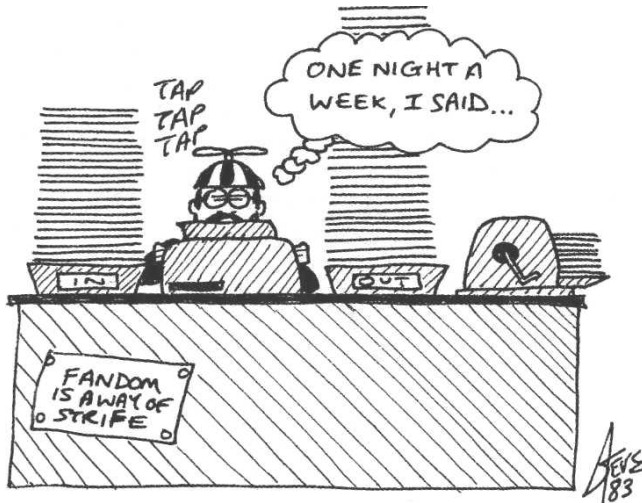


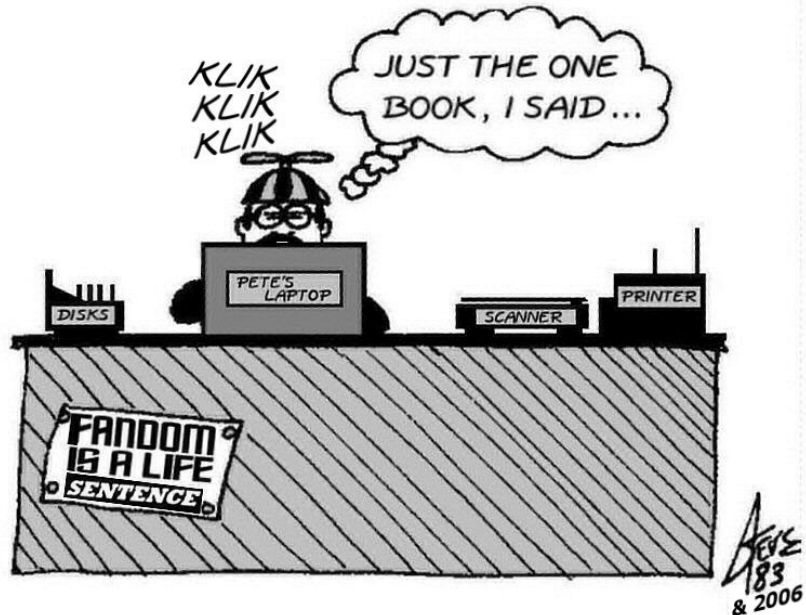
"it's so, so.... quaint." – Ian Sorensen



**One minute we're
safely in 1983...**

Special time-travelling issue!

**... and then
suddenly, it's the
Future and
everything has
changed!**



INSIDE: 'Happy Slapping-down' – The Joseph Nicholas letters; 'Whatever happened to APA-B?': **PLUS:** Sandra Bond; Bob Shaw; Chuck Harris; Ethel Lindsay; Lee Hoffman; Tom Shippey; Terry Carr; and more!

PROLAPSE

This is *Prolapse 3*, completed in November 2006 after a lapse of only 23 years by Peter Weston, now living at 53 Wyvern Road, Sutton Coldfield, B74 2PS, UK. You can send an actual, physical letter to that address if you want, but I can be reached a lot more quickly on e-mail at pr.weston@btinternet.com. While I'm producing some paper copies of this issue, *Prolapse* is being posted on the efanazines website, courtesy of the indefatigable Bill Burns. For those printing it out, Robert, official paper colour this time is yellow.

"The old bones creak, the withered hand reaches once more for the duplicator handle. There is no escape!" - Malcolm Edwards

And straightaway, advanced technology spoils a perfectly good interlineation (or 'lino' as we used to call them in the Good Old Days). Somehow an updated version, 'the withered hand reaches for the printer button' doesn't have the same resonance. But then, despite our cover a lot really *has* changed since the last issue of *Prolapse*. The previous two numbers were hammered out in the full frenzy of the Birmingham Renaissance, that bright summer when all things seemed possible, and were put through APA-B, the newly-formed Brum Group Amateur Press Association, something which went on to mutate out of all recognition (but more on that, later).

Not exactly great issues, maybe, but I was beginning from a cold start and at least they served their purpose by bringing me back into contact with fanzine fandom after a previous absence. And they *did* attract some very good letters. Unfortunately, before finishing the third issue I was called away rather urgently to run a door-handle factory but somehow my file of LoCs has survived all these years, through three house-moves, to be unearthed recently at the bottom of a banana-box when I was finally putting my magazine collection back onto shelves. Ancient history now, but reading through those letters (from too many friends now deceased) I'm once again touched that so many people took the trouble to write, and I feel I owe it to them to publish their words at long last, even if a few 'prompts' might be needed here and there.

This Strange Bond...

But wouldn't you just know it, within scant hours of my announcing on the secret *wegenheim* e-list my intention to produce another issue of *Prolapse*, Malcolm Edwards posted a message to say he had found his file for *TAPPEN #6*: "I only managed to produce 12 stencils, I see, in December 1983 ... I have no memory of why I stopped and never restarted: I assume it was pressure of job and changed home life. I now feel I should do something with this stuff, but I'm not sure what."

Marvelling at this continuing Cosmic Jest, I commented, "What is the strange bond that has linked us invisibly ever since I invented 'Malcolm Edwards' as a pseudonym back in 1966?" My remark brought forth this startling admission from the person we know as 'Malcolm':

"Time to confess. It has all been a brilliant double-bluff. It was me all the time, but I used 'Peter Weston' as a pseudonym because when I discovered fandom I was only eleven and I felt I needed to present myself as an adult. When I reached sixteen I had 'Peter' invent 'Malcolm Edwards' to prepare the way for my entry into fandom four years later. I persuaded a friend of my dad's to pretend to be 'Peter', and over the years – it's sad, really – he has come to believe that he really is 'Peter Weston' and he really did produce all those fanzines. But I've been getting a bit pissed-off lately as he keeps going around taking the credit for my book."

By total coincidence, Greg Pickersgill recently put the five 'Malcolm Edwards' *Vector* columns onto his web-site (www.gostak.co.uk/bts/index.htm) and Bill also has a link from efanazines. I'm not sure that the columns now have any worth apart from curiosity value, but I will comment that writing them under a pen-name was an object lesson in stupidity; how to do a lot of work and get absolutely *no* egoboo (sorry to embarrass you with that, Claire). This is where the Cosmic Jest comes in; why did I choose that particular name out of an entire Universe of possibilities, thus smoothing the way for the one person who was to give me some real competition to *Speculation* in the early seventies? And then he had the cheek to say he didn't like my trousers!

Special time-travelling issue

You're probably getting the idea by now... this issue has a lot of catching-up to do, which means it will need to jump about all over the place through Time & Space from 1966 to 1983, and on to the present day. If those letters are going to make any kind of sense there's necessarily going to be a lot of recapitulation from the earlier issues and along the way you're probably going to hear rather more about my local fandom than you really want to know. But still, if Arnie Katz can do it for Las Vegas, then so can I!

So let's go back in time to the Birmingham Science Fiction Group in early 1983, just after Rog Peyton suckered me out of retirement to take the Chair once again after a decade-long gap. Little did I know what I was in for! Because the BSFG was in its twelfth year, and to be brutally honest it had gone a bit stale. For years, committees had concentrated almost exclusively on a standard formula – my idea originally, as much as anyone's – for a monthly meeting with a programme item, usually a speaker, and a regular *Newsletter*, but that was about it. Many members came along, sat through the meetings and went home again without very much social interaction and even less interest in the greater world of fandom outside. It was a classic 'Circle of Lassitude.' Some – a very few – had graduated beyond this, people like Stan Eling, Cathy Easthope, and our new Superfan Martin Tudor; others such as Paul Vincent and Tony Berry were hovering on the brink, while much-slighted Steve Green was in more-or-less open revolt at what he saw as the fuggheadedness of the BSFG Establishment, having gone as far as to form his own, rival, Solihull SF Group.

How to change things for the better? With a few allies like Chris Suslowicz and Steve (who I quickly co-opted onto the committee) we 'brainstormed' ideas to try and put a bit of life back into the Group. What if we did a reprint of THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR? A Group fanzine? Or a Directory of British Fandom? We talked about starting a pen-pal scheme with the Birmingham, Alabama fan group. We voted £100 from the Group Treasury and spent it on a BSFG Party at the Glasgow *Albacon*. We started to hold fortnightly 'informal' meetings in a city-centre pub, like a more normal fan-group. But the best idea by far was APA-B, born out of dim memories of APA-L, the weekly APA run by LASFS in Los Angeles.

This will *really* get them jumping, we thought, a team-effort that would introduce members to the pleasures of writing and publishing, with a ready-made audience on the doorstep. We announced that the initial 'mailing' would be collated and distributed at the June meeting and I set to work on the first *Prolapse*, my own contribution. To crib from that issue, "some new and talented people had joined the Group, fans-in-the-making, just looking for the right door to step through. This would be my mission; to pass on the spark, like the 'Contact' Fairy in THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR."

I know I look ridiculous but
it's in a very good cause!



I discovered how much I enjoyed pubbing my ish again after all those years, this time writing the whole thing myself rather than begging for outside material. I described my hopes for the Brum Group, how I made my very own 'Shield of Umor' for the *Albacon* Fancy-Dress Parade, and how it was met with near-total incomprehension. I wrote about a mildly disastrous business trip to America with an announcement from the pilot, "There's something wrong with the engines." And I hardly mentioned those two words, "science fiction."

Well, the APA experiment worked, and the first few 'mailings' created a lot of excitement, as William McCabe describes elsewhere in this issue. The next project was a Summer Barbecue, an ambitious coach-trip taking over forty members (and some visiting Swedish fans) to a site we'd scouted-out in the Malvern Hills, some 45 miles from the city. Several of us spent all day making careful preparations, another big team-effort to provide the vast quantities of food, drink and utensils required... and the whole thing went sour because of the unpleasantness caused by a trouble-maker, the Scotsman Ian Hastie, and his crony, Simon Norburn.

I was pretty angry about the way this turned out, and after we unloaded the coach I went back with Steve and Paul Vincent to Martin's bed-sit in Washwood Heath to let off steam. And there, in the small-hours of the morning, Martin showed me a LoC on his fanzine that he'd just received from someone he'd never heard of called 'Michael Ashley'. "Look at this," said Martin, "It's a real KTF letter!"

