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## Shopping in the 1930s

Killing little hats and bands that play all day

## 'From Baird to Worse'

A televisual History

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The National Library of Scotland 1925 to 2005

Notice  
Bird's Custard goes  
like summer cream  
with stewed, tinned  
or bottled fruits.

# Shopping in the 1930s

Killing little hats and bands that play all day

IN THE YEARS before the Second World War, going to the shops was well established in Scotland as a pleasurable activity, especially for those who lived in towns. Times were difficult for shops selling luxury goods, but there were many places to go shopping. In the cities and larger towns, department stores were enjoying their heyday, and there were numerous multiple stores with branches nationwide such as Boots and Woolworths. For those who preferred more traditional shops there was a wide range of small specialist and general outlets to be enjoyed. Shopping was a safe, sociable pastime, and one that could be enjoyed all year round. For many, visiting the shops had become a way of life, whether or not they had any specific purchases to make. Although shopping particularly appealed to women, as the editor of the *Lady's Pictorial*

Olive M. Geddes

In 1912, the *Lady's Pictorial* described shopping as 'almost' a national pastime. The 'almost' looks quaint nowadays, with shopping established as a major activity in everyone's life. To celebrate this fascinating slice of social history, the Library's winter exhibition traces changes in shopping habits over the course of a century. In this article, Olive Geddes dips into a 1930s journal and finds out about the Edinburgh shopping experience of that era.

observed, it was also attractive to men such as Arthur Birnie, a lecturer in Economic History at Edinburgh University.

Edinburgh was Arthur's world. His diaries detail the daily activities of a comfortable, middle-class family, living an unexceptional life in Craigmillar Park in the 1930s. Arthur writes, 'I love Edinburgh, and would not choose to be anywhere else, though [] could always do with a little more salary.' There is much talk in his diaries of family life with his French wife, Yvonne, and their daughters, Monica and Yvonne (referred to as Yvonne II to differentiate her from her mother), and of Mrs Birnie's tempestuous relationship with their live-in maid, Chrissie. The family's recreations and social activities, from bridge and badminton evenings to visits to the cinema and St George's West church, all feature. There are also numerous accounts of regular expeditions to the shops. Arthur and Yvonne Birnie often went shopping together. Joint shopping expeditions by men and women were not

**Shopping in George Street, a 1926 promotional booklet enticing shoppers to Edinburgh's George Street.**



new. *The Lady's Pictorial* commented that men 'even do much of their shopping nowadays beneath the same roofs as their wives and sisters'. Male interest in shopping was due at least in part 'to the fact that so much attention is paid to men's wearing apparel and that it is so very much more attractive in this country than in France, so dainty, in fact, that even women stop before hosiers' windows to admire shirts, ties, socks and so on, all ensuited in the daintiest of colours'.

Being appropriately dressed was important then as now. Yvonne was particularly concerned that her husband be 'well-turned out'. He needed to 'look the part' in his professional life, at the kirk, and socially. The Birmies patronised a range of shops. Arthur bought 'an expensive pair of white trousers, a white pullover ... and a pair of grey gloves' at Stark's on South Bridge, and went to 'King's on North Bridge for a hat and tie', but their first resort was usually one of Edinburgh's department stores.

In Edinburgh, Jenners was the place to go. It was established on Princes Street in 1838, selling 'every prevailing British and Parisian fashion, in silks, shawls, fancy dresses, ribbons, lace, hosiery and every description of linen drapery and haberdashery.' The store prospered in spite of a disastrous fire in 1892. Patrick Thomson's on the Bridges was another favourite haunt and it was to these two stores that the Birmies turned first to augment their wardrobes. On 24 February 1936 Arthur records, 'Yvonne has decided I shall wear black coat and striped trousers on Sundays, so went to Patrick Thomson's and ordered 2 coats and waistcoats on approbation.'

Yvonne, too, was anxious to be suitably attired. When George IV died later that year, she 'went out to buy mourning clothes. Eventually appeared in black velvet skirt and black jumper'. Although husband and wife went shopping together, there were times when decisions as to purchases had to be made alone. 'Went shopping with her [Yvonne] to Princes Street, she trying on a dress. As gentlemen are not permitted to be present when ladies are trying on dresses I sat in the car.'

The clothing industry had been revolutionised during the nineteenth century, in no small part by the introduction of the sewing machine. Singer's factory opened in Glasgow in 1856 and sewing machines soon became readily available. By the 1900s, both



## Greensmith Downes' for Christmas Gifts

ESTABLISHED in George Street for over eighty years, Greensmith Downes have always specialised in the production and distribution of the finest Scotch Knitted Wear, and these productions now have a reputation which is practically world-wide.

Extensive alterations were made in the firm's premises, and these now form one of the architectural features of modern George Street, as well as representing, in interior structure and fitting, the very last word in artistic merit and practical efficiency.

Under these circumstances Christmas shopping may be conducted at Greensmith Downes' under the most pleasant conditions.

The following are a few suggestions for useful Christmas gifts from the various departments:—

### LADIES' DEPARTMENT

Combinations	7/11 to 28/8
Jackets	25/6 to 28/8
Suits	30/11 to 28/8
Stocks Hats	5/11 to 6/6
Antiseptic Powders	8/6 to 12/6
Vanishing Cream	2/6 to 3/6
Handkerchiefs	6/6 to 12/6
Flannel Dresses	11/11 to 16/6
Woolen Coats	18/6 to 28/8
Woolen Suits	8/11 to 20/8
Dark Hosiery	8/6 to 10/8
Cardigan Coats	8/6 to 12/6
The New Sweaters	5/6 to 12/11

### GENTLEMEN'S DEPARTMENT

Scarves	12/6 to 42/-
Handkerchiefs	10/6 per dozen
Do	10/6 each
Business Suits	8/6
Five Buttons	3/6 to 10/6
Pyjamas	12/6 to 15/6
Knitted Jackets	21/6 to 40/6
Knitted Waistcoats	10/6 to 20/8
Shirts	21/6 to 45/8
Drawings Coats	21/- to 35/6
Coats	12/6 to 28/8
Suits	3/6 to 21/-
Kilts and Ties	10/6 to 22/6

and Many Other Goods and Values. Arrivals special from 2/11 to 10/6.

133, 143 GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH

**CHRISTMAS FARE**  
for 1926—*The Pick of the Market*

WILLIAM ORR, Ltd.  
440 GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH

Advert for Greensmith Downes' 1926 Christmas offers from *Shopping in George Street*.

Advert from *Shopping in George Street* for butcher William Orr's 'Pick of the Market'.

ready-made and home-made clothes became easier to make and cheaper. Men's outdoor clothes were among the first mass-produced garments available over the counter. The range gradually increased, and soon even garments traditionally made at home, such as underwear, were being machine produced. By the 1920s, the range of women's clothing in the shops was wide enough for fashion to be considered as well as style and price. However, buying clothes for those going out to work was a priority and the thrifty housewife made much of her own clothing.

Yvonne Birnie made garments both for herself and the girls, going to the shops to buy the materials. On 5 November 1935, Arthur wrote, 'Gave Yvonne £3 to buy material for a new dress.' As a housewife, she was also expected to knit for the family. Yvonne's knitting needles and wool came from specialist wool shops. Arthur writes of a tram ride 'down town to Smith's, the wool shop in Frederick St., one of the busiest shops in town. Always full of women. Swarms of assistants. Yvonne chose some wool for a jumper taking something like 20 minutes to select the colour, a kind of coral.' In the 1930s, small shops still predominated, but the emergence during the mid-nineteenth century of department stores selling a wide range of goods had transformed the shopping experience. Shopkeepers now realised that their function was not only to supply goods, and that they could also influence what their customers bought. People could be persuaded how they spent their money.

From the eighteenth century, high-class retailers in particular had become skilled at enticing customers into their shops. In retail then as today, footfall was crucial to the success or failure of any shop. The first fixed shops tended to be open-fronted booths such as the Luckenbooths erected in the late Middle Ages in Edinburgh's High Street. Those selling goods would simply lean out and 'cry their wares' to passers-by, in much the same manner as stallholders in the traditional marketplace. With the introduction of plate glass windows this was no longer an option, and shopkeepers had to find other means of persuading potential customers to enter their premises.

The solution lay as much in the shops themselves and their staff as in the goods for sale. Tempting selections of sale goods, special lines and new stock were presented in eye-catching window displays. Inside was the promise of more delights to come. Shops such as Jenners were elegantly laid out often with grand staircases and plush viewing galleries. Staff were polite and smartly dressed in their uniforms. To venture inside these shops was to enter a different world.



Pattern book for Weldon's Fair Isle Jumpers

Department stores evolved from general draper's stores such as Duncan McLaren's in Edinburgh. With their large-scale operations, these shops increasingly stocked a wide range of materials and accessories for home dressmaking and other items for women's outfits, from hats and gloves to hosiery and lace. Many also sold household goods, furniture and carpets, all at fixed prices. Department stores were usually first to introduce new technology: cash registers, pneumatic tubes to dispatch orders and payments, and escalators to transport customers were all features. Like the general draper's store, their market was the cost-conscious middle-class customer anxious to confirm her (and it usually was her) gentility. The style of retailing of the new larger stores was also different from that of the small high-class shop. Customer service was still of great importance but it was less personal. Unlike more traditional stores where goods were kept out of reach in closed drawers and boxes, everything was attractively laid out on open display with clearly marked prices. Browsing was actively encouraged and shoppers could handle goods without being challenged by overbearing staff.

