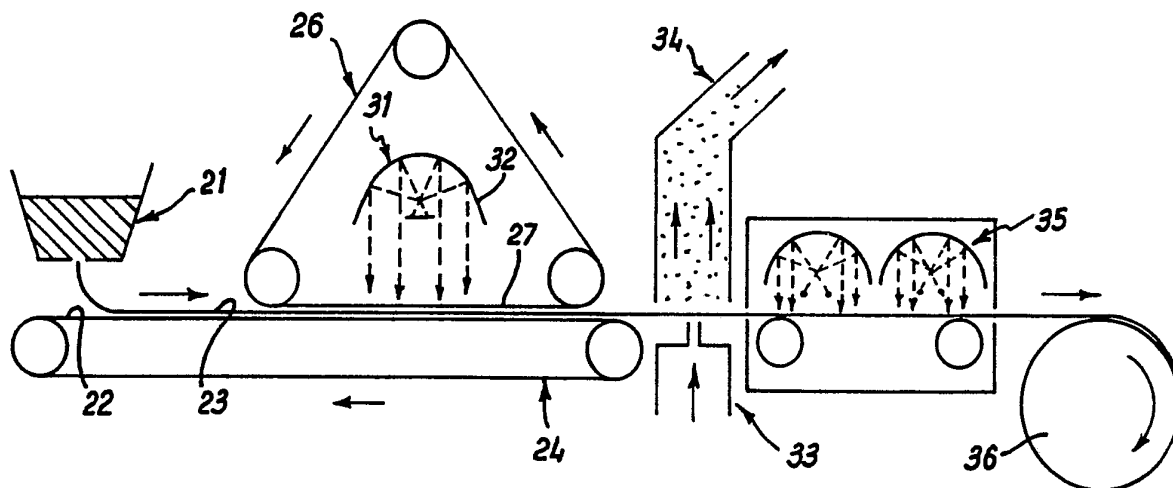




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<p>(21) International Application Number: PCT/GB91/00413 (22) International Filing Date: 18 March 1991 (18.03.91) (30) Priority data: 9006077.3 17 March 1990 (17.03.90) GB (71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): SCAPA GROUP PLC [GB/GB]; Oakfield House, 93 Preston New Road, Blackburn, Lancashire BB2 6AY (GB). (72) Inventors; and (75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only) : SAYERS, Ian, Christison [GB/GB]; 30 Chesterbrook, Ribchester, Near Preston, Lancashire (GB). GUTHRIE, James, Thomas [GB/GB]; 16 Oxford Drive, Kippax, Leeds LS25 7JG (GB). ALEXANDER, Gordon, Glenn [GB/GB]; 12 Pickford Road, Bexley Heath, Kent DA7 4AQ (GB). MORTON, Anthony [GB/GB]; 10 Holme Close, Earby, Colne, Lancashire BB8 6UG (GB).</p>	<p>(74) Agents: FUNGE, Harry et al.; M'Caw & Co., 41-51 Royal Exchange, Cross Street, Manchester M2 7BD (GB). (81) Designated States: AT (European patent), BE (European patent), CA, CH (European patent), DE (European patent), DK (European patent), ES (European patent), FR (European patent), GB (European patent), GR (European patent), IT (European patent), JP, LU (European patent), NL (European patent), SE (European patent), US. Published <i>With international search report.</i></p>	

(54) Title: PRODUCTION OF PERFORATE STRUCTURES



(57) Abstract

A method of producing an apertured sheet material is proposed wherein a layer (12) of photopolymeric resin material (10) is applied to a moving band (11), an apertured mask (13) which moves in synchronism with the support surface is positioned to overlie the resin material, and the resin material is irradiated through the mask (13) to effect an at least partial cure thereof in regions in register with the apertures (14) in the mask (13). After radiation of the resin material layer (12), uncured such material is removed by pressure fluid jets (16) and final curing of the resin material is effected. Apparatus for practising the method is also disclosed. The apertured sheet material is of use in producing fabrics for, *inter alia*, the papermaking industry.

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PRODUCTION OF PERFORATE STRUCTURES

The invention concerns the production of perforate structures and has particular, though not exclusive, reference to flexible structures for use in the papermaking industry.

