled off his correspondence and stuck on his canvas as an Imperial reference was damaged or removed, then 7 kopek Romanovs are in plentiful supply among philatelists, and any dealer worth his salt would provide a replacement with a postmark approximating the well-documented original.

So why just slap on the first 7k stamp that came to hand? And if the substitution was made before MOMA acquired the work, why wasn't this discrepancy noticed by the experts at the time?

Just asking these questions makes me wonder if my letter set alarm bells ringing

at MOMA. Maybe the curator is still panicking about the substituted stamp. Or even about the authenticity of the rest of the collection!

Looking at the matter from the point of view of Russian postal history, I guess that Malevich's use of the stamp makes it a unique specimen of the 7k Romanov, and thus a highly desirable item to an insatiable collector. I have a sneaking suspicion that somewhere in its travels, between Russia and America, the painting may have been waylaid by a zealous dealer and its stamp removed to become a prized treasure in an enthusiast's album. Obviously he's not going to shout about it.

So there the matter rests. I can only spread the word and hope that some day a young and aspiring art historian looks into the Russian avant-garde and is prompted to repeat my questions, and perhaps force some official answers. Meanwhile, I patiently study the stamp auction lists disposing of Russian collections that come my way, looking for an offer of a unique Malevich Romanov 7k, with that tell-tale heavy postmark on the lefthand side. ■

1 August 1989

The Curator
The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53 Street
New York
USA

Dear Sir,
While writing some notes on the stamps issued for the Romanov Tercentenary, I had occasion to refer to Malevich's Soldier of the First Division in which a 7 kopek stamp is used as a collage element. The painting Is reproduced, in monochrome, in Zhadova's Malevich (Thames & Hudson, 1982) and in colour in Milner's Russian Revolutionary Art (Oresko, 1979).

However, as you can see from the photocopies I attach, on making a comparison I was surprised to find that the stamps shown have different postmarks. That in the Zhadova illustration has a heavy circular cancellation on the left-hand side; the stamp in the Milner version has a lighter cancellation over the top right-hand corner.

In Russian Avant-Garde Arts: the George Costakis Collection T&H, 1981) there is a reference to the painting being acquired by V.D. Bobrov in the 1920s and, on page 57, there is a reproduction of a photograph of the work given to Costakis by Bobrov's widow. This shows the identical stamp to the Zhadova illustration, which suggests that this was the original stamp used by Malevich.

Another stamp must have replaced this by the time the colour transparency used

by Milner was made. Can you tell me if the replacement stamp was in place when the painting came into your possession, or has the substitution been made at MOMA? If you made the change, what was the reason—"restoration", "renovation"?

As I have a double interest in this anomaly, both as philatelist and amateur art historian, I should be grateful for any light you can cast on this discrepancy!

Sincerely,
Harry Turner.

26 August 1989

Dr John Milner
Department of Fine Art
The University
Newcastle-on-Tyne
NE1 7RU

Dear Dr. Milner,

In your book Russian Revolutionary Art (1979) there is a colour illustration of Malevich's "Private of the First Division", a painting in which he includes a Romanov stamp and a thermometer as collage elements. The same work is illustrated in Zhadova's Malevich (1978, translated 1982), in monochrome.

Comparing the illustrations recently, I was surprised to note that the postmarks on the stamp in each illustration were different, although picture credits were given to the Museum of Modern Art in both cases.

Curious at this discrepancy I looked for other illustrations of the painting. In Russian Avant-garde Art: the George Costakis Collection (1981) there is a reference to the work being acquired by V.D. Bobrov, in the 1920s and, on page 57, a reproduction of a photograph of the work given to Costakis by Bobrov's widow.

The stamp here has a heavy circular cancellation mark on the left-hand side, similar to that in the Zhadova illustration.

The stamp in the colour illustration of your book shows a light circular cancellation centred on the right-hand corner (see photostats enclosed).

I have written to MOMA enquiring about this point, asking if they can cast any light on the change, but no reply has been received to date. In view of your specialist interest in this area, I wondered if you could help.

Sincerely, Harry Turner.

RESOLVED MATTER:
The Malevich Aeroplane

To the director of the Tate Gallery, Millbank, London, 15 February 1980

Dear Mr Bowness:

I have long had a niggling doubt about the correct orientation of Malevich's "Aeroplane Flying" as reproduced in many publications, and my visit to the Tate "Abstraction" exhibition has not resolved the matter.

I have a copy of Kurt Rowland's "History of the Modern Movement" (an impulse-buy some years ago from the Tate shop), on page 5 which is printed a photograph that, though inadequately captioned, I assumed to be of exhibits at the Zero Ten exhibition of 1915.

The work in question appears on the bottom row of paintings on the left-hand side of the picture: with the black rectangles at the top. I think it reasonable to assume that this is how the artist intended it to be exhibited. While there is obviously some confusion about his intended title, since the 1915 catalogue does not include the word "aeroplane", there can be no doubt about the correct orientation of the painting.

So why is it hung "upside down" in your exhibition ?

Yours sincerely

Harry Turner

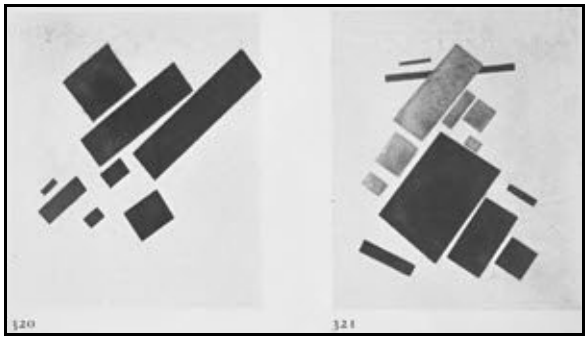
Illustration from the Kurt Rowland book [*right*]

The letter was passed to Michael Compton, the Keeper of Exhibitions and Education @ the Tate Gallery, who was too busy to do a reply until 1st April, 1980. He said:

The picture, which was later given the title "aeroplane" is in the bottom row on the right of the Zero-Ten exhibition and it was hung with the black rectangles down. Mr. Comption assumed that H.T. was confusing the "Aeroplane Flying" picture [No. 321 in the Tate exhibition] with "Eight Red Rectangles" [No. 320 in the

Tate exhibition], which is on the left in the photograph of the Zero Ten exhibition, and hung the same way as in the Tate exhibition. Further, Mr. Compton added that Malevich, and others, hung his paintings in different orientations on different occasions.

Illustration from the
Tate Gallery catalogue



320. Suprematist Painting, Eight Red Rectangles (1915), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

321. Aeroplane Flying (1915), Museum of Modern Art, New York

To Michael Compton, the Tate Gallery, London, 11th April 1980

Dear Mr Compton:

Thank you for your letter of April 1 which, I regret, does not entirely make sense to me. There is no confusion in my mind between the two compositions:8 red rectangles and Aeroplane Flying ! Perhaps the prints attached will resolve any ambiguities you may have found in my original letter.

1. The painting in which I am interested is numbered 321 in the Abstraction exhibition catalogue and given the title Aeroplane Flying, although the text comments that it was not so titled in the original catalogue of the Zero Ten exhibition,

2. The photograph of the Suprematist works at the Zero Ten exhibition, which is reproduced in Kurt Rowland's book, definitely shows the same painting at the bottom left, in an orientation different to that adopted in the present exhibition and catalogue.

You mention that Malevich occasionally hung works in different orientations – I should be grateful if you would guide me to any documentation as to when the present orientation of the work became accepted, and also when the Aeroplane Flying title is known to have been bestowed on the painting.

Yours sincerely

Harry Turner

Mr. Compton wrote again on April 14th, informing H.T. that the photograph in the Rowland book is from a later exhibition than the Zero Ten exhibition of 1915 – the XXVI State Exhibition retrospective of Malevich.

A photograph from the Zero Ten exhibition published in a contemporary newspaper shows the "aeroplane" with the orange-brown rectangles to the upper left [as in No. 321 in the Tate catalogue]. But by the time of the XXVI State Exhibition, the picture had been reversed. Mr. Compton had no information on when the painting acquired its title.

Problem Solved!

H.T. also wrote to the MoMA in New York, the owner of the painting, on 11th April 1980. We are still waiting for a reply . . .

Painting As Art

There's been a certain return to the idea of painting as Art, with exhibitions of the work of Mondrian, Seurat, Ellsworth Kelly and the like, in London recently. A sort of reaction to all the non-painterly contemporary manifestations of sharks in embalming fluid, sliced cows, and "installations" of all sorts that are hailed as the last word on the subject.

Sorta restores my faith slightly and encourages me to think about doing something with all the unfinished canvases lurking about here . . .

Though I was kinda put off by an article a Monday or two back in the Garudian. It was all about the restoration of Leonardo's "Last Supper", which has kept Brombilla Barcilon occupied ever since 1979, and included a chronology that upset me...

When Leonardo started work in 1495, he was unaware that the humidity in the refectory would cause rapid deterioration of his painting. By 1517 there were reports that the work was "beginning to decay", and Vasari remarks in 1556 that "nothing is visible except a mass of blurs".

A couple of centuries later there was an attempt to "restore" the painting: a couple of jobbing painters, Belotti (1726) and Mazza (1770) painted completely over the picture, imaginatively moving eyes and adding a beard to one of the figures in the process. Then in 1796 Napoleon's troops stable horses in the refectory and amuse themselves by heaving stones at the painting.

The place was flooded in 1800, and suffered a direct hit by an Allied bomb in 1943, so that only the north wall, on which The Last Supper was painted, is left standing. By 1947 the painting is almost invisible under a layer of green mould... which is when Mouro Pellicioli begins the first modern attempt to protect it.

Brombilla Barcilon became involved in 1979, and all the techniques of infra-red and UV photography, and computer reconstitution were called in to dig past the natural decay and depradations of seven previous "restorations" to Leonardo's original work. She hopes to complete the work next year.

There seems to be large dose of Faith in involved here; I think little of Leonardo's art will survive what has become largely an archaeological matter. ■

A couple of years back, that Good Fan and fellow-Mayanologist Chuck Connor sent me a copy of Nat. Geographic mag with an article on the work that had been carried out at the site of Bonampak, renovating the murals that had been discovered there. Been casting around in the studio chaos and miraculously found the mag on my first search.

These Mayan paintings were made long before Leonardo started on his masterpiece. By a stroke of luck the building had been made of limestone, and rain leaking through the walls had deposited a crust of calcite, obscuring but preserving the paintings.

The Mexican government, in 1984, began a 3-year programme to clean off this calcite skin and analyse the pigments used.

The Nat. Geographic took colour and infra-red photographs of the cleaned-up murals, and embarked on a computer clean-up/reconstruction of the originals. The article is illustrated by "before" and "after" comparisons, and it's amazing what convincing detail they've been able to recapture.

I don't know how far this work relates to that carried out on the Leonardo renovation, but at least the Mayan researchers have been working on the original paintings. Their work seems in line with much of the archaeological reconstruction of the ruined buildings, and has a greater credibility than the effort to bring back Leonardo in all his glory.

When I hear of the liberties known to have been taken by the 18th-century would-be "restorers" of Leonardo's work, I think Brombilla Barcilon and her team of three helpers have a near-impossible task to get back to the original, compared with the researchers at the Bonampak site.

