



STORIES FROM THE ARCHIVES:

“Influence as Great as Marconi’s”!

Living through a pandemic is to experience a unique period of history. Yet history is made up of many unique periods and events: some destructive to the world and its inhabitants, others beneficial to humankind, and still others that are simply happy or frivolous.

One important event in history was the invention of television. Miss E. H. McLean, possibly a teacher at PLC, wrote this for the May 1927 issue of the *Aurora Australis*:¹

“I must mention my great good fortune in being present at the first demonstration of television. Think of it! We sat in complete darkness, and the room in which the man was moving was in darkness also, and yet we saw quite clearly all he did, and he was two floors above us.

“Mr. Baird got this further development during the last six months by watching the setting sun, and he noticed how the red rays were not absorbed by the atmosphere. He worked on this, and found that by using the infra-red rays, which are invisible to our eyes, he could get a big step further in his work. So it seems he has got something which may in time have influences as great as Marconi’s.”

To put Miss McLean’s article into context we should understand:

Mr Baird – Electrical engineer and inventor John Logie Baird (1888-1946), the son of a Church of Scotland minister, is generally credited with having developed the television. It is fitting that Australian television’s “Logie Awards” are named in honour of Baird.

First demonstration – Baird gave the first public demonstration of moving silhouette images by television at Selfridges department store in London in a three-week series of demonstrations beginning on 25 March 1925.²

Reading Miss McLean’s words nearly a century on, her last sentence is prescient: “So it seems he has got something which may in time have influences as great as Marconi’s”. Guglielmo Marconi (1874-

¹ Series 2 *Aurora Australis* May 1927, p. 24.

² Wikipedia.

1937) developed the first effective system of radio communication. Few would dispute the claim that television has had as great, or greater, influence as the radio!

It was nearly three decades later, in November 1956, that the Minutes of our College Council recorded, “We were very pleased to receive at 24” T.V. Set.”³ This is the first documentation of the College having a television and the acquisition was probably so that teachers and staff could watch the Olympics, which opened in Melbourne on 22 November that year.

Television sets remained scarce in the College for some years, as the Year 2 students went to Mrs Thompson’s house to watch the astronauts landing on the moon in July 1969.⁴

Today we stream moving images on laptop computers and mobile telephones, both in the classroom and at home, but the technology to do so is based on the demonstration of what Miss McLean wrote about in 1927.



Boarders watching TV in 1995 (left) and 2003 (right).

Note that while many of the furnishings (and uniforms) are the same in both images, the television equipment has changed – there are no “rabbit ears” in 2003!

Debby Cramer, Archivist

³ Series 1 Minutes of College Council, 19 November 1956, p. 7.

⁴ *Man on the Moon* booklet, 1969, Bay Register PB 8.