

# John Logie Baird

1888-1946



## Famous for:

- Inventing the first working television
- Later development of colour and stereoscopic television.

John Logie Baird was an engineer and inventor. Known as 'The Father of Television', he is most famous for being the first person to demonstrate a working television.

# John Logie Baird (1888-1946)

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## Inventiveness

Born in Helensburgh on the west coast of Scotland, John was the fourth and youngest child of the Rev John and Jessie Baird.

He showed early signs of ingenuity by setting up a telephone exchange to connect his house to those of his friends near by. His first interest in television came in 1903 after he read a German book on the photoelectric properties of selenium.

## Working in wartime

Baird graduated from the Royal Technical College in Glasgow – now Strathclyde University – soon after the outbreak of the First World War.

Because of chronic ill-health, which was to plague him throughout his life, he was not accepted for military service. For a short time he worked for the Clyde Valley Electrical Power Company, before starting a small business manufacturing and marketing a water-absorbent sock. He then decided to move abroad.

## Life in Trinidad

Baird sailed for Port of Spain, Trinidad in November 1919.

Realising that the island teemed with citrus fruit and sugar, he set up a jam factory.

Unfortunately the local insect life either ran off with the sugar or landed in the hot vats of boiling preserve.

## Experimentation with television

Baird returned to Britain in September 1920, and after a brief spell in business in London, he started to experiment with television.

In Hastings in 1924 he transmitted the image of a Maltese cross over the distance of 10 feet.

Baird's first public demonstration of television was in 1925, in Selfridge's shop in London.

The breakthrough came in October 1925 when Baird achieved television pictures with light and shade (half-tones), making them much clearer.

He demonstrated these to invited members of the Royal Institution in January 1926. The pictures measured only 3.5 x 2 inches.

## BBC transmissions

In 1928 Baird sent television pictures from London to New York by short-wave radio. He also demonstrated television in colour, and developed a video recording system which he called 'phonovision'.

In 1929 the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) sent out experimental television transmissions. At first Baird had to pay the BBC to transmit his images. In 1930 the Baird company brought out the world's first mass produced television set, called 'The Televisor'.

The BBC began using his system for the first public television service in 1932, before switching in 1937 to the Marconi-EMI version. In July 1937 the Royal Society of Edinburgh awarded Baird an Honorary Fellowship.

## Colour and 3D television

At the age of 43, John Logie Baird married South African pianist Margaret Albu in New York. The couple had two children – Diana and Malcolm.

During the Second World War, Baird continued to fund his own research. His achievements included high-definition colour and 3D television, and a system for sending messages very rapidly as television images.

Baird died at home in Bexhill-on-Sea on 14 June 1946, and was buried in Helensburgh.

### Did you know?

While living in Trinidad, John Logie Baird and a friend caught a giant locust in their bungalow. They kept it in a bird cage and fed it on grass, whisky and soda.

Taken from the National Library of Scotland's Science Hall of Fame  
<http://digital.nls.uk/scientists/biographies/index.html>



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