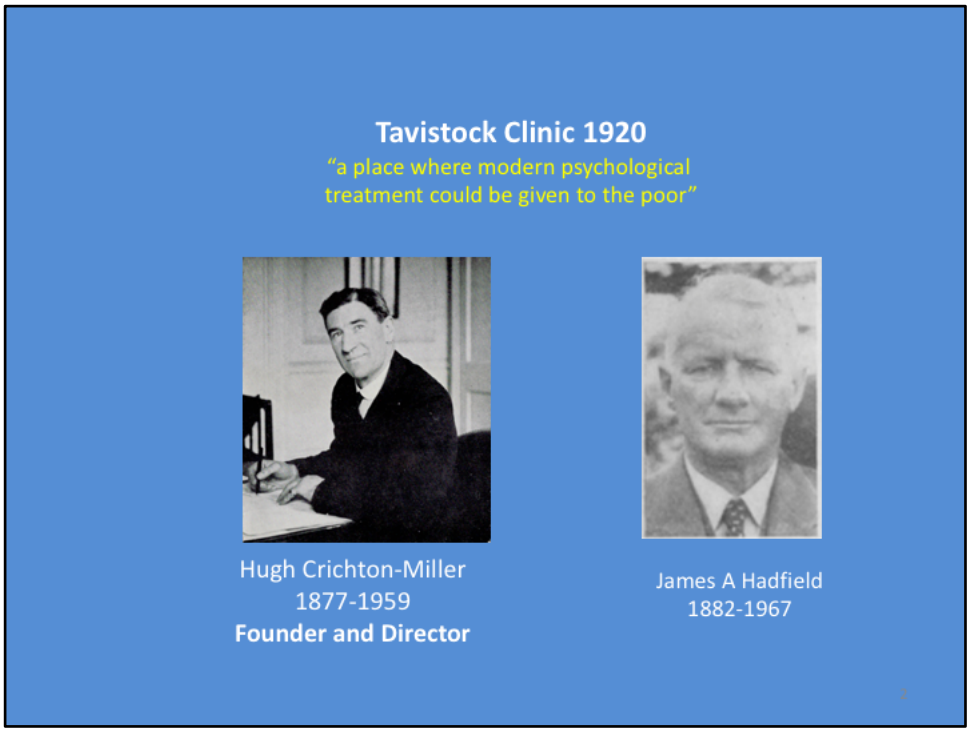
A hundred years ago - whether bringing up children or training soldiers – discipline simply meant doing what you were told, with the possibility of punishment if you did not.

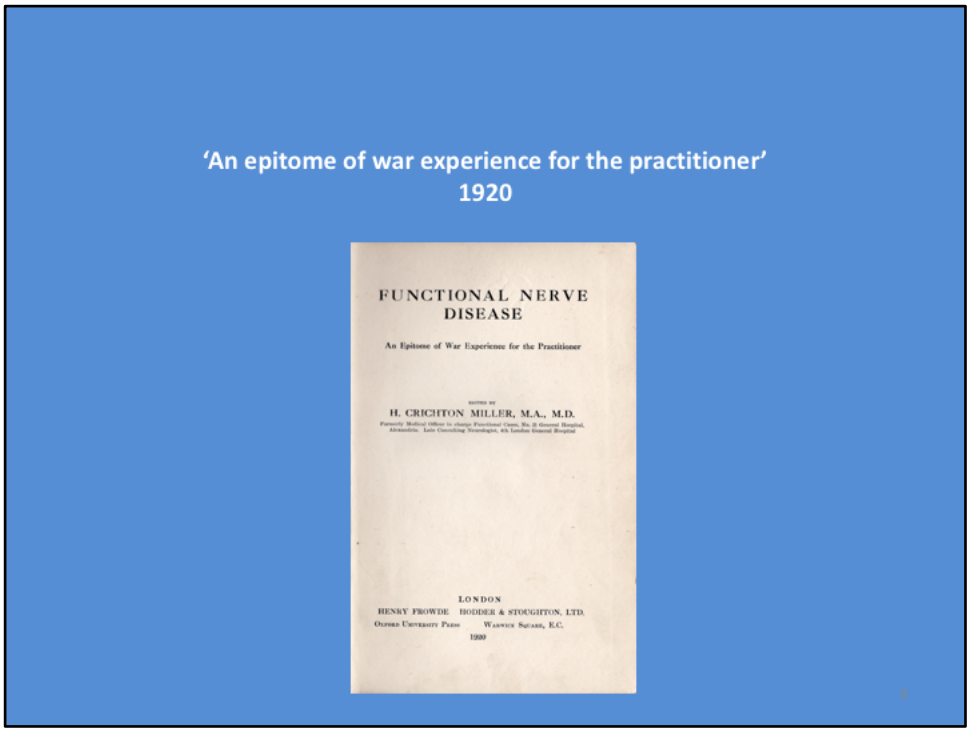
I tell a story about a few of the Tavistock pioneers who helped to change this view in unexpected ways. Their ideas were often resisted by the professional establishment.



Here is the Tavistock's founder Hugh Crichton-Miller and his colleague James Hadfield.

The Clinic offered regular confidential psychotherapy for people such as "teachers, social workers, clergymen, artists, students, clerks, artisans, small traders and many housewives". Crichton-Miller made up early deficits in the clinic's budget with income from his nursing home, Bowden House in Harrow, and his Harley Street practice – "soaking the rich in order to help pay for the poor". He also ensured that the doctors did not miss medical causes of mental distress, such as thyroid disease or tuberculosis.

