

Scratch Pad No. 35

October 1999

Not the Aussiecon Three Convention Report



Photo: Helena Binns



Photo: Karen Pender Gunn

So where's the Aussiecon Three report?

Not done yet. Not as easy to write as I'd expected. And lots of Paying Work arrived in recent weeks.

Front cover photo: Aussiecon Three/FanHistoricon's 'I Remember Somerset Place' panel

Photo 1: Left to right:

Back: John Foyster, Bruce Gillespie, Tony Sander, Bill Wright, Mervyn Barrett.

Front: Race Mathews, Karen Pender Gunn, Merv Binns, Dick Jenssen.

Photo 2: Left to right:

Back: Bruce Gillespie, Merv Barrett, Bill Wright, Tony Sander.

Front: Race Mathews, Helena (Roberts) Binns, Merv Binns, Dick Jenssen.

Right (standing): John Foyster.

John Foyster, together with **Joyce Scrivner**, organised FanHistoricon 9.5 as a stream of programming within Aussiecon Three because of a growing feeling among Australian fans that a start should be made on gathering and writing down our history. **Karen Pender Gunn** wanted to be involved because she wants to write the history of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. The rest of us just wanted to nostalgise a bit and escape from all those fabulous skiffy writers on all those other program items.

Race Mathews was in 1951 the centre of the small group of teenagers who in 1954 became the Melbourne Science Fiction Group, and later, the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. After much fanac during the fifties, including a fanzine called *Bacchanalia*, he sold his SF collection, disappeared from the Club, and became a politician (Federal MP, 1972–5, Victorian MP and Minister, 1978–92). After involuntary retirement from politics in 1992, he resumed his links with fandom during the nineties.

Merv Binns was a founder member of the Melbourne SF Club, and is the main reason why it continued through hard times in the late fifties and early sixties. The Club became a focal point for fabulous fanac during the late sixties, as the Australian fannish renaissance got under way, *Australian Science Fiction Review* put us on the world map, and conventions became bigger and sometimes better. The Club's successful venue was 19 Somerset Place, Melbourne, in a lane behind McGill's Newsagency, of which Merv was the manager. In 1971, Merv began Space Age Books in Swanston Street, and also kept the Club alive until it went to its present quarters in Brunswick.

Helena Binns was known as Margaret Duce when she joined the MSFC during the 1950s. She disappeared for some years, married Kelvin Roberts, and became a photographer. She was the official photographer for Aussiecon I, and took many photos of Aussiecon II. After Kelvin died, she became increasingly involved in fandom. She and Merv were married two years ago. They are currently attempting to merge their photograph collections.

Mervyn Barrett was living in Melbourne from 1961 until shortly before the Easter Convention of 1966, when the Australian fannish renaissance began. Merv says that the Club moved to Somerset Place in early 1961. Others say 1962. I was given a date as early as 1955 when I asked lots of people two years ago. Mervyn now lives in the tranquillity of New Zealand, so his memories are probably reliable.

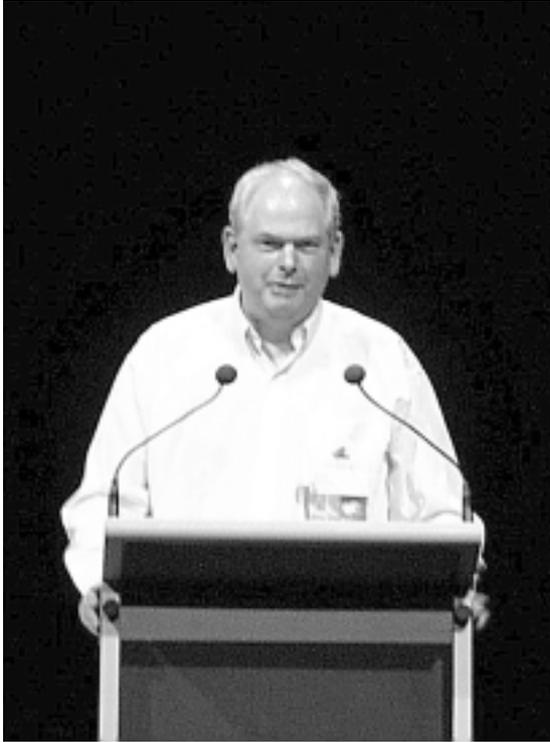
Dick Jenssen (Martin Ditmar Jenssen, hence the 'Ditmar' after which the Awards are named) was a founder member of the MSFC, was active during the fifties and sixties, then dropped out of fandom during the 1980s. When he retired as head of the Meteorology Department at Melbourne University, he found himself with too much free time on his hands, so now he produces fabulous computer graphics for fanzine editors.

