



THE
Robert R. R. R.

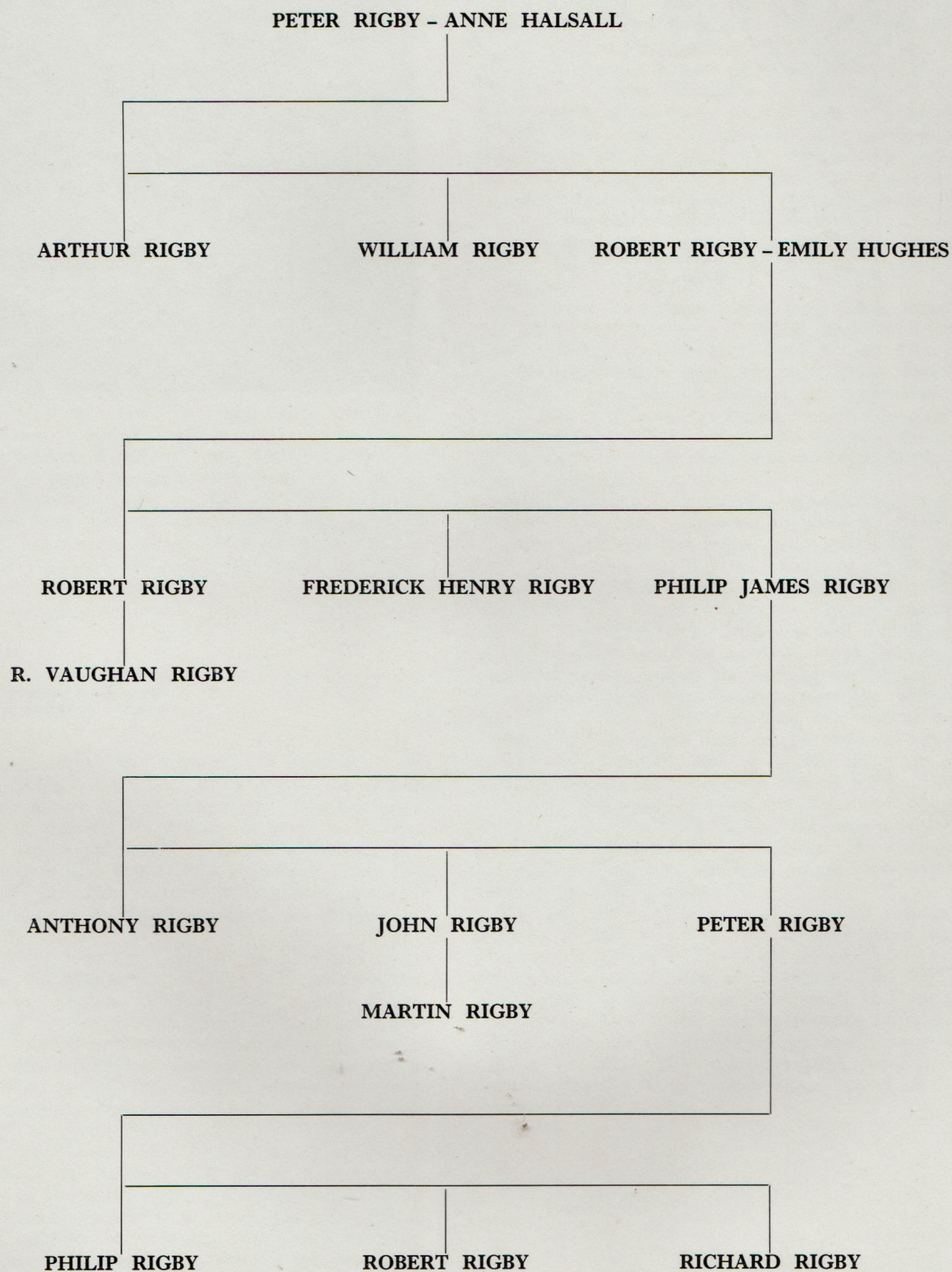
STORY

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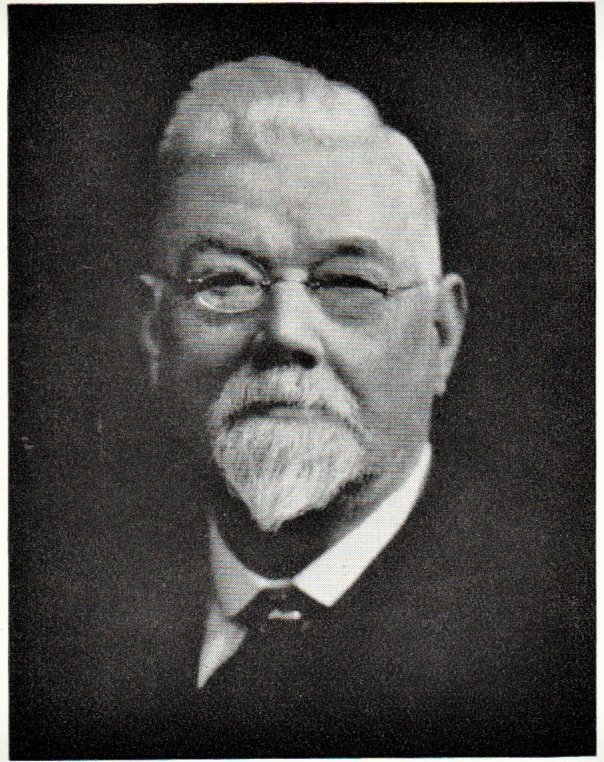
Dramatis Personae

(The Cast in Order of Appearance)



The Robert Rigby Story

*Written for The Directors
of Robert Rigby Limited
by Leslie J. Wheeler*



Overture & Beginners!

This is the story of a company; it is also very much the story of a family. We hesitate before using the word 'history' because it may cause some people to think of dull, unimaginative lists of dates and very little else. But they need have no fears because a real history deals with people, with places, with events and with things. That is just what our story is about – and it is very far from being dull!

The *people* in our story are both the family of our founder, Robert Frederick Rigby, and the three generations which have followed him, plus the 'family' which is our staff – many of whom have been with us for over fifty years. The *places* are at two important centres: one in the industrial heart of Birmingham and the other in the financial heart of London. The *events* are sometimes so dramatic – and so coincidental with national events – that they could well occur in many of the motion pictures made by some of our customers. The *things* we have manufactured are truly surprising: everybody in the film and television industries knows our famous Premier range of editing equipment, but very few people know about the Rigby copper rain gauge, or the Rigby (patented) trouser press!

To write the history of a company is not so very unusual. To write the history of a family is perhaps even less so – but to combine the two in an entertaining manner is certainly rare. This has been our aim and, although we cannot know if we have achieved it, we have certainly enjoyed the exercise. We sincerely hope you will enjoy reading not only our history, but also something of the atmosphere of the times it covers and the people who made it possible.

Curtain Up!

Our story begins at Tamworth, in the County of Staffordshire, and at a time when Queen Victoria was a young woman just 34 years of age. She had been Queen of England for a mere 16 years in a reign which was to last for 64 years and so become the longest in British history. We are talking about the year 1853 and, right at the beginning, we find one of the amazing coincidences which occur throughout our story.

Naturally, this year is particularly important to us because, on March 6th, 1853, our founder Robert Rigby was born at Bolehall, a small town in the district of Fazeley. He was the son of Peter and Anne Rigby – and it is interesting to note that the name 'Peter' does not appear again until three generations later, when another Peter Rigby became a Director of our company. However, that is not the coincidence to which we refer.

The coincidence is that The Photographic Society (afterwards to become The Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain) was founded in that same year. It goes even further and anticipates the motion picture industry our company now serves because, in the second issue of that Society's journal, dated April 1st, 1853, a Mr. William Jackson of Lancaster wrote: 'I have often felt surprised that photographers have not turned their attention more to the reproduction of moving objects'. Little did Mr. Jackson know that someone had just been born who was to

found a company which made a great deal of equipment specifically for those engaged in the photography and 'reproduction of moving objects!'.

The world had to wait almost another 40 years before motion pictures became a practical reality and, since our company's history is so interwoven with that industry, we will pause for a moment to note a special event which occurred in London just nine years before our own business was founded.

On May 10th, in the year 1890, the now famous British Patent No. 10131 was granted to William Friese-Greene and Mortimer Evans for 'Taking Photographs in Rapid Series'. Whilst many people still argue the significance of Friese Greene's contributions to cinematography, our interest lies in other aspects of his work. At that time he lived at No. 136 Maida Vale in London and, although during 1887 his earliest cinematograph cameras were built by a Mr. Chipperfield, an instrument maker of Clerkenwell, the machine which was the subject of his important patent was built by Lege & Co., whose workshops were in *Hatton Garden* – only a very short distance away from the premises we were to occupy ourselves in the near future.

An equally interesting coincidence is that, about this time, the first sheets of flexible celluloid ever made in Britain were produced by Alexander Parkes of *Birmingham* and, of course, motion pictures would never have been possible without the development of transparent celluloid. These were surely very good omens for Robert Rigby because his company was to develop such important roots both in *Hatton Garden* and in *Birmingham*.

Having said that, it becomes obvious that our family was bound to become involved in almost constant travel between these two great cities. In those early days one had the choice of travelling either by the London North Western Railway from Euston to New Street, or by the Great Western Railway from Paddington to Snow Hill. Selecting one or the other could not have depended upon the cost of the journey or on the running time, because both were identical. The manner of travelling offered three possibilities: either first-class, second-class or third-class. The single fare ranged from a well-upholstered first-class seat at 17/4d. down to a considerably harder third-class seat at 9/5d. and, just in case you were not being met at the end of the journey, your *horse* could travel at the same time for 28/-! Today a single first-class fare amounts to 60/-, but the travelling time has been reduced from 140 minutes down to 93 minutes.

The first recorded public exhibition of moving pictures to take place in London was given by Monsieur F. Trevey at The Marlborough Hall, The Polytechnic, Regent Street on February 20th, 1896. This created quite a lot of excitement, and must have been judged to be very presentable because, within a year, Queen Victoria commanded a demonstration of 'The New Cinematograph Machine' especially for the Royal Family and to take place at Windsor Castle.

Scene 1: Birmingham

By the spring of 1899 Robert Rigby had settled in Birmingham and decided to set up business in that city on his own account. The history of most successful companies shows that their foundations were laid by men full of energy, drive, and considerable initiative. Robert Rigby had all these qualities and, into the bargain, he was descended from tough, astute Lancashire stock. The foundations of a successful business were thus assured.

At this time Robert Rigby was 46 years of age, he had married Emily Hughes on April 10th, 1877, and they now had three sons. The eldest bore his father's name, and so we must refer to him as Robert Rigby junior. His second son was Frederick Henry Rigby, and the youngest son was Philip James Rigby who, incidentally, is now the Managing Director of our company. The business originated in premises at Legge Street, Birmingham, and was initially set up to convert scrap brass, gun-metal, and copper into ingots. This was done by a process of melting and then pouring the liquid metal into moulds. The finished ingots were then sold to foundries where they were used to make castings in sand and from wooden patterns.

When the business opened Robert Rigby was assisted by his brother, William Rigby, and also by his eldest son. They must have been a very proud little group indeed when the first deliveries of converted ingots were made on April 25th, 1899. Robert's second son, Frederick Henry, was only 16 years of age at the time the business opened – but he had already inherited much of his father's pioneering spirit, because he started his own career as a manufacturers' agent factoring cold-headed screws, and did not join his father's company until 1928.

The third son, Philip James, was not old enough to be thinking of a career when the business was started, and so his father sent him away to Europe to study the French and German languages. This was a very wise and farsighted decision, because Philip had a very valuable talent which enabled him to become an expert linguist. Thus, when he did eventually join the company in 1906 he brought to it an expertise which proved extremely valuable when the company developed its considerable export markets.

We were now approaching the turn of the century; a time which was to begin the most dramatic developments in industry, commerce, and transport and which, in an ever-increasing crescendo, was to lead to television, to computers, to satellites, and to the jet age. Who could have foreseen these possibilities when, on January 29th, 1900, the Twopenny Tube was opened in London and offered travellers the opportunity of journeying from Shepherd's Bush all the way to The Bank, or to any intermediate station, for a total fare of only twopence?

Scene 2: London

In 1901 Queen Victoria died at the age of 82 and after reigning for 64 years. If hers was the longest reign, it is also true that her son, Edward VII, was the oldest man ever to attain his kingdom – he was 60 years of age when he came to the throne. Understandably he had great plans to make great changes, and had waited long enough for the opportunity!

