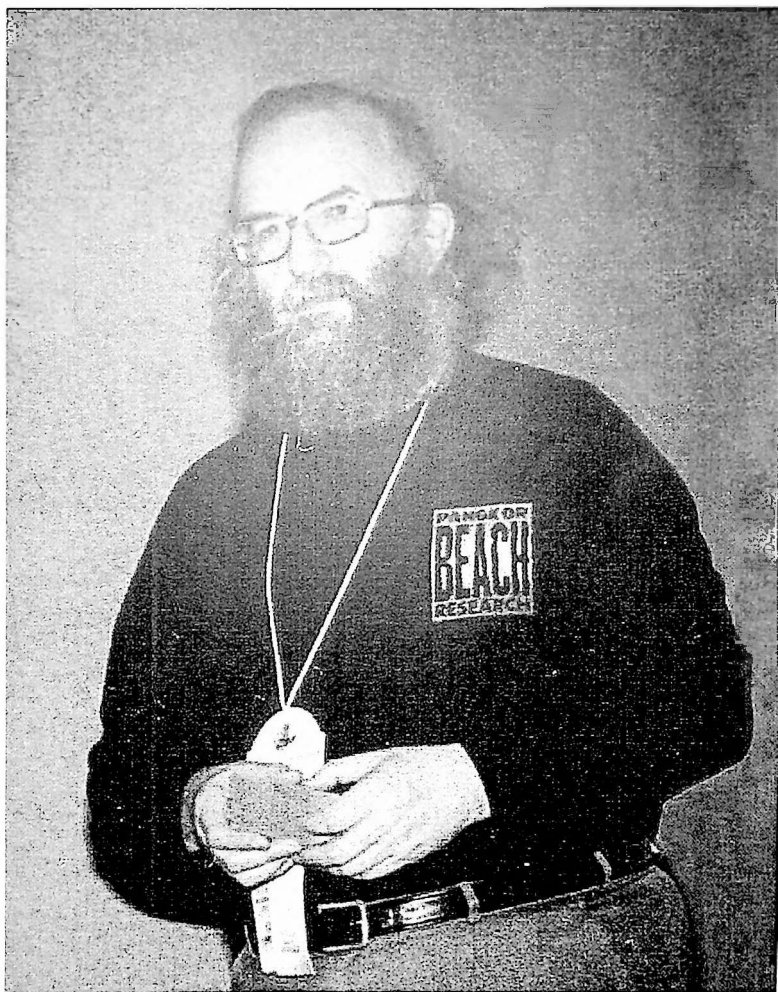


JOHN FOYSTER: THE CONTINUUM TRIBUTE

Transcript of the John Foyster tribute panel at Continuum
(Melbourne SF Convention) on Friday, 11 July 2003



John Foyster died in Adelaide on 5 April 2003. There have been three celebrations of his life: at his funeral on 9 April, at the Linden Art Gallery, St Kilda, on 11 May, and the Continuum tribute on 11 July, which you have just read.

Sally Yeoland has published John's Funeral. A copy should accompany the publication you are holding.

Yvonne Rousseau, John's wife, has published the Linden Celebration. If you would like to read a copy, write to her at PO Box 3086, Rundle Mall, Adelaide SA 5000.

JOHN FOYSTER: THE CONTINUUM TRIBUTE

is edited by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Collingwood VIC 3066, Australia
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for members of ANZAPA (Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) and other friends of John Foyster.

October 2003.

Grateful thanks for financial help from an American friend, and Bill Wright.

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Transcript of the John Foyster tribute panel at Continuum
(Melbourne SF convention) on Friday, 11 July 2003

Transcription by Bill Wright, with contributions by Yvonne Rousseau
Unless otherwise credited, all photographs by Helena Binns
Other photographs by Allan Bray and Gary Hoff

People who have known the late John Foyster during his forty-five years in fandom reminisce about the man and his achievements. Moderated by **Bruce Gillespie**.

Contributors, in order of speaking, were
Miranda Foyster
Dick Jenssen
Mervyn Binns
Jenny Blackford
Perry Middlemiss
Bill Wright
Robin Johnson

Panel discussion (largely unrecorded)

Most interpolations [...] are by the transcriber, **Bill Wright**, with occasional bits of added information supplied by the editor, **Bruce Gillespie**, who also had control of the microphone.

Recording equipment provided by **Myfanwy** and **Tony Thomas**. Recorded by **Myfanwy Thomas**.



Bruce Gillespie:

A few people weren't able to speak at the Linden Galleries celebration in St Kilda a couple of months ago because of the very tight timing. [Pause.] No one is volunteering? I'm sure that John's daughter Miranda has some more things to say that could start the rest of us off.

