A TALE OF TWO DEPARTMENTS? OXFORD AND THE LSE

Introduction

All disciplines have founding legends and hero figures. Social anthropology is no exception. Foremost amongst these was the brilliant young Polish émigré Bronislaw Malinowski, appointed to a lectureship at the LSE in 1923, on the basis of the 'ethnographic magic' he spun in the Trobriand Islands (Stocking 1992). He continues to rule pre-eminent over histories of the discipline, perhaps because of the romantic mystique surrounding the emergence of a new style of social research – the ethnographic method – from a South Pacific island.

An exhaustive and comprehensive biography of Malinowski's early life has now been published (Young 2004), and the second volume is on the way. Can any more usefully be said about the 'archetypal moment' of Malinowski's fieldwork, or his powerful influence over subsequent generations of anthropological researchers, commentators and critics? The histories have pointed to his penchant for self-publicity and the self-aggrandising way in which he designated himself as the founder of 'functional school of anthropology'. Still the lustre remains. So why start yet another history of social anthropology with Malinowski?

I do so in order to offer a different perspective on his success. My focus is less on Malinowski's tent in Mailu than on his office and seminar rooms at the London School of Economics (LSE). It was from here that he won the funding and support that underpinned his vision

for the discipline. Rather than attributing everything to individual intellectual bravado, credit is also due to the institution that allowed him to pursue his own iconoclastic manifesto.

In this chapter we also meet another key member of our cast – A. Reginald Radcliffe-Brown. He escaped from a very different social background – that of a poor Birmingham family – through a grammar school education and a scholarship to Cambridge. His role as the discipline's arch-theoretician and Malinowski's rival and alter-ego adds to the overall dramatic effect.

Rather than sizing up their egos and intellectual legacies, in this chapter I compare their places of work – the intellectual worlds enclosed within LSE's 'rabbit warren' of buildings and Oxford's cloistered common rooms. The comparison may sound humdrum, but is surprisingly revealing. At a time when Oxford, Cambridge and University College London were the only universities with active programmes of research in anthropology, LSE could afford to define itself differently. Malinowski's experience of the LSE was of a somewhat chaotic, left-leaning and freethinking intellectual milieu (Dahrendorf 1995). This was in marked contrast to the hushed conservatism of Oxford that frustrated Radcliffe-Brown on his appointment to his professorship and All Souls fellowship in 1936. I set the scene for the book by describing how the institutional and academic cultures of the two universities shaped the fortunes of the two protagonists.

Anthropology in the 1920s

Any new initiate of 'British' social anthropology is soon introduced to the classic ethnographic works of E.E. Evans-Pritchard. His tutor, Ranulph Marett, a classicist and Reader in Social Anthropology at Oxford since 1905, regarded him as one of the most promising undergraduates to come through what he called his 'Exeter nursery'. With a semi-aristocratic background in a clerical family, and a public-school education at Winchester, he seemed destined to inherit Marett's mantle.

Yet in 1924 Evans-Pritchard caused a stir by leaving Oxford to commence graduate studies at the LSE. He began there the same year as Raymond Firth, a young New Zealand research student who became Malinowski's most prominent, and loyal, student. Almost 75 years later, Firth still recalled Evans-Pritchard's telling comment: 'Raymond, you have no idea what it meant leaving Oxford to come to the LSE.' Firth remembered that 'Marett was horrified. The idea that

an Oxford man should leave Oxford in order to come to LSE was almost inconceivable.'

So what was the appeal of the LSE for Evans-Pritchard? Perhaps its main attraction was precisely that it wasn't Oxford. In comparison with Oxford's conservative intellectual environment, the Fabian-inspired School, housed in a muddle of streets off the new Kingsway thoroughfare, was progressive, well connected, and dedicated to the social sciences. For Firth, 'EP came to the LSE rather than to Malinowski'.[1] Yet he can hardly have failed to notice the dynamic and cosmopolitan atmosphere around Malinowski's research seminar.

There were also reasons for Evans-Pritchard to leave Oxford. There was little dynamism at either Oxford or Cambridge in the decades after the First World War. Stocking describes social anthropology as having only a 'precariously marginal existence' in 'a conservative and socially arrogant institutional culture' (Stocking 1996). There was a self-described 'triumvirate with equal powers' who between them were responsible for all teaching in anthropology at Oxford for thirty years. Ranulph Marett taught social anthropology, Henry Balfour prehistory and material culture, and Arthur Thompson physical anthropology. They sometimes referred to themselves as the 'Trinity', and saw their three subjects as 'on a par'. Research was not a priority, given their multiple responsibilities of curating, demonstrating, and teaching colonial probationers. Marett had extra administrative responsibilities, becoming Rector of Exeter College in 1928. He also had a golf handicap to maintain, heading to the Cowley golf course at lunchtimes (Marett 1941).

After an attempt at the turn of the century to include undergraduate anthropology courses within the 'natural science' honours school (the Oxford undergraduate degree) had been rebuffed, anthropology remained a diploma course. A subsequent attempt in 1910 by the Committee for Anthropology to appoint a permanent 'Professorship of Anthropology' revealed their vision for a cohesive disciplinary identity. They defined the putative professor's duties as 'to link together and harmonise the various branches of its study'. Without this synthesising function, it was feared that 'undue specialisation should assert itself, to the prejudice of Anthropology as a whole'. They need not have worried. Even though no professorship was created, it took a further twenty-five years before social anthropology finally dominated the other sub-fields.

