

ENGLISH PLUMB BOBS Part 1

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1. INTRODUCTION

Dear Fellow Collectors,

I was asked recently by a Fellow Collector from the United States to write about English plumb bobs. My first reaction was that I have insufficient information to fill 10 pages on this subject. Later, after searching my archives I found more illustrations of tools from England and the countries of the former British Commonwealth. Additionally, in my box of catalogue pages I found enough material to start a newsletter on this topic. Riccardo Chetoni from Italy is preparing a book about English Plumb Bobs, but it will be a while before it is ready for publication. Finally, I asked some friends to support me with pictures. Thus, thanks to Nelson in Connecticut, Riccardo in Italy, Karl-Heinz in Germany, Richard in Wales and all the other Fellow Collectors who helped me to write and illustrate this issue.

Ultimately, I assembled so much material, that I decided to divide the article on this subject into two parts. This month I will deal with English Plumb Bobs from the BRITISH ISLES, Part 1, then next month, English Plumb Bobs from the Former Members of the BRITISH COMMONWEALTH, Part 2. (Australia, New Zealand, India and Canada.)

**Unfortunately I have no histories of the “makers” at hand. Hopefully this Newsletter will stimulate those readers who have information to contribute it to the cause of a better understanding of English manufactured plumb bobs.**

## 2. WHAT IS INTERESTING IN ENGLISH PLUMB BOBS?

I asked some Fellow Collectors why they love English plumb bobs. Here are the answers:

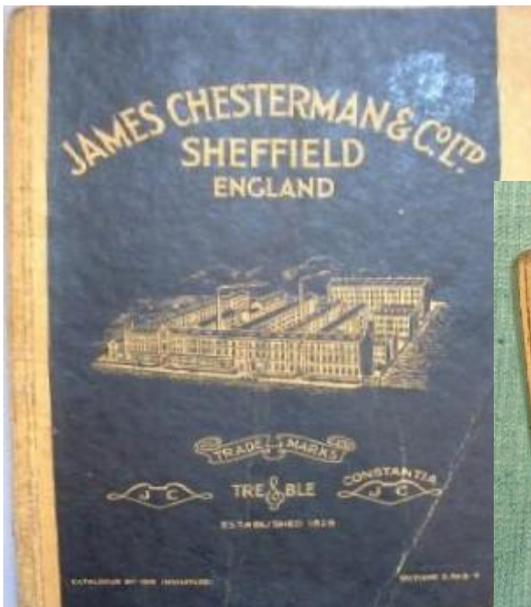
- *DIVERSITY AND VARIETY OF SHAPES*
- *BEAUTIFUL SHAPES*
- *Highly ORNATED*
- *WELL MADE*
- *POLISHED BRASS*
- *HEAVY*
- *BEAUTIFULLY FORMED BODIES*
- *REFINED*
- *AN UNUSUAL VARIETY OF MATERIALS such as BRASS, IVORY, IRON, WOOD*
- *Etc.*

And Nelson wrote me: *"YOU KNOW, I CAN'T THINK OF A COUNTRY THAT HAS PRODUCED MORE PLUMB BOBS FROM RARE MATERIALS, NEVER INTENDED FOR USE AS TOOLS, SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS "GENTLEMAN'S' TOOLS", PRODUCED FOR DECORATIVE OR CEREMONIAL USES.....I THINK THAT THIS IS REALLY WHERE ENGLAND SHINES."*

I agree with these statements completely. Below I will let speak the pictures for themselves.

## 3. ENGLAND; makers

### 3.1. CHESTERMAN Sheffield



No.	1623	1624	1620	1621	1622
	23/6	30/-	33/6	33/6	45/6

<b>Plumb Bobs</b>					
<b>Brass, with Screw Cap and Steel Point</b>					
No.	6	8	12	16 oz.	
No. 1760	1790	13/6	15/-	19/-	22/- each

