

Paterson Photographic Darkroom Equipment

The pack shot's shadow

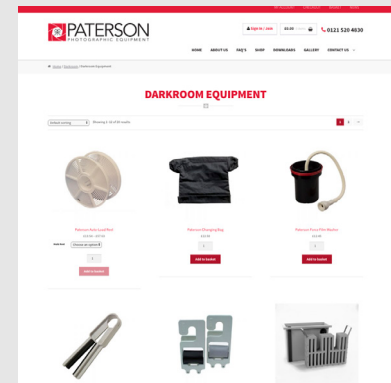


Paterson Photographic Equipment

Paterson Photographic Limited is a British supplier of photographic equipment best known for the high quality darkroom equipment it manufactures and distributes worldwide. This is a collection of images taken from their website that is representative of their photographic darkroom accessories product range. They also sell photographic tripods and lighting equipment.

Any photographer who develops and or prints his or her own analogue photographs, will invariably use these products. Their products are well designed, durable and justifiably popular. They are synonymous with analogue photographic process and has become one of nostalgic interest for photographers seeking a more traditional or tactile version of photographic practice.

As these images have been created as a sales tool for use in printed and online catalogues, they have been made in the visual vernacular commonly called the 'pack shot'. A pack shot is an image of a product designed to stimulate sales through portraying the product's distinctive features with clarity.



www.patersonphotographic.com

There are generally accepted rules for pack shots and although they appear simple, they can be a challenge to produce well. The photographed object should be centred in the image and be on its own, or partially disassembled to show important components. The image must be correctly exposed with all letters and logos easily legible and any distinctive features visible. The colours should be neutral and complex colour calibration processes may be adopted to control this process. The camera angle should be in front and slightly raised of the object to suggest the

viewer is seeing as a product on a shelf, or as if it had just been unboxed. The lighting must be 'soft' with no distinguishable or distracting shadows. Generally, there must be nothing about the image that might suggest a personal vision or creative impulse of the part of the photographer. The skill of the photographer is required to articulate the features and properties of the product without distraction or drawing attention to his or her's own work.



Product Code. PTP572

It is not the function of the objects that is interesting in these photographs. What is remarkable about these images is the way in which they have been created and presented. This set of photographs has been chosen because they are in fact, *poor* pack shots. The series lacks inconsistency, some have colours, smudged backgrounds, and varying camera angles. Some are on a reflective background, while others float in white space. There are a few of the images that are cluttered, and some are a muddy grey in tone. Their general lack of consistency might suggest a lack of a cohesive branding strategy. Individually,

most of them lack the clarity and lightness that we associate with a successful pack shot. But nevertheless, although they might be considered poor pack shots, they do convey the intention and spirit of the products well.

A beautiful irony exists here. These images are intended to sell products to photographers who, of all consumers, would know well, what may, or may not constitute a good pack shot. It is well within the bounds of possibility that this is fully intentional. The customers for these products are mostly amateur or pro amateur photographers and so these images might not intimidate the photographer by being overly glossy. It matches the prospective consumer's profile well.

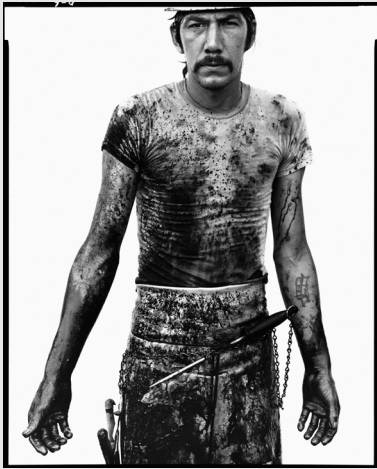


Broncolor Scoro 1600 Power Pack

By comparison, pack shots for the Swiss high end, high price bracket, photographic lighting supplier Broncolor, are of course, flawless in their execution.

From a historical perspective this form of product photography has its roots in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movement that rose in Germany in the 1920s, seen as a reaction against German expressionism. This precise method of can be seen in the works of Albert Renger-Patzsch, August Sander and Karl Blossfeldt. Bernd and Hilla Becher also adopted

this documentary approach, with their series of industrial landscapes of cooling towers, coal bunkers and so forth. Their so called *Düsseldorf school* style of photography is characterised by an objective, straight forward approach with centralised camera angles and minimised shadows. This way of working was also adopted by the American photographer Richard Avedon



Blue Cloud Larry-Wright
Slaughterhouse worker
Nebraska, 1979
Richard Avedon

who famously remarked; *"No to exquisite light, no to apparent compositions, no to the seduction of poses or narrative."* The pack shot is still alive and well in contemporary practice and is the standard for new products on online marketplaces.

