

William H. Brock (1936–



William Hodson Brock was born in Brighton, England, in 1936. He attended Hove County Grammar School, from where he won a scholarship to read chemistry at University College London in 1956. At university his interests turned away from the laboratory bench to the history of chemistry. On graduating in 1959 he took a graduate course in the history and philosophy of science at the University of Leicester and was appointed a lecturer in the subject a year later. His Ph.D. was awarded for a study of the chemical career of William Prout (1966), subsequently expanded into the book, *From Protyle to Proton: William Prout and the Nature of Matter, 1785–1985* (1985). Apart from visiting appointments at Toronto (1977), Melbourne (1985 and 1989), and Philadelphia (1990–1991), Brock remained at Leicester for the whole of his teaching career. In the 1960s Leicester developed an interdisciplinary graduate studies program in Victorian Studies and, in addition to teaching and researching in history of science, Brock directed the Victorian Studies Center from 1966 and 1990. In 1998 he retired as Emeritus Professor of History of Science, and moved back to the south coast of England at Seaford where he continues to write. He is Honorary Visiting Professor at the Centre for the History and Cultural Studies of Science,

University of Kent.

In twelve books and over one hundred papers, Brock has concentrated on four principal areas of research: the history of chemistry; the social history of Victorian science and mathematics (*Science for All: Studies in the History of Victorian Science and Education*, 1996); the development of scientific education (*H. E. Armstrong and the Teaching of Science 1880–1930*, 1973); and the development of scientific periodicals (culminating in the book written with Jack Meadows, *The Lamp of Learning*, 1984; 2nd ed. 1998). An early interest in nineteenth-century skeptical attitudes towards atomism led to a collection of essays with D. M. Knight and D. Dallas, *The Atomic Debates* (1967). Following a visit to Germany in 1973, he became interested in the careers of Justus Liebig and his pupil, August Wilhelm Hofmann. The edition of their correspondence, *Liebig und Hofmann in Ihren Briefen (1841–1873)*, was published in German in 1984, and the biography *Justus von Liebig: The Chemical Gatekeeper* appeared in English in 1998 and in German two years later. His best-known work, *The Norton History of Chemistry* (1992/1993) has been translated into Spanish, Polish, German and Japanese. Brock has had a long association with the Society for the History of Alchemy and Chemistry, both as editor of its journal *Ambix* (1968–1983) and as its chairman (1993 to date).

Brock was awarded the Liebig-Wöhler-Freundschafts-Preis by Die Göttinger Chemische Gesellschaft and the Dexter Award in 1995. In 1997 he received the Justus von Liebig Medal from the Medical Sciences Historical Society. In 2000 he was awarded the Justus-Liebig-Universität-Giessen Preis für Arbeiten zur Geschichte der Justus-Liebig-Universität-Giessen.

Brock believes that his “major contribution to the History of Science has been to have stimulated interest in scientific periodicals, and to have written a history of chemistry in a different and fresh way for the end of the twentieth century.” The History of Science “is important because, like the rest of history, we can only understand where we are as a society and which of several alternative directions to take as a society if we know about the past.”

Sources

Autobiographical information provided by William H. Brock.

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