WOLF'S PLUMB BOB NEWS 2012
Issue 09 September 1, 2012

WALLPAPER PLUMB BOBS

Author: Wolf Ruecker www.plumbbobcollectors.info

Dear Fellow Collector,
Dear reader of the PLUMB BOB NEWS,

Please, as always I am in search of new photos, catalogs, articles or personal stories about any aspect of PLUMB BOBS from you. Any help is appreciated.
If you have any information or pictures for these themes, please let me know.
Thank you, looking forward to hearing from you

Wolf

Content

1. INTRODUCTION

Dear Fellow Collector,
we all know that a lot of different professions use plumb bobs for their work. I have a listing with more than 50 different positions. The most common are masons and carpenters. They are well known.

Recently I got a short email:
Hello Mr. Ruecker,
… my query is about wallpaper plumb bobs.
Do you have any information about these in early use, up to about 1750?

mit freundlichem Gruss,

Bob Kelly
Lee, Massachusetts, USA

This was the beginning of a very interesting change of information and ends in this newsletter.

Robert M. Kelly has been working with wallpaper since 1976 as a paperhanger, manager of installation projects for residential and governmental historic buildings, and wallpaper consultant. More about him and his work you can read in: "Historic Paperhanging Technics. A Bibliographic Essay by Robert M. Kelly".[1]
Bob lived and worked two years in Germany.
After I sent him my information about wallpaper plumb bobs I asked him to write me WHY wallpaperers need and use a plumb bob for their work.

Below you find his answer.

2. WHY WALLPAPERERS USE PLUMB BOBS?

Mein lieber Wolfgang,

I would be happy to summarize the importance of the plumb bob in wallpapering.

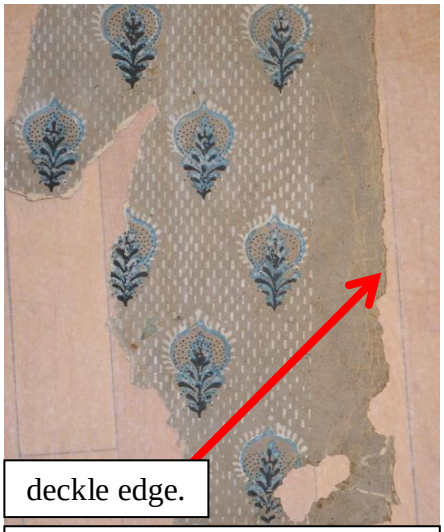
Historically, as you know, the plumb bob was used by many trades. One can readily see how the ability to insure that a timber is truly 90 degrees vertical would be important for those raising a barn or house. For example, to be able to predict how the rain water would run off, or so that one can add additional parts to the structure with confidence that the foundation or supports will bear the load.

It is not so obvious why wallpaper must be hung perfectly vertically. But this is very true, and especially true for the first sheet. I will commence explaining how it was done circa 1770 or so. By then the joined

[1] For download on
http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1986522

roll was in general use throughout Europe. The joined roll (also called in England a "piece" to distinguish it from a strip of paper) consisted of a length from 9 to 12 yards, made up of single sheets pasted one to another.

The paperhanger's first task was to trim one edge of the wallpaper even to the pattern, usually taking about an inch, more or less, from the edge. This could be done for the entire roll, or for just one strip. A strip could be 8, 9 or 10 feet high, as long as the wall itself. Even if there was no pattern, the paperhanger still needed to make this edge fairly even. Ordinarily this was done with shears. This operation was necessary in the first place because the sheets of paper often had a rough and uneven edge. This is often called the "deckle edge" (see photo[2]). One can readily understand why it was necessary to trim this very uneven edge showing in the photo. In this example the paperhanger would need to trim right alongside of the white dots.



courtesy of www.wallpaperscholar.com

Having trimmed the edge, the paperhanger was ready to hang the first piece. However, we know that even buildings plumbed and built by good carpenters do not have perfectly straight windows, doors and corners! They may be close, but they are never perfect. Because of this fact, it is impossible to rely on the straightness of a door or window or corner as a guide to hang the first piece. If a paperhanger would rely on a corner without checking it, the likely result would be that the pattern will run uphill, or downhill, as it proceeds across the wall. In other words, the horizontal pattern would not run true at 180 degrees, but would slide up or down, causing perhaps seasickness in the viewer!

