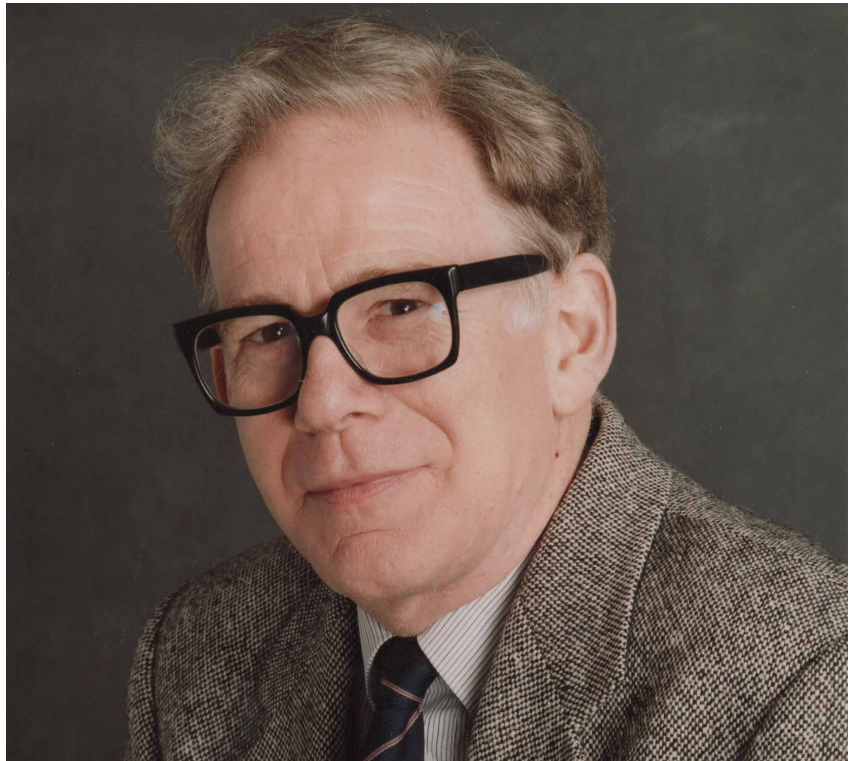


## Michael Hubert Cox

**M**ichael Hubert Cox, a giant in the evolution of the U.K. color television industry, died on 1 April 2022 after a long illness.

Cox, known to everyone as Mike, was born in Lancashire, on 30 December 1932, and was the son of a Church of England vicar whose parish for seven years from 1933 was at the British Church, Marseille, France. At the outbreak of WWII, Cox and his mother returned to the U.K. to live in Oxford, where he attended the Dragon School. During this part of his education, he won a scholarship to Dulwich College, which resulted in the family moving to live in South East London. On leaving Dulwich College in 1950, with university entrance qualifications, Cox went to the University College London (UCL) to study for a BSc in electrical engineering. At UCL, he was a member of the Students Union Council and he participated in many of the student “rag” activities, even once being arrested at a demonstration in 1953 resulting in him and his cohorts spending the night in the cells at Bow Street police station before, luckily, all were released from custody without charge! While at UCL, Cox joined the British Amateur Television Club and it was here, in 1955, that he built a television flying spot film scanner.

Cox did his National Service with the Fighter Control Unit, University of London Air Squadron. He graduated in 1957 having had to resit the mathematics year, but he used his spare time in that year to good effect by tutoring other



students. After National Service, Cox joined Marconi Company, Chelmsford, U.K., in their Graduate Apprenticeship course. Participating with him on the Marconi course were many engineers who became prominent figures in the broadcast industry and who, in due course, were instrumental in setting up television systems around the world, particularly in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Upon completion of the Marconi course, Cox went to work for Frazer Nash Electronics, Walton-Upon-Thames, U.K., for a year.

In 1959, Cox joined Associated Rediffusion, Wembley, U.K., as a studio maintenance engineer where he built an iconoscope camera in his spare time.

Then, in 1961, Cox joined ABC Television at their Teddington

Studios, initially as a planning engineer, then as Independent Television’s (ITV) only color development engineer for some years. Here, he was involved in the investigations and demonstrations of National Television Systems Committee (NTSC), phase-alternation by line (PAL), Sequential Color and Memory (SECAM), and near-infrared (NIR) color systems on 405, 525, and 625 lines. At ABC Television, he worked for Howard Steele, who was the chief engineer and who later became the director of engineering at the Independent Television Authority (ITA) in 1966. While Steele was at ABC, he persuaded the ABC Board in 1961 to invest some money in color television investigation. They carefully considered that they should not replicate

the work that the BBC was undertaking on NTSC and, at that time, the recently proposed SECAM system looked as if it had merit as an alternative system. As a result of the color system investigation work of Cox and his team, Steele was invited to join the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) ad hoc group charged with the decision-making of choice of the color television system for Europe.