JAMES CHESTERMAN & CO. LTD., SHEFFIELD 11, ENGLAND

CATALOGUE 1934



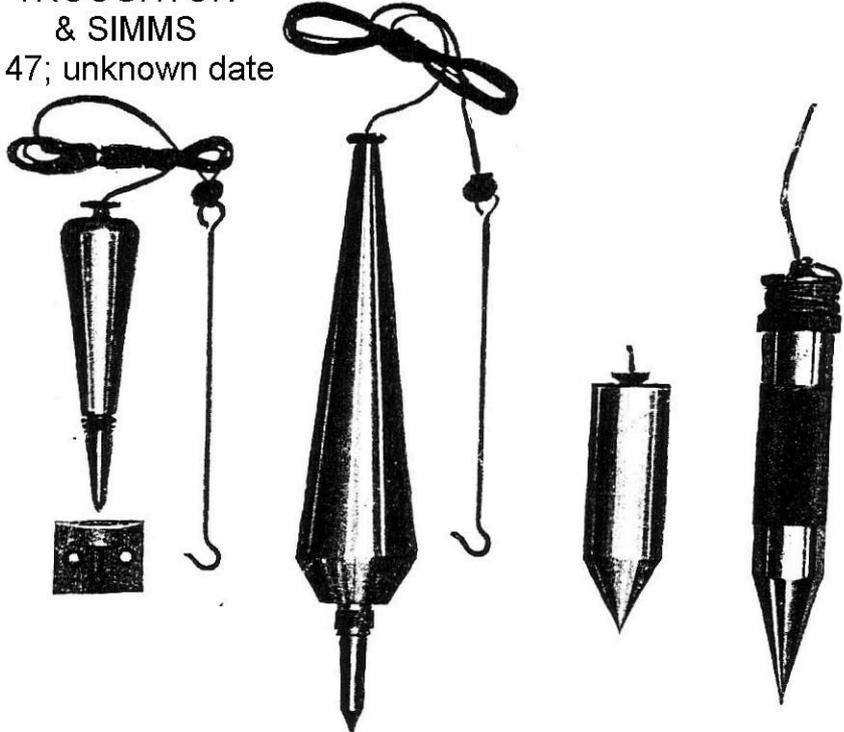
### 3.2. COOKE, TROUGHTON & SIMMS



LONDON, YORK AND CAPE TOWN

COOKE,  
TROUGHTON  
& SIMMS  
p 47; unknown date

PLUMMETS



S233

S234-6

S238

S241

- ✓ S233. PLUMMET, gun metal, with steel point, " carrot " shape as fig. above, fitted with 5 ft. of waterproof silk cord, complete with suspension hook and grip washer. Weight 8 ozs. ... .. £0 6 0
- ✓ S234. Ditto, ditto Weight 12 ozs. ... .. £0 7 0
- S235. Ditto, ditto Weight 16 ozs. ... .. £0 10 0
- S236. Ditto, ditto Weight 32 ozs. ... .. £0 15 0
- S237. PLUMMET, TAPE SUSPENDED, as S233, but giving instantly height of instrument above ground ... .. £0 15 0
- ✓ S238. PLUMMET, steel, cylindrical, 1.125 ins. dia. with core point ; without cord. Weight 12 ozs. ... .. £0 4 6
- S239. PLUMMET, PATENT SELF-WINDING, facilitates adjustment of the plummet in the field. Adjustment to  $\frac{1}{32}$  in. When not in use the cord is automatically wound up inside the body. Corded ready for use. Weight 15 ozs. ... .. £0 19 0
- S240. PLUMMET CORD, special silk waterproof, per reel of 50 yds. £0 16 0
- ✓ S241. PLUMMET, MERCURIAL TYPE, nickel-plated steel. Advantages are— great weight in proportion to size and low centre of gravity. Provided with braided silk cord, 1 in. dia., 16 oz. ... .. £0 15 0



The MERCURY in the cat looks like STARRET USA.

S239 self winding is unknown to me.

### 3.3. RICHARD KELL

*(Description from an Ebay auction, with permission. Thanks)*

#### **Richard Kell Toolmaker**

Northumberland, in the north of England, is the home of Richard Kell, Toolmaker. Richard's series of solid brass tools are not only a pleasure to behold but are also very ingenious. Each tool is crafted by Richard himself in his small workshop and a lot of time and attention goes into each individual piece.

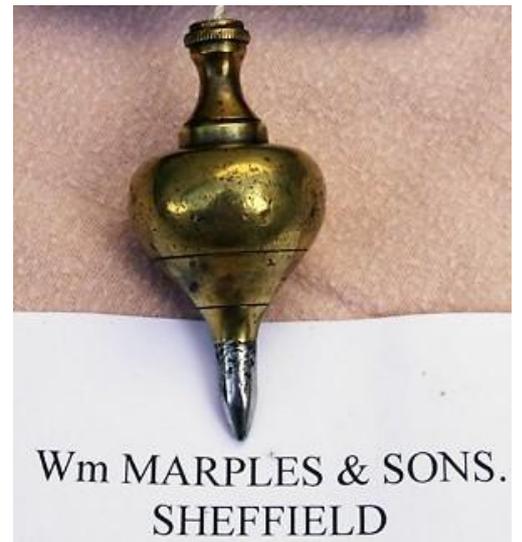
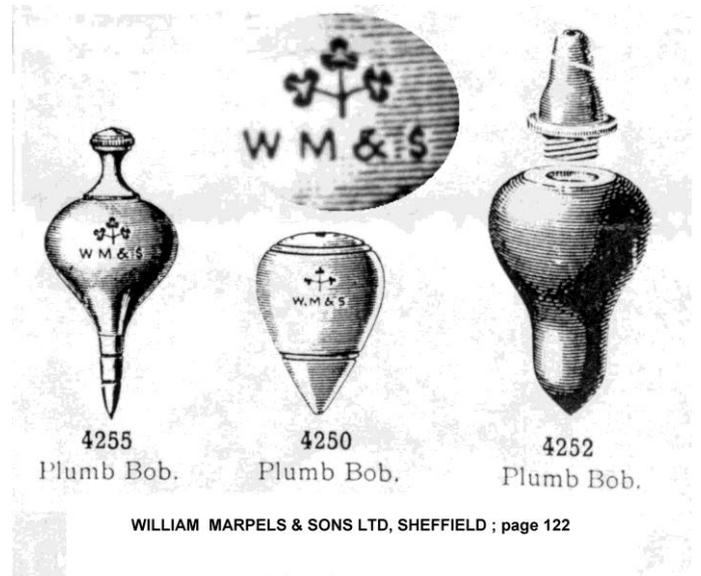
Richard Kell is a designer and craftsman who is known for his integrity of fine craftsmanship. He is known for designing simple, useful tools such as this absolutely beautiful plumb bob. If he puts his name on a tool, it is deemed to have passed his stringent benchmark test of the highest standard and quality. This quaint plumb bob comes exquisitely encased in a finely-crafted brass cannister, with a two-rimmed engraved rings on both ends. The cannister is just over 2" tall. The plumb bob is about 1 2/8" long and 5/8" in diameter and it is connected to the lid of the cannister with a very fine strong line. It has a finely-etched finial. The top of the plumb bob unscrews out for any need of a line change. For safekeeping, the plumb bob is lowered tip first into a solid inner stand which carries a rounded indentation which has been carved to accomodate the tip of the plumb bob snugly.



