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Stories from the Braziers Park Archive:

Reflections on Networks and Communities, Past and Present

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Archival documents in the Braziers Park stores, specifically the handwritten pages of notes that list the invitees to the Official Opening of Braziers Park School of Integrative Social Research, reveal the intellectual and social networks in which the founders moved, and in which they aspired to move. These humble scraps, never previously analysed, offer a telling snapshot of the new organisation's friends and supporters in 1950, as well as those they were inspired by and hoped to connect with. Invitees include high-profile authors and thinkers, campaigners and reformers, politicians and psychiatrists, anarchists and aristocrats.

This essay explores some of the people and ideas that the organisation sought to align with, and reflects on the continuities and discontinuities with Braziers' current communities and networks. What might the 21st century organisation learn from its past networks and aspirations? Brazier's anticipated cultural position was ambitious and outward-looking in its social and cultural reach; where does this endure, and where might this have this changed?

In a grey file in the former Victorian pantry that holds Braziers Park's archival papers, a small clutch of yellowing pages are grouped into a sheaf. Annotated in the spidery handwriting of Hilda Salter – a contributor to so many previous issues of *Research Communications*, and a long-time friend of Braziers Park – the folder is labelled 'Correspondence to do with Official Opening, 11 November 1950'.

Existing histories of Braziers Park School of Integrative Social Research (BPSISR), such as they are, have been mostly produced and received internally, and none have yet put the endeavour into full cultural and intellectual context. While a full history is still to be written, in all accounts so far, Norman and Dorothy Glaister are the main protagonists in the story. As the founders and the longest standing residents, their contribution was absolutely central, but what of the others who were there at the outset? Who was invited to be part in the beginning?

While these enquiries inevitably look back, I would like to argue that these are not just historical questions. In mapping the original organisation's supporters and those it aspired to align itself with, a constellation of names and occupations cluster around the early days of BPSISR. In an age of social media, where participation in social networks is central to how any organisation communicates its purpose externally, what can present day members and supporters of the current Braziers community learn from the School's earliest circles?

Social networking in mid-twentieth century Britain

It is particularly pertinent to explore the social networks in which the founders and supporters of BPSISR were enmeshed as the intellectual history of what is now called Social Network Analysis came of age at the very same times, and among the very same people, as those under scrutiny here. As Carrington and Scott (2011) discuss in their history of the practice, a language of 'points', 'lines' and 'connections' began to emerge among European scholars studying social relations in the 1930s. Informed by the sociological tradition of studying social structures, and influencing the nascent disciplines of social psychology and psychotherapy – areas in which the Glaisters were firmly embedded and, indeed, were shaping – 'group dynamics' came to form the dominant term for these studies, with the Tavistock Institute becoming the central focus for this work in Britain. Not coincidentally, this was Norman's base for his London psychiatric practice, and in many ways his intellectual home. While approaches to Social Network Analysis now take many and various forms, the developing discussions in mid-century Britain explored precisely the areas of human relations that underpinned the theory and practice of the Glaisters' exploration of 'social organisms'.

While this article does not apply a strict Social Network Analysis methodology to Braziers' social and intellectual networks, its proposition is that the 200 or so invitees, and the 90-plus attendees of Braziers' opening event, offer a neatly contained case study for exploring the founders' intellectual community, and for reflecting on the present day position of BPSISR in the wider world. The following enquiry thus provides, firstly, an overview of the invitees as a whole, then discussion of some notable individuals, followed by closing considerations for the present community on its social networks, as seen by an outsider.

The great and the good?

The scrappy lists of names scrawled on the pages in the archival folder were compiled by one Alex Farquharson MBE, MA, the director of Le Play House, the home of the Sociological Society since the 1920s (Scott and Bromley, 2013). All those invited to attend the opening of BPSISR, held on a Saturday afternoon in November 1950, received a printed postcard from Farquharson, who also gave the opening address.

One of the first notable characteristics of the list is how many names are foregrounded by 'Dr' or 'Prof'. Norman's training and livelihood in psychiatry undoubtedly shaped who was invited, and many former colleagues from his professional world understandably feature. Medical practitioners, scientists and especially psychiatrists are prominent. Progressive educationalists, from school head teachers to authors of alternative pedagogic treatises, reflect Dorothy's professional background as a pioneer of experimental education through her early career at Theodore Faithfull's Priory Gate school, and the interventions she made into outdoor educational methods through her books, published under her maiden name, *Cheiron's Cave: The School of the Future* (1928) *Tented Schools: Camping as a Technique of Education* (1934).

