The focus of the year was undoubtedly anticipation for the opening of the new Being Brunel museum. The culmination of six years of detailed planning and preparation, this ground-breaking, innovative and fun museum tells the story of Brunel’s extraordinary life – his successes, failures and characteristics.

From the latest acquisitions for the Brunel Collection to the careful conservation work being carried out on every item going into the new museum, you have helped to safeguard the history of the ship and Brunel for future generations to enjoy.

The importance of this work has been recognised by Arts Council England, who accepted the SS Great Britain Trust into its National Portfolio for 2018. This funding will support the Trust for the next four years in developing new ideas and projects to improve the visitor experience.

These projects will build on the work that was delivered in the past year, including the now well-established series of themed, programmed festivals held during school holidays. In the summer, this included performances of a circus show from partners Cirque Bijou, written and produced exclusively for the summer programme. These events enhance the authentic and immersive visitor experience, giving visitors a flavour of Victorian dockyard life.

Providing an authentic experience has been at the heart of one current project, ‘Global Stories: the people of the SS Great Britain’, which saw all passenger and crew lists for each voyage of the SS Great Britain transcribed and transferred to an online database.

Not only does this allow visitors to unearth connections with former passengers and crew, but the project has also helped to tell stories about these individuals through ‘boarding cards’, which can be used to explore the ship.

Alongside these new activities, the Trust continues to prioritise delivery of its unique range of education programmes.

This year, the Education team also developed a new interactive show telling the story of Brunel’s life. The Brunel Institute continues to hold regular drop-in sessions and last year encouraged over 10,000 visitors to engage with items in the collection.

I have been Chairman of this incredible organisation for nine years and it has been an exciting and fulfilling time. Building on the sound foundations left by my predecessors, I have helped it grow into an international success story: with the creation of the Brunel Institute, the Being Brunel museum, the recreation of an authentic Victorian dockyard and a number of highly successful educational innovations, especially the Future Brunels programme. The national designation of the collection by Arts Council England was a major achievement, the Brunel Network is now a reality and the developing academic collaborations, especially with the University of Bristol, have significantly extended our educational and research activities.

However, I must now stand down and hand the reins over to my successor, Jim McKenna, who will lead the Trust through equally exciting and challenging times. I would like to record my thanks to my fellow trustees, past and present, the staff and volunteers and the members, without whose enthusiasm and support none of these achievements would have been possible.

Bon Voyage and Nil Desperandum!

Colin H. Green CBE
Chair
This year saw the completion of the build for the new onsite museum dedicated to the life and work of Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

When it opens in March 2018, it will bring together the world’s most significant Brunel collection, telling the story of his life with never-before-seen collection items. Alongside traditional museum exhibits, there will be a number of interactives which will bring Brunel’s engineering achievements to life. The new building includes an access bridge into the now fully-restored, historic Grade II* listed Dock Office building.

Wild Creations, of Cardiff, has completed the installation of one of the largest pieces within the museum – an eight-metre high head of Brunel. Brought into the museum in separate pieces, the head was constructed within the main hall of the museum, where ‘Brunel’ will preside over the exhibitions. From the upper level of the museum, visitors will then be able to enter Brunel’s ‘mind’, where an audio-visual experience will provide an insight into the world through his eyes.

With so many aspects to the museum experience, a variety of contractors will work onsite to complete each bespoke element, ready to open the doors to visitors for Easter 2018.
GLOBAL STORIES: THE PEOPLE OF THE SS GREAT BRITAIN

In December 2017, the Global Stories database was launched onsite and online. This searchable database lists every passenger and crew member from each voyage of the SS Great Britain, allowing visitors to discover links to these individuals by name, age or nationality.

Terminals giving visitors access to the database have now been installed in the Dockyard Museum and, to integrate the database into the visitor experience, ‘boarding cards’ have been created. Each card profiles a historic passenger or crew member, providing details about them and their voyage on the Great Britain. These cards give visitors a new way of exploring the ship – through the eyes of one of its previous inhabitants.

Visitors can then use the database to find out more about this passenger before and after their voyage on the Great Britain. The boarding cards and the database are available in five languages – English, Spanish, French, German and Mandarin – to allow the majority of our visitors to get the most out of using them.

It’s wonderful to see how many visitors seem to enjoy exploring with the boarding cards and interacting with the database; as one visitor described, the project “brings it all to life”.

LATEST ACQUISITIONS

Thanks to generous donations and support from members, the Trust has continued to acquire new items for the collection. These objects provide incredible insight into the personal and working lives of the whole Brunel family. For example, a collection of materials bought at auction in November 2017 detail the working life of Isambard’s father, Sir Marc Brunel, including drawings from some of his earliest engineering projects.

