



Tim Stoddard

FURTANNIA

**The History of the
Furry Fandom
in the United Kingdom**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tim Stoddard, who online goes by the name Gamepopper and is known to his friends as Popper, has been in the furry fandom since 2008. He is recognisable by his Lynx vigilante fursona known by the alias “D,” who wears a mask and cape and carries a rapier sword wherever he goes. Not only has he gone to many furmeets and conventions throughout the United Kingdom and Europe over the years, but he has also been involved in furmeets and conventions as a volunteer and staff organiser.

Beginning in 2017, he took an interest in the fandom’s history, with a particular focus on his local communities. Since then, he has given history lectures on the furry fandom and furry-themed media at conventions such as ConFuzzled and Scotiacon, as well as written for furry publications such as Dogpatch Press and Flayrah. As a commitment to his research, he has contacted many furies to record their recollections and travelled to archives to view media about the furry fandom as it was intended, aiming to provide the full story of the furry fandom in the United Kingdom.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Ian G. S. Curtis (1948–2021) and Evelyn D. Stoddard (1925–2021).

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FOREWORD

UK FURRY AS I SAW IT

By Simon Barber

Anthropomorphics. They're hardly new in England—think *The Wind in the Willows*, *Rupert the Bear*, a host of other mostly children's book characters. I liked them from the start—and I liked getting involved with them the best I could. Back in 1980, I wrote my first anthropomorphic tale, never expecting anyone else to read it—an alternate second half to *The Wind in the Willows*. Looking back, it was no improvement. (The *Sven Hassel* cameo and the martial arts scenes only seemed like a good idea.)

Specific fandoms of each series existed for a long time. In the late 1980s I was a member of “Followers of *Rupert Bear*”, which still exists; I attended several meetings. But for anthropomorphics in general—in my case, I started when I made contacts in the USA. Spotting the early *Albedo* and *Usagi Yojimbo* comics was a revelation; the letters pages gave me contact addresses and more links to follow, which I did, eagerly. Yes, back then folks were printing their real street addresses for the world (at least, like-minded fans reading such comics) to see. In 1990 I joined my first printed fanzine, the short-lived (5 issues) *Furry Press Network*, contributing art and tales for the Seattle-area editor to collate, copy, and distribute to the membership. They, in turn, led me to wider connections such as the still-thriving *Rowrbrazzle APA* that I joined at issue 42 (it's passed 150 quarterly issues now!) and *The Canadian 'zine FurThestNorth Crew*, too.

But the early British scene? I already was a member of *Rowrbrazzle* when I returned to the UK from living in Germany in 1992. One of its Australian members, *Steve Kerry*, had just arrived in England and passed on the four contacts he had. The first was *Jan Paxton* (who preferred his “fan name” of *Porsupah*) in South Wales, and another was *Ian Curtis*. All of this was (for me) pre-internet by a couple of years; we wrote letters, traded photocopies on the lines of “this is what I draw and write; these artists and authors are what I like.” Summer 1992 saw what I think was the first UK furry meeting—maybe a dozen fans at *Porsupah's* family home for a weekend; there were maybe three of those from 1992 to '93. *Porsupah* was the first British fan I met who had a fursuit—in the USA,

he'd bought a professionally made Red Panda of head-turning realism. The camaraderie was excellent; we were a small and specialist group of fans, and we knew it.

There I met Ian Curtis—a defence journalist by trade, and perhaps the most knowledgeable man I ever knew. From what he told me, “Furries” as such had been a scattered population through the 1980s, generally part of the larger science fiction fandom. Some joined via the new and booming anime fandom—and so, by one way and another, we met up.

