

Alfred Nobel

Alfred Nobel was a chemist and engineer and manufacturer, best known for inventing an explosive called dynamite.

Alfred Nobel was born in Stockholm, Sweden. When Alfred was young, his father moved to Saint Petersburg and started a business that made tools and explosives. His business was successful, and soon the family could afford to send Alfred to study science with special teachers. As a young man, he studied chemistry alongside scientists both at home and in other countries like France and the United States. At the age of 24, he filed his first patent.

When the family's factory fell on hard times, Alfred's father gave it to Alfred's brother Ludvig, who helped revive the business. The rest of the family moved back to Sweden, where Alfred continued to study explosives, with a special focus on finding ways to safely make and use them. In 1865, he designed the blasting cap, a device that helps make explosives less likely to go off unexpectedly.

Soon after his success with the blasting cap, tragedy struck his company. The dangerous chemicals used in his factory occasionally caused explosions, which sometimes hurt and even killed people that worked for him. After an explosion at his factory in Stockholm killed five people, including his younger brother, the city ordered him to never again experiment with nitroglycerin in Stockholm. He moved his factory to other cities, still focusing on finding ways to make explosives safer to work with. In 1867 he invented dynamite, an explosive that was much safer and easier to handle than nitroglycerin. Dynamite became popular in mining and construction all over the world. After the success of dynamite, he continued to invent new explosives that were safer to handle. In 1884 elected to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

In spite of his fame, Nobel experienced his fair share of controversy. Many people did not like that his inventions could be used to hurt others. In 1888, when his brother died, a newspaper accidentally reported that Alfred had died and published an article about how dangerous his inventions were. This caused Alfred to think about how people might remember him. To make up for the suffering his work had caused, he started the Nobel Prizes, which are given out to scientists, writers and those who work for peace. The awards are still given out every year.