Bill Wright was, he tells us, once shy and thin — but then, so was Bruce Gillespie . . . once. Bill joined the Club in the late fifties, and was a major figure in putting together Australia's successful bid for Aussiecon I. He dropped out of fandom during the eighties, but has rejoined it and ANZAPA.

Bruce Gillespie is writing this stuff.

I had never met **Tony Sander** before Aussiecon, so I can't tell you much about him. I'm told that he was a member of the Club during the early sixties.

Scratch Pad, No. 35, October 1999. A fanzine originally for Acnestis and ANZAPA (October 1999 mailing) by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Collingwood, Victoria 3066, Australia. Phone & fax: 61-3-9419-4797. Email: gandc@mira.net. Photos as credited.



Photos: Richard Hryckiewicz.

First nighters:

Dave Langford (below) and **Bruce Gillespie** (left) were linked on the program rather more closely than we had expected. The idea was that I would give my Fan Guest of Honour Speech, Dave would deliver his special Aussiecon edition of 'Thog's Master Class', then we would all adjourn to the Auld Lang Funde party (for those who had contributed to the costs of Dave's trip). But Peter Nicholls decided to hold a party that night (although the Committee asked him to shift it to the night before) and Dave was invited. So the Auld Lang Funde party was shifted to early evening, seemingly placing it in opposition to the Opening Ceremony and my speech. But Dave, Fandom's ultimate Mr Nice Guy, dragged everybody along to the Opening Ceremony and GoH Speech anyway. I hope Dave enjoyed my talk a fraction as much as I enjoyed his.





Faces seen and not seen:

I'm depending upon friendly photographers when choosing the photos for this issue. The two on this page were taken by **Richard Hryckiewicz**, who gave me copies of over 100 photos from Aussiecon. The trouble is that Richard didn't know the people from Acnestis before the convention, and doesn't seem to have met you during it. And **Cath Ortlieb**, who also took lots of photos during the convention, hasn't scanned many of them yet. (She did take a superb snap of Maureen and Paul, which I hope will appear next time.)

Above: Opening Ceremony: Guests of Honour: Pro Guest of Honour: Greg Benford. Fan Guest of Honour: Bruce Gillespie. DUFF winner: Janice Gelb (during this convention known as St Janice). GUFF winner: Paul Kincaid. FFANZ winner: Linnette Horne. Absent: JMS and George Turner.

Below: Australian pros doing their stuff: Sean Williams (who's just been awarded an Australia Council grant); Nick Stathopoulos (who should have won Best Pro Artist Hugo); Stephen Dedman (whose recent books are Highly Recommended); and Simon Brown (whose stories are also H.R.).



Ancient and glorious

Photos by **Dick Jenssen**. With the exception of **Janet Barrett** (below left), they are people who look much the same age, although I'm about ten years younger than **Robin Johnson** and **Bill Wright**.

I didn't actually get to talk much to **Robin** during the convention, although this photo proves we sat down for a natter at least once. I know that he's returned recently from overseas — literally, since he and Alicia took a long holiday cruising around the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Robin and Alicia also recently called in at Westercon.

Every time I saw **Bill** during the convention, he was buttonholing somebody he'd never met before and giving a demonstration of how friendly the natives are. Since he was also staying at the Centra, he suggested that I also take advantage of the hotel's swimming pool. I even had my swimming togs in my luggage. Each time Bill saw me he would suggest a swim. Like the White Rabbit, all I could say was 'No time! No time!' and rush up the escalator.

At one late-night party, Bill entered wielding a bottle of E&E Shiraz, a top Australian drop. Robert Silverberg took one look at the bottle and said, 'Now *this* is why I came to Australia!' Bill had the undivided attention of the Great Man for an hour and a half.

Elaine and I caught up with **Janet** and Merv Barrett from New Zealand mainly on the Friday before Aussiecon. We hoped to natter during the convention, but rarely did.



THE ELDER GHODS, THE JOHNNY COME LATELY, AND THE BABES IN ARMS

Bruce Gillespie's Fan Guest of Honour Speech

Aussiecon Three, 2 September 1999

Members of the Aussiecon Three Board and Committee, fellow fans:

On a summer's day, about three and a half years ago, I received a letter from the Bidding Committee for this convention — Aussiecon III, the 57th World Science Fiction Convention. I read that letter. It fluttered to the ground from my paralysed hand. Even I was stunned into stricken silence. That piece of paper was a letter from Jean Weber inviting me to be the Fan Guest of Honour at Aussiecon Three if Australia won the bid.

