

# **Strand Electric - Hessenbruch GmbH,** **the early days of Strand Electric in Germany**

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## **Abstract**

After World War 2, the British theatre lighting company, Strand Electric and Engineering Company Ltd, started to develop a network of overseas agents and companies. In 1955 an agency was started in Germany, but due to the dominance of the incumbent suppliers, little was expected of it. In the same period, from the ashes of WW2, a small German theatre lighting company was started by lighting director Karl Hessenbruch, initially using ex-naval equipment. Hessenbruch's business flourished but was cut short by his early death. Strand and its German agent bought the company to strengthen Strand's German position, renaming it 'Strand Electric – Hessenbruch'. However just three years later Strand was purchased by the Rank Organisation, leading to further reorganisation. The existence and activities of Strand Electric - Hessenbruch are almost unrecorded in British archives, thus this paper explores the events leading up to the Hessenbruch takeover and the company's subsequent but short life.

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## **1. Introduction**

The British theatre lighting supply company ‘Strand Electric and Engineering Company Limited’, with the distinct roundel trademark shown in the label of Figure 1, was formed in 1914. After World War 2 it expanded its business internationally through a network of agencies and wholly owned subsidiaries. It was purchased by the Rank Organisation in 1968, who in turn divested it to a venture capital group in 1996. The UK business closed in 2006, though the brand name continues to be used. The company had been responsible for many innovations in the theatre lighting, thus recording and the preserving the archives has become important to provide a resource for today’s students, theatre technicians and designers [1].

In May 2020, a curator at the Gerriets Schweinwerfermuseum sent the author a picture of an old Strand effects disc to identify, shown in Figure 1 [2]. This displayed the Strand Electric roundel, but its design did not match any of the Strand effects discs catalogued. A subsequent close-up image of the label also showed the name ‘Strand Electric-Hessenbruch’, previously unknown to the author. The Strand archives at the UK Backstage Heritage Collection only refer to Gerd Ohlmer setting up a Strand agency in Germany, initially for Cinemoid [1].



**Figure 1. Strand Electric-Hessenbruch effects disc with rating label**

Further research, particularly using the searchable archive of the Deutschen Theater-technischen Gesellschaft (BTHG) and their journal Bühnentechnische Rundschau (BTR), revealed some elements of Strand’s early days in Germany [3]. This paper provides a resultant outline of Strand Electric and Engineering Company Ltd’s representation in Germany up to the conclusion of the take-over by Rank Organisation.

## **2. Strand’s German Market before the 1950s**

Before World War 2 and until the 1950s there is little evidence of Strand actively marketing to Germany. German municipal theatre and its lighting was already a sophisticated technological subject, with respected national authorities such as technical director Max Hasait and Professors Adolf Linnebach and Walter Unruh [4]. The major industrial suppliers, AEG and Siemens-Schuckertwerke, both provided complete theatre lighting systems, while

many smaller specialist manufacturers such as initially Schwabe then Reiche & Vogel ensured that foreign competition found little niche opportunity.

In contrast Strand focused on meeting the needs principally of the commercial London theatre market followed by the British regional and amateur stage, all notable for their economy in expenditure rather than technical excellence. Bentham [5] recounts how John Christie in the 1930s, when contemplating building his own theatre to emulate German opera performances, found how *'unsuitable Strand equipment was for his opera house'*; something that Bentham privately agreed with. When one contrasts the mechanical complexity and size of such as the Strand Grand Master control with the presettable sophistication of the Siemens Bordon control, it is easy to see the chasm in technology.

After WW2, Strand realised that to expand the business meant exporting, especially since the UK economy remained parlous. Prior to the war the sole agency was in Portugal, however by 1957, Strand's catalogue listed overseas subsidiary companies in Ireland and Canada, together with agencies in 39 other countries [6]. Despite this impressive list, Strand then only employed one dedicated export sales manager J. T. Wood, who had developed Strand's thyatron-based 'Electronic' dimmer [7]. Significant overseas sales of the Electronic dimmer occurred between 1949-1954, though none to Germany. Hamburg Opera did request an Electronic dimmer system in 1954, but were refused on the grounds that the system would be too large<sup>1</sup> [7]. The principal 1950s -1960s Strand lighting sales to Germany were to the new TV studios.

### **3. Diedr. Buschmann, the first Strand German Representative**

Strand's representation started in Germany in 1955, selling Cinemoid colour filters through the wholesale chemist 'Diedrich Buschmann', Pharmazeutischer Großhandel, Scharnstrasse 4, Braunschweig. The agent there was their traveling salesman, Gerhard E. Ohlmer, known to all as Gerd Ohlmer (Figure 2). He was asked by a scene designer friend if he could import 'Cinemoid' colour filter material, and consequently requested and was appointed as Strand Electric's German agent for colour filters [7, 8]. Bentham [5] reports that Ohlmer was personally interested in opera and ballet and spoke perfect English, having lived in Britain between the wars at a school in Harrow. He also records Ohlmer *'on his own initiative, began taking sheets of Cinemoid and Patt. 23 spots around Germany in his VW Beetle. He soon became Strand's official agent,'* [9]. German filter sales became considerable, since Ohlmer did not limit his commercial territory to just Germany, but roamed over much of central Europe including Austria, Hungary and Poland promoting Strand products [5, 7].

