

THE LATE MR. MARTIN DOUGLAS

A PAGE OF LOCAL HISTORY

By the death of Mr. Martin Douglas, of Fernalde-villa, Ashbrooke-road, we lose another of the links which connect the Sunderland business men of today with those of an all but gone-by generation. Though during his later years Mr. Douglas had not been actively engaged in business, yet he was of very energetic habits and vigorous to the last. Some half-century ago, few figures were better known in Wearmouth than that of the gentleman who passed peacefully but suddenly to his long rest, in his 7th year on Thursday morning last. The family of deceased, which had long been honourably connected with Sunderland, was directly descended from Sir John Douglas, of Dalkeith, brother to the redoubtable Laird of Liddesdale, who was distinguished as "The Flower of Chivalry", after his gallant defence of Loch Leven Castle during the minority of David II. During the rebellion of 1745, they espoused the cause of Bonny Prince Charlie, and more than one member of the family were present at the disastrous battle of Cullodan, where the great-grandfather of the lately deceased gentleman was killed. His son, then a boy ten years of age, was more fortunate. In company with Thomas Drummond, son of the Duke of Perth, he reached England and settled at Sunderland shortly after the collapse of the rebellion. Mr. Drummond we believe, took up his abode in the neighbourhood of Biddiok, and many of his descendants still reside on the banks of the Wear. Young Douglas prospered in the land of his adoption and subsequently married Miss Coulson, the then heiress to the Thornhill estate. One of their sons, Martin, father of the deceased, on many occasions distinguished himself in rendering assistance to the crews of vessels in distress in the vicinity of the port. His courageous efforts were the means of saving many lives, and on one particular occasion his heroic exertions received recognition at the hands of Government, and a public subscription amounting to Three Hundred Pound, was offered to him by Lord Dundas, but this he declined, giving an answer characteristic of him, "I don't do it for fee or reward, but for the good of my fellow creatures." The money thus subscribed was subsequently expended in the purchase of the first lifeboat ever stationed at Sunderland. Mr. M. Douglas, sen, having been long in the employ of, was taken into partnership by Mr. Hayton, coal fitter to the Marquis of Londonderry, at a time when all the coals from the Seaham Collieries were shipped at Sunderland. In 1822 the subject of this sketch became the partner of his father on the retirement of Mr. Hayton. Two years afterwards he married Eliza, daughter of Mr. Thomas Mordey, fitter for Earl Durham and father of the late Dr. Mordey. On the commencement of sinking operations at Wearmouth Colliery Mr. Martin Douglas, jun, was appointed manager and continued to act in that capacity until it passed out of the hands of the original promoters in 1848. So highly were his services valued by the colliery owners, that at his decease, in 1854, Mr. William Smith, one of the partners, left his whole fortune to the deceased gentleman. In connection with this legacy Mr. Douglas gave a striking proof of his sterling integrity. Among Mr. Smith's effects a slip of paper was found, upon which that gentleman had written the names of several of his friends, and the titles of the principal local charities. Opposite to these names figures representing sums ranging from Twenty-five pound to Three thousand five hundred pound were placed, but the paper was neither dated nor signed, nor were any instructions found therewith. Mr. Douglas thinking his deceased friend had at one time prior to his last will intended those bequests, he, with most uncommon disinterestedness, handed the sums mentioned, amounting to about Nine thousand pounds, to the various institutions and persons referred to on the slip of paper. Between 1854 and 1869 Mr. Douglas entered largely into commercial speculations, which in the end, unfortunately for him and for his family, proved unsuccessful, and in the latter year he retired from business altogether, and up to his death resided at Fernalde Villa, where he died. The deceased has left a widow and family of four sons and two daughters, the youngest of whom is our respected townsman, Dr. Mordey Douglas. Many friends will miss the genial kind-heartedness of his disposition and he will long be remembered for his high probity of character. Interment will take place Monday 1st at Sunderland Cemetary.