Prize-winning young engineers from opposite sides of the world come face-to-face in the Lee Tunnel

Two of the world’s brightest young engineers met for the first time in London’s deepest tunnel.

Chairman of the Young Australian Tunnelling Society Jurij Karlovsek joined Harding Prize winner David Clayton, of Morgan Sindall, 86.5 metres below the capital in the Lee Tunnel on June 12.

David, 27, who lives in Birmingham, won the award given to the UK’s best young tunnelling engineer recently for a compelling paper on the Lee Tunnel.

Jurij, 29, from Brisbane, is the current holder of the David Sugden Award, Australia’s equivalent honour.

The pair spent over an hour in Thames Water’s £635 million tunnel, designed to stop 16 million tonnes of untreated sewage spilling into the River Lee – a tributary of the Thames – from London’s Victorian sewers every year, discussing their ideas and marvelling at the scale of the construction work.

Jurij said: “It was good to talk to David and discuss ways we can help each other. His field of interest is very similar.

“Going into the Lee Tunnel was a fantastic experience. It is a great construction site, and the scale is overwhelming. There are so many things happening all in one place, all while the sewage works is in operation. That is very difficult. Projects like this should be shown more, especially to students, as they are inspirational.”

Tunnel design engineer David added: “It was great to meet someone with different opinions and views. He has lots of innovative ideas and is a clever bloke. We will stay in touch and help each other out in the future. He is keen to work with us at some point.”

The young engineers entered the tunnel via the imposing shaft at Britain’s biggest sewage works, Beckton, east London. They then travelled three kilometres inside the giant tube – the width of three double decker buses – by train to the tunnel boring machine (TBM), Busy Lizzie, which is approaching the half-way point on its journey to Abbey Mills, Stratford.

David won the Harding Prize, awarded by the British Tunnelling Society every two years, in April for his paper on the ‘TBM crossing at the Lee Tunnel connection shaft’.

Jurij was visiting London after attending the World Tunnel Congress in Geneva after claiming the Australasian Tunnelling Society’s David Sugden Award, also designed to encourage young engineers to develop the art of technical writing.