

**TO SEVERAL GENERATIONS, NORMAN HUNTER IS THE CREATOR OF THE DELIGHTFUL CHARACTER PROFESSOR BRANESTAWM AND AUTHOR OF A SERIES OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS CHRONICLING HIS ADVENTURES. BUT IN LIGHTING CIRCLES, HE IS THE PROPRIETOR OF THE OTHER THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE — A FULLY OPERATIONAL SCALE-MODEL OF THE REAL THING.**



■ Interior of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

# PROFESSOR BRANESTAWM'S MAGIC THEATRE

**N**orman Hunter, a sprightly 91-year-old, has now retired from writing, so maintaining the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane for the benefit of family and friends is more or less a full time job. But this theatre is no mere toy, and has recently been brought up-to-date with new Strand Lighting.

The 'three-eighths of an inch to the foot' scale model occupies what used to be the study at his home in Staines,

■ Norman Hunter with dimmers.



Middlesex. The 'auditorium' is in the entrance to the room and the 'backstage' area is every bit as complex as in a full-size theatre. For this theatre includes six bridges, two traps and 14 gridlines.

The dimmers may fall a little short of EC90 standards but they do the job they are intended for. As for the lighting, the theatre is spot-on. The latest acquisitions have been two items from Strand Lighting's architectural range — a Minicube and a Minispot — both of which are now serving as stage lighting.

Norman's love of theatre, stems from his first visit to the Theatre Royal in 1913 to see the pantomime, *Sleeping Beauty Reawakened*, with Will Evans and George Graves. In the 1920's, he returned to the theatre with his wife to see *The Decameron Nights* but he confesses that he has never actually been backstage at the theatre.

Instead, working from photographs of the interior he decided to build his scale model as a hobby, while he was working as a copywriter for an advertising agency in South Africa after the last war.

The theatre he built is as it looked after refurbishment in the 1920's (*Decameron Nights* was the re-opening production). Norman's construction programme, working from his photos, and architectural drawings reproduced

in *The Builder*, began in 1950. The bulk of the work was finished by 1954, then it had to be dismantled in 1970 when he retired and returned to England. Reconstruction began in 1979, when he stopped writing, and since then there has been a constant programme of maintenance and repairs.

He explained, 'I have been interested in the theatre, and model theatre in particular, for as long as I can remember. The strange thing is that it is no different to the real thing, in lighting terms. You can rehearse a show and everything will go smoothly. If anything is going to go wrong you may be sure that, without fail, it will happen in the middle of a performance.'

The little Theatre Royal's repertoire — all of them with properly planned lighting cues, realistic theatre sounds, music and scene changes — includes Gilbert and Sullivan, and Wagner.

Performances are given of established classics such as *The Mikado*, *Iolanthe*, *The Ring*, *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walkurie* and *Siegfried*.

All the scenery and figures of the cast are to scale but the only problem comes in *Siegfried*.

As Norman explains, 'Unfortunately, the dragon is rather on the large side, so when Siegfried slays him there is not a lot of room on stage for much else to happen'.