

SF Commentary 103

October 2020

36 pages

TRIBUTE TO JOHN BANGSUND (1939–2020)

**SALLY YEOLAND, JULIAN WARNER, STEPHANIE
HOLT, DAVID GRIGG, JOHN LITCHEN, and BRUCE
GILLESPIE**

**raise a glass to our departed friend John
plus**

**four articles and two poems
by JOHN BANGSUND**



John Bangsund, 2014. (Photo: Sally Yeoland.)

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FRONT COVER: Sally Yeoland's photo of John Bangsund (2014).

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Lee Harding (pp. 18, 21); Gary Mason (p. 35); Gary Hoff (p. 35); Elaine Cochrane (p. 36); Christina Lake (p.
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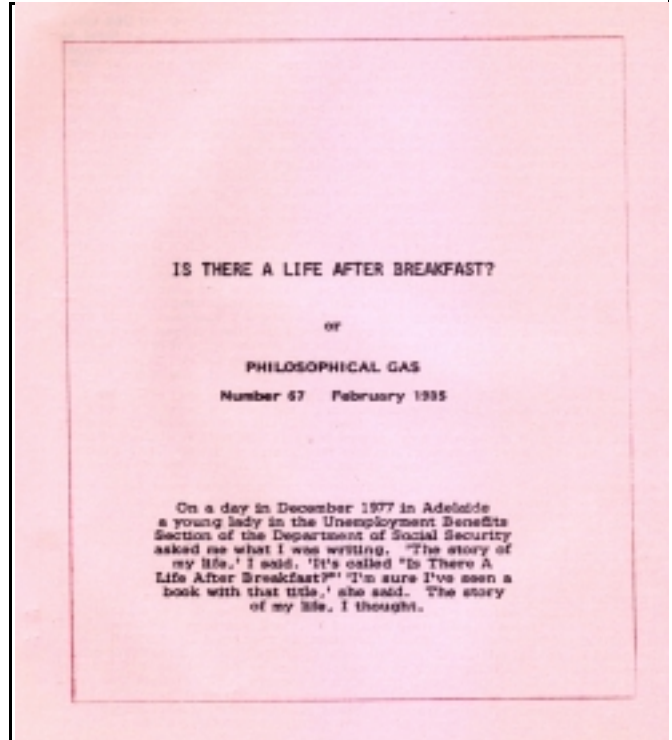
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A tribute to John Bangsund (1939–2020)

For help in preparing this much-too-short tribute to John Bangsund, thanks in particular to Sally Yeoland, Julian Warner, Stephanie Holt, Rose Mitchell, the Australian Science Fiction Foundation, John Litchen, David Grigg, and Roman Orszanski.

Below: John Bangsund and Sally Yeoland, Canberra, 1973, soon after they met. (Photo: John Litchen; see John's story of the Canberra weekend later in this issue.)



Sally Yeoland

The final update for John Bangsund

BANGSUND John

Died 22 August 2020 aged 81.

Much loved husband of Sally Yeoland. Brother of Joy Bangsund (Adelaide) and Ruth Kirsten (Melbourne) and brother in-law of Barry Kirsten, and brother in-law to Graeme Yeoland (dec. 2010) and Helen Yeoland (Hobart). Son of Leif Bangsund (dec. 1965) and Ivy Bangsund (Holyoak) (dec. 1997). And John so much appreciated his great niece Phoebe Sawyer in supporting him and Sally as his health deteriorated.

John will always be remembered as the Australian ambassador for science fiction to the rest of the world, and as Toastmaster at Aussiecon Worldcon Melbourne in 1975. And also for *Australian Science Fiction Review*, *Scythrop*, *John W Campbell: An Australian Tribute*, *Philosophical Gas*, *Parergon Papers* and many other fanzines, newsletter editor for The Victorian Society of Editors and honorary life membership, *Muphry's Law* and Assistant Editor *Meanjin*.

For so many of us it will be hard to imagine a world without John with his remarkable way with words, and as one of the best editors, and his sharp witted humour.

Thank you John for a wonderful life.

Privately cremated.



The above photo and the photos of John and Sally (pages 3 and 5) were taken by John Litchen in 1973 during his and Monica's honeymoon visit to Canberra. See John Litchen's article later in this issue.

John Bangsund died at approximately 2.40 a.m. on Saturday 22 August 2020.

The last time I updated you about John's situation on Facebook was on 14 August when he had tested positive for COVID-19. Based on medical advice at the time we all thought that he was asymptomatic at that stage, and that if symptoms did appear he might only develop a milder version of the virus. Unfortunately we were all wrong.

John had become very confused in the days before the positive result, and his doctors thought it was just another recurring non-COVID infection. But by the middle of last week St Vincent's Hospital doctors who were visiting Westgarth daily realised it had been COVID-19. By then John was rapidly deteriorating but I was still able to phone him each day. Westgarth's COVID nurses very thoughtfully organised a Facebook Messenger call early Friday evening, so John and I were able to see each other for the last time.

So sadly John had finally used up the last of those nine lives that we used to joke about. He had had so many near misses over the last few years with his health that we always had to wonder what the next major medical challenge was going to be. As difficult as it is to realise that John has really departed this life this time, we were really so lucky to have him in our lives for as long as we did.

The first major health challenge for John had been a massive heart attack in Geelong in March 1999. He moved back to Melbourne to Tasman

Another photo of Sally and John taken by John Litchen in 1973 in Canberra while filming the five-minute *Antifan* colour film that seems to have disappeared. Sally tells us that she was holding John's cigarette while he took part in the film. John is wearing a Michael Leunig *Nation Review* t-shirt ('Lean and nosy like a ferret').



Street, Preston, close to where I was living, as I had moved back in 1998. John was then able to continue with freelance work, mostly for *Meanjin*.

The next challenge was a major stroke in February 2005, which really frightened us all. We were so worried that even when he recovered he would lose that brilliant mind which made him such a good editor and writer. But thankfully that didn't happen. Instead he stopped freelancing and gave up smoking and drinking grog but was still occasionally writing. But it had slowed down his thought processes so everything took longer and much more effort to write anything.

And at this stage of his life he moved to Dight Street, Collingwood. There were other life-threatening illnesses and medical conditions along the way, but each time John remarkably managed to come through these. And thankfully he retained his love for Essendon and didn't convert to becoming an AFL Collingwood supporter.

John joined Facebook in October 2010 and this proved to be a lifeline for him, as he enjoyed making contact with so many of you and we saw some of his best writing. It was also a terrific way of him feeling that he was still able to keep in touch with his friends even though he was physically declining.

So many of you have said that it will be hard to imagine a world without John and I can only agree.

John didn't want a funeral but agreed to have a memorial gathering at some stage after the COVID-19 restrictions have eased, which could be some months away yet.

I have attached a copy of the death notice which will appear in Melbourne's *Age* newspaper on 25 August.

This also appears on John's FB page.

— Sally Yeoland, on Facebook, 24 August 2020

Julian Warner

A. Bertram Chandler Award 2001: John Bangsund

[Being an appreciation of John Bangsund, on the occasion of his receiving the A. Bertram Chandler Memorial Award in the year 2001.]

John Bangsund is, first and foremost, an editor. If

you want to appreciate the full depth of his experience as an editor, you can read his full Curriculum Vitae on his website at: http://web.archive.org/web/20160215000000*/%20http://users.pipeline.com.au/bangsund.



Australian Science Fiction Review 1, July 1966.

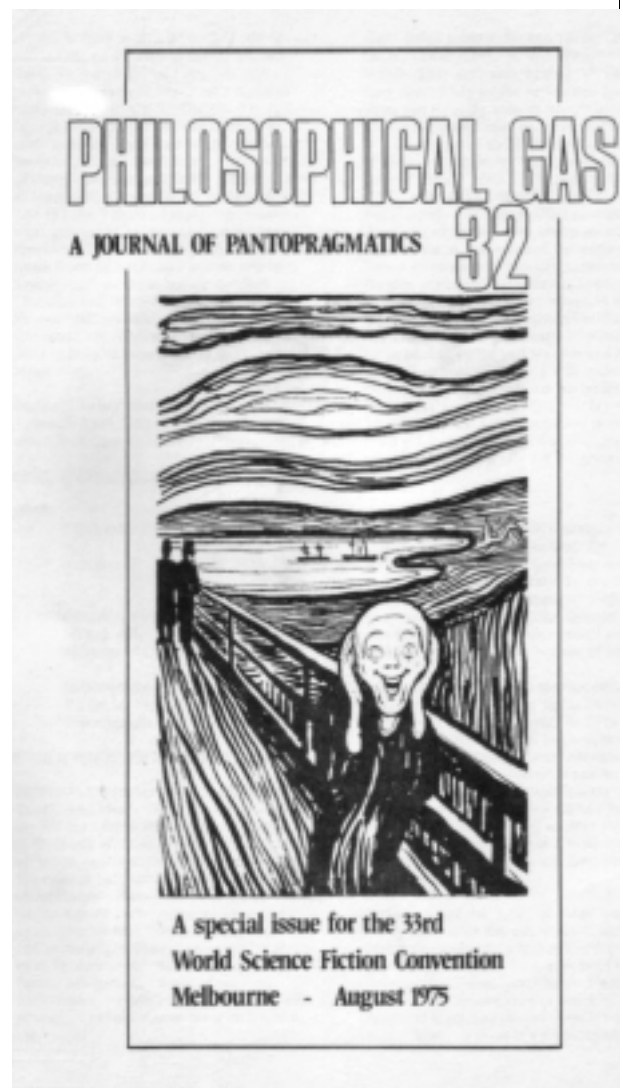
John's name appears on many books, of general fiction and non-fiction, and would have been familiar to those who read the prestigious Australian magazine *Meanjin* during the period in which he served as assistant editor. The Victorian Society of Editors has honoured John by making him a life member because of his many contributions to the Society. In editing the newsletter of the Victorian Society of Editors he became the editor's Editor.

However, the A. Bertram Chandler Memorial Award is an award for contributions to the field of science fiction. John's career in SF fandom began in the early sixties. His first fanzine article was published by Lee Harding in a fanzine named *Canto 1* in 1964. In a very short time, John became central to Melbourne fandom and was effectively the midwife to a re-birth of Australian fandom in general. Fandom was in somewhat of a lull in the early to mid sixties but it was revived by the regular monthly publication of the *Australian Science Fiction Review*. Leigh Harding and John Foyster wrote articles and reviews not always under their own names and John Bangsund edited and commented. *ASFR* lasted only a few years but it set a new standard for quality of reviewing, for reasoned criticism, for consistency, for intelligence, and for humour. Not only that, but *ASFR* was noticed overseas as well, putting Australia on the map as a place where fans and writers existed; fans and writers who were worth reading and who were worth knowing. The Australian readers of the original *ASFR* went

on to become our established SF writers, our most erudite critics, our Big-Name Fans, and our Boring Old Farts. When the established mainstream author George Turner told his publisher that he was interested in science fiction, George was introduced to John Bangsund. John introduced George to a new world, which George then made his own.

As well as editing *ASFR*, John was involved in the organising of other fans or at least encouraging them to organise themselves. As such, he was instrumental in the efforts to bring Australia its first-ever World Science Fiction Convention in 1975: Aussiecon 1. The first Adelaide SF convention, Advention 1, is described as having been started in John's flat [Membership of Advention 1 cost \$2.50 and accommodation was 50c per day, b.y.o. sleeping bag]. It seems that an awful lot of what was happening in Australian fandom in the sixties and seventies was done at Bangsund's place.

Since *ASFR*, John has edited and published many fanzines and apazines. Principal among these would be the long-running *Philosophical Gas*, which has continued until recent years. He may even be encouraged to publish a new edition. John esti-



mates that he has published some 200 or so zines in his fannish career. He has also contributed to APAs such as ANZAPA, FAPA, and FLAP.

As well as being very technically proficient as an editor, John writes in a manner which is gentle, humorous, witty, considered, and thoughtful. To enjoy his writing, you would want to catch the ongoing 'Best of Bangsund' which Bruce Gillespie has been publishing slowly in successive editions of his fanzines. There are some of us who keenly read *The Victorian Society of Editors Newsletter* just for the Bangsund bits. John has passed on the job of editor's editor but he still makes the odd contribution.

Just about every older Australian fan will have a story or two that involves John Bangsund. He was integral to the fabric of Australian fandom for many years and remains strong in the memory of both Australian and overseas fans. When John felt unable to attend Aussiecon 3, the fans came to him instead, taking the journey to his house north of Geelong so that they could catch up with a grand old fan.

If you have heard the voice of writer and critic Phillip Adams on TV or radio, then you have heard a voice that is very similar to John Bangsund's. John speaks softly but with authority; that authority coming from experience rather than university education. The time which John spent at a theological college undoubtedly contributed to his strong interest in matters philosophical. His

passion for reading was strongly fuelled by what he has described as one of his favourite early jobs, being librarian for the Victorian Railways Institute. Being paid to spend the whole day reading was wonderful but gave way to a future of John the bookseller, John the publisher's rep, and John the editor.

John's friends know of him as a great lover of classical music of the traditional and the twentieth-century kind. He has also enthusiastically drunk wine, smoked, loved and lost, gossiped, chatted, chatted, chatted, and encouraged. Encouragement is something which he has always been good at.

Recent years have had their ups and downs for John but he is still there and can still occasionally be lured out to a restaurant for a night of declaiming and reminiscing with old friends. If it was possible to give an award for just being charming and friendly, then we could give John that award anyway. However, it is most appropriate to present John Bangsund with the A. Bertram Chandler Memorial Award because of his tremendous enthusiasm for Science Fiction and because of his ability to transmit that enthusiasm to other Australian fans.