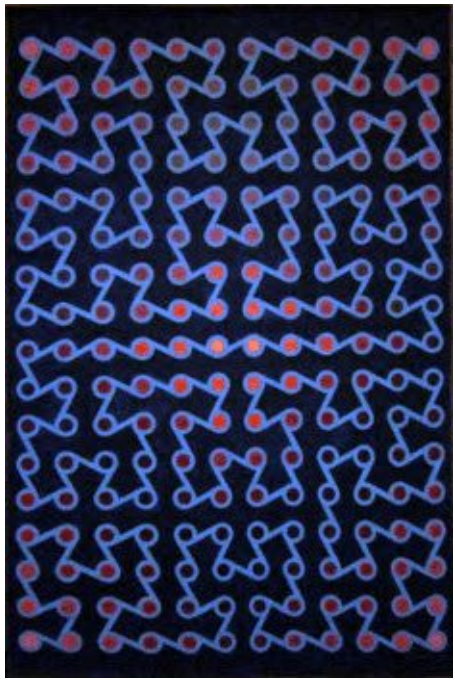
But she's not due to finish her task until next year, so we'll just have to hang on a bit longer... ■

to Fran & Brian Varley and Chuck Connor, summer 1997

Thoughts on Filling Space
D.O.U.S.S and Unicursal Lifeline

I like your remark about them appearing "confident". In a sense, they ought to exude a sense of "completeness" in that they are logical structures—a solution to a problem created within certain parameters: their creation is the result of "rules" being laid down (arbitrarily, intuitively in the first promptings).

But once those rules have been defined, then a system has been started and the work follows "logically" from the extension of that system, and any problems that arise in carrying out the system must be solved in the context created, so that the image is consistent, logically and visually, and has a certain in-built sense of completeness although it is merely one aspect or expression of the system.



D.O.U.S.S. (1972)

The large D.O.U.S.S. (40" x 60" is a precursor of Unicursal Lifeline—they both are sparked by the same basic idea, and then other ideas which were aroused in painting D.O.U.S.S. were carried on into UL.

The basic idea started off at Open University Summer School at Durham in 1972—one of those sunny, hot weeks that are both relaxing and stimulating.

One of the happiest times I can recall in the past few years when I felt free, able to work hard on something I was interested in.

I could relax the way I like (sunbathing), enjoy the Gulbenkian art gallery (just across the road), particularly an exhibition of Tao art from China, get into conversation with a wandering American and spend all afternoon talking about art in other cultures, traces of abstraction in past cultures, in a way that time stood still... And I had a "cell" bedroom to retreat to and gaze over the green landscape through the open window and work out all sorts of ideas.

And the ideas just flowed and flowed, and generated other ideas, and I discovered the "space-filling curve"—a line joining all points within an area or solid—that is infinite in length in that there are an infinite number of points in an area and is, paradoxically, an impossibility because a point is dimensionless.

One of those mathematical concepts not to be taken too seriously because it is

based on definitions and their manipulation in an abstract way but interesting for the things that can be done with it. I wanted to show it visually in some way, say the start of the curve before it began to fill up the area completely.

At the Tao exhibition, there were some prints of Taoist calligraphy, based on the rising streams and whorls of smoke from ritual incense burners (I ordered some prints for reference). I followed some textbook diagrams, making a square grid and connecting up the centres in such a way that units could be systematically linked and extended in certain ways and directions indefinitely.

And that was how DOUSS came into being.

It starts at one corner and travels tortuously over the canvas to end up in the opposite corner. The "points" became circles; the "curve" wrapped itself round them and linked up continuously with other circles. So wherever the eye dropped on the picture, it was carried along the line restlessly, with calculated optical colour changes to be experienced en route so that the picture surface became a restless path for the eye, with constant colour distraction to stop the eye from stopping at any one spot. Nothing startlingly new there, but novel in some ways.

And then I wanted to do a self-contained version, a "loop" line that had no end and yet was not obviously [closed]. ■

Unicursal Lifeline (1972)

Malevich Forgotten?

Dear F & B: You flabber my gast with the news that Malevich does not merit a mention in your art history books... The authors must have blinkers on – demand

your money back! Any self-respecting Western art historian tackling the 20th century developments must include an account of pre-world war exchanges between Paris and Moscow and the cultural contacts of revolutionary Russia and Germany, and key figures like Malevich, Tatlin, Rodchenko & Stepanova, Larionov, Popova, Exter and Al Lissitzky.

Wealthy collectors like Mikhail Morosov and. Sergei Shchukin of Moscow took a keen interest in new developments in French painting, buying Monet, Degas, Cezanne, later Gauguin. Shchukin then concentrated on Matisse and Picasso – his mansion housed a fabulous collection of these new works, open to artists and the public, and often referred to as the 'Museum of Matisse and Picasso'.

Morosov kept his collection to himself, but both collections were 'nationalised' after the revolution and opened to the public, which is why the big Russian galleries have so many key works of this period of French art. So artists in St. Petersburg and Moscow were well aware of Impressionist and post-Impressionist developments in Paris, and were developing their own version of Futurism. Which was why Malevich was the first artist to venture into pure abstraction, with Suprematism, (Kandinsky, in exile, did some adroit fudging of dates to try and grab the credit!) and why any account of modern art that ignores these developments is suspect.

Between the wars these aspects were ignored largely by art historians; I certainly had to work hard to try and fill in the hole once I realised that it existed, but from the sixties on, there was a seepage of information that became something of a torrent in the 70s and 80s when the 'thaw' in cultural matters in the USSR really allowed a reassessment of the artists of the period.

I rest my case.

The first big art show of Picasso & Matisse opened in London and was transferred to Manchester City Gallery in February 1946 – is that the one you'&re thinking about? I was still stuck in India at the time and was forced to rely on reviews and readers' letters in the press. Still have a collection of cuttings that I pasted up at the time; I was doing a forces correspondence course in an effort to brush up my erratic knowledge of modern art. Indeed, I have a vague memory that you borrowed this file to study for a while when you were in London!

The News had articles by Emmanuel Levy, one of the M/cr Academy establishment, who suggested that the 'man in the street' will find "the loveliest paintings" among the Matisses, and dismissed the Picassos as "dark, heavy and. restless like evil", describing the 'Portrait of a Lady' as having "all the feeling of a hen laying an egg", concluding that while "the common complaint is that Picasso has gone mad... all that he is doing is expressing a mad world".

The Guardian reports the opening by the Lord Mayor, who plays safe and confesses to not understanding the works on show, though he congratulates the Art Gallery Committee for bringing the pictures to Manchester. And R.H. Wilenski, then lecturer on art history at Manchester University, advised visitors to make a

study of some of the three to four thousand earlier peintings, drawings and etchings. Wow, what a put down, real heavy, man. When would we get time for the exhibition?

While I haven't got any letters from the News (Marion probably thought it a waste of time sending them) a clutch of Guardian readers' letters has survived, bringing up the theme of the "Emperor's new clothes", one from "a 100% Gael" who confesses that "the exhibition wrought within me a fury I have not known since the days of the Black & Tans".

Later letters from artists were generally supportive, as were reviews in the Statesman, Listener and Picture Post, though Matisse's contribution got far less percentage wordage than Picasso's.

The Beeb2 coverage of the current show left much to be desired. Disappointed that Sister Wendy was not dragged from her retreat for the occasion...

The Herbert Reed exhibition? Gosh, it seems ages ago since I was there. Didn't I tell you about it? Well, it was a sort of biography, with paintings and drawings illustrating the development of his interests as critic and writer: to seasoned exhibition-goers like Steve and me, there were signs that there'd been a frantic scrabble to find suitable pictorial interest to fill in some aspects and awkward corners of the show, resulting in a few far-fetched linkings, but on the whole it was illuminating. Brought back a lot of memories – I first became aware of Read as a critic at the 1938 SFA con when Benson Herbert was waving a copy of Read's Surrealism, produced when the big exhibition of surrealist work came to London in 1936.

Thereafter I caught up with Read's output as poet and anarchist. (Years later, when Benson. was visiting Manchester, I asked Marion to remind Benson of Read's book and he had no memory of it!). And his writings introduced me to the abstract art of the thirties – which led me on to the Russian avant-garde via the Bauhaus. It was interesting being reacquainted with names like Kenneth Armitage and Reg Butler – the model for the unrealised winner of the Unknown Political Prisoner competition was there – and a lot of Ben Nicholson.

One "discovery" was a work by an Edinburgh artist, Stanley Cursiter; "The sensation of crossing the street", a 'fresh' colourful painting in the futurist style, that looked as though it had been painted yesterday instead of in 1913. I promised Steve I'd try and find out more about it, and the artist. But info is in short supply! There's a reference to him in Frances Spalding's British Art since 1900 and a reproduction of another work which complements the one we saw in that it shows a view of the same street looking the other way.

The text links Cursiter with Christopher Nevinson, who adopted the 'simultaneity' of the Italian futurists: Nevinson also did two paintings in this style, looking up and down the Strand, but both his paintings are lost. Nevinson's subsequent argument with his Vorticist colleagues, who accused him of pandering to the hated Eye-ties, might account for the subsequent dearth of references to Cursiter.

To date I've not found any further info on him, though my hopes were raised when I caught the "Bigger Picture" series on Beeh2 with Billy Connolly as presenter in a view of 500 years of Scottish Art. The last prog dealt with the period, but I missed the beginning, and the part I saw dealt with contemporary painters. There's a book of the progs which is featured in the latest offerings from the Arts Guild at a reduced price, and there's a portion of one of the Cursiter paintings illustrated in the write-up, which suggests he at least gets a mention in the book. But I baulk at forking £18 for a book which has little interest to me – will have to wait till I see it in the library. Meanwhile I ought to be following up other books on Scottish art in the hopes that I can find other works. I suspect these two street paintings are his sole momento!

to Fran & Brian Varley, 27th February 1994

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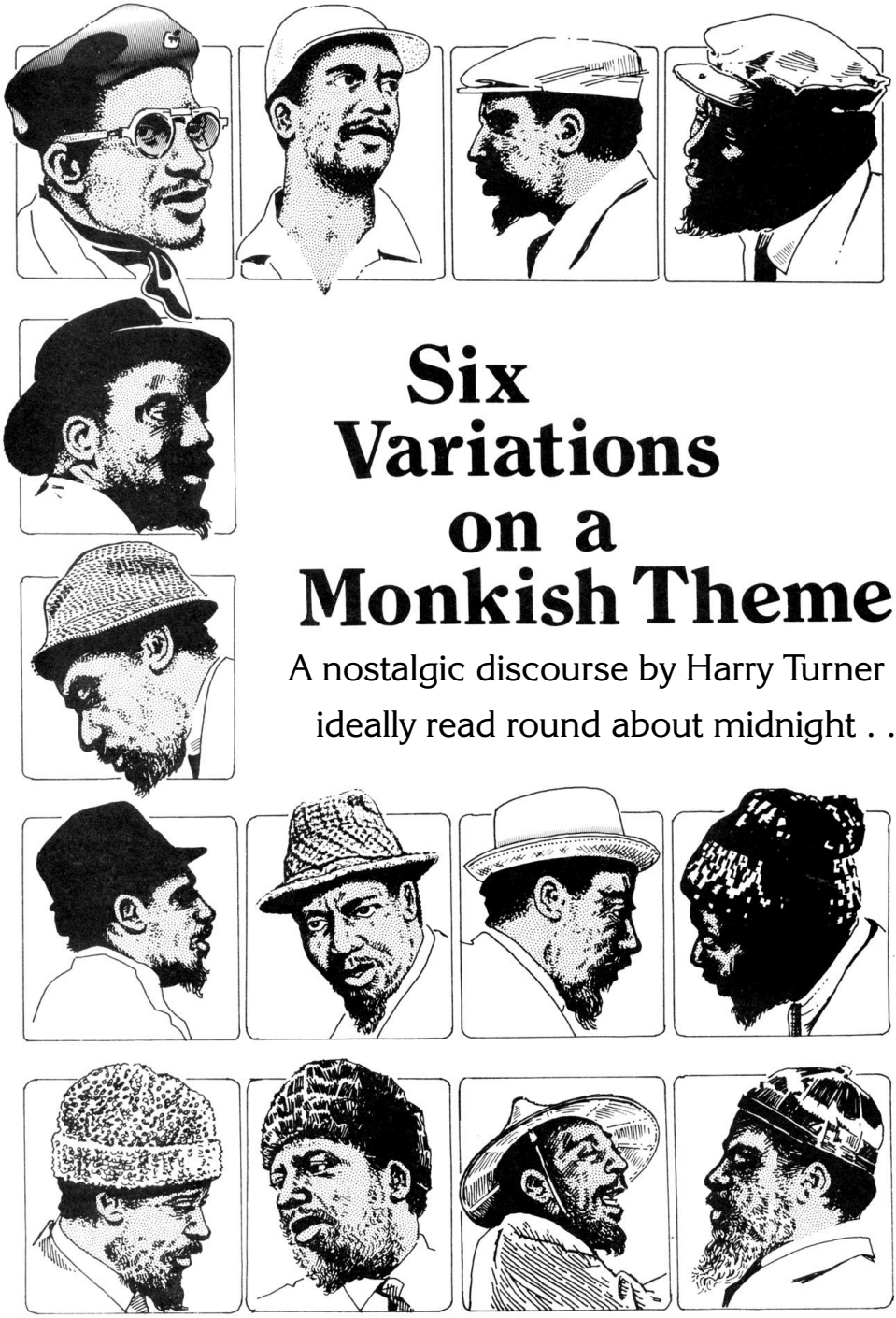
The Jazz Fan