*Picture right: from my collection a similar looking plumb bob with some technical equipment. Unmarked*



### 3.4. MARPLES

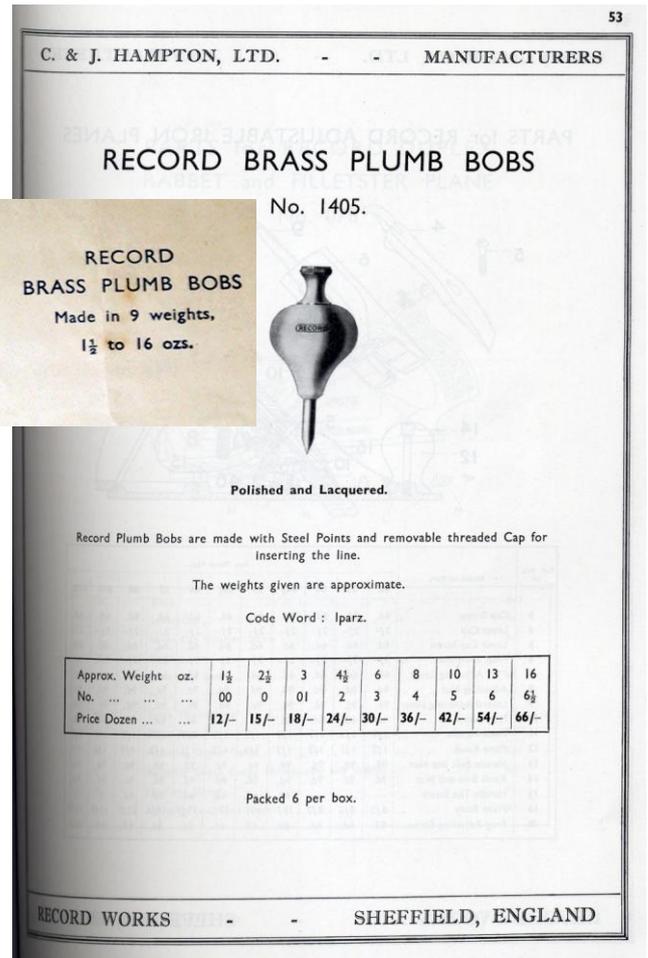


### 3.5. MILITARY

Plumb bobs or instruments in military use are marked with AM (AIR MINISTRY) and the CROWN or with E arrow B.



### 3.6. RECORD TOOLS



*Pictures (from left to right):  
Part of the David Lynch collection;  
Record with patina and extremely polished;  
RECORD 00 and 6 1/2*

For more information see the site from David Lynch Australia. He is expert for RECORD planes and the history of RECORD TOOLS: <http://www.recordhandplanes.com>

### 3.7. PICADOR, Watford



#### Plumb Bobs – Traditional

Die cast light alloy body – plated steel reversible point, necked body to accommodate approximately 6m (20 feet) of line – line not supplied.

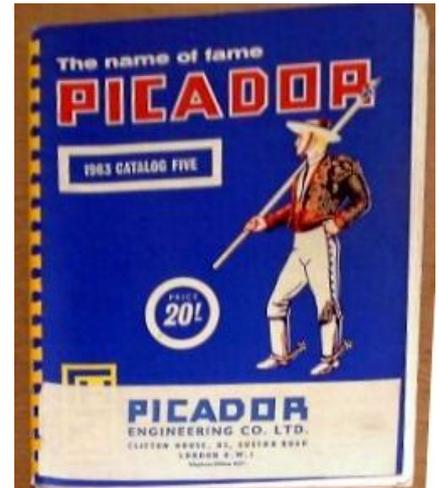
	TOTAL LENGTH		BODY DIA.		APPROX. WEIGHT kg.
	MM	INS	MM	INS	
322	67	2 5/8	25	1	0.06
323	71	2 7/8	29	1 1/8	0.08
324	76	3	32	1 1/4	0.10
325	76	3	34.5	1 3/8	0.11

322/5 Set of 12 comprising 3 each of above sizes

#### Plumb Bobs – Parallel

Plated steel accurately machined. Line attached via threaded nipple – fine not supplied.

	TOTAL LENGTH		BODY DIA.		APPROX. WEIGHT kg.
	MM	INS	MM	INS	
582 1/2	76	3	12.7	1/2	0.06
583	89	3 1/2	16	5/8	0.10
584	115	4 1/2	19	3/4	0.20
585	140	5 1/2	22	7/8	0.34
586	166	6 1/2	25	1	0.53



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Some time ago I had contact to a former director of PICADOR. From this interview and some catalogue information:

- PICADOR produced between 1950s and 1980s two types of bobs;
- TRADITIONAL as #322 323 324 325 in 60gr 80gr 100gr and 110gr and
  - PARALLEL as #582 1/2 583 584 585 586 in 60gr 100gr 200gr 340gr 530gr

The mark on the original plumb bob is located differently than shown in the pictures. I am astonished that the PARALLEL is much heavier than the TRADITIONAL..

