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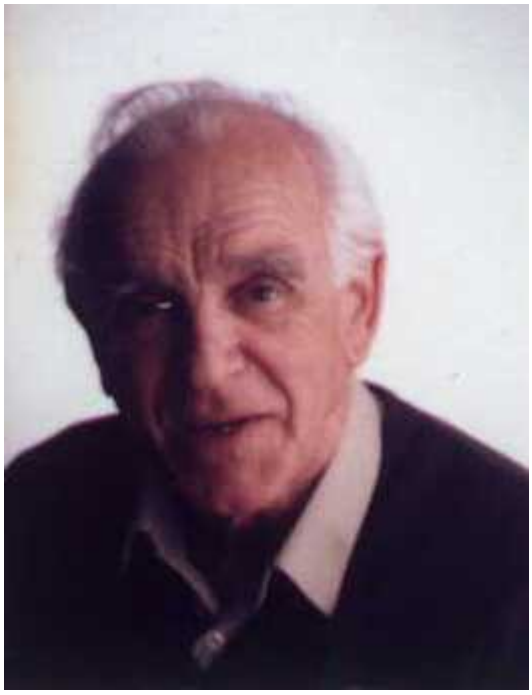
Interview with G.I.Brown

(Dr G.I.Brown is one of the foremost experts in Chemistry. We as forensic scientists became interested in him and his work, largely because of the book on explosives he wrote (The Big Bang - A History of Explosives, Sutton Publishing, 2001). This book was reviewed in Vol. 3, No. 1 in the General Books Section.

G.I.Brown



We at the "Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology" approached him for an online interview and he graciously agreed. The interview was conducted for well over two months. Some excerpts.....)

Qu. 1. Is this (The Big Bang) your first book? Which books have you written before? On which subjects?

Ans. I had not liked the text books I had used at school, so as soon as I began teaching myself I thought I would try to do better. I began with *Introduction to Chemistry* which was published by Longmans in 1952 and, as it sold well, I was encouraged to do more. *A Simple Guide to Modern Valency Theory* came in 1953; *Essentials of Certificate Chemistry* in 1954; *Introduction to Organic Chemistry* in 1957: *Electronic Theories of Organic Chemistry* in 1958; *Introduction to Physical*

Chemistry in 1964; *A New Guide to Modern Valency Theory* in 1967; *Introduction to Inorganic Chemistry* in 1974; and *A New Introduction to Organic Chemistry* in 1978.

When I retired from teaching, I wanted to go on writing so I changed tack and have done *The Guinness History of Invention* (1996); *The Big Bang: A History of Explosives* (1998); *Scientist, Soldier, Statesman, Spy; Count Rumford* (1999); and *Invisible Rays: A History of Radioactivity* (2002). The last three books are all published by Sutton Publishing and are all still in print.

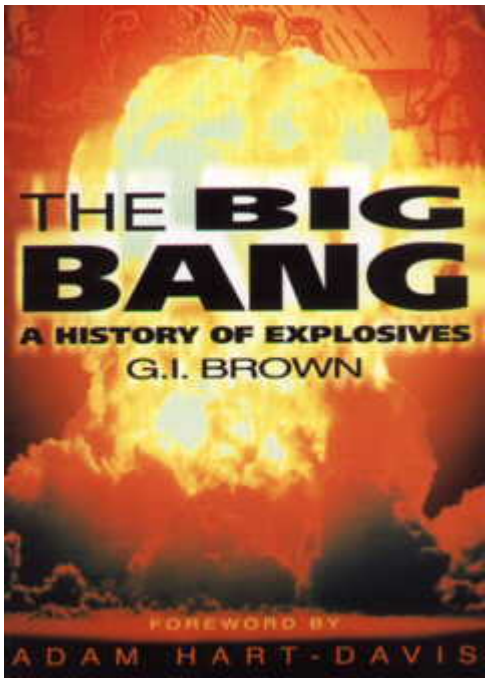
Qu. 2. What is your next book about? Does it have anything to do with explosives/chemistry?

Ans. I am hoping to write a biography of Sir Henry Bessemer.

Qu. 3. So you wrote 14 books in all - 9 text books and 5 books of popular interest. Right?

Ans. Partly. The fifth book on Sir Henry Bessemer is not published yet.

