August 13th

John Logie Baird

Born: Aug. 13, 1888;

Argyll and Bute, Scotland
Died: 14 June 1946

Baird is one of the trinity of fathers of television, alongside Philo T. Farnsworth [Aug 19] and Vladimir Kosmich Zworykin [July 29].

John Logie Baird (1917). US Library of Congress.

Baird gave the first public demonstration of a working television system on [Jan 26] 1926, a repeat of his informal "Stooky Bill" test [Oct 2], and in 1927 transmitted images via telephone lines between London and Glasgow.

His Baird Television Development Company carried out the first transatlantic broadcast on [Feb 8] 1928, and the first live transmission of the Epsom Derby. It was also responsible for the world's first mass-produced television set, released in 1929.

The BBC chose Baird's technology for its television broadcasts [Nov 2] before WWII, but his electromechanical system was eventually displaced by purely electronic systems [Nov 2], based on work by Zworykin and Farnsworth. Baird had also moved over to electronics in the early 1940s, and gave the first demonstration of a practical fully electronic color TV display in 1944.

Baird is less well-remembered for his thermal Baird sock which he was prompted to invent because of suffering from cold feet. Other forgotten gems were the glass razor, homemade haemorrhoid cream, and pneumatic shoes.

Experimental Radio License

Aug. 13, 1912

The US Department of Commerce issued its first experimental radio license to St. Joseph's College in Philadelphia under the Radio Act of 1912.

The Church & College Society Bulletin of January 1913 reported, "…the College Wireless has been brought to a perfection that is unrivalled by any station in the city which is not purely commercial. The graceful mahogany cabinet containing the new set of eighteen-jar condensers has proved a fitting complement to the transformer, while the new white marble switch-board, with its neat meters, polished switches and starter have evoked the admiration of all visitors to the station."

During WWI, the station helped monitor the airwaves in search of spy transmissions.

IE 3.0

Aug. 13, 1996

Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE) [Aug 16] version 3 was the first to be developed mostly in-house, without relying on Spyglass code [April 5], and the first to adopt the blue letter "e" as its logo.

It was also the first to offer some serious competition for Netscape [March 25] mainly because it began offering similar features (e.g. support for Java applets), popular extras (e.g. ActiveX controls), and was the first to implement emerging standards such as CSS [Oct 10].

However, IE's growing popularity came with some negatives, including increased scrutiny by hackers, who delighted in finding security flaws. The first was the Princeton Word Macro Virus Loophole, discovered just over a week after IE 3's release. It marked the birth of IE's long-lasting reputation for poor security.

Regular Podcasting Begins

Aug. 13, 2004

Adam Curry, a former MTV video jockey, launched an RSS [March 15] feed of audio recordings called the "Daily Source Code". It eventually ran for over eight hundred episodes, with half a million subscribers at its peak, and earned Curry the title "father of podcasting" for having popularizing the medium.

Something like podcasting had existed previously [Jan 11], as "audioblogging", but Curry was the first to offer audio via RSS feeds, in a radio talk show format, that appeared online on a regular basis.

Podcasting first became possible when Dave Winer [May 2] released RSS 0.92 in Dec. 2000; it included a new "enclosure" element to pass the address of a media file to the RSS aggregator, a feature that had been requested for a while by Curry and other audiobloggers. The phrase "podcasting" dates from [Feb 11] 2004.

The day before the launch of the "Daily Source Code", Winer had launched his own podcast, "Morning Coffee Notes", but as an ex-MTV host, Curry was in a much better position to attract listeners.

OSS License Ruling

Aug. 13, 2008

In the case of Robert Jacobsen vs. Kam Industries, Judge Faith

S. Hochberg ruled that programmers could still exert control over their intellectual property even after it had been released under an open source license. This decision was the first to examine the validity of such licenses.

The case began in March 2006 when Jacobesen filed a lawsuit against Kam alleging that the company had taken code from his Java Model Railroad Interface project, which was freely available at Sourceforge, and redistributed it without credit.

In her ruling, the judge remarked, “Traditionally, copyright owners sold their copyrighted material in exchange for money. The lack of money changing hands in open source licensing should not be presumed to mean that there is no economic consideration, however.”

ECMAScript 4 Dies

Aug. 13, 2008

ECMAScript began as a version of Netscape's JavaScript standardized by ECMA International to ensure the interoperability of Web pages across different browsers. The process began in Nov. 1996, kicked off by Netscape [March 25], and the first edition of ECMA-262 was adopted in June 1997.

Brendan Eich (JavaScript's developer [July 4]) commented at the time that "ECMAScript was always an unwanted trade name that sounds like a skin disease."

ECMAScript 4 would have been the first major update since the third edition in 1999. The intent was to better support programming in the large, add JSON features [Sept 3], and to fix bugs of course.

But progress was slow due to the competing requirements of the two browser heavyweights: Netscape's JavaScript 2 specification vs. Microsoft's JScript .NET [Feb 13]. A more recent contender was Adobe's [Oct 6] in-house ActionScript 3.0 engine (used in Flash 9 [Jan 6]).

Matters became heated, and led to a rather public spat between Eich and Chris Wilson, Microsoft's platform architect for Internet Explorer [March 18]. Wilson thought the proposals amounted to "breaking the Web," while Eich responded that Wilson was "repeating falsehoods".

In the end, Microsoft, Google, Yahoo!, Adobe, and other dissenters formed their own subcommittee to design a less ambitious update of ECMAScript 3, cleverly named ECMAScript 3.1.

The two teams made-up in July 2008, and on this day Eich announced that the standardization process would focus on ECMAScript 3.1 (later renamed to a more forward-looking ECMAScript 5) with the full collaboration of all parties. On Dec. 3, 2009, the fifth edition of ECMA-262 was published.

Since then, updates have been boringly uneventful, and version 11 was finalized in June 2020.