

The Thames Tunnel

To create an underground railway, first you have to dig a tunnel. Other people had tried to tunnel underground before, but not always with success. The most famous working example in London was the Thames Tunnel, which was developed by the brilliant engineers Sir Marc Brunel and his son Isambard Kingdom Brunel.



You Are Invited to...

The Brunels refused to be beaten and, to keep people interested, they arranged for a spectacular banquet to be held deep underground, 23 metres below the surface of the river. They invited fifty guests to eat dinner in the half-completed tunnel. The walls were draped in red and the tables were covered in glittering silver and crystal. While everyone ate and drank, a band of soldiers called the Coldstream Guards played rousing tunes, including 'Rule Britannia' and the national anthem.

R.S.V.P.

The tunnel opens

Fortunately, when the tunnel was finally ready in 1843, people had changed their minds again. It seemed that everyone wanted to go down and see what the Brunels had achieved. More than 50,000 people queued up on the opening day and they were happy to pay a penny in order to be among the first to cross from one side of the river to the other using the tunnel. At the beginning, no trains ran through the tunnel and passenger coaches had to be pulled by horses, just as they were on the streets above. Another twenty-six years passed before the first steam train travelled through the Brunels' tunnel.

The tunnel is open!

Time to get to work

The Thames Tunnel was the first in the world to be excavated, or dug, under water. Work on the tunnel began in 1825 using large teams of workmen. The work was hard and dangerous and ten of the men tragically died before the tunnel was finished. No fresh air blew into the tunnel so harmful gases and frequent floods injured many more of their fellow workers, and several times the workmen were accidentally showered with smelly sewage when digging went wrong.

BRUNEL'S BIG BORE

Many Londoners had grown tired of hearing about the difficulties and disasters over the years, and one of the newspapers even nicknamed the tunnel 'Brunel's Big Bore'.

As well as being dangerous, the project was enormously expensive. By the time the tunnel was completed, it had cost what would be about **£16 million** today and the work had taken almost twenty years.

The tunnel runs under the Thames between Rotherhithe and Wapping.

Nearly 200 years after digging started, our commuter trains today are still using the same tunnel to cross from one side of the river to the other.

Ghosts on the Tube

In addition to the 270 Tube stations in daily use, there are another 40 stations called 'ghost' stations – these are stations that are no longer used.

STATION
CLOSED

DOWN
STREET



It is widely believed that the bath at Down Street station belonged to British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill, but nobody knows for sure.

STRAND

How to spot a ghost station

Although trains don't stop at these abandoned stations, it is sometimes possible to catch a glimpse of the old platforms as you speed through in the dark. Look out of the right-hand window on a Piccadilly line train between Caledonian Road and King's Cross and you might see York Road station. You can also spot Mark Lane station on the District line between Monument and Tower Hill.

Look around when you're next walking through the West End. The Leslie Green stations with their blood-red bricks still stand out. Down Street station is easy to find in Mayfair, the old entrance to Hyde Park Corner station is now a hotel, and Aldwych station on the Strand still has its signage clearly stating 'Piccadilly RLY' and 'Strand Station'.

Spooky Places

Ghost stations can be spooky places, with no lights and deserted platforms. King William Street station still has old wartime posters stuck to the walls and there's a bath at Down Street station from when it was used as a secret underground bunker.

The station at Brompton Road was used for many years as a secret army headquarters.

Most ghost stations are locked and closed to the public, although a few can be visited on special tours. Some are used for storage and Aldwych station is often used to film music videos and scenes from TV shows and movies.



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Ghoulish remains have even shaped the Tube's routes. Between Knightsbridge and South Kensington stations the tunnel makes a strange sharp curve. There are so many plague skeletons buried there that it was impossible to drill through them and the tunnel-builders had to go round them instead.

Haunting the Tube

In addition to the ghost stations, there are also stories of actual ghosts haunting places on the Tube. Here are some spooky travellers' tales...

At Covent Garden station, travellers have reported seeing a tall figure dressed in Victorian clothes, thought to be William Terriss, an actor who was murdered in 1897.

Footsteps, slamming doors and other unexplained noises have been heard at Elephant and Castle.

People living near Highgate station have reported hearing not just one ghost but an entire ghost train speeding through the station at night.

There are reports of a ghostly figure dressed in black, called the Black Nun or Bank Nun, haunting the passageways of Bank station.

Perhaps the creepiest is the Egyptian god Amun-Ra, rumoured to haunt the British Museum station. The station is no longer used but a newspaper once offered a reward to anyone brave enough to spend the night down there and no one volunteered!

Have you seen a ghost?



It's a ghost station with a ghost!

Tube Records

Travelling around the London Underground you might not realise you're zooming past record-breakers all the time. Have you noticed any of these?



Hampstead station holds the record for being the deepest station, at 58.5 metres. Even the lifts going down to the platform travel nearly 55 metres, which is about the same as the height of Nelson's Column!



You need to be fit if you want to use the stairs in Hampstead station: there are over 300 steps! That's also a record.



EASTBOUND TRAINS



At **Alperton** and **Greenford** stations, passengers used to take the escalators up to the platforms instead of down.



Baker Street station has the most platforms, with an impressive ten.



Heathrow Terminal 4 has only one platform and it's the only Tube station where the trains run in just one direction.



The shortest Underground journey is on the Piccadilly line from **Covent Garden** to **Leicester Square**, which is only 260 metres. It's probably quicker to walk, but this is still one of the most popular journeys for tourists.

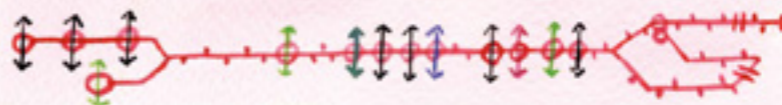
Record-breaking musician Sir Paul McCartney once performed as a busker at **Leicester Square** station, disguised with a false beard and sunglasses. The former Beatle claims he didn't make much money but says it was something he had always wanted to do!



Angel station has the longest escalators at 60 metres long.



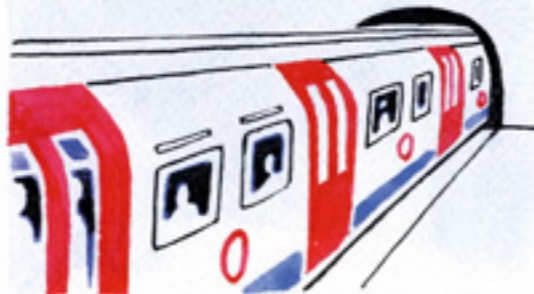
Today the longest journey you can take on the Tube without changing trains is from **Epping** to **Ruislip**, which is more than 54 kilometres along the Central line.



Amersham is the highest station. It's also the furthest west.



The longest tunnel is on the Northern line between **East Finchley** and **Morden** (via Bank), at 27.8 kilometres. For more than 50 years this was the longest anywhere in the world.



The Tube Challenge

If you really like the Tube, you might want to try the official Tube Challenge, which involves a mad dash to visit every station in a single day.

It's not as easy as it sounds. In fact, it's not easy at all, but it can be done. Since the competition started in 1959, many people have tried and failed to complete the challenge, but for those who have succeeded the times have been getting faster and faster. Anyone can have a go, but it takes very careful planning – where would you start? – and more than a few practice runs. So far, the quickest time that anyone has managed it is an astonishing 15 hours and 45 minutes. Exhausting, but not bad for all 270 stations!