To further encourage customers, prices, especially of new ranges or discounted items, were advertised in the local press, and mail order catalogues were introduced. Just about anything could be obtained for the customer with funds. Although some small shops saw department stores and multiples as rivals and complained of unfair competition, others welcomed them as they brought customers into the High Street.

Then as now, where people did their shopping and what they bought reflected their position in society. There were shops for rich and poor. Advertisements were a

good indicator of the target clientele. *Country Life* magazine for January 1922 includes an advert for the drapers McEwan and Co of Perth, promoting 'Gowns for the South and the Riviera' – with the implication being that their customers holidayed on the Riviera. This was aspirational shopping for the upwardly mobile middle classes.

Other shops aimed to sell to the less well to do. These shops, such as Lipton's grocery stores, tended to sell food and essential household goods rather than luxuries. Their advertisements stressed the cheapness of their wares and the length of their opening hours rather than the quality of the goods stocked.

How people paid for goods was also an indicator of social status. The middle classes generally paid in cash and the wealthy expected credit, while the poor had little money and needed credit to eke out what they had. 'Cash drapery stores' such as Patrick Thomson's, which advertised goods for cash at fixed prices, were firmly aimed at the middle classes. Co-operative stores were for the working class. Their goods were usually not the cheapest, but the share of the Society's profits or 'dividend' paid to all members made them popular.

Arthur and Yvonne clearly enjoyed their visits to department stores in the 1930s. These were attractive, safe environments where even a lone female shopper might feel comfortable. In this, department stores in Edinburgh, as elsewhere in Britain, had followed the lead of Selfridges, which was opened in London in 1909 by the American retailer, Harry Selfridge. His store boasted a rooftop tea garden, luncheon halls and a smokers' lounge, together with a picture gallery, hairdressing salon, library, and even a post office.

Shops were no longer places to go simply to make purchases, but also popular meeting places, with restaurants where shoppers might eat, drink and relax. Arthur Birnie writes that at Patrick Thomson's, where a small orchestra played diners' requests in the Palm Court Restaurant, he 'met Mrs Kay and her daughters at the door. Great palaver. Went and had tea.' Those moving in the same social circles patronised the same shops and so often met friends and acquaintances while out shopping, whether intentionally or not. This was particularly important for women. Just as men had their clubs where they might go to relax, meet friends and be pampered, so women went to the shops. Shops had become places to go, to see and be seen.

As shopping came to be seen as a leisure activity, so increasingly there was a distinction between buying everyday necessities and consumer goods. Some considered shopping for fashionable items for personal use indulgent, a charge often



Postcard advertising Patrick Thompson's department store on Edinburgh's North Bridge. The sender has written: 'Isn't this a lovely shop – a band plays all day.' Reproduced with the kind permission of Malcolm Cant.

levied at women. Arthur Birnie, however, appreciated his wife's attempts to be stylish. In 1935, he wrote 'Yvonne has bought a killing little summer hat. Only cost her 12sh 6d but she has fitted a flower to it and it looks exquisite.' Both had an eye for a bargain.

Buying presents for others was a means of countering the charge of over-indulging in shopping. Arthur and Yvonne went to Jenners together to buy a 'wristlet watch' for Monica on her birthday. On the same trip they bought a box of chocolates for Chrissie, the maid. Arthur ventured into Jenners alone in early December to look at a pearl necklace for Yvonne and order other presents.

While shopping for clothes and presents was a shared pleasure, for Arthur Birnie, the acquisition of books was usually savoured alone. Books featured large in Arthur's professional and personal life. His diaries record his various literary activities, from textbooks on economic history, to his attempts at writing a novel, and reading for pleasure. The new National Library was a source of reading matter, as were Boots on Princes Street, and an array of Edinburgh booksellers from Thin's to the shops and stalls in Haddington Place and on George IV Bridge.

Thin's was a favourite haunt. James Thin opened his bookshop on Infirmary Street in 1848, and soon became an Edinburgh institution. Arthur Birnie spent many a pleasant hour browsing among the bookshelves and was delighted by the personal attention given to regular customers.

24 August 1935. On [my] way home [I] was looking at the books in Thin's window, when a member of the family who is always to be seen in the front shop came out and told me my

book was selling very well. They had ordered a further supply, had sold at least 50 copies ... Was very glad to hear the news and grateful to Mr Thin for his kindness in telling me.

When he wanted to borrow books, it was to Boots on Princes Street that Arthur turned. Boots, the Chemists, began in Nottingham in 1849 selling herbal remedies and expanded rapidly in the late-nineteenth century. Their shops were initially aimed at working-class customers but in the mid 1890s they began to target the middle class with new stores and an extended selection of products ranging from stationery and toiletries to fancy goods and books. Boots Booklover's Library was established as a subscription library in over a hundred branches in the early 1900s. In March 1935 Arthur wrote, 'always enjoy spending an afternoon in Boots. Nothing I like better than rummaging the shelves of books, and then the people who come in are always interesting.' The Boots libraries closed in the mid 1960s.

Shopping for Arthur Birnie meant buying clothes, presents and books. There are only occasional references in his diary to purchases of foodstuffs. In the days before the supermarket and shopping mall and refrigeration and the domestic freezer, ushered in different ways to buy groceries, this was a daily task. 'Going for the messages' does not seem to have been part of Arthur's routine. When he does mention buying groceries, Chrissie the maid is unwell and his wife is away for the day. Arthur writes, 'Yvonne out. I was left in charge of the house. The day passed quietly. Did housework and went out for tomatoes.' Grocery shopping was a chore, and one Arthur was happy to leave to the women of the house.

For the Bimies, expeditions to the larger

stores to buy clothes and presents were pleasurable shared social experiences. Middle-class women in particular knew that when shopping they were likely to meet with friends and neighbours on the same errand. Conversations with fellow shoppers added to the attraction. Shopping often meant very different things to men and women. For many women, it offered a freedom they might not otherwise be able to enjoy. There was also a clear differentiation between shopping for necessities and shopping for consumer goods. While men might participate fully in certain shopping expeditions, when and where they went was on their terms. As the *Lady's Pictorial* commented in 1912, men were 'very much keener on shopping than they allow, or, perhaps even realise', but it was their womenfolk who took the real responsibility for shopping, in ensuring the household was provided with everyday necessities as well as participating in the more pleasurable experience of buying consumer goods.

## Note on sources

Arthur Birnie's diaries for the years 1906–09 and 1934–36 were presented to the National Library of Scotland by his family in 1994 as Acc.I 1018. The Library's Manuscript Collections include numerous diaries and journals of men and women from the eighteenth century to the present day. Arthur Birnie's diaries form part of the National Library of Scotland's winter 2005–06 exhibition *Sale of the Centuries: A Celebration of Shopping in Scotland*. Malcolm Cant's *Edinburgh Shops Past and Present* (2005), an anecdotal social history illustrated with over 200 pictures, is on sale in the National Library shop.

# 'From Baird to Worse'

## A Televisual History

**A** CENTURY AGO, television was no more than a fantastic idea, foreseen by H.G. Wells in his novel *The Sleeper Wakes*. In 1908 the Scottish physicist A. Campbell Swinton suggested that 'distant electric vision' could be achieved using cathode ray tubes, but he did not attempt to develop his idea practically and in 1924 he declared that it would be so much trouble to do so that it would hardly be worthwhile. In that same year, small news items began to appear in the popular press concerning television experiments, first in Hastings and then in London, by a young electrical engineer called John Logie Baird.

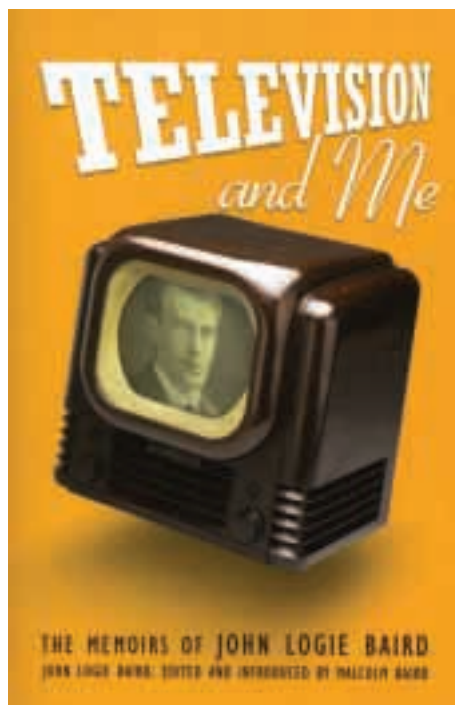
The public became fully aware of television in 1925. In March, Baird set up demonstrations in Selfridges department store, where shoppers queued up to see moving images traced out by a flickering neon lamp, viewed through a large rotating perforated disc known as the Nipkow disc. Simple shapes cut out of cardboard were placed in intense light in front of another rotating-disc apparatus with a photoelectric cell which acted as the camera. The weak electrical signals from the photocell were electronically amplified and sent to the neon lamp at the receiver disc.

In May 1925 Jack Buchanan, a rising theatrical star and an old friend of Baird from their schooldays in Helensburgh, sponsored a press luncheon at the fashionable Romano's restaurant in the Strand, to publicise Baird's experiments. Once again the Nipkow discs were put to work and the bemused pressmen tried to write up the show as best they could. Most of the reports were enthusiastic, but the *Daily Graphic* took a mocking tone: 'After lunch we were shown lots of pulleys and wheels and bits of cardboard, and told exactly how we were going to be able to see everything in future by wireless.'

