

Engagements and Encounters with Professor Rodney Needham: Retrospective Thoughts on Correspondence 1971-1997

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ABSTRACT

Rodney Needham was an outstanding scholar and someone who embarked ambitiously on fieldwork among the Penan in the early 1950s, when they were a remote hunting-gathering population in interior Sarawak. He also spent time with Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia and then went on to undertake a study in Sumba, eastern Indonesia. However, he gained his reputation from his meticulous and exacting work in structural anthropology, symbolic classification and the examination and understanding of the “fundamental structures of the human mind”. He did much more, in bringing French and Dutch structuralism to an Anglophone audience and promoting the work of those he felt to be neglected in anthropological circles, and those whose work he translated and edited from Dutch, German and French, including Claude Lévi-Strauss. This paper records edited correspondence with Rodney Needham from 1971 to 1997, which expresses his humanity, his propriety, his willingness to guide and advise and to give his time freely. It gives expression to some of the developing thoughts and perspectives of a leading scholar of anthropology in the second half of the twentieth century. It also demonstrates his sustained interest in the Penan, Sarawak and the wider Borneo during his long career from 1950.

Keywords: Rodney Needham, Penan, structuralism, symbolic classification, human thought, correspondence

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Some of Rodney Needham's Achievements

Professor Rodney Needham (born Rodney Phillip Needham Green) was an enormously significant presence in Southeast Asian anthropology, which included Borneo ethnography, and more importantly structural anthropology, the analysis of symbolic classification, relationship

terminologies and categories, and an examination of “the fundamental structures of the human mind” (although subsequently, he had major differences with Claude Lévi-Strauss (see, for example, Needham 1958, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1973a, 1973b, 1975a, 1986; Lévi-Strauss 1967 [1969]; and see also Dumont 1971; Fox 2019; Hugh-Jones 2008, Korn and Needham 1969; Leach 1970). Needham says, in his Editor’s Note and *postscriptum* to the 1969 translation of Lévi-Strauss’s *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1947, 1949, 1967),

In the new preface, which he modified especially for this edition and which was not supplied until after the translation and editing had been reported complete, Professor Lévi-Strauss indirectly charges the editor with a ‘fundamental misunderstanding’ of the very title and subject matter of the book, and imputes to him (admittedly in excellent company) a fallacious assimilation of elementary structures to prescriptive marriage which is alleged to have seriously misled later commentators on the theory. Readers who may therefore be justifiably uneasy that the editor should have assumed particular responsibility for the theoretical accuracy of the rendering of the argument will doubtless appreciate the assurance, for the present, that wherever the idea of prescription appears in this edition (see index s. v.) it is a literal translation from the French. For example, when in the opening lines of the work Professor Lévi-Strauss defines ‘elementary structures’ as ‘those systems which prescribe marriage with a certain type of relative’ (p. xxiii), this is a direct translation of his original and unamended words: ‘les systèmes prescrivent le mariage avec un certain type de parents’ (1949: ix; 1967: ix). It may be found informative, also, to refer to the only place at which Professor Lévi-Strauss has previously defended his argument, where he writes that if an alternative theory proposed by certain critics, in terms of psychological ‘preference’, were correct, matrilineal marriage would indeed be more frequent ‘but it would not need to be prescribed’ (Needham 1969: xx).

Rodney Needham also provided an important connection between Anglo-French structuralism and that which emerged from the Netherlands in the 1930s in the work of J.P. B. de Josselin de Jong (1935, 1952) and then later P.E. de Josselin de Jong (1972, 1977, 1985, de Josselin de Jong and Schwimmer 1993; King 1978a, 1983a; and see Barnes 1985a, 1985b; Fox 2002; Oosten 2006; Visser and Moyer 1999). His mentors during his early years in Oxford had been A.R. [Alfred Reginald] Radcliffe-Brown, as his supervisor for his BLitt/MLitt thesis on the Nagas of the Indo-Burma Border (1950), E.E. [Edward Evan] Evans-Pritchard, as the senior professor at the Institute of Social Anthropology, Oxford from 1946 to 1970, and Louis [Charles Jean] Dumont, his doctoral supervisor (Needham 1953; and see, Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950; Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940; Dumont 1970 1966, 1980). They turned to Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Robert Hertz and to those who published in *Année Sociologique*, and then to Claude Lévi-Strauss for inspiration.

One of Rodney’s masterpieces which impressed me in my early days as an anthropologist, was *Structure and Sentiment: A Test Case in Anthropology* (1962). Louis Faron says of this, in his review, “This is a scrupulously argued essay, containing an imposing array of finely articulated data which demonstrates the heuristic merit of structural analysis as against the so-called ‘psychological explanation’ of social institutions and their supposed genesis” (1962: 217). Faron continues, [Needham’s] book is “a trenchant, head-on criticism of Homans and Schneider’s *Marriage, Authority and Final Causes: A Study of Unilateral Cross-Cousin Marriage*...[1955].... [Needham] maintains a devastating proposition ‘that its conclusions are fallacious, its method

unsound and the argument literally preposterous” (Faron, *ibid*; Needham 1962: 1, 1963; also see Coult 1962, 1963, 1965; Löffler 1964; Maybury-Lewis 1965; Wilder 1964). Perhaps it is worth mentioning an extract from Richard Milner’s sympathetic obituary of Allan Coult, bearing in mind Coult was critical of Needham; it addresses Coult’s very sad premature death.

On my desk is Allan's obituary, clipped from the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The article mentions the 1966 Meetings of the American Anthropological Association in Pittsburgh at which he organized a special session on "Psychedelic Anthropology". According to the *Chronicle*, "Dr Coult caused a flurry (at the meetings) when he said his own use of drugs had convinced him the experience helped him understand the mainsprings of human culture". Then a member of the faculty of the State University of New York, he said: 'The anthropologist's first field trip should not be to Africa or South America or Japan, but into the hidden primitive layers of his own mind" (Milner 1970: 51).

For me, Needham’s other influential publications included the Introduction to his edited volume *Rethinking Kinship and Marriage* (1971a), followed by *Belief, Language and Experience* (1972), and then *Remarks and Inventions. Skeptical Essays about Kinship* (1974a). His paper on age, category and descent in the BKI, was so relevant and exemplary to further our understanding of the social organization of Borneo and other cognatic societies in Southeast Asia (1966a); and his thoughtful essays on "Polythetic Classification" (1975a) and "Skulls and Causality" (1976a). My admiration for Rodney Needham’s work is boundless and I should have written more about this in earlier years. Nevertheless, he influenced me greatly, though I was not one of his students (see King 1977a, 1980a, 1985a, 1985b; King and Wilder 2003: 117-118, 122-130).

His thought-provoking short essays, in his later years, which demonstrated that he had a strategy to impose himself on the development of anthropology, also guided me in my teaching and research, and I used these regularly in my second-year undergraduate courses, Principles of Social Organisation and Social Change in South-East Asia, and my first- and third-year lectures on The Peoples and Cultures of South-East Asia and The Anthropology of Southeast Asia at the Universities of Hull, Leeds, Chiang Mai, and Universiti Brunei Darussalam (Needham 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1987a).

In addition, I referred regularly to his translations and editions of prominent anthropologists, philosophers and scholars in my teaching and research, including Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss (1963 [1903]); Robert Hertz (1960 [1907, 1909]); A. M. [Arthur Maurice] Hocart (1970a [1952], 1970b [1936]; Needham 1967a, 1987b; Beidelman 1972; Laughlin 2018); Claude Lévi-Strauss (1964 [1962], 1969 [1947, 1949, 1967]; and see de Josselin de Jong 1952; Fox 2019; Hugh-Jones 2008; Korn 1973; Obadia 2012; Scheffler 1970); Dr. P.H. [Pieter Hendrik] Pott (1966 [1946]); Hans Schäfer (1963 [1946]); Carl Nicolai Starcke (1976 [1888]); Arnold [Charles-Arnold Kurr] van Gennep, the Franco-German-Dutch ethnographer (1967 [1911]); though Needham also much admired van Gennep’s *Rites of Passage* (1960 [1980, 1909]) he did not translate it; and see Belmont (1979 [1974]; Kertzer 1980; Rearick 1975; Rothem and Fischer 2018; Szokolczai and Thomassen 2019: 23-43); F.A.E. van Wouden (1968 [1935], 1956; and see Fox 1980); Charles Staniland Wake (1967 [1889], 1870; Needham 1975b, 1975c); and see Holmes for generous reference to Wake and to the poet-anthropologist Algernon Swinburne (2016).

Charles Staniland Wake

In my view, Charles Wake, an early inspirational anthropologist, rescued from obscurity by Needham, makes telling points about evolutionary theory in his 1870 essay, and in his later study of the development of marriage and kinship (1967 [1889]). It has relevance for certain later debates in anthropology on the relationships between biology, evolution and culture (see below). He says, “Let the law of evolution of organic forms be once established by the application of the principles of biology, and then anthropologists may apply that law to the phenomena presented by man [sic], to see whether it furnishes a key to the problem of origin. Anthropology, in its strict sense, has to do with man [sic] only when he appears with the structure and faculties which constitute him man [sic], and when the principles which govern the origin of organic life have been established, then alone can anthropology by the application of those principles hope to account for human origin” (1870: 17). In the late 1860s and early 1870s he served as Director of the London Anthropological Society, then as the first Director of the new Anthropological Institute. Holmes proposes that, at that time “Wake was one of the most prominent anthropologists in Britain.....with considerable institutional authority” (2016: 22-23). He had a particularly difficult time in arguing for his views and criticism of the prevailing evolutionism of the later nineteenth century, and perhaps because of disillusionment and the trans-Atlantic opportunities presented elsewhere he then departed for the USA.

I have a particular affection for Charles Staniland Wake. He was born in Kingston upon Hull, East Yorkshire on 22 March 1835, where I have lived, studied and worked for over 50 years. Wake spent much of his time there in a museum and scholarly environment. But before his departure for the USA, where he died in Chicago on 21 June 1910, he had happened to purchase a plot of land in Newland Park, a newly emerging middle-class suburb in the 1870s on the outskirts of Hull. So far as I am aware he never built a house on it or lived there, but it happens to be two minutes-walk from my house where I have lived for over 30 years and five minutes-walk from the University of Hull, founded as a University College of London in 1927.

Obituaries, remembrances and the Anglo-French-Dutch connection

Following Rodney’s very sad and much-missed departure in December 2006 there were numerous obituaries and subsequent references to his contribution to anthropology and intellectual life. There is no need to summarize these here. With regard to the interests of scholars of Borneo Studies the most important are those by Clifford Sather, in his Notes from the Editor in the *Borneo Research Bulletin (BRB)* (2006a), and the Memorials in 2007 in the *BRB* comprising Kirk Endicott’s “personal remembrance”, as a postgraduate student of Rodney Needham (2007), and Clifford Sather’s publication, with minor editing and with the assistance of Jayl Langub, of Joella Werlin’s transcription of her interview with her former tutor on 9 February 2000 in his residence in Oxford concerning his field research among the Penan (Sather 2007).

Both Sather and Endicott celebrate Rodney’s considerable contribution to anthropology through his teaching, postgraduate supervision and research, but also provide us with a touching reminder of how supportive and generous he was to his students and to those, like me, who wrote to him and visited him in Oxford for his advice and guidance. Endicott probably provides the most intimate obituary, and was one of his most prominent postgraduates (1970, 1979, 2007; and see Endicott and Endicott 2008, and see King 1981a); though there were many others including Barnes

(1974, 1996, and see King 1976a); and Fox (1968). Among other obituaries and references to Rodney's life and work which are worthy of note are those by Barnes (2007); Fox (2008; and see 1977, 1979, 1997 2013; and see King 2001a); Kidd (2019); Lyons (2011); MacClancy (2006, 2007, 2013); Pickering (2007); The Telegraph (2006).