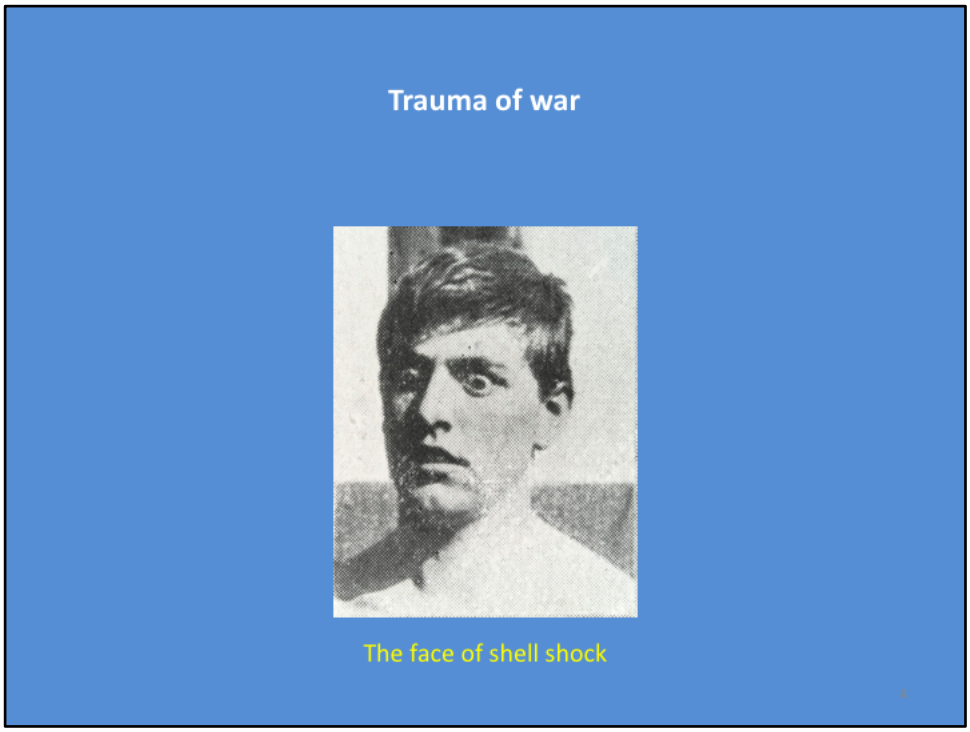
Medical investigations were part of the clinic assessment.



During the first world war, before the Tavistock Clinic was opened, Crichton-Miller and Hadfield had worked with shell shock patients in military hospitals and wrote about it in this book, published just before the clinic was opened.

All the chapters are written by physicians who had worked in war hospitals, including W. H. R. Rivers and William McDougall, who wrote in a concluding summary "it seems probable that underlying every neurosis is some amnesia" (p. 186).

Therapeutic recollection of overwhelming trauma is not a simple matter.

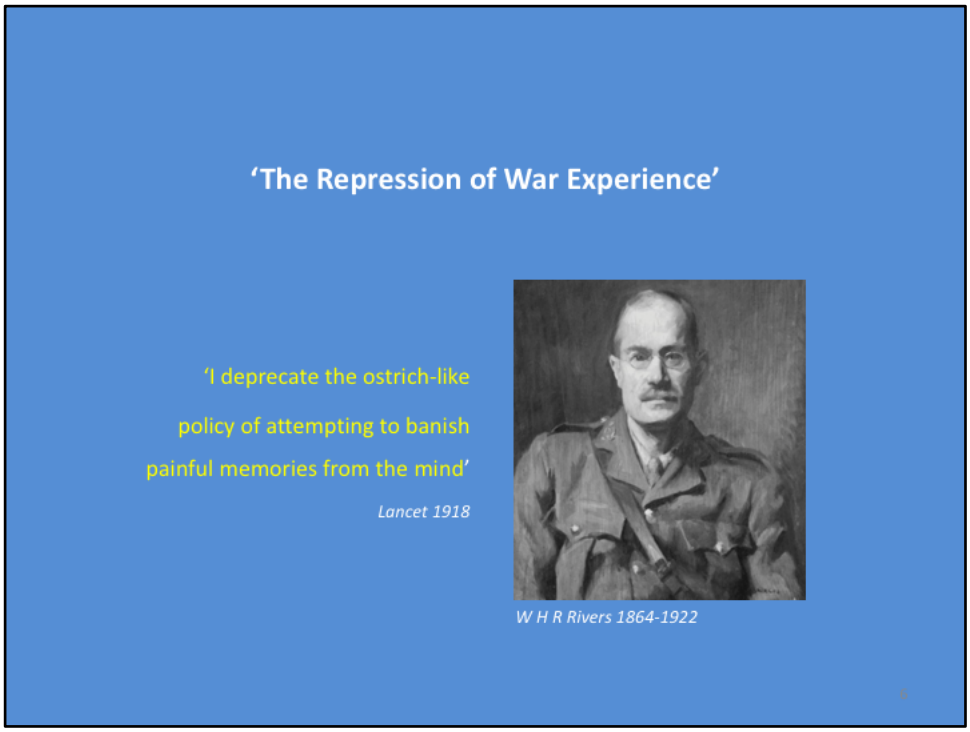


Shell shocked patients did not easily attract sympathy. A good soldier was regarded as someone who obeyed without question, who did not complain after having witnessed his comrades being blown to pieces, or after being himself buried alive under the earth lifted by an exploding shell. Rather than actual bodily injury, these were the kinds of experience that preceded shell shock.

Their symptoms were often bizarre. When army doctors could find no sign of brain injury they tended to assume that they were dealing with weaklings of some kind or another. But it turned out that many of these men had been highly respected people of 'good character' before they broke down, so it was hard to maintain this view.

Crichton-Miller and Hadfield had been impressed with Sigmund Freud's description of the unconscious mind - how it could produce bodily symptoms after psychological trauma - but they rejected his sexual theory and his atheism. They preferred Jung (here seated in the front row with Freud in 1909), who was the son of a protestant pastor.

Hadfield – born in the South Pacific where his father was a missionary - had been trained as a Presbyterian minister in Edinburgh before going into medicine; and Crichton-Miller's father, Donald, was minister to the Scots Church in Genoa, where Hugh was born. Christian faith nurtured their clinical approach.



