



LOCKS & KEYS



Issue 2

The Newsletter for lock collectors

March 1997

Welcome from the Editor

Welcome to the second issue of Locks & Keys. This newsletter is for anyone interested in collecting locks and keys. I aim to cover all types of lock and locking device operated by a key or keyless combination. I hope to include not only locks as such, but devices with locks built-in, such as moneyboxes, handcuffs, padbars, and anything else which readers consider should be covered.

There will be regular articles on readers' favourite locks; places of interest; readers' queries for other readers to supply answers; notices of books; and advertisements of locks for sale and wanted.

I can supply various other items related to locks, but I need contributions of technical material such as catalogues and patents.

Keep sharing!

Studying locks can also take us along some curious byways, and I shall be exploring some of these in future issues.

"Locks & Keys" needs your contributions!
Keep sharing the technical stuff!

£96.50 found in a skip

I have a wood-burning stove, which consumes an amazing amount of wood. On my way home, I often inspect any skips I happen to pass. The amount of wood discarded into skips at the sites of building repairs, extensions, and so on, is enormous. I haven't had to buy any firewood since I've been in this house - though since I did for the circular saw, inadvertently sawing through nails, sawing by hand has been tedious.

On my way home one evening, I passed a skip with some wood sticking out of it. So I stopped just beyond it, and went back to forage. (I have planted some trees, but at this stage, I'm still a hunter-gatherer!) There were several pieces of wood suitable for firewood, so I pulled them out. Also I saw an old suitcase.

The suitcase

As I also collect locks and keys, I decided to carry home the old suitcase, if I had room. Of course I did have room for the case.

My intention was to salvage one or both of the locks, as I did not have one of that type in my collection. When I examined the case, I found one lock open, the other locked. There were marks of violence having been applied to this lock, but it did (continued on p.2)

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£96.50 found in a skip continued from p. 1

not appear much damaged. Until the case was open, I could not remove the lock.

So I picked it open. It was a disk tumbler lock, but very small, with a narrow keyway, and it took a few minutes. Once the lock was open, I had a good look at the case. To my surprise, the case was in complete working order, with wheels at one bottom corner and a folding handle at the opposite top corner. It only needed a wipe clean with a damp cloth!

The key

When I sought a key, however, nobody had a blank that small. I tried several luggage repair shops, without success. Later, still having the lock with me, I happened to be near a large department store, so just because they sold luggage, I tried there.

An assistant looked at the lock, and the number on it. He had, he said, a drawer full of keys. He would be a few minutes whilst he looked to see if he had one of the right number.

Whilst he was away, I looked at the luggage on display. There were various cases of the same make as mine. And there, on the end of the shelf, was the very same model. It was a good quality French make. Just then the assistant returned, bearing two keys.

I took one, and tried it in the lock, thinking that the lock had probably been damaged by the violent attempt to open it. But no, though a little stiff, the lock worked. A puff of graphite eased the stiffness. The price of the key was £1.50. The price-tag on the case on display was £98! So I had a fully-working £98 case for just £1.50 - £96.50 found in a skip! The shop assistant could even offer me a pair of new locks with two keys for £15, but I declined that expense.

The case was such a good one, in fact, large, and easy to carry, that my daughter took it away to university with her. So I still don't have a luggage lock of that type in my

collection.

Mostly our hobby costs us money; for once I saved some!



Some useful helpers

As collectors, and sometimes as dealers, we often need some small or old part. And often, these are difficult to find. Some of the following names and addresses might be of use.

Peter Hall is a Master Locksmith, and also a Member of Associated Locksmiths of America, as well as the American Lock Collectors' Association. He is a "Security Consultant; and Dealer & Restorer of Antique Locks & Keys". His address is 14 Olive Grove, Burton Joyce, Nottingham NG14 5FG; telephone 01159 312411.

George and Val Olifent (MLA Members) run The Keyhole - a locksmithing business which specialises in repairing and conserving old locks and keys. Ring (24 hours) or fax them on 01623 882590 for details.

Please be considerate, and remember that they are running businesses.

(See also page 5)

On dating locks and keys: some considerations

Some artefacts are easy to date; they are marked with a date, or they have a reliable provenance. Others are not so easy to date.

