

Movers and shakers

It's hard to imagine that what we now believe to be true wasn't always so. There was a time when people believed the earth was flat . . .

Every now and again, someone comes along and breathes new ideas. Ann Wilson profiles five people who left the world a different place.

Charles Darwin 1809–82

His book, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, published in 1859, has been called 'the book that shook the world'.

Today, most scientists and ordinary people, with the exception of creationists, accept the theories put forward in this book. Darwin believed that all species (plants, animals and human beings) were not created individually, but evolved over millions of years through a process of natural selection. The struggle for existence meant that the species that could adapt best were those that survived.

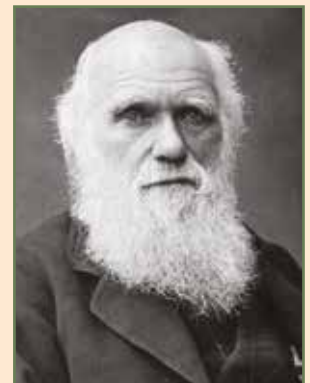
These ideas contradicted religious beliefs. People thought that God had created Adam and Eve and all the animals as they were then. It was also believed that the Earth was just 4,000 years old.

He said

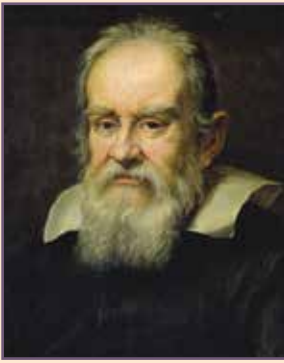
'The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble by us; and I for one must be content to remain an agnostic.'

They said

'Mankind is not descended from monkeys. There is no point in a world without God.'



Galileo Galilei 1564-1642



Galileo was born in Pisa, Italy. He spent years observing the movements of the planets through a telescope. At the time it was generally thought that the earth was the centre of the universe. Galileo believed, as Copernicus had done 70 years before, that the earth rotated on its axis once daily and travelled round the sun once every year. At the time, this was a fantastic concept, and considered dangerous by the Church.

In 1633 he was found guilty of heresy, and spent the final years of his life imprisoned in his own home.

Galileo is referred to as the ‘father of modern science’. He paved the way for the separation of science and religion.

He said

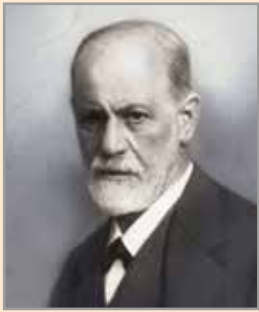
‘All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them.’

They said

‘The proposition that the sun is in the centre of the world is absurd, philosophically false, and heretical; it is contrary to Holy Scriptures.’



Sigmund Freud 1856–1939



Sigmund Freud was born in Austria. He developed the technique of psychoanalysis in his treatment of patients with mental disorders. His most famous book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, was published in 1900.

Freud argued that we all have an unconscious mind as well as a conscious one. The unconscious is where our motivations originate and our fears are buried. Memories, especially from childhood, have a huge influence on the way we are now, but we are largely unaware of their significance. We deny or resist becoming conscious of these motives.

Freud's proposals came at a time when strict scientific methods were seen as the only way to discover truth. By introducing the notion of the unconscious, Freud undermined the belief that we are in control of our actions, thoughts, and behaviours at all times.

He is commonly referred to as 'the father of psychoanalysis' and his work has been highly influential.

He said

'The mind is like an iceberg, it floats with one-seventh of its bulk above water.'

They said

'His ideas are unverifiable. His attitude to scientific research is irresponsible.'



Emmeline Pankhurst 1858–1928



Emmeline Pankhurst is seen as ‘the principal fighter for women’s equality in the UK’. Women were not given the vote because they were considered to be incapable of rational thought. Their place was in the home.

In her 20s Emmeline Pankhurst belonged to the suffragists, who wanted to achieve equal voting rights for women by peaceful means. She later joined the suffragettes, who had a more militant approach. Their tactics for attracting attention included smashing shop windows, burning down buildings, slashing paintings in art galleries, organizing marches, and chaining themselves to railings.

In 1908–09 Pankhurst was sent to prison three times. She experienced force-feeding after going on hunger strike.

The British government changed the law on voting rights for women in 1918. In 1928, women finally achieved equal voting rights to men.

She said

‘We are here, not because we are law-breakers; we are here in our efforts to become law-makers.’

They said

‘These women are hysterical and unreasonable. Heaven help us if they had the vote. They have abandoned their duties as wives and mothers.’



Elvis Presley 1935–77



Elvis Presley is known simply as ‘The King’. When he arrived on the pop scene in 1956, he introduced a new rhythm to music, sex, language and fashion. Before his arrival, adolescent kids dressed like their parents. Then Elvis shook his hips and changed everything. This new sex symbol mesmerized one generation, and at the same time alienated another. Boys wanted to be him, girls fell instantly in love with him and – most importantly – their parents all hated him. The teenager was born.

He did more than anyone else to invent youth culture, and as such he was considered a dangerous threat to society.

John Lennon said, ‘Nothing really affected me until I heard Elvis. If there hadn’t been an Elvis, there wouldn’t have been a Beatles.’

He said

‘If you like rock ‘n’ roll, if you feel it, you can’t help but move to it. That’s what happens to me. I can’t help it.’

They said

‘He was an indifferent singer, a mediocre musician, and a totally uninteresting person. In five years’ time, he will be totally forgotten.’ (Obituary 1977)