

HISTORY NOTES / NOTES HISTORIQUES

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(Brunel's original Temple Meads station) to recognize the Great Western Railway as an ASCE/ICE joint Historic Landmark. Sir Neil Cossons, chairman of English Heritage introduced Bristol's Deputy Mayor who welcomed us to Bristol. ASCE President Dennis Martenson described the GWR's position in engineering history and the Historic plaque was unveiled by the ASCE and ICE Presidents.

Brunel Bicentenary Conference

Isambard Kingdom Brunel was born on 9 April, 1806. Today he is the best known of the Victorian engineers through his innovative designs, many of which are still in existence. Brunel was an imaginative genius challenged by the impossible. Some of his projects were disappointments such as the atmospheric propulsion system for the South Devon Railway. Others were great hits such as the Great Western Railway, the S.S. Great Britain, and the Saltash Bridge across the Tamar River.

It is unusual that a structure be built as a memorial to an engineer after his death. However this did occur with the Clifton Suspension Bridge across the Avon Gorge in Bristol. Brunel had won a competition in 1830 for the design of the bridge but it was never completed in his lifetime. After Brunel's demise two of his colleagues completed the design and the bridge, as shown, was opened in 1864.

Because of the public's fascination with Brunel, many events celebrated his bicentenary in England this year.

The first "action" of the Brunel Bicentenary Conference, attended by delegations from ICE, ASCE and CSCE, took place on the evening of July 4. A small group from all three organizations traveled to Old Oak Common

railway depot for a ceremony to "name" the special train which was to take attendees and other guests to the conference in Bristol on the following day. The "headboard" mounted on the vintage steam locomotive "King Edward I" was duly unveiled by ICE President Gordon Masterton and the train officially named the "Isambard Kingdom Brunel".

On July 5th, together with some 150 other guests, we checked in at Paddington First Class Waiting Room for the Brunel Bicentenary Special. The train consisted of carriages of the Venice-Simplon Orient Express pulled by the "King Edward I" locomotive. With a champagne reception on the platform, the South Bank Sinfonia to see us off, and several TV crews filming the event, there was quite a party atmosphere.

All passengers were provided with a "Through the Window" guide to items of interest on the 190 km journey. These included Brunel's notable structures, such as the Wharncliffe Viaduct, Maidenhead Bridge and the Box Tunnel. We arrived in Bristol Temple Meads at around 2:30 pm, and then assembled in the "Brunel Board Room" of the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum



LEFT PHOTO Brunel-Clifton Bridge Plaque
RIGHT PHOTO Brunel-Clifton Suspension Bridge

This day of Brunel tributes ended with an evening civic reception on board Brunel's famous iron ship, the SS Great Britain during which the ICE, ASCE and CSCE parties were presented to His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester. Following this reception, we toured the beautifully restored ship and were able to see the newly installed replica engines turning (although no longer powered by steam).

On the evening of July 6, Brunel's "Train Shed" was transformed into a spectacular space for a gala dinner. The stage had a backdrop of the Clifton Suspension bridge and we were entertained by a jazz band and the Band of the Royal Air Force Regiment. A highlight of the evening was the auctioning of the train "headboard". Bidding was brisk and the eventual successful bidder was ICE President Gordon Masterton!

All who attended seemed very pleased with the success of these activities and you have to think that if I.K. Brunel himself had been there, he too might have been impressed! ■