

The Armistead series of lectures held in Dundee featured a talk by C.R.C. Steytler demonstrating the latest phonograph by Edison, as this article from the Dundee Advertiser of Wednesday, December 3rd 1890 describes –

On Friday evening Mr C.R.C. Steytler, of the Edison United Phonograph Company, London, is to deliver a lecture on the phonograph, and to exhibit Edison's latest improvements upon that wonderful instrument. Those who remember the first phonograph, which was brought out in 1878, will be able thoroughly to appreciate the immense change which has been effected in the machine perfected in 1890.

The original method adopted was to cover a cylinder with a loose sheet of tin-foil, upon which a needle, fixed to the centre of an elastic diaphragm, engraved lines and indentations corresponding in depth to the strength of the voice that spoke against the sensitive disc. The cylinder was put in motion by clockwork, and when the speech was finished the machine was reversed, and the tinfoil reproduced the sounds with a certain amount of accuracy.

The imperfections of this instrument were very great. The tinfoil was too tender an object to be preserved without injury for any length of time, and the slightest additional line or puncture on its surface destroyed its utility. Amongst all his other inventions Edison never forgot his phonograph, though it was laid aside for some time; and in the present year he succeeded in bringing out a machine which preserves the essential principle of his first device, though very much improved.

The “phonogram” which he now uses is a cylinder of wax, which is engraved by a very delicate needle with such minuteness and accuracy that the slightest sound spoken against the diaphragm is faithfully recorded and may be preserved for an indefinite period. Instead of clockwork the inventor has substituted an electro-motor machine, and the fittings of the new phonograph show the perfection of minute workmanship.

Mr Steytler has a practical knowledge of his subject “down to the bottom,” as the French say, and he has the reputation of being a lucid and entertaining lecturer. He will exhibit and describe the new machine in all its details, and will give numerous examples of its power and utility.