



# Title 332

“Scientific Researches!” a caricature of a lecture at the **Royal Institution** by James Gillray 1802. The lecturer was Dr Thomas Garnett, his assistant Humphrey Davy standing behind him with bellows, the Founder, Count Rumford, is at the door and the fashionable audience included Lord Stanhope. On 10 February 1984, 182 years later, the Author was greatly honoured to be invited to give a formal lecture on “Scientific Medals” at the same Institution, from the same bench. *Original coloured etching from the Author’s Collection.*

The year began with very sad news. My son Robert, then 33 years old, died in January tragically in Sydney at his mother's home where he lived.

My oldest daughter Frances Barbara, 36 years old, married to Geoffrey Wells, lived happily in Launceston, Tasmania, where I was able to visit them in April 1984. She worked there at a Marine-biological Research Institute and Geoffrey was employed as an executive in the Australian forest-product industry. I spent a delightful week with them in their pretty wooden home.

My younger daughter Angela Diana, 32 years old and unmarried, received the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree from the Macquarie University, Sydney, on 3 May 1984. I was able to be present at the Ceremony and of course at the party and festivities which followed. Her thesis for the degree was *When is a story not a story? A study of the TV News Item*. It was 161 pages long with many diagrams and I was much impressed with her choice of subject and contents. At the time Angie was employed by the Australian Broadcasting Commission as 'Pronunciation Research Officer' and 'Assistant to the Standing Committee on English as spoken in Australia'. For a time she had her own weekly programmes on these subjects.

My Friday Evening Discourse at the Royal Institution, London on 10 February 1984 was, and will be, the greatest scientific honour of my life. These Discourses, started more than 150 years ago by Michael Faraday, are prescribed to last exactly 60 minutes, not a second less and not a second more. A clock strikes 9 o'clock in the evening, the doors open at the first stroke of the bell, the lecturer strides to the table speaking his opening sentence without any polite preamble to the audience. The clock strikes again at 10 o'clock and the lecturer falls silent with the last stroke. It is a formal black-tie occasion, ladies in evening dress, without any questioning of the lecturer, his address being expected to be perfect, without any doubts to be elucidated subsequently. A dinner with the Director, in my case Sir George Porter, preceded the lecture. I had two slide projectors, showing obverse and reverse of my 60 scientific medals simultaneously, and had rehearsed to devote 60 seconds to each medal. It worked perfectly. I spoke about "The Medals of Science".

My second invitation to lecture that year was at the Australian Counter-Disaster College, Mount Macedon, Victoria, on 26 April at a Conference entitled "Human Behaviour during Disaster". I chose as title for my contribution "Interdisciplinary Disaster Research" and published an abstract in ISR 9/3, in September 1984. I had stopped two days in Darwin on my way round the world and there interviewed the Northern Territory Emergency Authorities to determine what lessons had been learnt since Cyclone 'Tracy' destroyed Darwin in 1974. My conclusion was: Hardly any. [See Title 315]