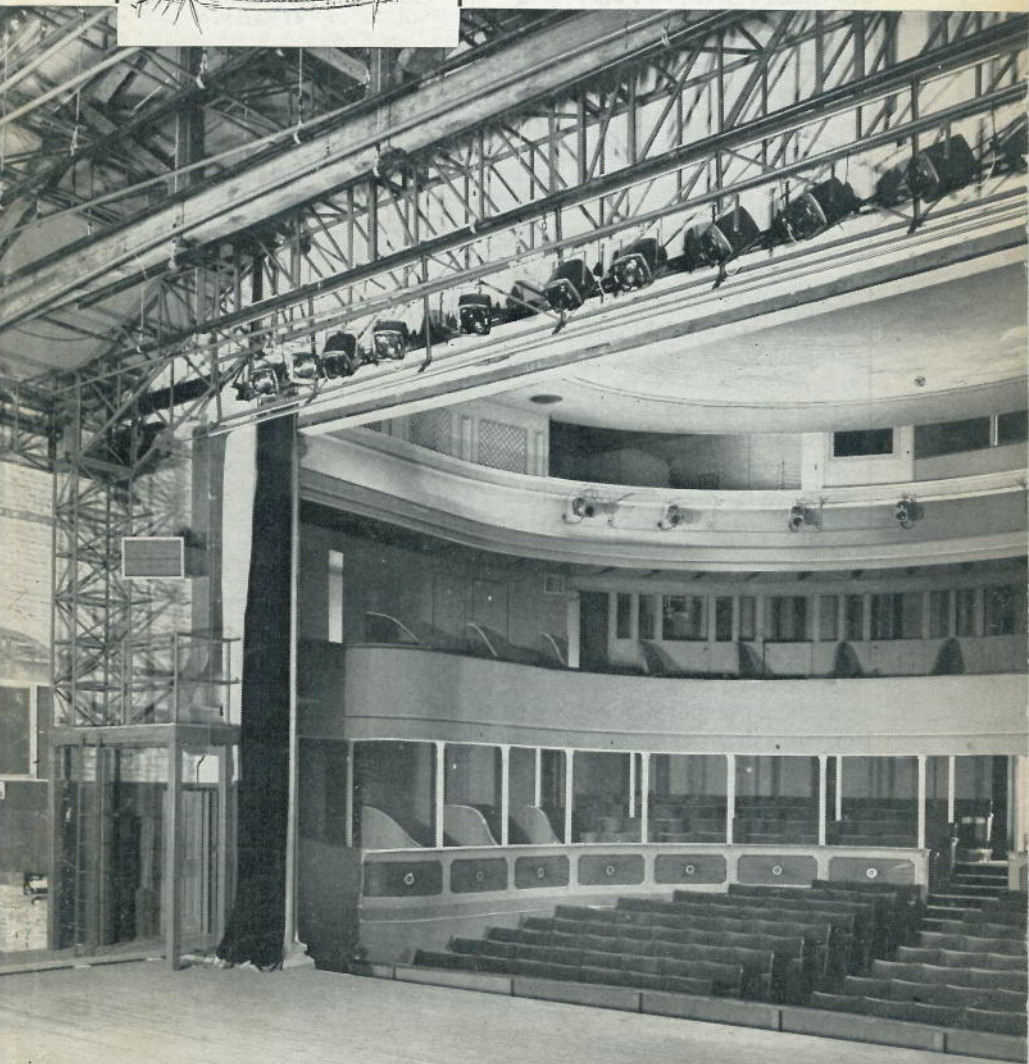




TABS

JUNE 1965

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Training of Theatre Technicians

For those who want to go on the stage professionally the way is nowadays comparatively clear; there are academies where one may train and there are schools for opera and ballet. What of those who want to work off-stage, those who in the definition of the ABTT wish to "assist the actor in his performance" but who have no wish to perform themselves—the technicians. The scene designers seem now to be well provided for, and this issue of TABS includes as an example an article on the excellent facilities available at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, London.

The people TABS must feel for are those interested in stage lighting and here all is far from well. The first difficulty is that there

are two sides of stage lighting, the technique as art and the technique as engineering. Nor is this latter very clear; the engineering of stage lighting ranges from that required of the trained electrical and illuminating engineer down to literally the work of a handyman. Let us assume for the moment that manufacturers and suppliers of equipment will provide all the engineering necessary and that they will recruit their staffs from appropriate training courses, this still leaves the training for lighting designers and theatre electricians to be provided. Logically it could be that lighting design is a natural appendage to a scene design course rather than something in any way connected with electricity. It seems to some of us strange that scene designers leave the appearance of their sets at the mercy of another hand. There seems to be a parallel in the composer (so-called?) who leaves the orchestration to an arranger.

The other branch, the executant, electrician or switchboard operator, would be less difficult to design training for if one knew what the career was. What are the prospects? These are gloomy indeed; with a few exceptions only, the money is not such that a responsible individual can tolerate it for long. Thus the theatre may become the place for two types of backstage staff: the stage-struck who spend a few years before seeking the better paid work (in television?) they owe it to their families to obtain, or the other type who loves the life especially as seen as an extension of the convivial pub so often adjacent to or opposite the stage door. Wastage of good men is thus going to be high and without the men to work it the best theatre and its equipment is going to be useless.

If we press those in charge of the theatre purse, whether at National, Civic or Commercial level, to provide more money for the running of theatres then we must demand greater responsibility on the part of those who will receive it. Money too easily obtained tends to be too readily squandered. Some production budgets have been inflated by expensive gimmicks which are discarded with as little thought as they were adopted. Good art arises from the disciplines imposed by the materials used and in theatre in this country today one of these materials is money. The theatre must have more money, but the theatre must spend it the more wisely.

Preservation of Existing Theatres

Scarcely mentioned in the press, probably the most important event in the Theatres Advisory Council and Association of Municipal Corporations conference this spring, was a small piece of paper waved before the meeting by Hugh Jenkins, M.P. After years of effort, principally on his part, at last theatres and cinemas become special classifications and are not merely lumped together as places of public assembly. This means that no longer can a theatre or cinema become for example, a Bingo palace overnight. From now on this will represent what to us is obvious, but not hitherto in the eyes of the law, a radical change of usage.

The need to preserve the existing theatre buildings was raised by Mr. Roger Snowdon in post conference correspondence in *The Stage* and in consequence we have devoted some space in this issue of TABS to two examples, both of which could be considered as worthy candidates for preservation. The first is the Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds, which is in the course of being restored to the purpose for which it was designed—a theatre. This Georgian building is luckier however than our second example, the Edwardian King's, Hammersmith, of which nothing now remains but a complete set of plans in the L.C.C.'s splendid theatre archive. A third form of theatre dependent on existing buildings must not be forgotten and that is a conversion to theatre. In our present example, the Rotherham Civic (page 40), the conversion was of a chapel to a theatre and two issues ago we had a project to convert in a like manner an early railway engine shed. Is nothing sacred? Why, before long maybe a Bingo Hall will be converted to a theatre!

The Royal Festival Hall

This famous concert hall has now re-opened after, it is said, a million and a half pounds have been spent on enlargements and improvements there. Among these we welcome the motorisation which allows the stepped concert platform to level out to make an open stage 53 ft. wide by 33 ft. deep at what the press likes to call the touch of a button. The mechanism has been designed and manufactured by Hall Stage Equipment to do this in the thickness of the platform (only 33 inches in the low position) without disturbing the floor of the hall itself.

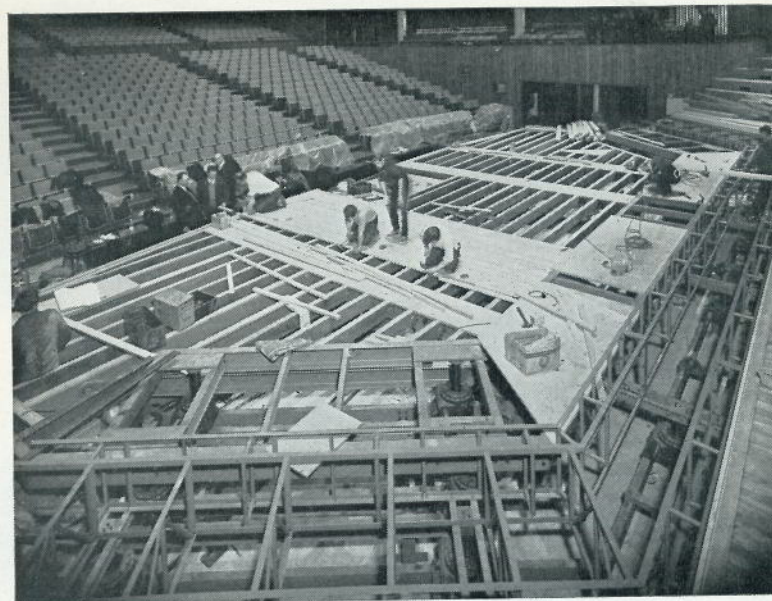
At least one of us at Strand Electric derives some inverted pleasure that with all this extra money around we were neither asked to revise or augment our original 1951 concert and stage lighting equipment. Could it be that it was perfect?

Cross Sectional-Interests

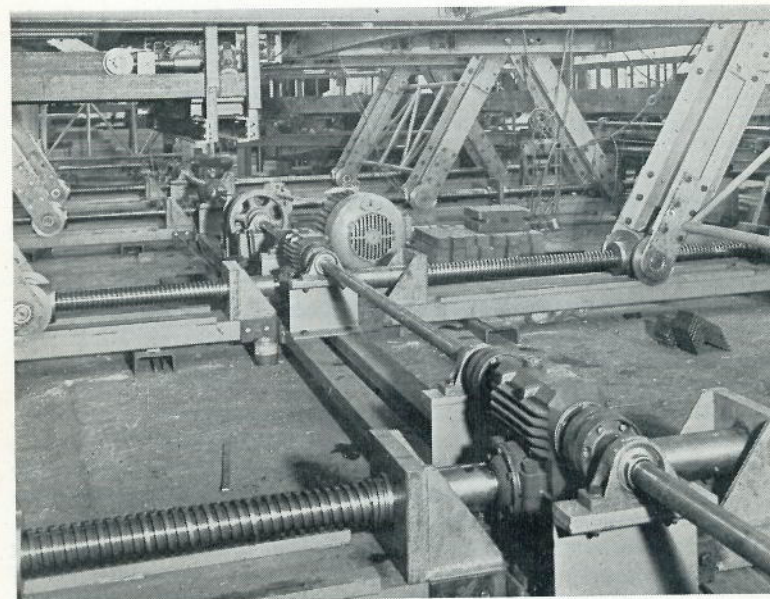
Readers may have sought angrily for the section promised by a caption in Philip Rose's "Stratford's Other Theatre" article in our last issue. The diagrams were both plans and purported to show, not as some imagined circle and stalls levels, but the old and the revised plan with the extra off-stage space, etc., contrasted. The article itself was pruned heavily, and in haste, to make room for the T.A.C. report. In so doing the sentence line 9, page 34 was cut back too hard and never came to full flower with the words, "... facilities are provided at stage floor level".

Tabs Binders

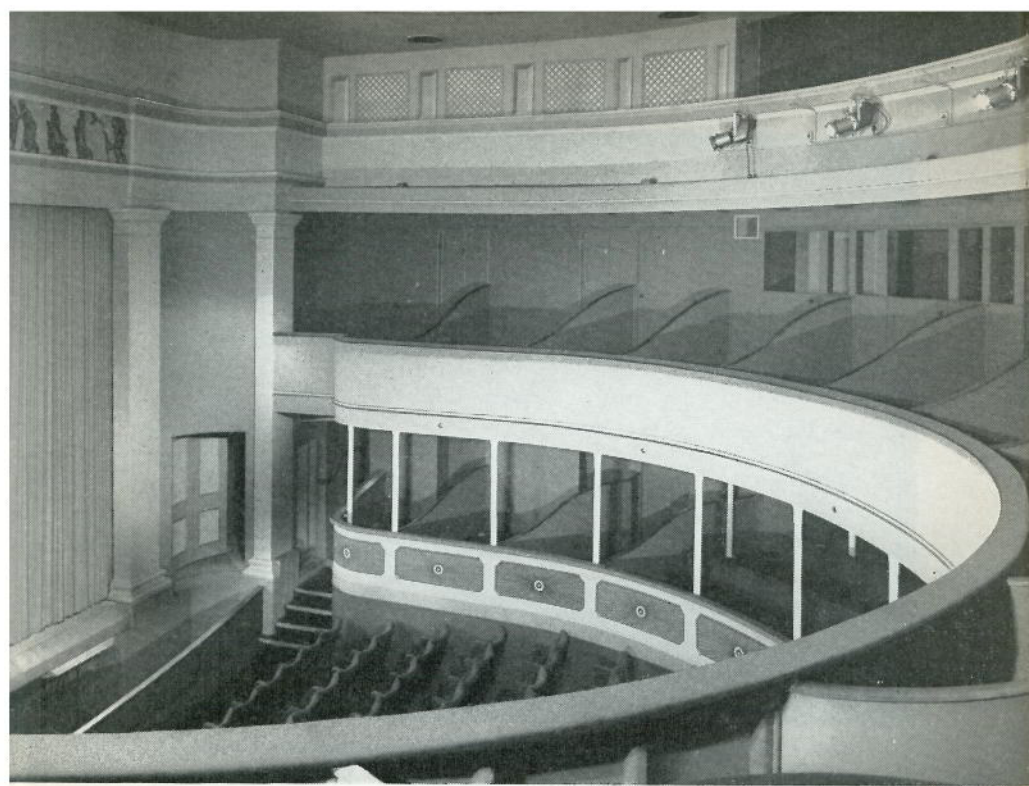
TABS binders of the do-it-yourself variety with stiff dark green covers and gold titling are available from Head Office price 8s. 9d. each, post free in U.K.