It certainly was, dripping with venom from the opening, "I presume you call your various issues *Empties* on the basis there's nothing in them," through various sneers about "mutual masturbation" to an ending of calculated poison. To someone as eager-to-please as lovable *Martin Tudor*!

What IS the matter with these people? Why do some individuals set out to pick fault, to spoil and destroy? I felt quite strongly about all this and at 3.00 a.m. started to write it up at some length for the second *Prolapse*, unfortunately confusing the 'nasty' Mike Ashley with a much more lovable avatar I'd known from a previous incarnation, as everyone joyfully rushed to point out afterwards. (Maybe that's the secret of getting a good response – make an obvious mistake in your fanzine and the whole world will write to tell you about it!)

Which brings me neatly back to those LoCs on *Prolapse-2*, most of which were sympathetic about our troubles. However, one letter in particular (from Joseph Nicholas) exerted an awful fascination, with a view of the world so markedly different from my own that I wrote straight back for further clarification. Fortunately I kept this correspondence, so take a deep breath and let's plunge into the world of British fandom, circa 1983.

I'd never previously had a great deal to do with Joseph Nicholas, our paths had rarely crossed, but in a letter to the *BSFG Newsletter* he seems to have been somewhat less than impressed with my first *Prolapse*. For the second issue I snipped a quote from his letter for an interlineation, exactly like the one below, which resulted in the following correspondence (trimmed slightly for brevity) giving some interesting perspectives on 1980s fandom.

“Grow up, man, for God’s sake! – Joseph Nicholas, *BSFG Newsletter*”

Happy Slapping-down?

The Joseph Nicholas Letters

18 August 1983

Dear Peter,

“Thanks for *Prolapse-2*. I see from its back cover that we’ve been sent it because I’m mentioned in it; this must be the first time in fanzine history that an out-of-context quote has been considered as a ‘mention’. And an inaccurate out-of-context quote to boot; you want to pay careful attention to the punctuation next time, and perhaps bear in mind that as a general rule I very rarely use exclamation marks in anything I write.

“Oh dear, I’m perhaps beginning to sound like Michael Ashley, whose letter to Martin Tudor seems to have offended you. Well, your comments on the matter don’t exactly make you out to be the soul of tolerance and wit, but... oh God, I hardly know where to begin, how to break the news to you. Everyone who read that bit must have felt (at least) some faint stir of amusement at your ignorance, because... there are in fact *two* Michael Ashleys. One is the boring simple-minded cretin you describe, addicted to the production of meaningless checklists of, say, Ten Recent Lithuanian Authors Who Wrote Stories About Computers (or Comets, or Barnacles from Mars, or Giant Intelligent Vegetables Who Built Stonehenge, or whatever). While the other is in his early twenties, has been around on the fringes of fanzine fandom for the past three or four years, and reckons we’re all a bunch of posy middle-class wankers addicted to nostalgia and fakery, who should be liquidated by the organs of internal state security without further delay. (Or something like that). I do not see how you could possibly have mistaken one for the other, unless of course you **just didn’t know**...

“Well, enough of this shit-kicking stuff; one can only go so far up someone’s nose before one has to crawl back down again... The trouble with a fanzine like *Prolapse* (which is why neither Judith nor I got around to responding to the first issue) is that it doesn’t exactly sparkle with tempting comment hooks – not, I hasten to add, that this is the fault of your writing, but I think it has more than a little to do with your contents. What, after all, can one say in response to an account of some unpleasantness at a summer barbecue, unless one has a similar anecdote of one’s own to offer? Which I don’t... which perhaps means that I lead a rather boring life, but then I guess that’s just tough on me.”

21 August 1983

Dear Joseph,

“Yes, I didn’t know there were two ‘Mike Ashleys’, and I can’t really see any way I could have discovered that fact; I commented to Steve Green, Martin Tudor, and Paul Vincent on the amazing difference between that letter and the MA I used to know, but of course all three are recent fans, and they just didn’t remember the ‘old’ Ashley. And I’ve not been involved with fanzine fandom since the mid-seventies. It’s a perfect example of a generation gap – unless someone has been **continuously** active from around 1973 to 1983, they wouldn’t have spotted the emergence of this doppelganger.

“I’m relieved, actually, because otherwise I’d have suspected the “good” Ashley had gone really sour, or had been taken over by some Evil Telepathic Mutant or something. And isn’t life funny – the day after I’d posted the ‘outside’ copies of *Prolapse* I received Terry Hill’s latest *Microwave*, which mentioned the existence of the two Ashleys. Just one day too late! Unfortunately, people will be so anxious to correct my misapprehension that they will miss the point of the article, as you appear to have done. Which is, ‘Is it really right to throw gratuitous insults?’ Although you **do** make an inadvertent contribution to this debate when you write, “the boring, simple-minded cretin you describe.” Now, Joseph, come on – I mean, unless the ‘real’ Ashley has done you some wrong, surely that’s a bit strong, a bit hurtful, to someone who Arthur Thomson calls “a keen and conscientious fan on the receiving end”? I wasn’t really thinking about you when I wrote about people who

deliberately set out to wound – as you know we’ve never really crossed swords. And I’ve actually had a sneaking admiration for the way you doggedly hold your corner against all challengers, year after year – but maybe the cap fits?

“Something else surprised me, your reaction to my little lino on the first page. Surely the whole **point** of interlineations is that they are ‘out of context’? By clever and judicious use of linos, a good editor can actually synthesise an entirely new context for them by allowing such comments to highlight or make a point about the surrounding material. I’m not that good, of course, but I know the theory. Also, as happened on this occasion, I’m usually very short of suitable snippets. Why did I use your comment? Well, it was about 11.30pm last Tuesday evening, and I’d written my opening two paragraphs straight onto stencil. Then I sat and scratched my head – I just couldn’t find a suitable interlineation. I rummaged through all my recent post, without success, then in desperation flicked through the latest BSFG *Newsletter*. And there it was, perfect, something which seemed to add a little irony to my immediately-preceding remarks; I’d been acting Old & Tired, and then you’re saying ‘Grow Up.’ That’s really why I used it, with no particular desire to ‘get at you’ with that quote. And naturally, in fandom a ‘mention’ is wherever your name appears – I thought that was a pretty basic ground rule.”

24 August 1983

Dear Peter,

“Is it right to throw gratuitous insults?” you wonder. That depends. The difference between us – and by ‘us’ I mean not specifically you and I, but the fannish generations we might be said to represent – is the difference between the overall tenor of the fandoms in which we ‘came of age’. You, after all, are a product of the sixties, while I am a product of the seventies, and it would be idiotic to claim there are no differences between the two decades, that just because we are both fans we have exactly the same outlooks and attitudes. I assume you agree with that, at least – and this is probably why you reject the casual brutality that characterised a certain portion of fandom in the middle seventies as alien to the ethos that moulded you, while I reject as alien what I see as the awful blandness and sometimes downright hypocrisy of the ‘if you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all’ school of thought.

“But in upholding the right for anyone to say what they like about whoever they like in whatever fashion they like, I do draw some sort of distinction between – to phrase it as generally as possible – the insult intended to wound as much as possible, and the insult intended to amuse. The latter is acceptable, part of the normal give-and-take of the fannish round, while the former is not. Arthur Thomson – and, since you quote him with such apparent approval, no doubt you, too – may consider both types equally offensive, equally indefensible, but I happen to believe such coddling as he seems to be pushing does more harm than good; it treats fans as children who have to be insulated from the harsh realities of the outside world, and, if ladled too liberally over them, can leave them incapable of dealing with the knocks it routinely hands out.

“So when I describe the checklist-producing Mike Ashley as a ‘boring, simple-minded cretin,’ I’m not out to do him down, not by any means; I’m just poking what I see as a bit of legitimate fun at him (and passing comment on the worthlessness – or so it strikes me – of his activities into the bargain). Should he choose to reply with an insult of similar mildness I shall take no offence, for it would be (to re-use an earlier phrase) no more than the natural give-and-take of the fannish round.

“As to the interlineations business; I still don’t think that a mere quote counts as a ‘mention’, particularly when it isn’t part of something larger and is so out of context. While I’m aware of the theory of interlineations, I find it substantially less than persuasive. Fucking witless, in fact. Never mind that any remark which can so easily be lifted from its original context and given a new one probably doesn’t have all that much going for it anyway.”

29th October, 2006

Dear Joseph

Well, I didn’t reply to your second letter but it seemed to me then (and still does now) to present a rather terrifying picture of 70s & 80s British fandom. No wonder I felt a bit alienated at the time. It sounds a harsh sort of world, where insults are hurled for no reason and innocents are routinely humiliated for “fun”. To me it seems the verbal equivalent of modern-day, so-called ‘happy slapping’, where passers-by are liable to be attacked for no particular reason except “to amuse” the perpetrator. However, I do appreciate that you wrote these letters a long time ago, and the entire correspondence now may have no relevance whatsoever to the kindly, mellow, current-model Joseph Nicholas of 2006. //

THE MELTING POT

Or, in hot water again!

(Editorial stuff in italics, like this)



Photo;
Catherine
Pickersgill

BOB SHAW, 90 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, Cheshire, WA4 2PG.
20 August 1983

Dear Pete,

“You know, reading your piece about the barbecue gave me a feeling like an elder god sitting up there on Olympus, ruefully shaking his head as he watches the mere mortals down below get themselves into trouble. It was a beautiful feeling, and I’m grateful to you for it.

“I went through all your preparations with interest and admiration for the effort that was being put in. I noted your inventory of the booze supply and suppressed a twinge of thirst because I love drinking beer in the open air. Then I came to the phrase “30-odd BSGF members” and – this is honest to God – I immediately thought, ‘Oh dear, there’s going to be trouble over the drinks supply.’

“So I read on with heavy heart and cringed at all the Hastie words that were spoken. Diplomacy doesn’t seem to be one of his strong points, but, my dear friend Pete, you should have taken professional advice. Why didn’t you ring me? When a group of more than 30 fans get together for an evening, a reserve of 55 pints of beer is quite inadequate. (The extra cans you had set aside for the bus journey would only have been enough to rinse the dust off the boozers’ taste buds and get them ready for a proper drink.) I know that some people in any group will drink practically nothing, which ought to things better for those who like their tipples, but the effect is always imperceptible.

