

HOBBY HISTORY

History Of The Match: II

Lucifers and Congreves [*Ed. Note: keep in mind that this was probably written in the late 1940s*]

Three years later, Samuel Jones of London, with a shop known as the “Lighthouse” in the Strand, placed Lucifers (from the Latin, meaning light-bringer) on the market. An exact copy of Walker’s friction lights under a new name.

Jones sold his lucifers in rectangular cardboard boxes, roughly the size of those used today, but with a slip-on lid instead of a sliding tray. He had no patent grant to protect his lucifers and was unable to obtain one, as it presented no novel feature. A near neighbor, G.F. Watts, also a chemist in the Strand, took advantage of this and brought out an exactly similar match under the name Watts’ Chlorate Match, at sixpence a box, each box containing one hundred matches.

This led to an advertisement war between them, which was carried on in the columns of the public press during the year 1831. Each ‘slanged’ the other in language that would not pass the editor of any respected daily today.

In 1832, the earliest British match manufacturer, Richard Bell, established a factory for the exclusive production of matches in Broad Street, London. Walker, Jones, and Watts had been merely chemists, making and selling matches as a profitable sideline. This firm still exists today [*at the time this was originally written*], although now incorporated with Bryant & May, who still produce matches under R. Bell & Co. labels.

The lucifer was quickly ousted by a new match—the Congreve, which was made with phosphorus and which was much more easily ignitable. The congrève had a long and successful run, being widely used as late as the ‘seventies.

This new phosphorous match was the invention of a young French chemical student, Charles Sauria, studying at the College de l’Arc at Dole, in the Jura. He was nineteen years of age when he began the experiment, finally producing the congrève in 1831.

This match was headed with a mixture of sulphur, chlorate of potash, sulphide of antimony and phosphorus made into a paste with gum. The first practical strike-anywhere match, it would ignite readily when rubbed on a wall or any firm surface.

Poor Sauria was unable to raise the 1,500 francs necessary to protect his idea by a patent, and derived no cash benefit from his invention; but others were quick to cash in on the new idea. During the later part of 1831, Nicolet, one of the college professors, spent his holiday in Germany, where he explained the principle of Sauria’s new match to some of his scientific friends. They, in turn, passed it on to certain businessmen, who at once saw its commercial value, with the result that a year later Europe was flooded with matches made on Sauria’s principle.

Most of the earlier congrèves used in this country [*England*] were imported from abroad, chiefly from Austria and Germany, the largest makers being Kammerer, Siegel, Romer, and Preschel. A number of makers now sprang up in England, chiefly in London, but the majority were small business only. Still, competition became so keen that only two, Richard Bell and J. Hynam, maintained their position for more than a few years.

Sir William Congreve, Bart., who while he was Controller of the Royal Laboratories at Woolwich invented his famous war rocket, about 1812, has often been incorrectly stated as the inventor of the match, which for some reason was named after him. Highly colored labels now began to adorn the matchboxes, which grew from merely displaying the maker’s name and details of his match to subjects and designs ranging from Victorian beauties to tropical scenes; from ships, soldiers, and buildings to flowers, birds, and trees.