

Northern Light - a story of Strand's Dealers for Scotland

Northern Light, who represent Strand Lighting in Scotland, are the typical Strand Dealer, but writ large.

They have their headquarters in Leith, the part of Edinburgh from where they cover Eastern Scotland and they cover the West of the country from Govan, a Glasgow Western suburb. (I must explain for overseas readers that although Scotland has a population of only 6 million — of whom a third live in the two principal cities — in area it is nearly as large as England).

In recent years, along with the rest of the UK, Northern Light's projects have more often been the upgrading of theatre facilities in existing buildings than work in new construction. So I have dealt here with two of their recent contracts, both typical of their day-to-day work, and one new from the ground up.

I should also explain that the company carry out stage equipment work as well as having a growing sound operation, supplying speakers, amplifiers and mixing consoles.

John Allen runs the Leith operation, while Mike Smyth, for many years a member of Strand's management, now runs the Govan office. Both depots have a large hire operation for both lighting and sound equipment, plus fit-up gear.

Some Northern Light Projects: Alloa Town Hall

The whole building is a delight, from the coloured faience interior of the entrance hall to the quality stonework of the whole of the exterior. No descent to common bricks to the sides or rear at Alloa!

Northern Light were responsible for the lighting, the sound, the stage equipment and drapes, the electrical contracting and the houselight dimming. (Strand Architectural).

1 *Alloa Town Hall. This handsome pile expressed the town's local pride some eighty years ago. Its recent refurbishment by Northern Light is a symbol of continuing civic self-confidence.*

2 *The re-lit and re-fitted hall interior. The coat of arms on the pelmet, like the drapes, supplied by Northern Light, flaunts the Alloa Town motto — 'Look About Ye'. Yes — they really do spell it this way!*

3 *Interior of one control room with M24 and effects. The other control room has the sound desk.*

4 *The FOH Harmonys. Note neat grouping and absence of 'clutter'. The hall has many uses, so must continue to look handsome by daylight as well as at show times.*

The Volunteer Hall, Galashiels

A more modest project in scope than Alloa, but very professionally carried out.

Everything a Scottish Hall should be — local stone, stepped gables, unpompous, quality building. Pity about the ventilators spoiling the roof line. When the stackable seating is out 550 people can be accommodated.

5 *The 1874 Volunteer Hall in the delightful Burgh of Galashiels, a fine town in the Scottish Borders. As Michelin says, 'Well worth a detour'.*

6 *Control is from the horseshoe gallery. Tempus 2G 36 and nine Tempus 10 Amp, Dimmer Packs. Not shown, but Cantatas are very much part of the picture in this project.*

The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama

In the centre of Glasgow, this Northern Light project was carried out a little while back.

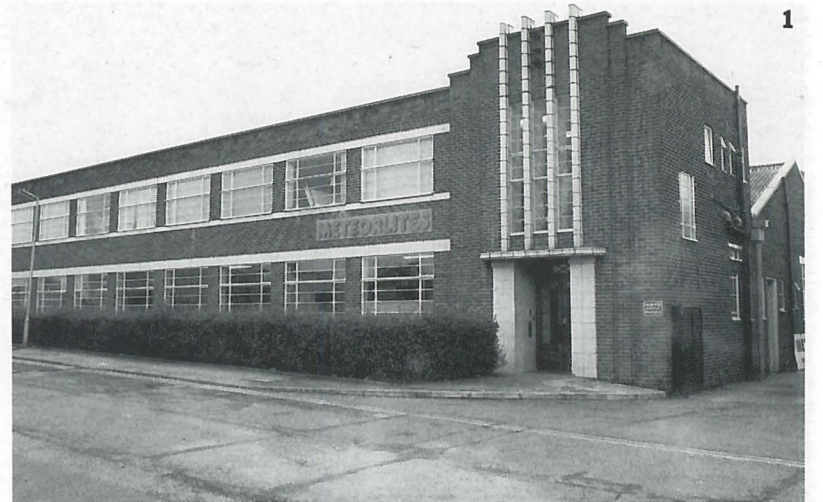
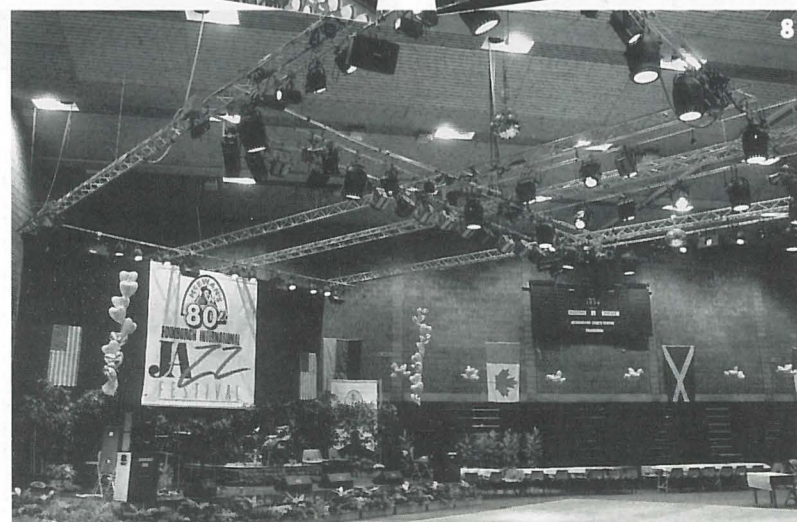
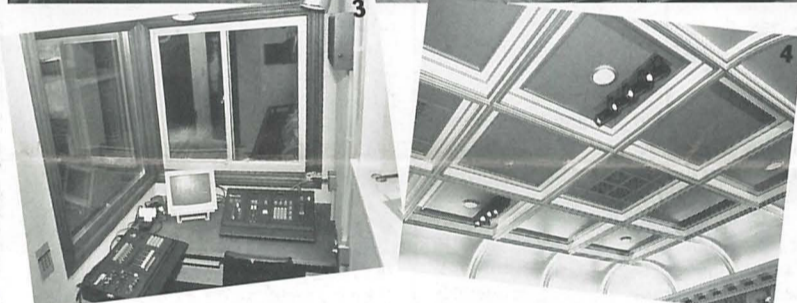
The consultant was Michael Holden, the Architects were Sir Leslie Martin in association with William Nimmo and Partners.