Many factors must be considered, in the absence of a provenance. The materials used, the techniques and crafts used, the style, any markings, any information that is available about the object's source.

For some periods, furniture designers published pattern books, whose dates of publication are known. Any piece which can be identified as being made to one of these published patterns immediately has a limit of age established. Unfortunately, this only applies to furniture, until almost present day times, when design registration was introduced.

Sometimes works of art are helpful. Many paintings and sculptures are of known date. However, they are often of more use for dating such things as clothes or furniture than locks and keys. Sometimes the artist is wanting in technical skill

Town fashion was generally in advance of country; and the best workmen commanded higher prices

to depict such details; more often, he was not concerned to render accurately what he regarded as unimportant details.

Sometimes he was not even trying to produce a picture of record, because his patron had commissioned a fantasy.

It is generally considered that simpler, cruder techniques are older than more refined and sophisticated ones. That does not necessarily follow for the results of their applications, however. Neither methods nor skills change overnight. I grew up in an estate of semi-detached houses built 1936-1938 by a firm of builders run by a father and son. They built pairs of semis alternately along the road, apparently all to the same plan. But those built by the old man had solid walls and slate damp proof courses, whilst those built by the young man had cavity walls and a felt damp proof course.

Often both skills and fashions in towns were ahead of those in the country. While

communication and travel were poor and infrequent, different fashions and skills could coexist. Often the most advanced skills and techniques could command a premium price which not every customer could afford.

Some designs continued with very little change over a long period, because they were functional. I have a tinplate cash box from a wealthy institution which was not founded before 1838. It is fitted with a Barron lock. Not only stock locks, but Banbury locks were commercially made until after the Second World War.

It is notoriously difficult to date furniture by its locks, or vice versa. Locks were often changed just because the key was lost, or because a new lock was cheaper than a repair. Look at basic, common, cabinet locks from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Some old designs were consciously continued, copied, or re-introduced on a large scale for the sake of nostalgia. Victorian Gothic Revival did exactly that for many things medieval, from floor tiles to key bows.

The chest looked as though it ought to have been in the Victoria and Albert Museum

The Weald and Downland Museum in Sussex has some old houses which were dismantled, and erected at the Museum site, restored to their pristine condition. I visited an upmarket fifteenth century hall house there. It was complete with smoky fire and what looked like period furniture. The custodian, a volunteer Friend of the museum, sat on a stool beside a fine chest of (continued on p. 4)

fourteenth century style. Had it been genuine, it would have been in the Victoria & Albert Museum. So I asked how old it really was. The custodian contemplated me, then replied, "This is 1981, so the chest would be - let me think ... 3 years old." He was a retired woodwork teacher who had made a faithful copy of a period chest. Visitors were encouraged to sit on it and kick their heels at the front of it to give it genuine wear! In a century's time it will be

Dating locks - continued from p.3

difficult to know that that chest is not as old as it seems.

There are locks, and especially keys, of exceptionally fine quality. These often are of known date. Unfortunately, they are rarely of much use for dating more ordinary specimens. Good quality works, being relatively valuable, often appear in financial records (receipts for purchase or repair), and household inventories. They can thus have a more detailed provenance than common items.

Good quality items are often relatively valuable, and often have a better provenance

Locks and keys are often separated from their context

Archaeologists rely heavily on the context in which an artefact is found for dating it. Deeper strata are generally older than ones nearer the surface. Unfortunately, one of the largest collections of old keys extending from medieval times had little such help. The 'Drainage Collection' in Salisbury Museum is, therefore, less useful than one might hope.

Methods and styles and materials do change over time, however. Whilst even now a non-carpenter could nail together some oak planks to make a twelfth century style chest, for authenticity, he would also need handmade nails and chain. Genuine wrought iron is now only made in very small quantities at Ironbridge Gorge Museum. If the chest were made of mahogany, it could not be twelfth century.

Early keyhole escutcheons, with 1, or 2, planes of symmetry, were developed from a piece of parchment folded once, or twice. Then the pattern was scribed on a piece of metal, and cut out roughly with saw or chisel. Detail shaping was done with a file. Then the edge was bevelled by filing. Early fly presses were not able to stamp large objects, especially of iron. Nineteenth century power presses could stamp quite large objects, and punch holes in them, in one blow. But such stampings were mass-produced - no more bevelled edges! Such presses can be seen still working in Coatbridge Museum.

