

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK ABRAMS

Recorded: Flat 6, 48 St Martin's Lane, September 19th 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 19th 1984

Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Technical Note	5
 Sections	
1. Family Origins	6
2. Latymer School, Edmonton	20
3. London School of Economics	29
4. First Academic Position – Lecturer in Agricultural Economics	35
5. America (Brookings Institution)	37
6. Back in England: Market Research and London Press Exchange	40
7. Philip Abrams	48
8. Wartime at the BBC	50
9. After the War	56
10. Philip at School	60
11. Back to Research Services Limited	62
12. Philip Abrams going to Cambridge	68
13. Research Services Limited (Part 2)	75
14. The Labour Party	77
15. Social Science Research Council	85
16. SSRC Survey Unit	87
17. Research on Old Age	89
18. Academic Relationship between Mark and Philip	93
 APPENDIX: Studies in Broadcast Propaganda (1940)	 98

Images	Page
Mark Abrams, Dominic Abrams, September 19 th 1984	2
Abram Abramovicz	6
The Jewish Pale of Settlement in Russia 1835-1917	7
Annie Isaacoff	10
The Market, Edmonton Green, 1915	12
Abrams Family Picnic in Wormley, Essex, 1926	13
Lew [Walman] 'The Machine Gunner', 1919	17
Latymer School form photograph 1925	21
Abram and Annie Abrams, 1930	25
Lew Walman at 73 Town Road in 1946, and the same house in 2012	28
Mark Abrams (undated)	44
Book: The Condition of the British People 1911-1945 (1946)	56
Book: The Population of Great Britain (1945)	58
Book: Britain and Her Export Trade (1946)	59
Mark Abrams (approximately 1950)	61
Mark Abrams, 1951	63
Book: Social Surveys and Social Action (1951)	64
Mark Abrams, Los Angeles, 1952	65
Evelyn Abrams and Philip Abrams, 1952	69
Philip with Jean Abrams, Lac de Pont, 1955	72
Mark Abrams, 1956 and 1957	75
Book: Must Labour Lose? (1960)	80
Dominic Abrams at the Kozminski School, Chicago, 1966	83
Mark at The Boltons (1969)	85
Mark, Dominic and Rebecca Abrams, 1970	87
Mark's Business Card with Age Concern	91
Book: Values and Social Change (1985)	92
Evelyn and Mark, Brighton, June 1988	97
Ben, Dominic, Mark and Jean Abrams, Pelham Square, Brighton, 1993	97

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 Cambridge¹, 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 Abrams²: 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 work³.

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 20th 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'.

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

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

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

1. Family Origins

*Audio note*⁴

MA: My father came to England in the early 1880s⁵. It was the time of the great wave of pogroms in Russia and, you know, it was time to get out. What stimulated him a little further was that he was approaching the age when he had been conscripted for the Russian Army..

DA. Which was, how old?

MA: which was around 18⁶. So, he thought well it is time to go. He lived in a sizeable town by Russian peasant standards called Grodna⁷.



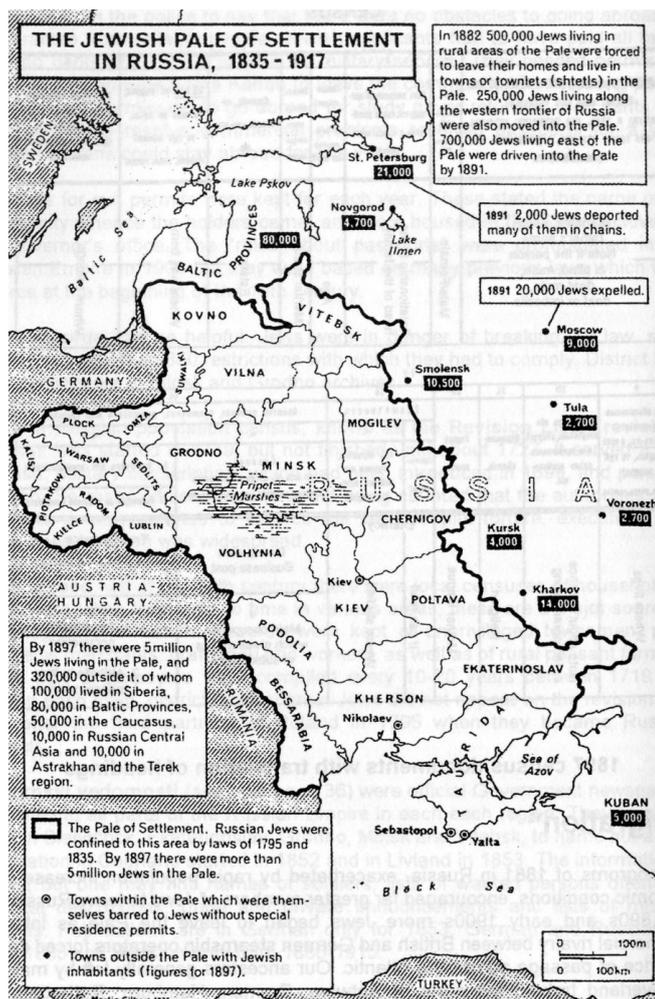
Abram Abramovicz

⁴ Tape 1, Side A; Audio data file: Marktape1. There is poor tape quality for the first 20 minutes, after which it improves

⁵ Paul Walman notes: Both parents came from the Pale of Settlement. From Abram Abrams Naturalisation papers they came to England – 1891. Originally lived in Friedrichstadt (now Jaunielgava) Latvia (Latitude: 56° 37' 0 N, Longitude: 25° 4' 60 E). Stated he joined the Russian army in 1888.

⁶ Rebecca Abrams adds: Shortly before he died Frank Adams (Mark's younger brother, who changed his name to Adams in order to be able to serve in the British army) told me that Abram was forcibly conscripted into the Tsar's army. This was normal practice in the Pale of Settlement, although Mark was wrong about the age. In fact, Jewish boys as young as 12 or 14 were routinely conscripted at that time. (See Walter Lacqueur History of Zionism, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972, p 57.) According to Frank Adams, every year on his birthday, the Tsar pulled lots for the names of Jewish soldiers who would be released from service. By a miracle Abram's name came up and he and his friend David Isaakovitz decided to leave at once for Britain.

⁷ Grodno/Hrodna, a town in which Jews were permitted to live and had a sizeable Jewish population in the late 19th century. Grodna was in Belarus, just across the border from Lithuanian, but it was all part of the Russian empire at that point. In an interview by Rebecca Abrams in 1986 Mark states: "My father had had a little more travel experience in that he had moved for a job to Riga which was probably the biggest port in the Baltic at the time and knocked around there for a bit and then on to another big town Kovna." "My mother came from a village in Lithuania called Pusushva and he came from an even smaller village and I can't remember its name".



He came to this country. He had no particular trade, being 18 years of age. All he had done was some fishing, in Riga, in the Baltic, but that is no trade in the East End of London.

DA: What would he have done if he had stayed in the Baltic and Russia?

MA: He would probably have settled permanently in Riga, which is a big town and had the great advantage, as far as he was concerned, of what is called intellectual stimulus. There were newspapers, there were books, there were people who incessantly argued about insoluble problems, and that's what he loved.

They came to London, went straight to the East End. As a great many immigrants from Lithuania and Poland and Latvia did. And there, I don't know how, in what way, he met my mother.

DA: Did he have any other relatives in the East End? Did he go to anyone?

MA: No, he went to a brother who had immigrated just slightly earlier, about a year earlier, who had settled in the West End. What is often overlooked I think is that the Jewish immigration was almost considered as being immigration to the East End of London. Well, in a very large extent, it was. But there was an equally important settlement in Soho, particularly the garment trade, for peddlers, for people who sold things from stalls and barrows and so on. And his brother settled there.

DA: So we already had some family here?

MA: Yes, but I don't think they had seen much of each other and I don't think they continued to see much of each other - they knew each other and saw each other. He just went to the East End of London for one very good reason. He had already heard that the real radical movement in this country was among the Jews of the East End⁸. That was true and one of the great German anarchists, Rudolf Rocker, who didn't know a word of Yiddish when he came to England, in fact, went to special efforts to learn Yiddish because he was told the only audience for the anarchist, would be among the East End Jews, who were crazy (!). So that was one reason for going to the East End, also there was a Jewish theatre there which rather interested him⁹.

And he took various jobs — making cigarettes, making walking sticks, anything that turned up. The one thing that he didn't do was tailoring. He never knew anything about that. It was always – little jobs that you could take on for a few days and then drop, or do on your own time, and do as a self-employed person, which was terribly important to him.

DA: Would he have had that opportunity had he not come to England?

MA: I don't imagine so. He would have been an employee of some kind, or he would have got stuck, if he had stayed in his birthplace, he would have been stuck in a Jewish community, which was absolutely ringed round. It was a ghetto. But he regarded himself, for what it is

⁸ Paul Walman adds: The German gentile wrote *The London Years* by Rudolf Rocker published in 1956. This book was an insight to life in London during his time in London between 1895 and 1914 and reflects the plight of the Jewish Russian immigrant workers. In the book Annie's brother David Isakovitch is mentioned a number of times. David later went on to write "A History of The Haymarket Affair" (Under his new name of Henry David) which was about a demonstration and unrest that took place on May 4 1886 at the Haymarket Square in Chicago.

⁹ Most likely the East End Yiddish Theatre, see also <http://www.jewishmuseum.org.uk/>

worth, a philosophical anarchist. The essence of philosophical anarchism is that you consider it degrading to be in a relationship where you are the servant of someone else, but it is, if anything, even more degrading to be an employer of anyone else. So, you have to work for yourself, that's all. And jobs like making walking sticks for special customers, or making a few hundred cigarettes – you were your own master, your own workman. So, that is what attracted him to the East End and there are lots of little jobs like that.

DA: Why do you think he became an anarchist? What

MA: I think, partly, this was his urban contacts in Russia. Grodno¹⁰, which by our standards is a small town, but by the standards of Jews who lived in tiny villages in the settlement, it was a metropolitan town. And to go Riga¹¹ was like going to New York today. It was a great Baltic centre, with a very... long history in the Baltic, as a centre. And that's where I think he picked up his interest there and was greatly fed by the activity of the radical Jews of the East End¹². He used to, later on, drag me, walking miles and miles because he could never afford fare money, to meetings of the Workers Circle in Cable Street¹³, to listen to them. And I had a great victory when later on I made him compromise and let me go and hear some of the Clydeside Rebels, who were orthodox members of the Independent Labour Party (laughs). That's right, he thought he was really getting on that. He would stand behind and say , "Hmm, that fella's soff, that fell's soff!"[sic], and the contempt in his voice must have reached even the man on the soapbox. Anyway that's where he settled.

And then the problem, once he got married¹⁴ was, how do you make a living of some kind, without disgracing yourself, and making enough not only to buy herrings and potatoes for yourself, but also for a wife, and for a growing number of children?

¹⁰ Grodno, spelled Hrodna on the map, 100km south west of Vilnius, on the Belarus/Poland border
<http://www.viamichelin.com/viamichelin/gbr/dyn/controller/mapPerformPage?expressMap=false&act=&pim=true&strAddress=&strCP=&strLocation=Grodno&strCountry=1794&productId=&x=27&y=10>

¹¹ Capital of Latvia

¹² Rebecca Abrams notes: See East End Jewish Radicals by William J Fishman for historical corroboration. Peter Kropotkin and Rudolf Rocker spoke at meetings during this period.

¹³ Rebecca Abrams notes: The Workers Circle was an organization formed by Jewish immigrants from Russia to promote self education, literary work and support for those of the community sick or unemployed. The initial group, the Arbeiter Ring Verein, with a membership of twelve was formed in June 1908 in what is now Tower Hamlets; a second was formed independently by five members and called the Freie Arbeiter Ring, holding its first meeting in July 1909. The two groups came into contact a year later and merged in July 1911. From 1912 the Circle had used rooms at 136 Brick Lane for its activities. In 1924 Circle House, Alie Street, E1 was purchased as the headquarters. May have held meetings in Cable Street as Mark says

¹⁴ Mark and Frank told Rebecca that Abram and Annie met through her brother David David (nee Isaakovitz), and that Annie was already living and working in the East End of London when they arrived. According to Mark, it was Annie who decided they would get married and Annie who officially gave him the name Abramovitz on the marriage certificate.

DA: Where did your mother come from?



Annie Isaacoff

MA: She came from Lithuania¹⁵. It was a small village outside Vilna¹⁶, which was then Russian, not Polish, as it is today¹⁷. So he began looking around for things to do that would be more stable, and what he picked up was being a peddler. He was able to hire a pony and a

¹⁵ Paul Walman adds: Pašušvys- pronounced Pusushva, geographical location: Kedainiu, Kaunas, Lithuania, Europe, geographical coordinates: 55° 24' 0" North, 23° 38' 0" East – Information from both her brother's (David & Jacob) Naturalisation papers

¹⁶ Yiddish name for Vilnius, capital of Lithuania

Paul Walman provided the following information on Annie and Abram:

Annie Isaacoff (also known as Issacorwitz):

Father: Nathan Isaacoff Issacorwitz; *Mother:* Pauline (Frumma Pescha) Saffer, *Birth:* Abt. 1872 in Pasusvys Kovno; Latitude / Longitude 56 00 24 00 E; *Married* Abram Abramovicz, 02 Oct 1892 in East London Synagogue.

Residence: 02 Oct 1892 Lane Place; 08 Nov 1893 28 Steward Street, Old Artillery Ground, London; 1896 1 Chance Street - Bethnal Green; 02 Jul 1900 5 Lebanon Terrace Hyde Lane; 02 Apr 1901 31 Cedar Terrace Edmonton; 20 Sep 1902 33 Cedar Terrace Rosebury Road, Edmonton; 27 Apr 1906 57 Balfour Road Edmonton; 28 Feb 1909 57 Balfour Road Edmonton; 02 Apr 1911 4 Moscow Street, Leeds; 11 May 1914 73 Town Road Edmonton; 03 Jul 1941 46 Park Avenue, Bush Hill Park, London.

Death: 01 Mar 1959 in 46 Park Ave Bush Hill Park; *Burial:* 01 Mar 1959 in Western Edmonton

Abram Abramovicz

Father: Lazarus (Lewis) Abramovicz; *Mother:* Sarah Katz

Birth: Abt. 1867 in Friedrichstadt (now Jaunielgava) Latvia; *Military Service:* Abt. 1888; Russia

Immigration: 1891 in London, aged 24. .

Residence: 02 Oct 1892 66 Brick Lane London; 08 Nov 1893 28 Steward Street and then as Annie (Chance Street onwards), though he did not move to Leeds for the period that Annie was there.

Adopted the name Abram Abrams in appox 1894 and had a certificate No 191102 issued by the board of trade to use the name for business purposes. Initially traded in Boots and Shoes for the fist 8 years and had a boot stall in Edmonton Green. Also started a drapery business and rented stall No 33 & 38.

Children: Nancy Abrams; Lizzie (Bessie) Abrams; Lily Abrams; Ida Abrams; Joe Abrams; Max Alexander (Mark) Abrams; Hilda Abrams; Frank Percy Adams

¹⁷ In the interview with Rebecca Abrams 2 years later he says it was part of the Russian empire at the time.

trap and get credit to buy various bits of haberdashery. And then he would load up and go off to the little villages of Hertfordshire, particularly Hertfordshire was his favourite place.

DA: When was this?

MA: Well I can tell you¹⁸, because he was already established in that kind of work when I was about 6 or 7. It was before World War 1, and I was always taken on his outings. It was wonderful! We would go off in the pony and trap and we would just meander on and on, and we'd come to a pub and say, "This is the place!", and get down, go in. And I remember on one occasion he left me in the trap, forgetting that the pony wanted to eat as well. The pony began eating the grass that rose steeply up the bank. And as the pony got higher and higher up the bank I got lower and lower, until I thought I was going to be well below the pony. And I began screaming, and he came out and pulled the pony back and took me into the pub with him. Which he did regularly after that. When that seemed reasonably adequate, he felt he ought to lead a more stable life, so we moved to Edmonton. At Edmonton we used the front room, which had ordinary windows like any other little house, as a place of display for his goods and wares.¹⁹ We occasionally got a customer, but not very often! [laughs] So from there he branched out and took a stall in the Edmonton Green Market, where things began to look up.



¹⁸ In the interview with Rebecca, Mark states that he was born at 73 Town Road, Elm Road, Edmonton, London N9 early in April 1906 but that his mother delayed registering his birth until the 27th of April because she was afraid he could be repatriated to fight for the Tsar's (Russian) army.

¹⁹ According to Abram's naturalisation papers, he first worked as an itinerant pedlar, then ran a boot stall in Edmonton market, and then set up shop in the front room of the family house in Edmonton. Eventually he seems to have bought the house next door and was running a haberdashery shop from the knocked together front rooms of both these houses.

The Market, Edmonton Green, London N9 c 1915²⁰

And, from that...

DA: What was your mother doing this time?

MA: She was looking after six children, plus another two who came later. And she was doing odd jobs like cutting down clothes and making them fit the younger children. And she also did the writing for my father, because she could write in Yiddish. And she could read Yiddish. And he never bothered²¹.



Abrams Family Picnic in Wormley, Essex, 1926²²

Back Row (Left to Right): Mark Abrams, Lily Tropp (nee Abrams), Meyer Tropp
2nd From back: Sam Marcovich, [unknown] Hilda Abrams, Joe Abrams, Sadie Abrams (nee Miller)
3rd From back: Bessie Markovich (nee Abrams), Abraham Abrams, Annie Abrams (nee Issacowitz), Ida Walman (nee Abrams), Lew Walman

²⁰ A postcard from Enfield Library's collection. Paul Walman notes: Abram ladies outfitters occupied numbers 33 and 35, between Geary's bakery (37, closest, without the canopy on the right) and Staveley Provisions (31, next to the telegraph pole on the right) on the west side of The Green. Later Joe opened a hairdressers at number 19. See also <http://lower-edmonton.anidea.co.uk/local/thegreen/thegreen.html>

²¹ In descending order of age: Nancy, Lizzie (Bessie), Lily, Ida, Joe, Max Alexander (Mark), Hilda, Frank.

²² Supplied by Paul Walman. According to his father, Ida was apparently pregnant at the time.

Front Row: Pauline Marcovich, Frank Abrams, [unknown, unknown]

DA: He just spoke?

MA: He spoke it and he read printed Yiddish, which was fine – there were always two or three Yiddish papers around the place, but written Yiddish, he never thought it was worth his while.

DA: I remember you telling me about his political activities. When did they really take off?

MA: They took off while he was still in the East End and his first years in Edmonton in North London. Incidentally, this is related to his political activities: in the house in Edmonton we had four pictures on the wall – one was a portrait of Émile Zola²³. Of course, because of the Dreyfus affair; one was a portrait which I have never seen anywhere else – I've never seen the Zola one anywhere else – it was a portrait of Kropotkin²⁴

DA: Why was that?

MA: Why that? – because he was the father of philosophical anarchism. And then there were two pictures – reproductions – one of the Worker's Daughter, and one of the Squire's Daughter – the Squire's Daughter was haughty, aloof, arrogant looking, dressed in fine clothes, but looking as sour as sour milk. The Worker's Daughter was chubby, rosy cheeked, eating away, and hugging a loaf to her chest. The contrast, and the lesson, and the moral, was obvious: If you want to be happy, don't have anything to do with these rich so and so's – stay away from them [laughing].

DA: That was the message on the wall all the time?

MA: All the time. And he never parted from them.

DA: Where are they now? Have you still got them?

MA: I think what happened was that they went not to my eldest sister, who left home at the age of 14²⁵. She found life was a little too intensive. She emigrated to America with my uncle²⁶. But

²³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89mile_Zola

²⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kropotkin>

²⁵ Paul Walman adds: Nancy was 17 when she arrived in New York

the next daughter, Bessie, I think she got them when she got married, when she came out of the synagogue. She was told it was a present. It was hoped this would poison her husband's mind and stop him being a paid labourer. He was tailor with regular job [laughs].

Well, he then went and got another stall in Hertford and ran the two together. But always, no paid help.

DA: Because you were helping?

MA: I would help on the Edmonton one mainly, but occasionally he would take me out to Hertford and I would help out as well. For some reason or another the other children didn't. They were busy – at the age of 13 left school and you had to go to work and bring in some money. So as long as I wasn't 13, and then when I was 13 I was trapped into this educational ladder so I was always available. You could always fit in education sometime.

And then from that point he decided, okay, that he could now, with the assistance from my mother and me and my younger sister Hilda, he could operate a proper shop. So he opened a shop in Edmonton, in The Green. The Green was the marketplace, the central marketplace for Edmonton, and it sold clothes and stockings, you know the usual sort of glorified haberdashery clothesware sort of shop. Which did reasonably well, until the war broke out. And then there was a great outburst, understandable I suppose, of anti-Germanism. Everyone who couldn't speak cockney was considered a German in Edmonton, and of course Jews couldn't speak like cockneys. So, it began to get very, very hot for Jewish people who couldn't speak English properly. They were accused of being German.

DA: Can I just ask what was the house you lived in like? Can you remember that?

MA: Yea, very clearly. Front parlour, front window, it was full of things he wanted to sell, not the full range but two or three things. Then there was one room, the parlour, which had aspidistra in. My mother always insisted that there should be a large aspidistra, a couple of arm chairs, and a sofa, and a little table. No one ever went in there. Then there was an intermediary room which was meant to be a dining room, but in fact it housed a table²⁷. My

²⁶ Paul Walman adds: She was alone – Uncle David had gone 3 years earlier.

²⁷ He says table, but in his interview with Rebecca he talks about the piano which was positioned in a middle room of the house that everyone passed through. His piano teacher was the son of the caretaker of Edmonton Jewish Cemetery.

mother was determined that we should all be great musicians. She didn't know what she was up against! It was dreadful [laughs]. And where we ate was in the next room, the kitchen. That was really the centre of the house, which had an open grate and was always food going on it, because with eight children you can't sit them down all together. And also you can't count on them all turning up at the same time. So, there was a permanent supply of fried things like fried fish, or latkes, or candied orange peel. Anything that would make room for itself on the open fire.