However, it is appropriate to single out some observations of Rodney as a scholar. Colin Kidd said of Needham, in his online entry in *Oxford Bibliographies* (2019), "Rodney Needham (b. 1923-d. 2006) was a brilliant and daring anthropologist possessed of considerable imagination and theoretical sophistication, a facility for languages, both European and Asian, and a broad-ranging comparative outlook that transcended his immediate specialisms in Borneo and Indonesia". Furthermore, in his tribute in *Durkheimian Studies*, William Pickering captures Needham's academic character in these words "[A] scholar of great precision with a razor sharp and precisely ordered mind. Very widely read in various languages and demanding in conversation, he created a presence that one seldom left without being edified or challenged in one way or another" (2007).

Perhaps James J. Fox, a former doctoral student of Rodney Needham, in his affectionate obituary (2008: 401-403), provides the most apposite perspective on Rodney's vision for anthropology. Fox says "Needham articulated his view of social anthropology most emphatically in his Oxford Inaugural Lecture, in which he envisaged 'an integrated semantic discipline, architectonics of significance'. Quoting Kant, Rodney proposed a discipline that would chart the limits of human understanding, a venture that would not only be cognitive but would engage the imagination and the passions. He went on to describe social anthropology as 'the practice of an empirical philosophy' whose benefits would be 'an expansion of the sympathies, a revision of conventional judgements, the provocation of alternative possibilities of conduct, a vision of man [sic] as he might otherwise be, or else a characterization of man [sic] as he can newly be seen to be' [Needham 1981: 27-28].....As an ethnographer of Southeast Asia, an assiduous author, translator, and editor, and a professor in social anthropology at Oxford University, Needham offered his own distinctive cast to anthropology focusing on the analysis of social categories [and relationship terminologies] in a comparative effort at comprehending human thought and action" (Fox 2008: 401; and see Palmquist on Kant 1986).

Needham had an enormous influence on the ways in which perspectives in anthropology developed in the Anglophone world, as did Professor Sir Edmund Leach, particularly in translating French, and in Needham's case, J.P. B. de Josselin de Jong's Dutch structuralism as well, to an English-speaking audience. Professor Dame [Margaret] Mary Douglas too was a champion of French sociology, though probably rather unsung in the French scholarly world, according to Buton and Soriano (2018; Douglas 1966, 1970, 1973, 1975 [1999], 1980, 1986; Fardon 1987, 1999, 2019; Iyenda and Fardon 2007). Buton and Soriano say "Though poorly known in France, the work of the anthropologist Mary Douglas is nonetheless essential for understanding the elementary forms of social organization and daily life. By shedding light on her academic career and personal life, this portrait rehabilitates the thought of a major intellectual.... Unquestionably, the work of Mary Douglas (1921-2007) does not enjoy the recognition it deserves from French readers. Best known for two books published twenty years apart – *Purity and Danger*, 1966 (first translated into French in 1971) and *How Institutions Think*, 1986 (first translated in 1999)" (2018:1).

Returning to Leach, as an Asianist anthropologist, among many other interests, he most certainly deserves a mention here. I remember vividly his chairing a lecture given by Professor Claude Lévi-Strauss in London in 1971 when Leach introduced it by stating that he was probably the only person in the audience who understood what Lévi-Strauss was saying, and that this was not merely translating what he delivered from the French language. I then met Edmund Leach in Cambridge in 1972 and the first question he asked me, knowing that I came from an area studies, sociology and geography background, “Before we engage in conversation, do you take anthropology seriously”. I am sure I said “Yes”. We then discussed his field research in Sarawak and his work on the Kachin and Highland Burma (and see Anderson 2007; Sadan 2013; Sadan and Robinne 2007; Tambiah 2002; King 2002).

I shared a considerable amount of time with Edmund Leach when we were both members of the London-based British Academy Management Committee of the British Institute in South-East Asia, first established in Singapore and then in Bangkok, and sadly no longer operating in the region. Dr Milton [E]dgeworth Osborne was the first Director from 1976, succeeded by Dr John [Francis Hyde] Villiers from 1979 to 1985; the Institute was closed in 1986 in Bangkok and then managed by a London-based committee, of which I was secretary, and working with three formidable chairpersons: William Watson, Professor of Chinese Art and Archaeology, and Director of the Percival David Foundation, SOAS, University of London (Scott 2009); and then Professor William G[erald] Beasley, an historian of Japan and East Asia, Emeritus Professor of the History of the Far East, SOAS, and Professor C. D. [Charles Donald] [Jeremy] Cowan, Emeritus Professor Southeast Asian History and former Director of SOAS (King 2013a; and see Carey 1986, 2023). In our frequent committee meetings, Leach presented me with a copy of his *Social Science Research in Sarawak* (1950), which I continue to treasure and then a copy of his *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954). Over time I also sent him papers that I had written on Highland Burma in response to Friedman’s and Nugent’s interventions (Friedman 1979 [1998]; Nugent 1982; King 1981b, 1983b, 2001b). Leach kindly sent me his critical notes on Friedman’s thesis, which, decidedly, confronted and dismissed a Marxist-oriented perspective on the relations between Kachin and Shan. At this time, he was also supporting the earlier work of Dr Roxana Waterson at Cambridge and her major achievement in the anthropology of architecture in Southeast Asia (1990, 1998; and see King 1997a, 1998), which she undertook during the mid-1980s and received funding from The British Academy.

During my stay in Cambridge, I also managed to meet and work with Anthony Richards, who was then the Secretary-Librarian at the Centre for South Asian Studies. Generously, he gave me access to his Iban-English dictionary which he was working on at the time (Richards 1981; King 1982a). His personal papers and part of his library are appropriately now safely in store at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) as the “A.J.N. Richards Collection”.

Correspondence and Meetings

The reason for writing this paper is quite simply that, as a senior citizen, I am in the process of tidying up my academic papers and I happened to come across correspondence with Rodney Needham going back to 1971 through to 1997, comprising some 60 letters. What the correspondence does, to my mind, is provide the occasion to access some of the thoughts of one of the most outstanding, innovative and productive anthropologists of the twentieth century, who happened also to have undertaken his first major fieldwork in Borneo. The letters cover the period

from November 1971 up to September 1997, from when he was a Lecturer in Social Anthropology in the Oxford Institute (1956-1976) and a Fellow at Merton College (1971-1975), and then into the later 1970s and 1980s when he was Professor of Social Anthropology and Fellow of All Souls College (1976-1990) at Oxford and then his early years of retirement. Nevertheless, during this correspondence and even after 1997 we kept in touch by 'phone.

In our correspondence he addressed me variously as "King, Mr King, Dr King, Victor, Terry". I was identified as "King" and its variations up to the early 1980s, then became "Victor" in 1982 and "Terry" in 1986. I have a number of identities, but the later use of "Terry" by Rodney Needham, when he got to know me better, possibly came from two of his close colleagues in Oxford who were also scholars of Southeast Asia. Peter Carey and Bob [R.H.] Barnes knew me as "Terry" and not "Victor" from my Hull University days. Moreover, my letters and 'phone calls, up to 1986, were directed to "Professor Needham", but then I adopted a form of address, "Rodney", from November 1987, as he had begun to sign himself in this manner, or simply "R" or "RN".

I had quite forgotten the content of these letters and on re-reading them, I thought that a summary of their content might be of interest to those readers interested in Borneo and to what exercised us in anthropology in the 1960s through to the 1990s. It was a rather emotional experience to go through these exchanges and remind myself of Rodney's great kindness, guidance and attention when I was attempting to develop a career in anthropology and the study of Borneo. I became very fond of him through our exchange of letters, though it took a while to meet him in person. The correspondence captures Rodney's character, humanity and his unfailing properness and politeness. I have selected key moments in our exchanges and I decided not to reproduce the full range of what we discussed. I have judiciously, I hope, edited the correspondence, excluding any material which I considered to be personal and which Rodney would not have wished to enter the public domain. I am fully conscious of Rodney's sensitivities in regard to unpublished material and to the way in which he guarded his Oxford postgraduate theses during his lifetime.

I contacted Clifford Sather about my intentions in regard to the correspondence with Rodney, and he reminded me of the delicate terrain that we have to traverse in recording in print anything of Rodney's which had not been published. Cliff says "[Rodney] often said that we should be accountable only for what we publish in print" (pers. comm. 22 July 2023). Cliff reminded me that his correspondence with Rodney had been deposited in the Borneo Research Council archives. He indicated that Traude Gavin had digitalized her correspondence with Rodney prior to and during the writing of her doctoral thesis at Hull on Iban textiles. Joella Werlin, one of Rodney's postgraduate students, sent her correspondence, excluding anything personal, to Merton College, Oxford.

I trust Rodney will not mind my reproducing extracts of his correspondence with me, in that he was so generous with his time and his advice about how to go about anthropological research. It places him in a very positive light. I remember asking him, in one of my visits to Oxford in the 1980s, whether or not he would permit me to make reference to extracts of our correspondence in some of my future publications on Borneo. He hesitated then said, "Provided, they are accurate, precise and to the point and do not contain embarrassingly personal material, then I don't mind. If you wish you can send the relevant material to me before publication".

I spent time with Rodney at All Souls College, Oxford in the 1980s, and at his apartment in Holywell Street where, on one occasion on 4 March 1988, he suggested that we should sit for a while, and in relaxed mode, gaze out of his first-floor window, sip a glass of wine, and contemplate a tree on the street immediately beneath his window which Rodney found “quite exquisite”. We sat there in gentle conversation, gazing at a tree. I then thought about the possibility that we might be engaging in a discussion on symbolic classification and the world of natural symbols. The biblical references to trees and their life-giving capacities struck me (The Tree of Life in the Paradise of God, The Book of Revelation 22: 1-21; and see Douglas 1970). Rodney, then informed me that he liked my book on Hendrik Tillema and the Apo Kayan, but thought that some of the translations from Dutch could have been a bit improved and that I had missed a reference in my bibliography (King 1989a [1990]; Tillema 1938a, 1938b). There was good reason for that, which I explained to Rodney, and I indicated that Peter King, Professor of Dutch Studies at Hull, his student, Alan Deighton, and Drs Jan Avé, a fluent Dutch and English speaker, and Conservator of the Indonesian and Southeast Asian Collections at the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden had assisted me with the translation. Mrs Noor Boeseman-Pluymert, the photo-archivist at the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden also helped translate the captions to the photographs. Rodney simply gave me a genial smile.

He then talked about his drafts on the Penan, and showed me some pieces that he had been working on. Some were in his distinctive hand-writing, others were delivered on his faithful Smith-Corona typewriter. Rodney never took to email. He then invited me to his favourite Oxford pub “The Turf” where we discussed the future of anthropology which he thought, in British higher education, had a rather uncertain future, and he said “You have to make up your mind where you are going. You seem to flit from one thing to another without a focus, but I am not suggesting that breadth of interest is necessarily a bad thing”. I think Rodney got it right, located as I was in Area Studies where we attempted to be multidisciplinary.

At this point of time Rodney had been residing, researching and writing in All Souls College for some twelve years when he had withdrawn from regular interaction with his colleagues in the Institute of Social Anthropology (from 1978). So, we did not visit the Institute. Following my presentation of a seminar paper on rural development in Sarawak at the Institute I stayed with Rodney for two nights at All Souls on 4-5 May 1988. Over dinner at All Souls on the first night I said to Rodney, “I don’t think my paper in the Institute went down all that well; it was too applied and not sufficiently theoretical. I think Bob Barnes [who chaired the session] rescued me”. Rodney responded, “I haven’t given a paper in years in the Institute. It really doesn’t matter. Just carry on with what interests you”.