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<sup>1</sup> They turned instead to AEG who obliged by designing a complete new system.



**Figure 2. Gerhard E. Ohlmer, c1912–1986 [10]**


Strand subsequently exhibited at the Bühnentechnische Tagung (BTT) in Hamburg in June 1956, and were able to secure a correspondence committee place on a panel discussing colour filter standardisation [11]. The first Strand advertisement in BTR was in 1960, when Buschmann advertised the ill-fated Strand K.T.V. system (aka ‘Klonk’) [12]. The system had also been exhibited in 1959 at BTT in Mannheim. In the advertisement shown in Figure 3, Buschmann claims to be the sole German agency and also states:

*‘As the first company in the world, on April 29, 1959, in a London demonstration theatre, constructed and exhibited its latest development to a gathering of 110 professionals for stage and television studio lighting.’*

The London demonstration was at Strand’s demonstration theatre in King Street. Bentham [5] afterwards decided that K.T.V. was a non-starter for theatre and TV, even coining the name ‘Klonktechnischewerk’ in an act of disrespect for it<sup>2</sup>. None were sold. Buschmann continued as the listed German agent in the 1963/64 Strand catalogue [13].

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<sup>2</sup> The system used punched cards for memory and buttons to select dimmers.



**THE STRAND ELECTRIC & ENGINEERING Co., Ltd.,**

konstruierte und zeigte als erste Firma in der Welt am 29. April 1959 im eigenen Vorführtheater in London einer Versammlung von 110 Fachleuten für Bühnen- und Fernsehstudiobeleuchtung ihre neueste Entwicklung:

Diese Stellwarte wurde für die Lichtsteuerung von Bühne und Fernsehstudio konstruiert. Sämtliche beleuchtungstechnischen Vorgänge, deren Gruppenkopplung und Stimmungen, sowie die Geschwindigkeit des Ablaufes werden auf Hollerith-Lochkarten vollautomatisch registriert und auf Stellwarte wieder ausgelöst. Der automatische Ablauf kann in jedem Augenblick manuell unterbrochen oder in einzelnen



nen Vorgängen verändert werden. Bei großen Stellwarten läßt sich die Anzahl der Stellhebel auf dem Pult durch ein Auswahlssystem auf eine leicht übersehbare Anzahl reduzieren, so daß ein Pult wie das abgebildete mit nur 20 zusätzlichen Leuchtdrucktasten 250 Stromkreise kontrolliert. Ohne Lochkarten arbeitet dieses Kontrollpult mit allen bekannten Vorteilen des „Strand Electric Systems“.

**STELLWARTE „STRAND ELECTRIC SYSTEM K.T.V.“**  
 vollautomatische Bühnenlichtsteuerung mit Lochkarten

Den Besuchern der Bühnentechnischen Tagung in Mannheim vom 27. - 30. Juli 1959 vorgeführt

Deutsche Alleinvertretung  
**DIEDR. BUSCHMANN - BRAUNSCHWEIG-SCHARRNSTRASSE 4**  
 Telefon: 2 32 49 u. 2 11 51 - Telegramm: Cinemoid

Figure 3. Advert for Strand K.T.V system in BTR 1960 [12]

Also in 1963, a sales assistant was hired to assist Ohlmer, Heinz-Jürgen Fritz [14], then aged 24. He stayed with Ohlmer, eventually replacing him in 1975.

#### 4. Karl Hessenbruch

Karl Hessenbruch was born c1904 in Remscheid, a small Rhineland town in Germany, and worked from 1923–1943 as lighting director at the Stadttheater Remscheid. World War 2 led to the destruction of both his and many other German theatres, thus after the war he set up a workshop for the production of theatre spotlights [15].



Figure 4. Karl Hessenbruch, c1904–1963 [16]

The 1946 DTHG timeline (in translation) provides a very complete description of the emergence of Karl Hessenbruch's business [17].

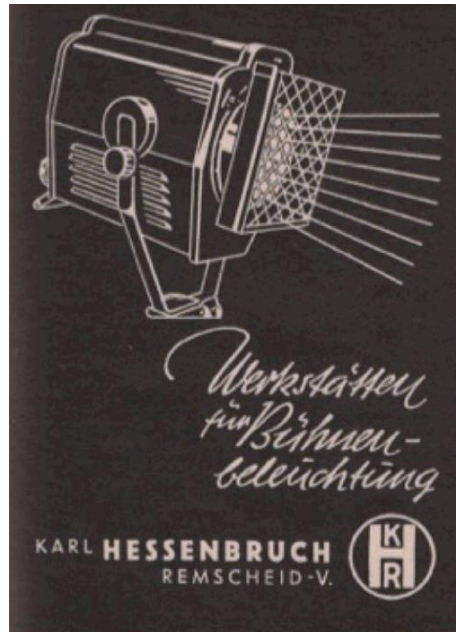
*'After WW2 repairs had to be carried out in the theatres in Berlin, which had suffered the most from the effects of the war, though materials were very sparse. In this emergency period, the low-voltage lamp was discovered as a replacement for the spotlight assembly. In northern Germany in particular, there were good relationships with shipping and the navy stationed there. This resulted in the discovery of signal lights used in maritime navigation for Morse code, etc. These devices were equipped with parabolic mirror reflectors which amplified the light source from mirrored low-voltage lamps (12 or 24 V). This resulted in a tightly bundled but very intensely illuminated beam of light, which could cover large distances. These spotlights were operated via associated transformers.*

