

A German Masterpiece in the "Garden of England" THE BROOMHILL WELTE ORGAN

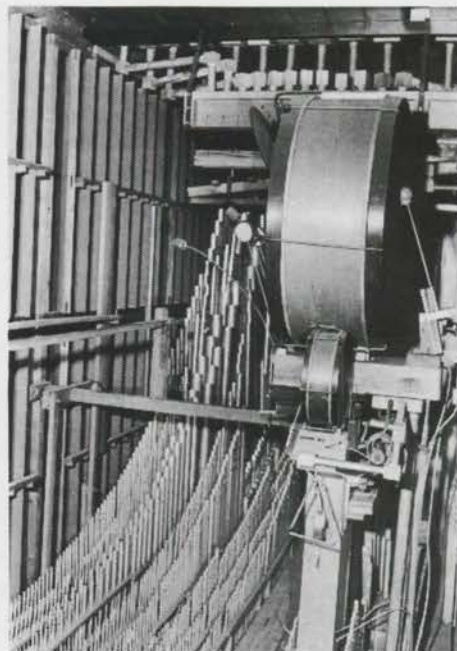
by John D. Sharp
ALL PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

The mansion of Broomhill, situated among the fields and woods of the Kentish countryside near Tunbridge Wells, houses what is probably the finest Welte player pipe organ ever installed in Britain. The house was originally the home of Sir David Salomons (1797-1873). He was succeeded by his nephew, David Lionel Salomons, a remarkable man whose interests were many and varied including science, photography, astronomy and engineering.

Sir David Lionel and his wife Laura were obviously music lovers having installed no less than three Welte pipe organs in their home. The first was a No. 4 Concert Orchestra, followed by the larger No. 10 Orchestrion, (700 pipes) installed c. 1900. The present Welte Philharmonic organ was installed in 1914 at a cost of 4,050 pounds, the earlier No. 10 instrument being taken in part exchange. This represented a very considerable sum in 1914!

The location of these organs was in the Science Theatre — a large building erected in 1896 with galleries on both sides plus a gallery at the rear incorporating a spacious projection room, originally equipped with a triple projector; the unique brass switching and meters are still in position on the wall, along with controls for 'phonograph' and auto-organ operations. The stage, upon which the main organ is installed is extremely large with lighting arrangements which must have been unique in their day. Dimmer switches and facilities for colour-mixing of side and footlights are still on the walls — a veritable museum of stage equipment. Huge scenery rolls lie on the floor, just waiting to be hoisted to the fly; we cannot even begin to visualise the scenes they represent — they have not displayed their canvas secrets for more than fifty years. As we gaze upward from the stage we see the many pulleys and festoons of ropes to manipulate the heavy scenery and a king-size projection screen, dating from 1900. The winding drums were made by the Reeves Pulley Company of Columbus, Indiana, and the screen would originally have been raised or lowered in a few minutes, by electric motor. Today, this operation takes all of twenty minutes to roll or unroll by a self-sustaining hand winch. A most ingenious mechanism is installed for mechanically drawing shutters over all the windows when necessary for complete "black-out."

A frequent visitor to Broomhill was C.S. Rolls, of Rolls-Royce fame, and it would appear that his motto of "Only the best is good enough" could well have been adopted by Sir David! Indeed, he decided that he must acquire the very finest organ obtainable, and so it was that he requested a specification for the Welte Philharmonic Organ. On receipt of the specification, the organ was ordered the same day. According to Sir David's notes the organ was ordered June 19, 1913, with a completion date set for July 1, 1914; the 45 very large cases were dispatched to England, the last one arriving only one week before the European War broke out, causing further delay in completion. The German workmen detailed to come to England for the installation work were unable to do so, and the job was undertaken by Steinway and Sons, the Welte UK agents. One German, who was already in England, assisted for about three months, and was then interned. Erection commenced on August 1, 1914, and was completed at the end of November the same year.



Chamber of Main Organ.

