

Broadcast Britain

A century of change

Personalities, politics, society
and culture 1922 - 2022



Presentation to Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society
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A century of change

- In 2023 I delivered a presentation on the centenary of public broadcasting technology 1922-2022
- 100 years of successful technological diffusion
- Technology behind radio & TV and today's convergence with IT in our multi-media age
- Clear audience feedback was for more on the PEOPLE behind this technology and broadcasting revolution
- This is the complementary presentation on the PEOPLE who entered our homes and changed us all forever
- And I've added bonus material for this society



Technological diffusion in action



- Broadcasting changes society
- Impacts on news and politics
- Culture – access to music, drama and the arts
- Education – power of talk and documentary
- Entertainment and Comedy
- Broadcast creates celebrities
- Television age begins
- Technology converges
- Future as multi-media?



Technological diffusion in action



1922 – 36,000 licences issued – some 0.15m people

1938 – 8.9m licences -71% of households - some 33m people

* * *

1937 – BBC TV begins – 35,000 viewers – but only 1,000 sets in use

1955 – ITV launched – 9.5m radio licences & 4.5m Radio & B+W TV licences – 32m people officially, unofficially audience saturation

2024-25, 23.8m licences issued, 300,000 fewer people took out a licence, but 98% of adult population say they access BBC services each month



PUPPETS
• 1 Television puppet
the Mule. Mu
the first to





So many firsts – we take for granted today

- Children's programme
- Outside broadcast
- Recorded programmes
- Broadcast drama
- Broadcast music
- News programme
- Religious service
- Political broadcast
- Recorded speech
- Royal Christmas Message
- Coronation
- Thought for the Day
- Sport commentary
- Gardening programme
- Variety programme
- Comedy programme
- Weather forecast
- Natural history programme
- Comedy programme
- Soap opera
- Woman's Hour
- World Service (Empire Service)
- Armed Forces Radio





2



3



5



9

A History of Broadcasting in 10 People



8



1



6



7



4



10

A history of broadcasting in ten 'people'

1. Guglielmo Marconi – radio inventor, entrepreneur
2. Peter Eckersley – engineer
3. John Reith – founding director
4. Val Gielgud – drama producer
5. John Logie Baird – TV inventor
6. Lobby de Lotbiniere – light entertainment impresario
7. Grace Wyndham Goldie – political broadcaster
8. Richard Dimbleby – live broadcaster
9. Lew Grade – first TV impresario
10. Richard Attenborough – documentaryist



Next Ten will be very different



Where it all began

Guglielmo Marconi

- The inventor
- Teenage experimenter in parents' attic
- Spark transmission with Morse Code
- Inventor of Radio Valve & Crystal
- Induction Coil and Coherer (detector)
- Vertical aerial and reflector (signal)
- Improvements in power and direction
- Ionosphere in long distance transmission better understood



The father of broadcasting?



Inventor — Entrepreneur — Personality

- Classic inventor - visionary, personality, entrepreneur, communicator – Nobel prize winner
- No broadcasting without Marconi - created technologies that made transition from spark telegraphy to public broadcasting possible
- Pace setter - early long-distance telephony broadcasts
- Influencer - changed public mindset - product with no physical form
- Commercial – charged royalties to use patents
- Entrepreneurial - took on HM Government protecting military signals, regulate & control
- Institution builder - crucial role creating BBC from 6 companies
- Innovative funding model - origins of radio and TV licence today



Captain Peter Eckersley

- First BBC Chief Engineer 1922-1929
- Experimented in wireless in school,
- Trained as an electrical engineer
- Wireless equipment officer in Royal Flying Corps
- Joined Marconi transferred to BBC
- Colourful personal life
- Marital difficulties - a public affair - sacked by Reith
- Joined Oswald Mosley's New Party
- Attended Nuremberg Rallies
- But later worked for MI6

