

1986; Standard bought Brock's in 1987; Standard was bought by the Chinese in 1988/89 and manufacture run down.

A meeting of the FMG in July 1989, at Kimbolton, met primarily to discuss the future. Members present were Fiestel/Benwell, Festival, Phoenix, Pain's, Nationwide, Sohni-Esco, Standard and Kimbolton. The main issues as ever were classification for transportation, operator fired displays and the new BS. It also led to a change of structure of the FMG but I, in the Chair, was instructed to contact Dr Jim Jeacock of the CBI Explosive Industry Group, to see if there would be a way of working together.

Discussions at FMG meetings up to this point and over these dates 88/89 are important from an historic point of view.

1. A letter from the Chief Inspector of Explosives for the introduction of the new BS made it quite clear that, although the HSE themselves would take samples for BS testing as and when they wished, it would be the responsibility of the Local Authority to check that the BS was maintained.

2. Trading Standards, for their part, stated that they did not have the knowledge, time or money to check little more

than time fuses and labelling.

3. The DTI also wrote to back up the concerns which Trading Standards were expressing about their involvement in the new BS.

4. CAT 4 fireworks were not part of the BS

What has changed since then and what issues arise?

- As far as Kimbolton Fireworks is concerned, we can see the sense of CE marking Cats 1, 2 & 3.
- There will be no CE marking Cat 4. At worst we are happy just to sell within the UK.
- Perhaps clear indications as to whom can be permitted to handle and store fireworks under HSE licence with an even playing field are needed. Even better standards of professionalism are required.

These issues need to be debated at the International Firework Symposium in Bordeaux this September.

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## **ASK ME ABOUT MY BOMBHELLS**

*Ettore Contestabile*

*BARCLAY Robert. Ask Me About My Bombshells. Loose Cannon Press Publications. ISBN: 978-0-9936881-0-2. Soft Cover, 236 pages. Available from Amazon £10.25. Reviewer: Ettore Contestabile*

I am not an avid reader of novels but this book was given to me by my daughter who told me that *Ask Me about My Bombshells* was a novel about people in the firework business. Secondly, the author, Robert Barclay, who had given her the book, is from my hometown, Ottawa. I was a little sceptical about reading this book as I had not heard of Mr. Barclay and he is not on my Canadian list of fireworks personas. In addition, my daughter told me that it contained some reference to a recent fireworks gathering in Malta. Could it be the Malta ISF of 2012?

So, I began reading. It was nice to see a schematic of a star shell on the Table of Contents page. In fact, the chapters are titled after the components of the shell and are ordered in the shell functioning sequence beginning with Chapter 1, The Leader Fuse, then Chapter Two, The Lift Charge, then Chapter Three, The Passfire, etcetera. Interesting! Under acknowledgements the author indicates that fireworks have long been his passion. This is quite evident from his website, [www.loosecannonpress.com](http://www.loosecannonpress.com) where he reminisces of his childhood Guy Fawkes' Day adventures. One of the great Canadian pyrotechnicians, Michael Bohonos of Garden City Display Fireworks, who just this summer won first place at the Casino Lac-Leamy Sound of Light Competition, is also acknowledged for his contribution: technical information on fireworks displays.

The book is basically about two fireworks families which, because of a long standing vendetta, are not on the best of terms and compete for fireworks contracts for different reasons - similar to what is occurring at present. The author sets the stage by giving some history of the two families and relates the story as if the events were occurring now in 2015. More likely, the events could easily have occurred over the last fifteen years or so. Readers in the firework business will quickly identify the probable periods of the occurrence of the various events and themes.

Robert Catesby is a character in the book - not as the leader of the Gunpowder Plot but rather as the head of one of the firework families. The other is an Italian firework family, the Pastorellis, who brought their secret fireworks composition formulae to Canada, passed them down to family members and the patriarch, now an old-timer, continues to believe in protecting their art and craft of old. You can just imagine the grandfather with blackened

hands from years of black powder production, rolling micce and manufacturing spolette and studatas, relating the old but reliable technology to his grandson. It is the never-ending story where fireworks nonnos would emphasise the superiority of European shells versus those cheap imports from China while being very reluctant to embrace new technologies. New technologies were not to be trusted. No one knew where they came from. On the other hand, the musically-talented grandson (who has also picked up the art of pyro manufacturing from his nonno) has come to realise the importance of timing shell effects to music and has gone into debt buying the best firing system to dazzle the audience with the greatest possible pyromusicals. And this is where the Pastorelli family business struggle begins. Sourcing cheaper shells from South America leads to betrayals, illegal activities, involvement with drug-traffickers, car chases, motorcycles, motorhomes and cheap hotels. It's all in this novel.

Through the struggles of the two families we learn of the issues arising from importing fireworks from various parts of the world. In the case of the Pastorelli's, the need to stay afloat spirals the company into the realm of contraband products. You may have heard of all this before. The various story lines are all interwoven in a mystery of competition in the firework business: surviving by importing from third-world countries, evolving from hand firing to computer-controlled pyromusicals. There are the elements of helping the competition (in times of crisis), joining forces to survive, police surveillance and investigations, activists and anarchist movements, love interests, death of old artisans and survival of skills in younger generations who, with differently rooted ambitions, embraced technology for the betterment of displays and survival of the family businesses. Time for the old-timers to sit back and enjoy not only their fruits but those of their descendants. The skill to manufacture and hand-fire your own shells is incomprehensible to the young who were born to sink their energy into interfacing the pyro with the high-tech magical black boxes.

*Ask Me about my Bombshells* has fairly technical content with quick moving themes which kept even me, a slow reader, enthralled over a three-day period. I so enjoyed the book that I contacted the author and we met up over a coffee. I discovered that Robert Barclay is not only an author of fiction but has also written books and gives courses in North America and Europe on trumpet making and restoration. Most importantly, he has two three-wheeler Morgans, which I hope to see, maybe next summer!