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From Birth to Teens: TV's Earliest Years at BFI Southbank



Throughout September, **BFI Southbank** will celebrate the 75th anniversary of a landmark in Television history that saw Britain deliver the world's first high-definition, regular public television service. Together with **The Alexandra Palace Television Society**, the BFI will host a short season of early public demonstration films, plays, and documentaries plus rarely seen extracts from early films and stills on display.

In the 1930's, there was feverish activity across the globe as inventors, technicians and entrepreneurs sought to create the world's first public television service. Great strides were being made in America, Russia, Germany, Japan and France, but it was Britain who emerged first. Although experimental services had been operating since the 1920's, it was in November 1936 that the **BBC** launched the world's first high-definition, regular public television service following test transmissions at Radiolympia in August of that year.

The Television Age had begun.

Television wasn't invented by an individual but by the progressive and scientific minds of many, though there is no doubt that, in the UK, it was popularised by the Scottish inventor **John Logie Baird**. His startling experiments made newspaper headlines and both him and his invention household names. When the BBC service launched in 1936, transmissions alternated between Baird's mechanical system and Marconi EMI's electronic equipment. Eventually the Marconi system was preferred, but Baird's role in bringing TV to the public eye was of great importance in the development of a fully fledged public service.

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Thanks to Robert Seatter
and John Escombe at the BBC and



**Simon Vaughan from the
Alexandra Palace Television Society**

The Fools on the Hill

BBC 1986. Dir David Giles. With Shaughan Seymour, Nicholas Farrell, Caroline Embling, Jill Balcon, Nicola King. 72min
Made as part of the BBC's 50th Anniversary Celebration of Television in 1986, Jack Rosenthal's charming play – based on anecdotes and actual events – is an affectionate tribute to the early days of television, with a story which centres on the scenes life at Alexandra Palace during the build-up to the opening of the BBC TV service in 1936.

+ Television Comes to London

BBC 1936. Dir Dallas Bower 19min
A demonstration film highlighting the programmes on offer to the first television viewers.
Thu 8 Sept 18:10 NFT2

Georgian Television

c90min
An amazing glimpse into the early years of British television with a specially compiled selection of most of the surviving (non-news) footage from the small screen, prior to the Coronation in 1953. Highlights include George Bernard Shaw on his 90th birthday (1946), Variety in Sepia featuring Adelaide Hall (from 1947), an experimental tele-recording of radio's flagship comedy show of the time ITMA (*It's That Man Again*) and scenes from the 1948 Olympics.
Wed 14 Sept 18:30 NFT2

Film and TV

c90min
Taking a look at the new medium of television through the eyes of film with extracts and whole segments from a variety of feature films, shorts and newsreels whose view was not always a rosy one. From reports from Radiolympia, via fearful warnings on the consequences of the one-eyed devil in the corner; to fanciful visions of an all-consuming, television dominated society – with the viewer left to decide whether such a world would be a dystopia or utopia.
Tue 20 Sept 20:40 NFT2

Live from Alexandra Palace

c90min
The Alexandra Palace Television Society and the BFI partner up to present a rare selection of early film footage and stills (the famous Campbell footage), both in colour and black-and-white, from pre- and post-war television. A special, newly-created compilation of pre-war material will be shown, in which rare footage has been married to existing sound recordings of the period. This will be followed by an audiovisual presentation of precious material. With glimpses of Greer Garson, Tommy Cooper and others, this is an unmissable event for those interested in the earliest days of broadcast TV.
Wed 28 Sept 18:00 NFT2

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £9.50, concs £6.75 Members pay £1.50 less on any ticket. Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment

BFI Filmstore

The BFI Filmstore is stocked and staffed by BFI experts with over 1,200 book titles and 1,000 DVDs to choose from, including hundreds of acclaimed books and DVDs produced by the BFI.

The benugo bar & kitchen

Eat, drink and be merry in panoramic daylight. benugo's décor is contemporary, brightly lit and playful with a lounge space, bar and dining area. The place to network, hang out, unpack a film, savour the best of Modern British or sip on a cocktail.

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

*** PICTURE DESK ***

**A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank screenings
can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank /**