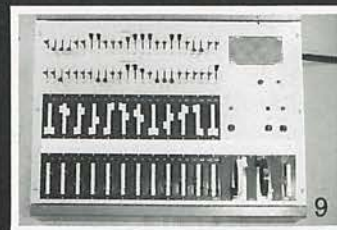


7. Burwood built Threeset, exported to Christchurch, New Zealand.
8. Sometimes the woodwork was a little late arriving!
9. Special small control panel to suit Victorian schools specification



incomes to club management committees, who then built auditoriums varying from quite good to really nasty, in which shows ran nightly on a sort of miniaturised Vegas basis. Some clubs could, and still do, stage full scale musicals like *West Side Story* or *Oklahoma!* but many club stages had limited height and so battens continued on. We never counted them, but my guess is that well over a thousand six foot S type were supplied to clubs before Iris I's came along to help out. Controls for clubs had to be simple, and above all, beer proof hence six way shaft mastered resistance dimmer banks were used for a long time, even after most other people had graduated to thyristors and remote control.

By the mid 60's we had about a dozen or so permanent staff in Melbourne, and indirectly kept a further 8 or 9 people in other states. Import restrictions on lanterns had been lifted, whereupon on London command, we stopped all Australian lantern manufacture. Compliance with the order was ensured by UK cutting off our supply of castings. We did continue the local production of dimmers and special control systems, for example a special 60 way Threeset touring board with 10 way racks for the Australian tour of *Disney on Parade*, the delivery time for which was less than the normal elapsed time for surface shipment London to Melbourne even if it could have been stock standard equipment.

By now we were becoming better known, not only in theatre but also television, having supplied lighting and control to TVW and STW in Perth; NWS in Adelaide and TEN in Sydney, the latter being possibly the last CD/W Electromechanical system to be built. It was to cause consternation when due for replacement in 1982 by MMS, because the removal crew were not to know that the last dimmer room wall had been built only after the dimmer racks (weighing several tons each) had been finally located, thereby leaving only a normal size door into a narrow passage. TEN was also the initiation into mechanical rigging of Brian Petty, our tame man mountain who went on to complete quite a number of counterweight and lift installations, before leaving to work for the American opposition, having become an acknowledged expert in the field.

Sales and hire turnover were still growing, and space was at a premium despite our having taken over the whole of the first floor at Graham Street Port Melbourne, including an old section once occupied by a food and spice merchant, which showered us with curry powder or nutmeg every time the wind rose above a certain speed. Consequently, I began campaigning for an event previously unknown anywhere in the Strand Electric world – a move to new premises, purpose built to our requirements. We eventually wore

down the opposition and commenced building in Trent Street Burwood whence we moved into stage one of about 7000 square feet in 1969. That year saw also the completion of two large projects, the SGIO Theatre in Brisbane, and the Perth Concert Hall, both fully Strand equipped.

Bruce Harvey chose not to stay, but followed Reg Bartrams example and moved to Queensland to establish his own business hiring stage equipment, and as local sales agent for Strand. Like Reg before, he became predominant in his state, and acclaimed as the local theatre technical expert. Local manufacture was to be supervised from then on by Brian Goldsmith, an expatriate who had worked under the famous Fred Brown in Strand London.

Australian business now accounted for rather more than 10% of UK Strand turnover in export sales, and we were, along with the Canadian, Hong Kong, American and German companies, to have some effect on the design and product planning going on in King Street. I had an advantage in this, as what were now my annual visits to England were easily planned as round world trips, calling on every other Strand company in the process and helping to form a close knit team offering a genuine international service.

1969 was also a major milestone (I nearly said gravestone) as it was then that the entire Strand Electric Group was purchased by the Rank Organisation, with consequent sweeping changes to administration, organisation and marketing, some good and some bad as is inevitable. From our viewpoint, the advantages then included a more professional approach to marketing and production planning, and closer access to financial and organisation chiefs in Australia. The main snag was that temporarily our international team spirit took a bit of a beating.

