

One September morning in 1959 Philip Rose found himself sailing towards Montreal from Britain with four hundred overprinted Strand Electric catalogues.

FROM LITTLE ACORNS

The spring of 1959 saw the opening of Strand Electric's own office in Canada. Before then there had been the occasional direct sale and Kliegl were selling Cinemoid and had an arrangement to market Strand's Thyratron tube dimming.

The design of Stratford Ontario's Festival Theatre had found Strand Pageant beam spots an ideal solution to its unique (at the time) lighting needs and, in those years before the stranglehold of television viewing eclipsed them, two or three Canadian repertory theatres, with UK origins, used some Strand equipment.

But it had been the middle of 1957 when Strand's Chairman Jack Sheridan decided it was time we did something about North America. No doubt the firm's success in Australia encouraged him. Jack, if nothing else, was a cautious man, well inoculated against the excesses of enthusiastic marketing men but he was strongly attracted to the idea of a Canadian Branch.

However, unanimous support at Board level there was not. One or two, who subsequently became keen "NA-philes" were anti the mere thought of tackling Canada and the States. However, Jack 'persuaded' the doubters that we should risk a modest sum and Frank "Tubby" Martin was despatched on a lighting (cheap!) cross-Canada tour to check out the territory. As I recall, his report was less than enthusiastic - Big country - small population - undeveloped theatre market - 120 volts and the Canadian Standards Association's 3" high stack of design, technical and safety requirements.

Jack had an internal fight on his hands but, with a little encouragement from those of us who thought the idea of a Canadian Branch long overdue, he gave "Bill" Lorraine the job of seeing that the appropriate parts of Strand's range were modified for 120V and submitted to CSA.

Some eighteen months later the core of Strand's range had CSA approval and was ready to go. The cost had been more than Jack would have liked, but once testing had started we were committed.

Pending CSA, planning had

been put on 'hold', but by the end of 1958 it was green for go. There had been a suggestion that we appoint an agent but Jack wisely accepted we had to have our own operation, and, unlike the competition, CSA approval and stock in Canada.

WE OPEN IN TORONTO

During the CSA approvals period Strand had been approached by Leslie Yeo, an actor who had been running a theatre company in Nova Scotia. When it closed, the ease he had in selling off his collection of Strand lights gave him the idea of selling more and he formed a short lived company (although not having a Strand sales agreement), "Area Lighting", with Jimmy Fuller in Toronto.



Where it all began. Now part of the Yonge/Bloor Underground Transit system.

However, with the demise of "Area Lighting" in early 1959, Jack suggested that Leslie join Strand and, with Bill Lorraine, who would move from the UK, jointly run the Branch. Shortly afterwards a shop was leased and 755 Yonge Street became the first launch pad for Strand North America. They had to move quickly as the first shipment was on its way.

During the next few weeks tons of equipment arrived - for stock, and to set up a fully equipped demonstration room. As everything came by sea in those days the heavy packing cases were, with time-honoured Strand Electric economy, used to make all the storage racks. At the same time Bill was working night and day to create and set up the demo room. Staff consisted of Bill, Leslie, and maid of all work, Beatrice, plus the odd temp for unpacking and carrying. The new branch was not only to market Strand equipment but also had the exclusive agency for Hall Stage Equipment in North America and, on early jobs we even brought in Drapes and Sound from the UK.

But, problems soon began to appear. Maybe the time scale was too tight, the objectives optimistic; whatever the causes it was clear that the plan and structure had to be changed.

It was decided that Bill would return to the UK and that I would take over his role.

"That was how I found myself, after a rough passage from Liverpool, one September 1959 morning sailing towards Montreal and enjoying the early fall scents of the St. Lawrence."

