CHAPTER 1

# *Introduction*

That Sigmund Freud became a major intellectual presence in twentieth-century culture is not in doubt. Nor is there any doubt that at all times there was both fervent enthusiasm over and bitter hostility to his ideas and influence. But the exact means by which Freud became, despite this hostility, a master of intellectual life, on a par, already in the 1920s, with Karl Marx, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie and Bertrand Russell, has not been sufficiently explored. Strikingly, Freud emerged as a twentieth-century icon without the endorsement and support of an institution or a profession (in contrast to Einstein, Curie and Russell). Where are we to look for the details of this story of an emergent – and new – figure of immense cultural authority? One of the principal aims of this book is to show how this happened in one local, parochial yet privileged, site – Cambridge, then as now a university town stranded in the English Fens with a relatively small fluctuating population (59,212 in the 1921 Census, a 48 per cent increase since 1911).[1]

So this book contributes to the history and geography of psychoanalysis, but in an unusual fashion. Most histories of psychoanalysis start either in Paris, glittering metropolis of the nineteenth century, or in Vienna, capital of a doomed polyglot empire; this one starts in Grantchester, a picturesque village two miles outside Cambridge, the traditional destination of afternoon strolls across the Meadows for dons and students. Most histories of psychoanalysis assume a diffusionist model, with Freud's principal disciples functioning as essential relays for the transmission of doctrine and practical techniques, with the founding of local psychoanalytic societies

[1] The population of Cambridge was estimated at 6,490 in 1587 (which includes 1,500 members of the University), 7,778 in 1728 (including 100 college servants and 1,499 members of the University) and 10,087 in 1801. ('The city of Cambridge: economic history', in *A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely*. Vol. III, *The City and University of Cambridge*, ed. J.P.C. Roach, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 86–101, www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/cambs/vol3/pp86-101, accessed 6 May 2015.

and eventually orthodox training programmes as the key stages in the establishing of authorized psychoanalysis in different countries and regions; this one is inescapably full of surprising figures, loose connections between events and institutions, informal encounters. Most histories of psychoanalysis have been overly influenced by two crude models: the 'Great Man' model, in which specific individuals have decisive influence in turning history their way; and the bureaucratic transplant model, in which the oversight of the International Psycho-Analytic Association (IPA) and its sub-committee the International Training Committee (ITC) determined the forms and procedures for establishing psychoanalysis throughout the world. The two accounts come together for the British instance in locating Ernest Jones as the individual who, through his campaigning, through his writings and through his incessant organizing, created the British Psycho-Analytical Society (BPaS) in 1919 and founded the Institute of Psycho-Analysis in London in 1926.

In contrast, this account of the early history of psychoanalysis in England will be relatively Jones-free and will not be centred on the British Society. Instead, it purposely takes an Absent Great Man – Sigmund Freud – and looks not to a specific set of psychoanalytic institutions but to a flurry of activity in loose networks, some attached to the University, others not, yet associated with Cambridge. Freud the physical individual never came to Cambridge. This book is the story of his non-arrival. What Freud stood for – that is a different matter. 'Freud' did stand for a set of therapeutic practices that were deployed increasingly as the Great War dragged on and on. After the War, 'Freud' also stood for a revolution in psychology – the 'New Psychology'. For some Cambridge scientists, as we will see, 'Freud' stood for a revolution in thought quite the equal of those associated with Newton and Darwin. And he also stood for outrageous and immoral fabricated views on children, and on the importance of sexual life in general; his name was often shorthand for the pollution of the mind and society created by modernity.

1922 was the year of Cambridge in Freud's consulting room. James Strachey, Trinity graduate and Apostle, Bloomsberry, literary dilettante, had started analysis with Freud in October 1920 and finished at the end of June 1922; Alix Strachey, graduate of Newnham in modern languages, wife of James, had started at the same time and left in 1921. John Rickman, Quaker graduate of King's, doctor and enthusiast, fresh from a stint as a psychiatrist at Fulbourn Hospital just outside Cambridge, had begun analysis in April 1920 and completed at the end of June 1922. Joan Riviere, grande dame and intellectual, niece of Arthur Verrall, Apostle and first

