

The Phonographic Record

Journal of the Vintage Phonograph Society of New Zealand (Inc.)

A society formed for the preservation of recorded sound

Volume 55, Issue 2, July/December 2020



The Christchurch member who found this 78 “in a junk shop” years ago was, understandably, mystified as to what it was for. Thanks to Greg Coe in Melbourne for the answer. Bear with me, this gets complicated. This and several other records of unaccompanied singers were made in 1928 by Australian Columbia for E.F. Wilks & Co. of Sydney, distributors of Gulbransen player pianos, for synchronisation with Master-touch rolls played on Gulbransen pianos in demonstration recitals. It must have been a challenge to get everything playing together and I have to wonder why they bothered. The records may not have been sold to the public so if nothing else the enterprise produced rarities for future collectors -- Ed.

THE PHONOGRAPHIC RECORD

Volume 55, Issue 2, July/December 2020

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For your information

As 2020 draws to a close we in New Zealand are enjoying something like “normality” though the isolation period for everyone arriving from overseas is still effectively preventing us from catching up in person with collector friends in Australia and further afield.

As you see above, we have cancelled the Society’s Post Office box as for the amount of mail and the annual fee it was no longer of any advantage. Another change, this one forced on us, is the move now under way to electronic banking with the imminent demise of cheques. As we no longer charge an annual subscription and have few parts left, this should not be a problem.

The team at “home base” in Christchurch (including of course Bethany who produces the magazine and has it printed) wish all our readers a happy and safe Christmas and New Year.

Gavin East
Editor

From original Edison Disc Phonograph instruction leaflet, courtesy Mike Tucker

1. DETERMINING DIAMOND POINT TRACKING

Place gauge on turntable, inserting spindle in spindle hole. Place nose of gauge $\frac{1}{4}$ inch away from horn lifting shaft. Raise reproducer limit pin with thumb of left hand to center of top part of loop. With right hand on horn lift lever, swing reproducer in to center of gauge and let it down gently. Still holding limit pin swing nose of gauge into contact with horn lifting shaft. Let weight down gently onto gauge, placing limit pin in center of loop. Reproducer diamond point should rest on tracking arc. If it does not, see Instruction Book.

2. SETTING REPRODUCER HEIGHT

When diamond point is in playing position in middle of tracking arc, the height of the reproducer cup above limit pin should be equal to the thickness of a Lincoln penny. If not, see Instruction Book.

3. ALIGNING HORN

Insert horn aligning bar in horn, locking it in place with clamp ring. Have horn set so that bar extends directly toward front, parallel with side of cabinet. Lower horn into playing position and bring nose of gauge into contact with horn lifting shaft. If horn alignment is correct, locating point will be within $\frac{1}{16}$ " of hole marked "250" on models with No. 250 horns or hole marked "150" on models with No. 150 horn. (See list of models in Instruction Book if horn number is not known). On smallest horn, No. 100, the setting is between these two holes. If alignment is incorrect, see Instruction Book. Check tracking radius after aligning.

4. DETERMINING LENGTH OF TRAVEL OF HORN

The arc inscribed nearest centre of gauge represents the final music groove of the longest record. It shows whether the horn swing is sufficient to permit diamond point to reach end of any record. This must always be checked if horn alignment has been altered.

5. SETTING 10 INCH AND 12 INCH STOPS

The lines marked 10 and 12 represent the first music grooves of the 10 inch and 12 inch records respectively. When the proper key is pressed, the diamond point can be swung in only as far as the corresponding line. Adjustment is described in Instruction Book.

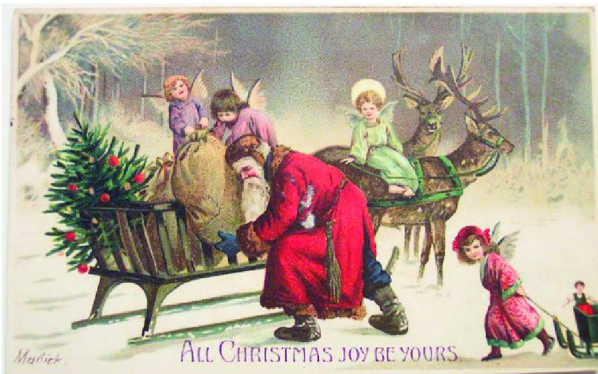
A Conservative Approach to Restoration **by David Peterson**

I recently turned my attention to an Oak Edison Opera that needed some love and attention after sitting in a rural outbuilding for many years prior to me buying it. The machine was very original and almost complete, but in desperate need of a careful clean and polish, some oil in the right places and adjustments to the running gear. This was one of those machines that I hoped could be saved in its original condition rather than needing new paint on the bedplate or a new finish to the case.

