

Report of meeting of West of England Group at Plymouth, on 5th July 2015.

It has been quite a while since our last “portables picnic”, and this year we were invited to the beautifully re-furnished home of John and Irene Hart at Hooe, on the edge of Plymouth. On this occasion though, the attraction was their garden with ample lawns for our portable gramophones [and a workshop larger than some London apartments].

We were very lucky weather-wise; a downpour on Dartmoor soon gave way to glorious sunshine for the rest of the day. In fact we had to keep moving the records into the shade.

As for the portables, it was something of a Columbiafest [models 220, 110a and 112a]; and Deccas [Nursery and 66 models – the latter with an original 1950s steamship luggage label]. No canines.

We had brought our own records, so they were quite an eclectic bunch – such as singers Jessie Matthews, Caruso, Maurice Chevalier, Walter Glynne, Christopher Lynch, and crooners Gene Austin and Smith Ballew. Pianists were represented by Carroll Gibbons and Charlie Kunz; the latter also provided the band accompaniment for the humorous “Madame la Marquise” on a German Imperial [from Rex].

More comedy followed with Billy Costello [the voice of Popeye] in “The Teddy Bears’ Picnic”, Arthur Askey in “Seagulls”, Albert Whelan with “Over the Garden Wall”, and Leslie Holmes who sang “The catch record” on Imperial. This was a clever number on similar lines to *The Broken Record*, involving trick sound effects of a cracked 78 – and a snatch of John Thorne dubbed in. We also heard a comic chorus song on Regal; “It always starts to rain” by the Two Gilberts – Fred Douglas + 1 on this occasion, though there were apparently four of them over the years.

Dance bands were also well represented, with such as the excellent Alfredo “Painting the Clouds with Sunshine”, the hot Ted Weems “Washing Dishes with My Sweetie”, the lively Bill Wirges’ “Yes sir, that’s my baby” on Harmograph – a St Louis label, Adrian Schubert’s “To whom it may concern” on US Crown, and Harry Hudson with “Cigarette”. Showing the versatility of the top dance bands, we heard Jack Hylton’s orchestra playing the sprightly “Grasshoppers’ Dance”.

After an enjoyable barbecue, we continued indoors with a feast provide by Irene, and then more records from John’s collection, in his purpose-built music room. It was well into the evening before we all left; our thanks are due to John and Irene for a great day.

Paul Collenette.