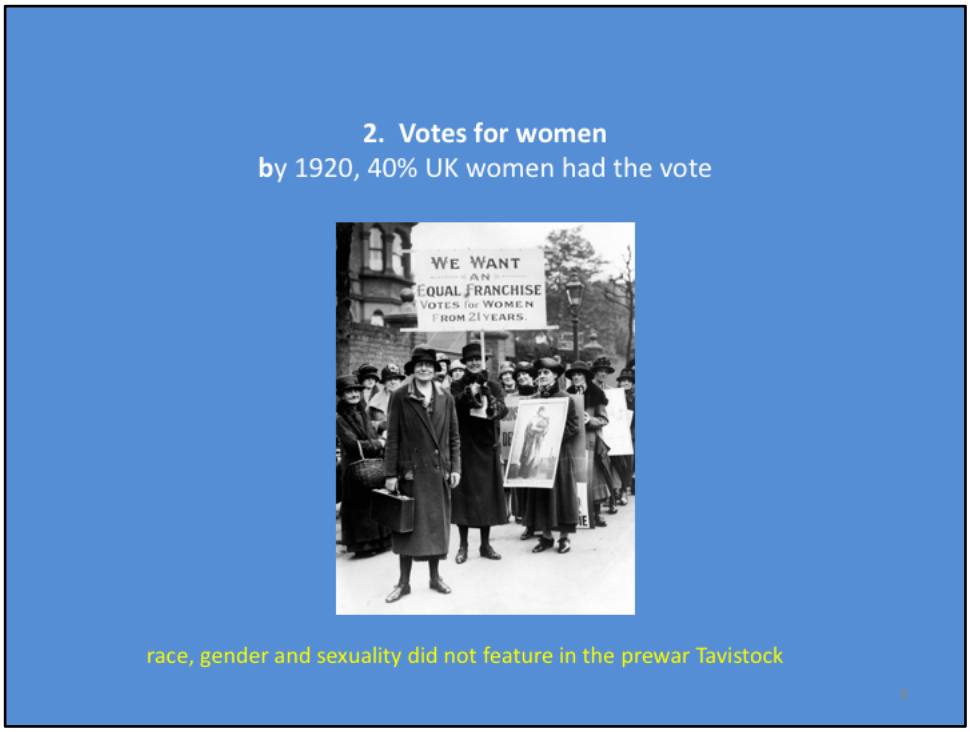
The anthropologist and physician W. H. R. Rivers was probably the most influential army psychotherapist of the time. He encouraged his patients not to bottle up their terrors but to tell him what had happened to them.

Trying to understand shell shock, rather than dismiss or punish it, led to change in psychological treatments, but there were setbacks too, when army colleagues became suspicious 'that a psychological explanation simply let malingerers off the hook'.

The dawning idea that recalling trauma can be therapeutic did not become the norm in British psychiatry or psychology. Only in this century have we heard a significant increase in the volume of voices challenging diagnostic orthodoxy, now encouraging clinicians to ask, instead of 'what is wrong with you?" the more open question, 'what happened to you?'.

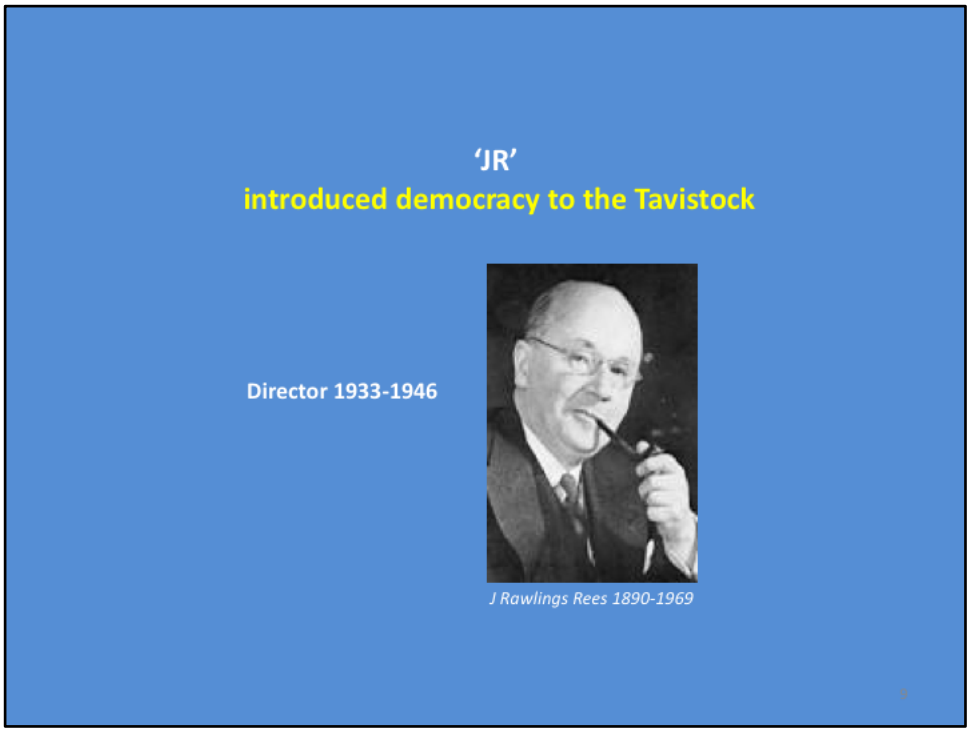
A note about the world in which the Tavistock was founded. The gigantic British Empire was weakened by the expense of war, but was still at its greatest extent, covering almost a quarter of the land surface of the world. Decolonisation was a long way off, though Ireland, then part of UK, was partitioned in 1921.

Imperial attitudes about nationalism, race and class prevailed.



