# BRADBURY & Co's SEWING MACHINES

CATALOGUES FREE BY POST.




ESTABLISHED 1852,

ARE

# DECIDEDLY THE BEST.

## MANUFACTORY: WELLINGTON WORKS, OLDHAM.


## An ISMACS Special

by Graham Forsdyke

AN INDUSTRIAL dispute led to the formation of one of Britain's largest and most successful sewing-machine manufacturers

It was in the cruel winter of 1852 that George Francis Bradbury, then 25, found himself caught up in the work-to-rule row at the Platt Brothers engineering company in Oldham, Lancs.

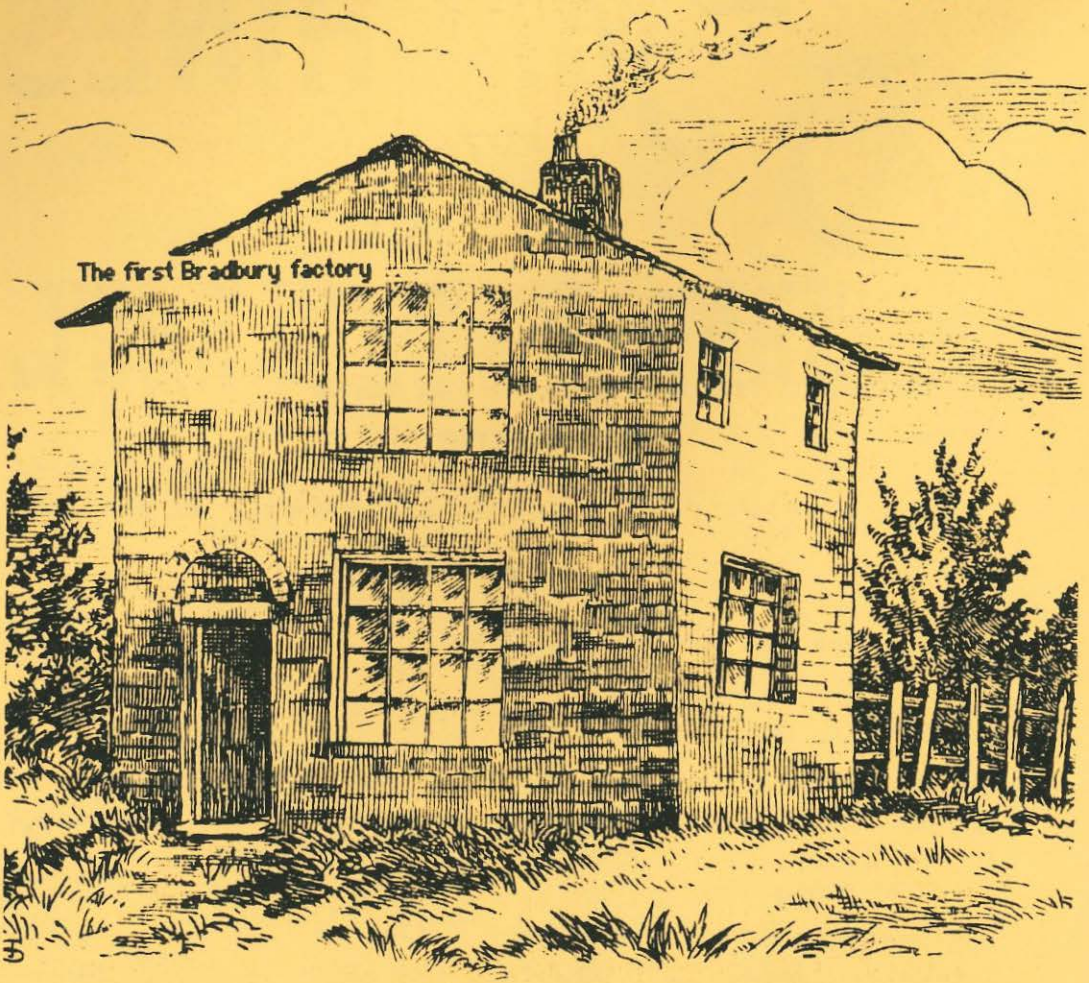
There was no industrial tribunial, no ACAS. When the workmen started muttering

about more wages and less hours, the brothers Platt simply closed the doors of the factory and declared a lock out.