— **Julian Warner.** Copyright 2001 Australian Science Fiction Foundation: asff.org.au

Stephanie Holt is a freelance editor and sometime writer. Until recently, she was a teacher and manager at Melbourne's RMIT University, working across its Professional Writing and Editing programs. Stephanie was the editor of Meanjin literary journal 1998-2001.

Stephanie Holt

Vale John Bangsund

This tribute first appeared in the September issue of Gatherings, the newsletter of the Institute of Professional Editors, the peak body for Australian and New Zealand editors.

Just as this newsletter was being finalised, news reached us that John Bangsund had died, at 81, on 22 August. John had been in poor health for some years, but it was the coronavirus that took him in the end. Our thoughts are with his wife Sally Yeoland,

his wider family, and his many friends.

While fuller appreciations and memories will undoubtedly flow over coming months, an initial tribute is in order.

John was a legendary editor, indeed an editor's

editor (or is that *editors' editor*? John would have had some thoughts on that), and an Honorary Life Member of the Victorian Society of Editors. Those who didn't work with him might know him as the inventor of Muphry's Law (more on that later), as editor of the Victorian Society of Editors newsletter for many years, or as a writer of marvellous columns and essays. A lovely example of his writing—once a staple of trainee editor reading lists—is 'On Looking It Up: A Ramble on Books and Editing', first published in *Meanjin* in 1994). [<https://meanjin.com.au/blog/on-looking-it-up/>]

After early theological studies, John's path through publishing took in varied roles: Hansard subeditor, publisher's sales rep, *Meanjin* Assistant Editor, among them, and many years as a freelance editor. He won the Barbara Ramsden Award from the Fellowship of Australian Writers for editing Lloyd Robson's *A History of Tasmania*, published by Oxford University Press. Among writers who've paid tribute to his skill is novelist Kerry Goldsworthy, who tweeted 'John Bangsund was the only editor who ever let me get away with a page-long sentence, because he understood exactly what I was trying to do with it. He was a fantastic editor and a very funny man.'

John wrote up the Barbara Ramsden award ceremony in 1984, in his typical self-deprecatory, droll and delightfully name-droppy way: 'Suddenly it's over, and Gerald Murnane is saying "You pompous bastard, Bangsund" but in a nice sort of way and Stephen Murray-Smith is beaming at me and a couple of kids who turn out to be science fiction fans ask for my autograph and it's compliments and flattery and smiles and all too much all the way.' You can find that account, and more from John, in *At the Typeface*, the anthology of Victorian Society of Editors newsletter selections edited by Janet Mackenzie.

For all his professional expertise, it was the energy, enthusiasm and erudition John brought to unpaid roles that had the widest impact. He was a key figure in the Australian and international science fiction scene, collecting, reviewing, promoting, and producing fanzines from the early 1960s, and bringing the world (and Ursula K Le Guin) to Australia in 1975 for Aussiecon, the 33rd World Science Fiction Convention. This was fandom of the first order.

So, from science fiction fanzines to the Victorian Society of Editors newsletter.

The society was established in 1970. In 1978, John volunteered to edit its newsletter. His predecessor, Jim Hart, had produced a newsletter (quoting John) 'informative, amusing, and short—rarely more than a single sheet'. John's, by contrast, 'would include matters of interest to our interstate members, such as reports on meetings, more news

about individual members (with their consent, of course), and book reviews, and considered articles on publishing and editing, and illustrations. Even jokes, if clever enough.'

His description hints at, but hardly conveys, its importance. Under John, the newsletter—at times assembled on a table-tennis table on his back verandah, and mailed out using the card index of members he was required to maintain—became essential reading. The 1987 citation for John's Honorary Life Membership of the Victorian society (one of the inaugural batch) calls it 'an institution within Australian publishing', and describes a 'superb publication' that provided 'up-to-date information on technological developments in a confusingly changing period.' His much-loved column 'The Threepenny Planet' gave full rein to his humour, wisdom and sense of fun.

John's legacy included following generations of admiring and grateful editors, and ongoing connection with the society. Liz Steele (Victorian Society of Editors president, 2005–2011) remembers 'a wonderful thinker and writer and analyser of words and their usage,' adding 'and his sense of humour was fab.' Jackey Coyle (president 2014–2017) recalls, 'John was in frequent contact during my time as president and (some time before that) as newsletter editor. His email headers rarely divulged the topic but always made me laugh. My favourite: "The ants are my friends, but not the nasty little green ones".'

In 1988, John had become Assistant Editor to Jenny Lee at *Meanjin*. Gerald Murnane was *Meanjin*'s fiction editor at the time, and stresses what a great achievement it was. The two had first met in 1961, as 22-year-olds taking a single night-school course in philosophy. As Gerald describes it: 'We were like nineteenth-century men that went to mechanics institutes, autodidacts, trying to make our way in the world.' Later John was assigned by Heinemann to proofread Gerald's 1987 *Inland*, which turned into an epic competitive event, with galleys spread across the floor and an elaborate scoring system for errors each found and missed (and after all that, a dead-heat finish). Gerald could speak for many: 'I loved him for his wit and his erudition. For taking the trouble to look things up. It was a delight to be in his company, so lively, and always humble'.

John remained at *Meanjin* as Editorial Consultant for a succession of later editors: Christina Thompson, me, Ian Britain. By the time I started editing *Meanjin* in 1998, John's main contribution was to proofread each issue. A good proofreader has your back, and John had mine, absolutely. No slip of grammar, misunderstood reference, misused word or incorrect fact seemed to get past him. Four times a year, a package of proofs would be despatched, and in due course would reappear

‘tobacco-scented and wine-stained’, as *Meanjin* stalwart Tim Coronel recalled when we reminisced. John’s proofing was rigorous and scrupulous, his feedback generous, tactful and reassuring, his messages warm with wit and humour. His knowledge of literature, classical music, the Bible and so much more seemed boundless—though of course there was also that famed reference library at his hand. You were learning from him, every time. What a privilege.

That wit and wordplay is captured most succinctly in John’s designation of ‘Muphry’s Law’. This is, of course, a mishap befallen the more familiar Murphy’s Law. Despite care and effort, and perhaps with editorial hubris, mistakes occur. John set out his law’s characteristics for the first time (they have been often reprinted) in the March 1992 newsletter, and it’s worth restating them here:

(a) if you write anything criticising editing or proofreading, there will be a fault of some kind in what you have written; (b) if an author thanks you in a book for your editing or proofreading,

there will be mistakes in the book; (c) the stronger the sentiment expressed in (a) and (b), the greater the fault; (d) any book devoted to editing or style will be internally inconsistent.

We editors didn’t know we needed a name for all that, until we got one, and it’s since caught on worldwide. (You can read US linguist and language columnist Ben Zimmer on Muphry’s Law at Language Log <https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=386>)

In recent years, John took to Facebook, and many friends and like-minded people who’d crossed his path were treated to his regular photos and reminiscences, puns and parodies. Ever the fan, there were pictures of cats and cars, digressions into family history, recommendations for music and movies. And of course, still, ramblings on books and editing.

He made an immense contribution to our profession. He is an immense loss.

— **Stephanie Holt**, August 2020

Bruce Gillespie

Farewell, John Bangsund (1939–2020)

Very few people have had a greater influence on my life than John Bangsund. It seems unbelievable that I could be living in a world without his benign presence, even though we haven’t set eyes on each other for years.

John’s name first appears in my life as the editor of a magazine called *Australian Science Fiction Review*. I bought the second issue in 1966 from the front counter of McGill’s Newsagency in Melbourne. Although it looked modest, its contents were dazzling, made brilliant by the editorials and other bits written by the editor, John Bangsund. I kept buying the magazine.

At the end of 1967, I wrote some articles for *ASFR*, and submitted them. Astonishingly, the same John Bangsund rang me (what was then a long-distance call) and suggested I travel all the way from Bacchus Marsh to Ferntree Gully to ‘meet the gang’ — the co-producers and contributors to the magazine. The weekend was being held to introduce George Turner to them. I was just lucky to be asked along. In that one weekend, I met John, his co-editors John Foyster and Lee Harding, their wives

Diane Bangsund and Elizabeth Foyster (but not Carla Harding, who was having a baby that weekend), and people such as Tony Thomas, Rob Gerand, Damien Broderick, and George Turner. They have all been very important in my life since then.

Lee Harding put me up at his place. We talked books and music, and he played me Mahler’s Symphony No. 1, the first time I heard it.

During 1968, the year in which I became involved with Melbourne fandom, John invited me to events held at three of the places in which he lived that year. One night, as I entered the main room at John and Diane’s Redan Street, St Kilda flat, I was faced with an entire wall filled with books. It became my ambition to fill a wall with books. Little did I know that this ambition would lead eventually to filling seven walls of a house with books.

The same night, John, Damien Broderick, and George Turner and several others sat around one-upping each other in the joke stakes. I listened and laughed, but was also listening to the music that John had playing in the background. It was



Australian Science Fiction Review 8, 1967.
(Cover illustration: Jim Ellis.)

Vaughan Williams' Symphony No. 9. John and Lee Harding had already done their best to initiate me into the wonders of classical music (as I had spent my teenage years listening to nothing but pop music). Vaughan Williams and the conviviality of that event pushed me over the edge, and I entered the wonderworld of classical music.

A few months later, John, Diane and flatmates Leigh Edmonds and Paul Stevens had moved house (yet again). I found myself part of a gathering of the Melbourne Fantasy Film Group. John, feeling besieged, played as background music the most amazing piece I had heard until then: Beethoven's Choral Fantasia, the dry run for his Symphony No. 9. It begins as a piano sonata and ends with the choir in full Beethovenian ecstasy. I asked John who were the performers. 'Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic.' 'Great singers,' I said gormlessly. 'They're not just singers,' said John. 'They're *German* singers.'

One of the members of the Melbourne Fantasy Group, whose taste ran to jazz, became dismayed by John's choice of music. 'I just don't understand that kind of music,' he said. John looked pained. 'You don't have to *understand* music,' he said. 'You just need to *listen* to it.'

A motto for the rest of my life.

In 1969, when I decided to publish *SF Commentary*

(which probably I should have called *SF Criterion*), John Bangsund, John Foyster, and Lee Harding (and Leigh Edmonds as well?) made the most magnanimous gesture I've ever heard of in the world of SF fanzines. Because I had no facilities up at Ararat, where I was attempting to be a secondary school teacher, they duplicated, collated, stapled and sent out in envelopes not just the 66-page first issue of *SF Commentary* but also the 40-plus-page second issue.

I still had no duplicator by the middle of the year. John, John, and Lee had had enough of producing my magazine. On a warm afternoon in June 1969, I visited John and Diane after they had moved back to Ferntree Gully. I had typed the stencils for *SFC* 3. John Bangsund taught me everything he knew about running an ink duplicator and producing issues for myself.

John Bangsund remained part of my life from then on, perhaps more to my great benefit than his. In the early 1970s, various friends of John Bangsund gathered around the kitchen table of wherever he was living at the time. Plans were hatched, such as the memorial book for John W. Campbell in 1971. Then in 1972 John went off to Canberra. During his three years there found a wife, Sally Yeoland, and produced vast number of fanzines fuelled by good red wine.

In 1974, Sally became part of my life as well, when she and John held a party in Melbourne to celebrate their wedding in Canberra the week before.

In 1975, overseas people flooded into Melbourne for Aussiecon, the first world science fiction convention to be held in Australia. John Bangsund, whose fanzine productions had been a major factor in Australia winning the right to hold the world convention and host Ursula Le Guin as our Guest of Honour, was Toastmaster at the Hugos Ceremony. This memorable event, captured on videotape by a team led by Don Ashby, can now be viewed on YouTube. John, and the rest of us, finally met Ursula Le Guin and many other people who had been merely legends until then. Times of good fellowship.

Elaine and I got together in March 1978, and married in March 1979. John and Sally had just returned from Adelaide, where they had been living for three years. We assumed that Sally was still a licensed marriage celebrant, as she had been in South Australia. When she returned, Sally could no longer remain a wedding celebrant unless she fulfilled Victorian requirements. She and John were the only people other than some of our relatives who knew we were getting married. When we rang John and Sally to tell them that the hitch had been hatched, they offered to hold a wedding party at their new place in Kew! We were astonished. We

were even more astonished to find that they had invited almost everybody in Melbourne fandom (and beyond). Many of them had brought wedding gifts. We're still using some of those wedding presents.

Happy times indeed, but during the 1980s John Bangsund drifted away from SF fandom. John gained a reputation as one of the best editors in Australia during the 1970s and 1980s. I was also a member of that world — again because of John Bangsund. In 1973 I had quit my job at Publications Branch, Education Department to go overseas. When I returned I could have stepped back into my old job, but John Bangsund has already given me the idea that there were in Melbourne entities such as 'freelance editors'. I didn't like working in an office from 9 to 5, so I tried freelance editing in March 1974. To my personal satisfaction and perpetual penury, that is what I've been doing ever since. John took up editing and writing the *Victorian Society of Editors Newsletter*, to the great delight of the society's members.

In the 1980s, John and Sally and Elaine and I met every Friday night at the Eastern Inn restaurant in Clifton Hill. Again, happy times.

If in those early years, if I had thought about John turning 80 (he is eight years older than I am) I would have said that we survivors would still be all sitting around a kitchen table listening to John's jokes and sharing experiences, just as we had in the seventies and eighties. But ill health knocked around John, and we haven't seen each other since I met Sally and John by accident in Carlton about ten years ago. Thanks to Facebook, though, many of us could still natter with John, who still had much sensible and delightful to say until not long before his death.