Ian was the host of UK furrydom, his standard three-bedroom, semi-detached home hosting three or four “Furcons” a year from 1993 through to 2019—ironically, one was booked long in advance for the week the country went into lockdown with COVID-19. The growth of the internet helped spread the word; the “housecons” by the year 2000 were attracting maybe 20 people—some from as far away as Belgium, Sweden, and Germany. Visiting artists and writers would drop by in passing—and for many years the sales team of Martin “The Ferengi” Dudman and John Tatman turned up to sell us their wares, including hard-to-find anthropomorphic and manga comics and DVDs. It was a time of discoveries; people would watch new and obscure films and discuss them deep into the night.

And so it was for 30 years—although in the last decade the crowds dwindled, mostly going online rather than making the trip. But we'd settled down to a core of half a dozen who met regularly—and would be still meeting up in Yateley, south of Reading, had Ian not passed away in the Spring of 2021. We'd met up at the London 2014 World Science Fiction Convention, where panels such as “Furries—Not What You Think They Are” had attracted a wide audience.

I'm impressed to read Furtannia—full of things I remember and 90% of things I never knew! Looks like I've got some contacts to make with the current scene. Looking forward to that.

Thanks, Tim!

The future—well, we're still here, and we like what we like. Long may it last!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has been a passion project of mine for over three years, I put a lot of work into source finding, travelling, researching, and writing to put this all together. However, that doesn't mean this book was solely the result of one person alone. This book wouldn't be possible without the generosity of furies willing to offer their time or provide resources to help with research.

First would be Mark Merlino, the first furry I contacted when conducting my research and along with his partner Rod O'Riley organised the first furry event on British soil, as well as maintain the ConFurence Archive as a home to early furry history. Next would be Fred Patten, whom I regret never contacting before he passed away in 2018, whose published works were the most readily available collated resource of early British furry history at the time.

Then it would be Mayfurr, a New Zealand fur who attended the Yateley Housecons in the early nineties and passed me onto Simon Barber, another attendee who also remains an active writer and contributor to fanzines, and Ian Curtis, the founder and host of the Yateley Housecons and effectively one of the founding fathers of the British furry fandom. Curtis also graciously invited me to his home for one such housecon in October 2019, where I also got to meet and speak to Ian Stradling and Rob Deighton, both of whom still active in the fandom.

Stradling also had his hand in the Dainties fanzine, but it's worth recognising the fanzines published by Foxy that profiled artists and writers to the wider American furry scene. The two also organised UK-FurCon (alongside Foxy's brother Prask and Aspirin) that inspired two German furies to run Eurofurence. Martin Dudman, meanwhile, not only distributed American fanzines across Europe but also published his own newsletter and comic book under United Publications.

Then there are the furmeets, to which I wouldn't know where to start if I didn't happen to encounter VulpeculaFox by chance at a Birmingham Furmeet. Thanks to him, I wouldn't have been able to speak to Ia'Kat, co-founder of the LondonFurs which continues to run tri-weekly to this day. A former attendee of which Marcony provided great insight to the costuming of the early days, as did UltraViolet on furry art.

SouthPaw and Rocky Raccoon were early organisers of meets for

the NorthernFurs, SlyCat had organised for HantsFurs, and (alongside VulpeculaFox) Budge the Dragon helped provide insight on the Mid-Furs.

RapidoFrog also contributed some information on the LondonFurs, but also the boat party that eventually became RBW. For ConFuzzled, thanks would go to LevLion and WolfieFox, who continue to organize the convention as head of stage and video team respectively since its inception. JasperFoxy founded and organized Britain's first furry rave, Frantic Eufuria, before moving onto running Furcation, which he's still the chairman of.

In the case of resources, there are quite a few. Dogpatch Press and Flayrah have been great sources and news for discussions, the latter holding the archive to the FurteanTimes which documented British furry news in the late noughties. WikiFur, although not a resource that would be deemed reliable without scrutiny, provided plenty of the tertiary information for me to research further.

Same goes to the Pursuit Archive, founded by Timduru and currently maintained by Orthank, which holds not only photos but videos of media broadcasts featuring furies.

