

Visitors take part in STEM craft activities as part of National Playday, in a collaboration with Sunny Jar Eco Hub and London Bubble Theatre



Introduction

2025 was another brilliant year for the Museum's research, public history, and science outreach.

This year saw the launch of an exciting temporary display focussed on the impact of the French Revolution on the Brunels' lives. Part of our wider French Révolution season, the display has galvanised discussion of underexplored areas of the Brunel Family story, intriguing visitors with objects such as a painted 18th-century fan which they might never have expected to see in a museum dedicated to civil engineering.

Museum staff and volunteers also presented outside the Museum, delivering public history and activities for the public as well as participating in Museum-sector conferences. This year saw a number of media appearances linked to the 200th anniversary of work commencing on the Thames Tunnel, including an exciting feature on two objects in the collection on the BBC's Antiques Roadshow.

Internal and external research continues apace, broadening our narratives and devising exciting new ways of sharing history. Our volunteers have contributed significantly to this research: their achievements this year include work to develop our understanding of Marc Brunel's early career in the US; the discovery of a previously unknown letter by 19th-century scientist Michael Faraday; a published article on Thames Tunnel shareholders; and the complete recataloguing of our incredible set of Thames Tunnel Designs.

As in past years, the Museum has hosted numerous student placements, on topics as varied as social media and marketing in Museums to reactions to the Thames Tunnel in the 19th-century press or the development of an interactive game featuring the Thames Tunnel stallholders.

Katherine McAlpine
Director



Visitors go behind the scenes to discover objects in the Museum's collection produced by Richard Beamish, resident engineer on the Thames Tunnel under Marc Brunel



Curatorial

French Révolution Season



From September, the Museum launched a new display focussing on the impact of the French Revolution on the Brunels. Presenting the oldest objects in the collection, the display considered the wide-ranging impact of revolution — which led to family member's exile or imprisonment.

The display was accompanied by programming including a series of specially-chosen films documenting French political history across Marc Brunel's life, and fan-making workshops for families, inspired by the pre-revolutionary painted fan on display in the gallery.

New Acquisitions

Toleware tray depicting the Thames Tunnel. c. 1843

Donated by Robert Roach. LDBRU:2025.18

This large, metal tray depicts the Thames Tunnel, and was almost certainly sold as a souvenir.



Letter from James Bandinel to John Maxwell-Barry seeking funding for the Thames Tunnel. 1828

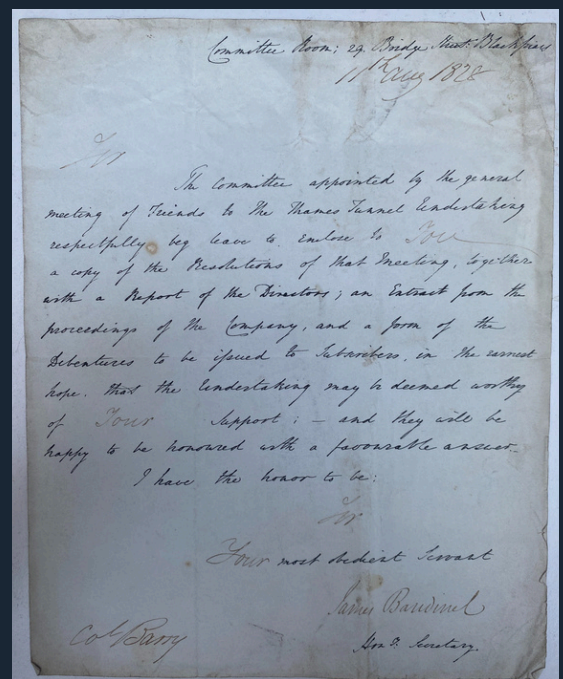
Purchased from Richard Ford. LDBRU:2025.19

This circular letter was drawn up to be sent to prospective investors in the Thames Tunnel during a period of financial difficulties; it was identified thanks to ongoing research into the investors in the Thames Tunnel.