Much of our business which grew up in London developed from seeds sown during this very year, and so let us recreate a little of the atmosphere which surrounded these events.

According to Madeleine Ginsburg, of the Victoria and Albert Museum, for a lady of 1901 to be in the height of fashion her dress would reach to the ground and completely cover her ankles. It would be smoothly tailored and severely nipped at the waist – which was controlled by a straight-fronted corset designed to throw her chest forward and to emphasise her hips! A gentleman of the same period would wear a high, curved top hat and would not leave the house without first putting on a double-breasted 'frock-overcoat' reaching well below the calf and elegantly shaped to his waist. This would completely conceal his formal jacket and most of his broadly-striped trousers!

This was the era of the flickering gas lamps and the rhythmic clip-clop of horses hoofs on cobbled streets. But there were many signs that the horse had very nearly had his day: in 1902 Montague Napier designed his 35 h.p. 'Gordon Bennett' racing car; in 1903 Dr. Frederick W. Lanchester introduced a 12 h.p. 4-litre car with a balanced 'vibrationless' two-cylinder horizontal engine with electric ignition, tiller steering and a worm drive to the back axle; in 1904 a racing car officially exceeded 100 m.p.h. and, of course, in 1907 Rolls-Royce introduced their famous 40/50 h.p. Silver Ghost.

Reference to these early motor cars is not without its point – because our company was directly approached by this infant motor industry for assistance and, in fact, in the years which followed we produced quite a wide range of accessories, such as step-mats for motor car running boards. These were extremely popular and we developed our lines to include both fibre and rubber mats enclosed in elegant metal trays which were reinforced with stamped corner pieces and given a highly polished finish. Many thousands of these were supplied to all the leading coach builders, including Rolls-Royce, Hoopers, Mulliners, Park Ward, and Jack Barclay. Many famous feet must have trodden on Rigby step-mats; we know that Rolls-Royce exported them to the Rajahs of India, and also that they were fitted to Cardinal Bourne's Daimler.

We produced many other accessories, including the almost indispensable carrier to hold a spare can of petrol. This consisted of a stamped angle-section base fitted with two rods and a flat metal cross-bar which stretched across the top of the can. We also produced licence holders, complete wings with moulded wells to accommodate the spare wheel, carriers for distilled water, and even drip-trays for use in the garage because, in those days, the oil seals on car engines were not particularly effective.

So far as entertainment was concerned in the year 1901, the music halls provided a great attraction and, from our brief glance at the motor car industry, one can well appreciate why Marie Lloyd received a boisterous round of applause when she sang 'Get Out And Get Under'! During December of this

year the pantomime at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, was somewhat unusual – it was 'Blue Beard' and the star on this occasion was that famous comic Dan Leno. Another considerable attraction was indoor roller skating, and this was available in long single-storey buildings – ideally suited for subsequent conversion into cinemas!

At least one such building remains as a cinema to this day; it is the 'Walpole Cinema' situated in Bond Street, Ealing. It was because such buildings could not accommodate a circle tier of seats that the projectors were mounted at a very shallow angle or rake. This imposed an almost level seating area and led directly to the need for screening a lantern slide carrying the request 'Will Ladies Please Remove Their Hats', because hats were so very large they would otherwise obscure the view of some unfortunate patrons sitting behind the owner of such a gorgeous creation!

So this was the atmosphere which existed when Robert Rigby was making so many journeys from Birmingham to London. During this time he became acquainted with a certain Mr. James Anderson, and together they decided to launch a company to serve an industry quite different from the casting foundries in Birmingham. Their company was to supply equipment to the new and exciting cinematograph industry and, for this purpose, they set up a modest workshop behind a diamond merchant's premises at No. 84 Hatton Garden, London.

No. 84 Hatton Garden is today the premises of Messrs Jay & Bamford, Ltd., and almost as if they remember our company's contributions to the entertainment industry, their building is currently known as 'Everyjoy House'! It was indeed very wise to select Hatton Garden as a centre for our London entry into the motion picture business because, in those days, we were surrounded by many well-known firms who quickly became our customers: Robert W. Paul maintained premises known as Paul's Animatograph Depot at 68 High Holborn; John Wrench & Sons had premises at 50 Gray's Inn Road; L. Gaumont & Co. were at 25 Cecil Court, and The Warwick Trading Company operated from 4 and 5 Warwick Court, High Holborn.

Although not directly connected with our industry, we also recall that Henry F. Purser sold his 'penny-in-the-slot Automatic Telescopes' from No. 33 Hatton Garden and, according to a magazine of the times, these were 'A Paying Investment having all movements necessary for viewing landscapes, seascapes and The Heavens from Piers, Hotels, Holiday Resorts, Towers, and Monuments'! Another most interesting company in the area was Chiappa & Sons Ltd., who operated from No. 6 Little Bath Street, Clerkenwell, and specialised in making 'Mechanical Barrel Organs, Harmoniums, and Pianos especially for Cinematograph Shows and Steam Roundabouts'. (For these and similar interesting advertisements we refer you to 'The Showman', Volume 1, No. 2, October, 1900.)

Without doubt, many of the people who operated these companies found time to meet at Henekeys nearby wine cellars in High Holborn, just between Gray's Inn and Fulwood Place, which still exists today almost exactly as it then was and is certainly well worth a visit. It still has the famous 'long bar' in which a most unusual triangular coal fireplace stands in the centre of the floor, facing a row of private compartments (somewhat like railway carriages but with the doors removed) and where any amount of business could be conducted in private whilst sampling the excellent wines!

Scene 3: New John Street, Aston

Although keenly attracted to his new cinematograph business in London, Robert's main interests at this time still centred upon his original works in Birmingham and, by 1902, that business had expanded to such an extent that he clearly needed larger premises.

A suitable freehold building was found in New John Street, Aston, and it is here that the registered offices of our company have remained to this day. Aston is situated on the northern outskirts of Birmingham and is well worth a visit because, amongst several other attractions such as the Aston Villa football team, it is also the site of a splendid Jacobean Hall (now a museum) which is said to be the original of Washington Irving's 'Bracebridge Hall'.

The ingot business was completely transferred to New John Street during this year and the original Legge Street premises were then closed. At the same time Robert decided that the day-to-day management of the new premises should be entrusted to his eldest son Robert junior, and so leave himself free to travel to London and elsewhere whenever this became necessary.

There is no doubt that working conditions were considerably improved with the opening of this new factory. Even so, they must have left a great deal to be desired and, to some extent, the very nature of the work made this unavoidable. Scrap metal did not arrive neatly cut to convenient lengths and ready for melting – and the small crucibles in which this melting process was carried out had to be raised to an intense heat by coke-fired furnaces. Altogether this must have called for men of considerable strength, because all the raw materials had to be man-handled. If similar problems faced us today we would think in terms of electrically operated lifting gear running along smooth overhead gantrys – but we are talking about the days when an electric motor was still quite a novelty!

The men who carried out this work were known as Casters – and they really were a querulous breed; always very difficult to control and always quite likely to down tools and walk out at the slightest provocation. But if they thought theirs was the only tough job then they were very much mistaken, because selling ingot metal to hard-headed Black Country foundrymen was certainly no easy matter – and obtaining payment for it afterwards was sometimes even harder!

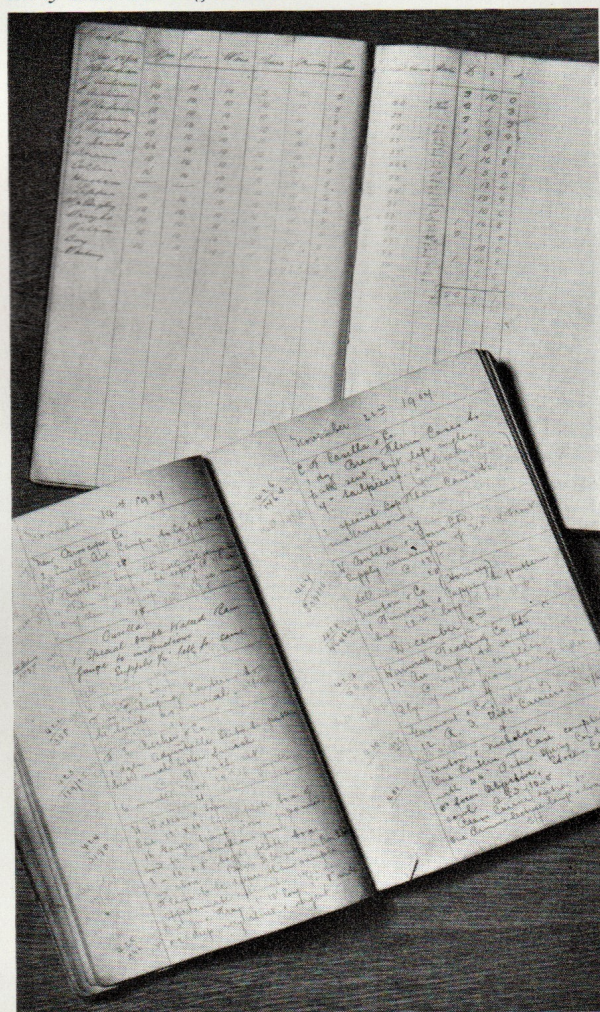
Fortunately the pattern of industry gradually changed and, of even greater importance, Robert soon realised there were very great advantages to be gained by making non-ferrous castings himself and from his own ingots, rather than merely selling them to other people to do this type of work.

However, this could only come about if he could find some additional premises because the New John Street works was already fully occupied. Fortunately he did find some old freehold house property at Lupin Street, in the Nechells district of Birmingham. This was ideally suited to his purpose because these houses were already occupied by people actually engaged in making non-ferrous castings. They operated on the really old traditional 'shop' system, where the entire business was in fact the family and consisted of fathers, sons and any available relatives all working together as a group.

The addition of Lupin Street to our Birmingham headquarters became very valuable and, over the years, many developments were to take place there before it finally had to be closed. When this occurred it was due to the compulsory purchase of the property as part of the Birmingham redevelopment scheme. However, that need not worry us at this moment because a very sound arrangement now existed in Birmingham – with metal ingots being produced in great numbers at New John Street, and almost all the output from this works being used in our own casting foundry at Lupin Street.

We can now safely leave Birmingham for some years and, in fact, our story does not take us back there again until the year 1928.

Early order and wages books



Scene 4: Hatton Garden Gets Busy!

We have now reached the year 1903, and although the film industry did not know it at the time, a picture was about to be made which was to become the first classic of the silver screen, and one which would be referred to by all students of the cinema for many years to come. It was of course 'The Great Train Robbery'. This was produced in America by Edwin S. Porter – and the world had to wait another 60 years before the real-life sequel was produced, this time in England, when a Government mail train was actually held up on August 8th, 1963, and robbed of £2,631,784 worth of old bank notes which had been taken out of circulation and were on their way to be destroyed!

Robert Rigby was obviously in the cinematograph business right at the very start of what was to become one of the most gigantic and exciting industries of the 20th century. Because of this the history of our activities in London does to a very large extent also reflect the history of the motion picture industry in England.

From the very beginning at Hatton Garden we were concerned with the projection of pictures onto a screen – but at that time only a very few of these pictures actually *moved*, because we started by manufacturing optical lanterns to project glass slides. Quite a number of these slides were hand painted – with infinite care and patience – and it was not for some years that photographic slides completely replaced this technique.

Two basic problems were common to the entire cinematograph process – both in original camera work and afterwards during projection – and these were quite simply to get enough light and to get a steady picture. The early designers hoped that the light source then used to project lantern slides might solve their first problem – but this really was asking too much, because in those days the standard light source was merely a paraffin oil lamp!

Known as a Stocks lamp, after its inventor, this device consisted of four wicks all burning simultaneously in front of a nickel-plated reflector, and enclosed in a housing which supported a rather complicated chimney. This chimney consisted of two sections and was fitted with a rack-and-pinion mechanism so that one section could move over the other and thus change the height of the assembly. By this means the operator could adjust his chimney to suit the available draught in the lecture hall and so as to maintain a bright steady light – always providing he had enough paraffin in the lamp and his wicks were well trimmed!

It did not take very long to discover that something considerably better than the oil lamp really was required, and alternatives such as the lime jet, acetylene jets, and even gas jets similar to those used for street lighting were all tried before the carbon arc light was introduced and really began to solve the problem. Even so, there remained huge strides to be taken to bring us from these early small-carbon arcs with only a 5½-inch mirror, and running at a mere 25 amps, up to the present-day giants with optically perfect 16-inch diameter mirrors and copper-covered high-intensity carbons rated at 180 amps or more! If Robert could be with us today he would find it very hard indeed to believe that in some London news theatres it is necessary to insert

a perforated copper disc in the projector lamp house – so as to *reduce* the screen brightness.

