

# HISTORY OF LOCKS

By Brian Morland



## More On Tann

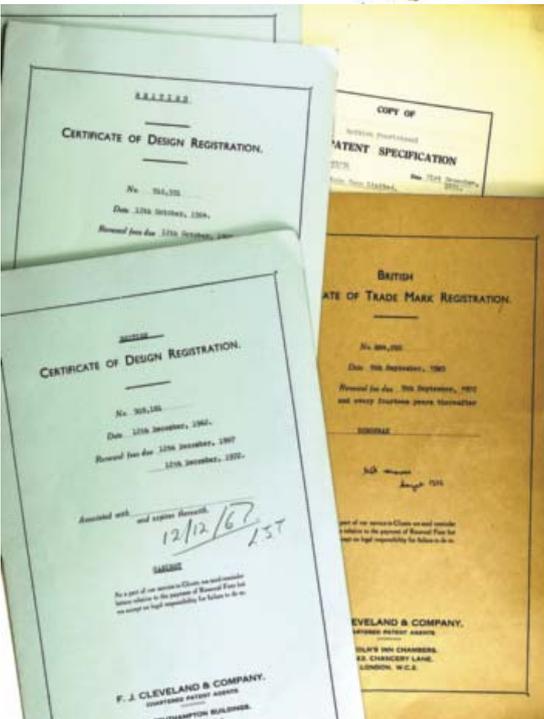
The one thing about studying historical locks is that with the revelations found in newly acquired artefacts and documents sometimes it becomes necessary to rewrite what's known, or what's generally perceived in the light of those new discoveries.

For instance; whilst cataloguing the Tann company records three large boxes revealed the Tann and Rosengrens company seals a many of the original Patent specifications additionally scrapbooks filled with press cuttings have also been found, they contain adverts and other Tann press related items but also includes some material relating to both Tann competitors' and the occasional magazine feature relating to security, strongrooms or safes. The volumes themselves are a little dog eared but the contents seem more or less intact albeit fragile and in the interest of preservation they are currently undergoing digitisation; they cover a date range from the early 1920's to the late 1950's.



Above Left - Three intact but rather fragile Tann scrap books, mostly featuring press cuttings and dating from the 1920's to 1950's.

Above - Tann Group Company seals including: John Tann Limited, John Tann Security Services Limited, Tann Holdings Limited, Tann International Limited, Rosengrens Limited, Rosengrens Tann Limited, Rosengrens Security Services Limited, Rosengrens UK Holdings Limited, Rosengrens Europe Limited and Secure Safes Coventry Limited.



Left - Numerous patent specifications, Design Registrations including: an early electric combination lock.

Tann were obviously very proud of their lineage of being the oldest safe maker in the world, they were established in 1795, a series of adverts, in the years before WWII, with the line 'Tann was making safes before....' and then would recount an early historical person or event.

The theme must have been successful as it continued through the war years (WWII) with captions like "ARP, War Risks and £8,780,000 fire losses", and into the 1950's the captions read: "Aftermath", "The New London" and "Craftsmanship in Three Centuries". It was both clever and

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**1799**  
Before  
*Income Tax was imposed by Pitt*  
**JOHN TANN**  
*was making safes*

Citizens secure service and protection through paying Income Tax. Many of them secure other service and other protection through buying John Tann Safes. One of these wise men writes—  
"My John Tann Safe gave complete protection to my records and Jewellery during the 'blitz' of May 10/11, when my shop and the neighbouring premises were a blazing inferno for a long time. Many of my neighbours were not so fortunate as to possess John Tann protection and lost everything."

**JOHN TANN LTD**  
Safe and Strongroom Engineers  
117 NEWGATE STREET, LONDON, E.C.1  
FOUNDED IN 1795

**2**  
Before the Battle of Waterloo  
**JOHN TANN**  
*was making safes*

Today the victories achieved over enemy air attack are exemplified by the following extract from hundreds of similar letters:—  
"It should like to place on record our appreciation of the service rendered by this particular safe, and for your information, it has been in our possession for over 35 years and has been touched in two serious fires as the result of enemy action during the past few months and, on both occasions, the entire contents have been saved in wonderful condition, and it would appear from your representative's remarks that it is to be granted a still further lease of life; this, in our opinion, is an amazing testimony for the products of John Tann."

**JOHN TANN LTD**  
SAFE AND STRONGROOM ENGINEERS  
117 NEWGATE STREET, LONDON, E.C.1  
ESTABLISHED IN 1795

**3**  
When Nelson was at Trafalgar  
**JOHN TANN**  
*was making safes*

THROUGH the changing scene of 150 years John Tann has kept ahead of the burglar, has met the increasing risks of fire, and forestalled the danger of aircraft attack. To the experience so gained is added a present concentration upon the needs of modern warfare. This is ensured the knowledge and foresight which will provide the future security of the Nation's wealth and records.

**JOHN TANN LTD**  
Safe and Strongroom Engineers  
117 NEWGATE STREET, LONDON, E.C.1  
ESTABLISHED IN 1795

**4**  
When Napoleon was called 'Corporal'  
**JOHN TANN**  
*was making safes*

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ESTABLISHED IN 1795

**5**  
BEFORE THE  
*Dory Safety Lamp was invented*  
**JOHN TANN**  
*was making safes*

All who face risks must have forethought. JOHN TANN SECURITY is the best business safeguard. One who knew this writes:—  
"The service given by John Tann safes... looks in larger safe recovered 2 1/2 weeks after the 'blitz' were perfect internally—the other safe was unexpectedly recovered over 10 months later, fully showing its terrible ordeal; the contents were intact."