When it comes to researching furry representation in the furry media, it wasn't enough to read articles or view recorded segments of reports, I needed to read the whole magazine or watch the entire show to fully understand the context and theme around the media that was depicting the fandom to the public. With that, I give thanks goes to both the British Library and the British Film Institute, both institutions provided well-preserved examples of furry representation in the mainstream media, even if it meant travelling to London to view it in person.

As for writing the book, it wouldn't be what it is without three individuals: Joe Strike, author of Furry Nation, which despite my comments in the introduction remains a fine example of furry historical reading and an influence on my own historical research. David Sula, who provided extensive constructive feedback that helped shaped the book to what it is. Grubbs Grizzly, who you wouldn't be reading this right now if it weren't for him.

Lastly of course, I want to thank all my friends and family, for their love and support as a member of the furry fandom. I wouldn't be where I am today without you all.



INTRODUCTION

The furry fandom is a subculture for fans of all popular media involving animals that have features commonly associated with humans. These features include the ability to talk, use tools, and walk upright. The technical term for such creatures is “anthropomorphic animals.”

There is no one way to get involved in a fandom like the furry fandom, nor is there a way I can provide readers with a list of instructions on how to join. This history aims to explain the origins of the furry fandom and how it got to where it is now. Whether or not you have heard of the furry fandom before or you have been a member of the fandom for several years, this book is for anyone interested in the background of the fandom in the United Kingdom.

What makes this fandom exceptionally challenging to describe is that its interests are incredibly broad. There are no boundaries limiting what kind of media is and is not allowed in the furry fandom. Furrries have discovered and joined the fandom through novels, comic books, films, television shows, anime, video games, and even original media created by other furrries such as artwork, fiction, music, videos, and costumes.

This makes fandoms like the Potterheads or Trekkies straightforward by contrast. While both the Harry Potter books and *Star Trek* TV series have had many spinoffs and adaptations, it is easy for the average person to recognise a fan of one of these franchises.

Even fandoms of a genre such as science fiction or anime are specific enough in their interests to make them easy to identify by the average person, despite the diversity of offerings these genres have.

Like any other fandom, there are three basic requirements for being a part of the furry fandom:

1. You enjoy the media that surrounds it, whether this involves an individual celebrity, a hobby, a storytelling genre, or a specific franchise.
2. You identify yourself as being active in the fandom community, which usually means attending or sometimes



A group of people dressed in fursuits (furry costumes) in Manchester 2018. (Photo: GreskilVulfbart.)

organizing events with your fellow furry fans or otherwise socializing with them in various ways such as in online communities. It is important to distinguish people who do this versus those who merely like, for example, the Disney animated feature *Zootopia* (or *Zootropolis* if you're British) or the video game *Animal Crossing* but who don't discuss their interests with a wider community.

3. You are welcoming, tolerant, and inclusionary of others of all genders, races, and sexual orientations. The fandom is and always has been accepting to everyone of different backgrounds, and its only intolerance is of individuals who are bigoted or abusive towards others.

It was at the age of fifteen that I myself discovered the furry fandom. I was a rather shy and socially awkward teenager who enjoyed professional wrestling, anime, and video games, fortunate enough to have a small group of friends who shared at least one or more of those same interests. I was also a frequent internet user who checked on online web forums, videos, and image galleries to find anything new, write comments in discussions, and occasionally post stuff of my own.

One of the video game fandoms I got involved with was *Sonic the Hedgehog*. Along with enjoying the video games and animated series, I had a keen habit of searching for fanart on art portals. After following a few artists for a while, one of them brought up an art-sharing website they used called FurAffinity.

It did not take long for me to realize that this was a website that artists used to share certain kinds of artwork, all of it featuring animals that were somewhat human. After further investigation, I found fanart and fanfiction for not just Sonic the Hedgehog but also other franchises that I enjoyed, including *Pokémon* and *Digimon*. Eventually, I created an account on FurAffinity, effectively taking my first step into the furry fandom.

