



Death of Brian Boru at Clontarf

In this issue: An Interview with John James



PARERAGON PAPERS

are published far too often by John Bangsund, PO Box 434, Norwood, SA 5067, Australia, for members of FAPA and ANZAPA and some others, and this is the fourth issue, commenced 24 September 1977

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THE BACK COVER of this issue was originally intended as the front cover, but the more I looked at it the more I realized that for the time being I have said all I want to say about the sad events of Remembrance Day 1975. (Most of it I said in *Philosophical Gas* 35, November 1976: if you would like a copy, please ask.) The issues are not dead: Sir John Kerr retires at the end of this year, but the Constitution that empowered him to sack the Prime Minister remains in force; the fact that the Governor-General refused to see the Speaker of the House of Representatives after the House had passed a motion of no confidence in the 'caretaker government', and after the Senate had passed the Appropriation Bills, remains; the fact that Australia is a monarchy remains, and must not be forgotten.

LETTERS OF COMMENT are invited on matters raised in this journal, or on any matter at all, come to that. So far I have published only letters from people named John (Speer, Ryan, Brosnan and Berry), but this is not a matter of editorial policy, even though it looks like happening again in this issue.

JOHN RYAN The *Death of Brian Boru at Clontarf* is nothing
PO Box 24 but filthy Protestant propaganda, spread by rotten
Yeronga Orangemen who are under the sad misapprehension
Queensland 4104 that because a person has stopped breathing he is
 dead. Never! Brian Boru shall live forever as
the... as the... Brian who? Actually, your illustration is taken
from a pornographic movie, in which the central character is saying
'If this is an orgy, let's get in for our cut!'

You didn't give me much to go on with that Williams character. Like the names of the books and publishers that you've been swiping these illustrations from *could* be a bit of help. ... The big question is: Is it a casual interest or do you really want to know?

JB: I would like to know something about Morris Meredith Williams, John, yes. The book I desecrated to provide you with these splendid drawings is Eleanor Hull's *The Northmen in Britain* (Harrap, London, 1913). And I should explain to the majority of readers that I have been using this artwork in the *Official Organ of ANZAPA*: John is not psychic.

I guess Gary Mason has told you that I am advancing my claims as a professional writer, having written the Introduction to the Ginger Meggs book being published by Souvenir Press. The book will feature Ginger Meggs Sunday pages from 1925 to 1952; 192 pages case bound; full colour except for 2 strips... and it's due to be released simultaneously in Australia and the UK prior to Xmas. The entries to *The World Encyclopedia of Comics* aside, this was my first real encounter with professional publishers... and I was astounded by

their attitude, approach and sheer incompetence. Considering all that has been said and written in fannish circles, I really shouldn't have been too surprised — but I was. I won't bore you with all the details as I know you've been down this road — but I just hope that all publishers don't run their businesses this way!

One of the highlights of recent weeks was the acquisition of a copy of Sidney J. Baker's *The Australian Language*. The second edition was published back in 1966 and, according to those that are supposed to know, it was simply out of print and unobtainable. I'd made do by borrowing the only copy in the Griffith University Library from time to time and copying interesting pages. The only problem was that they were *all* interesting pages. Anyway, a brand new copy bobbed up at a local book shop that specializes in remaindered stock. It cost \$13.50. As far as I'm concerned, this was a steal, as I would have willingly paid twice that amount. A great book.



JB: It certainly is, but you'll hate me when I tell you that my copy cost \$9.50 (the shop I bought it from still has copies at that price) and that a paperback edition has been around since 1970 (Sun Books, \$4.95). You must have asked the wrong people, John — but I know that's easy to do. A few months ago someone in Canberra had copies of Collins's *The English Colony in New South Wales* for sale at \$49.50, and I was bloody annoyed about this, because I had been saving up for a copy at the State Library's original price: \$18. Then I stopped being annoyed and rang the Library to check, and they still have the book at \$18. Likewise Bean's *Anzac to Amiens*: \$10 or more in secondhand bookshops around Adelaide, \$3 brand new at any Australian Government bookshop.