Needham and the Penan

Needham made a most significant contribution during the 1950s and 1960s to our understanding of Borneo societies with a series of papers on the Penan. He undertook a twelve-month period of fieldwork among the Penan in 1951-1952 with a brief return visit in 1958, which, at that time, must have been a physically and mentally demanding experience. Yet he never managed to bring to publication a monograph on the Penan, though he often referred to his determination to do so. At one of my last meetings with him in late 1988, in his residence in Holywell Street, he showed me a draft of a chapter that he had produced on the Penan; the paper was on the longevity of Penan dart poison, which was subsequently published in the *BRB* (1988; and see Zahorka 2006). In the

abstract of his thesis, he writes “The quality of a report depends much on the way the ethnographer sets about his work, and the reception given to what he presents as facts about a strange people depends to some extent on the reader's imaginative realisation (however far short this may fall) of what it costs the observer to obtain them. A man must judge his labours by the obstacles he has overcome and the hardships he has endured, and by these standards I am not ashamed of the results (1953)”.

A substantial amount of research on the Western and Eastern Penan in Sarawak followed on from Needham's intensive study, primarily from the early 1970s. Lars Kaskija, who studied the Punan Malinau in East Kalimantan, provides a very useful overview of hunter-gatherer research in Borneo, including that on the Penan (2017: 128-132, and see references, 147-158). Among many others Kaskija draws attention to the important work on the Penan of J. Peter Brosius (see, for example, 1986, 1991, 1992, 2007), Harmut Hildebrand (1982), Peter Kedit (1982), Jayl Langub (see, for example, 1989, 1996), Johannes Nicolaisen (1976a, 1976b), and Stefan Seitz (1981, 1988).

Rodney also undertook a brief period of ethnographic research among the Siwang/Chewong of Peninsular Malaysia between 1953 and 1955 and provided published notes on other Orang Asli groups (Needham 1956, 1964a [including the Penan], 1964b, 1974b, 1976b, 1984a, 1984b). He also supervised Signe Howell's research on the Che Wong (Howell 1984 [1989], and Endicott on the Batek (1979). He referred to the Siwang as a “semi-nomadic tribe” of central Malaya and one of the complexes of Orang Asli in what was to become after 1963 Peninsular Malaysia (*Semenanjung Malaysia*) (and see Lye Tuck-Po. 2011). He also refers to Charles Ogilvie's brief paper (1940), and says, “Ogilvie, our only source of information to date, renders the name of the tribe as ‘Che Wong’. I should prefer not to begin with a disagreement, but I have to record the name as ‘Siwang’” (1956: 49; and see Ogilvie 1949; though Rodney later used the term “Che Wong” in his association with Signe Howell's research (1984a, 1984b). Nicole Kruspe refers to them as Ceq Wong (2009).

It should be noted that, in traversing various parts of island Southeast Asia, Needham also visited Sumba and specifically the Mamboru in northwestern Sumba in 1955, and subsequently published a monograph on them (1987c; and see Forth 1989).

What interested me about Rodney's publications on the Penan is that he was looking to record and understand categories, classifications and terminologies, and he found them in naming terms. His major publications on the Penan focused on mourning or death names, friendship names and the structure of close social relations in terms of relative age, category and descent (and terminologies), not on hunting-gathering ecologies or livelihoods and the Penan engagement with the forest (1959, 1965, 1966a, 1971b). His accomplished paper on category and relative age included comparative material, not only on the Penan and Siwang, but also on the Andamanese, Kariera, Mapuche, Murinbata, Nuer, Pul Eliya, Tikopia, and Wikmunkan (1966a).

He had already read Claude Lévi-Strauss and was familiar with Dutch structuralism before embarking on his field research. We might ponder why he chose hunter-gatherers for his doctoral research rather than a more structured social system? At least, he moved subsequently from the Penan (1953) and Orang Asli to the “structured” Mamboru (1987c),

Kirk Endicott's remembrance is especially revealing. Endicott is, in my estimation, among his most prominent doctoral students; there were many others, too numerous to list (see Endicott 1970, 1979; Barnes 1974; 1996, Fox 1968, 1977), and he says of Rodney "Strangely enough, Borneo and the Penan did not play a big part in Rodney's teaching. In his course on "Relationship Terminologies" he mentioned the Penan as an example of a people with a cognatic system, but he had little interest in cognatic terminologies, and he quickly moved on to societies with prescriptive alliance systems". (2007:16). Though, in my view, his ethnographic summary of western and eastern Penan is particularly useful (Needham 2007[1972]).

Endicott has grasped the issue precisely, and it is revealed in letters and conversations which I had with Rodney. His letter of 10 February 1975 (provided in detail later), sticks in my mind. "[T]he interpretation of Penan life depends not on systematic structural analysis but on the comprehension of a range of cultural particulars" and "I find it hard to think about the Penan in terms of 'bilateral systems' or to concede that they have a 'kinship system'".

Endicott says, "Rodney often said that he regretted he had never published a general ethnography of the Penan. He obviously didn't consider his doctoral thesis a suitable basis for one, or he would have merely revised it into a book....I have discussed with various friends the question of why Rodney never completed his ethnography of the Penan. It may simply be that he found that his data were inadequate to answer all the questions he had, and it was no longer possible to get the information he needed" (2007: 16-17).

The Letters (My additions are in square brackets/parentheses)

I first wrote to Rodney on 15 November 1971 at the Institute of Social Anthropology in Oxford when he was a lecturer there and a Fellow at Merton College, asking for his advice about how I might develop my proposed research on Borneo and whether a study of the Iban of West Kalimantan might be worthwhile which was my supervisor's, Professor Mervyn Jaspas's preference, as an Indonesian specialist, or the Punan Ba[h] in the Upper Rejang in Sarawak which was suggested to me by Dr H. [Stephen] Morris, then at the LSE and his wife, Barbara E. Ward, my former MA supervisor at SOAS, then at Clare College, Cambridge, and Paul Beavitt, supervised by Stephen Morris, and Lecturer in South-East Asian Sociology at Hull, whose post I took over in 1973 after his departure to Leicester University (Needham 1954, 1955). On reflection I think I might well have opted for the Punan Bah, though, subsequently, Ida Nicolaisen provided excellent ethnographic material which I do not think I could have matched (see, for example, 1976, 1977). I received a memorable letter from Rodney on 30 November 1971 (Rodney would always date his letters in the style 30.xi.71), as follows:

Dear Mr King:

Thank you for your interesting letter about your projected research in Borneo.

I suspect that an intensive analysis of symbolism among the Iban would indeed be fruitful. I myself once nearly finished a book on the analysis of symbolism in all the tribes of the southeast of the island, and to judge by even that literary adventure there is much to be done. You will, of course, need to learn Dutch first, and possibly German, or even French and Italian. Naturally, too, you should write to Derek Freeman, at Canberra.

For some recent information on work in Kalimantan and in Sarawak, write to Herb Whittier (Dept. of Anthropology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48823).

As for relative age, the latest and most major application of that technique that I devised is to be found in Peter Rivière's Marriage among the Trio [1969]. I have done some work on the topic, but it won't appear in print until the production of a forthcoming volume of essays.

I find it hard to respond with further references to things that I have done. I have published between sixty and seventy papers, and I don't know which of them you know and which you don't. May I just refer you to some titles that you don't mention and which I think rather well of still? "Terminology and Alliance, I and II" (Sociologus 1966 [1966b] and 1967 [1967b]); "Right and Left in Nyoro Symbolic Classification" (Africa, vol. 37, 1967, pp. 425-51 [1967c]); "Introduction" and "Remarks on the Analysis of Kinship and Marriage" in Rethinking Kinship and Marriage (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971, pp. xiii-cxvii, 1-34 1971a).

The most beautiful analysis that I know of in recent literature is Francis Korn's "A Question of Preferences" in Rethinking Kinship and Marriage, chap. 5 [1971].

On Bornean symbolism, you don't mention, but you should certainly read in case you don't know it: Hans Schärer's, Ngaju Religion (The Hague, Nijhoff, [1963]). And on the ritual basis of society see the new edition of A. M. Hocart, Kings and Councillors (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970 [1936]; paperback edition forthcoming in February 1972 [1970a, 1936, 1972]).

Do let me know what you decide to do, and how you get on, and stay in touch.

Your sincerely,

Rodney Needham.

P.S. I should add that I agree with Stephen Morris: the Punan Ba[h] would make a nice study (I suppose you have read my paper on them? see Needham [1954, 1955]). But it may be that your interests develop elsewhere.

[I corresponded with Rodney during the next few years during and after fieldwork in the early 1970s, but there is not much of consequence in these exchanges, and there are some personal matters which would be inappropriate to record].

[Our exchanges then took off from the mid-1970s, following my return from fieldwork. I wanted to read Rodney's Penan thesis to examine how a senior anthropologist addressed his field material, and I asked if I could access a loan copy of his thesis from the Bodleian Library, Oxford in a letter of January 27th 1975. At that time, in writing up my doctoral thesis, I wanted to question him on relative age, category and descent, as well as more general queries about cognation and what I referred to as "bilateral kinship"].

[Rodney's response on 10th February 1975].

Dear King,

Your letter of January 27th took its time to get here, for some reason, and reached me only after I had told the Bodleian that I did not wish my Penan thesis to be consulted.

Even now that I know whom I am dealing with, the position is that I should prefer not to publicise that tyro description. You will in any case find a fair part of it in the various papers listed in T.O. Beidelman, ed., The Translation of Culture [1971; Needham 1971b] and more especially in my Remarks and Inventions (London: Tavistock, 1974), ch. 2 [1974a]). I have more work on the Penan in press, and next term I shall be returning to

intensive writing about them. And it is no quibble when I say, also, that I find it hard to think about the Penan in terms of “bilateral systems” or to concede that they have a “kinship system”!

If there are special queries that you would like to put about the Penan, do write them to me. If they can be economically dealt with I shall certainly do so. Otherwise, I shall keep them in mind as I rewrite my Penan materials. On the whole, though, I must say that with the exception of the insight that led to “Age, Category, and Descent” (1966 [1966a]) the interpretation of Penan life depends not on systematic analysis but on the comprehension of a multitude of cultural particulars.

Yours,

Rodney Needham.

[This letter has resonance with Kirk Endicott’s remark, in pondering why Rodney did not publish a definitive monograph on the Penan, in that he records much later on from the mid-1980s that Rodney had been working on the monograph from 1985 but by 2001 he had put it to rest, and that for particular medical reasons. He worked on it over many years, but, given his demanding scholarly standards, he never managed to bring it to print. There were just too many unanswered questions and the Penan, in his own words, had “no system”. Endicott records his wife, Karen’s view, with which I agree. “She [Karen] thinks that the Penan probably have a fluid, amorphous worldview and social organization, like many other nomadic hunting and gathering peoples in Southeast Asia, and thus are not amenable to the kind of ordered structural analysis that Rodney was so good at doing” (2007: 17)].

[We move on. When I took over as Honorary Secretary of the Association of South-East Asian Studies in the United Kingdom (ASEASUK) in 1976, I noted that Rodney had been a member, but his membership had lapsed, and I asked him whether or not he wanted to continue. I sent a letter to him on 16 March 1977 to this effect. I also raised the matter with him of my article on the concept of the kindred, in a publication edited by George Appell, and directed to Derek Freeman’s interpretation of Iban social organization (King 1976b; Appell 1976, 2001). Rodney provided some comments and then some advice over the ‘phone, which subsequently led me to modify my view (1978b). I also conducted a correspondence with Derek Freeman which was entirely amicable and constructive (see, for an intensive examination of this correspondence from 1972 to 1994, [King 2013b]). In the letter to Rodney, I also remarked on his paper “Skulls and Causality” (1976a), and on the book on Iban religion published by his former doctoral student, Erik Jensen (1974; and see Jensen 2010, and King 2011; and see Freeman 1975; King 1976c, 2017: 88-90). Rodney responded, on 21st March 1977, as he always did. And there is a reference to the Penan monograph].

