

Coming of age



VICKI BRUCE, *President Elect and Chair of the Centenary Subcommittee, introduces a year of celebrations for the Society's first hundred years.*

THE British Psychological Society is a hundred years old this year. On 24 October 1901 ten people met at University College London to form a psychological society: here we all are (over 34,000 members), almost a century later, at the start of a year-long celebration of the Society and psychology in Britain.

This centenary gives us the opportunity to reflect upon the achievements of British psychology, and of the Society. Those of you with internet access should take a look under www.bps.org.uk/centenary/centenary.cfm for the highly informative 'Chronology of psychology in Britain', which has been assembled by Dr Geoff Bunn, the Society's Research Fellow in the History of Psychology. The chronology includes highlights of the development of The British Psychological Society, of psychology as a discipline (a fair bit older than the Society), and of the diffusion of

psychological thinking and practice into wider society. It is a fascinating digest: to my mind at least it manages both to convey a sense of longevity and establishment and to illustrate how very recently certain developments took place.

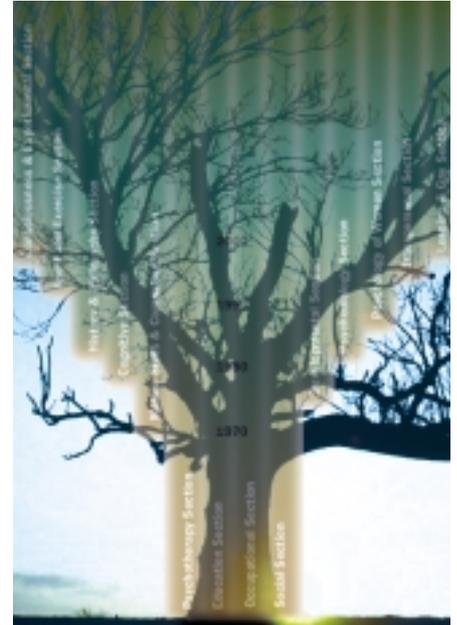
Some things have changed very quickly. The Society may be old, but psychology itself is still pretty youthful. Take these indicators of establishment selected from the chronology:

- 1898: Charles Myers, William McDougall and W.H.R. Rivers represented British psychology on the expedition to the Torres Straits.
- 1899: C. Lloyd Morgan became the first psychologist to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of London.
- 1920: Psychology was established as an independent section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.
- 1930: Beatrice Edgell became the first woman President of the Society.
- 1938: J.C. Raven published the Progressive Matrices Intelligence Test, adopted on a large scale by the British armed services during the Second World War.

Now contrast with other selections (see box left), which show just how rapidly psychology has grown from its small beginnings.

The wider society at large has also developed apace in its understanding and assimilation of matters psychological over the past century (again, this material has been selected from the chronology):

- In 1908 The Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded (*sic*) reported. Mental defectives were classified into four main groups, termed idiots, imbeciles, the feeble-minded and moral imbeciles. The commission's recommendations became law with the



Over the years the Society has grown and branched out into new areas

- passing of the Mental Deficiency Act 1913, and this remained in force until 1959!
- In 1915 Charles Myers coined the term 'shell shock' in an article in *The Lancet*. By the end of the First World War, the army had dealt with over 80,000 cases of shell shock.
- In 1922 the first psychologist in a British industrial company was appointed at Rowntree's Cocoa Works.
- By 1943 psychology had made major inroads into the military, for example a senior psychologist was employed in the office of the Chief of Naval Personnel and 10 psychologists (aided by many assistants) worked in other parts of the Admiralty.

Our centenary activities this year are aimed at celebrating the achievements of the Society, of British psychology within and beyond The British Psychological Society, and at disseminating these achievements, and our future potential, to the widest possible audiences. Our centenary slogan is 'Bringing psychology to society', and our various activities are aimed at different audiences, including our own membership and other psychologists – particularly those

FROM LITTLE ACORNS...

- On 24 October 1901 ten people meet at University College London to form The British Psychological Society.
- By 1939 just six chairs of psychology had been established in Britain (at UCL, King's College and Bedford College, London, and in Manchester, Edinburgh and Cambridge).
- In 1960 over half the chairs in British psychology departments were held by former students of Bartlett.
- A-level Psychology was launched by the Associated Examining Board in 1972, and just 275 candidates sat the examination.

in other countries – and influential public figures beyond psychology. We also aim to bring a greater awareness of psychology to the general public.

