



## **Over a Century of Psychology at Bristol**

**A Short History of the Department of Experimental Psychology  
University of Bristol**

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**in conjunction with**

**Emeritus Professor John Brown  
Professor Dick Eiser  
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Emeritus Professor Richard Gregory  
Emeritus Professor W. Peter Robinson**

**in 2008**

### University College, Bristol (1876-1909)

University College, Bristol was the predecessor of the University of Bristol; it first opened to students (69 women and 30 men) in 1876 and was based in a house at 32 Park Row, Clifton. Staff comprised two professors and five lecturers, and lectures were offered in 15 subject areas. One of these was Zoology, but neither Psychology nor Philosophy was mentioned.

Conwy Lloyd Morgan was born in London and studied at the Royal School of Mines; he came to Bristol in 1884 to take up a Chair of Geology and Zoology from a post at the Diocesan College in Cape Town. Although he subsequently established his reputation as one of the first experimental psychologists, he joined the university staff to teach geology. Lloyd Morgan soon became involved in the campaign for a charter to establish the University of Bristol: he was appointed Dean in 1887 and became Principal in 1891.



Conwy Lloyd Morgan FRS  
(1852-1936)

In 1901, Lloyd Morgan's research interests in the field of experimental psychology and animal behaviour led to his appointment to the newly created Chair in Psychology and Ethics. His work on the interpretation of animal behaviour led to the principle, widely known as *Morgan's Canon*: namely, "*In no case may we interpret an action as the outcome of the exercise of a higher psychical faculty, if it can be interpreted as the outcome of one which stands lower in the psychological scale.*" Lloyd Morgan adopted this law of parsimony and felt that animal behaviour should be described in the simplest possible terms. In 1899, he became the first Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS) in the field of psychology.

In the University College, Lloyd Morgan was responsible for the psychology lectures. The following description appears in the documentation: "*The object of these lectures is to get forth some of the principles of psychology which are applied in the methods of educational procedure.*"

Having made a major contribution to the University's charter campaign, Lloyd Morgan served as the University of Bristol's first Vice-Chancellor. He retired in 1919 with the title of Emeritus Professor of Psychology; he lived in Clifton until 1925, and then moved to 23 Elphinstone Road, Hastings where he died at the age of 84 in 1936.

## University of Bristol (1909- )

Lloyd Morgan held the first Chair in Psychology and Ethics, but after his retirement, this was replaced by a Chair in Philosophy. He was a prolific writer and his more important publications include: *Animal Life and Intelligence* (1890/91); *An Introduction to Comparative Psychology* (1894); *Habit and Instinct* (1896); *Animal Behaviour* (1900); and *Instinct and Experience* (1912).

In the early days of the university, 1910-11, psychology was taught as part of the Ordinary Degree of the Bachelor of Arts (BA) in the Faculty of Arts. A 2-year *Logic and Psychology* course was offered as an option, and an alternative, equivalent course, *Psychology and Ethics*, was on offer for theological students. There was no psychology available for study on the Honours degree path of the BA, although there were lectures on clinical psychology and associated topics taking place in other parts of the university.

In 1950, there were 161 students graduating in the Faculty of Arts of whom only two, graduated with Philosophy and Psychology degrees.

The Department of Psychology was formed in 1951. It arose as a result of dividing the Department of Philosophy and Psychology into two departments of Philosophy and Psychology. A Chair of Psychology was established in the new department; its first occupant was G.C. Drew. The department was based in Belgrave Road, Clifton.

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### George Charles Drew, Professor of Psychology (Head of Department, 1951-8)



Drew's research interests were in the area of skilled behaviour; he is known for his work on the effects of alcohol on performance which led to the development of the breathalyser in the UK. He left Bristol to become Head of the Department of Psychology at University College, London.

In November 1951, psychology was admitted as a subsidiary subject for the Bachelor of Science (BSc) General Science Ordinary degree courses. Psychology was studied as one of three subjects. This was in addition to the psychology course being offered as part of the Special Degree of BA. At this time, there were four Internal Examiners (G.C. Drew, Laura Bowyer, F.H. George and K.R.L. Hall) and one External Examiner (Professor G. Humphrey, Institute of

Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford). Frank George subsequently left to become Professor of Cybernetics at Brunel University.