Miranda Foyster:

I haven't prepared anything for tonight because, actually, I am rather looking forward to hearing from all of you about John.

My experience of him is obviously as a father and family man. Although I was quite aware of his passion and interest in science fiction, and of my mother and my stepfather's involvement as well. His interests overall were incredibly varied, and he shared all of those with us at home. So my memories of Dad are probably more related to domestic things like cooking and sitting out under the stars at the farm where he

tried desperately to teach me what the constellations were, but I could never remember them.

I guess the closest relationship that I had with Dad *vis a vis* science fiction would have been in the first house that we lived in when I was about two or three. My mother lost me. The front door was closed but she simply couldn't find me anywhere. Dad was sitting at his desk, working away. Eventually she got sufficiently concerned to ask him to tear himself away from the desk and come and have a look for me. They looked high and low and couldn't find me. Eventually they went back into the study where they found me underneath his desk where I had been sitting all of the time, just beside his legs, cheerfully eating the carbon versions of *Wild Colonial Boy*. [Sympathetic laughter] So, I suppose you could say I've eaten my father's words.

I'd really like to open to other speakers and to hear to a bit more about his involvement with all of you.

Bruce Gillespie:

We'll dodge around in time. In terms of science fiction, I'd like to start with somebody who, perhaps, should have spoken at the Linden celebration: Dr Dick Jenssen.

Dick Jenssen:

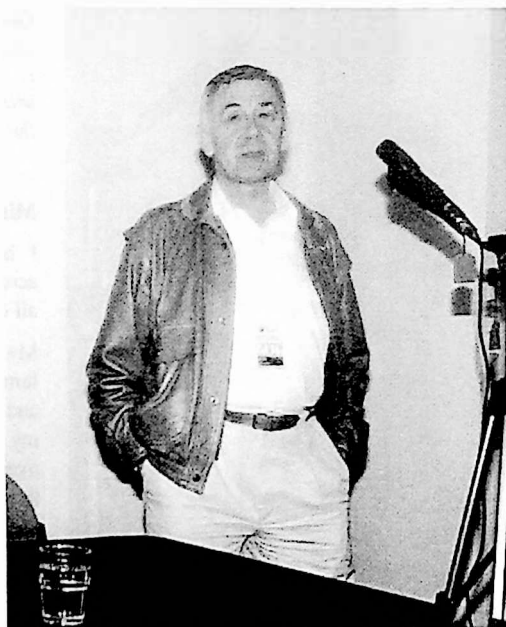
I was hoping that there would be many other people before me if I actually got around to speaking at all. What can I say? I met John very, very early in the piece: about forty years ago. I must say that I found John both incredibly stimulating and very, very frustrating.

I found him very stimulating because he was highly intelligent, because he knew what criticism was about, he knew what literature was about and he was someone that one could talk to and bounce ideas off him, get the feedback, and discover that one had been somewhat naïve in one's appraisal of certain science fiction writers in terms of literature; and that talking to him forced one to think very, very critically about why one liked something. Although John never actually said this, I think it was he who forced my views on criticism into two streams — one that said, 'I know what I like. It's personal and you can't argue with it'; and the other: 'I know what I like *because* . . . '.

Until I met John I was always saying, 'I know what I like; I'm not offering any reasons apart from "It's all a matter of taste".' John got me to think that, if you say 'I like this', you have to say why you like it and you have to say it critically and analytically.

I found John extremely irritating for exactly the same reasons. He was intelligent. He knew more about literature, he knew more about music, he knew more about science fiction than I did. I find that people like that are very difficult to deal with because it means I have to think a little bit harder, and I have to be more on my toes, and I'm really inherently lazy so I don't like doing that sort of thing.

But I remember two things that John did for me that changed my life, even though he may not actually have intended to change my life. One was: when I was going off to America I sent John a little letter saying I had just seen a film — which I think is one of the best films of all time — *Last Year at Marienbad*. I sent John a little letter with



two or three lines of comment on it saying I thought this and this and this. He wrote back: 'What a load of codswallop. How silly. Please be more specific about it and explain why you liked it. And you can't walk out of a theatre feeling sandbagged and saying the film was good.'

So I wrote something like three to four pages which he then, very kindly, put in one of his magazines — I think it was *Satura*. But that was a turning point in my life, because it made me realise that you have to support your likings if you think what you like has any quality whatsoever. I think I took more notice of John than I would have, say, of a lecturer at the university simply because John impressed me so much with his — how shall I put it? — acerbic wit.

I used to come away from some of my conversations with John feeling as though I had just slid down a razor blade or bumped into a wall full of razor blades. But he was never malicious. His criticism was always to the point and very, very specific indeed.

