THOMAS POTTERTON
1847-1926

Mr & Mrs Thomas Potterton
He was a pioneer in the development and application of gas-fired boilers
Thomas Potterton was born at Balham, London in 1847. In 1870 his father died, leaving him a building business which he was to transform by sheer ability, personality and good sense into a boiler company with a world wide reputation. His first ambition was to improve the efficiency kitchen ranges and boilers. Like Rumford and Tredgold before him, he was obsessed with the idea of achieving more efficient fuel utilisation, the fuel at that time being coal.

His ideas worked, and the company expanded. Always ahead of his time, he then turned to the development of the gas fired boiler, realising its advantages and the fact that, sooner or later, solid fuels were bound to give rise to air pollution problems. His instinct was again proved right, only this time not until he had risked his business by spending a vast amount of time and money in research and development calling for considerable personal hardship. This was typical. With Thomas Potterton no expense was ever spared to realise an idea once he was convinced of its potential.

Things improved in 1902 with his introduction of the world’s first gas boiler for central heating using town’s gas – the forerunner of the famous Victor range. A stream of designs and inventions followed including the first cut-out valve system and an ether capsule thermostat which he designed for the comfort of a relative dying from consumption.

By 1905 the company had largely ceased its building activities and was concentrating more and more on the development of heating equipment and its installation. Potterton himself had now emerged as a leading figure in
the heating field. He was a founder member of the I.H.V.E., a successful businessman, a colourful figure at conferences and exhibitions and a pioneer of advertising and promotional ideas.

But his first love, his passion for better boiler design, never left him. At 76 he was still striding down to his works at Balham – still ordering suits with a pocket specially made to carry his slide rule. He died on January 26th 1926 – the boss.

(From “The Heatmakers No. 4,” Potterton Commercial Division)
British Patent BP 5182 of 1894

No. 5182

Date of Application, 13th Mar., 1894—Accepted, 30th June, 1894

COMPLETE SPECIFICATION.

An Improvement in Boilers for Heating Greenhouses and other Structures.

I, THOMAS POTTERTON, of "Norman Hurst," 122 Cavendish Road, Balham in
the County of Surrey, Hot Water Engineer, do hereby declare the nature of this
invention and in what manner the same is to be performed, to be particularly
described and ascertained in and by the following statement—

5 Usually the flue from an independent hot water boiler passes away at the top,
there being a clear way to same directly over the fire, by which much of the heat
is conducted away and wasted. My invention relates to a boiler by which I avoid
this waste of heat, as I shall describe in accompanying drawings.

Fig. 1 is a vertical section, and Fig. 2 is a sectional plan of a boiler according to
my invention.

I make the boiler in two sections, right and left hand, which are bolted
together K K, each part having zig-zag projections A. B. C. over fire. The top
part of each section is made parallel to the part over the fire, thus forming a zig-zag
flue D. E. F.

15 A feed hole H, and clinker door J are provided in front. A flow pipe G
from top of each section, and return pipe R from side of each section, provide
for water circulation. These two parts are made so that these pipes may have the
same or independent circulation.

Having now particularly described and ascertained the nature of my said
invention, and in what manner the same is to be performed, I declare that what I
claim is:

A boiler having zig-zag projections over fire, and constructed to a form a zig-zag
flue, to act substantially and for the purpose set forth.

Dated this 13th day of March 1894.

THOMAS POTTERTON.

London: Printed for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Darling & Son, Ltd.—1894
Patent Drawing of 1894
1897 Advertisement

Installation of multiple Potterton boilers, Sandow’s Curative Institute, Piccadilly, 1909
A Potterton boiler servicing demonstration 1905
Delivering Potterton boilers for export in 1906.

T. Potterton Esq.
15, Ravensden Road,
Windsor, Berkshire,
London.
The Potterton Home at 15 Ravenslea Road, Wandsworth Common

**Thomas Potterton—1847/1926**
OBITUARY.

THOMAS POTTERTON.

It is with much regret that we have to announce the death of Mr. Thomas Potterton (senior partner in the firm of Thomas Potterton, heating engineers, of Cavendish Works, Balham), who passed away on Tuesday, Jan. 26, in his 79th year, at his residence, 15, Ravenslea Road, Wandsworth Common. His health had been failing for about two years, the last eighteen months of which were spent indoors. During last summer he became so weak that he took to his room, exhibiting remarkable patience and endurance, and thinking all the time of others. In this his fine character was displayed, as throughout his business career. A noticeable change occurred in his condition about a fortnight before the end, which happily was peaceful. He celebrated his golden wedding during the summer of 1922, and is survived by his wife, to whom (together with his two sons and daughter) heartfelt sympathy is extended. The funeral took place last Saturday; the service being at St. Mary's, Balham, and the interment at Wandsworth Cemetery.

At the age of 23, in the year 1870, upon the death of his father (Thomas Potterton), deceased took over the business established in 1850 by his father, which he developed as a heating engineer, inventing and patenting in the 'nineties special forms of kitchen ranges and boilers for the better utilization of fuel, which was then usually coal. From the year 1900 onwards, recognizing the great utility of gas, he directed his attention particularly to the gas side of the heating industry, inventing and perfecting a system of gas-heated hot water apparatus in which the "Victor" boiler plays the chief part.

The earliest patterns of "Victor" boilers embodied the essential features of the present-day models; being from the outset of sectional design, wherein lies the advantage of intermediate circulation with progressive temperatures. This scheme, in conjunction with the "cut-out" valve system (patented in the year 1904), has proved of great utility in hot water apparatus connected with domestic supplies. Other developments and patents in his water heating appliances came about in the years 1916 and 1921; while as recently as 1922-3 he applied some of his leisure to perfecting the "Victory" combination boiler for the use of both solid and gaseous fuels. There were other patents in respect of "Seal-Ed" oven cookers and "Queen" combined gas and coal ranges. During his many working years he handled numerous problems of a special nature requiring considerable judgment.
Mr. Potterton was one of the founders in 1898 of the Institution of Heating and Ventilating Engineers, on the Council of which he sat for several years; and he was a member of the Society of British Gas Industries. He was also a familiar figure at numerous trade exhibitions in London—the Building Trades Exhibition (from the commencement some 30 years ago), the "Daily Mail" Exhibition (likewise from the first of the series), and various smoke abatement exhibitions—even back to the days of the Royal Aquarium, where he displayed, at the autumn show of the Horticultural Chrysanthemum Society, his patents in coke boilers and other apparatus connected with conservatory heating and domestic purposes. Until midsummer, 1924, he daily visited his works at Balham; and although gradually taking more leisure, he did not cease to keep in touch with the technical side of the business.

The late Mr. Thomas Potterton.

The business will be carried on under the same name as heretofore by the two surviving partners—Mr. A. B. Potterton and Mr. T. F. C. Potterton.
The funeral service for Thomas Potterton took place at St Mary’s Church, Balham. He was a founding member of the IHVE and by a remarkable coincidence the present day Headquarters of CIBSE is next door to the church.