PRESS RELEASE

23/11/15

Inspiring Brilliance: Celebrating Maxwell's Genius and Legacy

The profound impact of James Clerk Maxwell, whose work continues to influence scientific and technological innovation, was celebrated by leading academics at the Royal Society of Edinburgh's recent conference; Inspiring Brilliance: Celebrating Maxwell's Genius and Legacy.

Nobel Laureate, Professor Peter Higgs, CH FRS FRSE was among the eminent speakers from across the UK who gathered to discuss Maxwell's outstanding contribution to physics and beyond. His legacy has enabled developments in fields such as colour photography, statistical physics and structural mechanics and this serves to further demonstrate the extensive reach and impact of Maxwell's work. Topics at the conference ranged from Saturn's rings to cybernetics and digital communications to mathematics.

The conference attracted a large audience and, as the event was fully subscribed, the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) elected to make it available more widely by streaming it live through IEEE.tv. Close to 450 people tuned in to watch online and the individual talks are now available to view on the RSE's own YouTube channel.

To coincide with the conference and to mark the 150th anniversary of Maxwell's electromagnetic theory of light propagation, a plaque depicting his pioneering equations was unveiled by Sir Michael Atiyah OM FRS FRSE and Dr Alasdair Allan, MSP Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages. The latter commented, "James Clerk Maxwell's pioneering electromagnetic theory is central to the development of virtually all modern electronic, radio and photonic technologies – smart phones, colour photography and x-rays all depend on his work.

"The new plaque, installed with the support of the Scottish Government, will be a physical reminder of his huge scientific legacy, and explain to people passing his statue in Edinburgh why he is still so revered a century and a half after his most famous publication.

"Throughout UNESCO's International Year of Light celebrations, our science centres and festivals have been hosting a range of events to remind visitors from around

Scotland, and beyond, what a great contribution Maxwell made to science and society."

Sir Michael Atiyah added, "Beneath his statue in George Street his equations are now embedded. Maxwell's genius took him far beyond light and underlies colour photography, computer technologies and telecommunications. The equations plaque and the statue will together emphasise Maxwell's huge contribution to his native city."

ENDS.

For more information contact Hannah Smith: hsmith@royalsoced.org.uk, 0131 240 2792.

Notes to Editors

Images

1. Professor Peter Higgs, CH FRS FRSE Nobel Laureate
   Topic: Maxwell's Equations: The Tip of an Iceberg

2. Conference Speakers by the James Clerk Maxwell Statue and Plaque on George St

   (L-R front row):

   Peter Reid
   Planning & Communications Project Manager, University of Edinburgh

   Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell DBE FRS PRSE MRIA
   President, Royal Society of Edinburgh

   (L-R back row):

   Professor Malcolm Longair CBE FRS FRSE
   Jacksonian Professor Emeritus of Natural Philosophy and Director of Development of the Cavendish Laboratory, University of Cambridge

   Professor Rodolphe Sepulchre
   Professor of Engineering, University of Cambridge

   David Forfar FFA FRSE
   Chairman, James Clerk Maxwell Foundation

   Professor Harald Haas
   Chair of Mobile Communications, School of Engineering, University of Edinburgh

   Sir Peter Knight FRS
   Senior Research Investigator at Imperial College London; Senior Fellow in Residence at Chicheley Hall and Past-President of the Institute of Physics Edinburgh

Professor Carl Murray
Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy, Queen Mary University of London

Professor Iain McLeod
Former Professor of Structural Engineering, University of Strathclyde

Professor Jim Al-Khalili OBE FRAS HonFBAASc
Professor of Physics, University of Surrey

Professor Peter Higgs CH FRS FRSE
Nobel Laureate; Emeritus Professor of Theoretical Physics, University of Edinburgh

Dr James Rautio
CEO, President, and Founder of Sonnet Software

3. James Clerk Maxwell Equations Plaque unveiled by (L-R) Dr Alasdair Allan the Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages and Sir Michael Atiyah OM FRS HonFRSE HonFREng, former President of the Royal Society and the Royal Society of Edinburgh

The Royal Society of Edinburgh is a leading educational charity which operates on an independent and non-party-political basis to provide public benefit throughout Scotland. Established by Royal Charter in 1783 by key proponents of the Scottish Enlightenment, the RSE now has over 1600 Fellows from a wide range of disciplines. The work of the RSE includes awarding research funding, leading on major inquiries, informing public policy and delivering events across Scotland to inspire knowledge and learning.


JAMES
CLERK MAXW