

THEN

Science Fiction Fandom in the UK: 1930-1980

This PDF sampler of *THEN* consists of the first 48 pages of the 454-page book – comprising the title and copyright pages, both introductions and the entire section devoted to the 1930s – plus the first two pages from the Source Notes, with all the 1930s notes.

To read more about the whole book (available in hardback, trade paperback and ebook) please visit <http://ae.ansible.uk/?t=then>.

Other Works by Rob Hansen

The Story So Far ...: A Brief History of British Fandom (1987)

THEN 1: The 1930s and 1940s (1988)

THEN 2: The 1950s (1989)

THEN 3: The 1960s (1991)

THEN 4: The 1970s (1993)

On the TAFF Trail (1994)

THEN

Science Fiction Fandom
in the UK: 1930-1980

ROB HANSEN

Ansible Editions • 2016

THEN
Science Fiction Fandom in the UK: 1930-1980
FIRST BOOK PUBLICATION

Published by
Ansible Editions
94 London Road, Reading, England, RG1 5AU
<http://ae.ansible.uk>

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Cover photograph: Convention hall and stage backdrop at BULLCON, the 1963 UK
Eastercon held at the Bull Hotel in Peterborough. Photograph taken by Bruce Burn;
backdrop design by Mark Ashby to specifications devised by Ken Slater. *Back cover:*
Science Fiction League membership certificate issued to Walter Gillings *circa* 1935.

ISBN 978-1-326-75326-9 (hardback)
ISBN 978-1-326-36675-9 (trade paperback)

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Dedication

For A. Vincent Clarke –
collaborator, chief researcher, and friend –
without whom this history would not exist.

Introduction

by Peter Weston

I recently wrote that Rob Hansen is “our Bede, our Roger Bacon”, which probably confused a few in the Overseas Territories who are not entirely familiar with either of those two old BNFs. But to recap, “the Venerable Bede” (to give him his full job-title) was a Northumbrian monk who from 700 A.D. onwards wrote a number of fantasy trilogies which shed light on a period of early English history that would otherwise have been unknown. Roger Bacon, of course, you already know about, since as keen science fiction fans we’ve all read James Blish’s *Doctor Mirabilis*. Haven’t we?

However the point I’m trying to make is a very real one; without Rob we would know almost nothing about British fanhistory, whereas thanks to him we know just about everything. Take our first fan-meeting, for instance – organised by Wally Gillings, it was held on 27th October 1930 in the house of George and Mary Dew, at 32 Thorold Road, Ilford. Six people were present and tea and crumpets were served at 7.30 pm.*

These days every British fan with the slightest self-awareness (and many Americans, too) will be familiar with Rob’s fanhistory, first published in four volumes as *Then* and later transferred to his website. It’s a truly amazing thing, and something of a minor miracle that it ever came to be written.

Now let’s backtrack nearly fifty years, to my own first convention. By today’s standards it was a pretty hopeless affair but nonetheless it made a very deep impression. I was hooked; I wanted to know more. How long had these conventions been going on? Nobody knew. My pal Cliff Teague had the mad idea that we neos should produce some sort of “history” of British fandom, but no one was interested and we quickly abandoned the project.

Like the Anglo-Saxons of Bede’s time we were living in the eternal present, only vaguely aware of past greatness and for the most part evincing little curiosity about our lowly state. And for some reason our time-spans were peculiarly telescoped so that someone like Ken Cheslin, who’d been around for just five years or so, was considered to be an “old fan”, while fanzines from the late fifties – if you could find them, and you couldn’t – were regarded as ancient relics.

A few years later I made a much more determined effort to pin down this “convention” business and nagged dear old Ken Bulmer – who we thought was a very old fan indeed – into writing down all the past events he could remember. He didn’t do a bad job of it, only forgetting Kettering in 1957, and his timeline is still the basis for the current Eastercon numbering sequence. But Ken himself had only come into fandom in the late forties. Who else was there? What about Ken Slater? Or the other bookseller, Ken Chapman?

Yes, back then everyone in British fandom did seem to be called “Ken”! But I’m serious; in the sixties it seemed impossible that our fannish history could ever be retrieved. Nothing had been written down, everything appeared irretrievably lost. In the early seventies Peter

*OK, I made up the bit about tea and crumpets! – PW

Roberts made a brave attempt to research our origins, but after a promising start retired, defeated. Slightly later a fan named Terry Hill tackled the same problem with only limited success. Cue for entry of Rob Hansen, stage left.

I first saw him at the 1975 Seacon. It was his first convention. He wrote:

"I was a beardless youth of 20, clean-limbed and eagle-eyed (it would be another year before I started wearing glasses), a virgin and, so far as I knew, the only SF fan in Cardiff, Wales. I was an impoverished trainee draughtsman and my finances were tight. As a first-timer who knew no one else at the con I had taken the committee's advice and allowed them to set me up sharing a room with another first-timer so there would be at least one person there I could talk with. He was Welsh, wore glasses, and had thinning hair and an acne-scarred face. He was also elderly – he had to be all of 30 – and smoked smelly French cigarettes. Try as I might I can't recall his name."

I don't think Rob and I spoke, or if we did I have no memory of it, but I noticed him on the dance-floor on the Sunday evening and thought he was a pretty sharp-looking character. He had dark, curly hair, wore a striped suit-jacket and blue jeans and was making some good moves. Not many fans can dance, so if any unattached women had been present Rob might have done well for himself that night!

That aside, after Seacon he quickly got in with the in-crowd, first with the Manchester people and the Newcastle "Gannets" (Rob Jackson was an early correspondent), then with the Ratfans (Greg Pickersgill, Roy Kettle, Graham Charnock, etc), and a year later published *Epsilon*, first of his many fanzines. In no time at all Rob was deep into British fandom, helped by the fact that he is one of those rare fannish types who can draw as well as write. But we still had no direct contact with each other; by this time I'd become unhappy with the arrogance of the Rats and their sneering contempt for anything that had happened before they came along, and thought he was merely one of their more junior members.

Unbeknown to me, however, Rob was different. Almost alone among fans of the period he had already become intrigued by the same back-story that had defeated his predecessors.

"Getting hold of a copy of *All Our Yesterdays* was where it began," he said, "then *A Wealth of Fable* (it was quite a few years after this I finally scored copies of *Immortal Storm* and *The Futurians*). Reading the Warner stuff, and in particular his sections on UK fandom, left me wanting to find out more."

Rob moved to London in 1980 and by the time the 1987 Conspiracy worldcon came along he was on the subcommittee for the fan-room, and was asked to submit ideas for fan-room publications. He suggested a "history" of UK fandom, and the result was a useful 40-page booklet titled *The Story So Far*. I thought it was excellent but Rob was less happy, saying it drew primarily on secondary sources. "I appreciated its inadequacies," he said, "and the idea of expanding it into something worthwhile grew in my mind."

The fuse had been lit! Previous efforts at compiling a comprehensive fanhistory had failed because no living fans seemed to have more than hazy recollections of times past. Hearsay was useless – what was needed was a real old-timer with a good memory, someone who had kept all their paperwork. Such a paragon had actually already appeared and was

waiting in the wings. Enter Vince Clarke, stage right:

“I honestly can’t remember the circumstances of our first meeting,” Rob writes, “I suspect it was at a One Tun meeting, but I can’t be sure. It was Terry Hill who got Vince back into fandom. He was trying to do some research on Walter Gillings, got hold of Vince’s address, and contacted him. Vince found himself being drawn back in, so he started Kent TruFandom with Terry, and I started attending meetings over there. Vince gave me some help with *The Story So Far*, and soon afterwards we started working together in earnest.”

Vince Clarke had been one of the most active fans of the fifties until personal tragedy caused him to quit abruptly in 1960. We all knew that. What we didn’t know was that he had kept everything – his fanzines, his correspondence, in a perfect time-capsule waiting to be reopened. We also didn’t realise that he had started fanning way back in the 1930s. So when he found Rob was receptive Vince was only too pleased to fan the flames:

“Imagine my surprise after the convention,” wrote Rob, “when Vince casually mentioned some sources he hadn’t told me about previously. It was October, and I’d been telling him what a shame it was that sections on the ’30s and ’40s in *TSSF* were so inadequate, and how I wished I’d been able to find out more. Shortly thereafter he sent me the first in what was to be a large number of packages of photostats over the next few months.”

The first duplicated, forty-page volume of *Then* appeared just six months later in March 1988, followed by three others over the following five years, for a massive total of over 270 pages. Then was a perfect case of the right two people being in the right place at the right time – Rob couldn’t have done it without Vince Clarke, and vice versa. Finishing a long-term project like that says a lot for Rob’s determination; in the process he became British fandom’s #1 historian. So it’s fitting that Vince willed his archive over to Rob and it now rests safely in the cellar of his house in East London, snug in an impressive system of racks and storage boxes.

Apparently I was particularly enthusiastic about the third volume (“The Sixties”), which Rob handed out at Mexicon 4 in the spring of 1991, and by now we were certainly in contact. According to his report:

“One of those who features prominently in its pages, Pete Weston, was delighted when I gave him his copy. ‘What a fine fellow you are, Rob,’ he said, putting his arm around my shoulders and hugging me chummily. ‘Let me buy you a drink. Let me buy you two drinks.’ He would buy me drinks all weekend.”

It wasn’t just about egoboo; I was thrilled that someone had finally put my formative fannish era into proper perspective. Since then we’ve worked on a number of projects together and Rob has become one of my closest fannish friends. We’ve had a lot of fun with old photographs, for instance. We can now recognise old fans from pictures of the backs of their heads, or identify a location by a crack in the wall or particular microphone. With the

Kettering cons we had masses of undated pictures of essentially the same people in the same hotel over four successive years, but we managed to put them in order by comparing details of Terry Jeeves's ties, Ina Shorrocks's hair-styles and so on (though it didn't help that Archie Mercer always wore exactly the same outfit, every year).

But enough of that. You probably want to know something about Rob himself, whether he's changed very much since his TAFF trip in 1984. Well, the dark, curly hair has faded a bit, of course, and I don't suppose he's done much dancing lately but otherwise he's the same, friendly chap he's always been. A bit alienated from current fandom, perhaps – aren't we all? – and likely to sit in the back row at London pub meetings, but definitely one of the good guys, one of those who still care. I guarantee he'll enjoy Corflu immensely.

Peter Weston, 2013

First published in CORFLU XXX Progress Report 2

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FESTIVENTION ad in New Worlds 9 (Spring 1951)

Foreword

For those who love science fiction and fantasy this is an age of plenty, a time when even august journals proclaim the triumph of the nerd, and to be an SF fan is no longer “a proud and lonely thing”. In his book *Billion Year Spree*, Brian Aldiss identified Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as the starting point for science fiction, and as a starting point for respectable science fiction it has much to commend it. But there’s another science fiction tradition, a trashier, far less respectable one that grew out of the pulps and whose own starting point was Edgar Rice Burroughs’s *A Princess of Mars*. This story, and its protagonist John Carter, lit the fuse for the nerd explosion that eventually brought us to where we are today, and a long line of works in comics and science fiction from Superman to *Star Wars* owe a debt to Burroughs. The first nerds – or fans – also came together because of the pulps, building connections, networks and ways of communicating through the only information superhighway available to them – the mail service – that find echoes in the modern day Internet. But who were these first fans, and where did they come from? That’s the story that will unfold in the pages that follow, a tale that runs like a subterranean stream through the cultural and counter-cultural events of the twentieth century in sometimes surprising ways.

The history of fandom is, if you like, the “underhistory” of science fiction itself and it’s not possible to fully understand one without engaging with the other. Nor is this just my opinion. *Then* was first published as a four-issue fanzine part-work (see cover gallery on page 413), and Colin Greenland accepted this in a letter of comment:

“Much of what you’re documenting goes straight over my head – 19 out of 20 names mean nothing to me, but the twentieth – Rog Peyton, Ken Slater, Gerry Webb, Stan Nicholls, Terry Pratchett.... Suddenly I’m on the inside, astonished to see familiar people transformed into unrecognisable previous selves – Chris Priest in particular, who, historically, is responsible for the fact that I’m writing to you from this address.

“The work I did on Moorcock’s *New Worlds* in *The Entropy Exhibition* was purely literary, and as such has seemed very ignorant and lop-sided to me for years now. I didn’t know anything about SF, and certainly nothing about SF fans. Decontaminating SF of all trace of fans was essential to my ill-considered approach of dignifying the literature. I’m not sure now where I got the notion that SF fans were bad for SF, but I can see how powerfully I was under the rhetoric of the time, and of the malformations of hindsight. It was all over well before I came to look at it. Just leafing through *Then* 3, noting the busy caperings of Moorcock and Platt and Priest, Lang Jones and Grahams Charnock and Hall, and their ambiguous historical relationship with Ken Bulmer and Ted Tubb and John Phillifent, reveals a lot about fandom as the matrix for New Wave SF, as well as illuminating some of the otherwise puzzling allegiances and antipathies between the survivors.”

Not that it’s always an easy history to get at, as John Clute pointed out in his letter of comment:

"I think the reason people, like myself, fail in our researching of authors to make proper use of fan material is twofold: 1) ignorance; and 2) the very obvious difficulties in actually obtaining, and then understanding the significance of, a very large number of productions, variously produced, and written sometimes in a language partially coded (wittingly or not) against outsiders. What you've done in *Then* is to open paths, light beacons. More must be done."

Then was written a quarter of a century ago and initially published over the course of five years. That was in the days before the Internet, which has since provided sources of information that were not available to me back then. These, along with subsequent work done by myself and others, have allowed me to expand and deepen this work. Expand, not extend; the post-1980 history of UK fandom is a story for someone else to tell. (The ancestor of *Then*, the booklet *The Story So Far* produced for the 1987 Worldcon, covered the 1980s to that point but in far sketchier detail. Those sections of the booklet have been included as supplements in this edition, but something more substantial is needed.)

Then remains a general, narrative history. I hope, as I have since first writing it, that others will take up the baton and research and write works focusing on specific people and events covered herein in much greater detail than I had the space or in some cases the inclination to do so.

