

A tribute to Bill Wright (1937–2022)

Dick Jenssen: 'As I remember Bill Wright'

LynC's Presentation Speech
when Bill Wright was awarded the A. Bertram Chandler Award in 2017

Bruce Gillespie: 'Bill Wright: Mr Multitudes'

Facebook tributes to Bill Wright



Bill Wright as we remember him best, in happier days. Dining with Dick Jenssen (who took the photo) and Elaine Cochrane and Bruce Gillespie in Collingwood in 1999.

SF Commentary 109

20 pages

February 2022

Also published as **brg** 121 for the February 2022 mailing of ANZAPA (Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association). Edited and published by Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard St, Greensborough VIC 3088, Australia. Phone: 61-3-9435 7786. Email: gandc001@bigpond.com. Member fwa.

Covers by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen).
Photo credits are often guesses. All corrections welcomed.



Bill Wright conducting the Meteor Inc. panel at Aussiecon 4, Melbourne, 2010. (Photo: Helena Binns.)

Dick Jenssen

As I remember Bill Wright

From childhood's hour I have not been
As others were—I have not seen
As others saw—I could not bring
My passions from a common spring—

Edgar Allan Poe 'Alone'

Bill is no longer with us but, for me at least, he is still a large presence in my life. So I write this remembrance in the present tense.

There are times when time itself seems paradoxical. I have known Bill Wright for sixty-six years but it seems very much shorter than that. I have no doubt that this is because interacting with Bill, in conversation or prose, is almost inevitably a new and refreshing experience. Given almost any subject — or even just a passing reference — Bill will follow a train of thought up and down his mental landscape, in and out of the tunnels of his mind, down branch-lines and sub-branch-lines to termini far removed from the original impulse. But the train-ride never derails. Following Bill's ruminations may seem as though there is madness in his method, but that's not so: Bill believes (as Idries Shah points out in his book *The Sufis*) that all is connected, and (as Carl Jung posits in his concept of *synchronicity*) the connection is sometimes non-rational and acausal. One must be on one's toes near Bill. Perhaps the best compliment I can pay to Bill's apparent non-sequitural thinking is to describe it as quasi-Proustian. For both, an image or a thought or an idea leads to another

image, thought, idea, which leads to another image, thought, idea, which ... and so on. With Proust there is always time to pause and reflect on what is written, with Bill there is no time to follow immediately, but only later.

Bill and I found each other in the Melbourne Science Fiction Club over six decades ago, and realised that we shared an admiration for Doc Smith's *Lensman* series. Remember that in the 1950s science fiction was still a marginal literary genre and was almost confined to the pulps, and in Australia was virtually nonexistent, and we were both still very young in spirit. While our literary tastes have evolved since that time, I know that if pressed to name the 'best' SF he has ever read, Bill would always nominate Eando Binder's *Spawn of Eternal Thought*, a two-part serial in *Astounding Stories*, 1932. In that short novel Bill found a hidden theme of incest, which clearly intrigued him, even if his reading was, perhaps, eisegetical. Bill also admired the works of A. E. van Vogt, in particular *The Voyage of the Space Beagle*. And, later, was captivated by Roger Zelazny's *Chronicles of Amber*.

Some short time after we became friends, Bill brought into the Club rooms a painting titled *The Galaxy Primed*, which I took to be a testament to his graphic accomplishments, and his never-to-be-lost admiration for Doc Smith. Some decades later, though, Bill admitted that it was his brother who was the artist, but by that time his renaissance qualities were so evident it seemed but a minor mendacity.

Bill has always been extremely energetic — and in various modes. The photos next page show Bill, on the left, acting as an auctioneer at *The 8th Australian Science Fiction Convention*, and, on the right, exhibiting athletic prowess



(Left): Bill Wright as auctioneer, 8th Australian Science Fiction Convention (photo: Dick Jenssen); and (right) Bill Wright being umpired by John Foyster at the Fannish Football Match, Ponderosa, Kyneton, September 1973 (photo: John Litchen).

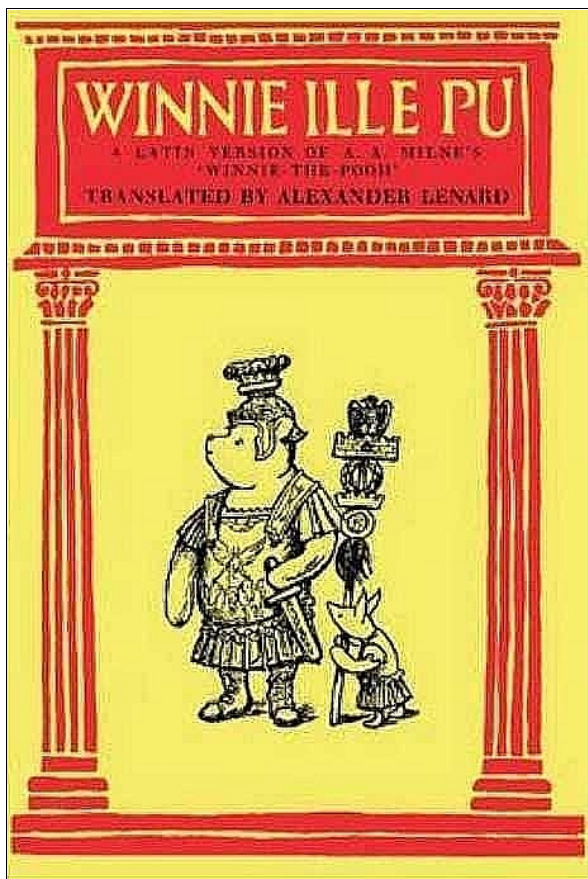
in *Australian Rules football*. Unfortunately, Bill's enthusiasm for the sport resulted in him being sent off the field by John Foyster — one of Australia's great SF icons. The reason for the expulsion is lying on the ground out of the frame of the photograph. An interest in football became apparent in Bill's seventies when he discovered soccer, or overtly acknowledged his passion for it, as he attended many matches with friends. His pleasure in watching led his proselytising its virtues to me. I remained unmoved — I felt that forbidding the use of hands meant that soccer was eminently suited for the Paralympics.