Strong SYMPTOM'S of Water on the Brain, or LOGIC'S Spread of No Use in the Floating Capital cartoon by Robert Cruikshank. 1828

Purchased from Sandra Werszler.
LDBRU:2025.21

This cartoon depicts an imagined flood in the Tunnel, with its humorous caption alluding, too, to financial problems which beset the project.



A newly-acquired illustration by Robert Cruikshank depicting a flooding Thames Tunnel, as imagined in Pierce Egan's novel *The Finish to the Life in London* (1828-9)



Public History & Talks



Katherine McAlpine Director

Katherine spoke at a number of sector conferences and events in 2025, starting with the Museum's Associations annual 'Moving on Up' careers event, speaking on a panel, 'So you want to be a Museum Director?'. In October, she featured on a panel, 'Calling time on poor pay policies in the sector' at the MA's annual conference.

Across the year, Katherine also made a number of TV and radio appearances in 2025, including BBC Radio London, Times Radion, the Times newspaper, and on the Antiques Roadshow.

Andrea Vasel Learning Facilitator

In the Jan-March edition of their magazine, the East London History Society (ELHS) published an article by Andrea on Emma Brunel. This was followed by a talk Andrea delivered on Emma Brunel for the ELHS as part of Women's History Month; well attended both online and in person, the talk introduced a largely unknown figure in the Brunel family to a wider audience.

Outreach Activities London Transport Museum

Museum volunteers were particularly active in providing outreach to other venues. This included participation in both summer acitivities at London Transport Museum - where volunteers Sue Thomas, Keith Turpin, and Jean Rogers led our *Tunnellers' Tales* kit to engage children with working conditions at the Thames Tunnel; and at the Museum's Depot Day, where Helen Bannigan delivered in-depth talks on the history of the Tunnel to visitors.



Brunel Museum Research Forum

2025 saw the launch of the Museum's new Research Forum, a programme of monthly talks in which internal research can be shared and external speakers are invited to discuss topics related to the Museum's stories. The following papers were presented across the year:

Lawrence Goldman (University of Oxford), 'Charles Babbage and the Origins of the Computer: Calculating Machines, Engineering, and the Victorian State in the Era of the Brunels'

Rose Teanby (Royal Photographic Society), 'Robert Howlett, Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Photographer'

Mark Kleinman (Brunel Museum), 'The Afterlife of the Thames Tunnel: The East London Railway'

Gill Howard (Brunel Museum), "'Fancy Articles" and "Multifarious Trumpery" from a Private Collection

Matthew McCormack (University of Northampton), 'Studying the History of Boots and Shoes'

Emily Boldry (Brunel Museum), Film Launch: 'Women in STEM. A Co-Produced Documentary'

Arran Saunders (Brunel Museum), 'New Insights into the Thames Tunnel Designs'

Malmi Mahagamage, Meherun Soud, and Yash Vaghela (QMUL), 'From Classroom to Community: Engineering Meets History'

Annalisa Nicholson (King's College London), 'Channel Crossings: The Story of French Exiles in Britain'

Elissavet Ntoulia (Science Museum), 'Becoming America: How Science Shaped a Nation'



A school group learning how about tunnelling methods as part of our new *How to Build a Tunnel under the Thames: A Guide for Young Engineers* schools programme



Research

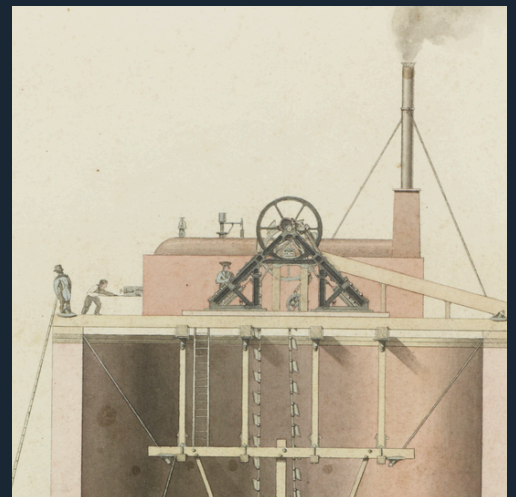
2025 saw newly published academic research of relevance to the Museum and its collections:

Junnan Li and Juan Manuel Cano Sanchiz, 'The Ecological Turn of Industrial Museums. A Comparative Analysis Britain-China,' *Diferents: Revista de Museus* 9, pp. 26-45

Junnan Li and Juan Manuel Cano Sanchiz explore how museums are undergoing an ecological turn aligned with current global strategies for sustainable development and argue that industrial museums have the responsibility to contribute to healing wounds of industrialisation (e.g. climate and ecological damage) through sustainable planning and environmental education. The Brunel Museum's Sustainability Statement forms one case study.

Ben Russell, 'Scientific Instrument-Makers' Engineering Models, 1830–1860: Places, Purposes, People, and Physicality,' *Bulletin of the Scientific Instrument Society* 164, 8-17

Ben Russell explores the rich material culture of engineering models retailed by instrument-makers over the period 1830-1860 and suggests that 'precision models' may be more appropriate as a name for such models, rather than differentiating between models built by instrument makers or engineers as has previously been typical. Examination of a model of a triangular engine used in constructing the Thames Tunnel, now in a private collection, is supported through evidence provided by a watercolour (right) in the Museum's collection which depicts the engine *in situ*.



Peter Jones, 'William Morris and the 8th Wonder of the World? A Speculation,' *Journal of William Morris Studies* 26.1-2, 78-84

Museum volunteer Peter Jones conclusively identifies the 'William Morris' listed amongst the shareholders in the preamble of the 1824 Thames Tunnel Company Act as the father of artist William Morris. He also speculates on the presence of William Morris junior at the opening ceremony of the Thames Tunnel on 25 March 1843 — the day after Morris junior's 9th birthday.

Conor Moloney, 'Portal: Research-Creation, speculative architecture and the subterranean imaginary,' *cultural geographies*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14744740251347934>

Moloney presents an entry to the 2024 Antepavilion architecture competition for a temporary folly on a site in Inner London, which formed part of a wider research project on play and counterplay in contemporary urbanism and reflects on the playful but essentially disposable nature of the 'pop-up' to develop a satirical critique of the construction industry. Objects from the Museum's collection were creatively reimagined to develop the work.

Research

The following research was published via the Museum's blog:

Jack Hayes, 'Anne Lister, aka Gentleman Jack, "ungentlemanned" at the Thames Tunnel' (18 February 2025)

In celebration of LGBTQ+ History Month, this blog shared new information about the visits of pioneering queer figure Anne Lister (1791-1840) to the Thames Tunnel. From proposing the Tunnel as a venue for an 'ungentlemanned' date with a woman, to considering Brunel's innovative tunnelling methods in relation to mines on her family's estate, Lister's visits to the Tunnel were as personally exciting as they were influential in developing her knowledge of scientific innovation.

Jack Hayes, 'Marc Isambard Brunel: What's in a Name?' (25 April 2025)

25 April 2025 marked the 255th anniversary of the birth of Marc Isambard Brunel in a small village in northern France. To celebrate, this blog examined the connection between Brunel's birthday, his unusual name, and a medieval knight, as discussed in newly-discovered letters by Brunel.



Mark Kleinman, 'The Afterlife of the Thames Tunnel: How a White Elephant Became the Windrush Line' (27 April 2025)

Though the Thames Tunnel, the world's first tunnel beneath a navigable river, was an engineering marvel, it was a financial failure. Almost two centuries later, it is a vital north-south rail link as part of London Overground's Windrush Line. In this blog, Mark explored the story of how a white elephant became the Windrush Line.

Mark Kleinman, 'The Thames Tunnel in World War II' (8 May 2025)



During World War II, the Thames Tunnel was a key transport asset across the Thames. With its strategic location close to the London Docks, it was vulnerable to enemy action. As the tide of war changed in favour of the Allies, neighbouring areas and perhaps the Tunnel itself played a key role in the eventual victory in Europe. Today, on VE Day, Mark Kleinman, Tour Guide and Museum Ambassador at the Brunel Museum looks back at the Thames Tunnel and World War II.

