

A quarter of a century of *The Psychologist*

Current Managing Editor **Jon Sutton** marks the anniversary with the help of his predecessors

A quarter of a century ago, in January 1988, *The Psychologist* emerged from the chrysalis of the *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society*, the two-colour format perhaps failing to do justice to the beautiful butterfly adorning that very first cover. 300 issues later, here we are, with the opportunity to look back at what the Managing Editor at the time, Elizabeth Mapstone, describes as ‘an exciting, but at times painful, period in BPS history’. How did *The Psychologist* take flight, what chaos can ensue from a single flap of its wings, and do further transformations lie ahead? I talked to some of the former editors to find out.

‘It’s like *The Sun*’

‘It was a period of metamorphosis,’ says Dame Glynis Breakwell, now Vice Chancellor at the University of Bath but from May 1988 serving a stint as Honorary

Editor with Graham Davey. ‘Perhaps that is why I would choose the cover of the August 1988 issue as my favourite. For me, it seems to depict a moth turning into a book – though I guess it is meant to symbolise completely the opposite, and involve a butterfly somewhere along the line.’ The theme of metamorphosis was so prominent, it appears, that it justified two similar covers in one year!

Mary Boyle, who was an Honorary Editor with Ray Bull for six years up to and including the *The Psychologist*’s inception, describes the drivers for development. ‘It’s fair to say the *Bulletin* was held in some affection by readers – there was certainly a very high level of engagement with it. But by the mid-1980s it was clear that change was needed. Other professions were updating their publications with graphics, colour, more varied covers and a wider range of content, leaving the *Bulletin* looking

decidedly staid. There was acknowledgement that the BPS needed to be more outward-looking in promoting psychology and in strengthening relationships with the media, policy makers and parliamentarians, including making them more aware of how psychological theory and research could inform policy. And internal communication was important too: the *Bulletin* was no longer up to the task of reflecting the diverse concerns and interests of psychologists. *The (new) Psychologist* was seen as playing a crucial role in keeping people in touch with what was going on, academically, professionally and in research across the discipline in the face of a growing number of specialisms, specialist journals, etc.’

Elizabeth Mapstone had been handed ‘day-to-day responsibility for the new magazine, and the special task of developing the news and features sections’, according to her welcome message in the first issue. ‘I was extraordinarily naive in those early days,’ she tells me, ‘and blissfully unaware that the changes I had been hired to implement were, let us say, controversial. I simply supposed that everyone in the Society wanted what I was told at interview was the goal: a house magazine that could communicate across those barriers that criss-cross the many subjects of our discipline, academic and applied, becoming a publication which could eventually appear on the book-stands.’

Dame Glynis remembers Mapstone as ‘driving change impatiently, moving us from thinking about *The Psychologist* as a pseudo-academic journal to thinking about it as a current affairs magazine for the broad professional psychology community. *The Economist* for the psychologist.’

But tensions were bubbling under the surface. ‘There was a preoccupation with protecting the supposed integrity of academic articles and the Honorary Editors’ authority over them,’ reports Mary Boyle. ‘The word “ringfencing” was never far from our lips.’ Elizabeth Mapstone confirms that ‘only the Honorary Editors were allowed to choose and/or comment on such articles, which continued to sport the long lists of references I was attempting to reduce in the “feature articles” of “more accessible style”. Not surprisingly, readers did not always understand the distinction. Nor was this quite enough, at first, to allay fears. “Can’t be doing with that,” said one Society stalwart. “It’s like *The Sun*.”’

However, Boyle remembers the first issue was ‘very well received; whatever fears people had proved groundless’. As

One from each year, part one

We have selected just one piece from each year of *The Psychologist*’s history, to represent the quality and diversity of the publication. Why not visit the archive (currently stretching back to 1998) at www.thepsychologist.org.uk to find your own favourites?

- Interview with B.F. Skinner** – John Masterson (April 1988)
- Noam Chomsky: American dissident** – Interview by Celia Kitzinger (May 1989)
- Special issue: Sexism, ageism and racism in psychology** – (September 1990)
- Special issue: Animal experimentation** – (May 1991)
- Torture and the torturer** – Lindsey Williams (July 1992)
- The psychology of women** – Paula Nicolson (March 1993)
- Robbie, Fitz and me: A venture into television** – Ian Stephen (January 1994)
- How Eurocentric psychology damages Africa** – J. Owusu-Bempah and Dennis Howitt (October 1995)
- Is the spirit willing? A pentologue on parapsychology** – Andrew Colman, Susan Blackmore, Robert Morris, Richard Wiseman and Christopher French (August 1996)
- Towards a psychology of experience** – Jane Henry, John Pickering, Richard Stevens, Elizabeth Valentine and Max Velmans (March 1997)
- Pictures at an exhibition: The science of the face** – Andy Young and Vicki Bruce (March 1998)
- Understanding assets and deficits in autism** – Francesca Happé (November 1999)
- Head to head: how should ADHD be treated?** – Steve Baldwin and Paul Cooper (December 2000)