*Disadvantages were the too small radius of the light circle at short distances and the non-adjustability of the optical system, but were compensated by the great robustness of the devices and the long service life of the lamps, which were also insensitive to transport. For this reason, large amounts were used in the theatres in the form of light battens, side by side, at the same time and thus gave a well-lit scene. Since the naval holdings were disbanded immediately after the end of the war, the lighting colleagues at the coastal locations primarily stocked up with such low-voltage spotlights and exchanged such devices nationwide for special light bulbs for other stage lights that were still needed. Initially, everything ran at black market prices or as exchange transactions. The situation was recognized by a former professional colleague who had set up his own small mechanical workshop in Göttingen after the war, called Karl Hessenbruch. From these purely military low-voltage spotlights, he developed the low-voltage spotlights most commonly used for theatres from then on for stage lighting purposes, by making the lamp adjustable in relation to the mirror and thus achieving a change in the diameter of the light beam, even if only slightly. These spotlights that he specialised in achieved a high market share and very quickly became established as stage lighting devices on the market. Only later did the established stage lighting companies take up this principle and produce such spotlights for 12 & 24 V, with power levels of 250 W, 500 W and finally 1000 W.'*

By 1949 Hessenbruch was able to advertise in BTR, offering 'Special workshop for Stage Lighting' [18]. In 1950 he issued a 12 page catalogue listing ramps (battens), lens spotlights, profile spotlights, effect projectors, acting area lights and of course horizont (cyclorama) lights, but curiously no low-voltage spotlights [19]. Hessenbruch routinely advertised through the 1950s, offering lighting for 'Stage, Variety and Cinema', and by 1956 was also selling his own projection systems [20].

With increasing orders he moved to Giessen, building his own factory in 1957 and in 1962 advertised 'Specialist workshops for contemporary stage lighting, design, planning and advice' [21]. In an undated (probably around 1958-60) catalogue from Karl Hessenbruch, Giessen, the range has expanded to occupy 46 pages. The designs have also changed to more rectangular shapes (easier to manufacture) and now include an extensive range of low-voltage spotlights, mirror controlled follow-spots and even tracker wire controlled colour changers [22].





**Figure 5. Hessenbruch BTR advertisement, 1953 [23]**

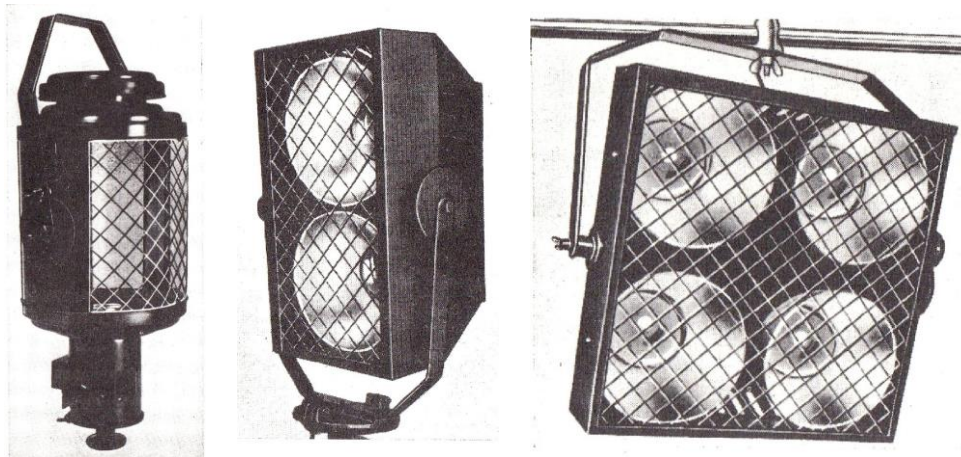
The company made many types of luminaires and effects systems, with surviving examples recorded in some German web pages, shown in in Figure 6. Samples also exist in the Gerriets spotlight museum. such as the classic low voltage (24 V) parabolic spotlight shown in Figure 7 (left) [2]. The extent of the range is illustrated in Figure 6 to Figure 9.



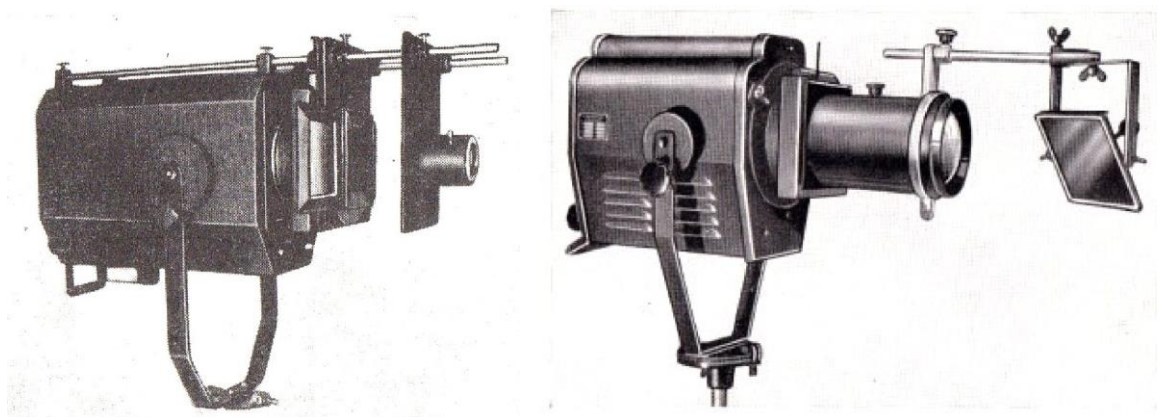
**Figure 6. Hessenbruch Giessen surviving luminaires, Spielfläckenscheinwerfer (acting area) (left) [24], Linsenscheinwerfer (PC) (right) [25]**



