

# **STUDIES IN THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THERMOGRAVIMETRY VI Conditioning Houses**

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## **Abstract**

This paper describes the origins of Conditioning Houses in Manchester and London as an adjunct to early commercial equipment in the UK.

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## **Introduction**

In an earlier article in these studies, which was concerned with the search for early commercial thermal analysis apparatus in the UK [1], mention was made of the Talabot-Persoz-Rogeat (TPR) Desicca.or (Fig. 1) exported from France in the 1850's and the possibility of it being used in Conditioning Houses in the, then, two main centres of silk in the UK namely, Manchester and London.

It was considered of interest to report on the origins of these Conditioning Houses as an adjunct to this earlier publication [1].

## **Conditioning Houses**

### *Manchester*

At a conference held on Friday, 21 October, 1887, during the Royal Jubilee Exhibition in Manchester, it was agreed to form a Silk Conference Committee for the purpose of promoting the silk industry. One month later, on 11 November, the above Committee was re-named The Silk Association of Great Britain & Ireland (SAGBI). The Minute Books of this Association [2] contain several references to Conditioning Houses. For example 'The Trade Silk Conditioning Company Ltd.' (Meeting on 19 June, 1888), '... the Silk Conditioning House in London' (Meeting 17 October, 1894), whilst at a meeting on 30 November,

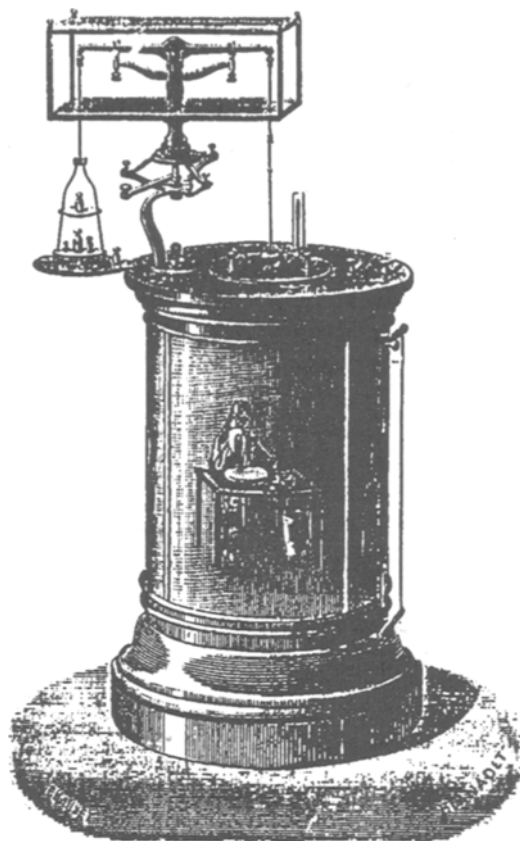


Fig. 1 The Talabot-Persoz-Rogeat (TPR) Desiccator

1888 it was resolved 'that the Secretary communicate with Messrs. Grace, Calvert & Thompson of Manchester, Chemists, and ask to supply charges for the conditioning of silk' (the above Company is mis-spelt, it should read Crace-Calvert & Thomson – see later in this article).

According to Perret [3], four TPR Desiccators were exported from France to Manchester in 1850. However 'Slater's Directory of Manchester' (Slater) and 'Kelly's Business Directory' (Kelly) give no listing for Conditioning Houses until 1858 when Slater lists the 'Silk & Wool Conditioning Establishment, 90 Mosley Street', whilst Kelly (1858); lists the 'Conditioning Establishment for Silk & Wool; Fredk. Crace-Calvert, Proprietor, 90 Mosley Street' [4]. The Slater entry for 1859 lists the 'Silk Conditioning Company' at the same address and there is a similar listing in the 1861 edition of Slater. The final listing (Slater, 1863) is for the 'Silk & Wool Conditioning Establishment' also at the same address [5].

Further details regarding silk conditioning in Manchester are given in Warner [6] who refers to an announcement in *The Chemist*, 1857–58 [7] that ‘an establishment for conditioning silk has been opened by Mr. F. Crace-Calvert under approval of the 23 firms engaged in the trade’. Crace-Calvert carried out the work in a laboratory at the Royal Institution\*, Mosley Street, Manchester – hence Crace-Calvert’s Mosley Street address given in Slater. Apparently work declined fairly rapidly and was then carried out as part of the private practice of Crace-Calvert, subsequently taken over by his successor Mr. W. Thomson and re-named Crace-Calvert & Thomson. After 1880 work decreased further and the last test was made on 17 July, 1902 for Messrs. Kidd, Boden & Co. After 1902 occasional tests were carried out at the Manchester Chamber of Commerce Testing House, established in 1895 and thus the demise of the Manchester Conditioning House was complete. As a matter of interest, a copy of the ‘Handbook of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce Testing House & Laboratory – Notes on Sampling & Testing’ [8] contains a photograph of the drying apparatus used for silk conditioning. It is not a TPR Desiccator and it can, perhaps, be assumed that new equipment was purchased when the laboratories were opened in 1895.

