

In this article specially written for the Helensburgh Heritage Trust website, Trust president Professor Malcolm Baird, son of TV pioneer John Logie Baird, recalls his childhood and student days.



London

I WAS born on July 2 1935 at the family home at 3 Crescent Wood Road in Sydenham, a south eastern suburb of London.

A mile or so away was the historic Crystal Palace, built in 1851 for the Great Exhibition which marked the zenith of British industrialism. It had originally been set up in Hyde Park and it was later shifted piecemeal to Sydenham and reassembled.

From 1932 onwards, part of the Crystal palace housed the laboratories of Baird Television Ltd., until the building was destroyed in a disastrous fire in November 1936.

My father's title in Baird Television Ltd. was managing director, but in 1932 the company was taken over by Gaumont British Pictures and he became only a token administrator. Nevertheless he received a salary of £ 4000 per year, this being about 20 times the average working wage.

He spent most of his time doing technical work on colour television at his small private laboratory, with his assistant Paul Reveley. The lab was located in the old coach house next to our home, so it might be said that I was born and raised in an atmosphere of science and technology.

However I have no recollection of the laboratory in those years. Access was strictly forbidden because of the high voltages, fragile cathode ray tubes and other hazards.

My time was mainly spent in the spacious garden which contained my main focus of activity, a sandpit; I was provided with a toy spade and a wheelbarrow. Through the calm air of that suburban garden I would hear the melodic strains of Chopin and Mendelssohn as my mother practiced on her Steinway grand piano.

Cornwall

Everything changed with the outbreak of World War Two in September 1939. British television was abruptly closed down and Baird Television Ltd. found itself with no market for its receivers. My father's salary ceased abruptly.

John Logie Baird — by his son

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