

# SAVE QUEENSBURY TUNNEL

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## Does historical legacy matter?

### Endeavour and ambition

Queensbury Tunnel was built by the Great Northern Railway as part of the company's efforts to create a strategically important north-south route that bypassed the congested lines around Leeds and Bradford. It took more than four years to complete, with lengthy delays caused by the volume of water entering the workings. But it did benefit from the use of an early rock drilling machine to improve productivity with the pilot tunnel's excavation.

### Appalling sacrifice

At its peak, around 600 men worked on the structure, assisted by 14 horses and a tramway over the hill that connected the two entrances and seven construction shafts. Conditions were unimaginable and at least ten men were killed during construction, aged from 25 to 44. One drowned, one fell down a shaft, two were crushed to death and three were involved in explosions. All ten are now commemorated by a memorial close to the north portal.



### Serving industry

The tunnel only remained operational for 78 years, serving as a conduit for passengers and millions of tons of goods. A gang of local platelayers spent their working days inside it, keeping the tracks well fettled. But the emergence of the motorcar - and the independence it brought - prompted a decline in traffic using the line and closure claimed it in 1956.

### Life after death

In its redundancy, children learned life skills by having adventures in the tunnel's darkness. In the 1970s, Cambridge University scientists established an observatory near its midpoint to measure earth strain, whilst British Rail researchers used it in the Nineties to test a new form of waterproofing grout. This Victorian miracle has a rich, compelling past.

### Should we care?

Queensbury Tunnel is one of the greatest civil engineering feats ever undertaken in this part of West Yorkshire. It is embedded in the community's social history and stands as a monument to the courage, enterprise and vision of the engineers and navvies who built - against the odds - in the 1870s. Although it has been disused by the railways for 70 years, it remains an asset of enormous scale and significance; it could not viably be replaced if it is lost. Should we commit millions of pounds of taxpayers' money to destroying the opportunities still presented by the tunnel for future generations?