SMCS NEWS



for Sewing Machine Collectors

Issue No 3 1985

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Leeds Get-together -- Oct 13

THE GREAT THING ABOUT throwing down the gauntlet is that sometimes it gets picked up. There will be a regional meeting in Leeds City centre Sunday 13 October (2 to 5 pm).

Knight in shining armour is freelance SM-mechanic Kenneth Waite who has introduced no less than five new members, mainly dealers in modern SMs in the Yorkshire area, into our ranks and has got everyone excited about the idea of hosting the first collectors' meeting in the north of England.

The informal gathering will be at the 168 Lower Brigate premises of Mike Kneeshaw. He's got a large shop only a few minutes walk from the main railway station, but he would appreciate a call in advance so he can organise enough chairs and food -- as a running buffet is also on the agenda. Telephone, business hours, including Saturday, is Leeds (0532) 430019.

As some of the northern contingent are new to collecting they are looking forward to an influx of old hands with machines to display, sell and exchange. I will also take some slides of selected machines from my own collection, including toys and French and American models from the 1860s, etc. MS

BBC Radio Locates Dorman

TWO OR THREE times a year, BBC Radio Scotland runs a 'Rummage Sale' on the air. Listeners may write in ahead or phone the programme for items they would like; other listeners very often can supply them. As soon as the last one was announced I wrote in, hoping that I might acquire something desirable in the SM line. My letter was selected and I duly made my request on the air.

A list of 17 names and 'phone numbers arrived, just as I was going on holiday. Throughout the next three weeks, I 'phoned 16 from caravan sites all over England. Nearly all were wanting to dispose of Singer treaders, two had Frister and Rossmans and two were unknown quantities. I gave up on number 17 as I got every sound BT produces except the right one.

Tried again at home with still no reply until, at last, success. The gentleman had a Dorman I could have. Dorman meant nothing to me until I consulted the rarity/desirability scale in S&R 8 and 9. The machine was in Edinburgh, 60 miles away, so my first stop there was to buy a suitcase trolley to take it home on the bus. (Pause for laughter from you knowledgeable folks.) For the rest the machine would fit into a large pocket. It measures 8" high x 4" x 3½" excluding the handle.

This tiny machine may be clamped onto a table or slide into a cast-iron base, which measures 7" x 6½". It is in beautiful condition and we got it working at home. Not only was the machine available, but it was in its original box, with instructions, two copies of testimonials and its original box of accessories, complete except for oil.

The two unknown machines were a Universuum which I took because it was free, and I am not a Scot for nothing. The other is still unknown, alive and well and living in the back of a cupboard in Haddington. I wonder if it is another Dorman? Norah Sims

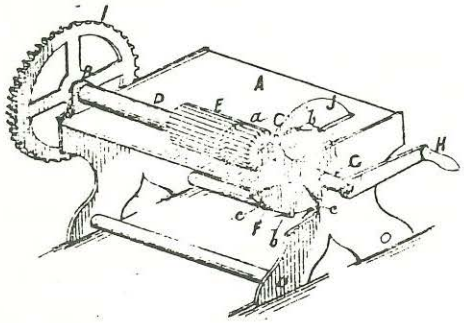
Editorial

FOR THE FIRST time SMCS News is issuing a special supplement following diligent research work by Carol Head. We hope to repeat the idea, material and finances permitting.

It will only be possible to publish such 'extras' or to maintain the size of the magazine if membership increases dramatically and I would again ask all members to try to introduce at least one member each. MS

Beyond the Fringe

DRESSMAKING in the second half of the 19th century was no mere matter of neat basic seams. Yards of trimming and thread, and strategic use of the binders and hemmers, corders, braiders and rufflers out of one's box of sewing-machine attachments were needed.



And if one's fancy was for perfectly-matching, feathery-edged fringing, 'a rich and beautiful trimming', then long strips of fabric were cut diagonally and the threads of one side carefully picked apart with a pin. 'Sorting' fringes was a chore occupy-many evenings. The scene was set for a mechanical fringer.

