

The Early History of our Firm

By Ernest F. Lang

Richard Peacock—(2)

RICHARD PEACOCK was a remarkable man. His personality and his career are typical in many respects of other

of education or position, he was enabled by his practical ability and force of character to carve his way in the world and win for



successful business men of the county in which he spent the major portion of his life, and of the county of which he was a native. Starting life with no great advantages either

himself a great position as an employer of labour and a director of industry. Mr. Peacock was born on 9th April, 1820, at Swaledale in the North Riding of Yorkshire.

He was the seventh son of Mr. Ralph Peacock. The father was a lead miner by trade and was in his way a genius although the opportunities for his abilities were not so important as they were numerous in that remote place at that period. By dint of industry and perseverance he had worked himself up to the position of foreman or superintendent of several mines in the neighbourhood and was much respected. He had great natural talents in mechanical matters and as a result all the clocks and watches were kept in repair by him and, being something of a violin player himself, the instruments belonging to native musicians were taken to him to be set to rights.

It was not to be wondered at, being born and cradled in such an atmosphere as this, that Richard Peacock should have grown up with a taste for mechanics and that when the railway era dawned and the lad found himself so near the point of its rising he should have set before him as the object of his life the attainment of some position of eminence in connection with this latest and mightiest of the forces of human progress. In the year 1825 the Stockton and Darlington line was opened and one of Richard Peacock's earliest recollections, although he was then but five years of age, was the paying of a visit with his father to Darlington to see the locomotive at work on the wonderful railway. This visit to Darlington brought forth results which had considerable influence on Richard Peacock's future career.

Ralph Peacock was stirred with new promptings and aspirations by what he saw. In the year 1830 the alluring power of the locomotive, which had been steadily making itself felt in his breast since his memorable visit to Darlington five years previously, had its effect. He made his leap into the outer world and was selected by Messrs. Walker & Burgess as assistant superintendent in the construction of the Leeds tunnel on the Leeds and Selby Railway. This appointment caused Ralph Peacock and his family to have to remove from Swaledale to Leeds,

and in the latter town they continued to reside for some years. After the Leeds and Selby Line (later part of the North Eastern system) was finished, the Company recognized Ralph Peacock's faithful service and ability by placing him in a responsible position in connection with their Leeds Station, and, ultimately, when he became too old for active employment, they pensioned him off.

Richard Peacock's education was continued at the Leeds Grammar School and there he no doubt acquired the solid foundation of a liberal education; but as time went on and railway enterprise extended with such marvellous rapidity, he grew anxious to be allowed to take some part in the movement. Whenever he could spare time from his lessons he would visit the tunnel where his father was working and watch the operations in progress and, at night, nothing would please him so much as to have a chat with his father whilst helping him in some mechanical work. The father gave him every encouragement and not only took the lad to see the Stockton and Darlington line, but also to view the railway made between Liverpool and Manchester. In 1830, those were the only two railways of importance in operation. Richard Peacock left school in 1834 at the age of fourteen, and his father apprenticed him to the famous firm of Fenton, Murray & Jackson, the engineers who were at that time making locomotives for the Liverpool & Manchester, and Leeds & Selby Railways and were largely employed in the building of steam engines of every class, as well as in the making of hydraulic machinery and pumps. At the time when Richard Peacock entered the establishment Mr. Murray was dead and Mr. Fenton and Mr. Wood had retired. The head of the firm was Mr. Jackson, who had originally been a pattern maker in the works, but having proved himself a valuable servant and married one of Mr. Murray's daughters, he received promotion adequate to his abilities and position. The new apprentice was placed under the direction of Mr. Jackson who had now the active

superintendence of the chief working department. Richard Peacock soon made his way into favour. He had an intense liking for his work and in all that he undertook he displayed zeal, conscientiousness and ability. He remained in these works until 1838, getting an insight into every branch of the business but devoting himself more particularly to locomotive work. In 1838 the opportunity for improving his position and gaining additional knowledge occurred. The

Leeds & Selby line had been opened a few years, but from the first the locomotive department had been mismanaged. Several managers had been tried and, from one cause or another, had failed to secure the confidence of the directors. Richard Peacock was well acquainted with all that

was going on from the fact of his being constantly about either on business or to see his father. His movements had attracted the attention of the directors and of Mr. Peter Clark, the general manager of the line. Mr. Clark engaged him in conversation from time to time and was thus able to form his own conclusions regarding his ability. This led to an offer of the post of locomotive superintendent being made to Mr. Peacock. At first he felt compelled to decline the offer and gave as his reasons his youth and the difficulty there would be on that account in assuming sufficient command over a body of men. "Can you manage the work?" said Mr. Clark. "Yes" answered Mr. Peacock.

