

The end of an era

Rochdale Gramophone Society is the second oldest recorded music society in the country but is now about to close after 93 years. It was formed towards the end of 1931 by a small group of friends. The story is on the Rochdale Gramophone Society website

The Society was started by Mr Frank Walkden who was then living in Milnrow. He had an EMG gramophone which had a huge horizontal horn. He and two friends met over a glass of beer in the Commercial Hotel and it was proposed to try to form a gramophone society. They canvassed a group of friends and advertised in the Rochdale Observer. The response was one, a Miss McCormick from Balderstone, who joined and remained a member until her marriage.

The first meeting was in the Drake Hotel in November 1931. On the night of the first meeting the EMG gramophone, which had been ordered, had not arrived. The railway people had failed to deliver it in time for the meeting and Mr Walkden had to run up to the Fishwick Street sidings to collect it. There was a right to-do in persuading the night staff to allow him to take it away, but they did and the waiting members had an exciting time trying it out.

Over the years the society grew and then declined in membership numbers. By the end of the 1900s it stood at about 30 members.

Changes also took place in the technology used. Initially it was gramophone records followed after many years by cassette tapes and eventually CDs. In the last couple of decades, it was also possible to enjoy opera and ballet using a digital projector.

In its closing years it has dwindled to just 8 members one of whom is 95 years old and has been a member for over 60 years.

In 1936 a national organisation was formed which is now called the Federation of Recorded Music Societies. (FRMS). Rochdale Gramophone Society has played its part in this organisation as one of its members photographed events and managed the FRMS website for 13 years, was Vice Chairman for 5 years and is now one of the 3 National Vice Presidents.

After the closure some of the Rochdale Gramophone Society members may join Ramsbottom Recorded Music Society.

Contacts for information

Martin Winn 0161 678 2024

George Steele 01706 525630