My reaction then, as now: 'Why me? Surely somebody has made a terrible mistake. They've got the wrong person. What did I ever do to *them*?'

There were good reasons to ask an Australian to be Fan Guest of Honour. Our Fan Guests of Honour in 1975 were two Canadians, and our Fan Guest of Honour in 1985 was American. Don Tuck, the Australian Guest of Honour at Aussiecon I, not only didn't turn up at the convention but immediately left fandom altogether. Since then no overseas world convention has asked an Australian to be Fan Guest of Honour. It was the right time to show the local colours.

But the burning questions remain. 'Why do we have to put up with Gillespie, whose speeches set new standards of boredom, and whose last known joke was in a fanzine in 1972, and only David Grigg ever noticed he'd committed it?' I am the person for whom Garrison Keillor wrote his Rights for Shy People. There are scads of Australian fans who give funny, entertaining talks. Many others can tell you in great detail about the secrets of the universe or the secret handshake. Those people would even *enjoy* being up here instead of me.

You can't even blame the *current* Worldcon committee for the fact that I'm here. I was selected by the Bidding Committee. As soon as Australia won the bid, the Bidding Committee dissolved itself, and left everything in the hands of the Board.

However, I do qualify for this position in one important way — I'm sufficiently ancient. I've been around fandom for thirty-two years: since the second week in December 1967. It is, after all, an unwritten rule that Guests of Honour at a World convention should have been a pro or a fan for twenty-five years or longer. Also, I've been around *continuously* for all of that time.

There remains one problem — I must have been selected by people whose sense of Australian fan history is faulty. I am not, indeed, an elder ghod of fandom, despite physical appearances. A major stream of this convention is called Fanhistoricon, during which the real story of Australian fandom will be told. Fan historians such as John Foyster, Leigh Edmonds or Chris Nelson can and will tell you that I am a mere stripling, a johnny-come-lately on the

Australian fan scene. All those Australians who joined fandom after me — after 1967 — are, of course, mere babes in arms.

I've told you why I should not be here. Who, then, should be standing here? Such a person should have been around even longer than I have, and contributed far more than I have. I offer you my little list.

In making up this list, I jotted down people without whom *I* would not be here, and more importantly, without whom the first Aussiecon, in 1975, could never have been held in Australia. Who, after all, could have imagined in the 1930s, when a small group of teenagers met each other in Sydney, that one day Australia might be able to hold not just one world convention but three of them? That early Sydney group included people who are only names to me. They included Vol Molesworth, Bert Castellari, Bill Veney, and Eric and Ted Russell. I've never met them, although fan historian Chris Nelson has interviewed two of them. I've seen their faces in photos published in Ron Clarke's *The Mentor*; when Ron reprinted Vol Molesworth's 'A History of Australian Fandom 1935-1963', which is actually a history of Sydney fandom.

To judge from the photos, Bill Veney was a big, bluff cheery sort of man. Molesworth is rarely shown smiling. They don't seem to have liked each other much. *Nobody* in Sydney fandom in the early years seems to have liked each other much. They held tumultuous club meetings, full of points of order and resignations, with splinter groups stomping off into the night. This whole group, with schisms and disputes rarely exceeded ten people.

In 1940, a teenager named Graham Stone joined the Sydney group, about the time Don Wollheim and Frederik Pohl from America suggested that the members of the Sydney Group call themselves the Futurians, the same name as the main New York fan group of the same period. During World War II, it was impossible to obtain paper supplies on which to publish fanzines. Nearly all the members of the Sydney group went off to war. In 1947, five of them met for the first time in five years, and Sydney fandom was reborn.

By 1947, Graham Stone was an important part of the Sydney scene, and has remained so ever since. The Futurians still exist. Graham Stone is still alive. His fifty-nine years of continuous activity should surely be honoured.

Yet if we offered such an honour to Graham Stone, it is probable that he would not accept. Sometime during the 1950s, Stone fell out spectacularly with the rest of Australian fans, especially those in the rapidly growing Melbourne SF Group. *Nobody* in Melbourne can remember what the dispute was about, but Graham Stone will still can. He will not reveal why he still considers Melbourne fandom as a dreadful conspiracy against him. But the barrier was set up,

and has never been removed.