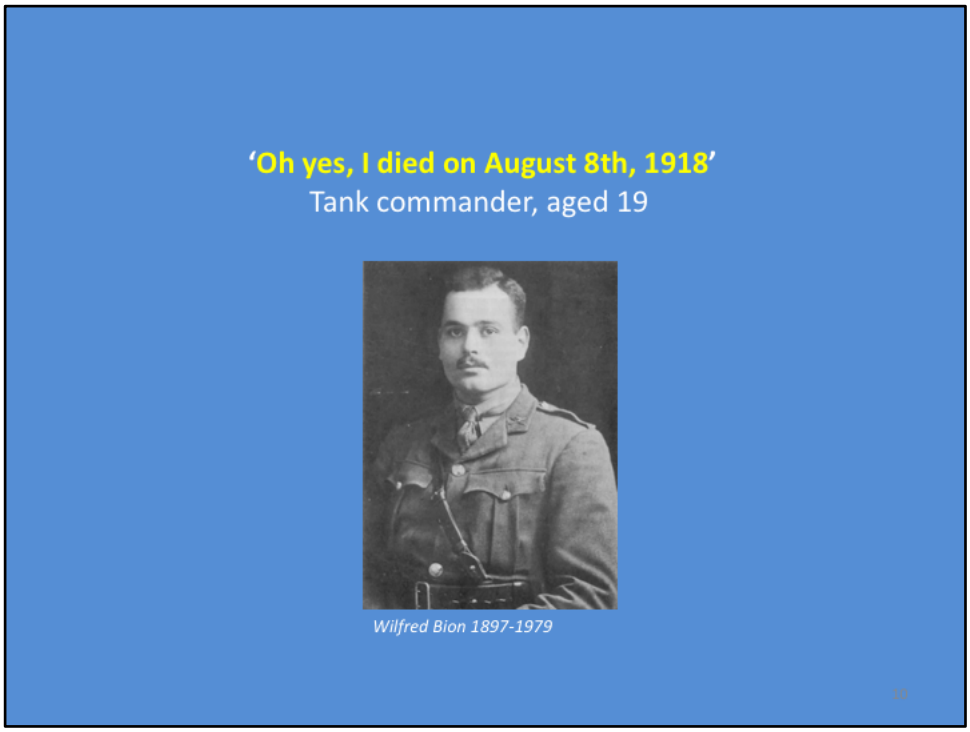
The war accelerated women's demand for votes, but in 1920 this was not universal. You had to be over 30 and live in a property above a certain value. It was not until 1928 that all women could vote on equal terms with men - 35 years after New Zealand did it.

While men occupied all the leading positions in the prewar Tavistock, there were several distinguished women whose vital contributions are rarely acknowledged: Mary Hemingway, Grace Pailthorpe (at what became the Portman Clinic), Syliva-Leith-Ross, Mary Luff and Jane Isabel Suttie.



John Rawlings Rees (always known as JR) was also a founder member of the Tavistock staff and, like his senior colleagues, also the son of a nonconformist minister. He had seen service at the front line but had not worked as a doctor there.

The Tavistock grew, adding popular courses to its clinical services, and in 1933 Rees was appointed director of a now thriving organisation, into which he introduced democratic management, in order to prevent maverick younger doctors, including Wilfred Bion, from leaving.

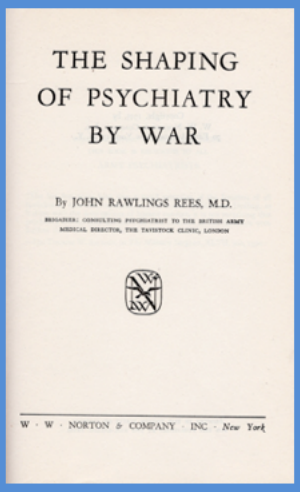


Still a teenager, Wilfred Bion witnessed terrifying slaughter and mutilation in lethal tank battles in northern France. Towards the end of his life, he wrote "I was doomed to spend the rest of my life paying the bill for all those shells and tanks and bullets and the state of mind used to provide an armour".

Despite his own suffering, his heroism in war - for which he was decorated with a Distinguished Service Order (DSO) – was recognised by his colleagues when he became an army psychiatrist in the second war.

Bion's father was a civil engineer in India and both parents were descended from protestant missionaries. At the age of 8, Wilfred had been sent from an idyllic childhood in imperial India to an evangelical non-conformist boarding school in East Anglia.

Consulting Psychiatrist to the British Army 1939-45

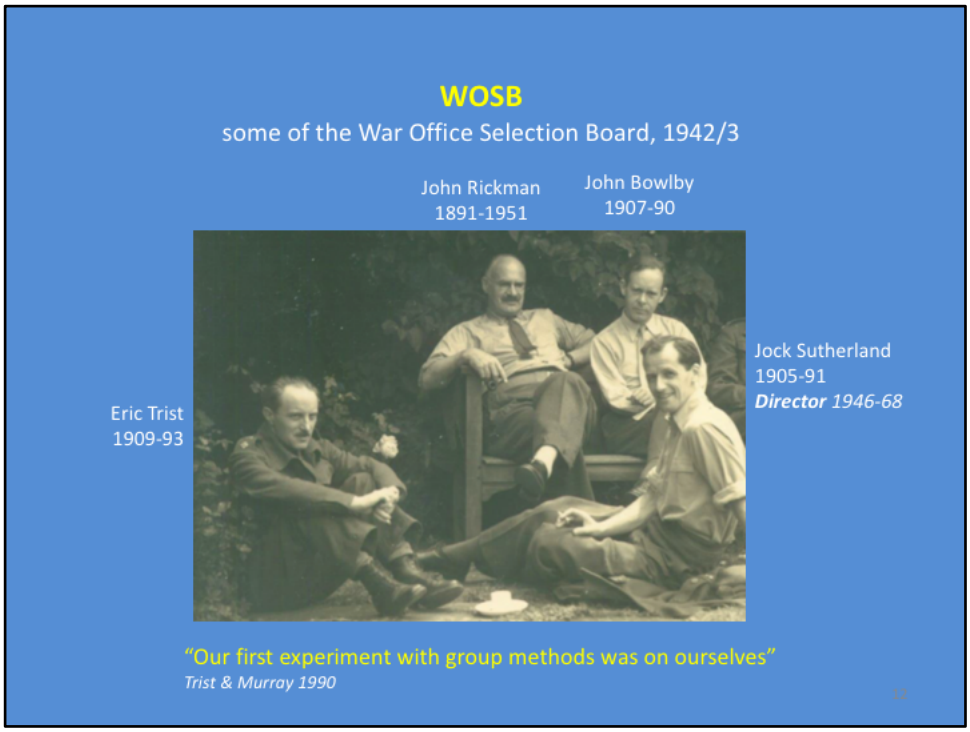


published in 1945

As the second world war approached Rees' enthusiasm for social psychology paid off, when he was appointed consulting psychiatrist to the British Army.

