

Throwing light on the subject

By ROB MILDON

Two weeks ago [*Guardian*, Oct 13], Leo Bolter told us the tale of the Opera House's old Kliegl Brothers spotlights, and how one of them was inscribed with someone's initials, someone whom he suspected was a past operator of the lights.

This week the puzzle solved itself, as Feilding man Terry Reed, upon reading the *Guardian*, put his hand up as the mystery initialiser.

He operated the spotlights at the Opera House from 1961 to 1966.

First working with lighting for the Rongotea Operatic Society, Mr Reed was asked to help out at the Little Theatre on Main Street. After the setup "they turned to me and said, 'what do you reckon?'" he recalls. "So I got thrown in the

deep end there with a few shows."

His expertise led to being called in as an emergency relief spotlight operator at the Opera House, and things went from there.

"I was very nervous - like all jobs - when you get thrown into something like that, until you do it a few times and it becomes second nature."

During rehearsals and shows, Mr Reed would be in the spot box for about three hours.

"It was hot!" he says. "You always took your jersey off."

It was he who modified the lights with the additional metal baffles discovered by Mr Bolter, "to keep the heat away from your face."

The carbon rods maintaining the bright electrical arc had to be constantly adjusted too; one set would last only a single show.

The spot operators had to help with the show packouts as well. With acts like the Ice-Field Follies, where the whole stage was iced over, this was no small job.

"We were there until about two in the morning," says Mr Reed. "All that ice had to be broken up."

The job wasn't without its small luxuries, though.

The carbon rods would take a quarter hour or so to warm up before the curtain rose, so Mr Reed would use the time to have tea, right there in the box.

Once the show started and the temperature rose, he'd quench his thirst with beer, smuggled in in his toolbox!

Receiving the princely sum of one pound per show, Mr Reed considered himself well-paid: it was enough money to put six gallons of petrol in his car.