William Fairbairn Encyclopedia Article

William Fairbairn

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William Fairbairn

1789-1874

Scottish engineer who revolutionized the construction of steam engines through his invention of a riveting machine. Fairbairn moved to Newcastle upon Tyne in 1804, where he was apprenticed to an enginewright at North Shields. From there he moved to London, where his engineering studies helped him produce such inventions as a steam excavator and a sausage-making machine. By 1817 he had established a facility in Manchester, where he made machinery for water wheels and cotton mills. His reputation grew and, before long, he was actively working on ships, bridges, locomotives, and other important contributions to the British economy. He was made a baronet in 1869.