

Getting Started with the Davy Notebooks Project

U3A Collaboration (March 2022)



24 March 2022

Dear U3A member,

Hello! I'm Dr Andrew Lacey, Senior Research Associate on the Davy Notebooks Project, based in the Department of English Literature and Creative Writing at Lancaster University. It's a real pleasure to welcome you to our project as a volunteer transcriber, and I'm looking forward very much to working with you over the coming weeks.

You're joining the project at an exciting time for us. Using the people-powered research platform Zooniverse, we're transcribing the 70 Davy notebooks that we know about, which are held in the archives of the Royal Institution of Great Britain, in London, and at Kresen Kernow, in Cornwall. We're very close to reaching the 50% completion mark – we've transcribed almost 35 full notebooks so far. Many of these notebooks have never been transcribed before – you could be the first person to transcribe Davy's words as he left them two-hundred years ago!

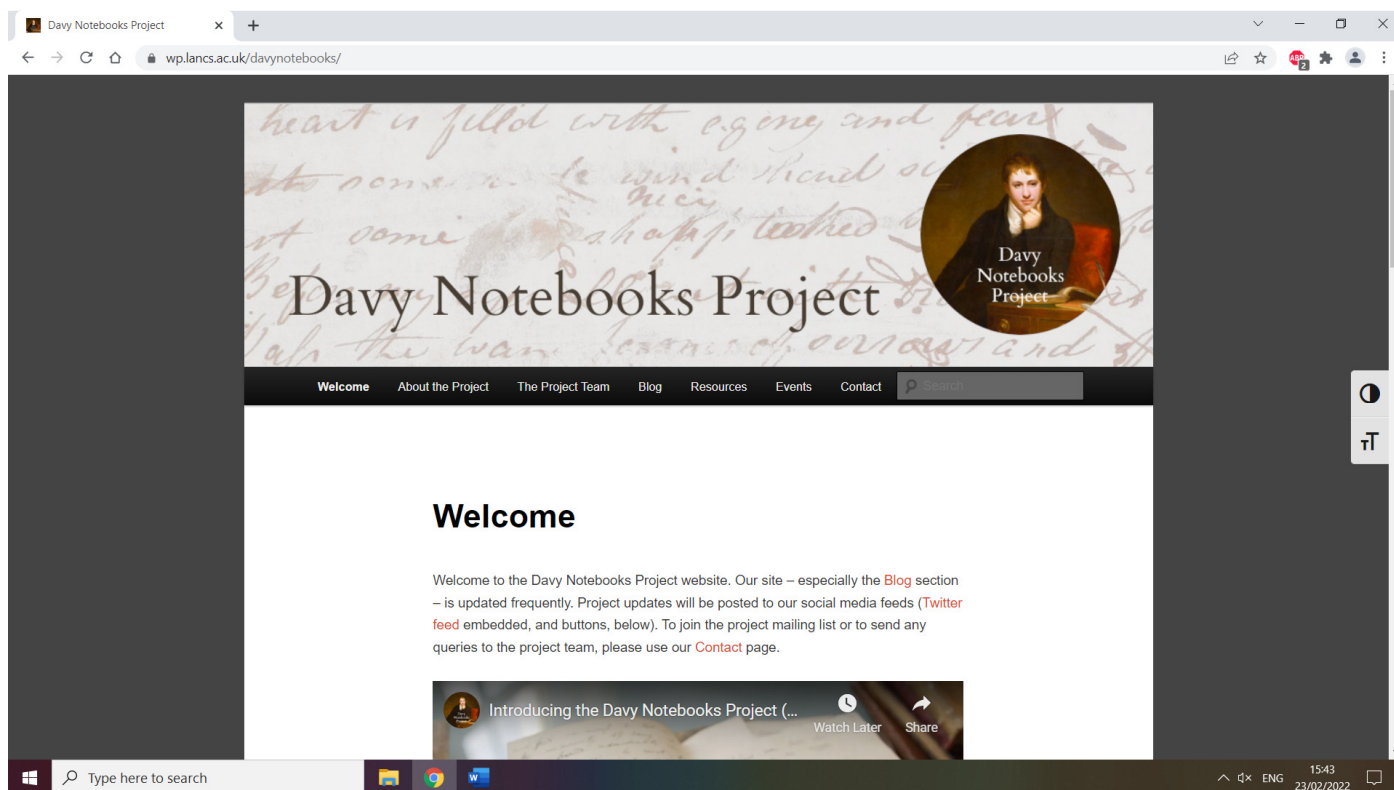
I hope that you'll find Sir Humphry Davy's notebooks fascinating documents to work with. While Davy (who was born in 1778, and died in 1829) was the foremost chemist of the early nineteenth century in Britain, he was also a poet, moving in the same literary circles as Lord Byron, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth. His notebooks contain poems, as well as sketches (some of which are embellished with watercolour paints). He was a keen traveller, making several tours on the Continent in the 1810s and 1820s. Davy also firmly believed in the principles of applied science – of putting ideas developed in the laboratory into practice in the outside world – as we see through his work on the miners' safety lamp (1815-17), which vastly increased Britain's industrial capability and saved many lives below ground, through his attempts to unroll, using chemical means, the Herculaneum papyri carbonised by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD (1818-20), and through his work on protecting the copper hulls of Royal Navy ships using electrochemical means (1823-25).

Davy's interests were varied: as well as records of his chemical work and poems, his notebooks contain material on agriculture, astronomy, geology, mathematics, medicine, philosophy, and more. As I hope you'll find out for yourself, Davy's notebooks frequently challenge the idea that the arts and sciences are somehow 'separate'. Davy clearly didn't see them as such – we have, for example, lines of poetry in amongst records of Davy's chemical researches. Rather, 'artistic' and 'scientific' methods both offered, for Davy, important ways of exploring the mysteries of the world around him.

If you'd like to learn more about Davy and the Davy Notebooks Project, we have a project website:

wp.lancs.ac.uk/davynotebooks

To find out more about the notebooks that we've transcribed so far, please see the **About the Project** page. The **Resources** page contains lots of useful information on Davy, including full and condensed chronologies of his life, and electronic versions of his published works. Our **Blog** is updated regularly with interesting findings from the project so far.



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