

HOBBY HISTORY

History of the Match: V

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

The year of 1898 was a milestone in the match industry; two French Government chemists—MM. Sevene and Chaen—discovered a new compound known as sesquisulphide of phosphorus, a harmless substance which, at last, made the perfect match and is still being used in the modern match of today. Bryant & May again stepped in and acquired the English rights for the new invention. Surprisingly enough, this firm today manufactures thirty-one different brands of matches.

The familiar book matches were first introduced by the Diamond Match Company of America in 1899. There also appeared the American all-safety match, with purple heads, the lower half of the splint being dipped in some red composition, rendering itself non-inflammable to prevent burning of the fingers. This was immediately dubbed by the public “the drunkard’s match”.

In the past, matches have been used extensively for advertising, such as: Drink Douglas Tea, Buy Serpell’s Biscuits, etc., printed on the sticks. Even periodicals used this advertising—*Household Words*, the old penny weekly, being the first in the field.

In 1942, to help the war effort, matches were being sold loose in South Africa, without boxes. The same number that formerly filled a box were wrapped in brown paper and sold as refills.

In late 1944, the Germans forbade Belgian manufacturers the use of the red dye for the customary red sticks with yellow heads, so the Belgian matches came forth in a new guise, as white sticks with brown heads.

The U.S.A. has produced the first waterproof match for use with their armed forces. The compound is a military secret at present. They are listed by the War Department as: “Matches, ordinary, water resistant (short type), Q.M.C. Tent. Spec. O.Q.M.C., No. 121. Diamond Match Company.”

The matches are roughly an inch in length and laid in the box sideways. A notice on the box reads to the effect that the matches will satisfactorily function after being under water up to a period of four hours. When the secret is eventually divulged and commercially exploited, it will doubtless prove a boon in many occupations. This latest development in the humble, yet essential, though often casually used match, clearly shows the last strides made in the development of the match industry since the days of Walker’s friction lights little more than a century ago. [This concludes this series on the history of the match]