well as the usual articles, there was a 'Who's who in the BPS', with a two-page profile of the then President, plus features on the use of video in trials of alleged child abuse; 'The Leading Edge', described as 'Influential psychologists make their choice of the "best" in recent research' and several pieces on 'Psychology in the Media'. The new format also allowed regular parts of the *Bulletin* – conference reports, Society news, etc. – to be reported at greater length. 'Even after 25 years,' says Boyle, 'it's still quite an interesting read. The design and layout wasn't great, particularly the cover layout, but we were all on a very steep learning curve. Elizabeth Mapstone as Managing Editor and Stephen White in the Leicester office were invaluable here as they were to the whole process of setting up and producing *The Psychologist*.'

Elizabeth Mapstone confirms 'the headache-inducing need to acquire desktop publishing skills in five minutes flat. Everyone worked extremely hard, but it would be true to say that during the early days, in Leicester technical know-how and experience were in short supply. Each issue in that first year was a small miracle.'

Challenging the orthodoxy

'There were moments of real concern as an editor – especially as a very junior and inexperienced editor,' says Dame Glynis. 'We wanted to reflect the debates of the day and in doing so it is inevitable that you rouse criticism and antagonism. Sometimes our selection of articles was considered very, very poor. Our readership let us know in no uncertain terms. On the whole it seems to me now to have been not just inevitable but mainly healthy and worthwhile disagreement. It is good to see that the current editorial team at *The Psychologist* continue to be willing to allow challenge to orthodoxy.'

'I think *The Psychologist* is much more confident now,' says Mary Boyle. 'At the beginning we were so braced for criticism of dumbing down the BPS House Journal, we were rather preoccupied with maintaining status – I wouldn't be



Covering the subject

Covers have always been a source of controversy for *The Psychologist*. 'While many praised our first,' says Elizabeth Mapstone, 'I was astonished to find the May cover, featuring a self-portrait by a child survivor of abuse, was severely criticised. Les Prince produced many memorable early designs, but towards the end of my stint, covers were to be designed by professionals. Not that this entirely eliminated angst: on their very first assignment (March 1993), they elected to change the approved photo, sparking widespread condemnation because the cover girl was too beautiful!'

In terms of my own editorship, I can confirm that nothing has provoked the fury of the membership as much as covers! Sometimes this is understandable: in 2005, a feedback session at the Society's Annual Conference in Manchester concluded that *The Psychologist* was 'puerile nonsense which has gone downhill in your time as editor', at least in part due to an April cover which makes me shudder with embarrassment to this day. Our January 2008 effort wasn't too popular in some quarters either!

All I can say in our defence is that psychological concepts are not always the easiest to illustrate, and that I hope the covers have improved over the years, with many more hits than misses. During my time alone we have sported a Banksy, mirror art, and myriad other styles and topics. Why not have a look at the archive at www.thepsychologist.org.uk and pick your own favourite?

surprised if the professor count of the contributors/reviewers was a little over the top. Thankfully, over the years this changed.' Dame Glynis concurs: 'I can see now that in format and choice of content we were hardly as radical as we thought we were being at the time.'

That may be so, but nevertheless over the years *The Psychologist* has tackled debates surrounding race and intelligence, torture, recovered memories, sexualities, drug treatment for ADHD, recreational use of Ecstasy, diagnosis, the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies agenda, and many more. *The Psychologist* puts its head above the parapet month after month, in a highly visible and accountable manner that is perhaps rare in the Society. The stated aim of the publication remains to provide 'a forum for communication, discussion and controversy among all members of the Society'. Often this controversy involves the Society itself, and *The Psychologist's* determination to serve as the mouthpiece of the membership rather than as a limp 'house organ' has been the source of considerable conflict.

Towards a new model

According to Mary Boyle, a definite high of her time was the formation of the Editorial

(later Policy) Subcommittee. 'The original name was always a misnomer, meant at the time to reflect that the subcommittee supported the editors. It was a very engaged and supportive committee which didn't shirk from spirited and direct discussion of at times contentious issues.' I would echo that to this day: The Psychologist and Digest Policy Committee plays a vital role as a representative body of Society members driving the publications and overseeing my performance as editor.

'The Editorial Subcommittee was seen as so important,' remembers Mary Boyle, 'due to considerable preoccupation with editorial independence and real concern about where control of the content would lie. An appointment like Jon Sutton's – a BPS employee based in Leicester as the sole editor – would have been unthinkable then; Maryon Tysoe's was the bridging editorship between the old and new models.'