The other basic problem – to get a steady picture – occupied many clever inventors for a very long time and, although several advertisements of the day guaranteed 'An Absolutely Rock-Steady Picture', this was not strictly true. All the early projectors which enjoyed any measure of success moved the film intermittently through the gate by a very simple device known as a 'dog-movement'. This was merely an eccentric pin mounted on a rotating flange, but in such a position that it intermittently extended the loop of film between the projecting gate and the take-up sprocket. It was not until the maltese-cross mechanism was introduced some time later that the picture really began to look as if it might have been painted on the screen.

We did manufacture quite a number of projectors fitted with maltese-cross mechanisms and, in fact, our earliest trade-mark used such a cross as our house symbol. However, that is running a little ahead of events and, as every good projectionist knows, we must keep our reels in their correct order if you are to follow the story with comfort!

It was really during the year 1905 that our business in Hatton Garden began to take definite shape. From its inception four years earlier Robert had been in partnership with James Anderson, but there were signs that this arrangement was not likely to be very successful – and Robert was not happy to leave matters as they stood. He solved his problem by what proved to be little short of a stroke of genius: he persuaded his brother Arthur Rigby to join the company and to take over the daily management of Hatton Garden.

Now Arthur was a man with considerable practical engineering experience and, like his brother, he also had the family characteristics of drive and determination. Without doubt it was due to Arthur's untiring efforts that the business was put on a sound footing; James Anderson left the scene, and Arthur began to forge links of tremendous importance with all the leading companies engaged in the cinema industry. The evidence of his success is with us even to this day, because we still proudly number some of his customers amongst our own.

Some idea of the amount of business passing through our Hatton Garden works at that time can be gathered from a quick glance at our 1905 order book. During that first year of Arthur's administration the company sold 160 cinematograph projectors (36 of these went to those famous film pioneers W. Butcher & Sons for £12 each!), 132 spools, 25 film menders, 127 lanterns (including both slide projectors and enlargers), 50 slide carriers, 170 Stocks lamps and well over 1,000 lamp trays. This really was an amazing amount of business for those days and, obviously, we were now well and truly 'in the motion picture business!'.

Naturally, we had many historic names amongst our first customers, such as Andrews Pictorial Enterprises, W. Butcher & Sons Ltd., Will Day Ltd., Films Ltd., L. Gaumont & Co. Ltd., The Globe Film Company Ltd., Henderson's North of England Film Bureau, The Hepworth Manufacturing Co. Ltd., Jury's Imperial Pictures Ltd., J. Lizars Ltd., The London Cine Co. Ltd., The National Bioscope Company, The New Bioscope Co., Newton & Co., The New Film Hiring Co., Robert W. Paul, Shanly's Animated Pictures, Walter Tyler Ltd., The Charles Urban Trading Co., Walturdaw Co. Ltd., and The Warwick Trading Company.

All these names bring back many echoes of the past and yet, strangely enough, only two can claim parity

with ourselves in that, like us, they are still trading under their original titles: they are The Walturdaw Company Ltd. and J. Lizars Ltd. Gentlemen, after 65 years association we proudly salute you!

In the following year, 1906, Robert's youngest son Philip returned to England after studying languages in Europe. When he arrived on the scene at Hatton Garden the business was growing at quite a pace, and we just had to take over additional premises at nearby Hatton Wall to accommodate the sheet metal department. At that time all the best lanterns and projector lamp houses were made from sheet metal known as 'Russian Iron'. This had absolutely no political significance, but we must have used many hundreds of tons of this material whilst we were at Hatton Garden.

When Philip joined the company we only employed a staff of 12 people in London, and he is credited with making the astute observation 'even so, the outlook does seem promising'!

In this same year, 1906, a very important event was taking place, although nobody in the world took very much notice of it at the time. A Frenchman by the name of Eugene Augustin Lauste – a former apprentice at the Edison laboratories but now living in London – was carrying out some very extraordinary experiments at his studios in Brixton. By August 10th, 1907, he was granted a British patent for 'A device to record simultaneously the movements of persons and objects and the sounds relating to them optically upon the same photographic records running side by side and at the same rate as the images received'.

This really was a 'master' patent and was recognised to be so important that it was maintained through seven editions at the Patent Office. Unfortunately, a patent can only last for 16 years, and Lauste paid a cruel penalty for being so much before his time because, in 1923, his ideas were by law declared to be common property – long before 'talking pictures' became a commercial proposition in 1928, and when that time came Robert Rigby & Co. were involved in a really fantastic amount of business.

However, for the moment we were still in Hatton Garden, and the silent picture had not yet been fully exploited. It is very interesting to recall just how this took place: once the equipment became reliable 'the cinema' became an astonishing attraction to the public and three quite separate industries were born. There was the equipment manufacturing industry, the film producing industry, and the film exhibiting industry. This pattern remained unchanged for many years, and resulted in a most important and healthy spirit of competition.

Although a few very small 'cinema circuits' did exist, it was more usual for each cinema to be individually run by its owner – and the only way for him to obtain films was to rent them from the producers. The film producers had no means of knowing if their finished 'epics' would be accepted by the exhibitors and so, of course, they were determined to make every film infinitely better than their previous one. When a picture was ready for exhibition it was given a 'Trade Show' and all the exhibitors were invited to view the masterpiece – and then to bid against each other for the privilege of being the first to show it!

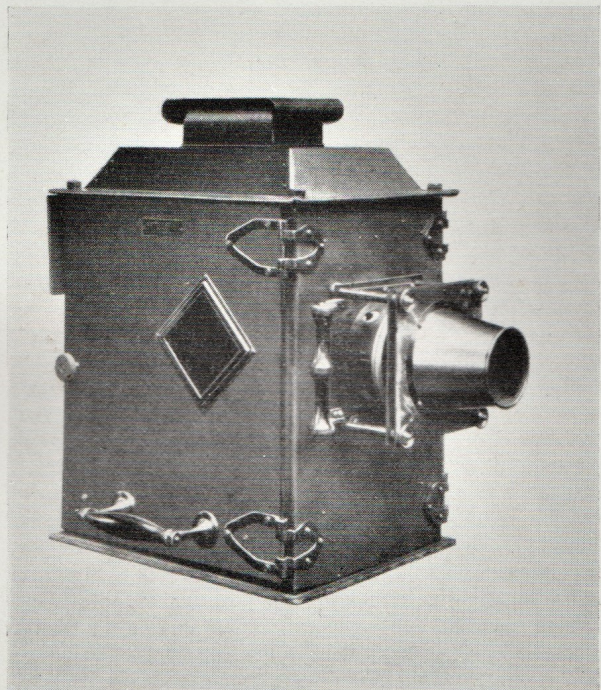
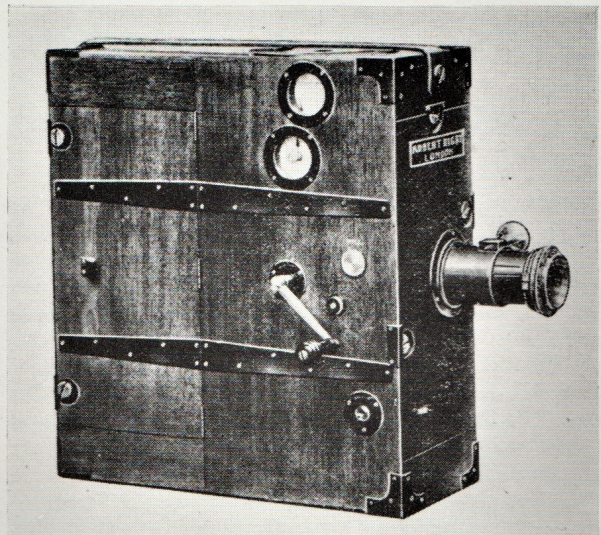
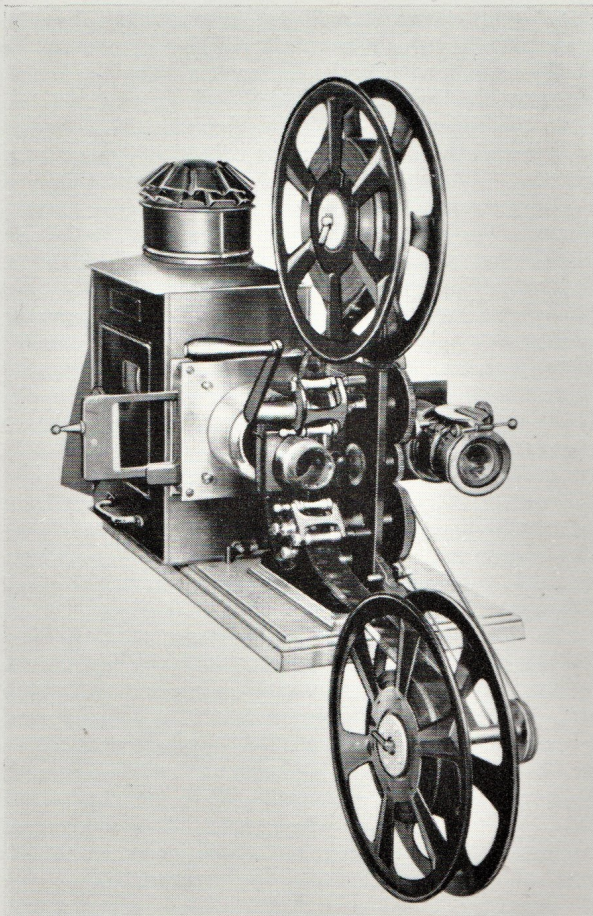
Exhibitors in those days really had to be showmen, and it was their job to please their patrons, pack their houses and so take enough money at the box-office to outbid their rivals for the first showing of the next great picture. Only the really successful showman could become the highest bidder and secure the

'first run' of a picture – for less money he might rent it during a 'second run', and if he couldn't manage this then there was nothing for it but to be content with a 'third run' at a relatively modest hiring fee. Coupled with this it was quite a common practice to change the programme twice in one week, and it was not unknown for some showmen to run *three* completely different programmes in the same week.

Until very recently an old cinema known appropriately as 'The Bioscope Electric Theatre' existed at Shepherd's Bush Green – ironically rubbing shoulders with the BBC Television Theatre. Along the side wall of this grand old-timer the prices of admission were permanently cast in solid concrete – 3d., 6d., and 9d.! The owner of that cinema *must* have been a good showman, because the prospect of increasing the prices would have been too terrible to contemplate.

Opposite:
Top left: Film and slide projector
Below: Stage projector and stand
Top right: Camera
Centre: Cinematograph stand
Bottom: Cinematograph lantern
This page: Early trademarks





Scene 5: A New London Home

Within two years our business had expanded so much that yet another move became essential and, in 1909, we transferred all our London activities to a self-contained four-storied factory at No. 9 North Mews. Now this was a most important development and, with several additions, it provided us with sufficient accommodation right up until 1934. Because our present London works is also in this area it will be helpful to our overseas friends and others who may not be familiar with London if we describe a little of the geography of the area.

Going from east to west many people think of 'London' as being anywhere between Tower Bridge and Marble Arch. This is not true; the genuine City of London only covers an area of one square mile – all parts beyond that area are districts of Greater London which sometimes have names of their own – such as the City of Westminster, which is more generally considered to be the 'West End'. The boundaries of the genuine old City of London are recognised either by 'gates' or 'bars'. Hence we have Ludgate, Bishopsgate, Moorgate, Temple Bar, and Holborn Bar. The point we are concerned with is the City boundary known as Holborn Bar.

This point may be recognised by one of our famous centres of Law – Staples Inn – situated at the corner between Holborn and Gray's Inn Road. The nearest underground railway station is 'Chancery Lane' which is on the Central Line. If from this point one walks down Gray's Inn Road the first major turning on the left-hand side is Theobald's Road; continuing down Gray's Inn Road we pass Northington Street, Roger Street, and then arrive at Guilford Street. We are essentially concerned with the area to the left of Gray's Inn Road which is bounded by Theobald's Road and Guilford Street because, within this area, all our London premises have existed right from 1909 up to this day. Our present works is in fact in Northington Street but, just to confuse students of London, this used to be known as Little James Street! Two other names complete all the geography we need to know at present: one is Brownlow Mews, which lies between Guilford Street and Roger Street, and the other is North Mews which lies between Roger Street and Northington Street. It was to the factory at No. 9 North Mews that we made our move during 1909.