Lots of firsts still driving broadcasting today

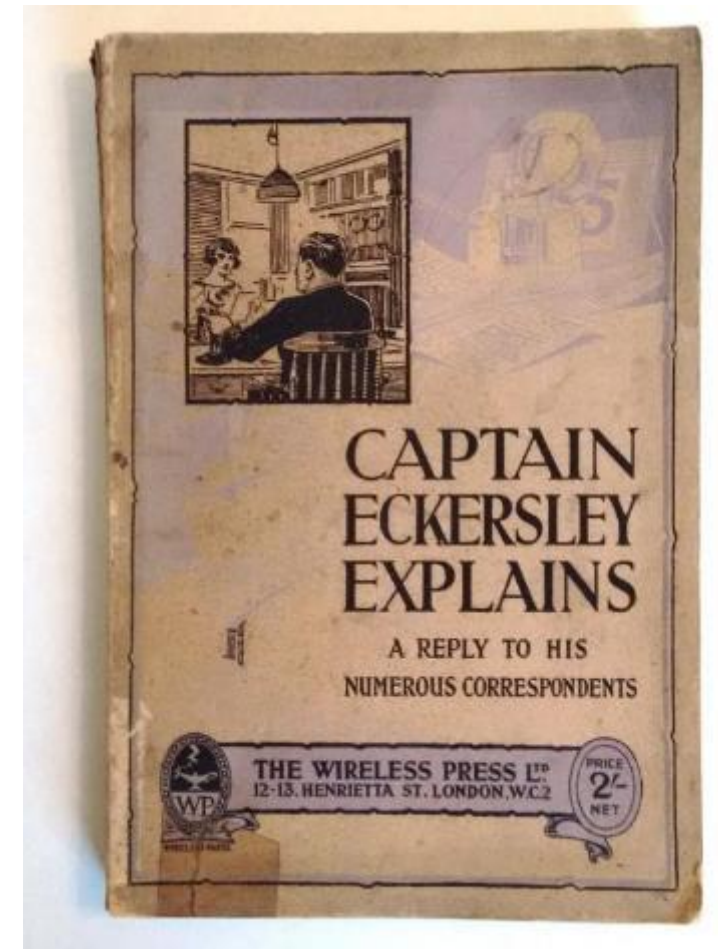


© BBC



'Prospero's Wireless'

- Eckersley shaped so much of what we know today
- Wireless pioneer – visionary experimenter at scale
- Originally it was local radio – each company had its own transmitter
- Drove technology to increase signal strength & reach
- Concept of local radio to regional then national radio
- Strategic direction of new technology and investment in transmission and reception
- 2LO becomes 5XX and 5GB
- Transformed radio into a fully national service



Sir John Reith

- Reith a complicated story of leadership
- Engineer son of the manse
- Tall austere figure – large facial wound in WW1
- Reith built BBC in enduring form that can still be recognised today
- Institution builder, drove mission and vision
- Reith, founding father, built BBC from 36,000 licences to 8.7m and from 4 employees to 4,000,
- Seen as old school autocrat – detailed management, strong control top down, strong moral drive

Mission to ‘educate, inform, entertain’



‘That wuthering height’

- Forging BBC culture recognisable today
- ‘Auntie knows best’ – audience research only began 1937
- ‘Improving’ approach with integrated programming
- Integrated BBC programming – ensure every listener exposed to culture, education, news, politics even international affairs
- Model broken by Forces Radio for troops called-up before WW2
- Not balanced or impartial initially - pro-government – fight for independence and BBC Charter came later
- Broadcasting House – built institutional power a national and international service at arms length from government



‘Nation shall speak peace unto nation’

Val Gielgud

- Using technology to transform and enrich the way culture delivered by BBC
- Radically different way of accessing entertainment, music, variety, drama, comedy and the arts
- Massive growth in a low-cost extended reach culture using wireless
- Brother of legendary actor Sir John Gielgud
- Joined BBC weekly 'Radio Times'
- 1929 appointed Head of Drama Productions – 26 years
- Later led TV drama at Alexandra Palace.
- Polymath writing books, plays, acting in radio plays



'Death at Broadcasting House'

Broadcast actor manager

- Visionary – drama very different on radio
- Innovating – took up many techniques of radio drama still commonly in use today
- Imagination - strongly believed stage plays could show the audience actions of characters, but radio could get inside listener's minds
- Understanding - more intimate, speaking one to one person
- Constantly reminded everyone to use full potential of radio drama - to use larger casts placed in more exotic settings than ever possible with stage plays
- Low cost reach into every home

