

CONTROL BOARD ALPHABET

An A B C for 1987 by Francis Reid.



A is for **access**, and it is interesting that the word which comes alphabetically first should be so fundamental to the operation of any lighting control system. Whether by pulling a large lever or pushing a miniature one or (in the fashion of current jargon) merely stroking a key, there is a need for immediate access to any particular light or group of lights for on/off and up/down.

Autocue accessed by a light pen pointed at the appropriate data on a video screen. But that was way back in the seventies: its today equivalent is perhaps the mouse (qv) which opens up the same scope for the painter's arm as the stopkey (qv) offered to the musician's fingers. However, in these microprocessed times, the most popular access remains the key pad. But tonight's operators were schooled when the pocket calculator re-educated fingers overnight—tomorrow's operators had a Sinclair Spectrum in their prams and write their essays on an Amstrad. Might they seek a return to the playability of a lever plus switch-button per lamp/group? Rockboard (qv) do, relegating the microprocessor to a facilitating role in effect sequences.

Rockboards are, however infinitely more sophisticated than the **A M C** (Advanced Manual Control) which seems to be the climax for non-manual presetting on the straighter stage.

A is also for **A E G**, a German firm who were around from when theatrical electricity was first dimmed until they chose to withdraw at the very moment when, overnight, thyristors made every previous device obsolete. But the 1950s AEG dimmer using paired thyratrons (qv) and the AEG preset desk were one of the principal antecedents of the multi-presetting that was to revolutionise lighting control from the mid-sixties onwards.



Today's most popular method of channel **Access** is by a numerical keypad, often associated with a wheel for increasing and decreasing the selected channel(s).

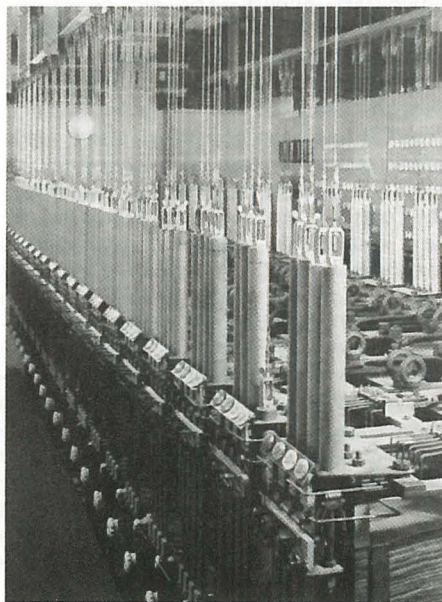
A D B of Belgium and **A V A B** of Sweden are leading board manufacturers who had the wit to choose names beginning with **A**, thus ensuring for themselves a high rating in any listing.



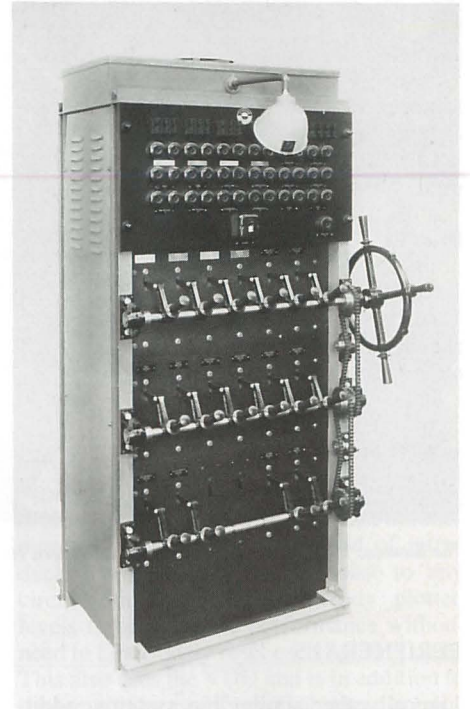
B is for **Board**, still the most popular word for a lighting control desk (as in "What is your board?", "Where is the Board?" "Who is on the Board?" etc) despite the sophistication that has overtaken the simplicity of the original switchboards and dimmerboards. Richard Pilbrow and Strand cleverly hijacked 'Lightboard' (qv) as a system name.

B is also very much for **Bentham** who for many years was synonymous with boards. For perhaps four decades he was the major English (as opposed to American) speaking influence: all our boards were either devised by him personally or by others reacting against his teachings. Always articulate in voice and pen, retirement has induced only partial mellowness and Fred is now active in the cause of theatre archaeology. And of course no lexicon can avoid digging in *his* past.

There can be no mention of Bentham without a reference to '**B**' **Bear** who was his Sancho Panza during the golden years of Strand. They affected to despise modern doctrines of marketing, yet their approach to sales and marketing was as successful as



Bordini Transformer dimmers, controlled by tracker wires.



A Bracket Handle Board.

it was unorthodox. They enjoyed a rosy apotheosis during the final years of Twenty Nine King Street (qv) when Rank endowed a saloon bar so that they could tilt at many windmills, particularly their benefactors.

Bordini transformers were the standard central European dimmer from the mid-thirties until the late fifties. Each circuit had its own secondary winding which slid in and out of the transformer, moved by a tracker wire from a central control frame with banks of levers. Circuits could accept any load from about 40 watts to 6 kilowatt. Such autotransformers never caught on in Britain except at Glyndebourne where a Bordini ruled from 1933 to 1963.

The Glyndebourne Bordini's mains supply was derived via three massive oil-filled **breakers** which acted as both main switch and protection. Despite many experiments, circuit breakers have never really supplanted fuses in the protection of dimmer outputs—a setting sensitive enough to protect a thyristor is just too easily triggered by the ravages of plugs, sockets, cables, lamp filaments and flymen.

Resistances (qv) were the preferred British dimmer, including those mounted in the **Bracket Handle** boards which were the poor cousins of the Grandmasters (qv). The dimmer handles, which were directly connected to the dimmers mounted behind the front panel of the board, could be screwed down to shafts for mechanical mastering; but there was no sophisticated gearing to allow colour banks to move in