ANIL AGGRAWAL'S
Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology
The world's first online journal devoted entirely to forensic medicine and toxicology · Published 1 January and 1 July

VOL. 7, NO. 1
Downloaded from www.anilaggrawal.com · ISSN 0972-8074 (Online) · https://www.anilaggrawal.com/ij/vol_007_no_001/others/interview/1/emsley.html

Interview with John Emsley

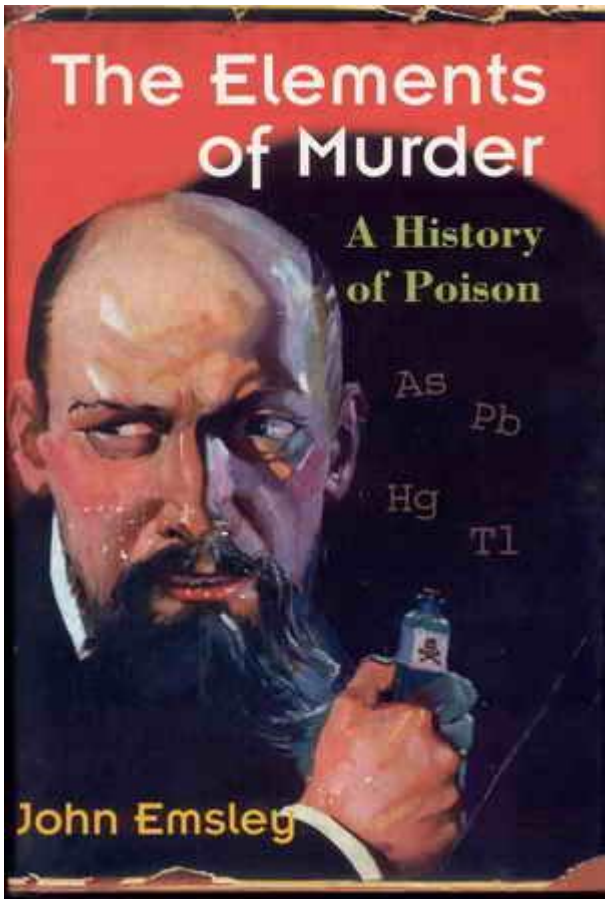
John Emsley



John Emsley, an extremely successful writer, broadcaster and author based in the UK, has written a number of best sellers. Among his most widely sought books are *The Consumer's Good Chemical Guide: Separating Facts from Fiction about Everyday Products* (Corgi Books, 1994), *The Elements* (3rd edition, Oxford University Press, 1998), *Molecules at an Exhibition* (Oxford University Press, 1998), *Shocking History of Phosphorus*, *Nature's Building Blocks: an A-Z Guide to the Elements*, *Vanity, Vitality, and Virility* and of course his immensely informative *The Elements of Murder - A History of Poison* published by the Oxford University Press in 2005. He teaches chemistry at the University of Cambridge.

We at the "*Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology*" became interested in his work mainly because of his seminal work on metallic poisons (*The Elements of Murder - A History of Poison*). We approached him for an online interview and he graciously agreed. The interview was conducted by the editor-in-chief Dr. Anil Aggrawal for well over two months. Some excerpts....)

Elements of Murder, the best selling book by Emsley. Click cover to read its review



Q. What is your basic profession - your calling in life

A. I am a chemist.

Q. You have written a number of books. Which was your first book?

A. My first book was *The Chemistry of Phosphorus*. It was co-authored by Denis Hall.

Q. Oh, yes. But it was not written for general public, right? Which was your first popular science book?

A. You are right. My first popular science book was *The Consumer's Good Chemical Guide*.

Q. Your first award?

A. In 1992, I got a Sony Award and Glaxo for radio script entitled "The Shocking History of Phosphorus" broadcast on BBC radio. It was my first award.

Q. Writers and thinkers are generally inspired by someone. Who or what has been your greatest inspiration?

A. My greatest inspiration was Mr Stockwell. He was the chemistry master who taught me the subject when I attended grammar school.

...I have a strong passion to communicate chemistry to the general public...

Q. Great! What has been the greatest love of your life?

A. My family - undoubtedly.

Q. What do you feel most passionate about?

A. I have a strong passion to communicate chemistry to the general public.

Q. You are a scientist. Do you believe in superstitions? Are you superstitious about something?

A. I am superstitious about a lots of things, as indeed most chemists are. I think it is particularly unlucky to drop a bunch of keys.

...I am totally honest about financial matters. I can never compromise on this...

Q. What is one thing you will never compromise with?

A. I am totally honest about financial matters. I can never compromise on this matter.

Q. What do you love?

A. Gin and tonic.

Q. And what do you hate most?

A. Garlic!

Q. What is that one thing you look forward to?

A. Days when I can simply read what I like and write what I like without interruption.

...I really look forward to days when I can simply read what I like and write what I like without interruption...

Q. If you were to be marooned on a desert island with someone, whom will you prefer?

A. English comedienne Victoria Wood.

Q. If you could change one thing about your family, what would it be?

A. Living closer to all my grandchildren.

Q. And if you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

A. I would love to lose a little weight.

Q. And if you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?

A. I want that there should be a world currency.

...My biggest assets are my collection of chemical books and papers...

Q. What are your biggest assets?

A. My collection of chemical books and papers.

Q. What is your biggest fear?

A. Losing a loved one.

Q. Your favourite food?

A. Fish and chips.

Q. Your favourite journey/holiday?

A. Undoubtedly New Zealand - the world's most beautiful country.

...My favourite destination is undoubtedly New Zealand - the world's most beautiful country...

Q. Your greatest necessity?

A. Friends.

Q. Do you have any regrets? What is your greatest regret?

A. Oh, I have never won a lottery! (chuckles)

Q. Your hero?

A. John Dalton (of atomic number fame).

Q. Your spice?

A. Oregano.

…I have always assumed that people are basically good and potential friends. That way you often get a positive response…

Q. What is your greatest strength?

A. Always assuming that people are basically good and potential friends. That way you often get a positive response.

Q. Do you have fantasies? What is your wildest fantasy?

A. As I said, winning the lottery. (chuckles again)

Q. Can you name a move, case or book that kick started your career?

A. Yes, it was a book called *The World of Plastics*. I was given this book when I was about 14.

Q. What touches you most?

A. Unhappy children.

…My happiest period was the three years when I was doing my PhD…

Q. When or where were you happiest?

A. The three years doing my PhD.

Q. Where do you see yourself five years down the line?

A. Living in Madeira - after winning the lottery!

Q. One final question - who or what would you like to born as in your next life?

A. This is easily answered. I don't believe there is a next life.



John Emsley can be approached via E-mail at JohnEmsley38@aol.com.


Listen to an interview with John Emsley conducted by Fresh air by clicking here. This is a different interview from the one conducted by our journal. In this audio interview John mostly talks about his book. Since we wanted to avoid questions asked in this interview (to avoid duplication of questions), we concentrated mostly on his personal life.

Interviews : Collective Index

Interviews in our sister publication : Collective Index

IMPORTANT NOTE: ALL MATERIAL APPEARING IN THIS ONLINE JOURNAL ARE COPYRIGHTED BY "ANIL AGGRAWAL'S INTERNET JOURNAL OF FORENSIC MEDICINE AND TOXICOLOGY" AND MAY NOT BE REPOSTED, REPRINTED OR OTHERWISE USED IN ANY MANNER WITHOUT THE WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE WEBMASTER