



Issue 5, July 2011

Odyssey

The Newsletter of the British Interplanetary Society

Why I Support the BIS

Martin Postranecky
FBIS, Library Committee Member

My life-long interest in rocketry and spaceflight started back in early 1960's - I was a 14-year old schoolboy in my home town of Prague at the time of Yuri Gagarin's flight. I recall we all had a day-off school to 'voluntarily' line the streets when he visited Prague... Later, as a student, I joined a group of space enthusiasts in an un-official 'Space' club, where we met once a week, exchanged information and tried to publish articles and books on spaceflight - mainly based on NASA or BIS sources - there was very little otherwise.

The BIS was even then held in great esteem - it was much better known and respected abroad than in the UK !

I remember trying to borrow copies of JBIS and Spaceflight through the University Library, which wasn't easy.

When I moved to London in 1969, it was not possible for me, as an East European from a 'communist' country, to continue working in my field of aeronautical engineering. But I still kept up my interest in most aspects of spaceflight and the history of rocketry. And, of course, I joined the BIS that I had always admired from afar. I found so much of interest there, especially among the group of like-minded 'Soviet space sleuths' who started the regular 'Soviet Space Forums' at BIS. I think I have only missed one or two since the 1980's !



One day I was asked if I wanted to help out with the BIS Library and join the Library Committee, which was fine with me - all those wonderful books to be perused, including many I could not find anywhere else - only occasionally interrupted by another BIS member wanting to use the library... It is sad to see how underused such a great asset is by the membership. Hopefully, this is now changing, and the library is becoming more appreciated. It is now also much more accessible, and I would certainly urge all members to use it for their research and enjoyment as much as possible. We cannot afford to lose this unique resource !



Don't forget to visit the library the next time you're at the BIS.

The library is open to members Monday - Friday, 10.30 to 15.30 (please call 0207 735 3160 before visiting in case the Library is being used for other purposes). When there is an evening lecture the library will be until 18.50.

"The BIS library has an atmosphere all of its own."

Sir Patrick Moore talking about what is arguably the Society's greatest resource.

BIS YouTube Lectures

Alan Lawrie on the Saturn V and Melanie Windridge on The Plasma Universe:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/DeltaVeeMedia#g/u>



FROM THE EDITOR

Odyssey is published every month by the BIS and is circulated by email.

Feedback on the Newsletter is welcome, including suggestions for future articles.

Please let *Odyssey* know if you are promoting the Society in any way, even if this is through a non-BIS event, so that we can share your news with the membership and offer support.

Please pass your comments to Mark Stewart, BIS Honorary Archival Librarian: Librarian@bis-spaceflight.com.

Layout & Design: Adrian Mann: www.bisbos.com



BIS on Facebook

Join the BIS on Facebook for the latest **BIS news, views and discussions:**

<http://tinyurl.com/42jesye>

Your participation will help support the Society and raise its profile - please join us on Facebook.



CONFESSIONS

OF A SPACE BUFF

Ray Ward FBIS

When I was growing up in the 1950s I somehow got the idea that we had already reached the Moon. Well, it seemed so near! I didn't, so far as I can recall, think we had got any further, but we must surely have got to something so close! I was surprised when I found we hadn't, and delighted when I learned we might get there in my lifetime. The history of space flight might be said to consist of reality catching up with my childish misconceptions!



Buzz signing an autograph with Ray Ward to the left.

I developed an early interest in astronomy, but I think it was an interest in science fiction that led me to space. Many sf writers, notably Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov, also wrote factually about space flight, and I was naturally led to those writings too.

I became increasingly uncertain which programmes were off or on. I wrote to Clarke in Sri Lanka and he sent his standard reply with an added note to contact the BIS. I did, and joined in 1971. I haven't yet heard of the wild celebrations planned for my 40th anniversary... However, I perhaps shouldn't brag: we have at least one member who joined in the 1950s and, I'm told, even one who joined in 1935, only two years after its foundation.