**JOHN TANN LTD**  
SAFE AND STRONGROOM ENGINEERS  
117 NEWGATE STREET, LONDON, E.C.1  
ESTABLISHED IN 1795

**6**  
Before streets were lighted by Gas  
**JOHN TANN**  
*was making safes*

Gas-lighting reduced the risks of City life but added a new fire danger—burning gas-mains. The "blitz" showed how real is this danger—here is an example.  
"...the contents of No. 33257 John Tann Safe were recovered intact when the... Company's Hall was destroyed by a landmine which exploded the gas-main and the safes subjected to intense heat. The contents of two safes of other makes were reduced to ash...."

**JOHN TANN LTD**  
SAFE AND STRONG ROOM ENGINEERS  
117 NEWGATE STREET, LONDON, E.C.1  
ESTABLISHED IN 1795

**7**  
BEFORE  
*Jenner gave the world Vaccination*  
**JOHN TANN**  
*was making safes*

Prevention is better than cure—and this applies to other things than disease. A John Tann Safe is the best protection against loss by any of the dangers to which valuable property is exposed in war and in peace. Read this extract from a recent letter:—  
"The whole building at our City address was demolished by enemy action on 29th December last, and all that could be seen in the little debris left, after burning for three days, was my safe... astonishment on opening the safe to find everything completely legible and mostly in perfect condition."

**JOHN TANN LTD**  
SAFE AND STRONG ROOM ENGINEERS  
117 NEWGATE STREET, LONDON, E.C.1  
ESTABLISHED IN 1795

**8**  
SINCE 1795  
John Tann have been leading makers of Safes, Strongrooms and Safe Deposit work throughout the world. They supply the Bank of England, the Royal Mint, great Banks in this country and throughout the world, Governments, Municipalities and all who install tested, reliable Security Equipment.

Remember The same service used by great Banks is at your disposal, and no John Tann Safe ever fails the purpose for which it is constructed.

**JOHN TANN SAFES**  
JOHN TANN, LTD • 117, NEWGATE ST. • LONDON E.C.1

**9**  
GELIGNITE BURGLARIES  
Modern criminals use modern methods; and high explosive, deadly but effective, is increasingly used by burglars. Fortunately, John Tann provides complete security against this, as against any other method of attack; the Patent, Tested, Anti-explosive and Anti-blowpipe Device is exclusively incorporated in John Tann burglar resisting Safes and Strongroom Doors.

Remember No John Tann Safe ever fails the purpose for which it is constructed

**JOHN TANN SAFES**  
JOHN TANN, LTD • 117, NEWGATE ST. • LONDON E.C.1

**10**  
COUNTRY LIFE  
JULY 31 1939

COUNTRY LIFE  
APRIL 29th 1939

Some of the adverts run by Tann featuring the "Tann was making safes before them". They were run in a variety of publications including Country Life

sincere advertising; the reader learnt about Tann in conjunction with either topical or historical interesting facts. Another series of advertisements titled 'Important users of John Tann Safes and Strongrooms' and included such names as The Bank of England, The National Provincial Bank, The Midland Bank, Lloyds Bank, The Irish Currency Commission, The Bank of Scotland and The Royal Mint. Some nice line drawings featured in this series which appealed to readers and looking at these today they are of historical interest as many have changed during the intervening decades.

Some of the scrapbook images were obviously intended for technical or trade publications and for specialised users. Topics included vault ventilation and Safes for Radium storage; not the sort of thing that's found in the popular press, but very enlightening for the techies here.

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One of the more unusual safes produced by Tann, it's for Radium storage.



Vault ventilation system where the ducting is pivoted into place when the door is open 'Ventilation without diminishing Security'



Other forms of vault ventilation achieved by ducting or via the emergency door.

As already mentioned the scrapbooks also contained some cuttings not relating to Tann, one such curiosity was a rolling door safe; reminding me of the cave man image in Vincent Eras' book. How often have we heard the words 'there is nothing new under the sun...' it's just the technology that has evolved!



Above: Early man depicted hiding goods secured by a large boulder; from Vincent Eras' book Locks and Keys Throughout the Ages.



Right: A rolling door designed by Chubb from the Tann press cutting books.

Another interesting item is a supplement dated Friday May the 6<sup>th</sup> 1932; its titled 'The Stock Exchange Gazette – Safe Deposits Supplement' 10 pages of articles and safe maker adverts. Makes interesting reading and of course there is current interest in these facilities following the high profile events of the following decades! The topics are: 'Safe Deposits. From Ancient Times to the Present', 'Design of Safe Deposits. Perfect Safeguards for Renters. Scientific Development of a British Industry.', 'Documents and Securities. Usefulness of Safe Deposits. Absolutely Private and Confidential.' And 'Public Use of Deposit Safes. A Growing National Habit. Security of Documents and Valuables.'

In another group of fairly ordinary cardboard boxes more heritage 'gold' was found Patent Specifications, Trade Mark Registrations and Design Registrations. They cover such things as Barrier Materials such as Durofrax, Key improvements, a cabinet specifically for Film media, electrical combination locks, Alarm systems for Safes and Strongrooms, and as you might expect any number of patents relating to safes, strongrooms, night safes and demountable strong rooms. All this will be a wonderful asset when writing up future articles and also to researchers and documentary makers seeking authentic accuracy.

**Brian Morland, curator of the Heritage Collection of locks and keys, welcomes comments and corrections on historical aspects of locks and keys. Brian can be contacted by email: [brian@emorlands.com](mailto:brian@emorlands.com)**