

In recent years Michael Holden has been methodically garnering theatre statistics and a happy combination of this painstaking editor with the members of the ABTT has produced an entirely new "super" *Stage Guide* of some 400 pages.

The choice of a certain theatre of all the theatres in the Guide as décor for the cover must cause its architect to wonder whether this was because it represented a mid-course between ancient and modern or whether it was because it bears the name of our great and much loved actress now in her ninetieth year.

The ABTT form was sent to all "professional" theatres in the British Isles—a fearsome, printed spread of the questions to which practical men need answers when assessing what a theatre is like in which to put productions on (and when necessary get them in and out). The result is here for everyone to see—a page to each theatre. Since the page format is the same in each case the comparative method becomes possible; furthermore the difference in form of each theatre proclaims itself. Critical comment, necessarily a subjective thing, as to the success or otherwise of the architecture or the facilities is absent; nevertheless with a little thought a vision of the theatre comes off the page. One sorrow, the dimensions are in metric as indeed they have to be since—like it not—we are going metric this year, next year, sometime but alas not never. There is however a conversion table at the back.

There are three appendices listing theatres in order of Seating capacity, Proscenium width and by Towns alphabetically. What is a theatre within the meaning of this book? Some idea of the comprehensiveness of its terms of reference is shown by the fact that the largest theatre scheduled is the Scarborough Open Air at 7,000 seats and the smallest that at Mull with only 35 seats. In between come such places as the Royal Albert Hall at 5,606; the Regal Edmonton, a relic of the super cinema days with 2,462 seats, a pros. of 56 ft. wide by 31 ft. 6 in. high and stage depth of 43 ft. 6 in. and with a 65 ft. grid of 69 single purchase counterweight sets. There are also

well-known amateur theatres like Ealing Questors, Highgate Mountview, Middlesbrough Little and Birmingham Crescent. Nor are those strange structures on the end of the pier omitted.

This is third of the *Stage Guides* proper and it is interesting to note that the first, published in 1912, put the Provinces at the beginning of the book and London at the end. Touring was obviously a major preoccupation and instead of named switchboards there was, in many instances, named accommodation. I can detect however no symbol for "quoth the raven" in this respect. Another splendid appendage to keep actors out of mischief was to list the local golf course. It is a sad thing that nowadays a company will be attracted to the Empire Sunderland because of its "Strand CD 120 lighting control" rather than for "the magnificent new Queen Alexandra Bridge" or "St. Peter's Church Monkwearmouth, one of the oldest in the Kingdom" or "the fishing" which "can be indulged in from the old North Pier, and also, under certain conditions, from row-boats obtainable on the beach".

This new *Stage Guide* is a book as much for the lover of theatres to dip into as for its more obvious target, those who must have such technical details with which to work and I include in this latter class anyone designing a new theatre. There is no better way of putting a size to the visual imagination than to pin an exact dimension to something that exists and which one can go and see.

No theatre library can afford to be without the new *Stage Guide* on its reference shelves and this goes as much for those in American Universities as ours over here.

There remains the problem of keeping the Guide up to date and in this respect one is happy to say that the new theatres may well outnumber the closures. It seems impossible that a reference work so well begun will be allowed to lapse and an obvious interim solution might be the publication in *The Stage* itself and in the *ABTT Newsletter* of schedules exactly to this format as each new theatre comes along.