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## Great Bus Journeys of the World No 13

Mike Roden goes from Clapham Junction to Shoreditch the long way round



It's two minutes past ten as I board the 35 bus on St John's Road on a drizzly, grey February morning and we're off up Battersea Rise, which quickly merges into Clapham Common Northside. The church of St Barnabas has a medieval look to it, though it was actually opened in 1898. A blue plaque on the wall of 47 Northside records that composer Edvard Grieg often stayed here between 1888 and 1906 as the guest of his publisher who would sometimes fly the Norwegian flag when the great man was in residence.

Into Clapham and past Clapham Common underground station, opened in 1900. Apart from a small domed entrance building the station is entirely underground. The 31ft Clock Tower next to the station entrance was unveiled in July 1906. Almost immediately we turn right down Clapham Park Road, an uninspiring mixture of small shops, hairdressers and takeaways.

### Ritzy

At the junction with Brixton Road there's a good view of the Ritzy Picturehouse. Opened in 1911 it was one of England's earliest purpose-built cinemas, which finally closed in 1976. Its revival was supported by Lambeth council and the London Cinema Collective, but the cinema's somewhat 'alternative' agenda, didn't always sell tickets. A desperate manager once advertised in the local paper to reassure locals that not every film screened was 'left-wing or gay'. Those headily independent days are gone and today the cinema (owned by Picturehouse Cinemas) is a multi-screen complex.

After a long wait the bus joins the bustle of Brixton. At the stop opposite the underground station the bus fills up, but there are also large numbers of commuters heading for the Victoria Line. The station – with very high usage for an inner suburban station – was opened on 23 July 1971.

### Bookie

We're soon turning into Coldharbour Lane. A 'cold harbour' was an uninhabited shelter, with a roof, door and possibly a simple hearth. In 1955, when John Major was 12, his family moved to a dingy tworoom rented flat on this road. Thus a future British prime minister is on record earning pocket money by delivering bets to an unlicensed bookie operating under the arches at nearby Loughborough Junction railway station.

We pass Camberwell Green, a sliver of ancient common land bought by the local parish in the late 19th century to protect it from development. Burgess Park named after Jessie Burgess, Camberwell's first woman mayor, opened in 1971. Unusually for a London park it was created out of a brownfield site which had been occupied by industry and housing.

Newington Library and the associated Cuming Museum – both opened in 1906 – have remained closed for two years since a disastrous fire. On the other side of the road is the former Labour Party HQ renamed John Smith House, in memory of the party's leader who died suddenly in 1994 after only two years at the helm. It's now a council hostel.

The bus heads on inexorably

towards the giant roundabout known as Elephant and Castle. Major redevelopment plans for this area don't all meet with approval, and a local group is campaigning for 'a regeneration that benefits local people'. Nonetheless the tall buildings are arriving. The 485ft Strata SE1 tower with its non-functioning wind turbines was completed in 2010, and those waiting on the starting line include One the Elephant, 360 Tower and Eileen House all well over 400ft high. More usefully for local people 2015 should see the opening of a new leisure centre, to replace the old Castle centre.

### Atmospheric

We turn up Newington Causeway which becomes Borough High Street, once the main road from the south. The only one remaining of its numerous galleried coaching inns is the George Inn, now in the shadow of the Shard. Mentioned by Dickens in *Little Dorrit* it is currently owned and leased by the National Trust. Such inns may have been the inspiration for the original theatres, with players acting on a stage in the courtyard surrounded by the standing audience with the more expensive 'posh seats' up in the galleries. The George is certainly still very atmospheric, and well worth a visit.

As is of course Borough Market. From the eleventh century, London Bridge held stalls selling grain, fish, vegetables and livestock. In the thirteenth century traders were relocated to Borough High Street and a market has existed there ever since. To our left is Southwark Cathedral, or more correctly The Cathedral

**Sights to see: The Ritzy cinema (photo:Oxfordian Kissuth); John Smith House, Southwark; The George Inn, London Bridge; the 'Walkie-Talkie Building'; punk band Superheaven at the Old Blue Last; Shoreditch Town Hall**



and Collegiate Church of St Saviour and St Mary Overie. There's been a church here since 606AD, and probably a Roman temple before that. The present building retains much of its medieval fabric though the nave is a late 19th-century reconstruction. It became a cathedral in 1905 when the Diocese of Southwark was created.

The current London Bridge opened in 1973, replacing a Victorian stone-arched bridge, which in turn superseded a 600-year-old medieval structure. There's evidence of timber bridges here since Roman times. Ahead of us is the much changed, sometimes maligned city skyline, with the Cheesegrater, the Walkie-Talkie and the Gherkin all seeming to nestle close together for company.

Along King William IV Street I catch sight of the Monument commemorating the Great Fire, then we pass Leadenhall Market whose origins date from the fourteenth century. The bus stops at Threadneedle Street, home to the Bank of England. The street's name may refer to the threads and needles used by the members of the Worshipful Company of Merchant Taylors, whose hall has been located here since 1347.

### **Bomb**

Outside 99 Bishopsgate there's a little huddle of damply dejected smokers. The building was extensively damaged in 1993 by a Provisional IRA bomb which also damaged Tower 42 behind it. Opposite at 110 Bishopsgate is the Heron Tower, at 755ft the third tallest building in London. A move by the owners Heron International, to rename it

the Salesforce Tower, after major tenant Salesforce.com, was recently quashed by the City of London Corporation which voted in favour of calling the property 110 Bishopsgate.

We stop briefly at Liverpool Street station. There are few passengers left on the bus now. A little further on Folgate Street is the site of Dennis Severs' House. It's named after the American owner who from 1979 until his death in 1999 transformed it into an atmospheric time capsule recreating domestic life in the eighteenth century. Well worth going to see on a candlelit winter's evening.

### **Shakespeare**

On Great Eastern Street, there's a pub called the Old Blue Last. In 1576 it was the site of James Burbage's playhouse The Theatre. Shakespeare was almost certainly a member of the company. After a few years Burbage pulled it down, went south and built the Globe. A pub called 'The Last' – as in shoemaker – is first recorded here in the eighteenth century. Over the next couple of centuries, the pub's fortunes wavered, until – by now renamed The Old Blue Last – by the 1980s it was notorious for hosting a brothel on its upper floor. Shoreditch, and the pub have cleaned up their act since then, and it's now very popular with the area's young people, famous for its live music and lively crowd.

The bus takes various detours caused by building work and road works, and eventually ends up at the Grade II listed Shoreditch Town Hall built in 1865. It's now an independent arts and events venue, and is apparently very successful which is good to know. Time for me

to return to Liverpool Street Station and make my way home via Victoria and the trusty 170 bus. The whole journey took almost an hour and a half, which is why TfL's thoughtful Journey Planner refused to give me details of this journey, but insisted I took the Overground from Clapham Junction which would have only taken 45 minutes. The choice is yours.

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