

It Had to Happen!

We mentioned in the “about us” bit of the Soeze article published in a previous issue that we had a wish list of Bradbury’s, well we’ve managed to cross one of the list. I’d spent four fruitless hours walking around one of the major antique fairs and was beginning to despair of finding anything of interest. Although earlier I’d come across a German Humbolt type machine which whilst it had no gilt left it was complete with box and instructions. The dealer had come down from £120 (\$240) to £60 (\$120) but I’d decided to keep looking.

Now I was getting towards the end of the stalls and I’d made up my mind that there was nothing for it but to go back and see if the German machine was still there, otherwise go home empty handed!

As I came out of one of the last tents (marquee is too grand a term) I virtually walked into an enormous leather-stitching machine. I did a quick double take to make sure my eyes weren’t deceiving me but no, there was a Bradbury A1 Repairing Machine in all its glory and it wasn’t



A1 Repairing Machine Head



A1 Repairing Machine: The ornate stand is in beautiful condition

looking too bad. The price tag was £120, which was less than I’d seen machines in worse condition sell for. The A 1 Repairing Machine was Bradbury’s Cobbler’s machine and was known as the Shoemakers Friend; as a result these machines had a hard life and are often in poor condition. It was also exported in large numbers to America, which is where most surviving examples seem to turn up, so even though it was made in Great Britain it isn’t particularly common. I gave the machine the once over, remarkably the highly ornate stand was in excellent condition. At first I wasn’t sure if the gold had been repainted as there was so much left but checking closely it became obvious it was all original, the main problem was the pitman was missing but at least the joints were there. Moving onto the table, it may have been refinished and had split in two places then boded back together, but still, that could be fixed. The head itself was slightly worn and the bare steel parts had surface rust but the Hand Wheel had retained most of its decals. The worst part was the metal ring on which the bobbin winder is mounted had fractured, however it’s relatively minor, isn’t structural and is repairable. Lastly someone had added an additional spring between the tension discs and the arm (why??). So yes it needed some work but nothing too serious.

I chatted to the Dealer; he'd bought the machine locally a couple of days before and was keen to get rid of it so we agreed a very, very good discount. Fortunately I could get the car right up to the stall and we lifted the machine in, it weighs an absolute ton and we struggled to manoeuvre it in without causing any damage to the machine (or car). It fitted ...just and off I went home happy as Larry. Now I only had to persuade Lin we really couldn't live without this wonderful machine! Coincidentally a couple of weeks later I managed to purchase a second example for just £12 advertised as just the head it came complete with shuttle and bobbin. When I arrived to pick it up I found that the owner was using the stand to display garden plants and had repainted it! However the pitman was still there so I bought the stand for an extra fiver.

Some History of Bradbury's A 1 Repairing Machine

These machines were produced at the Wellington Works, Oldham. Designed specifically for making and repairing shoes and boots it had an all round feed (could sew in any direction) and boasted the slimmest supporting arm without projections in the trade. The earliest documented evidence we have for its production dates to 1871 although a contemporary source quotes it as having been used during the American Civil War but we have not been able to verify this. Production continued certainly up until 1920.

Initially it was known as the Universal Feed Machine as well as the A1 Elastic Machine. It was originally available with two different arm lengths, the No. 1 had a 9 inch arm, and the No. 2 had an 11½ inch arm. It was the latter that became known as the A1 Repairing Machine. In 1871 it cost £9, the price was same in 1884 but by 1912 this had increased to £9 9s.

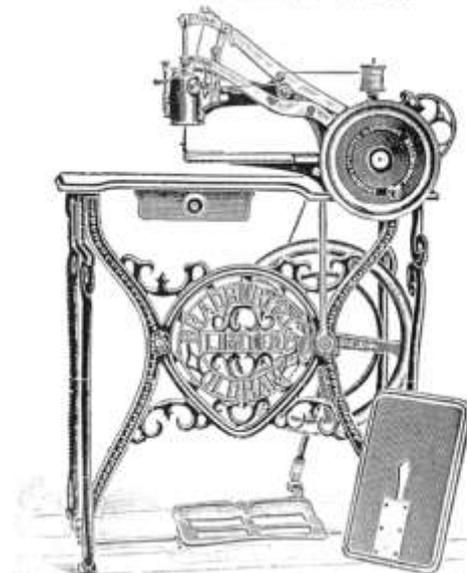
On 19th March 1878 T. Chadwick and T. Sugden patented a modification which, by reducing the work-supporting arm, allowed the circular rotating shuttle to be enlarged and the Patent No. 1080 appears on the arm of some later machines. Other than that only minor modifications appear to have been made which testifies to the strength of the original design given it was manufactured for 50 years or so.

The A1 Repairing Machine was particularly successful in the United States and many of the approximately 60,000 machines of this type manufactured were exported to America. Some of these are fitted to a different stand similar to that of the Singer 29 but with Bradbury & Co. diagonally across it. This seems to have been specifically produced in America for Bradbury's American distributor The Dunlap Machinery Co. Ltd, 69 Beekman Street, New York. Presumably it was cheaper to ship just the machine heads across the Atlantic.

Bradbury & Co. Limited, Wellington Works, Oldham.

All Round Feed A1 Repairing Machine.

"THE SHOEMAKER'S FRIEND."



MACHINE, with Stand and Extension Platform, complete £9 9 0

Arm is made of Steel, with no projections on the side, Length of Arm, 11½ inches. Shuttle box size of a shilling.
 It will do all manner of Repairs to Boots and Shoes with their soles on.
 It will sew patches on any part of the Boot or Shoe.
 It will Re-stitch the Goleashes, or Front and Back Straps.
 It will Stitch New Elastics into either New or Old Boots.
 It will Sew with Wax Thread, Linen Thread, or Silk Twist on any sort of Leather.
 It can be used for Boot-closing. It can be used for putting on toe-caps.