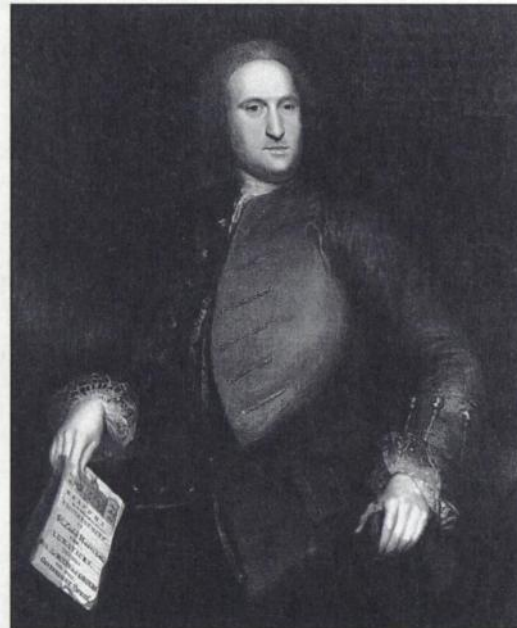


# Psychiatrist Fellows of the Royal Society

Thomas Bewley

The Royal Society is the oldest scientific society in Great Britain and one of the earliest in Europe. It is usually considered to have been founded in 1660, though a nucleus had been in existence for several years before that date. From Charles II's reign onwards, British Governments have constantly appealed to the Royal Society for advice in connection with scientific undertakings. The Society elects some 32 Fellows annually, who have been proposed by six or more existing Fellows. Foreign Members, not exceeding 50 in all, may be selected by the Council from among "men of the greatest scientific eminence" abroad. From this it can be seen that Fellows of the Royal Society are among the most distinguished scientists in the country. It is not widely known that several psychiatrists have been Fellows of the Royal Society.

## William Battie (1704–1776) FRS 1742, PRCP 1764 (FRCP 1738)



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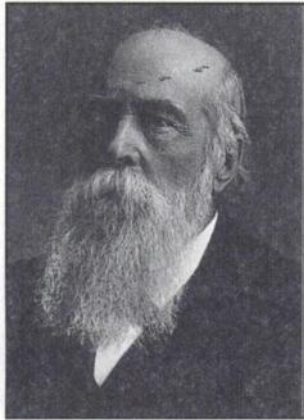
William Battie was physician to St Luke's hospital and was also proprietor of a large private asylum. His practice dealt exclusively with insanity. In 1785, he published *A Treatise on Madness* in which he made some censures on the practices formerly pursued at Bethlem. This led to a sharp rejoinder by Dr John Monro in a pamphlet the same year.

In 1763, he was examined before the House of Commons on the State of Private Madhouses, and received, in the printed report, "testimony highly honourable to his professional attainments". He resigned from St Luke's in 1764 and died following a paralytic stroke in 1776. In Munk's *Roll of the Royal College of Physicians of London*, it was reported of him that

"Eccentricity was strongly marked throughout the whole of his career, with many strange and amusing anecdotes concerning him on record . . . he was of eccentric habits, singular in his dress, sometimes appearing like a labourer and doing strange things. Notwithstanding his peculiarities, he is to be looked upon as a man of learning, of benevolent spirit, humour, inclination to satire and considerable skill in his profession".

He was involved in the proceedings between the College of Physicians and Dr Schomberg and the expensive litigation in which the College became involved was apparently due to him. The *Dictionary of National Biography* said of him ". . . he seems to have been an eccentric". It would appear he lent his name to the second meaning of the word 'batty', which in 1590 merely meant 'of, or belonging to, a bat' 'batlike,' but now has the second meaning 'crazy' 'barmy' or 'dotty'. Despite this William Battie was a considerable polymath. He was a distinguished, and published, classical scholar. He was an anatomist and physiologist as well as having delivered several eponymous lectures at the Royal College of Physicians. Despite his eccentricities he amassed a vast fortune in his lifetime which was estimated between £100 000 and £200 000.