The reliable guide that we need (a perfectly plumb line) can only be achieved by following a line with a weight on it. In other words, to use gravity instead of an existing structure which may or may not be straight. This reliance on gravity, which is always the same, will invariably produce a straight line.

The problem of transferring the line from the string to the wall can be solved in a few ways

1.) by marking the wall with a pencil at many points along the string so that the paper can be hung alongside the dots;
2. by chalking the line, and then snapping it so that a thin line of chalk becomes a guideline for the paper;
3. by having another person hold the line steady, while the first person hangs the pasted paper against the wall, brushing it into place with a soft brush.

The second piece overlaps the first so that the pattern joins up. The paperhanger must only overlap slightly, and if he joins the paper accurately, the strip will be more or less automatically plumb, because he is following both a grid pattern (the design) and a previously plumb 90 degree line (the first sheet).

The paperhanger can usually hang several succeeding strips. This is possible because if the trimming is fairly accurate, it creates a straight guideline in and of itself. Another reason that this is possible is because of the way that the block-printers do their work. These artisans impress colored patterns onto the paper. The template or block that they use for this resembles a large rubber ink stamp. The designs are often geometric, and are almost always square or rectangular. In this way a consistent grid pattern is made on the paper, and by following their registration pins, the block-printers create a straight line of pattern down the length of the "piece". Later, when the selvedge (another name for edge) is taken off by the paperhanger, the straightness of the pattern is now apparent.

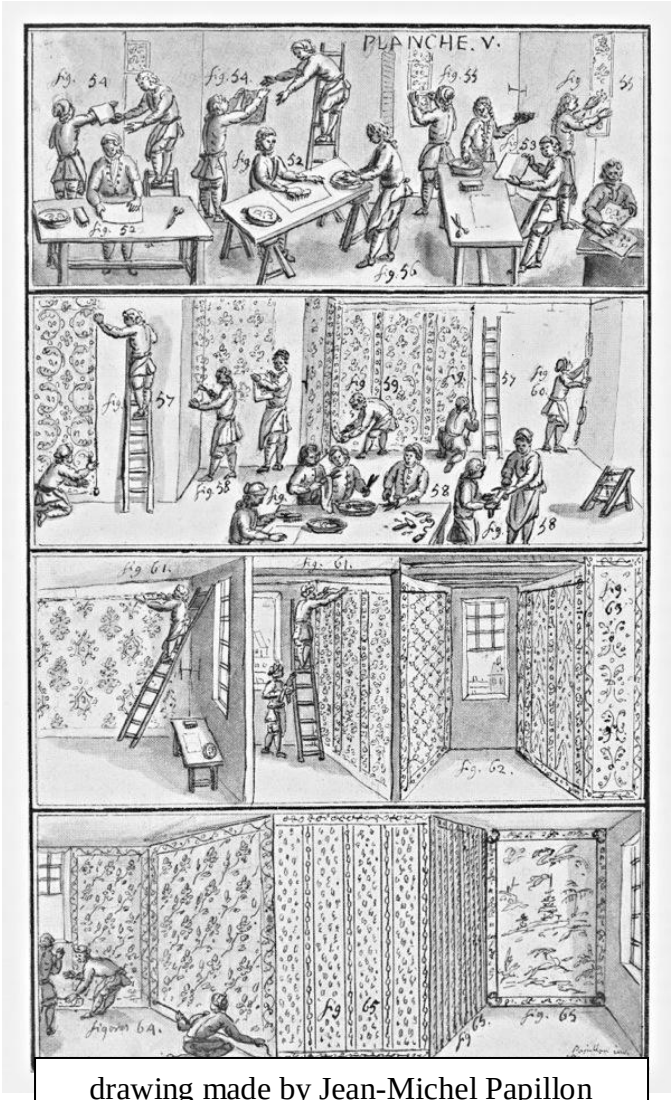
Still, a cautious and skilled paperhanger will check the trueness of his strips often, because it is easy to start getting crooked. And, in any case, when he comes to the corner, he must re-plumb the next sheet. The reason for this is that he needs to wrap the sheet into the corner slightly. As an example, if the corner is 10 inches from the last hung pattern, the next sheet must be cut around 10.25 inches wide so that it will extend slightly beyond the corner. The piece on the new wall must therefore be about 10.75 inches wide (wallpaper is usually about 21 inches wide.) This new sheet must again be plumbed with a plumb bob and a new guideline created, and then the sheet is hung from the guideline back into the corner. The reason, as we have already learned, is that the paperhanger cannot assume that corners are straight. He must hang straight paper, even in crooked rooms.