Once a lock or key is separated from its

surroundings, dating is more difficult. We can, however, recognise some designs and

We can recognise designs as *typical* of a time or place

methods as *typical* of a time or place.

R. Phillips



CHRISTMAS TASSELS

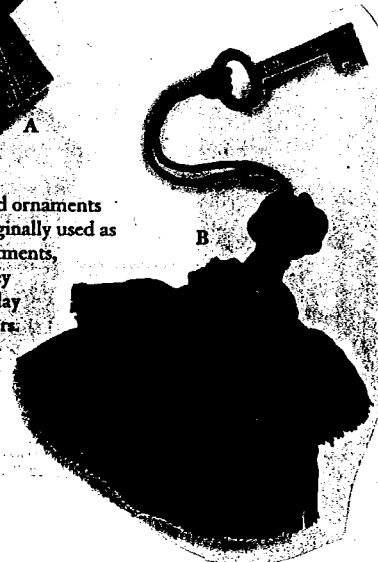
These elegant and richly coloured ornaments date back to medieval times. Originally used as a decoration to adorn church vestments, and later on ornamental keys, they make an ideal finishing touch today to wardrobes and chests of drawers. Height 3 1/4"

A 9208 Yellow Tassel £4.95

B 9206 Red Tassel £4.95

0142 Pair (Yellow & Red)

£9.50



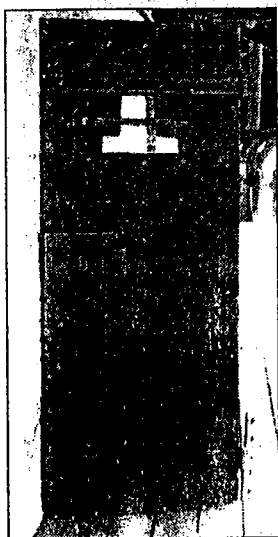
Trace 89 May 1996

Museums ◆ Libraries

Cell door taken from museum in Newbury

An 18th century cell door and water pipe were stolen from a museum in Berkshire on March 16/17. Details follow.

1. Late-18th century gaol cell door, constructed of two layers of planks bolted and nailed together, giving thickness of 5.7cm, the exterior side heavily studded, inner side with iron banding; distinctive hole cut through the door to allow food



and drink to be passed to prisoner; 187cm high by 76cm wide (similar illustrated, but stolen door had hinges extended to form hasps for locking and still had door post fixed to upright element of hinges). {C716}

2. Water pipe from elm log, late-18th century, about 183cm long by 30cm diameter, tapered at one end, a hole of 9cm diameter is drilled through length of log, with a further hole joining it at right angles about half way along its length. {C717}

Anyone with information is asked to get in touch with Sgt Adameczyk at Newbury Police Station, on 01235 776000, quoting ref FA0382339/96.

More interesting suppliers

These items are reprinted from *BBC Homes & Antiques* magazine; and from *Trace*. This is a magazine which features stolen antiques, and goes to people who might come across them or be offered them by way of trade.

Locks are generally about some form of access control, and many collectors will probably have some interest in crime prevention. The theft of an antique cell door might strike some as supremely ironic!

Martin & Company have a large range of cabinet fittings; traditional patterns and sizes are stocked, and sold by mail. The company, however, will only supply its catalogue to the trade, and would not supply me even with the pages containing locks, so I do not have much idea exactly what they do have.



Key detail

Do you know where I could buy authentic-looking, old-fashioned brass escutcheons and keys? I have a lovely little wooden chest that I bought for a bargain price at an antiques fair but, sadly, the original escutcheon has rusted and broken in two.

