

Raise your glass!

ON 24 October 1901, ten people met at University College London to found the Psychological Society, which gained the prefix 'British' in 1906 and its Royal Charter in 1965. We are a little younger than the American Psychological Association (founded in 1892) and about the same age as the French (1901) and German (1904) ones. The founding of so many psychological societies around the turn of the last century really marks that as the point when our fledgling discipline became sufficiently distinct to mark its identity with its own societies. The rest, as they say, is history (for more on the evolution of the BPS see p.516 of this issue).

Several years ago now Council had the foresight to set up a special Centenary Subcommittee to brainstorm, plan and ultimately oversee the implementation of a series of special activities in celebration of British psychology in our centenary year. I have already mentioned many of these activities in earlier columns, and I think most who have been involved would agree that the large majority of these special events have been enormously successful, sometimes in the face of quite considerable logistical difficulties. The year is not over yet, though, and the week of the actual birthday this month will be extremely busy. We have a parliamentary exhibition scheduled for 22–26 October (thanks to Judy Ellis, Stephen Newstead and Stephen White for their efforts in securing this), and then the birthday receptions on the 24th.

While the year itself has been an eventful and generally successful one, we are concerned that it should also generate a legacy for the future, not just a series of events that end as 2002 chimes in. One very successful strand of activities has been the public lectures at the national academies (at the Royal Society in February, the Royal Society of Edinburgh in April, with the British Academy and ALSISS still to come in November and December). We hope their success may lead to a regular annual series of psychology lectures at one or more of the academies, and we are actively exploring this possibility.

A society's health (and wealth!) ultimately rests upon its membership, and this year we are embarking on a survey to try to identify why people do, or do not,

join or retain links with the Society. BPS members are particularly rare among academic psychologists, and we hope to find out more about what we could do to make the Society more attractive to them. A survey of academic departments will be conducted later this year; we hope the results will inform policy early in 2002, marking a new phase of membership growth. Next year is also likely to herald a new phase in the governance of the Society – David Legge reports on developments on p.548.

Despite our long history, the history of psychology remains a relatively neglected topic in UK psychology departments. There are only a handful of psychologists whose major scholarly effort centres on history, and it is rare that undergraduate degrees offer options on the history of the subject (though of course historical perspectives are often well integrated in core material). When I was editor of the *British Journal of Psychology* my editorial board specifically suggested that historical articles would be appropriate for this general journal, but we received only a small number of responses to the call for historical articles that appeared in my 1996 editorial, few of which were of publishable quality. In five years I think we published just two articles that could be regarded as truly historical.

This year the Society has funded exhibitions at the Science Museum and National Portrait Gallery celebrating the

history of British psychology, but we feel the Society could do more in the future. May Council agreed to establish a working party to report (quite quickly) with suggestions for ways in which the BPS could further invest in archival and scholarly work into the history of psychology, and I am personally anxious that we should make progress on this before the end of my presidential year. I am grateful to Ingrid Lunt for her initiative in this area.

Back to the present. On 24 October we will be celebrating our birthday with five parties – one at lunchtime in Leicester for our office staff, and four evening receptions to be held simultaneously in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. Many members will attend one or other of the receptions, but inevitably only a tiny proportion of the membership can physically be present. But perhaps others can join us in spirit. At 7.30pm on 24 October we will raise our glasses to toast our Society. If you are near a glass of wine at the time, please join us in a toast to the past, present and future membership of the British Psychological Society.

Vicki Bruce

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Friday 5 October

BPS-sponsored showing of the film *Regeneration* at the Phoenix Arts Centre, Leicester, 6.05pm (see p.517). Tickets from the box office: 0116 255 4854.

Monday 8 October

British Association public lecture at New Walk Museum, Leicester, 7.30pm: Professor Mike Burton, 'Face recognition in the lab and on the street'. Admission free.

22–26 October

Exhibition at the Houses of Parliament (see p.508).

Wednesday 24 October

Centenary reception at the Science Museum (invited guests only).

