



HARRY TURNER: IN HIS OWN WORDS

2. EIGHTIES ONWARDS [MOSTLY]



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The Triad Optical Illusions Coloring Book (2006)
Harry Turner : An Artist In India [assembled by Philip Turner] (2009)
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the cover pix show H.T. with *Unicursal Life-Line*, at work in the garden of 12 Carlton Avenue and in India, pretending that the C.O.'s car is his



with part of the jazz record collection, August 1980

Eighties Onward

His sight restored, Harry continued to work as graphic artist after his retirement, doing paid freelance work for local newspapers and unpaid layouts for friends and societies. He worked on the *British Journal of Russian Philately* and created books for fellow members of the British Society of Russian Philately, and redesigned the publications of the Wyndham Lewis Society, having been interested in the Vorticists for many years.


An expert typographer, Harry was drawn into the world of computers, scanners and DTP in his seventies. He found that he could tackle design and layout jobs; which he had done manually in the era of *Letraset* for his societies; much more rapidly. He revelled in the convenience of being able to print proofs, make design changes easily and store projects on disk for future reference. In this new world, he became an essential ally of, and designer for, former Manchester Evening News colleague Steve Sneyd's publishing outlet, the *Hilltop Press*.

A stroke in his 85th year wiped out most of Harry's memories of his fannish years—a source of great regret—and his health declined in his final two years. We are now in an age when memories of someone like Harry Turner can endure on the World Wide Web as well as in the science fiction fanzines which continue to reproduce his work. So “gone but not forgotten” has never been more true for the likes of The Grand Old Man of British Science Fiction Fandom.



now & then

reflections on today
and yesteryear
by harry turner



Additional Art Observations:

The Fascination of Flexigation

**meanwhile,
back in
Lisa's pad...**

Lisa is saying her farewells to the Man from Gestetner and promising to think over his proposition. The exact details elude me, but I gather that in return for a few thousand quid Lisa could become the owner of a computer-controlled IBM typesetter, a combined offset printing and collating machine, and paper and ink for a year's Zimri's. (Buy now, before VAT !)

I retire to raid the wine cellar. By the time I return, dusting a bottle of Conesa Special Reserve Port, the MFG has gone. Lisa is tuning up her typewriter to the lively strains of flamenco belting out of the twin-track tape-recorder. A pile of Loc's wait to be commented on, beside a pile of paper on which we are to jot down all the witty comments that occur to us (d.v.). Lighting adjusted, chairs drawn up to the table, I uncork the bottle, pour out, and we're ready. Almost.

- Just a minute, says Lisa firmly, when are you going to explain what a hexahexathingummie is?

- A hexahexaflexagon, you mean?

- Yeah, that, she confirmed.

- Well, back in 1939 Arthur H. Stone, an English graduate student, went to Princeton University on a maths fellowship. He had to trim some American notebook sheets to fit a quarto English binder, and started folding the strips of paper he had left over. Playing about this way he made a paper polygon which had the property of changing its faces whenever it was flexed. And that's how he accidentally discovered the flexagon.

- Show me, she demands, promptly tearing strips off our valuable notepaper.

There's no way out, so I proceed to demonstrate.

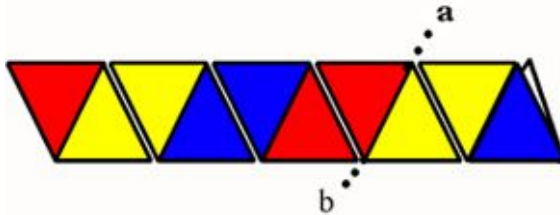
- Ideally you start off with strips about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide... that's about 4cms, I add since she always works things out metrically, and, er, a bit over 40cms long. Then you mark it off in 19 equilateral triangles, thus:



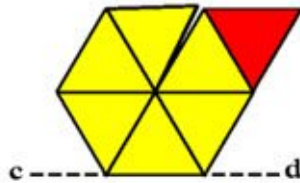
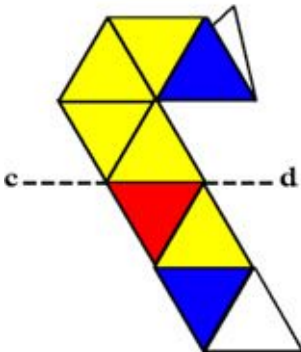
Colour the first three triangles red, yellow, and blue, and continue in the same sequence on one side of the strip, leaving the last triangle blank. You don't have to colour 'em but it makes the finished thing more decorative—you can number the triangles 1,2,3, and so on if you wish. On the other side of the strip, leave the first triangle blank and colour the rest in, say, black, green and purple in the sequence shown.



- That's a terrible colour scheme,, she interrupts.
- The choice of colours is a personal one, and not relevant to the demonstration. Right, now you fold the strip on itself so that the same colour triangles face each other inside—black on black, green on green, purple on purple.



Then you fold it this way (ab). And finally this way (cd) to form a hexagon.



Then you turn the blank triangle under and stick it over the blank triangle on the other side, so that all the triangles showing on the outside are either red or yellow.

- Ghod, that sounds dead complicated, she complains.
- It's easier to do than describe in words, as a Certain Artist would assert, I counter, and she blushes gracefully.

- Now your hexahexaflexagon is ready to flex. Pinched together two adjacent triangles, bend the paper along the line between them and push to the opposite corner. With luck, the flexagon opens up to show another colour face. By random flexing you should be able to uncover the other colour faces, but it's not always as easy as you'd expect....

Lisa's flexing the damned thing when I leave some hours later. If we get out it will be a miracle. Even if she does get around to producing it, if she tells other editors about the fascination of flexigation, I can see fanzine publishing going into decline.

I wonder if I ought to warn them of the sad tale told in Martin Gardner book *Mathematical Puzzle & Diversions* (Penguin) about the poor sod who caught his tie in the folds of a hexahexaflexagon he was flexing. With each successive flex more of his tie disappeared; at the sixth flex he was swallowed up bodily.

I must remember to scan the fan press for reports and rumour of disappearing fan editors... ■

originally published in Lisa Conesa's Zimri 4½, 1973

Triads the Hard Way

Anyway, in between snooker, I thought I'd better do some more sketches for John Owen, before he runs out of stock of my artwork (it saves me writing long locs). So I started doing some variations of the "array" sketch. It's a longwinded business drawing 'em by hand: I wish I'd got computer resources to do the hard work.

Alas, every time I feel I've got some spare cash to take the plunge, a bit of the house falls off and the builders walk off with my savings. I keep telling myself that did I but devote my energies to finishing off one of the projects and sold it then I could afford a computer and pay off repairs. Then I moan and say that I need to get a computer to finish off the project and there's another sneaky builder's bill due... One day all will be resolved: meantime, it's back to laborious hand drawing.

Just spent a frustrating half-hour trying to draw the second aspect of a shape. Triad shapes carry two viewpoints of a figure within their outline. Having drawn one viewpoint, it should be the work of minutes to redraw the shape from the other aspect. Maybe it's old age, but it never seems to work out that easy. Once you have done it, it's obvious of course...

I started this letter to clear my mind of conflicting images. Having looked at my abandoned effort I see a faulty connexion that was throwing me. 'Tis done, 'tis done. After much effort. All should be routine from now on.

Hell, it's time for more snooker... ■

to Steve Sneyd, 22 April 1992

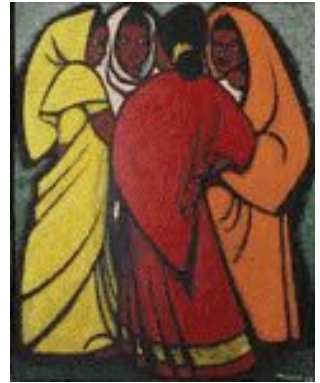
Art On Show

The gossiping Indian women were supplanted by more austere abstractions in the 60s: they now languish with with a collection of other canvases under a dust sheet in a corner of the studio.

The item illustrated (*Unit Structure*, below) has held pride of place in the front room this last 20 years or so (I refer to the painting, of course), having survived several rearrangements and decorating schemes.

The structures housing the record library have tended to expand up the other walls and reduced the number of works on display.

During the 70s I began to paint larger canvases—like 60" x30" upright—which made it difficult to display them on the walls in our cluttered environment.



Indian Women, 1946

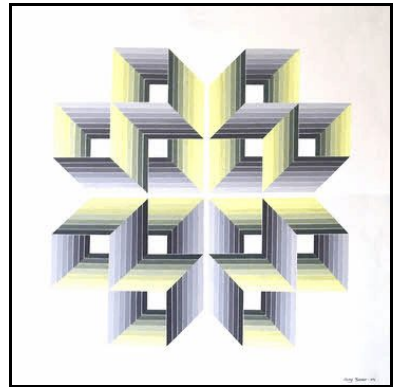
to Fran & Brian Varley, 22 September 1994

What is Art? asks jesting Brian

Art is what you say it is, I rejoin, provided you can persuade and influence a large and faithful audience to believe you. That's as good a working definition as I can give you. Seek not enlightenment and precision from dictionaries. That merely reveals a pathetic belief that words can explain everything, Whereas dictionaries merely trigger a cyclic repetitive tautological process, like art(art) that which is produced by artists / artist (ar-tist) one who produces art. Which doesn't get us very far.

Art is one of those constantly changing subjects and despite having been involved with aspects of art for most of my life there are now times when I feel I lag behind the current consensus (and it doesn't greatly worry me). Like I have not the slightest desire to get out of my studio to travel to the Big City just to see a not-very-well-preserved shark a la Damien Hirst. And I get very bored after looking at most 'installations' for more than three minutes or so.

Just as I never understood why the likes of Ad Reinhardt in the late 50s is acclaimed for 'white-on-white' and 'black-on-black' canvases when it had been done before by Malevich before the first world war, and was in the art history



Unit Structure, 1969

books. And all the people who try to shock the establishment of the day by repeating the tactics of the prime disrupter of the academic approach, Marcel Duchamp, But s'nuff; this is liable to start us on an unending discussion on 'originality'...

Making Pretty Patterns . . .

The 'Harmonograph' provided solid entertainment when the junior Turners invaded us at Easter weekend. My paper stocks are nearly depleted. Was amused at the hypnotic effect on the kids as the two pendulums inexorably guided the pen in ever-decreasing interactions; a very calming influence.

They made up for it trying out a new motor-racing game on the computer later. This is accompanied by sound-effects as you accelerate and slow, or come into contact with other cars or the barriers, as you try to negotiate the curves.

Michael came out of a spin and started going backwards along the track, enabling him to crash into all the wrecks he'd left along the track on his previous laps. Indeed, the rules were subverted in the effort to provoke as many crashes as possible; the repair bill must have been horrific at the end of the race, but the programme cast no light on that aspect. Nonetheless, a good time was had by all, and we had a job forcing them into their car to go home.

I hope they weren't encouraging dad to drive as they did!

Apart from the soothing aspect of watching the pen tracing out a gradual and complex figure, it is rewarding in the later stages to see the transformation of shape that the subtle decaying pendulum motion builds up. You have a limited control over the type of figure created—the position of the weights on the arms largely determines this, while the point at which you start drawing produces considerable variation in the result.

A more determined effort working with a graduated scale to fix weight positions, and to position the drawing arm, would give greater control but I lack the patience to be so systematic. I'm surprised I've not seen a computer prog on producing these shapes; happen it would lose some of the present unpredictability that the mechanical process has, and not have the same interest . . .

These 'harmonic oscillations' lie in that hinterland between art and science that has intrigued me for the past quarter-century or so. Indeed, working in this area has inured me to most of the attitudinising that has bedevilled the art world generally. There was a time when the art world tended to view pattern as outside the province of the serious artist, when it was looked down on as mere decoration. My ideas on that changed radically when I investigated the complexities of geometric Islamic art once I got involved with triads.

Fortunately the World of Islam Festival in the mid-70s produced a spate of books on the geometry behind Islamic pattern just when my mind was wide open

on the subject, and led me to investigate the mathematics involved, which touched on aspects of several sciences from crystallography to molecular structures. So that's another small part of deciding what art's all about.

Just noticed that the Harmonograph ("The 20th Century Drawing Machine for All Ages") was exhibited by the inventor, Ivan Moscovich, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts London. Information on lid of box. Also just noticed that I have fitted up my frame with the pen arm and drawing board transposed left to right according to the pic on box... Must change them round and see if it has any noticeable results on the finished curves.

(Do they have left- and right-handed models I wonder, idly). Theoretically not, I s'pose, tho' the changing point of making a start might be affected by changed muscular tensions prior to release of the pen. Hmmm.

The results do seem subtly different since I changed over the pendulums on the Harmonograph. Probably its just me adapting to the change. Will let you know when I've seen any assessable results.

to Fran & Brian Varley, 6th April 1994

More Art

Bridget Riley is getting loads of advance publicity for her Tate retrospective—quite a pile of cuttings building up in the file for later sifting, Good to see a real artist holding her own against some of the grotty manifestations of Britart that grab the media's attention these days. Begin to feel a solid urge (at last!) to catch up with a few canvases myself, after I've got this library rehousing project completed, of course.

Am amazed, and encouraged, to find most of the tubes of acrylic paint that I invested in on my retirement are still in usable condition despite the long period of storage. Which is perhaps as well when I brood over today's prices!

to Steve Sneyd, 5th July 2003

Why do I like this picture?

We live in a literate society that accepts the power of the word. An endless babble from radio and TV floats in the air around us; the printed word fights for our attention from posters and notices, from newspapers and magazines, from books and leaflets.

It seems taken for granted that anything can be expressed in words, that words can explain everything. Our whole education system is geared to the dogma.

Compulsory education tries to ensure that all Her Majesty's subjects are literate, making periodic checks on progress through examinations, and the regular award of certificates to the proficient. To emerge illiterate in the face of this onslaught of words is to be a failure, to incur a social stigma.

The word is god.

To doubt that, to assert that there are non-verbal areas of life and living where words are inadequate or useless, is almost a heresy. So, when I resort to my claim to be an inarticulate artist, my friends smile knowingly and into their eyes comes that distant look which tries to hide the thought: "He's putting on that boring dumb artist act again."

When I say that I'm an inarticulate artist, I don't mean that I can't talk about art and artists and their work; I can and do, frequently. One has to be able to talk about art, particularly one's own art, in these days of accepted self-promotion in the media, informed but non-painting critics, of grants and exhibition facilities controlled by nominees at the Arts Council and other such authorities.

And most of what is said on such occasions is an astute stringing together of accepted labels and jargon, empty but resounding phrases picked up from the verbiage written on the meaning of art by people who don't produce art; words that have acquired sufficient familiarity and veneer of significance to maintain the polite fiction that two-way communication is established.

How does one verbalise a non-verbal experience? Allegory, metaphor, analogy, are literary devices that hover round the fringes of meaning, processes of thought as ultimately self-defeating as the cyclic enclosed search for the meaning of a word in the dictionary. Pictures with literary associations get by in this literate-based society: pictures that tell a story, pictures that are simple descriptions of appearances, landscapes, still-lives, portraits.

Once an artist ventures to create abstractions, non-representational work, the result is chaos for the literate but visually untrained, and there is a wail of: "But what does it mean?"

The trouble is that too many of us take our literacy for granted, forget the hard work entailed in its acquisition learning the alphabet, the rules of spelling and grammar, the many years spent mastering the language sufficiently to express ourselves.

Perhaps most of us are exhausted with the effort and do not wish to start all over again in order to master the non-verbal visual world. Because that is what needs to be done if we are to explore the visual side of things with understanding.

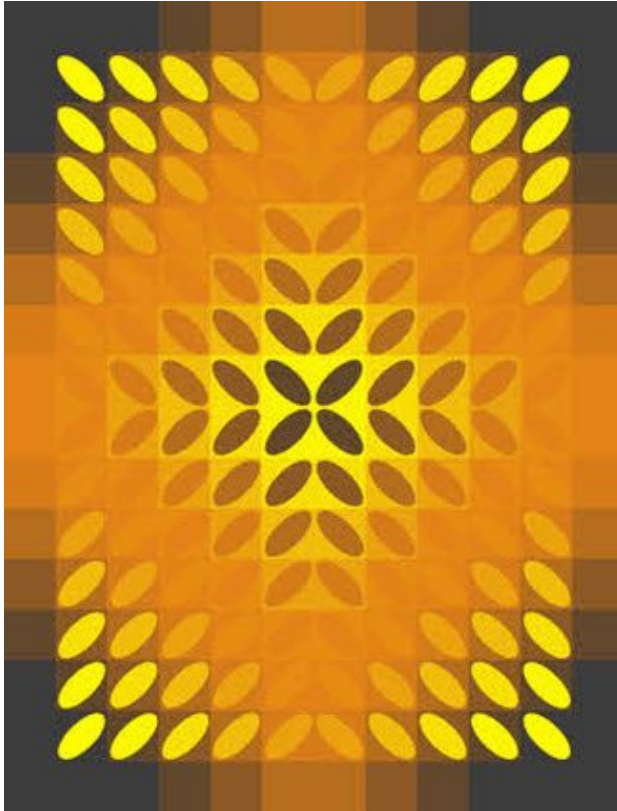
Words are of marginal help only: visual ideas can often be complex but expressed simply and directly, put over with more impact and speed than using words, rousing feelings and high emotion without a word being said.

To be able to handle colour expressively, to manipulate shapes and patterns, to establish visual relationships is something that has to be learnt, just as we learn to handle words as tools of thought. It seems a pity that our society is not concerned

with liquidating “visual illiteracy”.

I know why I like this picture. Give me a pen and a piece of paper to scribble on and I may be able make you see what attracts me to it, if it is not immediately obvious to you.

But don't expect me to explain in words... ■



Halleluja! planned as a 30" x 40" painting in 1974
realized electronically by PHT from HET's notes

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Astronomical Events

The total solar eclipse of 1973 was of near-maximum duration...

The next opportunity for such a lengthy view will be in the year 2168.

A good reason for joining the cruise organised by Transolar Travel and the British Astronomical Association to see

The ECLIPSE of the CENTURY

HARRY TURNER reminisces...

The ship is a labyrinth

**M/v MONTE UMBE, 8900 tons,
Naviera Aznar SA, Bilbao**

a multi-layered maze

A deck, main deck, promenade deck, sun deck
narrow corridors stretch endlessly
past cabin doors—numbered and named,
official, private, prohibito,
with the occasional blank face (senoras)
or mustachioed face (caballeros)—

and open at intervals on to a deck,
 (but which deck?)
lead unexpectedly to open areas
and wide stairways
curving up to the sun deck
 or, invitingly,
down to a capacious dining room.
With practice, passengers become familiar
 with the shortest route between any
 two points.
The labyrinth begins to yield some
 of its secrets.
You identify rallying points:
the information centre
the Marina and Les Robles lounges
 the swimming pools
 the cinema, Verandah bar
 Maxim's night club...

The memory stores data, computes
 guides your feet.

■ **It's Monday 25 June.** We're somewhere off the coast of Portugal, or even further south. It's 7.25 am. I woke early, and at 7am precisely heard the steward delivering tea to the cabin opposite. On our first morning we'd been roused by a violent knocking on the door at what seemed an ungodly hour, and sternly refused offers of tea then, and for the rest of the voyage. The morning light penetrates our window, a bright square moving leisurely up and down the wall opposite as the ship slowly rolls through the swell.

Odd how large the cabin seems when viewed from the bunk. On arrival it looked cramped, claustrophobic... but there's somewhere to stow all our possessions out of sight, the steward keeps it all neat and tidy, and now, peering round the corner of the wardrobe unit, there seems space enough. The vast four-compartment wardrobe, with hanging space and multiple drawers, occupies the wall opposite the door, with a bunk along the cabin walls on either side.

At the head of each bunk is a convenient recess for odds and ends, like books and specs, with the steward's bell and a switch for the bedlight. Between the wall and the door is the washbasin with an impressive array of glasses, flasks, and trays all individually clipped to the wall.

A murmur of conversation seeps through from the cabin behind us. Elsewhere something is vibrating softly. Can't be the cabin door as I folded an envelope and wedged it in position last night to stop it dancing to the insistent rhythm of the

ship's engines. Must be one of the wardrobe doors. But there is a subtle shift in the vibration that hits the resonant peak of some other part of the structure to set it dancing in its turn...

■ The ship's shop is quiet. The señora in charge speaks little English, but we do our best to communicate.

I point.

Sombrero?

I nod.

Par hombre?

I nod again then unbend and try out my limited Spanish.

Cuanto?

We establish the price as 62 pesetas, and so I acquire my *sombrero blanco par hombres*.

Marion says I look a right character in it, but it provides welcome relief to my sun-scorched forehead.

■ What colour is the sea? Well, it's not blue—it must be indigo.

Always wondered what indigo looked like, lost between blue and violet. Guess this must be it. But as we slide further into the Bay of Biscay, there is a subtle change to pure ultramarine. The sun blazes down from a clear sky. The ship cuts through the calm sea bringing a pleasant fresh breeze.

Lurking in a quiet oasis on the foredeck, between hoists and gantry, away from the regimented deckchairs, I can stretch out on a towel and soak up the ultra-violet. I don my *sombrero blanco*: very elegant. I rub myself down with oil and quietly fry.

Periodically, the surrounding chatter and pervasive rumble of the engines are punctuated by a chime of bells heralding a message over the amplifier system. Prosaic requests, instructions, pleas, exhortations in English...

"Will all passengers who have not collected passports please do so forthwith; thankyou..."

"Will Miss Somebody-or-other please report to the information desk; thankyou..."

"Mr. Mumble-mumble will be franking envelopes and postcards with the special eclipse cancellation stamp between four and four-thirty mumble mumble; thankyou..."

Then there are the messages relayed in Spanish: seductive, sheer poetry, reminiscent of those radio messages in Cocteau's film *Orphée*, fragments of surrealist poetry from another plane of existence; occasionally the firm voice of authority, brief and brutal, its eloquent syllables passing on secret instructions for the crew's ears only:

"All those assigned, report to the dining room and take up allotted

positions—when the passengers appear, shoot...”

“All stewards will creep into the passenger cabins tonight and rape and murder...”

“The ship is sinking—abandon ship and to hell with the passengers!”

But the voice of head waiter Mariano de la Huerga interrupts, inviting us to over-indulge...

“Will all passengers for the first sitting make their way to the dining room, where lunch is being served. Thank you.”

We're on second sitting. I apply another coat of soothing oil and turn over.

We join stargazers on deck that evening, just after ten o'clock, to be rewarded with a view of Skylab drifting across the heavens before disappearing into the mists. I find there's a knack to focusing binoculars on the moving point of light while compensating for the steady roll of the ship.

■ **It's Wednesday 27 June.** We are at Las Palmas. Five coachloads of enthusiasts leave the Monte Umbe early in the morning, taking the coast road through residential developments, ferro-concrete frames sprouting from areas cleared out of dusty lava rock, then past the airport, in time to see Concorde nosing its way down to the ground to prepare for its eclipse flight to Fort Lamy in Chad, Central Africa.

The dry countryside, resting between tomato crops, is spiked with teepees of canes, all dusty browns and ochres, and an occasional green patch of bananas. Eyes are battered by blatant advertising at every turn of the road—posters, signs, constructions—and even carved out of the dark dusky mountainside in white: PIGALLE DISCOTHEQUE & NIGHT CLUB. Then we are through Mas Palomas and on the way to the tracking station, an artificial grassy oasis in the parched wilderness.

This is one of the eleven ground installations, a ship and several aircraft that make up the Manned Space Flight tracking network, providing NASA with data and communications to control space flights, as well as receiving information from scientific experiments set up on the moon by the Apollo astronauts.

When we arrive, some of the staff are making adjustments to the large dish erected outside the station. The promised tour of the building proves somewhat perfunctory: they don't seem organised to deal with visitors and the Spanish technician is not happy trying to explain the functioning of the equipment in any detail. But we do the rounds, see the gear controlling the position of the main antenna and receiving data; see the computers, fed directly from the VHF radio signal antennas, and recorders taping information from satellites as well as that originated in the station, and all exchanges between Houston, Goddard, and manned spacecraft.

At the entrance gate of the station there's a small observatory and spherical-shaped building—the Solar Particle Alert Network Observatory. It gathers data

from solar flares and radiation using optical and radio telescopes, and other recording devices. We don't get in there, alas.

The tour then takes us to the centre of the island, and the aspect becomes greener and more pleasant. Some of the larger villages we pass through look relaxed and civilised after the frenetic development along the coast; houses set in extensive gardens, places in which to enjoy life at a reasonable pace, in the sunshine away from the rat-race. We pass by them all to start the long climb to Tejeda.

The driver seems to heave the bus physically round the hairpin bends. [*"Driver he is very skilled and family man"* announces our guide *"So you are safe!"*]. Fortunately there are no coaches coming down and we soon reach the top, cleared to give parking space for several coaches with the inevitable souvenir shop on the peak.

There's a marvellous aerial view of the whole island, dark shadows of clouds drifting over the landscape, with Las Palmas clearly visible to the north. And immediately below the peak is the vast crater of an extinct volcano, now eroded and under cultivation, but still impressive from this vantage point.

When we eventually arrive back at the ship it is almost dinner time, but we dash to enjoy a brief evening walk on the tiled pavements of Las Palmas. It seems very noisy, traffic zooming along at a fast lick, impatient horn blasts, the screeching of punished tyres...

Perhaps it is just the contrast after the relative peace and quiet aboard the ship. But it is good to walk on dry land again, to stroll through the city amid the bright lights, hear waves of explosive conversation from the small bars as we pass by, to do some window shopping—the only shops still open are those flogging optical and audio equipment—and wonder how it will all look in tomorrow's sunshine.

We return to the ship, enjoy a lively concert given by the folk group Pueblo Canario. Can't resist buying one of their records; hopefully it will sound evocative when played back home.

■ **Thursday 28 June.** We rise early to continue our exploration of Las Palmas since the ship sails at 1 pm. It's cloudy when we leave the harbour, the sun lurking behind the haze, but we take the cine camera and hope it will clear. We wander round the Castella de la Luz and gardens, visit the Fruit Market and marvel at the sheer variety of exotic fruits on display.

Find a post office, a modest establishment lurking behind large wooden doors, indistinguishable only by a scruffy enamelled *correos* sign above a slot in the post between the doors. [I hope the letters we optimistically cram in it are delivered!]. Inside a series of little windows with signs indicating the business transacted; a long queue outside the stamp window and a hectic discussion every time a new customer moves up and sticks his head through the window.

My request for 5-peseta stamps causes a slight delay since a new sheet has to be folded meticulously and torn into strips of five stamps, an operation carried out with great deliberation by the official, seemingly oblivious to the growing queue forming behind me. Then a further delay when he has to seek some 8-peseta stamps [obviously not in general demand as I am pleased to get some commemoratives, and only notice later that they are Christmas 1972 issues!].

We emerge into sunshine. I rush round wielding the cine camera in a frantic effort to make up for lost time, before we return to the ship.

Promptly at 1 pm the Monte Umbe departs Las Palmas. In almost no time at all, there is only an outline of buildings on the horizon, with the mountains beyond, all shimmering in the heat haze. And then nothing. Just the sea, stretching to the horizon.

And we are off to see the eclipse.

■ All around us enthusiasts are setting up and testing their equipment. On one side of the deck, Patrick Moore, a giant teddy bear in a tent-like shirt and baggy trousers, with a tiny shiny straw hat perched on his bonce, is about to launch into the umpteenth take of an interview with someone he's known for fifteen years (he keeps telling us), but alas, the person concerned persists in turning away from the camera and mike to explain his set-up. The director yells "cut" and a confab ensues, then the rigmarole starts all over again.

Patrick looms into the camera view and repeats his opening spiel after the board has clapped down on "take 19"... and it goes wrong again! Ah well, if this never makes it on to the BBC TV screen, at least I've got it on film...

■ Up on deck in the dark tropical evening groups of astronomers are star gazing. I find I am distracted by the smoke from our funnel, illuminated by navigational lights high up among the radio mast and radar gear, and realise that the string of fairy lights that blazed the whole length of the ship while we were at anchor at Las Palmas, has been extinguished in deference to the observers on the foredeck.

I hope it doesn't mean we are a navigational hazard—but with lights streaming out from all the decks below and the aft sun deck decorated with coloured lights, I guess we must be visible for miles.

I lean over the side, watch the intriguing waveforms created by our speedy progress, seething white foam-crested ever-changing patterns perpetually racing away from the bows, collapsing against the sides of the ship, vanishing into the outer darkness. Further out, occasional patches of phosphorescent foam are thrown up and race along with us, at the periphery of the light cast on to the surface.

■ Is it really a week since we set out? There has been much talk among the experts of the problems of ensuring the ship is in the right place at the right time

tomorrow (and a short prayer that there will be no morning haze to obscure the view).

An American expert, Mr Baumgartner, held forth about the phenomenon of shadow bands, laconically described the difficulties of observing them and dismissed all theories put forward to explain them. Marion found this interesting, but I had to admit that he lost me during the talk. So I adjourned and went sun-bathing. Followed by a shower, then a refreshing Campari-soda with peach juice and lots of tinkling ice. Yes, this is a lazy day, to be enjoyed before the Big Event!

■ It isn't every day that one views a total eclipse and then sails into Nouadhibou, main port of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Just one day.

Like today, Saturday 30 June 1973.

The cruise brochure promises that we are here to witness an outstanding astronomical event—an exceptionally long total solar eclipse. Not until the year 2186AD will an eclipse of similar duration occur, which is the best reason in the world for our presence here right now.

The shadow of the moon will originate near the borders of Brazil and Guyane, travel across the Atlantic Ocean and the Cape Verde Islands, pass over Mauritania and the African continent to the Indian Ocean. The maximum duration of total eclipse will be seven minutes plus.

The plan is that we sail down to a point in the centre of the 150 miles-wide shadow of the moon, and heave-to, so the ship becomes a floating observation platform.

We're two of many up before dawn, full of eager anticipation, roaming the dew-covered decks seeking a vantage point. The well-equipped groups and enthusiasts have already monopolised the fore deck, staked out claims with apparatus set up and waiting. But there's plenty of room at the rear where the view is clear of obstacles.

It seems strangely still, with no detectable engine vibration: the ship is virtually motionless, with engines merely ticking over to provide power and counter the movement of the water. We mark out our chosen observation spot, watch the sun rise, a pale disc in the haze on the horizon, then descend in search of breakfast.

In the dining room the talk centres on two topics: are we in the best position to get the maximum period of totality? and will the haze disperse or get worse and interfere with viewing? The liner *Canberra* with a party from New York was due to rendezvous with us and pass on data from weather satellites, but there has been no contact so far. Fears are expressed that she has departed elsewhere in search of clearer weather.

We return to our station, sort out filters and cameras, as the sun climbs slowly in the sky. The haze has not cleared but at least seems no worse. The deck fills

gradually with preoccupied observers making last fiddling adjustments to equipment. The minutes stretch: we wait, impatiently.

There is a stir as the time for initial contact approaches. Marion passes me a filter, through which the sun appears as a pale disc. At 9 hours 21 minutes GMT, partial phase begins: the moon takes a first nibble from the top of the solar disc, leisurely begins to eat its way down.

The disc becomes a crescent with the cusps above. As it does so we are conscious of a pervading gloom: damn, the haze must be getting thicker. The temperature drops appreciably then realisation comes that this darkness is due to the progressive elimination of the sun's rays.

The sea is calm: it's so quiet I can hear the waves lapping and slapping on the ship's side, above the faint murmur of conversation and a modulated radiophonic tune gently whistling from some nearby gear.

It all happens at a deliberate pace. We view the progress of the eclipse through filters until there is the slimmest outline of the solar disc left. Then, just as the moon completely blocks out the sun, there is a sudden silent explosion of light. The sky turns black, day becomes night: the brilliant solar corona flares around the obscuring disc of the moon, an exquisite ring of pearly radiance, a giant catherine-wheel suspended in space, its cold fiery faery writhing light bright enough for me to read the settings on the camera. We shiver as the temperature drops appreciably. I catch a glimpse of Marion, wide-eyed, staring at the spectacle in the heavens, am tempted to comment but hold my tongue in the face of that rapt gaze, am lost myself...



It lasts well over the full six minutes we'd been promised—a compliment to the navigational skills of Captain Vincente Mirallave in placing us on the right spot in that waste of ocean—as long as a lifetime and yet still not long enough. Then the rim of the sun appears above the moon, a quick sparkling of Baily's beads round the breaks in the lunar mountains, a sudden flash that heralds the end of totality, a warning that naked eye viewing is at an end.

It happens so abruptly that everyone seems surprised—the corona vanishes, the sun is shining again, we are washed with light, colour and warmth. All the pent-up emotion of the past minutes, a unique experience shared, erupts as a sudden burst of conversation. Then, an odd gesture, a spontaneous round of applause. The scientists among us relentlessly record the moon's passage to the bitter end. We linger awhile, watching through filters, still too dazed by the spectacle to talk.

■ Later that afternoon, relaxing astronomers are momentarily entertained as a small boat draws alongside and a Mauritanian pilot, with a great show of

athleticism, grabs a lowered rope ladder and climbs aboard. Then a first glimpse of Africa: the Cap Blanc promontory, outlined against a roseate dust cloud masking the horizon. As we sail into the Bay of Levrier fine sand envelopes us, sifting down shirt necks, invading hair, gritting teeth.

Majestically the Monte Umbe draws alongside an almost deserted quay, dwarfing the fishing vessels with their green crescent-and-star flags. A lone figure, tall, dark, resplendent in a flowing blue robe, hefts a video camera and gravely films the tourists busily photographing him. It seems we are the first pleasure cruiser ever to put into the workaday port of Nouadhibou, and likely to be the last. Hence the interest of Mauritanian TV in recording the event.

■ A press release by the Secretariat General à L'Artisanat et au Tourisme of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania says, in part:

"The port of Nouadhibou is suitable for all large vessels and has extensive loading and unloading facilities. However, it must be noted that continuing transport to Nouakchott, Akoujit, Atar, etc., can be effected only by air or sea, tracks being virtually non-existent... It must be considered impossible to reach any other town in Mauritania overland from Nouadhibou. A journey along the beach is particularly dangerous because of high dunes and tides."

In other words, Nouadhibou is a dead end.

■ When our expedition was first mooted, the intention was to sail to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and observe the solar eclipse from the interior. The Mauritians, when advised of these plans, politely pointed out that communications in the northern desert, over which the eclipse shadow would pass, were non-existent; that Nouadhibou, the iron-exporting port, while able to accommodate a ship the size of the Monte Umbe, was virtually isolated from the rest of the country; that day temperatures in the region exceeded 100°F during July and, worse, that sand winds from the Sahara would not only obscure observations, but gently and effectively scour and ruin all delicate optical and mechanical parts of unprotected instruments.

There was a rethink. Despite the problems, it was decided to view the eclipse out in the Atlantic. A few diehards shook their heads at the wild notion that the ship could provide a stable platform for worthwhile observations: they decided to leave the cruise at Las Palmas and fly on to Africa, where their equipment had already been transported, despite the misgivings of the Mauritanian authorities. So, fresh from a spectacularly successful view of the eclipse at sea, we're now here to pick up the returning members from this land expedition.

After a snatched meal, an enthusiastic band descend to the quay, collect at a small public post, where harassed gendarmes struggle to decipher passports and scrawl out the strange names on 24-hour passes guaranteeing "safe conduct". There's a currency exchange at the post: we'd been told that the going rate was

500 African francs to the £, but our advent coincides with a national revaluation to a new currency, and our sterling is exchanged for freshly printed and minted *ougiya*. We wander a short way in the growing dusk along a poorly lit gritty road that turns abruptly to run straight on into darkness.

The wind veers, bringing an overpowering whiff from the nearby fish-drying factory.

We turn back to the comforts of the ship. Enough is enough: we can wait to do our exploring on the morrow...

■ **It's Sunday 1 July 1973.** A hastily arranged scratch tour can only cater for a hundred or so passengers. We'd arranged with the couple in the neighbouring cabin to share a taxi, make an early start and return for lunch, then find that the tour has not only hired both available coaches, but the whole of the local taxi fleet.

Fortunately, as we set out before the main party is ready, we are able to bribe the driver of an ancient taxi to take us as far as the market, which we're told is the heart of Nouadhibou.

He belts down a long tarmac strip, swerves on to a stony track covered by drifting sand, and after some complicated manoeuvres there we are. The driver grabs his money and promptly rattles back to the quay.

The sun is still low on the horizon, but the flies are already active. People are setting out their wares at a few stalls; goats wander everywhere, their udders tied up neatly in little bags, scavenging among the waste.

A low huddle of undistinguished concrete buildings surround the market; beyond a wooden shanty-town proliferates. Isolated buildings advertise their purpose—here a restaurant, there a 'couture' complete with paintings of trousers on its walls and a sad cartoon of a European suit. Not that any of the inhabitants present wear anything that resembles a suit.

Most of the men favour flowing robes of white or light blue; there are turbanned Arabs, mouths masked against the dust; negroes in long gowns, or lengthy dark jackets buttoned down the front; the occasional worker from the harbour or mines, in slacks, shirt and obligatory hardhat. Women are in traditional Arab dress, dark, concealing, all enveloping, or else the bright patterned robes favoured by the negroes.

We wander round looking at the natives, and the natives, unspoilt by tourism, stare curiously at us. A tentative greeting of *bonjour* produces shouts of *bonjour* in reply and some friendly grins. We ask directions to the post-office—French is the get-by language—but our difficulty is in interpreting the directions offered, since the general layout of the buildings seems so capricious. The only road is the track on which we'd travelled in; the buildings seem to be dumped haphazardly in the desert on either side of this. When a willing youngster offers his services as guide, we snap him up.

Sidi, with the rest of Nouadhibou's children tagging behind at a cautious

distance, leads us unerringly through the maze, chattering happily and pointing out landmarks as we progress. A cinema, a modest Catholic church, a broken-down water wheel. We pause to look at this token of a less arid past. Sidi doesn't seem to know what it was for—he's probably never seen it working because of the worsening drought that had dogged northern Mauritania in recent years.

The post-office proves a more imposing structure than most, its walls plastered with official posters in French and Arabic, warning the locals of yesterday's eclipse and the dangers of gazing directly at the sun. Intending customers already crowd the doorway, but it seems the postmaster isn't expected for another hour.

Rather than wait, we decide to return to the awakening bazaar with our cameras. Sidi escorts us back; when we pay him for his services we have great difficulty in shaking off the rest of the entourage.

We find business in full swing, people doing their daily shopping, sorting the goods, haggling. Dust settles on garments, bright bolts of cloth, sandals, heaps of fruit and vegetables, cooked foods aswarm with flies despite flailing hands. The insects are everywhere, crawling unheeded on the faces of the children, crowding the eyes of bleating goats.

Muslim women in black robes shout curses, throw handfuls of dust when a camera points in their direction. A slim girl with a baby on her back offers to pose for us, *vous donnez un cadeau?* We gladly give her a few coins. When others cotton on, start lining up for a group photograph we beat a hasty retreat back to the post-office. The waiting crowd has grown meantime, restless at the non-appearance of the postmaster. Most want to get money changed because of the currency revaluation; if we only want stamps we're told, there's another post-office further along the highway—take a taxi, we are told.

We know there's not much hope of doing that today. But how far, we insist. Oh, about 30 kilometres only... It seems a lot of effort for a few stamps and we abandon plans to send postcards home from sunny Nouadhibou.

In the bazaar, rumours of an influx of tourists have attracted a wave of traders from the surrounding desert, bearing trays of bead ornaments and silver jewelry thin as tissue paper, big round toffee tins with silver and gold trinkets packed in cottonwool, or lugging canvas hold-alls bulging with ethnic wood carvings.

Every visitor from the ship is under siege. Show the faintest interest in these wares and you are immediately involved in the bargaining ritual: a complicated procedure, with delighted bystanders freely joining in, all in several languages, translating, commenting, advising, warning, as you juggle with four different currencies—African francs, pesetas, pence and the brand-new *ougiya*.

Only the arrival of a more promising customer can rescue you from the impasse that often results. Despite lapses into complete confusion I do acquire some carvings. But it is hot, noisy, smelly and the flies too aggressive.

We wilt... Miraculously a stray taxi trundles up the road, rescues and returns us to the harbour and the peace of our cabin.

■ We sail from Nouadhibou late that afternoon, simmering in the heat, fine Saharan sand clinging to sweaty skin, pursued by militant flies and the persistent reek of drying fish. Then welcome sea breezes cool things down, disperse the insects, freshen the air and make life bearable again. And we are off to Tenerife. ■



MV Monte Umbe

From Tom Sadler's The Reluctant Famulus #48, Spring 1997

In the Sky – Fact & Fiction

Tuesday night brings hope of viewing the comet-the cloud layer is breaking up and a few stars are making the most of the event. Will it hold out I ask myself as I tramp between the houses...

Yeah, I had a passing glimpse of an off-duty Commander Riker hamming it up in the best swashbuckling Cap'n James Tiberius Kirk tradition, in Superman on Saturday. Big-headed is our Will. Though I didn't linger; as the current soppy Superman storyline is even more abysmal than it was, and I find Lois a real pain in the ass. I see from the new Radio Times that she's due to take over as Ultrawoman and I shall do my level best to avoid that awesome spectacle.

In between this, the Champions, the narcissistic Buck Rogers, and various versions of the camp Avengers, not to mention continued recycling of Mission Impossible, we are being dragged through a Grim Period of New-Opportunities-to-View, in which only the prospect of Snooker just over the horizon raises my spirits and preserves my sanity...

So Thursday dawns and we still haven't glimpsed the comet [Hyakutake] despite the promises of clear night skies after midnight from the Weather-persons. The moon just about got through the mist here, the rest of the sky was effectively obscured.

Radio reports this a.m. suggest that everybody in the British Isles saw the comet except us. After the Halley fiasco I suspect that all this talk about comets is an Old Wives' Tale. It's just mass hysteria. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley re: Comet Hyakutake, March 1996

Comet Hale-Bopp: Where do I get the T-shirt?

Saturday 8 March 1997

Wowee! Hale-Bopp here I come[t]... Tonight I shall join the exalted ranks of those who have seen the wonder in the sky! [Hopefully] ■

Sunday 9 March 1997

Way-hay! I believe!! I've seen it... it's great!!!

Yup, my subconscious promptings roused me just after 4am. The prospects didn't look so good when I retired, as from the bedroom window the sky was obscured. It was still largely clouded over at 4am, so I dithered about making an effort and actually getting up.

Still, the time was right, so I dragged on a few clothes and groped my way downstairs, and was amazed to find the sky at the rear of the house was clear, the stars were shining and, as I staggered out of the back door, there was the comet dominating the view. Couldn't miss it...no messing. Bright, with a long glowing tail extending upwards... a real recognisable comet, actually hanging over our back-yard. Marion had left out the binoculars, just in case I actually got round to a viewing, and they made the spectacle even more spectacular.

After the frosty nights we've been having recently, I found it surprisingly mild when I ventured out of doors, so I lingered more than somewhat while savouring the sighting. After past disappointments, this comet really is impressive to the naked eye. And after all the excitement I still managed to wake up in plenty of time to hear Alistair this morning.

Though it's dull and the sky's completely obscured by cloud while I prepare breakfast, I feel bright and cheerful just thinking about my lucky exposure to that miraculous window in the clouds in the small hours. Can't get over the thrill of actually seeing a real comet in the sky at long last. Wow! Sorta wonder why it's not blazoned all over the front pages of the papers today...

Where do I apply for my "I'VE SEEN HALE-BOPP" T-shirt ? ■

§ Nisbet's Law of Appearances: "What you see is never what you get".

Tuesday 11 March 1997

Philip was complaining this morning that he couldn't get to sleep last night for

people tiptoeing up and down stairs and flitting past his bedroom door. Since he was awake he did peep out of his window and got a good view of the comet.

I was awakened around 5am by the lights going on in the house opposite, and decided to try my luck again. This time the comet was higher in the sky, just above the light pollution glow on the horizon, and the tail more clearly defined.

I hadn't been out long before being joined in my vigil by Marion, who claimed she had been down earlier... By the time I got back to bed, our neighbour opposite was driving away in his car, and then shortly after I heard the Guardian thump on the doormat. Had everybody been up early comet-gazing I began to wonder?

And this morning, over breakfast, Hale-Bopp actually won an accolade from the Today team, and an enthusiastic interview with an astronomer. Very deservedly so, I may say. ■

COMET UP-DATE — NEWS FLASH!!!

Monday 24 March 1997 brought relatively clear skies at long last to North East Cheshire and comet Hale-Bopp was sighted in the northwest sky by observers at the O&S viewing site in Carlton Avenue, Romiley, from 19:30 hrs.

Not quite the magnificent naked-eye object seen earlier in the month, but bright and the tail clearly visible through binoculars. Observations were continued over a period of a couple of hours, before being hindered by increasing murk on the horizon and obstructing chimneystacks... ■

WE BRING YOU ALL THE LATEST OBSERVATIONS AS THEY HAPPEN! KEEP VIEWING, KEEP IN TOUCH !

Another clear evening on Wednesday, and here's the comet still hovering over the rooftops of Romiley. I lingered to watch the lady from the Science Museum confessing to her love for meteorites, and hardly had time to switch the telly off before Marion was out with her binoculars.

Wonder if you saw the Weather Show before the BBC lunchtime news the other day, when Heather was talking about viewing Hale-Bopp? They kept showing these big-telescope pics of the comet, instead of what the naked-eye viewer could expect to see. I wonder what some folk would be expecting to see that night!

And a letter from Steve [Sneyd] confirms a sighting at Almondbury last Thursday; impressive he says, despite having to look right across the Huddersfield city centre glow.

Here's hoping the forecasters have got it right, and we shall be enjoying clear weather for some spectacular comet viewing over Easter weekend... ■

to Fran & Brian Varley

Expanding Horizons

Currently got my nose stuck into an account of the work of Edwin Hubble: revives quite a few memories of my early years in fandom, a time when the question of the expansion of the universe was still a matter of hot debate, and the red shift was thought to indicate that the speed of light could be slowing down...

According to *Novae Terrae*, the SFA bulletin, I gave talks on the subject of the red shift on several visits to Leeds HQ; and even had an article published in the journal of the Junior Astronomical Association, edited by one Marion F. Eadie.

Wow, heady days! ■

to Brian Varley, July 1999

The Last Eclipse (August 11th, 1999)

Was it really a week ago that we set out (hopefull) to view the eclipse?

BEEN COMPLETELY DISORIENTATED and disorganised since our return... am not sure if things will ever return to normal. We set off without too many complications: the organisers had provided a first-class train, but it proved to be Beeching vintage... like there was plenty of room, but the upholstery had been crushed by generations of middle-class bums, and was less than comfortable for an overnight journey.

In the original proposals the organisers were providing two trains: one starting from Preston (which we were on) and another starting from London. There must have been an overflow of bookings from London & SE, and to cope, the final last-minute info was that our train would be diverted to Slough to collect these stragglers.

This delay meant that on the return journey we'd arrive in Manchester in the small hours (when no local trains ran) instead of Wednesday evening, a quick check with city taxi firms revealed that night the service was inexpensive (relatively) so we made a tentative booking.

We dozed fitfully on the journey down, as there was a cheery group yakking into the small hours further up the compartment. Rolled into Penzance station around 7 am, to be cheered by sight of the sun gleaming under the clouds on the horizon.

There were plenty of folk in the vicinity of the station as several other special trains followed us in from London, but when we wandered round the town on an exploratory trip, checking on cafes and suitable vantage points for viewing, there was hardly any traffic and the place was not even as busy as would be expected in the usual holiday period.

A goodly number of shops and all the museums and attractions proved to be

closed for the day; as we were scheduled to return late afternoon, this didn't worry us unduly, though it seemed an odd attitude with all the potential customers hanging around...

The weather deteriorated steadily, with huge grey clouds drifting in from the sea bringing an occasional flurry of rain, so we finished up having coffee in the Wharfeside Centre, a modest shopping complex on the front with a wide open balcony, open to the sky, at first floor level overlooking the harbour, giving some shelter from any showers.

Every slight lightening of the cloud layer raised hopes that we might get a glimpse of the eclipse, but just minutes before it was due to start there was a build-up of black forbidding clouds that put an end to all such hopes. All we got was a sudden darkness when it was all happening above the clouds; eery but disappointing.

The lights around the harbour automatically came on, and vied with the photo flashes as budding photographers attempted to record the scene (maybe snapping fellow viewers?).

Contrary to the usual tale of birds and animals falling quiet during the event, the local seagulls (a vociferous lot) went wild, careering round with much, cacophonous shrieking. While there was a certain impressiveness about the moment, it felt far short of the glories of our 73 eclipse trip... if it weren't for those memories (over six minutes of totality) we'd have felt cheated. We wondered how Patrick Moore was getting on across the bay...

We went for another wander round the town and decided to get some grub to take on the train (trip catering being grotty and expensive with finished up with some hefty Cornish pasties from a local bakery, and returned to the station to see whether there was any rush for the train. Penzance station was in a state of seige, the entrance gate guarded by a solitary constabule while harassed staff fended off intending passengers.

Apparently the sudden influx of special trains had thrown established routines into chaos, and passengers were being herded into queues outside to await the call when their particular train was allowed into the station.

This was not a popular move; when our rep came round to announce that our train was likely to be delayed by an hour, many folk drifted back into town – thereby missing a further announcement that it would leave on time, after all. This was received with some scepticism in view of the depletion of the queue: we sat down and tucked into our pasties—very tasty they were too (perhaps the best thing that happened to us all day) and I felt assuaged after consuming half of mine, and saved the rest for later.

