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It was preceded by the following header.

RIP John Lambert

Former Director of the University's computing Centre John Lambert, who passed away in May last year, had a long and distinguished association with the University. His work with computers at Callaghan continued beyond his official retirement, as the following tribute written by **Alexis Antonia** reveals. Alexis, from the Centre for Literary and Linguistic Computing worked with John from 1980 to 2001.

Working with John

1980-2001

It was with some trepidation that I prepared for my first meeting with John Lambert, the then Director of the University of Newcastle's Computing Centre. I needn't have worried. John quickly put us at ease and assured us that our total unfamiliarity with the Brave New World of computing didn't matter at all. I had just been appointed as a Research Assistant to the then Professor of English, John Burrows, who had recently received a grant to do computer assisted analysis of Jane Austen's novels.

In those days the Computing Centre consisted of a mainframe machine connected to a number of Visual Display Units. Very few people (certainly no one in the humanities) had their own VDU. There were perhaps ten of these "magic machines" available for general use in a room near the Computing Centre. It should not have surprised us that the Director of the Computing Centre took a personal interest in our project. One of John Lambert's most endearing qualities was the possession of an open enquiring mind: - he was interested in, and knowledgeable about all manner of things. Happily for us, one of his pet interests was the English language. I was recently informed that John's interest in Computing in the Humanities predated his association with us. Apparently, when the very first computer appeared on campus, only three people were permitted to use it: (two mathematicians – John Lambert and Warren Brisley, and a metallurgist – Eric Hall). When they decided to write a concordance program, John tested it on a phrase from Beowulf, much to the delight of the University's inaugural Vice Chancellor, James Auchmuty.

During the early years of our research, John Lambert was always available to us. No problem was too small or trivial; nothing was too much trouble for

him. Open-handedly, he rendered us invaluable computing and statistical assistance. This initial work culminated in the publication of John Burrows' 1987 book "*Computation into Criticism. A Study of Jane Austen's novels and an Experiment in Method.*" A special research centre (The Centre for Literary and Linguistic Computing) was established on campus to facilitate the continuation of work with what has become known as the "Burrows' Method." When John Lambert retired as Director of the Computing Centre the CLLC was quick to take advantage of his interest in our work and secured his services as a casual part-time programmer.

The acquisition of John's expertise was both felicitous and timely. At that stage the CLLC was one of the heaviest users of the VAX system with a whole range of programs that were VAX dependent. When it became clear that PCs were to become the preferred way of computing, John started to rewrite our programs for the PC. Miraculously – it seemed to us – he had the new programs up and running just as the plugs were pulled on VAX. Ever a perfectionist, John kept improving our suite of programs right up until his untimely death. Always looking to the future, he had begun work on a program for converting our electronic texts to TEI format.

Working with John after his 'official' retirement gave me some insight into what an amazing, many-sided person he was. First and foremost came his family:- his wife, children and grandchildren were a constant source of pride and pleasure. He gloried in them and their achievements. The University – with which John had been associated since its inaugural days at Tighes Hill – was important to him, and he gave it unstinting service. His work for the Union was recognised with the naming of the Lambert Lounge in his honour. He acted as Treasurer for the Friends of the University, producing the best reports and newsletters etc. that computer technology could provide. He was Web Master for the Faculty of Arts and Social Science and freely gave his time and expertise to any Department which required it. For many years John was called upon to run teaching seminars on *Excel*, one of his many areas of expertise. He regularly lunched with members of the retired lecturers association, so acting as a link between the University's past and present.

John was so full of life that his sudden death in May 2001 took me totally by surprise. Even now, almost a year later, I miss working with John.

Alexis Antonia