

# Frederick Viggers Smith (1912–2006)

---

**Citation:** Findlay, J. (2006). Frederick Viggers Smith (1912–2006) [Letter to the editor]. *The Psychologist*, 18, 588.

---

Frederick Viggers (Fred) Smith died in July at the age of 94. He was a former Professor of Psychology at the University of Durham, a Fellow of the Society and President from 1959 to 1960. Fred came relatively late into academic psychology, having first trained and practised as a teacher. He subsequently took a degree course, graduating with first class honours in psychology from Sydney University in 1938. Following a period of professional work in Australia, he moved to the UK, obtained a PhD from the University of London in 1948 and held lectureship appointments at Birkbeck College and at Aberdeen. In 1950 he moved to Durham University as Professor of Educational Psychology in the Department of Education. In 1952 the university's Academic Board constituted psychology as a separate department and his post became the Chair of Psychology.

He had found a role to suit his talents, and, although the ride was rarely smooth when he was in the driving seat, he built up the department into a leading centre for teaching and research. A particular highlight was the occupation of fine new dedicated premises in 1970, of which he was obsessively proud. On more than one occasion, visiting academic speakers were forcefully reminded, during the course of a seminar presentation in the lecture theatre, to avoid scratching the wall with the long wooden pointer. He became a legend at Durham, with countless stories circulating about his golf and squash prowess, his motoring skills and speed, his unshakeable optimism.

Fred's range of interests within the subject was extensive and eclectic. His book *Explanations of Human Behaviour* was published in 1951, with a second edition appearing in 1960. He published a large number of scientific papers on topics varying from imprinting between lambs and ewes to personality in long-term imprisonment. Two further books *Attachment of the Young: Imprinting and Other Developments* and *Purpose in Animal Behaviour* were published in 1969 and 1971 respectively.

His idiosyncrasies did not make him an easy colleague or companion but his drive and integrity always commanded respect, and he would on occasion show surprising sensitivity to students or others with problems. He was always a dynamic individual and retirement to Australia allowed him to pursue an ambition for deep-sea fishing. However, his dedication to his subject and the development of the department at Durham were unquestionably the strongest driving forces in his career and his far-sighted planning left a legacy that many have appreciated. A former colleague summarises nicely: 'They don't make academics like him now I am sorry to say.'

**John Findlay**

*University of Durham*