Rotten Orangemen or sour Grapesmen? In fact (or at least in legend) Brian Boru, a good Irish Catholic, was killed by a pagan Danish lout named Brodir, on Good Friday 1014 (which, by using Dr Van der Poorten's patent method, I have established fell on a Tuesday that year). Brian Boru was hiking — no, that's wrong — High King of Ireland at the time, and by all accounts a bonzer bloke. Missed by all that knew him. Example to us all. R.I.P., B.B.

ABOUT JOHN JAMES Before I got John Berry's letter (see last issue)

I had written to Edwin Harper at Cassell's, in London, to ask politely what had become of John James. He thanked me for my kind letter, assured me that his company is full of enthusiasm and admiration for James's work but unfortunately unable to publish it because of the Dacey Economic Situation or some damn thing (see my remarks on Handbaskets, Sinister Effects on World Economy of, last issue), and said he'd pass my letter on to Mr James.

And he did. A few days ago I had a letter from the man himself. I'm pretty sure he didn't intend it for publication, but I'm also pretty sure he won't mind. When I have found a copy of *Bridge of Sand* and re-read the earlier books, I will be writing an article for some journal with a rather larger circulation than mine, in which I will be preaching to the unconverted, and therefore on my best behaviour. But here, Mr James, you are among friends — a funny lot, some of 'em, but at least they know who you are.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN JAMES

Dear Mr Bangsund:

Mr Harper has sent me your kind letter. Many of my nicest relations are Australians, but I didn't know I had any readers there, or indeed, anywhere. Anyway, it was a nice thing for an ex-author to get for breakfast.

I will bring you up to date on what Edwin Harper missed out. I *am* in paperback, or at least I was. *Votan*, *Ireland* and *Cattraeth* were all put out by Tandem, and they may still be available. I published *Bridge of Sand* last year with Hutchinson's, and the contract covered paperback. You might, if you felt like it, ask when they are going to bring that out. Sunday Express liked it.

Bridge of Sand is, as usual, two or three books in one. It is an essay on the art of poetry; it is a book on the place of magic in Roman thought; it is a book about the Public Schools in Britain; and it is a reconstruction of the Roman conquest of Anglesey, as suggested by hours spent in aeroplanes on the approach to Valley looking down at the Menai in all states of the tides. You may like it.

I am not regarded in the UK. I have no writing plans, not for publication, any more.

I am a civil servant, working for the Air Force Department, too expensive to get rid of but with no promotion prospects. My wife is head of a Comprehensive school with 1750 pupils, including my two teenagers. I live a couple of miles outside Cambridge, where my College have been very kind and voted me dining rights, more or less honorary membership of High Table, or if you prefer American, Faculty privileges. So when I feel like, I can pretend to be an Academic. Cambridge is a pleasant place to rot in, with bookshops and pubs and a massive library. Should I look for Bangsund in any of the catalogues? I started writing in the hope of getting out of the Ministry, but it didn't come off. So I've stopped. But if you want material for an article, a kind of one sided interview (I teach interviewing!), here is something to use.

One writes for a number of things. For money, primarily, so that one need then do nothing but write. And then, for fame. Didn't get either of those. And for the fun of doing it, but then why slam at the typewriter? Day dreaming is much easier.

Votan started with two things. One was Mortimer Wheeler's *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers*, which has the unarmed Amber Kings with their shaft burials, the Lubsoy graves. The other was the set of Saxon King Lists in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which if you take thirty years to a generation all go back to Odin at about 250 AD. But 250 was a rather boring time, so I went back to 150: and there is one saga, I think the Upsalinga Saga, which says firmly that Odin came from Troy and Thor went there to find him. So after that it was easy. *Ireland* came out of the Mabinogion. There were to have been two other volumes of Photinus, one to Africa and America for Ivory, and then another to China for Silk, to go with the Amber and the Gold.

