# CONTROL BOARD ALPHABET

Concluding Francis Reid's ABC for 1987

T is for **Twenty Nine King Street** so long the womb of British boards conceived by Applebee, Bentham and Woody out of Strand with Mansell and Leggett prominent among the midwives. T is also for the A5 **Tabs** which registered these births and recorded their philosophy. Its A5 blossomed into A4 on moving next door to number **Thirty Two**. It was a T called **Twynam** who put every Tabs to bed and then bestowed much of the Tabs spirit on Cue.

Teak boards took their name from the wood on which their slider resistance dimmers were mounted. The link between a liquid dimmer and its control handle was a **tracker wire** and these were also used for
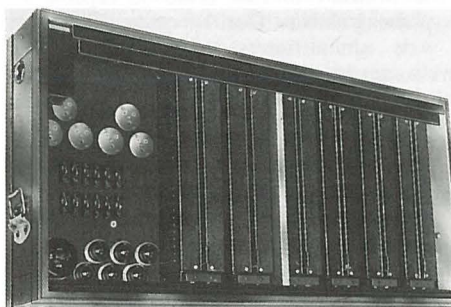
Teak Board

some other directly operated boards, particularly Bordonis (qv). **Tracking** is the means by which a computer board charts the progress of a channel's level through a sequence of cues. As a general matter of philosophy, American boards tend to compute changing levels whereas the Brits record complete states.

Transformer dimmers were load independent but expensive. **Thyratron valve dimmers** were also load independent
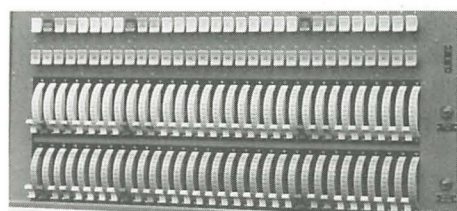
Tablet switches engraved with function or channel number.

but unstable. And their instability was of an unforgiveable kind: they failed on rather than off. Thyratrons chopped the waveform in the manner of the **Thyristor** which is very stable (to old board operators, almost to the point of boredom) and is the only dimmer

Getting a Threeset wing into Cheltenham Everyman Theatre

considered for the past twenty years except when finance dictates its **Triac** cousin.

Three-way **Tablet** switches, which eliminated labels by having space for engraved channel numbers, were used for forming groups on most of the Strand electronic boards of the 1950s and early 60s. **Threeset** provided three presets, each with three groups and (a victory for the user over Strand's then current Bentham philosophy) these groups could be formed independently within each preset rather than be common to all presets.

U is for **up-a-point**, perhaps the most frequent request from a lighting designer to a board operator.

V is for the thyratron **valves** and **variable loads** already mentioned. And it is for **variac**, the proprietary name for a brand of rotary autotransformers used at mains voltage as dimmers, and at low voltage for mastering choke boards with a large control current requirement.

W is for the **watering can** used for the daily maintenance of liquid dimmers by topping up the evaporation losses from prolonged running on check.

Woody was J. T. Wood whose 3-valve (one-per-phase) thyratron valve board of the early fifties, although somewhat prone to instability, opened a window on the future with its proportional crossfading between presets and its glimpse of the multi-presetting that would soon be computerised into infinite-presetting. As a pioneering exporter, Woody ensured that British stage lighting technology became familiar all over the world (Saloon bar mythology has him emerging from the sea, pattern 23 in one hand and sheet of cinemoid 17 in the other.)

Another Strand W is **Weston (Paul)** who has near witch-doctor powers (based on commonsense) for healing sick boards. Strong but totally unconfirmed rumours maintain that the processor racks at some early memory demonstrations contained nothing more memorable than Paul's own personal digits.

And, finally,

provided the standard group coding for boards with three groups per preset.

addendum
Many are the gaps in this ABC, particularly the exotic names bestowed upon today's boards. Before anyone else proclaims their most dastardly omission, let me offer mine. How did I ever miss out dimmer **curve** when so many of us spent so much of the sixties agonising over which law it should obey. (One day, Fred Bentham even lead us one-by-one into a darkened theatre to take a choose-the-curve test). I have always been happy enough with the S curve which is produced, so they tell me, by letting a dimmer do what comes naturally. But it's all old hat now that a board's software can allow each dimmer to have its own curve. I wonder if there are curve buffs who actually do this?