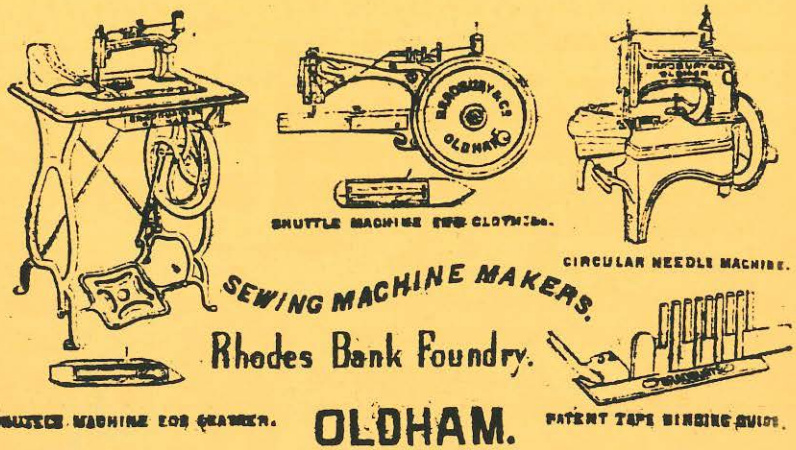
George probably did his share of picket duty and, while standing in the snow, started thinking about the work that the company was losing as a result of the shut down.

Among the orders that should have been being processed was one from an enterprising local dealer who had wanted the firm to copy one of the new American sewing machines that were just coming into the country.

Bradbury and a fellow lock-out Thomas Sudgen approached the dealer, explained that the dispute at Platt's factory was



The first Bradbury factory




Evidence of the Bradbury/Lancashire SM link This 1864 Kelly's Directory advert with its very Grover-like model (top-right).

likely to go on for some time yet, and offered to do the job themselves.

The work was completed in the small cottage at Primrose Bank, Oldham, not far from Bradbury`s birthplace -- his father's inn The Hanging Gate at Diggle, Saddleworth, to the west of Oldham. So small was the "factory" that the steam engine and boiler which the pair bought for £18 would not fit inside and had to live in a field next to the cottage, with the main drive belt entering through a hole cut in the wall.

This first machine was produced at a cost of £30. The new company prospered and by 1862, with two patents for folding attatchments to his name and an order for 500 machines under his belt, George moved to larger premises at Rhodes Bank where he was able to employ 17 men and six boys.

Little is known of his family, but the 1861 census report shows that he was married to Ellen, some five years his junior and had two children, Eliza aged two and George Howard aged one. A seven-year-old stepson is also shown, as is a 69-year old widow, Elizabeth Bradbury, probably his mother.

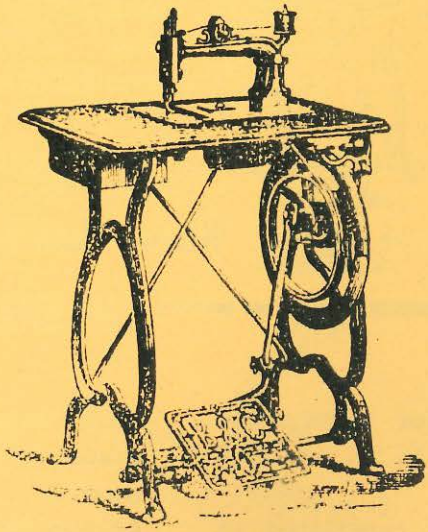
The big gamble came in 1866 when, like many other Victorian manufacturers, the company, which was listed as Sudgen, Bradbury and Firth in 1861 but as Bradbury and Co three years later, decided to

# BRADBURY & CO'S

## *MACHINES FOR MANUFACTURING PURPOSES.*

### LOCK-STITCH SHUTTLE MACHINE,

ON THE HOWE PRINCIPLE.



*NO. 1. A.* — *PRICE, £6 10.*

*NO. 2. B.* — *,, £7 0.*

*NO. 3. C.* — *,, £8 0*

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UNIVERSAL FEED MACHINES

## FOR PUTTING ELASTICS IN BOOTS, &c.,

No. 1. - - - - - Price £9.
No. 2. - - - - - ,, £10.