We had a rather mixed group of neighbours when we moved into our new premises; on one corner of Little James Street we had a family butcher, and next to him was a Welsh dairy. A farrier – or blacksmith – was at the intersection of North Mews and Roger Street, and this was owned by a veterinary surgeon by the name of Alfred West who occupied offices at the rear. A wheelwright had premises in Brownlow Mews where he fitted metal tyres to wooden cart wheels – and this was a very important occupation because almost all transport in those days was by horse and van (the modest sum of 2/6d. purchased the services of horse, van, and driver for one hour!).

The blacksmith's premises had been a disused Chapel before he arrived on the scene, and for a short period we rented the upper part of this building as a store house – until we discovered the weight of all our stocks had caused the floor to develop a rather alarming slope! This meant the blacksmith's ceiling had naturally done likewise and had to be supported

with stout metal stanchions very quickly, but he was quite happy about this arrangement because he could now conveniently tether the horses to these pillars while they were being shod.

In the early days at North Mews the power used to drive all our machinery was provided by one large gas engine, and it was some years before this was replaced by electric motors. Because it was quite a heavy and cumbersome piece of equipment the gas engine was naturally installed on the ground floor. It also created quite a considerable amount of noise, and so we put our offices on the first floor, together with the stores and the testing theatre. The second floor became our machine shop and assembly department, and the top floor was given over to the sheet metal and enamelling shops. These arrangements were a great advance on Hatton Garden but, by present-day standards, we would have had some difficulties in recruiting labour – because central heating was an unheard of luxury and, although we did install gas radiators on each floor, the only way to keep really warm in the winter time was to work like demons!

At this time we made a number of projectors containing the new maltese-cross intermittent mechanism, but the industry was growing at an alarming rate and large companies in America, France, and Germany flooded the British market with their machines. These were handled by such firms as J. Frank Brockliss, L. Gaumont & Co. Ltd., and The Walturdaw Company, who all employed a considerable staff both to install the equipment and also to provide routine maintenance at the theatres.

Quite a number of British firms such as Ross, Kershaw and Kamm, did manufacture cinema projectors for some years, but all of them eventually found it unprofitable and ceased operating. Long before that happened Robert Rigby decided to concentrate our activities on supplying ancillary equipment such as arc lamps, spools and spool boxes, film joiners, rewinders, film cabinets, etc. This was an extremely farsighted decision, and one of the major keys to our success. It could very well be that Robert was of the same opinion as Colman's of Norwich – who demonstrated that it can be much wiser to sell the mustard than the meat or, in a similar manner today Procter & Gamble, Unilever, etc., undoubtedly make handsome profits selling washing powders instead of washing machines!

We soon became accustomed to our new premises and the volume of work for the cinema industry continued to expand at a steady rate right up to 1914 and then, of course, the First World War very drastically changed our way of life. Almost immediately our company was placed under contracts to work for the Government, mainly concentrating our efforts on precision equipment for the Admiralty.

However, the production of some motion picture equipment was necessary throughout these war years because, even in those days, the value of a filmed record of scenes at the battle fronts was recognised. A number of these early 'war films' are still preserved in the National Film Archives, and 'stills' from some of them may be seen at the Imperial War Museum.

Many people believe that cinema newsreels were born as a result of these 'filmed reports from the front'. This topic brings to mind the name of Cherry Kearton, who was quite a famous cameraman at that time. In a copy of the Daily Mirror dated October 10th, 1914, the entire centre pages are given over to war pictures carrying the caption: 'These pictures are from a wonderful film by Cherry Kearton Ltd.'

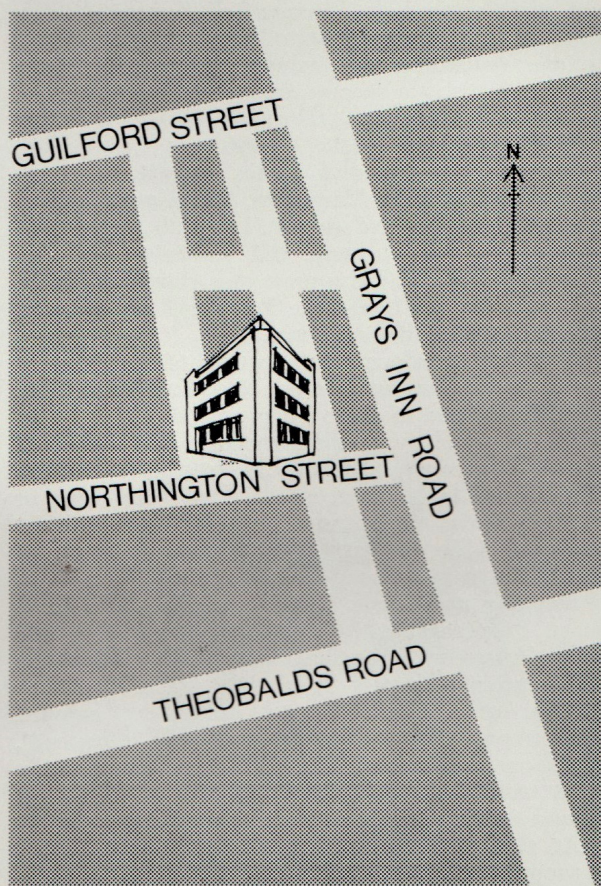
Amongst the pictures is a shot of six London omnibuses with completely open top seating and 'outside' spiral staircases – they also carry advertisements for Pears Soap and Dewars Whiskey, plus a destination board to Cricklewood – although they were photographed by Kearton in France! We also have a copy of the Trade magazine for October 5th, 1916; known simply as 'The Cinema' and containing over 75 pages, this mine of information was sold for precisely one penny. The front cover carries an advertisement which reads: 'The King Visits His Armies in The Great Advance, Taken by Special Arrangement with and under the direction of The War Office by the British Topical Committee for War Films', and then at the foot of the page we see: 'Sole Booking Director, W. F. Jury'. These two short references indicate that the film industry was very much in demand during the First World War.

The same magazine indicated that the cinema was also recognised as a much-needed means of entertaining a war-weary public, because this issue recorded that a total of 83 films were released in Britain during September, 1916, alone. We feel sure those of our readers who are interested in the history of the cinema will want us to include the following references to some of these first-world-war pictures.

That well-known company Butchers Film Service announced 'A Wife in a Hurry' as being 'a screaming three-reeler, bubbling over with fun, frolic and good looks, featuring Mr. Lupino Lane'. The Vitagraph Film Hiring Service recognised the powerful aid they could obtain from the national press and ran the following extract: 'Police called to control dense crowd waiting to see 'God's Country and The Woman''. The Fox Film Co. Ltd., were more down to earth with Theda Bara in 'The Evil That Men Do'. Pathe advertised their well-known trade-mark with the slogan 'Hitch a Rooster to Your Screen' and then offered that much-quoted classic 'The Perils of Pauline' with Pearl White in the title role. Incidentally, this was a famous *serial* film which came to the screen in ten weekly episodes.

Serials were great favourites both with the cinema managers and the public – particularly with the managers and in the belief that if you went to see 'part one' they would then stand a very good chance of getting you back in their theatres for the next nine weeks. The Gaumont Company were offering 'Diana and Destiny' and anticipated her predicament by announcing the supporting film would be 'What Could a Poor Girl Do'. Essanay had the same thought when they recommended 'A Daughter of The City' should be shown together with 'The Woman Always Pays' and Charles Urban may have started the cult for superlatives by calling his film 'Suzanne' a Superphotoplay!

It is also interesting to note that the magazine did contain several 'technical' advertisements: Archibald Vickers Ltd. made the bold statement: 'Wash Your Own Films with *Film-Clean* – a clear white safe spirit price only 3/6 per gallon in Free Can'.



Scene 6: Business As Usual

After the armistice was signed on November 11th, 1918, we gradually returned to the full production of our normal industrial products. During 1919 the British Government became very concerned because a great volume of foreign manufactured goods was being imported and sold in this country at prices which made it almost impossible for British manufacturers to compete. This resulted in the introduction of an important bill, known as 'The Safeguard of Industry Bill', and the effect of this was to impose an import duty of $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent. on a wide range of goods, including cinematograph apparatus. We were naturally both relieved and delighted with this piece of legislation, and its immediate effect was to enable us to recover our sales of projector stands, spool boxes, and many other accessories.

By 1920 we had two impressive catalogues illustrating the equipment which was then sold from Little James Street. One catalogue – known as 'Premier Stage Apparatus' – illustrated and described such items as the No. 1 Premier Stage Projector (a spot light complete with five colour filters); the Premier Stage Flood Projector (for use on the stage itself and complete with portable stand); the Premier Rainbow and Flicker-Effect Projectors; Arc Lamps; Lenses; Resistances, and – most important to the theatre manager's revenue – the Premier Advertising Lantern.

The second catalogue was known as 'Premier Cinematograph Apparatus' and this really formed the basis of the business which has continually grown at 'Premier Works'. It illustrated such items as the Premier Cinematograph Lantern; Premier Spool Boxes, having a body in stout-gauge planished sheet steel and *absolutely fireproof* – an essential requirement when all films shown in public cinemas were printed onto highly inflammable nitrate base; Premier Spools and, more particularly, Premier Split Spools whereby a roll of film may be inserted into a spool without tedious rewinding and which, incidentally, have been an enormous success and are still sold in vast numbers to film and television companies; Arc Lamps; Terminal blocks, Resistances; Ammeters; Voltmeters; Motors and Motor Regulators; Film Rewinders and Film Measurers. Our film measurers recorded both feet and metres 51 years before Britain adopted the metric system and decimalisation! The catalogue also included a most important forerunner of a now famous line – the Premier Film Mender, complete with knife and scraper.

These two catalogues listed a total of 261 different items – a truly enormous range of equipment in those days. Every one of these items was classified by an individual code name, and somebody must have had a very interesting time allocating suitable names. They certainly favoured words at the beginning of the alphabet, as more than 150 of them begin with the letter 'a'. One suspects a considerable amount of humour was introduced to the serious business of christening new items, because we find the No. 3 Stage Projector could be ordered under the code name 'Aflaming', thus making possible a telephone conversation asking for 'A Flaming Stage Projector'. Certain of the wire-wound resistances enjoyed such amorous names as 'Afflirted' and 'Affianced', whilst one film rewinder was unfortunately given the code name 'Abrupt' although, without doubt, it wound the film very gently and smoothly!

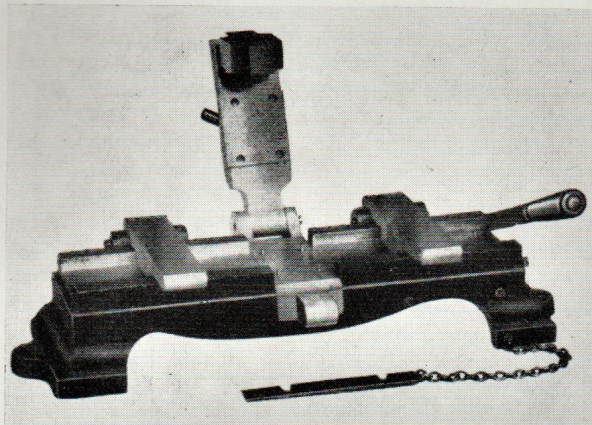
At this period the company employed a very appropriate Registered Trade-Mark in the form of a

maltese cross – the four-slotted device which is still used as the intermittent film-moving mechanism in all cinema projectors. Each quadrant of this trade-mark carried a letter so as to form the legend 'R.R.L.B.' and, of course, this indicated 'Robert Rigby, London and Birmingham'.

One important factor which has undoubtedly contributed to our success has always been our extremely good relationship with our staff – no further proof of this is necessary than a glance at the Roll of Honour which is reproduced on page 24 and shows how many employees have been with us for well over 40 years. The importance of this relationship was realised very early in our history, and one significant factor which contributed to its establishment occurred during 1920. This was the introduction of an annual profit-sharing scheme for the staff, arranged so that their benefits were related to their years of service with us. We are quite sure that any student of industrial relationships will readily agree that this was a very advanced managerial decision for those times.

In the year 1922 our founder's brother, Arthur Rigby, died after fighting against a very long and painful illness. Arthur had been in control of our London activities for 17 years, and we owe a great debt to him for the enormous strides the company made during that time. Without doubt it was his untiring efforts which established the name of Robert Rigby as a major supplier of equipment to the cinematograph industry.