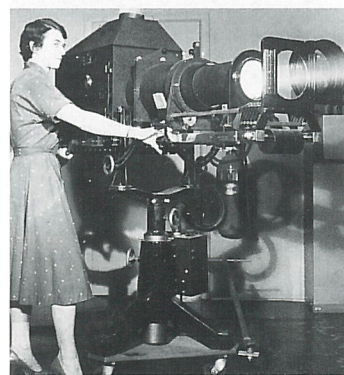
ENTER PHILIP ROSE, ON A TIGHT BUDGET

First task on disembarking was to locate the precious package of the first 400 Canadian overprinted UK catalogues and then scramble to catch the overnight train to Toronto. No one had thought to book a sleeper or even a soft seat - maybe they had but Strand economy had triumphed. A slatted wooden seat kept me nicely awake until, bleary eyed and full of second thoughts I arrived with the dawn at Union Station in Toronto.

Leslie was there and we met for the first time. "By the way" he said over breakfast, "I've made a 9 o'clock appointment for you at the University of Toronto Schools". A shower and change of clothing would have to wait and sleep certainly wasn't on the agenda.

At 9am we met "Red" Hobson of Ontario Electric - (he and I subsequently worked on many projects together) - and by noon I had the order for my first Canadian job - a 36 way Saturable Reactor dimming system with a full complement of spots, floods and borderlights.

The hotel at last. I should have been alerted by the rate, \$3.50 a night (Sterling exchange rate \$3.05 to the pound at the time). "When you are ready" said Leslie, "come along to the office, it's only about a twenty five minutes walk along Bloor, not worth a taxi". I sensed we were on a tight budget! Just where I was, soon became clear when a light tap on the door revealed a Kimono-clad lady wondering if I had a match and, "was there anything I needed?" Sleep was all I could think of.



Beatrice giving a Sunspot Arc demo.

Within days I was up to my neck in projects for schools, studios and theatres, from scheme designs (we acted as unpaid theatre consultants and guest lighting designers in those days), to lectures and demonstrations. I loved it all and clearly Canada was for me.

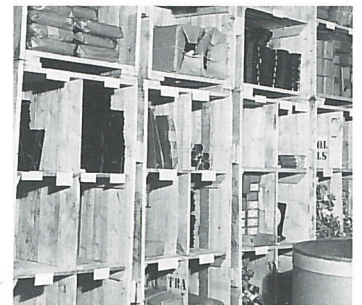
STRAND BECOMES MARKET LEADER

Within two years Strand was fast becoming market leader in Canada and had even appointed its own agent in the States - Norcostco in Minneapolis - quickly superseded by its own Branch - yes, an American

subsidiary of what had become Strand's Canadian Company - no longer a UK Branch.

For me, with some super colleagues, the next fifteen years saw Strand, later joined by Century under the Rank Organisation banner, become the leading force in Theatre, Television and Architectural lighting, not only commercially, but in thinking, innovation and development.

Looking back, the end of the fifties was not only the commercial dawning for Strand in North America but also a time for great



Part of Yonge Street budget modular stores racking system.

technical change. Early solid state dimming had arrived. The drive to store lighting levels and groups was producing many ingenious solutions from punched cards, magnetic plattens (precursor of today's credit cards), Ferrite and Drum stores. Younger readers will not believe how much time was spent at conferences, such as those of USITT and SMPTE and the like discussing dimmer law curves - Square Law, Cube Law, S Law and other esoteric aspects of the new technology. As for luminaires the Quartz Iodine Lamp, as the TH was called in the early days, was hovering in the wings about to revolutionise fixture and lighting design.

Within a few years the electrical worlds of 120V and 240V were less different and the opportunities for universal product and applications designs were increasing all the time.

The impact on Strand as a whole and how the fledgling Strand North America coped with all this and a succession of major projects, is a longer story, for another time, maybe.



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Philip Rose joined The Strand Electric & Engineering Co. Ltd. in 1941. After war service in the Royal Air Force he re-joined Strand in Len Applebee's Theatre Lighting Department. After moving to Canada in 1959 he became President of Strand North America in 1962 and joined the main London Board in 1968 becoming President of Century Strand when it moved to Los Angeles shortly after Rank's acquisition of Century in 1969.

He moved to the UK in 1974 with responsibility for International Marketing and Product Development. He is now retired.