New concert platform at the Royal Festival Hall under construction



Mechanism in concert platform to raise and level-out for ballet



THEATRE ROYAL, BURY ST. EDMUNDS

The restoration is reported by Mrs. Ironside Wood, who is drama adviser West Suffolk, and Iain Mackintosh technical adviser to the St. Edmundsbury Theatre Royal Trust.

Introduction by Olga Ironside Wood

Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk is lucky in having such an old-established theatrical tradition. From its dramatic beginnings in A.D. 870 as the burial place of Edmund, King and Martyr, to miracle plays in churches under the auspices of monks, morality plays in the Abbey Yards, to Shakespeare, Colley Cibber, Thomas Shadwell, Congreve, Fielding and Inchbald in the Shire and the Old Town Halls, and finally to every description of entertainment in the Theatre Royal, the tradition has been unbroken.

Stumbling upon the derelict theatre building some years ago, one felt that the bottles and barrels stored in it by the owners, Greene King & Co., gave it the stale, waiting air of a Victorian pub the morning after the noisy night before, but the eye was lifted to the beautiful curve of the galleries, the enormous stage area (alas stripped to the bare earth), and one noticed the practical arrangement of scene dock, dressing rooms, scenery reception bay and evidence of cleats and winches, plus an atmosphere of magic holding its breath.

The Theatre *must* be restored. So, suspecting the damage

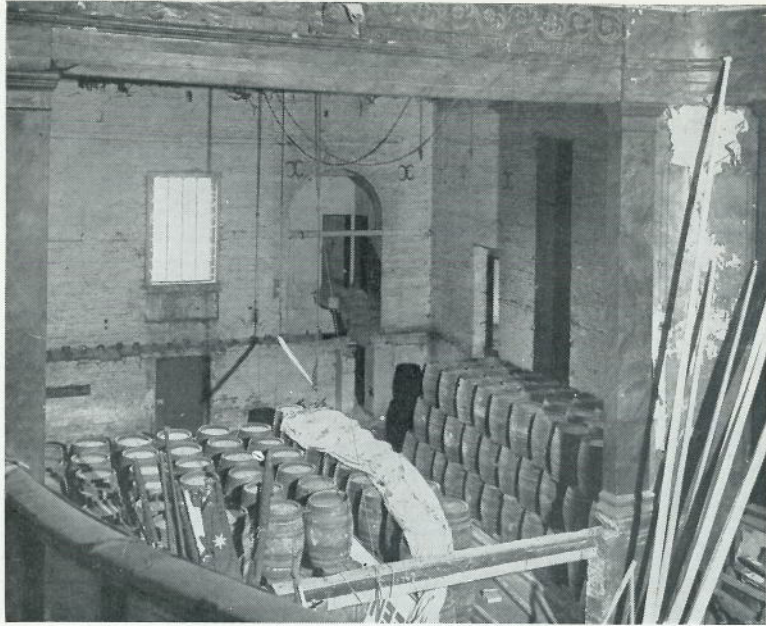
was mainly superficial, a movement was set on foot to restore the building to its former use, against every kind of Jeremiah's wail. It was only when the present Trust was formed and advice had been sought on the restoration that something of its history and architectural value was discovered.

It was built in 1819 at a cost of £3,000 to replace the Market Cross building of 1620, converted by the Municipal authorities to a theatre for the "convenience of visiting players" in 1734—the first authority on record to invite, and provide facilities for, "the players". The architect was William Wilkins, who also designed the National Gallery. Wilkins inherited the Norwich circuit from his father and it is to this blend of architect and practical man of the theatre who had probably heard theatrical problems debated, thrashed out and solved all his life, that we owe the charming design and the wonderfully practical building which stands today. It has needed very little alteration—in the shape of plumbing, comfortable dressing rooms and space for working—to bring it right up to date, although a few more seats would be a great advantage.

The attractive, unpretentious street façade was intact, although bricked up with small Victorian sash windows, and the elegant foyer broken up with Victorian partitions into stuffy compartments, since removed. The original entrance arches have been opened, with the consequent play of light and shade giving much greater architectural distinction. Inside, it is a rare example of a Regency theatre—the only Provincial Regency theatre in its original structural form in the country, designed in the traditional horseshoe shape, with dress circle, upper circle, gallery and pit. The pit floor was stripped to the earth, but has since been re-floored, carpeted and fitted with modern seating, in the soft terra-cotta red colour to which the auditorium has been restored. The galleries were found to be lined with broken cork, which makes a whisper from the stage area perfectly audible in the highest point of the house and over the years, with a refurnishing in 1845 and in 1906, the building has kept its original plan, with no substantial alteration to the structure. This was discovered when the architect, Ernest Scott, F.R.I.B.A., compared his measured plan with that by Wilkins on the parchment deeds.

Originally, the building accommodated 360 in two tiers of boxes, 300 in the pit and 120 in the gallery. It was decided to reduce this seating to about 400 all told, in order that each seat in the house would be comfortable, with a first-class view of the stage. Audiences today require much greater comfort to attract them from their own firesides. No matter what the fare on the stage is, if the seat is very uncomfortable, audiences think twice about coming again—and that they should come again is important in a provincial theatre.

The Trust has been particularly careful to give the stage a workmanlike, practical wood flooring, and to have no difference of floor levels—the theatre being built on a falling level—to facilitate handling of scenery, props and furniture. It is hoped in time to build on to the back of the theatre (a small amount of land being available



The derelict Theatre Royal as a barrel store

for this purpose) a scene painting workshop, workroom, carpenters' shop, property and wardrobe rooms, a green room and an office, to augment the present accommodation. The dressing rooms have been rebuilt and planned as practical, warm, comfortable actors' rooms. There is also a small, practical kitchen area.

The proportions of the proscenium arch are a delight to the eye, and with the stage depth and two kinds of apron stage Shakespeare classical and Restoration plays can be staged and we can approach very nearly to the style in vogue of putting the actors among the audience! This tremendous flexibility is perhaps, in miniature, the design that seekers after the perfect theatre form have been searching for so far, and thus the Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds, will—by an admixture of old and new techniques on the marvellously practical and prophetic style of Wilkins' original building—set a fashion or at least a new trend.

What makes us think we can make such a theatre, with 400 seats, self-supporting—bearing in mind that out of 51 theatres in the country, apart from London, only 13 get by without some form of subsidy? The short answer is—faith, vision and drive. The whole restoration has been an act of faith—it could not be otherwise, for who can tell whether an art form is “going to be good”? It can only *evolve* out of somebody's inner vision, and one knows too truly that the first vision is very often not the final form, but it becomes clear

as the art-form itself develops.

As the Theatre Royal Trust is empowered only to restore the theatre, and cannot indulge in any form of commercial undertaking, the theatre has been leased to a non-profit making management company for three years, and this company is anxious to provide in the theatre a full yearly programme of all popular forms of dramatic and musical entertainment in the widest range, including performances by amateur societies, schools and, as soon as practicable, regular professional productions. It intends to raise funds to accomplish these aims and to employ a minimum staff by forming a society of “Friends of the Theatre Royal” with a guinea subscription a year, for which members will have certain advantages, besides feeling they are contributing to an artistic centre in the county.

It is felt that, with only 400 seats in the house, this wonderful opportunity for the production of works of high artistic merit in such flexible conditions would not be able to keep a company solvent, and so the “Friends” method of financial help has been evolved. Time will show whether it is to be the pattern for future theatre running, or whether it will prod Governmental authorities into allotting regular and substantial help, particularly to theatres in rural and hitherto theatre-starved areas such as this—some distance between Cambridge and Ipswich theatres.

Progress Report by Iain Mackintosh

TABS is a sleuth hound for theatre news. With the happy excuse of the completion of a stage lighting contract the Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds, is being exposed in this sensational publication before the work is fully done or the opening date announced.

However the writer of this note welcomes the opportunity of telling what has been and will be done, and to add an unlikely footnote to a very topical problem: audience actor relationship in the area of the proscenium arch. My argument is that this pattern of Georgian Theatre provided a solution to adaptability of interest to present day architects and directors.

Bury St. Edmunds was to be the crowning glory of Wilkins' circuit. He acquired a large site, sold part for profit and then built a Georgian Theatre of classic dimensions and of classical decoration. The plan and section (Fig. 1) show the startling proportions, the envy of present day architects: a stage 10 ft. deeper than the auditorium. And the most distant spectator in the gallery is only 42 ft. from the stage.

But which stage? This is where the puzzle comes. Was the Bury Theatre a real Georgian Theatre? Or was it a Regency Theatre without proscenium arch doors like Wyatt's Drury Lane (1812), or even Phipps' Theatre Royal, Bath (1863), or the emasculated Theatres Royal at Bristol, Brighton or Margate all three of which suffered major alterations to the forestage area in the 19th century?

When restoration started at Bury St. Edmunds one could see

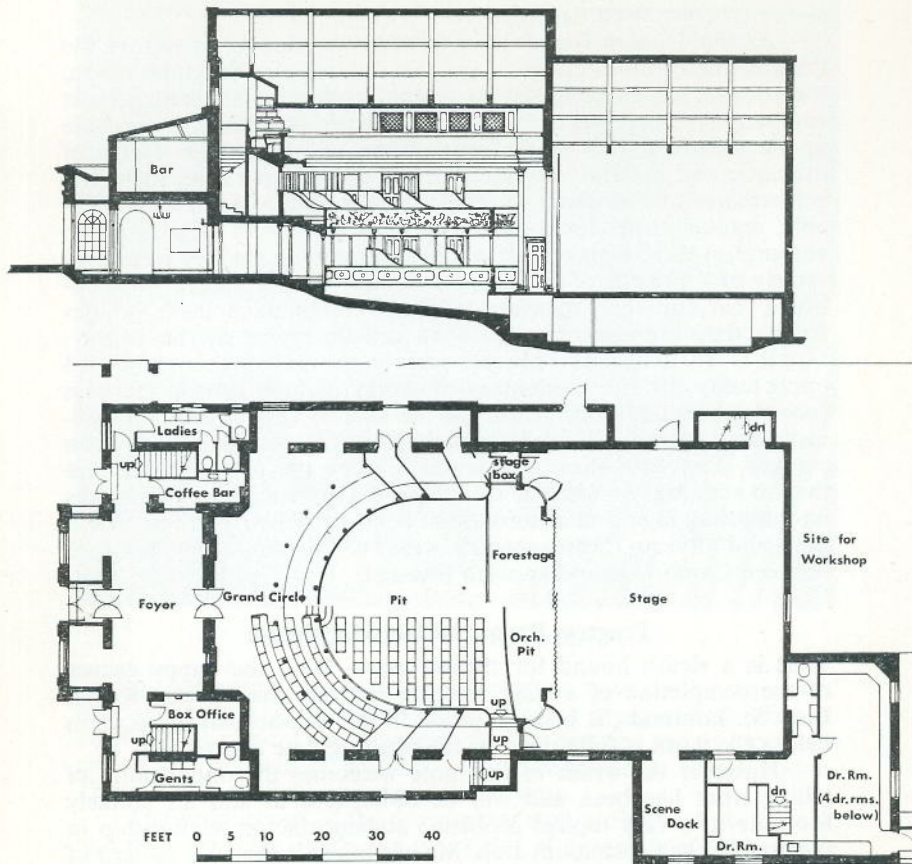


Fig. 1. Plan and section Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds

an ordinary proscenium arch flanked each side by a pair of pilasters separated by a blank quadrant. The boxes finished a clear 7 ft. short of the lintel at stage level—the rest of the stage having vanished. Interested theatre people saw the building, the architect prepared plans and the work started. Immediately two proscenium arch door openings were found in the quadrant “flutes”, one with the original door. Clearly there must have been a forestage of sorts. And so one was to be formed as an alternative to the traditional orchestra pit. (See plan Fig. 1.)

But worse was to come. It was not till after this work had been done that the writer of this article suddenly realised what the theatre had been like in 1819 and what must have happened subsequently. As in Foulston’s Theatre Royal at Plymouth (1811), in the Theatre

Royal, Bristol, in its original form (1766), in Ipswich, Cambridge and other theatres of the Norwich circuit built between 1803 and 1819, the stage originally came out to the *second* box, a full 8 ft. down-stage of the proscenium arch. A box each side had been taken (though the one above it on the next tier had been left), the proscenium arch doors plastered up and the stage cut back. But there are no reliable original plans of any of the Wilkins Theatres. And each of them had either been pulled down or drastically altered between 1887 and 1906. However the theory was confirmed by a local press report of the re-opening of the Bury Theatre in 1906 which listed the alterations. An examination of the basement of the Festival Theatre, Cambridge, showed that this theatre had suffered a similar fate between its building by Wilkins in 1806 and its alteration by Terence Gray in 1926.

