



outside a Polytechnic, and that was good fun. From there we went on to other things, of course.

These days, in 2003, we've had a number of people, not right here but near by, busy having a battle in the modern parts of Arab countries. I haven't been able to work out any particular reason why the United States should want to kill a lot of people who are running another country, but that's what they seem to think is the case, so I have to be willing

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Introduction

(2 April 2003: transcribed by Yvonne Rousseau, from John Foyster's dictation)

Eventually -- something to look at. This is a photo of the people I worked with in Malaysia in 1998 at Shah Alam, just near Kuala Lumpur. We worked on our project for altogether about two years. Eventually, in 2001, I also worked with some of my friends again in Kuala Lumpur. It was a fun time. Despite what you see, this photo was taken just

to listen to strange behaviours, and to hear that thousands of innocent people in those countries have been killed because of a wonderful idea from the United States. We could read, I suppose, for a few days or months, to explain why it was a good idea -- why we were keen to go around and kill people from other countries. No doubt, there's some really good reason. But, for me -- well, I won't be around to worry about it. So I'll have to leave everything for you.

The Light at the End of Science Fiction

John Foyster

The regular book column in *Harper's* is these days led by brief reviews by Guy Davenport, and very readable the column is. For the April 2002 edition, Davenport starts off by dealing with a new collection of stories by Avram Davidson, whose writing Davenport much admires.

And why not? It is by no means an infrequent

occurrence for reviews of science fiction works to appear in *Harper's* (for example, just back in January 2002, about half a dozen pages were devoted to an essay on four sf works). But it is a consistent and tedious paranoid bleat of science fiction readers, or more particularly science fiction writers, that they and their works are misunderstood or ignored. Is this true, and why, and does it matter?

Instead of worrying such a triple-barrelled question to death, consider instead a contrary proposition: why did a term such as "science fiction" come into common use? We know that Hugo Gernsback needed to invent a new term for use in *Wonder Stories*, having apparently failed to secure a legal or moral right to "scientifiction". But of course

he didn't need such a term for H G Wells, or the works of himself or his followers. Rather, there was a niche term that he and others found to be commercially valuable for marketing a "product". "Science fiction" is a term as useful and meaningful as "Rinso" but, just as "Rinso" can be used to label a product, so can, it would seem, "science fiction".

There is nothing unusual in this "progression": there is no need to invent a word or term unless someone wants to discuss a phenomenon and needs to distinguish some characteristic of the phenomenon that makes it different from the rest of our thinking. And of course since different users of the word will have different understandings of how the word may be used,

arguments arise about what the meaning of “science fiction” is. More properly, I think it is clear, the real argument is about how those speaking think the word should be used: there’s a nice knock-down argument for you.

There are people who write sensible things about this phenomenon that is from time to time referred to as “science fiction”. Consistently over the last decade Robert Silverberg in *Asimov’s* has been such a person. While such consistency can be admired, it is distressing that one has to stretch as far back through some of Norman Spinrad’s column in the same magazine to Robert Lowndes’s editorials in the 1960s in his rather, er, inexpensive magazines. But at least we do have Robert Silverberg to try to set us

straight every so often. And in his collection of new “science fiction”, *FAR HORIZONS* (1999), we have a serious lesson before us.

It is not difficult to deduce what this anthology is about: “The best science fiction ideas are very big ones that have never quite occurred to anyone before...”. Starting with this adventurous partial sentence, Silverberg’s introduction goes on plainly to advocate science fiction as a literature of ideas: when science fiction writers have “ideas” it will follow, in many cases, that they have ideas which in fact cannot be completely within the confines of one story – or novel. This anthology is a collection of further thoughts (or perhaps different perspectives) on some initial “idea”.

But what kind of science fictional “idea” is being explored? Let me begin with a concrete example. Several polls of various reader populations have identified Isaac Asimov’s *Nightfall* as the “best” science fiction story. I may not agree completely with this assessment, but it would be very brave to exclude *Nightfall* from any “list” of the best sf. *Nightfall* has exactly one underlying idea: this idea is developed through a short plot and character system to a denouement that binds them together quite tightly.