**Figure 7. Hessenbruch LV parabolic spotlights from 1960's  
500 W (left) [2], 500 W with built-in transformer (mid) [22], and 1000 W (right) [22]**



**Figure 8. Hessenbruch horizont (cyclorama) luminaires [22]  
1000 W (left), 2x500 W (mid) and 4x5000 W (right)**



**Figure 9. Hessenbruch projection luminaires [22]  
3000-5000 W (left) and 1000-2000 W with optional mirror follow-spot (right)**



Karl Hessenbruch died unexpectedly in 1963. His achievements as lighting designer, mechanic and manager were recognised in an obituary in BTR (summarised in translation below) [16]. The company workforce was reported as continuing to operate the business.

*On May 10, 1963, the lighting engineer and owner of the well-known company, Mr. Karl Hessenbruch, died unexpectedly in Gießen, at the age of 59. For 20 years, from 1923 to 1943, Karl Hessenbruch worked as lighting director at the Stadttheater Remscheid, his hometown. Immediately after the war he began to rebuild the theatre, destroyed due to the effects of the war, on make-shift stages in his hometown. At the same time he set up a workshop for the production of spotlights that were missing everywhere in the Rhineland at the time. He was tireless in the help he gave, under the most difficult circumstances. The production of low-voltage spotlights soon found interest in professional circles, orders rose and in 1957 the company moved into prestigious new works in Gießen.*

*Some 23 years of practical stage life and 17 years serving industrial work from the workbench, the vice and the drill was given to this man, his own designer and mechanic, foreman and commercial manager. He achieved a reputation that can no longer be imagined in the history of stage technology. The stage lighting technicians of the Rhineland, to whom he was a respected friend and helper, and the experts, will never forget Karl Hessenbruch.'*

## **5. Strand Electric - Hessenbruch GmbH<sup>3</sup>**

It is recorded in one of Strand's histories that this agency was started in 1955 in a town called Hessenbruch [26]. This is erroneous, no such town exists in Germany. The first contemporary evidence of Strand and Hessenbruch combining comes from Tabs in 1965 [27]:

*'The firm of Karl Hessenbruch (63) Geissen/Lahn, Siemenstrasse 21, will in future manufacture stage lighting as Strand Electric Bühnenbeleuchtung GmbH under the direction of Herr. Gerd Ohlmer of Diedr. Buschmann, Braunschweig, Strand agents in Germany.'*

This was reportedly the initiative of Ohlmer [10]. Similarly, the DTG chronicles for 1965 report (in translation) [15]

*'Due to the expansion of the German market, Strand Electric took over Karl Hessenbruch in Gießen, which was sold after the death of its owner, as a manufacturing plant for the German-speaking market under the company name: Strand Electric Bühnenbeleuchtung GmbH under the direction of Gerd Ohlmer.'*

However in December 1965 BTR still carried separate advertisements for Karl Hessenbruch and Strand Electric (agent Buschmann) [28]. By 1966, the Strand Catalogue (1968 but dated September 1966 on the relevant page) listed Strand Electric - Hessenbruch GmbH as agent in Giessen, [29]. It thus appears that the name 'Strand Electric Bühnenbeleuchtung GmbH' was

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<sup>3</sup> GmbH is abbreviation for Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung, equivalent to Limited Company in UK.

never used. Strand's magazine 'Tabs' started listing Strand Electric-Hessenbruch as a subsidiary on the back page in September 1967 [30].

**SCHEINWERFER UND LICHTSTEUERUNG**

**FRESNEL-SPOT**  
Modell 123 250/500W  
Modell 223 750/1000W  
Modell 243 1000/2000W

**SPIEGEL-SPOT**  
Modell 23/S 250/500W  
Modell 263 750/1000W  
Modell 253 1000/2000W

**STRAND ELECTRIC**  
baute und lieferte die ersten grossen Lichtsteuerungen mit 5-kW-"SENIOR"-Thyristoren in Europa. Jetzt liefert die STRAND ELECTRIC als einzige Firma zusätzlich 2-kW-"JUNIOR"-Thyristoren.

**JTM--JUNIOR**  
Verdunkelschrank mit entfernter Frontplatte für 20 x 4-kW-Thyristoren.  
Grösse: 950mm breit, 220mm tief, 1570mm hoch.

**TM--SENIOR**  
Verdunkelschrank mit je 20x5-kW-Thyristoren, ein Thyristorgerät herausgezogen.  
Grösse: 1120mm breit, 850mm tief, 1800mm hoch.