Harry Turner was a serial buyer of jazz and classical records and CDs. His particular favourites were Josh White, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker and Dave Brubeck but his collection of over 2,000 LPs, CDs and cassette tapes was nothing if not wide-ranging.

He founded the Thelonius Monk Appreciation Society and he decided that his collection of jazz recordings, books, etc. deserved a title: and so *Romiley Jazz Archive* was born.

As an active member of Manchester Jazz Society during its days at the Manchester Sports Guild building, he gave regular talks to share his expertise and his music collection. Jazz music was the background track to most of his work at home, and he had more than enough of various artistes to hold all-day or even all-week festivals dedicated to one performer or group of musicians.



Six Variations on a Monkish Theme

A nostalgic discourse by Harry Turner

ideally read round about midnight . . .

1 One of Thelonious Monk's more endearing eccentricities was the splendid variety of headgear he sported on and off the bandstand, in and out of the recording studios. In the early days, as attested by the 1947 photographs of Bill Gottlieb, it was a beret with a piano clip. Mary Lou Williams, the pianist, who knew Monk well during the years at Minton's Playhouse, claimed that he inspired the young boppers' uniform of beret, shades and goatee. Then Monk adopted caps: sporty items at first, baseball caps, then more workaday button-down styles, flat caps in tartans and boldly coloured checks.

For a period, he appeared in felt hats, from the sedate and sombre to the wildly informal. Even a spell with a wide-brimmed sombrero. Monk's changing headgear became an obligatory fashion note for the diligent jazz reporter.

Thus LeRoi Jones was careful to mention that for his successful 1957 date at the Five Spot Cafe, Monk appeared in a "stingy-brim version of a Rex Harrison hat". While Dan Morgenstern, reviewing a concert in Carnegie Hall, commented that "an added attraction was Monk's splendid white Texas-styled hat, an exact copy of LBJ's".

On his European tours of the 60s Monk produced some modish Astrakhans, and a lambswool winter hat from Helsinki. A trip to the Far East meant, inevitably, a coolie hat. On a world tour with the Giants of Jazz in 1971, when he made his last trio recordings for Black Lion in London, he favoured a silk mandarin skull cap, acquired in Tokyo.

Gerald Lascelles, jazz critic, writing in *Jazz Journal* about one of Monk's British tours, confessed to spending considerable time trying to relate Monk's choice of headgear to his mood, and to his music. Alas, he reached no firm conclusions. Could be the maestro just enjoyed wearing funny hats...

When he spoke at Monk's funeral, George Wein told how Monk had been followed on a European tour by the reporter doing the cover story for Time magazine. Every day for all of three weeks Monk came out of his room wearing the same hat. At the end of the tour, he appeared sporting a different hat, and when the reporter asked why the change, Monk's dry response was that you can't wear the same hat every day...

2 At the tail end of the 1950s I changed jobs and returned, after a long absence, to work in my native city of Manchester. It proved to be a propitiously timed move. Refreshing an erratic memory, I've been browsing through a box of souvenir programmes, handouts and ticket stubs that have survived from the 60s, when Harold Davison, following the relaxation of union restrictions, busily despatched American jazzmen on nationwide package tours.

The Newport Jazz Festival, Jazz at the Philharmonic, Jazz from a Swinging Era, the Basie and Ellington bands, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis and Sonny Stitt, Dave Brubeck, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Erroll Garner, Gerry Mulligan, Thelonious Monk and Art Blakey... most of them stopped off at the Free Trade Hall. And local promoters encouraged visits from individual American players—the likes of Henry Red Allen, Earl Hines, Buck Clayton, Bud Freeman, Pee Wee Russell, Ruby Braff, Teddy Wilson, Ben Webster, Don Byas—to front British groups.

In 1963, even the Beaulieu International Jazz Festival was diverted to the cavernous halls of Belle Vue . So much talent; so much music. The problem was getting around to listen to it all and a good part of my leisure was devoted to the ffort.

Only a few years earlier, around the mid-50s, I had begun to dream ambitiously of a jazz collection of new-fangled LPs to replace the many 78s casually acquired

since prewar days. Came the day when my battered radiogram was replaced by state-of-the-art hi-fi separates and a massive Wharfedale speaker which most visitors assumed was some sort of room heater. The record reviews were studied diligently and the domestic budget frequently imperilled by surreptitious buying of essential records.

While still happily listening to the music of earlier decades I began to sample the sound of contemporary jazz developments with increasing interest. One unfamiliar name among the many that cropped up in the reviews caught my fancy. "Thelonious Sphere Monk".

A resounding name, one not easily thrust aside or forgotten once heard. I was intrigued to find that reviewers' comments about him and his music ranged from ridicule to wild enthusiasm. To get my bearings, I checked with acquaintances. They proved non-commital, evasive or downright dismissive, quoting extant tales of the Mad Monk, high priest of bebop at Mintons in the 40s, a poseur who lacked all piano technique and hid behind weird chords and zombie music... a general thumbs down.

Looking back, it must be said that the war between 'trad' fans and 'modernists' was still being waged in the provincial jazz circles I frequented. Trad supporters simply closed their ears to post-war sounds; many modernists were too dazzled by the genius of Charlie Parker, even several years after his death, to appreciate that a plurality of jazz styles had already evolved with bop.

I had to hear Monk and make up my own mind. There wasn't overmuch of his music in the shops—a few EPs and LPs on the Esquire and London labels, culled from American Prestige and Riverside sources. I took the plunge with an album titled *Thelonious Monk plays the music of Duke Ellington*. Mind you, the sleeve note on this London LP was strangely apologetic, explaining at length that the session had been given the lure of Duke's name as a marketing ploy to attract customers who might otherwise have passed by.

It's not often that salesmen take you into their confidence like that; I found it an odd comment on the confusion of the time that Monk's own music was somehow regarded as the supreme obstacle to his wider acceptance... They really needn't have worried. I was won over at first hearing, responding to Monk's spare, lucid, percussive piano playing and, once attuned to his dissonances, enjoyed it all.

This 1955 trio—Monk with Oscar Pettiford and Kenny Clarke—play together marvellously: from the bluesy, relaxed, slightly off-key playing of *Black & Tan Fantasy*, the spaced out version of *Caravan*, to an account of *Sophisticated Lady* revealing a snappier, more brittle side of her personality than ever Ellington essayed. To contrast with these fine swinging tracks by the trio, there's a pensive solo piano exploration of *Solitude* which perfectly expresses the mood of the piece. Duke and Monk both have roots in Harlem piano, and on this LP Monk plays homage to the Master in the best way he knows.

(Much later, someone told me to listen to the track *Mr J.B. Blues*, one of the

Ellington-Blanton duets of October 1940, to hear a surprising foretaste of Monk's piano!)

Monk's radical approach to jazz piano seemed sheer delight. My ears had already been attuned by musical assaults on other fronts; the percussive pianism of Stravinsky and Prokofiev in pieces of the 20s, and those American mavericks of the piano, George Antheil and Charles Ives. Ives, especially, a nonconformist who discarded his early training at the piano to experiment and adopt an 'untutored' intuitive approach, had strong affinities with Monk, who seemed to follow a similar path within the jazz tradition.

Not long after, I had *The Unique Thelonious* LP on my turntable. This was, in effect, the second stage of the Riverside 'Monk-indoctrination' course, presenting Monk playing more familiar tunes by other composers. Recorded in 1956, this trio has Art Blakey replacing Clarke on drums. Monk approaches the tunes as points of departure for more radical recompositions on piano, playing throughout with subtle economy (not a note wasted!) and deceptive simplicity.

He takes ribald but respectful liberties with *Tea for Two* and *Honeysuckle Rose*, then treats *Darn that Dream* and *You are too beautiful* with moving tenderness, expressing feelings far removed from the stock sentimental pretensions of your average popular lyric. He starts an unaccompanied *Memories of You* with a certain hesitancy, feeling his way through the theme before moving into a personal interpretation that is sheer delight.

Highlight of the set is *Just you, just me*, where his rhythmic variations are taken at a lively pace, with active participation from Pettiford and Blakey.

Having survived thus far, I threw caution to the winds and sought an album of Monk's own compositions. *Monk's Moods*, from Prestige trio tracks dating from the early and mid-SOs, offered seven Monk originals plus three Monk renditions of pop songs. Mind-blowing stuff..., the house throbbed with the sound of *Blue Monk* for days, until divorce proceedings were threatened.

I've now lived with that particular version of *Blue Monk* for over thirty years, played it at an umpteen record recitals and talks and it still, to my ears, sounds as fresh and exciting as on that first hearing. Monk and Art Blakey, the drummer on the session, enjoyed an almost telepathic musical relationship.

In an interview shortly before Monk's death in 1982, Blakey was quoted as saying that "we were born on the same date, same year, and we've always been, like, together... He's more like me than anybody I ever met". And it shows in their music making. Monk has made several versions of *Blue Monk*—one is heard in Bert Stern's colourful film documentary of the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival, *Jazz on a Summer's Day*—but this first recording, made in 1954, is a masterpiece, a jazz classic.

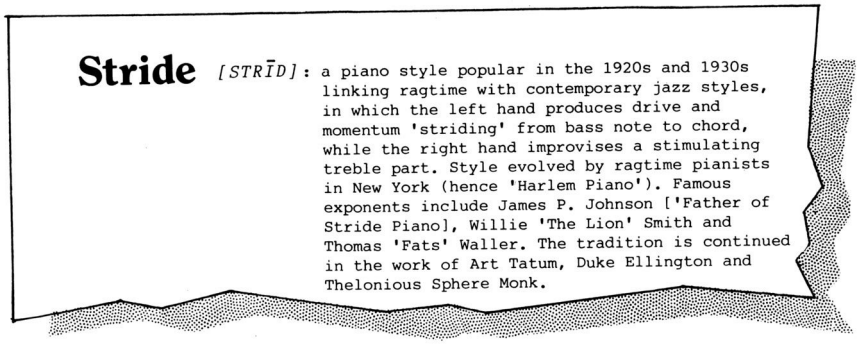
The LP also features Monk and Blakey in *Bye-ya*, a Latin-American romp of a duet; *Little Rootie Tootie*, where jarring single notes and clashing chords conjure up the progress of a little train careering jauntily along the track; and a typically

acidulated *Sweet and Lovely*. Max Roach takes over drums in a cheery set with much background vocalising and a slightly out-of-tune piano (imparting a teeth-on-edge start to *These foolish things* !).