At the time I was first writing *Then* it was already apparent the fuse lit by *A Princess of Mars* had found its explosion in *Star Wars*, something that for the generations that came after us was a pop-cultural event of seismic proportions in terms of what it set in motion. It and the wave of films and TV shows that followed in its wake had their effect on our essentially literary fandom of course, but beyond the confines of our conventions and fanzines what we had always referred to as "media fandom" grew into the all-conquering colossus of today.

Though not by design – I had originally intended taking it up to 1990 – this book covers those pre-*Star Wars* days; the "classic era" of science fiction fandom, if you like. I hope you find it enlightening and informative.

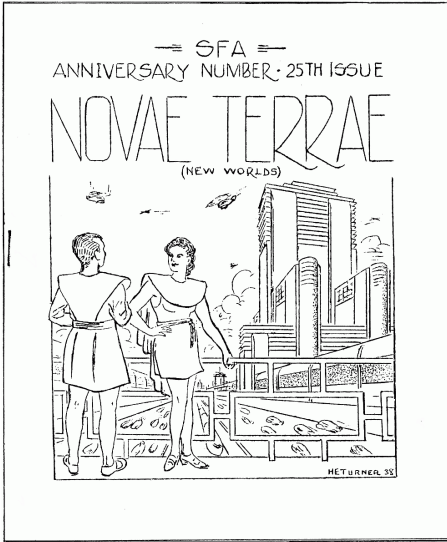
– Rob Hansen, 2016

A Note on Terminology

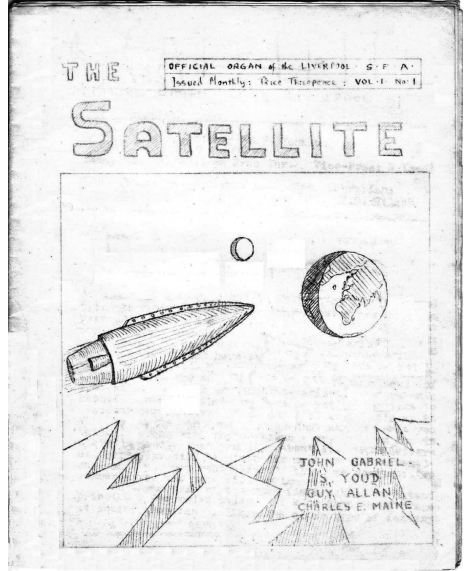
A number of fannish terms appear in the text that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Their meaning is usually obvious from context or is explained (see page 123 for an explanation of "sercon", for example, and page 133 for APA or Amateur Press Association). However, one that isn't is the sometimes capitalised "gafia", an acronym for Getting Away From It All. Leaving fandom is referred to as "gafiating" – entering a state of "gafiation".

Further online resources related to *Then* – including the Rob Hansen *Then* Archive, a gallery of fan photographs, and additional archived source material such as SF newsletters quoted here – can be found linked at:

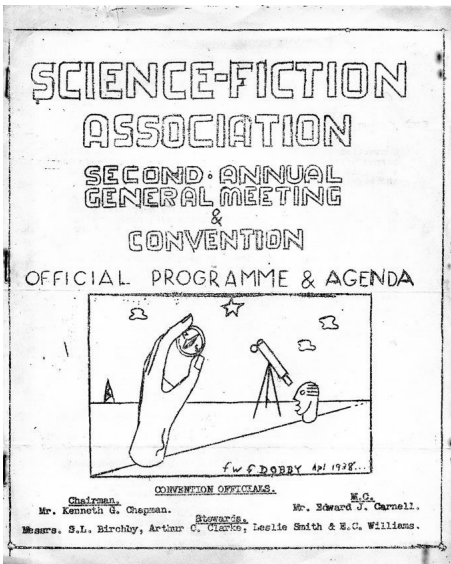
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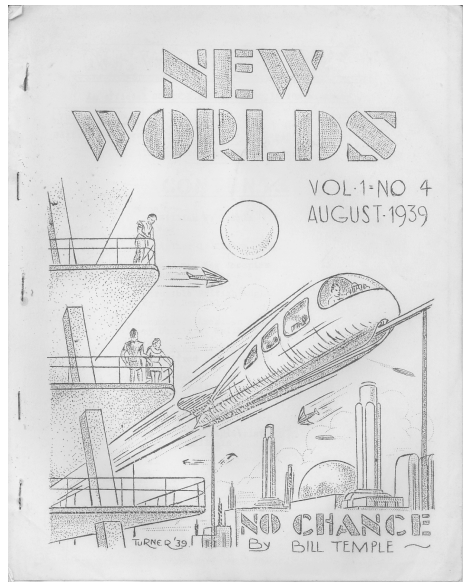
Novae Terrae 25
Artwork by Harry Turner



The Satellite Vol. 1, No. 1



1938 SFA Convention Programme Book
Artwork by Frank Dobby



New Worlds Vol. 1 No. 4 (August 1939)
Artwork by Harry Turner

The 1930s: GENESIS

When Hugo Gernsback launched *Amazing Stories* magazine in America in April 1926 he created the Science Fiction genre and ushered in the age of the SF pulps. True, there had been earlier works that we now consider to be science fiction – among them those of writers such as Verne, Wells and Conan Doyle – but though fantastic these were solidly in the mainstream of literature. Not until Gernsback did such fiction become a distinct and separate category of literature, one he termed “scientifiction”. The creation of this distinct and separate category of fiction brought with it a distinct and separate category of reader. In the June 1926 issue of *Amazing*, Gernsback noted that many of those buying the magazine had little or no chance of contacting each other and so, when printing their letters to the magazine in its “Discussions” column, started giving their full names and addresses. This led to correspondences springing up between readers, the beginnings of a sense of community, and eventually, to the formation of the first fan groups. In 1930 *Amazing* sponsored the Science Correspondence Club (or SCC), an idea of Ray Palmer’s that came into existence with the aid of Gernsback and which later metamorphosed into the International Scientific Association (or ISA). Yet it was another SF magazine, *Wonder Stories*, that was to be the most influential in the formation of British fandom. Its letters page, “The Reader Speaks”, was to lead, indirectly, to the formation of the first British fan group....

From the day in 1927 when he first stumbled across *Amazing Stories*, Walter Gillings’s hazy literary ambitions were focused on a single burning desire – to edit a British SF magazine. It was a desire that would guide him down the years. In 1930 he was in the throes of his first year’s training as a reporter on *The Ilford Recorder*, a job gained largely on the strength of the promise shown by a publication he must have produced pre-1927: a proto-fanzine. He later described it as:

“... an amateur magazine, laboriously produced in handwriting and ink-drawing while I was still at school, where I first developed an aspiration towards the editorial chair while exhibiting, at the same time, a certain flair for SF writing. It was in this select publication, which had a circulation of ten, that I authored a serial entitled ‘2000 A.D.’, inspired by some articles in *The Mechanical Age* of 1925-26 (to which, be it noted, I gave due acknowledgment). Like so many of my early works, it was never completed: the *Merry-Go-Round Magazine* came to a stop after seven issues, just when my hero had managed to establish radio contact with Mars.” [1]

It was a letter in the June 1930 *Wonder Stories* from Len A. Kippin of Ilford that led to the 18-year-old Gillings first meeting with another fan. He wrote to Kippin, who responded promptly to Gillings’s overtures by calling on him at his home in Leyton (Ilford and Leyton being, essentially, adjacent suburbs on the eastern edge of London – though not officially

part of the city). Being primarily an amateur radio buff Kippin was less earnest about SF and certainly a lot less driven than Gillings, but during his journeys as a commercial traveller he had picked up many of the magazines and acquired a taste for them. Once the two had met it was inevitable they would try to form a local SF club, and so they did.

In the 3rd October 1930 edition of *The Ilford Recorder*, with the sanction of an indulgent chief, Gillings inserted a "Letter to the Editor" he had written himself announcing the formation of the Ilford Science Literary Circle, the earliest known written record of fan activity in this country. It starts:

"We are writing to you in an attempt to bring together in Ilford all who are in sympathy with the furtherance of scientific knowledge and who themselves take a keen interest in the progress and, particularly, the possibilities of scientific achievement."

After giving examples of things predicted by SF writers, and paying homage to Jules Verne and to H.G. Wells, it continues:

"But this kind of author is scarce in this country, and consequently there is a shortage of scientific fiction. The writers of this letter, however, can claim to have surmounted this difficulty, and being anxious to popularise this type of literature (which, we would emphasise, is an admixture of imagination and scientific FACT), propose to form a club and enable others with similar literary tastes to avail themselves of the opportunity of becoming familiar with more recent examples of 'scientifiction'."

The letter was signed by Kippin and Gillings. Pompous it may have been but it produced results. On Monday 27th October 1930, at 32 Thorold Road, Ilford, the inaugural meeting of The Ilford Science Literary Circle was held. Besides Kippin, his wife, and Gillings, the other five who turned up included one J.W. Beck (later described by Gillings as "... a valuable member of the Circle ... can always be relied upon to propound a sound argument ..."), and George and Mary Dew. This latter pair were, according to Gillings "... a middle-aged couple who without quite realising what it was all about were willing to lend their front parlour so long as the group enlivened their Monday evenings". The readings from contemporary works of SF given at the meetings prompted discussion and argument that in turn provided Gillings with "copy" for the *Recorder*. In all a full eight of the paper's columns were filled with accounts of the Circle during the nine months and thirty-seven meetings of its existence. Such reporting is not as unusual as it might seem since *The Ilford Recorder* carried details of all manner of minor local activities, including those of many other hobby groups. Most of the copy on the Circle is fairly uninteresting, being largely composed of plot synopses of stories such as Lovecraft's "The Color Out of Space", but there is the occasional nugget among the reports on talks given to the Circle by guest speakers. One of these was given by J.M. Walsh (described as "... the well-known author of the remarkable story of inter-planetary adventure, *Vandals of the Void* ...") who discoursed on the possibility of life on other planets, while F.W. Wood (whoever he may have been) gave the Circle a glimpse of life in the England of 1991. This, he confidently predicted, would include "... day's trips in a flying ship to a North African pleasure resort, at reduced fares ... regarded just as a

charabanc outing to Southend was now, though the trippers would be able to gain some diversion by understanding their fellows in other parts of the world by means of the Universal language ...”, but “... women will still gossip ...”. So now you know. In with such reports was, of course, the constant proselytising [2]:

“There are some who delight in fantastic imaginings of the possible developments of science, basing their theories on present-day facts. In this category are members of the Ilford Science Literary Circle, who unanimously agree as to the excellent educative, stimulative, as well as the recreative properties of fictitious literature into which is interwoven an atmosphere of scientific research and invention.”

The Ilford Circle considered publishing a journal at one point but abandoned the idea as pointless. There was little potential readership and its activities were amply covered in the local press.

With missionary fervour Gillings tried to expand the Circle, arranging publication in another paper of a letter similar to that which had started the Ilford Circle and had leaflets printed, which Kippin took on his journeys and talked shopkeepers and stallholders into slipping between the pages of the SF magazines they were selling. These suggested the forming of similar clubs and urged people to get in touch with Gillings, but produced no response whatsoever. Meanwhile, Gillings had written of the Ilford Circle’s activities in letters to the American prozines and the March 1931 issue of *Wonder Stories* had even reprinted a few of his pieces from *The Ilford Recorder*. Inevitably this began to get him noticed by other British readers. Among these was one S. Nyman of Tottenham, North London, who tried persistently, but in vain, to stir up interest in that area and who took to calling on Gillings around midnight. He also attended a few meetings of the Ilford Circle and was apparently enough of a nuisance to annoy a number of members. Gillings’s *Wonder Stories* piece also brought him to the attention of fans in other cities, and this resulted in the creation of Britain’s second SF club.



Walter Gillings



Les Johnson

In Liverpool, a group formed that called itself the Universal Science Circle. Taking its cue from the Ilford Circle even to the extent of attracting members by inserting printed slips into the magazines sold by local dealers, the group numbered some half dozen members including its president, Colin H. Askham, and secretary, Les Johnson, and had an impressive library of nearly two hundred magazines. Its stated aim was “to facilitate the distribution and use of modern scientific knowledge *in all its branches* – truly a worthy and magnificent object for any club!” In other words it was science first and science-fiction second, a common state

of affairs in a number of early groups. Friction between such science enthusiasts and those who were fans of the fiction would eventually lead to conflict in US fandom, but not noticeably so over here. [3]

Having gone into recess for the summer of 1931 the Ilford Circle failed to reassemble, as Gillings puts it:

“... mainly for lack of enough members interested in more than parlour chit-chat, and partly because we could find no other way of discouraging an elderly lady who had mistaken us for a Spiritualist circle. Thus I was obliged to assume the role of secretary of the Science Literary Association, in preparation for the welding together of the more effective groups I optimistically expected to develop in the provinces.”

Gillings wrote about the British Science Literary Association (BSLA), which he later admitted having formed “... without the aid of members or charter ...”, in a letter that appeared in the November 1931 issue of *Wonder Stories*, claiming that:

“... things have been moving in Manchester, Liverpool, and Blackpool, where branches of what I shall now call the ‘Association’ are in the process of formation. As we hoped, we have inspired similar enthusiasts to start circles in these towns.”

Unfortunately Gillings’s own enthusiasm was ill-founded. True, Les Johnson of Liverpool’s Universal Science Circle expressed his desire to form a local branch of the BSLA, but a national fan organisation for Britain was an idea whose time had not yet come, and the BSLA came to nothing. Initially, however, there was some interest:

“... where there seemed to be the most promise, apart from Liverpool, were Manchester (where a fan named H.R. Hand was the leading spirit) and Blackpool, where a contact of Johnson’s called Jack Fearn was operating. Some of the cuttings I circulated as evidence of the Ilford Circle’s leisurely activities brought from this gentleman a brief acknowledgement formally signed ‘John Russell Fearn’, which congratulated us upon ‘a very original movement’, and gave no hint of the voluminous, avid correspondence we were to exchange in later years.”

