

1066 and all that

Once upon a time there was a stage lighting firm renowned for its equipment, or some of it, but which cast a blight over all with its strange irregular reference numbering. Thus there were Pattern 23s, 49s, 73s, 50s, all of which defied classification by those who wanted to classify them, but those who wanted to use them for lighting found that in their perverse way these numbers were memorable—indeed they became hallowed by tradition. Is there a lighting man alive whose soul is not still stirred one way or another at the number twenty-three? In overdue course reference numbers were devised for accessories. However, it was desirable to state, when ordering, in plain if abbreviated English what the thing—subject of the order—was. Cases of duplication were not unknown and there was always the peril of a slip; thus instead of a *Patt.* 137 flood one might receive a *Ref.* 137 snow effect.

Customers of a classificatory kind used to frown on these old *laissez faire* ways and wonder when some organisation was going to come in and take a hand. Well it has and has; of the result we can now report. Our catalogue price list bears an imposing new array of numbers—everything being treated alike. The basis is a seven digit code thus: instead of a *Patt.* 23 one simply orders a 20 01 003 or instead of a *Patt.* 23 W (wide angle) it is memorably a 20 01 405 which hangs from a 26 483 07 clamp, while the beam is daintily tinted with a 31 359 04 10 pink or according to dramatic need a 31 359 04 40 blue.

The observant will notice that now for colour we have grown two extra digits—the seven digit code only tells us that it is a piece of Cinemoid of a particular size—should one require it to be coloured then a further two digits are of course needed. For many purposes a 20 06 00T spot would be better in which case we should still need 26 483 07 to hang it, but our pink becomes 31 401 09 10, and of course we might need a 26 484 02 and a 26 626 09 if our *Patt.* 123, for that is what it is, were to be used on a stand from floor level instead.

A scrutiny of these new reference

numbers suggests that the main difference from their predecessors is the fact that they consist of seven digits instead of just two or three. Picking the code numbers for the seven variants of what we used to call a *Patt.* 23 seems to have been left to ERNIE. Working on the hypothesis that in an organisation there is organised thinking, and with Rene Cutforth's BBC television programme *The Codebreakers* in mind, we set out to break this particular code. Alas, we have to confess that even with a 41-page explanation of what it all meant before us we did not succeed. To take a simple case, the three sizes of Fresnel spots 500, 1,000 and 2,000 watt are respectively 20 06 00T, 20 11 008, 20 13 203. Why? How comes it that among a wholly numerical code a "T" crops up from time to time in the last column? It is no help to be told that the last column is only for the computer—we still have to get it correct when using the code because this single figure tells the computer that we have got the other figures right. Obviously it is no good having those figures right if the wrong last figure leads the computer to assume we have the right figures wrong. Likewise a right last figure is useless if any of the ones that are left were wrong. A cautionary tale indeed.

There are some, believe it or not, who find seven figure code numbers not easily memorable and it may help them to know that we would have had a nine figure code but for the firm stand taken by the man who has a finger in our index.

Balked of their public prey "the organisers" go to work in private adding digits here and there and almost everywhere. Thus that nice 31 359 04 40 mentioned has three extra digits put on it to show which representative sold that piece of blue Cinemoid. Of users we have 57 varieties, so a further two digits are slapped on, and for all we know the codemakers have a four-digit word for us. Who are "us" by the way? Breaking our traditional anonymity in this area of TABS we are 11280450230715 %72201009P400004328... or so the Electricity Board's computer tells us at the bottom of our quarterly bill.