A great deal of my own time was now being directed towards the planning and equipment design of several important theatre projects in Australia, notably the Adelaide Festival Theatre, the Seymour Centre and Theatre Royal in Sydney, and the early stages of the Victorian Arts Centre Theatres. We were very conscious of the fact that Adelaide was to be the first completed of a series of major performing arts centres, one in each capital city. We had lost the first contract to be let, that for the Sydney Opera House, which went to Siemens (But see cover story – Ed.) because we 'had no grand opera experience' (Covent Garden for some reason did not count) and needed to retrieve our position. This we did in Adelaide by obtaining contracts for all the machinery (including alas, some double purchase counterweights, Ugh!) stage lanterns including I believe the first permanent

theatre installation of Iris IV for the cyclorama, and the control system. This last deserves comment – I wanted to set an example by making this the first memory system in Australia, and it took several months of lobbying and negotiation to get acceptance of the idea. Remember, we were dreaded suppliers not exalted advisers of the Pilbrow or Unruh variety, but eventually the clients and architects relented. This victory coincided exactly with the European discovery that Strand IDM was grossly unreliable, resulting amongst other things in the Hungarian detention for a long time of one of my protégés, Peter Fitzwater. To Rank's eternal credit they spared no expense in correcting all the IDM faults, and eventually supplied all customers with very good working switchboards, but this took a considerable time and we were not looking for trouble our end. So, my being a Benthamite from way back, we opted for the next generation system DDM, eventually supplying two to Adelaide, and one for the Seymour Centre in 1974.

Our television industry was now outgrowing black and white, and had chosen the British PAL colour system for introduction in 1975. This meant that most of the commercial stations and some of the national stations had to revamp their entire lighting installations, especially as most had only partial dimming. Although import licences were now of the past, import duties were high, and any Government (ie Australian Broadcasting Commission as it then was) contracts had strong preferences for Australian content. We had since 1970 been making all our dimmers and racks in Australia; partly to have control over deliveries and partly because of the peculiarities of the SAA wiring regulations. This gave us a clear advantage over imported competition, and when combined with the newly introduced (1973) Modular Memory System so that studio chief engineers could decide their own desk functions and layouts we were able to supply to most channels. Even MMS did not satisfy all tastes – we built in Melbourne several special modules, notably some 360 channel twin lamp button mimic modules for the ABC Melbourne and Sydney studios, special effects units, and Digipatch, which used extended demultiplexing to provide a keyboard operated dimmer line to channel number patching facility.

The Burwood manufacturing sections, now enlarged by another 3000 square feet or so had by 1978 produced around 25,000 JTM dimmer modules and their enclosing racks, and nearly 5000 PAM dimmer modules. These latter were plug-in 5000w units, in 19" racks built using a purpose made aluminium extrusion. The modules had moulded plastic chassis and specially made multi pin

connectors to comply with local safety rules. They were our top of the range units, and it was always deeply regretted that company policy prevented them being sold outside Australia.

Manual control desks, and electronics for house lights or architectural (including fluorescent) dimmers were made in standard or custom built forms from 1969 onwards. In recent years there has been a considerable political pressure to reintroduce local content on lanterns, as other suppliers have done. Some are patently not suited to small batch local assembly, and this particularly applies to the laniro television units, which are made in a highly mechanised factory where the tooling is designed simultaneously with each lantern (sorry, luminaire). This was brought home to us when, as distributors for laniro here, we were negotiating the details of a special run of 350 Kahoutek dual source for the ABC. The production sample and its Italian designer came to Sydney, where he was regaled with horror stories of equipment bashing by OB crews, and stood over by supply authority inspectors. They returned to Rome and started on their record order – all very well, but it stopped production on almost every other model for some months.

Returning to theatre, we were still busy in our teaching and consulting roles and various staff members were called on to lecture at schools or colleges. We supported the formation of ABTT equivalents in Melbourne and Sydney, and were still regularly lending out recorded lectures made in England some years before.

Most of the final phase of my Strand career was devoted to technical detailing of the Victorian Arts Centre, leading eventually to submission of seven volumes of tender documents, five contracts eventually being awarded to Rank Industries Australia (Strand Electric Division). Two of these were for the supply of a total of four new model major control systems, and the Australian requirements for those contracts were the cornerstone of, and a financial contribution to the development of what is now known as Galaxy.

We endeavoured to set a precedent for the Australian market, and succeeded more than we dared hope, an achievement for which I must modestly claim some credit, along with two well known local lighting men, Bill Akers of Australian Ballet fame, and Len Fisher of the Canberra Theatre Centre.

By the time I moved, we had firm contracts for six systems, and knew that Sydney and Brisbane would follow not long after. I look forward to many more years in technical theatre, where appropriate, working with Rank Strand in whatever their current Australian or overseas structure may be. ■