

Report of West of England Group meeting at Topsham, 14th May 2016.

What a joyous and sunny day the Society's West of England Group garden party meeting at Paul Collenette's home in Topsham turned out to be – featuring portables.

The theme, "Springtime", playing discs on around six machines brought by sixteen members, demonstrated at once the striking differences between them as to quality, size, weight, etc., but most essentially the differences of performance of the various sound-boxes and what they delivered to their horns.

What was especially heart-warming at the party, though, was the attention given to a new member of the Society, Tom Crook, a young lad who came out of necessity with a carer, but who has found tinkering with an Edison Standard phonograph therapeutic in the extreme. He had many questions to ask, and who better than phono guru Paul Morris to supply the answers, and who had incidentally brought along his Edison Diamond Disc machine rendering "I wanna be loved by you", along with others of a similar nature. It's nice to know that the hill-and-dale recording system on disc is still getting a hearing.

But there was more. It was a day that marked the 70th birthday of our super-efficient Chairman Paul Collenette – ably assisted by Secretary John Hart – without whom so much that has been achieved by our local West of England Group would not otherwise have been the case. Happy birthday and thank you, Paul, and may your spring never run down! Even the birds nesting in his garden marked the occasion by chirping away happily and on pitch – not at all fazed by Jack Hylton.

And what an assortment of portable machines and discs members had brought along; here are just some of them;-

John Hart: a Decca 66 from 1958 – the machine pictured in FTR recently marked "Wanted on Voyage" - playing "Where do flies go in the winter-time?" sung by Ernie Mayne on Winner 3371.

Roger Mackey: Decca 120 from 1929, playing "Teddy Bears' Picnic", "Tea for Two", "Singing in the rain" (not needed to-day, luckily) and other dance-band numbers.

Merle Gardner: Edison Bell 321 in blue cloth – priced at £ 3 – 10s new – real money – quite a rarity. It happily married up, though, with his choice of vocal items from opera and Gilbert & Sullivan.

Geoff Parr: HMV designated as PAAO portable (sic) of 1921, cost £ 3 – 10s, later re-numbered as 105. It was an early attempt by HMV to sophisticate the portable market by producing what was essentially an indoor Table Grand, with handles very much needed and carried preferably by more than one person! It performed well enough though with a sparkling rendering of Harry James' "Flight of the Bumblebee" on Parlophone R 2848.

All in all this was a delightful occasion redolent of an Englishness of another era. As young Mr Grace used to say in the TV series "Are you being served"; "You've all done very well" – and we did.