

NUREMBERG / BAVARIA / GERMANY

Peter Henlein

Peter Henlein (also spelled Henle or Hele)^[1] (1485 - August 1542), a locksmith and clockmaker of Nuremberg, Germany, is often considered the inventor of the watch.^{[2][3]} He was one of the first craftsmen to make small ornamental *Taschenuhren*, portable clocks which were often worn as pendants or attached to clothing,^[4] regarded as the first watches. Many sources also erroneously credit him as the inventor of the mainspring.



Monument to Henlein by Max Meißner, in Hefnersplatz, Nuremberg

Small wearable clocks

He became known as a maker of small portable ornamental spring-powered brass clocks, very rare and expensive,^[2] which were fashionable among the nobility of the time. These were sometimes worn as pendants or attached to clothing,^[9] and so may be considered the first watches, although at over 3 inches long^[4] they were bigger than the first true pocketwatches which appeared about a century later, and were not able to fit in pockets.

He is mentioned in the city's records as the supplier of small spring-driven clocks, which were given as gifts to important people.^[2] He was supposedly the first craftsman to build clockworks into "Bisamköpfe", small containers fashioned from precious metals for fragrances or disinfectants.^[2] For example a Nuremberg paper records that in 1524 he was paid 15 florins for a gilt musk-ball watch.^[10] He also built a tower clock for Lichtenau castle in 1541, and was known as a maker of scientific instruments.

This . . . Henlein was very nearly the first of those who invented how to put small clocks into little boxes.