

BTS at 50 book

- I was a junior engineer with Halcrows. The RE was Dudley Trembath and my boss, Cliff Bowers. The contractor was Kinnear Moodie, Agent Bob Reid.

The site foreman was a man of considerable renown – Bert Williams, one of the old pre-war types who took no prisoners.

Cavendish Square was a quiet oasis in those days, just behind Oxford Street and was used as the site for the main access shaft and temporary tunnels to the ‘station ground’ works.

The shaft was serviced by a tracked crane (electrified RB22?) and provided the ‘man rider’ facility in a simple bucket – no H&S in those days!

Bert was down below and had been having a heated dispute with the crane driver about speed of service. He called for the ‘man rider’ and was hauled to the surface swearing like a trooper, at the top of his voice. This echoed around the square, at the North end of which was an active convent!

He threatened the crane driver with everything, including instant dismissal.

The crane driver had him suspended, swinging gently above the shaft, unable to get out at this location for several minutes. After a while the driver told him what he thought of Bert and his job, locked off the crane and departed. Bert meanwhile swinging freely above the 100 ft. deep shaft and in full voice.

Eventually a stand-in driver was found, and Bert was traversed to safety at shaft top, to the amusement of numerous onlookers. It was not a topic to discuss in his presence for many weeks after.

Neville Harrison (1 of 2), 260 words

Examples of typical stories ...these are available on the website

- CVB O - MLM 15**

In 1983 Mowlem were awarded the contract to reconstruct Blisworth Tunnel on the Grand Union Canal near Northampton.

We changed many aspects of the lining design to suit our method of working, including the first use in the UK of wooden pegs that developed into the dowels widely used today.

Because of our involvement in the design of the lining, I requested that the Mowlem logo should be added to the intrados of the segments along with the initials of the British Waterways Board and the precaster CV Buchan (Concrete).

Below these logos on the intrados of the segments, the markings also included the diameter, the segment type and mould number. Buchan chose to put their logo in front of Mowlem’s, with the segment type beneath.

The most common segment were Ordinaries with the reference “O” and these also had the highest number of moulds.

In my presentation on the Blisworth project at a BTS meeting I suggested that these markings represented the scores of football matches: CVB “O” – MLM 15 !!

Roy Slocombe (1 of 3), 177 words



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3 Pioneering in the footsteps of Brunel's Thames Tunnel

In 1995, Taylor Woodrow Construction was awarded an urgent and unique contract to strengthen the Thames Tunnel. Specifically the first sub-aqueous tunnel ever constructed. The original builders in 1825 had developed the first recognised tunnel shield, patented in 1818. It was a multi-level, cast iron, working platform within which miners used face boards to restrict the ingress of the Thames silt ooze that provided just a few feet of cover to the toxic soup that was the Thames at that time. Behind this shield, segments were erected, well bricks actually, layer by layer with mortar and bricks that have resisted chemical attack for 150 years. Muck was removed by cart and taken to the surface. It took 18 years to complete that tunnel, a pedestrian walkway for the amazement of Londoners who could now walk under the mighty Thames from Wapping to Rotherhithe.

The Assistant Engineer on that tunnel was a teenage Isambard Kingdom Brunel working for his entrepreneurial Father, Sir Marc Isambard Brunel. The sewage filled waters of the Thames beat that tunnel face control several times, washing the young Isambard up the shaft and sparing his life whilst others perished. River bed sink holes requiring the use of straw matting and bed ballast by divers in bell helmets before face control could be restored after many years of delay. I ask you, what has really changed in almost 200 years?

My role on the Thames Tunnel, some 150 years later was as Contract Manager for Taylor Woodrow on behalf of London Underground Ltd, to create a strong, thin inner shell of concrete to replace brickwork that had decayed after attack from a century of soot and water when London Underground steam locomotives took over the tunnel in 1869 before electric trains were introduced in the 20th Century. On the exact day we were about to start work on site, a letter arrived at the site office in an old warehouse we had converted just around the corner from old Wapping Station.

