

James Robert Erskine-Murray

Dr **James Robert Erskine-Murray** FRSE MIEE (1868-1927) was a Scottish electrical engineer and inventor. A protege of [Lord Kelvin](#) ha also worked with [Marconi](#) and was a pioneer in the development of the telegraph. He wrote extensively on telegraphy and wireless communication.

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Early life

He was born in [Edinburgh](#) on 24 October 1868, the eldest son of Alexander Erskine Erskine-Murray (sic), Sheriff of [Glasgow](#) (1832-1907), and his wife, Helen Pringle^[1], daughter of Robert Pringle of Symington.^[2] In 1886 he began study under [Lord Kelvin](#) at [Glasgow University](#) assisting Kelvin in electrical experiments from 1888 and graduating BSc in 1892.

Career

He began lecturing in Electricity at [Heriot-Watt College](#) in [Edinburgh](#) in 1896. In 1897 he was elected a Fellow of the [Royal Society of Edinburgh](#). His proposers were [Lord Kelvin](#), [John Gray McKendrick](#), [William Jack](#) and [Joseph Bell](#).^[3] He received a doctorate (DSc) in 1897 and in 1898 he became personal assistant to [Guglielmo Marconi](#) based at the Haven Hotel near [Poole](#) (often called The Haven Experimental Station). Here he was involved in Marconi's critical experiments regarding submarine telegraph cables. In 1899 he was moved to Marconi's Hall Street Factory in [Chelmsford](#).^[4] Later in 1900 he began lecturing in Physics and Electrical Engineering at [University College, Nottingham](#). In 1905 he transferred to George Coats Technical College in [Paisley](#).

In 1913 he was elected Vice president of the London Wireless Society, later renamed the [Radio Society of Great Britain](#). In the same year he was joint founder of Clark, Forde, Taylor and Erskine-Murray. During the [First World War](#) he was attached to the [Royal air Force](#) with the rank of Lieutenant Commander, being placed in charge of wireless instruments and radio communications. In 1918 this evolved into the [Wireless Experimental Establishment](#) at [Biggin Hill](#). In this year he took out a patent on electric vacuum bulb thermionic devices. In 1920 he succeeded [Alan Archibald Campbell-Swinton](#) as President of the London Wireless Society. Through the 1920s he was the Experimental Engineer at the [Royal Navy Barracks](#) at [Portsmouth](#). In 1922 he created an electronic device which acted as a navigation aid, a forerunner of the [global positioning system](#).^[5]

Personal life

In 1899 he married Alleine Frederica Florinda Gildea^[6], daughter of Major General G F Gildea.^[7] He died in Portsmouth on 12 February 1927.^[8] Their only son, James Alistair Frederick Campbell Erskine-Murray (1902-1973) succeeded to the title 13th Lord Elibank in 1962 upon the death of an uncle.^[9]

Publications

- *Forces Between Currents* (1891)
- *Some Experiments on the Viscosity of Air* (1891)
- *On the Temperature Variation of the Thermal Conductivity of Rocks* (1895) with Kelvin
- *On the Effect of the Rontgen X-Rays* (1896)
- *On Volta Electricity of Metals* (1898)
- *On Contact Electricity of Metals* (1898)
- *A Differentiating Machine* (1904)
- *A Handbook of Wireless Telegraphy* (1907 onwards)
- *Wireless Telephones and How They Work* (1910 onwards)
- *Wireless Communication Over Sea* (1912)

References

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2. "Person Page" (<http://www.thepeerage.com/p39700.htm>). *www.thepeerage.com*. Retrieved 21 October 2017.
3. *Biographical Index of Former Fellows of the Royal Society of Edinburgh 1783–2002* (https://www.royalsoced.org.uk/cms/files/fellows/biographical_index/fells_indexp2.pdf) (PDF). The Royal Society of Edinburgh. July 2006. ISBN 0 902 198 84 X.
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