“Learn from your experience in the Malverns! Next time you organise an outing like that, keep your prices down and cover only transport and food – and make it clear that everyone brings their own drinks. The people who don’t drink will be happy because they won’t be subsidising the boozers. The people who prefer other drinks – remember how popular white wine has become – will be happy. And the boozers will be happy. At least, if they aren’t, they’ll only have themselves to blame.

“In the next lesson I will give you my views on how to organise a science fiction convention.

PS: “Looking back over what I have written above, I see that I may have given the impression of being on Ian Hastie’s side. This is not so. If you allow, say, £2 for the cost of an 80-mile round trip with food thrown in (a bargain) that leaves £2 for beer. That is just enough to buy three pints, so you were actually providing him with more than his share. He had a hell of a nerve expecting to be kept in beer for an evening for a couple of quid. Some people I know would have ejected him from the bus for his behaviour.

“What was so funny in your account for the outside observer was the gulf of total incomprehension between your viewpoint and his. And the really priceless bit was where he enquired about the stock of beer and you, in the belief that you were being reassuring, said ‘Don’t worry, there’s one each.’ To a toper who was concerned about his supplies that could have been enough to bring on an attack of apoplexy. I haven’t read anything so funny since LUCKY JIM, and I intend to steal the scene and work it into my next comic novel.”

‘Stuff the fine fannish occasion, I just want to get ratted!’



Well I don’t know, Bob, we did have a total of 105 pints, plus cider, soft drinks and so on. And I was being sarcastic, not reassuring; Ian Hastie was causing trouble before we’d even got out of the city and I was already pretty fed-up with him at that point. Despite his depredations we still ended the evening with far more beer than the rest of us could drink. But the whole point of the barbecue was that it should have been a fine fannish occasion, a ‘fellowship event’ (to borrow a phrase from Rotary). If the wreckers hadn’t wanted to participate, why did they come along in the first place?

ETHEL LINDSAY, 69 Barrie Road, Carnoustie, Angus, DD7 7QQ.
27 October 1983

Dear Peter,

“Belated thanks for the two issues of *Prolapse*. I enjoyed every bit of them, and admired your ability to draw an unmistakable picture of yourself. I’m sorry that the guy who almost spoilt your barbecue was a Scotsman. This emphasis on beer I always find to be very boring. I have just been reading a con report from Mal Ashworth and that continual mention of beer rather spoilt it for me. I have written this before – I think it is a subconscious thing – ‘Look at me drinking beer, that **proves** I am a man!’ When I first wrote this I received a very comical reply from Bob Shaw.”

CHUCK HARRIS, 32 Lake Crescent, Daventry, Northants.
11 September 1983

Chuck (who I really wish I’d answered at the time) picked up strongly on the ‘costume’ I wore at the 1983 Albacon, illustrated by Steve Green on the cover of the first Prolapse (below):-



Photo:
Arnold Akien

Dear Peter,

“Please, if there are any vacant places on the next barbecue, after a hasty defection, could I come? I could suppose after that fracas you’ll be chary of organising another one, dammit. How pathetic and puerile can people get over a couple of bloody cans of beer?”

“I really enjoyed *Prolapse-2* – even the mailing comments on apazines I’d never heard of. The thing that intrigued me most was the cartoon identification you use – the wraparound spectacles and full-frontal moustache. A long time ago Arthur Thomson suggested we tried something similar in *Hyphen*, and I thought it worked quite well... especially for James White and myself. He gave me great lust-filled eyes popping right through my glasses, and ever since then even the most casual “–” reader has recognised me immediately. Good ol’ Arfer. He always had impeccable Taste, and knew my likes and dislikes. When we shared a room at any convention he always knew what I wanted. Always the same furnishings... two bottles of Gordon’s Gin and eighteen blonde ladies. Sometimes I got a bit fed-up with the damned gin and wished I could have a blonde lady, but he’d never share.. and who was I to argue with that Impeccable Taste?”

“But if there’s one thing I really agree with Arthur about, it’s ‘fandom is for fun, fandom is a place to make friendships.’ The friends I made twenty years ago are still my friends now, and I hope, will still be friends in twenty years’ time when I am 76 with a worn-out ‘I’ key – but there seem to be a lot more odd-bods around than there used to be. What the hell is up with Michael Ashley? *Empties* was a fine little ‘zine and could well progress to something memorable.... as long as it keeps away from checklists.”

‘Not much of a costume, is it..?’

‘Where’s his sword?’

‘Maybe if he had a dragon on his shoulder?’



“I think I must have been on my way out of the revolving door of fandom just about the time you were coming in for your first sentence, or I would have been in your fan-club years ago. I thought the Jophan’ fancy dress was **superb** – but what happened to the five, ten, fifteen trufen at the Con who should have been whistling, stamping, clapping and cheering their bloody heads off???” It was a simple but splendidiferous idea (but WHY has no-one ever thought of it before?) and worthy to rate alongside LeeH’s idea of going as *Quandry*. She ran page-size pieces of pale green silk through the duplicator and then stitched them into a dress. I don’t know what she did about page-numbering, but I hope that, first, she got the front and bacover in the right places, and secondly, that I made the letter column in that issue. She didn’t win either – which only goes to prove that Impeccable Taste isn’t a very common ailment.”

TOM SHIPPEY, University of Leeds, LS2 9JT.
22nd September 1983

And here’s a different perspective, from my long-time pal Tom Shippey with his unique mixture of bluff good humour and paranoia; the only Professor of Medieval English Literature to play a vicious centre-forward in Saturday morning footie sessions with the more daring members of the student population.



Photo:
Steve
Green

Dear Peter,

“I much enjoyed your account of the great barbecue and the great garboil which it engendered. Only one comment, or rather two. First, the whole thing sounds made-up. I mean, a name like ‘Hastie’ for a hasty

Scotsman? He's obviously allegorical. This is just the thing for which I ticked-off the late Philip K. Dick in a *Foundation* review (that was before they chucked me off the reviewers' list). He wrote back in apoplexy saying that just because someone was called 'Luftteufel' I was not to translate it as 'air-devil' even if it was appropriate to the character (German Luft = air, Teufel = devil) because that would be 'Luftteufel', see, quite different, why didn't I look it up in the dictionary, they had ways of making ignorant swine like me use their eyes. I replied in my usual fluent grammatically perfect Hun, and the matter seemed to drop. But I suppose you'll be telling me that this figment of your imagination wasn't called 'Hasty', see, but 'Hastie', quite different, man's a fool...

"The other thought, which struck me much more forcefully and early, was that it's just the kind of thing you expect. Or rather, WE expect. Or some of us expect. The long and short of it all is summed-up in *Luke* 10, v.38-42, which I expect you have forgotten. It's the bit where Big J turns up somewhere and is invited home by Martha, and Martha has a sister called Mary who sits and listens to the word; at which Martha, run off her feet, comes and asks for a hand. But the boss says, 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.'

"In other words, Mary's in the right and poor old Martha can get on with the cooking. Now, if Martha had been a bit quicker, she could have sat down and listened to the word as well, in which case no-one would have got fed and it would have been a bit difficult to blow her up about it. However, no doubt she didn't think of that and got back to her job on her own. The moral of this tedious parable, as regards you and me, is that while the world is NOT divided into two types of person, there are still a lot of fairly extreme Marthas, and even more obvious Marys. The really irritating thing that emerges both from the Gospel according to St Luke and from *Prolapse-2* (though of course with much more literary finesse in the latter) is that the Marys are amazingly good at putting you in the wrong. You can have sweated for hours over something but if anything goes astray it's **your** fault and scores of people will gleefully tell you about it. Only those who've previously got stuck with that sort of job themselves will notice the things that have gone right, and they wouldn't grumble, anyway.

"I could cite parallel cases... However, the last remark I'll allow myself on this paranoid subject is that the Official Culture of this nation is very strongly pro-Mary; nice people, you know, who point things out, offer advice, who drift around the corner the moment grub is up and wonder why the Westons of this world are so ratty."

LEE HOFFMAN, 350 N.W. Harbour Blvd., Port Charlotte, Florida 33952
14 September 1983

Another prompt: Lee takes my point about 'spoilers' then recalls my 1977 visit to Florida for SUNCON, when we stood outside a toyshop in Boca Raton with me saying things like "my girls don't want any more rotten dolls" following which, with a perfectly straight face, Lee handed me a beautiful doll. Afterwards, in Maya, I had speculated whether Lee would still send me the next issue of her SF Five-Yearly (due in 1981) which in the event never arrived. Maybe I'd said something to upset her, I thought....

*Photo copyright
Andrew Porter*



Dear Peter:

"It's too bad I wasn't on that barbecue trip instead of Ian Hastie. Not only do I not drink beer (which would have left all the more for ones who do) but I'd have been a lot more fun to be with, and would have had a grand time, thereby adding to the overall ambience of the gathering.

"From what I've been hearing about modern fandom, especially in G.B., the old L.A. Insurgents (Laney & cohort) were sweetness and light by comparison. It really is a shame that words have the power to hurt that they do. The people who use them as weapons for the joy of inflicting pain are really an unfortunate lot. Essentially very unhappy people, who project their dissatisfaction with themselves onto externals, being dissatisfied with all kinds of things and people, and often really sincerely believing that by expressing their feelings the way they do, they are working for Change For The Better. It is our pity that they really deserve. They are as much their own victims as the people they attack. They suffer real pain over imagined causes. The failure to realise that they're projecting inhibits the possibility of their working through their own self-hatred. It is sad. I'm glad that Martin is capable of dealing with mail of that kind.

"I hope you know and have known all along that no apology for The Doll Incident is needed. That is one of my fondest memories of the convention and its aftermath. In case you actually do feel some misapprehension, I want you to know quite seriously just how I felt about it.

"As I recall it, while we were in the toyshop I saw these dolls which had been made by American Indians and dressed in their ethnic costumes. They struck me as having nice souvenir potential because they were symbolic of something that was authentically American. I made some comment about them to you. You answered to the effect that dolls were too common. I realised that what you had noticed was the "dollness," whereas what had interested me was the "American Indian-ness." To me, it was only incidental that they were dolls. I figured the fact of being specifically from America would make a neat gift, so I got one, all the while letting you go on your way without pointing out the aspect you'd overlooked.

“Then when we stepped outside the shop, you started to explain to me why you hadn’t wanted to get a doll. To my sense of the theatrical, you were giving me an absolutely perfect Straight Line, setting up one of those little bits of play that is just plain neat. It was too good to pass up, so I gave you the doll there and then, instead of later. Honestly, it never occurred to me that the situation might be the least bit embarrassing. And you really had given me a few words of explanation of why you didn’t want to buy a doll *before* I bought one, so there was no way what you said could possibly have been a put-down. I was forewarned. I understood the situation.