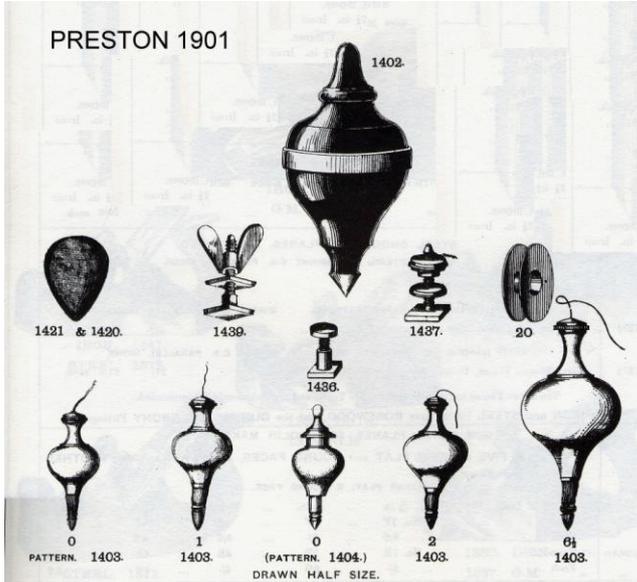
The DIE CAST ZINC in 1963 (DIE CAST LIGHT ALLOY in 1980) plumb bobs were produced from PICADOR MOULDS but sub contracted to other foundries.

Why different information about the MATERIAL in the catalogues?

Zinc is a material that was added to some of PICADOR products as an aluminium substitute. Possibly for reducing costs while maintaining good quality. Where it is stated “aluminium cast”, it also states that “the alloy will be pure.”

### 3.8. EDWARD PRESTON & SONS

Edward Preston is one of the most famous makers for plumb bobs. Let's have a look into some catalogues:  
*Pictures right:* The heaviest in this range a #12 with a weight of 4 lbs I bought it back from INDIA to Europe. 7 in = 18 cm high. I didn't polish it.



75

## 1909 EDWARD PRESTON & SONS, LTD.

### BRASS PLUMB BOBS.

**BEST QUALITY.**

These Plumb Bobs are made with removable screwed tops for inserting the line. They are accurately turned and have steel points.

The weights given are approximate.

	1½oz.	2½oz.	3½oz.	4½oz.	6oz.	8oz.	10oz.	13oz.
No. 1403.	00	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
	6/6	8/-	10/-	12/-	14/-	16/-	20/-	25/- per dozen.
	1lb.	1¼lbs.	1½lbs.	2lb.	2½lb.	3lb.	4lb.	
	6½	7	8	9	10	11	12	
	29/-	34/-	44/-	56/-	70/-	85/-	104/-	per dozen.

*Larger sizes can be supplied to order.*

TRADE MARK.

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### BRASS PLUMB BOBS.

**SECOND QUALITY.**

These Plumb Bobs differ slightly from our well-known No. 1403 Best Quality Pattern above, and are introduced as a cheaper article. While not being quite so well finished as our No. 1403, they may be accepted as reliable tools.

The weights given are approximate.

	1½oz.	2½oz.	3oz.	4½oz.	6oz.	8oz.	10oz.	13oz.
No. 1405.	00	0	01	2	3	4	5	6
	4/9	6/-	7/6	9/-	11/3	14/-	16/9	21/- per dozen.
	1lb.	1¼lbs.	1½lbs.	2lb.	2½lbs.	3lb.		
	6½	7	8	9	10	11		
	26/-	32/-	40/-	52/-	64/-	76/-	per dozen.	

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### IRON PLUMB BOBS.

These Plumb Bobs are Japanned, with removable screwed tops for inserting the line, and have turned centre bands and points.

The weights given are approximate.

	½lb.	¾lb.	1lb.	1¼lb.	1½lb.	1¾lb.	2lb.
No. 1402.	5/6	6/3	7/-	7/9	8/6	9/3	10/-
							10/9 per dozen.

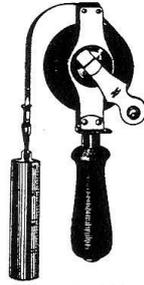
### IRON AND LEAD PLUMB BOBS.

No. 1420.	Egg Shape Japanned Iron Plumb Bobs	... 6d. per lb.
„ 1421.	Egg Shape Turned Lead Plumb Bobs	... 6d „

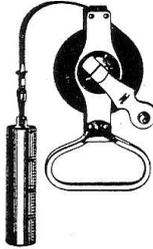


**Oil Gaugers' Steel Tapes**  
WITH LOCKING HANDLE.

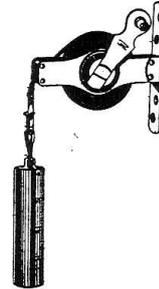
See page 78 opposite for prices of Tapes and Winders, and below for prices of Weights.



No. 4291/601  
Polished Wood Handle.



No. 4291 D/601  
"D" shaped Nickel Plated Handle. The letter "D" should be added after the number when ordering.



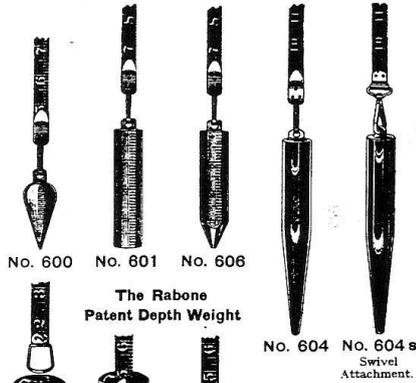
No. 4291 B/601  
With Derrick or Bracket Fitting. The letter "B" should be added after the number when ordering.

