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Making Waves: Oliver Lodge and the Cultures of Science, 1875-1940

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Dr James Mussell has received an AHRC networking grant for the project 'Making Waves: Oliver Lodge and the Cultures of Science, 18750-1940'.

Interdisciplinarity, particularly between the arts and the sciences, is notoriously difficult to achieve. This project takes one particular historical case study in order to understand disciplinary difference at a crucial moment in the past. Oliver Lodge (1851-1940), physicist, engineer, spiritualist and first Principal of the University of Birmingham, was a key figure in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century culture. Today, however, he remains relatively neglected, largely because of the apparent contradictions between different aspects of his career. This research network uses these contradictions as a starting point to consider the role of the disciplines in shaping knowledge. Taking Lodge as a case study allows us to understand the place of science in his period and to learn how disciplinary boundaries continue to structure research and knowledge today.

To understand a career such as Lodge's, it is necessary to take an interdisciplinary approach. The project is designed to bring together a range of scholars, archivists and museum professionals at four workshops, each focusing on a particular aspect of Lodge's career. The first will consider the place of science in the new Victorian universities; the second the many ways that signalling though space was understood in the period; the third Lodge's physics and engineering and the supposed differences between pure and applied science; the fourth scientific lives more generally, investigating different tools and methodological approaches for the study of historical scientific figures. A century later, this research network will reappraise Lodge's career, tracing the connections that structured scientific practice over Lodge's lifetime and so learning how the disciplines might be restructured today.

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