The images were only the size of a business card and they contained just 30 lines of definition. Baird's biggest problem was the lack of any shades of grey (half tones), so that the human face appeared simply as an oval blob of light with black holes for the eyes and mouth. It was possible to see when the subject was opening and closing his mouth, but facial features could not be recognised. More light was needed. Baird also looked for ways to increase the amplification of the weak signal from the photocell. Making use of the

### Malcolm Baird

The first television image was achieved by the visionary scientist John Logie Baird in 1925, the same year the National Library of Scotland was founded. Eighty years on, the Library itself has a vision for increasing accessibility to its collections using the latest technology. With the dividing lines between internet, television and telephone disappearing, Malcolm Baird, the great inventor's son, looks back at the early days of television.



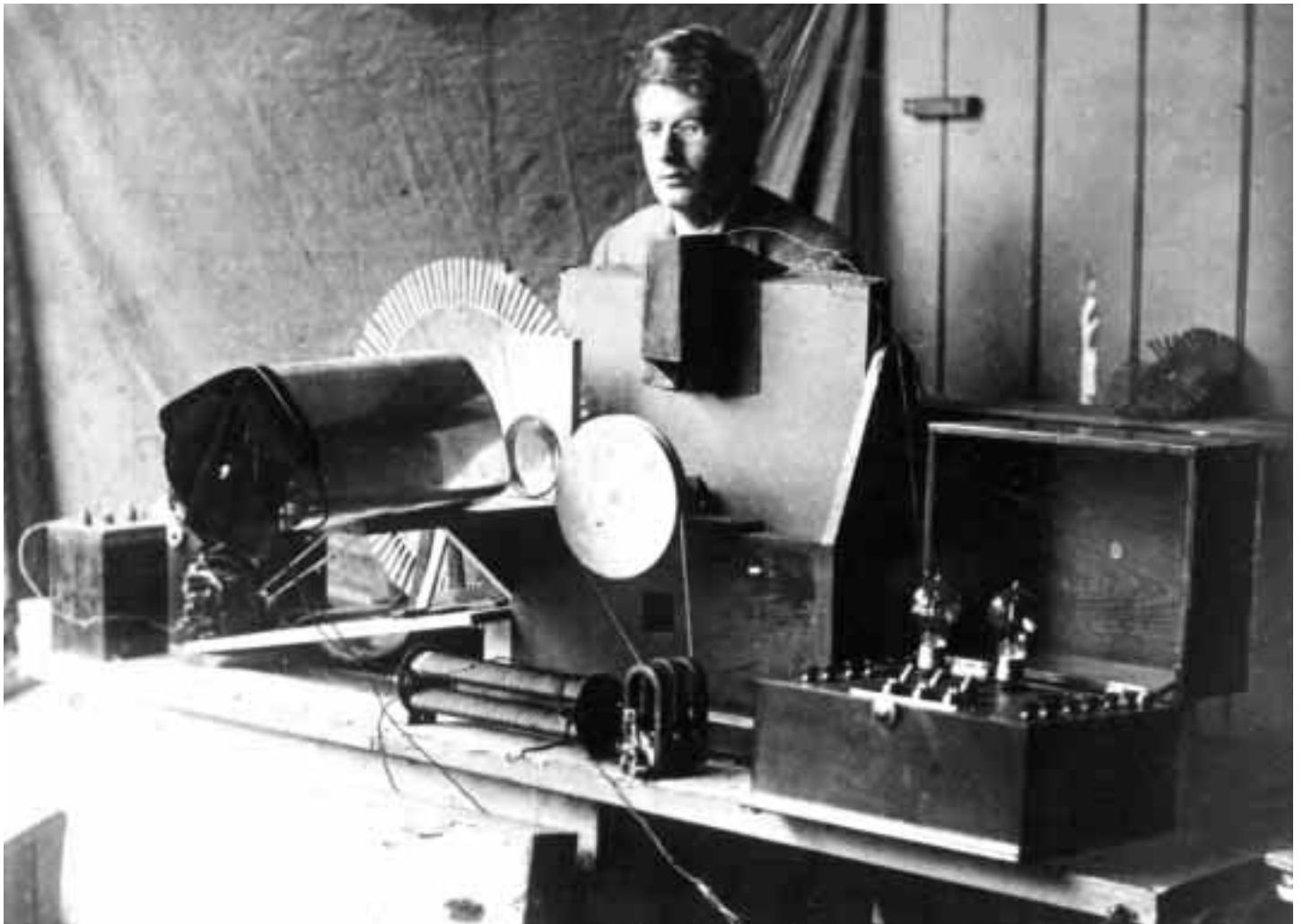
electrical knowledge he had gained as a student at Glasgow's Royal Technical College, he found that the system responded better to the rate of change of the current from the photocell, than to the current itself. Baird worked on in his cramped attic laboratory at 22 Frith Street in Soho, using the head of a ventriloquist's dummy as his subject. His own memoirs, published in 2004

under the title *Television and Me*, capture the excitement of the first breakthrough:

Funds were going down, the situation was becoming desperate and we were down to our last £30 when at last, one Friday in the first week of October 1925, everything functioned properly. The image of the dummy's head formed itself on the screen with what appeared to me almost unbelievable clarity. I had got it! I could scarcely believe my eyes, and felt myself shaking with excitement. I ran down the little flight of stairs to Mr. Cross's office and seized by the arm his office boy William Taynton, hauled him upstairs and put him in front of the transmitter. I then went to the receiver only to find the screen a blank. William did not like the lights and the whirring discs and had withdrawn out of range. I gave him 2/6 [12.5p] and pushed his head into position. This time he came through and on the screen I saw the flickering, but clearly recognisable, image of William's face – the first face seen by television – and he had to be bribed with 2/6 for the privilege of achieving this distinction.

Until this time, news about Baird's research had mainly taken the form of little pieces in the popular press through which he hoped to attract investors to his company, Television Limited. Few technical details had been given and the scientific establishment remained dubious, as Baird had no academic or corporate connections and his degree from the Royal Technical College lacked the cachet of Oxbridge or the London colleges. Baird and his associate Oliver Hutchinson, realising the need for respectability and credibility, decided that the first public demonstration of television should be given to invited members of the Royal Institution and reported only in *The Times*. On the evening of 26 January 1926, a gathering of distinguished scientists, some in evening attire, waited on the narrow staircase in Frith Street for their turn to be ushered into Baird's laboratory. The visitors were admitted a few at a time. They first saw the image of the ventriloquist's dummy (named by Baird as Stooky Bill) and then took turns to be 'televised' in the intense floodlighting. Baird takes up the story with a typical touch of humour:

In one room was a large whirling disc, a most dangerous device, had they known it, liable to burst at any minute with showers of broken glass ... One of the visitors who was being



Contemporary leaflet explaining how the Baird 'Televisor' works.

John Logie Baird with his apparatus at 21 Linton Crescent, Hastings, January 1924 (photo courtesy of the Royal Television Society).

# THE BAIRD "TELEVISOR."

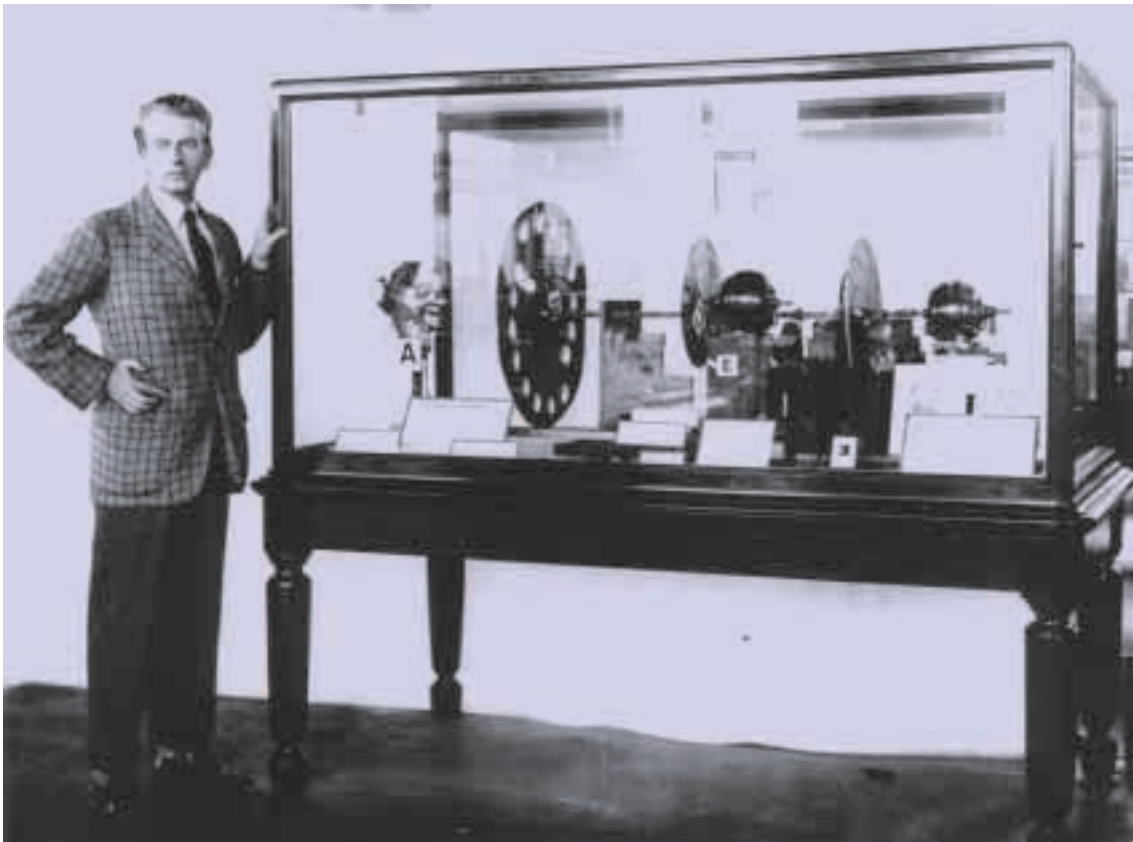
Diagram of the first successful "Television" transmitter exhibited at South Kensington Museum.

