



Above the stage: 20th century fly-plot on the wall of 18th century fly-loft.



18th Century Hot & Cold in all dressing rooms (plus 20th century sprinkler in case of fire).



The Foyer, added in 1791.

an emotive business: to stand on stage timbers that supported a 1773 performance of *Acis & Galatea* is lid flipping. And years of studying old stage plans with sets of grooves drawn in a perspective narrowing to upstage is no preparation at all for making an entrance between bays of preset flats, slotted into their carriages to await a mechanical substitution for the current scene.

There are six sets of slots. The downstage four have a capacity for four wing flats, the fifth can accommodate three and the sixth (the most upstage) can carry two.

Care has to be taken in making an entrance: there is a boom in each bay—a *candle pole*. The lights are now electric and each wing has its own thyristor dimmer, but the poles can all still turn in unison from a single timber dimming wheel in the prompt corner. These wing lights have just been changed to CIMA candles. There are 210 units on the wing poles: each unit comprises

two candles in a reflector. In the footlights there are 30 units, each reflector having three candles. There are 200 candle units available as extra lights.

Below stage are the wing carriages to carry the flattage dropped through the slots in the stage floor. Downstage centre stands the main capstan which allows the flats to be substituted. It is obvious when one thinks about it but, until confronted by the actual machinery, I had not realised just how much time an eighteenth century stage crew had to work between cues to preset the machinery. All these lines to be moved to the correct carriages in each bay (and presumably tensions to be finely adjusted) before manning the capstan for a magical coordinated change.

Also understage, of course, is the trap machinery which was an essential feature of baroque opera—a platform gently rising by means of a timber windlass rather than the counterweighted instant appearance traps

of the pantomime stage.

The fly loft is a wondrous collection of timber devoted to the art and science of mechanical advantage. There are simple rope sets but there are also complex drum and shaft operated systems for border substitution and for chariot flying. Flying height is restricted and cloths are tumbled—but the scenes were painted on full cloths rather than on the paired back shutters (meeting from the side) which were standard in the British theatre of the same period.

The thunder-run and wind machine are timeless examples. Hand cranked waves with a ship to sail upon them are part of the standard museum set-up in which the stage is left between performance seasons.

Wing space is quite tight. But then this type of staging required only minimum packing space for flats. Indeed the dressing room layout takes advantage of the acting area narrowing towards the back of the stage. Dressing rooms are delightful with their tall green tiled stoves, views of the park, and in some cases the original eighteenth century hand-painted wallpaper.

A visit to Drottningholm is a step through the fourth dimension: a moment of theatrical time has been frozen. Yes there is electricity, there are sprinklers, there are fire extinguishers and a prompt corner desk which is a concession to the modern cueing methods of visiting operatics. But these are the only intrusions of the present and they are so insignificant that they do not constitute any kind of alienation effect. Drottningholm is living history.