**JUNIOR LICHTSTEUERUNGEN**  
für 20 Regierstufen, Komplet mit 2 Lichtertrichterstellungen sind sehr preisgünstig.  
Grösse: 680mm breit, 530mm hoch, 330 tief.

**FÜR BÜHNEN UND TV STUDIOS**

**NIEDERVOLT-SPOT** NVA 500w 24v

**LINSE-SCHEINWERFER MIT PROJEKTIONS VORSATZ** SWP 2000w

**HORIZONT-VERSATZLEUCHTE** HOV 2 x 500w

**VERFOLGER--SCHEINWERFER**  
Modell 23N/RH 250/500W  
Modell 293 1000/2000W

**PROJEKTIONS--APPARAT**  
PRO 53 3000w  
PRO 54 5000w

**SENIOR LICHTSTEUERUNG**  
Lichtsteuerung mit 4 Lichtertrichterstellungen und Leuchtstufen-Gruppenanzeige für 120 oder 240 Verdunkelstufen.

**STRAND ELECTRIC--HESSENBRUCH**  
63 Giessen/Lahn, Siemensstrasse 21 (neues Industriegebiet)  
Telefon Ruf 7 64 35.

**DIEDR. BUSCHMANN**  
38 BRAUNSCHWEIG, Scharnhorststrasse 4,  
Telefon 21191, Telegramme: Chemold

**FIRMA W. EICHENBERGER**  
ZÜRICH 8, Cressstrasse 21,  
Telefon 247286

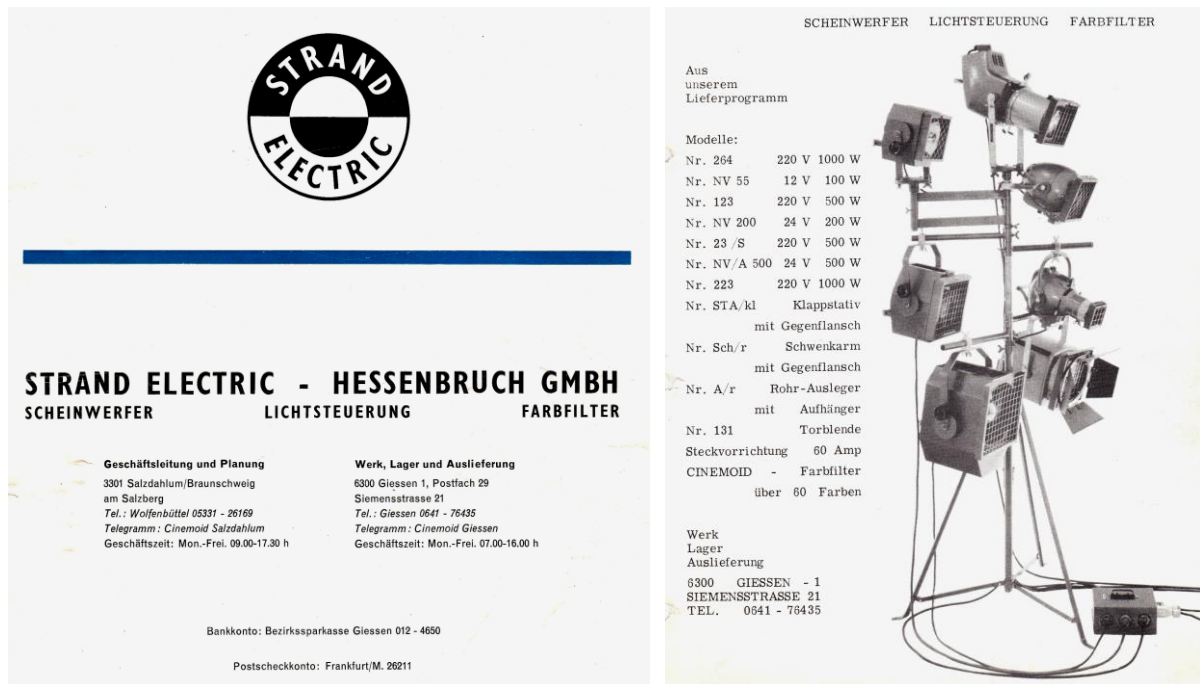
**LUDWIG PANI**  
WIEN V III/6, Kärntnerplatz 55,  
Telefon 53--2483

Figure 10. Advertisement for Strand Electric - Hessenbruch, BTR, June 1966 [31]

The first advertisement for the new Strand Electric - Hessenbruch enterprise appeared in BTR in June 1966 [31]. This was a double page spread of the luminaires and controls now offered, shown in Figure 10 [31]. However it contains few of the original Hessenbruch products with the implication that most of the Hessenbruch range was discontinued. Interestingly it now lists Buschmann as its agent, the servant has become master!

Similarly in 1966 a new combined catalogue was published, with the cover shown in Figure 11 [32]. The catalogue also appeared to show that few Hessenbruch products would continue, since apart from the illustration of page 3 in Figure 10, subsequent pages were solely Strand Electric products. While it was printed in England, the text was fully in German. The works, shipping address and accounts were now all in Giessen.

However the associated price list told a different story [33]. This 14 page document dated 1<sup>st</sup> October 1966 appears to be solely a German issue priced in DM, and lists almost all the Hessenbruch luminaires shown in the 1958-60 era catalogue as well as all the 1966 Strand products. The implication of this is either that without official Strand HQ permission the whole Hessenbruch range continued to be sold, or that the older products were still being made to special order while the old factory existed. The 1969 announcement in Figure 12 implies that a policy of allowing Hessenbruch product sales to deliberately decline by lack of promotion was most probably the situation.