The army was still run on Edwardian lines, with officers recruited largely from the upper classes. It now needed more officers than the public schools could provide, but had no standard apart from social class to gauge who would be a good leader.

So they asked Rees to help them select other candidates for officer training. Along with Bion and several others who had been at the Tavistock before the war, Rees recruited two younger doctors freshly qualified at the Institute of Psychoanalysis, Jock Sutherland and John Bowlby, and the social scientist Eric Trist, from the Maudsley Hospital.

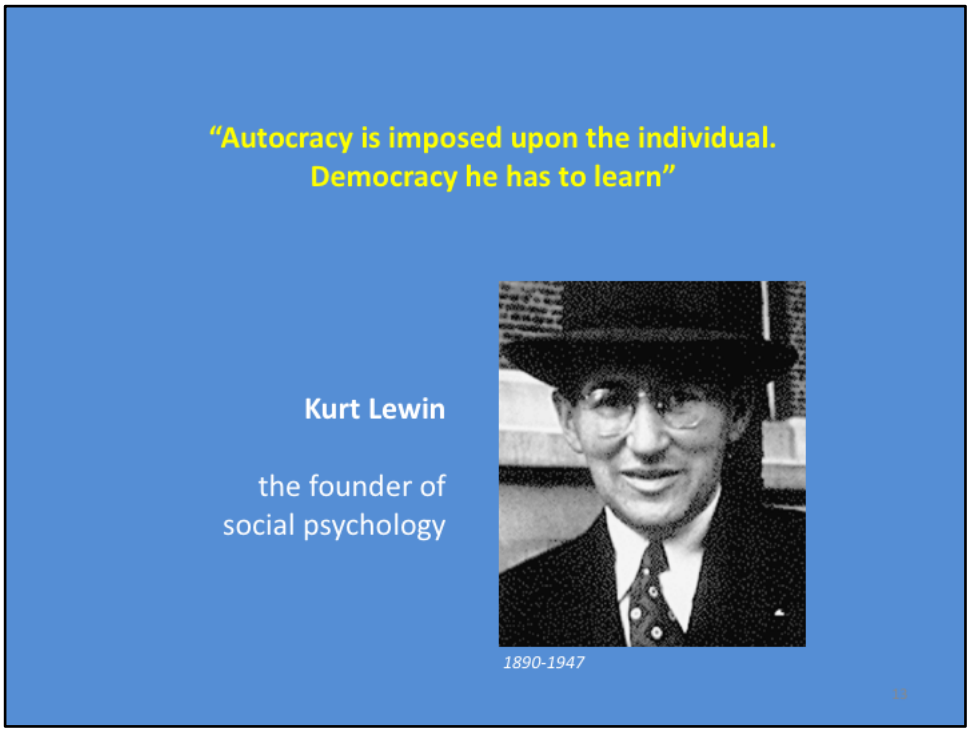


Together, these minds – alongside many others – were put to work in what became the War Office Selection Boards (WOSB)

WOSB came up with the 'leaderless group test'. Soldiers were put together in a group for several days and given tasks to perform. Army officers were pleased that these seemed designed to show who had the most muscular skills, but the observing psychologists were more interested in judging their social skills, in particular the 'quality of contact' (as Bion put it) that candidates had with others in the group.

It turned out that the most promising leaders were the men who attended to their rival colleagues – who noticed how they were – rather than the ones who tried to attract attention by ordering them about.

Later follow-up research done by Bowlby and Trist showed that this method was a great improvement on previous selections, reducing subsequent drop outs in training from 45% to 15%.

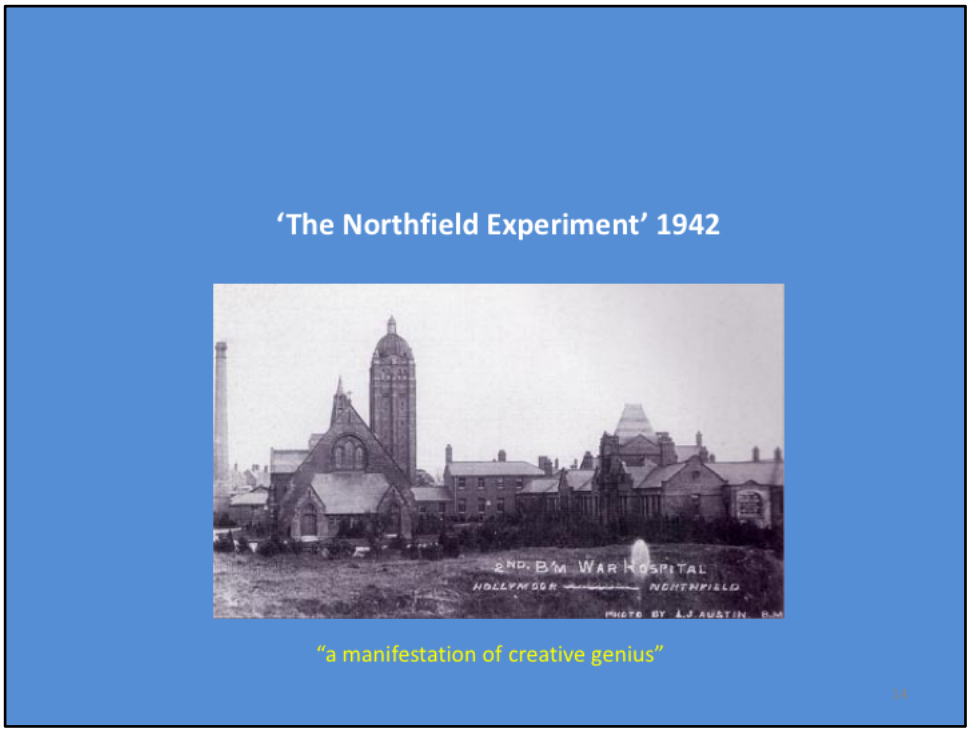


Eric Trist had been greatly influenced by Field Theory – a precursor of systems theory – developed by the German gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin.

Already in 1920 Lewin had noted that it is 'characteristic of capitalism that persons are not seen as subjects but merely as arithmetical factors like machines'.

