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Pursuing Power and Light: Technology and Physics from James Watt to Albert Einstein (Johns Hopkins Introductory Studies in the History of Science)

Bruce J. Hunt

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In the nineteenth century, science and technology developed a close and continuing relationship. The most important advancements in physics?the science of energy and the theory of the electromagnetic field?were deeply rooted in the new technologies of the steam engine, the telegraph, and electric power and light. Bruce J. Hunt here explores how the leading technologies of the industrial age helped reshape modern physics.

This period marked a watershed in how human beings exerted power over the world around them. Sweeping changes in manufacturing, transportation, and communications transformed the economy, society, and daily life in ways never before imagined. At the same time, physical scientists made great strides in the study of energy, atoms, and electromagnetism. Hunt shows how technology informed science and vice versa, examining the interaction between steam technology and the formulation of the laws of thermodynamics, for example, and that between telegraphy and the rise of electrical science.

Hunt’s groundbreaking introduction to the history of physics points to the shift to atomic and quantum physics. It closes with a brief look at Albert Einstein’s work at the Swiss patent office and the part it played in his formulation of relativity theory. Hunt translates his often-demanding material into engaging and accessible language suitable for undergraduate students of the history of science and technology.

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