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## Great Bus Journeys of the World No 22

Mike Roden travels on the 436 from Battersea Park Station to Lewisham



Until a couple of years ago, the 436 to Lewisham ran from Paddington but in 2016 it moved from Paddington to Battersea Park Station which is where I catch it just before 11am

So off we go, making swift progress through the Nine Elms development. I covered this part of the journey very recently on the 156 (*Battersea Matters* Spring 2018) so I sit back until we leave Vauxhall Bus Station and enter territory so far uncharted in Great Bus Journeys. Passing under the railway bridge we join Kennington Lane. The ancient Kennington Manor was given by Edward III to the Duchy of Lancaster in 1337 – making Prince Charles an important local landlord.

### Expenses

We're still within Parliament's Division bell zone, and from here it should only take eight minutes for an MP to get to the Commons to vote. Google tells me a bike would take at least ten minutes. But it's the reason so many MPs have flats round here – and this area figured heavily in the expenses scandal.

The Grade II listed Royal Vauxhall Tavern was built in the 1860s. It survived local redevelopment throughout the 1970s and 1980s and continues to maintain its independence, and its importance to the LGBTQ community. At times in the recent past it seemed to be under serious threat, though I believe it's currently safe.

On Durham Street we pass the Vox Studios which houses offices for PR agencies, tech start-ups, artisan food brands and the like. Originally a factory, the building's first occupant was a brewery. When that went bust

in 1925, the Marmite Food Extract Company moved in here.

Someone who lived near there as a child recalls, 'The smell from the factory was disgusting!' No doubt there were a few cheers when the factory closed in 1967.

In 1844, the site of the Oval was a market garden owned by the Duchy of Cornwall which leased it to the club, and continues to hang on to it, despite attempts over the years to purchase the site from them. Perhaps the Prince of Wales is a secret cricket fan. Surrey is now the only first-class county cricket club which does not own its own ground.

The final Test match of the season is traditionally played on this ground. The KIA Oval – its current official name – hosted its hundredth Test, against South Africa, on 27 July 2017.

The founder of Archbishop Tenison's School opposite the ground was Thomas Tenison, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1694 until 1715. He founded several schools, and this one started out life in the crypt of St Martin in the Fields, later moving here in 1928.

### Preached

Past Oval tube station we head onwards to Kennington Park. This was once part of Kennington Common, where John Wesley is reputed to have preached to a crowd of 30,000, and until 1800 similarly large crowds gathered to witness public hangings, including those of several who had taken part in the 1745 Jacobite rebellion. In 1848 the Chartists gathered there for their largest ever rally. Not long after this the land was enclosed, and with the help of royal sponsorship opened as a public park in 1854.

The road into Camberwell is primarily residential punctuated by parades of small shops and restaurants. In the late nineteenth century the local Camberwell Parish Vestry took the sensible precaution of purchasing Camberwell Green – once an area of common land – to protect it from development.

### Healing

The 'Cam' in Camberwell can be translated as 'crooked'. Springs and wells are known to have existed round here and there's a theory that those with contagious diseases or disabilities might have sought healing in those waters. A nearby gastropub called the Crooked Well may hark back to that idea. And the parish church of St Giles is named after the patron saint of beggars, the poor, and those who until very recent times were known as cripples.

There's been a church on this site since Anglo Saxon times. It was rebuilt in stone in 1154 and traces of this building probably survived in major rebuilds of the church in 1346 and during the reign of Henry VIII. However on 7 February 1841 a devastating fire virtually destroyed the medieval church. The architect chosen for the rebuilding was Sir George Gilbert Scott, and the new church was consecrated in 1844.

We're in Camberwell College of Art territory now. The College's history is closely linked with that of the South London Gallery, with which the College shares its site. The gallery came first, opened in 1891, supported by luminaries like Leighton, Burne Jones and G F Watts. The technical institute opened in 1898 and offered classes in specific trades,

Left to right: The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, Vauxhall; John Wesley; South London Gallery, Camberwell; Manze's eel and pie shop, Peckham; *objets d'art* in Aladdin's Cave, Lewisham



Note: All of the Great Bus Journeys have been cleverly extracted from *Battersea Matters* and can be downloaded from [www.batterseabus.co.uk](http://www.batterseabus.co.uk)



such as architecture, cabinet design, and wood carving. In 1986 the college joined six other art colleges in the London Institute which in 2004 became the University of the Arts. Its varied alumni include Maggie Hambling, Humphrey Lyttelton, and film director Mike Leigh.

