

De La Rue Living Timeline

1 Thomas de la Rue: Early Days

Our company was founded over 200 years ago, and since then we have grown, diversified, and transformed – both ourselves and the world. Our heritage is inextricably a part of the company we are today, and in order to look forward with integrity, we must understand where we are from.

Join the De La Rue Living Timeline blog for an exploration of the places, products, and people who have made us the remarkable company that we are today!



Thomas as a young man

De La Rue is a British company, but the name, as you might have guessed, has its roots across the channel. In seventeenth century France, religious intolerance forced many protestant families (known as Huguenots), to flee abroad. One such family was the de la Rues, who settled on the Island of Guernsey.

However, our history really starts on 24th March, 1793, the date that Thomas de la Rue was born. His family had now lived in Guernsey for generations, but he was the member who would give the name a legacy.

Thomas was the seventh child of Eleazar and Rachel de la Rue, who lived in a small farmhouse in the rural parish of La Forêt. He had an unremarkable early childhood, sharing two bedrooms with his growing family, until his mother moved them to Guernsey's only town, St Peter Port.

It was here that Thomas really began his journey. He was apprenticed at just nine years old to a master printer - Joseph Antoine Chevalier – who printed *Gazette de l'Île de Guernsey*. Thomas signed up to join him for seven years, and for the first two he was paid absolutely nothing!

At the end of his apprenticeship, Thomas immediately started looking for somewhere else to use his skills. There were only three newspapers in St Peter Port, so Thomas approached a wealthy immigrant, Tom Greenslade, to join him in establishing a new paper. In September 1812, the first issue of *Le Publiciste* was published.

This partnership was not to last. After just three months, Thomas and Greenslade fell out, and Thomas circulated an angry note to the public explaining his withdrawal from the paper.

However, the end of his collaboration with Greenslade marked the creation of Thomas's own newspaper, *Le Miroir Politique*. This was launched on 6th February 1813, the date we now celebrate as De La Rue's foundation. Aged just 19, Thomas de la Rue had founded his own business!

Le Miroir Politique, against contemporary predictions that four newspapers were too many, grew steadily. In just two months, Thomas had to run an advertisement asking for help. He showed less interest in the content of the paper than the quality of it – he soon announced that the *Miroir* would be printed on paper 'd'un qualité

superieur' (of a superior quality).



Front Page of the Opening Edition of Le Miroir Politique



I have made engagements to the public and Ishall fulfil them, for I am not one of those who say : "It matters not, my fortune is made !"

R.733073 as powerful — is impertiaent to the Reader, force me to discontinue partnership with Mr. Greenslade : all common interest ceases between us from this day; but the firm contracts we made to the public are not less binding in my eyes.

After having registered for a whole year, the names of a great many of the most respectable persons in this Island; it would be a wast of respect and delicacy -----if every possible effort was not made to fulfil the terms.

It is then, with the intention of discharging my part of this debt, that I think it proper to inform the public that the paper which has been honoured by so flattering a reception, will only change its place. — The Publiciste retains the same name, the same Editor, and nothing will be wanting to it, if honoured by the same subscribers. In order that the public might not suffer in any respect from a dissolution (which Mr. Greenslade himself provoked) I would have himed a press and all the requisites; until that which I have ordered from England should arrive; but it was impossible !

should arrive; but it was impossible! The hopes of succeeding in my anxious desires to satisfy the public without any delay; have prevented my issuing this notice scores: I shall now set off for London from whence I shall not return without a compleat set of types far superior to the others; it shall be the same with the paper.

I shall hasten the arrangements, so as to be able to continue my Journal from the 6th of February next; in the mean time, those who are willing to continue me their favors, are informed that Books will be open for subscriptions every day, at Miss Vauld's Library; at Mr. Marie's, in the Pollet; at Mr. Patourely, in Smith-street; and at the Proprietor's, in Fountian-street. The paper will be left as formerly at the different houses in the town. I take this occasion to roturn my cordial thanks to the public for the very liberal support which my feeble

I take this occasion to return my cordial thanks to the public for the very liberal support which my feelile florts have received ; to deserve the continuance of which, unither troubles nor expense, shall be spared on the pret Of its very humble and

very obedient Servant, DE LA RUE.

Guernsey, Dec. 22, 1812.

Thomas's note to the public, addressing his anger at Greenslade and his withdrawal from *Le Publiciste*

In 1814, Thomas travelled to a small village in Devonshire, Bishop's Nympton. There he got married to Jane Warren, a woman four years his senior. He had been introduced to Jane by Greenslade, and his brother Paul de la Rue had already married Jane's sister!

After marrying Jane, Thomas only remained in Guernsey a few more years. Reports vary as to why he emigrated – from a lack of opportunities on the island after the Napoleonic wars, to escaping the fate of having his parents move in with him! For whatever reason, Thomas, Jane, and their two infant children moved to England, eventually settling in London.

De La Rue, T.

40 Crown St.

Finsbury Square

Straw hat manufacturer

This was the *London Street Directory* entry for Thomas's first business in England. While it may seem a bizarre turn for the printer to become a hatmaker, straw hats were very much in vogue at the time. Thomas was nothing if not business-minded. He retained, however, a sharp eye for both innovation, and his paper and print roots. He experimented with Mackintosh's patent to waterproof his hats, and considered how straw could be used to improve paper. He even made paper hats – about which the *Illustrated Family Magazine* wrote:

'Possessing a boundless buoyancy of temperament, and with inexhaustible inventive faculties, he always alighted on some fresh novelty...driven from straw, he fell upon the idea of making bonnets of embossed paper. This was a great hit...'

He explored the creation of colour, writing "the best white I have produced yet" while experimenting with talc. He also worked on book-binding, making 'leather covers embossed in elaborate and beautiful patterns by means of fly presses'.

At long last, Thomas moved into stationery properly, setting up shop in Finsbury with two partners as 'Cardmakers, Hot Pressers and Enamellers,' cementing his continuous interest in printing.

In 1829, he produced a New Testament, one which has been described as a 'true typographical wonder.' The pages were embossed in pure gold powder, the lettering in gold, printed on both sides of the page. The paper is beautifully enamelled, and was described in 1839 as 'porcelain paper' which was 'at once chaste and elegant, and as reflective and clear as a mirror.'¹

While the New Testament copies which he gifted put Thomas onto the list of luxury manufacturers, only one copy was sold! The enamelling process was more famously used to create a clear surface on playing cards, which were to become the real product which put De La Rue on the map...

More to Follow!

¹ For the rest of this colourful description, see p916 of C. H. Temperley's A Dictionary of Printers and Printing <u>https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=7CtdNOa_30C&pg=RA1-</u> <u>PA916&dq=thomas+de+la+rue+new+testament++chaste+and+elegant&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwig-</u> pWS8Y3UAhVpJcAKHVHeDawQ6AEILDAC#v=onepage&g&f=false