But Cassell's weren't interested. So I wrote *Cattraeth* in order to get rejected and get off the treadmill. That got six inches in the New Statesman. It was an English prose treatment of the earliest Welsh poem, the *Cân Aneurin*. Or if you like, either a how-it-was reconstruction of fifth century Britain, or my debt to Welsh Nationalism, or really an account of the fate of the civilian adviser to the military. (All my military friends saw that one, but no reviewers or academics did.) Then I vowed to write no more where the readers couldn't pronounce the characters' names. I did *Leyden* out of sheer exuberance. Then I had a vision of the town of Wrackham, which is completely corrupt and never gets on the winning side — their most recent Honorary Freeman is called Stonehouse, but before him they had Maudling, and Snowden and Sidney Stanley and Bottomley and so all the way back to Guido Fawkes. I did one, and Cassell's weren't interested in any more. What happened with them was that they got taken over by the Americans, as you know, and are now no more than a front for bringing out American block-busters in Britain.

I had an agent who seemed very good at first. After the Cassell's debacle I said I would write no more. She teased *Bridge of Sand* out of me, and sold it to Hutchinson's. She seemed to be acting oddly, and when I began to argue with Hutchinson's took their side all the time. What became clear was that she was about to retire (and did so without warning) and wanted a mass of good will with publishers to sell with the firm. I didn't like the woman she sold it to. So I've stopped.

There really seems no point in carrying on writing, since there is no way of selling it, and therefore no likelihood of anyone's reading it. I don't want to get tied up with an agent again, since they seem to be more concerned with the publishers' interests than with their clients who pay the bill — since the agent's usefulness, if any, depends on the good will he has with the publishers, we seem to have an impasse.

I work for the Air Force, in a research outfit housed on a disused airfield out in the Fens. I live in a large Victorian house (about 1890) with an acre of garden, which I stay out of except to grow potatoes. My week? Well, last week Monday I went down to the RAF Staff College with a colleague to rehearse an afternoon's teaching set piece. Tuesday, in the office all day holding the post-mortem, and lunch in the bar at the Mess. Wednesday, to London for a meeting on training for young scientists. Lunch in a wine bar in Villiers Street with a mathematician colleague, a woman expert on the dispersion of locust swarms, or at least on analysing it by computer. Thursday: went off midmorning to take our current sandwich student, someone doing a year's work in the middle of a psychology degree (did you know I am a psychologist?), in to Cambridge. Got him his ticket for the University Library, and lunch on beer and sandwiches in the Eagle. Friday, in the office, and we all go out to lunch at a pub in the Fens. Friday evening, I begin to answer your letter (this has somehow now slipped to Monday evening), when my wife and I have to drive over to Cambridge to meet my cousin Noelle off the bus from Oxford, where she is librarian to the University department of Fine Art. Saturday, Noelle and I tour the art galleries of Cambridge.

with lunch with a couple of anthropologists in the Eagle, while my wife buys a wardrobe, and in the evening the three of us have dinner in the University Centre (the graduate club). Entrecote Bearnaise, and a very good Burgundy. Most of Sunday spent looking at Fen churches and laying in cheap apples, onions and plums from the farms for the winter. Dinner of roast beef with own beans, courgettes, potatoes, and own blackberry tart, with a bottle of Escarlat, from the Hérault. Took Noelle over to catch her return bus at about eight o'clock.

You will note that this leaves roughly two evenings and a bit to dig the potatoes, mow the lawn, paint the fence, argue with the tax-gatherers, read (I'm working through Michel Foucauld) and if ever I wanted to write, it wouldn't fit in very well.

If I ever wrote anything again, what would I like to do? Well... There's the sex life of Doctor Arnold, or how a Victorian public school really got founded (I was at school between Richard Burton, who was Dickie Jenkins then, and Clive Jenkins, so I am neutral on this). And then, what was the real story behind Sutton Hoo? And Pompeii - you and I are reasonable men, and while Pliny and his kind do all this talking about slippage of rocks and water in the hot veins, we *know* that if the mountain blew its top it was because the God was angry. I have the memoirs of the man who actually made the God angry - a Druid, naturally. And of course, Admiral Pliny went inshore and got gassed because he was *Called*. And I had a whole saga worked out on the career of a Victorian Naval Officer.

