

# The Oxford University Department of Psychiatry 1969–1996

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The Oxford University Department of Psychiatry was founded in 1969 during a period in which new psychiatry departments were being established in most undergraduate medical schools. It was the realisation of plans that had been formulated over at least 10 years by local psychiatrists and by leading members of the Clinical School, most notably by Sir George Pickering, the first clinically active Regius Professor since Osler.

As in most of the other new departments, the original staffing was small. The Chair of Psychiatry had been established with a generous donation from the W. A. Handley Trust, the University had provided a senior lecturer and basic support, and three lecturer posts were funded by a grant from the Regional Hospital Board. The present Department has nearly 100 staff but, again in common with most psychiatry departments in undergraduate medical schools, most of these are supported by outside funding. The present seven university staff comprise the Handley Professor, two Clinical Readers, a senior lecturer in clinical psychology, a clinical tutor and two lecturers. Among the outside funded staff three hold personal Chairs and two, funded through the National Health Service (NHS), are Clinical Readers. The Department houses three Wellcome Principal Fellows and two members of MRC external staff. In the last academic year the outside funding of the department was approximately two million pounds.

The new Professor, Michael Gelder, and his two new senior colleagues, John Bancroft and Dennis Gath, have all trained at the Maudsley Hospital and the Institute of Psychiatry. They set out to establish a research programme and to develop the teaching of medical students and postgraduates while taking responsibility for a clinical unit at the Warneford Hospital. The new University Department was able to build on efforts over a number of years by the NHS staff to establish research and teaching for medical students and postgraduates. For example, in 1969 there was already in existence a research unit, set up by Dr Christopher Ounsted, for research into child neuropsychiatry, with Dr David Taylor as the senior investigator. This

line of research has continued and is represented strongly in the present section of Child Psychiatry.

From the beginning research was seen as a priority by local NHS psychiatrists and by those responsible for regional and district planning in the NHS as well as by the University. With this initial encouragement, the Department grew by a series of initiatives. In some of these individuals developed research groups reflecting their own interests. In others, a long-term strategy was needed to develop areas of research that were not yet represented in the Department, for example old age and health services research. A growing range of academic interests and a variety of sources of funding have enabled continuing year-by-year growth. The result, 28 years later, is a department with wide interests and research which is both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary and a well established programme of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.

## Research

The first major programme of research, established in 1970 and continuing vigorously today, developed from Michael Gelder's previous work on behaviour therapy carried out at the Institute of Psychiatry. This work has continued to develop with a series of programme grants from the Medical Research Council and more recently from the Wellcome Trust. The success of the psychological treatment unit in developing effective treatments for anxiety disorders and related conditions has been substantially due to its multidisciplinary method of working. The team of psychiatrists and psychologists has changed over the years and so has the focus of their enquiries. Early research was mainly concerned with agoraphobia and, for a period, with depressive disorders. Current work, which is being pursued by teams led by Professor Clark, Dr Ehlers and Dr Salkovskis, is focused on cognitive-behavioural treatment of anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, hypochondriasis and obsessive-compulsive disorder. The international reputation of the groups has led to highly

fruitful collaborations with research workers in other countries.

A second line of research which was initiated in the early years of the Department concerns psychiatric and behavioural problems in the general hospital. Such work was one of the expectations of the Clinical School when the Department was established and it has developed vigorously with a clinical research programme that has been closely related to a consultation liaison service. The programme was initiated in 1970 by John Bancroft with research on attempted suicide and this work has continued ever since. One early outcome was the development of a consultation service provided by specialist nurses for management of parasuicide. For the last 20 years the programme has been directed by Keith Hawton with a series of studies of the epidemiology of suicide and attempted suicide and to the development and evaluation of interventions. The register of attempted suicide attenders at the Oxford Accident & Emergency Department is the longest established in Europe.

Other general hospital research has had the same origins of a response to clinical problems and the interests of individuals. Work on serious physical disorders began with research by Peter Maguire on breast cancer and has continued with work by Richard Mayou on a variety of major physical disorders (heart disease, diabetes, road traffic accidents) and by Dennis Gath on gynaecology and obstetrics. More recently, there has been an increasing interest in the causes and treatment of medically unexplained symptoms such as chest pain and palpitations, chronic fatigue and pelvic pain. This research, which has been strongly clinical, has involved collaboration with many general hospital specialists and has adapted and used methods of research proven in other areas of psychiatry. There has been a most valuable interaction with the expanding consultation and liaison service, such that research has focused increasingly on problems of concern to the service.