**Sir John Charles Bucknill (1817–1897)  
MD 1852, FRCP 1859, FRS 1866**

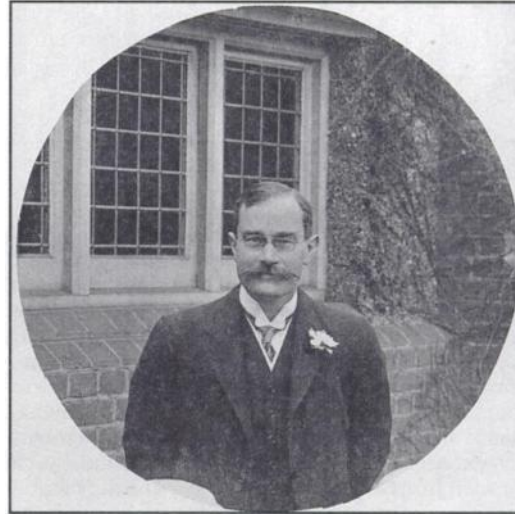


Sir John Bucknill was born the elder son of a surgeon. He went to Rugby school under Dr Arnold, then went to University College London. He qualified in 1840 with honours in surgery and Medicine and became Liston's house surgeon at University College Hospital. His health broke down 12 months after qualifying and he was advised to move to a warmer climate. In 1844, he became the first Medical Superintendent of the Devon County Asylum at Exminster and was there from 1844 to 1862. He became the most important psychiatrist of his time and was a distinguished President of the Medico-Psychological Society (1860). At the same time he achieved fame as a soldier. In 1852 he raised the Exeter and South Devon Volunteers, which played an important role in the evolution of the Territorial Army established in 1908. He was a member of the humane school of reformers and in 1858 with Daniel Hack Tuke wrote the *Manual of Psychological Medicine* which ran into four editions. This disseminated the new outlook on lunacy and its treatment. He conceived, founded, and from 1853 to 1862 edited, the *Journal of Mental Science*. He retired in 1862 and became Lord Chancellor's Medical Visitor in Lunacy for 14 years (1862–1876). He suggested reforms in many of the asylums he visited. When he retired as Visitor he moved to private practice and farming. In 1878 he helped to found the journal *Brain*. He wrote widely on madness in Shakespeare's plays, and in 1881 he recognised that the lifelong illness suffered by Jonathan Swift was Ménière's syndrome, which had been elucidated and described by Prosper Ménière in 1861. His own maxim was that

“the great need of the mental physician is to breathe much of the pure air of rational life for the sake of both himself and his patients”.

He was knighted in 1894 and died in 1897. In his long obituary in the *Journal of Mental Science* he was described as “Citizen, soldier and psychologist”.

**William Halse Rivers (1864–1922) MD  
1889, FRCP 1899, FRS 1908 Hon. LLD  
DSc**

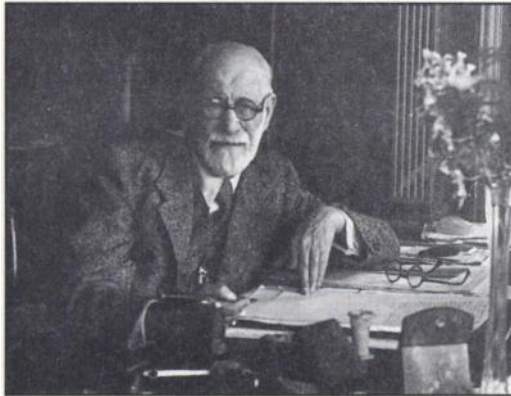


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Dr William Halse Rivers qualified at St Bartholomew's Hospital in 1886 as the youngest medical graduate ever. He then held junior appointments at Barts, in Chichester, at the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic and the Bethlem Royal Hospital. In 1892 he studied insanity at Jena, and the following year worked with Kraepelin in Heidelberg measuring the effects of fatigue. Also in 1893 he lectured on psychology at Guy's and University College Hospital. He was then invited to lecture on the physiology of the sense organs at Cambridge, and Cambridge remained the centre of his activities for the greater part of his life. He became university lecturer on physiological and experimental psychology in 1897 and was appointed Director of the new University Psychology department. He joined the 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits, from which he returned a keen ethnologist. This expedition was followed by others to southern India and Melanesia. From 1907 to 1908 he was involved with Henry Head on epoch-making research on protopathic and epicritic sensation. He then studied the effects of alcohol and caffeine on fatigue, and was one of the first experimenters to rely on double-blind procedures. In 1914 he was awarded the Royal Society's Gold Medal. During the First World War he was attached to Maghull and Craiglockhart Hospitals and did work of the utmost value in the study and treatment of war neuroses. He was later Consultant Psychologist to the Central

