

TABS ON TABS

by Alan Jowett

The roller system is speed monitored and compensated to avoid any excess tension on the film as any pulling will disorientate the molecular structure of the film and cause shrinkage problems in use.

Finally, the 500m jumbo master rolls are moved on a conveyor to the sheeting department, where the rolls are trimmed to 24-in width and reduced to 20-in x 24-in sheets or 50-ft rolls. Availability in roll form is one of the benefits for large users of Chromoid.

It is during this process that the emergent film passes over a light box and is visually inspected so that should any blemishes occur they can be cut out in the conversion process. Only virgin resin is used. Trim is discarded and not recycled — unusual in the plastics industry but the highest clarity of the finished film is vital.

This technology has enabled important changes in the production of diffusion products.

For many years cinematographers have recognised the need for a variety of diffusion materials to control the nature of light and shadow. Before Chromoid was introduced there were only two Cinemoid diffusion types and generally theatre designers were not very interested in the use of diffusion.

Now television and theatre designers have begun to understand what can be done and so Strand have expanded the range of choices. The production of diffusion types no longer depends on the use of a 'filler' which has the disadvantage of colour change and poor transmission. Now with Chromoid a specific designed surface pattern is embossed on the clear polycarbonate by precisely etched steel rollers in line on the production flow. Of special interest is Tough Silk that gives directional qualities — taking a symmetrical beam from a lighting instrument and massaging its shapes to suit the designer's needs. This product has a special value in adding to normal colour on cyclorama units to minimise the scalloping effect through too wide a spacing.

The visit left me very thoughtful; the manufacturing process is a great contrast to the more traditional skills in use at Spondon and described in the first issue of the re-born TABS.

To make Chromoid, a leap forward has been made in several technologies — dye formulations, plastic resins and in manufacturing control techniques. These have been necessary to meet the challenge of the luminaire designers, with lanterns becoming ever more compact, and modern T.H. lamps transmitting ever more heat, as well as the need to create colours and tints for a new generation of designers in theatre and television.

Editor's Note:
Norah wrote this article a few months ago. She didn't know about Strand's new lantern range — if she had the remarks in the last paragraph would no doubt have been given even more emphasis.

"CURTAIN up, light the lights" wrote Stephen Sondheim in *Gypsy* and the lyric, underlining two of Rank Strand's activities does emphasise that what theatre-goers see first on stage are the curtains. When the audience is eagerly seated and all eyes are on the proscenium, the elegance of the auditorium can be enhanced or diminished by the quality of the curtains. The customers may rank the scenes of valour and amour before the velours, but it can't help the drama if the drapes are drab and dreary.

When I dropped in on Rank Strand's Northern factory at Ashton-in-Makerfield, I was pleasantly surprised at the range of their work and the variety of their customers. Manager Brian Povey listed just a few of the theatres both in Britain and overseas which had recently been supplied with curtains. These range from the newly re-opened and much acclaimed Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London and theatres in Leeds, Edinburgh and the Isle of Man. Venues overseas include the magnificently-named Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall in Taiwan.

The workshop also supplies drapes to many customers other than theatres and these include local authority buildings, schools and colleges, hospitals, broadcasting studios and clubs. One of the sample photographs that Brian Povey proudly displayed was of the excellent curtains made for the Lakeside Country Club, in Surrey which was Club of the Year in 1981. Here the curtains were completed with the club's distinctive kingfisher motif.

As Brian Povey modestly says, while

there is no mystique in making curtains Rank Strand's customers do recognise the quality of production. There are many small back-street outfits, he acknowledges, who are able to make up short jobs or have a stab at a set of tabs. When it comes to making up a full set of curtains to the rigorous standards that local authorities and theatre architects specify, then Rank Strand are among the best.

It is not just the expertise of the team of highly-skilled seamstresses and the workshop's experience in supplying drapes to all parts of the theatrical world, but the complete A-Z service that customers can expect. From the initial drawings provided by the company's draughtsmen and the making of the curtains through to the final installation, the work is done not only with an eye to standards and detail but with efficiency and cost-effectiveness as a priority. In these hard, inflationary times Theatre managers, both private and municipal cannot be extravagant and customers at Strand know that they are getting value for money. Nothing is too much trouble — one recent project meant that the workshop had to make templates out of hardboard so that they could set out drapes to fit a proscenium!

While the audience might never realise the work that has been involved, managements know that curtains are an investment that will have to last for twenty years or more. When it is time to restore or replace often dusty and crumbling curtains, it is to Rank Strand's workshop that discriminating theatres turn.



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