

# FRANK MATCHAM

a footnote to the Aberdeen article

by Fred Bentham

IT is curious that the theatre architect whose name we hear more than any other today died way back in 1920. Even before the current spell of restoration and refurbishment of Edwardian theatres, his was the name that came to mind first. And to many, it is still likely that a picture of one of those buildings is what is conjured up by the word 'theatre'. They were real theatres. The theatres of between the wars, which followed, were not only few in number but could easily be confused with the cinema theatres. And as for those of the sixties and seventies, of today, those that have real character have

to be regarded as special one-offs. There is no such thing as a typical post Hitler War theatre.

While it is possible to lump the Edwardian theatres together as gilt multi-tier houses with side boxes and a well defined pros. opening complete with safety curtain and house tabs; the connoisseur can not only identify the work of different architects but the period of a particular 'Matcham'. One used glibly to say that Frank Matcham built two hundred theatres but the book devoted to him plays safe with "Between 1879 and 1912 he designed over 150 sumptuous theatres, more than twice as many as his nearest rival."

Seating capacities were high, compared to our own time, even in the smaller theatres; and such buildings must not only be looked

at for the variety of their theatrical decoration but for their skillful planning. Tight sites have been the rule and the class structure of the Edwardian audience posed problems in getting groups of people in and out without meeting each other. The grand entrance, foyers and bars were for the front Stalls and Dress (literally) circle. A middle-class entrance to one side looked after the Upper circle and plain doors round the side, where you could queue, got you into the Pit or Gallery. Even here class distinction operated and while the Pit (early door at sixpence extra, of course) was permitted to us as children, the Gallery was too rough and tough. In the West End, however, the Gallery had (and still has?) its dedicated, to whom that position seems a matter of principle rather than of cash or

sightlines! In any case, the only other cheap non-reserved seats, the Pit, downstairs under the first circle tended to vanish between the wars, to be re-named stalls, re-priced and perhaps re-seated!

In the refurbished 'Matchams' as we all go in by the grand front door, it can be fun to try and guess which walls today's architect has had knocked-down to join what to which. Think of it, there were completely separate stairways and passages for four tiers maybe. Those architects really had to know what they were doing - but then some of them, especially Frank Matcham, had a lot of practice at the game.

\*Frank Matcham, *Theatre Architect*  
Edited by Brian Walker: Pub. 1980  
by the Blackstaff Press, Belfast.

Frank Matcham.



## THE EDITOR'S MEMORY SYSTEM QUIZ

See if you *really* know about Strand Group theatre and TV lighting memory

systems - answers, and score of your knowledge on page 33

- Which of these famous theatres does *not* have a Strand Century memory system?  
(a) Royal Shakespeare Theatre Stratford upon Avon  
(b) Burgtheatre Vienna  
(c) Bolshoi, Moscow  
(d) La Scala Milan  
(e) New Metropolitan Opera, New York  
(f) Hall of the People, Pyongyang, North Korea  
(g) "Grand Old Opry" Nashville, Tennessee
- Which of these countries often requires a refrigerator for the board operator's lager to be built into the system?  
(a) Australia  
(b) Germany  
(c) U.S.A.
- Which was the first theatre in Britain to have a lighting level memory system installed?  
(a) The Royal Opera House  
(b) The Palace Theatre, Manchester  
(c) The London Coliseum
- What was the name of the first Strand memory system that featured modular units which could be re-positioned in relation to each other allowing a customer to design the layout for his own board?  
(a) IDM  
(b) MMS  
(c) DDM
- One of Strand's specialities is the use of the control wheel for increasing and decreasing light levels. What is its correct name?  
(a) Linear optical encoder  
(b) Digital reference wheel  
(c) Optical fader wheel
- One early Strand system used punched cards to record lighting plots. What was its name?  
(a) Memo Card  
(b) Memo Rank  
(c) Memo Reader
- Every good memory system warns an operator that he may be about to record a cue over an existing cue in the systems memory. How does Light Palette warn against this?  
(a) An orange warning light  
(b) A buzzer  
(c) A written warning on the VDU (CRT)
- MMS was a famous Strand system of the early seventies. Which TV organisation installed MMS in its studios?  
(a) CBS  
(b) RAI  
(c) BBC
- Some Strand & Strand Century systems offer VDU's (CRT's) to make information clear. Are they:  
(a) Real colour monitor screens  
(b) Black & white screens with coloured media in strips in front of them
- How many Strand memory systems have been installed, to the nearest 100, up to date?  
(a) 300  
(b) 750  
(c) 1000
- This picture shows a famous Strand systems designer with his last board. What is his name and what was the system called?  
(a) Len Appleby, System W1Z  
(b) Martin Moore, System MMS  
(c) Frederick Bentham, System DDM
- This picture shows a famous theatre consultant with a system he specified. Is it?  
(a) Nigel Pounder  
(b) Oleg Kusogsky  
(c) Richard Pilbrow
- Over 400 MMS/Compact systems were built between 1973 and 1981. The same customer bought the first and last - who?  
(a) Albery Theatre Group  
(c) BBC TV  
(c) National Arts Centre, Ottawa
- What type of permanent 'library' storage of lighting plots does the new Strand M24 offer?  
(a) Floppy discs  
(b) Bubble Memory  
(c) Audio tape
- Strand's DDM and Lightboard systems and Strand Century's Light Palette have processors made by which computer manufacturer?  
(a) IBM  
(b) Data General  
(c) Digital Equipment Corporation
- One country has over 60% of all DDM and Lightboard systems installed - is it?  
(a) U.K.  
(b) West Germany  
(c) Australia
- How many separate fades may be performed simultaneously on the new M24 memory system?  
(a) 7  
(b) 6  
(c) 2
- M24 may operate in conjunction with an existing fader wing. Suitable manual systems are:  
(a) Tempus  
(b) Most types of manual preset control  
(c) Strand's Grand Master switchboard
- All Strand memory systems have at least one key-switch whose purpose is:  
(a) To switch on power  
(b) To start up the micro processor  
(c) To protect the memory from unauthorised recording
- What percentage of London's theatres and concert halls who have memory systems chose Strand?  
(a) Over 90%  
(b) 60% to 70%  
(c) 40% to 50%

