Wladyslaw Sluckin Room

Professor Sluckin was a founder member of the department and Head of the Department of Psychology 1973-84
A little History

• 1921 Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland University College founded
• 1927 University College Leicester (1931 Dr FI Attenborough Principal)
• 1957 University of Leicester
• 1959 Decision taken to open a Department of Psychology
• 1960 Professor SGM (Gillmore) Lee (Bedford College) first professor of psychology

Dr Wladyslaw ("Wladek") Sluckin (Durham) appointed Lecturer in Psychology to assist Lee in opening department

• 1966 Wladek promoted to a personal chair
• 1973 Lee dies suddenly aged 52
• 1973-84 Wladek Head of Department of Psychology
• 1984 Wladek retires. Prof. Martin Herbert succeeds as HOD
• 1985 Wladek dies aged 66 of oesophageal cancer
• 1991 First Sluckin Lecture by Professor Patrick Bateson (Cambridge)
Gillmore Lee was from South Africa, had served in the RAF during the war, and came to the UK because of apartheid.

Wladek Sluckin was from Poland, arriving in the UK as a student in 1937, and staying as a result of the war.
The Department of Psychology, January 1964

(L to R): Professor Lee (in academic gown!), Gordon Evans (Chief Technician), Keith Taylor (Research Assistant, later Professor in Melbourne, Australia), Roy Davies (Lecturer), Ann Taylor (Lecturer), Michael Ball (Technician), Margaret Frape (Professor’s Secretary), Wladek, Derek Wright (Lecturer in Educational Psychology)
Wladek was best known for his work in early learning....

These are only three of his books
This classic picture, taken about 1970, shows Wladek in the department with some chicks (or maybe they were quail!), who had been misled into imprinting on him.

**Note for non-psychologists: Imprinting**
A method of early learning in which the organism follows another large organism it sees during a critical period shortly after birth. As this is usually mother, this is an evolutionarily successful rule of thumb.
Wladek first became interested in early learning about 1956 after hearing a lecture in Durham by the great British biologist William Homan Thorpe.

His experimental work in this area began shortly afterward, but as so often, it took some time to achieve something publishable:

W.H. Thorpe FRS (1902-1986), University of Cambridge
This paper was published after Salzen left for Liverpool and Sluckin for Leicester. Salzen (b 1930) later became professor of psychology at the University of Aberdeen. Their mutual departure from Durham coincided with difficulties with the Head of Department, whom they felt was bossy and interfering.
Flocking of Domestic Chicks

Newly hatched nidifugous birds do not behave as if they recognized their own kind as such. On the contrary, they react in the same way to a very wide range of stimulus objects by approaching them and by giving ‘pleasure’ notes when near them. Thus the birds become attached to the stimulus objects. Such imprinting normally occurs to parents or parent-substitutes. However, Collias\(^1\) suggested that simultaneous imprinting to siblings could account for the socialization of young birds. This suggestion was also made later by Weidmann\(^2\) and by Gray\(^3\), and has been implied by other students of imprinting.

If the flocking of young birds depends not on an innate mutual recognition mechanism but on early exposure to their own kind, then the birds’ early experiences should result in their tendency to return to familiar companions, be they similar young birds or any other stimulus object. This we set out to investigate, using domestic chicks hatched in the laboratory. The chicks were removed.

Table 3

<p>| (sec) spent in different regions of the runway by birds reared without food or water |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Min 1 ft. of | In neutral | Within 1 ft. of |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>nuculus chick</th>
<th>region</th>
<th>moving box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>538*</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>519*</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>514*</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>547*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>522*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that flocking or socialization of young birds may depend largely on the learning environment.

K. F. TAYLOR
W. SLUCKIN

Department of Psychology,
University of Leicester.

\(^1\) Collias, N. E., Auk, 69, 127 (1952).
\(^3\) Gray, W., J. Psychol., 27, 145 (1958).
Imprinting in Guinea-pigs

CLASSICAL imprinting of precocial birds has been studied in the laboratory for some 20 years. Suggestions have also been made over a similar period about the imprinting of precocial mammals, but no systematic experiments specifically concerned with imprinting have been reported so far. Although Shipley’s study of guinea-pigs referred to imprinting, in reality it was concerned with the approaches and following responses of these animals to moving objects. Imprinting involves more than that, namely an attachment to a given figure, and this can be readily assessed in a discrimination test. The experiment reported here describes imprinting in young guinea-pigs, judged in terms of the animals’ preference for familiar, compared with strange, objects.

Twenty-four guinea-pigs which were born in the laboratory were taken away from their mothers at 5–7 days of age and reared in isolated prams with different objects. At the age of 8 weeks, they were given a choice test in a discrimination box, the objects used being a guinea-pig, a toy guinea-pig, a toy cat, and a piece of paper. The results were as follows: 10 of the 24 animals showed a preference for the guinea-pig; 1 of the 24 showed a preference for the toy guinea-pig; and 13 of the 24 were indifferent. The differences are significant at the 1% level.

in animals which must already be strongly attached to another figure, the mother. The fact that such later imprinting can take place suggests that much further research is needed to determine the sensitive periods, if any, for this and other forms of early learning in guinea-pigs as well as in other precocial mammals.

I thank Mr Dugald MacArthur for constructing the apparatus, and Miss Elizabeth Tetlow for collecting most of the data.

W. SLUCKIN

Department of Psychology, University of Leicester.

Received October 1; revised October 25, 1968.

