

THE BARNETT SEWING MACHINE COLLECTION

This collection of sewing machines was accrued by James Nutcombe Barnett, who worked for the University of Reading's Applied Physical Sciences Department in the 1960s and 1970s. His enthusiasm for the history of the sewing machine led him to collect 130 models, some of which he used for demonstration purposes in lectures. When Barnett died in 1981, he bequeathed the sewing machine collection to The MERL. In 2022 - 2023, the collection was the subject of the Barnett project, which aimed to raise awareness of the collection, and also related topics such as rural garments and fast fashion.

The sewing machines cover a range of functions, and date from c. 1850 – 1970.

97/106 – Electric 201k Singer sewing machine, with serial number EK404046, which dates the machine between 1954 – 1956. The machine sits in its wooden case, which also contains a rubber mat and electric cable foot pedal.

81/25 - A Singer 29K71 sewing machine, serial number EN 805310, made in 1958. The 29K class of sewing machine is for shoe and boot repairing and for general stitching on tubular items of leather and canvas. It can be driven by foot or electricity. It was described by Barnett as a modern version of the Bradbury boot repairing machine.

81/26 – Miniature child's sewing machine manufactured in Japan by a company named Nakajima All Mishin Seizosho. Named the 'Lead' sewing machine, it dates to between 1933 – 1941. Like most child's sewing machines of the period, it makes a single thread chain stitch.

81/27 – The 'Ideal' sewing machine, made by Salter's of London c. 1921. It produces a chain stitch, and comes with instructions, a metal container cover, and a clamp to fix the machine to a table. It was marketed as a luxury sewing machine and models were sold in Selfridges.

81/28 – A Moldacot pocket sewing machine, made by the Moldacot Pocket Sewing Machine company in the 1880s. It is stored in the metal container it was sold in, made by Huntley, Boorne and Stevens. The two pocket sewing machines are the smallest in the collection, measuring only eight inches long. They are also rare, as the machines did not sew well, and were only sold for a few years.

81/29 – A Moldacot pocket sewing machine. As above; the only difference being that Barnett believed this machine was manufactured in Germany by a different company contracted by Moldacot.

81/30 - Miniature child's sewing machine made by Bing Werke of Bavaria. It has model number 1-10/9232, and comes with its original cardboard box. The instruction booklet is in the box and appears to feature a number of European languages including German, French, English, Italian, and Spanish. It was probably made in the 1920s.

81/31 - A Singer sewing machine, model number 47W69, serial number W1196921, made in the USA. The machine was intended for industrial use. It is designed to sew leather and the small cylinder bed will go inside tubular articles, so items like binocular cases can be made with it. It was specifically marketed as a machine for stitching gussets in leather articles.

81/33 – A Lewis blind-stitch sewing machine, which produced a lock-stitch that only appeared on one side of the material. It was made by Lewis in the USA.

81/34 – A Lewis blind-stitch machine; as above, but this machine has a visible serial number of 162174A.

81/35 – A two reel sewing machine manufactured by the Two Reel Lock Stitch Sewing Company Ltd. Dating to the early 1900s, this machine experimented with a large shuttle containing a small, second reel of cotton to make bobbin winding unnecessary. It produces a lock-stitch.

81/36 – A miniature child’s sewing machine, complete with clamp and instruction booklet, inside the original cardboard box. Manufactured c. 1922 by Singer, this machine produced a single thread chain stitch.

81/39 – A domestic sewing machine made by the Royal Sewing Machine Company of Birmingham in the 1880s. It has serial number 144394 and is decorated with an image of William Shakespeare. Described by Barnett as a “small lock-stitch machine with a boat shuttle”.

81/41 – A 178-1 Singer sewing machine with serial number AE 973067, dating it to 1938. It is a small industrial machine for tailoring, and would have been sold to laundries for the purpose of sewing on buttons that had come off in the wash.