Dear King,

Thank you for your kind letter of March 16th. I do indeed still have interest in South East Asia and am resident in the U.K., but I hope you will excuse me making an application to re-join the Association. I fear I am not by temperament a joiner (for example, I do not belong to the ASA any more) and find my commitment to my college the fullest satisfaction I need. On the other hand, if there is any professional occasion for the Association to turn to me on any matter, I shall, of course, be always ready to do what I can.

I am glad you liked “Skulls and Causality” [1976a]. It took me a while to write this. As for the likelihood of my publishing more on Borneo in the near future, the one grand question is

whether I shall be able to publish anything on anything at all. I am still desperately trying to finish a technical but straightforward analysis of an Indonesian system that I began six months ago, and it is now more than a month since I was last able to add a line to it. I hope to be able to despatch an Indonesian monograph during the long vacation [I assumed he was referring to his book on Mamboru, 1987c] and thereafter my over-riding concern will be at least to complete a straightforward monograph on Penan, though what with the pressures of teaching and administration, I cannot estimate how long that may take. I wish for my own sake that I could give you a more encouraging reply.

*Thank you again for writing,
Sincerely,
Rodney Needham.*

[I then had exchanges with Rodney in my review of his publications. I reviewed his *Right and Left* which he received in cordial fashion (King 1976d)].

[Rodney wrote to me on 18 April 1977 in regard to my review of the book].

Dear King,

The University of Chicago Press have just sent me a copy of your review of Right and Left [1976b]. While I suppose I cannot thank you for it, I think I can say that it is a remarkably serious and professional examination of the book. The one analytical point on which I would not have you think me lax is the “vertical associations”. These have greatly occupied me since I became interested in dual classification, and I think I have indeed something useful to say about them. A starting point is to be found in Jim Fox’s “On Binary Categories and Primary Symbols” (in The Interpretation of Symbolism, [1975]), which as Fox says starts in its own turn from a long analysis that I once made of Ngaju (and other south Bornean) symbolic classification. I wrote the latter in the mid-sixties, but there has been no respite from teaching since then in which I could write it as a monograph. I am afraid that brings us back to where we were in connexion with the U.K. Association of Southeast Asian scholars. Anyway, this note will stress that I am indeed concerned with the problems that you emphasise. It is not work that is in question but time!

*Yours ever
Rodney.*

[Somewhat later, in a brief card on 10 April 1981, he writes]: *I forgot to mention in my letter the topics of analogy and vertical linkages. See my Reconnaissances (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, ch. 2: “Analogical Classification” [1980]).*

RN

[At this point we were discussing the possibility of structural analysis and symbolic classification in a range of Borneo societies. Rodney’s letter indicates that he had done work on this, which developed from his translation of Hans Schärer’s *Ngaju Religion* (1963), but that it was unlikely to appear in print. In a letter that I sent him on 25 April 1977, I wrote]:

Dear Professor Needham,

I was also interested to read in your letter that you have made an extended analysis of Ngaju symbolic classification. Again, I regret that your other commitments have not enabled you to produce a monograph. We are desperately lacking this kind of work for Borneo.... In sum, I would simply like to stress that despite my critical comments on Right and Left, my teaching and research have been constantly informed and inspired by your work and that of your contemporaries in Oxford. Indeed, I am somewhat saddened that your energies, particularly on "things Bornean" are being taken up in other directions. Still, let us hope that your research on Penan and south Bornean symbolism, in particular, will reach fruition in the not-too-distant future.

[I then added in a later letter: *I very much appreciate your sending me the columnar table of Ngaju symbolic classification...My Sociologus paper would not have been possible without the inspiration which I gained from this work* [see later, King 1980a].

[And then, following my review (King 1976e) of Rodney's edition and introduction of Arthur Maurice [A. M.] Hocart's *Kings and Councillors: An Essay in the Comparative Anatomy of Human Society* (1970b [1936, 1972]) (and see Needham 1987a), Rodney wrote on 16th May 1977]:

Dear King,
If I may not thank you for your review of Hocart's Kings and Councillors, I am allowed to say how pleased I am to see his work given the measured attention that you paid it in Cultures et développement [1976e]. As a quasi-technical exercise, and at any rate a professional undertaking, the review is a fine piece of work.
Yours
Rodney

[Then Rodney wrote on 10 July 1978].

Dear King
Someone told me a little while ago that you were expected in Oxford but I neglected to put down or was not given the date. I should like to see you if you do come, I trust you will get in touch if you have the time; if I am not here [at All Souls College] I am at home in the evenings. You have my address and telephone number.
Yours
Rodney Needham

[I eventually wrote back on 5 September 1978, rather tardily. Staying with Drs Jan Avé in Leiden, I had been working in the archives in The Hague and visiting the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde and the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (KITLV) in Leiden, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, visiting Professor Otto van den Muijzenberg, in my summer vacation. At that time, I was collaborating on a bibliography of West Kalimantan with Jan Avé and Joke de Wit (Avé et al 1983)]. Jan Avé also took me to the Indonesisch Ethnographisch Museum Delft, where he had been involved in the preparations for an exhibition on Kalimantan in 1973 and written the introduction to the exhibition catalogue (Avé 1973)].

Dear Professor Needham,

Many thanks for your letter of 10 July 1978. Yes, I was expecting to come to Oxford and spend some time with Anthony Shelton, one of the students I taught in sociology and anthropology at Hull. Unfortunately, there was a change of plan and I was unable to make it. However, should I decide to come there in the near future I will certainly contact you.

[Anthony Shelton took his BA in Sociology and Anthropology at Hull, and then went on to a BLitt/MLitt and DPhil at Oxford in Social Anthropology. He is now Director and Professor at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia].

[The letter of 5 September continued]:

There is also one question I have for you. At the moment I am writing a paper on Borneo classification, which touches on some of your work and which I have been prompted to write partly as a response to an article by Gerald M. Erchak entitled 'Dusun Social and Symbolic Orders' in The Sarawak Museum Journal, 1972, 20: 301-313. He is critical of some of your work on classification and alliance, but, in my opinion, has misunderstood your argument. I have been going through your papers on this subject, but I am having difficulty tracing one of your analyses. I have applied through our inter-library loan service for your article 'A Synoptic Examination of Anal Society' in Ethnos 1964, 29: 219-238 (1964c). Apparently, for some reason, our library cannot find this reference. Therefore, I was wondering whether I have the correct bibliographic details. I would be very grateful if you could provide me with the reference, or even better, if you have an offprint or spare xerox copy. I would be pleased to pay for any costs you might incur.

*Sincerely,
Victor King*

[Rodney replied on 11 September 1978].

Dear King,

Thank you for your letter. I am sorry you were not able to get here after all. As for the Anal reference, the paper was published in 1964, but bore the date 1963 (usual with Ethnos): otherwise, the particulars you have are right. I have just one offprint here which I enclose; perhaps you will let me have it back in due course.

My compliments to Ian Cunnison (who was to have dined with me at the end of last term but whom I was sorry to have no chance to see for some reason).

*Yours,
Rodney Needham*

[Ian Cunnison was the first Professor of Social Anthropology at Hull University (1966-1989), and my tutor and lecturer in my undergraduate days (1967-1970), as was his colleague from Khartoum, Dr Talal Asad, now Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Middle Eastern Studies at the Graduate Center of City University New York (see Asad 1970, 1973 [1975]). Cunnison wrote his DPhil thesis at Oxford on the Luapula peoples of the then Northern Rhodesia (now the Republic of Zambia), where he worked at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute (1959). He taught for a time with Professor Max Gluckman in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of

Manchester (1955-1958), and also served as Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Khartoum (1959-1966) where he undertook a study of the Baggara Arabs (1952-1955) (1966). He is probably best known for his translation of Marcel Mauss's *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1954 [1950, 1966]).

[I replied on 3 October 1978].

Many thanks for the Anal paper. I took a photocopy of it and have returned the offprint. My article entitled 'Structural Analysis and Cognatic Societies: Some Borneo Examples' is near completion, and I am sending it to Sociologus.

I have passed on your regards to Ian Cunnison and he returns his warmest best wishes.

Sincerely,

Victor King

[In response to my paper in the *Borneo Research Bulletin* on the Iban-related Mualang of West Kalimantan, the neglect of P[ater]. Donatus Dunselman's work in Dutch (1950, 1954, 1955, 1958, 1959a, 1959b, 1961; and see Maxandrea [P. J. Hoek] 1924) and the Sarawak-centred approach to Iban(ic) Studies (1978c), which I sent to Rodney, he writes in a letter of 1 January 1979]:

Dear King

Let me open the year by wishing you well and by commiserating with you in your plea to our colleagues that they should learn Dutch if that's the language the evidence is in. Only beware: if you go so far as to enable it to be seen that a colleague not only has ignored Dutch sources but also materials in French and German and Italian you will find you acquire the reputation of a very difficult fellow!!

I trust we shall meet each other in the coming year, and since I never leave here [Oxford] unless I am forced that means that I hope you will have occasion to come here.

Yours

Rodney Needham

[We then moved into the 1980s, still in a more sustained structuralist mode, and a paper that I sent to Rodney on Structural Analysis and Cognatic Societies (King 1980a), and earlier pieces on Transition and Maloh Birth (1976f)], following Arnold van Gennep, and Unity, Formalism and Structure: Comments on Iban Augury and Related Problems (1977a)], with Erik Jensen in mind (1974, and then see 2010; and see Metcalf 1976, 1977; and also Metcalf's admirable monograph 2010).

[Rodney's response on 10 April 1981]:

Thank you for your paper on structural analysis and cognatic societies. Before I got far enough into it to appreciate the kind attention you had paid to my own work, I was wondering how we might bring about a meeting at last.

[There was a longish gap in our communications].

[Then personal matters were discussed...and Rodney's suggestion of my applying to Oxford for a Visiting Fellowship for one term in 1982-83].

I shall look forward to hearing from you soon. If you care to telephone, mornings are the best.

*Good wishes,
Rodney*

[I responded on 27 April 1981].

Dear Professor Needham,

My apologies for the delay in replying to your nice letter of 10 April. I have only just returned from a visit to my parents in Norfolk.

Your suggestion of a Visiting Fellowship is very appealing. Unfortunately, it will be difficult for me to get time off from Hull for the 1982-83 session. As you may know my colleague Lewis Hill, whom you supervised for his BLitt on the Kuki-Chin peoples of Upland Burma, and I are the only lecturers in Southeast Asian sociology/anthropology, and we are committed to teaching four courses per annum, plus supervisions of MA and doctoral students. Lewis is hoping to spend some months in Indonesia and Malaysia during 1982-83 studying the history, manufacture and symbolism of the keris. This necessarily leaves me holding the fort for part or all of that session. I have had a word with Ian Cunnison, my Head of Department, and David Bassett, the Director of the Centre for South-East Asian Studies, about your proposal, and while both of them are enthusiastic, they feel that there would be problems in covering teaching for 1982-83. However, we wonder whether an application for the following session (1983-84) would be in order.

This arrangement would, if it is agreeable to you, would fit nicely with my future research programme. I am hoping to embark on a new project in Borneo in the next few years and I have a visit arranged to Sarawak this coming summer. I have exhausted much of my Maloh material both in publications and my doctoral thesis (I have plans to revise it for publication (and see King [1985a]), and I am particularly anxious to undertake another field study. Therefore, by 1983-84 I would welcome a period of writing and reflection in Oxford.

[I then dealt with other matters and the possibility that I would be in Oxford briefly for a meeting in May, and could possibly contact him].

*Yours as ever,
Victor*

[Rodney replied on 30 April 1981].

Dear King,

Thank you for your letter. I quite understand the case you are in. I am pleased that you are coming to Oxford on May 14th and I shall look forward to meeting you. I shall give you the applications forms for 1983-84 then I shall show you the college. If you will, as you say, telephone me as soon as you are here, we can make a time. I am afraid I have to dine out on the evening of the 14th, and I have a committee meeting the afternoon of the 15th, but I shall arrange pupils and other matters so as to leave time to talk.

