

SCREEN PRINTING APPARATUS

The present invention relates to a screen printing apparatus for printing solder paste onto a surface of a printed circuit board through the medium of a screen having a plurality of openings that is used in producing surface mount technology circuit boards, and is the parent of United Kingdom Patent Application No. 9416286.4.

A screen printing apparatus of a type having a spatula-like squeegee which is arranged to be displaced along a pair of parallel-oriented guide rails back and forth and to be raised and lowered relative to the guide rails and which is adapted to be in pressure contact with an upper surface of the screen when it is lowered and placed into a lower position where solder paste is printed onto a surface of a printed circuit board through the medium of the screen is already known. This type of screen printing apparatus is disclosed in the Japanese Patent Gazette No. 1-55597 published on 27th November, 1989. In this type of screen printing apparatus, a considerable amount of solder paste is manually supplied onto the screen prior to operating the apparatus and the solder paste supplied onto the screen in such a way is printed on the surface of the circuit board by reciprocating the squeegee, while its lower end is pressed against the screen to introduce the solder paste into openings of the screen. Another screen printing apparatus similar to the above-mentioned type of apparatus is also disclosed in the Japanese Patent Gazette No. 1-9275 published on 11th April, 1987.

Major disadvantages of this type of screen printing apparatus are that as a considerable amount of solder paste placed on the screen is kept exposed to the air until the apparatus is put into operation, it tends to be solidified due to evaporation of flux contained therein and/or to be oxidized as it contains oxidizable components, such as lead, that as the printing of a solder paste is performed by reciprocating the squeegee, the solder paste tends to be excessively

printed on a surface of the circuit board and, as a result, printed film tends to be blurred on the surface of the circuit board and, in addition, a uniform printing effect cannot be obtained in every printing cycle, that it is difficult to prevent the solder paste from proceeding of such changes as solidification, oxidation, etc., even if it is frequently kneaded on the screen with manual labour during the period when the apparatus is not in operation, that to use such a solidified and/or oxidized solder paste brings about undesirable printing effects and for this reason, it must be removed from the screen and replaced with new solder paste, which means that a considerable amount of solder paste becomes a useless waste to be abandoned and in addition, replacement of solder paste not only requires manual labour, but also requires the printing operation to be stopped for a certain period of time, which results in economic loss and worker exposure to lead which is a health concern.

A screen printing apparatus which is provided with an apparatus for cleaning solder paste from a lower surface of a screen having a plurality of openings is already known. This type of apparatus is also disclosed in the Japanese Patent Gazette No. 1-9275 referred to above and is characterised by the provisions of a paper-wrapped roller as a means for cleaning solder paste residue from the lower surface of the screen. The paper-wrapped roller is arranged to be reciprocated in rolling engagement with the lower surface along a pair of guide rods to wipe out the residue adhered to the lower surface of the screen. A major disadvantage of this type of apparatus is that the paper-wrapped roller can only clean the residue from the lower surface and cannot clean the residue adhered to inner peripheral edges of the openings of the screen.

To these ends, in accordance with the present invention, there is provided a screen printing apparatus for printing solder paste onto a surface of a printed circuit board through the medium of a screen having a plurality of openings of

a desired print pattern and positioned on said circuit board, the apparatus comprising a solder paste automatic supply dispenser of a non flexible box-like structure which is arranged to be displaced along a pair of substantially parallel-oriented guide rails back and forth and to be raised and lowered relative to the guide rails, said dispenser having a chamber for containing solder paste to be printed on the surface of the circuit board and adjusting means attached to said dispenser for adjusting the temperature of the solder paste contained in said chamber so as to be capable of maintaining said temperature at a predetermined degree, said chamber being provided, at a bottom portion thereof, with a slit-like aperture extending substantially normal to the direction of travel of said dispenser and being provided, at its rear edge portion, with a squeegee blade extending along the entire length of said slit-like aperture to contact an upper surface of said screen when said dispenser is moved in said direction of travel, the apparatus further comprising actuating means mounted on said dispenser and for closing said slit-like aperture when said dispenser is in a non-printing position and for opening said slit-like aperture when said dispenser is performing a printing operation, whereby solder paste contained in said chamber is permitted to be dispensed onto the upper surface of the screen during each pass of said dispenser.