81/43 – A small, cast iron domestic sewing machine made in Germany by an unknown manufacturer and imported by James G Weir of Soho Street, London. Marketed as the ‘Weir Argus’, it has production/serial number 436. As it has no name stamp, it is possible that it was never sold commercially and was a prototype.

81/45 – A ‘La Norma’ domestic sewing machine, made by an unknown German manufacturer in the 1880s or 1890s. It has serial number '16633(209[?])'.

81/46 – An ‘Empress’ domestic sewing machine, made by the German manufacturer Grimme Natalis in 1877. It was sold in the UK by S. Davis & Company. It has serial number 91910 398 35.

81/47 – An industrial Singer ‘Elasticator’ sewing machine, dating to 1950. It has model number 147-29 and serial number 38467. This machine was used for fixing elastic to swimming trunks and other similar items of clothing.

81/48 – A Singer 119W2 sewing machine, used for stitching hems. It is an industrial machine with serial number W666139.

81/49 – An overlock sewing machine manufactured by the Merrow sewing machine company in either 1950 or 1951. It has model number A-3DW-4 and serial number 96512. Accompanying the machine is a copper oil can and three coloured cotton reels.

81/50 – A Singer 72W12 industrial sewing machine, with serial number W512376. This dates the machine to c. 1926. It would have been mounted on a work bench.

81/51 – A Wheeler & Wilson hem-stitching sewing machine with part number 204774. This is an industrial machine and probably would have been mounted on a work bench. As Singer company details are written on the plate, the machine likely dates to after 1905, when Wheeler & Wilson were acquired by Singer.

81/52 – ‘The Globe’ sewing machine, imported by James G. Weir and manufactured in 1885. Contains a ‘secret drawer which was patented by Weir.

81/55 – A Wilcox & Gibbs domestic sewing machine, probably manufactured in the 1870s. A hand wheel or hand crank was added specifically for the European market, which was made near Telford in the UK.

81/56 – A domestic sewing machine probably made by Frister & Rossmann of Germany, although it bears no marks or inscription. It has serial number 8741584v and is similar in design to the Singer 12k 'New Family'. Described by a specialist as a 'cam action' machine.

81/57 – A double chain stitch domestic sewing machine manufactured by Grover & Baker of Boston, USA. It has serial number 293997, dating it to 1870. It is a later model of the first ever portable sewing machine, and was produced with turned wooden legs.

81/61 – A W. F. Thomas lockstitch sewing machine, manufactured before 1883 (probably in the 1870s). It features hand painted holly leaf decoration.

81/62 – A 'Shakespear' sewing machine manufactured by the Royal Sewing Machine company in Birmingham. It is a shuttle lockstitch machine and was manufactured in the 1870s.

81/63 – An Edward Ward 'Arm and Platform' machine, currently on display in the Town and Country Gallery. It has serial number 123867, dating it to 1880. Despite being a domestic machine, it was also recommended for professional use, particularly for shirt cuff and collar makers. It converts from cylinder bed to flat bed by means of a hinged platform.

81/64 – A domestic Frister & Rossmann sewing machine, which is a clone of the Wilcox & Gibbs chain stitch machine with object number 81/55.

81/65 – A Junker & Ruh SD28 sewing machine. It is a hand sole stitching machine for leather work, specifically marketed to shoe makers and saddlers. Its primary function is to stitch the uppers to the soles of shoes.

81/66 – A Winselmann sewing machine named 'The Barnett'. It is a copy of the Singer 12k 'New Family' machine.

81/67 – A cast iron Wanzer sewing machine. It is a shuttled lockstitch machine with serial number 65630. It was made in Ontario, Canada, probably in the 1870s.

81/68 – A 'Little Wanzer' sewing machine, made by the Wanzer Sewing Machine Company of Ontario, Canada. This domestic shuttle machine produces a lockstitch and was manufactured before 1892.

81/69 – A Jones Hand sewing machine dating to 1879. It was made in the Jones factory in Guidebridge, Manchester and is stamped 'As supplied to HRH The Princess of Wales'.