“As to the 1981 issue of *Science Fiction Five-Yearly*, you aren’t the only one not to get it. Not because you weren’t on the list. But from all reports, almost the entire mailing of that issue disappeared completely between the hands of the guest publisher and those grubby outstretched hopeful hands of the addressees. (My own theory is that Dan Steffan mistook a disused coal-chute for a mail box). Dan published the last issue of *SFFY* for me, and I got my copy and at least two or three other people received copies, but the overwhelming lack of response and many queries from people who were on the list has led me to conclude that there is a black hole in Dan Steffan’s post office. Either that, or the whole thing is an illusion. Anyone who actually believes themselves to possess a copy of that issue of *SFFY* should sell it to some huckster quick, before it disappears.”

DAVE LANGFORD, 94 London Road, Reading, Berks, RG1 5AU
19th August 1983

Yet another prompt: Dave seized on my remarks about the Manchester Dead Zone, the observed fact that nothing fannish has ever come out of Manchester, and any trufan who ventures into the Zone is forever lost.



Photo:
Greg
Pickersgill

Dear Peter,

“Let me be the 97th person to rush you my suspicion that Martin Tudor may have his Ashleys crossed. Was his KTF letter really from happy, gentle friendly Mike Ashley in Kent, ancient fan, miscompiler of *THE ILLUSTRATED BOOK OF SF LISTS* and much-remaindered anthologist? Or was it, as the style of the quoted bits implies, from vicious young punk bastard Michael Ashley of Surrey (and intermittently Leeds U), self-proclaimed iconoclast and scourge of fan-editors who fail to write about REAL, REAL, LIFE WITH THE WARTS AND ALL? To those who haven’t kept track of the fannish scene over the last – er, how long since *Speculation* folded? – it’s as confusing as the even more egregious irruption of a fake Bob Shaw.

“Don’t you think a fannish myth as potent as *Mancon-5* (Dante had nothing on it) is almost a worthwhile thing to have emerged from Manchester? And there, too, UK fandom learnt the lesson that to spend huge sums of money importing expensive US authors (Robert Silverberg) was no longer something any financially responsible convention could afford (Oh, sorry, *Seacon 84*, did I make a *faux-pas* there?)”

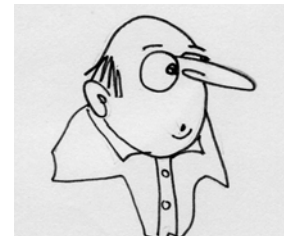
PAUL VINCENT, 25 Dovedale Avenue, Pelsall, Walsall, WS3 4HG
7th September 1983

Dear Peter,

“Hmm, yes, in the heady rush of activity and socialising which has been the lot of the Brummies since we disinterred you from that deep-freeze time capsule beneath New Street Station, I suppose it was easy to kid ourselves that everything in the garden was lovely. Then came the rude awakening in the shape of Ian Hastie and his gang of Barbarians. I don’t blame you for feeling annoyed when they turn around and hurl abuse at your good efforts, but don’t let them get you down. Some folks are never happy unless **they** are running the show, which is probably what underlies the present oafishness. Not that there’s any chance of them winning enough friends to do any real damage.

‘I don’t know much about this fandom thing but I CAN do a great job on your toenails.’

“Incidentally, you ask what has become of Alan Dorey. I can report that he is alive and (so he says) well, and has even got around to producing *Gross Encounters 11*, which he was flinging out to all and sundry at Silicon (having only completed it the night before). I hope he’s sent you a copy, since he has a bit of a dig at *Prolapse-1*. He seems to think the BSFG must have been in a really bad way if it had to dig **you** up before anything happened. No doubt you’ll have something to say on that score!”



*See my editorial comments about the descent of the Barbarian Horde upon our group. And I tried the old trick of ‘turning a poacher into the gamekeeper’ and it didn’t work. At the 1984 AGM the chiropodist Simon Norburn (Ian Hastie’s chief henchman) came onto the Group Committee, and he turned out to be completely useless, didn’t come to committee meetings, wouldn’t do anything. He just wanted to criticise the people who **were** prepared to have a go. As for Alan Dorey, he never did send me that fanzine so I’ve no idea why he didn’t like *Prolapse*. But then of course, he was living in Manchester at the time...*

IAN SORENSEN, 142 Busby Road, Clarkston, Glasgow, G76 8BG
16th September 1983

Saturday night at Albacon, and I was aimlessly wandering the corridors of the Central Hotel when I heard music. It was someone I'd never seen before, a slim young man playing piano and belting out a comic pastiche of well-known songs with great verve and enthusiasm. It was my first experience of Ian's rock-operas (or do I mean mock-operas?). Greatly admiring this new talent, I quickly introduced myself (he hadn't heard of me before, either) and we seemed to get on well. Ian quickly proved to be multi-talented and ever since has relentlessly sent me his fanzines, mostly with awful titles like the one below:



Photo:
Arnold
Akien

Dear Pete,

“This slightly late LoC for *Prolapse 1&2* is all your own fault. I hold you responsible for this ‘Brum avalanche’ I’ve been buried under. Much as I have enjoyed receiving and reading the zines (yours in particular, of course, it’s so, so...quaint) I have no sooner finished digesting one when another slips onto my plate. Give me a chance – I have managed to pub four issues in a year, you seem capable of doing the same in a day.

“I’d be interested to know a) why you are producing the type of zine you are, and b) why your very mild, friendly first ish met with such negative reaction. I must have missed something. Did you put messages in code, known only to old-timers in-between the lines?

“Thank you for your nice remarks about *Albacon II*. I must admit that I only read *THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR* a few days before the con, or I too would have been scratching my head and wondering what you were on about. I am one of the fans who Paul Vincent refers to as being interested mainly in con-fandom, but I have little interest in media or comics. I just like meeting people and doing silly things. It might be because I’m a teacher and it’s the only chance I get to let my hair down. Anyway, thanks again for the zines, and see you at *Novacon* where you might just be lucky enough to avoid getting *Mince the fourth, be with you.*”

LINDA KRAWECKE, 7A Lawrence Road, South Ealing, London W5
4th September 1983

Dear Peter,

“Thanks for the *Prolapses*. I must say that APA-B has a lot going for it as I’ve received various apazines and a lot of enthusiasm seems to be being generated.

“I’m sure that by now you’ve been enlightened to the fact that the Mike Ashley who sent the KTF-type loc to Martin is not the same Mike Ashley that you know. The new Mike is a younger fella, I assume student age. I remember him vaguely from *Yorcon-2* in 1981. His zine was being reviewed on the fanzine panel that year, which Greg was part of. I believe it was his first zine. It wasn’t bad, and though it wasn’t entirely slagged it was suggested that he could do better. Mike was present in the audience and when asked if he had any reply to the panel he shrugged. Obviously the shy type. Obviously not so shy in print. Not that this is uncommon... we all tend to put on a different mask in print. It’s just that since that time I’ve seen his name repeatedly in letter columns of fanzines and can’t recall him saying a good word yet. In fact, he’s become a cliché. Fanzine producers will approach each other at pubs or cons and ask, ‘have you had The Mike Ashley letter yet?’ to which the reply is a yawn or a shrug, and no more need be said.”



Photo:
Greg
Pickersgill

LUCY HUNTZINGER, c/o 1014 N. Tuckahoe St, Falls Church, Virginia 22046
24 September 1983

*And now a letter from a real firecracker (well, Lucy certainly is/was - this tenses thing gets difficult to manage, sometimes!) when I met her in San Francisco, a year or so after this letter was written. And I’m eternally grateful to Lucy for solving a minor mystery; did I or didn’t I send *Prolapse* to Ted White? The answer is that yes, I did, but it was somehow mysteriously spirited away...*

Dear Peter,

“I couldn’t help reading your fanzine. I didn’t mean to, honest. It just leapt into my hands as I was ransacking Ted White’s pile of current fanzines which are piled up around his typewriter. I was fatally hypnotised by the arcane and wonderful letters which floated before my eyes; never will I be free of their spell, the strangely compelling initials APA-B. Everyone in the apa appears to have sent their zines and I’m getting a pretty good impression of Dynamic Birmingham Fandom. You people sound like you know how to have a goodtime. I believe I prefer the apazines from Brum to the green-quarto thingies the London fans produce. I’m prejudiced, of course,

I'm the sort of person who prefers to see the local bands, who won't go to big rock concerts, who buys singles instead of LPs. **That** sort of person.

"Are you beginning to wonder why you've never heard of me? Aha! I will introduce myself, briefly, just for the hell of it. Subject of much controversy in Seattle & San Francisco fandom, due to unabashed high spirits, brutal honesty and fanzine-fanaticism. Travelled to the eastern half of the US on a pre-worldcon trip; my first time east of the Rockies. *ConStellation* was my first worldcon. I had a great time, including meeting Martin. I am now living in the famous Green Room (its walls are painted a hideous colour, ask Martin) at chez White. And I like opera, modern art, science fiction, flying and sailing, strange cocktails, short dresses, and dancing. There you go! Instant synopsis, trade edition to follow."

TERRY CARR, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, California 94611.
23 September 1983

Dear Pete,

"I felt quite taken-aback at not recognising the 'famous Freas cover' for *Martians Go Home!* In truth, I seemed to remember quite a different famous Freas cover for that story – a little green man looking through a keyhole – so I went and looked it up and sure enough, the cover I remembered was the one on that *Astounding*, all right.. But then I paged through the story itself and there among the interior drawings was the one on which you based your *Prolapse* cover. I doubt that you'd get any points in an SF trivia quiz this way!

"The above cavil notwithstanding, it was real good to receive a fanzine from you again, and I hope you'll keep sending 'em. The barbecue report seemed to go on far too long with practically minute-by-minute notations on what you did all day; the piece could and should have been a third of the length, to its betterment. I got the impression you wrote it mostly to demonstrate how much work you and the others had put into the affair and thus to castigate Ian Hastie for his behaviour, a task that shouldn't have taken three and a half pages.

"The letter column was the highlight for me, and I think as long as you're attracting letters from Langford, Edwards, Gillespie, Aldiss, LeeH and Atom, you needn't fret too much if you don't hear from Ted White.