Wolfgang, I hope this is helpful to you.
Bob

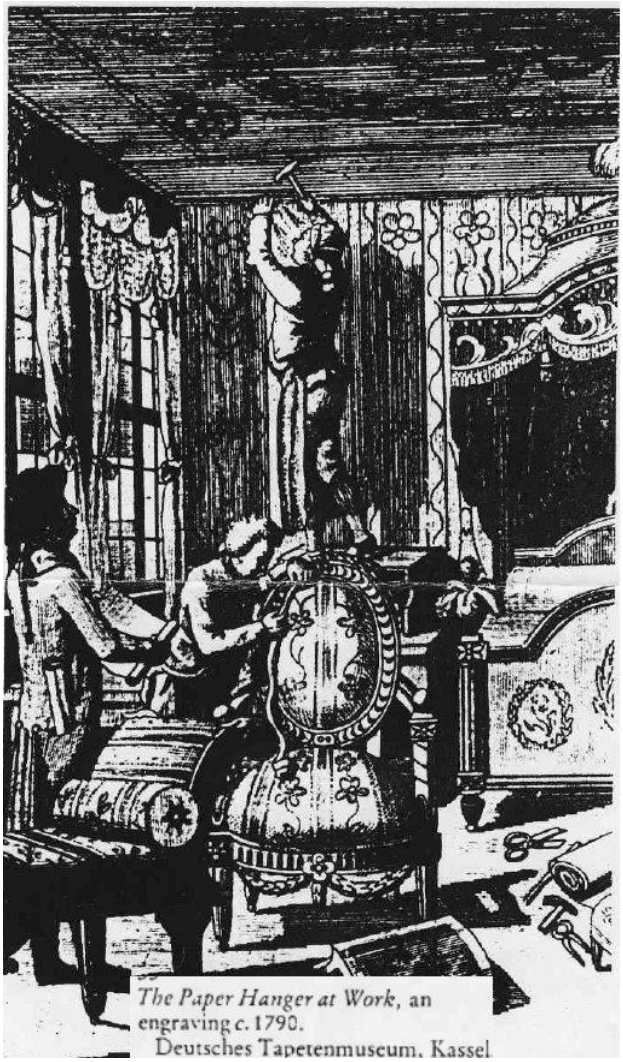
[2]and more pictures of ancient wallpapers you can find on www.wallpaperscholar.com

3. WALLPAPERERS AT WORK

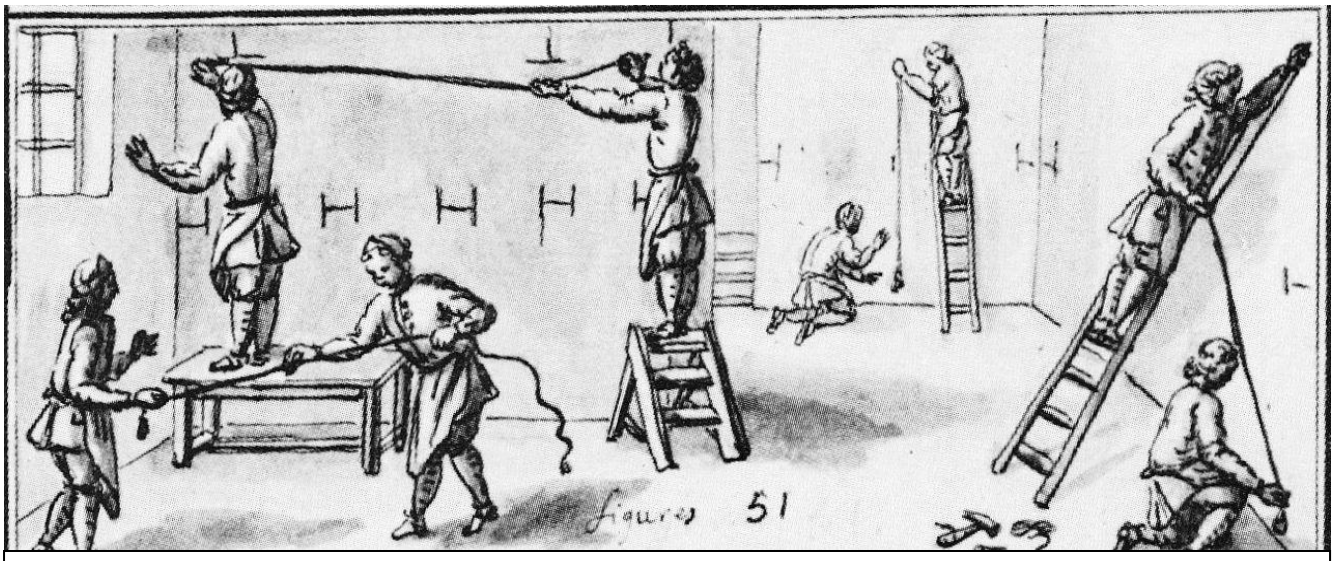
Bob sent me 3 pictures from France and Germany with paperhangers at work:



