

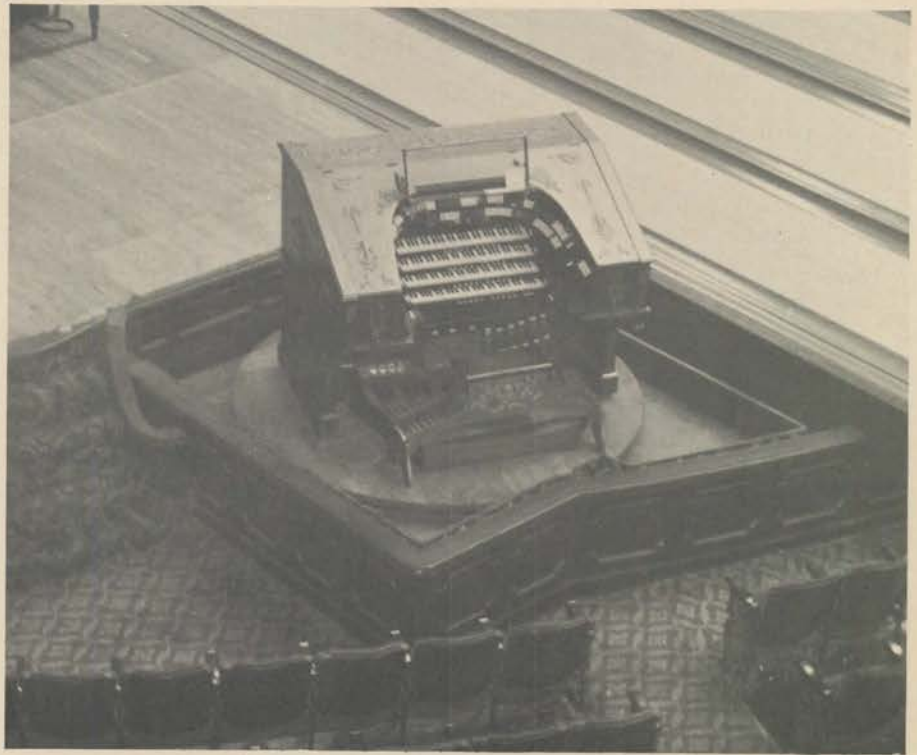
Pipe Organs In Business

It isn't at all unusual for a theatre organ to be removed from its dusty perch in a picture palace and reinstalled in an organ buff's home. Sometimes, however, the organ goes back into business, earning its keep in a restaurant, high school auditorium, or serving the congregation in a local church.

To introduce "Pipe Organs in Business," two theatre instruments are featured in this first of the series — the Robert Morton Organ in the former Loew's Midland Theatre, Kansas City, Mo., and the Christie Organ now in the Regent Theatre, Stotfold, England, which is now the Ex-Servicemen's Club. The Morton is currently silent again, but the Christie is used to entertain for stage shows, recitals and dances.

The Midland Morton fell into silence and disrepair following the advent of sound motion pictures. After 14 years of non-use it was refurbished enough to make it playable; there had been extensive water damage to some portions of the instrument and this could not be repaired. In 1961 the theatre was converted to an elaborate bowling alley called the Midland Stadium. It was the home of the Kansas City Stars of the National Bowling League.

In converting the theatre, none of the theatrical equipment was disturbed except where necessary for the installation of four bowling lanes. The only visible loss was a few rows of center orchestra seats. The projection equipment, curtains, paintings, statuary and, of course, the organ were retained. It was used on nights when the Stars played their home games. During bowling



The Midland Morton in position for bowling

seasons the organ was available for recitals.

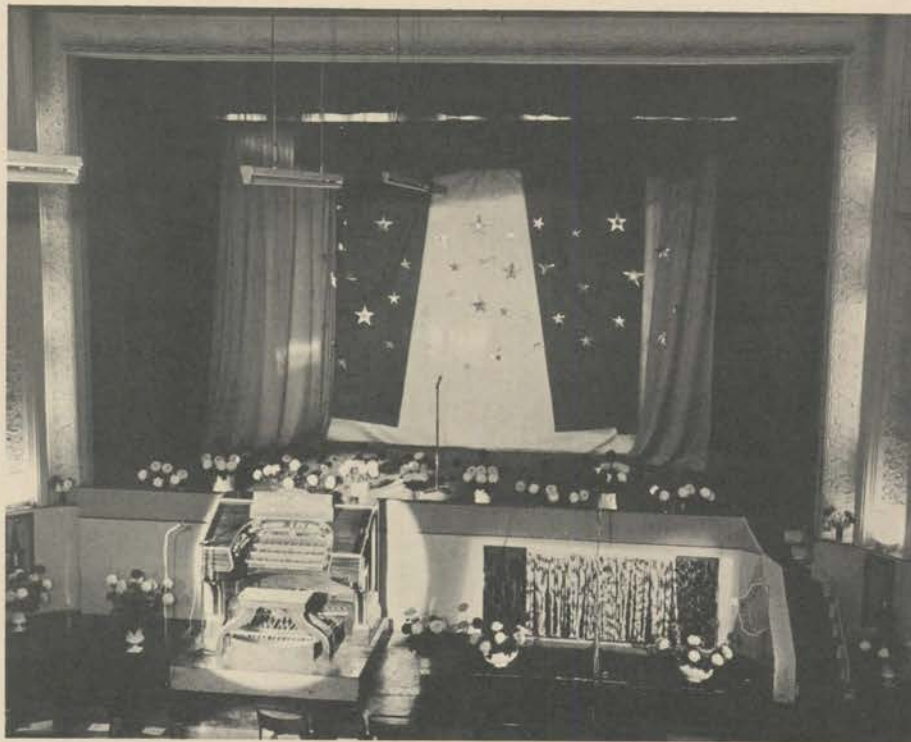
Lack of patronage forced cancellation of bowling and the theatre was again reconditioned, renamed the Saxon and opened as a first run motion picture house. The organ again suffered water

damage and last Summer the theatre's air conditioning system went out and the house was shuttered. A small theatre, The Studio, located on the former Midland-Saxon mezzanine, is open daily. It is not known at this writing whether the large theatre will be reopened.