And about fifty years after *Nightfall* was published Robert Silverberg produced, with Asimov’s agreement, what can probably be described as a “novelisation” of *Nightfall* which reviewers responded to (hardly

surprisingly) as being somewhat inferior to the original novella. Even though we can have character development (say), the guts of *Nightfall* is in Asimov's initial vision - not in any attempt to spread out that idea over nearly 300 pages. (Asimov's novelistic genius was exhausted by his much bigger idea - the Foundation series - and of course I don't refer to the later additions.)

In fact this kind of idea has some limitations, since this is the kind of idea that leads to an "alternative world", or at least some kind of world that can be explored. This world differs from ours in some way - usually some physical way - but in other ways is very familiar: we recognize the characters. A different kind of

sciencefictional idea has a different sort of characteristic: although we might recognize characters as such these are not primary components, the world is too different a place. I can illustrate this with a clarificatory example (I hope!).

[Note from Yvonne Rousseau, editing John Foyster's posthumously published eFNAC. John completed this introductory material in the first half of 2002. When he could no longer use the computer keyboard, John attempted to continue his analysis, on 7 February 2003, by dictating his thoughts. However, the brain tumour (glioblastoma multiforme) on John's parietal lobe had afflicted him (since its first manifestation on 28 September 2001) with increasing expressive dysphasia. John agreed in

April 2003 (in the last week of his life) that what he had dictated was too incoherent to publish -- although he still hoped to be able to amend it suitably. The best suggestion I can make is that, John wanted to express the view that the stories in this anthology had nothing to categorise them as science fiction except their settings -- transplanted from long-ago stories with better claims to being science fictional. Unfortunately, he could no longer produce the specific words needed for exposition and illustration, and thus his argument has been lost. During his dictation, John poignantly identified the difficulties he was having: "The problem is that sometimes you lose some key words."]

SEARCHING FOR JAMES

1. Norfolk, England,
September 1996

On a cold day in September 1996 I am on a train heading northeast out of London. I will be traveling as far as Norwich. A year earlier I would not have imagined myself doing such a thing, for one reason I feel cold is that as an Australian I am used to much warmer weather than this.

One day in 1995 I was having lunch at the University of Melbourne and for no apparent reason Meredith asked me "when did your

family come to Australia?" I knew only a little about my family, so was able to mumble only that one grandfather had arrived in the 1890s, while on the other side of the family my great-grandfather had arrived in the 1850s. "Don't you mean your great-great-grandfather?" asked Meredith, perhaps generously underestimating my age. But no, I was sure it was my great-grandfather.

Later, I wondered whether I had been right in giving that answer to her; I really didn't know too much about my family on either side. My cousins all lived in Western Australia. I had met them all once or twice, and looked at family photo albums. But I had met only one of my grandfathers, and had every reason to be uncertain about

exactly who was where in the family tree. My younger brother Graeme had looked into my mother's side of the family, but hadn't got past great-grandfather Perry. And my father had occasionally mentioned "Uncle Harcourt", but none of us could quite work out where he fitted in.

By the end of 1995 I had resolved to do something about my lack of knowledge of family history: I was changing jobs, and it would be a good time to develop a new hobby. But what to research?

The family names of my grandparents were Brown, Foyster, Perry, and Stephens. Foyster was by far the least common of these names (at the time there seemed to be only two distinct families in

Australia), so that seemed the best choice. And it was my own name also; if I wrote to people it would be easier to ask for details if you were inquiring about your own name.

In January 1996 I spent quite some time in the State Library of South Australia, copying addresses of Foysters out of English telephone directories. It was a primitive approach, but I knew that great-grandfather came from England, so I assumed that there would be more Foysters there.

I wrote to all the Foysters I could find, introducing myself and saying I was interested in finding out more about the family history, and sat back to wait for answers.

Somewhat to my surprise, I got about fifteen responses to my mailout of about a hundred letters. One of those who responded was Janet Foyster, who lived in Norwich, and in September 1996 that was who I was going to see. But by then I had uncovered much more information - much more than I would have thought possible.

