

## DEVELOPMENTS TOWARDS THE MAKING OF A CONSCIOUS GROUP DURING NORMAN GLAISTER'S TIME AT BRAZIER'S PARK (1950 - 1961)

*[Now a retired teacher, Hilda Salter's early interest in group dynamics led her to Braziers in 1954. Regular visits followed. She has served chiefly on the Sensory Committee and also works on the Archives.]*

Aims, developed from the text of the founding brochure of 1950. Words added to the original statement are underlined.

**'To make more conscious in ourselves the shape of the process of which we are a part, so that we may facilitate its development more efficiently and harmoniously.**

**Braziers Park has been founded as a permanent college for those who wish to understand man's place and part in nature, to discuss with others the social and ethical aspects of his continuing development, and to cooperate in working out, wherever possible, the principles that may facilitate constructive action in the world to day.'**

Braziers Park was bought and set up as Braziers Park School of Integrative Social Research in 1950 in the light of Norman Glaister's convictions about evolution. He had been inspired by Wilfred Trotter's vision of the distant future as containing: 'the perfect unit which Nature has so long foreshadowed...This perfect unit will be a new creature, recognisable as a single entity; to its million-minded power and knowledge no barrier will be insurmountable, no gulf impassable, no task too great.' (1) Norman Glaister had gone on to adopt and develop Trotter's ideas of the two types of people into which humanity tended to differentiate, namely the Resistives and Sensitives, whom we at Braziers now term Executive and Sensory. He had previously introduced dual governance by Executive and Sensory committees into three organisations with varying success. A group of young liberals rejected the idea. The Order of Woodcraft Chivalry adopted the structure for several years and it was successful in Common Wealth. Glaister's comment in 1954 on Trotter's theory was: 'He stops short of committing himself to any plans or prophecies for further development towards his perfect 'million-minded' creature, but the careful reader can hardly avoid the conclusion that, if his facts are accepted, there is a high degree of probability that the Resistive/Sensitive differentiation can be the beginning of nature's first step in the organic evolution of a multi-mental organism'. (2)

There was a real hope 'but too ambitious to broadcast widely' that setting up a group in Braziers Park might allow such an evolutionary first step to be facilitated. The task at Braziers, therefore, was to put the Resistive/Sensitive theory into continuous practice, to establish whether dual governance based on a Resistive and a Sensory committee, together with people's consciousness of their own balance of Resistive and Sensory gifts as individuals sharing in everyday life, made for an effective new synthesis. So, from the first few weeks, Braziers had a Committee of Management and a Sensory Committee. In addition, weekend courses based on mutual learning and teaching would offer opportunities to introduce others to the Resistive/Sensitive theory and to provide some income. The residential component was desirable since it would promote the cohesion of the group, as 'instinctive emotion is able to hold minds together'. To share the organisation and 'to eat in an atmosphere of friendship' were also important if people were to experience and live life on sensory lines. Would such an experiment, in fact, lead to, or pave the way for, the creation of Wilfred Trotter's 'multi-mental organism'?

To raise the group's level of consciousness during the early days, interested people continued a practice that had already been established in the annual Common Wealth Sensory Summer Schools that preceded the founding of Braziers. Trotter had pointed out in a lecture given to St. Mary's Hospital Institute of Pathology (3) that some people are so reluctant to accept a new idea that they negate it almost before it has been fully expressed. The group therefore not only appointed a recorder to summarise lectures and discussions but also two observers to note irrational elements, mood swings and their causes. This method, as advocated by David Bohm today, did highlight negative responses and attitudes - and also awareness that the response to ideas was intimately linked to the relationships

and attitudes within the group. At the same time, through arts weekends - painting, modelling, music, dancing, writing - people successfully practised a 'new synthesis', bringing 'hands, sight and mind' (4) together in art forms they had not previously attempted. In fact, sharing unused talents and becoming each other's audience made for greater ease in sensory exchange. This was in 1950 when self expression was beginning to be explored in education. Ultimately, the reflections of the observers in sensory discussions revealed varying degrees of tension and this method of exploring process consciously was dropped in favour of individual self-monitoring with regard to negative responses.

In 1953, observations on factors which influenced group discussions were reported in *Braziers Park Social Research Papers and Bulletin, No.1*. Various procedures were thus justified and used -

Groups tended to depend on the lecturer or the leader of a discussion so the initial response was often made by people working in pairs and reporting back.

Negative responses had a disproportionately large effect on discussion. Therefore the chairperson undertook to take all the positive responses first and to refrain from dismissing comments as irrelevant etc. This would prepare for a greater probability of restating the positive and negative points in a more effective new synthesis.

To encourage a group response, rather than a leader-led discussion, after a lecture, questions were put to the audience, to which everyone made a written response without mutual consultation. As these were read out it was understood that people following on could modify their ideas in the light of what they had heard.

It appeared that the size and shape of the room affected discussions. People seemed to become inhibited in rooms felt to be too large or too small.

The same paper recorded that the use of a group self-evaluation phase 'to note the relevance and irrelevance of fluctuations of mood' had been used both with and without observers. It was a procedure that should be approached with caution, since, by revealing problems of emotional attachment, it could threaten the stability of the group.

In 1954, in a paper entitled 'Mental Metabolism 2: Body and Mind as Mutually Environmental', (5) Norman Glaister outlined previous approaches to group psychology. He had known Trotter's work since 1919. By 1920, two writers, Le Bon and McDougall, had separately concluded that groups, dominated by their contagious emotion, manifested a 'group mind' which made them impulsive, irritable and capable of sudden changes of mood. In these unorganised groups the dominant emotion was so contagious that people lost their individuality and they were even capable of violence. McDougall went further, suggesting that, when people constituted themselves as a group with a common interest or purpose, they might be seen, unlike crowds, as being 'psychologically organized'. When five conditions were met, such groups might develop a group-mind and intellectual tasks be achieved. The conditions were continuity of group structure; the establishment of customs and traditions; members being acquainted with the nature of the group to strengthen affiliations with it; and the group's interaction with other similar groups. Finally, the group should have specialised parts with different functions. He also noted the vital, contagious and integrative part played by emotion in a group, but maintained that it was possible for psychologically organized groups to lose the disadvantages of unorganised groups and make a place for intellect.