**Figure 11. 1966 Strand Electric - Hessenbruch catalogue (cover left, page 3 right) [32]**

No future advertisements in BTR displayed or discussed Hessenbruch original products. A series of four advertisements in 1966 announced the installation of IDM/R memory lighting systems in the Canada Center for the Performing Arts, Ottawa [34]. Then in June 1967, the Strand advertisement reverted to again displaying the general range, but now omitting all Hessenbruch product [35]. Later 1967 advertisements solely carried promotions for IDM/DL memory lighting systems [36].

Bentham [5] reports that Ohlmer moved into a large house in Salzdahlum at the formation of Strand Electric - Hessenbruch, in 1965. The business address changed to an office in Salzdahlum in August 1967 but with works still in Giessen, then in February 1968 the advertised address became solely 3301 Salzdahlum, am Salzberg [37, 38]. The first street address was just 'Am Salzberg', but later became 'Salzbergstrasse 2'. DTHG also reported that Strand Electric - Hessenbruch GmbH had moved to its own plant in Salzdahlum, near Wolfenbüttel in Germany [10, 39]. Ohlmer [40] claimed that this move was due to further growth, though was probably more for personal and financial convenience since the new works adjoined his house.

In 1969 it was reported in the UK Strand catalogue shown in Figure 12 that Strand Electric - Hessenbruch made a complete range of 'German type' equipment, but that this was being discontinued due to the German 'preference' for British types [41]. This reference to the German type of stage lighting being 'specialist', despite its common use across much of continental Europe, sadly reflected the still parochial view of the UK Strand office. There is very little record of what German sales were made by Strand Electric - Hessenbruch, apart from several IDM/DL sales.

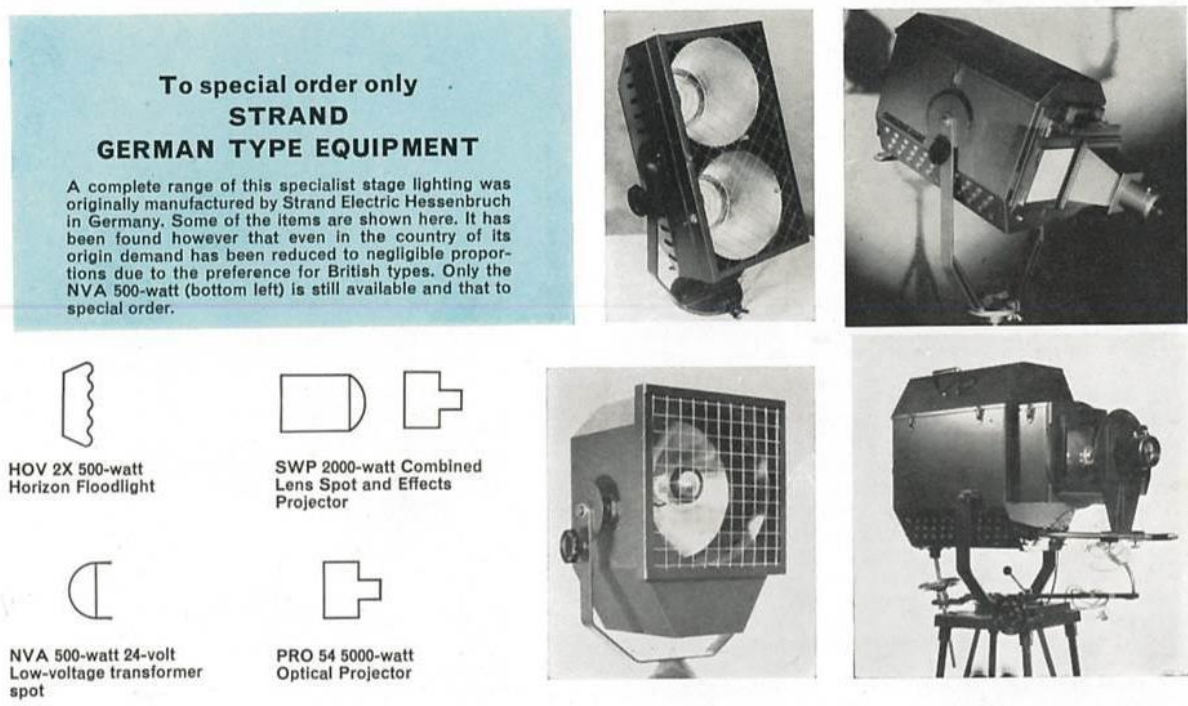


Figure 12. Strand German Type Equipment in 1969 [41]

## 6. Rank Strand Electric

The Rank Organisation purchased Strand Electric and all its subsidiaries in 1968. It is recorded by Unruh in 1969 [42, 43] that among stage suppliers, Strand Electric - Hessenbruch GmbH had been renamed Rank Ton und Bild GmbH (products: spotlights, lighting controls, colour filters, Wharfedale hi-fi loudspeaker systems). This was reinforced by a double page advertisement in BTR June 1970, showing the new company with its demonstration room all set out in Figure 13, saying '*We are there*' for the July 1970 Ulm BTT [44]. Almost certainly fourth from left is Heinz Fritz, with Gerd Ohlmer far right.