It is of importance to the production of papermaking and like fabrics that the fabric be of a predetermined and sensibly consistent permeability in order that uniformity of drainage/drying according to the particular stage of the papermaking process involved, might be achieved throughout the full areal extent of the paper sheet as it moves through the papermaking machine.

Conventionally papermakers fabrics include, for example, woven structures or structures defined by interdigitated helical coils to either of which structures there may be added one or more batts of textile fibres. Permeability of the fabric may be reduced by including stuffer yarns in the cross-machine direction of the fabric, be it a woven fabric or a link-belt defined by side-by-side coils, or, in the case of a link belt, by impregnating the same with a foam material or by including strips of an elongate material within some at least of the individual coils.

Accuracy and uniformity of permeability, whilst being controllable in the prior structures, is not ideal, and it is the primary object of the present invention to provide a means whereby specific requirements of a fabric as regards its permeability might more readily be attained in a simple and economic manner.

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According to the present invention there is proposed a method of producing a permeable fabric which comprises the steps of providing a layer of radiation curable polymeric resin material in fluid form, irradiating said layer of material through a mask selectively transparent to the radiation so as to effect at least partial curing of the material of the sheet in positions corresponding with transparent regions of the mask, removing uncured polymeric material and effecting any necessary full cure of the residual such material.

The invention also includes apparatus for use in producing the method aforesaid which comprises feed means for delivering fluid polymeric material, a support means to receive said material from the feed means, a source of radiation positioned to irradiate polymeric material present on the support means, the source of radiation being adapted to direct sensibly parallel radiation towards the support means, and a transparent mask intermediate the source of radiation and the support means and through which radiation passes to polymeric material positioned thereon, the mask being selectively transparent in accordance with opaque patterning applied thereto. According to a preferred feature, the support means is defined by a continuously moving band and the mask comprises an endless loop having a run arranged in spaced parallel disposition relative to the support surface and advanced at a like rate to the movement of the band.

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According to a further preferred feature, the feed means comprises a curtains coater delivering a continuous sheet of fluid polymeric material to the support surface.

The invention will now be described further, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which : -

Fig. 1 is a diagrammatic illustration of the successive steps in the method of the invention; and

Fig. 2 is a diagrammatic view of apparatus for use in practising the invention.

Referring now to Fig. 1 of the drawings, a photopolymeric resin material 10 is applied to the surface of a moving conveyor belt 11, the viscosity of the resin being such as to form a layer 12 of uniform thickness thereon, and a selectively transparent mask 13 is brought into closely spaced relationship with respect to the upper surface of layer 12 for advancing movement therewith. The band 12 includes transparent and opaque regions 14, 15 respectively.

The layer 12 of resin material is subjected to illumination, through the mask 13, of a kind such as will effect at least a partial cure of that material in locations thereof in register with the transparent regions 14 of the mask, the illumination being in a direction normal to the surface of the mask.

After illumination, the mask is moved away from the surface of the layer of photopolymeric material, and such material advances to be subjected to a localised jet of

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pressure air, as at 16, whereby uncured polymer is removed, thus creating apertures in the partially cured layer in positions corresponding to the opaque regions of the mask.

The apertured resin sheet is then subjected to further illumination so as fully to cure the resin, as at 17.

Apparatus suitable for practising the method is shown diagrammatically in Fig. 2 and will be seen to comprise a curtain coater 21 which supplies a layer 23 of a light-curable material of uniform thickness to the support surface 22 of an endless band 24, the support surface 22 having an easy release characteristic relative to the light-curable material and is typically of polytetrafluorethylene.

An endless mask 26 is positioned above the band 24, a lower run 27 of the mask being spaced from the support surface 22 by an amount sufficient to accommodate the material layer 23 present on the support surface 22 and to provide a small clearance between such material layer and the mask. The mask 26 is driven at a like linear speed to that of the endless band 24, and the "laminated" of the lower run 27 of the mask 26, the material layer 23 and the support surface 22 of the endless band 24 move together.

Mask 26 is selectively transparent, in the sense that regions are provided thereon which are opaque to the radiation necessary to effect curing of the light-curable

material, the regions, in the case under consideration, being circles of small diameter provided at close centres.

An elongated ultra violet light source 31 is provided within the loop of endless mask 26, the light source 31 further including a parabolic reflector 32 so positioned as to deliver parallel ultra violet light to the mask in a direction perpendicular thereto.