The only part that was missing was one of the four corner posts on the case. I removed one that was still in situ and this was used to have a new post turned to match. The new post was then coloured and polished in the correct colour before it was ready to fit to the case. After careful cleaning, it was clear that the shellac needed to be improved but that I would have to sacrifice what remained of the original Edison transfer on the front panel in order to do so. Using a shellac reviving product and extra fine steel wool I was able to soften the original finish and bring life back in to it sufficiently to save it. Thankfully the horn didn't need much more than a careful clean and polish to bring it back to a nice condition.

The bedplate still had a lot of the original paint finish and transfers. The paint was badly worn on the front edge in the usual place where owners tend to rest their hand to support the machine while it is being wound. After carefully cleaning the bedplate I was pleased with how it came up and so decided to leave it original and as is.

With a new water transfer in place on the front of the case, the machine is looking as original as it can be and is in my opinion very presentable for display. It plays well and I'm pleased to have been able to add it to my collection.





Editor's note:

The British television series “The Repair Shop” episode on the restoration of an Edison Opera attracted some unfavourable comment. Here by contrast is a less drastic treatment. Though Operas and Concerts have survived in relatively large numbers in New Zealand, I have a feeling that the oak Opera is the scarcest of the four options. I am sure I have heard a few collectors say that they assumed oak was for the Concert, mahogany for the Opera.

Meeting Reports July to November 2020

by Gavin East

Bob and Nu Wright welcomed us to their home in Aylesford Street, Shirley, Christchurch for the July meeting. In New Zealand this time of year is the depth of winter. There wasn't any snow in sight, however, as that is something we experience once a year if at all.

Joffre Marshall, our Patron, had died not long before the meeting so naturally there was a sadness about the occasion though we shared many happy memories of Joffre.

Steve James had been travelling in the North Island and found some choice single-sided Gramophone Co. discs in a shop in Masterton. They included red G&T's by Ancona and Tamagno. Steve was intrigued by the extra tag on the Tamagno label with a serial number. This was the pressing number and was supposed to be returned by the shop to G&T to calculate the royalties paid to Tamagno for each copy sold. As far as I know, Tamagno was the only artist to be paid like this so perhaps it was something Fred Gaisberg had to offer to get the great tenor to make records.

For August 2020 we met at Kathleen Campbell's home in Kaiapoi where we knew we would enjoy some magic lantern slides with accompanying narration. Before the entertainment there were a few items of business to discuss. We made the decision to cancel the Society's Post Office box and use my address.

Kathleen's cat Polly must have got used to us visiting as she stayed in the room throughout the meeting. I had not previously realised that she is one of that breed of cats known as polydactyls as they have extra pads and claws. Ernest Hemingway liked them which must be the most interesting thing I have ever read about Hemingway.

The 55th Annual General Meeting took place at my home in Lincoln in September 2020. I was very pleased and relieved to present audited accounts for the last three financial years, prepared by Trish Matunga at Gilbert and Associates Ltd in Lincoln. With no liabilities and over \$20,000.00 in the bank we are in a sound position so we had no hesitation in continuing the waiver of annual subscriptions.

My two year stint as President was up so the new lineup for 2020/21 is:

Patron: appointment(s) pending

Secretary: Shirley McGuigan

President: David Peterson

Vice President: Robert Sleeman

Treasurer: Gavin East

Committee: Wilf Boon, Roger Brown, Peter Harris and Bob Wright

The AGM took only a few minutes, after which we moved on to the monthly meeting for September. After some routine discussion I played a few rolls on the Ampico reproducing piano despite its need of tuning (taken care of by Stephen Powell on a visit from Wellington not long after the meeting).