Edward VII Professor of English Literature in the University, had moved from Jones's couch to Freud's in early 1922, returning to London in December. Arthur Tansley, University Lecturer in Botany, author of a psychoanalytic bestseller of 1920 entitled *The New Psychology and its Relation to Life*, began analysis with Freud on 31 March 1922, completing his first stint in June, and resigned his Cambridge lectureship in 1923 to come back for a more seriously sustained second analytic stint in late 1923 up to the summer of 1924. A Cambridge undergraduate, Roger Money-Kyrle, started analysis with Freud in the autumn of 1922, remaining in Vienna till 1926. In 1979 he described the milieu in which he moved:

> In Vienna, we met several people from Oxford and Cambridge, nearly all subsequently famous, who were more or less secretly in analysis. And I did not know till many years after that a half-uncle of my wife, a Fellow and Lecturer of Trinity, Cambridge, had spent one long summer vacation travelling Europe in analysis with James Glover, who was himself simultaneously in analysis with Abraham. Shades of the Peripatetic School of Athens in the third century B.C.! Incidentally, of course, I never mentioned psychoanalysis to [my doctoral supervisor Moritz] Schlick till I left, and then discovered that he himself was extremely interested in, but never spoke of it.[2]

So from March to June 1922, Riviere, Strachey, Rickman and Tansley were all in analysis with Freud, thus making up 40 per cent of his patient load.[3] What were they all doing in Vienna? Each had their own symptoms, their malaise in life, of course, but they were not ordinary patients. They and others like them were the means by which psychoanalysis became disseminated as a theory, as a vision of the world, as cocktail party chat, as a practice – and perhaps even as a form of knowledge suitable for inclusion in the teaching and research of an ancient university like Cambridge. By the summer of 1922, after listening for four hours a day, six days a week, for several months to a gaggle of elite Cambridge graduates, Freud must have known a lot about Tripos nerves, High Table backstabbing, the intricate family dynamics of large and eminent Victorian families and the sex lives of the English. He clearly knew what it meant to

[2] R. Money-Kyrle, 'Looking backwards – and forwards', *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 6 (1979), 265–72 at 266.

[3] From the beginning of the decade, both Americans and English were making the pilgrimage to Vienna to be analysed by Freud. In the American cohort of – roughly – 1920–22 were Albert Polan, Clarence Oberndorf, Leonard Blumgart, Monroe Meyer and Abram Kardiner. See Kardiner Oral History Interviews, interviews conducted by Bluma Swerdloff, 1963, Columbia University Oral History Project, New York, p. 102.

be the favourite of Lytton Strachey and an intimate of Maynard Keynes – it meant being part of refined homosexual Cambridge culture. Freud was certainly an expert on Cambridge. But what of Cambridge – what did it make of Freud?

This study is also, inevitably, a contribution to the history of Cambridge – principally the University, but also the city in which the University is located – at a key period in its history, 1910–30. The nineteenth-century reforms, which included the introduction of specialist honours degrees, the removal of religious tests, the expansion of the sciences and the broadening of the social intake of undergraduates, including crucially women, were followed in the 1920s with the putting in place of a new, thoroughly modern and still existing structure of faculties and departments, of career paths for lecturers and researchers, of scholarships for poorer students and essential interlocking with state educational policy. So the period of the reception of psychoanalysis was also the moment in the history of the University when it fully recognized that, in the words of the Asquith Commission of 1922, 'the growth of science at Cambridge since the era of the Royal Commissions [the 1850s] has been perhaps the greatest fact in the history of the University since its foundation'. This is also the period of Cambridge 'High Science', a term by which Gary Werskey meant, amongst other things, first, the period of the supremacy of 'pure science', uncontaminated by applications or by necessary alliances with industry or government; second, the period when this corner of science was still dominated by the traditional British elites and classes; and third, the period of Cambridge's first fully self-conscious scientific glory. In the judgement of Eric Hobsbawm, Cambridge 'virtually monopolized top-level British scientific achievement in the first half of the twentieth century'.[4] This study of the reception of psychoanalysis in the foremost science-oriented university in Britain and its surrounding elite culture in the early twentieth century therefore gives insight into the development of science-based knowledge institutions in Britain and the place of psychoanalysis within them. At a time of transformation in British universities, when state funding is being withdrawn from both the universities and the poorer students attending them, while at the same time the prestige of the sciences, technology and medicine has never been

[4] Gary Werskey, *The Visible College: A Collective Biography of British Scientists and Socialists of the* 1930s (1979), London: Free Association Books, 1988, esp. pp. 19–42; Eric Hobsbawm, 'Preface', in Brenda Swann and Francis Aprahamian (eds.), *J.D. Bernal: A Life in Science and Politics*, London: Verso, 1999, p. xi.

higher, a study of the creation of new disciplines within the newly state-funded older universities is salutary.