At the end of the hour, most folk had rejoined the queue and we were eventually allowed into the station (the police guard at the gate had been discreetly doubled), boarded the train, and after a quick check, started back home. We seemed to be sandwiched between a convoy of London-bound trains, speeding along for brief

spells, then crawling with the staff boosting morale at frequent intervals with announcements that we were back on schedule despite delays.

Then we stopped... dead.

Eventually we were told that some idiot had dangled an iron bar from a bridge and bashed in the windscreen of a train ahead. I returned to my pasty (still warm!) and felt at peace with the world. We dozed, and this time the talkative passengers dozed too.

We must have got started some time: stations came and went as we returned along the same circuitous route, and we arrived back in Piccadilly in the small hours, bum-sore but wakeful. Were amazed to find our taxi on the forecourt and soon were zooming home along empty roads at breakneck speed. It was a relief to be back and able to collapse on a comfortable bed..!

Don't think I've recovered completely yet. And Marion is already talking about the Zimbabwe eclipse of 2001 (guess we don't hold out much hope for the next one in Penzance in 2090).

Found time during the weekend to check the HYPHEN parcel which arrived just before our departure. Was intrigued to find that several issues were addressed to me and must have been passed to you when I started work at the Guardian, and was seduced by jazz activity in the Big City, deserted fandom and liquidated the fanzine collection.

I had completely forgotten that I passed material intended for a Now&Then Homes & Garden issue over to Walt, for use in Hyphen, and that I'd edited several issues of the in-mag reprint sheet TOTO for him. So there'll be a few additions to be made to the fannish database when I get time to sort the details. ■

to Brian Varley, August 1999

Events Astronomical

Trying to gather my scattered wits and recall when I last wrote and what, if anything, has happened since then. Gulp... Well, we've had a longish run of clear skies, chilly breezes, sunshine and dry spells, which makes a change. To our amazement this (the clear sky & chilly breezes) continued during the period of the lunar eclipse and we were able to view the whole process from start to finish; a rare happening indeed in our experience with viewing astronomical events...

Indeed we saw the start of events while having our evening meal, seated in the comfort of the living room, with a full view of the shadow starting to bite into the lunar disc framed in the window.

As the moon rose in the sky we made occasional forays into the garden to check on progress, sneering at TV reports that the moon was "blood-red"—an exaggerated description that the media seemed determined to perpetuate despite

the evidence of their eyes (if they really bothered to look). Still, it was quite impressive, and for once, we felt we had been really favoured by viewing conditions.

We've also had several sightings of Mir, though patchy clouds returned from the south to confound us; but we caught glimpses of the station as it rose past the scattered fringe of the cloud bank, and did its majestic trajectory over the Pennines. So the astronomical observers here are very well satisfied with recent events. ■

O&S 231 to Carol & Brian Varley, January 2001

Dr. H. Percy Wilkins Remembered

Dr. H. Percy Wilkins was a sort of proto-Patrick Moore. I became acquainted with his astronomical contributions in *Armchair Science*, back in 1935, and his name is inextricably linked in my mind with the by-line "author of the World's greatest Moon map".

I've looked up several biographical sources, specialist scientist and astronomer listings as well as general, but found no mention of him. He's referred to as "Author of the world's greatest Moon Map & President, Carmarthen Astronomical & Scientific Society" in 1935 issues of the mag—by 1937, this is amended to "Author of the Worlds two greatest Moon maps. Member of the British Astronomical Society".

Dunno when he became a Doc, or of what, but he seems to have been an amateur, rather than professional, astronomer; have memories that he became Director of the BAA Lunar Branch for a period. Only slightest recollections of the lunar bridge story of the 50s—there were always reports of viewings of crater lights and changes in markings by lunar observers, usually attributed to chance viewings of meteor contacts, but the bridge report seems on a par with recent efforts to dress up the so-called "face on Mars" report.

No reference to it in any of the Patrick Moore literature on our shelves... but then there isn't any mention of Patrick's one-time scepticism about the likelihood of space-travel: some things are perhaps best forgot!

I chucked out all my file of *Armchair Science*, Gernsback's *Science & Invention*, and the like, in the '60s. I find now that they were all strategically rescued by Philip and preserved in his collection. Looks like the hoarding gene has been passed on.

The Gernsback mags go back to 1931 and are crammed with Paul illos—it certainly brings back the memories browsing thru these pages after a long absence! ■

to Steve Sneyd, 14 May 2001

Venus in Transit, 2004

With memories of our hopeless quest to view the 1999 eclipse, we were out early today, anxious to catch a glimpse of the transit of Venus. Despite a slight build-up of cloud during the morning, we had plenty of clear spells during which we were able to project the sun's image, via hand-held binoculars, on to a sheet of card and got a distinct, if slightly wavery, view of the progress of the dot of Venus.

Perhaps not so impressive as the views shown on TV, but at least honour was satisfied... (Rather baffled by the number of TV progs encouraging schoolkids to gleg at the sun thru eclipse viewers – not much hope of them seeing the dot of Venus in transit).



11:10 a.m. BST

to Steve Sneyd, 08th June 2004

[That transit of Venus was something my mother had been looking forward to for . . . *decades!*

We were extremely relieved to have a clear day and to be able to see projected images of the sun; made using the eclipse trip binocs; with that little, moving black dot on them. PHT]



11:35 a.m. BST

It means what I want it to mean

GLEG – your query has sparked off a debate here... “‘Ave a gleg at this,” seems to be a phrase I’ve grown up with, so assumed it must be local usage (unless I’d picked it up elsewhere on my RAF wartime tour of Britain). However, when I asked Marion, she said she’d always lived with it and assumed it was from Scotland. (So did I pick it up from her?).

Consulting available reference works, the only hints came from the Shorter Oxford Dictionary (Northern or Scottish origin = sharp-sighted), and Chambers 20thC Dictionary, which gives gleg as Scottish, meaning “alert, clever”. Which don’t quite get over the sense of “look at this”... Philip is convinced that I’ve picked it up from reading Oor Wullie strips. [in the *Sunday Post*, Scotland’s favourite newspaper, PHT]

to Steve Sneyd, 21st June 2004

Life 1

Baffling Bin Bags

There were TV weather reports of 79 mph gusts in Macclesfield yesterday. Today Philip found a spare bin bag that had blown into the front porch of No.10, when he went out to work. Coincidentally, when I went round the back way to No.12, I found the empty dustbin blown over and stripped of its bin bag.

Do bin bags have a homing instinct ? ■

Re the query about homing bin bags, later in the day I noticed, through the glazed door, that there was something in the front porch of No.12. As the White Cross Parcel service are in the habit of dumping book club packets there, and then driving off without ringing the bell,

I investigated, only to find that the object was a black bin bag. I checked the bins at both houses and found they were still complete with bags.

This finding would seem to support the theory that the porches of No's. 10 & 12 Carlton Ave are the natural focus of a "Sargasso Sea" effect whereby prevailing winds dump all the flotsam on our doorsteps. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 28 January 1996

Bluddy Transco

Among other distractions, Romiley is plagued by Transco workers, digging little holes in the road, putting up barricades round them and then promptly moving on to do the same elsewhere.

Must be a couple of weeks ago that they visited Carlton Avenue, pulling up a few paving stones on the pavement opposite, and covering the hole with a massive iron plate. They later dug a neat square hole in the road nearby, and erected the obligatory barrier round it, as well as putting little notices all along the pavement for pedestrians to trip over, advising motorists that the road had been dug up. Then they packed up their pneumatic drill and cleared off.

At the end of last week they were back, complete with van and equipment to drill a couple more holes in the tarmac, and extend the barriers so that a couple of car-parking spaces have been lost to local motorists. So, after putting up with all the racket of their visits, we now have three deserted holes in the road, and no sign that the work will ever be resumed...

When I wandered through the village to pay some CTax on Wednesday, I was

amazed how many holes Transco have inflicted on us. Looks as though someone has mislaid a vital map, and these excavations are the only means to find out where their gas pipes are supposed to be.

And always, in the distance, is the irritating sound of drilling, as yet more holes are dug. When will it end? ■

to Brian Varley, May 1999

Call This Progress?

Piccadilly has now become an open station. It sorta just happened; they spent time and money rebuilding all the barriers and reducing the number of access points when installing the new computerised indicator board a year or so ago.

During this past year, the manning of the barrier has grown increasingly capricious; at our end we have two harriers serving some 4 or 5 platforms, which is not so bad when they are both manned and intending passengers can go thru one and arriving passengers thru t'other.

However, when one barrier has been unmanned and closed, there have been the occasional free-for-alls of people fighting to get thru the crush of disembarkees before their train departs. It began to happen with irritating frequency, and then a few weeks ago, I arrived to find the barriers all boarded up and free access between platforms and concourse.

It was a mite confusing with folk sticking uncollected tickets into every crack and crevice when faced with this unaccustomed freedom... I vaguely supposed that there was a strike on, but as the situation continued it dawned on me that Picc had been declared 'open', but I hadn't been around to hear.

Travellers are used to the situation now, but you meet more people hopefully asking details about train platforms and departures in the marked absence of BR staff. I usually shake my head uncomprehendingly. I can never understand the tannoy announcements that bounce round the platforms when timetables are unpredictably changed or trains just don't come in or go out; there seems be a large element of luck involved these days.

There was a local councillor complaining in the *Metro* that the ticket office at his local station had been closed, the guard on the train wouldn't sell him a ticket, and nobody wanted to know he arrived at Picc without a ticket, and how the hell did BR expect to make a profit? A good question.

While amused at Lamont's hack-stabbing speech and all the kerfuffle of Maggie endorsing John's fitness to stay in power and the Tory concern about winning the next election already, I wish we could see some signs of government materialising. What a sorry lot of politicians we have at present.

There were distinct sounds of disillusion with Clinton's performance evident in

Alistair Cooke's *Letter from America* recently— seems to be as inept as John [Major]. When Somalia events are rewritten in NY so blatantly, and Bosnia shows no signs of ever being sorted, there doesn't seem much hope of anything ever being settled. Still, the clearance of the industrial wasteland in the vicinity of the first firm I worked for in Manchester [Anchor Chemicals, Clayton], is making visible progress every time I pass it on the train run into Manchester: and, dammit, they're going to build the Velodrome there regardless of whether the Olympics come to Manchester in 2000 or not.

And after pedestrianisation, being redug by assorted visits from the gas and electricity work forces, the sewer men, and the tramway engineers, Market Street is being dug up again: this time to tidy it all up for visiting officials of the International Olympics mob... I hope the result impresses them. ■

June 1993

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Computers:

Before the event

Anyway, in between snooker, I thought I'd better do some more sketches for John Owen, before he runs out of stock of my artwork (it saves me writing long locs). So I started doing some variations of the "array" sketch. It's a longwinded business drawing 'em by hand: I wish I'd got computer resources to do the hard work.

Alas, every time I feel I've got some spare cash to take the plunge, a bit of the house falls off and the builders walk off with my savings. I keep telling myself that did I but devote my energies to finishing off one of the projects and sold it then I could afford a computer and pay off repairs. Then I moan and say that I need to get a computer to finish off the project and there's another sneaky builder's bill due... One day all will be resolved: meantime, it's back to laborious hand drawing.

Just spent a frustrating half-hour trying to draw the second aspect of a shape. Triad shapes carry two viewpoints of a figure within their outline. Having drawn one viewpoint, it should be the work of minutes to redraw the shape from the other aspect. Maybe it's old age, but it never seems to work out that easy. Once you have done it, it's obvious of course...

I started this letter to clear my mind of conflicting images. Having looked at my abandoned effort I see a faulty connexion that was throwing me. 'Tis done, 'tis done. After much effort. All should be routine from now on. ■

Hell, it's time for more snooker...

to Steve Sneyd, 22 April 1992

The Beginnings

Dear Both: Back again. Had a brief spell with your drawing prog but it just makes me feel that I'm being asked to perform with my arms lashed firmly to my sides, and my back to the drawing board. Having been drawing for going on 70 years using conventional methods, and being a lazy sod, I have acquired all sorts of short cuts and tricks that I do automatically and without conscious thought, and mentally anticipate and sort out problems before they physically occur.

The computer approach often seems so uneducated and slow by comparison; it plods. While I am struggling to bend it to my will I realise I could have done what I wanted in a fraction of the time, and gone on to other things. This may seem a run thing to say, but believe me, I find attempts to do creative work on the computer unduly frustrating, though it's useful to use it to manipulate original artwork – but that requires a good scanner.

I certainly can't afford the standard of equipment that the [Manchester Evening] News studio now have access to! So I tend to stick with my drawing board/lightbox hardware and drafting implements, as being less stressful and reliably productive. So long as I have access to a decent copier for instant enlarging/reducing I guess I'll get by for a few more years.

Wow! Did I just say all that?

Until I get a big Nat Lottery prize, I shall be content to limit computer activities to wp and dtp, exploring Mars via Vistapro, and occasionally dipping into CDROM archives.

Hope all the advice about the bad back proves useful. I have problems looking at the computer screen if I'm not wearing my reading specs; if I've got my bifocals on, I eventually get a crick in the neck trying to peer at the screen thru the bottom bit of the lenses... Who murmured anything about being user-friendly ?

to Fran & Brian Varley, 2nd March 1994

The Next Step

The sudden conversion to computerisation is due to not being able to turn a bargain down. Philip's company are buying surplus equipment from a firm that is installing a new system and one of the set-ups has been earmarked for me. (I suspect Philip is anxious about the inroads on to his computer time by Marion and self, and is fitting us up as a diversion).

It gives me chance to start up at considerably less cost than I thought would be possible. When it's all sorted out, will be able to do a more 'professional' job on future Hilltop pubs (hopefully!). Will keep you posted on progress when the machine is delivered. ■

Fran & Brian Varley, 20th January 1995

The Next Step II

It's a relief that we have a resident computer expert in attendance. The computer is a 386, with bags of extra memory installed, and a colour monitor. Thanx to Philip, we now have the latest MS-DOS, Doc Solomon's anti-virus prog, Word-Perfect with a string of fonts that will relieve me (hopefully) of ever having to buy Letraset again, (when I've used up the sheets grabbed at the MEN clearout!), with a fractals prog and a Chinese Checkers game to relieve stress from struggling with WORDPERF, and three "screensaver" routines of Philip's own design.

Which is quite enuff for us to try and cope with for the moment in between

reading the manuals...

When one of us loses patience, the other takes over and so far there have been no fights. It's a time-consuming business, but I hope to get around to doing something useful in due course.

While the supplier kept us hanging about for delivery, they seem equally lax about demanding payment. We're not complaining. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 28th March 1995

The Next Step III

Computer facilities have been extended with the installation of Microsoft Windows. My dtp prowess is coming on by leaps and bounds (is staggering, some might say) since I abandoned the plod of the (alleged) tuition manual for WORDPERF, and resorted to the tried techniques of Enlightened Empiricism, tackling jobs intuitively and relying on dips into the 100-page reference manual when I get in a jam.

It's a method which means I inadvertently pick up all sorts of info on the capabilities of WORDPERF by happenstance as I frantically flick thru the pages, and enlarge my vocabulary of computerspeak by struggling mightily with the index seeking key words that are often at loggerheads with my expectations.

Having a Resident Expert as back-up helps in emergencies, of course. The computer keyboard offers unexpected bonuses—like finding ' and ? on l'case keys, accents accessible without the rigmarole of changing daisywheels—as well as the plus points of being able to type on merrily and leaving the machine to carve up copy as instructed, being able to reposition copy and make alterations without effort, changing types and point sizes with a click of the mouse and seeing the results almost instantaneously.

Ah, the euphoria of catching up with the rest of the world at last. Forgive the evangelism of the newly converted...

Anyway, I now feel confident enuff to tackle further Hilltop projects that may need some back-up. While you are dithering whether to do a straight reprint of a tidied up revision of the Castle book, why not unload some copy on to me and I'll be glad to dummy up a few pages to help you make a decision. Obvious bonus of any computer-based publications in the future is that details can be kept on disk, so that you have a basis for any later revisions etc.

Right; I will say no more (for the nonce) about computers. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 15th April 1995

Different but less Distinctive

I was kicking myself after posting that last letter for absentmindedly forgetting that I'd got a copy of your Castles book, when I wrote. Then I realised that it was written in your own fair hand, and doubted the wisdom of reducing your calligraphy to boring typesetting...

At the most, I hazarded on reflection, you might want some display setting for the cover title. So I left the matter. Then a few days ago, I looked at it again and was curious to see if I could match the 'compactness' of your script (both legible and distinctive, I might add) with computer setting.

Enclosed are three trial pages which worked out surprisingly well I thought, roughly keeping pace with your writing and preserving the general 'look' of each page. Page 8 is a trifle flat and grey—to improve the appearance and facilitate reference to individual entries, I would suggest putting a marker immediately before each entry, thus:

- ACKWORTH—See PURSTON JAGLIM.
- ADDINGHAM—the two oval earthworks west of the town—ROUND DYKES at SE 055 531, and WOOFA BANK (WOFUL BANK 848—PNWR),

As I have gained a few lines of text on you here, there would be ample room to accommodate this, and it would impart a bit of life to the page as well as hiliting entries. And it'd be no bother to do. Hang on to these samples for reference.

Anyway, I thought it was quite a successful exercise. If you do decide to do a revised reprint some time in the future, bear the SFA Computersetting service in mind. I can keep a floppy disk of the copy so that the next revised edition will be no bother at all...

Having said all that, I should hasten to add that I decided I didn't like the Lobster drawings I did, which is why you haven't received them. I just couldn't get them right, so decided to leave 'em awhile and try again. I should have written, instead of keeping you in suspenders. But I have a clear spell coming up and will have a final try to get things right. Abject apologies, again, I grovel and withdraw, hoping all is forgiven. I'm not usually so intransigent. Old age must be catching up...

As regards the "virtual-gallery" of impossible art, I have knocked together several catalogues in the past of alleged exhibitions at Carlton Studies, but ran into repro problems scaling some things down to fit, and then repro satisfactorily on a copier. The computer gives me the chance to make these jobs look truly professional/authentic, so you may see something of 'em in due course.

Have invested in some software—*KeyCAD Complete*—which I'm hoping will be useful in producing some computer graphics, when I've mastered it. At the

moment I have given up the manual, which assumes a doctorate in computer-aided design, and fallen back on Enlightened Empiricist methods, until have acquired enough hands-on experience to fathom out what the manual is trying to tell me (it doesn't even sport an index, which at least eliminates that "counter-intuitive terminology" you mention—I still haven't mastered the elusive WORDPERF index, but am catching on. Slowly).

At least I'm making headway with WORDPERF, and established a few routines to achieve my ends, though I find my approach differs radically from Philip's... He seems to feed in all his text and then start to process it layoutwise; I find I start out with layout details and a fairly clear idea of how I want the page arranged and set out, and do everything in 'Graphics mode', so I can keep track of things as I progress.

After years of visualising layouts of jobs before getting down to the nitty-gritty of text, I guess I'm a creature of habit. But there's a lot of the resources of WORDPERF that I've still to explore, and I find myself dipping ever more frequently into the DOS manual in an attempt to clarify how the damn' machine works.

Give me another ten years or so... Though I hope they don't fly by as quickly as this year seems to have streaked past. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 29th May 1995

Three Months On

10 June 1995: I spend too much time with this computer. Compulsive it is. Hard to believe that it only settled in a mere three months or so ago; now the household gets organised round it. It must take a large part of the blame for my gradual withdrawal from the outside world in that time. Still, I've acquired a certain facility and mastered the essentials of WORDPERF, so that I feel relatively comfortable about tackling complicated layout jobs... And become increasingly aware of the potential of the prog, and resources I've not yet tapped.

So, some progress has been made. I swore I didn't want to get involved with the technicalities so long as it did what I wanted, but sheer curiosity has me with my nose in the DOS manual as well as the WORDPERF volume at times. Like I say, it's compulsive.

Sharing the No. 2 computer with Marion is useful, as it stops me becoming subserviently addictive, and letting the damn machine monopolise my time. Now, I average one good session a day, and leave time for other things. I'm still faintly surprised at the relatively brief time the computer takes to dispose of jobs that used to drag on more than somewhat. Like *LEWISNEWS*.

I've just disposed of an issue in advance of the intended schedule in next to no time flat—and that involved a complete design rejig and providing copier-ready

artwork in a ridiculously short time from scratch. No hassle over amendments and afterthoughts, all aggravation over changing around paste-ups and making things fit. No fiddling with Letraset sheets, and I must have saved ~~££££~~ on Cowgum (now about £4 for a 250ml tin) though I miss the whiff of solvent... Well, it was all good practice, and the final end product met with approval all round. So I'm clear of the Wyndham Lewis Society until next year. I think.

So if you do resolve the pros & cons of your outstanding orders on the Castle Book, and decide on a revised edition in the near future, the resources are at your disposal. As you will have seen from the sample, once the text is typed in, you can manipulate it in all sorts of ways—that second layout was a matter of changing instructions on the material already in memory, and involved very little extra input despite the drastic visual changes.

Thursday: Gad, a typewritten letter from you—you must be slowing things down! A few practical points, emerging from my increasing awareness of all that WORDPERF can do. I can provide prints, in the 'two pages on landscape A4' format, as I work through the pages, for checking and so you could see how things are progressing. This will give you chance to see things overall and make any changes before the final print-out.

When we get to that stage, WORDPERF will kindly rearrange the page sequence so that the sheets are printed all ready imposed for your printer... We can't provide colour illustrations just yet though. Though we have a nice line in Wizards and Dragons in the instant art file...

At the moment, as the No.2 computer is installed in No.12, we have to make a floppy of anything to be printed, and go next door to run it off on Philip's laser-printer. He actually had it (the printer) installed in No.12 for a weekend while Philip was busing updating his 386 computer up to 486, and it was very convenient. Having gained a certain proficiency on the machine, and in view of the cash we saved on this ex-Reuters model, I'm thinking of lashing out on a printer to complete our installation.

A savings-plan I took out on retirement matures at the end of this year, so I am tempted to spend some if it in advance. (There's also the promise of an unexpected bonus to members from the winding up of the MGEN pension fund, now that we have been handed over to Norwich Union despite my voiced misgivings! That should be due shortly).

We may as well get the benefit now, I guess. Whether I can run to a scanner of the requisite precision is another matter, best left to Santa Claus perhaps. But it's a thought.

Saturday: Gosh, don't time fly when you're having fun. For some time, on and off, I have been feeding material into the computer to provide a chronological database from which I can extract material for articles on early fandom.

All the stuff extracted from Vinç's archive, notes, articles and letters is going into it—at the moment it stretches from mid-1937 to mid-1942, covering the period I drifted into fandom to when I was snatched into the RAF. It's taken a bit longer than I anticipated, but it brings events together in a satisfying way and the overview provides some unexpected Insights.

At the moment the notes occupy some 35 A5 pages and there's still quite a lot more material to go in, but it's invaluable having it all printed out in readily available form, instead of stashed away in a multiplicity of files, folders, boxes that often refuse to disgorge a wanted item when it's wanted.

Reading of your struggles with 8 unfulfilled orders after the successful disposal of the whole print order of the Castles book, and the complaints of my philatelic friend complaining that sales of the Transcaucasian Railway Post book are completely dormant and his den is crammed with unsold copies, though he has just about broke even, it amazes me that I feel the urge to join in and publish an ish myself... But not just yet!

I picked up a remaindered copy of Art Clarke's *By Space Possessed* recently, and was glancing thru a piece called "Memoirs of an Armchair Astronaut (Retired)" harking back to the 1930s. "The actual building of rockets was frowned upon", he ses, "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." That comment screams out for a footnote. Like my piece on Rex v the MIS.

It made me think that there are several fan histories extant, and while I'm hardly qualified to compete, I can comfortably supply a string of footnotes to fill in their grander sweeps over events. So my project has been given the title of *FOOTNOTES to Fannish History*. I am vaguely contemplating the issue of a fanzine of some such title, which will enable me to publish the results of my researches in convenient chunks, and perhaps provoke a useful response.

You see where computers land you... At least it should get me writing again!

The Varleys passed on some odds & ends from Ethel Lindsay; included was a Chuck Harris zine which mentions that the new copier acquired by Vinç "has, er, stopped copying". This was in March, so I'm not sure whether it's been repaired and returned. It hadn't been sorted on 4 April when Chuck reports that he had to remove the copier from the car, as his wife wanted to drive some friends to a prize-giving event.

He got Sean (his son?) "home from the body-building class", to do the lifting. However the lad had to shift his grip and get the copier in a vertical, rather than horizontal, position as he was maneuvering thru the door into the house... and all the toner powder spilled out of a newly-fitted cartridge. All down Sean's pants and all-over the sage green carpet in the front room. A near-divorce situation, all in all.

I shall be writing to Vinç about a few more references from the Archive, so no doubt I shall be filled in on the later detatls...

By way of consolation, Chuck seems to have been provided with a computer

set-up by generous contacts in America and here. Even linked him up to the Net. Wow! ■

to Steve Sneyd, 1995

WINDOWS 95

So the great WINDOWS 95 launch came and went, and I don't feel any different. And I still have the same problems to face trying to manipulate this dodblasted computer into carrying out my every whim. Oh well...

I didn't see any queues outside the local computer shop on returning from paying a chunk of council tax, and when I peered into the window there was a marked absence of any new promotional displays; just the usual sun-bleached boxes of games and software. The owner seemed to be sat back reading a racing paper, oblivious to the excitement of the outside world.

Were there any WINDOWS 95 riots in Pedmore? ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, Summer 1995

Observations on OCR 1

OCR n. [Optical Character Recognition]

A method for misreading documents directly into a system without having to miskey the data first.

OOPS n. Either Acronym for Object-Oriented Programing System or (onomatopoeia) cry of annoyance following a mishap. Usu. both.

— Stan Kelly-Bootle, "The Computer Contradictionary", 1995.

Dear Steve: I thought you'd be intrigued by that raw OCR'd document... [The manuscript version of the work on Castles, PHT] I reckon there's a case to be made for including OCR in the creative writing syllabus as an entrée to unsuspected literary modes, even, perhaps, as an easing, if not a cure, of Writer's Block.

One real plus is the relatively brief time it takes to scan the document; a mere fraction of the time I'd take with keyboarding, so that any later manipulation seems merely a light trimming, involving little effort. (Hey, I got this scanner to try and feed my artwork into the system—the OCR function was just an incidental bonus!) Now I find my present memory is just not up to coping with the vast files ground out in graphics mode. Ho hum.

["As with most gadgetary acquisitions, the primary purpose is designed to generate a growing list of essential adjuncts."—The Computer Contradictionary]).

I trust the impulse to do something about the SFPoetry oeuvre in the light of these revelations will not add unduly to the many distractions piling up around your immediate and weightier (literally?) task of sorting the essential essays on RBrowning. Rest assured that, like the Castlebook, it's all on floppy, ready to be fed on screen and put into production whenever you manage to get around to it. Just so long as the system doesn't crash.

The contemporary 'art' scene imbues me with a profound sense of déjà vu; too many perpetrators, and the critics/media generally, act as if they've no sense of even the immediate past, and everything has to be hailed as "new" and "innovative" if not "fantastic" or "brill".

The "art market" rules apply, I guess, and the Turner Prize fills the role of rating and saddling us with the "Top Ten of All Time"... You may gather I am somewhat disillusioned with the taradiddle of the current art scene as viewed thru the meeja! But more on that another time... ■

to Steve Sneyd, 4th November 1997

OCR 2

Well, no problems with the line spacing but the machine boggled somewhat at those blocked up letters! However, it provided a useful basis for some nifty editing, (being able to enlarge the result on screen some 150% speeds things up no end, I find), and the results are enclosed. Decided I may as well add it to the existing A5 booklet copy so you have an idea of where you're heading, sizewise. As soon as the printouts appeared I noticed a few clangers, but as it's in the early stages I shall not lose any sleep over 'em just yet...

Right! I am amazed at the precision of the process when it renders a pierced-out full stop as an "o", though somewhat baffled at the tortuous process whereby when faced with a blocked-up typescript "o", it diligently searches the many specialist character sets available in WordPerf, covering every extra-keyboard requirement from accents to mathematical symbols, to choose from the "box-drawing" facility.

Logically, I should have expected it to plump for • from the "typographical" selection... I detect a certain quirkiness in some of the misreadings (a sign of AI lurking there?) and wonder if the "Mild swan", the inspired variations on Phantasmagoria, "Alien Tctley" and the like are examples of scanner irony. Thought you might like the enclosed samples to add to your Oulipo file. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 12th November 1997

OCR 3

... Like the tale of poets becoming pests! Can't believe any conscientious editor would accept a rawly scanned sheet, and look to Spellcheck to put matters to rights. When we first got the computer I tried Spellcheck and found it a real time-waster, obviously liable to gloss over wrong words if they happened to be spelled correctly, and with too limited a reference vocabulary; I didn't fancy feeding in all the specialist words my varied interests were liable to inflict on it. So out it went.

I also gave the Gramatik programme a whirl, but soon became fed up with its persistent complaints that I was using the passive voice, and admonitions to avoid long sentences. So that went out too.

By contrast, the OCR facility saves me both time and physical effort, and it's no strain to tidy up its occasional guesses (besides which they can prove entertaining at times!).

Eternal vigilance seems to be the key to successful word processing: I guess there's no software will do it all for you...

Incidentally, it's not the OCR files that eat up the memory, it's the size of scanned graphic files that occasionally give me cause for concern. For example, the floppy on which the Poetry booklet material is stored has a total capacity of 1.4Mbytes: all the text so far processed, including several automatic back-up files, currently takes up a mere 295Kb of that, so there's room for lots more.

Glad to say that with the new hard disk we've got bags of memory for word processing... it's my burning ambition to dabble with bloody graphics that gobbles up resources and slows things down! Thought I'd get away easily with black & white illustrations, instead of madly extravagant colour, but it just don't work out that way... Still a lot to learn, I guess.

What were you saying about Millennium Grants to virtual-reality deedas? ■

to Steve Sneyd, 15th November 1997

Smoothly with computers

Been busy fitting in the last bits to the layout of Steve's Lilith Lorraine poetry booklet. Now that Philip's workload has eased off, he's been scanning some pics (from sub-standard photostats!) for this job.

Must say they've come out well; indeed, the whole job has proceeded pretty smoothly, thanks to computer technology. I still can't get over the decided ease of producing same-size artwork for the printer with home facilities these days, compared to the struggle it used to be only a few years back: typing all the text out, cutting and pasting it up, fitting in Letraset headings, then swearing heartily

when some trifling amendment involved wholesale rejigging and several man-hours of patching up.

But thanks to the computer, this particular job has just grown smoothly from the word “go” and astounded us with both the way everything has slipped neatly and inevitably into place and the speed of its completion. It’s one of those projects that Steve has been researching over a good many years, so he’ll be glad to see it finished and on the way to the printer at long last. Must have a final close study of the text in search of bloopers over the weekend.

Was just about ready to close this note and wing it in a Pedmore direction, but couldn’t resist adding that bit when your letter arrived this sunny Friday morn. Good to see the pics of Fran on her scooter! And that pic of the NWSFC group... wow, I can only put a name to half of ’em (I guess ESN and me would be put off by the presence of JRF!), if that.

Like Eric the Bent & Terry, Dave and Eric Jones at the back; your good selves, S&y, and Mike in the middle; a very young Paul Sowerby, and an aging George Ellis at the front. That’s not a very high score: some other faces look decidedly familiar but names elude me.

O&S 138 to Brian Varley, 1998

Getting to grips with scanning

WOW! Scanning is only the start of your problems in making halftones from photos... For one thing, the screen doesn’t really show how the damn thing will look when printed. The one up above is a straight scan with the options set at DEFAULT.

The ones alongside are varied options in the EDIT frame: progressively reducing the BRIGHTNESS, while increasing CONTRAST. And after all that juggling you still don’t know how the result will come out until you PRINT—and you have another option... to choose HIGH or MEDIUM definition.

Decisions... decisions.

And when you’ve got round to printing, well it’s too late to change your mind if the result is a disappointment. And another thing. When traditional printers discovered that halftone dots should be angled at 45° for best results, why have computer programmers lined ’em up at 90°?

We shall have more to say about that in future issues of O&S...

O&S 139 to Brian Varley, 1998

Upgrade, but where?

Still brooding about acquiring one of these ultra-sophisticated models that are supposedly going cheap these days; our problem is yours in reverse... I can't make my mind up where I'd put the gear.

Oddly, neither Marion nor me are keen on disposing of the faithful 386... like it has its limitations but it gets on with the job in a relatively dependable way. It just has problems when I get ambitious in the way of manipulating graphics, and can't always keep up.

So it's probable that the 386 will stay where it is, and any new gear will be installed in the Library, which has a desk and conveniently available power points. Alternatively, if I get around to building a new desking arrangement in the studio, as vaguely planned for some considerable time, any new set up could be installed there, in a tailor-made environment.

Like you say, there's considerable time and labour involved once new gear appears.

Wow, where will it all lead?

O&S 140 to Brian Varley, 1998

Upgrade: what we got

... GOSH, HERE WE ARE ON page 4, and I've never said a mumblin' word about the new computer! Well, no doubt the Guru will fill you in on the sordid details, but it's state-of-the-art made up by Simply Computers to his spec; is now complete with Windows 98 and Corel WordPerfect Suite 8, (with another 500-page manual!), comfortably housed on one of the desks in the Reading Room.

All sorts of CD-Roms installed—my contribution to date covers Escher Interactive, The SF Encyclopedia, and that Monk encoded CD—ranging from Guide to Babylon 5 to a pile of Marion's astronomical items.

I'm feeling my way cautiously through the maze of Windows 98 and the transformations of WordPerf operation, but usually finish up wasting time browsing, quietly exploring the ramifications of entries in the SF Ency or taking liberties with Escher's tessellations.

It will obviously be a while before I master the full potential of the new resources and can take advantage of the speedier handling of those outsize graphics files which currently reduce our workhorse 386 into a dazed state of near-suspended animation. But I'm working on it.

Well, I suppose that's all just a momentary distraction as the world irredeemably slides into chaos, with el Nino storms and floods, terrorist bombings and Presi-

dential “strikes”, and free market economies collapsing like dominoes all around us... But the spirit of enterprise is not yet dead in humanity: I like this latest news story of the mail order firm that’s desperately trying to make a quick buck flogging Viagra pills to OAPs at 25 quid a tablet!

O&S 152 to Brian Varley, 4 July 1998

Typography

Philip has also complained at all the extraneous fonts that come with some programs, and the amount of zapping that has to be done to keep things manageable. With our limited memory [hard disk space, PHT], I limited the fonts installed on the 386 to a select few that I knew would be useful; there just didn’t seem any point in loading the machine up with a vast array of fonts we were unlikely ever to use.

It seems a pity that in the early days of computers, there were few, if any, programmers with a real appreciation of typography... how else explain the predilection for Times New Roman as a default font, when it was primarily designed for newspaper use, i.e. intended specifically to be set in narrow columns, and be of a weight that would survive casting in linotype metal slugs, being assembled as a page, over which a flexible mat is impressed, from which a curved metal printing plate is finally cast.

Times survives all that and works fine in those circumstances, but visually it leaves much to be desired when put to blanket use as an all-purpose typeface.

At least the typewriter gave you a limited choice—pica or elite—and then we moved on to daisywheel models, with a wider choice of styles (even Cyrillic), which seemed quite a breakthrough. Now, anything’s possible. But there are all sorts of subtleties to be considered if many of the faces available are used as they were intended.

Like this Papyrus face, as it’s presented, is not sufficiently leaded: the spacing between the lines needs opening up slightly so that ascenders do not foul the descenders of the line above. (Note for example that g/h and g/d sequence at the start of the lines above). I’ve had to open it up by 0.05" to achieve this present spacing. [OTHER on the Layout menu, then PRINTER FUNCTIONS, then LEADING ADJUSTMENT]. So why didn’t the installers sort that out beforehand?

In the days of metal type there would have been no complications: the metal base on which the individual characters appeared would have automatically determined the basic visual spacing of the lines, and any increase required in the space between lines would have been made by dropping a strip of metal between the lines of type.

The automatic imposition of these restrictions was lost as soon as photo-typesetting replaced cast metal. Now there's too much freedom and too many amateurs floundering in it...

Wow, you've got me on a hobby-horse again!

Was doing a listing of all typefaces currently available on No.2 computer; you have reminded me that I intended to revamp the file as a more convenient A5 folder that can be kept handy for quick reference. Will run off a copy to pass on... I reckon this selection is sufficiently varied to meet most eventualities.

The typewriter faces were included to cope with producing (near) facsimiles of old fanzine pages, incidentally, and are unlikely to be used for text otherwise! Can't honestly see the average computer user using these thousands of typefaces that some progs boast! Rather like these zillions of colours that allegedly can be summoned up... how often d'you need 'em? ■

to Brian Varley, October 1998

New Names for Old

Our 386 Fontlist was not produced from a built-in prog; it's a home-made document, done to provide a brief, handy reference when inspiration is needed, or a name/style refuses to come to mind.

Having memorised, over the years, the names that typefaces were given by the designers, it's annoying to have so many familiar faces now given unrelated fancy names by computer software folk; like I notice that Optima has been redubbed Omega on your listing for no very good reason.

And there are several, like Griffon [is actually Graphique] and Gourmand [is actually Garamond], on my listing that are pointless misnomers). ■

to Brian Varley, October 1998

More Isn't Better

Have had to learn a lot of new tricks in struggling to complete that job: the Corel update from WordPerf 6 to 8 seems to have introduced a plethora of niggling variations in procedures without any noticeable efforts to smooth out and simplify routines. But no doubt I'll get used to it!

However one BIG plus point with the Pentium is the facility to play a CD while you are working: that relieves a considerable amount of the frustration that accrues when you have to learn new ways of doing old tricks. Like right now I'm listening to the "Complete Birth of the Cool" CD, which rolled up on Saturday. It

combines both studio sessions and live broadcast material: and provides soothing background music to my computer struggles... except when Kenny Hagood starts vocalising!

“More fonts, more interest” doesn’t strike me as a very helpful or particularly true statement, when it comes to designing booklets. A single font can have plenty of variety through different sizes, weights [light, medium, bold], an italic version [also in different weights], and perhaps a decorative version too. So my aim would be to settle on a suitable font as a basic type face for the “editorial” setting of a booklet or magazine to give it a unified look and sense of continuity as the reader turns over the pages.

An occasional change of typeface may be helpful to give emphasis or contrast, but a riot of different fonts doesn’t help readability. Though there isn’t a neat set of typographical rules that can be blindly applied to ensure success. It’s largely a matter of experience in finding out what works in creating pages that guide the reader’s eyes through the text so that he/she absorbs the meaning, without necessarily being aware of the typographic stratagems employed. ■

to Brian Varley, November 1998

Copyright Complications

Note that Peter Mandelson’s liking for Arial has dampened your enthusiasm for the face. My response to the claims of “fontology” is as cagey as my reaction to the wofflings of “graphologists” on character revealed through handwriting... The font names thrown out in that article just highlight what chaos the computer software folk have brought to the once sober subject of typography.

Once upon a time, the accepted names bestowed on typefaces were traditional, based on early typefounders’ designs, or copyright tradenames of modern foundries. Things got a little out of hand when transfer lettering sheets came on the market, with lookalike (or almost lookalike) fonts given fancy names to dodge copyright complications, a tendency that carried over as phototypesetting began to replace metal typesetting.

Then the computer software people were caught up in this trend. Plus the additional complication that marketing arrangements in the US and rest of the world often affected the choice of name. However, things have now settled down somewhat, but while the legal rights of the original copyright holders are generally respected, there has been little attempt at standardisation of names.

Consult the Corel WordPerf8 listing of available fonts, and you find that an alphabet may have two or more names—one that of the original typefounder, the other bestowed, under licence, by software companies like Bitstream Inc, Esselte Letraset, Corel Corp. Thus this particular face started out as Optima, by Linotype

AG, turns up as Optimum under TrueType, and is dubbed Zapf Humanist by Bitstream.

I guess it's high time they got their act together and sorted things out... Must confess that the fancy names scattered about that Observer article sound as if they're all from a software listing of otherwise stock-in-trade fonts! ■

to Brian Varley, November 1998

Computers: The Next Next Step or Not The Millennium Bug!

Thursday Jan 13th

Just when we thought the 386 had bypassed Millennium Bug and become reconciled to operating in 2000 [see p. 184, PHT], it suddenly started acting funny today, and in the course of its initial routines stopped and complained of a bad command, and demanded to be given the right prompt.

The Guru was promptly called in, but after a battle of wits, he was unable to persuade the processor to return to its usual cooperation. He's had the thing in bits, and replaced components, but without success. Guess old age (or a faulty component) has finally taken over.

Searching through the literature, Philip noticed some obsolete processors going cheap at Morgan Computers, as a possible replacement, but alas they'd been snapped up when he enquired. Marion is not happy about involvement with the sophistication of the pentium, so we're due to go to the Morgan branch on Piccadilly station approach next week, to see if we can locate an obsolete pentium that's likely to be user-friendly to DOS and Windows 3.1, (while functioning in a speedier fashion than the 386!) and offer to take it off their hands for a rockbottom price... Will keep you posted on progress (or lack of it).

So we now leap to MONDAY

In between marathon bouts of watching Amurrican Football on the SkySports channel over the weekend, Philip has been persevering with the 386, but finally decided it's a lost cause, as the main disk-drive appears to be decaying and losing its faculties whenever he tries to coax it to conform to normal activity.

So we made our planned morning visit to the Morgan store: it turned out that they were expecting further supplies of the obsolete processors (advertised at around £70) but didn't know when they would arrive. Nor would they promise to reserve one for us if/when they did arrive. Which wasn't exactly cheering news!

The alternative was to lash out on an obsolete pentium set-up going for around £300. We were recommended to phone and check if they were in stock on

Tuesday, and then hare down to the store in the hope of getting there before they were sold. Which didn't sound an entirely satisfactory arrangement from our viewpoint. So we left with a sheet listing the bargains on offer, and a conviction that we'd probably end up buying a new set-up.

By way of consolation, we went to have a look at the "new" city centre, to find traffic now wending its way along Cross Street into the reopened Corporation Street, viewed the postbox that survived the [IR bloody A] bomb blast and is now reinstated, had a look at the medieval pubs that have been transplanted to a new site (and now look very Mock-Tudorish) at the back of the new M&S building, in a wide pedestrian area that will look better under sunny skies and summery weather—at the moment it just looks bleak and forlorn.

The landscape has changed drastically, and you have to seek out landmarks like the cathedral, the Corn Exchange and the old Kemsley building (still being converted into a wondrous cine-clubland) to get your bearings.

I see that Dillons in St Ann's Square has become another Waterstones shop, while the alterations to the Deansgate premises have been completed so you can now spend the day there browsing, with a coffee bar and intellectual literary sessions on offer... wow.

On the journey back we studied the Morgan leaflet and decided that rather than hang on waiting to see what might or might not be sent to the Manchester branch, we'd phone the direct mail dept at Birmingham HQ to see if we could grab one of the processors before they were distributed round to their branches.

Surprise, surprise, our order was snapped up and the goods promised for delivery tomorrow! It was too easy... though we won't believe it until they arrive. ■

to Brian Varley, January Y2K

[*Editor's Note:* The "faithful old" 386 was acquired cheaply in 1995 as surplus to requirements from Reuters, who were switching to something more modern, and outfitted with the hard disk from my first ever computer (bought in 1992 and by then evolved into a 486) to give it more storage space.

The magnetic coating on the hard disk started to decay in 2000 and no cheap replacements were available. So the choice was between a Pentium Windows system, upon which my mother wasn't keen, and an obsolete Pentium (costing £88 including VAT & delivery), which could be outfitted with DOS 6.2 and Word-Perfect 6 for DOS.

The Compaq P90 acquired from Morgan Computers is still going strong in 2020 but used only very occasionally. I remain surprised that the coin cell on the motherboard has not yet croaked. PHT]

More Computing

While marking time on the rehousing of the art library, I went in search of bits of artwork required. to finish off some of the projects discovered buried in neglected files on the computer. This eventually had me investigating dusty portfolios housing all the work I'd done on the abandoned Dover commissions before my eye operations—guess I've never had the courage to think seriously about resuming my involvement with these ventures during retirement.

Now I'm taken aback at the vast amount of long forgotten notes and artwork I stashed away. Could do with a couple more lifetimes to sort it out and lick it into shape, but for the moment I'd better just concentrate on the physicalities of the library rehousing job already started... (Guess it all seems far more demanding than it used to).

All the Hilltop material and the mass [mess?] of stuff I've turned out on the computer is tucked away on both hard disk and a clutter of floppies, No immediate likelihood of me running out of memory [disk space, *Ed.*] with this "new" computer—it boasts some 20gigabytes of of storage, well in excess of the Pentium's capacity, though lagging far behind the boasted 200GB's of some of the contemporary market leaders.

Main worries are the occasional vagaries of WINDOWS XP when asked to handle material or software originated in earlier Windows formats; progress in the computer world is a trifle relentless, and you just have to try and keep up!

Having the resources of three computers in use here, from different periods of production, can be a blessing in sorting out problems at times!

Investigating the Net also sounds as though it needs real doggedness, patience and persistence, to get results—plus an endless supply of time, Depressing to hear that so many people apparently don't get around to keeping contributors informed of use of their material...

Thoughts of the time-wasting aspect, and need to block the many unwanted messages floating around, dissuades me from joining in, I rely on Philip's occasional excursions to dig out material of interest—mainly NASA and science reports and the occasional snippet of sf or fannish lore—though in view of my Gutenbergish upbringing I prefer to print out any significant data to read, rather than have to scroll the text on-screen.

Guess I lack all desire to indulge in trendy handphone texting and e-mail communication when a letter will do...

to Steve Sneyd, 4th July 2003

Yet More Computing

Current update of the Hilltop Catalogue enclosed – had a slight worry that there's been a change of computer since the last one; Microsoft XP seems to delight in mucking up complex files on older programmes. However, this time, I got co-operation all the way, which was a relief—gives me the feeling that I'm in charge at long last!

to Steve Sneyd, 11th March 2004

It's An Upgrade?

On going from Windows 98 to XP

I find that many earlier simple Windows routines have now been made unnecessarily fiddling and complicated, while several of XP's programmed busybody antics can be most irritating at times. Like a balloon that springs, unsummoned, into view telling me that "there are unused icons on your desktop" and offers to invoke the "desktop cleanup Wizard" to clear things up... (why this twee invocation of "Wizards" ?)

Not being on the internet, I get fed up with screens persistently appearing when things occasionally go awry, telling me to contact the web-site. And all sort of devious tricks have to be resorted to when software geared to earlier Windows progs is snootily ignored by XP. I have acquired several manuals in my efforts to cope with XP's idiosyncrasies, but I usually shout for help when expert son no.1 is in the vicinity... ■

to Steve Sneyd, 15 October 2004

B.C. (Before Computers)

Good to hear from you again... The house sale seems to have stretched on unduly and I guess it'll be a great relief when matters are finally resolved and a few distractions removed. At least you've cast off the burdens of Treasurership—don't know how these organisations will survive without you!

Must say that publication of the journals of the Wyndham Lewis Society and the British Society of Russian Philately has been most erratic in the years since I handed over production to self-styled computer experts. When I think of all that typing and paste-up involved in my pre-computer days, preparing camera-ready copy, I marvel how I did it all single-handedly.

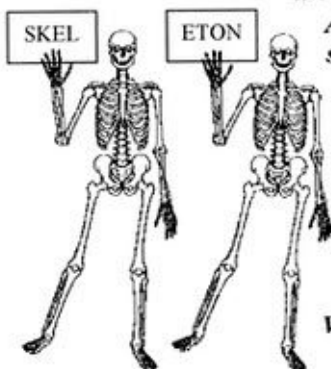
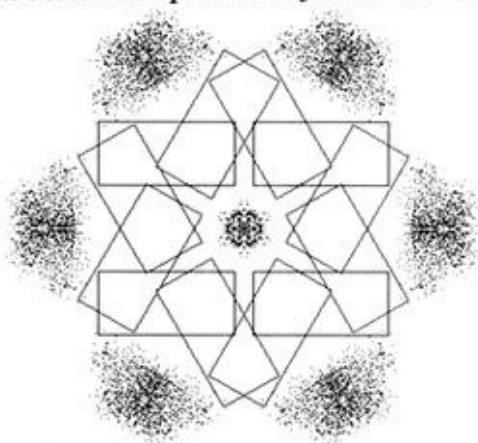
Now I've been replaced by committees, with money lashed out on computer facilities, but continuing apologies for non-appearance of publications on the due dates...

Can't really see what the problem is—the computer takes out all the hard work of the old routines, Or should do. But having gained my freedom after a hard stint I find little inclination to become involved again. I've still got all those piles of unread books to catch up with... Had quite a few sunny afternoons doing just that of late, though I usually finish up weeding and pruning now that everywhere is less soggy, and everything sprouting madly. ■

O&S 241 to Carol & Brian Varley, June 2001

GALLERY

looks at recent Computerart by Skel & Eton



*An exhibition
sponsored by
Clyde & Associates
to be held in No.2
Computer Room
before being sent
as an official entry
for the next
Turner Prize Contest...*

Wish the Lads luck!

Life 2

Customer Relations: A correspondence

Or how NOT to keep the customers happy!

5 January:

Letter to John Richards, Membership Manager, The Book Club.

Dear Mr Richards: You have dampened my enthusiasm for the New Year with your shock tidings on the December statement that books on order are being withheld until I pay an outstanding balance of £68.86... This demand is all very sudden, but I shall grit my teeth, stifle the urge to threaten resignation, and attempt to explain that this sorry state of affairs is not so much the result of a “simple matter of oversight” on my part, as you so gratuitously put it, but rather a consequence of shortcomings in your system.

You may recollect that the “Toys & Games” booklet included with a pre-Christmas mailing offered alternative forms of payment. I chose to pay a deposit by credit card, and have the balance charged to my book club account in three equal monthly payments. So much for expectations.