Earlier in the year, a descendant of the Brunel family kindly donated the Probate Will of IKB. A volunteer in the Brunel Institute, Vasilis Soteriou, has now transcribed the will, which gives details of how Brunel divided his estate: for example, to his son, Henry, he bequeathed, ‘such of my Books Illustrations Engravings Drawings Professional papers Maps Plans and Instruments he may select and wish to have in connexion with and for the purposes of his Profession of Civil Engineer’. As these items were not offered to Brunel’s other son (or wife or daughter), it’s clear that they were for the purpose of furthering Henry’s career as a Civil Engineer.

These items will go on display in Being Brunel and will sit alongside objects related to Brunel’s engineering achievements, helping to provide visitors with a comprehensive picture of the man himself.

SUMMER CIRCUS DRAWS RECORD NUMBERS

Last summer, the Trust welcomed almost 40,000 people – a new record for that six-week period. A partnership with Cirque Bijou provided an eye-catching draw for families and tourists, prompting high visitation against the potentially challenging backdrop of a new museum opening on the horizon.

Three shows each day in the dockyard featured circus performance students telling the story of ‘Crossing the Line’ – a historic ritual performed during voyages as the ship crossed the Equator. Acrobatics, music and storytelling featured heavily, with audiences of all ages packing the dockside. With such dramatic and unique performances, the marketing campaign was bold and memorable, drawing high visitor numbers throughout the holiday period and encouraging positive reviews and word-of-mouth recommendation regionally.

The Trust’s established approach of running family-orientated programmes during school holidays continued to pay off during October half term, when ‘Woeful Wounds’ also drew large visitor numbers. These events are specifically designed to offer families an immersive Victorian experience, encouraging them to make the most of their annual ticket and return throughout the year.
NEW BEING BRUNEL EDUCATION SHOW

Working in collaboration with Matt Pritchard, a freelance science communicator, the Education team has developed a new interactive show that complements the exhibitions within Being Brunel. The hour-long performance enables school visitors to learn about his successes and failures, whilst discovering which of his personal skills and attributes helped make him the inventive genius we celebrate today.

The Being Brunel show explores the history and science of Brunel’s projects with audience participation, interactive challenges and demonstrations. It was developed to increase the Brunel-related content offered to school groups onsite and to enable schools to participate in an activity as a whole year group.

The show is designed for an upper primary and lower secondary school audience, and gives the students an opportunity to appreciate the engineering principles and ideas behind the wider heritage of Brunel’s projects. The team developed the project over the course of last year, and they are now looking forward to delivering it to school groups alongside the opening of the new museum.

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND FUNDING

The Trust has received another significant endorsement for its work with funding from Arts Council England as a new National Portfolio Organisation (NPO). This funding, beginning in April 2018 and totalling £840,000, is unique because it will support core running costs to develop activity over a four-year period. This will support the development of new initiatives, whilst building upon and expanding existing, successful programmes.

This is the first year that museums have been able to apply for NPO funding, making it a real landmark that the Trust will join the portfolio. The Trust will sit alongside other Bristol organisations - such as Bristol Old Vic, Spike Island and Colston Hall - in becoming NPO-funded. Gaining recognition as an NPO indicates the SS Great Britain Trust’s strong reputation in the sector and is evidence of the excellent visitor experience on offer.
Once again, the Trust had a very good year financially, with visitor numbers reaching record levels, exceeding budget by 11% and last year by 13%. Work continued on the building of the new Being Brunel museum, which was completed early 2018 and opened, extremely positively, to the public in March. The Trust was successful in its significant application to the Arts Council England, meaning it will become a National Portfolio Organisation from April 2018 and receive core funding of £210k for each of the next four years. 

Unrestricted funds, which are mainly income and expenditure from operation as a visitor attraction, showed a £385k deficit for the year before transfers (£581k deficit last year). This comprised a planned operating deficit of £31k (as the Trust invested in the growth of the organisation to support the proposed expansion of the site) and the spending of £131k prior year surpluses on designated fund projects (last year £370k). In addition, a further £135k was spent from designated funds which was capitalised, notably on the engine and desiccant wheels. The transfer of £208k endowment income (£135k last year) reduced the unrestricted deficit to £188k (£446k deficit last year).

Overall, the Trading Company (covering the commercial activities of retail, events and catering) increased its turnover and contribution from the previous year, despite pressure on margins and increased competition. The income from visitors and trading enabled the Trust to spend over £2.5m on charitable activities in conservation, maintenance, education, and curating. Restricted funds increased by £3.2m primarily due to the income raised to fund the building of Being Brunel (last year restricted funds increased by £1.4m), which was not fully expended by the year-end.

