

# BRAMAH'S HISTORY - Antique Lock Profile

## Bramah Antique Locks

Bramah's made their first lock around 1784 and the patent on this lock was awarded in 1787. The designer was Joseph Bramah.

Joseph Bramah was a leading inventor of the industrial revolution, patenting over 18 new ideas, including a new valve for the water closet, the hydraulic pump, a fountain pen, a fire engine and importantly the introduction of a beer hand pump at the bar, to prevent fluid loss when barmen went downstairs to pour a new jug!

Joseph Bramah's contemporaries included Isambard Brunel of the SS Great Britain fame, James Watt for the steam engine, **Henry Maudsley** for machine tools and Josiah Wedgwood, who made ceramic toilet bowls.

Some of these inventions are on display in the Science Museum in London, others like one of his toilets you will find still working in Osborne House, Queen Victoria's home on the Isle of Wight.

The Bramah lock was unique and advanced property and valuables protection enormously, indeed it was 50 years ahead of any Chubb lock and 70 years ahead of Yale.

Such was its impact, a genuine original Bramah lock is most often found on the highest quality home or furniture.

## History of a Bramah lock

Using records from 1784, we are on occasions able to give detailed accounts of the purchaser of the original lock and for what property or estate.

However this is only on Bramah locks made by us. On Bramah type we can only surmise.

We charge a fee for this service, though standard information is available free of charge.

## Keycutting

We have a temperamental 1850 key machine, which now has a motor. This is used to cut original Bramah keys along with hand tools.



Henry Maudsley, maker of the Bramah Challenge

Henry Maudsley was born in August, 1770. When twelve years of age he was sent to work filling cartridges, and two years later he was set at work in the carpenters shop. His heart, however, was in the nearby blacksmith shop, and after several reprimands for neglecting his work he was transferred to the smithy when fifteen years of age.

His heart was in this work and he rapidly became an expert craftsman, especially in forging light iron work, and, in the use of the file, he soon surpassed all others.

At this time Joseph Bramah had taken out patents for improved locks. These were a great improvement over previous locks.

The locks were so delicate a mechanism that he found difficulty in securing workmen skillful enough to make them. Maudsley was recommended to him, but when Bramah saw how young he was, at that time only eighteen, he hesitated to employ him. His need was so great, however, that he finally hired him.

Maudsley soon proved himself to be most skillful. It is interesting to note that the very padlock that fifty years later withstood Hobbs the American expert for sixteen days, was one made by Maudsley's own hands when in the employ of Bramah.

Notwithstanding his youth, he was advanced from place to place until, by unanimous consent, he was made the head foreman.

Maudsley saw at once that it was essential, if the locks were to be manufactured in any quantity, that the parts must be made by machines. Skilled hand work could make a few, but the number were limited, the expense great and the merit very unequal. He became especially useful in designing special tools for making the patent locks.

Maudsley stayed with Bramah eight years with but slight increase of wages, and when he, at last, asked for an increase was refused so brusquely that he resigned, and in 1797 opened a small shop of his own near Oxford Street.

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## Openings

Regularly vanity boxes, despatch boxes, writing cases, Tantalus's and prestige furniture is unlocked, often though not always with manipulation. Stories of a key lost after 20 years or the lid of a box, which has been slammed shut, with the key inside, arise on most days.

Of course labour time is expensive and success is not guaranteed, so after an agreed period of time, we suggest that we cut the bolt and remake it. As a fixed and known option this can be better for the customer, though the choice is always theirs.

In the event of a piece being unmovable or the contents being of value, openings can take place at the customer's site anywhere in the world.

## Repairs

Bramah locks may last many years. How long precisely depends on their use, since brass does wear out.

Bramah's make new bushes and parts to fit and this will extend the life of the lock.

Most common repairs arise when the key becomes very slack or when the bolt/locking plate has been cut to open the box.

**A full quote is done at no charge.**

## Ageing a Bramah Lock

To age a Bramah lock you first need a genuine Bramah lock.

A genuine Bramah lock will be marked post 1798 with our address, which changed over the years. Prior to 1798 a unique spelling of our name is found, with certain other specific features.

Of course in our experience many people can be disappointed when they come to us, for they have in their hand a lock with the name Bramah on.

Without our address stamped on the lock they are however Bramah type products. Some for Aspreys and others we may have made, but most came out of the copiers, who started up when the patent expired.



An very early Bramah Lock, dated 1787

## **BRAMAH'S HISTORY - Antique Lock Profile**

A true Bramah will add authenticity and value to a box or a piece of furniture.

Common marks of the copier are Bramah London, Bramah Patent, Mitchell. Altogether we believe up to 5 separate organisations reproduced these old locks and they have all ceased to exist for the last 40 years.

### **Bibliography**

This is not a complete list, but it gives an insight to the influence of the Bramah lock.

