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# The De La Rue Story



THOMAS DE LA RUE  
1793-1866

A Display given to  
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by  
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# THE DE LA RUE STORY

The origins of the De La Rue family can be traced to the parish of La Foret on the island of Guernsey. Thomas De La Rue's father, Eleazer, and his ancestors, were smallholders on a 15 acre farm. He and his wife, Rachel, had eleven children, of which Thomas was the seventh, and it is doubtful whether their modest farmhouse provided much in the way of comforts for the thirteen De La Rues!

When Thomas De La Rue was born in 1793, his parents could have had little idea that he was to become one of Guernsey's most famous sons, a man who would make the family name renowned worldwide and would so elevate him socially that he was to become on speaking terms with Royalty and the aristocracy.

At nine years old, in 1802, Thomas was apprenticed to a local printer for two years, after which he met a Devonshire man, Tom Greenslade, and they set up a small weekly newspaper. This association did not last long and, in 1811, Thomas formed his own newspaper with unknown financial backing. This paper, "Miroir Politique" enabled Thomas to make a reputation as a fine printer and to save sufficient money for him to travel to Devonshire to claim his bride, a girl called Jane Warren, to whom he was originally introduced by Tom Greenslade.

Thomas returned to Guernsey with his bride and a year after their marriage their first child was born, Warren, in 1815. That year Thomas handed over his newspaper to his brother-in-law and moved his family to Devon and then decided to try to make his fortune in London.

London quickly demonstrated to Thomas that starting a newspaper was a very different proposition to what he had been used to in Guernsey, so he decided to become a straw hat maker. He had been familiar with straw hats in Guernsey but quickly extended this to a waterproof variety and then to paper bonnets. This work with paper led him to produce playing cards and to develop a stationery side. In 1830 he expanded the business by taking on two partners, this action allowed Thomas to concentrate on printing and stationery.

In 1829 Thomas De La Rue produced twenty-five copies of the New Testament printed in "pure gold powder" at £15 a copy. Only one copy was sold, to Lord Spencer for his library at Althorp, and one was given to King William VI on the occasion of his accession. The venture, although a financial disaster, established the De La Rue name with excellence and the highest quality.

By 1831 Thomas had moved strongly into production of glazed and coloured playing cards, a very successful venture. In 1833 the business moved to 110 Bunhill Row where it was to be the headquarters of the Company for over a century. The end of the decade saw a marked improvement in the Company. Young Warren had joined the business as had a wealthy chemist, Charles Button, who invested sufficiently in the business to give it a sound financial base. Thomas, Warren and Charles became the new partnership.

At about the same time, Warren became friendly with Edwin Hill who had a brother in the Civil Service, Rowland, whose interest was Post Office reform. From this friendship, Warren entered the production of envelopes and by the mid 1840s the business had become the largest envelope producer in the world, as well as producing over 100,000 packs of playing cards annually.

The 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition gave De La Rue the opportunity to show their expertise in envelope production and printing; this was followed by the 1853 New York Exhibition and the 1855 Paris Exhibition, after which Thomas was made a Chevalier d'Honneur.

About the same time, Thomas's younger son William Frederick, joined the business and developed the typography printing process. It was shortly after this, in 1853, that De La Rue entered the field of printing stamps with a contract to print Revenue stamps for the Inland Revenue. This was followed in 1855 with a contract to print the 4d postage stamp and then the 6d and 1s values. Success followed success and in 1879 De La Rue was awarded the contract to print the lower valued postage stamps, until that time printed by Perkins Bacon. Thus De La Rue achieved a monopoly of postage stamp production for the Inland Revenue which lasted until the death of King Edward VII in 1910. Security printing for overseas governments, notably Italy, Portugal, Uruguay & Ecuador also expanded, but the firm's greatest achievement was the monopoly of orders from India and Ceylon, for over 70 years.

De La Rue's work with the Crown Agents began in 1857 with the typographed halfpenny stamps for Ceylon. This side of the business was run by William De La Rue and during this period the Crown Agents were in conflict with Perkins Bacon over printing standards. This dispute resulted in Perkins Bacon plates being passed to De La Rue from 1862 as further printings of Colonial stamps were required.

Thomas retired in 1858 and died in 1866; the business was then run by his two sons Warren & William Frederick. However, William Frederick died suddenly in 1870, leaving no sons, and as Warren had retired shortly before the death of his brother, the business control was passed to Warren's two sons: Warren William and Thomas Andros.