"Fan-history musings; During much of the seventies, while I was working hard to establish myself financially as a free-lancer working out of California, I had comparatively little time to read all the fanzines I was receiving. Oh, I managed to read about half of them, in snatches here and there, but lots went into the To Be Read stack, and got covered up by later arrivals before I could get to them... by last year I had a stack about eight feet high "to be read." In the past year I've been going through that stack, picking out the best ones, and **making** time to read them. Thus it was that it was only recently that I read a bunch of issues of *Maya* and found what a first-rate fanzine I'd missed... including your column therein. So it may amuse you to know that while you apparently read much Terry Carr fanac as fanhistory when you first entered fandom, recently I've been reading some of your stuff in much the same light. It's nice getting caught up again. Let's both keep it that way."

Oh all right, Terry, so I was suffering from brain-sprain when I wrote that caption, after spending an hour or more tracing the illo onto stencil with a rusty nail. But you knew what I meant, didn't you! And how strange to think you might ever have regarded our activities in the same way as we remember the Tower of Beer-Cans to The Moon!

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

Arthur Thomson, who sent a half-dozen illos (some used in this issue) and said, "It's been nice getting these zines coming in from the younger Brumboys... their enthusiasm is contagious and it's interesting to see their writing styles develop." **Malcolm Edwards**, who noted that: "I think you've done old Mike Ashley an unintended injustice. I'm sure the person who wrote to Martin Tudor must have been Michael Ashley – a new fan and an entirely different person. Young Ashley has been going out of his way to be as obnoxious as possible to as many fans as possible. Old Ashley is still as amiable as ever." **Terry Hill**, who advised, "Don't confuse Ashley's KTF with 'Kent TruFandom.'" **David Redd** who sent a postcard saying "Pity you won't be in the market for any of those triffic Dave Langford stories, or anything by David Redd, even." **Patrick McGuire**, who asked in amazement, "Since a barbecue 40 miles from base *is* a major undertaking, why schedule such an event not even to shove-off until 7 pm? By the American conception a proper picnic starts around noon and lasts until maybe 10 pm." And finally, a strange letter from **Alexis Gilliland**, who wrote about someone called 'Aram Bakshian Jr., chief speechwriter to President Reagan,' who had stirred up trouble by describing rape as 'a cherished fantasy' among women. Somehow, I'll think I'll pass on that one, thanks, Alex. //

Do write in – letter or e-mail. A fanzine lives by the response it gets, so please send me a LoC for the next issue!



Photo copyright
Andrew Porter

"I fear I have reached that stage of finding old fanzines
more interesting than current ones" - Claire Brialey

Several weeks ago (yes, now we're back in 2006) I produced a few facsimiles of the earlier *Prolapses* and sent them to those who wanted them, including Steve Green. He commented: "Re-reading the first two issues of *Prolapse* after more than twenty years was akin to waking up following a riotous all-nighter in the *Novacon* bar: blurred fragments of memory floated into view, sometimes welcome, often not. I had, for instance, completely forgotten the boorish behaviour of that gormless wart Ian Hastie at the Brum Group barbecue, although it was a delight to be reminded what a hive of activity Midlands fandom developed into during the mid-1980s. It was rare indeed for there to be a gathering of some kind (either a formal BSFG meeting, one of the 'informals' or – a little later – a MiSFITs meeting) without at least one new fanzine doing the rounds. Happy days." So, having caught up with fabulous Birmingham fandom as far as the middle of August, 1983, you're probably wondering....

....And then what happened?

Renaissance and Counter-Reformation

Somewhere in an alternate Universe the Renaissance continued and the fourth British worldcon was run by the BSFG at the Birmingham ICC site in 1987 with Steve Green as Chairman. We had the people, we had the con-running experience, it could easily have worked out like that...

In *Empties*, Martin Tudor tells how the idea was born during one drunken night in his bed-sit with Steve and me during April 1983: "the fannish revival was in full swing, all three of us were heavily engaged in fanac of all descriptions, the atmosphere was electric, the world was our oyster, the hosepipes* were charging us with an almost supernatural energy – and we were all pissed out of our tiny skulls." Next day sobriety returned but the vision remained and in August Martin bravely set off to the *Constellation* worldcon to make the bid, carrying a pile of flyers featuring artist Pete Lyons' British Bulldog and the slogan, 'Britain's Still Fine in '89.'

He was robbed. "Before I could distribute more than a hundred or so flyers," said Martin, "I was accosted by the Secret Masters of Fandom, who said we were wasting our time in bidding for 1989 because Boston already had that sewn-up. However, they were in a position to make me an offer I couldn't refuse. They were not happy with the current bids for 1987, and said it would be to the benefit of all concerned if 'Britain were to be Heaven in Eighty Seven.' So I quickly convinced Colin Fine and the rest of the British contingent to help throw a launch party, and our bid was on the way."

Unknown to Martin, a few hours earlier those SmoFs had waylaid Malcolm Edwards with the same message. It probably wasn't too hard to persuade him. Later, they brought the two streams together, and the fourth British worldcon was launched to general acclaim. So much goodwill existed for a return to Brighton that both West Coast bids swiftly evaporated, and in 1985 Britain won almost unopposed as '*Conspiracy* '87,' after campaigning seriously for little more than a year. But Martin was side-tracked and left the committee early on. "If only I'd been in Baltimore," said Steve recently, "I think we could have pulled it off – and what a project *that* would have been for the BSFG!"



Photo: Arnold Akien



As a consolation prize Steve became Chairman of the 1984 *Novacon* and shook things up by moving out of the Royal Angus to the Grand, and climaxing with a wonderfully controversial 'presentation' to GoH Rob Holdstock that is still remembered today in some quarters (Steve protests it was a 'committee decision'). Maybe we'll re-visit that next time!

* Martin was introduced to the 'hosepipe' during his University days; an evil concoction in a pint mug, consisting of a bottle of Guinness, a double brandy, and a bottle of barley wine.

What of the villain, Ian Hastie? At the APA-B collating session in August, his pal Simon Norburn showed him *Prolapse-2* with my piece about the barbecue, which had taken place only a week or two before. Hastie stood there and read it with mounting outrage.

“You can’t write this about me,” he complained loudly.

“Why not,” I asked reasonably, “it’s all true, isn’t it?”

“This thing is just a yellow sheet,” he spluttered.

“Blue, actually,” I retorted, and left him making various threats of violence.

Who was he? Where did he come from? What was his problem? In Paul Vincent’s (and Dick Eney’s) words, we had experienced a ‘Barbarian Invasion,’ similar to the sort of influx that had washed over the larger British fandom in 1964. The Brum Group had around 100 members by this time and some of them were complete outsiders, unassimilated, people who had absolutely no conception of fandom and probably didn’t even know much about science fiction. Ian Hastie had blundered into our club and was dissatisfied because he wanted something we couldn’t give him. He didn’t want to produce fanzines or listen to Colin Kapp talk about nothing in particular for two-and-a-half hours (well, neither did we, really, but we did at least put up with it because it had some vague connection with SF). Ian Hastie would have been much happier in a rugby club, the Buffs, or a pub full of heavy drinkers with loud voices, and he probably found something like that since after a few more months he vanished, never to be seen again.

But I was delighted with the response to the second *Prolapse*. Answering Ian Sorensen’s question, I had deliberately set out to produce a retro-fanzine in the style of the early sixties, taking Tom Perry’s superb *Quark* as a role-model. As said in my third ‘Behind the Scenes’ column in *Vector*, I regarded humorous fanzines, when done well, as the finest specimen of fannish art. This was something I would have liked to have done in my fannish youth, if I had been able, and I was simply trying to put the clock back. Naturally, other survivors from the sixties approved, while more recent fans – Joseph Nicholas, Alan Dorey, some others from the ‘London lot’ as I described them – were not so keen. Regardless, I worked on a third issue. I scribbled notes for a piece about my first visit to the Edinburgh military tattoo, and how much the Walter Scott Monument looked like a Victorian step-rocket. I was going to write about a trip to Chicago, when I met Algis Budrys (who talked about bicycles) and went for late-night ice cream sundaes with Fred Pohl.... but never got that far.

Halfway through October my job blew up in my face. Since early 1980 I’d been running a small company, originally part of the Wilmot Breeden Group. There were only fourteen of us and it was profitable, but it had been sold to a local businessman along with another, closely-related sister company which was a major loss-maker. So, under pressure from his bankers, the boss put my operation up for sale – without telling me! Tipped-off by friends, I confronted him, asked if it was true, and then offered to buy the business myself.

“You haven’t got any money,” he said dismissively.

“No,” I said, with incredible bravado, “but I can borrow it.”

The result was that I was sent home in disgrace for being ‘disloyal.’

As you can imagine the next few weeks were extremely tense and worrying, while I ran around trying to interest various financial institutions in my situation. It took months to resolve all the issues involved and I didn’t finally sign the contract – and hand over a cheque for £350,000 – until January 12th in the New Year. While all this was going on I had little time for a fanzine, and put my *Prolapse* LoCs into a folder where they remained for the next twenty-three years.

I tried to keep up my involvement with the club, though there were no more ‘projects.’ Still, *Novacon-13* went off successfully at the Royal Angus, despite all the trouble earlier in the year from a committee that at first had been totally hostile to the parent group. I’d had some private misgivings about Phill Probert as chairman, but he seemed to do a good job this time (only to let the Group down badly with *Novacon-15*). A month later we had our Christmas Party, with Bob & Sadie Shaw as special guests and a menu that included ‘Roast Suckling Sandworm’ (joints of pork, which the chef had arranged in a spiral on a large platter). And in January of the New Year the BSFG held its AGM, which was the beginning of the end for the Birmingham Renaissance.

I’d always been aware that some members of the group were less than enthusiastic about the fannish revival – Vernon, Pauline & Chris Morgan, even Rog Peyton had taken no part in the previous year’s events. Now there was a reckoning, complaints, arguments, and while I was elected for another year as Chairman it was a mistake because I wasn’t able to give the group the attention it required. The magic was over; I had a dysfunctional committee which couldn’t get anything done, and after a lot of upset (as a result of which Stan Eling swore never to hold a committee post again) I eventually resigned in the following September. Rog took over, and for a long time afterwards my involvement with the BSFG was minimal. //

There's no doubt that APA-B was a success, a great way to encourage more involvement between members of the BSFG. The idea of having our own, local APA took off like wildfire, even among people who'd never tried their hand at any sort of fanzine work before. I managed to put something into each of the first three monthly 'mailings' and had clever ideas for *Prolapse* covers worked out in my head for months to come. But I was overtaken by events in the real world and had to abandon APA-B. What happened next was always a mystery to me, until ... **zip forward to 2006...** at a recent Group meeting I was delighted to find that someone had kept a diary, at least to 1989. William McCabe was a newcomer, back in 1983, and while he gets a few things wrong I was charmed by his honest and revealing account of how things seemed to an outsider, looking in. Forgive me, but I can't resist adding a few foot-notes.