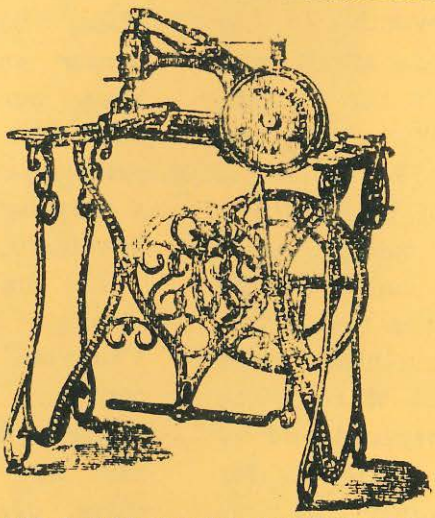
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MAKERS.

OF THE

THOMAS

MACHINE



FOR

TAILORING

AND

SADDLERY

WORK

*SHIPPERS AND LARGE USERS LIBERALLY DEALT WITH.*

build its own model factory on Wellington Street, Oldham, and named it Wellington Works.

In that year, while the Marquis of Queensbury was drawing up his rules for boxing, Bradbury was enlarging the workforce to fill his new factory, By 1871 he had 244 hands (shortly to increase to over 600) producingnore than 25,000 machines a year.

Before moving to the new plant there were three models in the Bradbury catalogue -- a Thomas-type shuttle machine designed for stitching leather, a Howe-type shuttle model obviously aimed at the home market and a "circular-needle machine" which looked as if it owed quite a lot to early Grover and Baker design.

Two years after opening the factory he was advertising an improvement on the old Belgravia machine which he called the Adjustable. This was clearly a Wheeler & Wilson 7 clone, but with several advantages over the American original. These included adjustable-belt tension for use when sewing heavy materials, graduated indicators for presser-foot spring pressure, stitch length and thread tension.

Bradbury also claimed that his machine scored over the W&W in having a quickly-removable needle plate, a dress protector to prevent oil being thrown from the belt onto the clothing of the operator and a lock to trap the flywheel in a stationary position.

As if all that wasn't enough, the Belgravia was capable of making six different stitches. They were: Lockstitch, double-chain Grover and Baker, embroidery, pearly, cable and, with the aid of a special bobbin, a chainstitch a la Willcox and Gibbs.

The patent for the Belgravia was taken out in 1867 and at once won a silver medal at the Great Centenary Show in Manchester for its "valuable improvements".

By 1869 the Belgravia was being advertised in three forms which differed only in the style of the cover over the machine. The cheapest machine, black-japaned on an unpolished table, sold for £7-7s. A polished tabletop and a small lid to cover the machine head hoisted the price to £8-10s, whilst the top of the range was the same machine but with a lid completely covering the table at £8-15s. It was also possible to have bronzed or even silver-

plated arms for slightly extra cost.

The English Woman's Domestic Magazine in 1868 reported even more elaborate designs with prices ranging up to a heady £21, presumably for the model refered to by the writer as making "an elegant ornament for a drawing room being fitted with handsome mirrors".

Worrall's directory for 1871, by which time Bradbury had moved to the prestigious Queens Road in Oldham, shows the Belgravia and also the "Howe-Principle" machines and also the giant "elastic machine for use in the boot industry".

By 1875 Bradbury, now 48, was on the move again, with a new private address at Crumpsall House to the North of Manchester This is also the date that his name dissappears from the patent applications, although Sudgen, H Lomax and T Chadwick, in the company's employ, continued to apply for patents.

It is possible that Bradbury took less interest in the company after this date, for he was to die less than 10 years later and could possibly have retired due to ill health.

The company continued after his death, producing its first motor cycle in 1898 when there were branches in many big towns all over England and Scotland. It prospered, still in the Wellington Works, up until the 1920s. But a hoped-for big contract to supply the army during the first world war fell flat and the business eventually folded in 1924, with the factory and its nickel-plating plant -- the first to be opened in England -- being sold off by the official receiver.

## Visit to the Works

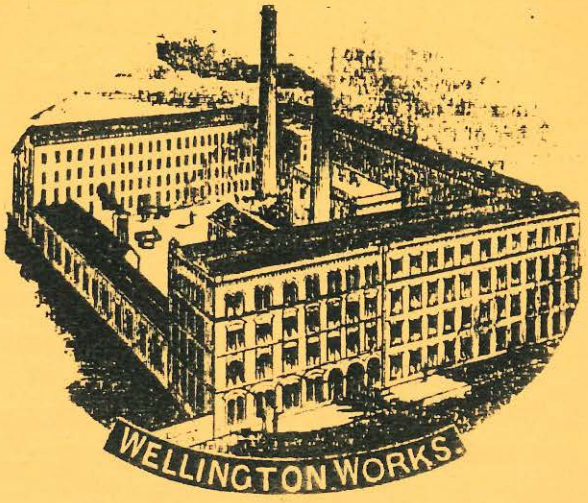
AN INTERESTING insight into Victorian engineering and factory practise is given in a March 1882 issue of a weekly magazine Ben Brierley's Journal. The editor was invited to visit the then new Wellington Works and pro-duced the report from which we quote here.