In July 1932 Hugo Gernsback spent a week in London with the specific purpose of finding writing talent to suit his magazines, a visit Gillings didn’t find out about until Gernsback had left these shores:

“The interview which, I later learned, the *Daily Express* ran at the time also escaped my notice. Had I known that he was only ten miles away, there is no doubt I would have waylaid the prophetic genius, pleading with him to take me home with him to the Land of Science Fiction, or at least to appoint me editor of a British edition of *Wonder Stories*. The hope would almost certainly have been in vain; yet the meeting, if it had taken place, might well have changed the course of British SF – whether for better or worse we can only speculate.” [4]

Britain's third SF fan group was formed in Hayes, Middlesex (located a few miles north of Heathrow Airport and, like Ilford, essentially a suburb of London but not officially part of the city). The first other fans knew of the existence of the Hayes Science Fiction Club was when its secretary, Patrick Enever, had a letter printed in the August 1932 *Wonder Stories*. In it Enever leapt to the defence of the magazine after someone had written claiming that it was read only by morons, and in the process had this to say about the Hayes SFC:

"Here in an area of about 3 miles we have nearly a score of members, all of whom read this magazine. They are all well-educated, and we have one or two really brainy fellows among us. And you can't kid me they read *Wonder Stories* just for amusement because, as secretary of our Science Fiction Club I know differently.

"We glean an enormous amount of scientific and general information which is all filed and indexed for future reference. And the fellow in charge of this 'information bureau' has a busy time of it, I can tell you."

This letter brought a sufficiently good response in terms of missives sent to Hayes SFC that a few months later Enever wrote to *Wonder Stories* again. This time he outlined the history of the group:

"The society was formed back in 1927, before any science-fiction had reached England, other than Wells, Verne and a few contemporary 'dreamers'. On very rare occasions there would come into possession of the club, a tattered copy of one of the existing American magazines, and such an event was always celebrated with high glee in the club meetings.

"After a while the supply became more regular, and in 1929 we were able to obtain at least three magazines every month. In that year *Science Wonder Stories* came on the market, and it is the club's boast that, though we never dare enter a subscription due to perpetual instability, we have yet succeeded in obtaining copies of the magazine for every month...."

All very impressive and all, of course, completely untrue. It wasn't that uncommon for fans of the day to exaggerate and "bend the truth" a little in order to make themselves and their activities seem more significant, but this set of fabrications unfortunately took on a life of its own and can now be reasonably regarded as constituting British fandom's earliest hoax. Over the years, as a result of Enever's letters, quite a few articles have been written claiming that Britain's first fan group was formed in 1927 and a number of fanhistorians when stumbling across these articles or the original letters have thought they were on to something big, this writer included. Enever came clean on what had actually happened, many years later:

"Early in 1932, repeat '32, having been an avid reader of *Amazing Stories* for some five years, I accidentally allowed a workmate to see a copy, only to find that he, too, was an addict. His name was John R. Elliot, and with a name like that we had to make him President. Of course, we had to have something for him to be President of, so with the assistance of Leonard Tookey, we founded a Science Fiction Club."

“A few letters in *Amazing’s* readers’ column revealed the alarming fact that there were other sub-normals in Britain who read ‘science-fiction’, so we enrolled most of ‘em. By a stroke of genius we thought of creating a magazine, to be called *Fantasia* and to be devoted to reviews of SF, amateur ditto, club correspondence, etc. We thought of it. We thought of it hundreds of times, even typed it for several months, but beyond having a bee-yootiful cover printed for the first three issues, we never seemed to get any further.” [5]

Fortunately, we know a little more about the club thanks to the survival of a tranche of letters sent to American fan Forrest J Ackerman [6]. The first of these was sent to the 16 year old Ackerman, who then lived in San Francisco in January 1933, the Hayes group having got his address from a letter published in *Amazing Stories*. The printed “SCIENCE FICTION CLUB” letterhead listed John R. Elliott as Vice-President, but no one else, and invited him to join stating:

“It has long been one of our aims to establish in England a Science Fiction Club on the scale of which similar clubs are already established in America and Germany.”

The club claimed to offer to members:

“...many advantages, a few of which are listed below:

“Our magazine/book service, and Book Information Department;
Our general scientific information bureau;
Correspondence between SFC members, and members of overseas clubs.”

By 8th May, Enever was writing to him on paper headed “BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION” (no relation to the later organisation of the same name) which listed Elliott as President, with an address in Southall, and Enever as Hon Sec., address in Hayes, Southall and Hayes being adjacent to each other. This seems quite grandiose given the group appeared to consist of three people at this point, but you have to admire their ambition.

At some point the group contacted Walter Gillings, who tried in vain to set up a meeting with them. He later wrote of the group that:

“... it claimed to have produced what must surely have been the first British fan magazine, titled *Fantasia*; but the first I heard of either fan club or magazine was when one of its erstwhile officers sought my advice on how to go about publishing a journal which might serve to keep the organisation together if it could be revived.” [1]

In mid-1933 what was almost certainly the earliest meeting between British and overseas fans took place. Writing about it decades later, Enever remembered the date of the meeting as July 1931, which is obviously wrong (and may even be a typographical error). The Hayes group did not become the BSFA until early 1933, and a reference to Enever and Elliott hiking to Uxbridge to catch the Underground makes sense when Elliott lived in Southall, but not later in 1933 after he had moved to West Kensington. We can, I think,

therefore reasonably conclude that “July 1931” should be July 1933:

“John R. Elliott and myself were President and Secretary respectively of the British Science Fiction Association – and two of the only three members who had ever met, incidentally. The third was Len Tookey the Treasurer, and for obvious reasons we met him quite often.

“Our usual meeting place was my home in Hayes which boasted a garden shed we called the Club Room. John and Len had garden sheds too, but mine was rat-free – the dog slept in it. On this July day we had called an emergency session to discuss a club matter of great importance – I’d received a letter from one of our many Continental members, Gjeord Rienk Schaafsma a Dutch accountant, in which he proposed to meet us all in London during a business trip the following week.

“London was all of fifteen miles from Hayes – a journey not to be undertaken without considerable planning and preparation, if at all; for at that time Hayes was connected only very tenuously with the Metropolis. A rickety tram would take the venturesome traveller as far as Shepherd’s Bush but from there on it was every man for himself. So far as our visit to London was concerned trams were out, anyway. Len Tookey was quite adamant about that. Once he’d been on a tram that ran off the rails at Acton and another that lost its trolley pole at Uxbridge. They were dangerous, he opined, from top to bottom and he’d have nothing to do with them.”

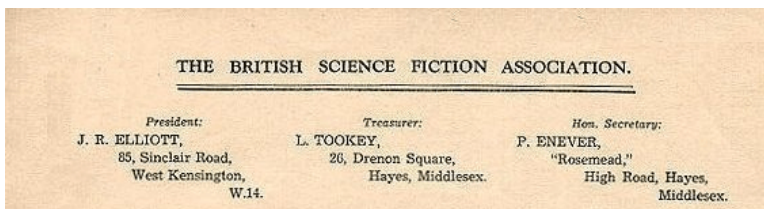
Eventually, Enever and Elliott hiked down to Uxbridge and caught the Underground to London and the Piccadilly bar where Schaafsma awaited them. As Enever reported:

“We talked about *The Moon Pool*, about *Metropolis*, which the Dutch were seeing for the first time, about the Marie Corelli story John and I were currently assisting to film ... about the *Amazing Stories* Quarterlies and Annuals we had sent Gjeord, and about ourselves. Especially about ourselves. Fandom hasn’t changed much.” [7]

Hayes BSFA received a letter from Schaafsma when he returned to Utrecht, but lost contact with him a couple of years later.

In October, Enever wrote to Ackerman informing him that:

“*Fantasia* is not out at the time of writing, but Mr Walter Gillings of Ilford has offered to edit the next issue, and several are backing it financially so we hope to have it out by the end of October.”



He also mentioned that “two new members” from London – Andrew McMillan of St. John’s Wood and Ernest Kent of Dulwich – were looking for American correspondents. When Enever wrote again on 2nd November, the printed letterhead now had Elliot living in West Kensington (though he was soon to relocate again, this time to Shepherd’s Bush) and had added Len Tookey as Treasurer.

In his letter of the 30th, Enever was forced to concede to Ackerman that:

“The *Fantasia* has again been abandoned from lack of support, both financial and contributory. Sorry.”

However, writing about this period many years later, Enever claimed:

“If our old *Fantasia* had gotten FIVE subs to any one issue we’d have had to work overtime to type enough copies!”

This suggests it did at least exist in a preliminary form, possibly as a carbon-copied internal newsletter for the Hayes group, but if so it never graduated from this to become the fully-fledged, printed journal they wanted it to be.

In late 1933, the British Science Fiction Association affiliated with the ISA. [8] It’s doubtful whether they ever derived any benefit from their association with the ISA since by that time it was virtually moribund and was not, in its first incarnation at any rate, long for this world. Nevertheless, the Hayes group seems to have acquired a new dynamism, as Enever explains:

“We did, however, enrol an impressive list of Honorary Members, including Forrie Ackerman, Hugo Gernsback, Drs. Jung and Adler, and many others. In conjunction with an amateur theatrical group known as the Oxford Players we made a film of Marie Corelli’s *The Young Diana* – I particularly recall that affair as I was the motive power in the thrilling water-wheel scene – and we had us a high old time while the club lasted.” [5]

On 28th September, a gathering was held in Liverpool at the Wallasey home of Philip E. Cleator. Also present were Colin H. Askham, Les Johnson, and Norman Weedall. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the formation of an interplanetary group, and the following month the British Interplanetary Society was duly formed in that city. Cleator was its President, Johnson its Secretary, and Askham its Vice-President. Local meetings were held in a room above McGhie’s Café at 56 Whitechapel, but the BIS quickly became far more than just a local group. Though the BIS, which was dedicated to exploring serious ways by which the conquest of space might be achieved rather than to SF, it nonetheless soon numbered many SF fans among the nationwide membership it attracted, and would be a very visible component of pre-war fandom. As Johnson later recalled:

“The unexpected spin-off following the foundation of the BIS was that through the contacts I accumulated as the first Hon. Secretary of the Society, the world of British Science Fiction (such as it was then) which had not responded to the efforts of Walter

and myself in 1931, experienced a sudden violent motivation.

“It is a strange thing that people who were interested in interplanetary travel were not necessarily interested in Science Fiction; more credibly those who were interested in Science Fiction were interested in interplanetary travel, and thus, like spaceships gravitating towards a Black Hole they came to me as Hon. Secretary of the newly-formed Society: Arthur C. Clarke, Eric Frank Russell, Walter Gillings, Edward John Carnell, G. Ken Chapman, and William F. Temple. John F. Burke and Dave McIlwain, both then resident in Liverpool, called at my home, and others too numerous to mention made their presences felt – all previously more or less isolated devotees of the new cult of Science-Fiction, then spelt with a hyphen. Of course, it was I who went to P.E. Cleator as it happened, but the remainder gravitated to the fold. It appears that what I had started, more than an interplanetary society, was a Science Fiction movement. I had unwittingly succeeded where in 1931 Walter and myself had failed.” [9]

Actually, interplanetary societies and groups of rocket enthusiasts were becoming increasingly common at this time, though the experience of groups in other countries could differ markedly from that of those in Britain. In 1927 the German amateur rocket society VfR (Verein für Raumschiffahrt) was formed, and its original members included most of the rocket experts of the day: Hermann Oberth, Max Valier, Rudolf Nebel, Klaus Riedel and Willy Ley. Like their counterparts in other countries, this group fired a number of small liquid-fuelled test rockets (they had a small testing ground in the Berlin suburb of Reinickendorf) and had a number of brushes with the authorities as a result. In 1930 a young student from Berlin joined the group, the 18-year-old Wernher von Braun, and that same year the German Army appointed Captain Walter Dornberger to work on rocket development for them at their Kummersdorf firing range, fifteen miles south of Berlin. In 1932 the VfR demonstrated one of their liquid-fuelled rockets to Dornberger and other officers at Kummersdorf, a demonstration that was to sound the group’s death-knell. With Hitler’s rise to power and the military potential the Nazis saw in rockets there was no way a private group was going to be allowed to continue openly working on them. In 1933 – the year Hitler became Chancellor and assumed absolute power over Germany – the Gestapo moved in, and overnight the VfR ceased to exist. They claimed that this was due to complaints from local residents, but this was almost certainly a smokescreen. From this date rocket research became a military secret. In 1933, von Braun joined the army rocket group. Twelve years later Britain was to become all too familiar with the fruit of Dornberger’s and von Braun’s labours. [10]

In 1934, Britain got its first professional SF magazine, sort of. *Scoops* was a weekly boys’ paper, whose first issue was dated 10th February 1934, and which during its run featured tales by Professor A.M. Low, John Russell Fearn and Arthur Conan Doyle, among others. In later issues it also carried a column by Cleator titled “To the Planets” that brought the BIS regular mention and a number of new members. It attracted quite a few adult readers, including Gillings, who hoped it could be transformed into a proper SF magazine. It was not to be. *Scoops* lasted only twenty weeks and the 23rd June issue was the last. [11]

At the end of May, Enever sent Ackerman copies of *Scoops*. In his accompanying letter he wrote:

"Thanks for boosting the BSFA. Just at the moment we need it. Things are going all wrong. *Fantasia* received another set back when actually in our printer's hands. We couldn't guarantee a circ of 200, so he 'walked out' on us! Too bad. Now we are printing it ourselves on a small hand-platen machine, but insufficient type keeps holding us up. Still I am determined to issue it or bust."

Thus far all of this scattered activity in Britain had not amounted to much, but the false starts were almost at an end because 1934 was the year the SFL arrived.

Patterned after the SCC/ISA, the Science Fiction League was started by Gernsback and Charles D. Hornig at *Wonder Stories* in May 1934. A few months after its formation came the first proposal for a British chapter of the SFL from Les Johnson but his appeal fell on deaf ears (and, in fact, there appears never to have been a Liverpool chapter). Someone else eyeing the SFL was Patrick Enever. On 18th October he wrote to Ackerman:

"I secured last half year (end of May, to be precise) a job which has proved to be a 'hot' one, by which I mean it's an important one (Chief Records Clerk at the Fairey Aviation Co., England's second largest military 'plane factory, again to be precise) and being still in its early stages necessitates me putting in over fifteen hours a day every day bar Sundays.

