



Shamrock record of June 1929 purporting to be of Irish traditional music (courtesy Bill Dean-Myatt)

SHAMROCK RECORDS: THE FIRST IRISH-MADE COMMERCIAL DISCS 1928–1930

Nicholas Carolan, Irish Traditional Music Archive, Dublin

Version 1.0 as at 14 November 2012¹

While sound recording has been carried out in Ireland since 1878, when the first tinfoil-cylinder machines were introduced,² no commercial recordings were manufactured in the country for the first fifty years of the medium's existence. Irish performers went to Britain to be recorded, or British companies came to Ireland on brief recording excursions, but the resulting cylinders and discs were made in Britain. It was as late as 1928 before an attempt was made to set up an Irish manufacturing company. This attempt, like many another in the still young industry, was accompanied by a measure of sharp practice. In time it was to be revealed as an episode in the chequered business and criminal career of one of its principals.

H.P. Fay Gramophone Records Ltd was registered as a new private company in the Irish Free State on 11 December 1928 with nominal capital of £1,000 in shares of £1. The first directors were two subscribers of 500 shares each: Arthur William Greenhill, Pontifex House, Shoe Lane, London, director of Greenhill & Sons Ltd, London; and Hugh Patrick Fay of the same address, engineer. Greenhill was British, Fay Irish. The registered office was at 28A Arran Quay, Dublin.³

¹ More relevant information on Shamrock Records will emerge in the future, and the article will be updated here to include such information as it is found. The essay should be cited by author, title, version and date on www.itma.ie as above. Additions can be sent to shamrock.records@itma.ie.

² Nicholas Carolan, 'The Talking Machine Comes to Ireland', in *Dear Far-Voiced Veteran: Essays in Honour of Tom Munnelly*, ed. Anne Clune, Old Kilfarboy Society, Co Clare, 2007: 73–83.

³ Public Record Office – now National Archives of Ireland – file 7812 D; *The Irish Times*, Dublin, 21 Dec. 1928: 11.

The main business of Greenhill & Sons was the manufacture of accessories for the motor and cycle trade,⁴ but Arthur William Greenhill had a personal interest in sound recording and in May 1928 had applied for a patent for ‘improvements in or relating to talking-machine sound-record members, such as disks, and methods of making the same’.⁵ He was doubtless a son of the J.E. Greenhill who in 1891 patented the ‘Greenhill Mechanical Phonograph Motor’, which was manufactured in London.⁶

Hugh Patrick Fay was an ‘American engineer and businessman’ who had been ‘born and reared in Donabate’, Co Dublin.⁷ Irish census records for 1901 and other sources show that he was born in 1889. He was, in the census year, still at school and living in Ballalease West, Donabate, Co Dublin, the only son and middle child of three children born to Mathew Fay, a seemingly prosperous farmer originally from Co Cavan, and his wife Margaret.⁸ In 1904, at the age of 15, Fay emigrated to New York.⁹ As the Irish partner of the new company, he would go on to handle publicity in Dublin and be its public face. He told newspaper reporters that he had been ‘associated for

⁴ *The British Motor & Cycle Standard Catalogue*, The Standard Catalogue Co Ltd, London, [1923–5]: 5, 22. Celluloid was the main component of the company’s products.

⁵ Espacenet patent search at <http://worldwide.espacenet.com>, accessed 8 Aug. 2012.

⁶ George Frow, ‘Prime Mover’, *Hillandale News*, London, no 72, Apr. 1973: 38–41; ‘The December 2000 and April 2001 Sales, Revisited’, *Hillandale News*, no 236, Winter 2001–2002: 432.

⁷ *Irish Independent*, Dublin, 9 Jan. 1929: 9.

⁸ www.census.nationalarchives.ie, accessed 4 Aug. 2012. From the census records alone he could also have been born in 1890, but a variety of other sources quoted below confirm the date of 1889. The 1911 census records show only the parents living on the family farm.

