

In Memoriam

Professor George Seth, 1905-1990

George Seth died, in Belfast, on 28 July this year, bringing to an end a life and career devoted to the furtherance of psychology. Whilst without doubt the father of psychology in Northern Ireland, his influence extended well beyond the Province's shores.

George was born in Scotland on 23 April 1905. He was educated at the University of Edinburgh where an honours MA in English Literature led to a BEd through which a life-long interest in psychology was established. A doctorate in child psychology was followed by the award of a Dickson Travelling Scholarship in education which enabled him to spend time in Paris studying the French educational system.

A series of appointments followed which allowed George to extend his knowledge and experience in teaching and with children: assistant lecturer in psychology in the University of Edinburgh, assistant psychologist in the University psychological clinic, Rockefeller Research Fellow in Yale, the Columbia Neurological Centre and the Institute of Child Welfare in the University of Minnesota, and from 1935 lecturer in psychology at University College, Cardiff (Department of Education). During the war he was asked by the Welsh Board of Health to establish and run (from 1941-1945) a peripatetic psychological service for evacuated English children in Wales. This was in addition to his university duties.

The most productive period of George's professional career commenced when he was appointed lecturer in psychology at the Queen's University of Belfast in 1946. This led to appointments as Senior Lecturer in 1952 and Professor in 1958, a post he held until his retirement in 1971. The title Emeritus Professor was conferred in 1972. Over this period

George developed and enhanced the department, attracting an enthusiastic and talented group of staff (the fact that three recent Presidents of the Society belonged to that group is perhaps not without significance!). He welcomed into the department as students many refugees from other faculties disenchanted with their lot and he afforded a particular encouragement to many mature students to return to Queen's and begin a new career in applied psychology from the department. George's ability to be flexible and creative in meeting the needs of individual students was something for which both of us have reason to be very grateful as without it, as for many others, we would never have become psychologists. George Seth saw psychology as an important contributor to the real world of everyday life and work. This was reflected in the way the department, under his influence, developed. Post-graduate courses in clinical, educational and occupational psychology were established and George was at his most effective in arguing how psychology must make a contribution to life in many areas of society.

Those of us who were taught by George are unlikely ever to forget the experience. The ability to talk for an entire lecture within one sentence and the manner in which an idea, or an aside could lead into unknown and unplanned territories made note-taking problematical, but ensured concentration and interest!

George Seth played a vital role in the BPS over this period: at national level he was member of Council, of various Boards and Committees, culminating in his election as President in 1967. As important was his interest and involvement in the Northern Ireland Branch. George was the driving force behind its creation in 1956 and was its first Chair.

The first paper presented was entitled (in retrospect predictably), "Psychology in the Community", and was given by George. From that point onwards, until failing health limited his attendance in the late 1980s, George was present at every Annual General Meeting of the Branch, every Annual Regional Conference, and most scientific meetings as well. Many early morning speakers at Branch Conferences, facing audiences decimated by the previous evening's deprivations, could be certain of at least one enthusiastic listener, usually in the front row, waiting to ask the most pertinent of questions!

Professor Seth's own research interests centred around children. Author of *Speech in Childhood* and various research papers in appropriate journals, his main contribution to psychology, however, must be through the staff and students he attracted to the department and whom he enthused and inspired, and through the structures and systems he worked so hard to establish and maintain through which psychology could be promoted in both academic and professional arenas.

No account of George Seth could be complete without reference to his life-long soul mate, May, whom he married in 1936. May, a child psychologist in her own right, supported George as the centre of psychology in Northern Ireland for over three decades. Though never a formal member of the Queen's department, it was the joint influence of George and May which laid the basis for the close and enduring links between staff and students which those of us who passed through that department found so valuable and supportive. May died in 1983, and she and George are survived by their four children, three sons and a daughter.

Joan and Jerry Harbison
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