In the big cities in the 19th century new theatres were built devoid of forestages which no longer served a useful purpose. The proprietors of the provincial circuits, whose decline dated from the late 1820s, could afford only to alter their theatres by chopping off the stage and plastering up the doors. Now it is possible to put back what was taken away at Bury. Thereby a dramatic illustration is given of the turning wheel in theatrical fashion and a unique opportunity provided for a theatre company to play in a complete Georgian Playhouse of reasonable size. For the Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds, turns out to be an 18th century Playhouse built to a pattern that had changed less since Wren than it was to change in the next 20 years. 1819 is therefore a key to the decoration only (Greek Revival) which William Wilkins applied to this form of theatre.

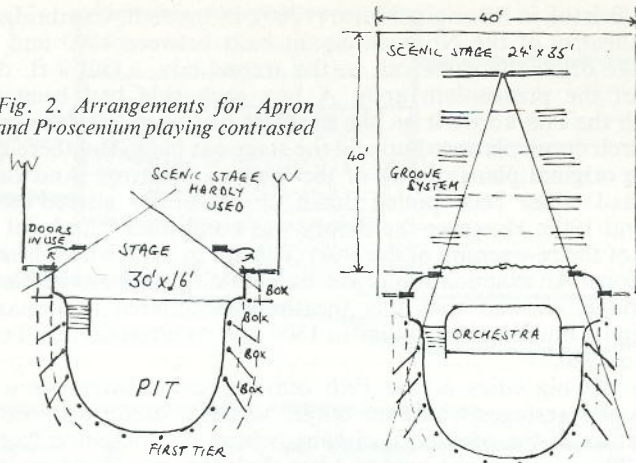
Like all 18th century Playhouses in England it was built to serve two traditions:

- (a) The English drama which emphasised the spoken word and the humanity of the characters and hence demanded a close relationship between actor and audience. Thus a principal playing area at Bury 30 ft. by 16 ft., and most of it down-stage of the proscenium and with 200° encirclement.
- (b) The masque, opera and heroic tragedy best viewed behind a frame that divides the player from the audience and on a stage suited for perspective scenery. Thus at Bury the magnificent classical arch and behind a stage 40 ft. in depth.

The red herring of 1906 has resulted in a workable compromise. Three forms are available:

- (1) Full Georgian forestage contrived by a “temporary” but permanent looking replacement of the boxes. This has been allowed by the Fire Authorities.
- (2) The “Victorian” picture frame stage with 1906 orchestra pit.
- (3) The compromise half size forestage enabling the proscenium arch doors to be used—a 20th century gloss on both 1906 and 1819.

Fig. 2. Arrangements for Apron and Proscenium playing contrasted



From the exposé of the theatre's past and potential for modern companies to an account of the equipment now installed and to be added later.

Since a flytower was rejected both for financial reasons (it would have cost twice the £42,000 already raised and spent) and because it could have been an anachronism in a Georgian Theatre, it was decided to keep the stage as simple as possible. The rake has not been restored. Instead there is a perfectly flat stage broken only by trap areas and front to back side lighting troughs in place of dips. The survey of the building showed that the roof trusses could not support any real load and so a fit-up tubular structure (see cover photograph) has been devised by Hall Stage Equipment to the suggestions of the writer of this article.

The hemp lines and the winches are worked from the floor, a fly gallery having been regrettably omitted for economy. The whole structure is supported by towers at the upstage corners and at the downstage corners by similar towers standing on 8 ft. high bridges to give a clear passage to the proscenium arch doors which, of course, open off stage. All four supports go through the stage to small concrete piers in the basement, thus avoiding any load on the existing fabric.

Lighting control is by a 72 way 2-preset Strand console at the back of the gallery. Forty-eight dimmers are fitted at present though the F.O.H. positions are wired for the eventual 72 ways. Distribution is as follows (1 kW unless shown):

F.O.H.	15 (9 × 2K)	20
Stage high level	20 (3 × 2K, 3 × 3K)	35 or 30
Stage low level	13 (8 × 2K)	15 or 20
5 kW projectors		2
	48 ways	72 ways

Lanterns F.O.H. are Patt. 264 Bi-focal, the soft edge Profile facility being considered essential for forestage work, and Patt. 23. The spot bar has Patt. 223 Fresnels and Patt. 23 Profile spots. There is a sprinkling of Patt. 243 and 123 Fresnels, Cyc lighting is chiefly by Patt. 60 floods. In response to public demand footlights can be fitted but these double as cyc bottom sunk in troughs when the cyc is hung at the furthest upstage position. All internally wired spot bars terminate in 15 amp. B.S. plugs to be patched as desired to the fly plug boxes downstage, midstage and upstage. Even the F.O.H. spots are patched in this way at two principal plug boxes at each end of the gallery so as to give absolute flexibility for a stage whose main playing area can be either in front of the proscenium or behind it.

As yet there is no sound equipment. All the wiring has been carried out so a complete effects system and stage relay can be installed later. The sound console will be placed on the 8 ft. bridge over the D.S.A.L., or prompt corner (where one finds an original 18th century prompter's spyhole in the proscenium arch door).

Production facilities will come later—there is the chance of building a workshop at stage level on land belonging to the theatre behind the back wall.

Much more is to come first: the auditorium is only partially decorated. The painting of the swirling sphinxes and griffins on the front of the centre tier of 13 boxes and the marbling of the proscenium

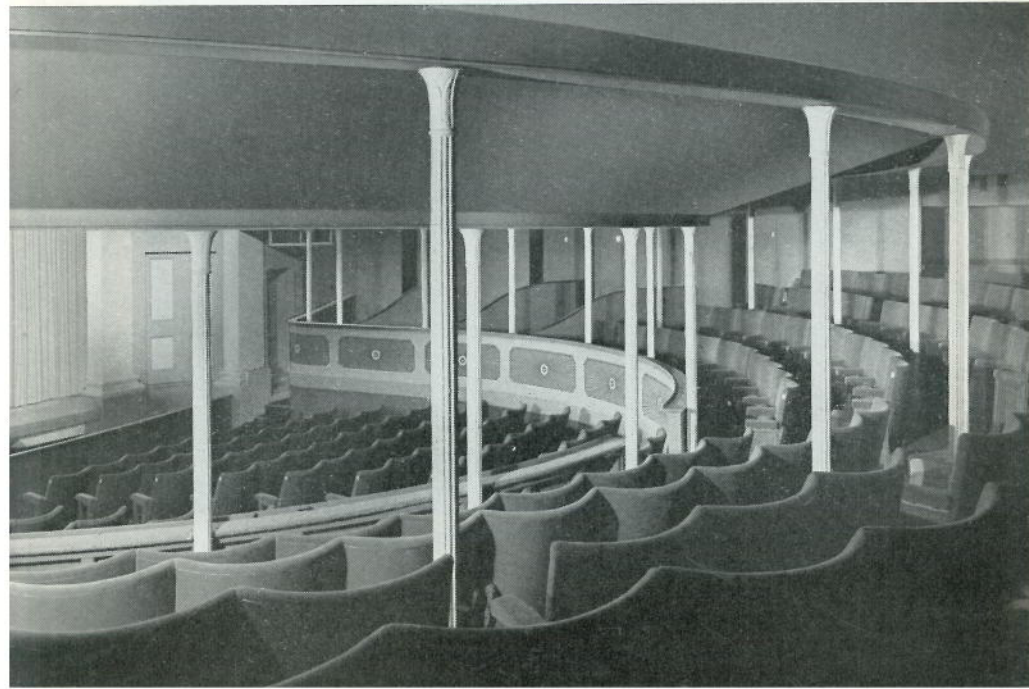


Theatre Royal Auditorium from stage

arch will be bold and may surprise those who have refined ideas of chaste Regency decor. The effect should be as *vulgar* as the Parthenon with its gorgeously painted polychromatic statuary. There are no roccoco mouldings, rather all decoration is in simple flat *trompe d'oeil*. This is the stylised Georgian Theatre just before *illusion* won the battle and the truly adaptable proscenium stage of the 18th century, with its alternatives of either immediate contact between audience and actor on the forestage or of detached spectacle on the scenic stage behind, lost one half of its character and became plain *picture frame*.

In what did the adaptability lie? In the ambivalent character of the transition from the stage to auditorium which either contained actor and audience in the same room or else divided them into different worlds. In the March issue of TABS Peter Moro might have been describing the essence of this type of Georgian Theatre when he wrote in the penultimate paragraph:

“ If it should continue to be a requirement, as it frequently is today, to alter the relationship between the stage and the audience for different productions the future of such adaptability lies in this direction. Instead of the often insanely elaborate efforts to shift the acting area and regroup the audience, different nuances of production can be achieved by the far simpler device of manipulating the character of the transition from the acting area to the auditorium.”



HOW DID THEY DO IT?

or The King's, Hammersmith

by Frederick Bentham

The author would like to thank Anthony Pigott, who with his father T. V. Pigott covered so long a period of management at the King's, for reading and checking this article.

There has been quite a rumpus in *The Stage* and much correspondence in which I felt impelled to take a part.* The row arose from a letter by Mr. Roger Snowdon in which he appeared, to some of us at any rate, to overstate the claims for preservation of existing theatres rather than building anew. The Golders Green Hippodrome, a protégé of his, is a good example of a theatre like this which is in the front line of discussion. Along with the idea of preservation goes another notion today and that is can a theatre be versatile. Golders Green for example has for all its enormous number of seats—2,245 in all—staged a great range of productions. It has proved a singularly *adaptable theatre*, but note that such adaptability was not the result of mechanical devices and moving this or that. The theatre just sat back, so to speak, and took on all comers.

It is not the purpose of this article to advance the pros and cons. I suppose at heart I am pro *all* types of theatres except mechanically adaptable ones! The theatre should not be butchered to make an engineer's or architect's holiday. I have sympathy nevertheless for the architect who wants to leave behind a theatre of our time for the generations who follow to remember us by; we should not live entirely in theatres borrowed from or bequeathed by our ancestors. I like old theatres provided one can see properly and also I like little but complete theatres. Perhaps this is a relic of one's amateur days, but there is a lot of fun to be had from feeling at home in a little theatre and of being able to do everything oneself if need be, without intermediaries becoming essential. Not very far to walk, so to speak, and everything at all times well within one's comprehension. The restored Theatre Royal, Bury, is a good example of this kind of thing.

However, this article is not written to philosophise or to advocate or condemn, it is to examine one form of theatre as objectively as possible and see how physically (finance is for others) it did what it did.

The theatre chosen for this examination is the King's, Hammersmith. At first sight an illogical choice since it was closed down in January 1955 and now is no more but in fact it is a better choice than Golders Green for three reasons. The first is that the seating capacity of 1,500 plus at the King's was nearer the absolute maximum considered for such a theatre today than the 2,000 plus of Golders Green. The second is that the King's was always a theatre whereas Golders Green was a Hippodrome. It had indicators each side of the pros. and often played Variety. The third reason is that although I know the latter quite well, I knew the King's very well indeed. It was