Was the problem then - and still in the fifties - how to give a group the features of the individual that were lost in the formation of unorganised / primitive groups? In 1921, in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud himself wrote: 'If we thus recognise that the aim is to equip the group with the attributes of the individual, we shall be reminded of a valuable remark of Trotter's, to the effect that the tendency towards the formation of groups is biologically a continuation of the multicellular character of all the higher organisms.' (6) Freud, rather, saw individuals as tending to preserve their independence and keep aloof from possible rivals, since it was fear of censure from the people in the civilised groups they belonged to that limited the degree to which they could indulge their desires. Finding themselves sometimes in a primitive crowd, they found temporary release from their repressions, before returning to frustration and individuality. Ultimately, he rejected continuity from

the herd, stressing rather that: 'Just as primitive man virtually survives in every individual, so the primal horde may arise once more out of any random crowd.' (7)

Norman Glaister's observation was that Freud 'seems to accept human nature as it is, and human society as both incapable of any great change, and doomed to the indefinite continuance of their present discontent.' (8) He continued: 'Trotter seems to indicate a path by which humanity may explore consciously the adventure of social life while accepting the objective task of providing for each individual mind the best possible conditions for its own development. These could include, in addition to the environment of a healthy body, mental conditions for the fulfilment of the life of the mind at least as good as the physical conditions provided by your body for the benefit of each of its tissue cells.' (9)

Norman Glaister followed Trotter in seeing people as essentially gregarious animals 'whose instincts of self-preservation are directed towards survival as members of a group'. Because people are social by nature, they need to learn the culture in which they find themselves, but they do not need socializing. Naturally gregarious, humanity simply needs to channel its instinct (and modern psychologists now accept gregariousness as an instinct) towards mutually beneficial ends. Also in this essay, Norman Glaister wrote 'And we must not lose our self-interest, since it is the foundation upon which all other interests rest; but we must find time, when we are building on this foundation, to build in the separate interests of some of our fellow-men, and eventually, we may hope, of all of them'. (10)

It was the 'multi-mental' aspect of groups that Norman Glaister pursued both in Braziers and through endeavours to find other groups with similar interests. Common Wealth members who could visit only at intervals continued trying to establish sensory committees in other associations to which they belonged. It was expected that when one group had managed to achieve a demonstrably effective degree of conscious balance in its Resistive/Sensory decisions and actions, then other groups would spring up spontaneously and humanity would be a little nearer to creating a multimental organism. The term '*group-mind*' does not occur in the Common Wealth Sensory Summer School literature or in the early *Braziers Quarterly* publications. However, at the time of the first schism, according to Glynn Faithfull, Norman Glaister considered that the strength of feeling that united the protesters really was evidence that a group-mind did exist. The term, and the reality it describes, are referred to in Braziers internal documents of the period and by 1954, in the same paper, 'Mental Metabolism 2' Norman Glaister defines 'group-mind': 'I assume, therefore, that there is nothing out of tune with existing knowledge and experience in the concept of a group-mind as an entity, additional to, though consisting of (and dependent upon the functioning of) individual human minds'.

From then on, both terms could be heard in Braziers, 'group-mind' gaining ground over the years as some people found the concept of a 'multimental organism' difficult or threatening. (In recent years, with a revival of interest in the concept, the term 'multimentality' has tended to supersede 'multimental organism' as being more acceptable without the biological connotation.)

### **The influence of the ideas of W.R.Bion**

My first experience of Braziers was at the Sensory Summer School in 1954. I attended as a result of an advertisement in the New Education Fellowship's *New Era* magazine following attendance at the N.E.F. Conference in 1953. There I had heard A. and J. Cannon speak, after they had left Braziers and before I had heard of it. I had followed the writing course led - and inspired - by Marjorie L. Hourd whose work Alfred Cannon praised in *Braziers Park Quarterly No. 7*. At the time of my first visit Norman Glaister had already read the work of W.R.Bion, which had been published in *Human Relations, Vols. I-IV, 1948-51*, and was later collected with other papers in *Experiences in Groups*, Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1961. It had been my good fortune to be involved for two years in an extra-mural class at Manchester University based on Bion's 'leaderless group' / 'interpretive group' discussion theories. In fact, it had been through the auspices of Mrs L. Herbert, our non-leader, so to speak, that I attended the conference in the first place. During the Braziers Sensory Summer School, therefore, I recognised, as familiar, the nature and purpose of some of Norman Glaister's comments in discussions.

Bion's methods provided an excellent way of raising the consciousness of a group about patterns in social interaction. He recognised that every group has an official task - the purpose for the coming together of the group. However, it also functions on the level of the basic assumptions of the individuals concerned, i.e. each participant including the 'leader', and of the needs of the group as a whole. In addition, the group has its own culture: 'I shall postulate a group mentality as the pool to which anonymous contributions are made, and through which the impulses and desires implicit in these contributions are gratified.' (11)

At any point in a discussion, individuals have unconscious assumptions about the reaction (approval/disapproval) the group has both about them and about what is happening in the group. They are surprised to find that these basic assumptions bear little relation to the situation and may severely hinder the progress of any rational discussion. The more individuals can be made aware of the diversionary element in their assessment, the better the chance of the group's achieving real progress. Group assumptions may be as wildly irrational as individual ones and only when the group can accept the truth of appropriate interpretations can the individuals enter more into the reality of the situation. Once both individuals and group have freed the blockages, fantasies, strategies, digressions, then they are free enough to become a work group.

