



Located on Broomhill, near the town of Southborough, the Salomons Estate, was the location of the first TASS outing of the year.

We were given a talk and a tour by the curator and local historian Dr Chris Jones, who introduced us to the three David Salomons and the art and architecture of the Jewish Country House, as was.

Origins and Early Life

The Salomons family were Jewish, having arrived from Holland in the 18th century as part of a wave of Ashkenazi migration that settled in London. Our talk began with Sir David Salomons, born in 1797, at a time when Jews faced significant legal and social exclusion in Britain. It is therefore to his enduring credit that he established himself as a financier, politician, and property owner. These achievements were far from routine: time and again he was required to challenge legislation from outside the system to gain inclusion within.

Finance, Faith, and Political Struggle

Following his father, a stockbroker, into the City, Salomons became one of the original founders of the London and Westminster Bank. This financial security, combined with growing confidence, enabled him to expand into politics. His persistence in the face of exclusionary, Christian-based swearing-in ceremonies was exemplary. Repeatedly denied access to offices to which he had been elected because he refused to take a Christian oath, he nonetheless held fast to his principles. Through sustained challenge and determination, he succeeded in pressing for a more neutral oath that would permit Jews to take political office.



Civic Achievement and National Recognition

At the age of 38, in 1835, he was elected Sheriff of London; by 1839, High Sheriff of Kent; in 1847, Alderman of the City of London; and in 1855, Lord Mayor of London. Finally, after an eight-year struggle with the House of Commons, he succeeded in changing the law and became Liberal MP for Greenwich, a position he held until his death in 1873. In 1869 he joined the distinguished ranks of family members on his wife's side — the Rothschilds and Montefiores — when he was granted the hereditary title of Baronet, becoming the First Baron of Broom Hill: a fitting reward for a life lived with moral purpose and considerable achievement.

Creating Broomhill: Architecture and Landscape

Alongside his public life, Salomons established two country residences with his wife Jeanette: Burrswood in Groombridge, and also Broomhill. At the latter, he built a new house in 1850, probably designed by his friend Decimus Burton, using local stone quarried from the grounds. Designed in the Italianate villa style, the house featured Corinthian columns, porticos, and balustrades. The lower levels have retained the warmer tones of the sandstone, particularly in areas more sheltered from the weather. From the patio there are sweeping views down the valley towards Rusthall, and much land was purchased to protect this prospect from future development.



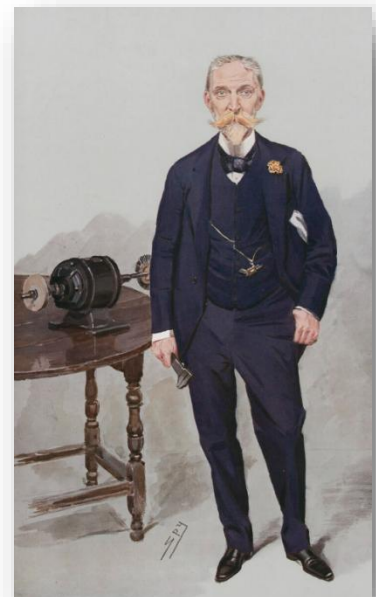
Domestic Life, Art, and Cultural Display

Internally, the family quarters were divided into male and female rooms, with the latter enjoying the sunniest aspects. Daytime socialising and leisure took place in the drawing room and to demonstrate their cultural awareness, the Salomons created picture galleries and sculpture rooms to display contemporary artists; rather than old masters. The house retains some beautiful details of craftsmanship, as well as opulent but sophisticated original wallpapers. Numerous portraits were commissioned, including *"Doubtful Fortune"* by Abraham Solomon RA, which still hangs in what was once the library. The painting to me has a distinctly Pre-Raphaelite feel, reflecting the artist's circle, and in the background depicts St Paul's Church in Rusthall — the very view the family worked so hard to protect.



The Second Baronet: Science, Innovation, and Expansion

Sir David had no children of his own, but after the deaths of his brother and sister-in-law, he adopted their three children. Among them was David Lionel Salomons, who eventually inherited both the estate and the baronetcy and made it his primary home. The Second Baronet of Broomhill proved, like his uncle, an extraordinary force of nature. Educated at University College London and Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, he graduated in the Natural Science Tripos in 1873. A pioneer, inventor, engineer, collector, and designer, he gained fame for his ideas and creations and became the architect of the estate's expansion into the grand complex we see today. He was also a cutting edge horologist, amassing a huge collection of extremely valuable watches, including the exquisite entirely gold watch, allegedly given to Marie Antoinette and worth millions today.



Experiments, The Tower, and the Theatre

One of his earliest projects was the Tower, built in 1876 from brick atop a sandstone outcrop to gain extra height. Originally intended for stargazing, it later evolved into a water tower. He added a range of workshops for his experiments in electricity, including work on electric tricycles and energy storage and safe domestic supply.

He also constructed a remarkable wooden theatre, used for science fairs and for hosting visiting scientists demonstrating the latest technologies. Complete with a magnificent organ, stage areas, and wooden ladders, its interior evoked the feel of a sailing vessel. Naturally, it was fitted with his own advanced designs for automated shutters, lighting, switches, and electrical supply — far ahead of their time.



Carriages, Stables, and Architectural Flourish

Between 1890 and 1894, Salomons built a substantial new coach house and stables, with accommodation for twelve carriages and twenty-one horses. Designed by Salomons himself in collaboration with local architect William Barnsley Hughes, the building incorporated ingenious details, including systems that allowed horses to self-feed. Constructed from red brick with white Portland stone, it is reminiscent of a French château and is arguably the architectural highlight of the entire estate.



Family Life and Wider Connections

Despite a relentless schedule of collecting cars, building scale railways, experimenting with X-rays and photography, and standing at the forefront of early car ownership, Salomons also married and raised a family. He married first Laura of the de Stern family, connected to Strawberry Hill (a previous TASS visit). Her mother was Julia of the Goldsmid family, associated with Somerhill — another local Jewish country house. Together they had five children, including their heir, David Reginald, who tragically died in WW1. Their daughter Maud later lived at Huntleys (now part of Bennett Memorial School), visible from Broom Hill, four years into her marriage to Captain Blunt.

Legacy and Conclusion

Sir David Salomons died in 1925, after a lifetime of valuable creativity. His will, published in the local newspaper, recorded estate duties of £80,500 — approximately £6 million today. We can therefore conclude that the Salomons were an immensely wealthy family who were noble in name and deed. They took it on themselves to further the integration of Jews in British society, and paved the way for future aspirations. They also were instrumental in pioneering domestic electricity, x-ray technology and motor car ownership, as well as leaving a remarkable architectural legacy, and unlike the super-rich of today, to stand tall when paying their taxes.