

chips except our lanterns or luminaires, call them what you will.

The best way of summing up early stage lighting and effects is to say that imagination was way ahead of the means. They, which included the pioneer lighting designers, were always attempting and possibly achieving the impossible. What is more they did this at considerable risk to life, limb and property. So much relied on what we would call a naked flame. Add to this the use of fireworks, lycopodium and magnesium flares and then go and sit on a gasbag to increase the pressure for the limelight. Explosive mixtures waited upon the unwary, the ingredients being conveyed in very dubious flexible pipes and temporary connections. There are hair-raising descriptions of even a simple daily ritual like lighting the sunburner over the auditorium. Nor were the technicians the only ones at risk, the costumes of chorus and ballet girls were vulnerable in extreme especially as they were the more likely to be in or near the wings.

Outside the North end of the St. Gothard tunnel one can see a memorial to the 800 men who lost their lives during the nine and a half years it took to blast the same number of miles through the Swiss Alps. Perhaps we should put up a memorial to the 'small army of theatrical personnel who, if not actually killed by what was popularly called the *devouring element* were at least disfigured by it. They were the victims of a mixture of indifference and incompetence at both administrative and managerial levels'. In the meantime the least we can do is to read and ponder well the twelve pages which make up the Rees chapter 11, Accidents. Turn the page and we arrive at 'The incandescent carbon-filament electric lamp' – the Swan lamp whose centenary some of us are celebrating at the moment but that of its arrival in the theatre under the auspices of Mr. D'Oyly Carte has to wait a couple of years yet.

What the electric lamp brought which no one could really dispute was safety and respite from the immense amounts of heat but it did not in its early days (shape of electronics to come!) necessarily bring reliability. And this was a reason for some return to gas and of course it lingered on in some theatres as secondary lighting. Incidentally, the streets around Covent Garden are still lit with the stuff. A question which did turn up in respect of both gas and the new electric light was 'Too much light?' and this is with us still. It is a strange thought that what made the development of the equipment so difficult was not so much the production of light but of dark. The now common adjustable beam spotlight is a device for shadowing part of the stage instead of allowing light to spew everywhere from battens, floats and lengths as it had to in times past. What has always made a stage switchboard particularly complicated to design and manufacture has been the need to dim lights instead of just switching on or off like everyone else does. It may be that the history of lighting in the theatre should be seen as a struggle to gain the power to practice the Art of Stage Obfuscation!

PIT, BOXES & GALLERY. The Story of the Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds, by Iain Mackintosh. Published by The National Trust. £1.75 (by post from the Theatre, £2.00).

I first read *Pit, Boxes & Gallery* on the eve of an interview for the job of Administrator of the Theatre Royal at Bury St. Edmunds. I am writing this review of the book at my desk in the Administrator's office below the 1819 scene dock and the absence of my window is the only nit that I can pick in the superb Richard Leacroft drawing which recreates how this theatre must have looked for at least its first decade.

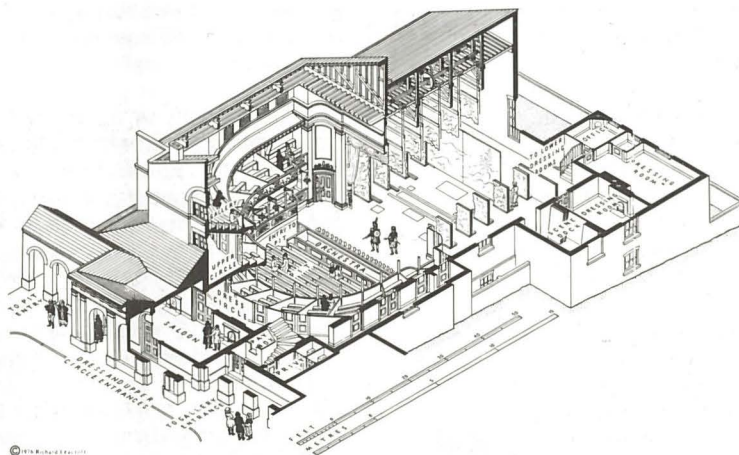
The two events are not unconnected: the book and the job. If I had any doubts that I should, could or would administer Bury, then this book dispelled them. After reading the text and ogling the pictures, I undertook all the appropriate rituals like touching wood, crossing fingers, and hoping that some benevolent divinity was hard at work shaping my end.

The reading of this book brought no stunning revelations – just cosy confirmations of the joys of the Georgian Theatre in general and Bury's Theatre Royal in particular. I am no new convert to the ideology of shallow-tiered horseshoe intimacy (to be fully polemical, the only wedge auditorium that really works for me is the Colchester Mercury). My Georgian conversion began

backed by an extensive scenic stage. The gradual retreat of this forestage until Bertie Crewe's cosmetic remodelling in 1906 to produce a low-budget imitation of an Edwardian theatre. Closure in 1925 and restoration in 1965. Now in the care of The National Trust, an active working community theatre presenting the complete spectrum of spoken and musical performances.

All this is dealt with by Iain Mackintosh in detail that is compellingly readable. And the particular events at Bury are related within a reference framework of general theatre history.

Bury is often described as the last surviving *Regency* playhouse. Iain Mackintosh stresses the *Georgian* aspects. One cannot deny that it obviously had all the Georgian features but nevertheless it is surely a regency theatre in that it looks forward to a post-Georgian theatre age. Can we not speculate that the uniquely *curved* proscenium walls and doors were planned to enable a simple conversion to a proscenium-framed stage? Architect Wilkins was his own client: his brief was probably heavily influenced by his actors but not dictated by them. The actors were resisting the retreat of the acting area to its new position within the scenic stage, but Wilkins must have realised the inevitable. His positioning of the proscenium doors may have given them undue prominence



in the early fifties with discovery of Richard Southern's *The Georgian Playhouse* and a 1956 visit to the (then) unrestored Georgian Theatre in Richmond, Yorkshire. Southern's book did not mention Bury because William Wilkins's masterpiece had been hibernating as a beer barrel store, asleep and forgotten since 1925.

Iain Mackintosh, author of *Pit, Boxes & Gallery* has now assumed Dr. Southern's mantle as our leading Georgian Theatre architectural expert – a status earned by his consulting work at Bury, his projection of the Georgian form within contemporary Inverness, his Cottesloe concept and, above all, his Hayward Gallery exhibition of 1975. If there is a divinity shaping *his* end, Mackintosh's apotheosis will be the restoration of the Old Vic.

The basic facts of the Bury Theatre's history are simple to state. Built 1819 in the Georgian mode with an acting forestage thrusting well into the auditorium and

but it also made them simple to convert. With one clever stroke William Wilkins must have endeared himself to his actors while anticipating the future tastes of his audience.

I rejoice that the enthusiasts of 1965 (and these enthusiasts included Mackintosh) went for a working compromise rather than a museum reconstruction. As a result we have Georgian intimacy coupled with contemporary comforts and technology. I personally am now lucky enough to enjoy this building daily and I cannot deny that it excites me to be a small brick in the continuing heritage of this marvellous building. With every year that passes, Bury's Theatre Royal becomes an even more vital part of Britain's theatrical heritage – Actors and Audiences alike (and even the more discerning pundits) agree that there are few places as theatrically exciting as a full house at the Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds.

FRANCIS REID