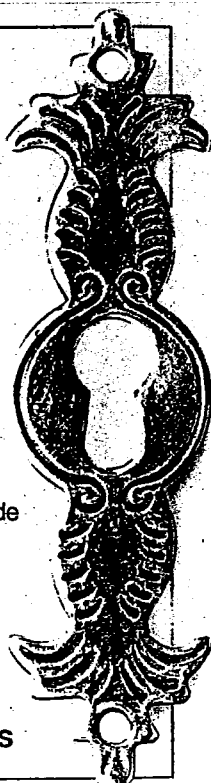
The selection shown here is from Restoration Materials, a mail-order company based in Lancashire. They sell a vast range of brass fittings for furniture – including casters, locks and cabinet handles – along with leather for desk tops, stringing, inlays, and the



barometer and clock parts that they first specialised in. Most of the key and escutcheon designs are copies of old styles, and are given an antiqued finish for authenticity. Shown here are:

(above left) escutcheon B5, priced £2.50; (right) escutcheon 1624, priced £1.21; (below left) one of a wide range of key blanks, costing from around £1.50 each.

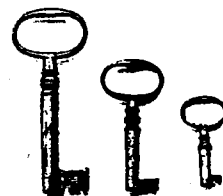
You can visit Restoration Materials at Proctor Street, Bury, Lancashire BL8 2NY, or tel: 0161 764 2741 for mail-order details. JS



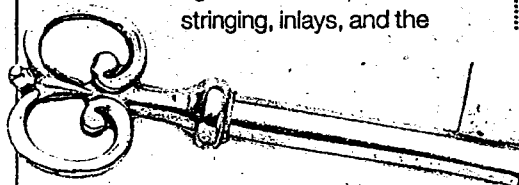
Open Sesame

I have a lovely 19th-century tea caddy which my father left me, but I can't open it as the key was lost years ago. Can I get a new key cut at a locksmith's?

You could do this, but it might look too modern for your box. An alternative is to have one cut from an old key. Nicholas Mitchell at The Swan, Tetsworth, Oxfordshire (tel: 01844 281777), cuts keys for boxes and furniture from original decorative Georgian steel ones, like these dating from 1790-1830.



To have a new key cut costs around £20, including p&p. He may ask you to remove the lock and send it. This can be done at a furniture restorers. Nt



Questions from readers

Write in to "Locks & Keys" with your questions about locks. Somebody will surely be able to supply answers. The Editor will be pleased to print a composite answer to questions. When replying, please mention the number of the question.



- 1] Several persons claimed or are credited with inventing the moving bolt stump as a pick-resisting device, generally known as the 'protector' bolt stump. Can we have nominations for inventor and date, please?
- 2] Does anyone still make key blanks for Cotterill Climax or Cotterill-Wilson locks?
- 3] When did E. Cotterill begin and cease trading, and what became of the company?
- 4] When did the Bilfix Lock Company cease trading, and what became of it?

S. Mordan: lock-smith inventor - an update

Following last issue's article, further information has come from Neil Davis, Vintage Pencils, Harefield.

Sampson Mordan (1790-1843?) was an engineer who worked for Bramah in his youth, and also did some silversmithing. He claimed to have started his own business in 1815 (the year after Bramah died), though it might have been a few years later.

Mordan and Bramah both made propelling pencils; but Mordan chose to specialise in pencils and good quality wares - scent bottles, cardcases, snuff boxes; and, the Bramah Lock patent having expired in 1816, copied that extensively. Some locks are marked S MORDAN & CO PATENT; they usually had an odd number of sliders, unlike most of Bramah's, which had an even number.

Bramah lock copies

Several other British companies also made copies of the Bramah lock, and marked them with their own names. Foreign (mostly Belgian) copies are usually anonymous.

Mordan also made some propelling pencils in the form of a Bramah key with a ringbow. These have a telescopic action inside, and were made in 9 ct gold, and silver. They are quite rare.

Although S. Mordan & Co. is perhaps best known today for propelling pencils, Mordan in various commercial partnerships made a considerable range of products, including some furniture. Mordan made considerable use of Bramah locks, not only on furniture, but adapting them to other uses.

The company premises at City Road London were bombed out in 1941, though the company was not formally liquidated until 1953. Rights to the patents eventually passed to Filofax.

R. Phillips

ABRIDGED SPECIFICATIONS OF HOBBS & CO.'S PRINCIPLES OF SECURITY AGAINST PICKING AND FRAUD.

Hobbs & Co.'s Patents "Protector" Locks.

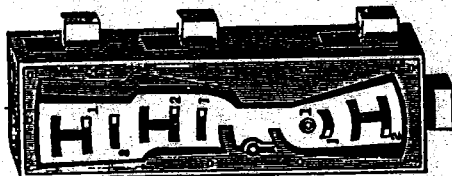
THESE Locks combine the principles of lever security as a protection against the use of any but the true key; of the moveable-stump security as a protection against picking; and the revolving nozzle security as a protection against fraud.