Malinowski at the LSE

The London School of Economics could not have been more different. The idea of a new school of economics was first floated as an idea in August 1894 at a now famous breakfast discussion – about the best use of a Fabian supporter's legacy – between Sidney and Beatrice Webb and George Bernard Shaw. It became a reality, with more than 200 students studying political economy, only fourteen months later. Founded at high speed, its fortunes prospered with state funding, and it soon established its own characteristic intellectual culture and pedagogic style.

Bronislaw Malinowski was a doctoral student at the LSE from 1910 to 1914, and rapidly became the protégé of Charles Seligman – the first Professor of Ethnology at the University of London, based at the LSE. Malinowski's subsequent appointment in 1921 as first lecturer and then reader was unsurprising. It was personally engineered by the LSE's mercurial, far-sighted and often despised director, William Beveridge. Firth felt that 'not many institutions would have accepted Malinowski as a Reader, and it was this freedom in the social field of the LSE which led to his appointment'.[2] Harold Wilson famously described Beveridge as 'probably the greatest administrative genius of this country, but almost certainly the worst administrator' (quoted in Harris 1997, 11). Beveridge's intimate personal relationship with the School administrator Jessica Mair (Lucy Mair's stepmother) was also key, even if did challenge even Bloomsbury's social mores.

In his 19 years at LSE, Beveridge transformed a small institute that Sidney and Beatrice Webb had apparently told him 'would run itself' into the largest centre for the study of social sciences in Britain. But his dislike of formal administrative cultures meant that he conducted business in a highly personal fashion, leaving it with a governance structure that a subsequent director described as 'bewildering' (Dahrendorf 1995, 179). There were no formal departmental administrative structures at the LSE until the 1960s, and strong disciplinary loyalties coexisted within a congenial senior common room where academics 'met and felt part of a single-faculty school' (ibid., 209).

Bronislaw Malinowski's mythologised role as the 'Joseph Conrad' of social anthropology is well known and has been carefully dissected, most notably by George Stocking (1992, 1996). By the time of his appointment as reader, he had published his influential *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Malinowski 1922), and was developing an increasingly cosmopolitan network of followers. But there was more to his teaching than the much-admired research seminar. Trained at the ancient universities of Cracow and Leipzig, the Humboldtian idea of a research-led model of academic practice would have been familiar to him. One of

the reasons for Malinowski's close alliance with William Beveridge was their shared belief in the importance of a more scientific approach to the social sciences.

On his appointment, Malinowski was at first keen to please. He working closely with his mentor, Professor Charles Seligman, a one-time medical doctor who had become interested in anthropology during an expedition to the Torres Straits, and been appointed to the chair in 1913. Their relationship was sometimes stormy, but Seligman was like an 'elder brother' to Malinowski, and they were united by a 'collegial bond of suffering' (Young 2004, 161) from a variety of physical ailments.

On his appointment Malinowski offered to lead a course in the methods and aims of anthropological fieldwork, only to be reassured that he was already doing more than enough teaching. He spent his first years building relationships both with influential missionaries like Joseph Oldham and Edwin Smith (see Smith 1934), but also with philanthropic institutions like the Rockefeller Foundation. This resulted in a major grant for the International African Institute for Languages and Cultures (later the International African Institute) that Edwin Smith had helped set up (see Richards 1944). The award complemented other grants that the LSE had received from Rockefeller. Malinowski was not one to hide his achievements, and, in a letter to the School Secretary in 1929, pointed out that this 'new approach' of functional anthropology 'lends itself more readily to the practical application of anthropology in colonial affairs'. Malinowski's success at winning over the LSE to his vision for anthropology depended on garnering research grants. He had a talent for convincing others of anthropology's direct utility, and getting them to fund academic research on that basis.

Given their very different temperaments, Malinowski found working under Seligman increasingly difficult. Right from the start he declared himself interested in 'advanced teaching', leaving Seligman to teach general undergraduate courses in ethnology and technology. In 1930, Malinowski wrote to Jessica Mair stating his belief 'that post-graduate work is of the greatest importance in a new science still in a process of formation, as Anthropology is, especially its social or cultural side'.[3] Indeed, he was disparaging about delivering 'elementary training' to amateurs (in 1932 he had only one taught masters student), feeling that it was a distraction from the research work that is 'essential'. As a result, his lectures (read seminars) had 'reached an advanced level', to the extent that he refused to be tied to formal course titles. Raymond Firth recalled how Malinowski in 1933 'was using the seminar as a vehicle for Coral Gardens ... Each term the school issued a list of

lectures, and a long reading list, but in fact it usually turned out to be Malinowski's seminar.'

One of the myths that has been perpetuated within anthropology is that its early students received very little training, and that this, paradoxically, contributed to their success. Kuper's suggestion that there was 'no formal teaching' (Kuper 1996a, 66) at the LSE is contradicted by Malinowski's own view of what he was doing. Malinowski laid great store by the formal scientific training and socialisation he offered to his students, to the extent of even preparing a written programme of research training. As well as seminars on field methods and carefully structured (and transcribed) graduate seminars, he insisted that all students submit written plans for their field research, and these were carefully vetted and discussed. His letters to the LSE Secretary go into teaching and training arrangements in great detail: 'Every time a student of mine has been going into the field, I have arranged a series of seminars on methods of field work, in which the protagonist and several of the older research students have participated. I gave such seminars to Raymond Firth, Edward Evans-Pritchard, and Hortense Powdermaker.' In 1932, with a growing set of students, he also asked all his students to prepare a thorough fieldwork proposal, asking them to detail the particular issues they wished to explore. Insisting that 'all empirical observations must have the backing of a theory', he offered to provide for them a special course on the 'functional analysis of culture in relation to the technique of fieldwork'.[4]

Malinowski was highly strategic in his use of the Rockefeller grant. Of the thirteen IAI fellowships awarded in 1931–2, all were his students. He also employed a number of returning students as research assistants. In one report he acknowledged how his first assistant, Raymond Firth, had since produced a valuable book, and another, Isaac Schapera, a good thesis, 'so that the other aim of a research assistantship, the training of assistants, is yielding also, I think, good results'. If his approach to fieldwork was novel, so too was this explicit focus on training social researchers. In his reports to the foundation, Malinowski repeatedly emphasised the importance of the 'special training which they received' for their subsequent development, describing their role in leading seminar discussions as the 'supreme form of academic teaching which consists in mental cross-fertilisation'.

