

range of professionals as authors but was aimed at amateurs. By 1936 the separate articles, greatly enlarged plus much new material, were published as *Stage Lighting Principles and Practice*. I had something to do with this book in two ways. Firstly, Aldred was an engineer and believed that figures should be checked. The best place to do this was in the new Strand Electric demonstration theatre in Floral Street, of which I was the sole custodian and attendant. The second role for me was as inventor of the Light Console which was at the time in the theatre all polished and brand new from Compton's. Strand had not delivered (or completed) the dimmer bank, so nothing worked but no author of a new book dare neglect it. Thus it was that I found myself sitting alongside the great Harold Ridge on the console bench and explaining what it *would* do and how.

The young inventor holding forth confidently had no difficulty in convincing Ridge of the merits of the wonder machine. Every scrap of that loquacious confidence was extinguished two hours later in the Garrick – his first lunch in the awesome aura of a London club!

The three pages devoted to the invention begin "This Light Console is superior to any system that has been invented hitherto and is likely to hold the field for many years to come." And so on plus some of my very own words. And *nothing* had been demonstrated to work as yet. Such are the gambles that plague that author who would be up to date in a technical field. The console received its press launch in June 1935 and the book is dated 1936. So allowing for the slow process of book production the interview must have taken place in 1934 – certainly the four dials above the keyboards, in the photograph Pitmans used, are dummies painted-in.

It is a fact that a bit of lightning lighting invention took place at that interview long, long ago. Having heard the whole spiel, Ridge turned to me and asked how did one find out the level of individual dimmers. This had not been provided for. There were the four 'setters' (hence the four dials) to allow dropping-off at levels when setting from zero in a blackout or behind the tabs (I always intended to be out-front) but all the rest was intended to be judged by eye. If it looked right, it was right! However, if the great man wanted it, then individual dimmer readings there *had* to be. Instantly, I replied to the effect that you press the particular dimmer stopkey to second touch and read the result on one of the master dials.

That original Compton relay bore those hastily vamped-up extra contacts right up to its untimely end, accidentally at the hands of the refuse collector, just ten years ago. This brainwave was to stay right through the electro-mechanical era and indeed the germ remains in the centre push of the channel rockers on my last control – the DDM of 1972 at Stratford-upon-Avon.

During the war Harold Downs asked Harold Ridge to bring his old *Theatre and Stage* material up to date for an edition conceived as two fat volumes. In which case all the stage lighting would come together as one section instead of as a series of four-

page instalments. Ridge having been out of theatre for some years referred Downs to me. This could not have come at a better time. Condemned to a strict sanatorium regime at Midhurst extending uncertainly into infinity or limbo, here was something which could be done, and was, entirely from bed. The result was aimed wholly at amateur theatre. So far so good, but I had thought for some time of writing a comprehensive book and here was a nucleus to expand and better still, a publisher who might not need much persuasion.

On the sixth day of August 1946 a contract was signed for a work "entitled *Stage Lighting*" and with it went a small fortune – a £50 advance "on receipt and approval of the MS." The MS, diagrams and drawings were nearly complete when early in 1947 Pitmans published *The Technique of Stage Lighting* by R. Gillespie Williams and I thought my own book was sunk. Surely they would not run to two books on stage lighting. Pitmans would not realise that in Williams they had got hold of someone who *always* saw stage lighting in terms of colour changes! However, after some months the galleys began arriving, then the page proofs and there was the index to do. I am a great believer in a comprehensive index but they are a difficult job – especially in bed with an enormous window wide open to allow the wind to blow everything about. I stress the bed regime in this context because it does mean that the bulk of the book *Stage Lighting*, which was ultimately published in 1950, was written straight out of my head without any books of reference to hand or other means of checking anything. The delay caused by the Williams book turned out to be an advantage because I was able to substitute some last minute photographs of dimmer banks, light consoles not yet installed and add a two-page appendix to describe "Recent Progress". The picture of Electronic-Preset here was of the very first prototype with hand-made dimmer levers, and the 216-way Drury Lane Light Console was a scale model in wood and plaster made for me by my brother.

By the time the second edition came out in 1955 these things were facts. There were many more installations to photograph and it is these rather than large changes in the text which is the main feature. Working in type-metal imposed disciplines unknown in these days of computer setting and word-processors. Changes buried in the text had to be matched exactly in the existing space and the ends of chapters were happier areas for revision. Above all pagination must not be upset, due to the mass revision of the index this might entail. Television, although rating two minor entries in both editions thus far, secures a proper place in my pages in 1957. The happy days when Strand Electric was master in both theatre control and television control had begun. One more make do and mend edition follows, in 1961 I think, as I have no copy but remember putting the photograph of a 1961 C.D. console at Miskolc Hungary in it: though there must have been a few other changes as well. It was now time for a major re-write but being very busy indeed, the 'old' book got viewed as a youthful esprit best buried.

Goaded on by Percy Corry who said it was now or never and with the late 'B' Bear to help with proof reading and the index, the job was done fairly easily.

This edition of 1968 appeared under the new title of *The Art of Stage Lighting* and is, perhaps, my favourite of the whole series. It is a real book of the right size for any bookshelf and except in one respect makes a good comprehensive survey of what was then the technique of stage lighting, how it got there and where it was about to go. Solid state thyristor dimmer systems were well established, electro-mechanical ones on the way out and instant dimmer memory had *just* made its entry on the scene. There was the usual difficulty, neither my two (WHZ and IDM) nor Thorn's (Q-File) were anything but early prototypes. They were going far, obviously, but they had not really started as yet. I was very cagey about Q-File's numerical call-up, being a firm believer in my individual rocker tablet per channel, and felt it unlikely theatre would take to it! The weakness of this edition was the scanty treatment of what Richard Pilbrow called the multi-lantern complexity, the massed ranks of spotlights which started here with Joe Davis's versions for H. M. Tennant of the American lighting layouts for shows like *Death of a Salesman* (1949). Large layouts I did envisage, otherwise why a Light Console in the thirties suitable for 200 or so channels when sixty or so was considered large. I think it must be an instinctive distaste for all that *special* rigging and expensive labour for the lighting of *one* production only. Another instinct at work may be the original writing for amateurs who had little experience and money to deploy. Shades of my own amateur days and the unwritten law of the old Strand Electric: Is it necessary? If it is, then don't pay anyone to do it if you can possibly do it yourself! Another foible was the relatively large amount of space given over, in a book of stage lighting, to theatre architecture. Mind you, Ridge's own 1928 book had a chapter on "Design of the Theatre" and another on "The Next Theatre?" examining the Bel Geddes project.

What was a good idea in my 1968 edition, was the chapter headed "Equipment in Common Use". This enabled equipment of my own time, some of which might survive a long while yet, to be lumped together with that at any moment to become obsolete and the very latest about to be launched. However, by the time the 1976 edition came out the pace of equipment turnover had hotted-up so much that David Adams was right in declaring, in a review somewhere, the "in Common Use" part to be misleading. This I neatly corrected in the 1980 edition by changing the title of the chapter to "Equipment Around and About". The stuff simply *has* to survive; in museum store or hanging over the stage, the locus is immaterial. The amateur theatre is proving a great help in conservation. In some quarters there is a reaction against installing the 'latest' – as it is bound to be out of date in four years. Elderly, durable discards from professional theatres (which have had to succumb to the pressures of