

THOMAS RHODES FIRTH was born in Yorkshire in May 1832. His professional career commenced in 1848, when he was articled to a relative, Mr. Thomas Rhodes, Civil Engineer, who at that time had an extensive practice. On completion of his pupilage he received an appointment from Messrs. Peto, Brassey and Betts, and assisted in the construction of some railways in France. The firm taking up contracts in Australia, Mr. Firth was appointed one of their engineers, and, with other members of their staff, arrived in New South Wales in 1859. In the following year the extensions from Parramatta to Penrith on the west, and to Menangle and Picton on the south, were started, and in 1862 the extension of the Northern line to Branxton and Singleton was commenced. While acting for the contractors on those works he had attracted the attention of the late Mr. John Whitton, the Government Engineer-in-Chief, who, in 1862, offered Mr. Firth the appointment of District Engineer. This offer he accepted and thus commenced his long connection with the Railway Construction Branch of New South Wales.

Tempted by an offer of high salary he resigned his appointment in 1878 to join a contracting firm, but after a short experience found the work unsatisfactory and returned to the Government service, taking up his former position as District Engineer in charge of various contracts, principally on the Southern line. In 1889 he had control of the trial surveys, and in that position had much to do with the location of various lines. In the following year he was promoted to Chief Assistant Engineer for Railway Construction, which position he held until 1895, when he was transferred to the service of the Railway Commissioners as Engineer-in-Chief for Existing Lines. In that capacity he was responsible for the maintenance of all the Government railways in New South Wales, involving the carrying out of many important works, such as duplication of lines, improvement of grades and curves, renewals of bridges, besides the innumerable matters which claim the constant attention of the Maintenance Engineer of a large system.

Early in 1902 Mr. Firth's health showed signs of weakness, and extended leave was granted him until March, 1903, when, no improvement having taken place, he retired from the Government service. He died on the 20th July, 1903, from Bright's disease.

Mr. Firth was elected a Member of the Institution on the 5th December, 1876.

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