There's a buoyant account of *Bemsha swing*; *Trinkle tinkle*, with its shimmering clusters of edgy notes from Monk, and forceful interjections from Roach to provoke fresh cascades; with a bonus of a piano solo with Monk prodding the theme of *Just a gigolo* through idiosyncratic subtleties to a hesitant, hanging finish.

3 If you're a sucker for stride piano (which means you have sense of humour) then you'll have a copy of Monk's 1964 *Monk's Time* album on your record shelf. There's an unaccompanied version of *Nice work if you can get it* on which Monk takes a measured stroll, with an agile right hand apt to wander off in unexpected directions before the cliff-hanging finish is reached. Or, if you should feel in need of a lift, he takes a Harry Warren hit, dusts it down, and gives it an airing, launching himself into a long but hilarious opening solo on *Lulu's back in town*.

This is wayward stride piano, a decidedly uneven progress over the keyboard in search of the good time, a rolling, rollicking performance, witty and carried off with great gusto. And he's back, seeming a touch exhausted, after the rest of the quartet have had their say, with a stride closer...



Monk had listened hard to many pianists in his formative years in New York. While he admitted to no major influence, on his occasional astringent send-ups of stride style, he gives a reverent nod toward the Harlem masters of the art—James P. Johnson, Willy the Lion Smith, Fats Waller, Duke Ellington—sharing the joke.

New York was home to Thelonious Monk. He had a great affection for the city, knew it well, since for twenty years, before success caught up with him, he had to scuffle for jobs, playing in dance hails and bars.

"You want to know what sound I put in my music—well, you have to go to New York and listen for yourself," he told Valerie Wilmer in an interview. And soprano-sax player Steve Lacy, with the insights gained from spending over a decade

studying and playing Monk's music, suggests that the whole body of work is a revealing self-portrait of Monk, set against a background of New York, and all the people Monk knew.

4 I began dimly to see the obvious. Monk had departed from bop routines, was intently pursuing a musical path of his own. I was happy to go along with him. Despite the spate of desirable Parker reissues in the shops, curiosity about Monk's music ensured that part of my hard- pressed record buying budget was diverted to catch up earlier recordings on the Blue Note label.

These tracks had been collected and issued on LP and were, as they used to say, available at specialist shops (as pricey imports). Blue Note was a small independent company formed in New York in 1939 by Alfred Lion and photographer Francis Wolff, both refugees from Nazi Germany.

A long-time jazz collector, Lion at first issued traditional and swing items, but when the recording ban ended in 1944 he became interested in the 'new sounds' of the younger players. He hired tenor man Ike Quebec as musical adviser, and gave Monk his first break as leader, playing his own music, at the end of 1947.

Monk came to the Blue Note dates with a stockpile of his compositions. Alfred Lion said later that they had difficulty initially finding musicians who could play with Monk because of his departures from the prevailing bop-dominated style. Consequently the results are mixed, musically, though the pianist is a delight throughout.

The musicians had to learn what he wanted largely by ear, and the early ensembles do not appear to have always realised Monks aims; bop orthodoxies intrude and conflict with his more melodic overall concerns.

Round about midnight suffers from the front line; *Humph* has some interesting trumpet from Idrees Sulieman; Thelonious gets the stride treatment. The trio sides at the second date include four Monk pieces: *Ruby my dear*, *Well you needn't*, *Introspection*, and *Off minor*. It is interesting to hear Blakey's swing-period technique change over later tracks and open out into his more flexible but assertive 'front-line' style.

The July 1948 date has Monk leading a quartet featuring Milt Jackson on vibes, backed by John Simmons on bass and Shadow Wilson on drums. There is a marvellous internal balance and stimulating interplay between piano and vibraharp that produces outstanding jazz.

In the wry but remarkable reworking of the traditional blues in *Mysterioso*, the pianist slips in chords and jagged phrases that heighten and point up Jackson's fluid solo, and Monk avoids the bop format of identical opener and closer by varying the final recapitulation. There's magic in the animated I mean you. and the harmonic and rhythmic interweaving in *Epistiophy*.

Three years later, Jackson is back again with Monk on a quintet date, with Sahib Shihab on alto and Blakey on drums. The inclusion of the horn restored the bop combo front line and rhythm, but everyone seems at home with Monk's material, giving good accounts of *Straight, no chaser* and *Four in one*, with an exemplary *Criss cross*. A final session in May 1952 has Monk leading a sextet including horn men Kenny Dorham, Lucky Thompson and Lou Donaldson, with Max Roach on drums.

According to Lion, the singles sold well in Harlem and black areas of a few other big cities, but it took several years before the white jazz audience began to buy. Apparently the legend of Monk as an inept pianist persisted. But these tracks, concise performances for issue as 78s, are today of historical as well of musical interest, since they offer the first recorded versions of many Monk compositions now accepted as an essential part of the jazz repertory.

Thereafter I came across Monk in other contexts. Norman Granz included him on piano in a reunion of Bird and Diz in 1950—moments to treasure! And then two Prestige sessions in 1954, with the Sonny Rollins Quartet and the Miles Davis All Stars. There are some inspired solos in all that music.

So when the news came that Monk was to tour Britain in 1961, I knew, to a degree, what to expect. And I wasn't disappointed.

5 It has always struck me that the story of Monk's erratic rise to fame has all the improbability, the ironic and coincidental circumstance of one of O'Henry's New York short stories.

When Monk started composing in the early 40s, he was totally involved in his music making. Teddy Hill, his boss at Minton's, has told of the long after-hours sessions at the club piano, when he had to plead with Monk to leave, so that he could lock the place up. He spent hours practicing when at home, unchallenged by the neighbours. Mary Lou Williams remembered his obsessive playing of new compositions, going on night and day until he was stopped.

His ideas fired his contemporaries, from Gillespie and Parker, Bud Powell, Tadd Dameron, Sonny Rollins, Miles Davis, Art Blakey, John Coltrane to Steve Lacey; they have all acknowledged their debt to Monk at various times. Nellie, his wife, said that he never attempted to do anything else but play music. And he was not prepared to compromise just to land a job; he would not play down to audiences. As Steve Lacey commented ". . he's the only man I ever met who really does exactly what he wants to, with no jive at all".

Monk had his cabaret card withdrawn in 1951 after being involved in an incident with the police, barring him from playing at night clubs in New York. This left him dependent on his earnings from occasional recording sessions, and in those lean years Nellie had to go out to work to help support the family. If ever a man needed

a Guardian Angel in the 50s, it was Thelonious Monk. Luckily, one was right at hand, already in New York.

In 1951 the wealthy Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter abandoned the boring life of a diplomat's lady in Mexico City and chose to dig the jazz life of bustling New York. In a very short time she became a wellknown figure on the city jazz scene, befriending many musicians. Monk was one in whom she took a special interest, helping him and his family.

She proved instrumental in having Monk's cabaret card restored in 1957, so that the pianist was able to take a quartet into the Five Spot Cafe. The young John Coltrane left Miles Davis to join Monk on the gig, which caused such a buzz among the New York jazz audience that the group were invited to stay and work all through the summer.

That same year, four new albums of Monk's music were released by Riverside Records, and met with wild critical acclaim and the accolade of five-star reviews in *Down Beat*.

Another release, on the Atlantic label, of Monk with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, further boosted his success. In 1958 and 1959 he was voted Top Pianist in the *Down Beat* Critics Poll, as well as being well received at the Newport Jazz Festival.

From then on, Monk prospered...

6 I've grown up with Monk's music, experienced it in context, as it were, attended several concerts and stockpiled some 60+ LPs on the library shelves. I return to his music frequently; it's music that in some odd way defeats the repetitive recording process by sounding fresh at each playing. It's music that demands to be listened to, that is always revealing new insights.

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During the long spells of unemployment until the mid-50s, Monk had plenty of time to compose; some fifty pieces came out of this period. When the jazz audience began to catch up and accept him, when performances and touring left him less time for composing, he set himself the objective of establishing this repertory. And with typical single-mindedness, that is exactly what he achieved in the next decade, when performances and touring left him less time for composing.

After a decade of international fame, the 70s brought periods of illness and enforced semi-retirement. For many years Monk lived at the home of the Baroness; she remained his watchful patron and confidante until his death in 1982.

It will be interesting to see how future generations of jazzmen will treat his body of work. The surprising thing is that it has attracted attention in a wider context. 'Straight' musician Gunther Schuller has written 'Four variants on a theme of Thelonious Monk (Criss Cross)'. And a recent Radio 3 piano recital of American piano music included transcriptions of solos from Monk's *Round Midnight* and *Monk's Point*. Monk lives! ■

Written 1989
Published in *Peak Listening Period* (*STRIDE* 33 1/3). 1992
Revised 1996

I Remember Joe

Lisa (Conesa) can be a very sceptical person.

I say that because a scribbled note lurking in the ZIMRI file brings back memories of an outing some few years ago. The legendary jazz pianist Joe Albany had just decided to settle down in Europe and one of his first sessions over here was organised in a Manchester pub.

That adjective "legendary" was deserved in Joe's case. He'd a reputation among musicians and a few critics for his prowess as a bop pianist, but there was precious little of his music on record. Some Georgie Auld big band tracks in 1945, a session with a Lester Young small group in 1946.

Sadly, he'd had a row and missed a recording date with a Charlie Parker group the same year... then nothing until a private recording of a rehearsal with tenor sax man Warne Marsh appeared on the American Riverside label in 1957. (And I had to chase that record for several years until I caught up with a secondhand copy: but it was worth the wait).

So when Tony Williams, modern jazz devotee and originator of Spotlite Records, announced a new Albany disc in 1972 I got a copy forthwith. It proved a faint disappointment despite the warnings on the sleeve—a home recording made on a domestic recorder by a pianist still practising to overcome years of neglect and recover his old facility and style. But a moving experience. And there was a promise that with Tony's help, Joe was quitting the States to settle in Europe, as so many

of his compatriots had done already.

And now, one chilly night in '73, here I sit with Lisa and about twenty other fans in the small, somewhat cheerless, jazz room of the Black Lion, waiting to hear Joe Albany play.

He's small, modest, grizzle-haired; looks as though he'd had a rough time living out the past few years. But he can play... you readily forgive the odd clumsiness, the occasional fumble after years of inaction. Forget the deficiencies of the decrepit pub upright. Pray that the rumbustious backing group will hold back and give Joe more room to expand—a young and brash drummer plays at one dynamic level, loud, and the trumpeter tends to rambling and protracted solos that hold up the proceedings. But the moment comes when Joe is left to cope with only the rhythm section and allowed to solo, It proves an evening at once sad and inspiring.

When the first session ends Lisa disappears in the direction of the loo. There are several people jockeying for a word with Joe, but as he comes near the table I am able to snatch a brief conversation with him, to mumble something about how great it is to hear him in person, and ask if he has plans for more recordings. He mentions a session arranged by Tony Williams in Britain, and the hope of later gigs on the Continent, before being nobbled by other admirers just as Lisa returns.

– Well, aren't you going to speak to him, she hisses, as Joe drifts back to the bandstand.

– I have, I say smugly, still in a euphoric state.

– You liar! grins Lisa.

– It's true, I did! I protest.

But its no use. Nothing can persuade her that I did. To this day, whenever a turn in the conversation sparks the memory of the event, she will return to the topic, usually with the words: "You didn't really speak to him, did you?' and despite my most vehement protests just shakes her head in disbelief.

