

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!

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).

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

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.

This was the *London St*

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 hat-maker, 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* <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=7CtdNOa-30C&pg=RA1-PA916&dq=thomas+de+la+rue+new+testament++chaste+and+elegant&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwig-pWS8Y3UAhVpJcAKHVHeDawQ6AEILDAC#v=onepage&q&f=false>