

# Founding factors

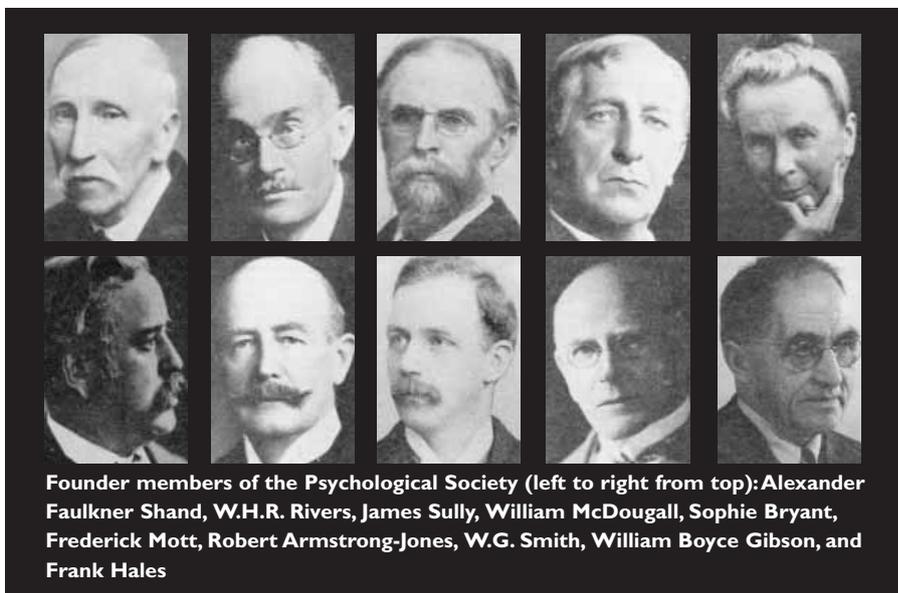
**O**N 24 October 1901 a group of 10 people met at University College London and founded what became the British Psychological Society. But what made this event possible in the first place? A number of important historical factors can be identified.

**The creation of social roles for 'experts of the self'** Mesmerism and phrenology had encouraged ordinary people to consult experts to obtain advice about how to heal and improve themselves. Mesmerism is also a historical example of the process whereby physical phenomena (electricity and magnetism) provide metaphors for the emergence of novel psychological phenomena (hypnosis).

**The development of an evolutionary physiological psychology** The key texts of this antimetaphysical movement were: Spencer's *Principles of Psychology* (1855); Bain's *The Senses and the Intellect* (1855) and *The Emotions and the Will* (1859); Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872); and Carpenter's *Principles of Mental Physiology* (1874). 'Darwin's Bulldog' T.H. Huxley praised Carpenter for having contributed 'to the foundation of a rational, that is to say a physiological, psychology'.

**The appearance of forums for discussion** Edward Cox established the Psychological Society of Great Britain in 1875, proposing 'only to collect facts and investigate psychological phenomena' (Richards, 2001). After it folded in 1879 some of its members set up the Society for Psychical Research to gather information on telepathy, hypnotism, hauntings and hallucinations. The Aristotelian Society (1880), Croom Robertson's Psychological Club (1880s) and Bain and Croom

This month Geoff Bunn identifies 10 factors that contributed to the formation of the Psychological Society in 1901. Elizabeth Valentine, continuing our series of influential figures from the last 100 years of psychology, writes about James Sully, who called the meeting at which the Society was formed.



Founder members of the Psychological Society (left to right from top): Alexander Faulkner Shand, W.H.R. Rivers, James Sully, William McDougall, Sophie Bryant, Frederick Mott, Robert Armstrong-Jones, W.G. Smith, William Boyce Gibson, and Frank Hales

BY GEOFF BUNN

Robertson's *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* (1876), were also important vehicles. **Alexander Faulkner Shand** (1858–1936), a barrister by training, hosted many early Society dinners at his home in Kensington. (Genealogists may note him as the great-grandfather of Camilla Parker-Bowles.)