We went to France this year. I attended a conference on military sociology at Toulouse. We stayed three nights at the conference site, and then four with French friends in Toulouse with whom we exchange children for summers. They suggested I ought to write a novel set in Languedoc, but on the one hand Zoe Oldenbourg has done enough and on the other, I can't think of one. Except, perhaps, who killed Arthur and who married Guinevere afterwards? But the Greeks might sue me. The old Albigenian sites were hardly evocative at all, or the Somme battlefield. But we stayed at Remilly Allicourt one night, just outside Sedan, and I kept on thinking of the two occasions, once in 1940 and once in 1870, when that village was filled with terrified troops struggling to get away from the Germans - going different ways in the two years, incidentally.

I read the labels on sauce bottles. Science fiction, real novels, almost everything. Only, when I was writing I didn't dare read any other historical fiction. I don't write science fiction, because it seems too formless and free of any restrictions to be fair - I haven't written anything yet where the interested and expert reader can't work out the date and day of the week from, e.g., the tides. I have a pal at Edinburgh Observatory, and others who are navigators. Duggan is the best ever in historical novels. Try also and find Meriol Trevor, *The New People*. (Do you know Malcolm Levine, who comes from Perth but now lives here, and has several odd novels out which are called science fiction because they don't fit in to any other category?) Once a year since I was about 12 I read through *Gulliver's Travels*. It helps my style. You ought to look also for novels by Vaughan Wilkins, died about 1955, but entertaining. He hates the House of

Hanover, but he too works within a firm historical framework. Have you read Kenneth Roberts' autobiography, *I Wanted to Write* (Doubleday 1949)? He really wanted to write straight history, and that's why his fiction doesn't ring lively (and when given the choice he preferred Emu Burgundy to the real thing, p.274, so perhaps that's why he is so stolid). But you should find it and see p.430 with framework for a novel, never written, set on a convict ship bound for Australia. You can overdo the firm base.

What else? I am Welsh, and for *Cattraeth* had to do my own translation of the sixth century text, thus discovering that about one-third of the words in it are not known from any other source and therefore for a lot of it it's anybody's guess. I give conference papers in French, and can read them in Russian, German and Italian. Originally a classic, I can tell the difference between *παράγων* and *παρα εργον*. At about 14, I read R.G. Collingwood's autobiography and Mumford's *Technics and Civilisation* in the same week and never recovered. As an undergraduate I went to Wittgenstein's lectures, with more or less the same effect. I wrote my novels direct on to the typewriter: usually four or five drafts. *Votan* was the first I ever tried.

Welsh Anglican Labour, and that's a rare commodity. Any church services in novels come from the Prayer Book of Edward VI, not the 1660. I watch rugby with relish, and will look at cricket - wife, daughter and son are all members of Surrey and went to the five days of the Oval Test wearing T-shirts that say 'Pommy Power brings the Ashes Home'. I sat by the telly. Kojak fan. The BBC version of *I, Claudius* better than Graves' original.

Like Doctor Johnson, I am obliged to any man who visits me, and if you ever come to Britain, please look me up. Well-intentioned readers may find me on most Saturdays in the Eagle from about 12.00 to 12.45, with my family joining me one by one, and me drinking Abbot. (This is the pub that figures so largely in Watson's *The Double Helix*.)

I hope that Parergon Press prospers. Thank you very much for your interest, and I am sorry that the future will be, it seems, so barren on my side.



JB: The gentleman doth protest too much, methinks - but then, I'm not a psychologist. I think John James will write again (I'd love to see those unwritten novels he mentions!), especially if some of us who like his work write to him and say so, and tell him to keep out of the flamin' pubs, find a decent publisher, and get back to work. All this decadent Kojak-watching and French-plonk-drinking is of no use to us at all, sir!

We'll see you, some of us, in 1979, when the World Science Fiction Convention is next held in England.

Since Mr James didn't expect his letter to be published, I have omitted his address. In any case, it may serve some useful purpose to write to him care of Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd, 178-202 Great Portland Street, London, or Cassell & Co. Ltd, 35 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4SG.

