

Professor Stephen Anthony Crook – BA, DPhil

A eulogy, 10 September 2002

Life



Steve Crook was born in 1950 in Farnborough Kent, to the SE of London. His family was very much in the same trade that he was to follow. His father is a historian who during Steve's formative years was Deputy Director of Leicester Polytechnic (now Simon de Montfort University) and his mother was a primary school teacher. He went to School at Abingdon just outside Oxford.

Steve went to York University in 1970 where he read for a BA in Philosophy. After a temporary career in the public service he went back to York to do postgraduate study and (having seen the error of his ways) switched from philosophy to sociology. He received his Doctorate in 1984 – he always insisted that it should be abbreviated in the English form (DPhil) rather than the Latin form (PhD).

Steve's supervisor at York remembers him in terms that became familiar to all of us:

I certainly have an abiding image of Steve, remembering him not so much for his thinking and academic work (which are very substantial) but for his great character, the wonderful smile and unshakeable sense of humour.

He took his first academic job at the College of St Mark and St John in Plymouth in the SW of England where he taught for 6 years. He was recruited to the University of Tasmania in 1985 where he was selected from a field of over 60 applicants. He rose rapidly through the ranks in Tasmania where he eventually became the restorative and healing Head of a Department that had just been through a bad time.

When JCU decided to found a Chair of Sociology in 1997, Steve was the obvious appointment in the field. It was a stellar appointment of which the University was justifiably proud.

Steve brought his glittering intelligence to bear on a wide range of topics: the mass media, popular culture, the big social changes that affect societies, the development of environmental values, and more latterly, how people managed the risks associated with the consumption of meat and of genetically modified crops.

He published five books and several important articles. His own favourite book was probably *Modernist Radicalism and its Aftermath* a sociology-of-knowledge treatment of the development of sociological theory. However he is probably best known for *Postmodernization* on which Jan Pakulski and I were privileged to collaborate with him. It needs to be said that that book was Steve's idea and that his was the intellectual driving force behind. It is fair to say that PoMo, as he called it, centred a golden age of sociology in Tasmania when that Department became, for a brief time, a leading global player in sociological thinking.

Family and Relationships

There were other women before Rosie. Lucy, one of his girl friends when he was a student at York wrote this when she heard of his death:

He was an exceptionally clever man . . . He was also a trifle too fond of cheap university beer; and his most endearing habit was his playfulness. He was always surrounded by about six other blokes. And they would do ridiculously silly things at night like filling balloons with water and dropping them off the college roof.

Rosie and Steve met in Plymouth in 1981. Rosie tells me that she didn't like him at first, refused his advances and had to have her arm twisted by a friend just to go out with him. Her first impression was that he was 'pushy and arrogant' – just shows how wrong first impressions can be. They eventually got it right and they established a great relationship full of companionship and quirky good humour. Not long after they were married they set off on the great adventure of moving to Australia.

Until 1991 Steve would have said that Rosie was the best friend he ever had but then Felicity came along and he had two best friends. I never saw a prouder, more beaming father than Steve – he never tired of talking about his flickety-flick. More importantly Felicity seemed to encourage him to express the playful, child-like side of his nature. They became, from the moment Felicity could talk, 'exceptionally close, they were always up to mischief and loved keeping 'secrets' from mother.' The biggest cost, to Steve, of his untimely death will be missing out on Felicity's progress and growth. But I know that her daddy's image and guidance will always be with her and that she will always be the accomplished and fun-loving person that he taught her to be.

Work

Teaching

Steve had trained to be a schoolteacher and had once intended to be one. It is not surprising that he was a hugely effective and popular university teacher. He took an uncompromising stance on the content of his teaching, deciding that students deserved to be helped to understand the most complex and difficult of issues. However he made sure that even the most under-prepared of students could get access to these issues by meticulous preparation and the careful and repeated stressing of key points.