It's been a long trip (or a short trip — what's a few decades among friends?) but my life has been greatly enriched by the life of someone I would never have met if I had not picked up from a bookshop counter a copy of a modest-looking little magazine in 1966.

Thank you, John.

— **Bruce Gillespie**, 25 March 2019/25 August 2020, based on an article written for John Bangsund's Eightieth Birthday tribute published in Sally Yeoland (ed.), *John Bangsund: Eightieth Annish* (2019).

John Litchen

Honeymoon weekend in Canberra, 1973

[Three of John's photos from 1973 appear at the beginning of this issue of SF Commentary: two of John and Sally, and one of John holding in front of him his favourite book of Australian humour, Lennie Lower's Here's Luck!.]

That weekend was officially our honeymoon. Monica and I got married on 19 May 1973 and three weeks later were in Canberra for the Queen's Birthday long weekend at the beginning of June. We weren't able to go anywhere immediately after the wedding and the Queen's Birthday weekend was the first opportunity. We parked our camper van in front of John's place or in the driveway and were prepared to sleep in it overnight, but John kindly offered us his double bed, when we told him that this trip was our 'official' honeymoon. He said he would sleep somewhere else. Someone slept on the lounge in the other room, and that could have been Robin Johnson who was there at the same time.

The next morning John and Sally turned up, so I presume he stayed at her place that night. I don't think they were living together at that time and had only just started going out. It was a good thing we stayed indoors that night and not out in the camper van because the temperature outside dropped below zero overnight. Everything was iced over when we went outside in the morning.

The rest of the day (Sunday) was spent wandering about Canberra, going to the National Library where we shot the scenes for the short colour film as well as taking a few other photos. I have no idea why Robin was in Canberra at that time. He sort of turned up everywhere, whenever anything was happening. He was also in Sydney when we filmed the second *Antifan* movie. He most likely has some photos from this time as well, because he did have a camera. He certainly had a camera with him in Sydney and took shots during the filming of the second *Antifan* film. The Canberra footage doesn't appear in the second film either. It was only in the

short film (four or five minutes long) and that film seems to have disappeared.

— John Litchen, 25 August 2020

David Grigg

Canberra visit 1973

[David Grigg made his pilgrimage to visit John Bangsund after John took up his job as Hansard Editor at Parliament House in late 1972 and before he met Sally in mid 1973.]

I had let John Bangsund know that I would be visiting him soon ... but I felt somewhat guilty, because I'd sent the letter informing him of this about two days before I left Melbourne, and he naturally hadn't had time to write back and say get stuffed or whatever he felt like.

So I went down to the Sale post office and sent John a telegram which read: 'ARRIVE CANBERRA THURSDAY. POST SIGN IF UNWELCOME — GRIGG' and merrily set off on my way. This was Wednesday morning, and I planned to drive as far as Cooma, which is in the Snowy Mountains that day and drive to Canberra suitably refreshed the morning after. Cooma is about 250 miles from Sale. Well, that was the plan.

I quite enjoy driving, and I was making good time when I got to Orbost. That's where I got lost. I drove down a road which I thought was the Princes Highway, but wasn't. In fact, the signs indicated that I was going to Bombala, the last major town before Cooma, so I thought that was okay. But after about 30 miles of this road, it turned into a gravel, dirt-surfaced track.

To say the least, I was surprised by this turn of events. I brought out my maps, and discovered that the road I was on did indeed ultimately bring me to where I wanted to go, and a little shorter than the main road. But the surface was unmade for about a hundred miles.

If I had been sane, I would have turned back. I wasn't.

A hundred miles of winding, twisting, dirt and gravel roads with unguarded precipices on either side takes a lot out of you and your car. By the time I got to Bombala, I was a wreck. Right in the middle of the dirt road stretch, I became paranoid about what would happen if my car broke down.

I hadn't seen a single car or person or habitation

for fifty miles.

I rested up for a little while in Bombala, had a milk shake, had the guy at the petrol station check my oil and so on, and went to Cooma. There I booked into a motel, got inside and was violently and gut-wrenchingly sick all night. That was pretty bad. I think that it was partly reaction against my very real fear and tension during the journey, and partly perhaps a touch of gastro or something.

The next morning I managed to keep down the motel breakfast and drove the seventy miles or so to Canberra.

I expected John Bangsund to be at work, and I was planning to look around Canberra during the day and visit John in the evening when he was home from work. But since I didn't have John's exact address, and had only visited his flat once before, I thought I better check in the daylight and see if I could find it.

Driving slowly down Wentworth Avenue in Kingston, I came to the flat I recognised, and lo and behold (to coin a phrase) there was John's car in the driveway. So I parked my car and walked around the back.

The sign on the door said: 'KNOCK LOUDLY, I'M ASLEEP'. So I did, and he was.

John is a parliamentary reporter earning some incredible sum, but the recent elections and the subsequent confusion and breakups of parliament meant that there was very little work for him to do, so he was being sent back home every week.

When he arrived, he said; 'I got your telegram. It was rather funny, you see, I've been awaiting a telegram from Diane telling me that I'm a free man, and when I opened the box and saw the telegram, I thought that was it. I went into the post office waving the telegram. But when I opened it, I said to the staff there: "I haven't lost a wife, I've just gained a visitor, and he wants me to put up a sign if I don't want him." The lady at the counter thought that was hilarious.'

'Oh,' I said, 'I'm sorry...'

'Well I was going to put up a sign saying: "Grigg

wanted. Apply within.” but I thought I might get more than one.’

We sat down and did a lot of talking. John told me that he had three or four very important things to do over the weekend. One of these was to go and see about a sound system he was buying and the other was to start duplicating the book about John Campbell that he is publishing (*John W. Campbell: An Australian Tribute*).

I agreed with John that these were both worthwhile projects, and so like two energetic fans, we didn’t do either that day. Instead we sat in John’s small flat and talked some more, went and had a quiet meal in the nearby Chinese restaurant, came back and talked some more and all of a sudden it was four o’clock in the morning and I had to pump up my airbed.

John, it seems, lives permanently on an internal clock mechanism which is four hours out of phase with the rest of the universe. All of the four days I spent there ended at the same time in the morning.

Well, on Friday, I declared I wanted To Go Off And See Canberra, and John went off to see about his stereo sound system. I saw Canberra from all sorts of angles in about an hour and a half, and then went off in boredom to Queanbeyan in NSW where I bought a book at a second hand store.

Back at the Bangsund residence we reconvened what we were already calling the Canberra Miniminicon ’73. John had got finance and met Helen Hyde, and on Saturday we would get the sound system and have lunch at the Hydes.

Weird things happened during those long evenings. One time we spent hours looking through Brewer’s *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* for references to dolphins, through an Anglo-Saxon Dictionary for derivations of my surname, talking about fans, ancestors, just happenings, reading John’s ideas for a play (to be composed on stencil), about the Australia in ’75 film (still haven’t got that tape, John) and so on and so on.

The Hydes were fun, I knew it would be. Somehow Leigh and Helen live in an enormously civilised atmosphere compared to John’s cultured chaos. The food was good, and talking to the kids and the dog was great. And John collected his sound system, and we both became impatient to set it up and hear it play.

At the Canberra Hilton again, we unpacked the speakers and the beautiful turntable and the cassette tape deck and the amplifier and moved shelves and plugged things here and connected wires here, and finally the system was all set up and gleaming, connected to the reel-to-reel recorder and just itching to play music.

So John went off and selected one of his favourite pieces of music, and with great ceremony placed

it on the turntable, lifted the pickup, and placed it with great care at the edge of the rotating record.

The pickup made a scratching noise and skidded to the middle of the disc. “*%#@” said John.

‘Umm,’ I said, ‘It’s not supposed to do that, is it?’

‘I wonder if I should check the stylus pressure ...’ meditated John, ‘It should track at 1.5 grams.’

So he brought out a delicate little balance thing which measured the stylus pressure by means of a see-saw. At 1.5 grams, the seesaw balanced, that was the theory. The stylus went clunk! In practice.

‘Looks like about 90 grams,’ said John.

We had a look at the instructions and in the box and moved a few things here and there, all to no effect.

‘I often think to myself,’ said John, ‘What would John Campbell do in a situation like this?’

So we sat and thought about it and looked glum, and we finally decided that there had to be a counterweight missing from the other end of the pickup arm. So I got an empty pill bottle and placed it on the end. No effect, still at least 90 grams pressure. I used two bottles and put some typewriter cleaning putty on the end. Nothing. I was looking around for something else when John returned with an old hammerhead.

We put the hammerhead on the end of the arm, with the end of the arm through the hole, and juggled it around a bit, and measured the pressure again. With John measuring and me moving the hammerhead backwards and forwards we balanced it at 1.5 grams pressure.

So there was the enormously expensive turntable sat there with a rusty old hammerhead balanced on its pickup, peacefully playing Bach.

‘John Campbell would have been proud of us,’ I said.

We spent the rest of the evening finding out what was wrong with various other parts of the system, which John declared he was going to return when he went to get the real counterweight for the turntable. We spent at least a couple of hours trying to trace down a source of interference by sheer deductive logic, and we ended up with a point by point list of what we knew wasn’t working right. John was sure he could hear the effect of the hammerhead on the hi-fi, and the cassette recorder wasn’t as good as he’d hoped. I think we finally decided to do away with the cassette and buy tape and records instead, and I think that’s what John eventually did.

Sunday was John Campbell day with a vengeance. I finally got to see the duplicating of the Campbell book begin. It had obviously been an enormous labour to type up and prepare in John’s meticulous way. It’s a cliché to say it was a labour of love, but I think that is what it had been to John.

There were times when he'd stopped typing for months, stuck at one point, but it was finally all on stencil.

I don't think that it's hard to understand that John was approaching the duplication of his opus with reluctance.

But we began, and as I read the stencils and handed them to John, I said to him that even if the book should take another six months to bring out, it would be more than worth it. And as the stencils went through the machine on that long day, we became more and more enthusiastic about it.

We managed to get about a quarter of the way

through the work when it was more than late for dinner. John had prepared specially the pages which contained George Turner's article, so that he could use it as a sample and to show George himself how it would look in print, so we went down to the post office and despatched that to George, and went and ate a good meal, came back, and talked again until late in the morning.

— **David Grigg**, excerpt from an article published in his fanzine *Touchstone* sometime in 1973. Also included in Sally Yeoland (ed.), *John Bangsund: Eightieth Annish* (2019)

John Bangsund

Memories from my childhood

For **Samuel R. Delany**.

- **Rationing**

During the 1939–46 War just about everything was rationed in Australia. The finding and losing of ration books, and what could be done about it, was a daily domestic drama with different actors.

- **Food for Britain**

By 1947 I was a Wolf Cub (my father was Akela in the Fifth Northcote group). I was pretty hopeless at everything the Cubs did, but, partly driven by my father, I was as good at collecting non-perishable foodstuffs for export to the

starving people of Britain as anyone. This at a time when some things (petrol, for example) were still rationed here. Oh, and we threw our hearts and voices into Empire Day (originally 24 May), but not necessarily our minds.

- **Billy**

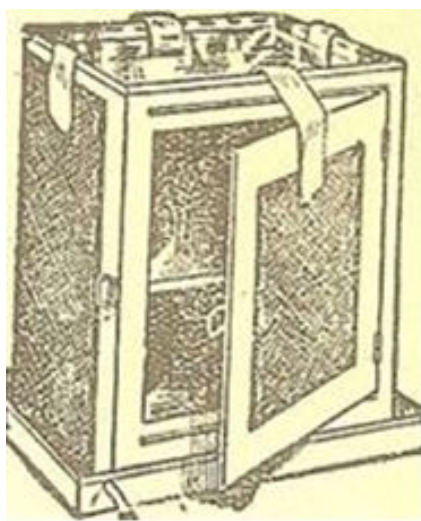
Billies were universally used in the bush to boil water for tea. In our street in Northcote each night we hung one on a veranda post, with coins inside, which were removed by the milkman before he filled it with milk. Later, when milk came in bottles, we would put our bottles, all empty except one that usually had a note for the milkman and cash for the milk he delivered. Various transactions of this kind were normal in those innocent days, and the deliveries were made by a man with a horse and cart, not necessarily his property.

- **Coolgardie safe**

The Coolgardie safe is still used in remote areas. It is basically a metal box with lots of little holes in its four sides, covered with a wet hessian (burlap) cloth, hung inside the house or from a tree. We had one of these hanging in our back veranda, which had been converted into a room before we moved in.

- **Ice chest**

Ice was also delivered by horsedrawn cart, but usually during the day, because the ice man had to enter each house on his run and put the ice in ice chests. Later, when my father built a billy-cart for me, I would take it to the ice works a few blocks away and buy one big block of ice



Coolgardie safe.

that would keep us going for a few days, and that would save us a little money. In early December 1946, while my mother was in a maternity hospital, we were looked after by my Danish grandmother, who was in the habit of putting leftover food in the ice chest, including fish and chips. I can't remember eating the leftovers, but I must have.

- **Food**

Rabbit, otherwise known as 'underground chicken', was our staple diet. You could buy it at the butcher's or catch your own. I lived in the wrong part of Northcote to go rabbiting. Besides, I was scared of it. Rabbiting was done by men and boys with ferrets, which must have been muzzled to stop them eating the rabbits, and the rabbits ran out of their burrows and were caught by the waiting little gangs. During the day the men openly sold their catch more cheaply than the butcher's going rate, usually as rabbitohs on the streets, sometimes to the butchers.

