

**Association of Open University Graduates**  
**In**  
**Europe & the Rest of the World**

**Patricia Cowling (Local Contact)**  
**10 Rue Philippe de Bourgoing**  
**14117 Tracy sur Mer, Calvados, France**  
**cowling@wanadoo.fr**

Welcome to the AOUG Newsletter for members in Europe and the rest of the world !

By way of introduction, my name is Patricia Cowling. I have been a member of AOUG for over 20 years and have been an officer, holding several positions, including that of Chairman. I live in Normandy, France and am your contact, if you have any questions or just want a 'chat'.

You will have read in OMEGA about the problem AOUG has with e mail addresses. From time to time e mail addresses change but they have not always been recorded on the Association's computer.

**VERY IMPORTANT**

Having received this communication safely, please reply to me to confirm. Just a 'received' will be sufficient, but of course I would love to hear your news.

In this Newsletter we have an article written by Patrick Noble, a member living in France. I am sure that you will enjoy its international flavour and "thank you" Patrick for taking the time to send it to me.

Owing to the costs which would have been incurred for the Executive Committee, they have decided not to hold the 2013 AGM/Spring Weekend in Rouen, France. So...I am offering a special weekend for our members, families and friends, in Rouen in September this year – 2012. I do hope that some of you can make the journey and join up with fellow members. Please remember that family and friends will be included in all of the weekend events. A booking form and full details are enclosed.

I would welcome articles, snippets of OU related experiences, comments etc., for future Newsletters. Please send to me at [cowling@wanadoo.fr](mailto:cowling@wanadoo.fr)

I wish you all a very happy and healthy 2012, where ever you are.

Patricia Cowling

**Rouen, Normandy, France**  
**Friday 7th September to Sunday 9th September 2012**

**Cost per person sharing a bedroom 113€ or £99**  
**Cost for single occupancy 179€ or £156**



Rouen, situated on the banks of the River Seine, is the ancient capital of Normandy. The pedestrianised city centre enables visitors to explore the ancient streets and to view the historic buildings at leisure. Famous for its Cathedral, a favourite of Monet, the trial and burning of Joan of Arc, the half timbered houses, the 'Gros Horloge', plus an abundance of museums, including fine art, ceramics, iron related objects, antiquities, education, natural history, medicine etc., we are spoiled for choice!

**How to Get There**

**RAIL:** Rouen is on the main railway system, one hour from Paris

**ROAD:** The A13 motorway from Paris; 129 kms  
The A28 motorway from Calais; 215 kms

**AIRPORT:** Rouen Seine Valley Airport – 10 kms from Rouen - limited flights and Destinations, or

Paris Charles de Gaulle

## **PROGRAMME**

**Friday** Arrive at the hotel at anytime that is suitable to your travel arrangements. The hotel rooms are available from 14h.00 but luggage can be stored, if you arrive in the morning. I shall be there to meet you.

18h.30 Meet in the hotel bar

19h.00 Depart for a local restaurant for dinner

**Saturday** Breakfast is available from 07.00hrs

09h.00 Meet in the hotel foyer and depart for the city centre, Tourist Office

09h.30 A two hour guided tour of Rouen with a professional guide  
The rest of the day is free to explore the city at your leisure

18h.30 Meet in the hotel bar

19h.00 Depart for a local restaurant for dinner

**Sunday** Breakfast

Please vacate your room by 10h.00 but your luggage can be stored for you if you want to stay in Rouen longer. I can also arrange additional nights

The cost of the weekend includes 2 nights hotel bed and breakfast and the guided tour of Rouen. Your bedroom has double or single beds, TV, telephone and shower/bathroom. There are a few rooms for the disabled and lifts to all floors. The hotel has its own underground car park, but this must be paid for. You are responsible for paying for any other charges you may incur at the hotel and for your meals other than breakfast.

## **Options**

I have included several options because I am aware that some of you will be travelling a long way and may be restricted for time or would like to extend your stay. Also some of you will have already visited Giverny and/or Bayeux.

## **Monet's House and Gardens at Giverny**

Giverny is on the route between Paris and Rouen. If you are travelling by car from the direction of Paris, I would recommend that you visit Giverny, if you have not been there before. Also, on the Friday, early afternoon, I can arrange for transport for anyone who would like to go to Giverny, at an extra charge, depending on the numbers going.

## **Bayeux**

Bayeux, a beautifully preserved medieval city, was the first town in France to be liberated after the D Day landings. The Bayeux tapestry, a world heritage site, is not to be missed. I can arrange for transport to Bayeux on the Sunday and for hotel accommodation if you should need it. I can also take you on a tour of the D Day beaches.

I hope that the options will assist in giving you the flexibility to plan your visit and to derive the best for your time and expense. The weekend is open to members, their families and friends. The booking form is on the next page.

