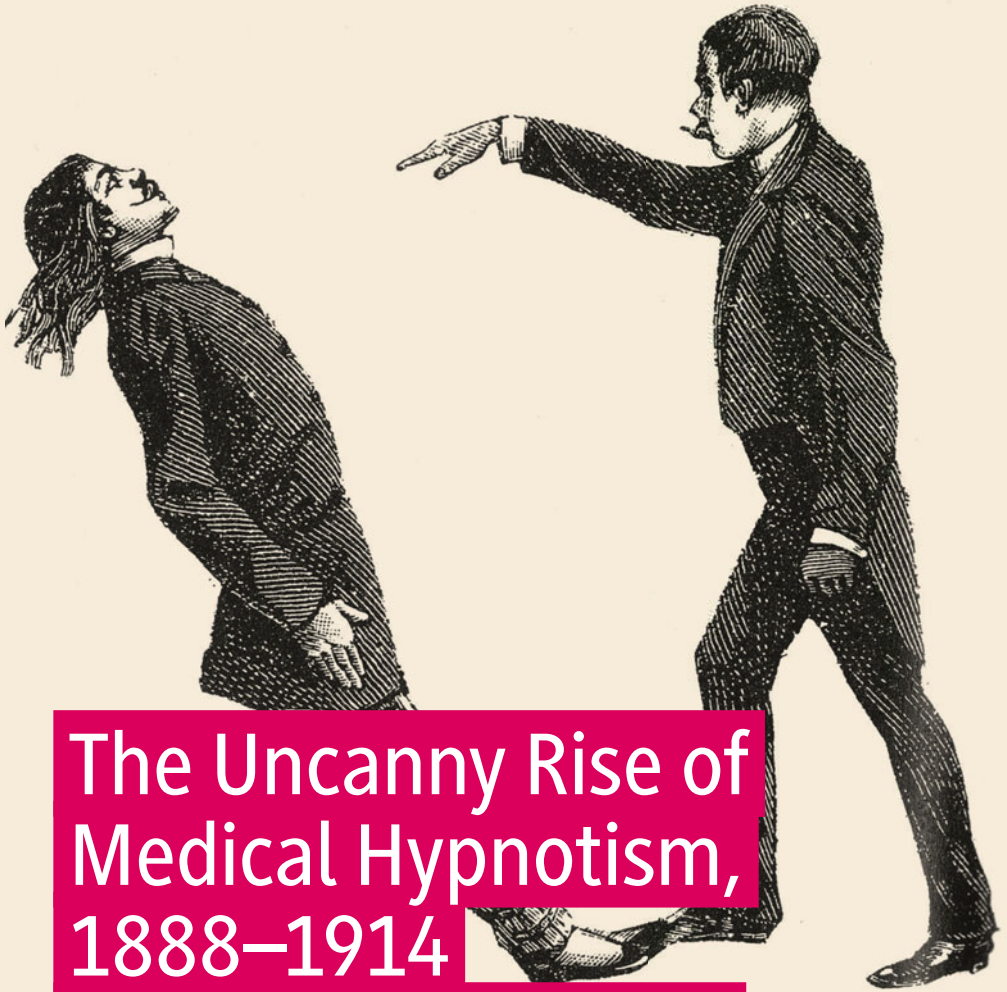




MENTAL HEALTH IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



The Uncanny Rise of  
Medical Hypnotism,  
1888–1914  
Between Imagination  
and Suggestion

Gordon David Lyle Bates

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# Mental Health in Historical Perspective

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Gordon David Lyle Bates

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of Medical  
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*For Vanessa, Gulliver and Kingsley  
my support team*

## PREFACE

The genesis of this book is thirty years of clinical practice of psychiatry. When I started the Ph.D. which informs this monograph, I had little idea of my motives. But as I reflected over the time of writing and attempted to justify the subject matter, there are three moments that came to mind as formative. Firstly, my experience working with Dr. Michael Prendergast at the original Birmingham Children's Hospital. The early nineties saw an increase in severe somatising illness in young people: an epidemic of ME (myalgic encephalomyelitis). Over a 6-month training placement, I witnessed children who were stuporous, unresponsive and immobile in bed, start eating and return to home and school. It was nothing short of miraculous. This was a form of holistic treatment that did not require pharmacology skills but leadership, a clear therapeutic model based on suggestion and an excellent team. I was hooked!