Now, the other thing that John did that changed my life is really quite trivial, I'm sure, for most people. If you read *Wake Up You Lot!* [Bruce Gillespie's tribute to John in the July 2003 edition of his fanzine *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life*], you'll find everything I'm saying there. I had known that there was a book called *Remembrance of Things Past* by Marcel Proust, and it was supposed to be a good novel. I also had heard that it was a particularly difficult novel to read. When John told me that he had just finished reading it, I thought: well, maybe (a) it's worthwhile reading, but (b) do I have the energy? So I asked him what he thought of it. And he said, 'I'd like to read it every year.' That was more than enough for me to get me to actually settle down and read the book, which I think is head and shoulders above any other work of fiction I have ever read.

I have gone back to Proust throughout my lifetime, and I must say I find it a source of enjoyment and pleasure and intellectual stimulation. I would never have read the book without John. I would, probably, never have thought critically about science fiction if it hadn't been for John, or literature; and for that I have to thank him. I also have to thank him for many other things indeed, simply because he was a friend of mine.

I was an extremely insecure young arsehole when I was at the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. Things haven't changed; I'm an insecure *old* arsehole now. But at least John helped reduce the insecurity at times. I'm sure what I'm saying is what almost everyone else will say. John's influence was simply one in which he forced one to open one's mental eyes and expand one's mental horizons. For that I have to say, 'Thank you, John Foyster.'

Bruce Gillespie:

Everybody here has been influenced by John in different ways. The first person in fandom John must have met was a young man standing behind the counter at McGill's Newsagency; just as the first person I ever met who had any interest in science fiction was the same person. So I was wondering if Merv Binns would like to say a few words about meeting John in those days.

Mervyn Binns:

My association with John is nowhere near the literary type of thing that Dick spoke about, but was mostly concerned with his fannish activities. Not even his fanzines, because I have never been a big reader of fanzines. Everybody has given me their fanzines over the years, but I never even got to read many of them. I just never had the time when running Space Age Books and trying to run the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. But I remember John's presence, starting from when I first met him.

He used to come into McGill's Newsagency when I was working there, where we had copies of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club's little magazine *Etherline*. He was always coming in to ask, 'When is the next *Etherline* coming out?' I think that's when John first got to know about fandom in Melbourne. Then, through the years, my association with John was more through the conventions that we either ran together or were involved with in some way.



Mervyn Binns.

A number of Australians went to the 1979 convention in England known as Seacon to put on a tableau to publicise our bid for a world convention that was supposed to be held in Sydney in 1983. That didn't eventuate, but we did win the bid for Melbourne in 1985. John Foyster, George Turner, myself and various other people dressed up in costumes designed by our friend John Breden and portraying characters from the Cordwainer Smith series [concerning the fabulously rich planet of Old North Australia and the not-so-benevolent interstellar rule of the telepathic Lords of the Instrumentality of Mankind].

It's the little things like that I remember of John. At that same convention, before we went to the fancy dress show, we were at a party that was put on by Gollancz Publishers where we were meeting and talking to all these wonderful authors from America, and we had to race out to put our costumes on for the show.

The other things I remember particularly about John are days when we went up to the farm [the Pondarosa farm, near Kyneton, the country retreat of John, and Elizabeth, his first wife, and her parents, Mr and Mrs

Pike]. We had great times at the farm, with football matches and cricket matches, and the encouragement that John gave to me to try to get the Melbourne Science Fiction Club operating better. He tried very hard to get us to do something about the club [in the 1970s]. Finally, we gave up. But fandom grew at any rate, even though the Melbourne Science Fiction Club went into hibernation. I didn't realise until recently just how much John had been involved in getting the conventions for us — the worldcon — and all the activity that he'd been pushing behind the scenes. He was terrific in that respect.

There's not much more that I can say, except that there is one more thing that I can remember. We ran the Club for a short time in a mid-city office in McKillop Street. We had the club duplicator there. I went up there one lunchtime when John was trying to print some of his fan magazines. There was more ink on him and on the wall than I think was on the duplicator.

Bruce Gillespie:

There were many magazines that John was associated with, but the two that he put together very conscientiously were the two versions of Australian Science Fiction Review. The two people he did ASFR, series one, with couldn't be here tonight. John Bangsund, of course, was the official Editor of the first incarnation of the magazine. Lee Harding, who was the third member of the group who ran ASFR, flew out of Melbourne today for Western Australia. The Second Series — the resurrection — of ASFR began in 1986, and Jenny Blackford has kindly offered to tell us a few stories about John Foyster and ASFR at that time.

