James Clerk Maxwell comes to Aberdeen: 1856-1860

- Maxwell was appointed Professor of Natural Philosophy (i.e. Physics) at Marischal College in 1856.
- His main remit was to teach Mechanics, Dynamics, Optics, Astronomy, etc.
- The University term ran from early November to Early April.

- Maxwell took lodgings at 129 Union Street.
- For past-times he enjoyed walking, impromptu gymnastics and reading classical literature.
- Upon the death of his father in 1856 he inherited the Glenlair estate where he spent much of his time out of term.

- At Aberdeen Maxwell ran an evening class for workers, at the ‘Aberdeen School of Science’.
- He worked on fundamental problems in understanding light, the behaviour of gases and astronomy (see other boards).
- He married the Principal’s daughter.
- He left Aberdeen in 1860 when the Royal Commission overseeing the merger of the two Universities in Aberdeen gave the post to his King’s College colleague, Professor David Thomson.

- Mrs Clerk Maxwell, daughter of Marischal College Principal Daniel Dewar. Courtesy James Clerk Maxwell Foundation and Peterhouse College, University of Cambridge

- Maxwell was a subscriber to the Music Hall, opened in 1859 as a venue for the great British Association for the Advancement of Science Meeting, pictured here, at which he announced a new law of Physics.

Tallis’s map of Aberdeen in the 1850s