

Film deal brings joy for stroke-hit author

by Beatrice Phillpotts

AN eco-thriller penned in the 1970s by a Chiddingfold author is now being filmed as an international TV mini-series with a budget of \$25million.

James Follett's *Ice*, a chilling tale of the global threat posed by a breakaway iceberg the size of Belgium, was published in 1978 and broadcast as a BBC Radio 4 Saturday night theatre production in 1986.

Filming is now under way in New Zealand on the four-hour movie with an all-star cast that includes Sam Neill and Simon Callow and it is scheduled for release in April. The film company Power's current slate includes *The Day of the Triffids*, which has just been screened by BBC1 as a Christmas special.

A best-selling author, Mr Follett has written 25 novels and a 1982 publication *The*

Tiptoe Boys was filmed as *Who Dares Wins*.

The news that a second book was to be screened came as a big thrill, particularly as Mr Follett suffered a debilitating stroke five years ago that left him fearful he would not be able to write again.

"I was writing a book a year but I have not published anything since," he said. "I now have trouble walking and my concentration is not as good.

"I used to be able to write 2,000 words a day. My wife Christine has been a real rock. I was very depressed because I thought my difficulties with concentration would mean I couldn't write at all.

"She said I should write 200 words a day. I took her advice and I've just finished a new novel *Hellborn*."

Mr Follett arrived home from hospital in a wheelchair but thanks to intensive physio-

therapy can now walk with support and improves his mobility on the treadmill exercise machine installed in his study. His many fans also provided an important psychological boost to aid his recovery. There were 50,000 supportive emails waiting for him on his website when he switched on his computer at home.

The author is unable to travel to New Zealand to watch the filming but is very much looking forward to seeing the finished result. Much of the action takes place on a glacier and filming had to be brought forward following a sudden panic because the set was starting to melt.

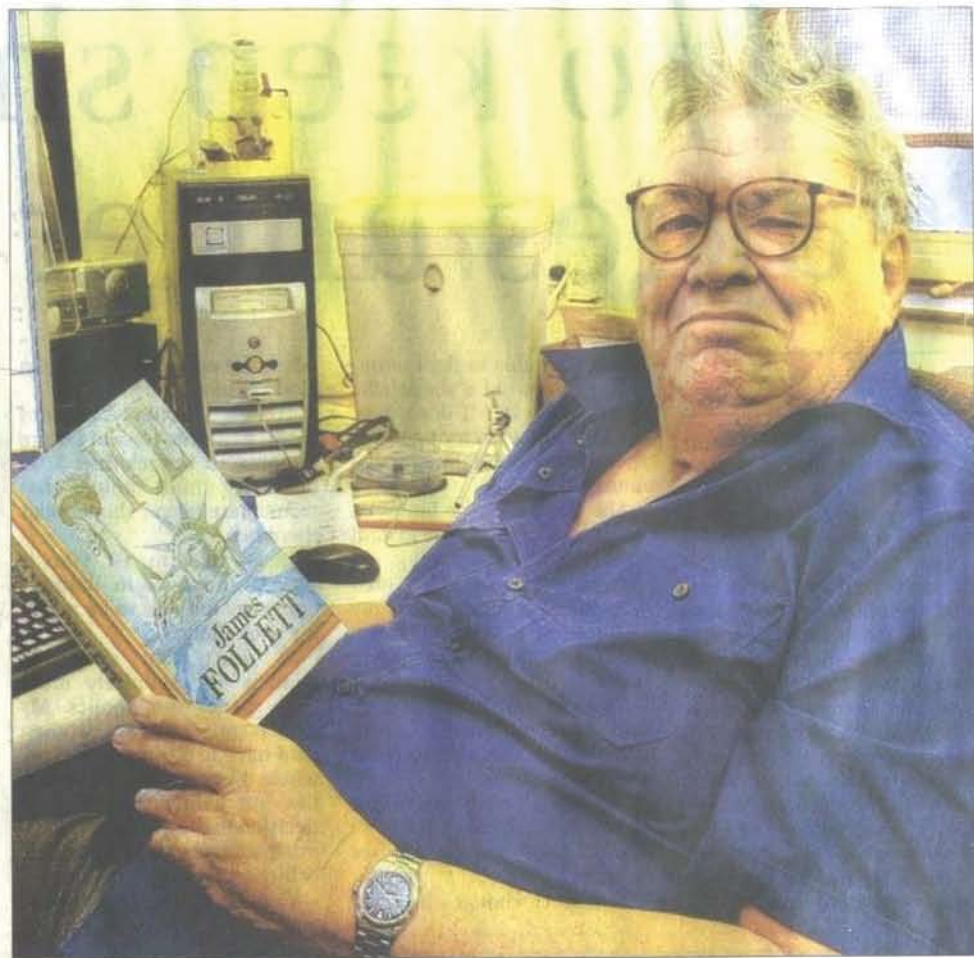
"It was a lovely hot summer when I was writing the book," Mr Follett recalled. "I froze a huge piece of ice because I wanted to see how long it would last and it took two weeks to melt on the lawn.

"I had an extraordinary piece of luck with my research. I didn't know where to start to get information about icebergs and there was no internet then. I got talking to a marine geologist at a party, who worked at the Institute of Oceanography that was then based just down the road at Wormley.

"He gave me everything I needed to know and a library ticket to go into the institute. I couldn't believe it was all there, just two miles from my home. It was a huge piece of luck.

"It took me six months to start writing again after the stroke and I was very depressed. But I'm now up to 300 words a day and I'm happy. I've got a notebook full of ideas and a very supportive agent.

"One paragraph gradually grows into a book. My next one may also take several years to write but I'm going to carry on doing it."



Author James Follett with his book *Ice* which is now being made into a TV mini series.