Your initial response to my order was to bombard me with a multiplicity of form letters advising that individual items ordered were not available, but that you were working on it. After an interval, more form letters arrived, one a definite thumbs-down, others still optimistic. My state of suspense was relieved as items began to turn up during December—with no indication of charges included in the parcels.

It would seem from your statement that instead of the expected charge of a £10 deposit being made to my credit card, you passed a charge of £7.98 to my club account for one item. Later, you charged three other gift items direct to my club account. Which goes a long way to explaining why my standing with your accountant is at so low an ebb.

I would ask you to check why arrangements went awry, and straighten out the statement charges. You might inform your marketing department that after this fiasco, there is little chance I shall succumb to their blandishments next Christmas.

Yours disenchantedly, H. Turner

22 January:

Note to Accounts Department, The Book Club.

I enclose cheque for £30.90 covering books supplied. With reference to the balance of your statement, please refer to my letter of 5 January.

H. Turner

29 January:

Dear Mr Turner: We regret that we cannot trace receipt of your letter. Please send a copy so the matter may be dealt with.

S. Newman, Customer Relations Department.

6 February:

Dear S. Newman: I attach copy of my January 5 letter as requested. I suggest that you charge the outstanding balance of £37.96 to my credit card account to clear the matter.

H. Turner

Letter dated 30 January: received February 7

Dear Mr Turner: Thank you for your recent communication. We have noted your comments and regrettably due to an administrative error your account was debited in full for the order from the "Toys & Games" catalogue, instead of three monthly instalments.

We are most concerned that because of this two orders were held. However, we are now arranging to send the books under separate cover, and we trust you will accept them with our compliments.

Although your account shows the complete balance you can pay over three months and please disregard any billing invoices you may receive. Please accept our apologies for the inconvenience you have been caused.

Yours sincerely, K. Rogers (Mrs), Customer Relations Department.

15 February:

Dear Mr Turner: Thank you for your recent communication. We trust you have now received our letter in reply to yours of January 5 and that this has now resolved the matter for you.

Yours sincerely, J.V. Smith, Customer Relations Department.

17 March:**Message on February statement of account...**

Dear Mr Turner: We have been looking at our membership record and it seems

for some reason you have not yet paid the outstanding balance of £37.96. We are sure this is a simple matter of oversight on your part: But if there is a problem or misunderstanding of any kind that is holding up payment, please let us know what the trouble is. Otherwise we look forward to receiving your payment with no further delay.

Yours sincerely, John Richards, Membership Manager.

17 March:

Note to John Richards, Membership Manager.

I would refer you to my letter of February 6, addressed to S. Newman of your Customer Relations Department, authorising payment by credit card.

H. Turner

April 30:

Message on March statement of account...

Dear Mr Turner: We wrote to you a few weeks ago to remind you that we were awaiting payment from you of your outstanding balance of £37.96.

We still don't appear to have heard from you either with your payment or with a letter giving your reasons for not paying. You will appreciate that to keep a club like this running smoothly and economically for all our members, it is very important that everyone settles their account promptly. We hope we can count on your full cooperation, and we look forward to receiving your payment right away.

Yours sincerely, John Richards, Membership Manager.

May 1:

Note to John Richards, Membership Manager.

What happened to my credit card payment instructions? I give up. Cheque enclosed.

H. Turner

Letter dated 30 April: received May 16.

Dear Mr Turner: Our Membership Manager has passed details of your club record to me and asked me to write personally about the £37.96 currently owing on your account. You have always paid promptly in the past. And, frankly, I am surprised

that—in spite of having written to you twice—we have received no payment nor even a reply from you. I can only think it has been an oversight on your part.

However, as Credit Controller, I must point out the seriousness of this matter, and ask you to settle your account without any further delay. I am reluctant to have to take firm action in this matter and would prefer to rely on your own good sense.

May I ask you to put your cheque or a postal order in the enclosed special return envelope and get it off to us today or, if you still feel you have a genuine reason for not paying, please write and tell us about it. Either way, do get in touch with us without any further delay.

Yours sincerely, D.Blackwood, Credit Controller.

16 May:

Letter to D. Blackwood, Credit Controller, The Book Club.

Dear Mr Blackwood: I have received your letter dated 30 April with the current mailing: by now, I trust, the cheque for £37.96 will have been received and worked its way through that ponderous system of yours, and settled the matter.

What annoys me is the fact that I have tried to clear the account on two previous occasions. What do your staff do with all these bits of paper that reach them? I returned a letter from S. Newman on Feb 6 and asked for the account to be cleared through my credit card account, but nothing appears to have been done. I referred to the matter again when I returned the order form on March 17; this was either unnoticed or ignored.

This matter has been dragging on since the New Year. The only sensible response that has emerged from your monolithic organisation has been from Mrs Rogers of your Customer Relations Dept. Otherwise you would have had my resignation from membership, in the face of organisational bumbling, long ago.

Having forced me to write unnecessarily, I hope you will have the courtesy to write and assure me that this ridiculous mix-up is at last sorted out, and that we can carry on without the word-processed threats and blandishments. Otherwise, I go where I don't have to put up with all this unwanted hassle.

Yours, H. Turner

22 May:

Dear Mr Turner: Thank you for your recent communication. Your account has now been credited with your recent payment of £37.96.

Please accept our apologies for the inconvenience you have been caused.

Yours sincerely, P. Norton, Customer. Relations Department. ■

Customer Service (?)

Sympathise with your wrangle with BG [British Gas]. Must confess that I've absolutely no faith in any organisation which relies on the phone as the main means of communication... especially those that shelter behind recorded messages recommending you to press various numbers that fail to connect you with the people you want to confront with a complaint.

I prefer to get said complaints into print (which at least keeps me with a record of where I'm up to) though it becomes increasingly obvious that many organisations no longer boast staff capable of replying to letters.

There've been several occasions recently when I've not had any acknowledgment of a complaint, but matters have actually been rectified, so I feel the written complaint has effectively reached someone. And if there are any later complications, I don't have to rack my brains to recollect the gory details.

Seem to recall that I gave up on BG a longtime ago, when trying to get sensible info on their charges and comparisons, but they persistently replied with "form" letters that had no real relevance to my queries, merely providing a multiplicity of different addresses and phone numbers—a tortuous method of keeping the customer at bay... They'll probably just ignore you if you threaten to change your supplier.

Must confess that I'm a mite surprised at the silence of BT over our change-over to C&W...It makes all their current advertising claims about "thousands" asking to be reconnected with them seem rather hollow! ■

to Brian Varley, September 1999

Dave Brubeck

After the wrestling finished on Friday midnight, Philip flicked over the channels and Dave Brubeck suddenly beamed at us on screen—turned out he's arrived here for his tour and was getting a spot of publicity on Jools Holland's pop round-up on Beeb2...

Which reminds me of a tale in the current Jazz Review:

... the Dave Brubeck Quartet rush into a lift. The doors close and as the lift starts off it drops about five inches and emits an awful screech.

"What was that?" demands Brubeck with an air of some alarm.

"E flat'," calmly states Paul Desmond. ■

O&S 268 to Carol & Brian Varley, 30 November 2002

DINOSAURS: Build or Buy?

Fancy you remembering my struggling efforts to mould dinosaurs! I 'borrowed' the clay from someone going to pottery classes, and had a somewhat clumsy stegosaurus, and a more ambitious triceratops, hanging around waiting to be fired for ages. By the time I found someone to take 'em in hand I think the trike had been damaged, so only the steg got fired and glazed, with one of the back fins collapsing in the process.

Then in the mid-70s one of those doomed enterprises attempting to sell cosy watercolours, provide a framing service and offering artistic odds'n'ends, opened at the far end of the village. I passed it on my trips up to Bredbury library, and was captivated by the appearance of a vast porcelain triceratops on offer in the window. White glaze, some 20" long and 10" high, a defiant glare and aggressive stance directed at window-gazers – I promptly fell in love with it.

The shop was an erratic opener: every time I passed the white trike fascinated me, and by the time I found the premises actually open, I was all psyched up to dash in and enquire the cost of the trike in the window.

I got a rum reception: the lady behind the counter countered my enquiry by asking all sorts of questions seeking to establish my reasons for wanting to buy before she committed herself. I slowly gathered that the pottery had some slight defects which would upset an avid collector of pieces but perhaps not be of moment to an avid devotee of dinosaurs, and this factor affected the price she was likely to demand. Or it may have been that she couldn't bear to part with such an eye-catcher in the window.

Eventually I dragged a price out of her, glad that no other buyers appeared to be in the offing; it made me gasp a bit, but after some haggling and an arrangement to pay in instalments, I toted the carefully packed prize home dreading an accident on the way. I drooled over the new acquisition and hid my amateurish stegosaurus in the background.

This was the time when my cataracts were getting me down and I was defiantly taking up photography (to prove something or other); so I should have some pics, I took of my friend tromping through the wastes of our grass patch...

Some time later I noticed that the art shop was giving up; a "closing down sale" poster appeared in the window. The sale seemed to last a while, and then on one of my journeys to the library, I was transfixed by the appearance of a white stegosaurus among the display of everything that must go...

Once again I encountered that reluctance to actually part with the dinosaur – it was a "second", (and even I could see one or two chips off the tail spikes, and some unsuccessfully glazed pits in places), was I interested in it as a porcelain piece or was I perhaps more interested in dinosaurs, and therefore not so critical?

Being experienced in handling these fine points, I attempted to establish if this

was one of a series, who was the modeller, and find out a bit of background info. But I drew a blank there. However, we negotiated a price, considerably lower than for the triceratops, and once again I carefully picked my way home, desperately scared that an upstanding paving stone might cost me my prize, and spent the rest of the day gloating over my dinosaur collection.

Currently the models lord it over the classical records shelves, between the speakers and the CD player. Very impressive: the trike is a convenient wearer of headphones, and national health shades when not in use, quite domesticated by now. Alas, I've never found out any details of the origins of the pieces, but I'm glad I got hold of 'em when I did. My feeble effort at modelling was discreetly disposed of... I recall that my record-buying was severely inhibited for a period when the purchases were made, but it all seems worthwhile today, and I remain grateful to the arty lady who brought them to my attention even if she didn't reveal all I'd have liked to know about 'em.

I hoped that somewhere, sometime, I'd come across a reference to the originator. But nowt so far. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 23/05/1993

Discontent the Order of the Day

The feeling of disquiet persists. Actually, I'm beginning to suspect that I slipped into an alternate universe some time around last Wednesday/Thursday. I mean, one minute Labour were all set to win, throwing parties, and dominating the TV scene and then, pof! here we are with a Tory government again, Neil Kinnock resigning, the Labour Party arguing about a new leader amid shouts of a rightwing conspiracy... And our local Tory scrapes in by 900 odd votes. And us pensioners won't be getting vast increases after all. Aaaargh!

The trams are actually running through the city centre: I can report a sighting last week, and Philip returned from town on Saturday with another sighting report. In my case, I was proceeding out of Market St. into Piccadilly and heard this faint whoo-whooping in the distance and turned, together with the massed shoppers to witness the vehicle creeping round from Mosley St.

It didn't have a bloke walking in front with a red flag, but it might just as well have, the speed it was going. Evidently, still early days and pedestrians treated with circumspection: how long will that last? I ask meself. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 13 April 1992

Energy Gap

Surprised to hear that you are still getting power cuts; wonder why the Midlands is so prone to them... Not noticed any effects of local voltage reductions on computer activities for a long while, so our generators must be coping. It's gone surprisingly quiet on the utilities front generally, now the subject's cropped up.

Forget when I last had any proposal to change gas or electricity supplies, and never seemed able to draw up proper comparisons of all the dodgily-phrased assessments of alleged savings. And recent references in the press and *Which?* etc. to the perils hidden in small print clauses for those venturing to change suppliers, certainly don't help to clarify matters any.

With all the abrupt changes in the weather pattern so far this year, the central heating has lingered on far longer than expected, and I have a feeling that we've been tempted to light the living room fire to cheer up more dull, nippy evenings than average, so the power/fuel providers hold all the cards in their grubby fists, and I can't see our domestic costs dropping significantly for the "summer" quarter this year!

At which depressing conclusion, I happened to pick up the Health Check brochure you so thoughtfully sent us. Wow, doomy! Even more depressing.

Do you think there's potential for a Health Check Kit Club, providing a new home test kit every quarter for members? I'm sure they've only touched the tip of the iceberg with these two kits, and there are lots more perils lurking in wait as they step up the age limit. (Bet there's a Hypochondriacs Anonymous site on the Web already!).

to Brian Varley, O&S 139

Extra-Musical Memories

I'VE JUST BEEN NOSTALGICALLY wallowing in a noisy piece of music, a prime example of avant-garde dissonance that first assaulted my ears sixty-odd years ago—Alexandr Vasilevich Mosolov's *Iron Foundry: Music of Machines*, an orchestral episode from a ballet popular with the Soviet proletariat in the '20s, which went on to achieve notoriety in the West.

It was issued here, before the war, on one side of a ten-inch 78rpm record which Arthur C. Clarke promptly added to his collection. You'll find a report in the March 1938 issue of *Novae Terrae*, of one of the record recitals he gave to the London Branch of the Science Fiction Association: a chilly February meeting started off with Wally Gillings reading Lovecraft's *Colour Out of Space* (that's how dedicated fans were in those early days!)...

“His audience sat enthralled, then interested, then passive, then replete, then a little fidgety. After 1½ hours heroic reading without a stop Mr Gillings drew his story to a finish. Grunts and deep sighs sounded from about the table, of ecstasy or relief. The big moment then arrived—a programme of sf music offered by Arthur Clarke.

“Several faces became stonily resigned as the handle was wound, and as the first notes of *Things To Come* thundered out, eyes wandered to papers and magazines. And then as the maddening rhythm of Mosolov’s *Steel Foundry* slammed and roared across the frosty air eyes became expressive once more, but alas, only with amusement and disgust...”

Arthur took great delight in playing the Mosolov piece at full volume to impress unsuspecting visitors (I was one!) to the 88 Grays Inn Road flat that he shared with Maurice Hanson and Bill Temple.

A few years later I spent some time in Arthur’s company at RAF Yatesbury, to find myself roped in to help at several wartime record recitals that Arthur busily organised as part of the camp entertainment. While Mosolov didn’t feature in these programmes, I found that Arthur still liked to operate at maximum volume, blithely ignoring all protests from wilting listeners in the front rows...

Many years later, in the 80s, a Russian Melodiya LP featuring the music of Mosolov, revived these memories. It included a live concert recording of *Iron Foundry*, enthusiastically applauded by the audience, and so I couldn’t resist adding it to the collection. The grinding orchestral rhythms and dissonances refreshed fading memories but I guess after a lifetime of listening, most of that first impact of encounter is now lost on me.

The music on this particular vinyl album later reappeared in CD format, to be included in the *New Penguin Guide to Compact Discs 1989* with a less than enthusiastic review... “a record for libraries and for those with a specialised interest in Soviet music”. Later editions appear to have discreetly ignored the disc, but no doubt it’s currently available among the vast amount of Russian recordings on the market, if you’re curious and prepared to search for it.

George Antheil (1900-1959), an expatriate American, caused a sensation in Paris in 1926 with his *Ballet mécanique*, scored for eight pianos, eight xylophones, pianola, two electric doorbells and aeroplane propeller.

Nearer to Russolo’s concept, though Antheil dissociates himself from the Futurist aesthetic in autobiog *Bad Boy of Music* ... also see p.113—says that the original title for *Ballet* was *Message to Mars* ! If he’d stuck to this, he would have certainly been highlighted in one of Arthur’s recitals... ■

[See Bill Temple’s *British Fan in His Natural Haunt* No.1—Eric C. Williams puts Mosolov piece on radiogram when Bill complains of headache...]

Family Features & History:

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 pocsards).

He formed a touring company after the war, and I have vague memories of being added to the entourage in my pre-school days. 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.



to Steve Sneyd, 21st February 2003

Early History and Before

I haven't got around to writing much about the early days yet, got lots of notes and tentative starts, but nowt readable that I can cast in your direction. Patience, patience. Started corresponding with Marion in 1937, when she was President of the Junior Astronomical Association and I was secretary of the Manchester Interplanetary Society, and we first met at the Glasgow Empire Exhibition in 1938.

I can also reveal that when we arranged to get married in 1942, the ME coincidentally sent my call-up papers for the date we'd picked, and we had to scramble to get spliced a week earlier than planned, to fit in a honeymoon of sorts. I began to suspect someone was getting at me when, in May 1945, I was home on compassionate leave to greet our firstborn, only to be recalled back to camp to be told that I'd been posted overseas, then allowed home again on embarkation leave, which was cancelled after a few days, when I started off on my journey to India. And it was eighteen months before I got back and out of the RAF.

So much for the synopsis.

During the past few days I've been ruthlessly editing the varied and disjointed versions of my story of life under the Raj that are on file, and assessing what seems needed to fill in the yawning gaps between some episodes.

Now I can move the text around and print out the sheets it becomes easier to grasp the overall picture, provide essential links and continuity, and hopefully

develop some of the supporting characters in a bit more depth.

In between tackling this and the fanhistory database I've actually got around to doing some writing at long last, and am feeling quite pleased with the results so far. The computer's doing a grand job of stitching all the bits together as I revise the existing texts, and the printer has been working overtime since I sorted out a page style and format for the material.

Even made a start on redrawing some bits of artwork I wasn't happy with on a job of Steve's that went awry before my shipment to hospital last year and has been on my conscience for far too long. If I can sort that out I shall feel I'm definitely making progress...

Of course, once you burrow into the quiescent chaos of old files, then all sorts of "lost" papers give themselves up...Like an old copy of the Official Guide to Bredbury Romiley Urban District, not dated but circa mid-60s. Claims that Bredburie, Cedde (ancient name for Chadkirk) and Werneth all appear in the Domesday Book of 1086.

The historical bit (written by Anon) suggests that the area must have been unattractive to settlers in pre-Roman times, with its bleak hill top, heavy clay soil of the intermediate land—probably covered by trees and becoming marshy where the slopes flattened out—and the swampy valley floors. The rivers flowed more fully then, until they were dammed in the 9thC to supply the main towns.

The Romans surveyed and constructed a road over an ancient track (now followed with little deviation by the A560), and this continued to be used for the transport of salt from Cheshire throughout medieval times. It seems likely that William the Conqueror's army, on its march from Yorkshire to subdue rebellion at Cheshire, followed this route, and virtually all the townships on the way were systematically looted.

Bredbury seems to have missed out, for reasons that are not immediately clear, but the army crossed the hill into Romiley which, although not on the direct route, is duly described as "waste" in the Domesday survey.

The names Bredbury and Romiley are Anglo-Saxon, and probably date from the first permanent settlements. 'Cowlshaw' and the 'kirk' of Chadkirk suggest that the Norse invaders found their way into the district, probably during the 10thC. Any questions? ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 20 February 1996

RAF Yatesbury

Been putting the new printer thru its paces and running off the voluminous notes that I jotted down, rampaging thru ancient fanzines and letters, before I was stricken down in August. I find it much easier to read the printed pages and assess the material so far gathered, than peering at a computer screen. I can now use the sheets when checking and interpolating further material, before adding it to the master-file on the computer.

Also written to Vin^c at long last so that the impetus of returning to the project is not lost, and the database will continue to grow. It's all something of a voyage of discovery: once you start unearthing a few half-forgotten facts, it surprises me how many buried memories surface.

I had a phone call from an ex-News studio member, John [Butterworth], (who took early retirement a couple of years ago) asking about Steve's poetry prog on the radio; he started talking about Arthur Clarke and radar, and that led to a discussion of the geography of Yatesbury RAF camp, where John stayed during his National Service stint.

We established that the NAAFI was near the main gate, and John said he was in a block of huts overlooking the main road. He asked whereabouts I was housed, and for the life of me I couldn't remember. Then I recalled we had a glorious summer in 1943, and one of the joys of being on night duty was that after breakfast we could take a blanket and go sunbathing in a field alongside the huts.

One of the added attractions was that there was a WAAF camp, Compton Basset, not so far away across the fields, whose inmates had similar ideas. There was a devoted group of "bird" watchers, I recall, who spent a lot of time scanning the horizon with binoculars. And all that reminded me that our huts must have been on the far side of the camp from the main road. And all these details fall into place 'cos of an enquiry about Steve's Stanza programme... Odd. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 1995

The Padfield Enigma

Good to hear from you – glad you were able to fit in a break to the work routine and sounds like you had a really pleasant trip. Noticed the Frank Padfield obit in the G but the name rang no bells and I didn't get round to reading it.

"Padfield had a happy childhood living above the family grocer's shop in Southampton, and won a scholarship to Taunton's grammar school there. With A-levels in physics and both pure and applied maths, he joined the RAF as a radar mechanic in 1942. It was over three years

before he was promoted to lance-corporal, to serve alongside the then Corporal Arthur C Clarke. Commissioned as a pilot officer in 1946, he was briefly posted to RAF Chigwell, where he married the commanding officer's daughter, Barbara, and was recommended for a university place.

[from theGuardian obituary, 2004/02/13]

Suspect the obit-writer was so determined to work in Arthur Clarke's name that he messed up his chronology... Padfield was called up the same year as me – my first step to qualifying as a radar mech was the six-month radio course at Wham College of Tech. I was posted to Yatesbury for radar training at the start of 1943, (probably Padfield arrived about the same time) – it was later that year that Arthur departed from Yatesbury on an officer-training course.

Have studied an “end-of-course” pic (original now faded & yellowed, but computer-enhanced below) taken with the Brum Tech tutors – lots of familiar faces though the names begin to elude me – only half-a-ozen of this gang went on to Yatesbury, the rest finished up elsewhere as wireless and radio mechanics.



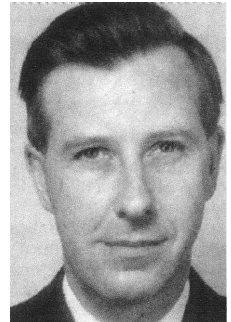
Birmingham Tech. radio course, 1942

No sign of Padfield, guess he must have trained elsewhere; no mention of him in Arthur's biography! In case you're wondering, I'm kneeling in the middle row, second from the right hand side of the pic.



But hold on... on reflection, I can't place the bloke who towers over Tubby on the left of the pic. Alas, this is the most badly faded part of the photo – but I do seem to detect a certain resemblance to the photo of the Air Commodore that appears with his obit.

Those cheekbones, the set of the mouth... Maybe he was on the same Brum course, after all. Wow!



to Steve Sneyd, 17th February 2004

Been checking an “end-of-course” group photo taken at Yatesbury during 1943, but there’s no sign of Paddy on it... The camp was split into a multitude of Radio Schools – my postal address was “No.8, RS”, while Arthur, located in a nearby block of huts, refers to his unit being “No.9 RS” in his memoirs. Could be that Paddy had his radar training in yet another small unit there.

I was transferred to the permanent staff after training, and spent the rest of 1943 doing maintenance on the many tech sites, but our paths just don’t seem to have crossed again – Yatesbury was a big camp with an ever-changing population, so it would be easy to lose track of him! (Should explain that most of the pics of me taken while in the RAF were sent home, and preserved together with our exchange of correspondence – so I had two big cartons filled with letters and memorabilia to scabble through when I started to write up the past occasionally, on retirement. The Brum pic is the only one to fade so drastically with time: the photographer must have been economising on developer...)

to Steve Sneyd, 1st March 2004

Radar Hierarchy

Ta for your letter. Don’t think I’ll be chasing that Brylcreem Boys book – having been dragged in the RAF reluctantly, never regarded myself as one of them, I guess. Reminds me that the books John Butterworth left me on RAF radar operations reveal a decidedly cliquish tendency among the people featured.

The Yatesbury-based groups tend to be tight-knit and presented as dominating the scene – the contributions of the rival radar school, Cranwell, to ground radar activities are usually conveniently ignored. Think that in my case, a) I obviously didn’t go to the right school or move in the right circles, and b) lacked the right spirit, having no great love of the RAF as an organisation (merely one of the enlisted masses itching to get out)...

Am constantly amazed at the way some folk make a career out of their war experiences, and seem to enjoy all the donning uniforms, waving flags and medals and parades. I feel they’ve not had much of a life.

to Steve Sneyd, 15th April 2004

Learning how to do retirement

All best wishes for the New Year, and many thanks for-your card and ‘annual’ update! It sounds a really frantic scramble to stay ahead of the games—daytime job and also chasing over the terrain in the small hours—I guess I couldn’t keep up

with the, pace of life in the US of A; old age is definitely creeping up on me! So if the life-style that may be revealed in this letter strikes you as singularly sedate, it may be that I've successfully dodged out of the stress-producing conditions imposed by others and slipped into a state of self-imposed stress.

The deadlines no longer seem so nagging, and can be amended as convenient; my own projects get priority now, though I allow occasional freelance jobs to intervene (in this hi-tech age, I find personal skill and insight are in great demand, to make up for the shortcomings of technology:) and the cash they bring in helps bolster my healthy appetite for books and records. Don't know how long it will last, of course. At least I've got by for a few years, so here's hoping...

The first few years of retirement have been busy ones. Mainly spent catching up with a lot of neglected interests. I think I became involved with Borges' role of the blind librarian when I was struggling with visual problems and frantically trying to read everything I wanted to as the darkness closed in. Then I started to acquire books against the day my sight was restored; to have them by me, in readiness. You can build up a pretty big library that way, and I have.

Am still doing. These days, I'm never short of reading matter: in my chosen subjects, the listings are pretty comprehensive. (I even get students passed on by tutors from the Polytechnic with a recommendation to consult my sources!) I enjoy being a sighted librarian. Main problem is providing shelf space—the piles tend to overflow on the floor.

I achieved my ambition to rehouse the record library—several thousand LPs—last year, just in time to have an irreplaceable valve conk out in one amplifier. So the hi-fi needs replacement this year, and as there seems a distinct mover to CD on the part of the record companies, I guess I'll have to add the facility.

Though my heart sinks when I read the specs of most reputable equipment: all I want to do is hear the music, without too much fuss, and without track-programming, and sophisticated systems of remote control. Anyway, I'm looking forward to a scout round the declining number of hi-fi shops in search of a system that'll see me through the next decade (will I be past worrying by then I ask myself?).

The main thing that kept me from reviving the projects left under dustwraps when the eye-operations were in progress, was the earnings rule imposed on pensioners, whereby if you earn over a certain amount, they start taking back your state pension. A state of affairs I resented, and was an inhibition to contacting any publishers.

I had to console myself with the thought that this rule was relaxed when a pensioner reached the ripe age of 70. So I set my targets accordingly. Then just as I approached the key age, the earnings-rule was abolished—just like this bloody government! However, aside from all this Thatcherite shambles, Fate was moving in its usual mysterious way. About the middle of last year I had a fan letter from Israel, from a bloke who'd discovered my Triad book.

Through him I started corresponding again with a neglected friend in Argentina, who had been in contact with an English firm publishing educational books, trying to get them interested in several projects. He mentioned that they still had my book in their catalogue. The firm started up in the early 80s, and I made a note then that they were potential publishers of some of the material I was working on, but never pursued the matter for the reasons above.

When I wrote to the boss man, explaining that I had lots of stuff awaiting sorting out for publication and asking if he was interested, I got an enthusiastic letter back, saying that he'd stocked my book for several years and always assumed that I was an American author. Now he knows that I'm on the spot.

In effect, he thinks it a great idea to publish a book under their own imprint. So... having discovered all the original artwork is in immaaulate condition despite a ten-year rest under wraps, I am presently engaged in drastic revisions and rewrites and, possibly, the use of colour, for another impossible objects book.

Am hoping to disengage myself from freelance work during the months to come, to complete this job. If it goes through, then the proceeds should relieve from any need to do freelance work. In which case, thanks to a new pair of glasses with special bifocal lenses, which are proving a big help, I hope to settle down to some serious drawing and painting. The local artscene is full of competent but dull work; it needs livening up again.

Plans, plans... but that's the way 1980 seems set. Unless Fate has other things up its sleeve.

Am still going to classes at Manchester university, During the last few years I've concentrated on Russian history and culture. From the painterly avant-garde years at the turn of last century I've branched out to cover earlier Russian art, and then the ups and down of the Soviet period.

Also spent a year studying music of the last couple of centuries, and another year investigating Russian and Soviet literature. Am still struggling with the language, on and off, and borrowing Philip's 1,100-page Russian-English dictionary—chemists need to be able to read literature in Russian as well as German—but gradually progressing.

During the last couple of years I've been on courses concentrating on Central European literature, which inevitably is involved with political developments. So, in between Gorbachev's reforms in the USSR, and the far-reaching effects in the rest of Eastern Europe, it's been a rewarding and relevant period of study.

While I'm still trying to understand things that happened in the 20s and 30s—and had profound effects in shaping the course of my life—I am lost in wonder that the cold war has suddenly and miraculously ceased to be the big barrier that we've had to get used to. There even seems a faint hope that the spirit might spread here to remove Maggie's clammy hand from this country's affairs.

Alongside all this, it's been an effort to keen up with the widening horizons wilth astronomical and astrophysical advances, the discovery of organisation in chaos,

and all the exotic areas of science opened up in this last decade.

The flood of information in all the areas I find of interest, from archeology to paleontology, quantum physics to artificial intellinence, is such that it's a relief to have retired and be able to devote so much time to understand it all, impossible though it is... ah, exciting times, looking for patterns may be futile but it's compulsive and rewarding at times to gain the odd insight.

My only complaint is that while I find interesting people to talk about particular interests, therw are very few I meet who share the range of interests. Even with music, I know folk who are interested in either jazz or 'serious' music, but hardly anyone who is mad keen on both.

I find it hard to separate all these interests. Always have. I resented efforts to split science and arts subjects at school, and was forced into the science stream, a grounding that ensured I got a grounding in rubber technology in subsequent years, and then electronics and radar when I was bunged into the RAF in the war years. And probably prompted my switch to advertising after the war.

At least after that I was able to mix the two as I'd always wanted. It seems to have rubbed off on the kids, too. Philip started off in chemistry, and then decided to write. Bill started off in art than turned to farming, and currently is in charge of computer studies at an agricultural college.

Robert went through to his chemistry PhD as the prospect of a job on graduation was slight, now he's a technical marketing man in educational material. I guess it all broadens the mind...

to Joy & Sandy Sanderson, 4th January 1990



"... 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—nd 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-in-the-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 luffed 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 off 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-smearred 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 Yugoslavian 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 six 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 roused 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 hard-back 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 enlightened 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-Gil's 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 ratchet track, hugged the mountainside, 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. Coincidence 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, roused 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 Madras 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 grounds 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, where there were 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 Mahabaleshwar. 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 Mahabaleshwar 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! ■

published in Hazel Ashworth's fanzine Lip #6, September 1991

Out-of-Season Trial

You'll also find a spare booklet enclosed made up of relevant notes on the [1973] Eclipse Cruise for retention in your files, and hope you find it of interest. The following year the MEN marketing department started to organise reader holidays, and we were lucky in being sent out as guinea-pigs on a trial out-of-season cruise to the Canary Islands, this time calling at Madeira, Tenerife and Lanzarote, this last being at that time still very much an undeveloped volcanic island and only just beginning to exploit its tourist potential. So we were able to catch up with some of the sights on Tenerife in more leisurely vein than on the original trip.

Went out on a P&O ship, the *Slack Watch*, which seemed a trifle regimented after the free and easy life aboard the good ship *Monte Umbe*... But that's another story, and I can't locate any notes just at the moment: I suspect most of the documents that survived from that outing have finished up in Marion's files. I must check with her. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 6 October 1996

Spot the Difference

Gathered my addled wits together to complete a piece for the writing class, and then arrived in Manchester earlier than usual. To fill in time I wandered over to see how the post-bomb work was proceeding, but the area still looks pretty devastated and I found myself drifting out of curiosity to the CIS building and Ancoats area.

It's hard to tell the difference between the bombed area and the area that's merely suffered sporadic demolition—there's little sign of the much vaunted "urban renewal" to be seen anywhere. Manchester has been a mess since I was a kid, and I guess it's too much to hope that it'll improve when I've snuffed it.

In which gloomy frame of mind, I was not surprised that the class finished just as it came to my turn to read my piece. Still, since it mentions the bonfire nights of my childhood, I guess it'll gain in topicality next week... ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 5 November 1996

Working at the Manchester Guardian/Evening News

Your comments on office parties and career moves make me realise that I led a relatively stable existence at the Guardian. I joined them at a time when a) Laurence Scott had ambitions to boost the Guardian from a regional paper with semi-national coverage, to a fullscale national daily, and b) the end of newsprint rationing meant that the [Manchester Evening] News had to adjust to active selling of advertising space after the restrictions that persisted into the postwar years.

In effect, I initiated a marketing studio promoting the papers' circulation, and servicing advertisers and potential advertisers in both papers. I found I was working in an area never covered fully by the company in the past, and interacting with advertising, editorial and production departments in a period of great change. I rapidly acquired a reputation as a problem-solver and built up a small creative group that proved, over the years, more permanent than the management.

I was there for nearly thirty years and the work the studio did continued to be so essential to the operation that we survived some four major upheavals in management, as the company progressed and expanded. I reckon I retired just at the right time, when "new technology" began drastically to alter and inhibit the whole production set-up of the newspaper industry.

The changes in the past decade have been decidedly more radical than during my whole career there. Essentially, the paper newspaper can be effectively replaced by an electronic setup... The joke is that I didn't even have to apply for the job in the first place: it was positively handed to me on a platter. But maybe I've already regaled you with that story? ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, January 1997

Going to the Guardian / On the move . . .

My involvement with the Guardian started when management changes at Redfern's made my life unduly complicated. Redfern's was a family business when I started there.

I was advertising manager, responsible to the general sales manager, and working with the sales managers of half a dozen separate departments: footwear, covering both shoe manufacturers and the repair trade, household items, automotive, chemical and engineering trades, and advertising mats. Which gained me experience in a whole range of advertising activities from exhibitions, sales and technical literature, point-of-sale material and mail order.

(It was the exhibition work and occasional visits to the ad agency that got me down to London so often in those years). I also had charge of a small internal

printing and mailing section, which explains the incidence of offset covers for *Astroneer*, *Space-Times* and other zines of the time.

However the day came when Tom Redfern started looking forward to his retirement, and brought in a firm of consultants to plan the future structure of the organisation. It finished up with Redfern's becoming the holding company, and each of the sales departments being boosted into a subsidiary company. This meant that the general sales manager became redundant, and took early retirement.

So, instead of having a referee to appeal to, in the event of a disagreement with one of the sales managers, now elevated to directors, I found I was at their beck and call, and spending most of my time dashing from one company meeting to the next, and trying to cope with conflicting priorities. So, I decided the time had come to move on.

The problem was that to get a job with the interest and variety of advertising activity I'd enjoyed, probably meant moving south. This I wasn't keen on: we were well settled in at Romiley and Philip was attending William Hulme Grammar.

There was just a faint chance that a local manufacturing company might be looking for someone like me, otherwise the alternative was a job with one of the bigger advertising agencies still operating in Manchester in those days, which could be restricting and too specialised.

To sound out local prospects, I drafted out a small display ad, which I thought would stand out in the classified columns (the pages were crammed tight with small print in those far-off days) and sent it off to the Guardian, asking the cost. I promptly got a reply from the ad manager, Norman Roscoe, giving me the info, with a PS asking me to phone the secretary of William McMillan, the advertisement director. I did, and was asked to call in and see him.

Willie McMillan, (known to everyone as 'Mac'), had my letter on the desk in front of him. It seemed that Norman had been impressed by my handwriting, and shown the letter to Mac. Having read my intended ad, Mac decided I was just the man they needed to start up the promotion department the company had been planning. So it was all settled, just like that. Salary? Don't worry, you'll get more than you're getting at present.

I insisted on tackling a job just to show how I'd go about matters, and was passed over to a rep with a problem that wasn't really a problem, and everyone was suitably impressed with my solution. So it was all settled, just like that. Only snag was that there was no office space immediately available in the Guardian building at the time, so matters had to be left until suitable accommodation could be found. I left in a slight daze, and Mac's parting words were mock-regret that he'd not put the ad in the G first before interviewing me, so he'd have got the revenue!

All that happened in the autumn. I got occasional phone-calls from Mac, apologising for the delay in sorting out the matter of office space, but the weeks

passed by, and I began to think it was all too good to be true, and would fizzle out...

I needn't have worried though. Just before Christmas I had a call inviting me to view some premises in the Royal Exchange, across the road from the Guardian building in Cross Street. And matters were clinched there and then.

I handed in my notice at Redferns to move into the new studio, and the new job, a couple of months later... just in time to attend a Dave Brubeck concert at the Free Trade Hall by way of appropriate celebration!

And that's how I came to meet and work with Laurence and Charles Scott, Brian Redhead, Michael Frayn, Harold Evans, Mary Stott, Bill Webb and other press worthies, over the next thirty years. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 20 January, 1997

Cinematic Postmodernist Eclecticism

Philip switched to the tail end of *The Untouchables*, another inevitable remake, in which Sean Canary tries to pinch the limelight from Elliot Ness—who is depicted as such a wishywashy character he would never have survived in the grainy black&white series—but expires in a puddle of his own blood. A very self-conscious arty version of the old favourite.

I was left aghast at a laboured take-off of the Odessa Steps sequence (from Eisenstein's *Potemkin*) in which a comely young wench struggles with a large child in the most improbable-looking pram imaginable, and a couple of pieces of luggage, and gets involved in a shoot out between cops and hoods on the vast station staircase.

Very contrived and grotesquely funny for all the wrong reasons... And that was only one of the distractions that made me give up trying to read a book, to watch Eliot in a rooftop chase after an improbable Frank Nitty imitator, and then to see Sean, after being riddled with bullets and leaking blood from multiple punctures, survive for several hours merely to cough out a punch-line when discovered by a distraught Eliot Ness... And I see this farrago gets a ***** [Five Star] rating in Radio Times.

Ugh!! Why does presentday cinema get taken so seriously/get up my nose? I'm already fed-up of hearing about the refurbished digitalised squeaky-clean Star Wars. The whole concept is still as corny as it always was.

Eeee... feel in a proper niggly mood after being exposed to all this cinematic postmodernist eclecticism... or whatever it is. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 24/03/1997

The Erudite Mathematician

What's all this about being baffled by an article from that erudite mathematician H.E. Turner in *Urania***? Tell me more... (I'll probably be baffled too after fifty years or so, but I should warn you that I have a letter of praise from Sir James Jeans himself, preserved in the Archive in case I ever require a testimonial—or get hard-up in my old age and need to flog his autograph to the highest bidder). ■

** Journal of the Junior Astronomical Association

to Fran & Brian Varley, end March 1997

From the Dawn of a New (Labour) Era

Wow! Everything's different today... like there's been a Great Flip in the Time-Space area and an Alternative Universe has just opened up.

Had a dream last night that there was a Labour landslide at the election and the dreaded Tories were swept out of power, even the unspeakable Ian Hamilton and Warren Hawksley. And here this fine sunny May morning, the Guardian announces that it is indeed so in the real world. Takes me right back to the day I arrived in India, over fifty years ago, to hear similar news... And here's the cycle starting all over again, though I dunno if I'll survive another fifty years to see the outcome this time. ■

Must say that I have viewed the deserved downfall of certain Tories—like Hamilton, Portillo, Mellor, et al—with considerable glee, and the removal of some of the ambitious from the disorderly scramble for leadership of the party has a certain poetic justice.

Though there's a certain air of unreality about the world this week. All this hooha about the Borneo gold-find turning into a “hoax” (fraud, I would have said!). The fuss over the allegedly “brilliant” pianist David Helfgott and his world concert tour, which seems no more than a glorified publicity puff for the film. And now this farcical brouhaha between Michael Howard and William Hague (who rouses my hackles every time I see him on TV) and their champagne party arrangements... it's all such a change from that bloody boring election campaign! ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, May 1997

Back to normal—somewhat!

Had a visit from Domino today [a neighbour's cat]. Found him parked on No.12 back doorstep waiting for someone to come round and let him in. He shot upstairs in search of his favourite chair but found it piled up with junk, and wandered into the spare room, to be astounded by the changes since his last visit.

After lots of meowing in wonderment as he explored the inner recesses of the two storage units that Philip is beginning to fill up, he noticed a vacant chair and settled down for the afternoon, purring with satisfaction. Refreshed, he departed homewards in search of nourishment, as we packed up for the evening meal.

I may have mentioned that we haven't seen the Siamese for a long while, but she arrived back on the scene a few days ago: suspect she's been to Colditch Cattery... So things are back to normal in the cat-world.

Wish I could say the same about our world; here we are, it's Monday, and Di continues to dominate everything so far as the media are concerned. I'm just surprised someone hasn't decided to put her on permanent view in the Millennium Dome. It looks as though the media are determined not to let us get away from Di for a long long while...

Much later: The Big Question now seems to be can we get away from Elton John?—he seems to be taking over direction of post-funereal arrangements. And if you rush to get a CD of that bloody song, don't bother to send us a tape! ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, September 1997

To & From Redferns Redfern's Rubber Works, Hyde

That early job of mine was not with ICI, but with the Anchor Chemical Co, a Manchester firm that specialised in chemicals for the rubber industry. I nursed ambitions to become a rubber technologist at this time; however, when I got back from India, was demobbed, and returned to the job I decided that the wartime developments in synthetic rubbers and changes in the industry meant I had more than a lot to catch up with.

As it happened, I came back to the job just when they were having trouble over costs with the London advertising agency—the firm, as a matter of prestige, had front-cover contracts with the two leading rubber-industry journals—when I submitted some economical typeset layouts for ads, I found my talent in that direction was greatly appreciated and apparently just what was needed.

So that relieved me of any worries about restarting my technical education from scratch; instead I found myself busy forming a publicity department, with the responsibility of producing and distributing technical literature and other printed

matter. The director behind these activities, Tom Martin, was friendly with Tom Redfern, of Redfern's Rubber Works of Hyde, one of Anchor's leading customers.

He arranged for me to visit Redferns and look at the printing section they ran, to pick up any useful ideas. So the publicity department acquired a Multilith machine, and we were soon happily churning out reports and printing most of the company stationery...

As it happened, a few years later, Redfern's were looking for an advertising manager. While I was relatively happy with my job at Anchor, I was not enjoying the Manchester atmosphere—after a year and more in the fresh air of the Western Ghats, I found the stench of the industrial “park” (occupied by British Steel and a variety of chemical companies), somewhat oppressive.

The prospect of moving away from Manchester to the cleaner atmosphere of the foothills of the Pennines had its attractions—for years I'd been an enthusiastic Youth-hosteller and weekend visitor to the Peak. So I applied for the job—I met Tom Redfern during the interviews, who grinned and asked what he could say to Tom Martin if I was appointed...

Fortunately Tom Martin also grinned when I raised the matter and wished me well. So that was how the Turner family came to live in Romiley in the early '50s.

Redferns had five departments—sole & heels, dealing with shoe-repairers, and footwear companies; a range of domestic products; industrial mouldings; protective linings; and advertising mats—all under the control of the marketing manager. So I found myself dabbling in pretty well all aspects of advertising—point-of-sale activities, print and catalogues, mailing promotions, and exhibition work.

I got to London frequently either visiting the agency or supervising stand erection and arrangements. It kept me busy and was a great experience... until Tom Redfern decided to retire, and called in consultants to plan the future of the company and they decreed that each of the departments should be reformed as separate companies, which introduced a large element of chaos into my job.

And that's when I wrote out an ad for insertion in the Guardian...

Am sure you must have seen “point-of-sale” fascias and bills for Redferns plastered all over the place in the '50s—I forget the marketing statistics of that “pre-trainer” era, but there were thousands of shoe repairers in business dedicated to prolonging the life of leather footwear.

We had a team of thirty or more sales reps in the footwear department calling on 'em nationwide. As we supplied “stick-on soles” (our main competitor was Phillips, as I recall) for the folk that hankered to economise and do their own repairs.

Memories came flooding back after I sent that last letter, I recall that as a junior, my appearance in court over the matter of the Manchester Interplanetary Society met with the strong disapproval of the sales manager at Anchor; he was a WW1 veteran and a leading light at the local branch of BLESMA (British Limbless Ex-

Servicemen's Association), having lost a leg in France.

However, things changed after WW2—whenever I had occasion to visit his office, I was inevitably introduced to visitors as a wayward genius who had foreseen flying bombs and V2s, and more-or-less invented space-flight...

So far as my career swing is concerned, I've always had an abiding interest in both science and art. At the Central School I attended in the thirties, the art master left me to my own devices most of the time, and my efforts were prominently displayed on the walls. Then in the third year we switched to School Cert/Matriculation subjects, and I concentrated on maths and science.

Always seemed to do well in exams and finished up my time by winning some prize or other, and choosing a pile of books. (In a mood of cheery optimism one I selected was *Relativity Physics* by W.H. McCrea, but I soon decided that I'd bitten off more than I could chew with that one. It still lingers on the shelf, but is not consulted very often!).

Did better when I attended Newton Heath Tech and won the Herbert Birley medal in 1937, plus more books, coming out top in the Rubber Course exams. Sensibly, I went in for subjects I could cope with this time—like David Lasser's *The Conquest of Space* and Charles Philp's *Stratosphere & Rocket Flight*, both still in the library...

Then just before the war, a couple of British science-fiction mags appeared and I managed to get some illustrations accepted, and began to dream of a possible spare-time career as a commercial artist, though the rewards were not very high then! So I fitted in at Anchor Chemical, being able to flit comfortably between sales and laboratory departments, and then at Redferns coping with both the areas of general and technical advertising,

Guess I was pretty lucky with my job applications. When I decided to leave Redferns, there didn't seem to be any jobs with the same wide scope that I was enjoying, covering most aspects of advertising. So I designed a display ad, setting out my qualifications and experience, and sent it in to the Guardian for insertion.

I received a note from the ad manager giving me a quote but asking me to contact Bill McMillan, the advertisement director before insertion. When I spoke to him, he told me that I seemed to be just the man the Guardian & News happened to be looking for, and would I come in for an interview.

This was the time when newsprint rationing had just ended, and a general scramble for circulation was under way, while Laurence Scott nursed ambitions to convert the Guardian from a leading regional paper to a national daily.

So I went in, displayed my wares and told my story, and found that the job of organising a marketing & statistics studio, serving both the Guardian & News was mine for the taking. At that time the Guardian was largely subsidised by advertising income from the News—under rationing the ad reps had become accustomed to rationing available space for advertisers in the paper: now they had to sell it, in the face of strong competition from the Chronicle and other local papers.

So I provided a back-up service for them in the expectation that mounting ad income would be available to carry through long-term plans for the Guardian to settle in Fleet Street as well as Cross Street... Quite a demanding job, but I revelled in it; my staff expanded to meet the demands, and the sixties, importantly, were the years when the Sports Guild Jazz Cellar and Club 43 came into their own, attracting US jazzmen over to play here, and the Free Trade Hall featured frequent jazz concerts.

It all seemed to good to be true. Which is why I stayed with the Guardian until my retirement! ■

to Peter Ashford, June 2003

Mutiny?? No Way!

Guess I wasn't all that seriously involved in the RAF Strike – when it broke, we were isolated on a small radar station in the Western Ghats, remote from all the action. My main memory is that Accounts at Poona kindly sent us a message that they'd make sure we got some pay before they walked out.

As I recall, our only contribution, by way of solidarity, was my mate Nick Cropper climbing the 100ft aerial mast and flying a red handkerchief at the top. The real effect of the “walk-out” was in the bigger base camps, where the dangers of confrontation and friction with admin and RAF police were only too real.

Am surprised there's not been any reaction from people who were more deeply involved with events (the government of the day delicately avoided use of that word “mutiny” you so casually use !) and think any action should come from them.

to Steve Sneyd, 23rd June 2004

The Stroke

Belated thanks for your letter back in September, and apologies for the absence of seasonal greetings from this end. Fact is I had another run of ill-health towards the end of last year, culminating in a (mild) stroke that had me languishing in Stepping Hill hospital for a month or so; I lost the power of speech and use of my right hand, and recall very little of the first week of my incarceration.

The good news was that the therapists started my verbal memory working again in the second week, and with exercise my hand returned to near normal working. Began to feel quite my normal self and realised everyone else in the ward was bedridden and far worse off than me.

It became rather boring only having a corridor, running the length of the wards,

to walk up&down by way of exercise (the garden was out of bounds because of bad weather).

Fortunately, at the end of the second week of my stay, I was moved to another ward inhabited by a few other livelier patients, who provided more congenial company. Marion visited me each day and brought some books to relieve the boredom—found it hard to concentrate on reading for a while, then welcomed the chance to catch up with several items from the Great Unread Pile lurking at home, without all the usual distractions...

Eventually had a second brain scan, and optimistically thought I might be allowed home well before the Christmas break, but though promises were made, none materialised—I was kept in, under observation, right until the eve of the holiday, when I was told that my bed was required for a more urgent case and the family had been advised to collect me...

So I didn't miss the usual family reunion after all, though I felt a bit wobbly on my pins after all the weeks of inaction.

Was glad to get back to the computer and begin picking up the details of home existence again—been kept busy for the past month sorting out the confusion of domestic finances, mailings from book clubs, renewing expiring subs, catching up with correspondence, and listening to an accumulation of CDs.

Still experience occasional moments when I can't find the word I want, forget aspects of what used to be familiar routines, or can't locate some essential object, but memory keeps improving all the time... Guess I'm more or less back to normal for an 85-year old. Felt somewhat fatigued at the least exertion when first home, but like you, found a spot of persistent exercise worked wonders.