Bion discovered, when he tried to avoid 'leading' discussions in the conventional manner, that people resorted to various types of stratagem to make him conform to the kind of leader who would save them the effort of thinking for themselves, or provide a butt for casual criticism, or make them subservient by treating them as followers instead of as equals. Discussions at Braziers had already reviewed the possibility of developing a 'herd of leaders', and Norman Glaister had encouraged equality, to his own detriment as far as the first schism was concerned. As a result of his work in the training wing of a military psychiatric hospital and, later, at the Tavistock Clinic, Bion identified:

**the D group** - where individuals and the group collude to make one of the group a leader, so that he will make decisions and be responsible for them. Or, like institutions, they rely on a dead leader/hero whose life and ideas provide them with a bible.

**Pairing** - individuals engage each other in eye-contact, while speaking, to invite support of an idea they want the group to adopt; two in agreement will be more effective than one. The pairs may change several times during a session.

**Fight/flight** - a new idea is instantly seen as threatening, so people attack it vigorously or take refuge in 'fleeing' by diversionary tactics like changing the topic, closing a window, disapproving silence, or expressing sudden concern for someone else.

**the P group** - instead of depending on a dead leader, the group anticipates one to come, perhaps notionally as a result of the 'pairing'. A 'P' leader may be the miraculous birth, the Messiah, the next child in the family that will bring new hope and is worth making sacrifices for.

All these modes avoid the reality of the present but groups may move towards reality if participants 'make the study of their tensions a group task' and are prepared to feel 'varying degrees of discomfort' in hearing people's reactions. Absenteeism, for instance, may well be an unconscious attempt to dominate the group who resent feeling rejected.

Bion's aim was that, once participants sufficiently understood the working of group reactions and had adjusted to their own responsibility in this context, then the group would develop into a mature work group. The value he placed on groups is seen in the following: 'I consider that **group mental life is essential to the full life of the individual, quite apart from any temporary or specific need**, and that satisfaction of this need has to be sought through membership of a group. (12)

The official 'leader' or 'consultant' of one of Bion's groups had the double task of feeling with the group in order to experience himself/herself its emerging and changing moods, as well as of interpreting the current basic assumption of the group. Clues offered by the way things were said or done and body language allowed him/her to reveal their relevance to selective inattention and scapegoating, as well as to the basic assumptions mentioned above.

One occasion which revealed the effectiveness of Bion's theories occurred on a Whitsun festival weekend when Braziers people and visitors were discussing a lecture on the terrace. The sky had clouded over and spots of rain began to fall. One member of the group began to look up and then look at Norman; she tried to catch the eye of the others in the circle. It was clearly going to rain more heavily quite soon, but the coffee break was no more than ten minutes away and the group mood felt to be in favour of continuing with a discussion that was producing satisfactory insights. The lady concerned looked robust, but pulled the cardigan on her shoulders more closely about her, waited a moment and, when this prompted no move, she expressed some stern words about the folly of waiting to be drenched and stalked off. The mood was broken.

After coffee, there was a choice of continuing the discussion or first considering the previous incident (following Bion's principles). The lady welcomed this, repeating the need to monitor the comfort of visitors. Because people might be susceptible to colds, the group should have gone indoors at the first sign of real cold. She implied that she had been championing the unspoken needs of others rather than her own. Norman reminded her gently of the topic - some aspect of relationships and changing their pattern - which could have been upsetting; but where others appeared to be absorbed and were contributing, she alone had shown discomfort. Was there a possibility that a deeper distress about the topic had been transferred unconsciously to the weather, which could be used safely to avoid a painful discovery? One or two others began to explain how they had seen their personal situations slightly differently during the earlier session. The supportive context freed the original protester to acknowledge reluctantly the correctness of Norman's interpretation. Presumably, she worked on what she had allowed into consciousness and joined more fully in the rest of the course, even though initially she had made a bid for leadership, tried to institute a pairing phase and then operated in a flight/fight mode - all unconsciously.

Bion's were the first groups in which the principles of psychiatry were linked to ordinary discussions with their own agenda and Norman did sometimes employ Bion's interpretations where appropriate in summer schools, festival weekends etc.. But Braziers was not set up to provide therapy, though therapeutic benefit might occur incidentally, as in the above incident.

Norman Glaister was more concerned to acquaint people with Bion's whole theory, and to investigate what happened to the basic assumption functioning when several people in a discussion were already conscious of, and prepared for, group dynamics as driven by basic assumptions. Speculating on the original rise of consciousness in the primitive groups of hominids, he considered that it was probably some physical disability from birth or accident that gave rise to self-consciousness in individuals. These handicapped people would need to study their group's actions to identify what adaptations in their own behaviour were needed to allow them both to keep up with the group and to remain acceptable members of it. Self-consciousness would begin, in this way, to have survival value. Norman Glaister observed that, in Bion's descriptions of the fitful progress of his groups' discussions, tensions arose when individuals became irritated or frustrated that the group as a whole was slow to recognise and provide for the individuals' needs and expectations, at which point protests caused a switch in the basic assumptions mode. The term I-group, then, could be added to Bion's list to describe the phase when the group-mind assumes that better progress will be achieved if individuals' needs and expectations (often unspoken) can be reconciled with collective needs and actions.

He concluded, therefore, that the primitive herd, before consciousness developed, had always had a basic assumption group-mind (referred to as a **Primitive Group Mind**) and that this had gone underground with the development of consciousness but was still a significant power to reckon with. (This could be seen most readily in the **Family Group Mind** structure.) However, the I-group remained and needed to be developed into sophisticated, self-conscious group-minds which would constitute multi-mental organisms.