The apparatus further includes pressure fluid means 33, preferably a compressed air jet, at a position downstream both of the mask 26 and the band 24, there being extractor means 34 arranged in register with the pressure fluid means 33 and at the opposite side of the layer 23 with respect thereto.

An additional curing means 35 is included downstream of the pressure fluid means 33, the radiation supplied by said curing means being of a kind appropriate to effect curing of the photopolymeric material.

The apparatus is completed by a take-up roll 36 to receive fully cured apertured material.

In one particular example the photopolymeric material used consisted of a blend of acrylated esters and/or urethanes and a photo initiator. The acrylate moieties are the active centres in so far as curing is concerned and the initiator is based on acetophenone. A 1 mm thick layer of the photopolymeric material was laid on the support surface and the mask was so positioned that the lower

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run thereof was spaced from the surface of such material by a distance of 1 2 nm. The light source, which source was positioned 1 metre above the photopolymeric material, was such as to provide radiation of a dominant wavelength (Lambda max.) of 365 nm to give a partial cure time of 30 secs. The apertures in the mask were circular in form, each being 1 mm in diameter and being provided at 2 mm centres.

It is to be appreciated that the thickness of the material layer and the geometry of the individual apertures and their disposition, will be selected according to particular requirements, and that the cure time will vary appreciably according to the intensity of the illumination and the spacing of the light source from the photopolymeric material.

Furthermore, it is to be understood that the wavelengths of the ultra-violet light emitted by the source will extend over a range of between 250 to 400 nm, although the initiator reacts to wavelengths within a narrow band of, say, 360 - 370 nm. The light source will, of course, be selected having regard to the wave-lengths required to effect reaction of the initiator included in the photopolymeric material. It is to be appreciated that the method and apparatus as aforesaid will allow of the production, as a continuous process, of apertured sheet material in a simple and economic manner. The thickness of the sheet may be varied to suit particular requirements,

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whilst the particular formulation for the photopolymeric material will be selected having regard to the characteristics required in the end product.

5 If it is required to improve the tensile strength of the sheet material, yarns and/or fibres may be included in the mix applied to the support surface 22 of the endless band 24.

10 The facility for selective curing of the material applied to the support surface 22 of the endless band 24 which arises from the use of a mask provides for the production of apertured structures of a broad range of permeabilities and this merely by suitable selection of aperture size and spacing. As will be recognised the method of the invention does make possible the creat-
15 ion of a graded permeability towards the edges of the sheet merely by use of a mask of an appropriate form.

The form of reflector is intended to ensure that the light reaching the mask is parallel light, thereby to ensure accuracy in aperture form and size, although it
20 is thought that, by judicious selection of the light source and reflector, apertures having cross-sectional dimensions which vary progressively in the thickness direction of the material may be possible.

25 Whilst the invention is described in the context of irradiation by ultra violet light, it is to be recog-

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nised that other energy sources may be utilised, and in this regard mention is made of such as an electron beam as a source of radiation. The apertured structure as aforesaid, whilst being intended primarily as a fabric for use in the papermaking and like industry, is thought to be of application in other contexts. The apertured structure as aforesaid is of application as a papermakers' dryer fabric, and may be combined with a textile batt, as, for example, by applying a thin apertured structure in accordance with the invention to one or both faces of a textile batt, to form a papermakers wet felt.

The invention is not limited to the specific detail of the arrangement hereinbefore set forth, and alternatives will readily present themselves to one skilled in the art. Whilst production of an apertured structure by the continuous process is hereinbefore disclosed, it is to be understood that in some circumstances it may be preferred to build up a structure in a stepwise manner by creating individual panels joined in edge-to-edge disposition to a previously formed panel, means being provided to ensure appropriate alignment between the apertures of the panel in course of creation and the apertures of the existing panel or panels and the panel in course of creation being cast to abut an edge or edges of an existing panel or panels and to fuse therewith or adhere thereto on partial or full curing.

