



Leslie Mitchell

(1905-1985)

About Leslie

Leslie Scott Falconer Mitchell (4 October 1905 – 23 November 1985) was a pioneering British broadcaster, best remembered as the first person ever to appear on BBC Television. Born in Edinburgh, the only child of Charles Eric Mitchell and Leslie Florence Whittington (née Lowe), he was raised largely by his novelist uncle, William J. Locke, after his parents' separation. Educated at The King's School, Canterbury, and Chillon College in Switzerland, Mitchell initially pursued acting after a brief stint as a trainee stockbroker.

Through the 1920s, he toured Britain, South Africa, and the West End stage, playing roles such as Captain Stanhope in *Journey's End*. A serious motorbike accident in the late 1920s left him with lasting injuries but did not end his career. By 1932, his rich voice led him to BBC Radio as a dance band commentator, and in 1934 he became a staff announcer and producer.

In June 1936, Mitchell was chosen—alongside Jasmine Bligh and Elizabeth Cowell—from 600 applicants to join the BBC's experimental television service. On 2 November 1936, from Alexandra Palace, he opened the world's first regular high-definition public television service, a landmark in broadcasting history. Calm and reassuring, he became the face of *Picture Page*, conducting over 20 interviews a week until 1939.

During the Second World War, unable to serve in the armed forces for health reasons, Mitchell joined the Home Guard and contributed to the BBC Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme. He also became a key voice of British Movietone News, narrating newsreels from 1939 until 1975.

In the post-war years, Mitchell worked freelance, presented major televised events—including the wedding of Princess Elizabeth to Philip Mountbatten—and was the first announcer on ITV's Associated-Rediffusion when it launched on 22 September 1955. He served as head of presentation there until 1958, later focusing on commentary, documentaries, and programmes marking television's anniversaries.

Mitchell's career spanned nearly five decades, bridging the pioneering days of pre-war experimental TV to the era of colour broadcasting. His achievements were recognised with the John Logie Baird Award (1964), honorary membership of the Royal Television Society (1983), and the Freedom of the City of London (1984) for his wartime contribution to morale.

Described by the *Daily Mail* as a "Television Adonis," Mitchell married twice—first to Phyllis Joan Constance (1938–1965), then to Inge Vibeke Asboe (1966)—and had no children. He published his autobiography, *Leslie Mitchell Reporting...*, in 1981.

Mitchell died in London on 23 November 1985, aged 80, after a period of ill health. His ashes were scattered in Scotland, leaving behind a legacy as one of the founding figures of British television.