### **Basic Symbols Courses**

Marion Milner, a psychiatrist and author of *A life of One's Own* and *On not Being Able to Paint*, under the name of Joanna Field, was associated with Braziers for several years. Glynn Faithfull adopted her use of postcards, photographs and reproductions of paintings to explore individual and group reactions

to such types of basic symbols as trees, boundaries and birds etc.. It was natural that, from a large number of pictures, people should choose those that reflected their positive attitude to the subject, like noble or defiant trees in isolation on a rocky hill-top, a delicate dancing larch near a flowing stream, or overhanging willows by a lazy meander. It was a shock, or surprise at least, that more frightening aspects of the subject were also selected, like a Rousseauesque fossilized tree lying in a scorching apocalyptic desert equipped with lion and armed savage. Sharing reactions revealed the deeper layers of response that the prettier choices sometimes overlaid. Trees represented opposites; they were symbols of change or death, but also suggested regeneration and new life. Symbols reflected moods. A single tall tree might threaten to fall and annihilate the viewer, or be a source of strength and courage. People were amazed to discover a wide range of response in their own reactions and that contradictory reactions bore equal emotional strength. Major learning, however, came with the realisation of the variety, the ambivalence and the polarities contained in the group as a whole. Unlike each individual, the group as a whole could encompass all responses with equanimity, offering comfort and stability thereby. **Because the group was not subject to individual whim, together its members could balance the extremes produced by the individuals.**

With subjects like 'Birds' deeper psychological levels could be expected from the outset, so that, as well as associations with gifts, love and prey, birds could be seen as mythical creatures or as messengers on a divine mission. They were also symbols of freedom and escape. 'Boundaries' proved to be equally potent; the theme functioned as a social and group image from the start, prompting the beating of the bounds by our walking round the estate. Consideration of urban and country boundaries recalled a poetic treatment of the theme and Robert Frost's wise line, 'Good fences make good neighbours'. So often, it seemed, responsibility lay with ourselves, in our own reactions. But individuals, unsupported by a group, often have great difficulty in reconciling the polarity of their own reactions.

Nowhere was this clearer than in looking at the 'Mother and Child' image. This universal symbol is represented in every historical period, and for a long time all responses in the session were positive, as if the symbol united everyone. Numerous Christian images reinforced this general assumption, until reality broke in. The plight of unmarried mothers, the grinding poverty of the 30s with little or no contraceptive advice, the infant mortality of the Victorian period: all these had been firmly suppressed in individual responses. But as soon as the darker side of the image was mentioned, examples proliferated and changed the group perspective. So, although the individual response to pregnancy was assumed to be one of joy and happiness, echoing society's unconscious yearning for a messiah - or Bion's P Leader - this was balanced by equally powerful distress, fear and panic when a woman's period came late - or not at all. Furthermore, at the time of these discussions even contraceptives could intensify fear, since they were known to have caused cases of thrombosis.

In retrospect, it was clear that these courses functioned on several levels. Individual responses were enriched and deepened by seeing the wide variety of thematic image. Hearing other people praise and value pictures one had rejected or ignored gave much deeper insights into oneself and other course attenders than is customary in general social contact during a weekend. Beyond this, it was sharing the same experience together, engaging, in fact, in **group-thinking**, that indicated differences between individuals and groups. Whereas individuals were subject to stress when themes touched a raw nerve, and they might have fewer resources for overcoming pain, the *whole group* could contain *polarities* with equanimity. It seemed possible that sharing living experience honestly in the same way might lead to some form of group-mind that could resolve opposites by subsuming them in a new synthesis. As a result some people became more convinced of the importance of the group as an entity and wanted to explore group-thinking further. It must be stated in this connection that the term *group* is used generally. The courses were open to anyone wishing to attend and, though residents were present as much as possible, no two courses would consist of precisely the same personnel. The possibility of group-thinking was available to all, since weekends were run on the principle of mutual teaching and learning.

### **Input from Halbert L. Dunn, M.D. PhD.**

Attendance at Braziers' courses sometimes conveyed a sense of living at the forefront of ideas. Reinforcement of the importance of creativity and of taking the spirit of humanity into account when envisaging the future of society came in 1954. Braziers was emerging, restructured, from one of the most critical periods of its history, when Marion Milner sent Glynn Faithfull a copy of Halbert L. Dunn's leaflet, *Creative Destiny*, which initiated an exchange of ideas over several years. This American doctor from Washington wrote of the need for ego-centricity to be converted to socio-centricity; shared experience with subsequent increase in understanding would lead to a creative destiny for mankind.

Norman Glaister was always searching for similar or parallel ideas to his own and welcomed Dunn's stressing the need to tackle so much more than physical illness. 'What High-Level Wellness Means' was published in the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* in 1959. There Dunn showed himself not even content for people to achieve 'good health' which may be 'a relatively passive state of freedom from illness in which the individual is at peace with his environment - a condition of homeostasis.' He characterised wellness 'as dynamic - a condition of change in which the individual moves forward, climbing toward a higher potential of functioning'. Developing this concept further, Dunn identified **high-level wellness** which also involved an openness to meet life's expanding challenges and live at a still fuller potential and required 'the integration of the whole being - his body, mind and spirit - in the functioning process'.

In 1957 he had issued a sheet of 'Suggestions for Continuous Release of Tensions' which applied to individuals, groups and nations. These were 'willingness to face inconsistencies in our thinking, willingness to hear and examine the other fellow's viewpoint with an open mind, willingness to encourage freedom of expression from those around us, willingness to adjust one's own views, willingness to make time for unhurried contacts with others when such relationships are essential, willingness and determination to give credit and recognition to others, eagerness and determination to serve others, and willingness to give freedom to those one loves'.

