

Report of West of England Group meeting at Westonzoyland, Som.; 4th March 2017.

Westonzoyland having now become the epicentre of the WoE Group, we again met at the charming home of Roger and Nicki Mackey for a programme of “Martial Melodies”. This took the form of a canter through military history, illustrated by appropriate music.

Discs were played on a fine E.M. Ginn Expert gramophone (with electric motor and Meltrope 3 sound-box) – recently acquired at the Society’s auction at Malvern; cylinders on an Amberola 50.

We heard the ever-favourite Peter Dawson on HMV in *Drake’s Drum* – with Devonian references, a crowd-pleaser for us – and on a Blue Amberol (from a 1909 wax) with *The Admiral’s Broom*. (Admiral Blake had been a resident of nearby Bridgwater). Dawson’s diction on the cylinder seemed even better than on the later disc.

Relating to the Battle of Trafalgar, we were played *The Death of Nelson*, robustly yet sensitively sung by Walter Widdop on HMV D 1833. Then we heard today’s earliest record (1903); G&T GC 1353, Tennyson’s poem *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, sonorously recited by Canon Fleming. Next we had *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, sung by Walter Scanlan, and the clear, high soprano Elizabeth Spencer with *My Hero* (from *The Chocolate Soldier*). Both these were on Blue Amberols.

Moving on to World War 1, we listened to the stentorian Robert Howe (on Ariel 1201) in the sturdy recruiting song *Your King and Your Country Need You*. Another war on, and we had *Colonel Bogey*, actually a 1915 march, but here recorded in 1939 by the Royal Marines Band (Plymouth) at HMS Raleigh, where the excellent acoustics ensure that it is still used for recordings.

Necessarily, the eponymous (Percival) Mackey’s Band was represented – by *The Toy Drum Major*; and moving on from dance- to jazz-band, we heard the blisteringly hot Miff Mole & his Molers in *Navy Blues* – hardly played as a blues, they stomped through it.

After this, we returned to vocal records: Flotsam & Jetsam laconically lamenting the lack of songs for the RAF, with *Song of the Air*; then a couple of composer/lyricists – the reedy, mournful Irving Berlin in *My British Buddy*, and the wickedly satirical Noel Coward in *Don’t Let’s Be Beastly to the Germans*.

Then we broke for Nicki’s marvellous tea, resuming with members’ records. Curiosities included a 1955 EMIDISC private recording of a Royal Marines saxophonist; *Tom Marches On* – a newsreel-type march from the *ITMA* radio show; and *Gladiators’ Farewell* on a 1909 Favorite. On cylinder, we had *Bombardment/Lord Baltimore* (US-E) and the incisive (deafening, almost) *The Whip* (B.A.) marches.

Notwithstanding Messrs. Flotsam & Jetsam’s grumbles, the R.A.F. was not completely neglected musically. Raymond Newell sung – and shouted commands – in *Archie of the R.A.F.*, and the R.A.F. Band themselves played and whistled amusingly *In a Clock Store* on a 1930 Regal.

Though the subject was ostensibly serious, we had lots of fun, and we earnestly thank Roger and Nicki for another enjoyable programme.

Paul Collenette