CHERRY WILDER
16b Egelsbacherstr.
6070 Langen/Hessen
West Germany
22.9.77

Well, Frosch and Begorra, it's bloody
Bangsund, the biggest broth of a bhoy who
ever ate broth in a residential, who's after
sending his ould Auntie Cherry a beautiful
bonanza of fanzines. Perhaps this is called
a Bonanzine. And of course that makes a
Bombazine a fanzine for terrorists. Anarchists just used to call
theirs a magazine... remember how the adjutant used to shout 'Steady,
Carruthers, they're going to blow up the magazine!' But I digress.
Our cat is very beautiful, parti-coloured, just like a digress. On
her little cat passport it says 'tricolor'. It is not really a pass-
port, it is an immunization record. Which reminds me of a true
story our-friend-Gunther brought back from a holiday in Cornwall,
me dear, about an Englishman teaching in Ireland. The parents of
one broth of a boy who had been offered immunization wrote a note
saying 'We object strongly to Michael being humanized.' End of
digression B, sub-section 4.

About Brian O'Nolan. He is a Great Mythic Figure. I associate him
with the Welsh Bran Anallyddn, the keeper of the sacred cauldron
known as the Great Pot O'Gaal. Actually what he boils down to is
the consort of the Goddess in triad, see *The Greek Myths* by Robert
Graves, footnote p.104 or any other page with an alder in the month.
Another dying god, bejabers. See the article in the *Analecta Bol-
landiana* for 1926, digression B, sub-section 4, entitled 'St Anal-
lyddn and His Wonderful Lump'. Bear in mind, too, what Guy Fawkes
said as they led the poor lad away from his magazine: 'I feel I am
going to regret the outcome of this November the Fifth Business.'

The god Bran, of course, is famous for his head, singing upon the
rock. There are any number of Singing Heads in the US, I understand;
they call them rock groups.

What? Not like *The Malacia Tapestry*? Sometimes I think George
Turner has no soul. Should we try him with *Fifth Business*? Poor
Bill Rotsler... as well as running A-Corn single-handed he is now
obviously suffering from Artist's Wrist or Adelaide Arm from
drawing so many beautiful things for the frenzied fans of the
antipodes. Speaking of artists, your boy (your Harald Fairhaired
boy) M. Meredith Williams is good, but keep an eye open for S. Baghot
De La Bere.

Goodness... this is a loc. I do not usually write locs. In fact for
a while I wondered what they were.



JB: Fans write locs; I publish letters of comment. It's just part
of my campaign to preserve a High Tone about this publication.
Lovely to hear from you, Auntie Cherry! Living in darkest Deutsch-
land has not diminished your sense of the Absurd, obviously: you
write to Harding and me, for example. George Turner has so too got
a soul, but I don't know whether he has read Robertson Davies. *Fifth
Business* is now available in paperback from all good Australian book-
shops, both of them. Is Langen/Hessen as pretty as Wollongong? Norm
asked me to ask you, and sends his regards to Ubu Alles.

STEVENS FOR DUFF! If America can send us Bill Rotsler, the least we can do is send America Paul Stevens. John Foyster, Mervyn Binns and I have nominated Paul for the 1978 Down Under Fan Fund, and we believe he is a most worthy candidate. At present I do not know who the other candidates are, and I do not know who Paul's American nominators are. Nor have I read Paul's official election platform. I am presenting Paul's candidature in a serious vein because I am sure that Paul and others will present it humorously. Paul is an accomplished humorist, in print and in person, but behind the jokes and the zany flights of fantasy there is a serious bloke, worth taking seriously.

In the October 1972 issue of *Bundalohn Quarterly* I published one of the more serious things Paul has written, and I am pleased to reprint it here. For readers who do not know Paul Stevens, or who have not known him long, it will serve as an introduction.

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IT'S NOT A HOBBY, IT'S A GODDAM WAY OF LIFE!

A TERRIBLE THING happened to me early in October: I turned 30. The horrible truth is that I don't feel 30 mentally, but I do feel 30 physically - in fact on some days even older. To this I attribute science fiction fandom as the cause. The only thought that makes me feel better is that Bangsund, Binns, Harding and Foyster are all over 30, perhaps even more, and it serves them right.