And then there was the scullery. The scullery had a copper – a large open copper, where you did boiling of your clothes when you wanted to clean them. That had a little fire underneath it and the fire was going, the water was getting warm, you pushed in all the clothes with a stick, added some soap and let it boil, for a bit – stirred it from time-to-time and took it out, and then came the tough job of putting it through the mangle. God! Have you ever tried working a mangle? You could tear your guts out when turning the handle on some of those clothes. It was all right, it was fine after a while. You would see who'd win – would you win or would the mangle win? [laughs]. Usually I won.

DA: Sounds like a really big house.

MA: No, they were all very small rooms. It was part of a terrace. And then there was a reasonably long garden. And we had a civilised neighbour, the Mattocks. And they suggested that we'd both benefit if the fence between their house and our house was pulled down. We'd then have the illusion that we each had a large garden. And strangely enough, it worked. This stuff by the American poet²⁸, you know that 'good fences make good neighbours', turned out to be absolutely wrong. Pulling down the fences really helped in that case. Then, in our part of the garden, we kept chickens. So we had eggs regularly and, once or twice a year, we would have our own chicken to eat as well. You know, we would all go out and feed the chickens with maize and oats.

To cope with the conviction that all Jews were Germans, my father took into partnership a man who had a son in the army. So he stuck in the window of this shop a photograph of this son in his army uniform, showing that at least, you know, we were on the right side. And then by a sheer fluke, this cousin of mine he would be, the son of my father's relation in the West End, joined the army, became an expert on how to operate a machine gun, and had his photograph

²⁸ This probably refers to Robert Frost, who didn't write the words, which came from an old proverb, but wrote a poem around them "Mending Wall". See: <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88/frost-mending.html>

taken operating his machine gun, or ready to operate his machine gun [laughing]. This also was put in the window – this was Lew, our cousin, the machine gunner, from Soho.



Lew [Walman] 'The Machine Gunner', approx 1919

DA: Did this placate the neighbourhood?

MA: Well, yea. Oh, yes we were regarded as okay. Then after the war, you see this was by 1918, when I was already 12 – up til then in Edmonton I had gone to Montague Road Elementary School, which was about, I suppose, two and half miles away. We walked at 8:00 in the morning and then walked back again at 12, and then walked back again at half past one, and then walked back again at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. It was absolute hell. Because among other things, it passed what I thought was the biggest Jewish cemetery in England. The Montague Road Cemetery – and I thought, my God, how quickly can I get past the cemetery?

But, it was a very tough school. I remember my first week there. There was always, among the regular students, there were always 20 or 30 gypsies. Because there was lots of open space there and they used to park near the school. And the biggest of the gypsies picked on me in the first couple of days, to fight me. Well, my fighting tactics were very simple. As soon as I saw him approaching, I backed. And I kept on backing – round and round the field, until he got tired [laughing]. My brother was watching this, my older brother, and he said, "Ah, that is not the way you fight. When you see him approaching to you, and is within a couple of feet of you, push out

your right arm as hard as you can and hit him somewhere. And then while he is still bewildered that you are actually hitting him, hit him again doing the same thing with the other arm – straight out”. I thought, fine. “Should we practice it?” He said, “No, no, no we don’t need practice. No one to practice on here, except me. You remember and do it, cause he’ll pick on you again tomorrow. He has already been telling his pals what he is going to do to you tomorrow”.

DA: You must have been terrified.

MA: Yea, I was. But the tactic worked! He tried three or four times, coming straight at me – I pushed out my arm [laughs]. He gave up and after three or four. He went away. And he left me alone after that.

DA: A school toughie were you!?

MA: I wasn’t the school toughie, but at least I wasn’t kicked around or anything.

DA: And what did they teach you? Did you speak Yiddish at home or did you speak ...

MA: No, we spoke at home – we spoke a mixture of Yiddish and English. In that my parents spoke Yiddish, but the children spoke English. And, although we could speak, the children could speak a little Yiddish, and my parents could speak a little English, neither of us would give way – we stuck to our languages, but it was all right²⁹. We understood perfectly. And on the great holy days – like the New Year and the Day of Atonement and things like that, my mother would insist that I walked to Tottenham, which was the next borough, and go to the synagogue there. And my father would ostentatiously (when he should have been fasting), would ostentatiously eat his way through a rilo, [laughs] to show what he thought. But he never did anything positive, but it was just a sort of negative, to show that this was not really what he approved of. In fact there was one rule in the Abrams family that was never broken by either of them. That you must never, under any circumstances, hit one of the children. If the worst came to the worst the only way you could get relief from frustration or anger was to bang your head

²⁹ Rebecca Abrams adds: It states in Abram’s naturalisation documents that while he spoke good English as well as fluent Yiddish, he was barely literate in English. From his written test, you can see that he was simply copying the English letters from the given script, but did not know how to write. He was 50 years old at this point and had lived in England for 30 years. I remember Sonia saying that right up to the end of her life Annie never really learned English and mainly spoke in Yiddish. I also remember Mark saying his parents spoke Yiddish to one another.

against the wall. They would do it. I'd seen both of them do it, rather than strike one of the children.

DA: Was that unusual at the time?

MA: Oh it was very unusual. You could hear the yells coming from every house in the street, every minute of the day practically. When the husbands weren't beating their children, they were beating their wives. No, no, that was ... I've never known ... what I do remember of my mother, is something very striking that has stayed with me all my life ... I don't see why I should be embarrassed. I'll tell you: The child after me was my sister, Hilda. And when she was still quite young, my mother was breast-feeding her, and I came into the room and I saw this strange animal being breast-fed (I knew it was my sister alright), and my mother looked up and saw me looking sort of half puzzled, half you know. And what she did was to pull her breast down out of Hilda's mouth and, squirt my face with it with the milk .. warm milk all over my face! Then we looked at each other and then burst out laughing. And that, I will always remember. You know, this warm milk and then the minute, no, quarter of a minute, of absolute silence, and then we both burst out laughing. And that was typical of her. And if she wanted to show me what an awful swine I was, she would go and beat her head on the wall rather than mine.

DA: Sounds quite a strong woman.

MA: Yes, she was small, she was pretty, but she knew what one should do and what one shouldn't do. One of her favourite sayings, and of my father's as well, but more hers, was, and I think it is the same in German, -- "*es passt nicht*", -- it is not becoming for a Jewish person to do a thing like that ... *es passt nicht*. And we knew that when she said that it meant, 'Please, don't do that'. And that was as far as she ever went in a rebuke. What was much more common with her, she would say, "Where are you going now?" And I say, "I am going to walk down the street to see what is on at the movies, not the movies, the picture palace." And she would say, "Are you going to walk all that way. Put an apple in your pocket. And here I've got some warm latkes I've just fried ... put one of those in your pocket, you'll be hungry." Now I had to wrestle with her almost to prevent her putting food in my pockets! That was her contribution to my upbringing. My father's contribution was to inculcate me with his idea of sound, political society.

DA: So, we've got to just after the war. Were you very conscious of the war, or was it just kind of ...

MA: Yea, I was conscious of the war because the Zeppelins were dropping bombs near us. In Wormley, Hertfordshire, we could see them going over. There was a terrible blackout. There was no food. The reason we had chickens and then began to grow potatoes was that there was no sort of rationing. You waited for someone to say, "Do you know they've got potatoes at so and so?", and then the whole street would make a rush! If you were very lucky you could get some things called artichokes ... we never knew how to cook artichokes. But we always took what we could. And that was one reason for our attempt at self-sufficiency.

Well, then from Edmonton, there was a scholarship examination held, when you were 11, to go to Latymer School Edmonton, Latymer Grammar School. And for the whole of Edmonton, I suppose in a normal year, there would be about 10 places. It was primarily a fee paying school. Maybe a dozen, I don't know. But anyway when my year came I said, yes, I would take it, and I came top. I was given an enormous bound volume of Boy's Own Paper to celebrate this [laughs]. And I went to Edmonton Latymer School, where I played football, I never got to the top of my form. But usually I was second or third or fourth and the form teacher would say....

Audio note³⁰

³⁰ Tape blank for small section 15 seconds, ...

2. Latymer School, Edmonton

I would say you know, “Why do you have to do better?” Then I thought of a way by which I could do better. One of the pupils in my form was Queenie Roth, who later became Queenie Leavis. She married Leavis of Cambridge. And the two of us decided that we would not go into morning prayers and stand there listening to these others singing hymns [laughs]. We would say, “On religious grounds, we object.” Instead we would stay behind and she would test me out in Latin, English literature, Chemistry ... I would try to test her out in Chemistry, and so on. It was a sort of private coaching system with no payments ... it was a mutual coaching, which we had 20 clear minutes every morning of the week. It was a great help to me. I don't imagine it was much help to her, but she thought, “Well okay, all right, if he wants to give a quick *quid pro quo*, well then this will satisfy him, then he'd tell me some nonsense about Chemistry.”



Latymer School form photograph, 1925

Back Row (Left to Right). Fordham, Hindel, Abrams, Smith

Middle Row: Roth, Pickard, Rice, Woodfield, Barnacle

Front Row: Dyer, Hoskins, Moffat, Ashworth, Amos, Hobling, Strugnell (Una, later Mark's first wife).

So I stayed on there. I became a house captain and then, when the, I think it was the 1923 general election was held, parliamentary election, the Headmaster decided it was time that the pupils learnt about politics in the real world they were growing up. And they should meet, and between them pick out three candidates – a Conservative, a Liberal and a Labour. So they did, and they picked me as the Labour candidate. And then he said, “Fine ... now what Labour candidates have to do in real life is address great audiences ...” No microphones in those days, no television, no radio. So, the big assembly hall was made available to us and we each, in turn, not on the same day -- we each had a day to ourselves, addressed the school. All I remember is that the one question that I thought was going to baffle me was, Philip Snowden had said that he disagreed with the devaluation of the pound and the Labour party officially said it was they that wanted to devalue the pound. And the question was, “How are you going to reconcile Philip Snowden’s attitude to that of your party leader?” And I said “It was not a commitment of the Labour Party to adjust itself to the views of an individual. If Philip Snowden wants to remain a member of the Labour Party, he will adjust his views towards the manifesto”. And even the teachers clapped that [laughs].

DA: Your father must have been rather stunned by this ...

MA: No, he had been allowing me to go all this time to hear Keir Hardie and people like that ... David Kirkwood, [John] Wheatley, [James] Maxton, who regularly came to Edmonton. Edmonton was quite a political spot then. It was one of the first London outer boroughs to elect a Labour MP, a man called Frank Broad.

DA: Were your father’s own political attitudes changing as well, or was he just being tolerant of yours?

MA: He was being tolerant. The furthest he would go. I mean once when I was away at the LSE in the first year and I had to read Graham Wallas on human nature and politics. And I was sitting reading, and he said, “What are you reading?” And I said, “Graham Wallas, Human Nature and Politics.”³¹ He said, “Sounds good. Who’s the author, who is this Graham Wallas?”

³¹ Rebecca Abrams adds: Graham Wallas (1858-1932) Professor of Political Science, LSE 1914-1923. Played a leading part in the creation and development of LSE from the day of its conception in August 1894 until the end of his active life. He was a lecturer at the LSE from 1895 and became its first Professor of Political Science. H.G Wells remarked in his Autobiography, “...there is scarcely any considerable figure among the younger generation of publicists who does not owe something to his slow, fussy, mannered, penetrating and inspiring counsels.” From: ‘Portraits from the Past: Graham Wallas’ by W.A. Robson from LSE Magazine, May 1971, No41, p.5

And I said, “He is a well-known Fabian.” He said, “My God, a Fabian? That’s a politician? Ha!”, and walked away [laughs]. But that was about as far as he went. Maybe he was right! No, he thought it was alright, as long as I was always able and ready on Saturdays to help with the stall or the shop.

DA: Did he run a magazine or something as well, or he used to collect money or something for ...?

MA: He helped in his early days. There were two of them you see, there was him and my mother’s brother, both active politicians. And, my uncle, that is my mother’s brother, he really was a skilled worker, and his skill was printing. And he had a small, little printing workshop in the basement where he lived in the East End, and he would run off leaflets, pamphlets, statements and so on³². My father’s job was to try and get money so that they could buy paper – to run off these leaflets.

And I remember him telling me about this fantastic occasion when he had a real killing. They agreed that they should find some rich sucker and take his stolen goods away from him ([laughs] (all property being stolen, of course). And the idea was that they should approach, once they’d found the idiot ... they should approach him and say, “Look, you work night and day and what do you got at the end? ... a few hundred pounds ... it’s nothing. You’ll wear yourself out doing this. We’ve got a much better scheme. We can produce false money which is so good that you will never be caught. And we will let you have it. At a half, a third, of its face value ... you’ll see.” And he said, “How do I know?”. My father said, “Well, I’ll bring some along ... we need a little notice ‘cause you know we can’t turn this stuff off like this I’ll bring some along and you will see ... and I’ll stay here or go with you, and you’ll buy something with these things ... you’ll take it to a bank and you will see ... it will be so good they won’t know.” So after a week or so my father turned up with a few coins, a couple of notes, the sucker tried it out, and sure enough it was all accepted. Of course it was accepted because it was the genuine stuff! So the man said, “Okay, this I will buy. You bring me a bag full of this stuff.” My father said, “It is not all that easy. We don’t want to get caught. We want to plan it carefully. You will get on a bus at Gardeners Corner ... the first one that passes Gardeners corner “, (which is in the East

³² Paul Walman adds: This is verified by the fact that David Issakovitch later worked as Compositor for Jewish Daily News, Bronx, New York – As stated on the 1930 USA Census. Rebecca Abrams adds. see East End Jewish Radicals by William J Fishman, a history of Jewish radicalism in the East End of London at that time. D.Isaacovitz is mentioned on p 223 as living at 1 Chance Street in 1896, from where the Yiddish anarchist newspaper was produced for a short while.

End of London). “The first one that passes after 9 o’clock going eastwards ... you get on first with your money, that you are going to give us for your fake money, and go upstairs. I will then get on after you with the money I’m going to give you. We will sit, you know, side-by-side almost, and I will pass you my bag and you will pass me your bag. And then the next stop you get off and I will stay on ... no one will know.” So, that is exactly what they did. And when the sucker got home and looked at this stuff, it was so obviously fake ... and so obviously counterfeit, he was absolutely furious. He found my father and said, “You cheat! You swindler! ... You told me you were going to sell me good false money and it turns out to be lousy false money!” And my father said, “Yep, I am afraid you are right and I think you ought to do something about it ... but, I will help you. The police station is just down the road and I think you should go there and tell them that you tried to buy counterfeit money from me, and I cheated you. And I will go with you and I will confirm your story that you wanted to buy this counterfeit money and, you know, I was a weakling and I fooled you. Shall we go now?” The man said, “You Lobos, you”,³³ which is a term of non-endeavourment (in Yiddish), and the matter was dropped and they had enough money for some time.

But my uncle finally fled the country, because he organised a strike among the sweatshop workers, all women, in Leeds, to come out on strike. And he would chain himself to some railings as a protest so that it made headlines in the local Leeds paper. And sure enough he did it. But all that happened was that they cut the chain ... they took him off to the lock-up and I think he got three weeks in jail. And the girls all went back to work, and he went off to America. So that was the end of the partnership [laughs].

DA: So, you were at school still?

MA: Yep,went back to school and then when I was 18 they said, “You ought to go to university”.

DA: What was your position in the family ... were you first child or

MA: Oh god no, I’ll tell you names, and then if you want to expand on that. The eldest, the first born, was Nancy, then there was Bessie, then there was Lillie, and then there was Ida, and then there was Joe, and then there was me, and there was Hilda and then there was Frank. That should make eight.

³³ Meaning ‘wiseguy’ in Yiddish.

DA: Plenty.

MA: Oh yes!

DA: What were your mother and father called?

MA: He was called Abram, and my mother was called Annie ... Ann. She never allowed Annie ... she was Ann.³⁴ Somewhere or other there is a photo of them. It is fantastic how good looking my mother was then, and how respectable my father looked. Obviously, he'd borrowed the clothes from the photographer! [laughs]

DA: We ought to get that copied.

MA: Well, I have had it copied and I sent a copy to every one of the children. And we will have ours somewhere in Brighton and I will try and find it. If I can't I will borrow one from Frank or Joe, or someone.

³⁴ Annie Isaakovitz was apparently known as 'the belle of Lithuania' in her youth, according to Mark's comments to Rebecca.



Abram and Annie Abrams, approximately 1930

DA: So, did any of the other kids go to university?

MA: Well, the first one, Nancy, ran away from home at 14 ... she didn't run away, she said she was going to Uncle Dave in New York, but effectively was getting the hell out. And went off ... she worked, you know, as a waitress amongst other things. But then went to Cornell University. Where, apparently she did quite well. And then she did her thesis on a relationship between a mother and her daughter. I suppose nowadays it would be called a sociological study or an anthropological study, because it was set in a particular context. The context being the Abrams family! But it was considered pretty good, and on the basis of that she decided to begin with, that she would be a tramp ... you know, and she just wandered around America and landed up in Chicago ... went to the university. And a man called Ernest Burgess³⁵, a grand old man of

³⁵ Burgess supervised Nancy's PhD, according to Mark's interview with Rebecca

American Social Studies, particularly social gerontology and measures of life satisfaction ... all that ... took her on as an assistant. Which was a great coup for her. It would have been for anyone, to be an assistant to Burgess. But she couldn't stand working solidly in one place ... she took off again ... this time she went to New Jersey, bought a little land, and began selling milk [laughs] to the neighbours. But all the neighbours had their own cows in New Jersey. So, she decided to sell her bit of land and she heard of a place called Florida where fortunes were to be made.

Audio note³⁶

MA: ... Land boom ... all you had to do was buy any piece of land and in a few years it would be worth ten times more. So, she went to Florida. And the depression came. And the land was worthless, no one wanted to buy any land. So she just abandoned it, and made her way across country to California, where she really felt at home ... there were lots of people like her. And then she thought it was time she had offspring. But she didn't want ordinary offspring, you know, too chancy. You marry someone, and there you are stuck with his offspring [laughs]. So she began looking around ... she went to Mexico ... over the border, and found the ideal father for any children she was going to have ... a Mexican lawyer. So she put the project to him ... he said, "Yes, sure, fine." And they produced a daughter, who was called Barbara, but now calls herself Barnaby. And she is now living very happily in California. She has a son who wrote to me recently and said he wants to do post-graduate work in economics in England ... should he do it at the London School of Economics, or should he go to Cambridge?

DA: Nice choice.

MA: I said, neither [laughs]. Go to somewhere where life is real [laughs], like Manchester. I don't know if he took my advice. So, that's what happened to Nancy.

DA: What happened to the others? Went into business?

MA: They worked in the shop or they got jobs, with one exception. Ida became a singer.

DA: Did she keep the name Abrams?

³⁶ End of Tape side A, start of side B

MA: Oh sure, yea ...mmm. And this was really quite an event in our lives. Because when she began singing at concerts, that's where you had to start in those days ... little local concerts, she came into contact with someone who already sang in the chorus at Covent Garden. And he had a terrific voice. Everything was beginning of a crescendo but then moved very quickly to fortissimo [laughs]. And it was terrific to hear him sing. He used to sing in the garden ... irritate the neighbours! He also had a habit of wearing a large overcoat with the seam stitching undone so that he could go into shops and steal things, and slip them into his overcoat! We were always curious as to what he would bring home. Sometimes it was apples, sometimes it was fish, you know, depending on what business was like³⁷. But Ida took her singing seriously and, you know, if she occasionally got opportunities, would bring in a little money as well.

DA: And presumably your mother was very proud of this?ambitions.

MA: Oh yes, she thought this was right and proper. The others didn't do anything out of the run ... what you would expect from that sort of life. Then she married Lew, the machine gunner.

DA: Did the machine gunner survive?

MA: Until a few years ago. Yes, he got through the war all right. They had a son called Nathan ... nobody called him Nathan, he was Nate. And they came to me one day and said they had a problem ... I said, "What's the problem?", and they said "Nate has joined the Communist Party. And we wanted him to be a tailor, and we think this will interfere with his career" [laughs]. I said, "There is nothing you can do about it if he wants to be a communist. You've got to let him be a communist. If you think it is wrong, maybe he will think it wrong later on, but it is no use saying to Nate now." So Nate went off and became a communist, but he did leave, I think, oh about ten years later. So that's what happened to Ida.

³⁷ In his interview with Rebecca, Mark says the family had a lodger called Philip who was a singer at Covent Garden, and that he used to steal food and hide it in special pockets in this coat.



Lew Walman at 73 Town Road in 1946, and the same house in 2012

The other two girls got married, had children. Their husbands were reasonably competent workers, and one of them was a gambling addict and I used to earn a little extra money placing bets for him. He had a system. And he knew the system would break the bookies, but once they found him putting a lot of money on greyhounds, they would get suspicious and they would warn him off. So he wanted two or three help mates. Those were boys who would go around to different bookies saying, 5 shillings on this greyhound, and the other would say put a pound on the same greyhound. His system was very simple arithmetically. He would always back the greyhound that was in the third cage. He said "Sooner or later, no matter how bad the dog is, the turn of number of 3 must come up! It's the theory of probability", which he'd never heard of. As a theory of probability, he said that if you spin a penny long enough, you get same number of heads as tails ... so if you have greyhounds starting, sooner or later number 3 must win. If I lose okay, next time I increase my bet so I get back up what I lost, plus something I gain from number 3. And this went on and the first week it worked! I began putting my half crown on, and at the end of week I had £5. At that point I said to him, "I am through ... I know when enough is enough. This will never happen again." [laughs] He said, "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry!". The next I'd heard of him, he had sold everything, his clothes, the house ... everything, and put his head in a gas oven and killed himself. So, don't take up gambling if you want a steady income. [laughs] It doesn't work out.

|

3. London School of Economics

Well, at the LSE...

