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**SIR DAVID LIONEL SALOMONS**

Dr. Ian Beavis

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**D**r Beavis began by telling us that the subject of his talk was Sir David Lionel Goldsmid Sterne Salomons, Baronet, 1851 to 1925. His father, Philip Salomons, born in 1796, travelled to the United States as a young man and became a U.S. citizen but, on returning to this country, became an influential figure in the City of London, making a great deal of money destined to be spent by his son on his scientific experiments at Broomhill. Philip held a number of public offices: he was Sheriff of Sussex, a J.P., and had some honorific military roles as well. He probably never lived down the adventure he had as High Sheriff when he was entertaining judges to a banquet in Lewes. Arriving early, he began to explore the county gaol and managed to lock himself into a cell. His cries for help were unnoticed until the banquet was half-way through. In 1850 he married Emma Abigail Montefiore, the mother of David Lionel.

The family's link with the Tunbridge Wells area began in 1829 when the first Sir David Salomon (uncle of Sir David Lionel) purchased the lease of the original small villa of Broomhill and then commissioned the young architect Decimus Burton to rebuild it, creating the building that we know today as the Salomons Centre.

Sir David Lionel Salomons was born in 1851 and studied science at Cambridge, following his childhood interest. He succeeded his uncle as Baronet in 1873, and the young man came to live at Broomhill. When Sir David Lionel moved into Broomhill he set about embellishing the site, first adding the water tower cum astronomical observatory amid a host of well-equipped workshops for his scientific explorations. A visitor commented that these were the finest workshops, prepared for all tasks, in the world. There was also a laboratory and the great science theatre, fully equipped for demonstrations, but used mainly for conferences and discussion of scientific discoveries. The theatre also included the magnificent Welte organ, which has now been restored so that concerts are once again being given there.

Illustrations were shown of the Stable Block, which today are very much visited and admired. These had an innovative automatic feeder which could not only measure out a feed of hay but deliver it to a particular horse just on the pull of a lever. Sir David Lionel also took out patents in electricity, although he always maintained that he was a scientist not an entrepreneur. He nonetheless became chairman of the City's first electricity company, and held several other public offices: he was a magistrate and a member of Kent County Council, but was unsuccessful in standing for Parliament. He was also very interested in the furtherance of women's rights and wrote an address to the Ladies of England.

One of the many slides we were shown was a contemporary cartoon from *Vanity Fair* depicting Sir David Lionel and poking fun at a 3-volume book he had written on electricity, calling it 'Unappetising Stuff'. In fact it was translated into various foreign languages as well as being used as a text book in the United States. He married in 1882 Laura de Sterne and they subsequently had five children, a son and four daughters.



Sir David Lionel's main interest lay, however, in horseless carriages and he was applauded for this because it was thought they would ease the hard labour of horses! Yet his interest in electricity had not waned and his house, Broomhill, was one of the first to be fitted out with electricity long before it came to the main Tunbridge Wells area. He had a great engine house and an accumulator house where batteries could be stored for future use. But his interest in the motor car went back as early as 1874. He played with the idea of an electric car but realised it would not be practical given the technology of the day. Indeed, their development is only really happening today.

Sir David Lionel became a founder member of the Automobile Club of France, the oldest in the world, and helped to organise a number of motor races on the continent. He thought that France had pulled ahead of Britain and he was determined to popularise the motor car for its economic value and also to start up a motor manufacturing industry in Britain.

During his year as Mayor of Tunbridge Wells, he organised the first ever motor show at the agricultural ground in Tunbridge Wells on the 15th October, 1895. As there were only two motor cars in the country he had to invite a few more exhibits from the continent. Some never made the journey so it was a fairly modest show with only six exhibits. But it was hugely influential. Up to 8,000 people came and it was covered by the press from various countries including the United States. The *Courier* asked, 'Will the horses of the future be fed on petroleum instead of oats?' A slide of a fire engine with a Daimler engine made the point that the famous names were there at the very beginning. Sir David Lionel then drove his automobile onto the Eridge Road and the ease with which he threaded his way in and out of the horse-driven carriages amazed all who saw it.

Sir David Lionel was a member of several societies and a philanthropist. He used the science theatre to put on lectures for ordinary people using all the latest technology and he entertained groups from far and wide. One of these was the Croydon Photographic Club who were enormously impressed by the wonderful effects in the theatre all accomplished by one man pushing a button.

Sir David Lionel presented Southborough with its Royal Victoria Hall, to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. He also presented various hospitals with X-ray equipment and opened the 'new electrical room' at the Tunbridge Wells Hospital in 1912.

The local M.P. stated that as a result of his election as mayor, Tunbridge Wells would become the foremost resort of the day. There were two main highlights of his term of office: one, the motor show; and two, the inauguration of the town's first electricity system. The power was switched on by Lady Salomons and then everyone proceeded to the Town Hall to the electricity exhibition which demonstrated its uses other than for lighting. People were amazed by kettles, hair curlers and so on which were on display. Sir David Lionel was asked to stay on for another year as Mayor but declined.

Unfortunately his later years were clouded by tragedy. His only son, David Reginald Salomons was drowned at Gallipoli. He was on board a sinking ship and his last words were, 'I will see my men safe first'. He died a hero, beloved by all who knew him.



## BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

David Lionel Salomons died in London in April 1925, and was buried at Rusthall, near Tunbridge Wells. He bequeathed his scientific instruments to Cambridge University and eventually his only surviving daughter, Vera Bryce Salomons, presented the estate to Kent County Council. It is now in the hands of Canterbury Christchurch University who have preserved three memento rooms of the Salomons family. It is pleasing to think that one can still visit the house and see memorabilia of the life and times of Sir David Lionel Salomons and his family.

Dinah Lampitt



Caricature by Sly for *Vanity Fair*, 1908