Jenny Blackford:

John somehow mysteriously conned a whole group of people into each thinking it was their own idea to re-start ASFR. We were all under the impression it was our individual idea to have a really literary fanzine full of good literary criticism. John made the rules; the absolute rules. There would never be any fiction. There would never be any cartoons. *He* broke that rule, twice, with the Seacon drawings,



and again with the Ian Gunn drawings in the Index issue that Yvonne Rousseau did with great effort. It was a labour of love, which she couldn't have done without immense devotion to the ideal of *ASFR*. And we would never exchange a fanzine with anyone. It always had to be paid for. You can imagine how popular that was, but nobody was going to argue with John. There was no point arguing with John. It was very much like arguing with a brick wall.

We dutifully sent out hundreds and hundreds of copies to people John had met at conventions all over the place. We've still got things we can't read, such as *Fantastike* from Hungary and magazines from Croatia, Poland and Russia. There are some rather beautiful Russian postcards that I probably should show you. I think they're in Russian. They're certainly in Cyrillic; they are not in a Romance script. We have many strange things in the *ASFR* archive, which anybody who really wants to see some literary fannish history is very welcome to dig through. By the way, if anybody would like to have a set of *ASFRs*, as complete as we've got, just ask Russell or me at any point. We are happy to give anybody as many *ASFRs* as they'd like.

[In response to a question about print runs, Jenny replied:] John set the print runs, you see, because he would always take them to Noel Kerr, our printer. I think the print run was random, in fact, because we ended up with much bigger piles of some than others, for reasons we never understood.

Collation meetings were always fun, but they were not a low-cholesterol type of situation. Russell and I had discovered pâté and brie. They were not around in our childhood. You didn't get much pâté and brie in working-class Newcastle before the 1990s. I think you can find it there now, but it would be a pretty recent innovation. We didn't see olives until our twenties, apart from the odd glass jar in a supermarket.

We would lay in great slabs of pâté and brie and some bubbly — which John wouldn't touch, of course, because he never touched alcohol. We would also have Milo on tap because he always wanted Milo. That was really low cholesterol as well. He would turn up with Bruce Gillespie's enormous stapler that we would set up on the kitchen table. Wherever he came from, he would somehow get up to Bruce's place to get the stapler before the meeting. Heaven knows how he organised that, especially once he'd moved to Adelaide — but he did it! [Editor's comment: Jenny forgets that she and Russell picked up the stapler from y place after John moved to Adelaide in 1987.]

[An off-microphone conversation ensued, from which is inferred that Noel Kerr took over the overall printing, folding and stapling of *ASFR*. Jenny continues:] It got complicated around that point. We did staple some of the A4 issues. We did 16, 17, 18 and, I think 19. Copying was getting so much cheaper by the end days of *ASFR*.

It wasn't that different after John moved to Adelaide. John would make sure he would turn up every two months for the collation. He never missed one.

One of Russell's jobs, apart from, as John always said, writing long, boring articles, was typing in the long, boring articles that overseas academics sent us. Nobody ever sent us anything on diskette. It would have been too easy. We had to re-type everything. We would do it in our format and send a

diskette over to John. He would put it into Ventura Publisher, which was his chosen medium. After a while, he would post over the pasted-up copy and we would take the pages into CopyPlace.

It all got done. It really wasn't noticeably harder. There was no great difference because we weren't dropping in to John's place day by day. After he moved to Adelaide, he actually did come and drop in every day. He was regularly turning up for the spare room once he had moved over to Adelaide.

Whenever he turned up, it was always with a box of cakes from those wonderful Acland Street cake shops; usually with some Black Forest cake — the *real* Black Forest cake, not the Australian form of Black Forest cake. The *real* one that's about three million calories a bite. And some meringues for me, because we had found out about then that I couldn't eat wheat. More cakes than you can possibly imagine, and there were always most of them left over by the time he left. And he would never take any away. That did a lot for the *ASFR* editors' mean weight.

Anyway, anybody who would like some relics of that time, do feel free to let us know. We have holy relics.

Bruce Gillespie

The ASFR influence goes on and on. Dave Hartwell, who assembled a team about the same size as the ASFR team to publish the New York Review of Science Fiction, has said in the magazine that the main influence in setting up New York Review of Science Fiction was ASFR Second Series. Except that Dave Hartwell has managed to keep his magazine going for over ten years. Every month, the team assembles at his place in upstate New York to put out the magazine.

Somebody else who was heavily influenced by John in the fannish direction was Perry Middlemiss [Chairman of Aussiecon Three, Melbourne, in 1999].

Perry Middlemiss:

When Bruce asked me to come and talk about John Foyster, I had a bit of a think about when I'd actually first met him, and I couldn't remember. I do remember seeing him about the same time as I saw *this* character [Bruce] and a few other characters that I can see around here — at Aussiecon, the 1975 worldcon held in Melbourne. I don't know when I actually got to meet him after that. It must have been some time in the late seventies when there was a huge explosion of fannish activity in Australia. Coming from the backwaters of Adelaide, as it was at that stage, a lot of our contact was

through fanzines. Much of it started off through ANZAPA [the Australia and New Zealand Amateur Press Association].