Two years later, he maintained that for human beings to attain their full potential in major aspects of their nature, and achieve high-level wellness, twelve 'basic needs' should be met. These were survival, communication, fellowship, growth, imagination, love, balance, environment, communion with the universal, a way of life, dignity and freedom and space. Such concentration of ideas provided rich material for discussion. Furthermore, his comment that individuals are increasingly afflicted with illness when they feel out of touch with their group's, or society's, spiritual preoccupations is as true today as in the fifties.

Almost incidental to the main thrust of discussion, mind-stopping truths were thrown up like, 'Of course, the best test of mental health would consist of being able to cope in a balanced way with the discovery that all you had previously believed in and held most dear had just been proved to be untrue.' Such a caveat has a long-term effect.

### **Sir Geoffrey Vickers' contribution to *The Lancet***

The subject of mental health and social change was also raised in *The Lancet* of 22 March 1958. Sir Geoffrey Vickers wrote: 'The agents of adaptation are not those who are commonly called well-adapted, still less are they conformist; they are those who carry within themselves without injury a more than usually large measure of tension - tension between the norms of individual and social experience, between the 'is' and the 'ought to be', between the present and the future; in a word, those who have a high degree of immunity to the pressures which threaten our mental health.'

For people trying consciously to reconcile and combine the strengths of Resistives and Sensitives in order to facilitate more effective action, this was seen as strong encouragement from an outside source. As it was (and is) customary for the Sensory Committee to discuss trends, issues, problems and information related to the probable outcomes of decisions to be made, there was always some delay to accommodate this process before the Committee of Management took the decision. At critical periods, this thinking and waiting period could create tension for those who are naturally

inclined to quick response and action, even apart from the ordinary tensions of sharing a house. Keats' 'negative capability' had been used at Braziers previously to describe this even-handed state of suspension. As a poet he could naturally hold images from different seasons in mind at the same time. He also saw the ability to live equably with contradictory impressions of people, and also with their conflicting opinions, as positive and creative. So Keats trusted humanity's capacity to live in a state of uncertainty without distress, the inference being that waiting for time and circumstance to illuminate the situation can be beneficial. In addition, Braziers considered the longer thinking time to be necessary as a means of achieving something closer to group consensus, resulting in a decision, therefore, with a greater chance of active support.

Sir Geoffrey Vickers' stress on tension covered both that situation and also the more painful occasions when the situation veered towards schism which the group wished to find the right way to avoid or heal. Acceptance, control and understanding of tension are necessary in lives lived consciously. A group, too, needs to be mutually supportive and itself seek external support to ensure that mental health and agreed change are promoted, without damage to mental individual-and-group health. Such is the nature of the Braziers experiment. 'Agents of adaptation'? The original brochure in 1950 expressed as Braziers' aim: 'To make conscious the shape of the process of which we are a part, so that we may facilitate its development more efficiently'.

### **Living language**

One aspect of Glynn Faithfull's Italian studies introduced the concept of living and dead languages, which drew attention to the importance of words and their meaning in everyday speech. Classical languages no longer in use were considered to be dead. The term 'living' language comprised not only the popular, informal, oral tradition that combined poetry, music and movement but also the changes in meaning and usage which threatened traditional thought patterns. In conflicts, to define and maintain a view-point precisely, words may be strained, or change, to express exact meaning. This may entail semantic change on one hand or suppression on the other. Alternatively, **living language** may be used to create new meanings when new insights require substance by being named. It may also reveal unconscious preoccupations.

Glynn Faithfull reported the author's comments on a couple of incidents in the life of John Morton Stanley to show how simple statements may reveal real, yet hidden, meanings of which the speaker is entirely ignorant. They may convey personal or cultural significance. Everyone knows how Stanley greeted Dr Livingstone in Africa with the words 'Dr Livingstone I presume?' Anstruther, the biographer, movingly reported how this choice of word instead of the correct 'assume' revealed Stanley's socially inadequate background as well as his diffidence at meeting the great man. The meaning of the word was clear, but it resonated with deeper import - his humbler origins. A similar, more telling incident had occurred earlier. After first beating a work-house school-teacher senseless rather than endure a beating himself for something he hadn't done; after then being rejected by a distant branch of his family; and after running away to America, the youth looked for work in New Orleans. He saw a possible employer in the shape of a middle-aged man reading a newspaper near some warehouses.

He asked for a job. The words he used were, 'Do you want a boy, sir?' He had no knowledge of the fact that the man was childless, with an ailing wife. He was not aware of the human, rather than the functional, implication. Nevertheless, the living ambiguity of the request touched the man's need. This lonely man found a suitable job for the youth, and in adopting him as his son, gave him his own name - the one by which we know Stanley. Both gained lasting fame thereby.

From then on, (1958), during a variety of courses, the group became more conscious of import in ordinary conversation. By then, a reporting-in round was often used once or twice during a week-end. Participants at the beginning of a session might comment on their activities since the previous one, describe something that had pleased them on a walk, report on a change of mood, a new idea or a problem from a previous session. It became noticeable that different members of the group would refer to the same incident, image, symbol or a disturbed night. It was as if something was being shared or exchanged on a group-mind level yet expressed through individuals. The living language



gave the cue. If tutors took the possible import of this into account in their next session, in a spirit of living and learning, then the weekends tended to become more creative, stimulating and fruitful of ideas. Living language, therefore, became another element in sensory awareness - and failure to pick up on semi-submerged attitudes and thoughts sometimes denied a situation its full realisation.