Although the aesthetic of the pack shot may have its roots in a photographic tradition, the pack shot's success is driven more by its practical role in the consumer purchase scenario rather than artistic ones. The application of this objective manner of representing products suggests a scientific and authoritative view of the goods. The unadorned nature of the images is intended to inform the purchase decision with objective facts rather than by means of emotive symbolism. Much in the same

way soap powder, or tooth paste advertisements often include white tiled spaces with attractive people wearing glasses and white coats.

A good pack shot is not easy to do well. Most of the challenges are around the elimination of reflections in the product. The classic being the stainless steel tea pot. A reflective object easily provides a view of the studio in which the image is created. As well as this, an intricate play of the positioning of lights and white paper is required to make it as if the object is floating in a generic, unidentifiable white place. A non-place as it



Avanti Mondo Stainless
Steel Teapot L
Peter's Of Kensington

where. The same issue is presented with the lighting; there must be no shadows that might give a clue to either the source or the direction of the light. These elements combine to remove any gestural signal of the maker out of the image.

As so many processes, the pack shot production process is rapidly being streamlined. They are made easier with 'pack shot tents' that enclose the object in a neutral white environment which are readily available online. Also common practice is the creation of the image directly from the 3d software in which the product is designed, with no physical artefact required. Fully automated

solutions for the pack shot are also available so that any trace of the human can be removed from the end result as well as from the process of creating a pack shot.

The lack of casting shadows plays a crucial part in suggesting the absence of the photographer. This allows the viewer to suspend the suggestion of the identity of an image maker, and allows space for the imagination of the viewer and potential customer. Just like in a casino, where any hint of day light is excluded, the lack a directional light cast no shadow and so no time of day can be implied. With no shadow, the object floats in a non specific white space, drifting in a timeless nowhere. Could it be heaven perhaps?

In the *Story of Peter Schlemihl* by Adelbert von Chamisso (1848), a man sells his shadow to the Devil for a promise of endless riches. In the story he quickly discovers that a man without a shadow

is no longer a complete man and is shunned by society. Thankfully his plight is resolved with the aid of a pair of seven-league boots as he discovers the virtuous merits of education, nature and self improvement.



Peter Schlemihl
George Cruikshank, 1824

In a sense, the Paterson products (or other pack shots), have shunned their shadows as well. Not selling so much to the Devil, but nevertheless, the desire for increased wealth does play a part. The products are incomplete without their shadow. The implication is that you will purchase this product and once you obtain it, its shadow will be activated. Enabled by yourself. You complete the purchase, you complete the product. And so insinuated, you will also be completed by means of this purchase.

The Paterson Darkroom Equipment pack shots are different because these are products designed to be used in quite literally a dark room. The film development process necessitates total darkness. The analogue black and white printing process may be safely undertaken under a 'safe light'; a low level, red filtered light that does not effect the photographic paper (The Paterson Darkroom Safelight, Product Code PTP760, £27.08).

The photographic dark room is a laboratory for the orchestration of light and shadow where the photographer quite literally operates in the shadows. In this space the manipulation of light is highly selective and intentional. The completion of shadow takes place in the very process printing and developing the analogue photographs. The use of these products will assist you to create, and complete, the shadows of your desires.



Product Code. PTP360

In some way, it is pleasing that the Paterson Photographic Darkroom Equipment images fail as pack shots in the conventional manner. If all of the objects had no shadows, then they may be products that seek shadows. But in the somewhat haphazard treatment of the images in the context of the series, some of the products do have noticeable shadows. The diversity of approach may indicate that they most likely have been taken by different photographers at different times and locations. The Mixing Jugs (Product Codes PTP301 to 310), for example, have both, neutral white space and a dark background at the same time. One of the few products to be operated in full light.

