

A Brief Company History

The history of Tannoy goes back to 1926, commencing shortly after the start of broadcasting in London. 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 dry batteries - expensive and with a relatively short life, or lead acid 'wet' batteries - also expensive and frequently in need of recharging. Most commercial garages at the time, had battery chargers and this became a profitable side-line to their normal business. An engineer named Guy R. Fountain owned one such garage, in the Dulwich area of London.



The commercial accumulator chargers in use then, employed mercury vapour rectifiers and were relatively expensive. This prompted Guy Fountain to look into ways of simplifying the charging process, with the aim of designing a charger more suitable for use in the home. To do this a rectifier was necessary. He perfected an electrolytic rectifier, which was simple and reliable enough for home use. Production of this rectifier used two different metals: **tantalum** and a lead alloy. Thus the name Tannoy was coined. Guy Fountain set up a tiny factory in Dalton Road, West Norwood, London, to manufacture these rectifiers and Tannoy the company was born.

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

At the same time the company became interested in the world of Public Address. Large companies such as Marconi and Western Electric were already in the Public Address business, but their equipment was not flexible enough to cater for mobile and portable applications in circuses and fairs. Early in 1930, the company won a contract to supply the Bertram Mills Circus, the most famous circus in Europe, with a sound reinforcement system, and from that time onwards Tannoy never looked back.



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, Tannoy had developed a complete range of high quality microphones and loudspeakers, together with amplifiers with power ratings between 10 - 200 watts. They had also developed measuring equipment for the precise evaluation of their performance. Even the famous Gilbert Briggs made use of their unique measurement facilities. 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. In 1937 the factory once again moved to larger premises in Canterbury Grove, London.

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 politicians and national leaders could address vast crowds. People would follow more closely, and participate more completely in, all outdoor sporting events. 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 the war came in 1939, all the Tannoy facilities were concentrated on the nations 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. It was during the war that the company became known for the so-called 'Tannoy' PA System, Consequently, in 1948, 'Tannoy' became a generic term in its own right, being included in the Oxford Dictionary. The phrase 'Over the Tannoy' is well known to service men and women from all over the world who spent their war years based in Britain, in fact it is still in general use in the UK today when describing Public Address announcements.



The expansion of staff premises, which had taken place during the war, provided the foundation for the next phase of development in post-war British and world markets. The need for sound reinforcement in legislative assemblies and for translation in international assemblies became of paramount importance.

Tannoy 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 HQ in Geneva, and for the UN building in New York. Tannoy had become one of the world's largest suppliers of translation and sound reinforcement equipment for international conferences and there was scarcely a country in the world where Tannoy had not formed a vital link in international debate.



Between the late 1940's and early 1950's Tannoy developed very high-powered electronic fog warning signals and a unique range of flame-proof transducers for the petrochemical industry. It further developed high-powered, high quality loudspeakers and established itself as the leading European loudspeaker manufacturer in recording studio monitors and became well known for very high quality loudspeakers for the fast growing audio and hi-fi markets. It was at this time that the first Dual Concentric™ loudspeaker was developed and subsequently launched at the London Radio show in 1948. 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. Decca expressed interest in the new loudspeaker for use as a studio monitor and bought the first six produced.

In the early 1970s Tannoy was sold to an American Group, Harman International Industries. Tannoy then moved to its present location in Coatbridge, Scotland, in 1976. The Beatrice Foods Company purchased Tannoy, along with a number of other Harman businesses, in 1977. With a decline in the hi-fi industry in the early eighties Beatrice Foods took the decision to sell the company, resulting in a management buyout by the working directors of Tannoy in 1981.

By 1983, Tannoy's 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 for Tannoy and is one that has grown with considerable success.

Not content with the success achieved in the existing Tannoy markets, and keen to be as up to date as possible within the Public Address sector, Tannoy moved into the Closed Circuit Television field in 1985. This entailed setting up a complete department with a team of highly skilled engineers to 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.



Tannoy succeeded in rapidly increasing its presence in traditional Tannoy markets, loudspeakers for domestic hi-fi, professional recording and broadcast use. The Tannoy range of loudspeakers then included the famous Dual Concentric™ models and also discrete models using compression drivers or dome tweeters and separate bass units.

The excellence of Tannoy loudspeakers has long since 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 Tannoy are the largest hi-fi loudspeaker import.

Over the years Tannoy has been awarded many accolades for its products in Japan. This includes the prestigious 'Golden Sound' Award; first awarded in 1982 to the Westminster loudspeaker and then again in 1986 for its RHR Special Limited Edition when the company was celebrating its 60th anniversary.

In 1987 Tannoy introduced the Systems Division dedicated to extending Tannoy's influence within the area of complex PA and communications systems. The development of an intelligent monitoring system for constantly testing the performance of PA loudspeakers combined with the completion of prestigious installations at sites throughout the world had placed the Systems Division in a unique position in the world market. New products were being developed to ensure that Tannoy remained a leader in its field and the Systems Division had already taken the initiative in launching a marketing drive with its advanced Voice\Fire Alarm Systems.

