


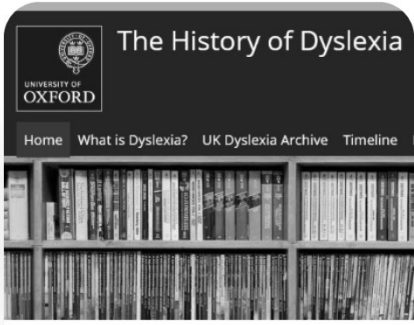
# From Victorian medicine to neurodiversity: Episodes in the history of dyslexia in Britain



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## UK Dyslexia Archive


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**Welcome**

Welcome to *The History of Dyslexia*, a project tracing the origins of dyslexia in the late 19th century, to its present widespread and hard-fought history.

- ▶ Housed at St John's College, Oxford
- ▶ Collaboration of psychologists (Maggie Snowling, Kate Nation), historians (William Whyte, Robert Evans), geographers, since 2016
- ▶ Archive, e.g. records of the Word Blind Centre, British Dyslexia Association, Dyslexia Institute, European Dyslexia Association, Helen Arkell Centre; ~40 oral histories with scientists, teachers, campaigners

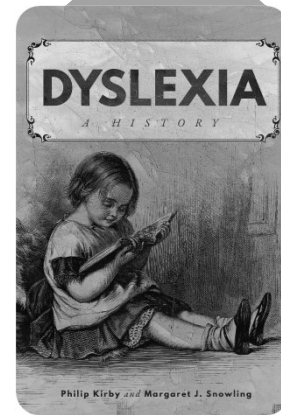


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## Structure of today

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1. Origins –
  - ▶ Victorian medicine and 'congenital word-blindness'
2. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century –
  - ▶ British lull in interest, but further research elsewhere
3. Modern dyslexia –
  - ▶ British campaign for political recognition, expanding science
4. Possible futures –
  - ▶ For the term, for research, for people with dyslexia...



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## 1a. Origins - Reference to word-blindness (1877), dyslexia (1887)

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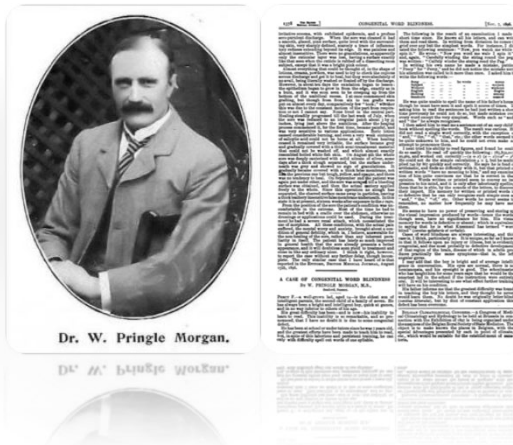


- ▶ Adolph Kussmaul (1822-1902) (left), Professor of Medicine, first identified reading problems (1877) as specific research concern; coined the term, 'word-blindness' (*Wortblindheit*)
- ▶ Rudolph Berlin (1833-97) (right), ophthalmologist, Professor of Medicine in Stuttgart, coined 'dyslexia' in 1887 to align the term with contemporary literature
- ▶ On Berlin – '[He] named the ship even though he never became her captain' (Wagner, 1973)

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## 1b. Origins - William Pringle Morgan and Percy (1896)

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- ▶ William Pringle Morgan (1861-1934), physician (left)
  - ▶ Percy F. – a well-grown lad, aged 14 – is the eldest son of intelligent parents, the second child of a family of seven. He has always been a bright and intelligent boy, quick at games, and in no way inferior to others of his age. His great difficulty has been – and is now – his inability to learn to read. This inability is so remarkable, and so pronounced, that I have no doubt it is due to some congenital defect. He has been at school or under tutors since he was 7 years old, and the greatest efforts have been made to teach him to read, but, in spite of this laborious and persistent training, he can only with difficulty spell out words of one syllable.
- ▶ Dyslexia framed as: developmental, discrepancy between intelligence/reading skill, class/gender?