drawing made by Jean-Michel Papillon



The Paper Hanger at Work, an engraving c. 1790.
Deutsches Tapetenmuseum, Kassel

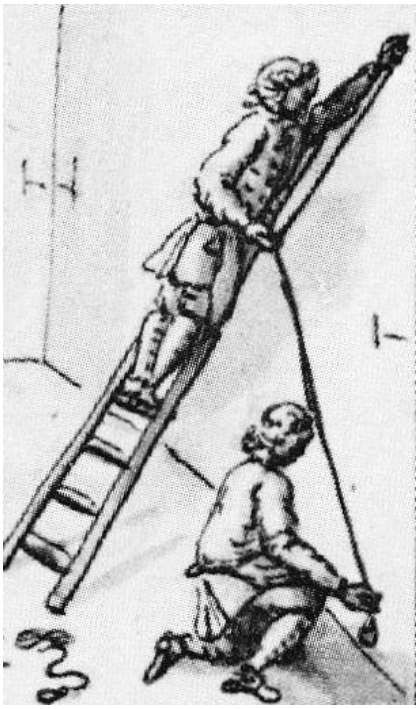


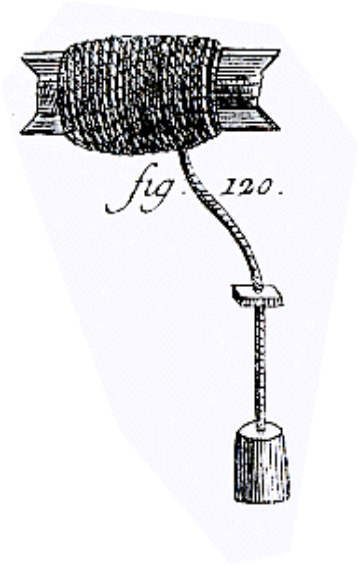
drawing made by Jean-Michel Papillon

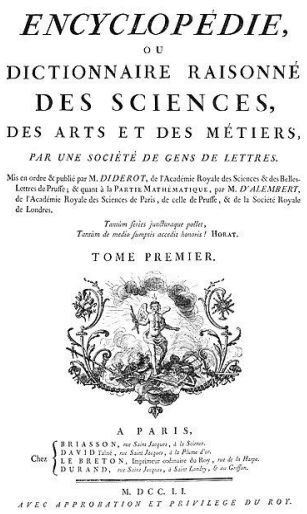
We will discuss the details below.

4. USING THE PLUMB BOB IN FRANCE 18TH CENTURY

The plumb bob shown in the French picture used by the two paperhangers looks like the French plumb bob "fil à plomb" (fig. 120) mentioned in the ENCYCLOPÉDIE OF DIDEROT ET D'ALEMBERT Paris 1751-1772







ENCYCLOPÉDIE,
OU
DICTIONNAIRE RAISONNÉ
DES SCIENCES,
DES ARTS ET DES MÉTIERS,
PAR UNE SOCIÉTÉ DE GENS DE LETTRES.

Mis en ordre & publié par M. DIDEROT, de l'Académie Royale des Sciences & des Belles-Lettres de Prusse; & quant à la PARTIE MATHÉMATIQUE, par M. D'ALEMBERT, de l'Académie Royale des Sciences de Paris, de celle de Prusse, & de la Société Royale de Londres.

Tantùm series juncturaque pollet,
Tantùm de medio sumptis accedit honoris! HORAT.

TOME PREMIER.

