

Tribute to Roger Jowell

(Newsletter 19, Feb 2012 Research Network)

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When Roger first settled in London in the mid-60s, he joined my research group at RSL, but not for long. Very soon he put in a 'transfer request' and moved to Gerald Hoinville's group in exchange for another researcher. At that time, Gerald was leading our breakthrough into public sector research. This was what Roger wanted and marked the start of a close relationship with Gerald that lasted for 20 years. Together, they broke away to establish SCPR, not as a commercial research agency but as a registered charity—an early indication of their strategic vision, increasing their acceptance by the public sector and giving access to research grants. Charitable status was not SCPR's only innovative feature. As the organisation grew, it adopted a whole new language: an interviewer panel, not a "field force"; respondents, not "informants"; sponsors, not "clients"; and so on. It cultivated an ethos of belief in methodological purity and turned away all commercial research. Several senior market researchers were attracted by these features—Barry Hedges, Jean Morton-Williams, Colin Airey. But not me. When I left RSL it was to join Andrew Ehrenberg and Gerald Goodhardt, at Aske Research. But we remained friends and eventually in late 1974 came the offer I could not refuse. Again, Gerald and Roger had shown their strategic vision. They had built strong relationships with Graham Kalton (then at Southampton) and with the team of survey methodologists at the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan, led by famous names like Leslie Kish and Charlie Cannell. And they had lined up ESRC support for something like SRC in the UK—a methodology unit attached to what was by then a major survey supplier. I was to help raise our profile in the international research community, contribute to survey design and analysis but not manage surveys; I was even allowed to go on working with Andrew on Fridays. Not many agencies, I think, would have allowed such freedom to a senior researcher. And none, I'm sure, would have had done so in 1975, when public sector research was cut back and inflation was rampant.

Up to this point, it is almost impossible for even a close observer to identify Roger's unique input. "Roger and Gerald" or "Gerald and Roger" were effectively collective nouns. But a move into Northampton Square, an association with City University, and the establishment of the Survey Methods Centre in 1980, seem to mark the start of a break-up, with Gerald mainly involved in methodology and teaching developments, and Roger mainly in survey development and management. By 1984, the relationship had broken down and Gerald left Roger as sole Director of their joint creation.

Different people will remember Roger for different contributions to social research. My own choice (in addition, of course, to his courage in sticking to his principles) would be his contribution to the creation of the Social Research Association; his development of an educative framework of ethical standards (as opposed to an inflexible Code of Conduct) adopted by both the SRA and the International Statistical Institute (but not, sadly, the MRS); in particular, his support for the doctrine of 'informed consent', recognising as a norm the respondent's right to know who would use the information they provided, and for what purposes. Then there is the [British] Social Attitudes Survey, with its core variables for measuring change and the unique opportunity it offered to outside academics to define their own question sets and write up their own results; and the internationalisation of the UK model.

And there is his enthusiastic acceptance of qualitative research, telephone interviewing and other alternatives to traditional face-to-face surveys. On an entirely personal level, I will remember too his unfailing tolerance of my eccentric doubts about the importance of survey 'purity'.