Like I say, Lisa can be very sceptical. ■

Written for *INTERIM* I 975

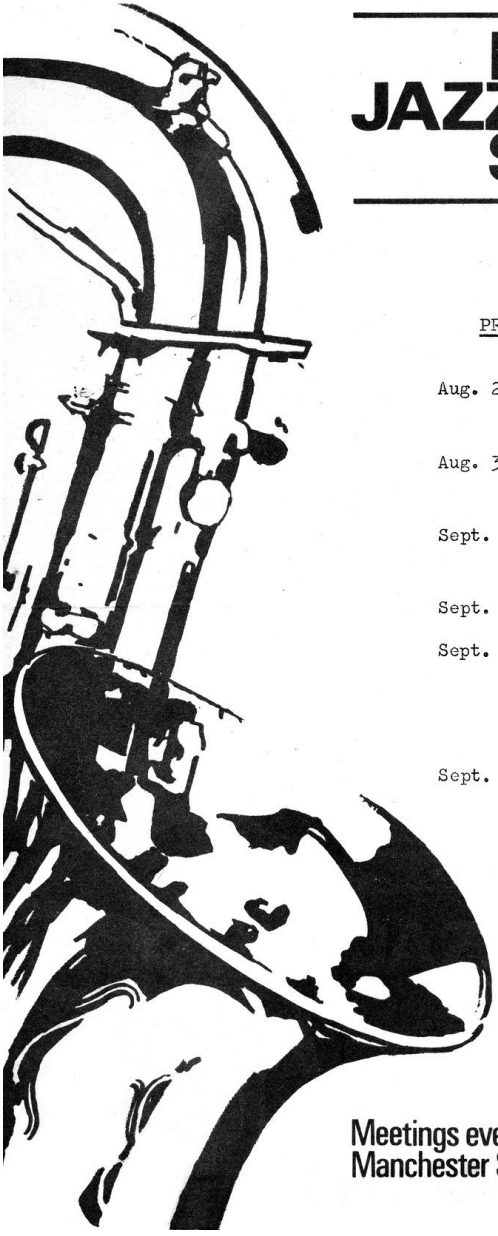
Out of the Past—MSG Remembered

It's Boxing Day after the Christmas following Manchester's ill-fated bid for the Olympic Games, and I'm standing in the snow on a car park near the Cathedral, rather the worse for wear after celebrating until the small hours, arguing with Vic about where the Manchester Sports Guild, that solid hunk of Victorian brickwork, used to stand. Exactly when did the Guild shut its doors and bring a Northern jazz era to a close? I demand. Vic hazards fifteen years ago. I think it was more that the

city council just earmarked the block for demolition, then left the premises standing empty, wasted, for years before finally razing it in the name of inner-city development.

We agree on some things. That the MSG started in the Fifties when a few enthusiasts got together to raise money to support amateur sports groups by organizing jazz clubs and concerts in venues around Manchester. And very successful they were, too.

After nine years, they had amassed enough funds to take over a drab commercial property on Long Millgate, overlooking the Cathedral, and convert it into a thriving sports and social centre within a year of opening. Thanks to the links built up with the local bands and a following of devotees, the MSG, with its ballroom and jazz cellar, was the leading jazz centre in the North West. ■



MANCHESTER JAZZ SOCIETY

PROGRAMMES FOR AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 1967

Aug. 23rd. Jazz off the Record - unissued recordings presented by Steve Voce.

Aug. 30th. Louis Armstrong in the Twenties by Dave Mylchreest.

Sept. 6th. Ragtime, part 2 by John Featherstone
Washboard Jazz by Mike Hazeldine.

Sept. 13th. Milt Jackson by Harry Turner.

Sept. 20th. Benny Goodman by Gordon Bowers.
Chicagoans and Condonites by Eddie Lambert.

Sept. 27th. Bill Coleman by John Chilton, a return visit from an invited recitalist who is sure to maintain the high standard set by his previous recital on Henry Allen.

Meetings every Wednesday at 8pm in the Jazz Cellar Manchester Sports Guild, Long Millgate, M/c 3

Jazz Notes or Music is music is music

WIMPEY build houses; WIMPY flog burgers

Growing up in the thirties, as I did, I was exposed to the popular banalities of Tin Pan Alley lyrics featured by the dance bands of the day on records and the wireless. I acquired a taste for jazz in those years, concentrating on the instrumental playing and doing my best to close my ears to the obligatory vocals.

A few singers penetrated the barrier—Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday and a bunch of bluesmen—but otherwise I got into the habit of listening to the music and not the words. The rise of the singer in the pop music of the past twenty years or so has not tempted me to change.

Lyrics should be heard, not seen ... (Berry Bock)

I occasionally feel that time is running out on me & despair of catching up with all that's going on. Often it doesn't seem worth the trouble of trying. Over the years I've acquired more than 2000 LPs—a collection of jazz, blues, Indian music and concert & chamber music—and I've been listening to it pretty hard during the period when loss of sight forced me to abandon most of my regular activities.

Like I was saying about fandom and mundanity up there, the categories imposed on music from outside begin to look pretty silly; the lives and music of, say, Joseph Haydn and Duke Ellington share affinities that span the centuries and artificial distinctions of the critics... Thelonious Monk does as much for jazz piano as Busoni or Alkan for Western 'serious' pianism.

to Terry Hill's Microwave*, July 1982*

All The Big Names

When I started working at the Guardian (the time of my first retirement from fandom) I attended my first Brubeck concert at the Free Trade Hall. And thereafter became a regular attendee at the Manchester Sports Guild, an organisation that started organising jazz sessions to raise money for the sports activities and then finished up becoming the biggest northwest jazz promoters for many years.

The Manchester Jazz Club used to meet in the jazz cellar there every week, and it was a great time when 'Jenks', who ran the place, started bringing over American players and organising tours. Folk like Red Allen, Peanuts Hucko, Earl Hines, Teddy Wilson, Peewee Russell, Ruby Braff, Bud Freeman, Joe Turner... and he'd book in any touring players such as Buck Clayton (who appeared with the Humphrey Lyttelton band on several memorable occasions).

Oh it was a great time to be around. Club 43 went in for more modern stuff, Don Byas, Cecil Payne and the like, and often attracted folk from the FTH after the concerts were over, so you'd have Basie or Ellington people jamming with the resident band.

And there was a steady stream of musicians at the Free Trade Hall concerts—Dizzy, Miles, Mulligan, MJQ, Monk, Art Blakey & several versions of the Messengers, Garner, Hawkins, Benny Carter, Ellington, Basie, and a string of mainstream players—they became regular visitors once or even twice in a year.

And there were a few surprises occasionally at the Hole in the Wall, such as the time Tony Williams dragged Joe Albany from oblivion in New York and started him out on a new career, right here. It's hard to believe how much live music there was around Manchester in the 60s and early 70s. It just seemed as if it would go on for ever, and the problem was fitting it all in.

You've really started the memories welling up now... And it's intriguing to have so many recordings of these occasions and know that I'm there somewhere. locked in the applause and general ambience...

Wow, let me regain my composure. ■

letter to the Varleys

Vanishing Sounds

The [Miles Davis] session has just been reissued on med. price CD, but having just been shown an article in the *Mail* by Philip (I mean P has shown me the article, not that he's written the thing) reviving the scare story of yesteryear that CDs deteriorate after a few years and become unplayable, there's maybe no point in passing that bit of information on.

Obviously there's no point in throwing away LPs just yet. Was alarmed to read that the marketing man of the company responsible for the curdling CDs gaily defends his position by arguing that the buyer of a car doesn't expect his car to last for ever: so why should CDs be different ?

to Fran & Brian Varley, 24th November 1993

CONTENTS

Overcoming Cataracts

Harry Turner's father, Barton, ended up registered blind after suffering retinal detachments following cataract operations. Harry also required cataract operations—possibly as a result of exposure to the high levels of microwave radiation emitted by wartime radar systems. He arrived at his sixties, at the beginning of the 1980s, unable to see well enough to paint and draw, to work on his publishing contracts, and to read or watch television. Paradoxically, photography was about all that he could manage with the right equipment.

The results of the operations were less than 100% successful but good enough to let him resume reading and drawing, and his previous visual interests. He was able to add serious stamp collecting to his list of interests, and he also went back to the Open University for courses on art—he had actually managed to work through one course in a state of severely diminished vision, having booked it before being told that his first cataract operation would be postponed for 5 months.

His restored sight allowed him to continue his creative work in the field of graphic art and design for a further two decades.

Coping with the Problem . . .
. . . and the Cure

When my eyesight noticeably deteriorated in the mid-1970s, I got fed up with the optician's vague assurance of "a loss of acuity owing to ageing" and saw a specialist, who confirmed that it was cataracts. At the time, it seemed to be the worst thing that could happen. At the Guardian, I was running the marketing studio, with two art groups and a copy group doing promotion work and servicing advertisers; largely a matter of general control of the creative aspect.

I was able. to withdraw from drawing board work and concentrate on more administrative matters. But outside, I was producing a book for Dover Books, and had several other contracts lined up, and I found I was losing the ability to do all the things I'd just taken for granted. And I had to get through the next few years before the surgeon would operate. So, you accept the situation and cope best you can.

I soon found that the gradualism of cataract means that you adapt and compensate in many ways as things get worse, become fatalistic, and have the comfort of knowing ultimately it's an operable condition and you'll—hopefully—have your sight restored. However, there were complications that still left a few question marks, and worries.

Available light became a major consideration. It was a period when art gallery management and conservation decreed more discreet lighting in galleries, which caused problems for me, and I gave up attending art exhibitions. Print seemed to get greyer and fainter—I had to abandon reading while commuting. I gave up film societies because it became impossible to read captions on foreign films; they'd be snatched away before I was halfway through deciphering them. I was able only to make out detail within a few inches of my nose, which made nonsense of trying to read titles on the library shelves, as well as trying to paint.

Eventually, I was reduced to having my secretary at work read all the papers that arrived on my desk—and occasionally rescuing documents I scrawled messages on under the impression they were blank sheets...

Fortunately, I travelled into work by train—no problems there—and when I arrived in Manchester, I insinuated myself in a mass of travellers, who swept me across streets without any worries about traffic. I just mentally switched off in these circumstances; the journey became automatic, I was listening to music inside my head, and often arrived at the office with no clear memory of the journey just made.

It was 1979 before my first eye op, which was designed to deal with the complications and brought no immediate improvement, but if all went well, the cataract could then be removed from this eye, which by now had lost all useful vision. All went to plan and the cataract op was set for the new year. With my usual

optimism and impatience to catch up, I signed on for an Open University course on modern art. However, expectations were dashed as the op was then postponed until May.

It became a challenge to make a start on the course; all my energies became focussed on coping, somehow or other; I found myself so busy I didn't have time to get broody. The course became a great morale booster and help in facing up to things. And after the removal of the cataract from my right eye, and the gradual readjustment to an altered vision, the world seemed a wonderful place indeed.

I was limited to Cyclopic vision—while I had some useful vision in my left eye, it had to be blanked out, as it was not now compatible with the right. I found I had virtually to learn to see again, adapt to changed conditions; coping with print, judging distances; I could have done with a Cataracts Anonymous rehabilitation course. ■

The Problems

9 November 1976

I get so involved in my own activities that I lose track of the passing of time, and only surface sporadically to keep in touch with people. Partly this obsession to concentrate on doing the things that have been neglected in past years, is triggered off by the knowledge that my time left in which to do them is strictly limited. I still "waste" time I suppose, but I make progress, too, and can see some concrete results for my efforts.