Being Jewish (though he had fought for the Kaiser in the first war) he had to leave Germany when the Nazis came to power in 1933 and migrated to USA, finally settling at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) where he set up groups to explore racial and religious prejudice. These were the original 'sensitivity training groups', also known as T-groups.

Lewin coined the terms 'group dynamics' and 'action research' and helped to set up the Tavistock Institute's journal *Human Relations*, but died too soon to continue an international collaboration with them.

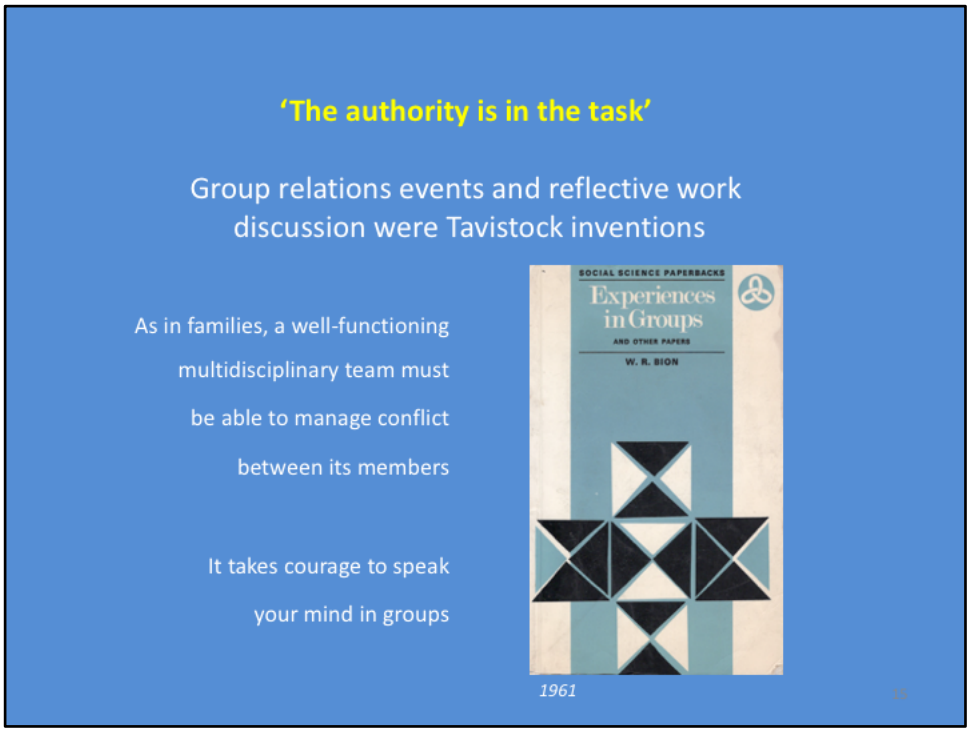


Meanwhile, for just six weeks in 1942, Wilfred Bion and his former training analyst, John Rickman, took charge of a military psychiatric hospital near Birmingham, called Northfield.

Rickman was a Quaker who, during the first world war, had gone straight from medical school to volunteer in an ambulance service in pre-revolutionary Russia. While there, working in very isolated peasant communities, he could observe how village councils ran their meetings, absorbing disagreements over several days until they reached consensus. "I never saw a vote taken. Everyone's 'face' was saved by this method."

At Northfield, instead of giving the patients treatment, Bion and Rickman put them into groups and held a large meeting every day, called a parade. Apart from compulsory exercise, for the rest of the time the men had to organise themselves which – after several weeks of chaos – they finally did. One of their principal achievements was the setting up of a dancing class.

They had gained their own authority, and became more like soldiers than patients.

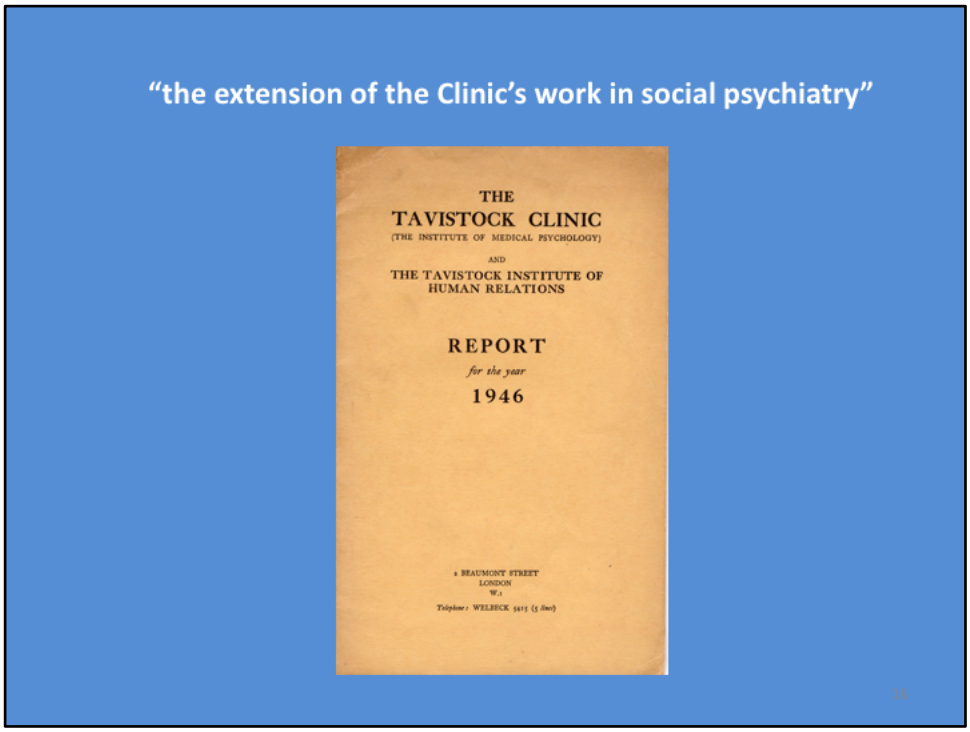


The pioneers realised that every organization – not only the army – needs staff who can use their own imagination to play their part. This radical shift in social science paved the way for new methods of professional training.

