

WEST OF ENGLAND GROUP MEETING, BLANDFORD, 8 SEPTEMBER 2018.

It was a welcome return to Brian Oakley's home in beautiful Dorset for his presentation "Out of the Mainstream", which certainly lived up to its title.

We began with recordings from the Edison Archives, including Thomas Edison himself reciting "Mary had a little lamb" at a function in 1927 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the phonograph. Next was the famous 1918 "Gas Shell Bombardment" record, HMV 09308, the subject of a detailed article by Peter Adamson in FtR67.

Other oddities included, quite literally, "The Oddfellows Song" on Columbia RO16 sung by Brother Watcyn Watcyns. To this day it is still sung at the beginning of every Oddfellows Order meeting.

The Square Record Society (only the label was square) issued records in limited editions, which proved so popular that they were later released by some of the major record companies. We heard the mournful "Death's Black Train is coming" sung by the Rev.J.M.Gates. The unfortunately named Mrs Bagot Stack made recordings for the Women's League of Health and Beauty during the 1930's. We were encouraged to join in "Feet and leg exercises sitting" and did so with varying degrees of success.

Two wartime records on the Topic label followed. This label was owned by the Worker's Music Association, a left wing organisation with reputed links to the Communist Party. "The Black Blackout" was certainly anti-establishment in tone, and "The Peat Bog Soldiers" was a favourite of British PoW's in Germany, so much so that the Germans tried to ban it.

"The story of Half Pint the kitten" on a rare 7 inch Esquire brought back memories of "Listen with Mother", and the presentation ended on an uplifting note with "The Lord is my Shepherd" sung by the Billy Graham Greater London Crusade Choir on Redemption RR551.

After tea and a tour of Brian's collection it was time for member's records, carefully chosen in the spirit of the theme. Frankie Howerd told the tale of the "Three Little Fishes" who swam out of the mainstream (get it?) and over the dam, with fatal consequences. Edric Connor sang a calypso dedicated to football and to Manchester United in particular. A mystery record followed, which was correctly identified as "Underground Train Noises". Why HMV accorded it Red Label status is another mystery.

Rare labels were not neglected. We heard Sam Lanin on the Beeda label, which made no mention of it's manufacturer. Your reporter has since discovered that it was made by the Compo Co.Ltd, Canada's first independent record company, founded in 1918 to press records from American masters for distribution in Canada.

Finally we heard one side from a set of HMV Special Records "For the use of H.M.Forces only". This gave helpful hints on distinguishing between American and German uniforms in bad light. Vital knowledge indeed!

So ended a most enjoyable and thought provoking presentation. Grateful thanks to Brian, whose home is becoming a regular and welcome venue.

Roger Mackey.

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FORTHCOMING WEST OF ENGLAND GROUP

MEETING.

Saturday 2nd March 2019. Topsham, Devon. Paul Collenette : "Edison Records : The Final Year 1929.