It wasn't all deadly serious though. He lightened his lectures with a wry and penetrating wit. His sense of humour focussed on contradiction because he enjoyed the way in which contradiction revealed so much about social life. One of his favourites, and one that I have

often appropriated for my own use, arose when discussing Australian women's magazines in his course on popular culture. One of the odd things, he would say, about the three main Australian women's magazines is their titles. We have the Women's Day which seems to come out weekly; then we have the Women's Weekly, which, as you might expect, comes out monthly; and then we have New Idea which seems to have no bloody idea at all. The point he wanted to get across, of course, was that magazine owners will call their magazines by any name so long as it boosts the circulation.

Steve felt a strong sense of duty about teaching. He insisted on providing teaching materials to students, with the generous assistance of his colleagues, right into the late stages of his illness. I think he would have been teaching on the day of his death if he could have been.

Scholarship

Most people know that these days Universities are difficult places for academics to work in because of funding cuts. Steve, like many others, found them doubly difficult because of their emphasis on what he called 'performativity' – he abhorred the tendency of Universities to import simplistic business models into their culture, to want to count and measure and manage everyone's performance. He believed, I think rightly, that while this led to increased outputs these were generally of inferior quality.

He was himself something of a traditionalist in terms of academic values. Although he did important research, principally on the spread of environmentalist values, and he acquired research grants, he was much more interested in emphasising the old-fashioned value of scholarship rather than research. He believed in the intellectual working-through of complex issues and that this was the best way to advance knowledge.

Another of those contradictions that Steve loved could be found in the system of academic ranks that Universities employ. There are five ranks labelled A to E. The most junior grade, Associate Lecturers, get an A grade, whereas Professors, sadly, get the failing grade of E. When Steve was promoted to level D at the University of Tasmania he was offered a choice of titles, Reader or Associate Professor. Spurning the status compromise implied by the latter, Steve was the last person to receive the honourable and unambiguous title of Reader in that University (where it has since, quietly, been dropped).

Steve was deeply committed to the role of the public intellectual – the academic who speaks out on public issues. He championed junior colleagues who took on this role, against others, including myself, who insisted on more formal performance criteria. He wasn't too much of a slouch at being a public intellectual himself either. He was both adroit and courageous, for example, in public media debates surrounding homosexual law reform in Tasmania, managing to point out that Tasmanians did appear to the rest of the world to be in the back woods, without giving offence to his audience.

In his late career here in Townsville, this commitment, along with his well-justified ambition, led him to leadership of his profession as President of the Australian Sociological Association. His main achievement here was to engage in crucial financial negotiations with the International Sociological Association to ensure that the World Congress of Sociology would be held in Brisbane, for the first ever occasion in Australia. Sadly, his illness prevented him from seeing the second term of his Presidency through and from attending the meeting.

Taste

Steve was essentially a private man, avoiding public displays of emotion where possible. But his lifestyle often displayed charming and unexpected touches of flamboyance. He is the only senior, male colleague I have known to wear red shoes to the office. One of the delights, for him, of moving to Townsville was the opportunity to wear colourful board shorts into work every day.

His reading tastes were as you might expect intellectual, so much so that I once caught him hauling out *The Origin of the Species* as recreational reading. He enjoyed and was knowledgeable about classical music, especially vocal music and opera. Rosie and Steve shared a love of dogs and of cricket and I think that one of the things that they missed about Hobart was easy access to the Bellerive Oval. On the other hand, Rosie did not share the taste he developed for American Western movies of the mid-twentieth century. Obviously this was a point where his academic interest in popular culture and his personal pleasure elided. But I think that he loved the clean and unambiguous heroism and courage, and the simple morality that those movies portrayed. An interest in heroism and courage would also help to explain his conversion to being a passionate supporter of rugby league, something some of his best mates from the South never, quite understood. Indeed he became so passionate about it that the family dogs are called Wally and Lewis.

Values

So what kind of man was Stephen Crook? We all know a bit of him but I rather think that he himself would not have minded being compared to the heroes played by Alan Ladd or better, by Gary Cooper in those American Westerns.

