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Introduction to Locksmithing

by Bidy Walcot

Locks come in all shapes and sizes, from the most basic of padlocks to electronic locks that use technology such as retinal scanning, but even a minimal lock can defeat an intruder. Indeed, a good lock – such as the standard mortice lock installed on the external doors of many homes – is a requirement for home contents insurance. Given that we are all keen to safeguard our possessions, it's no wonder that locksmiths have always been in demand.

A locksmith is skilled in the art of making (and breaking) locks, and will provide locks and keys for everything from your doors and windows to your garden shed and your car. Many are also general security specialists.

Locksmiths will replace lost keys or make duplicates of existing ones. They will also replace locks that have been worn or damaged. A locksmith will fit high quality locks to meet insurance requirements, and door bolts to give you extra locking points, hinge bolts to protect the hinge side of your door, and window bolts to give your windows extra strength.

Locksmiths will be able to repair lock mechanisms that have suffered wear and tear over time, and can even renovate old locks that cannot be removed owing to heritage rules. If you've experienced a burglary, locksmiths can often repair the damage, fixing locks (or fitting new ones) and even supplying items such as split doors and damaged frames. If you lock yourself out, many locksmiths provide an emergency service. A locksmith should be able to break the lock on your door without causing any damage to the door itself, and will then fit a replacement lock for you – very handy when the alternative could mean an undignified entry into your property through a window.

And locksmiths don't just stop at doors and windows. How about padlocks for the shed, or safes for storing valuables? Some locksmiths are also general security specialists, who can provide advice on home security and insurance, and will install security measures such as alarm systems, bars and grilles, CCTV, and secure access systems for communal doors in multi-occupancy buildings.

There are more than 2,000 qualified locksmiths currently working in the UK, so how do you go about finding the right one? First, check a locksmith is licensed by the Master Locksmiths' Association, or MLA. Recognised by the Home Office, the MLA sets and promotes standards of conduct, practice and materials within the trade. To obtain a licence from the MLA, applicant locksmiths and locksmithing companies must undergo comprehensive inspection procedures. Look out for the logo – two crossed keys on a yellow background – indicating that an individual or company is MLA approved.



Locksmiths can be based in a shop, or a vehicle, and can work alone or as part of a larger organization. Many specialize in one aspect of the trade as, say, master key system specialists or safe technicians. If there's a specific job you want doing, you might be able to find a locksmith who is an expert in that field, and locksmiths are frequently certified in specific skill areas or to a certain level of skill within the trade. Always consider a locksmith's level of proficiency and whether or not he or she has the skill to do the right job for you. If you want to install new locks or a security system, a locksmith should provide you with good, friendly advice as to what product would most suit you and your property.

Obviously, the cost depends on what you want. Even so, there are some useful pointers to bear in mind. Always ask for a quote, and make sure that any estimates you are given are provided by fully qualified locksmiths. Comparing quotes from different individuals and companies will give you an idea of who could give you the best value for money. When buying products such as locks or alarm systems, seek advice before you buy as to which product might suit you best, check to see which represents the best value, and compare prices between locksmiths and locksmithing companies to get the best deal. And remember, personal recommendations are often a good way to discover whether or not a locksmithing service represents value for money.