When in the 1960s Melbourne became the centre of fan activity in Australia, Graham refused to have anything to do with that movement or *Australian Science Fiction Review*, the magazine that created that movement. In 1970, when Syncon I took place, the first Sydney convention for many years, Graham Stone did not attend, although some of the Futurians did so. The Futurians still meet, and probably always will. But no news of their activities escapes south of the Murray River, or indeed anywhere north, west or south of Sydney.

A couple of years ago Elaine and I attended the birthday gathering of a non-fannish friend of ours. We were talking for about half an hour to an archaeologist named Tim, who lives in Fitzroy. We mentioned our interest in science fiction. He said: 'My father is very interested in science fiction.' Tim's name, it turned out, was Tim Stone. He is Graham Stone's stepson. We mentioned that his father had a reputation throughout Australia as being one of our most disputatious fans. Tim looked shocked. 'That can't be,' he said. 'My father is the most gentle of men. Totally devoted to science fiction, of course.' What is the real truth about Graham Stone? Only Ron Clarke, another Sydneysider who won't venture south of the Murray, could tell us. Whatever the truth, all hail to Graham Stone's nearly sixty years of SF activity.

The second name on my list is Mervyn R. Binns, known everywhere as Merv Binns. Fortunately, he has received the A. Bertram Chandler Award, but the fact remains that he should have been selected as a Worldcon Fan Guest of Honour many years ago. Since 1954, he has been vitally important to Australian fandom. He should certainly have been treated better than being denied an entry in the recent so-called *Australian Science Fiction Encyclopedia*, since much of the rest of Australian science fiction activity could not have happened without his efforts.

I first became aware of Merv in the early 1960s. With my eleven shillings pocket money per week, I haunted the book shops of Melbourne in search of science fiction magazines and books that I could afford. I quickly realised that only one shop, McGill's Newsagency, had the really good stuff. Not only did it have the full range of British publications, but it even sold some American books. One of these was a very cheap copy of the American hardback edition of Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, which had just won the Hugo Award. I still don't know how ten copies were sitting on the counter at McGill's, but I bought one of them, and it is still one of my most precious possessions.

For many years, every SF book sold at McGill's contained a little slip of paper advertising the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. I couldn't attend because meetings were on Wednesday nights and I was commuting from Melton, and later Bacchus Marsh, and the last train home was at 6.20 at night.

It didn't take long to realise that the manager of McGill's, the rather abrupt and not always cheerful man behind the counter, was the person who put those slips of paper inside the books. At the time I did not realise that he, Merv Binns, also controlled a much greater empire than McGill's. It was the Melbourne Science Fiction Club.

In 1966, Merv also began to sell at McGill's Newsagency duplicated magazines that I recognised as fanzines only because I had been reading Lin Carter's column about fandom in *If* magazine. In August 1966, I bought *Australian Science Fiction Review*, No. 2. It cost 30 cents, and I had to

think carefully before spending such a large amount on a fanzine. From then on for a year I bought *ASFR* every month at McGill's. When the publication schedule of *ASFR* began to falter, I complained to the manager. After two years I wrote to the editor of the magazine.

As I became more and more involved with fandom itself, I discovered the importance of Merv Binns to everybody in Australia interested in science fiction. He was one of a group of people, mainly teenagers, who formed the Melbourne Science Fiction Group in 1954. The leader of that group, Race Mathews, has written a lively account of those early days of what became the Melbourne SF Club. At various times, other members of the club were more active than Merv, but most of those people disappeared during the fifties and sixties. Some of them, such as Race Mathews and Dick Jenssen, have rejoined fandom during the last five years or so. Race Mathews is best known these days as a distinguished politician. Dick Jenssen (or Dr Martin Ditmar Jenssen) is remembered in the Ditmar Awards, which are hotly disputed year after year. Bill Wright, who dropped out during the 1980s, has recently returned to vigorous fanzine publishing.

During the 1950s, the Melbourne Science Fiction Club kept moving premises. Editors of *Etherlime*, the Club's magazine, came and went. Although there were Australian SF conventions in the early 1950s, first in Sydney and then in Melbourne, none was held between 1958 and 1966. During that lean time, Merv kept the Club going.

