

Gregory, Olinthus Gilbert | Encyclopedia.com

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(*b.* Yaxley, England, 29 January 1774; *d.* Woolwich, England, 2 February 1841)

applied mathematics, science education.

Gregory was one of the band of self-taught or privately tutored mathematicians who swelled the ranks of British mathematics during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Despite his limited schooling he established a reputation as a writer on scientific subjects, and in 1803, through the patronage of Charles Hutton, he was appointed instructor of mathematics at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. In 1821 he succeeded to the professorship and held the post until his retirement in 1838.

Gregory's most important scientific publication, *A Treatise of Mechanics*, appeared in 1806 and went through at least four editions. Although it was a didactic compilation rather than a publication of original research, it was one of the most complete works on pure and applied mechanics that had appeared in English. In purpose and presentation it was an early example of what would now be described as "engineering mechanics." Its theoretical sections covered such topics as the analysis of the flexed beam and the theory of the loaded arch, while its descriptive sections dealt extensively with machine design. The book constituted a contribution to the tradition of applied mathematics and applied mechanics which was then being fostered by the Woolwich mathematicians.

In 1825 Gregory produced another book, *Mathematics for Practical Men*, devoted to "the principles and applications of the mechanical sciences for the use of the younger members of the Institution of Civil Engineers" (which had been founded in 1818 and of which Gregory later became an honorary member). Around this time he also did experimental research on the velocity of sound. From 1802 to 1819 he edited the *Gentleman's Diary* and from 1819 to 1840 the *Ladies' Diary*. On the strength of both his reputation in science and his status as a prominent Dissenter in religion he was included among the group that founded London University, the first nonsectarian university in England.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gregory's scientific publications include *A Treatise of Mechanics*, 3 vols. (London, 1806); the first volume of the *Treatise* was translated into German as *Darstellung der mechanischcen Wissenschaften*, J. F. W. Dietlein, trans. (Halle, 1824); *Mathematics for Practical Men* (London, 1825); "An Account of Some Experiments Made in Order to Determine the Velocity With Which Sound Is Transmitted in the Atmosphere," in *Philosophical Magazine*, **63** (1824), 401–15.

Gregory also translated one of René Just Haüy's works, *An Elementary Treatise on Natural Philosophy*, 2 vols. (London, 1807).

For additional bibliography see *Dictionary of National Biography* and [British Museum Catalogue of Printed Books](#).

Harold Dorn