The excitement of the Apollo programme really got to me - and it so nearly might not have happened. If America had got the first man into space, Kennedy probably wouldn't have committed to putting a man on the Moon by the end of the sixties; and if he hadn't been assassinated he would probably have cancelled Apollo. It was the appalling way in which his presidency ended that made people think they must fulfil his commitment.

I saw the launch of Apollo 16 in April 1972 and Apollo 17 in December 1972 on trips organised in association with the

BIS (with side visits to Houston on the first occasion and Huntsville on the second). I will never forget how Apollo 17 instantly turned the whole sky orange. I do a lot of quizzes, and was once asked in which year was the last Apollo Moon flight, so of course I said "1972," but could have added: 33 minutes past midnight on 7 December! I also did Manned Space Flight on Mastermind in 1978 - there had been a lot less of it then! - and won my round.

In 1973 I also went on another trip arranged in association with the BIS, to the south-western USA, with visits to Mount Wilson, Vandenberg Air Force Base, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, the Lowell Observatory at Flagstaff, Arizona, and Meteor Crater.

When I joined the BIS I lived in Sheffield and therefore had little opportunity to attend meetings, but one I couldn't miss was an address by Clarke soon after I joined; this was arranged by the BIS at the Royal Commonwealth Society in London. Arthur's theme was the enormous number of benefits that have come out of space, and my most vivid memory is of the great roar of laughter when he said (and I recall his exact words): "If I hear any more about Teflon non-stick frying pans I shall throw up!" Thousands of new and improved products have come out of space, but the only one most people have heard of is wrong: PTFE (Teflon), the substance used to coat non-stick utensils, was invented in 1938. And still, 40 years later, one finds people (including some who should know better) asking if we had to send men to the Moon to get non-stick pans!



The Mensa reception in 1974 attended by Clarke (right) and Asimov (centre), accompanied by (l to r) George Atherton, Lance Ware and Victor Serebriakoff of Mensa.

I met Clarke on several other occasions. In 1974 Isaac Asimov, then a Vice-President of Mensa (of which I am a member) came to London. Clarke was also in London and was invited to the events, starting with a reception at which I found myself in the same room as

Clarke and Asimov at the same time! Clarke wittily introduced Asimov at a meeting, again at the Royal Commonwealth Society (I have a sound tape of the event), and there was a rather riotous gathering at the now long-vanished Globe pub in Covent Garden,



a gathering-place for sf fans, attended by Clarke and Asimov. Neil McAleer's biography of Clarke, *Odyssey*, contains a photograph of Clarke introducing Asimov at the RCS, and I'm certain one of the fuzzy blobs in the foreground is the back of my head!



Fred Clarke, Buzz and Buzz's wife.

Clarke was also a speaker at the first annual Mensa conference at Cambridge in 1979, arriving with his brother Fred. I reminded him of our earlier meetings and said I had brought some of his books, and would he sign them? When he entered the lecture theatre and saw me with the heap of books (first editions of his novels) he sat next to me and signed them all. I also have a signed copy of the first American edition of *The Exploration of Space*, bought for \$1.25 in a second-hand bookshop on Hollywood Boulevard in 1973; but I can't remember when he signed it. I saw him again at the now defunct Commonwealth Institute when he spoke about the sunken treasure found off Sri Lanka. My most vivid memory of that occasion is the mass of silver coins he brought along, fused into a lump in the shape of the bag, which had, of course, long since rotted away. Members of the audience were allowed to try lifting it, under the watchful gaze of a security man, and very heavy it was too.

At the BIS Space '93 conference in Hastings a satellite link-up with Clarke in Sri Lanka was set up by BT; and I and others, including Patrick Moore and Buzz Aldrin, spoke to him. I have the video the BIS produced of the occasion, though only Clarke is seen, not any of those who spoke to him. When, many years later, I worked in Hastings I told my colleagues that I had met the second man on the Moon - not, as they might have thought, in America but at the White Rock Theatre, just a short distance away!