"Well if you will undertake that, I will see to the other part of the business" said the manager. Under that understanding the appointment was duly made, with the approval of the board of directors. It was a great responsibility to be assumed by a youth of eighteen, but it worked out all right, for Mr. Clark was as good as his word with regard to the management of the men, with whom, however, there was no difficulty after it had been once made clear that the

new head of the department knew more than they did. Mr. Peacock held this position with credit to himself and advantage to the company until an amalgamation was effected between the Leeds & Selby, and York & North Midland Railways in 1840 when, naturally, a fresh shuffling



Gorton Hall

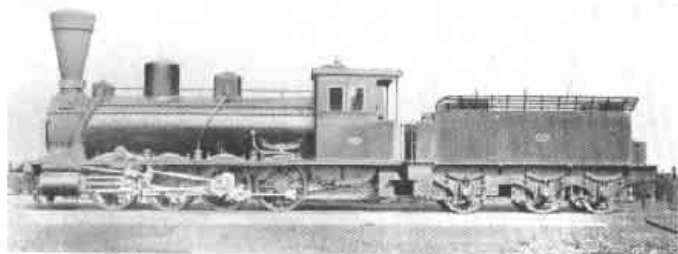
of the managerial cards took place. The locomotive headquarters were now removed from Leeds to York, and George Hudson, the "Railway King" as he afterwards came to be called, who was the moving spirit of the amalgamation strongly urged Mr. Peacock to go to York and take charge of the locomotive shops under Mr. Cabery, but the young engineer was disposed now to go further afield in quest of larger experience and accordingly declined the offer. Mr. Peacock made his way to London taking with him many valuable testimonials of ability and, after looking around and carefully counting his chances, he presented himself before Mr. (afterwards Sir) Daniel

Gooch, who was at the head of the Great Western undertaking then in course of active construction under the direction of Brunel. Mr. Peacock had made up his mind to gain experience at whatever cost, so he placed his abilities unreservedly at the disposal of the Great Western engineer to put him to what he pleased or send him wheresoever he desired. His pride was in his work; he had none for anything else. So we find him in 1840 and 1841, momentous years in the history of railways, bending all his energies to the congenial duties of railway work. Nothing came wrong to him at that time, from superintending a gang of workmen to driving an engine, and he had frequently committed to him the duty of running up and down the line with Brunel, between whom and himself the most friendly relations were maintained. In 1841 Mr. Peacock reached an important turning point in his career. The Manchester and Sheffield Railway was nearing completion and at the suggestion of his friends in Lancashire and Yorkshire he applied for the position of locomotive superintendent on that line. He made application, forwarded testimonials, and had the satisfaction of receiving the appointment without even an interview. He went down to Manchester and entered upon his new duties immediately, arriving on the scene a week before the first locomotive was to be delivered. For fourteen years he continued in this position, during which time the undertaking largely increased in extent and importance. During his charge the selection of the most suitable site for the railway workshops and main locomotive depôt devolved upon him, and at Gorton, in accordance with his designs and under his direction, the large and important works of the railway were eventually laid out. These are described in a paper he read before the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (see *Proceedings*, January, 1851, page 22), of which he was one of the original members since its establishment by Mr. Beyer in 1847. In 1849 he was made a member of the Institution of Civil Engineers.

Mr. Richard Peacock resigned his position with the Manchester & Sheffield Railway in 1854, in order to enter into partnership with his friend, Mr. Beyer, to whose scientific training and highly developed mechanical genius he brought invaluable knowledge of the working of the locomotive and, in addition, commercial instincts of the highest order. This combination soon ensured success. The story has already been told of their planning of the Gorton Foundry works in sections so as to admit of the gradual expansion of the whole by the simple addition of other counterpart sections without disturbing the portions previously erected—a far-sighted and successful policy.