⁹ ‘Passenger Lists leaving UK 1890–1960’, accessed via www.findmypast.ie, 31 Oct. 2012. This source confirms his date of birth as 1889 and classifies him as a labourer.

years with the gramophone trade and [had] travelled extensively in Germany, America, and Japan'.¹⁰

Hugh Patrick Fay had indeed been associated for some years with the gramophone trade. In New York in 1921, when he was in his early

thirties and head of sales and distribution for the

Siemon Hard Rubber Company,¹¹ he

had also become 'President and

Managing Director' of the short-

lived Gaelic Phonograph Record

Co. This had its offices first at

637 Madison Avenue, a

prestigious-sounding address,¹²

and it advertised 31 double-

sided discs for sale in the Nov-

ember of that year, including

recordings of songs in the Irish

language.¹³ The artists were mostly Irish-

born: popular and semi-classical singers, 'Irish tenors' among them;

and traditional instrumentalists whose recordings are still sought

after, such as the piccolo player P.J. McNamara of Limerick city, the

accordion player Patrick J. Conlon of Co Galway, and the



¹⁰ *Evening Herald*, Dublin, 17 July 1929: 1.

¹¹ Allan Sutton & Kurt Nauck, *American Record Labels and Companies: An Encyclopedia (1891–1943)*, Mainspring Press, Denver, Colorado, 2000: 283.

¹² Google tells us that the School of American Ballet was founded by George Balanchine at that address in the 1930s.

¹³ *The Gaelic American*, New York, 5 Nov. 1921: 2; 12 Nov. 1921: 2; 19 Nov. 1921: 2. I am obliged to my colleague Harry Bradshaw for these leads to Hugh Patrick Fay's earlier adventures in the record trade. My recounting of the Smithfield-Shamrock story to him triggered his memory of Fay's involvement in Irish-American sound recording in New York and a donation of the appropriate references.

Chicago-born uilleann piper Tom Ennis. In spite of such a full-blooded start, and at least three more issues,¹⁴ the company quickly ran into difficulties. It moved to 40 West 57th Street in February 1922, and Fay was replaced as managing director in the following month.¹⁵ In March 1923 Gaelic filed for bankruptcy.¹⁶

Six years later, in Dublin, the new Fay Gramophone registration was quickly followed up in early 1929 with the exciting news that the company had acquired premises in Smithfield, in north central Dublin, and that plant had been installed for the manufacture of gramophone records. The making of celluloid fancy goods and toys, and gramophones and radios, was also envisaged. Operations were to start on 1 February, and it was hoped that some 250 people would eventually be employed. It was proposed to produce 8-inch records for sale at 1/3 each and 10-inch records for 2/6. According to Fay, the project would involve an outlay of £20,000, and it was intended that the factory would eventually produce 6,000 records a day.¹⁷ A company premises seems also to have been opened at no 36 Pearse St in south central Dublin, a shopfront premises which was called ‘Shamrock Gramophone House’ from 1928.¹⁸

The Fay company advertised for a sales manager in April 1929,¹⁹ and by June it was reported that 1,000 copies of each of fifteen records

¹⁴ *Talking Machine World*, New York, Mar. 1922: 159.

¹⁵ *Talking Machine World*, Mar. 1922: 155.

¹⁶ Sutton & Nauck: 85, 283.

¹⁷ *Irish Independent*, 9 Jan. 1929: 9. The premises was a ‘former skin and hide store’. There were several such on Smithfield and it has not been possible to identify the Shamrock premises.

¹⁸ *Thom’s Official Directory of Ireland for the Year 1928*, Alex. Thom & Co., Dublin, 1928: 2062. The entry also appears in the issues for 1929, 1930 and 1931, but not subsequently. Strangely, none of the issues gives an address for H.P. Fay Ltd or Shamrock Records in Smithfield.

¹⁹ *The Irish Times*, 25 Apr. 1929: 1.

"SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF"

SHAMROCK RECORDS

Made in IRELAND by IRISHMEN, from IRISH MATERIAL.

Not Merely IRISH but acknowledged by
PRESS and PUBLIC as the BEST.

