

In Memoriam: Dr Rob Smith (1960-2025)



(photo courtesy of Gerard McElwee)

The first issue of *the International Journal of Rural Criminology* was published in December 2011. Arguably, the most important article in this inaugural issue was titled “Theorizing Illegal Rural Enterprise: Is Everyone at It?” It was written by Robert Smith, then at The Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Scotland, with co-authors Gerard McElwee (Nottingham Trent University) and Peter Somerville University of Lincoln). The authors argued that there is a great diversity of illegal activities in which people living in rural areas, especially farmers, can engage:

The purpose of this article is to consider the nature of illegal rural enterprise; to establish if it is distinctive space in entrepreneurship theory and practice; how it is construed; how, and if, it is enacted. A conceptual categorization which links the activities of illegal entrepreneurship in the rural is developed (McElwee, Smith, & Somerville, 2011, p. 40).

Not only was the typology very innovative, but so was their methodological approach, which was more like a case study necessary to build a model about how a successful business develops, an approach to theory and data collection rarely seen in criminology and criminal justice studies. In essence, they converted grey literature and personal communications into scholarly gold, linking interpretative understanding in the spirit of the French sociologist Max Weber to the advance of criminological scholarship. They met their key informants at pubs, barns, and offices (any place other than staid university offices) constructing a new understanding of crime that always forms the intellectual foundation of rural criminology.

This spirit of scholarship continued for Rob Smith, often in cooperation with colleagues interested in the same issues. For IJRC alone, Smith (2013) developed a typology of rural criminals by adopting a police intelligence perspective. Rob Smith et al (2017) reviewed and



critiqued the literature on food fraud, paying close attention to the dynamics behind the European Horsemeat scandal in 2013. Further, he (2021) examined the link or “nexus” between farming and waste disposal, creating another typology by which to bring understanding to environmental crime and criminals within a rural context.

These articles and many more authored/co-authored by Rob Smith speak to the huge productivity of a scholar who was both inventive and collaborative. Indeed, he was a great scholar and an equally great colleague.

I first personally met Rob Smith at a conference in 2014 held in Stockholm and organized by Vania Ceccato (KTH Royal Institute of Technology). Papers from the conferences were published in the *Journal of Rural Studies* the following year. Rob was one of the shining personalities of that conference, offering insightful comments with a blend of humor that entertained everyone. I suspect that his personality was this way long before we met, perhaps even from the day he was born, and all the way up to the end of his life on August 3.

Our email exchanges and a couple of zoom calls were highlights in the years since my retirement in 2014, watching the field of rural criminology grow, especially its internationalization. I can say with certainty that if ever I wanted to collect varied accents of people speaking the English language, there is no better place to begin than today’s international network of rural criminology scholars. At the top of my favorites on this list would be Rob’s Scottish elocutions.

I was aware of his health situation (cancer) for the past couple of years, but I also knew he did not taper off in his dedication to scholarship. During this year, 2025, he had volunteered to help with copyediting and the review of a monograph for IJRC.

In September and October of 2024, I was a visiting academic with the Faculty of Law, University of Białystok in the Podlaskie Voivodeship of eastern Poland. My primary host, Emilia Jurgielewicz Delegacz, drove me to the village of Kruszyniany, where a wooden mosque was built a couple of centuries ago by Tatars. The village itself is within walking distance of the border with Belarus. Next to it is a cemetery, with graves both very old and very new.

Somehow, the words to a poem began to form in my mind’s eye, and eventually, I completed it. I dedicate this poem to the memory of Rob Smith. I don’t know if Rob Smith was much of a gardener, but I do know with surety that he kept his smile all the way to the end, and we fellow rural criminologists have inherited his intellectual garden, festooned with blossoms and nary a weed. We are the flowers that I wish Rob could see.

A gardener's elegy
(dedicated to Rob Smith)

As I grow old but keep my smile
I wish someday to join my compost pile
To help grow some flowers I will never see

But my family and friends, well, they disagree
It's the grave and stone for me
Not ever to help grow some flowers I would never see

How will they do if I'm not there
Will they yet grow to beauties fair
Still, they are flowers I shall never see.

Joe Donnermeyer

References¹

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- Smith, R., Manning, L., & McElwee, G. (2017). Critiquing the inter-disciplinary literature on food fraud. *International Journal of Rural Criminology*, 6(1), 65-81.
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¹ The references listed in this in memoriam are those directly associated with IJRC. Rob Smith wrote much more, especially about illegal business enterprise. Rob's colleague and good friend, Gerard McElwee also composed a memoriam in which he mentioned that Rob was the author/co-author of over 200 book chapters and peer-reviewed journal articles. The memoriam can be found on the website for the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (<https://www.isbe.org.uk/tribute-to-dr-robert-smith/>).