Scheele, Carl Wilhelm (1742 – 1786)

Summary Article: Scheele, Carl Wilhelm from Chambers Biographical Dictionary

1742-86

Swedish chemist

He was born in Stralsund (now in Germany) and was apprenticed to an apothecary. In 1775, the year that he was elected to the Stockholm Royal Academy of Sciences, he moved to Köping, where he became the town pharmacist. In the 1760s he began to investigate air and fire, and soon came to doubt the received view that substances contain a vital essence which they lose when they burn. He passed on information about his experiments to Antoine Lavoisier, who subsequently discovered the true nature of combustion and named the new flammable gas "oxigine". Scheele subsequently discovered a great many other substances, including hydrofluoric acid, chlorine, copper arsenide (known as "Scheele's green"), hydrogen sulphide, and many important organic acids. In 1781 he distinguished between two very similar minerals, plumbago (graphite) and molybdena, discovering the metal molybdenum in the process. His investigations of plant and animal material were fundamental to the development of organic chemistry.


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