Bill was a person of many accomplishments.

I had spent two years at the University of Wisconsin in Madison USA, and on return my contact with Bill, apart from seeing him at the Melbourne SF Club, was limited to getting together to talk about SF and, especially, to play games — board and card — with David Acton and Gary Manning at my place or at David and Lynn's home. One afternoon we met at David's for an all-night card marathon, and as we entered the living-room there was a small piano, lid opened, and sheet music prominently displayed on it of music by Liszt. Bill sat down at the piano, and, sight-reading



**They Laughed When I Sat Down
At the Piano
But When I Started to Play!—**



the music, immediately began to play. And it was Liszt, nonetheless. There was a sudden loud thump (!) as David's jaw hit the floor, and many moments of silence as we took in this completely hidden and unexpected talent of Bill. It was a real-life example of 'They laughed when I sat down at the piano'. We were not laughing, just simply overwhelmed.

Yet another instance of Bill's renaissance qualities was displayed when A. A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* was translated into Latin. Bill, of course, read it. It's a far cry from the first pages of *Latin for Today* by McEvoy and Jenkins, which would have been the standard text in schools in Bill's time. Oh lord! *Discipuli, picturam spectate* still haunts my reveries. And while Pooh resonated with Bill, so did the Terrytoon cartoons of *Mighty Mouse*, of which he had a complete collection on DVDs. Then again, he could speak at length on the original *Captain Marvel* comics drawn by C. C. Beck.

As mentioned above, pressure of work, and several extended trips overseas in connection with that work, meant that I lost contact with most of the SF world, and when I retired my

re-connection was of a somewhat desultory nature. But here, again, Bill came to the rescue when he resurrected his fanzine *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop* in December 1996, and asked me to generate cover graphics for succeeding issues. This meant that I had something to do as I slid down the razor-blade of life into senescence, and — *most importantly* — enabled me to repay a long-standing debt to SF. Many issues of *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop* will be found on the website <http://efanzines.com/>. Reading these issues is a perfect a way to enter into the Wright Universe.

I believe that, as it has done for me, SF has made a difference, perhaps even an enormous difference, to Bill's life. Personally, I found that just being with, mingling with, the members of the *Melbourne Science Fiction Club* was probably the best group therapy sessions I could have wished for. Friendships forged then have lasted for decades. Unlike me, however, Bill's indefatigable energy has meant that he has repaid SF far more that I could ever have conceived. I will not detail those exploits here, since they may be found in Bill's publication *Aussie Transpacific April 2013* which is located on the *eFanzines* site (<http://efanzines.com>). But I must point out that Bill has set up *Meteor Incorporated*, a site devoted to preserving SF, and which is designed to collect SF literature and fanzines. As well, Bill initiated, and has been the driving force behind, the *Norma Hemming Award*, which promotes 'excellence in the exploration of the themes of race, gender, sexuality, class and disability in speculative fiction'.

In the last decade, Bill had many health problems, the first of which was type 2 diabetes. In spite of this debilitating illness which should have reduced Bill's life to that of an abstemious ascetic, it did nothing to quell his penchant for the sybaritic, so he continued to indulge in his favourite meals, wines and puddings. (Oh, I used the word 'abstemious' because Bill would have been the first to point out that it contains all the vowels, once and once only, in their correct order, such was the nature of his quick wit.)

But then followed a series of improbable mishaps, all involving falls: Bill had started to use a walking stick since he was becoming increasingly unsteady. There was the time when, as he was descending from a tram, it pulled away, threw him backwards and left him sprawling on his back, and on to a raised rail. Shortly after, as he left a taxi taken to have dinner with friends, the cab, in its turn, drew away unexpectedly, and again Bill fell on his back — but this time also onto a bottle of wine which he was carrying. Another fall when he was visiting hospital and a car backed into him. There were incidents in trams which started or stopped suddenly. And then came some urinary problems involving a permanent catheter — and concomitant infections. The upshot of these was that for the last two years Bill has spent more time in hospital than out. If those incidents were not enough, his doctors discovered small cancers in his bladder, which, fortunately, seemed to be under control.

And then only a few days ago (mid-January), Bill had yet another fall in his flat — again onto his back — which left him almost immobile. As Bill told me in the last conversation we had while he was in hospital this final time, he phoned for help, and when the police and ambulance arrived, they had to break down his

door in order to take him to hospital.

In hospital the news was bad. Bill had fractured, perhaps had broken, his spine in several places. He immediately went into surgery, and underwent a major, five-hour operation. Even though it was successful, over the next day or so Bill had trouble breathing, and as the hours passed the difficulty became more intense, and he was placed on life support. Even worse, his mind began to slip away, and he faded in and out of lucidity. In this last phase, when it was clear that the end was inevitable, he asked for the support to be turned off.

This time, Bill, our wonderful, seemingly indestructible Bill did not leave the hospital, it being one fall too much. Not being religious, Bill had asked for a cremation with no ceremony, and no press notice. Only his memory remains and the joy he brought to his many friends.

He may have been gathered, but for me Bill is still here: his presence still looms large in my life, and in many others' lives, his passion for life and its pleasures is unforgettable, and his determination to continue living in his own terms is an inspiration.

— Dick Jenssen, January 2021

LynC

Bill Wright 's A. Bertram Chandler Award 2017: The Presentation speech

Prepared by LynC on behalf of the Australian Science Fiction Foundation.

Born in 1937 in Sydney, Bill remained on the fringes of fandom (in his own words) till after he turned twenty. In 1958 he joined the Melbourne Science Fiction Club (MSFC), then operating out of a warehouse in Somerset

Place. The rest, as they say, is history, although it was another ten years before he became really active.