Whatever happened to APA-B?

Or, William McCabe meets the Brum Group

Preamble

Sometime around the beginning of the 80s I was looking for something new to do about my lack of a social life. Rock shows were fine but it was rare that I talked to anyone, even at the smaller gigs in local pubs where the rest of the audience seemed to be composed of the workmates and families of the band. Theatre and Cinema were a great escape but there was little interaction. I never felt that I really managed to fit in at the pubs I went to.

I found a listing in the *What's On* guide. I don't remember too much of what it said but it had something to do with Science Fiction. This was promising. I knew what that was. I'd seen some of the movies, read some of the books. I could probably fake it. It was in a room above a bar so there couldn't be a whole lot to it. There wasn't. They had a guest speaker and an audience of about 20 or 30. I tried talking to people but, although they were polite, they didn't seem to care. This was only my first try. I shouldn't expect that much this quickly. I would try again.

Something must have seemed better because, within a couple of months, I paid the membership fee. 1983 was the year that the group decided to "get more in touch with fandom". There are stories that this came about because the group chairman (Pete Weston) had suggested that *Novacon* should try to make large (£500) profits to subsidise the group/ be run exclusively by local people. The backlash from this was apparent at the January AGM. There were rumours that *Novacon* would split from the BSFG. So the BSFG came up with the 'fannish' projects idea. *

It meant that there would be all kinds of 'projects' for people to join in with. At least, it should have done. I was just trying to get "in touch" with the group. Although it seemed to me that everyone knew each other, I was seeing this from an outsider's perspective. I thought that I could get in to this group by joining in on one or other of their projects. I had already failed to find the garage where they assembled their float for the Lord Mayor's show the previous year. Maybe I should have called up first.

* No, No, No! (sigh). William, you have it exactly 180 degrees wrong! The BSFG had been taking *Novacon* profits for years and – while there was nothing particularly wrong with that – by the time I took over the Chair the Brum Group was deeply unpopular among large parts of fandom because we were perceived as doing nothing very positive with the money. I was trying to change all that, by 'putting something back into fandom' and by balancing our books so the group paid for itself. As for *Novacon*, it was always meant to be run by locals, but by the time I took over as chairman, the incumbent committee (who had already been appointed the previous November) were seemingly determined to cast themselves loose from the Group's control. You obviously didn't realise that I was fighting several different rearguard actions at the same time, while trying to nudge the Group into a different path, one that would pull it together and bring it more into contact with the fannish mainstream.

The first project announced was the 'APA'. Despite having hardly any idea what this was – there was a page or so of explanation in the newsletter – I figured that I should try my hand at it. In the months before the APA started I managed to get the office to agree to let me use the photocopier to reproduce the thing and even managed to get hold of an existing 'fanzine' – although I can't remember which it was now or whether there was more than one. The final "Invitation to join" suggests the nature of the group's involvement. Despite membership of the BSFG being required, the group will do nothing to help with the production of any of the contributions, "although we're sure that various members will co-operate with each other in duplicating." If there was any 'co-operation' I never heard of it. *

June 1983

The first issue of the APA was collated at the June meeting of the BSFG on the table used by the speaker (Barrington J. Bayley). There are nine separate contributors including Peter Weston's *Prolapse* – an 11-page effort that is apparently his first fanzine in years – and Simon Norburn's *TOS* – his first attempt at this sort of thing, although he doesn't seem to want to stay (the initials stand for "Throw out Simon"). Neither of these will still be there after September. There are members who have never read fanzines, those who have produced their own for years, and those who are already in a few other APAs. There's even the odd one that seems to have posted in his contribution.

The second month is even bigger than the first. Fifteen contributions and only one of the originals not present. But this is almost the end of the initial enthusiasm. There's a larger page-count in the third mailing (100 pages!) but less contributors. People are already starting to drop out. The size of the mailing falls – November is the only other month this year with more than 50 pages.

Collating the APA at the BSFG meetings isn't working either. The regular meetings go on long enough to mean it doesn't start until late, so the attending contributors aren't that happy. The rest of the group don't like it because they're used to congregating around that table (the only place other than the bar with space for glasses). Never mind, the group now has a new informal meeting at the end of the month in a local pub. The collation can be done there with no trouble. Actually, there's some question about the status of this meeting. It's referred to as the 'informal informal' or the 'second informal' by some (another 'informal' group meeting has already been running for some months), or the MiSFiTs by others (mostly Martin Tudor and friends). **

Some years later, I was told that this was also a meeting of a group from Solihull and they thought it was their idea. It's possible that different people were told different stories. Either way, once the APA collation moved here, this was little more than a regular meeting for the APA members. Certainly, some never came but most of those present were usually members.

1984

The BSFG's accounts at their AGM in January caused complaints about the APA. It seems that it had cost the group £28.00 and certain members didn't like it. There were comments within the group saying this was too much for something that most of them had nothing to do with. This started a movement within the APA to break from the BSFG. ***

The decline in membership continued through 1984. Four more left in the first three months with only one new member. Several more announced they would quit but continued to contribute sporadically. The monthly average was 6 contributions and 22 pages but in May there were only three magazines and seven pages. Martin Tudor spent around half a page explaining why he intended to leave. His biggest complaint was the lack of "new blood" and "interesting material." A month or two later I referred to this as "his own parting shot at the organisation".

* Well, some of us **did** help each other but with memories of PaDs in mind (something you wouldn't have known about, William) we specifically wanted members to make the effort to produce their own zines. Too much spoon-feeding prevents you from getting that full sense of commitment!

** Steve Green comments, "MiSFiTs = Mercian Science Fiction Triangle. The 'General Wolfe' (our main home) was in Aston, within the ancient kingdom of Mercia, plus Martin was – still is, probably – a huge Marilyn Monroe fan and The Misfits was her final film. Hence the later convention, MiScon, and its successors."

*** The members who complained were those who had been most opposed to the whole fannish revival and who had taken no part in the APA. As outgoing Chairman I vigorously rejected their criticisms. At the time this really annoyed me because considering the energy, enthusiasm and sense of involvement the APA had engendered (and set against the surpluses from Novacon), I rather thought we could afford that £28.00 or even ten times as much.

With the growing distance between the APA and the BSFG, one of the things that would have to change was the name. APA-B was an obvious reference to the group and it would have to go. A contribution at this time from Administrator Cath Easthope includes the following reply to my earlier comment;

“When talking about Martin Tudor, you referred to APA-B as the ‘organisation.’ I like it, it sounds slightly disreputable, as if it were a mafia front company or something. What do you think of ‘The Organisation’ as the new name for the APA? Does anyone have any other ideas?”

I don’t think anyone had actually thought of a new name before then. I hadn’t thought of it as a name when I wrote it. Either way, although it took a while, the new name caught on. Other changes were coming through. Cath had been ill a lot around this time and frequently didn’t show up for the collation meetings. Eunice Pearson, as deputy, had been doing the job of administrator. In August, Eunice announced that, in the absence of any other offers, she would now be taking over the job properly. Strangely enough, the previous month Joy Hibbert had proposed an election for the post and said she would stand. It’s probably a good thing that this offer was ignored at the time. Joy was one of the few members that lived outside of Birmingham and had yet to make it to any of the collation meetings (a.k.a. the MiSFiTs). Even worse, this would probably have meant a premature break with the BSFG. They were already complaining about costs and this would mean every mailing being posted out. Eunice started an advertising campaign. There should have been ads in *Locus* and *Ansible* and there was a whole page in the *Novacon-14* Programme book.

1985

The membership of the APA is moving away from the BSFG. There are new members from Southend, Sheffield and Suffolk. Within a couple of months, half the members are from outside the Birmingham area. People start to complain about having to be BSFG members to be members of the APA. BSFG membership is five pounds per year at this time and the ‘benefits’ are a discount on the price of admission at meetings – something those who live outside the area don’t use – and a monthly *Newsletter* that no-one seems to think worth the trouble. An early poll on leaving the BSFG gets little response and the results are open to interpretation. Although most of the votes cast are in favour of leaving, non-votes are taken as a vote for the status quo, in which case the vote is to stay.

Martin Tudor re-surfaces in June – his only appearance that year – with an explanation of the BSFG committee’s view of the APA. According to him, the committee has gone from enthusiastic incompetence under Peter Weston to general apathy under Rog Peyton. They are willing to pay the expenses for the APA but they don’t want to support non-BSFG members. They don’t mind non-members being in the APA as long as they pay their own way. The following month’s *Newsletter* carries an announcement that “On Tuesday the 9th of July, The Organization split from the BSFG.” It also promises a full report to appear the following month – this never appears and the matter is never mentioned again.

**Character assassination,
that’s what it is!**



With the new members there seem to be particular themes developing. Nick Mills shares Steve Green’s taste in movies. Chuck Connor’s references to obscure records are partially picked up by Simon Lake although in his case the range seems confined to a particular line of independent label material. Simon seems to share a political style similar to Joy Hibbert – a not-quite-radical righteous indignation over various alternative ideals. There are pieces on animal rights/vegetarianism and AIDS. Somehow we even have our first overseas member – Jean Weber in Australia.

I suspect I haven’t seen all the material from this period. There are mailing comments on a letter from Rog Peyton in the early part of the year and a poll from Eunice Pearson on the rules of the APA after the break from the BSFG, yet I have never seen either document. The most likely reason for this is that I have been collecting the mailing at the monthly MiSFiTs meeting and not getting anything that has been posted out. This causes some friction at one point. Because there aren’t enough copies to go round at one meeting and we have a visitor from the USA who wants a copy, I agree to wait until the next meeting for my copy of one mailing. Eunice decides to mail it out instead and expects me to pay for the postage but (partly on principle) I never get around to it.

Phil Probert (partner of Eunice Pearson), who contributed to the APA as “Zoltan,” his dog, is the Chairman of the 1985 *Novacon*. Things go very badly for *Novacon* that year and all of it is laid at Phill’s door. Programme items happen late or not at all. The equipment for the film programme isn’t ordered and details aren’t passed to

anyone (including the projectionist) until the day before the con ... A joke award, CUFF ("The Concrete Overcoat Fan Fund") for the fan you'd most like to see in a "concrete overcoat" goes to Phil Probert at the closing ceremony, and he and half the committee walk out. Neither he nor Eunice are seen again for years. *

Since Eunice is still administrator for the APA at this point, things are difficult. Cath Easthope is collecting contributions and taking them out to Eunice but nothing is given out at the meetings. Because of the earlier problem, nothing is being posted out to me.