Flying Hospital Mount Vernon, where he investigated the mental phenomena of flying. He published *Instinct and the Unconscious* in 1920. At the time of his death he was President of the Royal Anthropological Institute and the Folklore Society. He became a leading authority in a remarkably broad field comprising the physiology of the sense organs, psychology and anthropology, all of which he regarded as different aspects of the same problems (the biological reaction of man to his environment and the fuller understanding of man's mind). Personally, he was a man of high qualities – a keen intellect, broad sympathy and absolute integrity. He never married and was a shy reticent man with a stammer, who had a monastic reclusive lifestyle. His patients thought highly of him as a “patient and deeply sympathetic man”. Siegfried Sassoon was among his patients and gives an extensive account of his treatment in 1917 for ‘shell shock’. He wrote “. . . my definite approach to mental maturity began with my contact with the mind of Rivers”.

### More Recent Fellows



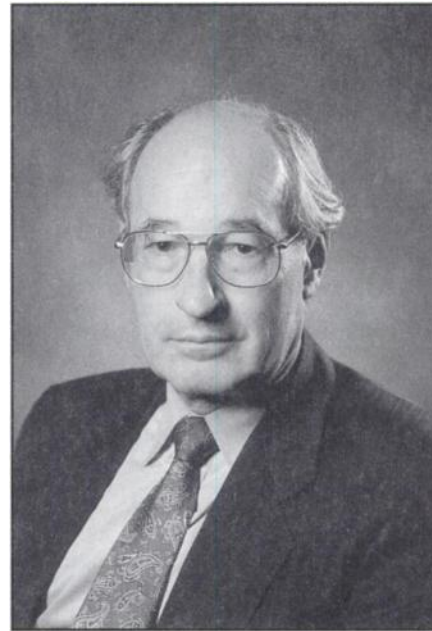
© Freud Museum, London

The Royal Society elects foreigners to its membership and in 1936 **Sigmund Freud** (1856–1939) was elected as the “Inventor and Chief Worker in Psychoanalysis”. The Royal Society is limited to a total of 50 overseas Members, so such an election is a mark of extreme distinction and Sigmund Freud was the only foreign psychiatrist so honoured. Although today we follow Popper and doubt that psychoanalysis is science, there can be no doubt that Freud was a genius who markedly altered the way we think about the human condition, even if today his

influence is greatest outside the field of medicine and science.

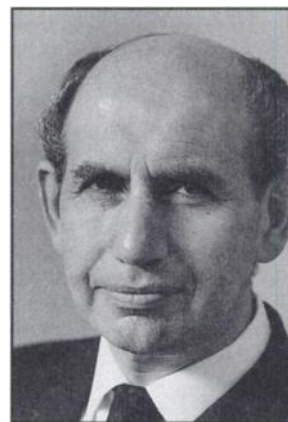
Two current Fellows of this College are also Fellows of the Royal Society. I will quote from the citations for their election.

**Professor Michael Rutter (1933–, FRS 1987)** was “Distinguished for his role in establishing child



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psychiatry as an academic discipline. He has used epidemiological and other methods to make important contributions to our understanding of the consequences of early family disruption, the study of autism, and other aspects of child psychiatry”.



**Sir Martin Roth (1917–, FRS 1996)** was cited for “his general contributions to the understanding of mental disorders in the elderly. These led to a new clinical discipline, psychogeriatrics, when the problems of late life were being recognised as a major medical and social problem. His pioneering investigations led to the

crucial demonstration of the difference between dementias and affective and other illnesses of old age. The quantitative, neuropathological and psychological studies by Roth and his colleagues established Alzheimer's pathology as indicative of a disease separate from normal ageing and from other psychiatric disorders. His development of clinical instruments also provided the basis for modern epidemiological studies".

There I would have left it, till Henry Rollin pointed out that no less than 34 medically qualified gentlemen who were elected FRS merited a section in Macalpine & Hunter's *300 Years of Psychiatry*. Whether all or any of them should or could be classified as a psychiatrist depends on one's definition of the term and

whether the greater part of their professional life had been spent in the care and treatment of the mentally ill. I have therefore left all 34 out, but not before convincing myself that there can be great distinction in psychiatry.

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