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## Great Bus Journeys of the World No 23

Mike Roden takes the 360 from Kennington to South Ken



I disembark from the 344 at the Imperial War Museum then cross the road to the bus stop opposite, in sight of the museum's impressive cupola. The museum was founded during the first World War and moved to its current site in 1936. The building was home to Southwark's Bethlem Hospital from 1815 to 1930, and while known as Bedlam was once notorious for charging to view 'the freaks of Bethlehem'.

The 360 starts its northward meander at Elephant and Castle just a couple of stops away. Three noisily straggling crocodiles of primary school children pass by to join the stream of visitors heading along the path to the museum.

### Hybrid

In January 2010 this was the first route to use hybrid only vehicles, and this model is even more up-to-date, with mobile phone charging sockets behind every seat. We head down Lambeth Road and then onto Black Prince Road which is a very narrow lane, punctuated by speed bumps to add to the fun. This traffic calming measure was first used in 1906 when the top speed of an automobile was only 30mph.

We pass the Jolly Gardeners, apparently London's premier 'German gastropub'. That's not a term I've come across before, but apparently there's a lot of them in the capital.

The Millbank Tower dominates the north side of the river as we turn left onto Sir Joseph Bazalgette's Albert Embankment. This was opened in November 1869 with the twin aims of protecting low-lying areas of Lambeth from flooding and providing a new road

to bypass local congested streets. Like all river frontages this one is now home to large developments of luxury (ie unaffordable) flats. One of them – a Norman Foster designed tower named the Corniche – promises panoramic views over the Houses of Parliament and 'is perfectly placed to capture the unique beauty and personality of the London metropolis'.

Not sure about the beauty of Vauxhall Cross, but the numerous shops and bars which populate the arches under the railway line seem to sum up London's slightly spiky personality better than an anonymous tower block with a posh name.

The cloud hovering over this bit of urban history is Network Rail's avowed aim of selling off all its railway arches. At present that plan is being vigorously resisted by a nationwide network of tenants called the Guardians of the Arches, so there's a glimmer of hope.

There's a longstanding popular belief that the name Vauxhall derives from Guy Fawkes – but that hapless conspirator had no local connection. It probably comes from the name Falkes de Breauté, the head of King John's mercenaries, who owned a large house in the area in the late thirteenth century. Faulke's Hall became Foxhall, and eventually stuck at Vauxhall.

The bus station is still in operation, though TfL's development plans mean that its days may be numbered. Here we drop off and pick up some passengers and then head onwards over Vauxhall Bridge.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the nearest bridges were Battersea and Westminster. A

scheme mooted in 1806 for a road crossing here was strongly opposed by the owners of Battersea Bridge, concerned about a decline in their toll income. But in 1809 another plan was agreed, though the owners of the new bridge would have to pay compensation for any drop in Battersea Bridge's revenue.

The original bridge was the first iron bridge over the Thames. Built by a private company, it charged tolls until it was taken into public ownership in 1879. It was then found to be in urgent need of repair and reinforcement, and despite attempts to deal with its structural problems, eventually it was decided to replace it.

The current bridge, which opened in 1906 took eight years to build. It was the first in London to carry trams and later one of the first two roads in London to have a bus lane. It was grade II listed in 2009.

We stop alongside another large tower block, rather oddly named Riverwalk. To the left is Grosvenor Road, and to the right we have Millbank, recalling the presence here of watermills until the early 1700s. Later the Millbank prison opened in 1816 heralding itself as a model for all future penitentiaries. In the end it proved unfit for purpose and was demolished in 1892. Most of its former site is now occupied by Tate Britain.

### Cubitt

The traffic lights change and we head up Vauxhall Bridge Road, very soon taking a left turn onto Drummond Gate and entering Pimlico. Once part of the Manor of Ebury, the area was known as Ebury fields. In the 1840s Thomas Cubitt transformed a tract of

Left to right: The Corniche, Vauxhall; Vauxhall Bridge; The Gallery pub, Pimlico; the Western Pumping Station; the Bibendum Building, South Kensington



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)



marshland into a grid of handsome white stucco terraces with streets of smaller scale properties behind. In 1877 a newspaper summed up the area as the home to those who were 'not rich enough to luxuriate in Belgravia proper, but rich enough to live in private houses.'