American Jesse Bethuel Lincoln came up with such a device, patenting it first at home on November 21, 1876 and followed with patents in Great Britain, France, Belgium (3, 4 and 5 May, 1877, respectively), Austria and Hungary,and Germany (23 and 29 June, 188, respectively. Manufacturers and sole proprieters were W V Phillips & Co, Providence, Rhode Island, USA.

Lincoln claimed: 'The only attempt so far as I know, to do this work by machinery has been to use a needle with a flat notched end in a SM, which, being thrust through the cloth rapidly in a vertical direction, produced a similar but imperfect result, but this device frequently broke the threads instead of separating them, besides so clogging the machine with the refuse as to interfere with its usefulness for general work.'

In the Lincoln/Phillips machine, bias strips of cloth (maximum width 2 cm) are fed under a wooden roller which advances the strip so that one edge comes into contact with a 'fringer'. This is a disc, rotating in a vertical plane, with a series of hooks at its periphery, the sharp points of which enter the cloth and separate the threads to form a combed, slightly curled fringe.

The machine works with silk or other smooth -fibred fabric, but the threads of cotton (unless mercerised) and linen are too rough to be successfully teased. I doubt that the fringer was a commercial success. Our machine was found in Norfolk (England, not Virginia) many years ago, and I do not know of another example. Martin Gregory

Auction News

Phillips, Blenheim St, London - 28 August, 1985

HAVING YAWNED MY WAY through the viewing dominated by six Willcox and

Gibbs I wouldn't normally ask the price on, I wondered if it was worth staying for the auction. Anyway a few of us 'stagedoor Johnnies' clogged the doorway humming our 'where has all the good gear gone' anthem to the tune of 'long time passing' when bang, a C3 Challenge with little gold and a missing slider was knocked down for £140.

Worse is to come. Would you believe a C4 W&G with the rocking arm rubbed free of paint and generally looking as if it had been used in a bovver boys' football match, for £100? OK, it had its box, but I have a shed full of empty boxes I don't want but which I feel guilty about throwing away. A superb C9 example W&G went to a Dutch dealer in the room for £50. Another W&G with an American Machine Co logo, and filigree gold-fern patterns across the arms brought £80 (C7), whilst three more W&Gs in C4 to C6 brought £35, £36 and £38.

The remaining machines in this dull, but unexpectedly high-priced, lot were a C6 Jones (£35), C4 Atlas (£36) and a rough C4 Wanzer A with no gold, boxed, (£35).

One of our spies infiltrated the front row to overhear the name of this mysterious (and wealthy) commission buyer, but no-one recognised the name.

A 10% buyer's premium should be added to all the hammer prices. MS

Never Give Up

DOWN IN THE west-country SM-collecting belt there is a SM shop that has had displayed two collectable models -- an hexagonal Collier and an Arm and Platform-- since Moses was a lad.

At one time or another our stalwart collectors down there have tried to prize these treasures from the dealer's hands.I'm told Martin Gregory was working on them 15 years ago.

However, Bernard Williams, former sec/treasurer of the joint society who, though his first love is typewriters still has a SM collection to stir the hearts of most of us, walked in the shop and out with the machines. He was quite unaware of the ground that had been trodden before until he visited CH's new home and was informed he'd 'stolen' her machines.

It seems the third generation of the same family had recently taken over the running of the shop and, presumably, hadn't the same affection for these oddities as the founding grandfather.

* * *

Rita Heath was holidaying in Bath recently and learned from an antique dealer about the 'one that got away'. An elderly gentleman had brought him an old SM in a polished box. The dealer had no idea what to offer but the old boy said "Well, it's a nice box, it must be worth £25". It was put on the stall at £70 and whisked away within two hours.

The only clue the dealer had was that it had a brass plate and

turned legs, confirmed the Grover and Baker on page 11 of CH's book.

'I don't know for whom I felt the most despair', said Rita, 'Myself for turning up a fortnight too late, the dealer who lost out on a fatter profit, or the poor old gentleman who went away quite satisfied with his £25.' (Come along, fellow members, if it was one of you, own up!)

Anyway, the story ends happily for Rita because she found a complete Beckwith in a quaint old box full of accessories under a counter in Salisbury two weeks later.

And I found a rare model at a huge Auto-Jumble in the same general area. It was a Whight and Mann 'Excelsior' machine head (see SMCS News 1) purchased from an elderly Polish man who'd bought it in Southampton 30 years before for 10/-d (50p).

