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A LOOK AT SANDOZ

A world without colour is unimaginable and all through history men have used colours to express their personalities both in the affairs of daily life and in art. For many centuries natural colouring matters only were available and it is not surprising that, when organic chemistry made possible the extension of these by the discovery of synthetic dyes, industry quickly seized the opportunities thus presented. In 1886 the Chemist Alfred Kern and his business associate Edouard Sandoz founded in Basle an enterprise, known to-day as Sandoz Ltd., for the manufacture of dyes, and as early as 1911 an affiliated company was established in Britain. Some of the first dyes synthesised by Sandoz are still in use to-day and soon Acid Wool dyes were added to the manufacturing programme, among them Xylene Light Yellow 2G. This Sandoz discovery was singled out as the most outstanding in the realm of acid dyes till then by being used to dye the wool in a rosette made to mark the occasion of the Jubilee Celebrations of the Society of Dyers and Colourists.

* * *

When the firm of Sandoz was founded in Basle in 1886, it was chiefly interested in the production of dyestuffs and of chemicals for industry. It was not until 1917 that an independent Pharmaceutical Department was formed. Then, as now, research was the key to success in the pharmaceutical field, and Sandoz was fortunate in obtaining the services of Professor Arthur Stoll to direct the research activities of the new department.

Stoll and his colleagues devoted their energies to the examination of crude vegetable drugs, the isolation of their pharmacologically active constituents, and the determination of their chemical structures. Success soon crowned their efforts — ergot, a fungus that grows on rye, yielded a pure crystalline substance called ergotamine. Ergotamine found its first use in midwifery, for the control of post-partum haemorrhage; later it was discovered to be the first specific drug for the treatment of migraine.

After ergotamine had been isolated and proved of value in obstetrics, another ergot alkaloid with similar applications, ergometrine, was discovered; modification of its molecule produced a semi-synthetic derivative, methyl-ergometrine. Both these compounds act almost exclusively on the uterus and are in everyday use in obstetrics. Since then, the various alkaloids of ergot have been exhaustively studied and found to have a range of therapeutic actions much wider than was originally expected.

* * *

75 years' activity in the chemical industry: Sandoz Ltd., the third of the four Basle chemical concerns to celebrate an important anniversary, was founded 75 years ago by Dr. Alfred Kern, a chemist, and Mr. Edouard Sandoz, a prominent tradesman, both descended from old Swiss families. The beginnings were modest, since the factory employed only ten workers and possessed only one 15 h.p. steam machine. From this small dyestuffs factory grew, down through the years, a chemical concern of world-wide repute, which to-day possesses 25 branches and 100 agencies in Europe and elsewhere. This extraordinary growth is due to the creation of a pharmaceutical division

which, in addition to the manufacture of dyestuffs, developed to a remarkable extent. A series of striking discoveries led to the manufacture of a number of medicines which now form an indispensable part of every doctor's pharmacopœia. Then the manufacturing programme was extended to include chemical products for the textile industry and, shortly afterwards, for agriculture. To-day Sandoz is a group of world-wide importance employing over 10,000 men and women, half of them at the main factory and offices in Basle. In 1958 the turnover exceeded 500 million francs, and in 1960 amounter to 645 million francs. The first 75 years of its existence can be considered but a step in the development of the firm.

* * *

Sandoz Products Ltd., or The Sandoz Chemical Company Limited as it was then called, was incorporated in England in 1911. From the outset the Company has been a subsidiary of Sandoz, Basle, Switzerland, which had itself been established twenty-five years earlier, in 1886.

The original objects of the Company, as laid down in its Memorandum of Association, were to carry on the business of manufacturers of and dealers in dyestuffs, pigments, pharmaceutical products and textile auxiliaries, and during the past fifty years the Company has achieved a position of eminence in all these fields. The original address was at Arundel Street, Bradford, where the Company rented very modest offices and warehouse premises.

The Sandoz organisation in Britain has expanded continuously over the past fifty years, and from time to time additional companies have been incorporated or acquired. An indication of the growth of the Company can be gained by comparing the original capital of £2,000 with the present figure of £3,880,000, and by the increase in the number of staff and workpeople from a mere handful to almost 600.

A New Chemical Manufacturing Building

The four-storey building recently opened by Sandoz Ltd., is laid out to serve its specific purpose, i.e., the manufacture of chemicals for the textile, leather, paper and other industries.

Lengthwise the building is divided into halves. The western half is for the handling of non-inflammable materials, while the eastern half, fitted with the highest standard flame-proof equipment, is for processes involving the use of inflammable solvents and other materials with extremely low flash-point.

In the centre of the building, acting as a fireproof division between the halves, is a section containing the main staircase, a passenger lift, and two goods lifts. Behind the goods lifts is a wide passage, with double flame-proof doors, which connects the two building halves and provides access to a vertical shaft which runs from the basement to the penthouse and contains the service pipes with branches running east and west on each floor. Finally, behind this passage, on each floor, lies a completely enclosed electric switch-room.

The height of the building allows the arrangement of reaction vessels in groups above one another, using the top floor as a loading platform and working by gravity from vessel to vessel through the various operations until, on the ground floor, the finished products can be run off into packages and despatched through two loading bays.

The basement contains auxiliary plant, such as a refrigerating plant, air compressors, vacuum plant and the steam distribution.

Suitable raw materials are stored in tanks in the basement and, finally, there are modern washing facilities, with showers, toilets, a locker room and a pleasant rest room for operatives.

Structurally, the building is so arranged that it is easy to exchange reaction vessels and other equipment, allowing flexibility in the future manufacturing programme and facilitating repair and maintenance of plant.

The manufacturing capacity amounts to about 6,000 tons per year of a variety of products, such as wetting agents, penetrating agents, dyebath assistants, emulsifiers, water-proofing agents, detergents, fat liquors for the leather trade, and optical brightening agents, to mention only a few.

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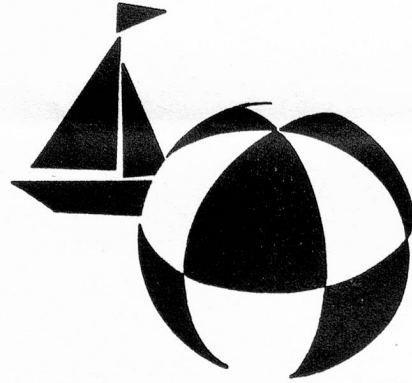
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