

Thomas Stevenson, Civil Engineer, 22.07.1818 – 08.05.1887



Thomas Stevenson was the youngest son of engineer Robert Stevenson 1771-1850, designer of the Bell Rock and Isle of May Lighthouses, and the brother of engineers Alan and David Stevenson. Between 1854 and 1886, Thomas designed over thirty lighthouses with both his brother David and nephew David Alan Stevenson.

Thomas Stevenson's greatest achievement was the designing of a revolving light which earned him an international reputation. In addition to his innovative work as a lighthouse and harbour engineer, Thomas Stevenson invented the Stevenson screen used in meteorology as a shelter to shield meteorological instruments to enable accurate weather measurements to be taken.

Thomas married Margaret Isabella Balfour and their only son, Robert Lewis Balfour Stevenson, was born in 1850. At about the age of eighteen, Robert changed the spelling of his middle name to Louis (pronounced Lewis). Expected to follow in his father's footsteps and to join the family engineering business, R L Stevenson enrolled as an engineering student at Edinburgh University in November 1867.

R L Stevenson spent the month of July 1868 in Anstruther observing as part of his engineering training, the work being carried out by the family firm of D & T Stevenson on Anstruther Harbour. He lodged with carpenter Baillie Brown in Cunzie House, Crail Road, opposite St Adrian's Church. A plaque on the side of the house records his stay. Stevenson wrote later: *'though I haunted the breakwater by day, and even loved the place for the sake of the sunshine, the thrilling seaside air, the wash of waves on the sea-face, the green glimmer of divers' helmets far below, the musical clinking of the masons, my one genuine preoccupation lay elsewhere'*.

The engineering work created the outer basin or Union Harbour. The east pier and western breakwater including Chalmers Lighthouse were added providing a major deep water facility for Anstruther. The work cost over eighty thousand pounds.

It was a disappointment to Thomas, but not a surprise, when his son announced that he no longer wished to pursue an engineering career and that he intended to become a writer. To provide some security, R L Stevenson began studying law at Edinburgh University in November 1871 qualifying as an advocate in 1875, but he never practised.

Thomas Stevenson died in 1887 aged 68; sadly his son was too ill to attend the funeral. Thomas is buried in the family plot in the New Calton Cemetery, Edinburgh.