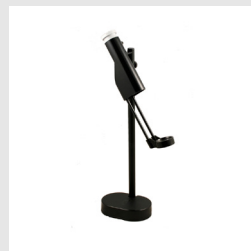
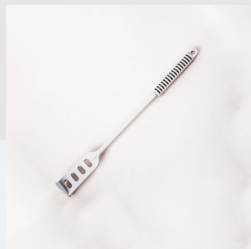
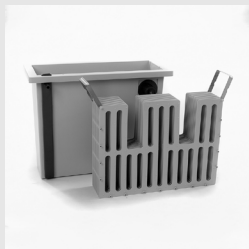
These packs shot fail gloriously as traditional pack shots, but excel as still lifes of photographic equipment. They introduce a sense of character in to the representation of the products that resists the usual mainstream requirements for a sanitised environment. The style of photography quite clearly shows evidence of the technical challenges that the photographer faced in the creation of the shot. This in turn reflects the creative and technical dilemmas of the prospective consumer. In short, by showing what might be considered faults, the images allow a slight sense of place and personality to be expressed. Just enough to enable us to place ourselves at the scene, and to be consoled and guided by the Paterson photographers themselves. These images say: we are not perfect or complete, but then, neither are you. Yet.



Product Code. PTP309,310



Product Code. PTP306















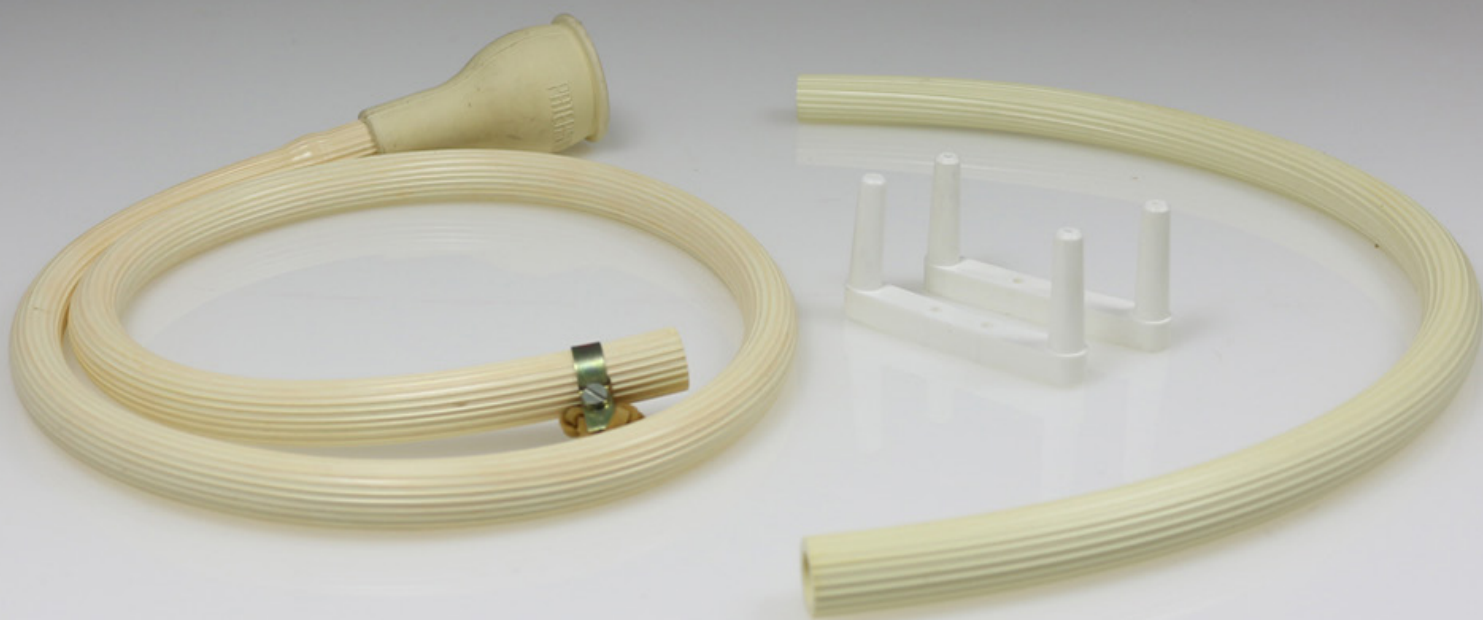






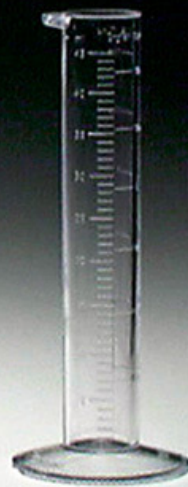
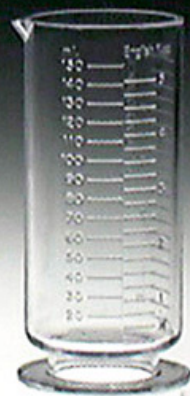
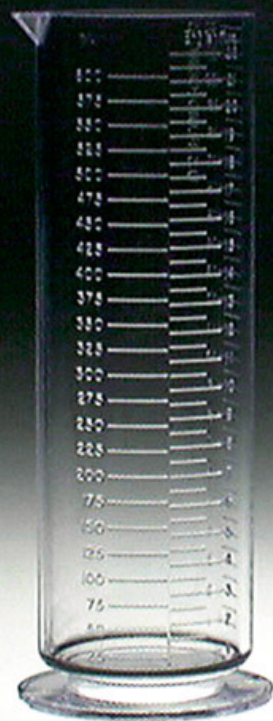
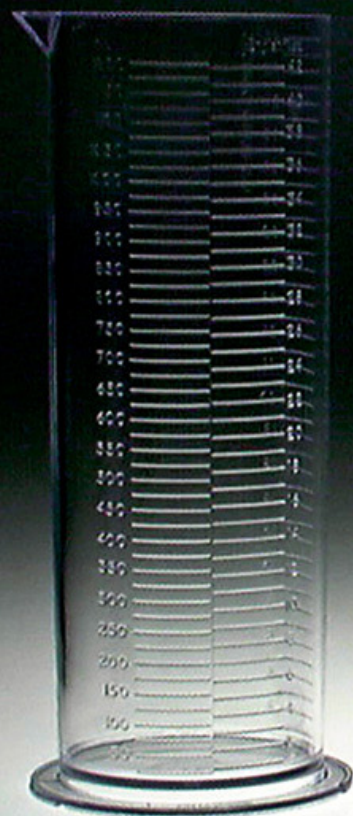


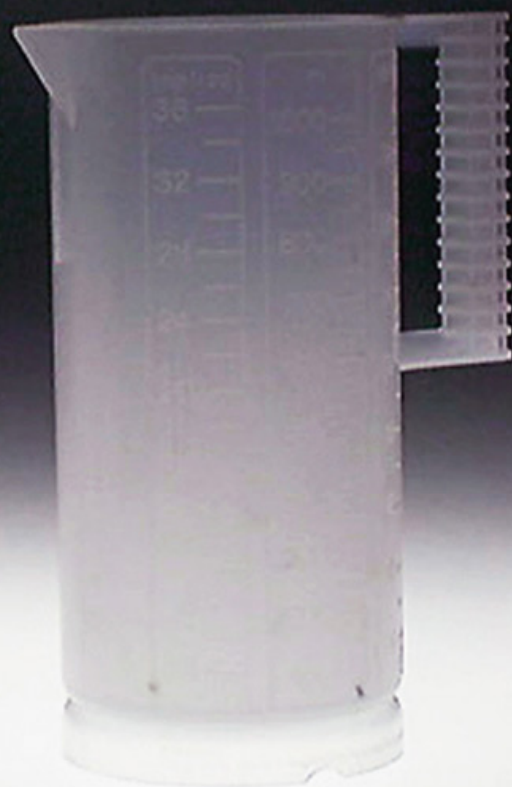
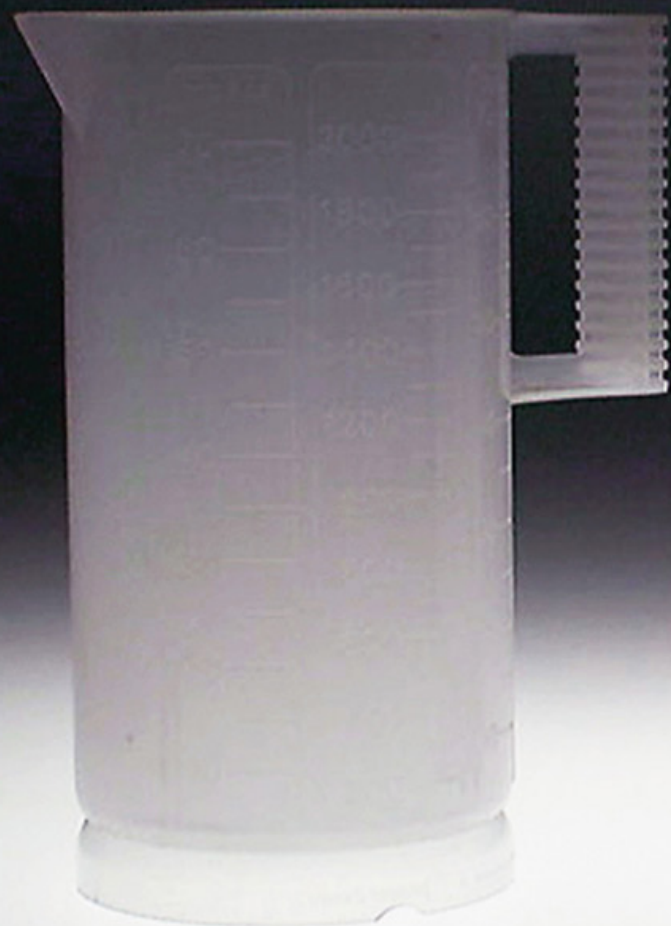