During the 1950s, much of the appeal of the Club was that it was one of the few places in Australia where SF readers would obtain supplies of their reading matter. During the War, the Australian Government stopped the importation from America of all non-essential supplies, including magazines and books. The only American SF that arrived here was in British editions. The only authentic American SF magazines in the country arrived here as ballast in ships. I've been told that Mr Franklin from Franklin's Books in Melbourne bought these at Princes Pier. In turn, the American magazines gravitated to the Club, where members could read and swap these rare treasures. The Government ban on spending American dollars lasted until 1959.

I've asked quite a few members of the Club when it moved to its most famous quarters, 19 Somerset Place, where it occupied the upstairs bulk store of McGill's itself. The answers I received ranged from 1955 to 1965. Nobody, not even Merv, could remember the right date. John Foyster says 1962. New Zealander Mervyn Barrett, who was living in Melbourne at the time, remembers the date as April 1961. Whatever the truth of the matter, the move to Somerset Place took place long before I joined fandom.

As I've said, the Club room was originally a McGill's bulk store. It had a high ceiling and was very roomy. There Merv created a haven for all those people who sought solace from football-crazed, six-o'clock-swilled suburbanised Melbourne. The Club rooms contained the Melbourne SF Club library, accumulated since the early 1950s; a duplicator, ink and duplicating paper; a table tennis table, cooking facilities, a chess set, comfortable old leather theatre seats, and projection facilities. You entered the place by riding on one of the last hydraulic lifts in Melbourne. The lift had broken down by the time I discovered the club. By then the only access was a very narrow wooden staircase.

At the end of 1970, one of the members of the Club became concerned that the Melbourne Fantasy Film Group was regularly showing 1930s and 1940s films on nitrate

stock. Nitrate stock was notoriously unstable. If any one of those films had spontaneously burst into flame, nobody could have escaped alive from the Club rooms. The Club member reported this to the Melbourne City Council, and the Club was closed immediately.

For once in his life, Merv did not despair. He had already been thinking about leaving McGill's and setting up his own shop. In early 1971, with the help of a loan from Ron Graham from Sydney, he set up Space Age Books in Swanston Street. For the time being, the Club's library was moved to a flat rented by Paul Stevens and John Breden. Today, Merv is best remembered for that heyday of Space Age Books, which lasted until 1985. It was one of the first specialist SF book shops in the world, and for many years probably the largest. Many of us were quick to point out the unwise business practices that Merv made at Space Age, especially in the matter of security. For the first and only time in my life, I stole a book. I took it from the shelf, meant to pay for it, then discovered it in my bag when I got home. Next day I went back and slipped it back onto the shelf. Nobody had noticed.

We also remember the value of Space Age Books as a centre of the best years of Melbourne fandom. If somebody can resurrect the first Aussiefan film, made in 1972 by John Litchen, you will see both the interior and exterior of the first Space Age Bookshop at 317 Swanston Street, plus pictures of many Melbourne fans as they appeared then — slim and sporting a lot of long hair.

How, then, does Merv's long fan career form a connection between 1954, when a few teenagers met in each others' homes, and this convention? The short answer is: by being there. The long answer is: by selling *Australian Science Fiction Review* at McGill's. That's the fanzine that I began to buy regularly in 1966 and is the reason why I became an SF fan rather than merely a reader. *ASFR*, as it was always called, was edited by John Bangsund, and during its first year much of it was written by John Bangsund as well as John Foyster and Lee Harding under their own names and various pseudonyms.

In *ASFR* No. 2, the editor described himself and his lifestyle:

Last weekend my wife and I moved from our flat at Coburg to my old place at Northclump, salubrious suburb, sometimes called 'New South Rome' by the cynical, situated on the slopes of an extinct volcano and bounded by the noble Merri Creek and mighty Yarra River, a suburb called 'home' by the illustrious Bernard O'Dowd, the great Joe Fogg, and now, once more, by myself. In the rapture of my homecoming I managed to mislay some letters which should have appeared here — or they may be irretrievably lost in the wildernesses of Western Victoria, where I spent the last four days conning humble shopkeepers into buying my employer's publications and the last three nights typing stencils in motels en route. (At a guess I'd say I'd be one of the few reps on the road who travels with an electric typewriter, a pile of sf, and selected volumes of Hardy, Peacock and Hazlitt in the boot of the car.)

John Bangsund was a man of wit and perception, I thought. Better still, although his magazine is devoted to SF, he and his writers read much besides SF. This was somebody I would like to meet. The other contributors to the magazine also sounded interesting. I would also like to

meet the other writers, including such mysterious figures as K. U. F. Widdershins and Alan Reynard. They were personalities, not merely reviewers or critics. *ASFR* was not only serious about science fiction — treating it as a branch of literature instead of some ghetto artifact — but also had that special quality, which I later could be called 'fannish'.

