

THE KINEMA IN THE WOODS

THE CINEMA UNIQUE WITH THE ORGAN UNIQUE!

by Tom B'hend

Photos and information courtesy of J.W. Green

With all due apologies to our theatre organ brethren in Britain, we colonists throughout the world have read with obvious delight the exploits of Robin Hood and his Merry Band in the sylvan loveliness of Sherwood Forest. To all the adventurous souls who would do as Robin and his men did, we hail anything that carries us back to the days of yore, which are no more.

But there still remains in the United Kingdom many other forests or wooded glens offering solace, restful vistas and, to some of those who are dedicated to music in the form of the theatre organ, the beautiful opportunity to live vicariously and to partake of this ear-pleasing sound within the rustic tree'd topography reasonably close to London.

To the theatre organ aficionado, there is in particular one shaded area offering an invitation. It is Woodhall Spa and its Kinema in the Woods Cinema with its recently installed Compton Kinestra (a real pipe organ) where it is possible to while away one's holiday and be entertained by the luscious sounds of wind through whistles — sounds that all organ buffs relish — and a drug that has yet to be declared debilitating or illegal because of its addicting qualities.

Woodhall Spa, according to J.W. Green, owner/operator of Kinema in the Woods, offers an ideal way to spend part of a holiday in Great Britain. "If any ATOS members are planning a visit to the United Kingdom, I would be most pleased to welcome them to our area," he has advised.

Reaching Woodhall Spa is relatively easy. An interesting trip is from London to the City of Lincoln, which is a tourist attraction itself with a beautiful cathedral and township interests. From Lincoln to Woodhall Spa is but a short drive. For a fast trip, the 125-mile-per-hour train from London to Grantham and short drive to Woodhall Spa offers the quickest means of reaching Kinema In The Woods. The distance from London is approximately 136 miles, and driving by auto requires about two and one-half hours.



KINEMA IN THE WOODS owner James Green, shown seated at the console of the Compton organ, is an accomplished organist himself.

The Spa has many fine hotels and guest houses. Petwood Hotel is most interesting — during the War years it was the Officer's Mess for the 617 (Dambusters) Squadron, and a bar has been dedicated in their honor.

The Kinema and Compton

Sixty-five years old last August, the Kinema at Woodhall Spa — unique among cinemas of Britain — showed its first film, silent, of course. Starting life as a concert pavilion overlooking tennis courts, croquet lawn, gardens and bandstand in Spa grounds between the Victoria Hotel and newly built Petwood House, little changed until the palatial Victoria Hotel burned down on Easter Sunday 1920.

In 1922, Captain Archibald Weigall saved the Spa Baths from being closed down and Captain C.C. Allport converted the concert pavilion into the Pavilion Cinema. Conversion was achieved by adding a corrugated iron shed on the north end of the pavilion and projecting onto a transparent screen from the back. Woodhall's cinema was the nation's 68th to be opened, and the rear projection system — which is what makes the Kinema unique — is still used today. This was one of the few provincial houses patronized by Royalty on several occasions each year. Music for silent films was provided by the Phantom Orchestra (this was not described, but is thought to have been similar to what is known in the U.S. as a photoplayer - Ed.).



Winter creates a white wonderland but doesn't alter the operating schedule of Kinema In The Woods. Motion pictures are shown here seven days a week.



Kinestra For The Kinema

Open seven days a week, Woodhall Spa's Kinema In The Woods undoubtedly would have continued as a picture house without being blessed with organ music had it not been for the new owner, James Green. He owns cinemas at Spilsby and Mablethorpe. In his Bijou at Mablethorpe he had David Hill build and install a four ranker which has been in regular use since 1984. According to British organist David Lowe, cinema owner Green is an accomplished organist himself.

Electronic organs had been used periodically at the Kinema after Green assumed control of the house in 1973. And subsequently his own Wurlitzer electronic was installed on a small platform to the right of the screen. It was used on

special occasions and prior to evening performances.

The Compton Kinestra, which ultimately came to Woodhall Spa, was first installed in the Super Cinema, Cambridge. Visual feature of this organ was the ornate laquered red and gold console decorated in eighteenth century oriental style by a Japanese artist who was hired by the Compton Organ firm.

In 1931 the cinema was renamed the Tatler and installed talking pictures; the organ fell into disuse. It was eventually purchased by London organ builders Monk & Gunther and sold in 1978 to Nigel Turner. Adding a third manual to the console, he installed the organ in a building on his horticultural nurseries grounds at Harpole. Turner also augmented the instrument with a piano and replaced the pneumatic relay with a

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Christie solid-state relay and capture system. It was the first electronic relay installed on a British theatre organ and also incorporated a tape reproducing unit.

