

THE EDITOR'S JOURNEYS



In which your editor goes hunting for vintage stage lighting and finds a thriving business built around an amazing lighting collection.

Early one recent October morning the editorial barouche, with the editorial Pentax safely on board, set off from darkest Surrey. I was to pay a long deferred visit to Mr James Laws of Attleborough in the County of Norfolk, to track down some of Strand's early history.

Eastwards along the M25, through the Dartford tunnel and then northward up the M11, then, a few miles south of Norwich, into Attleborough, a pleasant small town now thankfully by-passed. Through the old town centre, sharp right on the Diss road, a deep curtsy from the Spirit of Ecstasy as we negotiate the 'level' crossing and left into a small industrial estate.

Mr. Laws' operation is called Ancient Lights. Could this somewhat utilitarian single-story building, at least as ancient as 1975, house an operation so romantically named? Well, it does and it doesn't. An efficient and modern lighting hire operation, with many lrisers,

Nocturnes and Harmonys available and a lighting repair operation with a tremendous stock of Strand parts is indeed to be found within.

But the company name derives from my host's original and still consuming interest in the stage, film and television lighting of the past.

Here, I think, a few words about James himself are in order. I have known him for the last fifteen years, and have sought out his company at every likely function. He is a man whose whole career contains the fascination of opposites. Does the average lighting man require at least a Galaxy to light a two hander? It has been known. James Laws favourite board is Strands CD, manufactured at Gunnersbury in the fifties. Like Fred Bentham, James strongly feels we were meant to use our feet as well as our hands, so pedals are a must.

Does your average theatre electrician beat a path from the provinces to the glitter of the West End? Indeed he does. Our hero actually started in the West End and gradually spiralled outwards. An early turn took him to that outpost of provincial life, Sadlers Wells, further turns taking him even farther afield via Windsor, Cardiff and Exeter, until eventually Pitlochry in the heart of

the Scottish Highlands was reached. But, a pattern emerges. Twice his spirals had led through East Anglia, and to this delightful part of England he and his charming wife have now returned to settle.

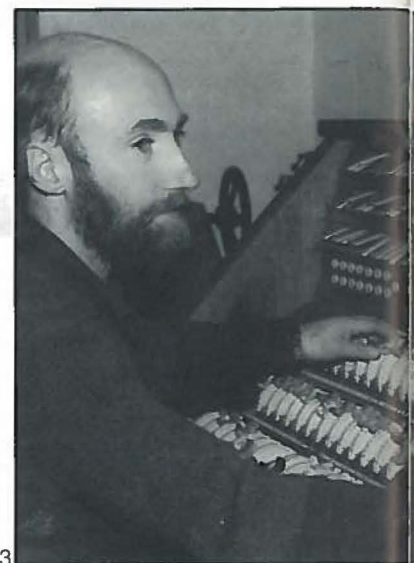
Back on board the equipage, off to the other side of town, down a pleasant lane, through a wide farm gate and we are at The Collection. This is actually housed in a large building at the end of a garden, from whence originally the whole business operated.

And what a treasure house. A kind of display window, if anything



so vulgar can be imagined in Attleborough, houses the original Light Console from the Festival Hall, a giant mirror ball and a World War II searchlight. Incidentally, has any reader ever stood close to a searchlight? They are, to anyone used to even the largest studio lantern, enormous. The parabolic mirror reflector must be a good six feet in diameter.

Inside there are really two areas. The first is a kind of rock pile of unreconstructed lanterns, some in fairly poor shape, just as they have



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been acquired over the years. The second area contains the vintage equipment which has been re-furbished, re-wired and re-lamped for tungsten halogen. Why? Because these units have come to be greatly in demand by film and T.V. companies producing show business stories.

Who would want a whole stage

