

## Obituary

**Sidney Gordon Brown** (Fig. 1), who died on 5 February 2010, was among the biologists who worked most actively during the 1950s to 1970s to understand whales as a basis for managing whaling, a world wide industry that was already on the verge of decline. His particular expertise was the distribution of whales and techniques of whale observation. This he developed during years of practical experience aboard whaling ships and at shore based stations, and in meticulous studies of the industry's records.

Born in Hull on 22 June 1923, Sidney was the son of hard working, chapel going socialists. A happy family life was marred by the death of his father in 1932. He showed an early interest in local natural history, exploring the northern countryside by bicycle as far west as the coast of Lancashire. He left Malet Lambert High School at age 16 with no prospects of furthering his education. Instead, to boost the family income, he took employment as a laboratory assistant in the local pharmaceuticals factory of Smith and Nephew. During World War II, in 1942 to 1947, he served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, where his background in chemistry made him useful in handling munitions and explosives. After the war an ex-service further education and training scheme grant enabled him to realise his full educational potential. He attended University College, Hull, graduating in 1951 with a BSc in zoology and marine biology. He later gained a research MSc from London University.

Sidney's first career appointment was with *Discovery* investigations, Britain's long term government programme that since 1925 had provided scientific data toward the rational management of the whaling industry. As a whaling inspector he joined an Antarctic cruise in the factory ship *Balaena*, in which he checked that government regulations were being observed, and gathered material that he and others would later use in research. This voyage was the introduction to a career in whaling research that eventually spanned 33 years.

In 1952 Sidney married Jean Buxton. From *Discovery* investigations he moved to the Institute of Oceanography at Wormley, Surrey. In 1963 he was transferred with the Institute's Whale Research Unit to the Natural History Museum, London, where in 1976 he became officer in charge. In the following year the Institute's whaling and sealing units merged and moved to the British Antarctic Survey headquarters in Cambridge. Sidney migrated with his family to nearby Oakington, where he lived within easy cycling distance of laboratory and office.

Through much of his working life Sidney was a British representative on the scientific committee of the International Whaling Commission, the forum concerned with regulation of the whaling industry throughout the world. From 1955 he coordinated the commission's whale marking scheme, an international sea-borne effort to trace movements of whales. As a researcher he maintained constant contacts with whale



Fig. 1. Sidney Gordon Brown 1923–2010.

scientists throughout the world from Norway to New Zealand. Simultaneously he maintained direct links with the industry itself. In 1963 he served as a whaling inspector on South Georgia, and in 1966–1967 undertook a three months' cruise in the Japanese research ship *Umitaka Maru*, observing on behalf of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation. Though the only European on board, Sidney established close and cordial relations with the Japanese whalers, gaining useful insights into how they viewed the future of their industry. This was a point noted particularly by Dr Neil Mackintosh, then a doyen of British whaling research, who among others was negotiating with the Japanese on the viability of remaining whale stocks.

He served also as a whale expert on the Survival Service Commission of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), and took part in several radio and TV programmes concerning whales and whaling. At one time he was notified of every whale stranding on the British coast, attending many of them to secure data and specimens.

Sidney Brown retired in 1984, but for several years continued to write, creating a life time tally of over 120 research papers, contributions to books and other publications. He remained particularly interested in the history of whaling, and the careers of two particular Yorkshiremen of note, the whaler/scientist William Scoresby and the explorer Captain James Cook RN. He is survived by his wife Jean and daughters Helen and Katherine, who have contributed much to this memorial. (Bernard Stonehouse, Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)