DA: How did you go there?

MA: How did I go there? I got a scholarship.

DA: Why did you apply there as opposed to somewhere else?

MA: Oh, because the people at Latymer said, “You are cut out to be a politician ... you are obviously interested in politics, you know more about politics ... the only place to go, and you have got to go to a university, is the London School of the Economics,” which I had never heard of. But I then found out that one of the masters was taking an external degree at the LSE ... so I said, “Okay, fine”. And they said, “You have to sit an exam, and a few scholarship exams as well”. I did, and it worked out. I went there, to the LSE, and it was very pleasant. I found a few friends ... very close friends ... I began to play for the second football team, which made me okay with the heavies, and meanwhile I kept in as part of this small group³⁸.

DA: What sort of departmental structure did it have? Is it the same as it is now or ...

MA: No, it was dominated in those days by two things – I think if one wanted to say what was distinctive about the LSE in those days, was first of all the teachers. You know, you didn’t go along to someone called Mr. Jones or Mr. Brown or Professor Brown or Professor Jones. You were taught by Harold Laski! or by Professor Tawney³⁹! or if you were very lucky, Sir William Beveridge! World figures. I mean if you were interested in politics they were world figures. Little upstarts who were just beginning their careers as teachers turned out to be Kingsley Martin, the late editor of the New Statesman. They were all stars, and they were brilliant teachers. And Laski’s relationship with his students, and it was a big place even in those days, Laski’s relationship with his students was that he would say, to about a dozen – fifteen, twenty of them, “Every Tuesday I will arrange to be at home in Edison Place. Any of you who care to come around are welcome.” And usually a dozen of us turned up, sat on the floor. He would talk

³⁸ Mark tells Rebecca (in her interview) that for a year he “was able to get a flat in Bloomsbury at 6 Tavistock Square. The landlords, jointly, were Virginia Woolf and Leonard Woolf. The only disturbance they caused me was they had the Hogarth Press in the basement and when there was a publication ... the press in the basement was pounding away, but I didn’t hear much because I was right up in the attic.”

³⁹ Mark’s PhD supervisor.

about the American Constitution, about the American Supreme Court, about what the Labour Party want to do ... you know, we would take part as not quite as equals, because we weren't, obviously we weren't equals. But as participants, and not simply as people listening and taking notes. And that's the sort of place it was. All of them -- the History Department, Geography Department – they were world figures. In the political world anyway.

And the other distinctive thing about it: there was a very high proportion, in the Graduate School anyway, of Americans – bright Americans who would have heard, even in the back woods of Oregon, heard about the London School of Economics. And their ambition was to go on to the LSE. And that was very stimulating. Because some of them were very bright and even when they weren't bright they were interesting.

DA: Who were your friends, and what were you reading?

MA; Well, I was suppose to be reading Descriptive and Analytical Economics. And this meant that you took a history of the theory of economics from Adam Smith, through Ricardo, right on to the Cambridge economists. And we all loved listening to Dalton on the Cambridge economists, because he was a Cambridge man himself originally and he could never mention Pigou or Robertson or Marsh or any of the outstanding Cambridge economists without making a joke about how ridiculous they were [laughs], and how out of touch they were in this ivory tower they'd built for themselves, in Cambridge. I know when he was told that someone had changed a poster ... there was a poster up saying that there was going to be a public lecture by someone called Cox, a Cambridge economist who was going to lecture on 'Population' ... and someone had gone down and transposed the 'C' into 'P'. And he [Dalton] thought that was real funny. So did I for a matter of fact! [laughs]

And the sort of little circle ... I suppose the two that I saw most of to begin with, was a man Bill Sweet, who was reading geography, and came from Southend, and he went on to teach at one of the polytechnics in the west, Plymouth or Portsmouth, I am not sure which. And a man called Alan Dudley⁴⁰, who came from Worcestershire. And he, after a few short jobs, went on to become an ambassador. And we saw a good deal of each other the first year or two. Less after that, because the circle widened a little to include Krishna Menon, the Indian communist leader,

⁴⁰ This was possibly the Alan Dudley involved in wartime propaganda and measurement of public opinion in the USA during WW2, aimed at maintaining good relations with the USA and possibly with the intention of bringing the US into the war. He does not appear to have been an ambassador, but may have been attached to the British Embassy. See: Henry Butterfield Ryan *The Vision of Anglo-America: The US-UK Alliance and the Emerging Cold War 1943-1946* (Cambridge UP, 1987)

who was a very forceful figure. And the other man was Abba Lerner, who came from the East End, London, rather later in life ... He had been a presser in a tailor shop. And then someone said, "look you are too smart for this, why don't you get some sort of grant to go to the London School of Economics?" He did, and became an outstanding professor in the United States, a professor of economics. Those two were added to the group. But the outstanding addition was a man called Otto Berobach van de Sprekle⁴¹, who was the offspring of a Dutch father and a Malaysian woman [laughs]. And somehow he had more of his mother's looks about him than his father's. But he and I became great friends ... We used to go on holidays together. And he was always inventing ways of spending one's time doing non-work.

I remember, I think it was my first graduate year, after I had graduated, Otto said, "Did you know that term is going to start without Dalton's great inaugural lecture, open lecture, to freshers? How long is he going to be away? He's going to be away the whole week. So they postponed the lecture, the freshers will just have to start life without him." And Otto said, "If it is going to be a whole week and then he'll turn up on the Monday and give his lecture, none of the students will recognise him, will they? They won't know. But he'll be introduced." And Otto said, "Wouldn't it be funny if Dalton were kidnapped and one of us took his place on the platform?" [laughs] I said, "That'll be a terrific idea". Otto said, "I am glad you agree with me ... you do it!" I thought, "Oh God, why didn't I keep my mouth shut?" I knew couldn't back out. I said

Audio note⁴²

"Yea, sure, I'll do it, but somehow you've got to arrange for me to get a gown."

...Otto saying that I should simulate Dalton. Well fortunately I had heard the lecture three times, I knew all his jokes. They stole Professor Ginsberg's gown, because he was the shortest man on the staff and it therefore, it more or less fitted me ... and, by the time I reached the theatre where the lecture was going to be given, the word had spread ... every member of the staff was there including Beveridge. Every one of the porters, every one of the attendants at the lavatories there. I thought, "Oh God, what am I doing? What have I done?" And I thought, however, Otto said I've got to do it, so I better do it. I walked to the platform and stood up and welcomed them. Hoped they would have a fruitful, successful, time, followed by an equally fruitful, successful career. And then I gave them the first of Dalton's standard jokes. There was a mild smile, a little titter ... I went on a bit about books they should read, and then I came to the

⁴¹ In Rebecca's interview he appears to call him Otto van Detman.

⁴² End of tape 1/ Start of Tape 2 which was damaged at the time of recording (serious tape squeak). Audio file: MarkTape2-Track1

second of Dalton's jokes. This got a better reception and then I went on and produced the third of the standard jokes -- this was at the expense of the Cambridge economists. That puzzled some of the students, but they laughed by now. At that point I looked up and Bill Sweet was standing at the back of the hall doing this [waving, laughs]. Apparently what had happened was that Dalton had turned up, gone to his room and they had arranged a relay of obstacles. As he was getting ready to go to give the lecture, someone had stopped him and said, "Oh, Professor Dalton I am so glad to have met you Dr. Dalton, I have a terrible problem, you must help me with this ... it will only take two or three minutes". And Dalton said, "All right come on in". So that had given me another three or four minutes. And then he came out and as he got to the top of the stairs, another student stopped him [laughs], but this couldn't go on for long. By the time the third student tried it, Dalton said, "I am sorry I am already late, come see me tomorrow". Bill Sweet waved. I said, "Oh, I am afraid I've got to stop my lecture there, I have rather an urgent appointment that I've forgotten all about, I'll see you all tomorrow". And there was a window at the back of the theatre and I hopped out of the window [laughs]... students were completely flabbergasted! And at that point Dalton walked in, to cheers from the faculty, who were already enjoying the thing. And he got up on the platform and welcomed them all ... wished them a happy successful career and then gave them his first joke, which they already knew. There was a roar of laughter... He thought, oh, it is going down well this year... The second joke they didn't let him finish ... they gave the punch line themselves!

DA: He must have been so confused. Did you observe ... you waited to observe this?

*MA: No, no Bill Sweet sat there. I couldn't get out of the well I'd jumped into without help [laughs]. And I went home afterwards. They told me it had been a great success ... they returned Ginsberg's gown to his room. I went home, I thought, "Now I ought to register at the Employment Exchange to get myself a job and do something, but I'll go to the school first anyway, collect my books and football boots that I left in the locker." The minute I opened the door at the LSE, the porter said, "Hey". I said, "What is it?" He said, "I've got a letter for you from Dr. Dalton". I said, "Oh, have you?" He said, "Yes, I was to give you as soon as you arrived". All right, I took it down to the lavatories and I opened the letter. It was a sheet of paper on which had been written – 'Congratulations. *Hugh Dalton*'. Wasn't that marvellous of him?!*

DA: You must have been really relieved as well.

MA: Oh, God and how? And when he came to write his autobiography, he mentions this incident. He said, "I am convinced that Mark Abrams will go far." [laughs] So that was Otto.

And again, Otto took me off to Salzburg ... which was an absolutely marvellous experience for me ... we didn't see much of world-level opera in Edmonton! So going to Salzburg was quite a thing. But Otto had an obsession with toy soldiers. So, as we left Salzburg to go north, he began spending his money on lead, tin toy soldiers. And when he spent all his money, he said to me, "Mark how much money have you got left?". And I parted with it, and so I had no money left, and he said, "Don't worry. In Amsterdam I've got an uncle. And he's rich ... all I've got to do is knock on the door and your purse is full, my purse is full ... we will live again." So, I said, "Okay". So we got to the railway station at Amsterdam, and Otto called up a taxi, gave the taxi driver his uncle's address, and off we went. Otto said to the taxi driver (because he could speak Dutch well), "Wait." While we were at the door we knocked, and we knocked and we knocked and then finally someone from next door said, "Who is it you want?". Otto told them. He said, "Oh, I think your uncle is away in Switzerland on a holiday. There is no one there!" Fortunately, Otto was able to get enough money from her to pay the taxi driver and we went walking until the morning. Then in the morning, we went to uncle's office, and explained our position to the finance officer. He said, "I've got no authority to give you money to go anywhere. The most I can do is, I can give you money for food, and money to spend a night in a cheap place. And that's about as far as I can go. Possibly your uncle will be back tomorrow, day after, and can clarify matters, and he will perhaps advance you money to get back to England." Okay. Next day, same thing happened. Uncle still not back. Otto said, "Alright, we will just walk around. And so we passed a place, Otto said, "Let's go in and have a drink". I said, "You're crazy, we've got no money for a drink!". He said, "Don't be silly. Come on in". We went in and had beers, and Otto finished his and said, "Now Mark, I want you to go and stand at the door and hold the door open while I explain to the bartender that we've got no money, but make sure the door is open". So Otto went to the bartender and, before the bartender could jump over the counter, Otto was out of the open door, and I was with him. And we ran and ran and ran, until we were sure that no one could catch up with us. The next day we went to uncle's office

Audio Note⁴³

DA: Now where were we? ... you and Otto were ...

⁴³ Tape sticking here. Audio file: MarkTape 2-Track 2

MA: Well, on the third day we turned up at uncle's office and the finance officer said, "Stop, I've bought you two air plane tickets to take you back to London. If you get a bus straightaway it will take you to the airport and you can be back in London in two hours' time". We said, "What about sandwiches?" He said, "I've bought some sandwiches for you ... here they are". And that was Otto.

DA: Sounds like a pretty wicked character, who could have ended up in prison or something?

MA: No, he ended up as a professor of political philosophy in Australia.

DA: Oh well, they always send that sort of person ... criminals and vagabonds.

MA: But anyway, after that I needed a job, having got my PhD, Tawney was my supervisor.

DA: What was your PhD on?

MA: Oh God, it was on *The Origins of the Industrial Revolution*. It dealt with the royal monopolies granted at the beginning of the 17th century to courtiers, some of whom simply made a lot of money and wasted it, spent it on women, and so on ... and some of whom regarded it as a possible nest egg to invest in what was to become the industrial revolution. And that is what I did my thesis on.

4. First Academic Position – Lecturer in Agricultural Economics

DA: Which years were they?

MA: That would be [19] 27-29. In 29 I needed a job. Well, Allan Dudley, a member of the original group said, "I think that could be arranged. My uncle is head of an agricultural college near Evesham, and they are looking for a Lecturer in Agricultural Economics. You know economics. Go be an expert on agricultural economics." I went out and was interviewed. The uncle knew nothing about economics. He didn't know a great deal about agriculture either, but what he was interested in was someone who would play duets with him on the piano. Could I play the piano? I said, "Well, sort of in a way, yes". And he said, "Good, good. How well could you, for example, play the piano for hymns in the morning?" I said, "Oh yes, that's easy, it's just vamping most of the time". He said, "okay, you've got the job".

DA: Well qualified, I see?!

MA: That's right, and I became a lecturer in agricultural economics. I don't know if it did the students any good. They seemed to enjoy it. It was rather unusual as a course in agricultural economics but it did me good because I was expected also to do research. And the first year's research was in an unknown subject ... then unknown subject ... the marketing of fruit and vegetables. It was the first marketing study I have ever heard of in this country, because all the people around there were growers of fruit and vegetables. And so I studied the way they actually marketed their produce, and then suggested how they ought to market it. And they said, "Fine, that's useful. What are you going to do research on in the second year?"

The second year was a slightly different subject. I wanted to do a research on social mobility among children of agricultural labourers. It has nothing to do with asparagus or brussels sprouts or anything like that. And I said, "I suppose it is alright, might as well." And so I went round all the villages within a radius of 80 miles and said, "What I would like is your school registers of leavers in 1921". Most of them had these. They gave me them and said, "What did I want them for?", and I said "I want to see what has become of them." So they gave me the names and addresses of the children who had left these elementary schools in the villages in 1921. And I proceeded to try and track as many as I could, to see whether there had been in some sort of social mobility ... if so, what kind. Was it different for girls and boys? One of the things that always puzzled me is that everyone that has done a study on social mobility has

done it exclusively among men. I mean, I automatically took it for granted that there could be social mobility among women too, so I covered girls, as a matter of course. Anyway, some of them I couldn't trace at all – they had just emigrated or joined the army and never come back. But quite a lot of them could be traced: either they were still living locally, or they had gone off to the nearest big town, which was Birmingham. Some of those boys got jobs as policemen, some of the girls had gone off to big towns and got jobs in shops, or serving in the markets and so on. Some of them simply stayed behind and got jobs as skivvies in halls and there are plenty of big halls in the Vale of Evesham ... big house.

Audio Note⁴⁴

MA: We were on..... social mobility among the children of agricultural labourers. And social mobility had almost invariably necessitated geographical mobility. There were no opportunities for upward mobility in the villages.

Then, I decided to get married to Una. And this raised a great problem, with my parents.

DA: Why was that?

MA: Because she was not Jewish. And they thought, you know, it was wrong. So I thought the best thing was to clear out of the country.

DA: That's rather drastic.

MA: Yep.

DA: Was this having married her or before you decided to?

MA: No, having married her⁴⁵. But fortunately I was able to go to Harold Laski, tell him the position and then he said, "Well now it's Monday now, in the middle of August, come back on Friday, and I think I may have solved your problem."

⁴⁴ Tape 2, Side A; , audio file: Marktape3

⁴⁵ Paul Walman notes that Mark and Una married at the West London Synagogue

5. America (Brookings Institution)

So I came back on Friday, and he said, "It is alright, I have arranged for you a Fellowship at Brookings Institution. You can get on a boat as soon as you like and go to America."⁴⁶ And he said, "There are one or two of my friends there you might like to see. For example, there is Felix Frankfurter⁴⁷ – I think he is not yet on the Supreme Court, but pretty close to it. You might drop in and see him." So I dropped in to see him.

DA: Where was that?

MA: That was in, he was at Harvard, I think, then. And Frankfurter said to me, "Well, what are you going to study here." And I said, "I thought what I would study was how the decisions of the Supreme Court had affected the development of capitalism in America". He said, "What?" I repeated it. He said,([now speaking to Jean] "Wait a moment, yeah, bring it [cup of tea] in")..... And Frankfurter said, "Wait a minute. I'll call in one of my colleagues." And he call in a man called Walton Hamilton⁴⁸, and described what it is I was going to do in my year at Brookings. And didn't say that I only had a year at Brookings ahead of me. And then said Hamilton, "How long do you think it would take an Englishman who has never been to America really to get a firm enough understanding of the American constitution to cope with that subject?" And Hamilton said, "Well, if he is good, he could probably manage it in two or three years." Frankfurter said, "Thank you, thank you, Walton." [laughs] And he looked hard at me and I said "Well, maybe I will have to cut it down a bit!"

And then I went straight on to Brookings where I, in fact, what I did, for the first year, was enjoy myself. We had developed a great friend there, a man called Isadore Lackman⁴⁹, who was a doctor, but his main activity was music. He had been the music critic for the New York Times, given that up to get educated, get trained as a doctor. Come from Washington, but had never really abandoned music. And it was always possible, if a really great string quartet was performing in Washington, that Isadore would phone up and say, "Look I've got the Budapest string quartet staying at my flat. And if you come over, they can play this afternoon", or this

⁴⁶ In the interview with Rebecca Mark explains that Una spent 6 months learning Hebrew and converted to become Mygaya, so that they married before leaving for America.

⁴⁷ Felix Frankfurter (1882-1965), Jewish Supreme Court Judge from January 30, 1939 to August 28, 1962. (see Twentieth Century Jews by Monty Noam Penkower, Academic Studies Press pp 75-104.)

⁴⁸ <http://ideas.repec.org/p/vic/vicddp/0104.html>

⁴⁹ Sonia Jackson comments, I think I met Lackman with Mark a couple of times. He knew all the famous musicians. He may have written a biography of Rubenstein or perhaps he just told stories about him

evening, whatever it was. And so I'd go over, and there it was. That first year in Washington at Brookings was first-rate, because...

DA: Did you do any work that year?

MA: No, I read bits but really what happened was, I got to know American academics of the kind that went to Washington, or who worked in Washington. For example, in that first year the American Economic Association held its annual conference in Washington and by that time one of my quite close friends, very close friends, was a negro called Abe Harris, Abram Lincoln Harris, but he was Abe Harris to everyone. And he taught at Howard University as an economist. And when the conference came around, I said, "Abe are you going?" He said, "Yes, he feels he ought to attend", and I said "Fine, I'm in the Willard Hotel. You've got pass where I am, at New Hampshire Avenue. You've got to pass there on your way. Why don't you pick me up and we can go together?" And we picked up two or three other economists on the way. We went off to the Willard Hotel. Wesley Mitchell was the President that year, a great Institutionalist Economist in America. And when we got to the front door of the Willard Hotel, the door porter looked at us and said "Yes, you, you, you, that's all right you go straight through the main entrance". Then pointing to Abe Harris, the black, he said, "There's a lift around the back for packages and cargoes and bookcases. You can use that one". And so, we said, "No. Either Professor Harris comes up with us, or none of us go up". And he said, "Okay – so none of you go up. It doesn't worry me." [laughs] And we said, "But we said we want to go to the conference." He said, "Well, if you want to go to the conference, I told you what you can do. Tell that black fellow to go to the back, and go up in the lift he will find there." So one of us went up to see Wesley Mitchell, President, and told him what had happened. Mitchell went to see the manager of the hotel and said, "Either Professor Harris comes back with me in the lift along with the other academics, or we simply cancel the conference." So Abe Harris came up. And that was one of the early breaks in segregation there. I don't think the American Economic Association ever met again there at the Willard.

But what I did with my time was occasionally to give lectures at what were called John Lead clubs. John Lead was an American communist who wrote a book called *Ten Days that Shook the World* -- the Russian revolution. And John Lead clubs were clubs of left wingers, and they wanted to know ... said would I give talks on how the unemployed in Britain were coping? What was the British Government doing in fact to be of help to the unemployed? I said "Sure, alright". I spent a little time lecturing to John Lead clubs around there. And I soon got to recognise two

very ardent members of the audience, who stayed awake and never missed a single word and turned up at every one of the lectures. Two members of the police! [laughs] I didn't mind much, because there were compensations. For example, while I was there that first year there was the Bonus Army marched on Washington – you know, the unemployed. But that sort of drifted away and what happened was that the real down and outs went to bivouac, to live out, on what was called The Jungle, which was the garbage heaps outside the city of Washington, where the hotel and restaurants had their garbage emptied. And they would try and find scraps of food to eat on this. And I went out a couple of times, to see them. And that was the first time I'd ever come across the name of a soldier called McArthur, and a soldier called Douglas. Both later on became Generals, but at that time they were chasing the unemployed out of the Jungle.

DA: Did you actually meet them?

MA: I didn't meet them because I was running too fast. And there is a nice photograph⁵⁰ of me somewhere in the loft (at Brighton), of me running like mad through all the garbage with one of these armoured cars coming after me. That was the first year.

DA: What was ... I mean you referred to unemployment in Britain. What sort of year are we talking about?

MA: 1929/30. The Crash.

DA: Right. Yea, and what was happening in the States at that time? Was it similar?

MA: Well, yes. That's where the Crash started.

DA: Why were they concerned about Britain?

MA: They thought America was doing nothing. They would like to know if anyone was doing anything. Roosevelt hadn't really got going yet with his various relief plans. And then the second year, well, they let me stay on for a second year, against the rules – those scholarships are supposed to be for one year. Anyway I stayed on for a second year and wrote a book called *Money in the Twentieth Century – A Study of the Trade Cycle*.

⁵⁰ Not yet located

DA: Where was it published?