1969 appears to have been a pivotal year. Not only was he significant in the running and administration of Australia's 8th National Science Fiction Convention (Natcon) — held in the MSFC Club rooms at the top of that



Bill Wright presented with the Chandler Award trophy and citation, 2017. (Photo: Helena Binns.)

warehouse — but in December 1969 he joined the fledgling Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association (ANZAPA). He was an active contributor until 1979, and again from 1996 to 2012; publishing the long running *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop* (IRS).

In 1970 he became a founding member of the Nova Mob, a Melbourne-based SF literary discussion group originally convened by John Foyster. Nova Mob still holds monthly meetings, at which he continues to be a regular.

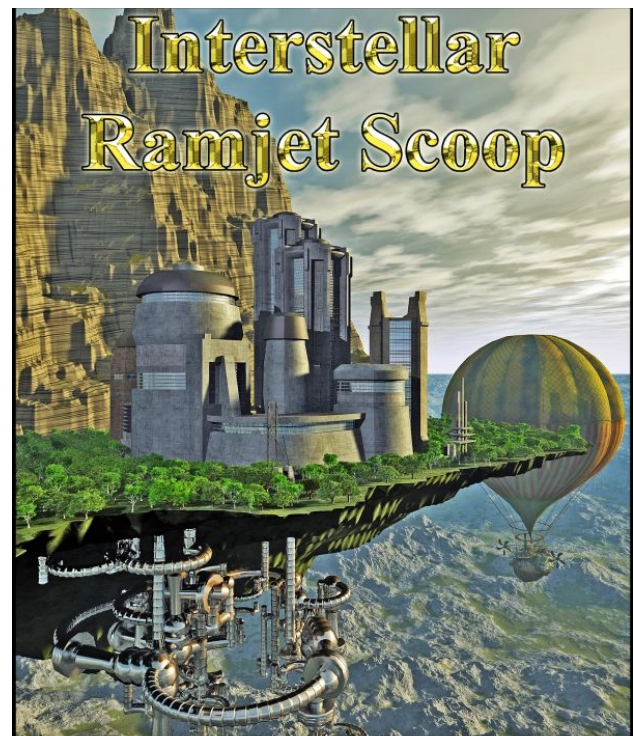
In the late 1960s a group of fans joined together to bid for an Australian city to host the 33rd Worldcon in 1975, and Bill was appointed secretary of the bid committee with a brief to manage the correspondence. Bruce Gillespie, who inherited boxes of the correspondence from Ain75's New York agent Andy Porter, remains impressed with the excellent job he did.

In 1971 he (in his own words) was given a highly visible bit part in John Litchen's hugely successful bid movie *AussieFan*, starring Paul J. Stevens as Anti-Fan. His main contribution, though, was to finance the second of two prints which were taken overseas to promote Australia in 1975. *AussieFan* premiered at Syncon 72, the 11th Aussie Natcon, in 1972. In August that

year, he and Robin Johnson took the film over to the Worldcon, where it played continuously for four days. American fans of the day still talk about the impact the film had. It continued to be shown all over America until Torcon 2 (the 31st Worldcon in Toronto in August 1973), which decided that the location of the 1975 Worldcon would indeed be here, in Australia. Aussiecon, the first Australian Worldcon, was held in Melbourne in

August 1975, with Bill continuing his role as Secretary.

It is significant that when Bill writes about his own achievements from that era that he remembers not his own contributions, but the



AUGUST 2012

PUBLISHED BY BILL WRIGHT
UNIT 4, 1 PARK STREET, ST. KILDA WEST, VICTORIA 3182

THE JOURNAL FOR INQUISITIVE READERS

Cover graphic by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen).



people he met, such as Susan Wood (founding Member of Wiscon) and Ursula Le Guin.

Then came a dark period in his life.

IRS ceased publication in 1979 and Bill was barely heard from until he emerged, chrysalis-

like, in 1996 with a new revamped and now colourful *IRS* featuring Ditmar covers, poetry, humour, and intellectual dissertations.

In the early 1990s, whilst still gaffiating, he donated his entire fanzine (fannish publications) collection to the MSFC where it became known as the 'Bill Wright Collection'. It is now housed in the Monash University Library's Rare Books Collection. A truly priceless set of historical written ephemera.

In 2002, after retiring, he stepped up his involvement yet again, by joining the Australian Science Fiction Foundation (ASFF), where he continued as valuable, but 'ordinary' Committee Member for five years.

During this time he instigated the Bring Bruce Bayside fan fund (2003–2004) to send Bruce Gillespie to America to visit with the many fans he had been communicating with for years.

In 2007, the Western Australian Science



Aussiecon 4, Melbourne, August 2010: ANZAPA members. Seated: Marc Ortlieb. Standing l. to r.: Murray Moore, LynC, Garry Dalrymple, Bill Wright. plus GUFF winner James Shields.

Fiction Foundation proposed an award for excellence in the exploration of themes of race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability in a speculative fiction work, in honour of Norma K. Hemming. The Western Australians asked the ASFF to implement it. Bill stepped up. For the last nine years he has put in an extraordinary number of hours and phone calls administering this award.

The inaugural Norma K. Hemming Award was presented in 2010 at the 67th Worldcon, Aussiecon 4, and has subsequently been awarded at Australian Natcons.

He also took on administration of the A. Bertram Chandler Award for outstanding achievement in science fiction (Australia's highest fan award), named after acclaimed mid-twentieth century Australian SF author Arthur Bertram Chandler.

Since travelling overseas to drum up support for the first Aussiecon and encountering the LASFAs club rooms, Bill and others have long held a dream of having a central gathering place for fans and a properly administered SF library. In August 2007 a small group of Aussiecon attendees, Bill amongst them, set up Meteor Incorporated, an incorporated association formed to gather funds for acquiring premises and hiring qualified staff for a science fiction institution and research archive under the ownership and control of the science fiction community. The initial seeding money came almost entirely from Bill's retirement fund in the form of thousands of shares. He and Carey Handfield then worked tirelessly to obtain deductible gift recipient status from the Australian Taxation Office and to set up a process for fans to register their intention to remember the Meteor Fund in their Will. While Meteor Inc was severely hit by the GFC a few years later, it still continues to house fans' collections in storage places around Australia pending the fulfilment of the dream for a proper place.