Leading a cultural revolution

Beatrice Harrison

Cello & the Nightingale 19 May 1924



National Programme

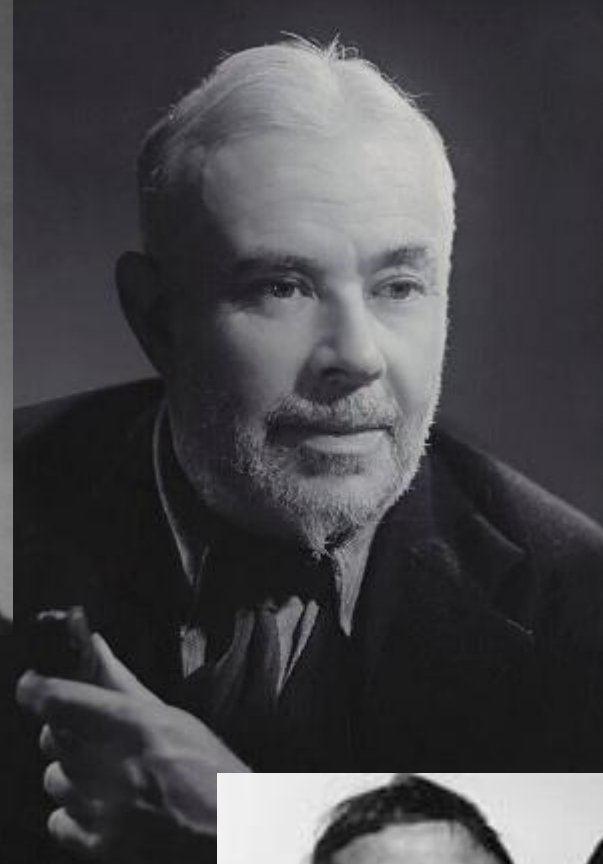
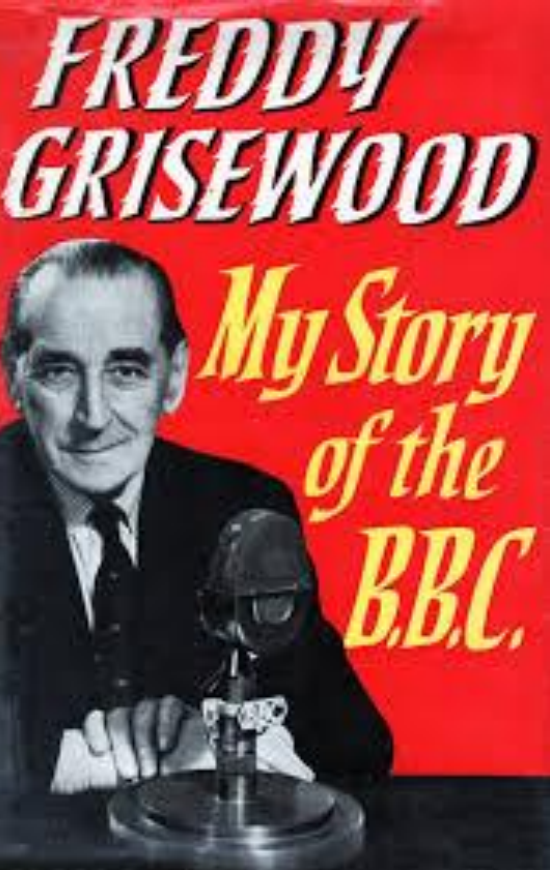
DROITWICH
200kc's 1.300m.LONDON
1.149kc's 261.1m.WEST
1.149kc's 261.1m.NORTH
1.149kc's 261.1m.National Programme
continued overleaf**"DEATH AT
BROADCASTING HOUSE"***(Far left) What horror lurks on
the other side of the door..?**(Left) Steward BBC sound
effects boffins master the
airwaves with another skilful
performance.*

A new murder
mystery adapted
from the novel by
Val Gielgud

Starring
Ian Hunter
Austin Trevor
Mary Newland
and
Henry Kendall

DEATH AT BROADCASTING HOUSE





Broadcast
Celebrities



John Logie Baird – TV Pioneer

- Famous inventor & pioneer of a TV system
- Lot of TV 1sts – broadcast, transatlantic, colour, outside broadcast, theatre broadcast, boxing match
- Used a scanning disc, a semi-mechanical image capture system using film - fundamental flaws
- A ‘Trevor Bayliss’ kind of inventor, self-taught enthusiast
- A ‘Blue Peter’ inventor – the sticky-backed plastic user of his time
- Brilliant, individualist, inventor, creative – many here I expect will see him as a kindred spirit
- But sadly not the inventor of a successful TV system



© National Library of Scotland



Seymour de Lotbiniere – Outside Broadcasting Pioneer

- Imposing presence - Old Etonian – 6' 8" 203 cm tall
- Developed sports commentary technique radio & tv
- Perfected use of technologies - got lighter, faster, better
- Vision applying technology in ways familiar today
- Commentary with summarizer, multi-camera coverage, background sound and vision mixing
- Covering major national events - transformational
- Oversaw televising of 1937 Coronation, 1948 London Olympic Games
- Directed ground-breaking coverage of 1953 Coronation of Elizabeth II – formative event in UK TV



