

*The Lighting Control from the Playhouse Theatre, cleaned, repainted, and rebuilt at Central School of Speech and Drama. The area to the right of the control drive wheel contained a few dimmers driven by a chain drive system. These were cannibalised to complete the left hand side. One channel on each shaft has been wired up to control one of the old lanterns located in the now vacant right hand side.*

longer manufactures for the theatre. One of the senior employees dated it positively at 1930 having inspected the mechanism. He was even able to point to the spot where it would have been built 54 years ago! It was a most satisfying result.

On the other hand we have other items as yet unidentified including our largest piece, the lighting control from the Playhouse. This is not to say that we don't know who made it, we do, but we don't know its history. On the face of it, the board is simply the control left over from the theatre's last days as a public venue with some relays installed by the BBC. But is it? Considerable

doubt lurks in my mind. Firstly, the theatre was still on a DC supply when the BBC started operations in 1950. One of their obligations was to facilitate the change over to AC. Within one of their internal memoranda is a reference to a particular dept, having a 'lighting control suitable' for the AC supply. Secondly, the only dip trap mountings seem to be contiguous with a 1954 installation. There are no other holes visible in the floor and the floor is the 1907 one! Thirdly, amongst the documents found was a proposal drawing from Strand Electric for a housing to contain spotlights on the Upper Circle Front. This work was

not carried out. However when we first entered the building there were two spotlights on stands in the front of the Upper Circle plugged into 5 amp outlets on the audience side of the rail. (The BBC did not use the Upper Circle for audience.) Add to this the fact that the Theatre Inspectors would not have allowed sockets in these positions if people *were* to be admitted and we must deduce that the majority of the wiring was done during the mid 50's by the BBC. So is the control the original adapted, or another brought from somewhere else (where?) by the BBC? Investigations are being pursued.

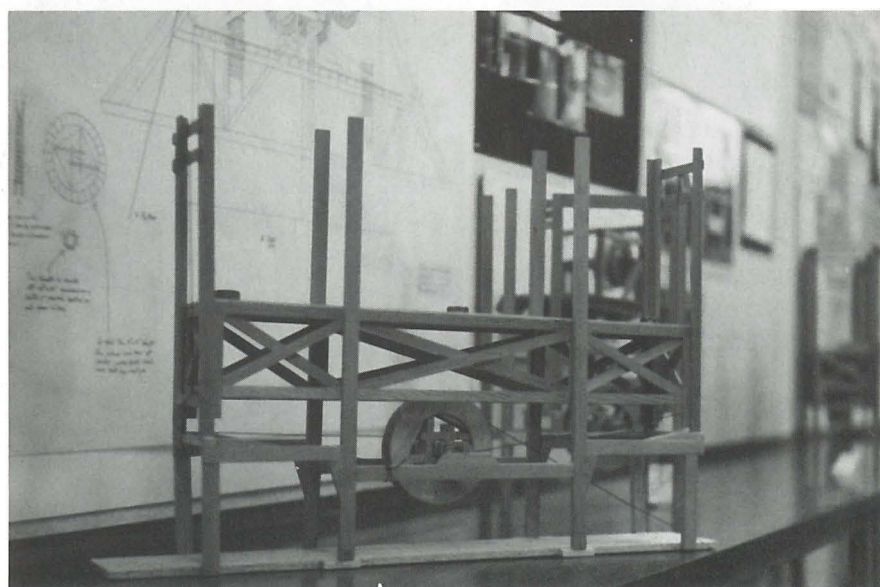
We have also gathered amongst other things a number of Strand Electric Patt 44 lens spots. In fact we have a run of 5 examples completed, each one of which varies slightly from the other as the manufacturers attempted over the years to reduce the man hours taken in the making. As far as we can gather the advent of new bits of stamping machinery or detail changes in construction were not noted so all we can do is place them in order of labour intensity knowing that the most recent would be from the early 1950's.

This part of the work is most interesting and our search for fresh articles to work on is continual, so we tend to keep only one example of a completed type in order to keep finding space for new arrivals.

One may ask why this emphasis on bits of out-dated gear? Well, if we are training people for the technical management side of theatre it seems necessary to offer as many means of solving problems as possible. There are, for instance, characteristics in the Victorian bridge mechanism which still hold true now, i.e. the use of weights on each corner to balance the load or the use of one pulling line to operate the motion which then gets transferred to the lifting points on the bridge. The ability to resolve technical mechanical needs comes from the ability to understand the principles of movement and how motive power is transmitted. Equally well one has to understand when and how loads are being transmitted. In this sort of stage machinery these things are readily seen. It is not beyond possibility that some of these principles might prove useful in some future context.

I also firmly feel that the Higher Diploma type of course we have at Central provides the best springboard for this sort of work. We have a more practical base than the more academic drama degree courses and yet maintain enough mental rigour for the research to be adequately thorough. In a purely selfish world I might however want the students to stay for longer, for as soon as they are really adept at the work they move on to their careers!

The main benefits other than the personal ones, are on the one hand, the ever increasing amount of practical teaching aids we can use which in turn increases year by year the amount of information we can successfully impart. On the other hand, the work when indexed will become a useful part of the body of knowledge about the theatre as a whole.



*Model of one of the two downstage bridges at the Playhouse, Charing Cross. The timbers run from the basement floor to the underside of the stage. The bridge is seen in its 'down' position which is a few inches above a mezzanine floor in the real installation. The rope from the top of the drum runs down to the right in the picture; pulling this string/rope will raise the bridge platform. Omitted are counterweights at the corners. Dark objects on bridge are hexagon nuts acting as weight to assist the downward movement.*