Hope your plans to up-date the Newtonian telescope that fell in your lap have progressed as planned—maybe even a backyard observatory by now? Viewing conditions here when we first came were quite good, especially on the Pennines side; now they are pretty grim—the night sky is illuminated by all the road and street lights of the Greater Manchester urban sprawl that has built up around us over the years...

Marion's observations these nights usually concentrate on "flashes"—sightings of the space station and all the bits'n'pieces floating in orbit around the earth.

to Dave Rowe, 12 February 2005

[The 'flashes' were brightenings of Iridium network communication satellites when their sails were at just the right angle to catch the Sun. They went from a moving dot of light to a flare as bright as a full Moon over a few seconds, and then faded out. PHT]

Further Fandom Recollections:

Fandom: Looking Back vs Being There

20 April 1977

Dear Charnocks both:

After all my rash promises of lengthy locs I fled on holiday and was content to collapse in a sunshine and siesta routine by way of escaping from the work problems of the pre-holiday period. And here I am, back again, still in a lazy mood and bitterly resenting that I still have to work for a living... Ho hum.

But I must get that letter off my conscience. The trouble with these big, readable fanzines is that they overwhelm me when it comes to making a response—there's so much to write about that I finish up not knowing where to start. And consequently there's a danger that the letter is postponed until I find time..., and then by the time I do find time, I decide that's taken so long that any comments I make are just so much ancient history and not worth sending.

This thoroughly messes up the communications. So, I'd better get down to it now, while I've got some paper in the machine, and stop making excuses...

I suppose the main item that triggered off my responses was this fanzine review by D. West, which in a masterly way, ranges over quite a range of fannish preoccupations. There are so many points that demand comment that a proper response would no doubt produce an article as long, if not longer, than the original. I guess I'll just amble through a few of the things that interested/irked me...

First, there's the problem of the fannish generation-gap. To me, the article has a between-the-lines assumption that all the burning fannish issues arose in the 50s or thereafter. This I find as irksome as the bland assumption in too many articles on pop music by the younger generation that history began with the Beatles.

Obviously, D. West's outlook is conditioned by his fannish experience: he has a "period outlook" that cannot appreciate the atmosphere of earlier fandom—and British fandom has been going since the 1930s.

I admit to something of the same difficulty in reverse: I came into fandom in the late 30s, was forcibly gaffiated towards the end of the war by being sent out to India, resumed semi-active contacts in the immediate post-war years, and returned to fanzine publishing (and OMPA) during the fifties—after which I faded from the scene, to return a few years ago.

Despite its patchiness, my fannish career at least enables me to make comparisons—to see both the changes and the lack of change in tandem—in a way that D. West cannot. He is obviously blinkered when he looks back, tends to project the views of a later fannish generation on to an earlier generation where

they do not apply. (Or didn't apply). This imperfect appreciation of the ideas and ideals current in earlier fandoms seems to be the crux of the Platt-Millis brouhaha that is currently getting an airing.

There's always been a divided attitude towards organisation in fandom. In the thirties, with the demise of the Science Fiction League, it seemed "a good thing" to form the Science Fiction Association in Britain as a focal point, both to hold fans together and attract new recruits

At the time the number of fans was so small that it was the only sensible thing to do. But fannish politics intruded, and when there was a shift of control from the provinces to London there was quite a lot of resentment generated.

The demise of the SFA about the time war broke out was a source of satisfaction to many fans who felt little need to be "organised"—mainly those involved with fanzines—and when plans were voiced a year or so later that a British Fantasy Society be formed to organise wartime fandom, there was a brief explosion of fanarchistic activity to sabotage the project.

In these early days, fandom had a very conservative core—mainly the sercon, pros and would-be pro element—that favoured an organisation because it supported an sf "Establishment". This lent authority to the view (which even the freer elements accepted) that there was a natural progression in fandom, from neofan to acceptance as a full-blooded fan, and from then to the hierarchy, either as a pro, or through fannish good works to acceptance as a BNF. And that accepted order of things was very much prevalent in the 50s, when Walt was, deservedly, elevated to BNFship (even Ghodship in some fannish circles).

I don't see how any new fan of the 60s could quite appreciate the reason for Walt's veneration among the Trufen. Even assuming it was possible to read a goodly part of the material he, and Irish Fandom, produced, it would be difficult for anyone looking back to be able to recreate the spirit of the times, the atmosphere and excitements that sustained and inspired us all. And if that statement seems faintly obscurantist, I can only say that much that happened in fandom was not documented, that in view of the limited circulation of fanzines and their ephemeral nature, much of what was documented would not generally be available to later generations of fans.

Platt's reaction to Walt as being an Old & Tired BNF, part of an earlier fannish Establishment, is perhaps understandable. There are earlier examples of fans who were as disruptive as Charles seems to have been—Stu McKenzie is a name that pops up in my memory—and the reaction against the Establishment has echoes (or pre-echoes) in the early 50s. Around that time there seemed to be a propaganda campaign largely inspired by Frank Arnold to elevate Ted Carnell and other relics of British First Fandom into a state of fannish sainthood.

It was when Walt started to quote large chunks of this eulogistic uncritical gush in his own fannish columns that I wrote a BLAST! item in Zenith (the pre-Weston one, that is), denouncing this distorted fancestor-worship. (I seem to recall

sending copies of this item to Greg ages ago—maybe you’ve seen it).

I feel West’s attempt to analyse Walt’s feelings towards Platt’s attacks is way off the beam. It seems reasonable to assume that Walt’s involvement with fandom at that time, after all the busy years, was on the wane: the outpourings of a belligerent unappreciative newcomer could well have hastened his retirement. But since Walt is hovering on the fringes again, the obvious thing seems to seek his views rather than indulge in speculation...

In some respects we were a tighter-knit fannish community back in the thirties and forties: we were certainly smaller in number, and though the outlooks of what were dubbed First and Second Fandom were basically irreconcilable, we jogged along together. There were fanzine fans, con fans, and sercon fans, and a few congenial types who contrived to live with all three groups. The rivalry of the zeros and amateurs was there; and many aspirants to pro-dom made it.

Many of the issues that roused strong feelings still persist in present-day fandom, and continue to rouse strong feelings—but the ambience of that earlier period has gone, and each fannish generation grows up in a different atmosphere, has a subtly changed outlook.

It is the intangibles that govern each generation that are so difficult to pin down, to recapture or recreate. A fact which makes me hang back from the extravagant nostalgia for the fifties that has swept fandom recently. For me there is no best period: each fannish generation creates its own heroes and ideals. And I guess the present is always the best time to be living in.

I go along with West’s semantic exercise at the start of his article where he tries to persuade us that fanzines are art—though I wish he’d not slipped into using that cap A, especially as on page 33 he equates Art with a capital A with the reverential, awe-struck culture bit. And I applaud when he tries to make semantic sense of the words “amateur” and “professional”.

Maybe he tries too hard and runs his subject deep into the ground but I guess he knows his audience: I suppose my own urge is towards being a professional amateur, using the professional there as referring to mastering technique and working to a high standard—the thing to avoid, I suppose, is being relegated to the status of amateurish professional?

That seems to be the goal of the Graham Poole school, I go along with West when he derides the belief that you can learn to write (or achieve anything in any of the arts) by studying the “successful” and doing it their way, that conformity and emulation is all. I’ve noticed a preoccupation with techniques and markets among some of the fannish art fraternity—having ideas worth expressing seems a long way down on their list of priorities. Which is probably why we continue to suffer the same old decorative embellishments in fanzines no doubt. (Though Wrinkled Shrew pages are mercifully free of this corn, I am glad to see).

3 MAY/77

The arrival of Vibrator reminds me that this is quietly rotting in the typewriter. I'd better send it off though it's a bit incoherent in parts: if I hang on to rewrite it, it'll never reach you for sure. I wonder if you find the response drops off after a mammoth issue, because of the inertia of correspondents when faced with a heavy comment job? Maybe it's just me that's not so young & enthusiastic as I used to be...

Anyway, the only thought that occurs to me at this moment is that after rightly demouncing the Pooleish System of Successful Writing, West has a dig at Zimri as dragging ten years behind the avant-garde. Surely Lisa does not deny any literary merit to sf: she is, obviously, aware of sf as a part of the literary scene but looks for an audience both inside and beyond fandom.

That may not be an aim that appeals to the fannish fanzine purist, but it is an aim in which she has met with a certain amount of success in reaching an interested audience.

Obviously it's a valid aim, and the matter of the avant-garde aspirations exists largely in the minds of half-baked critics... or would-be critics. Me, I hope Lisa continues in the way she has, because one of my contributions produced an enquiry from a New York publisher which materialised as a contract for a book. So I'm not complaining... Maybe Graham Poole should have a rethink.

But I'd better get this in the post or else you'll cross me off the mailing list. Come to think of it... but enough. To the post box. ■

to Pat & Graham Charnock, 1977

Remembering Eric Needham

Eric the Needy

During 1937 I was one of the members of the Manchester Interplanetary Society who were investigated by the local police and appeared in court following a rocket launch explosion at a technical meeting. Eric Needham insinuated himself into my awareness some time after the excitement of the MIS affair had died down.

He was a diffident, faintly scruffy character with short-cropped hair, not aired in the accepted social graces of the time and received with faint disapproval by my mother when he called.

He became a frequent visitor to my attic den at 41 Longford Place and spent more time investigating my collection of SF mags and books than in conversation.

One of the books was *Astronautics & Relativity*, acquired as a prize. Eric, impressed, fingered pages on *Relativity* and asked: "You understand this?"

I blushed and admitted that I'd bitten off more than I could chew.

He was an omnivorous reader and noter of trifles. When he did talk it usually

involved some unexpected, and occasionally disconcerting, questions. He had a knack of picking up some dubious statement and exposing the flaw in an argument. He seemed a serious character, but there were occasions when you suddenly tumbled to the fact that a grin had crept into his face as he led you on to make some preposterous claim.

An apparently innocent enquiry could by devious logic lead you into making unsupportable assertions, which Eric would then ingenuously expose... An uncomfortable candour... He was an odd mixture of ingenuousness and artless, childlike guileless—yet he had a knack of needling out info... and a cruel streak on occasion.

Frequent visitors to the clubroom included Rocket, our fox terrier mascot, Bill Shelton and Fred Tozer (ex-schoolmates), George Ellis and MIS enthusiasts Bill Heeley and Stan Davies—all readers of SF, and budding futurologists.

Eric introduced an element of chaos into the serious approach of the rest of us. He had a knack of starting off fierce arguments by some ingenuous query. When we were nearly at each others throats we would realise that Eric had dropped out of active participation and was sat in a corner of the attic listening and watching our antics with quiet amusement...

from Ethel Lindsay's *Bletherings* No. 5 (May 1972)

Harry Turner:

There's no escape from the past, is there? Here am I happily making up for all the lost time in pursuing a career as a painter of serious intent, and you send me these-reminders of my more profligate years...

For the historical record, your statement that the material you have used in *Bletherings* 4 represents an unfinished Now and Then is not quite true. The cover by Denness Morton was intended for *Astroneer* which was the organ of the fan group, in which the leading lights were Dave Cohen, Eric Bentcliffe, Brian Varley, Sandy Sanderson et al.

We met in the Waterloo Hotel, circa 1954, as Eric reports in *The Awful Truth*. The article by Brian Varley and the other Morton page were originally intended for the post-war *Zenith*, which I abandoned in the second issue as it seemed to be getting very "sercon" whereas my tastes ran to the spontaneous and casual, as exemplified in *N&T*.

So the Widowers' verses are really the only *N&T* material in this survival from the past! Yes, the unsigned verses were Eric's—and so are some of the signed ones for that matter.

Having get the record straight, I hasten to say that it's nice to hear from you (albeit indirectly!) and to see that fandom still survives. And that FAPA is still functioning. I am mildly amazed that these things happen.

I know a few very young SF fans and still keep in touch with a few of the older

gang. And how are you making out? Still at Courage House, I see...

Your old and tired fan face...

Harry.

Chuck Harris:

I agree with everything you say about Eric Needham—probably the most gifted and most under-rated writer to have graced Anglo-fandom. He was a talented poet and a genuine surrealist poet. And wildly generous with rare SF books too. “You said you’d never read *THE KING IN YELLOW*, Chuck so I found you a copy. Don’t send it back: I’ve got a couple more of them somewhere”.

He’d never take any money and only reluctantly accepted a German lady who was surplus to my requirements at the next convention...

Harry Turner:

All Chuck (Harris) said about Eric Needham was true—though he wasn’t entirely ‘under-rated’: he had a fair correspondence from his fans considering the limited circles of fandom. It was a pity he couldn’t find a better outlet for his comic genius than fanzines, but I think he was probably too impulsive and erratic a writer to have written on a commercial basis.

The thing about the N&T period was that it was all spontaneous and grew naturally. Eric was a lonely creature—he had personal problems that eventually piled up and were one reason for his rapid exit from Fandom—and I like to think that he found comfort in his visits here when the kids were all young and there was plenty of life and activity to distract him from his preoccupations.

In one sense it is true when he says that his N&T work was autobiographical—even the wildest fantasies have originated from something that happened or something that was said. Eric had a childlike awareness—he would pounce on an unconsidered remark and build a make-believe (but logically water-tight) world from it.

He was self-educated: most of his extensive knowledge came from erratic reading during his RAF career—which was why you would find him surprisingly knowledgeable about some esoteric topic and then suddenly ill-informed on some accepted, mundane matter.

And it wasn’t all literary and philosophical knowledge he’d absorbed—he had a phenomenal grasp of things mechanical and electronic, and a genius for building equipment of all sorts from junk parts.

I first met him before the war at fannish gatherings; it was 1937 at the Leeds SFA that our paths first crossed; but I can’t recall we had a great deal in common then. My main memory is of someone vaguely scruffy and inordinately shy.

When our paths crossed again in post-war years, he’d changed considerably and we found a lot in common—though he was still vaguely scruffy and still shy with strangers, but covered up by acting in some outrageous way. (I seem to recall

your first meeting with him will bear this, out!)

The thing that I liked about him (though it could be uncomfortable on occasions) was his natural curiosity and forthright questions about any topic that interested him. He had a refreshing uninhibitedness that kept me mentally alert during the years when a comfortable family existence could have led to rapid bourgeois complacency!

I certainly enjoyed his company. He was able to make easy contact with people through his articles and letters in a way he often found difficult in a personal confrontation. As Chuck says, he could be wildly generous—and often would do his good deeds under a cloak of anonymity. Ah well, I hope he's found some happiness wherever he's gone.

Gad..I thought I'd lost the knack of writing long letters. See what an effect you're having on me. I think your fanzine brought back all the thoughts of Eric...

Harry

from Ansible #37 (Jan 1984)

RIP AGAIN: "Eric Needham died suddenly on Dec 1. I received word from his widow Kathleen. Eric was best known for offbeat writings in Harry Turner's fanzine and in particular was the originator of the 'Widowers Wonderful' verses. He was active in early Manchester fandom and had a truly original brand of humour, much appreciated by his friends." (Ethel Lindsay)

SF Poetry

In the poetry category, the name that stares out for me is that of Eric Needham. He belonged to my fannish generation, haunted meetings of the SFA in the attic meeting room of 41 Longford Place, Victoria Park, in pre-war days, mainly to borrow magazines.

We lost touch with each other during the war, though we were both in the RAF, but made contact again in the late 40s when I was living at Moston, Manchester.

We became embroiled in the North Western Science Fantasy Club in the early fifties, and I resuscitated the club fanzine Astroneer, using stuff I had left over from the Zenith days. I can't lay hands on a copy but will track it down as I fancy it has a poem by Eric.

Eric and I became committee members in an effort to rescue the SuperMancon of 1954 from the dreamy clutches of Dave Cohen and convert it from fantasy to reality. Eric and I eventually fled from Mancunian fandom to start up the Romiley Fan Veterans & Scottish Dancing Society, and issue Now & Then, when OMPA was formed.

The Widower's ad campaign attracted many fannish copywriters, but none with quite the flair of the originator—Eric. After the first small issue, we rapidly

expanded in paging with each issue, and had to make it generally available instead of just an APAzine after the third issue.

to Steve Sneyd, 21 September, 1987

Infinite Leisure

I guess Terry Carr must think of us old ex-fans who returned to the everyday world for long periods as having infinite leisure! Where would I find time to write autobiographical details to fill in my “missing” years, when I have a struggle just keeping pace with current distractions? Essentially, it’s just a matter of the energies devoted to fanac being diverted to activities that promise to be more rewarding.

So after dealing with the mundane necessities, like earning a living to support a family and paying off the mortgage, I concentrated my interest (and most spare cash) into drawing, painting and music and such-like cultural areas. The outward and visible signs of that time and effort are an art-history library, and a record/tape collection of jazz and classical music that currently presents storage and filing problems even after overflowing into two adjoining houses.

I can cheerfully spend the next twenty years (if I live that long!) exploring these resources to the full. I could say that I found I got along very well without fandom—relegating it to the “goddam hobby” category—but admit that it’s pleasant to look in on it occasionally to renew old acquaintances and to get to know a few new friends, and see and hear what they’re doing—even to know they’re still around, like Terry Carr.

But a little exposure to fandom goes a long way. Fannish preoccupations tend to be repetitive over the years and I guess they bore me, so that I gladly return to what seem to be more varied and rewarding activities elsewhere.

The hell with writing about unfannish life—what self-respecting fan-editor would want to print it? ■

LoC to Microwave #8, March 1985, by Margaret Hill and Elda Wheeler

Early Science Fiction Poetry

I’m not quite sure what you regard as ‘SF poetry’, but early fns did include poetry of sorts. I enclose two rare and rotting copies of the ‘legendary’ Zenith, with offerings by Sam Youd (John Christopher) and Dorothy Morton (a non-fen but a pal of Marion’s and fellow-attender at a writers’ class in the Glasgow of the late 30s-40s).

The reference to a contribution from H.K. Bulmer on page 13 of Z1, reminds

me that this was a poem which never saw print; originally, it had been sent for the proto-Zenith that appeared in Mike Rosenblum's Futurian War Digest (Fido). As I recall, its non-appearance provoked Ken to write and accuse me of burying it because I'd raised my standards too high (maybe I did!).

My memory of the content of the sheets I sent to Mike during 1941 for inclusion in his mailing is of the vaguest. I seem to recall I illustrated poems sent in by fans—Don J. Doughty's name surfaces—and, indeed, I have a manuscript copy of a rumty-tum bit of space imperialist verse by Arthur Clarke, which also was not published (by me, at any rate; I daren't let you see this as Arthur would sue me if it were spread around...).

[Afterthoughts department: I suspect that the rumty-tum verse must have been an early version of his *Twilight*.

If you want to dig further into this prehistoric aspect of fans and poetry and publishing, I suggest you need to get into touch with the Vinç Clarke Fanzine Library. I enclose my copy of the catalogue that Vinç issued a couple of years back, since he acquired a wp last year he may have produced an up-dated version.

I suggest you write and ask him if he can give you details of the verse-content of the Fido litter during 1941, and it might also be worth investigating John Burke's Satellite (1938-40) and Fantast, started by Sam Youd (1939-42) and continued by Doug Webster (which Vinç doesn't list in this catalogue).

So that line of enquiry should absorb all the spare time that remains. Like you say, the nearer you get to the horizon, the wider it gets... ■

Vinç sent me a pile of Fido litter material recently. I didn't realise I'd done so much stuff for Mike in the way of covers and inserts. The proto-Zeniths in the Fido mailings were all Illustrated verse? I presume Vinç sent you these? I think I must have looked for better things when I started in on the full-blown Zeds: I was into Read, Spender, Eliot, Pound and Day Lewis at this time.

Still have several slightly damp-stained slim volumes, acquired in those days, on the shelves. Was also discovering Modernism in painting and reaching the inevitable conclusion that a goodly number of fannish contemporaries were right philistines.

Amused to notice that on the dust jacket of Faber's Spender Poems it ses in large red print "third impression of the revised and enlarged second edition" -- not exactly a point today's marketeers would stress. Still at 40 poems for 6 bob, not bad value. Hardback, too.

I like that "fanzies" ... it's a good word to describe Eric's prose output. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 29th July & 3rd October 1989



THEY SAY THAT LIFE IS JUST A FRACTAL IN HILBERT SPACE...

"Someday I hope to have enough time to really get a good piece of my life fractal down on disk... I would hazard a guess that, in the future, recording one's own life fractal will be a very popular activity among retired people."

— Rudy Rucker

LIFE FRACTAL 22r:

How I got into hi-fi but missed the 1943 Midvention

I recall that in the autumn of 1942 the RAF sent me on a lengthy radio course at the Birmingham College of Technology. It was a welcome respite from the rigours of camp life in the back of beyond to return to a big city, enjoy the comforts of civvy billets in down-town Edgbaston, and put my spare time to good use again.

I promptly made contact with a local fan correspondent, Arthur Busby, to find out what had happened in fandom during my absence. He gave me an up-date and took me round to meet fellow fan Tom Hughes, who proved to be a hi-fi addict. Even in those days of 78s and radiograms there were enthusiasts who aspired to high-quality sound reproduction; Tom was one of this rare breed (rarer even than sf fans) and the performance of his home-built equipment impressed me no end.

I was beginning to grasp the fundamentals of the requisite technology at the college classes, and decided, there and then, that I too could no longer tolerate the mellow distortions of your average commercial radiogram of the day... So I enthused to Marion, in my next letter home:

"I went round to see Arthur last night and after a chat we toddled over to meet Tom Hughes. Tom is a bachelor, mad keen on music and a collector of sf and scientific books generally. When we arrived, he'd just finished transferring his collection into a magnificent mahogany bookcase (converted from a vast display cabinet) which occupies virtually the whole of one wall of

the room. Made me quite envious. I was promptly escorted into the next room to see/hear his brainchild in action. This is a record player constructed with his own hands... a marvellous bit of work, with a five-valve amplifier and assorted transformers occupying the top of a sideboard, a gramophone turntable perched perilously on a chair, and a huge speaker mounted in a separate wooden box. Even more marvellous, it works! The only trouble is that the volume control seems to operate from loud to louder; the place fairly .vibrates when a heavy orchestral piece is being played. In fact Tom has a habit of switching on full blast and then retiring to the next room to put the music in better perspective... We played Dante. Sonata and several ballet pieces, and wound up the evening with some solo piano. Quite an enjoyable concert, though I wonder how the neighbours survive."

Tom's record collection was extensive and filed in racks for easy access. The dead weight of all that shellac must have put a strain on the floor joists but probably had a helpful damping effect on any unwanted resonances set up when the system was operational. As well as Tom's recitals, there were live concerts held regularly at the Town Hall, and soon I found myself involved in presenting gramophone sessions—jazz and classics—at the city YWCA, where entertainment (of -a staid and respectable variety) was provided for the forces. All in all, I found a surprising amount of music in wartime Brum.

In a letter written the following February Marion passed on news of a con—the Midvention—proposed by the recently formed British-Fantasy Society:

"It's to be held. at Easter: too bad you'll have left Brum by then! I dare say you'll have heard all about it by now, since Messrs. Busby & Hughes appear to form the Birmingham contribution to the committee."

I found Art and Tom despondent at the unrealistic plans they'd been asked to deal with:

"Thank Ghu I'm likely to miss the Midvention. Art and Tom have been saddled with the task of arranging everything, much to their disgust; all they've gotta do is find a hall to hold 50 fans for three nights, and accommodation for visitors! Arthur called down maledictions on the sponsor of the scheme... It's-practically impossible to find any halls for such a meeting locally; the Grand Plan hardly takes war conditions into account."

I guess I didn't have much sympathy with the efforts of the BPS to organise fandom at that time. The SFA had served a useful function in its day, linking fans and fan groups all over the country, and after its demise, fans maintained those

contacts despite wartime restrictions. In 1942 thanks to the efforts of individual fans, newsletters and fanmags flourished, with generous American fans donating 'sf mags and supplies' of much-needed usable paper for faneds.

There seemed little need to divert time and energy to running an essentially superfluous institution like the BPS, and before I was roped into the RAF I battled briefly alongside Doug Webster pushing the cause of fanarchy, but the organisation-lovers won the day... But I had to leave Art and Tom with their problems; right then I had my own preoccupations—the course was nearing its end, I faced practical tests and assessments at the college and there was a big question mark hanging over my future movements.

I was posted from Birmingham at the end of February, long before con matters were resolved. I heard that the con did materialise, much later, in different and less ambitious circumstances. The date slipped to the end of April and the venue was moved to Leicester—much to the relief of Art and Tom, no doubt! They attended the event together with visitors including Art Williams, Don Houston, Terry Overton and Ron Holmes. And the usual good time appears to have been had by all...

I had plans to visit D.R.Smith, the fannish Sage of Nuneaton, before leaving Brum. Don was a friend of long standing; a fan who gained considerable repute over the years for his long and interesting letters, and prolific contributions to fanmags, as well as his Olympian aloofness from gatherings of fans.

The bus service to Nuneaton proved virtually non-existent and my occasional attempts to hitch had been damp ignominious failures. With time running out I made a last effort, only to be foiled by the commanding officer's desire for a formal 'passing out' ceremony, plus group photographs of classes and tutors.

I'd wangled out of some official Red Army celebrations that were going on, only to find myself mobilised with a working party shifting all the chairs out of the YWCA so that everyone could be huddled together in one of those panoramic group portrait shots. Needless to say, it took hours of maneuvring before the desired results were achieved, and then the chairs had to be carted back... The upshot was that I never did get to meet DRS.

But in other respects, I felt my time had not been wasted. Frequent discussions in class and discreet distribution of spare copies of Manchester Interplanetary Society Journals had won over several converts to space travel at the college—including my tutor. So the word spread, with the majority of the class moving to Bolton, while the rest of us were dispatched to Yatesbury, in deepest Wiltshire, to continue our training on more hush-hush developments...

FRACTAL FLASHBACK 22s:

"Sausage town plan towed in a hole" [see *Volume 1*]

LIFE FRACTAL 22t:**Interlude with Ego***

*(An early nickname of Arthur C. Clarke)

On the very first day at Yatesbury Radio School I wrote home exultantly:

“I think Arthur Clarke is still here. At least there’s a corporal in charge of a squad that marched past who was his double! I’ve not yet found out where he’s quartered, so if you happen to have that postcard he sent me at Redcar, it’d be a help. Of course, I might bump into him again some time...”

So, with one thing and another,—adjusting to camp routines after the sloth of civilian lodgings, being put on night shift, and getting familiar with the geography—several days passed before I tracked Arthur down. He was in a block of huts not far from my new abode. When we did meet all our spare time that day was spent exchanging news:

“This morning I was dragged off by Arthur into the store room of his hut where he thrust a homemade 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. Then we sat and talked about the Junior Astronomical Association and its demise... (An organisation headed by Marion for many years) He’s got his typewriter here and keeps a file of all potential BIS members he’s met. He’s due to give a talk on rocket propulsion at the month end. (After a discussion with the bods in my hut this evening I’ve made ’em all promise to turn up—with a few sceptics it should be a hectic session!) This afternoon Arthur was running a gramophone concert and roped me in to help with the records: quite a good programme—Cockaigne overture, Walton’s first symphony, the Dvorak violin concerto and Borodin’s second symphony. Well attended, too. We carried on playing records long after the audience had departed. I had thought after all the concerts at Brum, that musical life here would be dead, but apparently the station C.O. is keen on music so we get record concerts on camp every Tuesday and Sunday evening.”

Later meetings were sporadic owing to changing shifts. But as the weeks passed, music continued to play a prominent part in the routine, in between technical training, and the inevitable ‘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.

On March 10 I wrote 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. Have you spotted it yet? 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 have discovered a means of disposing of those Astonishings that keep arriving. Arthur is willing to have 'em, so send it 'em on quick before he changes his mind...”

Arthur was a keen member of the ‘current affairs’ discussion group run at 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, Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador, 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, 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 my time for these diversions was severely restricted by having to work on a night shift.

Eventually I was switched to a day shift and I then realised that the big advantage of night work was that you dodged fatigues. Now my name started appearing on duty lists: one boring chore was lighting the instruction hut stoves on the technical 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 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... So, 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 war-time dailies that were our main source of reading matter conflicted with the need to hoard copies to cover the newly-polished hut floor prior to weekly inspections, but fortunately there were two Canadians billeted in our hut who had papers sent regularly from home, and these were 100 page weekend issues with umpteen pages of comics.

The slow progress getting the stoves working was at least eased by being able to catch up with the adventures of Little Orphan Annie, the Grumps, Bringing Up Father, and the Katzenjammer Kids and other familiar friends of my younger days... But fatigues tended to expand to fill the time available as I complained in a letter toward the end of the month:

“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 I was worn out. Most of the class were yawning and dozing off during the lectures. And 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—no doubt you noticed that when you visited the Flat!—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...”

I was excused fatigues after a series of inoculations for something or other, but promptly lost interest in life thanks to a throbbing arm and the sight of my fellow-sufferers agonising around me:

“There was no music circle yesterday as there was a piano recital by Marjorie Few at the station theatre. I still felt groggy after my inoculations and decided not to go, but Arthur came in panting, all enthusiasm, to collect me. So I went. It was a great recital: a Beethoven sonata, preludes by Rachmaninoff and Chopin, and two pieces by Liszt. Apparently she was playing with the LPO at Marlborough and was persuaded to play for us before returning to London.”

I had a request to go to Arthur’s talk on the following Wednesday and write an unbiassed (!) report for the wall newspaper. Needless to say, it was Arthur who

made the request... He had a big audience, mainly technical people, and there were raging arguments all over the camp for weeks after, with 'Spaceship' Clarke being regarded as a nut-case or a genius!

Shortly after, around mid-April, Arthur was told that 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:

"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 on 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 60 pages per 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. And strangely enough, he does seem to get a lot done—or at least leaves that impression!"

Though only a few days later I was to write to Marion:

"In the evening I was treated to the spectacle of Arthur packing up. What a commotion! He'd got three large suitcases and his kitbag spread over the floor, and kept whipping things out of one and into another, changing his mind and reversing the process a few seconds later. And he kept finding things at the bottom of the cases that he'd clean forgotten about, which slowed down the packing... We carried on a conversation separated by a growing pile of Arthur's belongings—eventually he disappeared altogether, although 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 he'd not done any more packing after unearthing this volume. I can't see he'll ever get away at this rate!"

But go he did, as I reported on April 21:

"I'd managed to skip 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 I was immediately besieged by a bod who'd spotted them in Arthur's hut and begged to borrow 'em as he was "keen on science fiction". I passed them on, with a health warning, and he bore them off in triumph... ■

published in Hazel Ashworth's Lip #4, September 1988

Manchester Fan Ron Lane Remembered

Ron Lane published several zines, including *Gemini*, though my mind is blank about content. He had literary inclinations—oddly enough he was recruited into fandom by the English master at Ducie Avenue Central School, Sam Mundy, who had been very patient in putting up with my efforts to convert Eng. Lit. to SF while a pupil and kept in touch with me after I left school, pointing likely candidates in the direction of the Manchester Interplanetary Society...

I think you'll find some verse in *Gemini*. Ron was active in fandom during the war years and finally became a Bevin boy. Died in a boating accident in the fifties, alas. And Eric [Needham]; died of a heart attack a few years ago... ■

to Steve Sneyd, 21 September 1988

[From a "One-time member of the SCIENCE-FICTION ASSOCIATION"]

Thanx for answering my question about filking—though I wasn't really expecting you to devote most of an issue to my plea for enlightenment. Well, I guess I did my bit of filking, but that was a long time ago when I was young and carefree. Now I'm old and carefree, I'm happy to leave the filking to your generation.

It's just that we didn't call it filking then; we just did it and didn't bother about a name. Mercifully, we didn't have recorders in those days and nothing is preserved, for which you contemporary filkers ought to be grateful.

I am currently more involved in re-exploring the vast accumulation of jazz LPs, tapes, and cassettes while in the process of rehousing the collection... ..And it's a lengthy, but full of rewarding moments, process playing 'em over and indexing them too.

If you must know, the immediate reaction of my fannish generation to Quatermass and Journey into Space and suchlike phenomena was an affectionate hilarity. Ditto Star Trek and Blake's 7. I don't understand people who take these minor manifestations so seriously as to elevate them to cult status. They must have something lacking in their lives.

But I must cease pontificating (though as an Old and Tired Fan I feel entitled to on occasion). Don't let the urban fannish culture get you down; it's just that they always get better media coverage because the media don't get around to the countryside. Especially when you've got a foot of snow. (But not during May, surely?) ■

LoC to Dave Bell's Real Soon Now #2 (1990)

[I had to look this up but apparently, fans started singing folk songs at social gatherings back in 1930s and making up their own sciffy lyrics for traditional tunes. And the "filk" bit was a fanzine typo for "folk", which caught the fannish imagination. PHT]

Prozines: Very Casual Work

Odd how one thing leads to another. Andy's request has aroused my own curiosity about what I was doing in the fifties. I lost all interest in doing artwork for struggling publishers who couldn't pay the rates, and kept no record of what I'd done.

Philip dug out his files of Nebula, and I was surprised at the amount of stuff I illustrated for Pete Hamilton—some of it I can recall with a certain amount of pleasure; a lot of it I'd like to forget! I suppose it all depended on how tight the deadline was, and whether I actually was free to work from the typescript or had to follow instructions at secondhand as to what was needed.

Maybe I should try and make a record; looks as though I've another future copying job ahead of me! Not yet started to investigate Science-Fantasy... Andy tells me that according to Alan Hunter, I did the cover of the second issue, but I have no memory of it, and suspect Alan is thinking of something else. I'll believe it when I see it.

I suspect that most of the illustrative work I turned out in the 50s was pot-boiling; I fancy I put my heart and soul into the amateur publications. Certainly, I seem to have wiped the memory banks pretty clean of my involvement with the pro

sf mags of the period; there seemed a general assumption on the part of the editors that seeing your work in print was reward enough!

I wonder where I stand after all the overhauling of the copyright laws? As I recall, I was just asked for artwork, and received a cheque looong long after delivery, with no written contract, stipulations about copyright, or whatever. Hmmm. I got very few of the originals back; in the case of Pete Hamilton I heard rumours, long after Nebula folded, that he'd been auctioning artwork at several cons.

Ah well, it's like investigating the activities of someone I knew in the distant past. As fast as I seem to get some details in focus, the mists around get thinner, and a larger picture emerges. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 07/03/1991

The Invention of Colour Printing?

Was amused at Shelby Wick's account [in STET #6] of the invention of Vicolor in 1951. It reminds me of my own venture into colour printing on a duplicator way back in 1941-2, thereby anticipating the development of Vicolor by a decade. I can't claim to have invented my process: it was, in effect, forced upon me by a defective inking mechanism. But years after the event I kept getting queries from other faneds as to how it was done.

I started cutting stencils for fanzine covers in 1937, all direct-on-to-stencil jobs. First, it was for the SFA monthly mag, *Novae Terrae*, produced by Maurice Hanson, Bill Temple and Arthur Clarke. Then I started to do regular covers for John Burke's *Satellite*, Sam Youd's *Fantast*, (later taken over by Doug Webster when Sam was dragged into the forces in 1940), Ted Carnell's *New Worlds* (not the prozine!) and Mike Rosenblum's *FIDO* (*Futurian War Digest*).

I contributed several pages titled *Zenith* to the *FIDO* litters that Mike circulated to help struggling faneds during wartime. Then after decorating everyone else's fanmags, I decided to do my own thing and launched *Zenith* as an independent mag.

Early in 1941 I had acquired a rusting relic of a duplicator that someone had thrown out for scrap. It was in a sorry state even after being cleaned up and restored with loving care. The drum inking mechanism was broken and had to be discarded; a replacement was unobtainable in wartime. The only way to ink the drum was to lift the stencil periodically and brush on ink.

It required a certain amount of practice to judge the optimum ink coating—too much and the stencil was flooded, too little and the results were patchy. Experience eventually enabled me to assess all variables—size of paintbrush, viscosity of ink, room temperature, and the height of the Heaviside Layer—so that the inking routine became an automatic process.

On a good day, I reckoned to get some 25 perfect sheets through before having to lift the stencil and re-ink. The machine was not an automatic feeder: each sheet had to be positioned and hand-fed. And, being a perfectionist, I used to slip-sheet. Which may strike you as a somewhat tedious way to produce a fanzine. It was, but then my productions averaged 24 pages an issue and under a 100 copies, owing to the limiting factor of wartime paper shortages.

With the first issue out of the way, I looked round for ways to improve production, and it was then that I hit on the idea of painting different areas of the roller pad with separate patches of colour ink. This enabled me to print red illustrations with black print on several pages.

It was easy—too easy—several colours printed simultaneously in perfect register. By the fourth issue I was using red, green and black on the same page, and experimenting with illustrations using deliberately merged colours, creating effects not obtainable by the conventional method of separate colour runs. Just when I'd really mastered the colour technique my fanpubbing came to an end in 1942, when I was called up into the RAF.

I didn't get around to pubbing another ish until the 1950s. I'd still got the duplicator (which my co-editor of the day, Eric Needham, a palaeotechnologist of repute, assured me was a vintage 1913 Model 2a Romeo) but by then I'd settled for the easy life.

It was enough of a bind having to keep lifting the stencils to ink the drum without the added complications of colour patching. The stencil-lifting process was fraught on occasion, since in the interests of economy we replaced the unused portions of stencils by a piece of backing sheet, held on by Sellotape.

The reclaimed bits of stencil were typed/drawn on, and tacked on to a stencil head to provide extra free stencils. With repeated lifting, the vagaries of Sellotape adhesive added to the suspense. Further economies were effected by modifications to the drum which enabled us to use any known brand of stencils we could lay hands on instead of being limited to using the Romeo version.

But production was still very labour-intensive. Eric discreetly stayed away the weekends I announced that yet another Issue of NOW & THEN, organ of the Romiley Fan Veterans & Scottish Dancing Society, was to be produced. I was forced to enrol my three sons to help with the feeding, slip-sheeting, collating and stapling, while I concentrated on the urgent niceties of ink control.

By the end of the 50s, however, the labourers had become organised and demanded pocket-money for their services. The wearisome production methods were getting me down. I gave the duplicator away to the Scouts and gafiated.

I was dragged back into fandom again in the 70s but by then was content to let others do the publishing and just provide the occasional memoir or artwork to keep them happy. So, there it is. Sorry to steal your fire, Shelby. I've written to the Guinness Book of Records staking my prior claim.

I'm still marvelling at the sheer size of your production achievement with STET,

and wondering just how long it's going to take me to read thru its 90 pages. I guess I'd better wing this off to you now, in case another issue arrives before I've finished.

Will write again! ■

to Leah & Dick Smith, 9 November 1992

Episode 2

Thanx for the card. Glad the antiquarian notes on duplicating were of interest. Will have to disappoint you over direct-to-stencil artwork for STET—I handed over my styli and wheel-pens to an ambitious fanzine editor in the 70s, thinking I'd never be asked to do any more stencil-cutting in the age of offset... So I was wrong!

I can offer you an example of early work, however. The enclosed was passed on to me by a relative who found it in some old files she was clearing out. This was obviously drawn for fans interested in archaeology, and appeared in Zenith 4 in February 1942. [page 70] Over fifty years ago, mighod. Done, as I recall, with a home-made stylus that was an all-purpose tool for line work and with lettering guides, a cogwheel pen, and a Gestetner 'dotted-rule' fine wheelpen.

This sheet must have been a reject because of the fading on the left side, (Very strict on quality control in those far off days!) and if you add it to your specimen file, you will no doubt note that. Must say that the paper has stood up to the ravages of time very well. I bought up all the stocks of green paper when I started on Zed; I must have struck lucky with some pre-war production, as there was considerably less show-through than with the 'white' paper available during the war.

I've just been looking thru the locs in Zed 5—there were a few drools from fans in the forces!—and find an extract from a letter of Forrie Ackerman:

"The stencil lovely—she not only is passable but well nigh unsurpassable! 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 have xrpted that reclining rarebit from the Feb ish [Zenith #4, page 67] and put her on the wall amongst originals and fotos. The only piece of fanmag art to be so honored..."

My curiosity is roused about this stencil I cut for VOM—I have absolutely no memory of what I did. I wonder if any of the greyheads in your readership know of this pic... I may be disappointed to see it again after all this time, but I'll take the risk. One of the disadvantages of drawing direct on to stencil was that you had no record of what you'd done until the printed result turned up.

In anticipation of your next question, yes I'll draw something for STET if inspiration strikes next time I'm hovering over the drawing board. ■

to Leah Smith, 24 November 1992

Episode 3

Thanx for another card. You're right, I do look somewhat formally dressed on that photo for a fanpubbing session—by today's standards. But this was the early 50s: a sports jacket and soft-collar shirt with tie was casual wear then (over here at any rate). It was a genuine working session—not just posed for the photographer—that patched up stencil being evidence enough of that!

We were working in the living room and strictly under orders to not make a mess, though I recall that mysterious splashes of duplicator ink did appear on the wallpaper from time to time... Dedicated casualwear wasn't invented until the Rolling Stones and the 60s, no one wore T-shirts until then, not in public anyway.

I changed jobs at the end of the 50s and started working as art studio manager at the Manchester Guardian. When I abandoned collar & tie for polo necks, and turned up for work sporting the first safari suit (in an electric light-blue) in Manchester, there was quite a flutter along the office corridors. How times change.

I can think of a couple of older fans who might still be equipped to turn out hand-drawn stencils. However, I'm not sure that they would be very keen to oblige: it's so much easier to draw on paper and have it reproduced by photo-stencil or photo-litho with detail and solid blacks/tints preserved intact.

It's different when you're forced to draw direct onto stencil because there's no other way of reproducing a drawing. In those circumstances, any artist will make a virtue of necessity and find ways of exploiting the limitations of the medium. Take away that challenge with easier alternatives, and the alternatives get the artist's attention: we're a lazy lot, us artists.

In the early days I did work direct on stencil because most non-artist editors couldn't be trusted to redraw my work on to stencil; indeed, few of 'em wanted to try. During the 50s I was in charge of a small ad department with an offset-printing section. There were a whole range of printing plates available, depending on the size of the print run, from cheap plastic-coated plates for short runs to aluminium or zinc plates for extended runs.

The zinc plates were usually reserved for photo-litho jobs; all the other plates could be typed on direct with a special ribbon, or drawn on directly with a greasy crayon, or litho ink, applied by pen or brush, giving a variety of effects, from tone to solids, not possible with stencils.

I took advantage of the facilities to design and run off covers for several of the current fanzines, like Astroneer and Space-Times, and revived Zenith (with Derek

Pickles as co-editor) for one issue in '53. Later, when I joined OMPA (Off-Trail Magazine Publishers Association) in 1954, I dragged out the old Roneo duplicator from retirement for the somewhat informal zine *Now & Then*.

Most of the issues of N&T were produced in a rush over a mad weekend when deadline was imminent, and probably benefitted from the need for improvisation when emergencies occurred. Co-editor and writer on this one was Eric Needham, and we had fun trying to keep up with the demand as word of the mag spread outside OMPA circles.

Eventually we had to reprint some of the earlier material: I'll try and copy the combined 1 to 3 reprint issue to give you a taste. Let me know if you'd like to see the rest of the eight issues we put out. All artwork drawn on stencil, natch. ■

Later:

I gafiated during the 60s but was dragged back into fanpubbing and did a fair amount of work for Lisa Conesa's *Zimri* during the 70s. She used photostencils for most of the artwork, but several covers were done by offset, two were screen-printed in colour. *Zimri* 7 had half its pages printed offset: sample enclosed.

Also enclosed is a piece of artwork that might prove suitable for a future cover: if you want a title, how about "Alien Artefact"? I have a couple of other items that may be of interest, but have no access to a copier until after the holidays—will send them on then...

Hope you find these bits&pieces of interest! ■

Afterthought:

I was brooding, after sending the bits and pieces in that last letter, on the pages out of *Zimri* 7. I didn't get around to mentioning that their main attraction for me was that they merged words and graphics painlessly. Most fanzines seem to stick the graphics in to fill up holes in the text, or break up the uninviting prospect of masses of solid text, to give the reader's eye an occasional break. Few fanzine editors successfully mix the two... ■

to Leah Smith, 20 December 1992

“Serious” Eric Needham

Steve Sneyd has waved a copy of *Idea* 8 in front of my nose with letters from Chuch Harris reminiscing about Eric Needham and Widower's Wonderful products. I must admit to smiling at the revelation that Chuch has believed in actual existence of a Widower's Store in Manchester for the past few decades...

When Eric and I published *Now & Then*, we found a general tendency among readers to take the fiction seriously and scoff at the facts. Just to keep the record

straight I should perhaps ask you to print the version of the Bloch jingle that Chuch tried to recall—it went thiswise:

When viewing the wringers of washing machines
 Ample-bosomed young women show fears;
 But if you've a full bust, then just put your trust
 In WIDOWER's WONDERFUL BRASSIERES !

I'm a bit baffled by Chuch's reference to Eric's "serious" poem. I fancy he's thinking about a piece called 'Nocturne' that appeared in our first issue of N&T which starts off "As Manchester daylight falls/O'er Lewis's and Baxendales..." and goes on to list a string of company buildings that were familiar to Mancunians in the 50s, but have almost all disappeared during the last 40 years, and ends "And there the window cleaner's Nemesis/ An unlit block of empty premises!" More of a window-cleaner's lament and written (and published) long before Widower's advertising campaign got under way.

I first met Eric in the early days of the original Science Fiction Association in 1937, when he was a regular visitor to my Manchester home, and we visited the SFA branches in Leeds, Liverpool and London together on several occasions. I lost touch with him during the war years (we were both enrolled in the RAF), but we met up again when a new generation of fans started up the Nor' West Science Fantasy Club in a Manchester pub), in the early 50s.

We helped to resuscitate the club fanzine, became involved with the disorganisation of the SUPERMANCON. After which I moved house and family to Romiley and that led to the formation of the Romiley Fan Veterans & Scottish Dancing Society and the publication of its proceedings, initially as a contribution to the newly-formed OMPA.

But I ramble on. It occurs to me that it might be more to the point if I wrote a memoir about Eric: he certainly deserves it. Would you be interested in such an offering? ■

to Geri Sullivan, 21/11/1992

Fifties Fans

Have been trying to gather together a few memories of Eric Needham. Over the past year and more, I have been quizzed by folk writing about the Widower's verses, mainly in US fanzines. I had a few exchanges with Chuch Harris who, it turned out, was firmly convinced that an actual Widower's store existed in Manchester, and claims to have encouraged ESN to try and do their legitimate advertising for them.

He was also wildly misquoting some of the Widower's verses from memory. It seems time to write a piece about the Eric Needham I knew, while the interest in his literary flights continues!

Been trying to reconstruct some of the NorWest Science Fantasy Club period, when I resumed contact with Eric again. There was a Mancon in 1950, but I don't think I was in touch with the NWSFC until after that event—probably around 1951 or so. I'm sure I met Eric Bentcliffe, Dave Cohen, Paul Sowerby, Roy Beresford, Fran and Cyril early on—I have a feeling that Brian and Sandy Sanderson came on the scene later. I have memories of B & S turning up in uniform... National Service? This was when we had a house in Church Lane, Moston—opposite the Dog's Home—and I'd started working in Hyde.

Paul Sowerby had produced the first issue of the club's zine *Astroneer*, a ghastly hekto'd bulletin that earned raspberries all round, left the editor in a low state of morale and led to me being persuaded to help out with the next issue. It was supposed to be a joint production with Paul, but in the event he backed out and left me to a solo effort.

I have memories of meeting his mum—a somewhat formidable lady—who expressed her firm convictions that Paul was wasting his genius and time with the low life sf fans at the Waterloo, and ought to be doing serious work with the BIS. She was probably right, too, and thereafter Paul disappeared from the scene.

Fortunately, I still had some material left over from Zenith files, even after Ron Beresford had raided them for material for his zines, and in the new job I had charge of a small offset printing section. So the mag appeared mid-1953 with material from wartime by Marion, D.R. Smith and Eric the Needy, plus an article by Sandy, and graced with a two-colour cover drawn and printed at work. Philip helping me out with the duplicating and collating and binding. A note of the finances still survives, showing a net profit of 6d overall. Owing to the noticeable lack of support we never got around to a third issue.

Just found a note assuring me that I was indeed at the 1950 con (at which Fran gave a display of 'Future Fashions'; how could I have forgotten that?).

Afterthought on the death of *Astroneer*: did Eric Bent's *Space-Times* take over as NWSFC publication? Or did I just get involved reviving Zenith with Derek Pickles? Must think that one through. And when did Stu McKenzie take over S-T? An event which led to Triode starting... but I guess the details are not particularly relevant to the Needham story. I am getting distracted by detail. Afterthought about Stu: did he join the regulars, or was he always a regular? And did Paul's mum look askance at fans after meeting Eric?

I remember agreeing with Eric to keep clear of the wild arrangements being dreamed up by an irresponsible Dave Cohen as the Manchester-London feuding hotted up, but as matters degenerated so far near the time of the event, we found ourselves involved trying to rescue something out the chaos that built up before and during the Supermancon. It was a relief when things went so far 'wrong' that

everyone enjoyed the sheer informality—and the planned London sabotage was disarmed.

In retrospect it was fun, but it was a trifle harrowing trying to prop up Dave and his associates, and I think that was when we parted company with the NWSFC.

I think Brian had gone down to London, and that you went down there too. I had to go to London on exhibition work fairly frequently, and met you quite often, in between visits to the Bulmers, when I met Vinç and Ted Tubb. We were living in Romiley by then, and Eric used to come over most weekends and that was when we cooked up the RFV&SDS and Now & Then for OMPA, and when it caught on, expanded to wider circulation. ■

Yes, the Stu Mac memories raised the spectre of that fannish misfit and the Bentcliffe frustrations over Space-Times. I came across a print of a hand-drawn litho printed cover run off for Eric the Bent on the Redfern's printing gear: for a Christmas issue, obviously inspired by plastic toys bought for the occasion—a spaceship money box and an assortment of spacemen that Woollies sold as stocking fillers.

