

BBC TV Scotland and STV first shows

Written by Professor Malcolm Baird - Last Updated Tuesday, 26 February 2013 17:33

Professor Malcolm Baird, son of TV inventor John Logie Baird and president of Helensburgh Heritage Trust, remembers the first broadcast.



BBC TV Scotland opened in a wave of optimism on Friday March 14 1952, just a few weeks after the Queen's accession.

At that time I was a teenager on a scholarship at Fettes College, studying physics and chemistry and trying to avoid being maimed on the rugby field.

The evening hours were mainly taken up by a study period — known as prep — followed by a do-it-yourself supper and lights-out at 10:15 p.m.sharp. On March 14, there came a short break from this spartan routine.

Television was to be started in Scotland from a new transmitter at Kirk o'Shotts. The BBC kindly invited the family of John Logie Baird to the inaugural broadcast from its Edinburgh studio.

My mother declined, but my sister Diana and my aunt Annie Baird, John Logie Baird's sister,

came over from Helensburgh in a hired car for the occasion.

I was given an evening leave of absence from Fettes and boarded a No.24 tramcar which slowly groaned its way up the steep hill from Comely Bank to the city centre.

The BBC's new television studios, grandly called Broadcasting House, were located at 5 Queen Street. The invitation had specified "Dress -- Highland or Dinner Jacket".

Guests included Scotland's aristocratic and cultural elite (Highland attire), plus a handful of London-based BBC executives (Dinner Jackets) who had ventured to their new outpost in what they saw as the frozen North.

In the main studio, the VIP audience was in the focus of live television cameras and the atmosphere was tense. The pictures on the monitor screens were small and horizontally lined, in black and white, but they reminded me of Robert Burns's lines:

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!

In his speech opening the transmitter, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Rt Hon James Stuart, found the time to put in a good word for John Logie Baird. This was followed by a Prayer of Dedication by the Very Rev Charles L.Warr, Dean of the Thistle and Chapel Royal.

After a Vote of Thanks by James Miller, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, the stage was taken over by the first live television entertainment from Scotland: a performance by the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, with Tim Wright and his band.

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