

# Henry Dyer

Born 1848.

Life story by Robin Hunter.

Available online at [www.livesretold.co.uk](http://www.livesretold.co.uk)



## Contents

1. Introduction
2. Early Years
3. Call to Japan
4. Return to Glasgow
5. Legacy

*Robin Hunter, the author of this life story, has published a book *Henry Dyer: A Scottish Engineer in Japan*. It is available in print and Kindle editions at Amazon here: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B074LQCLNX/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?encoding=UTF8&btkr=1>. He also publishes a website about Henry Dyer which is here: <http://www.henrydyer.org.uk/>*

# 1. Introduction

*Henry Dyer was a Scottish Engineer who played a major part in the industrialisation of Japan in the latter half of the nineteenth century through his capacity as founding Principal of the Imperial College of Engineering in Tokyo. This web site charts Dyer's life describing his early childhood and education in Scotland, his work in Japan and his later life back in Scotland.*

*Henry Dyer's story is a fascinating one especially as he lived through times of great changes in Japan and Scotland. He was a prodigious writer who recorded and commented on many of the economic, technological and social changes he saw in both countries. He was also a man who held strong, often radical, views which made him an interesting, and at times controversial, character. He did much to bring together the British and Japanese communities, each of whom he believed had much to learn from the other.*

Henry Dyer was born in 1848 in Bellshill within the Parish of Bothwell in the West of Scotland. His early years were spent in Bellshill and in the nearby village of Shotts. Around 1865 he and his family moved to Glasgow where he worked in a foundry, and attended Anderson's College in the evenings. Later he became a student at the University of Glasgow, where he obtained a degree in engineering. In 1872, Henry Dyer was invited to become the first Principal of the newly created Imperial College of Engineering in Tokyo.

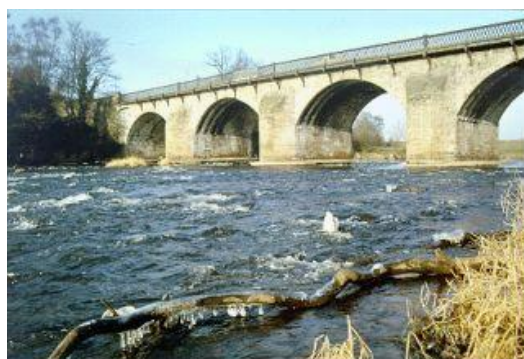
He went to work in Japan in 1873 where he lived until he retired from his post as Principal of the College, about ten years later. On leaving Japan he returned to Glasgow where he contributed to the cultural, social and educational life of the city until his death in 1918. In recent years Henry Dyer has been remembered in a number of ways. In 1996 and 1997 the University of Strathclyde and the University of Tokyo held symposia in Glasgow and Tokyo, respectively, to commemorate Henry Dyer. Much has been written about Henry Dyer and he has left behind a large number of publications.

*These web pages are based on pages originally developed for the University of Strathclyde by some of the descendants of Henry Dyer's sister, Janet Dyer (photo on right). The considerable assistance of Shoji Katoh of Nagoya University in Japan and the late Olive Checkland in providing information for inclusion in these pages is gratefully acknowledged. Acknowledgements are also due to a number of other organisations and individuals for permission to use photographs and other artwork.*



## 2. Early Years

Henry Dyer was born on 16 August 1848 in the village of Muirmadkin (now absorbed in to the town of Bellshill) in the Parish of Bothwell (Bothwell Bridge shown right) in what is now known as North Lanarkshire. Bellshill is some 12 kilometres east of Glasgow in the West of Scotland and is situated on the bank of the River Clyde.

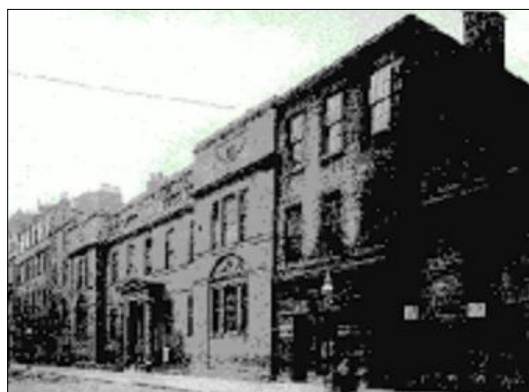


Henry's father, John Dyer, was born in County Cork, Ireland about 1823 where his father, a soldier, was stationed at the time. His mother, Margaret Morton, was born locally about 1824. Bellshill was something of a 'boom' town at the time with the discovery of iron and coal in the area in the 1830's and, as a result, had experienced an influx of 'immigrant' workers from all over Britain and Ireland, as well as from Poland and Lithuania.

At the time of the 1851 census Henry aged 2 years and his sister Janet aged six months lived with their parents (and a lodger) at 32 Edinburgh Road in Muirmadkin. John Dyer is described in the census as a foundry labourer. The number in Henry's family became five in total, with the birth of a second son Robert in 1853.

About 1857 the family moved to Shotts, after perhaps a brief stay in Holytown. Shotts is about 15 kilometres east of Bellshill midway between Glasgow and Edinburgh and was at that time the centre of the Iron industry in central Scotland. John Dyer worked in the Shotts Iron Works (then at its height) and Henry was educated at the local school (Wilson's Endowed School) where he was highly regarded by his school master. He later worked in the offices of the Iron Works for a short time.