Tysoe followed Hugh Foot, who had served as an Honorary Editor from May 1992 to May 1997. She picks up the story: 'I was the first person to be responsible for editing the publication as a whole, and in my second year, the post of Editor was moved from one paid day a week to two. I believe this upgrade of the role was very important in paving the way for the significant expansion in resources

looking back

that came in later years (for instance, for the Editor to be full-time, and for a staff journalist – oh, what I would have given!).’

According to Mary Boyle, ‘one (rather blunt) way of looking at the development of *The Psychologist* over the last 25 years is that it reflects the BPS’s gradual and, I have to say, hard fought for recognition that if it wants a high-quality and effective house publication it will have to pay for it.’

Growth

I ask Maryon Tysoe about the highs and lows of her own time as editor. ‘The coming-on-stream of new initiatives was always exciting – an expanded “Research in brief”, as the section on the latest research was called then, new series (‘State of the art’, ‘Why I study...’, ‘Personal space’), *A Guide to Writing for The Psychologist* to help contributors, and so on. Just one example of contributors’ impressive work came in the November 1997 issue: 10 psychologists, at about three weeks’ notice, writing short, insightful analyses – drawing on theory and research from their own areas – of the complex reactions to the death of Princess Diana. But sometimes there were very specific moments: these tended to be hit-you-in-the-eyes visuals, such as our first splashes of internal colour in just the centre pages. I remember too my thrill at the sight of the first issue in a completely new, engaging (we all hoped) and contemporary design (January 1999). It seemed a tangible sign of our attempts to build on my predecessors’ achievements and to keep moving forward.’

The noughties

My own first issue at the helm was in May 2000, after a chance conversation at a Society conference eventually led to me leaping from the ivory tower for the opportunity to become the first editor based solely in the Leicester office. ‘50 issues max’, said my arrogant 25-year-old self, ‘revolutionise it and leave in a blaze of glory’. Now, almost 13 years on, it’s nearly impossible for me to look back on something I am still totally immersed in, and to convey the love I feel for *The Psychologist* (and not forgetting our Research Digest, which turns 10 this year). Churning out issues month after month, year after year, is hard; ensuring the publications constantly evolve is trickier still. Thankfully I have been supported by my small but perfectly formed team (we operate with three full-time equivalents),



An early splash of colour, from March 1998

by a creative committee, by an ever-expanding and generous membership and by a thriving and fascinating discipline.

I ask my predecessors whether they have noticed that evolution. Mary Boyle says that ‘obvious changes are the increased size; more international authorship; a wider range of content and creative development of features; use of colour; much greater use of illustrations and links to the web. It also seems “younger” and I don’t think that’s just because I’m getting older; there is more involvement now from younger members of the Society. But I’m struck by the continuities and that the original rationale – communication across members and external communication – still very much informs the content. The role hasn’t changed much; what’s changed is the variety of ways the role is met.’

Maryon Tysoe also notes changes and continuities. ‘There is more of everything, operating to excellent effect: staff, readership, number of pages (including absorption of the *Appointments Memorandum*), amount of colour, news and new series. Very significantly, there’s a strong web presence, which you initiated and is so vital now. But it seems to me to have stayed the same in its

central purpose, to be the place where all psychologists can communicate with and interest both each other and the outside world.’

I think that last point is increasingly the key: communication with the outside world. At the Psychologist and Digest Policy Committee meetings we are fond of the ‘village’ metaphor: *The Psychologist* helps all members of the village communicate, but we might also

showcase what psychology has done for those outside the village, and invite guests in. *The Psychologist* is no longer simply ‘by members, for members’: even though it is a membership

publication with a reasonably controlled circulation, technology and social media give us an opportunity to seek more influence in the ‘global village’.

That philosophy has informed some of the new formats in recent years and those planned for 2013. There has also been an attempt to diversify, to mix the professional and personal in new formats taking hold since the major redesign of 2008, such as ‘One on one’ and ‘Big picture’. ‘New voices’ is our attempt to encourage emerging talent in science writing, and ‘Looking back’ reflected an overdue recognition of the fascinating tales lurking in psychology’s past. There is

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much still to do, but I hope we are heading towards a publication that is as diverse and delightful as the discipline it represents.

Back to the future

Whatever became of the distinguished academic who likened *The Psychologist* to *The Sun*? 'They later offered to contribute a feature article, and became a strong supporter of the developing *Psychologist*,' recalls Elizabeth Mapstone. 'As the shock of the new wore off, dissenters became fewer. Looking back, it seems astonishing that the early days of what has become a properly professional publication should have provoked such anxiety.'