I don't know whether people here are familiar with the concept of ANZAPA, and the concept of the OBE, that is, the Official Bloody Editor. If John didn't start ANZAPA, he at least carried on its tradition, because he seemed to get nominated and elected as its OBE on a fairly cyclical basis every two or three years. He would go for a huge cleanout of everybody who wasn't doing their minimum activity. No matter whether the roster was full or not; he just got rid of them. There are a number of people who still hold grudges regarding this. In Adelaide I know people in fandom who dislike John to this day, based on the



Perry Middlemiss.



The Fake Foysters — and a real one — as Guests of Honour, Adelaide 1981
(from left to right): Jeff Harris, Helen Swift, John Foyster, Paul Stokes, John McPharlin. (Photo: Allan Bray.)

way he handled things. For a while there I disliked him as well, because I was one of the people who got bootied out.

The one thing I learned pretty quickly about John was that he was blunt. He didn't suffer fools gladly, and he would just tell you, 'Sorry, you're out.' There was nothing personal in it. It was just that you hadn't been doing what you were supposed to do, so you were gone. Most of us in fandom who were shy young things at that stage in our early twenties didn't take too kindly to this, but we soon grew out of it — or, at least, some of us did. I hope that I did.

The next time I saw him was at the first ANZAPACon in 1978. I don't remember much about that, except sleeping on the floor and having to smoke outside the huge flat [in which he and Jenny Bryce lived at the time]. I don't even remember where the flat was. I know it was somewhere in St Kilda. [It was an upstairs flat in Marine Parade.]

One thing that came up in a few publications that have come out over the last year or so has been the story of the *fake Foysters* at the Syncon in 1979. I don't think there's anybody here who was at that convention. The Adelaide people decided to bid for the 1981 national convention and had already decided on John Foyster as being our triumvirate guest — as John Ossian, the fiction writer, as K.U.F. Widdershins the critic, and as John Foyster the fan.

In order to publicise this, we had decided to go to Sydney in 1979 and parade in the masquerade as look-alike Foysters. Most of them did pretty well. John McPharlin, whom some of you will remember, decided he didn't have to do anything. He just went as he was because he looked like John. I couldn't make it, unfortunately, because I had a university exam to sit. Generally it went across well, the convention went pretty well when we won the bid for 1981, and things ticked along very nicely.

Then John became the inaugural chair of Aussiecon Two, a position that he handed over to David Grigg later on. John was with me in LACon in 1996 when we won the bid for Aussiecon Three. At

that stage I wasn't chair of the convention. I wasn't even chair of the bidding committee. I was just on the committee and acting as treasurer because nobody else was stupid enough to do it. John kept on hanging around me afterwards. For a long time I couldn't work out why he was hanging around me that evening, other than just commiserating as if to say: 'You poor bugger. Look what you've let yourself in for. Now you are going to have to put up with it.'

It took me a while to work it out, and it was only the other day when I was actually looking at a photo of Robin Johnson, myself and David Grigg sitting in a room at Aussiecon Three at the Old Farts Party (as the traditional gathering of present and past worldcon chairs is called) and I suddenly twigged that John had realised what I looked like. I was slightly balding, I had glasses and a greying beard — just like the other three, and him So I was *it*. There was nobody else on the committee who could possibly do it, but he never said that. But I am absolutely certain he looked at me and said, 'This guy's it. I've got him pegged.'

John helped a fair bit, not necessarily by being there all the time for the organisation of Ausiecon Three. But he was around in the background and I could always get in contact with him, ask him a few questions and he would come over and help me out. Most of the time his response was: 'I don't think you know what you're doing.' That was all right. It was good for someone to tell me that because I knew I didn't know. I was trying to fool everybody else, but you couldn't fool John about that because he knew what was going on.

Getting back to the late 1970s when I first got into fandom and was involved in fanzines more than anything else, there were three people — three Johns as I used to think of them — who I thought of as being people I wanted to aspire to in some way. One was John Bangsund, because I liked the way he wrote and how erudite he was. One was John Berry, because I really did like the way that he wrote. He was very good, and he was more Australian than most Australians and much more so than most of the Americans. And the other one was John Foyster. I wanted to be like this character over here [pointing to Bruce Gillespie] and be able to write criticism, but I never could so I didn't bother. (Sorry, Bruce, but you weren't one of the three.) John Foyster, more than anything else, because of his energy. He just basically was involved in everything.