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## 1c. Origins - Word-blindness in Britain (1890s-1910s), child focus

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- ▶ “If the British system of spelling had been phonetic the defect would not be nearly so noticeable. In Germany, the language there being much more phonetic, such cases were said to be far less common.” (Edward Treacher Collins [left] in the *Lancet*, “Ophthalmological society”, 1910)
- ▶ “It is a matter of the highest importance to recognise the cause and the true nature of this difficulty in learning to read which is experienced by these children, otherwise they may... either neglected or flogged for a defect for which they are in no wise responsible. The recognition of the true character of the difficulty will lead the parents and teachers of these children to deal with them in the proper way, not by harsh and severe treatment, but by attempting to overcome the difficulty by patient and persistent training.” (James Hinshelwood [right], “Congenital word-blindness”, 1900)

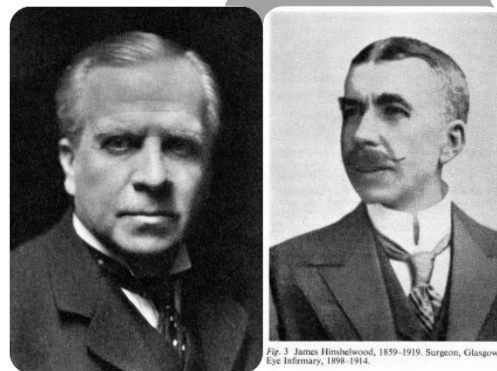


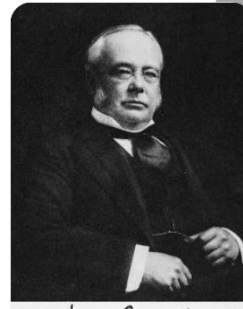
Fig. 3 James Hinshelwood, 1859-1919. Surgeon, Glasgow Eye Infirmary, 1898-1914.

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## 1d. Origins - Word-blindness in Britain (1890s-1910s), debates

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- ▶ “The employment of this term [by Hinshelwood *et al*] has been misleading and unfortunate. In the case [Broadbent] observed... the blindness for words was a part of a much larger defect, a complete loss of the faculty of naming an object at sight” (William Broadbent, 1896, who also worked on aphasia) ([left](#))
- ▶ “Now I quite agree with Sir William Broadbent that the word has frequently been used by writers loosely with different meanings attached to it and therefore it has been frequently misleading. The fault, however, lies, not in the word, but in the fact that those who use it have not always had a clear conception of what Kussmaul meant by it” (James Hinshelwood, 1896) ([right](#))



W. Broadbent

W. Broadbent

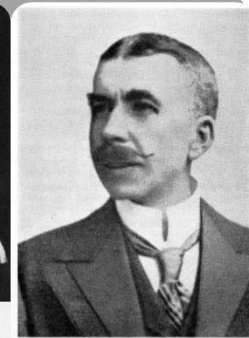


Fig. 3 James Hinshelwood, 1859-1919. Surgeon, Glasgow Eye Infirmary, 1898-1914.

James Hinshelwood

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## 1e. Origins - Theorising dyslexia's emergence

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- ▶ “When the ability to read and write is possessed by few, those who cannot read and write do not stand out. The child who would later be termed feeble-minded could successfully labour with his equally illiterate fellows. It was only when education became general that the problem of [reading] backwardness was discovered.” (David Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped, 1760-1960*, 1963)
- ▶ “The formation of congenital word blindness [can be understood] as the constitution of a ‘technology of power’, ultimately concerned with further capitalising the population, through acting upon specific and individual bodies.” (Tom Campbell, “From aphasia to dyslexia, a fragment of a genealogy”, 2011)
- ▶ Yet:
  - ▶ Other systems of general education, why did dyslexia not emerge there?
  - ▶ Why have central governments, in fact, been generally reticent to recognise dyslexia? Why current possible retrenchment?
  - ▶ How are contexts and drivers to be differentiated?
  - ▶ What role do individuals play in responding/contributing to understandings?

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## 2a. Early C20<sup>th</sup> - Sporadic interest in word-blindness

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...could not shift the onus and responsibility on to the approved societies.

"It would be a good thing if we could make an absolute certainty of every child's life, and I don't think, generally speaking, that it should be necessary for a married woman to go to work. When it is necessary, it would be a good thing if there were some scheme to ensure the natural feeding of a child, but that is clearly a burden to be borne by the 'State'."

**CRUSHED IN PIT SHAFT.**

**NO CULPABLE NEGLIGENCE BUT LACK OF CARE.**

A verdict of "death by misadventure" was returned at an inquest at Doncaster to-day, on Thomas Darkin (38), pit sinker, of Union Street, Doncaster, who lost his life at the Markham Main Colliery, Airedale. A chargeless pit sinker, Thomas Shaw, was killed at the same time.

The two men were working on a scaffold about 200 yards down, when the hoist came down and crushed them. Shaw was killed on the spot, and Dr. Ingham, but several times, he covered one and then, and did it. He received a verdict of "death by misadventure" at the coroner's court.

The charge man was not as careful as might have been in giving the signal, and

**"WORD-BLIND" CHILDREN. CANNOT READ, BUT SHINE IN OTHER WAYS.**

Children who cannot read are not uncommon, even in these days of general education, and Dr. A. Wear, the chief school medical officer for Leeds, told a "Yorkshire Evening Post" reporter to-day that nearly every month cases are found.