Mr. Peacock has, not inappropriately been called the founder of the trade and prosperity of Gorton and Openshaw as it was not only due to him, as above stated, that the workshops of the Manchester & Sheffield (subsequently styled the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire) Railway were brought to Gorton, but it was also at his suggestion that Mr. John Ashbury and Mr. (afterwards Sir) Joseph Whitworth put up their respective works in Openshaw and that the Midland Railway Company also erected locomotive steam sheds there.

Mr. Peacock did good work in developing the locomotive engine in its earlier days, being specially associated with experiments in connection with the blast pipe; his experiments are fully recorded in D. K. Clark's work on *Railway Machinery*. A reference to these is also to be found in Zerah Colburn's *Locomotive Engineering*, page 259, in connection with the description of Mr. Beyer's design of the celebrated "Don Luiz" express passenger locomotive for the South Eastern Railway of Portugal, which was illustrated in our previous article on Mr. Beyer. The reference is as follows:— "The short cast-iron blast pipe, reaching just above the level of the upper row of the flue-tubes, is to be remarked. This level of blast orifice gives the best results, creating a better draught with the wider orifice, as



One of the Engines for the Grand Russian Railway

compared with higher blast-pipes; and was arrived at by Mr. Peacock by means of a series of well-arranged experiments on the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway. The low blast pipe is now generally employed. The first blast pipes were carried some distance into the chimney and had very contracted orifices and a sharp blast, causing much back pressure on the pistons."

It was, however, more as an organizer and a judge of men, and as possessing an almost intuitive mastery of financial questions, that Mr. Peacock's talents were seen, than as an inventor. One example of this occurs to memory. Political events in Europe, which culminated in the Franco-German War of 1870-71, resulted in the placing of a number of Russian orders for locomotives in England. For many reasons, both financial and technical, bearing upon Russian ways of doing things in those days, such business required no small degree of diplomacy and management for bringing it to a satisfactory conclusion for both parties. The quota of Russian orders placed at Gorton Foundry produced, as elsewhere, difficulties, and Richard Peacock had personally to take these in hand. However, his fine presence and *bonhomie*, which made him *persona grata* in high quarters, coupled with his other qualities, soon removed all obstacles to success. We reproduce herewith a photograph of him taken during the winter of 1870 in St. Petersburg, when he was delivering engines for the Grand Russian Railway.

He used to relate an amusing experience whilst superintending the prescribed engine mileages. It was found that the axle journals used to run hot owing to the fact that the natives had discovered the—to them—excellent edible properties of the tallow used in the axle-boxes. A judicious admixture of castor oil soon remedied this.

Richard Peacock took an active part in local matters and identified himself with any movement tending to the progress and prosperity of the neighbourhood. He was elected the first Chairman of the Local Board of the Gorton district and continued to hold that position until 1866, when the pressing calls of business compelled him to resign. He was President of the Gorton, Openshaw and Bradford Mechanics' Institute from the time of its opening and also President of the Manchester Steam Users'



Mr. Richard Peacock in Russian Costume

Association, from 1886. Both of these offices he held until his death. In 1885, when the newly-created Parliamentary division of Gorton was called upon to choose a representative, he was elected its member and continued to represent the constituency until his death. He was also a Justice of the Peace for the County of Lancaster.

Among the many local interests with which Mr. Peacock was closely identified was the promotion of the Manchester Ship Canal. The idea of a waterway for ocean-going vessels, affording Manchester access to the sea, had engaged the attention of the inhabitants of the Manchester area, from time to time, for many years notably in 1825, 1841 and 1877, but it was not until the late Mr. Daniel Adamson, head of the engineering firm of that name, had organized a committee from among the supporters of the idea in 1882 that the movement had its practical inception. First and foremost among the supporters of Mr. Adamson was Mr. Peacock. Both were much of the same type and strongly attracted to one another.

Two plans were prepared for the committee, one by Mr. E. Leader Williams and one by Mr. Hamilton Fulton. The latter, which was to straighten, deepen and widen the Irwell and Mersey rivers between Salford and Liverpool so as to afford a depth at low-water spring tides of 22 feet, was abandoned and that of the former engineer was preferred, which was to construct the

navigation with a series of large locks capable of passing ocean-going vessels, as well as smaller ones, so as to maintain the water at nearly its present height at the docks at Manchester. The prolonged Parliamentary conflict which ensued was the most arduous and protracted in the annals of private bill legislation.