The second formative incident forms the basis of an anecdote that I have often repeated. My wife is a general practitioner who confessed to one of her patients that she sometimes asked for my advice about patients because I was a psychiatrist. The lady that she told this to did not seem reassured by the source of her psychiatric treatment plan. 'I should hate that,' she said seriously, 'he must always know what you're thinking.' This was my first realisation of the unusual beliefs that the public hold about psychiatry and psychiatrists. I just thought it was an interesting job. However, it did make me consider the projections and bizarre ideas that the public have about my profession and I started to look out for

them in popular culture. While it was flattering that we were thought to be able to read minds, within films and books this was portrayed as a bad thing and people with such powers inevitably abused them.

Finally, in researching my dissertation for a course in Medical Humanities, I discovered that the roots of talking therapies and dynamic psychiatry lay in mesmerism and a Victorian gentleman's club called the Society for Psychical Research. While medicine is a highly pragmatic discipline with most time spent doing the job rather than thinking about it, I wondered why I had never previously heard about this exotic heritage. I realised that the lady who thought I could read my wife's mind and the parents who wanted me to hypnotise their son to make him behave better were on to something. Somehow, the time when early doctors used hypnotism or investigated telepathy has remained in our cultural memory. It was my profession that had air-brushed away this inconvenient truth from our accepted institutional history. I was determined to find out more about the New Hypnotists and this book is the result.

London, UK

Gordon David Lyle Bates



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have often wondered who reads the acknowledgements and at whom they are aimed. I like to read them, as for me, this part of any work allows a fascinating glimpse of the oily, spluttering machinery that lies under the gleaming bonnet of the highly polished creation. It is the chance to see behind the curtain of the Great Oz and observe the people who made it all possible. Therefore, it is particularly important that I mention the people that I owe.

For their practical help, I must thank Peter Henderson, the school archivist at King's school, Canterbury; Sue Young, internet historian for her vast online resource on homeopathy and the Golden Dawn, particularly her help with re-finding her original sources for me; Francis Maunze, Archivist at the Royal College of Psychiatrists; Tom Carter at Blackpool Heritage Service and Wendy Townsend and her staff, lead librarian at Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust. Special mention must go to the anonymous librarians at the Wellcome collection, the National Archive at Kew, the National Library of Scotland, Aberdeen University Special Collections and Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam University.

This work would be much poorer without the conceptual contributions of many people. The historians, Mathew Thomson and Philip Kuhn were generous with their time and supportive of my efforts exploring their domains. Closer to home, the Birmingham Psychiatry and Philosophy group introduced me to 'looping kinds' and listened kindly and attentively to the first draft of an early chapter. Jamie Scott, Chris Adams

and Didge were so enthusiastic about the topic when my confidence in its merit was low. Andrew Duffy went above and beyond the duties of a Best Man by reading both the thesis and the Ph.D. His suggestions helped me to work out the hard decision of which material to jettison.

My Ph.D. supervisors were Roger Luckhurst and Jo Winning. I met both of them during a Master's course in Medical Humanities at Birkbeck College. Despite the threats to their jobs and their department, they have remained positive and inspirational over the last seven years. Roger's love for late Victorian genre fiction and the weird and wonderful is infectious. Jo helped to convince me that my choice of topic was not only important for the whole field of medical humanities but also that writing it was possible. They both helped with my successful application for a Birkbeck Wellcome Institutional Strategic Support Fund grant which enabled me to prioritise the writing of this book over my clinical commitments for six months.

I should mention too, William Hughes and Rhodri Hayward, the two examiners of the thesis and the anonymous book reviewer. Jointly, their helpful suggestions alerted me to the gaps and weaknesses of my story and inevitably improved this book. At the publishers, Lucy Kidwell took a punt on the unusual subject matter and Eliana Rangel helped with the practical aspects.

