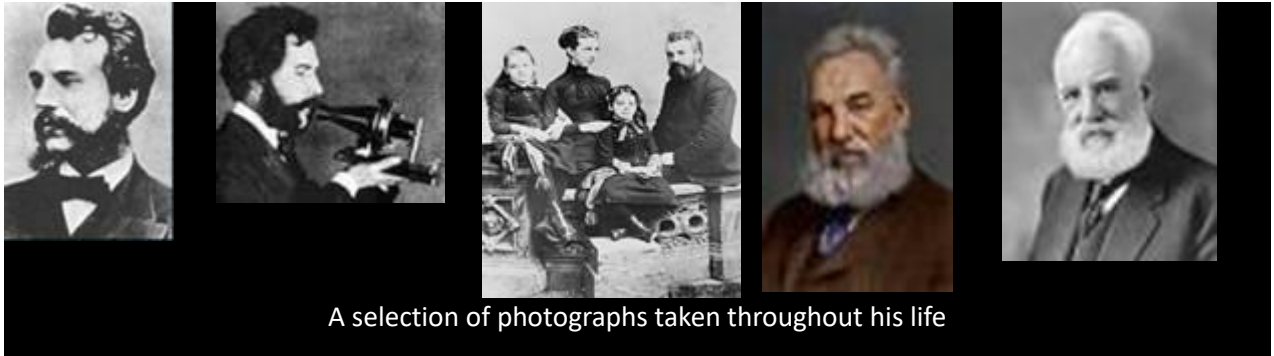


Alexander Graham Bell

3rd March 1847 - 2nd August 1922



Alexander Graham Bell is undoubtedly the most famous scientific figure to emerge from the Royal High in the 19th Century, and vies with Sir Walter Scott for the title of our most famous son. The following potted autobiography is an amalgam of articles in the public domain along with some photographs throughout his life.



A selection of photographs taken throughout his life

As a young child, Bell, like his brothers, received his early schooling at home from his father. The family home was at 16 South Charlotte Street, which now has a commemorative plaque marking it as Alexander Graham Bell's birthplace. He had two brothers: James Bell (1845-1870) and Edward Charles Bell (1848-1867), both of whom died of tuberculosis. His father was Professor Alexander Melville Bell, and his mother Eliza Grace (nee Symonds). Although he was born Alexander, at age 10 he pleaded to his father to have a middle name like his brothers. For his 11th birthday, his father acquiesced and allowed him to adopt the middle name Graham, chosen out of admiration for Alexander Graham, a Canadian being treated by his father, and a boarder who had become a family friend. To close relatives and friends he remained 'Aleck' which his father continued to call him in later life.

At the age of 11, he was enrolled at the [Royal High School](#), Edinburgh, Scotland, which he left at age 15, completing only the first four forms. His school record was undistinguished, marked by absenteeism and lacklustre grades. His main interest remained in the sciences, especially biology, while he treated other school subjects with indifference, to the dismay of his demanding father. Upon leaving school, Bell travelled to London to live with his grandfather, Alexander Bell. During the year he spent with his grandfather, a love of learning was born, with long hours spent in serious discussion and study. The elder Bell took great efforts to have his young pupil learn to speak clearly and with conviction, the attributes that his pupil would need to become a teacher himself. At age 16, Bell secured a position as a "pupil-teacher" of elocution and music, in Weston House Academy, in Elgin. Although he was enrolled as a student in Latin and Greek, he instructed classes

himself in return for board and £10 per session. The following year, he attended the [University of Edinburgh](#), joining his older brother Melville who had enrolled there the previous year.

In 1870, Bell emigrated with his family to Canada, and the following year he moved to the United States to teach. There he pioneered a system called visible speech, developed by his father, to teach deaf-mute children. In 1872 Bell founded a school in Boston to train teachers of the deaf. The school subsequently became part of Boston University, where Bell was appointed professor of vocal physiology in 1873. He became a naturalised U.S. citizen in 1882.

Bell had long been fascinated by the idea of transmitting speech, and by 1875 had come up with a simple receiver that could turn electricity into sound. Others were working along the same lines, including an Italian-American Antonio Meucci, and debate continues as to who should be credited with inventing the telephone. However, Bell was granted a patent for the telephone on 7th March, 1876 and it developed quickly. Within a year, the first telephone exchange was built in Connecticut, and the Bell Telephone Company was created in 1877, with Bell the owner of a third of the shares, quickly making him a wealthy man.

In 1880, Bell was awarded the French Volta Prize for his invention and with the money, founded the Volta Laboratory in Washington, where he continued experiments in communication, in medical research, and in techniques for teaching speech to the deaf, working with Helen Keller among others. In 1885 he acquired land in Nova Scotia and established a summer home there where he continued experiments, particularly in the field of aviation.

In 1888, Bell was one of the founding members of the National Geographic Society, and served as its president from 1896 to 1904, also helping to establish its journal.

Bell died on 2nd August 1922 at his home in Nova Scotia.



Dr Bell visits the Royal High School for the last time on St Andrews Day 1920



The Evening News carries the same story as shown on the left

Acknowledgements

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