Malinowski's students have written about 'his real love of teaching' (Firth 1957) and his captivating 'Socratic' teaching style. He was, by all accounts, dedicated to his students, and in his obituary Audrey Richards described how:

> the sheer intensity of his work was probably the strongest impression he
> made on students ... He gave his time generously to students and demanded
> theirs in return. Students worked at any problem in which he was at that
> moment intensely absorbed ... They might be irritated by his intolerance, or
> inspired by his enthusiasm. They were never bored. (Richards 1943, 3)

Seminar discussions were often led by his senior students like Meyer
Fortes and Siegfried Nadel. Malinowski called them the 'mandarins',
because they had done degrees in other fields before coming to the
LSE. Meyer Fortes had come from Cape Town in 1926 to do a PhD in
Psychology and to work on the causes of juvenile delinquency in the
East End of London. Siegfried Nadel from Vienna where he had done a
doctorate in Psychology and Philosophy.

In 1933 Malinowski wrote to his wife at the start of the new
academic year: 'I got a new batch of mandarins – some of them quite
nice. The class promises to be almost as good and as numerous as last
year' (Wayne 1995, 180). Recording everyone's addresses, Malinowski
would start by carefully dividing his students into two groups.
Discussions were regularly transcribed, and the transcriptions show
that his students played a vital role in expounding and developing
Malinowski's theoretical positions to others. These transcripts, curt
summaries of the debates, served as a resource for students and for
Malinowski's own theoretical work.

Charisma and Conflict

Not everyone shared Malinowski's perspective or liked the
psychodynamics of the seminar. Meyer Fortes, never fully converted to
Malinowski's brand of seamless and over-programmatic functionalism,
described how his 'catalytic virtuosity kept the seminar at a high pitch'
(Firth 1978, 5). Malinowski was of course a skilful rhetorician, so one
has to take his own correspondence about his teaching with a pinch of
salt. If he praised them in writing, Fortes felt that he sometimes treated
his students in his seminar 'abominably' (ibid., 19). As Stocking put it,
'if he did not demand discipleship, he did demand allegiance' (1996,
403). On a number of occasions Malinowski scolds his students for
being difficult, for missing seminars or for disagreeing with him. One
letter to Paul Kirchoff, a student and leftist activist, stands out:

> there is extremely little chance of any fruitful collaboration between you
> and me ... on the one hand a pupil ought to choose those teachers with
> whose method he feels himself to be in sympathy, and on the other hand, I
> shall not be able to recommend for field-work somebody whose point of
> view I do not understand.[5]

A subsequent letter to Kirchoff ended 'It is really a question of whether I am going to believe you that you have done all to make yourself familiar with my point of view or not.'

Edward Evans-Pritchard had also been at the receiving end of Malinowski's scorn. In 1928, Evans-Pritchard, then a young researcher in Sudan, wrote a beseeching and disingenuous letter to his former teacher. 'EP', as he styled himself, had fallen out 'very deeply' with Malinowski 'sometime around 1925'.[6] Despite this, he still needed the latter's support. He put pressure on Malinowski to publish his paper comparing Trobriand and Azande magic. 'If it is ever to be published it must be published _now_ ...,' he writes. 'After all the nice things you say I shall feel very disappointed if when I return home I find the publication is as far off as ever.' In return he seeks to ingratiate himself with Malinowski, sending an extensive set of notes from his fieldwork on taboos. In the final paragraph he also piles on the flattery, reaffirming his loyalty to Malinowski, as against any commitment he might have had to A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (who at this point had not added the Radcliffe to his name):

> as you say when I wrote it I stood very much where Brown stands. Since my further experience I have moved very considerably from this position. I don't want to flatter you but quite sincerely I think that I was standing where Brown stood because my field-work was on Brown's level. I now think that I have had better field-work experience than Brown and move more from his position.[7]

He goes on to capture this intellectual evolution in diagrammatic form. He draws an arrow from his own name vertically up to Brown, and then further on to Malinowski. On reading the letter, Malinowski adds a self-mocking scribble of his own, perhaps signalling his own dislike for Evans-Pritchard. Next to his name, he adds 'God's view – only a very short distance'. The diagram is a cryptic affair, but captures the tight nexus of rivalry, patronage and competitiveness amongst a group whom Firth later referred to as 'a band of brothers'. Evans-Pritchard's antipathy for Malinowski became well known, and he used to regularly recall that, when he had asked Malinowski for advice on fieldwork, he had been told simply to 'not be a bloody fool'.

Malinowski's relationship with Seligman also turned sour as the former's reputation grew, especially after his appointment as professor in 1927. This conflict came to a head when in 1931 Charles Seligman appointed an archaeologist from University College London over Malinowski to chair the 'University Board of Studies'. It was a snub that Malinowski found particularly hurtful given his dislike of his rival Grafton Elliot-Smith's 'ill-will and boorishness'.[8] Elliot-Smith was

professor at UCL, and championed the rival 'diffusionist' theoretical
school that Malinowski saw as a threat to his own influence.