### **Sir Julian Huxley and Teilhard de Chardin**

In 1959, Sir Julian Huxley, partly in celebration of the centenary of the publication of *The Origin of Species*, and also to introduce the evolutionary theories of Teilhard de Chardin, published a series of articles in *The Sunday Times*. These were entitled 'The Destiny of Man'. Great enthusiasm ensued at Braziers that speculation on future developments involving more complex metagroups should be in the public domain and, following a letter from John Murrell, published in *The Times*, many readers showed interest in Braziers as a result. Weekend courses, led by several people, refocused attention on Norman Glaister's main preoccupations, humanity's place in the universe and multimentality.

As copies of Teilhard's translated work became available, interest increased and it is thought that Braziers was the first adult college in England to base a weekend on *The Phenomenon of Man*. Excited and energetic discussion resulted. Teilhard's account of evolution corresponded with Norman Glaister's. That in itself, as well as Teilhard's concept of the noosphere - 'the thinking layer' outside the biosphere - and his exploration of the necessary transformation of human nature for 'the creation of a common consciousness' in a convergent world, all provided material for much debate. This led, beyond the period under scrutiny, to the long-term relationship of Glynn Faithfull and John Woodcock with the U.K. Teilhard Association.

### **'Art of Living' Courses**

So far, ideas relating to self-understanding, awareness of interactions between people, and ideas which were introduced to Braziers from outside sources have been the themes outlined in this paper. This section will refer to observations, insights and techniques that Braziers discovered for itself. As I first began attending the annual Sensory Summer School and what may be termed 'Art of Living Courses' in 1954, it is not inappropriate to draw on experience gained thereby. However, as I was not resident at Braziers for long periods, others, who attended at different times, might wish to change the emphasis in places. The following account, however, is based on my experience, and discussions with long-term residents at the time.

In the early years, weekend courses concentrated first on the ideas that led to the founding of Braziers, philosophy, evolution, attitudes to religion etc., to consolidate what the group held in common. To these were added creative and artistic weekends (painting, modelling, music, writing) to achieve a balance of the intellectual, creative and practical. The emphasis was on personal involvement in the process of living consciously, which is reflected in such titles as 'Earning a Living and Living a Life', 'Living with More Meaning', and 'A Technique for Solving Difficulties', courses already described in *Research Communications Nos. 12 and 13*. In these, participants learned much about themselves and more about each other than in traditional types of course, because people read back to the group as much of their self-discovery as they wished to share. Other courses like 'Writing as Self-Discovery', 'Human Relations Seminar', 'Time to Think' and 'Living Drama' followed.

Two longer types of course were also important to Braziers. The annual Sensory Summer School lasting a week or a fortnight was based on Braziers' current thinking or concerns, as in 'Must We Take Sides?', 'Towards a Mutual Society', and 'Giving Shape to the Unknown'. Visitors also contributed short talks. Experimentation with the structure of sessions might take place. There was usually a work component and an outing as well as social evenings. The double aim was to explain Braziers to visitors, in hopes of recruitment and to develop the experiment. One great asset from the start had been the good relationship formed with the Progressive League who held regular courses at Braziers. It was a great pleasure, therefore, when Eric Hills also began to use Braziers regularly for MENSAs weekends.

New Year, Easter, Whitsuntide and Bank Holidays provided long weekends, so, to give a broader programme than was possible on a weekly basis, three component parts were offered. These consisted of serious philosophical, psychological or broadly scientific discussions, an artistic topic like art or music appreciation, and a creative element like writing, painting, pottery or dance. By forgoing some free time it was possible to attend almost everything. One could follow one, two or all three themes - or ignore them and go for walks, or some other preference. No other college adopted such an approach, the variety of which made both for holiday relaxation, and also achieved (often incidentally) a cross-fertilization of ideas and images. The experience of learning as part of an interactive group led to some remarkable events when the 'sub-groups' spontaneously combined for a joint session. For example, at one Whit Weekend, themes of continuity, time and immortality were given visible form by a huge painted phoenix as a backdrop for a resurrection dance and readings from Shakespeare, Dante and the group's own work. The combination had not been foreseen.

It was a concentrated mix when Braziers' residents, friends and acquaintances provided most of the lectures, some of the running of the house and tried to attend some sessions of courses organised by visiting groups, aiming, where possible, to extend contacts and seek ideas that could be integrated with Braziers' thinking. This arrangement was possible chiefly because of the small scale of Braziers' weekend courses at that time. The same factor also enabled visitors attending the Liberal Arts courses to become aware that ideas of mutuality and interest in each others' ideas characterised the place. As gregariousness was deemed an instinct, it followed that sharing experience was considered natural. Wardens of the Adult Residential Colleges acknowledged, at their conferences, that people on courses often asked for aspirin to cope with unexpected headaches brought on by over-stimulation or the excitement and tensions of being away from customary routines. Fortified in this way, they could make the most of course discussions and establish new contacts. By the end of a good course a slightly anxious state frequently changed to one of euphoria. However, this new state was chiefly emotion-based and often short-lived. Braziers discovered that courses with a strong sensory component made for a deeper sharing and included real striving for new insights. When achieved, these promoted a longer-lasting high-level wellness which was more soundly based and more sustaining. **Melogenesis** was the term Braziers coined for such a state of high-level wellness as mentioned above in connection with Halbert Dunn.

A discovery made in the fifties concerned the **U tube** phenomenon. The setting was always an open discussion in which the least aware person present almost invariably brought into the open some sensitive matter that others had just spent several moments suppressing in their heads in an attempt to ensure that it would not be raised at that time, even though related issues had been voiced. Just as downwards pressure on the surface of liquid in one side of a laboratory U tube forces the fluid higher up the other, it was as if the desire to prevent something from being expressed at that time ensured that it was put before the group. Honor Fawsitt, who was Acting Warden, wondered if the effect could be prevented. On occasions when the process seemed about to function, we both tried holding the item loosely in mind in the spirit of 'Yes, the item will be available soon but not just yet', to see if denying the strength of the rejection would prevent the disclosure of the topic. Although it seemed to work once or twice, we could come to no firm conclusion.