Yet 'Cambridge' is not only a university peculiarly well configured for the development of the sciences, but also a traditional key node in the system of elite institutions sustaining British life, through the education of the next generation's elite. And 'Cambridge' is also the town of Cambridge, located in what was in this period an economically backward, non-industrial relatively poor part of England – transformed subsequently, from the 1960s on, by the development of science-based satellite industries closely associated with the University.

While this is a study in the dissemination of psychoanalysis, it does not directly concern its popularization, since the groups and cohorts examined are undoubtedly part of the educated and cultural British elite of the period. Not without a series of extensive and extended struggles, science became an integral part of elite culture – perhaps now at its very centre – and much of the account of psychoanalysis given in this study is of its interaction with, and its interrogation, absorption and repudiation by this elite culture. But it is also, almost by accident, a study of the reception of Freud's ideas by some of the key British intellectuals of the twentieth century (who all happened to be associated with Cambridge): Bertrand Russell, J.M. Keynes, Virginia Woolf, J.D. Bernal, Joseph Needham (from the point of view of the Chinese, Needham is the most important Briton of the twentieth century).

A question, however, certainly does hang over this study: why Cambridge? The first and obvious answer to that question is a straightforwardly empirical one: the remarkable range and number of Cambridge men and women engaging with psychoanalysis from roughly 1910 on was unmatched by any comparable cohort in Oxford, Manchester, London, Edinburgh or any other of the cultural and university centres of Britain. The question as to *why* this was the case is best addressed after taking the full measure of this varied and surprising engagement.

Much of the material that makes up this book is not well known to historians, or else – and this is a crucial point – is known under a different description. Placing the history of disciplines within the local Cambridge context brings out the fluidity of interchange and surprising cross-influences in their development – the advantages that 'local history', history in its place, has brought elsewhere. The study of the dissemination of ideas within Cambridge encouraged us to develop a prosopographical method: a collective study of the lives of a group, a population, a cohort. The links between these multiple 'life-lines' has proved not only fertile but surprising.

There is, however, one over-riding reason why the story this book tells has been overlooked till now: the episode recounted here *came to an abrupt end*. Historians committed to a continuist methodology (as most historians often inadvertently are) will naturally therefore be inclined to overlook it or at least downgrade its importance, if judgements of importance are based on relevance (to today, looking backwards) or 'influence' (on today, looking forwards). It would be too brutal to call this episode a blind alley of history with no progeny or issue of any kind, but it has certainly been overlooked by those seeking to find the sources of the present in the past, to tailor history to 'presentist' concerns and strictures.[5] Since disciplinary histories – whether of physics, literary criticism or psychoanalysis – are by definition committed to presentism, since they take the existence of the discipline as a given (though usually with very great concern about its place and date of birth), they will often find themselves at a loss with episodes, ideas, figures who do not immediately conform to the boundaries established later by those disciplines. To take one example from the stories told in this book: why did James Strachey, in drafting during the Second World War one of the most fateful documents in the history of British psychoanalysis, his Memorandum on Training, suddenly evoke the teaching of geophysics to psychoanalytical candidates? It is only by tracing the whole of the history of Freud in Cambridge that we find the answer.

There may also be another reason for the forgetting of the enthusiasm for Freud in Cambridge in the 1920s. First loves and youthful enthusiasms, particularly those that are tied to strong emotions and sexuality, are often later re-described by historical actors themselves in reproving and jocular terms. A youthful enthusiasm for psychoanalysis may be described in the same sort of terms, and with the same sort of attention to historical accuracy, as the stories many happily married middle-aged parents tell their children of their first loves. This analogy will remind us that in writing the history of psychoanalysis, passions, secret loves and deep inner troubles will play, even in Cambridge, as important a part as the architecture of scientific theory, the foundations of a scientific discipline or the proper way to educate the next generation. Psychoanalysis began with the emergence of the dream. A common thread weaving through our stories of Cambridge lives, the dream is, appropriately, where we too must start.

[5] George W. Stocking, Jr., 'On the limits of "presentism" and "historicism" in the historiography of the behavioral sciences', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 1 (1965), 211–17. Stocking's article is not the first work to use 'presentist' in roughly the same sense as Butterfield's *Whig Interpretation of History* (1931), but it appears to be the start of its more recent use.