

Oliver Heaviside

Maverick mastermind of electricity

Basil Mahon

The Institution of Engineering and Technology

Acknowledgements

Many people have played a part in the creation of this book. I am very lucky to have had generous help from Alan Heather. He is a great-great-grandson of Oliver's uncle, George Heaviside, and has provided personal memories – his mother described Oliver as 'an awkward old cuss but a brilliant man' – and a great deal of information about the family and about Oliver's life in Devon.

Everyone who is interested in Heaviside today owes a great debt to the Chelsea Publishing Company and others for keeping their editions of his collected *Electrical Papers* and his treatise *Electromagnetic Theory* in print over the years, thus giving direct and easy access to the great man's thoughts. Thanks are similarly due to the Institution of Engineering and Technology for maintaining their fine collection of Heaviside's notebooks, letters and papers, and I am especially grateful to archivists Anne Locker and Asha Marvin for their efficient and friendly help with research.

I am also indebted to fellow writers, especially to Bruce Hunt for his illuminating account of Heaviside's relationships with Hertz, Lodge and Fitzgerald in *The Maxwellians*, to Ido Yavetz for his scholarly insight into Heaviside's work in *From Obscurity to Enigma*, and most of all to Paul Nahin for his monumental biography *Oliver Heaviside: Sage in Solitude*.^{*} Nahin's book is a treasure house of information about Heaviside and his contemporaries. Why, then, write another book? I hope that mine will complement Nahin's and others by presenting a compelling story and so bringing Oliver to a wider audience than he has so far enjoyed.

Nahin acknowledges his own debt to Professor Ben Gossick, who amassed a vast collection of material in preparation for a biography of Heaviside but died in 1977 before completing it. It is thanks to them both that I have been able to include some poignant extracts from Oliver's letters to Fitzgerald, and my obligation extends to the Royal Dublin Society Library, from whose Fitzgerald collection Gossick had photocopied the letters.

Profound thanks are similarly due to Ivor Catt for editing and publishing G.F.C. Searle's intimate recollections of his friend Oliver in *Oliver Heaviside, The Man*. Searle's little book shines a clear light on Oliver's character and is the source of many of the passages I have quoted from Heaviside's correspondence with Searle and Lodge, including his letters to Lodge on candidacy for the Royal Society and the death of Fitzgerald.

^{*} Retitled for its second edition – see Bibliography.