

MARSDEN. DEATH OF MR. THOMAS NICHOLSON, THE RAILWAY CONTRACTOR.

During last week, a man was gathered to his fathers, to whom, from his former connection with Marsden, and from having undertaken, and successfully completed, several important public works, it is discharging but a simple debt of gratitude to pay a tribute to big memory. Mr. Thomas Nicholson was in early life a common labourer, and instead of being ashamed of his humble origin, as too many men are, he frequently referred to it with frank and manly candour. While young, he was a labourer on the first English railway ever made, the Stockton and Darlington; and he was also employed as a workman during the erection of the present London-bridge.

He afterwards executed several contracts; and advancing step by step, eventually became a comparatively large subcontractor in making the railway tunnel at Woodhead. He had scarcely completed his contract at Woodhead when he became the sole contractor for the Standedge tunnel at Marsden, on the line of railway between Huddersfield and Manchester. The successful execution of this important undertaking must for ever associate his name with Marsden, and with railway enterprises. Some authentic particulars never before made public, regarding this his greatest work, and on which his name as a contractor will rest, namely - the Standedge tunnel - will, it is believed, be found of local, and possibly of general interest.

Mr. Nicholson had the remarkable fortune of being engaged in the construction of the two longest railway tunnels in the world - those of Woodhead and Standedge. An erroneous impression is prevalent, that former is the longest in England, and this is stated as a fact in the last edition of that high authority, the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the truth, however, is that the Woodhead tunnel is only three miles and 20 yards long, while the length of the Standedge tunnel is 3 miles and 66 yards, the latter being 46 yards longer than the former.

It should be added that the canal tunnel extends parallel with the Standedge railway tunnel, and is the longer of the two, being 3 miles and 267 yards, so that the longest railway tunnel in England, and also, probably, the longest canal tunnel have been cut side by side, beneath the Standedge hills. (It may be mentioned in a parenthesis that the elevation of the canal tunnel is loftier than any other canal tunnel in the kingdom, being 636 feet above the level of the sea.)

Mr. Nicholson, having previously completed the necessary preliminary preparations, such as making the approaches, and putting down his steam engines, commenced excavating for the Standedge tunnel on the 1st of November 1846, and completed it on the 1st of November, 1848, having finished the large undertaking in the extraordinarily short space of exactly two years. The height of the tunnel, exclusive of the masonry, is 18 feet; its breadth, 15 feet; the thickness of the masonry ranging from 18 inches to upwards of 3 feet. Besides having several steam engines at work, drawing the debris up the various shafts, 40 boats were employed in conveying excavated material, which was taken to the boats through drift ways connecting the railway and canal tunnels.

When the work was in full operation 1,953 men were employed by Mr. Nicholson at one time, this being the highest number. For blasting purposes 102 tons of gunpowder were consumed, at a cost of £5,131; of gun cotton (then a new invention), 168 lbs., costing £29; and fuses amounting in value to £693 were used.

To give light to the men while at their work 150,798 lbs of candles were burnt, at an expense of £3,618; and to keep the engines in motion and warm the men 8,733 tons of coal were consumed, while for building purposes 2,535 tons of lime were used.

Nine fatal accidents occurred during the progress of the works. The men had a club of their own, to provide against sickness and accidents, and Dr. Broughton, J P., then of Dobcross, but now of Preston and Joseph Hesslegrave, Esq., then and still of Marsden, were selected to be their medical attendants and advisers. The cost of the tunnel was £171,003 5s. 3½d.; upon the approaches Mr. Nicholson expended £30,665, making a total of £201,608 12s. 3½d.

Mr. Nicholson had some dispute with the company about extra works, into the merits of which it is neither the province nor the inclination of the writer to enter. Suffice it to say, that a work of such

magnitude satisfactorily executed, which it would have been hoped would have left a moderate competency, according to his own statement, found Mr. Nicholson unfortunately, a worse man in a pecuniary point of view at its conclusion than it found him at the beginning. The tunnel and the approaches combined are three and a half miles in length showing the cost per mile to be £53,428. Mr. Nicholson was a man who, under a mild and unassuming exterior, possessed a resolute will and great determination of character. He was shrewd and genial without a hint of vanity. Though the want of a good education in early life was necessarily a serious drawback to his success, yet as he was an acute observer, and had a retentive memory he acquired a large fund of useful and valuable knowledge.

He was easy of access and never ashamed to speak of his early hardships, struggles, and trials; and during his residence in Marsden he was respected by all grades of society. He removed from the village a few years ago and latterly resided at Tedbergh, where on the 9th inst., he died aged 70 years.

Mr. Nicholson's death was the result of an accident, He was at a place called Ingleton, 17 miles from home, and, as superintendant of a portion of the line in that neighbourhood, had gone to inspect a viaduct that was giving way. When within a short distance of the place, he saw the ballast engine coming. The engineman gave the signal, which Mr. Nicholson mistook for a salute, not observing that the engine had a train of waggons attached to it by a rope and advancing on the line upon which he was walking. The buffer of the engine struck him on the shoulder and knocked him down, the waggons passing over his feet, crushing the toes of the right foot and the whole of the left foot to pieces. He was carefully conveyed home, where, under the careful treatment of Dr. Howitt, of Lancaster (who was telegraphed for), the toes of the right foot were amputated, but he durst not amputate the left foot through fear that the patient would sink under the operation.

Mr. Nicholson lingered for several days uncomplainingly suffering the most excruciating pain. The continued loss of blood, and mortification of the left foot supervening, proved too much for the patient's strength, and on Thursday week he expired without a struggle leaving behind him a wife and family to deplore his loss. The sympathy expressed for the deceased gentleman by all classes for many miles round Tedbergh was unbounded, for he had rendered himself universally respected in the neighbourhood. At the time of the accident, he was in the enjoyment of good health and spirits, and indulging in the pleasant anticipation of coming back again, and settling for life in this neighbourhood, where he had just obtained an appointment.