

## THE MOUNTBATTEN THEATRE

*In which the Editor sees what an enlightened local authority is doing to put their theatre to full use.*

THE famous port of Southampton lies only a good hour's run from the Editorial Surrey estate, so a civilised start was in order one recent March morning.

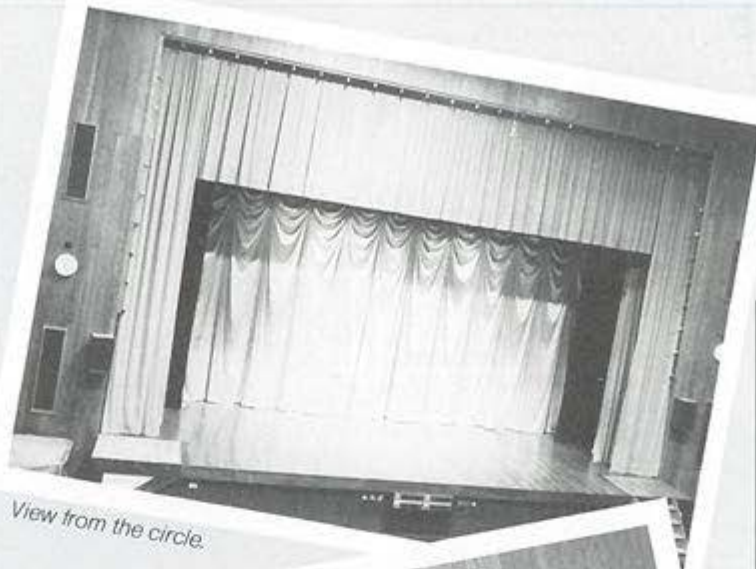
Up on to the Dorking to Guildford Road, past the ninth century church of St. Thomas of Canterbury, down Guildford High Street, where the cobbles provoke a slight rumbling from even the Editorial barouche, then northward a few miles along the Hogs Back with its fine views to either side, and westward on to the Southampton Road.

Southampton, while still a vigorous harbour town, was famous throughout the twenties and thirties as the home of the Cunard line whose Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth offered a weekly transatlantic service.

Whenever I go abroad I regret those spacious days. In place of the plastic tray of airline food discreet stewards offered haute cuisine. In place of a lean back chair a spacious cabin - Ah well!

Southampton has kept its traditional prosperity by diversifying into many industries, as well as being a local shopping mecca.

To add to its attractions as a local centre, the City has made its Mountbatten Theatre more widely available. It was originally opened in 1971 as part of the then College of Technology. This building has now become the College of Higher



*View from the circle.*



*Ron Billet on the spot!*

Education, and although there are still calls on the theatre as an examination centre, about 300 days a year are available for other purposes.

The Mountbatten is centrally sited in East Park Terrace and is probably one of the best equipped theatres for its size I have visited.

There are 400 seats downstairs which can be removed when this is required, and 125 in the balcony.

Lighting control is by a Rank Strand Satellite Memory system and there is a full stage rig of 120 modern Strand luminaires. A modern sound system has been installed and 16mm and 35mm films can be shown. Radio mikes are available and even smoke and bubble machines, so anyone staging a show should have the minimum of equipment hire charges to meet. Scenery can be flown above the 34ft 4in deep stage. The proscenium opening is 31ft 6in.

Although various dances, fashion shows, concerts etc are always scheduled Ron Billet, the lively theatre manager, stressed that they were very much in the business of hiring out the theatre for days or for evenings when no show was booked.

With all the well maintained equipment available, catering on site and three trained permanent staff and a hire rate of £90 for a 4 hour period, they should be very busy. ■



## A TRIP DOWN DRURY LANE

IF, gentle reader, you have taken a quick glance at the photographs of the theatre interior accompanying this part of my journeys and if you are knowledgeable about London Theatres, you may have assumed that I have been up to Drury Lane. So I have, in a very small way.

If you are even more observant and if you look very closely at the photos you may well appreciate that it is in fact a marvellous model.

This wonderful construction, made at a scale of  $\frac{1}{8}$ in to 1ft was built by Mr Norman Hunter some time resident of South Africa and latterly of the Thames Valley.

If you are not of a mathematical turn of mind I can give you an idea of the size of the model by simply mentioning that at the scale of  $\frac{1}{8}$ in to 1ft the proscenium opening amounts to 1ft 4in. In one particular area the model exceeds the original. It has power flying. There are also stage lifts, and 'iron' and quite a few other electrically operated goodies.

Turning to the lighting there are floats and four battens each with four circuits utilising 6 volt 3 watt

bicycle dynamo lamps. The cyclorama lighting is actually by mains voltage using 60 watt lamps in recycled nut loaf tins - a fashion that I trust the professional theatre is not about to adopt.

One most important point which must be driven home as often as possible to every stage lighting enthusiast, whether he be the most basic of village hall amateurs or the most adept of model makers, - ALL STAGE LIGHTING MUST BE DIMMABLE.

Without dimming there is no control and no balance.

Lighting is the use of dark as well as light. Mr Hunter understood this from the start - how I wish

everybody else did.

Every circuit in the Thames Valley Drury Lane is dimmable, and can be 'mastered'.

The switchboard does not follow the latest and now universal practice of memory systems for professional theatre. I wonder if Mr Hunter will be inspired to produce a model Galaxy? Obviously he is very well capable. If his detailed electronic knowledge should ever fail him, then imagination would serve. After all, he is an author. He chronicles the adventures of a Professor Brainstorm for young readers in a series of successful children's books published wherever English is spoken. ■