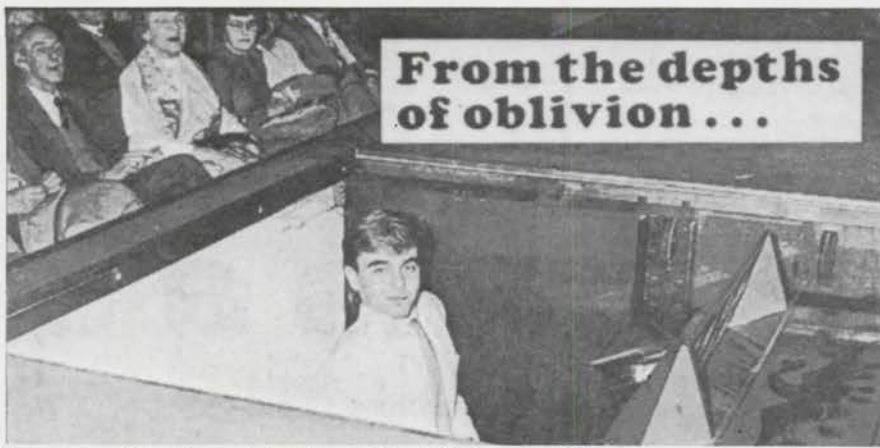
Green bought the organ from Turner in 1986 and moved it to Woodhall. About the same time, a lift was obtained from the Odeon (Regent) Hanley which elevated a Wurlitzer console.

Considerable work was needed at the Kinema to accommodate the lift and organ. The 15-foot stage was removed, heating pipes, electrical wiring rerouted, and curtain and screen masking motors were re-sited. Two chambers were then built at each side of the screen — with each chamber becoming wider at the back following the line of projector light beams. Swell shades open directly into the auditorium and another set in each chamber open behind the screen.

The organ was thoroughly cleaned and made ready for installation. Main chamber, left of the screen, first to be completed, received the Diapason, Flute, Viole d' Orchestre, Viole Celeste and Clarinet as well as most of the non-tonal percussions and effects. Upon completion of the Solo side the Tuba, Tibia Clausa, and Vox Humana ranks, tonal percussions — Xylophone, Glockenspiel, Chimes, Chrysoglott/Vibraphone and Crash Cymbal — were erected.



Rising on its lift, the Compton Kinestra console elevates into a theatrical setting enhanced by the Austrian stage drape behind it. Console is red and gold lacquered with eighteenth century oriental designs that were painted by a Japanese artist hired by Compton.



Below stage at the Kinema-in-the-Woods, Woodhall Spa, something stirs...



As if by magic the stage undergoes a strange transformation...



Film organ music is back on song!

ONE of the great traditions of British cinema has been put back in the spotlight at Woodhall Spa.

From now on most film shows at the Kinema-in-the-Woods will be heralded by a recital on a 50-year-old cinema organ which will rise through the floor in the time-honoured style.

The new feature is the achievement of a long-held ambition by cinema proprietor James Green and represents a considerable engineering feat as well.

Woodhall Spa lies above an exceptionally high water table which means you only have to dig down three feet before water starts seeping through. Housing the organ below

Comeback for a forgotten star of film nights

ground involved digging down 11 feet so a watertight capsule had to be created to protect the valuable instrument when not in use.

Organ enthusiast David Hill, from Caistor, achieved the tricky task, and from now on the Compton organ, built in 1927, will rise from the depths to give monthly recitals and will also feature in many of the cinema's nightly film showings.

Mr. Green also plans special summer shows which will include an organ recital, nostalgic film clips and some community singing.

The organ, chosen by Mr. Green because of a distinctive Japanese lacquer which blends perfectly with the Kinema's decoration, is the only surviving example of three instruments made by the London-based manufacturer John Compton.

It was used in a London cinema from 1927 to 1943 and then went into storage to be all but forgotten until 1978.

Then it was bought by a private collector and Mr. Green was able to purchase it for an undisclosed sum last year. The player at its grand relaunch was Nicholas Martin.

Originally fitted with two tremulants, one in each chamber, it was decided in advance that more would be needed and that new wind regulators would be provided for them.

The console was on display in the foyer until the lift was ready for it. And this project was an arduous job. It was started during November 1986. About two and a half feet down, water was encountered in the removal of about 80 tons of sand and gravel soil. Excavated to a depth of about ten feet, all the sides had to be shuttered and a de-watering plant hired until the area was waterproofed. The cinema operated throughout all the work and at one time front rows of seats were cordoned off, and the screen curtains hung over what looked like a major archaeological dig. In spite of the upheaval, the show went on, no patrons or usherettes were lost, and by the end of January 1987 concrete work was finished and waterproofed including an access passage under the screen.