MA: It was published by John Lane in England in, I think, almost as soon as I got back – which must have been 1931. I think that was the date. Anyway, it was John Lane – the Editor of the series was Krishna Menon, who had been one of my friends at the LSE. And of course Trade Cycle Theory - Depression theory was the subject. And this was possibly, but I don't know, but possibly, in English, the first exposition of what 50 years later is known to everyone as monetarist theory of the trade cycle. Erm, not a bad book, I suppose.

DA: Well received?

MA: Yes. One reviewer in I think Econo.. not *Economica*, in the *Clear Market Review*, which was a journal of London School of Economics, said, "Abrams, in his book of money has done for Hayek", who was already the great man, "has done for Hayek what [Arthur] Eddington has done for God. We understand him, but we don't agree with him." [laughs].

At the end of the two years I came back. And for a while I earned a little money coaching backward students at the LSE.

DA: Do you think the book turned out to be an advantage in terms of your career, your development? Or what kind of part did it play in your longer term do you think?

MA: I think it cured me of any itch to be an economist. That the part it played in my career, that I realised that it was not for me. This business of arguing about unidentifiable things, which couldn't be substantiated by empirical data and so on. I got it out of my system.

6. Back in England: Market Research and the London Press Exchange

And then at the end of 1933 when I got back, a man called Colin Clark, who was an economist at Oxford phoned me – a friend of mine, phoned and said, “Mark, do you know anything about market research?” And I said “No”. He said, “That’s alright, ignore that question. The appointments officer here has had a request from a firm in London. They want someone who is a good economist to go and be in their market research department”. And I said, “Well, if that’s what they want, I am prepared to be an expert on market research.” So I went along and I was interviewed in December 1933 by the Chairman and the Managing Director of the London Press Exchange, and the salary was £300 per year. I thought, God, this is real money at last, after coaching students at half a crown an hour! They said “Any more questions?” I said, “No, no, that’s fine.” One of them said to me, “Do you think you could manage on £300 a year?” -- cause I said I’m married, and had a small son ... “Can you manage on £300 a year?” I said, “Yes, I think I can”. And he said, “I don’t think you can. I don’t see how you can. I would be much happier if you would accept £350 a year”. So, I said, “Well, that’s very, very nice of you, I’d be happier too.” And he said, “Okay fine, you start January 1st.”

DA: Philip was born then?

MA: Yes, Philip was born in 1933.

DA: Where were you living then?

MA: In, I think it was Carleton Gardens in Camden Town, North London. And I started work there and the first job given to me was to manage a survey on the readers of the British national press – who were they, what did they read, what did they want to read and so on. And we took a sample of 20,000 respondents.

DA: Sample?!

MA: Sample, yes [laughs]. And at one point I was asked, “Do you think that’s the right figure.” And I wasn’t sure whether they meant that’s too small or too big. And I thought maybe they mean it’s too small. So I said “Well of course you could always expand it afterwards if you want to”. But 20,000 turned out to be adequate, and the technique was very simple. The interviewers went round with a complete set of yesterday’s newspapers – the previous day’s

newspapers. And they said to a respondent, "Do you read one of these?" (I think it was nine national newspapers) And if they said, "Yes I read..." – The Daily Sketch or The Morning Post or whatever paper they mentioned. You said, "Fine, here's yesterday's..." Times, Mirror, Sketch, whatever it is, "...and we'd like you to go through with us, and tell us on each page what you read, what you looked at -- the news, the features, the advertisements, everything in the paper". And 20,000 people said yes, they would, and once they said, yes, they had looked at it, then we wanted to know – did you read all of it, or part of it, or just look at the headlines, and so on. So we were able to say at the end, "Alright the readers of the Daily Herald (which was then the great working class newspaper), the readers of the Daily Herald are much more likely to look at a political story if it is on the front page left-hand side, than if the same story or a similar sort of story is on the right-hand side of the front page. They are much more likely to read an article in the News Chronicle if it is signed by someone with a real name, than if it is simply attributed to Our Correspondent. That they like the idea, though it may be the same person writing the two stories, that the readers of The Times read the leaders in The Times regularly." And incidentally when, months after when this finished, I told this and showed the figures to one of the younger members of the Walter family, which was the family that owned the Times then he said, " My God I didn't think they were such dopes." [laughs]

Anyway, at the end of this we knew a great deal about what the British newspaper reading public liked in its papers, didn't like in its papers, what caught their attention so that they read right through to it. And there were some very interesting findings.

Now one thing, and there were nine volumes of this report, 'cause it was an enormous document. One of the uses I made of it, many, many years later, was when I wrote a piece for *Encounter* in which I said, "Let's take as our starting point that if you know nothing about society, then the easiest way to find out what their values are is to look at the advertisements that appear in their newspapers, that they read. Because you can bet your life that the people who stay in business long enough to spend a lot of money on advertising have caught the right mood and motives and values of that particular society." I said, "We take that as our starting point – let's take these nine papers that I examined in 1934, look at some of the outstanding ads, by well-known manufacturers – now turn to contemporary newspapers and take the ads of the same products by the same manufacturers in the same papers and see if, by looking at the ads, there has been a change in their evaluation of what are the values the British public."

It turned out to be absolutely fantastic. In the Guinness⁵¹ ads for example, which were broadly on the theme that if you drink Guinness, you'd be twice as strong and you'd be able to do twice as much work in carting around steel girders. The ad for Bournevita was a woman with arms stretched out like this and three little children growing up – they are going to be strong and healthy because they are drinking Bournevita. Now Ponds face cream showed an aristocratic dame in her late-30s, I suppose, gently dabbing her face with a little Ponds cream and saying, "I would never use anything else on my face." And so on – a whole series of those things. The Horlicks one was 'Drink Horlicks tonight: tomorrow when you go for your interview, you will get the job.' [laughs]

Now if you take those same products and same advertisers today. They're trying to sell the same products on the basis, of, you drink Horlicks and you will be a smash with the girls tomorrow', 'you drink beer and the gang will be all around you', 'you use our cosmetic and everyone will want you'.

DA: So you think attractiveness rather than health or strength?

MA: And sexual. And, instead of showing little children growing up and becoming more and more mature, you show little children night after night getting greedier and greedier as they gulp down more bloody sausages, or whatever it is you are trying to sell! This must reflect a change in the values of the people. That they no longer believe that the right thing is to work hard, to get jobs, to have healthy maturing children -- The values have changed. I still feel that not enough is made of the importance of the content and character of advertising as an indicator of what are the values of a society.

Anyway that was a by-product of that study.

DA: Who were you working for again?

⁵¹ "Guinness is Good For You"



Mark Abrams (undated)

MA: I was working for the London Press Exchange, which in those days was probably the biggest agency in this country. And it had one characteristic that was a godsend to me – they thought I was good [laughs]– and so did their clients. And therefore they gave me a good deal of autonomy.

I can remember two or three occasions when, for example, I did a survey for a client – a London Press Exchange client – the J. Arthur Rank Organisation. They had completed a film called *Hamlet* by a man called Shakespeare and they thought it was going to be terrific. But someone said, look you've got to get 10 million people to pay ninepence each before you get your money back on this – make sure it is tailored right for them. So they asked me to do research and I came back and I said, "You know, part of the trouble is that some of the people don't know who this character William Shakespeare is. They want to know if he has written any other stuff – has any of it been on in the West End. You know, is that a real name, or is that just a pen name he is using? Other people at the other extreme say "We would never go to see anything where

commerce had laid its dirty hands on a classic". I said "I think you'd better drop the name 'Shakespeare' from the big headlines you are planning to use on it and have 'Jean Simmons and Laurence Olivier in a great love drama'. And then little letters on the bottom, ' William Shakespeare wrote the script', or something like that!".

Anyway they did alter it, and Rank himself said, "You know I like very much like what you have done, the piece of research, I think it has helped a great deal. Now, what I would like you to do is think of a piece of research that you would like to do yourself. It doesn't need to have any value to me at all or to the film industry at all or anything – just something that you can regard as giving you a kick and have them send the bill to me."

And I said, "The thing I would like to do you may not approve of". He said, "it has nothing to do with it. What do you want to do?" I said, "Well I want to make a study of who are the children, who go off every Saturday morning to your cinema clubs? What sort of homes do they come from? What influence do their parents have on what happens to them on Saturday mornings? How are they performing at school as compared to children who are not addicts of these movies? And generally study parts of what is the impact of being a Saturday morning JR Odeon addict, upon children as compared with not being one of them"?

And he said, "O, sounds okay. Alright go ahead." I said, "it is going to cost £2,000". Which in those days was an awful lot of money. He said, "that's alright. You tell them to send the bill to me."

And I did. I don't say I spent the cheque, the cheque went to the London Press Exchange. But I did that piece of research and the teachers were, for example, were very co-operative. We got them to grade each child. We did not tell them which child was an Odeon addict, and which wasn't. We simply got them grade each child on commitment to doing their work, on co-operation in the classroom as against aggressiveness in the classroom, various traits, various forms of behaviour of that kind. They played ball, did it very well. Then we interviewed the parents and some of them said, "Oh well, yes, we know Billy", or whatever his name is, "goes to these things but we find it rather interesting because afterwards we can talk about the movie, and you know, we feel we are together with him". "We know about Pearl Buck", not Pearl Buck but Pearl White or whatever her name was, "because Billy tells us all about her and then we go to see her films for ourselves".

And we looked at the comics they read. And again the parents of the kids who were addicts, said, "Oh yes, we know he reads comics but then so do we when he is finished with them". So it was a very interesting piece of research.

And another sort of incident was when the London Press Exchange produced what they thought was a terrific piece of advertising – for Crunchie bars, you know Crunchie bars? – honeycomb with chocolate over them. It was a little kid balancing a Crunchie bar on his nose with his mouth open, expecting a Crunchie bar to fall in. The agency and the art director thought this was terrific. It was eye-catching – kids would wonder about it – want to go in and say, "A Crunchie bar for me, a Crunchie bar for me". Well anyway Cadbury's said "Well, can't we do some research to see what young teenagers think of this?". Oh, I said, "yes". We did it with tape recorders. We went around and showed kids the ad – young teenagers they were – showed the ad and said, "Now tell us what you feel about us and how you react to it" – and we taped them. So when it came to presentation I was asked to report the results of this survey, I said, "Well, I think the easiest, simplest and quickest way to convey the findings to you is if I play you a tape of some of the first, but typical, interviews we carried out. "

They said "Fine – all right."

So the tape started and the first person, a girl, said "Well, if I may say so, ...I think that's soppy." [laughs]. "Thank you very much, Miss." Second tape – "Cor blimey, you mean snotty-nosed kid doing something that isn't going to get him anywhere is going to be a good ad? I reckon it is rotten!" And so the tape went on, and after a few of these, I think that is probably enough, isn't it? And Edward Cadbury said, "There is no other agency in the country, I think, would have played those tapes to us if they'd done the research. From now on, all our advertising will be placed with the London Press Exchange, and all our research will be done by Mark Abrams". And it was interesting working for clients of that kind.

And again just before the war what was then the Gas, Light and Coke Company said they wanted to know how they could get people to switch – to stop adopting electricity and remain loyal to gas – that was the real fight. And I said, "Well you know the only way you can do this is by interviewing people who are using gas, seeing what the satisfactions, dissatisfactions, difficulties, problems they had with using gas, and see if they can be countered rationally". And they said, "Sure, okay, fine, go ahead". So I did a survey in parts of what was then the Gas, Light and Coke Company's area. And each time we piloted it I added more and more social

material to it, about housing density, about the quality of the housing. Of course it was relevant to their attitudes towards the use of gas. And, you know, it became in fact a social study of housing conditions of the London poor, more or less. And they [LG&C] said it was fine. “We never thought that you’d do anything more than go around saying to people -- how much do you like gas? – a lot, a bit, not at all, you hate it – that sort of thing. [laughs] And this is terrific.”

Now, it so happened that, during the war the London School of Economics started a magazine, a journal, quarterly journal called *Agenda – Agenda for the Post-war World* – and the then director, whose name I forget, said, “you know we would like to publish this as an article in *Agenda for the Post-war World*.” And it was published as such. So, that was one of the good things about working for them, that one always felt I’m practically free to do anything, as long as it’s good, not necessarily useful in helping them to sell something, but good. They will appreciate that. There were lots of opportunities like that came up, working for them.

And also it was during that time that I first met a man called Paul Lazarsfeld who is the father of survey research and so on. He was on his way to America. And he told me that he had a very good young woman as his assistant, Gertrude Pardner⁵², and she would like to come to London to do research. I don’t know if this is true or not, whether she did want to come to London or whether she would have preferred to have stayed in Vienna, but I was pretty sure that Paul wanted her to come to London. She came to work for us, and it turned out that she had worked with Paul Lazarsfeld on a survey of milk consumption in Vienna. And we were going to do a survey on milk consumption in England, so it fitted in perfectly. And out of that grew a sort of small seminar that I held regularly at the Waldorf Hotel (since we were charging it to the client that was okay with everybody, including the client) in which I got together about, oh half a dozen, outstanding psychoanalysts/psychologists and we talked about the consumption of food as a psychological area for research, and beverages as well – you know, like Horlicks and Bourneville and Ovaltine and that sort of stuff, and Bovril – and

DA: Why were you interested in that?

MA: Well, because the LPE had several clients who produced food stuffs and beverages and so on and so I thought, “Well why not?, If the money’s there, it’s an interesting subject ... there must be a psychology of food consumption or psychology of nutrition, whatever one likes to call it. No one has ever done any work on this before.”

⁵² Sounds clearly like Pardner but perhaps should be Gardner. No links found.

DA: You were curious about this? Or were you looking kind of social factors?

MA: Well, I had to have, had to have some sort of payoff at the end. So I said that the final meeting of the seminar will be devoted to 'What advice would you give to the manufacturer in the light of our discussions?' The sort of people who were there was a man called Ernst Kris, who was the editor of the *Imago*, a journal of the International Institute of Psychoanalysis, who had come fresh from Vienna; there was a man, [Emmanuel] Miller, Jonathan Miller's father, you know, and another three or four people like that. And they were, I won't say brilliant discussions, but we knew we were there for a good lunch and a general relaxed talk in which people were free, to talk and say, no one was taping them, put their stuff in print. But that was the sort of thing that was possible for me in those days and I greatly enjoyed it. They were good employers [laughs].

DA: Sounds wonderful.

7. Philip Abrams

What was it like having Philip around first ...

MA: Well having Philip around at first was rather strange I think the one outstanding thing that I remember, ...you know one remembers the dirty napkins and all the other rubbish of that kind. And him howling in the middle of the night. That happens with every cub. But, I hope this doesn't sound too stupid: one night Philip was put down to go to bed and he was pretty restless, and so I said, okay I will go in and attend to him, and lay down with him. And a woman friend of Una's came in after a while and said, "He is marvellous with Philip. They both are getting on so well together". And he was a comparatively easy child to get on with. He tended, later on, as he grew up I think, to become more so. He tended to be a little secretive about himself and his feelings ... you know he, he went along with things, and went his own way, very often. But I think, at that stage certainly, we got on very well together.

DA: Where was he at school from say up to about 1940/50?

MA: Ah, well once the war broke out you see, we moved out to a cottage in the country, Buckinghamshire, to a village called Kimble. And he went to the village school for a bit and then they began dropping bombs on Kimble, because Kimble was very near – we were so stupid to pick Kimble – it was very near the headquarters of Bomber Command. We didn't know that but apparently the Germans did! [laughs] And when I heard bombs had been dropped on Kimble, I thought it was time we did something. So Philip was sent off to some progressive school in Scotland⁵³.

DA: God!.

MA: I know! But it was remote. It was well away from any bomb-worthy target, and, you know, as progressive schools go, they seemed to be fairly reasonable – the kids did not swear incessantly, they weren't drunk all the time. [laughs] And he settled down there alright⁵⁴.

DA: How old was he when he went there?

⁵³ Sonia Jackson comments, This was a progressive prep school, fashionable in left wing circles, called Kilquhannity House that had a famous headmaster, I think called Mackintosh, who was much influenced by A.S.Neill. One has to remember that this was in pre-Bowlby days but still! I think the effect was lifelong.

⁵⁴ Sonia Jackson adds, not according to Philip's account, which was that he was very unhappy, particularly as his sister Evelyn was able to stay with their mother Una.

MA: Oh, quite young. He must have been, I know he must have been quite young⁵⁵ because one day when I went up to see him, and Una of course went up to see him, the two of us went up to see him, the people who were running the school offered to take us for a little drive (because petrol was rationed because you couldn't drive very far) and to take Philip along with us. And they failed to strap him in. I don't think people bothered with straps in those days, but they failed to lock the door as well. And he just stumbled out of the car as it was going about twenty five miles per hour, and fell into the ditch, so he must have been quite young then. And then when the war was over we moved back to London.

DA: Was Una teaching by this time? What was she doing?

MA: As a child, was he teaching?

DA: Was Una teaching when Philip?

MA: Was Una teaching? Yes, Una did supply teaching. And it was a great help, because after the war worked out I left the London Press Exchange and joined the BBC. And Una was doing supply teaching.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Six years old

⁵⁶ Sonia Jackson says she thinks Mark had set Una up running a children's home in Worthing at this stage.

8. Wartime at the BBC

DA: So you actually lived in London?

MA: I lived at the back of the BBC.

DA: Bush House area?

MA: No, no. The Portland Place one – there is a narrow little street in the back there. And I had a flat there.

DA: What were you doing at the BBC? And how did it come about that you left the London Press Exchange?

MA: Well, this man Ernst Kris that I mentioned to you was taken on immediately by the BBC, partly because he was Austrian and knew German and knew Germany. Partly because he was a psychoanalyst. And they thought, to have someone like that around, attached to the overseas broadcasts might be a help to them. And they had another woman, joined Kris, called Alison Outhwaite⁵⁷, who had been a journalist in Germany and knew German very well and the two of them worked together. And then the question came of turning it into a formal unit ... not simply two unattached people trying to make an impact on busy journalists, busy broadcasters ...

Audio Note⁵⁸

Kris said I think I know someone and mentioned my name to a man called John Salt, who was head of overseas broadcast⁵⁹. So they phoned me and I went along, and was interviewed, and they said, "Fine, we liked you to start as head of our Overseas Propaganda Analysis Unit." I said "Fine, you know, that's useful I hope," so I set up this unit at the BBC.

DA: But why did you do that rather than stay at the London Press Exchange?

MA: Well, it was not terribly useful being in an advertising agency with the war going on.

⁵⁷ See papers of Ernst Kris: : <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/mss/eadxmimss/eadpdfmss/2006/ms006003.pdf>

⁵⁸ Tape 2, Side B;

⁵⁹ John Salt died in 1947. See obituary at <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-olive-shapley-1081732.html>

DA: So you felt it was just more useful?

MA: Yea, I felt it was more useful. And I built the unit up and we had people like Dennis Brogan⁶⁰ ... I persuaded him to join. A man called Denys Harding, who was then Professor of Psychology at Bedford College⁶¹ -- I got him to join. Frank Hardie, the man who had been President of the Oxford Union when they passed the resolution 'We Will Never Fight for King and Country'⁶² -- he joined ... and it became a very, very good unit and it produced each week an analysis of all overseas broadcasts, either originating in Germany or from occupied parts of Europe -- occupied by Germans or the Italians later on.

DA: When did you actually join the BBC? Can you remember which year it was? You've got here '39?

MA: '39, Yes, it was the end of '39. And it became the thing that people yammered for, and they were always told, "No, no. Confidential to hand picked people." It went to the Foreign Office, it went to the Ministry of Information, it went to Cabinet Ministers. And then, finally (all my time at BBC Broadcasting House), then it became big enough for them to say, "Look you must have your own headquarters, your own offices". We moved out towards Marylebone High Street, to a sort of abandoned nursing home in Duchess Street. We had the whole place to ourselves and produced this. And there I developed something which I think was a fairly useful social research tool, which I called 'content analysis'. You'd go through material over a period of time and you will see what its latent content is, and its intention and, why it's there, and why certain things are being said and done and so on. But it means a very careful reading and analysis of the manifest material.⁶³

DA: And what was the main way you went about that?

MA: I went about it in a very crude way, quantitatively to begin with. How many times in the quotations for example how many times in the quotations from Berlin, were there

⁶⁰ Dennis Brogan was later to supervise Philip's PhD at Cambridge, and Hugh Brogan was a friend of Sonia and Philip's' <http://www.universitystory.gla.ac.uk/biography/?id=WH0133&type=P>

⁶¹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-professor-d-w-harding-2320718.html>

⁶² See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_King_and_Country_debate#cite_note-BWBU-3 and <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/modern/hardie/hardie.html>

⁶³ An example of this is provided in the Appendix, which shows Mark's 1940 content analysis 'Studies in Broadcast Propaganda', which examined German broadcasts about Britain's vulnerability to attack.

references to the imminent invasion of England ... that is to their home audience. And when the number began to decline, I said, "Maybe they are preparing their people for there not being an invasion of England. Let's see if it is changing to other countries". Then when Italy came in, I said, "Let's see how many times Italian propaganda refers and relates to the Middle East and in what terms ... positive or negative ... as a potential war area ... as a possible revolution area, and so on." And finished up by saying, quantitatively, the Italians are replacing the Germans in the Middle East as the inciters of Arab hostility primarily directed against the Jews. They had become more than a mouthpiece for Berlin ... they are way ahead. So clearly, either they are worried about what is going happen there or they are hoping very strongly for Arab support. So, it was a quantitative thing to begin with.