The opposition was of the most relentless character and the principal opposing interests were the possessors of resources which made possible the retention of the best forensic eloquence and scientific skill; nevertheless they failed to induce Parliament to arrest the progress of a great national enterprise. One of the witnesses for the opposition, an expert in estuary navigation work from the United States, was a little too expert, and the cross-examiner for the promoters, seeing that he had an able but somewhat conceited and loquacious individual to deal with, cleverly took advantage of this. Pressing the witness on the score of his main objection to an important



The late Mr. Daniel Adamson

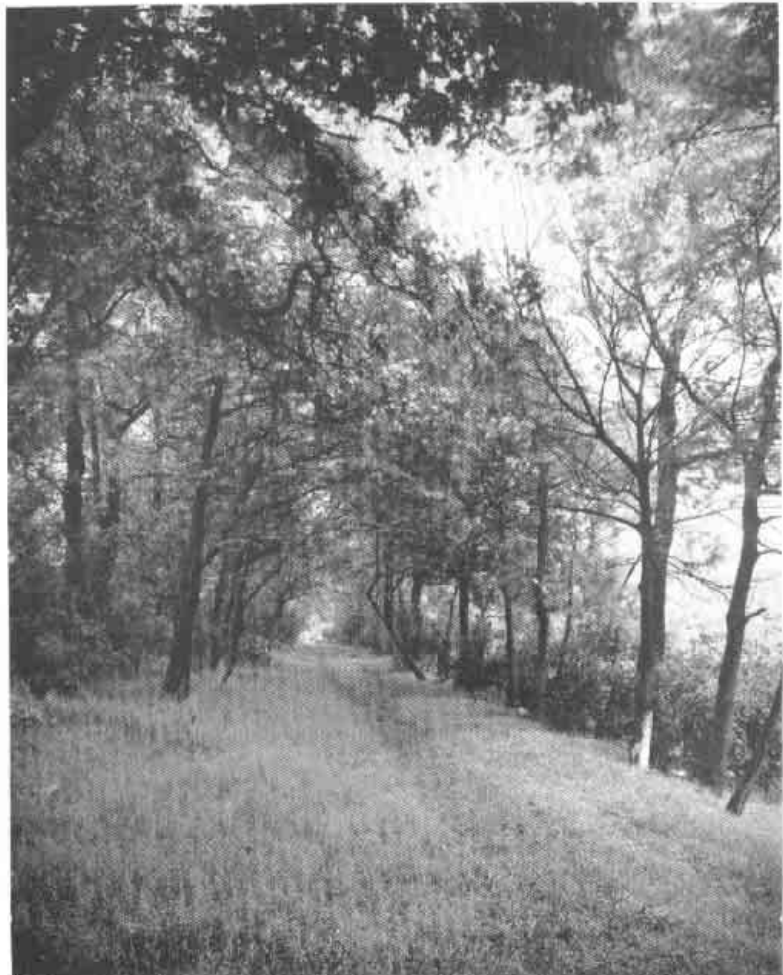
detail of the scheme, he bluntly asked him what he himself would have proposed instead. To this the witness unguardedly gave the desired answer. To the consternation of the opponents it was realized that their own highly-fee'd witness had given away a very valuable suggestion. It was, in fact, at once adopted by the promoters with much subsequent advantage to their case. Three years after the formation of the committee above referred to, the Parliamentary proceedings resulted in the incorporation of the Manchester Ship Canal Company, which received the Royal Assent on Aug. 6th, 1885.

It was a proud moment for Daniel Adamson who had borne the brunt of the battle and, among his supporters, to no one more so than Richard Peacock, who had effectively co-operated with him on many an occasion in arousing public opinion in favour of the scheme. Richard Peacock was a grand speaker to a Lancashire audience. He had none of Daniel Adamson's fire, but his deliberate and matter-of-fact manner gave his listeners the belief that he knew what he was talking about and meant it.

He had a considerable fund of dry humour. He could always manage to bring in an anecdote racy of the soil to strike home his argument. Nor was he too particular in the matter of bluntness. Few people who were present at the meeting in the Mechanics' Institute in David Street, towards the end of 1883, will have forgotten the droll story he told in replying to an opponent who said the Canal would cost too much. He said it reminded him of a man who wanted to buy a dog. Seeing a man with one to sell, he approached him and the following conversation took place. "What dost want for thi dog?" "Five pun'" said the man. "That's a h—l of a price, aint it?" "Aye! but it's a h—l of a dog," replied the man.