A PARIS,
Chez BRIASSON, rue Saint Jacques, à la Science.
DAVID l'aîné, rue Saint Jacques, à la Plume d'or.
LE BRETON, Imprimeur ordinaire du Roi, rue de la Harpe.
DURAND, rue Saint Jacques, à Saint Landry, & au Griffon.

M. DCC. LI.
AVEC APPROBATION ET PRIVILEGE DU ROY.

It also could be used as a chalk line (see the two workers in the figure below).

More about the history of chalk lines from the beginning in China and Japan up to now you can read in my WOLF'S PLUMB BOB NEWS 2008-11 "CHALK LINES, SNAP LINES, SUMITSUBO" on my website on page "DOWLOAD PUBLICATIONS". Direct link to this page: http://www.plumbbobcollectors.info//41328.html

At the other picture we can see very clear the use of the plumb bob by two workers verifying the verticality of the wallpaper (fig. 57 right)

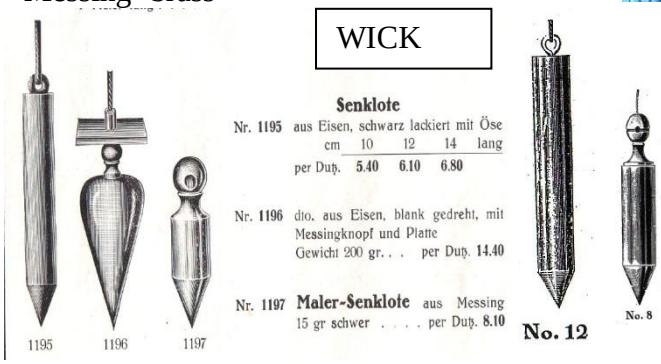
In the figure left we can see the plumb bob lying at the table.

The use as a chalk line (snap line) is shown here:

5. WALLPAPERERS PLUMB BOBS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

The **GERMAN** wallpaperers and wall tile setters used small cylindrical plumb bobs from brass or black painted iron with a loop/eye or with a horizontal hole in the cap as shown below.

Remark: Maler-Senklote means wallpaperers plumb bobs for painters;
Messing=brass



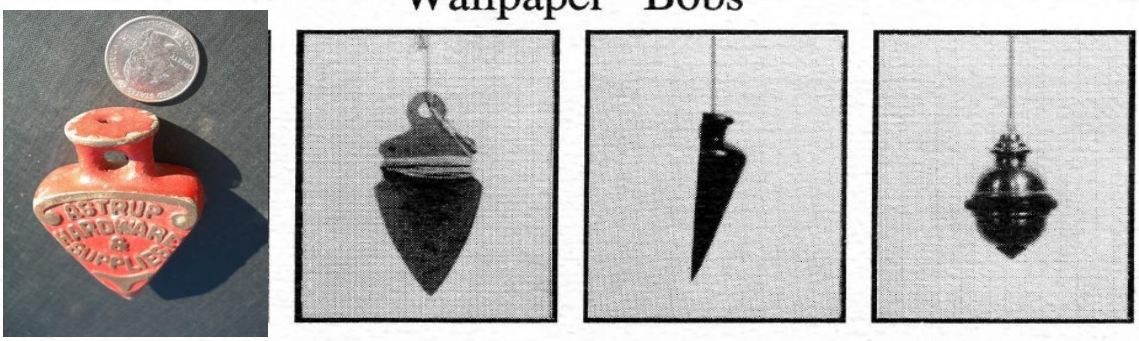
About the very special wooden plumb bobs in the **U.S.A.** I wrote already in my WOLF'S PLUMB BOB NEWS 2012-03 "WOODEN PLUMB BOBS": Wallpapering PLUMB BOBS
In the U.S.A. there are two special bobs for wallpaper hangers or tile setters. One of them is made of a flat iron sheet, so that it lies close to the wall and you can mark the position along the line without offset.

The second plumb bob is made of WOOD, but is shaped like a plumb bob **cut in half.** It is the only wooden plumb bob - that I know - made for workers.
Here, the hole for the cord is positioned so that it still hangs exactly vertical. Purpose is that there is no damage to the tiles or papers by the material (wood), if it strikes to the wall or falls down accidently. Secondly the cord is close to the wall. You can draw an accurate marker along the line.

