

Who was David Livingstone?

An information sheet to support the educational worksheets for children aged 9-13 published by LivingstoneOnline.org

David Livingstone was born on the 19th of March 1813 to a working-class family in Blantyre, Scotland, the second of seven children. The family lived in one room in a tenement building owned by the mill company Livingstone's father worked for. Livingstone started working in the mill at the age of ten. He was taught to read and write by his father, and in addition to schooling in the evenings provided by the company, he taught himself Latin and developed a love of natural history.

At the age of 19 he was promoted and, with his increased wages, by 1836 he had saved enough money to enter Anderson's College, now the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow to study medicine. Two years later, he suspended his course and spent a year at the London Missionary Society in Chipping Ongar, Essex. He moved to London in 1840 to complete his medical studies and at the end of the year he qualified as a Licentiate of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. That same month he was ordained as a missionary by the London Missionary Society and in December set sail for South Africa and then travelled on to the mission station at Kuruman as a missionary doctor. It was at Kuruman he met his future wife Mary Moffat, daughter of missionary Robert Moffat.

From 1841 until his death in 1873 Livingstone explored the interior of central and southern Africa. His initial aim was to spread Christianity and bring commerce and "civilisation" to these regions but his later missions were more concerned with exploration, firstly of the Zambesi and its tributaries, and later to find the source of the Nile. During this time he returned to Britain twice, in 1856 and in 1864.

Livingstone was one of the first medical missionaries to enter southern Africa, the first in central Africa, and he was often the first European to meet local tribes. He won their trust as a healer and medicine man. He was particularly sought for his skills in obstetrics, the surgical removal of tumours and ophthalmology.

Livingstone was a keen and accurate observer; he was also a prolific writer and his journals, letters and published narratives provide observations on African diseases such as tropical ulcers, scurvy and malaria. He was one of the first to administer quinine in a dosage that is now considered effective and thus, unlike previous expeditions in Africa, his parties of explorers suffered a comparatively low death rate. More than 30 years before Ronald Ross established the link between mosquitoes and malaria, Livingstone suggested their association: 'Myriads of mosquitoes showed, as probably they always do, the presence of malaria.' (Livingstone, 1865, 368).

During his final years Livingstone was beset with health problems, but he refused to leave Africa. After his death in 1873 his body was returned to Britain for burial in Westminster Abbey.

Further information and assistance can be obtained from Kate Simpson at k.simpson@napier.ac.uk, or through Twitter [@livingstone13d](https://twitter.com/livingstone13d)

www.livingstoneonline.org provides the biggest repository of David's words online. Visit the site for a vast array of texts and images to compliment the educational worksheets.