

Out from the shadows

Tadhg MacIntyre, Aidan Moran and Mark Campbell shed light on the origins of psychology in Ireland

St Patrick's Day, 17 March, is the Irish national holiday and is celebrated with equal enthusiasm in Dublin, Belfast, Birmingham, Glasgow, Liverpool and London. The Irish connection to Britain is well founded as it is based on our geographical proximity and complex political relationship over the centuries. As we celebrate the feast day of our patron saint (although it seems that St Patrick was probably Welsh), it is worth considering the origins of psychology in Ireland. Specifically, we are interested in how the emergence of psychology in Ireland has been influenced by the pre-eminence of psychology in Britain.

Arguably the phrase 'long past but short history' has particular resonance when one reflects on the status of psychology in Ireland. For example, although several notable pioneers of philosophical and empirical psychology (e.g. George Berkeley, William James) had deep roots in Ireland, the Psychological Society of Ireland is a relative newcomer, having been founded in 1970 (Swan, 2013).

Furthermore, universities in Ireland have only offered formal qualifications in the discipline of psychology since 1958, and the country has yet to implement

a statutory registration scheme. However, a closer look at the origins of psychology in Ireland gives rise to a different story – and Irish people, as we know, are especially proud of their stories.

Looking east

Prior to the emergence of psychology as a distinct academic discipline in Ireland, a number of pioneers of psychology with Irish roots made their mark on the field through their positions in other countries. Notwithstanding the historically problematic political definition of Ireland

(see Kiberd, 1997), many of our great scientists and thinkers, like Robert Boyle, were born in Ireland of Anglo-Irish descent (Stewart, 1979). Furthermore, much of their education and scientific contributions occurred in Britain (Brock, 2011). This was true of the Irish-born pioneer

of education for women, Sophie Bryant, who was to become one of the 10 founding members of the British Psychological Society (Clark-Carter, 2001).

Not surprisingly then, the tendency to

look eastwards towards the social structures and educational institutions of Great Britain was commonplace for many of our scholars. However, there were two pioneers who lived in Ireland. Firstly, Dr William Saunders Hallaran (who received medical education in Edinburgh) wrote the first Irish textbook of psychiatry in 1810 when in Cork working as superintendent at the Cork Lunatic Asylum (Kelly, 2008). And secondly, the philosopher Bishop George Berkeley was educated at Trinity College, Dublin (Winkler, 2005). Berkeley was the Bishop of Cloyne from 1734 to 1752, spending much of his working life in Ireland. Nevertheless, all were part of the Anglo-Irish intelligentsia of colonial Ireland. The same could be said for an Irish family who left their five-acre plot in County Cavan, for Albany, New York – the James family.

Looking west

In 1789 an Irish family left our shores for the United States and two generations later their descendants (Henry, Alice and William) would become world famous for their contributions to art, literature and psychology. William James (1842–1910) published his seminal two-volume textbook *Principles of Psychology* in 1890, defining psychology as 'the science of mental life, both of its phenomena and their conditions'. This description is still integral to contemporary psychology in Ireland (e.g. The Psychological Society of Ireland's definition: psychology is the scientific study of thought, emotion and behaviour). In 1875 James established the first psychology laboratory in the world at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Although the Leipzig laboratory of Wilhelm Wundt is often cited as the birthplace of the psychology laboratory, scholars now accept that the German lab was actually opened in 1879, several years after James's (Brock, 2006). James went on to become the third President of the American Psychological Association, in 1894 (Goodwin, 2011).



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Similar to the aforementioned pioneers in psychology, it is uncertain whether William James would have considered himself to be an Irishman despite his roots (MacIntyre et al., 2013). Brock (2006) suggests that the 'link between psychology and modernity explains why most of the significant developments in the early history of psychology occurred in Britain, France and Germany and not, for example, Spain, Italy, or Greece' (p.229). In line with this thinking, it is apparent that Ireland's early contributions to psychology were primarily through our intellectual exports. Next we shall consider briefly how the colonisation of Ireland (and subsequent decolonisation) affected its history of psychology.