My friend Bruce Cynar already mentioned it 1991 in his famous "THE PLUMB LINE" on page 11. (see fig. below)
The complete "THE PLUMB LINE continuum" you can download on my website[3]

The Plumb Line PAGE 11

Wallpaper Bobs



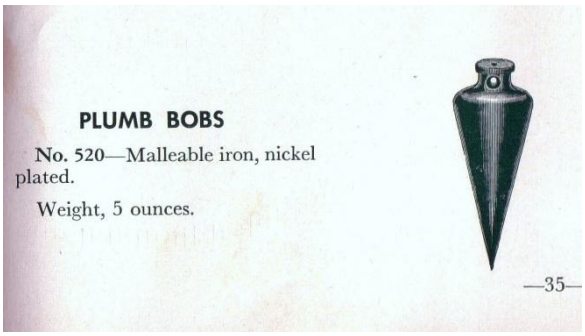
From left to right: An aluminum bob marked ASTRUP HARDWARE & SUPPLIES. A flat steel cutout that looks like an arrow head. One reader wrote that he has a similar one that looks like the silhouette of a Christmas tree. A standard shape cast iron bob that has been cut in half. These three will all lay flat against the wall. The last bob is a plump little round bob with a rubber bumper. Another reader wrote that he had the same round bob, but with a leather bumper. (All from the author's collection.)

[3] www.plumbbobcollectors.info on page THE PLUMB LINE CONTINUUM

A combination tool plumb bob / chalk line was produced (and patented) by RIDGELY; USA. More see my PATENT NEWS 2007-22.
DIRECT LINK to the page "PATENTS OF PLUMB BOBS" is:
http://www.plumbbobcollectors.info//42041.html

Flat wallpaper plumb bob (see fig. above)

Another plumb bob from Ridgely (catalog # 37 Springfield Ohio p 35) and chalk lines from p 36 (see fig. below)



Ridgely was very famous for their paperhanger's tool and their catalogs.

THE RIDGELY TRIMMER CO., Springfield, Ohio, U.S.A.

RIDGELY CATALOGUE 1912 page 15 detail

COMBINATION
Plumb Bob and Chalk Line

No. 522 — Self-chalking chalk line and plumb bob combined—made of steel and brass, highly nickeled and beautifully finished throughout. Cut No. 1 shows it in use. No. 2 shows detail. Line is attached to winder "A," which can be pulled out of bob and pushed into wall. "B" is set screw controlling dogs which hold line anywhere wanted. "C" is reservoir for chalk, which is filled in a second but cannot leak.

Size 3 in. long, 1¼ in. diam., wght. 12 oz. 20 feet of line attached and shipped full of chalk ready for use. Price per doz., ***$20.00.***

Plumb Bobs

No. 520, malleable iron, nickeled, wght. 5 oz. per doz., ***$2.00.*** No. 521—Steel turned lathe and absolutely perfect. Polished and nickeled—the best bob made, wght. 6 oz. per doz., ***$2.40.***

TRIMMER COMPANY

SELF-CHALKING CHALK LINE

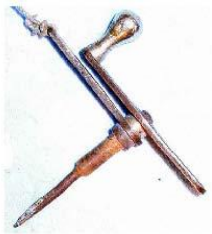
No. 444—Reel holds 50 feet of line, size as per No. 0 under chalk lines, and blue chalk enough to last for years. It can't get out of order, always ready for work, no driving nails in the wall. No helper required; simply stick the little sharp awl attached to the end of the line, as per cut, in the wall, and snap the line.
Three inches in diameter, weight 5 ounces. Money refunded if not satisfactory.