Cox and his small team gave demonstrations of various aspects of SECAM in the studio at ABC Television to both EBU and International Radio Consultive Committee (CCIR) groups. During these demonstrations, they got to meet the “great and good” of the European Television fraternity. The first ever SECAM vision mixer was demonstrated during this time, as was the recording of programs on the monochrome (RCA TR-22) VTRs, which were installed at Teddington. They also designed and built a lot of other ancillary color studio equipment because, at the time, it was simply just not available commercially.

Cox’s team also gave color television demonstrations to the British General Post Office (GPO) to support a series of lectures, which they were giving to interest groups around the U.K. For these demonstrations, they required to have a SECAM video source because the alternative NTSC video source from the BBC would not have traveled far on the GPO’s video circuits of the time, due to their bandwidth limitations. The picture sources used in the demonstration were from a Rank Cintel polygon 35-mm flying spot telecine machine and a crude color caption facility consisting of his home-built vidicon camera and a color synthesizer, which was the prototype, of what was later to become known in the industry as the “COXBOX.”

With the change in independent television franchises in 1968, Cox left ABC Television having made the decision to set up his own television equipment design and manufacturing company, Michael Cox Electronics Ltd. (MCE). The

successful uptake in the market of their first product, the aforementioned COXBOX, underpinned the company’s further development, and the company grew significantly, amassing a good range of coding, switching, and mixing products, and, by 1985, the company employed 125 staff. The “COXBOX” name was given to the product by a German customer (ZDF), who bought one of the first units. In all, some 400 “COXBOX” units were made between 1967 and 1982.

MCE was bought by Carlton Communications in 1985 and Cox left the company soon after. In the following year, he helped financially with a management buyout of a company from GEC-McMichael. Cox became a major shareholder and nonexecutive director of this new company, which was set up as Vistek Electronics, to manufacture monitors, coders, and standards converters. Simultaneously, he set up Cox Associates Ltd., and this company produced test signal generators, title assemblers, and various other electronic television “black boxes.”

It was during his time at Rediffusion that Cox joined the Royal Television Society (RTS) in 1958 and in subsequent years, he became a member of the RTS Council from 1967–1975, 1977–1980, and 1981–1984. He was the chair of the RTS Papers Committee from 1967–1975 and in this position, he helped to organize the technical papers for the first International Broadcasting Convention (IBC) in 1967 of which the RTS was one of the sponsors. He was made a Fellow of the RTS in 1975 and was the chair of the RTS Future Development Committee from 1977–1979. In 1979, Cox joined SMPTE. He was appointed to the board of directors of the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) in 1991 retiring in 2010. Patrick Swaffer, the president of the BBFC declared that Cox was a man full of the good of good humor and common sense with a good business brain. He did

not interfere with the classification side of the BBFC operation, contributing by just simply working hard to ensure the organization was well resourced, financially stable, and had the facilities to properly discharge its statutory duties and, in this regard, he was very supportive.

Cox was invited to join the IBC Management Committee in 1988, where he became the deputy chairman in 1991 and then the vice president of IBC in 1998. Cox was deeply involved in the negotiations with the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE) in 1996 to allow it and all the other sponsoring organizations, RTS, International Trade Association for Broadcast and Media Technology (IABM), IEEE, SMPTE, and Society of Cable Telecommunication Engineers (SCTE) to each have a shareholding in IBC.

In retirement, Cox built his own 3D color television system in his sitting room and, when completed, took it to various amateur radio clubs and universities in the South East of the U.K. with the flat projection screen used for the demonstrations tied precariously to the roof of his Fiat Panda car. On one occasion, it fell off while he was driving on the M3 motorway, but luckily he was driving in the inside lane!

In 2006, Cox volunteered to help at the Richmond Talking Newspaper (RTN), and Alec Thomas, the then chair of RTN, recalls him using his technical skills and mischievous sense of humor to migrate the whole operation from audio cassettes to digital media without any major problems. This resulted in RTN being one of the first Talking Newspapers in the U.K. to achieve this transition. Cox also arranged, through his Liberal Party connections, a monthly interview with the MP for Richmond, Vince Cable, to keep listeners informed.

Cox had a wonderful sense of humor, was superb at electronic circuit design (as such he had “green fingers”), and he will be sorely missed by all who knew him in the industry.