David Peterson and I had been able to buy many of the 78's from the estate of Paul Flight of Little River and I showed a selection including some Fonotipias and operatic G&T's plus a Filmophone, always a welcome sight.

The October meeting at Wilf Boon's home was a particularly lively one in the best sense! This was due in part to our guest Henry Deer, a Christchurch piano technician who with Wayne Smith has restored many player pianos including Duo-Art reproducing pianos. Henry began his career with Begg's in 1961 and shared his memories of the last decade of that firm, once a household name in New Zealand for anything musical.

Robert Sleeman had been offered a large collection of 78's for what was likely to be a very reasonable price so Steve James was happy to follow this up after Robert had selected some for his collection. I had a couple of recent finds to share. One was a manivelle or hand cranked musical box in the shape of an upright piano, the other an album of sheet music including some early ragtime piano solos with illustrated covers. Wilf Boon had been looking for a copy of TANZA 78 number one, "Blue smoke", and had found one with David Peterson's help so played this landmark of New Zealand recording history for us.

To round off the year's meetings we were as always pleased to accept Peter Harris' invitation for November 2020. Steve James had scored a great find in the shape of an album of sheet music including many beautiful engraved and illustrated pieces dating back to the 1830's.

Robert Sleeman showed us two examples of the Excelda “cameraphone” and demonstrated one with a TANZA 78 of “Old Shep” sung by Luke Simmons. Robert also showed us an HMV accessory not often found, the large circular nickel plated multi compartment needle box. Kathleen Campbell showed us some additions to her record collection from a recent visit to Oamaru. David Peterson had been given some 78’s for the Society and these were handed round with just about everyone finding a few of interest.

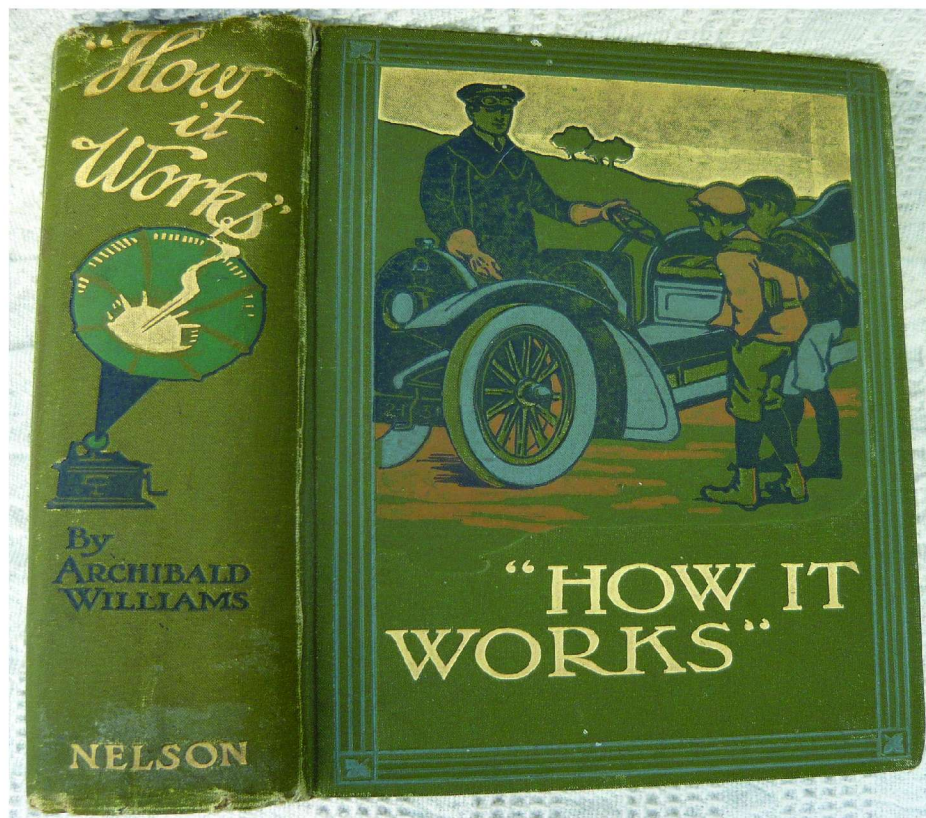
After supper including the milkshakes for which Peter is renowned, we looked at more of his very varied and interesting collection including his recent purchases of two early radios with separate speakers and an Edison Standard Model B.



