The man who changed everything
Christine De Luca

James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879), Scottish mathematical physicist
Statue by Alexander Stoddart, in George Street, Edinburgh

This statue is fitting for a modest Scotsman
whose learning lay lightly on his shoulders;
who looked up through nature to describe
the hidden numbers holding it together;
predicted and proved the less than obvious:
unseen worlds, force fields, the planets.
His was the plinth on which Einstein built.

The bronze of Maxwell is quiet and reflective;
neo-classical, unshowy. One of his Tobys has
pride of place; the dog privy to his master’s
ruminating about vision, physiology of sight,
but wise enough to see that his was different.
Perhaps he was a canine expert on Saturns’s rings;
the one that salivated at the thought that light
is an electro-magnetic wave; that barked loudly
when the fourth equation brought it all together.
His owner’s gentle eye and ample beard are caught,
the slight academic stoop, the romantic heart.
Clay is a hard taskmaster, the sculptor said,
but you’d never guess. And you’d never think
Maxwell was the man who changed everything.

The statue was commissioned in 2006 by the Royal Society of Edinburgh