Warren William was the elder and an able administrator; credit is due to him for keeping the De La Rue records in such meticulous order. Warren William was also responsible for the Company's success with the Crown Colonies and the "Key and Duty Plate" designs. Warren William was a keen horseman but, in 1896, a fall from his horse in Hyde Park affected his brain and he committed suicide in 1921.

In 1896, Thomas Andros De La Rue found himself in sole command and changed the partnership into a limited company with himself as chairman. He brought in his three sons, Evelyn, Stuart and Ivor, but kept overall control himself. In 1901, King Edward VII approved De La Rue designs for Great Britain, India and most Colonies. De La Rue was on top of the world!

in reality things were different. Thomas Andros had forgotten the controversy that surrounded the De La Rue stamp printing monopoly of the 1880s, and when King George V came to the throne, it was proposed that the contract should be split with Harrisons. Thomas Andros was so incensed that he put an ultimatum to the Secretary of State to the effect that De La Rue had all or nothing - the latter won! Thomas De La Rue was so devastated that he never lived to see a Harrison postage stamp as he died a few months later.

De La Rue quickly declined after the death of Thomas Andros. The three inheriting brothers were often in dispute and, at the outbreak of World War I, Evelyn and Ivor joined the army leaving Stuart in charge. The firm went from bad to worse under Stuart, Evelyn and Ivor did not return to the firm, and in 1921 Stuart told the family that the firm was almost bankrupt.

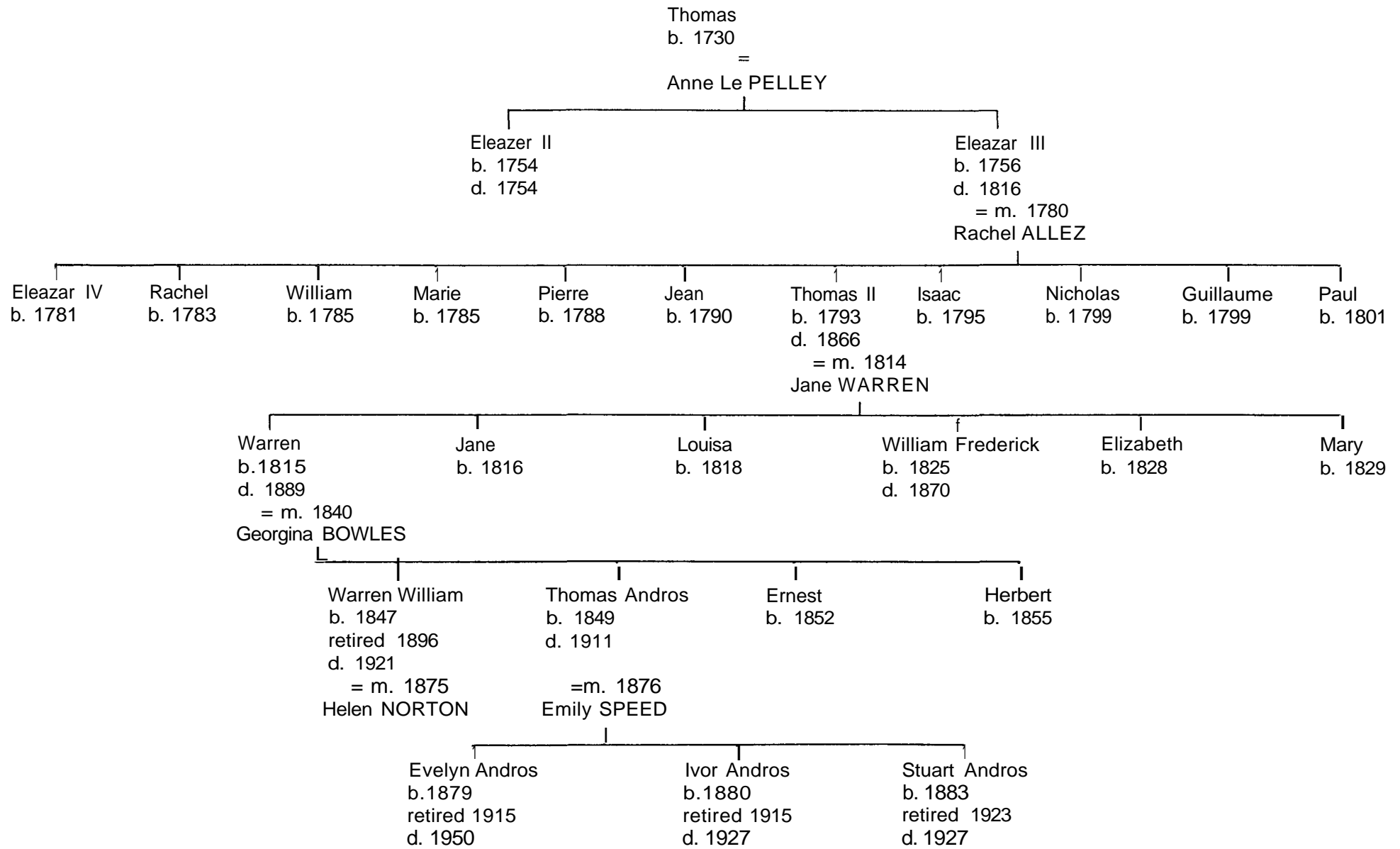
Management changes were quickly implemented and outsiders were employed. Bernard Westall joined the company and was eventually appointed Managing Director. De La Rue, whilst retaining their interest in stamp printing, expanded into security and banknote printing and, in 1933, the company made a profit for the first time in twenty years.

