Isambard Kingdom Brunel

Famous Engineer

Born 1806.
Died 1859.

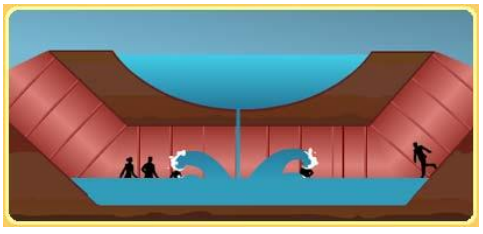
Isambard Kingdom Brunel was born in Portsmouth in 1806.

At school, Brunel was very clever and loved Maths.

When Brunel left school in 1820, he became an apprentice to a watchmaker in Paris.

At the age of 16, Brunel started work in his father's engineering office in London.

His first job was with his father in London, building the Thames Tunnel. The tunnel went underneath the River Thames. It was one of the first underwater tunnels in the world.

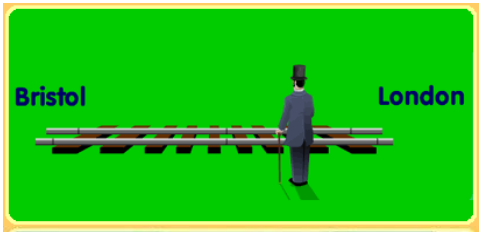


In 1828, Brunel was injured in an accident when the underwater tunnel collapsed.

He went to Bristol in 1830 and won a competition to build a bridge over the River Avon. Work on Brunel's Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol began in 1836.

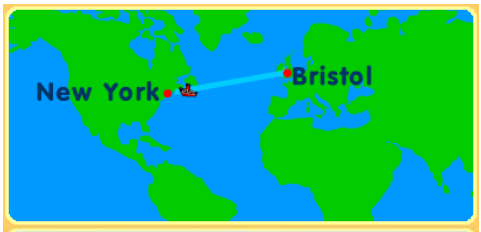
While the bridge was being built the only way to cross was in a basket. The basket hung from an iron bar that was placed across the Gorge. Brunel was the first to cross the river in the basket. Once he got stuck halfway across, so he climbed out and fixed the roller!

Brunel and his wife Mary had three children called Isambard Junior, Henry and Florence. He loved to do magic tricks for them.



Brunel wanted to build a railway from London to Bristol.

In 1833, he became Chief Engineer of The Great Western Railway. Brunel used his walking stick to measure the broad gauge track.



Brunel also wanted to build ships to sail from Bristol to New York in America.

The first ship he built was the SS Great Western. It was made from wood.

His second ship, called the SS Great Britain, was even bigger and was made of iron. This ship was built in 1839 and is still on display in Bristol today.

In 1852 he began building his last ship, the SS Great Eastern, which was the biggest ship in the world at the time. The Great Eastern took more than 5 years to build and finally launched in 1858.

In 1859 news of an explosion on board the Great Eastern really upset Brunel.

Brunel died of a stroke a week later at the age of 53.

Brunel's work meant that people could travel and trade in a new way.