

OPTICAL FIBRE JOINTS IN
OVERHEAD ELECTRIC TRANSMISSION SYSTEMS

This invention relates to overhead electric transmission systems of the kind in which one or more than one overhead electric conductor is freely supported in long lengths between pylons, towers, masts or other upstanding supports mutually spaced along the system, all such supports, for convenience, being included in the generic term "tower". The invention is particularly concerned with overhead electric transmission systems of this kind in which the overhead electric conductor, or at least one of the overhead electric conductors, includes at least one optical guide for the transmission of the ultra-violet, visible and infra-red regions of the electromagnetic spectrum, which regions, for convenience, hereinafter will all be included in the generic term "light".

One form of overhead electric conductor including at least one optical guide for use in the communications field adapted for transmission of light, is described and claimed in the Complete Specification of our U.K. Patent No. 1598438 and comprises at least one layer of helically wound bare elongate elements of metal or metal alloy, at least one compartment within and extending throughout the length of the overhead conductor and, loosely housed in the elongate compartment or in at least one of the elongate compartments, at least one separate optical fibre and/or at least one optical bundle.

By the expression "optical bundle" is meant a group of optical fibres or a group of fibres including at least one optical fibre and including at least one non-optical reinforcing fibre or other reinforcing elongate member.

An overhead electric transmission system of the aforesaid kind in which the overhead electric conductor, or at least one of the overhead electric conductors, includes at least one separate optical fibre and/or optical bundle for the transmission of light, will hereinafter, for convenience, be referred to as "an overhead electric transmission system of the kind described".

In an overhead electric transmission system of the kind described, it is usually necessary at spaced positions along the system to effect a joint between the optical fibres and/or optical bundles of two overhead electric conductors suspended from a tower or between the optical fibres and/or optical bundles of an overhead electric conductor suspended from a tower and of a cable extending to a sub-station or other location. Where the or each overhead electric conductor is the earth conductor of the system, the joint between the optical fibres and/or optical bundles can be effected with no difficulty. However, where the or each overhead electric conductor is a live conductor of the system, precautions have to be taken to ensure that the joint between the optical fibres and/or optical bundles is electrically isolated with respect to earth.

It is an object of the present invention to provide, in an overhead electric transmission system of the kind described, a joint between optical fibres and/or optical bundles of two overhead electric conductors suspended from a tower, or between optical fibres and/or optical bundles of an overhead electric conductor suspended from a tower and of a cable extending to a sub-station or other location, in which each or the overhead electric conductor constitutes a live conductor of the system.

According to the invention, the joint between the optical fibres and/or optical bundles is enclosed within a substantially fluid-tight housing of metal or metal alloy, which housing is electrically connected to each or the said overhead electric conductor, is electrically insulated from earth, and has an external shape of such a form as to provide effective control of electrical stress.

Preferably, the metal housing comprises a substantially flat base and, detachably secured to the base, a separately formed dome of substantially hemi-spherical shape.

The or each overhead electric conductor whose optical fibre/s and/or optical bundle/s is to be connected at the joint, preferably passes into, and effects a substantially fluid-tight seal with a wall of, the metal housing, preferably at a position adjacent the base of the housing.

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Preferably, the or each joint between the optical fibres and/or optical bundles is itself housed in a substantially fluid-tight enclosure of plastics material, which enclosure is directly or indirectly supported within the metal housing and where, as is preferred, the plastics enclosure is filled with petroleum jelly or other water-impermeable material of a grease-like nature, each optical fibre and/or optical bundle effects a substantially fluid-tight seal with a wall of the plastics enclosure.

The metal housing may be electrically insulated from earth by any convenient means but, preferably, the metal housing is mounted on the upper end of an upstanding elongate housing which is made of porcelain or other electrically insulating material and which may be mounted on the tower or other structure e.g. at a sub-station.