In Tavistock study seminars members listen to one of their number presenting a clinical report or observation and then share their perceptions of what they have heard. In contrast to a classroom, there are no right answers, but a whole range of possible perspectives. This is a more complicated – and sometimes also an irritating and competitive – way of learning, but when they can see how each has a point, the group creates a richer whole. Each learns from the others in 'peer supervision'.

Group relations and work discussion show us what a multidisciplinary team is. To be an effective worker, you have to stay in your own skin, and notice how the way you behave is affected by others. It is tempting to dismiss such disturbing thoughts from your mind. What can be achieved is "a capacity for seeing ourselves in interaction with others and for entertaining another point of view whilst retaining our own, for reflecting on ourselves whilst being ourselves." This is what 'learning from experience' means.

The selection procedures devised during the war also led to more discriminating ways for businesses and other big organisations – such as the civil service – to select staff for leadership positions, as they still do in what are known as 'assessment centres'.



After the war, as the clinic prepared to join the new NHS, there was much anxiety about who should stay and who should leave. Wilfred Bion – now the archetypal Tavistock leader – led the transition by taking weekly staff groups for a whole year which, as Trist later wrote, "prevented the formation of organized factions". During this time Bion began work on his famous papers, first published in the new journal *Human Relations,* only much later collected in *Experiences in Groups*. Then he left the Tavistock to concentrate on psychoanalysis with individuals.

The Tavistock Clinic was now fully democratic, all management being in the hands of elected senior clinicians. Sutherland became medical director, and Bowlby was appointed his deputy and head of the children's department where he now pursued his life's work, fundamentally revising our idea of children's needs.

The six Bowlby children were isolated in what John later referred to as "opulent neglect" on the top floor of a grand London house

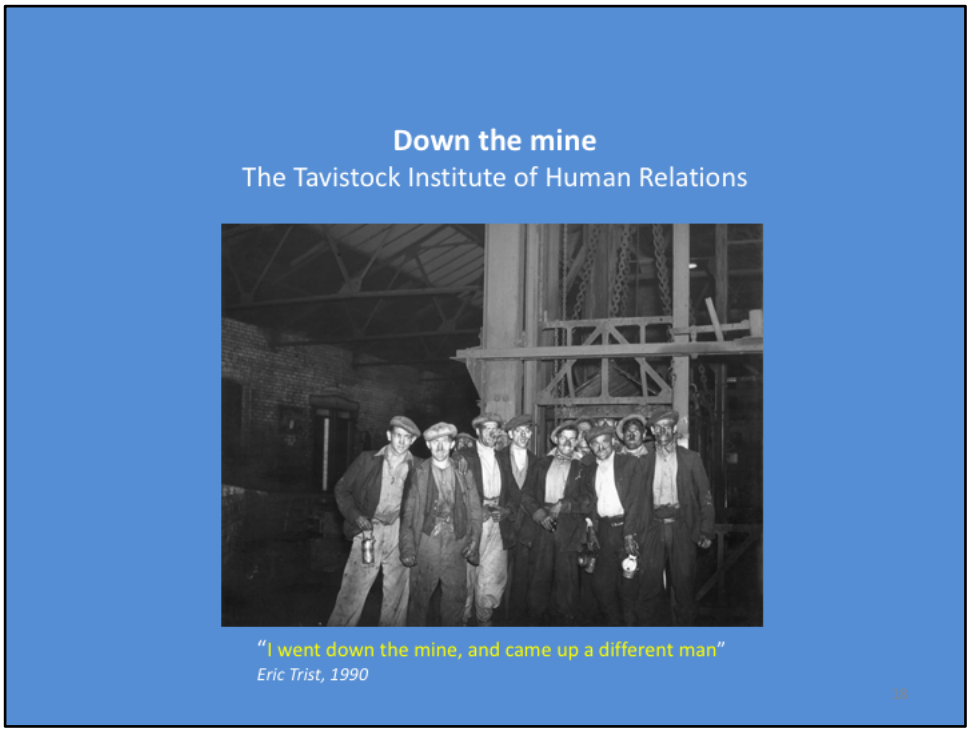
They saw very little of their parents, except in the holidays

25 Manchester Square

At the beginning of the war Bowlby had completed his classic study '44 juvenile thieves'. This showed that far more of these young people than the controls (17/2) had suffered prolonged separation from caregivers in the first five years of life. He protested in a letter to the *British Medical Journal* that the abrupt separation of small children from their parents by evacuation away from the cities – supposedly for their own protection – 'can lead to a big increase in juvenile delinquency in the next decade'.

At the time most people, especially the upper classes who sent their seven year old sons to boarding schools, thought that missing your parents was something you simply had to get used to. At the age of 11, towards the end of the first war, Bowlby had himself been effectively evacuated to a boarding school. "I would not send a dog to boarding school at that age" he later said.

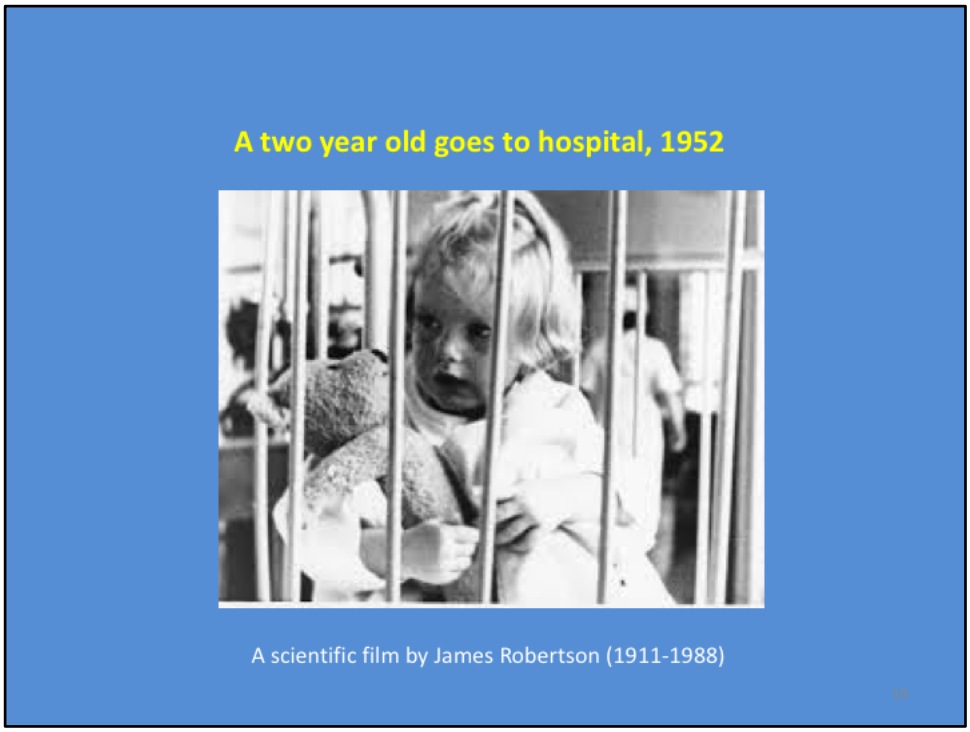
Though respecting his brilliance, many of Bowlby's contemporaries in psychoanalysis, psychiatry and psychology saw him as a delinquent who challenged prevailing assumptions.