- A. The object to be transmitted. (This is the original inventor's head used by Mr. Baird at his first experiments.)
- B. Rotating disk with holes, creating a horizontal line of images of the object A to pass over the lens C.
- C. A shaded disc revolving at light speed intercepts the light reflected from the object, allowing it to reach the light sensitive cell in a series of flashes.
- D. Before reaching the cell, the light passes through a rotating spiral disk, giving a further subdivision of the image.
- E. The aperture through which the light passes to the light-sensitive cell. The action of the discs B, C and D is to cause the light image to fall on the cell in a series of flashes, each flash corresponding to a small space of the image.

These flashes falling on the cell generate electrical impulses, which are transmitted to the receiving machine, where they control the light from a lamp placed behind an optical system which is similar to, and revolves exactly in step with, the transmitting machine.

By this means a spot of light of varying intensity is caused to traverse a ground glass screen. The light is brought to the lens by the lens and also in the shadow. This light spot traverses the screen so rapidly that owing to the persistence of vision the whole image appears instantaneously to the eye.

The receiving apparatus is not shown.



**John Logie Baird with his apparatus at the Science Museum (photo courtesy of the Royal Television Society).**

transmitted had a long white beard, part of which blew into the wheel. Fortunately he escaped with the loss of a certain amount of hair. He was a thorough sportsman and took the accident in good part, and insisted on continuing the experiment and having his face transmitted.

The scientific visitors were favourably impressed and a report of the demonstration appeared in *The Times* of 28 January. Baird's achievement acted as a spur to television research by others, in particular in America. In April 1927, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company sent television over the telephone lines between Washington and New York, with Herbert Hoover (soon to be president) appearing before the camera. AT&T used a version of Baird's system in which the images were scanned mechanically by a rotating perforated disc. Baird was shaken by the loss of his monopoly of television, but he pressed on with public demonstrations; he sent television by phone line from London to Glasgow in May 1927, and then in February 1928 he sent television by short wave radio from London to New York. The *New York Times* compared this achievement to that of Marconi in sending the Morse code letter 'S' across the Atlantic by radio, twenty-six years earlier.

In 1930 a new company called Baird Television Ltd. was formed from earlier Baird companies. Although it had fewer than forty staff, it moved ahead in many directions including the showing of large-screen

television to capacity audiences at the London Palladium (1930) and the televising of the finish of the Derby (1931 and 1932). In 1929 the BBC had been persuaded, with considerable reluctance, to start experimental television broadcasting. This enabled Baird Television to market the Televisor, the world's first mass-produced television set. The scheduled television programmes were broadcast over regular BBC medium wavelengths late at night, after radio had closed down. Because of the limitations of the permitted bandwidth on the medium wave, pictures could only be sent on the original 30-line standard, even after the Baird company had developed higher definition pictures of 120 lines. This meant that the broadcast programmes were usually restricted to one person at a time before the camera, for example in talks, recitations or solo musical performances.

By the early 1930s electronic television techniques, as first envisaged by Campbell Swinton, were moving towards practicality. In 1923, Vladimir Zworykin in the United States had patented an electronic camera which became known as the iconoscope. Although the early iconoscopes did not produce anything resembling a picture, the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) threw its immense resources behind Zworykin. Another American, Philo Farnsworth, developed a type of electronic camera known as the image dissector. The first test of this device, in September 1927, simply showed a moving blob of light. It took several more years before either the

iconoscope or the image dissector was able to produce recognisable pictures. Progress in the USA was slowed by a bitter patent dispute between Farnsworth and RCA which was not fully resolved until 1939.

In Britain, the leading record company Electrical and Musical Industries (EMI) decided to become involved in television. They soon combined with the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company to form a joint subsidiary Marconi-EMI Television Ltd. with the sole objective of developing electronic television. The new company had access to RCA's television patents, and it emerged as a major competitor with Baird Television.

In 1932 the control of Baird Television passed to the Gaumont British Picture Corporation. A year later, Baird was personally deprived of executive power, although he retained the title of Managing Director for publicity purposes. On the positive side, Gaumont British had great financial resources, enabling the company to increase its research effort and extend its scope from mechanical television to other methods, in particular the use of cathode ray tubes. Baird Television Ltd. was part owner of a German company, Fernseh AG, which had developed the so-called 'intermediate film' technique, whereby a scene was filmed and then the film was developed within a minute or so and scanned to provide a television signal. The Baird company also entered into an arrangement with Philo Farnsworth, but his image dissector camera proved to be rather insensitive.

Much has been written about the

technical competition in 1936 between Baird Television and Marconi-EMI, with the two companies transmitting 'high definition' television to BBC viewers on alternate evenings. The Marconi-EMI electronic technology, based on the RCA system and providing a 405-line picture, had the edge over Baird's 240-line pictures. Baird used three different systems all of which were on somewhat of a trial basis. These were mechanical scanning, the intermediate film system, and the Farnsworth electronic camera. In early 1937 the decision was made that the BBC would adopt the Marconi-EMI technology. Nevertheless, Baird Television Ltd. stayed in business as a manufacturer of receivers and, through Gaumont British, started to provide large-screen television in cinemas, including an experimental show in colour.

Although only a few thousand households could afford the sets and the reception was limited to a 50-mile radius of London, the future for television looked good. But in September 1939 the BBC abruptly closed down its television service in the interests of national security, the market for sets vanished and Baird Television went into receivership soon afterwards. Baird decided to continue his research using his own savings. Between then and 1944 he produced results which, but for the war, would have had an immediate effect on the industry. These included high definition colour television with an all-electronic receiving tube known as the Telechrome, the first of its kind in the world. He also developed high definition stereoscopic television. Baird had never enjoyed good health and in early 1946 he became seriously ill. He died in June of that year at the age of fifty-seven. His memory lives on and there have been five major biographies, including most recently *John Logie Baird: A Life* by Antony Kamm and myself. We are grateful to the National Library of Scotland for their help in the research for this book.

Much has changed since the time of John Logie Baird. Picture definition was increased from 405 to 625 lines in 1964 and colour was introduced in Britain in 1967, several years after its appearance in the USA. Other technical advances have included the replacement of valves by solid state devices, the introduction of satellite and cable, and the proliferation of available channels. Today, television is in 99 per cent of households and the real cost of a set is a few days' average earnings as opposed to several months' earnings in the 1930s.



**Seeing by Wireless: The Story of Baird Television by Ray Herbert. The images to the bottom right were photographed from the screen of a Televisor in 1928.**

As recently as the 1960s, thousands of British workers were employed in the design and mass production of television sets. At the professional level, the Television Society, formed in 1928 with Baird as its first honorary fellow, consisted of scientists and engineers with a smattering of journalists. This all changed when television set production ceased in the western hemisphere. The last major British factory to close (1978) was the Baird cathode ray tube plant in Bradford, operated by Radio Rentals Ltd. which used the Baird name for its brand of television sets. In the past thirty years, the term 'television industry' has come to refer to programming and distribution rather than the manufacture of equipment. The change has been faithfully reflected by the Royal Television Society (it gained royal status in 1966) which now caters for television managers and executives who are concerned with ratings, regulatory politics and finance.

Although science and engineering have moved away from centre stage in television publicity, the technology continues its inexorable advance. The small 30-line monochrome picture of 1925 is now replaced by a 1,000-line colour picture on a 1.07m (42-inch) screen that can be hung on a wall, taking up far less space than a cathode ray tube set. Stereophonic sound is available. Stereoscopic television has yet to reach the consumer, although it is being used in industrial and medical applications.

Programme quality has not improved to the same extent as technology. The average programme is seen once by a large but uncritical audience, just as a tabloid newspaper is glanced through once before it is discarded. Although there are a few nuggets among the dross, there is a long history of dissatisfaction with the content of television. In a historic interview in 1967, Malcolm Muggeridge asked the BBC's first Director General, Lord Reith, what he thought of the medium; he replied that it was 'potential social menace of the first magnitude'. In the United States at about this time, the television pioneer Philo Farnsworth angrily refused to have a set in his house. The humourist Frank Muir, in a letter to *The Times* in January 1976, asked slyly whether television had gone from Baird to worse. My mother, shortly before her death in 1996, was asked by a journalist for her opinion of modern television programmes. She was usually plain-spoken, but on this occasion she damned with faint praise: 'Well, I suppose television must be a good thing as it provides employment for so many people.' The pace of change has accelerated in recent years because of channel proliferation and audience fragmentation; even the BBC, formerly a rather complacent organisation, has been affected by the general mood of uncertainty. The growth of the internet has reduced the average weekly viewing hours per person and this is particularly true for the more educated and affluent sectors of the population. Video piracy is becoming a serious issue. The Royal Television Society's brochure for its convention at Cambridge in September 2005 describes television as a group of 'burning platforms', which is the new management jargon for problems requiring urgent action. As the industry struggles to adapt to change, the technical people in the background continue to come up with new devices which are keeping the administrators off balance. The next eighty years of television promise to be as eventful as the first eighty.

## Note on sources

John Logie Baird's 'presence' at the Library is mainly in the shapes of books, magazines, year books and technical material, some contemporary, some retrospective. Two of the most recent publications relating to Baird are *John Logie Baird: A Life* by Antony Kamm and Malcolm Baird, NMS Publishing, 2002 (GEB-1.2003.4.2), and *Television and Me: The Memoirs of John Logie Baird* edited by Malcolm Baird, Mercat Publishing, 2004 (HP2.204.2706). Journals such as *Television* (Y.116) give a sense of the excitement generated by the new technology.