The great Italian tenor Francesco Tamagno (1850-1905), creator of the title role in Verdi’s opera “Otello” and star of the Gramophone & Typewriter Ltd (“G&T”) record catalogue



Like Steve James, who found this record recently in a New Zealand shop, I used to wonder why only Tamagno's records seem to have the extension of the label with a serial number. Thanks to the internet, particularly Howard Friedman's research, we know that the great tenor had a special arrangement with G&T whereby he was paid a royalty on each copy sold. The number was supposed to be torn off and returned to G&T by the retailer -- Ed.



Running my eye along a shelf of late nineteenth and early twentieth century British books with pictorial bindings in a local secondhand bookshop recently, I was surprised to see a picture of a cylinder phonograph on a book's spine.

The author acknowledges the Edison Bell company as source of his information on the phonograph. The book is undated but appears to have been published about 1905 -- Ed.

President's Report 2020

by Gavin East

Although the President's Report is an annual opportunity to reflect on the past and contemplate the future, the disturbed state of the world tempts me to go no further than to express my relief that the Society is still functioning.

Nevertheless we can look back on a year with many positive aspects while, looking forward, there is potential to serve our members in better ways. For example, though Christchurch area meetings are enjoyed by a small group, some members find driving to a meeting on a Monday evening, especially in winter, a problem.

With so many of us now retired or self-employed, we could look at having meetings in the daytime. My successor as President will have many opportunities to suggest ways in which the Society can improve without losing sight of the special character that has maintained us for fifty-five years.

I thank Shirley McGuigan, our Secretary, and the Executive and wider membership for their support over the past year and wish the incoming President a happy and fruitful term of office.



Berliner Restoration Project Appears on New Zealand Internet Auction Site



This Berliner “Trademark” gramophone, an early one from 1898/99 going by the brake design, attracted a lot of attention when it appeared on the Trade Me auction website earlier this year.

If any gramophone deserves to be called “iconic”, surely this is it.

The successful bidder was a New Zealand collector who paid a little over \$1,000.00.

Flexible 78rpm Records Part 3 – Laminated records by Adam Miller

Laminated records were made from a sandwich of paper and one or two layers of usually clear celluloid, although some were black shellac lacquer (later used on an aluminum core to produce what are often referred to as 'acetates'). This also allowed the production of the first 'picture discs'.

6. Featherflex

Noel Pemberton-Billing (of World constant-speed record fame, and all-round genuine eccentric) invented the thin flexible record produced by Featherweight Flexible Records Ltd in London, in 1923-24. They were two 10" sides of shellac over a thin base described at the time by reviewers as being "canvas-like". Unfortunately, the surface was easily punctured rendering the rare survivors frequently unplayable, and sound quality was poor anyway. About 25 pairs of titles were issued, selling at 1/3d each.



WORLD RECORD (Aust.) PTY. LTD.
817 STREET, BRISBANE, VICTORIA,
AUSTRALIA
TELEPHONE - 33454

WOCORD
All Record Productions are fully protected by patents.

3PB

Price List

Record	Price
Wafer Duplex Record	1/-
Wafer Duplex Record	1/-
Gold Label	1/6
Wafer Record	1/6
Unrecorded	2/-
Austral Duplex Record	2/-
Austral Duplex Record	2/-
Gold Label	2/-
Austral Record	2/-
Unrecorded	2/-

Price 1/6 each. Further Patents Pending.

Station at Home by Wireless
Under the call sign of 3PB we broadcast complete Dance Programmes each evening all the latest hits. The name and number of each Record will be announced when broadcasting.

Despite the lack of success of these records, Pemberton-Billing left for Australia and set up the equally unsuccessful World Record (Australia) Ltd and manufactured a series of similarly constructed but inflexible discs (Austral & Condor) which had a much thicker pressed card core, so while unbreakable fall outside the remit of this article. Their claim to fame was that some were the first records produced in Australia from locally recorded masters. A Wafer (also Wafer Duplex) record was also produced at this time, billed as lightweight and flexible, but I have been unable to locate so much as an image of its label.

