

Hood, Roger Grahame

(1936–2020)

Carolyn Hoyle

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Roger Grahame Hood (1936–2020), by Matthew Hood

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Hood, Roger Grahame (1936–2020), criminologist, was born at 26 Collingwood Road, Redland, Bristol, on 12 June 1936, the second of three sons of Ronald Hugo Frederick Hood (1910–1996), stockbroker's dealer, and his wife, Phyllis Eileen, *née* Murphy (1911–1991). At the time of his birth the family lived at Sailor's Rest, Cumberland Basin, Bristol, but Phyllis and her sons Martin (*b.* 1934) and Roger spent the Second World War years with relatives in Leeds, while Ronald served with the Royal Artillery in Africa. When he was demobilized and able to return to his family, Roger did not recognize him, a trauma that the latter often mentioned in later life. After the war the family moved to Birmingham, where Phyllis worked for a department store and Ronald worked for a stockbroker. Roger's younger brother, Stephen (1949–1979), was born in Birmingham.

Educated at King Edward VI Five Ways School, Hood captained the rugby team and excelled at athletics. He also shone in the classroom, and, ignoring some misjudged advice from the school careers department that he should seek an apprenticeship as a lens grinder, won a scholarship to study sociology at the London School of Economics. He graduated in 1957, after taking a course in the newly emerging discipline of criminology in his final year. It was taught by Hermann Mannheim, one of the field's founding fathers, whose family had sought refuge from Nazi oppression. Impressed by Hood's studiousness and

engagement, Mannheim invited him to help with a paper on what would become *the Homicide Act* (1957), which was then being debated in parliament and would abolish the death penalty for certain types of murder.

Hood must have demonstrated aptitude, for soon after he graduated, Mannheim asked him to become his research assistant on a study of sentencing disparities in magistrates' courts. This became the first large-scale empirical study of sentencing in England, and Hood's first publication, *Sentencing in Magistrates' Courts* (1962). His work with Mannheim initiated his interests in both sentencing and the death penalty, which he maintained for the rest of his life.

Meanwhile Hood took up a place to study for a doctorate at Cambridge, supervised by Leon Radzinowicz (whose entry for the *Oxford DNB* he later wrote). He had come to the right place at the right time. Cambridge had established the first British Institute of Criminology in 1959, with Radzinowicz appointed as its director and a university professor. In 1963 Hood became its first PhD graduate. His thesis, on the reformatory institutions for young adult offenders known as borstals, honed his empirical skills and gave him a taste for writing about the history of criminal justice. A decade later, Radzinowicz asked him to co-author the fifth and final volume of his *History of English Criminal Law and Its Administration*. Its publication in 1986 demonstrated Hood's thoroughness and attention to detail.

Meanwhile, Hood had met Barbara Blaine Smith Young (1934–2004), a housing adviser, born in Pennsylvania, USA, daughter of Donald Waldo Smith, mechanical engineer, and his wife, Margaret. Roger and Barbara Hood married on 15 July 1963, the year in which Roger also took up his first teaching post, as a lecturer in social administration at the University of Durham. Their daughter, Cathy, was born the following year. The marriage ended in divorce in 1985, and on 5 October that year Hood married Nancy Colquitt Stebbing, *née* Lynah (1943–2019), a museum curator from Savannah, Georgia, USA, daughter of John Heyward Lynah, steel manufacturer, and his wife, Nancy. Nancy Stebbing had children of her own, Zoe, Clare, and David, but the two families gelled. Roger was also very close to his nephew, Matthew, whom he raised from a young age.

Hood returned to the Institute of Criminology at Cambridge in 1967 to become assistant director of research and a fellow of Clare Hall. During this period he and his colleague Richard Sparks co-authored *Key Issues in Criminology* (1970), a renowned and enduring survey of the field which was translated into many languages. The book cemented Hood's reputation, and in 1973, when he was just thirty-seven, he was appointed reader in criminology at the University of Oxford and a fellow of All Souls. He had found the perfect intellectual home for the rest of his career.

Hood had served briefly on the Parole Board in 1972–3, and some of his empirical research at Oxford examined the board's work and drew on this experience. He also began to investigate the treatment of minorities in the criminal justice system. However, his writing was becoming increasingly sophisticated, and in contrast to his earlier publications, began to feature critical and normative engagement with criminal justice policy. This led to invitations to speak not only to fellow academics but to criminal justice professionals and policy makers, which enhanced the influence of his findings on policy and practice.

On arrival at Oxford, Hood took over the university's Penal Research Unit from its founder, Nigel Walker. Besides himself, it initially sustained just a couple of researchers on temporary, rolling contracts. Hood devoted considerable energy to expanding it by securing research grants, at first mostly from the Home Office. Its growth enabled the appointment of a series of outstanding staff, many of whom went on to successful academic careers. In 2001 the growing DPhil programme was joined by an MSc in criminology and criminal justice, established by Hood and a small group of colleagues. Renamed the Centre for Criminological Research in 1976 and the Centre for Criminology in 2005, the unit reached maturity, as a vibrant department within Oxford's faculty of law.

