

From the Archives

The man behind the music industry at Roehampton Club

75 years ago, the passing of Trevor Lloyd Thomson Williams of Iver Heath, Buckinghamshire at the age of 87, was reported in the *Uxbridge and West Drayton Gazette* under the headline 'Death of Gramophone Pioneer'. The service took place on Wednesday 15th December at the local St Margaret's Church and among those present in the congregation were Colonel and Mrs Charles Miller representing Roehampton Club.

Trevor Williams was associated with the British Gramophone Company for more than 50 years serving as Chairman for 30 years and is credited as one of the most influential figures in the growth and development of the music industry. Williams was born to a wealthy Welsh land-owning family. He was educated at Marlborough and Trinity College, Cambridge studying law before entering the world of commerce. He also spent some time as a farmer and was well known for his herd of British Friesian cattle. He was President of the British Friesian Cattle Society (BCFS) for seven years and was instrumental in introducing the breed from Holland in 1914 by special permission of the Board of Agriculture which had previously prohibited the importation of cattle.

He is best known for his collaboration with American entrepreneur, William Barry Owen who approached him in 1897 with a business proposal based on the invention by US based inventor, Emile Berliner of a device called 'The Gramophone'. Owen had arrived in England

representing the US based Gramophone Company concerned at the competition from the German company called Parlophone which had been set up in Berlin as a record label and manufacturer of gramophones. When the news of Parlophone reached America, those associated with the US based Gramophone Company feared that the European market could become independent and needed support from the UK to protect their interests.

Despite his early reluctance to be convinced of this new technology, Trevor Williams was hooked in February 1897 when he registered a venture with William Barry Owen at the Hotel Cecil called The Gramophone Company setting up its offices and first recording studio at 31 Maiden Lane near the Strand in Central London with help from an Engineer called Fred Gaisburg. Williams is known as the first investor of the Gramophone Company in the UK with him and his partners contributing about £5000 in setting up the initial enterprise. This investment is equivalent to more than £680,000 in today's money. The logo for the newly formed Company was to become very well known – the picture of a dog listening to an early gramophone, painted in England by Francis Barraud. The painting 'His Masters Voice' was made in the 1890's with the dog listening to an Edison cylinder Phonograph which was capable of recording as well as playing, but Thomas Edison did not buy the painting. In 1899, William Owen bought the painting from the artist and asked him to paint over the Edison Machine with a Gramophone which he did. Technically, since Gramophones did not record, the new version of the painting makes no sense, as the dog would not have been able to listen to his master's voice – the master being Francis Barraud, the artist and his faithful dog called 'Nipper'. In 1902, a Gramophone subsidiary called the

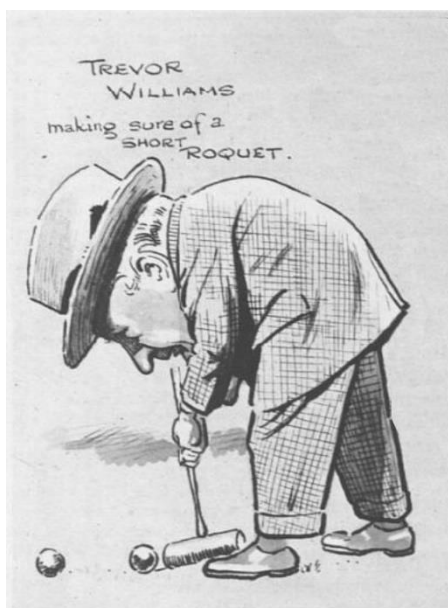


MR. TREVOR WILLIAMS,



Victor Talking Machine acquired the US rights to use the dog and gramophone as their Trademark which began appearing on their records that year. UK rights to the logo were reserved by Gramophone. Nipper the dog lived from 1884 to 1895 and is buried in England with a celebrated grave marker.

It was in February 1908 that the Company introduced the new labels featuring the famous trademark known as 'His Masters Voice', generally referred to as HMV to distinguish themselves from earlier labels. The Gramophone Company itself was never known as HMV or His Master's Voice but successfully grew their business to merge with Columbia Gramophone Company in 1931 to become Electric and Musical Industries better known as EMI with its links to the golden age of pop music and the many famous bands that recorded in their studios selling millions of records all over the world.



While responsible for an outstanding achievement in the music industry, Trevor Williams was an accomplished croquet player at Roehampton Club featuring on several occasions in the newspapers including a caricature in 1921 in the Sketch. The significance of his contribution to the business world and the Club was clearly recognised by senior Members at Roehampton Club with Colonel Miller and his wife making a point of attending his funeral.

Steve Riedlinger – Club Archivist

