

Thomas Crapper Day

27th January 2020

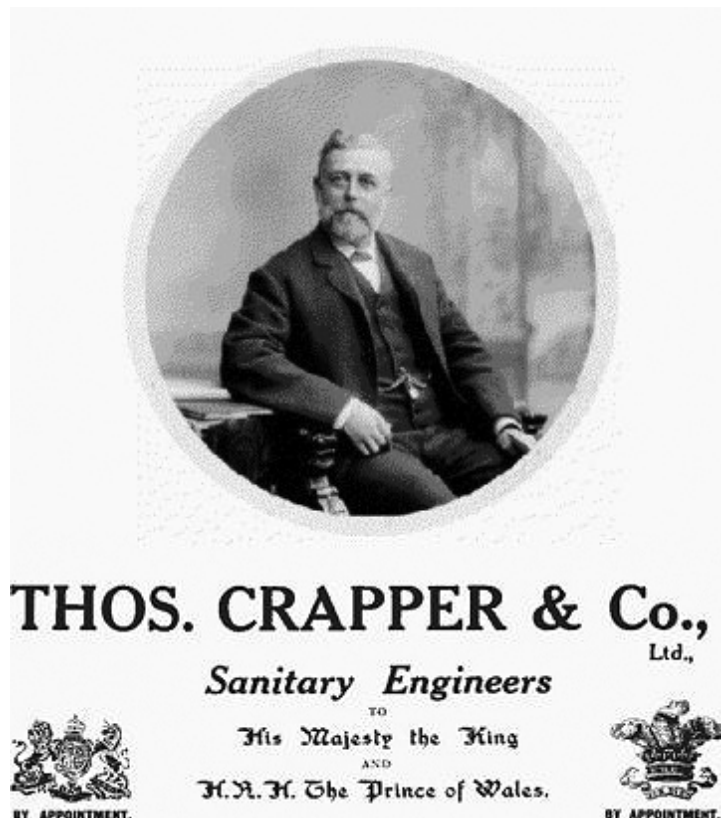
By John Carnaby

One of the most well known names in sanitary history worldwide is without doubt Thomas Crapper, the name always make people smile. So much has been written about him including numerous myths, from whether he actually existed to the false presumption that he invented and produced the first wash down water closet.

This brief article of his life is written at this present time, as this January 27th 2020, is the 110th year of his death in 1910.

Thomas was born in 1836 the small village of Thorne, in Yorkshire and was brought up in the Waterside area at Thorne Quay. His Father, Charles, was a steamboat Captain and ran a regular Steam Packet (paddle steamer) service along the River Don from Waterside to Hull. In 1840s, as Thomas grew up, he lived there with his Mother Sarah and brothers Robert a seaman and James a waterman along with his younger brothers.

Who would have thought Thomas Crapper would later hold four Royal Warrants and the Company would exist in the Plumbing Industry through six reigns for the next 160 years.



Sometime between 1851 and 1860, Thomas made his way down from Thorne to London and during this period was trained to become a qualified plumber by his older Brother George Green Crapper who had established himself earlier in Robert Street, Chelsea.

On 26th July 1860, Thomas married Maria Green at Trinity Church in Chelsea; they were both 23 years of age. Maria was a cousin of Thomas and also a childhood sweetheart who in her young days attended a private residential school for girls in Norfolk. They set up home at 3 Marlborough Cottages, College Street, Chelsea.

By 1866 Thomas had premises called Marlborough Works at 50, 52 and 54 Marlborough Road (now Draycott Avenue) Chelsea and also the early 1870's, Thomas was trading as Thomas Crapper and Company in Robert Street as a Plumber and Brass founder, employing 12 men and 12 boys and living with his family in Middleton Road, Chelsea.

As the business grew Thomas then took on a business partner, a Mr Robert Marr Wharam. Robert was the son of Joseph Wharam a very close friend of Thomas; they grew up together in Yorkshire. Robert with his background as a commercial clerk came into the Company to look after it's business and financial affairs.

By the 1880's, Crapper & Co.'s reputation was such that they were invited to supply the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) at Sandringham, Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace and Westminster Abbey with sanitary ware and services. They remained by Royal Appointment to Edward when he became King and was also warranted by George V, as Prince of Wales and once again as King.



In 1904, at the age of 68, Thomas decided to retire and passed the firm on to both his nephew George Crapper, a Plumber and his business partner Robert Marr Wharam.

In 1905 the Company traded as, Brass Founders and Engineers; Manufacturers of Sanitary Appliances, Heating Apparatus, Electrical, Hydraulic, Steam and Gas fittings; and Lead, Zinc, Glass, Colour, and Varnish Merchants.

In 1907, Robert Marr Wharam and George Crapper opened their flagship show rooms at 120 King's Road, Chelsea, a very grand address opposite Royal Avenue and near Sloane Square. They were to remain there until 1966.

On 27th January 1910, Thomas Crapper died aged 73. Thomas and his wife Maria had lived at 12 Thornsett Road, Anerley London SE20, for the last thirteen years of his life and was buried in the nearby Beckenham Crematorium and Cemetery.

Later the Marlborough Works were sold and all the Company's operations were based at King's Road and by the late 1950s run by Robert Marr Wharam's son, Robert G. Wharam.

On Robert G. Wharam's retirement in 1966, he sold the firm to John Bolding & Sons nearby rivals, who very soon closed the showroom at 120 Kings Road, sold off the property, and moved Thomas Crapper & Company to their own premises in Davies Street, just off Oxford Street (this building still remains). Then in 1969 John Bolding went into liquidation with all their assets being sold, including Thomas Crapper & Co. Ltd.



Marlborough Works, Chelsea, showing "By Royal Appointment" sign above the building

The Company then lay dormant for nearly 30 years.....until in 1998 the Company and it's name, was again revived by Simon Kirby.

Simon continued manufacturing sanitary fittings in Stratford upon Avon to the same exacting standard as Thomas did all those years ago, then after some 18 years in business decided to sell it on in 2016 and retire.

Thomas Crapper & Co is still going strong and is now based in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire.