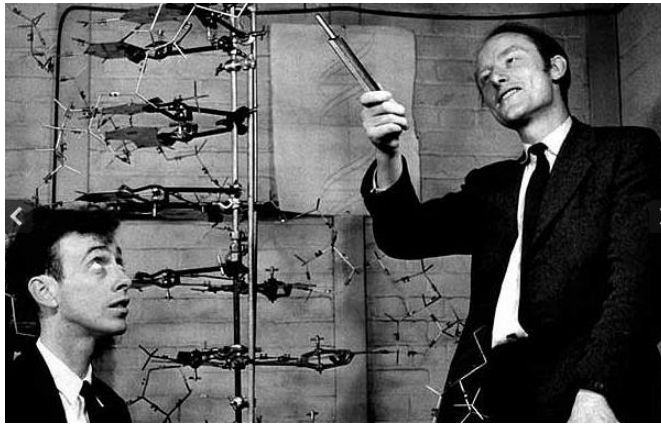


# Obituary



## *Upton Lovell*

**Antony Barrington Brown** (born July 13 1927, died January 24 2012)



Although his image of them beside the model of the double helix has now become definitive, it in fact was not published until 15 years after he had taken it. In 1953, when he was living in Cambridge, he was contacted by a friend who wanted a picture to go with an article he was proposing to Time magazine. “BB”, as he was universally known, made his way to the Cavendish Laboratory by bicycle, towing his tripod and lights on a trolley. This he hauled up several flights of stairs and knocked at a door as directed.

Inside were two men who greeted him affably and waved at an array of retort stands holding an assemblage of brass rods and balls. “Although supposedly a chemist myself,” he recalled later, “it meant absolutely nothing to me and fortunately they did not expose my ignorance by attempting to explain it in terms I might just have comprehended.” He took three or four frames of them next to the governing system of life itself, and a few more snaps of the pair drinking coffee. The story must have baffled Time as well, since the magazine returned his negatives unused together with half a guinea for his trouble.

Even when Watson and Crick were awarded the Nobel Prize in 1962, the photograph remained unknown and it only first saw the light of day in Crick’s bestselling memoir *The Double Helix* (1968). Thereafter it was widely reproduced, although it was only recently that Barrington Brown had been able to enforce his copyright. The two

scientists even posed in a second version of it 40 years on, while it was also used to recreate their original model which had long since disappeared.

Antony Charles Barrington Brown was born at Chester on July 13 1927. His father was a geologist who travelled frequently to South America (where he discovered Guyana's vast Kaieteur Falls), and for three years Antony was left with his grandparents when his mother and sister also went out to Peru. He was educated at St Edward's School, Oxford, and then did his National Service with the Royal Tank Regiment.

In 1948 he went up to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, to read Natural Sciences, but came away with a Third after spending most of his time working on the student newspaper, *Varsity*. While its picture editor, he took on a keen young photographer but fired him a few weeks later for being unreliable. Despite this blow, Anthony Armstrong-Jones would go on to make a career for himself in the profession, latterly as Lord Snowdon. Barrington Brown then worked briefly as a research chemist for Esso before returning to Cambridge and setting up there as a photographer. As well as supplying national newspapers with pictures, he took many portraits of the university's academics and of undergraduates of the time, such as Mark Boxer and Michael Winner. An exhibition of those images will open at the National Portrait Gallery next month.

His work first gained a wider audience in 1955 when he took part in the Oxford and Cambridge Far Eastern Expedition. This was a 32,000-mile trip overland from Hyde Park Corner to Singapore and back, lasting a year and made by a group of six recent graduates in two Land Rovers donated by the firm as a means of advertising the reliability of its vehicles.

"BB" characteristically suggested himself as the expedition's photographer and cameraman, and, on the somewhat shaky basis of his chemistry degree, was named its doctor. Subsequent commissioning by David Attenborough for the BBC of film of the journey provided vital additional funding, as well as a charming record of encounters with peoples and landscapes in Asia that have since changed irrevocably. In his account of their adventures, *First Overland* (1957), Tim Slessor paid tribute to Barrington Brown's pragmatic nature, as well as recalling his blunt way with words. "See Benares and leave before you die" was a customarily pithy summary of the attractions of India's holy city.

The demands of providing for his growing family then prompted Barrington Brown to find steadier employment with Dexion, a manufacturer of storage systems. The best-known of those he devised for them was Speedframe, made from square-section metal tubes which could be quickly fitted together to assemble tables and benches. The success of this prompted him to develop innovative methods for constructing other items of furniture, and even buildings, from pre-fabricated materials. From 1967 he was based in Wiltshire, where he designed a number of houses, including his own.

His marriage to Pamela Jones was dissolved in 1981, and the next year he married Althea Wynne. He was able to use his knowledge of engineering to help with the technical and logistical side of her work as a monumental sculptor, and together they became stalwarts of the community around Warminster. He was appointed MBE in 2003, the same year that he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society.

Antony Barrington Brown and his wife were killed in a car accident. He is survived by a daughter and three sons of his first marriage, as well as by his three step-children.

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