N.B.—No lock is really secure without these three principles of protection.

Protection against Picking is obtained by means of what is technically known as the moveable stump, which diverts any pressure which may be put upon the bolt for the sake of discovering the special arrangements of the levers. When the bolt is pressed backward by the pick, the moveable stump is forced down against a stud fixed to the back-plate of the lock, thus leaving all the levers perfectly free, and stopping all further movement of the bolt until all the levers are simultaneously raised to their respective positions by the true key.

Protection against Fraud is obtained by means of a revolving nozzle, having a circular piece of metal at its base, behind which is a projecting step which actuates the bolt like the ordinary terminal key-step, for which it is substituted. This revolving nozzle renders it impossible to fraudulently tamper with the interior of the lock by cutting or grinding away the bolt-talon or the terminal step of the key, so that the key might pass round without fairly throwing the bolt; thus leaving the owner to suppose that he had thrown the bolt, when in reality he had only lifted the levers, and moved the bolt so far as seemingly to have locked the lock, but from which position the bolt could be easily withdrawn by an ordinary pick.

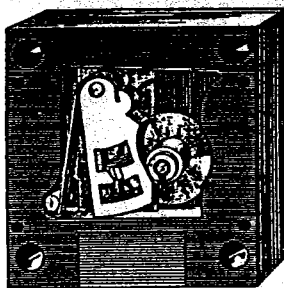
Hobbs & Co.'s Violence "Protector" Locks.



Hobbs & Co.'s Principles of Construction and Protection.

In every other Lock hitherto made or devised (whether Key or Keyless) the Lock-bolt has finally only one point of holding to retain in position the large bolts of Safes and Strong Doors. This holding point is called the "Retaining Stump," because it retains the Lock-bolt in position sufficient for general purposes, but not where great temptation is offered. The distinguishing feature of HOBBS & CO.'S Violence "Protector" Locks consists in their being provided with a series of moveable or Protector Retaining Stumps passing through a corresponding number of gatings in the levers, and extending in some cases almost the entire length of the door. Any one of the Retaining Stumps would be sufficient to hold the Lock-bolt in position, even if all the others had been successively extracted, either by violence, or by drilling, or by chemical solvents. To destroy the holding power of these Locks (even with engineering tools specially designed for the purpose) would require more time and labour than any mechanic could surreptitiously secure to work on them; for it would necessitate the removal of from 60 to 300 square inches

of the solid door, the positions of the series of Retaining Stumps in each Lock being indefinitely varied. In other Locks there is only one Retaining Stump in one fixed position, and that position can in most cases be accurately ascertained from the construction of the Lock, or by comparison with other Locks of the same size.



These Violence "Protector" Locks are made in several sizes for various degrees of security. The larger sizes, for the highest class security have 15 levers, which are arranged so as to be readily changeable in the order of their combination. Such change of arrangement in the levers amounts practically to a new Lock as often as it is made, and will necessitate the use of a different Key. The levers are so accurately balanced that they can be moved with perfect ease, and certainty of working is secured by their substantial

and efficient construction.

These Locks are not sold to the Trade.

TIME LOCKS.

When it is desired to close a strong room or a Safe for a certain specified number of hours, HOBBS, HART & CO., LTD., provide a Time Lock with either two or three separate chronometer movements:

These Locks are arranged in the design of the bolt mechanism in such a manner that they control all the other Locks on the door, and the keys cannot be used in their respective Locks until the expiration of the number of hours for which the Time Lock has been set. The limit of time being 72 hours.

These Locks may be inspected, and prices will be quoted upon application.