It is, therefore, one object of the present invention to provide a screen printing apparatus of the kind described above which is capable of dispensing a predetermined amount of solder paste having a predetermined degree of temperature, onto the upper surface of the screen in each printing cycle.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a screen printing apparatus of the kind described above which is capable of preventing the solder paste to be printed on the surface of the circuit board from being solidified and/or oxidized and which is capable of supplying the solder paste having a

desired degree of viscosity.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a screen printing apparatus of the kind described above which is capable of preventing the solder paste to be printed from being excessively supplied onto the surface of the screen.

It is another object of the invention to provide a screen printing apparatus of the kind stated above which is capable of indicating the amount of the solder paste remaining therein.

It is another object of the invention to provide a screen printing apparatus of the kind described above which is capable of obtaining uniform and precise printing effect in every printing cycle.

It is another object of the invention to provide a screen printing apparatus of the kind stated above which is capable of minimizing the amount of the solder paste to be wasted.

It is a further object of the invention to provide a screen printing apparatus of the kind stated above which is capable of economically performing printing operation and of protecting workers from being exposed to lead contained in solder paste.

It is a further object of the invention to provide a screen printing apparatus of the kind stated which is provided with apparatuses for cleaning solder paste residue from the screen.

Other objects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from

the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

Fig. 1 is a vertical cross-sectional side view, in a simplified form, of a solder paste automatic supply dispenser as one embodiment of the present invention, showing the state in which a slit-like aperture is closed;

Fig. 2 is a view similar to Fig. 1, showing the state in which the slit-like aperture is open;

Fig. 3 is a bottom view, in a simplified form, of the dispenser;

Fig. 4 is a vertical cross-sectional side view, in a simplified form, of a variant of the dispenser, showing the state in which the slit-like aperture is closed;

Fig. 5 is a view similar to Fig. 4, illustrating the state in which the aperture is open;

Fig. 6 is a perspective view of a bottom wall block of the dispenser;

Fig. 7 is a perspective view of a wall block which can be substituted for the bottom wall block and a rear wall block of the dispenser;

Fig. 8 is a vertical cross-sectional side view, in a simplified form, of apparatuses for cleaning solder paste residue from the screen, and illustrating the system in an operative state for performing cleaning operations;

Fig. 9 is a view similar to Fig. 8, showing the system in an inoperative position;

Fig. 10 is a plan view, in a simplified form, of the dispenser; and

Fig. 11 through 14 are schematic side views, each illustrating the manner in which the dispenser and the cleaning apparatuses are operated, respectively.

Referring to Figs 1, 2 and 3, there is shown a screen printing apparatus as one embodiment of the present invention. The apparatus comprises a solder paste automatic supply dispenser A of a non flexible box-like structure which is arranged to be moved along a pair of guide rails back and forth and to be raised and lowered relative to guide rails and which is provided with a chamber 1 for containing solder paste 2 to be printed on a surface of a printed circuit board 3 through a screen 4 formed of a metal plate, such as a stainless steel plate, having openings 4A and positioned on the circuit board 3, which is placed on a printing table (not shown) in a well known manner.

The chamber 1 is defined by a pair of relatively thick side walls 5 parallel to each other and extending parallel to the direction of travel of the dispenser A, a front wall block 6 fixedly secured at sides thereof to inner surfaces of forward portions of and extending perpendicular to side walls 5, said front wall block having at a lower portion thereof a rearwardly inclined transversely extending inner surface 6A, a rear wall block 7 fixedly secured at sides thereof to inner surfaces of rearward portions of the side walls 5 and extending parallel to the front wall block 6, said rear wall block being relatively shorter than the front wall block 6 in vertical length and having a forwardly inclined transversely extending inner surface 7A and a horizontal bottom surface 7B, a movable bottom wall block 8 movable toward and away from the front wall block 6 and being in sliding contact at sides thereof with the inner surfaces of the side walls 5 and at a top surface 8A thereof with the bottom surface 7B of the rear wall block 7 and a removable lid 9 for covering the upper end of said chamber.

