

WASC 2306

Extract from
Robert Robertson's
Diary recording
official visit to
Factory following
Quinton Hill NC
Explosion 7-5-1894

R. G. P. K.
W.A.

THE RECENT NITRO-GLYCERINE EXPLOSION.

THREE HEROES RECEIVE RECOGNITION.

A pleasing ceremony was performed at the Cordite Works on Wednesday, when Mr William T. Thomson (chemist in charge, Guncocton Factory), Mr Robert Robertson (chemist in charge, Nitro-Glycerine Factory), and Mr David Wright (foreman of nitro-glycerine) received tangible recognition for gallantry displayed by them at the lamentable explosion at the Nitro-Glycerine Works on the 7th of May, 1894. Not only did these gentlemen receive at the time the approbation of the Press and townsmen, but on Wednesday they were complimented for their prompt display of courage by Government officials of high standing who were visiting the factories. These officials were Lord Monkswell (Under Secretary of State for War), Mr Woodall, M.P. (Financial Secretary), Dr. Anderson, D.G.O.F., Colonel Sale, R.E., Dr. Kellner, Mr Brade (secretary to Lord Monkswell), Mr Gibson (private secretary to Mr Woodall), and Mr A. C. Strange (assistant private secretary to the Secretary of State). They were met by Colonel Ormsby (superintendent of the factory) and Captain Hulcatt, R.E. (works department). After making a detour of the Gunpowder Works, the party arrived at the Cordite Works in the electric launch "The Spark," where they were met at the landing stage by Captain Nathan, Lieutenant Buckle, and Mr John Thomson (manager of Guncocton, Nitro-glycerine and Cordite Factories). A visit was paid to the guncocton department, after which the party assembled outside the laboratory and manager's office. Here were gathered Mr W. T. Thomson, Mr Robertson, Mr Wright, and Mr Barker, together with 200 employees. The scene was a pretty one. A capital view of the Abbey Church and town in the distance, and near at hand, the green pasture, the red buildings, and still closer, the gathering of men, some clad in bright red, others in black, whilst a third section was composed of blues and whites from the machinery department, not to speak of the sprinkling in the ordinary every day costume. Mr Woodall, M.P., stepped forward, and Colonel Ormsby introduced Mr Thomson, after which Mr Woodall said a pleasant duty devolved upon him in the absence of Mr Campbell-Bannerman. That right hon. gentleman had been unwell, and he would have been present, but that he thought that the journey would call for too much exertion. However, he (Mr Woodall) was glad to compliment the three gentlemen [Messrs. Thomson, Robertson, and Wright], who distinguished themselves on the 7th of May last year—in a way which he ventured to say was heroic—by

HAVE PRESENCE OF MIND

in the discharge of duty, which probably had the effect of saving life and which was entirely effectual in preserving Government property. When engaged in processes which were necessarily dangerous they must realise constantly how important it was that every one engaged should be constantly attentive to every detail of duty, not only with regard to their own interest, but to the interests of those around them. The act performed by the three gentlemen before him would doubtless live in their grateful memories. He hoped that the recognition they would receive would not be called a reward, but would be a refreshing reminder of their deed, and act as a further stimulus—if such be required—in the further discharge of their duties. Probably all of them remembered the

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Presentation of
good watch
for "good service"
at explosion 18
of nitro-glycerine
on the 7th of May.

UNFORTUNATE AND MYSTERIOUS EXPLOSION

which sent into instant eternity four of their fellow workers. The detonation that caused the explosion was clearly followed by a second explosion, so close that it was difficult to distinguish them. These left the mixing house standing. In this house was a quantity of explosive. Had that remained probably there would have been a third explosion, carrying mischief and injury in its train. The presence of mind to which he had referred: the instant courage, without hesitation or any feeling of danger, prompted these three gentlemen to go and drown the charge was most servicable and most valuable. Mr Woodall then received from Colonel Ormsby a leather case in which was a gold demi-hunter watch, with gold albert chain attached. This he handed to Mr Thomson, at the same time expressing the pleasure it gave him to do so. A similar presentation was made to Mr Robertson, with a good wish, and also to Mr Wright. In handing the watch to the latter, Mr Woodall was understood to say that his (Mr Wright's) part was warmly and gratefully appreciated by those who were responsible. The officials then left the works amid loud cheers from the men. The watches were made at the establishment of Sir John Bennett, of Cheapside. Each bears an inscription like unto the following, respective of the name:—

Presented to
W. T. THOMSON,
In recognition of
GOOD SERVICE

At the Explosion of Nitro-Glycerine,
At Royal Gunpowder Factory,
7th May, 1894.

After the officials had left the scene the men dispersed, some to their work and others to their homes. Thus ended a pleasant ceremony, which is bright side to a dark page in the history of the Royal Gunpowder Factory.

Killed: Bennie, Chemist 40
Foreman Pembert
Foreman W.G.
a workman

RR's watch No 115614
Sir J. Bennett.

W.T. Thomson, Asst. Manager
R.R. Chemist in charge
D. Wright - a workman
in W.G. (afterwards Foreman)