The psychology being taught at this time had a broad base: the history of psychology, and “current problems” were seminal courses. Social and comparative psychology as well as statistics, experimental and psychometric methods, the study of cognition, and the physiology of the central nervous system were also covered. There was also an emphasis on applied fields. For example, the Principal Psychologist at Barrow Gurney Hospital, just outside Bristol, had a part-time lectureship. Links with the Bristol Children’s Hospital, Hortham Psychiatric Hospital at Thornbury, and seven Bristol schools allowed students to practise supervised, diagnostic and individual intelligence testing. An overview of the 14 research theses completed in the ‘50s shows that eight were concerned with child development and clinical psychology, while the remaining six covered learning and perception, the nature of skilled activity, and semantics.

The department at this time was located in several buildings in Berkeley Square. In the early 1950s, it moved into 8-10 Berkeley Square, where it remained for around 40 years. Previously, 8-10 Berkeley Square had been St Brendan’s College, a Roman Catholic school. The school was run by the Catholic brothers and was fairly strict as reported by members of staff who had attended as children; upon moving in, it was found that every room was connected to the head’s room via microphones. Before being a school, it had been used as a house for ‘fallen women’ in the early part of the last century.

A final note concerns the experimental apparatus, the Cambridge Cockpit. In the 1940s, Professor Sir Frederic Bartlett FRS (an experimental psychologist at the University of Cambridge) was concerned about the performance of military personnel, and in particular, fatigue and its effects in relation to task demands. Bartlett turned to his colleague, Kenneth Craik, in order for him to design an experimental cockpit for testing purposes. The device Craik produced was described as the Fatigue Apparatus, but subsequently became known as the Cambridge Cockpit. Initial studies using the cockpit were conducted by Drew who authored a report: *An Experimental Study of Mental Fatigue*. Further studies examined, besides prolonged working periods, noise, sleep deprivation, the administration of alcohol, amphetamines, and vitamins. A detailed description of the experimental programme was published in 1948 under the title: *Pilot Error: Some Laboratory Experiments*. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the remains of the Cambridge Cockpit still lie somewhere in a basement in Berkeley Square.



8-10 Berkeley Square  
(Location of the department until 1991)

**Kenneth Ronald Lambert (Ronnie) Hall, Professor of Psychology  
(Head of Department, 1959-65)**

Hall's interests in psychology were varied; his PhD at the Institute of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford was entitled *Some Verbal Factors in Perception* and was the first to be awarded in the area of psychology. After his PhD, he was appointed Head of the Department of Clinical Psychology at Barrow Gurney Hospital. This was followed by a Chair of Psychology at the University of Cape Town where his interests moved from psychiatric illnesses to animal behaviour.

At Bristol, Hall was responsible for installing the facilities and resources for using primate species as experimental animals in his studies of their social organisation. He was keen for the primates to breed, and just before he died, a Patas monkey had been born without difficulties one lunch time. It is thought that the brain problems which caused Hall's death may have been as a result of a monkey bite. Alf (or Oof as reported in one newspaper) had escaped through an open window in Berkeley Square and onto Brandon Hill; using drugged bananas as bait, he was recaptured but in the process bit Hall, who died 7 weeks later. The coroner returned an open verdict. But, this incident led to the cessation of all primate work in the department.

Following Hall's untimely death at the age of 47, Ivor Pleydell-Pearce, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, took over as Head of Department. His research focused on stress, and he was particularly interested in meditation as an antidote to stress. In the early 1950s, he had been researching pain thresholds, which included administering electric shocks to subjects (as they were called then).

It was at this time that psychology left the Faculty of Arts to become part of the newly formed Faculty of Social Sciences. In 1966, a Joint degree in Sociology and Psychology was created. However, Joint schools in the Faculty of Science remained with the creation of Joint Honours degrees in Physiology and Psychology, and Psychology and Zoology as well as Single Honours degrees in Psychology.

In 1965, the number of psychology undergraduates totalled 36 with 22 studying for a BA and 14 studying for a BSc degree.

Despite the departure of the monkeys, the department still had active animal research with marmosets, rats, birds and fish. Given this level of zoological-associated activity, there were plans in the 1960s for the biology building to house psychology.

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**Henri Tajfel, Professor of Social Psychology  
(Head of Department, 1967-69)**

Bristol was only the third university to deem social psychology deserving of an appointment at chair level, and Tajfel was its first occupant. Polish by birth, his education in Paris was interrupted by the Nazi invasion of France, and he spent most of the war as a French prisoner-of-war. On his eventual discharge, he discovered that all his family in Poland had been murdered.