CLAIMS

1. A method of producing a permeable fabric comprising the steps of providing a layer of radiation curable polymeric resin material in fluid form, irradiating said
5 layer of material through a mask selectively transparent to the radiation so as to effect at least partial curing of the material of the sheet in positions corresponding with transparent regions of the mask, removing uncured polymeric material and effecting any necessary full cure
10 of the residual such material.
2. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the radiation comprises parallel light directed perpendicularly of the mask.
3. The method as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, wherein
15 uncured polymeric material is removed by fluid under pressure.
4. The method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the radiation curable polymeric resin material is applied to a moving support surface and the
20 selectively transparent mask is progressed at a linear speed corresponding to that of the support surface.
5. The method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein a fabric is built up in stepwise manner by creating individual panels successively in edge-to-edge
25 abutting relationship with a previously formed panel or panels, the panel in course of creation being cast to

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abut an edge of an existing panel to fuse or adhere thereto on curing.

6. The method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the mask is maintained in closely spaced
5 disposition with respect to the resin material existing on the support surface.

7. Apparatus for the production of permeable fabrics comprising feed means for delivering fluid polymeric material, a support means to receive said material from
10 the feed means, a source of radiation positioned to irradiate polymeric material present on the support means, the source of radiation being adapted to direct sensibly parallel radiation towards the support means, and a transparent mask intermediate the source of
15 radiation and the support means and through which radiation passes to polymeric material positioned thereon, the mask being selectively transparent in accordance with opaque patterning applied thereto.

8. Apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein the support
20 means comprises a continuously moving band and the mask comprises an endless loop having a run arranged in spaced parallel disposition relative to the support surface and advanced at a like rate to the movement of the band.

9. Apparatus as claimed in claim 7 or 8, wherein the
25 feed means comprises a curtain coater positioned and adapted to deliver a sheet of fluid polymeric material to

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the support surface.

10. Apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 7 to 9, wherein the source of radiation includes a parabolic reflector positioned to deliver parallel light to the mask in a direction perpendicular thereto.

11. Apparatus as claimed in claim 5, or in claim 9 or 10 when dependant thereon, wherein the source of radiation is disposed within the endless loop forming the mask and is co-extensive with the band in the widthwise direction thereof.

12. Apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 7 to 11, further including means adapted to remove uncured polymeric resin material, said means including a source of fluid under pressure adapted to apply a localised jet or jets of pressure fluid to an at least partially cured polymeric resin material existing on the support means.

13. Apparatus as claimed in claim 12, further including additional curing means downstream of the means adapted to remove uncured polymeric resin material.

20 14. An apertured polymeric resin material produced in accordance with the method claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6.