It seems a long time since the depressions of last year: apart from the work-stress situation, I suppose some of the trouble was a resentment at the realisation that my sight was deteriorating and that I was losing the ability to do so many things that I'd just taken for granted. I'm so visually oriented that it just seemed about the worst thing that could have happened to me.

Of course, it isn't, and though I tend to count the seconds I spend away from what I want to do, in a sense I am fatalistic and accept the situation and am determined to keep on exploring my visual preoccupations as long as I am able.

I don't get anything like the amount of reading done that I used to. I have difficulty in reading newspapers unless the light is very good—which means I never get chance to catch up with the papers while I'm commuting on the train.

I tend to hawk around an anglepoise lamp when I'm at home so that I have enough illumination to read; one of these days, I can see myself walking around with a miner's lamp on my forehead in the effort to unscramble the faint xeroxed copies that seem an indispensable part of meetings at work.

I've given up going to the film society because it became impossible to read the subtitles on foreign films: I'd be working hard deciphering them only to have them snatched away before I was halfway through, and making myself unpopular with incessant mutterings of "What did it say? What did it say?". . . I have occasional

trouble focussing on the TV screen and have to sit nearer than most, but the same complications arise with subtitles.

1978 February
From a letter to David Scott Blackball, In Touch, BBC Radio

I am a graphic designer by profession but the effects of cataract during the past few years have made it increasingly difficult to work normally. Since the deterioration in eyesight has been gradual, I have been able to accomodate myself to the change to some degree, but seem now to have reached the stage where it is impossible to deal with detail work. I must be one of many people in this position . Can you put me in touch with someone, or some organisation, who might have helpful information on the problems arising from cataract?

1978, March
From a letter to Anne Theakstone, In Touch, BBC Radio

I have been to see a specialist about the cataract and am due to go for a further visit in July, when I will raise the matter of low vision aids. As I mentioned earlier, the deterioration in vision has been so gradual that I have had time to adapt to the situation in many ways. My real problems are just starting I suppose, since while my right eye has lost all useful vision for some time, I now find that my 'working' left eye is also affected.

I find myself very dependent upon light levels and directed illumination when working, with problems from glare and awkward reflections. Conventional working methods have to be modified: it is no longer possible, for example, to lightly sketch in a design as a guide to finished work. I can no longer distinguish such details.

Instead I draw an initial sketch in black ink on detail paper, then use a light-box instead of a drawing table, so that I can see the sketch relatively clearly through the paper on which the 'finished' work is drawn. It is far less strain to work in this way, with the light coming through the paper. I realise such tricks are a temporary measure, but at least they enable me to turn out a fair quota of work.

I have reading problems too (I'm short-sighted) and have not yet found a satisfactory magnifier... The closed-circuit TV sounds as though it could solve many problems for some time to come, but I'd have to sell my record collection (or some other family heirloom) to meet the prices quoted!

Just at the moment, I have a feeling that time's running out on me so far as doing the things I enjoy—drawing and painting—and there's a slight irony in the fact that I recently interested a publisher [Dover Books of New York] in several books on design, essentially concerned with perception and perceptual problems.

Reading becomes an increasingly tortuous process, a continual struggle to retain the place, to retain sense and continuity. As the mists obscure all but a few

letters at a time, I find myself slipping back in search of a lost word. Printed type gets greyer, merges with the grey page... It's no longer possible to skim over a page to get the sense. There's no pleasure in it. ■

The First Operation

August 1979

Saw the eye specialist on July 8 and he wants to operate on my right eye this coming November—the time depends on the waiting list. This initial op will be a cryopexy, to stabilise the retina and minimise the risk of detachments. Hopefully, the cataract on this eye will then be removed in the New Year.

I shan't be sorry (so long as the op is successful!) since it becomes more difficult to read and see detail with my "good" eye. I had a succession of ideas for paintings recently but it's frustrating trying to put them on canvas. I took advantage of the bright sunlight a week or two back and tried to work in the garden. I drew up one canvas fairly successfully despite some confusion between my guide markings and some elusive marks that proved to be a perambulating greenfly... Then I had to give up when the light went.

I'm seeking consolation in tackling photography more seriously than I have in the past. I know that'll sound daft in view of the difficulties I've just mentioned, but I should explain that I'm using a 35mm camera which has interchangeable view-finders: I am able to use a "waist-level" view-finder which gives a large clear image (I can see this bright image better than I can see the actual scene!) and also has a magnifier to check the focus. All in all, being able to take good photographs helps me to feel less frustrated over my deteriorating vision.

November 4th :

Won ticket to Dave Brubeck concert in *Radio Manchester* contest

November 5th :

Saw Dave Brubeck @ Tameside Theatre, Ashton

Monday November 26th :

To Stepping Hill for preliminary eye operation

Tuesday November 27th :

Cryopexy on right eye

Friday November 30th :

Back home again

3 December 1979

I got home from hospital this weekend... I suppose I should start off with a reassuring bulletin to say that the op appears to have done all it set out to do. I don't get any immediate visual benefit—essentially it's a preventative step to minimise possible complications when I have the cataract op in the New Year.

My sense of the flow of time has been disrupted by the op and I still haven't found my way back to reality. I distinctly remember last Tuesday morning because I had to don a drafty backless operating gown (not really my style!) and when I was rolled over for a jab the nurses wanted to know which exotic beach had produced my all-the-way-down tan and wouldn't believe my story of holidays at home.

Thereafter things were a trifle confused. I rode a swaying trolley along miles of drafty corridors, went for a brief spin along the A6, seemed to pull up in an underground trolley park (somewhere in the vicinity of Merseyway), hung about until traffic jams eased, then I was given another jab, but not in the same place...

The next thing I was aware of was being back in the ward on Wednesday morning. My eye was bunged up for a couple of days and I went for a shave on Friday after the pad was removed and I could wear my glasses. I must admit I was scared stiff by the villainous face reflected in the mirror—and that was after the swelling had gone down.

DIARY NOTES for 1980 plus extracts from letters

25 January 1980

Cataract operation on right eye postponed.

8 February 1980

OU Modern Art course starts

Bank Holiday Monday May 5th :

Into hospital for cataract op on right eye. Everywhere was deserted that morning—the roads were empty with not a soul. I had a strong conviction it was the end of the world with me the only survivor ...

Tuesday May 6th :

Had op.

Wednesday May 7th :

Pad removed from eye, but only saw pink opacity, not even light and shade: apparently some blood to be cleared.

Thursday May 8th :

Still no vision, but mist is grey-white.

Friday May 9th :

While wiping eye realised that I had glimpses of handkerchief through a thin rim of peripheral vision; central area still opaqued. But as the day progressed, light & shadow, with some colour, emerged in the central patch.

Monday May 12th :

Increasingly aware of shapes and colour and patchy detail as vision clears. The windows at the rear of the ward seem relatively smaller than image in good (left) eye. During Mr Gupta's final examination, could see the group of doctors relatively clearly for a brief period. Saw TV images as if through fluted glass, but occasionally sharp.

Tuesday May 13th :

After cleaning eye, was aware of a Cezannish 'facetted' world. On occasions, the images seems sharper (without glasses) than through left eye.

14 May 1980

My handwriting's a bit erratic for sustained letter writing at the moment, so I've fixed up an extension cable and dragged the electric typewriter out into the garden. If this note is shorter than I intend it to be, I'll have been short-circuited. Or worse.

The op went very smoothly. Going into hospital on Bank Holiday Monday was a trifle disconcerting at first—everywhere seemed so *quiet*: no people about, hardly any traffic on the roads, it almost seemed the end of the world had been the day before. But it was business as usual at the hospital, and there I was, back in the same ward, being greeted by familiar faces and settled in in no time at all. Even managed to see the snooker championship finals later in the day (there's not usually much competition for TV viewing in the Eye Ward rest room).

Having got that momentous matter resolved, I settled down for the night, deciding that hospital mattresses hadn't got any softer in my absence. The 'NIL THROUGH MOUTH' sign appeared over my bed, which is hospitalese for saying that you get nowt to eat or drink until after the operation.

Life in hospital is one long round of stuff being delivered on trolleys. There's a basic pattern to it but I've never found the energy to sort out what it is. You're laying back, peacefully dreaming of home comforts, and there's the distant clatter of an approaching trolley.

You have several minutes to speculate on what it is arriving this time: tea, pills & potions, meals-on-wheels, drops & eye maintenance, sweets, newspapers, someone being wheeled away for an operation, someone being wheeled back, or someone trundling a trolley just for the hell of it...

The first drinks trolley usually rattles in about 5.30 am, a time when I'm sufficiently conscious to register its arrival but hardly awake enough to respond gratefully. Amazingly, most of the staff remembered that I swill black coffee for

preference—good memories these girls:

I had my operation on the Tuesday morning. I played a very passive part in the whole thing again though this time I had a local instead of a general anaesthetic. There was taped music playing when I was delivered to the operating room though I was uncertain whether it was for the benefit of the staff or to soothe the patient.

I was too busy marvelling at hearing Mozart at a time like this to fully register all the explanations I was given about procedure as a hood was placed over my head, and my head cradled so that I was vaguely gazing up at the overhead lights.

While things proceeded and looming faces masked the lights and medical small-talk wafted by unheeded, I was more aware of the outside world through the touch of a warm hand that held mine reassuringly all the time I was on the table. In retrospect that contact seemed the most important part of the whole business...

And back in the ward, it was back to welcome drinks, a meal, and a comparing of notes with adjacent patients... and a slightly restless, endless hot night. We were all aware of the operation next morning, complaining of prickles and irritation as lashless eyelids had gummed up during the night. But the time came for pads to be removed and cleaning up to be done, endless drops to be dropped, and some folks reported that they could see the nurses, and cheered the rest of us who couldn't.

It was a day of miracles. There was an old feller in the next bed who'd been blind for a couple of years before he came in, and he was able to see fairly clearly immediately after his operation. On our first day I'd been guiding him round, and unwrapping those tightly packaged portions of butter, cheese, and marmalade that cause problems when your vision is deficient. He finished up helping me round when I had to wear a pad for a while, which meant I couldn't use my specs.

We spent the next few days gazing forlornly out at all the sunshine and hoping it wouldn't disappear before we were discharged.

I started to get some vision back at the weekend. I was wiping a tear away and realised that I could see the handkerchief on my cheek in some detail. I couldn't see my hand properly when I held it before my face, but I could distinguish my thumb when I waggled it. From then on the whole eye gradually cleared up and, intermittently, I became aware of shapes and colour, and increasing detail. Still a long way to go—the specialist says it'll be two or three weeks before my eye has settled down again. But it's all very miraculous, and during the past few years I've learned to cultivate patience.

My immediate plans are to catch up with all the sunbathing I've been missing. If you hear reports of Arab terrorists seen lurking in the shadows in Romiley, pay no heed. It'll just be me, sporting an evil-looking pair of National Health "Foster-Grants" ...

It was a lovely June that year: warm, sunny, with a brightness my newly-restored sight found almost intolerable. For a while I was still dependent on my fading left eye to get around, and to see any detail, but eventually when my right eye had

healed I had an examination and was told that everything was progressing favourably, and I was given temporary specs that 'blanked out' my left eye and gave my new vision chance to work.

It was marvellous. I wake up each morning and anxiously test my eye to reassure myself that the new vision has not just been a dream: every morning is another miracle, to be celebrated for the rest of the day.

Comparing the vision in each eye, I now realise how long I've been living on memories, with an efficient brain making mental corrections to counter the gradually thickening veil over my sight.

I'd forgotten just how bright and clean and washed with light the world is, even on the dullest, miserable day.., how bright and intense colour can ..... the subtle colours that lurk in shadows... I had, literally, to learn to see again.