Film mender



Scene 7: Robert Rigby Limited

Our story so far has recorded something of the part our company played in the early growth of the motion picture industry in Britain. But another equally exciting means of entertainment was also being born at this time, and in later years our company was to serve both industries with equal success. We are referring to that infant who was first modestly known as 'wireless', soon became known as 'radio' and ultimately developed into the giant 'television'. The growth of that enormous industry depended very much upon Sir Ambrose Fleming's invention of the thermionic valve and this is important to us because, without it, the motion picture might never have found its voice.

The Robert Rigby Story would therefore not be complete without recording that special date when, on November 14th, 1922, the British Broadcasting Company began daily wireless broadcasts from Savoy Hill, London – a station which became famous by the call-sign 'London 2LO'. Within two years stations had also been opened at Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Cardiff, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and Belfast (in that order), and this brings us to the year 1924 – a most auspicious year both for Britain and also for our company.

It was most fitting that our own organisation became a Limited Company during this important year, because our business was expanding very rapidly and, for the fourth time, we once more found ourselves in need of additional space!

Our London headquarters were still at No. 9 North Mews, the four-storey premises we had first occupied during 1909. Now it will be remembered that North Mews lies between Roger Street and what was then known as Little James Street, whilst another mews – Brownlow Mews – lies between Roger Street and Guilford Street. Very fortunately we were able to secure premises in these nearby Brownlow Mews – and this we promptly did by acquiring the lease from George Mann & Co., a firm specialising in the manufacture of printing machinery.

At that period we believed these additional premises really would satisfy our needs for some considerable time. We little knew that the motion picture – the greatest of all illusions – was about to shatter our own illusions and answer back – literally! This happened in the year 1928 and when 'Warner Brothers First National Vitaphone Pictures' gave it the *voice* to do so; and from that moment we became caught up in a frantic wave of excitement and expansion. Almost overnight we were forced to increase production out of all proportions to anything we might previously have dreamed of; the pay-roll was doubled, delivery schedules were only met by working many hours of overtime, and in two really hectic years our output was practically trebled. How did it all begin?

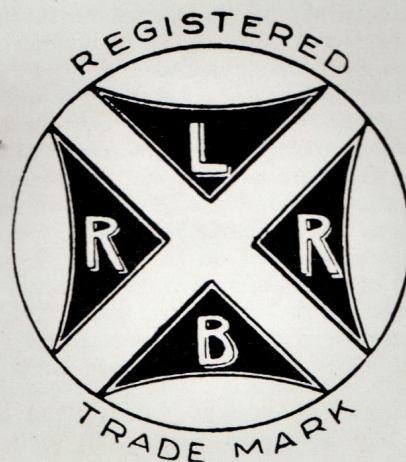
The very first full-length 'all-talking, all-singing' motion picture was 'The Jazz Singer', and this came to London during September, 1928, when it was shown to an astounded audience at the Piccadilly Theatre. The sound which accompanied this film had been recorded onto large discs, similar to gramophone records, but 16-inches in diameter and arranged to rotate more slowly and in synchronism with the projector mechanism. In those days the picture film was projected at a speed of 16 individual 'frames' every second and the playing time of a single

record had to equal the projecting time of a 1,000-foot reel of film.

Although these large discs appeared to be similar to conventional gramophone records there were several important differences. For one thing, they were not played by starting at the outer rim and running towards the centre – quite the reverse. The cinema operator was required first to carefully lower the pick-up needle into a *radial* groove and then to guide the pick-up arm to the outer limit of that groove. All this was done whilst the record was stationary and was designed to ensure that the disc started to rotate in perfect synchronism with the picture film. The disc turntable was positively linked to the projector mechanism and both were then driven by a common heavy-duty synchronous motor.

Our company became involved with talking pictures from this moment onwards and we did manufacture some equipment for these very early 'disc talkies'. However, whilst they were instantly popular with cinema audiences they were not a very practical proposition for the industry because, apart from the difficulties of synchronisation and the problems of transporting the discs, it was little short of a tragedy if one of them became mislaid, scratched or broken!

Fortunately it quickly became possible to record sounds by photographic methods and to optically print either a 'variable density' or a 'variable area' sound track alongside the pictures. This immediately and positively guaranteed that both sound and picture would be reproduced in perfect synchronism – and also accommodated both of them conveniently on the original flexible rolls of film which were well-known throughout the industry.



Scene 8: Birmingham, Lupin Street

At this point in our story we must remember that our Birmingham organisation had also been steadily developing whilst so much activity in the motion picture business had been going on in London. Way back in 1903 we left Birmingham well and safely established at two centres: with metal ingots being produced at New John Street and sand castings being manufactured at Lupin Street. Previously to that we also mentioned that our founder had a son, Frederick Rigby, who had not joined the company when it was formed but had started out on his own account as a manufacturers' agent factoring cold-headed screws.

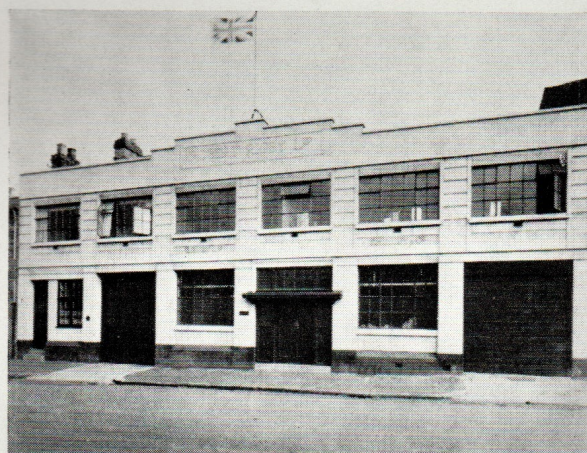
Early in the year 1928 Robert and his son Frederick held a conference, and the upshot of this was a decision that Frederick should join the family business at Birmingham. At this time he was 45 years of age – just one year younger than his father had been when he founded the company in 1899. By now Frederick had gathered a great deal of knowledge not only about the marketing of screws but also about the techniques involved in their manufacture.

It had undoubtedly been a sound policy to extend the original metal ingot business to include the manufacture of sand castings, and it was now equally logical to use Frederick's wide knowledge and experience to introduce the manufacture of screws at our Birmingham premises.

It was accordingly decided to re-organise a portion of our Lupin Street factory to accommodate this work, and a new department soon appeared on the scene, together with a number of capstan lathes and hand-operated 'worming' machines. These machines were used to create the actual screw threads, but they were quickly replaced by the more modern technique of thread rolling.

The quality of work which can be produced on a capstan lathe depends very much upon the skill of the mechanic who sets up the series of operations it is intended to perform. Some people may therefore be surprised to read that this exacting task was carried out for us by a certain Mrs. Eveson. We should perhaps have said 'a very special Mrs. Eveson' because, right at the beginning of our story, we mentioned the family spirit which exists amongst our staff. Mrs. Eveson was not only our 'capstan lathe set-up mechanic' but she also had direct control over all the female labour employed to operate the lathes. She stayed with us for over 30 years and remained long enough to see her son, Mr. J. C. W. Eveson, become Works Manager of our Birmingham plant – a perfect example of the family spirit which exists throughout the company.

From 1930 onwards the activity at Lupin Street steadily expanded, but the type of work performed there gradually changed. In particular, the foundry activity became uneconomical and eventually had to be terminated – this was mainly because of increasing difficulties in finding suitable labour for the sand casting operations, and also because the growing popularity of hot brass pressing techniques was largely replacing the use of cast parts. The Lupin Street factory was therefore concentrated on the manufacture of screws, on cold forging, and machining.



Scene 9: Progress in The Thirties

Back at No. 9 North Mews we were still working almost 'round the clock' to keep up with the talking picture boom and, for a brief period, we had to take yet more premises in nearby Brownlow Mews. The cause of all this activity was, quite literally, a mad scramble to equip the nation's cinemas with means to reproduce sound, which by now could be photographically recorded onto the picture film. Once the bulk of these conversions had been made the volume of business did relax somewhat and we were able to dispense with the most recent of the Brownlow Mews acquisitions.

The very first sound heads we ever produced were made for British Talking Pictures, Ltd., but these were relatively small affairs compared to the units eventually developed by British Acoustic Films Ltd. (a company which, along with Gainsborough Pictures (1928) Ltd. and many others, was to be absorbed by Gaumont-British, who were themselves eventually to be absorbed by the J. Arthur Rank Organisation). We produced several hundred British Acoustic sound heads for use in conjunction with Gaumont Eclipse projectors.

Most appropriately during this great rush to develop talking pictures, a group of technicians came together to form the London Branch of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers of America. However, the organisation was destined to only a short life under that name, and subsequently became the British Kinematograph Society during the year 1931.

In these early 'talkie' days the sound heads were box-like additions fixed below the normal picture projecting mechanism – something quite different to a modern integral unit capable of projecting both 35 mm and 70 mm 'wide-screen' pictures, as well as reproducing either optical or magnetic sound tracks!

It is of course also true that similar progress has been made in many other directions. For example, the film itself has been completely changed and, instead of the original celluloid with its highly inflammable nitrate base, all motion picture films are now made on perfectly safe triacetate base materials which are very difficult to ignite and burn less intensely than a newspaper.

This reference to nitrate film reminds us that one of the greatest fire hazards in a cinema of those days was obviously located where the greatest volume of film was stored. Because of this it was illegal to store or even to rewind films in the projection box itself, and a quite separate room complete with film storage cabinets had to be provided. These film storage cabinets were quite elaborate units, designed so that each reel of film was isolated in a separate fire-proof compartment – and each compartment was fitted with an automatic self-closing door. Similar precautions were taken in the operating box because the risk of fire in this area was very considerable. It was particularly important to prevent fire spreading through the projection port (or window) and actually into the auditorium itself, or even to chance the possibility of the audience seeing evidence of a fire occurring in the operating box (because that would almost certainly cause a panic). To guard against either of these events special gravity-operated fire shutters were mounted on the wall of the projection box and so that they would completely obscure the projection ports once they fell into position.

Robert Rigby Ltd. became involved in manufacturing all these safety devices and, in fact, as far back as 1920 we had manufactured the Premier Iron-Clad Operating House which was approved and adopted by the London County Council and many provincial councils.

It was by now quite obvious that providing new equipment for use in the cinemas only satisfied one side of the industry: this was because the British film studios quickly realised that they too must begin to produce talking pictures if they were to stay in business. In turn this would undoubtedly mean more work for us, and we realised it was very inconvenient to remain with our London headquarters split up in its present fashion with No. 9 North Mews as the main building but also with several workshops scattered around the locality.

This seemed very much like the story of Hatton Garden all over again – but on this occasion with a very big difference, because we were now in a position to contemplate building premises especially to suit our requirements. The only problem was – where to find the Real Estate!

It so happened that an old-established firm of concertina makers by the name of Lachenal had premises on the corner of Little James Street which, incidentally, had by now become known as Northington Street, and this was almost opposite to our own building in North Mews. It was more or less inevitable that the concertina could no longer compete with such technological advances as the talking picture, and so in that era of Bing Crosby, Paul Whiteman, Ambrose and the ubiquitous nightingale singing its little heart out in Berkeley Square, Lachenal's closed their doors for the last time.

The factory itself was of no use to us at all, but the site on which it stood was ideal, and so Robert Rigby Ltd. immediately bought it up and promptly moved in with a team of demolition contractors. Our aim was to create purpose-built modern premises which would comfortably house all our London activities under one roof and so, naturally, the next urgent requirement was to find a first-class architect.

Very fortunately our present Managing Director, Philip Rigby, was a personal friend of Mr. Edwin Sadgrove who, apart from being the Chairman of the Criterion Restaurant in Piccadilly Circus, was also a past President of the Association of British Architects. Mr. Sadgrove advised Philip to approach a Mr. James Bowden, whose experience in designing factories included the famous Ovaltine plant at King's Langley and also extensions to the John Dickinson factories at Apsley.

Mr. Bowden was delighted to co-operate and it was on his drawing board that our present London building was born. The contract to erect the five-storey premises was placed with Gazes of Kingston Ltd.