HERE ARE SOME GEMS FROM OUR LIST:

<p>Bohemian Girl (Overture) Balfe #2030 Wino, Women and Song (Waltz) Strauss SHAMROCK CONCERT ORCHESTRA</p> <p>Blue Danube (Waltz) Strauss #2031 Light Cavalry (Overture) Suppe SHAMROCK CONCERT ORCHESTRA</p> <p>Yes! Let me like a Soldier Fall (Mairiana) Wallace #2032 Seamus O'Leary, Tenor</p> <p>The Floral Dance Andy Doyle, Baritone</p> <p>There is a Flower that bloometh (Mairiana) Wallace #2033 Seamus O'Leary, Tenor</p> <p>The Bandoire Andy Doyle, Baritone</p>	<p>Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes (The Gondoliers) Sullivan #2034 Tony O'Moore, Tenor.</p> <p>The Old Rustle Bridge by the Mill James McDonnell and Chorus</p> <p>Elly Mayvouron (Lily of Killarney) Benedict #2035 Seamus O'Reilly, Tenor</p> <p>Molly Bawn Denis Ford, Tenor. Lover</p> <p>My Irish Lass (Jig) Xylophone Solo</p> <p>Ma's Birthday (Jig) Xylophone Solo #2036 Dan Hynes, Ireland's Premier Xylophone Player.</p> <p>Colonel Boggy (March) #2037 Irish Soldiers Band</p> <p>La Paloma (Accordion Solo) The O'Flanagan Bros.</p>	<p>El Capitan (March) Sousa #2038 Irish Soldiers Band.</p> <p>Blaze Away (March) Accordion Duet The O'Flanagan Bros.</p> <p>There's a Rainbow Round my Shoulder. #2039 Dixon and Warren Bill Johnstons, Chicago's Black-Faced Star.</p> <p>Glad Rag Doll (Fextrol) Yeller, Acer, Plaza Dance Band Deagherty #2040 Kahu and Sanders The Novelty Dance Orchestras.</p> <p>Just a Night for Meditation (Fm. 1908) Lewis, Young and Polish #2041 King for a Day (Waltz) Lewis, Young and Polish The Novelty Dance Orchestras.</p>
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H. P. FAY, Gramophone Records, Ltd.,
SMITHFIELD, DUBLIN.

From Ireland's Own, Wexford, 20 July 1929

had been distributed.²⁰ They were produced on a ‘Shamrock’ label,²¹ and they had been pressed, it was said, from ‘mother’ records made in America. Negotiations were in progress for the building of a studio in Findlater House at 50 O’Connell Street, Dublin, for the purpose of recording local artists. A ready demand was expected for these records in Ireland and in America with its 30,000,000 Irish ‘kith and kin’.²²

The new company was evidently aware of the strong contemporary interest in Irish traditional culture and its collection, an interest that had led to the formation of the Folklore of Ireland Society in 1927 and would lead to the Irish State’s creation of the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935. Over the next few months Irish folklore and music, and songs, jigs, reels and marches were to be put on records in Dublin and disseminated around the world, according to Fay, and a select party was to explore the remotest parts of Ireland in search of the ‘true Gaelic culture’.²³ By July 1929 he was claiming that he was about to begin ‘an extensive Tour of Ireland with our Recording Van, making tests of Traditional Irish Music to be submitted to our Musical Director, and our Permanent Recording Studios and Band Rooms will Open at 28 Upper O’Connell St. in a fortnight’s time’. He also issued a warning about a non-Irish ‘recording apparatus’ that had been touring the country in search of Irish talent.²⁴

²⁰ *Irish Independent*, 15 June 1929: 6.

²¹ As might be expected, there have been several other Shamrock labels in existence over the decades, some of them 78 labels of the name published in Irish America in the 1920s and 1950s, and at least one a microgroove label published in Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s.

²² *Evening Herald*, 17 July 1929: 1. No mention of Shamrock Records has been found in the contemporary Irish-American press.

²³ *Evening Herald*, 17 July 1929: 1.

²⁴ *Irish Independent*, 3 July 1929: 5. This rival operation was doubtless that of the Parlophone Company of London which had come on the first of two productive recording trips to Ireland in mid-1929 (see www.itma.ie/digitallibrary). The resulting records were manufactured in Britain.

WARNING

MESSRS. H. P. FAY GRAMOPHONE RECORDS, LTD.

The Proprietors of the New "Shamrock Record," the only Gramophone record manufactured in Ireland, having learned that a recording apparatus has been touring the country in quest of Irish talent, wish to warn the public at large that these people have no connection with this company.

OUR company is purely Irish,
Irish-owned, Irish worked
and we hope **WILL** get the support of
every Irishman.

Artists and those desirous of making Gramophone Records are well advised to get in touch with this office before they commit themselves to anything definite with these people, because such commitments will certainly mitigate against the chances of Artists recording for the

SHAMROCK RECORDS

and the further loss of royalties that must accrue from the large American market, a monopoly of which we hold through our existing Contracts with Leading Firms in the United States of America.