Where the optical fibres and/or optical bundles connected at the joint are components of an overhead electric conductor and of a cable extending to a sub-station or other location, preferably the optical fibre/s and/ or optical bundle/s of the cable passes into the porcelain housing through the lower end wall of the housing, extends upwardly through the porcelain housing and enters the metal housing mounted on the upper end of the porcelain housing through its base. In this case,

preferably the lower end wall of the porcelain housing is of electrically conductive metal or metal alloy and is earthed. The housing of porcelain or other electrically insulating material is preferably at least partially filled with an electrically insulating medium in a fluid or semi-fluid state. Where the electrically insulating medium in the housing of porcelain or other electrically insulating material is an insulating oil or an insulating gas, e.g. SF₆, it preferably fills the housing and is preferably maintained at a positive pressure by a known device; where the electrically insulating medium in the housing is of a grease-like nature or other semi-fluid state, it need not fill the housing and may, for example, be a petroleum-based insulating grease. The circumferentially extending wall of the elongate housing of porcelain or other electrically insulating material may be provided at spaced positions along its length with outwardly extending circumferential sheds.

Where the optical fibres and/or bundles connected at the joint are components of two overhead electric conductors, the electrical interconnection between the two conductors may be supplemented by at least one strap of electrically conductive metal or metal alloy secured to the metal housing and electrically interconnected between the two overhead conductors.

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In all cases, preferably the metal housing supports a circumferentially continuous ring of metal or metal alloy which encircles the supporting housing of electrically insulating material and serves as a corona ring.

In addition to the joints between the optical fibres and/or bundles, the metal housing may also accommodate regenerators and/or ancilliary equipment associated with the optical communication system.

The invention is further illustrated by the following description, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:-

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic side view of a tower of an overhead electric transmission system showing mounted on the tower, the housings of three optical guide joints between overhead electric conductors suspended from the tower;

Figure 2 is a diagrammatic sectional side view of a preferred joint between optical fibres of two overhead electric conductors suspended from the tower shown in Figure 1,

Figure 3 is a diagrammatic sectional side view of a preferred optical guide joint between optical fibres of an overhead electric conductor suspended from a tower and of an optical cable extending to a sub-station, and

Figure 4 is a sectional side view of the preferred form of fluid-tight seal arrangement by means of which an optical cable is fed into the insulating housing of a joint of the kind shown in Figure 3.

Referring to Figures 1 and 2, the overhead electric transmission system comprises three phase conductors 1, 2 and 3 and an earth conductor 4 freely supported in long lengths between towers 5 at spaced positions along the system. Each phase conductor 1, 2 and 3 has a central bore extending

throughout its length in which is loosely housed an optical cable element comprising a plastics tube 17 having a bore in which is loosely housed an optical fibre 18. Phase conductors 1 on opposite sides of a tower 5 are freely suspended from a cross-arm 6 on the tower by insulator strings 11 which are connected to the conductors by conventional wedge-type fittings 14; phase conductors 2 on opposite sides of the tower are freely suspended from a cross-arm 7 by insulator strings 12 connected to the conductors by wedge-type fittings 15; and phase conductors 3 on opposite sides of the tower are freely supported from a cross-arm 8 by insulator strings 13 connected to the conductors by wedge-type fittings 16. Electrical connection between phase conductors 1, 2 and 3 on opposite sides of the tower 5 and the optical connection between optical fibres of the phase conductors are effected at the joint 20 shown in detail in Figure 2. The housing 21 of the electrical and optical joint between the conductors 1 and their optical fibres 18 is supported on the cross-arm 7; the housing 21 of the electrical and optical joint 20 between the conductors 2 and their optical fibres 18 is supported on the cross-arm 8; and the housing 21 of the electrical and optical joint 20 between the conductors 3 and their optical fibres 18 is supported on an auxiliary cross-arm 9. Detail of the electrical and optical joint between the conductors 1 and their optical fibres 18 will now be described with reference to Figure 2.

The electrical and optical joint 20 comprises a cylindrical tubular housing 21 of porcelain which is mounted on the cross-arm 7 with its axis substantially vertical and

which is closed at its lowermost end by a metal end plate 22 and is closed at its uppermost end by a metal housing 23 comprising a flat base 24 and, detachably secured to the base, a separately formed dome 25 of substantially hemispherical shape. The circumferentially extending wall of the housing 21 has outwardly extending circumferential sheds 26 at spaced positions along its length. The metal end plate 22 is earthed. The housing 21 is filled with mineral insulating oil 31 which is maintained at a positive pressure by means of a pressure tank 32.