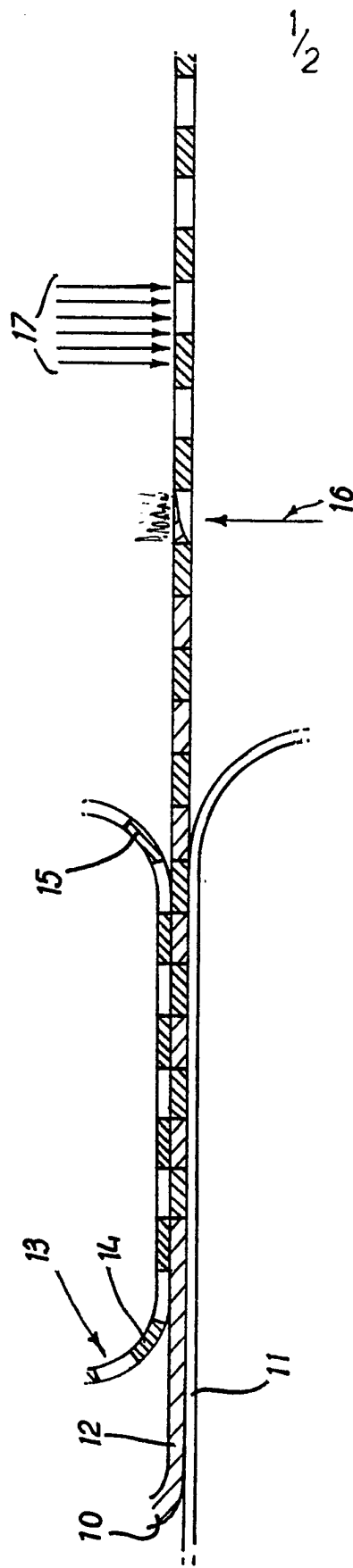


FIG. 1

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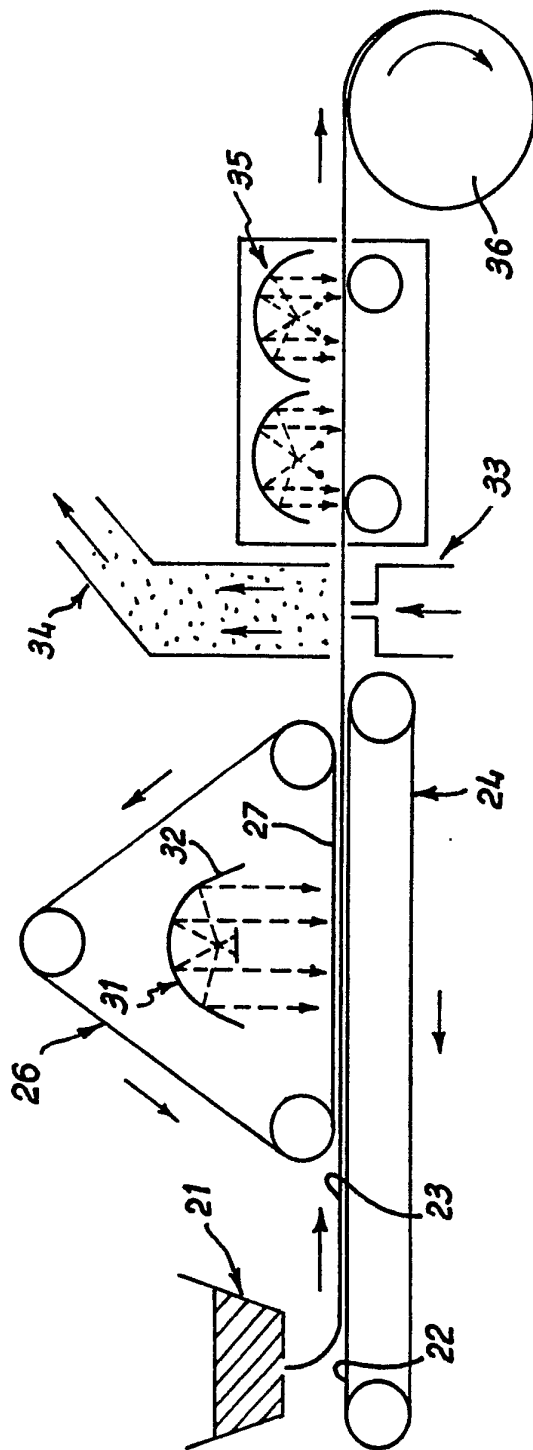



FIG. 2

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No PCT/GB 91/00413

I. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER (if several classification symbols apply, indicate all) ⁶		
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both National Classification and IPC		
IPC ⁵ : B 29 C 41/28, B 29 C 35/10, D 21 F 1/00, B 29 C 35/02		
II. FIELDS SEARCHED		
Minimum Documentation Searched ⁷		
Classification System	Classification Symbols	
IPC ⁵	B 29 C, D 21 F	
Documentation Searched other than Minimum Documentation to the Extent that such Documents are Included in the Fields Searched ⁸		
III. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT ⁹		
Category ¹⁰	Citation of Document, ¹¹ with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages ¹²	Relevant to Claim No. ¹³
X	US, A, 4514345 (JOHNSON et al.) 30 April 1985 see the whole document ---	1-4, 6-9, 11-14
X	EP, A, 0234197 (HERMANN WANGNER GMBH) 2 September 1987 see the whole document -----	1-3, 7
<p>¹⁰ Special categories of cited documents:</p> <p>"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</p> <p>"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date</p> <p>"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</p> <p>"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</p> <p>"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</p> <p>"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</p> <p>"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step</p> <p>"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.</p> <p>"&" document member of the same patent family</p>		
IV. CERTIFICATION		
Date of the Actual Completion of the International Search	Date of Mailing of this International Search Report	
7th May 1991	19 JUN 1991	
International Searching Authority	Signature of Authorized Officer	
EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE	 MISS T. TAZELAAR	

**ANNEX TO THE INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
ON INTERNATIONAL PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

GB 9100413
SA 45513

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on 13/06/91. The European Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
US-A- 4514345	30-04-85	None	
EP-A- 0234197	02-09-87	DE-A- 3600577 JP-A- 62162092 US-A- 4728530	16-07-87 17-07-87 01-03-88