



Paris
Branch

Newsletter

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Page

2 Chairman's message

3 In Memoriam

3 Quiz

5 Recollections of Christmas

Mark Yates, Janet Warby, Henrietta Flinn

8 The Brunels –Father & Son *Patrick Noble*

12 A Recipe for your Christmas goose.

13 Quiz answers



Chairman's message

Welcome to a chilly ending to what has been a busy year with even the possibility of a rare White Christmas looming.

I received sad news the other day, we have lost one of our members, Patrick Noble. He was a regular and popular face at our monthly lunches and also contributed to the Newsletter. You will find more details in the *In Memoriam* section below as well as one of his articles in this edition.

My thanks go to Elaine and Michael for their hard work in providing us with two splendid Christmas lunches this month. They were both well attended and it was nice to meet up with all those who came on two very pleasant occasions

Janet and I have been busy collecting the results of this year's Poppy Appeal, and we should be able to announce the total raised very shortly. We may even have surpassed 1000 Euros. An interesting difficulty arose from the substantial quantity of coins from the various collection boxes which we distribute all over Paris. We ended up staggering under the weight from bank to bank trying to find one with a machine to count and sort the money! Banks these days seem to despise anything but plastic.



I am looking forward to next year when I shall be announcing a number of new events and activities I shall be organising. More news for you next January.

Until then I once again thank all on our committee for their contributions this year, and all our members for their support with a special mention to those of who have managed to attend our events this past year.

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Stay safe and warm.

In Memoriam

Patrick Noble: born 7/1/34 at the age of 88

We have learnt with sadness of the death of Patrick, a much valued member of the Paris Branch since 1977.

Patrick served in the RN as petty officer on HMS Kenya from 1956-58 and subsequently became a chartered electrical and mechanical engineer.

His interests included sailing and history - especially military history; He has already contributed to our monthly Newsletter and you will find another of his articles in this issue.

Patrick's son is a Lieutenant Colonel in the British Army and was stationed here in Paris as a Liaison Officer until the summer of last year.

Our sincere condolences go to all Patrick's family and his friends.

Christmas Quiz



1. Which country first started the tradition of putting up a Christmas tree ?
2. Which popular Christmas beverage is also called milk punch ?
3. How many ghosts show up in "A Christmas Carol" ?
4. What do people traditionally put on top of their Christmas tree ?
5. Where was baby Jesus born ?
6. What Hollywood actor played six different roles in The Polar

Express ?



7. *What colour are mistletoe berries ?*
8. *Which fairytale was the first gingerbread house inspired by ?*
9. *Who invented the Christmas wreath ?*
10. *Where did the tradition of Christmas stockings come from ?*
11. *What are dates of the traditional 12 days of Christmas ?*
12. *How do you say Merry Christmas in Spanish ?*
13. *Where does the Royal family traditionally celebrate Christmas ?*
14. *When do the Royal family exchange their presents ?*
15. *In "Home Alone", where are the family going on holiday ?*
16. *Where does the word 'winter' come from ?*
17. *What King was crowned on Christmas Day ?*
18. *Traditionally, how long before Christmas should you start making Christmas cake ?*
19. *How many gifts are there in the 12 days of Christmas song ?*
20. *What is the best-selling Christmas song ?*

Answers on last page

Recollections of Christmas past:

Circa 1950

They were called "boarding houses" in those days. Afterwards they became "private hotels" and now they're all kinds of "residences" or whatever snobbish term is in vogue. Auntie Nan had one of them, right on top of the North Cliff, a row of big houses facing north so that, when there was a winter's storm, the wind climbed 300 feet of cliff before it blasted into the front door so hard it might as well have been welded closed and we had to go round the back to get in. That's the most Christmassy place I ever knew.

In summer the "full up" notice was out most of the time when Auntie Nan's regular contingent of often Scottish visitors took over but in winter there was no-one. That meant that, having a dozen bedrooms available, she was the one who got lumbered with the whole family over Christmas week.

From far and wide they came, Other aunts who appeared like fairy godmothers once a year. Uncles crept out of the woodwork and mostly crept just as quickly off to the pub - except for one, uncle Ted who used to gather the youngsters round the fire and tell ghost stories for as long as you wanted. I wonder now who he was. Cousins too there were - some I still know but not their offspring now, and to my infinite regret, Auntie Nan has gone and there is no family gathering place.