Yours,

RN

[In the event we managed to find two hours to meet on 14 May in Oxford, we talked about our joint interests and the Visiting Fellowship and toured the college. We also found time for refreshments in “The Turf”].

[I wrote on 21 May 1981].

Dear Professor Needham,

May I take this opportunity of saying how much I enjoyed our pleasant and constructive meeting last Friday in Oxford. Unfortunately, I cannot say the same for the meeting of the Co-ordinating Council of Area Studies Associations which I attended there. The prospects for area studies look distinctly difficult, and I came away feeling rather depressed.

I think I have not as yet sent you a copy of my Occasional Paper. It is the second number in a new series which we have recently launched in the Centre for South-East Asian Studies, Hull. It is something of a preliminary effort, and I have since reworked it for publication in a forthcoming special issue of the Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science. This latest piece tries to confront, rather more directly than the Occasional Paper certain issues which Edmund Leach raised in his Highland Burma Study.

Unhappily I did not meet Bob Barnes during lunch at St Antony's. The college provided us with a special buffet in separate rooms.

Thank you again for showing me All Souls. I hope we can meet again in the not-too-distant future.

Sincerely,

Victor

[We then telephoned quite frequently from 1981, particularly in regard to what Rodney was then writing on and had completed, including his *Circumstantial Deliveries* (1981) and further down the line *Against the Tranquillity of Axioms* (1983), and *Exemplars* (1985) and that he had in mind a series of “succinct statements”, and in a comparative frame, about the nature of human thought and its relationship to cultural behaviour and social organization].

[Correspondence then lapsed for a while. I became involved in visiting former students and colleagues in Sarawak, Sabah, Brunei and Peninsular Malaysia during the early and mid-1980s and then following up various possibilities that had presented themselves in Sarawak and Brunei. In the event I sent Rodney my Occasional Paper (1979a), much later than anticipated, and subsequently the follow-up piece on ethnic classification and relations in Borneo (King 1982b). I also mentioned to him that I had come across a paper I had been given in 1972 by Drs. R. Wariso of Universitas Tanjungpura in Pontianak].

[Rodney replied on 24 March 1982].

Many thanks for your interesting paper on ethnic classification: most clear and useful. But do tell me where one sees a copy of R. Wariso, Suku Daya Punan (1971), a surprise to me.
R.

[I replied on 28 March 1981].

*Dear Professor Needham,
Unfortunately, I do not have a personal copy of Wariso's report on the Punan. It was in the form of a typed manuscript and only a limited number of copies were produced at Universitas Tanjungpura. I had access to a manuscript and took notes from it. I enclose a paper on forest nomads in KalBar which refers, in a little more detail, to the report. I think I've extracted the most significant information from it [King 1979b].
With best wishes,
Sincerely,
Victor*

[A reply from Rodney on 1 June 1981].

*Many thanks for the Punan paper; I had not seen it and I am glad to possess it. Do you know of the report by Stephen Headley on the Mahakam? "Report on a Mission to East Kalimantan" (he is at CeDRASEMI, 44 rue de la Tour, 75016, Paris) [Headley 1981].
R.*

[I did know Headley's report. Rodney then renewed his invitation to All Souls College and reminded me of the Visiting Fellowship in 1983-84. Rodney's message (29 March 1982) in regard to the Fellowship dwelt on the process of application]:

*Among your reasons for wishing to come to Oxford you might state my own presence here and also the possibility of collaboration with Bob Barnes and Peter Carey (the latter is at Trinity College).
I should like to have you here and am prepared to do what I can. You will understand, as I have explained to you when we met, that no one can guarantee a Fellowship or even, in advance of knowing the field of competition, estimate the chances of election.
Let me know what you think.
Yours ever,
Rodney*

[I replied on 19 May 1982].

*Dear Rodney,
Sincere apologies for my late reply to your letter of 29 March. I have delayed writing to you because I have been waiting for a decision on a grant application to the British Academy to undertake fieldwork in Sarawak in 1983-85. The possibility of a Visiting Fellowship to all Souls College still interests me, but I am also anxious to get back to Sarawak in the near future. Unfortunately, I shall not hear from the Academy until mid-June, so I should like to hold back my decision about the Visiting Fellowship for a while.
Perhaps you will remember when we talked together, I visited Sarawak for two months last summer. I had a very profitable stay, and I managed to get up to Belaga. The Museum is initiating research projects in connection with the planned resettlement of long-house communities in the Upper Rejang and the Bahui. If the work goes ahead to construct dams for the generation of hydroelectric power on and around the Bakun rapids – and it seems*

likely that approval will be given – a large area will be inundated. The Museum wishes to survey the populations there and undertake anthropological studies of various of the groups in the region prior to resettlement. Lucas Chin has invited me to investigate Ukit, Bukitan or Sihan communities there, and I am keen to do so. If I can get funding, then I will go to Sarawak for some months during 1983 and 1984.

I much appreciate your interest in my coming to Oxford, but I hope you will understand my reasons for not making up my mind just yet.

Thank you once again,

Sincerely,

Victor

[I wrote to Rodney on 19 August 1982].

Dear Rodney

Just a line to let you know that I have been awarded a Leverhulme Fellowship by The British Academy to undertake fieldwork in Sarawak during the summer vacations, 1983, 1984, 1985. I also plan to extend these vacations with a period of study leave.

All this means that regretfully I must postpone an application to All Souls. I hope that if I have free time after the Sarawak project, I might still be able to approach the College. May I thank you warmly for your interest and assistance.

I shall try to keep you informed about the situation in Sarawak.

Best regards,

Victor.

[Rodney's response on 24 August 1982 is interesting].

Thanks for letting me know about your plans and possibilities. Felicitations on the chance to make a study of the Bukitan or Ukit. Really it is I who should be doing that – but then there are many things in that area that I should have done already and have not done. Do keep me informed of your plans in Sarawak and if you can call in here before you leave next summer. The college and its VF [Visiting Fellowship] programme will last for some time yet so nothing immediate is lost.

Thanks for letting me know where you stand. There is no hurry, for our closing date is not until September. Of course, it is more important that you should return to Sarawak, especially if they are really going to build those dams. No doubt it is what I should doing!! I have interested Peter Metcalf in coming here in T.T 84, if the College can be persuaded to elect him. I plan to be writing exclusively about Penan at that time. Perhaps you could fit a term into your sabbatical year?

Yours Rodney.

[Unfortunately, though getting to Belaga in the company of Tuton Kaboy from the Sarawak Museum, I did not manage a study of the Bukitan or Ukit, though one of my doctoral students did take this on some years later and produced a fine study of the Ukit (Bhuket), principally in Sarawak. But she also managed a visit to West Kalimantan (Thambiah 1995, and see 2016)].

[We then exchanged letters through the early 1980s when I was working in Sarawak from 1983 to 1985, and then I received an important letter from Rodney on 29 January 1986].

Dear Terry

I have just received through Virginia Matheson the greetings you sent, and want to reciprocate. You have been in my mind recently in any case, for with two books in press (plus an edition of Hocart papers [1987a]) and two terms of sabbatical yet ahead I am now deep into the Penan book. It all looks exceedingly difficult to me at the moment and I am not sure how I am going to make it. The great drawback, as you know, is that there is no structure to organise the account (as it did for my Mamboru monograph) and that they lack practically everything in the way of institutions that people are accustomed to look for. So, I don't know what good it would do even if I could talk to you about it, but all the same I have been wondering if you were ever likely to get so far south as this. It would be good to see you, in any event. As things are, I have spent the last month regaining a command of the language(s) and ordering notes and reading others, so I am now at the point from which I can begin active writing. With luck the thing could be done this summer: historical ethnography, of course, but in view of what has happened in Sarawak perhaps especially useful in the end for that reason.

Yours ever,

Rodney Needham

[My contact with Virginia Matheson, Professor Emeritus and Fellow in the Department of Political and Social Change, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University, was through her husband Professor M. B. [Barry] Hooker, Senior Associate of the Centre for Indonesian Law, Islam and Society at the University of Melbourne Law School. We enjoyed a close relationship when he was a Professor in the Centre of Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Kent, Canterbury and when I was in the Centre for South-East Asian Studies at Hull].

[I wrote to Rodney on 11 February 1986].

Dear Professor Needham,

I am so pleased to hear that you are engaged in your Penan book. I would indeed like to talk with you about it, but I do not think I shall be able to get to Oxford in the immediate future. However, I have agreed to provide Leslie Palmier (an old friend and he was our external examiner at Hull for three years [King 2013c]) at Bath University in his Development Studies programme with a paper on rural development in Sarawak, probably May this year, or perhaps in the first half of 1987, so I may be able to arrange a stop off in Oxford on my way back from Bath.

I have recently managed to complete four papers arising from my research on rural development in Sarawak, all in press, one of these is an assessment of the Batang Ai resettlement programme above Lubok Antu, two others provide a broad survey of the Sarawak land development boards and the issues relating to government-funded and -directed land development, and finally a survey of the relation between anthropology and rural development in Sarawak [1986a, 1986b, 1986c, 1986d; and a later summary paper 1988]. I am finding all this very absorbing. I am hoping to return to Sarawak this summer. I understand from a recent item in The Borneo Bulletin January 18, that the Bakun Dam project is being reconsidered by government and could be shelved, though this is unlikely and there is no final decision. At present Lucas Chin energetically is taking every

opportunity to send social scientists to Belaga to undertake research on behalf of the Museum, whether or not the Bakun development goes ahead. As you may know Simon Strickland, lately of Cambridge, has now completed his research on the Kejaman, Ida Nicolaisen has just sent into the Museum an interesting report on the Sekapan, and Vinson Sutlive did a brief survey of Iban-Kajang relations downriver of Belaga. This last summer I met Peter Brosius from Michigan who has been given the Penan as his project. No doubt he has been in touch with you. Peter Kedit is engaged in a Sihan project, and a recently arrived Japanese student is intending to examine a Kayan community upriver of Belaga. Quite a formidable research effort!

Unfortunately, for various administrative and personal reasons I was unable to participate in the Bakun studies so that my work, under Sarawak Museum auspices, has been redirected to government rural development programmes in general, and the difficulties experienced in the implementation of these in specific instances. It has taken the prospect of a dam and resettlement scheme for the government to begin to commission studies on some of the most important peoples and changes in Sarawak. Arriving at the Sarawak Museum this last summer reminded me of what it is was like in the heady and lively days of the early 1970s when it was difficult to reserve a desk and working space in the Museum Library. More recently, not only was the Museum jostling with anthropologists working on Bakun, but there were ecologists undertaking a conservation survey on behalf of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and other scholars such as Allen Maxwell and Carol Rubenstein working on other aspects of Sarawak cultures.

Very best wishes to you, and I wish you well in your renewed work on the Penan.

Sincerely,

Terry

[Then Rodney wrote on 14 February 1987].

Dear Terry,

Thank you for your long reply and for all the news. A visit next term would be splendid; it is not possible to be quite certain at the moment but it ought to be feasible to find you a room overnight on your way to or from Bath. You could dine here, sleep overnight, and be on your way after breakfast the next morning, and that should be enough time for talk about Borneo.

On the Penan, the changes sound very deep; children go to school, so people speak Malay, and longhouse life for them must make differences as well.

I admire your professional persistence and your resilience to return there.

My Sumba monograph ("Mamboru") was formally accepted for publication by the Clarendon Press earlier this month. Otherwise, no news except that from time to time I have been reading drafts of Berawan prayers for Peter Metcalf in preparation for a new book on them [Metcalf 1989].

I look forward to seeing you here.

Yours ever,

Rodney.

[Rodney then wrote on 8 March 1987].