Friday 2 November

BPS-sponsored showing of the film *Memento*

at the Phoenix Arts Centre, Leicester, 6.05pm (see p.518). Tickets from the box office: 0116 255 4854.

Monday 5 November

Public lecture at the British Academy, London, by Professor Annette Karmiloff-Smith. Admission free: please apply to The Secretary, The British Academy, 10 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AH. Tel: 020 7969 5264; e-mail: lectures@britac.ac.uk.

Monday 17 December

ALSISS public lecture by Professor Marie Johnston. Venue and title tbc.

For more information and centenary merchandise contact Libby Langley on elilan@bps.org.uk. Tel: 0116 252 9585.

Centenary events



DYSLEXIA AWARENESS WEEK

FROM 29 October to 3 November the British Dyslexia Association is running an Awareness Week. The BDA hopes that the week will highlight maths and dyslexia issues, such as being able to understand concepts while forgetting the process. The charity is calling for better training of teachers in identifying and providing for dyslexic difficulties in maths.

CALL FOR EXPERT WITNESSES

A NEW edition of the *UK Register of Expert Witnesses* is due out next May. Psychologists who wish to promote their availability as witnesses to solicitors, barristers, and insurance companies can apply now for a listing, for which the recommendation of at least one instructing solicitor is needed.

□ For full details apply to JS Publications, PO Box 505, Newmarket CB8 7TF. Tel: 01638 561590; e-mail: terri@jspubs.com.

THE TRUTH ABOUT DEMENTIA

A NEW report from the Mental Health Foundation is urging professionals to tell people the truth about their dementia. According to MHF, people who develop dementia are not usually told what is wrong with them. MHF research shows that people with dementia find the opportunities presented by knowing their diagnosis outweigh the limitations: people were able to make sense of the changes they had noticed, take steps to adapt their lives and make plans for the future.

□ Copies of the report *Tell Me the Truth* are available at the MHF website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk.

EXAM RESULTS

THIS year 31,740 students sat A-level psychology examinations, an increase on last year's total of 30,187. The proportion of female candidates remained steady at just over 77 per cent, and males were again outperformed at the top three grades. A total of 48,342 candidates took the new AS-level psychology examination.

Parliamentary affairs

AS part of its centenary celebrations, the Society is holding an exhibition in the Houses of Parliament during the week of 22–26 October. The exhibition is sponsored by Dr Ian Gibson MP, chair of the board of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (an all-party group promoting understanding of science and technology within parliament).

The exhibits (including posters, leaflets and demonstrations) are designed to inform MPs, peers and civil servants about the range of research conducted by psychologists, the role of the Society in British psychology, and the applications of psychology in a wide range of everyday situations.

Dr Judi Ellis, the Society's Parliamentary Representative who worked with the Centenary Subcommittee and centenary officer to secure the exhibition time, said: 'Our overarching aim is to raise the profile of psychology and psychologists in Parliament and to make those present aware of the important

role that psychologists can and do play in informing current societal issues and controversies.'

A reception will be held on the Tuesday to promote the

exhibition and the Society's centenary year. Professor Vicki Bruce and Dr Ian Gibson will speak at the event, addressing parliamentarians and members of influential external bodies.

Contacts in government?

The BPS has long experience of commenting on legislation and providing expert evidence and advice to parliamentary committees and ministries. To develop this work the Society has appointed a part-time parliamentary officer, Nicky Edwards, based in the London office. This new 12-month post has been created to strengthen our relations with government, with the aim of becoming involved in policy making as well as consultation.

One of the first tasks will be to conduct an audit of members' existing contacts in Whitehall and Westminster. Have you represented psychologists' views to government in the past five years? Do you have a good current working relationship with a particular MP, peer or civil servant?

If so, contact Nicky Edwards by 15 December with a brief summary of how you have represented the Society's views to government since 1997, along with names of useful contacts you have made with ministers, their advisers, parliamentarians or civil servants. The project will begin with government at the UK level, but details of links with the Scottish Parliament and the Assemblies of Wales and N. Ireland are welcome.