To meet the requirements of users of Oil Fuel, we have introduced these Steel Tapes on open Nickel Plated Winders. These Tapes can be supplied on these Winders with three alternative types of fittings, as illustrated above, at the same price. The detachable weights are extra (see below). The prices for the Tapes and Winders are given opposite on page 76, the extra cost of detachable weights and different attachments are given below. Numbers of Tape and weight should be given when ordering.

**Weights and Plumb Bobs.**

The prices for detachable weights given below are extra to the prices given opposite on page 76, which are for the Tapes and Winders only. The prices below include the standard Spring Clip for attaching the weight to the Tape.

If a Swivel Attachment method is preferred, as illustration of No. 604s, this can be supplied at 9d. each extra. The letter "S" should be added after the number of the weight when ordering.



No. 600 No. 601 No. 606

The Rabone Patent Depth Weight

No. 604 No. 604s Swivel Attachment.

No.	Length	Diam.	Weight	Description	EXTRA Price to Tapes on page 76 each
600	2 3/4 in.	1 1/4 in.	6 oz.	Pear-shaped Brass ...	3/6
601	4 "	1 "	15 "	Brass, flat one side, graduated in accordance with Tape ...	4/-
6012	4 "	1 "	14 1/2 "	As No. 601, with 2 flats, graduated 2 measures ...	6/6
606	4 "	1 "	12 1/2 "	As No. 601, but pointed 1 inch from end. Flat one side graduated ...	5/-
6062	4 "	1 "	12 "	As No. 606, but with two flats graduated ...	7/6
604	6 3/4 "	1 "	18 "	Brass, Nickel Plated, with pointed end for penetrating heavy oil ...	6/-
605	6 3/4 "	1 "	17 1/2 "	As No. 604, but made of Staybrite Steel, which is preferred in some cases where Brass Weights are liable to chemical action ...	16/6

**THE RABONE PATENT DEPTH WEIGHT.**

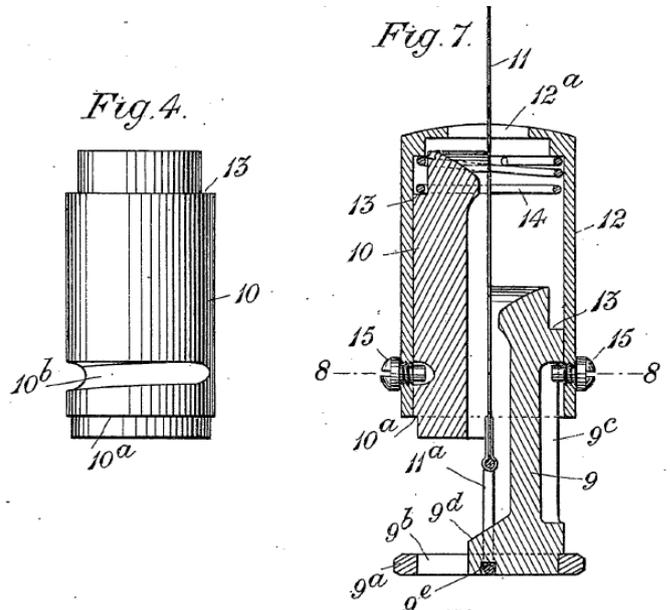
This Weight is designed for use with standard types of Steel Tapes in all cases where accurate depth measurements are required., e.g. Fuel Storage Tanks, Ships' Bunkers and all sounding operations.

The Brass Weight can be used with any ordinary steel tape upon which the measurement starts at the end of the Ring, and for any width of Steel Tape from 3/4 inch to 1 1/4 inch wide. NO. 602 3 1/2 inch long, 1 1/4 inch diameter, 1 1/4 lb. weight ... 18/- each.

Quarter Size Drawings.

GB (Patent No. 356370). 1930

This depth weight or plumb bob was patented GB356370 John Rabone & Sons Ltd, Birmingham 1931





### 3.11. OTHER MAKERS: BDS, WILLIAMS, LMSD, TAYLOR ROLPH, FOREIGN etc.

There are a lot of other makers, where only makers' marks and a few details are known.

*If you know more, please let me know.*

Some by distributors in England sold plumb bobs are made in Germany i. e.

**BDS MADE IN WEST GERMANY.** Unfortunately I could not find exactly the distributor / maker. There are some possible abbreviations. The mark "MADE IN WEST GERMANY" shows, that it was sold in the 1950s, when Germany was still occupied. Later Germany marked with "Made in Germany".



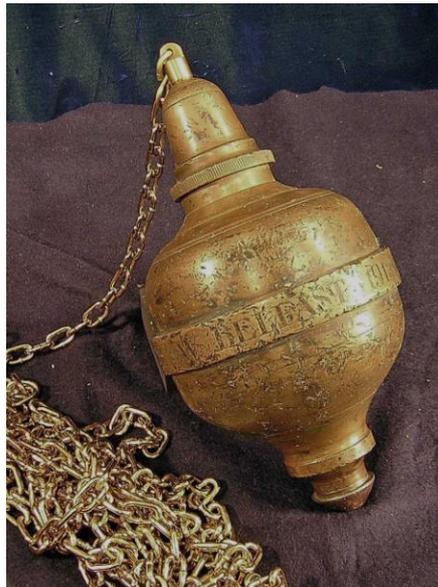
We also find a marking **FOREIGN**.

