

THAMES TUNNEL.

In addition to the various attractions in this wonderful Work of Art, a series of

FRESCO PAINTINGS,

By I. B. Henkin, have been introduced in the Panels of the Shafts. Rotherhithe. Wapping.

They consist of Views of

Place de la Concorde, Paris.	Island of Guillaume, Switzerland.
Ross Castle, Lake of Killarney.	Bay of Naples.
Dover Castle.	Hampton Court.
Osborne House, Isle of Wight.	Wreck, Grace Darling saving the Crew.
The Queen's Yacht.	Fothergill Medal, Humane Society.
Windsor Castle.	Interior of Longstone Light-house.
Greenwich Hospital.	Constantinople.
The Raft.	Quebec.
Balmoral Castle.	Wahaha, Germany.
Leaning Tower of Pisa.	

TOLL, AS USUAL, 1d.
Open Day and Night.

No. 26. SATURDAY, APRIL 4, 1857. Price One Penny



Fancy Fair Shops and Entertainment 1852

In 1852 London proudly announced the world's first underwater fairground. The east tunnel was for the entertainers and the audience watched through the arches from the other tunnel. Here, before the trains came, were sword swallowers, fire eaters and magicians. The first Thames Tunnel Fancy Fair was held, with tightwire artists, fire eaters, sword swallowers, Ethiopian serenaders, Indian dancers, Chinese singers, electricity, and Mr E. Green, the celebrated bottle pantomimic equilibrist. Steam powered musical organs pumped out Verdi. There was even electricity. The acts were from all over the world, and so was the audience. This is the first ever underwater multi-cultural festival, and we re-created it as part of our celebrations for 'All Our Stories'.

To cross under a river via a kind of subterranean bridge rather than over it in the normal fashion was a truly miraculous concept for the Victorians and the excitement it caused is reflected in the quantity of commemorative items produced. Most of these appeared after the tunnel was completed, but some printed souvenirs were produced almost as soon as construction began.

Peepshows

T. Brown, exploited the tunnel's 'optical' qualities and produced a peepshow. Published in June 1825, it came in a slipcase in cream or green or turquoise and when pulled out and opened the tunnel could be viewed in three dimensions in all its hoped-for future glory, brightly lit and filled with fine horse-drawn vehicles, stagecoaches, laden wagons and gaily-clad pedestrians. Brown's idea was taken up enthusiastically by others and dozens of peepshows appeared over the next thirty years, almost until the moment the tunnel was converted into a railway tunnel. The early peepshows are extremely fine. Some of them are double shows with two views: one of the river and its ships, the other of the tunnel beneath; some even include the tunnelling shield with the men at work in it. When the tunnel finally opened, a particularly splendid one appeared, showing a procession of dignitaries, a brass band playing lustily and Marc himself joyously waving his top hat. Many of them bear multi-lingual captions to appeal to an international public and they could be bought not only at the tunnel but also in shops in London as far away as Leicester's Pantheon Bazaar.

Protean Views

An alternative to the peepshow was a 'Protean View' or 'transformation'. This was a lithograph printed on thin paper with a second view pasted behind. When the transformation was held up to the light or set it in a viewing frame, the front image would disappear, revealing the hidden image behind. In some the tunnel 'transformed' into Queen Victoria's coronation procession and some 'transformed' from a snow scene or Lake Windermere into the tunnel. Others were simpler, with just the tunnel and a sheet of tissue paper pasted on the back but when held up, the gas-lamps in the Tunnel would suddenly light up and shine brightly.

Guidebooks

In March 1827, when visitors were first admitted to view the works, the Tunnel Company provided them with a guidebook with a text written by Marc himself (updated when necessary) and a set of good illustrations, most of them drawn by members of the engineering team. In pocket-sized format, these informative little books were issued and re-issued with extraordinary frequency, sometimes as often as three or four times a year, right up to 1862. They were also translated into the major European languages, including Norwegian and Dutch, and after 1835 there were American editions.

In May 1828, shortly before the seven-year stoppage, the Company began to issue handsome broadsheets. These bore a descriptive text (which again would be frequently updated) and illustrations of the tunnel and shield. They included details of opening times and public transport links and were reassuring in tone because they were, after all, enticing people to visit to a building site: 'The Archway is lighted with oil gas; the work is dry and warm, and the descent by a large staircase, and perfectly easy to ascend and descend', and people continued to flock to Rotherhithe. This endless flow of publicity material ensured that the tunnel remained in the forefront of everyone's mind while Marc was negotiating with the Government for further funds to complete it.

Fun of the Fair

Within a year more than two million people had paid their pennies and experienced the thrill of walking under the river. And there were other attractions to tempt visitors. In 1853, a German tourist, Max Schlesinger, wrote, "As we descend, stray bits of music greet our ears. Arrived at the bottom of the shaft there is the double pathway opening before us, and looking altogether dry, comfortable and civilised, for there are plenty of gas lights... As we proceed the music becomes more clear and distinct and here it is: a miniature exhibition of English industrial skill. It is an Italian organ played by a perfect doll of a Lilliputian steam-engine. That engine grinds the organ from morning till night; it gives us various pieces without any compunction or political scruples. The Marseillaise, German waltzes, the Hungarian Rakowzy March, Rule Britannia, Yankee Doodle, etc. does this marvellous engine grind out of the organ."

There were also refreshments and, more importantly, a mass of souvenirs to purchase. The American novelist, Nathaniel Hawthorne, described "an arched corridor of apparently interminable length, all along the extent of this corridor, in little alcoves, there are stalls or shops, kept principally by women, who, as you approach, are seen though the dusk offering for sale views of the Tunnel, put up with a little magnifying glass, in cases of Derbyshire spar; also cheap jewelry and multifarious trumpery".

Souvenirs

Much of this survives: cheroot cases, snuffboxes, pincushions, needle-cases, thimbles, little sewing-boxes, handkerchiefs, mugs and beakers in pottery and horn, children's plates, fine glass goblets, paperweights, shells, splendid gin flasks with the front moulded into the form of the Wapping entrance and many other weird and wonderful knick-knacks such as miniature muskets or spinning tops. Some bear only the words, 'Bought in the Thames Tunnel' or 'A present from the Thames Tunnel' (and after the Queen's visit 'The Royal Thames Tunnel') but others show the tunnel in cross-section, displaying the handsome double horseshoe-shaped arches and the grand stairways, or in sectional elevation with the river above. Hawthorne was describing what is now called a peep-egg, with a magnifying glass in the top (some have several views on a revolving spindle) and of course any amount of prints could be bought. All this contributed a much-needed £450 a year and more to the cash-strapped Thames Tunnel Company.

J.V. Quick occupied Stand 47. He was a printer and publisher who had been producing such items as gas-lighters' annual Christmas poems from various premises in north London but was swift to cash in on the Tunnel's popularity, setting up a printing press from which he issued souvenir broadsheets, first to commemorate the opening and then to mark the Queen's visit later in the year. Each has an illustration and descriptive text surmounted with the proud words, "Printed by Authority, 76 feet below high-water mark" (one impressed owner wrote on his, "I saw this printed"). Another of Quick's broadsheets could be cut out and assembled at home to make a peepshow, one panel of which showed Quick at work at his press.