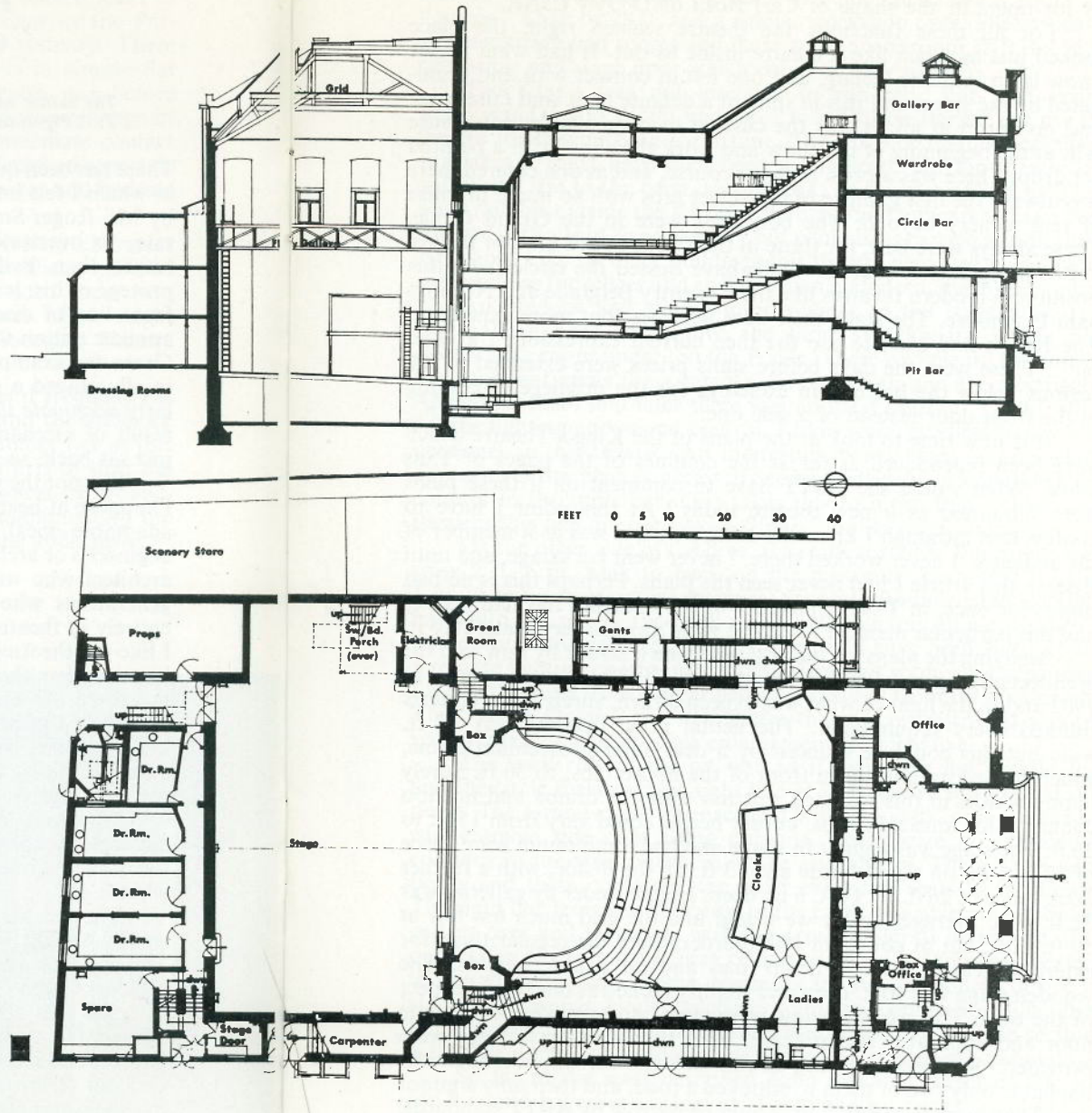
* *The Stage issues dated March 11th, 18th and 25th, 1965.*

the local theatre of my boyhood. I went to school for some 8 years, and years are very long at that age, within sight of it, and its profile formed the most interesting part of the skyline as seen from the playground.

The King's, though no great work of architecture, looked like a theatre. It was not buried among other buildings and consequently its utility well-built and not too untidy silhouette proclaimed it for what it was. There was the stage tower, then the main bulk of the auditorium with the steep slope of the roof over the gallery and finally a classical pediment topping the front façade with a lady holding a lamp, not however F. Nightingale. This theatre is no more, but for 52 years it led an active and full life.

The King's, Hammersmith, was one of the two J. B. Mullholland theatres, the other being the Wimbledon which still survives and which has 200 seats more. The policy for these theatres in the days we are talking about was a weekly change of production. These productions, with one annual exception of the Christmas pantomime which ran for some weeks, came from two main sources. One was the West End success which was just leaving the West End and being reformed as a No. 1 tour, for example Sybil Thorndike in *St. Joan*. The other source was the perpetual tour of which, at any rate as far as drama is concerned, there seems to be no equivalent now. Fred Terry toured and played in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* for years and years after it left the West End. Matheson Lang in *The Wandering Jew* was another example. These visiting companies often had two or three plays in their repertoire and would stage them all in their short stay. An obvious case was Sir Frank Benson's Shakespearean Company. His two weeks would include, as I recall, the regulars *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *Merchant of Venice*, and others.

A thriller with sinister Chinamen, *The Silent House*, "direct from its sensational West End run" could be preceded by Shaw and followed by Shakespeare and then perhaps Ruth Draper. This was not the limit to this *adaptable* theatre, for every so often one row of stalls and the floor under was removed and into this enlarged pit would file the orchestra for a musical show, for example Jack Buchanan in *Stand up and Sing*,



Plan and section King's, Hammersmith

or for opera in the shape of Carl Rosa or D'Oyly Carte.

For all these functions the theatre seemed right, the place looked just as much like a theatre inside as out. It had what I now know is an intimate feeling, and one felt in contact with and dominated by the stage, and this in spite of a definite pros. and false pros. and no apron at all. It was the custom to open the festoon house tabs at the beginning of the show and work the show with a painted act drop. There was a pros. arch, of course, and as one entered there was always the first glimpse of the velvet tabs with so much promise of real scenery beyond. The best seats were in the Grand Circle. These always were best, for those in the know, in this kind of theatre and it is significant that the Stalls have ousted the circle from this position in modern theatres like the Coventry Belgrade and Nottingham Playhouse. The stalls then were next best but more expensive! The King's had also, to use the then current expression, "a good pit". These were the days before stalls prices were extended to the regions below the balcony in exchange for the privilege of coming in the front door instead of a side one.

It is now time to look at the plans of the King's Theatre which have been reproduced as far as the confines of the pages of TABS allow. What would the ABTT have to comment on if these plans were submitted as a new theatre today? At this point I have to confess that although I knew the King's well, it was as a member of the audience. I never worked there, I never went backstage, and until I began this article I had never seen the plans. Perhaps this is no bad thing; for once, in TABS, a member of the audience has had his say and this particular member loved the King's and is very grateful to it.

Studying the plans for the first time, one is struck by how well the architects Sprague & Barton knew their job. The theatre opened in 1902 and in the light of what was expected then, surely the architects fulfilled every requirement. The actual pros. opening was 34 ft. wide but this could be reduced by a deal inner proscenium frame, which moved on and off in front of the house tabs, to 30 ft. Surely happy widths in this instance, not too wide for drama and not too confining for musicals. Pros. border height could vary from 15 ft. to 20 ft. The stage was regular in shape and had a minimum wing space of 12 ft. 6 in. on the O P side and 13 ft. on the P side, with a further dock space of 26 ft. by 14 ft. 6 in. deep. Height under fly galleries was 22 ft. 6 in. average. Today we would find the grid much too low at 50 ft. plus, but of course in 1902 borders were the regular thing for exteriors. There were 50 hemp lines and no counterweights. The wooden stage was 40 ft. deep and slightly raked as one would expect of the time. The regions below were clear; no mistakes of concrete floor and apparatus rooms there. Star, slow and grave traps were provided. Fourteen dressing rooms are shown, all but one with daylight; only two of them overlooked a road, and then only a minor one. The passages at 3 ft. 7 in. would be narrow by ABTT standards. The rooms were at stage, first and second floor level, consequently there was no need for frustrating lifts. The get-in and out for scenery

was on the level through proper doors and there was a room for "props" 12 ft. by 28 ft. and a similar workshop over. The carpenter and electrician had rooms and there was a spare room 15 ft. by 16 ft. near stage and stage door which could be very useful.

The King's was not intended to run rep., but post-second world war Donald Wolfitt and prior to it Wilson Barrett did use the theatre for this purpose for a time. The absence of full workshops and storage must have then been a handicap, but the theatre did not fill the site to the brim, so to speak, and a space 66 ft. by 17 ft. was available outside the P side of the stage and appears to have been covered with a lean-to for scenery but could have carried a substantial extension. Like all older buildings this theatre provided more nooks and crannies for offices and so forth than a modern, more open, plan.

An obvious and simple improvement to the stage nowadays would have been to remove the large switchboard perch, and electrician's room under, on the P side. There was plenty of room in the basement areas for a remote dimmer bank and the electrician. Also as we shall find later there was an ideal position "out front" for the lighting and sound control. Mikes were, needless to say, not necessary in this theatre. An interesting below-stage feature which appears on the plan is access from back-stage to a concealed bar counter in the stalls bar. One takes this to mean that unlike most theatres this one did not have a "pub" on its stage doorstep.

On the other side of the pros. the stalls seated 582 in twenty-two rows 2 ft. 6 in. back to back on the maximum permitted rake of 1 in 10 but not of course stepped. Separate tip-ups extended right back into the pit. In the back wall of the pit was an alcove with a raised floor holding seven seats. These could have been given up for a remote lighting control and a most excellent room contrived there for it with access from the bar behind instead of from the auditorium. The "Stage Guide" for 1946 states that the orchestra pit was for sixteen players with possible enlargement to thirty-five.

The back row of the pit was 64 ft. from the fire curtain line and the circle front cut this sight line at 12 ft. above the stage at this point. The Grand circle was excellent with 314 seats, only six second row extreme side ones being dubious. There were no supporting columns in the way anywhere in the auditorium. There were stage boxes and these contained the most expensive seats in the house. The sight line from the back row of the circle was scarcely cut by the gallery over and then only with the pros. border at its highest. The oppression of the under gallery ceiling was here and to a lesser extent in the pit mitigated to some degree by the time honoured device of sloping it upwards. Under balconies conjure up ventilation difficulties but the only thing I can remember, and this shows on the section, is that the dome ceiling could slide away during intervals on hot days.

So far in the seats described John Neville's target of 900 for rep.* would have been achieved. Thick padded backs could not be allowed in any re-seating but otherwise all is reasonably well.

* TABS, Vol. 23 No. 1.

However, what about the remaining seats to make up the published capacity of 1,566 for the King's, Hammersmith? Alas! no one could describe these—the Gallery—in any way as satisfactory. The section shows the slope of this gallery. I never sat there myself but it looks awful: someone who did confirms that she felt a real sense of vertigo when she had perforce, these being the only seats available, to climb up there with her young son. The occasion was the last pantomime production the King's staged—"Dick Whittington"—and as the gallery was half full it shows that even in 1954 bad seats were considered by the public better than no seats at all if the show itself was attractive enough.

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PROGRAMME.—Contd.

ACT 1.

Scene 1 ... Outside Buckingham Palace
Scene 2 ... Captain Sainsfather's Studio
Scene 3 ... The Pit Head
Scene 4 ... Lord Torrington's Library
Scene 5 ... At the Coal Pits (a Mile Deep)
Scene 6 ... The Worsen 'Ole
Scene 7 ... The Colliery Gates
Scene 8 ... The Worsen 'Ole

INTERVAL.

ACT 2.

Scene 1 ... The Assembly Rooms, Puddlehampton
Scene 2 ... The Village of Wolverhampton
Scene 3 ... Old Bill's Home
Scene 4 ... Outside Westminster Abbey
Scene 5 ... Inside Westminster Abbey
Scene 6 ... The Houses of Parliament

Original Music composed by NORMAN O'NEILL and IVY ST. HELEER.
Incidental Music by KENNETH IRVING. Scenery painted by Messrs. BRUCE SMITH, MACLEARY, PHILIP HOWDEN and ERNEST HOWARD and built by JACK HILL.
Electrical Effects by STRAND ELECTRIC COY.

The Entire Production by SEYMOUR HICKS.

Head of the Theatre: SEYMOUR HICKS
General Manager: JOHN F. LAYD
Musical Director: FREDERICK HARRIS
Stage Manager: ROBERT H. GANN

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From the King's Theatre Programme May 22nd, 1922

Should we be too hard on the gallery with its backless but padded benches? They were better than the bleachers in football and sports fields. They were better than some studio theatres provide today for young people. The young and some others do stand in the arena of the Royal Albert Hall with enthusiasm right through a promenade concert. This practice is not unknown for students in some continental opera houses. The gallery had a great merit, it was cheap.

Looking at a programme of May 22nd, 1922, one finds that the Gallery seats were 9d. (7d. plus 2d. tax). The front part was known as

amphitheatre at 1s. 6d. and the same was charged for the Pit. Early doors giving first choice 2s. Top prices were Orchestra Stalls 5s. 9d., Grand Circle 5s. and only 3s. at the back. Single seats in the boxes which I have tended rather to despise were as high as 7s. 6d., obviously highly regarded. A box complete could be as much as 63s.!

The pace backstage must have been pretty terrific as the illustration taken from this programme shows. The play "Old Bill M.P." starred Edmund Gwenn and was by Bruce Bairnsfather who also played "himself". This play had, I make it, thirteen different scenes! They apparently got their electrical effects from the right firm, a firm which was then only eight years old. The following fortnight was no rest cure either with fourteen different Carl Rosa operas to put on for their "annual" Grand Opera Season.

Enough of this nostalgia, I think we could agree that here was an excellent and adaptable example of a theatre of its time, expected to do justice to drama of all kinds, opera, musicals, ballet and pantomime. A steep gallery at least meant people could get in and hear and see, somewhat distantly, for 9d. Had the theatre survived, the gallery with its 350 more distant seats would obviously have been closed for good. Perhaps the front 320, the amphitheatre, would have been kept in reserve for an absolute winner. The King's, Hammersmith, was no architectural beauty but it was and had the atmosphere of a theatre. It was well built and according to its brief well planned and what is more was capable of being adapted; but it is no more.