I don't know the best way to carry out a family history study. I suspect that the best way will depend somewhat on a range of circumstances. In my own case, for example, I knew very little about the members of the family, but I did know that the family name was quite rare. In Australia, the Foysters were to be found in Victoria (almost all the descendants of my great-grandfather) and in northern

New South Wales (the "other" Foysters). My uncle Alan lived in Western Australia and, although I didn't know it then, at least one of "our" Foysters lived in New South Wales. And then there was my father's half-brother Robert, who lived in Canberra. Appealing to strangers in England seemed a good starting point to me.

But by the time I was traveling to meet Janet I knew much more than when I first wrote to her. As a result of what I had learned I would be stopping off on the way to Norwich, trying to find out some more about Foysters.

For most people, asking older relatives is usually an important first step in trying to find out about your own family. This was not something

I could pursue very far: my grandfather Foyster -had died in 1970, and my father was not terribly interested in such things.

My father was able to tell me just two things. First, his family was descended from Huguenots. Second, when I noted that grandfather and great-grandfather had both lived into their 80s, and asked my father whether this was a family tradition, he said that they did seem long-lived, but that one more generation back the male Foyster had died at age 47, of some kind of liver complaint. One of these "facts" was wrong and one was right. So I had very little to go on from my family.

But nowadays there are two other places you can go to for

such information. Genealogical societies exist in most parts of the western world, and I joined the local society. And the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has a program of collecting genealogical information and making it available not only through their own family history centers but also through other libraries. I started visiting a local family history centre.

For someone like me, employing scattershot methods to gather information about all the Foysters I could identify, there were two specific tools that would be of great use. The records of births, deaths, and marriages (BDM) in England were available from 1838 on microfiche and microfilm at

the local genealogical society: I could find out about the last century or so of Foysters from that. And the IGI produced by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was a listing of basic information about individuals that had been collected from parish records extending back hundreds of years.

The IGI was a computer-based system, and could be sorted by, for example, family name, so it was quite easy to compile a list of all the Foysters identified there. But here my first doubts about what I was doing began to emerge: the IGI bundled together two surnames, Foyster and Foister. It is a logical enough thing to do, since presumably the different spellings are just a matter of how clerks recorded

them in different places and at different times. Suppose, however, sometimes clerks had spelled the name as Foster or Forster (to take two more common family names). Would my approach collect all the relevant information about "Foysters"? It seemed that I would in addition at least have to collect information about "Foisters".

That became important when I turned to the BMD, which is not computerized and not sorted by family name: it is organized chronologically, quarter-by-quarter, although within each quarter the names are recorded alphabetically. So to gather information about the Foysters (and the Foisters) I would have to examine each volume for possible family members. And if the name was

accidentally recorded as "Foster" or "Forster" I would miss it.

So I began building lists of Foysters (etc.) from the two data sources. The BMD showed Foysters to be scattered over most of England, though with some local concentrations. The IGI, stretching back further in time but less complete, showed something quite different. Foysters (and Foisters) were to be found concentrated in an area running east-west roughly between Leicester and Norwich and only twenty or thirty miles wide north to south. And there was a second concentration just east of Leeds.

Even though the IGI is not complete, this pattern was very

suggestive: perhaps if I went further back in time I would find greater concentration in only one or two places. This might be where the Foysters originated. This might point to their Huguenot origin.

In such a wild pursuit of family origins as I was conducting, good fortune is an important element. I was doubly lucky.

First, the IGI included my great-grandfather's baptism in 1833 in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire. His father's name was given as James. And the IGI suggested that great-grandfather (whose name was Robert George Foyster) had several brothers. That made it all the more likely that there would be descendants of those brothers still living in England.

But at least I knew who I was looking for: James Foyster.

Second, having discovered this apparent concentration of Foysters between Leicester and Norwich, I began looking in books about the area. And in a volume of pedigrees published by the Norfolk & Norwich Genealogical Society I discovered on the contents page a listing of "Foyster of Kenninghall and Banham". Turning to that entry I found a family tree extending over three pages, beginning around 1500 and ending early in the 19th century with a James Foyster. But it was not "my" James Foyster.

Even though I could see no connection to my family I did now at least have an outline against which any other

Foysters I might turn up could be sketched in.

In the middle of 1996 I therefore had some idea of Foysters collectively, and I knew I was looking for James Foyster. I searched though the BMD looking for information about the death of a James Foyster, whom I knew had been married in 1814. I was seeking a James Foyster born in, probably, the 1790s. This was one of the many times when searching for an uncommon name became important. There was only one likely candidate, a James Foyster born in 1791.