A Cinema Operating 65 Years Now Offers Theatre Pipe Organ Music

By March the lift was in. A new stage was constructed around it and two electrically operated shutters are incorporated which protect the console when not in use. On April 12, 1987, the console was mounted on the lift. The Phantom piano is situated on the left side of the stage.

By early May 1987, one year after the organ arrived at Woodhall, the Tuba rank was on wind, and over the next few weeks the rest of the instrument was completed. In its new specification the tonal range was extended. Extra 4' pitches were provided on Great and Solo manuals, extra couplers and stopkeys are provided for the English Horn rank and the Melotone unit which is to be installed in the near future.

The tonal range of the piano was extended, and keyboard action re-leathered and the instrument overhauled and tuned.

On October 29, 1987, the usual picture show at the Kinema was missing as the renowned organist from Turner's Musical-Merry-Go-Round, Nicholas Martin, played the 3/9 Compton in public for the first time in its new home.

And so, in these times when many towns larger than Woodhall have lost their cinemas, the Kinema In The Woods begins the approach to its 70th year with the additional feature of a unique Compton cinema organ. A unique organ for a unique cinema.

Specification of the Compton Cinema Organ as Installed at The Kinema In The Woods Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire. June 1987

Pedal	Ft.	Accompaniment	Ft.	Great	Ft.	Solo	Ft.
Acoustic Bass	32	Vox Humana	16	Tuba	16	Tuba	16
Tuba	16	Viole	16	English Horn	16	Tibia	16
Tibia	16	Tuba	8	Diapason	16	Tuba	8
Clarinet	16	English Horn	8	Tibia	16	English Horn	8
Tuba	8	Diapason	8	Clarinet	16	Diapason	8
English Horn	8	Tibia	8	Tuba	8	Tibia	8
Diapason	8	Vox Humana	8	English Horn	8	Vox Humana	8
Tibia	8	Clarinet	8	Diapason	8	Clarinet	8
Violin	8	Violin	8	Tibia	8	Cello	8
Tibia	4	Viole Celeste	8	Vox Humana	8	Tuba	4
Piano	16	Flute	8	Clarinet	8	English Horn	4
Piano	8	Diapason	4	Viole D'Orchestra	8	Tibia	4
Cymbal Crash		Tibia	4	Viole Celeste	8	Piano	16
Bass Drum Tap F.		Vox Humana	4	Flute	8	Piano	8
Drum Roll		Violin	4	Tuba	4	Piano	4
Cymbal		Viole Celeste	4	English Horn	4	Glockenspiel	4
Snare Drum		Flute	4	Diapason	4	Xylophone	4
Tolling Bell		Flautina	2	Tibia	4	Chrysoglot/Vibra.	4
Triangle		Chrysoglot/Vibra	4	Vox Humana	4	Chimes	
Accomp. To Pedal		Melotone	8	Violin	4	Octave	
Great To Pedal		Snare Drum Tap		Twelfth	2 (2 ² / ₃)	Melotone	8
		Snare Drum Roll		Piccolo	2	Melotone	4
		Tom Tom		Flautina	2	Melotone	2 ² / ₃
		Castanets		Tierce	1 (1-3/5)	Melotone	2
Tremulants		Jingles		Piano	8	Krumhorn	8
Main Chamber		Tambourine		Glockenspiel	4	Cor Anglais	8
Flute, Violin;		Block		Reiterator			
Viol Celeste, Diapason		Triangle		Xylophone	4	Toe Pistons.	
Clarinet		Sand Block		Chimes		Siren; Klaxon; Fire Bell;	
		Octave		Muted Chimes		Three combination pistons	
Solo Chamber.		Great Sub To Accomp.	2	Octave		Cymbal; Bird I; Bird II.	
Tibia		Great To Accomp.	2	Solo To Great Sub.		Boat Whistle; Train Whistle;	
English Horn, Tuba.				Solo To Great		Door Bell.	
				Solo To Great Octave		Swell and crescendo pedal	
Vox Humana.		6 Combination pistons		Solo To Great Tenth		indicators, and voltmeter	
		to each manual, plus		Solo To Great Twelfth.		over solo manual.	
Vibraphone on.		setter piston.					
Melotone Vibrato on.		Two swell pedals, one					
		crescendo pedal.					

COMPTON THEATRE ORGAN

Built by John Compton in 1927/28

First installed in the Super Cinema Charing Cross Road, London.

It is a 3-Manual, 9-Rank Compton with Phantom Piano

*It is Decorated in an unusual style, it has been Japanese Lacquered in Red,
and every Flat surface is Beautifully painted with a different design.*