**Science Fiction Archive Podcast Transcript**

Dr Phoenix Alexander: You're listening to Tales from the Square with me Dr Phoenix Alexander. In this episode, we're going to be looking at the science fiction collections of Liverpool University Library.

I'm the science fiction collections librarian here at the University of Liverpool. It has some curatorial responsibilities in terms of organising outreach, bringing people to see the materials via exhibits or sort of open days, pedagogical functions such as teaching with the materials, it's the day to day of organising the materials down in the stores doing the cataloguing in the library catalogue and sort of keeping my eye out for sort of new acquisitions to take on for the university.

I knew coming in obviously, when I applied for the job that it was the largest catalogue collection of science fiction in Europe, and I knew some of the big names that the library has such as the Olaf Stapledon archives, John Wyndham, Eric Frank Russell, so many sort of amazing, amazing archives. But what I didn't actually realise when I started was just sort of the sheer volume of printed materials too. So, at the minute there are two separate stores where the sci fi materials are kept, we have the science fiction store, which contains most of the printed materials, and then the archival materials are in a separate store. So the archival materials include things like ephemera, handwritten manuscripts and typed scripts, letters, correspondence, drawings, anything that isn't printed in a book, a bound, published book.

I'm very excited to say that we have just acquired the personal library of Arthur C Clarke. This comprises mostly printed materials signed by him or annotated by him, but also some photographs, slides, letters clippings, and this is the largest collection we have from an author so we're very excited.

Arthur C. Clarke, I guess is one of the fathers of science fiction. He is an extremely famous and prolific science fiction author and scientists in his own right. Many of his classics include ‘2001’, which obviously was made into the movie directed by Stanley Kubrick and he co-wrote the script of that with Kubrick himself, ‘Rendezvous with Rama’, ‘Childhoods End’ as well as actually many scientific writings too, his reach sort of extends all around the world. He is not just an intellectual, an author, but an ever- public figure too and really generous in sort of sharing his expansive vision with the world and a lot of his sort of scientific writings and predictions either through his fiction or nonfiction actually have happened, I guess, in the 2020. But I would say sort of the blockbuster title that most people might recognise is ‘2001 Space Odyssey’.

So one of the most important items that we received from the Arthur C Clarke personal library is one of his personal typewriters. So this is a Remington Noiseless Portable, comes with its own sort of special carrying box. It's very sleek, black, silver-keyed machine in great condition. And he used this typewriter to write an article on geostationary satellite communications in 1945, for a publication called ‘Wireless World’. This was a very prescient article because it would go on to sort of predict a technology that would come about in the next 10 years or so. It's fantastic to have this piece of literary and sort of scientific history in the Collections of the University of Liverpool. The estate of Arthur C. Clarke are absolutely lovely, and they really wanted the University of Liverpool to have the materials because we hold archival materials of lots of Golden Age science fiction, and Clarke was also given an honorary degree from Liverpool I think in 2006. So we were very, very fortunate in that I managed to acquire his library and I'm still in the process of unboxing. Because this is about 100 boxes of materials. And it's just opening each boxes like Christmas, you know? What on earth am I going to find and so yets we're very, very excited to have that we have plans to sort of do exhibits and some outreach, and obviously teaching materials too

So now we're going to look at some items from the printed materials from the collection, slightly more modern 20th century materials. We have a collection of video games from the science fiction collections with the Josh Kirby illustrations. Josh Kirby is the famous illustrator of a lot of Terry Pratchett's novels. We have facsimiles and originals of time charts drawn by Olaf Stapledon, the actual originals are in plastic folders because they're very delicate. So we have photocopies in colour and these can obviously be handled and you can look at them very closely and sort of get a better sense of his work.

We have in the John Wyndham archive the typescript proof of the ‘Midwich Cuckoos’ one of his famous novels we have a calendar of Frank R. Paul, who is one of the iconic illustrators of the Golden Age of science fiction. He illustrated covers for many of the most famous magazines such as ‘Amazing Stories’ and ‘Wonder Stories. and his visions are just incredible.

One of the most exciting items in our collection is the first issue of ‘Amazing Stories’ from April 1926. ‘Amazing Stories’ was the first sort of mainstream science fiction publication in the US, edited by Hugo Gernsback. And who was the founder too. The Hugo Awards now is named after him. And this issue has HG Wells, Jules Verne, Edgar Allan Poe, sort of superstars of of literature in its in its very inception. And this will also go on to feature the artwork of Frank Paul, who is was one of the iconic illustrators of the science fiction Golden Age. So we're very lucky to have this particular piece of history.

We live in a time where sort of, I think we're quite conscious of certain narratives of extinction, whether it's sort of climate change, or manmade war, or it's kind of a pessimistic time, I think we're fearful time in a way. And I think for me, Special Collections and Archives have a duty not just to the authors whose work we steward and we preserved for future generations, but also just, this might sound a bit grandiose, but just as a, as an archive and a record of human life, you know, and it's particularly with science fiction. A lot of people think they might think science fiction is an escapist genre or a fantastic genre, that it's sort of somehow further removed from real life, quote, unquote, whatever that means, then realist literature, but I actually disagree. I think science fiction is one of the most nakedly political genres and modes in which to write in that in the technologies it imagines a society organisation who is present in a particular future and who isn't? I think these are all very, very political decisions. And obviously the science, science fiction genre can be sort of surprised, surprisingly small minded and conservative as any other genre. But I think what it does is it it really sort of can inspire ways of living differently or thinking differently.

Protecting these materials. sharing these materials with folks will hopefully inspire them to sort of not think of the future as something foreclosed, but it's something that can be theorised and sort of imagined that every moment like the possibility of something different. So I think it's a good antidote and an ethical duty to progressive history, that sounds very grandiose. I do believe I do believe that, sincerely.

The biggest misconception, I think for Special Collections and Archives is that you have to be a student or somehow affiliated with the university to come and research here or come and see what's in the holdings, which is absolutely not true. The Special Collections and Archives are open to all members of the public. I think there's something in here that is interesting for potentially everyone. I think you're going get so much out of actually coming in and seeing what we have.