

# Travelling Hopefully

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Two important and useful London Transport events have happened in recent months: the opening of the L.T. museum in Covent Garden and the publication of the guide *Theatre London\**. That a book can be 'useful' no one will question but how can such an adjective be applied to a transport museum in our theatre context? The answer is that it gives us some very good clues as to the way the *Museum of Theatre Technology* or the *Backstage and Outfront Museum*, or whatever it is decided to call it, could be run. We must no longer deceive ourselves by believing that *The Theatre Museum*, in the slow process of being set down in a basement in the same locale, can cover even a small part of our needs as technicians. They have neither the space nor the right staff, even if they had the right funds.

It is only necessary to take a look around *The Science Museum* in South Kensington to confirm this. A wonderful and successful place but it can only be a general museum for most, perhaps all, the branches of science

and engineering there included. If one wants real detail then the R.A.F. museum at Hendon, the Railway at York, the Montague at Beaulieu or the L.T. one under review here have to be visited. How can we, in our own case, imagine a satisfactory comprehensive combination of the *Art of* with the *Technology of* — the very words are antipathetic! And each covers such an immensely varied field. Indeed even when keeping the two strictly separate there is still the risk of a bias in a particular direction. In 'ours' it is the lighting lobby that is the active one. Stage machinery people are singularly ill-represented on paper for a start — the doers and have-doners that is. Any skill in penwork seems to lie with the going-to-doers. Then again although stage lighting switchboards have been very large some stage machinery is enormous. That is one reason why the L.T. museum is so relevant, it includes large and small and, like us, it has to include architecture. So let's get back to London Transport.

Like that Anglo-Scottish play recently, they have been collecting a lot of rotten notices: from their own G.L.C. director too — a curious parallel! I wish Margaret T., Sir

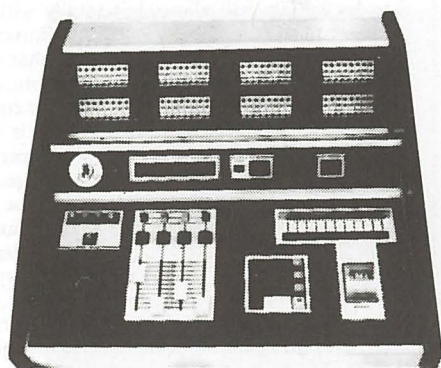
Geoffrey H. and the rest of the front bench (and their shadows opposite!) had to use L.T. daily. After all, unlike the rest of us their place of work has a covered walkway and subway directly to their local station — Westminster. In the case of Downing Street there is a bus stop right to hand. The same rule of daily use would have to apply to those at the top of the G.L.C. and of London Transport itself. I couldn't see the PR man I had an appointment with at 280 Old Marylebone Road, next door to the Edgware Road Station, because his car was held up in traffic on his way back from Bayswater — two stations away on the Circle Line!

Does anybody who is anybody ever use public transport? The present Lord Chancellor prefers to use a push bike and very environmental it is of him but years ago I did look up and see Michael Foot sitting reading in the tube. About the same time Dame Sybil Thorndike, with an elderly Lewis Casson in tow, made an entrance at South Ken and this in a packed rush hour train. Very impressive it was too: a pair of (house?) seats were instantly found for her although she declared above the tunnel noise that they really didn't need them! Legend has it that Dame Sybil did a lot of travelling to her place of work by tube.

As for my own — Kingsway, Floral Street and King Street — it has always been the tube for me. Indeed when it comes to writing, the tube has been a most satisfactory workplace in itself without interruptions or distractions — given a seat and a fashionable skirt length of well below the knee. As for theatre going itself there has only been one sensible method of doing that — London Transport. Not that during my, let us say sixty, years it has always been called by that name nor do I include buses. It really means London's Underground. To walk, cycle or park the car on the outskirts and take the train. Of course the key station was Piccadilly Circus — Cochran's *Centre of the World* — but people will find it difficult to believe from what they see today that this station was at one time a masterpiece, one of the sights of London. The architect was Charles Holden who was to make our commuter architecture famous.

What we see today seems a squalid affair to be got out of as quickly as possible. Not that this is possible if, like me, you *have* to join the long queues at the inadequately staffed 'box offices'. In the thirties this sub-surface circular concourse was warm and inviting, exuding a degree of luxury. That it no longer does so is not just due to the fact that we cannot keep anything within the public's reach clean nowadays. The fluorescent lighting ruins the original colours. These, according to Charles Hutton who was in Holden's office then, were very carefully chosen to suit tungsten lighting. The columns in the concourse are bronze

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