



John Logie Baird; Guglielmo Marconi; Leonardo Da Vinci; Michael Faraday

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Here are four household names whose discoveries inform many corners of our daily lives. Their daily lives - and much else beside their history-making contributions, are discovered here in highly informative detail. Common to all four (this is a formula-based series) is a picture of the subjects' early years, showing their emergence as what we now call 'scientists'. Baird, the sickly son of the manse who at a tender age provided electric light for his home by installing a hydroelectric plant in the kitchen sink waste pipe, went on to play cricket with Jack 'Goodnight Vienna' Buchanan. Marconi, his scientific bent despised by his father but encouraged by his Irish mother, got his lucky break when he failed the entrance to the Italian Naval Academy and had to make do with Livorno Tech. (Why do we still call it Leghorn?). Goldsmith tells their two tales with a nicely old-fashioned didactic touch with very clear technical explanations.

Leonardo was best known in childhood for his fine singing voice; his other talents flowered when his family moved to the cultural hotbed of Firenze (why do we still call it Florence say the Euros in my pocket?) in his teens. Michael Faraday, bookbinder son of a blacksmith, made his own luck by sending Sir Humphry Davy a sample of his work. Ross chronicles these two with smooth professionalism - less technical than Goldsmith but with a better eye for social detail.

An endearing feature of this quarter and therefore one presumes (this is a formula-based series) of the rest, is the frequent appearance of 'in their own words' features. Largely quotations from the subjects' lively accounts of their own experiences, these also contain comments from contemporaries, so Marconi includes Captain Kendall's matter-of-fact report of his wireless message that precipitated the arrest of 'Crippen, the London cellar murderer' on his **SS Montrose**.

The publishers puff themselves as 'the gold standard for children's information books'. Something from my extremely vague (and reluctant) grasp of economic history tells me that a gold standard is something that one can come off, but nevertheless, this handy and friendly foursome, with a good standard of relevant illustration, is well worth the outlay of a few Faradays.

Running Order:

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