There were three ancient ladies who lived with Nan. I presume there was some sort of family arrangement for these great great aunts had been with her since the war. Two were sisters from Hull. Hull was the most bombed city in Britain and their house fell around their ears one night and, after a time living in a Nissan hut, they ended up permanent residences chez Nan. They were called Lottie and Gertie and were very old. Lottie must have died early on and I remember her but vaguely. Auntie Gertie though hung on for years and lived in a green armchair from which she very rarely moved. She had, however, her fixed ideas and insisted that at either the full or the new moon - I can't recall which - the curtains had to be drawn because to behold it through glass was to invoke appalling bad luck. She couldn't stand the sight of an empty lamp bulb socket either. It had to be changed quickly because, if you left the socket with no bulb in it, it would leak electricity all over the place with goodness knows what awful consequences.

Auntie Aggie was a different kettle of fish. She had been, I think, the owner of the house until it passed to Nan. Crippled (breaking your hip had consequences of a severity we have completely forgotten now - as I have every reason to appreciate) but she hobbled about on a crutch doing this, that and the other. She "made herself useful". My clearest memory of her



is sitting in the scullery plucking the Christmas goose, feathers flying. Maybe that's why I tend now to look down on the turkey as an inferior and recent interloper.

Christmas dinner (at about 2 o'clock on Christmas day of course) was the highlight of the holiday, second only to waking up at five in the morning and emptying the Christmas stockings in spite of ferocious warnings about not getting up till seven.

It was one of these gorgeous Christmases, I have no idea which, or indeed how many we were sitting round that enormous table, extended to its full length and breadth but once a year. It was impressive though and bright with crackers and candles and, when I was attributed a drumstick my day was made. Even Auntie Gertie had left her green armchair and was sitting next to me. Eventually we got around to the dramatic moment of the flambéing of the Christmas pudding. My father set fire to the enormous pudding producing lovely blue flames. Auntie Nan distributed the steaming portions. As my plate arrived my eye fell upon my neighbour at table, great great auntie Gertie. She was something of a gourmand or, to put it another way, was atrociously greedy when it came to good food. She took a huge spoonful of Christmas pudding and put it in her mouth. Suddenly she stopped chewing, her face screwed up and tears came to her eyes. She knew, however, how to face this crisis: She took out her false teeth, held them up to her mouth and blew on them to cool them. "By gum." she said, "That isn't half hot!". A silence fell....

Mark Yates

CHRISTMAS IN THE PAST

Christmas was never dull in our home while we were growing up. It started with mum making the cake, sausage rolls and mince pies, getting the turkey ready for the oven and making the dreaded sprouts ready for the pot plus the potatoes and parsnips with all the trimmings. The smell was something that still only seems to come with Christmas.

The tree was up and the paper chains we kids had sat laboriously making were hanging from the ceiling and around the rooms.

I remember one year my dad had been out for a pre-Christmas drink - or however many, with his father and brothers. We children were tucked up in bed dreaming of the gifts Santa would bring us in the morning. I was suddenly awoken by the noise of the drum kit my brother had asked for being dropped down the stairs, the piano for my young sister plonk plonking as it also fell and the talking doll I had asked for saying 'Mama' as it landed at the bottom of the staircase. There were a lot of funny words being said that I did not know the meaning of! Surely Santa was not so silly that he had dropped the sacks with our

gifts! Maybe we should have left milk instead of the tot of whisky and mince pie he so readily consumed each year in each house. We found our sacks with gifts at the bottom of our beds when we woke up in the morning a bit messy but there nevertheless. It was only many years later, whilst recalling childhood memories of Christmas with own children, that the story of the dropped sacks came to light.