The Glaisters' years at the heart of the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, the outdoor youth group which brought them together in the 1920s, and which intended to put into practice new ideas from education and psychology, are also reflected in the invitees, many of whom are long-standing woodcraft movement friends (Edgell 1992; Pollen, 2015). Local dignitaries were invited, including titled and knighted industrialists and philanthropists, as were representatives from a range of organisations, local and national, with whom the founders felt allegiance. These include local Women's Institutes and Workers Education Associations, representatives of the British Council and the Family Welfare Association, plus editors and honorary secretaries of educational and learned societies and publications, encompassing psychological, biological, sociological, pacifist and left-leaning periodicals. Well-known authors were listed alongside local and national press

representatives. The following section considers some of these invitees – and acceptances – in more detail.

‘The Pattern Takes Shape’

Some names on the list indicate the desire to establish or consolidate connections with local figures of significant standing. Lord Nuffield, the wealthy British manufacturer of Morris cars, was a supporter of high-profile medical and educational endeavours, including the Nuffield Foundation and Nuffield College, Oxford; whether he was acquainted personally with the Glaisters is not known. Perhaps, like Sir Stanley and Lady Irving, who were prominent neighbours in Ipsden, Nuffield was invited for his Oxfordshire location as much as his philanthropy. Sir Julian Foley, an Oxford industrialist who served in senior roles in government bodies including the Board of Trade and the Board of Supply was another local titled influencer who topped the list. The inclusion of Mr and Mrs Peter Fleming, the brother and sister-in-law of the James Bond and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* author Ian Fleming, and the younger son and daughter-in-law of Valentine Fleming, the former owner of Braziers Park, show how the Glaisters maintained links with those who owned the site before them, but also with the educated and successful; Peter Fleming was also the author of celebrated travel books.

Other prominent authors on the list, not all of whom are well-remembered now, include Desmond Shaw, the author of science-fiction romances as well as a wide range of publications on spiritualism and reincarnation. Shaw’s books included poetry and plays, and he also founded the International Institute for Psychical Research in 1934. Perhaps, like Vera Brittain, the best-selling author of an autobiographical account of voluntary nursing in the First World War, Shaw was invited more for his interests in what we might now call ‘alternative spirituality’ than for his sci-fi profile. While *Testament of Youth* is now the work most associated with Brittain, her life was devoted to the ardent pursuit of pacifism; she was, for example, a prominent member of the League of Nations Union, the Peace Pledge Union and, like Dorothy, wrote campaigning articles for *Peace News* (whose editor was also called to attend).

Another invited author whose reputation is now dominated by one publication was Dr Alex Comfort. Like many of the renaissance figures in the Glaisters’ circle, Comfort was a polymath who combined well-received poetry and novels with medical innovations. His interests in biology, psychiatry and sociology, alongside his political philosophies – he was a prominent anarchist and pacifist around the time of the opening of BPSISR – have tended to be overshadowed by the enormous success of his pioneering manual, *The Joy of Sex*, in the early 1970s. The nexus of Comfort’s interests in 1950 –

flowing across science, anthropology, cultural criticism and political resistance (Goodway 1994) – reflect well those held by the Glaisters in the same period.

Senior academics were notable among invitees. Dr John Frederick Wolfenden was then Vice-Chancellor of Reading University, but is now most famous for chairing the committee that produced the Wolfenden report, recommending the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1957. Dr Alexander Carr-Saunders, the Director of the London School of Economics, was also on the list. In both cases, it is likely that they were recognised as sympathisers not so much for their status as institutional leaders but for their particular educationalist ethos, in the case of Wolfenden, or in the case of Carr-Saunders, for interests in the application of biological principles to social improvement. Carr-Saunders was centrally involved in Toynbee Hall, the social reform centre in East London that aimed to provide practical solutions to poverty, and which had provided a home for some of Norman's communitarian experiments in the 1930s. Carr-Saunders was the Secretary of the Eugenics Educational Society, and editors from the publication *Eugenics Review* were also invited to attend the BPSISR launch. While it may now feel uncomfortable to trace connections between BPSISR and the highly unpalatable ideology that categorises bodies into those 'fit' and 'unfit' to breed, before the Second World War eugenics was widely popular among those we would now consider to be progressives (Bland and Hall, 2010), and its societies drew on the same range of intellectual roots and evolutionary metaphors – from biology, sociology, psychiatry and religion - as the Glaisters used to make the case for their own causes.