The South London Gallery is still going strong – its forthcoming exhibition is intriguingly called *Knock Knock, Humour in Contemporary Art*. It has recently opened a contemporary arts space and annexe in the nearby Peckham Fire station building. Dating from 1867 this is the earliest surviving example of a purpose-built fire station in London. By 1920 it was deemed unsuitable for modern requirements, and a replacement was built nearby. It was sold in 1925 and from 1934 until 2007 housed the head office of a local butchers firm.

'Peckham' is a Saxon place name meaning the village of the River Peck, a small stream that ran through the district until it was enclosed in 1823. Apparently this is one of the most ethnically diverse communities in the UK, and the High Street reflects the vibrant mixture of nationalities.

### Blake

Before the railways came to town it was another rural outpost, where in 1765 while staying in Peckham an eight year old William Blake saw his first vision: 'A tree filled with angels'.

Out of the corner of my eye I catch sight of Persepolis, a shop and cafe devoted to Middle Eastern and Levantine cooking. According to *Time Out* it's 'colourful, crowded and charmingly bonkers'. Sounds worth a visit.

The Kentish Drovers pub recalls the eighteenth century inn of the same name which stood on the other side of High Street. The village was the last stopping point for many cattle drovers taking their livestock for sale in London.

We're now in the middle of a slow-moving convoy of several buses. This is a very well-served route and I'm starting to wonder about the point of the 436.

Leaving urban bustle, we speed up through unremarkable residential streets towards New Cross. The name may derive from a coaching inn called the Golden Cross. The bus garage which opened in 1906 was originally a tram depot – the largest in London. The first generation of London trams ended in 1952 when the final tram – watched by enormous crowds – ran from Woolwich to New Cross.

There are two commemorative plaques on the local Iceland store. These both record London's most devastating V2 bombing in 1944 when 168 people died and the Woolworth's store was destroyed.

The main bus stop is near the Marquis of Granby, an imposing pub which is the drinking place of choice for many of the Goldsmiths students, whose campus is across the road. Originally founded in 1891 as a technical institute by the Goldsmiths livery company it became part of London University in 1904, and now specialises in the arts, design, humanities, and social sciences. It has a very long list of famous alumni including Damien Hirst, Antony Gormley, Lucian Freud, Mary Quant and Bridget Riley,

The bus turns onto Lewisham Way sailing through yet more

residential streets towards our destination. Eventually the houses are interspersed with shops, though on the other side of the road it's still leafy suburbia.

We pass the large Lewisham headquarters of the Celia Hammond Animal Trust. She was a model in the 1960s and campaigned against the wearing of furs. The trust now runs several clinics and helps to rescue and rehome thousands of cats every year.

### Junk

Just beyond Lewisham Southwark College the eye is arrested by Aladdin's Cave, a massive junk shop and salvage yard. Stuff is piled high outside but apparently the shelves inside are crammed up to the ceiling with aisles just wide enough for one person. The site for this ramshackle building was once home to Lewisham Road station, on the now lost Nunhead to Greenwich Park line.

We're on Loampit Road now, higher rise buildings turning up ahead of us indicate we're almost there. The brickmaking kilns established along this hill from the late eighteenth century gave employment to much of the growing working-class population of the village and provided materials for the 19th century building boom that was fuelled by the arrival of the railway in 1849.

Until the 1870s Lewisham consisted mainly of large houses with extensive gardens. Following a pattern seen everywhere in the London suburbs the wealthier inhabitants moved out, and over time the big houses were replaced by streets of rather humbler homes as the town expanded.

The town centre was devastated by a flying bomb in 1944 but had recovered by the late 1950s. In 1977 the shopping precinct was built. It's the town's main shopping centre and my journey terminates outside it. It's taken just an hour to get here, but it seemed longer. Rather than explore further, I head towards the station.

On the way I pass Lewisham's DLR station. I take the next train to London Bridge, then head back to Waterloo on the Jubilee Line then to Clapham Junction. At the end of it all, I'm still a bit uncertain about the 436, wondering if anyone would miss it if it stopped operating.