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EXPERIENCES

# The secret tunnels of the Second World War, a future centre of experience in London

*The space known as Kingsway Exchange Tunnels will be converted into an experience centre by the architecture studio WilkinsonEyre.*

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In **London**, the **secret tunnels of World War II** have been characterized for more than seven decades by their government secrecy at the mercy of the Official Government Secrets Act. Until recently the new owner of the **tunnels**, **Angus Murray**, and the architectural firm **WilkinsonEyre**, revealed their project to transform the space known as **Kingsway Exchange Tunnels**, into a unique **underground attraction**.

Arranged under the Chancery Lane tube station on High Holborn Street in the centre of the metropolis, the **tunnels** occupy an area of **8,000 square metres** and have a **diameter of 7.6 metres**, which is equivalent to the width of three London buses.



*Air raid shelters were ordered after the start of the bombing raids on London.* DBOX/The London Tunnels

After being built in 1940 as an **emergency bunker** for 8,000 people seeking refuge from the **Blitz** – the series of bombings that hit the country at the beginning of the Second World War – the **tunnels** aim to open to the public for the first time with a proposal that will seek to preserve the "**deepest licensed bar in Britain**" that was established there in the 80s.

### **SECRET WORLD WAR II TUNNELS WILL OPEN TO THE PUBLIC FOR THE FIRST TIME**

The future **experience centre** in the hands of **WilkinsonEyre** will involve the opening of the **underground tunnels** that, after initially serving as a refuge, in 1944 housed the headquarters of the Special Operations Executive, a branch of MI6 whose purpose was to help the resistance of the Nazi-occupied regions of Europe.

History also alludes to the fact that from 1949 onwards, the **tunnels began to be used** as a secure and secret long-distance telephone exchange, housing a total of 200 employees and the first transatlantic telephone cable, the TAT1, which later served as a direct line between Moscow and Washington.

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*From 1949 onwards, the tunnels began to be used as a secure and secret long-distance telephone exchange. DBOX/The London Tunnels*

By the end of the 1980s, telecommunications technology had advanced and the **telephone exchange in the tunnels** became obsolete, so they proceeded to dismantle the site entirely, along with the bar, the restaurant with false windows and the recreation room with pool tables that they had previously installed.

So it's no surprise that with their extensive historical baggage, the tunnels have been the inspiration for the "Q Subdivision" of **Ian Fleming's James Bond novels**, and that in turn, after the law was repealed in 2007, **Australian businessman Angus Murray** decided to buy them in 2023 so that **WilkinsonEyre** can bring its past as a secret government communications hub to the stage.

With an estimated investment of **269 million dollars**, the goal is to **transform the tunnels into a cultural experience** thanks to the installation of large-scale, high-resolution curved immersive screens, interactive structures, aroma emission technology and individual acoustic speakers.



*The aim of the project is to transform the tunnels into a cultural experience. DBOX/The London Tunnels*

"We are delighted to bring our expertise in designing visitor destinations to this unique place in the heart of **London**, but unknown to most," said Paul Baker, director of **WilkinsonEyre**, in a statement.

"These **secret spaces** present the opportunity to tell extraordinary stories that helped shape the 20th century, along with jaw-dropping **immersive digital experiences**."

With an operating capacity of two million visitors a year and its entrance located at 39-40 *Furnival Street*, **the World War II tunnels** could also host different **experiences** in collaboration with major entertainment companies, artists, performers and curators.



*The tunnel project is estimated to be completed in 2027. DEOX/The London Tunnels*

If the project is approved, the **history of the tunnels and the WilkinsonEyre project** will come to life **from 2027**.