

SCHOOL TIES

DROOLING OVER THE CATALOGUE

THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR BOYS
TUNBRIDGE WELLS

by Charles Bell

Schools with aging equipment and limited budgets are often only able to sit and drool over the latest Strand lighting catalogues. In the pages of the glossy brochures are visions of technological sophistication and beauty. Smart black luminaires – we used to call them lanterns – hang in row upon row, all controlled by unbelievably versatile memory desks.

We thought that we were being clever some seven years ago when, with the financial help of the P.T.A., we ripped out our old wall-mounted creaking and sparking dimmers. We replaced them with a twelve channel two preset control unit which we could operate from the back of our Hall. I must confess that we bought this system from a competitor because it was cheaper than the Strand equivalent and we have regretted it ever since.

Editor's note:

It never does to ignore the advice of that master mechanic, the late Henry Royce. He said to a customer who queried the price of one of his motor cars – 'Remember the value will still be appreciated long after the price is forgotten'. This is just as true of stage lighting.

After a perusal of the new equipment on the market it now seems positively antedeluvian.

Still, jealousy gets you nowhere. Right from the start we decided to make the best of the equipment we had, and to extend its range and capabilities when we could. Way back in 1978 we had only six Patt 23 spots, four Patt 123 fresnels, a batten and four floods. Along with the new control system, the P.T.A. provided four more (smart black) fresnels. Since then we have added some Minim fresnels and a few second-hand Patt 23's. Last year we were given four 1000 watt Patt 223 fresnels from an old theatre which we have overhauled and painted (smart black).

My favourite acquisitions came from the Rank Strand sale a couple of years ago. The first was a curvaceous Patt 823 which looks amazingly good. It is a classic piece of design. But the one dearest to my heart is a (smart black) Patt 774 1000 watt bifocal, which we use as a follow spot. Its proportions are perfect and it functions superbly. I would like, in these pages, to congratulate its designers. It is, in my opinion, the highest state of the art in the old lantern technology. It will last us for years.

Recently we have expanded to eighteen channels which is about our limit unless the Education Committee feels generous enough to pay for some extra controls and lighting. In the current financial climate this seems a little unlikely.

We get a lot of fun out of our lighting. We have the capability to light several areas of the auditorium and

"In this our amateur issue of Tabs we have concentrated on the amateur lighting man – in fact much of this issue has been written by the members of this enthusiastic and expert group. Almost always the amateur begins his interest in lighting at his – or increasingly her – school. In this section we have brought together some interesting school stories".

stage in several different colours. The capability to isolate a particular small area has proved particularly useful. Boys now operate the full system in performances. Last term (March '85) a second year boy handled a very complex lighting plot for a Drama Evening. He tackled the whole thing with great competence and assurance: so much so that I have stopped covetting those new computer controlled lighting desks. Who needs one when you've got bright teenagers around?

P.S. I'm afraid I haven't stopped covetting some of those new (smart black) luminaires though!

MACBETH (15-18 February 1984)

BOLTON SCHOOL (BOYS DIVISION)

by Stewart McGuffie

Having read your recent issue of Tabs and heard of your lack of contributions concerning school productions, I decided to write and tell you of the 'unusual' production of Macbeth in Bolton School last year. Having worked on lighting in both the school's theatres on a number of occasions before, we had become experts in the art of improvising with our somewhat antiquated system, which was part Junior 8 and a 'portable' bracket handle type system. The provisions in the theatre were once described as 'haphazard but prolific'.

The theatre has a stage which measures 18' by 10' and is a fairly unusual shape. For performances, loose seats are laid out as preferred, usually about 100 in number. Lighting for a standard production usually consists of around eight or ten luminaires, mainly of the Patt 23 and Patt 123 type. A number of 'stage lights', which are shop display lights are also

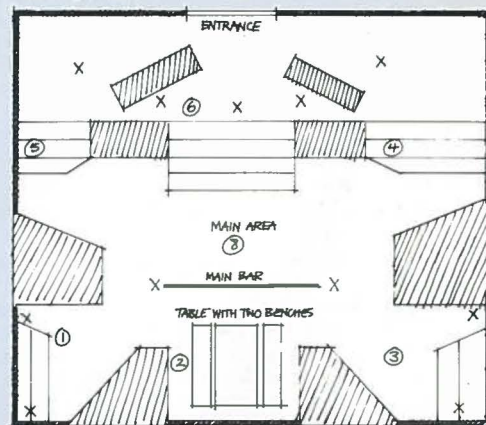
used, mainly for class lessons. With this normally restrained lighting set up, lights being hung from one front of house bar only, the set up for Macbeth seemed to us of almost Television proportions. We were lucky in that much of the necessary equipment could be borrowed from our larger theatre provided we could find space to hang it.

The final rig, with lights hung from all manner of positions (including heater vents), totalled thirty-three separate units with ten 123s, 10 23s, 2 500W non Strand spots and ten Patt 137s. The production required the use of two basic colours, amber and white, over a large area in the centre plus six subsidiary areas each to be individually lit. We were faced with the additional problem that the audience was spread all round the acting area so an attempt had to be made to light it from as many angles as possible without glaring the customers. The operating system at that time consisted of fourteen dimming channels, all of the old resistance type. Luckily, we had provision for 60 amps of capacity and at times came fairly close to reaching it (much to the distress of the school electrician).

By the time the performance came round we had ironed out all the problems we could, had found positions for all the lanterns, and were as near to starting as we were ever likely to get.

By our own standards the lighting went surprisingly well, although perhaps much of the audience were overfaced by the amount of light and the heat generated by the lanterns themselves and by the standard heating system. Needless to say, the actual play went well, with red leotarded witches and seemingly endless bats dancing across the stage.

Productions are now much easier as since the performance we have the advantage of a fully modernised system with a portable control desk. Productions have however lost much of their 'novelty' value.



The areas labelled 1-8 were mainly provided with lighting in two colours

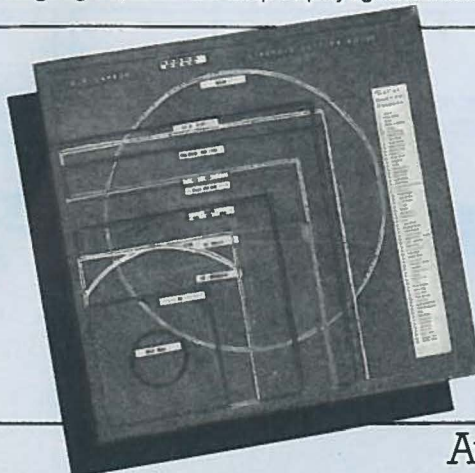
X = Lights were hung at all these positions with 20 on the main bar

▨ = Audience

HOW TO TRIM "CINEMOID"

by Graham R. Lawson

A simple but effective device which greatly facilitates the cutting of Cinemoid and similar filter materials, and which ensures a perfect fit of the cut filter into the frame is made from a piece of plywood a little over 30 cm (12 inches) square. A series of grooves is cut into the surface of the wood using a chisel or a sharp knife, the spacing of the grooves corresponding to the sizes of filter material that are



likely to be desired by the user. The frame sizes are marked with dry-transfer lettering, a list of Cinemoid colours and reference numbers are glued on, and the guide is then finished with a layer of varnish.

To use this filter cutting guide a sheet of Cinemoid is placed over the wooden square and is scored with a knife – or even a screwdriver blade – using the appropriate grooves as a guide. The Cinemoid then breaks easily along the scored lines and can be fitted easily into the filter holder.