Publications

Arran Saunders, 'New Insights into the Thames Tunnel Designs' (24 June 2025)

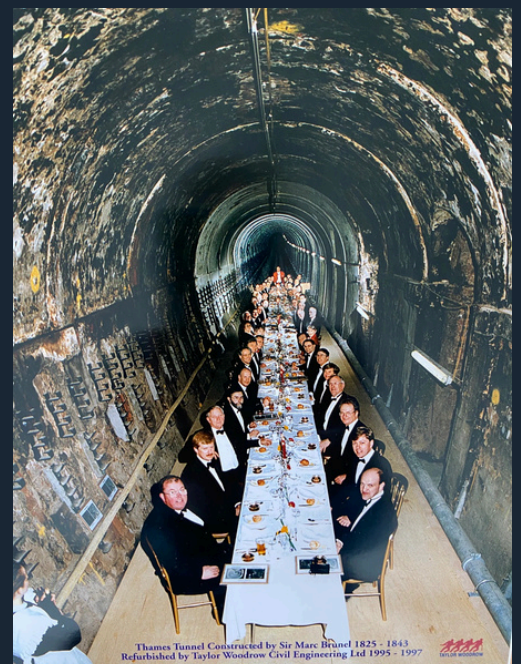
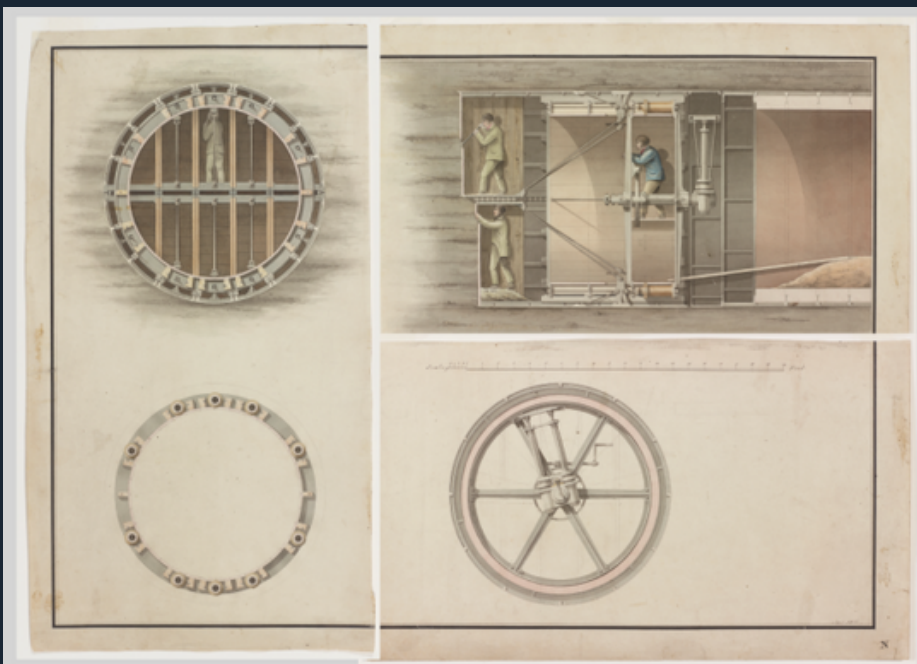
Following a project to research and recatalogue the Thames Tunnel Designs, Arran Saunders provided new insights into the collection. Calling into question received ideas about artistic attribution and highlighting new archival discoveries about the production of the Designs and their purpose, the research project developed a far greater understanding of the Designs and unlocked new interpretations of both individual images and the collection as a whole.

Mark Kleinman, 'Marc Brunel and the American Steamboat' (24 September 2025)

The Brunel name is inextricably linked with the great nineteenth century steamships. However, long before Isambard Kingdom Brunel designed and launched three world-changing ships, his father, Marc Brunel, had been involved with steamships: and not in Britain, but in the United States. In this blog, Mark Kleinman considered Brunel's engagement with American steamboat pioneers in the 1790s to help better understand his wider story and achievements, and emphasise the importance of the crucial years Brunel spent in the United States.