Like them: he had

- A deep commitment to (the traditional) family and community, and a willingness to defend them against any threat.
- Quiet skill and competence in the performance of his duties
- An unwillingness to associate himself with the idle and feckless
- Courage in the face of extreme odds.
- Stoicism in adversity/ non-revelation of the inner turmoil
- A deep sense of justice and fairness/egalitarianism especially to those weaker than oneself.

Stephen Crook was a good man.

Emeritus Professor Malcolm Waters

THE PASSING OF PROFESSOR STEVE CROOK

It is with the deepest regret that the Sociology Discipline at James Cook University learnt of the passing of our colleague Professor Stephen Crook. Steve passed away peacefully on Thursday, 5 September 2002, in the Townsville Hospital. Steve had been bravely fighting a battle against cancer for more than a year.

Steve had been known to many of us since the early 1990s when he was invited to review our efforts and offer some suggestions about how we could continue to develop sociology at JCU. His friendly manner and knowledge of academic affairs was highly valued. When a Chair in Sociology was established, Steve was the successful applicant and he brought many new ideas to our discipline. So highly thought of was Steve upon arrival that he was quickly appointed Head of the School of Psychology and Sociology. There he served with distinction through a period of major organizational change within the School and the Faculty as a whole.

Steve introduced a number of new subjects, maintained a vigorous research effort and supervised a number of Ph.D, Masters and Honours students, all of whom greatly appreciated the insights and attention he was able to offer them. This was a responsibility that Steve took very seriously indeed and he demonstrated the highest level of professionalism in guiding our students. All of us found Steve a very fair minded person who had a real love of Sociology and a deep sense of the role it has to play in society.

The news last year that Steve had contracted cancer came as a great shock to us but we were amazed at the fortitude, courage and optimism with which he fought the battle he faced. He had a number of setbacks but was always ready to fight on. In first semester this year a number of us worked with Steve to keep his favourite subject going while his treatment moved into a most serious phase. Once again we were amazed at his tenacity. We will remember Steve as a truly dedicated sociologist and educator. He will be greatly missed.

Our sincerest condolences go out to Steve's wife Rosie and daughter Felicity.

Mervyn F. Bendle Ph.D

Senior Lecturer and Head of Sociology

School of Anthropology, Archaeology and Sociology

JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY

Dear Colleagues

With the passing of Steve Crook, Australian sociology and TASA lost one of its true exemplars and advocates. All who knew Steve appreciated his professionalism, his friendly and relaxed manner, and his unwavering commitment to sociology. Aside from Steve's obvious intellect, the qualities that I will always remember and admire him for surround his humanity – his kindness, warmth, and dedication to making a difference. He could always be counted on to support colleagues, provide sage advice, and take a leadership role when required to champion the discipline and the Association.

Steve played a pivotal role in preparations for TASA's hosting of the XV World Congress of Sociology held in Brisbane (July 7-13, 2002). Sadly, his illness prevented him from attending, though he did hear of its success. Steve's last TASA appearance occurred during the TASA 2001 conference held at the University of Sydney in December. He was in good spirits then and participated in a number of sessions, chaired the AGM and was the MC at the

Conference dinner. He clearly enjoyed his time at the conference, taking the time to socialise with colleagues who were obviously happy they could share this time with him.

It is an understatement to note that Steve's contribution to Australian sociology and TASA were significant. He was:

- TASA President from 1999 until his resignation in February 2002
- Joint-Editor of the Journal (1993-1997), with Jan Pakulski and Malcolm Waters
- Foundation Chair of Sociology at James Cook University (est. 1998)
- Regular panel member of the Jean Martin Award and Best Paper in JOS Prize
- Supervisor and examiner of many honours, Masters and PhD theses.