But there were other reasons for this antipathy. As well as
Seligman's dislike of Malinowski's 'semi-popular propaganda work'
and 'frequent railing against your colleagues', a recurring tension was
the loyalties of their respective research students. One of the
increasingly vituperative letters written by Malinowski to Seligman in
1931 revealed the reasons behind Evans-Pritchard's 1925 'break'
with Malinowski. The latter declared himself 'deeply convinced' that
Evans-Pritchard, like Audrey Richards and Raymond Firth, ought to
do a theoretical thesis before fieldwork, but Seligman had given him
'advice diametrically opposite to this'. When Evans-Pritchard 'felt
inclined to accept your advice' and 'decided to specialise on the Sudan
and to write a thesis on his field work, and not on a theoretical subject,
I also asked him to register with you'. Malinowski went on to explain
that he had then resigned from supervising him, and not subsequently
advised him 'on a single point of his plans or his work'.[9] The
beseeching letter Evans-Pritchard had sent from Sudan is likely to have
further antagonised Malinowski. Their rivalry never ceased. Later
Audrey Richards would send Malinowski regular letters detailing her
'eaves-dropping among the enemy', and describing how Evans-
Pritchard and Paul Driberg were openly blaming Malinowski for
forcing them out of the LSE and the International African Institute.[10]

Part of the issue was the supposedly cooperative but actually
competitive relationship between the different colleges of the
university. This was aggravated by the presence of the 'children of the
sun' (as Elliot-Smith and his 'school' of diffusionist thinking at UCL
were pejoratively described). At one point, more students were
attending UCL seminars than those at LSE (Stocking 1984, 10), and
Malinowski felt deeply threatened by this. Seligman felt that a broad
introduction to anthropology ought to be offered to LSE students in
order to attract students who might otherwise go to University College,
whilst Malinowski's view was that the colleges should go their own
ways and not seek to collaborate over the courses offered. He saw this
as a way of avoiding duplication, and relieving the LSE – and himself
– of undergraduate teaching obligations.

Relations between Seligman and Malinowski worsened further
when the former pushed for a ruling that all Ph.D. students should do
a year of general training in 'the foundation of the science (Physical
Anthropology, Prehistory and Simple Technology) before being
allowed to take a higher degree in one of its branches'. Seligman felt 'it
is a great mistake to allow a man to take a Ph.D. in Anthropology who
is in fact only studying one branch of Anthropology'. Of course,
Malinowski disagreed – many of those who attended his seminar had

very little prior training, and indeed he had inserted a clause in the regulations that 'prior knowledge of native situations' could be counted (which is how Jomo Kenyatta became a student). Malinowski immediately ensured that he had the LSE administration on his side. The LSE registrar obligingly confirmed that requiring postgraduates to 'attend Undergraduate courses in anthropology and pass a qualifying exam' would be a 'retrograde step', and that the ideal state 'is freedom from restriction by unnecessary University regulations'.[11] Malinowski dealt with the issue by simply not turning up to the relevant committee meetings; his presence as convener was vital in order to make a ruling on the matter. In 1933 Seligman retired in ill health, and, despite his further efforts to influence the teaching covered at the school, Malinowski now had free rein over the development of the subject.

Malinowski's close working relationship with the School secretary, Jessica Mair, proved invaluable. Malinowski regularly wrote to her about his bodily afflictions, a seemingly integral part of his creative persona. One time he wrote asking that he be let off the first week of lectures because of the 'grippe that inevitably greets my arrival in London'. Another time he retreated, with the director's agreement, to Champneys health farm for three weeks, coming in only for his seminars. In 1931, using Radcliffe-Brown's apparent threat to transfer anthropology from LSE to the School of Oriental Studies, he suggested to Jessica Mair that 'if we can present the sociological world with a fait accompli of a supremely strong anthropology department at LSE we are out of danger'. She advised him to approach the director with proposals for a new readership and lectureship. For Seligman, Evans-Pritchard was an obvious candidate, but Malinowski refused point-blank, confiding in the director that he would not like Evans-Pritchard to be 'permanently attached to the teaching staff of the School. It would not be fair to him or to the school. I mean his talents are definitely not in the teaching but in the research line.' Instead, Malinowski managed to convince everyone that Raymond Firth should be tempted back from his Rockefeller Professorship in Sydney. As Malinowski wrote to Jessica Mair, after his strategising had borne fruit: 'EP who would have been foisted on us, as you know, had we not anticipated the move'.[12]

The archives reveal Malinowski's skill at getting his vision of anthropology institutionalised within the LSE, proselytising a style of postgraduate research-led teaching within the LSE and the university at large. He was, however, aware of his effects on people. In a moment of honesty, he admitted to Seligman that having:

> a junior colleague in one's dept with a 'mission' would I am certain be
> extremely annoying to me, especially if I were not in sympathy with this

mission. I sometimes imagine that you must think of me as I do of Elliot-Smith, that is, as a perambulating compound of megalomania, monomania and self-seeking – and a bee or two in my bonnet.[13]

Michael Polanyi's (1958) emphasis on the unconscious and tacit ways in which craft skills are passed from master to pupil has been an influential explanation of the process of disciplinary training and reproduction within the academy. But some historians of science now argue that intellectual and methodological precepts need to be articulated before they can be embodied in practice, and that being explicit is equally important to imitation and socialisation (Olesko 1993). This seems to be a better explanation of Malinowski's style. Academic jockeying and politicking necessitated incessant self-promotion, even if Malinowski was able to mock his own shortcomings.

