

Elmer and the founding of ICMS



Thanks to Robin Knops, Susan Oakes, Jane Walker

In 1979 Elmer became Professor of Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh.

April 1989, **Abdus Salam**, Nobel Laureate in Physics and the founder of ICTP in Trieste, received the inaugural Edinburgh Medal at the first Edinburgh Science Festival, organized by the Edinburgh District Council, in whose Economic Development and Estates Department **Ian Wall** was the Principal Development Surveyor.

In his acceptance address, Salam challenged Edinburgh to establish similar centres not only in science but also in engineering and mathematics. The objective would be to help train academics from developing countries and to benefit local industry.

The Heriot-Watt Principal Alistair MacFarlane (a control engineer) was attracted by this idea and invited the Heriot-Watt Mathematics Department to make a proposal for a National Nonlinear Mathematics Centre. These plans, drawn up by Robin Knops, Jack Carr and JB, which included a commitment to mathematics in developing countries, were informally presented to Ian Wall, who was favourably impressed.

Almost simultaneously, in May 1989, another critical event took place. The LMS convened a meeting forming part of a retreat of LMS Council at the Isle of Thorns in Sussex "to discuss the creation of a national mathematics institute."

At the time Elmer was a member of LMS Council.

From the Minutes

" Motion: The mathematicians present at the Retreat welcome with enthusiasm the creation of the Institute for Mathematical Sciences in Cambridge, along the broad lines proposed by the Cambridge Committee.

The motion was passed with 22 in favour, 1 against and 5 abstentions."

(No mention in the minutes of the intervention of Adrian Smith.)

Back to Edinburgh ...

June 1989: a second meeting with Ian Wall, at which it was decided to invite the University of Edinburgh to join the project, and Elmer and Terry Lyons were appointed as representatives.

A discussion paper was written with the twin aims of

- (i) formalizing the relation with ICTP
- (ii) acting as a precursor for an application to the recently announced SERC competition to fund one or two UK Mathematics Research Centres.

Success in this competition seemed remote, and alternative sources of funding were sought in the event of a negative outcome, and the Scottish Development Agency offered a substantial grant for a feasibility study in that eventuality.

August 1989: Outline bid submitted to SERC. Edinburgh was one of 5 out of 11 applicants invited to submit a full bid.

Elmer and JB wrote the proposal: a David v. Goliath, North v. South effort ... Written endorsements from several North British universities.

24-25 November 1989: interviews with special SERC Mathematics Panel, Principals of both the University of Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt University attended.

As expected the Committee chose to award the centre to Cambridge, but the Edinburgh bid got a lot of positive comment and was clearly the runner-up.

6 December 1989: protocol signing ceremony at the Edinburgh City Chambers for the founding of an Edinburgh Mathematical Research Centre, the protocol committing the signatories (the two universities, ICTP, the Scottish Development Agency and the City Council), on completion of the feasibility study, to co-operate to seek funding for its establishment.