I sent off for the death certificate of this James Foyster. A few weeks later it arrived and revealed that James had been born in

Feltwell, Norfolk, and that his next of kin was listed as J E Foyster. This, I guessed, would have been his oldest son, also named James according to the IGI.

According to the death certificate my great-great-grandfather James had died in a London boarding-house in 1875 (in other words, in his middle 80s). So much for my own father's recollection of a death at age 47. But now, using the information in the IGI about where his sons were born, I could trace at least some of James's movements.

Born in Feltwell in 1791
Married 4 August 1814 in Bury St Edmunds to Elizabeth Causton
Son James baptized in Bury St Edmunds in 1815

Son Charles baptized in St Neot's in 1819
Son William baptized in Walsoken, Norfolk in 1827
Son Albert baptized in Wisbech in 1829 (and subsequent sons in the same place)
Died London in 1875.

This seemed like a life of travel! I didn't know where the family lived between 1836 (when the last son, Thomas, was born in Wisbech) and James's death almost forty years later. Although I now had some outline of his life, I didn't understand much about it at all.

So I returned to the other line I was pursuing, and tried to locate other Foysters in the past whose paths might have crossed that of James. One

obvious place to start was "Kenninghall & Banham" where there was, through the pedigree that had been compiled by Patrick Palgrave-Moore, at least some sense of order imposed upon what was now, uncommon though the Foyster name might be, a large number of "ancestors" to be tracked down.

As a result, when I set off to travel to Norwich to visit Janet Foyster, I would visit Kenninghall on the way. I had no contacts there, no names, and knew little about the town. I did know that I would have to travel from Diss (the nearest station) by taxi to Kenninghall and back. I really had little idea of what I would find.

I did have some idea though. I had been to a few small towns

in England, and I assumed that Kenninghall would be like them. And when I had first visited England, in 1979, I had traveled briefly to this area, but only as far as Colne Engaine, west of Colchester. As it happens, Colne Engaine is only a few miles from Halstead, which was the home of the man (a John Foyster) to whom, according to Patrick Palgrave-Moore's pedigree of the Foysters, the Kenninghall family estates passed.

As I traveled the weather grew grayer as we went further north. By the time we reached Diss the rain had not yet begun, but it was surely now quite close. There was one taxi. "Kenninghall, hang around a bit, and back to Diss?" I asked. He was happy with that.

I didn't look at Diss as we left it. I was focused upon the more distant destination, but with one eye on a possible distraction: according to my information, the last of the Kenninghall Foysters had been "lord of Bressingham Priory". With a rather naïve leap I assumed that this meant that there would be a priory in Bressingham, a small town on the way to Kenninghall notable for its steam engine museum and gardens.

The taxi-driver slowed as we passed through Bressingham, but although we pulled over near the steam engine museum at a large house, it didn't look much like a priory; we drove on to Kenninghall, and in particular its church. We pulled over at the church and I made my way into the

grounds which looked just like other churchyards. It was beginning to drizzle.

As I turned left to walk alongside the church towards its entrance I glanced at the first row of gravestones: the first name was "Sarah Foyster". Well, I seemed to be in the right part of the world! The other gravestones in the same row were also Foysters, all from the 19th century. (But here was new information: according to the pedigree the "family" estates were inherited by Foysters who did not live in Kenninghall, so these Foysters must be somewhat away from the line covered in the pedigree.)

I searched the remainder of the churchyard, as the rain slowly got heavier, but the

graves were all more recent - there were no more Foysters. I took photographs of the gravestones, and I took photographs of the church. It would have been sensible to have explored Kenninghall further, but there was still no real link to my family, and I had to catch a particular train to reach Norfolk in time to meet up with Janet Foyster.

I did ask the taxi driver to take me on a short detour, out a few miles to the north-west to Quiddenham, where I knew that Foysters had lived, and where there was a mound that competed with many others as being Boudicca's grave. It kept raining. The countryside looked very appealing to me. We stopped very briefly at the church at Quiddenham (which was open, unlike that at

Kenninghall), and then we turned back to Diss. The rain got heavier.