- **Fruit and vegetables?**

Yes, but nowhere near the quantity or variety that we are used to now, and far more home-grown. We had an apple tree in the back yard, and my father grew various uninteresting but sustaining vegetables. Pumpkin galore, and other things I have never willingly eaten since those days. Kohlrabi, for instance. I looked it up in a dictionary at the time, and it said 'Some varieties are grown as feed for cattle.' Or to that effect; that wording has been around since 1912, and is currently in Wikipedia. The word translates as 'cabbage-turnip', so I would probably like it these days, but I think we were growing the cattle-feed variety.

- **Coffee?**

You've got to be joking. We drank the cheapest tea we could find. If we insisted on coffee, the best we could do was Turban brand chicory essence. ('It's most disturbin' when there ain't no Turban' I think was their elegant motto.) I believe it is still made. I can't imagine why.

- **Billy-cart races**

I mentioned earlier that I had a billy-cart. For some years after the war in Northcote we had a race down a steep, wide street — Bastings Street, to be exact — but I think the organisers called them by their American name, soap-box derbys. No, I never entered one of these races.



Billy-cart.

Too dangerous, and you had to walk back up the eastern flank of Rucker's Hill afterwards. (The apostrophe is correct. The hill was named after Wiliam Rucker.)

- **Newsreel theatres**

are what we had instead of television until 1956, and for a few years afterwards. They were mostly in town (which is what we called the CBD in those days, or 'the city') and business thrived. Their organisation, particularly the gathering of news, is covered in the film *Newsfront*.

- **Slates and pens**

In my first year or so at Helen Street State School, Northcote, 1943–4, we used slates with chalk. At some time we moved on to wooden pens with nibs, and ink wells. Students were assigned to be ink monitors, keeping the wells topped up. By 1950, ballpoint pens or biros (named for their inventor, the Hungarian László Bíró) were available, but not encouraged at Northcote High School. I still remember the look of fury and anguish on the face of Mr Day, the woodwork and sheet-metal teacher, when I used a biro instead of a pencil for something we had to draw.

- **Television**

TV was officially introduced to Victoria in 1956, to coincide with the Olympic Games, but it had been around since 1929. In 1949 I went to the Exhibition Buildings for the 'Australia Makes It' exhibition, at which I saw live, closed circuit TV. My parents bought a television set about 1960. It has all been downhill since then.

— John Bangsund, on Facebook, 2019

John Bangsund

A way of life: The confessions of an sf addict

[Written in 1968, for *Apastron*, edited by Gary Woodman and Doug Kewley, Easter 1968.]

There was a time, ages ago it now seems, when my leisure hours were full of the delights of good literature and music. Quite by coincidence, this was a time when I was not yet married. Evenings and weekends were spent with Hazlitt and Peacock, modern novelists, the classics, Wagner, Bach and the Romantics. Somehow, these halcyon days passed, and I now find myself a victim of an insidious and apparently unbreakable habit; red-eyed, hands a-quiver, I go on and on — reading, writing, and thinking about *science fiction*.

Four years ago I had never consciously read a work of science fiction. Certainly there were books which I now recognise as such, but at the time I did not label them so. The very words carried overtones of adolescence and triviality. I can remember very clearly a day when I picked up a book by Hal Clement, called *Needle*. I was then Librarian at the Victorian Railways Institute, and I felt it more or less my duty to try to understand what people were reading, and why. But *Needle* was too much for me. I read the first few pages and flung the book down. Oh, it looked interesting enough, but I felt I was wasting time, valuable reading time, which I could more profitably spend re-reading Hardy or Durrell.

And now I find myself not only devoting two-thirds of my reading time to sf, and enjoying it immensely; not only endeavouring to write the stuff myself, but — heaven help us! — I find myself the editor and publisher of a critical journal which has gained an international following and a Hugo nomination in its first year, and one of Australia's best-known sf fans.

How did this happen? How did a relatively sober young man of more or less refined taste find himself caught up in the crazy world of science fiction — and the crazier world of sf fandom?

It all started with Mary Pavletich, a girl who worked the accounting machine in the Railways Institute office. Mary used to come to the library to talk to me, but mainly to use my phone to call her boyfriend on the next floor — a towering blonde

Dutchman named Koos Bleeker. One day Mary invited me to a surprise party for Koos, and I accepted. Somewhere, unheard by me, there must have been at that moment a rumble of thunder, or a Wagnerian brass crescendo fraught with an impending-doom motif. I went to the party, accompanied by a charming young lady named Ildiko. When I arrived, the front room of the Bleeker residence was packed with excited conspirators working themselves up to give poor Koos the shock of his life. Amongst the crowd was a smallish, slimish chap with glasses and a twinkling eye, who was fussing about with a tape recorder. Later in the evening, after Koos had recovered from the splendid welcome we gave him, but before supper came on, there was the usual mid-party lull in activity and Ilda and I found ourselves talking to Koos's sister, Carla, and her husband, the character with the tape recorder — Lee Harding.

The conversation didn't last long, but I seem to recall Lee and I swapping observations on music in general, and Mahler in particular. A few months later I met Lee again, at Koos and Mary's wedding, and again we talked about music, though by this time Mary had told me that Lee was a writer of — ugh — science fiction. I didn't hold it against him, he seemed a pleasant enough kind of bloke.

My assistant at the library was a young lady named Muriel. Around August 1963 she became engaged to the Institute's membership clerk, David, and I had another party to attend. It wasn't a bad party, actually, though I went alone and feeling utterly rejected by the entire female population of Melbourne. There was some goon there playing a sort of improvised double-bass — a tea chest and a length of rope — and another playing hit-tunes of the forties on the piano. The pianist, who played entirely by ear — and sounded like it — did a strange thing: he began, with a dazzling display of musical incompetence, to pick out themes and bits and pieces from Mahler symphonies and Beethoven concertos, egged on by the only other person in the room who recognised them. Yes, Lee and I enjoyed ourselves that night. We finished, Lee and Carla and I, standing out in

Warrigal Road until midnight, talking. For over an hour their poor little Fiat stood with engine running and one door open while we talked on and on. Finally, Carla got cold and we departed — but not before I had wrung from them an invitation to visit their place the following weekend. ‘You can’t miss it,’ Lee said, ‘You go out through Bayswater, follow the Mountain Highway until you come to a service station, then it’s the first house you can’t see from the road.’

For the next month or so (for that matter, for the next four years, off and on), I spent some part of every weekend at the Hardings’. I don’t remember much about conversations, except that they were largely about music. Lee assured me that every time he tried to talk about sf I’d talk about Thomas Hardy or Thomas Love Peacock. Sometimes we got onto philosophy, and this proved my undoing ... One night he gave me a paperback and said, ‘There: you’re pretty hot on theology — (I had, in fact, spent a couple of years in theological college), read that story and tell me what you think of it.’

So I took the book out onto the verandah, and read Arthur C Clarke’s ‘The Star’. And the founda-

tions of my antipathy to sf began to crumble. Here was as fine a dramatic presentation of a theological difficulty as I had ever come across, as a story, and as stimulus to thought, it was first-rate.

The next stage of my conversion was typical of my approach to things in those days — and perhaps, to be honest, even now. I borrowed from Lee a copy of that most informative book, *The Science Fiction Novel* (containing essays by Heinlein, Kornbluth, Bloch and Bester on sf as ‘imagination and social criticism’ to see what I was in for. Then I read Theodore Sturgeon’s *Venus Plus X*, and I was hooked.

The last weekend in September I started my annual leave. By some diabolical stratagem I had managed to borrow the family car, and I planned to drive to Queensland in it. Along with tent, camping gear, food, and other optional equipment, I loaded into the car a great swag of books to keep me going for three weeks — Hardy, Turgenev, Durrell, Shakespeare, Euripides, lots of others I’ve forgotten, a dictionary, and — Sturgeon’s *Some of Your Blood*.

It was a great trip. I drove through Gippsland, up the south coast of NSW through Sydney, Newcastle and the north coast to Brisbane, then over to Toowoomba, Dalby, Kingaroy, and back down through Armidale to Sydney, and along the Hume Highway to Melbourne. All the way I searched bookshops and newsagencies for good sf. I read Clarke, Vonnegut, Sturgeon, Ballard, Knight, Bradbury, Leiber, Simak, Pangborn — and Harding. By wading through dusty piles of magazines in the lesser Sydney and Brisbane bookshops, I came up with an almost complete set of Lee’s stories in *New Worlds*, *Science Fantasy*, and *SF Adventures*. I also managed to read one novel by Turgenev, and Dur-



John Bangsund

John Bangsund, 1964. (Photo: Dick Jenssen.)



Lee Harding (l.) and John Foyster (r.), 1964.
(Photo: Dick Jenssen.)



(l. to r.): Dick Jenssen, John Foyster, John Bangsund, 1964. (Photo: Lee Harding.)

rell's *Alexandria Quartet*, but the competition was too strong for the other worthies I'd taken with me.

After a while my old sense of values reasserted itself. I normally read about four books a week. At this stage I was averaging about five 'real' books to every sf novel or story collection. But Lee had successfully introduced me to the field, and under his guidance I was able to read the cream of it. The rubbish — and for me that still included almost everything written before 1960 — was to come later. Meanwhile Lee also introduced me to 'fanzines'.

As the name suggests, a fanzine is a magazine produced by a fan. There are hundreds and hundreds of them. Most fans at some stage or another either produce or contemplate producing a fanzine. Fanzines come in all shapes and sizes, are printed by all kinds of processes from carbon copies to letterpress, and cover, literally, every subject under the sun. The story is that they originated from the letter columns in the early sf magazines. Hugo Gernsback (who died only last August, full of years and full of honours) published the first magazine devoted to science fiction, *Amazing Stories*, in 1926. He also published the first sf letter column. Over the years the fans flooded to the magazines — and each other — with letters. Printing costs eventually pre-

cluded lengthy letter columns, so the fans produced fanzines.

(Do you find the word 'fan' rather juvenile? I do, too, but it's a time-honoured word, and I can't think of a better. Some people have advocated the replacement of 'fan' by 'enthusiast' but for me 'enthusiasm' carried a similar historical overtone to 'fanaticism', both of which overtones are largely unheard by people today. My only regret it that the same word is used to describe 'wrestling fans' and 'pop fans' and 'footy fans'. Nonetheless, I will continue to use the word: after all, only sf fans belong to 'Fandom'.)

The first fanzines I ever saw were *Warhoon*, a fascinating publication put out by one Richard Bergeron of New York, and *The Wild Colonial Boy*, produced by a young man, then a school teacher at Drouin in Victoria, named John Foyster. Lee and John and Sergeant Bob Smith, then of Bandiana, were the first fans I met. Early in 1964 John sent me the first issues of his new fanzine, *Satura*. Eventually I contributed letters and artwork to it — and my fannish career was started.

In March 1964 I went to the Adelaide Festival, and while there made my first attempt to write a science fiction story. I also wrote copious letters about the Festival and other things to Lee and Carla. On my return Lee informed me that he planned to produce the fanzine to end all fanzines, and asked me to work up my letters into an article for it. For months we worked on this fanzine, which we eventually called *Canto*; I spent countless hours

Three Johns, 1964: John Bangsund, John Baxter, John Foyster. (Photo: Dick Jenssen.)



drawing illustrations and headings, most of which Lee rejected. (Amateur editors are even tougher than professionals.) Finally, in December, it appeared, and a very nice job it was, too. And there was not one mention of science fiction in it, from beginning to end! I came out of this experience with resolutions to write more, and to produce my own fanzine one day, in which, needless to say, I would edit hell out of anything Harding submitted to me!

In March 1965 I drove to Sydney, and while there made the acquaintance of John Baxter, one of the very few Australian sf writers and a well-known fan. He looked disconcertingly like me: mid-twenties, overweight, receding hairline. I outlined to him a story I proposed to write, and his only comment was, 'What's the point of it?'. He assured me that every story must have some point, some purpose, and I tried to remember that.

Somewhere about this time I joined the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. If the clubroom, with its water-powered life and decadent atmosphere, was astonishing, the club members were no less so. I don't quite know what I expected — a bunch of schoolboys, perhaps. Instead I found school teachers, engineers, clerks, housewives, university lecturers, and, presiding over their activities, a city bookseller, the redoubtable Mr Mervyn Binns.

John Foyster, backed by the club, started to organise a convention — the seventh to be held in Australia, and the first for something like eight years. For some reason I was on the committee — something to do with publicity, I think. (I designed a poster, but didn't do anything else that I recall.) Conventions are, like fanzines, a time-honoured sf pastime. Each year there are dozens of them, in many countries, the most illustrious being the World Convention, for the honor of conducting which clubs all over the world compete. Our 7th AustCon (need I say anything about the prevalence of Orwellian contractions in fandom?) was small by most standards, but we had a great time. We watched films, fought with discussion panels, listened to tapes from overseas writers and editors, wasted money at auctions, and talked, talked, talked.

