

60 Years of Tannoy

A potted history of a Company whose name is synonymous with 'Sound'.

The Tannoy organisation was founded in 1926 by Guy R Fountain, a young Yorkshireman who was fascinated by the enormous potential he could see in the electronics field of electrical engineering. In the mid-twenties, when everyone was excited about the prospect of "talking pictures", news of which was filtering through from the USA, domestic radio was firmly established as a form of home entertainment.

These early radio sets needed low voltage DC to heat valve filaments and high voltage DC to provide the prime power source. This had to be supplied by batteries, either lead acid "wet" batteries, expensive and frequently in need of recharging, or by dry batteries, also expensive and with a relatively short life.

Guy Fountain was intrigued by the possibility of obtaining DC current from the AC house mains. To do this a rectifier was necessary. In 1926 he perfected an electrolytic rectifier which was simple and reliable enough for home use. The trade mark 'Tannoy' was derived from the Tantalum alloy used in its construction. Guy Fountain set up a tiny factory in Tulsemere Road, West Norwood, London, to manufacture these rectifiers and Tannoy was born.

Soon after the establishment of the factory in Tulsemere Road experiments had started with moving coil loudspeakers with DC energised magnets. This growth in the loudspeaker division of the business led to a move to larger premises in 1930.

The need for precise evaluation of the performance of amplifiers, receivers and loudspeakers had become a vital necessity, so the now well established Tannoy research laboratory undertook the development of a complete range of test and measuring equipment. In 1933, Guy Fountain produced his first discrete 2-way loudspeaker system.

By 1934, the company had developed a complete range of high quality microphones and loudspeakers, together with amplifiers with power ratings between 10 and 200 watts. They had also developed measuring equipment for the precise evaluation of their performance. In a decade, when every step forward was a step into the unknown, they had established themselves as one of the leading audio engineering specialists in Europe.

Between 1934 and 1939, the arrival of high power, high quality sound reinforcement and relay equipment had a big impact on almost every facet of social and economic activity. Vocal and

instrumental music could be created and, in public life, vast crowds could be addressed by politicians and national leaders. People could follow more closely and participate more completely in all outdoor sporting events and communication in the rapidly growing industrial complexes of the time became simple and reliable. Tannoy was always at the forefront of this communications revolution, developing its own equipment and production technology and building up a fund of knowledge and experience which was to prove invaluable in the days to come.

When war came in 1939, all the Tannoy facilities were concentrated on the nation's defence programme. Communication systems for airfields, crew communication for submarines and tanks, command systems for gun batteries and systems for the defence industries were developed and put into production.

With the return of peace in 1946 the need for sound reinforcement in legislative assemblies and for translation in international assemblies became of paramount importance. Sound reinforcement systems were installed in the House of Commons and translation equipment for the United Nations was supplied for their temporary HQ in Paris, their permanent European HQ in Geneva and for the UN building in New York. Tannoy has become one of the world's largest suppliers of translation and sound reinforcement equipment for international conferences and there is scarcely a country in the world where Tannoy has not formed a vital link in international debate.

Between the late 1940's and early 1950's Tannoy developed very high-powered electronic fog signals and a unique range of flame-proof transducers for the petro-chemical industry. Also at this time they produced their first Dual Concentric loudspeaker. A horn-loaded compression driver was built concentrically with a direct radiator bass unit using a single magnet assembly with two gaps mounted on a heavy cast frame. At this time, Decca expressed interest in the new loudspeaker for use as a studio monitor and bought their first six.

By the early 1950's, LP records and FM broadcasting had arrived and the first rumbles of the High Fidelity explosion were heard. During this period Tannoy Dual Concentrics were adopted by a number of major recording studios; and today, many of the world's leading broadcast, TV and music studios also rely on Tannoy loudspeakers for monitoring the quality of their sound output.

In 1974, Guy Fountain, now an old man and not

in the best of health, gave up control of his firm. Tannoy became part of Harman International, later to be bought by the Beatrice Foods Corporation of Chicago, and a large modern factory was opened at Coatbridge in Scotland.

Tannoy severed all links with Harman International in 1980, and on 12 December, 1981 the Company was purchased from Beatrice Foods by the working directors of the company. By 1983, growth in the domestic hi-fi loudspeaker market had increased dramatically, and new range introductions ensured this continued expansion.

1984 saw the introduction of a new modular "building block" range of music PA loudspeakers. This was a new market and now, 2 years later, the product range is immensely successful and has grown since introduction.

Not content with the success achieved in the existing markets, and keen to keep as up to date as possible within the Public Address sector, they moved into the Close Circuit Television field in 1985. This entailed setting up a complete department with a team of highly skilled engineers who provide a friendly, but thoroughly professional and efficient service. The integration of Public Address and CCTV systems is a major advantage for crowd control, property surveillance, incident and fire alert as well as general monitoring purposes.

Today Tannoy Ltd. is once again a wholly owned British company and is rapidly increasing its presence in traditional markets of loudspeakers for domestic hi-fi, professional recording and broadcast use. The excellence of their loudspeakers has even been recognised in Japan where the Tannoy GRF Memory won the prestigious Stereo Sound "State-of-the-Art" Award. In fact Tannoy loudspeakers have a devoted following in Japan where they are the largest European hi-fi loudspeaker import.

The current range of loudspeakers includes the famous Dual Concentric models and also discrete models using compression driver or soft dome tweeters and separate bass units. Some of these models feature our patented SyncSource time delay system to reduce distortion and provide accurate stereo imagery.

1986, the 60th anniversary year, promises to be yet another record breaking year in all market sectors. With the introduction of a new Dual Concentric range of loudspeakers into the domestic hi-fi market and new studio monitors into the professional sector, they feel confident that the upward trend will continue.

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