It is not surprising that Tajfel's major research contributions to social psychology were in the fields of prejudice, intergroup conflict, and social identity, but he was also a pioneer and evangelist in the expansion of social psychology in Britain and Europe. With Ford Foundation assistance, he created a group of doctoral postgraduates in Bristol, nearly 20 of whom went on to become professors of social psychology in the UK, the Commonwealth, and mainland Europe. With several colleagues, he founded the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology, along with its journal and a monograph series, the former of which continues to flourish. Along with other collaborators, he was a major force in the development of social psychology in both Western and Eastern Europe. For the period of his tenure, Bristol became the

European Mecca for social psychology. His Social Identity theory is still one of the two or three major inspirations for social psychologists. At that time, a fund established in his honour enabled postgraduates from Eastern Europe to spend time working in British universities. Both the European Association and the British Psychological Society: Social Psychology Section have founded annual Tajfel memorial lectures.

In the Senate minutes of 1967, reference is made to the need for a second chair in physiological psychology and comparative behaviour. There is also a proposal for psychology to share a lecturer on an equal basis with the School of Architecture. Architecture at Bristol covered both the structural engineering and social aspects of design; when designing a hospital, there is a need to take into account the needs and requirements of the people who will use the building. As an example, a PhD thesis, *Evaluation of Hospital Ward Organisation* by Anne Noble of the department, focused on the effects of open and closed wards on patients' welfare and recovery.

In 1970, Richard Gregory was created Professor of Neuropsychology and Director of the Brain and Perception Laboratory at the Medical School (Department of Anatomy), University of Bristol. This group was funded by the MRC (Medical Research Council) for research into the cognitive neural processes of perception. This work was based on the notion of perceptions as predictive hypotheses; clinical implications included Parkinson's disease.

The journal, *Perception*, was founded in 1972 by Gregory, who was the first Editor-in-Chief. In the 1980s, the Brain and Perception group became part of the Department of Psychology and moved to Berkeley Square. To this day, *Perception* continues to be edited from the department, and Gregory remains as Editor-in-Chief.

In the early 1980s, Gregory was the brainchild behind the establishment of the Exploratory Interactive Science Centre, located in Bristol city centre, which became a model for 'hands-on' science centres in the UK and worldwide.

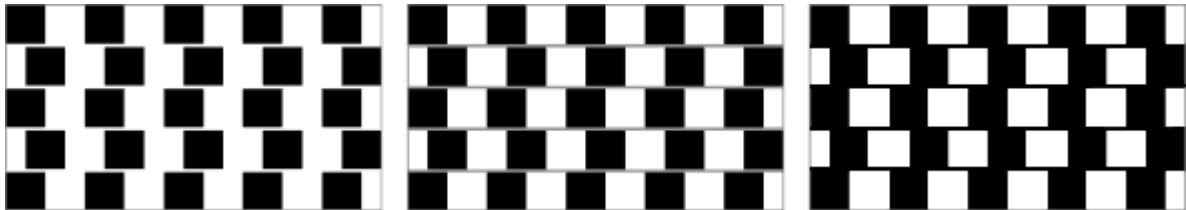


Richard Langton Gregory CBE FRS

Gregory is probably best known for his work on perception and visual illusions. One of the more well known is the café wall illusion. This was based on observing the tiles of a café near the university in Bristol and the effect created whereby the tiles did not appear as parallel as they actually were, as they seemed to converge in alternate-direction wedges. Building a series of models, Gregory and colleagues then went on to test the effect in the laboratory. This particular study was published in the journal, *Perception*, in 1979. Gregory retired in 1988 as Emeritus Professor but still has an office in the department and is a frequent visitor.



The original of the Café Wall, St Michael's Hill, Bristol



The Café Wall display

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**John Brown, Professor of Experimental Psychology  
(Head of Department, 1969-84)**

Brown is well known for his work on memory and forgetting. His PhD thesis in the 1950s was entitled *Immediate Memory* and was concerned with decay theory of immediate memory. It should be noted that the term, short-term memory, did not exist at this time. Brown published a number of seminal papers from this research.

Brown had worked in the department as a temporary Assistant Lecturer in 1953-4, and he recalls teaching 5-6 undergraduates in a class. He moved to Bristol from Newcastle in April 1969. During the following summer term, he remained as Head of the School of Psychology at Newcastle University as well as being Head of Department at Bristol.