It seems the good models are still around -- it's just a question of finding them -- and not giving up. MS

In at the Beginning

A MOST INTERESTING and important document has come into our possession. It is the recollections of James Bolton, written in 1901, and dealing with his work for 40 years with the Singer SM Co which he joined in 1852.

The original of the manuscript is with Bolton's grandson in Illinois. The copy which we are serialising in SMCS News was kindly provided by member Connie Wennerberg of Chicago.

Bolton was born in Mobile, Alabama, in 1832 and died in 1916. His story of the Singer Company from its outset is the history of the very early years of the SM industry. MS

FOUR YEARS IN THE NEW YORK FACTORY -- 1852 to 1856

IN 1852, I learned that I M Singer & Company had opened a factory for the manufacture of their sewing machines on Center Street near the Tombs. I called there and applied for a position as a machinist and met Mr Ogilvie, the foreman. He said they were not ready yet, but if I would call around in 10 days, he would have a place for me.

As I was going out, the foreman called me back and asked if I knew of a fine workman, to send him around. I said, 'I flatter myself I am that.' 'Well', he said, 'this is a very fine piece of work.' In reply, I said, 'If you will show me what it is, I will tell you whether I can make it or not.' He then brought me a bobbin. I smiled and said to him, 'If I cannot make that, I cannot make anything.' He said, 'Now look at that; you may think there

is nothing to it, but the angle of the point has to be exact and the bobbins have to be of the same length after they are hardened.'

I told him I had been doing much finer work than this for the past three years, that I had been at the bench for six years, and for the last three years had been doing as fine work as there was in New York, including the House printing telegraph. He said, 'If you think you can make them, go right to work.'

Before starting, I inquired as to the number of bobbins they considered a good day's work at Boston, where the bobbins up to this time had been made, and he said three dozen a day, so I commenced by making my tools with a view of turning out four dozen a day, and finally I got along so I could make the four dozen a day very easily.

In the meantime, I found that the adjusters were getting $12 a week and I was getting but $9 and making a dozen more a day than they had been in Boston, so I told the foreman I ought to have more pay because mine was the finest job, as he understood it, and I could not understand why the adjusters got $12 a week while mine was the finer work. He said the explanation was that six bobbins were given away free with each machine, therefore they had to get them made as cheaply as possible.

Then I told him, 'I can get a boy who will make these bobbins for you at $5 a week.' I had a boy in mind whom I had instructed how to make rule joints and he said, 'If you can do that, I will put you on adjusting at $12 a week and you can bring the boy right along.' So I brought the boy, who was soon able to make the four dozen a day. So, while adjusting machines, if there was any new work that Mr Singer wanted done, I was the one selected to do the work. Amongst other things that he got up at the time was his jack feed. I did the work on the jack feed and it worked very nicely. It was simple in construction and durable and we thought at one time it was the best thing out. However, up to this time we had not sewed over seams.

In sewing over seams, it would make short and long stitches. I was very much interested to make the feed a success. The various models and machines I had worked on got me quite familiar with all varieties of cam motions, and I thought I would suggest to Mr Singer how to improve it. After I got through suggesting and making a sketch, Mr Singer said, 'Young man, who in hell is inventing this machine?' So I made up my mind I would make no more suggestions, simply follow orders.

Things went on until competition was getting stronger and sales falling off, and then Mr Singer got it into his head that the machine must be improved, and commenced by altering the No 1 and No 2 machines, which were 2 to 1 in speed, and changed them into 4 to 1 and did away with the heart cam that drove the shuttle and which was

very noisy and instead drove the shuttle by a crank and pitman.

In addition to this, Mr Clark suggested that on the sale of these improved machines, they would allow $50 on every machine taken in exchange. The price then of the No 2 was $150, so the company got $100 cash on such exchanges. This increased the trade to such an extent that there was no more room in the factory for additional adjusters.

