



Cavalcade—Drury Lane 1931.

circuit instead of the usual practice of a common return." A revealing glimpse of early wiring practice.

George Wright the present chief electrician at the Lane recalls that they used to duck each time a board fuse blew and showered them with molten lead. Everything was open-front and the fuses merely wire stretched across two terminals. A voltage of 100 DC was not regarded as dangerous but could draw juicy great arcs when a circuit was broken. I well remember my own first sight of the old Drury Lane intake. It was quite awful, as the photograph reproduced on the previous page will confirm. The room was very damp and the walls carried a mixture of old and not quite so old switchgear. The prize exhibit was a large

open knife DP change-over switch. It belonged to the days when there were a number of separate generating stations. If one failed then the whole installation could go over to another though the duty of operating this switch can have been no sinecure!

In keeping track of the history of stage lighting it works out very conveniently that Brian Legge is interested in pre-1914 whereas I concern myself with that time onward—the age of the Strand Electric. Most of this I can cover from my own experience—first as a schoolboy hooked on stage lighting and then actively employed therein. Memory can be an unreliable witness however, but a complete set of Strand's press books and much other

archive material is there to prompt and correct.

The first mention of Drury Lane in Strand Electric's own publicity was in an advertisement of April 1927 where it headed a list of "Latest Contracts". Tracking this down I find that the contract was for "Sunray footlight and battens". The next record, a single advertisement only in the now defunct *T.M.A. Journal* of November 1931 is of "Electrically operated colour changing spotlights" for Noel Coward's *Cavalcade*. There were 26 of these mounted in an ugly sheet metal housing on the dress circle front. The spots were focus lamps with 10" x 6" plano lenses and semaphore frames operated by four large and heavy solenoids. They were 1,000 W and each was individually controlled both in respect of colour-change and dimming but it is difficult to believe that they were used this way very much. Any way they had their own special board. All that can be said with safety is that in shows like *Oklahoma* and *Carousel* they moved en-masse fully frontal, so to speak; but that is to jump ahead.

Even odder is the reference in *The Stage Guide* of 1946 to "Cyclorama top lighting with 36 floods coupled to 36 dimmers." One suspects that this bank of Schwabe lamps was a relic of Basil Dean's 1924 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* but—separate dimmers to each flood! The rest of the same summary leaves much to question. The four-circuit footlight and the ten 3-circuit battens all with independent dimmers is fair enough but what can one make of "All dips with ind. dimmers, all dips switch controlled." How many were there and why were they alone singled out as switch controlled? The final line of the entry is indeed a proud one;—"Any requirements can be provided for."

The special board for the *Cavalcade* circle spots had been made by Strand and put in the only position available—across the switchboard room opening, thus denying the operators any view whatever during the years that followed. Space was so tight,



Light console at Drury Lane 1950–1976 showing observation window on operator's left.