Our MR. H. P. FAY is about to start an extensive Tour of Ireland with our Recording Van, making Tests of Traditional Irish Music to be submitted to our Musical Director, and our Permanent Recording Studios and Band Rooms will Open at 28 Upper O'Connell St. in a fortnight's time, when all Artists who make the necessary application will be given a Free Trial, so that we may be able to choose those suitable.

ARTISTS BE CAREFUL

THINK OF YOUR CHANCES WITH A COMPANY
WITHIN EASY DISTANCE FROM YOUR HOMES, AND
A CERTAIN GUARANTEED SALE OF

500,000 RECORDS PER YEAR

ISSUED BY
**H. P. FAY, Gramophone Records, Ltd.
SMITHFIELD, DUBLIN.**

*From Irish Independent,
Dublin, 3 July 1929*

An option had been taken by Fay on a factory in Rathmines, it was reported, for the future manufacture of gramophones and radios.²⁵ Young employees, including a ‘dozen pretty girls’, had been trained by experts from England. Twenty-five thousand discs of the June 1929 issue had been made on the company’s eight pressing machines.²⁶

Surviving copies show that Shamrock records were 10" double-sided discs. A large green gold-edged shamrock featured as a central logo, and lettering was in gold and black on a cream background, all suggestive of the Irish national flag. They were issued by ‘H.P. Fay Gramophone Records Ltd., Dublin, Ireland’, and were, the labels proclaimed, the product of ‘electric recording’ and ‘made in Ireland’.

Local dealers began to advertise the new records: ‘McHugh’s have the new Dublin-made “Shamrock Records”. Come and hear the first Irish-made records at 59 Talbot St. (at the Bridge) [Dublin]’.²⁷ Provincial agents were appointed: ‘Sheridan’s Gramophone Stores, Ceannanus Mór [Kells, Co Meath]... We are also Agents for the New Irish-made “SHAMROCK” Records’.²⁸ Three hundred dealers throughout Ireland were said to be carrying the records.²⁹

²⁵ Another company – ‘OrchestraPhone Company Ltd’ – was registered by Fay and Greenhill for the making of gramophone records and gramophones on 25 Mar. 1929 with nominal capital of 100 £1 shares. Both gave their address as the Gresham Hotel, one of Dublin’s leading hotels. This company was also involved in experimentation with sound for film, and gave a ‘synchronised sound films’ trade-show demonstration in the Stella Cinema, Rathmines, Dublin, in Apr. 1929. The demonstration was only partially successful, perhaps because of the physical limitations of the cinema (*Irish Independent*, 9 Apr. 1929: 10). This company was dissolved by the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies on 28 Aug. 1931 (Public Record Office – now National Archives of Ireland – file 7850 D).

²⁶ *Evening Herald*, 17 July 1929: 1; *Ireland’s Own*, Wexford, 20 July 1929: 62.

²⁷ *Irish Independent*, 25 June 1929: 14.

²⁸ *The Meath Chronicle*, Navan, 10 Aug. 1929: 3.

²⁹ *Evening Herald*, 17 July 1929: 1.



From Irish Independent, Dublin, 1 July 1929

Newspapers greeted the discs uncritically: they were ‘superb records’, a ‘triumph of skill in Irish manufacture’, and ‘everything in connection with the records is Irish, including the wrappers and printing’, according to the *Evening Herald* of Dublin.³⁰

It is not known for certain what records were available by June 1929, but they included the discs

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|------------------|---|
| S2004 &
S2005 | Doreen McCoy: Where Have You Been All My Life? Foxtrot Song (“Lucky Girl”). (Robin, Furber, Charig); Is There Anything Wrong with That? (H. Magidson, M.H. Cleary) |
| S2014 &
S2015 | Seamus O’Brien, vocal: The Soldier’s Song; My Dark Rosaleen |
| S2018 &
S2019 | Irish Soldiers’ Band: Moore’s Melodies Selection; Dear Little Shamrock Selection |

³⁰ Issue of 5 July 1929: 5.