"You see the BSFA and all concerned must of necessity take a back seat for a while. In fact, as our President Jack Elliott is in a similar position we found it necessary to suspend the Association and I instructed the members to that effect. On Jan 1st '35 the BSFA is scheduled to reopen. I have been racking my brains to find some way out of our difficulty – lack of a definite programme. The BSFA has a good membership, capable of a big membership increase judging by the number of enquiries which are always pouring in ... What I'm coming to is this: I want to be greedy, to have the advantages that would accrue if the BSFA were a chapter of the SFL, without losing any of our individuality, our only asset. You know, we are the only SF club in England, and we have members in Australia, Holland, Ireland, New Zealand etc.

"You are a member of the BSFA – a Director of the SFL: Mr Gernsback is an Honorary Member of the BSFA; it should be to our mutual advantage (pardon the seeming egotism) that the BSFA should become a sort of 'extra chapter'. With a little publicity we should be able to pull in at least a hundred members."

This seems more than a little fanciful for the period, despite the success of the BIS. Speaking of which, that group lost its meeting venue above McGhie's Café in February 1935 and those meeting there could easily have lost their lives. It was a few weeks after Willy Ley had visited them and, as Les Johnson remembered:

"The Members were so engrossed in their deliberations one evening that in spite of the noise and commotion prevailing downstairs, it was not realised that the premises were on fire. While comments were being made by the Members with regard to the likelihood of a drunken brawl prevailing in the lower portion of the café, or perhaps even in the street outside, they did not immediately appreciate the reality or indeed the desperate nature of their situation.

“Not until the door burst open and a smoke-begrimed fireman appeared brandishing an axe, did they come to any understanding as to what was happening. And the fireman, himself, was as astonished as anybody else to find the members of the BIS oblivious to the fact that the downstairs portion of the café had been gutted – while they were debating as to how a rocket ship could reach the Moon!” [9]

Early in 1935 an attempt to establish a chapter of the Science Fiction League over here was made by Ackerman, then one of the SFL’s ten Executive Directors. Presumably as a result of Enever’s letter of October 18th, he asked that the BSFA become the organisation’s first foreign chapter, claiming it would then become one of the leading SF groups in the world. This never happened, its members eventually joining the SFL individually. And that was the last that anyone ever heard of the Hayes group. As Enever explains:

“I believe that the Dead A/C Dept., of the bank at Hayes still holds a few shillings – all that is now left of the British Science Fiction Association, of which I was once secretary.

“I think it was the repeated failure of *Fantasia* to emerge from the presses that really cooled members’ ardour. I remember we had to refund a subscription to John Russell Fearn, which noble act cut our treasurer to the quick.”

“Towards the end of 1935 I moved to Manchester and lost touch with the remaining members. I left behind in Hayes a great library of SF, files, and piles of correspondence, some unanswered no doubt, and a small printing press on which *Fantasia* was at last to have been produced.

“But apparently it never was. The last I heard was that a land mine wiped out the lot early in the war. At least, I know it ‘vanished’ the house for that was my father’s, and I can only presume that the records were still in it.” [12]

Aircraft production by Enever’s employer, the Fairey Aviation Co., was primarily at the factory in North Hyde Road, Hayes, with flight testing carried out locally at the nearby Great West Aerodrome. Losing the latter in 1944 when the Air Ministry requisitioned it to build London Heathrow Airport, with no compensation until 1964, caused a severe financial shock which may have contributed to the company’s eventual end. But all that lay in the future. In 1935, recent receipt of large UK military contracts necessitated the acquisition of a large factory in Heaton Chapel, Greater Manchester. This had been used as the National Aircraft Factory No. 2 during World War I, and would go on to produce various aircraft during World War II. It was presumably a job transfer to this new operation that required Enever’s relocation. Though he lost contact after his move to Manchester, Enever would reappear in fandom in the 1950s, now calling himself Paul Enever, by which point John Elliott had long since vanished and Len Tookey was running a restaurant in Cornwall. [5]

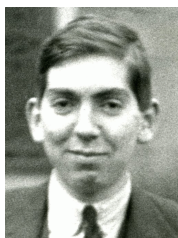
Looking back on the British Science Fiction Association – the first group in the country to ever use that name, but not the last – it’s clear it was a genuine attempt at a national organisation on the part of the Hayes group. Unfortunately, their reach exceeded their grasp and in any case it’s doubtful they could have succeeded at that point. The idea was still probably premature, if only by a few years....

During 1934-1935 so many letters from British fans were printed in *Amazing* and

Wonder Stories that the latter made its August 1935 “The Reader Speaks” department a “British Edition”. By this time Gernsback had gotten the message, and of the thirty-seven chapters of his Science Fiction League that were granted charters up to the time that Startling Publications became its new sponsors, Mort Weisinger its new secretary, and the magazine was renamed *Thrilling Wonder*, five were in the UK. The first of these was in Leeds. A young student in that city, Douglas W.F. Mayer, had written to *Wonder Stories* proclaiming himself to be secretary of “a small English science society”, the Institute of Scientific Research, which embraced five other organisations including the International Scientific Correspondence Club and two radio research societies. Nevertheless there was still room for the SFL, which duly appointed him Director of Chapter no.17, on 1st April 1935. From May it held regular meetings devoted mainly to the discussion of space travel and the showing of films, but it would eventually go on to become the country’s most active fan group. Hot on the heels of Leeds SFL came a Belfast chapter, Chapter no.20, with Hugh C. Carswell as Director. In June the third UK branch of the SFL, Chapter no.22, was launched at Nuneaton by Maurice K. Hanson and Dennis A. Jacques who became its Director and Assistant Director respectively. Within eighteen months other chapters would spring up in Glasgow (Chapter no.34, Donald G. MacRae as Director), and Barnsley (Chapter no.37, Jack Beaumont as Director), but neither these nor the Belfast chapter were to prove as significant as those in Leeds and Nuneaton, or indeed leave much behind to show they had ever existed.



Doug Mayer



Maurice K. Hanson



Denny Jacques

Having had his doubts about the SFL, Gillings didn’t join up until the organisation had been going for a year. When he and Kippin did send for memberships Gillings enclosed a letter urging all British readers to join the SFL – but only with a view to the eventual formation of a British Science Fiction League, one which he hoped would function apart from the parent body, have its own Executive Directors, and maybe even its own department in *Wonder Stories*. The letter wasn’t printed. Six months later Gillings wrote again, this time proposing to start an Essex chapter which might eventually develop into an East London branch. Again nothing happened. Raymond A. Cass of Hull, G. Moses of Southall, and Herbert Street of Walworth also proposed local chapters that never came into being, possibly because they couldn’t meet the three-member minimum the SFL required.

When Doug Mayer formed the first non-American chapter of the SFL he called on his friends George Airey and Herbert Warnes to form the necessary quorum. The announcement of this chapter’s formation in *Wonder Stories* attracted other local SF enthusiasts, of course, and in May 1935 it held its first official meeting. Naturally, this was reported in *Wonder Stories*:

"Our first foreign Chapter, in Leeds, England, held its first meeting on May 18th in the library of the Institute of Scientific Research of Leeds. All the members were present ... and a dues of four pence per month was decided upon to cover secretarial expenses and the purchasing of old science-fiction magazines. C.H. Maclin was elected treasurer and A. Griffiths was made a new member of the Chapter."



George Airey



Bert Warnes



Albert Griffiths

The "Institute of Scientific Research" was an invention of Mayer's and its "library" the house at 20 Hollin Park Road where the 16 year old Mayer lived with his parents. By the end of July membership had grown sufficiently, numbers having been swelled by newcomers such as R.W. Robson, W.G. Stone, F.W.F. Dobby and P.W. Berry, that the comings and goings had all gotten to be too much for Mayer's elderly parents. Thus, in August, Leeds SFL moved its meetings to the 5 Florist Street home of the newly-married Warnes, which was to be its home for the next year. Warnes has estimated that by the end of 1935 Leeds SFL had about twelve members, of whom about half were regulars. As to what the group did:

"Our activities closely followed those of other fan groups of the time with discussions and debates on all manner of subjects, largely stimulated by stories in the pulp mags. These often went on until the early hours of the morning and many a time Albert Griffiths stayed with us overnight as he lived outside the Leeds area." [13]

Not long after Leeds SFL was up and running, Nuneaton SFL followed suit. Like Leeds, its first meeting was reported in *Wonder Stories* the following year:

"On June 7th, 1935 the Nuneaton Chapter of the Science Fiction League was given charter by Headquarters, in future to be known as Chapter Twenty-Two, with Charter members Dennis A. Jacques, First-Class SFL No. 737, (Assistant Director), J.E. Barnes, SFL No.926, M. Crowley, SFL No. 927, P.W. Buckerfield, SFL No.928, and Maurice K. Hanson, First-Class SFL No. 738, (Director)."

Interesting clusters of membership numbers there, with Hanson and Jacques one apart and the other three being consecutive. This suggests that Hanson and Jacques applied to join the SFL together, as did the other three. The SFL charter required a minimum of three to form a chapter, so Hanson and Jacques would not have been able to do this until contact was made between them and the trio. Of course, the trio could have applied to form a chapter by themselves, but presumably they saw Hanson and Jacques's names listed in *Wonder Stories* and decided to get in touch with them first. Early meetings were held at the 89 Long

Shoot home of Dennis Jacques:

“The first official meeting was held on June 26th when hazy plans were clarified and made concrete. There were later Chapter meetings at intervals – these consisting largely of discussion and planning – followed by the foundation of the Chapter Library. The nucleus of this (consisting of odd magazines presented by members) gradually developed into today’s product, (helped very much by the presentation of three or four dozen magazines dating back to 1930 by newcomer D.R. Smith, SFL No. 1199.)”

Smith would go on to be a major fan and stay active in fandom for decades.

In late 1935 first contact was made between the BIS/fandom and a major writer. Les Johnson explains:

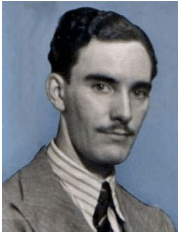
“About this time, a letter was received from Eric Frank Russell asking for a current issue of ‘The Journal’ of the Society and any back numbers available, to be sent to one Dr. W. Olaf Stapledon, a Professor at Liverpool University, who was also the author in 1930 of *Last and First Men* – a science fiction epic. Unfortunately – or otherwise, as the case may be – Stapledon had never heard of science fiction (apart from H.G. Wells) until Eric Russell and L.J. Johnson visited him (and were royally entertained) at his bungalow at Caldby Hill, Wirral, Cheshire.” [9]

Hugo Gernsback was the first to apply the term “fan” to those among the SF readership who, not content with being merely passive consumers of science fiction, wrote letters to the magazines and formed local groups. But this wasn’t all they did. They also produced amateur magazines. We now call these “fanzines” but back then they were known as “fanmags”, the term “fanzine” not coming into use until the early 1940s when it was coined by American fan Louis Russell Chauvenet. [14]

The first true British fanzine was *Novae Terrae*, published by Maurice K. Hanson and Dennis A. Jacques for the Nuneaton chapter of the SFL. (It was not the first fanzine published outside North America, however, since the first issue of *The New Zealand Science Fiction Bulletin* had appeared in February 1935.) [15] The first issue of *Novae Terrae* appeared in March 1936 and there were another twenty eight, the last in January 1939. At this point Hanson handed the editorship over to Plumstead fan John (Ted) Carnell who published a further four issues under the anglicised name *New Worlds* (which had usually appeared alongside the Latin version on the contents page anyway). In those thirty-five months, however, it made history. Carnell himself first appeared in its pages in the second issue in which he began a long and successful career as a fan columnist with a report on various feuds then raging in New York fandom. He had to apologise for this report in the fourth issue.

At some point in 1936 one of the Leeds group’s earliest members, W.A. Dyson of Huddersfield, was killed in an accident. It was the first death in British fandom. By September 1936 membership had increased still further and Leeds SFL had outgrown the Florist Street address, which was due for demolition anyway (though this didn’t actually happen until the following year), and for a brief period the HQ of the group was shifted back to Hollin Road. This was for administrative purposes only and no meetings were held there,

but it appears to be around this point that J. Michael Rosenblum contacted the group (his own belief was that he was among the first Leeds fans to contact Mayer but neither Airey or Warnes remember him being at Florist Road, so it seems likely that he and the other newcomers who joined the group with him responded to a further mention in *Wonder Stories* around this time). Rosenblum's father owned a lot of run-down property in Leeds at this time and he was able to let them use a room in one of those properties. This was at 9 Brunswick Terrace and the room was located over a small printing business in the otherwise empty building. By November, Leeds SFL was installed in its new clubroom and entering its most significant period.



E.J. "Ted" Carnell



Mike Rosenblum



Eric Frank Russell

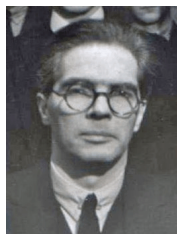
Such groups as existed in the early 1930s were for the most part small and isolated but with the proliferation of inter-fan correspondence and the steadily increasing number of fanzines came curiosity about other fans that led to the first visits. In the US these often involved enormous distances but the poor road and rail links, not to mention the fares involved, made visits in the UK a hardly less daunting task. Nonetheless, personal contact between fans from different parts of the country became more frequent as the decade progressed. Ted Carnell's own first contact with other fans occurred when, in April 1936, he received a letter from Les Johnson, then secretary of the BIS, saying that he and Eric Frank Russell were travelling to London from Liverpool on business and hoped they might see Carnell. He met up with them at Liverpool Street station, and tagged along with them to Gillings's home. This was the first meeting between the two men who were to become rivals and loom large in the early history of both SF and fandom in this country. According to Johnson neither "up to that time had ever met, and in fact knew very little about each other or about each other's activities". [16] Meanwhile, Johnson had been shaking things up in the British Interplanetary Society:

"The expansion of the BIS continued until by the end of 1936 it became evident to many of the Council Members at the Liverpool Headquarters that any future the Society might have rested on its transfer to the metropolis, London. This view, unhappily, was not shared by the President, P.E. Cleator, or the Vice President, Colin Askham. However, with the consent of the majority of the Council, I sponsored the formation of a London Branch at the end of 1936, and the Headquarters were transferred in 1937." [9]

The first meeting of the London branch of the BIS took place on 28th October 1936, and as Ted Carnell later recalled:

"... it was held in Professor A.M. Low's office in Piccadilly, and amongst some twenty members present were Wally Gillings, Arthur C. Clarke, and ourselves. Shortly before the meeting began, a quiet fellow snuck into the office and whispered earnestly to Walt – we thought it was the cops or the insurance man but it turned out to be just a science fiction fan who wasn't very interested in rocketry. His name, as we recall, was G. Ken Chapman.

