

Alexander Fleming

(1881 – 1955)

Alexander Fleming was born on 6th August 1881 near Darvel, Ayrshire and grew up on a farm. He moved to London when he was 13 and worked for a shipping company. In 1903, Fleming began to study medicine. Fleming's later work focused on simple, tiny living cells called bacteria.

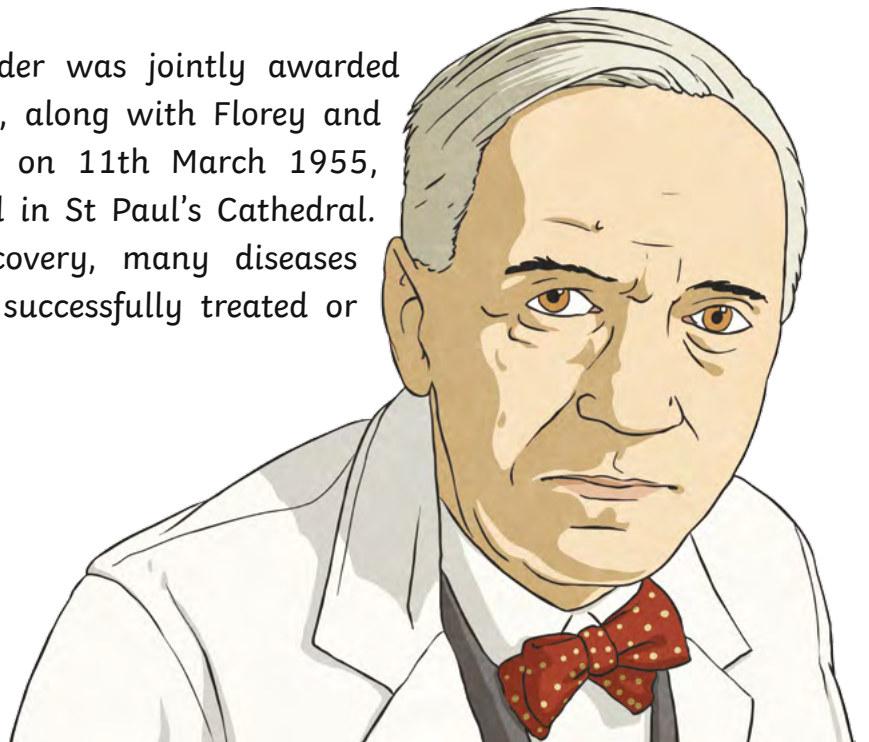
Some bacteria help us stay healthy, but some bacteria can also cause infection and disease. In France during the First World War, Fleming saw many soldiers die from infected wounds. As a result, he wanted to find antibacterial treatments.

In August 1928, Fleming left a jar of mould in his laboratory before he went on holiday. When he came back, he noticed that bacteria had entirely covered the jar, except for one area which was clear of the bacteria. This was Fleming's breakthrough; the moment he realised that some antibacterial agent had stopped the bacteria growing. He later identified this antibacterial agent as penicillin.

In 1939, two scientists, Howard Florey and Ernst Chain, investigated how to reproduce Fleming's penicillin. Their work meant that penicillin could be produced in large amounts and that the first ever antibiotics were made. Infections such as meningitis and scarlet fever could now be treated and many bacterial infections were eliminated.

Fleming was thought of as a hero because his discovery saved many lives during The Second World War. He was awarded a knighthood in 1944, becoming Sir Alexander Fleming.

For his work, Sir Alexander was jointly awarded a Nobel Prize in Medicine, along with Florey and Chain, in 1945. He died on 11th March 1955, and his ashes were placed in St Paul's Cathedral. Thanks to Fleming's discovery, many diseases and infections have been successfully treated or completely eliminated.



Questions

Read the text carefully and answer the questions by completing the sentences below.

1. Where and when was Alexander Fleming born?

Alexander Fleming was born

2. What are bacteria?

Bacteria are

3. What was the name of the antibacterial agent that stopped bacteria growing?

The antibacterial agent that stopped bacteria growing was

4. Who continued Fleming's work on penicillin?

continued Fleming's work on penicillin.

5. Why are we grateful for Alexander Fleming's discovery?

We are grateful for Alexander Fleming's discovery