The removal of the lens from my left eye means that images of the outside world are not focussed, are blurred. But as I'm short-sighted, without glasses everything has always been blurred for me, as long as I can remember. So I'm no worse off in that respect. The temporary problem is that the size of the retinal image in each eye differs: my right eye sees a LARGER image than does my left, so the two images don't fuse as they should normally.

So I'm restricted to monocular vision, using one eye only; this makes it difficult to judge distances. . . I tend to reach out for things and not quite making it, or people hand me things and let go before I've decided I've got them.

The new lens in my specs is now convex where before it was concave. The world appears slightly magnified, so that eveything seems nearer than it used to, and I'm relearning distance estimates. This can be disturbing at close hand—when I look down my feet seem inordinately large and my legs shorter. Lifting my glasses means things are stretched out to more 'normal' proportions. (With time, I become more used to the view through my glasses; without them my feet seem so far off, I feel dizzy!)

Initial problems are that the new specs seem to distort the world—the sides of doorways appear to bulge in a confining way so that I edged myself delicately through the apparent narrow gap in the middle. And after a long time compensating for a virtually blind eye and making due allowance for obstacles on that side, it's disconcerting to find that situation suddenly reversed.

However these problems are short-lived: the brain monitors and interprets received perceptions and learns, so that doorposts eventually register as vertical. Though the magnification of the new lens partially reduces the accustomed field of vision and it requires more head movement to make full use of peripheral vision.

It took longer to learn to cope with stairs and steps, with kerbs and low walls. Steps seem unaccountably to finish before you've descended; going up you can stumble over an 'extra' last step. Your foot meets the kerb before you've lifted it. But again, it's all a matter of practice makes perfect, and it's eventually sorted for you mentally.

I still have problems when I'm hemmed in by a crowd or packed in a lift; I get disorientated. The best way to stifle annoyance/indignation at the occasional collision is to get in first with: "I'm blind in one eye: what's your excuse?"

There are all sorts of minor snags to regained sight—but I'm not grumbling, just trying to explain. I'm grateful for all I'm now able to do!

> I have little patience with people who used to complain that I passed them without acknowledgement—it amazes me that this continues to upset some people even when you've explained that it's enough of a problem seeing where you're going, without scanning the face of every passer by. There was a time when I smiled at everyone just in case I should have known them—but that can get you into trouble, too!

Reading had become a struggle to make the most of available light; it had degenerated into a skimming over the page, a continual struggle to retain the place, going in search of words missed and lost in a desperate effort to retain sense and continuity. It is only now—post-op—rereading some of the texts I have struggled over in the recent past, that I realise how much I inevitably missed. My reading now has regained its fluidity, speed and instant comprehension of an argument, a quicker understanding of a text, where I had got used to stumbling on a few words at a time, losing track of the overall sense.

I'm surprised there isn't a Cataracts Anonymous rehabilitation course. It can be hard work adjusting. It's at times like this that I realise what a marvellously delicate organism the human eye really is, and how much we just take it for granted until something goes wrong. ■

First Progress Reports

DIARY NOTES for 1980 plus extracts from letters

Friday May 16th :

I discovered years ago that each eye registered a distinct colour cast—a white surface seen through the left eye had a warmer, pinkish tinge compared with my right eye, which registered the same white surface as a clean, clinical bluish-white. At night, looking through the bedroom window at the sodium-vapour street lights, my left eye registered a warm overall orange cast—my right a cooler light.

This morning, sat at my desk, against the window with a strip of sunlight catching the papers and piled books, when I close my right eye, the illuminated areas have a warmth, a sensation of essential yellowness as its basis. Closing the left eye and viewing the scene with the fresh vision of the right, the old contrast has asserted itself and the illuminated areas appear white, an intense white with no

local colour hidden in it.

My left eye registers the sky as blue toned with a warm grey—my right as a pure, intense blue : the trees, yellowy green to my left eye, are a green to my right, a 'green' green that does not have any excess of yellow to it.

Thursday May 22nd :

Went for check up: with test lens, can read down to bottom of chart! Have to return in 3 weeks time, when eye has healed and settled down, for a further check, and prescription for lens.

Tuesday May 27th :

Got sick note for 4 weeks from doctor : see him in a fortnight, after visit to Mr. Gupta.

Wednesday May 28th :

I've "seen" my OU notebook as bright red—which is how it looks to my new eye, but when I look at it with my left eye, I realise that what I've been seeing is actually a dirty brown which must have been colour corrected by my internal image enhancer to what I knew it to be.

Wednesday June 4th :

Trip to London—visit to Dali Exhibition. London's hottest day...

Thursday June 5th :

Broadcast of Philip's story *The Coventry Box*, Radio 4, 4.45pm. Letter from Diego Uribe, Buenos Aires, resuming contact.

9 June 1980

I've just had a cataract removed from my right eye, and in the period between the operation and having new spectacles prescribed I've discovered an unexpected 'spin-off' benefit.

The frequency of my visits to art galleries in recent years has declined as my eyesight has deteriorated because of cataract. I still have some useful vision in my left eye, but as it gradually misted over I found the general light level increasingly critical to my seeing or not seeing. Unfortunately current art conservation methods tend toward reducing gallery lighting levels to protect the pigments in precious paintings from fading, a practice that worked against me.

I suppose I really gave up the struggle early in 1978, after a particularly frustrating visit to the *Dada & Surrealism Reviewed* exhibition at London's Hayward Gallery. For my eyes, the lighting left much to be desired: I was unable to decipher the catalogue text, and the use of ceiling spotlights cast shadows in unwanted places, often on to the pictures themselves, as well as creating pools of

darkness that made it impossible to read the descriptive cards mounted alongside the paintings.

There were several displays of drawings and documents mounted behind glass about waist-height, at a 45 degree angle. The convenience of this arrangement was negated by the overhead spotlights; when I leaned over to look my head cast an impenetrable shadow... And there was one of these units that proved unexpectedly to be protected by a *vertical* sheet of glass, a fact I did not realise until I tried to bend over the exhibits for a close look—with a painful contact.

Logically, I suppose a gallery curator does not expect to have to cater for the partially sighted. I took the hint, accepted the inevitable, and gave up. Though there is one exception to the encroaching gloom in major galleries—the National Gallery still has light airy rooms and a visit still holds rewards.

So much for the preamble: now for the 'spin-off' benefit I mentioned.

I occasionally use a large rectangular magnifying glass to read small print or to resolve some detail that eludes normal viewing. By a happy accident while revelling in my newly restored vision I found that on looking through the glass with my right eye, a picture on the wall, some six feet away, appeared in clear larger-than-life detail, and right way up. This chance vision was so exciting that I walked round examining all my paintings through the glass, seeing details that had been obscured for years.

The obvious place to exercise this newly-found vision was the National Gallery. My immediate call was to the room dominated by a painting I have long admired: Uccello's *Rout of San Romano*, a bold colourful Renaissance work by one of the pioneer painters of perspective. This large work occupies most of one wall and faces a conveniently-placed row of chairs from which it may be viewed in comfort.

I sat down and whipped out my magnifying glass, closed my left eye, and got things into focus. It was so marvellous a sight that I wished the surgeon and all the staff who made the miracle of my restored vision possible could have been there to share the intense pleasure—the whole wonderful picture floated before me and how long I spent there, luxuriating in all the never-before-seen detail, I don't know. I just lost myself in the experience.

When I relaxed and returned to normal, donning my ordinary glasses (and the use of my fading left eye), I realised that the attendant had left his seat at the room entrance and was regarding me quizzically from one side of the room. He seemed convinced I was doing some unorthodox forbidden photography, and still looked baffled despite my explanations...

After that, there was no holding back. Next stop was the Hayward Gallery, where I was able to sit in the centre of most rooms and survey the large canvases on the walls through my glass in pleasing detail. Though there was one hazard here: they are in the habit of displaying sculptures on the floor, relying on people with normal vision to take due avoiding action. Obviously, they had not allowed for idiots like me wandering around, with one eye screwed shut and the other peering out at the world through a large magnifying glass...

I finished up the day at the Salvador Dali exhibition at the Tate Gallery. If you hear any reports of a quaint surrealist character seen wandering around squinting at the exhibits through a magnifying glass while tripping over the shin-high rope barriers round the more valuable exhibits, you'll know who it was.

Me.

Wednesday June 11th :

Immediately after the operation, when the eye had begun to heal and the mists cleared, it seemed miraculous that I could see again ... Things were still blurred in the centre of vision, but for the next few days, I kept holding my hand in front of my face to see if I could count my finger ... and eventually did.

Over the past couple of weeks, things have improved steadily, and from an astigmatic, facetted view (late Cezanne style), I've reached a slightly blurred, multiple-image clarity. The thing that really takes my breath away is how light and bright everything is, how intense and glowing colours are. I'd forgotten after the years of accommodating to the increasing gloom. Now that I can compare the vision in both eyes, I realise how much light & colour the cataract in my left eye cuts off.

Thursday June 12th :

Visit to Mr Gupta: given prescription for reading & distance lenses for my left eye: now have a 'balancer' over other (right) eye to obscure my fading vision and to stop discrepant images fighting.

Monday June 23rd :

Got new specs: Can now see to read—despite slight problems—in bad light even... But there are problems : there should be a training course.

Wednesday June 25th :

Steve Draper [Dover Books] wrote to say he's got a job in San Diego and is returning to US in October; will call Aug/Sep to discuss book.

25 June 1980

Another milestone has been passed and I'm now fitted out with new specs so I can get the benefit of New Vision. The specialist warned me that I might find some

difficulty in judging distances when first I wore them: he was dead right:

All the information my brain has been storing up for the past sixty years is now suddenly at variance with the visual data coming in from the New Vision. I reach out for the sauce bottle and find my extra-large hand closes on the space immediately in front of the bottle. I walk through doorways and the doorposts lag unpredictably and buffet me when I think I'm through. I go upstairs and my foot anticipates the first step but doesn't quite make it; I go downstairs and unaccountably an extra step materialises at the bottom.

But I'm persevering...

There are lots of advantages: outside, the light and clarity of vision is overwhelming after the years of clouded vision as cataracts got worse. It's only now that I realise what a lot I've been missing—even on a dull day everywhere looks sunny now. I hope that feeling doesn't wear off!

When the rain stops, I nip out for trial runs up & down the avenue. Well, perhaps not so much runs as 'tentative ambles'. By dint of will-power I'm attempting to slow down my usual walking pace so that I can negotiate kerbs, puddles, holes and protruding paving stones without disaster, and cut down the number of lamp standards, posts and other obstructions I tend to barge into. (When I venture into the big city, I might fall back on my old specs and dimming eye & associated reflexes to cope with it all, until I've gained a little more confidence with the New Vision:).

I was disappointed wi.th results when first I tried to read: I was more aware of all the defects of my eye which seemed to distort a page of type until it was a struggle to settle on a particular line and follow it through. But my fading vision has given me so many 'bad habits'—like holding notes 3" away from my eye to make them legible—that I've a whole process of re-learning to do.

Today, I seem to have made fairly rapid progress: I've hit on the right distances at which I can focus, and am gradually training myself to see what I want to see—the type—rather than be aware of the eye imperfections. My reading speed has shot up prodigiously and I'm no longer dependent on the level of illumination: I can once again see print with clarity in dull light and artificial light. Marvellous. When I've mastered my reading, I'll attempt to do some drawing ... the crucial test.

I have not quite coordinated my handwriting—it still finishes up with an exaggerated italic slope and has a tendency to drift high right. Practice, practice... That's why this is being typed. Although initially I had problems in hitting the keys squarely; my fingers finished up in the spaces between the keys, though I adjusted fairly rapidly.

Saturday September 13th :

Completed outline drawing for 30" x 30" canvas 'Adventure Playground'

Monday October 6th :

Went to lunchtime talk by Jane Farrington at Wyndham Lewis retrospective at City Gallery.