- S2022 & **Pat Murphy, accordion, with piano:** Irish Jigs; Irish
S2023 Reels
- S2029 **Michael O’Connell, with piano accompaniment:** The Hills of Donegal. Irish song. (P.J. O’Reilly, W. Sanderson); **Jere Conway:** Danny Boy³¹

The Shamrock July 1929 list, according to a newspaper advertisement from the company, consisted of twelve issues in an S series which was now using a single catalogue number for each disc, and included discs that did not purport to be Irish but were of what would have then been called ‘jazz music’:

- S2030 **Shamrock Concert Orchestra:** Bohemian Girl (overture; Balfe); Wine, Women and Song (waltz; Strauss)
- S2031 **Shamrock Concert Orchestra:** Blue Danube (waltz; Strauss); Light Cavalry (overture; Suppé)
- S2032 **Seamus O’Leary, tenor:** Yes! Let Me like a Soldier Fall (‘Maritana’; Wallace), matrix 132A; **Andy Doyle, baritone:** The Floral Dance (K. Moss), matrix 133A
- S2033 **Seamus O’Leary, tenor, with orchestra:** There is a Flower that Bloometh (‘Maritana’; Wallace); **Andy Doyle, baritone, with orchestra:** The Bandolero (Leslie Stuart)
- S2034 **James McDonnell, tenor, & male chorus:** Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes (‘The Gondoliers’; Sullivan); **Tony O’Moore, tenor:** The Old Rustic Bridge by the Mill

³¹ Listed for sale on www.offtherecord.ie, 27 Sept. 2012.

- S2035 **Seamus O'Reilly, tenor:** Eily Mavourneen ('Lily of Killarney'; Benedict), matrix 135A; **Denis Forde, tenor:** Molly Bawn (Lover), matrix 135B
- S2036 **Dan Hynes, Ireland's premier xylophone player:** My Irish Lass (jig; W. Whitlock); Mac's Birthday (jig; W. Whitlock)
- S2037 **Irish Soldiers' Band:** Colonel Bogey (march; Alford); **O'Flanagan Brothers, accordion duet:** La Paloma (Tradier)
- S2038 **Irish Soldiers' Band:** El Capitan (march; Sousa); **O'Flanagan Brothers, accordion duet:** Blaze Away (march; Holzmann)
- S2039 **Bill Johnstone, Chicago's Black-Faced Star:** There's a Rainbow round My Shoulder (Jolson, Rose, Dryer); Old Man Sunshine (Dixon & Warren)
- S2040 **Plaza Dance Band:** Glad Rag Doll (foxtrot; Yeller, Ager, Dougherty); **The Novelty Dance Orchestra:** Beloved (waltz; Kahn & Sanders)
- S2041 **Plaza Dance Band:** Just a Night for Meditation (foxtrot; Lewis, Young & Pollack); **The Novelty Dance Orchestra:** King for a Day (waltz; Lewis, Young & Fiorito)³²

³² *Irish Independent*, Dublin, 1 July 1929: 10, and from discs in the collection of the Irish Traditional Music Archive. Additional composer etc. information has been supplied from Karlo Adrian & Arthur Badrock eds, *Edison Bell Winner Records* (second, revised edition; with history of Winner by Frank Andrews), E. Bayly, Bournemouth, 1989: passim; and from Bill Dean-Myatt, pers. comm., Aug. 2012.

All the ‘Irish’ artists are otherwise unknown by name, and it is certain that the original recording artists (who were not Irish) were all given hibernian pseudonyms by the company to make them more attractive to its target audience. Since the original recordings were said to have been made in America, it could be believed that they were recorded by Irish-American performers who were unknown in the homeland. The ‘O’Flanagan Brothers’ were doubtless meant to give the impression of being the Flanagan Brothers, a genuine and successful Waterford family group of recording artists in 1920s Irish America, one that may have recorded earlier for Fay’s Gaelic Phonograph Company in New York.³³

The chicanery did not end there. Most of the masters were recorded not in America, as stated, but in England by the Edison Bell Company of London, and it is certain that not all of them were electrically recorded.³⁴ On the evidence of identity of repertory, and similarity of instrumentation, vocal category, disc pairings, issue dates, etc., many of the Shamrock artists are to be found on the Winner label of Edison Bell, and some on its Velvet Face label. The ‘O’Flanagan Brothers’ are revealed to be the Macari Brothers, a London piano-acordion duet whose recordings of ‘La Paloma’ and ‘Blaze Away’ were released on Winner disc 4790 in March 1928. ‘Doreen McCoy’ must be the American comedienne Beth Challis on Winner 4872 and Winner

³³ For the Flanagans, see the Viva Voce CD *Tunes We Like to Play on Paddy’s Day* (VIVAVOCE007, Dublin, 1996).

