

Bollard or Barrel?

By Neil Shapiro



Two versions of an E.G. Zimmermann match holder with the same figure & different match containers

A trifling but interesting question is why a metalsmith would create the same figural match holder with different containers to hold the matches (see above and below this essay.)

E. G. Zimmermann made at least two match holders with different kinds of receptacles for holding the unlit matches. The proof that both of these types of match holders were made by Zimmermann is the signature on the bottom of the plinth on both types of holders. This essay will speculate on why Zimmermann may have done this.

Both the bollard and the barrel are secured to the plinth by a single screw and square nut in the same place so it would not require any changes in the casting to make the plinth or the figure on either type of holder. All the forge would need to do is cast a bollard or a barrel and then secure it to an existing plinth. This would enable the forge to sell the match holder in either conformation with little or no added expense.

So who would purchase the barrel and who would purchase the bollard? The bollard was designed to hold a lighted match in the receptacle in the top of the lid so the user could either seal the wax on a letter or document and/or light a cigar. In all likelihood the user would have it on their desk or work table since it would require using at least one hand to open the lid, extract the match, close the lid, strike the match and then place it in the opening in the lid.

The user of the barrel would have a much easier time extracting a match, striking it and then using it to ignite something. One possibility is that the barrel holder was used in a kitchen so a cook could have their hands relatively free to extract the match and light it.

Another possibility is the expense of making a bollard with a hinged lid and a receptacle for a match was more expensive than casting an open barrel to hold the matches. Maybe the simple savings in manufacturing costs was the reason for the barrel.

We do not know whether Zimmermann made the barrel or the bollard version first or produced them simultaneously. Both holders were made circa 1860-1890 and both had the same striking area so both holders, we assume, used the same kind of matches.

But maybe they did not use the same strike anywhere match. Maybe the bollard holder used a more combustible type of match, e.g., one capable of spontaneous combustion, hence, the need for a holder that enclosed the matches. And if the match containers did not hold the same types of matches the difference between the matches might have been in their size. For example, a parlor match was larger than a kitchen match so an open barrel may have allowed a taller match than the bollard.

To this point remember that in Europe, 1850-1900, there were fusees, two-headed matches, vestas, wax vestas, matches with wooden, wax, wire and braided stems. In Britain alone, there were more than twenty three patents granted for the making of matches.

I began this essay by stating that the question of the match container on two identical figural holders was trivial. But the more I thought about this question the more I realized the manufacturing, political, social, technological and economic history involved in trying to resolve this question was fascinating.

But brevity is the order of the day and I will not detail all that I learned in trying to answer this question. Perhaps when IMSA is able to hold another meeting we will discuss all this in depth.

I will end noting that as the Zimmermann foundry's records were destroyed in WWII we are left to speculate on why two different match holders were made for sale with the same figures but with different match holders.



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Note: Personal conversation with Terry Janke, a Zimmermann collector, has helped me think about this issue.