Richard Peacock delivered this story in all fulness. The first sensation of the

audience was surprise at its bluntness and then everyone present roared with laughter except the tale-teller. Richard Peacock was as stolid as one of his own anvils. The influence that he had on the early fortunes of the Ship Canal will never be sufficiently known. To see those two giants, Daniel Adamson and Richard Peacock, standing shoulder to shoulder on the same platform dealing sledge-hammer blows at weak-kneed friends or open opponents was a sight to inspire the most faint-hearted.



Private approach, still existing, which formerly led from Gorton Hall to Brookfield Church

Richard Peacock belonged to a class of proprietor employer which is rapidly vanishing, particularly since the coming of the era of large public companies, and lived both with and for his workpeople.

Gorton Hall, where he dwelt, was a commodious and comfortable residence standing in beautiful grounds which contained well-equipped stables and dairy premises. Happy in his home life, no rôle became him better than that of bountiful master and generous host. The Hall was a veritable museum of art treasures testifying to a cultured and discriminating taste, and to the ideals to which he gave expression when, as President of the Royal Manchester Institution, in 1880, he



Old Gorton

delivered a notable address in which he put forward a claim for a closer alliance between commerce and the arts than had previously existed in this country. The general public had an opportunity of seeing several of the best paintings he possessed as they formed part of the loan exhibition of pictures that formed so attractive a feature of the Jubilee Exhibition, at Old Trafford, in 1887.



Brookfield Unitarian Church

One of those paintings was Rosa Bonheur's replica of the famous one by Potter, "The Bull," at present domiciled in the permanent collection of old Dutch pictures in the Mauritshaus in the Hague, and the story is told of an occasion when two country yokels, visitors to the Old Trafford Exhibition, were examining the painting which made a natural appeal to them. "What's this called?" asked the one. The other, mistaking the inscription, replied, "The Bull after Potter." "Oh, aye!" said the questioner, after a pause, during which he had scanned every corner of the canvas, "It's a gradely and fearsome beast, but where's Potter?"

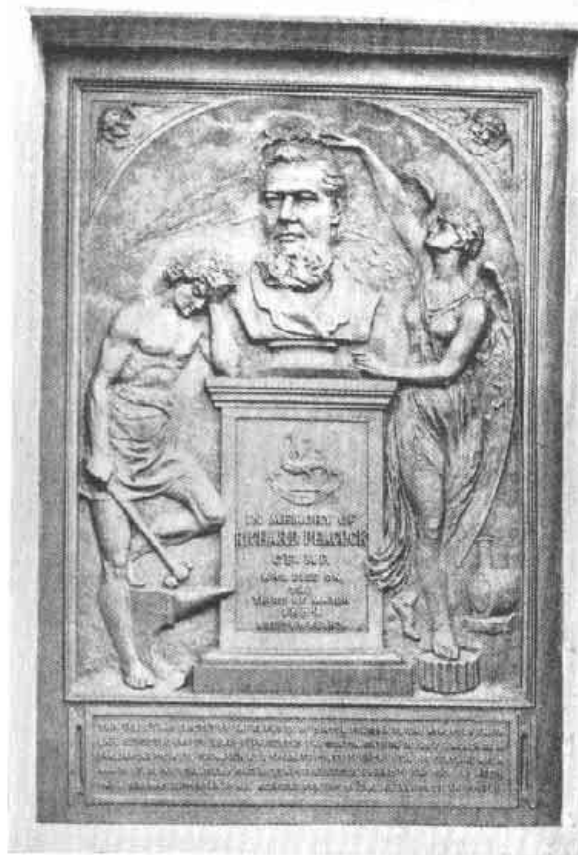
The Hall has long since been demolished and the estate turned over to local housing requirements. Little remains but the lodge and the entrance gate-posts to mark the scene of its former glories.

Richard Peacock took a lively human interest in the welfare of his workpeople. He knew their virtues as well as their faults and understood them thoroughly. He could be approached by any of them when in difficulty and distress, and this was the secret of the whole-hearted loyalty they rendered him. As magistrate he frequently attended the weekly "Petty Sessions" held in the Gorton Town Hall and many a delinquent's fine did he pay out of his own pocket. He had a specially weak spot for any one of his big forge men who might happen to appear before him, in consequence of having indulged not wisely but too well. He realized that theirs was often a thirsty job.

