

Geoffrey Pearson

Geoff Pearson was born in Manchester, and educated at Accrington Grammar School and Peterhouse College Cambridge and the LSE, and after working as a psychiatric social worker, Geoff before commencing his academic career. His first major publication “*The Deviant Imagination*” (1974), confronted and unpacked a wide range of theories, and located the historical foundations for many of our contemporary policies and attitudes, particularly those relating to youth deviance.

In 1976 Geoff published his most celebrated study *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*, which provides a historically grounded antidote to the popular idea that deviant youth were a

radical and dangerous departure from an eternally recurring golden age of stability peace and tranquillity. In “*The New Heroin Users*” (1987), he gave a voice to users and addicts, confounding the stereotypical imagery of this most demonised group, while positioning chronic drug use within the context of multiple deprivation and social exclusion.

Geoff moved to Goldsmiths College in 1989, and was a member of the Runcimann Inquiry into *Drugs and the Law*, and vice-chair of the Institute for the Study of Drug Dependency/DrugScope. He worked on studies of drug use amongst young people in care, drug markets, and the policing of drugs, becoming a major figure in debates

around drugs and drug policy.

Geoff retired in 2008, and chaired the *independent Commission on Social Services in Wales* that produced a highly critical report in 2010. He championed early career social historians and ethnographers, and always insisted that the deprived and demonised had stories to tell. A dedicated husband, father, grandfather and great grandfather, a lifelong Manchester United fan and a loyal friend, Geoff Pearson was one of those rare senior academics who knew the value of listening. He leaves a huge gap.

■ **Professor Dick Hobbs**. Department of Sociology, Essex University

Steve Abrams

Steve completed his psychology degree at his home town University of Chicago in 1957 and moved to the UK in 1960 to undertake a doctorate at Oxford University part-funded by the Human Ecology Fund. This turned out to be a CIA front organisation, itself secretly funded by the notorious CIA mind-control project MK-ULTRA which included dosing people with LSD without their knowledge to see if it could be used as truth drug and as a way of disabling enemy forces.

Steve finished his studies in 1967, but never received the award because by then he was one of the UK’s leading drug reform activists and therefore a major source of embarrassment to the university.

He formed the Society of Mental Awareness (SOMA) and wrote an essay which said (correctly) that cannabis smokers were dealt with more harshly than heroin users, because heroin was legally prescribed to addicts on the NHS. In January 1967, *The Sunday People* got hold of the story and focussed on

Steve’s claim that 500 Oxford students smoked dope. This story was the spark that lit any number of stories and surveys about campus drug use in the UK and eventually led to government investigations into drug use, chaired by Baroness Wootton.

Meanwhile Steve was earning himself the reputation as a ‘dangerous man who must be stopped’ – according to *The News of the World* in 1968 because he had discovered a loophole in the law which allowed the prescribing of cannabis tincture and SOMA itself began manufacturing pure THC for medical purposes.

But Steve is probably best known for organising the famous full page advert in *The Times*. Appearing on 24 July 1967 at the height of the media storm over the arrest of Mick Jagger and Keith Richard on drug charges, the advert began ‘the law against marijuana is immoral in principle and unworkable in practice’. Paid for by Paul McCartney, the advert was signed by 65 leading names in British society including Graham Greene,

MPs Tom Driberg and Brian Walden, David Dimbleby, RD Laing, Jonathan Miller and David Bailey.

By the richest of ironies, Steve’s view that the law on cannabis had never been prosecuted was lauded by Peter Hitchens in his recent book which attacked the British establishment for deliberating allowing cannabis smoking to go unpunished so that left-wing intellectuals could be left to indulge in peace.

Steve pretty much disappeared from public view, spending much of his time writing and researching the history of UK cannabis policy while sadly struggling with emphysema which left him housebound and was the ultimate cause of his death last November.

See also the obituary for Steve written by Dave Luke in published in 2013 edition of *Psychedelic Press UK*.

■ **Harry Shapiro**