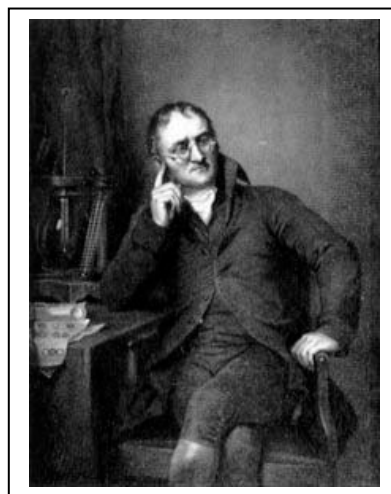


John Dalton (1766 - 1844)

Dalton re-introduced the theory that matter is made of 'atoms', experimented with gases and investigated the force of steam.

John Dalton was the son of a humble Quaker hand-weaver living in the Cumberland village of Eagles Field. His strong mind received its scientific bent from the influence of two men, Elihu Robinson a Quaker and John Gough, a blind man of scientific interests, encouraged Dalton to record the meteorological observations which he continued to make for fifty-seven years until the day before he died.

Dalton and his brother were both colour blind, and he was the first man to describe this condition in detail.



John Dalton was a self-taught scientist. He imagined that gas was made up of particles too small to be seen by the naked eye. At twenty-one he started keeping a daily weather record. He kept it until the day he died—making a total of some two hundred thousand observations!

Dalton became a teacher of mathematics in the New College of Manchester. He was elected a member of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester and later became its President. His earliest paper read to this society was on the subject of colour blindness. It is said that he went to a Manchester tailor for a suit of 'some good strong drab cloth' and, to amazement of the tailor, selected a piece of scarlet material used for hunting coats.

He used to spend his holidays walking on the Cumberland fells and he carried with him his home-made barometer and thermometer, to measure the atmospheric pressure and temperature, and would collect marsh gas from the floating island in Derwent waters.

Dalton lectured several times at the Royal Institution, but was not a success. He had no facility in devising impressive experimental demonstrations nor was he very competent in making work those, which he did attempt. His manners and speech were rough and sometimes crude. He lived a simple life, being rather shy but kindly, and said he "never found time" to marry.