

# BRITISH BUTTERSCOTCH BAKELITE

## Part 2—continued from the previous issue

*Jocelyn Howells*



A few of these BBBs are sew-throughs, and I even found one self-shanked example. Some of the backs show straight-across saw marks. The backs are always flat or nearly flat, and the book speaks to this also. It says that the hardened piece, after removing from the mold, must be ground level at the bottom, which would be the back of the button. I believe

this would account for what I called "saw" marks we see on some of these buttons -- not all. I assume that is because some of them were flat enough right out of the molds and didn't need grinding. Again I'm making an assumption, but so far my previous assumptions have proven to be correct.

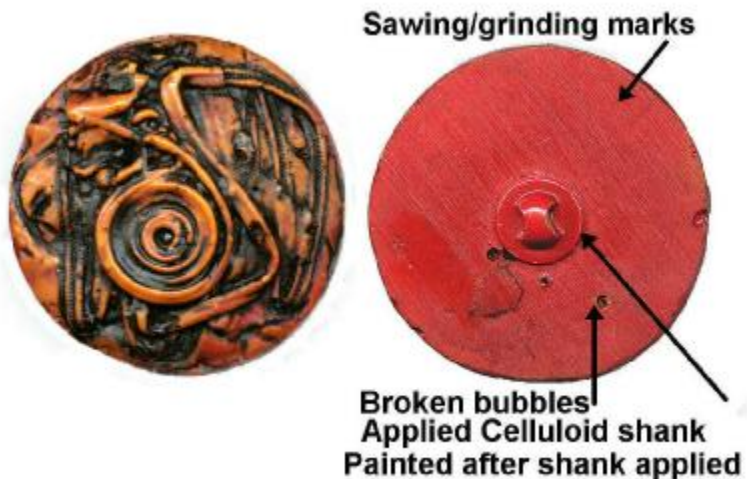


Many BBBs have a single deep vertical hole near the shank. Up till now I hadn't been able to figure out why this hole is there, but wondered if it had something to do with removing the button from the mold. The book tells about the molding process and offers a clue why we see these holes in some of these buttons. It has to do with the register-holes that are punched in the plaster supports, which leave prongs in one half of the mold. While I don't pretend to under-



stand the molding process, I am pretty sure this pertains to the existence of the deep holes we see in the backs of some BBBs.

I've found quite a few of these from vintage collections on cards of plas-





ter or wood compositions of the ANN and GAP types. Some of them have a similar look and could be mistaken for those materials at first glance. And some of these buttons are truly outstanding in design and beauty and great subject matter, which any button collector would be proud to add to their collection.



We now know that these buttons could have been made only since 1946. I am surmising that they continued to be made into the 1960s, approximately, but that still remains to be proven with additional documentation.

If using these in Bakelite competition, read the awards carefully to make sure what type of buttons are called for. Some Bakelite awards may want just the Catalin types machined/carved from cast rod or sheet stock. But if not excluded, these BBBs can definitely add to the variety of Bakelite buttons that can be represented in an award, along with the darker early molded powder types, as well. And they could be a counter on a Bakelite tray, such as a metallized example or unusual subject matter not otherwise available to Bakelite collectors. [*American collectors often enter competitions - Ed.*]

Yes, this information is cutting edge, and I think that not a lot of collectors are tuned into them yet. I did picture a few and tell about them in my book "Plastic Buttons: How to Identify Using All Six Senses", but it still takes time for all that information to register and sift down to all collectors. But now you know -- and can start looking for them and appreciating them for what they are. So, how many metallized Bakelite buttons do you think you already have in your collection but just



didn't know what they were? I bet there are a few - happy hunting!



PAINTED/PEARLIZED



NOTE SAW/GRINDING MARKS, VERTICAL HOLE & BUBBLE

After my original presentation at The National Button Society of America in 2004, the word started getting out, and more of you are seeking,



recognizing and loving these buttons. Some of these buttons might fall into the category of "ugly" buttons in the eye of some beholders. But definitely not to me and to others who have discovered their charm -- they do

have a way of growing on you -- and they really are Bakelite!



To recap, the characteristics of British Butterscotch Bakelites are:  
Straight-line saw marks across the back.

Backs flat or nearly flat.

Inserted metal loop shank OR an applied shank of various types, whatever the maker had available.

Sometimes a deep vertical hole near the shank that appears to be drilled, which is related to the molding process.

Bubbles may have been created if the hardening accelerator was added too briskly to the phenolic resin liquid prior to casting. Broken

air bubbles may show on the exterior, either front or back.

Detailed molds, sometimes in high relief, created castings of virtually any subject or shape, but openwork is rare.

Metalized finish may resemble copper, brass, bronze, silver, pewter, etc.



The ones that are not metalized are normally finished with paint or a glaze, which also tended to wear off the high spots. Just a few were left the unfinished natural butterscotch color, which can vary from light to dark shades.

The hot needle test produces very little reaction, other than a slight burn mark at the test site if the needle is left in contact a sufficiently long time. There is no typical formaldehyde odor, as these are not hardened in formaldehyde as other cast phenolics are. In fact, there is very little, if any, odor of any kind when hot needle testing BBBs.

An occasional example may be found in an off-white color due to a higher quantity of hydro-





chloric acid added to hasten hardening. However these hot-needle test the same as the butterscotch colored ones and are also phenolic.

Many of these are "funky and chunky", and some would even say ugly.

These buttons date from 1946 to circa 1960s, possibly later, and apparently were made primarily in Great Britain. So if you can determine origin and age of your button, that would greatly aid in pointing to the possibility that you have British Butterscotch Bakelite.



This article is dedicated to all the wonderful British button dealers who helped me build my collection and add to my knowledge of these amazing buttons. In particular, to Margaret Blain who gave me the book, and to the memories of the late Dorothy Speculo and Joan Nathan, who are greatly missed.

(This article includes information that I presented originally at the NBS 2004 Convention, with many updates. I am very excited to have learned more about these buttons and pleased to share it with the British Button Society. All I ask is that anyone with additional information about these buttons please share it with me, to add to our collective body of knowledge. Did you know of any person or business who made these buttons? Or sold them? I welcome any information you can add to this research. Likewise, I wouldn't be averse to the opportunity to acquire more of these buttons to add to my study and collection, either. ☺



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