In 1969 Time-Life produced a set of six 12-inch LPs called *To the Moon* and an accompanying book, tracing the history

of space flight up to Apollo, so of course I had to have it. I took to carrying the book around and asking people connected with space whom I met at BIS and other events to sign it. The preliminary pages are now covered with hundreds of signatures including many space travellers (Dave Scott, Buzz Aldrin, Paul Weitz, Deke Slayton, Ulf Merbold, James van Hoften, Don Lind, Loren Acton, Wubbo Ockels, Sergei Krikalev, Helen Sharman, Claude Nicollier, Yuri Usachev, Chiaki Mukai, Mark Shuttleworth, Paul Lockhart, Piers Sellers, Anousheh Ansari, Soeyon Yi, Richard Garriott) and others (Clarke, Asimov, Carl Sagan, Patrick Moore, Len

Carter, Ken Gatland, Geoffrey Pardoe, Tom Paine, Reg Turnill, Roy Gibson, Eberhard Rees, Bob Parkinson, Tony Lawton, Geoff Perry, Mitch Sharpe, Fred Ordway, Heather Couper, Nigel Henbest, David Baker, David Hardy, William McLaughlin, Alan Bond, George Mueller, etc.)

I have been to countless BIS meetings and other events, heard some marvellous speakers and met some brilliant and fascinating people. It has been one of the most important parts of my life and I am enormously grateful to the BIS for it.

INTERPLANETARY MAN REVISITED

From the BIS Archives: The Legacy of Olaf Stapledon

By Mark Stewart

Part One

London 2011: Many luminaries have given talks at the BIS over the years but few have had more impact on its members than the one delivered by Olaf Stapledon in 1948. Any internet browser will give you a pencil sketch of the man: born May 10 1886 (just nine years before publication of *The Time Machine*) in Seacombe near Liverpool, a noted British philosopher and writer (of both fiction and non-fiction), married with three children, who died unexpectedly of a heart attack in September 1950. But look beyond these hastily drawn details and you find a man who should be far more famous than he is.



Olaf Stapledon lecturing to the BIS on "Interplanetary Man" on 9th October 1948.

Without Stapledon it's unlikely that any of Clarke's *Space Odysseys* would have been written. Or *Imperial Earth*, *Rendezvous with Rama*, or *The Fountains of Paradise*. And given that Olaf had an equally profound effect on Patrick Moore perhaps there would be no *Sky at Night*, or any of Patrick's books, over one hundred in total. By any reckoning such omissions would make the world a drearier place.

The world has not forgotten Stapledon; his books are still for sale, both on the high street and on the internet and his importance is still recognised by historians of both science fact and science fiction. One book recently reviewed for Spaceflight – *Cosmos & Culture: Cultural Evolution in a Cosmic Context* – contains a paper on The Postbiological Universe. This is a universe that would have been very familiar to Stapledon, for it is one "in which most intelligence has evolved beyond flesh and blood to AI." The paper encourages the reader to engage in "Stapledonian Thinking" in considering issues affecting the evolution of Mankind across cosmic spans of time. This chapter also discusses the possible rise of machine intelligence to the point where it surpasses the human intellect, a familiar theme in the seminal novels of both Stapledon and Clarke.

One of the great unrealised projects of modern cinema is a movie version of one or more of Stapledon's novels. And it will take a cinematic genius – the successor to Stanley Kubrick, or Ridley Scott – to film these stories. But it can and should be done, for few novels lend themselves so readily to the "mythic grandeur" contained in Olaf's cosmic visions. It is time once again to go in search of the "proverbial good science fiction movie",

which - with one or two intelligent exceptions (*Blade Runner*, *Silent Running*) - hasn't been seen in our cinemas since *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

London 1948: A very different world to the one we live in today, one in which cigarettes are considered a harmless sophistication, and trams are still visible in the streets. The skies are different too; strangely quiet and devoid of vapour

trails. Very little TV and no commercial radio. And, of course, no internet, not for another forty years or more.

