

Report of meeting of West of England Group at Exeter, on 14th November 2015.

Around a dozen members met in Exeter at Paul Morris' Victorian house, with gas lights and coal fire setting the scene for "The First World War – 100 years on". He started with a grey wax cylinder of a war poem written and recited by himself, and played on an Edison Fireside. Mostly, however, he played discs from the WW1 period on his EMG gramophone, which projected very well in the large room.

The Anglo-French alliance dated from 1905, so we began with *Entente Cordiale March* by HM Scots Guards [Columbia 2461] – and its obverse, the tuneful, stylish *Namur March*. At the outbreak of war, recruiting songs were required; foremost was Paul Rubens' *Your King and Country Want You*, robustly sung by Stanley Kirkby. He was joined by Jack Charman on an Edison-Bell Winner in *We shall all do the goose-step* - an ironical Kaiser-bashing song.

The extremely patriotic Edison-Bell company also issued *Our whistling Tommies* – group whistling with band accompaniment – to keep up morale. Though one wonders about E-B's policy in issuing *Mid shock and shell* – a military band number with cymbal sound-effects for the shells.

Changing style, we heard *Porcupine Patrol* - making fun of ragtime "animal" dances, [which Lionel Monckton, its composer, hated] – from the musical-comedy *The Dancing Mistress*. Musical-comedy, though, was losing ground to revue, since the returning troops preferred snappier, more topical entertainment. We listened to a good example of this – a Columbia disc of *Business as usual*, which had clear military undertones, with horses-hooves effects. Columbia were then in the forefront with original cast recordings, and we heard *When the clock strikes thirteen*, with clever, almost saucy, lyrics – about the new restricted licensing hours, designed to limit munitions workers' time in pubs.

From around 1916, the influence of American music became more noticeable, as with *Watch the bee go get the Hun* – and was soon to dominate the popular music scene. But in the meantime, we still had more wistful songs like *Keep the home fires burning* – beautifully sung by John McCormack on Victor, and *God send you back to me* by Thorpe Bates.

The war ended in 1918 and Winner released *Stony broke in No-Man's Land*; more upbeat, however, in 1919, was Walter Donaldson's inspired *How ya gonna keep 'em down on the farm [after they've seen Paree?]*.

We had a short break for tea, resuming with members' records. A particular curiosity was a Bulldog record, with etched label, of a speech by Horatio Bottomley, M.P. and swindler. Speech continued on a 1917 HMV, by Harry Lauder, in a fund-raising appeal for the war effort. Songs were represented by Maggie Teyte [refined] and Alf Gordon [unrefined].

Joe Pengelly brought along a CD of former soldiers from WW1 relating [in 1976] their war experiences; most interesting and historic.

Altogether, this was a most thoughtful programme, and we thank Paul warmly for providing it, and at quite short notice.

Paul Collette.