In 1966 I was a bit more serious about SF than I am now. A strength of *ASFR*'s reviewers was that they had not met the writers whose books they reviewed. Since every famous SF writer was fair game, many of them began to send letters to the magazine. In 1968, Samuel Delany wrote to John Bangsund:

The Review — a number of people around here have started referring to it simply as 'The Review' (indicating that there is no other, perhaps?) — has become one of the more intriguing voices in the dialogue of current SF.

In No. 10, George Turner, a new contributor, put himself on the map by laying a depth charge under Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man*, one of SF's sacred icons. *ASFR* gained Hugo nominations in 1967 and 1968. And in 1968, John Bangsund drew a cartoon of the spire from the Melbourne Arts Centre on a letter he was sending to Andy Porter in New York, and scribbled as a bit of an afterthought, 'Australia in 75'. Andy Porter took the suggestion seriously. So did many other Australian and American fans. During 1970, the Bid was on to gain the right to hold the 1975 World Convention in Australia.

When I actually met John Bangsund, I suspect I appeared to him as that ultra-enthusiastic fool whose articles he had agreed to publish. I was surprised because John Bangsund in person turned out to be diffident, even rather shy. In person, Lee Harding was more like the John Bangsund I expected. During 1968, John underwent a year of increasing emotional and financial difficulties. *ASFR* was about to fold. Lee Harding, John Foyster and Leigh Edmonds put an enormous amount of work into producing the first two issues of my magazine *SF Commentary*. John Bangsund taught me how to use a duplicator, and for a time I tried to emulate some of the best features of *ASFR*. Not even the Second Series of *ASFR*, published during the 1980s, could do that.

For many overseas fans, John Bangsund disappeared from sight in the early 1970s. However, he continued to publish in various apas. Australian fandom would have been entirely different without him. And he should be standing here instead of me.

But what about John Foyster, you might say? Why wasn't he chosen as Fan Guest of Honour at the convention? He seems to enjoy giving talks such as this. He's good at humour, which I'm not. Also, he's been around much longer than I have, and is the link between all the people I've mentioned so far.

John Foyster learned about fanzines and fandom from John Baxter — the same bloke who today writes film biographies and lives in France. Foyster met Baxter at Baxter's family home at Bowral, a New South Wales country town. During the same weekend they both met Damien Broderick, a teenager who was at the time training to be a priest. As John writes:

On the Monday morning John Baxter and I set off to catch a train to Sydney. We were about halfway to the station when the ground began to vibrate wildly. When

the earthquake was over, we ran back to the Baxters' house to see if there was any damage. There was, as I recall, relatively little damage — a crack or two of a very minor nature. And so we turned back for the station and took the train to Sydney.

How better to start your fannish career than with an earthquake!

By the mid 1960s, John Baxter had stopped publishing fanzines, even as John Foyster began publishing them. His early titles included *Satura*, *The Gryphon* and *The Wild Colonial Boy*. Soon after, John Foyster met John Bangsund and Lee Harding, which led to the publication of Lee Harding's fanzine *Canto I*. John Bangsund was not much interested in science fiction, but he gave the impression that he might enjoy publishing his own magazine.

In Easter 1966, John Foyster organised the first Australian convention for eight years. Held at the very crowded Melbourne SF Club rooms in Somerset Place, it generated the feeling that Australian fandom had undergone a renaissance. Kevin Dillon was so moved by the fannish significance of the event that he walked down the aisle and placed in John Baxter's hand a twenty pound note in order to set up the next Australian convention. Twenty pounds would be worth about \$400 today.

The most important event of the 1966 convention occurred during the Business Session. It was decided that Australia needed a new national magazine. John Baxter said at the time: 'What we're thinking of is an amateur magazine, circulated amongst people who are interested in science fiction, and probably containing articles and reviews and stories, perhaps.' Lee Harding named John Bangsund as the person who should edit it, and John said yes. Lee Harding and John Foyster joined the team that would produce it monthly. It was, of course, *Australian Science Fiction Review*.

Although the idea of Australia in 75 was hatched by John Bangsund in Melbourne and Andy Porter in New York, it was John Foyster who led discussions about the Bid at both the first Syncon in 1970 and the Easter convention of the same year. John had picked a committee to investigate the possibility of holding a world convention in Australia. During 1970 and 1971, every fanzine publisher in Australia churned duplicators in order to raise interest in the idea. In 1973, Australia won the bid.