1986

Around this time I remember a meeting between several of the APA members (myself, Cath, Peter-Fred Thompson(?) and some others (Christina Lake?) who drove out to Chelmsley Wood to see Eunice and deliver a mailing that had been collated at the MiSFiTs. ** Since we could not get a reply, the mailing (along with a few notes) was just pushed through the door. I got the impression that other members were having trouble communicating with Eunice. The breakdown could not have been total since, in February, Eunice called an election. Steve Green became the new administrator and Eunice disappeared.

I still have not seen mailings from November 85 to February 86 and I don't really know what was in them. The most important item seems to be the cause of the 'feud' between Joy Hibbert and Chuck Connor. By March, Joy is saying that she's said all that she is going to on the matter and Chuck is saying nothing at all. About all I've worked out apart from that is that Joy has promised not to communicate with Chuck in any way.

The MiSFiTs meetings are fading fast. The pub where they were held has been closed and the new venue is much more crowded and not at all suitable for collating a stack of A4 paper. In June, Steve Green decides to shift the deadline to the end of the month rather than the date of the meeting. In September, he tells us he can't continue as admin. either, and passes the job to Joy Hibbert. Although Joy immediately calls an election, this does little more than rubber-stamp her appointment. She wins by 5 votes to 1.

This change of administrator marks a watershed in many ways. There is a purge of members who haven't contributed – 3 in the first month, and all of them voted for Joy – followed by an amnesty when Joy realises how few members have been contributing. Chuck Connor's name simply disappears from the membership list.

October's mailing contains a 4-page contribution from Martin Tudor (his last-ever appearance). This is where he presents his version of the creation of the MiSFiTs. It reads as if the first meeting was something between him and Paul Vincent. His description of the event isn't that different from my own memory. I certainly felt like I wasn't there for that part of the conversation. I suppose this is just his assertion of rights over the name "MiSFiTs" now that the meetings no longer happen. I heard that he revived the name in later years. I was even told where the meeting was on one occasion.

The APA is now purely postal. There is no social meeting except for the odd one at a convention. In some ways, that's a great pity. November includes Rob Gregg's last contribution and an announcement of his death on the admin. page.

1987

The character of the APA changes to some degree with the administrator and with events. The initial membership had come from the BSFG. Despite all of its proclaimed intentions, the BSFG never really belonged to 'fandom.' Certainly, the group organises conventions and various members have produced fanzines over the years but most of the group don't have anything to do with this. Apart from those who joined at the beginning, few (if any) have joined the APA. By the beginning of 1987, only a couple of APA members regularly turn up at BSFG meetings (Steve Green and myself). A second wave from the time of the MiSFiTs (although most of them didn't come to the meetings) seemed to have some kind of fandom connection, although the connection wasn't as direct as it might be. Most of those are gone. Of 23 contributing members in 1986, only 5 contribute more than once in 1987, and only 2 will survive into 1988. APA-membership went from 22 in October 1986, to 12 in February 87.

* Here's Dave Langford's report in *Ansible-45 (Feb '86)*: "I was a guest but nobody wanted me to do anything before a talk scheduled 48 nail-biting hours into the con. [...] Obligatory programme collapse was hastened by the non-appearance of various promised speakers such as Robert Rankin. As time oozed gently by, appalling rumours did the rounds: surely Chris Chivers hadn't learned only days before that he was (a) coming, and (b) organizing the sound systems? Surely Gerald Bishop didn't discover only at *Novacon* that he was supposed to be showing films all Saturday night? Fans were not deterred from having fun (apart of course from those who suffered the Langford speech. "Too humorous" -- *Brum SF Group Newsletter*), but the committee bared their teeth at one another, quite a lot. [...] Earlier memories of Sunday night are mercifully few. Cap'n Probert and First Mate Eunice (plus sister Carol) were over the side and swimming hard at first sight of enemy COFF awards, leaving the rest of the committee glazedly watching *Novacon* go down on an even keel."

** For some reason the word 'blitzkrieg' comes to mind!

Joy tries to keep up membership by getting in friends and acquaintances from outside fandom. New contributors seem to come from around Stoke-on-Trent and are more likely to show up at a "Gay Pride" march than a convention – one writer at a GP march refers to all of the APA being there (a gross exaggeration). Some very strange opinions are expressed – I remember someone explaining that you couldn't be working class **and** left wing – and an odd sense there was some kind of 'Party Line' to it all.

I thought the 'Party Line' was
a queue for the drinks!



This was also the year of the Brighton Worldcon. There is a sudden surge of interest in this sort of fannish activity before the con, and a surge of new members from May onwards (6 in July alone). There are more overseas members – 3 from Europe (although none manage a third contribution), and one each from the U.S. and New Zealand. By the end of the year we have a full complement (25 members) and a waiting list. This is the beginning of a computer age. There is a lot of talk about the early Amstrad word processors, BBC computers, and programs like Locoscript. In extreme cases there are JANET mail addresses, and shots from the 'Earthlight' bulletin board. Several contributions are printed on dot matrix printers using unusual (even undecipherable) fonts.

1988

The year begins with the protests over the Local Government Bill or, more precisely, one particular clause that forbids local government to use money to "promote homosexuality." Although the APA has moved on from its 1987 emphasis on 'gay politics' – Joy is the only one who has continued to focus on the subject – there is a lot of support for the protest.

This was also a year of two elections. I'm not sure exactly why, but I suspect that the first (held in March) was supposed to have been delayed from the end of the previous year. The candidates in both were Joy Hibbert, Kev McVeigh, and myself. After having polled only one vote (my own) in every previous election, I decided that, if I didn't do better in the December election I was going to quit trying. I had even been promised someone else's vote this time around. Sure enough, the results came in and once again I had only received one vote. I haven't stood in an election since. December was Joy's last month as administrator as Kev won that election.

1989

Kev McVeigh was not a success as administrator. First there were complaints about the way the mailing arrived – in badly torn envelopes or Post Office plastic wrappers because the envelope had come open in transit. In April, Kev decided he couldn't continue because of work commitments / emotional problems / ill health. He also had a very public row with Joy over money she had withheld when he took over as administrator. I can't be sure whether there was a May mailing. I don't have an admin sheet for it so it's possible that it was mixed with the June bundle. Joy's last contribution comes in June and is entitled "Without the aid of a mailing" (although it includes mailing comments). There is a lot of anger directed at Kev in there, but no mention of the forthcoming change of admin. It's quite possible she never knew he was standing down.

The only declared contender for the job is a combined entry from Jenny Glover, Terry Moran, and Charles Stross, known as the 'Leeds Mob.' They take over without any opposition. Maybe it's a sign of the popularity of the APA or the bitterness between some of the members but, with Joy's departure, there's only one member left from before 1987. On the other hand, in January of this year, Mic Rogers contributes for the first time. She is still a regular contributor fourteen years later. Maybe this is a sign that things are quieter now. //

COLLECTORS' ANONYMOUS – No.1 in a continuing series of true confessions;

Hello, my name is Peter. I collect science fiction books. I think I knew I had the habit bad when one of my best friends said he was going to kill himself. He was the one who brought me into the local fan club and had let us hold our meetings in his flat. One day he told us that he wanted to die because his girl-friend had dumped him. He asked Rog Peyton and me around for his 'suicide party.' We had a nice Chinese meal and then my friend told us to help ourselves to his SF collection before he put his head in the gas-oven that night. So I took his copy of IN SEARCH OF WONDER which I'd always wanted, then filled some carrier bags with his collection of *New Worlds* while Rog took his best Gnome Press editions. We said goodbye to our friend and walked away with our bags of books. I did feel a bit guilty. "That poor sod is going to kill himself tonight," I said. "No, he won't," said Rog confidently. This was a really bad thing to do and I am very sorry now. //

From a concept by 'Malcolm Edwards', who asked, "What is your single most embarrassing collecting moment – the one where you knew that any reasonable outside observer would conclude that you had lost your marbles completely? Do please send me your own most intimate secrets for exposure in future issues of *Prolapse!*"

A month or so back in our secret e-mail group, Sandra Bond said somewhat smugly that she had a complete run of Prolapse (all two of them) and also the rare Prolapse Mailing Comments, a single-sheet of comments for APA-B that came out in the month between the two full issues. “Ah, APA-B!” Sandra sighed fondly, “what a peculiar little offshoot of fandom that developed into. I even served as Administrator for a year myself in 1990-1, by which point it had already long been renamed 'The Organisation'.” Well, I wasn't going to let her leave it there, was I? So after a few weeks of relentless nagging, Sandra was induced to explain what she meant in a piece that neatly carries on from William McCabe's earlier revelations, even if their memories don't quite agree on some details.

‘What a peculiar little offshoot of fandom...’

Sandra Bond explains

When I wanted to know about APAs, I turned to Vince Clarke. This is scarcely surprising, since when I wanted to know anything about fandom in 1987, I turned to Vince Clarke.

I didn't know, of course, that Vince himself had been a co-founder of the first British APA, The Off-Trails Magazine Publishers Association, back in the fifties, or that OMPA had flourished through to the late sixties and then entered a long, slow decline until its final expiry some ten years later, so little remarked by fans of the day that even now it's unclear just when it gave up the ghost. I didn't know about the subsequent re-invention of the British APA by expatriate American Linda Krawecka a few years later, or the sudden inexplicable urge of British fannish fans circa 1983 to join APAs which led to the founding of half a dozen of the things.

I didn't even know how an APA functioned, and spent some time poring over the very brief entries I could find in my SF encyclopaedias trying to figure it out. It all seemed very complex. But what I did know was that APAs were a part of fandom, and a long-standing part at that, and seduced by passing descriptions of how many early SF writers had been in FAPA, I turned, as aforementioned, to Vince.

And Vince, genuinely delighted to help along a neophyte who was so evidently keen on fannish culture, even if somewhat indiscriminating in shovelling it all aboard, wrote back. He told me how he'd founded OMPA and his disappointment on returning to fandom a few years ago when he found that not only was OMPA no more, but that an orange box containing the first five years' mailings had gone missing from his attic somewhere in the timeline between 1961 and 1982. He explained how an APA worked, which was more than Peter Nicholls or Brian Ash had ever done for me. And he regretted that he didn't really know what was going on in British APAs, since he was a member of none, but pointed me at Steve Green “who I know has been active in the past”.