The person who added real qualitative understanding to the material in a way that I couldn't do were these two – Ernst Kris⁶⁴ and above all Alison Outhwaite – both knew Germans and Germany and could say, "Aah I know Guderian, and when Guderian⁶⁵ is brought forward to say that sort of statement ... I know what is really on his mind," sort of thing. And somehow this account of what we were doing, particularly the paper saying we don't think there is going to be an invasion of Britain. When that turned out to be right, it was passed on to America, because they were think of setting up a similar unit, and they sent over a journalist to interview the three of us and write a piece called 'Magicians of the Air' ... and all three of us were photographed⁶⁶ holding telephones to our ears, you know, which was the photographic cliché at the time. To show that you were important and busy you had to have a telephone stuck to your ear! [laughs]

Well, after a while this reached the point where the Foreign Office... and I began to expand the thing and say that "Not only is this an analysis of enemy propaganda but Page 1 is five main points, or six main points that we in our turn should be putting into British propaganda". And that immediately upset the Foreign Office, who instituted an enquiry into what this unit was doing and why it was doing it, and who the hell were they anyway? And a man called French – I want to say Sir John French – but his first name may not have been John, came and interviewed us all and looked at our material. And the outcome was that we should not be suppressed, or fired, or shot or anything, but we should be transferred to the Foreign Office ...

⁶⁴ See Kris (1941) *The Danger of Propaganda*. <http://www.pep-web.org/document.php?id=aim.002.0003a>

⁶⁵ Rebecca Abrams adds: Heinz Wilhelm Guderian (1888 – 1954) was a German general during World War II. He was a pioneer in the development of armored warfare, and was the leading proponent of tanks and mechanization in the Wehrmacht (German Armed Forces). During the war, he was a highly successful commander of Panzer forces in several campaigns, became Inspector-General of Armored Troops, rose to the rank of Generaloberst, and was made Chief of the General Staff of the Heer in the last year of the war.

⁶⁶ Not yet located

and it became the Political Intelligence Department and I became the manager of the FO's Political Intelligence Department.

DA: So, you were responsible for firing off propaganda?

MA: Not for actually sending it out. Simply the analysis of the enemy and the provision of raw material, guidelines as to what we should be doing in return. And in fact people like Brogan, who was very, very quick at writing things, would read through our summaries and our analyses, and get out his typewriter, and start typing out counter pieces, which would then be passed on to the overseas broadcasting machinery, the leaflet writing sections, and so on.

Now there was one interruption in my service with the BBC. When the Germans began bombing places like Coventry, and so on. [Herbert] Morrison was then Home Secretary, responsible for civilian morale. And one of the men who worked with him had worked with me at the London Press Exchange – his name was Clem Lesley, he was an Australian but settled in this country. And Clem said, “If you really want to find out about civilian morale under bombing, get this man Mark Abrams away from the BBC and get him to study it”. So that was arranged. And what happened was that I would wait until a town was being subjected to a series of bombing attacks, then off I would go. I remember, in places like Hull, spending a couple of nights, hiding under tables [laughs], because they did not have proper dugouts! But then seeing what happened.

DA: Did you take in a little team of researchers or something?

MA: No, No.

DA: It was just impressionisticof it?

MA: You could say that, but it was also backed up by what you might call operational statistics. What really the Government wanted to know was, not what was happening to the morale of people as such, but what they wanted to know was ‘what effect is any change in their morale having on our output of raw material?’

The outcome was pretty simple. That in a place like Hull, which was making absolutely no contribution to the war effort ... all it had was a paint trade at the Baltic which was absolutely

dead. And a couple of bombs on their golf course, outside Hull, and a third of their population disappeared and they went away and never came back. The factories did not mind, it made no difference to the war effort.

But a comparable attack on West Bromwich in the Midlands, which was really making important war material ... three, four, five attacks there ... and within two or three days the people were back, again working twice as hard because they thought, "We'll show these bastards. They can't bomb us". And the general outcome was to say, "Look, whoever uses bombers to attack a civilian population with the idea that it will help the war effort is making a great, great mistake. If he bombs civilians which are making no contribution to the war effort, he's wasting his bombs, because it is better to leave them there being useless than anything else. They're going to go on being useless. If he uses his bombs to attack people who are important to the war effort, then it is going to be counterproductive. Those civilians will come back in a temper and more determined than ever." And that could be verified, you see, by statistics of production.

DA: It increased following a bomb attack?

MA: Yea, I remember going along to a room at the Savoy Hotel and talking to one of the senior people in the Ministry of Production and saying, "I must have statistics of the output of airplanes, and things like that ..." and he said, "Only Lord Beaverbrook can release those." And I said, "Okay, well phone Beaverbrook." And he did, and the figures were in the direction I wanted, that I expected, rather than wanted. And then I went back to the BBC. I had just been seconded, for I think, was six months, something like that.

And then the other break came when the Americans came into the war and they set up the equivalent of an overseas propaganda department, called the OWI (Office of War Information). And they used to beam propaganda material to Germany and to the Japanese and so on. And, so I was sent over as a sort of adviser. And it was fantastic.. You know, you would spend your time trying to explain to these journalists from the West the difference between Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia ... or that in Yugoslavia there were two lots of partisans and that Tito was okay and that Mihailević was not so okay. Of course our materials were going to Tito. And therefore any claims by Mihailović⁶⁷ that he was beating the Germans was probably inaccurate because

⁶⁷ Dragoljub "Draža" Mihailović (Драгољуб Дража Михаиловић) leader of Chetnik partisans trying to re-establish the monarchy in Yugoslavia ,See: http://216.239.59.104/search?q=cache:5bLCWbBU9Woj:en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dra%C5%BEa_Mihajlovi%C4%87+%22Draza+Mihailovic%22%2B%22partisan%22&hl=en or <http://www.trussel.com/hf/tito4.htm>

he just didn't get the armaments to do it. And they kept saying, "Well how do you spell Mihailović? It doesn't sound like a Yugoslav name to us" ...[laughs] as if they knew Yugoslav names!

DA: So you were overseeing or advising?

MA: Oh, advising. I gave them a weekly directive with guidance as well, yup.

DA: Were they competent, do you think? I mean compared with what you had been used to?

MA: Well, they couldn't be as efficient, effective as the British because they were so far away both from the Germans and the Japanese. Problem was the only people who heard them were the people in Germany and Japan working for the government, who were monitoring these broadcasts. There was one cartoon appeared in the *New Yorker* at the time, of a bewildered looking American soldier with a bayonet rifle bringing in a German that surrendered and the American GI says to the Colonel, "Sir he surrendered because he said he heard some of our propaganda and believes it." And everyone at OWI felt, "Oh God, yes."

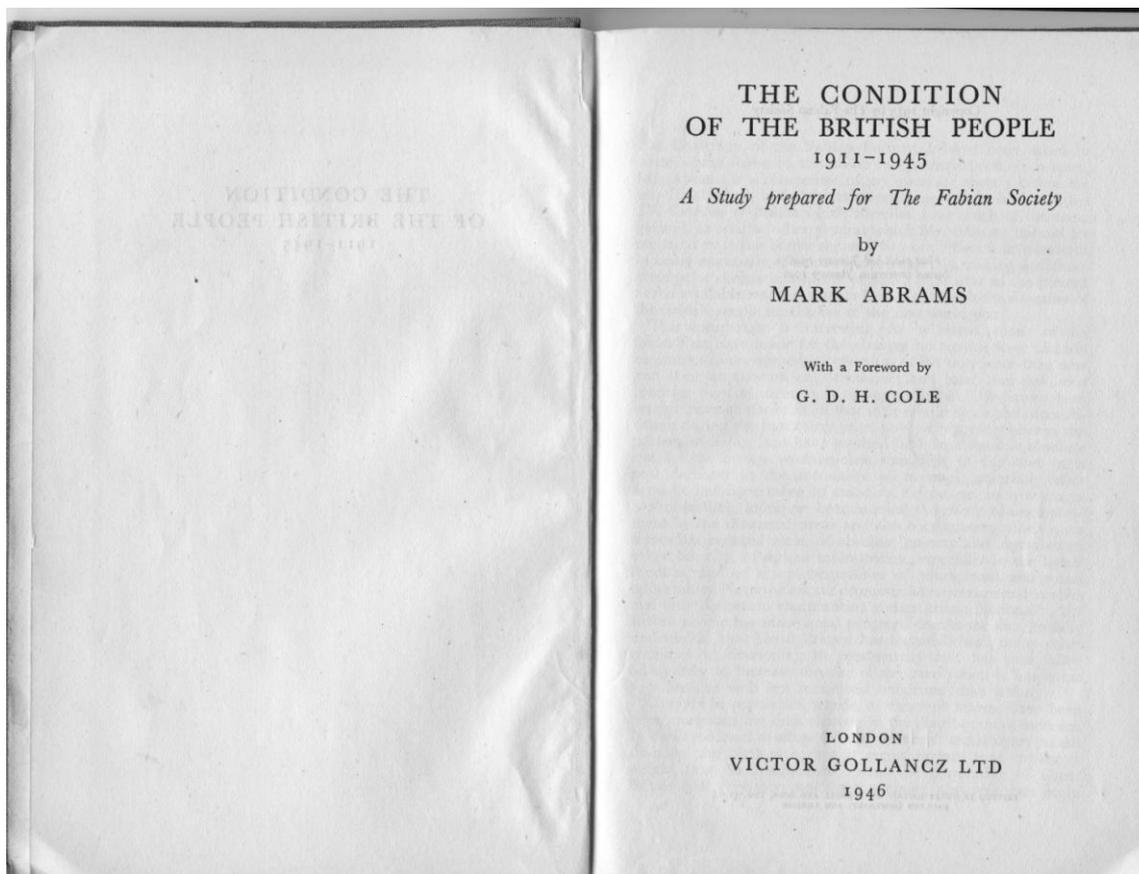
Well then I came back and worked ... no, at the time I came back I think I had already been moved to SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters of Allied Expeditionary Force)

DA: What did that do?

MA: What did that do? It didn't mean any difference. I still went on doing the same sort of work. And that was the war, as far as I was concerned.

9. After the War

And then at the end of the war I thought well they don't need people like me any more, it was time I went back to my old job. No, no there was so much bureaucratic delay and confusion that I didn't get out for about a year. And during that year I wrote another book called *The Condition of the British People: 1911-1945*.



The Condition of the British People (1946)

DA: What did that concern? What was it based on?

MA: It was based on official statistics on the living conditions, housing conditions, work conditions of the British people. Over that period. I think it was meant to do two things – first of all to show how awful conditions were in 1911, that things had improved a bit after 1939, but there was still a hell of a lot to do. In fact G.D.H. Cole wrote a foreword to it and I gave the

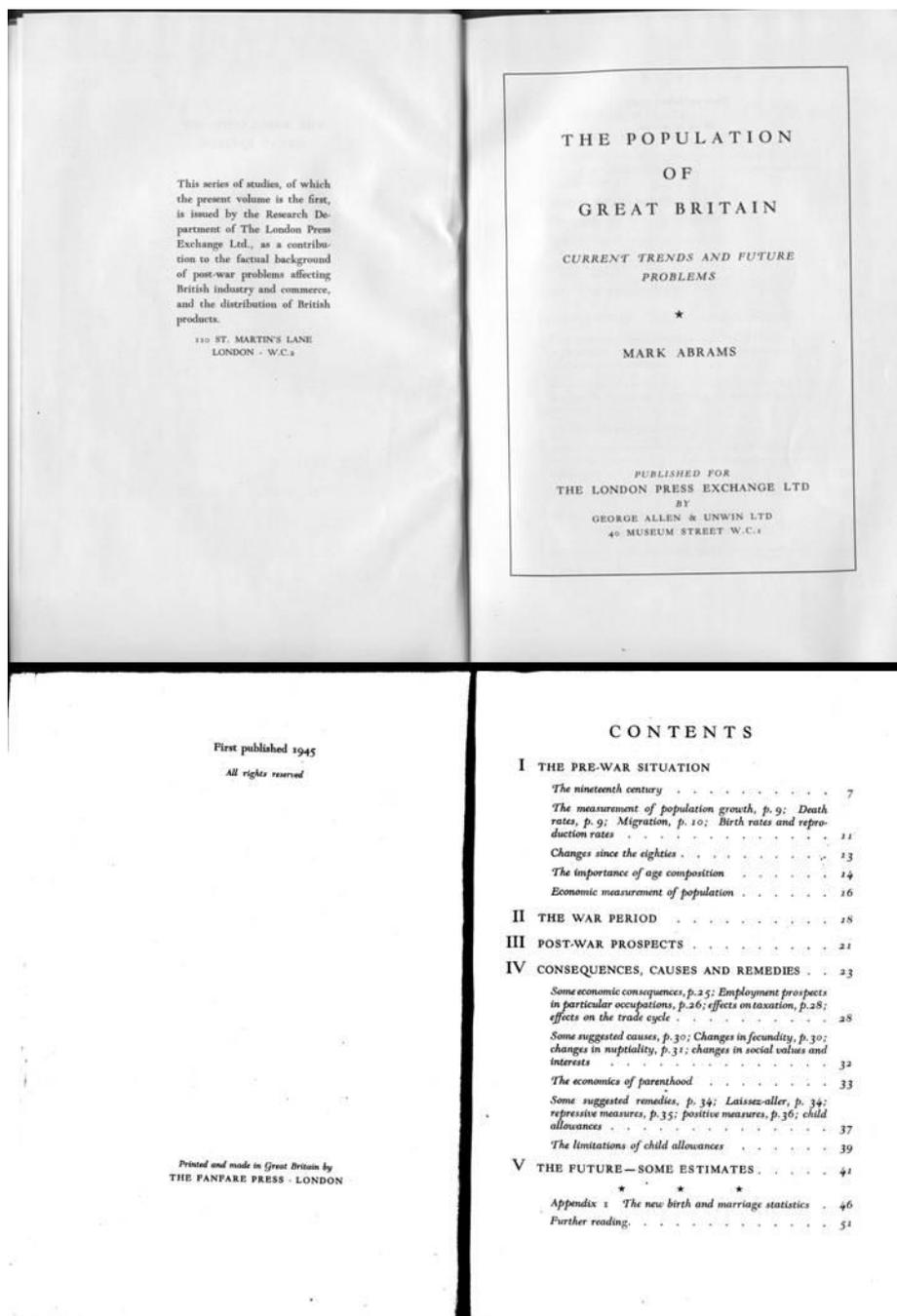
copyright to the Fabian Society, and they took all the royalties [laughs]. It was part of the Fabian campaign on, you know, a preparatory document for *Agenda For A Post-war Britain*, under Attlee.

DA: And do you think ... I mean, as you saw it, had the desired impact on the desired people?

MA: No, I think it became a well read text among undergraduates. It sold quite well. And in fact when Gollancz came to me, and said they would like a new edition of it, I discovered that the Fabians had sold the copyright and we could not get it back.

DA: Who had they sold it to?

MA: An American publisher. They said they sold it because they were no longer getting royalties on it, because what was happening was that students were xeroxing, you know were making photocopies of the thing ... that's no good to them.



This series of studies, of which the present volume is the first, is issued by the Research Department of The London Press Exchange Ltd., as a contribution to the factual background of post-war problems affecting British industry and commerce, and the distribution of British products.

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THE POPULATION OF GREAT BRITAIN

CURRENT TRENDS AND FUTURE
PROBLEMS

★

MARK ABRAMS

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CONTENTS

I THE PRE-WAR SITUATION

<i>The nineteenth century</i>	7
<i>The measurement of population growth, p. 9; Death rates, p. 9; Migration, p. 10; Birth rates and reproduction rates</i>	11
<i>Changes since the eighties</i>	13
<i>The importance of age composition</i>	14
<i>Economic measurement of population</i>	16

II THE WAR PERIOD 18

III POST-WAR PROSPECTS 21

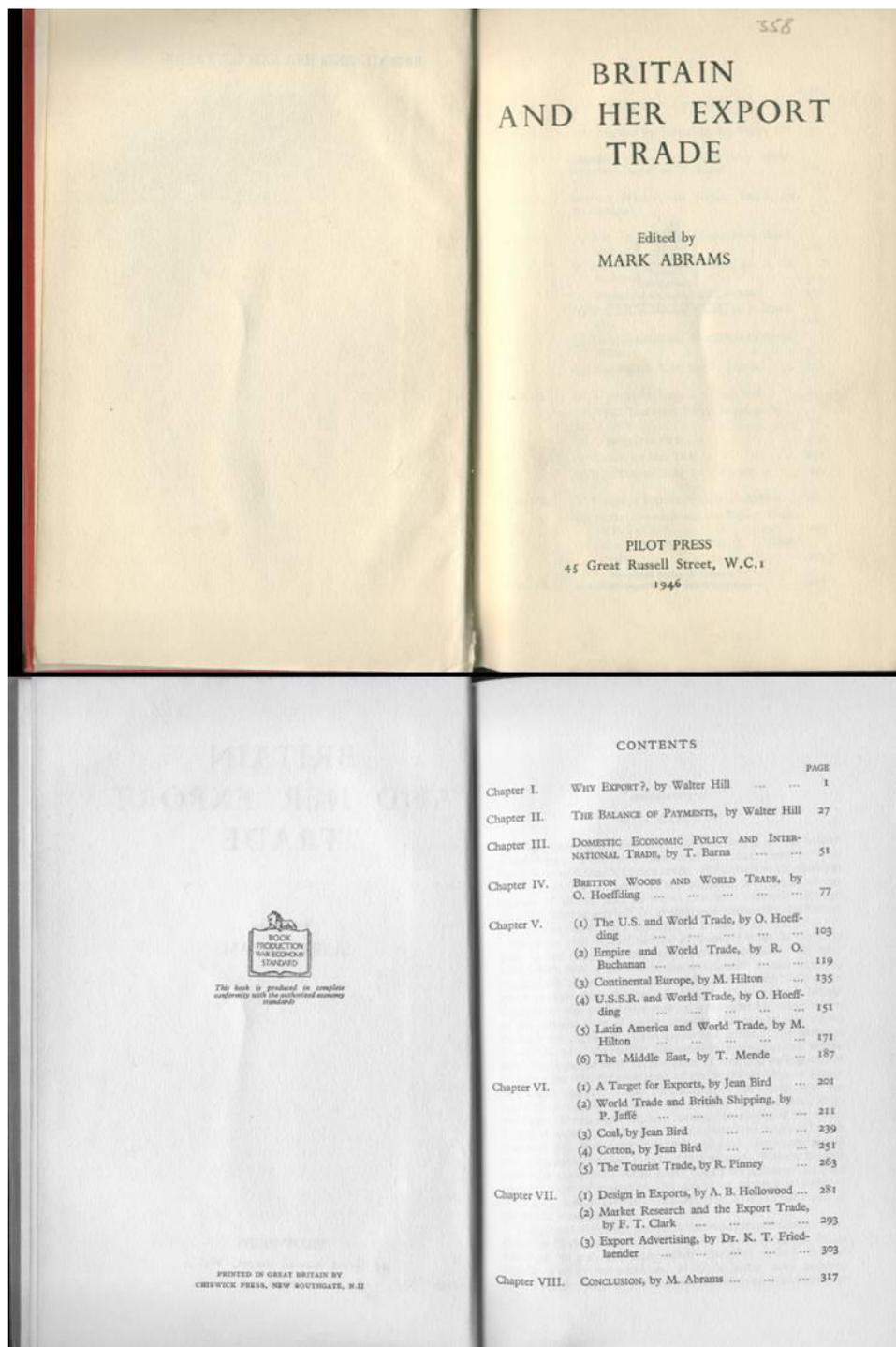
IV CONSEQUENCES, CAUSES AND REMEDIES 23

<i>Some economic consequences, p. 25; Employment prospects in particular occupations, p. 26; effects on taxation, p. 28; effects on the trade cycle</i>	28
<i>Some suggested causes, p. 30; Changes in fecundity, p. 30; changes in nuptiality, p. 31; changes in social values and interests</i>	32
<i>The economics of parenthood</i>	33
<i>Some suggested remedies, p. 34; Laissez-aller, p. 34; repressive measures, p. 35; positive measures, p. 36; child allowances</i>	37
<i>The limitations of child allowances</i>	39

V THE FUTURE—SOME ESTIMATES 41

<i>Appendix 1: The new birth and marriage statistics</i>	46
<i>Further reading</i>	51

The Population of Great Britain (1945)



Britain and her Export Trade (1946)

DA: So, that was what ... 1947?

MA: Yea, it came out about '46/'47, something like that.

DA: Where were you living then? You have moved from Kimble.

MA: We lived then in Bourne Hill, Southgate, North London.

10. Philip at School

DA: And Philip was still at school wasn't he? He has just started his secondary school?

MA: He was going to ... he went to two schools. The first one was a prep school – Swanbourne, which had a great reputation – socially as well as academically, and nowadays if I ever mention to any of the ex-heads of public schools who live in Pelham Square⁶⁸, that Philip went to Swanbourne, they say, “Really? Oh tremendous, tremendous place. Was Evans in charge then? Lucky boy. Lucky boy”. It was considered one of the prep schools in those days.

DA: Did he like it then?

MA: Did he like it? Yea, I think so because one of the Evans' sons was an expert on submarines and had a lot of experience at submarine warfare, and kept the boys entertained with account of submarine warfare. Which Philip rather liked. Then he went to Wycombe Grammar School, which he didn't find terribly stimulating except for one thing. For many years after the war there was a shortage of newsprint in this country. So not only did you have four-page newspapers, but you also had a shortage of comics. And, to young school boys in the first form and second form, this was a terrible handicap, to be without comics. So, Philip organised a Comics Exchange [laughs].

DA: Ah, typical!

MA: I don't know if there was a rake-off for him, he probably read all the comics for free [laughs].

DA: I am glad to hear that he read comics.

MA: Oh, of course he did. That, I think was the most important thing in his life at Wycombe Grammar.

DA: Was that a boarding school as well?

MA: Yeah.

⁶⁸ Mark and Jean's Brighton home, 12 Pelham Square

DA: And he'd what, come out for holidays

MA: Yea. [*Telephone rings...*]

DA: We were dealing with the time between 1946.



