



Always Inventing - a photobiography of Alexander Graham Bell

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Media type:

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'Mr Watson, come here, I want to see you!...' Most of us know that Alec Bell invented the telephone and some of us know that this was a result of his being a highly gifted teacher of deaf people. But did you know that this most benign of inventors also pioneered the metal detector (to locate the fatal bullet in US President Garfield), the iron lung (in response to his son's death from respiratory failure) or the hydrofoil, or tetrahedral spaceframes or (hello Dolly!) a strain of super sheep? This superb study of a true polymath tells us all this and much more as we trace the milestones in Bell's career from his early Scottish upbringing to his setting the world water speed record (70.86mph) three years before his death. The whole book is a beautifully integrated sequence of narrative and photographs, excellently written, designed and produced. As well as Bell archive photography we get to see contemporary cartoons (the first mobile phone), Mark Twain's phone bill (even then you paid extra for an extension) and most precious of all, Bell's own Edward Lear-like sketches for his prototype 'vacuum jacket'. And so, as with all good biographies, we come to have a full-bottomed acquaintance with the man (who was, incidentally, the first person to use x-rays in Canada) and to appreciate the value of his work to a hugely gratifying extent. The other gear thing that Bell did was to set up the National Geographic Society's magazine, and the Society's current Chairman is Bell's great-grandson, which makes this production very much a family affair. Congratulations to the family for engaging Tom Matthews to provide the narrative - it reads seamlessly from end to end like a good novel and to the design and research teams for producing this example of books at their best. Libraries should seize this avidly and promote it energetically while avoiding sullyng the brilliant endpapers with insensitive date-labels. Me, I'm going to read it again.

Running Order:

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