The specification, as set out on the Steinway order form was as follows:

Welte Organ and Echo Organ

Three manuals and Pedal; compass C.c. 61 notes

GREAT		SWELL		ECHO ORGAN	
1 Viol d'orchestre	8'	1 Eoline	8'	1 Vox Humana	
2 Voix celeste	8'	2 Flute douce	8'	2 Eoline	
3 Flute traverse	8'	3 Viola	8'	3 Vox Angelica	
4 Violine diapason	8'	4 Bourdon	8'	4 Vienna flute	
5 Open diapason	8'	5 Open diapason	8'	5 Unda Maris	
6 Gamba	8'	6 Trumpet	8'	6 Tremulant	
7 Bassoon	8'	7 Horn	8'		
8 Flute	4'	8 Oboe	8'		
9 Principal	4'	9 Clarinet	16'	PEDAL	
10 Rain effect	2'	10 Flute	4'	C.F. 30 notes	
11 Storm effect	16'	11 Principal	4'	1 Bourdon	16'
12 Harp effect	4'	12 Clarion	4'	2 Violinbass	16'
13 Church bells		13 Tremulant		3 Tuba	16'
14 Tremulant				4 Cello	8'

Semi-automatic stops: Big drum, cymbals, tympani, kettledrums, triangle, castanets, Tracker blocks for reproduction of master rolls and No. 10 Orchestrion Rolls. Console for great organ with pneumatic action. Transmission between manual and Echo organ, electric including 16 volt dynamo for necessary electricity. Swell pedals for great organ and echo organ. Automatic crescendo and forzando arrangement. Draw stops (English system). Interchangeable pistons, combination of stops (English system). Automatic re-roll for both rolls. Automatic switches. All electric motors, transformers and other requirements to be supplied to suit current at Broomhill, 100 volts and 67½ cycles (AC).

The Echo organ is situated at the back of the hall in a special room above and behind the projection room, some 200 feet from the main organ. One wonders what the effect of acoustic delay would have been! An unusual separate blower mechanism is provided by two bellows, actuated by motor-driven eccentric levers and feeding a reservoir. Wind requirements would be very modest for this section of the organ, having only to supply five ranks of quiet, low-pressure pipes. The electric action for Echo department is 16 volts D.C. By the completion date the "Rain effect" and "Storm effect" stops had been replaced by Flute Harmonic 4' and Bourdon 16', plus a III-rank Mixture.

There is a total of approximately 2000 pipes, including 349 in the Echo organ. In the manner of the period, the performer was hidden from view behind an oak screen but was able to keep an eye on proceedings in the hall via a complicated system of mirrors. Combination pistons could quickly be set with a barrel-and-pin mechanism housed within hinged compartments on either side of the keydesk.

Broomhill is fortunate in having a very extensive collection of music rolls for the Philharmonic Organ as well as those for the earlier No. 10 Orchestration, which were returned to the factory in Freiburg for adapting to the new organ. The music was obviously selected to suit all tastes from Bach's Preludes & Fugues, through Guilmant, Lemmens, Wagner, Sousa Marches and a large collection of Dance Music — Polkas, Galops and 2-Steps, not forgetting a piece catalogued as "Ta-Ra-Ra-Bom-De-Aye!" The No. 10 Orchestration rolls were mechanically cut, and the Philharmonic rolls, although mechanically cut, were from registers made by great musicians of the day playing on a specially constructed organ in the factory. These organists include masters such as Lemare, Bonnet, H. Goss-Custard and the great, blind organist Alfred Hollins, playing his own works. Little is known about concerts and recitals in the Science Theatre, but it is thought that the eminent theatre organist, Reginald Foort played here on at least one occasion. Maybe, diligent searching of old newspaper files will bring further evidence to light. On Sir David's death in 1925 the Baronetcy became extinct and the estate passed to his daughter, Mrs. Vera Bryce Salomons, who generously presented Broomhill to Kent County Council, "for the people of Kent." It is now administered by the Regional Health Authority as a Conference and Training Centre.

