

Report of West of England Group meeting on 16th September 2017.

We (14 of us) were delighted to be meeting at a new venue, Brian Oakley's house in a beautiful Dorset village. Brian is of course well-known to us as an HMV expert, having co-authored the definitive book "His Master's Gramophone". His subject here was "Celebrate the Voice - in speech and song".

Our first record – though Russell Hunting's last – was a 1901 single-sided Gramophone Concert (GC 1224) of *Casey as a Doctor*. Further speech was on Amberol 473, of Ernest Shackleton telling of *My South Pole Expedition*. Shackleton's speech was unremarkable, until, pleasingly, he murmured "all right?" at the end. We were somewhat anxious as this wax cylinder was played on an Edison Opera; but, panic off, a model L (sapphire) reproducer was used.

Another 1910 Amberol followed – no. 40015 (Grand Opera Series), of contralto Marie Delna, who was in excellent voice. Switching to a Diamond A reproducer for Blue Amberol 3756, we heard Thomas Edison's only commercially-issued speech cylinder of "Let Us Not Forget" - our WW1 allies, especially Italy.

Another rarity was an Odeon sample disc (pink label) of *When I Was Called To The Bar* sung very fast by an unknown (British) singer. A further "Not for Sale" record was Columbia C 029 introducing (by Norman Long, possibly?) the New Savoy Orpheans in *You Are My Heart's Delight*.

Not to be overlooked, was our national treasure Vera Lynn, who sang *The White Cliffs of Dover* on Decca in 1942 (having already recorded since 1935).

After a few more records, we broke off to view Brian's collection, and to enjoy a great tea. Then we re-gathered for some members' records. Regal G 6020 had on it Billy Williams' signature, and the song *I Can't Keep Still To-night* - a catchy tune from c. 1912.

Our member Joe Pengelly was unable to come to the meeting, but had sent us a recording of himself singing part of Handel's *Messiah*; what a fine tenor he was in 1962 ! Lighter music followed, with Ivor Novello and Mary Ellis (who lived from the 19th to the 21st century) in *My Dearest Dear*.

Spoken-word political records included Mahatma Ghandi – surprisingly restrained – on a 1931 Columbia, and Julius Drewe (of Home & Colonial Stores – and Castle Drogo, Devon – fame) making an election speech in 1928, where he railed against the 1926 General Strike.

Next, we had a spot of humour: W H Berry on a 1911 HMV, talking hilariously about *The Bassoon*, with novelty bassoon effects.

Fetching in an Edison Home – with repeating attachment – Brian played an amusing c. 1912 Clarion cylinder of Albert Whelan singing *Put a Bit of Powder On It*. In contrast, the 1934 HMV demonstration record sonorously intoned the virtues of "The latest HMV radio-gramophone", with samples of HMV recordings.

And so ended a fascinating and enjoyable afternoon, for which we are most heartily grateful to Brian.

Paul Collenette.