These children suffer from what is known as "word-blindness"—that is, they cannot distinguish one printed or written word from another. Some kink in their mental equipment makes it impossible for them to grasp letters and words, to realise that they differ from each other, and represent certain things. Sometimes this is attended by mental deficiency. Often "word-blind" children are very clever in other ways, notably in drawing and the use of their hands.

An apparently bright child's inability to read puzzled teachers until "word-blindness" was found to be the cause.

A "word-blind" child may have no difficulty in writing words, but cannot read them.

Dr. Wear cited a case of a "word-blind" child who was asked to copy a short sentence containing the word "love." He then asked the child to spell "love."

"L.U.V." came the answer. The child was unable to realise what had been written. In other cases the child was normal.

S. PAUL'S SCHOOLS, Holly Walk, Leamington.

**REPORT.**

Date: July 1932 3<sup>rd</sup> Term.

Name: Louise Dacie

Class: 2 Position in Class: 16

Subject	Mark	Remarks
Arithmetic	50	54 Good
English (verbal)	50	42 Good. After read
Reading	20	16 Good. After read

S. PAUL'S SCHOOLS, Holly Walk, Leamington.

**REPORT.**

Date: 1932. Xmas Term.

Name: Louise Dacie

Class: 2 Position in Class: 16

Subject	Mark	Remarks
Arithmetic	50	48 Good
English (verbal)	50	48 Good. After read
Reading	20	16 Good

**General Remarks:**

*Louise is a splendid worker, but must still try hard with her Reading & spelling.*

*Louise is a splendid worker, but must still try hard with her Reading & spelling.*

*Louise is very intelligent but her reading and spelling are still weak.*

A typical school report (1932)

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## 2b. Early C20<sup>th</sup> - Why the British lull in interest between ~1920-60?

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- ▶ Cyril Burt (1883-1971) (right), first educational psychologist to a governmental body, LCC (1913)
- ▶ "Nearly every educational psychologist has had cases referred to him in which this verdict [word-blindness] has been pronounced; and it now seems pretty well agreed that, provided adequate and appropriate teaching can be arranged, practically all such cases will respond as well as their intelligence and other abilities will permit" (Burt and Lewis, "Teaching backward readers", 1946)
- ▶ Millfield, Somerset (right), first British school to assist a child with word blindness – Martin Attlee in 1942



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## 2c. Early C20<sup>th</sup> - Samuel T. Orton and his mobile clinic

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- ▶ First half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – British interest plateaued, but elsewhere expanded, e.g. Denmark and esp. US
- ▶ “One issue not infrequently raised by parents of these children is that of what their reaction should be toward the excessive awkwardness which leads to spilled food at table, upset milk glasses, etc. It often helps the parent to understand that this condition may be a real disability and not merely excessive carelessness. Obviously, punishment or scolding for such accidents is not just nor does it seem to be efficacious since too much attention paid to the mishaps may increase the difficulty... Possibly the best attitude for parents to adopt is that of tolerant amusement toward each episode but with careful observation of the faulty movements, looking toward sympathetic instruction for their correction” (Orton, *Reading, writing and speech problems in children*, 1937)



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## 3a. Modern dyslexia - Word Blind Centre for Dyslexic Children (1963-72)

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- ▶ Opened by Princess Margaret in Coram's Fields, Bloomsbury (right)
- ▶ Research interest in Britain coalescing, with international connections
- ▶ Founded by the Invalid Children's Aid Association (ICAA)
- ▶ Committee members: Macdonald Critchley, Patrick Meredith, Tim Miles, Maisie Holt, Oliver Zangwill
- ▶ Chairman: Alfred White Franklin (1905-84) (to Princess Margaret's left), who was also chair of the ICAA, first president of British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (BASPCAN)
- ▶ First director, Alex Bannatyne; later, Sandhya Naidoo, who served until its closure



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## 3b. Modern dyslexia - Word Blind Centre and class

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- ▶ “The distribution of State and private schools in each group is similar, so that this sample provides no evidence that boys in private schools are more liable to specific reading or specific reading or specific spelling problems than boys attending State schools” (Sandhya Naidoo, *Specific dyslexia*, 1972)
- ▶ Privately funded students, but not only: late 1964, West Sussex County Council funded place at the Centre, other LEAs later
- ▶ Example of student record: “Father can’t read & mother is apt to pin all the blame of children’s backwardness onto Dad. Mother is resentful of any suggestion that her children are not normal. With an I.Q. of about 94, I feel that something other than low intelligence is preventing him from reading”

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## 3c. Modern dyslexia - Word Blind Centre and lobbying