Looking inwards

A special issue of the *Irish Journal of Psychology* in 1994 explored the influence of colonialism, post-colonialism and post-modernism on the Irish psyche (see Halliday and Coyle, 1994; also Moane, 1994). The period from independence in 1922 to post-war Ireland was an insular one in which the church dominated the zeitgeist. The first chair in 'Logic and Psychology' at University College Dublin was occupied by a Catholic priest (Brock, 2011) – which is not surprising given the close links that existed in the country between philosophical psychology and religion. In the early 20th century, the reactions against imperial Britain were replaced with a cultural and political parallelism (Kiberd, 1997). Hence, Ireland mirrored many of the structures of British society but without the secular status of its neighbouring island.

Unlike in Britain, the origins of psychology in Ireland were not in the laboratories of our universities but in the provision of mental health support services (Brock, 2011). A Scotsman of Irish descent, John McKenna (1919–1998), helped to establish the first qualification in psychology at University College Dublin (UCD) in 1958 (see

Brock, 2011). McKenna (1986) recounts how the World Health Organization directed its attention towards member states that were underdeveloped in terms of mental health personnel. The Irish government responded by introducing psychological services in healthcare (Brock, 2011).

The 1950s were a key time for psychology in Ireland, with the Northern Ireland Branch of the British Psychological Society (NIBPS) founded in 1956 (see McHugh & McLoone, 1980) and the 1958 foundation by George Seth of the School of Psychology at Queen's University Belfast (tinyurl.com/o5hdyoo). This was followed in 1962 by the School of Psychology at Trinity College, Dublin (Byrne et al., 2012), and around a decade after the first graduates from these institutions appeared, the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) was founded. Not surprisingly, given the aforementioned origins, clinical psychology emerged as the first division within the PSI (Carr, 1995). Other key milestones across the four decades of the PSI include the hosting of the European Federation of Psychological Associations (EFPA) Congress at UCD with 1600 delegates in 1997, the hosting of the BPS Annual Conference in Dublin in 2008 and, most recently, the establishment of the division of sport, exercise and performance psychology in 2012.

Looking north

The aforementioned anomalous political definition of Ireland had created bridges for researchers, practitioners, and societies, respectively. The conflict in Northern Ireland influenced psychological activity across the islands. Since the 1980s the study of intergroup contact and intergroup relations has led to a proliferation of psychology research across the decades (e.g. Bull, 2006; Monaghan, 2013; Muldoon et al., 1998). Another field notable for its 'North–South' cooperation in Ireland is sport psychology. For example, Kremer et al.

(1998) edited a special issue of the *Irish Journal of Psychology* devoted to 'Current research in sport and exercise psychology in Ireland'.

Today there is still considerable organisational overlap between Irish and British psychology. For instance, Gerry Mulhern, currently the PSI's Director of Professional Development, was President of the BPS in 2010/11. The late Professor Noel Sheehy (1955–2011), who was President Elect of the BPS in 2011, lectured on both sides of the border, firstly at University College Dublin, and subsequently at Queen's University, Belfast. Joint events between NIBPS and PSI are held regularly including an annual careers day, an All-Ireland Student Congress and a regular lecture series to enhance public engagement. The border obviously holds few barriers to academic mobility and cooperation.

With the advent of the Health and Care Professions Council and the commensurate statutory registration process (see Swan, 2013), the necessity for practitioner psychologists in fields such as education, health and clinical psychology to have dual accreditation status is paramount. Dual membership of PSI and BPS is commonplace and it enables increased mobility for both consulting and for employment in healthcare, occupational and academic settings. This approach augments the curricula vitae of aspiring professionals, provides CPD pathways for neophyte practitioners and can give established professionals access to a large network of collaborators in their chosen field.

Psychology in Ireland cannot be said to have evolved in isolation (Humphreys & Guerin, 2013), and the contribution of the BPS to the PSI should be acknowledged. But that's another story...

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