The taxi driver dropped me off at the centre of Diss at the local tourist centre. The weather was now improving, so I looked around Diss briefly, which seemed a very pleasant town indeed, and then went into the tourist centre, where I had a conversation about Kenninghall with the woman looking after the shop. As it happened, I had just missed out; I had arrived just after an expert on Kenninghall had left to go back there.

There was no time to pursue that, as the time for the train to leave was now quite close. I caught it fairly comfortably, and disembarked at Norwich

where Janet was waiting to meet me.

It is fortunate that Janet is about my age. At the time we began writing to one another she worked at the University of East Anglia and during 1996 had exchanged quite a bit of correspondence. I was very much looking forward to meeting her.

Janet had planned quite a busy schedule for us, given that we were beginning mid-afternoon. She drove me around parts of Norwich where she knew Foysters had lived in the past (especially her own family, of course). We walked around Norwich Cathedral. Eventually we drove back to the (Records Centre) where we hoped to look up some information about Foysters.

Trying a new source of historical information is something I usually find bewildering: how is the material organized, is it indexed, and if so, how? It was the usual story in Norwich. I had a list of some documents I wanted to consult, and an assistant was very ready to help. But checking the index system did not prove to be helpful. The first document we looked for wasn't at the place the index said it would be. It was frustrating, and it was getting close to closing time. The assistant looked in the vicinity of the place the index had pointed us to, and found another document related to Foysters. It was an inventory of goods left by a deceased Foyster which she offered to copy for us. When she had

done so she added that it was such a bad copy that we could have it for nothing!

With that centre closed Janet and I went upstairs to the library to see what additional information we could uncover. We found a few scraps, but nothing as interesting as the inventory.

Janet took me to a pub next to the Wensum River for dinner. I didn't have much to say because I realized that I wasn't going to be seeing Janet much longer: she had been so kind and helpful, and I was about to leave to return to London. I couldn't be sure that I would ever see her again - and she was the only English Foyster I had met. She drove me back to the station for the long trip back to London.

I had met Janet, I had seen Kenninghall, but I was no closer to "my" James Foyster.

James Foyster (1791-1875)
This James still eluded me. Eventually I was able to compile a list of his children, a list that I hoped was complete.

As I have noted above, James was married to Elizabeth Causton on 4 August 1814 at Bury St Edmunds. I could find references to many sons.

- 1) James Foyster was baptized at Bury St Edmunds on 15 September 1815.
- 2) Charles Foyster was baptized at St Neot's in Bedfordshire on 15 July 1819.

- 3) Henry Foyster was baptized at St Neot's Bedfordshire on 11 July 1821.
- 4) Joseph Foyster was baptized at St Neot's Bedfordshire some time in 1825.
- 5) William Causton Foyster was baptized at Walsoken, Norfolk, on 27 May 1827.
- 6) Albert Foyster was baptized at Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, on 21 May 1829.
- 7) Robert George Foyster, my great-grandfather, was baptized at Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, on 19 July 1833.
- 8) Thomas Foyster was baptized at Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, on 5 March 1836.

Though this list is formidable, it already shows some cracks in terms of the quality of the information. First, there's no date of birth or baptism for Joseph. But he appears in the list because I found him in a source of information I haven't previously mentioned: the 1881 British census.

The Coodabeen Champions

[24 February 2003: dictation by John Foyster; transcription by Yvonne Rousseau.]

It's an old story now, about 20 years ago, and about a very weird Australian radio program. Currently, it's on ABC National radio on Saturday and Sunday nights. I had some part of that program when it began, so here's something a bit different.

Twenty years ago in Australia I found myself involved in something interesting for the time. That was a need to fix up

a little program that was to help Aboriginal children. I had done this sort of thing before, but this occasion was surprising to me.

There were a number of aspects of it. One was that it was perceived that education for young Aboriginal children could be improved. But to make it happen, it would be important to have a number of activities, and there was one that we were going to do at the end of the school year, with Aboriginal children aged about 12 or 13. It was meant to have some language, some mathematics, and a good deal of time playing sports with other kids and having school holidays. It would be interesting to kids, because there would be wonderful people in the holiday

arrangement. But there had to be something to justify our being able to do this kind of thing, and all the money that was involved.