The chapter on imaginary hypnotism contains close readings of Arthur Conan Doyle's 'John Barrington Cowles' and *The Parasite*. Some of this material has previously appeared in a different form: 'Arthur Conan Doyle in Mesmeric Edinburgh and Hypnotic London', *Victoriographies* 11, 3 (pp. 314–30) and 'The Fascinating Fictions of Arthur Conan Doyle: Hypnotism and Mesmerism in "John Barrington Cowles" and *The Parasite*' in *Re-examining Arthur Conan Doyle*, edited by Nils Clausson, 59–74, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

I would also like to thank Robert Wozniak, the editor and curator of the series *Classics in Psychology: 1855–1914* (Bristol: Thoemmes) for his unknowing help. Not only did he include Lloyd Tuckey's *Psycho-Therapeutics* (1888) as one of the key psychology texts of the era but his comment that 'Biographical Information on Tuckey is not readily available', was the critical spur for this work.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Robert Wozniak, 'Tuckey, Psycho-Therapeutics', *Classics in Psychology, 1855-1914: Historical Essays* (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 1998) pp. 100–2 (p. 100).

Finally, a word about my wife and sons, Vanessa, Gulliver and Kingsley. They have had to put up with my mental and physical absence over the last few years. They have heard more stories about the New Hypnotists and hypnotism than anyone should have to. They have witnessed me tell the same stories to their friends and rarely complained. They have supported me throughout and I will take this opportunity to thank them.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Gordon David Lyle Bates** is a child and adolescent psychiatrist and writer. He was recently appointed as the Historian in Residence at the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He lives in a Victorian house in Birmingham which is too cold for writing. He has written many papers and several chapters on psychiatric and medical humanities topics. This is his first book.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BHS	British Homeopathic Society
<i>BJH</i>	British Journal of Homeopathy
BMA	British Medical Association
<i>BMJ</i>	British Medical Journal
JMS	Journal of Mental Science
MPC	Medico-Psychological Clinic (also known as the Brunswick Square Clinic)
MSSST	Medical Society for the Study of Suggestive Therapy
MTHG	Medical Times and Hospital Gazette
PMS	Psycho-Medical Society
RLHH	Royal London Homeopathic Hospital
SPR	Society for Psychical Research
SRIA	Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia



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# Introduction

## INTRODUCTION

In May 1897, Bram Stoker published *Dracula*, his well-researched and medically informed version of the vampire myth.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, most of the iterations of the literary vampire had powerful new gifts: unspoken communication, irresistible compulsions and the psychic connection. Using their strange mesmeric eyes and their Byronic charm, they could compel their victims to do whatever they wanted, ‘speak’ to them across great distances and even steal their life force and energy. This uncanny and intimate link was to be part of the enduring appeal of the modern vampire tale.

Bram Stoker’s network of friends and his medical links mean that it is no coincidence that at this time British Medicine was battling another dangerous but appealing foreign invader, hypnotism. Hypnotism too, was linked to telepathy, rapport, neurasthenia (nervous tiredness) and automatic obedience. It had been scientifically sanctioned by the recent clinical experiments of the eminent French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot of the Salpêtrière, making it a reputable subject for medical scrutiny once more. This was not just a trivial or parochial professional matter. Its mystical and disreputable predecessor mesmerism had become an integral

<sup>1</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (London: Archibald Constable, 1897).

part of European cultural life in the form of travelling lectures, magical stage shows and spiritualist séances, even in Britain.

Mesmerism was the name given to the pseudoscience which had initially enchanted Paris nearly 120 years before. The Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer had brought his animal magnetism to the capital in 1778 and entertained, fascinated and apparently cured many of the nobility and peasants of pre-revolutionary France. It was characterised by close theatrical ‘passes’ or manual gestures over the sick body parts which required a close proximity between ‘opérateur’ (mesmerist) and ‘sommnambulist’ (patient). It was explained as a rebalancing of the patient’s magnetic fluid by the healer.