Patricia Cowling

[cowling@wanadoo.fr](mailto:cowling@wanadoo.fr)

Association of Open University Graduates in Europe  
10 rue Philippe de Bourgoing  
14117 Tracy sur Mer  
Calvados  
France

E.mail : [cowling@wanadoo.fr](mailto:cowling@wanadoo.fr) Website : [www.AOUG.org.uk/Europe](http://www.AOUG.org.uk/Europe)

**Rouen, Normandy France**

**Friday 7th September to Sunday 9th September 2012**

To be held at Hotel Ibis, Champ de Mars, Rouen, Normandy, France

**Cost per person, sharing a bedroom: 113€ or £99**

**Cost per person in single room: 179€ or £156**

**A deposit, non refundable, of 50€ or £40 is required and the balance by 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

Forename.....Surname.....Title.....

Address.....

.....

Post Code.....Country.....

Telephone/Mobile.....e mail.....

Names of others booking with you.....

.....

Bedrooms: Double.....Twin.....Single.....

Please state if you require a bedroom with disability facilities: Yes..... No.....

**Payment options:**

**UK £ cheque** made payable to Patricia Cowling

**Euro cheque on French bank account only**, made payable to Patricia Cowling. If you wish to pay with a cheque from another Euro country please add 16€ which is charged by the French bank.

**International Money Order** payable in Euros

Please return this form, either by e mail or post to:

Patricia Cowling

10 rue Philippe de Bourgoing, 14117 Tracy sur Mer, Calvados, France.

[cowling@wanadoo.fr](mailto:cowling@wanadoo.fr)

## **THE BRUNELS – FATHER & SON, AN ANGLO – FRENCH SAGA**

### **Marc Isambart Brunel 1769 – 1849**

### **Isambard Kingdom Brunel 1806 – 1859**

#### **Introduction**

In 2006 the British Royal Mint issued two commemorative coins, each of £2.00 Sterling face value, to mark the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Who was he? What had he done to deserve such an honour? To answer this question we must first go back a generation to look at the life and work of his father, Marc Isambart Brunel, who in large part determined the destiny of his son.

#### **Marc's Early Years**

Marc was born in 1769 in the village of Hocqueville in Normandy. At eleven years of age he was sent to a seminary in Rouen, for which he showed little enthusiasm. So Marc left the seminary to go and live with relatives in Rouen, where he received an education orientated towards mathematics and naval architecture. He showed an exceptional gift for drawing and an intense interest in everything mechanical. In 1786 he entered the French Navy as a cadet on a frigate leaving for the West Indies.

On returning to France in 1793 as a young royalist officer he found himself in conflict with the revolutionary regime. During this time he met Sophia Kingdom, a young English woman, working in France as a governess. Due to his political activities Marc was in great danger, so he left for New York. In the precipitation of his departure he could not take Sophia with him. She was arrested accused of being an English spy, but was later released and she returned to England to settle in London.

#### **Marc in the USA**

Marc was to stay six years in and around New York. With another *émigré* he carried out surveys for the construction of several canals. He was also responsible for the design and realization of a number of building and construction projects, including the New York theatre. He won the design competition for the Congress building in Washington, but finally another design was adopted as being more economical. During this period Marc and Sophia exchanged letters.

He had learnt that the British Admiralty had difficulty in procuring the 100 000 pulley blocks per year that it needed. So he set about inventing machines to mechanize their manufacture on a production line basis. Marc then decided to go to England to present his ideas to the Admiralty, and obviously to be once again with his beloved Sophia.

#### **Marc in England**

Once arrived in England Marc met Henry Maudsley, an imaginative master mechanic. Between them they produced prototypes of the block making machines, with Maudsley transforming the conceptual ideas of Marc Brunel into mechanical reality.

In the meantime Marc and Sophia were married; they were to have three children, Sophia and Emma, and then in 1806, Isambard.

Brunel and Maudsley presented their block making system to the Admiralty and they won the contract, setting up their production line in Portsmouth Dockyard, with only six workmen replacing sixty previously needed to hand make the pulley blocks. Brunel then turned his attention to other spheres, in particular to sawmills, where he transformed the traditional way of working into that of modern mechanized production. Unfortunately, whilst Marc Brunel was a brilliant engineer, he was not a good business man, being too naïve and trusting.

By 1821 he was bankrupt and found himself in a debtors' prison, but the Czar of Russia, Alexander I, offered to settle his debts if Marc would come to Saint Petersburg to work for the Russian government. This forced the British government to decide that they did not want to lose Marc Brunel, and in particular they did not want him to work for Russia, so they paid his £5000 debt, which released him from prison.

Marc now launched himself into a second career in the field of public works, the most famous of which was the construction of the tunnel under the River Thames between Wapping and Rotherhithe in the East End of London. This was particularly difficult, with many accidents occurring due to flooding. The tunnel, after many delays, was finally finished in 1840. In recognition of this achievement Marc Brunel was knighted in 1841 by the young (22 years old) Queen Victoria. Today the tunnel is part of the London Underground network.

Marc and Sophia were to follow with great pride the achievements of their son, but Marc's health was failing. He died in 1849, and Sophia died ten years later.