I fired off a letter to Steve, and heard back from him that he was cutting down on his apahacking, but if I wanted to join one, he suggested that the best one for a young fan like myself might be The Organisation, of which the organiser was Joy Hibbert, of Stoke on Trent. Steve may now be surprised to learn, at this remove of time, that it was he who first put me in contact with Joy and set my life onto a path that was very different from what it might have been otherwise.

Young and innocent as I was then, the name of Joy Hibbert was unknown to me, though to the rest of the fannish world it was all too well known. She had folded her fanzine *Sic Biscuit Disintegraf* just in time to avoid being sent the first issue of my *Nowhere Fast*, but her copious and frequent letters of comment were still a feature of fandom in 1987, as were her appearances at conventions; a large woman with a perennial, almost tangible, low-energy hum permanently surrounding her and the darkest pair of brown eyes I've ever seen on a human being. Opinionated, verbose, terminally disenchanted with everything fannish yet still enamoured of the broader church of fandom and fanzines, Joy could and did switch from kindness to venom at the drop of a hat, or – more commonly – the drop of one wrong word. But when not blinded by her prejudices or by contrariness, she was frighteningly intelligent and, what was more, incisive. APAs could have been made for Joy.

I won't discuss her personality further here, since the record shows that I went on to become first of all a close friend of hers, and then more still, until the inevitable crash in 1994 which led to my name heading her list of hatred until her untimely death. Suffice it to say that she wrote back to me, enclosing various over-runs from The Organisation, and invited me to join the waiting list to become a member, an invitation which I accepted with alacrity. A few months later, in 1988, I made it to the top of the list and full membership, and began to receive entire mailings instead of mere leftovers. *

There was little to suggest that only five years earlier The Organisation had been APA-B, the official APA of the Brum Group. Peter Weston can no doubt tell better than I of the first few mailings when he and most Birmingham fanzine fans of the day were members (though, as was pointed out by mischief-makers at the time, Rog Peyton put his *Land of Laughs* through Frank's Apa instead, and never had a thing in APA-B). The APA began to haemorrhage Brummies almost from the start, and within a couple of years the last couple, founding editor Cath Easthope and her successor and my brief correspondent Steve Green, had left, leaving only one member from the Brum Group in the shape of William McCabe, a strange almost Cliff Teague-like fellow who had had little or no contact with fandom prior to joining the APA but who not only stuck with it doggedly, but even went on to do a few issues of a general circulation fanzine, *Song to Anything That Moves*.

And Joy, of course, who though not a Brummie *per se*, lived only a few miles away in Stoke and whose *Lilith's Child* had first appeared as early as the second mailing. Joy had taken over as Administrator (or Godparent, as it was known in TO) several months before my advent, and had single-handedly turned round the APA from being a stagnating affair to a vibrant and even bustling place whose monthly mailings were usually full of opinion and debate on everything under the sun.

It wasn't Joy who first recruited non-Brummies, of course; Darroll Pardoe had been a member from the start, perhaps trading on his origins in Stourbridge fandom, and in the first few years members such as Naval fan Chuck Connor (*Big Eyed Beans From Venus*) were recruited, as were prolific second-rank 80s fan-artist Dave Collins and prolific second-rank 80s fan-writer Philip Collins, these last two, unrelated despite their surnames, putting out a joint apazine called *Collins Inc*.

But Joy, as already noted, was a prolific correspondent, and her disinterest in most faanish matters led her to be more interested in the less hard-core fans and fanzines, many of whom were younger than average or at least less experienced in fandom. So it was that many of the Knew Mutants, of whom I've written elsewhere, came to be members of TO, such as Steve and Jenny Glover who were both prolific contributors to the APA, as was Tommy Ferguson of Belfast who contributed *Thingy*.

Via Tommy, what seemed like the whole of Young Belfast Fandom joined up in TO: there was Eugene Doherty with *The Obdurate Duplicator*, the machine in question for which his apazine was named formerly belonging to Walt Willis, no less. There was Peter Dunn, fanatic Patrick McGoohan obsessive, whose apazine's title *The Butler Did It* was by far its best feature. And with a variety of titles such as *Space Doubt*, and with a mop of blond hair on head and face ("Is that a beard or did someone throw a cat at you?"), there was Joe McNally, indisputably the APA's most entertaining writer in a gonzo speedfreak way, posting ninety mile an hour rants about his then-employers, a Belfast newspaper, and anything else that came under his beady eye. Joe went on to more congenial employment with *Fortean Times* and got to commission articles from Dave Langford about Eric Frank Russell.

Another member who resembled Joe, in both hairstyle (slightly darker but equally frizzy and copious) and in professional writing potential, was the editor of a computer-printed apazine named *Death Squad*, one Charles Stross. Even in 1988 Charlie already had his sights set on pro-writer status and turned out his apazines in between huge quantities of unsaleable stories –then, at any rate – which led the Leeds fans of the day to make rather a figure of fun of him. Charles, I am sure, laughed all the way to the bank. Or to his multiple recent Hugo awards, at any rate. I wonder whether I'd get any bids if I put my run of *Death Squad* up on eBay?

There was Edinburgh's Jane Carnall, who was a very 'out' young lesbian (much to my discomfiture back in those unenlightened days) who was more interested in writing homoerotic stories about Kirk and Spock, or worse still, characters who weren't even from an SF series, like Bodie and Doyle. In my first contribution I wrote a

* If I can interrupt for a moment, I'll just mention that Joy Hibbert and I took one look at each other and decided we weren't going to get on at all. I found her letters and mailing comments to be invariably wrong-headed, seeming to miss the point of whatever topic was under discussion, and she appeared to have no trace of any sense of humour. Here's a silly little example; in the first *Prolapse* I quoted three different definitions of my title, deliberately (and for effect) omitting the most obvious and well-known meaning. The irony of course went right over Joy's head; she solemnly admonished me that "what words mean in a dictionary is often irrelevant to what they mean in real life." Gosh, I thought, you don't say! Then I saw some of that 'venom' coming out and decided to keep well clear. You did well, Sandra, to last out seven years.

mailing comment to her, challenging what I perceived as a reverse-sexist remark, but then my courage failed me and I corflued it out before running off the stencil, which led to Jane asking me what I'd suppressed at regular intervals for years before I finally confessed. Somehow or other, Jane and I became friends nevertheless.

And then there was Kev McVeigh, always a prickly fellow, who became the first of the neofans whom Joy had recruited to fall out with her. Hypocritically, I kept on the sidelines of this one to begin with, since at the time I was trying to keep on the good side of both, a tightrope which very soon proved impossible to walk and led to my entering a full-blown and very silly feud with Kev. It was, with hindsight, probably unwise of me to write for the APA a parody of the 'Not The Nine O'clock News' sketch 'Constable Savage' and call it 'Constable McVeigh', in which McVeigh was carpeted by his superior for constantly arresting Joy on "ridiculous, trumped up and ludicrous charges like 'walking on the cracks in Wilf James' logic' and 'walking around with an offensive life'".

I confess that I no longer recall the pretext for Kev and Joy's row, but I do recall that it led to Kev quitting the APA forthwith and Joy being defeated in an electoral vote for Godparent by Jenny Glover. There was much electioneering about minac quotas and the status of the 'envelope account', a small sum of money mainly comprising funds from ex-members who had failed the said minac quotas and which was used to buy mailing wrappers. Joy had, it was alleged, been using recycled envelopes for the mailings when there was money in the fund to buy new ones. It all seemed very silly.

William McCabe stood as a third candidate in this election and received one vote, mine. I'd met William at my first *Novacon* and, while he had a reputation for being something of a social leper, I actually found him rather fascinating, a little birdlike man with glasses who spoke in a quiet monotone but who knew about a lot of things other than science fiction. After that *Novacon* meeting I bumped into Rob Hansen in the bar and, to make conversation, told him "I've just been talking to William McCabe and he was telling me all about Richard Burton." Rob's reaction was spectacular: he leapt in the air, his hair frizzed out, his jaw dropped, and he exclaimed in a squeak "What the hell does HE know about Richard Bergeron?!"

By now I was a student at University College London, and when Jenny Glover looked round for a volunteer to take over running the APA, I stood forward. For 1990-1991 I was Godparent of The Organisation. The feeling of power was... underwhelming. I got to collate the mailings once a month, moan at people who didn't send enough copies, and generally smooth ruffled feathers.

I recruited, of course, or tried to. I hauled in former APA-B member Eunice Pearson, new and enthusiastic London fan John D. Rickett, and another Londoner, Nina Watson. Then came a feud which pretty much destroyed my enjoyment of the APA. One member whose name I'd better not mention had been cheerfully writing about his experience with magic mushrooms and other dubious substances. Another member, newcomer Nick Atty of Cheltenham, pitched a fit, wrote a viciously prim and self-righteous mailing comment about how the use of illegal drugs was immoral and damaging the fabric of the country, or some such twaddle, and finished up with a barely veiled threat to shop the first member to the police if he ever wrote about the subject again in an apazine.

Fans being both libertarian and anti-censorship on the whole, this led to vast amounts of negative feedback being heaped on the helpless Atty's pointy head, and the issue threatened to consume the whole APA for two or three months despite Atty's only real supporter being his brother Steve.

By now I was approaching my final year and had also been co-opted onto the *Mexicon* committee, so I was glad enough to palm off the Godparenthood onto Tommy Ferguson, and it wasn't too long after before I gave up entirely.

Several years later I dropped back in for a brief visit. A few of the old names were there still, including the perennial William McCabe and the Atty brothers, but somehow it didn't seem the same and my renewed membership didn't last long. As someone remarked, you cannot put your hand into the same water twice, and for me The Organisation was so much a part of my late teens and early twenties that I couldn't put myself back into the same frame of mind. Too much had changed, either about me, about the APA, or both. The Organisation no longer made me an offer I couldn't refuse. //

Thank you, William and Sandra, and that's probably as much as we really want to know about The Organisation, although I understand it has continued until the present time. How strangely things turn out, sometimes!

THE FINAL ROUND-UP

While this issue hasn't turned out quite the way I expected, I've had a lot of fun in putting it together. More than anything it has been a vehicle for those long-lost letters but perhaps it also may serve as a small piece of British fan-history. Artwork this time from Steve Green & Arthur Thomson. Planned for the next issue is 'Weir Tales', another symposium culled from the e-list, and 'I Remember Brumcon,' in which the time-machine goes back even further, to what I'd like to regard as my first convention in 1959, even though I wasn't actually there. And we'll see what sort of postbag *this* issue brings in! //