Mark Abrams (approximately 1950)

11. Back to Research Services Limited

MA: Yea, it was the end of the war, and I went back to Research Services, which was a subsidiary of the London Press Exchange ... and Research Services was formed after the war, as an independent company... well yes, “independent” in quotes. As a separate company, with me as the Managing Director. Which had another advantage from my point of view – it meant that one was not nearly so dependent on the clients of the LPE for research. During the war I had already done some, or directed some, research of this kind, outside. For example, throughout the war I directed the Ministry of Agriculture’s National Food Survey, which still goes on you know, almost exactly the same form as I worked out in 1938/39. The National Food Survey in 1982 has just appeared. It is interchangeable almost in appearance, and in method, with the very early one.

I managed to do several things during the war of that kind. I did a survey ... oh, this might interest you because it is a link. I was asked to do a study of the newspaper reading, in the third winter of the war, by the British soldier. What did he read in the way of newspapers? So, I did the usual thing ... drew a sample, drafted a questionnaire, briefed interviewers, sent them out. They interviewed soldiers and sent the result back. They were tabulated, and then it was given to Allen and Unwin to publish. But since I was technically a civil servant I couldn’t say that during my spare time I also did surveys for other people. So I had to invent a name. And it was published under the name of Philip Kimble⁶⁹. [laughs] It seemed to me a sensible, attractive solution to me. And erm, somewhere or another there must be a copy of it around.

DA: Fancy doing all that work and then having to publish under a pseudonym.

MA: Yeah, I know [laughs]

DA: You must have been a bit fed up about that?

MA: No, no, no.. no, it never worried me.

⁶⁹ Not yet located.

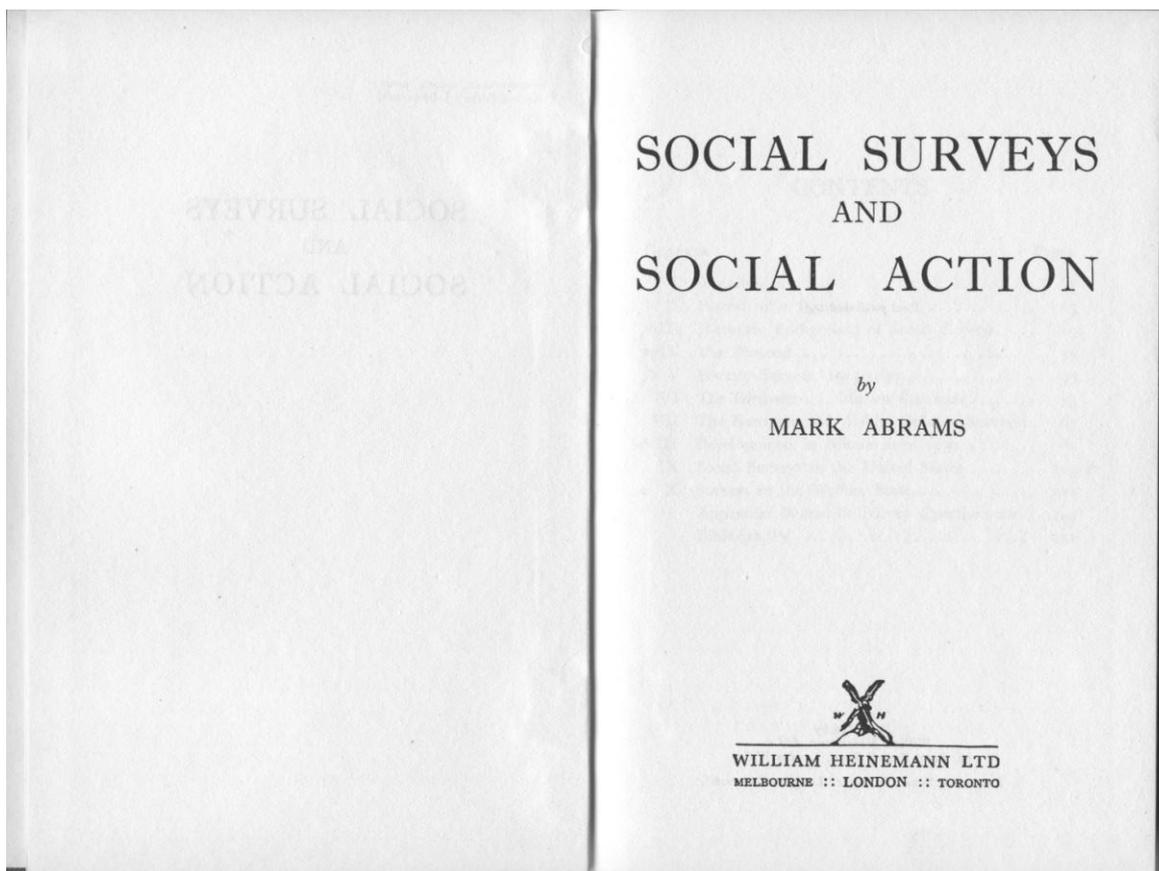


Mark Abrams, 1951

DA: You also ... was it in 1951 ... published a book on social surveys?

MA: Yea, *Social Surveys and Social Action*⁷⁰.

⁷⁰ Sonia Jackson observes, *Social Surveys and Social Action* was considered a classic text and had a whole course built around it at Barnett House – Social Work and Social Policy department at Oxford. In the mid 1950's.



Social Surveys and Social Action (1951)

DA: How did you find time to write it but also what made you want to write it?

MA: Well, I was asked to go to the University of Chicago as a visiting Professor of Social Research. I found that what this meant was taking a seminar, once a week, once a fortnight, and talking about how you do survey research work, what the difficulties are, other techniques of doing research, and so on. And when I first went there I said to the President of the College, "You know once a week, that's not much of a teaching load, is it?" And he said, "Oh, you don't know our students. It is a week's work to prepare a lecture that will satisfy them." He turned out to be right. I remember the first lecture that I gave was on research for the welfare state, and then I said "Well, any questions?" ... we were sitting at a very large table. And the sort of questions that they fired me was ... "Well, that was interesting, have you read so and so?" ... and I said, "No, no, I am sorry I haven't read it" ... and they said, "Oh" ... then the next question was, "Well, what about so and so. Have you read that?" ... my answer would again be, "No I haven't got around to that" They had read much more than I had! [laughs] When there were ever any absentees, the alibis given me, the explanation given to me always was, "He/she had to see his/her analyst this morning." [laughs] Oh they were real high flyers there.



Mark Abrams, Los Angeles, 1952

DA: They sound appalling!

MA: But anyway after a while I found I could cope, and needed something to do, so I wrote this book, *Social Surveys and Social Action*, and it was published here, and it was, in those days, a great success, I think. Heinemann sold 8,000 copies! Up to till I had not heard of any book of that kind being sold of 8,000 copies. And it was reviewed in America, I remember Morris Janowitz⁷¹ reviewing it and saying, “The flavour of Fabianism, unfortunately, is to be discovered through all this book [laughs]. It is all about policy making, the Welfare State”. You know that was published, and again they asked me a few years later to revise it ... bring it up to date and I said yes and at the end of the year they said, “Look Mark you still haven’t even sent us a synopsis.” And I said, “Oh, maybe next week.” And they said, “Don’t be silly, you mean never.” And I said, “All right, never.”

DA: But it became a sort of handbook?

MA: Mmm. Yea, yea, very widely read. But I am saying that one of the advantages of having Research Services, after the war, as a separate company, was that one could undertake, not only work for government departments, some of which was extremely interesting, but one could

⁷¹ Sonia Jackson notes, Morris and Mark must have become close friends as it was Janowitz that acted as Philip’s sponsor when we went to America in 1966 and he and his wife Gayle were incredibly kind to us.

even undertake work for competitors of the London Press Exchange. They didn't mind in the least. I would undertake work for National Benzol, which was an LPE client, and simultaneously for Shell, because they didn't mind either. But some of those early post-war surveys were very interesting.

The one for example, on the productivity of British labour in the construction of Fawley Refinery. Where what happened is the Americans, ESSO, planned this refinery on the assumption that you would need a minimum of three British workers to do what two American workers would do. They had thought they were being optimistic about that. And then suddenly, they found the thing was going to be finished on time! Better than on time, if anything. So, would I do a survey to find out why these clowns were behaving in such an un-British way. And the answer was simple – the quality of management. That any British firm that they had gone to, the management was sitting in the Dorchester and they wouldn't go near the site at Fawley, whereas the Americans, they were on the site, they were there at 8 o'clock in the morning, their door was always open. If there was any difficult job, difficult in the sense of that it was technologically newish to the British workers, they would say "Fine, we understand why it is difficult, you were trained as welders, but welding for a refinery is different, we appreciate that ... in two weeks we can give you the necessary training" ... and they said "Two weeks? An apprenticeship in this country is five years", and Bob Cole, the American in charge, would say "Maybe it is five years, but you will be expert refinery welders in two weeks ..." and they were. Or they said they wanted tea in the afternoon [laughs] and, how could you get tea? There was no water supply laid on there in the marshes. And they said, "That's okay. Water will be laid on. There will be a tap. You will have to boil water, but there will be boiling water" ... and it was, within a week.

DA: Very efficient then?

MA: And he persuaded them. "Look I'll give you an extra (I don't know what it was) tuppence an hour if you will agree to interchangeability of jobs. If there is nothing for this crew to do, but there is a lot to be done there, then you all will get an extra tuppence an hour if you shift and do it, basically." And they said "Fine, okay." So it was the attitude of management.

And also if there was any dangerous work to do, one of the American managers would say, "Aah, aah, look we are going to put this on flare tonight. And when you put the rig on flare it can be dangerous. It usually isn't, but it can be. So, we will handle it". And, so you know, one

explained, it was explained -- it is the question of competence, the attitude in relationship to British management. I remember one of the men, as I interviewed a lot of themone of them saying to me, "You know, I tell you, you get your self-respect back when you work for someone you respect. And if you work for someone you don't respect, then you are ashamed of what you are doing". And that was it. That was the sort of job, you see, that came along.

DA: But at the time, that was presumably rather, not a popular message, to say things like, the management were incompetent.

MA: You bet it wasn't.

DA: Did you actually try to publicise that?

MA: It was published as a small book. It had a joint author, an American woman called Grey, who had worked with Merton in America ... passing through England she stopped and we worked together on this. It was published. And I got invitations from a few branches of the electricians union, because they had been closely involved in this, to go round and talk to some of their groups, which they organised to listen to them, and to talk to productivity teams, which the country at the time was bursting at the seams with people calling themselves productivity teams⁷². And all waiting for trips to America, to talk to them. And I did, I lectured to them.

.....So that was the sort of thing that happened. So when NEDDY⁷³ was set up, they also wanted to know why on earth people went out shopping, and they were offered good, fine, solid English glassware, and they said no, they preferred ... have you got any Swedish? Haven't you got any Danish glassware? ... or they were offered British crockery and they said haven't you got any German crockery? Why was it, why did this happen?" And I said, "The easiest thing is to ask the retailers. They will know why they don't place their orders with you."

So we did about 13 different industries and I remember the one on cameras. It was at the end of the war and British manufacturers of cameras had a monopoly. There were no other cameras were available in this country. And then Japanese cameras began to come in. And I finished the report and I said, "Well look, what the buyers in the retail store say is that the Japanese camera is technically very much better, that it is much easier to handle, even for good technicians it is much easier to handle than the complex English one. And they get better

⁷² Time and Motion.

⁷³ National Economic Development Council

deliveries, even, from Japan, than they get from British manufacturers.” And I had to give this presentation to the little NEDDY that was concerned with the camera industry. And the spokesman for the British camera manufacturers said, “I can tell you something ... first of all what these people are telling you is lies, and secondly, I can tell you this. The Japanese camera manufacturers will be bankrupt in three years time”.... They are not bankrupt yet! But the English manufacturers are!

12. Philip Abrams going to Cambridge

DA: So, let's just find out where we are a bit more. Philip must have been coming up to around about 18 ... must have been leaving school, more or less by that time.

MA: He was leaving school. He had been at Worthing Grammar School then and ...

DA: How did he do there? What was his school performance like:

MA: Well, he was ambivalent about it. He liked some of the teachers. He felt he knew more than some of the teachers [laughs] – which is probably right. And he wanted to get to a good university. He felt he was ready for a good university. So I spoke to Dennis Brogan, at the Reform Club, we met and I said, “Look, I have a son called Philip. And its time for him to be going to university. What do you think?” And Brogan, who had been at Peterhouse, during the war you see when the LSE had moved out, said, “The place to go if he is interested in history is Peterhouse. “Got more fellows than they've got students ...[laughs]” which wasn't quite true, but it seemed like that. And it's the place for historians to go. “Tell him to apply to Peterhouse. He'd be interviewed and so on.” Which Philip did. They said, “Fine, you are in.” And that was a great boost to him. 'Cause he enjoyed Cambridge a great deal. He met new friends ...friends who he thought were his intellectual equal, which he hadn't had at Worthing you see. People like Affleck⁷⁴, Thirlby, Cornford. You know, they were just as bright as Philip in their own way ... some were a little misguided, one or two thought a little too highly of communism [laughs], but anyway they were interesting. And he was bringing them along ... by that time we were living in the Boltons⁷⁵ I think ... and he was bringing them along and it was fine to have them there. Occasionally he would ask if we would move out so that he could have a party there [laughs].

DA: What was he like with Evelyn? She must have been ... she was around at that time. How much younger was she?

⁷⁴ Sonia Jackson comments: James Affleck (best man at our wedding), Peter Thirlby, both members of CUSC [Cambridge University Socialist Club]. James Cornford, son of John, grandson of Francis and Frances, later Director of Nuffield, was my friend more than Philip's.

⁷⁵ A large flat in Kensington



Evelyn Abrams and Philip Abrams, 1952

MA: [19] Thirty three to [19] thirty eight – five years younger ...

DA: So the same gap as myself and Rebecca. Now, how did they get on?

MA: They got on pretty well. She liked him. He felt a sort of fatherly interest in her progress. It was rather a strange fatherly interest in the sense that he was more inclined to deprecate and laugh at some things she thought were smart and good. But clearly they got on okay. But by the time he went to Cambridge he was very much caught up with Cambridge life. And there were a few occasions where I met people at Cambridge. Like Postan⁷⁶, who was the Professor of Economic History there, who was very good and who I believe was a historian.

⁷⁶ Sonia Jackson adds: Munier (Michael) Postan, a Russian, one of the leading Cambridge historians of the time, married to Lady Cynthia. His first wife was Eileen Power, a medieval historian, author of a famous biography of Peter Abelard it is Boston?

He then got a year's fellowship at Oxford⁷⁷, I think, didn't he? Went off to St. Antony's, one of the new colleges there, but he almost immediately went back to Peterhouse. And I remember him telling me two things at Peterhouse. When he reached the age of 25, he got a notice from the War Office saying when you become 26 you will no longer be liable to be called up for military service. And therefore will you report to the military tribunal next Monday, or Tuesday or whatever it was. So, Philip duly turned up and then said, no, he is a conscientious objector. "What?" "Against it". They said, "On religious grounds?" He said "Oh no, no, not religious grounds". That didn't help! If he'd have said on religious grounds they'd have said, "Oh thank God, beat it!" But no he wasn't going to have it on those grounds. And they said, "You'd better do work of national importance of some kind. I don't think you will be much good in the coal mines." Philip said, "No, I don't think I'd be much good in the coal mines. What else is there?" By this time they were getting pretty fed up and they said "Oh we can think of something for you to do. Why don't you go into the distributive trade and help in a shop". So Philip went and got a job with the Cambridge Co-operative Society delivering milk⁷⁸ [laughs]. Two things: He apparently did his job well. The round delivery started at 6 in the morning ... he was there on time always.

But three things I remember from there: first of all, that he used to take on other people's rounds as well, in the afternoon⁷⁹, so as to get more money ... he always needed money, Philip. And the other thing was that he was going around one day with the milkman and Butterfield, head of Peterhouse, saw him and said, "What are you doing there? Get down, get back to your duties" [laughs]. And Philip said, "No, I am on military service." Butterfield said "You clown!⁸⁰ You are suppose to be working on [John] Locke." And Philip said, "That's what I do in the afternoon ... I work on John Locke", and he explained the situation.

Audio Note⁸¹

MA: He fell off one morning, off his milk delivery van and broke a wrist⁸². He was taken into Addenbrookes and they set it, but they set it badly, so he had to go back. It was broken and reset again. And then he got an honourable discharge from the military duties⁸³ [laughs].

⁷⁷ Arranged by Peter Laslett

⁷⁸ Sonia Jackson comments: This was arranged through the Labour Party in which Philip and I were both much involved. Philip had to get a heavy goods driving license

⁷⁹ Sonia Jackson notes: This seems to be a misapprehension. There were no afternoon rounds and in fact Philip used all his spare time for his PhD

⁸⁰ Sonia Jackson notes: This is an expression Mark used but it is improbable that Butterfield would have used it. The story seems inconsistent because the Master's Lodge was not part of Philip's round

⁸¹ Tape 3 starts here, audio file: Marktape4

DA: At what point did he meet Sonia? This must have been fairly around about that time?

MA: It was around about that time⁸⁴. He was already I think, yes I am sure he was, a research assistant⁸⁵ because he spent his summer holidays, usually, with Jean and me in France ... first of all in Provence around Avignon, then later on in Burgundy, where he'd go away with us.

DA: He became very attached to those areas.

MA: He loved it ... God ... I've never seen anyone enjoy a holiday so much. Even when he was stopped by a French gendarme, who obviously thought, 'this uppity, adolescent, loafing around Orange'. And he came over and said in French to Philip ... "Show me your papers". He said, "Of course", and produced his British passport, and said, "I am a tourist". Gendarme said, "Ah",motioned him on, defeated. But he always enjoyed those holidays. We would say, "You've got to get up at 6 o'clock tomorrow morning 'cause the only bus to wherever it is goes at 7 from the city gates and we must be there." He was there ahead of us. And he would occasionally do some absolutely barmy things. I don't know if he ever took you to Pont du Gard, that great bridge, viaduct across the mountains, the hills, which the Romans had built as a viaduct. He climbed all the way up the side of the hill, on top of the parapet of this thing, and began walking along it. It made me dizzy just to look at him [laughs], but we daren't shout at him ... he wouldn't have heard us anyway ... we thought, "Oh God we'd better keep our eyes closed." But he was enjoying it ... he thought it was terrific. And also he was, on those holidays, there was always the historian there. You know, when we took him once to Villeneuve lès Avignon, which was across the river from Avignon itself. This great medieval fortress. And he said, "Now one can see the brutality and the violent side of feudalism". That great massive fortress there, which was the quintessence of brutalism in architecture. No, no, it was a great joy to be with him on holiday in places like that.

⁸² According to Sonia Jackson, Philip fell off a ladder putting up Christmas decorations in the youth club they ran in Swavesey. It was his elbow not his wrist that was broken. It must have been 1957, just before Dominic was born. It was a bad break and NHS did not set it properly, so Mark ended up paying for it to be redone privately.

⁸³ More precisely, the Coop dairy department had no further use for him because he couldn't carry milk crates any more.

⁸⁴ Sonia and Philip met in 1954 and married in September 1956.

⁸⁵ He may have been assisting Peter Laslett while working on his PhD



Philip with Jean, Lac de Pont, 1955

And then, when we were in Burgundy the second time, in his third year, when he got a cable from his tutor saying, “A First”. Very pleased.” And the *monsieur le patron* wanted to know, was there any trouble, they’d never had a cable in that little village before. So, in such French as we could muster between the three of us⁸⁶, we explained to him. And that night for dinner he produced not only the usual food, but a special bottle of Corton Charnay. The very finest burgundy wine you could possibly get and he said, “For Monsieur le Victor”, putting it in front of Philip,

Well, anyway that was those years.... So we first saw Sonia when we were in Cambridge to see him, one afternoon after he had graduated and a young girl passed by on a bicycle. And she beamed at Philip, and Philip sort of looked a little embarrassed, and walked on. And we didn’t say anything ... obviously he didn’t want to say anything, so what could we do? Then when we were introduced to Sonia sometime later, we recognised her as the girl on the bicycle! [laughs].

But I remember him going when he was a Cambridge, to see Butterfield, and say that, “Sure he was giving lectures and supervisions on British 17th/18th century political thought. What he would like to do, would be to get around to the still surviving founding members of the British Labour party, and first British Labour Parliamentary party, after World War I. Interview them, get down their accounts of how Attlee had happened, and bring together some archive material

⁸⁶ Philip spoke excellent French. Una was a modern linguist and had ensured both Philip and Evelyn were fluent in French as children. They had to speak French every day at home.

which they must have in their homes". And Butterfield said, "Oh you mean journalism you want to go into?", and Philip said, "No, history". Butterfield said, "I would call it journalism, Philip." And Philip gave up. He knew that he wouldn't be allowed to do that.

DA: What were you doing during that time? So we are coming up more or less to the time ... he must have married Sonia sometime ...

MA: Yea. Oh God did we have a wrangle about that! It went on and on. Neither of them wanted to get married in a synagogue. But Maurice⁸⁷ was furious about this. How he carried on. His dear old Dad would die if he heard the news. And they couldn't keep the news from him. If anything like this to disgrace the family ... why didn't I talk to him and why didn't I insist? I was the father of the bridegroom, and the bridegroom had the final word on this. I said, "All right I will talk to Philip about it." Philip said, he doesn't see any point in it, they can go to a Registry Office, pay the fee and get married. That seems to them the important thing. And they didn't think much of this lark of going off to a synagogue and stamping on a goblet, under a canopy. And, Sonia was just as insistent as well. And I said, "Well look, you know, as far as you are concerned, you know that going to the synagogue thing does not really do any harm, any damage to your marriage, and you have the bonus that it would give some pleasure to Maurice's father, you know, and it won't cost you anything in terms of any sacrifice you have to make that means anything to you, because you are going to get married in a Registry Office anyway". And he agreed. Maurice was a bit of a bastard really! [laughs]. I remember when they were getting married ... just before they were getting married – and you know the custom in Jewish families, particularly families which are so determined that weddings should take place in synagogues, and so on -- the custom is that the bride's father makes some contribution towards the cost of the reception and the meal, and that sort of thing. And clearly Maurice had no intention of doing this⁸⁸ ... so it was arranged we should have him and Tilli around to dinner one evening and I would bring up the subject. This was at The Boltons. And they came around, and after they had a good meal we moved into the comfortable front room. I put him in a nice arm chair ... and then I said, "Oh Maurice, by the way, something we ought to discuss I

⁸⁷ Maurice Edelman, MP. Sonia's father.

