

The Trials of School Lighting Design

By A. K. WHITEHOUSE

Monday. Your very own amateur lighting designer and professional English teacher—let him be called Fred—had to take the register of a notorious fourth year class this morning. It was an omen. At 9.00, the S.M. informed him of the efficiency of British Rail—the Mini-2 had not arrived at the station. Phone calls to hire dept. showed that it had left Euston the previous Tuesday. Fred recalled the “Travel to London in ninety minutes” advertisements.

Tuesday. Fred actually did some teaching before wandering to the stage to welcome the (borrowed) lanterns—two 264’s, four 123’s, four 23’s. These all had 15a plugs. At lunchtime, he enjoyed himself changing these to 5a plugs. (NOTE—there is a stage in existence with 5a sockets, we have two of them—guided tours by appointment.) Then Fred started on the four long extensions, none of the 5a sockets terminated F.O.H., hence the extensions from old footlight traps on stage. At 1.25, Fred wanders off, leaving the A.S.M. to finish plug-changing. Thankfully he reflects that the cues are listed, and the plan is made. Even so, is it too much to ask to be able to work on a stage worthy of the name?

Wednesday. Having spent every available minute on stage (with no free periods), Fred is cursing the above A.S.M., who has found more sockets, with no indication of what is paired, or how. The Mini-2 is not yet installed, so the tech. run and first dress

rehearsal are again postponed. Fred arrives home exhausted, and does not relish a later night tomorrow, most of which will be spent tracing circuits and re-routing extensions. He is boosted by one thought—by eight o’clock tomorrow, all will be well.

Thursday. A few problems met with installation. Red Tape had told Fred months ago, that the supply was 60amp. Fred’s reaction can be imagined on being told by the same R. Tape that the supply is thirty amps. Unofficial opinion from amused observers is that that is a mighty big cable for a 30amp supply. Anyway, he can now only use six channels, one rack. And having calculated on ten channels, or possibly eight, this will mean one of two things. Either the production relies on the two 264’s for all front lighting (ludicrous), or Fred must cut out 2kw of on stage lighting (better, but it removes virtually every special, subtle effect).

Friday. A happier day, if you can ignore the lamp in the 264 that blew this afternoon. No spares, of course. Nevertheless, Fred was happy, since, for the first time, lanterns actually lit! A preview of things to come, when Fred experimented with a subtractive mixture of steel/cyan in one flood. There ensued a fifteen minute “discussion” with the producer, who never envisaged the inside of Newgate Gaol as being remotely sinister. Eventually, Fred got a word in sideways, and revealed

that he never intended to use that anyway, his target being a broken colour arrangement.

Saturday. Fred modifies the lighting once more. After a leisurely day of angling and colouring, the other 264 blew its lamp—Fred suspects two cases of borrowed old age. The fuse replaced, he decides to use two 123’s in the place of the 264’s, and to use the other front lighting more. 3kw lighting out front, and a batten and two floods on stage.

Sunday. A welcome day off.

Monday. A tech. run, at last, showed Fred to be right—4kw is the minimum front lighting in the average school. He soldiered on, however, losing virtually all the subtle changes, because the extra light just was not to be had. It was generally agreed that the front lighting was pretty poor, though the hastily-angled 123’s did little to improve it. And a headmaster advising Fred of the last-named fact, did little to improve Fred’s temper. Fred was happy now about the broken colour floods for Newgate, and the producer approved to the extent of making it more sinister than even he had dreamt!

Tuesday. A pleasant day. Fred was able simply to wander around during the rehearsals doing nothing but ponder on the dress rehearsal after school. Not a bad run, either, since the desk control was now backstage and Fred could see nothing on stage. Except for a few late cues, all was at last well.

Wednesday. First night, and the first time with something less than daylight outside. Fred, operating, made 1½ errors—a section of the stage was left at 4 instead of 7 on the dimmer, and on one fade, he hesitated, but did not stop, when things seemed to go a little too dark!

Thursday. A perfect run. Audience reaction was much better, although some ad libs earned the actors concerned a roasting from the producer. Lighting was faultless.

Friday. Last night. One error at the very opening spoils a repeat of last night, but it was the type of error that would only be noticed by someone who was there before. After that, it was faultless until the curtain calls, controlled by lighting, since the curtains had been removed. The S.M. had been cueing Fred very well, if rather dramatically, and the appearance of the producer just as he was going to do so once more, froze both S.M. and lighting. She gave a cue vaguely aimed at someone, and the resulting confusion can be imagined, as Fred ignored all signals and went through the calls, regardless of happenings on stage. Nevertheless, it was a success, as shown by the remark of the producer, as she had emerged from the audience at the interval, “Fantastic! I haven’t recognised it as the same thing!”

PS. On returning the control to the station, enquiries revealed the presence of the first control. The evidence of British Rail seemed to indicate that not only had it arrived on time, but Fred had never phoned about it, and as predicted by the Hire Dept., they were throwing the blame around like a terrified skunk!

