

# Humphry

# Davy

1778-1829

## What did he discover?

Humphry Davy was a Cornish chemist and inventor born in 1778. He started as an apprentice to a surgeon and worked with other scientists in their laboratories. His presentations at The Royal Institution inspired many British people to become interested in science. He also joked that his greatest discovery was his assistant, the famous scientist Michael Faraday.

Davy worked with many other British scientists including, Henry Cavendish, on voltaic cells, which were an early form of electric batteries. He theorised that the best way to decompose chemical compounds into their elements was

by electrolysis. Using electrolysis, Davy was able to isolate many elements from their compounds including magnesium, sodium and potassium. He also proved that diamond is a form of carbon.

Another discovery that Davy made was the use of nitrous oxide (laughing gas) as an anaesthetic, which is still used in hospitals and dentist surgeries today.

Davy's most famous invention is the Davy lamp, a lamp which could detect when the level of flammable gases in coal mines were unsafe to work in. The lamp would burn with a tall blue flame, rather than a short orange flame, when the flammable gas levels were unsafe. This invention saved many miners' lives.

## Something to think about...

Why do you think it is important for us to be able to separate elements from their compounds?