In 1987 Tannoy merged with Goodmans Loudspeakers Ltd to form TGI plc, thus making the group one of the largest manufacturers of quality loudspeakers in the world. Tannoy, already approved to 05-24 military requirements, followed a policy of applying stringent quality control procedures through the use of sophisticated measurement facilities and in-house developed computer-aided test equipment.

Continuing product development enabled each of the subsidiaries to achieve considerable increases in sales while improvements in manufacturing efficiency resulted in greater flexibility and speed of response to customers' needs.

In 1989 the group acquired Audix Ltd, another well respected PA equipment manufacturer and contractor. This was merged with the Tannoy Systems Division, to become Tannoy-Audix Ltd. This combined strength then proceeded to gain contracts worldwide valued at millions of pounds.

Tannoy Ltd continued to do what it always did best; design and manufacture state of the art domestic and professional loudspeaker systems. In fact, the company actually won the 'Golden Sound' Award for the third time; this time, in 1990, for the System 215.



Over the years, Tannoy has continued to develop its expertise in many areas where there is a requirement for high quality sound - most notably in the area of broadcast, professional recording (both audio and film sound track), and of course the company is famous world-wide for its hi-fi loudspeakers. To this day Tannoy remains active in several key audio sectors: Residential Audio, Installation Speakers and Studio Monitors.

In all market sectors, Tannoy continues to incorporate exceptionally highly developed derivatives of the Dual Concentric™ driver into it's products. This unique technology, utilising a centrally mounted HF unit behind the Tulip WaveGuide™, maintains the sound principles behind the original design concept in that it combines transparent, fluid performance with true point source symmetrical dispersion properties. Further, more and more Tannoy products include a very high frequency driver, or SuperTweeter™, first designed for the 1996 Golden Sound Award winning Kingdom model. By covering frequency ranges up to and beyond 50kHz, the incorporation of this WideBand™ technology not only resolves fine detail of high frequency information but also effectively enhances the listening experience even at lower frequencies, making music more natural and true to life.



Within the Residential Audio sector Tannoy targets the mid to upper end of the market, with speakers and systems priced between EUR 200 to 30,000. Tannoy is moving more strongly into the growing Home Entertainment market offering 5.1 satellite/subwoofer systems and various in-wall solutions.

In the Commercial market, Tannoy focuses mainly on background music and speech systems, such as those for retail outlets, shopping malls, houses of worship, public buildings, corporate boardrooms, as well as music systems for clubs, pubs, and bars. Further, Tannoy has been active in the Studio Monitor market for more than 15 years, in recent years with the immensely popular Reveal monitors, in both their passive and active forms. Recently released is the top of the range Ellipse monitor; cutting edge design that incorporates Tannoy WideBand™ and Dual Concentric™ technology.



Tannoy is the brand name on many prestigious sound installations throughout the world. Examples include the Hong Kong Convention Centre, the Sydney Opera House, the London Palladium theatre, Coca Cola Headquarters in Atlanta, the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino and the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas, the Dolce & Gabbana headquarters in Milan and the Finnish National Theatre.



The Tannoy Group's Scottish headquarters are located in Coatbridge, near Glasgow with another facility, Tannoy North America, based in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. Other world markets are covered through a large network of country specific distributors. Manufacturing is split between the facility in Coatbridge and a range of sub-suppliers, with some assembly carried out in Kitchener for products specific to the North American markets.

In January 2002 Tgi plc merged its entire portfolio of companies with the TC Group, forming a holding company of seven individual companies; Tannoy, Martin Audio, Lab Gruppen, TC Electronic, TC Helicon, TC Works and GLL, to which TC Applied Technologies has recently been added. With each company in the TC Group retaining its autonomy and individuality, the true purpose of the merger was to create a group with the necessary expertise, agility and market access to share research and development resources; this to take advantage of the ongoing trend towards convergence of digital, electronics and acoustics technologies in the audio industry.



In 2003 Tannoy was able to present the first fruits of the combined technological expertise within the TC Group – iDP™ Technology, the digital solution to precision defined acoustics and ultimate audio system flexibility.



iDP™, or Interactive Digital Programming, was first exhibited at CES in Las Vegas, Nevada. The system had been engineered into the Eyriss loudspeaker range to produce a home theatre system of immense flexibility and quality. Following that, at the Frankfurt Musik Messe in Germany, the company unveiled the new Ellipse studio monitor also fully equipped with iDP™ Technology. It is Tannoy's vision to continue down the path of providing cutting edge audio solutions into all markets in which we are active.

A rich heritage, class leading technology and an inspired team of people combine with a classic brand name to ensure that the company will continue to make history by living up to its mission statement:

Tannoy is a leading innovator of premium audio solutions utilising cutting edge acoustic, electronic and digital expertise.