"The meeting snored to its inevitable finale (all BIS meetings used to give us a headache – the jargon was so flighty!), and the fans moved to an adjacent café to thrash out weightier problems, like the latest *Astounding*. Walt dashed off copy appertaining to the 'greatest ever' futuristic meeting, and rushed it by phone to Associated Press. Then we sat back and decided that it was time we had some sort of London fan group instead of these haphazard meetings. But nothing was done at the time." [17]



Prof. A.M. Low



G. Ken Chapman



Bill Temple

The disagreement between Les Johnson and the others over the forthcoming transfer of power from Liverpool may have been more acrimonious than his bland description above suggests. On Sunday 15th November Johnson spoke at the second London meeting of the BIS. Bill Temple was there and recorded his impressions in his diary. He arrived at the Mason's Arms ...

"... to find a meeting of 12 going on at a T-shaped table, with Johnson at the head. Gillings was there; later I spoke a few words to him, & he said this BIS business was just a sideline with him; he was mainly interested in scientification. What a queer society this is! Johnson spent about 2½ hours giving a minutely detailed account of the Liverpool Society, read completely through a long Minutes Book & another Special Minutes Book. It might be called 'The Dictatorship of Mr. P.E. Cleator'. This Cleator appears to be a regular character. He didn't seem to care a damn about the rest of the members so long as he had his way with everything. He banned any criticism against himself. Let the Society down in many ways. Kept them in the dark about everything, ignored them until the membership fell away rapidly. Insisted on writing and editing the 'Journal' all himself, & expressing his own views through it, which were violently & sarcastically atheistic & anti-religious. Invited prominent rocketeers to lecture to the Society & didn't tell Johnson until the last minute, so that only 11 turned up to hear Willy Ley, the German expert. Johnson said this Cleator was 'strong minded'. To me (judging from these reports) a callous, selfish, thoughtless, spoilt, mean, eccentric. ... But he resigned the Presidency when Johnson insisted on the London Branch taking

control. An amazing story, this, in full. Being left with all the responsibilities of the Journal, etc., & probably as an aftermath of the battle with Cleator, Johnson had a nervous breakdown." [9]

Having built up a library, acquired a clubroom, appointed officers, and started corresponding regularly with fellow spirits nationally and in the USA the Leeds group was, by the end of 1936, Britain's most active fannish centre, home of the biggest and most prominent SFL chapter in the country. Their clubroom was open day and night, though the group held its official meetings on Sundays, and the chapter received a certain amount of attention from the local press, *The Yorkshire Evening Post* describing the clubroom as a place where:

"'Prophetic Fiction is the Mother of Scientific Fact' is written over the door.... Inside there is a vast array of 'science fiction' periodicals. Perhaps it is unfair to stress the American magazines ... The 'Science Fiction League', as may be guessed from the wording associated with it, originated on the far side of the Atlantic...."

The liberal use of quotation marks is a good indication of the scepticism with which American SF was treated back then. *The Yorkshire Evening News* was both kinder and more perceptive. Space-rockets were in the news so, while acknowledging the members' "... immense good humour, enthusiasm and vitality ..." it concentrated on their primitive experiments in this field. What secured the Leeds chapter's place in history, however, was the convention they organised. [18]

On Sunday 3rd January 1937, fourteen SF fans assembled in the Theosophical Hall at 14 Queen Square, Leeds, for the first ever science fiction convention to be held anywhere (rival claims are sometimes made that a visit between a group of Philadelphia fans and a group of New York fans that took place in the home of one of the former a few months prior to this constituted the first SF convention, but these are disregarded by most serious fanhistorians). Doug Mayer appears to have been one of the prime movers behind the convention. At first, venues more centrally located than Leeds were considered before Leeds SFL realised they could more easily handle arrangements in their own city. There was no registration fee, though fans were required to write in advance for free tickets. The convention was well-publicised and if not for a flu epidemic then raging would doubtless have pulled in more people. Most of those who attended lived locally, but six prominent fans came from other parts of the country. [19]

Ted Carnell, Walter Gillings and Arthur C. Clarke met up at St. Pancras Station late the previous night and caught the mail train to Leeds, with Maurice K. Hanson joining them at Leicester. The train arrived at Leeds station – which was apparently then still under construction – around 4am. The quartet were met by Harold Gottliffe, who whisked them away to the Clubroom, which Ted Carnell described thus:

"That Clubroom really had something. It was as comfortable as any large single room could be, which had been fitted out by the ingenuity of the members, and we remember Michael Rosenblum giving us a conducted tour round the book-wracks – sorry – but they were an eye opener to ordinary fans who hadn't had the yen to make

a collection." [17]

The other out-of-towners – Eric Frank Russell and Les Johnson– arrived from Liverpool around noon.

Herbert Warnes, then Director of Leeds SFL, presided and at 10.30am called the proceedings to order. Convention secretary Doug Mayer read out messages from Professor A.M. Low (editor of *Armchair Science*), Olaf Stapledon, H.G. Wells, John Russell Fearn, Festus Pragnell, and The Oklahoma Science Fiction Association.

Walter Gillings gave the first talk of the day, during which he outlined his plans for *Scientifiction*, a fanzine he intended to put out shortly. Gillings had taken the precaution of issuing a circular to test demand for such a zine, and though the results had been disappointing he intended going ahead with it anyway, feeling that a printed journal would be acceptable to the fans and to the publishers he hoped to impress. A few weeks after the convention *Scientifiction* duly appeared, an attractively printed journal that was easily the most professional-looking fanzine the country had yet produced and one which brought a lot of prestige to London fandom.

Ted Carnell told the convention how fanzines were springing up all over the place in America and referred to the petty squabbles occurring between some of their fan groups. He warned British fans to avoid such bitter rivalry and then went on to report the progress of the new London branch of the BIS, and the recent resignation of Cleator as BIS President. Arthur C. Clarke, an ex-Taunton fan and treasurer of the London branch, described the work that had gone into establishing it and said that members were anxious to embark on practical research. Maurice Hanson told the sad story of the Nuneaton group's activity which, apart from helping in the production chores on *Novae Terrae*, seemed limited to borrowing books from the chapter's library.

This first SF con was a serious affair, yet it couldn't really have been otherwise. SF fandom had existed for a few short years and SF itself was little more than a strange minority interest, a peculiar branch of literature barely existing beyond the confines of the pulps and ignored by most authors and publishers, that was read by people who actually believed that men would one day walk on the surface of the Moon. British fandom, then, was clearly anxious to establish a good image for itself and after lunch on that Sunday afternoon the convention met to consider a proposal made by Leeds SFL for a non-commercial organisation to further the cause of science fiction in Britain. This was the Science Fiction Association and it was set up "... to encourage publishers to pay more attention to scientifiction and to stimulate public interest in science". The intention was to ask the British SFL chapters to become branches of the new organisation and to encourage the formation of other branches throughout the country. The visiting fans proposed that Leeds should be the headquarters for the SFA, and that *Novae Terrae* should become its official organ. This was agreed and Mayer was appointed the SFA's first head. (It was proposed that H.G. Wells be asked to become its president, but this idea was soon abandoned.) Not everyone was happy about the SFA, as soon became clear.

On 24th January 1937, at the Leeds group's regular meeting, Mayer moved that the club formally secede from the SFL and thereafter be known as Leeds SFA, in accordance with the decisions taken at the convention. However, there were those in the group, led by J. Michael Rosenblum and Harold Gottliffe, who opposed Mayer's motion (which was passed) and

decided to remain affiliated to the SFL rather than sever their ties with the US organisation. And so a schism developed, with the Leeds group having two separate factions. This was at least partly attributable to the personal animosity that existed between Mayer and Rosenblum and conflict seemed inevitable. Then Gottliffe announced that the SFL faction was nevertheless behind most of the principles of the SFA and would continue to solicit memberships for it and conflict was, for the moment, averted. According to Rosenblum:

“When the SFA was formed the arrangement had been that the Leeds group should do the actual running of the society. But this idea turned out to have the seeds of discord hidden within and two schools of thought developed. One held that *only* the managing of the SFA mattered, and that members of the group should conform to the instructions of the SFA officials as nominated by the formation convention; even if such officials were out of conformity with the constitution of the group – as Mayer was by then: whilst the opposing viewpoint was that the Leeds group was an autonomous body, entitled to run itself as its members wished, and that if need be the official positions could be re-arranged within the Leeds group by free election” [20]

Noting that the Leeds group’s Jewish members were all in the SFL faction (the seventeen in that faction were Rosenblum, Gottliffe, Eric Moss, Bernard Cohen, James H. Gilmour, Austyn G. Snowden, Percy Friedman, John Moss, Frank Meilin, George Thomson, Mire Goldblatt, Matthias Rivlin, John D. Lewis, I. Crowther, Donald Price, E. Rose, and Harold Solk), US fanhistorian Sam Moskowitz has speculated there might have been an ethnic component to the schism. [21] If so it was never mentioned in fanzines of the time or by any of the participants this writer subsequently contacted about these events. It’s possible that ethnic group identification or solidarity may have inclined the group’s Jewish members to side with Rosenblum but, absent corroborating evidence one way or the other, this will remain speculation. The tensions in the wider world at this point suggest another interpretation.

Quite apart from any personality clash between Mayer and Rosenblum the antagonism between them might also have had a political dimension. In the early 1930s socialists and pacifists had been united in their opposition to war but with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935 and, more decisively, with the start of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936, that marriage came undone. From then on the two diverged dramatically, pacifists maintaining their opposition to all wars while the socialists argued that all means must be used to reverse the spread of Fascism. Where once there had been unity there was now antagonism, and it’s not unreasonable to assume the pacifist Rosenblum and socialist Mayer mirrored this clash.

By contrast with Leeds, Nuneaton SFL changed not only their organisational allegiance but their city of allegiance as well, becoming not Nuneaton SFA but Leicester SFA. Maurice Hanson had always lived in Leicester rather than nearby Nuneaton anyway, and presumably a change in numbers with the weight of membership shifting in favour of Leicester provided an excuse for the change.

The February issue of *Novae Terrae*, though still identified on the cover as “Produced by Chapter 22 of the Science Fiction League, NUNEATON, ENGLAND”, announced the fanzine’s change in status:

“With this issue *Novae Terrae* becomes the official organ of the Science Fiction Association. As you will read elsewhere in the issue the Association was a direct outcome of the Science Fiction Conference held at Leeds on January 3rd; it fulfils a need that has been increasingly felt since the dissolution of the B.S.F.A. – a primarily British science fiction organisation with headquarters in this country.”

The issue carried the first of what was to be a monthly report on the SFA, opening with a list of its “Aims and Objects”. This confirmed that 9 Brunswick Terrace was to be the national headquarters of the Association and that Doug Mayer was Secretary, George Airey the Treasurer, and Bert Warnes the Assistant Treasurer. It also stated:

“At the time of writing although the ‘membership drive’ has not commenced, we have fourteen members, and one branch has been formed.”

That branch was Leeds, of course, and also included was a report on their progress. This listed Bert Warnes as Chairman, Harold Gottliffe as Treasurer, and George Airey as Librarian. It also stated the Leeds branch currently had eleven members. Since eleven from fourteen leaves only three, that number was presumably the membership of the Leeds group in total at that point rather than just those of their number who had formally joined the SFA.

February 1937 saw the publication of the first issue of *The Science Fiction Gazette*, published for the SFA by the Leeds group, with the second issue appearing in April and the third in May. In the spring Doug Mayer put out the first issue of *Tomorrow*, the quarterly journal of the SFA and the respectable “front” it intended presenting to outsiders. The association was coming together, and in viewing it from the present it might be instructive to examine the climate in which it came into being. This is what Sid Birchby had to say when writing about the period some years later:

“As I re-read those early fanzines, the general air is one of humbug. Of course, it was the age of humbug. Down in London where I was living, I was conducting a steady and worthy correspondence with a number of fans and writing pages of the grossest self-deception and pomposity. I was convinced that fandom, or rather science fiction, was going to sweep the world. To me, the Leeds Conference, which I did not attend, was like thunder in the heavens, and the resolutions of those present were edicts to be treated with profound respect.

“Even then, you see, there was an Inner Circle to Fandom; the very first in Britain. It consisted of the handful who had taken the initiative to meet one another. At Leeds they gave each other resounding titles: within months they were the BNFs and lone fans like myself, happier writing to other fans than meeting them, were content to know that British Fandom was starting off in a properly constituted manner, guided by duly elected Secretaries and Chairmen. For me, the Conference was a Parliament whose authority was not to be questioned, but which at the same time I saw only as something remote from my hobby and myself. Leeds was a fan club run by strangers. I did not for some time see it as the start of a national movement.

“Such an attitude could hardly exist today, when no fan tells another what he shall or shall not do. But this was the age of Baldwin. Only a month before the King

of England himself had been thrown out for not conforming with the Establishment. As a fan, I felt it was quite right and proper that the fanzines that the new SFA sponsored, such as *Tomorrow* and *Novae Terrae*, should print their steady diet of pep articles on 'Whither Mankind?' and 'Science Progress'.

"It was the New World we were making, and the golden tool was Science. Around us the world was moving into the first steps of the dance of death. Spain was in the middle of her civil war; Italy had just finished the Abyssinian war; Germany had re-occupied the Rhineland. Against this background, British Fandom reflected that middle-class respectability which Britain as a country maintained in the face of rising chaos abroad.

