

SS Great Eastern was an [iron-hulled steamship](#) designed by [Isambard Kingdom Brunel](#), and built by John Scott Russell & Co. at [Millwall Iron Works](#) on the [River Thames](#), London, England. Powered by both sidewheels and screw propellers, she was by far the largest ship ever built at the time of her 1858 launch, and had the capacity to carry 4,000 passengers from England to Australia without refuelling. Her length of 692 feet (211 m) was surpassed only in 1899 by the 705-foot (215 m) 17,274-gross-ton [RMS Oceanic](#), her [gross tonnage](#) of 18,915 was only surpassed in 1901 by the 701-foot (214 m) 20,904-gross-ton [RMS Celtic](#) and her 4,000-passenger capacity was surpassed in 1913 by the 4,234-passenger [SS Imperator](#). The ship having five [funnels](#) (which were later reduced to four) was unusual for the time. The vessel also had the largest set of [paddle wheels](#).

Brunel knew her affectionately as the "Great Babe". He died in 1859 shortly after her maiden voyage, during which she was damaged by an explosion.^[4] After repairs, she plied for several years as a passenger liner between Britain and North America before being converted to a cable-laying ship and laying the first lasting [transatlantic telegraph cable](#) in 1866.^[5] Finishing her life as a floating [music hall](#) and [advertising hoarding](#) (for the department store [Lewis's](#)) in [Liverpool](#), she was broken up on [Merseyside](#) in 1889.