"Precious warm walking, isn't it? Said Lowton drawing a Bramah key from his pocket with a small plug therein to keep the dust out"

Pickwick Papers,  
Chapter L111, Charles Dickens.

"For this he repainted the box, traced his initials on and affixed new hinges, a Bramah lock and brass handles."

An Unsocial Socialist,  
Chapter VI, G. Bernard Shaw.

"Billy knew the door was secured by a shunt lock, which he gratefully identified as a Chubb rather than a Bramah which is reputedly unpickable."

The Fourth Protocol,  
Page 13, Frederick Forsyth.

"Jagger demonstrated how to attack various locks. Bramah locks, used for diamond safes, were by far the most difficult. The pins move horizontally through the lock and it is impossible to pick."

Spycatcher,  
Page 40, Peter Wright.

### **Value of Bramah Locks**

No formal market exists, but we are aware of good quality locks changing hands for in excess of £200.



# BRAMAH'S HISTORY - Chronological History of Bramah

## A Chronological History of Bramah Locks 1784 to 2002

Date	Company name/Address/Event	Lock Markings
21st August 1784	Bramah Lock Company, Denmark Street, St. Giles. The lock patent was granted.	Locks marked I (or J) Bramah. Patent
1784	Moved to 124 Piccadilly, London.	
1789-1797	Henry Maudsley Works Manager.	
2nd June 1798	Patent extended for a further 14 years.	Locks marked I (or J) Bramah and a crown – no word Patent. Locks marked I (or J) Bramah with or without crown, but with address 14 or 124 Piccadilly.
1801	The Bramah Challenge padlock, now in the Science Museum, was placed in the shop-front of 124 Piccadilly.	
1805	Prior to 1805 the key 'bit' faces a smooth expanse of metal. After 1805 the 'bit' is directly opposite one of the several slots.	
1813	Eldest son Timothy joined the business as a partner and the Company name was changed to Bramah & Son.	
1814	Joseph Bramah died.	
1821- 1836	Two other sons Francis and Edward became partners and the Company changed its name to Bramah and Sons.	
1837- 1841	A new partner joined the Company and the name was changed to Bramah and Robinson.	
1841	The lock business was separated from the engineering business. The former became Bramah & Co and the latter became known as Bramah, Prestige and Ball.	
1851	The Bramah lock controversy. Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace. Bramah & Co was still at 124 Piccadilly London.	
1871	Down Street , Piccadilly,W. The first mention of Needs & Co (Late Bramah & Co) patentees and sole lock manufactures of Bramah patent lock etc.	Locks probably marked J T Needs & Co. Down Street, Piccadilly,W.
1875	Needs & Co patent lock makers, 128 Piccadilly.	Locks probably marked J T Needs & Co.128 Piccadilly.
1885	Needs & Co still at 128 Piccadilly.	
1901	Company owned by J T Needs & Co and held Royal Warrants from Queen Victoria and King Edward VII. The works were in Deering Street. In 1901 the Company was bought by Whitfield Safe & Lock Company.	Locks marked J T Needs & Co 100 New Bond Street (Late J Bramah 124 Piccadilly)
1904	The business name was changed back to Bramah & Co and the engineering works was moved to Oldbury Place. A Royal warrant was granted by King George V – Bramah & Co patent lock makers to the king, 100 New Bond Street.	
1919		Locks marked with 32 Old Bond Street
1926 - 1934	Company took over 2 Nottingham Street.	Locks marked with 2 Nottingham Street address.
1934	Incorporated as Bramah Manufacturing Co Ltd and name then changed to Bramah's Ltd	
1936 - 1939	Moved from 2 Nottingham Street to 11 Old Bond Street.	Locks Marked with 11 Old Bond Street address.

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Date	Company name/Address/Event	Lock Markings
1939-1963	All bespoke locks made at Oldbury Place. In 1963 the Company was purchased by Mr Len Young who within three months designed and launched the current low volume high security range of products.	Locks marked 31 Oldbury Place address.
1966	Bramah's Ltd purchased by J R Bramah & Co Ltd and renamed Bramah Security Equipment Ltd its name today.	7 Guard Mechanism Current.
1986	Jeremy Bramah purchased the Company.	
1987	Assembly moved from 31, Oldbury Place W1 to Hornchurch in Essex, where a complete manufacturing plant was set up. Sid Pinner Works Manager..	Locks marked I (or J) Bramah and a crown – no word Patent. Locks marked I (or J) Bramah with or without crown, but with address 14 or 124 Piccadilly.
1991	Works Manager Bill Kirk. Bramah launched its Swiss style profile locks.	
1998	Works Manager Mike Bocking. Bramah produced a narrow stile Cabinet lock 32mm.	
2002	All Bramah Deadlock Forends and Coinbow keys marked with Queens Golden Jubilee mark, for one year until May 2003.	Locks marked Queens Golden Jubilee 2002.