"But in 1937, the SFA was determined to go through with its regulating policy. The satirical articles of D.R. Smith in *Novae Terrae* were carefully buttressed about with stodge about Branch Meetings and Votes of Thanks. There was to be no slipping out of Fandom's foundation garments while the Establishment lasted." [22]



Sid Birchby



Harry Turner

In March 1937 the Manchester Interplanetary Society got in trouble with the law when a rocket they fired from their Clayton Vale launch site exploded resulting in one member, Herbert Snelson, being taken to hospital. The incident was covered in all manner of local and national newspapers and, as member Harry Turner later related:

"During the rest of that week, members were frequent visitors to the city News Theatre where the local newsreel included brief footage covering the incident. The thing that really impressed me about this was that all the folk who'd chatted to us on the day and shown interest in the society (and been noted as potential members) turned out to be plain clothes detectives.

"So, it was not entirely surprising, after the press had forgotten the matter, that most of the members actively involved received summonses to appear at the City Police Court on May 14 ..."

Fortunately, the case provided the magistrate with light relief from more serious crime, and in a subsequent court appearance it was dismissed after the Society's members forswore the use of an "admixture of potassium chlorate and sulphur" in future experiments. How very different from the fate of the VfR. [23]

Also in March, the BIS transferred its headquarters from Liverpool to London. Professor A.M. Low became President and Ted Carnell inherited the roles of Publicity Director and editor of the *BIS Journal*. It was the first step in the inevitable gravitation of fannish

leadership to the capital. Unfortunately, it also appears to have dampened enthusiasm in Liverpool, according to Les Johnson:

“The transfer of the headquarters of the BIS having taken place, Mr. L.J. Johnson arranged for a combined meeting of science fiction enthusiasts and BIS members to take place in Liverpool on April 16th, 1937, but despite having sent out invitations to thirty individuals only six turned up, including Eric Frank Russell and Johnson himself. An appeal was made in *Novae Terrae* for any fans in the Liverpool area to contact Mr. Johnson with a view to enlivening (and re-populating) future meetings in the city.” [9]

The April 1937 *Novae Terrae* was the first to list Hanson as sole editor, with Denny Jacques now an “Associate” along with Maurice T. Cowley. The SFA report this issue was titled “Notes & Jottings” and credited to “the Secretaries”, presumably Mayer and Warnes. It gives some interesting data on the Association’s finances:

“It is with regret that we announce that we shall not be able to issue our first quarterly in printed form. The cost of printing would be between £2-10s and £3. We have at the time of writing forty-five members, each paying 1/6 per quarter (5/- per year is merely 1/3 per quarter). Of this, sixpence per member goes to pay for the three copies of *Novae Terrae* that he receives. This leaves a total of only forty-five shillings to pay for secretarial expenses, circulars, etc., and the quarterly. It is thus quite obviously a financial impossibility to have the quarterly printed at present. There remain three alternatives for the future: (a). The subscription should be increased. (b). The membership should be increased. (c). The quarterly should be duplicated. It is hoped that (b) will be the one ultimately followed, but meanwhile, we are acting on (c), and the quarterly in a special duplicated form (probably with a printed cover) will appear about April 26th.”

Just how busy the Leeds group were can be seen in this bit from the report on the activities of that branch:

“The regular monthly meeting was held on Sunday, April 4th. It was decided to hold meetings to discuss scientific topics on Tuesday evenings, and to have meetings of the practical science section on Thursday evenings, besides the regular weekend functions.”

Among those listed as having joined the SFA in the past month were P.W. Berry and B.H.Cohen of the Leeds group, and L. Flood of South Hackney, London – presumably Les Flood.

In May 1937 an attempt was made to contact Barnsley SFL to ask it to become part of the SFA, but the group had dissolved. At its height, a few months earlier, it had acquired six members and been rare among British groups in being composed mainly of science enthusiasts who thought that science fiction should be subordinated to the active furtherance of science. It had soon collapsed, a fate suffered by Belfast SFL around the same time when its Director, Hugh Carswell, joined the RAF. Glasgow SFL circulated a “Petition for Science”

in early 1937 and then it, too, vanished. Nonetheless, by June the SFA, which had set itself a target membership of 100 within a year, was up to 62 members and beginning to turn its attention towards America.

A second incarnation of the old ISA had been formed in the US by New York fan William S. Sykora in 1935 but in June 1937 it collapsed. The SFA offered to take over all the obligations of the ISA but the offer was declined. However in the final issue of the ISA's official organ, *The International Observer*, Donald A. Wollheim (later the publisher of DAW books) suggested that US fandom join the SFA en masse in the absence of a worthwhile American alternative. This was all more than a little ironic given that Wollheim had been largely responsible for engineering the collapse of the ISA. On the West Coast a Los Angeles branch of the SFA was formed in June under the chairmanship of Russell J. Hodgkins after LASFL members began joining the association in large numbers, and within six months the branch was claiming a membership of 28. So at this point the L.A. group (later known as LASFS) became a branch of both the SFL and the SFA. Back in Britain, meanwhile, trouble was brewing. [24]

By the end of June 1937 open warfare seems to have broken out between the Leeds group factions. Surprisingly, it appears to have been this seemingly innocuous announcement in the "SFA Monthly Report" in the first *Novae Terrae* for June (there were two that month) that triggered the conflict:

OFFICIALS: It is suggested, to save time when writing, that letters should be sent direct to the various officials who are: General Secretary – D.W.F. Mayer, 20 Hollin Park Road, LEEDS 8. Assistant Secretary – H. Warnes, 5 Florist Street, Leeds 3. Treasurer – G.A. Airey, 9 Gledhow Park Drive, Leeds 8.

There are copies of this issue of *Novae Terrae* in circulation as they were printed, and others with the following notice stamped on the cover:

THE SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION
9 BRUNSWICK TERRACE, LEEDS 2.

NOTICE

Will members please note that, owing to the resignation of Messrs Mayer & Warnes from the Leeds group, and consequent change of officers, all correspondence should be addressed to the society's HQ & NOT to any private address.

The notice would have been the work of Rosenblum and/or Gottliffe and/or Cohen, and in order to have stamped the covers they must have had a hand in the distribution. This suggests that after it became the SFA's official organ, editor Hanson was forwarding the print run of *Novae Terrae* to Leeds HQ for mailing out, so perhaps relieving him of postage costs and the chore of envelope stuffing was part of the quid pro quo. The fact that not all copies bear the stamp further suggests that the members of the SFL faction had already mailed a

number out before someone thought to look inside and spotted the offending notice. As to why they could have taken offence, well, 9 Brunswick Terrace was both the Leeds group clubroom and the official address of SFA HQ and, despite their differences, those members of the SFL faction who had joined the SFA were clearly doing their bit for the Association. Having Mayer and Co. request that henceforth correspondence should be directed to their private addresses may have been seen by the SFL faction as an attempt to freeze them out. Even so, claiming Mayer and Warnes had resigned when they had done no such thing may not have been the wisest of moves.

In July both factions released their own versions of the fourth issue of *The Science Fiction Gazette*, causing confusion and consternation to those who received them. As London fan Eric Williams noted in a letter at the time:

"I am returned (from holiday) and what do I find on opening the postbox? Two gazettes filled with acid ... Gottliffe tells me that Mayer is a dirty faker (in so many words) and Mayer tells the world that Gottliffe and Co. are playing a hoax. Both it seems are able to publish gazettes, both declaim the other. Who is right?"

Mayer, Warnes, and Airey rushed out a fifth issue – also dated July 1937 – in which they described Gottliffe's actions as "degrading", implied his continuing to receive monies on behalf of the SFA constituted financial impropriety, and announced the suspension of Gottliffe, Rosenblum, and Cohen from the SFA:

"...for a period of three years, the suspension commencing today, July 13th, 1937. After July 1st, 1940, they may rejoin, subject to the approval of the members and of officials of that time. They must be made to realize that although science fiction fans are notorious at ignoring conventions, there are some things which even a fan must not do, and disgracing a science-fiction society is one of them."

As Moskowitz notes:

"Apparently the expulsion did take effect, because no Leeds SFL member is listed as attending any British convention sponsored by the SFA up until the outbreak of World War II. The group either stayed away voluntarily, or were led to believe they were not welcome. Nor did any of their contributions appear in SFA publications until 1939, except for a reply to the SFA's allegations." [21]

This appeared in the July 1937 *Novae Terrae* as an "Editorial Note":

"In connection with the disagreement in Leeds, Mr Gottliffe and his supporters ask us to state: (a) That new members accepted by 9 Brunswick Terrace are official members of the SFA. (b) That people at 9 Brunswick Terrace consider themselves at least as well qualified to receive monies on behalf of the SFA as anyone else, and that all money taken will be accounted for. (c) That these people consider expulsion of certain members null and void."

This affair was the sort of thing there is no coming back from and though the two factions had previously managed to co-exist within the same fan group that would now no longer be possible.

The time was ripe for London to take over, and so it would. All the factors that would lead to the gradual eclipse of Leeds by London fandom were falling into place and, at Mayer's urging, the first fan group in London proper would soon form.

August saw the demise of the Leicester/Nuneaton group. During that month Hanson moved to London, with his duplicator, and without him Nuneaton fandom faded away, leaving only D.R. Smith as resident active fan. So it was that the October *Novae Terrae* appeared under the joint editorship of Hanson, Carnell, and Clarke, the first issue published in London. Meanwhile, the strife in Leeds was continuing to worry fans in the capital and on 21st August, Eric Williams wrote to Sid Birchby with the following proposal:

"For some time now Ken Chapman and myself have been thinking of really going all out for a London branch of the SFA, and now that Hanson of *Novae Terrae* has come to town I think this is the time to take over a little of the duties of Leeds. As you know, there has been a spot of bother up there which if it continues might injure the reputation of the Association with the fans. Mayer has suggested that if London formed a really strong club, they might take over a large part of the business."



Eric Williams



Arthur C. Clarke



Harold Gottliffe

Some indication of the acrimony generated by the schism in the Leeds group can be seen in the report below of one of the first post-split meetings of Leeds SFL. The report, in the February 1938 *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, was written by Mike Rosenblum, and begins:

"On Sunday 5 Sept, 1937, the Leeds Chapter of the SFL held the first of its Winter Session meetings. Among those present was the director, Harold Gottliffe, the secretary, J.M. Rosenblum, the treasurer, B.H. Cohen, and many other members. By special invitation, members of the Leeds Rocket Society attended, as their Technical Advisor, J.H. Gilmour B.Sc., gave a short talk later in the evening.

"The proceedings opened with a short speech by the Chairman, A.C. Snowden, who outlined, for the benefit of new members, the history of the Chapter. When he mentioned the resignation of the first Director, he was unable to proceed for some minutes because of the cheering. He said: 'You will remember also – those of you who were present – how at our meeting of 24th January a majority of our members present decided to dissolve the chapter, and how only the prompt action of Michael in reorganising the remaining members present saved the first English Chapter of the SFL

from complete extinction. We cannot thank him too much for the service he has rendered in the past'."

The same report mentioned that Snowden had recently visited the Manchester Interplanetary Society for their AGM, further evidence of the increasing links that were being forged between Britain's scattered groups.

On Sunday 3rd October 1937 London members of the SFA turned up in full force to launch their new branch at a meeting held in Catford at the 11 Clowders Road home of Eric Williams. Eighteen fans attended and the meeting was apparently held amid considerable enthusiasm. G. Ken Chapman, who presided, was elected chairman of the branch, with Williams as secretary, and a letter of good wishes from Leeds headquarters was read out. It was agreed that meetings should be held every month at a place to be agreed and that members' activities should include the writing of SF and the study of scientific subjects. To this end William F. Temple was elected chairman of the Writers' Circle and a Science Committee was appointed. Ted Carnell told the assembly of the pitfalls American fan organisations had encountered which Britain had thus far avoided. The SFA, he announced, had made US fans sit up and take notice and shown them how such an organisation should be run. Someone else who showed up, uninvited, was S. Nyman of Tottenham. He kept leaping to his feet with questions on the smallest point of order during the meeting and succeeded in irritating most of the others present. [25]

The second London SFA meeting (the first of the regular monthly meetings agreed to at the Catford gathering) took place on Sunday 7th November 1937, in the Ancient Order of Druids Memorial Hall (hereinafter referred to simply as "Druids Hall") at 14-18 Lamb's Conduit Street in Holborn, a venue Ken Chapman appears to have been instrumental in finding. The meeting ran from the afternoon into the evening, and as well as London SFA members was also attended by a delegation from Leeds HQ consisting of Doug Mayer, George Airey, and Herbert Warnes. Thus Druids Hall became the regular venue for the monthly meetings and the next was held on Sunday 5th December, Sunday having been established as the most convenient day to hold them. In addition to holding these formal meetings, London SFA members soon began meeting informally as well. As Birchby recalls:

"As from Thursday 9th December 1937 I began having tea with some of the regulars. Such gatherings may have started before then but this was my first. After work I went up to Holborn and in a Lyons' teashop joined six of the SFA gang in poached egg on toast and a jaw."

The others at that meeting included Williams, Clarke, Temple, and Carnell. These informal meetings took place weekly in the J. Lyons at 36/38 New Oxford Street (and occasionally at the Express Dairy next door at no.40) and one of those who remembers them has suggested that Thursday was chosen because that was when Ted Carnell got a half-day off from work. London fans still meet on a Thursday to this day, and the thought that this tradition started because many decades ago Ted Carnell got a half-day on Thursdays is a sobering one.