I find it difficult to catalogue all of John Foyster's many achievements within fandom. In 1966, after a detective pilgrimage, he discovered the true identity of Cordwainer Smith just a week before the news came that Dr Paul Linebarger had died, and that Dr Linebarger had written SF as Cordwainer Smith. John's tribute to Cordwainer Smith appeared first in *ASFR* No. 11, and has been reprinted several times since then. John's two critical fanzines *exploding madonna* and *Journalist of Omphalistic Epistemology*, featured writers such as Samuel Delany, James Blish, Sten Dahlskog, Brian Aldiss, George Turner and many others, although its print run was only 15 copies per issue. His many other fanzines have included *Chunder!* and *Norstrilian News*, which gave Carey and me the idea of calling our small press Norstrilia Press.

In August 1970, John began the Nova Mob, Melbourne's SF discussion group. It took the entire first meeting to decide on this name. The Nova Mob has kept going, with one or two lapses, ever since. The format has remained the same: one person will give a paper on some aspect of SF, but the rest of the evening is social. No dues are paid; we

depend on the good graces of the people at whose homes we meet. Our Thirtieth Anniversary is next year.

John was also the Chairman of Aussiecon II during its early stages. In 1986, he gathered together a collective to publish the Second Series of *Australian Science Fiction Review*. In 1987, he moved to Adelaide, where he began Critical Mass, the Adelaide equivalent of the Nova Mob.

The trouble with reducing a person's career to a catalogue is that it gives the impression that John Foyster is a paragon of virtue. Not so. I have at home a photo of John, taken in 1963 before he grew a beard. The beard masks a sardonic smile. John prefers the role of devil's advocate because occasionally he doesn't mind siding with the devil. He has, for instance, spent the last thirty years denigrating most of my own fanzine efforts, which has only made me more determined to keep going. However, on the day when I was most deeply in trouble, in late 1975, it was John Foyster who turned up that day at the door and sat down at the same table for a couple of hours, saying little, but providing just the support I needed at the time.

Let John Bangsund say it best, as he always does:

There is a certain daunting aspect to John Foyster, in person and in print. He does not suffer fools gladly — not from any malice or lack of essential humanity, but simply from having more important things on hand. This shows itself in a certain abruptness of manner — perhaps aloofness would be a better word — which is easily misunderstood by lesser mortals, i.e. most of us. In his writings he expects you to make the necessary logical leaps from one thought or sentence to the next . . . — and if you don't do this, that's tough cheese and you should be reading something else. Foyster the merciless is well known in fandom — perhaps more so overseas than here. [However] John's fandom is the pure old-time 'just a goddamn hobby' kind. Not the crass commercialism of those who charge money for their fanzines; not for him the sad hang-up of those who have nothing else in life except fandom. . . It's just lucky for us that John's way of life, in its enviable totality, includes a deep involvement with fandom. We are richer for it.

In describing some of the people who should be here instead of me, I realise that I have still left out many names. 'What about . . .' I hear you cry!

What about Leigh Edmonds? He has to be on the list. Leigh began ANZAPA, the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association, which celebrated its thirtieth anniversary last year. He published several of Australia's best fanzines, especially *Rataplan*, *Fanew Sletter* and *The Notional*. *Rataplan* was nominated for a Hugo in 1985. Leigh Edmonds was my co-organiser on the only convention for which I was ever responsible. It was called Bring Your Own Con. It had no program, and no guests of honour. Each day took place at a different venue, including the Botanic Gardens and the huge back yard of my parents' then residence at East Preston. Leigh enjoyed fandom back then, and was one of our few producers of fannish fanzines, but in recent years has given the impression it is rather less important than his career. A pity. I'd give a lot to see a new issue of *Rataplan*.

What about Ron Clarke? Ron Clarke is one of the few remaining Sydney fans. He began publishing fanzines in the early 1960s, even before *ASFR* began. Ron was still at school when he published the first issue of *The Mentor*, and

it has kept going ever since. John Foyster extols the virtues of *The Mentor* more enthusiastically than I do, but I wouldn't be without it. Over the years Ron has published much valuable material, especially long-running columns by Bert Chandler, Buck Coulson and Mae Strelkov. He was one of the last fans in contact with Peter Singleton, the famous British fan who wrote from all his columns and letters from a mental hospital.

What about . . . ? What about . . . ? The cavalcade of names goes on.

