

Looking back . . .

## EXCELSIOR STILL EXCELS



by Tony Ive  
Special Accounts  
Manager

WHICH is the oldest paint factory in the Transvaal that is still in operation and still retains its independence (not taken over, merged, or otherwise bereft of its original identity)?

It would seem that the firm with the strongest claim to this position is Excelsior Paint works, of 217 Main Road, Fordsburg, Johannesburg.

In January of 1936, Walter Rauner and his wife Lydia arrived in South Africa from Germany, travelling on the same ship as Dr V. Lowensohn (founder of Chemical Utilities, now part of Plascon-Evans). The effect of the Depression was still being felt — times were hard, jobs were difficult to find, and the couple was penniless (although they did manage to bring a car with them as a treasured possession).

Mr Rauner was offered a job in a bicycle works at £5 a month, but the rent for the couple's flat was £11. Fortunately, Mrs Rauner was skilled as a dressmaker and at once began working to keep herself and her husband going.

Mr Rauner had experience as a paint chemist, but no one was making paint in Johannesburg. This fact prompted him to consider setting himself up as a paint manufacturer and he went into partnership with Johann Bergs, who had emigrated from Germany in 1928.

He began operations in 1937, with hand-



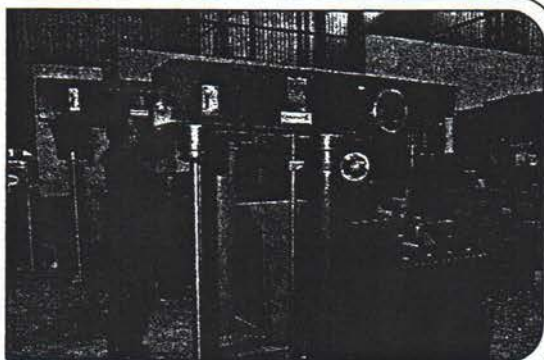
Monty Mymin, who took control of Excelsior Paint Works in 1975

operated equipment, in the backyard of a building on the corner of Main Street and Park Lane, in Johannesburg. He gave the newly formed company the name "Excelsior" for no reason other than liking it and because it had been familiar to him as the name of various enterprises back in Germany.

Mr Rauner not only made the paint, he marketed it as well. With his careful attention to the application queries from his customers, whether firms or private individuals, he gradually built up a business conducted very much on personal lines. Much of it consisted of across-the-counter sales by Mr Rauner himself, to whom even the smaller paint-user knew he could turn for advice, confident that he would receive a careful and considered answer.

Just across Park Lane, on the next corner site, was a substantial brick building housing a manufacturer of cardboard boxes. The owner was anxious to move and offered the building to Mr Rauner. With the help of his partner the purchase was effected, and in 1944 the paint works moved to the premises it occupies today.

Varishear mixing machines on the production line at Jones Engineering, in Elandsfontein, near Johannesburg. These machines are unique in that they feature variable-pitch mixing vanes, which can be adjusted while the machine is in operation. Suitable for the mixing of virtually all paints and coatings, the Varishear is one of Chemtra's most popular product lines, and is to be found in factories throughout South Africa.



### Chemtra CLASSIFIEDS

MATEER BURT single-head auger powder-filler — ex-showroom model. R13 000.

JENAG 1200 straining machine — reconditioned, ex-demonstration model. R5 000.

SOLVENT RECOVERY UNIT, new, from Newgate Simms, of UK. R11 000.

CAPPING MACHINE, semi-automatic, air-operated. R3 300.

HIGH VISCOSITY drum emptying and filling machine — second hand. R7 000.

TORRANCE HSF 100 batch bead mill. R19 980.

TORRANCE BALL MILLS, steel and porcelain lined — very special consignment at special prices.

### Fibre drums safest for N.C.

AMONG the lessons learned from the fire that razed much of the Bergerac plant of SNPE, in France, early in October last year, was that fibre drums offer a significant safety advantage in the storing of nitrocellulose.

The fibre drums conduct heat much less readily than metal containers, and the risk of the remote ignition of the nitrocellulose is therefore greatly reduced. Although Bergerac nitrocellulose is still available in steel drums, Chemtra strongly recommends that its customers specify fibre drums for increased safety. These drums have been approved by 'The Chief Inspector of Explosives'.

SNPE (Société Nationale des Poudres et Explosifs) is the world's second-largest manufacturer of nitrocellulose, with Hercules INC. USA being the largest.

### Waist-deep in water

Mrs Rauner remembers some of the events of those days. In November 1950, when Johannesburg was hit by storm described as the worst in years, Park Lane was waist deep in water and Main Street became a raging torrent down to the Fordsburg dip. Excelsior Paint Works featured in a picture, showing the extent of the flood, that appeared in the *Rand Daily Mail*.

Another instance of newspaper-propagated fame was when thieves one night laboriously loaded the company truck with a heavy consignment of paint, and then had to abandon their haul when they could not start the vehicle. The newspaper headline read "A lot of sweat for nothing".

In 1967, Mr Rauner retired. The paint works was taken over by Mr L F Christiani, but the Bergs family retained its interest in the building.

Mr Monty Mymin, the present owner, took control of Excelsior Paint Works in 1975. His experience in paint manufacturing began in 1951 with Iron Duke in Durban, continued in England for three years with Jensen and Nicholson, and for 10 years with Tambour Paints in Israel, before he returned to South Africa in 1970 for three years with Plascon.

The Production of Excelsior is still mostly decorative paints, water-based and alkyd. Some industrial paints, such as drum finishes, are also produced.

Chemtra



Johannesburg  
Tel. (011) 836-2941  
Telex 8-4178

Cape Town  
Tel. (021) 55-5356  
Telex 57-206-42

Durban  
Tel. (031) 68738/9  
Telex 6-28314

Port Elizabeth  
Tel. (041) 52-1730  
Telex 74-7752