Anthropology in 1930s Oxford

Back in 1930s Oxford, there is a similar struggle for influence and control. After many years of equilibrium, Ranulph Marett began to plan for his own succession and to reinvigorate the teaching of Oxford anthropology. One reason was chronological, or, as Marett phrased it in a letter in 1933, 'we must be putting our house in order, since the present teachers are all getting rather old'. But there was also a growing jealousy of Malinowski's success at attracting grants and the best students from Oxford and Cambridge. So Marett with his classics colleague John Myres began planning an approach to the university for a new professorship, collecting statistics about the salaries physical and social anthropology faculty at Cambridge and LSE. By this stage, Marett no longer felt he had to argue for treating all aspects of the field equally. As he put it in a letter to Hodson at Cambridge, 'If we made a full professorship out of it, I should myself of course like to see the Social Anthropology made the main subject.'[14] Marett was philosophical about the chances 'to do something more for the subject', recognising that as the university was 'completely broke, I doubt if anything will come out of it'.

But Henry Balfour soon got wind of the plans for the new Professorship. Writing only a month after Marett and Myres had met, Balfour voiced his concern about the 'undesirable' suggestion that 'anthropology should be dominated by one of its sections ... against the original scheme' and that the 'independent boosting of one branch has reacted unfavourably upon the others'.[15] However, he did add his name to a memorandum that proposed the appointment of a Professor in Social Anthropology, advocating the provision for an undergraduate

degree in the subject, and the need for adequate teaching premises. The proposal was accompanied by a list of 'distinguished ex-students', and compared Oxford's spending on the subject (£1,150 a year) with that of London (£2,750). What was the university's reaction? After establishing a further subcommittee to consider the matter, the Hebdomadal Council finally declared itself unable to help, but stated that the request would be included amongst the 'urgent needs' to be submitted to the national University Grants Committee (UGC).[16]

Aware of LSE's success at fund-raising, Hebdomadal Council also decided to create yet another committee to approach the 'Rockefeller trustees or other benefactors for funds for the development of social studies in Oxford' and asked the anthropologists for an account of the 'work which is now done and suggestions for its development'. At this point the social sciences were greatly outnumbered by the Arts faculties, who between them taught 80 per cent of Oxford's students. This was the green light for Marett and Myres to put together a series of elaborate building and staffing plans for the development of anthropology. They proposed a whole new Faculty of Human Sciences, with its own Institute bringing together included the sub-faculties of geography, anthropology and economics. It was yet another political fudge, full of references to the importance of studying the 'dynamic process of Man's physical and mental evolution' in order to appease Balfour. Even the specific request for a Professorship in Social Anthropology was hidden in the section on 'Accomodation and Equipment'. In order to keep the rest of the committee on board, Myres and Marett had been forced to push the case for a broad definition of the subject. Their proposal was finally completed in the autumn of 1934. But by then Rockefeller had decided to terminate its funding of anthropology programmes, faced with a huge drop in income caused by the world recession (Stocking 1996).

Oxford's elite All Souls College stepped in to fill the gap. After it promised to fund and host a new University Chair in Social Anthropology in 1935, the University's Hebdomadal Council finally approved its creation. Still wary of over-specialisation, the Council had suggested that the 'title of Chairs should be as wide as possible' and proposed that the Chair should simply be titled 'Professor in Anthropology'.[17] Again, the Committee for Anthropology went to some length to explain the subtle but important distinctions between the different branches of anthropology, making the case that 'social anthropology is no more limiting a phrase than Colonial history, International Law, International Relations and so on'.[18] The politics behind the All Souls decision to fund anthropology are explored by Davis (2007).

Marett could afford to be magnanimous in victory. Writing to Balfour on his impending retirement, he praises him for being the only one of the 'three men in a boat' surviving to 'manage the tiller'.[19] Balfour's one consolation was that he was made Professor in Ethnology in 1935, despite the protestations of the Anthropology Committee that the title was a misnomer.

Anthropology as an Oxford Honours School?

Radcliffe-Brown was appointed to the Oxford professorship in July 1936. There were more than a dozen candidates, including, by his own account, E.E. Evans-Pritchard. One of the members of the appointment panel, the historian Reginald Coupland, also invited Malinowski to apply for the post. Malinowski ruled himself out of the race, explaining that he had 'a very real debt of gratitude towards the School of Economics and the University of London' and 'that I would not like to sever my connection with this institution which has assisted me so generously and effectively in developing social anthropology in this country'. Instead he proposed Radcliffe-Brown as 'by far the most suitable from every point of view', proclaiming his 'genius' at organising departments as much as his theoretical contributions. Coupland responded by expressing disappointment that they 'must be content with second best', but expressing the hope that Radcliffe-Brown would indeed actually apply for the post, as 'the electors might not think R-B's claims so outstanding as to set all our candidates aside and issue an invitation which might be refused'.[20] Marcel Mauss was one of Radcliffe-Brown's referees. Whilst Mauss complained about Malinowski's 'despotism' in his letters to Radcliffe Brown, he too was less than fulsome in his praise of Radcliffe-Brown's theoretical achievements.[21]