This mark was printed on all goods not produced in England, especially imports from Germany to protect the English economic system.

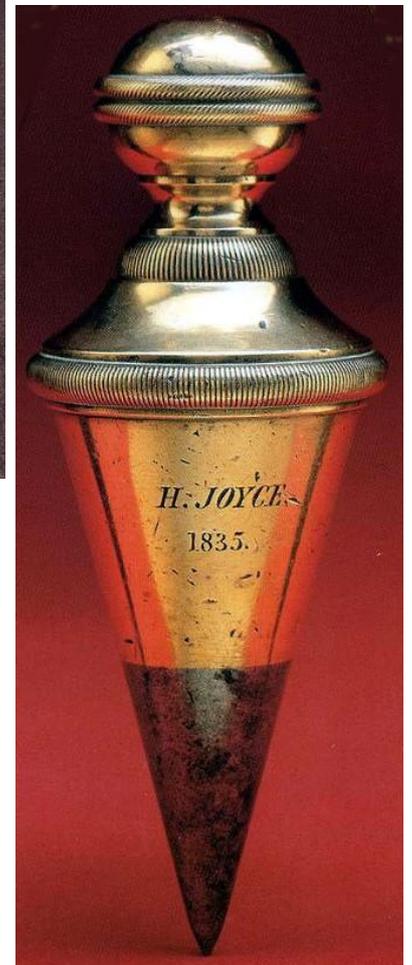


### HARLAND & WOLF SHIPYARD PLUMB BOB (Nelson Denny collection)

*"This 20 pound, solid brass bob is about 10" long and 5 3/4" in diameter. This tip is steel or maybe iron and the cap, with a knurled lip unscrews. I've made a hanger for the cap as I wanted a chain to support the bob. It is held in a screw and is easily removable. On the girdle of the bob is: **H&W BELFAST 1913**. Harland & Wolf is the very old Belfast shipyard where the Titanic was built, before being moved to Southampton. Wonderful age and character marks. Of course, the Titanic sailed in 1912 and this is dated 1913, so there is no absolute tie, but the possibility does exist."*



The **H. JOYCE 1835** is a quintessential example of an English plumb bob. Bruce Cynar noted author of "The Plumb Line," noted, "the Joyce bob was one of the finer pieces I've ever owned." Sold at auction in England in the early 1990's it traveled to the American Mid-West then in 2004 it "traveled" to a noted collector in Olympia Washington. Since 2009, Joyce resides in Hadlyme, Ct., a proud centerpiece in the collection of Nelson Denny."



Did YOU already visit my "SEARCH PAGE" <http://plumbbobcollectors.info/60864.html> on my web site?

There are still some other "Wanted" plumb bobs.

# LMSD

(Pictures below are from different Fellow Collectors)

## WHO KNOWS THIS COMPANY LMSD?

Perhaps: London, Midland & Scottish railways and the "D" for Darlington Depot

Nelson Denny sent me the following information:

- *"I HAVE 11 EXAMPLES MARKED LMSD AND MY OBSERVATIONS ARE BASED ON THOSE 11"*
- *IT HAS BEEN PROPOSED FROM MORE THAN ONE SOURCE THAT LMSD STANDS FOR "LONDON, MIDLAND, SCOTTISH DERBYSHIRE" THE NAME OF AN ENGLISH RAILROAD IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY BEFORE THE NATIONALIZATION OF BRITISH RAILWAYS.*
- *THE SHAPES ARE HIGHLY VARIED, BUT ALL THESE SHAPES HAVE A CHARACTERISTIC INDENT AT THE TIP, AND CAPS THAT WOULD BE TERMED "ACORN" IN SHAPE.*
- *MARKINGS ARE ALL THE SAME SIZE, A CIRCLE WITH THE LETTERS "LMSD" AND A NUMERAL. MOST ARE STRUCK WITH THE MARKING IN SEVERAL PLACES ON VARIOUS PARTS OF THE BOBS.*
- *THE LMSD'S ARE BRASS WITH STEEL TIPS AND OFTEN EMPLOY LIGNUM VITAE AS AN ACCENT MATERIAL IF NOT FOR THE ENTIRE BOB BODY.*
- *ALL 11 BOBS I HAVE ACCUMULATED ARE IN WHAT WOULD CALL "UNUSED CONDITION." THIS CONDITION FACTOR, AND THE EXTREMELY STYLIZED AND DECORATIVE ELEMENTS LEADS ME TO BELIEVE THEY WERE NOT NECESSARILY CONSTRUCTED AS WORKING TOOLS.*
- *APPEARANCES AT LIVE AUCTIONS AND ON EBAY ARE FREQUENT; THERE SEEMS TO BE A FEW OF THEM SURVIVING, AND I HAVE NEVER SEEN 2 EXACTLY ALIKE"*



## WILLIAMSON

I am searching since a very long time without positive result for a WILLIAMSON'S patent with INTERNAL BOBBIN.

Who knows more about it?



## TAYLOR ROLPH patent

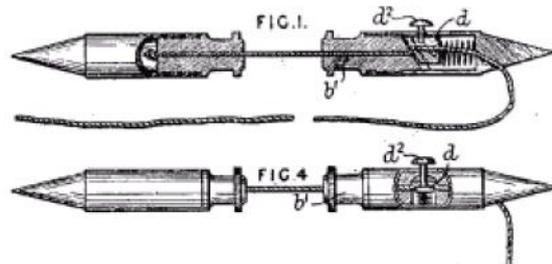
Recently on EBAY, there was a listing for a "patented TAYLOR ROLPH" with a patent number 30048.

