

## The Tower Subway

On 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1870 the world's first underground railway opened. It did not last very long. The passengers sat in a wooden car on rails. This was pulled by cables from one end of the tunnel to the other. There were lifts at each end of the tunnel. A steam engine worked the lifts. This railway went under the Thames in London.<sup>1</sup> You can see the old entrance tower in the picture.



The docks in London were getting bigger. There were more ships and there were more workers. New docks opened on the south bank of the river Thames. People went to live and work there. They often wanted to cross the Thames. They had to go to London Bridge. It was a long way to go. A tunnel would be a help. People could cross through the tunnel and then they would not need to go to the bridge.

The Tower Subway was 410 metres long. It was quite a small tunnel. The owners of the tunnel could not make enough money from it. Soon they had to stop running the railway.

The Tower Tunnel was still there. Now it was used for people to walk through. There were no lifts now. People had to go down spiral stairs. Then they walked into the round opening of the tunnel. It was like walking through a very long tube. You could not see the other end. The walls were damp. The lights were dingy. The air was foggy. The floor felt as if it moved under your feet. The rails were still there to trip you up. Voices boomed and echoed through the tunnel for a very long way. On and on you had to walk. It made you think of all the water above you. It made you think of the ships that passed over your head. Then you had to climb up the stairs. Up and up. But it was so good to be in the fresh air again!

In 1894 Tower Bridge was built. No one needed the tunnel now. For many years it carried water pipes and electrical cables. Nowadays there are only old pipes and cables inside the tunnel.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Permission sought from *Londonist* for picture 14/04/21 <https://londonist.com/london/secret/the-tower-subway-the-secret-thames-tunnel-that-s-150-years-old>

<sup>2</sup> Image by kind permission of Matthew Williams.