Dear Terry

A note to compliment you on the weeping-forest book by yourself and Jan Avé; it arrived just the other day and I was much impressed by the clear density of information in it [Avé and King 1986a, 1986b]. When you next write to Avé, whom I have not met for many years (we were students together once at Leiden), do give him my regard. Your expostulations against the environmental changes caused by the timber companies are very telling. That issue has been brought very close to me by two recent occasions. First a Kenyah friend of mine sent me a colour photograph, taken from the air, of the Akah valley; when I lived in it with Penan, on each of my visits, it was thick primary rainforest, but now it is nearly all a kind of scrub, marked here and there with red gashes showing where the land has eroded and slipped, and timber standing only on the steep ridges that the loggers could not well exploit. Then I had on Thursday last a visit from a pleasant young Dutchman, Jenne de Beer from Amsterdam, who had just returned from Borneo [see, for example, De Beer and McDermott 1989]. He spent some months in Kalimantan, looking at Punan Batu, and then five or six weeks in the Fourth Division of Sarawak, where he visited the Penan Mago. What he told me, and the slides that he showed me, left me shaken and depressed, as I still am. We agreed on the character of the eastern Penan, and I remarked that they were shy and unresisting, so that when they encountered something they did not like they would retreat, but de Beer responded that now there is nowhere for them to retreat to. The Penan L. Buang have had their surrounding forest stripped and have been forced to move quite a distance to the southeast, though what resources they can have found there is not evident. I wish there were some occasion for you to come here, perhaps when you visit London. I should much like to talk to you about your findings in Sarawak. I have proposed to de Beer that he might work with the Savup (Sebop) [apparently now rendered locally as Chebup] in the ulu Tinjar – if they are still Savup and still there- and he seems keen on that.

*Yours,
Rodney*

Jenne [Joannes Henricus] de Beer served as the Executive Director of the Non-Timber Products Exchange Programme for South and Southeast Asia from 1998 to 2010. NTFP—EP produced the publication *Voices from the Forest*].

[I replied on 18 March 1987].

Dear Rodney,

Thank you for your letter of 8 March and your encouraging remarks about People of the Weeping Forest. I shall certainly inform Jan Avé that you have been in touch with me when I next write to him. Unfortunately, Jan and I have not been in contact much in the last year but I am still in touch with his son, Marek and daughter Wanda who are still in the Netherlands. Wanda is working for the WWF and studying medicinal plants in Indonesia [Avé and Satyawati Sunito 1989]. Jan retired from the Museum some months ago and promptly departed for the south of France. He is a fluent speaker of French as you, but then, English, German and Dutch, and some Polish/Russian (from his wife) and, of course,

Indonesian/Malay. He has a retirement house there and he wants peace and quiet for a while.

I think our efforts to get something out to accompany the exhibition in Leiden exhausted us. It was a rather desperate affair. We only managed to get the Dutch edition of the book from the printers on the very day of the official opening by Sir David Attenborough. I, for one, was somewhat unhappy with the Dutch text; it was very rushed. We had rather more time to work on and expand the English version; but even so, the Museum's schedule left me little time to translate Jan's sections from Dutch into English and edit them [and see King 2012]. Interestingly I have just come across an advertisement for a recently published book by Evelyn Hong (one of Cliff Sather's former students from Penang) [1987] which would seem to have similar concerns as our weeping-forest: Natives of Sarawak: Survival in Borneo's Vanishing Forests (1987) The issue of forest destruction is a particularly sensitive one now. I have seen recent copies of the Straits Times and the Borneo Bulletin which have featured stories on Bruno Manser, who has been charged by the authorities of inciting the Penan of the Fourth and Fifth Divisions to protest about the exploitation of forests in their homeland. A close friend of mine in Kuching has recently written that Manser is still at large and is being "sheltered" by the Penan. I have no idea what his status is or what conditions he is living in [Manser 2004, 2007].

Perhaps I shall learn more soon. I am leaving for Malaysia Friday week to spend about four to six weeks in Sarawak. I am hoping to secure a formal academic link between our Centre and the Sarawak branch of Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM) in Bintulu [now Universiti Putra Malaysia]. I shall be visiting one of my PhD students there, who is currently conducting field research on the transition from swidden cultivation to commercial agriculture among Bidayuh communities in the Serian area [Abdul Rashid bin Abdullah]. Also, to spend a few days with another of my PhD students in Kuala Lumpur who is working on political development among the Ibans, particularly in the lower Rejang, his homeland [Jayum A. Jawan].

With my very best wishes, It was certainly good to hear from you again and I hope we can meet soon.

Yours,

Terry

[Drs Jan Avé was Conservator of the Indonesian and Southeast Asian Collections at the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden. From 1972, when I first met him, until 1990 we enjoyed a productive relationship (Avé et al 1983, Avé and King 1986a, 1986b; King 1989b, 1990, 2012). He left the Netherlands for retirement in the south of France in the mid-1980s but we continued to cooperate on projects].

[Professor Abdul Rashid bin Abdullah was later to become Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS); PhD University of Hull, 1993]. Professor Jayum A. Jawan (PhD Hull 1991) was appointed to a senior Professorship in Politics and Government at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and then to the Distinguished Tun Abdul Razak Chair (the 15th Professor to be appointed) at Ohio University, and most recently to the inaugural Tan Sri Empiang Jabu Research Chair in Dayak Women's Studies at UPM].

[Bruno Manser was a Swiss environmentalist and human rights activist who lived among the Penan in the headwaters of the Limbang between 1984 and 1990 “to live a simple life”, and then revisited periodically thereafter (2004, 2007). He was instrumental in organizing the Penan to establish blockades on the roads in their homelands from which logging companies were operating].

[Rodney replied on 22 March 1987].

Dear Terry,

Thanks especially for letting me know about the book by Evelyne Hong. I shall send off an order tomorrow. As for Manser, no doubt you will keep your ears open. Do let me know on your return, what you hear about him and the fate of the Penan. And in that connection perhaps you can find the occasion to pass on my compliments to Abang Yusuf Puteh at the Sarawak Foundation in Mosque Road; he has expressed a particularly sympathetic interest in the Penan in the ulu Tutoh, and has said he may be writing something about them.

Another matter is the young Dutchman de Beers, whom I must have mentioned to you. I mentioned to him what a good idea it would be to make a study of the Sebop, and I said that as far as I knew they were still in four longhouses in the upper reaches of the Tinjar. If the opportunity ever rises in your coming visit, will you very kindly see what you can find about their current situation? What with recent disruptions they may not be there at all, let alone in a convenient grouping of longhouses.

Have a good time, and do get in touch on your return. I very much hope you will be able to return here.

Yours,

Rodney

[I responded on 6 May 1987 after my return from Sarawak].

Dear Rodney,

Many thanks for your letter of 22nd March. I received it just before my departure for Sarawak. I arrived back in Hull a few days ago. Fortunately, I met Jayl Langub in Kuching. He now works in the State Planning Unit and continues his interest in the Penan and other orang ulu groups.

I also chanced to meet Peter Brosius in Kuching, who is continuing his work on the Penan until the autumn. I mentioned the Sebop to him and he confirmed that there are still communities in the Tinjar. He is also of the opinion that the Sebop would make a very worthwhile study. He is of the view that there are about four villages or so there, but the Tinjar basin has been subject to intensive logging activities.

Unfortunately, I did not meet Abang Yusuf Puteh in Kuching. The state elections were on at the time I was there, and several prominent people were dashing here and there to canvas votes. The new Dayak party (PBDS) did very well, but though still wishing to remain a member of the Barisan Nasional at federal level, though in opposition to Abdul Taib Mahmud [now Tun Pehin] and the BN at the state level. These issues were being discussed when I left Sarawak.

I have enclosed offprints which may be of interest to you, and recent newspaper cuttings.

Yours,

Terry

[Rodney followed up on 18 May 1987].

Dear Terry

I am very grateful to you for all of your help in the midst of your own implications in Sarawak, and for the offprints and especially for the photocopies on the Penan in the press. Good news about the Sebop, though I have no pupil in prospect who might be willing to take them on.

Thank you again. Do look for some way to get down south and in that case come over to Oxford.

*Yours ever,
Rodney.*

[Then from Rodney on 14 November 1987].

Dear Terry,

I was taken aback yesterday when Tony Reid told me that you had been in Oxford. I do wish I had known you were coming, and I am sorry indeed we did not meet. I understand that there was some inconvenience with your rail journey, but perhaps nevertheless you could have come to stay in college overnight and we could have had a chance to talk in detail at last on Borneo matters. Let us make sure we do so on another occasion.

*Yours,
Rodney.*

[I replied on 18 November 1987].

Dear Rodney,

I am sorry not to have contacted you while I was in Oxford. Peter Carey had invited me to participate in a discussion at Trinity College about a European Newsletter in South-East Asian Studies with representatives from the Netherlands, Germany and France. It had then been arranged for us to attend Denys Lombard's seminar at St Antony's and to dine at the college thereafter. After some difficulties British Rail got me to Oxford at 2pm on Tuesday, just in time for the meeting. I had to leave Trinity promptly the next morning to be back in Hull by early Wednesday afternoon for a staff meeting. I had hoped to find time to 'phone you on the Tuesday but I was swept along by events, and it would have been difficult for me to disengage myself from the company to visit you at All Souls. Nevertheless, you were in my mind, but time and prearranged commitments were against us meeting.

I did see Bob Barnes at St Antony's and he has invited me to present a seminar at the Institute on 4 March next year. Perhaps that might provide the occasion for us to meet.

Apologies for appearing thoughtless. It was not my intention.

*As ever,
Terry*

[Rodney replied on 21 November 1987].

Dear Terry

I am glad to hear that you may be here on March 4th. Please let me know in advance what your timing will be and whether you would care to stay here overnight. I shall at least hope that you will have the time to come in for something, and shall look forward to seeing you.

Yours,

Rodney.

[And then on 3 December 1987].

Dear Terry,

May I ask a favour of you. Gathorne Cranbrook tells me of a piece by Labang and Medway in Trans 6th Aberdeen-Hull Symposium on Malaysia Ecology, ed. A. G. Marshall, and published in 1979 as Univ. of Hull Department of Geography Misc. Series 22 [D. Labang and Lord Medway 1979]. Would it be possible for you please to obtain for me a copy of the article, or if it not too bulky or horrendously expensive, of the monograph itself? It is surely somewhere in the Radcliffe Science Library, but I should prefer if feasible to have a copy from the source. I hope this would not be too much of a trouble to you; perhaps you need only pass on this note to a colleague in Geography, with your assurance that I shall send him the money by return.

The Borneo book still progresses, painstakingly: working on linguistic issues at present; it takes forever to be half-way sure of some lexical questions – but it is great fun to be reading the Busang dictionary, just for its own sake.

Yours ever,

Rodney

[I did not pursue it, but I assumed he was reading J.P.J. Barth's *Boesangsch-Nederlandsch Woordenboek* (1910). Or perhaps also Southwell's work (1980).

Gathorne Cranbrook also published an interesting anthology on the *Wonders of Nature in South-East Asia* in an OUP series in the 1990s (Earl of Cranbrook 1997; Foreword, King 1997b).

[I replied on 9 December 1987].

Dear Rodney,

Many thanks for your letter of 3 December. The Geography Department can supply a copy of Paper No 22 in its Miscellaneous Series. I have therefore purchased it on your behalf for the price of £3. Which I hope is acceptable to you. I am content to cover the cost, but if you wish to recompense then a cheque in my name, but no urgency. Until your letter I was unaware that Gathorne had written a paper in the Aberdeen-Hull Series. I have just read it with interest.

I will be in touch again before 4 March.

With best wishes,

Terry

[From Rodney 13 February 1988].

Dear Terry

Would you like to let me know of your plans for your visit to Oxford on Friday March 4th. To begin with will you be here in time for lunch at 12.30? Then would you like a bed for the night or two nights plus breakfast? Or otherwise, what did you have in mind and when might I hope to see you for a talk?