"This extensive concern finds employment for about 480 workpeople and, incredible as it may now seem, such is the division of labour that no two people are engaged on the same class of work.

"From the fusing of the rough pig iron to the fashioning of a screw so small that we were unable to see the thread and from the sawing

up of logs of American Baywood to the polishing of a cabinet to the most excellent finish we were permitted to see every process grade by grade until one of the most wonderful pieces of mechanism yet conceived by human ingenuity was perfected and ready for my lady's boudoir.

"We were first conducted to an extensive foundary where the earlier stages of the work were being performed. Here we found 25 workpeople engaged in making moulds and castings; and such is the rapidity of manipulation that we saw one man make a mould in just over two minutes that would cast 42 wheels, each wheel so perfect in its formation that no test whatever need be applied




"The cutting of these wheels is another wonderful branch of the work and so precise in its motion that it would be impossssible for a workman to turn out an imperfect piece of work. The polishing of the wheels in on the principle of pebbles on the sea beach -- friction. They are placed along with scraps of iron in a barrel which rotates.

"The turning, punching and drilling room we found to be a busy hive. Here the largest and most minute parts of a machine were being fashioned; the punch doing the work which would formerly have been done by the lathe -- much more quickly and with unerring precision. Such is the variety of work done in this department that Messrs Bradbury need not go outside their own building for any kind of tool used by them."

The editor goes on at length about visiting the sawing room where the timber was prepared by 25 hands and explained how the dovetail joints and various mouldings used to decorate the cabinets were produced by new-fangled machines.

Our scribe was further impressed by the production capability of the plant. At the previous factory the limit was a mere two machines

per month, but at Wellington Works 2000 were possible in the same time.

The final visit of the tour was to the inspection bay were the machines were tested. "One of these was working and making 2,000 stitches per minute."

"What would your great grandmothers have thought of that?"

## Right-Hand Man

ANOTHER youngster from the Platt Brothers company played a large part in the Bradbury story.

Thomas Chadwick started his working life as an apprentice with Platt's in Oldham in 1860, working his way up to become a fully-accredited mechanic. But he decided that he could do a better job of running the business and purchased the shares of each partner until he owned the business outright.

He then cast around for another partner and settled on William Jones, who was later to form his own company at Guide Bridge. This short-lived partnership lasted until only 1864 when Chadwick was tempted away to join Bradbury, later to become the firm's joint managing director

Chadwick, a local-council Alderman, died in 1886 aged 56, at which time, after the death of Bradbury, he was chairman and managing director of the business. He too was the owner of many patents, some taken out jointly with Bradbury and/or Sudgen.

Thomas Sudgen himself was officially titled an "improver and inventor" at the Bradbury plant. He was still employed by the company when he died, aged 72, in 1888. Initially both he and his brother Frederick left Platt's to work with Bradbury, but of Frederick no more is known.

A newspaper report at the time of his death states that he (Sugden) and Chadwick became the proprietors of the Bradbury company at a date not given. But as the same report gave Sudgen credit for inventing the Lancashire Sewing Machine, this might not be the most reliable source.

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## Belgravia Song

We first printed this 1868 advertising poem praising the Belgravia machine in Shuttle & Ribbon 10 (1984). *These show patented inventions which are only supplied with the Belgravia Sewing machine.

The Wheeler & Wilson stitch is mine
The Grover & Baker too;
And then with these I now combine
*The Willcox Gibbs, 'tis true.

Thus single chain and double chain
Are stitches I can make,
And if you call on me again
The Pear stitch you may take

The Cable stitch I make below,
Embroider out of sight
But as you will not like it so,
*Belgravia will be right.

For on the surface, right in view
Where traced is the design
The coloured silks in every hue
I lock and intertwine.

My stitching it is terms plain
When both sides are alike:
But 'tis elastic in the chain
Which does no wonder strike

Although such marvels I can do,
I'm plain to understand;
And those who buy me will not rue
My service to command.

*I'm always onward on my way,
And never backward go,
To break my threads and cause delay
That would provoke you so.