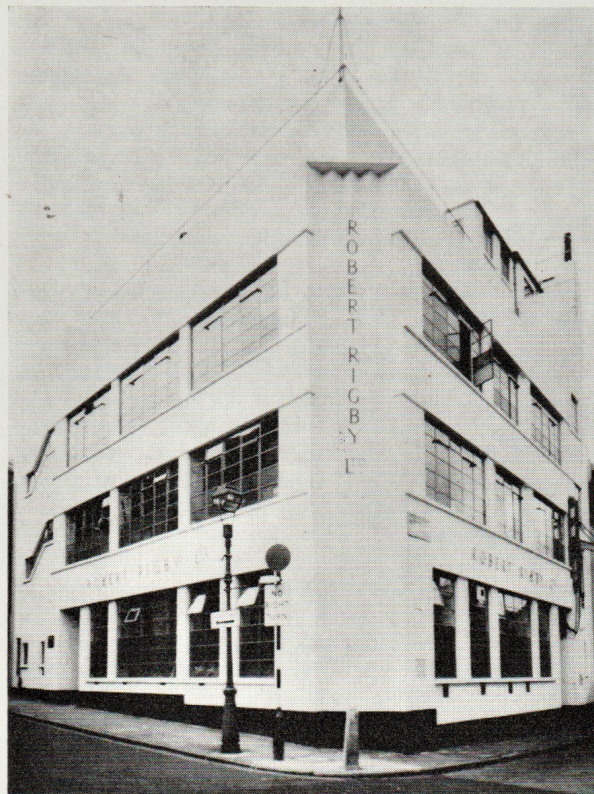
All seemed to be progressing extremely well and then, on February 6th, 1934, our founder Robert Rigby died at the age of 81 and after running his company for 35 years. It was indeed little short of a tragedy that this should happen when the new London building was so very near completion. He would undoubtedly have been a very proud man if he could have lived to see the new magnificent and spacious premises bearing his name – such a very far cry from his first small and dark workshop at No. 84 Hatton Garden.

It is fitting to recall that at this time Robert Rigby Ltd. consisted of three branches: the Lupin Street factory, responsible for capstan lathe work and the manufacture of cold-headed screws, and under the

control of Frederick Rigby; the New John Street factory, responsible for metal ingots and castings, under the control of Robert Rigby junior; the new Northington Street factory, responsible for all cinematograph equipment and under the control of Philip Rigby.

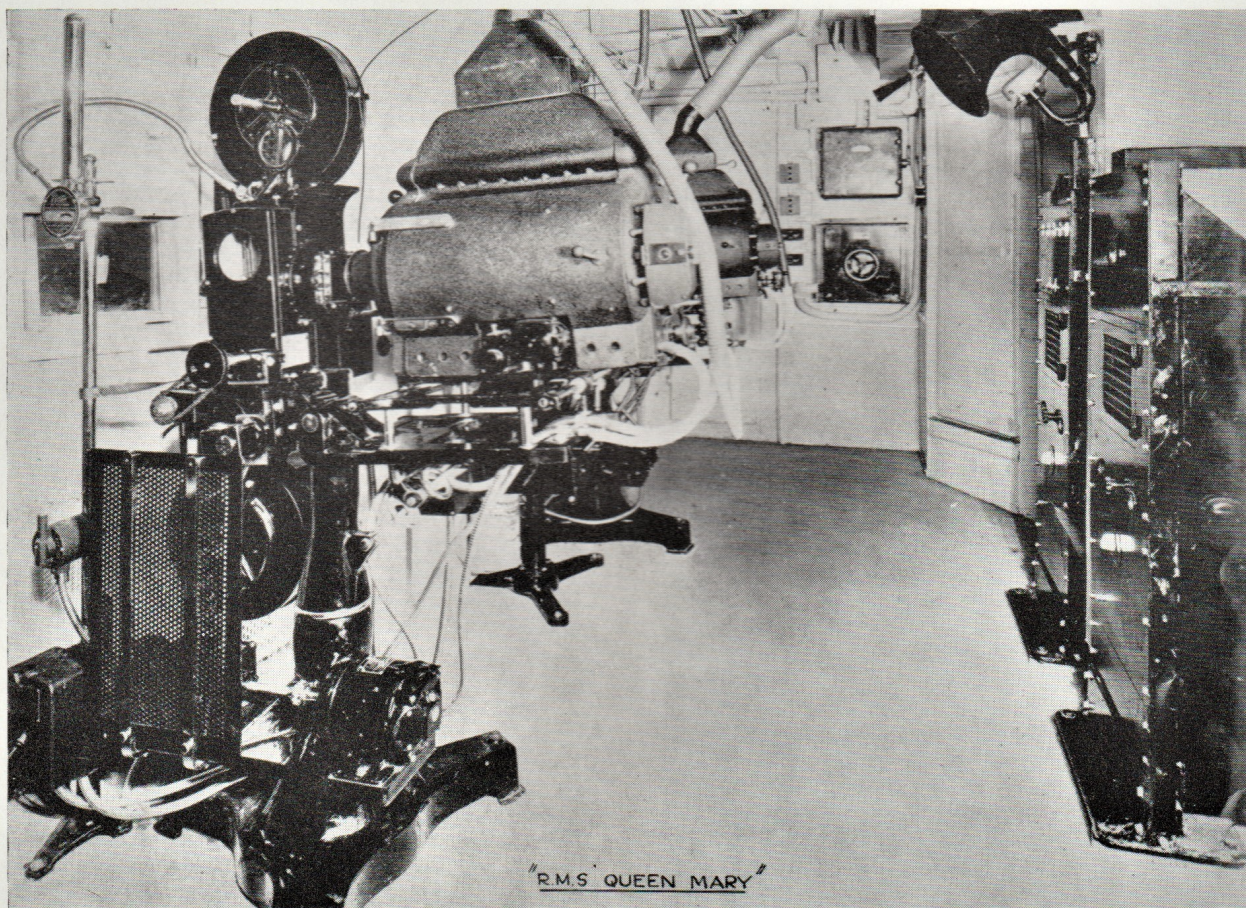
In the following year, 1935, work began on another new building, this time in Birmingham and to replace the old premises at Lupin Street. The volume of work undertaken by the capstan lathe department in this factory had been steadily increasing and this, together with the equally constant growth in the production of cold-headed screws, not only justified the new building but made it urgently necessary. The screw department was controlled by Mr. L. Mogg at that time; he had joined the company in 1930 and is still the foreman in charge of this greatly increased activity – yet another example of the loyal family spirit which is so characteristic of our company.

In more recent years Robert Rigby Ltd. has supplied a great amount of equipment to the television industry. It is therefore important at this moment in our history to record that on November 2nd, 1936, the British Broadcasting Corporation opened the very first television station in the world. This took place at Alexandra Palace in North London, and although many other buildings have since been brought into service to take over some television feature programmes, the BBC News Division remained at 'AP' for 33 years and did not move away until 1969. Even then the faithful old premises found a new lease of life and is now used for 'Schools' TV Broadcasts'.



Premier Works, Northington Street

Gaumont Eclipse projector with British Acoustic soundhead in use on board the 'Queen Mary'



Scene 10: Fire Over London

In September, 1939, Adolph Hitler invaded Poland and so set alight one of the greatest conflagrations the world has ever known. Almost immediately we found our entire resources were placed under contracts with the Government, and Philip Rigby became a member of the Ministry of Supply Committee specially set up to deal with the production of Bofors gunsights.

This was the second occasion in our history when we had been called upon to give of our best for the National war effort but, of course, our contribution this time was at a far higher level than it could have been in 1914. Nobody who lived through the six years following September, 1939, can ever forget the magnificent leadership and stirring speeches of Winston Churchill (afterwards to become Sir Winston Churchill). One speech was most appropriately aimed at all production factories: 'Give Us The Tools And We'll Finish The Job'.

Robert Rigby Ltd. can certainly claim that their entire staff responded magnificently to that call. The firm carried out particularly fine work in manufacturing precision gun-sights for anti-aircraft guns, together with sun compasses, searchlight components, tripods, portable firing ranges, components for sea mines and, just as in the First World War, a considerable amount of cinematograph apparatus which was an essential requirement for all three services.

The London 'cockney' has always been famous for his humour, and the almost incredible problems of modern warfare made his home part of the battlefield. Even so, his spirit never failed and the number of really funny stories which testify to this are legion. In some small way we must have added to his comforts because, amidst all the highly scientific equipment we were building at that time, we were suddenly called upon to rush through a special set of 'punches' – and these were urgently needed at a factory nearby where they were manufacturing millions of saccharine tablets. With the sugar ration cut to an absolute minimum thousands of housewives would have blessed Robert Rigby Ltd. if they had known about those punches!

When Mr. Bowden designed our Northington Street premises in 1934 he included a spacious basement in his plans. This was indeed fortunate, because the Holborn Council commandeered that basement as an air-raid shelter and every night, as the wail of sirens echoed across the gloomy London skies, residents from the Theobald's Road and Gray's Inn Road area gratefully struggled down into it with their blankets and sleeping bags.

After what seemed a lifetime the last flying bomb arrived and the last 'all clear' did eventually sound. When peace returned in 1945 a great deal of London lay in ruins but, very fortunately, our Northington Street premises were intact and almost immediately we were able to revert to the production of our standard lines for the cinema, theatre, and photographic industries.

In less than a year – to be precise, on June 7th, 1946 – the BBC resumed television transmissions from Alexandra Palace although at that time only 20,000 TV licence holders existed, and they were all in the London area. Because of this the Corporation began a series of new installations to provide national

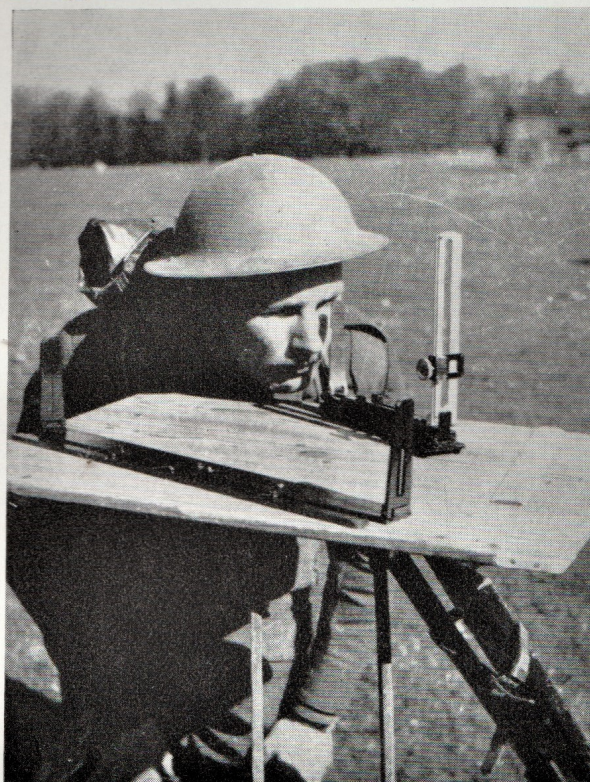
television coverage and, within six years, high power transmitters were operating in the Midlands, the North of England, Scotland, and Wales. Much of any television programme is derived from motion picture film, and this implies the need for a great amount of film-handling equipment, such as rewind benches, editing machines, editing 'horses', film joiners, spools, storage racks and even film waste bins! From 1946 onwards Robert Rigby Ltd. has supplied much of this equipment to the BBC and, subsequently, to all the ITV companies and many television stations overseas.

By now a third generation of the Rigby family had entered the business, and this event reminds us of the coincidences referred to at the very beginning of this story: many years ago Peter and Anne Rigby had *three* sons, Arthur, William, and Robert (our founder). In turn Robert had *three* sons, Robert junior, Frederick, and Philip (our present Managing Director). Philip also had *three* sons, Anthony, John, and Peter. It will therefore come as no surprise at all to learn that Peter has also had *three* sons although, at present, none of them is old enough to enter the business!

However, our family tree shows that Robert junior had one son – and he is our present Chairman, R. Vaughan Rigby, who first occupied this position during 1956. Two of Philip's sons, Peter and John, are both Directors of Robert Rigby Ltd., but Anthony unfortunately died at an early age. Peter is currently responsible for all production at Northington Street and John is very busy building a most impressive export market for our goods – already between 25 and 30 per cent. of the company's output goes directly to overseas customers, not only in Europe but also in America and throughout the world.

For the sake of clarity we have allowed this part of our story to run a little ahead of the true chronological order of events, and to correct this we must now return to the year 1946 and to Birmingham.

A rangefinder in use



Scene II: Birmingham, A Time of Change

The ingot business at Birmingham represented the basic roots from which our entire company has grown, and by 1946 that activity had been in existence for 47 years. The importance of this has always been recognised by keeping the registered offices of the company at our New John Street address and, in fact, they remain there to this day. During the whole of that period Robert Rigby's eldest son, Robert junior, had been steadily building this works and he continued to do so until his death in 1946. When this occurred the management of New John Street passed to Mr. H. F. Barrow – who had joined us 14 years earlier and, incidentally, has only recently retired after 38 years service with the company.