7. Aeroplane & Bellbird

The British technical advisor for World Record (Australia) was Frederick Mitchell who, after the failure of his former employer, established the Unbreakable Disc Records company in 1927 at the former's site in Brighton, Victoria. The first Aeroplane records were black, with gold printed labels, each side bearing the detail of both tracks. Masters came from American Plaza. They were issued in May 1928 selling at 2/6d, with an initial release of eight records, with ten more following in June. In parallel many of the same titles were issued on the Golden Tongue label for distribution by Craig Williamson Ltd in Melbourne. The whole concern collapsed after just a few months, making both Aeroplane and Golden Tongue flexible discs extremely scarce. Later Golden Tongue records were pressed conventionally by Clifford Ltd.

Just like his previous employer, Mitchell was undeterred and continued to improve on his patents, releasing in March 1930 the first batch of flexible Bellbird records from the slightly renamed Unbreakable Record Pty Ltd. These sold for 3/- and had "UNBREAKABLE" at the top. Masters came from Grey Gull, with occasional items from American Plaza and English Imperial. Around 100 were issued (numbered 100-151, then 300-346) before production ceased around September 1930.

A new company - Flexible Record Co Ltd - was formed and Bellbirds continued to be issued in 1931, but now with "FLEXIBLE" at the top, with about 20 issues from American ARC. These were probably pressed by Vocalion in Melbourne. The whole concern was liquidated in July 1931.



8. Pik-Nik

The 9" Pik-Nik was issued in June 1930. It was single-sided with dark brown shellac over a thin card base, similar to Durium, but slightly smaller and bearing a blue paper label. Just six records were issued before the producers -Worldecho - went bankrupt. All tunes were by the Collegians Dance Orchestra - a pseudonym for the Savoy PlazaBand.



9. Trusound

Trusound were one of the earliest true picture discs, being clear celluloid pressed onto a two-sided thin paper picture. The first ones were produced in Austria by Trusound Ltd in late 1931, then there was a break while they went into receivership in July 1932 and re-emerged in 1933 as Trusound Pictorial.

Records utilising Parlophone's old recording studio in St. John's Wood. About another 40 records were issued, selling at 1/6d each. The company went bankrupt finally in June 1934. A report at the time explained that due to the huge pressure required to make the outer celluloid adhere to the inner picture, the entire record could disintegrate in the press and no doubt this added to the cost and reduced the number of records which could be made.



A wide variety of picture styles appeared, bearing some relation to the tune on each side. A near complete set of illustrations of the known Trusounds can be found at Michael Thomas's excellent web resource (see References).

A wide variety of picture styles appeared, bearing some relation to the tune on each side.

10. Voices of Victory

During WWII the Gem Safety Razor Corporation made available mobile recording studios whereby US soldiers could record a message home. These single sided card records were 6½" in diameter, and were supplied with a mailing envelope. Many seem to be recorded then posted within the USA, so probably by soldiers on base; others may have been done at USO shows. All were introduced by the operator. The record's obverse shows various aspects of the recording process, including the mobile unit.

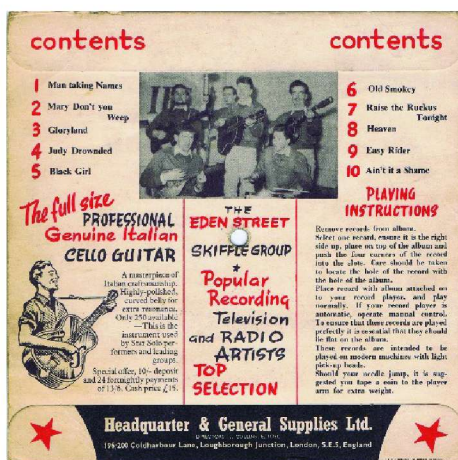


11. Popular Skiffle

In 1957, the Headquarter and General Supplies Ltd of Coldharbour Lane, London, created a gimmicky product to cash in on the skiffle craze sweeping Britain.

It consisted of a card sleeve containing 10 single-sided, 7" clear flimsy plastic squares, each with a single skiffle tune recorded by the Eden Street Skiffle Group. The front of the sleeve had four slots into which the corners of the "record" were to be placed to allow playing.