© National Portrait Gallery

‘Lobby’ – ‘a towering figure both physically and mentally’

Grace Wyndham Goldie – political broadcasting pioneer

- Created political and current affairs broadcasting
- Narrowcasting – from rally to the sofa, crowd to 1 to 1 intimacy
- Executive & Producer in Radio & TV – one of few senior women
- Pioneered studio formats in politics and current affairs broadcasting we take for granted today
- Coverage of 1950 General Election was a first,
- 1955 relaunched 'Panorama' in new format with Richard Dimbleby, later Robin Day as lead presenter
- Other firsts - launch of nightly news magazine 'Tonight', and 'Monitor' dedicated to the Arts
- Built a team of producers and reporters, the 'Goldie Boys'
- Her key word was 'Balance'

'One of the most influential of television's pioneers'



© National Portrait Gallery



Richard Dimbleby – first battlefield reporter

- Concept of live broadcast coverage on the ground
- Left school at 18, worked for family paper *Richmond and Twickenham Times*.
- Joined BBC 1936 as first news ‘observer’
- 1939 BBC’s first war correspondent, went to France with BEF, 8th Army, D-Day
- Flew and broadcast from Lancaster bomber & pathfinder raids
- 1945 broadcasts from Belsen
- General Election specials
- Commentates on many state events
- Presents *Panorama* 1955
- Roving reporter on *Down Your Way*