Northern Light equipped all the performing area in the building, as well as providing and installing the CCTV installation.

7 *The Principal auditorium interior.*

Northern Light and the Edinburgh Festival

8 *One photo must stand for the company's very heavy involvement in this tremendous event — here we see the Meadow Bank Concert Hall set up for a Jazz Festival. This featured a rather vintage lighting rig, proving that Strand make things to last and that Northern Light maintain their hire stock to a very high standard.*



Meteorlites of Elstree

Anyone with any interest in light must have their attention awakened by the name Elstree. Originally three film studios were to be found in 'England's Hollywood'. Today, as with the original Hollywood, television has made great inroads.

The BBC have one studio complex, now Galaxy and Quartzcolor equipped, from whence 'Eastenders' among many other famous shows comes. There is the Cannon film studio — 'Raiders of the Lost Ark', 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit', etc — and just across the road from the Meteorlites 'thirties' head office was originally another studio, now transformed into a more mundane commercial building.

Meteorlites, founded and controlled by Ronan Willson, is one of the UK's really major lighting and rigging hire companies. They originally specialised in hires to the music business, still a very important part of their activities, but quickly became involved in trade shows and large scale product launches. Within the last few years TV hires have assumed ever greater importance.

With over a million and a half pounds worth of hire stock they are one of the few companies that can equip several major tours at a time and still cope, say, with a complete OB rig of the Albert Hall for the BBC.

Among their many firsts, Ronan told me that his was the first company to bring pre-wired bars into the TV centre — in 1983 for 'Top of the Pops', when they were able to impress the BBC with the speed of their setting up.

Said Ronan, "It's no good arguing with the TV people about whether their very strict safety standards are really required. We meet them scrupulously and cooperate fully with all their safety checks".

On one famous occasion Meteorlites rigged the Albert Hall for a Rock Gospel show between midnight and 8am, effectively saving the show's budget a complete day's hire of the hall.

On the music side Iron Maiden, Fleetwood Mac and Elkie Brooks tours have been supplied. And if you are used to purely theatre lighting sized rigs reflect on the eight tons of lighting which is to be rigged for the Iron Maiden Wembley show!

Strand have provided Showchangers and Colour Scrollers and will shortly be delivering Litescan units.

Where Might You Have Seen Meteorlites and Strand Automated Lighting Last November?

Status Quo — 18 Par Scans (with Scrollers)
Elkie Brooks — 19 Par Scrollers.
The Earls Court Ski Show — 5k Colour Scrollers.

Thames TV 'Meltdown' — Par Scans and Cadenzas with scrollers.

Iron Maiden — 12 Cantatas with scrollers, 18 Irises with scrollers.

Meteorlites is the first UK hire company to go into Strand automated lighting in a really big way. Said Ronan, "We held back for a time on colour changers and remote control lighting until we saw which system came out on top. Then we chose Strand. Now we are fully committed with spare units in stock and fully trained technical support in the field".

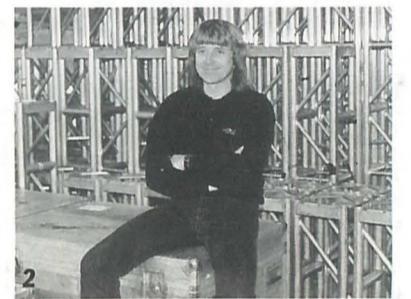
We next talked about the increasing use of 'music lighting' techniques — the trussing, the pre-wiring and the remote control of lights and of colour — in the theatre proper. "Ah", said Ronan a glint appearing in his

eye, "that's why we are now so interested in getting theatre hire contracts!".

1 *Meteorlites Elstree head office. The lighting and rigging lives in the industrial building behind. Although the extension is pure 'Thirties' the interior is all smart black and grey and angular furniture.*

2 *Ronan Willson with just a little of Meteorlites trussing.*

3 *Tony Simpson checking Showchangers before they go out.*



Peter Joins The Trekkies



Peter O'Hara outside our Los Angeles factory.

Strand stalwart Peter O'Hara, who joined the company in 1935 and worked for us for 27 years, joined the 'Trekkies' — fans of the 'Star Trek' TV and film series — on a recent trip to the USA.

Now retired, but still acting as a consultant, Peter worked on installations in many of Britain's most famous theatres during his career. He also designed the Samuelson 400 and 125 systems.

On his visit to the States, he toured Paramount Studios, NBC TV, and the Strand Lighting factory, all located in Los Angeles.

At the film studios he studied the sets of both the new 'Star Trek' movie and the new TV series — 'Star Trek — the next generation'.