



# HELENSBURGH HERITAGE TRUST



## Newsletter – March 2026

The days are definitely getting longer and that means that our series of winter talks will come to an end at the end of this month – with another talk not to be missed! Julian Hill will be telling us about local geology on Wednesday 25th March.

**Subscriptions.** 1st April is the start of the Heritage Trust's subscription year.

***If you pay by direct debit,*** you have nothing to do! Around the middle of this month you will receive an email from GoCardless warning you that your direct debit will be collected by them on or shortly after 1st April.

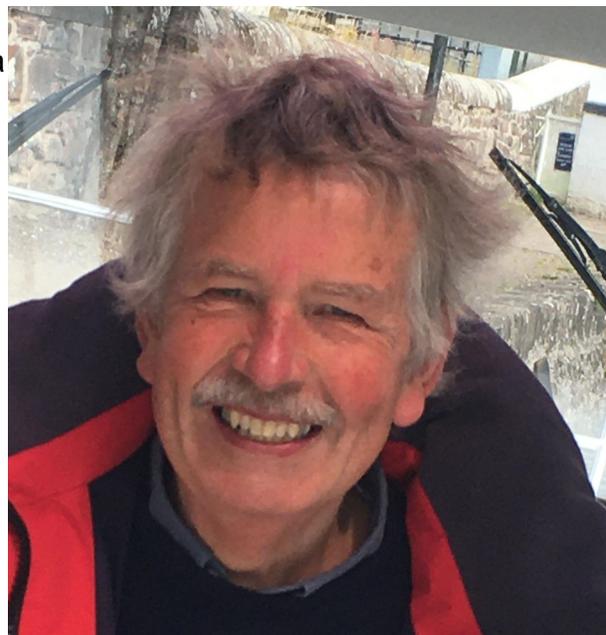
***If you pay by standing order,*** it would make the treasurer's life very much easier if you were to change to direct debit. You can do this by clicking on this link – <https://pay.gocardless.com/BRT0003JAEAAZ9V> - and if you have problems in setting it up, just contact Stewart Noble on [snoble84@gmail.com](mailto:snoble84@gmail.com) or 07944 176915 for help.

Some of you who pay by standing order should recently have received an email from Stewart. If you have, could you please just make his life easier by doing what he asks in the email?

**New Trustee.** We are delighted to say that Roddy MacRae has volunteered to become a trustee and has duly been co-opted; his co-option will have to be ratified at the next Annual General Meeting.

Roddy is originally from Newtonmore and worked as a GP in Banff before retiring from the medical profession to Helensburgh in 2000. He was actively involved in the Banff Preservation Society and Banff Museum

We are still looking for other trustees, and in particular for a new treasurer – so please,



don't be backward about coming forward!

**Baird TV Centenary.** The invention of television by John Logie Baird took place on 2 October 1925 and the first public demonstration was 3 months later on 26 January 1926.



The Baird TV Centenary Trust is working away hard on a programme of events to celebrate the centenary. The easy way to find out what is on is to go to their website which is [jlbtv100.org](http://jlbtv100.org) – this also contains a lot of information about the man himself, as well as a trail round Helensburgh pointing out the places and objects connected with him.

In particular there will be an exhibition from 9 to 27 April in the Burgh Yard (formerly Rossdhu Place, close to Domino's Pizzas in

West Princes Street). Volunteers are wanted to man this exhibition, and **the organisers would be delighted if Heritage Trust members could help. If you wish to be involved, please contact Chris Sanders by phoning 01436 678028 or by email to [chrislinda298@gmail.com](mailto:chrislinda298@gmail.com)**

**Death of Douglas Brown 1950 to 2025.** Douglas was an important member of the informal group at the University of Strathclyde which, in the 1970s, had started to study the life and work of John Logie Baird. He also spoke several times at Heritage Trust meetings.

In a tribute to him Malcolm Baird, our Honorary President, writes that Douglas "helped to dispel my father's stereotypical image as an eccentric and impoverished character who had created a primitive system of mechanical television which soon became obsolete. Douglas's detailed research on the later part of the Baird story has been spelled out in two books:

1. Images Across Space – the Electronic Imaging of Baird Television (Middlesex University Teaching Resources 2009).
2. The Three Dimensions of John Logie Baird (Radio Society of Great Britain 2012).

"These two books are important not only for their technical content but also for their accounts of the company called Baird Television Ltd. In the 1930s it had several hundred employees and large premises in and around the Crystal Palace in South-East London.

"In closing this tribute, I worry a bit about whether Douglas's books have had the public attention they deserve. They rank highly among the books which have been written about my father."

**The Centenary of John Logie Baird's Birth.** This took place in 1988 and at that time Robert Ryan's predecessor as chairman of Helensburgh Heritage Trust was Rev David Clark who had served for 28 years as the Minister of what is now Helensburgh Parish Church. Last October David wrote down some of his memories of that time.