We have a large number of events planned for the year – some still in the planning stage, so the list will not be complete until well into the year itself. On the right is a brief synopsis of some of the major events, with primary target audiences.

These and other activities are being developed through the efforts of a large number of members and our enthusiastic staff, and I would like to issue an early thanks to all concerned. We hope that in addition to the events being planned centrally there will be activities of a number of kinds within subsystems, particularly our regional and national branches. Some such events will be aimed at drawing local members into celebrations of the centenary, and others, we hope, will be aimed at reaching out to the general public in different parts of the country. For example, the South West Branch will take a Society/psychology stall to agricultural shows, and the Scottish Branch is planning a Society/psychology bus to be based in central Glasgow during the week of our Centenary Annual Conference.

As well as celebrating our achievements and developments, it is important that the centenary also provokes us to look forward, and to stimulate future developments. This is an exciting time to be a psychologist. The academic base of psychology has flourished (relatively speaking) over the past 10 years or so with the boom in popularity of the subject. The professional practice of psychology has also been enhanced: in part by the increasingly rigorous scrutiny applied to training and qualifications by the different Divisions of the Society, and in part by the acceptance of matters psychological by society at large.

The continued prosperity of the discipline will depend upon our collective efforts to demonstrate the excellence and timeliness of our research activities, the professionalism and variety of our practice, and the breadth of our horizons and interfaces with other disciplines and other professional groups. Youthful, but not immature, as a discipline we have progressed beyond the stage of adolescent squabbles about legitimacy, to a point where we can look forward to future growth and further diversity with energy and optimism.

We may be 100, but we don't feel a day over 21.

...GREAT CELEBRATIONS GROW

5 January 'Psychology – A Science for Society'. A one-day conference at the Royal Society, aimed at rehearsing key achievements of the discipline to an invited audience of users from the fields of health, education, law and work. (Target: public opinion and policy)

18 January Opening of Science Museum exhibition on the history of psychology, with associated trail to other exhibits within the museum. The exhibition will be open for most of 2001. (Target: General public and psychologists)

18 January Book launch – *Psychology in Britain: Historical Essays and Personal Reflections*. (Target: Members and psychologists worldwide)

February Special issue of the *British Journal of Psychology*. (Target: Members and psychologists worldwide)

22 February Public lecture by Professor A. Cowey at the Royal Society, London. (Target: General public and general science audience)

28–31 March Centenary Annual Conference, SECC, Glasgow. (Target: Members, plus general public via associated press and civic activities)

11 April Edinburgh International Science Festival. Public lecture by Professor V. Bruce at the Royal Society of Edinburgh. (Target: General public and general science audience)

9 May Launch of photographic exhibition of psychologists at the National Portrait Gallery, London (will run until 27 August). Associated public lectures, and leaflet to be distributed with *The Psychologist*. (Target: general public, Members and psychologists visiting European Congress)

1–6 July VIth European Congress of Psychology, Barbican Centre, London (Target: Members and European psychologists, plus general public via press coverage)

5–8 September Cognitive Psychology and Health Psychology Section conferences to be held in Scotland, jointly with European societies. (Target: Members and European psychologists, general public via press coverage)

24 October Birthday receptions to be held in Leicester (lunch), London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. (Target: Members and public dignitaries)

17 December London Conference – at Westminster Central Hall under the overall centenary theme 'Bringing psychology to society'. (Target: Students studying psychology – members of the future)

CENTENARY COVERAGE CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS



We are still welcoming brief reports on the last 100 years of psychology. We are inviting pieces on influential figures in psychology and important contributions made by psychology to society. We need your pieces as soon as possible.

To discuss contributions, please contact our Associate Editor: Centenary, David Clark-Carter, by e-mail: d.clark-carter@staffs.ac.uk, or at the Division of Psychology, Staffordshire University, College Road, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 2DE. Tel: 01782 294515; fax: 01782 745506.

Remember, *The Psychologist* relies on your contributions every year, not just for the centenary. Articles may provide a broad overview of a particular area or issue; discuss theory; or debate applied issues and practical and professional problems. Please keep your style informative but entertaining and suitable for a wide-ranging, non-specialist audience. See our guide to writing for *The Psychologist* on the Society's website, and our new contributors' information on p55. Feel free to contact the Editor for advice on jonsut@bps.org.uk.