The Endowment Fund provided net income to the Trust of £208k (last year £135k). The managed investment portfolio performed well during the year, with the overall value of the fund increased by £765k mainly due to investment income, unrealised gains on investments, donations and matched funding (last year £1m increase).

Overall, the Trust’s total net incoming resources were £3.5m for the year (last year £1.9m incoming resources). At the year-end the balance sheet was strong with total funds at £22.5m, largely made up of tangible fixed assets at £14.2m (an increase of £3.8m, made up of £4.1m million investment in the Brunel museum offset by depreciation charges), endowment funds at £6.8m and a healthy cash balance of £1.6m including a reserve fund of £400k and £584k designated for specified future projects. The Trust continues to have no external borrowing and remains in a very stable financial position.

Kerry Lock
Hon Treasurer
17 May 2018
INDEPENDENT AUDITORS’ STATEMENT TO THE TRUSTEES OF THE SS GREAT BRITAIN TRUST

We have examined the summarised financial statements of the SS Great Britain Trust for the year ended 31 January 2018 which comprise extracts from the Income and Expenditure account and the Balance Sheet.

RESPECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES OF TRUSTEES AND AUDITORS

The trustees are responsible for preparing the summary financial statements in accordance with applicable United Kingdom law. Our responsibility is to report to you our opinion on the consistency of the summary financial statement within the Annual Review, and its compliance with the relevant requirements of section 427 of the Companies Act 2006 and the regulations made thereunder. This report is made to the charity’s trustees, as a body, in accordance with the terms of our engagement. Our work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charity’s trustees those matters that we have agreed to state in this report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charity and the charity’s trustees, as a body, for our work or for this report.

We also read the other information contained in the Annual Review and consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the summary financial statement.

We conducted our work in accordance with Bulletin 2008/3 issued by the Auditing Practices Board. Our report on the charity’s full annual financial statements describes the basis of our opinion on those financial statements and on the Trustees’ report.

OPINION

In our opinion the summary financial statements as disclosed on page 11, is consistent with the Financial Statements and the Trustees’ report of the SS Great Britain Trust for the year ended 31 January 2018 and complies with the applicable requirements of section 427 of the Companies Act 2006, and the regulations made thereunder.

We have not considered the effects between the date on which we signed our report on the full annual financial statements (21 May 2018) and the date of this statement.

Mazars LLP
Chartered Accountants (Statutory Auditors)
90 Victoria Street, Bristol, BS1 6AN
30 July 2018
The SS Great Britain Trust is grateful for all the support it receives from its members, from individuals, companies and trusts. We would like to thank the following in particular for their generous donations and pledges of support during the year ended 31 January 2018:

6 O’clock Gin
Airbus UK
Architectural Heritage Fund
Arthur J. Gallagher Insurance Brokers Ltd
Arts Council England
Aurelius Charitable Trust
Avery’s Wine Merchants Ltd
Babcock International Group plc
BAM Nuttall Ltd
BMT Defence Services Ltd
DCMS Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
Edith Murphy Foundation
Friends of The National Libraries
Headley Trust
Heritage Lottery Fund
ICOM UK
IOP Publishing
Lloyd’s Register Foundation
Mr Bill Tindall
Mr David Parker
Mr Guy Wilberforce
Mr John Baker
Mr Ray Daniels
Mr Don Jones
Mr John Hollingdale
Professor Andrew Lambert
Mr Chris & Mrs Jill Logue
Dr Malcolm Lewis
Mr Stephen & Mrs Jean Macfarlane
Dr Liz MacKenzie MBE & Dr Campbell MacKenzie
Mrs Cara MacMahan
Dr Campbell McMurtry
Mr David Parkes
Mr Mary Prior CVO MBE
Alderman Brian Richards JP
Mr Clive Richards
Mr Roger Smedley MBE
Mr David Sproxton CBE
Mr John Hollingdale
Mr Ken Bradling
The Late Rt Hon the Lord Euan Strathcona and Mount Royal
Dr Grant Watson, OBE
Dr Grant Watson, OBE

Guarantors:

The legal members of the charitable company are known as “Guarantors.” All members of the board of trustees and the following individuals are guarantors:

Mr Alan Aberg
Mr Chris Booy
Mrs Janet Brinnand
Mr Edward Cooke
Mr Richard Fitzgeorge Parker
Dr Jo Gipps OBE
Mr John & Mrs Lynne Griffin
Mr Michael Hill

The SS Great Britain Trust

10,129
People attended ‘Archive in Fire’ to learn about an item in the Collection

1,250
Volunteer hours given to transcribing passenger and crew lists

13,504
People visited the Brunel Institute to find out more about the Designated Collection