At seventeen, I had moved up to sixth form and made friends with a new student named Allan. He enjoyed video games and electronic music as much as I did, so we got along from the start. During one lunchtime, we were talking about things we wanted to do and places we wanted to go to. “I want to go to Anthrocon,” Allan casually commented.

Immediately, I recognized what he meant. Anthrocon is a furry convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. At the time, it was the largest furry convention in the world, and it is still one of the most heavily attended.

While I was somewhat aware of furies living in the United Kingdom, I assumed they lived in major cities, or at least far away from the town Leamington Spa, England. And yet, Allan lived in Kenilworth, a smaller town that was close by.

I just had to ask to be sure, “Are you a furry?” He answered with no hesitation, “Yeah, are you one, too?” Admittedly, I was taken aback, but I did manage to answer shakily, “Yeah, I’m aware of them.” The exchange encouraged me to investigate the fandom because now there was someone to whom I could talk in person about it, and I am sure it helped him as well because it was after that talk that I found out something about him that I did not know before: he could draw.

Allan would carry an A4 sketchbook in his bag—almost full and heavily worn—and draw anthropomorphic characters in between lessons, and he shared some online under his moniker, Feros the Wolf.

He was also really interested in animals—wolves, especially. In contrast, I was really into wild cats from a young age, thanks to the Disney film *The Lion King*. Although my favourite animal was the cheetah for their speed, Allan suggested I might lynxes, feeling that I shared a similar personality to them, including how they were supposedly known for their loyalty.

This eventually encouraged me to try drawing furry art. Another influence was watching an anime film called *The Cat Returns* in which a teenager is taken to a kingdom of cats against her will, and a suave feline goes to help bring her home.

For those outside of the United Kingdom, Sixth Form is a type of school for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds studying to enroll into university.

The combination of lynxes and that suave cat gave me the inspiration for a character of my own. Using a scene from the film as a reference, I drew an anthropomorphic lynx who wore a silver mask, a red cape and hat, and carried a concealed blade. It would take a few more drawings done by myself and others before I realized that I had created not just a character but an avatar, or what the furry fandom would call a *fursona*.

A few years later, I followed a Manchester furry artist who did regular livestreams, and one day they posted on their journal that they had a table at the dealers' den at ConFuzzled, a furry convention happening in their home city. I remarked on this to Allan the next day during a lunch-break. "What's ConFuzzled?" he asked curiously.

I had mistakenly assumed that he already knew about it, so I answered, "It's a furry convention happening in Manchester." There was a brief pause about this news that he had never heard about in his life. "There's a furry convention in Manchester?!" he exclaimed with widened eyes, "Tim, we have to go!"

He then made his next instructions noticeably clear to me: "Go and register when you get home. We'll set up a room share and then sort out travel. We're going to this convention." Next thing I knew, I was back home and registering for my first furry convention and planning an excursion to Manchester.

Fortunately for me, I had planned long-distance trips to conventions before with my friends for years, so as far as my parents were concerned, this was not unusual behaviour. Being eighteen by the time



Birmingham Furmeet (November 2011) with me on top-left corner. (Photo: Alexey Zapuskalov)

of the convention, I was eligible to go, and my sister was also a student living in Manchester at the time, so she could help with part of the journey. Aside from the fact that I had to skip classes on Friday to go, Allan and I were heading to our first convention, and our first furry gathering.

Even though we did not know anyone else at the convention, we had a great time checking out some of the talks, going to the dance hall, and playing games. The highlight would have to be the Sunday when we struck up a conversation with two furies, which eventually lead to us checking out an event called “Frankensuits” in which people make costumes from scrap materials in the shortest amount of time. We found the costumes so hilarious we cried with laughter throughout their construction.

The last event we saw was a parade of people in costumes going around the inside and outside of the hotel. We had to leave soon after because it was a Sunday and we had to get back for school the next day. Allan enjoyed the convention so much that he wanted to return next year and have a costume of his own, and while I enjoyed the convention as well, I was not sure about going again.