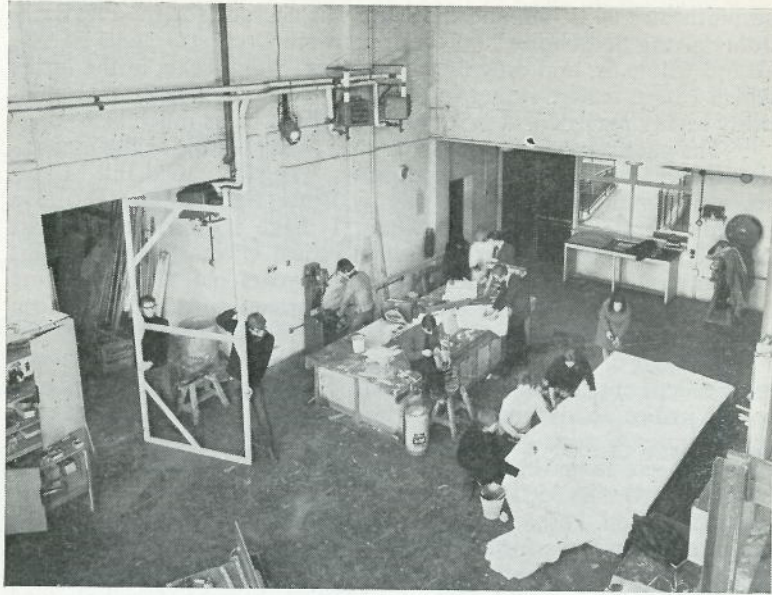
THE JEANNETTA COCHRANE THEATRE

by Michael Trangmar

Head of Theatre Design Department, Central School of Arts and Crafts, London.

The studios and workshops which surround the new Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre at the L.C.C. Central School of Arts and Crafts house a department for training young students of theatrical design. It was the earnest desire of the founder of this department—the teacher whose name is recorded above the theatre for successive generations of students—that her pupils might be made constantly aware of their responsibility to the whole art of theatre and that they might not work too much insulated from the demands and stresses of actual stage productions.

Jeannetta Cochrane was wise enough to have learned from her own experience as a designer the futilities and conceits of unrelated theatrical design. Her project for a professionally-equipped theatre with adjoining workshops, costume cutting rooms and studios for design, caught the imagination of the London County Council



Carpentry shop at Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre

Education Committee, who provided a team of young architects to work with her on the scheme. Unhappily, she did not live to see her plans completed. Though the new building had to wait for road improvement schemes in the neighbourhood, it now stands complete on the corner of Theobalds Road and Southampton Row, Holborn, alongside the recently modernised main building of the Central School.

The 355-seat theatre recently opened its doors to the public for the first time and thus became a new addition to London's theatreland. The opening production, a satirical opera, *One Man Show*, by Nicholas Maw and Anthony Jacobs, was specially commissioned for the occasion by the L.C.C. and was designed and mounted by the students of the theatre department. Students thus had an opportunity to try their hands at co-operating with an opera company under actual working conditions and to see that which had begun as trial and experiment become appropriate design for production. They were able to judge the reactions of a paying public and the Press and to feel the responsibilities of helping to entertain. Students worked alongside professional staff and stage hands to run each performance and this made them aware of the practical aspect of design. Now, until the time comes round again for the annual production which they will design and mount, the students will stand aside to learn from the professional use to which the theatre will meantime be put. They will absorb the atmosphere

of theatrical presentation, attend rehearsals and study performances, both backstage and as members of an audience.

A student joining the Department of Theatrical Design is taken progressively through a *three-year* course designed in its early stages to enlarge his vision and to reveal to him the possibilities of present-day design, while devoting a proportional amount of time to research into period detail. During his first two terms he will attend basic lectures on the History of the Theatre, the History of Costume and technical lectures on Stagecraft. He will take a course of Model-making, designed to promote skill in modelling theatre sets in varied materials and will explore shape, position, material, area and colour. The History of Theatre course covers the architectural development of the theatre from antiquity to the present day and the changing styles of theatrical presentation. It is illustrated by means of slides and students are given nine plays of differing periods to read and design as an accompaniment to the course. It is expected that students will complete this study by a written and illustrated thesis on some aspect of the theatre. The Costume lectures are based on the evolution of cut, which is the foundation of the history of costume, and which forms the connecting link between each period. Attention is drawn to the design of clothes which changed to form part of the larger canvas of the décor against which they were worn; also to the social conditions which influenced ornament and choice of material. In the practical classes which follow the lectures the student will cut and design costume of the period which has been discussed. The lectures are illustrated with diagrams on the blackboard and slides and reproductions taken from contemporary sources. Throughout the first year, and indeed the entire course, all students attend regular classes in drawing and painting, however advanced they may prove to be in their development.

The second year of the course is concerned with a programme of design exercises, each lasting approximately five weeks from the initial play-reading and briefing, conducted by a designer or producer, to the final criticism of finished work by members of the design and technical staff. This can prove to be a marathon for all concerned when something like thirty designs have to be given full **consideration!** During this second year the student takes practical classes in scene-building and scene-painting, the design and making of masks and stage properties and also millinery. The study of lighting commences with theoretical lectures on light and electricity and is then demonstrated in scale form on a model theatre, complete with 72 circuits, 2 master dimmers and an adaptable representation of the proscenium of the Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre with working house tabs! At this point the advantage of having a fully-working theatre as part of the building becomes apparent. The class can **move into the theatre** and learn the art of stage lighting from humble beginnings, such as helping to clean lanterns and lenses, adjust lamps and reflectors and set spot bars and front-of-house



Paint frame at Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre

equipment. Lighting effects upon the stage can be studied from the stalls or from behind a 4 ft. square pane of glass which separates the control board from the balcony of the auditorium. The theatre has 54 lighting circuits controlled from a saturable-reactor type control board with preset facilities. Students will be able to watch lighting set-ups and rehearsals as they take place in the theatre. The scene-painting classes make use of the 40 ft. power-operated paint frame and the workshop is equipped with circular saw and mortise and tenon-cutting machinery for mechanised scene-building, as well as a number of power-operated hand tools. The stage itself has 35 counterweighted sets of lines in the grid, a movable lighting bridge and cueing and inter-communication facilities from the prompt corner to all parts of the house. A gently curving removable apron stage covers a pit for an orchestra of 22. Dressing rooms can cope with a cast of 16 and there is additional temporary accommodation if necessary. As the theatre is licensed for public performance the student is brought face-to-face with safety regulations and fire-proofing at an early age!

In consolidating his first two years' work a third-year student is given a more flexible programme, in which he prepares his designs and practical work for his final Diploma. Each student is expected to design and make at least one theatrical costume and one historical study costume during his course and these he will show at his Diploma examination, together with scenic models, ground-plans, etc. It is customary for designs to be chosen from among this third-

year group when the department presents its annual collaboration with an outside group of actors, singers or dancers.

Any young artist wishing to enter the department must first feel sure that he is ready to enter training for a precarious, difficult and dedicated profession. Applicants are only considered after at least one year's previous full-time art training, and it is an advantage if this has included a course on the History of Architecture. A good education is necessary (the Central School requires at least five passes at "O" level in the General Certificate of Education) and it is desirable for theatre students to have successfully studied English Language and Literature, History and French or another modern language. As in all branches of the theatre, personality counts for a great deal and a designer must have especial qualities of patience and tact. He must be able to read a script with insight and intelligence and be able to discuss it at short notice with actors, producers and managements. Most important of all, he must be conscious of wishing to make a perhaps small, but often essential, contribution to the total art of theatrical presentation.



Auditorium from the stage of the Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre

The Theatre Department of the Central School of Arts and Crafts has a long tradition of preparing design students for the theatre—Jeannetta Cochrane started her first costume classes in the early 1900s although scenic design was not added to the course until

the 1930s. The aims of the present course, enormously broadened since those days, are progressive and experimental and are fair set to demolish the limits of design set by antiquated materials and conservative touring conventions. The students are given encouragement to compose designs that will be adventurous and workable and, above all, appropriate to whatever style of production lies ahead.

BOOK REVIEWS

National Council for Civic Theatres Survey 1964/65.

This report was launched at a press conference at the Mermaid recently and although it would seem that no arrangements are to be made for its distribution through the book trade in the normal way—it is for example unpriced—it is too important to go unreviewed. It is a “must” for those studying the Civic theatre in Britain. Unfortunately the National Council for Civic Theatres has tended to spoil its own cause by what is considered by some to be a too pretentious title for what at any rate began as a regional organisation covering a particular form of Civic theatre which is mainly interested in touring. National Council evokes something equivalent to the Arts Council but devoted particularly to Civic theatres, and incidentally some dissident voices were heard at the Mermaid on the revival of touring as such.

However, be this as it may, we owe Councillor Harper and Reginald Birks a debt of gratitude for allowing some of the immense enthusiasm they have devoted to the Sunderland Empire to be expended on an exacting survey of Civic theatres up and down the country. Here is the complete picture of Civic theatre as it is today. A picture of local council activity at all levels, including that of complete apathy. Forty-eight of the 400 councils completely ignored the questionnaire and a reminder. Of those who did reply 170 do not contribute anything towards the presentation of Theatre Arts—professional or amateur. The report serves a particularly valuable purpose in indicating the different forms Civic activity may take and perhaps applying a necessary corrective to the notion, which seems to me inherent in Arts Council support, that theatre is the Opera, the Ballet and the Drama.

FREDERICK BENTHAM

Leap to Life John Wiles & Alan Garrard (*New Edition*) Chatto & Windus. 21s. From time to time references to the need to introduce children to drama effectively have been made here. More emphasis in TABS has however been given to the inhibiting effect the usual school hall, excellent for assembly, has on this work. This still happens. The children begin by acting amongst themselves on the floor but at the magic age of eleven are put 4 ft. above it at one end and told to declaim to an audience of hundreds, of which only some four or five rows can see.

A book first published in 1957 has now been revised and re-issued by Chatto & Windus. It is “Leap to Life” by John Wiles and Alan Garrard (Drama Adviser, Buckinghamshire). It describes the idea behind Alan Garrard’s campaign for dance drama and its practical syllabus. This all began in 1947 and is growing. How fast? The impression the book leaves is that it should be faster and thus I give it my recommendation to all teachers. The tendency now to consider providing Drama spaces rather than proscenium stages in schools is surely part of this re-thinking. Those responsible cannot fail to be excited by this book if in fact they don’t already know it.

B. E. BEAR



“The Deadly Game” by Frederick Dürenmatt. Directed by Kalman Burnim. Designed by Donald Mullin

LIGHTING THE ARENA STAGE

by Donald Mullin

There has been a Theatre in the Round (“Arena” in U.S.A.) since 1941 and permanently from 1949 at Tufts University Massachusetts. Mr. Mullin tells us that he has been Assistant Professor of Drama (remarking “We Americans give ourselves rather gaudy titles”) and Technical Director of Theatre there since 1960. Prior to this he had ten years’ experience of both professional stock and academic theatre.

In the September, 1964, issue of TABS, Mr. Stephen Joseph commented upon the lighting requirements of the arena stage. I would like to supplement those observations with others based upon a slightly different fund of experience, and to disagree with one or two of his remarks.

There has been a great deal of unnecessary confusion over light and the arena stage, usually from those who are reasonably familiar with the proscenium stage but who consider the arena something rather exotic. Transfer of solutions learned in one medium to the

other is comparatively simple, providing one has solutions originally. When one examines the things that light is required to do, it is a quite ordinary process to have these things done anywhere, simply by adaptation. Reliance upon formulae is dangerous unless the formulae are understood. It might be to the point to discuss the various propositions and find where they lead us.

Techniques of theatre lighting in the United States reached their peak of development in the better Broadway houses two generations ago. Modifications have been made since, as new equipment has become available, but the secrets remain basically unchanged. Lighting elsewhere in this country was, and still is, lamentably primitive (the Off and On, or Lavender and Pink school), not due to a lack of funds and equipment as one might think, but to a lack of training and original thinking. Since arena stages developed in areas remote from Broadway it is not surprising that most of them rely upon hit or miss techniques that have little or no relationship to professional practice of any kind, much less that which might be adapted with any intelligence to staging in the "round". Without professional experience or advice we depend upon books and articles, and are plagued with texts that say everything about colour, electricity and equipment, and next to nothing about the methods used so effectively by professionals who know their craft. Instead of experimentation or investigation, schools (at least in the States) still depend upon Stanley McCandless' *A Method of Lighting the Stage*, over-simplified when it was written and now badly out of date. Later publications repeat the same generalisations, it having never occurred to the authors, apparently, to talk to the expert in order to discover what he does and why he does it. While the professional certainly is the man to consult, even he slips occasionally. A major lighting equipment supplier in New York provides a catalogue displaying a suggested arena lighting format completely unsuitable for anything but animated lectures. In this case even the "current practice" of the multitude of arena tent summer theatres is ignored.

It might be pertinent to list the functions of light on the proscenium stage so that we may investigate how these functions might be fulfilled by equipment mounted in the arena.

- (1) The actor is lighted by instruments from two divergent sources out front, which makes the features plastic and avoids the passport-photo appearance we all know well enough to want to avoid. "Cool" and "warm" recommendations for these, from McCandless, are subject to the criticism in my footnote opposite.
- (2) Side lighting complements illuminations from the front and gives the actor increased dimension, separating him from his fellow. Lanterns for this purpose are mounted behind the proscenium, to the sides and above, either on stands or towers.
- (3) Back lighting, also called "halo" or "kick" lighting, is directed upon the actor from above and behind. This not only provides an actual "halo" around the actor's form which makes him seem

singularly alive, but also serves to separate him from his background.