□ Tel: 020 7692 3412; e-mail: nicedw@bps.org.uk.

Ethics for counsellors and psychotherapists

ALL practitioners of counselling and psychotherapy within the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) are now required to conform to comprehensive new ethical guidelines. This follows the September publication of a new *Statement of Fundamental Ethics*.

The BACP has always had a complaints procedure, but instead of a list of legal do's and don'ts, all BACP therapists must now conduct their professional lives within the values and principles of counselling and psychotherapy.

These include being committed to continuing professional development, applying the lessons of the latest research, and even retaining 'mental balance' by enjoying a full life beyond the consulting room. In future, BACP practitioners will not escape censure because existing evidence is insufficient to 'prove a technical breach', as there will also be an inquiry into how far the overall treatment has been delivered ethically.

The move comes as the government considers regulating all forms of 'talking treatment'. BACP spokesman Philip Hodson warned: 'We still need legislation to regulate the

entire field of counselling and therapy properly. It should be an offence to practise as a counsellor or therapist if you are not properly qualified. Ministers would be pushing at an open door, but successive governments have backed away from this.'

CORRECTION

The correct name of the national award given to Professor Cary Cooper and Professor Mark Haggard is Commander of the Order of the British Empire, not as reported in the August issue.

Mental Health Act: Looking forward to change?

ANNE COOKE at the 10th Maudsley Debate.

A RECENT and popular development at the Institute of Psychiatry in London has been a series of public debates on controversial topics. On 5 July the motion was 'This house looks forward to the implementation of the government White Paper on mental health'. It was defeated by a large margin.

The debate was prompted by the publication last December of a joint Department of Health and Home Office White Paper (see www.doh.gov.uk/mental_health/whitepaper2000.htm) proposing sweeping changes to mental health legislation. The reforms have wide-ranging implications for some psychologists, including new powers as 'clinical supervisors' to detain or otherwise compel people. While welcoming many aspects of the proposed reforms, the BPS has, in its responses to the government's consultation process, expressed concerns about others, including:

- the potential for a large increase in the numbers of people subject to compulsion;
- the broad definition of 'mental disorder', which risks including those who retain the capacity to make treatment decisions for themselves;
- a greatly increased emphasis on risk and risk assessment, which could increase stigma, fuel the culture of blame in services and lead to unnecessary detentions;
- the potential for medicalising violent behaviour through the concept of 'dangerous people with severe personality disorder';
- compliance with the Human Rights Act;
- confidentiality issues arising from proposed new duties to share information;
- weakness of proposed safeguards, such as the lack of a requirement to provide access to a range of treatments (e.g.

psychological interventions) before compulsion is resorted to.

Many of these concerns were reiterated by speakers at the debate, which was attended by over 150 professionals, service-users and others. Before hearing the speakers' arguments only 2 per cent of the audience supported the motion with 61 per cent opposed and a substantial 37 per cent undecided.

Tony Maden (Imperial College), a forensic psychiatrist, proposed the motion. He suggested that the White Paper ensured that 'difficult' patients would receive treatment rather than punishment. His statements that he was 'proud to be an agent of social control' and that 'he who pays the piper calls the tune' drew vociferous reactions from the audience, including a question posed by another psychiatrist about whether there was 'anything you think we shouldn't do for money'?

Paul Bowen, a barrister from the organisation Liberty, opposed the motion. He claimed the proposals were motivated by perceived rather than actual risks to public safety, would add to stigma, would turn clinicians into jailers, placed undue faith in the accuracy of risk assessment, and had inadequate legal safeguards. He added that the changes negated the only moral justification for detention of people with mental health problems – that of providing treatment. Pointing to evidence from the US that compulsory community treatment sometimes deterred people from approaching services until it was too late, he stated that the proposals would subject new groups of people to coercion and breached the Human Rights Act.