# Literature in 1925

## Towards a Scottish Literary Renaissance

The Scottish Literary Renaissance was initially inspired and led by Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M. Grieve). He had returned from war service in Macedonia ambitious to become a poet of significance; and ambitious also to instigate a revival in Scottish writing which would throw off North British associations and recover a distinctive literary identity drawing on revitalised traditions and European and other contemporary influences. His first venture consisted of the three *Northern Numbers* anthologies published between 1920 and 1922: collections of contemporary Scottish poetry modelled on the successful English Georgian poetry anthologies edited by Edward Marsh. These were followed in August 1922 by *The Scottish Chapbook*, the first of several magazines to be edited by MacDiarmid. It was in a series of editorials or 'Causeries' in the *Chapbook* between February and April 1923 that he debated the feasibility of Scots as a modern literary language (having earlier appeared in the October 1922 issue as the new poet 'Hugh M'Diarmid' with the Scots-language 'The Watergaw'). His avant-garde conclusion in his editorials was that 'the Scots Vernacular is a vast storehouse of just the very peculiar and subtle effects which modern European literature in general is assiduously seeking... It is an inchoate Marcel Proust – a Dostoevskian debris of ideas – an inexhaustible quarry of subtle and significant sound.' *Sangschaw* (1925), a collection of modernist lyrics in literary Scots, was the first significant outcome of this debate and experimentation, to be followed in 1926 by *Penny Wheep* and the long modernist dramatic monologue *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*.

Of course, not everyone agreed with MacDiarmid's emphasis on Scots as the language of a literary revival; nor with his distinctive, modernistic literary re-creation of the language. What is important, however – apart from the achievement of MacDiarmid's own poetry – is the new interest the debate aroused in historical tradition and contemporary possibilities. John Buchan's historical collection *The Northern Muse* is representative of this. Unlike MacDiarmid, Buchan seemed uncertain of the continuing literary potential of Scots, but he was anxious that contemporary readers should remain aware of the old tongue and be able to read the poetry and other literature it had inspired. A review of Buchan's anthology in

### Margery Palmer McCulloch

1925 was a significant year for literature in Scotland. It saw the publication of Hugh MacDiarmid's first collection of Scots-language lyrics, *Sangschaw*, John Buchan's historical anthology of Scottish poetry, *The Northern Muse*, Edwin Muir's *First Poems* and Willa Muir's extended essay *Women: An Inquiry*. In their different ways, all were representative of the revival in Scottish writing which began principally in the years after the end of World War I and continued throughout the interwar period.

the *Burns Chronicle* of 1925 suggests not only that his concerns had struck a popular note but also that the ambitious contemporary revival inspired by MacDiarmid was winning supporters in the wider community. For the *Burns Chronicle* reviewer:

This book comes opportunely on the eve of the promised Scottish Renaissance, for the proper understanding of which it will be a great help to the general reader who has not made a special study of Scottish literature, and whose library of Scottish vernacular poetry is consequently limited... Hence, in the 533 pages of the book more than a superficial acquaintance is made with the works of Dunbar, Montgomerie, James I, Henryson, Sir David Lyndsay, Barbour, Blind Harry, Sempill of Beltrees, Gavin Douglas, and some of the anonymous Makars who have done so much for the Scottish lyric.

Other happenings in 1925 suggest how quickly this idea of a literary renaissance took hold among those interested in education

**C.M. Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid) pictured on his seventieth birthday. Photograph: Gordon Wright.**



and the arts. MacDiarmid himself had briefly used the phrase 'a Scottish Renaissance' in the first *Scottish Chapbook* of August 1922 when writing of the earlier Belgian literary revival and its magazine, *Jeune Belgique*: 'the next decade or two will see a Scottish Renaissance as swift and irresistible as was the Belgian Revival between 1880 and 1910.' The phrase was taken up more prominently the next year by the French writer and critic Denis Saurat who contributed an article on 'Le Groupe de "la Renaissance Écossais"' to the *Revue Anglo-Américaine* in April 1924. In 1925, both Thomas Henderson, editor of the *Scottish Educational Journal*, and Edwin Muir, writing in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, used the phrase in the title of their articles on the new Scottish literature, and this terminology continued to be used throughout the interwar period in newspaper articles and literary and cultural journals both within and without Scotland as interest in the new movement spread. This interest was probably helped by the *Scottish Educational Journal's* commissioning of MacDiarmid in 1925 to write a series of articles on Scottish literary and other artistic figures – a series which caused great controversy in the Journal's pages and which was published as *Contemporary Scottish Studies* in 1926.

There was interaction also with other art forms. In his 1925 article in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, Edwin Muir drew attention to the work of composer F.G. Scott and his modernist settings of MacDiarmid's lyrics. MacDiarmid himself wrote in the *Scottish Educational Journal* in November 1925 about the Scottish visual artists William McCance and his wife Agnes Miller Parker who were supporters of the new movement but had been forced to move south to England for work because of the absence of opportunities in the visual arts in Scotland. When looking for an image for the cover of my recent book of primary source documents for the Scottish Renaissance, I was excited to come upon William McCance's linocut 'The Engineer, his Wife and their Family', held by the Hunterian Gallery in Glasgow University. Its modernist European influences and the resonances of Glasgow's engineering past in its machine-like forms and title, parallel the interaction of new influences and past traditions I recognised in the literary movement also. Interestingly, this image too belongs to 1925, although I did not realise when I chose it that it would have a future significance in this article!

Another major poet of the revival period was Edwin Muir, whose *First Poems* was published in 1925 by Virginia and Leonard Woolf at the Hogarth Press. In the early 1920s, Muir was celebrated as a critic rather than poet, with MacDiarmid describing him



**Lines Review No. 4, January 1954, contains part I of an article by Hugh MacDiarmid on the Scottish Renaissance. The Library has a complete run of Lines Review 1952–99.**

in the *Scottish Educational Journal* of September 1925 as 'incontestably in the first flight of contemporary critics of welt-literatur'. Muir had come to prominence as a writer with the *London New Age* periodical under the editorship of A.R. Orage. The success of his first book *We Moderns* (1918), written under the pseudonym of 'Edward Moore', and developed from a previous series of articles in the *New Age*, resulted in a contract with the *American Freeman* magazine which allowed him and his wife Willa to travel in Europe. There they achieved the competence in German which enabled them to earn their living until the late 1930s as translators of German literature, including the fiction of Franz Kafka and Herman Broch.

Muir was always ambivalent about Scots as a revived language for poetry, although he wrote perceptively not only about early Scots poetry of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but also about the modernist MacDiarmid. As a result of recent critical emphasis on Muir's *Scott and Scotland* quarrel with MacDiarmid over the use of English as the future language of ambitious Scottish poetry, it is often forgotten that in the 1920s and early 1930s Muir was probably the most significant published interpreter of MacDiarmid's new poetry. He wrote in his 'Scottish Renaissance' article of 1925, for example, that in the poem 'Country Life' there is

an almost fantastic economy, a crazy economy which has the effect of humor [sic], and yet conveys a kind of horror, which makes this poem so original and so truly Scottish... This

vision is profoundly alien to the spirit of English poetry; the thing which resembles it most, outside other Scottish poetry, is perhaps the poetry of Villon. It is the product of a realistic, or more exactly a materialistic, imagination, which seizing upon everyday reality shows not the strange beauty which that sometimes takes on, but rather the beauty which it possesses normally and in use.

In a later article, 'Literature in Scotland', in the *Spectator* of May 1934, Muir commented:

The real originality of 'Hugh MacDiarmid' is that he employs Scots as any other poet might employ English or French: that is, to express anything which a modern writer may have to say. This has not been done in Scotland since she ceased to be a nation, since about two centuries, that is to say, before Burns.

Although the use of Scots as the language of poetry was not for Muir himself the way forward (as an Orkneyman he described Scotland as his 'second country' in a *Listener* article in 1958), the above quotations show that he understood both the formal and cultural aims and achievement of MacDiarmid's early poetry. In 1925, his own poems were more tentative and eclectic, searching for ways to overcome the sense of discontinuity he felt with his Orkney childhood and recover a more stable sense of self. Muir's best poetry came in the 1940s and 1950s, after many years of apprenticeship and achievement as critic, novelist and autobiographer as well as poet.

Willa Muir's *Women: An Inquiry* was another significant publication of the year 1925. The Scottish Renaissance movement has been criticised as a male-dominated movement which – like the modernist period in art and culture generally – marginalised the achievements of women. It is certainly true that the dominant public figures in Scottish as in European modernism were male, with women often operating on the periphery as writers, or being involved more as supporters and enablers. Willa Muir herself suffered from being considered mainly as the wife of Edwin, as opposed to the highly educated writer and translator she knew herself to be. She wrote in her journal at a particularly low time in her life in 1953:

I am a better translator than he is. The whole current of patriarchal society is set against this fact, however and sweeps it into oblivion, simply because I did not insist on shouting aloud: 'Most of this translation, especially Kafka, has been done by ME. Edwin only helped.' And every time Edwin was referred to as THE translator, I was too proud to say anything; and Edwin himself felt it would be undignified to speak up, I suppose... And I am ashamed of the fact that I feel it as a grievance. It shouldn't bother me. Reputation is a passing value, after

## EDWIN MUIR

P.H. Butter



Edwin Muir by P.H. Butter was published in Oliver and Boyd's 'Writers and Critics' series, 1962.