⁸⁸ Sonia Jackson comments: This is incorrect as a Jewish bride's father would expect to pay the whole cost of the wedding and the bridegroom's family would only contribute to incidental expenses such as a few bottles of champagne so there was never any question of expecting Mark to contribute. In fact the wedding was inexpensive because it was held at Lindisfarne (Maurice and Tilli's family home) and the little synagogue in Amersham on the Hill. Maurice and Tilli were very disappointed at not having the opportunity to host a much grander society wedding. Mark probably believed that, at that level of society, which was upper middle class, (Sonia) was an heiress because her grandfather Harry Yager had been enormously wealthy. But in fact Maurice and Tilli, as socialists, firmly believed that adult children should support themselves. The row was because Mark was in favour of Maurice make us an allowance after the wedding, but that was against my parents' principles. However the two sets of parents never resolved their differences.

suppose and that is the allocation of the costs of this reception, these people are being invited, their holiday afterwards, and you know and all that sort of thing. And I thought perhaps we should go 50/50 in this (thinking this was a great gesture on my part)." And Maurice said, "50/50? I wouldn't give them a penny. If you want them to get married, you pay for it". And that finished the discussion [laughs]. I think Tilli was a little embarrassed, but she was very loyal to him. Anything he said was law.

DA: So that strained relations for a while?

MA: Well, we didn't invite them around to dinner next night! [laughs]



Mark Abrams, 1956 and 1957.

13. Research Services Limited (Part 2)

DA: What work were you doing at the time ... around that time?

MA: What year was that?

DA: '57.

MA: '57 ... where was I? I was at Research Services ... '57 ...I think, all sorts of sort of interesting surveys I was doing at Research Services about then. One of them was for the *Guardian*, which was then the *Manchester Guardian*. And they're obviously not ever going to increase their circulation up in the Manchester area, as the *Manchester Guardian*. They wanted to know, was it worthwhile moving to London? So, Lawrence Scott came down to see me and said "Could research help on this?"

[So I said] "Okay, we will do a survey in which we will take a sample of your present readers, and then we will find a sample of people who match them, on all their outstanding traits, and interview them and ask them why they are not readers of the *Guardian*? ... Why on this one characteristic, are they deviants from the majority?" And so we did a survey and it was easy enough to list what were the outstanding traits of the *Guardian* readers, the then *Guardian* readers. Then we went to their nearest neighbour, who scored the same on these, I think it was seven traits we listed, and asked them why they weren't reading the *Guardian* ... what were they reading, and why did they prefer that to, say, the *Guardian*, what did they know about the *Guardian*? And at the end I said to Lawrence Scott, "You know there are no more *Guardian* readers left for you really in the Manchester area ... you seemed to have exhausted all the people with those peculiar characteristics. You are going to have to find them now in the south of England. Why don't you take a couple of pilot areas, get copies of the *Guardian* down there by motor bike, overnight, and available on sale before breakfast, and then change the character of the thing? Why the hell do you never have any signed articles? People like signed articles. Why do you not have a woman's page? If you introduce into the sort of family that I think you should go after, a paper without a woman's page, then the woman will kick up a row. She feels she is the equal of her husband. And a paper which ignores the existence of women isn't her idea of a good newspaper. You'd have to overcome that." I said, "Again, you never give any space to horse racing, or to any sport except cricket. You know in the south of England they

play football as well, and they indulge in horse racing quite a bit. Give them some.” You know, and a few other things like that.

So Lawrence Scott said, “I think you are right.” I said, “Another thing is that you’ve got to drop this word ‘Manchester’, which is a nasty word in the minds of the people brought up in the south, they think of it as a grimy, old broken down industrial, textile town. And if they do happen to see it on a news stand what they see on the front page full of ads by people who want to sell second-hand cars or want to sell abandoned warehouses. Take the ads off the front page and put your lead news stories there”. And he said, “Alright, all we’ve got to do is persuade Wadsworth”, who was then the editor of the *Guardian*, “to shift to London. And make all these editorial changes in the make up of it” ... God! Wadsworth was absolutely furious ... he was a Lancashire man himself, he was a historian really rather than an editor. He was a very good editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, but he finally agreed. And, to begin with, they lost 20,000 circulation.

DA: So they weren't very pleased with you?

MA: The people up in the north thought this was outrageous! [laughs] We can't have our ads about how to acquire a broken down warehouse (or whatever it is) on the front page We have to turn to an inside page for that! They lost 20,000 readers straightaway. But within three years they were 20,000 above the point they had had started at. And from then on they've never looked back, gone ahead all the time. And Lawrence Scott was so pleased with it that at the next meeting of the International Journalist Union, I think it is, yes, or International Press Union, that's right ... which is devoted normally just to professional problems, and so on, of newspapers and journalists, he persuaded them to let me have the floor, to present a talk on how the *Guardian* changed its character, and won. And that brought in a lot of other research on newspapers and magazines. On the *Times* – I said to the *Times*, you know I am doing research for the *Guardian* and you are its main competitor. They said, “We don't care, we want you to do research like the research for the *Guardian*”. And some of its provincial competitors like the *Liverpool Post*, the *Western Mail* and so on. They were perfectly happy. And most of them survived.

14. The Labour Party

DA: When did you start to talk about Sociology, or even research at all, to Philip? He must have been by that time interested in what you were doing as well as in what he was doing.

MA: Umm, I think his real interest, as distinct from just polite interest, would be when I began doing surveys for the Labour Party, which I think he disapproved of, fundamentally.

DA: Why?

MA: He didn't think a political party should base its organisation, its propaganda ... you know, its general conduct, on survey research. They should have clear-cut ideology, and stay with it.

DA: Subsequently proved wrong of course, in that belief!

MA: So that I think he didn't approve of it, but he was interested in it. For example, the first one I did for the Labour Party was on, how would the British public ... and this was for Gaitskell in '54 ... how would the British public take the idea of comprehensive schools? Did they know what comprehensive schools were? What did they think of the 11+ selection procedures, and so on? And, I think that was what first turned him against it. Because what the public said was two things. First of all they said, by and large, (these were the parents of young school children), "By the time our Johnny is 14 we want him to be up there working and making some contribution to the family income, we need the money ... the way he is spending money now, on his bicycle, we need it". Or, "By the time Doris is 14 she ought to be beginning to help the family" – you know, the long-standing tradition and attitude, and up to a point makes sense. That was one attitude. Another attitude was, "Well, no, we think the 11+ is all right, cause the brainy ones get through, don't they ... and that's fair" [laughs]⁸⁹.

And then I was asked by Gaitskell to present this to the Labour Party Executive and its educational advisers. Its educational advisers were a man called Max Morris, a communist, Margaret Cole and Tawney. I got up, gave them the results, and then the inferences from the results. That, what was needed was an educational programme for the voters and not an

⁸⁹ Sonia Jackson recalls doing some of the coding of the interviews: There seemed to me to be a complete split between middle class and working class parents but not about working but in what they wanted. Working class parents didn't expect their children to achieve. The most important thing for them was for their child to be happy. Middle class parents were just the same as now and never even mentioned happiness

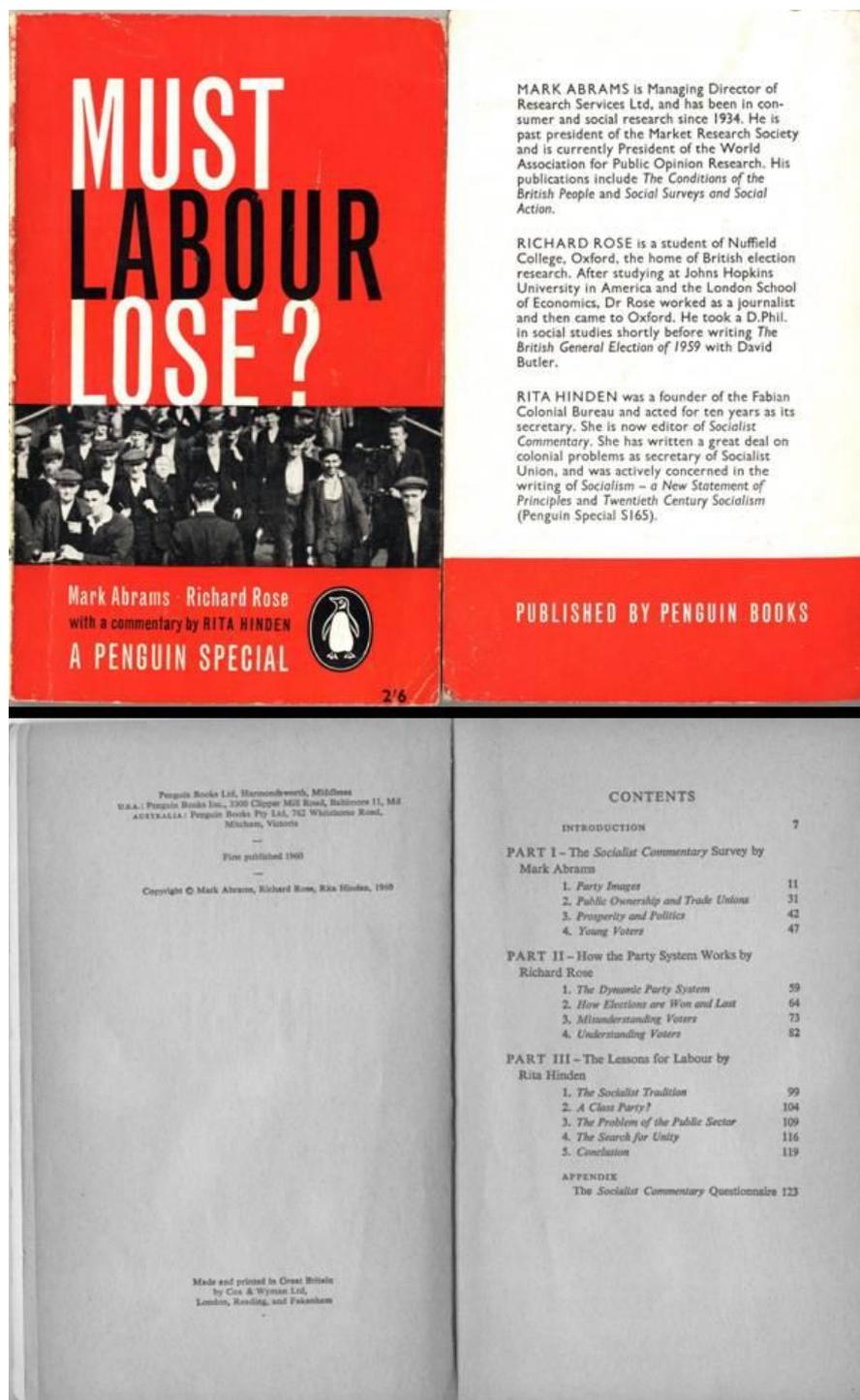
educational policy for children. That the party had not put over its social case for abandoning selection. And I was very lucky there, at that point, because evidence was beginning to emerge that something like 20% of elementary school children, who were later on being called up to the armed forces, as conscripts, were showing scores on various tests which put them way ahead of many of the middle class children who went on to universities.

Umm, I said, “You know you’ve simply got to educate the public ... the voters, that you have a social case to put to them and that, you have you know, an efficiency programme to put to them. That simply out of sheer self-interest ... the country’s got to make the best use of its resources”. And I remember, I think it was either Max Morris or Margaret Cole, got up and said, “the sort of thing you are saying reminds me of Goebells. You want to twist people’s minds. We know what is good. And we shall therefore pursue what is good.” And Tawney then spoke up, and Tawney said, “Well you may never have an opportunity, you may lose every election. If that is your attitude, I think, you know, perhaps we do have an education” (he did it very gently). And Gaitskell was of course on Tawney’s side and my side, but I don’t think Philip was at that point. So that was when he⁹⁰ began to take an interest, but it was a critical interest.

And I remember when one member, a woman member, of the Labour Party Executive said why they were in danger -- because they were still in office then – of losing the next election was because they were not appealing to the altruism of young people. And would do I survey to show the extensiveness of this altruism? And then the Labour Party could appeal to the young on the basis that it was the party of altruism. I said, okay. So we had the usual sort of questions. “Have you done any voluntary unpaid work at all for anyone on any course or any organisation at any time in the past 12 months?” 3% said yes. “Would you please tell us exactly what it was?” And most of them, yes, it was accurate. You know, the description they gave justified their claims. And then we said “Right, now supposing the British government had surplus funds to dispose of, wanted to spend them on things that would benefit people in general. Here are half a dozen: send food to people who are starving in Biafra, Nigeria; increase old age pensions by five shillings a week; build bigger leisure centres for young people”. You know, a dozen or so of these things. The Biafrans didn’t get a showing in, it didn’t even come to 1%! [laughs]. Old age pensions – oh to hell with that as well. It was, build stadiums for young people. So I took the results back and said, “Look, I don’t think you are going to win the election with these new voters based on their altruism. You can’t bribe them because, in any case they say they are going to vote Labour. Don’t upset them by saying you

⁹⁰ i.e. Philip. Actually it was at the time of Suez. He and Sonia both joined the Labour Party when they got back to Cambridge

are going to waste money on starving people in Africa, it will only irritate them.” And she never spoke to me for months and months afterwards. And that was the sort of thing, I think, that interested him.



Must Labour Lose? (1960)



Unveiling the commemorative plaque at Policy and Economic Planning (1967)⁹¹

DA: He did some work on the army, didn't he? How did that come about?

⁹¹ Malcolm Rigg, Director of the Policy Studies Institute, located the following description from *50 years of PEP 1931-81*, in which Richard Bailey, Director of PEP until 1963, writes: "In 1966, the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust funded a major survey of racial discrimination in England which, as we shall see, had an almost instant impact on legislation as well as among the wider public. Thus we relaunched a full programme of work. By 1967, we had a staff of 15 researchers and about 30 in all; and Dick Davies organised two glittering public events. Following the impact of the survey of racial discrimination, there was a dinner at which Roy Jenkins, who had just left the Home Office to become Chancellor of the Exchequer, said that the PEP survey had been decisive in the government's decision to go through with the second Race Relations Act. Israel Sieff [pictured centre] presided and Edward Boyle and Mark Abrams [centre left] also spoke. We had Norman St John-Stevias to thank for the other event. His researches on Walter Bagehot had discovered that Bagehot had lived in PEP's elegant new building in [12] Upper Belgrave Street; and he suggested we ask the Greater London Council to erect a commemorative plaque. After a dignified delay they did, and the then Prime Minister, Harold Wilson [centre right], unveiled it with a knowledgeable speech." This description was echoed in my phone conversation with John Pinder (director of PEP at the time and possibly to the left of Mark in this picture, perhaps with Vic Feather, then General Secretary of the TUC). John observed that Mark was the inspiration behind the survey of racial discrimination and played an important part of PEP and its later transition to become the Policy Studies Institute.

MA: Yea, that was the thing that really caught him. Well I had known Morris Janowitz from the war, we had worked together. Morris and Ed Shils and myself had done work together on German morale. And Morris became very interested in the military. Military sociology became his great obsession. And he wanted to know more and more about it. He wrote to me and said, "Who in Britain is equally obsessed, has the same set of interests?" I couldn't think of anyone. There was a man called Brian Tunstall⁹², but he was only interested in sailors, because he lectured at the Greenwich Naval College. And I said to Philip, "What about you?" "I suppose it is as good as anything else to do, isn't it?" So Morris came over ... we had discussions, and he got Philip really interested in the pure incompetence and inefficiency, and dysfunctionality, of a military caste in a democratic society. And he wrote a couple of very good papers⁹³. That's the sort of stuff that I want this man Bulmer to include, .but I don't think he will. However, we won't go into that now. And that was when it started.

And then, when he went off to Chicago, and really met, as a colleague in the Senior Common Room, in seminars, the Chicago people, that he really saw that it was sociology he wanted. I remember you coming home one day and saying the kids at school were chasing you and shouting , "Whitie! Whitie! Whitie! Get that Whitie!"⁹⁴.

DA: Did you come to Chicago to visit us?

MA: Yes, I did, I think it was you standing there that Gayle⁹⁵ told me that you had come home and told them that.

⁹² http://www.camberpete.co.uk/sailing_pages_new/naval_warfare_in_the_age_of_sail.html

⁹³ Sonia Jackson comments: I remember doing a lot of work on one of them, about the class origins of officers in the different armed forces – the RAF was much more democratic but the army had hardly changed since Wellington's days

⁹⁴ This is in 1965-6 when Dominic was at the Charles Kozminsky school in Chicago, and was one of only a handful of white children in the school, as shown by his class year photograph.

⁹⁵ Janowitz



Dominic Abrams (top right) at the Kozminski School, Chicago, 1966

DA: Strange place to be as a kid. By that time I was nine, I'd been around for quite a while hadn't I. And Dad's interests had moved on from that military work rather

MA: Well not entirely, he was still interested in it, I think, you know, if he'd had 36 hours in a day rather than 25 he would have liked to have gone on with it. Because he felt it wasn't exhausted. But, yea he was then ... well you see Morris, when Philip was there on his year's secondment, sabbatical, whatever it was, he got Philip to write *The Origins of British Sociology*. And that's when Philip, I think, really began to develop his theoretical ideas about sociology. And basically, his theory was that the main reason why Britain had never produced a decent sociologist (which was true when you compared it with France or Germany or America), was because its political statisticians had been too successful. That, if you were a [Charles] Booth or [Joseph] Rowntree, you could change the whole of society with the statistics you produced about poverty in England, or about old age in England. And that had acted as a powerful magnetic to draw potential sociological material away to doing survey research -- mainly concerned with poverty. And I think he was probably right in that. But was it a loss to Britain? Who the hell cares about two or three more sociologists of world renown when it comes to

being able to document poverty so clearly and unambiguously that you could make people shut up talking about “They’re poor because they are idle and because they are drunkards and of course they don’t like work”, and being able to say, “No. They are poor because you don’t pay them decent wages, or they are poor because you turn them off when you’ve got no orders. You know, they have nothing to fall back on”.

I am sure if I had a choice, I haven’t of course now, much too old. But if only I had a choice between continuing along the line of work that Booth and Rowntree had made so popular in this country ... popular is not the right word, so powerfully effective in shaping this country ... or producing a new theory of group adhesion, adhesiveness. I would have said, “Hmm. Let me do another survey”. Whereas I don’t think Philip ever felt that way. He was much more in the line of my grandfather, if I may say so, who was a Rebe, and was a great Talmudic scholar⁹⁶. He would sit and look at his stuff and say, “Well now, when you use that word it has behind it a traditional meaning, it has a contemporary conceptual meaning, it has a vulgar meaning of the populace, it has an elitist meaning. Now let’s separate these out”. And my grandfather would spend day after day, after day going through a line after line of the Talmud to straighten out all these possibilities, and then rank them. You know, I think Philip has something of that influence.

⁹⁶ The Rebe, or spiritual leader, was probably Annie’s brother, of which she had two living in Leeds. In Rebecca’s interview with Mark, he said he was sent up to Leeds at the age of 7 to stay with his mother’s parents because she hoped he might train to be a rabbi. Annie had family living in Leeds at this time, Annie’s mother was already living in Leeds with her second husband by 1909. This would make sense of the fact that Annie herself was clearly more educated than Abram as Mark says earlier in the interview she could read and write in Yiddish, whereas he could speak and read Yiddish, but didn’t write in either Yiddish or English. According to Mark, his father’s father was a horse thief! But ‘horse thief’ might also be a metaphor in Yiddish for a rascal.



Mark at The Boltons, 1969

15. Social Science Research Council

DA: How did your own research. Began to change didn't it? For example you get into workingnow How did you stop working for the Labour Party?

MA: Oh, I had to stop working for the Labour Party when I got the job with the SSRC. I said, "Look it is going to be very difficult for me to be a civil servant, and at the same time do the research for Labour Party. And I give them advice on their propaganda and their policy and so on. Civil servants aren't supposed to do that sort of thing. So will you in the future give all your research to Research Services, a straightforward commercial transaction and I will have nothing to do with it." But unfortunately Research Services said, "We are not interested in doing political research. We make much more money out of doing straight market research. A great pity. So that's how I stopped doing research for them. Then what happened you see, was that when I was about 60, fourteen, fifteen years ago, no, more than that, eighteen years ago! Good God! [laughs]. I thought, if I am going to make any change I ought to start making it now. And Michael Young began to get interested in futurology. And he said to me, "Would I be a consultant to his group on studying the future?". I said "Fine." And then, like an idiot, he said, "Of course we can pay you." I think it was £3,000 a year as a consultant, and like an idiot I immediately went to the LPE Board, and said, "Of course I will hand over the £3,000 to you because you are already paying my salary and I wouldn't dream of taking two salaries." And they said, "Yes fine. As soon as you get your cheque get it to Mr. Trumper." [laughs]

DA: A mistake?

