

# AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK ABRAMS

**Recorded: Flat 6, 48 St Martin's Lane, September 19<sup>th</sup> 1984**  
**Interviewer: Dominic Abrams (grandson, then aged 26)**  
**Present: Jean Abrams**

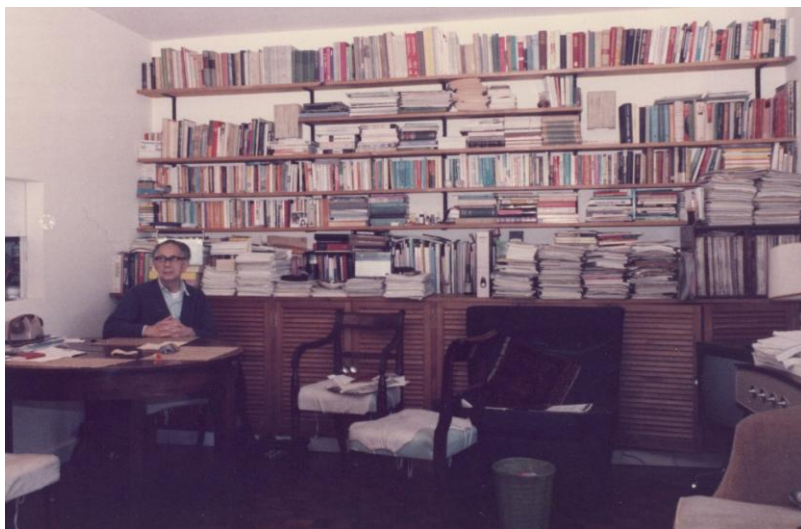
I interviewed Mark over the course of a sunny September day in 1984. The interviews were conducted using a Sony cassette recorder. Mark's wife Jean was with us and supplied regular cups of tea, lunch, and enforced occasional breaks (though both Mark and I seemed not to notice the passage of time).

Born in 1906, 77 years old at the time of the interview, Mark was still actively involved in research and enquiry. I asked Mark if he would mind being interviewed and that my aim was to learn more about the Abrams family and its background, as well as about his, and my father's (Philip Abrams, by that time deceased) lives and work in social research. At the time I had just completed my own PhD in Social Psychology at the University of Kent, and was starting the second year of a temporary lectureship in Psychology at the University of Bristol. Facing an uncertain future as the academic jobs market had been shut down by Conservative government cuts, part of my interest was in how Mark had navigated both academic and commercial social research.

Mark died in 1994 and in 2002 the tapes were first transcribed for me by Mayling Stone. The transcript was subsequently viewed and checked by various relatives, friends and colleagues who had worked with Mark at various times. One of the striking aspects is the clarity of Mark's diction and the liveliness and lightness, as well as astonishing fluency, that characterises his narrative. Even now, what Mark had to say is engaging, thought provoking and entertaining.

I am enormously grateful to the following for providing details on family background: Paul Walman, who has extensively researched the Abrams family tree, Sonia Jackson (Philip Abrams' first wife), Sarah Kearns and Evelyn Abrams (Mark's daughters with Jean and Una, respectively). Thanks to Michael Warren, Martin Bulmer, Alan Marsh, Jennifer Platt, Malcolm Rigg, John Pinder, and others for providing additional detail and background relating to LPE, Research Services, SSRC and Age Concern, and for correcting transcription errors of names and places. In places notes are added based on additional material Mark provided in an interview with my sister Rebecca Abrams in 1986. Rebecca also helped substantially with corrections and notes for this transcript. Particular thanks to John Hall for his encouragement and support leading to a finally complete and accurate version of the transcript and to Scott Anthony, at Cambridge for his detective work and encouragement. Apologies to anyone I have forgotten to thank.

Dominic Abrams, Canterbury, Kent, February 22nd 2012.



**The interview at St Martin's Lane: Mark Abrams (top and left), Dominic Abrams (right). September 19<sup>th</sup> 1984**

## Technical Note on the Transcript and Audio files.

This transcript and the audio files are to be lodged with the Papers of Mark Abrams at the Churchill Archives Centre at Churchill College Cambridge<sup>1</sup>, which also houses an archive of Mark Abrams' work and materials, lodged by Mark's wife Jean Abrams and his daughter Evelyn Abrams.

As far as possible, the transcript itself is a completely accurate and full verbatim transcription of the interview. In the main text of this transcript an italicized bold note indicates a transition or issue with the recordings. These were first recorded on cassette tape, then copied to CD in 2002, then in 2011 new copies were of the intact tapes direct to .wav and .mp3 files. Unfortunately the second tape was faulty at the time of recording, resulting in high pitched tape noise. However, it was possible to salvage a reasonable rendition (with some filtering).

Footnotes generally provide information about people, names and locations that Mark mentions. Valuable material was provided by John Hall who has a website area dedicated to Mark Abrams<sup>2</sup>: Unless footnoted, further information about most of the individuals, places or publications mentioned by Mark can be found readily by searching Wikipedia. John Hall also devoted days of time to help locate more obscure or more informative web links for details of people and places, and these are footnoted throughout. More extensive background details are available from John's website. Further assistance was given by Scott Anthony, Fellow of Christ's College Cambridge whose research on modern British history includes a study of Mark's work<sup>3</sup>.

Where indicated, family history and other academic details were provided by Paul Walman, Sonia Jackson, Rebecca Abrams, myself, or other sources who have collectively tried to locate books and photographs of times or places mentioned by Mark. We also managed to unearth some of Mark's propaganda analysis work for the BBC (see Appendix). A few items could not be traced. These include details and covers of two books, the first, *Money in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, published by John Lane in 1931, and the second (written pseudonymously as Philip Kimble) published by Allen and Unwin. Also two photographs, one of Mark 'running like mad through all the garbage with one of those armoured cars coming after me' (in Washington DC), the other of Mark with Alison Outhwaite and Ernst Kris with phones to their ears, labelled 'Magicians of the Air'.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD%2FGBR%2F0014%2FABMS>

<sup>2</sup> <http://surveyresearch.weebly.com/mark-abrams.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hist.cam.ac.uk/research/research-projects/modern-british/mark-abrams>