³⁴ The following analysis is based on Adrian & Badrock 1989. Edison Bell did reissue some discs from such American labels as Paramount, Gennett and Domino, and it is just possible that some of these appeared on Shamrock. I am grateful to Bill Dean-Myatt for suggesting possible Winner sources for Shamrock Records and supplying me with his research notes. Electrical recording was first introduced by the record industry in America in 1924–25; and the first electrical Winner recording was issued in Apr. 1926 (Adrian & Badrock 1989: [4]).



*Shamrock 2022 and its acoustic original of 1914:
Edison Bell Winner 2582 (courtesy Bill Dean-Myatt)*

4879, both issued in February 1929. ‘Seamus O’Brien’ may be a composite of baritone Seamus McCarthy (Winner 3612, February 1922) and baritone Jerome Murphy (Winner 3627, also February 1922). The ‘Irish Soldiers’ Band’ is the Band of H.M. Irish Guards (Winner 2683, September 1914, and Winner 4636, August 1914). ‘Pat Murphy’ is, on at least one track, the North of England accordion player Jack Williams who recorded ‘Irish Jigs’ (Winner 2582, April 1914).³⁵ The ‘Shamrock Concert Orchestra’, oddest of all, is actually the Margate Municipal Orchestra conducted by Bainbridge Robinson (Winner 4396, May 1926). Tenor ‘Seamus O’Leary’ is likely John Perry (Velvet Face 1132, July 1925), while baritone ‘Andy Doyle’ is Robert Carr (Winner 3939, February 1924). ‘James McDonnell’ is possibly the tenor Wilson Pembroke (Winner 2016, February 1912), ‘Tony O’Moore’ John Lovering and chorus (Winner 2515, post December 1913), and ‘Denis Forde’ Edward Wilson (Winner 4350, March 1926). ‘Ireland’s premier xylophone player Dan Hynes’ is the Englishman Billy Whitlock, composer of the pieces ‘Mac’s Birthday’ (Winner 5342) and ‘My Irish Lass’ (Winner 5355), both released September 1917. Older items from the Winner back-catalogue that could be passed off as Irish-American were obviously being cherry-picked, as were recent recordings that would appeal to more modern tastes. On the other hand, genuine and recent Irish Winner artists, of whom there were several, could not be released on Shamrock as their records would already have been well known in Ireland.

By late August 1929 an obscure legal dispute had arisen between the founding shareholders Greenhill as plaintiff and Fay as defendant. It seems that Greenhill as Chairman had appointed extra directors, Doris Peggy Greenhill and Mrs T.A. O’Reilly, and that Fay had interfered

³⁵ Identification of Williams by Bill Dean-Myatt from a Winner disc in his possession (pers. comm. Aug. 2012). He thinks that the Murphy ‘Irish Reels’ track may be the track ‘Bits o’ Blarney’ on Williams’ disc Winner 2579.

with the running of this new board. An interim injunction was issued restraining Fay from acting other than as a member of the board. It was hoped that an amicable solution might be agreed.³⁶ The name of the company was changed to 'Shamrock Gramophone Records Ltd'.³⁷ In December 1929 Greenhill was in further business trouble and petitioned in the High Court in London for the winding up of Greenhill & Sons, giving his address as 3 Mountjoy Square, Dublin.³⁸

By February 1930 Shamrock Records itself was in liquidation and its records, machinery, and office furniture were being sold at auction.³⁹ The final winding-up meeting was held on 30 December 1930.⁴⁰ Ireland's first record-manufacturing company had, it seems, fallen victim to boardroom disagreements and doubtless to the Great Depression that was universally affecting the record industry. It would be another six years before disc manufacturing would begin again in Ireland, when in 1936 the British combines EMI and Decca would establish a record factory in Waterford to avoid heavy Irish import tariffs on foreign-made records.