Sue Thomas, 'Banquets at the Thames Tunnel: New Sources for the World's First Underwater Dinners' (10 November 2025)

Monday 10 November 2025 was the 198th anniversary of an extraordinary dinner, held under the waters of the River Thames in the Thames Tunnel. This was the occasion for Sue Thomas to reveal a raft of new information about the dinner, following her exciting discovery of a file of RSVPs sent to the Brunels.



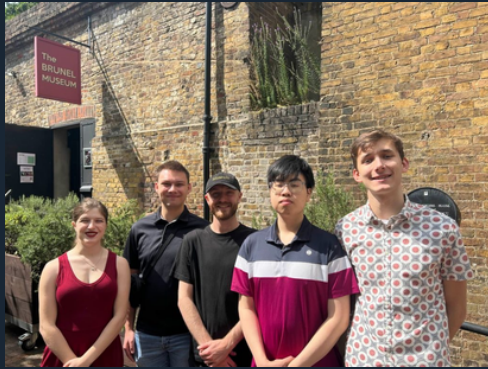
Engineering students from Queen Mary University, London, planning their display of research carried out into the Thames Tunnel Designs and aimed at family audiences



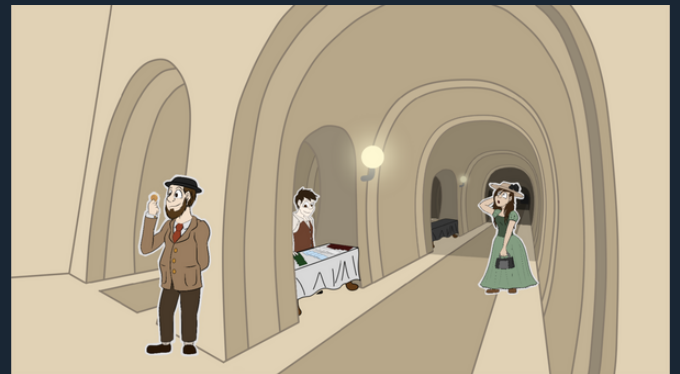
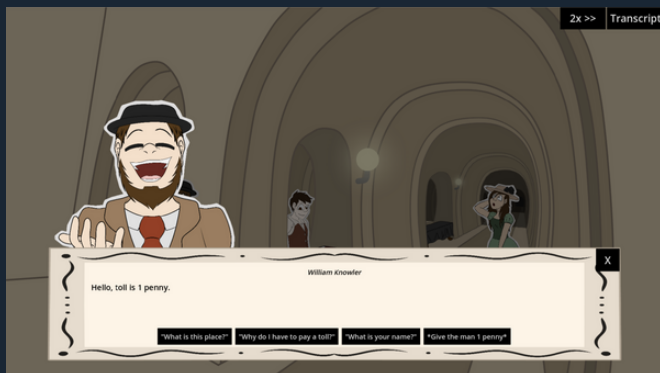
Placements

Designing a Multimedia Interactive View of the Thames Tunnel Bazaar

Tyler Allison, Amelia Collard, Hung Dao, and Quinn Williams
(Worcester Polytechnic Institute)



From March-May, we welcomed another team from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the USA. Tyler Allison, Amelia Collard, Hung Dao, and Quinn Williams worked to develop a proto-type interactive game which allows players to experience the Thames Tunnel as it was in the 1840-60s when it functioned as an underwater shopping centre. Drawing on the Museum's research which has compiled a list of shopkeepers and other information, the team produced a fully-playable prototype and a report with recommendations for its implementation in due course.



Disaster, Folly, Wonder of the World: The Thames Tunnel in the 19th-Century Press

Pedro de Almeida Briggs de Albuquerque
(Queen Mary University London, MA History)

In March-April, Pedro Briggs de Almeida de Albuquerque completed a research internship in the course of his MA studies at Queen Mary University London. Undertaking a project entitled *Disaster, Folly, Wonder of the World: The Thames Tunnel in the 19th-Century Press*, Pedro used the British Newspaper Archive to consider how the Thames Tunnel was received by the press through a series of public relationships disasters and the Tunnel's eventual triumphant opening in 1843. As part of his project, he produced a series of blogposts introducing the topic and his findings to a general audience.