*Yours ever,
Rodney*

[I replied on 18 February 1988].

Dear Rodney

Many thanks for your letter of 13 February. I have only just been in touch with Bob Barnes about arrangements for Friday 4 March. Unfortunately, I will not be able to make it at 12.30. The most convenient train for me leaves from Hull at 8.31am and arrives, after several changes, in Oxford at 1.44pm. The British Rail system does not really cope with cross-country travel from Hull. I am to report at the Institute at 4pm and I gather that Bob would like to take me for a drink after the seminar. So, as I see it, I shall have time early afternoon, and also after the pub on Friday evening. I should be most grateful for a bed, evening meal and breakfast, and depending on your programme, I could drop in immediately on my arrival, say, just after 2pm. I am not sure how long the seminar will last and the refreshments afterwards, but sometime later on the Friday evening is also possible. Perhaps you could let me know how you are placed on Friday.

*With best wishes,
Terry*

[In the event I stayed for two nights in Oxford].

[Rodney replied on 22 February 1988].

Dear Terry

Thanks for your letter. I have had to wait until this morning to make the arrangements and then reply. You will have a guest room waiting for you on Friday March 4th (and 5th if you wish). I don't know what your commitments are for that evening but I have put you down provisionally for dinner; if you are not dining elsewhere that will mean being back here by about seven, I shall expect to see you first sometime around two or thereafter on the Friday afternoon. Much looking forward to your visit.

*Yours ever,
Rodney*

[I replied on 25 February 1988].

Dear Rodney,

Many thanks for your letter and for your kindness in making arrangements for me. I shall come to All Souls direct from the station. I would like to make dinner on the Friday evening, provided I am not too delayed at the Institute.

Look forward to seeing you after so long.

Sincerely,

Terry

[I managed to get to the dinner and had long discussions with Rodney and other senior professors at All Souls, at the end of an exhausting day.

[I thanked him in a letter on 16 March 1988].

Dear Rodney,

Just a note to thank you for your generous hospitality while I was in Oxford. It was good to see you and to have time to talk with you about Borneo and the wider Southeast Asia.

Your question about palms, their use and indigenous perceptions in Central Borneo.

Checking a Maloh word-list I have down sang as the large, long leaves of the palm

Teysmannia altifrons: a short-trunked palm found especially in the upper Embaloh region and used in a variety of rituals. Does this square with your identification?

Sincerely,

Terry

[Rodney replied on 21 March 1988].

Dear Terry

Thank you for your letter. It was good to have you here and for once to have a chance to talk. I have since read your Maloh monograph also; apart from its ethnographic value it tells me much about the direction of your own interests (as well as how far in some respects they diverge from mine!!). As for saang, I have it as the fan palm (Licuala) for both eastern and western Penan; Kedit's list of palm names does not confirm this. Elshout identified it as Cordyline Jav. And this name is reported from Busang. Brosius will no doubt sort it out..

What the Penan whom I knew called sang did not look, in the leaf, like Teymannia altifrons: which I think was called anau. The Penan did not use the leaf in ritual, though of course all the longhouse peoples did.

Yours,

Rodney.

[I then asked him whether my Maloh monograph (King 1985a) was available in the Bodleian. He replied on 25 May 1988].

Dear Terry

I cannot be sure without ordering up your Maloh monograph in the Bodleian but it may be that you have not exploited this; so, just on the merest off-chance, here is their reference (the figures are the Bodleian shelf mark). Very dense and detailed material, ordered with admirably Germanic thoroughness.

PS I enclose a photocopy of a couple of photographs of Maloh traditional dress which you may not have come across. Meant to do so long ago. The photographer walked through Embaloh country.

[So, Rodney and I then were exchanging photographs on Borneo peoples to test one another. Rodney sent me images of West Kalimantan and suggested I might try to identify their source. I sent him images of Punan in West Kalimantan. These were photographs from the Dutch colonial period].

[His letter on 3 June 1988].

Dear Terry

Well done; you passed. It was indeed Maxandrea's [P.J. Hoek], De Dajaks in de Binnenlanden van Borneo [1924]. As for the photographs you test me on: I am afraid I cannot help you, for I never knew the provenance of the pictures. Odd pictures do turn up in works on Kalimantan, especially in the early decades, and without attribution. I have not even the German originals of Die Gottesidee [Schärer 1963, 1946] any more, but I am sure that if there had been information on the illustrations, I should have included it in the English edition.

Yours ever,

Rodney Needham

[I contacted Rodney on 8 June 1990 about Italian students who might wish to see him in Oxford].

Dear Rodney,

Sorry for the short notice. At present we have five Italian students with us in Hull who are studying Indonesian language and literature with Professor Luigi Santa Maria at the Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples. Two of the students - Gabriella Ranno and Patrizia Decurione - will be spending a few days in Oxford studying some of the Malay manuscripts there, from 11-14 June. They asked whether they might meet scholars of Indonesia in Oxford. We thought of you, Bob Barnes and Peter Carey. This is all rather rushed, but they may attempt to contact you while they are in Oxford.

We explained that you are very busy and that we did not have the time to arrange a meeting in good time. However, if they do 'phone you at All Souls and you have a moment, perhaps you might be able to see them. They are very bright and enthusiastic students and their Indonesian is good.

With warmest regards,

Terry

[Rodney responded on 13 June 1990].

Dear Terry

I am sorry to have just missed your telephone call this afternoon. I had gone down to tea with a pupil only a minute before. This is merely to say that of course it will be all right if

your students call me. These are busy days and they may be out of luck, but, if we can meet, I shall be only pleased to do so.

Yours ever,

Rodney

PS. I shall look forward to seeing you after Sian Jay's viva and trust you will be able to leave a little time before returning to Hull. My apartment is in Holywell and only two minutes' walk from college. I should like to take you to my local pub, if there is time, and to catch up on Sarawak news.

[On 25 June 1990 I wrote].

Dear Rodney

Thank you for your kind letter of 13 June. In the event our exchange students from Naples had to shorten their stay in Oxford and spent their time in the Bodleian. They therefore did not have the opportunity to contact you.

It was good to see you, however, briefly at the pub, after Sian Jay's viva. We had an interesting time with Peter Rivière as the internal examiner.

Yes, I also hope to see you in the autumn, and I have your telephone number at Holywell.

As always, with my best wishes,

Terry

[Sian Eira Jay was a graduate of the University of Hull in social sciences and also took courses in South-East Asian Studies. She then went on to complete a DPhil at Oxford on Priests, Shamans and the Cosmology of the Ngaju Dayak of Central Kalimantan in 1991. She was formerly a researcher in the Departments of Ethnography and Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum and an editor for the Macmillan Dictionary of Art. She then spent much of her career in working as an editor and lecturing in Singapore].

[Subsequently, I also sent Rodney a copy of Jan Avé's paper on "Contributions to Borneo Studies in the German Language" (1990) in late 1990 accompanied by a brief note on 20 December 1990, and wishing him well and a relaxing time during the Christmas period].

[Rodney responded on 16 January 1991].

Dear Terry,

Your note of December 20th awaited me when I returned from San Francisco at the end of the year, but since then I have been confined mostly to my bed with a nasty virus and this is the first day on which I have felt fit enough to get up and try to do something about my desk. I am sorry for the delay. You allude to a review article by Jan Avé, but I cannot find it in the pile of untended matters and must assume that it is somewhere there. Anyway, thanks for your part in sending it, and for your communication. I had a fine Christmas with my sons, thanks, but have no news. Beatrice Clayre has written of the confusion and changed circumstances of her return to Sarawak, and I am due to examine Monica Janowski on the Kelabit in April, it appears, but that's about it. I too much hope that our paths will cross in this new year; do give me a telephone call if there seems at all a chance that you may be in Oxford and free to call in here.

*Yours ever,
Rodney*

[Dr Monica Janowski is currently a Research Associate at the SOAS Centre of South East Asian Studies, University of London, and the Curator of the Southeast Museum at the University of Hull from 2022 (as I am still Hull-based, we are working together to sustain and develop the collection). She was also a Research Fellow and Advisor at the Sarawak Museum (2017-2022). Her research interests are wide-ranging, but she has a particular focus on the anthropology of food and kinship and relatedness through food, the symbolism of crops and animals, and most recently cosmological beliefs and symbolism on “dragons” in island Southeast Asia. Her major publications include *The Forest, Source of Life: The Kelabit of Sarawak* (2003), *Tuked Rini, Cosmic Traveller* (2014), her paper on the hearth-group (1995) and edited books with Fiona Kerlogue (2007) and Tim Ingold (2012).

Her doctoral research, supervised by Maurice Bloch at the LSE, resulted in a thesis on Rice, Work and Community among the Kelabit of Sarawak, East Malaysia (1991)].

[Rodney also wrote on 19 February 1991].

*Dear Terry,
Just a note to tell you that now I am up and about [after a period of ill-health with a lung infection], I have discovered that the first copy of Jan Avé's review article did arrive at All Souls lodge. I am passing it on to Beatrice Clayre (that is to await her return). Thanks again and, I am sure, on her behalf as well, for it is a most interesting piece.
Yours ever
Rodney.*

[Dr Beatrice Clayre took her MA and PhD in prehistoric archaeology at the University of Edinburgh. She studied and worked in Germany, Spain and Portugal and received homage from the University of Seville for her contribution to Spanish archaeology. From 1964 to 1968 she lived in Sabah and Sarawak with her husband, and studied the languages of Dusun, Lun Bawang, Penan, Kayan and Sa'ban as a Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM) Bible translator (see, for example, 1996). She was instrumental in bringing a substantial amount of Stephen Morris's unpublished research on the Oya Melanau to fruition (Morris 1997). She was guest editor of the 1997 Sarawak Museum publication (also see Morris 1991). She has had a long involvement with Sarawak and the Sa'ban (see her wide-ranging paper on the languages of Borneo 1996)

Iain F.C.S. Clayre, who worked closely with Stephen Morris, was awarded his PhD on the Melanau language at Edinburgh University (1972). Their son, Alasdair Clayre, born in Sa'ban country at Long Banga is currently studying for his PhD on the Sa'ban in the Faculty of Social Sciences at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) (see, for example, Clayre 2020)].

[Rodney wrote to me on 12 August 1991].

*Dear Terry,
Just in case you have not been sent a copy. I am writing to let you know that Alexander Adelaar has in press a long examination of the Tamanic languages (inc. Embaloh/Maloh). which so far as I can gauge such a matter, proves that they are cognate with Southern*

Sulawesi and proposes that the original speakers were from there. Naturally, he cannot be particular about how they ever got to the ulu Kapuas, but all in all it is a most interesting demonstration. I cannot pass on to you the copy which I have myself been lent, but no doubt Adelaar would let you have one.

No news: I am doing my best to resume work, but it is not much of a best so far.

Yours as ever,

Rodney

PS Beatrice Clayre, by the way, after enduring rather awful living conditions in lowland Sarawak, has some most interesting findings on Sa'Ban, Lun Dayeh and eastern Penan.

[K. Alexander Adelaar "The Classification of the Tamanic Languages" (1994), I had also communicated frequently with Ülo Sirk on the close relationship between Maloh (Embaloh, Taman) and Bugis (1979; and see Lander and Ogloblin 2008). And see the excellent work on linguistic classification of Smith (2017).

[I responded on 22 August 1991].

Dear Rodney,

Sincere thanks for your welcome letter of 12 August. I do know of Alexander Adelaar's work, which I much admire, and I have seen an early paper of his on the Tamanic languages. I shall write to him to ask for a copy of the publication to which you refer.

I am busy at the moment with a general book entitled The Peoples of Borneo [1993] for a Blackwell series edited by Peter Bellwood and Ian Glover on The Peoples of South-East Asia and the Pacific. Frighteningly they want me to include a chapter on prehistory. I am madly reading up on this without much success. Wish me luck.