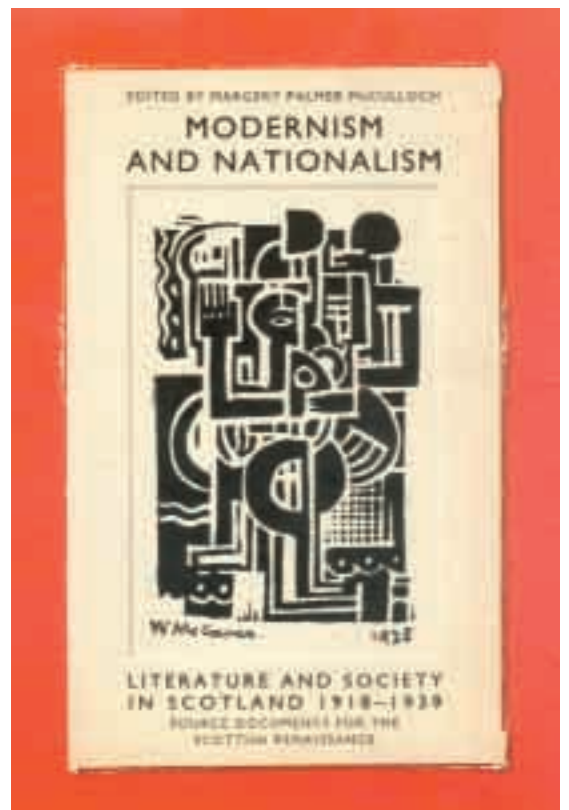
all. [...] And yet, and yet, I want to be acknowledged.

Willa's 'grievance' and the problem of female public invisibility generally at that time had probably more to do with social mores in relation to gender roles than with any deliberate attempt to marginalise women by their male counterparts. Willa's contemporary Catherine Carswell, whose public profile in the 1930s was strengthened as a result of her *Life of Robert Burns*, wrote in her unfinished autobiography about 'the imitability of diffidence' – something which suggests an inner insecurity with regard to her public role despite her confident exterior. On the other hand, the interwar period was a time of expansion for women, and for women writers in particular, and Willa Muir's 1925 enquiry into the creativity and role of women in society was symbolic of the new thinking and changing opportunities of the time. However, while her essay focused on the importance of regarding female and male roles as equal and complementary, although different in nature, this was not her experience in her everyday life. She began her first novel *Imagined Corners* in 1926 while in St Tropez and Menton with a translation commission. As a result of pregnancy, a difficult childbirth and its aftermath, new mothering responsibilities and the pressures of translation deadlines, it was not until 1931 that the book was completed and published. Edwin, meanwhile, published six books in addition to their joint translations in the same period.

Despite her difficulties, Willa Muir in the end made an important contribution to twentieth-century Scottish writing and to our understanding of the interwar period in

particular. The same is true of a number of women writers of the 1920s and 1930s who, with hindsight, are now seen as having contributed important female perspectives to the literature and society of that time. Although in most cases I have not been able to nominate publications specifically related to the year 1925, these writers include Catherine Carswell, whose two novels *Open the Door!* (1920) and *The Camomile* (1922) began a female 'renaissance' before the literary revival of MacDiarmid and his associates was securely launched. Nan Shepherd's *The Quarry Wood* of 1928 anticipated Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song* of 1932 in its rich north-east Scottish register and story of a country girl torn between her love of learning and her love of the land. Nancy Brysson Morrison's *The Gowk Storm* (1930) tells the story of unfulfilled female lives in a remote rural manse on the edge of the Highlands, but it also, implicitly, involves itself in the contemporary debates about religion and Scots language and the need for renewal in insular country communities. Dot Allan brings a woman's perspective to urban settings and topics in novels such as *Hunger March* (1934) and *Makeshift* (1928). As in Allan's *Makeshift* and Carswell's *The Camomile*, fictional scenarios by women in this period often involved the ambition to be a writer, which returns us to the question of female creativity and how this should/could be manifested, which Willa Muir explored in her 1925 essay.

In the 1920s, the focus of the national revival debate in Scotland was predominantly literary. In the 1930s, on the other hand, as economic conditions in Scotland worsened and the political climate in Europe darkened, 'the condition of Scotland' and political debate of various kinds – national and international – increasingly moved to centre stage. What makes the interwar Renaissance movement so distinctive as a cultural movement is that its writers were equally involved in the debates about social, economic and political conditions in Scotland and Europe as they were in the debates about Scotland's literary culture. For these writers, cultural renewal had to proceed hand in hand with a wider national renewal; and nationalism (in its varying degrees) and internationalism were two sides of the one coin, not opposing positions. Although the outbreak of World War II brought an abrupt end to the interwar phase of this renewal movement, and although the changed political and social climate of the immediate post-war years could not accommodate a



Margery Palmer McCulloch's *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1919-1939*. the cover illustration is 'The Engineer, His Wife and His Family' by William McCance.

return to the cultural debates of the interwar period, this ambitious attempt to create an indigenous, distinctive modern Scottish literature had laid the foundations for the confident literary culture we have today. Constituted in 1925, the National Library of Scotland, with its rich resources of Scottish books, periodicals and manuscript material, enables contemporary readers to understand this story – and other stories – of Scotland's past and so participate in the continuing development of a distinctive, modern future out of an awareness of the past. Such understanding and participation is what the Scottish Renaissance novelist Neil M. Gunn described in the essay 'Highland Games' as 'growing and blossoming from our own roots'.

### Note on sources

Margery Palmer McCulloch's *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1919-1939* (Q3.205.0015) provides an excellent selection of primary sources, illuminating the Scottish Literary Renaissance through the voices of those who generated it. As well as the printed publications – many rare and ephemeral – of Hugh MacDiarmid, Neil Gunn, Edwin and Willa Muir etc., the Library's Manuscripts Division has extensive collections of relevant correspondence and papers. Full details are easily found on the Library's website [www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk).

# 'The Lamp of its Own Citadel'

The National Library of Scotland 1925 to 2005

**D**RIVEN BY THE VISION of Sir George Mackenzie, King's Advocate, the Library first appears in the Advocates' Minute Book of 28 July 1680 in a reference to a 'Fonde for ane Bibliothecq'. By the time of its official inauguration in 1689, the scope of the original library had already begun to broaden from a source for law books to a 'general library for gentlemen'. Mackenzie had stressed that its content should consist only of books closely allied to jurisprudence, but by 1695 the Minute Book records that 'the profession of the Laws carys necessarily with it all the Belles Letres and the knowledge of ancient and modern History'. The foundations of the Advocates' Library as a broad scholarly library were set.

In the early years the Faculty made the most of its limited purchasing funds but relied heavily on gifts from Faculty members. In 1710 legal deposit, which permitted claim of every book registered at Stationers' Hall, was granted to the Library, along with eight others including the Ancient Universities of St Andrews, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. From the beginning the Advocates' Library claimed extensively, thereby setting the foundations of the collecting policies followed by its successor. Foreign books were also acquired, but it was during David Hume's Keepership that a systematic policy of purchasing works of West European scholarship, particularly those of France, was established. The eighteenth century was the Library's 'golden age' as one of the great intellectual centres of Scotland, but the nineteenth century brought a new range of pressures.

The insatiable demand for print led to an enormous expansion in the numbers of books published, and legal deposit became a 'burdensome blessing' as accommodation became vexatious. Running the Library consumed an increasing proportion of Faculty funds; and the generous public access intended for serious scholars began to raise concern as the Library turned into a general meeting place for Faculty business and tourists dropped in to see round. In 1859 the Library Keeper, Samuel Halkett, reported exasperatedly that 'the Library premises are so laid out that strangers, when once admitted, can hardly be prevented by our weak staff of attendants from roaming at will over the building'. As the century wore on, it became apparent that this situation could not continue indefinitely.

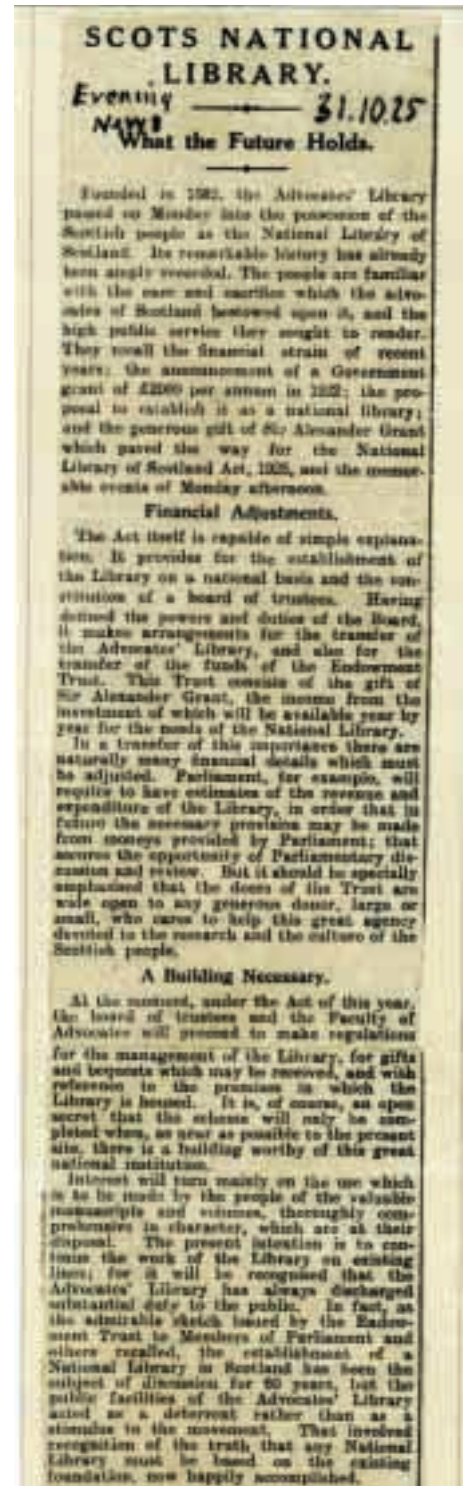
In retrospect, history seems dominated

Ann Matheson

To mark the eightieth anniversary of the foundation of the National Library of Scotland, Ann Matheson traces its genesis through the centuries. Scotland has good reason to be grateful to the Faculty of Advocates for the custodianship of its private library over more than two centuries until by agreement, in 1925, the non-legal collections of the Advocates' Library were transferred to create the National Library of Scotland. To appreciate the latter, it is necessary to understand these deep-rooted origins.