Indicated by reference numeral 10 is a top cover which is removably secured to top surfaces of surrounding walls 5, 6, 7. These walls 5, 6, 7 can be formed either of light metal, such as aluminium or of transparent synthetic resin.

The chamber 1 is provided with an electric sensor (not shown) for detecting the amount of solder paste 2 remaining therein, said sensor being electrically connected to an indicator arrangement (not shown) provided outside the dispenser A for indicating said amount in response to a signal of detection sent from said sensor when said amount is lower than a predetermined level.

The movable bottom wall block 8 is formed, at a front end portion 8B having a curved upper surface 8Ba, with a rearwardly inclined transversely extending inner surface 6A of the front wall. In the illustrated embodiment, the inclined inner surface 8C is provided with a transversely extending recess 8D in which a transversely extending squeegee blade 11 is securely mounted along the entire length thereof in such a manner that a lower straight edge 11A thereof projects slightly downwardly of the lower surface 8E of the movable bottom wall 8 along the plane of the inclined inner surface thereof.

In the illustrated embodiment the squeegee blade 11 is formed of synthetic resin or rubber having excellent mechanical strength as well as excellent chemical resistant properties, such, for example, as reinforced nylon or the like. It is to be noted, however, that the squeegee blade can be integrally formed with the bottom wall 8 at its front end 8B, in the event that the bottom wall 8 is to be formed of synthetic resin. Thus, since the inclined inner surface 8C of the bottom wall 8 and the inclined inner surface 6A of the front wall 6 are parallel to and opposite to each other, there is formed therebetween a transversely extending passage 12 which terminates in a transversely extending slit-like aperture 13 at its lower extremity. The passage 12 and slit-like aperture 13 are

closed when the bottom wall 8 is in contact with the front wall 6 at its inclined inner surface 8C and opened when the former is moved away from the latter. In the present invention, the slit-like aperture 13 is arranged to be normally closed and to be kept open during printing, which will be described in detail later.

The solder paste automatic supply dispenser A is provided with a temperature adjusting device for adjusting the temperature of the paste 2 contained in the chamber 1 of the dispenser A to maintain the same at a predetermined level, for example 25°C. In the illustrated embodiment, this device comprises a pipe 14 through which circulating water flows, the pipe being incorporated into the front wall block 6 of the dispenser and connected via flexible circulating pipes (not shown), to a circulating pump device installed outside the apparatus. This adjusting device makes it possible to adjust the solder paste temperature depending upon changes in room temperature to thereby hold down the change in the solder paste contained in the chamber 1 at a relatively low cost.

The solder paste automatic supply dispenser A is also provided with a rotatable member 15 in the form of a relatively heavy metal cylinder which is arranged to be driven for rotation by means of a motor-driven mechanism 16 mounted on the dispenser structure to knead the solder paste 2 contained in the chamber 1 so that the solder paste can have a desired degree of viscosity for printing. The mechanism 16 comprises an electric motor 17 and a chain gearing 18 with sprocket wheels 19, as shown in Fig. 3.

The bottom wall block 8 of the dispenser is provided with a transversely extending arcuately curved recess 8E between its front end 8B and its top surface 8A and a transversely extending depression 8G behind the top surface 8A. The depression 8G is provided with a cut-out portion 8H at one end adjacent to one of the side walls 5, as shown in Fig. 6. The bottom wall block 8 is provided

with a link arm 20 which is pivoted at its low end to the cut-out portion 8H so as to be pivotable about a horizontal axis for a predetermined angular range. This link arm 20 constitutes a part of a drive mechanism for moving the bottom wall block 8 toward and away from the front wall block 6 to close and open the slit-like aperture 13 formed at the lower end of the chamber 1 of the solder paste automatic supply dispenser A. The link arm 20 is operatively connected, at its upper end which projects into a recess 7C of the rear wall block 7, to a known crank mechanism (not shown) which, in the illustrated embodiment, is arranged to be operated by a pneumatic cylinder 21 supported on the outer side of a side wall 5, whereby when the cylinder 21 is actuated, the bottom wall block 8 is caused to be moved toward or away from the front wall 6 along and between the side walls 5 to close or open the aperture 13, together with the squeegee blade 11. The aperture 13 can be arranged so that the amount of opening can be adjusted.

