

## BRUNT, Sir DAVID (1886 - 1965), meteorologist and vice-president of the Royal Society

**Name:** David Brunt  
**Date of birth:** 1886  
**Date of death:** 1965  
**Spouse:** Claudia Mary Elizabeth Brunt (née Roberts)  
**Parent:** Mary Brunt (née Jones)  
**Parent:** John Brunt  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** meteorologist and vice-president of the Royal Society  
**Area of activity:** Education; Science and Mathematics; Space and Aviation  
**Author:** Emrys George Bowen

Born 17 June 1886 at Staylittle, Montgomeryshire, the youngest of the five sons and four daughters of John Brunt, a farm worker, and Mary (née Jones) his wife. Up to the age of ten David was a pupil at the village school, then in the charge of a single teacher who gave all his instruction in Welsh. In 1896 John Brunt moved his family to the south Wales coalfield where he subsequently worked as a coal miner. The family settled at Llanhilleth in Monmouthshire in surroundings very different from those to which they were accustomed on the open moorlands of mid-Wales. For the next three years David Brunt attended the local elementary school and quickly overcame the linguistic and other problems arising from larger classes and the absence of any special attention. In 1899 he was placed first on the list of those obtaining entrance scholarships to the Abertillery intermediate (later county) school and it was here that he first began to show exceptional brilliance in mathematics and chemistry. In 1904 he obtained a distinction in additional mathematics at Higher School Certificate level and as a result was awarded a county exhibition of £30 for three years. Later that year he obtained the top entrance scholarship of £40 for the same period at U.C.W., Aberystwyth. These scholarships allowed him to embark upon a university career. At Aberystwyth he studied mathematics, physics and chemistry. His teachers in mathematics included two distinguished professors then at Aberystwyth - R.W. Genese and G.A. Schott - both of whom became very proud of their pupil. In 1907 he left Aberystwyth with a first-class honours degree in mathematics and after a short break proceeded as a scholar in mathematics to Trinity College, Cambridge. Later he gained firsts in parts I and II of the Mathematical Tripos and in 1909 was elected to the Isaac Newton studentship at the National Solar Physics Observatory.

After leaving Cambridge he spent a year as a lecturer in mathematics at the University of Birmingham and two years in a similar post at the Monmouthshire Training College, Caerleon. While he was at Caerleon, he married in 1915 Claudia Mary Elizabeth Roberts of Nant-y-glo, Monmouth, who had been a fellow student both at Abertillery and Aberystwyth. They had one son who died unmarried.

The real turning point in David Brunt's career came in 1916 when he enlisted in the Royal Engineers (meteorological section). In the war years he did important work related to atmospheric conditions at low levels in chemical warfare and at higher levels when he became meteorologist to the Air Force. He was often mentioned in despatches. He became an expert forecaster and after demobilisation he accepted an invitation to enter the Meteorological Office which in 1921 became the Air Ministry. He did not allow his official duties to interrupt his personal research, and he accepted Sir Napier Shaw's invitation to join him in his duties as part-time professor of meteorology at the Imperial College of Science and Technology, London. This led, after the retirement of Sir Napier Shaw, to Brunt becoming the first full-time professor of meteorology in Britain. He held the chair from 1934 to 1952 and two years later he was elected a Fellow of the college.

During his academic career he wrote 58 scientific papers and five important books - *Combination of observations* (1917), *Meteorology* (1928), *Physical and dynamical meteorology* (1934), *Weather science for everybody* (1936) and *Weather study* (1942). He was president of the Royal Meteorological Society, 1942-44, and received both their Buchan prize and Symons gold medal. He was president of the Physical Society, 1945-47. He had many interests closely related to meteorology in its wider application. He was chairman of the British Gliding Association, 1935-46, and chairman of the Electricity Supply Research Council, 1952-59. He was elected F.R.S. in 1939, and in 1944 was awarded its royal medal. He rendered great service to this famous scientific society as its very efficient secretary 1948-57, and as vice-president 1949-57. He received a knighthood in 1949 and K.B.E. in 1959.

Sir David Brunt was undoubtedly the most distinguished meteorologist in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century when the subject was changing from being almost a descriptive science to becoming a science increasingly based on mathematical concepts, and at the same time changing from a reliance on ground based observations to data from the upper atmosphere. He received the Sc.D. degree (Cambridge) in 1940, and later an honorary D.Sc. degree from the University of London in 1960, and a similar distinction from the University of Wales in 1951. He died 5 February 1965.

### Author

Professor Emrys George Bowen, (1900 - 1983)

### Sources

*Portreadau'r Ffannwr*, i, 33-4

*Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society*, 11, 41-52

*The Times*, 8, 23, 24 February 1965

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### Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [David Brunt](#)

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