Fandom at this point, and for some years to come, was devoted primarily to the furtherance of science and of science fiction, yet had it started earlier things might have been

very different. Writing some years later about the pre-*Amazing* days Grace Burns, a British woman, observed:

“When I was in my youth, we too had our science fiction and very keen we were on it, I assure you. Of course, organised fandom was non-existent. As for rubbing shoulders with authors, that was impossible, separated from us as they were by the impenetrable barrier of the editorial office. I think that the main difference was that our enthusiasm had a political bias, whereas modern enthusiasm seems to be non-political. I was a keen socialist in my youth and naturally a secret supporter of the suffrage movement.” [26]

Yet British fans of the late 1930s were not apolitical, nor uninfluenced by the huge socialist and pacifist movements of the day. The most prominent of the latter was Dick Sheppard’s Peace Pledge Union. In October 1934 Sheppard, Britain’s first “radio parson”, had written a letter to *The Times* speaking out against the growth of fascism and the possibility of war. This was hardly an innovation but, towards the end, he added that any men who felt as he did and wanted to do something should send him a postcard with the words: “We renounce war and never again, directly or indirectly, will we support or sanction another”. This was the peace pledge, and within weeks Sheppard had received over 100,000 postcards bearing pledges. From this grew the Sheppard Peace Movement, later renamed the Peace Pledge Union, and among its distinguished sponsors were people such as Siegfried Sassoon, Vera Brittain, Aldous Huxley, and Bertrand Russell. Naturally, there were fans who “took the Pledge”, the first in a long line of British fans who were to become involved in the peace movements of their day.

Copies of the Peace Pledge Folder went out with the November 1937 *Novae Terrae* and in this, and in the socialist views put forth in Eric Williams’s “Are You a True Science Fictionist?” and in Albert Griffiths’s “The Future”, articles that appeared in that same issue, American fan Donald A. Wollheim saw enough of interest to write a piece titled “Commentary on the November *Novae Terrae*” for the January 1938 issue. In it he outlined the basic tenets of “Michelism”, a movement named after New York fan John B. Michel and launched on 31st October 1937 in the “Mutation or Death” speech written by Michel and delivered by Wollheim at the Third Eastern Science Fiction Convention in Philadelphia. In the *Novae Terrae* piece Wollheim defined Michelism thus:

“MICHELISM is the belief that science-fiction followers should actively work for the realisation of the scientific socialist world-state as the only genuine justification for their activities and existence.

“MICHELISM believes that science fiction is a force; a force acting through the medium of speculative and prophetic fiction on the minds of idealist youth; that logical science-fiction inevitably points to the necessity for socialism, the advance of science, and the world-state; and that these aims, created by science-fictional idealising, can best be reached through adherence to the program of the Communist International.

“MICHELISM is the theory of science-fiction Action.”

This caused a sensation in US fandom, being the first time any of the Michelists had publicly admitted their creed was essentially Communist; but, with the exception of Dave McIlwain's denunciation of Michelism in the first issue of *The Satellite* later that year, reaction over here was rather more muted. Not that British fandom, too, hadn't been getting politicised. As the inclusion of the Peace Pledge Folder indicates, British fans on the whole tended towards pacifism, but that wasn't all. While the Michelists had been getting interested in Marxism, British fans appear to have been much affected by the appearance, in 1937, of H.G. Wells's *The Star-Begotten*. In a piece called "Wake Up, Fans!" in the December 1937 *Novae Terrae*, Doug Mayer asked "why it has taken so long ... for the fans to turn their attention from the outpourings of hack writers to the problems of humanity ...", and answered:

"Whatever the cause, it is pretty certain, I think, that little of this new outlook had attacked British fans before the beginning of 1937. It is also certain that prominent British fans of my acquaintance began to stray from the accustomed path towards the end of July. Perhaps some of the magnificent ideas expressed in *Star-Begotten* were responsible for this awakening. In the Leeds Branch, at least, the change from amateur scientists to idealistic sociologists took place following the introduction of this book, and my half-humorous comment that fans were slightly star-begotten."

After commenting on Michelism approvingly ("... a few of our American colleagues who shared the same beliefs decided in a typically American fashion that action, and not theorizing, was required"), Mayer concluded:

"I am asking that all thinking fans should admit that science-fiction in itself is a mere nothing; it is what lies beyond science-fiction that counts. I am also suggesting that it is a practicable possibility for persons who share these ideas to unite in an attempt to DO SOMETHING, and I certainly believe that the matter is one that should be seriously and actively considered in further articles, and at the forthcoming British Conference."

True to his word, Mayer used his speech at the next convention to spread these ideas; and they were not without popular support. However, whereas it had been possible to be both a committed socialist and a committed pacifist in the early 1930s that wasn't the case by the end of the decade, the British Left having abandoned pacifism en masse when the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, as mentioned earlier. Since a lot of British fans were committed pacifists (we'll see later just how widespread pacifist sentiment was in British fandom) this would seem to have precluded much socialist activism. There were a number of reasons for this fannish pacifism but Christian principle – turning the other cheek and the like – was not one of them. World War I lay only twenty years in the past at this point and not only had almost every family in the land lost someone in the trenches during that terrible conflict but when visiting the shops you were inevitably confronted by a small procession of crippled veterans outside Woolworth's and other big stores, chests bedecked with medals, begging – yet compelling as it was, even this wasn't the main reason. No, fans of the time were convinced, no less than a later generation facing the possibility of nuclear holocaust

would be, that war would lead to the end of civilisation. If you managed to survive the explosives and the poison gas you were sure to be killed by the plague that would follow large-scale death. Many fans were willing to endure anything rather than contribute to that collapse but, as we shall see, such a position was to prove increasingly hard to maintain in the years that lay ahead. [27]

Following the split in the Leeds group, the SFA faction had found themselves back at Florist Street, but in October 1937 the street was demolished and they had to move on. January 1938 found the group using Mayer's Hollin Road home as an accommodation address once again and it was here that the winter issue of *Tomorrow* was produced. Among those who had come along with Mayer, Warnes, and Airey following the split were Dobby, Griffiths, Berry, F.V. Gilliard, and A. Miller. In April, Leeds SFA moved into its new clubroom at 312 Roundhay Road, a venue acquired by George Airey from the same source as the Roneo duplicator he had found for the club the previous year. As Bert Warnes recalls:

"The premises consisted of an attic flat over some shops, which we were delighted to obtain through the efforts of George Airey who was again able to prevail upon his employers, a well known firm of builders and estate agents. The flat was sited opposite the Clock Cinema and was undoubtedly the best venue we ever had. In fact it was so cosy and comfortable that George and his wife, when they married some months later, occupied it as their home for some time to come."

As well as the usual lectures and film shows Leeds SFA expanded its activities at its new venue to include things such as ESP experiments and the like. Not that there wasn't also room for frivolity, as Warnes and Airey recall:

"We would not have you think we were always po-faced. We can recollect one particular party, a 'Walpurgis Night', which Doug organised with his usual flair and which was so noisy and boisterous that the neighbours complained." [13]

For some time Ted Carnell had been urging that Britain's next SF con should be held in London, and it was. On Sunday 10th April 1938, Britain's second convention – called simply "The Second Convention" – was held at the Druids Hall, and 43 people attended. There were two sessions, in the afternoon and evening, held in the hall's "temple" – which was dimly lit and had cardboard scenery representing Stonehenge at dawn. Carnell was Master of Ceremonies and Ken Chapman the chairman. In the evening session were speeches by Gillings, A.M. Low, Les Johnson, I.O. Evans, Doug Mayer, Benson Herbert, and John Russell Fearn. Greetings were read out from Dr. John D. Clark of Philadelphia, Oliver Saari of Minneapolis, Dr. Otto Steinitz of Berlin, Leo Margulies at *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, Ray Palmer at *Amazing Stories*, and the Los Angeles group. It was the afternoon session that proved most significant, however. It was here that London's dominance of British fandom became complete when control of the SFA was passed to an all-London committee (Ken Chapman was appointed secretary, Carnell was made treasurer, and Prof. A.M. Low – beating out Gillings, John Beynon Harris, and John Russell Fearn – became president). It was a bloodless coup. [28]

The last issue of *Scientifiction* to be produced by Gillings appeared in March 1938. As

he had hoped it would, *Scientifiction* had convinced a publisher that there was a market for a British SF magazine, and that Gillings was the man to edit it. So, in June 1937, *Tales of Wonder* had duly appeared. The first two issues were trial issues and there was a gap of nine months before the next appeared, but when it did the publishers promised to put it on a quarterly schedule. Having acquired this new responsibility Gillings decided to drop *Scientifiction*. At this point the SFA stepped in. They decided to combine it with *Tomorrow* and had this package professionally printed. The first of these expanded *Tomorrows*, issue five, appeared in the spring of 1938. Unfortunately it proved too expensive to maintain and the autumn issue of *Tomorrow*, the seventh, was the last.

On 22nd May 1938, Clarke and Hanson from London, and Mayer and Bloom from Leeds, journeyed up to Manchester for the official opening of the Manchester branch of the SFA. A group of eight or nine local fans joined them in the branch's clubroom for the ceremony. This was in the attic of Harry Turner's parents' house, and the local fans included Roy Johnson and Turner himself. Destined to be a mainstay of early Manchester fandom, Turner was a talented artist (who would later earn his living that way) and soon became the main cover artist on *Novae Terrae*. [29]

The SFL faction of the Leeds group got into fanzines in 1938. January brought the first issue of *The Bulletin of the Leeds Science Fiction League* from Gottliffe, and March the second. This was replaced as organ of Leeds SFL in June 1938 when Rosenblum launched the first issue of his fanzine, *The Futurian*. Rosenblum thought this was a good name, but he wasn't the only one. In New York the Michelists were looking for a new name, and they liked it too. On 18th September 1938 they renamed themselves the Futurian Science Literary Society, a title that usage eventually abbreviated to "The Futurians", and had as members some who would go on to become the biggest names in SF. However, it was 1945 before they admitted they had lifted the name from Rosenblum's fanzine. His response, in FAPA, was uncharacteristically sarcastic:

"I must thank the Futurian Society of New York for their wonderful magnanimity in allowing other people to use the word they so neatly appropriated unto themselves. And seeing as we were never asked what we meant by the term 'Futurian' it might be considered presumptuous for the New Yorkers to define it as they wish. However, I am grateful for the acknowledgement of the purloining of the term, an acknowledgement some seven years overdue. It is interesting to note that I possess a letter, written when the term was adopted, by DAW stating that 'Futurian came just when it was needed, and so was appropriated'; and one from Pohl which says that the New York people thought of the term before we did and had adopted it before they knew we were using it. Amusing, eh no?" [30]

Early in 1938, Arthur C. Clarke was living in a tiny bedsit in Norfolk Square, Paddington, so small that according to fannish legend he had once got wedged between its walls when he put on a double-breasted suit. Thanks to William Temple, Clarke was known in fannish circles as "Ego" (he later used the pseudonym E.G. O'Brian in his professional writing), and was one of the capital's more prominent fans. In June 1938, Temple was flat-hunting in London and decided to call in on Clarke. Since both were members of the BIS and SFA, were keen on music and wanted to write SF professionally, Temple suggested they find

a place big enough for both of them. They found it at 88 Grays Inn Road, a four-room flat on two floors in the middle of a terrace, just around the corner from where Virginia Woolf resided and less than two minutes walk from Druids Hall. Visiting the place shortly after Temple and Clarke had taken up residence, Sid Birchby described it thus:

“On the lower floors there is a foot clinic, some kind of Socialist press, and the International Writers’ Club, which appears to be a kind of literary hugger-mugger. Finally, on the top two floors, is their flat. The previous occupant was ‘Grid Leak’, the radio expert of the *Daily Sketch*. At present everything is still upside down. There are piles of gramophone records and stacks of books all around, and Arthur’s collection has not yet arrived! The place is very snug, though, and should be a good spot for us all to congregate of an evening!” [31]

Destined to become famous in fannish folklore as “the Flat” this dwelling was soon made the official headquarters of the BIS and venue for the monthly meetings of its London branch. Here the BIS constructed instruments for its proposed Moonship, among which were an inertia-governed altimeter which got tested on the escalators of Chancery Lane Underground station. The Flat also became a magnet for visiting fans. The first of these was Harold Gottliffe, who was brought along by Ted Carnell. Another early visitor was Maurice Hanson, then living in a bedsit in Bloomsbury, who was invited to join Clarke and Temple and became the Flat’s third occupant. This meant that *Novae Terrae*, the SFA’s official organ, was now published out of the Flat, so naturally enough Temple joined the editorial team. Almost immediately it became looser and less serious. Hanson had tended to pomposity in his editorials but this was soon knocked out of him and *Novae Terrae* began to print the type of material familiar to readers of modern fanzines. Soon the Flat would provide the SFA with more than just an editorial office for its official organ, however.

On Thursday 18th August, London SFA moved their weekly meetings from J. Lyons to the Flat, a move that proved very popular. On the corner of the terrace containing the Flat was the Red Bull, a pub destined to become the first that London fans ever gathered in. Those at the weekly SFA meetings tended to split into two factions: the teetotallers, headed by Clarke and Hanson staying in the Flat for the meeting; the others such as Ken Chapman, Frank Arnold, Temple and Carnell adjourning to the Red Bull for well-lubricated conversation. At closing time both parties joined again in the Flat for chips and chat until the last trains left. On one occasion the returning revellers found the stairs to the Flat barred with furniture. Behind this, armed with mops and brooms and prepared to keep the drunks out, were Clarke and the other teetotallers. The pub contingent stormed the barricade and, thanks to smart rapier-play with a rolled umbrella from Carnell, broke through. After all, the Flat was theirs too – it was everybody’s. Other regulars at this time included John Beynon Harris, Eric Williams and Sydney J. Bounds. The press showed some interest in the Flat, probably because it was HQ for the BIS and there was public interest in rocketry, and during its existence Clarke and Temple were interviewed for the *News Chronicle*, the *Evening Standard* (by critic Ian Coster), the BBC (by F. Buckley Hargreaves), and by a Nazi journalist who, according to Temple:

“... was certainly a spy ... the tall fellow with the quiet voice and restless hazel eyes

looked through our cuttings book, and appeared very *uninterested* in those dealing with rockets." [32]

In the summer of 1938, Ted Carnell and Les Johnson launched the "Science Fiction Service", the first British business specialising in SF. They had met the previous year to set it up, as Johnson later recalled:

"Following a day trip from London to Liverpool on Sunday 27th August 1937, by train, Ted Carnell and myself got together to form 'The Science Fiction Service' for the world-wide supply of Science Fiction books and magazines by mail order. All this was part-time activity on the part of each of us, as I was a Clerk in the Liverpool Education Offices, and Ted was then employed in the Printing Department of Gamage's Stores in London."

