In 1868, The Times reported that poisons contained in dyes were affecting the public's health. A doctor informed a London magistrate that brilliantly coloured socks had caused severe "constitutional and local complaint" to several of his patients. In one case, a patient's foot had become so swollen that his boots had to be cut off. Respected chemist, William Crookes, offered to identify the poison if doctors would send him samples of the deadly socks. The story of how he solved the mystery gives this book its title and forms the basis of the first chapter. Written by a respected science historian and established author, this collection of essays contains 42 tales of chemists and their discoveries from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Other topics covered include: the quirky beliefs of American philanthropist, George Hodgkins; the development of the chemical laboratory since the 1830s, and the career of C.P. Snow before he became a novelist. Its broad coverage and modern approach makes it of interest to chemists, teachers, historians and laypeople with an interest in science. Written with a light style and presented in a series of unconnected vignettes the book is easy to dip into at leisure.

William H. Brock is a retired Professor of the History of Science. He read Chemistry at UCL before studying the History of Science at the University of Leicester where he later became a lecturer then a professor. He has published many papers and books including The Fontana History of Chemistry.

Who could resist a book with a title like that? Written over Bill Brock's career of more than forty years as an historian, they carry an easy authority and are thoroughly accessible. The book is an entertaining read. The Royal Society of Chemistry is to be congratulated for publishing these spirited essays as part of the Year of Chemistry. They deserve and ought to reach a wide public; and will also be a valuable resource for professional historians.

Source : Ambix - David Knight

on the whole I found the tales intriguing and absorbing. enjoyable and enlightening, and often made me chuckle, sometimes to myself and sometimes out loud.anyone with more than a passing interest in chemistry should find it thoroughly enjoyable and perhaps will come away, as I did, remembering that sometimes things can be learned in science by looking to the past, as well as to the future.

Source : Philip Ball

'this is the perfect bedside book for any chemist and hopefully for any other scientist with a historical inclination. The essays, all self-contained and mostly very short, are ideal for dipping into. "you're sure to find this book full of delights.'

Source : Emily Flashman

'you're sure to find this book full of delights.'
I found it interesting to read just how much of an influence chemistry has had on our day to day lives, from the clothes we wear to the food we eat. ‘Each chapter is a collection of relatively short and easy to read essays, making it simple to put the book down and pick up again later. My favourite was the story which gives this book its title. It was interesting to read that chemical detective work is not a modern notion and funny to learn about the scientists’ views on the colourful undergarments of Victorian society!’ "Written in a friendly, flowing format, this book would be appealing to anyone with any interest in the history of chemistry and science in general"

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"I didn't know that!" was a common and delighted reaction of mine as I read these essays. Readers interested in an idiosyncratic tour of some of the sights in the history of chemistry centered in 19th- and early 20th-century Britain can scarcely expect a more knowledgeable or engaging guide than William Brock.

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Source: CHOICE October 2012 Vol. 50 No. 02

Some of the articles explore fascinating chemical sidelights, such as the socks mentioned in the title...

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The book truly offers something for almost anyone interested in chemistry.

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Summing Up: Highly recommended.

Source: CHOICE October 2012 Vol. 50 No. 02

“the author displays his considerable scholarship in every line and even the shortest pieces are so dense in terms of information as to provide a multitude of ‘jumping off points’ for further exploration” “The book might well serve as a source of short readings for students to prompt discussion on a variety of general topics of a historical or sociological nature.” “The essays certainly do inspire the enquiring reader with a desire to know more” “Each essay is itself a mine of glorious nuggets of information, much of which is unreferenced, offering the reader such gems as the sock story mentioned earlier, an entertaining song about sewerage, and the involvement of the Chemist Justus Liebig with the origins of Fray Bentos corned beef and Oxo”

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