To this point the Shamrock Records story seems to be a typical story of a failed business: a reasonable idea brought forward with initial success but ultimately brought down by external circumstances beyond its control. Hugh P. Fay quickly bounced back but his ill-luck continued. In 1931 he established a new company at 121 Victoria Street, London: Fay Home Recorders Ltd, renamed the following year as Fay Radio & Recorders Ltd. This was for a recording device of his own invention which sat on a standard gramophone

³⁶ *Irish Independent*, 29 Aug. 1929: 4.

³⁷ Public Record Office – now National Archives of Ireland – file 7812 D.

³⁸ *The London Gazette*, London, 6 Dec. 1929: 7969.

³⁹ *The Irish Times*, 22 Feb. 1930: 16; 26 Feb. 1930: 14.

⁴⁰ Public Record Office – now National Archives of Ireland – file 7812 D.

turntable and recorded onto a ‘Faytone’ aluminium disc.⁴¹ The new device was introduced in July 1931 to a distinguished gathering including several MPs in the Park Lane Hotel, and speeches and a violin solo were recorded and played back to the satisfaction of those attending.⁴² Fay was to be paid £10,000 by the company for his invention and a salary of £2,000 per annum plus expenses. He later drew down some £500 in expenses ‘without express authority’. The firm never traded profitably and it was compulsorily wound up by court order with debts of some £5,000 in March 1933, Fay and his wife being among those claiming the assets of the company.⁴³ Bankruptcy proceedings were taken against him by his creditors, who were unable to ascertain his address.⁴⁴ He had emigrated to Canada, to Quebec initially.⁴⁵

Some ten years later, Hugh Patrick Fay’s appearance in a Dublin court and his conviction as a fraudster throws a retrospective light on his attempt to set up an Irish record industry.

About 1948 Fay, who had returned to settle in Ireland in 1946,⁴⁶ became involved in a business scheme in Dublin which had an American dimension similar to that claimed for his record project. He proposed setting up a mineral-water company named Texacola and canvassed subscriptions for the purpose. Texacola Holdings and a company called Coco Cola Ltd was registered by him and others,

⁴¹ *Hillandale News* no 77 (Feb.–Apr. 1974): cover, 152.

⁴² *The Gramophone*, London (Aug. 1931): 37.

⁴³ Frank Andrews, ‘Guiniphones’, *Hillandale News* no 80 (Oct. 1974): 233–5.

⁴⁴ The proceedings were seemingly successful as in 1942 he was applying for discharge (*The London Gazette*, 20 June 1933: 4174; 24 Feb. 1942: 945).

⁴⁵ ‘Returns of Passengers Leaving the United Kingdom’, The National Archives, London, accessed via www.findmypast.ie, 31 Oct. 2012. Again this source gives his date of birth as 1889. He landed in Canada in April 1933 (www.collectionscanada.gc.ca, accessed 4 Nov. 2012).

⁴⁶ *The Irish Times*, 22 Mar. 1951: 3.

both operating from 1 Ely Place Upper. Stating that he had a syrup to make this unique mineral water and that he had brought over the secret from America, Fay collected some £3,000 for shares from various subscribers.⁴⁷ The skirting of copyright infringement of the Coca-Cola company's famous product was obvious; the American company successfully took an injunction against the Irish one in March 1951, preventing it from giving the impression that they were connected.⁴⁸ In 1953 Fay was arrested in London and brought to trial in Dublin for converting the share subscriptions he had received to his own use.⁴⁹ Described as a 65-year-old engineer of no fixed address, he was unable to get bail and was held in custody. In the course of the trial, it was revealed that he had gone to the United States at an early age and had been sentenced in Los Angeles in 1926 to from one to ten years for conspiracy to commit grand larceny. He had been deported after 18 months, a short time before he began setting up Shamrock Records in Dublin. Subsequently, in the 1930s, he had entered Canada illegally, and had been deported from there in 1937. He conducted his own defense, protesting that his Los Angeles conviction was for 'bootlegging – a commercial business'. In Dublin he was sentenced to four years penal servitude on seven counts of fraudulent conversion.⁵⁰ Hugh Patrick Fay died in Kensington in London in 1961, aged 72.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *The Irish Times*, 18 May 1954: 9. The court was told however that the syrup called Texacola was being sold in Ireland from 1948 by a Texas Guinan who was employed by an air company at Shannon. Guinan had gone to work in Saudia Arabia leaving Fay with the formula.