Another interest from the first years was in biological mechanisms in psychiatric disorder, and psychopharmacology. The first studies were of the neuroendocrine responses to antipsychotic drugs, building on work that had been initiated, before the Department was founded, by Bertram Mandelbrote and Geoffrey Harris, FRS, the Professor of Anatomy in Oxford. The research developed significantly with the arrival in Oxford of David Grahame-Smith as Director of the MRC Clinical Pharmacology Unit. A most fruitful collaboration was established, with joint research projects involving linked laboratory and clinical investigations of 5HT function in health and in psychiatric disorders. Professor Grahame-Smith



*Fig. 1. The opening of the Wellcome Building 1995 by the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, Dr Peter North. (l to r): Dr Peter North, Professor Sir Stanley Peart, Professor Sir David Weatherall, Dr David Gordon, Professor Christopher Fairburn, Professor David Clark, Dr Paul Salkovskis (front) Dr Anke Ehlers, Professor Michael Gelder. (Photo credit - Rob Judges)*

and his colleagues were generous in providing training in basic scientific research for clinicians who wished to prepare for a career in clinical research. Among the many psychiatrists who benefited from this opportunity were Guy Goodwin, now Handley Professor, and Phillip Cowen, the present director of the psychopharmacology laboratories. More recently, neuroscience research has expanded considerably with the move to Oxford of Tim Crow, previously director of the Division of Psychiatry at Northwick Park Hospital, and through the work of Paul Harrison, a Wellcome Senior Fellow. The plans for the Prince of Wales' Centre for research on schizophrenia and affective disorder, funded by SANE, and Guy Goodwin's appointment will lead to further developments in research using techniques in neuropathology and neuroimaging.

Other major interests have developed from the particular interest of members of staff. For example, the research programme on eating disorders developed by Christopher Fairburn has included clinical and epidemiological studies as well as research on psychological treatment. This programme is notable for the range of international collaborations. Recently, the Wellcome Trust generously provided a new research building to house this programme and that of the Psychological Treatment Group. As time has passed it has been possible to establish a research group for old age psychiatry, led by Robin Jacoby, and to expand the research on established child psychiatry. In each case, support from the health authorities was essential in establishing a core of staff who have gone on to

attract substantial outside funding. Child psychiatry research, directed by Greg Stores, has continued the long-standing interest in neuropsychiatry with work on epilepsy and sleep disorders alongside projects on developmental issues, psychiatric aspects of physical disorder and aspects of child abuse. Research in psychiatry of old age began with work by Tony Hope on behavioural aspects of dementia and has expanded with the arrival of Robin Jacoby to include work on affective disorders and suicide.

As in any department, other interests and topics have been represented over the years reflecting the interests of individuals. These topics include psychiatric history, psychotherapy, ethics and philosophy. Clive Adams has played a leading role in extending to psychiatry the work of the Cochrane Collaboration, while Dennis Gath, Laurence Mynors-Wallis and Max Marshall have developed a programme of health services research.

In all these studies the strength of the Oxford department has been not only the sum of its individual research groups but also the opportunities for collaboration with members of the many internationally respected departments of the Medical School and the other science faculties of the University.

### Clinical work and teaching

The University Department has been fortunate to have enjoyed the backing of health service colleagues from the beginning and has taken a full role in developing Oxford's psychiatry services, especially the general hospital consultation liaison service. The interchange of staff has led to close working relationships between the NHS and the University, both in developing services and in postgraduate training.

The central task for a department of psychiatry must be the teaching of medical students. The Oxford programme combines seminars and tutorials with an emphasis on well supervised individual clinical experience. This has been maintained despite a substantial increase in the size of the school. Through the collaboration of many NHS colleagues it has been possible to continue with attachments of a small number of students to a clinical firm to ensure personal experience of the care of patients as well as academic and clinical tutorials, a weekly study day of seminars, and opportunities to see a range of psychiatric specialities.

The *Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry* for post-graduates and the *Concise Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry* and *Essential Psychiatry* for medical students, have been successful with their respective audiences. Numerous other books have



Fig. 2. Professor David Clark presenting Professor Michael Gelder with a specially bound copy of *The Science and Practice of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy* (eds Christopher Fairburn and David Clark) published by OUP to mark his 27 years as Professor of Psychiatry. Also pictured are Professor Guy Goodwin (right), incoming Professor of Psychiatry, and Dr Richard Mayou, Clinical Reader

been published by members of the Department, the most recent being *The Science and Practice of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy* edited by David Clark and Christopher Fairburn and published by Oxford University Press. This book, which includes contributions by current and ex-members of the Department and by North American collaborators, both marks Michael Gelder's tenure of the Chair of Psychiatry and is a comprehensive account of a subject which has been at the heart of Oxford research.

### Conclusion

At the end of its first 27 years the Oxford Department of Psychiatry seems firmly established as one of the larger and most successful departments in a flourishing clinical school and with a breadth of research activity and expertise which will sustain a growing programme of research. With Michael Gelder's retirement, Professor Goodwin will bring new possibilities for work on biological psychiatry which will enhance the many opportunities for working with other neuroscience units among the clinical and pre-clinical departments of the University.

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