Psychiatrist Chris Burford (St Ann's Hospital, north London) seconded the motion. He spoke of the difficulties of 'revolving door' admissions and suggested that the White Paper, which he called 'balanced and progressive', provided a framework for treating vulnerable people who otherwise missed or evaded treatment.

Finally, Andrew Johns (South London and Maudsley Trust), a forensic psychiatrist, concluded by pointing out that the contribution by people with mental health problems to the homicide figures is falling by 3 per cent a year. He suggested that the proposals are a response to public emotion fuelled by media images of crazed

killers rather than to demonstrated need. He claimed that we need 'evidence-based government'. While welcoming the proposed right to advocacy, he rounded up the debate by reiterating the estimate that 5000 people would require detention in order to prevent a single homicide by a person with a mental disorder.

After comments and questions from the floor the audience voted again. The number of those supporting the White Paper had dropped slightly to 1.5 per cent, and the number of those opposed had increased considerably – to 90 per cent.

■ Anne Cooke is at the Salomons Centre, Tunbridge Wells.

BRIEFING AND DEBATE

Reform of the Mental Health Act: Implications for psychologists

At the Society's London office
Tuesday 30 October 2001, 12 noon to 4.30pm

The Professional Affairs Board invites BPS members to a briefing and debate on the implications for psychologists of the proposed new Mental Health Act.

For full details of the day see p.460 of the September issue of *The Psychologist*.

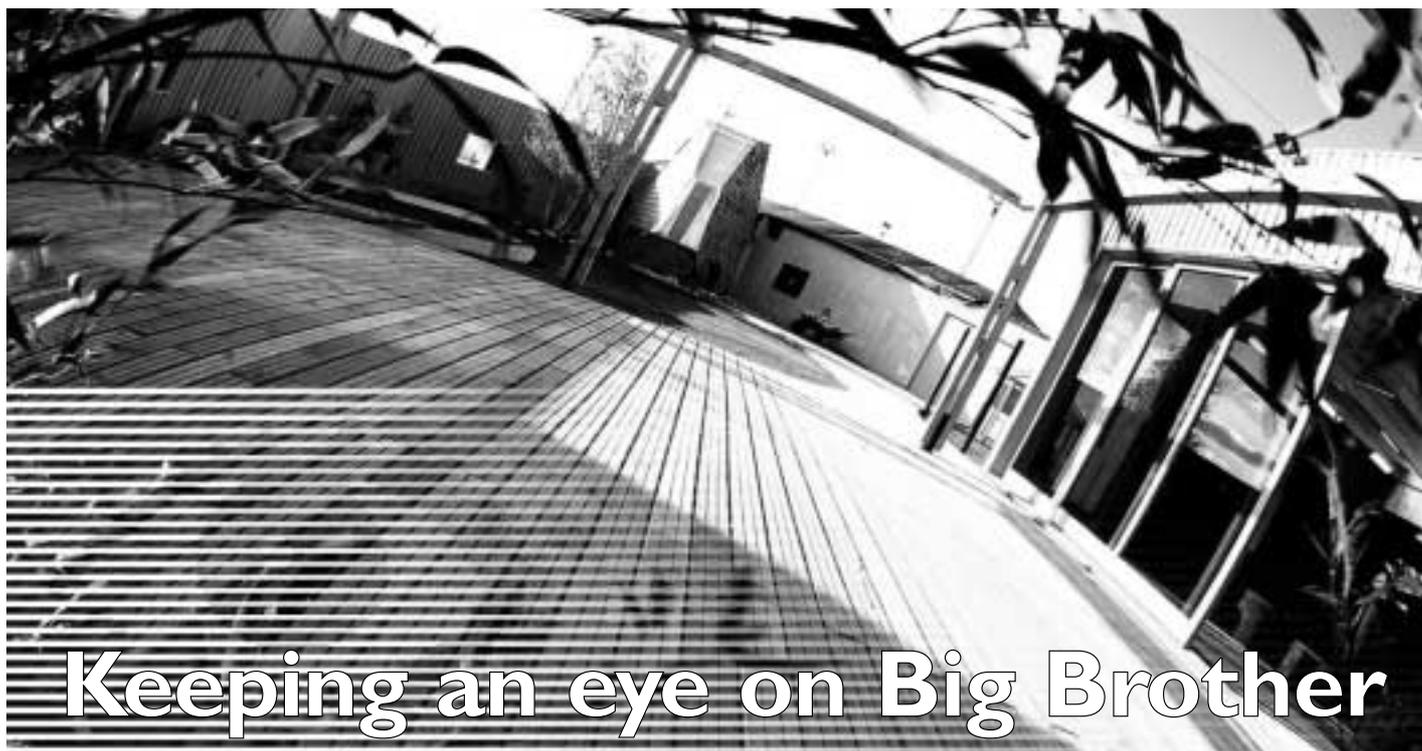
For further information or to request free tickets please contact Christina Docchar on 0116 252 9506 or chrdoc@bps.org.uk.

