

London; 17 July 2018

Norman Field made a welcome return to London with a programme on **The Rise and Fall of the Disc Record Company, 1907 – 1915**. The primary source for his talk was a 160 page typescript from Frank Andrews' papers, thought to be an early draft of an introduction for a book on Nicole Records.

We began with John Watson Hawd, a gramophone pioneer who helped the Gramophone Company establish some of its overseas markets, especially in India. He left the Company in 1903. We then turned to Nicole Records, an offshoot of Nicole Frères, a Swiss manufacturer of music boxes which was keen to diversify. These 7 inch discs made from a brown celluloid substance on cardboard hold the distinction of being the first discs manufactured in the UK. They were cheap and popular but came unstuck in 1906 when Nicole Frères failed and took the record business down with them. Hawd then set up the Disc Record Company, bought the assets of Nicole Records and began pressing discs from the Company factory in Stockport. Several dubious subsidiary companies were launched and failed and numerous short-lived record labels came and went, all using the Nicole masters from 1906. New material was needed and began to be introduced using pressings from the German-based Beka Records. By 1913 Hawd resolved to relocate the factory to Harrow in London. There were now many more companies selling records and prices had slumped. With the outbreak of war in 1914, German products became inadmissible, a catastrophe for the Company. New material was introduced from American sources and prices were cut but it was too late and the Company collapsed in 1915.

Norman illustrated his account with examples of the Company's recordings and included a wealth of detail which I have barely touched on here. It was fascinating, bringing clarity to a less familiar facet of the early gramophone world. It deserves to be published.

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