*I have a gauge, a lovely gauge,
For quilting to and fro;
It is the wonder of the age,
So simple you must know.

And then this gauge I can arrange
For two widths at a time;
In others you've to make a change
And measure ev'ry line.

'Tis well designed for large work too,
It saves a deal of trouble;
Three times the bulk we can pass through
Because the gauge is double.

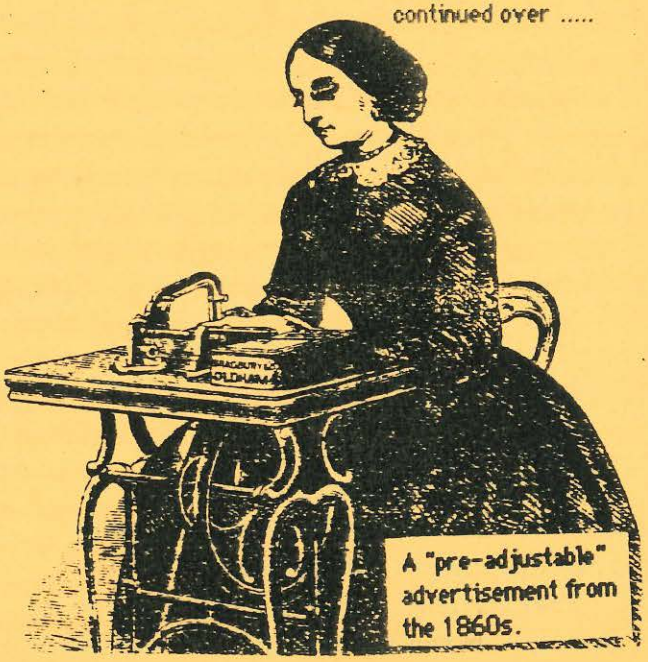
*My Trimmer is a certain guide,
For ev'ry width of braid;
And you can stitch on either side
So novel it is made.

*Supporting rods for heavy cloth
Are fixed beneath the table,
So with your work you ne'er get wroth
For to do it you're able.

*I have a Creaser all should see,
*On tucking gauge attached;
They'd say man's ingenuity
Had not a better hatched.

My *Hemmers and my *Binders too
All others they outvie;
They do their work so very true,
This no one can deny.

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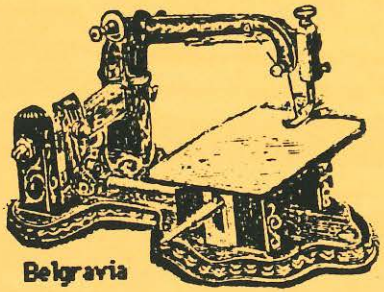
A "pre-adjustable" advertisement from the 1860s.

*My cloth plate has two pretty slides
To change without a screw
*An Oil shield I have got besides,
Won't let the oil spot through.

*My cloth presser I can adjust
For strong work or for light.
*My belt tightner on it I trust,
To drive the needle right.

I gain'd the very highest prize
At Manchester's great show.
Gold medals melted 'fore my eyes
At that grand overthrow.

'Legions of Honour' say pseudo,
Were flirted in my face;
Of them I ne'er made 'much ado',
As they were out of place.



Belgravia




Left: This ring, patented 6 Feb 1868, allowed the Wheeler and Wilson-type machine to produce a single-stitch chain-stitch.

## The Machines

JUST WHICH American machine Bradbury and Sudgen set out to copy when they took over the Platt Brothers order is not clear, but it was probably a Grover and Baker of the type that Judkins was having made for the Lancashire Sewing Machine Company.

The dates match up, the Lancashire geography is correct and Bradbury certainly offered a similar machine when he was established in his own right. So it's not too much wishful-thinking to wonder if the young Mr Bradbury was responsible for those historic Judkins machines. Another piece of evidence pointing to this theory is a newspaper report in 1888 which credits Sugden with having invented the Lancashire machine -- obviously wrong but clearly there was a connection.

Advertisements in the early 1860s show this machine, a Howe clone, a Thomas clone and a patented binding guide. It is not until the later part of the decade that the Belgravia, first labelled the adjustable and then the improved, appeared.

There's one other shred of evidence to help the hypothesis. The Judkins machine which was exhibited at the Exhibition in 1851 was

made by Platt brothers who, in 1909, presented a replica to the Science Museum. Obviously, if Judkins was using the Platt company in '51 they would have been the obvious choice a year later also.