The records will not reproduce well, being fully transparent. The only information on each label area is the matrix number and track title impressed into the run-out. My examples are all gently wrinkled into unplayability. There are no signs that "Skiffle Album Number 2" ever appeared.



While there have been other issues of 78rpm records on a flexible substrate, such as Pathé's Cellodisc, USA's Flexo and the obscure Spanish Delfos label, it is hoped this short series of articles supplies a good overview of the range of truly flexible records issued during the 78rpm era.

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Advertisements

Phonograph Society of New South Wales Inc:

From cylinder to CD, the Society is for those interested in all aspects of historical sound recording and reproduction at its monthly meetings in Sydney. One subscription for all: \$A30 pa Australia and overseas. Write to The Secretary, Phonographic Society of NSW (Inc), P.O. Box 215, Epping, NSW 1710, Australia, or visit our website www.phonographicsocietynsw.welcome.to

Phonograph Society of South Australia:

An organisation of enthusiasts interested in the collection and preservation of the artifacts of sound recording and reproduction and research into their evolution. The PSSA NEWSLETTER, containing interesting articles and news, is published quarterly. Relevant books and reprints are also sold. Annual dues (Australian currency); NZ, Asia and South Pacific \$28.00; Rest of the world \$32.00; Write to: the Secretary, PSSA, P.O. Box 235, Kent Town, S.A., 5071, Australia. Phone and Fax (=61-8+8337-7134) E-mail: nelsent@picknol.com.au

The Antique Phonograph Society:

The California Antique Phonography changed its name at the beginning of 2012. We are now The Antique Phonograph Society. Our mailing address remains P.O. Box 169 Victorville, CA 92393 USA. However, our website changed a few years ago to: www.antiquephono.org
Rates for members outside North America are \$40 USD (check) or \$42 USD (through the website/paypal)

The City of London Phonograph and Gramophone Society Limited (CLPGS):

To join us, contact the Membership Secretary: Tim Wood-Woolley, 28 Park Terrace, Westcliff on Sea, Essex, SS0 7PH, United Kingdom or e-mail clpgsmembership@blueyinder.co.uk. For more information visit the CLPGS Web page at www.clpgs.org.uk

Wanted to Buy:

Dancing Rastus or similar figures to fit on old gramophone records.
Please email: v.rbrown@amuri.net or phone 064 3 312 4477 (NZ)

Wanted to buy (or exchange for what you need):

Reproducer, arm and “horn” or amplifier for a Mikiphone – or complete Mikiphone in any condition. Bruce Leask, 20 Hind Place, Palmerston North 4410, New Zealand. Phone (06) 3550636.

Wanted to Buy or Exchange:

HMV No.4 soundbox, gold finish and early style with “His Master’s Voice” printed on front. Record dusters with New Zealand shop names. Gavin East, 4A Lyttelton Steet, Lincoln 7608, New Zealand, email: gavexcat88@gmail.com

Wanted to Buy:

TANZA 78’s featuring vocals by John Hoskins. Please contact Wilf Boon via the Society’s email address, nzphonosociety@hotmail.com or phone (03) 332 2897

Wanted to Buy:

TANZA records Z90: Pixie Williams singing “Maoriland” and “Sailing Along on a Moonbeam”, with the Allan Shand Orchestra. Would be interested in other TANZA records, please send me numbers.
Contact Francis Young at hjyoung@xtra.co.nz or phone 07 549 2767.

Wanted to buy:

Large cygnet crane with adjuster spring. The repo ones the society used to make would be fine. Chris Rogers 3 Windham St Vic Australia 3749 email c.m.rogers@bigpond.com.au



One of eight 16 inch, 33 1/3 r.p.m. shellac Vitaphone film soundtrack discs found recently in a New Zealand antique shop. I have not previously heard of these early soundtrack discs turning up in this country. Since 1991 the Vitaphone Project has coordinated a worldwide search for these discs and has been able to restore the sound to many of the films held in the Library of Congress.

The New Zealand discs appear to be for films for which the soundtracks have already been found but there could be "lost" discs waiting to be found here -- Ed.