He started off a lot of things in this place, and it's unfortunate that Irwin Hirsh isn't here, because he would have been able to talk about the influence that John Foyster had on him and on how he, Irwin, ran his GUFF trip all the way through Europe. He told me later on that he based it a lot on what John had already done. Some of the things that John had done with fan funds, for example, are really quite useful and quite innovative in terms of what he did in this country. So it was very fitting that he became the first recipient of the GUFF [Get Up and Over] fan fund that was set up by Leigh Edmonds (Australia) and Chris Priest (UK).

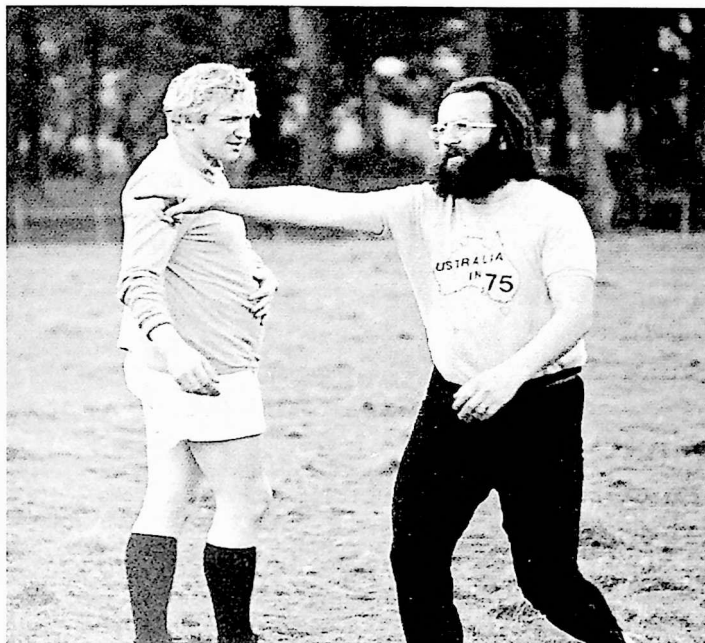
Somewhere in my house I have a videotape of a conversation I had in the early 1990s with Leigh Edmonds and John Foyster, discussing fan funds. That was when I was interested in the history of fan funds. I should try to resurrect that at some stage because it was very interesting. John was a big influence on my fannish time . . . I call it career because that means I actually tried to organise something that I never had organised on that scale. He was very useful for all of us, and I really appreciated the work that he did and the help that he gave me over the years.

Bruce Gillespie:

There are quite a few people here who could talk about John's influence on them, so I am looking for volunteers. But Bill Wright surely must have some good Foyster stories . . .

Bill Wright:

I don't know how other people found John, but I found him intimidating. John was a man who took a different approach than I to science fiction when I was young. He saw it as something that could be



John Foyster orders Bill Wright off the field at one of the fabulous fannish football matches held at the Ponderosa farm in the 1970s. (Photographer unknown.)

criticised. I saw it as something to blow your mind. You read space opera and you didn't mind the climax on the climax on the climax. You read the whole thing uncritically and I thought that this idea of questioning why you liked things was pretty rough. It took me quite a while to get used to that frame of mind.

What really helped was when, in August 1970, John formed an unstructured organisation called the Nova Mob, where all the

fans gathered together . . . just met . . . to talk about science fiction. The Nova Mob was great. All of that was the same time as *ASFR* was closing down, where meaningful discussion of science fiction really started.

I can remember the big stoush there was internationally when *ASFR* hit, in particular in the United States. Reviewers were expected to say nice things about authors that could be quoted on the dust jacket in order to sell the books. That wasn't John's style at all. He upset an enormous number of people in North America at that time.

John was an extraordinary bloke. He was never unkind. [Buzz of comment from the audience.] People might say: 'I don't know about that.' But I think, looking back, that he was never unkind. He was devastating when he thought he had to be. He took people as he found them and, if he found he could communicate with them at close to his level, he did. If he found he could communicate with them at other levels, he did. He was prepared to let people say 'I like it because I like it because I like it' if he thought they were incapable of progressing.

And that was true of John.



Bill Wright.

Bruce Gillespie:

Robin Johnson, you were associated with John on Aussiecon One, in particular. It would be great if you could tell some good stories arising from that.

Robin Johnson:

It's not a story, really . . . but John was very good at manoeuvring people into doing things that he thought had to be done, but be damned if he was going to do them. I, and to a lesser extent, Leigh Edmonds, were victims of this. I seem to remember that his reason for wanting no longer wanting to no longer be chairman, let alone on the committee, of what became Aussiecon One was the bombing of Haiphong Harbour [in 1972]. I have always had a problem with that, because I really can't see what the connection was.