In the middle of this, I got carried away and said a Foolish Thing. We had talked during a business session about the fun we had had, and about how we should go about holding conventions and, in between, somehow keeping intact the spirit of the thing — if you like, the fellowship, the community of shared interests. And I suggested — oh, I said it with my own big fat mouth — that we should start a sort of official fanzine, devoted to discussing sf and keeping up with fan news. There was dead silence. Then: who will do this thing? And that is how I became the editor, publisher, financier,

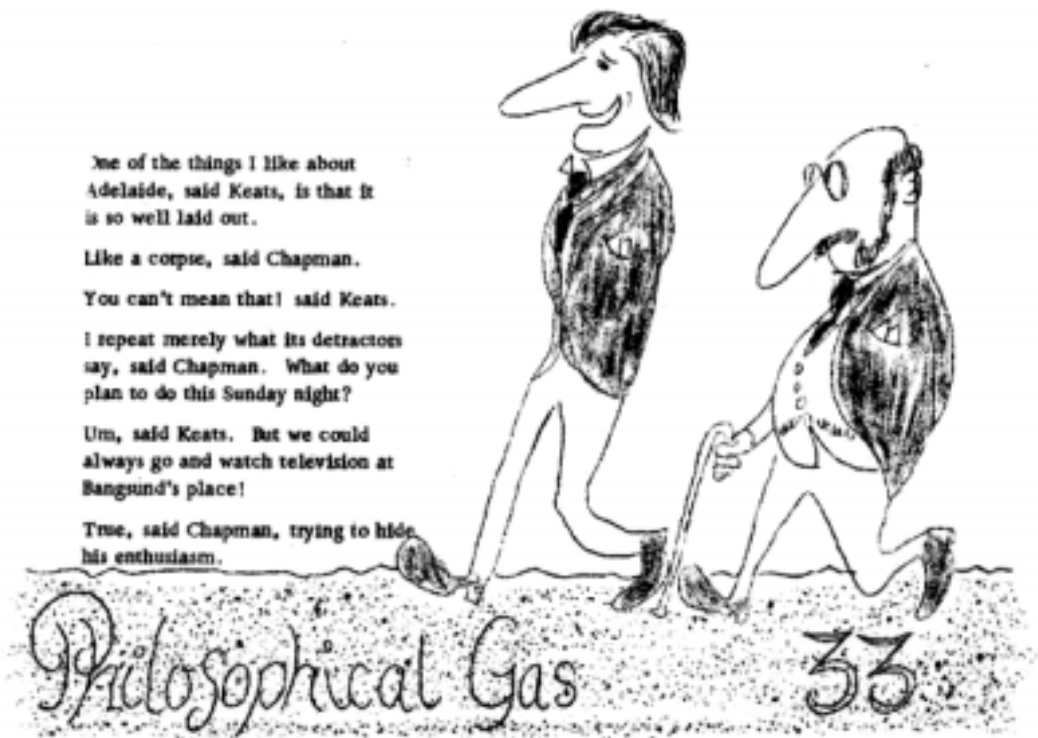


handle-cranker, stamp licker, typist, and chief-cook-and-bottle-washer of *Australian Science Fiction Review*.

Twenty months and fourteen issues later, I am still wondering how I suddenly got so involved. I was married a few weeks before the convention: was my rash volunteering a subconscious move to stop myself becoming completely married? I don't know, but *ASFR* has certainly provided Diane and me with some emotional crises. But on balance it has been a most interesting experience and, marital harmony now restored, I contemplate the continued development of *ASFR* with enthusiasm.

In the course of my work as a publisher's representative I met fans all over Australia — many of them not in contact with any organisation. I correspond with fans, authors and editors around the world. And I have been forced, by the very position I have come to occupy, to think hard about sf, literature, and fandom — and to read more sf. Last Christmas I decided I would have to read pre-1950 sf, no matter how it hurt. I started on Van Vogt, proceeded to Kornbluth, Kuttner, Heinlein, and others, and enjoyed every minute of it. There remains now the final barrier: I just can't read the pre-1940 stuff — Campbell, E. E. Smith, and the rest. But no doubt the time will come ...

An accusation frequently levelled at sf is that it does not concern itself with people. And this is true as it once was — since sf is primarily a literature of ideas, a vehicle of speculation. 'What would happen if...?' is the question sf asks, and attempts to answer. It is also often said that science is catching up with sf.



One of John's best-known enthusiasms was for the mid-nineteenth century novels of Thomas Love Peacock. John adopted two of Peacock's characters, Keats and Chapman, for a long series of short punning stories that reminded most SF readers of the 'Ferdinand Feghoot' stories in *F&SF* during the 1960s. The above is not a great example of John's stories (for he and Sally did enjoy their three-year stay in Adelaide 1975–78), but it is the only example of John's cartoon depictions of Keats and Chapman that I could find readily.

In many important respects science is way ahead of sf, and sf serves as a populariser of scientific concepts. And these are two of the considerable values I find in the genre: the speculative and (to a dumb layman like me, raised on the humanities) educational aspects. Because of these things, sf broadens the mind: if it doesn't increase wisdom, it at least stimulates the imagination. And, most of the time, is thoroughly good entertainment.

That is sf as literature. But the other side of sf is fandom, and it is here that the human values predominate. It comes initially as a shock to learn that many fans no longer read much sf, until one realises that fandom is something apart, something that grows out of sf but does not necessarily stay in it. I have had so much enjoyment over the last few years from meeting fans, corresponding with them, reading their publications, that I am inclined almost to go a bit mystical and talk about fandom as a church-substitute — for that, almost, is what it

is, and nowhere else but in the church have I found such a sense of world-wide fraternity. Certainly I have heard of no other literary field in which this phenomenon occurs. Robert Bloch, a name you may recognise as the author of something called *Psycho*, but more esteemed by us as a great fan and as author of a profound and moving little story (fannish manifesto, some would say) called *A Way of Life*, remarked in a recent letter to me: 'As far as I'm concerned, sf performs a far better job of global unification than the UN.' I'm inclined to agree with him.

We may argue about the relative worth of Heinlein, become hot under the collar about slighting remarks about Ballard, but we have no differences about race or creed — and we have a lot of fun. Fandom *is* 'a way of life'. My only regret is that I did not discover it sooner.

— John Bangsund, Easter 1968



December 1967 or January 1968, Wilson Street, Ferntree Gully: Some of the many Melbourne fans mentioned in the following article: (*l. to r.*): *Standing*: Tony Thomas; Diane Bangsund (Kirsten); John Bangsund; John Foyster; Elizabeth Foyster; Jillian Miranda Foyster.
Seated: Leigh Edmonds; Paul Stevens; Merv Binns.
 (Photo: Lee Harding.)

John Bangsund

1968 and all that

Written in preparation for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association (ANZAPA), 1993.

In *Slaydomania II* Ms Frahm of North Queensland claims to have known me while I was still active. I forget when I stopped being active, but it is true that I was still more or less functioning when Leanne and I first met at Anzapacon in 1978. In that year Leigh Edmonds and I were in our thirties, a fact that may have irritated him, because he always thought I was very old. It follows that in 1968 we were both in our twenties: he had just entered, and

I was about to leave.

In those days, a quarter of a century ago, I was married to a lady named Diane and had a cat named Grushenka. Diane was new to fandom, but Grushenka had never known anything else, having been born at the Hardings' place at The Basin. In late 1967 the three of us were living at Ferntree Gully. Barely a week went by without some fannish gathering at 11 Wilson Street, and it was there that

I began my long career of being mostly unemployed (in the technical sense, that is: I was quite busy then publishing a journal called *Australian Science Fiction Review*). Diane had become involved with the Melbourne SF Club, an outfit that I tended to avoid. Dick Jenssen called it 'the travel agency'. It seemed to attract wild-eyed young men as fond of exotic substances, loud music and strange films as they were of sf. At Easter 1968 the club organised what we modestly called a science fiction 'conference'. Its main venues were an old community hall and a picture theatre in Boronia, a couple of miles from Ferntree Gully, so our place and the Hardings' were packed with fans from interstate (and some locals who couldn't bear to go home), and the convention, or party, went on for some days after the conference had officially ended. The interstate people there, as I recall, included Pat Terry (a long-time Sydney fan, then in his eighties), John Baxter, Kevin Dillon, Bob Smith, John Brosnan, Jack Wodhams Jack, a postman from Caboolture, had published a couple of stories in *Analog*, and more had been accepted. Addressing the conference, Jack said we'd better enjoy his company while we could, because in a year or two he wouldn't want to know us. But he said it in that nice laconic way that Queenslanders have.

Diane and I were getting tired of travelling forty-odd miles a day, leaving for work in the dark, arriving home in the dark, but perhaps I agreed too readily when she suggested that we share a place with Leigh Edmonds and Paul Stevens, who were moving from South Melbourne. Some time after Easter 1968 we moved into a house-sized flat at 12 Redan Street, St Kilda. When the flat next door was vacated, Tony Thomas, a frequent visitor, seriously considered moving in. We thought that eventually we could have the whole building occupied by fans, and with this awesome prospect of a super slanshack in mind we formed *Skarcfuta* — the St Kilda Australia Regional Committee For Un-Terran Activities. But before Tony could make up his mind (he was about to marry John Foyster's sister, Myfanwy, and he wasn't sure how keen she would be on the idea), our agent told us we'd be wise to look for another place: the Anglican school on the corner, St Michael's Grammar, had bought the property and soon the building would be demolished.

We could only have lived at Redan Street for four or five months at most, but the place became legendary. At least three fanzines were published there: I was still doing *ASFR*; Leigh had revived the MSFC's clubzine, *Etherline*, and started a genzine called *Rataplan* (the name inspired by the landlord's song in Burnand and Sullivan's *Cox and Box*); and there may have been others. There were frequent editorial meetings, with George Turner,

Lee Harding, Damien Broderick, Dimitrii Razuvaev and others — rarely John Foyster: he was doing postgraduate work at Monash, and Elizabeth had asked us kindly not to distract him. I don't think Paul was publishing anything then. He and Noel Kerr conducted cinematic evenings in the lounge room, screening horror films and (more often) soft porn. Sometimes I came home late and found the room full of people I had never seen before.

Odd memories come back: Damien striding down the street with a tree over his shoulder, or at least a very big branch, which he courteously presented to Diane as one would a bouquet; a rumour that the English sf writer David Rome was living in St Kilda, and one day there he was at our door, explaining that his surname was Boutland and 'Rome' just one of his pennames; Peter Darling and Gary Mason posing for photos in the back yard, one of them holding up for examination the centrefold from the latest *Playboy*, then Leigh's turn, grinning as he demonstrated the only way to read Andre Norton's *The Sioux Spaceman* — upside down; the night that someone broke into my car and stole three books: when the police came I told them to look for someone who liked Hazlitt, Simon Raven and Mao Tse-tung, and they looked at me as though I had described a very suspicious character indeed, someone like me. I can't recall Bruce Gillespie visiting Redan Street, but he can. He had a mystical experience there with George Turner, Damien Broderick and Beethoven. I think we can rely on Bruce to tell us about that.

Just before we moved I did one of the worst things you can do to a friend: I sold my car to Tony. It was a Humber Super Snipe, a huge, impressive-looking car, six or seven years old when I bought it. It had belonged to one of the big oil companies, the salesman told me, and had always been chauffeur-driven. Maybe so, but it moved like a tank, and things kept going wrong with it. I decided to trade it on a VW. Tony asked if he could buy it for the trade-in price. I should have said no, but I didn't. A few weeks later he and Myfanwy set off on honeymoon, and the car self-destructed in some desolate place in the Western District.

The place in Redan Street was probably built in the early 1900s. There were four apartments, two up and two down, each with a big bedroom at the front, behind that the hallway and a huge lounge, a smaller bedroom and bathroom off the wide corridor, then a big kitchen and dining area, and at the back a pantry and a tiny bedroom, presumably for a servant. For our purposes it was ideal: three private spaces separated by large communal spaces. (Leigh cheerfully accepted the servant's room, and managed to fit his enormous collection of model aeroplanes and Andre Norton paper-

backs in it.) The place we moved to, about September 1968, was quite different. It had modern plumbing, for a start, and a laundry. It was one of a block of two-storey flats in Glen Eira Road, Elsternwick, just east of Hotham Street. It was almost house-sized, but not as big as Redan Street. Upstairs were three bedrooms and a bathroom, downstairs the lounge, a dining room and the kitchen. We converted the dining room into a bedroom for Diane and me, and I took one of the bedrooms upstairs for a work room.

The part that visitors seemed to like most was the staircase: Paul, Leigh and Diane used a variety of impromptu sleds on it, and most of our visitors couldn't wait to try it. Having stairs naturally meant that we had a cupboard under them, which we instantly dedicated to George Turner, but we usually referred to it as 'Dillon's Room'. Kevin Dillon was reputed to be able to sleep anywhere. For a few years afterwards the broom closet or other suitably small enclosure in most fannish households in Melbourne was called Dillon's Room. The practice continued in Adelaide, in Gary Mason's house at least.

When Ron Clarke visited us at Elsternwick we had a special insult ready for him: the latest issue of *The Mentor* was hung in the toilet, and above it the notice 'Emergency Use Only'. I can't recall whether Ron was amused or upset, or even whether he let on that he had noticed, but then that's the way I recall Ron generally. Ron had been talking for some time about starting an Australian apa. Whether he did anything but talk about it I don't know, but in the event it was Leigh who started APA-A (renamed ANZAPA by the third mailing), and that happened at Elsternwick in October 1968.

I forget how long ANZAPA's original constitution remained in force, but I remember very clearly where it was redrafted. Despite having a functioning laundry, while we were at Elsternwick we used to go to a laundromat just west of Hotham Street, and that's where Leigh and Paul and I rewrote the constitution. This is the kind of thing, Bruce Gillespie tells me, that it is essential to record for Australian Fannish Posterity. It would have been better recorded at the time, but unlike Bruce I don't keep a diary — and although I keep apa mailings, I keep them only in the very general sense that I don't throw them out. So I don't know when we rewrote the constitution, only where. Leigh and Paul went on using that laundromat after we parted company, and I sometimes joined them after Diane and I parted company, so it could have been as late as 1971.

