Apart from Baird, Britain's very own pioneer, the obvious place to look for clues to the future of television was America, where the medium had launched before even the BBC managed it - although initially the sole programme anywhere was two hours of a Felix the Cat doll rotating slowly on a turntable by way of a test transmission.

There was only a certain amount that could be learned from America, of course. The terrain itself is completely different, for one thing. Britain is a small country, small enough that the whole thing could be served with a single network of relatively few transmitters. Even if a single centralised network from sea to shining sea didn't involve principles anathematic to The American Way, it would have been unwieldy and impractical from its sheer size, let alone the federated nature of the United States hinted at in the name.

Besides which, their television was *commercial* - which was still barely considered moral in the UK, let alone thinkable. Public broadcasting over there basically meant tiny radio stations operating out of, and for the benefit of, colleges and the like. Other than that, broadcasting in general was, like everything else, something to make money on. This was Baird's ideal: networks built and run by entrepreneur-inventors like Allen B. DuMont, who helped make television practical with the first consumer-level electronic receivers, not to mention the first cathode ray tubes that didn't die almost immediately. He then went on to fulfill Baird's greatest ambition by taking these creations as a foundation for one of the first and most innovative television networks in the United States, or indeed anywhere else. Britain had no need for the latter stage, of course; it had the BBC. Baird's dreams of an inventor-led rival service died with him.

The late entry of the United States into World War II meant they could keep working on the technology for longer - essentially they started sooner and ended, or paused, later. But technology was only the half of it. A lot of it turned out to be incompatible with the British system, unless they spent millions of pounds (which no-one would have had even without the War) on tearing the entire infrastructure down and rebuilding it anew to match. Fortunately there were other things to learn from America. They also had greater and more up-to-date experience by now of the mere act of television broadcasting.

Unlike us, they hadn't stopped during hostilities. After several years of a morass of competing systems and services,the first commercial television service - WNBT in New York - finally emerged out of the all-new National Broadcasting Corporation in New York, from a transmitter atop the Empire State Building, on July the first 1941. Six months later Pearl Harbor was bombed and America entered the War, but although research into television was understandably tabled in favour of things that went bang, the station kept on broadcasting. In fact, it's never stopped, and

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broadcasts to this day as Channel 4 in New York City (albeit as WNBC).

The Hankey Committee's brief was to look into the potential future of television broadcasting - the entire future, not just the immediate one of the next decade or two. Which meant learning - or cribbing - as much as they could about the actual practical concerns of broadcasting. Basic bread-and-butter things that are second nature now, but the Americans were still learning as they went. How synchronised sound worked. What a camera was. Presentational etiquette and techniques (although, inevitably, the less formal and more toothsome American techniques were considered as examples of "what not to do" for the dinner-jacketed BBC announcers). And, yes, how commercial television worked, and what could be learned from it. It might have been unwanted, even blasphemous to the British television industry, but there's always something to learn even from the enemy - by then we had Nazis teaching us how to build rockets (or torture people effectively, in Klaus Barbie's case). Besides, there was that "entire future" consideration as well - you never know, commercial television in the UK might still happen. Best to be prepared.

The Hankey Committee delivered its final report to the Privy Council in December 1944. It was only a handful of pages long, and made six main recommendations. First and foremost, to preserve the BBC's monopoly in television as in radio. Second, expand television into "the regions", ie everywhere but London. Third, 405 lines (then high-definition) to be enshrined as the technological standard. Fourth, similar standards to be imposed on television receivers, making as much use of what we'd learned from DuMont and others. Fifth, more co-ordination and oversight into research and development, including the formation of a Television Advisory Committee to, effectively, carry on the same work as the Hankey Committee on an ongoing basis. Sixth, that television should be financially independent from Parliament. Also, look into Baird's 1000-line idea and see if it ever becomes practical.

This was finally published in March 1945, and after some unrelated business was out of the way (some peace treaties and an election) the new peacetime Atlee government committed themselves to the committee's recommendations in the autumn, starting with the setting up of the new Television Advisory Committee. Now the ball was in Haley's court.

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