A simple form of the **Round** - described in *Research Communications No.12* - was used regularly, I think, before it became common elsewhere. This form of communication became very creative when it was also linked to living language, recurring imagery and dreams, particularly during festival weekends when cross-fertilization of ideas could take place as described above. Participation made people more aware of their role in the group whether they spoke or were silent. Whereas in talking sessions at other colleges you were aware of your own reactions as an individual and the rest were just 'the others', at Braziers there was a greater sense of having shared an experience with other people and that this joint learning was important, forming a basis from which more could develop.

Discussions naturally include differences of opinion yet, if increased integration is sought, it is vital to find ways of limiting unnecessarily negative effects. The **Apple Tree Game** was adopted and practised at intervals, to strengthen positive rather than negative responses. When collecting ripe apples, the picker selects perfect fruit for keeping; any bruised or damaged ones are discarded or ignored. This was applied to opinions. So some course of action would be proposed for the purpose

and it was agreed that everyone who spoke would contribute only positive comments in making their response. To do so proved to be difficult, even taxing. Some topics could not be sustained for more than fifteen minutes, and half an hour seemed to be the longest period in which nothing but good could be found - before fantasy or humour ended the exercise. Nevertheless, the attempt did reveal that there were more aspects of a subject to consider than were at first envisaged, and it was clear that some people habitually see only negatives before slowly acknowledging any favourable points. These were useful observations.

Another insight was made when the group, or an individual, seemed to persist in repeating mistakes. It was as if people were committed to performing longer and harder precisely those actions that had not worked in the first place. So a *post vitam* session was held after weekend courses. The opposite of a post mortem which identifies what has gone wrong, the post vitam reviewed as many aspects of the weekend that had gone right and which could be repeated. So more of Braziers' strengths could be identified and the group learned 'to pick up the goodies'. Occasionally, if any material intended for inclusion at the weekend had been crowded out for some reason, Norman Glaister would review the ideas that had been missed. So it was worth staying on for an extra night to be part of this process.

Although sensory exchange was recommended and trusted, it was not the comfortable, positive, reinforcing experience that people sometimes assumed. Because it was 'new', at first people felt that it needed protection until fully developed, so the Sensory Committee itself was deliberately kept small. One might be invited to sit in on a session but not to become a permanent member. Consciousness, therefore, was certainly raised when the Sensory Committee's being seen as an elitist, privileged group provoked envy and suffering in those who wished to attend but found themselves guided elsewhere. Recognition of this very unsatisfactory outcome led to progressive attempts over the years to increase the number and variety of meetings where sensory discussion might be experienced. Sometimes this has enriched, and at others it has devalued the process. An attempt should, perhaps, have been made to introduce sensory training through exercises, simple at first but increasing in length and complexity. In open discussions, it is not always easy to express completely frank views about difficult issues that affect everyone in the community, and have a bearing on future decisions. At times, it was found that the same issues needed several discussions at regular intervals in order for people to adjust to each other's ideas and re-examine their own. Sometimes silence seemed preferable to speech, and a few moments' silence allowed people time to consider both what could be said, and the most appropriate language for that expression. Sometimes, it felt as if one had to learn to sit with one's hand on a white-hot stove. Patience and persistence could bring rewards.

The importance of group sharing, and of the group as the context in which the individual's experience may be enriched, should be clear by now. In fact, group sharing was considered so important that the invitation to visitors to join in the work in hand was simply a practical extension of the principles operating in the rest of the course. Visitors, therefore, were asked to volunteer to help wash up one main meal a day. Braziers was a small enterprise. The need was obvious and conversation with friends, staff or new acquaintances made for congeniality. I recall a remarkable man, a polio victim with severe mobility problems, who could not join in. Expert on the harmonica, he perched against a table and provided entertainment for the washers up. In winter, one might be engaged in addressing envelopes by hand and packing them with the new 'Calendar of Courses'. During the summer, weeding, planting out in the vegetable garden, fruit picking - even scything - provided exercise, pleasure and sometimes conversation about Braziers' aims. Proof of the effectiveness to encourage integration through thinking, making and sharing is not quantifiable in an objective way, except that people came, and returned in response to something imperfectly understood but which conveyed warmth and concern for them. A few came, lived alongside, and successfully used the experience to relaunch their careers in a different direction. Some, of course, did not return and, as society in general began to stress the needs of the individual in space, choice etc., and materialism gained ground, some visitors began to demur eventually at the request to help with washing up.

Nevertheless, a good balance between individual needs and group experience still flourished at Braziers. It was in courses like those listed in the second paragraph of this section (p. 13) concerned with problem solving, or with life techniques in dealing with stress or balancing work and leisure, that people were encouraged to make written or spoken responses on their individual experience of the

chosen theme, as they were guided through a series of questions. (See *Research Communications Nos. 12 and 13*). The tutor then structured a hypothetical change of one element in the problematic situation - a single dramatic change - which would allow one to rework a part of one's life and affect the future. The aim was that a current burden might become an adventure. An important factor in the successful thinking that took place was that imagination had free rein when participants were separated temporarily from the stressful situation. In one of these exercises, taken from a later period, I discovered that I could choose to murder my mother, confess, and immediately be given a life-style in which the instruction of teenagers and the interminable marking of books would have no part! My laughter startled the group. The unexpected release mechanism made an intolerable outlook more bearable, and recalling the preposterousness of the revelation saw me through many a difficult moment in the following years. Stress in connection with dependency in age found resonances among other visitors. It was not surprising that people found a stay in Braziers could beneficially allow thinking time in which to change direction and find new attitudes.