One of my friends had been involved previously, and he had some kind of argument for the mathematics, but it wasn't fully developed. And so, in October 1982, it still needed some development. It happened that I had a lot of contacts with the Federal Government and so it was fairly easy for me to say, 'Hey, what about doing this, what about doing that?' and eventually, by the beginning of December, we were set to go. I had all the contacts to arrange the mathematics part. My friend Jeff Richardson (one of the Coodabeen Champions!) was interested in the

computing side, and therefore we thought we were ready to make something of a go of it.

We looked forward to the Aboriginal community that we had been working with making this something worthwhile. In January 1983, then, we were able to get started. And what would happen?

Well, it seemed to be working relatively well. There were about 40 Aboriginal kids, but then they had a huge support group from the Aboriginal community. So you would normally have something like 10 full-time Aboriginals who would work on supporting these kids, and then you would have, of course, special visitors. The holiday was twelve days, so that was good fun for the kids, but there were things

for them to learn. They would learn, say, some mathematics during the day, and then they would have some sporting activities in the afternoon. And what would make it particularly attractive for the kids would be that the play of the adults was really significant. Any of them in Melbourne would be footballers, but then there were others as well. And on the first occasion two of those others were Gulpalil and Ernie Dingo.

Gulpalil on each occasion spent an afternoon or evening dealing with teaching kids about dance in traditional ways. Ernie Dingo was then a person who was not known all that well, but he is now very well known as a movie actor and on television, where he

does cultural programs just about every week. They would meet and have some activities with the students. This wasn't of as much interest to the kids as football (being sport), but they did have some interest in what Gulpalil was able to do. And they certainly weren't too interested in mathematics!

One of the fun parts at the beginning of the day's activity was discussing some particular cultural activity. And one day Ernie and Gulpalil are talking to the kids, and one kid says, 'How about showing us how to start a fire?' And then there is naturally some consultation between the two, and then Ernie and Gulpalil say, 'Yeah, we'll have a demonstration of how to start a fire,' and off they go. Well, it was amazing, the fact that two men who have

had a lot of experience in living in the real world had so much trouble in starting a fire. It didn't go at all well. But this was very good for the kids who marginally had a mixture of Aboriginal culture but who also (the same kids) had to learn the other kind of culture because they had to live in Melbourne, as part of their place. That was something that went well.

There were other problems, of course, that didn't go well. The thing that we knew would always go well was football. You would also have cultural dances during the night, and for the first year that went quite well. At the end of the second year, there were difficulties.

In 1984, things were a little bit difficult. Ernie Dingo had been moved away, so he didn't have that skill that was helpful. An important skill is actually being able to discuss real issues. Ernie came from Western Australia, whereas most of the Aboriginals he would be meeting here would be from Melbourne, almost. So it wasn't quite real, as it were.

Nevertheless, everything worked much the way we expected, so Jeff and I were saying, well, we were getting there: we were starting to get all the skills that we wanted. Remember, what we were trying to do, as we set up the system, was to say that the people who organized the things had limited skills in running the kind of program we were talking about, and so

each year we hoped to improve the quality. But, as I said, there were some difficulties. Things were not too bad, but there was that difficulty of Ernie not being there, and the replacement person not having the same skills.

In 1984, there were of course other things going on in my life. My son James had been born, and at the same time I was having some difficulties, I thought, with people who were helping organize the world science-fiction convention (Worldcon). This was to be held in Melbourne in 1985, and I was Chairman.

For example, when I got back from working on that particular part of the Aboriginal program, I rang up a committee member and said,

'Well, it's about time we had another meeting,' and the response was, 'Well, actually, we're having our meeting now.' Oh! Right, okay. So then I had to return to the system of having discussions on aspects of the science-fiction Worldcon. From my perspective, that was becoming more and more annoying because, for example, in June 1984 I had real problems with an Australian mid-year science-fiction convention where I had organizers who at that particular time would complain that certain things weren't being done, but on the other hand they were unable to do the jobs that they were meant to do themselves. So in June, for example, people were saying, 'Well, maybe John Foyster ought to be able to do

this or that,' and yet they were not getting their own work done in those particular days, whereas I actually was doing the work. So I wasn't really having a lot of joy, in how people were boasting of all the wonderful things they could do, but they weren't actually doing the things required at the time. And that was basically what made things a little bit uncomfortable for me.