The healing potential of mesmerism had been popularised in the UK somewhat later, by John Elliotson (1791–1868), a distinguished physician and founder of University College Hospital (UCH) in London. He had started to trial the techniques of Mesmer and his followers in the late 1820s and was most impressed by the medical conditions that he could improve. However, despite his successes and his prominence, he had been forced to resign his chair in 1838, when his consultant colleagues turned against him and banned further displays of mesmerism at UCH. Elliotson would continue to work in the capital but died in poverty.

Mesmerism had become the crucible for the new objective and scientific credentials of Victorian medicine. Its associations with magic, fraud, quackery and inappropriate intimacy between male doctors and usually female patients made it too hazardous for the precarious newly established medical profession. John Elliotson and mesmerism were direct challenges to orthodox medical practice and were brought down by the combined might of the medical institutions using the specialist medical and lay press. The new journal the *Lancet* and its editor Thomas Wakley played a prominent role in Elliotson’s downfall.

Despite the orthodox medical response to mesmerism, the general public remained fascinated. Hovering between life and death, the indeterminate trance state held a pervasive influence on Victorian life. A powerful reason for the interest was the widespread rejection of the prevailing scientific materialism, the belief that the objective world available to the natural sciences was all that existed. This led to interest in esoteric new philosophies like Occultism and Theosophy which re-emerged and emerged respectively in the 1870s. Both Theosophy and ceremonial magic resonated with the Victorian drive for self-improvement

and both included trance as an important technique for creativity, mental communication and astral projection.

Elliotson's clinical demonstrations were shamelessly duplicated and repeated across the country, initially as a form of education and entertainment hybrid, the mesmerism lecture. These always began by inducing a shift in the consciousness of the somnambulist, the trance state. The power of the trance would be demonstrated to the audience by imperiousness to pain. The success of travelling hypnotists and their shows had kept trance alive in the UK. By the 1890s, any self-respecting stage magician would incorporate a hypnotic or trance mind-reading act into their performance. This trivialisation of trance was one of several negative associations taken on by mesmerism.

Another important connotation was the link of the trance state to spiritualism and contact with the dead as a result of the popular growth and slow evolution of the Church of Spiritualism. Starting with the Fox sisters' experiences with 'rapping' to communicate with the dead in the United States in 1848, the Church of Spiritualism had spread across America and quickly to the UK. Both formal religious Spiritualism and its less religious variants tapped into a very real Victorian need to communicate with their deceased relatives, which was usually made possible by the entrancement of the spirit medium. Spiritualist mediums and mesmeric lecturers frequently overlapped both in terms of personnel and belief systems. By the latter half of the century, spiritualist seances were increasingly commonplace in stately homes and middle-class parlours. The spirit mediums who interceded with the afterlife became more and more likely to enter a self-induced trance or one induced by a fellow spiritualist. After the exposure of many spirit mediums as frauds, trance itself was viewed sceptically by many.

This book is about the courageous and ambitious British physicians who risked their reputations and livelihoods to fight for medical hypnotism just fifty years after Elliotson's very public disgrace. Firstly, they had to convince a sceptical medical professional that the trance state of hypnotism was safer and different to that of mesmerism. Both procedures induced a state of reduced awareness and increased suggestibility to facilitate healing. Unlike Mesmer's dramatic induction techniques, most hypnotic inductions were provoked visually through sustained focus on a bright object and verbally, through calming and positive affirmations. Some proximity between patient and physician was required but close 'passes' were not.

The physicians also needed to provide a rationale for the therapeutic benefits that did not rely upon the doctrine of the imagination, an ancient mystical concept developed by the alchemists, which had little place in modern scientific Victorian medicine. The effects of trance were theorised to be the result of suggestion, a theory proposed by Hippolyte Bernheim and Ambrose Liébeault based in Nancy, France. The usefulness and shortfalls of this theory will be reviewed.

## THE NEW HYPNOTISTS

Throughout this book, I will use ‘New Hypnotism’ as the name for the British medical hypnotism movement of the time and the ‘New Hypnotists’ for the loose affiliation of extraordinary doctors who advocated for it. This is based upon the title of Charles Lloyd Tuckey’s essay for the gentleman’s periodical the *Contemporary Review*.<sup>2</sup> Without television or radio, the printed word played a major part in promoting scientific literacy in the general public. Tuckey, Robert Felkin, George Kingsbury and John Milne Bramwell had all visited and learned about hypnotism from Hippolyte Bernheim and Ambroise-Auguste Liébeault.

