

John Palmer Smythies (1843-1894)

1894 Obituary

JOHN PALMER SMYTHIES, son of the late John Kinnersley Smythies of the Tye, Bentley, Essex, was born on the 27th of March, 1843, and was educated at Rugby and at Cambridge. On leaving the University he was articled to Messrs. McClean and Stileman, under whom he was subsequently engaged as an assistant engineer on the construction of the Furness Railway and other works. In 1871 Mr. Smythies proceeded to Argentina, where he was engaged during the next few years on the Las Flores Extension of the Buenos Ayres Great Southern Railway and on the Cordova and Tucuman Railway. He then practised on his own account in Buenos Ayres, but soon took up his residence at Rosario, where he saw that there was much to be done in the way of public works, not only in that city but also in the province of Santa Fe of which it is the chief town. He proposed the canalisation of the Parana, which would have enabled ocean-going steamers to reach the port of Rosario; a scheme for the drainage of that city; and the irrigation of the province by means of canals. Finding that great difficulties were thrown in the way of his various projects, Mr. Smythies abandoned engineering and purchased the station of Las Turbias in the province of Santa Fe, where he devoted himself to the breeding of fine stock and to the development of that property which was of considerable extent. Mr. Smythies was brutally murdered on the 2nd of January, 1894, by a native servant whom he had dismissed. It appears that the man demanded ten dollars more than were due to him, which his master refused to pay. The matter was decided by the nearest judge in favour of Mr. Smythies, to whom the servant exclaimed as they left the court: "You are going to pay for this, friend." Mr. Smythies immediately drove off alone, except for a native boy, brother to the murderer, while the latter went to a store, bought a knife, and with a companion started in pursuit. They overtook the carriage at the entrance-gate to the station of Las Turbias and the dismissed servant immediately attacking Mr. Smythies, who never carried fire-arms, stabbed him in the back and two other places and then cut his throat. He was buried in the English cemetery at Las Rosas.

Mr. Smythies was elected an Associate of the Institution of Civil Engineers on the 19th of May, 1868, and was placed in the class of Associate Member on its creation ten years later.