81/70 – A Howe lockstitch sewing machine from the Howe sewing machine company. The serial number 230693 dates it to 1871. It is stamped with the likeness of Elias Howe, who is widely credited as the father of the modern sewing machine.

81/71 – A Grover & Baker sewing machine with serial number 436096, dating it to 1872. It is a portable model of the company's famous double chain stitch machine. It is also described as a 'turned leg model'.

81/72 – A Jones sewing machine made in Guidebridge, Manchester, which was used by James Barnett in demonstrations. It copies the design of the Howe machine with object number 81/70.

81/73 – A Grover & Baker sewing machine with serial number 131517, dating the machine to 1865. It is an early model of the machines with object numbers 81/59 and 81/71.

81/74 – A W. Taylor sewing machine with an elliptical shuttle and cross belt drive. It has serial number 32578, dating it to c. 1873. Taylor machines were manufactured in Driffield, Yorkshire.

81/76 – A ‘Standard’ sewing machine, made in Hong Kong post 1950. It is a domestic machine with a Class 15 mechanism.

81/77 – A heavy duty Singer 66k domestic sewing machine. It has serial number F6500974, dating it to 1915. It produces a lockstitch and features an oscillating hook.

81/78 – Named ‘The Oxford’, this machine is a clone of the Singer 12k ‘New Family’ machine. It has serial number 995209 and was manufactured in Germany by an unknown maker.

81/79 – A Frister & Rossmann Model E sewing machine, made in Germany. Noted by Barnett as one of the last Frister & Rossmann machines made with a black finish.

81/80 – A model 8 Wheeler & Wilson sewing machine with serial number 487059. Undated, but likely made in the late 19th century as the model 8 was first sold in 1876.

81/82 – A Jones ‘Family CS’ sewing machine and wooden box. Purchased by Barnett from the toy shop E Hill & Sons in Reading, the machine has serial number 385030.

81/83 – Although the manufacturer of this straight shuttle machine is unknown, the most probable candidate is Frister & Rossmann of Berlin. It was sold by agents Leigh & Crawford in England and has serial number 809106.

81/87 – A British-made James Weir chainstitch sewing machine with serial number H3999. Operable by hand or foot, this machine dates to c.1875.

81/89 – A multi-stitch machine made by the Florence Sewing Machine Company in 1869. It has serial number 95795 and performs lockstitch, knotstitch, double lock and double knot. It was named after its city of manufacture in Florence, Massachusetts.

81/90 - A W. F. Thomas sewing machine with serial number 1235. The machine has a cylinder bed for sewing tubular articles and has a slotted wooden table to convert it into a flat bed machine. Dating to 1853, this was one of the earliest sewing machines with this functionality.

81/91 A ‘Defiant’ sewing machine, made by Lehnmann in Germany and sold by Harris in the UK. Made in the late 19th century, this machine was marketed to suffragettes.

81/93 – A 60Q Mero sewing machine with serial number 99736. This is a heavy industrial machine which uses shell edge stitching to produce decorative edging. It was made in Hartford, USA in 1950 or 1951, and sold by Walter O’Brien Ltd in the UK.

81/94 – A lockstitch sewing machine with serial number 61405. This manufacturer of this machine is unknown. It works on the long shuttle principle and has been described as “cam action”.

81/96 – A Howe lockstitch sewing made in New York, USA. It has serial number 1428298 and was manufactured between 1867 and 1886, probably c. 1875. It is stamped with a bronze likeness of Elias Howe.

81/97 - A Singer 'New Family' sewing machine with serial number 3529071 and factory number 638271, dating it to 1879. This is arguably the most influential machine in the history of mechanised

sewing, being Singer's first successful domestic machine. It has an oscillating shuttle and sews a lockstitch.

81/98 – A 63/8 Singer sewing machine, designed for manufacturing umbrellas. This particular machine is left handed and has serial number AC782831, dating it to 1929. Though it is the size of a typical domestic machine, it was only used in industrial environments.

81/99 – A 'Jones Hand Machine' made by J. and T. Wilkinson, a manufacturer and repairer from Wellingboro.

