

The Freshgate Trust Foundation



**Proud supporter of
'100 Years of Stainless Steel Sheffield'**

The Freshgate Trust Foundation



YEARS OF
STAINLESS STEEL
Sheffield

Harry Brearley

2013 is the centenary of the discovery of stainless steel by Harry Brearley, Sheffield in August 1913. Harry Brearley was born 18 February, 1871 in a backyard off Spital Street, Sheffield, the eighth child of a steel maker and his wife. After an early informal education in the steel factories, Harry went on to 'discover' Stainless Steel in 1913. His story is a remarkable one with his spirit of discovery, innovation, fairness and philanthropy emerging at every step.

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The Freshgate Trust Foundation is a grant making charity established in 1941 by Harry Brearley, the discoverer of stainless steel.

The Trust awards around £100,000 per year in small grants for charitable activities in Sheffield and South Yorkshire.

The Freshgate Trust Foundation is pleased to be part of and a financial contributor to the celebrations recognising the centenary of the discovery of stainless steel.

The Freshgate Trust Foundation was formed in 1941 with £20,000 from Harry Brearley who wanted to:

‘Operate and support ideas which are likely to make life more bearable, cheerful and attractive to people who have a limited choice in the occupations they follow and the locality and surroundings in which they live...’

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Harry was taken on as a bottle washer in the laboratory at Norfolk Works working for Messrs. Thos. Firth and Sons. During his time there he was fortunate to be under the eye of the chemist Mr James Taylor who gave him hands-on, informal education where Harry learned many of the skills related to steel making. From that beginning Harry decided to understand chemical analysis more thoroughly and worked his way through the steel making business, including (from 1904) a stay in Russia, where he managed a factory. On returning to Sheffield, he resumed chemical analysis work in Firth's laboratory.

In May, 1912, Harry visited a small arms factory to study erosion and fouling in rifle barrels. It was this happy coincidence that led to the discovery of stainless steel. He experimented with various combinations of steel with added chromium and carbon until a steel was discovered in 1913 that was 'rustless'. The metal was later described as 'stainless' by Mr Ernest Stuart, after he had attempted to stain it with food acids.

In 1920 the Council of the Iron and Steel Institute presented Harry Brearley with the Bessemer Medal in recognition of his discovery. Harry continued with an active role in various companies ending with his appointment as consulting metallurgist and was presented with the Freedom of the City of Sheffield in 1939. His autobiography *Knotted String* was published in 1941. He died in 1948.

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In 1941, Harry Brearley decided to set up a charitable foundation to give help to people who may have started life like himself with limited choices.

The name *Freshgate* was used to reflect the new start that the Trust's grants could give to beneficiaries.

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Harry Brearley, 1871–1948
Sheffield Local Studies Library:
Picture Sheffield s08302

The circumstances of Harry's life affected him profoundly; here are a few extracts, in his own words, taken from his autobiography, *Harry Brearley: Steelcase Pioneer (1889)*.

The house would be less than twelve feet square. How we lived I don't know, and I have no idea how my mother managed to keep us reasonably clean.

I cared less than nothing about going to school but I was enchanted by the crowded interest in the surrounding streets...

I learned many things in those early days which left no room in my mind for school lessons... I spent scores of hours watching pocket-blades forged, files ground, lead toys cast and metal buffed and burnished to shining brightness.

We were always poor even when my father had regular work... I earned money by bundling sticks... [when] eight years of age.

I first began to work at Marsland's Clog Shop, the most ill-fitting child that ever started to earn something of his own living... My next job was at Moorwood's Iron Foundry where I was the warehouse boy. Having the run of the works was of interest... it was discovered at the end of the week that I was below factory age and had to leave on that account...

My next job was a cellar lad in the crucible steelmaking furnaces... The cellar lad begins at once to know the properties of the materials with which he has to work and to accept responsibility for an appreciable part of the furnace tools...

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Since 1941 the money has been invested and the value has increased significantly. The dividends earned from investments are used to support local charitable causes. We recently estimated that building from Harry's initial investment, Freshgate has made grants exceeding £2m at current rates (February 2013) to many hundreds of charitable groups.

We support six areas for grant aid:

- **Education (including travel and training)**
- **Medical (both physical and psychological)**
- **Recreation (including holidays)**
- **Music and The Arts**
- **Welfare and Social Care**
- **Heritage**

There is no maximum grant though in practice most grants are around £2,000.

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