In the illustrated embodiment, the slit-like aperture 13 is further provided, at its front edge portion, with a blade 22 which extends along the entire length of the aperture in parallel relationship with said squeegee blade 11 and cooperates therewith to define the aperture 13 through which the solder paste 2 is supplied from the chamber 1 onto the upper surface of said screen 4. This blade 22 is also made of a material similar to that of the squeegee blade 11 and can also be integrally formed with the front wall block 6 at its rear bottom portion along the rearwardly inclined surface 6A, if the front wall is to be formed of synthetic resin. The side walls 5 are provided, at their lower surfaces, with leak-preventing members 23 respectively for preventing the solder paste 2 contained in the chamber 1 from leaking out from lower side openings 13A of the slit-like aperture 13 during the period when the aperture 13 is kept open for printing. The leak-preventing members 23 are made of a material similar to those of the blades 11, 22 and are in sliding contact with the lower side portions of the two

blades 11, 22 at their inner surfaces, as shown in Fig. 3.

Indicated by reference numeral 24 is an opening which pierces through the rear wall block 7 for supplying the solder paste into the chamber 1 from outside of the dispenser A when the amount of the solder paste 2 remaining in the chamber has been reduced. This opening 24 can be connected to a solder paste supply device (not shown) via a flexible tube (not shown).

Figs. 4 and 5 show a variant A' of the dispenser A shown in Figs. 1 to 3. This dispenser A' is provided with a cleaning device 25 of a simple construction for cleaning a residue of the solder paste 26 from the upper surface of the screen 4. This device 25 comprises a scraper projection 25A which projects forwardly downward from a lower portion of the front wall 6 and extends normal to the direction of travel of the dispenser A' so that the solder paste residue 26 adhered to the upper surface of the screen 4 can be scraped off as the dispenser is lowered from above to a starting position for printing and travels forward along the screen. The scraper projection 25A can either be integrally formed with the front wall block 6 or separately formed, using synthetic resin.

It should be noted that the rear wall block 7 and the bottom wall block 8 can be integrally formed with each other into one wall block 27, as shown in Fig. 7. Where such a wall block 27 is used instead of the two blocks 6, 7, it is preferable that a pneumatic cylinder is horizontally mounted along one of the side walls 5 so that its piston rod can impart to the block 27 a rectilinear motion to move it toward and away from the front wall 6 without the provision of a slider crank mechanism or the like.

Operation of the embodiment of the present invention shown in Figs. 1 to 3 will be described in connection with operation of the invention in combination with

apparatus for cleaning solder paste residue from the screen as will be described hereunder with reference to Figs. 8 through 14.

Figs. 8 through 14 show a screen printing system which comprises, in combination, a solder paste automatic supply dispenser of the type described with reference to Figs. 1 to 3, a first apparatus B for cleaning the solder paste residue from the upper surface of said screen and a second apparatus C for cleaning the solder paste residue from a lower surface and from openings 4A of said screen.

The dispenser A is supported by a carriage 28 slidably mounted on a first pair of parallel-oriented guide rails 29 and arranged to be moved therealong back and forth by means of a belt drive 30. The dispenser A is arranged to be raised and lowered relative to the first guide rails by means of a pneumatic cylinder 31. The first cleaning apparatus B comprises an apparatus housing 32 of a non flexible structure which is arranged to be displaced along a second pair of parallel-oriented guide rails 33 situated underneath said first pair of guide rails 29 back and forth between two predetermined positions by means of a rack and pinion mechanism (not shown) and a first transversely extending cleaning blade 34 provided within the housing 32 and arranged to be brought into sliding contact with the upper surface of said screen 4 to remove the solder paste residue therefrom when the apparatus is actuated at a first position for the cleaning operation and to be detached from the surface at a second position where the cleaning operation is completed. As shown in Fig. 8, the blade 34 is fixed to a cylindrical member 35 and projects radially outwardly therefrom. The cylindrical member extends transversely, is rotatably supported on side walls of the housing 32 and is arranged to be rotated in opposite directions within a predetermined angular range by means of a pneumatically operated drive 36. The cleaning apparatus B further comprises a collecting device 37 for collecting the

solder paste residue 26 removed from the upper surface of the screen 4 by the blade 34. The collecting device 37 comprises a residue transfer roller 38 which extends transversely in parallel relationship with the cylindrical member 35, is rotatably supported on the housing 32 and is arranged to be rotated anti-clockwise by a drive mechanism, (not shown) and a transversely extending residue receiving plate 39 which is removably supported at one end by a mount 40 within the housing 32 and is in sliding contact with a peripheral surface of the residue transfer roller 38 at the other end.