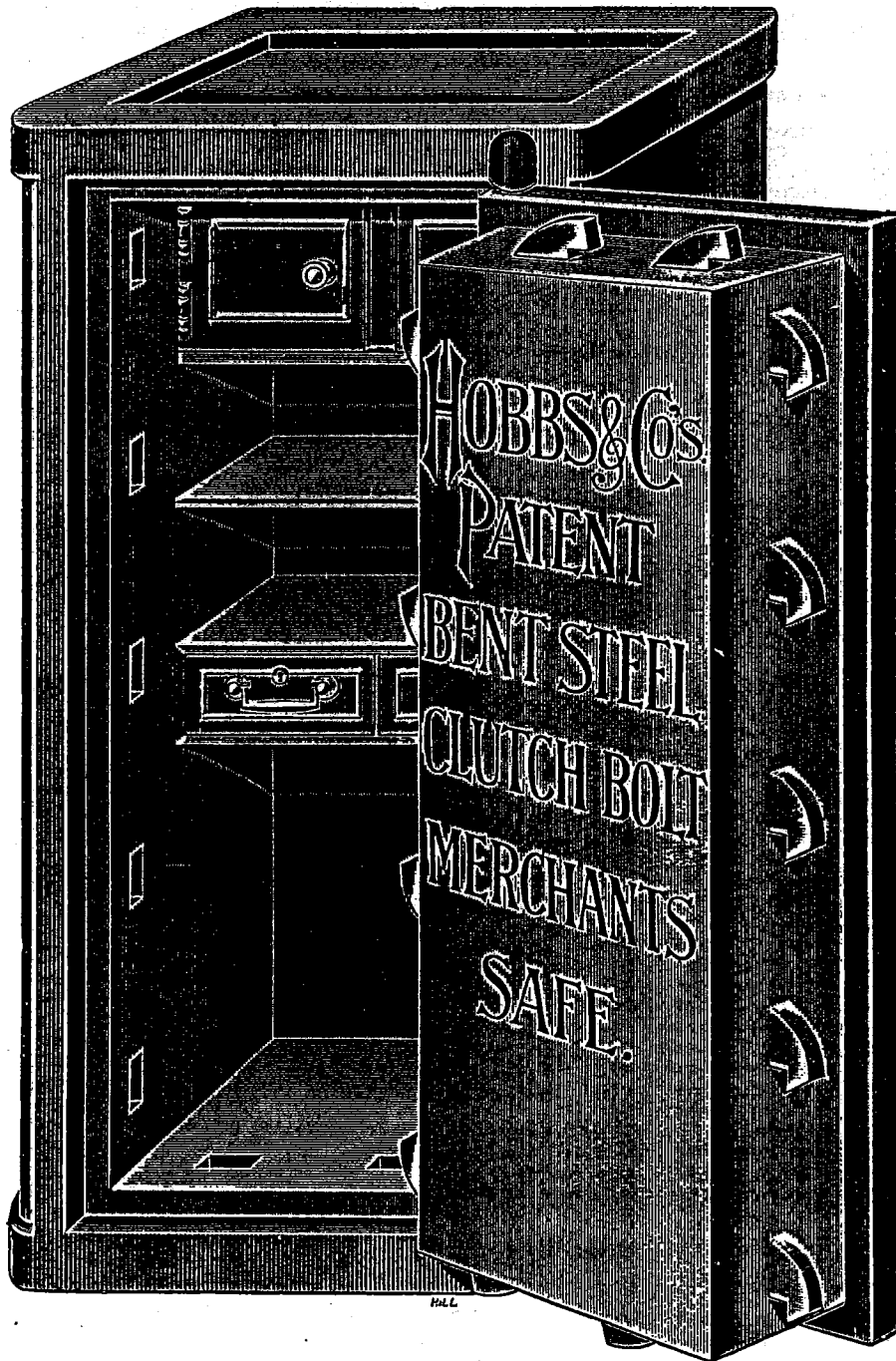
**HOBBS & Co.'s PATENT BENT BODY, STEEL,
FIRE, FALL AND BURGLAR RESISTING SAFES.
"PROGRESS" D QUALITY.**

The interior fittings are secured by HOBBS & Co.'s Patents "Protector" Locks with two keys each to differ, but they can be made *en suite* if desired, at a slightly increased charge.

Quotations for other Sizes or Styles of Fitting upon application.

**SPECIAL
SIZE.**

**MADE TO
ORDER ..
ONLY....**



Outside size 72-in. x 36-in. x 30-in.

Inside size 64-in. x 26-in. x 20-in

Fitted with 12-inch double-door cupboard, one shelf and two 6-inch drawers.

Price **£105 0 0.**

Approximate weight 31½-cwts.