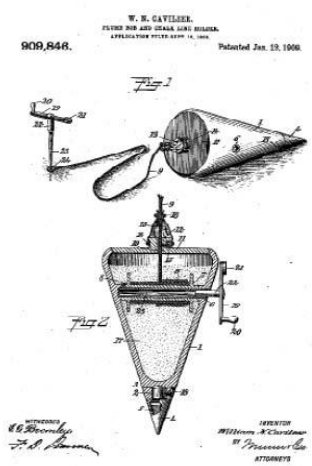
CHALK LINES

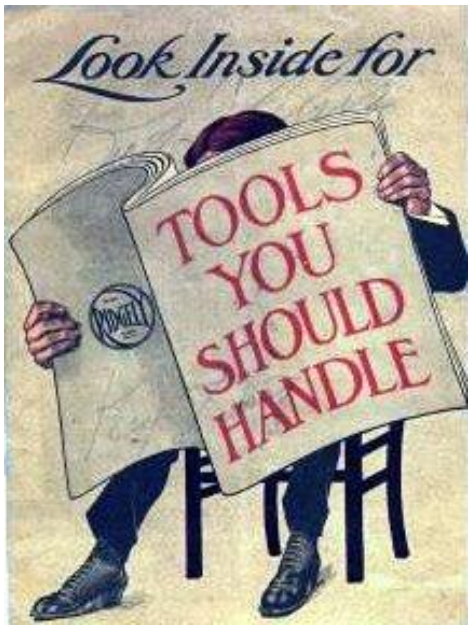
No. 185—Actual Size

No. 185—Chalk Lines. Bleached cotton, solid braided, will not kink or ravel. Put up in 20 foot hanks, 12 hanks to a bundle, in one continuous length, total 240 feet per bundle.
Weight per bundle, 6 ounces.

U.S.A. part 3
RIDGELY Jan. 12,1909 US909846







In my collection I have also a RIDGLEY TRIMMER patented 1885

A complete "tool box" with all the tools (unfortunately not from my collection) ☹

The "ASTRUP" was sold on Ebay for $ 47.00 (fig. left)

Offered on Ebay: Shop project wallpaper plumb bob from wood: (fig. right)

Last but not least from America here comes a patented flat plumb bob for paper hangers already described in my PATENT NEWS 2007-19 **Patent US3,866,329 WEST / Stanley 1975**

STANLEY *produced 1975 in the U.S.A. for a short time (later in ENGLAND) the following flat plumb bob that looks similar to the French ones, but it is more useful (horizontal AND vertical use) and it is patented. On Ebay the* ***US-version*** *was sold for 204$.*
The English version you can get much cheaper. ☺
In the catalogues you find it as STANLEY 47-173.
Use is HORIZONTAL and VERTICAL

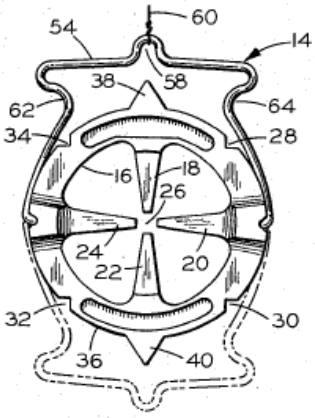


FIG.2

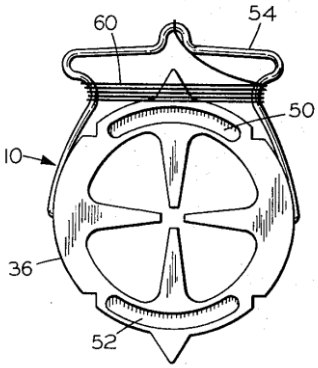


FIG.3

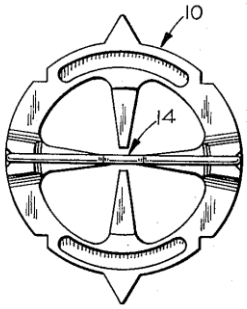


FIG. 7

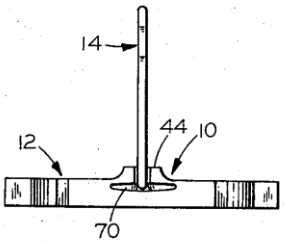
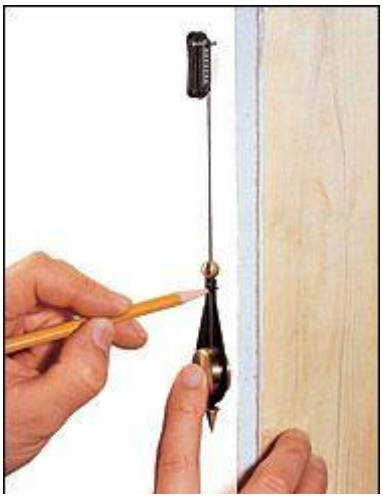


FIG. 8

Also designed for the use by wallpaperers is the patented plumb bob from LEE VALLEY / VERITAS IN **CANADA** described in my PATENT NEWS 2007-39:
Design patent US 393,219 1989 and patent US 5,974,676 1999 (figures. below)