Were there other observations that could be made about sessions in which people expected to derive pleasure from exploring a topic as a group? Experiments with group writing and group art could be illuminating and also great fun. In discussions, there was greater awareness of the importance of laughter and silence. Silence could indicate that discussion had approached an unwelcome topic that people were unwilling to broach. Laughter might simply be a response to wit or a joke; it might mark the pleasant conclusion of a well-rounded session. The situation was more complex when spontaneous silence followed laughter. The group might have reached a new level of perception through the following sequence. A serious discussion might be drawing to a close. An unexpected, slightly offbeat comment would suddenly seem to reverse or challenge the conclusion the session was moving towards. A preposterous element in the challenge would trigger both laughter and silence. The silence, however, was pregnant with thought. The challenge revealed either that the previous assumption was still inadequately considered and needed modification, or the content of the challenge itself actually pointed the way to significant progress. The fact that the potential insight had occurred in a group session safeguarded its further consideration since, as has already been pointed out, individuals tend instinctively to negate a new idea.

A few people wanted to take deeper soundings in the group, wondering if it could be considered as autonomous, with a life of its own. One theory suggested that the group-mind knew everything about the group, which sometimes proved correct if you had something to conceal. Was there a sense that a fact told to one person was automatically known by all? (Yes, concerning feelings. Definitely not about practical arrangements!) A theory advanced by one person maintained that the total knowledge gained through the experiences of 10 - 12 members of a good group was sufficient to solve most of their group problems. At times of good group energy, examples of synchronicity seemed to abound. Was this evidence that some form of Braziers' group-mind included friends living at a distance - 'outriders' like me, as Honor Fawsitt described us. Could synchronicity be tested? In correspondence about such thoughts, I suggested that the Sensory Committee could nominate a weekend as an extra Sensory Research weekend, without advertising it, to see if appropriate people turned up or phoned. The nearest we came to such coincidence occurred in connection with the Quiet Meeting held on Sunday mornings after the manner of the Quakers. Two of us who always tried to 'tune in' to this at the appropriate time began to feel 'something was wrong'. We phoned - from Lowestoft and Blackburn - to discover that the time had been changed. Such questions, and others, have surfaced at intervals throughout Braziers' history.

If a group is concerned to increase consciousness, however, its success rests on the mature relationship between individuals as themselves, and individuals as responsible members of the group. In this, people must make their own individual journey, since consciousness is rarely a Damascus experience. It requires effort, and some exercise of will: consciousness may then emerge in time. The group's patience could be relied on in this regard. Discussion might illuminate a difficult situation but one was not aware at first how far one might be prepared to change one's attitude. Or one might be concerned about a personal matter, but not yet be quite ready to face sharing it with the group as a whole.

To cover these situations, the group learned to allow for the benefit of time in assisting change. One could identify and confess to **auto-disclosure** to convey that one had identified something important

but needed more time to think. This was replaced by **self-disclosure** when one was ready to discuss the problem and any progress made with it. The change from one to the other might take a day, a week or months, but the use of the terms allowed one to keep in touch with the group and indicate progress. Because of this form of self-reporting, the procedure was more subtle than simply saying, 'I pass' as in a Round.

The process could, in fact, result in increased fellowship and empathy because of the honesty of intention. After all, the basic problems of life confront everyone, and sharing people's different attitudes to, and ways of coping with, them could help others extend their living skills. Sometimes, it might be theoretical rather than practical, as when one might be required to write a new speech for a Shylock who extended the hand of friendship, since he no longer wished to demand his pound of flesh. A sense of deeper association grew and was visible from time to time. Differences there certainly were; but likenesses were stressed whenever possible. The friendly atmosphere that resulted stemmed not just from the welcome of a few people but also from the climate of opinion that everyone who came had something of knowledge, attitude or experience to contribute to the group or to the sessions. It also seemed that, in a context of openness and 'towardness', people might within two days achieve a depth of knowledge of each other that it would take two or more years to attain in ordinary circumstances.

Norman Glaister died in 1961, which brought a major part of Braziers' history to a close. The founding aim, as recorded in the original brochure, would continue to inform the vision. Glynn Faithfull and Honor Fawsitt provided leadership and creative thinking at Braziers with Norman Phillips as Chairman. John Woodcock and his colleagues continued developing the 'Experiment in Group Living' which had begun the year before in London and which John and Evelyn Woodcock described in *Research Communications Nos. 10 and 11*.

In general, it was the interplay of individual and group, the capacity to share in the ways described, and the recognition that all human beings were members of the same species in a developing context that gave people their very real sense of belonging, their attachment to mutual teaching and learning and their feeling that Braziers was a special place. For the founders, and for many people attracted by the experiment since 1950, the whole of this was understood within an evolutionary - and cosmic - context, which presupposed that a long way ahead multimentality might one day come into being and develop further.

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### End Notes

- (1), (2) *Braziers Park Research Papers and Bulletin*, No. 5, Sept. 1954, pp.6 and p.7
- (3) Printed in *The Lancet* CCXXXVI Dec.9 1939, but taken here from *Braziers Park Quarterly*, No. 2
- (4) *Braziers Park Quarterly*, Nos. 6 and 7 1952
- (5) Mental Metabolism 2 in *B.P.R.P. and B.* No 5, Sept. 1954
- (6), (7) *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, S. Freud, as printed in *The Britannica Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 54: p. 672 (6); p 687 (7)
- (8), (9), (10) *Mental Metabolism 2 in B.P.R.P. and B.* No. 5 Sept. 1954
- (11), (12) *Experiences in Groups* by W.R. Bion, Tavistock Pub. Ltd., 1968, p.50 (11); p. 54 (12)