

VISIT TO CLAPHAM SOUTH DEEP LEVEL SHELTER

by Roger Tuke

Your writer was fortunate enough to secure a ticket for a one hour visit to the Clapham South Deep Level Shelter on one of the tours organised by LTM Hidden London in October 2015.

The history of the deep level shelters has been covered before, most notably in Andy Emmerson and Tony Beard's book *London's Secret Tubes* and more recently Nick Catford's *Secret Underground London*. Notwithstanding that, Clapham South is most interesting in that it has more subsequent uses than most of the other seven deep level shelters built. These include after war time public shelter use in 1944/45, troop billet in 1946 for victory parade, hostel use for the immigrants from the Empire Windrush in 1948 (hence the establishment of Caribbean communities in Clapham and Brixton locally), hostel for youth associations in the late 1940s, Festival Hotel in 1951 (with dedicated bus service to the festival site on the South Bank), troop billet again in 1952 for the funeral of King George VI and hotel for visitors to the capital for the coronation of our current monarch in 1953.

More recently from the 1970s it has been, along with many of the other deep level shelters, used for secure document archive storage (cardboard boxes on the former bunk bed frames). Interestingly despite being built by LTPB, the ownership of the shelters did not pass to their successor LUL until the late 1990s. Although now vacant, much remains from the original build and use, with many witness marks and most of the original directional signage.

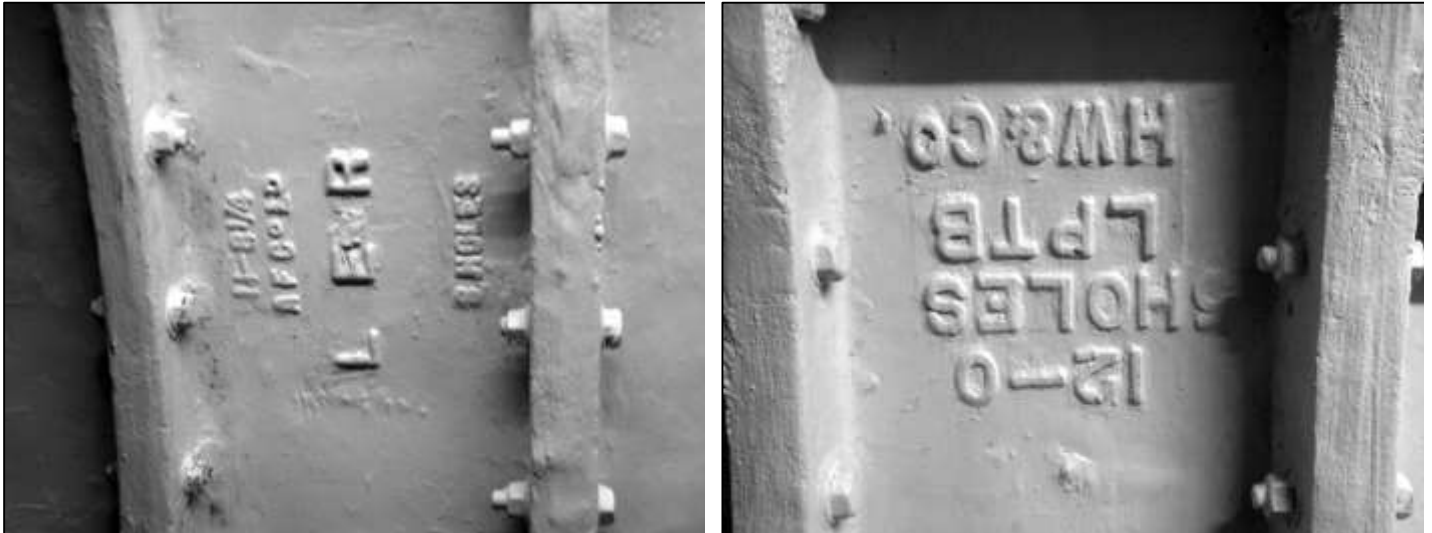
Noted were tunnel lining rings with both LER and LTPB initials, with makers' names of Stanton and HW&Co. (Head Wrightson?) respectively, used often side by side. LTM are to be congratulated on recreating various cameo scenes using the bunk beds, draped room images and story boards to bring stories from the shelters alive to the tour participants.



Above: The upper level to the shelter tunnel.

Below: LER (Left) and LPTB (Right) tunnel lining rings.

Photos: Roger Tuke



The tour commenced at the southern “Drum” ventilation shaft (recently built over by a residential development) on Balham Hill just to the south of the Underground station via a deep spiral staircase.

The tour took in not only both levels of sleeping accommodation, which was constructed in the full length of the tunnels by use of a pre-cast concrete floor being inserted mid-point in the tunnel diameter, but also stopped off at a medical point (free to those sheltering pre establishment of the NHS), toilet accommodation, shelter control area, a canteen, an escape point and an explanation of the ventilation and drainage systems employed. And all whilst Northern Line tube trains could be heard every few minutes rumbling directly overhead.

All in all a wonderful opportunity to see a hidden gem of secret London, which hopefully may one day be open to visitors on a more regular basis if LTM gain planning consent and plans come to fruition for use of the northern “Drum” on the edge of Clapham Common as a café and visitor centre.

Below: Upper and lower level plan of the Clapham South deep shelter.

Photo: Roger Tuke

