

Thomas Savery Biography

Thomas Savery

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Biography

As an English army officer, Thomas Savery was once ejected from the Lord of the Admiralty's office as a lunatic because he proposed a ship that could be propelled by side-mounted wheels rather than by wind or oars. Fortunately, some of his other ideas were better received, among them a water pump, the first working steam-powered machine.

Savery was born in Devonshire, England, about 1650, but little else is known about his first four decades of life. Some sources even question his career as a military officer. He was an inventor and owned several patents, such as one for a 1696 machine for polishing plate glass. He was also a published writer, and his writings include *Navigation Improved* (1698), and a translation from the Dutch *Treatise on Fortifications* by Baron van Coehoorn (1641-1704).

His most important contribution was his 1698 water pump. An atmospheric engine by definition, Savery's pump did not produce any motion. The pump used the expansion and contraction of steam to create vacuums that raised water from flooded mines. This "Miner's Friend" consisted basically of a boiler, a separate collecting chamber, and two pipes. Water in the boiler was heated until it turned to steam. Valves opened to allow this steam to pass into the closed storage chamber. This hot chamber was then cooled from the outside to condense the steam and create a vacuum. Water from the mine was then sucked up to replace the vacuum and forcibly expelled through the drain pipe.

However, the pump did not prove to be very practical since it could not be sealed tightly enough to raise water much higher than 25 ft (7.6 m). Nonetheless, it was used for decades to supply water to towns and country homes and to recycle water back into millraces.

Savery seemed to have given up making improvements on the water pump, but others like Denis Papin and Thomas Newcomen were quick to see other possibilities of steam power, and went on to create the steam engine and other important inventions.