Steve had a longstanding interest in social theory and was regularly in demand to deliver papers at conferences around the globe. An acknowledgement of his international standing came as recently as 2001, when the book he co-edited with Jan Pakulski and Malcolm Waters, *Postmodernization* (1992), was republished in a Chinese language edition. Steve's research interests were in social theory, the sociology of culture and political sociology. Major publications include:

- *Environmentalism, Public Opinion and the Media in Australia* (co-edited with Jan Pakulski, 1998)
- 'Minatours and Other Monsters: "Everyday Life" in Recent Social Theory', *Sociology* (1998)
- 'Biotechnology, risk and socio-cultural (dis)order', in *Altered Genes* (1998)
- *Adorno: The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture* (editor, 1994)
- *Postmodernization: Change in Advanced Society* (co-authored with J. Pakulski and M. Waters, 1992)
- *Modernist Radicalism and its Aftermath: Foundationalism and Anti-foundationalism in Radical Social Theory* (1991).

To honour Steve's memory and contribution to Australian sociology, TASA has established the Stephen Crook Memorial Prize, to be awarded bi-annually for the best book in Australian sociology. In addition, Steve's Presidential Address, given during the Y2K TASA Conference at Flinders University, will be published in the *Journal of Sociology* (2003, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp.7-14).

For his unwavering commitment to sociology, fellow colleagues and students; for his intellect, stoicism and friendly, charming manner - he will be greatly missed.

John Germov

TASA President

The University of Newcastle

It was a privilege to have worked alongside of Steve on the TASA Executive. Not only was he 'nice', he was also intelligent and inclusive as the President. He was able to steer TASA

through all of the difficult negotiations with the ISA and ISA Brisbane 2002 owes a lot to Steve's ability and patience. Thank you Steve. We owe you much and will greatly miss you and your clear-headed approach to life and to Sociology.

Graham Marsh

Without Stephen's support, encouragement and direction my sociology honours thesis would never have been completed. Moreover, my lasting respect for the discipline was initially sparked by him and later, constantly nurtured throughout our ongoing friendship. His passing fills me with great sadness. He leaves us richer for having known him.

Moya Cassidy

I first met Steve Crook when we were both postgrads at The University of York, UK. He was a few years ahead of me, but I was struck by his friendliness and supportiveness towards other people. Our paths crossed a few times over the following decades, in Australia and the UK, but he was always easy to talk to, open and unpretentious, and had a deep love of and commitment to Sociology. I regret that I didn't keep in contact with Steve as much as I should have. We all lead such busy lives at such great distances. But I do not regret knowing and sharing some good jokes with a fine person and scholar. Au revoir, Steve.

David Rowe

In Stephen Crook's passing sociology in Australia loses a very fine mind, a generous personality and a great talent. I knew him from his Tasmanian days when he conducted some excellent research along with his team Pakulski and Waters and then he moved to Townsville to give generously of his talent for leadership to both that University and to TASA. We miss his grace and commitment.

Professor Ann Daniel

To our colleagues in TASA

On behalf of the Sociological Association of Aotearoa/New Zealand I would like to convey our sympathies for the sad loss of your colleague Stephen Crook. It is of course distressing to lose any colleague, but the great contribution that Stephen made to sociology in Australasia intensifies his loss to the discipline and profession. Our thoughts are with you.

Kevin Dew, President of SAANZ

It was a great privilege to have known Steve and our thoughts are with his family and friends at this sad time.

David McCallum

I worked with Steve at Marjons in the late 70s and early 80s and attended his first lecture. Not a single student understood a word that he said. It was from that moment on that Steve developed his passion for making sure his students both understood and enthused about Sociology. Teaching Sociology at a time when society was pronounced not to exist was a bit of a challenge. The early battles he fought formed his characteristic resilience and good humour.

Assoc. Professor Les Sharpe

Vale Stephen Crook: I took every undergraduate unit that Steve taught at Tas Uni in the late eighties, and he was my honours thesis supervisor. I can only reiterate all of his excellent qualities that others have mentioned on this page - especially his humour, intellect and dedication. Thank you Steve.

Peter Feldman

Vale Stephen Crook: Despite any initial unease from some colleagues, Steve's work at Marjons was always clearly impressive and at the right level of challenge. He substantially raised expectations and standards for staff and students and the College enjoyed its own brief golden age for Sociology teaching and scholarship during his stay -- he certainly needed all his confidence, resilience and humour though.

Dave Harris