The New Hypnotists had to fight the negative perceptions of other British physicians and the general public to achieve acceptance. I will describe the ways that, against the odds, medical hypnotism managed to achieve its goal of mainstream credibility, going up against the innate conservatism and reactionary nature of British institutional medicine. The British Medical Association and Ernest Hart, editor of the *British Medical Journal* (*BMJ*), were formidable opponents and did not always fight fairly. Hart went so far as to set up a ‘sting’ in which some of the New Hypnotists were duped into unsuccessfully hypnotising an actor who had previously worked for stage magicians, feigning entrancement and enduring painful procedures. Hart took great glee in exposing the doctor’s gullibility in the *BMJ*. His attitude can be easily discerned from the titles of his journal articles and books: *Hypnotism, Mesmerism and the New Witchcraft*, *Hypnotism and Humbug*, and *The Eternal Gullible*.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>2</sup> Charles Lloyd Tuckey, ‘A New Hypnotism: A Reply to Mr E Hart’s “The Revival of Witchcraft”’, *The Contemporary Review*, 63 (1893) (pp. 416–9).

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Hart, ‘Hypnotism and Humbug’, *Nineteenth Century*, 31 January, 1892 (pp. 24–37); Ernest Hart, ‘Mesmerism and the New Witchcraft’ (London: Smith and Elder, 1893). His articles on hypnotism were collected and republished in Ernest Hart,

dispute took place across both the medical and lay press. At first, the New Hypnotists had to use the gentleman's journals to promote their ideas as the medical journal editors strictly controlled access to their pages. Later they used their own medical journal the *General Practitioner* to advocate for suggestive therapy.

Throughout, the New Hypnotists used their personal connections in the London club culture to disseminate their message and were in turn influenced by those that they met there. They formed a part of an unlikely series of networks of late Victorian esoteric knowledge. Their connections with the investigations of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), whose elite membership included Government Ministers and Nobel Prize winners, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an occult ceremonial magical group founded by two physicians, helped to both shape and propagate their views. It is these links to psychism and the occult which make the rise of medical hypnotism 'uncanny'. Its rise was also uncanny in the sense that it was counterintuitive. The power of the medical establishment was such that it was successful in suppressing other fringe practices such as homeopathy, hydrotherapy (balneotherapy) and electrotherapy.

As well as its representation in the scientific literature and factual articles in gentleman's periodicals, imaginary or fictional hypnotism was very popular in the 1890s. *Dracula* was just one of many literary narratives concerning hypnotism. These stories were not only shaped by the information and attitudes in the public domain but also helped to shape the public's beliefs about hypnosis. In order to examine some of the persistent themes of hypnotic fiction which include automatic obedience, gender, sexuality and medical professionalism, I will offer close readings of L. T. Meade's medical mystery 'The Red Bracelet' and Arthur Conan Doyle's gothic novella *The Parasite*.<sup>4</sup> These stories show the complex and frequently conflicting views about hypnotism. Hypnotism was simultaneously seen as highly dangerous, needing tight regulation and as ineffective, the result of trickery and the preserve of mountebanks. Analysis of fiction is rarely used in medical histories but this untapped resource helps to illustrate the shifting cultural landscape around hypnotism.

*Hypnotism, Mesmerism and the New Witchcraft*, enlarged ed. (London: Smith and Elder, 1896).

<sup>4</sup> L. T. Meade and Clifford Halifax, 'The Red Bracelet', *Strand Magazine*, 9 May, 1895, (pp. 545–61); Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Parasite' in *The Parasite and the Water's Mou*, ed. by Catherine Wynne (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2009) (pp. 3–47).

The final chapters describe the way that suggestive therapy was eventually accommodated by orthodox medicine. In part, this was because there was a growing appetite for the insights of psychology and talking therapies in the general population. However, for suggestive therapy to be adopted by the mainstream of medicine it had to be adapted and the hypnotic induction techniques and the depth of the trance state both lost their importance. Meanwhile, the personality of the doctor, the suggestive affirmations that he used and the relationship with the patient moved to centre stage. The theory of suggestion found its way into various early psychological therapies from early Freudian analysis to mixed hypnotic catharsis and the auto-suggestions of Émile Coué: ‘every day and in every way, I am getting better and better’.

