

Abrams, Mark Alexander [*formerly* Max Alexander Abramowitz] (1906–1994), social scientist, was born at 57 Balfour Road, Edmonton, London, on 27 April 1906, one of eight children born to Abraham (Abram) Abramowitz, also known as Abramovich or Abrams, and his wife, Annie (Hannah), *née* Issercorwitz. His father was a journeyman bootmaker and later a shopowner and house agent, and, according to Abrams, a ‘philosophical anarchist’. His parents were immigrants of Latvian and Lithuanian Jewish stock. Abrams had some early interest in the rabbinate, but in the event, after Latymer School, Edmonton, he decided to study economics at the London School of Economics. On 20 June 1931 he married Una Strugnell (1906–1981), schoolteacher, daughter of Leonard Strugnell, insurance clerk. They had one son and one daughter.

Abrams was a fellow at the Brookings Institute in Washington, DC, from 1931 to 1933, and then returned to England to join the research department of the London Press Exchange (LPE), at that time one of Britain's leading advertising agencies. During the mid- to late 1930s he undertook the pioneering work in social investigation which was to make him influential in establishing and developing elements of sociology, in social and market research, and in opinion polling. Large-scale surveys of newspaper and magazine readership, and of consumer behaviour, established his authority in both developing and evaluating mass communications—an authority he was to retain for decades. During the same period he established contacts with like-minded scientists abroad. He did much to help refugees escape from Nazi Europe, and was one of Sigmund Freud's helpers in his final move to England in 1939.

During the Second World War, Abrams worked first with the overseas department of the BBC, from 1939 to 1941, then with the psychological warfare board, and then at Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF). In these latter positions he undertook further pioneering survey work, at the psychological warfare board investigating, among other things, the impact of bombing on civilian morale. His work on food consumption during the war was a turning point in government data collection. The National Food Survey, a large-scale investigation into the nature and extent of national food consumption, ran, in one form or another, for the next sixty years. Indeed, Abrams's work was instrumental in establishing the widespread use of survey research to monitor the population's experience, needs, and beliefs, and set a pattern which survived and grew into the twenty-first century.

During the late 1940s the market and social research industries underwent major expansion. In 1946 Abrams founded Research Services Ltd, which developed into one of the UK's largest and most influential survey research companies. He also established the Market Research Society, the professional association for Britain's research business. He remained managing director, and then chairman, of Research Services Ltd until 1970. His first marriage having been dissolved in 1951, on 20 March 1953 he married Jean Bird (*b.* 1917), journalist, daughter of Frederick Lucien Bird, municipal research director. They had one daughter.

In the 1950s and 1960s Abrams had strong links with the Labour Party and undertook many private polls for them. He was a member of the Metrication Board from 1969 to 1979. In 1970 he left Research Services Ltd to become director of the Survey Research Unit at the Social Science Research Council. Then, in 1976—at the age of seventy—he became research director at Age Concern. During this same period he was an adviser to the Consumers' Association and, from 1978 until his death, was a vice-president of the Policy Studies Institute. Also, though less formally, he encouraged the careers of a number of young researchers.

In 1981 Abrams's son Philip Abrams, at the time professor of sociology at Durham University, died suddenly. This was a difficult period but he drew strength from his wife, his daughters, his studies, and his love of music. He died at the Royal Sussex County Hospital, Brighton, on 25 September 1994; he was survived by his wife and daughters.

Abrams was one of the founding fathers of structured social investigation, and his work on its techniques, utilization, and evaluation had a major impact on the post-1945 growth in the use of survey research by

commerce and government. A small but vivacious and humorous man, with twinkling eyes and a love of argument (he retained his enthusiasms well into his eighties), he was a courageous, experimental, and occasionally idiosyncratic researcher who believed that the views of all members of society should be assessed and taken into account in policy formulation. He was accepted and respected both in academia and in the commercial sector and, unusually for the period, managed to bridge the gap between the two. He believed in research not only as a means of describing society, but as an instrument to help improve it. He was a skilled raconteur and debater, with a profound belief in democracy.

Michael Warren

## Sources

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## Archives

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## Likenesses

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