It was an instant success and was, according to the Newcastle Daily Journal in July of 1868: "destined to become the most popular of all sewing machines".

It would seem that the company saw the Belgravia as a domestic-market machine only, for this was the model pushed in advertisements as ideal for home use. Although also offered for the home market, the Howe-based machine was also vaunted as ideal for manufacturing purposes and, of course, the Thomas-inspired monster was purely for industrial use in the tailoring and saddlery industries. Bernard Williams is one of the few collectors willing to give a home to this impressive, but so heavy, hulk.

Later machines to emanate from Wellington Works included the Wellington itself -- one of the few hand models from a company which seemed to devote most of its production to treadle machines -- the company's own Rotary-Shuttle or conventional late 19th Century appearance, and the Soeze.

## The Machines Today

BIGGEST PRIZE for the collector would be one of the early Grover and Baker look-alikes, but I know of none in captivity.

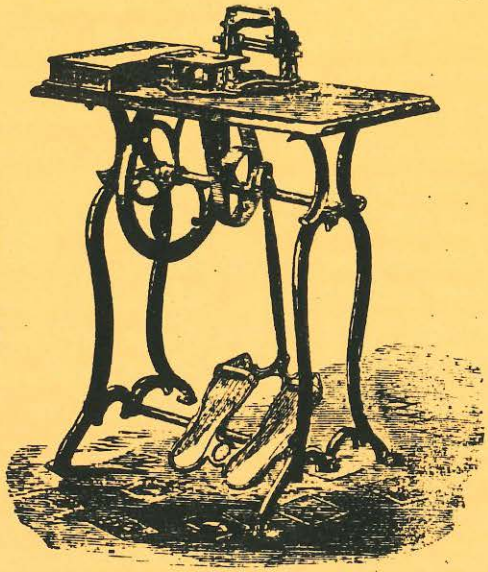
The Belgravia, in its Adjustable and Improved forms, must have been made in vast quantities and members Jack Maloney and Bernard Williams have fine examples. It would be easy to pass this machine by, thinking it merely a Wheeler and Wilson, but with its many mechanical differences it certainly rates keeping an eye open for. As far as I know this machine was not offered in a hand-drive version. Strangely, exactly the same range of machines, called the Victoria, was being offered at the same time by another Oldham company, Watson, who was claiming in his advertising to be the manufacturer.

The same careful scrutiny applies to the Howe-based versions.

With its large and attractive picture of the Duke, the Wellington hand machine is probably more attractive than the Jones to which its owes its design, and is certainly considerably rarer.

The Thomas industrial-lookalike, although a lot of machine for the money, would not be sought by many collectors.

# IMPORTANT IMPROVEMENTS
IN
# SEWING MACHINES
## FOR FAMILY USE.



"THE ADJUSTABLE BELGRAVIA" makes the world-renowned Wheeler and Wilson Lock Stitch, and will also make the Grover and Baker Stitch, the Pearl Stitch, and the Cable Stitch.

"THE ADJUSTABLE BELGRAVIA" will embroider on one or both sides of the cloth simultaneously, with from one to eight beautifully blended colours.

"THE ADJUSTABLE BELGRAVIA" has six newly-patented inventions, viz.:—an adjustable cloth presser spring, an adjustable belt tightener, an adjustable preventer, an adjustable double quilting gauge with slide, an oil shield, and a despatch cloth plate slide. These newly-patented appliances are attached to each Machine, and are included in the price.

THE ADJUSTABLE BELGRAVIA" is a simple Wheeler and Wilson Machine largely improved; and will, to a certainty, at no distant ... most popular of Sewing Machines.—*See Newcastle Daily Journal, 9th July*, 1867.

"THE ADJUSTABLE BELGRAVIA" obtained a Silver Medal at the Great Centenary Show, Manchester, in August, 1867, for its "valuable improvements," defeating the Machine which obtained the Gold Medal at the Paris Exposition.

**BRADBURY & CO.** are the Sole Manufacturers and Vendors of the Above; and they also make the most approved Machines for Manufacturing ... es.

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**B. & Co. being the most extensive Sewing Machine Makers in the United Kingdom, also makers of the greatest variety of Machines, both for Manufacturing and Domestic Purposes of any firm in the world, are therefore in a position to offer special and advantageous terms to Shippers and Government Contractors.**

Advertisement from the Oldham Almanac of 1868 when Bradbury was offering his Adjustable Belgravia for between 7 and 16 guineas.