I hope we can meet up soon. With my best wishes,

Terry

[Rodney had read my Borneo book, and wrote on 5 July 1993].

Dear Terry

I have just begun reading your new book on Borneo, marvelling the while at your determination and professionalism in ever undertaking such a task, and have come upon the name of Wyn Sargent. It occurs to me that you may well never have come upon a letter of mine prompted by one of her reports, published as it was seventeen years ago, so here it is. Now for chapter 2.....

Yours ever,

Rodney

Wyn Sargent, *My Life with the Headhunters* (1974); I was undertaking fieldwork in West Kalimantan at the same time as she was pursuing her adventures in other parts of Indonesia].

[And then again from Rodney on 8 July 1993, bearing in mind the meticulous approach with which Rodney read books and manuscripts. He would always find something to draw your attention to].

[I responded on 12 July 1993].

Dear Rodney,

Thank you for your two letters of 5 and 8 July. They arrived while I was involved in organising the 9th European Colloquium on Indonesian and Malay Studies here in Hull. It was an excellent conference, but it has meant my mail has been placed in a large pile ready for answering this week. I have included a programme for the Colloquium which might be of some interest to you.

The high point for me was to chair a session by Professor Sartono Kartodirdjo, a scholar I had admired from my early interest in rural protest movements in Indonesia [1966, 1973, 1988, 1997; King 1973, 1975a, 1977b; see also 1978d, 1978e, 1980b].

Thank you for your kind words about my Borneo book. As you probably realised it is not solely directed at an academic audience. I was advised not to enter into any details of scholarly debates in anthropology or archaeology, not to use too many anthropological terms unless I defined them in simple and straightforward terms, and I had to keep footnotes to a minimum. In the event I managed to do without them altogether.

I enclose the title page of Chadwick and Courtenay for information

Thank you for your useful piece of information on Wyn Sargent's book.

With my best wishes, as always,

Terry.

PS You have probably heard that Beatrice Clayre has received a grant from the British Academy to continue her linguistic work in Sarawak.

[Rodney followed with a note on 14 July 1993]

Dear Terry

A note to say that I found your new book just what it is meant to be: comprehensive and sound and even-handed, and altogether most useful. Not a single misprint, that I detected either. There is one little quibble about one expression but as it touches only me I need not specify; but I can say that there is a related point in your statement that there are certain very powerful symbols and that "spiritual forces emanate from them," (p. 249). Which likewise I jib at. Passing over that, can you please help me with a reference? You cite Chadwick and Courtenay on "Punan Art" [1983] which I do not know, and I wonder if you have any further particulars (centrally the ISBN) by means of which I can ask the Bodleian to acquire it [King 1987]. I don't even know, to tell the truth, where James Cook University is. What a relief it must have been to you to have completed such a demanding work, even if there could be no doubt that it would be worthwhile.

Yours ever,

Rodney

[And he corrected me on 16 July 1993].

Dear Terry,

A note about your book; at page 44 (I think Beatrice Clayre has borrowed my copy) you allude to the Sebop in connection with the Kenyah. But it seemed to me that the reference was ambiguous. One reading, as I recall it, was that the Sebop are a main group within the

Kenyah. This could well be maintained so long as it was premised on the admission of western Penan and eastern Penan also as “Kenyah” (as I have labelled their isolects); otherwise, they would be distanced as, according to western Penan, former Penan and therefore distinguishable from the Kenyah.

*As ever,
Rodney*

I decided not to include some of the letters in the early 1990s. There were messages about Rodney’s health and his month-long visit to New Zealand, and various matters in our correspondence from April-May 1990 to do with the examination of the thesis on the Ngaju of Central Kalimantan, supervised by Rodney].

[Much of the correspondence was in connection with Traude Gavin’s doctoral research on Iban textiles and her revisions for publication (1995, 2003 [2004]; and see 1996). I was her supervisor, but in conversation with Rodney, he generously agreed to read her draft chapters. She says, in her acknowledgements, “I am grateful to Professor Emeritus Rodney Needham for giving so generously of his time and for commenting in great detail on all draft chapters. His queries were invaluable in pointing out gaps in data, especially when I returned to the field in 1993. I profited greatly from his advice and his criticism helped to avoid a number of errors and misrepresentations...He further pointed out many references, which helped to deepen my approach to the field data” (2003: ix-x).

She also acknowledged the support and advice of Derek and Monica Freeman. “I thank Professor Emeritus Derek Freeman and his wife Monica for seeing me at a time when he was occupied with other work, for I benefited greatly from his remarks and observations. He kindly allowed me to quote from his notes and to include some of Monica’s drawings in this publication” (ibid.: x; Appell-Warren 2009; King 2010).

Gavin drew upon the advice and guidance of two of the most prominent anthropologists who had undertaken research in Borneo (see, for example Needham 1964b, 1966, 1976; and Freeman 1967, 1968, 1979). Subsequently Needham and Freeman went their separate theoretical ways in the understanding of indigenous cultures in island Southeast Asia, including Borneo, following Freeman’s “conversion” from British social anthropology in Kuching to what he referred to as an “interactionist paradigm” and his critical examination of Margaret Mead’s Samoan research (Mead 1928; Freeman 1983a, 1983b, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1991, 1992, 1994-95, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; and see his criticisms of Needham 1968, 1975; and see Appell 1984; Appell and Madan 1988; Jarvie 2012, 2017, 2018). Freeman’s paradigm “recognizes biological as well as cultural variables” (see Shankman 1998: 36), and deploys perspectives from evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology; the key triad is culture, biology and evolution (Shankman 2000; and see Hempenstall 2017; King 2019).

It should be noted that Freeman’s paradigm and his dissection of Mead’s findings and conclusions and the conduct of her field research (see Freeman 1983a, 1998, 1999a), in turn, have not escaped criticism (see, for example, Acciaioli 1983; Brady 1983, 1991; Caton 1990; Côté 1992, 1994, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2005; Foerstel and Gilliam 1992; Holmes 1986 [1987]; Leacock 1992; Levy 1984; Mageo 1988; Orans 1996; Patience and Smith 1986; Paxman 1988; Scheper-Hughes 1984; Shankman 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2013a, 2013b, 2018;

Young and Juan 1985). Clearly Needham and Freeman differed significantly on the ways in which human cultures should be interpreted and analysed; (compare, for example, Freeman 1980, 1992 and Needham 1978, 1979, 1980). And the Mead-Freeman controversy is approaching its fortieth year.

In my experience, controversies spawn controversies; there is one specifically in Borneo Studies, which also arises from different anthropological modes of interpretation and analysis. This is in regard to Traude Gavin's thesis on Iban ritual textiles. The issues have been extensively debated and there is no need to return to them in any detail (King 2017, 2018a; Heppell 2018a, 2018b; and see Gavin and Heppell below). Gavin examines "the names of patterns, [and] "the different ways in which these names are used and their relation to ritual efficacy", for which Rodney Needham's advice and guidance was invaluable, particularly the matter of naming, categories and classification. She was critical of evolutionary approaches for the understanding of textile forms and of the notion that patterns were pictographs "telling a story" (2003:1; and see Gavin 2005, 2008, 2012 [a paper in which Gavin draws attention to the problems of a Sarawak-centred approach to Iban and Ibanic studies and the problems of defining "Ibanic"], 2015a, 2015b, 2016).

There has been a critical counter-argument provided by Michael Heppell, a former doctoral student of Derek Freeman (2006a, 2010, 2014, 2016). Heppell attempts to integrate biological-genetic, technological and cultural variables into an evolutionary framework to explain Iban weaving and textiles in terms of Darwinian sexual selection, reproductive success and the survival of the fittest. He also connects his criticisms of Gavin with Freeman's critical view of Margaret Mead's Samoan research (2014: 149, 153; 2016: 24). Heppell et al's *Iban art: Sexual selection and severed heads* (2005), including elements of Freeman's paradigm and a reference to Freeman's paper 'Severed heads that germinate' (1979) has been subject to critical review (Wadley 2006; and see Heppell's response 2006b; and see Sather 2006b) as has his *The Seductive Warp Thread* (2014) (see, for example, Gavin 2015a; King 2017, 2018a; Heppell 2016, 2018a, 2018b). The main thrust of Wadley's review is that "art is a form of communication and, as with language, we use it in multiple ways" (2006: 263). For me certain kinds of evolutionary approach are unconvincing and certainly a thesis of "sexual selection" is untenable. I return to Charles Staniland Wake and his 1870 essay on the problem of evolution in the social sciences. And perhaps Marshall's paper captures the problem of a claim to "ethnographic" authority (1993).

Nevertheless, the debate does continue and, in my view, can never be resolved, and though I regret the more recent exchanges between colleagues whose knowledge and expertise I value, I have to continue to question claims to authority (Sutlive and Appell 2018; King 2020; and see Sather 2018a, 2018b)

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The last written message I received from Rodney, though we were still in contact over the 'phone, was not about anthropology at all. I mentioned to him in the mid-1990s that my eldest son was taking piano lessons, and he immediately recommended some suitable music for him, and gave me CDs for him to listen to.

He sent a card on 26 September 1997, accompanied by a CD.

Dear Terry,

I got this for a friend the other day and was nicely impressed by it (for all that Naxos is a cheap range of CDs), recalling the [Camille] Saint-Saens that you once bought here in Oxford, I thought your son might care to have it. I do not much take to No.2, I must say (too close to No. 1, beginning with the tempo of the opening theme, and then rather blaring and imprecise, as though the composer did not really know what he wanted to do), but this No. 1 is a classic.

*Yours
R.*

My final thoughts on our exchanges, bearing in mind, during this whole period, Rodney was writing, translating and editing, and teaching and supervising students, is that I was but a very small part of his prodigious correspondence with so many others.

What I also take from our correspondence is Rodney's continuing interest in and commitment to Borneo Studies, Sarawak and the Penan, though clearly, he had moved into broader fields of anthropological interest in his case-studies of prescriptive alliance and his theoretical work on the ways in which human thought is structured. Jayl Langub's paper (2017) demonstrates Rodney's continuing engagement with the Penan and what they thought of him fondly as a stranger who entered their lives. I talked with him frequently about my work in Sarawak; eventually a reminiscence appeared in print, unfortunately after his death (King 2018b). Rodney continued to publish on the Penan and Orang Asli into the 1980s whilst pursuing his other interests in prescription, alliance and symbolic classification across a range of Southeast Asian societies and those beyond Southeast Asia. In addition, he edited and also translated several volumes written by scholars whom he was convinced should be exposed to an Anglophone audience, or, if written in English, should be rescued from neglect.

I suppose you could style him an English gentleman-scholar, always polite and proper, but he drew you into his enthusiasm for anthropology and his desire to engage with what his correspondents were working on, and particularly seeking news on Borneo as he remembered it in the 1950s and as it had changed in the 1980s and 1990s. In the academic world there are those you like and take to, and those you probably want to distance yourself from. I was genuinely fond of Rodney and I thoroughly enjoyed our correspondence and his company.

My one deep and lasting regret is that I was unable to apply for a Visiting Fellowship at Oxford and work with him. It was my loss. Endicott succinctly identifies Rodney's spirit and soul (if this distinction can be made). "[H]e also treated his former students – at least those I know - like extensions of his family. He genuinely cared about us, our spouses, and our children and was concerned about the ups and downs our lives went through. It's ironic that a man who made his reputation distinguishing structure from sentiment in kinship should have had such a strong sentimental attachment to his kin and quasi-kin" (2007: 14-15). Though I was something of a "distant relative" he took an interest in my work and career development and even my son's music lessons and his progress with the piano.

And a footnote to one of his last letters to me, and an amusing one, mentioning no one in particular, but reflecting on anthropology as a discipline and those who practice it. "Our anthropology colleagues can be odd. We are worse puzzles than our exotic subjects".

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