By mid-1938 the SFA was at its peak with a membership of well over 200, and new branches continued to form. Liverpool finally got its own branch in June. At a "foundation" meeting held on 21st June the Liverpool branch of the SFA was inaugurated. As well as the eleven or so local fans present, out-of-towners Turner and Bloom also showed up, and officers for the year were elected (Les Johnson as president, Norman Weedall as vice-president, Harry O. Dickinson as hon. treasurer, and F.D. Wilson as hon. librarian). Liverpool SFA held its second meeting on Friday 26th August 1938 at the Hamilton Café. It was agreed that this was where the branch would meet on alternate Fridays, though they later moved to what Johnson described as "a famous Liverpool lunch-time eating house, Messrs. G. Petty's Café in Hackins Hay". [9] John F. Burke and Dave McIlwain were charged with producing its official organ, but this would not appear until after the group had moved again. In September, the Science Fiction Service opened in an office in the centre of Liverpool at Room 7, 15 Houghton Street, (at a cost of 7s.6d. per week). Just as "The Flat" had become the centre for BIS/SF fans in London, so until the outbreak of war "The Office" became the focal point for fans in Liverpool and elsewhere. In October the first issue of *The Satellite* finally appeared. Apart from recording the doings of the branch this first issue carried McIlwain's denunciation of Michelism and also a short story by him published under the name of Charles Eric Maine, a pseudonym he wouldn't use professionally until 1946. [9] [33] Before the end of the year, the group acquired some new members, as Ron Holmes remembers:

"I appeared just after the introductory stage when Eric Frank Russell, Les Johnson, etc., had created the group and it was about to fall apart. EFR never again came to a meeting (too busy at his job) and Cleator was on his way south. I can recall Les complaining about EFR that he had pinched one of Les's plots for a story, designated 'Meat-Eaters of Metropolis' by Les, and about cannibalism which, apparently, EFR used in a published story. Meetings at the Hamilton Café had come to an end.

"With Les setting up an office in the centre of Liverpool it became possible to use it as a meeting place in the evenings. He then invited all local people on the SF Service books to attend, which included me, and I did. So out of this new arising we had Les and Abe Bloom (who was something of a partner) together with Dave McIlwain and

John Burke – then me – as the basis of the group. Les Heald came later, and several others came in and out vaguely. LesJ worked not very far away in the Liverpool Corporation Education Office, Burke’s father was a police inspector, LesH was a clerk in a civil engineering firm.” [34]

Number 15 Houghton Street has now long since been demolished but the site is easy for anyone to find, marked as it is by the second tallest free-standing structure in Liverpool (the tallest if you include its antennae). As Les Johnson wrote decades later:

“The former site of ‘The Office’ is now clearly visible for miles around Liverpool, and even out to sea. For rising right through the centre of what had been No. 15 is The Radio City Tower, thrusting its umbrella-like shape 450 feet into space above the remains of Houghton Street, and looking for all the world like a giant H.G. Wells-type spaceship about to blast-off from the Earth.” [9]

Meanwhile, those at London HQ maintained as much physical contact with the provincial branches as they could. On Sunday 17th November 1938, Arthur C. Clarke, Bill Temple, and Eric Williams travelled up to Leeds at the invitation of Doug Mayer, to address a meeting of Leeds SFA. Each of them gave a talk, and the meeting concluded with drinks, chat, and the showing of an SF film. On Sunday 18th December (“... an icy day, snowing, with the wind rattling over the roof ...” Temple reported), London SFA held a Christmas supper at the Druids Hall, followed by a couple of films, including “White Hell of Pitz Palu”. [35]

The January 1939 *Novae Terrae*, the 29th, proved to be the last. The sheer volume of work involved in producing it was proving too much for Hanson:

“This is the last issue. It is in no spirit of boastfulness that I instance the occasions of an editorial being written on Christmas Day and the super Anniversary Issue produced only by working ceaselessly through August Bank Holiday Sunday and Monday and night after night afterwards until 1am ...”

However, rather than allow *Novae Terrae* to die entirely Ted Carnell decided to start up a fanzine under the anglicised form of its name, and in March the first issue of *New Worlds* duly appeared.

On 21st May 1939, Druids Hall was again host to a convention – called simply “The London Convention”. Among the forty-eight who attended were a respectable number of out-of-towners including George Ellis and Eric Needham of Manchester; Dave McIlwain, Ron Holmes, Eddie Ducker, L.V. Heald, and John Burke of Liverpool; Phil Hetherington from Northumberland, and Sam Youd (a.k.a. John Christopher) from Hampshire. The afternoon session was enlivened by Arthur C. Clarke (during a break from playing his usual role of straight-man to Bill Temple) who organised a general knowledge quiz between a team of provincials and one of Londoners (the provincials won). W.J. Passingham and Prof. A.M. Low gave speeches and the SFA gained a number of new members from among those who attended. Writing about the convention later in *The Satellite*, Ted Carnell surprised readers when he announced that:

"... the general air of enjoyment that was prevalent throughout the entire proceedings was a fitting setting to what was literally my swan song to active fandom. As from the Convention and this column, I am dropping out of the over-active side of fandom and becoming just another London fan. *New Worlds* will continue to appear, as already stated, quarterly, and I shall of course be present to upset the regular London meetings." [36]

Actually, Carnell's next issue of *New Worlds*, the fourth, appeared in August and was the last. When *Novae Terrae* folded in January, Carnell had picked up the reins with *New Worlds* but had not produced his fanzine as the official organ of the SFA that *Novae Terrae* had been. This left a gap, one that was plugged shortly after the convention....

The first three issues of *The Satellite* were modest, half-foolscap, spirit-duplicated productions, but by the time of the London Convention it had developed into an impressive, duplicated, quarto fanzine, one with a nice line in iconoclasm. Its mystery columnist, "Fantacynic", managed to ruffle feathers on both sides of the Atlantic, while Dave McIlwain's cartoon covers introduced a new and much-needed element of humour to fanzine presentation. All of which may explain why it was chosen to be the new official organ of the SFA. It ceased being merely the organ of Liverpool SFA and went national with its June 1939 issue. Of visiting London and of "Fantacynic" Sam Youd was later to observe:

"... in mid-teens I couldn't afford the fare to London from Hampshire. My first trip was a special to the '39 convention, and I had to leave before the end to catch my train back. There was some comment that Fantacynic could not be me because he referred to events taking place after my departure; but I did have a good stringer in John Burke." [37]

And of *The Satellite*:

"We were all surprised when it became the national organ, it (and John himself) having been gadflies to the bovine corpus of SFA HQ."

Other fanzine activity at this time included, from its first issue in April, Youd's own *The Fantast*. This was a reasonably impressive mimeographed production that, initially, appeared on a regular monthly basis. In its second issue John F. Burke said of conscription, then recently introduced:

"I intend to fight it with everything I possess (even to the extent of chucking portions of my collection at people who attempt to arrest me). In the first place I refuse to bear arms against any human being, and in the second place, I am certainly not going to fight to defend a country overburdened with taxes, oppression and restrictions as ours is, and stinking from top to bottom with the rule of patricians and a form of Fascism just as dictatorial as Germany or Italy."

As subsequent events were to prove, this analysis was more than a little naive, but the worsening international situation was something no one could ignore. In the summer of

1939 it played a large part in the disbanding of Leeds SFA. According to Warnes:

“Regrettably, in mid-’39 we had to face the inevitable and it was decided to pack it in. Of what became of our records and library we are none too sure. We think Mayer bundled the lot up and dispatched it to our HQ in London, and what became of it then is anyone’s guess. Lost without trace we fear.

“Other factors were, of course, present. Doug was at this time beginning to lose interest in the SFA. His undergraduate pursuits were becoming more and more demanding and without his active support our organisation, which was so much in his hands, was bound to fail sooner or later.” [13]

All in all, 1939 was a quiet year for British fandom. Its members watched events in the world at large with growing concern, but for the most part it was in good shape. All that would soon change.

Source Notes

Unless otherwise stated, all publication information on fanzines is taken from Peter Roberts's indispensable *Bibliography of British Fanzines* (1936-1979). Obviously, the majority of sources referred to when writing this work were contemporary fanzines, most of which, unfortunately, are largely unavailable to most researchers since they were produced in small runs and few copies of the earliest survive. Those that do are mainly in the hands of private collectors, such as myself. Efforts have been made to put complete runs of these early fanzines online in recent years, and these will continue. Cites of *Then* below refer to the four-issue fanzine partwork where the initial version of this history first appeared.

The 1930s

[1] Story of *Merry-Go-Round Magazine*, finding *Amazing*, and Kippin from "The Clamorous Dreamers" by Gillings in *New Futurian* (Summer 1954) edited by J. Michael Rosenblum).

[2] Ilford Circle data from *Ilford Recorder* as noted in text. Also "The Impatient Dreamers" by Gillings (and obviously based on "The Clamorous Dreamers"), from the prozine *Vision of Tomorrow* 2, December 1969. George and Mary Dew's names obtained from electoral register.

[3] Universal Science Circle, S. Nyman, start of BSLA from "The Clamorous Dreamers" by Gillings in *New Futurian* (Spring 1955) edited by J. Michael Rosenblum).

[4] Gernsback visit from "The Impatient Dreamers", *Vision of Tomorrow* 4 (June 1970). BSLA from letter by Gillings in *Wonder Stories* (November 1931).

[5] First quote from Enever letter in *Wonder Stories* (May 1933). Second from letter to Vince Clarke from Enever, 20 March 1952. An earlier letter dated 29 Jan 1952 is signed "F.P. Enever". This fits with a records search by Catherine Pickersgill revealing that he was born Francis P. Enever, though we've been unable to determine whether that P stood for "Paul" or "Patrick".

[6] Some years after Forrest Ackerman's death, several letters to him from John R. Elliott and Patrick Enever were offered for sale on eBay. Scans were put online, and these have been quoted from here as noted.

[7] Meeting between Hayes BSFA and Gjeord Rienk Schaafsma from article by Enever in 1960 *Combozine*, published by Science Fiction Club of London. The ellipses in the quote replace the words "about the Science Fiction League, which Hugo Gernsback had so recently launched". These were omitted as a misremembered anachronism since the SFL did not launch until the following year. Enever's letter to Ackerman of 30 November 1933 confirms that the filming of the Marie Corelli story took place in mid-1933, which fits with Elliott having to hike to an Underground station.

[8] Hayes BSFA/ISA link from *The Immortal Storm* (p.17) by Sam Moskowitz. Enever's *Fantasia* quote from letter to Vince Clarke of 10 March 1953.

[9] Formation of BIS from various sources, most notably "Story of Outlands",

unpublished article by Les Johnson provided to Hansen by Steve Holland, and “A Tale of Two Fandoms” by Bob Parkinson in *Relapse* 16 (February 2010) edited by Peter Weston. These are also the sources of the relevant quotes. *Relapse* 16 also contained the first extracts from Bill Temple’s diaries.

[10] Story of VfR from Philip Henshall’s *Hitler’s Rocket Sites* (Robert Hale, 1985).

[11] Story of *Scoops* from *Vision of Tomorrow* 4. Hayes BSFA quote from Enever letters as per [5].

[12] Enever quote from his letter as [8]. Story of SFL from many sources, notably “The Clamorous Dreamers” in *New Futurian*, Spring 1957, and “The Impatient Dreamers” in *Vision of Tomorrow* 5, February 1970.

[13] Science Fiction League membership details collated from many issues of *Wonder Stories*. Leeds SFL/SFA details from letters to Hansen from Herbert Warnes and George Alwyn Airey.

[14] Chauvenet’s coining of the word “fanzine” is generally known; see specifically *Fancylopedia* II (1959) edited by Dick Eney.

[15] *NZ SF Bulletin* as first true non-North American fanzine: from Walt Willis’s column “The Immortal Teacup” in *SF Digest* (1952) edited by Henry Burwell.

[16] First Gillings/Carnell meeting from *All Our Yesterdays* (pp.84-85) by Harry Warner, Jr.; also “The Impatient Dreamers” in *Vision of Tomorrow* 9 (June 1970). Rosenblum’s version of formation of Leeds SFL from his article “Leeds Leads” in *Orbit* 1 (September/October 1953) edited by Gibson.

[17] Carnell quote from his fanzine *Sands of Time* 8 (January 1943).

[18] *Yorkshire Evening Post* quote and story of Leeds con both from “The Impatient Dreamers”, *Vision of Tomorrow* 5 – also *The Immortal Storm*, *Scientifiction* 2 (April 1937) edited by Gillings, and the Souvenir Booklet.

[19] From Moskowitz at [21] “the Official Souvenir Report claimed an attendance of ‘about twenty’. Eric Frank Russell, who had been there, stated there were thirteen, and an extant photo shows only eleven. The report names fourteen.” I have gone with the fourteen named as the most likely attendance.

[20] Rosenblum quote from his “Leeds Leads” in *Orbit* 1. Other details from *The Immortal Storm*.

[21] Moskowitz speculation from his continuation of *The Immortal Storm* in *Fantasy Commentator* 45/46 (Winter 1993-1994) edited by A. Langley Searles.

[22] Birchby quote from *New Futurian*, January 1957. For those unfamiliar with fannish jargon, BNF stands for Big Name Fan.

[23] Manchester Interplanetary Society details from Harry Turner article in *Tocsin* 1 (March 1977), edited by Harry and Irene Bell.

[24] US data from *The Immortal Storm* and from *Novae Terrae* (June/July 1937) edited by Hanson. Quotes and details of Leeds split from Birchby in *New Futurian* 6 (January 1957).

[25] Formation of London SFA from *Scientifiction* (October 1937) edited by Gillings. Birchby quote as [31].

[26] Grace Burns quote from *All Our Yesterdays* p.4.

[27] Description of inter-war attitudes based on Vince Clarke letter in *Then* 2 (March 1989) edited by Hansen.

[28] Account of first London con: “The Impatient Dreamers”, *Vision of Tomorrow* 9