

Obituaries

Thomas Bewley, CBE, MD, FRCPI, FRCPsych (Hon)

Formerly Consultant Psychiatrist, Tooting Bec, St George's and St Thomas' Hospitals, London, UK



Shortly after his appointment to a consultant psychiatrist post at Tooting Bec Hospital in 1961, Thomas Bewley, who died recently at the age of 95, began to accept patients with alcohol problems as well as small numbers of heroin addicts. From this latter experience, in 1964 he published a seminal paper in *The Lancet*, drawing attention for the first time to a group of young drug users.¹ He reported that they differed from the previously described addicts in middle age, who had become addicted to analgesics in the course of pain control or were healthcare professionals with easy access to pharmaceuticals. He recognised that the somewhat laissez-faire prescribing of heroin and cocaine by certain doctors in private practice and a few general practitioners was contributing to the increasing number of younger addicts. His treatment approach recognised that immediate abstinence was rarely easily achievable and that the management of addicts' physical and social problems was essential – a policy now referred to as harm reduction. His experience and research in this area of addiction management, and his evidence to the Interdepartmental Committee on Drug Addiction (the Brain Committee), were to be hugely influential in the provisions of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which led to the restriction of prescribing controlled drugs for the maintenance of addiction to specially licensed doctors, and to the establishment of specialist drug dependency units. He himself established such clinics at both St Thomas' and St George's Hospitals, London, in addition to the in-patient unit he ran at Tooting Bec Hospital.

Alongside his work in addiction, Thomas became involved in the newly established Royal College of Psychiatrists and, first

as Sub-Dean and then as Dean, he worked to extend and improve the training of psychiatrists working in services that were not attached to established teaching hospitals. He also furthered the promotion of the addiction specialist group to the status of a College Faculty. In 1984 he was elected President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the first President not to be an academic. During his presidency, he established the College Research Unit to further the development of evidence-based treatments. He was also appointed an adviser on drug dependence to the World Health Organization. In 1988 he was awarded the CBE.

Thomas Bewley was born on 8 July 1926 into a medical family, the son of Geoffrey Bewley and Victoria Bewley (née Wilson). His grandfather and father were prominent Dublin doctors and sometime superintendents of the Quaker Mental Hospital there. His mother had trained in medicine and his sister followed the family tradition and became a psychiatrist. Thomas trained in medicine at Trinity College, Dublin, and in psychiatry at St Patrick's Hospital. A separate branch of the Bewley family were tea and coffee importers who had been the first to challenge the monopoly of the East India Company, and to this day they claim that their Quaker values determine their business practice.

Thomas married Beulah (née Knox), later Dame Beulah, a distinguished epidemiologist, in 1955, having come to work in England in 1954. They had five children. He worked first in Claybury Hospital and then, after three unsuccessful applications, was accepted in 1956 at the Maudsley Hospital, London. Here he learned the need for precise formulation of a patient's management under the exacting supervision of Felix Post and developed an interest in alcohol addiction under D.L. Davis.

In 1957 the Bewleys moved to the USA, where Thomas studied problems of alcoholism in different ethnic groups at the University of Cincinnati. On returning to the UK, he undertook locum posts as a senior house medical officer at Tooting Bec Hospital and in 1961 was appointed a consultant psychiatrist there.

Thomas Bewley developed an approach to addiction that viewed the addict as a patient in need of all round medical care and treatment. He described himself as a 'Quaker atheist' and his approach to clinical practice was based on Quaker values of tolerance and care in the tradition of the Retreat at York. He was both a dedicated clinician and one who worked tirelessly to establish his approach to alcoholism and drug dependency across the whole country and to improve and maintain standards in psychiatry. He will be remembered also as a sympathetic and encouraging mentor of trainee psychiatrists and, perhaps more importantly, by a diminishing number of younger colleagues, for his gentle and tactful advice as they embarked on consultant responsibilities.

Somehow, alongside this busy and distinguished professional career, Thomas (never 'Tom'!) maintained a vigorous and eclectic intellectual life. He was an avid reader, a possessor of an extensive library, a lifelong theatre and opera goer, a bridge player

and a formidable chess competitor. He was the author of witty contributions to the *College Bulletin* as 'Ezra the Scribe' and wrote a history of the College entitled *Madness to Mental Illness*.²

Thomas died on 26 June 2022. Beulah died in 2018. Their daughter Sarah died in 2003. He is survived by his other four children, Susan, Louisa, Henry and Emma, and his granddaughter Hannah.