Each overhead conductor 1 passes into, and effects a fluid-tight seal with the wall of, the dome 25. The base 24 and dome 25 of the metal housing 23 may suffice to carry current between the two conductors 1 but, if desired, in addition a strap of electrically conductive metal or metal alloy (not shown) may be secured to the metal housing and electrically interconnected between the two conductors. The optical cable element protrudes from the cut back end of each conductor 1 and its plastics tube 17, in which is loosely housed the optical fibre 18, passes through and effects a substantially fluid-tight seal with an end cap 28 of an elongate enclosure 27 of plastics material in which the joint 30 between the optical fibres 18 of the optical cable elements is housed and which is supported on the base wall 24 of the metal housing. The enclosure 27 is filled with petroleum jelly 29.

The base wall 24 of the metal housing 23 supports a circumferentially continuous ring 33 of metal or metal alloy which encircles the porcelain housing 21 and serves as a corona ring.

The electrical and optical joints between the conductors 2 and their optical fibres 18 and between the conductors 3 and their optical fibres 18 are substantially identical to the electrical and optical joint shown in Figure 2.

Figure 3 shows a diagrammatic side view of an optical joint between an optical fibre 63 protruding from a plastics tube 62 of the optical cable element of an overhead phase conductor 61 suspended from a tower (not shown) and an optical fibre 73 protruding from a plastics tube 72 of the optical cable element of an optical cable 71 extending to a sub-station (not shown). The optical joint 40 comprises a cylindrical tubular housing 41 of porcelain which is mounted on a cross-arm 57 of the tower with its axis substantially vertical and which is closed at its lowermost end by a metal end plate 42 and at its uppermost end by a metal housing 43 comprising a flat base 44 and, detachably secured to the base, a separately formed dome 45 of hemispherical shape. Outwardly extending circumferential sheds 46 are provided at spaced positions along the length of the circumferentially extending wall of the housing 41.

At the lowermost end of the porcelain housing 41, the optical cable 71 effects a fluid-tight seal 54 with the metal end plate 42 and the optical cable element of the optical cable comprising the plastics tube 72 in which is loosely housed the optical fibre 73 passes upwardly through the porcelain housing and into the metal housing 43, making a substantially fluid-tight seal 55 with the base wall 44 of the metal housing. The overhead phase conductor 61 passes through and effects a substantially fluid-tight seal with the dome 45 of the metal housing 43, the conductor being electrically connected to a phase conductor (not shown) suspended from the opposite side of the tower by a conventional jumper cable (not shown) which may extend between the other conductor and the metal housing. The plastics tube 62 of the optical cable element 62 of the overhead conductor passes through and makes a fluid-tight seal with one end cap 48 of an elongate enclosure 47 of plastics material. The plastics tube 72 of the optical cable element of the optical cable 71 passes through and effects a fluid-tight seal with the other end cap 48 of the enclosure 47 and the optical fibres 63 and 73 of the overhead phase conductor and optical cable are jointed at the optical fibre joint 50 housed in the enclosure. The plastics enclosure 47 is filled with petroleum jelly 49 and is supported and spaced from the flat base 44 of the metal housing. The porcelain housing 41 is filled with mineral insulating oil 51 which is maintained at a positive pressure by means of a pressure tank 52. The flat base 44 of the metal housing 43 supports a circumferentially continuous ring 53 of metal or metal alloy which encircles the porcelain housing 41 and serves as a corona ring.

Figure 4 shows a preferred form of fluid-tight seal arrangement 54 by means of which an optical cable 71 is fed into the insulating housing 41 of a joint of the kind shown in Figure 3. In the arrangement illustrated it is assumed that the optical cable 71 has three optical cable elements each comprising a plastics tube 72 in which is loosely housed an optical fibre 73. As will be seen on referring to Figure 4, the cable 71 is cut back to expose lengths of the plastics tube 72, a sleeve 80 of heat-shrunk plastics material surrounds the cut-back end of the cable and the sleeved cut-back end of the cable passes through a two-part gland 81, one part 82 of which is screwed into a tapped hole in the base 42 of the housing 41 into the housing. An 'O'-ring 85 of elastomeric material is housed in the part 82 of the gland 81 and is compressed around the cable 71 by the part 83 of the gland and the gland washer 84 to effect a fluid-tight seal between the cable and the base 42. The exposed end of the cable 71 is sealed by a body 86 of epoxy resin which is housed in a protruding part 87 of the sleeve 80 of heat-shrunk plastics material.