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- ▶ Word Blind Centre: Alfred White Franklin (left), Macdonald Critchley, Patrick Meredith
- ▶ Ministry of Education: Dr JN Horne (Medical Officer), author of report on reading delay tentative about dyslexia, 1962
- ▶ White Franklin to Horne – “He [Horne] does not appear to mention word-blindness, specific dyslexia or developmental dyslexia except to say that the [full report] aimed at determining whether the condition existed. Am I to understand that he is still sitting on the fence?”
- ▶ Horne to White Franklin – “It is quite correct to understand that I am still “sitting on the fence”, for this survey is not yet complete. Surely it is logical to conclude before reaching conclusions... In the course of this survey, have been surprised at the depth of feeling expressed about some of the terms”

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### 3d. Modern dyslexia - Expanding community (~1970s)

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- ▶ Advocacy/support organisations, e.g. British Dyslexia Association (1972)
- ▶ Teaching centres, e.g. Helen Arkell Dyslexia Centre (1971), Word Blind Clinic (1971), Dyslexia Institute (1972)
- ▶ Research centres: Aston University (Margaret Newton), Bangor Dyslexia Unit (Tim and Elaine Miles), Barts Dyslexia Clinic, *inter alia*
- ▶ Specialist schools, including Fairley House (1982), East Court (1983), Mark College (1986)
- ▶ *Clockwise from top left: Helen Arkell, Marion Welchman, Margaret Newton, Bevé Hornsby*



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### 3e. Modern dyslexia - Warnock Report on SEN (1978)

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- ▶ Mary Warnock (right), "The hostility in the Department [of Education and Science] of this concept was manifested by the instruction we were given when we were set up at the beginning of '74 when I was summoned by the person... who was responsible for the committee... He said, 'You should not suggest that there is a special category of learning difficulty called dyslexia'" (Interview for UKDA, 2013)
- ▶ "One of the things we were forbidden [by Thatcher] to mention was, dyslexia because that was thought to be a middle class invention" (Testimony to Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2005)
- ▶ Following decade, governments used Warnock's reticence to group children to stall parliamentary questions about dyslexia, e.g. that they did not recognise the category 'dyslexic children'



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### 3f. Modern dyslexia - Celebrities and public knowledge

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- ▶ Susan Hampshire (left), actress, former President of the British Dyslexia Association
- ▶ Discovered her dyslexia after meeting with Word Blind Centre staff; her son's physician was Alfred White Franklin
- ▶ “[Hampshire] decided to be very involved and stand up and be counted, and worked probably three or four days a week [primarily, for the BDA and the Dyslexia Institute]... talking about it [dyslexia], going on the radio, visiting schools or whatever... That was a labour of love. I was doing it to raise money for dyslexia, it wasn't my personal profit. It didn't raise huge quantities, but it raised a lot in those days to help.” (Interview for UKDA, 2017)

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### 3g. Modern dyslexia - Recognition in parliament

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- ▶ 1987 – Dyslexia provision discussed in House of Commons
- ▶ Conventionally, considered the moment of formal recognition
- ▶ “I open my response to this short but important debate by trying to dispel a myth – that the Department of Education and Science and its Ministers do not recognise dyslexia as a problem. The Government recognise dyslexia and recognise the importance to the education progress of dyslexic children, their long-term welfare and successful-function in adult life, that they should have their needs identified at an early stage. Once the assessment has been made... the appropriate treatment should be forthcoming.” (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, Robert Dunn MP [right])



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### 3h. Modern dyslexia – Further political recognition (1997-)

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- ▶ 1997-2001 - “We were in a quite powerful position. We’d got a massive majority, the commitment of the Prime Minister, someone [Blunkett, left] who himself had been to a special school with at least two sons who’d experienced this particular specific educational need [dyslexia], a very understanding ministerial team, and we’d got Michael Barber heading the standards unit – so it was quite formidable for people to take it head on” (Interview for UKDA, 2017)
- ▶ 2009 – Dyslexia consensus definition in Rose report, prepared at the request of the Brown govt.
- ▶ 2010 – Dyslexia protections in the 2010 UK Equality Act
- ▶ But, retrenchment in recent years; ongoing ‘dyslexia debate’

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### 4. Dyslexia’s history, today

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- ▶ Need for a new consensus definition...
  - ▶ “The word has frequently been used by writers loosely with different meanings attached to it and therefore it has been frequently misleading” (Hinshelwood, 1896)
  - ▶ “Clearly there are very significant differences in the ways in which this label is operationalized, even by leading scholars in the field” (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014)
- ▶ Role of dyslexia’s social history in issues today, e.g.
  - ▶ Worried parents
  - ▶ ‘Middle-class myth’ (right)
  - ▶ Metropolitan disease
- ▶ But, substantial grounds for optimism...



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