Avro Lancaster



© National Portrait Gallery



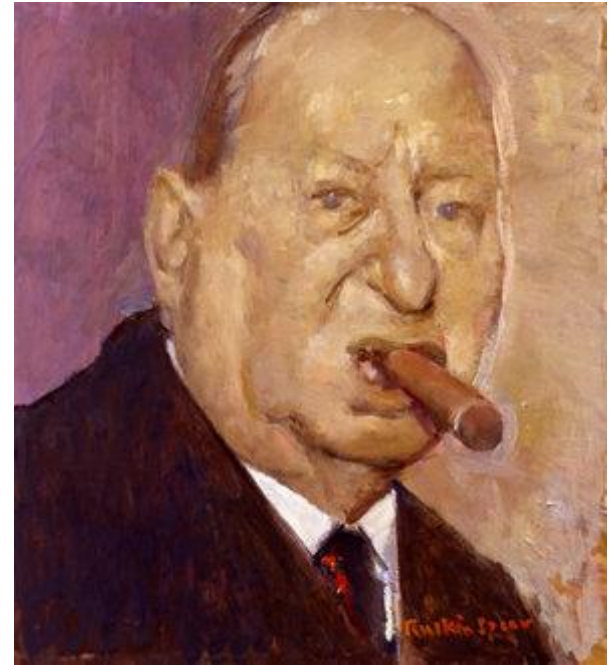
© Imperial War Museum



© Getty

Lew Grade – the first TV impresario

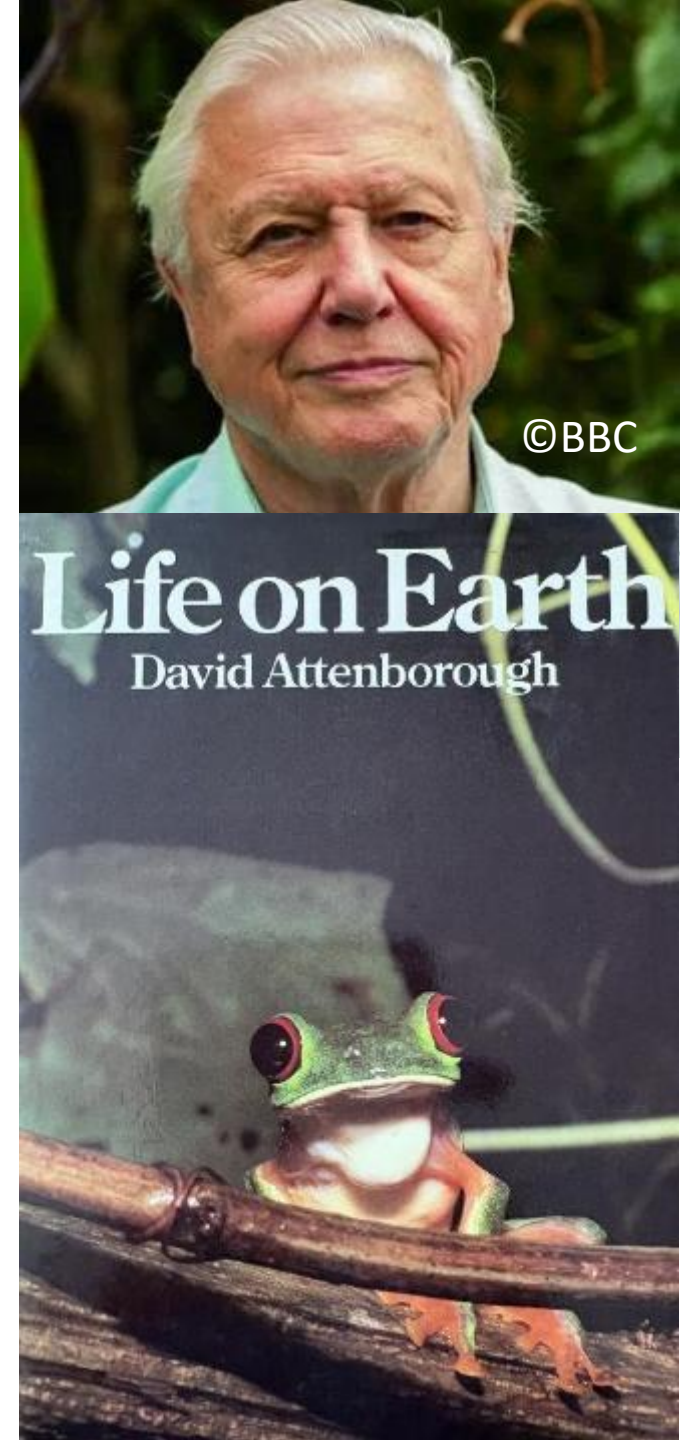
- Brought competition to broadcasting – challenge to BBC,
- Enabled by creation of the Independent Television Authority
- Born **Lev Winogradsky** Ukranian born British media impresario
- 1954 moves into television production founded Incorporated Television Company (ITC) to distribute programmes
- Larger than life figure, cigars, Rolls-Royces, plutocrat image
- Promoter of successful TV programmes to UK and US market – eg Adventures of Robin Hood, Thunderbirds, Muppet Show, The Prisoner
- Director of Associated Television ATV – Midlands regional broadcaster
- Invested in feature film production, but several mega box office failures caused him to lose control of ITC
- Ultimately ATV failed after losing its ITV franchise
- Set the pace for the modern plurality of TV and today's multi-media



Sir David Attenborough- Life on Earth

- Iconic broadcaster of natural history – created the genre
- Travelled the planet to bring nature into our homes
- 1952 joins BBC as Talk Producer Natural History
- 1954 Zoo Quest, 1957 joins BBC Natural History Unit
- Multiple series of programmes, restless to improve
- Commercially important, global reach
- Controller as BBC 2 moved into colour 1965 – 1970
- Appeared and won awards in B+W, Colour, HD, 4K & 3D
- Freelance broadcaster still working today

He's the full package: voice, script, images, 'wow' factor



I can guarantee that a similar presentation a decade from now will be completely different

- A new world of broadcasting
- Massive convergence internet, computer, mobile, terrestrial, satellite
- Streamers with traditional radio and TV
- Free to air and subscription media
- Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, Automation & Robotics
- Consumers also creators – YouTube, Instagram, Tik Tok
- The world of the influencer
- Democratic and Oligarchical at the same time



Next top 10?
US & Global Owners of
streamers, cable & social media



Lachlan Murdoch



Demis Hassibis



Sergey Brin



Larry Page



Mark Randolph



Next top 10?

US & Global Owners of
streamers, cable & social media

Elon Musk



Reed Hastings



Jensen Huang



Sundar Pichai



Satya Nadella



Tim Cook



Jeff Bezos



Mark Zuckerberg



If liberty

means anything at all

it means the right to tell people

what they do not want

to hear

BBC HD Preview



BBC HD

1080 lines

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<https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/research/heritage-trail/>



FROM 1923 TO 1932
THE STUDIOS AND OFFICES OF
THE BRITISH BROADCASTING COMPANY
AND ITS SUCCESSOR
THE BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION
WERE IN THIS BUILDING

<https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/research/heritage-trail/>







MARCONI HOUSE

Within this building Marconi's
Wireless Telegraph Company Limited
operated their famous broadcasting
station 2.L.O. from May 11th to
November 14th 1922 when it became
the first station of the British
Broadcasting Company.

The first pre-announced broadcast
of public entertainment
took place two years earlier when
Dame Nellie Melba sang from Marconi's
Chelmsford Works on June 15th 1920.