In 1941 Westall made a short speech following the destruction of their factory at Bunhill Row by German bombs:

"Today we have seen the burning of our factories. They have been destroyed, not De La Rue. New factories will one day be built. Today is the beginning of a new, and, let us hope, a better De La Rue".

How right he was!

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DE LA RUE GENEALOGY

# DE LA RUE - "DON'T MISS" VIEWING GUIDE

## Suggested viewing of some of the more interesting or important items

Frame 26	Baggage labels, Bank notes & Postal Orders
27	G.B. Largest multiple of 1887 5d Die I; 1912 Savings stamps.
28	K.E.VII - Universal Colour Trials - largest collection extant.
29	French Colonies - Imperf colour trials.
30	Sierra Leone - Victorian Revenues & £5 K.G.V, mint & used.
31	DLR - Salesman leaves & Straits Settlements High Values.
32	Nyasaland KGV - Sheet of £10 on document & 4s mint sheet.
33	Straits Settlements - Revenue Documents.
34	Nyasaland K.E.VII - Corner plate copies of the high values.
35	Nyasaland - KGVI £10 Revenue/Revenue, KGV Revenue blocks.
36	Nigeria - the Rainbow trials!
37	Transvaal essays, Northern Nigeria £25, Nigeria £1 plate 23.
38	Dominica Revenue sheets & Barbados colour trials.
39	Bermuda - Dock issue proofs, KGV high value blocks.
40	Tanganyika - Quarter imperf sheet of 10s & KODI trials.
41	India - Quarter sheets of the 1865-76 issue - ? unique ?
42	Ceylon - Rs 1,000 & De La Rue colour trials.
43	De La Rue - contents of counter/sales books.
44	British Central Africa - Revenue use and Proofs.
45	Lagos - Postal stationery.
46	Lagos - De La Rue Proofs & Trials.
47	Malta - Covers & KGVI £1 Revenue.
48	Lagos - Queen Victoria, high value surcharges.
49	Hong Kong - Revenues - colourful!
50	Nigeria - Postal Order & Postcard to Falklands.
51	Straits Settlements - \$25 Revenue/Revenue on document.
52	De La Rue - Samples of the varied sheet sizes.

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## DE LA RUE

The exhibit on show today is somewhat unusual let alone unconventional, but it does have VARIETY.

27 frames have been filled and constitute:

6,501 items being, stamps, proofs, documents, trials, banknotes, postal orders, etc etc etc

from over 80 countries

and include 970 De La Rue archival pieces, items, stamps, proofs etc.

The exhibit concentrates more upon the 20th Century than the Victorian issues and the display extends outside postage stamps into Revenue stamps and use, court documents and other ancillary De La Rue printing.

The exhibit is not arranged in any particular order. There are gems mixed in with more common material and the write up has been kept to a minimum in most instances.

Many items have never been exhibited previously.

Surely there has to be something for everyone? - Maybe NOT!!! - Well I tried! - Enjoy (if you can)!