

Callum: Hello, I'm Callum Robertson and this is People and Places. Today I'm going to be talking about the actor James Doohan.

James Doohan was most well known as the engineer Scotty in the iconic science fiction programme Star Trek. Initially Star Trek was a television series in the 1960s but since 1979 there have been 10 films and four further television series.

The series began at a time when space exploration was in its infancy, man had yet to walk on the moon and the idea of travelling in space was catching on in the public imagination.

The television series referred to space as 'the final frontier', the last unexplored area. And in the series, the exploration took place in a spaceship called the Enterprise. Such was the impact of the series that in the 1970s NASA called one of their real space shuttles by the same name, Enterprise.

James Doohan played the chief engineer of the fictional star ship Enterprise. It was his job to get the most out of the engines as the vessel flew through space. Of course it was a fictional vessel and during his life James Doohan never did get to fly in space.

He died in 2005 but his dream to go into space was realised last month when his ashes were flown in a rocket into orbit. It was something he had asked for in his will.

BBC correspondent Peter Willis attended the rocket launch and explains a little more about what is called Post Cremation Memorial Space Flight. How many people have used the service so far?

Peter Willis

Post Cremation Memorial Space Flight, as it's known, is a growth industry here in the United States. Star Trek creator, Gene Rodenberry, was one of the first to have his remains fired into orbit. That was ten years ago and since then more than 100 others have made the final frontier their final journey.

Callum: Peter described these space flights as a 'growth industry'. It's a new business which is getting bigger. He said that more than 100 people have made the final frontier their final journey. He mentioned Gene Rodenberry as another individual who had his ashes flown into space. When was this and what was Rodenberry's connection to Star Trek? Listen again.

Peter Willis

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Callum: Gene Rodenberry was the creator of Star Trek and his ashes made the trip into the final frontier 10 years ago.

What is perhaps interesting about these space flights is that the ashes don't stay up in space. They are fired up in a small unmanned rocket from the desert and then come back down to earth. Peter Willis describes what happened when James Doohan's rocket was launched. Who else's ashes made the trip as well?

Peter Willis

There were tears and whoops of joy from relatives on the ground as the rocket took off from a tiny launch pad here in the middle of the desert. Scotty's ashes were accompanied by those of the former American astronaut Gordon Cooper and 200 other people. Scotty's widow, Wendy Doohan, says he wanted to follow the example of Star Trek's creator Gene Roddenberry. Today's launch is seen as a considerable boost for the commercial space effort. The company behind it predicts that more people will now be looking to have their ashes beamed to the 'final frontier'.

Callum: James Doohan was accompanied on this final trip by the ashes of former astronaut Gordon Cooper and 200 other people. Peter Willis suggests that the publicity surrounding this launch will encourage more people to have their ashes blasted into space. Listen again.

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Callum: That's all from this edition of People and Places.