



Press Release

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Inventors and Inventions

(Patents, protest and power in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1890)

The National Archives at Kew are celebrating 200 years since the birth of arguably Britain's most influential industrialist by launching the exhibition, *Inventors and Inventions: Patents, Protest and Power in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1890*.

Isambard Kingdom Brunel (b. 1806-1859) drove the expansion of domestic and international travel by designing and constructing railways, bridges, tunnels, and ships during the industrial revolution.

A visionary, who is probably best known for constructing the network of tunnels, bridges and viaducts for the Great Western Railway, Brunel also introduced the first steamship to service the transatlantic route.

Featured alongside artefacts on Brunel are influential designs that took root during the Industrial Revolution. With *Inventors and Inventions* drawing together patents and artefacts from British luminaries such as Richard Arkwright, Robert Stephenson, Isambard Kingdom Brunel and Eadweard Muybridge.

While the Industrial Revolution saw a rapid rise in patents, Brunel was ironically a powerful opponent of Britain's system of patent protectionism, which he believed stifled progress.

Alongside artefacts such as Brunel's sketchbook, is the patent for Richard Arkwright's 'Spinning Frame' – credited by some with altering the way textiles were made, developing the mass manufacture of clothing and influencing the modern industrial factory system.

There are also some bizarre concepts that now lie dead and buried in the archives of patents and specifications: including a coffin designed to thwart the 19th century practice of body snatching.

Enclosed within a reinforced steel casket, John Hughes' bizarre coffin patent from 1823, vividly illustrates a corpse being secured with hand and ankle cuffs.

Backed by a fledgling medical profession conducting anatomical research – body snatchers had little resistance to their ghastly 'profession', until the 'profession' was outlawed in 1834,

Inventors and Inventions: Patents, Protest and Power also explore the impact that the Industrial Revolution had on the working population.

The Industrial Revolution, while transforming the labour market, also led to a backlash from workers in danger of being forced to abandon old traditional practices. Included in the exhibition

are: 'Wanted' posters in reaction to incidents of arson and vandalism against the burgeoning agricultural and textile manufacturing sectors; letters in reference to the 'Swing riots' and Luddism, including one from Ned Ludd, who led the machine breakers in what was the industrial equivalent of a peasants revolt; and one of the earliest known trade union cards in existence.

Inventors and Inventions Patents, Protest and Power features a range of famous patents, plans, paintings, artefacts and photographs from The National Archives including:

- Agriculture
Richard Arkwright's *Specification for the Spinning Frame*,
Edmund Cartwright and his *Specification for Loom for Weaving*,
James Hargreaves with his *Specification for Spinning, Drawing, and Twisting Cotton*,
- Public health and sanitation
Joseph Bramah's *Specification for his Water Closet*,
- Transport
George and Robert Stephenson's various *Specifications for Improvements to Locomotive Engines*,
Isambard Kingdom Brunel with photographs and artefacts,
- Communications
Charles Wheatstone and William Fothergill Cooke with a copy their *ABC Telegraph Transmitter*,
- Photography
Eadweard Muybridge with projected images from his Zoopraxiscope machine.

Notes to Editors

For press enquiries, photos and images please contact Stuart Brennan in The National Archives Press Office on 020 8392 5277 or stuart.brennan@nationalarchives.gov.uk

The National Archives, Kew, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk has one of the largest archival collections in the world, spanning 1000 years of British history, from Domesday Book to newly released government papers. The free museum and research rooms are open to the public 6 days a week.

Over nine million records are available to view at Kew and some, including wills, First World War Army medal cards and Second World War Seamen's medal records are also available online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline

The Family Records Centre, Islington, which is jointly managed by The National Archives and the Office for National Statistics, holds the indexes (not the certificates themselves) for births, deaths and marriages for England and Wales from July 1837 and also copies of wills, before 1858, from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) and some other church courts.