A decade later, a sabbatical taken by Brown was covered by Peter F. Powesland who acted as Head of Department, 1979-80. Powesland is best known for his work on speech style and social evaluation, which he carried out in conjunction with Howard Giles; for example, their book entitled *Speech Evaluation and Social Evaluation* published in 1975.

John Hurrell Crook, an ethologist, sociologist and student of Chán (Chinese Zen) Buddhism was a Reader in Ethology in the department at this time. He is well known for his work studying the social organisation of animals, and his publications on the evolution of human consciousness.

During this period, the Intercalating degree in psychology for medical and dental undergraduates was established. This ran for over 30 years until the 1990s. Student numbers in the '70s remained buoyant, and the department readily filled its places. In the Postgraduate Block in 8-10 Berkeley Square, the students had their own common room called Joe's. During one weekend, a group of undergraduates decorated it according to the colours and style of the time.

The Bristol undergraduate programmes were based on the Oxbridge model with tutorials, a project and assessment primarily by examination. There was, at this time, a move towards introducing continuous assessment into UK degree programmes. The undergraduates at a Staff-Student Meeting asked if this would be possible; however, when staff explained what this would involve, the students asked for an assurance that they would not have more continuous assessment. Further discussions concerned the general paper. Undergraduates were required in their final year to sit a synoptic paper comprising questions from all areas of psychology; this paper was not popular with the students because there was no set syllabus for revision. It was subsequently withdrawn which many lecturers felt was a shame because it distinguished the very good students.

In 1981, the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, required universities to reduce their staffing substantially and imposed year-on-year budget cuts, but at the same time the number of students was being increased. Staff, who left the department, were not replaced. Being a small department spread across two faculties, it was under pressure throughout the 1980s, and at times looked as though it might disappear.

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**Howard Giles, Professor of Social Psychology  
(Head of Department, 1984-7)**

When Tajfel retired, the chair was not filled until Giles was promoted. His research interests were in the social psychology of language and communication, and with the development of his Speech Accommodation Theory (eventually re-christened as Communication Accommodation Theory), he began to revive the strong tradition of social psychology at Bristol introduced by Tajfel and maintained by John C. Turner. He and Peter Robinson initiated the Biennial Bristol International Conferences in Language and Communication, followed in due course by the founding of the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, an International Association, and the editing of Handbooks. In collaboration with Robinson, Giles tried to obtain funding for a Centre for Language and Communication but failed, and with no prospect for developments in Britain in 1989, Giles accepted an invitation to become Professor of Communication at the University of California Santa Barbara, where his theorising and empirical contributions to intergroup communication have led to international collaboration and influence on a massive scale.

By the early 1980s, there was no longer any research with animals in the department. This did not however, prevent the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) from throwing red paint at the door of 8-10 Berkeley Square. The Animal House in the department (housed on the top floor and on the flat roof) had in fact, been the first of all the UK psychology departments to close. The Georgian building built in the 1790s was not suited to keeping animals for research purposes and refurbishment would have been excessively expensive.

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**W. Peter Robinson, Professor of Social Psychology  
(Head of Department, 1987-92)**

Robinson had been Head of the Advanced Studies Division of the School of Education, and Dean of the Faculty in 1981 when Senate voted to close down the School. By 1987 that School was no longer threatened, but alarmed at the clear dangers to Psychology, he was allowed to move across as Head of Department.

His long-standing research interests had been in children's development of competence with language and communication, and most of his recent publications were about young children learning to adopt the perspectives of other people. A further area was socially-based



differences in the self-perception and self-evaluation of academically successful and unsuccessful adolescents, but for the 5 years of his tenure he saw his major task as preventing the closure of the department. The university policy of not replacing staff who left and an expansion of student numbers led to a collapse in the student-staff ratio. Funding for research was scarce. A plan to disperse staff to other departments in the university, and suggestions for early retirements was requested; but no such plan was handed in! The only academically positive development at this time was the inauguration of a Master's programme in Organisational Psychology, which ran for 10 years. At the beginning of the '90s the university also required departments to become modular, and at his farewell to the graduands of 1992, Robinson prophesied that they were the last cohort who would enjoy the kind of personal tuition and care that had been a distinguishing feature of the department throughout its history; we would be moving from a university education of students to the teaching of courses with a focus on assessment.

