

THE GORHAM GREAT BRITAIN CONNECTION

By Neil Shapiro

The Gorham Manufacturing Company, founded in 1831 in the United States, had a showroom in London, England by 1904. By 1909, Gorham had purchased a factory in Birmingham England and was producing many of the same goods that they made in Providence, Rhode Island. One example of this is a match safe, production number B2511. On the version made in the USA the bezel reads the usual Gorham marks, (letter “G”, an anchor, rampant lion), “B2511”, “sterling”; on the other side of the bezel it reads, “pat. 1910” (this is Gorham’s patent for a spring).

The version of this safe with the English marks reads, “B2511”, on one side of the bezel and “sterling silver” on the other side of the bezel. Right below the lip, on the body of the box, the English version has the letters, “G.M.Co.” and “.925”, a triangle in an oval, and a lower case “f” in a rectangle with a rippled bottom.

These marks translate to, the Gorham Manufacturing Company, the sterling standard of .925 grains of silver, the Birmingham mark for imported plate from 1904-1998 and the date mark of 1905.

On November 9, 1904 this safe was made for the first time in Providence, Rhode Island. In the first production run twelve of these safes were made (more runs were made later and many copies of this safe were produced), the silver for these 12 safes weighed 10 ounces and 8 dwts and all the finished safes were oxidized to highlight their Art Nouveau design.

Both safes are the same size, share the same design and have an identical striker but have different springs. The USA version has the 1910 patented spring (# 969,076 dated August 30, 1910, the spring was lodged under the hinge pin to prevent it from dropping) and the English version uses an older version of a Gorham hinge. Whether this was because Gorham had not yet patented its new hinge in Great Britain is not know at this time. One other difference is the lack of oxidation on the English version. Again, we can’t be certain that the lack of oxidation is due to someone polishing it off, simple age wear or if Gorham thought the English public preferred the shiny look of silver. *



American version on left.



Obverse sides, American version on left



Marks for imported plate

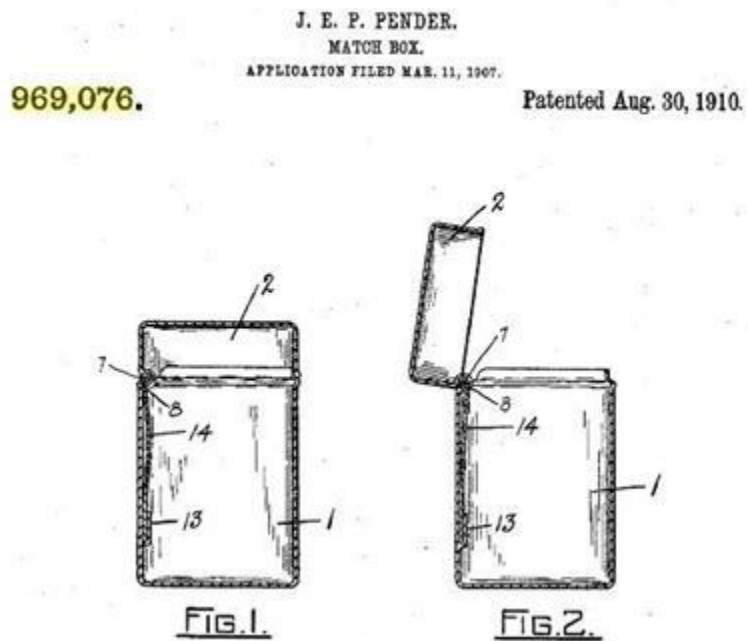
Another Gorham safe B1300 has similar marks (although with a 1904 date mark):

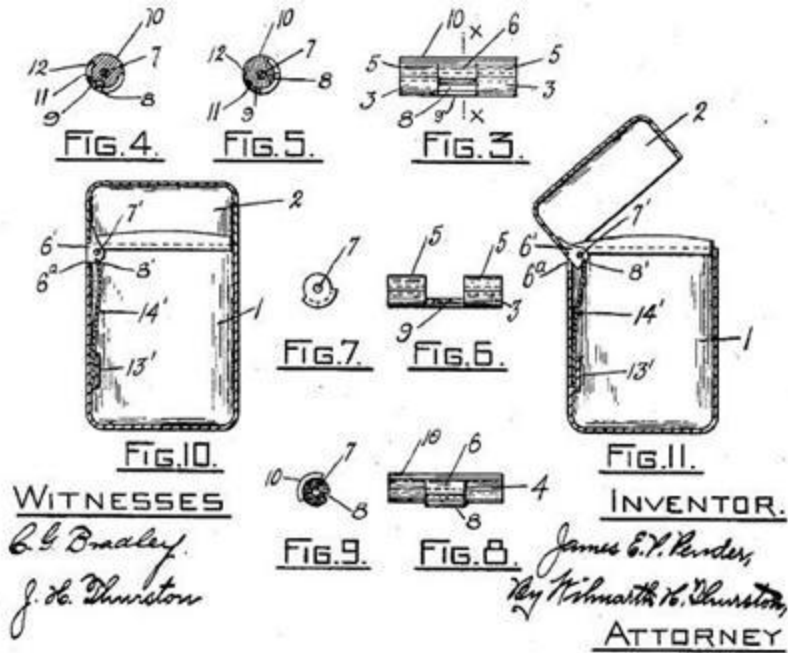




(Photographs of B1300 courtesy of George Sparacio)

To date, researchers have found nine Gorham match safes that have the patented 1910 spring. They are production numbers B2149, B2148, B2198, B2511, B3175, B3803, B3804, B3805, and B3989. Below is a copy of the patent issued to J.E. Pender, a silversmith and foreman at Gorham.





The Gorham manufacturing Company maintained their factory in Birmingham, England until 1914 when World War II ended the company's English presence.

* In private correspondence with Edward Eldred, an English vesta (match safe) researcher and silver expert, he told me that almost all the vestas were highly polished at that time and that the general English population preferred their silver to be shiny.