Around 1865 the Dyer family moved to Glasgow where Henry was employed at James Aitken and Company's foundry in Cranstonhill. There he served his apprenticeship as a student engineer under Thomas Kennedy and A C Kirk, and was awarded a Whitworth Exhibition in the workman category, in 1868. At the same time he attended classes at Anderson's College (right, later to become the University of Strathclyde) in the company of Yozo Yamao. In 1868 Henry became a student at the University of Glasgow where he graduated in 1873.



While in Glasgow the Dyer family lived at 449 St Vincent Street (1871 census) and 128 Dumbarton Road (1881 census).

### 3. Call to Japan

In 1872, at the age of 24, Henry Dyer received an invitation to become the Principal of the Imperial College of Engineering (ICE) being set up in Tokyo by the Japanese Ministry of Public Works. The ICE was one of three engineering colleges being established in Tokyo at the time, though the only one to be under the control of the Ministry of Public Works. He was followed about a year later by his wife to be Marie Ferguson. The marriage took place at the British Legation in Yokohama.



Imperial College of Engineering, Tokyo, about 1880.

The teaching methods introduced by Dyer and his colleagues at the Imperial College were revolutionary at the time and much credit for the rapid industrialisation of Japan at the end of the last century has been attributed to the work of 'Dyer's College', as it was often known.

In 1882, after ten years in Japan, Henry Dyer tendered his resignation from his post at the Imperial College and returned with his family to Scotland.

---

## 4. Return to Glasgow

On his return to Glasgow in 1882 Henry Dyer lived in Lenzie, near Glasgow, for a few years.

Thereafter, from about 1885 until his death in 1918, he lived, with his wife Marie and family, at 8 Highburgh Terrace (now 52 Highburgh Road) in the West End of Glasgow, not far from the University of Glasgow. Although he was not successful in obtaining an appointment to a senior University post on his return, he became involved in a wide range of educational activities at university and school levels in the West of Scotland. His engineering work was recognised by the University of Glasgow in the award of the DSc degree in 1890. He was also honoured by Glasgow University through the award of an honorary LLD in 1910.

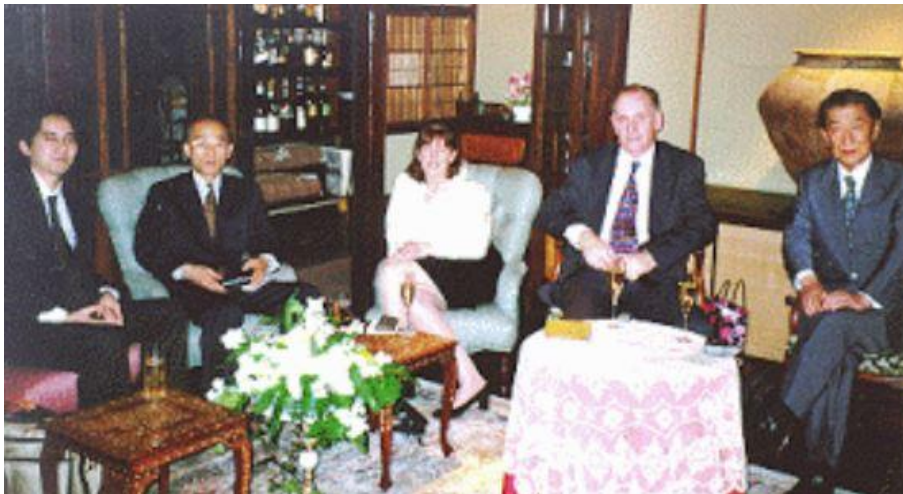


He pursued many interests in other activities, mainly of a cultural and religious nature while maintaining a strong interest in all things to do with Japan throughout the rest of his life.

Henry Dyer died on 25 September 1918. His gravestone is in the Necropolis cemetery in Glasgow.

---

## 5. Legacy



Yuici Iwano of Jitsugyo No Nihon Sha, Kenji Ishihara, Lesley Hart, Robin Hunter, Shinichi Yamao in Tokyo, 1997.

In recent years the work of Henry Dyer has been commemorated in a number of ways. Two symposia have been held in his memory, the Strathclyde Symposium in April 1996 and the Tokyo Symposium in March 1997. In addition, as part of its centenary celebrations, the Japanese publisher Jitsugyo No Nihon Sha Ltd published a Japanese translation of *Dai Nippon* in 1999.

In 1998 two busts of Henry Dyer were created by Kate Thomson, a Scottish sculptor living in Japan. The creation of the busts was sponsored jointly by ICL(Japan) and the British Embassy in Tokyo. One of the busts was presented to the University of Tokyo on 29th July 1998, and has been placed in the office of the Dean of Engineering. The other bust was presented to the University of Strathclyde on 16th November 1998 and was placed in the University Library.

Henry Dyer received many honours for his pioneering work in Japan and for the educational and other work, which he performed on his return from Japan. He was a prolific writer and left behind an extensive list of publications. In addition, many articles and papers have been written about his life and work, including a number of appreciations on his death in 1918.

