A Bit About Brunel

• Brunel was born in 1806 in Portsmouth. He had an English mother (Sophia Kingdom) and a French father (Marc Isambard Brunel).

• Aged just 14, Isambard Brunel was sent to France to study mathematics and engineering at the best technical school in the world (Caen College in Normandy).

• On his return, he went straight to work with his father on the Thames Tunnel. By the age of 20, he was the Chief Engineer but was nearly killed when the Thames Tunnel flooded in January 1828.

• In 1833 Brunel was appointed Chief Engineer for the project to build the first railway line between London and Bristol (the Great Western Railway).

• In 1855 Brunel designed and built the first prefabricated hospital. It was visited by a famous Victorian nurse, Florence Nightingale.

• In the 1830s Brunel invested in the Great Western Steamship Company. He set about building better and faster ships to cross the Atlantic. His first was the Great Western, which was the longest paddle steamer in the world at the time. In an Atlantic crossing, she beat her rivals by four days! Next came the ss Great Britain. His third and last ship was the enormous ss Great Eastern.

• During Brunel’s recovery, he entered a competition to design a bridge across the River Avon at Clifton. After a few modifications, his design won the competition, but the bridge was only completed after his death as a memorial. Brunel’s suspension bridge still carries traffic across the gorge today. Brunel’s original design was based on an Ancient Egyptian style.

• Brunel’s ss Great Britain is considered by many to be his masterpiece. As well as being the world’s first great ocean liner, she was the first iron-hulled, propeller-driven steamship. Most historians agree that Brunel’s ss Great Britain is the forerunner of all modern passenger ships.

• Brunel is, arguably, the greatest of England’s engineers. The legacy of his work continues to live on.