81/101 – An 'Anita B' sewing machine with serial number 103329. It was manufactured by H. Grossman of Dresden and specialises in making straw hats. It uses the Willcox and Gibbs single thread chain-stitch mechanism, but it produces a zig-zag stitch.

81/102 – A domestic lockstitch machine which was probably made in Germany and sold by agents Leigh & Crawford in the UK. It was made in the nineteenth century and was based on the long shuttle principle.

81/103 – A small chainstitch sewing machine, probably a child's sewing machine. It was made in Germany by an unknown manufacturer. The serial number of the machine is 17016 and it is inscribed with an 'M'.

81/104 – Named 'The Challenge', this sewing machine was manufactured by the Imperial Sewing Machine company. It was manufactured under Harris and Judson's patent 20996 and dates to c. 1875.

81/105 - This is a 'B' sewing-machine manufactured for the Atlas Co. in Braunschweig, Germany. It is very similar to, if not a copy of, machine with number 81/102.

81/106 – Named 'The Wellington', this sewing machine was manufactured by Bradbury & Co. of Oldham, England. It has serial number 13396.

81/107 – A Wheeler & Wilson sewing machine with serial number 127735, dating it to 1863. Has a stationary shuttle, the loop of the needle-thread passing under it. This is an early machine, manufactured shortly after the company's invention of the glass presser foot.

81/108 – A Wheeler & Wilson model D-9 sewing machine with serial number 2783021, dating it to 1892.

81/109 – Manufactured by Mundlos & Co of Megdeburg and sold by the Royal Sewing Machine Company, this machine is named the 'Original Victoria'. It is a clone of the Singer model 28 and dates to the 1920s and 1930s.

81/110 – A 'K' sewing machine from G. M. Pfaff, with serial number 701161. Similar to the machine with object number 81/111, but with a reversible feed.

81/111 – A Singer 28K sewing machine with serial number S1684755, dating it to 1907. It is a domestic machine with a vibrating shuttle.

81/112 – A Jones sewing machine with number 89898 located under the throat plate. It has notable similarity in design to Willcox and Gibbs machines.

81/113 – A Type 10A Willcox & Gibbs sewing machine with serial number 180121, dating it to 1871. There is an automatic lubrication pump attached to the machine from 'Bijur Lubricating Corp'.

81/116 – A Singer model 52-15 industrial sewing machine. It has serial number K65293, dating it to 1902. It is a six needle single thread chainstitch machine.

81/117 – A model 201K Singer sewing machine with serial number EB 985505, dating it to 1939. This sewing machine was the top of the range machine produced by Singer for domestic use.

81/118 – A Singer 'Dearborn' machine, known also as the American Blind Stitch Machine. It has model number 9C1 and serial number S10366. It was designed to make a stitch that was invisible on one side.

81/119 – A Singer 23-12 sewing machine with serial number W 148728, dating it to 1916. It is a button hole machine, one of the first made by Singer.

81/120 – An 86-1 Singer sewing machine. It is designed for sewing small articles.

81/121 – A 105-20 Singer twin needle sewing machine with serial number AK 967869, dating it to 1952. It is an industrial machine with an electric motor makes a bottom stitch with its two needles and one looper.

81/122 – A Campbell-Cyclone Lockstitch sewing machine, designed and built by the Campbell-Bosworth Machinery Co. Inc. This leather stitching machine potentially dates to the 1950s or 1960s.

81/123 – A 34K11 Singer sewing machine with serial number ED 197819, dating it to 1941. Officially named a "pillar" machine by Singer, it specialises in lockstitching onto hollow leather articles and concave surfaces.

81/124 – A 7-27 Singer sewing machine with serial number G 3405945, dating it to 1914. This belt powered machine specialises in sewing canvas. It has two needles and shuttles for a wide felled seam.

81/125 – A 35 K1 Singer sewing machine with serial number EW020708, dating it to 1961. It is a double thread chainstitch machine for sewing carpets together.