I'd put it on one side to write to Eric and ask what other covers I'd printed for him, but Vinç told me of his death before I got round to writing. Am I too harsh in my judgment of Dave Cohen as a happy moron? I recall that I was glad to part company with him after the Supermancon fiasco.

In a recent letter Ethel [Lindsay] told me she'd met him at some fannish occasion and enjoyed meeting him again. Maybe I have too long a memory. Yeah, I can see he'd have been in love with a title like 'Editorial Consultant'. I could never quite understand Stu's behaviour: he seemed intelligent enough but all the attempted manipulation that went on in his fannish links seemed over the top. But I guess a trip to the States on the TAFF fund could seem a dazzling prospect. This would be round about the time that the Bulmers went over, wouldn't it?

I never had any contact with ESN after he left Manchester at the end of the 50s. I think it must have been Vinç that told me that he'd surfaced in Yorkshire in the late 70s, married and all. Apparently he made contact with Ethel; and appears to have been a quieter version of his slightly abrasive earlier self. Then not long after, someone wrote to say he'd had a heart attack and died. I must get more details from Ethel and see if she'll write a footnote to his career. Like you, I was sorry not to make contact again.

Yes, he certainly got Ethel all steamed up at the time he descended on her unannounced at the Eye Hospital. He could be acutely embarrassing to someone who didn't know him, though, as you say, it was all very hilarious to the observer. Eric was quite unrepentant over the stir he caused and I had to write some fast letters to try and smooth ruffled Scottish feelings! ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 24/11/1992 & 10/12/1992

Portfolio

The only other excitement was a letter from Steve Green, of Critical Wave (a somewhat sercon review), suggesting that “as an artist active in sf fandom for more than 50 years” a portfolio “reflecting the range of illustrations you’ve produced over the years” is long overdue. I suspect Steve Sneyd has something to do with this sudden rush of interest.

No problems about filling up the four A4 pages available I suppose, but “reflecting the range of illustrations produced over the years” is something of a complication. Most of the stencilled stuff of yesteryear does not survive the size reduction necessitated by the limitations of space; but fortunately, I’d got copies of several covers I’d done for mags in the 30s and 40s from Vinç Clarke’s archive, with a view to using them as illustrations in fannish reminiscences, and have been able to rescue a few of the simpler line jobs.

Even came across some scraperhoard illustrations for Wally’s Science-Fantasy, done in 1950, so I reckon that should give them plenty to go at.

I gain the impression that these latterday fans imagine I have a vast archive of all the artwork I’ve ever done, all on file and ready to be shown on demand. Maybe I should have been more methodical and forward looking, but I guess one has to shuffle off a lot of acquired baggage periodically—this place is cluttered up enough! ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 03/08/1993

New Frontiers: some recollections

Have been momentarily distracted by two issues of New Frontiers that Vinç enclosed: these were Benson Herbert projects, edited (anonymously) by Sam Youd and Joyce Fairbairn (his first wife). First ish was Jan 1947, the second April-May, after which Benson lost interest, either because of lack of profits or black-market paper supplies dried up, or both.

The first ish got a general raspberry from fans because of coverage of “psychical research, occultism, Spiritism, astrology”, and had an article on Spiritualism by fan Ron Lane. I found it as grotty as I remembered it!

I’d forgotten all about the second issue, which included a reprint of the Maurice Hanson story from Zenith 5, and a redrawing of my back-cover illustration from the same ish, plus a splurge of fannish names on the contents page ranging from Eric Frank Russell (Fortean Society), through John Burke, Bill Temple, Jack Banks... and readers letters from stalwart fanwriters of the day D.R. Smith and Julian Parr. Which suggests that most of the material in the first ish was inherited

from Benson, but that the second reflected changes by Sam and Joyce.

It reminds me that at this time, I'd only recently returned from India and been discharged from the RAF, had started working again at the Anchor Chemical Co., was getting used to having a 2-year-old son disrupting the household, and searching round Manchester for a new home and having to face up to the idea of buying it: Which maybe explains why I recalled so little of that second more-promising issue.

The advertising—of the Joan The Wad, Gypsy Petrulengro, the Rapidism Institute, Lionel Stebbing 'Dynamic Manhood' and Hutton's Brand Gland Tablets variety—(wot no Rosycrucians?) probably dried up with the lack of response from the readership...

I was taken by surprise by the cover design for NF. In my mind's eye I had an image of a design printed in dark blue, a solid square with some wording reversed out, surmounted by a strip with an illustration of a landscape, over which a one-line title stretched. The actuality was in red, a surrealist high-horizon landscape, leading to low hills, over which peered two eyes, one shut, the other open the pupil a sun shining over the hills and illuminating the perspectivised title on the left. I remember it now I've seen it again, but am left with the problem of my original confused memory.

Fortunately there is a small ad in the first ish for OUTLANDS 'magazine for adventurous minds', published in Liverpool, whether by Benson or a rival I can't recall, which is what must have stuck in my mind. A trivial matter, but I'm glad that's sorted things out! ■

to Steve Sneyd, 17 Jan 1994

Con Crunch

The list of cons [in Critical Wave 35]—some fifty to be held before the end of the year—is frightening, especially when some nut is already organising the Millennium Con for 1999-2000. Among my notes for that 1939 article is a reference to a nucleus of fans muttering about the probable consequences of the promotional activities of Carnell, Gillings and other sercon evangelists: needless, to day, they fell far short of imaging today's reality.

None of the book reviews tempted me. Still Chuck Connor's comments in the lettercol about review copies (and the dearth of them), and the tear-up of Helena Bowle's fanzine review col raised a smile. He must have enjoyed writing that. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 24/06/1994

Communications with the Outside World

My exchanges with Arthur [Clarke] are more in the nature of terse notes. Like informative snippets such as the fact that viewing conditions aren't too good in the middle of Columbo; his next-door neighbour is the Iraqi ambassador, who has security lights on all night.

I seem to be writing at greater length to Ken Bulmer, whom I caught in reminiscent mood recently. I was trying to remember when last I saw him, and decided it was at the Tynecon in 1974. Which is also the last place and time that I saw you. Twenty years back. Wow. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 07/07/1994

Space Times

The only relic of my contact with this is a print of a cover for the December 93 ish—a Christmas stocking with a plastic Spaceship Bank, and three of the 5" high plastic spacemen (with perspex helmets) that Woolworths used to flog at that time: a still-life collection from the lads' toy box. Printed, in red, from a hand-drawn plastic Multilith stencil, and run of in the printing unit at Redferns Rubber, when I worked in Hyde.

When this first surfaced, I meant to contact Eric B [Bentcliffe], and find out what else I'd done for him, as I have vague memories of doing several covers as well as pages of fan fotos. Alas, I left it too late. So, if you are ever at a loose end, and tempted, to investigate that suitcase, I'd be interested to hear if any other Turner covers survive.

No rush. Just curious.

CRIT WAVE

As you say, BORING. In 1935 there was a small group muttering about the dire results that could follow the promotional efforts of Carnell, Gillings and sercon evangelists, but I guess they never envisaged just what has resulted. Who goes to all the cons listed—almost 50 to the end of the year! And I see some hopeful is already at work organising the Millenium Con for 1999-2000. I might be tempted to send them a news note for the Romney Fan Vets 50th Anniversary Con in 2004, just to see if they print it.

However, I have to report that the Turner Art Folio has resulted in a letter from Arthur Clarke (d'you think they just remembered to send him a copy?) saying that "it's getting lonely up here on Dinosaur Plateau" and that he's "delighted to see

that you're still at it!" Hmmm, I wonder what he means. Last time I wrote to him was a few years ago when he came over here for an operation, so Maybe I should be grateful to C'WAVE for prompting him to write. Must send him some samples of art and writings.

to Fran & Brian Varley, 13th July 1994

The basic concept . . .

I picked up a remaindered copy of Arthur Clarke's *By Space Possessed* recently. 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." That comment, I thought, screams out for an explanatory footnote.

And I have just such a one ready—my piece on Rex v The Manchester Interplanetary Society. [see Volume 1]

So thanks to Space Sage Clarke for the suggestion. I am only too well aware that there are several fan histories extant and while I'm hardly qualified to compete, I can comfortably supply a string of footnotes to fill in some detail perhaps overlooked in their grand sweeps over events.

FOOTNOTES TO FANNISH HISTORY is the [tentative] title of the project, which may blossom out as a fanzine in the foreseeable future, enabling me to publish my memories and recent research into the archives in convenient chunks and, hopefully, evoke a response from surviving contemporaries.

25 April 96

It was a damp Sunday in mid-September, 1938. I'd been pottered around doing odd jobs, feeling less than up to any violent activity. Rocket, the family fox terrier, seemed unusually lively, obviously raring for an outing... I had resisted the invitation. George Ellis and Fred Tozer, early arrivals for the monthly SFA branch meeting, were with me in the attic clubroom, investigating the latest additions to the library.

Interest centred on a rebound volume of an Edwardian scientific romance, an 1899 epic by A. Laurie, *The Conquest of the Moon*, with some intriguing engraved illustrations, and a copy of John Gloag's 1932 SF novel, *Tomorrow's Yesterday* (which had intrigued me with its typographical innovations), both picked up cheap at sales of the now defunct Mudie's library.

We were interrupted by the sound of the doorbell and the barking of Rocket. I

careered downstairs to greet Eric Needham and Stan Davies, and hung about momentarily trying to call back the dog, who after pausing to be made a fuss of had gone bounding down the street, chasing fallen leaves with an excess of energy. We abandoned him and staggered up the four flights of stairs to the clubroom

● E.S.N.: "If we draw a right angle to represent 90° , a straight line to show 180° , and a circle for 360° , then two straight lines equal a circle?"

Eric stayed on after the others had departed, scrounged a sheet of SFA notepaper and while I dozed he stabbed purposefully at the typewriter. He paused to ask if I'd a spare envelope, tucked in a brief note, and scrawled an address on it. Anticipating his next request, I told him I was out of stamps, whereat he departed without revealing who he'd been writing to.

All was revealed when the next issue of *Novae Terrae* appeared (November 1938). The first letter in the readers' letter column, 'SCRIPSI...' (page 11), was from Eric. Maurice had captioned it "From a Proof Reader":

This latest *Novae Terrae* is a great improvement on all the previous ones, and I can only find three spelling mistakes, five misprints, two over-spacings and one rare case of a missed inverted comma. But on page 11 there are eight dots after SCRIPSI, and on page 17 there are ten. Whose fault is this?"

No editorial comment was forthcoming, but I guess Eric's response had lightened Maurice's deep gloom: at least there were no more threats in the next issue to cease publication.

FOOTNOTES TO FANDOM #0

*the "pilot" for a series of occasional pieces published by
the Septuagenarian Fans Association © Harry Turner, 1996*

Very Early Days

Haven't you seen *Zenith*? It started out as a few pages contributed to Mike Rosenblum's combazine, *Futurian War Digest*, and then I luckily got hold of a quantity of green duplicating paper and decided to publish my own zine to mark my birthday in 1941, using a broken-down duplicator my father had acquired.

We got out five issues, and a sixth was in preparation when I was called up. Somehow, we never seemed to find time to finish it whenever I was home on leave. Most of the material was passed on to Ron Lane for use in his mags, but a few oddments that survived in the files eventually finished up in *Astronaut*, the NWFS mag I tried to perpetuate.

No doubt you have a copy of that. I'll dig out the *Zenith* file for you if you

promise not to eyetrack it too much: the molecular structure of the wartime paper is getting a trifle unstable after all these years! ■

Have reread those later copies of Zenith, and found 'em entertaining still. Enclosed herewith . . . There were plans for a couple more issues but the RAF call-up effectively bugged them up! ■

Yep. All the Zenith artwork was drawn direct on to stencil. I'd had lots of practice, from 1937 on, when I started doing the covers for the Science Fiction Association mag, *Novae Terrae*, and went on to do regular work for *New Worlds*, the fanzine, when Ted Carnell took over, as well as covers and interior illustrations for frequent issues of Sam Youd's *Fantast*, (later taken over by Doug Webster) and John Burke's *Satellite*. Even sent cut stencils over to Forry Ackerman... and did no end of work for sheets included in FIDO during the war. In great demand in them days, so I had plenty of practice!

Must have had lots more patience in them far off days, too. The Zenith duplicator was a battered old Roneo my father had got from somewhere for running off lists. The machine was hand-fed, a sheet at a time, and as the inking mechanism didn't work, the stencil had to be periodically lifted from the drum, while fresh ink was applied.

This could be a fraught operation with detailed stencils! It was this defect that I exploited to get the multicolour runs, all in one printing, by applying different coloured inks in appropriate positions on the roller—no problems with register, and so, in a very roundabout way, timesaving, too. I admit to enjoying the ego-boo...

I fancy you'll have to send back the file copies before you get any answers to your queries about Marion's pieces—she's not looked at that file for a good many years now and will probably need to refresh her memory!

Which reminds me that I also used to do occasional stencils for covers of Miss Eadie's *Urania*, journal of the Junior Astronomical Association, during my stint as Hon. Treasurer, of that worthy organisation.

Gosh, that was all a long time ago. ■

I find it exceeding hard to link up with the mind behind ZENITH of fifty odd years back. I don't think I considered myself a writer in those far-off days, and content to let the verbalisers get on with it while I concentrated on the artwork. Hence my pot-boiler on cities in the first issue was probably a sign of a desperate shortage of material, never needing to be repeated once the readership were persuaded to fill up the pages.

And don't leap to conclusions about the artwork. I had been a regular attendee at John Bold's studio and life classes, in Grosvenor Street, for several years. I think there's a relevant fragment in the file marked "Autobiography"—must do you a copy... ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, February/March 1996

Philip Cleator

Many thanks for the FC. [Fantasy Commentator]. The Cleator article was of decided interest—I didn't know of his death and wonder why he didn't qualify for the Garudian obit columns. I see that he was born in 1908, making him around 30 when he took an interest in MIS activities.

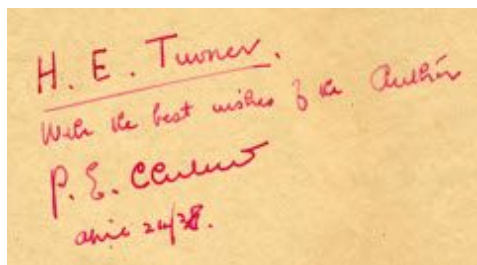
I remember being impressed when he first rolled up at Longford Place in a car, accompanied by his fiancée, to give the society a talk. He gave Eric Needham a lift home after the meeting, which Eric always proudly claimed to remember as the first time he'd ever ridden in a car.

He also gave the society generous support in the way of providing material for the journal, and he was a paying sponsor when we decided to go for a printed replacement of the duplicated journal.

I fancy that he took an interest in our efforts because after all his pioneering work, he felt pushed out by the machinations of the London BIS membership—just as the Leeds fans felt edged out by the London takeover of the SFA organisation. I guess these things rankle at the time despite the official white-washing that goes on...

Though a more personal memory is of Cleator as a militant atheist, an attitude which impressed me greatly at the time when I was forming my own irreligious ideas; the place was awash with National Secular Society publications like *The Freethinker* and the works of Chapman Cohen that he passed on, much to my mother's horror.

And I still have a copy of "Rockets Through Space" he autographed for me as a memento of one of those visits. ■



from H.T.'s copy of *Rockets Through Space*
by P. Cleator

to Steve Sneyd, 17 March 1996

Fannish Digging

IT JUST SO HAPPENS that Steve sent me a "taster" of the Moskowitz article in Fantasy Commentator, which answers your query about Z. Suspect that Sam's main interest is in 'fan politics' and the opportunity to have a dig at his old Arch-Enemy Don Wollheim... ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 31 April 1996

Remembering John Roles

Quote from recent letter from A Vinç Clarke, Archivist of the Welling Fan Archive: "I wish I could remember more about Stu Mackenzie—would make an interesting article for MIMOSA, the US fan-historical zine. I suppose Ted Tubb was fairly close, but I've been putting off contacting him".

So there you are, there's a gap in the market you could well fill. Though I seem to recall that Stu could be a bit touchy about things that were said about him, and even threatened litigation at some stage or other...

Back on the TFWOP28 front, I now have it clear in my mind that while I used the Word, Walt Willis put it on page 28 (of HYPHEN 11), and it was Daphne Buckmaster who actually put the Fanphrase into print, by using it in her loc to HYPHEN 12. I now also know what Mike Wallace said to upset my equilibrium. Wow, we ran that one into the ground.

The RAF Strike programme also prompted Vinç to dig out a few instalments of John Roles' reminiscences of his SouthEast Asia days, from OMPA mailings. It was Ethel who first mentioned "Roles's Rollings: Adventures of a Lotus Eater" to me in a 1992 letter, but then never returned to the subject. I was busy enlarging my own Indian story at the time, and decided to leave investigating John's account of his experiences until I had gone some way with my own.

Did you ever know John? He always seemed to be hovering in the background at any meetings of the Manchester-Liverpool crowd I attended, the foreground being occupied by the Shorrockses and Eric the Bent. At that time in the fifties, I rarely Bent. At that time in the fifties, I rarely mentioned my RAF days... "When I was in Poonah in '45" didn't sound a particularly fannish conversation opener, I guess, and I always thought of John as one of the younger generation who'd missed overseas service. So I lost a chance there!

John appears to have arrived in India early in 1945, trained as a teleprinter operator in Army Signals, and finished up in Rangoon by October. Thereafter moved around Singapore—Kuala Lumpur—Penang and back to Singapore HQ in August 1946. He mentions in passing that he spent a further two and a half years in Malaya. . . say to autumn 1948.

He was dumped on various RAF units during the January strike period, but seems to have been so preoccupied with his efforts to "go native" at this period, that any references to the strike must have completely passed him by. I'd like to get in touch with him, but don't think he's still actively engaged with fandom. Don't recall seeing his name in any recent fanzines that have come my way.

Apparently Ron Bennett (now retired from his comicbook-stall) sent in for copies of the Roles' Indian saga, which is when Vinç remembered to do a set for me. Wonder what Ron's interest is? ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, Summer 1996

FWOP28

Have no recollection of this letter to the MG (Manchester Guardian) at Super-Mancon time that you mention, though the name Hella Jaspert has a faintly familiar ring. I shall add her to Mike Wallace, on a growing list of people to re-investigate. Seem to be discovering all sorts of holes in my memories... like it was a faint shock when it dawned on me that I had apparently precipitated the FWOP28 thing. And I seem to have been the prime bringer of Fanarchism on to the fannish scene to judge from references in wartime fetters and my readings of FIDO and anguished comments from Mike at the opposition to his efforts to get the British Fantasy Society under way... ■

During recent correspondence with Vinç, the subject of "The first word on page 28" cropped up. Vinç had mentioned the name of Daphne Buckmaster when we were commenting on the early days of OMPA, and I was reminded that when she was innocently discussing high society functions such as balls, the word happened to start off page 28 of her *Ompazine*, enabling some low mind subsequently to quote "TFWOP28" as a handy euphemism.

No, replied Vinç, the FANCYCLOPEDIA 2 entry for TFWOP28 says: "Actually was 'Harry', but refers to what he was saying in the phrase 'Harry Turner says ***** to Mike Wallace'. The page 28 was that of HYPHEN 11 in the letter column".

This has me slightly croggled. Apart from the quibble that this definition suggests that the first word on p.28 of HYPHEN was not "balls", so how has it come to be quoted as the source of the fannish phrase, it asserts my memory about the derivation is false. I admit to having a distinct memory of saying "Balls to Mike Wallace" but completely forget what provoked me to say it. Indeed, while sorting out the N&T material, I noted in passing that the graffiti "BALLS TO MIKE WALLACE" is scrawled on the Makin Street wall pasted with two Widower's ads that appears in N&T 3.

I have written to Waft Willis to ask if he can throw any light on this momentous matter, seeing as how I find myself in so deep...

Latest newsletter from Vine announces that he has a grand-daughter... He also mentions that the Welling Archive had a visit from one Helen Merrick, an Australian lady working for her Ph.D. on the history of female fans, who made copious notes from fanzines such as FEMIZINE and SPACE TIMES...

You have been warned.

And mention of SPACE TIMES prompts me to ask if you have any copies still in your archives? All I have are copies of two covers I printed in 1953 on the Multilith machine when I worked in Hyde, for the anniversary issue (in two colours!) dated June, and a Xmas issue. (Just noticed that this last is dated December 1953, while my artwork is signed '1954'. I musta had trouble with Time even in

them days!). I know I printed some photo-pages for later issues, but am uncertain if I did any more covers. I'm also trying to remember how Stu Mackenzie got mixed up with SPACE TIMES... did he take over the printing? ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 5 & 8 August 1996

From the Varley Archives . . .

Overwhelmed by all these ancient fanzines from the Varley archives! Thanx for clarifying several vital issues. I now have the matter of TFWOP28 sorted in my mind after seeing HYPHEN, and relationships with SPACE-TIMES begin to make sense. I had all this stuff once, but passed it on when I gafiated at the rear end of the 50s.

Loved your account of Life with the Mackenzies. He sounds just like the creep that I remember. When he disappeared from fandom, didn't the EYE funds vanish too? Incidentally, in the Widower's Wart Remover episode, Eric mentions that he overcame his desire "to see Sir Mortimer Wheeler and Connie Mackenzie" when he converted his TV into an Electropsychometer. Any significance in the linking of names there? Was Connie a TV presenter?

You seem to have been destined to be everybody's Treasurer. A piece of paper that persistently survives from this period in my files, is a carbon copy of my account rendered for that copy of ASTRONEER, showing a net profit of 6 old pence (or was it a deficit?). Can't just lay hands on it now, but the financial report could well have been addressed to you, I guess. I printed a cover and odd sheets for a further issue, which never materialised; funds all diverted to ensure 5-T's survival probably..

I am still baffled by that Christmas 1953 issue cover being signed as "1954"—d'you think the issue was delayed or sump'n and slipped schedulewise? (just idle curiosity). This was one of the jobs printed on the Multilith, when I was working at Redfern's in Hyde. Drawn direct on to the printing plate!

The Rocket Bank and plastic spacemen, with removable helmets, were part of the kids' presents that year and a popular line available at Woolworths. Forgotten completely about the "End of the Voyage" cover on the July 53 5-T.

Looks as though I printed it on the Zenith-several-colours-printed-simultaneously duplicator. Must make a copy of that for my files. It's a throw-back to an early Novae Terrae cover, seen from a different viewpoint, a subtlety probably lost on all you young fans... ahem.

The Glossary was produced when we withdrew N&T from OMPA and went public, because so many folk were asking to get on the circulation list. We decided to combine the first three OMPA issues into an introductory ish, with new illos, for the benefit of nonOMPA readers, and included the Glossary to fill in obscure

references for the benefit of any puzzled American fans, though I fancy we created even obscurer items in the process. Produced just after the time of the third OMPA mailing, say April-May 1955.

Might even get around to producing that promised update if the N & T project goes thru satisfactorily. Though I could finish up having to produce a Glossary of the Glossary at this late date... ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, August 1996

More Early Days

Am appalled by a piece entitled “Romping Through Fandom With The Little Woman...”, printed under my Henry Ernst pen-name. I never wrote that: I suspect this to be a BV forgery... ■

Q&A ANSWERS

1) You sound as though you suspect Denness Morton of being a figment of my imagination. He’s a genuine artist in his own right, who came along in the early 50s, and did work that appeared in *Zenith* and *Astroneer*, and some that didn’t get published at the time.

He was a Scot—from Dundee, I think. I probably made his acquaintance when I helped out Alan Hunter by running the Fantasy Art Society for a brief spell at this time. (See Ethel’s *Bletherings* 4, masquerading as *Astroneer* 3 !). ■

I can report other discoveries while clearing out the junk stashed in the unit. Like an almost full box of non-standard staples that will fit a stapler that had fallen into disuse; and all sorts of documentary evidence of my long-forgotten activities in the local art world, when I abandoned fandom in the 60s.

Found copies of *EASEL*, a journal I edited for the North West Federation of Art Societies, and catalogues of umpteen art shows where I’d had work on show. In between this and the Manchester jazz scene and my new job at the *Guardian*, it was no wonder I didn’t have time for fandom for the next ten years or so!

There are files and notes here that I’ve not seen for decades. Must grit my teeth and not be distracted from the current programme of activities... But one day, will get round to sorting things. I hope. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 30 August 1996

In the Seventies...

Vinç will be happy to copy any Archive items you may want; he has a copier, provided with fannish support, so he should be able to fill any gaps in your Scottishe file... In his last letter he mentions that Derek Pickles is home after suffering a heart attack. Today [Friday] comes a brief note from Derek apologising that the get-together with Dave Cohen will have to be postponed...

And I've discovered an Ethel letter, dated 30 May 1994, in which she writes: "Somewhere in SCOT I have recounted the weekend he came to visit me in Glasgow but I dare not open the file to find this or you will never get this letter!"). Would dearly love to go on seeing DAGON, and must confess that there have been so many items of interest (DiscWorld, comic strips etc) that I still have the copies you sent lurking in my archive!

The remaining issues of ZIMRI will be included with this. One of these issues won Lisa a Nova Award, either 6 or 7 I think. Am baffled that they seem to have passed uncommented on by Ethel, just as I can't understand her lapses of memory about meeting me at the Bristol con in '73 and the Manchester con in '70. (I see I mentioned this in a letter in '92 but got no response!). So it goes...

Manchester fandom at the time was dominated by Savoy Books—there was a running fight between Dave Britton (Moorcock admirer) and God, the Chief Constabule of Manchester, who was determined to stamp out Dave's pornographical (alleged) publishing activities... I knew Dave, Mike Butterworth, Paul Skelton, Chuck Partington, Kevin Smith, Pete Presford, Brian Robinson and others mainly thru contacts with Lisa.

Steve was a regular visitor to Dave's bookshop and perhaps was more involved with them than I ever was. My fannish links were largely with the contemporary fanzine-publishing community and surviving old-timers. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, September 1996

Some Fannish Accounting / Doing the books

SATURDAY

I came across a fragment of fannish accounting that might engage the interest of the Treasurer. You may recall that the NWSFC published the first issue of a quarterly mag called ASTRONEER with Paul Sowerby as editor, a horrible hektoed effort that languished until, in a rash moment, I offered to help out with a second issue.

This was around the time I tried to revive ZENITH, as I had access to the

Multilith while working at Redferns, as well as the Original Zenith Duplicator in working order, and some articles written in wartime, but unpublished, that provided the core of an issue.

(This was as well, because Paul's mum told me she didn't approve of him mixing with low fannish types and wanted him to concentrate on BIS work—so I finished up producing the mag on my own). Anyway, here's an insight into the financial aspect of the matter!

Can't immediately think who this note was addressed to (did the club have a treasurer in those days?) but kinda suspect it went to Eric Bentcliffe, as director of publications...

ASTRONEER FINANCES

November 9/53

Incomings	Outgoings
Subs &	Paper "borrowed" from
casual sales ... £2. 6. 6	Eric Jones (3 reams) ... £1. 4. 0
	Printing cover .. 8. 0
	Stencils 12. 6
	Postage (worked in with Zenith) 2. 6
	Cash in hand ... minus 6
<hr/> £2. 6. 6	<hr/> £2. 6. 6

This may not be orthodox accounting but it's true. So if you can sell one or two more Astro's we'll be making a whacking profit... I never paid EJ for the paper as I intended replacing it, but now that he is passing on the job, maybe you'd sooner have the cash. Cheque herewith. So that swells the S-T funds a little. I still have a few copies of Astro in hand and after number two is on the bookstalls, we stand a faint chance of paying our way. At least, I can't grumble at this initial "loss"!

Dunno what crisis hit the mag after that... Were you in Manchester at that time, or had you both already departed Londonwards? I was all ready to start on another issue and printed that Denness Morton cover in readiness for number three, and one or two other bits'n'pieces, but the project was just allowed to fizzle out.

No doubt funds were short owing to the build-up for the forthcoming Supermancon, and this, of course, was about the time that SPACE-TIMES was taken over by the London end when Eric Jones retired from the scene. Do you have any memories of a crisis then?

Come to think of it, for a time I was engaged in producing the Supermancon combozine, which involved me doing a lot of printing for many of the participants, so maybe ASTRONEER was initially pushed in the background by that and Paul's departure. After the con I guess club funds were non-existent!

Things were certainly chaotic in the post-con period, by which time I was moving from Willow Bank to peaceful Romiley, and lost touch with the NWSFC survivors, apart from Eric the Bent and Eric the Needy. And by that time I fancy Eric Bentcliffe found the Liverpool fans more congenial company, and had more or less abandoned the Manchester club. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 22 February 1997

Fanzine Beginnings

As to your queries, the first issue of Astroneer was a hektographed nightmare produced in 1952 by Paul Sowerby, which is the one referred to in Pete Roberts' listing. I was asked to help out with the second issue, Summer 1953, in which both The Unicorn and 25thC Love Song appeared.

I did some work on a third issue, and printed a cover, but it was abandoned when the Supermancon left the Nor-West Science Fantasy Club in disarray! The pome The Village STFan appeared in the lone postwar issue of Zenith in June 1953, and was a reprint from Fanfare, (Dec 1943) the US fanzine. Copy enclosed.

While rooting round the files I came across a few FUTURIAN/FIDO items: have you seen Harold Gottliffe's pome "Astronautics" (Sep '38) or his "The Unknown Sea" (March 41)? And the FIDO Litter had a Needham epic "The Internal Combustion Motor" (in Don Doughty's TIN TACKS), and a poem by Dennis Tucker, "Saga of Earth". Have you got Marion's "The Atlanteans" (May 41)?

[Afterthoughts department: I suspect that the rumty-tum Clarke verse I mentioned must have been an early version of his Twilight]. ■

[see Early Science Fiction Poetry, Footnote #22, PHT]

to Steve Sneyd, 12th November 1997

(The) Fantast

Well, it started off as The Fantast and in the last issue Doug Webster wrote: "We were with the editor of The Fantast when he first read the news" [see BOYCOTT FANTAST! in Chronological Notes #2]. So I guess, officially that's what it is/was... I notice that I omitted the "THE" from the title on the run of covers I did, from the Oct-Nov 1939 issue (Vol.1 No.7) on... whether that was a design liberty, or on instructions from the ed, I can't recall at this late date. It became general usage to refer to the mag as "Fantast" or "Fay", so you takes your choice! I have stuck to The Fantast in the text.

You seem to have the editor-run correctly aligned. Sam edited the first eight issues. During 1940 he wavered somewhat as he seemed to expect a rapid transfer into the armed forces (call-up was usually a month after registration at that time).

I cut a stencil of a cover for an intended February issue (Vol.1 No.8) but Sam dithered over publication and it didn't appear until May, when the design was used with a typed-over date amendment and dubbed "Vol.2 No.1". John Burke was having difficulties continuing his *Satellite*, in the period following the lapse of SFA support, so Sam joined forces with him, and their combined editorial resources produced *Fantast* 9 (Vol.2 No.2) in March 1941, with Doug Webster helping out typing stencils, and John handling production and distribution.

Sam was still a "free" man at the beginning of August 1941, when he stayed for a week or so with the Burkes in Liverpool, and I joined them for the weekend. But Sam abandoned *Fantast* after that: Doug Webster took over available material and produced the next issue (Aug/41 Vol.2 No.3) on his own from Aberdeen.

His father ran an office equipment business, which was fortuitous; Doug got past a tribunal as a conscientious objector, [though I never found out for what reason], and was "working on the land".

Whatever his job, he seemed to have lots of time off for fanac, including hitch-hiking on trips round northern fandom, and, with ready access to duplicating facilities, was able to take a lot of the production load off Mike Rosenblum—also a C.O. and doing farm work—in getting out *FIDO* so regularly). Both Sam and John were dragged into the forces during autumn of that year, and Doug continued solo with *Fantast* until No.14, dated August 1942. By which time, the RAF had also whisked me away...

We all still kept in touch, somewhat sporadically. During 1942 and 1943, however, it was largely Mike and Doug's publishing activities that kept the flame of fandom flickering. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 15th November 1997

More about Zenith

Dear Steve: You really have got me rooting round one way and another... but first let me mention various enclosures; like the Gottliffe "The Unknown Sea" cover, the ESN epic of "The Internal Combustion Motor", Marion's "The Atlanteans", and another unmentioned Morton item from Zenith.

You'll also find an updated draft of text, in booklet form, and also as loose pages (which I thought might help you manipulate things a little more conveniently), together with your copy returned for checking.

Phew! Meanwhile I am having problems trying to sort out why that third Zenith,

obviously produced for the FIDO Litter in July 1941, didn't appear until several years later!

The issue appears to have started as a cover, the Dennis Tucker poem "Saga of Earth" with page illustration, and a drawing for a Poe quote (all dated "'41"). The cover finished up in FIDO 26 (Feb '43) and the rest in FIDO 21 (July '42)...

So far as I recall, I supplied Mike with stencils for the first two Litter-Zeniths and suspect that I was not too happy with the repro. So I duplicated No.3 myself and while so engaged got the urge to pub an ish of my own, and probably held back sending the sheets to Mike in the circumstances... then when I got my call-up papers in '42, and had to give up Zenith anyway.

I probably passed them on with other odds and ends of usable paper for Mike to use in FIDO. Which seems a reasonable explanation for the messy entry in Pete Roberts' bibliog: the best I can think of at the moment, anyway!

All of which makes me realise that I must have been (mistakenly) thinking of the Tucker poem when I invoked the name of Don Doughty, as reported in your original article. Does that merit another footnote? Sorry!

Was amused to realise that "Roy/Rory" Faulkner mentioned in your article was actually the same Rory Faulkner who was appointed as Lonely Hearts counsellor of Now&Then (the Ancient Matriarch Of Remote California, no less). She visited Romiley in person, (a very spritely pensioner), to claim her membership of the RFV&SDS, while over here for the con following the SuperMancon.

Wow... hope I remember to put everything in the envelope this time... there seem a helluva lot of papers and files spread around the keyboard; just hope they get back in the right files. (Ever thought of hiring a secretary?). ■

to Steve Sneyd, 19th November 1997

"About Art"

I've been intending to write to you for a considerable time now... I am reminded every time I see your drawings in the fanzines that arrive here, but for some reason find it hard to get down to starting a letter when it's so many years since we were last in contact.

However, this week we had a surprise visit from Art Widner and Shirley [Atkins] —my first contact with Art goes back to the early war years, when we exchanged fanzines, but I lost touch with him during my RAF travels.

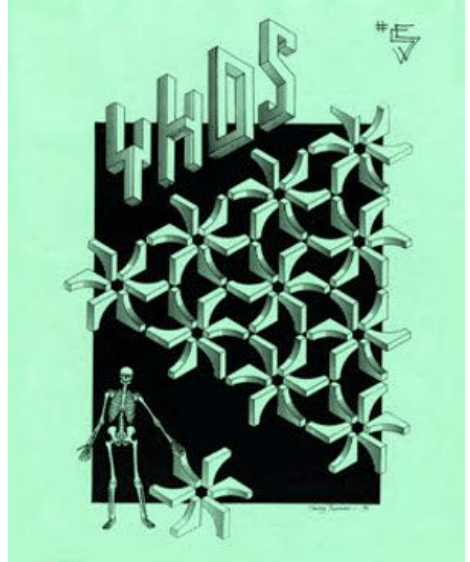
Then in 1992, out of the blue, he sent me a copy of Yhos which sparked off an irregular correspondence and eventually a request for artwork. So I sent off a drawing early in 1995. Thereafter, all was silence from Gualala, and I wondered if all was well with Art.

Until this Monday, that is. I had a phone call mid-morning from Mal Ashworth to tell me he'd found his typewriter after several years searching, and would be sending a letter real soon; meanwhile, he had an old friend there who wanted to speak to me.

"Hi", ses a deep voice, "I'm Art Widner". And a few hours later we found ourselves entertaining Art and Shirley...

We continued the gabfest over lunch on Tuesday; fanning in these circumstances becomes like time-travelling, with all the years laid out to be dipt into, and even the more remote years become mere yesterdays. I couldn't believe that we were picking up the threads of events that happened when we were both 55 years younger, and bridging the long lapse in communication with no difficulty at all.

Your name cropped up in the conversation, and I confessed that I'd lost touch with you when I first went gafia at the end of the 50s. I mentioned my good intentions in recent years to write and say hello—"You should do that" asserted Art firmly. So I have (I just can't believe that I'm about to post this!) ■

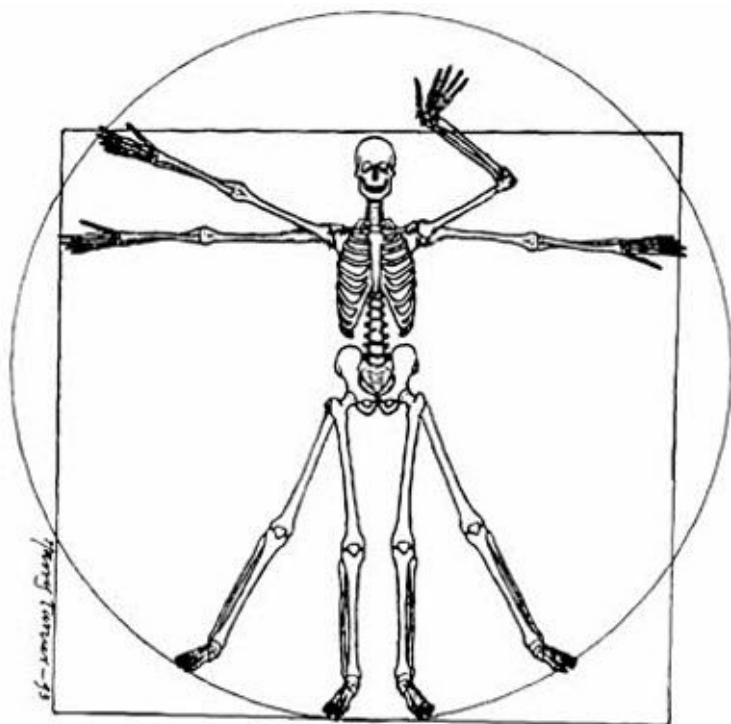


H.T. cover for YHOS #55

to Alan Hunter, 19 March 1998



Marion & Harry Turner, photo by Shirley Atkins, 1998



Septuagenarian Fans Association™ • Romiley.

Dear Alan: Was invited to visit the Intuition Eastercon in Manchester t'other week-end, and prevailed upon to appear on a couple of panels. One, with John Dallman and Steve Jeffery, proved a somewhat inconclusive discussion on the role of fanart. At one stage John asked if there was any point in continuing with the Ken McIntyre Award (but didn't get an answer!), which stirred up my fading memories of the fifties when the Fantasy Art Society was a link for budding artists.

The other was an ambitiously titled session—The Science of Colour, the History of Art—which, in the brief I was given on arrival, was to debate "how science has changed the way we paint and see pictures over the centuries". Which struck me as a rather deep but delightfully vague topic that perhaps would appeal more to OU students than con fans.

In the event, the panel, largely made up of contemporary practising pro-artists, spent more time beefing about the demands of publishers and the enforced digitalisation of their . trade, than any interaction of science and art history. As the only dinosaur present, going back to forgotten ToW and Fantasy days when computer graphics were still pure sf, I felt outnumbered.

Went on to visit the Art Show, squeezed into two rooms and split into so many small display cubicles it was impossible to view the offerings, mainly commercial

work, in any comfort. I gave up. Still, in between times I caught up with a few correspondents among younger fans and even tracked down some old-time fans...

Norman and Ina Shorrocks were at the reception desk and Ron Bennett in the dealers' room. (Last time I met them was at the 1987 Leeds Conception). Inspecting Ron's stock while he was dealing with a potential client, I revived a few old memories looking through a pile of ancient Astoundings, faintly shocked to see 'em marked at £25 each (largely BRE's they were too!). And you say you have acquired a hundred? Hope you've got 'em insured!

I guess modern cons hold few attractions for me: too overwhelming. I feel happier in a fanzine environment, which occasionally gets me back to the drawing board!

Regards, Harry. ■

to Alan Hunter, 21 April 1998



Remembering
Fran Varley

Fan Reports

Having dealt so swiftly with Steve's last lot of copy for his Lilith booklet, I thought it would slow him down a bit, in view of his other manifold commitments. No way! A bewildering collection of bits of new copy, afterthoughts, and revisions arrives back promptly this morning... dunno where he gets all the energy from. So that should keep me quiet this evening sorting it all out.

He mentions that Vinç is improving; still in hospital for treatment monitoring, but able to move about with a zimmer frame. I'd delayed writing, thinking I'd wait until he'd got back home, but will send something off in view of this news.

Also had a fanzine from Simon Ounsley of Leeds apologising for delays in pubbing his ish as he has been incapacitated by worsening ME symptoms. He mentions that Mal Ashworth was in hospital for heart surgery but is a trifle vague about the date (presumably late 1997).

It seems that Mal spent as much time in the George, a pub opposite Leeds General Infirmary, as he did in the ward. So much so, that the anaesthetist is alleged to have commented, as Mal came round after the op, that they had half a mind to take him across to the George and let him come to in familiar surroundings... He seemed chipper enough when we spoke on the phone a month or two back and didn't mention the op then.

Philip has been getting a multitude of catalogues recently, including one from *Neat Ideas*, but their price for 5L cartridges is £44.99, with a reduction to £39.99 if you buy four or more... Wow, I'm glad we've got those two cheapies from Viking in reserve: sounds as if our bargain £35.99 price was an unrepeatable offer, if not an actual mistake!

O&S 137 to Brian Varley, 09/06/1998



**IT'S
THE VERY FIRST
POSTWAR
MANCON !**

... and they've forgotten to invite
Eric and Harry
to the Party.
WOW!!

But we're not brooding about it.
Here's

O&S 140

Fan Reports 2

Have received a copy of Fantasy Commentator with tribute to Sam Moskowitz. It also included an article on Steve and his multifarious activities: I thought I knew Steve fairly well after nearly thirty years acquaintance, but it seems I don't really know the half of all he's been involved with... So it goes.

I wrote to Vinç as it looks as though he's likely to be in hospital a while yet, getting back his strength. Got a surprisingly cheerful reply, and he ses that with so much time on his hands he's loc'd all the fanzines he's had of late, though he ses it's murder being limited to handwritten notes.

Says he can get out of bed and walk about with a stick, but can't get back into bed... yet. Still on a 'nil by mouth' routine, and is looking forward to the day when he's allowed to eat solid food again.

O&S 140 to Brian Varley, 1988



(above: Brian Varley, Eric Bentcliffe, Harry Turner)

[next page: Harry Turner & Sandy Sanderson]



**WOW! DIG THAT SNAZZY
CASUAL WEAR!
THEY CERTAINLY KNEW HOW TO RELAX
IN THE FIFTIES...
BUT DID ANYONE
ACCEPT THE INVITATION?**

Snags & Casual Wear

Steve's jubilation at getting his Lilith Lorraine book finished had a slight setback when he couldn't get any response from the printer after sending the copy on. Turns out the printer had an accident and has been in hospital incommunicado... Still he's back on the job and results are promised in a fortnight or so.

After which the spotlight is liable to fall on me to do something useful about the neglected Widower's Wonderful Catalogue project. Gulp. That file has been collecting dust for a long while now, so I guess it's high time I reopened it and concentrated on picking up the threads... These days I seem to be more successful at catching up with the menial jobs rather than trying to be creative.

O&S 142 to Brian Varley, 1st July, 1998

Here it is Sunday, with little improvement in the outlook: overcast, not very warm, and a perpetual hint of rain. Ugh! While rooting round in the music room I found I had a duplicate of a Cannonball & Coltrane CD, which is not on your list. I pass Won with a tape from the Bechet concert and the Hersch CDs.

No grumbles about the Olympia concert which sounds a jolly romp, but after the big build-up by reviewers, I find I have profound reservations about Hersch. He seems far too cold and clinical in his approach, and the spirit of Monk gets lost somewhere between the notes, I feel.

Maybe this dull unseasonal nondescript weather is getting me down: I guess I find it hard to work up much enthusiasm about anything just at present.

Only bright spot is the pic that will greet you on the cover. Had my doubts about this one as the original was underexposed (probably snapped on such a day as we are suffering now!) and came out flat and lacking all detail. Manipulation on the scanner has introduced a bit of contrast and brought out a lot of otherwise buried detail. This was taken during a visit from Sandy, on leave, in the mid-50s.

Gosh have I been a reluctant gardener for so long... I recall that I wore out that trowel I'm holding, and actually had to buy a replacement.

Have also got some better pics of Sandy with Terry Jeeves and Eric, on a visit to Sheffield, yet to be scanned. At this rate, I should be able to produce a lavish illustrated version of me fannish memoirs one day. The 386 keeps groaning at the size of these graphic files it keeps being asked to handle, and is prone to collapse without warning when my enthusiasm becomes too demanding.

Also have a rather grubbly little snap of Eric, taken in his Longsight flat, obviously in the days before flash came along. That too has responded well to manipulation on the scanner. Watch this space for further revelations.

still O&S 142 to Brian Varley, 4 July 1998

Posh Douglas

Most of us youthful fans back in early SFA days emerged from working-class homes, left school at 14 or 16, and didn't have money to spend on fancy clothes. Douglas W.F.Mayer came from a wealthier stratum of society and was a university student at the time of the pic. Which is why he stands out from the rest of us scruffy fans.

The exact details of his background elude me at the moment (things are back to chaotic in the studio with all the DIY) but I have them somewhere; so far as I recall, his father was a big noise at Leeds university, and DWFM's career after the war was centred on work with student organisations here and abroad.

Will fill in the facts when that errant file surfaces...

Bill has sent a colour poster he's produced for the North Wilts Arts Festival. Very impressive, all done with Corel 7.0 which he picked up "cheap in a sale". I might have to start looking out for sales if I'm to compete with all this creativity; though I find it enough of a challenge trying to get this damned computer to do what I want in mere black&white...

Ah well, back to the woodwork!

O&S 150 to Brian Varley, 4 July 1998

Recommended Reading

... There are more inspiring items in the mail, fortunately—like the Sept Jazz Journal with a belated brief obit for Dotty Donegan; delayed because the writer, Eddie Cook, has been ill of late and absent from the editor's chair. The Monk Alone CD set is reviewed and acclaimed as a contender for the Record of the Year. (Did I get round to sending you any of this on tape? My memory of act and intention is confused). Forgettable names like Damagoy Ralasic, Steven Kowalczyk, Birli Lagrene, and Antonio Forcione rise momentarily from the review pages, then sink, as they seem unlikely to arouse much interest judging from the comments. So much for keeping abreast of the new talent!

And then there's *Forrest J Ackerman's World of Science Fiction*.

If you feel the urge to wander down memory lane, to recapture that sensawunda of the days of the old US pulp sf mags and corny early TV epics, and enjoy a few good belly-laughes, I can heartily recommend this collection (published by Aurum Press, ISBN 1-85410-573-6). If you're still well in with your Librarian, you might ask him to reserve it for you. I guarantee it will

brighten up any dull evenings that may loom ahead. I catch up with my past every time I dip into the pages... Get the distinct impression that 4SJ's enthusiasm for the genre has not waned one iota since those distant heady pre-war days; I marvel that he has apparently made a career out of it, and now throws the Ackermansion, his home-cum-museum, open to the public at weekends, free of charge!

O&S 152 to Brian Varley, 4 July 1998

Secret Stuff?

With a change of font and esoteric changes to point size, word & letter spacing, have succeeded in coaxing Steve's latest booklet into a convenient 24-page format. Almost ready for the printer now: just await the final OK from the Master...

Meanwhile he has passed on a book of Sir Arthur's—Astounding Days—which

is a rambling mixture of autobiography and comments on early pulp sf he came across, memory apparently being helped by access to Mike Ashley's The Complete Index to Astounding/Analog and microfiches of the complete run of magazines! Wow. It all refreshed fading memories of those early days...

Later:

Have finished that book of Arthur's, but felt it read more like a casually tossed-off fanzine article than a properly planned book. Get the distinct impression that Arthur has a lot of folk out there willing and eager to tidy up any of his loosely expressed thoughts for publication! He tends to ramble into all sorts of peripheral reminiscences and I found myself surprised by odd niggling discrepancies that cropped up... like he refers to his wartime stay at Yatesbury "No.9 Radio School"—well, we were both in the same camp, but the address was "No.8 Radio School" according to all my correspondence. (Or am I breaching some official secrets ruling by revealing that?).

Still, it was worth the read, rousing quite a few pleasant memories of fandom's early days... My conscience was stirred, but I lack the energy to finish off any of my many unfinished memoirs! (Indeed, I get occasional days when I lack the energy, period. Think it must be the continuing wintry chills getting at me!). ■

to Brian Varley, April 1999

Remembering Eric Frank Russell 1905-1978)

When, exactly, did I first meet up with Eric Frank Russell?

I made contact with "organised" fandom early in 1937, some months after that very first convention. The pic of EFR alongside was taken (and given to me) by Harold Gottliffe, one of a party of Leeds fans who visited Liverpool and then called on me at Manchester in the summer of that year.

Though I was a 17-year-old keen to meet kindred spirits, I guess I then regarded an admired author like EFR (15 years my senior!) as a somewhat remote and distant "hero".

I attended the first London SFA convention in April 1938, but have no recollection of meeting EFR there. Then the Manchester SFA branch was officially opened in May, and in June I visited Liverpool for the opening of the SFA branch there, but don't think that EFR was present at this gathering of a dozen or so local fans.