SEE ALSO:

'Mental Health Act reform: Emerging challenges' by David Pilgrim and David Hewitt (p.526, this issue)

'Chance to influence changes to the Mental Health Act' (p.397, August 2001)

'Reforming the Mental Health Act' by Lesley Cohen (p.118, March 2001)



Keeping an eye on Big Brother

PETER COLLETT on his involvement in the 'reality-TV' show *Big Brother*, and what psychologists can gain in return.

THE second series of *Big Brother* came to its climax in July. Once again the press had a field day, and everyone was talking about the contestants as if they knew them personally. What lies behind this fascination with *Big Brother*, and what lessons does it have for us as psychologists?

Big Brother has rewritten the rules of television, firstly by confounding the expectations of the television companies, and secondly by exposing the voracious appetite that the public has for intimate, close-up views of other people's lives. Sixteen million calls were made to vote contestants off the show during the nine-week series. We don't know who the voters were or if some voted several times, but the sheer magnitude of the vote was enough to persuade some of the newspapers that young voters were more likely to cast a vote in *Big Brother* than in the national election. So how does a show following 10 strangers cramped into a house in London manage to become such a media event?

Part of the explanation lies in the fact that *Big Brother* is one of the first truly multimedia shows – people can watch the contestants on TV, follow them on the internet, and find out what's happening in the house via their mobile phones. *Big Brother* is also uniquely interactive because viewers can get involved by voting contestants out and deciding the winner.

Then there's the mixed-motive character of the game show – the need for the housemates to act as a team, but also to nominate each other for eviction. This is the essential ingredient of the show and it's what generates most tension.

As you'd expect, *Big Brother* has had its critics. Some people have complained that it's all rather boring: in the early days several pundits predicted that if *Big Brother* didn't provide lots of nudity and sex, then viewing figures would plummet. In fact during both series there were surprisingly few glimpses of flesh, and as far as sex is concerned it was a case of 'No thanks, we're British'.

The fact that millions of viewers remained glued to their screens in spite of this low 'shock value' shows how easy it is to misjudge the viewing public. It also points to a more interesting conclusion – that what really attracts people to the series is the opportunity to watch other people close up, and to work out how they tick and what they're likely to do next. In this respect *Big Brother* is actually a programme about psychology – the psychology of other people. It's no coincidence that *Big Brother's* Monday edition, when I appeared with other psychologists such as Geoffrey Beattie and Sandra Scott, consistently got the second highest ratings. The fact that it was only exceeded by the Friday show, when

evictions takes place, underlines the central role that psychology played in the series. It also reflects the growing interest in psychology, as well as people's desire to have their own and other's actions explained in interesting and unusual ways.

Part of the fascination with *Big Brother* is the remarkable complexity of real people, and the challenges that the audience encounters in trying to understand them. In soap operas the characters tend to be scripted to a formula. As a result their motives are more transparent and their actions more predictable. In *Big Brother*, on the other hand, the contestants are multifaceted and mercurial – they're constantly surprising each other and themselves. This forces viewers to reappraise their opinions – to recognise that the housemates they admire can have a dark side, while the supposed villains of the piece may sometimes possess redeeming qualities.

