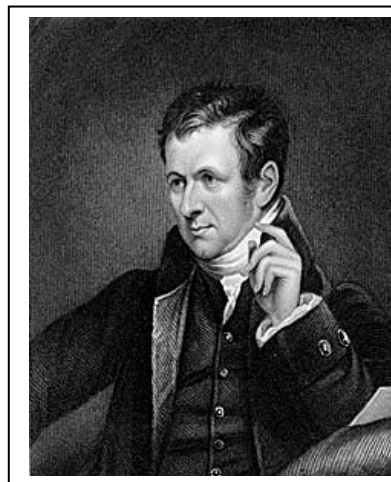


Humphry Davy (1778 - 1829)

British chemist who discovered several chemical elements and compounds, and became one of the greatest exponent of the scientific method. Best remembered for his contributions to the understanding of electrochemistry and for his invention of a safety lamp for miners. Davy discovered boron; proved that diamond is composed of carbon.



Born in Penzance, England after haphazard schooling Davy was apprenticed in 1795 to Biningham Borlase, an able apothecary-surgeon who later qualified as a physician.

Humphry Davy's father of yeoman stock, was a woodcarver in Cornwall, but earned little by it and lost many speculations in farming and tin mining. After his death in 1794 Grace Davy managed a milliner's shop until she inherited a small state.

Schools in Cornwall in the late eighteenth century were not very good, but Davy emerged at fifteen with a fair knowledge of the classics.

Young Davy was apprenticed to a surgeon. He was interested in many things but decided to study chemistry after reading Lavoisier's book on the subject in 1797. He started experimenting with gases. One way in which he studied them was by breathing them in. this was very dangerous and could have killed him, but it led him to discover the "laughing gas". Soon a more serious use was found for it, as an anesthetic.

In 1812 he married a wealthy bluestocking widow, Jane Apreece, but the marriage was childless and not happy. His health was good, aside from a serious illness, probably typhus, at the end of 1807; but in 1826 he suffered a stroke from which he never fully recovered.