Mr Singer asked me if I could suggest anything whereby the output could be increased. I told Mr Singer the best way to do that would be to put the adjusters on piece work, and he asked me how that would help matters. I said by placing the adjusters on piece work, they would work harder and faster in order to earn more money. At this time the adjusters were turning out one machine a day each at a cost to the company of $2. Mr Singer consented to try this experiment allowing the adjusters $1.75 per machine. As a result of the change from day work to piece work, each adjuster turned out three machines a day, which was very gratifying to Mr Singer. On account of this increase in my earnings, the adjusters were making more money per week than the foreman, through whose influence the price was then cut to $1.25 and finally to 75 cents.

THE NEW HAVEN OFFICE -- 1856 to 1860

Mr Singer asked me one day how long it would take me to get ready to leave New York and take charge of an office. I said, 'Mr Singer, I am always ready to go as soon as my hat is on.' He turned without saying any more and I thought perhaps my answer was not satisfactory, but in about two weeks he called me to his office on Broadway and said, 'Mr Bolton, I have arranged for you and Mr Clark to go to New Haven tomorrow morning, and Mr Clark will see that you are properly installed in the New Haven office.'

As I was leaving, he said, 'There is one thing I want you to understand. We are willing to give you all the machines and merchandise you want, but we do not want you to be sending here for money to live on, which has been the case up to this time.' I said, 'Mr Singer, if I cannot get along in New Haven without sending here for my wages, I will go back to the bench.' So the next morning Mr Clark and I went to New Haven on the 8 O'clock train, and after having breakfast at the Tontine Hotel, we went to the office and he introduced me to Mr Goodsell, who was then the agent, and told me to take an inventory of the stock and send it to New York. This is about all that was said and done at that time.

After looking into matters, I found that Mr Goodsell had not sold a machine in three months, and I made up my mind that if there was any business to be done, it would have to be done with carriage and harness makers, as that was the great carriage centre, especially for the southern trade. I determined to canvass all the carriage

and harness factories in the city. I canvassed that trade and none of them wanted Singer machines. They had tried them and they had failed, and there was but one No 3 in use, and that would only sew with silk and gave them much trouble, owing to the friction used. These factories were all using Nichols and Leavitt machines so, after trying canvassing, it seemed to me my success was extremely doubtful.

However, I had left the shop and made up my mind I would die game. I borrowed one of these Nichols & Leavitt machines to make an examination of it, and I found it would sew all kinds of linen thread very nicely, while the Singer would not. There also seemed to be no trouble with the feed, as was the case with the friction feed of the Singer. Another help to them was the rolling presser which was not on the Singer at the time. Owning to these conditions, I was not justified in engaging any help and keep my promise to the Company in not sending for money and, as a consequence, I was porter, clerk and boss. Then I got a supply of scraps of enamel and patent leather for the purpose of finding out the difference in the two machines, and why it was they were all buying the Nichols & Leavitt.

To be continued.....

Feedback

OTTO LANDGRAF'S piece on steam-driven machines touched a cord with two of our engine-collecting members. Geoff Hiscock and his wife Doreen regularly attend steam rallies, while Martin Gregory devotes hours to building intricate scale-model engines which share his and Jennifer's house with their SMs and other interesting kitchen and mechanical gadgets. They both sent information for this issue. MS

From Geoff Hiscock

The article on steam-driven sewing machines needs a little correction. The devices illustrated are, in fact, 'hot-air engines'. Heinrici was a leader in this field, as was a Scot, Stirling. Working on a hot-and-cold-air displacement, they will run on a paraffin lamp. The hp of .10 is about right. They were the most inefficient machine ever. The largest didn't produce more than 3.3hp. Most of their power is kinetic being derived from the massive flywheel needed. The point not mentioned is that they are a one-speed machine. Apart from turning down the heat there is no way of controlling the rpm. Like many things, it seemed a good idea at the time.

From Martin Gregory

Notes on the 'Steam Machines' pictures (page 8)

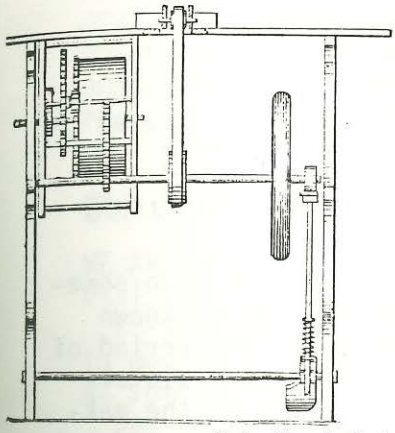
Picture 1: de Vries book on Mechanical Antiques (usually reliable)

gives this woodcut as from 'de Nateur 1884' (not the early 1870s).