My first solid memory of meeting up with him is at a more select gathering—a British Interplanetary Society London meeting on Sunday 17 July 1938. This was held at the home of R.A. Smith in South Chingford, the BIS HQ at the time. Guest of honour was Bob Truax of the American Rocket Society, then a midshipman

working at the US Navy experimental station at Chesapeake Bay and conveniently in the UK on a training cruise.

In those days the BIS strictly confined its activities to theoretical matters, so it was exhilarating to hear of the practical research that Bob was able to carry out using the academy machine shop facilities and the test grounds of the naval experimental station where he was stationed. I remember that an affable EFR (a BIS member) turned up unexpectedly later in the meeting and immediately livened up the proceedings.

When official business was concluded he became centre of a fannish group, the conversation flowed, and he kept us entertained with a continuous flow of tall stories until things broke up and people reluctantly went their various ways.

I realised that EFR was very much a kindred spirit. Having broken the ice, as it were, I kept in occasional touch with him from then on, and found we shared many interests—through letters and exchanges in fanzines, and the chain-letters that circulated in early wartime years.

He introduced me to the works of Charles Fort, bowled me over with *Sinister Barrier* in *Unknown*, and wrote some printable (and unprintable) letters of comment when I started pubbing a fanzine, *Zenith*, in 1941.

I think he was called up in the RAF towards the end of 1941; by 1942 he'd settled in civvy billets in London on a four-month course and was able to meet some of the fans still there—a fan-gathering at Bill Temple's home (while Bill was on leave) at which he met Reg Medhurst, Art Williams, Joyce Fairbairn and Jimmy Rathbone. He was posted to Cranwell next and had a riotous stay (as reported in *Futurian War Digest*).

By then, I'd also been grabbed by the RAF, after enjoying a somewhat charmed period of "freedom" as the German air force did a good job in bombing the local records office on two occasions, and I had to report and supply my details anew each time. (In the event, my call-up papers arrived just just as Marion and I arranged to get married!).

The RAF distinguished between "wireless" and "radio" in the trade classifications and so far as I recall, EFR was working as a wireless mechanic, involved in maintenance and repair of general communications equipment. I found myself diverted to the trade of radio mechanic, which led to RDF-mechanic (radio-direction-finding), a title that was Americanised to radar mechanic at Yatesbury, early in 1943. (Arthur C. Clarke was an instructor at the Radio School there).

I still kept in touch with fandom for the next year or two, but contacts gradually slipped away, and then ended when I was posted to India just before the end of the war.

Demob arrangements dragged and I didn't get out of the RAF and back home again until the very end of 1946. After which I was too busy picking up the threads of civilian life to bother much with fandom until the 1950s... by which time most of the prewar and wartime accumulated letters and papers had been thinned out

by various moves and inevitable clearances.

I never caught up with EFR again. So, my contacts with him were limited to that immediate prewar and early wartime period. ... While there was a strong sercon ("serious & constructive") trend in British fandom in those early days, I always found EFK to have a subversive sense of humour. I lapped up Sinister Barrier when Unknown arrived, and EFR won me over wholeheartedly to Charles Fort.

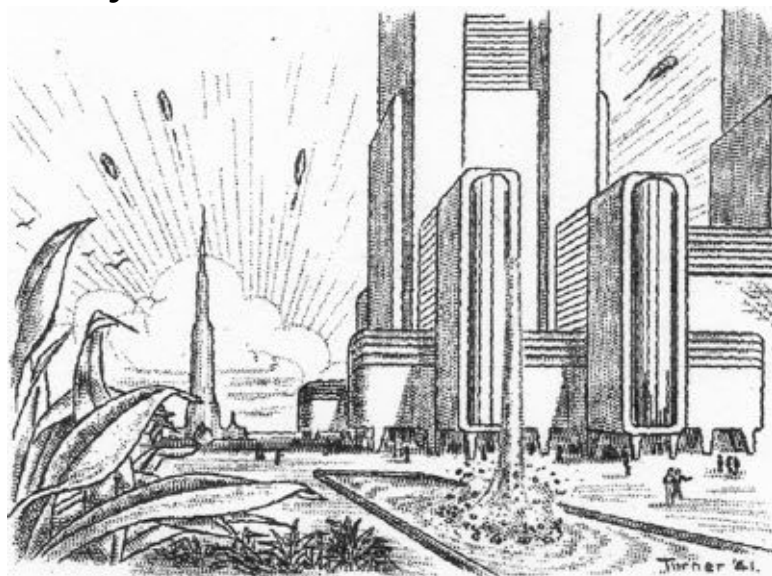
Prior to my overseas posting during the war, I was despatched to Blackpool where we were brainwashed with lectures on jungle warfare to and Japanese booby-traps (which gave us a slight clue about our ultimate destination, although it was supposed to be a closely-guarded secret). Skimming through secondhand book stalls in search of reading matter for that journey

I was lucky to pick up the 1931 US edition of Fort's Lo!, which accompanied me on the voyage. It's survived the years and still lurks on my library shelves next to The Complete Books of Charles Fort. ■

*from letters in 2001 to John L. Ingham, who was preparing a book about EFR.
"Into Your Tent" was published in 2010*



SF Poetry; the lack of it



Not been in touch with Rob Hansen since he produced the last Then. Been rummaging through correspondence with Vinç in the early 90s, when I borrowed those copies of New Frontiers, in case any remarks had been exchanged about the contents. Gather that the first ish was grotty (largely blamed on Benson Herbert), but the second ish was more fannish – even including a backcover plc, and a reprint of a Maurice Hanson piece, both from Zenith – but have a growing conviction there was no poetry...

to Steve Sneyd, 18th June 2002

Malcolm Ashworth

Just had a note from Don West telling me that Mal Ashworth collapsed and died last Saturday. He's had heart problems and been in and out of hospital for some years.

We've always kept in touch, then Mal slowed down on the correspondence and it became a standing joke between us that his typewriter was lost under junk, but he would write a long letter when he managed to unearth it—he always sent a Christmas card with a handwritten update on events filling all the spare space.

We exchanged cards last year, but with my own medical preoccupations this year I never got round to my usual follow-up letter. Fortunately when trying to restore some order to the chaos a few weeks back, I came across Mal's last card and realised I still owed him a response: so I put that right forthwith.

Had a card in return from Hazel & Mal during October, when they were spending a week in Somerset with Hazel's sister, and Mal mentioned that he'd finally fished out his hardly-used electronic typewriter the other day "and a proper reply is in the pipe-line".

Alas, I won't get that now... but I'm glad we made that last fleeting contact. ■

OES 268 to Carol & Brian Varley, 30 November 2002

Unlikely Fan?

I sat the Guardian rail travel feature and was pleased to note that the rack&pinion track up to Ooty is, amazingly, still going strong after all these years. Ah, memories, memories.

Glad to hear you completed your "all-stations" project—no doubt you'll be putting forward your proposal for reducing car traffic by opening strategic stations near new shopping complexes. Sounds the sort of project that might be welcomed in certain quarters to help divert attention from anti-war critics' comments on the amazing lack of WMD found [in Iraq] now the war's ended. (Guess the CIA will be working on it.)

Was tickled pink to see the masterpieces of SF art discovered in Saddam's palace—d'you think he was a fan? Noticed in the Guardian that Terry Pratchett has the same birthday as Saddam...

to Steve Sneyd, 18 April 2003



Past Blaster

Parcel from PostScript today included *Bradbury: An Illustrated Life*, which made me realise how little I was acquainted with the life of Ray Bradbury despite lapping up much of his prose over the years. And I was completely taken by surprise to see a reproduction of a cover of mine on Ted Carnell's prewar fanzine *New Worlds*, (with a credit in the caption and an index entry. Yeow !) in the section on Ray's early fan days...

to Steve Sneyd, 22nd March 2004

Life 3

Gardening Notes

It was love at first sight. I knew that *Maranta Leuconeura* and I were meant for each other as soon as I set eyes on its attractive foliage: broad oblong leaves, with strong red veins reaching from yellow-green midribs across a dark velvety green, with incisive formal strokes.

I returned home from the garden centre to find Marion brooding over wilting buds on her African violets, and offered my sympathies before rhapsodising about my latest acquisition. She brightened in the face of my enthusiasm and took time off from her problems to tell me that the maranta is also known as the prayer plant, because it turns its outspread leaves upward, as if praying, in the evening. This was news to me but observation proved that it was indeed so.

Once aware of the phenomenon, I was intrigued. Being of a systematic turn of mind, I checked the limits and duration of the rise and fall, finding that a pendant leaf rises through an arc of 135 degrees during the evening, falling back to the vertical by the following morning. I continued to measure the height of a leaf tip from the table at regular intervals during the day, for the period of a week or so.

Drawing a graph from the readings, plotting height against time, revealed that there was a marked dip from about 7 am, which apparently continued to 7pm, when there was a spectacular rise to maximum erection around midnight. I was uncertain about what happened between 2am and 6am since I could never stay awake to take readings. However, subsequent observations made me aware that the movement was not so smooth as this initial data implied.

Between 10am and noon there were deviations that gave a curious ripple to the curve on the graph. To clarify matters, I took more frequent readings over this period and discovered that the leaves of the maranta fluttered leisurely for an hour or so, before descending to their lowest point. Also, that between 5pm and 7pm there was another oscillatory phase before they rested prior to that spectacular evening climb.

Curious to see this effect in more detail, I rigged up my old Quarz 8mm cine-camera to take timed single-frame exposures during these crucial periods over the next few days. Impatiently, I waited for the film to come back from the process labs, but was rewarded when eventually able to screen the results.

It proved to be a revelation, confirming a mounting suspicion: the speeded-up action showed the maranta leaves sweeping up and down in a co-ordinated fashion, flapping as if seeking to get a lift. There was no doubt about it—the *maranta was going through all the motions of attempted flight*.

It was while relating all this to Eric, plant psychologist at the local garden centre, over a pint one evening in the *Stock Dove*, that I perceived a role emerging for

myself as a plant trainer. Eric was droning on about more and more scientists (and royalty) being convinced that a harmony exists between all living things on the planet Earth, and how plants are equipped to respond to human behaviour in more ways than we know. That was it: I decided to encourage the maranta in its efforts, to become its mentor and model.

Every day, in the late morning, I took the plant out in the open air and set it an example by standing there before it, flapping my arms in slow motion. The neighbours' curiosity was roused by this routine; my concentration suffered as I became aware of stealthy movements, spying eyes and whispered comments behind the hedge dividing the gardens. But Marion set their minds at rest with some story that I'd taken up the ancient Chinese exercise of *t'ai chi*; certainly at this early stage my efforts bore some resemblance to the essentially slow gentle rhythmic movements of that oriental discipline.

Thereafter, I was able to pursue my training sessions without distraction, and application was rewarded when the maranta was able to match the rhythm of my swaying arms. Continued practice limbered up its leaf stems and, with this new-found flexibility, I was able to speed up the ritual.

All this regular exercise was making me feel decidedly spry. It seemed time to test out its effect on the maranta. Placed on a delicately balanced scale, a distinct lift was apparent during the more vigorous part of the routine. It was a great day when, not long after, freed from the confinement of its pot, the maranta was able to make its first momentous hops into the air, unaided.

Soon, leaves flailing, it remained airborne for a brief spell.

But summer had sped by, there was a decided nip in the air. I fancy the combined effect of chill weather and frantic activity proved too much for the plant; being taken out of the shelter of its pot probably didn't help either.

The maranta drooped: its glorious foliage yellowed and faded. Fortunately all was not lost. I rescued a few healthy off-shoots and reared them during the winter in a soil-less hydroponics cabinet designed by Eric at short notice, in which the roots were able to mop up sustenance without the restraints of soil in a pot.

Thanks to a borrowed sun lamp they are thriving, making phenomenal leaf growth. In the coming year, given a good summer and intensive training, I hope to launch the world's first flying marantas into the skies above Romiley.

The *Guinness Book of Records* has been warned to stand by.. ■

published in Chuck Connor's Thingumybob 5, April 1992

I seem to go in for Gradualism

I seem to go in for gradualism with my complaints, going through a period of slow deterioration, which in a sense helps you to adapt and make the most of your

condition. In the late (19)70s I had eye problems—cataracts & complications—and finished up having four operations over a three year period. As you surmised, I earned my living as a designer, so increasing blindness seemed something of a catastrophe during that time ...

I worked for the Guardian group in Manchester, in charge of a department made up of two design studios and a copy group; as my sight got worse, I was able to delegate designing work and concentrate on management, using my secretary's eyes.

When I fully regained my sight, it coincided with a particularly busy period at the papers, and I was rushed off my feet in the couple of years before my retirement. Looking back, the time away from work, recuperating from the operations, was ultimately helpful in extricating myself from all the daily routines and decision making, and helped me adopt a more laid back attitude to problems that arose.

Encroaching blindness meant giving up painting and drawing, missing art exhibitions, made reading and writing a labour: when I reached the stage of asking little old ladies to help me across the road, I was almost ready to give up. I recall I had a frantic period trying to catch up with all the books I'd meant to read but not got round to... and ultimately found most consolation in the record collection I'd built up.

Then everything changed after the final operation—like you say, it's a reprieve. Suddenly, there's so much you want to do, want to catch up with. You live intensely in the present, rather than leave things for an uncertain future.

With me, now I could see what a mess I'd made of paintings done when I was reduced to peering at the canvas from a mere three inches away (while poking myself in the eye with the brush), I was all set to resume work. However, the demands of the job kept me away from the easel in the rush to retirement, and then when I became a leisured pensioner there's been so much to fit in the time available that I've not yet got around to painting again.

I blame it all on that Jim Burns. He attracted me to his writing classes years ago and diverted my energies to wild literary ambitions. Which reminds me of an earlier stay in hospital, while fighting for King & Country, duly documented and read out at one of Jim's sessions. OK, maybe I should have stuck with the painting... ■

to Kevin Ring of Satori Books/Beat Scene, February 1996

Grauniadisms & Earthquakes

26 October 2002: Mark Gardner's written an obit for bop-pianist Dodo Marmarosa in the November Jazz Journal ... Seems it's authentic this time—am reminded that the Garudian rashly published a before-the-event obit for Dodo, by Ron Atkins, back in 1992, and when they had to print an apology a few days later, couldn't

resist the comment that the “cliche ‘dead as a dodo’ will be avoided for ever”... [And as at 29th they still haven’t risked mentioning Dodo’s demise on their obits page !]

The quake-count continues to rise, though we take the word of the experts on the continuing rumbles, as they have not noticeably disturbed the peace of Romiley. Earlier in the week, there were some flashes in the evening sky which puzzled us... there was a vague suspicion of thunder, but as we’ve been plagued by firework displays from over-enthusiastic pre-Bonfire Night addicts for several weeks, we couldn’t be sure what exactly we’d seen. Now there’s increasing mention of strange lights in reports, apparently linked with the quakes. Very odd. We reserve judgment and calmly await developments...

[Note: in the autumn of 2002, the Manchester area experienced over 100 earthquakes of magnitude up to R3.9]

Continue to attract the attention of clairvoyants: this time it’s Raylene van Worth, who also writes gushy long letters with lots of scribbles in the margins, apparently typed furiously while she’s sat up in bed, in New York, too excited to sleep. Don’t think I know that feeling... I never type in bed. ■

Climate Riot

28 October: Wow—I know I promised not to mention the weather in future, but can’t resist saying what a real wild day it was yesterday, with black clouds racing across the sky and the wind racketing round like an express train. And we got off fairly lightly, according to the papers. Am aghast at reports that climate changes mean we’ll get such storms much more often in the future. Yet today is a complete contrast: sunny with hardly any wind, pleasant to be out and about... Must say that I find these day-by-day abrupt changes unsettling.

More Glenn Gould CDs arrived this morn—there’s a Great Unheard Pile building up in the music room. I shall have to spend a relaxing evening catching up; that should take my mind off the blasted weather. ■

O&S 267 to Carol & Brian Varley, 2002

Grey Power

Most of these advocates of a Pensioners’ Party seem to more concerned with selling things to middle-class retired folk than taking any political action, to judge from the mags you passed on. Before retirement, I attended one or two meetings

where well-meaning folk told us to cultivate a hobby to fill in the time we would soon find hanging on our hands, in order to prepare for the coming traumatic change.

I didn't find the change in any way traumatic: already had more hobbies than I could cope with and the only problem was fitting in all the things I wanted to do in the extra time available. Indeed, as you are aware, I still have problems in that respect. I don't see many of my interests reflected in these mags: they seem to operate in an alternative universe.

There have been occasions when I was tempted to revive The Party of Moderate Progress within the Bounds of the Law—it sounds ideally suited to present day political correctness. It was founded in 1911 by the Czech writer Jaroslav Hasek (author of 'The Good Soldier Svejk') when he stood as candidate for Prague Royal Vineyards.

His policy was to debunk the Monarchy, its institutions, and its social and political system, officially, though it was alleged that it was actually to bring thirsty voters to a friend's pub and boost business with frequent meetings. Could be said to be the Literal Democrats of their day, and even had a party hymn:

A million candidates rose up
To hoodwink honest people.
The electorate would give them votes
And they would gladly take them.
Let others call for violent progress,
By force world order overturn.
Moderate progress is our aim
And Jaroslav Hasek is our man.

Party records are fragmentary. A few accounts have survived in Hasek's *The Red Commissar*, which you may be able to dig out of the library.

I may yet get around to organising a Romily branch of The Party of Moderate Progress. When I get some of these other jobs out of the way. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 07/07/1994

GUP? Blame it on computers!

Notice in the *Sat Garudian* that Stephen Jay Gould has published yet another collection of essays, and see his *Millennium* book is now out in paperback. He must be coining money... And here's the *Observer* Lit Ed Robert McCrum crying that there are Too Many Books... yeah, I go along with that! Seems that there are 100,000 new books currently published each year.

McCrum suggests that the computer is largely to blame, having virtually abolished the old autonomy of the publisher, and largely reduced the role of the printer to that of a mere machine-minder, now that authors can deliver a book “oven-ready, on computer disk”. Only consolation offered by McCrum is that “the autumn of 1998 may well go down as the mad high noon of a party that ended in tears and recrimination”.

Meanwhile, I stagger on trying to keep up with the ever-present GUP.. at least there seems to be hope that matters may ease one day, real soon, if Mr McCrum is to be believed.

Dashed around doing some essential shopping as the city centre was not too crowded, and got back home without having to dodge a single shower, which was quite good going. Piccadilly Station is still a shambles—every platform is cluttered with scaffolding as work on the roof continues. Another vast job which looks unending...

They wanted to shut the station down over the Christmas period, but there was such a wail of protest from suffering commuters that they won't dare carry out their threat. ■

to Brian Varley, November 1998

Heroes

I guess my current Hero is George Herriman, perpetrator of the Krazy Kat cartoon epic, syndicated in US newspapers from around 1913 until the artist's death in 1944.

The basic plot of this strip is simply stated: Policeman-dog, Offissa B. Pupp loves a cat named Krazy, who—alas—loves Ignatz, a cynical brick-heaving mouse. Oddly, when Ignatz fends off Krazy with an adroitly thrown brick, the cat regards it as a sign of affection. So Offissa Pupp spends his time protecting Krazy from assaults by Ignatz, the action taking place in the ever-changing surreal desert landscape of Coconino County, Arizona.

If that strikes you, perhaps, as a limited and boring theme, be assured that Herriman is deliciously offbeat and varied in his rambling story lines, delivered with much philosophic comment on life's frustrations.

And there's a supporting cast of diverse and entertaining characters: Joe Stork, “purveyor of progeny to prince & proletarian”, who lives on top of the Enchanted Mesa; Kolin Kelly, supplier of bricks to Ignatz; Mrs Kwak Wak, local gossip; Walter C. Austridge, a Dickey Bird, i.e. a bird wearing a dickey; Bum Bill Bee, busily not going anywhere; Don Kiyoti & Sancho Pansy; Mock Duck, oriental launderer; to name but a few—who impinge on the action in a multitude of diverting ways.

Herriman was a frequent visitor to the Navajo country straddling Arizona. Images

of the strange rock formations of Monument Valley—like Agathlan, Thunder Needle, Chuckawalla Butte, Pika Mesa, the Elephant’s Feet—are part of the ever-changing background to Krazy Kat, as are images linked with Indian culture. And Herriman is adventurous, occasionally roaming down the passages of time to Ancient Egypt, or the prehistoric past. On occasion he even reverses Time, invokes alternate universes...

When I showed Steve Sneyd a page dating from May 1930, headed by a pic of Krazy gazing in wonder at a tall mesa block shaped like a giant brick set against a dark sky, he commented that the Mega-brick was a definite monolith-alike, and wondered if Arthur Clarke was a Krazy Kat fan.

However, in his short story *The Sentinel* Arthur describes the alien artefact as a “pyramidal structure, twice as high as a man”, which suggests to me rather that it was Kubrick or an associate, influenced by memories of Krazy Kat, who transformed pyramid into monolith for the film *2001*...

In its early days, Krazy Kat appeared as black&white pages in the Sunday papers. Then in June ‘35, the Hearst editors decided to shift KK to their new tabloid-format coloured comic sections. While there were some editors and readers who apparently didn’t appreciate the near-Joycean dialogue and bizarre situations of Herriman’s cartoon artistry, it survived—above all because it enjoyed the insistent support of the publisher and press magnate William Randolph Hearst. He was Herriman’s staunchest fan, who early on gave him a lifetime contract with King Features Syndicate.

Now, inhabitants of the 21st century are privileged—we have the opportunity to dip into, wallow in, and enjoy the continuities of several compilations of Krazy Kat cartoons.

In the late ‘80s and early ‘90s, collections of Krazy Kat Sunday pages were published by Eclipse Books and the Turtle Island Foundation, which are now collectors’ items at fancy prices. Fortunately, Fantagraphics Books, of 7563 Lake City Way NE, Seattle, Washington, 98115, USA have recently embarked on a series of paperback volumes, edited by enthusiast Bill Blackbeard, featuring the complete full-page comics.

The years 1925-6, 1927-8, and 1929-30 are already available, with a further five volumes, covering the Eclipse material, in the pipeline.

Consult www.fantagraphics.com.

[the final volume, 1943-44, was issued in the autumn of 2008. PHT]

A few years back I was lucky enough to pick up a remaindered copy of Vol.1 of “The Komplete Kolor Krazy Kat”, edited by Rick Marschall, published in the UK by Titan Books, 1990. Look around for a copy [but ignore the info on the dust-jacket that it is the first of seven volumes—so far as I know the rest of the series has still to materialise].

Or you might like to contact the Amazon Books website for a listing of available Krazy Kat books. I bought a copy from them of the Abradale Press “Krazy Kat: The Comic Art of George Herriman”, a generous sample of his work, published in 1999. Highly recommended! ■

He who dithers stays safe!

I had dithered about going into Manchester on the day the bomb went off, in search of tape bargains, but postponed matters. Quite a shock when the news reports filtered through later... Travelled in since, to find Corporation Street completely devastated, with Marks&Sparks a ruin, and the lavatory-tile fascia of the Arndale a wreck, the Royal Exchange windowless, and all sealed off while the debris is cleared.

Most of the damaged shop-fronts in Cross Street and the Market Street precinct have already been restored and things, surprisingly, back to normal in the surrounding areas; but it'll be a long while before the real damage is sorted, especially to the Royal Exchange.

I hope they manage to improve on the architectural eyesore of the Arndale, given the opportunity to rebuild... What the IRA expected to achieve with this gesture completely eludes me; the miracle about the whole sorry affair is that no-one was killed.

On which solemn note, I'd better close. Hope you are enjoying summer now it's officially arrived...

to Peter Ashford (British Society of Russian Philately), 24th July 1996

Houdini

During a clear-out, I unearthed a vast mailbag—just the right size for a budding Houdini to escape from—with a metal clasp at the neck and a tag for the New York postal dept. This arrived some twenty years ago, bearing a hundred copies of my Triad book from Dover.

I didn't know what to do with it then, and I'm still wondering... I suppose I could put an ad in the post-office window, in case it's just what a local aspiring Houdini is looking for... ■

to Brian Varley, May 1999

I am an Elderly Person

October, 1991

I know I am an Elderly Person because I saw a British Rail poster advertising special fares. It's confirmed when I ask at the ticket office for an "Elderly Person's Return" and I get one.

I also know I'm an Elderly Person when I go to my birth-place in Brunswick Street, Manchester, and there's not a trace of my childhood scene remaining. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 15 October 2004

India by Guide Book

Been gloating over some bargain books that I've picked up at a sale – like a guide to India (vintage 1993), for £2.95, which covers in some detail many of the areas I once wandered over in the Western ghats and Southern India. It really brings the memories crowding back; gives details of a "hill-station tour (on foot, selectively over a few days)" at Mahableshwar, which largely echoes our off-duty explorations while billeted in a deserted Government House, ostensibly being trained on GEE navigational radar equipment...

Government House had once been the residence & summer seat of Bombay Government officials and their wives in the more peaceful days of the Raj—prior to our arrival it had been used by the army as HQ for jungle training courses and was in a sad state of neglect by the time we got there! "This is a region of heights and views, lakes and holy places, for quiet wanderings and contemplation. Take a picnic" this guide says...

I was fortunate to find a tatty copy of an old guide while haunting the bazaar during my stay, and we visited most of the places which offered spectacular views over the ghat valleys—Elphinstone Point, Arthur's Seat, Lodwick Point, Chinaman's Waterfall and Wilson's Point [our technical site was located on this highest point (1435m)], and still have a sketchbook of many views as a record.

Amazingly, the old names still seem to be in use, though nowadays I see the visitor can enjoy conducted tours—and I notice that the energetic are offered tennis, badminton and indoor games at the Hindu Gymkhana in Mahableshwar.

Was interested to note on looking at street maps of some once-familiar cities that the old names still linger.

In Bombay there was a spate of renaming after independence and Hindu names, not surprisingly, supplanted most of the thorofares named after Victorian worthies. But the old names still seem to be in use.

Bangalore was a town I enjoyed discovering, and the map in the new guide

makes me feel I wouldn't get lost if I revisited it, as so many familiar landmarks are still there. (Nowadays the computer software industry seems to have taken over the place). And over in the West, Ootacamund and the Europeanised hill stations seem to have been preserved much as they were.

Wow, reading through this guide is almost as good as a visit—minus all the negatives like insects, sweat and disease... ■

O&S 238 to Carol & Brian Varley, April 2001

Jazz at the MSG: recollections

In the cellar

You can practically sit with the band and feel the front line blasting bam through the bottom of your uplifted pint. At the concert, white-coated waiters wriggled between the bar and an enthusiastic audience, seated at tables.

For a while Jenks and Jack Swinnerton were joined by Ernie Garside thus bringing all aspects of jazz – trad and moder – to the MSG.

As Steve Voce once remarked, Ernie, sharp dresser represented the mod scene while Jenks be-sweatered anarchy the more traditional.

I remember some ecstatic nights, like the time the Lyttleton band and Buck Clayton were playing together – chase choruses, going on and on. Jenks had got an extension that night to 2 am – rolled out after all trains had long departed and night service buses were noticeably absent.

A fine night so just walked home along winding Cheshire roads living the events over and over again in my mind.

Then there was Pee Wee Russell. I heard him in the Ballroom with the Gary Cox Quartet and with Alex Welsh Band.

It was while we were reminiscing that I became aware of the music. I thought it was a car radio somewhere but the place was deserted and no one in the cars still there. I waved to Vic to shut up and asked if he could hear it.

Then I realized it seemed to be coming from under our feet—there must have been a real jam session going on underground – it was odd. Then a wild roll of the drums and clash of cymbals and a wild shout of Ooya-Goya made me realise that we were standing right on the site of the MSG premises and in a buried cellar down below the dear departed were still playing over past triumphs.

But maybe it was the booze.

It's Boxing after Christmas following Manchester's ill-fated bid for the Olympic Games. I'm standing in the snow of a car park near the Cathedral, rather the worse

for wear after celebrating into the small hours, agreeing with Vic that this is the very site where the solid hunk of Victorian brickwork that housed the Manchester Sports Guild use to stand.

We were less unanimous about exactly when the Guild finally closed its doors. Vic hazards fifteen years ago. I think it's more. The city council just earmarked the block for demolition, the MSG was forced out, and then the premises were left standing empty for years, before being finally razed in the name of inner-city development.

– I became a habituee of the MSC when a change of job brought me back to Manchester at the start of the 60s, I comment. Not for any of its sporting activities, I add hastily since I have a horror of strenuous competitive exercise.

– Yeah, it was a bit of a joke, that, says Vic.

Turns out he was one of the folk roped in by the Guild during the early 50s to help raise money in support of local amateur sports groups, by promoting the occasional jazz gig, then forming local clubs to help spread the word.

– Sure, we had a few disappointments at the start, he mused, lost money for a while at some venues. Then things really started to ball as we brought bands to the Manchester jazz scene and attracted the attentions of a growing audience of jazz fans, and people we could count on to support the Guild's other activities.

While financially helping sports activities, from football to fencing, from judo to women's cricket, we built up a respectable reserve fund from our profits. Enough to take over the building on Long Millgate and convert it into a thriving sports and social centre, complete with jazz cellar and ballroom.

Within a few years of opening, we were firmly established as the leading jazz centre in the North West. The entertainment tail was beginning to wag the dog.

By way of celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Guild, the committee decided to do something of more than local interest. Seemed a good idea to invite a well known American jazz musician to the club for a weekend of residency, to play alongside British bands. Choice fell on Henry Red Allen, the trumpeter, and over several nights in April 1964 he played with the bands of Alex Welsh, Sandy Brown, Bruce Turner and Humphrey Lyttelton. It was a rousing success.

The Happiest I've been . . .

They say you only realise how happy you've been in retrospect... like to have come down from the clouds to realise how high you've been floating.

During the 60s and 70s I met and heard many of the American jazzmen I'd admired on record over the years. There was an influx after relaxation of the Musicians' Union ban/restriction—old timers who'd come down in the world, newcomers still battling in the popularity stakes.

For me, one high spot was the Manchester Jazz Fest of June 1963, which came

about because Long Thingumy decided that the annual Fest at Beaulieu had run its court and M/cr took over.

Wandering thru the echoing exhibition halls of Belle Vue after surviving the token civic opening, we got down to the real nitty gritty—three days and nights of almost continuous music-making, a rich feast of entertainment, a surfeit, a mad scramble to get from one gig to the next, to sample everything.

Ecstatic!

One of the highlights for me was the sound of Buck Clayton making music with the Humphrey Lyttelton band – Humph traditionalist, Buck modest in person yet musically assertive, confident and able. It was the beginning of a musical pairing that blossomed in later years.

If I have to go into Manchester city centre these days, it's usually for some specific purpose; social calls on MEN, delivering some artwork from a freelance commission, or visiting one of the art galleries.

I was early for an appointment the other day and having a few minutes to kill, I went by a circuitous route to have a look at what 'progress' has done to the Victoria Station area after all the optimistic plans to reshape the area if Manchester won the Olympic Games.

I dallied over the record stall in the High St market and wandered round the ugly backside of the Arndale Precinct and past the CIS Building, and found myself confused. The geography had been considerably altered since last I visited the area by the winding track of the Metrolink, breaking through the side of the station.

The new buildings, buildings ripe for demolition, newly opened spaces... I felt the need to consult an old and tatty city guide to remind me of how it all was when I used to visit the area regularly.

It's amazing how the years slop by: my main trips to the vicinity of the station were to the Manchester Sports Guild building, not, I hasten to add for any healthy pursuit, but in search of entertainment. In the sixties, the Sports Guild built a reputation as a jazz centre.

I met up with a rum bunch of jazz fans, local musicians and record collectors, who assembled in the Jazz Cellar every week for record recitals and discussions. Once or twice a month, a guest speaker would be invited. Writers and broadcasters like Charles Fox, Alun Morgan, Paul Oliver, Albert McCarthy, editor of *Jazz Monthly*, or musicians like Bruce Turner, Sandy Brown, John Chilton...

In between times the rest of us took turns to air our enthusiasm and prejudices. Chairman and leading light of this select bunch was Eddie Lambert, who strove to keep opposing camps of trad supporters and bopper from each others' throats by providing a speaker from each camp for the evening session.

In those intolerant times, half the society members listened, the other half retired to the bar and haggled over surplus 78s and EPs...

When things were booming, it was decided to do something more than purely local interest—to bring a world-famous American musician to the club for a weekend residency and have him play alongside leading British bands. The choice fell on trumpeter Henry Red Allen. Over several night, he played with the Alex Walsh Band, Sandy Brown's Band, the Bruce Turner Jump Band and then the Hymphrey Lyttleton Band.

The excited response set the MSG promoters to try it again, and again and again... Jazz fans heard the greats: Pee Wee Russell, Buck Clayton, Teddy Wilson, Earl Hines, Albert Nicholas, Freddie Hubbard, Eddie Lockjaw Davis, Eddie Miller, Bill Coleman, Peanuts Hucko, Teddie Wilson, Joe Turner (Big) ['65 tour with Humph], Wild Bill Davison, Ruby Braff, the John Chilton Swing Kings, the Alan Hare Big Band, Teddy Wilson with the Dave Shepherd group...



manchester
jazz
society

The Manchester Jazz Society meets each Wednesday at 8-00 p.m. in the Jazz Cellar of the Manchester Sports Guild, Long Millgate. The Cellar Bar is open, with waiter service. Admission is 2/- per week, membership costing 6d.

[I, too, was a regular at the MSG in the 1960s, but as a member of Manchester Sword Club, which used to meet there. I did go to the jazz club once, though; when my dad's eyesight was wonky and he needed a guide-person to escort him to and from a Ben Webster gig. The music was somewhat wasted on a rock & Classical philistine like myself but the beer was very okay. PHT]

Lights Out!

Wow, your letter arrives to remind me that a week's gone by without any addition to this note... I blame the continuing rotten weather. Yesterday the icy gales were blowing all day, with flurries of snow or hail, and to crown it all the power abruptly went off in the evening.

Was just starting to edit a file of an article on Richard Brautigan that I'd been OCRing, when poof! in an instant all was plunged into darkness. I switched off the computer and groped around for a torch I knew was handy, and wandered out to

find that all the street lights were off in our vicinity, and it looked as though the power was off over a wide area. I arrived back at No.10 to find a frantic search for candles going on—it's so many years since we suffered any power cuts that memories of where the fall-back illuminations had been stashed were decidedly confused.

Fortunately Marion had recently been sent some samples of scented candles which were useful while we located the emergency supply (under the stairs, of course). So we spent the next couple of hours by the fireside, listening to a concert on the battery radio, Marion & Philip attempting to read by candlelight, while I was content to give my eyes a rest from staring at a monitor.

A phone enquiry told us that Romiley, Bredbury and Woodley were affected and they were still attempting to find the cause for the interruption—presumably some power lines had been blown down by the gales.

Must say that the glow and warmth of a cheery fire helped to boost morale during the wait. Then I heard the central heating boiler stirring into action again and realised the street lights were back on. So power was restored around 11pm... I dashed back to check if I'd lost anything on the computer, to be grumpily reminded that I should close down Windows before switching off the machine; the OCR'd material was intact, apart from a few minor corrections I'd made prior to the sudden cut.

So I felt I'd got off lightly.

I see that global warming has crept back on the agenda with the news that the arctic ice-cap is definitely melting at a rate that will divert the Gulf Stream, and ensure that European weather cools off appreciably. While not very welcome, the report has the consolation that it will come about in umpteen years time—when I'll have long ceased worrying about it...

Am sure I've heard all this before. So settle for the immediate concern that chilly winds are said to be returning this weekend. Ho hum. Consoled by the fact that the daffs have made a surprising recovery over the last few days and are now erect and seemingly none the worse for being laid so low. An inspiring example to us all.

They have been proudly announcing on the local TV the good news that work on the City Art Gallery extension (which seems to have been going on for the past decade) is at long last completed. The bad news is that the place will not be ready to open to the public again for another couple of years at least.

So it goes...

I could well have got out of the habit of visiting art galleries by then. ■

Odds & Sods 207 to Brian Varley, April Y2K

Manchester Modified

or The Confusion of an Open Station

From Ashburys station through to Ardwick, there are vast clearance schemes taking place, with earthmovers and bulldozers flattening the vast expanse of derelict industrial sites and abandoned railway sidings, visible every time one takes the train to Piccadilly. My suspicions that this is all part of the hopeful preparations for the Manchester 2000 Olympics bid have tempted me to break my journey and see what exactly is happening to my old haunts along the 54 bus route, when I used to work at Anchor Chemical Co in Clayton Lane.

However, an article in Guardian 2 confirms all my suspicions—Bradford Colliery, the steel works are gone, though the Bradford Gas Works gasometer still dominates the horizon. The area is now called 'Fastlands' and will be the site of the Olympic Velodrome, whether or not the Games actually come here. I still have massive doubts that they will, but at least they are the reason for considerable clearance and renovation taking place.

After the pedestrianisation of Market Street, a relatively brief period of newness was ruined by successive digging operations by gas, electricity and sewers, which left the place scarred, followed by various unrelated experiments with 'tactile' paths for the blind which were a menace to the sighted.

Then the advent of the 'tramway' led to further upheavals over a long period. So now it's in the process of being dug up and redone to present a tidy spectacle for visiting International Olympic Committee members... Somehow I don't think they'll ever make Manchester look presentable as a city. (And I've been in the vicinity for over 70 years, man and boy, he grumbled). To add to the fun, Piccadilly has been made into an 'open' station. It all happened rather quietly. After all the platform barriers had been rebuilt, and reduced in number, of course.

Travellers have been harried by unmanned barriers for a long time: platforms 1 to 4 were reduced to two barriers, one of which would be closed quite often; no help when a couple of trains are unloading passengers into the fore-court, and a frustrated lot of intending passengers are attempting to infiltrate in the opposite direction because they can see their train preparing to depart!

This state of affairs lasted some months, then last month—no ticket collectors, their booths all boarded up, and free access in and out of the platforms. I assumed there'd been a strike or something, a common reaction judging by the number of uncollected tickets stuffed into the cracks around the boarded-up booths. No announcement or anything; just an absence of bods to ask about train changes (of which there've been too many of late).

Why all the money was spent replacing the old barriers seems unclear. But Piccadilly is now definitely an open station... ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 14/06/1993

Manchester Reblitzed, 1996

The Manchester bombing [on Saturday, 1996/06/15] dominates thoughts here more than somewhat. What the hell the IRA hoped to achieve by doing this, at this time, completely eludes me. The miracle is that no one was killed. There was some confusion on the various maps that appeared in the papers as to where the van was parked.

It seems to have been illegally parked on double lines outside Marks & Sparks, and given a parking ticket by a warden a couple of hours before the explosion, if the MEN report is to be believed; the security camera shot that is appearing everywhere, shows it on the corner of Market Street/Cannon Street, with the Royal Exchange in the background, and the traffic light on the island in the foreground.

Since there is only a double lane for traffic coming from Cross Street at this point, I should have thought that stronger action than just leaving a parking ticket would have been called for...and some effort made to check why the van was parked there anyway, considering all the parking facilities around the vicinity.

The MEN has a "CITY TERROR SPECIAL" out today, with a page air-shot pic along Corporation Street, showing the extent of the damage to the Arndale complex, Marks and Longridge House. The dreaded Arndale toilet tiles seem to have had short shrift and been largely ripped off—I wonder if we can hope for an improvement when rebuilding starts? But it'll be a good few months before the city-centre can hope to begin to return to "normal", that's for sure.

Is it only a week ago that I went to Threshers in Marple to replenish the wine cellar, and the good weather tempted me to linger around the canal moorings, and even venture along the stretch of the Peak Forest canal that wanders into the Derbyshire countryside, enjoying the views of the hills and the antics of the ducks along the way.

I was tempted quite a way—there are few locks once out of Marple, and the path is level and not so tiring for us old folks as our home stretch can be—before I realised that I'd better return home before Marion wondered where the hell I'd got to...

It all seemed so peaceful then. ■

17 June 1996

Went into Manchester today, to see the damage and visit the [MEN] Studio. There's limited access partway up Market St precinct, but the whole of the Arndale Centre is still closed and cordoned off. Corporation St, from the Royal Exchange corner along to Cannon Street, is completely devastated.

Remember all the fuss in years past about loose tiles falling off the Longridge House office block? Well, the copper corner bolts did their stuff and the tiles withstood the blast pretty well, but there's not a window left in the place.

Marks'n'Sparks is apparently a complete write-off and the shopping precinct behind is all cordoned off. The Royal Exchange also has been effectively deglazed and is boarded up and inaccessible.

In St Ann's Square the damage is patchy—Dillons escaped but the Barton Arcade behind is damaged right through to the Deansgate side, and the church has holes for windows. There is patchy blast damage in all the side streets off Market Street, and despite the clear-up, the whole area glints with particles of glass embedded in the tarmac of the roads.

They're still clearing the rubble away in Corporation St and hauling down those tiled panels that still precariously hang from the battered Arndale. Here's hoping that the architects come up with something a little more inspired if it comes to rebuilding. The place swarms with vans as glaziers flock in to replace shopfronts and office windows, and temporary boarding goes up.

I suppose the fine weather is a welcome factor in the clear-up. And outside the immediate area, life goes on much as usual though the traffic is snarled up. The belated IRA "apology" to those injured in the blast just sounds ludicrous, and considering the timing of the event it really is a miracle that no one was killed.

There were a couple of new faces in the studio. Mike has left (I fancy computing wore him down), Stu has disappeared to another floor, so there are only four of 'em left. Roger still hovers round—his hair has gone white, whether from stress or natural causes I couldn't say. Come to think of it I bumped into Hughie Nixon, and he has a white wig, too. (I can still only manage a tatty grey).

I missed Jim, who had sneaked a day off, and as Kevin was besieged by anxious enquirers, Fred explained that a new system has been installed: copy is now bar-coded as it comes in, and every job is meticulously timed from start to finish, and fed directly to production to fill an appropriate hole in the paper.

I can understand Mike getting fed up; I should certainly hate to go back myself under the present conditions.

Don't know why, but this visit really brought home how radically the whole job has changed under the impact of the computer in the past decade, and made me appreciate that I probably retired at the right time, this side of sanity. ■

21 June 1996

Corporation Street still looks a mess and the reports emerging that buildings like the Royal and Corn Exchanges have skidded on their foundations and may have to be demolished after all, suggest that it'll be a long time before things return to normal in the city centre.

Sad about the Mitre, too. I have too many mental landscapes already cluttering my mind, all familiar local places that no longer exist, except when I summon them up in imagination. Did you happen to see the letter in the Obs from the resident computer Guru of Carlton Avenue, about the competition for redesigning Manchester's centre?

Re the Royal/Corn Exchanges, I saw a report a few days back (which eludes me now) in the *Garudian*, which seemed to suggest that some pessimistic earlier reports on the extent of the bomb damage had been exaggerated, so your [Steve Sneyd's] faith in the solidity of Victorian architecture may yet be vindicated.

It amazes me how much of the Arndale has reopened so soon, after the first woeful reports. 'Appen the City fathers saw they weren't going to get much out of the government after the state visits from Hezza and John, so now they're gritting their teeth and looking on the brighter side of life. ■

18 September 1996

Mathematics & the Imagination

In the mad heat of last summer Lisa discovered that raspberry yoghurt is improved by the addition of Sandeman's Fine Old Ruby Port. Her method is to add a teaspoonful of port to the yoghurt, stir briskly, test, and so on ad lib until the required degree of enrichment is reached. She soon graduated to tablespoonsful, and then sloshing it straight in from the bottle, though in this case some finesse is required if the mixture is to retain its consistency. If it becomes too liquid, then Lisa's policy appears to be to drink it and start again...

When she discovered that I utilise empty yoghurt containers for mixing paints, Lisa's experiments were extended to visits to the studio. Today the local dairy has supplied orange yoghurt so she is trying vodka in place of port. While not materially affecting the flavour of the mixture, it certainly adds interest.

She pauses in mid-swig to ask what I am doing.

It just so happens that I'm carrying out an experiment of my own, standing on a chair, and dangling a paperback copy of Kasner and Newman's Mathematics & the Imagination from the end of a long piece of string.

– I'm waiting for this book to jump into my hand, I explain.

Lisa gives me a pitying stare and returns to her work.

– Then you've a long wait ahead.

– It could happen any minute, I protest.

– Not unless I give it a helping hand, bounces back the sceptical rejoinder.

– Don't you dare... you'll ruin everything. Just take my word for it. It's bound to happen sooner or later. All the facts of statistical mechanics and physical chemistry, not to mention the kinetic theory of gases and probability theory, support my belief.

Molecules are always moving – they only stop when the temperature drops to absolute zero, and that condition prevails in the studio only in mid-winter – and this book is continually being hit by the molecules of air moving around it.

At this precise moment in time, the buffeting from above and below is about equal and cancels out so that gravity pulls the book down. But come the moment

when the molecules pushing the book down happen to ease off, then kapow! the molecules of air pushing the book upward successfully counteract gravity, and the book leaps into my hand...

– Sheeeeeesshhh... mouths Lisa, with eyes upturned.

I am stung by her obvious disbelief to make a wild claim.

– Well, it's even possible to forecast when it will happen. Since the probability lies between $1/\text{googol}$ and $1/\text{googolplex}$, the book will definitely rise within a period of less than a googolplex of years...

– A googlewhich?

– A googol is merely a convenient mathematical name for a big number... ten to the hundredth power, or 1 followed by a hundred zeros. A googolplex is an even bigger number... ten to the googol power. It has been said that there wouldn't be enough room to write it out in figures, even if you put down a zero every centimetre of the way right out to the furthest star from Earth. But we're still dealing with a finite number, less than infinity, that mathematicians can throw about casually in calculations...

– How about a drink while you're waiting, comes a relaxed invitation.

– You're distracting me, I protest with all the dignity I can muster.

An hour later there are still no detectable results though the stiffness of my arm suggests that some air molecules have been doing their damnest to push the book to the floor. I give up and climb down from the chair.

The studio is deserted. The Blonde Presence has gone and so has the vodka.

A spreading multicoloured pool catches my eye and I become aware that several paint containers are slowly leaking their contents. During the mopping up I make a mental note to complain to Lisa that her Polish vodka is slowly dissolving the plastic yoghurt pots. ■

item for Lisa Conesa's Zimri?

The Millennium Change: A Sceptical Pedant

Surprise, surprise, the Garudian third leader today manages to draw attention to the fact that the timing of all these millennium celebrations is a trifle in advance... "if the world had been even a little more numerate than it is, we would not be celebrating the new millennium this year at all but at the start of 2001. However, that only proves that maths counts, even if most of us cannot."

Even publish a reader's letter whose wife wants to know "if she can start to claim her pension at the beginning of her 60th year—that is from the date of her 59th birthday?"

And on the TV local news magazine progs there are idiots talking about this being their "last appearance this century", though they obviously expect to be

back again in the New Year... aarrrrgh!

How come everyone's so confused?

It may be coincidence, but I see that the Guardian's daily Corrections & Clarifications column is temporarily suspended for the next few weeks...

Meanwhile, by the time we have established that today is Friday and December 31 and, indeed, New Year's eve, I have lost count of the number of twerps on the TV who are convinced that this is the last day of the century... though I was cheered by sight of a lone reporter who had visited the Greenwich Meridian Line to try and get over the right perspective on matters of timing, but no one in the immediate vicinity seemed to be listening to him.

Too busy planning parties, obviously. (Since we didn't have a Xmas do at Romiley, we've decided to have a family party tomorrow, just to keep up with all the celebrating that's apparently going on worldwide).

Well, here it is, New Year's Day, at long last. I guess that Romiley & district enjoyed a distinctly classier firework display than we saw last bonfire Night. Almost as spectacular as the displays on the telly, and a damn sight noisier. Expected the garden to be buried under the remains of all the rockets that were unleashed, but there's surprisingly little debris from the celebrations in evidence this morning.

The mists are heavy this morning—it was left looking really smoky when the fireworks were bursting overhead—though at 10 am the sun is making a vain effort to assert itself, but only making things more obscure.

Just been checking the dating on computers and while the Pentium is correct, the 386 has decided that today is in 1980. After some persuasion from the Guru it now insists on showing the year in full as "2000" rather than a mere "00", but at least it's co-operating.

See that today's Garudian labels those who insist that the celebrations are a year too early, as "pedants", and those that say today's date is only a number, as "sceptics". As a sceptical pedant, I fail to see what all the fuss is about. Suspect it's all been engineered by the fireworks industry to boost flagging bonfire night sales...

Our neighbour, Geoff, tells me a sad tale about taking the family, plus fireworks, up on top of Werneth Low to welcome the New Year. He expected to have a good bird's-eye view of the celebrations all around but, alas, they found themselves surrounded by dense obscuring hilltop mists, and eventually had to beat a retreat to catch up with the festivities. ■

to Brian Varley, December 1999/January 2000

Modern Transport

The feeling of disquiet persists. Actually, I'm beginning to suspect that I slipped into an alternate universe some time around last Wednesday/Thursday. I mean, one minute Labour were all set to win, throwing parties, and dominating the TV scene and then, pof! here we are with a Tory government again, Neil Kinnock resigning, the Labour Party arguing about a new leader amid shouts of a rightwing conspiracy... And our local Tory scrapes in by 900 odd votes. And us pensioners won't be getting vast increases after all. Aaaargh!

The trams are actually running through the city centre: I can report a sighting last week, and Philip returned from town on Saturday with another sighting report. In my case, I was proceeding out of Market St. into Piccadilly and heard this faint whoo-whooping in the distance and turned, together with the massed shoppers to witness the vehicle creeping round from Mosley St.