Saturday October 18th :

Wyndham Lewis Seminar at Central Library.

Friday November 14th :

Got permission off Jane Farrington to take photos at WL exhibition, but not allowed to use flash. ■

The Other Eye

31 December 1980

Last time I wrote I must have been full of my first operation and expectation of having a cataract op in the New Year. In the event it was delayed until the start of May. And I probably nattered about taking an Open University course on modern art (a substitute for painting!) when I had vision restored to cope with it...

The preparatory op, a cryopexy, proved satisfactory, although not intended to produce any immediate benefit so far as vision was concerned, but my position on the waiting list took longer to rise to the top than anticipated. I faced increasing problems with the continuing deterioration of sight—reading slowed to a snail's pace since print seemed to get fainter and fainter.

Visits to the library became a torture—both to see titles on the shelves and to read the texts at the level of illumination provided—and I eventually found it only possible to read at home, where I could place an anglepoise lamp directly on to the page. TV viewing became hard work rather than pleasure. I gave up going to art exhibitions as I couldn't cope with gallery light levels. Going out on dark winter nights became such an obstacle course that I just stayed at home most of the time. Life, you will gather, began to seem grey, grim and depressing.

When I signed on for the OU course, it was in the belief that the cataract op on one eye would be over before the course started. Being forced to make a start before the operation proved a personal challenge: I was determined to prove to myself I could cope and, indeed, the work focussed all my energies to that end. I found myself so busy I didn't have time to get broody. So in the event, signing on for that course proved to be the best thing I could have done to boost my morale in the circumstances.

Everyone was co-operative. I acquired a lot of study material in advance so that I was able to get off to a good start despite my restricted opportunities for study. It was difficult to write notes; often I had to let my pen 'go through the motions' and hope the result proved readable (occasionally it wasn't). To get over the difficulties in scanning notes on an A4 page, I devised a card index system to cope

with notes and references as I progressed: the cards were just the right size, compact and within my field of clear vision.

Of course, it helped studying a subject that was already familiar and for which I already had a fairly extensive library of reference books. For the essays that had to be submitted, I relied on my electric typewriter—most of the time it spelled out things as I intended and handled things in a neater way than was possible with my now decidedly wayward handwriting.

All in all, the course was a great help in preserving my interest in things visual: with the advent of spring, sunshine and late light evenings, things seemed more tolerable. But it was a relief when I was eventually summoned to the Hospital.

Monday 11 May 1981

To Stepping Hill for the cryopexy on my left eye. A sunny day: I take along a copy of Gunter Grass's Cat & Mouse to read.

Tuesday 12 May 1981

Morning operation—local anaesthetic again—took a tablet and dozed awhile before going into the theatre. It was hard on the back, lying on the trolley just waiting! The local was three injections round eye: each one rather painful but just as it seemed to become unbearable, the sensation eased off. The anaesthetist told me to swear if things got too much, but by that time the need had passed.

After the injections she put a pad over my eye and said she would have to apply pressure to "spread" the anaesthetic. Which she did! It felt like my eyeball would be permanently compacted—I began to see light blue points of light, a regular grid in the darkness. Again, just as the effect touched intolerability, she desisted, announcing that I'd he ready for the theatre in about twenty minutes. I felt as if I'd already had the operation...

Wheeled into the theatre, transferred to the operating table, looking up at the light fittings, while people bustled around... head cradled and hooded... a nurse holds my hand reassuringly.., we make small talk. I comment on the lack of music and got round to asking if it was provided for the doctors or patients; she laughs and says for both really, and while I can have music, it'll have to be Vivaldi. Vivaldi it was, and it was a delightful distraction during the procedings...

Then my face was covered by several layers of fabric leaving my eye exposed, and the lights came on with painful intensity. Mercifully heads, hands, apparatus, who-knows-what kept blocking it off. While my eye was frozen, technically, I couldn't feel anything, but there was an awareness, a feeling of manipulation, that sense of an increasing approach to the limit of toleration.., there seemed no end to the waiting, and then Mr Gupta said he was nearly finished, that it would soon be over.

I'd lost track of time, but the music tape was still playing when the lights dimmed, hood and cradle removed from my head, and I was returned to the back-

breaking trolley, then on the way back to the ward. All over.., but my eye hammered somewhat under the pad.

They were serving a meal when I was put back in bed, but I had no enthusiasm for food, I just wanted to lie there and doze...

Then drinks and another meal trolley—fortunately I'd ordered sandwiches, which presented no problems in handling. I really felt hungry after missing two meals, and tucked into an extra corned beef sandwich that was going spare—heaven! It was quite a contrast to my first operation with a general anaesthetic, when I was out for 24 hours after the op. That way I had really no idea of what the op involved (perhaps as well, first time?). But after this session, memory says it was more of an ordeal than the actual cataract op; I hope, now it's all over, that's an end. It was worth having a local, and a speedy recovery. I took some tablets for a racketing headache, but otherwise don't feel too bad as I settle down for the night, after reading most of the evening.

Friday 15 May 1981 :
Out of hospital.

Wednesday 21 October 1981 :
Saw Dr. Mather and got sick note for month.

Monday 26 October 1981 :
To Stepping Hill for second cataract operation.

Tuesday 27 October 1981 :
Had cataract operation on left eye.

Friday 30 October 1981 :
Out of hospital again. Drops: BETNESOL N cyclopentolate 1%.

26 - 30 October 1981 :
To Stepping Hill for second cataract operation

14 December 1981

Thanks for the get-well card: I don't suppose a "cornea" set of jokes has been committed to paper for quite some time...

Everything seems to have progressed well since I had a preliminary check-up on the eye a week or so ago. It was still quite an effort to prise my eye open then, but after a week indoors, away from irritations and infections, I can now open it at will. Though if I do open it, someone inevitably flicks in some drops. The problem has been to find effective distractions from a sore eye-ball and the prickle of newly-growing eye lashes on one side, and a sympathetically weeping eye on the other.

But things are settling down at long last.

After viewing the world for so long with one beady eye, it's going to take time to get both eyes working together again. I go to see the specialist again next Friday; hopefully I'll be able to be tested for new specs. So, in a few weeks time SUPERSPECS may be haunting you... watch out.

January 1982

Settling down to binocular vision. With the new glasses there are occasional problems in coping with stereoscopic images: when I get tired and.relax the effort to fuse the images from both eyes—like when watching late-night TV—I find things drift and I get double vision, as each eye operates independently. It requires a conscious effort to drag them back together again, and persistence until it happens like it used to, without conscious effort.

There are slight problems estimating traffic speeds: vehicles that seem a safe distance away hurtle close sooner than expected. I play safe and stick to crossings! Concentrating on making progress forward, it is disconcerting when you are overtaken by pedestrians approaching unseen from your restricted side vision. And difficult to make conversation with a person walking at your side who moves outside your area of vision—if they fall back you can find yourself talking to thin air...

AFTERTHOUGHTS

15th October, 1991—Memory of [first] eye operation at Stepping Hill

Reading matter: Lessing's *Shikasta*. A Tamil orderly came to check on my last occasion in hospital. "You won't believe this," I told him, "but it was in 1945, in Bangalore ..."

Loss of side vision:

When crossing at road junctions, there's the problem of having to turn my head to check behind, check in front, check to left and a quick turn to ensure the first behind check is still valid. Then forward... By this time, I feel giddy and step off the pavement hoping that any unseen motorist will spot you and act accordingly.

I followed the example of fellow crossers at first; until I learned the hard way that impulsive crossers can be dangerous models! Thereafter, I looked for a little old lady to escort me across. Or trusted lights, though motorists in a hurry are still a hazard. ■

Afterwards

My binocular vision since my eye operations occasionally presents problems. It is not quite what it used to be. I had to work hard for a time after the final operation to fuse the images from both eyes once again—my brain had slipped out of earlier

habits after the years when I was dependent on the vision of only one eye at a time. After my spell of monocular vision, binocular vision only came back with training.

When I get fatigued, even now, the images tend to drift apart and require a constant effort to superimpose them again. But when I'm watching some rubbishy programme on late-night TV, this is a convenient warning to give it up !

For the life of me, I can't fuse the red/green images of the many stereo images in Richard Gregory"s book *The Intelligent Eye*—I thought at first that I had a faulty copy and the red/green printings were displaced at too great a distance on the page for me to resolve from a comfortable distance.

Eventually, I decided it must be me – it's some quirk of post-cataract optics, focal distance complications caused by my dependence on external positive lenses to focus the images on my retinas...

But, curiously, your drawing and spectacles work for me ! ■

to Diego Uribe, January 1985

On the matter of bifocals, I can report that for 99% of the time I find the reading lens line is completely invisible, the transition from distance to reading mode occurring without a hitch. I may have mentioned that I got the bifocals after attending a Russian class at [Manchester] university, where the tutor wrote out lots of words on the blackboard, which we were supposed to copy.

I was hindered in this because I needed my long-distance specs to read the blackboard, and then change to my reading specs to write it out in my notebook. The distraction of switching specs slowed me disastrously. The tutor having reached the bottom of the board proceeded to clean off the top half, and start out on another sequence. I just couldn't keep up.

By the time I got my bifocals the Russian class had been dropped because of lack of support. That's life. However, once I'd got used to them, the bifocals more-or-less became a permanent fixture, and my reading and distance specs have just collected dust, and been kept on hand for emergencies. There didn't seem to be any need for the refinement of varifocals until I hit this "in-between" situation as an onlooker at the computer. But I guess that occasional disadvantage hardly justifies the outlay on varifocals.

It was a source of considerable amazement to me, immediately after my operations, when I was coping with temporary lenses, how eye and brain adapt and correct distortions. Initially, I had great difficulty in assessing distances because of the magnification of the simple lenses I was given; things always turned out to be further away than they seemed, and it was hell coming down stairs. And the sides of doorways curved in alarmingly, so that I felt I needed to squeeze through.

Then vision adjusted as the learning process took over, and the doors miraculously straightened out, and an outstretched hand actually made contact with an object instead of stopping some inches in front. I learned to see what I

expected to see, again. Mind you, If I lift up my glasses and look floorwards, my feet now seem such a long way off, I feel quite giddy! The rooms in the house seem smaller, and I can only get a sense of the true perspective (though blurred!) when I remove my specs.

About the only time I return to reading specs these days, is if I'm doing a big drawing and an all-over field of clear vision saves me wagging my head about unduly. Otherwise, I wear the bifocals all day. (I don't need them at night as my vision in dreams ins 20/20: don't recall ever wearing specs in my dreams). ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, end of June 1997

On this matter of moving your head around to help with reading, I suppose I do it automatically when wearing the bifocals, to adjust different situations. I become more aware of it when, for example, I'm reading [from] the copyboard on the left of the monitor, and keep glancing over periodically to the screen to check on my keyboarding. At such times, I become aware of the restricted field of the "reading window" on the bifocals, and hurriedly change to reading specs, to cut down on unnecessary movement and make life easier...

With either specs I can accommodate a line length of text without any noticeable head movement, though if I try to use my left eye solo, I am hindered by a central blind spot (which just about covers an individual letter) as my eye travels along the line. Fortunately, this defect is not apparent when I use both eyes together...

My main complaint is the loss of peripheral vision after the operations. I find it difficult to walk alongside anyone; it's disconcerting when you're trying to carry on a conversation if you can't keep track of your companion's position. And when I need to cross the road, I have to look squarely in each direction, and then do a quick last-minute check before making a dash: crossing a junction, where a glance over your shoulder as well as in both directions is essential, can get me too dizzy to start off in confidence! ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, September 1997, during Di-Mania

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Continued in Part 2

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