MA: A great mistake, yes! And then I worked as a consultant to the futurologists group on what's going to be the future that the world of Britaingo on. It was quite interesting for a while, but it always seemed to me, "Oh God, the forecasts always go wrong." And the only interesting part was when I was asked by the Dutch to do surveys among the Dutch people as to what they thought about the future, what they thought was a desirable future, as distinct from what they thought would be the future. And compared the Dutch public views with the views of the Dutch élite on that. And, crudely, what happened was that what the Dutch public thought was going to happen materially was going to be fine, but what was going to happen morally was going to be pretty awful, drug addicts all over the place, kids not working, not being interested in work, increasing the crime. But they'd all be better off, they'd all have a lot more money. What the élites thought was that, morally, every Western country would be finer, freer. They'd have

wider outlooks, there'd be more humanitarianism. But unfortunately, they wouldn't be economically so well off. This was a very interesting contrast in between the two. And then they came along and said, "Look the Social Science Research Council...", the first approach was that they would like Research Services to declare itself a non-profit making organisation and undertake research for the Social Science Research Council. I said, "Well I am sorry they won't agree to that, I know. It is no use my bringing it up to the Board because it is such an asset to them." So they went back and said, "Well, too bad." Then they said, "Why don't you resign and join the SSRC? We will create a Survey Unit, and you will be the Director of it". I thought, "Well okay, fine, this is the time". So I did, and it didn't work out very well ... for two basic reasons: one reason.



Mark, Dominic and Rebecca, 1970

16. SSRC Survey Unit

One reason is that I am not, by any definition, a good administrator of an organisation. You know I like doing work and I like talking to people who are doing good work, or even bad work [laughs]. But I like talking to them about work, and doing research. But the idea of organising people and doing things methodically and seeing that the right items are on the agenda for the next meeting, and that there is a next meeting even ... I don't do well at all. Very badly. It has pursued me all my life. Fortunately at Research Services I had Dorothy Darling who could do all that for me ... wonderful! And then, when she left, I had Joan Wright who could do it for me, up to a point⁹⁷. So that was one reason -- that I was not a good administrator. I would sit through management meetings and think, "Oh God, why am I wasting my time on this? You know, I could be over in the computing room, getting more tables run and so on ... and we have heard this all before and who the hell wants to know what the precedents are for paying paternity leave to academics under the age of 30? ...either give them money or don't give them the money." I was no good at that at all.

The second reason was that, I think I aroused a great deal of animosity among academics.

DA: How?

MA: Well, because very often ... well let me start a little earlier than that. Even before I came, the Social Science Research Council was rejecting 70% of all applications, on the grounds that they didn't think, usually, they didn't think people sending in the applications were capable of doing the research they wanted the money for. Now, when the figure stayed at that after my appointment, and it was fairly widely known that any application that involved a survey might be discussed with me and shown to me as one of the assessors, perfectly properly, and didn't get through, they said, "Ah, it's because Mark said thumbs down on that." Now in some cases, in order to overcome that, what I would say is, "I don't think the way this is written, is set out, really tests the hypothesis that the man or woman has in mind." or "I don't think it will really collect the information that is really relevant to an adequate knowledge of this particular phenomenon. But, tell the person who has put in the application, if they care to come to me, I would be only too pleased to help them". Now the way that was handled was to write to people and say that "If you care to go and get the advice of Mark Abrams we will reconsider your application." And

⁹⁷ John Hall comments, Joan was with him at the SSRC/SU and was the only typist in the Unit. We felt embarrassed asking her to do any typing until we got our own typist. This was well before word-processors and PCs.

that was the kiss of death you see. They thought, "Why? We've been in this chair for 15 years running a highly successful department and they tell us we've got to go and get him to tell us how to do surveys." So, the two reasons combined: if I'd been a good administrator, I would have followed up the thing and seen that the letters that went out were much more diplomatic, or altered them and said, "Mark Abrams is terribly interested in your project and would be grateful if you would let him come and talk to you about it." You know, there are ways of doing these things I suppose. So, you know, it became, "Oh God, you know, we put in this application. If we get through all right it means we may have to have him looking over our shoulders. If we don't get through, it is because he has said no.," and so on.

I remember the strangest event of that kind was when an old, old friend of mine, a woman called Mary Douglas, an anthropologist, had her application turned down. And someone who had not the slightest knowledge of what had happened in the process, said, "Oh it must have been because Mark said no." She never had anything to do with me after that. Until, finally someone told me that it was because she knew that I had had her application rejected. I'd never seen her application, let alone rejected it. In fact I have never spoken to her since then either because I've never had an opportunity to. So I think those two things.

17. Research on Old Age

Well, now how did the elderly come into my life, apart from myself?! That was because, at one point, the Sainsbury family set up a series of trusts. And they made it clear that one of the areas they were particularly interested in providing grants for was problems of the elderly. Well the man they appointed as their adviser on which grants to give and not to give was a man called Hugh De Quetteville⁹⁸. And Hugh De Quetteville said, "The one man who really knows about research is Mark Abrams. So why don't we get him to tell us what research is needed on the elderly?"

Okay, he approached me and I said, "Yes fine. I will write a paper for you on it, but give me a week to read what's available because I know nothing about it." except some research I had done in 1947 on the condition of the elderly, for old Seebom Rowntree, who refused, incidentally, to let it be published because it ran counter to his particular line of what should be done for the elderly. Anyway, I went through the stuff, and I said, "Really you don't need any more research on the elderly. There is enough research already done for policy makers. If they are concerned about the elderly, to start doing useful things, right away. There's lots of information available." And they said, "Well, that's not good enough, we've got to spend our money in this direction." So I said "Alright, two things you can do: first of all, produce a sort of compendium of available material, call them *Profiles of the Elderly*. And you will bring together all the research that has been done on their housing conditions, on their diets, on their standards of living, on their migration habits, and so on. All that is available, it is just a question of getting someone to go through all the material and bring it together in a series of profiles like this. And that will be one good thing. Then everyone can get a copy and will say, "Ah ah, we mustn't do that survey again for the third time, it has already been done twice". I said "The other thing that is important is that the real problem of the elderly for the rest of this century is going to be the old elderly – the people 75 and over. Whereas everyone so far, nearly everyone so far has done research on the elderly defined as 65 and over, or else of pensionable age. And people of 60, 65 - they are not really elderly, there are a proportion of them working, and there's, and those who are not working are pretty active. The 75s and over are going to be the real burden, the problem of the future. You get a high degree of dementia among them, a high degree of physical incapacity, you get a great deal of loneliness, you get a high proportion who are living alone, and you get completely inadequate residential accommodation for them. And none of this is aired and no one is yet apparently adequately aware of the fact that the great

⁹⁸ Director of the Gatsby Trust

increase in the elderly population, from now on, is not going to be the 65s to 74s, they are actually going to decrease in numbers. It is the 75s and over which are going to go up by 25%, 30%, 35% -- we don't know yet. But it is obviously going to be an increase of that order."

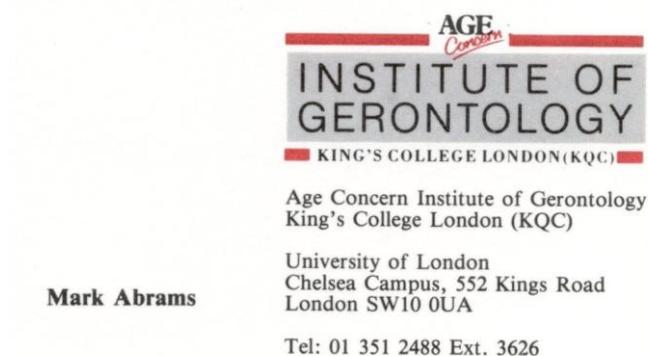
So De Quetteville said "that sounds fine ... those two projects we think are fine". I said, "Good, thank you". And he said, "Well, you know, we'll pay you for this?" I said "That's alright, I'll leave that to you for what it is worth". He said, "Of course we can't pay you as an individual, we have to dispense funds through an organisation ... a charitable organisation or an academic organisation. And, how do you feel about Age Concern acting as the intermediaries?" "Sure, that's okay with me, I don't care." He said, "Alright I will send them a cheque for £2,000". "How much?" " £2,000, and they will simply transfer it to you as a consultancy fee, they can call it that". He said, "Now the next thing is, who does the work, the research?" I said, "Well, any really serious, competent person who applies himself to what is available, can do the work". He said "No. The committee has met and we want you to do those two projects". I said, "Well I can't, I am busy with Research Services". And he kept on saying "Why don't you resign from Research Services? Why don't you retire? It's about time you retired."

DA: Is this after you'd already had time off for doing the SSRC work? You went back to Research Services?

MA: No, no. I am still at SSRC.

DA: But you are on Research Services books or their committee or something?

MA: I was on their pension, so I had contacts with them of a very, vague kind. So I said, they were already thinking of closing down the Survey Unit at the SSRC. First of all they asked me to stay on an extra three months, I did. And then they said would I stay on another year. Feebly, I said, "Yyes." And then, I said, "Enough's, enough, I am now leaving, I am going to join Age Concern as the head of their research unit. That's fine."

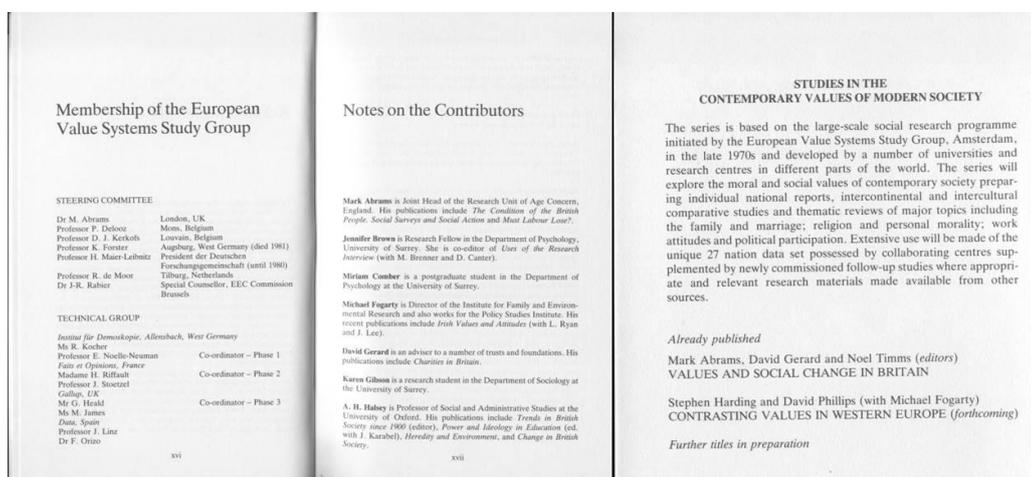
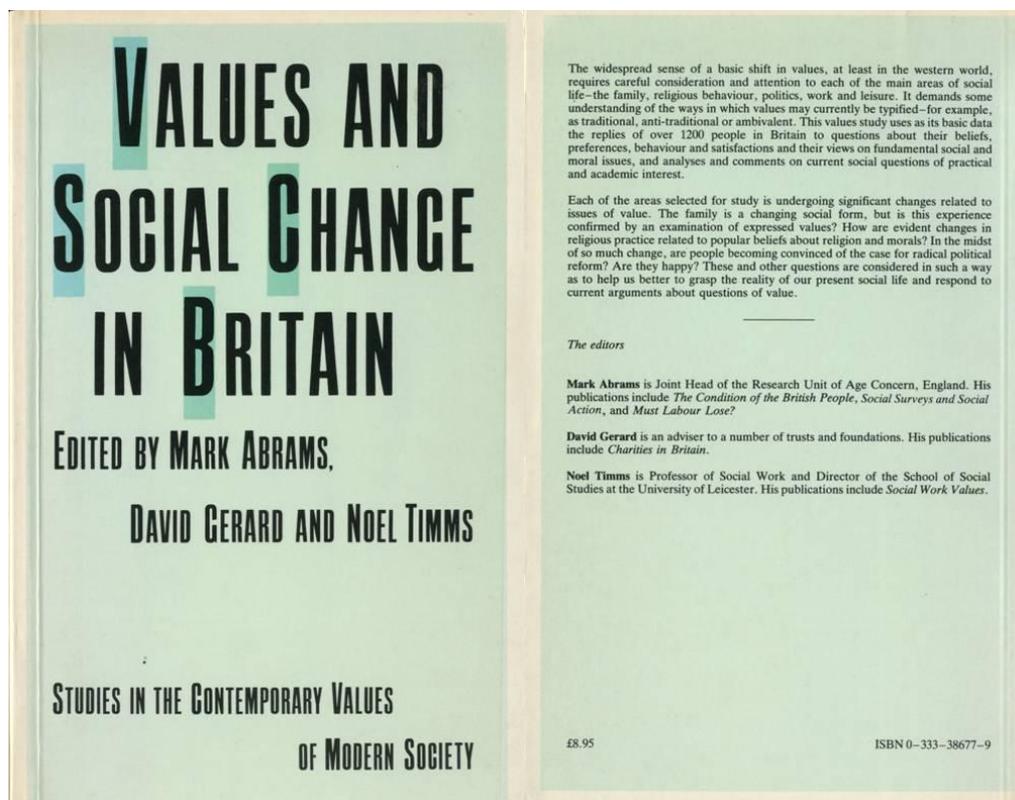


Mark's Business Card while with Age Concern

So I saw David Hogman of Age Concern. And he said, "How much time can you devote to this". I said, "Not a great deal, because I'm still interested in a lot of other things I want to follow up – two days a week, how's that?" He said "Alright, fine." Then we agreed a salary, which was pretty modest I think of £4,000 a year, which, compared to what I was getting at even at the SSRC, was pretty modest. And compared with what I'd have got if I'd gone back full-time at Research Services was extremely modest. But you know it seemed to me something that I would like to do. So he said yes alright they would pay that. And I said, "Oh, by the way, the cheque for £2,000 that De Quetteville gave you. He said, "Oh yes what we've done with that. We will send on a cheque for £300 and the rest we will keep for sort of overheads." I said, "What overheads?". He said, "You know you always have overheads they need in any organisation". And I thought, you bastard!. But it didn't make no difference, I took the cheque they sent me, and I never told De Quetteville, I should have done I think, that the money had gone not to me but to Hogman's outfit. And they produced, I think, £60,000, the Sainsbury Trust, which went to Age Concern. And then for about two years/three years I worked on these two projects of the *Profiles* series, and then *75s and Over*, which was a survey study. And since then I followed it up. There was a grant, again through Age Concern, from the Nuffield people, to do a longitudinal study of aging. What happens to people as they age, and so on? Can one find, in early material, predictors of non-survival, and can one find predictors of survival, but poor survival as compared to good survival? And I've done that and I think the material is good. The people in Germany at an international conference there said they thought it was extremely interesting and my data was unknown there, and would I please hurry up and publish it. And then I sent a copy to Bernard Isaacs, who was professor of psychiatric gerontology at Birmingham University, and he wrote back and that he thought it was fascinating and would I please prepare it as an article for the *British Medical Journal*, which I never have done. I keep

thinking, well maybe next weekend, when there is no one at Brighton, I will do it then. But I haven't done it yet. One gets lazier, you know, as one get older.

Audio Note⁹⁹



Values and Social Change (1985)

18. Academic Relationship between Mark and Philip

MA: Now what more can we discuss? You know more than you need to know about me
[laughs]

DA: Tell me more about your view of what Philip did in his research and how it developed, and his thinking.

MA: Philip's interest in research. *[taking a break]*

DA: so where were we.....when he was applying for research monies

MA:no, I think you see, Philip was uneasy in a way, all his academic life, about the possibility of simply being another version of me. For example, when he first got his Chair at Durham. Went up there, and almost immediately, the word went round in the Social Sciences Department ... Oh God, now we are going to have to do surveys, we are going to have to learn about political sociology, and so on, now that he's come. The assumption, and accusation, being, you know, that he would have exactly the same interests that I had. And he was aware of that, and I think he almost went out of his way to avoid any contact with surveys of the normal kind, the usual traditional kind ... and went out of his way to follow up his own real interest in political sociology. And his first published work on Locke was really a study on political sociology, in a sense, to show that here was a man that could talk the language of radicalism, but at the same time be a through-and-through conservative. And somehow they were compatible in the same philosopher. So his interest in political sociology he sacrificed in a way. Because of his unwillingness, his fear, of being confused in some way with me, and being influenced by me ...

Audio Note¹⁰⁰

.....and that went on, I think on many occasions. For example, I had gone to America for a time, and been very impressed with the *Detroit Area Study*. Which I think is one of the major inventions of the academic world, as far as the social sciences are concerned, of taking an area, and year after year, after year, studying it. But each year, giving a member of the social sciences faculty, a senior member, an opportunity to say, "Well this year we will study a

¹⁰⁰ *Tape 3, Side 2*

particular aspect of the Detroit area that impinges most closely on my work and my interests ... In return I will take the post-graduate students who want to join the *Detroit Area Study* ... they will be apprentices if you like, but they will also be colleagues, in the sense that when the study is finished, any of the material they want to use for their own publications, they will publish over their own names." And I was greatly impressed with this, partly because it threw a great deal of sociological light on how a community develops, changes in the tensions it had. Also partly because it produced, year, after year, new young people who had learnt how you use empirical research in developing social theory, and I thought this was wonderful.

So I came back to England, and told the Social Science Research Council about it, how good it was. And they were sufficiently impressed to say "Fine, draw up a memorandum indicating what such a scheme is and how it could work in this country and we will send out invitation to all 45 universities in the country, asking them to put in applications for funds to set up a similar programme here. But it will be a programme, not a project. The funds will be guaranteed to begin with for five years." So I did this, and the thing was sent out. We got 11 applications back. The majority of them were pretty bad. Four of them were short-listed, and included among the four was the one from Durham University, which had been written by Philip. I thought it was absolutely first-rate. He had understood completely what the Detroit area could do as a post-graduate training tool, what lights it had thrown on the American social scene, and what the people who had worked on it as graduate students had subsequently done -- how good it was. Now I was not alone in feeling that it was first-rate. Everyone on the Council who was concerned in the project, felt exactly the same way. Now unfortunately, well unfortunately in a sense, Philip not only wrote that project ... that proposal ... but when it came to presenting it to the Council and arguing for it, Durham University picked Philip to do it. That meant he had to sit one side of the table, with me the other side of the table, and me being flanked by people I was going to live with for the next few years anyway. And, I imagine Philip thought, oh God, if the thing is given to Durham now, everyone will say, "Well it's because Mark is there and intimidated the others". That was absolute nonsense. Even if I voted against Durham, it would have been given to Durham, because it was so good. But when it was given to Durham, Philip ostentatiously dis-associated himself from the project. He watched it being handed over to the Geography department. When the Geography department made a mess of it, I think made a mess of it, Professor Angus Campbell and I went up to look at it, to monitor it, talk to the people on the course who were very unhappy. And we both said, "Philip, why don't you take a greater interest in it?" Philip said no. He did not want anyone, for a moment to believe, think, suggest, that he had got this because he was connected to me. And he leant over backwards, time and

time again, I think, to make clear that he was Philip and that I was Mark. And I can understand that.

[Cake arrives served by Jean Abrams – 18 minutes 40]

This meant that, in a way, Philip neglected some areas of sociology which I knew he was interested in. For example, his interest in political sociology was very real, very important to him. His very early studies of the young liberals, the young socialists, the young conservatives, was something that excited him. That he wanted publish very much. But no, he felt that would be running the risk of

DA: Being too close? But surely his work on neighbouring was getting actually in some way quite close to what you had been doing. Obviously it was a different theoretical position, but in methodical terms, and some of the real interest behind it. It must have been quite similar?

MA: No, it is very, very interesting that although neighbouring, in practice, is very largely a matter of support and care for the elderly, Philip, from time-to-time in his writing makes clear that there are other segments of the population, who are important in community care – the young, the single parent, and so on. The homeless, and so on. That it is wider than just the elderly. Again, in terms of methodology. The bulk of his support material, other than his own thinking, is in the terms of vignettes -- long quotes of people on what they mean by neighbourliness, or what they mean by neighbouring. Whereas I think my temptation all the time would have been to say ... “Here are three possible definitions of neighbouring. Which is most important? Which is least important? And then at the end said ‘93% said this and 20% said that”.

DA: Do you think that was a matter of presentation? I mean, my recollections of seeing the questionnaires and things, and the interview schedules being coded, was that that kind of hard empirical quantitative data was often there but he choose not present it.

*MA: He left it to other people to present it and work on it, yes and to work on it and present it. Yes. Whereas that was the first thing I would have asked for ... where are the [cross] tabs?
[laughs]*

DA: Why do you think he got involved in such applied questions, given that his interests were largely theoretical?

MA: Well, in fact he'd long ago mentioned to me that he would like to be involved in policy research. I was not encouraging I suppose, because I said, "Well, the only thing that convinces some of the policy makers, is when you produce great tabulations of people who want this, or want that, or showing how many of them have houses with no lavatories in, or no central heating. That's the sort of thing that gets the headlines and influences policy makers. You realise that when you say you are going into policy research". And he said, "Well yes I suppose so." But the interesting thing is that almost the last thing he did, you see, was to accept this post at the Policy Studies Institute, where, whether he liked it or not, he would have had to relate quantitative empirical material of this kind to recommendations about policy, or implications for policy making. So, there might well, eventually as he grew older, have been some reconciliation within himself, at this feeling that figures were mucky useless stuff. [laughs]

DA: I think it is interesting in a way. Maybe he gave that impression more strongly to you than he did to me, 'cause perhaps he felt, I don't know ... but he would often discuss with me what was the use of doing experiments for example.

MA: Oh, yes.

DA: Saying well, you know we can't really learn very much from them. I would argue back and say that, that on the other hand, you have to try and test theory in very controlled conditions. And he'd agree with that ...

MA: He would agree with that?

DA: He would. We would reach an impasse, he would be accepting the need for data, if you like, but on the other hand, be resisting the possibility that you could have any objective data. So I mean, I think he was, to me anyway, presented a recognition of both things as being important. And maybe with you he was resisting a bit more strongly.

MA: Yes, I think that's right. In fact he didn't often discuss his work with me at all.

DA: No, he didn't with me that much.

MA: I don't think he, in fact, I don't think he did with anyone much!



Evelyn and Mark, Brighton, June 1988



Ben, Dominic, Mark and Jean Abrams, Pelham Square, Brighton, 1993