Much has been made of the public rivalry and seeming enmity between the two champions of the new school of anthropology. Radcliffe-Brown's letters show a different dimension to this relationship, as he repeatedly sought to flatter Malinowski, asking him for advice and support, and even sharing confidences about his chest problems. Back in 1929, whilst in Sydney, Radcliffe-Brown had confessed to Malinowski that 'the trouble about Anthropology is its name'. He went on to bemoan the inclusion of physical anthropology and prehistoric archaeology in a 'conventional curriculum', and wished 'never to have to teach either physical anthropology or archaeology again'. In a moment of candour, he proposed that 'you and I and anybody else who will help us ought to build up the new sociology or anthropology that is needed', preferably in Oxford,

because 'Cambridge does not suit my health'. He even felt Oxford was
a risk for his chest, but a risk that would be worth it 'if I was free to
treat the subject in my own way and not be required to lecture on the
"Races of Man" etc.'. The letter ended with a further bout of flattery –
'I should greatly like to be working near you and co-operating more
closely.' So it came to pass. Whatever Malinowski thought of his
protagonist, his intervention with regard to the Oxford post was
influential, and Radcliffe-Brown was, on paper at least, grateful.[22]

Radcliffe-Brown finally arrived in Oxford a year later in October
1937, but had already begun to develop his vision for a more
specialised research-led field. Contacting the influential classicist John
Myres after his appointment, he wrote to express his appreciation at
being 'called to become your junior colleague in the oldest school of
anthropology in the British Empire', and seeking his advice over the
'further development of social anthropology at Oxford'.[23] Whilst
Malinowski had left for the USA by this point, his success at getting his
style of social anthropology institutionalised within the LSE over the
1920s and 1930s would have been closely watched by Radcliffe-
Brown. Yet far-reaching pedagogic reforms were much less simple
within the Oxford system.

Like others before him, Radcliffe-Brown was attracted to the idea of
a final honours school in anthropology, with candidates being
'permitted to specialise to a limited extent' within one of the four fields.
Before his arrival, he wrote to his colleagues about his ideas. But any
proposal he drew up had to be vetted by the Committee for
Anthropology, which still included Ranulph Marett, the ethnologist
Henry Balfour, Leonard Buxton and the biological anthropologist
Professor le Gros Clark. At first, they were in agreement, and in
Radcliffe-Brown's absence, they prepared a fuller specification for the
degree, which included a comparison with the London and Cambridge
degrees, and the numbers of students they attracted. But they also put
their own spin on the proposal, concluding that the proposed
recommendation should be for an Honours School based 'on a
combined study of Race, Culture and Evolution in their combined
bearing on the evolution of society'. The committee took the view that
the combination 'has hitherto worked so well that there is no reason to
depart from it'. They concluded that the honours school should retain
the principle of the present diploma and 'be on a broad educational
basis'. They decided to await the reply of the new professor before
submitting the new statute.[24]

This was hardly what Radcliffe-Brown had in mind. But as he only
arrived in Oxford in October 1937, he had not had the time to convince
the committee members of his vision. Whilst they were all for a final
honours school, they each had rather different views about its contents.

The institutional constraints on introducing an undergraduate honours degree became clearer at a meeting he had held with the university registrar in March 1939 to seek support for his vision. The registrar, Douglas Veale, in a subsequent briefing note to the vice chancellor, reported that Radcliffe-Brown had announced that 'unless he could develop a school of anthropology, preferably an undergraduate school ... a real cultural school, he would much rather go away'. He named his price – £600 a year. Veale retorted that the only way to find this sum was to save it elsewhere, asking whether 'there was any need for a reader in Physical Anthropology at £550 a year'. Radcliffe-Brown agreed wholeheartedly, saying that 'people had been measuring skulls for 60 years without producing a single result of real scientific importance', and that money for the development of social anthropology could best be obtained by retitling the Readership in Physical Anthropology. He also pointed out that Nuffield College was keen to draw on anthropological expertise in developing its colonial studies provision.[25]

But Veale was not convinced, and asked about the competition for undergraduate students with Cambridge (which had sixty students at this point) and London, as the 'total number of undergraduate students is fairly strictly limited'. Veale then wrote to the Vice Chancellor noting that it was 'unlikely that Anthropology will ever become a school like Greats, Modern History or English Literature, which will be taken merely as an intellectual discipline by people who intend to follow careers for which special knowledge is not required'. He concluded that 'the time has arrived when we ought to concentrate on what we are doing well', leaving Cambridge to 'develop social anthropology without competition from us'.[26]

Radcliffe-Brown was not totally alone in this fight. Evans-Pritchard had accompanied him on his visit to the registrar, having been appointed to a Research Lectureship in African Sociology in 1935. In 1939 he was joined by Fortes, who also held a research lectureship for two years, and by Max Gluckman, before he left to take up a post at the Rhodes Livingstone Institute in September of that year. This small coterie met regularly with Radcliffe-Brown, both in the latter's rooms at All Souls and in various north Oxford public houses. Radcliffe-Brown dominated, and continued to cast an intellectual spell over their debates. As Evans-Pritchard later recalls, it was these discussions over 'system' and 'structure', later reiterated in the 1940 RAI presidential address 'On Social Structure', that formed the analytical underpinnings of *African Political Systems* (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940) and *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950). But the relationship between 'master' and 'student' was not straightforward, given Evans-Pritchard's own charismatic personality,

and the fact that, by some accounts, he had come a close second to Radcliffe-Brown in the 1936 election.