### *London*

In 1851, a French merchant named de Larbe purchased equipment and set up in London as a Conditioner. The venture was not well supported and a Monsieur Chabot, a silk merchant of Huguenot descent, persuaded several manufacturers to take over the business and form a Company, which commenced operations in 1859. The following were listed as directors: Thomas Brooks, Martin Cornell, Edward Fox, Richard Harrison, George Kemp and Henry Soper [9]. This information is confirmed by the Public Record Office, whose files show that The Trade Silk Conditioning Co. Ltd. was formed as a Limited Company in December, 1858, The Registered Office being at 4 Alderman’s Walk, New Broad Street, Bishopsgate, City of London. The Company was dissolved on 5 July, 1901 [10]. Additional confirmation is provided by various entries in the Post Office London Directory in which, from 1860 to 1870 the offices of the Trade Silk Conditioning Co. Ltd. are listed at 4 Alderman’s Walk, with Ph. J. Chabot as Secretary and Manager. This address, coupled with the fact that Chabot was of Huguenot descent is of interest since the Huguenots, who had settled in London from the 16th Century onwards were permitted to live immediately outside London’s eastern wall, close to the historic Bishop’s Gate, but were not allowed to trade freely within the City [11]. Alderman’s Walk lies immediately outside the old eastern wall of the City and

\* In 1882, this became the present Manchester City Art Gallery.

it is open to speculation whether the choice of premises at that address was by accident or design. Also speculative is the hypothesis that Monsieur Chabot utilised some of the eight TPR Desiccators exported from France in 1852 [3].

By 1873, the Post Office London Directory shows that the company had moved to 15, Wilson Street, London, EC, with James Scott Bareham as Secretary. There are no entries in the Directory for the company for 1871 and 1872, although according to the 1872 edition, 15 & 16 Wilson Street were occupied by Stephen Walters & Sons, silk manufacturers. In 1899, the company again moved premises to 87A Worship Street, London EC, with J. S. Bareham remaining as Secretary, a position he held until 1895, when he was succeeded by Henry Titford.

Entries in the Directory for the Trade Silk Conditioning Co. Ltd. cease in 1901, which agrees with information from the Public Record Office [10]. According to Warner the business of the Trade Silk Conditioning Co. Ltd. was transferred to the London & India Docks Company in 1901 [9]. This is confirmed by an entry in the London & India Docks Co. 'Dock Committee Minute Book No. 1', Committee Meeting held on 29 July 1901:

'The Committee recommended acquisition of the Trade Silk Conditioning Company at a cost not exceeding £150, and that accommodation be found for it at Cutler Street Warehouses at a further expense of about £150 – The Docks Company taking over the business, together with its staff.' [12].

In 1909, the London & India Docks were taken over by the Port of London Authority and silk conditioning was still carried out, but the transfer to the London & India Docks saw the demise of the Conditioning House in London.

As a final comment, it was mentioned earlier that Henry Titford became Secretary of the Trade Silk Conditioning Co. in 1895. According to Warner, after the business was transferred to the London & India Docks Company 'Henry Titford continued as secretary and manager, and still supervises the work for the Port of London Authority' [9]. However, an exhaustive search by R. R. Aspinall [12] and the present author of the extent records of both the London & India Docks Co. and the Port of London Authority failed to reveal any mention of Henry Titford. By a stroke of good fortune, the present author was able to contact descendants of Henry Titford, from whom it was ascertained that he was born on 20 April, 1842. In 1877 his occupation was a Raw Silk Assayer, with an address at 15 Wilson Street, London (see earlier). He died on 18 June, 1927, aged 85 [13]. Perhaps the reason for his name not appearing in any of the record books mentioned above indicates that his retirement coincided with the move to the London & India Docks Co. This is only conjecture, albeit shared by his descendants [13].

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## References

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- 2 Archives Dept., Central Library, Manchester. Cat. No. M197/1/1/1-4.
- 3 A. Perret, *Monographie de la Condition des Soies de Lyon*, (Lyon: Imprimerie Pétrat Ainé, 1878).
- 4 Frederick Crace-Calvert was born on 14 November, 1819, near London. He studied in France, principally natural science, and lived there 1836-'46. On returning to England he worked as a consultant. He was a honorary professor of chemistry at the Royal Institution, Manchester and was the first person to manufacture and use 'carbolic acid' as a disinfectant. He had a very important influence on the application of science to industry, feeling equally at home in France and England. He was elected Fellow of the Royal Society on 6 June, 1859. He died in Manchester, October, 1878 as a result of an illness contracted in Vienna, where he had gone to serve as a juror at the 1873 International Exhibition.
- 5 Information from Local History Library, Central Library, Manchester.
- 6 F. Warner, *Silk Industry of the United Kingdom, its Origin & Development*, (London: Drane, no publication date is given, but the copy held in Guildhall Library, London (Cat. No. 338/47677] is catalogued as 'published 1921').
- 7 The full reference is: *The Chemist*, 5 (1857-'58), 449.
- 8 First edition, (Manchester: Marsden & Co., 1903). Manchester Central Library, Ref. No. 677/0287 MA4.
- 9 *Op. cit.* (ref. 6) p. 412 et. seq.
- 10 M. Young, 'The Silk Weavers of Spitalfields & Bethnal Green', *Family Tree* (1991), June, 4.
- 12 Communication, 3 July, 1991, from R. R. Aspinall, Librarian, The Museum of London, London E14 9RL.
- 13 Correspondence with John Titford, December, 1991, Lynett Titford, January, 1992 & Anthony R. Titford, February, 1992.