



Return of the Thorndike

The Thorndike Theatre in Leatherhead, Surrey, was opened by Dame Sybil Thorndike in 1969. Designed by Roderick Ham, the theatre was built and funded with enthusiastic support from local theatre groups, and went on to become an ambitious and high profile producing theatre. Its manager and founder, Hazel Vincent Wallace, was able to woo well-known actors and directors from London to create some remarkable productions.

At its height, the Thorndike Theatre's club had 12,000 members; it was described as 'a jewel of a theatre'. But despite the fact that houses were largely full, the economics of regional theatre meant that there was a dependence on subsidy and local grants. Inevitably there was never enough, and it was eventually closed down in 1997. Only the building's Grade 2 listing saved it from demolition.

But late last year, following six months of refurbishment work, the Thorndike re-opened as a working theatre under the ownership of a Christian organisation, Pioneer People, who took out a 15-year lease in April 2001. Now called simply 'The Theatre', the venue will play host to a mixture of performances and community projects, as well as conferences, corporate events, cinema and worship.

LIGHTING

PP's technical manager, Michael Forestier-Walker, found a theatre that had suffered leaks and an infestation of pigeons. The clean up was no small task. For the replacement of the lighting installation, he turned to experienced lighting designer Richard Horley. Horley's design work includes visitor attractions such as the Jorvik Viking Centre in York when it received its 10-year makeover in 2001, television work with MTV and live touring - he is just about to hit the road as LD with girl band Atomic Kitten. Horley recalls: "I went in to look at the existing equipment, which was the original 1960s Strand system (80 channels), but with numerous additions and changes over the decades."

On top of this, there was evidence of some work abandoned half-way through: "The hard wiring was hanging out of a number of places that it



clearly shouldn't have been and a whole new patch and plug system had been half-fitted and then left, just to make it more interesting!" Under the circumstances, the first step was clear: in Horley's words: "We ripped the whole lot out and started from scratch."

Budgets were tight, and Horley was quick to settle on a suitable dimming system. He explains: "I specified three new Anytronic Contractor 24 dimmers as the best value for money dimming system available. I've used them on a number of other venues - they're easy to install, with a clever initial hanging bracket system and lots of room to terminate your cables! The MCBs plus the RCD option are a nice finish!"

Horley then went on to design and specify Andolite Ceeform and Socapex break-out box layouts to distribute the dimming feeds via the existing box trunking around the venue. When it came to lighting fixtures, Horley and Forester-Walker had to look for the best possible deals on second-hand equipment.

Horley says: "I sent Michael off to Entec and he came back with three Clay Paky Golden Scan HPEs! Cerebrum LTG [Lighting Technology Group] supplied budget Italian Pars and all the Andolite gear, plus all those useful items such as Ceeform plugs, lamps, DMX cable, etc.

"Point Source's Ben Marshall used to work at the Thorndike and was a mine of useful information. He had obviously been following the auctions and supplied a large number of Sil 30s and Patt 743s, which Michael is a fan of (showing his age! Sorry Michael) I wanted to put in Source Fours but you don't see too many of those available second-hand yet!"

The issue of lighting control was more involved, as Horley explains: "Michael wasn't sure exactly what he wanted. I put him in touch with various suppliers, sent him a host of brochures and had a series of very long phone calls. I finally packed him off to the PLASA Show with a list of stands to visit and there he made the final decision to buy an ETC Express 24, while my existing Pulsar Masterpiece 108 served for the Golden Scans."

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