In 2013 he successfully stood for DUFF (Down Under Fan Fund) and travelled to LoneStarCon 3, the Worldcon in Texas that



Bill reading the citation for the first Norma K. Hemming award, 2010, to Maria Quinn for *The Gene Thieves*.

year. While over there, did he sit back and just enjoy himself? No. He did a study tour of the fannish premises of several American SF clubs, with a view to determining if their experience could be transferred to Australia.

Unfortunately, since 2013 he has been plagued with ill health. He has struggled on and is still attending MSFC meetings, and until very recently has continued to administer the awards under the ASFF aegis.

In February 2017, he attended the joint fans' birthday party where it was revealed he had reached the very venerable age of 80.

A lifetime of exemplary and selfless service to the Australian SF Fannish community makes Bill a very worthy recipient of the 2017 A. Bertram Chandler Award.

Let's all raise a glass to this wonderful gentleman.

—© LynC 2017 (with a lot of help from Aussie Transpacific April 2013). Source: Australian SF Foundation website

Bruce Gillespie

Bill Wright: Mr Multitudes

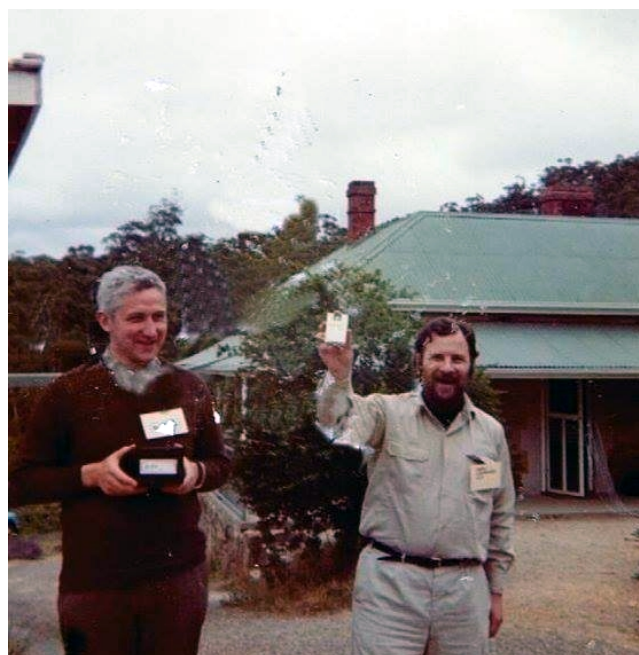
Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes).
Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself'

I can never write adequately about Bill Wright. There were too many Bill Wrights, each living in a different compartment of his life, each with a separate group of friends. The world of fandom is too small to contain his many interests and achievements.

All I can offer are a few of my memories and impressions of the man we lost on 16 January 2022.

I cannot remember how I made friends with Bill Wright. Or did he make friends with me? I know he was dismayed that some of the writers for my new magazine *SF Commentary* (begun January 1969) were sceptical about his favourite Golden Age writers or ignored them altogether. He told me that his favourite writers were E. E. 'Doc' Smith and Roger Zelazny. I had never read the former (because his books were rarely reprinted in British/Australian editions until the 1970s) and in 1970 I became disenchanted with the writing of Roger Zelazny. In Bill's mind, I suspect, for several years I was part of a 'hypercritical critics' camp, alongside John Foyster, George Turner, and John Bangsund. Yet Bill got along well with us in person.

We were friends by the beginning of 1972, because he was one of three fan writers I invited to contribute to a special issue of *SFC* about 'My 1971'. Bill's account was a strange but entertaining account of a life divided between a wide variety of interests. At that stage I had little idea of what motivated him. I



Bill Wright and John Bangsund at Adventon 2 in the Adelaide Hills, January 1972. (Photo: Gary Mason.)

had joined fandom only at the end of 1967, and by 1972 still had not established deep connections with the Melbourne SF Club. Bill had already been a stalwart supporter of the Club for fifteen years.

At the beginning of 1972, the Adelaide fans held Adventon 2, a relaxacon (i.e. an SF convention during which few discussions of SF were likely to take place) in a scout camp in the hills near Adelaide. Despite the fact that we would be roughing it, quite a few Melbourne fans attended, including Bill Wright, John Bangsund, David Grigg, Lee Harding, and me. There were many jokes, not much discussion of SF, and midnight strolls in the forest.

During the first night meal, Lee and John were competing (as usual) in the



**Bill speaking, at Syncon 2, Sydney, August 1972.
(Photo: Gary Hoff.)**

jocular/rowdy/drunken stakes. The central rooms of the scout camp area were in an old homestead. (Sleeping quarters were old sheds outside.) The homestead still boasted a very old upright piano. During the meal, John Bangsund took to the piano, performing his usual Victor Borge sketch, which involved playing around with a very simple piano tune and making some good jokes. He stopped performing. Rowdiness and dinner continued. Slowly we became aware that the piano playing continued. Somebody was playing a Beethoven sonata. We looked around. Ignoring the hubbub, Bill was calmly playing the gorgeous melody from memory.

Bill did indeed contain multitudes. He never played piano in my hearing after that. (Also see Dick Jenssen's article.)

In 1972, Bill became more and more involved with the bid to hold the 1975 World SF Convention in Melbourne. He became the Secretary of the convention committee. There



*Above:
LEIGH EDMONDS, BILL WRIGHT and PAUL STEVENS
discussing a set-up for the take of the next scene, in the alle
in which Antifan "has an assignation with **Fanarchist**
(played by Bill, who also plays himself), a sinister visitor
from overseas whose mission is the effective destruction of
Australian plans for a World Science Fiction Convention.
And the instrument of this destruction will be **Antifan!**"
Fanarchist hands Antifan a bomb and a set of instructions.
"These are the evil plans for the elimination of the
Committee and all its works!"*

A scene from the *Antifan/Aussiefan* film, 1972. Leigh Edmonds, Bill Wright, Paul Stevens. (Caption and presentation by Merv Binns. Photo by John Litchen.)

were no computers or internet; after every meeting he typed the minutes on stencil and printed enough copies on his duplicator to distribute among the members.

