

PRESS RELEASE

Green Plaque unveiling at No 10 Berkeley Square, Clifton, BRISTOL by The Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society

A green plaque will be unveiled on Saturday 8th August at No. 10 Berkeley Square, Clifton 11:00am, to commemorate the bi-centenary of the birth of Mr Charles Richardson, Civil Engineer. It was his place of residence from 1860 until his death on the 18th February 1896. Charles Richardson conceived, designed, and was the original engineer of the Severn Tunnel. His life achievements were somewhat overshadowed by an unforeseen natural phenomenon which resulted in others being accredited for the successful completion of the project which resulted in Charles Richardson's contribution to the project being somewhat marginalised.

Charles Richardson's career and reputation was established as an eminent Victorian engineer before his involvement in the construction of what was at that time the longest subaquatic tunnel in the world. He was apprenticed to I.K.Brunel in September 1834 for 4 years. He had charge of the sinking of trial shafts for the Box Tunnel and in 1837 was for some months an assistant engineer in the Thames Tunnel.

In 1838 he was appointed Resident Engineer under the direction of I.K.Brunel for the Swindon to Cirencester railway. He completed this line and the headings and shafts of the Sapperton Tunnel. He completed a further section of the line through the Stroud Valley in 1846. He was then appointed Resident Engineer of the Monmouth – Hereford later to be the Hereford- Ross – Gloucester Railway.

His place of residence whilst engaged on this project was Ross-on-Wye and it was here that he met and married his wife Mary Frances Thomson. It was also during his residence at Ross that his cricketing prowess was noted, only to receive the admonishment of his superior Mr I.K.Brunel for engaging in such activities. Charles Richardson is accredited with being the inventor of the spliced cricket bat and a bowling machine.

In 1858 he was invited by I.K.Brunel to be his Resident Engineer on the Bristol South Wales Union Railway who stressed that he needed an engineer who would be active in the field and not one who directed operations from an office. This appointment would later prove to be the turning point in his career as it was during the course of its construction that the death occurred in 1859 of I.K.Brunel. Richardson along with Brereton being appointed Joint Engineers of this railway. It was whilst he was engaged in the construction of the ferry landing piers on the banks of the Severn and his study of the tidal flow and geological structure of the river bed that he conceived his original design proposals for a tunnel to link Bristol with South Wales in preference to a bridge. After years of debate the project received Parliamentary approval and 1872 the GWR appointed Charles Richardson as Engineer of The Severn Tunnel Railway.

In the intervening years Charles Richardson became Chief Engineer for the Bristol Harbour Railway completing the first section in 1870 and consultant engineer for the roofing of the Corn Exchange.

In 1862 he was a founder member of The Bristol Naturalist Society due to his geological interests. Its library was conveniently based at 20 Berkeley Square. He was admitted as a

Member of The Institution of Engineers in 1875. He was an authority on the subject of landslips.

As a result of the increase in traffic arising from the opening of the tunnel he was the Engineer for the GWR in the doubling of the line from the Severn Tunnel to Bristol.

Charles Richardson's venture into the world of business occurred in 1864 when, as a result of his discoveries made during the excavation of the Patchway Tunnel he established The Cattybrook Brickworks at Almondsbury.

Charles Richardson died on 10th February 1896 at his home in Berkeley Square following a severe stroke. He is buried in Almondsbury Churchyard. There is a plaque dedicated to his memory in the church.