Julia Berryman (L) arrived in Leicester in 1969 as a graduate research assistant, and later registered for a PhD under Wladek’s supervision. Later she was Senior Lecturer in the Department of Adult Education, retiring in 2005.

Clare Fullerton (R) (d 2015) was a postdoctoral research fellow in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Dick Porter came as a visiting postdoc after his PhD at Wayne State University (Michigan) and subsequently left for a professorship at Vanderbilt University, Nashville Tennessee. For the last 20 years he has worked and lived in France.
Toward the end of his career, Wladek branched out from his main study of early learning in animals.

He was known for his generous attitude to younger members of the department.

Here is a joint paper with a younger member of the department who later became himself well-known:
A.M. Colman, M. Walley and W. Sluckin, 
British Journal of Psychology 66, 481-486 (1975)

PREFERENCES FOR COMMON WORDS, UNCOMMON WORDS AND NON-WORDS BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

BY A. M. COLMAN, M. WALLEY AND W. SLUCKIN

Department of Psychology, University of Leicester and Northampton College of Education

In the first experiment, groups of 6–7-year-old, 10–11-year-old and 18–20-year-old subjects were presented with aesthetic choices between common words and unfamiliar non-words. All groups displayed a preference for real words but this tendency was significantly more pronounced in the intermediate age group than in either the younger or the older groups. In the second experiment, a group of 18–21-year-old subjects displayed a significant preference for uncommon words over common words, while groups of 7-year-old and 9–10-year-old subjects overwhelmingly preferred the common words. These results indicate an inverted-U function relating familiarity and liking, and this provides a parsimonious interpretation of the preferences of subjects of all ages.
Wladek’s life before Leicester and Psychology

1919    20 March: born in Warsaw 
(Father is eventually an industrialist with a metal factory)

1937    Comes to England to study English

1938    Student of Electrical Engineering at Queen Mary College

1939    War starts. Family money cut off

1940    QMC evacuated to Cambridge

1941    Meets Alice Klaus. Fails B.Sc. Final exams

1941    Starts work as power station engineer in Leeds

1942    (15 May: marries Alice Klaus). 
        Resits final exam, receives ordinary degree

1943    Bored by being Power Engineer. Resigns without new job
Wladek aged about 2 with his parents Chaim and Celina Warsaw 1921

Wladek and Alice Cambridge about 1944
Wladek’s life before Leicester and Psychology (2)

1943: Bored by being Power Engineer. Resigns without new job
Employed as sales assistant in radio shop in Huntingdon
Gets into row with boss at Radio shop. Hits boss
Fired from Radio shop
Called up by Polish army. Fails to show up for enlistment
Volunteers for British army
Starts work in Cambridge Electrical Company
Job labelled “reserved occupation”. Rejected by British army

1945: War ends. Moves to London. Alice trains as Psychiatric Social
Worker at LSE. Series of odd jobs as electrician.

1946: Thinks of starting up as manufacturer of electrical equipment.
Creates test models of ammeters. Fails to get up in the morning. Enterprise fails.
Wladek’s life before Leicester and Psychology (3)

1946  Thinks of starting up as manufacturer of electrical equipment. Creates test models of ammeters. Fails to get up in the morning. Enterprise fails. **Big rethink about career and future**

1947:  Starts work as a correspondence tutor for Cleaver-Hume press

Applies to Birkbeck College London (evening classes) to study philosophy.

Course full. Rejected

After discussion with Alice applies to study Psychology.


1950:  B.Sc. II(i), Birkbeck
Life as a refugee

Then as now, life for people displaced by war and deprivation was not straightforward.

At the end of the war, most of Wladek’s family at home were dead.

Wladek and Alice thought very seriously about returning to Poland. By 1946 it was clear that life in Poland was not good, either economically or politically.

Wladek and Alice were not Zionists and were not attracted by Palestine.

The Polish Resettlement Act 1947 gave citizenship to Polish ex-servicemen.

In 1949 Wladek and Alice became British.

In 2010, Alice was awarded an OBE for services to mental health.
Wladek’s life before Leicester and Psychology (4)

1950: B.Sc. II(i), Birkbeck
1951: Research Assistant, University of Durham
1953: Lecturer in Psychology, University of Durham
1955: Ph.D, University of London

“Criteria and circumstances of occupational success in cooperative employment in Newcastle-upon-Tyne”

Two early texts.

**Principles of Alternating Currents** (1951) was written as part of his tutoring work for Cleaver-Hume.

**Minds and Machines** (1954) was written at the suggestion of Alec Mace. It is an early popular exposition about artificial intelligence.
By 1984 under Wladek’s leadership the department had grown substantially.

Some faces are still recognisable from 1964.

Front row (Centre Left, Uli Weidmann  Centre Right, Robert Thomson (d 2017) and Martin Herbert (d 2017)
This obituary was written by Wladek’s close friend and colleague Robert Thomson, who died aged 95 in May 2017.

Rob was an Oxford-trained philosopher. He had been Wladek’s colleague in Durham, before being recruited by the Leicester psychology department in 1963.
I’m not sure what Wladek would have made of the present combination of disciplines

Department of Neuroscience, Psychology and Behaviour

He was a great opponent of reductionism

He would have regarded the “...psychology and behaviour” as a tautology

Those were different times. It was much harder to disentangle what was going on inside the brain
The whole Sluckin family is grateful to the University, the School of Psychology, and all donors for the honour and recognition they have bestowed on Wladek over the years.

He was strongly committed to learning and scholarship as well as research.

We hope that students will have the opportunity to practice all three in this building and in this room.