In 1972 he and Robin Johnson attended the World Covention in Los Angeles to establish a firm connection between American fans (the people who would vote on the 1975 Worldcon site in 1973) and Australian fandom. During the winter of 1972 he and other Melbourne fans had been actors in the *Antifan/Aussiefan* short film, directed by John Litchen, to publicise the bid. Bill took the part of the Fanarchist, the mad bomber who sets out to destroy the Aussiecon Bidding Committee. After his character is blown up, Bill miraculously reappears at the end of the film during the crowd

scene during which Melbourne fans congratulate Aussiefan for his help in winning the bid.

Bill and Robin showed the film non-stop at LACon. Jack Chalker then took the film and showed it at every North American convention he attended during 1972 and 1973. During the World Convention held in Toronto in August 1973, Australia won the 1975 bid. The film is credited as doing much of the work for us.

I have one other clear memory of Bill during 1972. As LynC has pointed out, Bill did not join ANZAPA (Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) until Mailing 18 in 1972, although in later years he liked to think of himself as a founder member. 1972 was the first year during which members of ANZAPA voted on the Anzapopoll to decide the most popular member of the apa during the preceding year. I can still remember the beaming smile on Bill's face as he told me I had won the first Anzapopoll. He was always very happy to see others' success.

I won't go into the reasons why I missed many program items of Aussiecon when it finally took place in August 1975. It was held together by a small number of people, especially Robin Johnson, and including Don Ashby's crew who made a complete video record of the convention. Bill Wright put vast amounts of energy into the weekend. I'll have to leave it to others to remember exactly what he got up to.

Bill faded from my sight during the late 1970s. He attended meetings of the Nova Mob, Melbourne's monthly SF discussion group, but he felt that none of the rest of us paid enough attention to the 1930s and 1940s authors who inspired him. He gave talks on E. E. Smith, Roger Zelazny, H. Beam Piper, and other authors from the 'Space Opera' era, but failed to persuade me to read them. My fannish social life centred around one of the first major independent groups in Melbourne fandom, the Melbourne University SF Association. Through MUSFA I met Elaine, and we got together in early 1978. Bill Wright seemed to disappear from my life. By 1979 he had disappeared from Melbourne fandom.

Elaine and I saw Bill only once in the years between 1979 and 1993. We were walking up Swanston Street, Melbourne, and Bill was walking down it. He was about twice the weight he had been when we had last seen him. He seemed to be quite unconnected with anything going on around him. We said, 'Hi, Bill.' He replied briefly, but hardly seemed to recognise us. He kept walking. We realised a few years later that he was already suffering badly from diabetes 2 during the period before he was diagnosed.

Bill might never have rejoined fandom it had not been for the efforts of Dick Jenssen and, before him, Race Mathews.

Race Mathews, a founder member of the Melbourne SF Club in the early 1950s, took involuntary retirement in 1992 when he lost his Victorian parliamentary seat of Oakleigh during the Kennett landslide. He got in touch with all his old friends from his SF days as well as some people from a later fan generation, such as Elaine and me. In particular, he persuaded Dick Jenssen to return to fandom. We members of new group discovered that we were not connected so much by our interest in classic SF as by our interest in films. Race and Iola had just bought the largest TV then available and a laserdisc player. They invited their old and new friends to watch movies monthly at their new home in South Yarra, starting in mid 1993. These meetings were very successful.

It was Dick who phoned Bill Wright, who was overjoyed to discover that he was remembered by his old friends. Since we had last seen him wandering down Swanston Street, his diabetes had been diagnosed. He had changed his diet, reduced his weight, and had been riding his bike around St Kilda. Suddenly here was the Bill Wright we remembered from the early 1970s. Dick, Elaine, and I began to have dinners with Bill, Lee Harding, Helena and Merv Binns, and other older SF fans. And we saw each other each month at film nights.

A year or two later, Bill said that he wanted to rejoin ANZAPA and relaunch *Interstellar*



Race and Iola Mathews' monthly film night gathering, early 2000s. Bill Wright is seated. *Standing l. to r.:* Carey Handfield, Bruce Gillespie, Race Mathews, Bruno Kautzner, Merv Binns, Helena Binns, Dick Jenssen, Madeleine Harding, Lee Harding. (Photo: Iola Mathews.)

Ramjet Scoop, his fanzine from the 1970s. Dick Jenssen had been exploring the revolution in home computing during the 1980s and 1990s. He had written his own program to generate colour fractals. He combined the fractals with images from new graphics programs such as Bryce and E-on Vue in order to generate brilliant covers for *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*. *IRS* became one of the most popular fanzines published in ANZAPA. After I became Official Bloody Editor in 2005, Bill travelled from St Kilda to Greensborough every two months to help collate the mailing.

In 2004 I was part of an online discussion about fan funds. I wrote that the one overseas convention I would really like to attend would be Corflu, the annual convention of fanzine fans, but I would never be able to afford the fare. Marty Cantor from Los Angeles fired back: why don't we start a fan fund to bring Bruce Gillespie to Corflu in San Francisco in March 2005? And it happened, just like that, in a week or two. Arnie and Joyce Katz from Las Vegas offered to collect funds in the US. As soon as he heard about the Bring Bruce Bayside Fund, Bill Wright offered to collect funds in Australia and make the travel arrangements.

In a few weeks, Bill in Australia and Arnie

and Joyce in America had raised \$5000 for the trip. Bill donated a lot of his own funds, as did several other local friends. Thanks to Bill's money-raising skills, the ticket was soon paid for.