At Redan Street we tended to congregate in the kitchen, at Elsternwick in the lounge room. Part of the reason for this, I realise now, is that even then I preferred to relax with my elbows on a table rather

than sit in a lounge chair. Another is that any fanzine-publishing household must have a collating table, and there was a lot of fanzine publishing going on at Redan Street, so one way or another we spent a lot of time at the kitchen table. At Elsternwick the only communal space was the lounge room, which also served as dining room and collating room. It was big enough for these things. At first the flat didn't seem big enough for Leigh's music and mine — a problem we hadn't struck at Redan Street, because there, if you happened not to like Shostakovich or Mahler, the Rolling Stones or Cream, you could go somewhere else in the house and not hear it. At Elsternwick there was nowhere to go, so we gradually got used to each other's music, learning what we could put up with and what we couldn't. When I was out, Leigh would play heavy metal; when Leigh was out, I would play Bruckner and Bach. One day I came in and found Leigh listening to a Mahler symphony — memory suggests (see how cautious I am becoming?) that it was the third. I have always thought of that moment as a turning point for Leigh: soon afterwards he was *devouring* classical music, learning piano, studying music with Felix Werder, composing music. But it might be closer to the mark to say that it was a turning point in my perception of Leigh: he was becoming his own person. I don't know when Leigh and I first talked about our view of life, or how often, but we agreed in general that it's a matter of deciding what things are important to you, then organising your life to make the most of those things. Over the next few years I watched Leigh doing that, while I fumbled opportunities and lurched from one crisis to the next.

Bernie Bernhouse, a regular visitor at Glen Eira Road, seemed to have unlimited access to the latest American records, and other exotic things, and he couldn't wait to share them with us. I listened with as much good grace as I could to his records — some I actually liked: Arlo Guthrie's *Alice's Restaurant*, for instance — and declined the other things. Late one night Bernie dropped in (having earlier, so to speak, dropped out) as I was listening to one of Bach's unaccompanied violin sonatas, and he couldn't believe his ears: he had never heard such sublime music, he said. And having heard it, he couldn't bear not to hear it again. He insisted I play it again, and again, and again, and sat there fiddling along with it and moaning with ecstasy and crying out 'Wow, man!' and the like. I don't know what he had dropped out with that night, but from then on he said mine was much better gear. Music also had the distinct advantage of being legal. Bernie was usually good company, mainly because he always seemed enthusiastic about something. When Leigh started recruiting members for ANZAPA — yeah, man! — Bernie was in like a shot.

He was listed as a member in the first mailing, but was too excited by ANZAPA to publish anything. As far as I know, Bernie is the only person who has been in ANZAPA without contributing to a mailing.

Damien Broderick was another regular visitor. It's odd to realise that he was only 24 at the time: he had already made his mark as a writer. None of us knew where Damien lived, but I had driven him home once and he asked to be let off at a telephone box in Prahran, so we decided that he lived in telephone boxes. Damien has never been a fannish fan. You can tell that from his novel *Transmitters* (1984), a delightful book, which is largely about fandom, very well researched, very funny, and contains almost recognisable portraits of many local fans, but when he attempts fannish humour it doesn't ring true: it always sounds like Damien, who is a great humorist in his own right, but fannish humour is a complex mixture of individual voices and shared allusions and in-jokes. Having said that, and recognising that Damien would probably prefer not to be thought of as a fan at all, I have to say that he provided the funniest occasion I can remember at Glen Eira Road. In *ASFR* 16 I had reviewed Philip Harbottle's *The Multi-Man*, an extensive annotated bibliography of John Russell Fearn. This project was greeted with disbelief in Melbourne, where the consensus was that Fearn, under his own name and as Volsted Gridban, Vargo Statten, Astron del Martia and others, was the worst sf writer the world has ever known. We must have been talking about him when Damien picked up a copy of Fearn's *The Intelligence Gigantic* and began reading it to us.

Three men stood quietly thoughtful in a wonderfully equipped laboratory, each holding in his hand a sheaf of papers upon which were executed abstruse mathematical formulae, and sections of the human anatomy, correct to an amazing degree.

The tallest of the three, Doctor Albert Soone, Professor of Chemical Research — a tall, broad-shouldered man of perhaps forty-three years — studied his own papers silently, his lofty forehead wrinkled into furrows of thought, his steel-grey eyes abstracted. The black hair seemed a trifle disordered.

Next to him, equally absorbed, was a much older man, possessing a far kindlier face, less severely chiselled — Professor Peter Ross, Master of Anatomical Research.

The third member of the group, David Elton, an exceptionally well-built young man with riotous fair hair, china-blue eyes, and a square, purposeful face, stood watching his seniors attentively, his hands sunk in the pockets of his laboratory smock.

Presently Dr Soone laid down his papers on the bench and regarded his two companions meditatively.

'Well, Dave,' he remarked at last, after a profound cogitation, 'You certainly have found something! Congratulations!'

The words were curtly spoken, in a cold voice.

That's about as far as Damien got, carefully enunciating every dreadful adverb and adjective, before he joined us in uncontrollable mirth. For weeks afterwards we had only to describe anyone or anything as 'less severely chiselled' and we would pack up all over again.

One night Dick Jenssen came to see us, a fairly rare occurrence. As I recall, the committee organising the 1969 Melbourne Easter convention met at our place, and Dick may have been a member of that committee. Dick (more formally Ditmar) was something of a legend among the older Melbourne fans. Along with Mervyn Binns, Race Mathews and others, he was a founder of the MSFC. I first met him at the Degraives Tavern (when it was still Jenny's Cellar) in late 1965 or early '66, and what I'd heard of him was true: he looked too young for his age, far too young to have a doctorate, and he could wiggle his ears at will. He had a wicked sense of humour, bordering on the perverse, and a repertoire of disgusting, brilliantly funny jokes. He was urbane — a perfect gentleman, Diane said. A meteorologist by profession, at the least prompting he would talk about the geometry of art, or classical music, or the secret life of Ludwig of Bavaria: he seemed to know everything. But his most passionate interests were sf and film. At our first meeting he talked about *Lawrence of Arabia*, which he had seen overseas. They cut the part where the Arab shoves a stick up his camel's arse, he said sadly. We didn't believe him: typical Jenssen humor. In 1992 I saw the uncut version of the film, and he was right. We always took Dick seriously, but we weren't always sure whether to take him literally. What he had to say that night, this cheerful, unfathomable man, was that we really should have our own equivalent of the Hugo Awards, to recognise Australian achievement in sf and to provide a distinctive Australian recognition of world achievement in sf. If we could work out a system of awards, he said, and he would help us with that, he would put up the cash for the trophies. You could call them Ditmar Awards, he said, with just the hint of a twinkle in his eyes. Twenty-four years on, we still have the Ditmar Awards. Well, not all of us: I have one, and Italo Calvino had one, and Gillespie seems to have the rest.

My Ditmar Award was for *ASFR*, which by then had become more of a burden to me than a pleasure. It had twice been nominated for a Hugo,

and I was proud of that. Many of my enduring friendships in the sf world were founded on it. But I simply couldn't afford it, and to tell the truth, I had become a little tired of sf and very tired of retyping other people's writing. I wasn't sure at first how much I wanted to be involved in ANZAPA as well, but the experience was liberating.

I enjoyed writing *The New Millennial Harbinger* for ANZAPA, and the reaction to it was very pleasing. Lee Harding wrote: 'Offhand I suppose I could think of a round dozen reasons for *ASFR* to fold; I had thought that *ASFR* 17 was the best reason yet. But now you've gone one better. The no.2 *Harbinger* is so good it makes one wonder why you persist in this pose of Guardian of SF. I enjoyed every word of this delightful effort — and the material was so

much more interesting than this weary old sf kick.' If you had had as much strife as I had with Lee over editorial policy you would have found that pleasing. John Foyster produced *ASFR* 19 in March 1969, and I did the final issue in June. That final issue had a photo of Thomas Love Peacock on the cover; looking at it today I remembered that it was originally meant to be the first issue of *Scythrop*. And *Scythrop* begat *Philosophical Gas*, and here we are.

According to Leigh Edmonds' list in mailing 64, I contributed 740 pages to ANZAPA in its first ten years. I suppose you could fairly call that active.

— **John Bangsund**, *Philosophical Gas* 84, February 1993

John Bangsund

Glimpses of a golden age: or, How I became an editor

fanzine (fæ.nzin), orig. U.S. [f. *FAN sb.2 + MAGA)-ZINE.] A magazine for fans, esp. those of science fiction.

Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary, vol. I (1972)

Oxford's first citation dates from 1949. Peter Roberts, in Peter Nicholls' *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* (1979), gives 1930 as the date of the first known fanzine and credits Russ Chauvenet with inventing the word in 1941. Peter Roberts continues:

[The] early fanzines were straightforward publications dealing exclusively with sf or amateur science and were produced by local fan groups founded in America by the more active readers of contemporary professional sf magazines. As interest grew, however, and sf fans formed closer contacts and friendships, individual fans began publishing for their own amusement and fanzines became more diverse, and their contents more capricious; fan editors also began to exchange fanzines and to send out free copies to contributors and letter-writers. Thus fanzines abandoned any professional aspirations in exchange for informality and an active readership — characteristics which persist to the present and which distinguish fanzines from

conventional hobbyist publications ... The smaller fanzines are often written entirely by the editor and serve simply as letter substitutes sent out to friends; others have limited distribution within amateur press associations such as FAPA.

A. Langley Searles (still publishing the *Fantasy Commentator*, the fanzine mentioned in Oxford's 1949 citation) and Russ Chauvenet (who invented the word) — and Bruce Gillespie, John Foyster and I — are among the 65 current members of FAPA (founded 1937). Fans have a word for this: time-binding. They also have a term for FAPA: elephants' graveyard. I have been a member since 1971, and I am one of the youngsters.

Bruce Gillespie publishes several fanzines, among them *SF Commentary* and *The Metaphysical Review*. In recent years he has published in the latter a kind of continuing anthology called 'The Best of John Bangsund'. *TMR*'s publication schedule is fortunately infrequent, so Bruce hasn't scraped the bottom of the barrel yet, but I thought he was going close to it a few months ago when he said he would like to reprint my first extended piece of fanzine writing — an account of my visit to the Adelaide Festival in 1964. Sir William Walton was one of the distinguished guests at that festival, so the piece was called 'Sir William and I in Adelaide'.

Bruce usually writes a few lines introducing his

selection; this time I volunteered to do it, and I finished up with an 1800-word article — which, with his permission, I am about to reprint. It's an essential part of the story of how I became an editor. What I wanted to do in the article is summed up in its title: it is said that the Golden Age of Science Fiction is 13; for me it came a little later.

Glimpses of a golden age

It's hard to believe now, but from 1961 to 1965 I was respectably employed as a librarian at the Victorian Railways Institute. In my spare time, which seemed endless, I read good books, listened to good music, watched good films, travelled a lot around Victoria, and wrote about these and other things in a diary. Something of a republican even then, when Queen Elizabeth visited Melbourne in 1962 I didn't stay in town for the show but went off to Portland, stayed in a cheap pub, and read nothing but Shakespeare for three or four days.

I lived alone, but I had a social life that now seems extraordinarily active. I joined the ALP, indeed belonged to the same branch as Barry Jones (then emerging as Australia's greatest TV quiz champion, now national president of the party). I was moderately active in Amnesty, writing swingeing letters to foreign dictators, who never wrote back. I went to concerts and films and exhibitions, usually with some bright girl I had met in the library. I did not watch television. I did not read science fiction. At a party in 1963 I met Lee Harding, a writer of science fiction. I was 24. My life was about to change in a way I could never have imagined.

'You go through Bayswater and head for The Basin,' Lee said when I accepted his invitation to dinner, 'you'll come to a service station on your right, then our place is the third house along. You can't see it from the road.' Lee and Carla's place was full of books and music, and I felt at home the moment I arrived. And we had so much to talk about! I believe I stayed the night. Lee was very tactful about science fiction, barely mentioning it. Knowing my background as a theological student, before I left Lee gave me a copy of Arthur C. Clarke's 'The Nine Billion Names of God' and invited me to comment some time on the theology in it. The hell with theology! I was suddenly and most unexpectedly hooked on science fiction. Lee introduced me to the best and most interesting writers, and I couldn't get enough of them. On a long trip to Queensland later that year I read nothing but sf. Some of the places I stayed in are linked still in my mind with the books I read there.

Lee also introduced me to fanzines and fandom, and eventually fans. I met the fans' voices first. Lee

was part of a round-robin continuing conversation on tape with John Foyster, John Baxter and Bob Smith. I think I met John Baxter first, on that trip to Queensland. We sat at either end of a sofa in his Sydney flat, sneaking glances at each other, because Lee had told us that we looked and talked alike. Apart from agreeing that we didn't, I remember little of that meeting with John Baxter. His interests overlapped with Lee's, but not much with mine.

I met John Foyster about Easter 1964. I couldn't quite relate the man to his voice or his fanzines, and didn't know what to make of him at all. He was the youngest of us. He seemed at once shy and arrogant, considerate and condescending. I had never met anyone with such a sharp wit. When I read Shelley's comment on his friend Peacock, 'His fine wit makes such a wound the knife is lost in it,' I thought instantly of Foyster. We established a mutual respect from the start, but it says something about both of us that I was surprised, years later, to realise that he had long regarded me as a friend: such a great honour I thought he bestowed sparingly. John Foyster is probably friend to more people than anyone else I know.

In 1963 Lee and Carla became, almost literally overnight, my best friends. Lee was an enthusiast, a man born to make discoveries and share them as quickly as possible, then move on to the next. I have something of that in my own nature, so Lee and I sparked each other off. I spent most weekends at Lee and Carla's place, and during the week Lee and I had long conversations on the telephone. 'Are you two lovers or something?' my mother once asked me — a question that embarrassed me no end. 'Tell her I've got a bum like a peach,' Lee suggested when I told him. He wasn't quite as fast as Foyster, but close.