What about Robin Johnson, perhaps not the only native Tasmanian with a pukka British accent, but a startling figure to meet at an Australian convention in 1968. During the early seventies Robin was famous for being able to hold a conversation, listen to the phone, type a stencil, listen to a music tape and watch television — all at the same time. No wonder he called his own fanzine *The Butterfly Mind*. After he moved to Melbourne, he became Chairman of the committee to run Aussiecon I, and did a brilliant job. This brilliance took its toll. Towards the end of the last day of the convention Robin was found wandering down the middle of Bourke Street. He says he does not even remember that last day.

What about the women fans, you might say? Where are they on my list? I joined Melbourne fandom at a time when the only women who turned up at conventions or club meetings were the wives or girlfriends of male fans. The situation had been so one-sided in the fifties in Sydney that there was a bun fight when a woman actually asked to join the Futurians. By the late 1960s, there were plenty of women SF readers out there, but the Melbourne SF Club rooms frightened them off. The three SF widows of the time, Diane Bangsund, Carla Harding and Elizabeth Foyster, none of whom now married to the fans of the same surname, gave a theatrical presentation at the 1971 New Year's convention. This was a wonderfully rude picture of the lives of SF fans at the time.

There were certainly famous women fans in Sydney fandom in the forties and fifties, including Norma Heming, who died young, and Norma Williams, who was writing to fanzines as recently as the 1980s. Only one woman, Margaret Duce, is remembered as having joined the Melbourne Science Fiction Club during the fifties. She disappeared during the sixties, then reappeared during the 1970s with a new name, Helena Roberts. She was the official photographer for Aussiecon I, and also photographed Aussiecon II. She still has large albums of those photos. After her husband Kelvin Roberts died, she began to rejoin fandom, and two years ago she married Merv Binns, to our great rejoicing. It would have been quite right if Helena had been chosen to be Fan Guest of Honour this year.

However, it was Shayne McCormack who became the first female fannish recruit of the 1970s. She and Sabina Heggie attended the 1970 Easter Convention. They were

the first *Star Trek* fans to make contact with the mainstream of fandom. Sabina disappeared after a year or two, but Shayne began to publish some excellent fanzines. With Bob Smith, she organised Syncon II in 1972. It was the first hotel convention held in Australia, and was a great success, showing that a world convention could be held in Australia. By 1975, about half of the members of Aussiecon I were women.

And there's another name. Bob Smith. I could talk for half an hour about his contribution to Australian fandom, especially his famous carousing expeditions to Melbourne from Puckapunyal Army Camp during the early sixties. And what about Paul Stevens, who invented the Paul Stevens Show and the Golden Caterpillar Awards and wrote some of the funniest pieces that have appeared in Australian fanzines? The list of distinguished elder ghods of Australian fandom is impressive.

I've left one candidate to last. His name is also Bruce Gillespie, although he often appears as 'brg' — that's small letters, not capitals. He bears little resemblance to the person you see in front of you, although he inhabits the same body. When he sits down in front of the keyboard, he is debonair and literate and all powerful and even sometimes slightly witty. None of the dullness and shyness you see before you. As the Gillespie fingers begin clicking across the keyboard, the magic essence of fandom descends through him. Editorials and articles pour through the keyboard onto disk. The contributions from great fannish correspondents from all over the world begin to form a glorious pattern on the page. A fanzine takes shape. It might be *SF Commentary*, which began in 1969, has been a bit sick lately, but will be resurrected Real Soon Now. It might be *The Metaphysical Review*, which began in 1984, never features a word about metaphysics, but is powered by a great enthusiasm for music and books and fannishness and travel and joy and sorrow — what I call 'personal journalism'. It might be little magazine called *brg*, for the members of ANZAPA, or it might be *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life* for the members of Acnestis. It might be a letter, or more often these days, an email. Whatever it is, it's the product of the Bruce Gillespie you can only meet on paper, the one who loves publishing as much now as he did when he typed his first stencil in that blindingly hot summer of 1968 when George Turner said he'd send me some reviews and John Bangsund gave me the *ASFR* files and John and Leigh and Lee duplicated and collated the first issue, and the letters poured in and they've kept pouring in ever since, and . . . Thank you, everybody. Thanks to you and the Aussiecon Three Committee for putting up with my ravings tonight. It's been a wonderful and very short thirty-two years. Enjoy the rest of the convention.

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At 5 p.m. on 6 September,
it was all over . . .

Sigh!



Photo: Richard Hryckiewicz