

## FAMOUS (or perhaps not so famous) PEOPLE WITH A DOLTON CONNECTION

There are some things from history that just don't get taught in school, so we hope the following might tell you something you didn't know about a colourful individual from this area. William Hooper was born at Chapple Farm, Dolton 200 years ago on 18th March 1818, son of yeoman farmer John Hooper and Mary Elizabeth (nee Medland). He was the 6th of a large family of eight and although they were quite a well-to-do family it is unlikely the farm could support them all, so William and younger brother Rowland were packed off to Exeter as apprentices. William with a chemist and his brother at a draper. William's life story shows us that he was clearly a good learner and quite inventive as a chemist.

In 1840, having completed his training, he and Rowland married two Carnell sisters from Clyst Hydon and moved, Rowland to Marylebone and William to St Martin-in-the-Fields. He set up his own business as a chemist at the northwest corner of Trafalgar Square.

Incidentally, Enoch Friend was apprenticed to Rowland in his drapery business. Enoch later set up his own successful drapers shop in London, then years later built London House in Dolton, where he ran the Devon branch of the business while his children continued in London.

William had 7 children with Janetta, but she died in 1855. He married Anne Lowndes two years later and they had 4 more children.

All this time he was growing his business as a "Chemist and Druggist". He developed a process of vulcanising India rubber, introduced by Charles Goodyear, and from this he went on to invent rubber water-beds and cushions for use in hospitals and was among the first to develop a method of using ether as an anaesthetic at a time when the idea of operating without pain was a new concept. Sources disagree whether Hooper's inhaler was the actual one used by James Robertson for the first anaesthetised wisdom tooth extraction in 1846, but he certainly spoke at a meeting of the Pharmaceutical Society in January 1847 on the improvements then made to the inhaler following many tests, including the facility to provide some oxygen at the end of the process to improve recovery. He had even shown that anaesthesia worked better on an empty stomach. He must have carried out many experiments; it is said that his assistant died of laudanum poisoning and a pair of horses which had belonged to Queen Charlotte died from chloroform administered by him.

By 1853 he was working with a Mr Fry under the name of "Hooper & Fry" manufacturing rubber beds for hundreds of hospitals and institutions. Beds of his design were still in use in preventing bedsores up to the early 1970s.

Still being creative he worked on an idea of making roads out of rubber and laid a short stretch in London. Someone else soon came up with the novel idea of putting the rubber on the wheels instead, so that idea came to nothing.

After Mr Fry retired William concentrated on the use of rubber for insulating telegraphic cables, for which he took out several patents. In 1868 from his factory on Mitcham Common he supplied the cable to connect Ceylon to India, also Newcastle to Denmark. The next year a cable was laid from Scotland to Norway. The deal with the company he was supplying ended in litigation which cost around £25,000 over 7 years to settle.

After this he manufactured more than 3000 miles of cable for the Persian Gulf, Denmark to Russia, Sweden to Russia, Brazil and Australia. More than 900 miles of these cables were later lifted, and sheathing added to them in the years up to 1920, after some of these cables had already been in service for 50 years.

By 1870 with orders for more cables in China and Japan he formed a limited liability company "Hooper's Telegraph Works Ltd." One of the directors being John M Dunlop. This company had a new cable-laying steamship built - The CS Hooper.

The company started out well with cables laid along the coast in Brazil and several laid in the West Indies and Cuba, but the failure of a cable on the north coast of South America proved costly. This, and unsuccessful efforts to raise finance for other cables led to William Hooper providing his own money to prop things up at a cost of £150,000. Then the company failed to repay these loans and he was forced to bring an action against them. As a result, the company went into liquidation. These troubles, it is said, shortened his life and he died aged 60 in 1878. A sad end to an inventive entrepreneur.

William and his brother Rowland had arranged adjacent family graves in Kensal Green Cemetery, where his first wife was buried. The joined headstones had the words "Let Brotherly Love Continue", but even this didn't go as planned; some of his children were buried here as were Rowland and all his family, but William ended up buried in Tooting churchyard.

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