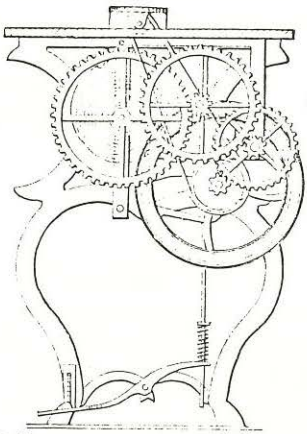
Picture 2: A chap named Heinrici designed small Stirling engines with paraffin heaters at this time. Could this be a Stirling engine rather than steam?

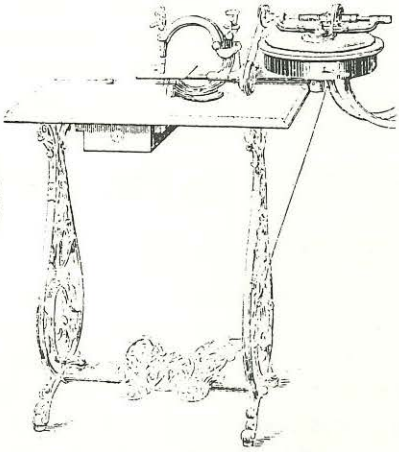
Picture 4: Two other illustrations (undated) of the Tyson motor are in 'Machines' by S Strandl 1979 which book also has a re-drawn picture of a water motor driving a family-type machine.

I include illustrations of two more motors from Knights Dictionary of Mechanics c1880 -- a clockwork one which I presume you wound up before starting sewing (the drive layout looks suitable for a Wheeler & Wilson machine) and a water motor connected to a Willcox and Gibbs.



Spring Motor for Sewing-Machine.





Lane Water-Motor, attached to a Sewing-Machine.

Our Own Bard

I used to have nice hobbies like macrame, art and lace
Which I'd work at all composed and with a smile upon my face;
But since collecting sewing-machines became a fascination,
The expression on my countenance is grim determination.

It began with mother's treadle, which I felt I ought to keep
Soon followed by an F & R *ubiquitious and cheap.
I then learnt of all sorts of ones I never knew existed
And definitely odd-ball ones that don't seem to be listed.

I peruse the local papers armed with notepad and a pen.
While the family -- resigned -- chant: 'Oh no, not beans again!'

Like the elusive Pimpernel, I seek them here and there,
In junk shops, at car-boot sales, and every antiques fair.

My loft is full of boxes, and my brain revolves on cogs,
And I wield a frenzied oil can while the house goes to the dogs.
My friends, by now machine-bored stiff, just shake their heads
and mutter,
'She's definitely Weir'd -- a complete and utter nutter.'

But I polish up my 'booty' with cheerful disregard
And wonder what I'll do for kicks if ever times get hard.
The answer is a fact I'd find it really hard to face.
For I'd be back where I began -- on macrame, art and lace!
* Frister & Rossman Rita Heath

* The Practical Mechanic's Journel in its record of the Great Exhibition of 1862 commented that the American exhibition, surprisingly, contained nothing new; the awards given were generally worthless, few being merited, many being wrongly with-held. The awards were summed up as being careless, ignorant and prejudiced!

Letters to the Editor

From Peter Starling

I've been wondering vaguely about whether the Society could do something about keeping some kind of register of the numbers of known machines of various makes where not much is known about the period of production or the total made. It might help to build up a picture of what went on and whether machines were early or late in the maker's life. We seem to know a good deal about the big makers and not much about the smaller ones. It might be worth thinking about.

Recently, on making the usual enquiry in a general antiques/bric-a-brac/secondhand shop not far from home, I was told, 'Oh yes, I've got two old SMs over there. Instead of the usual Singers or Fristers I was able to carry off a C2/3 Agenoria for £8 which pleased me greatly. As that afternoon turned out to be particularly wet I spent it improving the general state to about 4/5 and felt the day had by no means been wasted.