Robinson's tenure did, however, end on a most positive note. The second national Research Assessment Exercise had resulted in only a medium rating for Bristol Psychology, and the Vice-Chancellor of 1992 was aspiring to top ratings for all departments in the next one. In a meeting that was finally likely to permit a replacement for Brown, a dynamic discussion developed where the two Deans supported offers of two chairs, a probable readership for the spouse of one, plus two supporting lectureships for each chair. An incredulous Robinson sent a memorandum of understanding for this outcome to committee members within minutes of the ending of the meeting. Martin Conway and Andy Smith accepted their offers of chairs, Sue Gathercole accepted a readership, and the lectureships were advertised.

In order to let the new staff settle in, Norman Freeman, Professor of Cognitive Development, acted as Head of Department for a year. Freeman had joined the department in 1972. His research is in cognition, and he has been primarily concerned with trying to model and test hypotheses about representational development, especially in young children.

The department at this time was still relatively small; the yearly cohort of undergraduates was approximately 45. Applications remained buoyant and it was evident that the department could increase its student numbers and still maintain the same entry standards.

During the Summer of 1991, the department moved from 8-10 Berkeley Square to a new purpose-built building at 8 Woodland Road, and in 2006 a new entrance from Priory Road was added to the building.



Entrance to the 'new' department at 12A Priory Road (2006)

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**Martin A. Conway, Professor of Cognitive Psychology  
(Head of Department, 1993-2001)**

One of the new appointments, Conway, was a cognitive psychologist interested in autobiographical memory. In the early '90s, psychology was becoming increasingly popular at A-level and as a degree subject. This popularity coupled with increasing number of school leavers being encouraged to go to university was reflected in the growth of the department at this time. Undergraduate numbers nearly doubled and a new Master's programme in Health Psychology was launched; this was organised by Smith until he left the department in 1999.

In the 1990s, the department changed its name from the Department of Psychology to the Department of Experimental Psychology in order to provide a better descriptor for its activities.

Professor Alan Baddeley joined the department from 1995 to 2003. His research interests are in human memory, neuropsychology and the practical application of cognitive psychology, although he is probably best known for his research on working memory. Professor Baddeley is the UK's most highly cited (referenced) academic psychologist.



Alan David Baddeley CBE FRS

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**Peter J. Rogers, Professor of Biological Psychology  
(Head of Department, 2001-4, 2008- )**

Rogers' research is concerned with food, drugs and behaviour. While his work on appetite and weight control is very relevant to tackling the modern epidemic of obesity, his interests in the psychopharmacology of licit drugs pick up the theme started by Drew 60 years earlier. The appointment of other staff with complementary expertise established the study of biological and cognitive bases of appetites as a significant area for the department.

Staff and student numbers continued to increase with the introduction of a suite of Master's programmes in Research Methods. The department moved towards being solely in one faculty, that is, Science, as opposed to offering first and higher degrees for students registered in either Social Sciences or Science.

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**Iain D. Gilchrist, Professor of Neuropsychology  
(Head of Department, 2005-8)**

Gilchrist's research is concerned with the link between vision and action, for example, to understand how and why we move our eyes, and other visually guided actions such as drawing, copying and foraging. In order to understand these processes, both patients and unimpaired individuals are tested.

In 2006, a new entrance was created onto Priory Road, and thus, the new address, 12A Priory Road was adopted. (The new building at 12A Priory Road is on the site of a house

destroyed during the Second World War; hence, the local residents were reluctant to continue with its original house number, 13, and its perceived 'unlucky' connotations.)

Undergraduate numbers are now over 100 per year; the majority are Single Honours, but the Psychology and Zoology, and Philosophy and Psychology Joint Honours degrees still exist. All undergraduate awards are BSc degrees. There are now Master's programmes in Research Methods, Neuropsychology, and Vision Sciences. The number of faculty includes eight professors (Bowers, Freeman, Gilchrist, Hood, Noyes, Oberauer, Rogers, Troscianko) and 21 other academics (Baddeley, Benton, Briscoe, Brunstrom, Damian, Farrell, Frankish, Jarrold, Kazanina, Kent, Leonards, Mattys, Mohr, Munafò, Park, Pellicano, Penton-Voak, Pleydell-Pearce, Rowe, Scott-Samuel, Stollery).

Today, the University of Bristol has over 16,500 students, and is a very different institution from 1876 when there were just 99 students.

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*Disclaimer: Every attempt has been made to maintain accuracy in this account.*