

Scottish Group Meeting

22 September 2018

Peter Adamson gave us a presentation expanding upon his recent article (*FtR* 67, Autumn 2018, pp.137–146) about HMV's famous **Gas Shell Bombardment record** made on 9 October 1918. As his article provided all the basic details, this report will concentrate on additional material that he provided, notably the actual sounds, both of the issued disc and of the unissued recording of a Siege Battery from the same 'session' that he obtained via the late Brian Rust.

To start us off in the right direction, Billy Gray kindly brought a 1910 Senior Monarch gramophone with wooden horn, in order to play us his original single-sided copy of HMV 09308. This gave us an important insight into how the disc would have been heard when it was first issued. Peter and I agreed afterwards that the sound of the mysterious (and probably faked) 'bongs' was very much more convincing in this context, confirming that HMV had indeed 'done their job' in providing a suitable soundscape, however genuine (or otherwise). After a brief retelling of the recording expedition, we were shown in more detail the processes of obtaining a spectral display to provide a visual analysis of what was audible: the interrupted background noise from the original recordings, and the relative sound quality of the shellfire and 'bongs'. We also heard, of course, the unissued Siege Battery recording, with its sharp and fairly realistic shellfire sounds competing only fitfully with the incessant bumping of a bad crack in the disc. An excerpt from Peter's home experiment, with his colleague banging a very different drum, made for a quite convincing (and amusing) demonstration of the probable studio fakery.

Peter also gave us some extra interesting detail via contemporary illustrations. Two of these showed us the mechanisms of the newly-developed 'No.106 Fuze' (as mentioned in the gunner commands) and he briefly hinted at its ingenious in-flight rotational release of a safety catch to make it more sensitive even to grazing barbed wire. Propaganda posters of the time exhorted us to "Feed the guns with War Bonds and help to end the War" (as on the unissued recording) instead of "...help to win the War" (as recorded on HMV 09308).

Overall, despite a distinct lack of any musical or other conventional entertainment, the presentation proved to be both interesting and informative, and the audience of 14 seemed well content with these unusual recorded sounds and Peter's explanations of them.

As a postscript, Peter asked me to mention that in his *FtR* article two of the illustrations (the spectrogram on p.141, and the diagram on p.142) should each have appeared on the immediately following pages: their separation from the associated text will have proved somewhat confusing to the readers.

Ken Jobling