

TUNNELLING UNDER THE THAMES:

Beneath the Thames, fifteen miles east of London, a new road tunnel is being built between Dartford and Purfleet. Mr. George Nugent, Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, descends by lift on the Dartford side to inaugurate the work on the main tunnel. These shafts go down 80 feet on each bank, and they're already linked by a narrow pilot tunnel built under the river before the war. The main tunnel, wide enough for a double carriageway, will be driven forward by a huge boring shield. Behind this shield, Mr. Nugent inaugurates the work by tightening the last belt on the first ring of the tunnel lining.

For two thousand years, the Thames has been London's lifeline - but it's a barrier, as well. The last downstream bridge is the Tower Bridge; eastward of that, the last "road" crossing is the Blackwall Tunnel - in the heart of London's East End, where its continuous traffic must thread a way through many miles of congested streets. But before long, thanks to the new Dartford project, millions of vehicles a year will be able to by-pass London altogether. The cutting-edge of the great shield cannot be forced through the chalk and gravel faster than five or six feet a day, even though the pilot tunnel is already there to help progress. Because of constantly seeping water, the men must work in compressed air, at pressures up to 35 pounds per square inch. In five years time, a lorry will be able to drive direct from the Dartford by-pass to the Southend Arterial!