**The establishment of experimental psychological laboratories** Francis Galton set up an Anthropometric Laboratory in London in 1884 to record statistical variations in 'natural ability'. Three years later James McKeen Cattell established a small, short-lived laboratory in Cambridge. **W.H.R. Rivers** (1864–1922) also set up a laboratory there in 1897. With help from Galton, **James Sully** (1842–1923) opened an experimental psychology laboratory at University College London in January

1898. That same year members of the Cambridge anthropological expedition Charles Myers, **William McDougall** (1871–1938) and Rivers set up a makeshift laboratory on Mer, an island in the Torres Straits archipelago.

**The emergence of markets for psychological expertise in education** Compulsory education was introduced in England in 1876. Inspired by Galton, north London Collegiate School Headmistress **Sophie Bryant** (1850–1922) gave mental tests to her students in 1886. A philosopher and libertarian feminist, Bryant was described by Cattell as 'one of the ablest women in England'. Bain, Ward, Lloyd Morgan and Sully all wrote psychological textbooks for teachers.

**The introduction of new legislation pertaining to the care of the insane** The Lunacy Act was passed in 1890. Four years later, the London County Council's asylum at Claybury was opened with **Frederick Mott** (1853–1926) as Director. One of his achievements was to demonstrate that 'general paralysis of the insane' had a syphilitic aetiology. **Robert Armstrong-Jones** (1859–1943), the asylum's first Medical Superintendent, introduced training courses for asylum nurses. **W.G. Smith** (1866–1918), Director of Claybury's Department of Experimental

Psychology, was one of the few British psychologists to have studied with Wundt. Smith later set up the first psychological laboratory in Scotland.

**The invention of the psychology textbook** Sully's *Outlines of Psychology* (1884), revised as *The Human Mind* (1892), would later be described as 'the most scholarly, comprehensive and well-balanced factual textbook of psychology ever produced by a British psychologist' (Hearnshaw, 1964, p.134) Stout's *Manual of Psychology* (1898) became the most widely used psychology textbook in Britain.

**The creation of psychology teaching positions in universities** After a career spent in journalism, Sully became Professor of Philosophy at University College London in 1892. The following year Rivers was appointed Lecturer on the Physiology of the Special Senses at Cambridge University. Stout was the first holder of the University of Aberdeen's Anderson Lectureship in comparative psychology in 1896. Two years later Dr Henry Wilde, an electrical engineer, offered the capital to Oxford University to endow a Readership in Mental Philosophy. The holder was obliged to lecture 'on the illusions and delusions which are incident to the human mind' and 'on the psychology of the lower races of mankind'.

**The emergence of 'human kinds' as targets of psychological knowledge and intervention** 'Feeble-minded child', 'criminal' and 'lunatic' had become terms of common parlance. Havelock Ellis published *The Criminal* in 1890, the year in which The National Association for Promoting the Welfare of the Feeble-Minded was founded. The British Child Study Association, of which Sully was an active member, was set up in 1894. Formed at a time when cultural fears about national degeneration were widespread, many of the Psychological Society's members were interested in eugenics. Armstrong-Jones, Burt, McDougall, Mott and Myers were all members of the Eugenics Society.

**International developments** The *American Journal of Psychology* was founded in 1887; the American Psychological Association in 1892; and *L'année psychologique* in 1894. The First International Congress of Psychology was held in 1889. Three founder members of the Psychological Society were to leave British shores in subsequent years.

McDougall became Professor of Psychology at Harvard in 1920. **William Boyce Gibson** (1869–1935) was appointed Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy at the University of Melbourne in 1912. **Frank Hales** (1878–1952) emigrated to Canada in 1905 and became a farmer.

The creation of the Psychological Society in 1901 was therefore brought about by a combination of practical, intellectual, literary and scientific factors. James Sully, the most senior founder member of the Society (see biography below), had witnessed many of these developments at

first hand. It was appropriate that it was he who was accorded the honour of presenting the first paper to the Society's first meeting. His topic was 'The evolution of laughter'.

#### References

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