

## **The Glimmering Ray** **Sir Humphry Davy**

Presented 3rd September 2025

To United Peninsula Lodge # 24

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This is a presentation about a man who was not a Freemason had, all the attributes of a Freemason, except for perhaps, humility.

In 1989 in Penzance Cornwall a lodge was consecrated named the Sir Humphry Davy Lodge No 9327. Humphry Davy was born in 1779, His father was a wood-carver in very humble circumstances.

Born in Penzance, Davy was sent to grammar school at the age of six and then to Truro because he had at an early age shown an exceptional intellect in poetry and art. At 16, he was apprenticed to an Apothecary which started his interest in chemistry particularly that of galvanic corrosion affecting the copper and iron floodgates of a local port.

At 21 he experimented with Nitrous Oxide or Laughing gas which is still used today in modern dentistry. In 1801 he became a lecturer and a member of the Royal Institution and went on to develop the Arc Lamp and 3 years later was a member of the Royal Society where he isolated the metals, Barium, Calcium, Strontium, Magnesium and Boron . During his lectures he supported and encouraged women to attend and helped their attempts to learn all they could about science

He insisted that Chlorine was an element and chose the name because of its characteristic properties. the word coming from the Greek choloros, meaning green – yellow.

He is most remembered in 1815, for his invention of the Davy Lamp that prevented the ignition of firedamp or methane in coal mines, which killed an average of 100 coal miners a year. The mine owners were incensed at these explosions, not because of the loss of life, more the loss of production and therefore profit. The Davy lamp consists of a wick in the oil sump with a flame enclosed in a mesh screen, not only did it provide safety from explosions it also indicated the presence of black damp or carbon dioxide A modern-day equivalent of the Davy lamp has been used in the Olympic flame torch relays.

For his invention he was awarded the Rumford medal, which is still awarded to this day From 1812 on he was knighted and moved in high society circles with his assistant Michael Faraday, he also met Ampere, Volta and Napoleon Bonaparte.

In 1823 he invented what was then known as the Davy Protector which was a series of Zinc plates attached to ships bottoms which were plated in copper. This invention did

not work as well as expected at sea and resulted in ships bottoms becoming fouled by weed.

This was a disaster for Davy who nonetheless maintained throughout that there was no problem. The poet Lord Byron was critical of his efforts and Davy being also a renowned poet replied

“We have the copper that will not disperse in the sea,  
The Patent secures it quite from decay,  
And makes it in voyages bright as the day  
But everyone knows who is not an ass  
That the work on the copper depends on the brass”

Davy spent the last few months of his life traveling in Italy and thence Switzerland dying in Geneva, where he was buried in 1829.

He was a man versed both in the Arts and Sciences

The Consecrating Officer of the Lodge in his closing remarks said “The symbolism of the lamp’s light should shine out as a light in the World. As the light of the lamp is used to illuminate the dark passages underground and dispel fear; so too we should use the brightness of our knowledge to add luster to our Brotherhood.

Humphry Davy refused to patent the lamp using the words “for the benefit of humanity “  
From in part the Masonic Square. pub Lewis Masonic June 1990 Article by S.J. Haskin