To make sure I did not back out on the last day, Justin Ackroyd picked me up on the morning of my birthday, 17 February 2005, and I departed at midday. I arrived at midday the same day in Los Angeles. The Bring Bruce Bayside journey had begun. I returned on 16 March. I had a wonderful time, which I wrote about in *American Kindness*, my trip report. This was one of the highlights of my life.

Bill Wright was a man of many contradictions. He was a member of many different groups, none of which overlapped with fandom. He talked about his membership of the St Kilda branches of the RSL (people who are probably quite conservative) and the ALP (people you would expect to be left-wing), and his friends, the members of a group he called the 'Canasta club', centred around the mysterious Lady Pamela, a lady who treated her friends to lavish meals, concerts, and theatre nights. (I can't ever remember hearing her surname, but I did meet her once.)

Bill could make a good argument for the



Melbourne Science Fiction Club Investiture of Lifetime Members, 15 April 2005. *L. to r.:* Bill Wright, Merv Binns, Dick Jenssen, Jack Dann, Lee Harding, Bruce Gillespie, Alan Stewart. (Photo: Helena Binns.)

Melbourne SF Club. Second Investiture of Lifetime Members, 2009. James (Jocko) Allen and Helena Binns were the new Lifetime Members. *L. to r.:* Jocko Allen, Bruce Gillespie, Helena Binns, Dick Jenssen, Merv Binns, Bill Wright. (Photographer unknown.)





Promoting the Australian Science Fiction Foundation, ANZAPA, and other Australian activities during Aussiecon 4, Melbourne, August 2010. (Standing, l. to r.): unknown, David Russell, Jean Weber, LynC. (Seated, l. to r.): Gerald Smith, Bill Wright. (Photographer: unknown.)

anti-capitalist revolution, yet he relentlessly played the stock market. He could organise financial set-ups, as he had been a risk management analyst at Colonial Mutual Life until his retirement. But Bill could not resist a gamble on the stock market, so it was a miracle that financially he survived his retirement. He was one of the few Melbourne fans who shared my love of classical music, yet he also loved many child-like pleasures, such as *Mighty Mouse* cartoons (he had a complete set on DVD). He re-read his favourite authors constantly, yet occasionally would discover a new author.

Bill's ability to worry hard, long, but constructively showed itself best when he worried about fandom. Beginning in the mid 1990s, he initiated a series of projects that made him famous within fandom. He often roped in Carey Handfield, me, and a few other friends to do the donkey work for each of these projects — but we were glad to follow orders. LynC's Chandler Award Presentation Speech gives a much clearer idea of Bill's fannish achievements than I can. Once unleashed, Bill could not be contained.

Meteor Inc. has been my favourite Bill Wright-inspired project. Like most fans of my generation, I have a great collection of books, movies, and CDs. Like Bill, I have often thought that it would be wonderful to leave in my will all my SF and fantasy books to an institution dedicated to preserving and archiving them. Bill really thought that he could build such an institution, but the concept depended on a few of his financial ships coming in. He organised a series of meetings that fired up the enthusiasm of many Melbourne fans — but none of us have the kind of cash reserves that could buy premises and build the institution itself. Bill's miracle investments failed. But it's still a great idea.

As LynC recounts, Bill was commissioned by the Western Australian Science Fiction Foundation to establish the Norma K. Hemming Award to honour the Australian SF writer and playwright who died in 1960. The award would be for excellence in the exploration of themes of race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability in a speculative fiction work.

Bill spent months of each year organising

this award. He set up the team of judges, Rob Gerrand, Russell Blackford, Sarah Endacott, and Tess Williams. (A few years later, Sean McMullen replaced Russell Blackford, who had to withdraw because of pressure of work.) He extracted copies of the books out of Australian publishers so that he could supply them to the judges. I still don't know how he managed that. He spent a month a year arranging for the creation of the trophies, notifying the winner, and (in several cases) arranging for the winner to travel interstate to the annual Continuum convention in Melbourne to receive the award. (He paid for the trophies himself, but did not like us to mention this fact.) The first award was made in 2000, to Maria Quinn for *The Gene Thieves*, during Aussiecon 4 in Melbourne. During the same convention, Sean McMullen and Bill staged a reading of one of Norma Hemming's radio plays on stage.

I was asked to join the Australian SF Foundation as a committee member in 2009. Bill joined the committee about the same time. From then on, it became the organising centre

of the Hemming Award, Meteor Inc., and the A. Bertram Chandler Award, which had been given every year since 1979. Carey Handfield and I and the other committee members responded to Bill's enthusiasm.

In the 1980s or very early in the 1990s Bill's health had been badly affected by the onset of diabetes 2. By the end of the 1990s he seemed well on the way to recovery. But diabetes 2 wreaks its effects slowly and steadily. In Bill's case, he suffered from neuropathy of the feet. The sufferer slowly loses feeling and becomes more and more unsteady while walking, making it more and more likely that he or she will fall over. Bill began to suffer falls with increasing frequency, either in the street or at home.

Bill also suffered some digestive problems that he would not talk about, and it became apparent that his eyesight was deteriorating. He would walk into a social group, sit down, and seem to ignore everybody. One by one we would say 'Hi, Bill.' He would then realise that we were there. In 2013 eye problems stopped



Meteor Inc.'s finest hour: the Meteor Inc. Panel at Aussiecon 4, Melbourne, August 2010.

Left: Bill Wright at his best, spruiking Meteor.

Below: The panel (l. to r.): Carey Handfield, Bill Wright, Paul Day, Mark Loney, Bruce Gillespie, Rob Gerrand. (Photos: Helena Binns.)





Bill Wright presents the first of two Norma Hemming Awards to A. A. Bell (for *Diamond Eyes* in 2011 and *The Devil's Diadem* in 2012). (Photo: Helena Binns.)

him producing issues of *IRS*. Also, his eyes had become clouded by cataracts. Only in the last year of his life, after cataract surgery, could he again write long essays.

Norma K. Hemming Award Winners

No award was presented in 2017 (for work published in 2016). In 2017, the Award considered two years of work, with the presentation for 2018 covering work published in 2016 and 2017.