The funny thing, though, is how things changed in a year. We finished sixth form, and I moved away from all my friends to go to university. Despite struggling to make new friends, I ended up finding a social circle around campus, thanks to the furry fandom, as another student invited me to a furry meetup in Birmingham. Those meetups helped me overcome most of my struggles with socialising, and I enjoyed more time out with other people instead of spending days alone behind a computer screen.

From that point onward, I was completely on board with the furry fandom. The following year, I picked up my first fursuit at the next ConFuzzled and brought my character to life for the first time.

For ten years, I took a fursuit to every furmeet and convention I went to in the United Kingdom, Europe, and even Canada. I would also host a game developer meetup at ConFuzzled, as well as work as an organiser at the very same Birmingham meetup group where I made friends at university and helped organise another furry convention in the north of England.



My fursuit. Birmingham Furmeet (December 2019; photo: AnukaTemple)

That is the story of how I got into the furry fandom and is probably a similar story to how some other people joined, although another interesting story concerns how I got into researching the fandom's history. There are videos online from panels in the United States from those who shared stories of their experiences, yet it was not until the publication of *Furry Nation* by journalist and long-time American furry Joe Strike that I took an interest in furry history.

During a road trip to a furry meetup, one of my friends noticed that I was reading the book to pass the time. They took one look at the cover and noticed the book's full title, *Furry Nation: The True Story of America's Most Misunderstood Subculture*, and asked "What about British furies?"

The truth is that, despite my fondness for the book, its information is very American-centric, seldom mentioning any international presence in the fandom. Hence, that question lingered on for the rest of the day because they did have a point. The furry fandom is a misunderstood subculture, but it is not an American subculture: it is an international one.

The furry fandom began in the United States of America, there is no disputing that. The first conventions, fursuiters, and artists originated over there, and to this day the USA is home to the largest gatherings of

furies. However, it is also true that the fandom has had international members since not long after those first gatherings took place. Understanding how the fandom grew internationally and how these local communities differ from each other is important, including how this pertains to my home country.

That is when I began to do research and found what little was properly documented. Fred Patten (1940–2018), a prolific fandom historian, had written about the British fandom in two of his works on the furry fandom: *An Illustrated Chronology of Furry Fandom, 1966–1996*, published in *Yarf* magazine in 1997, and the book *Furry Fandom Conventions 1989–2015*, published in 2017. The furry fandom's information database, *WikiFur*,

had baseline information on various moments in the UK furs' past scattered around, some of it citing Patten's work directly, but extraordinarily little is available in the way of primary sources and personal accounts.

One day, submissions for events were open for ConFuzzled 2019. When I read the news, I thought to myself that someone should really do a talk on the history of the furry fandom in the United Kingdom, someone with the experience and knowledge who could talk at length about



Fred Patten

the fandom over the past thirty years. I wondered where those people were and why they have not done it yet. Then I realized that I had been doing my own research for around a year, so perhaps those people were waiting for someone like me to give it a shot.

As a result, I had submitted “History of Furrries in the United Kingdom” as a one-hour talk, and a few months later it was on the event schedule. My expectations were low for the interest and attendance, considering I was previously known only for doing video-game-related events, and I was much younger than those who traditionally do furry history talks. Yet at the time the talk was scheduled to begin, I was standing in front of a room filled with people to the point that several people had to sit up against the walls and gather up at the rear of the room because there were no seats left.

After I talked and answered questions for nearly an hour and received a round of applause, the recorded attendance was over a hundred people, not counting those who left after trying to listen in from the doorway, unable to get inside the crowded conference room. There were several people who showed their appreciation for what I had put together, one of whom said that someone should really write all this information down.

Since I still had my notes, and I had continued to update my research all the way up to the day of that talk, I figured I could give it a shot. This book that you are reading now is the result of years of researching message boards, forums, mailing lists, and printed publications, as well as talking to several furrries. The result is an in-depth guide and history to the furry fandom of the United Kingdom.