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The Life of Sir John Fowler, Engineer

As a civil engineer, Sir John Fowler (1817–98) devoted his life to the railways. His best-known achievements include the first railway bridge across the Thames in London, Manchester Central Station, the development of the London Underground and (with Sir Benjamin Baker) the Forth Bridge – arguably the most remarkable feat of engineering of the nineteenth century. Given access to friends and family papers, the author and social theorist Thomas Mackay (1849–1912) portrays a man who was fascinated by engineering as a child, and who continued to work up until his death. As a portrait of one of the architects of Victorian Britain, this biography, first published in 1900, will be of great interest to historians of the period as well as readers wishing to know more about the development of iconic infrastructure.

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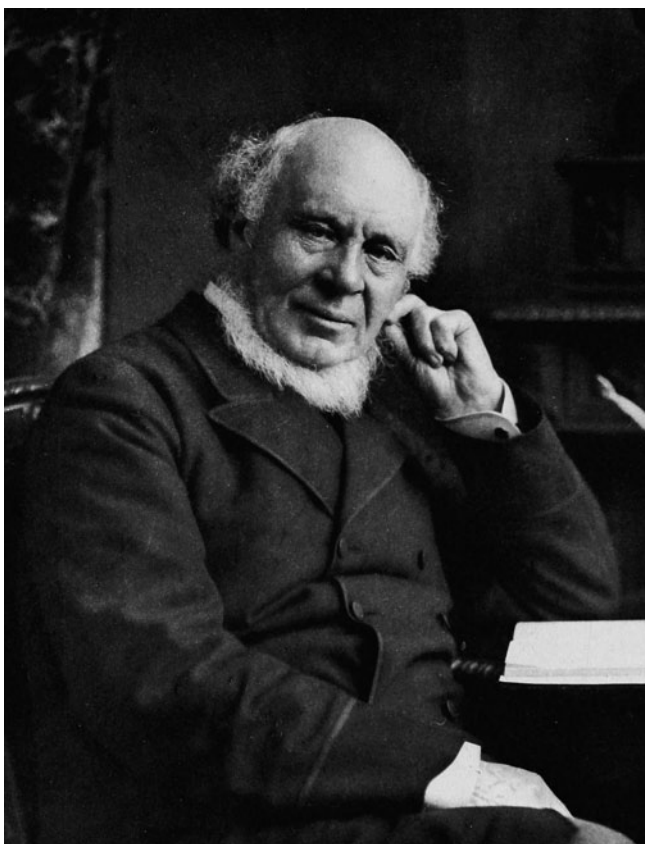


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John Fowler

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THE LIFE OF
SIR JOHN FOWLER
ENGINEER
BART., K.C.M.G., ETC.

BY THOMAS MACKAY

WITH EIGHTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET
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PREFACE

THE life of a great practical engineer, whose labours cover the last sixty years of the nineteenth century, might without irrelevance be made the occasion of writing a history of modern engineering. It was Sir John Fowler's business to utilise, in the interest of his clients, the inventions and discoveries of a most prolific half-century of progress, and an enumeration of these would in itself constitute a very complete chronicle of the advance of engineering science.

In such a treatment of the subject the vastness of the details must have overwhelmed the features of any single personality, however eminent, and no such ambitious task has here been attempted. It has been the author's endeavour to sketch the lights and shades of a strong and interesting character, and to indicate the particular subdivision of scientific function to which Sir John Fowler's energies were so successfully devoted.

A great organiser, like Sir John Fowler, appeals perhaps less strongly to the imagination than the great discoverer or inventor. Still, his work is an indispensable element in that most important task—the domestication of science for the public service. Our

conception of the industrial and commercial mechanism of the age will be very incomplete, unless we realise the part which is played by men like the subject of this biography.

A large collection of letters and papers has been placed in the author's hands by Lady Fowler. To her and to other members of the late Sir John Fowler's family he is much indebted for information, suggestions, and corrections. He has also to acknowledge valuable assistance given by the late Mr. Baldry, and by Sir Benjamin Baker, Sir John Fowler's partners. The kindness with which all his inquiries have been met has, he hopes, enabled him to overcome, in some degree, two great disadvantages: one that he did not know Sir John Fowler personally, the other that he is not an engineer.

The work of preparing the following narrative has been full of interest. An experience such as that of Sir John Fowler is a most important chapter of industrial history, and the author can only hope that in his presentation of the facts the interest has not been allowed entirely to evaporate.

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