From Bill Burleigh

With reference to SMCS News No 2, page 12, item 'Playtime'; the enclosed instruction sheet may be of interest to you. As you see, the Essex was advertised as a 'miniature SM' and not a toy.

As you say the 'grey' area between toy and adult machines is interesting. I do not know when the 'Grain' arrived -- but I am wondering if Essex sold out their small model to become the Grain,

because I have another Essex machine that is larger and far more sophisticated with the mechanism covered in.

Whilst writing I would like to congratulate you on the excellent magazine.

Membership News

NEW MEMBERS

PETER A WELSH, 8 Walton Road, Gosport, Hants PO12 3QG
Tel: 0705 588785

LIBRARIAN, Inst of Agricultural History & Museum of English Rural Life, Reading University, White Knights, POB 229, Reading RG6 2AG, Berks.

HAROLD GLICK, Glix Machine Co Ltd, Merrion St, Leeds, Yorks. MD

JOHN H HORTON, 15 Kergn Grove, Wakefield, W Yorks. WF2 ONR.

DOREEN TOMLIN, 66 Brick Kiln Lane, Shep Shed, Leics LE12 9EL.

JOSEPHINE & JACK WALLACE, 1736 Gates St, Alexandria, VA 22303,USA

PHILLIP SMITH, Textile Machinery Services, 1 Red Lion Sq, Heanor, Derbyshire. Tel: Langley Mill 712924 MD

Obituary

WE ARE SAD to announce the death, in June, of long-time member Bill Smith.

70-year-old Bill came into collecting via his 40 years dealing in modern SMs. His compact, though carefully-selected collection of some 25 models,will stay with the family.

Son Phillip, who took over the shop when Bill semi-retired some 10 years ago, has now joined the society. MS

HANS CLEMENS,one of our few members specialising in collecting toy and miniature SMs, has died.

He passed away, peacefully during the night, from a heart attack shortly after a short holiday in his summer house in Northern Germany.

Hans, who wrote about German auctions for the magazine, began his collecting with Sigrid and built upa fine selection of miniatures. The couple played host to your Editor some time ago and were welcome visitors to her London flat. Hans will be missed not only as a fellow enthusiast but as a friend. MS

To save space and typing time some abbreviations will be used in the magazine. Initials of club officials and regular contributors (eg GF Graham Forsdyke); SM: sewing machine; CD: dealer in collectable machines; MD: dealer in modern machines.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS
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Chairman: Brian Matthews, 8 The Vale, Oakley, Hants. Tel: 0256 781834.

ADVERTISEMENTS

Starting a collection: Sewing machines for sale, also toy machines. Basement, 288 Westbourne Grove, Portobello Market (Sats only). Tel: 01-363 7494.

Turned-leg Grover and Baker 14 for sale, £1100, or will exchange for interesting and rare machine/s. Send replies to PO Box G&B, c/o Editor, address on front cover, who will pass them on to the advertiser.

WANTED: Photocopy of Beckwith instruction book -- Mrs Rita Heath, 99 Forest Way, Highcliffe, Christchurch, Dorset. Tel: 04252 5559.

FOR EXCHANGE: Arm & Platform, Shakespear, Challenge, English Howe (figure 8 base), Gresham & Craven and Agenoria. All very-good-condition. WANTED: Early, interesting SMs and early toy SMs. Also wanted interesting, early typewriters including early toy ones. Bernard Williams, 80 Manor Road, Burton-on-Trent. Tel: 0283 65858 evenings.

SEWING MACHINES bought and sold; also typewriters and gramophones, etc. The Talking Machine, 30 Watford Way, Hendon, London NW4. Telephone 01 202 3473. Open every day.

MAGGIE SNELL collects, buys, sells and exchanges early SMs. Large selection always available so send your 'wants list' or telephone her on 01 488 0474.

MEMBER'S private sales, wants and exchange advertisements are free, though all 'for sale' items must be priced. Collector/dealers and any member offering large quantities of machines will be asked to pay a modest fee of £1 per inch (minimum £1). Copyright of all articles submitted and used belongs to the SMCS unless previously assigned and the committee reserves the right to abridge, add to or alter in any other way any material submitted for publication.