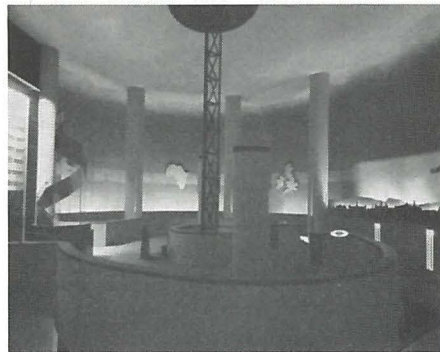


# A.D.MCMXXXVII – MCMLXXXVII

## Tabular Nostalgia from Fred Bentham

Fifty years ago in October 1937 a new 'journal' appeared. It was foully printed in house on an offset litho machine just acquired called a Rotaprint. There were twelve pages, of which one was blank, two had a schedule of hire charges and two formed the cover. In spite of the fact that it had an article "Introducing Mr. P. Corry" and his new Manchester branch and an anon one by myself "A New Lantern" introducing the Patt.73 Mirror Spot, who then could have predicted the role this tiny journal was to play and the run it was to enjoy. The idea that Strand should publish it originated with Hugh Cotterill; but the *inspired title* TABS came from James Twynam and the memorable front cover drawing from his freelance colleague Oxlade. Cotterill had turned up on the Strand Electric board one year earlier when the company had gone public. Prior to that he had been a well known member of Major Equipment; one of Strands' four real competitors and in consequence was then regarded with some distrust by the rest of

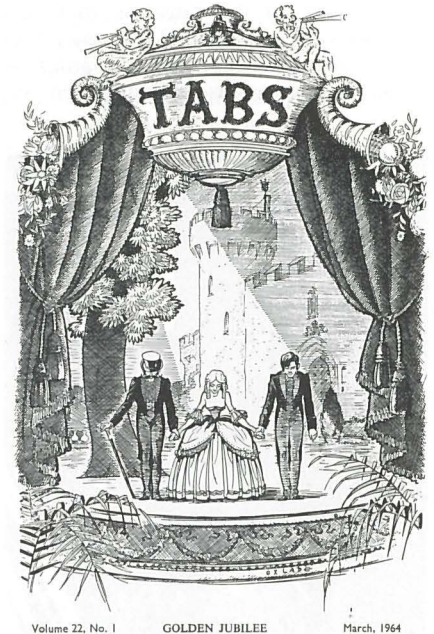
Prompting the memory with those pre-war issues of TABS I get the impression that the next three, each of twelve pages, also rolled off our Rotaprint. They are dated Nov.37, Jan.38 and April 38. The fifth issue was Vol.2 No.1, September 1938. This was professional job and looks it. There were 20 pages and at the very end there appears the code "8.5M 1626 W.P.938". The last is the date and the initials stand for Watkins-Pitchford, the firm James Twynam worked for at that time; but it is the "8.5M" which fascinates me. Is it really possible that after less than a year with four such simple issues



*The G.P.O. Pavilion at the Glasgow Exhibition 1938  
A professional job which never got a mention in Tabs.*

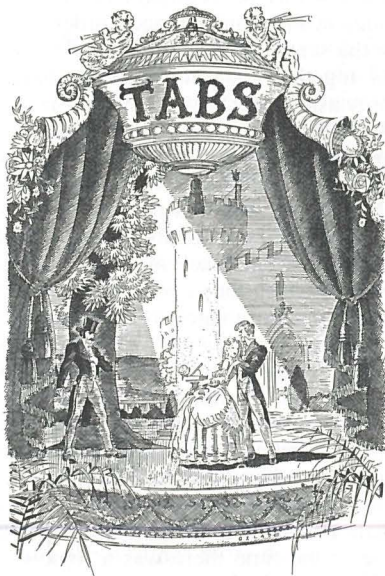
our directors thought it wise to print 8,500 copies of a free journal "Issued in the Interests of the Amateur Theatre". And it was just that: although Cotterill allowed descriptions of an occasional professional stage lighting job, such as the Wimbledon theatre and the Buxton Opera house, to appear; really big and ingenious jobs like those for 1938 Glasgow Empire exhibition did not rate an entry of any kind. TABS readers had to wait until the Golden Jubilee issue of March 1964 before they could read of the wonders we in Strand had performed up there! Right from the early 1920s Strand lighting had by no means been confined to the stage, hence my own use of the title *Theatrical Lighting* rather than Stage Lighting for the brand new Strand catalogue two years earlier.

The word "Amateur" was not dropped from "Published in the Interests of . . ." until Vol.17 No.3 in Dec.1959. This is in spite of a tribute from Eugene Braun, Chief Engineer Radio City Music Hall New York, printed in TABS seven years earlier which said "I want to express my appreciation for the many wonderful copies of TABS. I really enjoy reading the contents, since they are very interesting and informative. We have nothing here to compare with it and I would feel very let down if I could not look forward to its continued receipt." The issue



Volume 22, No. 1 GOLDEN JUBILEE March, 1964

*Our front cover characters take their curtain call for the Golden Jubilee number in 1964.*



*Tabs No.1. appeared in October 1937  
dedicated to the Amateur Theatre.*

us. For the record the other competition was Venreco and Holophane in London and Furse from Nottingham.

Except that it was in an atmosphere heavy with Hovis flour milling down by the river Thames in Millbank but a short step from Big Ben and all that, I am in a haze how Hugh Cotterill and James Twynam came together. To make all clear I have prevailed upon James to tell that story himself.

which dropped the "Amateur" at last was also the first ever to have a photograph on the front cover. A picture showing Patt.23s dumped in the snow during a get-in had turned up from Norway and was irresistible for a December issue. Our next cover photograph did not appear until June 1964; but this initiated regular use from then on. The honour fell to the Questors Ealing's production of *Brand* which opened their new theatre. By appropriate chance an *amateur* company's venture but introducing a pioneer form of theatre building.

This use of photographs was prompted by Sean Kenny remarking, as we sat in a taxi on the way to a meeting at the Arts Council, that he found it difficult to refer to back numbers because they all looked alike. It was news to learn that he read TABS, let alone kept them for reference. It is funny how we took it for granted that only amateurs could, or at any rate *would*, read our stuff. It was a tradition which never really died in the *old* Strand Electric that pros only responded to person to person contact. Electricians in their stage door pub as a matter of habit (this is a long time ago!) and 'top' brass in our demonstration theatre if we thought we had something to interest them or a special tryout rig for their new show. In fact the original Seecol theatre in Floral Street was constructed with that purpose in mind. Out in the auditorium there were only a dozen or so more or less