Big Brother also provides viewers with a privileged view of events in the house, because while the contestants only witness some of the action, the viewers have the illusion of seeing everything. This gives them a sense of omniscience and it leads viewers to form opinions about certain housemates that are very different from those held by the other contestants. This, I suspect, is why viewers are unsympathetic towards contestants who emerge from the

house and complain that they have been unfairly presented on the screen. Rightly or wrongly, the viewers feel they know better.

Before *Big Brother* began there was a lot of talk about its role as a 'social experiment'. Of course, strictly speaking it isn't an experiment since there are no controls or repeated trials. However, in a loose ethological sense it is an experiment because it provides an opportunity to study an enclosed world at close quarters. It is very unusual to find opportunities of this nature – a rare example is John Gottman's 'Love Lab' in Seattle (Gottman & Silver, 1999), where couples are separated from the outside world and their actions are constantly recorded and analysed.

A record is also kept round the clock during *Big Brother*. Two trained 'loggers' watch what's happening on the screens and enter a description of events into a 'media log'. As a consultant to *Big Brother* one of my jobs was to search this media log for various patterns of behaviour. I produced reports on a range of topics, such as gossip, flirting, bitching, and the reasons that contestants give for their nominations. As a psychologist I found this an interesting and rewarding opportunity. Television programmes like *Big Brother* give us a chance to study topics that are usually quite difficult to record. Gossip, for example, has been studied by several psychologists, but usually at a distance, seldom through observation, and certainly not within an enclosed community where every instance of gossip can be analysed in detail and related to other transactions between the people involved. Topics studied need not only be social-psychological – they can also extend to topics like stress, sleeping patterns, and variations in mood.

But what about the contestants

themselves? Have they been fairly treated, has it been a worthwhile experience, and how will they adapt to a life of undeserved fame? One of the criticisms that has been levelled against *Big Brother* is that it is exploitative and unconcerned about the psychological welfare of the participants. This is simply not true. Not only are the applicants carefully screened to find out about their past and to ensure that they

'programmes like *Big Brother* give us a chance to study topics that are usually quite difficult to record'

are robust, but everyone on the shortlist is subjected to a lengthy talk where they are warned about what's likely to happen after they leave the house – how they'll lose their privacy, become public property, and so on. Of the 20 applicants who were subjected to the talk this year, only one decided to withdraw. During the show the contestants are provided with the dedicated services of a therapist, and this continues to be available to them after the show is over.

After this year's series some of the contestants were reported in the press saying that the programme had portrayed them unfairly. In spite of this, all of them said that they regarded the time they spent in the *Big Brother* house as an extremely valuable experience and as something they would never have missed. These sentiments are remarkably similar to those expressed by people who have been part of other isolated groups. Research on 'capsule habitats' – for example, astronauts who take part in simulated space flights, scientists who live in experimental bases on

the polar cap or under the sea – shows that the immediate and long-term effects of the experience are generally very positive (Suedfeld & Steel, 2000). Participants invariably recall the event with pride. They often see it as a turning point in their lives, something that, in spite of all the difficulties they experienced, they would never have missed in a million years.

While we're rightly concerned with the welfare of the contestants, we may in fact be missing a more interesting issue, which is the value of *Big Brother* for society as a whole. In a multicultural society like ours it's essential that prejudice towards minority groups be challenged. I believe that *Big Brother* helps to achieve this by introducing viewers to minority groups (e.g. lesbian, gay and black contestants) they may not have encountered before, drawing them into their lives and subtly persuading viewers to see the contestants as individuals in their own right as well as members of a particular group. Although it was probably never any part of the producers' intention, it's quite possible that what *Big Brother* has achieved in the areas of ethnic, religious and sexual politics is much more important than what it has done for entertainment.

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References

- Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (1999). *The seven principles for making marriage work*. New York: Crown.
- Suedfeld, P., & Steel, G. D. (2000). The environmental psychology of capsule habitats. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 51, 227–253.