As we got older our family would attend midnight mass. Our Parish Priest, Father Adolf Koch, yes he was of German origin, was a stickler for people being on time. If, listening to the sermons he gave, you coughed or a child cried or played up he would stop and wait for silence. He was well known for this amongst his peers and colleagues. This particular year we had all attended Mass, mum came with us even though she was not a Catholic but liked the carols. Dad arrived late as once again he had been out with his dad and brothers. We waited for him at the front of the church and when he arrived all went in and tried to find a pew big enough for our family of five. There was only one pew free..... right at the front of the church. We were directed there by one of the ushers. Sitting in the pew was fine until dad decided he wanted to kneel and pray so he got hold of the kneeler to put it on the floor and in so doing caught our mum on the shin. She was not amused, yelled in pain and gave him a look which could have put him in his grave. The carol service started and we were all singing well when our dad apparently decided that the performance of the congregation was not up to scratch. He stood up, stepped out of the pew, and started to conduct the congregation exclaiming 'Sing up everybody'. My brother was mortified, my mother furious. That was the last time the whole family attended midnight mass together.

It was not always like this but these things stick in your mind when you are young. We laugh at it now and whilst reminiscing with each other and telling our children what it was like in 'the old days' at Christmas, we think fondly of our parents who are no longer with us but gave us what they could for these special events.

Merry Christmas to you all and I hope you have fun memories to fall back on.

Janet Warby

**Henrietta Flinn has a recommendation for your
Christmas viewing:**

On Christmas Eve I recommend you watch *Joyeux Noel*, the 2005 film directed by Christian Carion. It is a fictional version of what happened on Christmas Eve in 1914 along some parts of the Western Front when British and German soldiers agreed to a cease-fire, left their trenches, met each other in no man's land and celebrated Christmas together. In the film French troops also took part in the truce.

Soldiers talked, showed photos of their loved ones to each other,



exchanged food and drink, sang carols together, gave each other the opportunity to bury their dead and even played friendly games of football. Some British and German officers were unhappy about the truce and worried that it would undermine the fighting spirit of the men. After 1914 the High Commands on both sides tried to prevent any truces on a similar scale happening again.

The *Football Remembers Memorial* commemorates the Christmas Truce in the National Memorial Arboretum and was dedicated by Prince William. On the 100th anniversary in 2014 the English and German national soccer teams staged a friendly match in England in remembrance of the soldiers' impromptu soccer games in 1914. (England won 1-0.)



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

Marc Isambart Brunel 1769 – 1849

Isambard Kingdom Brunel 1806 – 1859

By Patrick Noble



In 2006 the British Royal Mint issued two commemorative coins, each of two pounds 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 1792 as a young royalist officer he found himself in conflict with the revolutionary regime. During this time he met Sophia Kingdom, a young Englishwoman, who was 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 producing 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 of course 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 were awarded a 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 5 000 pounds 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 in due course 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 Quatre 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 – For railway buffs “God’s Wonderful Railway”) was founded in 1833 to build a railway between London and Bristol, 120 miles (190 km) 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



One of the last Broad Gauge trains to pass through Didcot Station, in 1892

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' 0 1/4" 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 SNCF and RATP.

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 236 feet (72 m) long, was of 1 700 tons displacement with two engines totaling 750 horsepower, and during her lifetime made 74 trans-Atlantic round trip 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 the first ocean going ship built of iron and driven by a propeller (rather than by paddles). She came into service in 1845, was 322 feet (98 m) long, was of 3 300 tons displacement with an engine of 1 500 horsepower. She made numerous voyages between the United Kingdom, North America and Australia. In 1886 she was severely damaged off Cape Horn, and was left to rot in the Falklands.



The Great Eastern

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

In 1852 Isambard Brunel decided to build a gigantic ship, the "S. S. Great Eastern", 692 feet (211 m) 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 largest ship that had been

built in the world, until the arrival of the big liners at the beginning of the 20th 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 encountered. During the 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 amusement park (*Quelle honte!*) 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. At the Rotherhide end of the tunnel there is the Brunel Museum.
- The railway network conceived and built by Isambard is still fully operational, in particular the Royal Albert Bridge over the River Tamar.
- Every day tens of thousands of passengers pass through Paddington Station, Brunel’s London terminus.
- 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.
- In Uxbridge, close to Isambard’s London to Bristol railway line, there is the campus of Brunel University London.

So Isambard Kingdom Brunel well and truly earned his place on the coins presented by the Royal Mint 200 years later.

