

Harry Kay (1919–2005)

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Harry Kay, a former President of the British Psychological Society, died on 14 December 2005 after a long illness. He was 86. From Rotherham Grammar School he went up to Trinity Hall, Cambridge in 1938 to read English. With the outbreak of war in 1939 he joined the army and fought with the Royal Artillery through the campaign in North Africa and Italy. At the end of the war he held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

In 1946 he returned to Cambridge to complete his degree choosing to read moral sciences in Part II of the tripos. As a schoolboy and an undergraduate he was an accomplished athlete, breaking many school records and gaining a half blue for hockey. He retained his interest in sports and games, especially cricket and tennis, throughout his life: in tutorials he often used examples from sports to illustrate a point of psychological interest. On graduation he remained in Cambridge to undertake postgraduate work in the Nuffield Unit for Research into Problems of Ageing.

While in Cambridge he was much influenced by Sir Frederic Bartlett who believed that progress in psychology would come from addressing real-world problems that would in turn lead to theoretical insights. This general approach was adopted by Harry, who throughout his scientific career worked on applied problems and encouraged others to do so. During this period in Cambridge he also served as psychologist to the Naval Arctic Expedition in 1949.

In 1951 he was appointed lecturer experimental psychology at Oxford. The 1950s was the decade during which he carried out much of his own experimental work. His investigations into learning and memory in adults and the effects of ageing were completed and successfully submitted for a PhD. The same period also saw the publication of further work on motor skills. On his appointment to the foundation chair of psychology at Sheffield in 1960 he immediately set about building a firm research base. His own research efforts were now focused primarily on occupational psychology.

An early success stemming from his work in Cambridge was programmed instruction and teaching machines. This work attracted interest from industry and led ultimately to the establishment of the National Centre for Programmed Instruction for Industry. Around this time he was awarded the Vernon Prize for his work on industrial training. In the mid-1960s the MRC, seeing the need to build up the research base in industrial psychology, responded positively to a proposal to establish a research unit in the area in Sheffield. In 1968 the Social and Applied Psychology Unit began work with Harry as honorary director. The broad theme of the Unit's work was applied cognitive psychology. Alongside the development of the research programme a postgraduate training course in occupational and organisational psychology was introduced. By the time he left Sheffield, work psychology, as it is now known, was firmly established.

During the 1960s he became increasingly involved in university administration and particularly in academic planning. He served as Pro-Vice-Chancellor in Sheffield and in 1973 he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of Exeter University, where he remained

until his retirement in 1984. He worked on many committees, some specialist scientific (MRC, SRC, SSRC, NATO Human Factors), others concerned with general educational matters. He chaired the UCCA, the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, and served the GMC as a lay member. In 1981 he was appointed CBE. He was President of the BPS, the Experimental Psychology Society, and the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Section J (Psychology). Sheffield and Exeter Universities awarded him honorary degrees.

Harry Kay was a kind and deeply tolerant man, always courteous in his dealings with others and always prepared to give time to students and young research staff. He believed passionately in the central importance of education at all levels for any civilised society. He never lost his interest or commitment to psychology; after his stroke he made careful observations of his symptoms and disabilities in the belief that psychology had much to inform neurology.

He is survived by Diana his wife of 64 years, a son, a daughter and a grandson.

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