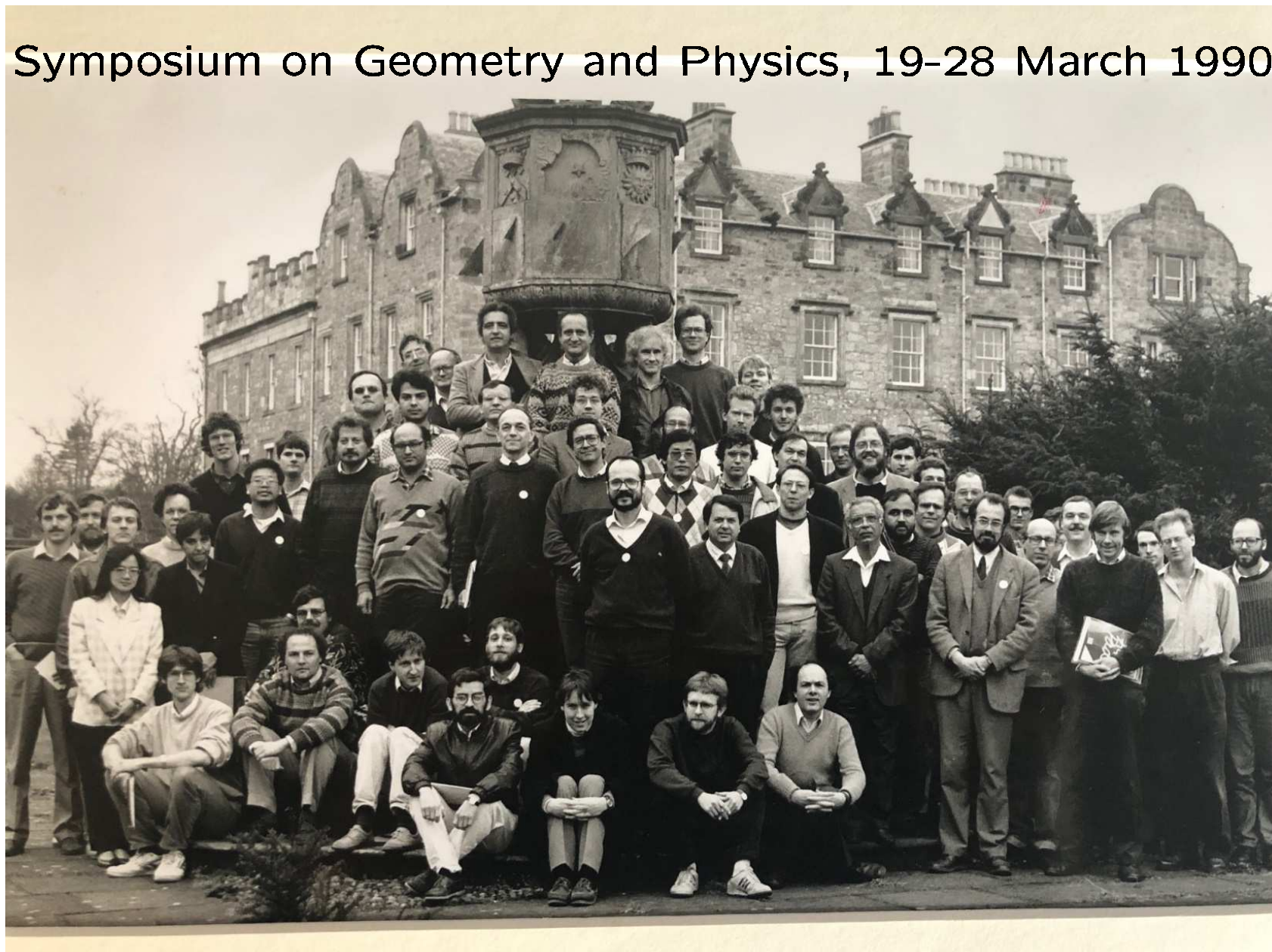
The feasibility study reported positively, a Steering Committee was formed, and at its first meeting in May 1990 it was decided to name the centre the *International Centre for Mathematical Sciences*.

The ICMS mission was stated to be:

- To create an environment in which the mathematical sciences will develop in new directions.
- To encourage and exploit those areas of mathematics that are of relevance to other sciences, industry and commerce.
- To promote international collaboration, with particular reference to mathematicians working in developing countries.

Elmer organized the first ICMS workshop at Newbattle Abbey

Symposium on Geometry and Physics, 19-28 March 1990



For many years (until the award of a rolling grant by EPSRC in 2004 when John Toland was Scientific Director) ICMS operated on very limited funding (25K per year from each university, plus support from Standard Life, The Royal Society, Royal Society of Edinburgh, LMS, EMS, Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Limited, the City Council and individual research grants) but developed an increasing reputation for its workshops and programmes.

A key factor was that by luck ICMS acquired the most prestigious of initial premises, after David Ritchie of the James Clerk Maxwell Foundation saw Elmer on TV saying that ICMS was looking for accommodation.

14 India Street, Edinburgh

The home of ICMS from 1994-2010.





Workshop on
Mathematical
Develop-
ments in Fluid
Mechanics
1995

2010-2018
South College
Street

2018 - Bayes Centre, Potterow

Home also of the Maxwell Institute.

