

News from JAC

The Joint Astronomy Centre has been entertaining and educating potential young scientists of the future – and celebrating the birthday of an important scientist from the past.



JAC Director Gary Davis cuts the cake

AstroDay

Every year in May, the town of Hilo in Hawaii celebrates AstroDay at the Prince Kuhio Plaza, which is the local shopping mall. All observatories on the Big Island of Hawaii participate in this event by

JAC staff on Hilo AstroDay



setting up educational exhibits, talking to the attending public about their latest discoveries, and providing some entertaining astronomy and physics lessons for the youngsters. The Joint Astronomy Centre's booth featured displays of hardware and images, a birthday-stars computer game, and a Solar System in need of sorting. A number of JAC staff spent time talking to the public about their work. In total, over 15,000 people attended the event.

James Clark Maxwell remembered

June 13, 2006 marked the 175th birthday of James Clerk Maxwell, the famous Scottish physicist who discovered the theory of electromagnetism and forever changed our views on



James Clerk Maxwell in his 40s

the nature of light. The UK's submillimetre telescope on Mauna Kea, Hawaii was named after this father of modern physics. JAC, which operates the Telescope, celebrated the occasion with a barbecue picnic, and lecture on the life and work of the physicist.

Maxwell was born in 1831 in Edinburgh. At the early age of 25 he became Professor of Physics at Marischal College in Aberdeen. From there he moved first to Kings College, London, and then, in 1871, to become the first Professor of Experimental Physics at Cambridge where he directed the newly-created Cavendish Laboratory. It was at the Cavendish, during the next 50 years, that so much of the physics of today continued to develop from Maxwell's

inspiration. Maxwell died in 1879.

The James Clerk Maxwell Telescope (JCMT) was opened in 1987. It is the largest telescope of its kind in the world. Its 50-foot dish collects submillimetre radiation, which is used to study the coldest material in the Universe, such as interstellar clouds, the birthplaces of stars and planets, and dust rings around young stars.



The James Clerk Maxwell Telescope

Maxwell was very much an unsung hero, though recognition did come from one notable source, a certain Albert Einstein, who acknowledged that the Special Theory of Relativity owes its origins to Maxwell's equations.