Placements

Audience Evaluation at the Brunel Museum

Yufei Huang and Yuxin Zhang

(University College London, MA Education in Museums and Galleries)

Across the summer, Yufei Huang and Yuxin Zhang focussed on developing the Museum's evaluation programme, working to capture audience insights and reactions. They also learnt specific skills in evaluation children's feedback, putting them to work as they helped run and evaluate the Museum's family activities and schools programme.

Social Media and Marketing at the Brunel Museum

Seung Yeon Kim

(University College London, MA Managing Museums)

From January-May, Seung Yeon Kim completed a wide-ranging placement in which she took on responsibility for developing the Museum's public-facing communications. The Museum's social media presences saw a notable boost, with our most viewed Instagram of 2025 being a video Seung Yeon produced to provide an insight for first-time visitors into what to expect. During her placement, Seung Yeon also produced a blog exploring the history of the Museum's mural (right, produced in 2005) for ArtUK's Murals Digitisation and Engagement Programme.



Clore Fellow

Tsosheletso Chidi



In February, the Museum hosted Tsosheletso Chidi, an international Clore Fellow.

She shadowed the Museum's Director, learning about leadership in the UK cultural sector.

Placements

From Classroom to Community: Engineering Meets History at the Brunel Museum

Malmi Mahagama, Meherun Soud, and Yash Vaghela
(Queen Mary University, London, BA Engineering)

Supported by a QMUL Centre for Public Engagement grant, a team of three Engineering students carried out a summer internship to examine the Museum's Thames Tunnel Designs and design a family-oriented display intended to give younger visitors an insight into the technical processes depicted in the designs. Supervised by Rehan Shah (QMUL) and Jack Hayes (Brunel Museum), the team gained valuable research experience in archival study, and developed their communication skills before producing tangible, impactful resources. Their display was on view in the Museum across the summer.

Elizabeth Stevens

(Brigham Young University)

As part of a long-running summer internship, Elizabeth Stevens worked with Learning and Engagement Producer Gabriella Codastefano to plan, deliver, and evaluate the Museum's schools and learning programmes.



Participants in the Museum's newly launched *Discovery Walk* schools activity



With thanks to

The Museum would like to thank staff and volunteers from the following places, who facilitated our research, public history, and science outreach across 2025:

Archives Départementales de l'Eure, Évreux
Archives Départementales de la Seine Maritime, Rouen
Avery Library, Columbia University
Birmingham Libraries
Bodleian Libraries, Oxford
British Museum, London
Brontë Parsonage, Haworth
Charleston House, Fyfe
Columbia University Archives
Crossness Engines Trust, London
Dulwich Picture Gallery
Dutchess County (NY) Department of History
Fan Museum, Greenwich
Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery
Historic Buildings and Places
Historic Red Hook, NY
Horniman Museum, London
Imperial War Museum, London
Institution of Civil Engineers
London Bubble Theatre
London Transport Museum
Mendelssohn-Haus, Leipzig
Museum of Freemasonry, London
National Archives, London
National Gallery, London
New York Historical Society
Old Royal Naval College & Maritime Greenwich
Portsmouth Historic Dockyard
Queen Mary University Library, London
Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter
Royal College of Surgeons Library, London
Royal Society of Arts, London
Stevens Institute of Technology, NJ
Science Museum Group
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
SS Great Britain Trust, Bristol
St Alfege's Church, Greenwich
The London Archives
The Postal Museum, London
Time & Talents, Rotherhithe
Transport for London Corporate Archives
UCL Centre for the Legacies of British Slavery
University of Portsmouth
Young V&A, London

Funders

The Museum would like to thank the following, who provided generous funding to support our many activities across 2025:



Art Fund_



Visitors discover the story of the Thames Tunnel through a guided tour

