

**Friday 16 March 2001: For Immediate Release**

## **First National Historic Chemical Landmark recognises Impact of Pioneering Work in Platinum research**

Scientific achievements, which led to the development of car exhaust catalysts and the design of platinum-based, anti-cancer drugs will be recognised on Wednesday 21 March 2001.

A National Historic Chemical Landmark will be awarded at Johnson Matthey Technology Centre, Sonning Common, Reading to recognise chemical research into the platinum metals – platinum, palladium, ruthenium, rhodium, osmium and iridium - and the life enhancing applications of that research.

This landmark will be the first National Historical Chemical Landmark in the UK, as part of a new Royal Society of Chemistry initiative to commemorate major achievements in the chemical sciences and to bring them to the attention of the public.

The Royal Society of Chemistry's Immediate Past-President, Professor Tony Ledwith will present the Company with a brass plaque to be displayed in the Johnson Matthey (JM) reception area. Barry Murrer, Director of the Technology Centre will tell an invited audience about the development and clinical applications of platinum-based chemotherapy drugs. Gary Acres, former JM Director will give a presentation on autocatalysts.

In the late 1960s in the UK, scientists and engineers at JM developed catalyst technology based on platinum group metals to control gaseous pollutants from industrial plants. In the 1970s, clean air legislation forced vehicle manufacturers to investigate ways of reducing emissions from cars. Johnson Matthey scientists successfully demonstrated the benefits of their platinum-based catalyst in reducing car exhaust pollution, and catalytic converters became the remedy of choice. This resulted in the opening at Royston in 1974 of the world's first production plant for the manufacture of catalytic converters, and the Company received the first of two Queen's Awards for Technological Achievement.

In the same decade, Johnson Matthey was also pivotal in the research and development of a new platinum-based, anti-cancer drug, Cisplatin. A short time later its analogue, Carboplatin, which has fewer side effects than its predecessor but equal efficacy, was developed. This drug is widely used as a chemotherapeutic agent. Johnson Matthey received its second Queen's Award for Technical Achievement for its research in this area, jointly with the Institute of Cancer Research and the Royal Marsden Hospital. New platinum-based anti-cancer agents invented at Johnson Matthey are also currently under development.

In November 2000, Johnson Matthey was awarded its second Royal Academy of Engineering MacRobert award; the UK's most coveted prize for engineering innovation, for the development of the 'Continuously Regenerating Trap' a revolutionary emission control system. The Company officially opened its new European autocatalyst factory in Royston on 14 March 2001.

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## Notes for Editors

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1) **Photographs will be available from the Royal Society of Chemistry after the event.**

2) The landmark plaque will be presented at 6.00 p.m. on Wednesday 21 March at Johnson Matthey Technology Centre, Sonning Common, Reading, Berkshire. There will also be the opportunity to take part in a tour of the Centre from 4.00 p.m. and a buffet will be provided after the ceremony. **Members of the press are welcome to attend provided they notify Tracey Wells at the Royal Society of Chemistry in advance.**

3) The plaque inscription reads:

‘Johnson Matthey Technology Centre – Pioneering work has been carried out in these laboratories since 1970 on the chemistry of Platinum Group Metals for the development of car exhaust catalysts and the design of platinum anti-cancer drugs. Exhaust catalysts are fitted to most modern vehicles and make a global contribution to air quality.

Platinum-based drugs play a major role in cancer therapy.’

4) The National Historic Landmarks programme highlights sites around the UK where important chemical breakthroughs have been made. This will be the first such Landmark awarded in the UK.

5) The Royal Society of Chemistry is the Learned Society for chemistry and the Professional Body for chemists in the UK. With 46,000 members world-wide. It can trace its history back to the Chemical Society founded in 1841. The Society is a major international publisher of chemical information, supports the teaching of chemistry at all levels, organises hundreds of chemical meetings a year and is a leader in communicating science to the public.

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6) Historically, the partnership of Johnson and Matthey was formed in 1851 between Percival Norton Johnson, an assayer and refiner of gold and platinum metals, and George Matthey who had joined Johnson as an apprentice in 1838 at the age of thirteen. The Company made continual advances in platinum fabrication, melting and fusion, and these early developments formed the foundation for the industrial applications of platinum which today are still of primary interest.

7) During the Second World War, Johnson Matthey products played a significant role in the allied war effort and they enjoyed a period of growth and expansion in the post war years. They continue to make a valuable contribution to scientific technology, expanding existing businesses and developing new products and are also currently making substantial investments developing a fuel cell business, considered to be the power source for the new millennium.

8) The Johnson Matthey Technology Centre (UK) is located at Blount's Court, Sonning Common, Berkshire. Blount's Court dates back to 1287, and was acquired by Johnson Matthey in 1975. Originally known as Kent House, the site of Blount's Court was in the Binfield Hundred, part of the Parish of Shiplake in the Royal Manor of Bensington (Benson) which covered the greater part of South Oxfordshire. The House did not become known as Blount's Court until 1465 when it passed to Thomas Stonor to become the Stonor's family home until the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1960, the building was sold to the American machine Foundry Limited for conversion into laboratories and purchased by Brook Bond Tea in 1964. Extensive refurbishment of Blount's court has taken place between 1968 and the current time.