There will be many who still remember the exciting days of his first parliamentary candidature. The whole of the employees of Gorton Foundry, down to the smallest office boy, turned canvassers for the occasion. In those days of non-political Trade Unionism both Conservative and Liberal views were well represented among the men, but all differences paled into insignificance against the greater importance of securing

the best representative for the interests of the Division. Among Mr. Peacock's many benefactions to the neighbourhood was his presentation of a new place of worship to the Unitarian body, to which he himself belonged, to replace the old Unitarian Chapel built in 1703. This is the handsome structure on Hyde Road known as Brookfield Church. The building, which cost

£12,000, was opened in 1871, a few weeks later than the Episcopal Church of St. James's built by Mr. Beyer. Its first minister was the Rev. George Henry Wells, a noted divine, who had served at the old chapel for 34 years. He retired from the pulpit of Brookfield Church in 1881 and was succeeded in the following year by the Rev. Dendy Agate, who held the ministry for the next twelve years. It was during his ministry that Mr. Peacock died. The fine new school buildings which replaced the former ones, but on a more suitable site, also testify to the generosity of the



Memorial Tablet in Brookfield Church.

Peacock family as a whole.

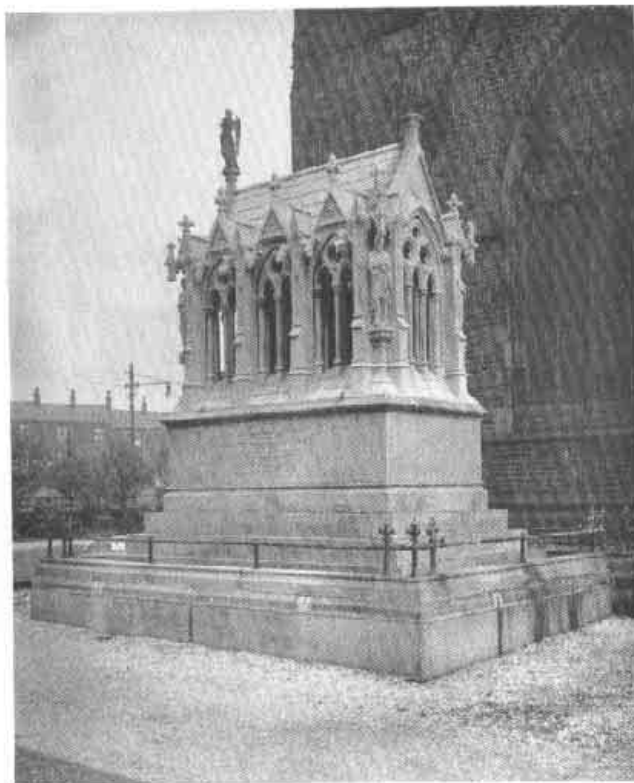
Richard Peacock died where he had lived, at Gorton Hall, on 3rd March, 1889, in the sixty-ninth year of his age, after a lingering illness, the progress of which had been followed with anxious sympathy by innumerable friends of both high and low degree. With him passed away one of the most genial and interesting figures of his industrial era, and whose name will always

stand as one who truly loved his fellow-men. The beautiful memorial tablet, designed by John Cassidy, the Manchester sculptor, to be seen in Brookfield Church eloquently expresses the love and esteem in which he was held. The inscription runs:—
 "This tablet was erected by the employces of Gorton Foundry to the memory of their late respected employer, who represented the Gorton Division of East Lancashire in Parliament, from its formation as a separate constituency, until his death. He was a man of sterling qualities, a kind and unostentatious friend to the poor and needy, and a generous supporter of all agencies for the elevation of the people."

On the right hand of the illustration of Brookfield Church can be noticed the

position of the stately monument which is placed above the vault where he lies buried. *Requiescat in pace!*

Richard Peacock was twice married and at the time of his death left a family of four children—two sons and two daughters. Of the former his eldest son, Colonel Ralph Peacock, who succeeded him at Gorton Foundry, alone survives, living in retirement at an advanced age in the South of England. Of the two daughters, the elder one, who married Mr. W. T. Birchenough, J.P., alone survives. The younger one married Mr. G. P. Dawson who succeeded Colonel Peacock in the position of Managing Director on the formation of the new Beyer, Peacock & Company (1902) Limited.



Mr. Richard Peacock's Tomb