Close by Isambard Brunel's pioneering steamship, S.S "Great Britain", in the heart of Bristol docks, stands a former banana ripening plant. Today the building could be described as the centre of animated film for Europe, if not the world.

This is the home of Aardman Animations, a production house for commercials and short subjects, and a group of people who are at the top of their profession. Together with Lancashire born animator Nick Park they have done wondrous things and seen their efforts rewarded handsomely.

There is a cosy canteen on the top floor of the building. The keen-eyed visitor will notice along one wall a trophy cabinet. Amongst the contents are some golden statuettes, the presentation of which is normally proceeded, on a Spring night in Los Angeles, by the words, "...and the Oscar goes to...". Nick Park heard those words and headed stagewards for the third time in six years on March 25th this year. Studio Manager and Head of Lighting, John Bradley, and Director of Photography, Dave Alex Riddett talked to LIGHTS! about Nick's creative gifts, Aardman Animations, their work, and two of Bristol's famous sons...

14

(Above right) The deadly duo start a window cleaning business. The street is a model, and it is a good illustration of the depth of detail achieved. (A Close Shave)

(Right) Nick Park, just for once, caught in front of a camera.

Wallace &Gromit

-the animated odd couple!
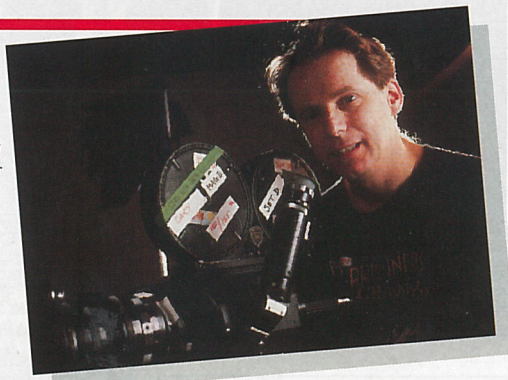
John Bradley's office has the cheerful clutter that can be found at production facilities all over the world. Bits of cable, connectors, together with invoices, production schedules and the odd catalogue, Strand Lighting's no less, vie with the paraphernalia that is the stock in trade of a gaffer. *"Some of my equipment is older than me,"* smiles John. *"There's the Patt 23, and a Strand 2K Fresnel, the 243, and a fair sprinkling of STM dimmers".* But John is not presiding over yet another museum in this famous old city. A visit to the lamp store, as well as a walk around the stages, is a detailed wander through the Strand catalogue. Toccata and Alto, Prelude and Harmony, and one of John's favourites, the Minim

are mixed with Vegas and Pollux, Castors, Arturos, Iris and Orions. Theatrical and Film fixtures combining to help make the best animation currently to be seen anywhere in the world.

As we walk through the facility there is ample evidence of a busy studio. One crew painstakingly works on a Quavers Crisp commercial, another quietly lights a huge tabletop landscape, with a Rocky Mountain background.

Covered in "mud" are outrageous caricatures of 4 x 4 trucks, and on a neighbouring table an average American dwelling, and in the driveway two basket-ball playing dogs. Soon all this will come to life in a series of Chevron Gasoline commercials in the United States. The scenes

demand a lot of light and the techniques used vary little from shooting live action. John has rigged Strand dimming and control throughout the facility. Much in evidence are longserving Tempus control boards and Permus dimmers as well as the much newer LD90 racks together with Andi DX Digital Touring Dimmers. GSX Consoles are also employed with Genius and Communiqué software.

However although resting from their last adventure, *A Close Shave,* Wallace and Gromit are never very far away. It could be said that their spirit pervades the facility. This is not surprising.

Alison Graham, writing last Christmas in the UK's *Radio*

Times probably said it best: *"There is a glorious Englishness about Park's way of working with co-writer Bob Baker, which perfectly matches the antimacassar-adorned Ealing comedy world inhabited by Wallace the optimistic inventor and Gromit, his mute but knowing sidekick. Wallace, the tank-topped inventor with the big ideas and the small brain, given a voice by the incomparable Peter Sallis (of Last of the Summer Wine fame). And Gromit, the electronics expert who communicates world-weary wit and intelligence with just a tilt of his eyes, as he waits to pluck his "master" from his own shortcomings."*