This patent GB 191030048 MERCER 1911 MEASURING DEV FOR BOWL GAMES is **not** for a PLUMB BOB, but for a measuring system of a bowling game. Separated into its parts, you could use either part as a plumb bob, however, that is not the defining feature.

The pieces (plumb bobs) are used horizontal as the END and BEGINNING of the MEASURING LINE. Inventor is John Harley MERCER, of British nationality, Mount Carron, Carron, Falkirk, Engineer..... TAYLOR ROLPH used his patent to sell his products (Games, especially bowling games).

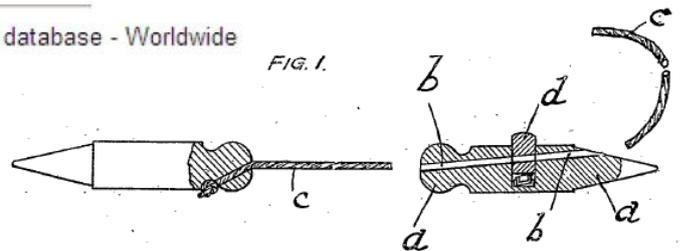
### Abstract of GB191030048

30,048. Mercer, J. H. Dec. 28. Cleats. - In devices for measuring distances in the game of bowls consisting of a cord fixed to one contact point but free to pass through another, the cord is gripped at any point by a device of the kind in which kinking of the cord is effected. Three forms of the device are described in the Specification. In the form shown in Fig. 1, a spring normally pushes the locking-piece *d* against the inclined face of the plug *b* so as to cause the hole in the former to be out of alignment with the central hole in the latter; in that shown in Fig. 4, the piece *d* is adapted to force the cord into a recess in the plug *b*. The third form is similar to that just described. In all cases the locking-piece can be depressed by means of a projection *d*<sup>2</sup> so as to release the cord.



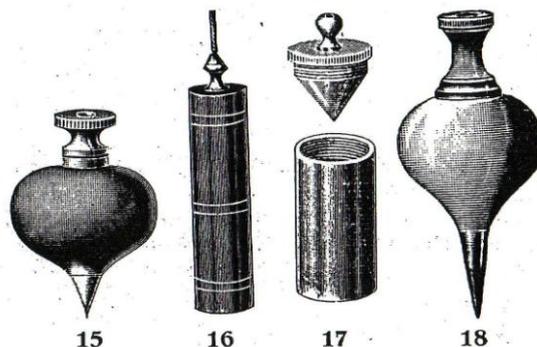
Data supplied from the [esp@cenet](mailto:esp@cenet) database - Worldwide

Drawing from the patent GB 181606 MERCER 1922 MEASURING DEVICE FOR GAMES



## GAMPPER

The German maker Gampper produced plumb bobs before 1900 und now for all over the world, especially for the English market. In a catalogue page from 1926 you see, that shapes from all countries are in the program. They never marked with the Gampper name. More commonly they were marked with the distributors' logo. (More in the next issue about the plumb bobs in Australia):



GAMPPER, Murrhardt Germany 1926



## 4. COLLECTION RICHARD JONES, Wales

### From the collection of Richard Jones



AM AIR MINISTRY.JPG



arrow through apple.jpg



display 1.JPG



display 2.JPG



display 3.JPG



display 4.JPG



display 5.JPG



EDWARD PRESTON.JPG



EP spool + EP plumb bob.JPG



FOOTPRINT.jpg



Highly ornated in wooden box.JPG



interesting shape.JPG



knurled cap.JPG



knurled decoration.JPG



LEAD for plumb level.jpg



like COOKE.JPG



long iron tip.JPG



MARLIN, London.JPG



MONUMENT, London.JPG



PO ASB 1972.JPG



ROLLS ROYCE Derby.JPG



sharp tip.JPG



small display 1.JPG



small display 2.JPG



small head, big body.JPG



STORMONT ACHER S in shield.JPG



stubby.JPG



two left from RECORD.JPG



Type Buck & Hickman.jpg



W & W.JPG



with brass spool.JPG



with spring.JPG



Wm MARPLES & SONS.JPG



xxx.JPG



yyy.JPG

## 5. UNMARKED

Some unmarked English plumb bobs from the collection of Karl-Heinz Riess and my own showroom.