On Sunday, January 17, 1988 an open meeting was held in the Science Theatre, and a talk illustrated with slides and Welte organ recordings entitled "Sounds Interesting" was presented by Richard Cole, curator at London's Science Museum. This event proved to be a real

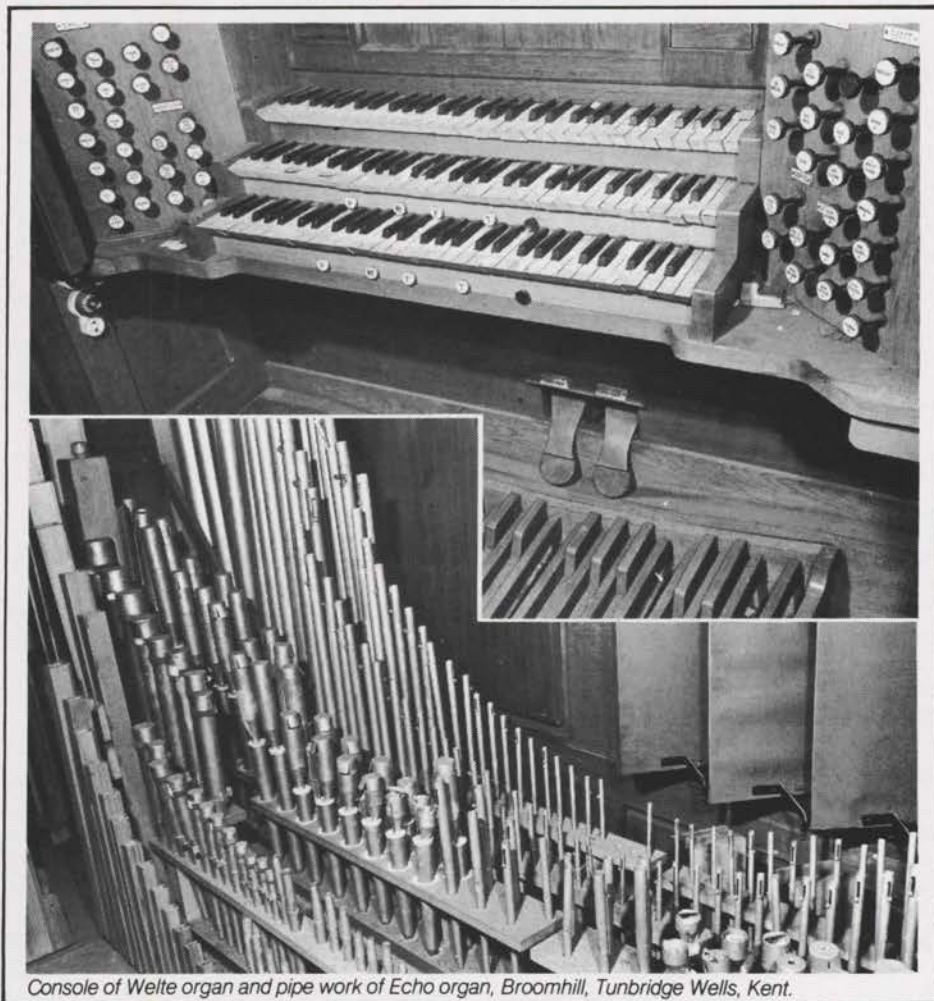


Welte organ in Broomhill, Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

winner, with the theatre packed with organ enthusiasts. At the end of the talk, house lights were dimmed and curtains drawn, revealing the organ, splendidly floodlit from end to end. There was a brief silence — and then an audible gasp of wonderment as this instrument, so long forgotten, was there in all its majesty. The organ has not been played since Sir David's death and the Sir David Salomons Society is dedicated to raising the very considerable sum of money required to

have the instrument professionally restored.

I am indebted to Mr. Ted Crampton for allowing me to use some of the material he has researched, to John Wheeler, MBE and to Douglas Bennett, curator of Broomhill who has assisted me in exploring and photographing the inner mysteries of the Welte, as well as readily making available books, documents and other records of this wonderful instrument.



Console of Welte organ and pipe work of Echo organ, Broomhill, Tunbridge Wells, Kent.