- (4) Blending and toning instruments, usually floodlights or battens of one type or another, serve to wash the acting areas and the setting, removing unwanted hard edges and neutralising spill. They also add a colour tone to the entire stage, as opposed to specific colour requirements for individual areas.
- (5) Downlighting by high-powered lensed instruments adds, from directly above, some of the same effects apparent in backlights and sidelights. More importantly, they help vary mood. Increasing or decreasing downlighting will make radical changes in shadow configurations and in depth perception. Downlights will also introduce an unearthly and mystical quality that cannot quite be matched any other way.
- (6) Footlights, abandoned too quickly in the States, help tone and blend, and careful adjustment of intensity will balance shadows cast from front mounted instruments that are, for some reason or other, at too high an angle.
- (7) Specials, hung to accent, illuminate or colour certain specific scenes, areas or bits of business, have mounting requirements determined by the production in hand, and cannot otherwise be planned for. Cyclorama lighting and other particular functions of stage illumination that have no parallels in the arena may, for our purposes, be ignored.

The only function of the ones listed above that cannot be duplicated in the arena is that served by footlights, although certain experiments have been made with plexiglass floor sections, under which special baby spots were mounted.

How can these uses of lighting instruments be adapted to the arena? Quite easily, providing one is willing to make some concessions. In general terms the five-sided lighting in the proscenium

The McCandless Method suggests two instruments, at 45° to the perpendicular and to the horizontal, focused upon a single area; each with a different colour filter, one "warm" and one "cool".

In theory the actor will be seen from the front as having one side warm, one cool, with the facial configurations shadowed in the opposite colour. Features are modelled, or made plastic and three dimensional in appearance, and colour differences echo natural light, which is half direct and half reflected light.

In fact members of the audience seated close to one source will see actor primarily in the colour tone of that source and those close to the other will see that colour tone. Almost half the house, then, will see pink actors while the other half will see blue ones, if those colours are used. Further, the area on the actor's features lighted by both colour tones will be of a colour resulting from the mixing of the warm and the cool—in the case of pink and blue filters, the facial colouring will be a pale magenta! Only the offstage sides of the actor's head will appear to be the actual "warm" or "cool" planned for.

The remedy is to forget "warm" and "cool" and rely upon differences in related tones, as two different tints of pink, and in intensity, one slightly dimmer than the other. Face will be modelled, colour mixing will be within sane limits, entire audience will see pink actors.—MULLIN

(fronts, sides, back) may be duplicated by spotting an arena area with five instruments in a circle, equally spaced. From most seats in the hall the actor within this area will appear to be lighted much the same as his fellow on the proscenium stage. The light behind will act as a halo, those to the sides as sidelights, and those above the spectators as front lights. Only the types of lanterns used change somewhat, since the arena is best served by the Fresnel-lensed, or soft-edged, instrument. The floor is much too prominent to allow sharp-edged spots to be used except for special purposes. An exception to this is the profile spot, whose framed edges are a necessity when adjusting light areas close to seating.*

Blending and toning is achieved by battens mounted in the centre, usually in pairs and in three colour circuits. Downlighting, in addi-

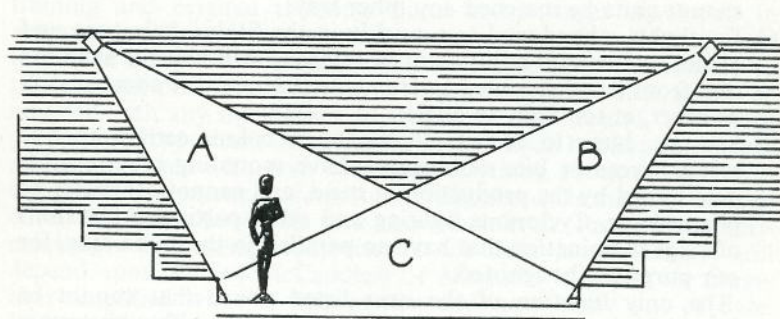


Fig. 1. Lighting a small arena with four instruments may, in theory, seem possible. In practice it is not, as the above figure indicates. The instruments overlap only in the area "C", and even then at a level below that of the actor's head. In areas "A" and "B" the actor is lighted from one side but not from the other.

tion, is particularly valuable. The normal angle of light in the arena is somewhat higher than desirable, but may be made to seem less so when, in contrast, downlights provide an even higher source. Floor reflection is of much greater importance in the arena than in the proscenium theatre, and battens combined with downlights are not quite so ghastly in practice as they may seem in print.

The above observations are based upon an acting area that is in turn broken up into numerous smaller areas, both for ease in lighting and for the necessary variations in cueing complex productions. A "minimum" lighting standard for even the smallest arena is *not* possible with four instruments for the entire stage. Even the most poverty-stricken parish hall must include a more complex fit-up if the actors are to be seen at all. It is quite possible to reduce the instruments per *area* to less than five, providing one is willing to give up what that instrument or instruments would otherwise provide. Rather than discussing minimums, one should reach for the

* The new Strand Patt. 264 Bi-focal Profile Spot would seem to suit here—EDITOR.

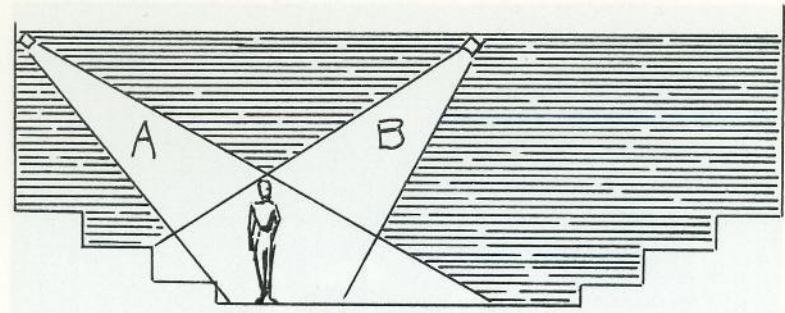


Fig. 2. Lighting at 45° angles is not always advisable. As shown, "A" will strike the backs of the heads of patrons seated in the first row, while "B" will shine in their faces.

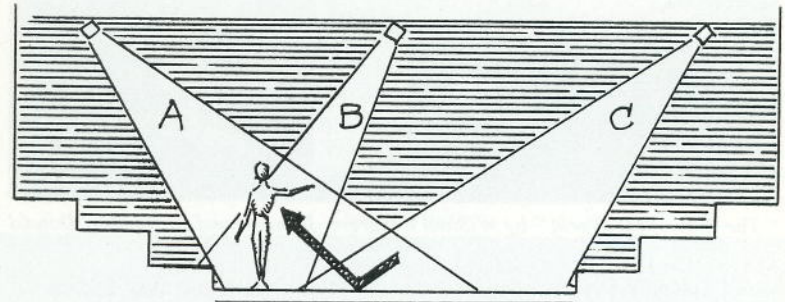
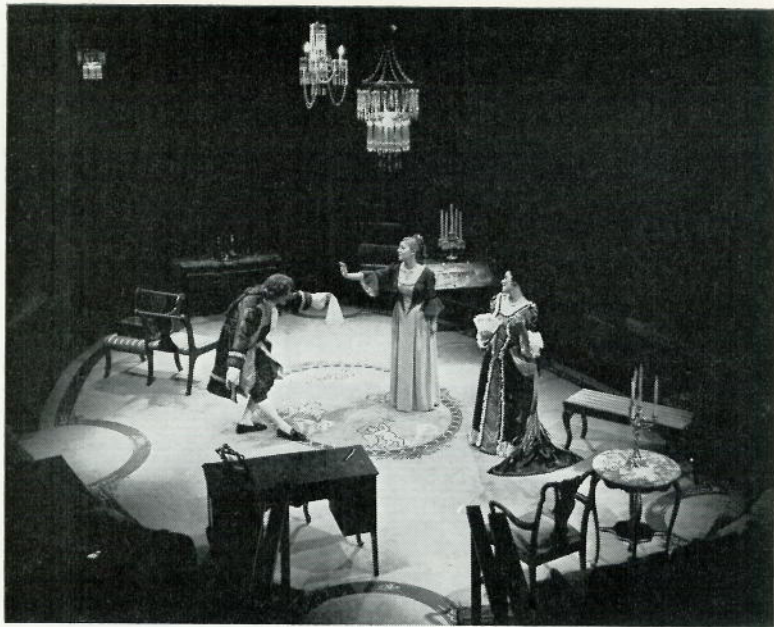


Fig. 3. The more usual practice is to "cheat" the lights to positions above 45°. "A" has been moved in to avoid striking the first row, while "B" has been focused to keep light out of the patrons' eyes. "B", however, does not then quite match the head level of actors playing close to seating. "C" serves this function, supplementing "B" by reflecting from the floor, as shown. This type of mutual support by floor bounce is a characteristic of arena lighting.

maximum within one's means. Drama groups should no more consider lighting a production with a total of four instruments than they should entertain doing Shakespeare with wooden swords. Four instruments per *area* is an acceptable reduction, but three as suggested by Stephen Joseph is not, for the degree of arc between any two of the three presents an unpleasant fall of light upon the features, and the intensity of each lantern must be raised in order to have sufficient foot-candles fall on the stage. Three per area, cleverly combined with subtle usage of lanterns which flood over several areas, may serve as a temporary solution when no alternative is possible, but expecting a lighting designer to do anything effective under these circumstances is wishful thinking.

Additional requirements for the arena not usually found in the proscenium include lighting for the aisles, as they usually end being



"The Way of the World" by William Congreve. Directed and designed by Donald Mullin

used as hallways, roads, or sundry other quite natural means of access to the stage. In large halls, as the American summer musical tent, the aisles serve the purpose of side stages in which "front" or "in one" scenes are played, and thus must be lighted with as much care as the stage itself.

Mounting positions for instruments have, in many cases, been provided for by holes or slots in the ceiling above the audience. While this arrangement may be designed carefully enough to look attractive, it inevitably places severe restrictions upon the lighting designer, since the slots are never where he wants them. It is best to leave the entire area above the audience as well as the stage clear for hanging, with as many barrels as possible rigged in some form of permanent grid. This arrangement may be reasonably unobtrusive, and audiences soon begin to take the exposed lighting equipment quite for granted. Some arena designs provide an "egg crate" mask over the stage to provide a more pleasing overhead view. These box sections merely get in the way. They mask, certainly; the lighting as well as the equipment. In large halls a drape or solid construction may be hung down in a figure following that of the stage outline to provide a "teaser" border or horizontal mask behind which lights above the stage may be hidden. This is a standard feature of the American summer musical tent, since the area of the teaser is used as a decorative front, trimmed to match the style or mood of the produc-

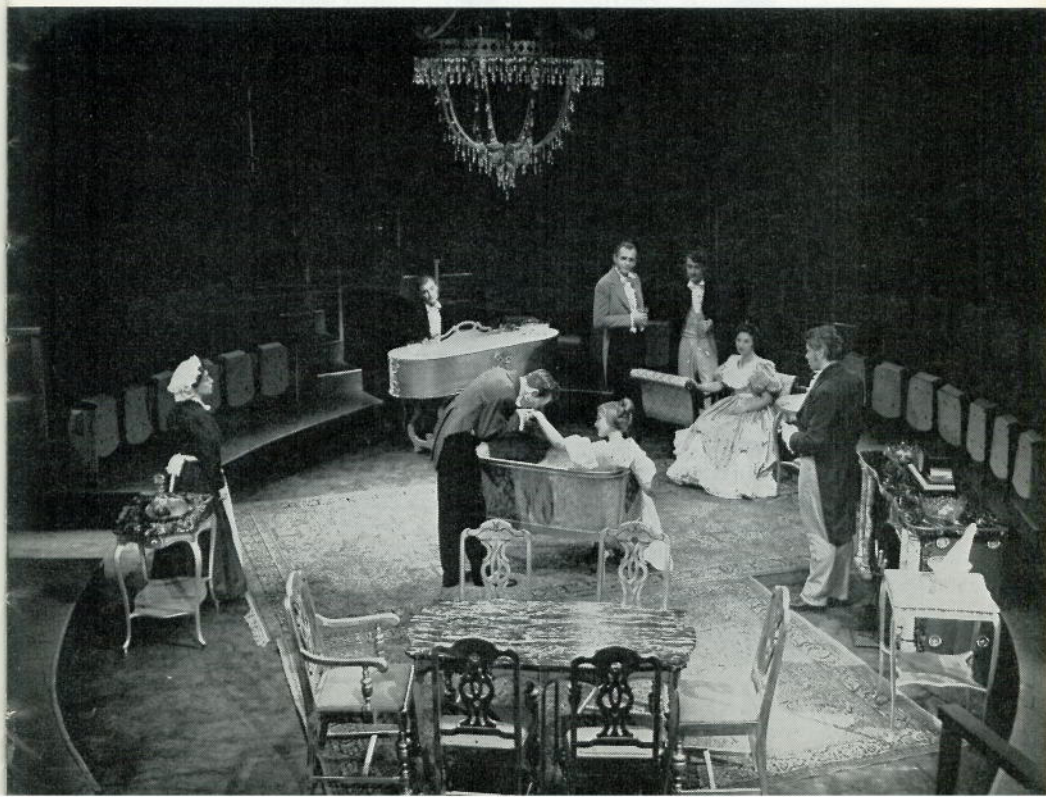
tion. This addition, however, creates almost as many lighting problems as it solves decorative ones.