The British counterpart presents a much more encouraging picture. THEATRE ORGAN is indebted to John Fosskett, secretary of the Theatre Organ Preservation Society, for supplying details of the installation. This is the second pipe organ to be installed in the Regent Theatre. When it opened in the mid-thirties, the cinema was equipped with a Wurlitzer organ that was removed from the La Scala Theatre in Glasgow. It was used in interludes and with stage shows. After World War II, with the decline in patronage, the Wurlitzer was sold and moved to the Ritz, Birkenhead, where it remains today.

Ultimately the Regent was converted to a Club and little over one year ago it was decided to install an organ for the enjoyment of the patrons. Many instruments were investigated and finally the 3m/10r Christie in the Carlton Theatre at Tuebrook was purchased. It had been first installed in 1932. A two chamber organ, it was rebuilt into the single chamber space at the Regent by Phil Burbeck and Rupert Kettle. Work started mid June, 1963, and by the beginning of August the installation had taken shape and the wind was on.

Although a fair amount of juggling had to take place the general character of the instrument remained unchanged. The



Ex-Servicemen's Club Christie in spotlight. —Photo by John D. Sharp

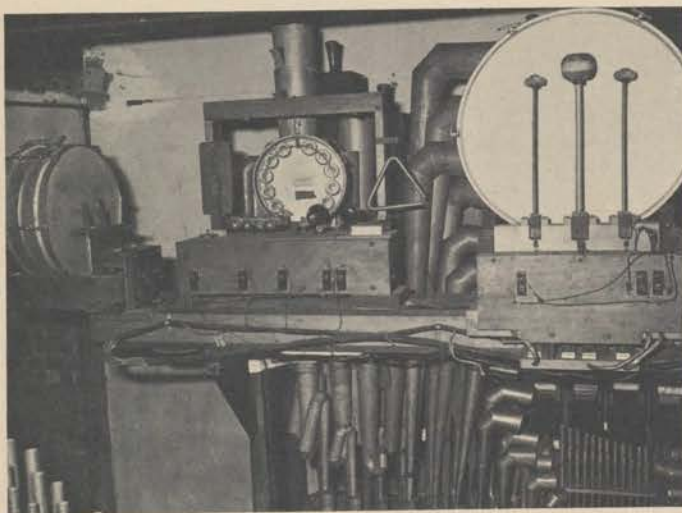
theatre organ

percussions were placed to be effective for dance work, but this was done in such a manner that it was not to the detriment of the pipe work. The organ speaks out with effectiveness, due to the hall acoustics, helped by the upward opening shutters and sensitive layout of the instrument. The only addition has been an octave coupler, (solo super to great).

This is definitely one organ that speaks for its keep — it's a pipe organ that is really in business!



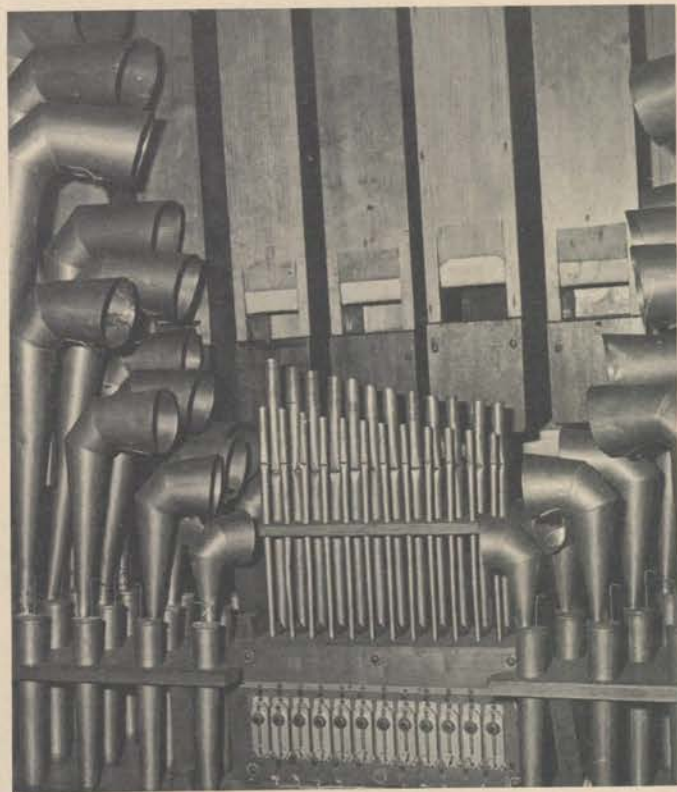
Part of the tonal percussions required much juggling to put in place without effective paperwork.



Installation of traps and percussions was made wherever space permitted. Above: Drums surround a small section of toy counter holding tambourine, castanets, triangle and sleigh bells. Percussions are used during dances at the club.



Pictured on this page are photos of the former Regent Theatre at Stotfold, England, showing installation of the Christie organ. Excellent photography of John D. Sharp provides THEATRE ORGAN readers with the fine views. Above, members of the club crowd around the console to look and ask questions of organist William Davies.



Installation of pipework in the single chamber. A smaller WurliTzer was installed prior to the Christie and this necessitated crowding extra ranks into the same space under the stage. Chamber area is to right of console as seen in proscenium view on page 18.