References

- 1 Bewley TH. Opiate addiction. *Lancet* 1964; **1**: 938.
- 2 Bewley TH. *Madness to Mental Illness: A History of the Royal College of Psychiatrists*. RCPsych Publications, 2008.

Martin Mitcheson

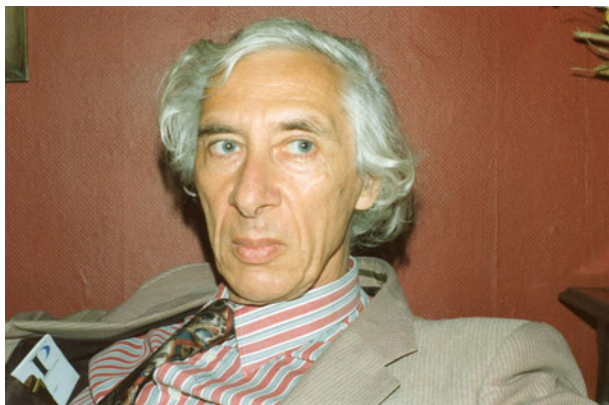
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John Birtchnell, MD, DPM, FRCPsych, FBPsS

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John Birtchnell, who died on 5 September 2022 at the age of 90, had a long and prolific career in psychiatric research. A common factor linking his areas of research interest was the definition and measurement of psychological dependence. It was out of this that he developed his general theory of relating, which he regarded as his most important contribution to knowledge.¹ Questionnaires were constructed for measuring maladaptive forms of relating both between couples and between family members. The theory has proved useful in the assessment of personality disorder in a number of clinical settings. It has also been used in research in the evaluation of

individual and couple psychotherapy.² Having observed a strong association between marital quality and depression he began to develop measures of marital quality and carried out a collaborative study with marriage guidance counsellors and with the Tavistock Institute of Marital Studies in London. Out of this collaboration emerged numerous papers on the links between marital conflict, marital affection and depression in wives. Another strand to his research was a concern with the possible causes and management of attempted suicide, which led to links with the Samaritans.

Throughout his career John balanced his pursuit of statistically valid data from populations with the in-depth knowledge of individuals, couples and families gained through his clinical work as a psychotherapist. In over 100 published papers, topics included early loss and separation experiences, social class and mental illness, marital quality and depression, the causes and management of attempted suicide and maladaptive forms of relating. In later years John drew on evolutionary theory to theorise on brain function and was fascinated by aspects of memory even as his own was failing.

John was born in Aylesbury on 8 April 1932, the only child of Wilfred and Minnie Birtchnell. His father was an aircraft fitter. The family moved to Gloucester when he was five, his father taking a job in a nearby aircraft factory. John attended Sir Thomas Rich School. His schooling was interrupted when, at the age of 12, he fell from a tree, sustaining a compound fracture of his arm and nearly dying of septicaemia, being saved by the recent introduction of sulphonamides. A second medical emergency was the outcome of his quest for knowledge, when, at the age of 15, learning that six berries of deadly nightshade would be lethal, he thought it would be interesting to experience the effects of three.

Already confirmed in his wish to be a psychiatrist before he studied medicine at Edinburgh University, he did house jobs in psychiatry and neurosurgery, then senior house officer posts in Liverpool in neurology and psychiatry, obtaining the Diploma in Psychological Medicine in 1963. After clinical posts at Crichton Royal Hospital (Dumfries) and St John's Hospital (Aylesbury) he went to Aberdeen. His earliest research interests were in the possible short- and long-term consequences of parental death, the topic of his MD thesis, at Aberdeen University, where he subsequently trained full time in psychotherapy, obtaining the Aberdeen University Diploma in Psychotherapy.

For the remainder of his career he worked for the Medical Research Council, commencing as an MRC Clinical Research Fellow in the Department of Mental Health, Aberdeen University, where he worked on the Aberdeen Case Register, then moving in 1970 to the MRC Clinical Psychiatry Unit at Graylingwell Hospital, Chichester, under the directorship of Dr Peter Sainsbury. Here the focus was research on suicide and attempted suicide. On Dr Sainsbury's retirement in 1982, this unit was disbanded and John was relocated to the MRC Social Psychiatry Unit at the Institute of Psychiatry, London, where he worked for most of his career. After his retirement in 1998, he continued to work as an Attached Worker with the Section of Clinical Psychiatry at the Institute.

He was the editor of the *British Journal of Medical Psychology* (1989–1995) and it is a measure of his ability to work collaboratively across disciplines that, as well as being a