Unfortunately the metal ingot business at New John Street was now facing very difficult times, particularly because of increasing labour problems and also due to a serious shortage of raw materials. Meanwhile, at the Lupin Street premises, Frederick Rigby was very anxious to re-open the brass sand casting activity which had been terminated during 1930 – shortly after he had joined the company to introduce the screw manufacturing business.

Frederick was advised not to do this but, as an alternative, to consider opening up a new interest by manufacturing zinc-based alloy pressure castings. A start was made in this direction and certainly met with initial success; it may well have continued to do so had it not run into difficulties on two fronts: firstly, because the interest in this venture was extended to include the complete manufacture and assembly of electric tubular heaters which, on the face of it, was quite a logical development since this type of heating appliance is based upon a pressure casting. Secondly, and far more seriously in its consequences, because we learned with some dismay that although we owned the freehold of our Lupin Street works, we were soon to be forced to give up these premises!

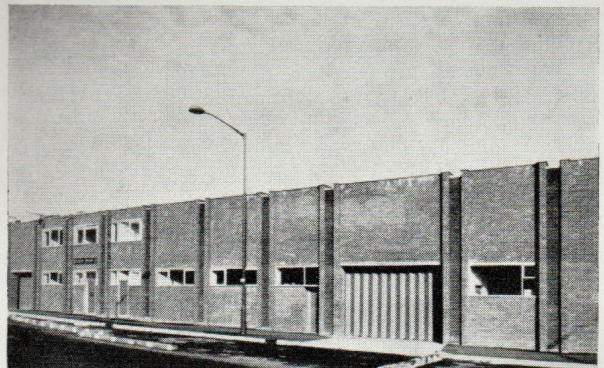
All this came about because an Act of Parliament, passed during 1946, gave the Birmingham Corporation the right to acquire the whole of the Nechells area for redevelopment, and for this purpose they had been granted the power of compulsory purchase. Fortunately, no such order is implemented at once and, in fact, we did not actually cease activities at Lupin Street until 1960. Even so, many decisions concerning the whole future of our activities at Birmingham had to be taken long before that occurred.

By 1958 it was clear that the metal industry had effectively passed into the hands of the large combines and, without a very considerable capital investment, it was no longer wise for us to compete in this sphere. Parallel to this the Birmingham Corporation had suggested that the solution to our Lupin Street problem was to move to a site in South Wales – the only alternative being to transfer the work from that plant into our New John Street premises. However, this latter suggestion was effectively strangled at birth because the Corporation was not prepared to grant the necessary Industrial Development Certificate!

Under these circumstances there was no alternative but to close down the die casting and tubular heater activities. At the same time it became obvious that our main energies and finances should really be concentrated upon our London business, and to

serve the cinematograph and television industries because, under Philip's management, these interests had completely overtaken all our other activities. To put these decisions into effect agreement was reached during 1958 to reconstruct our New John Street works and to concentrate activities there on expanding and perfecting our cold forging techniques.

After a long illness Frederick Rigby died in 1961, and the New John Street works then came under the control of Mr. W. E. Walsh – who is a director of our company and is resident in Birmingham. Another upheaval occurred at New John Street when road widening took place during 1969 – and this meant that the front of the entire premises had to be rebuilt! However, the wisdom of the 1958 plan is now self-evident and today our Birmingham works manufactures an extensive range of complex cold-forged components, both in steel and a variety of non-ferrous metals. Although these are supplied to widely different markets, one of the most important is undoubtedly that of the motor car industry and, in this connection, it is interesting to recall those much earlier activities when our company supplied step mats, licence holders, and a host of similar accessories to the same industry when it was a struggling infant.



Scene 12: Premier Works Today

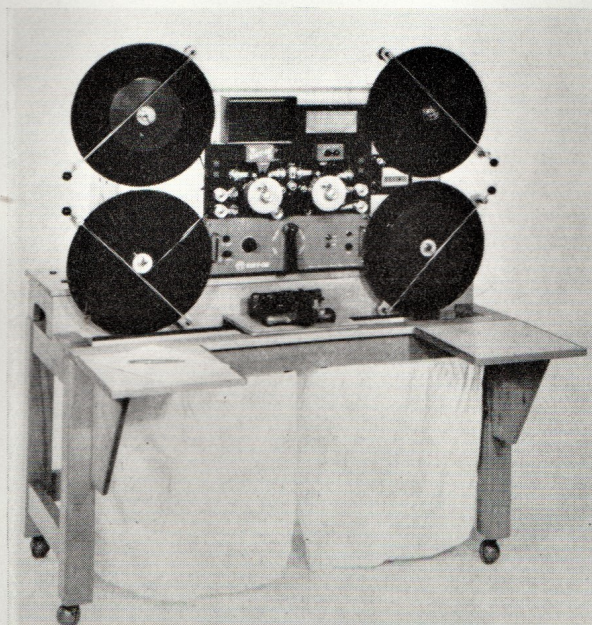
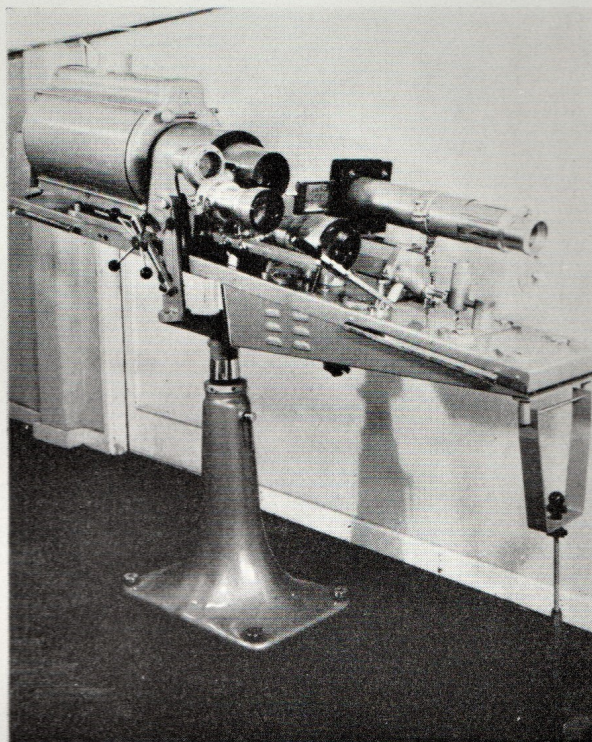
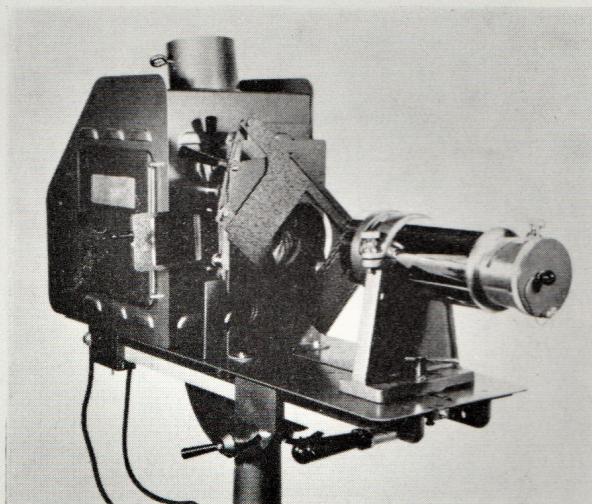
There are two important dates to recall in order to bring the London part of our story up to date. They both relate to our 'Premier' trade-mark, and it is interesting to note that we first adopted this word as far back as 1909, when our business was moved from Hatton Garden to No. 9 North Mews. This really was a great occasion and one which should be marked by christening the new works with due pomp and ceremony – and so it was that No. 9 North Mews became known as 'Premier Works' and all our publicity since that time has carried this title as part of our address. It was not until December 5th, 1949, that Robert Rigby Ltd. officially applied to the Patent Office for permission to register the word 'Premier' as our new trade-mark, and this was eventually granted to us during 1952.

Since that time an enormous range of equipment has proudly carried this trade-mark and may be seen throughout the motion picture and television industries of the world. Both these industries have come a very long way since they first made somewhat diffident appearances before an unbelieving public – and Robert Rigby Ltd. has trodden a similar and complementary path of progress.

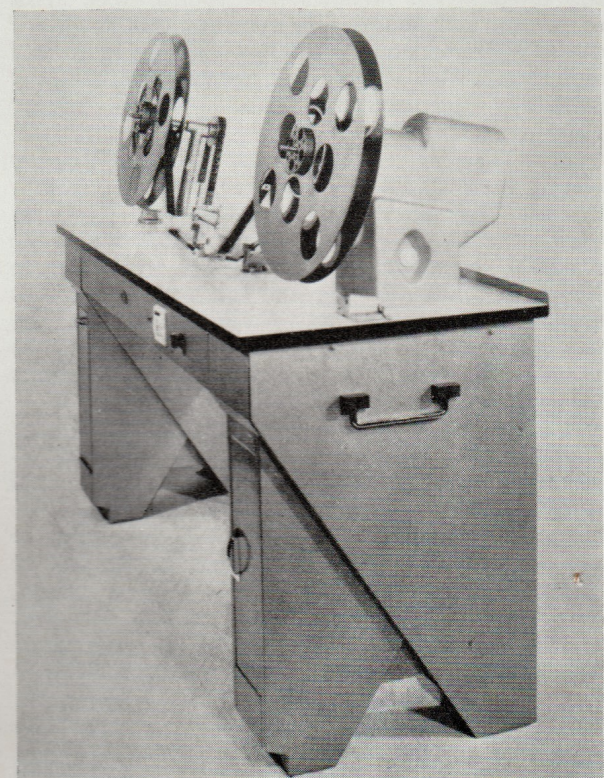
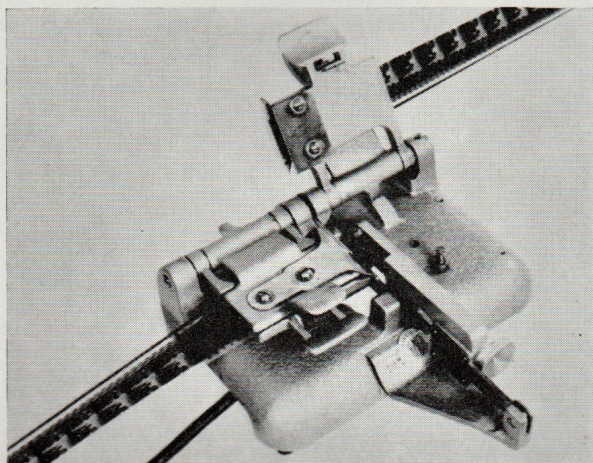
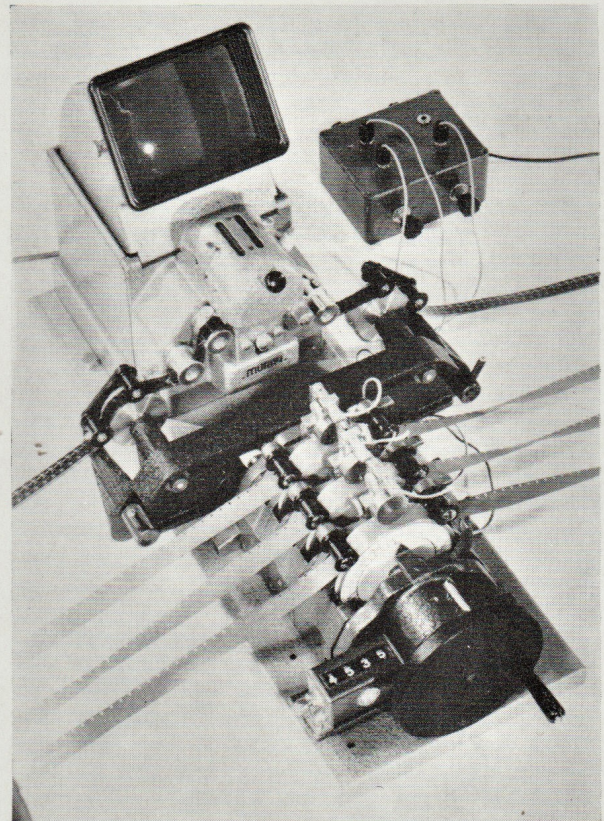
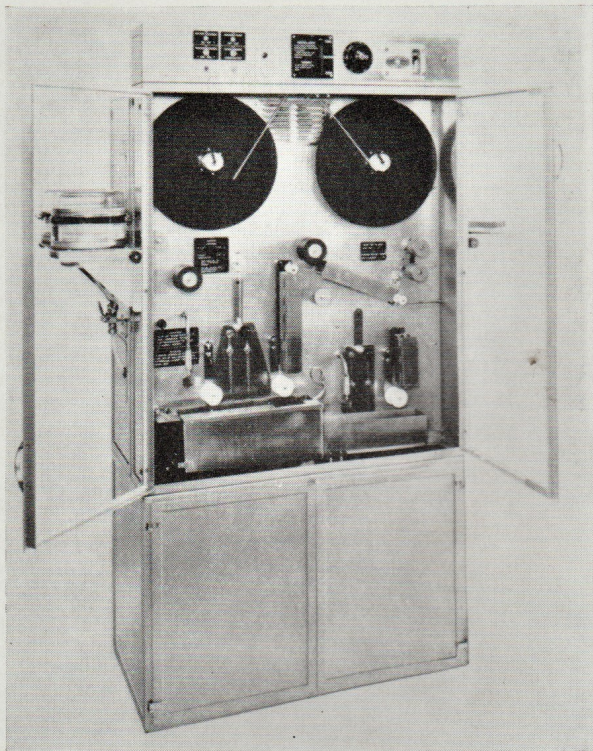
Our current range of 'Premier' equipment reflects this progress and includes such sophisticated items as picture and sound film synchronisers, magnetic sound track readers, 14 different varieties of 16 mm and 35 mm film joiners, high-pressure film cleaning machines, and the very latest precision editing machines.