Next Radcliffe-Brown began to push for a one-year diploma that specialised in social anthropology, seeing this as a quicker route of reform. Part of his case was the necessity to make 'better provision for an important class of colonial officials who wish to study social anthropology, but who have not the time at their disposal for the full diploma course'. No revision of the diploma regulations had been made since 1905, despite the developments in the field, which Radcliffe-Brown saw as playing in his favour. His proposal was to have a general one-term introductory course, allowing admission into a two-term specialisation for 'advanced work' in either social anthropology, physical anthropology or technology.[27]

The proposal, like Radcliffe-Brown's other initiatives, was controversial. The General Board of Faculties – a university-wide committee – was not inclined to register three separate diplomas, given the costs of examining and the precedents they would set for other departments to establish their own diplomas. But it was his anthropology colleagues who led the opposition.[28] Offering what amounted to a specialist diploma in social anthropology would mean that 'physical anthropology' and 'primitive technology' would no longer be compulsory, breaking up the long-respected 'trinity' of anthropological teaching at Oxford. Henry Balfour was outraged, and was driven to write one desperate postcard to Professor John Myres, headlined 'This is an SOS', protesting at what he described as the 'extremely one-sided and narrow minded proposal now afoot'. He felt that a one-term general introduction was a 'ludicrous allowance', and would turn out a lot of incompetent 'specialists', with too little general preparation, and not enough within their own field to be of great use.[29]

The question that divided them was simple. Would an application for three specialised diplomas weaken the case for a final honours school that could bring together the different fields? Most saw Radcliffe-Brown's preference for the specialised diploma as working against the longer-term aim of an honours school. During 1938 and 1939, letters and counter-proposals flew backwards and forwards, a phenomenon Penniman described as a 'pamphlet war' as Radcliffe-Brown sought to 'torpedo' the existing diploma. Radcliffe-Brown did not mince his words – he was of the opinion that 'Diploma students are not worth teaching, they do not have the time to do even the minimum of reading.'[30]

Things came to a head when in late 1939 Radcliffe-Brown circulated a damning memo declaring that the standards of the diploma students were embarrassingly low, and that 'both physical and social anthropology suffer very much from persons who know a

little (or think they do) and do not know how little they know'. He felt that it should be made impossible for anyone to 'obtain a diploma in anthropology by spending three terms in picking up a few miscellaneous and disconnected scraps of knowledge about a number of subjects which it is quite impossible to study systematically in that time'.[31]

Penniman took up the debate on behalf of the Pitt-Rivers Museum, tabling a counter- resolution to maintain the existing diploma and to push for a final honours school. Citing Evans-Pritchard's support for the honours school, Penniman pointed out that the diploma had always been intended as an introductory training, and that, whilst it was 'impossible to eliminate entirely the type of student who will not do credit to his training, much can be done in this direction without wrecking the existing diploma'. Penniman felt that if they continued 'tinkering' and 'monkeying' they would be laughed at, and he was loath to accept the 'uncertain schemes of a man who always appears to change his mind halfway through any plan he sponsors'.[32]

Eventually it was left to John Myres to adopt the elder statesman role, smoothing over the tensions with a set of highly complicated new regulations for the diploma that all sides could agree on, meeting several of Radcliffe-Brown's demands along the way. It remained a single diploma, but allowed for increased specialisation in one of the three sub-fields. The final syllabus was not agreed until 1940, by which point the onset of war had made students scarce on the ground.

Radcliffe-Brown was unbowed. In the same provocative vein, he decided to rename the Department of Social Anthropology as an Institute. After getting agreement from the Faculty Board to his proposal in June 1939, he then wrote to the Curators of the University Chest explaining that 'If social anthropology is ever to have any real importance in Oxford it will be because this becomes a centre for research.' He went on to note that 'there may be some chance of appealing for outside financial help' but that it 'would be somewhat easier to appeal for funds for an Institute than for a department'. Its implications would be that 'we intend (or at least hope) to be concerned not only with teaching but also with research'.[33] The following April, long after Radcliffe-Brown had physically changed the sign on the front door, the General Board of the Faculties agreed to the retitling.

The new title was no flight of fancy. Radcliffe-Brown was aware of the Colonial Office's plans for a major Colonial Development and Welfare Act, and wanted to ensure that Oxford was able to benefit from the research funding that Lord Hailey – author of *An African Survey* (1938) and architect of the act – had insisted be part of the programme. In the same year he applied for resources to support a

programme of research training in social anthropology. It was accompanied with another threat, testimony to the frustrations he faced over the final honours school and the specialist diploma. He hinted that if 'the University decides to take no effective part in the development of a subject the importance of which in a colonial empire is being increasingly recognised' it would 'leave serious work in anthropology to Cambridge and London'.[34] It was a vision that he was never to put into place. During the war he took up a Visiting Professorship in Sao Paulo from 1942 to 1944, and afterwards, reaching statutory retirement age, retired to the Welsh hills from where he continued to write until his death in 1955.

Conclusion

Like other historians of modern social anthropology, Kuper (1996) sees Malinowski as the 'founder of the profession of social anthropology in Britain', describing him as its only 'master ethnographer' during his fifteen years at the LSE. Yet Kuper's description of Malinowski's 'mythical charter' for his new discipline and his 'messianic self-image' underplays the role that LSE as an institution played in supporting his meteoric career. The intellectual ferment he created through his famous research seminar depended on the autonomy granted to him by LSE director William Beveridge, as well as on the left-leaning reputation that attracted so many to the LSE during the 1920s and 1930s. The personalised and informal nature of decision-making in the LSE, and the high level of autonomy offered to individuals, made it much more likely that Malinowski's iconoclastic approach to teaching and training could succeed.