It confirmed the Listing of the tunnel as a Heritage Monument. "All work must stop". In the following weeks, working with LUL and Heritage Representatives and with as much innovation as the original tunnel build, we crafted a Steel Fibre Concrete shell and intricate shuttered arches to replicate the original, World Heritage Listed shape and form of Brunel's masterpiece of engineering and pioneering courage. In the 1990's we maintained a tunnelling industry made up of a relative few determined characters and the pioneering spirit of Brunel. We all celebrated completion of the Refurbishment of the Thames Tunnel after 2 years in 1997 with a candle lit, black tie dinner on long tables set out inside the tunnel itself. An empty chair was left at the head of the table for a Brunel to sit.

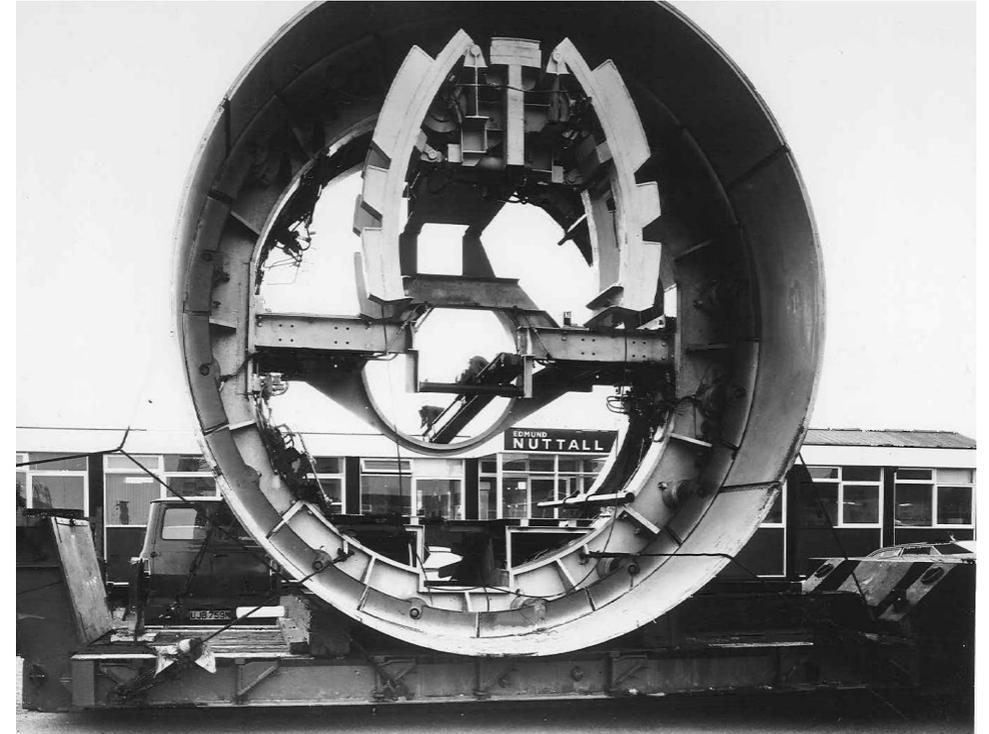
That night, with a string quartet echoing down the arches, drinking fine wine, enjoying the best food I have ever eaten underground and amongst the finest Team of Constructors, Designers, Clients and Heritage Guests who had worked tirelessly day and night for 2 years; we were privileged to Toast the Spirit of Brunel. The refurbished tunnel now incorporates the Spirit of many more modern Pioneers who have continued the development of tunnelling methods and techniques. The technical records show the extraordinarily innovative use of Steel Fibre Concrete behind complex shutters but the entry in Marc Vandevalles' book "Tunnelling is an Art" that gives me greatest satisfaction is the recognition of the intensely Collaborative working of all the Parties to get the project completed, despite the last minute and well deserved Heritage Listing.

Sam Simons (1 of 1), 499 words



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...and please include some pictures (drawings too if you have any). Photos or people are particularly good, but please try and identify everyone



These may be very precious to you – we can copy and return the same day...



'50 years of the BTS' book: Progress Dec 2019