by specific events, but deeper examination reveals that progress comes only after much effort. So it was with the founding of the National Library of Scotland. The notion of the Advocates' Library as a national library de facto was in circulation for almost a century before 1925. In 1842, the Faculty itself declared that the Library 'from its important contents – and liberal communication to others – may justly be deemed a National Library'. In 1863, the publisher, William Chambers, later Lord Provost, presented a paper at the Social Science Congress in Edinburgh, in which he candidly expressed his aim as 'the transforming of the Library of the Faculty of Advocates into a national institution'. The arguments about how this was to be realized rumbled on for the next half century. The Faculty wished to uphold its legitimate pride in its Library and its 'reputation throughout Europe as a learned society', but it also had to face the realities of running an institution of such national importance on a virtual shoestring.

A proposal by Gladstone, Chancellor of the Exchequer, in 1854 to take over 'the whole of the Library for public use' was not pursued. By 1922, this idea had again gained general, if not universal, acceptance in the



1925 newspaper article from the *Edinburgh Evening News*, in which William Graham MP discusses 'What the Future Holds' for the newly constituted Scottish National Library.

Faculty. It was taken up on the eve of the First World War through the Faculty Committee, under the active Convenership of Hugh P. Macmillan. With war intervening, it was not until 1918 that the Faculty by a

majority accepted a proposal for a revived Library Committee with a remit to confer with Government about the institution of a National Library of Scotland. The Macmillan Committee then set about pressing government for funding, backed up by appeals to private benefactors. It would have been easy for the Faculty to buy its way out of trouble by selling Library treasures, a course of action that had supporters, but it is to its credit that this solution was irrevocably set aside in favour of a wider view of the national interest.

After protracted government negotiations, the path to Scotland's National Library was eventually smoothed by the quiet intervention of Mr Alexander Grant, an enterprising businessman from Forres, whose munificence in contributing £100,000 as a permanent endowment nobly concluded the matter. At their first meeting in 1923, Grant confided to Macmillan that he 'had always ... had a great admiration for learning, but in his own life he had little opportunity or leisure for the enjoyment of books. Here ... was the chance to do something practical to help others to enjoy the advantages which he himself had missed'. When his banker arrived with the cheque, the amount had been left blank for Macmillan to complete. He wrote £100,000, the sum that Grant had casually mentioned in conversation, and was informed that Mr Grant required no receipt. These two men implicitly trusted each another in their common cause. National achievements often involve many hands: but in the founding of the National Library of Scotland the triumvirate of Sir Alexander Grant, Lord Macmillan and Sir John Lamb of the Scottish Office stands supreme. With the last impediment removed, the National Library of Scotland Act 1925 received Royal Assent on 7 August 1925, and its new Board of Trustees, chaired by Sir Herbert Maxwell, met in Parliament House for the first time on 26 October 1925.

By the 1925 Act, the non-legal collections (c.750,000 books, and a collection of manuscripts) passed to the nation, while the Faculty retained the law books, manuscripts, Faculty Records, and legal deposit for law books. Borrowing rights for Advocates exercised the minds of the Faculty and the Scottish Office; and a compromise that bestowed lifetime borrowing rights on Advocates in Faculty in 1925 was eventually agreed upon. Faculty members continued actively to use the borrowing privilege. The last member to exercise this right was the late Lord Cameron for whom 'M' books, the 'pick' of newly received legal deposit books, were regularly set aside and sent through to the Advocates' Library, until shortly before his death. His son, Lord Cameron of



**The Gutenberg Bible is one of the Library's greatest treasures. This illustration shows the first page of volume two. The illuminations were done by hand, probably in Erfurt (Germany).**

Lochbroom, has told me of his childhood memories of his father bringing books home and how useful they were to him as a young boy at his studies.

Over the eighty years from 1925 the National Library has presided over a major expansion of its collections and public services. With numerous successes and some shortcomings, it has gradually taken its place as one of the national libraries of the smaller northern European countries, developing strong national, UK, European and international links. In the post-1925 period, the Library's buildings – the 1956 building on George IV Bridge and the Causewayside building, completed in two

phases in 1989 and 1995 – provided pivotal points for expansion. The responsibilities of national libraries began to be defined in professional library writing from the 1960s, and the Library was quick to adhere to national and international guidelines. Improved funding encouraged new collecting policies, for example, the manuscripts of modern Scottish writers from the late 1960s. Where there were gaps in collections, steps were taken to fill them. The Advocates' Library had failed to claim Scotland's local newspapers in the nineteenth century, thus depriving the country of an invaluable research source. By the 1950s comprehensive claiming of the country's current local newspapers had been achieved, and a systematic policy of filling gaps in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century holdings by acquiring microfilm copies was established in the 1970s, and has been continued by the work of the recent Newsplan 2000 Project, which was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the UK regional newspaper industry. Collecting policies began to be formalised, although retaining an essential touch of serendipity.

The landmark British Library Act of 1972 reshaped national library services in the UK, but retained the distinctive traditions of Scotland and Wales in their separate national libraries. Curatorial expertise for special collections (e.g. maps, music, manuscripts and rare books) was expanded in the 1970s, and a more structured approach to collection management and preservation was introduced in the 1980s. Surveys to identify the needs of the Library's readers were introduced, and the results helped to guide future policies. In 1986, for example, a survey to establish where the collections were failing readers showed a dissatisfaction rate of less than one per cent over thirty-six weeks, but notably most of these items were nineteenth-century British local publications which, although of little interest at the time, were actively sought a century later. Above all, the advent of computers introduced unparalleled opportunities to make the Library's collections available remotely, initially through online catalogues and more recently through digital texts.

The collecting policies of the National Library largely followed those established by its predecessor. The difference was in scope and scale. The Library continued to draw generously on legal deposit to secure Scottish publications and those of the rest of the United Kingdom in supporting research in its widest definition. By the end of the century over 250,000 books and journals were received annually. A voluntary scheme set up in the 1990s between the legal deposit libraries and publishers for the deposit of some electronic publications

culminated successfully in the Legal Deposit Libraries Act 2003. The scale of purchasing from overseas also increased dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century. Even in the 1950s, the Library's purchase grant from government was a mere £1,000; by the early 1980s it had risen to £750,000. This welcome increase enabled gaps in the collections to be filled, and allowed greater scope for buying manuscripts and overseas materials. It was short-lived, however, since from the late 1980s government consistently pegged purchase grants to inflation levels that bore no resemblance to market prices. An additional factor was the need to buy science publications for the new Scottish Science Library, with little extra provision in funding. Supported by its Trustees, the Library resolutely maintained its purchase grant as a separate figure in its grant-in-aid to protect the collections through these difficult years, despite the temptations of a single line budget. Nevertheless, in the mid-1990s, in spite of the Library's best endeavours, it was necessary to divert some funds to cover essential running costs.

Throughout the century the Library benefited greatly from special collections that were gifted, deposited, or, in certain instances, purchased to add to existing strengths in particular fields. The 1925 foundation brought immediate donations – Lauriston Castle in 1926 and Rosebery in 1927 – and over the next eighty years a vast array of collections on diverse subjects, including literary first editions (Hugh Sharp), mountaineering (Graham Brown), Scottish music (Glen), baking and confectionery (Macadam) and manuscripts (Blackwood and Haig among many others) have been added. Prominent among deposited collections are the Crawford (Bibliotheca Lindesiana) Collections (1988) and the Collections of Blairs College Library (1974). The full list (to 1999) can be found in the published Special and Named Collections in the National Library of Scotland, and an updated list is maintained on the website at [www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk). The Library has always been deeply indebted to the generosity of private donors, and some of its most splendid books and manuscripts are owed to private gifts. Despite the greater financial pressures of modern times, it is notable that so many individuals still choose to present collections or individual books to the nation.

A major development in the 1970s was the Library's turning to the outside world or, in Sir George MacKenzie's words, 'a mutual co-operating for the good of the whole'. With more publications to acquire and less funding available, it was clear that if libraries wished to satisfy the needs of their readers, they must work together more. The National Library was a British pioneer in this field, setting up a confederation with other



**A detail from the Auchinleck manuscript, 1330, which is displayed in full at [www.nls.uk/auchinleck](http://www.nls.uk/auchinleck)**

research libraries in Scotland in the early 1970s. Co-operation was originally based on libraries' physical collections but subsequently the benefits of online technology were also exploited collectively for the national good. Co-operation on Scottish collections began with Scotland's public libraries in the late 1990s. The 'national collection' would thus be the sum of all its parts, and the national library would be one among other libraries.