It is therefore not surprising that our London history is now repeating itself for the *third* time – because 'Premier Works', Northington Street, is once more bursting at the seams! We still find the need for several ancillary workshops and stores in nearby Brownlow Mews, and our payroll has now almost reached a hundred – a very far cry from the day when Philip Rigby joined a little band of 12 people at Hatton Garden and rightly prophesied that the outlook *did* seem promising!

There is no secret formula for success, but without doubt one of the most valuable and essential ingredients is the wonderful spirit of teamwork and ready co-operation which has always existed between our management and our staff. It is impossible to pay tribute here to every individual for the part he or she has played in 'The Robert Rigby (Success) Story', but our deep debt of gratitude for their loyalty and dedication is recorded in some small way by the 'Roll of Honour' which is reproduced in this book. The company has an enviable record for long service, and no fewer than 28 employees have been with us for 25 years, whilst five have even completed 50 years of continuous service.



Top: All-purpose slide and effects projector
Centre: Xenon slide projector
Bottom: Edit-Or



*Top left: Film cleaner and treatment machine
 Below: De Luxe splicer with auto scraper
 Top right: Sync viewer attachment with
 synchroniser and viewer
 Below: 70 mm motorised rewinder and bench*

The Supporting Programme

At the beginning of our story we did promise to mention something about copper rain gauges and trouser presses – and now that the main narrative has almost been brought up to date it is time to keep that promise. In the early formative days Robert was greatly interested in metals; all types of metals, and their properties and what he might be able to make with them – and so to some extent he must have thoroughly enjoyed a period of what might perhaps be described as ‘experiments with industry’.

During that time the company produced those copper rain gauges, together with brass thermometer cases, steel testing machines and many other devices. One fascinating instrument, known as a Roddalite, was made for a Birmingham gunsmith: this consisted of a battery-box fitted to a tubular mount designed to carry an electric bulb at one end and a bulls-eye lens at the other. The whole unit was clipped to the stock of a gun, well clear of the rear sight. A pair of contact arms, projecting from the right-hand side of the unit, ran parallel with the gun barrel to terminate at a point where the sportsman's left-hand would naturally support the gun whilst firing it. At the crucial moment he would close these contacts and thus cause a beam of light to be projected directly in line with the gun-sights. These fittings were exported to India and became quite popular with the big game hunters as they prowled about during the night!

Now the trouser presses had quite a different and more humane purpose. One very successful line was more of a trouser stretcher than an actual press and was made for Messrs J. M. Lewin, the gentlemen's outfitters of Jermyn Street, in London's West End. This consisted of two stiff buckram sections, tapered so as to fit to the shape of the trouser legs, and complete with a comb-like arrangement of flat steel strips. The trousers were held in position by means of tapes fitted to their narrow ends and, when these had been carefully attached the trousers, together with their stretchers, were all rolled up together and held firmly in place by a two-inch webbing strap!

About this time a doctor at St. Bartholomew's hospital brought us into contact with the medical profession. This worthy gentleman required a mirror-type arc lamp but, instead of using ordinary carbons he wanted to cause an arc between rods of tungsten – and this arc had then to be focused onto the patient's skin. The theory was that the rays from his lamp would be equivalent to those from the sun, and would therefore have a most beneficial and healing effect on his patient. We regret that we are unable to report whether or not his device really worked and so, with the title of a currently very successful series of British films, we can only say ‘Carry On Doctor’!

Robert Rigby Ltd. has also played a small part in pioneering long- and extended-play gramophone records. This was at a time when two brothers by the name of Goodson had hired one of our Brownlow Mews workshops and were experimenting to make cheaper records on plastic discs. They already had a metal matrix and needed a press with which to transfer impressions onto their plastic discs. Now we had a very old letter press which had been a standard piece of office equipment in the days long before the

introduction of carbon paper. Copies of typed letters could be made with this device by first placing them in contact with a sheet of tissue and then a special sheet of damped ‘copying’ paper. The whole assembly was then placed in a ‘letter book’ which was literally squashed together in the hand-operated letter press. We adapted our letter press to meet the Goodson brothers' requirements and, in fact, they did manage to produce reasonably satisfactory LP records although, of course, the output was limited and directly proportional to the speed and strength of the hand-press operator!

Right at the opposite end of the scale, we even made status symbols because, in the far-off days before the Stately Homes of England had either been sung about by Noël Coward or had been thrown open to the public in order to survive at all, Messrs. W. Watson & Sons were providing their owners with rather beautiful 12-inch diameter long-focus biconvex lenses – and we were asked to mount these in elaborately ornamented brass frames. The completed device could then be hung in the ancestral window and so provide the fortunate owner with a greatly magnified view of his wonderful landscape. Who knows, perhaps one day these magnifiers might become much sought-after as highly prized antiques!

Coming Attractions

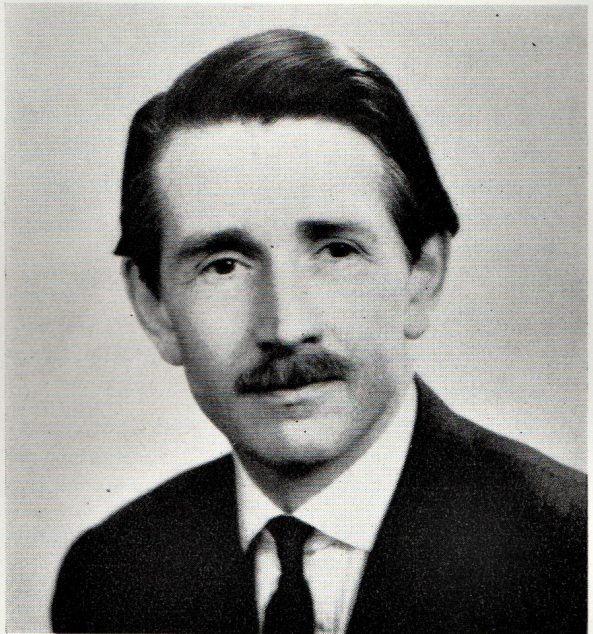
For almost three-quarters of a century the family name of Robert Rigby has been highly respected in the cinema world, and also still holds an important and prominent position in the industrial circles of Birmingham. The company name, Robert Rigby Ltd. of Birmingham and London, stands for a family business which started in the reign of Queen Victoria and has developed and been modernised over the years so that it now holds one of the foremost positions in the British motion picture equipment industry. It produces high quality scientific instruments; it has constantly developed many new ideas; it serves the cinema, television and allied industries, and it also serves the motor-car industry. It is proud to have trained many fine engineers and, undoubtedly, will in the future continue to stand as a symbol of highly skilled craftsmanship, reliability and efficient service. In short, it is the type of company on which the prosperity of England has been built and, as such, will continue to play its part in the economy of the nation.

The Robert Rigby Story has developed alongside the story of the cinema: an industry which grew from showing ‘thirty-minute two reelers’ up to the wide-screen CinemaScope epics in full colour and with stereophonic sound. In fact, the pictures are now so long that they are shown in two parts – interrupted by an ‘Intermission’. So we believe it is with Robert Rigby Ltd., and now we invite you to relax during our own . . .

Intermission

Milestones

- 1853 Robert Rigby, founder of the company, born at Bolehall, Staffordshire.
- 1853 The Royal Photographic Society founded as 'The Photographic Society'.
- 1890 Friese-Greene and Mortimer Evans granted Patent No. 10131.
- 1896 The first recorded public exhibition of motion pictures in London.
- 1897 Queen Victoria commanded a demonstration at Windsor Castle.
- 1899 Robert Rigby set up in business at Legge Street, Birmingham.
- 1900 The Twopenny Tube opened in London.
- 1901 Robert Rigby joins forces with James Anderson at Hatton Garden.
- 1902 The Birmingham business transferred from Legge Street to New John Street.
- 1903 Production of the first screen classic 'The Great Train Robbery'.
- 1905 Robert Rigby enlists help of brother Arthur to manage Hatton Garden.
- 1906 Philip Rigby joins his father's business at Hatton Garden.
- 1907 Eugene Lauste takes out 'master' sound recording patent.
- 1909 Robert Rigby & Co. move from Hatton Garden to No. 9 North Mews.
- 1914 The First World War and Robert Rigby & Co. under contracts to Government.
- 1919 The Safeguard of Industry Bill protects British firms against imports.
- 1920 Robert Rigby & Co. introduce staff profit-sharing scheme.
- 1920 Robert Rigby & Co. issue two illustrated catalogues of equipment.
- 1922 Arthur Rigby died after managing the London business for 17 years.
- 1922 The first regular wireless broadcasts from 'London 2LO'.
- 1924 Robert Rigby & Co. becomes Robert Rigby Ltd.
- 1927 Formation of The British Television Society.
- 1928 The first-ever full-length talking picture ('The Jazz Singer').
- 1929 London branch of Society of Motion Picture Engineers of America formed.
- 1929 Robert Rigby Ltd. manufacturing soundheads for talking picture projectors.
- 1934 Robert Rigby, our founder, died at 81 years of age.
- 1934 Premier Works opened at Northington Street, London, W.C.1.
- 1935 New premises built at Lupin Street, Birmingham.
- 1936 BBC opened first-ever television service in the world (Alexandra Palace).
- 1939 Second World War and Robert Rigby Ltd. under contracts to Government.
- 1946 Robert Rigby junior died and New John Street management passed to H. F. Barrow.
- 1949 On December 5th Robert Rigby Ltd. applied for 'Premier' trade-mark.
- 1952 Premier trade-mark granted.
- 1958 Re-organisation of Birmingham activities.
- 1960 Anthony Rigby died.
- 1961 Frederick Rigby died and New John Street management passed to W. E. Walsh.
- 1963 New John Street concentrating on cold forging techniques.
- 1969 Northington Street overflowing with orders and is now one of the leading manufacturers of scientific and technological equipment for the motion picture, television, and allied industries.



Above:
Chairman: R. V. Rigby
Managing Director: P. J. Rigby
Right: Directors
W. E. Walsh
J. J. Rigby
P. P. Rigby

Roll of Honour

Employees who have completed 25 years in the Service of the Company

Robert Rigby (Founder) – 1901

Frederick Findlay – 1901

Norman Anderson – 1902

Walter Goward – 1903

C. Reading – 1903

Philip Rigby – 1906

Sydney Yeeles – 1909

Harry Cross – 1912

Charles Sheil – 1913

Albert Storey – 1918

Cecil Wright – 1918

Ernest Seager – 1919

Stanley Wright – 1919

George Styants – 1920

W. Kaines – 1922

Edward Cross – 1923

Arthur Eley – 1923

Frederick Rigby – 1924

William Govey – 1925

Thomas Hanshaw – 1925

Frederick Atley – 1926

G. Banfield – 1926

William Holliman – 1926

John Gurr – 1927

Philip Kingsman – 1927

Frederick Peters – 1927

Agnes Rigby – 1928

S. J. Hill – 1928

Mrs. Eveson – 1929

L. Mogg – 1929

James Thompson – 1929

Frederick Bass – 1930

George Robins – 1930

H. F. Barrow – 1932

J. Eveson – 1936

Frederick Plimpton – 1936

Frank Butcher – 1937

George Taylor – 1938

To the above and also to many others the Company owes a deep debt of gratitude for their loyalty and dedication.

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