The Ulm BTT was a major promotional event for the new Rank Strand. A chartered plane flew nearly a hundred delegates to London for product demonstrations and theatre tours, plus the inevitable 'Farbenmusik' (colour music) by Bentham [45].





**Figure 13. Rank Sound and Image GmbH – Dept. Strand Electric, ‘ULM 1970’, BTR [44]**

By 1970 the German branch office had become Rank Strand Electric at Salzbergstrasse 2, 3301 Salzdahlum, under company Rank Ton und Bild GmbH. To announce this an open letter to customers was published in the August 1970 BTR, shown in Figure 14 with translation following [40]. The registered office for Rank Ton und Bild GmbH remained in Hamburg (at least until 1975/76), together with a number of other Rank subsidiaries [46].

In December 1970 Rank Strand’s list of subsidiaries finally changed to show Rank Strand Electric for Germany [47]. The legacy of Karl Hessenbruch had ended.



# RANK STRAND ELECTRIC



ZWEIGNIEDERLASSUNG  
DER RANK TON + BILD GMBH

RANK STRAND ELECTRIC, 33 Braunschweig, Postfach 4449

Information  
für unsere  
GESCHÄFTSFREUNDE

**WERK FÜR  
SCHEINWERFER  
LICHTSTEUERUNGEN  
FARBFILTER**

Firmensitz + Showroom:  
3301 Salzdahlum  
Salzbergstr. 2 / Weg nach Sickte  
Ruf: 0 53 31/79 51-52-53  
Telex: 0952-441  
Telegramm: Cinemoid Salzdahlum

Ihr Zeichen: ----- vom: ----- Mein Zeichen: Oh./Ki. vom: 1.8.1970 Sachbearbeiter:

## FIRMENFUSION MIT DER RANK-ORGANISATION

Sehr geehrter Geschäftsfreund !

Den Zusammenschluß unseres Londoner Stammhauses, der STRAND ELECTRIC AND ENGINEERING COMPANY LIMITED mit der RANK ORGANISATION nehmen wir gern zum Anlaß, um Ihnen einen kurzen Bericht über die Entwicklung unserer Firma zu geben.

Die STRAND ELECTRIC besteht seit 1934 als Spezialfirma für Bühnenbeleuchtung im weitesten Umfang. In der Folgezeit entstanden Produktionsstätten und Filialen in fast allen Ländern der Welt. In Deutschland wurden die Interessen zunächst durch die Firma Diedr. Buschmann in Braunschweig wahrgenommen, bis die Übernahme der Firma Karl Hessenbruch zur Gründung einer selbständigen, deutschen GmbH. führten, deren weiteres Anwachsen die Errichtung eines Werkes mit Verwaltung und Showroom in Salzdahlum bei Braunschweig notwendig machten. Im niedersächsischen Zonenrandgebiet hat sich diese deutsche GmbH. inzwischen einen festen Platz im Wirtschaftsleben erarbeitet.

Die "RANK ORGANISATION" wurde 1936 als Gesellschaft zur Produktion Britischer Filme gegründet, aus der sich zahlreiche branchenverwandte Tochtergesellschaften entwickelten, die zusammen mit der RANK XEROX im Jahre 1969 einen Jahresumsatz von über 2 Milliarden D-Mark erzielten.

Als Auszug aus unserem Lieferprogramm nennen wir :

Herstellung, Verkauf und Verleih von Lichtsteuerungen und Scheinwerfern für den gesamten Unterhaltungssektor und für alle architektonischen Zwecke. Theaterbestuhlungen, Geräte für Film- und Fernsehstudios, hochwertige Kameras und Vorführgeräte für Diapositive auch in enger Verbindung mit der Robert Bosch GmbH. in Stuttgart. RANK WHARFEDALE und H.J.LEAK produzieren Hifi-Lautsprecher, Tuner und Verstärker. Sowie Computer, elektronische Datenverarbeitung, Präzisionsinstrumente, und diagnostische medizinische Geräte.

Die "CENTURY LIGHTING CORPORATION", seit 40 Jahren führend in der amerikanischen Theater- und TV-Studiobeleuchtung wurde im November 1969 übernommen und der RANK ORGANISATION in den USA als CENTURY STRAND INC. und in Kanada als STRAND CENTURY LIMITED eingegliedert.

Mit dem 1. Juli 1970 sind die notwendigen Registrierungen, die aus der Firmenfusion der STRAND ELECTRIC LONDON mit der RANK ORGANISATION resultierten, abgeschlossen und wir firmieren jetzt, wie aus dem Briefkopf ersichtlich. Die Ihnen bekannten Mitarbeiter - geführt vom gleichen Management - stehen wie bisher zu Ihrer Verfügung.

Mit freundlicher Empfehlung Ihre  
RANK STRAND ELECTRIC  
Zweigniederlassung der Rank Ton und Bild GmbH.