The second cleaning apparatus C comprises an apparatus casing 41 of a non flexible closed box-type which is arranged to be displaced along a third pair of parallel-oriented guide rails 42 situated underneath said second pair of guide rails 33 back and forth by means of a belt drive (not shown) and to be raised and lowered relative to the rails by means of a pneumatic cylinder 43, and a second transversely extending cleaning blade 44 mounted on the casing 41 and arranged to be brought into sliding contact with a lower surface of the screen 4 to remove the solder paste residue therefrom when the apparatus is actuated at a first position for the cleaning operation and to be detached from the surface at a second position where the cleaning operation is completed. The second cleaning apparatus C further comprises a device 45 to suction the solder paste residue 26A adhered to inner peripheral surface of openings 4A of the screen 4 as well as the solder paste residue 26B being removed from the lower surface of the screen 4 by the second blade 44 by the suction of an air current.

This device 45 comprises a suction tube 45A an inlet 45B of which is opened into the casing 41 through an opening 46 formed in a bottom wall 47 thereof. An outlet of the suction tube 45 (not shown) is connected to a vacuum cleaner or other pneumatic device (not shown) for suctioning pieces of the solder paste. Indicated by reference numeral 48 is a suction aperture formed between a rear

wall 49 on which the blade 44 is mounted and an upper wall 50 and extending transversely along the blade 44 so that the solder paste residue can be suctioned therethrough during cleaning. The first and second blades 34 and 44 are preferably formed of synthetic resin, such as reinforced nylon or the like so that the surface of the screen 4 can be protected from being abraded.

In operation, the solder paste automatic dispenser A is, when at rest, in an initial position shown in Fig. 11 and from there it is lowered and placed into a second position shown in Fig. 12 to start printing. When the dispenser A is placed into this position, the slit-like aperture 13 is opened by moving the bottom wall 8 away from the front wall 6 so as to be capable of supplying solder paste 2 contained in the chamber 1 of the dispenser onto the upper surface of screen 4 and, at the same time, the rotatable metal cylinder 15 is made to rotate clockwise in the state in which its peripheral surface is in sliding contact with the upper surface 8Ba of front end portion 8B of bottom wall 8 to knead solder paste 2 and to facilitate supply of the same, and the dispenser A is made to travel forwardly, i.e. in the direction of arrow X, with the lower end 11A of the squeegee blade 11 and the lower end 22A of the opposite blade 22 being in sliding contact with the upper surface of screen 4. As the squeegee blade passes each of the openings 4A in screen 4, a predetermined amount of the solder paste supplied out of the chamber 1 is applied and filled into the openings 4A by the squeegee blade 11, whereby the openings 4A are filled with the solder paste 2. After the squeegee blade 11 has passed all the openings 4A and reached a third position where it is shown in ghosted lines in Fig. 12, the aperture 13 is closed, rotation of the cylinder 15 is stopped and the printed circuit board 3 is downwardly moved with a printing table (not shown) in a well known manner so that the screen 4 and the circuit board 3 are separated from each other and printed films of solder paste having a pattern corresponding to the pattern of the openings 4A of the screen 4 are left on the circuit board 3.

The solder paste automatic supply dispenser A' shown in Figs. 4 and 5 as a variant of the embodiment of Fig. 1 is capable of cleaning the solder paste residue 26 adhered to the upper surface of screen 4 by scraping off the residue 26 by the scraper projection 25 as it travels forward along the screen for printing. Cleaning of the residue is performed immediately before printing occurs, since the scraper 25 is provided forwardly of the slit-like aperture 13, thereby enabling the solder paste 2 supplied in a well kneaded state to be prevented from being mixed with the residue 26. Other functions and manner of operation of this dispenser A are the same as those of the first embodiment.

