

building for the purpose and what do you find? A number of universities provide the awesome answer—lots of architecture and lots of equipment. In such mini-palaces trained custodians are necessary and inevitably restrictions appear. Makeshift and improvisation sit strangely among the Guitos. Surely the main stimulus in adventure playhouses comes from the frustrations and restrictions, from imaginative leaps and wriggles past the obstacles

and from adapting what comes to hand. If everything comes to hand then what? However, hope on—even if the building and its content is dead right, you can be absolutely certain that not enough has been budgeted to staff and maintain things on the scale to which they were designed. Cash does not flow for ever: the place once opened, funds will dry up, and so too we better had!

Gunnersbury 1932-1971

Who was Gunnersbury? it may be asked. More correctly it should be, “What was . . .” because this was the first purpose-built factory Strand Electric had. One of the purposes it well proclaimed was that it was to cost as little as possible. The building in Power Road was no architectural masterpiece and everywhere one was conscious that it had just enough substance to hold itself up. Nevertheless, this factory, probably the first built for stage-lighting in the world, has a warm place in the hearts of Strand men and its closure on Friday, 1st October, like the passing of an old friend, demands that we pause awhile and think.

From this small factory came forth virtually all the jobs whose names made Strand world famous. The mass-production side of things, beginning with the Patt. 23 in 1952, had to be hived off first to Vauxhall, then to Kennington and later to Gorton, but the real craftsmen remained at Gunnersbury—most of them for extremely long periods of service. With a school-leaving age of fourteen it was quite possible to have forty years or even more.

It was at Gunnersbury that all the big jobs were made—the tailor-mades requiring manufacturing skill and imagination. This last was both necessary and convenient because it allowed one to get away with just a simple assembly drawing and thus get a job launched and made quickly. In its heyday it was commonplace to see the same man—one of the fitters—cut up the iron, build the frame,

assemble on it all the made-in and bought-in bits (clutches, dimmers, relays, motors, shafts and bearings) and then wire the lot—both the high-voltage busbar distribution and the low voltage action. Testing followed and re-assembly on the site—maybe just down the road at the White City or way up North or across the seas. Like as not the same man stayed with the job—or rather “his job”—the whole time, including “standby” in the opening week.

Things cannot be done this uneconomic way any more. Nor can a man have his own engine with his name painted on the cab as he used to in the earlier decades of the railways—his to cosset and grow fond of.

In industry times change and with them customs. All these small, crowded, ill-adapted Strand Electric factories have now been absorbed in one enormous factory—a veritable Versailles of green crystal and air conditioning—all in spacious surroundings in Kirkcaldy. Never in Strand’s wildest dreams could they have imagined such a place.

The working conditions are now ideal, but the work itself . . . ? There’s the rub, the better the equipment is designed to be made and the better the means and the machines provided for making it, the less fun it may be to do the job on the bench. Meantime let TABS pay a tribute to Gunnersbury and all (all?—well, nearly all!) those who worked there. Without the things they made, TABS itself would have had no purpose to serve.