Gerd E. Ohlmer

Bank: NORDDEUTSCHE LANDESBANK/BRAUNSCHWEIG  
Konto 535 328  
Postcheckkonto: Hannover 364 11

Bahn + Expressgut: Station WOLFENBUTTEL  
Postadresse: 3301 Salzdahlum  
Geschäftsführer:

Figure 14. Open letter in BTR, 1970 (translated below) [40]

Translation of open letter:

*RANK STRAND ELECTRIC, a branch of Rank Ton & Bild GmbH  
Makers of spotlights, lighting controls and colour filters*

*Information for our BUSINESS FRIENDS*

*1st August 1970*

### *COMPANY MERGER WITH THE RANK ORGANIZATION*

*Dear Business Friend!*

*With the merger of our London headquarters, STRAND ELECTRIC AND ENGINEERING COMPANY LIMITED with the RANK ORGANIZATION we are happy to take the opportunity to bring you to give a short report on the development of our company.*

*STRAND ELECTRIC has existed since 1934 as a specialist company for stage lighting in the broadest scope. In the period that followed, production sites and branches were established in almost every country in the world. In Germany, the interests were initially taken care of by the Buschmann company in Braunschweig, until the takeover of the firm Karl Hessenbruch led to the establishment of an independent German GmbH, whose further growth made it necessary to set up a factory with administration and showroom in Salzdahlum near Braunschweig. In the Lower Saxony border area this German GmbH has developed a permanent place in business life.*

*The "RANK ORGANIZATION" was founded in 1936 as a company for the production of British films, from which numerous branch-related subsidiaries developed which together with the RANK XEROX in 1969 had an annual turnover of over 2 billion marks.*

*As an extract from our delivery program we name:*

*Production, sale and rental of lighting controls and spotlights for the entire entertainment sector and for all architectural purposes. Theatre seating, devices for film and television studios, high-quality cameras and demonstration devices for slides, also in close connection with Robert Bosch GmbH, in Stuttgart. RANK WHARFEDALE and H.J. LEAK produce hi-fi speakers, tuners and Amplifiers, as well as computer, electronic data processing, precision instruments and diagnostic medical devices.*

*The STRAND CENTURY CORPORATION, leader in American Theatre and TV studio lighting for 40 years was taken over in November 1969 and incorporated by the RANK ORGANIZATION in the USA as CENTURY STRAND INC. and in Canada as STRAND CENTURY LIMITED.*

*As of July 1, 1970, the necessary registrations from the company merger of STRAND ELECTRIC LONDON with the RANK ORGANIZATION were completed and we are now operating as you can see from the letterhead. The employees you are familiar with - managed by the same management - are at your disposal as before.*

*Kindly yours*

*RANK STRAND ELECTRIC, Branch of Rank Ton und Bild GmbH,  
Gerd E. Ohlmer*

## 7. Discussion and Conclusion

There is no record found of the financial arrangements, or the scale of Strand Electric Holdings company investment in Strand Electric - Hessenbruch. Since the company was dissolved or transferred on the Rank takeover, Strand must have had a majority stake, but did Ohlmer have a share? Apart from the short announcement in Tabs in 1965, Strand and Bentham are completely silent on this subject in contemporary English writings. Even in Bentham's later autobiography, he describes only social visits to Ohlmer, not products [5]. Was this ignorance of detail or disdain?

Ohlmer was not only involved in Rank Strand in Germany but was also listed in the 1975/76 Hamburg directories as a Director for both Rank Ton und Bild GmbH and Rank Radio International GmbH in Hamburg (both at the same address) [46]. His directorships of the Rank subsidiaries in Hamburg imply some influence or need to be compensated. Bentham [5] reported that Ohlmer never had a service contract with either Strand Electric or the new Rank Strand, despite being the sole signature for all commercial contracts over the whole period as Geschäftsführer (Managing Director).

Seen for the first time in totality, it becomes an interesting study in business branch management. Here the Principal is inexperienced both in understanding and controlling its distribution, while the branch, initially just an agency, has ambitions beyond the Principal's. It is clear that with the death of Hessenbruch, Ohlmer saw an opportunity to both enlarge his portfolio and acquire a ready-made manufacturing facility, able to meet the German needs that his British suppliers chose not to address. It also appears to have enabled him to leave the employ of Buschmann and become Geschäftsführer of a semi-independent company.

However it seems that Ohlmer had no desire to compete head-on with established suppliers such as Reich & Vogel, nor to antagonise his principals by developing alternate new luminaire products. So he just cherry-picked a few items and acquired a decent workshop that could be moved when the time was right to his home in Salzdahlum. It is also likely that the well-known brand of Hessenbruch was useful to open sales doors.

The opportunity to exploit this situation proved brief, since after just four years, Strand Electric was sold. The arrival of Rank might have changed things radically, but the independence of regional companies was also the current Rank management style. Consequently, lack of central direction continued.

Gerd Ohlmer stayed with Rank Strand until retiring in 1975, and died on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1986 aged 74 [9, 10]. He was remembered as an outstanding personality, while very amiable, open-minded and hospitable [10]. Ohlmer's 1963 hire, Heinz Fritz, was promoted to Sales Manager in 1970 then took over as Geschäftsführer in 1977<sup>4</sup> [14]. He continued the tradition of independent product manufacture to meet local needs, but this time of dimmers. Local manufacture of luminaires was never revived, though modification of UK luminaire products to suit German requirements was common until harmonised EU standards were adopted.

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<sup>4</sup> It is not known who officially managed during the period from 1975-77.



## 8. Acknowledgements

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