This period in anthropology's history mirrors an important shift within the academic culture of British universities at this point. With growing state support for research, anthropologists did not need to subscribe to the Oxbridge vision of 'character-building' undergraduate education, but rather could focus on developing a professional research culture. At an organisational level, this shift required new centralised financial and organisational nous – the universities needed to be able to apply for and manage large philanthropic grants for research. At a personal level, this shift was often achieved by dominant, dare one say egocentric, personalities who were prepared to act as missionaries for their particular view of the world, trampling over the strongly held views of others. This style of leadership was less appropriate in the conservative and consensual decision-making culture of the Oxford faculty boards.

A comparison of the LSE and Oxford at this point reveals the powerful role that universities play in shaping disciplinary fortunes, determining what can be taught and how. The Oxford committees and the faculty boards served both to protect scholarly traditions and to constrain change and innovation. Marett may have been the consummate operator and skilled in Oxbridge institutional politics, but he could never have wrought the far-reaching changes that Malinowski achieved at the LSE. On the other hand, Oxford anthropology might well have been less successful in developing its vibrant post-war intellectual atmosphere if its application to create an Anthropology Final Honours School had been approved – given the amount of undergraduate teaching this would have necessitated.

Perhaps only an egocentric figure like Radcliffe-Brown was able to challenge Oxford's unspoken social codes. Because of his hauteur, he was seen as an *arriviste*, an outsider who didn't understand Oxford. He was treated accordingly, and his antagonistic attitudes provoked bitter resentment amongst his colleagues. On the other hand, the post-war institute inherited by Evans-Pritchard owed much to Radcliffe-Brown's success at reforming the department. Whilst Evans-Pritchard wrote regularly about Oxford anthropology (1951, 1953, 1959) he did little to acknowledge his forebear, distancing himself from Radcliffe-Brown's divisive reputation. Nonetheless, the centre of the British social anthropological universe shifted after the war back from the LSE to Oxford, at a time when the Cambridge faculty was still dominated by physical anthropologists. This changed over the following decade. Meyer Fortes was appointed to the William Wyse Chair in 1950, Edmund Leach to a readership in the same year, Jack Goody to a lectureship in 1954 and Audrey Richards to a readership in 1956.

I have tried to portray something of the protean nature of anthropology and its disciplinary identity during the pre-war period. Its intellectual shape and its status within British universities were far from clear-cut. Whilst the Oxbridge 'establishment' was able to resist the LSE approach for a while, it could not compete with the growing move towards a professorial, research-led academia, and the need to attract funds and international prestige.

Notes

1. Interview with Raymond Firth by Maurice Bloch, LSE history, LSE archive, BLPES.
2. Ibid.
3. Bronislaw Malinowski (BM) to Jessica Mair (JM), 10.2.30. Malinowski Archive, BLPES.
4. BM to JM 10.21930, BLPES.
5. BM to Kirchoff, 18.3.31 File 3, Malinowski student correspondence, Malinowski papers, BLPES.
6. Interview with Raymond Firth, 1989, LSE archive, BLPES.
7. Evans-Pritchard to BM 25.11.28, Malinowski papers, BLPES.
8. BM to Charles Seligman 05.9.31. Malinowski papers, BLPES.
9. Ibid.
10. Audrey Richards papers, AR 2/1, BLPES.
11. Evans to Jessica Mair 13.3.31, LSE archive, BLPES.
12. BM to JM 30/1/34, Malinowski papers, and Malinowski to Beveridge, 1929, BLPES.
13. BM to CS, 5.9.31, BLPES.
14. Ranulph Marett, letter to Hodson, 11.1.33, Marett Archives, Exeter College
15. Henry Balfour to Myres 2.2.33, Balfour papers ff84, Oxford University.
16. Paper 210, Oxford University Committee on Anthropology (OUCA)
17. Oxford Hebdomadal Council papers, CC1/1/2 Dec. 34.
18. DC 1/1/2, 183rd meeting, OUCA.
19. Marett to Balfour, Balfour papers, Oxford University.
20. BM to Coupland 2.7.36, Coupland to BM 31.7.36, Malinowski Archive, BLPES.
21. Marcel Mauss to Radcliffe-Brown (R-B) 22.1.35, and job reference dated 22.9.36, both re-published in Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford 25(2) 1986, translated by William Pickering, with notes by Peter Riviere.
22. R-B to BM, 3.12.29, Malinowski correspondence, Malinowski Archive, BLPES.
23. Myres manuscripts, Oxford University, MS 81 fol. 25.
24. Oxford Registry Archives, DC1/1/2 Paper 235, March 1937.
25. Memorandum by Douglas Veale 18.3.39 Oxford University Registry files UR 6/ANT/4.
26. 'Note for VC on 10th Jan' by Douglas Veale UR6 /ANT/4.
27. Myres manuscripts, MS 81, fo. 33, 138.
28. The Anthropology Committee officially became a sub-faculty of a new Faculty of Anthropology and Geography (A and G) in 1938, in order to allow research students to be supervised. Radcliffe-Brown had originally hoped to create a dedicated Board of Studies for Anthropology – here too he had to be content with second best.
29. Myres, MS 81, fo. 35, 131.
30. Penniman to Myres, 27.10.39, part of a series of letters in Myres, MS 81, fos. 33–44
31. R-B Memo to Fac. of A and G Board, entitled 'The diploma in Anthropology', dated Oct 1939 in Myres MS81
32. Penniman to Myres 27.10.39, Myres Ms 81
33. R-B to Congregation (UC/FF/228/2 1934–1947). The Faculty Board of Anthropology and Geography agreed to the change of name on 8/6/39. On 26.6.39, R-B wrote to the Curators of the University Chest, who gave their agreement, subject to confirmation by the General Board of the Faculties on 19/4/40.
34. Faculty of A and G Archives, FA 4/2/1/1 p80, Oxford University.