Next, after the slit-like aperture 13 has been closed, the dispenser A is raised and returned to the original position from the aforementioned third position to complete one printing cycle. The first and second cleaning apparatuses B and C are, when at rest, in their original positions spaced apart from the original position of the dispenser A, as indicated in Fig. 11. When the apparatuses B and C are at rest, the first cleaning blade 34 of apparatus B and the second cleaning blade 44 of apparatus C are disengaged from the upper and lower surfaces of the screen 4, respectively, as shown in Figs. 11 and 12. More specifically, on one hand, the first blade 34 is retracted into housing 32 of first apparatus B and, on the other hand, the second blade 44 is positioned underneath the screen 4, and then, as the dispenser A has been returned to its original position and the circuit board 3 separated from screen 4 and moved away therefrom, the first and second blades 34 and 44 are brought into contact with the upper and lower surfaces of the screen 4, respectively, that is, the first blade 34 is rotated counter-clockwise to come into contact with the upper surface and the second blade 44 is raised with the casing 41 to come into contact with the lower surface, as shown in Fig. 13.

As the first and second blades 34 and 44 contact the surfaces respectively, then

the apparatuses B and C are substantially simultaneously made to travel in the direction of arrow Y to remove the solder paste residue from the upper and lower surfaces of the screen 4 and from the openings 4A in the screen 4 by means of the blades 34 and 44 and the aforementioned suction device 45. By employing the two cleaning apparatuses B and C which work together, the solder paste residue can be effectively cleaned not only from the upper and lower surfaces of screen 4, but also from the openings 4A therein.

In the first apparatus B, the solder paste residue 26 removed from the upper surface of the blade 34 during cleaning comes into contact with a peripheral surface of the residue transfer roller 38 and is adhered thereto by its viscosity, so that it is transferred onto the residue receiving plate 39 by the transfer roller 38 which is arranged to be rotated counter-clockwise. The residue 26 piled up on the receiving plate 39 is made possible to be easily disposed of by detachment of the plate 39. In the second apparatus C, the residue 26A in the openings 4A and the residue 26B scraped off by the blade 44 are suctioned and collected by the suction device 45 for disposal.

As the apparatuses B and C finish cleaning and reach positions underneath the original position of the dispenser A as shown in Fig. 14, the first blade 34 is turned clockwise and returned to its original position and the second blade 44 is lowered and disengaged from the lower surface of screen 4. Thereafter, the apparatuses B and C are returned to their original positions to complete one cleaning cycle.

Mechanisms used for operating the solder paste automatic supply dispenser A and the first and second cleaning apparatuses B and C are sequentially controlled by a sequential control unit including a control circuit arrangement (not shown).

The scope of the invention is indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing descriptions and all changes or variations which fall within the meaning and range of the claims are intended to be embraced therein.

**CLAIMS**

1. A screen printing apparatus for printing solder paste onto a surface of a printed circuit board through the medium of a screen having a plurality of openings of a desired print pattern and positioned on said circuit board, the apparatus comprising a solder paste automatic supply dispenser of a non flexible box-like structure which is arranged to be displaced along a pair of substantially parallel-oriented guide rails back and forth and to be raised and lowered relative to the guide rails, said dispenser having a chamber for containing solder paste to be printed on the surface of the circuit board and adjusting means attached to said dispenser for adjusting the temperature of the solder paste contained in said chamber so as to be capable of maintaining said temperature at a predetermined degree, said chamber being provided, at a bottom portion thereof, with a slit-like aperture extending substantially normal to the direction of travel of said dispenser and being provided, at its rear edge portion, with a squeegee blade extending along the entire length of said slit-like aperture to contact an upper surface of said screen when said dispenser is moved in said direction of travel, the apparatus further comprising actuating means mounted on said dispenser and for closing said slit-like aperture when said dispenser is in a non-printing position and for opening said slit-like aperture when said dispenser is performing a printing operation, whereby solder paste contained in said chamber is permitted to be dispensed onto the upper surface of the screen during each pass of said dispenser.

2. A screen printing apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein a rotatable member is provided within the chamber of said dispenser, said rotatable member being arranged to be driven for rotation by means of a drive mechanism mounted on said dispenser to knead the solder paste contained in said chamber so that the solder paste can have a desired degree of viscosity for printing.