The well-known genealogist, Donald Whyte, who came to the Library as a young ploughman with a keen eye for research, and was taken under the wing of the Librarian, Maryatt Ross Dobie, comments in his memoir 'Fifty Years a Reader: Memories of the National Library, 1950–2000' that during this period 'NLS was marked by change and development in almost every aspect'. New initiatives were introduced to make the Library's collections better known: travelling exhibitions (from 1977); an expanded publishing programme (from the late 1970s); and involvement in international scholarly programmes (from the 1970s). Later, when online catalogues were introduced, the Library in the 1990s gave the highest priority to securing funding for the retrospective conversion of its printed catalogues in order to make the national collections accessible remotely. It is to the credit of government, and to the enlightened Scottish Office civil servants at the time, that the importance of this step was readily appreciated, and funds were found to support it.

The last two decades of the twentieth century brought major change. From the late 1980s building up physical collections was no longer considered an unchallenged good. Government pressed the legal deposit libraries to reduce their collecting policies, and review after review was initiated. While not resisting, the Scottish Office gave the Library considerable support. The Policy Review by the Scottish Education Department in 1987 reported that the Library's legal deposit policies were 'well

articulated, consistent with each other, and soundly documented in the Library's own policy documents'. The term 'heritage' entered the lexicon in the 1980s, and promotion of heritage led to lengthy debates on how libraries could offer greater accessibility to collections without patronising over-simplification. Less government funding for new initiatives led to the need to seek funding for collections from alternative sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund. Most significant of all was the arrival of the Web, and the opportunity to add 'virtual' collections to the physical collections built up over three hundred years. At the end of the century there came constitutional change and in 1997 Scotland's Parliament.

In serving twenty-first-century Scotland, and in directing its own future course, the Library has the profound strengths of its inheritance, and a strong collective memory that is an eloquent expression of more than three centuries of Scottish life. From the 1680s there have been many difficult times but, like Pitt, the Library has always 'walked upon impossibilities'.

## Note on sources

The most detailed account of the history of the Advocates' Library and the National Library of Scotland up to 1989 can be found in the series of essays published to mark the 300th anniversary: *For the Encouragement of Learning: Scotland's National Library 1689–1989*, Patrick Cadell and Ann Matheson (eds). Edinburgh: HMSO, 1989. In the same year Roger Craik and John St Clair published *The Advocates' Library: 300 years of a National Institution, 1689–1989*, Edinburgh, HMSO, 1989. A detailed study of the Library's early buildings can be found in Iain Gordon Brown's *Building for Books: The Architectural Evolution of the Advocates' Library, 1689–1925*, Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press, 1989. The Records of the Faculty of Advocates (Faculty Records) provide very detailed information for the early period. Lord Macmillan deals with the events surrounding the 1925 transfer in his memoirs: *A Man of Law's Tale: The Reminiscences of the Rt Hon. Lord Macmillan*, London, 1952. For the post-1925 period, the National Library's *Annual Reports* are a useful source: up to the mid-1990s the Reports contain detailed statistical information about the Library's collections.

The title of this article, 'A Lamp of its Own Citadel', is from W.K. Dickson and Hugh P. MacMillan *A National Library for Scotland: Proposal to Establish a Scottish National Library on the basis of the Advocates' Library*, Edinburgh, 1922.

## Notes on contributors

MALCOLM BAIRD was born in 1935 at Sydenham, not far from the Crystal Palace, where his father had an experimental television transmitter. After his father's death in 1946 he went to school and university in Scotland. For several years he worked in the Chemical Engineering Department at Edinburgh University and since 1967 he has been with McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, where he is now professor emeritus. He is co-author (with Antony Kamm) of *John Logie Baird: A Life* (2002) and has edited his father's memoirs entitled *Television and Me* (2004).

OLIVE GEDDES is a Senior Curator in the Manuscript Collections Division of the National Library of Scotland. She has a wide-ranging interest in Scottish social history, particularly travel, women, leisure activities and sport. Olive Geddes is the author of *A Swing Through Time: Golf in Scotland, 1457–1743* and *The Laird's Kitchen: Three Hundred Years of Food in Scotland*. She is curator of the Library's winter 2005–06 exhibition *Sale of the Centuries: A celebration of shopping in Scotland*.

MARGERIE PALMER McCULLOCH is Research Fellow in Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow and co-editor of the scholarly journal *Scottish Studies Review*. Her principal research interests are in twentieth-century Scottish writing and her books include critical studies of Edwin Muir, Neil M. Gunn and (as co-editor) Lewis Grassic Gibbon, in addition to many chapters and articles on women writers. Her most recent book, published in 2004, is *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918–1939*, a collection of primary source documents for the interwar Scottish Renaissance.

ANN MATHESON was Keeper of Printed Books in the National Library of Scotland from 1983 to 2000. She was Secretary General of the Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche (1994 to 2000), and Chairman of the Literature Committee, Scottish Arts Council (1997 to 2003). She is Chairman of the Consortium of European Research Libraries, which provides integrated tools and services for European printing of the hand press period. Her research interests are in the 18th century, and she has contributed articles to a wide range of scholarly and professional journals.

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## NLS Today

### Moray Launch

As our final article recounts, many of the tenets on which the Library was founded continue to flourish and evolve in the twenty-first century. The National Library has a healthy history of collaboration with other libraries. This tradition has recently been extended to public libraries, with the recent launch of a partnership with Moray Libraries in October. The partnership will see the active promotion of national resources to the people of Moray, primarily through raising awareness in schools and library-learning centres throughout the region. This renewed relationship with the area has a historical resonance, as it was a Moray man, Sir Alexander Grant of Logie, who helped to make today's National Library of Scotland possible through his donation of £200,000 in the 1920s and 30s, the equivalent of £12m today. The Moray partnership is part of a wider programme of working with local libraries, with authorities in Glasgow and Aberdeen engaging in similar initiatives in the near future.

### Newsplan Scotland

Similarly, the Library's vision to capture and preserve Scottish daily life has recently reached a new level, with the completion of the Newsplan Scotland project in August this year. This ambitious project began in 2000. Its aim was to work collaboratively with local libraries across Scotland, to preserve nearly 4 million pages of newsprint, from the period 1700–1950, which pre-dates the Library's own rigorous policy of collecting Scottish newspapers and periodicals.

Thanks to the effort of all involved in the project, researchers and local historians can now retrieve early editions of current newspapers or historic titles which are no longer in circulation, such as the *Aberdeen Shaver*, *Cambuslang Pilot*, *Piper O' Dundee*, *Edinburgh Star*, *Glasgow Clincher*, *Greenock Election Squib*, *Highland Echo*, *Scottish Prohibitionist* and *Saturday Smile*.

### Isabella Bird

Perhaps the most significant shift in Library policy of recent years has been to widen access and broaden engagement with a more diverse range of individuals and communities than ever before. This can be seen in the foreign collection policies (from South Asian to Australasia and Eastern Europe), the development of the digital library, and in the Library's outreach, events and exhibition programme.

The Library's recent exhibition, *In the Footsteps of Isabella Bird: adventures in twin time travel*, advances this trend with the first UK showing of photographic work by Professor Kiyonori Kanasaka of Kyoto University. The exhibition, which is part of the EU-Japan Year of People to People Exchanges, marries eastern and western cultures and offers contrasts between 19th century exploration and modern day travel. Professor Kanasaka retraces the intrepid journeys made across remote reaches by 19th century explorer and writer Isabella Bird. This exhibition not only promotes a valuable cross-cultural exchange, but also reflects on historical change. To cement this link between past and

present, it should be noted that much of Isabella Bird's work, original photos and letters can be found in the John Murray Archive, which the Library hopes to acquire in 2006.

Our current exhibition, *Sale of the Centuries*, provides a glimpse of our changing relationship with shops and shopping, over more than three centuries, from the early markets and fairs, through the growth of the corner shop and the High Street, to the age of the grand department store and beyond.

*Sale of the Centuries* runs from 8 December to 12 February

### Scottish Science Hall of Fame

[www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk) now offers an interactive opportunity for web users to select historic scientists for celebration. The latest addition to the website's Digital Library, the Scottish Science Hall of Fame, has just been launched. The site is a two-part project, which encourages users to vote for their favourite Scottish scientist. Users can choose from a selection of twenty four scientists, spanning several centuries and most disciplines. The voting site – a 'first' on the NLS website – is an interactive resource for anyone interested in science and could be of particular use to schools. The top ten will then be featured in a more detailed site, which will further outline their contributions to science and everyday life. John Logie Baird – whose endeavours are recalled by Malcolm Baird's article within – is among the candidates. Why not log on and cast your vote?

[www.nls.uk/scientists](http://www.nls.uk/scientists)

### Future Publications

This is the final issue of *Folio*. The Library will launch a new publication, replacing both *Folio* and *Quarto*, in the New Year, with a revised format and design, while retaining the high quality, in-depth articles that reflect on the Library's collections, research, outreach and other activities.

We would like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to all who have contributed to *Folio* over the years, and in particular to the Editor, Jennie Renton.

We welcome comments on how we might best develop our newsletter, as well as contributions for publication. Please address all correspondence to the in-house Editor, Julian Stone, Marketing Communications Officer at [j.stone@nls.uk](mailto:j.stone@nls.uk) or 0131 623 3764.

Our newsletter will continue to be available online. For enquiries concerning web features and content, please contact Alison Buckley, Web Editor on [a.buckley@nls.uk](mailto:a.buckley@nls.uk) or 0131 623 3775.

If you are reading someone else's copy and would like to be added to our mailing list, please contact Bruce Blacklaw, Communications Assistant on [b.blacklaw@nls.uk](mailto:b.blacklaw@nls.uk) or 0131 623 3762.

**Cover image: From a 1920s Bird's Custard advert from Weldon's Fair Isle Jumpers pattern book.**