It went on beyond June 1984: in fact, through July and August. Those three months were very, very difficult

In the end, I had a situation where I felt I couldn't operate any more with the rest of the science-fiction Australian Worldcon committee. That is to say, in my view, we had an agreement that we were going

to do certain things. I was going then, as far as I could make out, on the schedule that was agreed. But others would feel, 'Oh, it doesn't really matter: we'll tell John when it suits us.' And I simply couldn't do that, and in the end, instead of being able to go to the Worldcon in Los Angeles in 1984, and represent Australia, I just had to retire. I said, 'Look, if you can't tell me what we have agreed to do, I can't see any point in me continuing.' So that's what I did. Interestingly enough, in large numbers of 'history' documents, it is claimed that I quit because of family reasons. This was never true: always untrue, and embarrassing to me. But let's forget that little problem. There certainly were two other things that were more of a problem at that time

of the year, and let's just look at those two.

James became much more unstable in his health -- really unwell -- and he was not going to be able to live very much longer. In addition, the particular Aboriginal program with a problem was now using some even more doubtful methods for dealing with it. By January 1985, it was getting to a stage where we could still run the Aboriginal program, but what exactly was going to happen? One of the things was that the program had been moved from the particular place that had been very suitable for running it, and was now somewhere else, on a Victorian beach. I don't know the reasons for this, but I assume some politics. To me, the new place didn't turn out

to be very suitable. The staff were being involved again a little bit, in terms of creating problems, and the key thing was that the initial place was very suitable and this one wasn't. And Jeff Richardson and I continued, and all that sort of thing, but it wasn't really so good. We had another two weekends working out how to run things, in the middle part of January. It was done -- barely -- but it wasn't very satisfactory.

Unfortunately, James was very ill -- about to die -- and on top of that, I had damage from a duodenal ulcer, for which I was not being treated at the time. But we managed to get the Aboriginal program completed. However, James died in less than four weeks after that, and of course there

were times in my life when I actually had other things I wanted to think about!

Interestingly enough, my Aboriginal friends at that time, and then for more than a year after that, were very supportive, because of James's death. But science-fiction fans in Melbourne didn't seem to take any interest at all. The question then was, what happens next? Other people went to the 1985 Worldcon, but I don't know too much about it, because I had to go away, for a problem with my health. Eventually, in 1986, my then wife, Jennifer Bryce, was able to meet Ernie Dingo, when he was in a movie that Bruce Beresford was making. So she was able to meet up with him again.

Ultimately, at the end of 1986, I had got to the stage where my health was pretty hopeless, and I changed jobs. It was unpleasant, of course, and then, occasionally, I was only very slowly able to do other things that I felt I really wanted to do. Fortunately, I'd put efforts into Aboriginal participation for a long, long time, so that these things were coming my way.

And in the early 1990s, I'd been involved in managing schooling of kids in languages which are very, very minor, and working out how it could be done. I was getting, at the last, to a national system that allows kids and teachers to work in very minor 'unimportant' languages. For example, Farsi was one of the languages I was interested in.

And that was able to keep me going, in terms of interest in that kind of activity. Finally, for me, at last, round about the year 2000, it was possible with languages to look at the question of getting Aboriginal languages organized, and how this could be managed. Since that time there has been a national approach for Aboriginal students and their languages, which is much the same as the way that was organized professionally for languages like Farsi.

In other words, I felt that now I had been able to get done one of the things in my life that I had wanted to do. It took a long time. (The actual first time it started was in 1976, so it has been quite a long part of my life.) Of course, I am no longer myself involved with

Aboriginal languages, although I would have liked to have done that. But, after my efforts, now I have been able to see quite a difference in the way languages other than English are treated.

And eventually, of course, Jeff Richardson had a time off from the Coodabeen Champions, and then again he came back. I haven't seen him now for about 15 years. Maybe I ought to have a chat. But then that's what we always want to do: we always want to have a chat with people. This week, for example (on 23 February 2003), Jeff's program spends a lot of time discussing the success of Trini Lopez. What a strange program!