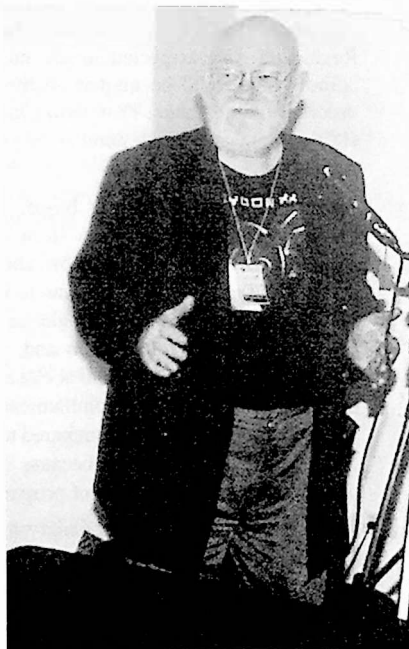
But he used that as a reason why someone else should do it. Initially it was Leigh Edmonds and me. Then Leigh managed to drop out rather adroitly a little bit later. I was just rather slow as the moving finger came by, I think.

I've got an enormous respect for him, and absolutely no intellectual qualification to boast of, because his intellect was so far above mine. But he had some marvellous ideas; some I'd really like to see followed up. I might try this one on Dick. He had an idea for what we now call a computer data set, I guess, which was the three-dimensional locations of all the stars within, say, fifty light-years of Earth. The idea is: the screen on the computer is the view out the front of your space ship. Now, let's forget relativity, but you see the stars and the patterns of them as you zoom off at umpteen light years per second; and you'd see a sort of 3D representation of the scenery you were going by.

Perhaps he did do it, but I certainly never saw it. It's probably not too difficult. Actually, he did explain to me what the problem was. When you go out in the country and there's no light pollution around and you look up on a clear night, you see all these stars. You start seeing the patterns that the ancient mariners did, which developed into this crazy idea of constellations, which is meaningless. You're seeing a middle-sized star pretty close, very bright, and an extremely large star very far away that is not so bright, and all this. If you just use the stars that really are fairly close, you'll be seeing an awful lot of the actual sky. So the question is, in order to make the computation a bit easier, do you just assume the rest is fixed — the nearby stuff and all the rest is a long way away — or do you produce what would be an enormous data set of millions of stars?

Anyway, this was an interesting idea at a time when I was working on what we then thought was quite a big computer. By today's standards it was almost as big as my laptop in terms of storage. I managed, with a couple of other people at work, to spend quite a lot of time on it. I didn't get fired because of it, but one of the other people did. His influence spread. I think I probably unfairly boosted this bloke into the position where he got blamed for the surprising loss of computation power at Shell. I can't blame John for it; I really ought to blame me.

I can think of a lot of things that John wasn't terribly impressed with the way I thought about various things. And because I don't have the giant brain of a Ditmar I didn't get embarrassed into giving my reasons for things. He was kind there. He knew a lesser intellect when he saw one, so he made me do something else. [Laughter]





(From left to right): Myfanwy Thomas, Bruno Kautzner, Merv Binns, Miranda Foyster.

Fragments of the panel discussion:

Bruce Gillespie:

We'll have our panel discussion now. If people would like to ask questions, or if members of the panel would like to ask each other questions about John Foyster, or if I have left anybody out whom I definitely promised could speak, please remind me.

[Extensive off-microphone discussion; followed by **Bruce** coming back to say:] That's the mystery. Why John did what he did, when he did. Why did he stop doing his Ph D? Nobody really knows.

Is there anybody who does know? Miranda, have you any insights?

[**Miranda** said that John's abandonment of his PhD studies in the early seventies might have had something to do with supporting a wife and young child. There follows a long off-microphone discussion about John's achievements, followed by **Perry Middlemiss** saying] I brought it up, so I had better tell you. Aussiecon in 1975 was the first worldcon in Australia. Prior to that there had been a fair bit of fannish activity in Sydney, back in the 1930s and 40s and into the 1950s. It only started to kick off again in Melbourne in the 1960s when John Foyster started helping to organise the first national science fiction convention that had been in Australia for about eight to ten years.

It culminated . . . no, it didn't culminate because it kept on going right through to 1975 with Aussiecon. After that, a whole lot of people who didn't know much about what was going on inside fandom from different parts of Australia — and I was living in Adelaide at the time — all came together in Melbourne and got to meet a large number of other people. Most of them went away thinking, 'Gee, that was a good idea. Why don't we hold another one?' Being stupid people, we ended up holding another one in 1985, and another one again in 1999.