We pass Pimlico Station, a late arrival to the underground network in 1972. Almost opposite at no 1 Lupus Street is the Gallery pub, one of the first buildings to be erected here. Cubitt realised that meeting the leisure needs of his tradesman and labourers would keep them happy. It's now advertised as a 'warm traditional pub with great beer and a Great British menu, all homemade and featuring fine seasonal produce'. So hurry along there if you fancy a traditional fish finger ciabatta.

Lupus Street does not refer to the unpleasant autoimmune disease but is named after an ancestor of the Grosvenor family, Hugh Lupus who was made Earl of Chester after the Norman Conquest.

### **Cabman's Shelter**

The Victorian Gothic pile of St Saviours Church was built in the 1860s. The Cabmen's Shelter opposite – one of only 13 remaining out of the original 61 – is still doing brisk business.

Pimlico Academy stands on the site of the old Pimlico School which was demolished in 2010 in spite of opposition from the Twentieth Century Society, and a host of critics including Richard Rogers and Stephen Bayley. The current building is a 'C-shape' with different departments on each floor.

Lupus Street is dominated by council housing; many of the lower level blocks have shops and restaurants at street level. Eventually it loops back to the Embankment and with the Battersea Power Station development opposite across the river, we turn right to pass under the Grosvenor Railway Bridge. This was constructed in 1860, with later widenings. In the 1960s it was extensively rebuilt and widened to take an array of ten parallel railway lines.

Next to the bridge the Western Pumping Station with its Italianate ventilation chimney stands on the site where in 1725 the Chelsea Waterworks Company built its headquarters.

We continue past Chelsea Bridge and the Royal Hospital grounds. At this point the road narrows, with Tideway Tunnel development works on either side. Then the bus turns in next to the Bull Ring Gate and we get a panoramic view of the historic hospital founded by Charles II in 1682 as a retreat for veterans.

### **Obelisk**

The obelisk a little way from the gate is a memorial to the 255 officers, NCOs and men who fell at the bloody battle of Chillianwalla in 1849 in the second British-Sikh war. A passenger gets on at the bus stop here, then we head back the way we came. There seems to be no useful purpose for this odd detour.

We turn up Chelsea Bridge Road and continue to Lower Sloane Street.

The Rose and Crown originally dates from the late 19th Century but was rebuilt in 1934. It narrowly

escaped destruction in 1944 when a V1 flying bomb struck nearby killing at least 66 US servicemen and 9 civilians. All the buildings around the pub were destroyed.

At Sloane Square the bus heads past Peter Jones, then from Cadogan Gardens begins a circuitous journey through Edwardian mansion block land until we reach Fulham Road.

We're nearing the end now, but no 81 is worth a mention. This is Michelin House – originally the UK headquarters of the tyre company – and dominated by the Bibendum restaurant, now run by French chef Claude Bosi. Dinner for two there with wine and service will set you back an eye-watering £225, though lunch is priced more modestly at around £35 for two courses.

The building has three large stained-glass windows all featuring the Michelin Man mascot. Its official name (and I didn't know this till today) is Bibendum – with the accompanying slogan *Nunc est bibendum* (which translates roughly as Drink up)

We leave South Kensington station behind and reach Exhibition Road via Cromwell Place and Thurloe Place passing the V&A and the Natural History Museum as we cross a very busy Cromwell Road.

### **Albert**

The 360 is the only bus which travels along Exhibition Road, and we zip past the Science Museum, Imperial College and the Royal Geographical Society before turning alongside Kensington Gardens to the Albert Hall. This opened in 1871 as a memorial to the life and work of the Prince Consort. He keeps a fierce eye on the place as he sits in gilded splendour on the Albert Memorial.

Next we pass the Kensington outpost of the Royal College of Art then down Queens Gate and the bus turns onto Prince Consort Road. We reach journey's end near the Royal College of Music. Rather than wait for the next bus back down Exhibition Road, I stretch my legs with a brisk walk to the Science Museum. There I enjoy an excellent cup of coffee and a fortifying chocolate brownie, and marvel at how many museums this quirky bus route links. Then home on the 49 bus.