In one of these streets a man makes his way to an evening appointment. He is unremarkable in appearance. He lacks any of the iconic features that will so characterise Einstein in the public imagination, a collective consciousness which will never truly embrace this visionary writer. Perhaps he is a little bookish, there is something

of the professor about his clothes and diffident manner and he would not have drawn a second glance from passers-by. Some legendary figures just don't look like legends. He enters a non-descript building and proceeds to a room reserved for a meeting of the British Interplanetary Society, an organisation still largely unheard of in the post-war years and which lacks a permanent home.

In the audience is a very young Arthur Clarke and an even younger Patrick Moore. And, as its 1948, it's quite possible that other founding members of the Society are also present: possibly the "brilliant eccentric" Archie Lowe – the pre-



War leader of the BIS; perhaps also the multi-talented Willie Ley (who would go on to co-author books with Chesley Bonestell and Wernher von Braun); the modest and self-effacing Les Shepherd (who helped found the International Astronautical Federation); and the hugely gifted R.A. Smith, whose classic space paintings still adorn the walls at BIS H/Q.

Clarke has already written his groundbreaking and world-changing paper on geosynchronous satellites; but it is still some fifteen years or more before he will team up with Stanley Kubrick to provide cinema goers with a wholly realistic glimpse into the near future. And it is still nine years before Patrick Moore will present the first episode of the *Sky at*

Night, a programme which will go on to become the longest running series on British TV. More than any other writer, Stapledon's novels – particularly *Star Maker* and *Last and First Men* – will influence both Clarke and Moore.

Part Two of this article will appear in the August edition of Odyssey.



Upcoming Lectures & Evening Events

Cosmonaut talk: Oleg Kotov: 30 June

Apollo 15: Jerry Stone: 6 July

Astronaut talk: Richard Garriott: 20 July

Artists in Space: David A. Hardy: 1 September

Impacts - The story of terrestrial and extra-terrestrial impacts:

Andy Green: 7 September

Symposia

World Ships: The Long Journey to the Stars: 17 August 2011

For further details on these and other BIS events see: <http://www.bis-space.com/what-we-do/events>

Print Watch



Dr David Baker's latest book is mentioned in this month's *Physics Word*, the monthly magazine produced by the Institute of Physics.

David, who is a Fellow of the BIS, has recently produced a Haynes Owners' Workshop Manual on the Space Shuttle; for further details see: <http://www.amazon.co.uk/NASA-Space-Shuttle-Manual-Construction/dp/1844258661>

Web Watch

Wired Magazine remembers Arthur Clarke's seminal paper on satellite communications: <http://www.wired.com/dayintech/2011/05/0525arthur-c-clarke-proposes-geostationary-satellites/>

The first space plane passes into legend: iconic shuttle photo: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-13691608>

Skylon passes key review: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-13506289>

The Science Fiction Hub: <http://www.sfhub.ac.uk/>

The Science Fiction Foundation: <http://www.sf-foundation.org/>

Out of This World: Science Fiction but not as you know it (free exhibition from 20 May to 25 September at the British Library) www.bl.uk/sciencefiction

Vignettes

"I would venture a suggestion that Clarke is going to be reassessed as a writer. It took ten years after his death for H.G. Wells to be recognised as the genius he was; and the same will happen with Clarke, whose artistry has been underrated, I think. Childhood's End is my favourite Clarke book. One of the things I learnt from working with Arthur was always to be professional; he wasn't nostalgic about science fiction, he always looked forward to the next book, to the next project."

BIS Fellow and science fiction author Stephen Baxter talking about Arthur C.

Clarke at the Society's February 2011 meeting entitled: Bridging imagination and reality.

More on Stephen Baxter

Official website: www.stephen-baxter.com/

Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Baxter

Orion Publishing: <http://www.orionbooks.co.uk/content/search?SearchText=Stephen+Baxter+S&searchButton=Search>

In Next Month's *Odyssey*

An interview with top British science fiction author Paul McAuley

Stephen Baxter on the enduring influence of H.G.Wells

Why I Support the BIS by David J. Shayler

Plus part 2 of Interplanetary Man