The understanding of this early history of psychological therapy requires the recovery of both the cultural context and the wide-ranging therapeutic practices that were found in London between 1900 and 1914. Early British psycho-therapeutics was heterogenous and treatments were often hybrid. This early history is little known and not well told but hypnotism and suggestion were important components. The New Hypnotists played a key role in two early psychotherapeutic institutions: the Medical Society for the Study of Suggestive Therapy ((MSSST) founded in 1907) and the Medico-Psychological Clinic (MPC), established in 1914. Both groups utilised an empirical form of treatment using different psychological therapies depending on the patient’s need.

By the start of the twentieth century, the medical environment and popular culture were much more conducive to talking therapies. The British Freudian myth of massive medical and public resistance to Freudian ideas at this time is just that. There were cogent criticisms of the prominence of sex and the time commitment for both analyst and analysand but these were quibbles rather than wholesale rejection. Freud’s ideas were well-known to those interested in psychological therapies. In addition there was increasing public curiosity about all forms of mental work. This included practical ‘mind-drills’ like Pelmanism to exercise one’s brain and new North American influences like the New Thought movement and self-help books both of which were strongly influenced by the idea of suggestion. Non-medical mind cure therapists started to emerge, threatening the medical monopoly. Probably the most prominent of these was Arthur Hallam’s lay London Psycho-Therapeutic Society (LPS). It offered free treatment and was a centre of learning for



medical and non-medical therapists. Hypnotism, magnetism and suggestive therapy were routinely used by its therapists. There was good take-up of the free service and its lecture programme.

The outbreak First World War suddenly raised the profile of psychotherapeutics. The scale of the trench-based warfare and the constant fear of death or injury led to massive numbers of psychologically damaged soldiers on both sides. When the British Army looked for help from the medical psychologists, the solutions that they offered were mostly variations on hypnotism and suggestive therapy. It was to be the highest profile for the treatment which soon fragmented into other forms of therapy after the war.

Suggestion was incorporated into more general medical practice as a mechanism for the nonphysical healing aspects of the doctor-patient relationship. It came to mean that a cheerful and optimistic physician had better outcomes. This belief and form of practice were typified by the work and writings of the charismatic Canadian-born physician William Osler, who established Johns Hopkins Medical School and became the Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford in 1905. Curiously, the importance of this part of the clinical relationship became more actively considered and better described by the physicians when the profession's monopoly on healing was threatened from an unlikely source: the meteoric rise of faith-healing and the Church of Christian Science in the early twentieth century. This interest predated the experimental investigation of the concept of the placebo effect in the 1950s. However, the ideas of suggestion and expectancy continue to be important ways that placebo effects are understood today.

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## The New Hypnotists

The birth of the New Hypnotism can be traced back to two events and four innovative British physicians: Charles Lloyd Tuckey, John Milne Bramwell, George Kingsbury and Robert Felkin. They were quite different men with different backgrounds, abilities and strengths. While there is evidence that they were familiar with each other, there is no evidence that they were particularly close (with the exception of Kingsbury and Tuckey) or worked in concert to promote hypnotism, despite my claim for a movement. They did share interests and clubs: Tuckey and Bramwell were senior members of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), an elite society which examined previously inexplicable phenomena like haunted houses and the abilities of spirit mediums with the methodology of science; Felkin and Tuckey were part of an arcane ceremonial magic group, the Hermetic Society of the Golden Dawn. Another connection which links Bramwell and Felkin was attendance at medical school in Edinburgh, where animal magnetism remained on the syllabus long after Elliotson's humiliation had suppressed its consideration in England.

The New Hypnotists were also united by the separate visits they had made between 1888 and 1889, to Ambrose Liébeault and Hippolyte Bernheim in Nancy and the Amsterdam hypnotic clinic of Frederik van Eeden and Albert van Renterghem. The work of the Nancy school was