

Notes on Mark Abrams (from John Hall, 19 Oct 1994)

More than ten years ago, some of the people who worked with Mark over the years (ie myself, Roger Jowell, Cathie Marsh, Alan Marsh) talked about producing some kind of Festschrift for his 80th birthday in 1986, but pressure of work meant we never quite got round to it, and he actually ended up coming to dinner at my house in Wood Green instead. Funnily enough, I had recently begun to think we might do something in time for his 90th.

A whole string of names comes to mind for possible contributions, but this only emphasise the size of the task. (Ralf Dahrendorf, Asa Briggs, Marie Jahoda, Alan Marsh, Donald Monk, Roger Jowell, Aubrey McKennell, Gordon Heald, Louis Moss, Bob Barnes, Eileen Cole, Chelly Halsey, Ivor Crewe, David Butler, Clive Payne, Colin Brown, John Utting, Harold Wilson, Denis Healey, Michael Young, Cyril Smith, Claus Moser, Graham Kalton, could all give their twopenn'orth). Others dead! (Janowitz, Szalai, Lazarsfeld, Campbell

The Mark Abrams Prize (QSN) ^{BSA} ^{Joan Wright} ^{Himmelfarb} ^{Matys Campu R Stats} ^{App Gp (never affiliated)}

When I was at the SSRC/SU I was editor of Quantitative Sociology Newsletter. Inevitably, some of the costs of production and distribution (as well as my time) were borne by the Unit, but Mark happily absorbed these. When I moved to PNL in 1976 QSN continued to be edited, published and distributed from there. When Paul Lazarsfeld died I instituted, in consultation with Mark, what was intended to be an annual Lazarsfeld Memorial Lecture under QSN auspices. Marie Jahoda and Angus Campbell each did one, but the most influential was that given by Mark on Social Theory, Social Policy and Survey Research (and published in QSN) (at LSE?)

When QSN ceased publication in 1982 we had more than £1,000 in the kitty. I persuaded the few remaining members to wind up QSN and to use the fund to establish an annual prize for the best piece of work linking social theory, social policy and survey research. Mark was eventually persuaded to allow his name to be attached to the prize, being at first reluctant to clash with the Philip Abrams Prize to be offered by the BSA. Finally, and at Mark's request, the SRA were persuaded to allow the prize to be awarded at their AGM.

I chaired the original panel of twelve judges (which supplied a short-list to Mark for him to make the final choice) and ran the competition for the first three years, but then managed to persuade the SRA to take over. I remember one year Mark even put some of his own money in to award an extra prize to a report on the effectiveness of exercise classes for older people.

The prize is now well-established and I would have thought that it would not take much to persuade the SRA to make it a permanent and fitting memorial to Mark. With sufficient organisation, the enormous world-wide affection for Mark could also well result in a Mark Abrams Memorial Scholarship, tenable at a British university and examining links between social theory, social policy and survey research by secondary analysis of British survey data. I would have thought the BSA, MRS, AMSO, and the ESRC would wish to be associated with any such initiative.

Bradburn, Andrews, Nelson, Collins

Mark seemed to know everybody who was anybody in survey, marketing and social research, and to have been involved in the early stages of a quite remarkable number of major research programmes and their derivatives.

[The following will need checking for accuracy and sources, but] His tutor at LSE was R H Tawney and he achieved the highest ever grading for his PhD. He was the youngest ever Director of the London Press Exchange. I cannot be sure of my facts in some of the earlier surveys, but the National Food Survey and the Family Income Survey spring to mind as examples. Did he really confront Churchill and Harris to tell them bombing of civilians wouldn't work? Did he really ask, "Who is this nut-case?" and Harold Laski told him to shut up and look at the other drinkers' faces when Hitler was giving one of his raving speeches in a Berlin bierkeller before 1933? Did he really invent the word "Teenager" in his report *The Teenage Consumer*?

SSRC Survey Unit

Mark was appointed part-time^t Director of the newly formed Survey Unit of the SSRC in January 1970 (during Michael Young's chairmanship). Its main function was to provide advice and assistance to academics and others doing non-commercial survey research, especially if funded by SSRC. It also did surveys for council to assist it in its work and had a modest budget for its internal research programme.

I joined the Unit in October 1970 as the first full time staff member, closely followed by Dr Alan Marsh in November. John Utting came to us as Deputy Director in early 1971. Other academic staff over the years were Janet Kennedy (now Askham), Farida Beverly, Dr Norman Perry, the late Prof Cathie Marsh, Jim Ring and Colin Brown.

The unit conducted three very large surveys for Council: the first was a longitudinal survey of 9,000 SSRC and DES award-holders which tracked them for six years (the seventh wave was scrapped when the unit closed). This was for internal consumption only and further work was discouraged on the unnecessarily dismissive recommendation of [forgotten his name, but he's Prof of Stats at Inst of Ed]. *Harvey Goldstein*

The second was a survey of every academic, independent and commercial organisation in the UK to trace funded social research projects undertaken in the preceding five years. This resulted in at least one book (Crawford and Perry ?1975) and a chapter in something that Al Cherns was editing.

