

ISAMBARD KINGDOM BRUNEL

Robin Jones

Isambard Kingdom Brunel was the greatest Victorian engineer; some might say one of the world's greatest of all time.

Today Isambard Kingdom Brunel is perhaps best known for the creation of the Great Western Railway, nicknamed 'God's Wonderful Railway', which in 2010 celebrates its 175th anniversary, but he also pioneered the SS *Great Britain*, the first propeller-driven transatlantic steamship, as well as numerous important bridges and tunnels. His designs revolutionised transport engineering, but without the utilitarianism of many of his modern-day successors.

Much of Brunel's work combined the grace and elegance of classical art with modern technological thinking, which he pushed to the boundaries of what was possible in his day and then often went a further mile – mostly, but not always, with startling and resounding success.

In Halsgrove's new, pocket-sized hardback series of great lives, renowned railway specialist Robin Jones re-tells the inspiring story of Brunel, engineer extraordinaire.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A graduate of the University of Central England, Robin Jones, founding editor of *Heritage Railway* magazine, was a news editor and chief investigative reporter at the *Birmingham Evening Mail*, and over the years has produced several books and special publications, along with historical features for numerous other newspapers and periodicals.

He has been interested in railways from a very early age, when his elder brother Stewart took him trainspotting at Widney Manor station in Solihull at the age of four; at the end of the British Railways steam age.

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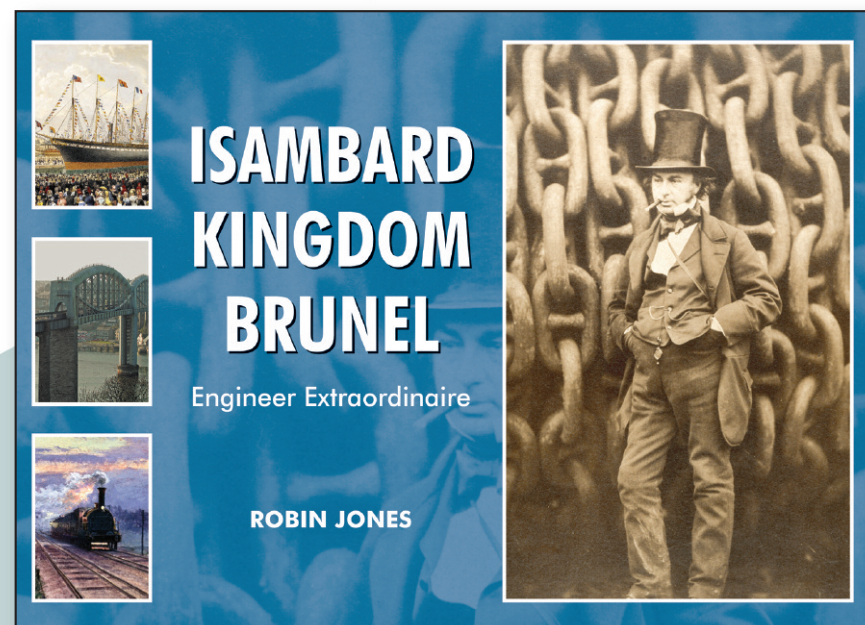
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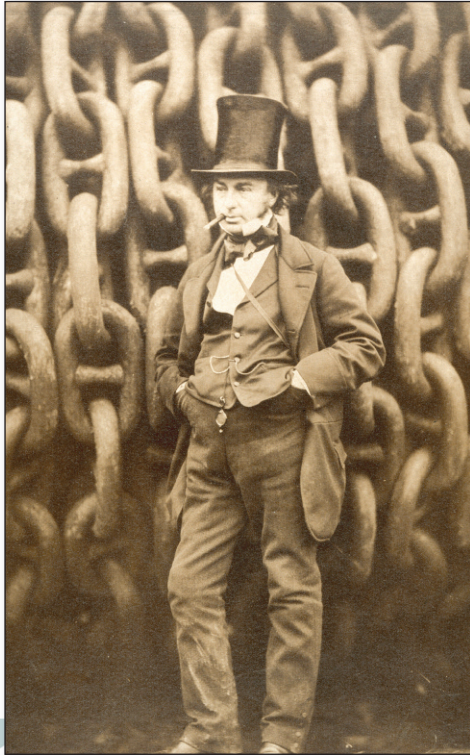


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ISAMBARD KINGDOM BRUNEL



The famous photograph of Isambard Brunel in November 1857 standing in front of the chains used for launching the Great Eastern.



A broad gauge locomotive on the Bristol & Exeter's Watchet, later Minehead, branch.



Chippenham's magnificent Cotswold stone station building.



Isambard's plans for Clifton Suspension Bridge helped his appointment as engineer of the Great Western Railway.



The front of Isambard's original Bristol terminus.

Brunel's elliptical Maidenhead Railway Bridge when completed.

Isambard proved them wrong, as in the second decade of the 21st century, it is still being used by express trains.

While Isambard had experimented with locomotives like the portable GWR engine project, it was clear that, master of engineering as he was, there were others who knew more about railway engines.

Below: Maidenhead Bridge over the Thames today.

In the very early days of the GWR, he ordered a motley assortment of 19 locomotives from various builders across the country after giving them only the most basic specifications to follow. The end results were patchy and unimpressive.

In his hour of need, in came 20-year-old Daniel Gooch, who had worked as a teenager at Robert Stephenson's Vulcan Foundry in Newton-le-Willows and aided his brother, T L Gooch, in mapping out a route for the London & Birmingham Railway.

Despite his youthfulness, Isambard was sufficiently impressed to take a chance on Gooch – and never looked back.

While Gooch supported the concept of the broad gauge, he was appalled by some of the early GWR engines, and began drawing up his own designs while the line was still under construction.

Out of those initial 19 engines, it soon became clear that only six were adequate for the job. In stepped Robert Stephenson, who supplied a 2-2-2 locomotive, *North Star*, originally built

for the 5ft 6in gauge New Orleans Railway before the order was cancelled.

North Star, which Gooch claimed he had partially designed, was regauged to 7ft 6in and arrived at Maidenhead by barge in late November 1837, later followed by sister *Morning Star*.

North Star, the pioneer GWR locomotive now in Swindon's STEAM Museum.

Example of a double-page spread.