Winners:

- 2010: Maria Quinn for *The Gene Thieves*
- 2011: A. A. Bell for *Diamond Eyes*
- 2012: A. A. Bell for *Hindsight* & Sara Douglass for *The Devil's Diadem*
- 2013: Margo Lanagan for *Sea Hearts*
- 2014: N.A. Sulway for *Rupetta*
- 2015: Paddy O'Reilly for *The Wonders*
- 2016: Louise Katz, for *The Orchid Nursery*
- 2018 Short Fiction: Foz Meadows, for 'Coral Bones' & 2018 Long Work: Claire G. Coleman, for *Terra Nullius*
- 2019 Short Fiction: *Winter's Tale*, Nike Sulway & Shauna O'Meara. 2019 Long Work (tie): *From Here On*, *Monsters*, Elizabeth Bryer & *Ghost Bird*, Lisa Fuller.

— Information from Australian SF Foundation

Bill became more and more frail, but nothing reduced his levels of enthusiasm. If he could help anybody, he would. If fandom advertised any social events that interested him, he would do his best to get there. However, when he sat down we were never quite sure he would be able to rise to his feet again. After it became plain that nobody in Australian fans had the funds to build Meteor Inc., Bill closed it in as satisfactory way as possible by sending a large amount of material to Monash University Library's Rare Books Collection. With great reluctance, he relinquished all his organisational duties (such as the Norma Hemming Award and the Chandler Award). A new administrator for the Hemmings was appointed, and the awards have continued.

To the astonishment of everybody in Australia, Bill stood as a candidate for DUFF (Down Under Fan Fund) in 2013, and won the race, although he was already having trouble walking. It was Bill's last hurrah in fandom. He travelled to LoneStarCon 3 in Texas, the World Convention of that year, and met for the first time many overseas people who still remember him fondly. The highlight of the trip was when he visited Geri Sullivan in New England, and she smuggled him into the presentation of the Ignobel Awards. After his return to Melbourne, Bill's eyesight had deteriorated to such an extent that he was not able to write a Trip Report, and he seems to have lost the photos he took.

In 2020 Bill suffered a series of catastrophic falls when travelling. A door closed as he was getting off a tram, leaving him to fall back onto the street. A few months later, a taxi pulled out, throwing Bill to the ground. Then he was knocked over in a hospital car park. Each fall was so severe that Bill spent months in hospital or a rehabilitation facility, eight months in all.

Despite this horror year, he was determined not to move out of his flat. He was able to arrange major renovations at his flat, and council and health services helped him stay. Friends who lived in the area also helped him

in many ways.

And then ... and then ... In 2010, an operation for prostate problems meant that he had to rely on a urinary catheter. This led to him suffering from kidney infections.

Somewhere along the line he was diagnosed as suffering from bladder cancer, and had ongoing treatment. A few weeks ago he returned home from hospital after an exploratory procedure. He was in his flat when he fell very badly. Dick phoned Bill to ask how the procedure had gone, and Bill said he was in hospital. Read Dick's account of what happened next.

For a few days we did not know anything about the state of Bill's health. Elaine found

an email address for Bill's sister Rosemary. She phoned on 17 January to tell us that Bill had died the day before, the day before he would turn 85. This still seems unbelievable, because Bill had survived all the other ghastly health events that had hit him during recent years.

The great wonder of being a member of fandom for over fifty years is that I have met many people who do not fit into mundane society, yet contribute far more to the world and their friends than most other people do. They are true originals, but even among them, Bill Wright was unique. Goodbye, good friend.

— Bruce Gillespie, 24 January 2020

Tributes, Facebook, 18–19 January 2022

Here is a small selection of the many tributes posted to the Facebook page of 'Bruce Richard Gillespie' when I sent out the news that we had lost Bill Wright. Thanks to over 100 people who sent their condolences and tributes.

Jacqueline Monahan

I met him on him on his DUFF trip. He was a very lovely man, smart and kind. I'm so sorry for us all.

Natalie MacLachlan

Bill was generous, spirited, and had a touch of mischief in his heart. This is sad news. Fandom's lost a great friend. From us both.

Michael O'Brien

All of us of a certain age will remember him well. A part of Melbourne fandom from way back.

Reply: Talie Helene Honestly, even a very brief encounter with Bill conveyed his depth of knowledge of specifics. He was better known and still very much respected recently, more than you might imagine.

Jukka Halme

Sad news. I remember him well from Contact 2016 in Brisbane, when we were presenting

awards. Well, I gave one and Bill took a while giving out Norma K. Hemming and A. Bertram Chandler awards.

We had a very nice and long chat afterwards. He gave me a plushy koala that occasionally turns into a drop bear, or so Bill told me anyway. Truly a loss.

Alison Barton

Thanks for letting us know Bruce. I will share with the MSFC page, please also feel free to add anything there. Cheers, Alison

Randy Smith

I am so very sorry to hear this. I was his native guide for a day while he was on his DUFF trip. He was a delight and full of stories. I organized a fannish lunch for him where he got to meet some Bay Area fans. We also toured around a bit, finishing with supper with still more fans. The day was unforgettable. I'll miss him.

Ian Mond

So sorry to hear this Bruce. I remember him fondly. There was no one like Bill. And his passion for fandom was enormous.

John Purcell

Sad news, indeed. I remember meeting him at LoneStarCon III in 2013 when I was in charge of the fanzine lounge. He was the DUFF delegate that year, and we had quite a few lengthy chats that week. I am very sorry to hear this.

Jeanette Gillespie

Sorry to hear of the loss of another of your old friends Bruce. It sounds like he was a real treasure.

Reply: Bruce Richard Gillespie Yes, that group of founder members of the Melbourne SF Club in the 1950s has diminished during the last two years. The remaining older friends are not in the best of health, either.

KRin Pender-Gunn

Oh damn. Such a large figure in fandom, he was so enthusiastic.

Geoff Allshorn

OMG! I am so sorry to hear this.