Like Norman, Carr-Saunders had been a member of the Royal Army Medical Corps in the First World War. This non-combatant division provided a means for pacifists to support the wounded without bearing arms. It is notable that several names on the list are associated with RAMC, and this reinforces not only the dominance of physicians among invitees, but also the pacifist politics of many. The invitation extended to the Quaker publication, *The Friend*, underscores this pacifist pattern. Other publications, including the *Manchester Guardian* and *Time and Tide*, a literary magazine with distinctively left-wing and feminist leanings, show how the founders of BPSISR wished to locate themselves culturally and politically.

The social research organisation, Mass Observation, founded in 1937 by anthropologist Tom Harrisson, poet Charles Madge, and documentary film-maker Humphrey Jennings, was another distinctive organisation on the list. Eclectic in its interests and wantonly irrational in its research methods, Mass Observation sought to capture the everyday lives of ordinary people in mid-twentieth century Britain (Pollen, 2013). Informed, as were the Glaisters, by new ideas in psychoanalysis as well as experimental and amateur approaches to anthropology, the model of Mass

Observation perhaps explains the kind of hands-on 'social research' that Braziers Park hoped to undertake. Norman specifically referred to Mass Observation in his 1945 manuscript *Greater Things*. Here he envisaged that the organisation's prestige, combined with his 'sensory-resistive' structure, could make it an ideal force for implementing the pragmatic actions required for improved social evolution. It is not known whether he made such an approach, but he would have already been familiar with Madge through their shared membership of the Psychologists' Peace Society, founded in the 1930s (Forrester & Cameron, 2017).

Other notable members of the Psychologists' Peace Society included John Bowlby, the celebrated champion of psychological attachment theory who undertook initial training at Theodore Faithfull's Priory Gate School (where Dorothy had also been a tutor), and Dr John Carl Flugel, another invitee. Alongside Ernest Jones - the populariser of Freud in Britain - Flugel was at the centre of the psychoanalytic community in the 1920s and 1930s. He was also personally motivated by creative experiments in living, endorsing and practicing dress reform and nudism (Pollen 2016 and 2018), and was a member of the H. G. Wells-founded Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals in the 1930s, who argued for social reform to extend to all aspects of life, including the life of the mind (Joad, 1934). Again, the eclecticism, if not eccentricity, of Flugel's ambitions and interests align him well with the catholic breadth of the Glaisters' aims.

Dr Donald Winnicott was another prominent psychoanalyst on the invite list. Perhaps most famous for his development of ideas around the 'transitional object' and the 'good enough' mother, Winnicott's psychotherapeutic practices had led him to Norman through their participation in war-time schemes for so-called 'maladjusted' children. Through the extension of ideas developed in the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry and its educational off-shoot, the Forest School, such children were trusted with self-governance, in supported but deliberately primitive living conditions, where self-reliance and hardihood could be cultivated. These same techniques had been applied by Norman and others to the Grith Fyrd training camp for unemployed men established in the New Forest in the early 1930s (Field, 2015). From 1936 they were applied to older boys and young men who demonstrated challenging behaviours in the Q Camps scheme (Franklin, 1943). This therapeutic community at Hawkspur in Essex brought together radical psychiatrists and experimental educationalists including Cuthbert Rutter (the head of Forest School), Otto Shaw (head of Red Hill School) and, not least, Marjorie Franklin (member of British Psychoanalytical Society; executive member of Howard League for Penal Reform; council member of the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency). Despite the closure of the Q Camps project in 1940, Rutter, Shaw, Franklin and Winnicott remained connected to the Glaisters, and all were invitees in 1950.

‘Tea will be served at 4pm’

The emphasis so far has been on those who were invited. Inevitably, many intended guests were otherwise engaged. What of those who actually attended? Of the 90-plus who finally took tea on the terrace, I concentrate on two in particular.

Lancelot Law Whyte was, perhaps, Norman’s star guest. An engineer and financier by trade, Whyte applied the principles of physics to cosmic philosophy in a series of works of applied science, including *The Next Development of Man* (1944), which was a profound intellectual influence on Norman, as credited in his unpublished manuscripts *Greater Things* (1945) and *Implications of the Gregarious Habit in Man* (1948). Whyte developed an ambitious, biologically-influenced philosophy of human development and its shortcomings. He offered a critique of dualistic thinking and the promotion of ‘unitary thinking’ as its rectitude; ‘integration’ was proposed as a corrective to the ‘disassociation’ so common to the European psyche. Whyte emphasised process over stasis, and at Norman’s invitation was the invited speaker to the first of the Super Sensory Summer Schools in 1947 that laid the basis for the establishment of BPSISR. Whyte’s education, at Bedales (a pioneering co-educational public school) and Cambridge University, matched him culturally as well as intellectually to the emerging BPSISR community; his status - simultaneously philosopher, scientist, banker and anti-fascist (Whyte 1974) - fitted him professionally and politically too.