Patrick Noble



Our final offering for you this Christmas is a Recipe for your festive goose.

Many years ago, in a strange bookshop near Cluny I came upon a coverless old book going for 10 francs. It was "The Experienced English Housekeeper" by Elizabeth Raffald, printed in 1769. I had the volume rebound and gave it to my mother for Christmas that year.

The book is once more in my possession and I take this opportunity to include as another.

My Christmas offering for you is an extract of two pages of this work containing a splendid seasonal recipe which would leave even a Downton Abbey table in the shade.

Do take the time to decipher it and savour, if not the dish itself, at least the language in which it is written. See next page:

*A Yorkshire Goose Pye.*

TAKE a large fat goose, split it down the back, and take all the bones out, bone a turkey and two ducks the same way, season them very well with pepper and salt, with six woodcocks, lay the goose down on a clean dish, with the skin-side down, and lay the turkey into the goose with the skin down, have ready a large hare cleaned well, cut in pieces, and stewed in the oven, with a pound of butter, a quarter of an ounce of mace beat fine, the same of white pepper, and salt to your taste, till the meat will leave the bones, and scum the butter off the gravy, pick the meat clean off, and beat it in a marble mortar very fine, with the butter you took off, and lay it in the turkey; take twenty-four pounds of the finest flour, six pounds of butter, half a pound of fresh rendered suet, make the paste pretty thick, and raise the pye oval, roll out a lump of paste, and cut it in vine leaves, or what form you please, rub the pye with the yolks of eggs, and put your ornaments on the walls, then turn the hare, turkey, and goose upside-down, and lay them in your pye, with the ducks at each end, and the woodcocks on the sides, make your lid pretty thick and put it on; you may lay flowers, or the shape of the fowls in paste, on the lid, and make a hole in the middle of your lid; the walls of the pye are to be one inch and a half higher than the lid, then rub it all over with the yolks of eggs, and bind it round with three fold paper, and lay the same over

over the top; it will take four hours baking in a brown bread oven, when it comes out, melt two pounds of butter in the gravy that comes from the hare, and pour it hot in the pye through a tin-dish, close it well up, and let it be eight or ten days before you cut it; if you send it any distance, make up the hole in the middle with cold butter to prevent the air from getting in.

A HARE PYE.

CUT a large hair in pieces, season it well with mace, nutmeg, pepper, and salt, put it in a jug with half a pound of butter, cover it close up with a paste or cloth, set it in a copper of boiling water, and let it stew one hour and a half, then take it out to cool, and make a rich forcemeat of a quarter of a pound of scraped bacon, two onions, a glass of red wine, the crumb of a penny loaf, a little winter savory, the liver cut small, a little nutmeg, season it high with pepper and salt, mix it well up with the yolks of three eggs, raise the pye and lay the forcemeat in the bottom, lay in the hare, with the gravy that came out of the hare, lay the lid on, and put flowers or leaves on it; it will take an hour and a half to bake it.—It is a handsome side dish for a large table.

A SALMON PYE.

BOIL your salmon as for eating, take off the skin, and all the bones out and pound the meat in a mortar very fine, with mace, nutmeg, pepper, and salt to your taste, raise the pye, and put flowers or leaves on the walls, put the salmon in

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Christmas Quiz Answers

1. *Germany*
2. *Eggnog*
3. *Four - the spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Future and Jacob Marley*
4. *An Angel*
5. *Bethlehem*

6. *Tom Hanks*
7. *White*
8. *Hansel and Gretel*
9. *A German Lutheran pastor names Johann Hinrich Wichern*
10. *According to tradition, the original St. Nicholas put gold coins in the stockings of three poor sisters.*
11. *The Twelve Days of Christmas are the last six days of the old year, (26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 December) and the first six days of the New Year (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 January)*
12. *Feliz Navidad*
13. *Sandringham*
14. *Christmas Eve*
15. *France*
16. *The word winter comes from the German is winter which in turn is derived from the root wed meaning 'wet or water'.*
17. *King William 1 of England in 1066*
18. *Two to three months before*
19. *364 gifts*
20. *Bing Crosby's White Christmas is the best selling Christmas song with more than 50 million copies sold.*