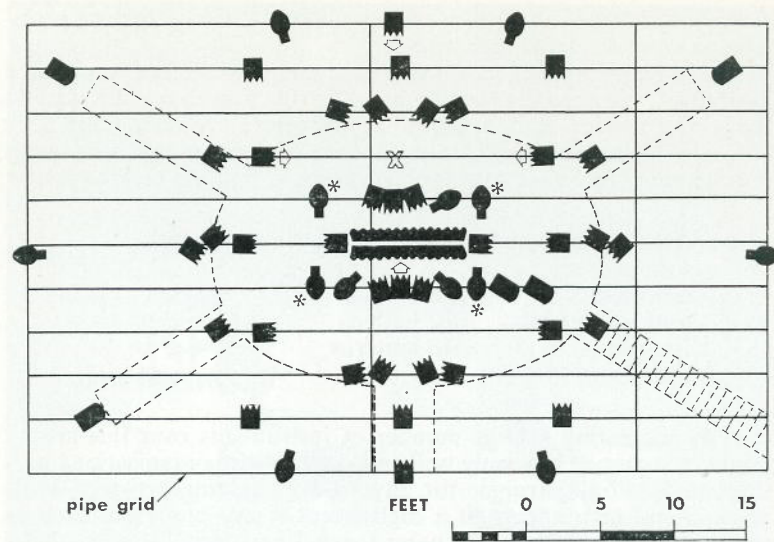
For an acting area of reasonable size, say 16 by 20 feet, it might be desirable to arrange the lighting areas so that there are eight around the circumference and a ninth in the centre. Allowing for four entrance aisles, this will leave us with the following instrument requirements for maximum sophistication in lighting techniques:





Areas 1 through 9	5 lanterns each	45 total
4 aisles	2 " "	8 "
downlights	6 " "	6 "
tone and blend	2 battens	2 "
specials	10 lanterns	10 "
		<u>71</u> grand total.

By suggesting a large number of instruments over this area it might be assumed that only well endowed theatre organisations with large halls should struggle for any kind of lighting artistry. While professional instruments of a high intensity are preferred, such as the Strand Patt. 123 6-inch baby Fresnel and Patt. 23 series baby profile spot, it is almost as effective to use smaller instruments, such

"Camille" by Alexandre Dumas, fils. Directed by Kalman Burnim. Designed by Donald Mullin





-  6" Profile
-  4" Plano
-  6" Fresnel
-  Borderlight

STAGE PLAN OF THE TUFTS ARENA THEATRE

Acting area 27 ft. 9 in. by 18 ft. 3 in. Capacity 210 seats

Diagram shows a basic area fit-up

8 areas about the circumference with 4 lanterns each	32
5 aisles with two lanterns each	10
3 centre areas with 4 lanterns each	12
Downlights*	4
Borderlights	2
9 profile spots	250-watts each
38 Fresnel lanterns	250-watts each
5 plano convex lanterns	200-watts each
4 profile downlights*	250-watts each
2 battens, 3 colour PAR-38, 150-watts per lamp.	

All accommodated on a 24-way 1000-watt control board.

*It was decided to settle for more areas with four lanterns rather than fewer with five; limitations are imposed by the available 250 watt lamp and the 1,000-watt dimmer capacity on hand.

as the Patt. 45 4 1/2-inch. It must be remembered that visibility requires a certain level of light, obtainable either by a few high powered spots or by more numerous ones of a lower power. The latter are, naturally, less expensive than the former, so large numbers does not necessarily imply doubled or tripled costs.

A possible alternative to professional lanterns is instruments of a homemade variety. While one may imagine a dim little bulb inside a tin suspended by string, a sealed-beam lamp inside a section of stove-pipe can be remarkably effective. A vast number of these may be produced almost overnight with the most simple tools. The homemade instrument cannot be focused and thus is not as flexible as the professional lantern, but it is preferable to nothing, and spots of this type can supplement a standard fit-up readily.

Whether homemade lanterns are used or not, the expenditure necessary to supply even the modestly equipped stage can be considerable. Theatre is the leisure time activity of either the well-to-do or the extraordinarily persistent. Most of us are in the latter category. Homemade lanterns are simple. Homemade control boards and patch panels are not. Accumulating the necessary equipment is a task sometimes called "heartbreaking" by those who have established amateur theatres, as in their later years they look back upon the jolly hard times they all came through so gloriously. It is jolly only in retrospect. Professionally manufactured (and guaranteed) control boards are readily available at a modest cost. With a little more pleading and a somewhat more realistic view of "minimum" needs this sum can be raised.

It is a distinct mark of an amateur that he is willing to do without, willing to stay up all night even though there is no need whatever to do anything of the kind, and willing to share the credit. None of these are qualities of the average professional, especially not the last. In spite of this it is the professional craftsman who must be our guide. The lighting designer's craft is not a particularly difficult one when materials are there to be used. It becomes a frustrating bore when they are not. Just as that seventeenth century table must be found and that costume must be made, the requisite number of lanterns must be provided for, not last, but first, for an actor can pantomime when needed, but he cannot even do that in the dark.

CIVIC THEATRES AND THE AMATEURS

by Percy Corry

Most of the professional actors, directors, technicians and the architects who spoke at the Civic Theatres Conference (reported in the March issue of TABS) assumed that a Civic Theatre would either have a resident professional company or would be visited regularly by professional companies presenting elaborate productions of opera, ballet, classic drama, pantomime and symphony concerts. There were differences of opinion about desirable seating capacities, whether they should be in the 700, 900 or 1,500 range. The multi-purpose hall was very properly dismissed as being quite useless as a theatre but the possible requirement of a multi-purpose theatre, particularly one without a fly-tower, was dismissed too perfunctorily. The general attitude was a thought too metropolitan and apart from a few pertinent contributions, took little account of realities in those smaller provincial cities and towns where there is a doubtful possibility of maintaining a resident professional company of any acceptable standard of competence. Also, the possible need to include the amateur theatre in a civic venture was almost completely ignored or was played down.

Unfortunately professional theatre people generally regard amateurs as blacklegs who are too involved in their own activities to be willing to "support" professional theatre. This is not true, of course. Many amateurs and many of those who make up their audiences are devoted, critical theatregoers who are not only willing but are anxious to see first-class productions that are "professional" in every sense. There are, alas, a number of hard-working, under-paid professional companies whose standards are no better than those of many well-established amateur theatres. Could not these under-paid professionals be more correctly accused of being involuntary blacklegs?

It seems probable that in most of the smaller provincial urban areas, civic theatres could best serve the community, and the theatre as a whole, by a well-planned combination of both professional and amateur productions. It would be good for amateurs to have to survive comparison with professional standards: many of them become far too complacent about far too little achievement. And professional companies could gain by having to justify their professionalism to experienced and critical audiences. Civic theatres of this type could create a national circuit for tours organised by the National Theatre and other subsidised producing companies. It is not sufficient for exalted companies to make token acknowledgment of their indebtedness to provincial taxpayers by sending their knights and dames (or their understudies) on short, rare visits to large theatres in a few large cities. They should establish Number Two and Number Three touring companies whose productions would be directed by men and women of established reputation. The



Auditorium, Rotherham Civic Theatre

star-billing for the box-office would be provided by the names of the playwrights, the companies and the directors. If the actors were chosen for their ability they would soon make their own names attractive to the playgoers. The productions should be specially designed for the smaller theatres and for touring economically. In this context economy does not mean sacrifice of quality.

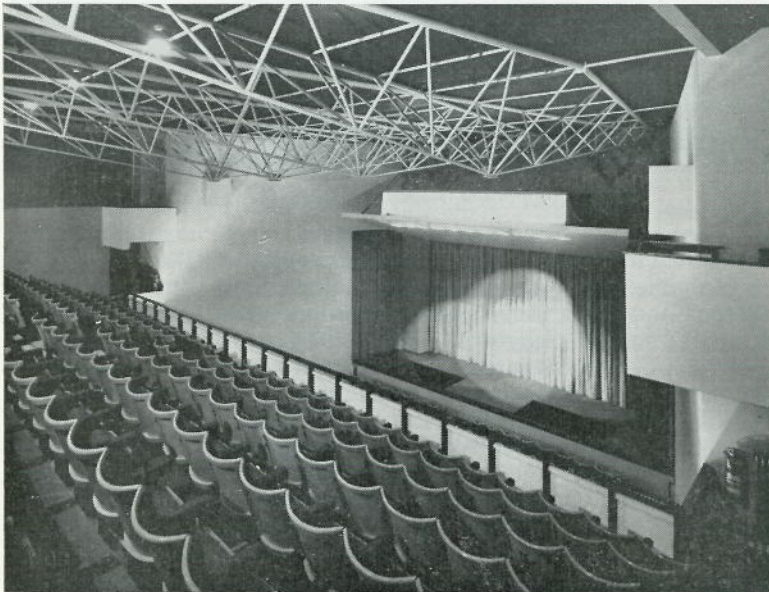
The number of civic theatres being discussed or being planned is increasing rapidly but there is some justifiable nervousness in rates-conscious councils about venturing into a business of which they know little and about which there are so many conflicting opinions and so many expensive imponderables. There is a pressing need for authoritative guidance based on practical realities, and on an agreed national pattern of theatre development. A pattern of sorts is, of course, being created in our old-fashioned British empirical way. For the large cities the new theatres of Coventry, Nottingham and Leicester are regarded as varied prototypes, but the experience in these theatres needs some expert study. Those who wish to follow on similar lines should have impartial guidance.

Some towns and cities may wish to follow the Sunderland example and may be inclined to build new theatres with the large capacity necessary if they are to attract star-studded national companies. Would it be justifiable to build such a civic theatre, probably requiring heavy subsidy, if there was in the area a commercial theatre able to cater for the prestige companies? Is there any nationally guided policy for such theatres?

In many towns it would probably be recklessly imprudent to adopt either the Coventry or the Sunderland pattern. Would Leicester's Phoenix or Manchester's Library provide their correct

solution, or is it an authoritative opinion that those theatres are usually too small to maintain a good professional company that is adequately paid? Is it justifiable to assume that as theatres multiply, the small theatres with limited earning capacities will not be able to afford the salaries that their best actors could obtain elsewhere? And may not the small theatres then find it difficult to attract audiences sufficiently large to fill even their restricted numbers of seats? Is there a national policy to guide them?

And what about the amateurs? Owing to the closure of theatres and cinemas many operatic and dramatic societies are without any



Auditorium, Middlesbrough Little Theatre

suitable place in which to perform. In some towns they are held to ransom by cinema owners who can charge extravagant rents for the use of unsuitable and inadequately equipped stages because the amateurs have no better alternatives. These amateurs provide their own subsidies by their subscriptions, their jumble sales, their raffles and what-not. They do it because they love it, of course, but they are keeping theatre alive in areas where it would otherwise be dead. They have every right to demand consideration in the civic theatre schemes which, of course, will probably be subsidised by the rates paid by them.

There are numerous theatres operating very successfully on a combined professional/amateur basis. Some details of two of them,

Rotherham and Middlesbrough, are given at the end of this article. Experience in these and other towns proves that there can be effective partnership between professionals and amateurs.

