

17 October 2017. There was a large audience to greet John Liffen who presented **The Science Museum's Audio Collections in Sight and Sound**. The acquisition of objects started as early as 1897 and most of them were photographed. Obviously John could not bring the actual items but could show to us pictures of them and thanks to modern technology we could hear the sound of some of them. Starting with phonographs there was a tin foil phonograph from 1885 by the London Stereoscope Company and an original Edison phonograph donated by Mr Edison. Unfortunately later on in his life he said it was on temporary loan and wanted it to be returned. This was done but not before the available skills in the Museum were able to create a facsimile. A phonograph duplicating machine from 1897 followed and then a 'Concert' phonograph from 1913. The latter series of machines are thought by many to be Edison's very best phonographs. Then John took us on to the commercial application of Edison's phonograph as an office dictating machine. We saw a dictating machine with a transcribing machine for the typist to use. These were in use until the 1950s. John showed a picture of Peter Copeland transcribing from a cylinder of 1888 thought to be a recording of Queen Victoria. We moved on to disc machines with a view of a Berliner gramophone from 1889, a 1911 Pathe machine for playing hill and dale records, an HMV number 5 machine (the famous trademark model) and an EMG Expert model from 1932. We saw a number of pictures of a Parsons Auxetophone which was powered by compressed air and was a very loud loudspeaker. This item was from 1913. From 1920 came an HMV internal horned gramophone which was fitted with a World Records attachment. The latter was featured in a presentation which we enjoyed at Great Malvern this year. A different way of presenting records followed which was a Wurlitzer Simplex jukebox playing 78rpm records. This was from 1936. From post WW2 times, John showed an HMV 45rpm record player the records for which presumably having the large centre holes. John was of the view that this was a 'badged' model from Victor. A 1981 Beogram record player was next then a Collaro 4T200 transcription unit which was pictured beside a contemporary Wharfedale loudspeaker. A Poulson Telegraphone wire recording machine from 1903 followed then we heard about the Marconi-Stillé machine which recorded on steel tape travelling at 30 inches per second. This could be very dangerous in operation if the tape broke so the BBC kept it in a locked room when in use. A BBC portable machine used in the last war and Ludwig Koch's portable recording kit which he used for bird recording were presented next. John took us on to a German Magnetophone tape recorder of 1943 which was the forerunner of all modern tape recorders. We also saw a picture of a Decca recording lathe. An American Wallensack cassette machine came next. To help dealers find faults in radiograms we saw and heard from some of a set of 8 discs and then heard from a similar record featuring electrical interference. Coming from the early days of talking pictures were two records numbered 9 and 10 which were part of the sound track for 'Broadway Melody' from 1929. We learned that the record labels were marked each time they were used and destroyed after 20 playings to ensure quality of sound was maintained. Some other interesting recordings heard were one of Alan Blumlein's stereo test recordings from 1933/34, an RCA long playing record (33 1/3 rpm) from 1931 and a private record produced for the retirement of A..E Holman. 3 Voight inventions followed. A condenser microphone of 1925, a moving coil pickup of 1943 and a corner horn loudspeaker of 1935. The evening drew to a close with a recording made to accompany a presentation at the Museum called 'The Trumpets shall Sound'. The audience applause showed that they really appreciated John's fascinating talk.

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