



**First class:** Learn how a network of mail trains kept the post on track **MILES WILLIS**

# What lies beneath

## HEAD UNDERGROUND TO DISCOVER SOME OF LONDON'S SUBTERRANEAN SECRETS

THERE is a hidden world of tunnels, caves and basements under the capital's streets. Although many of these spaces are inaccessible to the public, others offer a fascinating glimpse into London's history.

Here are some of the most interesting and accessible tunnels that are open to visitors:

### THE THAMES TUNNEL

Designed by father and son engineering superstars, Marc Isambard Brunel and Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the Thames Tunnel was opened to the public in 1843.

Considered as one of the wonders of the world at the time, it was the first tunnel to be built under a river.

Although most of the tunnel has now been incorporated into London's transport network, the Grade II listed Grand Entrance Hall remains. It has been converted into part of the Brunel Museum, which tells the Brunel family's fascinating story. The atmospheric space is also used for concerts and events.

**How to get there:** Rotherhithe station (London Overground) is a two-minute walk away. Bermondsey (Jubilee line) and Canada Water (Jubilee line and London Overground) stations are both about ten minutes away on foot. Bus routes 381 and C10 stop nearby.

### THE POST OFFICE TUNNELS

In 1914, the Post Office began building a railway underground.

Stretching six and a half miles from Paddington to Whitechapel, the Post Office rail network carried an impressive 4million letters a day at its peak.

Although the line stopped running in 2003, you can still visit part of the network at the Postal Museum in Clerkenwell.

From there you can ride on one of the converted battery-operated mail trains to other Post Office stations, discovering the network's fascinating history as you go.

**How to get there:** Farringdon (Circle, Hammersmith & City and Metropolitan lines), Russell Square (Piccadilly line) and Chancery Lane (Central line) Tube stations are all under a 15-minute walk away. King's Cross St Pancras station (Circle, Hammersmith & City, Metropolitan, Northern, Piccadilly and Victoria lines) is a 22-minute walk away. Several buses stop in Clerkenwell.

### WOOLWICH FOOT TUNNEL

Not to be confused with the Greenwich Foot Tunnel, this 500-metre-long passage runs from Woolwich, in the Royal Borough of Greenwich, to North Woolwich, in the London Borough of Newham.

Designed by Sir Maurice Fitzmaurice, the tunnel under the Thames was originally intended to provide an alternative when the ferry service wasn't working.

Opened to the public in 1912 and now used by about 1.5million pedestrians and cyclists a year, both entrances are Grade II listed.

**How to get there:** Woolwich Dockyard station (National Rail) and Woolwich Arsenal station (DLR and

National Rail) are both under a ten-minute walk from the tunnel's south-side entrance. The Woolwich Ferry's terminals are a short walk along the river. Several bus routes stop nearby.

### CHISLEHURST CAVES

One of the oldest tunnel networks available to visit is also one of the least well known. Chislehurst Caves - a man-made cave and tunnel network - date from Roman times, or possibly earlier, and stretch for more than 22 miles in south-east London. Dug and worked as chalk and flint mines, the tunnels and caves were used for munition storage during World War I and as an air-raid shelter for up to 15,000 people during World War II.

The caves were also used as a dance and music venue in the 1960s and '70s, when the likes of David Bowie, Jimi Hendrix, The Rolling Stones and Pink Floyd gave performances there.

**How to get there:** The caves are a short walk from Chislehurst station (National Rail). Buses 162 and 269 both stop nearby.

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**Sound of the underground:** Music at the Brunel Museum **JACK HOBHOUSE**

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