## 6. OTHER DISTRIBUTORS

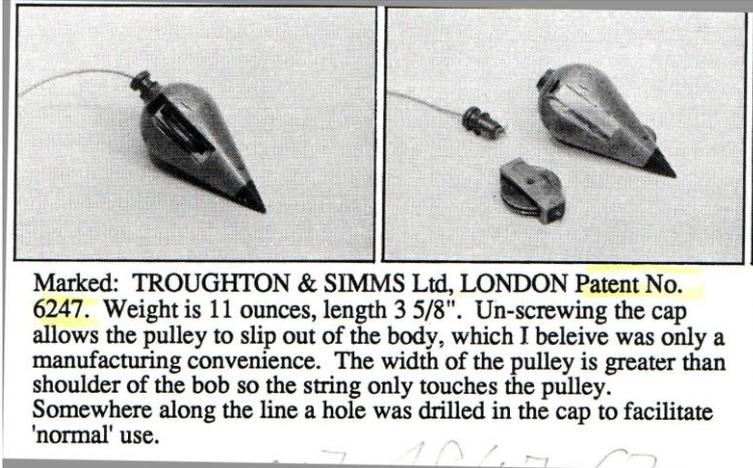
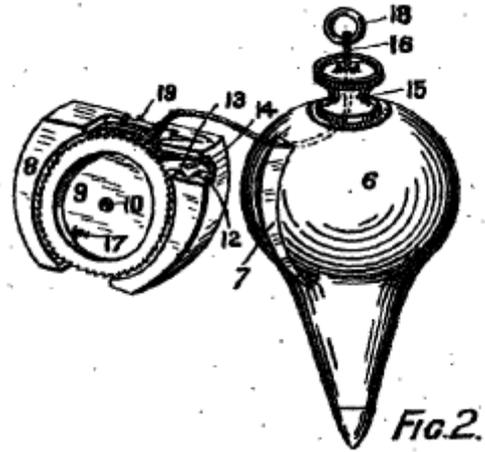
Other names of distributors or makers are known. Perhaps later I will write about names like:

LAIRD ship yard; MWST; W&W; LION TOOLS Swindon; MDS Ltd; CHARLES NURSE; BUCK & HICKMAN; HEADLAND THOMAS TOOLS; KAYE & SONS; SKELTON; STEDALL & CO; MOORE & WRIGHT; NICHOLSON & WEST; BM & CO; AIRLYNE LTD; MARLIN; PO ASB; STORMONT ACHER; MONUMENT BRAND; THORNHILL; MANN, Liverpool; WILLIAM FARNBURN etc.

## 7. PATENTED PLUMB BOBS

About patented English plumb bobs I will write later a special issue, but today I will show a very interesting English patent GB 190719687. More about it you can read in the WR PATENT NEWS 2007-47 "Mechanized Plumb Bobs".

In "THE PLUMB LINE" by Bruce Cynar it was shown 1991.

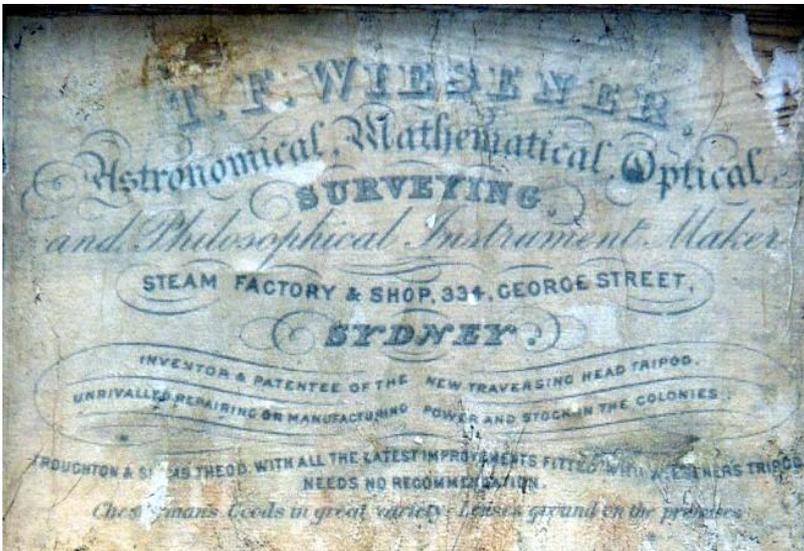


Marked: TROUGHTON & SIMMS Ltd, LONDON Patent No. 6247. Weight is 11 ounces, length 3 5/8". Un-screwing the cap allows the pulley to slip out of the body, which I believe was only a manufacturing convenience. The width of the pulley is greater than shoulder of the bob so the string only touches the pulley. Somewhere along the line a hole was drilled in the cap to facilitate 'normal' use.

Picture above: patent drawing.

I had a problem to find the patent, because Troughton & Simms marked it with the WRONG patent number. #6247 from 1909 instead of #19687 from 1907. Inventor in both patents was William George Wiesener from Sydney Australia.

It is a very expensive plumb bob. Value nearly 600€  
Below some nice pictures of this mechanized patented English plumb bob from Fellow Collectors.



## 8. LAST BUT NOT LEAST:

NICE DISPLAYS OF ENGLISH PLUMB BOBS from the collection of RICCARDO CHETONI , Italy

*Figure right:* a row of old ivory bobs.



## 9. RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Further information about English plumb bobs in:

- THE PLUMB LINE CONTINUUM
- PLUMB BOBS OF THE WORLD
- WOLF'S PLUMB BOB NEWS
- 2008-09 INFORMATION FROM CATALOGUES
- 2009-05 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
- WOLF'S PATENT NEWS 2007
- 2007-08 LASER PLUMB BOS
- 2007-13 CARTER Gyrostatic Gimbals
- 2007-19 Flat French + STANLEY
- 2007-47 Mechanized plumb bobs

All these publications above are available on  
[www.plumbbobcollectors.info](http://www.plumbbobcollectors.info)

### REMARK:

*This is an article of the monthly published WOLF'S PLUMB BOB NEWS that is sent on demand as PDF-file attachment by email. FREE. You can see all former and future publications on my website*  
[www.plumbbobcollectors.info](http://www.plumbbobcollectors.info)

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Thank you for your interest!

Wolf Ruecker

**CONTINUED in the next WOLF'S PLUMB BOB NEWS 2010-05 "ENGLISH PLUMB BOBS PART 2"**