*Given the fact that JLB was a son of the manse of the West Parish Church, later St. Bride's and later united with the Kirk in the Square, I found myself quite closely involved in arranging the various events to mark the occasion in 1988. As minister of what was then known as The West Kirk of Helensburgh it seemed natural that the church should be the focus of at least some of the commemorative events.*

*Up to that point there wasn't all that much in the way of physical commemoration of JLB. There were plaques on the former Council Chambers and the house at 121 West Argyle Street where he was born – and, of course, the rather splendid bronze bust near the war memorial in Hermitage Park, later moved to the sea front at the foot of William Street.*

*We decided early on to commission a stained glass window in the church – and we had the place for it, with a plain translucent glass window in the south transept just asking for something to make use of the sunlight which streams in there. Approaches were made to a range of TV-related companies, both broadcasters and*



*manufacturers, and the donations received were more than adequate to fund the creation by artist Arthur Speirs of the four light window showing Baird, his background, inventions and achievements. The second window shows Baird himself looking at a lens and contemplating its opportunities. We prepared gift cards of the window to mark the occasion, using the words of Renaissance mystic George Herbert :*

*'A man that looks on glass  
On it may stay his eye;  
Or, if he pleaseth, through it pass  
And then the heaven espy.'*

*A centenary church service was arranged at which the window was unveiled by JLB's widow Margaret Baird. This service was held on Sunday 14 August 1988, the day after the actual centenary birthday. Leading figures from the world of television were invited to attend and the church was packed for the service. The sermon was preached by the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Right Reverend Professor James Whyte. Taking texts from the apocalyptic books of Ezekiel and Revelation he delivered an important challenge to the TV elite before him to handle carefully the opportunities of the digital age which were only just opening up at the time. He reminded all present that television was a medium capable of being used for the benefit of society but also attended by risks of less favourable directions. The bible*

lessons were read by JLB's son Malcolm Baird and leading Scottish news presenter Mary Marquis. Prayers were led by myself and the Rev. Robin Buchanan-Smith, a director of STV. A video recording of this service still exists, has been reformatted and is available to the Heritage Trust.



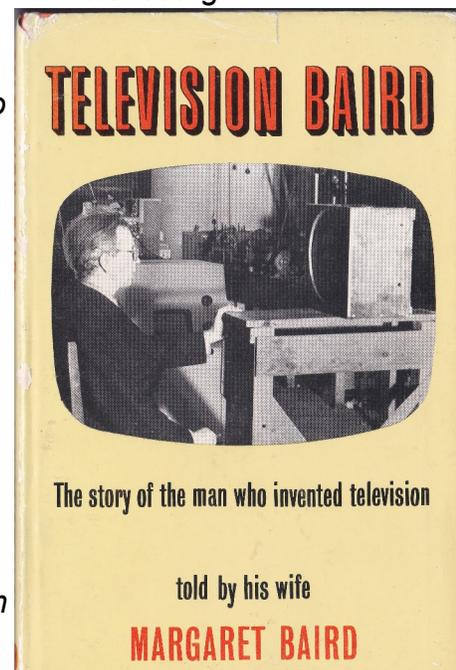
JLB and Margaret at St Tropez 1939

*In order to prepare for the service I spent some time with Mrs. Baird, then aged 81, and visited her at her home in Hamilton. I have two vivid recollections of my visits. The first was that her modest home had rather been taken over by boxes of yellow-covered books. 'Television Baird' had been written by Margaret Baird in 1973 - her own memoirs of life with the famous inventor. South African born, she was a classical pianist who met JLB when she was invited to play at an early programme. They married in 1931 and she was almost twenty years his junior. It seems that the publishers had decided to clear out their remaining stock of the book and Margaret Baird was the unwitting recipient. I accepted her invitation to take some and made off with a box which I happily distributed around Helensburgh.*

*Rentals, who by this time owned the Baird brand name, of a large box containing a new video recorder (younger readers – ask your parents!). The problem was that she really didn't have much idea what to do with it. So I found myself down on my hands and knees in the front room of the widow of the man who invented television trying to explain how it worked and what all the various wires and switches were supposed to do. As if I knew! It was a delight to meet this charming lady.*

*In addition to unveiling the window at the Centenary Service she made a second appearance in The West Kirk a few weeks later when the BBC arrived to mark Baird's centenary by recording 'Songs of Praise'. She was interviewed by the presenter Ian Gall, spoke of her life with JLB indicating that his favourite hymn had been 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty' which the assembled congregation then sang as part of the programme. Among other contributors were locals Norman Glen, Walter Blair, Margaret Nicol and*

*My other memory was of a subsequent visit, soon after, to find that Margaret Baird was the recipient, from Radio*



*the Rev Ian Mackenzie, Head of Religious Broadcasting at BBC Scotland and who stayed in Glenan Gardens.*

*This was quite an event and huge BBC Outside Broadcast vans filled the corner of Colquhoun Square. In those days recording of such programmes was a lengthy and sometimes laborious affair with cameras and microphones having to be moved around and repositioned. It took hours. We started in daylight and finished in the dark. This did not suit Margaret Baird terribly well! A lifelong smoker, she required at least two cigarette breaks in the course of the proceedings. But the recording was finally completed, broadcast a few weeks later. Again, it has been reformatted from the original video and is available to anyone interested,*

*This was not the only TV programme to come from Helensburgh and The West Kirk in 1988 in commemoration of JLB. Around the same time ITV's 'Highway' team descended on the town, the abiding memory of which, for me, is of Harry Secombe standing in the rain at Rhu Marina in a trench coat and white wellies belting out the psalm tune 'Old 100'!*

*Now, 37 years later (the age JLB was when he unveiled his invention) TV and the related industries have moved on in ways unimagined even then. Helensburgh remains rightly proud of its most famous son and the present centenary events express that well.*

**Robert Thorburn photos of Glen Fruin.** The February meeting of the Heritage Trust consisted of a display of these excellent photos which were taken between 1908 and 1912. Some of those at the meeting were interested in perhaps acquiring some of the photos, and we shall have to give thought to how this might done – so watch this space! Meantime, just to whet your appetites, here are a couple of the photos.



**Newsletter written by Stewart Noble  
Treasurer, Helensburgh Heritage Trust  
Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation No. SC 024603  
[www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk](http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk)**