Do you know that I was once a nice polite kid who was interested in Drama? I even joined a drama group where there were all these nice nubile young girls who all wanted to be Sarah Bernhardt, and I used to help them with their lines. I reckon that if I had stayed in the drama group I probably would have met The Girl and married and settled down by now. But no - *I had to join fandom!*

Well that was some time ago, and I have changed. I am no longer a nice polite dumb ignorant kid. No. Now I'm a crotchety vicious mean-minded sonofabitch working behind the counter at the Space Age Bookshop. Fandom has taken me over completely. Of course there are no nice nubile young girls in fandom. If there were, Harding would have raced them off long before I got near them.

I remember in the beginning I was living in Lilydale, a small town some twenty-five miles from Melbourne, and I got this terrible urge to read science fiction. I've always had an urge to read, and sf was always on top of the list. *Tiger! Tiger!*, *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* and the first three episodes of *Citizen of the Galaxy* (took me two years to find the final episode) hooked me. When I heard that there was a science fiction club in Melbourne, I just had to join it. The library sounded like heaven. I saw Merv Binns (the bloke with the golden halo behind the counter at McGill's newsagency) and asked him about the club and when it met and all that.

My first view of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club was these three people sitting on this doorstep at 19 Somerset Place. 'Can you tell

me where the science fiction club meets?' I asked them. 'Here!' they said, in a strange tone. It turned out that Binns had gone to the pictures and was not due back until about 8 - a ritual that has remained unchanged for many years, since it is only recently that the club has started meeting on Thursdays instead of Wednesdays. And so I joined the MSFC.

At first I was content to observe the strange goings-on of these otherworld people, and delve deep into the morass that was the club library, but as the months went by I began actually to talk with the denizens of this strange place - people like Dick Jenssen, John Straede, Mervyn Barrett, Dave Sofar, Cedric Rowley, even Merv Binns (mainly he asked me for money).

Soon after this I went along to the Victorian Railways Institute Library, and there I met this short fat bloke who ran the place. 'Got any science fiction?' I asked him innocently. 'Nah!' he answered, giving me a look as though I had just crapped in the middle of the floor and was busy wiping my bum on a rare edition of *Pride and Prejudice*. Wrinkling his nose, he said 'How about some Thomas Love Peacock?' 'No thanks,' I replied, edging for the door, 'I don't read animal stories.' Years later I found out that the short fat fellow was the editor of this and other rags, and that he still reads Thomas Love Peacock. Or so he says. I mean, have you ever seen anyone reading anything by an author with a name like that?

After some years, some member of the MSFC, a sadist no doubt, decided to organize a science fiction convention. This activity, which I later learnt has strong religious significance, was conducted over Easter 1966 in the mouldy clubrooms in Somerset Place, and it produced a bunch of equally mouldy fans, chief amongst them John Foyster, John Baxter and Lee Harding. And there was Damien Broderick, Wynne Whiteford, Doug Nicholson, Mike Baldwin and other mythical characters. Baxter earned my undying worship by showing clips from horror films and a fantastic bit from *King Kong*. I went into raptures.

Several interesting insights into the fannish character were displayed during this first Australian convention in many years. Bangsund was there. Just married, we were told by Mrs Bangsund, at length. Foyster got up and proposed that what Australia needed was a fanzine, and Harding got up and volunteered Bangsund's services and everybody cheered - except Mrs Bangsund, who seemed visibly moved. (Some years later she confided in me that she wished she had thrown Harding down the lift well.)

And so *Australian Science Fiction Review* was born, and the beginning of 'Australia in '75'. It was at that convention that I met Leigh Edmonds, a quiet lad with a sensitive fannish face and a good Methodist upbringing. (Whooboy! has he changed!) Also at that convention I helped to sweep the floor. At the next con in 1968 I helped choose the films, and swept the floor. The 1969 con saw me assistant organizer, and still sweeping the floor. At the 1973 Eastercon in Melbourne I will be big boss-man, and I will be telling other people to sweep the floor. I will probably still sweep the floor. If you are looking for me in '75, watch out for the bloke with the broom.

It has been an eventful time, the last eight years or however long it