In 1947 the Tavistock divided into two organisations. The Clinic joined the new NHS the following year, and the Institute started doing action research in industries, such as factories and coal mines.

In a celebrated study commissioned by the newly formed National Coal Board, Trist and his colleague Ken Bamforth demonstrated greater productivity when teams were encouraged to organise themselves, rather than following managers' orders. It was published in *Human Relations* in 1951.

Both the Coal Board and the mining unions rejected their findings. There is a pattern here. Creative collaboration is harder to control but gets better results. Whatever they say, employers and foremen who want things done their way will prefer obedience to initiative.



As a Quaker conscientious objector during the war, James Robertson had worked as a boilerman in the War Nursery set up by Anna Freud, who trained all her staff in child observation. In 1948 Bowlby recruited him to study children separated from their parents, leading to his now famous scientific film 'A two year old goes to hospital'. It shows in heartbreaking detail the grief of Laura, admitted to a paediatric ward for a routine hernia operation. She could not understand why her parents' visits were so brief and why they would not take her home. Most paediatricians could not accept this evidence. As in nationalised industry, Tavistock enlightenment was not welcome in the health service.

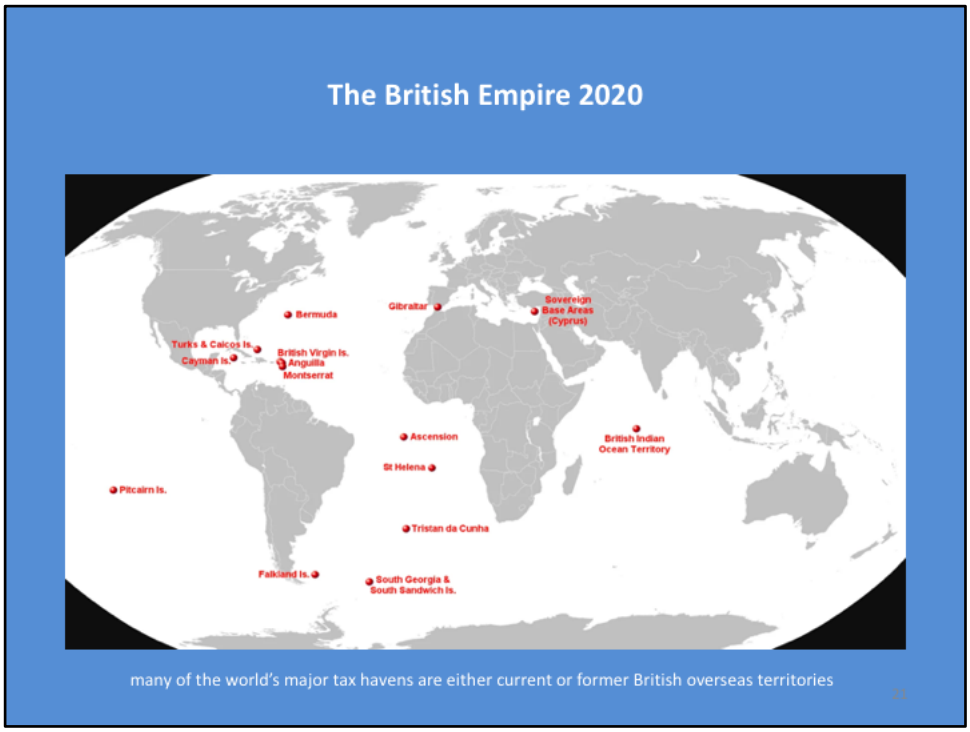
Bowlby said that all of us need attachment figures throughout life, especially when very young, very old, in pain or afraid. Our idea of a good child had begun to change: no longer one who did, or learned, what he or she was told without question, but someone who was confident, curious, and able to ask for help without shame.

As we see now in modern Britain, every generation has to relearn this lesson.

From these discoveries we learned that if you take your employees, your students or your children seriously and trust them to think for themselves, they will do the same to others. Self-regulation begins to replace obedience to the rules. But there is always tension between the two positions. Following rules is seductively simpler, and the Tavistock revolution did not change the social world – in employment, education and families, for example - as it had hoped. Even attachment theory, widely accepted as fundamental developmental science, is often seriously misunderstood.

New ideas from Tavistock staff were underpinned not only by psychoanalysis, but also by personal experience, faith, psychology, anthropology and politics:

• the nonconformist Christianity of the founding physicians, of Bion's background and education, and the Quaker egalitarianism of Rickman and Robertson
• the applied Marxism, social anthropology, field theory, and passion for democracy that Trist brought to the post war Tavistock from his time with Lewin in USA in the 1930s
• the formative child and adolescent experiences of the later pioneers who – apart from Bowlby – shared a sense of being social outsiders, through class or religion.



Both wars challenged and changed concepts of courage and stoicism, social class and authority.

Yet even today, imperial privilege and its racist legacy still enthral many people.

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