81/126 – An 11-17 Singer sewing machine with serial number G 3085415, dating it to 1916. This industrial feed-up arm machine is designed for sewing leather. 11-17 machines have the specific function of stitching back strips on leather boots and closing operations on other tubular items.

81/127 – A Bradbury & Co. sewing machine for sewing canvas. Known as the 'Bradbury Boot Repairing Machine', it was the forerunner for the Singer 29K series.

81/128 – A Wheeler & Wilson D-9 sewing machine with serial number 3000370. It is powered by a Schaltenbred and Muller Hydraulic sewing machine motor.

81/129 – A White sewing machine with serial number 1037990. It has a long shuttle mechanism and leather drive belt. It dates to c. 1890.

81/130 – A Wheeler & Wilson sewing machine with serial number 1056692, dating it to 1875. It is an early lockstitch machine. The presser foot has an inset glass plate.

81/133 – A Singer 132K6 canvas stitching machine, used for making heavy articles such as tents and awnings. It has serial number EC804202, dating it to 1940. It features alternating pressers.

81/135 – A Singer 6K11 'zig-zag' machine. It is an industrial sized machine for stitching canvas. It has serial number EK329940, dating it to 1955. These particular machines were mostly used in the manufacture of sails.

81/136 – A 'Fearnought' sewing machine, with a treadle inside a wooden cabinet called a 'Davenport' or 'Devonport'. It was manufactured by Hulse, Pringle and Woodhead of Birmingham. It was not manufactured in large numbers and is the only known Fearnought machine in existence.

81/137 – A Singer 46K52 sewing machine, for seaming fashioned underwear, silk, artificial silk and cashmere hose. It forms a complicated chain stitch specifically for seaming these garments. It has serial number EC 094563, dating it to 1939.

81/138 – An 'Essex miniature' sewing machine, manufactured by either White & Co. or A. G. Mason Co. in the 20th century. It is a lightweight machine often associated with 'switch selling', where a salesman would sell a deliberately shoddy machine and return later to upsell a higher quality model.

81/139 - A Wheeler and Wilson sewing machine model No 1, with treadle and wooden cabinet. This lockstitch machine has serial number 928909, dating it to 1873. The cabinet was high quality for the time, with drawers for accessories.

81/141 – A similar machine to number 81/135, this Singer 6K12 'zig-zag' machine has serial number EK 329941 and dates to 1955. It was suggested for the manufacture of tents, wagon covers and tarpaulins. It could perform over-seaming or straight sewing, and had an independent upper and under feed.

81/145 – A Singer 97-10 sewing machine, the heaviest ever built by the company. Originally designed for heavy horse harnesses, this machine was used at the Martin Baker aircraft factory for making ejection seat harnesses. It specialised in general work in leather up to one inch thick, and for stitching close to double bar buckles. It was powered by a 0.5 HP Singer electric motor. The serial number AG433281 dates it to 1943.

The below sewing machines are held by The MERL but do not form part of the Barnett collection

2011/78/1-6 – A Singer 99k sewing machine with serial number EA837251, dating it to 1936. The machine has a separate power cord and faux skin covered wooden case with handle and detachable lid. The machine belonged to the donor's mother, Marjorie Ellen Bunting, who received it as a gift on her 21st birthday. She used the machine in her job as a seamstress at a hosiery factory in Bulwell, Nottingham.

88/7 – A hand operated Dulcia sewing machine. It has No. 529 and was likely sold in Reading by Fortescue Bros of West Street.

60/133 - A 'Little Wanzer' lock knit sewing machine made by the Wanzer Sewing Machine Company at their premises in Great Portland Street, London. The machine has a marble base and dates to 1867. It was passed down for many generations of the same family, and was in use until 1960. It was used most recently in Parkstone, Dorset.

65/228 - A hand-operated sewing machine manufactured by Willcox & Gibbs of New York, USA. It was acquired from T. & R. G. Grace, corn millers, maltsters and agricultural merchants of Tring, Hertfordshire. The firm was once connected with weaving.