### **The Young Isambard**

Isambard Brunel spent his early childhood in Portsmouth. His father then sent him to study in the Lycée Henri IV in Paris. At quite an early age he joined his father as an assistant, working on various projects, in particular that of the Thames Tunnel. In 1831, at 25 years of age, he won a design competition for the construction of the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol, but it was only completed in 1864, five years after his death. However it was his work in the design and construction of railways, and later ships that was to make him not just famous, but a national hero.

### **The Great Western Railway**

The Great Western Railway (GWR) was founded in 1833 to build a railway between London and Bristol, 180 kilometres to the west. Isambard Brunel was appointed to be its first Chief Engineer at the very early age of 27. The GWR was to spread from London over the whole south west of England and into South Wales. Isambard personally surveyed the complete route from London to Bristol, designed and supervised the construction of bridges, tunnels, earthworks, stations and locomotive depots, as well as the manufacture of the coaches and locomotives, a veritable marathon.

Isambard's railway works were numerous. Perhaps the most spectacular example is the Royal Albert Bridge across the River Tamar, enabling trains from London to continue into Cornwall as far as Penzance.

### **The Battle of the Gauges**

From the very beginning of the GWR, Isambard Brunel took a controversial decision. All other railways in Great Britain were being constructed with a gauge of four feet eight and a half inches (4' 8 1/2" or 1m 43,5 cm), but Isambard decided on a gauge of seven feet and a quarter of an inch (7' 01/4" or 2m 14 cm), on the basis that it would give more stability, a

smoother ride for the passengers, the possibility of more powerful locomotives and more space for transporting goods. Where the two rail systems met, if you wanted to cross from one network to the other you had to change trains. The same applied to the transport of goods.

In 1846 the British Government settled the question once and for all by passing a law requiring that from then on all new construction had to be 4' 8 1/2". This became universally known as "standard gauge". In the world today about 60 percent of railway lines are to standard gauge, including most lines in continental Europe, in particular those of France, both for French Railways and for the Paris Metro.

In England, the question of compatibility was resolved by laying three rails so as to be able to accommodate trains of either gauge. The GWR phased out the last broad gauge trains in 1892.

### **Isambard's First Two Ships**

In building the railway from London to Bristol, Isambard Brunel said to himself, "Why not continue to New York?" So he built a wooden paddle steamer, the "P. S. Great Western", which provided the first steamship service opened in 1837, with a crossing time of 15 days. She was 71 metres long, was of 2 300 tons displacement with an engine of 750 horsepower, and during her lifetime made 74 trans-Atlantic round trip (A/R) voyages.

But Isambard was not sitting on his laurels, for he planned a bigger ship, the "S. S. Great Britain", completely innovative in conception, being built of iron and driven by a propeller (rather than by paddles). She came into service in 1845, was 98 metres long, was of 3 600 tons displacement with an engine of 1 500 horsepower. She made numerous voyages between the United Kingdom and North America and Australia. In 1886 she was severely damaged off Cape Horn, and was left to rot in the Falkland Islands.

### **Isambard's Last (and Fatal) Ship, the "S. S. Great Eastern"**

In 1852 Isambard Brunel decided to build a giant ship, the "S. S. Great Eastern", 220 metres long, displacing 22 000 tons, with a total engine power of 8 000 horsepower. She was intended to carry 4 000 passengers non-stop to Australia, and then come back with no need to re-coal. To increase her strength and resistance to damage she was given a double hull and was divided into a number of watertight compartments. When finished in 1859, she was forty years ahead of her time, and in fact remained the biggest ship that had been built in the world, until the arrival of the big liners at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

However from the very beginning the "Great Eastern" experienced difficulties concerning financing; the project was repeatedly menaced by the possibility of bankruptcy. Then when the time came to launch her, enormous problems were met. During the various sea trials there were several fatal accidents. The resultant stress was weakening Isambard Brunel, already suffering from bad health. He died in 1859 before the maiden voyage was made to New York. As a passenger ship she was too big and too ambitious a project for the epoch; Isambard, like his father before him, was a brilliant engineer, but a mediocre business man, for which he paid the price. For a few years the "Great Eastern" was used for laying submarine cables; she laid the first trans-Atlantic telegraph cable from Ireland to Newfoundland. She then became an amusements park (*What a disgrace!*) before being finally broken up in the 1880s.

## **The Brunel Heritage**

Brunel has been described as “a one-man industrial revolution”, but what remains of his achievements in physical terms?

- Every few minutes a London Underground train passes through the Brunel tunnel under the Thames.
- The railway network conceived and built by Isambard is still fully operational, in particular the Royal Albert Bridge over the River Tamar.
- Everyday tens of thousands of passengers pass through Paddington Station, Brunel’s London terminal.
- The Clifton Suspension Bridge dominates the skyline of Bristol.
- In 1970 the “S. S. Great Britain” was brought back from the Falkland Islands, to be entirely renovated to her original glory. She is now sitting in the dock in the centre of Bristol, a great tourist attraction, well worth a visit.

Patrick Noble AOUG member in France