Hood was always mindful of the value of contact with the system's 'customers', that is to say, offenders. For many years he ran the Oxford prison discussion group for students and prisoners, where he traded cigarettes and chocolate for chat. The walk from All Souls to the prison took just five minutes, but they were worlds apart. Some of the 'residents' at both institutions had their idiosyncrasies, but they readily warmed to Hood, in part because of his energy and enthusiasm for the issues he researched. He also developed a long relationship with Grendon Underwood, a prison set up as a therapeutic community for serious offenders, to which he frequently brought students and colleagues.

Meanwhile, Hood was developing a further stream of research, which was rooted in his early work with Mannheim on the *Homicide Act* and in 1961, he wrote a paper about the abolition of the death penalty. The United Nations (UN) had already published two successive surveys of global trends in capital punishment based on questionnaires to member states, the first by Marc Ancel in 1962, the second by Norval Morris in 1967. In 1987 it asked Hood to produce a third. He used it as the basis for a wider-ranging report, which was first published by Amnesty International but republished by Oxford University Press as *The Death Penalty: a World-Wide Perspective* (1989). The book documented the extent to which countries were moving towards the restriction of capital punishment—a stated UN policy goal. However, Hood's volume was a meticulous and comprehensive review of all the available academic and grey literature on the subject, as well as a survey of laws, policies, and practices. He later conducted two further UN surveys while the book went through five editions (the fourth and fifth co-authored with Carolyn Hoyle), each one more ambitious than the last.

Hood's eminence as a death penalty researcher and his experience of engaging with stakeholders led to a fruitful partnership with Parvais Jabbar and Saul Lehrfreund, co-executive directors of the Death Penalty Project, a non-governmental organization based in London that represented clients *pro bono* in numerous jurisdictions and conducted advocacy against capital punishment. Retirement from his full-time post in 2003 allowed Hood to focus almost entirely on the death penalty, and his alliance with the Death Penalty Project led to studies in Asia and the Caribbean that challenged the rationales for retention. This could require him to adapt to unfamiliar cultural norms. At a banquet in China the hosts gave a series of impromptu performances of popular songs. Asked to reply in kind, Hood persuaded Jabbar and Lehrfreund and others from the British delegation to join him in a lusty rendition of 'Ten Green Bottles'. When this marathon finally reached its painful end, Jabbar suggested that next time, it might be better to start at five bottles.

Oxford life suited Hood. He was a talented cook, and a lover of fine wine, usually supplied by the extensive All Souls' cellars. Nancy, who worked for Oxfordshire museums and wrote local histories, was a constant companion, sharing his appetite for travel, culture, and family life. She also played a significant role in the conversion of Oxford's prison into a somewhat unusual hotel. Roger had always been a loving, involved father and stepfather. Retirement allowed him to lavish attention on his grandchildren, and his nephew's son.

Hood was widely honoured by his peers. Elected a fellow of the British Academy in 1992, he was given the Sellin–Glueck award for distinguished international contributions to criminology by the American Society of Criminology, and later appointed both CBE for services to criminology in 1995 and an honorary QC in 2000—an accolade he was delighted to receive in the same year as Nelson Mandela. Fittingly, the Centre for Criminology instituted an annual Roger Hood public lecture when he retired. By this time it was obvious that his scholarship had made an impact on policy and practice around the world.

In the last decade of his life Hood remained intellectually active. He continued to write and travel, visit the Centre for Criminology to chat with younger colleagues, and enjoy companionship and good food at All Souls. He carried on cycling late into his seventies, and later, when he grew frailer, would walk across the city wearing a fedora, maintaining his poise with an elegant stick. Nancy's death from an aggressive form of cancer in early 2019 was a blow from which he struggled to recover. His family and friends did their best to support him, but just as he was beginning to find his feet came the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the isolation enforced by lockdowns. This most sociable of scholars did not find it easy to spend most of his time alone, wistfully observing that it was akin to solitary confinement.

Hood died with his family by his side of pneumonia after a short illness on 17 November 2020, at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford. He had lived for many years at 36 The Stream Edge, Fisher Row, Oxford. His and Nancy's ashes were buried under their favourite tree in front of a small church, St Margaret of Antioch, in Binsey, Oxford. A few months earlier he had been gratified to hear that his former student, co-author, and friend, Carolyn Hoyle, had established the Oxford Death Penalty Research Unit within the Centre for Criminology. Its aims were to maintain and develop the empirical, theoretical, and policy-relevant research on the death penalty worldwide to which Hood had made such a significant contribution: it was a fitting legacy to his long and distinguished career.

Intellectually generous, and the sponsor and inspiration for numerous professional careers, Hood nurtured students and colleagues alike, although he did not spare criticism where he felt it was merited, ever ready to wield his red pen on others' drafts. He was a man of high principle and unimpeachable integrity, and an anti-racist before the term was invented. His late career, working on the death penalty, exemplified his insistence that criminology should be not only an academic discipline, but a resource to be deployed in the struggle for legal and social justice.

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Likenesses

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