But, in that late period between 1975 and, say, 1981, there was a huge upsurge of activity in Sydney, with a number of successful conventions. Also a number of apazines and a larger number of fanzines came out. People seemed to come out of the woodwork. I was in the middle of it, so I didn't see it. You really need to ask people like Bruce and those people who had been around in the early 1970s as to what the explosion was. But it struck me, from reading back on what had happened previously, that



The Foyster Continuum Panel (before Robin Johnson and Bill Wright joined it) (left to right): Miranda Foyster, Dick Jensen, Merv Bruns, Jenny Blackford, Bruce Gillespie and (standing) Perry Middlemiss.

the number of people involved in fandom in Australia had tripled in size in a period of one or two years. It was huge.

[**Kate Forsyth**, a Guest of Honour of the convention, asked from the floor, 'I've only just got to know about science fiction activity in Australia. Just what did John Foyster do?' **Bruce Gillespie** gave his version:] There is a document, prepared by John's family and friends for his sixtieth birthday, called the *Festzine* [subtitled *Things for John Foyster's Sexagesimal Anniversary*]. That includes a complete chronology of all his many achievements, many of which I had never heard of. He had a whole professional career that had nothing to do with fandom, in which he had extraordinary achievements.

The 1966 convention led to *Australian Science Fiction Review* being started. John Bangsund, who was the editor, placed the magazine in bookshops all over Australia. People wrote to him. They formed four or five State groups that didn't exist before then, and there were serious conventions and, as Perry was saying, John Foyster got up at the 1970 convention and asked: 'Is there a possibility of holding a world convention in Australia?' He nominated a committee. They investigated and decided, yes, we will bid in 1973.

In those days, the only way fans communicated with each other was through fanzines. Over a hundred different Australian fanzines came out in 1971, because we were trying to convince the world that we were interesting and that all this fabulous stuff is happening here, and that's really what gained us the convention. So much of it was John rallying the troops and organising conventions with Leigh Edmonds.

There was one at the beginning of 1971, held at Melbourne University, that became known later as GelatiCon because, just as a panel was starting, Lee Harding put his head through the door and said, 'There's a little man outside with a gelati van.' Whereupon everybody at the convention immediately left the room and formed a queue in front of the gelati van. That was one of the more enjoyable Australian conventions of all time. [John Foyster and Leigh Edmonds published a complete proceedings of that convention in their *Boys Own Fanzine* No. 2.]

Then, in 1973, a group of twenty Australians went off to Toronto where the world convention was held

that year, and we won the bid to hold the world convention in Australia in 1975. Things have just kept rolling ever since. If John Foyster hadn't been there at the right time, it could have taken another ten years.

[Much off-microphone chatter, then **Bruce Gillespie** comes in again with] One of my favourites was the launch he did at the Opening Ceremony for Aussiecon Three. So far as I know, his speech wasn't written down. The problem with Aussiecon Three was that we weren't allowed to tape anything, otherwise hotel staff had to do it for us at \$70.00 an hour. In one of the best speeches John ever gave he related his basic view of fandom. It was wonderful, because he gave us the idea that fandom is a worldwide organisation that operates independently of science fiction or, indeed, any of the things that bring us together, and that we had all come together at this convention in a spirit of friendship.

At the same convention, he gave his viewpoint of what he thought of modern criticism by standing up and giving a talk about Samuel Delaney's criticism. He said, more or less, that if it's no longer important what the writer writes but only what the reader reads, then the writer has disappeared altogether. So, at the end, he tore up his speech and flung it in the waste paper basket, so the speech no longer existed.

[**Mervyn Binns**, the elder statesman of Melbourne fandom, told the background about the fan opera, *Joe Phaust*, presented at the legendary 1973 Eastercon. That was held in a delightful rabbit warren called the Victoria Hotel, next to the Melbourne Town Hall in Little Collins Street. Interesting and all as Merv's account must have been, judging from appreciative chuckles emanating from the audience, **Bruce** eventually had to cut in with] We've got three minutes. We've all heard about the acerbic Foyster, and the helpful and influential one. But there was another side to John — a story I told to Miranda, and she agreed with me.

On probably the worst day of my life, in October 1976, a day on which, as happened from time to time in the seventies, a young lady said she wasn't in the least interested in me, I heard that I had to get out of my flat and I realised I had no paying work for the next six months, who should turn up on the door step but John Foyster!

I had no idea why he turned up. Maybe things were going wrong for him as well. He just listened to what I had to say. We sat at the table. We talked to the bloke downstairs, who was also being booted out of his flat. This incident exemplified the incredible support John could give to people when they really needed it. I think all of us who have been involved with John have felt this support at some time or another.

We'll finish now. It wasn't a panel thing at the end, but thanks to everybody who spoke. It has been enjoyable saying these things, and we hope they get transcribed and people get to read them as well. Thank you very much for coming along, and thanks to John's sister, Myfanwy Thomas, for bringing and operating the microphone and cassette recorder.



John Foyster at Syncon 2, the Australian National Convention, Sydney, August 1972. (Photo: Gary Hoff.)