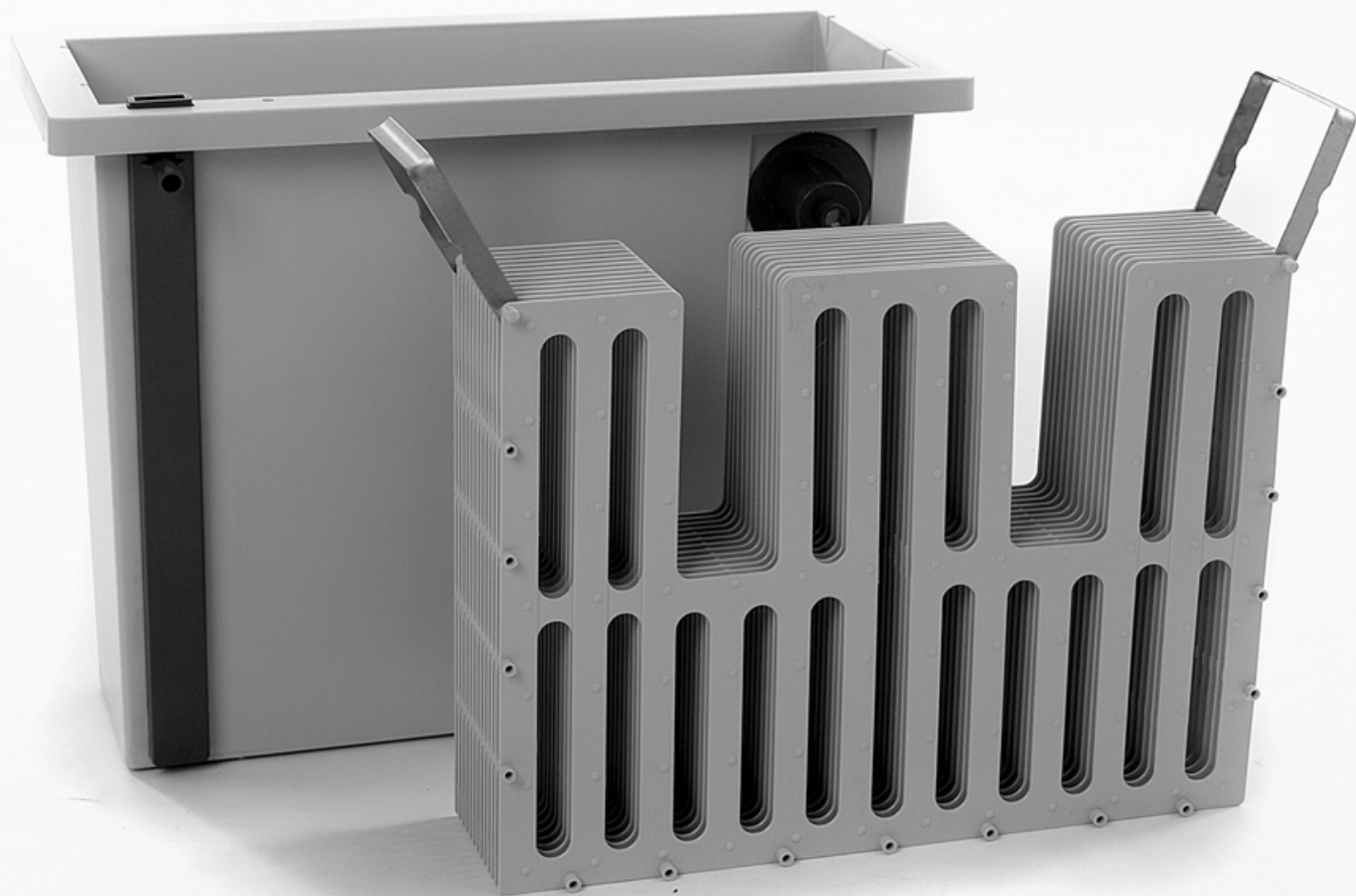
















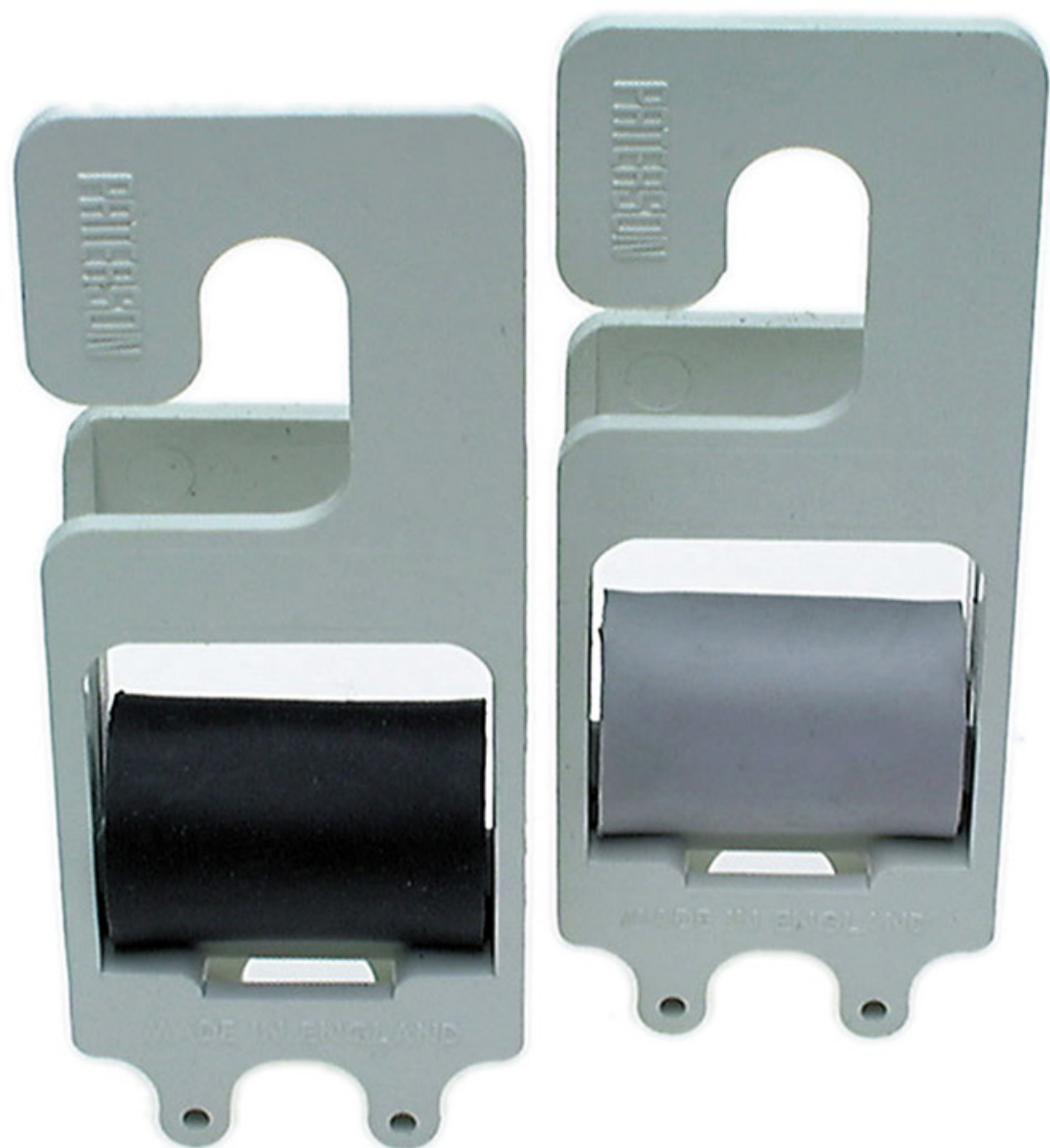
























All images gratefully downloaded from:
www.patersonphotographic.com

Steve Rood, 2018