Marion Milner – also known by her *nom de plume*, Joanna Field – was another prominent attendee, and contributed to BPSISR cultural activities in its early years. Milner’s reputation in the present day is primarily as a pioneer in the use of journals and painting in therapy, as detailed in *A Life of One’s Own* (1934) and *On Not Being Able to Paint* (1950). Milner was active as a psychoanalyst for more than forty years; she had had close associations with Winnicott from the 1940s, but her husband had received psychotherapeutic treatment from Theodore Faithfull in the 1920s (Letley, 2013), suggesting that a connection with the Glaisters’ circle was longstanding. In her highly personal books, Milner explored the practice as much as the product of art; through a synthesis of ideas from Freud and Jung, metaphysical poets and modern artists, she explained that her accounts were ‘an attempted embodiment of the process of creating’ (1950: 145). Milner’s experimental approach to the psychoanalytic process combined self-realisation with mystical explorations; her connection to with the founding aims of BPSISR is clear.

New contacts and future directions

What use is this exploration of BPSISR's historic network to the current community and organisation? The 1950 invitees might be compared to those participating in the Wider Community Weekends at Braziers Park twice annually, or the cultural activities offered in the current educational programme. Regular activities include yoga, tai chi and meditation retreats; permaculture, organic gardening and herbal medicine studies; creative events based on storytelling, mythology or children's book illustration. Recent talks have explored the philosophy of animal rights, Native American culture and green politics. There are writing workshops and film screenings, as well as the annual hosting of the experimental arts and music festival, *Supernormal*. As such, cross-disciplinary eclecticism continues. Additionally, there are self-conscious attempts to maintain continuity with the organisation's past through revisiting historical themes (such as recent events exploring the relationship between BPSISR and woodcraft groups, and the Sigma anti-university experiments of the 1960s). These are reinforced through the topics discussed on BPSISR's social media.

Yet there are distinctive differences. The early invitees contained some proto-ecologists, particularly among those who endorsed outdoor education, but given the dominance of yoga, meditation and alternative health in current activities, it is notable that few had dominant interests in these areas (although several were interested in eastern spirituality, and Quaker traditions of silent sitting infused early BPSISR practices). Any community builds its activities in reflection of its membership, so the ageing, wealthy, privately-educated, Oxbridge-trained academics and medical professionals who dominated the gathering in 1950 inevitably reflected Norman's social and cultural background. The demographic of the current community has broadened, in reflection of wider social changes and contemporary concerns, and so, necessarily, have its contacts.

What is notable, however, is the centrality of the formal study of biology, psychiatry and sociology to guests in 1950. Where are the current exchanges with these academics and professions? Invitees to the launch were eclectic in their interests, and in some cases even eccentric, but many operated within an educational establishment, albeit one that had not yet formalised into rigid disciplines. Arguably, the current Braziers community is now more 'alternative' in its interests than were its founders, and consequently operates most comfortably at the countercultural fringes. While some invitees were mid-career at the point of Braziers' launch, many were already high achievers; certainly, from a distance, they are an eminent bunch, at the forefront of their disciplines or top of their professions. Many were publicly feted. This offers a further point of reflection. Who is invited to current gatherings and public events at Braziers Park? Are Vice Chancellors of Reading and Oxford universities ordinarily included? Where are the senior professors, members of parliament, prominent broadcasters, editors of national newspapers, head teachers, bestselling authors and

household names? There are practical challenges to assembling such gatherings, but perhaps the ambition of BPSISR's founders offers something to be emulated in spirit. The Adult College that the Glaisters and their supporters established encouraged the 'imperfect knowledge' of amateurs but it also drew on formal expertise. It was outward-facing as well as inward-looking; the founders expected their endeavour to have significant impact and the stature of the audience they invited reflected the high-profile debates into which they wished to intervene.

Norman Glaister stated at the opening event, 'I cannot say what the future will bring because we do not know what new contacts we shall make and what new ideas will be brought to us'. He continued, in the ethos of his philosophy of multimentality, 'I ask our associates and friends to join us in creating the road by which we may move on towards better understanding and more constructive action' ('The First Twelve Months', 7). Social networks, like living organisms, are ever in process. As such, they can be adapted and extended, in the spirit of what was claimed at the founding: 'Braziers Park is probably unique in the breadth of the field covered by its integration; no aspect of life, individual or social, can be said to be outside its purview' (BSPISR 1950: 11).

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