⁴⁸ *The Irish Times*, 22 Mar. 1951: 3. Fay was represented by the Irish Attorney-General E.C. Micks SC. Costs were given against Fay, but these were not paid and in Oct. 1952 an order was given for the winding-up of the Irish company (*Irish Independent*, 21 Oct. 1952: 3).

⁴⁹ *Irish Independent*, 7 May 1954: 5.

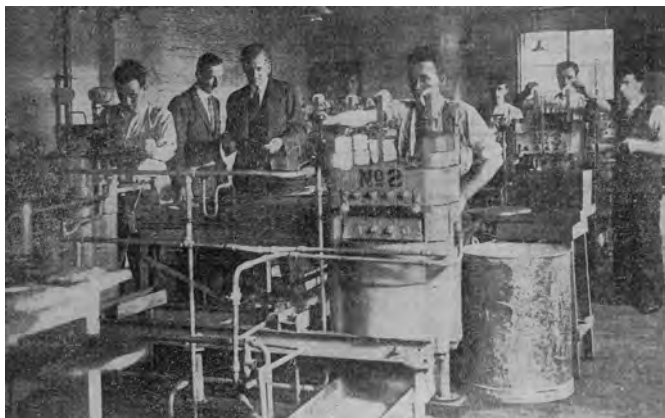
⁵⁰ *The Irish Times*, 11 June 1954: 8; 14 July 1954: 3; 20 July 1954: 7.

⁵¹ 'Deaths Registered in October, November and December, 1961' accessed via www.findmypast.ie, 31 Oct. 2012. Again this source gives his date of birth as 1889.

In the light of his Dublin conviction and his earlier bootlegging conviction in Los Angeles, the suspicion must now be that Fay's dealings in Shamrock Records also were not above board. The injunction taken against him by Arthur Greenhill and the other directors indicates that he was acting independently of them in his running of the company. As the front man on the ground in Dublin he may have been directing income towards himself, as with Texacola. The whole elaborate Shamrock project was not set up as a fraud, but it is likely that Fay was directing the operations to his own benefit above that of anyone else, especially as his get-rich scheme began to encounter difficulties. There must also be a suspicion that the eight pressing machines and other equipment with which he set up Shamrock manufacturing in Smithfield were obsolete pieces of equipment belonging to the era of acoustic recording and acquired cheaply in England as the industry there retooled for the manufacture of the new electric recordings. And his 1922 replacement as managing director of the Gaelic Phonograph Company must also be wondered about.

Given the different forms of deceit involved in the Shamrock enterprise, it would be reasonable to ask if indeed any of the label's discs were ever actually manufactured in Dublin, or if they had been pressed by Edison Bell in London with Shamrock labels and then exported to Ireland. But the discs were certainly manufactured in Dublin, as is clear from several pieces of evidence. Photos showing the manufacturing process, taken in the Shamrock factory in Smithfield, were published in the *Evening Herald*, and its editor himself inspected the premises in July 1929.⁵²

⁵² *Evening Herald*, 17 July 1929: 1, [10].



From Evening Herald, Dublin, 17 July 1929. Hugh Patrick Fay is third from left, holding a record.

The gramophone critic of the magazine *Ireland's Own* also visited the plant in the same month and saw disc manufacturing in progress.⁵³ This evidence is confirmed by a detailed advertisement from Dockrell Ltd, the auctioneers handling the company's liquidation sale in February 1930. As well as 10,000 double-sided 10" discs comprising 23 different records, 24 mother matrices by Edison Bell Ltd, 15 master waxes, and a variety of generators, vats, chemicals, boxes and crates, the sale included hydraulic presses and pumps, copper anodes, edging and grinding machines, and a range of ancillary manufacturing equipment.⁵⁴

⁵³ *Ireland's Own*, Wexford, 20 July 1929: 62.

⁵⁴ *The Irish Times*, 22 Feb. 1930: 16.

Whatever his faults, the fact remains that Hugh Patrick Fay, along with Arthur William Greenhill, was the driving force in establishing the first Irish company to manufacture sound recordings, and the company did press the sound recordings in Dublin. It is hoped that some twenty-odd different Shamrock recordings survive somewhere in the world as evidence. The present writer would like to receive details and copies of them.⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ Information can be emailed to shamrock.records@itma.ie.