It didn't have a bloke walking in front with a red flag, but it might just as well have, the speed it was going. Evidently, still early days and pedestrians treated with circumspection: how long will that last? I ask meself. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 13 April 1992

My favourite Poem

In the years when I haunted jazz clubs in search of music and convivial company, the conversation-opener was a query about your favourite musician. I regularly rose to the bait, sparking off a lively discussion that was eventually drowned in the sheer volume of sound generated on the bandstand. The time came when I realised that these heated exchanges added little to the sum total of human knowledge. Thereafter I went to jazz sessions just to listen to the music.

This "favourite" gambit proved an inevitable accompaniment to other cultural activities. Conversation with the current light of my life on visits to the ballet centred on favourite dancers; a sibilant whisper in the middle of a poetry reading signalled the arrival of a favourite poem; at art galleries the question "who's your favourite artist of all time?" was one to which natural modesty forbade me to give the obvious answer. I decided to haunt future cultural venues solo.

I run away when anyone raises the subject of favourites. The simple truth of the matter is that I don't cultivate them. The way I see it is this. Art is discovery, and one interesting experience always opens up others, so I never want to hang around too long in the same spot.

Thus while early concert-going introduced me to the classical repertoire, a diversion to music of the Baroque opened my ears to the delights of improvisation.

From there it was but a sideways step to jazz and, following an unexpected stay in India, to oriental idioms. After that experience my mind had limbered up enough to investigate contemporary music.

Exploring such a vast terrain, and fitting in occasional return visits at irregular intervals, doesn't leave room to single out one work as favourite. I'm happy to linger with some discoveries longer than with others, but am never tempted to erect a shrine for the worship of only one piece.

To me that seems an eminently sensible attitude. However I am uneasily aware of the many manifestations of society's obvious obsession with favourite things, like record displays that trumpet "Folk Favourites", "Favourites from the opera" or "All-Time Favourite Hits", and the sounds of radio music with "Your Hundred Best Tunes", "These you have loved" or "Jazz Record Requests", perpetually playing someone's favourite tune.

As with music so with the other arts—poetry even. There are many poems to which I return with pleasure, but there's no solitary monolithic favourite of a poem towering proudly over all others in my mental library. Some authorities might connect this with the trauma induced by the routine of Eng. Lit. classes at schools during the early thirties.

Poetry appreciation meant memorising large chunks of the Treasures of English Verse, with the threat of an imposition or an angry cuff when memory stalled. I can hear those poems still in my mind's ear, unsummoned, gabbled and garbled:

O-young-Lochinvar-is-come-out-of-the-west-Through-all-the-wide-border-his-
steed-was-the-best-And-save-his-good-broadsword-he-weapons-had-none-
He-rode-all-unarmed-and-he-rode-all-alone...

The noise of battle still rolls among those mountains by the winter sea, Lynette endlessly nags good Sir Gareth, and the hosts of bloody daffodils persistently flash upon my inward eye, despite being buried by the accumulated memories of the ensuing forty years.

These, decidedly, are among my unfavourite poems.

It was the fortuitous arrival of a teacher of less authoritarian bent that rescued me from this miserable process of brainwashing. (Are those people who cling so pathetically to a Palgravian Golden Treasure the unfortunates who didn't escape?). I had laboured under the misapprehension that the only good poets were dead ones, and their work was written in an archaic language that had little in common with the urgencies of everyday speech.

The new master introduced me to contemporary living here-and-now poets, opened my mind to the magic of words, and having roused my interest sent me off on a personal trip that promptly led to Eliot and Pound, to Auden, Spender, McNeice and Read. And they, in their different ways, guided me to wider fields, to other poets, to other cultures.

On my bookshelves there are still a few of the slim volumes of verse acquired in these years of teenage enthusiasm. Glancing through one recently I dislodged a yellowed cutting with some lines by Louis MacNeice that must have echoed my political preoccupations:

Twenty years forgetting,
 Twenty years turning the Nelson eye,
 Out wings heavy with the pollen
 Of flowers about to die.

We said "Make merry in the sunshine,
 At least we are alive,"
 But now the sun has set behind the hangar,
 There is no honey in the hive.

With war-clouds looming, I made merry in the sunshine, until I discovered that posts have the gift of prophecy. I found myself in the RAF and the sun was indeed setting behind the hangar. Then a few years later a posting to India brought me face to face with an alien culture.

I struggled with some of the epic poems—the Rigveda, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, but the translations proved to be as poor as the bindings of the books, which crumbled and perished with damp and mould during the monsoon rains. The ants finished off the remnants before I did.

One tatty volume has survived my stay, a paper-bound collection of work by budding poets serving in the forces in India. One piece in particular impressed me then and still leaps to mind when thoughts turn to India:

The railway stations in the blinding sun;
 The spilling, milling, spawning, gibbering mob;
 the twisted, half-mad shapes with sores that run;
 the flies; the squatting, silent forms that gob
 the betel-juice where they think fit; the smell;
 the everlasting dogs; the beggar's whine;
 the third-class multi-coloured, heaving hell;
 those blatant-furtive squattings all along the line;
 foul bazaars which reek and rot
 and creep and crawl as day grows hot;
 women who hold, with lightest grip,
 plum-bloom babies at their hip;
 the buffalo black— vile, padding beast—
 whose back's a scurf of old dry yeast;
 the train which threads its trembling way

through god-like hills at break of day,
 past folds on mighty folds of brown,
 up to the snows eternal crown;
 girls with ankles jewel-hung
 who use their hands to scrape up dung;
 the Taj Mahal, serene and proud,
 so beautiful, so white a shroud;
 villages of mud and slime,
 the afterbirth, forgotten, from the womb of time:
 the Royal Hotel—or Cecil—the Empress—or Green's;
 the Club, cantonment and the bungalow;
 the lordly ones in state; their would-be queens;
 the world of the bottle, the stars, the pained "hullo";
 the well-kept lawns; nostalgic English flowers;
 the bearers and the dhobis and the chowkidars;
 the shadowed ease; the slow, unruffled hours;
 those leisured, velvet evenings filled with diamond stars.

That evocative fragment from H.H. Tilley's *The Indian Scene* is a shared experience and attitude.

Most of my duty time was spent in isolated radar sites, on peaks in the Western Ghats, remote from any form of civilisation. Once on a rare foray into the bookshops of Bombay, I discovered an American edition of the collected works of Dorothy Parker. During the next few months I rose early each day and greeted the rising sun with a reading from this volume.

Should Heaven send me any son,
 I hope he's not like Tennyson.
 I'd rather have him play a fiddle
 Than rise and bow and speak an idyll.

It helped to exorcise the resentment attached to Eng. Lit.

Essentially, I suppose I'm not a word-person: my mind copes more easily with visual rather than verbal imagery, and a poem does not always come singing off the page at first reading. I enjoy the typographical layouts of work by e.e. cummings, like the look of the jagged aggressive agit-prop rhythms and constructions of Mayakovsky, but poems really come alive, become an incantation, in performance.

Performance, whether a personal reading, a broadcast or a recording, brings the words to life.

To hear the dry, lay-preacher delivery of T.S. Eliot or the friendly strangulated tenor of Richard Brautigan, the keening protest of Bob Dylan or the booming lyric

rhetoric of Dylan Thomas the flatly-spoken wit of Dorothy Parker or the less-than-sober accent of Dominic Behan... that's a true poetic experience.

There are times when I have felt the urge to break through the bounds of mere appreciation and write some verse. The results have usually made me appreciate all the more the work of those with the requisite talent and skill. But the arrival of concrete poetry in the fifties, after a long trip from the work of Mallarme, Apollinaire and the Futurist Marinetti, brought together the artistic poets and the poetic artists.

Of course some cultures had been doing it a long time—oriental and Islamic poets had the advantage that verbal and visual meaning were inextricably linked in the unity of a calligraphic symbol. What seems an abstract design to western eyes speaks clearly to the faithful and hence the protests when a French manufacturer used a pleasing pattern as a trademark on underwear until it was explained to him that the design was an invocation of the name of Allah.

In western terms, concrete poetry stretched the boundaries of definitions, became a new way of playing with words and their meaning and associations. I joined in the fun and have a certain affection for one of my dabblings. It has no title, but on relection, if it had to have one, what better than:

M y F a v o u r i t e P o e m



A Mysterious Incident

We had a Mysterious Incident around bonfire night. Mid-evening there was a blitzworthy “whump” and the house gave a momentary shudder. My first thought was that some of the scaffolding must have collapsed, and I raced round the back of the house to check at the front.

The scaffolding was still in position, but all the neighbours were out in the

middle of the avenue speculating about the disturbance—all the way down, in the pools of light from the streetlamps, folk were out. It just needed a warden wandering along to complete the WW II effect.

But there were no signs of activity anywhere; no sirens or police cars racing to a disturbance. So, after comparing notes and agreeing that it had seemed a sizeable explosion somewhere, we drifted back to our TVs to see if anything came on the local news. Nowt. Nor a mention on any local radio stations. And nothing in the local press later. Odd. At the time, we convinced ourselves that someone's hoard of rockets had exploded, or at the very least there'd been a gas explosion. Or a descending satellite had landed nearby... ■

to Steve Sneyd, November 1990



Lodwick & Elphinstone Points from Govt. House, Mahabaleshwar, 14th February, 1946

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Military Musings

Bloody D-Day

The rotten sods have put a D-Day prog in place of Humph's jazz prog tonight. Have they no respect? Or shame . . . I see that the BBC has spent over £1 million on coverage of the D-Day weekend and wonder if they'll have anything left to splash out when the 50th anniversary of the Great RAF Strike in South-East Asia comes round.

I'd been holding myself in readiness for this, when veterans are summoned for interview and reminiscences, and wondering if it would look ostentatious to sport my Defence Medal. I am prepared to be disappointed when the time comes . . .

to Fran & Brian Varley, 7th June 1994

The Other War

When I wrote to Arthur [Clarke], I threatened to drop in on him if the veterans should gather to celebrate the Great RAF Strike in South East Asia on the fiftieth anniversary in 1996. I had some worries about the appropriateness of wearing my Defence Medal at this shindig but revelations in the Observer the other weekend have swept any reservations aside.

Seems that the gongs sported by Prince Charles when hobnobbing with the D-Day veterans included the Queen's Service order (New Zealand), Q. Elizabeth II Coronation Medal, Q.E. II Silver Jubilee Medal 1977, Canadian Forces Decoration Medal 1991, and the New Zealand Commemorative medal 1990...

That collection must have impressed the old sweats no end. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 24 June 1994

Don't Mention the War!

This week's Metro News has the headline SYMPATHY FURY OF WAR VETS which puzzled me a while as it kept catching my eye. Investigation revealed that there's an event in Manchester next week marking the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima bomb, and "Worldwrite" have got M'cr City player Niall Quinn to add a letter as part of a target of 700,000 letters of friendship and sympathy for the bomb victims to be sent to Japan.

The Manchester branch of the Association of Far East PoW Clubs, not surprisingly, ask “who gives sympathy to us and remembers the price we paid?” The organiser of an exhibition at Castlefield, One Thousand Suns, “can’t understand why PoW veterans object”. I doubt if they’ll ever see eye to eye.

I recall that as I was steaming in the direction of India, I was perturbed at the euphoria I left behind because the war in Europe had ended; there was an attitude that the war was as good as over which completely turned a blind eye to the deadly slog of the Pacific war and the Home front.

Which I didn’t share, natch. The sudden collapse after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki raids transformed the situation.

Setting the results of those acts against the continuing slaughter that would have taken place without their deterring effect may be problematic in retrospect. But I find it hard to do anything but welcome the release that resulted from dropping the bombs.

Who can be objective in the face of personal survival? ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 24/06/1994

On not coming the “old soldier”

Can’t say I’ve ever thought of myself as cast in the role of an “old soldier”... old, maybe, but soldier? Never! I marvel at these folk who appear to have settled for making a career out of the few years spent in the forces, and enjoy themselves forever dressing-up and parading round displaying their medals, bemoaning the conduct of the younger generation.

I deny everything. Like so many of my contemporaries, I was reluctant to get dragged in, overjoyed to get out, and then just buried the memories while I tried to catch up with my life. It wasn’t until I retired and started rereading letters that had survived from wartime, that I finally felt an urge to write about the experience... I admit to surprise at the vividness of some of the memories those letters revived.

Feel little involvement with Remembrance Days and Cenotaph parades—they just happen on the telly, and all the fine sentiments about sacrifice and wars to end war, sound empty and hollow in the face of all the misery caused by the conflicts that continue to rage over this planet.

I married Marion in the early days of the war and we endured five years of separation. My main memory of my return (a whole year after the war officially ended!) was arriving in Manchester, decked out in my demob suit, and joining a bus queue outside the station.

Still had my tan from the sunshine of SEAsia, but was shattered to hear someone behind me whingeing on to the effect that “some buggers seem to manage to get away on holiday”.

That comment stuck in my mind, to offset all the token talk of “a grateful nation”.

Wow! I'd better stop before I sound too bitter & twisted! ■

letter to Kevin Ring of Satori Books/Beat Scene, November 1999

RAF Rivalry

Right, back to the present century and ta for your letter...

Don't think I'll be chasing that Brylcreem Boys book – having been dragged in the RAF reluctantly, never regarded myself as one of them, I guess. Reminds me that the books John Butterworth left me on RAF radar operations, reveal a decidedly cliquish tendency among the people featured.

The Yatesbury-based groups tend to be tight-knit and presented as dominating the scene – the contributions of rival radar school Cranwell to ground radar activities are usually conveniently ignored. Think that in my case, a) I obviously didn't go to the right school or move in the right circles, and b) lacked the right spirit, having no great love of the RAF as an organisation (merely one of the enlisted masses itching to get out)...

Am constantly amazed at the way some folk make a career out of their war experiences, and seem to enjoy all the donning uniforms, waving flags and medals and parades. I feel they've not had much of a life.

I snuck a look in ERG just to see what Terry said about me – so far as he is concerned I guess I did gafiate a long time ago. Am inclined to maintain my frosty silence !

We had a visit from Paul, eldest grandson, today (I have to look up to him – he's a hefty 6'6" now). Just returned from a long holiday in South Africa, armed with a vast collection of photos and providing a running commentary, covering trips from Capetown up Table Mountain and hiking/biking round the coast to Durban then in&out of Lesotho –fitting in sky-diving & bungee-jumping...

to Steve Sneyd, 15 April 2004

Still not impressed . . .

Still enjoying real summery weather and tempted out to bouts of grass trimming and weed pulling – it's the garden wheelybin collection on Monday – and see the mock-orange bush about to blossom and poppies about to pop at the back, while the peonies are all ready to bust out at the front.

But enuff of these gardening distractions...

At least they help me dodge some of the TV orgy of seemingly never-ending celebrations of bloody D-Day. Makes me begin to wonder if there's anyone out there thinking of organising a celebration in 2006 of the 60th anniversary of the Great RAF Strike, from the Middle East to Singapore, in protest at undue demob delays.

I don't think I'll be up to it, but 'appen the powers-that-be will prefer to forget that Great Event.

to Steve Sneyd, 06th June 2004



Bombay, gateway to India, 1945

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Life 4

Not Missing Manchester

I suppose two things broke my habit of regularly visiting Manchester. The university classes lost some appeal with the increasing tendency to concentrate on courses leading to qualifications, so that the more out-of-the-way interesting subjects faded from the syllabus. Then Marion's illness and stays in hospital, a year or so back, kept me at home for long stretches, and changed a few accepted routines.

Must confess that I've found nothing in recent university classes to persuade me to return, and on the odd occasions when I do venture on a visit to the Big City, the place seems to be in a state of perpetual turmoil—like they're still working on Piccadilly Station; have been digging up Piccadilly Gardens to fit in a new building, and reorganising Market Street (again) before they've properly sorted out the area that suffered from the bomb blast.

The art gallery alterations have still a year or two to run before completion; the Reference Library is run-clown and littered with computers and obscure group meetings; the bookshops are a shadow of what they were; while most of my old haunts have disappeared. And nearly all the people I knew at the Guardian & News have now retired. So there's not a great deal to attract me in, especially as the train service has not improved over the years.

to Peter Ashford (British Society of Russian Philately), 30th March 2001

One of those days . . .

Went dashing into the Post Office on Tuesday morning to get some stamps for a batch of letters/bills sorted out over the bank holiday, but forgot about the pensioners. The place was packed with a snaky queue, and I was just debating whether to call back later, when it was announced from behind the counter that they'd run out of money because so many folk were claiming double-pensions, and didn't know when there'd be more cash arriving.

One bloke announced that he'd brought his shotgun with him, but would call back tomorrow when they were worth robbing, which caused a few nervous souls to back away, and the staff took the opportunity to announce that they would be glad to serve anybody wanting to pay money in.

I pushed to the front and got my book of stamps but I guess it didn't materially help the situation...

Then on the way back, I went thru the park and was amused to see a young bloke exercising the dog by sitting on the kids' roundabout with the dog on the end of a lead being encouraged to pull him round. It was one of those days. ■

to Steve Sneyd, 3 September 1992

Past Attitudes

While digging out some of the references in early fanzines of my youth (courtesy Vinç) I was amused to find some statements of "faith" on atheism and communism which were revealing of my attitudes in them far-off days. It may finish up in a piece on "1938" that I've been brooding over for too long . . .

I lost any faith (Christian) I may have had in the days when I was bundled off to Sunday School in Grosvenor St (we lived in Brunswick Street, Ardwick Green end, then). The mainstay of the place was the scout troop, who were a training ground for organised shop-lifting from the likes of Woolworths 3d & 6d stores.

The discrepancy between professed ideals and actions, and accompanying hypocrisy, led me to lead a double life—with kindred spirits, I bypassed Sunday school to spend my collection money in a nearby Temperance Parlour on strong drink: Dandelion & Burdock, sarsaparilla and suchlike beverages.

The prevailing mood of our discussions at the Parlour was scepticism; and a complete loss of faith in the teaching of do-gooding religious teachers, and the ability of gung-ho scout masters to see the corruption that went on under their noses. Don't ask me where this high morel stance came from.

So by the time I came to fandom, around 1937, I was a convinced atheist and a student of Marxism. (Come to think of it, I probably still am).

The Spanish Civil War was raging, the Left Book Club prospered, H.G. Wells got more pessimistic, the Nazis organised the "Degenerate German Art" exhibition, and pacifism spread. In such circumstances communism seemed to offer the only sensible alternative course of action, despite doubts about Stalinism – the purges, Trotsky's exile, the MetroVick engineers trials.

J.B.S. Haldane was one of my heroes then (and still gets lots of respect from me). There were fierce arguments at work – one of my hest friends was a member of Peace Pledge Union – (and was sacked for his views when war broke out) – with a majority holding "red" views, but a few stalwarts supporting rightwing views (they joined the TA and were whisked away as soon as war broke out).

I never heard the Red Dean, but heard the Red Vicar – the Rev. Etienne Watts, of All Saints Church, which was bombed early on in the war!) who was a regular visitor to the studio of Barbara Siven, immediately under the studio of John Bold, where I went for life classes, in Grosvenor Street. Barbar's place was used to prepare and store the banners for marches. (These studios also suffered in the first

raids of the war: someone must have had them on a list).

Attitudes during the war stretched credibility. In the forces, since Russia was an ally, the official Communist Party was tolerated—the Welfare Officers kept a beady eye on all discussion groups—but any activities by Trotskyists were suspect. During my stay at Yatesbury radio school in 1943, there was a feud broke out between Stalinists and Trotskyists and hectic debates raged in the NAAFI which, technically, was outside the control of the Welfare officer.

I was friendly with a bloke, Frank Ward, a convinced Trotskyist and Fourth International supporter, ready to debate with anyone and distributing Socialist Appeal to any takers. I suppose our hut was marked down, because of the discussions that raged there, but little action was taken.

However, there came a time when Frank became ill, reported sick and disappeared into hospital for a spell. On being discharged, he was due to go on sick leave, and the routine was to have a kit inspection before he left camp.

The morning of the inspection I was one of several radar mechs who'd come off night duty and were settled in bed (and legally entitled to feign sleep during all the distractions that ensued). A warrant-officer burst in ahead of the time for the kit inspection: Frank was still laying out his stuff in the prescribed manner on his bed when he was told to stand by h'm bed as an officer arrived with an escort.

There was a token poking about the kit on display, then a request for Frank to open his locker. The W.O. was told to turf out the books in the locker, which after being examined with distaste, were then crammed in a packing case a suddenly appeared, and it was announced that they were being confiscated.

Frank, ever the barrack-room lawyer, insisted that he be given a list as receipt, there and then, which caused some confusion. The upshot was that all his papers & books were carted away, and Frank was left to go on leave wondering if he'd ever see his library again—apart from the many volumes that were reposing undetected in my locker, which he hastened to take away with him . . .

On his return he was told that he'd been posted to a camp at St. Athan, off work on radar, and departed same day. Next time I heard from him, he was a civilian, having been given an "honorable discharge" from the forces, and living in Glasgow busy organising strike activities. Some time later, he wrote to say that all his books had been returned to him, as per list he had exacted.

I spent a lot of time kicking myself for not revealing all the subversive literature in my locker on that fateful day, and there was a rush of folk writing to Frank about membership.

I shall return to that topic in due course! Enough, for now.

(As a souvenir of that occasion, I still have a booklet "The Death Agony of Capitalism, and the Tasks of the Working Class" by Leon Trotsky (Produced by Trade Union Labour), with a backpage ad for 'Socialist Appeal', price one penny).

to Fran & Brian Varley, 15th July 1994

Postal Puzzle

The post office has been sporting a large notice proclaiming they're open longer hours, and they've cancelled the traditional Wednesday-afternoon closure. Out of curiosity I took down a communication for Steve, expecting to hand it over the counter, as usual, but was told to put it in the outside postbox, if I wanted it collected today! Odd.

We never fathomed out what happened to the original staff last autumn. I probably mentioned that we passed in the bus one morning to see the place still locked up, and a notice on the door saying the place was closed until further notice. When it did open up again a week or so later, the 3 or 4 staff who had been behind the counter for more years than I can remember, had gone, replaced by two somewhat forbidding ladies.

We never found out the reason for this sudden sweep, and studied the local freesheets during ensuing weeks expecting to hear lurid tales about the manager absconding with lottery money, or going on the rampage and killing off his staff... But not a cheep by way of explanation has ever emerged.

The really odd thing is that under the old regime you could always rely on a formidable queue of OAPs circling the space in front of the counter, whenever you were in a rush to get something posted. I even suspected there was a League of OAPs that used the shop as a regular meeting place. But nowadays you rarely see anyone drawing a pension, and queues are a thing of the past. It can't be that the new staff are super-efficient and deal with demand at a brisker rate.

The old staff always took in letters after weighing and stuck the stamps on for you; this new lot just push the stamps under the barrier and expect you to do the licking... And on dark nights I often wonder about those mysteriously vanished pensioners... where do they collect their pensions now?

Occasionally I speculate: did the pensioners find out where the staff went and transfer their custom in a spirit of loyalty? ... or did the staff perchance have a big win on the lottery and take longstanding customers on a sunny holiday? Or is it another strange alien abduction?

My curiosity knows no bounds. ■

to Brian Varley, May 1999

Preserving Memories

Still gazing at that NWSFC photo struggling to dredge up a few more names. Was this taken at the first Mancon in October '52? I think Eric and I appeared on the scene after seeing newspaper reports of the get-together in the local press and

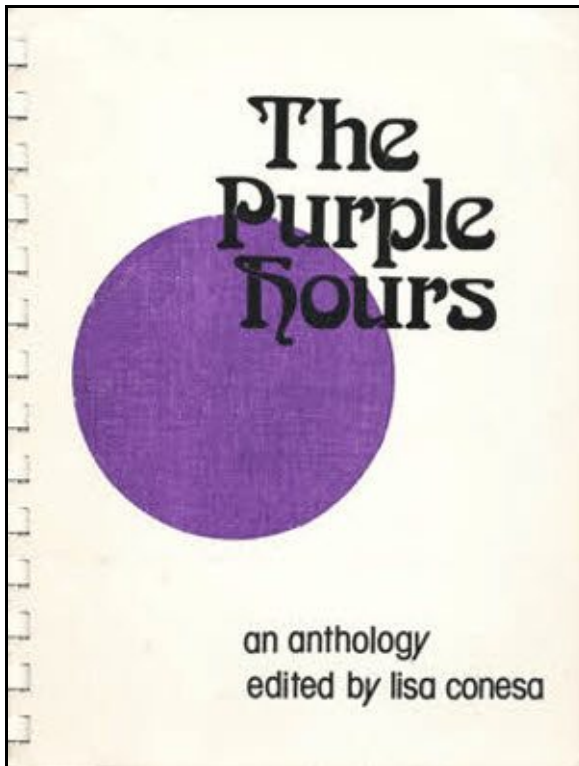
then visited the Waterloo later.

If you've got a copy of *The Purple Hours* hang on to it – it's now a scarce collector's piece! Apart from all that though, and more to the point, I think you'll actually enjoy some of the verse in its pages! And it's a reminder of the last time we met...

Robert was a student at Newcastle university at the time of the Tynecon, and so Marion came along for a combined fan and family occasion. We were pleasantly surprised to find the Varleys there too!

I fancy you'd be rash to have a quick mass clearout of drawers etc. I recall my mother having a drastic clearout after my father died, burning and disposing of a pile of papers and cuttings he'd kept as souvenirs of the time when he toured the music halls as The Great Deville, illusionist and master escapologist. Which in later years I came to feel was a great loss. Just take it easy with the sorting, as you are doing: some things you'll want to keep.

O&S 139 to Brian Varley, 1998



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Publishing

Publishing Perils

Did I tell you that I had a book published by Dover Books of New York in the late 70s? 'How to Design Impossible Objects', a colouring book, complete with instructions how to draw your own designs—nothing ambitious, though it bought me an electric typewriter and the Encyclopedia Britannica, and still left me with change to get some fish'n'chips.

I met the Dover President, Hayward Cirker, on several occasions when he was on the way to continental book fairs; and we became quite friendly. I finished up with several more contracts for design books—'Paradoxical Patterns', a more intensive development of my triad figures as pattern generators, various items on Islamic patterns, and making models of geometrical solids and so on. But alas, I had to abandon them all because of the problems of fading eyesight.

I completed most of the drawings for the Paradoxical Patterns project, but have lacked the urge to finish it when sight was restored. Things were a trifle frantic for one reason and another in the years immediately before retirement, and then when I did retire, I reached the top of the waiting list for a varicose operation on one leg, and after I'd recovered from that they told me I needed a double hernia op. So time sorts slipped by, but at least the ravages of 65 years fighting gravity had been repaired!

So I always had an excuse for not getting back to the projects, though I'd take 'em out and dust them down periodically, and tell myself I ought to do something about them. Then there was the problem of earning too much and getting it deducted off my pension. Which seemed rather a waste of effort. At least having passed the 70 mark I've dodged that penalty, so I keep trying to work myself up to it. So it goes. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 18/08/1992

Offspringboo

It's a hard life: here's Philip denying his book is autobiographical, and me being accused of making it all up and using "poetic licence"... Well, in my case, the autobiographical element is strong in most of my writing! I must confess that I was surprised by the first novel that Philip had published, *The Necessary Peace*, about a handful of German infantrymen avoiding the Russians to try and surrender to the Americans in the dying days of the European war.

It all seemed very realistic to me, and a surprise that he was able to summon up the period so convincingly. And Sam Youd was moved to comment that he was “amazed at Philip’s empathy with infantrymen, German infantrymen, indeed German infantrymen in a war which must seem as remote to him as the First War, or the Crimean, did to us”.

The book had an American edition—they changed the title to *The Last Campaign* and gave him a more striking dustjacket design. He must get it from his mum. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 25/01/1994

Affordable Publishing

The computer offers a wholly different approach to your publishing activities. No longer do you have to think in terms of a hefty outlay on producing a hundred or more copies, which you then have the problem of storing and selling to recoup expenses. The computer offers you the ultimate in vanity publishing—you may, if you wish, produce a single copy, to be gracefully bound, and repose, comfortably, on your shelves. That’s the extreme case of course!

Or you can put a book together on the computer, to provide a master copy for your shelf, plus a set of original artwork pages that can be used to run off limited numbers on a photocopier, to be bound as and when required, so you spread the outlay while keeping up with the demand, all without cluttering up precious domestic space in any way.

Sounds too good to be true? Well, you’ve got a willing idiot here who’ll gladly look after the assemblage of text and pics on the computer, try to meet your ideas on layout, and provide the essential artwork. (The future developments I hinted at earlier cover the acquisition of a scanner, which can feed illustrations and photographs into the computer, and do a bit of tidying up where necessary).

Computer facilities easily allow for afterthoughts and rearrangements during the initial production, and allow considerable scope for revision even after the job has been completed. You are left free to concentrate on the form and content of a book, and once that is settled, then you can make up the bound volumes in small lots, as required.

Nor are you limited to A4 format: if you want only a modest volume then you can go down to A5. I’ll enclose a few bits and pieces I’ve done for different jobs, so you can think about it.

to Peter Ashford (British Society of Russian Philately), 29th January 1996

Low-Circulation Publishing



them pram-unfriendly steps @ Odessa

The recent arrival of another production of Siberian philatelic interest from Sheffield, and BSRP newsletters fluttering in from Brum, are inevitable reminders of a long-neglected correspondent in far-off Ashton...

The only excuse for my recent continuing silence that I can summon up is that we succumbed to the flu bug after a seasonal visit to the Junior Turners at Nottingham, and are only just beginning to revive an interest in the outside world. Trust that all at No.9 have dodged such perils and are enjoying good health!

No doubt you've seen Philip's [the other one, PHT] new volume of Trans-Siberian Railway postcards—I was most impressed. It looks as if he's now using his computer for production and printing, which saves the vast outlay on an outside printing job, and the long wait before sales begin to recoup that outlay (if ever!).

Of course, you have to fork out for a computer, scanner and printer to achieve that happy state, but once you're set up, a publication can be stored on file. No need for that vast stockpile filling up the spare room, awaiting orders; you just run off copies in small batches, as and when orders are received.

All of which leads me to enquire if your one-time publishing plans are still dormant... Towards the end of last year I felt somewhat frustrated by the limitations of the faithful 586 computer in handling graphics, while Philip—son

No.1—needed to expand his resources. So we got together and installed a third set-up, of pentium PC, scanner and colour printer, to take us into the millennium (as they say).

I'm still finding my way round this new gear (which to date has imposed no limitations on my wild ambitions) but the pic of the Odessa steps on the letterhead, taken from a vintage postcard, is an example of what now can be done in the privacy of your own home. I trust it engaged your attention as intended! And monochrome photographic prints come through as photographs instead of the contrasty prints of the average copier. Lo!

As another perk, I should mention that the scanner has an OCR (Optical Character Recognition) facility, which means that you send me your typescript (and it doesn't have to be in your Sunday-best typing) which the scanner will obligingly "read" and feed directly on to the computer screen, in any type and size I specify, ready for me to edit to fit the required layout. No need for all that retyping we did in the past: this is the lazy production-man's dream.

Trust you are convinced that this simplifies things no end, especially if you want to indulge in a low-circulation, specialist publication. Your main costs are paper and a contribution to printer inks (modest if only monochrome printing required of course), and the Post Office are obligingly reducing the rate for second class mail come April. Need I say more...does this info stir your slumbering urge to publish and celebrate the Millennium?

I trust the shock of getting a letter from me after so long a wait, is not too much for you, and send my regards to you both...

Cheers

to Peter Ashford (British Society of Russian Philately), 31st January 1999

Sneaky Perks



Rare photographs of the "Cropper's Witnesses" group featured at the Mahableshwar JazzFest 1946. Alan Chandler, clarinet, Joskins on charpoy,

'Achmed' Turner on packing case bass, Greenie on drums (and refreshments) with the 'Rev' Nick Cropper telling-how-it-is. (The guy advertising Y-Fronts is our only sponsor).

It's funny... it's been so long (fifteen years!) since I was last employed that I'd forgotten all about the perks of using departmental facilities on occasion, and just assumed that Philip [BSRP member, not me, PHT] was doing it all at home on his computer. Now you've reminded me, I realise how dependent I used to be on the Guardian studio darkroom, and how the advent of the home computer these last few years has now given me an independence and freedom doing design work that I once never thought possible.

Your reminder also suggests why most of the folk using "business equipment" tend to be somewhat staid and unadventurous in their layouts and choice of typefaces. I got no response from Ivo when I suggested that he might use a more readable and compact typeface to save space, set copy in columns rather than strung out in over-long lines across the page, and give titles a bolder look. That was before I acquired a computer and realised how easy it could make life!

I get the impression that a lot of users are content just to stick to the "default" choices made by software programmers rather than explore all the possibilities now made available.

After all the years I spent designing print, doing visuals and layouts for the "technical" people to work to, with limitations on the availability of typefaces, and the inevitable compromises that had to be made, it's nothing short of miraculous now to be able to design things exactly as I want 'em direct on the screen. And then be able to print out the results...

No more cut-out and paste-up and making things fit... An infinite choice of typefaces, in all sizes... feed in, size and manipulate graphics freely, no problems moving or changing text. And thanks to the scanner, a typescript can be "read" by the computer and appear on screen ready for editing without the one-time need to retype it all... how's that for labour-saving?

Yep, we can print both sides of the sheet—no problem. Can even print in booklet form: A4 folded to A5, or A3 folded to A4. Or do sections to finish up as a poster or banner. Even do transfers to print on T-shirts, if you're desperate. Anything more you need to market your publications? But enough of computers. (They can be maddening at times, but overall they certainly add a lot of sparkle to life!)

to Peter Ashford (British Society of Russian Philately), 12th February 1999

Life 5

The Pursuit of Knowledge rather than Instant Expertise

My excursions on to Open University courses have been purely self-seeking, in search of guidance and information on subjects in which I have had an interest—whatever I learned was the immediate end, rather than any ambitions to acquire degrees and recognition. So I found myself out of step with tutors and other students most of the time.

Some tutors were horrified because I didn't conform, the occasional one became quite friendly when he sussed out my motives for study. I acquired a reputation as a 'perfectionist' on several occasions because I liked to probe in depth rather than skim over the material to keep up with the academic schedule; most of my younger fellow-students didn't seem to know quite where they were going most of the time and were solely concerned with acquiring enough 'instant' expertise to pass the exam and get a credit towards their degree. No doubt they'll finish up qualified but not very knowledgeable.

The last course I tackled (and I probably won't be able to afford any more !) was the Modern Art & Modernism, a revamp of the earlier Modern Art course that raised the issues of Modernism and post-Modernism. It soon became obvious that the course was not actually about its proclaimed subject, but rather concerned with art historians and their manipulations of art history.

So while fellow students were busy assimilating the 'right' opinions to see them through the course and exam (some right sycophants there), I decided it was time that I tried to assess how I'd arrived at my present views, after growing up in the 'modernist ambience' and absorbing so many ideas uncritically.

So, I'm still in effect progressing the course under my own steam, with time to fill in all the neglected gaps, and follow up all the 'recommended reading' lists and tracking down sources. I've accumulated more and more related books—many of the American books quoted in the course were out-of-print, and now, a couple of years later, have been reprinted as paperbacks, making it easier to get to grips with the material instead of having to rely on selected quotas.

I still attend classes at Manchester University to provide a basis for my present activity; at the moment I have a particular interest in events in the thirties, events that shaped my life in unsuspected ways. There's no end to the probing!

So, all in all, now I'm outside the confines of the academic establishment, it looks as though I have embarked on a slightly narcissistic course. The self-indulgence of old age.

There are all sorts of other projects linked with this... I'm also catching up with

a six-months accumulation of records: the hi-fi conked out just before we had the builder into No. 10 to do some structural alterations during the summer. As the place was in such a mess, with dust floating everywhere, and we had to move possessions and ourselves round various rooms as the work proceeded, I gave up any ideas of immediate repairs.

I recently got around to a fault-finding session, and with the minimum of upset actually got everything working again so far as record reproduction was concerned, so now we are back to surround-sound 4-speaker stereo again.

While working through the new records I've also been revisiting the Collection (which needs existing shelves to be reinforced, and a considerable footage of new shelves to house it.) I did once think that I would give up buying records on retiring, and spend the rest of my days playing through the Collection, but it hasn't worked out that way. Though I still have an occasional urge to spend a whole day and immerse myself in some musician's work, to really get to hear what he's saying.

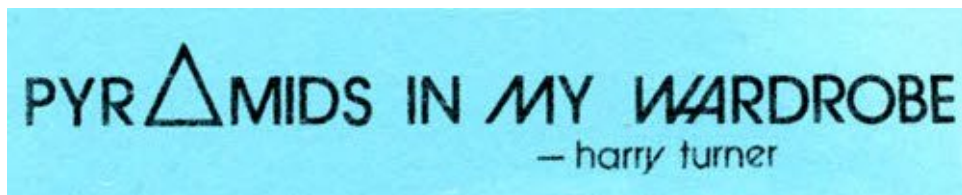
Ideally, the scenario would be an early start in the small hours of the morning, on one of those finds, glorious summer days that seem endless; I'm alone in the house, and the rest of the family are elsewhere pursuing their own interests. I have all the records of, say, Charlie Parker, lined up and start playing them in loosely chronological order and carry on right through the day, playing and comparing all available takes of each track, dipping in the discographies and relevant books—a real 'In Memoriam Charlie Parker' day.

I see there are 65 Parker albums on the shelf (and sundry tapes) so maybe a day will not be enough to play through team... let's see, 35 LPs with an average playing time of 35 mins, that would fill some 40 hours... All right, a 3 Day Parker Festival!

I guess there will be complications when I got around to Mozart and Haydn; I just checked and I have some 90 Mozart LPs and 113 Haydn LPs, Problems, problems. I can see that I shall still be busy when it comes to post-retirement.

(Is there life after retirement ?).

to Mal Ashford, December 1988



- You don't seriously believe all that crap about god being an astronaut, do you, asks Lisa incredulously.

My reputation as a serious thinker sways in the balance. I've just got hold of a copy of von Däniken's book *In Search of Ancient Gods ... his "pictorial evidence for the impossible"*. And I have to admit that among the wealth of illustrations provided there are many that impress me, ranging from the grandiloquence of the Tiahuanaco ruins and Nazca "lines" to the elaborately carved stone bas-relief over the sarcophagus and remains that the ancient Maya left in a burial chamber inside the Temple of Inscriptions at Palenque—a find that shook up archeological preconceptions in the 1950s.

This exquisite example of classic Mayan sculpture, on a stone some 14 feet long by 7 feet wide, and weighing all of 5 tons, depicts, according to orthodox opinion, an Indian on a sacrificial altar. Däniken chooses to interpret it as showing an astronaut cradled in a space capsule. And his book includes the work of American aviator engineer John Sanderson, who has decided to re-interpret the carving in terms of a technical diagram and produced a picture of an efficient-looking space craft with an astronaut at the controls. But another item catches my attention... about pyramids.

- Guess who's involved in these miniature pyramids I mentioned in the review of the Umland's book, I invite Lisa.

- Who, she enquires vaguely, preoccupied as she breaks off typing to slosh another blob of corflu on the blood-splattered stencil in her typewriter.

- Son of Marshall McLuhan, no less, I announce. Seems that it was McLuhan junior who first built an 18-inch high model pyramid in red Plexiglass, and as well as resharpening a blunt razor blade, also preserved a juicy beefsteak for all of 20 days. And Däniken also mentions this experiment with a cosmic ray detector in the Pyramid of Chephren, but his reference doesn't make any more sense to me than the Umland brothers did...

- That figures, murmured Lisa, happily typing away once more:

- Incidentally, your readers don't need to let me know where to get a commercial plastic pyramid: the address is right there in Däniken's book. Though what inflation's done to the price quoted of three dollars I shudder to think... ■

* * * * *

I can never resist the lure of a book sale. There's this copy of "Teach Yourself Polish" going cheap. Hearing the language spoken on visits to Lisa has created a certain aura of familiarity, and the back-page blurb is full of promises: "laborious learning of tables .. replaced by a gradual process of familiarisation.. grammar similarly simplified.. a thorough grounding." I feel supremely optimistic about my capabilities. I pick it up. Why not, I think.

Getting down to it, I find there's more hard work than the publishers suggest. Polish grammar's more involved than English. Then there's the complication of inflection, the way words keep changing form by function and relationship to other

words in a sentence. But I persist. Eventually, when I fancy I have achieved a certain mastery, I pluck up courage to compose a letter to Lisa. Nothing involved, and yet, as I lick the envelope flap, I feel this is going to surprise her.

Apparently it does.

On my next visit while complimenting on my letter she mentions, in a polite way, a few mistakes in the matter of gender. Then she looks faintly puzzled. What, she asks with eyebrows raised, is this bit about the painting that's fallen behind the wardrobe?

Back at the studio, I ransack the waste-paper basket, unscrumple the many drafts discarded during composition. I consult my notes. Not a hint of paintings falling behind wardrobes. I am seized by an immense sense of failure to communicate and, next day, when the local Boy Scouts call collecting for their summer jumble sale, am tempted to present them with "Teach Yourself Polish".

The thought that stops me is that I might yet have a future as a Dadaist poet in Polish... ■

originally published in Lisa Conesa's Zimri 8, 1976

The Railway Crisis on Saturday August 21st, 1975

The train from Manchester along the Guide Bridge route pulled up at the signal immediately outside Romiley Station. Just ahead, on the Bredbury track, was the tail end of a long train (which proved to be a special excursion) stretching across the points and on to our track. The diesel engine unit was just about level with the end of the platform and the signal box. The train was stationery though there was some activity going on at the engine end.

After about five minutes' wait, the guard (who had been consulting with the driver) walked back through the train and confirmed that we couldn't get past until the excursion train could be started. It seemed to pointless waiting when the station was a mere walk away, so I opened the door and jumped down on the track.

One of the other passengers stood in the doorway just as I was preparing to slam it shut. I asked him if he was coming and he muttered something about his wife. I offered to help her down, and waited awhile, while he was evidently trying to persuade her to come—eventually, he returned and said I'd better go on.

So I walked along the sleepers and caught up with the guard, who had dismounted ahead of me.

There were shouts from the stranded passengers as we went by, the guard complaining about a lady passenger, who had been nagging him because she was going to arrive home late and she had been travelling the route for 12 years and never had anything like this happen to her.

“Should reckon herself bloody lucky,” he opined and protested that he was just as anxious to get home after a long day as she was.

The hot afternoon sun blazed down on the diesel unit and a weary-looking driver. “Dead, completely bloody dead,” he advised the guard. “Well, the St. Pancras train will be following soon and can probably push you out of the way, but what happens to the train, I don’t know... Or if this lot’ll ever get home.”

I left them, walked through the quiet station, looked back at that dead train, coaches sprawling from one lot of rails, right across the Guide Bridge line, and into the platform. Trains could still pass through into Manchester (via Bredbury & Reddish North) but nothing could get past the other way.

It was quiet as I walked down the main road. No one seemed aware of the tragedy for the excursion passengers, the frustration of the people waiting to get off the Guide Bridge train. I seemed to be the only one prepared to get off and walk.

I wonder when British Rail solved their problems! ■

Ramblings of The Septuagenarian Fans Association – Part One



Opening up the Secret Archives of the long-defunct Manchester Interplanetary Society reveals that in 1938, aspiring astronaut and enthusiastic Youth Hosteller Harry Turner discovered a large chunk of Martian meteorite on the lonely slopes of the Pennines.

The present whereabouts of this unique specimen is unknown...

We thought you would like to know that...

A Recipe For Sleep

Don't recall ever trying to sleep by counting sheep. With my advancing years I find that these evenings I tend to doze off while reading a book or watching a boring late-night TV prog—then I'm faced with the problem that the moment I slide between the sheets I become wide awake.

Mentally reviewing the events of the day or pursuing odd memories that well up doesn't help. However, I have found that these distractions can be dispelled and sleep assured by the simple ploy of thinking 'In' and 'Out' in time to my breathing.

It works every time.

Once I've settled into this routine, the next thing that happens is being awakened in the morning by the ringing of the alarm. Infallible, it is. Doesn't stop you dreaming though ■

8 May 2004

Letter of Comment published in Claire Brialety's

No Sin But Ignorance #47 (October 2007)

A response to issue #46, published 3½ years earlier!

Searching for completion

When I got the urge to resume philatelic activities, as light relief from the inhibiting effect of cataracts, I found myself concentrating on Russian issues with memories of all those thirties issues celebrating stratosphere ascents, polar flights, airship construction and the like.

I happened to get into contact with a firm called Joystamps, operating in Birmingham, who concentrated on Russian and Eastern Europe issues. When I started to amass material relating to the space effort, Joystamps came up with lots of items of interest and before long, I found myself well and truly hooked collecting Russia generally.

A mad urge to complete my collection as far as the end of the [USSR] makes me draw parallels with Vinç and his Archive of fanzines, and my periodic efforts to retrieve bits of the past for my fan-Temories collection. That same mad urge to completeness seems to be rampant there too!

Been having fun with a Webster limited-circulation zine of 1942 (which lasted one issue; alas!) which begged Forry Ackerman to stop reminding us that he is No.1 Fan, reports on Miss E.J. "Ted" Carnell's wedding to Mr R.A. Heinlein, and Mr H. Ernest Turner fervent championship of Fanarchy is supported...

Since You Ask

I didn't realise that Walt Willis was having such a bad time medically until I read that con report. In his condition I should have begged off the invitation but then I would have dodged such a trip anyway, as I've generally lost my urge to get up and go to these functions. I definitely haven't the stamina/patience to put up with all the carry-on he details at the MagiCon.

(Amused at the reference to Laney taking up stamp collecting as an alternative to fandom. Yup, I get that connexion!) As for the rest of the trip, just reading about it made me tired. I guess I'm just lazy as well as being unsociable these days.

Talking of H.G. Wells Being Mean . . .

Well, you were. Half-a-crown was a lot of money in them days and he'd probably forgotten his wallet. And they definitely didn't have credit cards then. Arthur Clarke issues a sheet to avoid being involved in extended correspondence with well-wishers etc; in a para headed "REQUESTS FOR HELP" he goes on to say "If I responded to all appeals I get for literary, financial, educational, etc., assistance I would have no time (or money) for anything else. It is often difficult to ignore genuine and deserving cases, but I save my conscience with the thought that I now directly support about 50 people."

See—not even 2/6d. on offer there...

He tells me these forms are his "life-savers" and wonders how authors managed before word processors. Even confesses to feeling guilty about all the letters he wrote to Dunsany, C.S. Lewis, etc. But no mention of Wells.

Just thought you'd like to know.

I've built up quite a reference section on HGW, and have been researching your story. According to David Smith's biography Desperately Mortal 1986, on page 339, there's an account of his 1939 visit to Australia, which mentions; "The public sought Wells's autograph, which he would cheerfully give upon receipt of a cheque for 2/6d payable to the Diabetic Foundation, of which he was then President." And on page 531 there is a note to the effect that Wells rewrote the Diabetic Association prospectus: "Their brochure to raise money for diabetes research featured his photograph, as well as the letter.

It was about this time [1938] that Wells began to charge 2/6d. for his autograph, with the funds going to the Association. Wells was an advocate of diet, rather than insulin, in the diabetic treatment".

Which makes it seem that you have got hold of a garbled story... So who's your authority?

Ha!

Another search for completion . . .

When I first got to know Marion we discovered that we were both reading Verdun by Jules Romains, and became hooked into reading other volumes in the series “Men of Good Will”, that could be got from the library. Later, we bought copies of Verdun and a succeeding volume The Aftermath and, not realising what we were taking on, started searching through the secondhand shelves for earlier volumes in the saga.

Romains started on it in 1932, and the following year it appeared here in translation, though the publishing history is somewhat confusing since at an early stage the English publishers, Lovat Dickson, started to publish volumes containing two of the French books. Our serious search started after the war, when everything before Verdun was out of print. We picked up a 1936 volume The Earth Trembles (Books 9 & 10), and then hit a stone wall.

Until I arrived in Bombay: investigating the furthest reaches of the vast International Book House I came across Quinette’s Crime (book 2) [1933], smelling of damp after surviving several monsoons on the shelf, but otherwise in good nick. Further searching revealed another volume, alas, a victim of both damp and termite depredations, and in imminent danger of crumbling; too far gone to rescue.

And after that, nothing. On my return home I chased several dealers without success for several years. Those earlier volumes must have been published in limited editions and being held tenaciously by the owners. Subsequent enquiries after other more recent authors have often produced offers at such inflated prices that I gradually gave up any hope of being able to afford the original Lovat Dickson Romaine even if they turned up... So I lost interest.

Now, I’m wondering if they’ve been reprinted. He finished up writing 27 volumes in the Men

of Good Will between 1932 and 1943 apparently. I have this urge to satisfy my curiosity after all these years. Then I look at the Great Unread pile, and think maybe I’ll postpone trying to catch up just now. But one of these days...

to Fran & Brian Varley, 9th July 1994

RAS In Action

Romiley Astronomical Society were out in force on the evening of Tuesday 5 August BST to watch the passage of MIR across the Cheshire Sky. It swooped up over the rooftops going at a good lick, really bright, amid the “ooh”s and “aah”s of the assembled membership, to be obscured by a passing cloud toward the end

of its traverse, then reappeared before falling to the horizon.

We waved to them but didn't see anyone waving back. We're promised clear skies again tonight and a sighting before we get stuck into Babylon 5. Exciting, innit? ■

More sightings of MIR early on Wednesday evening and later around midnight—zoomed up dead on schedule and we realised that there was a fainter point of light following it which we decided must be the Soyuz up in orbit with it. So we got a bonus sighting.

In today's (Thursday's) paper, it ses that the Progress supply ship was temporarily undocked from Mir yesterday to make room for the relief crew's arrival today. So the "satellite" we saw must have been the Progress tagging along after separation. Really exciting, innit? ■

Harry Turner's Odds & Sods 100, August 1997[Friday]

We had another sighting of Mir last night as the skies cleared, but it was low down and hidden by the murk on the horizon for a while before we spotted it, then it got mixed up with the dazzling radiance of the rising moon and we lost track of it again. We are promised another sighting tonight when it rises higher in the sky, but it looks as though that's the last chance we'll get for the time being, though you folk further south might still be lucky. No sign of the Progress container, which ain't going round Mir, but merely trailing further and further away behind it.