3. A screen printing apparatus as claimed in Claim 2, wherein said rotatable member to knead the solder paste comprises a relatively heavy metal cylinder and said adjusting means for adjusting the solder paste temperature comprises a pipe through which circulating water of a desired temperature flows, said pipe being incorporated into said dispenser and connected via flexible circulating pipes to a circulating pump device installed outside the apparatus.

4. A screen printing apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said slit-like aperture is further provided, at its front edge portion, with a blade which extends the entire length of said slit-like aperture in parallel relationship with said squeegee blade and cooperates therewith to define the aperture through which the solder paste is supplied from the chamber of said dispenser onto the upper surface of said screen.

5. A screen printing apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said dispenser is further provided with means for cleaning a residue of the solder paste from the upper surface of said screen, said cleaning means comprising a scraper projection projecting forwardly downward from said dispenser at a front portion thereof and extending normal to the direction of travel of said dispenser so that the solder paste residue built up on the upper surface of said screen can be scraped off as the dispenser travels forward for printing.

6. A screen printing apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the chamber of said dispenser is defined by a pair of side walls parallel to each other and extending parallel to the direction of travel of said dispenser, a front wall fixedly secured to inner surfaces of forward portions of and extending perpendicular to the side walls, said front wall having at its lower portion and rearwardly inclined transversely extending inner surface, a rear wall fixedly secured to inner surfaces of rearward portions of said side walls, a movable bottom wall movable toward



and away from said front wall and having at its front end a rearwardly inclined transversely extending inner surface parallel to that of said front wall and having a transversely extending recess in which the squeegee blade is securely mounted along the entire length thereof in such a manner that a lower straight edge thereof projects slightly downwardly of said movable bottom wall and a removable lid for covering an upper end of said chamber, said rearwardly inclined transversely extending inner surface of said front wall and said rearwardly inclined transversely extending surface of said movable bottom wall forming therebetween normally closed transversely extending passage and aperture which are opened when the movable bottom wall is moved away from said front wall, thereby permitting a predetermined amount of the solder paste contained in said chamber to be supplied onto the upper surface of said screen therethrough.

7. A screen printing apparatus as claimed in Claim 6, wherein said front wall, said rear wall and said movable bottom wall are formed of shaped blocks, respectively and wherein said rear wall is provided with an opening through which solder paste can be fed into said chamber from outside.
8. A screen printing apparatus as claimed in Claim 6, wherein at least one of said walls is formed of transparent synthetic resin so that the amount of the solder paste remaining in the chamber of said dispenser can be observed from outside thereof.
9. A screen printing apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the squeegee blade is integrally formed with the rear edge portion of said slit-like aperture.
10. A screen printing apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the chamber of said dispenser is provided with an electric sensor for detecting the amount of



the solder paste remaining therein, said sensor being electrically connected to an indicator arrangement provided outside the dispenser for indicating said amount in response to a signal of detection sent from said sensor when said amount is lower than a predetermined level.

11. A screen printing apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said dispenser includes a pair of side walls parallel to, and spaced from, each other in a direction of travel of said dispenser, a front wall fixedly secured to inner surfaces of forward portions of and extending perpendicular to the side walls, said front wall having at its lower portion a rearwardly inclined transversely extending inner surface, a movable rear wall movable toward and away from said front wall on rearward portions of said inner surfaces of said side walls and having at its front end a rearwardly inclined transversely extending inner surface parallel to that of said front wall and having a transversely extending recess in which the squeegee blade is securely mounted along the entire length thereof in such a manner that a lower straight edge thereof projects slightly downwardly of said movable rear wall and a removable lid for covering an upper end of said chamber, said rearwardly inclined transversely extending inner surface of said front wall and said rearwardly inclined transversely extending surface of said movable rear wall forming therebetween normally closed transversely extending passage and aperture which are opened when the movable rear wall is moved away from said front wall, thereby permitting a predetermined amount of the solder paste contained in said chamber to be supplied onto the upper surface of said screen therethrough.

12. A screen printing apparatus, substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to Figures 1 to 7 and 10 of the accompanying drawings.