

The Great Invention | Inventors | Hubert Booth (1871 - 1955)

Booth, Hubert Cecil (1871-1955) English mechanical and civil engineer who invented the vacuum cleaner 1901. Booth, born in Gloucester, studied at the City and Guilds Institute. He formed an engineering consultancy 1901 and his British Vacuum Cleaner Company 1903.

Booth conceived the principle of his vacuum cleaner after witnessing the cleaning of a railway carriage by means of compressed air which simply blew a great cloud of dust around.

In his machine, one end of a tube was connected to an air pump, while the other, with nozzle attached, was pushed over the surface being cleaned. The cleaner incorporated an air filter.

Because of the large size and high price of early vacuum cleaners and the fact that few houses had mains electricity, Booth initially offered cleaning services rather than machine sales. The large vacuum cleaner, powered by petrol or electric engine and mounted on a four-wheeled horse carriage, was parked in the street outside a house while large cleaning tubes were passed in through the windows. The machine was such a novelty that society hostesses held special parties at which guests watched operatives cleaning carpets or furniture. Transparent tubes were provided so that the dust could be seen departing down them. Booth's machines received a great popular boost when they were used to clean the blue pile carpets laid in Westminster Abbey for the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902.

Smaller, more compact indoors vacuum cleaners followed, but until the first electrically powered model appeared 1905, two people were required to operate them - one to work the pump by bellows or a plunger, the other

to handle the cleaning tube.

Having worked on the design of engines for two Royal Navy battleships, Booth was commissioned 1894 to work on a Ferris wheel at Earl's Court, London, and afterwards on similar structures in Blackpool, Vienna, and Paris. In 1902 Booth directed the erection of the Connel Ferry Bridge over Loch Etive, Scotland.

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