The third was a survey for the Computer Panel of computing facilities and use in every social science department and centre (or their constituent parts) in all universities in the UK. (Utting J and J Hall *The Use of Computers University Social Science Departments Occasional Paper 3, SSRC Survey Unit, 1973*).

Other studies included a survey for the SSRC Next Thirty Years Committee to investigate public and "élite" expectations of, and attitudes towards, likely economic and social changes in the next ten to fifteen years.

Quality of Life

I was involved in all unit surveys (and still have quite an extensive collection of documents) to the extent that I was responsible for all data capture, documentation and, until Jim Ring joined us in 1972, computer processing and analysis. To some extent I was also responsible for questionnaire layout and design, but my principal non-computing work was with Mark in setting up the series of so-called *Quality of Life* surveys in the UK.

These were concerned with extending social indicators beyond "objective" central and local government economic and social statistics (eg doctors per thousand pop) to include social-psychological factors (Subjective Social Indicators) and involved a tremendous amount of international interdisciplinary development of definitions and instruments in collaboration with social scientists in the USA, (Norman Bradburn, Angus Campbell, Frank Andrews) Europe, (Aubrey McKennell, Erik Allardt) and later Canada (Bernard Blishen, Tom Atkinson) ^(? & Australia? - Bruce Headly)

Two pilot surveys were conducted in 1971 and full scale studies in urban Britain in 1973 and 1975. The 1975 survey was also replicated in Stoke-on-Trent and Sunderland (See especially: Abrams M *Subjective Social Indicators in Social Trends No 4* HMSO 1973; Hall J *The Quality of Life in Urban Britain: some developments and trends Social Trends No 7* HMSO 1976; Hall J F and Perry N H *Aspects of Leisure in Two Industrial Cities Occasional Paper 5*, SSRC Survey Unit, 1975)

This pioneering work, scorned by some as derivative, underpinned much later work in the USA and Europe as well as the UK. Apart from articles in *Social Trends* and *Encounter*, little was widely published on the UK work, but the GHS and other major surveys now regularly carry questions on satisfaction with goods and services and the NHS is riddled with consumer satisfaction surveys.

Allanbach Inst.
In the early 1980's Gallup ran a *World Quality of Life Survey* (sic!), and has now also run two waves of a huge cross-national survey of social and moral values (based on work by the European Value Systems Study Group chaired by Prof Jan Kerkhofs of the Catholic University of Louvain) which contains QoL measures and others specifically developed from earlier SSRC ideas. Mark was a member of the Steering Group for the first wave. *(Carra-Kish-Himmelwitz)*

A parallel project on Values and Social Problem Indicators in Contemporary Europe (chaired by Prof Walter Rüegg of Universität Bern) has conducted surveys in several countries in Western Europe, for which PNL provided the core questionnaire. Both projects drew heavily on previous SSRC/SU QoL work and on intellectual input from PNL which funded two Research Fellowships in my unit (Dr Steven Harding and Dave Phillips) with myself providing overall guidance and technical support (computing and documentation).

For the last several years, Mark concentrated on the elderly, but others will be more familiar with this work (Sheila Peace at the OU and Janet Askham of the Age Concern Research Unit at KCL).

The Polytechnic of North London

After the SSRC Survey Unit closed in 1976, Mark was immensely and actively supportive of my efforts to set up the Social Research and Planning Option of the new B A (Hons) Applied Social Studies degree, and to develop the research programmes which eventually led to the establishment in 1978 of my own Survey Research Unit at PNL. I quite openly envisaged this as a direct continuation of the SSRC/SU, and many colleagues will remember that, after the closure of the SSRC/SU, there was a gap in provision until the establishment of the SCPR initiative.

Mark was a constant visitor to PNL and was appointed by CNAAs as the first External Examiner for the Option which had its first intake in 1977. He saw us through the early waves of graduations from 1981 and was very impressed with the quality of the work he saw, so much so that he had no hesitation in awarding a high proportion of First Class marks to the research components. *confirming*

As the course developed he also became External Assessor for those students eligible for the Diploma of the Market Research Society, and continued in this capacity when his term of duty as External Examiner expired.

For his particular contribution to the development of research and research training at PNL, and in recognition of his stature as a social scientist at national and international level, he was awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the Polytechnic in 1982.

Although he would never say it to my face, I think he was rather proud of his links with PNL, especially since, as far as I know, it was and remains the only British higher education institution to offer him any kind of formal academic recognition. (Perhaps Noël Parry, then Dean of Faculty, and Dr Paul Corrigan, then Head of the Department of Applied Social Studies, might be persuaded to write something).

Summer School. → PNL
→ ESSRC.

Speech at Barbican?
(Rachel Pierce
Graham Hamblin)
Tom Roberts
Jane Hopkinson

Leggatt/Janowitz Seminar.
Social Science Omnibus.