Edwina Harvey

I'm sorry to hear that sad news. I liked Bill, and admired what he'd done for Aus SF fandom. I last saw him at the Medtrek Reunion for Susan Batho in Katoomba. (The hotel was right next to the Katoomba RSL, and Bill wanted to do some research there.)

Mark Fraser

Thank you for informing us: at first I did not recognise the name, having long absented myself from fandom. Then you mentioned the fanzines, and I remembered *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*. Why memory of that fanzine has stuck with me I do not know — but it did.

Joanna Handfield

Very sorry to hear it. He was always good to me, especially in the aftermath of Carey's stroke in 2011.

Susan Batho

Such sad news. Bill was always one to sit and have a drink with and a long talk. I will definitely miss him.

Tess Williams

That is distressing and sad — he was a lovely humane person who I had dealings with for a few years.

Gary Hoff

Sad news, so sorry to hear that. You and Bill were some of the first contacts I had after my arrival in Australia.

Sean McMullen

I remember him acting in the revival of Norma Hemming's 1958 play *The Matriarchy of Renok* back in 2010 at the Melbourne Worldcon. He never let age stop him from joining in.

Robert Lichtman

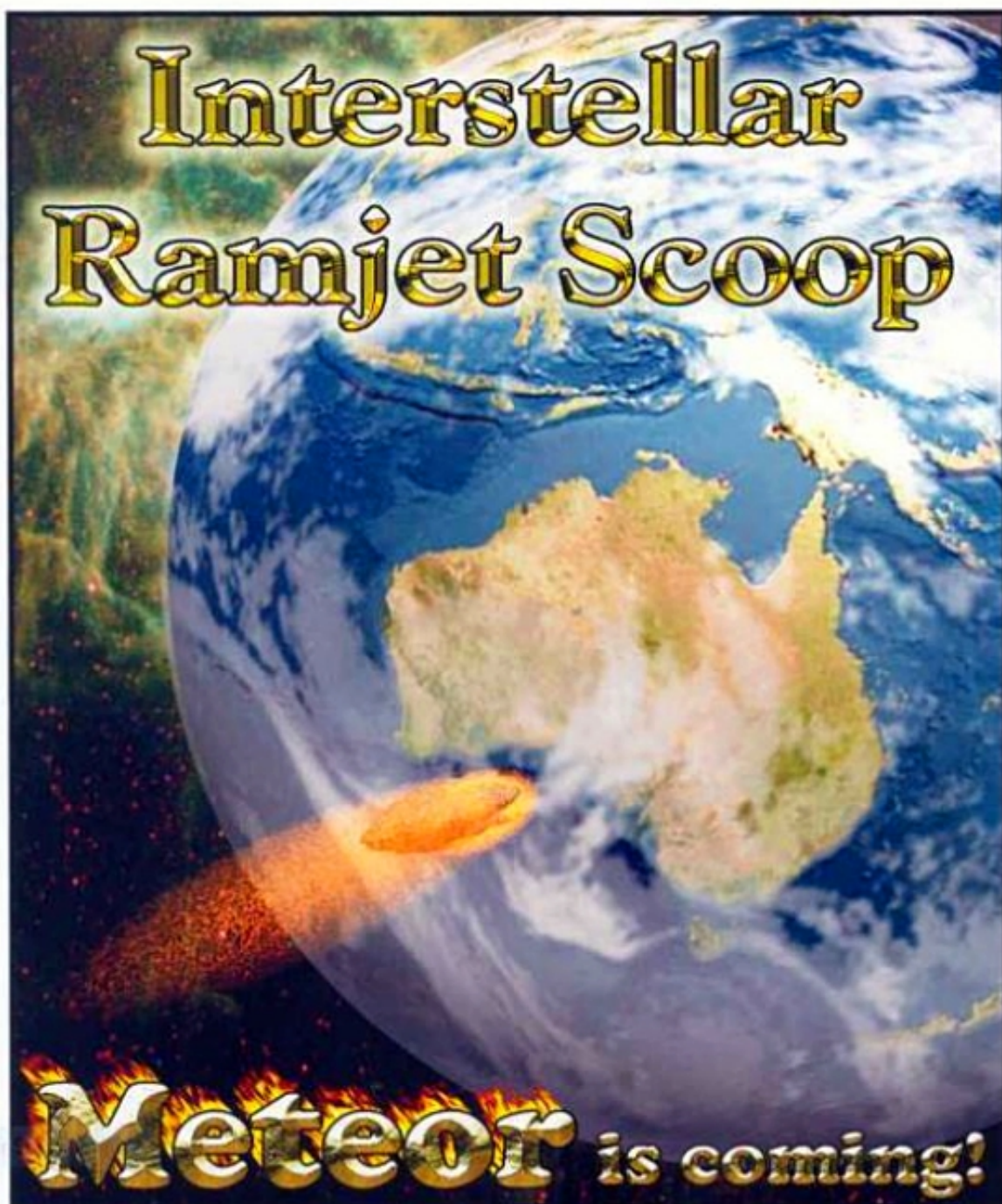
Sad indeed! Carol and I loved meeting him when he visited us on his DUFF trip. And he loved my taking him on a tour of San Francisco sights (winding block of Lombard Street, Coit Tower, Haight-Ashbury etc.) on our way to Jay & Dixie Kinney's.

Russell Blackford

Oh no, sad news. I knew Bill well from working with him on Meteor Inc. and the Norma K. Hemming Award, and other fannish stuff. He was always enthusiastic, supportive, and kind.

Mihaela Marija Perkovic

So sorry for your loss. Bill took me for an insanely lovely day out during my GUFF trip in 2013 and I loved the time I spent with him and am glad I got to know him a little bit.



ANZAPA MAILING #242 APRIL 2008
PUBLISHED ORIGINALLY FOR ANZAPA
BY BILL WRIGHT
4/1 PARK STREET ST. KILDA VICTORIA 3182

THE JOURNAL FOR INQUISITIVE READERS

Cover graphic by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen).