

MAD SCIENCE SHOW  
10 REAL MAD SCIENTISTS Part 1  
by Nick Clowes

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By the time we reach college age, most of us are aware that real scientists are nothing like their movie counterparts. There's a lot less wild hair, while bad German accents and screams of "it lives!" are few and far between. However, not so long ago, the line between real life and fiction was much more blurred. Right into the 20th century, great scientists were conducting vital, world-changing research while also, in some cases, presenting more than their fair share of oddness and peculiarity. Here, we give you ten real-life scientists who could give Victor Frankenstein a run for his money in the eccentricity stakes.

Francis Crick (1916-2004)

Along with James D. Watson, Francis Crick will forever be remembered as one of the discoverers of the very structure of DNA. The duo met while working at the University of Cambridge and in 1962 received a Nobel Prize for their scientific work. Crick was arguably among the finest minds in science, which is what makes his later beliefs all the more difficult to fathom. At some point in the 1970s, Crick became an advocate of one of the weirdest pseudoscientific theories of all time – a theory so out there that if someone on the bus were to suggest it to you, you might be tempted to edge away from them quite quickly. The premise of "directed panspermia" is that life on Earth was deliberately seeded by extra-terrestrials – an idea that seems more like the plot of a sci-fi film than anything based in methodical scientific research.

William Buckland (1784-1856)

William Buckland – an alumnus of Corpus Christi College, Oxford and a contemporary of Charles Darwin – is remembered for being the first man to pen a complete description of a fossilized dinosaur, the *Megalosaurus*. In his spare time, however, he was also a man who insisted on dining on everything. And we do mean everything, including roast hedgehog, potted ostrich, panthers, porpoises, puppies, and even bat urine; garden moles, though, were apparently a bridge too far. However, perhaps Buckland's

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greatest gustatory achievement is his reportedly having eaten the shrunken heart of King Louis XIV – a distinction that arguably overshadows his account of a *Megalosaurus*. Perhaps any scientists wishing for a place in the history books should give up the experiments and get chewing on anything that crosses their path. Then again, perhaps not.

José Delgado (1915-2011)

University of Madrid graduate José Delgado may have received a prestigious professorship at Yale University, but his research at the venerable institution's physiology department was mighty strange, dealing on the whole as it did with mind control. We're not joking: while at Yale in the 1950s and '60s, Delgado inserted electrode implants into the brains of primates and used a remote control that gave off radio frequencies to make the animals perform complicated movements. Later, he placed an implant into the brain of a bull and got into the ring with the beast, using his transmitter to stop it charging before it reached him.

Perhaps most alarmingly of all, Delgado also wired up no less than 25 people. Behaviourally, his device only impacted people's aggression, but he kept striving for a way to achieve mind control, once creepily stating, "We must electronically control the brain. Someday armies and generals will be controlled by electric stimulation of the brain."

Stubbins Ffirth (1784-1820)

Stubbins Ffirth was a University of Pennsylvania researcher fixated on one particular scientific scheme – and a very dangerous one at that. As a trainee doctor, he became obsessed with the idea that yellow fever was non-contagious, to the extent that he went to great extremes trying to prove it. Armed only with a trusty blade and his incessant desire to find the truth, Ffirth first sliced open his arms and smeared vomit from yellow fever patients into the wounds. When that made no difference, he poured the vomit in his eye, drank some of the vile liquid, fried the stuff and breathed in the fumes, and – in a final act of madness – covered himself with blood, urine and saliva from infected patients. Ultimately, Ffirth proved his theory, insofar as he didn't get sick. However, we now know that this was as much down to him taking samples from late-stage patients who were past the point of contagion. In other words, Ffirth swallowed infected vomit but didn't shed much new light on the disease.

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