CLAIMS:

1. In an overhead electric transmission system of the kind described, a joint between optical fibres and/or optical bundles of two overhead electric conductors suspended from a tower, or between optical fibres and/or optical bundles of an overhead electric conductor suspended from a tower and of a cable extending to a sub-station or other location, in which each or the overhead electric conductor constitutes a live conductor of the system, which joint is enclosed within a substantially fluid-tight housing of metal or metal alloy, the housing being electrically connected to each or the said overhead electric conductor, being electrically insulated from earth, and having an external shape of such a form as to provide effective control of electrical stress.
2. An optical fibre joint as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the metal housing comprises a substantially flat base and, detachably secured to the base, a separately formed dome of substantially hemi-spherical shape.
3. An optical fibre joint as claimed in Claim 1 or 2, wherein the metal housing is mounted on the upper end of an upstanding elongate housing which is made of porcelain or other electrically insulating material and which has a lower end wall.



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4. An optical fibre joint as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the metal housing comprises a substantially flat base and, detachably secured to the base, a separately formed dome of substantially hemi-spherical shape, and is mounted on the upper end of an upstanding elongate housing which is mounted on the tower, which is made of porcelain or other electrically insulating material and which has a lower end wall.

5. An optical fibre joint as claimed in Claim 3 or 4 in which the optical fibres and/or optical bundles connected at the joint are components of an overhead electric conductor and of a cable extending to a sub-station or other location, wherein the or each optical fibre and/or optical bundle of the cable passes into the housing of porcelain or other electrically insulating material through the lower end wall of the housing, extends upwardly through the housing and enters the metal housing mounted on the upper end of the housing through the base of the metal housing.

6. An optical fibre joint as claimed in Claim 5, wherein the lower end wall of the housing of porcelain or other electrically insulating material is of electrically conductive metal or metal alloy and is earthed.

7. An optical fibre joint as claimed in any one of Claims 3 to 6, wherein the housing of porcelain or other electrically insulating material is at least partially

filled with an electrically insulating medium in a fluid or semi-fluid state.

8. An optical fibre joint as claimed in Claim 7, wherein the electrically insulating medium in the housing of porcelain or other electrically insulating material is an insulating oil or an insulating gas which fills the housing and is maintained at a positive pressure.

9. An optical fibre joint as claimed in Claim 7, wherein the electrically insulating medium in the housing of porcelain or other electrically insulating material is a petroleum-based insulating grease.

10. An optical fibre joint as claimed in any one of Claims 3 to 9, wherein the circumferentially extending wall of the elongate housing of porcelain or other electrically insulating material is provided at spaced positions along its length with outwardly extending circumferential sheds.

11. An optical fibre joint as claimed in any one of Claims 3 to 10, wherein the metal housing supports a circumferentially continuous ring of metal or metal alloy which encircles the supporting housing of porcelain or other electrically insulating material and serves as a corona ring.

12. An optical fibre joint as claimed in any one of the preceding Claims in which the optical fibres and/or optical bundles connected at the joint are components of



two overhead electric conductors, wherein the electrical interconnection between the two conductors is supplemented by at least one strap of electrically conductive metal or metal alloy secured to the metal housing and electrically interconnected between the two overhead conductors.

13. An optical fibre joint as claimed in any one of the preceding Claims, wherein the or each joint between the optical fibres and/or optical bundles is itself housed in a substantially fluid-tight enclosure of plastics material, which enclosure is directly or indirectly supported within the metal housing.

14. In an overhead electric transmission system of the kind described, a joint between optical fibres and/or optical bundles of two overhead electric conductors suspended from a tower substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as shown in Figures 1 and 2 of the accompanying drawings.

15. In an overhead electric transmission system of the kind described, a joint between optical fibres and/or optical bundles of an overhead electric conductor suspended from a tower and of a cable extending to a sub-station or other location substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as shown in Figures 3 and 4 of the accompanying drawings.