Jacket Cover of "The Big Bang - A History of Explosives" by G.I. Brown, published by Sutton Publishing Ltd. Click on the book to go to its review.



Qu. 4. I hear you used to teach chemistry. Can you tell us about your career? Your educational background?

Ans. I was born in 1920 and educated at Blackburn Grammar School; Kingswood School, Bath; and Magdalen College. I then served as a technical officer with the Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Britain and with the Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) in Australia. That is how I first became interested in explosives. Thereafter I taught Chemistry and was a Housemaster at Eton College until I retired in 1984.

Qu. 5. Could you tell us about your family? Did you inherit the love of chemistry from your parents? How many children do you have?

Ans. I still live in Eton with my wife. One daughter teaches Chemistry at Lady Elenor Hollis School in Hampton. The other is a doctor; she lives in Sydney.

Qu. 6. If God asked you choose your profession again, what would it be and why?

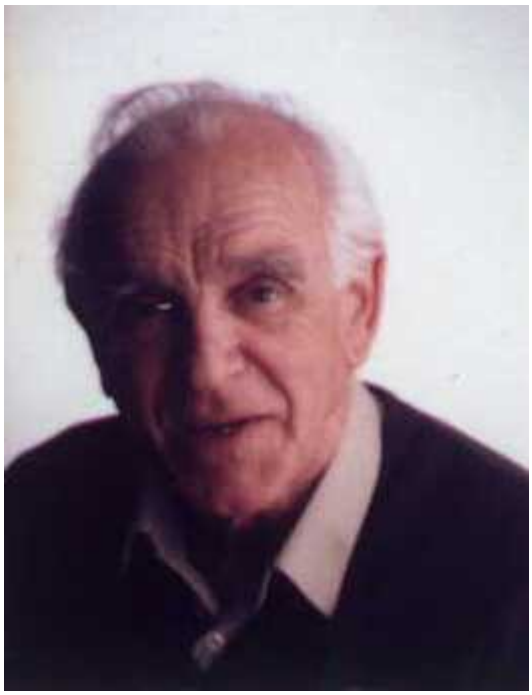
Ans. If I were to have my time over again I think I would still like to teach and certainly to write.

Qu. 7. Have you ever traveled to India, or to Indian subcontinent? Would you like to visit, if such an opportunity arose?

Ans. My wife and I once spent 3 days in Delhi *en route* for Australia. We were lucky enough to see the Independence Day Parade which was marvellous.

Qu. 8. So you saw the Independence Day Parade! That's great. When was that?

Ans. We saw the Independence Day Parade in 1985. And it was remarkable that a Japanese girl who my wife and I sat next to in the stand had used the Japanese translation of my book on Valency Theory



".. Asimov was something of a genius. I wish I knew how to explain his success. Then I might be able to copy it!! ..."

Qu. 9. Are you interested in Science Fiction? Do you think SF is a good means to teach science to children?

Ans. I do not care for science fiction but I recognise its attractions.

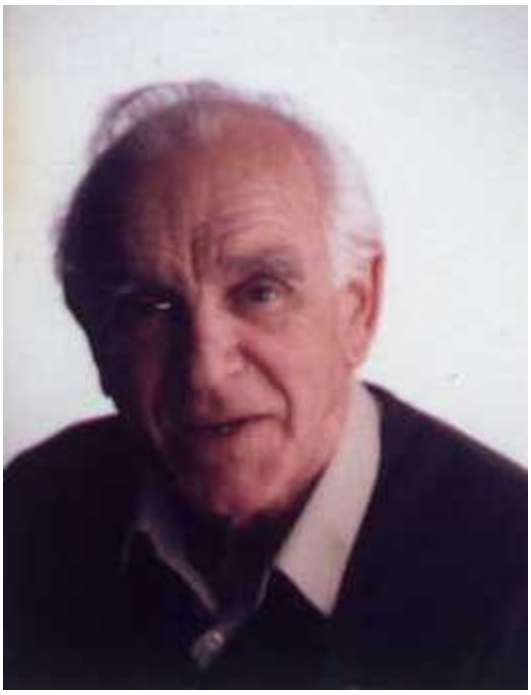
Qu. 10. What do you do in your spare time? Your hobbies, interests?

Ans. I am keen on all sports and on do-it-yourself activities.

Qu. 11. Your favorite authors/books?