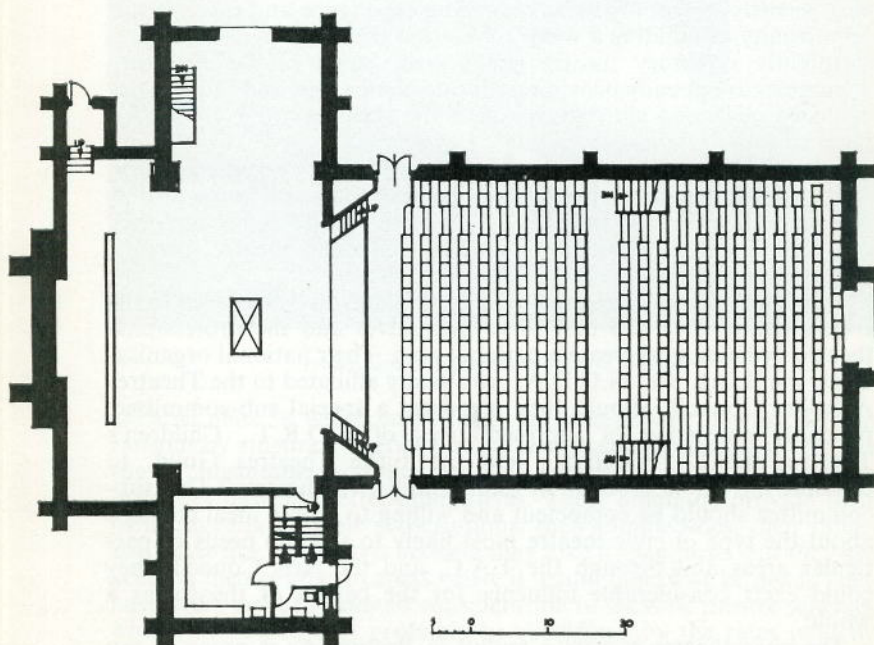
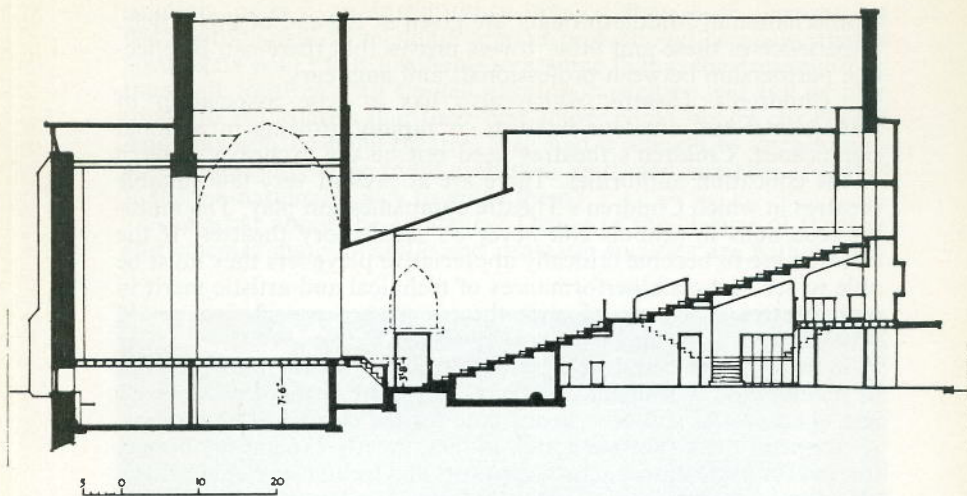
Children's Theatre, which also has a close association of professional and amateur interests, is rapidly growing in national significance. Children's theatres need not be the exclusive concern of the education authorities. There are at present very few suitable theatres in which Children's Theatre companies can play. The multi-purpose halls in schools can never be satisfactory theatres. If the children are to become critically appreciative playgoers they must be able to see first-class performances of technical and artistic merit in real theatres. The type of civic theatre we are considering would provide them with the facilities they need.

Such a theatre could be operated at a cost below that involved in maintaining a resident company, but even if the cost were no less, there would still be a strong case for the combined operations. A circuit of these theatres could, in fact, greatly expand the opportunities for professional actors, directors and technicians. A considerable number of companies, specially formed to cater for this market, would be required, and actors would have to be willing to tour. These touring companies could provide unknown actors of ability with security of employment, rewarding experience and much better opportunity of building a wider reputation than any small weekly or fortnightly repertory theatre could give. Some of the repertory companies are already providing touring companies, and this activity could be expanded with advantage if the theatres are available for them to tour.

Professionals and amateurs are already complementary. Many of the best amateurs become professional; and some professionals, either because they fail to make the grade or because they can earn a better living outside the professional theatre, become amateur again.

If the amateurs are to establish their claims to be included in the civic schemes they can best serve themselves and the professional theatre by helping to create a national plan. Their national organisations, the B.D.L. and N.O.D.A. are already affiliated to the Theatres Advisory Council. Should they not form a special sub-committee, probably consisting of representatives of C.O.R.T., Children's Theatre, B.D.L., N.O.D.A., and the Little Theatres Guild, to examine the whole problem of establishing civic theatres? This sub-committee should be competent and willing to advise local councils about the type of civic theatre most likely to suit the needs of particular areas and through the T.A.C. and the Arts Council, they could exert considerable influence for the benefit of theatre as a whole.

The civic theatre is now a reality in Britain. As it grows it can either be an expensive prestige flop or it can be a lively addition to our communal life. The amateurs can have an important part to play but they must not rely on some remote benevolent body to be



Rotherham Civic Theatre plan and section. Architects Hadfield Cawkwell and Davidson

their casting committee. They are nationally organised and should do something about it . . . now.

Rotherham Civic Theatre

The Rotherham Corporation bought a chapel and converted it into a theatre with a capacity of 387 at a total cost of about £40,000. It has operated successfully since 1960. A touring scheme organised by the Lincoln Theatre Company ensures that a professional company visits Rotherham, Scunthorpe and Loughborough. Each theatre is toured one week in three. Other professional companies are also booked and periodically the Rotherham Theatre stages productions in which producer and actors are directly paid by the Council.

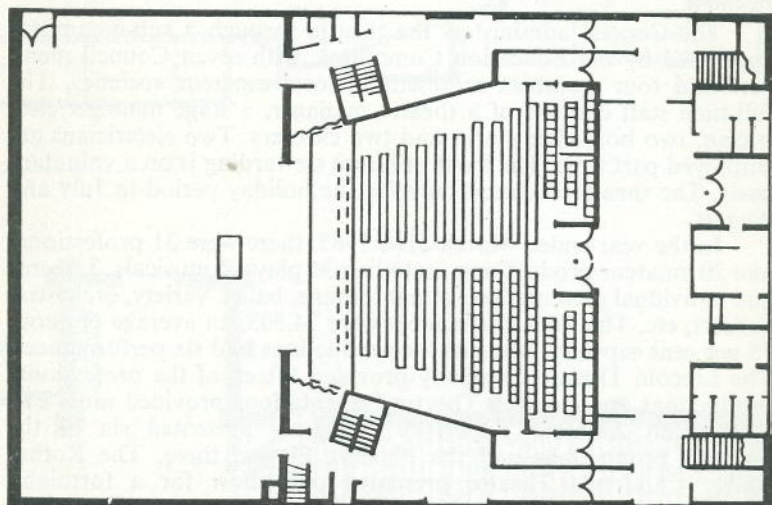
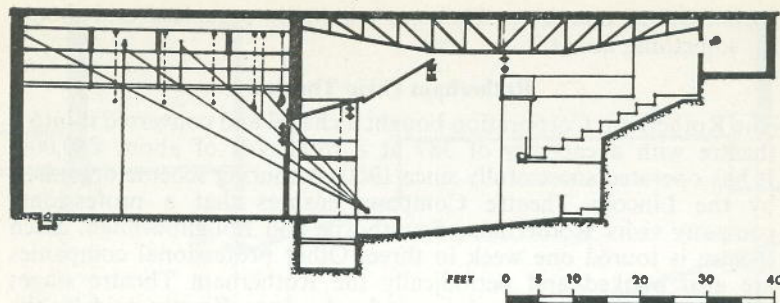
The Council administers the theatre through a sub-committee appointed by the Education Committee, with seven Council members and four members representing local amateur societies. The full-time staff consists of a theatre manager, a stage manager/electrician, two box-office clerks and two cleaners. Two electricians are employed part time. The front of house stewarding is on a voluntary basis. The theatre is closed only for the holiday period in July and August.

In the year ended March 31st, 1965, there were 31 professional and 20 amateur productions, including 36 plays, 5 musicals, 3 operas and individual presentations of pantomime, ballet, variety, orchestral concert, etc. The total attendances were 74,503, an average of about 75 per cent capacity. Most of the productions had six performances. The Lincoln Theatre Company provided fifteen of the professional productions and London Theatre Presentations provided nine. The Rotherham Amateur Repertory Company presented six of the amateur productions and the Phoenix Players three. The Rother Valley Children's Theatre presented one show for a fortnight, playing to capacity. South Yorkshire Theatre for Youth presented Shakespeare to 88 per cent capacity. The five musicals were presented by local operatic societies, also playing to near capacity.

In addition there were non-theatrical bookings, including a lecture, two conferences and two film shows. The Civic Theatre Club regularly uses the foyer or the theatre for lectures, discussions and social activities.

Middlesbrough Little Theatre

This is virtually a civic theatre, although it is owned and controlled by an amateur group formed in 1930. For many years the company played in a church hall, but soon decided it was necessary to build their own theatre. They created a building fund and later amalgamated with the Cleveland Literary and Philosophical Society whose reserves were able to augment the fund. With generous assistance from the Middlesbrough Corporation, national Trusts and local industrialists they were able to open this theatre in October, 1957. It was then one of the few new theatres that had been built since 1939.



Middlesbrough Little Theatre plan and section. Architects Henry Elder and Enrico de Piero

The total cost was £50,000 and as a result of the prodigious efforts made by the members, the theatre was fully paid for soon after the opening. The theatre has a seating capacity of 492 on two levels: the most remote seats are less than 60 ft. from the front of a stage that is 40 ft. deep and 70 ft. wide. The building was attractively designed and made economical use of modern materials and building practice.

The full-time staff now consists of a theatre manager, stage manager and a clerk/secretary. Cleaners are employed part-time. The rest of the theatre labour is voluntary. Grants are provided by the Middlesbrough Corporation and the North Eastern Association for the Arts to cover the theatre manager's salary, any losses on professional productions, and capital expenditure. The Middlesbrough Little Theatre's members regularly present six productions

each season, a total of 36 performances, under the direction of a professional producer. In the 1964-65 season there were 44 amateur play performances and 36 by four local amateur operatic societies. There were 69 professional performances, 19 film shows, 6 dancing displays, 11 concerts and a B.D.L. festival. Full attendance figures are not available at time of writing, but appear to average about 70 per cent for stage shows with others varying between 40 and 80 per cent. In early April there were only three clear weeks still unbooked for the season 1965-66.

In TABS of April, 1958 (Vol. 16, No. 1) I wrote: "There are many theatre people, both professional and amateur, who see in the changing pattern a possible development in which there will be close harmony, and co-operation between the amateurs and the professionals. In this change the initiative must come from the amateurs and in the new Middlesbrough theatre one can see a pattern." It is not necessary, seven years later, to amend the statement.

CORRESPONDENCE

NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE

DEAR SIR,

I have read Mr. Neville's semi-complimentary views on the Nottingham Playhouse in the last issue of TABS with great interest. It is of vital interest to the architect to hear the views of the person using his building and it is a pity, and perhaps symptomatic, that in the case of this building the only way to find out is for the architect to read about it in a magazine fifteen months after the opening night.

Mr. Neville criticises the building and of course he is perfectly entitled to do so. In some specific cases he is careful to point out that the architect could not be blamed, implying that he could be in all others. This is misleading. For instance, both his criticisms of the small revolve and the depth of the fly tower are directly connected with the last minute change in the brief and the decision to scrap the waggon system asked for originally and for which the stage was designed.

He says the loges are not popular. Of course they are not if he insists on using them for picture frame productions. He should know that they are part of the so-called adaptability and are designed to be used for open stage productions only.

He complains about the noise from the workshop. A soundproof shutter, which was provided in the original design, was cut out for reasons of economy and can be installed at any time. This would help to shut off the noise.

Mr. Neville says the rehearsal room is inadequate. I agree. The simple reason is that space was limited by site and cost. Mr. Neville goes on to say that it "in no way resembles the size of the stage, even remotely" and that "there is no point in including a rehearsal room unless it resembles the size of the acting area". As the rehearsal room is the same size as the acting area this statement seems a little harsh.

When it comes to the question of dressing rooms, Mr. Neville becomes angry. He must not think that the reason why they have no windows is because architects are either stupid or callous. However misguided we might have been,

the windows were omitted because, due to the limitations of the site, only four of the twelve dressing rooms could have been given windows and these only at the expense of privacy. Instead of installing windows which would therefore have to be permanently obscured, we reluctantly decided to omit them. In the opinion of Mr. Neville, this was the wrong decision.

Mr. Neville says that he would prefer an auditorium seating 900 and without a balcony, but I very much doubt whether he is aware of the implications of such a request.

Lastly, Mr. Neville says that the building, because it is too "posh", keeps away the "working classes". What evidence has he to think that the working classes, in this country, go to the theatre: any theatre? Where were they in the old Playhouse? Nothing could have been less "posh" than that!

Yours etc.,

PETER MORO

LEICESTER and HAMPSTEAD

DEAR SIR,

I hope you will forgive me if I point out an error in Mr. Clive Perry's article in the April issue of TABS. Mr. Perry states of the Phoenix Theatre in Leicester "it must be the quickest built and cheapest professional theatre erected in Britain for a long time," while at the commencement of his article Mr. Perry states—"To show that a theatre can be built and put into working operation for a little under £30,000 is perhaps the main contribution that the Phoenix has made to the present crop of civic theatres."

May I point out that on December 16th, 1962 (the Phoenix opened on October 8th, 1963) *London's first civic theatre*, the Hampstead Theatre Club,* opened after only three months in construction and at a total cost of £17,000, furthermore, it was Mr. Derek Goodwin, then director of the Living Theatre at Phoenix, who persuaded a group of officials to visit Hampstead to see what the Hampstead Borough Council had achieved, and a visit to Hampstead and to Leicester reveals an architectural similarity of approach, while the Leicester paper carried the story of London's first civic theatre and urged Leicester to follow this example!

Yours etc.,

JAMES ROOSE EVANS

* *Described and illustrated in TABS, Vol 21, No. 1.*