Later: fortunately, the moon was hidden by a tree at the time Mir put in an appearance, shooting from behind the clouds on the horizon, so we had a good view. Still no sign of the Progress, though. Seems as though the returning astronauts are due for a ticking off by Mr. Yeltsin for careless behaviour... ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, August 1997

Romiley Wildlife! 1

Went to bed in the small hours this morning and was surprised to spot a fox in the avenue... Slinking across the road it paused and gazed back, so I saw its pointed snout, and then its bushy tail as it turned and trotted towards the main road... ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, autumn 1996

Romiley Wildlife! 2

Considering the general scepticism that greeted my report some long while ago of seeing a fox strolling down the avenue in the moonlight, I don't know if I dare

report the fact that as I looked out of the window of No.2 Computer Room a few minutes ago, I saw a fox slinking along the back of the garden.

This, I thought, must be reported forthwith, and dashed downstairs. To my surprise, as I opened the back door of No.12, the fox came slinking back on its tracks, not even bothering to notice my appearance, to disappear into neighbouring gardens. I wandered into No.10 and told my wonderful story, but they seemed unmoved by it all...

It's true I tell you! ■

[I have photos of a fox which parked on the terrace at the back of the back garden for a while in July 2013. Laura, Robert's daughter, was visiting her Grandma at the time and she spotted it. PHT]

to Brian Varley, December 1998

Spiders

The morning mist today revealed layers of spiders' webs blanketing the garden. Every plant is crowned by sheets of interlaced webs suspended from upthrusting stems: on the top of the giant dwarf cypresses and in pockets down the sides, like helicopter-landing pads on the spreading limbs of the lavender bushes, layered along the top of the privet hedge, insinuated between the nascent blooms of the viburnum bodnantense (yes, it looks as though we'll have this flowering this winter!)...

With all these flytraps it's no wonder there are no insects on view. And with their disappearance what happens to the spiders? The dessicated corpses revealed by spring cleaning says it all. With all this invisible industry revealed today, what is the significance of their complete absence on the rose bushes... nary a single strand anywhere. The rising sun steams the clinging moisture from the webs; as it rises, the webs return to their former near-invisibiility.

End of gardening interlude.

to Fran & Brian Varley, 13th October 1994

Telephone Banking & Exercise

My recent complaints about NatWest [bank] result from hitches in the enforced transfer of our account from Romiley to Stockport and chiefly derive from having to rely on phoned instructions. Definitely prefer dealing with someone behind a counter to a disembodied voice at the end of a phone.

It so happens that I haven't needed to use a cashpoint machine since I retired—indeed, after eleven years I've completely forgotten my PIN number anyway!—and after a working lifetime with salary transferred to the bank account, writing out cheques and using credit cards to pay for most everything, and rarely getting to handle coin of the realm, it's a novelty now to draw out money, and actually feel cash momentarily before I pass it on.

While I could sit around at home and pay the Ceetax by standing order, I prefer to draw the cash out of the bank periodically, and get a bit of exercise tramping up School Brow to the council office at the local library. That way I can keep an eye on any books that the library are selling off, see if there's anything of interest in the Information Centre, call at the post office en route, and maybe catch up with essential photocopying, all in the one trip. Even if I do get rained on now and again.

This is one of the several routines devised to ensure that I drag myself beyond the immediate vicinity of the village shops periodically. Another is the occasional trip to Threshers, which has the merit of including the climb up the hill from Marple Bridge to the shopping centre, and the toil up Compstall Brow on the return journey, with the option of catching the bus if it gets too strenuous.

(The canal towpath route is temporarily closed while repairs are being carried out). Then there is the ascent of Werneth Low, for an eventual descent into Hyde and sundry DIY stores. So all trips have a purpose, while getting me out of my chair and away from the computer for a while.

When I retired, I realised how much walking I had done while at work. The Deansgate complex (and that is just the right word to describe the complicated linkages between the several buildings we [the Manchester Evening News] occupied) meant that I spent much energy dashing between various departments to ensure that jobs went through smoothly, speeded up by on-the-spot decisions.

And even when I first retired, I found myself in demand helping out the various freesheets the News had taken over, dashing to the Metro office in the wilderness at the far end of Deansgate most days of the week, and then out to Bolton periodically. So now, after all this rushing around has died down, I am left with a certain amount of energy to burn up. Hence the emergence of the Ceetax routine, and similar incentives to get me up and out walking. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, May 1997

[CONTENTS](#)

Television

TV Blues (& Greens!)

27/Nov/1996

Had a slight crisis at weekend when the TV tube went on the blink, and we lost the red beam. Watching snooker played with yellow, green, and blue balls plus an assortment of black and various shades-of-grey balls, is a trifle confusing. But apart from that, we found it quite restful watching other progs in vintage black'n'white. Made the repeats seem just like real repeats, and The Bill like Z Cars...

However, Granada's TV-Repairman arrived first thing Monday and after the initial shock of being asked to deal with such an obviously vintage set ("They don't make 'em in veneered cabinets any more!" he ses, "I don't think I can get you a replacement of this model...") said we'd be offered a more state-of-the art model.

So we had a new set installed yesterday. He marvelled at the remote-control we had and opined that it must have been the very first model Granada put out, so we let him take it away for their museum.

We are still studying the manual to find out how the complicated replacement works, marking the change from analogue tuning to purely digital operation, and struggling to master the intricacies of Teletext facilities.

No doubt all good preparation for learning to cope with the 21st century when it gets here.

Meanwhile, it's a relief to see the snooker in full colour again.

11/Dec/1996

Have caught up with the digital technology of the replacement TV, and can now summon up these CEEFAX pages offering supplementary info for progs like Sky At Night, which may be useful on occasion. Discovered also that CEEFAX provides captions for most programmes, (which may be helpful when Klingons are plotting dastardly deeds in their own lingo in StarTrek), to the extent of verbalising sound effects like "crash" or "crackling"!

While investigating, was amused to find that even the signature tune of Neighbours is rendered as a caption... perhaps that really is taking things too far!

17/Dec/1996

Was amused to try out the Ceefax captions on Homicide [Life on the Street] the other night, as I'm never sure whether the characters mumble as part and parcel of the "realistic" presentation, or if it's just my hearing that's deteriorating with age.

Proved quite an entertaining experience—the captions would seem to be script-based, and are not always borne out by the actual dialogue, and found I learned

several slang words that otherwise would have been lost as mere mumbling.

Adds a distinct dimension to the experience! ■

to Steve Sneyd in 1996

What's that he said?

Did I ever mention that we have mastered the intricacies of our digital remote control for the new telly, to the extent that we occasionally fall back on Ceefax when things get boring, or catch up with relevant info when Patrick [Moore] has been holding forth.

I've just realised that the ability to switch on sub-titles is quite a boon: I found it hard to follow Patrick's conversation of the Jupiter prog. He gabbles and loses me. I also have trouble with *Homicide [Life on the Streets]*, and am never sure whether the characters mumble as part of the 'realism' of the presentation or if my hearing has really deteriorated with age. So last instalment, I went into Ceefax subtitles mode, to find it quite entertaining.

The captions seem to be script-based, and are not always borne out by the actual dialogue, but I found I learned several slang words that otherwise would have been lost as mere mumbling.

Adds a distinct dimension to the experience. ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, 17-18/12/1996

TV—Above & Beyond

Happened to get around to reading the readers' letters in Radio Times this week and was astounded to see a couple of folk have written praising *Space: Above & Beyond*. "This is science fiction for mature people" one gushes, and the other wants to hear if further episodes have been bought...

While I have suspicions that these epistles were probably written by the editor to drum up controversy, I am reassured by a footnote from the BBC2 scheduler, regretting that, "a second series won't be shown as only one was commissioned in America".

I'm just grateful that someone over there realised it was crap and pulled the plug. (It must be really bad when even the Americans realise it!). Hope they do the same with *Dark Skies* while they're at it.

Seems it was the Aliens that dragged the US into the Vietnam war after all, according to the last instalment... ■

I see from the new RT that on Saturday BBC2 brings us the final instalment of *Space: Above & Beyond*. A slight relief, and a really intriguing title: *Tell Our Moms We Done Our Best*. I can hardly wait.

By way of highlighting the quality sci-fi of S:A&B, they then follow with a 1958 film epic, starring Zsa Zsa Gabor, *Queen of Outer Space*. On studying the helpful film notes supplied, it emerges that the Queen in question, ruler of a feminist planet Venus, who plans to destroy Earth, is not played by Zsa Zsa, and that the epic is “a serious contender for the worst film ever made”.

I suspect that a desperate planner at Channel 4 may welcome this ready-made answer to a future bank holiday slot... a season of the worst-ever sci-fi films.

I can hardly wait! ■

to Fran & Brian Varley, April & May 1997

Subtitles

Knocked off for *NYPD Blue* last night, and Philip obligingly switched to subtitle mode. They seemed to be having trouble on this occasion—the words kept coming out garbled, odd letters missing, then moving in just as the next caption strip came over.

Began to be quite a game guessing the missing letters, which all added to the entertainment, as the story-line seemed a trifle lacking and routiney... I figger it's just become another series that's outlived its useful life and become a habit.

Mention of subtitles reminds me that Philip summoned them the other day for Babble-on 5, and it was a rather hilarious addition to the rapid-fire “story-so-far” introductory shots. Though they disappointed me by not sub-titling that indignant “Get the hell out of our Galaxy!” protest...

O&S 138 to Brian Varley, 1998

Subtitles 2

Despite all my recent sweeping dismissals of Babble-on 5, must confess that I look forward to it today, in view of the TV entertainment wasteland created by the bloody World Cup coverage mania. Though I don't think I'm so desperate that I'll hang on for *Flash Gordon* this afternoon despite the endorsement of The Guide that it's a “surprisingly good comic-strip caper”.

Still, I might, I might... Then I see there's an epic about Atlantis, a Jules Verne travesty, not to mention *Trapped in Space* this evening. Wow, what a feast of

grotty sci-fi for the connoisseur!

In the event Babble-on wasn't too bad. The sub-title facility helped again, of course; it's now obligatory—though I am disappointed that the desperate plea to “Get the hell out of our galaxy!” continues to be ignored. Still, despite all the variances between what is said and what is sub-titled, it is a welcome way of retaining a slight grasp on the storyline.

So Babble-on is creeping back into favour, and I might even be glad to welcome back the StarTrekks by the time the World Cup has disappeared off our screens. (Gad, what a confession!). And I even returned to Jazz Heroes when I heard that Gerry Mulligan was the hero in question. Can't say I was impressed.

O&S 139 to Brian Varley, 1998

Subtitles 3

My day was made on Sunday when we switched on for Babble-on 5, and they actually showed a sub-title for the “Get the hell out of our galaxy!” soundbite. Well, they didn't actually show “the hell” words... must admit that just seeing “Get out of our galaxy” was a mite tame considering the fervour of the spoken word. Still, they are obviously trying.

And the evil Mr Bester got his come uppance... or will do when Garry Baldy has drunk his “block” into submission. Just hope he's not too inebriated to shoot straight. All this assuming you were allowed to watch this episode on Welsh TV! Will try to explain if you missed it...

O&S 140 to Brian Varley, 1998

Belgian Bashing

... Switched on the telly while preparing lunch to watch the start of the Belgian Grand Prix. Been bucketing down with rain there and the commentator talks of swapping the weather forecasters for a handful of seaweed. Maybe we aren't doing so bad after all...

t dried up just before the start of the race, but that didn't stop David Coulthard losing control of his car at the first acute bend, hit the barrier and bounced back right across the track and created mayhem among the rest of the pack, after the first three cars had zoomed ahead. A right shambles it was—wheels and bits of chassis whizzing all over the place! So the start was cancelled and the whole thing restarted... eventually.

Took ages to clear all the wreckage from the thirteen cars involved. Second time

round the favourite, Mika Hakkinen, was pranged early on and put out of the race by the dreaded Michael Schumacher. Damon Hill took the lead, followed closely by Schumacher, but things were temporarily put on hold until the new wreckage was cleared.

The race has been allowed to continue despite the drastic reduction in participants, so we have to sit tight and see if Damon can win the day. Wow, exciting, innit? Will check back during the afternoon to see how Damon is doing, but I'll be surprised if he pulls it off with a paranoic Schumacher hanging on his tail...

Went back to see how things were going in Belgium after finishing off the pantry shelves. Arrived in time to see Schumacher emerging from the mists and spray to collide with the back of David Coulthard's car, losing a front wheel in the process, and having to crawl back to the pits on three wheels: so that's him out of the running. So for once Damon looks like having a clear run without distractions and maybe even winning.

Which he did. And there was a dodgy moment when a fuming Schumacher went storming over to have a punch-up with Coulthard over the crash! Wow, so here I am at the computer reporting back, just in case you missed all the excitement!

Looks as though I needn't have bothered... Here's Damon's victory splashed all over the Monday front pages, and the *Garudian* has a two-page spread in the sports section devoted to the mayhem. So it's unlikely you'll be left blithely unaware of the grim debacle enacted on Sunday. Well, it makes a change from the renewed spate of guff about Diana that's currently getting an airing.

That was August Bank Holiday that was! Phew...

O&S 152 to Brian Varley, 4 July 1998

Encountering the WWF

We are still getting used to the multiplicity of channels brought to us by Cable&Wireless. Determined to get back with the SuperBowl after ITV abruptly cut off his regular viewing of American football, Philip has been tempted to add SkySport to our list... which means that we're currently provided with hours of live coverage of the snooker—the Brit Open—usually at times when I want to be doing other things so I am having to be selective! Plus in-depth coverage of WWF “wrestling”.

This last is a far cry from the ITV-Kent Walton popular prog of yesteryear. Actually, there's not a great deal of wrestling to be seen when it's on; it's become largely a form of performance-art with lots of hammy acting and Amurrican struttin' an' badmouthin' between acts of violence, like batting anyone in the ring with a folding chair, or even a handy sledgehammer.

There's probably more fighting done outside than in the ring, raging through the dressing rooms into the underground garage, the participants being hotly pursued by camera man and the ref, so that an official countdown can be made if anyone gets someone else floored (it doesn't seem to matter if it's not the original opponents—everyone seems free to join in).

All presented in a "soap" format, with a vague story-line based on the interactions and relationships (in and out of the ring) of all the groups involved, presided over by a brave matron from the management board of the WWF... Good for a laff on occasion, but a trifle wearing with repetition. And they certainly like to bombard viewers with selected highlights of "what has gone before"! ■

to Brian Varley, August 1999

More WWF

Philip had a solid couple of hours of American football ahead of him on SkySports, late evening, which kept him going until after midnight. When he retired, I caught the tail-end of the snooker highlights, and as I was feeling fairly wide-awake couldn't resist switching back to SkySports to see how the wrestling 'soap' was progressing.

This was a programme lasting from lam to 4am (!) titled "No Mercy", supposedly all 'grudge' bouts to settle some of the on-going feuds. It was guaranteed low-class entertainment: there's a lady ex-champ who refuses to retire (allegedly in her sixties!), the Fabulous Moolah, who has been annoying the present WWF belt-holder, a glamorous young fighter who has announced that she'll see off the Fab Moolah for good.

However, the way things worked out, with one of Moolah's henchwomen doing a little dirty work outside the ring, Moolah got her opponent down for a count and returned to the dressing rooms, waving the belt in triumph, leaving the ex-champ in tears in a deserted ring. Wow.

There are quite a few women wrestlers on the US scene at present; indeed, they have upset the male TV Champion (everybody seems to be a champ with a belt to carry round these days), who insists that women have no place in the ring, and spends a lot of his time rushing in and chucking them out when he gets the chance. So he's been feuding with Chyna, a mature, well-developed and proficient lady who wrestles in a tight revealing black leather two-piece.

WWF had persuaded Good Housekeeping to sponsor a showdown bout between these two, and he turned up with a folding kitchen table which he set up at the ringside, lots of metal bins and utensils (including a kitchen sink), and supplies of flour and milk, presumably with the plan of demonstrating, in the spirit of the occasion, that woman's place is in the home.

However, while he was sorting out this motley collection with an assistant, Chyna comes bounding into the ring and catches him unawares, so the wrestling started in earnest right from the start, before the bins and utensils (Hollywood wares, evidently, from the way they promptly dented in use) were used to clout each other.

The lady gained the upper hand in this exchange, chucked him out of the ring, and the fight continued on the floor, with bags of flour being heaved around with great abandon. Chyna was well ahead on points, finally sweeping all the stuff off the kitchen table, and laying a dazed champ on it, prior to leaping from the ropes on to him for a coup-de-grace. However, he rolled off so she crashed down and split the table in two. She was rolled back into the ring, stunned, while the champ and his assistant gleefully mixed milk&flour in a vast jug. By the time he returned to the ring, China had recovered and promptly turned the tables, and the jug of goo finished up being tipped over the champ.

However, while Chyna was celebrating, the champ grabbed his belt from the side of the ring and clobbered her with it while the ref was otherwise engaged, put her in a figure four leg lock and apparently won the bout. He was triumphantly waving the belt on his return to the dressing rooms when he was called back by the ref, as a panel of officials had protested over this questionable use of the WWF trophy, and decided that the match should continue, no doubt feeling that the sponsors might be upset at such low methods being used to get victory.

So he returned to the ring and had to face a furious Chyna, who promptly got him down and counted out and was able to retire with the belt herself. Dunno how Mr Macho [Chris Jericho, PHT] will ever live that down!

We did get some wrestling, too. The British Bulldog has been interfering with bouts in an effort to get a championship confrontation with The Rock, present all-conquering American hero. This campaign has been going on for some time: tonight was the great occasion. Touch and go at times, but he got beat in the end: well and truly. but I doubt that it'll solve anything ... I expect the Bulldog to be back rampaging again.

By this time it was turned 2am, so I packed it in—I'd have dearly loved to see the biggest grudge match of the evening: a bout between reigning champion TripleH, and an opponent he crippled a year or so ago, Steve Austin. Hard man Austin is raring to get back and exact his revenge, so this was to be the highlight of the "No Mercy" prog. Still, have to get some beauty sleep, and no doubt we shall see flashbacks of all this on future programmes. I hope.

Better entertainment than Princess Zena, or Hercules. Or Robin Hood. Does all this screen violence, undermining the notion of fair play, prepare the audience to face up to the realities of modern life? Someone, somewhere must have written a book about it. ■

to Brian Varley, September/October 1999

WWF Discontent

Here it is, the Saturday after Bonfire Night ... Bright spot of the day was a highly entertaining episode of the WWF wrestling soap... gosh things are really getting out of hand, with the unpopular champ, Triple-H, ganging up with other malcontents against the WWF management, interfering in the (planned?) outcome of bouts, and generally starting to run things their way.

The WWF bossman thought he had cooked up a plot to forestall these unwelcome intrusions and for a while it looked as though things were going his way. Then it all went horribly wrong...

Wow! Stay tuned for developments! ■

As you may have gathered the WWF soap has really begun to dominate our viewing. When faced with a limited choice of late evening entertainment, we settled for BBC2's epic on the rise and fall of Canadian wrestler Bret Hart, one-time WWF star, rather than the campness of Batman.

Seems "Hitman" Hart comes from a large family of wrestlers (and the girls all married wrestlers as a matter of course, so the whole gang of current performers are apparently related in some way!), signed up with WWF around twenty years ago and has been groomed for stardom as WWF's Good Guy.

The decline in his fortunes started when Ted Turner took over WCW, and started to grab a large chunk of the TV audience. The WWF bossman, Vince McMahon, (who seems to write all the scripts and generally mastermind the action of his wrestlers) eventually decided that the fans were more captivated by the pranks of the real bad guys and insisted that Hart changed his image to restore their falling viewership.

Evidently Hart wasn't too keen on this, but made a few "put-down" speeches guaranteed to totally enrage patriotic US fans, then decided he didn't like being hated. So he wanted to retire as WWF champ. Then rumours that he intended defecting to WCW upset the WWF boss; however, it was finally agreed that he'd have a well-publicised final bout and then retire as undefeated WWF champion.

However, when it came to the crunch, there was a dramatic behind-the-scenes revision of this arranged scenario in the course of the bout so that our hero found himself unexpectedly counted out, defeated and forever banished from the hallowed portals of WWF...

Apparently Hart is now with WCW so we must look out for him, having had all this background story filled in courtesy of the BBC. Must admit that the WCW shows we've seen so far on Channel 5 do, on occasion, show actual bouts of wrestling in between the obviously staged show-biz performances which dominate WWF presentations. Though after seeing so many of the present day WWF "villains" relaxing in harmonious family get-togethers in this BBC2 show, it

becomes harder to take 'em seriously when they're shown misbehaving and acting mean—it's the same slightly undermining effect that the "how-it-was-done" dinosaur programme had on the main series!

It seems a real long while since Kent Walton presided over the Brit small-screen wrestling, and the likes of Mick McManus, Jackie Palo, the Royal Brothers, George Kidd, Les Kellett, and Adrian Street kept us entertained. Even recall fitting in visits to live bouts during several family holidays down in the West Country. Didn't realise the nostalgia would cling so long, and still keep me glued to the screen like this. Must dig out the book by Simon Garfield, *The Wrestling*, and refresh my memories... ■

When I returned home (from a trip to Manchester) I found Philip had been visiting the WWF website and left me a printout of the "script" for a 1 am to 3 am Smackdown! prog that we ignored the other night. Can't resist enclosing it for you. I like that last phrase: "a melee ensued". On WWF a melee always ensues! No doubt we will catch up with the excitement over the next week or so... ■

to Brian Varley, November 1999

Enuff WWF

The main bright spot on TV has been the ongoing wrestling soap: the management problem at WWF has come to a crisis in Vince McMahon's continuing absence, with Stephanie, his revolting daughter, conspiring with the villainous Triple-H and his minions, to embarrass all the "good guys" on the staff.

But a mutiny of the faithful led by Mankind (a wrestler who apparently started out as "Cactus Jack" I have memories that Cactus Jack appeared as a US guest on the British circuits, but he surely can't be that old!), seems just about to upset the apple cart. Although he managed to be sacked from WWF by the usurping management, he returned at the end of this week's instalment in time to put the kybosh on a dastardly plot to rob the current WWF champ of his belt by under-hand means.

Wow, convoluted storyline but gripping stuff... am all agog to learn how things pan out next week and hope the goodies fare a little better than they have been doing of late.

Phew: guess it's about time Vince returned to join in the struggle again!

I'll shortly be able to sort the link between Cactus Jack and Mankind, while filling in some background on the WWF farce, as Philip has presented me with a copy of Mick Foley's "bestselling autobiography"—which has been getting well-publicised as part of the antics in the soap. Suspect Philip must have been investigating the WWF website in order to lay hands on this...!

LATER... Ah, it seems the Cactus Jack that I recall seeing on TV was Jack Foley, Mick's dad. Seems Mick took over the name when he started up in the business around 1986, but seems to have finally abandoned it during his career at WWF, when he emerged as Mankind...

But his book is a somewhat rambling account so I haven't sorted out all the convoluted strands of this colourful virtual-reality world of wrestling-entertainment. Yet. (Just checked Simon Garfield's book *The Wrestling* and find there is a passing mention of John Foley in a "roll of honour" read out by Pat Roach at a 1995 reunion party).

But enuff of my current obsession. ■

to Brian Varley, December 1999/January 2000



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Themerson Who?

1st March 2004: Delighted to report that I've acquired that copy of Stefan Themerson's novel *Prof. Mmaa's Lecture*—it's not an original Gaberbocchus Press copy, but a US hbk edition of 1975, in quite good nick. So I'm pleased to settle for that, and will pester Peter Riley for further volumes in due course to fill up gaps in the surrealist shelves...

I recall writing a review of the book when Lisa went into a decline over pubbing Zimri, and I cut a few stencils for Interim, a magazine intended to bridge the gap, but which never saw print. I've actually seen a carbon copy of this item on a file recently but, needless to say, with all the junk getting so mixed up of late, can't lay hands on it now I want to look at it. Will keep looking as I'm curious to read my first reactions—it's bound to turn up when I'm looking for summat else... I hope.

I spore it's long been imminent, but it was still a shock yesterday when the MC announced that there would be no Letter from America from Alistair Cooke – our Sunday breakfast routine usually focuses on this event. We'll miss him – Sunday morning will never be the same again !

5th March

Seen trying to dig out some info on Gaberbocchus Press activities – surprisingly can't find any mention of the Press or Stefan & Franciszka Themerson in the many vast volumes on the shelves purporting to provide comprehensive details of books & literary life, or even in the fat biographical dictionaries. Don't understand it – never realised they were that far on the fringe so far as the publishing establishment was concerned.

Stefan's last book, The Mystery of the Sardine, published by Faber in 1986, quotes Robert Nye of the Guardian on its dust-jacket: "He is an immaculate stylist, a constructor of the most complex and intricate fiction, and a thinker of originality and breadth". So why is he so comprehensively overlooked, I'm tempted to ask!

11 March 2004

Also enclose some more of the internet stuff about the Themersons which Philip downloaded for me recently. I still can't get over the way the mainstream establishment appears to have completely ignored their activities—it really narks me, especially when I see so many apparent nonentities swelling the entries in the biographical volumes.

I think I became first aware of them in the sixties, when Gaberbocchus published a translation of Queneau's *Exercises in Style* which earned some ecstatic reviews. Then I saw some extracts published in *Typographica* magazine, which led me to

get a large but slim volume by Stefan, *Apollinaire's Lyrical Ideograms*. Another large but slimmer volume by the two of them, *Semantic Divertissements*, finally tempted me to try Stefan's novels, by which time I guess I was well & truly a convert....

to Steve Sneyd, March 2004

Theodore Major Remembered

Was somewhat surprised when Theodore Major, at one time a Northern artist enjoying considerable repute in the days when Lowry was still an up and coming artist, died mid-January but didn't get a mention on the obit page of the *Garudian*, which was cluttered by a lot of worthies I'd never heard of. However they finally redeemed themselves on Saturday.

Major used to be a leading light of the Manchester Group, back in the late forties and fifties. I met him many times at the Midday Studios, a gallery once housed in the basement of a now-demolished office block at the back of Mosley Street, near Central Library.

Eventually he fell out with the local art establishment, the small galleries and Manchester Academy, and stopped exhibiting his work, so I lost track of him in the sixties. Then when the poll tax was introduced, he hit the local headlines for refusing to pay the charge for the house next door, on the grounds that it was empty apart from storing his pictures.

The press made a big thing about an old unsociable recluse being hounded down by the local council. It appeared he'd just spent his later years, after his wife's death, dependent on the state pension, painting but not showing any of his work, letting it accumulate in this next door house. Eventually, public opinion forced the council to stop hounding him down. Now it appears that there are thousands of undated paintings waiting to be sorted and assessed. ■

to Brian Varley, March 1999

To Manchester: But Why?

Went into Manchester for the first time for ages – there've been a few special supplements in the *Metro* freesheet, about all the changes made since the bombing, presumably to attract shoppers, but it still looks a mess around the Cross St-Market St area, with plenty to be done before all the damage has been restored.

The main difference that struck my eye is that where once all the main

thoroughfares were dotted over by white splotches of discarded chewing gum, now they're dotted over by black splotches. I gather the plan to remove the offending splotches by burning has not been too successful. And the makeshift platform for the trams, installed immediately outside Lewis's, has now been sensibly moved to the middle of the road, where it serves trams in both directions.

I wandered into Habitat to claim a free catalogue (and wondered why, when I got home and studied it!), then visited Waterstones in search of a book for Marion (which they hadn't got in), after which I'd had enough of the Big City.

Is it really a couple of years since that IRA bomb went off? I wonder if the place will ever really recover. ■

to Brian Varley, September 1999

Back To Manchester

Went into Manchester again on Saturday, to pick up Marion's book. And, inevitably, bought a few more... Well, I did go with an intention to check on whether the autobiography of Ravi Shankar, plugged with an extract in last Saturday's Guardian, had yet been published. It has apparently but they hadn't yet got copies on the shelf at Waterstones, so I left them with an order.

While there, I noticed a copy of *Cat's Cradle*, now added—belatedly—to my Vonnegut collection, and was moved to enquire after his collection of early short stories that got a mention in a recent Saturday Review.

"Oh, you'll find it downstairs in the hardback department" I was told; it seems to be part of the recent reorganisation that the SF section now sells only paperbacks. (Come to think of it, the Guardian item appeared under the heading of 'Paperbacks'—I suspect they're all just trying to confuse me.) So I arrived home with that, too.

Incidentally, have you spotted this "Millennium SF Masterworks" paperback series put out by Orion Publishing? They've been putting out two "classic" SF a month since the start of the year, and I've been catching up with stuff by Philip K. Dick, Bester, Stapledon etc. which I'd like to reread, and feel should be on the shelves anyway. Not bad value at £6.99 if you can't locate 'em at the library!

When I went to the station it was more showery than sunshiny, but by the time I arrived at the Big City, the clouds had blown away and the sun was strong. The place was crowded, no traffic was flowing along Piccadilly as a vast digger was noisily wrecking the road surface.

Must have been creating a lot of dust, which early showers had converted to mud on the pavement all the way to the Arndale. And there seemed to be a superfluity of amplified street musicians competing with the melodic spill-out from the HMV store and the yapping of stray dogs along Market Street.

The new M&S building, all glazing and steelwork, gleams emptily in the sun, though the effect is spoilt by the semi-demolished remains of the buildings that have made way for the vastly extended store. (These buildings escaped the blast from the bomb, but have suffered because of the changes on the rest of the site, while Corporation Street is still in a mess and virtually closed and looks like continuing that way for a long long time yet).

Noticed that the Royal Exchange Theatre are advertising monthly Sunday night jazz concerts—shows featuring the likes of Stan Tracey, Julian Joseph, & Jacques Loussier—but regrettably the late train service in and out of town is non-existent at weekends...! Ho hum. So I'll just have to console myself with music at-home.

Piccadilly station is aglow when the sun shines through the crystal of the newly-glazed roof, (though it's hard to read the indicator signs for the dazzle!), and work continues on platforms 9 to 14. The platforms we use have been cleared of all the obstructing scaffolding at long last, and while there's now room to move, they're bare and still (hopefully) to be refurbished—we need some seating returned for the comfort of impatiently-waiting passengers!

to Brian Varley, September 1999

To Manchester Again

Went into Manchester again, with Marion, on Thursday... We got our timing wrong, alas! When we got to Cross Street, we were amazed to see vast numbers of workers in hardhats and yellow plastic jackets, busily engaged in yanking down barriers, clearing away junk, directing a stream of vans, rolling out cables, or just standing around waiting to be directed to the next job.

There was a feeling of bustle, though it was not immediately obvious just what they were trying to achieve... And to add to the tumult, the giant diggers had been moved from the Piccadilly area and were operating full blast at the entrance to St. Anns precinct. In the background, the demolition of the buildings behind the new M&S emporium was proceeding apace, with revving trucks and clouds of dust...

We tried to get away from the racket and dodged through to Waterstones to pick up my Ravi Shankar book, and then wandered round Habitat's first floor display, weighing up the tables and chairs, looking for a replacement of our extending Utility Antique, that would cope with our routine threesome, and meet the need for 8-9 places when the Nottingham Turners visit. No decisions reached on that point as yet.

Elsewhere, Christmas decorations were going up ready for the Great Shopping Spree, but somehow I don't think we'll be joining in the festivities.

When Friday's Metro arrived we learned that the Queen is visiting Manchester this very day, arriving at Victoria Station, and likely to pass the spot where we'd

seen all the frantic activity on our visit. Curses... fancy missing the opportunity to meet Her Majesty!

Though I find it hard to believe that everything could be swept clean and tidied up by the time she swanned through... must pay another visit some time to see if they made any significant changes.

Marion was not impressed by her visit to post-bomb Manchester. Must confess that apart from the Town Hall area, it becomes increasingly difficult to find familiar surroundings. The places I haunted in my Guardian days are changed beyond belief... even monumental bank buildings, stone edifices that seemed destined to survive the next millennium or two, are gutted and awaiting the demolishers, and vast signs and logos plastered on other one-time anonymous buildings is an indication of changing occupiers and standards.

Further afield it's worse: one-time jazz haunts are car parks or new offices. The site of the old Smithfield Market, once the place where I haunted the barrows in search of US sf supplies, is now preserved only as a facade of an entrance wall, a relic now standing isolated amid small cloistered garden plots and the odd seat for the weary pensioner.

No sign of the vigorous commerce I knew; just odd piles of stones and rubble amid the park-type greenery. And routes from the centre that used to be crammed with shops—along London Road, past Ardwick. Green, down Stockport Road, Hyde Road—have been so mangled by crossing motorways and pokey little new housing estates, that you can walk for ages without passing a shop. I now find it hard to recall how the place looked in my younger days.

We were once a nation of small shopkeepers: but no more. Not here at any rate. Little remains of the city I grew up in: ever since the end of the war, grandiose plans are produced periodically but apathy always seems to strike before anything solid and lasting is achieved.

Manchester has been in a state of continuing transition as long as I can recall, and it's been hard to see any signs of real improvement during my lifetime. Though, having said that, I did notice on Thursday that the toilet-type tiles that smothered the exterior of the Arndale Centre (and roused much rude comment) before the bombing, are being replaced by a glazed frontage. Suppose anything's an improvement there...! ■

LATER

Just been reading a feature in the Metro on the "city centre's next giant leap forward". Seems we are now to get a New Cathedral Street along the rear of the new M&S building, linking St. Ann's Church with the Cathedral. This is where all the activity was concentrated last Thursday, and it seems the buildings being demolished will be replaced by a complex with a four-floor department store, and row of shops, together with a "12-storey glass residential tower on the corner of Deansgate... which will dwarf the cathedral tower", providing "80 homes ranging

from 2-bedroom apartments to luxury penthouses with roof-top courtyards, and is likely to set new record prices for city centre apartments”.

While not expected to be completed until 2003 it is hailed by the chief executive of the city Council as “another major step forward to rebuilding Manchester city centre”.

I feel overcome by a profound sense of déjà vu... ■

to Brian Varley, September/October 1999

Manchester Book Shops

Must say that I've lost track of bookshop take-overs. When on our trip to the Big City, we did notice that in St Ann's Square, the building housing the old Sherratt&Hughes emporium, taken over by WH Smith (and ruined) some years back, is due to be rebuilt.

Dillons, in the same locale, was taken over by HMV about the same time, and my account card cancelled, so I tended to lose interest. Some time later, HMV seemed disillusioned about trying to run book shops and could have well sold out to Waterstones, who have been revitalised of late, with this big “live-in” store in London, and expansion of the Manchester Deansgate shop—they've taken over the top floor of the rest of the shops in the block: you can get lost wandering round the shelves on the first floor (which is no doubt the intention).

They have a full rota of visits and signing sessions by authors, and even open on Sundays, in case the locals are desperately short of reading matter... In Stockport, Dillons occupy a large corner site bang in the middle of the Merseyway shopping centre and appear to thrive, while the smaller Waterstones shop languishes on the shopping fringe in Princes Street, which has suffered a considerable drop in prestige after the planners drastically altered the road plan in that vicinity.

Must confess that since I gave up my regular visits to Manchester, I've lost track of the changing fortunes of the big booksellers, having fallen back on mail-order (that way I concentrate on what I need, without the distraction of impulse buying upsetting the budget). I still have an account card for Blackwells, who have a busy bookshop in the Manchester university precinct, but forget when last I used it over the counter it's so long ago! ■

to Brian Varley, October 1999

Remodelling Manchester

Weather on Saturday proves to be gray and nondescript: it's dry, with a kinda hint of rain lurking around, as I catch the train to Manchester and the Poetry Festival. Must confess to finding the city more unwelcoming than ever: the streets to the Library seem increasingly lined with new blank-faced impersonal buildings or familiar facades cloaked with plastic sheets and scaffolding, undergoing some mysterious transformation.

The City Art Gallery has disappeared under plastic, with huge signs proclaiming that a New Gallery will ultimately emerge... The Reference Library is cocooned within a voluminous shroud and and I have difficulty locating the entrance under a tunnel of scaffolding.

It's not much better inside, the once spacious foyer has been filled up with infra-structures and displays, and I stagger up the stairs to a completely redesigned first floor, with the exhibition area now taken over by a vast number of computers providing internet access—all seats occupied by enthusiastic devotees.

Wander up to the second floor, pass through a vastly enlarged arts library, spot one or two jazz books that I decide I must investigate some time, drift out into a corridor and eventually track down the poets, this year confined to a couple of rooms, but with no sign of the worthy representative of Hilltop Press.

Return to the Arts library to satisfy my immediate curiosity about those jazz books and by the time I get back to the Poets Room, Steve has arrived and is busy arranging a display of his wares.

Things are quiet—I suspect many intending visitors are probably lost in the circular maze of the library corridors; last year displays were arranged on the reading tables in the arts library, so people were passing by all the time and things were pretty lively.

Now they've radically reorganised the arts library: most of the tables have disappeared—not sure if this is to make more room for all the books they've acquired in the interim, or if the library has just been squeezed into less space to allow more offices to be fitted on the second floor. Anyway, as it was quiet, it meant we had a good chinwag catching up with things... ■

to Brian Varley, November 1999

Translation Troubles

I'm having a little trouble translating messages in the media at the moment. While shopping in the Precinct the other day a bill outside the newsagents caught my eye:

ELDERLY
FACE
CARE
CRISIS

It said. why should “elderly face care” be in crisis? I promptly thought, and it was only when I joined Marion that the penny dropped and I realised that the elderly were facing a “care crisis”. Today, I was flicking through the Guardian and spotted the headline:

Short
breaks
rank
again

which immediately registered as “short breaks” rank again, and didn't make a lot of sense, until I started to read the story to realise that Ms Short [sometime New Labour minister, PHT] was “breaking ranks” again. I begin to think I've been retired too long... old age is taking over!

Nope, I hadn't seen any news about Wincanton twinning with Ankh-Morpork — I'm a devoted reader but have no affinity with *Discworld* fan activities outside the literary manifestations. I can't stand the shortcomings of illustrators like Josh Kirby and would never dream of gracing a dramatisation by Stephen Briggs — just don't believe the magic can carry over in the starkness of a stage performance.

I have the same trouble with *Hitch Hiker's Guide*; all the magic, for me, is locked in the radio and book versions. Once adapted for TV—they never made Zaphod convincing—there were signs of strain; I can well understand why Adams was obstructive over the proposed film version and dread to think what will emerge if they ever do get round to making a film without him.

Varamonde always seems to bring news from an alternative fandom—Forward and Walotsky unknown to me; as I recall, when I used to read *The Mag of Fantasy & SF* there were no pics on the cover, just the title and a listing of stories (maybe I only saw the BREdition... this was during war/immediate postwar years. And Walotsky was not born until 1943!)

to Steve Sneyd, 16 April 2003

The Ultimate Catastrophe: A Miracle of Lost & Found

I was dashing out for the train on Thursday and, as has become customary, felt in my pocket to check that my travel pass was there. Gulp, it wasn't. Since it's always been there on checking for the past nine years, I panicked, checked all pockets, duffle-bag, and sundry papers and books I had on the train the previous day. No travel card.

Quick survey in the vicinity of the coathooks drew a blank, dash up to the studio, ditto. Having missed one train, I checked in at the station, but no-one had handed anything in.

By now I was convinced it must have been left on the train since my memory blanked out after I had removed my return ticket from the plastic wallet with my pass.

I was advised to contact the lost-prop office at Piccadilly and charged full fare. A sickening experience being faced with the realities of unsubsidised fares! I dashed straight to the class, arrived late, and tore back to Picc Station but by the time I located the lost prop office it had already closed.

Seemingly you are not supposed to lose any property after 4 pm, Mon to Fri.

I thought I may as well have a fling while I was in the big city, having spent so much on my fare, and retreated to Dillons in search of consolation. The January sale was still on—well, perhaps it wasn't the January sale, but some sale—and while it seemed a trifle bin-endish, I did locate a large Lunar Atlas, reduced in various stage from £19.99 to an all-time low of £2.99. Published in 1990, in mint condition,

I couldn't fathom why they were so anxious to unload it, but decided that it was a token offering from Fate to compensate me for my immediate loss. I felt a bit better about matters as I travelled home.

Next morning things looked black again. I couldn't find a BR Lost Prop Office number, so rang up a general number to find that all departments were covered by it, which meant I did considerable hanging-on until the operator found an opportune moment to put me through.

Still, once I got there the lady sounded sympathetic as she took down my details and I expounded my theory that the pass must have been lost on the 15.57 to Marple, and sounded more optimistic than I felt that it would turn up eventually.

I left her with my phone number and then made an effort to get through to Marple station, just in case someone had handed it in there, but was baffled by BR policy, which seems to keep the numbers of all local stations ex-directory. I nearly rang back to the nice lady at Picc, but reasoned that she'd check up with Marple if there wasn't anything in M/cr.

So I turned to another ransack of all the coats hanging in the hall, in the forlorn hope that it had been hiding someplace all this time; no joy, but I did locate a £

coin lurking in what should have been an empty pocket, which softened the blow of my extra outlay on fares more than the theoretical savings on Lunar Atlases.

The day before, Parcel Force had called when everybody was out but instead of just hiding the parcel in the garden-shed, had left a card suggesting I call on their Bredbury depot, presumably as it was a long time since they'd seen me. Traipsing up to this isolated outpost involves passing the library Information Centre, so I thought I'd call in and make enquiries about procedures for getting a replacement pass in case the original didn't turn up.

By this time, I'd convinced myself that it was most unlikely to turn up, and was vaguely imagining how long it would be before I got a replacement and how much excess fares I'd be caught for before my status was quo'd. For one thing I'd need a passport photo.

There should have been some spares left over from the time (in 1985!) I acquired my pass; I looked where I thought they should be and, lo! that's there they were. Which seemed an auspicious money-saving start. So when I called in the info centre and bent the ear of the lady in charge, expecting to be told I'd have to hie to the transport office in Stockport, my flabber was gasted when she smiled and said they were now authorised to issue passes, and if I had a photo, I could have a replacement there and then.

I produced my pic, signed a form, and was ushered back on to the doorstep clutching my brand new pass, complete with plastic wallet. No fuss, no charge, no sweat. I was impressed very favourably by the efficiency of our local staff...

All my problems over, already. I almost caught the bus home, just to prove it worked...

We were just sitting down to the evening meal when the phone rang. Yeah, you guessed it. It was the guy at Marple station to say that someone had handed in my pass, and they'd be glad to return it if I'd call tomorrow. Which is why I have now got a standby pass as insurance for the future. And a warm spot for the ladies that look after the ageing in the community.

Sometimes two days can stretch to a lifetime. Did it all really happen in a mere two days, I keep asking myself? From the Ultimate Catastrophe and then right back to normality so soon?

On Saturday the sun was shining (what else) as I set out for Marple, duly collected my original pass, exchanged some friendly banter, and walked back. Fate did not let me win all the way. Just as I started to climb up Compstall Brow, the wind freshened and the rain and sleeted pelted down. They've just finished cutting back all the overgrown bushes at the side of the path, and there was absolutely no shelter.

I got absolutely drenched, and it was no consolation when the sun struggled out again as I turned into the avenue. En route, I paused to wipe the sleet from my specs and noticed a large notice outside Gothic Farm as I passed — "EGGS, HAY & STRAW" it said at the top, and then filling 2/3rds of the space "GOLF BALLS".

Their fields adjoin the golf links. Looks as though they must have had a good harvest this year... ■

to Steve Sneyd, 6 March 1994

Uncle Eric Laithwaite

Monday's Guardian brings a reminder of Eric Laithwaite (my favourite lecturer from the Royal Institution Christmas progs of the '60s & '70s), inventor of the linear induction motor (magnetic levitation), and delver into the mysteries of the gyroscope. I never understood why he was cold-shouldered by the government here when Japan and other countries were so interested in maglev trains.

Now, several years after his death, NASA is developing a maglev drive as an economical way of launching space craft.

So it goes... ■

to Brian Varley, September 1999

Why study history?

1. Poetic metaphor

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Little Gidding : T.S. Eliot

2. Philosophical considerations

Why study history? A simple question that deserves a simple answer. First things first—define our terms. Where's that dictionary... "Why"... for what reason; "study"... examine closely, ponder over. All very clear so far! "History"... the study of past events.

So where has that got us...hmmm, why study the study of past events? Clarify, clarify. Dig deeper: lift down the encyclopedia.

Success! There bang in the middle of a long-winded entry is the key sentence: mental bells ring and lights flash as my eye bounces off the proclamation:

HISTORY... IS ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED

Mind you, after coming out loud and clear like that, the writer loses his nerve and pulls down the shutters, handing out a rider to the effect that the word is used in two senses, and may mean the record of events, or the events themselves, though he concedes that the modern usage of the word covers the events. Okay. We seem to have it all wrapped up.

If history means all that has happened—or will happen depending at what point in time you view the process of change—if history is all that happens, the whole slam-bang sequence of events in our dynamic universe, then everything you do is history. Which means that likewise everything you study is history. The fine point arises of how you study a process when you're part of it but that is not, currently, our worry.

The answer to the question “why study history?” is that you ain't got a choice in the matter: you study history because there's literally no other goddam thing to study...

3. A cautionary tale from the Orient

Long ago, way back in 200 BC by Western reckoning, Shih Huang-ti unified China. He did it by defeating the warring feudal states, one by one, installing himself as Emperor of the First Empire, and founding the Ch'in dynasty.

He promptly abolished the feudal system, replacing it by an efficient military dictatorship, then solved the unemployment problem created by putting liberated serfs to work on the Great Wall.

He embarked on an ambitious programme of standardisation throughout the Empire: standardisation of written language, of weights and measures. Even of cartwheel axles... this ended the practice of transferring and reweighing goods at state boundaries because of differences in the spacing of the wheel ruts, and by way of bonus, speeded up military transports across the Empire.

He had a political arm to help carry out these reforms: the Legalist party, whose doctrine demanded strict obedience to the letter of the law, who believed that effective social organisation depended on the threat of dire punishments for offenders. His subjects complained, among themselves, quietly, about his ruthlessness.

The act that really won Shih Huang-Ti a dishonourable mention in recorded history was his “burning of the books” edict. All teaching was banned throughout the Empire, on pain of death, and all books were ordered to be destroyed, with the exception of some basic texts on medicine, divination, agriculture and the Imperial archives.

In parenthesis, with the objectivity of some 2,000 years distance from these events, it should be said that a story is handed down of the Emperor being warned by a soothsayer that the success of the wall depended on ten thousand men being buried beneath it. Instead of carrying out the obvious course of action Shih

Huang-Ti sought out one man whose name embodied the word “ten thousand” and buried him. A happy compromise for the other 9,999 survivors.

The Emperor died in 210 BC. The fact of his death was concealed by his chief minister Li Ssu, who feared for his own survival, long enough to force the Crown Prince and Meng T'ien, the most capable Chinese general, to commit suicide when shown a forged Imperial command, Li Ssu then had the second son declared Emperor and a magnificent tomb built for his illustrious father. Rumour has it that there was some trouble with the workmen and they finished up buried alive in it.

The Ch'in dynasty was not only unpopular but short-lived. The second Emperor was deposed by rebel forces, and an illiterate man of obscure origin became the first of the Han Emperors. He was Han Kso-tsu, who tactfully resisted attempts to return to feudalism and set about reinforcing the idea of the unity of the Empire.

Though illiterate, he realised the advantage of allowing the scholars and philosophers to reopen their schools, and reconstruct the lost ancient texts painstakingly from memory aided by the few precious books that had escaped the Ch'in edict, even before the proscription on teaching and books was repealed formally. But a definite break in tradition and consciousness had been created: the classical feudal world was now historically remote.

It is recorded that the new Emperor grew tired of his chamberlain, Lu Chia, continually quoting from the classical Book of Odes and Book of History. “I conquered the Empire on horseback”, he grumbled, “what is the use of these Odes and Histories?”

“You can't govern the Empire on horseback.” replied Lu Chia, “If Ch'in had followed the precepts of the ancient sages and governed the Empire in humanity and righteousness, then Han would not be governing it now.”

The Emperor frowned at the prospect. “Touché” he said—or some ancient Chinese equivalent. “Explain to me the reasons for the collapse of Ch'in, the rise of Han, and what it was that won and lost kingdoms of old.” And in obedience to the wish of the Emperor, Lu Chia wrote a book on the history of statecraft, in twelve chapters. The Han dynasty ruled, with one brief interruption, for over four centuries. ■

Sources:

1. The Complete Poems & Plays of T.S. Eliot (1977)
2. Collins New Guild Dictionary
3. Encyclopedia Britannica
4. Chronology of the Ancient World / H.E.L. Mellersh (1976)
5. The Early Civilisation of China / Yang Yap & A. Cotterell (1975)
6. Larousse Encyclopedia of Ancient & Medieval History / (1965)

FINALLY

Few of us leave behind such a wealth of material, visual and written, to illuminate both the author's own life and those of the people he encountered; particularly the creators of science fiction fandom in Britain in those long-lost days before World War Two. It is even less usual for the life to be as worth documenting as Harry Turner's was.

He was a polymath, whose life soon overflowed the available free webspace when his son, Philip, created a memorial website based on the material which formed the basis for this book and the others devoted to other aspects of his father's life and works.

It is the compiler's intention to attempt to let the people who knew Harry Turner, or encountered his work via his contribution in one particular field, to know how much more there was. Most of the more can be found hosted by HTSPWeb.co.uk.



Meanwhile, people won't stop creating Widower's verses:

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