U.S. Patent Nov. 2, 1999 Sheet 1 of 2 5,974,676

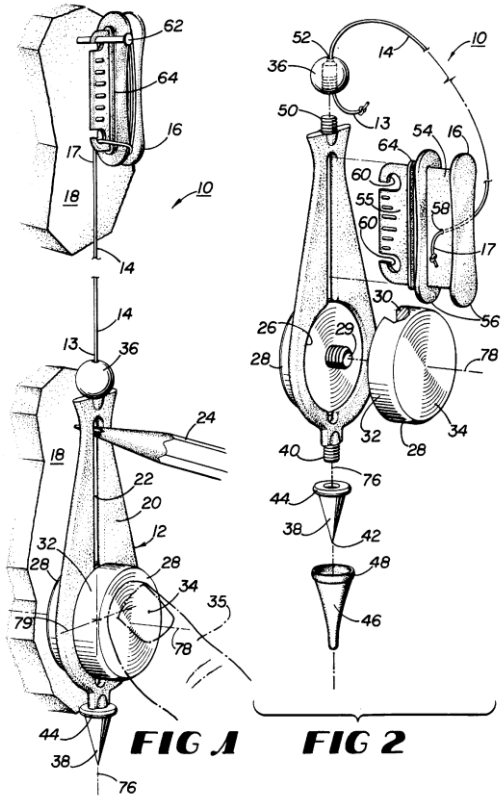


FIG 1 FIG 2

[57] **ABSTRACT**

A plumb bob assembly including a plumb bob for use adjacent to a wall or other vertical surface, a cord, cord spool attachable to the plumb bob for storage and a tip cover. A pencil may be inserted through a vertical slot in the plumb bob body to mark the position of the plumb bob relative to an adjacent wall. The plumb bob has a relatively flat, tear-drop shaped plastic body, to which two disk-shaped brass weights, a brass cord attachment ball and a conical brass tip are attached. A plastic spool has a cord receiving region defined by two walls and a plate that protrudes beyond one of the walls. Opposed hooks on the plate provide a means for tying-off the cord and hanging the plumb bob assembly from a nail during use. A collar on the plate locks the spool on the plumb bob during storage by inserting the plate into the slot in the plumb bob body.

15 Claims, 2 Drawing Sheets

US00D393219S

United States Patent [19]
Beall et al.

[11] **Patent Number: Des. 393,219**
[45] **Date of Patent: **Apr. 7, 1998**

[54] **PLUMB BOB**

[75] Inventors: **Jerrold R. Beall**, Newark, Ohio; **Michael S. McGuire**, Ottawa, Canada

[73] Assignee: **Lee Valley Tools Ltd.**, Ontario, Canada

[**] Term: **14 Years**

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

689069 9/1930 France .
268892 1/1938 Switzerland .

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Photograph of plumb bobs from The 1994 American Woodworker Calendar. ©1993.

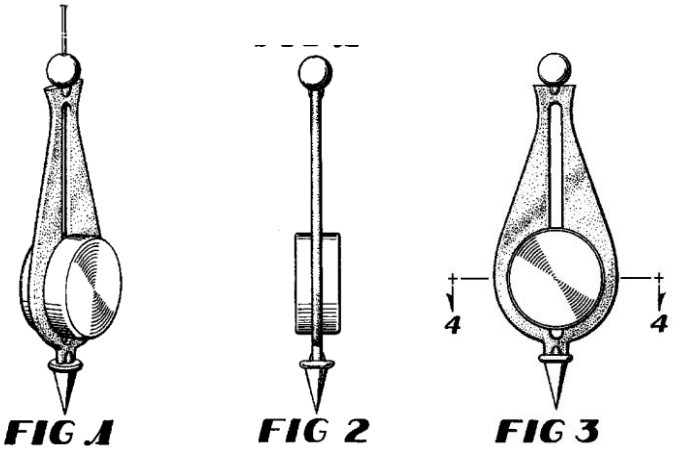


FIG 1 FIG 2 FIG 3

In **ENGLAND** I found a special plumb bob sold by PLASPLUGS

Please let me know when you have more samples.

6. SOMETHING TO SMILE ABOUT

Who knows about using the plumb bob in this crooked house in Zoppot; Poland?

7. REMARKS

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 publications on the website www.plumbbobcollectors.info

Remarks and contact by email: plumbbobwolf@t-online.de

Do we meet us on the