As I recall, Lee didn't actively encourage me to write. In fact my first fanzine writing appeared in John Foyster's *Satura* — a letter or two, maybe other things. But I had been writing for years, in my diary and occasionally elsewhere, and I desperately wanted to convince Lee that I had at least the makings of a real writer, the sort of writer who could be published, perhaps even for money. One night I gave him a short story to read. He read it, in total silence. He finished it, got up quietly from his chair, walked quietly to the back door, opened it, and shouted into the night: 'Speeee-yew!' Well, I didn't think much of it either, but I was hoping for some sort of constructive comment. As he came back into the room and we fell about in convulsive laughter, I knew he had given me far more than that.

The third Adelaide Festival of Arts was held in March 1964. I took a fortnight's leave from the library and went to Adelaide. I had visited Adelaide three times before, during the 1950s, and had good

memories of the place. It is still my favorite Australian capital city. Sally and I lived there for a while in the late 70s, and would have stayed there indefinitely if there had been work for me. My budget for that trip in 1964 was minimal, though it seems luxurious now. I had paid for my train fare and modest accommodation, and for tickets to the main things I wanted to see, and had a few pounds left over. I did a lot of walking in Adelaide, far more than I could believe when I moved there twelve years later, but I was young then. It was early autumn. Everything about the place was luminous, golden: the train's early morning descent through the glorious Adelaide hills, the trees along the Torrens, the late sun on the city buildings, the day's memories as I returned to my little rented house in the caravan park at Hackney.

At the Railways Institute in Adelaide, where I was welcomed as an emissary from some higher plane of existence (my library had thirty branches, theirs none), I was given an office and a typewriter, and there I wrote another story, 'The Beheading of Basil Pott'. From that office, and from Hackney, I also wrote a lot of letters to Lee Harding. When I returned to Melbourne I couldn't believe Lee's excitement. He wanted to publish my story. He wanted to publish my letters. He wanted to publish a fanzine. He had published fanzines before, but nothing like what he had in mind now. This one would be something really special, and he would call it *Canto*.

The rest of 1964, outside of working hours, was mainly taken up with *Canto*, a lady named Carolyn, and a twelve-year-old car. 'Not an Alvis!' Lee cried in some mixture of disbelief and despair as I drove my limousine up his driveway at The Basin.¹ At least he knew what it was. I had long admired English grand touring cars, and in 1952 I had fallen in love with the Alvis TA-21 at the Melbourne Motor Show. I never thought I would own one, but there it was, in mid-1964, a snip at 500 pounds. Carolyn liked it. I had met Carolyn the night before I left for Adelaide, and I saw the Alvis in a used-car lot in Prahran one day on my way to her place. Lee, I think, never entirely approved of Carolyn or the Alvis.

One day Carolyn and I drove to Olympic Park to watch John Foyster running in an athletic meeting. We cheered John when we saw him, but he probably didn't hear us. Shortly after there was an announcement on the PA system: in a very plummy voice an official said that if anyone present owned a black Alvis sedan (not mine, I thought, mine is black and silver-grey), registration number WT-962 (but that is my number, I thought), they should inspect it at their earliest convenience, since it appeared to be on fire. The Alvis, it turned out, wasn't actually on fire, but was close to it. Both

Carolyn and I were smokers, and one of us had dropped live ash on a cloth that I kept under one of the front seats. The car was billowing smoke when we reached it. I doubt that John Foyster ran faster that day than I did.

Meanwhile, back at The Basin ... I was very fond of ellipses in those days. Lee didn't seem to mind them. I can't recall now whether Lee or I cobbled my Adelaide letters together to make up the piece we called 'Sir William and I in Adelaide', but I suspect I did. The uninspired introduction and ending are certainly mine. Rereading the piece after all these years was an unexpected pleasure: on the whole it is embarrassing, but I like its exuberance — and the touches of humour that creep in here and there between the bouts of labored witticism. But I must say that I have long since become very fond of Walton's music.

Canto 1 appeared early in 1965. As well as my piece on the Adelaide Festival, it included my Basil Pott story, a fannish comic strip based on Walt Kelly's *Pogo* characters that I did later in 1964, and pieces by Foyster, Bob Smith and Don Symons (a superb writer, known to the great world, if at all, as father of the musician Red Symons). For the second issue John Foyster wrote about Dame Joan Sutherland and Don Symons wrote about his career in gold smuggling, and other things were written or planned, but *Canto* 2 never appeared.

In 1966 John Foyster organised a science fiction convention, the first in Australia since 1958. Today's Australian fandom, and much of its science fiction, has its origins in that convention. In turn, that convention had some of its origins in a house near The Basin that you can't see from the road, and a caravan park in Hackney that has long since gone, and a fanzine that appeared just once.

How I became an editor

I became head librarian at the VRI in 1962. My predecessor, a man past retiring age, had run the Victorian branch of the Returned Servicemen's League from his office and more or less let the library run itself. I was very impressed by the activities of the VRI earlier in the century, when it was a workers' educational, cultural and recreational centre — part of the same movement as the Mechanics' Institutes. For years it ran lecture meetings, addressed by outstanding men (invariably men) from all fields of endeavour, and by all accounts the meetings were packed. I recall seeing Bernard O'Dowd's name² on one of the programs, and he was talking about poetry, not about parliamentary draftsmanship (his day job). There were concerts. The library thrived: among its old books that had survived was a huge leather-bound set of

Wagner's operas; the dates stamped in the volumes were many. In 1962 the two main activities of the Institute were industrial training (courses on signalling, basic electricity and the like) and sport. The library's annual loan rate had peaked during the Depression, fallen slowly during the 1940s and 50s, and by comparison had all but collapsed after 1956, when television came to Melbourne. I felt like changing some of this, and I did.

I removed the maze of balustrades and grilles from the library, changing it from a fortress into a big open space. I hung framed prints of early Melbourne about the place and brought in armchairs and a goldfish tank. I set up a collection of children's books. I abolished the Dewey system from the small nonfiction section, and doubled its size. My predecessor had kept the motor-repair manuals in a locked cupboard in his office; I put them out on the shelves, and increased the section tenfold. I wrote a book column for the Railways Newsletter and ran ads for the library in the weekly gazette. I founded the VRI Music Club, organising regular concerts in the library of recorded classical music, and wrote the program notes for them. I visited the branch libraries much more often than they were used to, and upgraded their collections. I encouraged the opening of new branches. My reward for all this was suspicion from the general office and enthusiasm from the library's users. By 1965 the annual loan rate had shot up to a figure approaching those of the early 1950s, and my expenditure on acquisitions had set entirely new records. By 1965 I knew I wanted to be a book editor. The general office was pleased to see me go.

The library was unusual in that it was able to buy books directly from publishers at trade rates. This meant that publishers' sales reps visited me regularly, and they usually went away happy. The reps were mostly interesting blokes (all men, yes), but I was surprised at how unbookish most of them were. When I mentioned this to Jim Ellis,³ one of the reps from Cassell, he said that booksellers were much the same: among the people he called on there were only three who were good for a bookish conversation, and I was one of them. He could talk at length with anyone about the trade and books in general, but with me he could talk about Dostoevsky and Iris Murdoch, Nietzsche and Michael Innes, Joyce Cary and Kazantzakis and Camus. Jim was a bright, gentle, witty man, and we got on famously. He liked *Canto* when I gave him a copy. (So did Max Harris in Adelaide. On the strength of my drawings in *Canto* he commissioned me to illustrate an article by Andrew Fabinyi in *Australian Book Review*. I have not been commissioned to illustrate anything since, with good reason.)

Canto 2 went unpublished mainly, I think, be-

cause Lee Harding lost interest, or simply couldn't afford it, but in some part (I didn't want to cloud the 'golden age' with this kind of talk) because I hated the way he edited me — my writing and even my drawings. Lee's writing has always been good, in recent years very good indeed; his *Displaced Person* hasn't been out of print since it won the Children's Book of the Year award in 1980. But when it came to editing, in 1965 anyway, Lee had a tin ear. He was an interventionist editor, as every editor must be at times, but he didn't know how to intervene sympathetically. He seemed to have no respect for other people's writing, which to my mind was the first duty of an editor: not that their words are sacred, but neither are they raw material. I was sure that I could out-edit Lee any time, and Jim Ellis encouraged me in this belief.

Jim also encouraged me in the belief that I could get into book-editing by the back door. Australian publishing was still in its infancy, but there were signs that it was about to grow up in a hurry. Jim and I were confident that if I could get some kind of job in publishing, sooner or later my talents would be recognised. So I went to Cassell and began my short career as the world's worst sales representative. Oh, I wasn't that bad, but I didn't have the killer instinct needed for the work — and I wasn't helped by Cassell's firm-sale policy. When you ordered books from Cassell you were stuck with them; other publishers were experimenting with sale-or-return, but not Cassell. During my two years with the company they introduced something much more controversial — the closed market. This relieved booksellers of the burden of overstocking, but it also reduced their profit margin. The retail price of a book had always been twice its landed cost; in the closed market that price remained the same, but the bookseller's margin was reduced from half to one-third. The truly professional booksellers protested mightily. Frank Cheshire, one of the most successful and influential booksellers in Melbourne, caused a sensation in the trade when he stopped buying books from Cassell. (But he went on buying Cassell's books, through Oxford University Press. Oxford were in a building close to Cheshire's main shop, and Frank Eyre and Frank Cheshire were good friends.)

This isn't telling you much about how I became an editor, but it may explain the kind of editor I became. I wasn't interested in the politics of publishing, or for that matter the business of publishing — more exactly, I wasn't interested in getting involved in such things and turning them to advantage. I was interested in the books themselves, and in doing what I could to get the books to the people who wanted them. I had done this at the library; I went on doing it at Cassell. When advance copies of the Jerusalem Bible arrived at

Cassell no-one knew what to do with them: the company already had Eyre & Spottiswoode's real Bibles, and sold them in great quantities; what could they do with a new translation from Darton, Longman & Todd — and a Catholic translation at that? I went to Melbourne's biggest Catholic bookshop, took an order for a thousand copies, and listened to what I was told about this Bible. And I read it, and loved the translation. I sold hundreds of copies to religious booksellers, and dozens to general booksellers, and single copies to little country bookshops and newsagencies in three States, from Albany to Orbost to Ulverstone (five States if you count places like Albury and Mount Gambier, which were on my country runs); by the time I left Cassell I had sold about three thousand copies. DL&T also published things like *The Ancrene Rewle*, translated by Tolkien, and I sold a swag of those too. Cassell were lucky to have a former theological student on their sales staff; otherwise they might have lost the agency. I was lucky I did so well with the religious list; otherwise I might have lost my job much earlier.

A new sales rep was taken on in 1967 while I was in Western Australia, and by the time I returned he had sold vast quantities of books to people I had already called on with the same list. He knew nothing about books, but he could sell anything to anyone. Soon afterwards Jim Moad called me to his office and encouraged me to resign. Jim had worked his way up from storeman to sales rep to sales manager to managing director of Cassell Australia. Jim said he had hoped I would go a long way in the company. I said I had enjoyed being a rep, even if I wasn't much good at it, but what I really wanted was to be an editor. Jim was sympathetic — but life wasn't like that, he said; sometimes it wasn't possible to do what you want to do; what he really wanted to do, he said, was play the stock market. Instead of which, I thought, you are stuck here as Australian head of a great publishing house. The irony of it! — the absurdity! I went off and got a job as production scheduler at a Dunlop tyre factory. It was great: I could do a week's work in two days and spend the rest of the time reading.

The first book editors I ever met were Andrew Fabinyi and David New, at Cheshire's in 1959. Six years later I met Bob Sessions, the editor at Cassell. I volunteered to read proofs, and enjoyed such books as Peter Mathers' *Trap* and Thomas Keneally's *Bring Larks and Heroes*. I gave Bob a long list of queries for Keneally, and I believe Keneally accepted some of my suggestions. I can't recall Bob encouraging my ambition to be an editor. Maybe he did, in a general way. If he didn't, I wouldn't blame him. I was generally regarded as a bit of an oddball around the place anyway, a salesman who read the books but didn't sell many, a staff junior

who discussed music with David Ascoli (Cassell UK sales director, and translator of the German musicologist Alfred Einstein), a practising agnostic who talked theology with religious booksellers, and a science fiction nut.

The science fiction convention at Easter 1966, held in McGill's Newsagency's warehouse in Somerset Place, was an extraordinary event. It was, as I've said, the first in Australia since 1958, and there was something of the atmosphere of a revival meeting about it, a wonderful feeling of something happening, a powerful sense of fellowship. Towards the end, when we were discussing whether to hold another convention next year and generally what to do next, I suggested that we could keep up the momentum and preserve some of the feeling of community by publishing a fanzine. The idea was well received, and people instantly started nominating editors: Harding! Ron Clarke! Baxter! Broderick! But over them all Lee Harding was saying — very clearly, magisterially even — 'I nominate John Bangsund. 'And so', John Foyster wrote two years later, 'the die was cast, since when the cast has been dying.' The die was cast indeed: that was the moment when I became an editor.

It's always fun thinking of titles for things, and there was no shortage of suggestions for the title of this fanzine. For a while I seriously considered *Jindivik*, which had a nice Australian sound and a connotation of flight. Unfortunately it was the name of a flying drone used by the military for target practice, so that was out. In my wilder moments I toyed with *The Invisible Whistling Bunyip*. If you have read Edmund Wilson on H. P. Lovecraft you will know where that came from. But on the principle that if you can't think of a name that is both clever and obvious, forget clever and go for obvious, I called it *Australian Science Fiction Review*.