Personally, I'm not so surprised. As Hugh Foot said in 1993, 'As creatures of habit we didn't like change: change by its very nature breeds suspicions about slipping standards.' But I sense that anxiety to this day. I wonder if it reflects the fact that, as Maryon Tysoe comments, '*The Psychologist* is still the only physical entity we get for our membership money... it has an ever more vital role to play in helping us to feel a collective identity as psychologists, no matter what our precise work, and to show the public the great value of psychology and how it can benefit them.' Perhaps this is increasingly so in a fragmenting discipline under pressure to demonstrate its worth.

Or maybe that's rather self-aggrandising, and our biggest challenge remains getting thousands of members to actually get the magazine out of the wrapper each month! I certainly recognise that for all the evolution of the last 25 years, the pace of change in the next 25 is likely to be greater. We have made strides in electronic publishing, with our hugely successful offshoot Research Digest blog (see www.researchdigest.org.uk/blog) and making *The Psychologist* available on tablet, smartphone and e-reader via our website. But we still need to develop our online offerings, while never neglecting the importance of what lands on your doormat each month.

For the final word, I will hand over to Dame Glynis once more: 'For me, *The Psychologist* remains a vital channel into the Society and its activities. It keeps me updated in an easy-to-digest way. It seems to have evolved and matured, it is no longer uncertain about the job it has to do... Long may it serve the Society – and evolve with it.'

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One from each year, part two

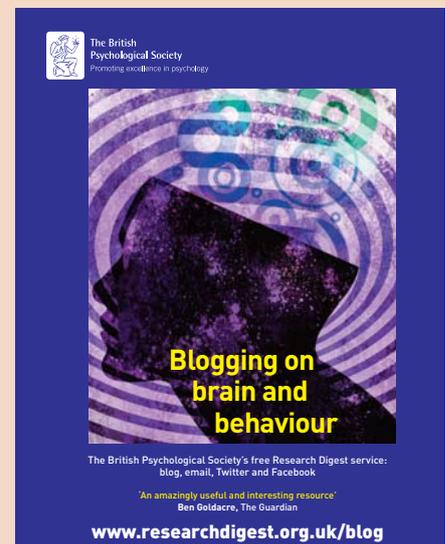
Find these articles and hundreds more in the archive at www.thepsychologist.org.uk.

- Weird and wonderful: 100 odd-sounding papers from the world of psychology** – Neil Martin (September 2001)
- Sorted: Ecstasy facts and fiction** – Jon Cole, Harry Sumnall and Charles Grob, plus peer commentaries (September 2002)
- ECT: A shocking treatment** – Lucy Johnstone (May 2003)
- Locked in: Have psychologists got the key?** – Andrea Kübler (March 2004)
- The anarchic hand** – Sergio Della Sala (October 2005)
- Freud's influence: personal and professional perspectives** (September 2006)
- The social brain of a teenager** – Sarah-Jayne Blakemore (October 2007)
- Questioning the banality of evil** – S. Alexander Haslam and Steve Reicher (January 2008)
- Social cognitive theory goes global** – Albert Bandura (June 2009)
- The supreme infant** – Alison Gopnik (March 2010)
- Stanley Milgram: The man, his passions and motivations** – Alexandra Milgram (September 2011)
- Opinion special: Replication, replication, replication** (May 2012)

25 years of psychology

Just as *The Psychologist* has experienced change and development, so has the discipline itself. We asked some of those who contributed to that very first issue for their 25 words on how psychology has changed in the last 25 years.

- John Morton: Psychology fell in love with genes and neurons and drugs and happily abolished the mind. Then consciousness re-emerged! Can it be reduced to epiphenomenalia? Watch!**
- Clive Fletcher: Occupational psychology has grown hugely and is increasingly influential in organisations, but less often part of, or valued by, the narrowly neuroscience-dominated psychology departments.**
- Chris Brewin: In their treatments clinical psychologists sought less to 'correct' clients' 'faulty thinking' and exploited techniques requiring acceptance, increased mindfulness, or changing unwanted images through fantasy.**
- Cary Cooper: Psychology has moved from rats, to brains, to people, a tsunami-like effort to deal with a range of relevant behavioural issues of our time.**
- John Findlay: Psychology has greatly matured both as a science and a social science and has also enhanced its key role in developing cross-connections between both disciplines.**
- Graham Davies: The promise of an applicable cognitive psychology menaced by the REF with its emphasis on 'fundamental' research and the New Reductionism symbolised by fMRI studies.**
- Douglas Forbes: Psychology has become much more accessible through the wonders of IT, user-friendly Research Digests, etc. Happily, its findings now frequently impinge upon educated adult awareness.**



Also celebrating an anniversary – 10 years of the 'user-friendly' Research Digest