Ans. I like reading Winston Churchill and Alan Morehead and have tried, not very successfully, to base my style of writing on theirs.

Brown's Superlatives



My Birthday : February 16, 1920

Place Of Birth :Wigan, England

Real Name : George Ingham Brown

First book : An Introduction to Chemistry

I Love : My wife

I hate : Pomposity

I am superstitious about: Nothing

My biggest fear : No great ones

My strength : Determination

My Hero : Haven't got one

My favorite quote: When the going gets tough, the tough get going

Qu. 12. How many hours do you write every day?

Ans. I write for 2-3 hours most mornings.

Qu. 13. Which book has taken you the longest to complete. The fastest?

Ans. My *Guinness History of Inventions* (covering the whole field) took me longest; about 5 years. My *biography of Rumford* was quickest; it took just about a year.

Qu. 14. Your book (The Big Bang) is so full of stories and anecdotes. Do these stories come naturally to you while writing?

Ans. I keep a scrap book of odd bits and pieces that I come across and which I think may, at some time, fit into one of my books.

Qu. 15. Is the same true of the pictures in your books too? They too are quite unique and rare.

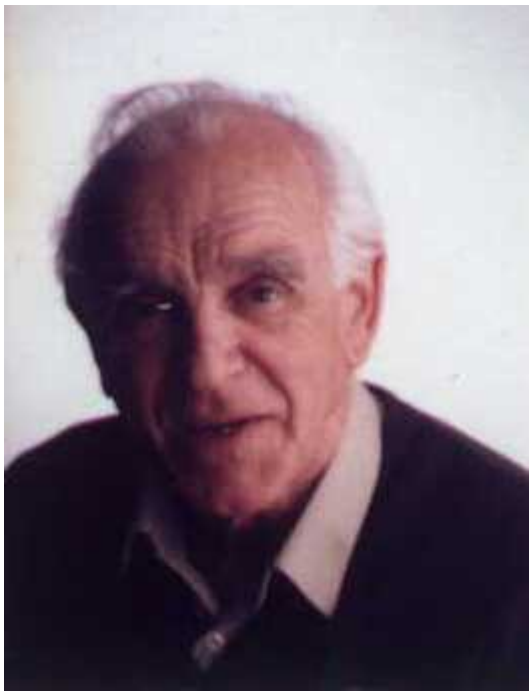
Ans. Yes, I keep a scrap book for pictures too. I use commercial firms and government organisations. The American ones are particularly helpful. I only use photo agencies as a last resort

Qu. 16. Isaac Asimov was once asked what would he do if God gave him just five more minutes to live, and he replied, he would type faster. What would your reply be to the same question?

Ans. I really don't know.

Qu. 17. Any message for our readers?

Ans. If you ever turn your hand to writing, choose text books if you need money. I have sold almost 1 million copies of them but only about 25,000 of the others!!



".. I like reading Winston Churchill and Alan Morehead and have tried, not very successfully, to base my style of writing on theirs. ..."

Qu. 18. Really! Why do you think, people do not read general books such as "The Big Bang", despite them being so intensely written? Do you think, people only read to pass exams, and not for pleasure?

Ans. Text books sell by their 50's, 100's and, for some organisations, 1000's at a time. And once an institution has adopted a text it tends to stick with it which brings in lots of repeat orders. Popular books, however good, only sell singly.

Qu. 19. How do you explain the success of such general writers as Issac Asimov? I hear he wrote almost 500 books, almost all of them on general science.

Ans. Asimov was something of a genius. I wish I knew how to explain his success. Then I might be able to copy it!! But I can't think that he did 500 books. That would be 1 each week for 10 years!! Or 1 a month for 40 years. It surely isn't possible.

Qu. 20. Would you say one could earn a decent livelihood just by popular writing?

Ans. I wouldn't care to try. I think you would need a lot of luck. There are some people who do it but many more, I feel, who try and fail keep writing as a sideline hobby, and it can then be great fun.

G.I. Brown can be approached via E-mail at gibeton@hotmail.com. The review of his book The Big Bang *appears in Vol. 3, No. 1. Readers wanting to visit this review may want to the linked page (page001).*

Interview appearing in the previous issue Interview appearing in the next issue Interviews : Collective Index Interview with Anoop Chandola, in *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews (sister publication)* (Volume 1, Number 2, July - December 2002)

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