The first issue appeared in June 1966. It ran 32 quarto pages and was printed on the Melbourne SF Club's Roneo duplicator in McGill's warehouse. I had typed most of the stencils in the basement of the Commercial Travellers' Club in Perth. The contributors included Brian Aldiss, Michael Moorcock, Langdon Jones, John Baxter, John Foyster, Lee Harding, Jim Ellis (as 'Jay Wallis') and Bob Sessions (as 'Scribarius') — and Stephen Murray-Smith (a quote, with his blessing, from *Overland* 33) and Bernard O'Dowd (his poem 'Australia', probably reprinted with Lothian's permission, but maybe not). My editorial started and ended with quotes from Sean O'Casey. One of Lee's reviews had the title 'Communist Chulpex Raped My Wife!' Such things more or less set the tone of *ASFR* from the beginning: it was concerned with science fiction as literature; it was irreverent, often funny, serious about everything and grave about nothing;

it was unashamedly Australian, and its outlook was international.

One day in 1967 Bob Sessions said ‘Do you know that George Turner is one of your mob?’ Which mob? All I knew about George Turner was that he was a Cassell author who had shared a Miles Franklin Award with Thea Astley, and that his latest novel, *The Lane Dog Man*, was due out soon. Bob was working on the jacket copy, and he showed me what George had written about himself: he was a science fiction addict. So I arranged to meet George Turner, and we had a good talk and I gave him a set of *ASFR* (and I met his dog Caesar:⁴ ‘Don’t encourage him,’ George said as Caesar placed his great paws about my neck and licked my face), and that meeting accidentally launched George’s distinguished career as a critic and eventually writer of science fiction.

That is one of the best things that came out of *ASFR*.⁵ Here is another. In February 1967 I wrote about two novels, *Planet of Exile* and *Rocannon’s World*, and I said ‘I feel sure Ursula K. Le Guin will go a long way’ — one of my better predictions. We struck up a correspondence later that year, and in 1973 she agreed to come to Australia as our guest of honor if we won our bid to hold the 1975 World Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne. We won, Ursula came to Melbourne, and I had the privilege of handing her the Hugo Award for best sf novel of 1974, *The Dispossessed*. While Ursula was here she ran a workshop for aspiring sf writers, the first of a number conducted by distinguished local and overseas writers. Her influence on Australian sf is incalculable. But it wasn’t simply a matter of a bunch of Melbourne fans saying ‘Let’s put on a World Convention, let’s get Ursula LeGuin as guest of honor’ and just doing it: you need funding for a scheme like that. The committee applied to the Literature Board. Nancy Keesing was chairman of the board at the time. In a review of George Turner’s *In the Heart or In the Head* in *Overland* 97 (1984), Nancy said that it was *ASFR* and other fanzines I had sent her that persuaded the board to give us a grant.

Now you know about fanzines, or about one of mine anyway.⁶ On the strength of *ASFR* I got a job as assistant editor of Materials Handling & Packag-

ing; on the strength of that I got a job at the *Age*; on the strength of that, and a rigorous test, in 1972 I got a job as a Hansard subeditor in Canberra; from there I moved over the road to the Australian Government Publishing Service, where I first enjoyed the title of editor; from there I moved to Rigby in Adelaide; I went freelance in Adelaide in 1976, returned to Melbourne in 1978, worked part-time as assistant editor of *Meanjin* from 1988 to 1992, and now you know the lot, or most of it anyway. Since *ASFR* it has all been down hill, and I should have stayed in the library, or the tyre factory, but some people never know when they’re well off and I’m one of them and that’s how I became an editor.

Notes

- 1 When my father died in 1965 I reluctantly sold the Alvis and acquired his Morris 1100. Apart from a self-destructing Humber, I have since driven eminently sensible cars.
- 2 Bernard O’Dowd and I lived in the same suburb, I learnt after his death in 1953. If by some chance I had visited him in his ‘crag of a house’ at 155 Clarke Street, Northcote, he might have shown me his letters from Walt Whitman (1819–92). So often we live so close to a distant past without knowing it; our elderly neighbours in Adelaide possessed a letter written to an elderly friend of their youth by the founder of Adelaide, Colonel William Light (1786–1839).
- 3 Jim Ellis died in 1979, in his mid 40s.
- 4 Caesar, a Great Dane, played an important role in George’s *Transit of Cassidy* (1978), published by Bob Sessions at Nelson.
- 5 *Australian Science Fiction Review* ran for twenty issues. The last appeared in 1969. A second series of *ASFR* was published from 1986 to 1991 by an editorial collective including John Foyster, Yvonne Rousseau, Jenny and Russell Blackford, Lucy Sussex and Janeen Webb.
- 6 No, I gave up reading science fiction long ago, except some of my friends’.

— **John Bangsund**, *The Society of Editors Newsletter*, September 1992

John Bangsund's poetry corner

Coming Up for Blair A Song of J. Prufred Alfrock

For Damien Broderick

'Mistah Brando — he dead'

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evenings are hung out again to dry
Like impatient either-ors upon a table ...

We can't.

Why not?

We're waiting for Frodo.

Let us go, through certain half-decided
pages,
The muttering last stages
Of nestless rites in cheap three-day
conventions
And sordid affairs that no-one mentions:
Pages that follow like a tedious agreement
On innocuous content
And draw you to a listless but compulsive
question ...
Oh, do not ask 'But can you draw well?'
Let us go and see George Orwell.

We can't.

Why not?

We're waiting for Michelangelo.

In the room the women, gaunt and raw,
Talk of 1984.
On the road the men, debased and drear,
Go down and out to Wigan Pier.
At Father Bob's Anomaly Farm
Dazed Burmese (who mean no harm)
Pay homage to catatonia: there's laughter
(But the clergyman's dafter).

Inside, the wailing Jonahs fly
Their withered aspidistras high ...

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
What was it that made Oscar wild?
That tint of sky that Prussians call their blue?
But let us go now (me and you),
Through certain half-deserted alleys,
Singing the Ballad of Reading Galleys.

We can't.

Why not?

We're waiting for Marlo.

To live in the midst of the incomprehensible,
The detestable,
That fascinates even as you abominate it ...
Imagine: the regrets, the longing to escape,
The powerless disgust, the surrender,
The hate ... the smell
Of napalm in the morning. (He paused.)
The rest is sea-story.

I grow bald ... I grow stout ...
I have worn the bottoms of my trousers out.
But let us take the air, in a tobacco trance,
And watch the mermaids dance.

I do not think that they will dance for me.

Why not?

Ain't mermaids.

What then?

Whiting.

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the
This is the
Not with a but a

—John Bangsund, Philosophical Gas 79, May 1990

THE ORSTRALIAN NOTIONAL ANTHEM

Orstralia! Orstralia!
Yer know we'll never fail yer!
We'll fight for yer and die for yer
Whene'er yer foes assail yer!
Our sunburnt land is green in spots,
There's gold in sand - and we've got lots,
We're big on Truth and Liberty:
Orstralia is the place for we!

The East is red, the South is not -
This is the Land That Time Forgot.
But Time has caught up with us now
And we're all reading Chairman Mao.
Yes, Time has caught up with us now,
And we're all reading Chairman Mao,
But Chairman Mao is rather bleak,
So now and then we read Newsweek.

With E.G.Whitlam at our head
We'll soon be either red or dead;
Whichever it turns out to be,
It is our modest Destiny.

Whichever it turns out to be,
It is our modest Destiny -
But Destinies are born, not made,
So ours will likely be mislaid.

We've all got homes and cars and jobs;
We're all right, Jack - but we're not snobs!
If everyone was like we are
This World would be Utopia!
If everyone was like we are
This World would be Utopia!
There'd be a lot less strife and fuss
If everyone was just like us!

Orstralia! Orstralia!
Yer know we'll never fail yer!
We'll fight for yer and die for yer
Whene'er yer foes assail yer!
Our blokes are beaut, our sheilas grouse,
And we have got an Opera House -
And pies with sauce, and BHP:
Orstralia is the place for we!



- Copyright © John Bangsund 1972
First public performance: Melbourne Science
Fiction Convention, Easter 1973

Although John Bangsund forgets to mention it in the articles reprinted here, his 'Notional Anthem', written to celebrate the ascension in December 1972 of E. G. Whitlam and the first Labor government in Canberra for umpteen years, remains one of his best-remembered compositions. The tune is 'O Tannenbaum'. It has been published widely, and sung badly at several conventions, often with Bill Wright as conductor.

John Bangsund's cartoon corner

When the cartoons on this page were first published, it would not have been necessary to explain them. But that was in 1970, whose Easter Convention they illustrate. John reprinted them in *Bundalohn Quarterly* 4, October 1972. At the 1970 Melbourne Easter Convention (Cinecon), the bid to hold Aussiecon in 1975 was launched.

Top left: John Bangsund welcomes New York fan Hank Davis, who had taken illegal time off from Vietnam War R&R in Sydney to attend the convention in Melbourne.

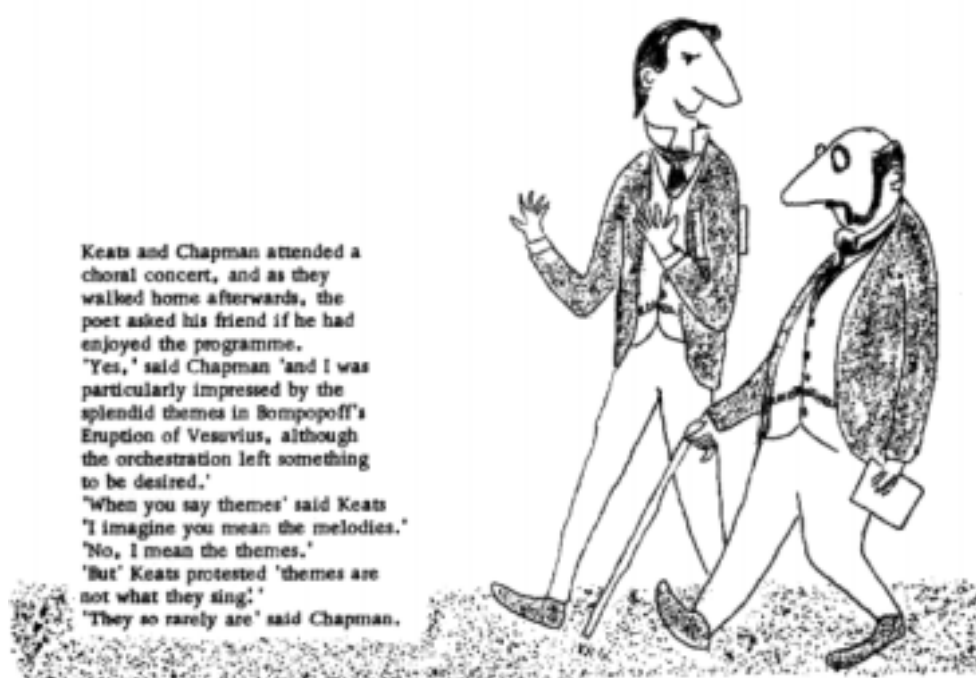
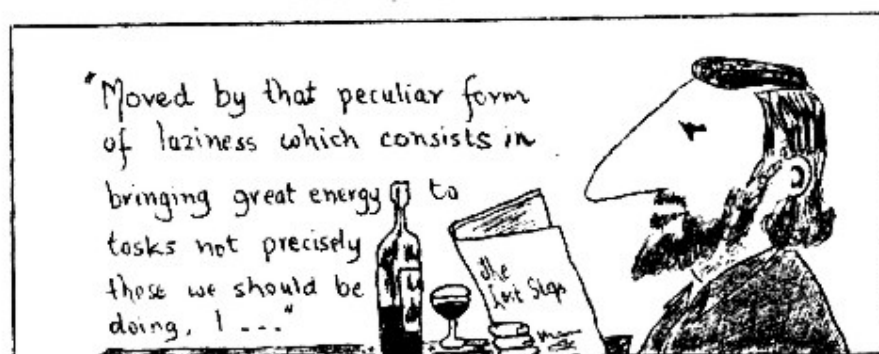
Top right: John Foyster interviews Artemis Crutch, ace SF writer (Lee Harding).

Below left: John Bangsund attempts to run the Business Session, with much help from John Foyster.

Below right: Merv Binns fears bankruptcy because of running Cinecon, which showed lots of movies. Convention attendees complained of having to pay \$9 per person to attend the four-day convention.



Another selection of John Bangsund cartoons



Glimpses of a golden age

(Top left:) Early 1960s: John Bangsund. (Photo: Dick Jenssen.)

(Top right:) Easter 1968: John Bangsund welcomes a group of fans to Wilson Street, Ferntree Gully, before the Melbourne Easter Conference of that year. (Photo: Gary Mason.)

(Below left:) August 1972, Sydney: Lee Harding and John Bangsund at the Costume Ball, Syncon 2. (Photo: official Syncon photographer.)

(Below right:) August 1972, Syncon 2 Awards Ceremony. John Bangsund gives Bruce Gillespie his very first Ditmar Award for Best Fanzine (*SF Commentary*). (Photo: Gary Hoff.)



Glimpses of a golden age



(Left:) John Bangsund and Sally Yeoland, soon after they met in 1973. (Photo: John Litchen.)

(Middle:) 1982: (l. to r.): John Foyster, Damien Broderick, John Bangsund. (Seated): Carey Handfield. (Photo: Elaine Cochrane.)

(Below left:) 1997: John Bangsund during a visit by various fans with Christina Lake to Fyansford, Geelong. (Photo: Christina Lake.)

(Below right:) Two Chandler Award winners: John Bangsund and Mervyn Binns. (Photo: Helena Binns.)

