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## Great Bus Journeys of the World No 16

Mike Roden enjoys being a tourist in his own town on the RV1 from Waterloo



Having exhausted the routes which touch on Battersea, I decided to embark on some voyages of discovery by bus through different parts of London, highlighting some lesser known bits and pieces of history on the way. All the new routes will be easily accessible from Battersea.

The RV1 has been operating since April 2002 between Covent Garden and Tower Gateway station. It serves many streets that previously were not served by buses. At the time the *Daily Telegraph* dubbed it one of the 'best routes for sightseeing on a shoestring'.

I'd opted today to let the train take the strain, and came into Waterloo that way. The bus actually starts at Catherine Street in Covent Garden, heading to Aldwych then across Waterloo Bridge. I've missed out that bit, and started on York Road.

Anyway, the bus arrives and three other passengers come aboard with me. We're soon turning past Jubilee Gardens with the London Eye behind it. We're in that quiet period where the city's not over-run with tourists and the queue for a ride in one of the pods is very small.

### Hungerford Bridge

We pass under the Hungerford Bridge, opened in 1845. It was originally a suspension footbridge designed by I K Brunel crossing the river between the South Bank and Hungerford Market. In 1859 it was bought by the South Eastern Railway Company to extend their line into the new Charing Cross station. The new bridge, designed by Sir John Hawkshaw and opened in 1864 had

walkways added on each side though the upstream one was removed when the line was widened.

The remaining footbridge was very narrow, and became dilapidated and dangerous – it was the scene of a murder in 1999 – and in 2002 it was replaced by two 13ft wide footbridges, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Queen's reign.

### Grade 1 status

Before 1951 this was an area of industrial buildings and railway sidings which formed the principal site of the Festival of Britain. The only building to remain was the early nineteenth century shot tower, built to make lead shot by dropping molten lead from a height. During the Festival, it housed a large radio telescope and transmitter. It was eventually demolished to make way for the Queen Elizabeth Hall. Most of the other structures like the Dome of Discovery and the Skylon have also gone. But the Royal Festival Hall remains and we're behind it now. It was the first post-war building to be granted Grade I status in 1981.

We're now heading along Belvedere Road towards Waterloo Bridge. The first bridge on the site opened in 1817 and despite needing regular reinforcement was not finally replaced until the 1940s with a new design by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott. It's often described as the 'ladies' bridge' because of the large female work force which was involved in its wartime construction

After the bridge the road changes its name to Upper Ground. The oldest thoroughfare in this part of Southwark, it is the descendant of the

path which from the Norman period ran along the inside of the embanking river wall; and it still retains the twists and turns of a country lane. In quick succession here you can see BFI Southbank, the National Theatre complex and the London studios of ITV, the home of many popular daytime and entertainment shows.

Next to the studios is Gabriel's Wharf, almost deserted at 11am on a January morning, but in high summer its shops, bars and restaurants are a magnet for tourists. It's hard to pin down the history of this wharf area further back than its life as a collection of old garages.

Traffic starts to slow down along Broadwall. If you want to visit the Oxo Tower, which is behind us, you'll need to get off at the next stop. Originally a power station serving the Royal Mail it was acquired in the 1920s by Liebig (makers of Oxo cubes) for use as a cold store. The company overrode a ban on illuminated advertising signs, by giving the tower four sets of vertically aligned windows which just happened to spell out the word OXO. In the 1990s the tower was refurbished to include a restaurant, craft shops and exhibition space and is now a popular visitor destination.

### Facebook pub

Turning into Stamford Street a sign welcomes us to Borough & Bankside and we pass the Thirsty Bear which bills itself as the first Facebook pub. Customers can pour their own pints from table-side taps, text for waiter service and use the iPads provided to order food or update their social network profile. Sounds like fun.

Traffic now slows to a crawl and

Sights to see: Hungerford Bridge; the Royal Festival Hall (shown when first built); the Oxo Tower; the Hop Exchange; The Shard; City Hall



the bus joins a queue of construction vehicles and enters what feels like a massive building site. Number 1 Blackfriars – one of the largest developments on this stretch of the Southbank – is now well advanced. Its 50 storey tower will contain 274 flats, from studios starting at £1.15m to penthouse suites expected to fetch up to £23m. The sellers are targeting potential buyers in Russia, China and the Gulf. Affordable housing it ain't!

### Museum

On Southwark Street we pass the Kirkaldy Testing Museum. David Kirkaldy's Testing and Experimenting Works opened in 1874 setting international standards in testing materials. Preserved here is Kirkaldy's unique Universal Testing Machine – a huge hydraulic powered machine in full working order. At the moment the museum is only open on the first Sunday of the month between 10am and 4pm and on the third Sunday for guided tours at 11am and 2pm. It's one of those surprises that even a busy street can spring on you in London.

The Shard looms ever closer as the bus ambles past numerous new residential and office developments with 'retail opportunities' on the ground floor. Another little known building here is the Grade II listed Hop Exchange. Opening in 1867 it served as the brewing industry's centre for hop trading. A glass roof allowed business on the trading floor of the Great Hall to be conducted under natural light. A fire in 1920 led to the top two storeys being removed, and the building is now used for offices and as an events venue.

After passing Borough Market and Southwark Cathedral (attractions for another time) we head past London Bridge station on Tooley Street. On the left is Hays Galleria, now a mecca for small shops and restaurants but formerly known as Hays Wharf, once one of the chief delivery points for ships bringing tea to the Pool of London. At one time so much imported food passed through here that it was nicknamed 'the Larder of London'.

Despite incorporating fireproofing technology Hay's Wharf was destroyed in the great fire of Tooley Street of 1861. This started in a jute consignment stored nearby and was London's biggest fire since the Great Fire. It raged for two weeks and killed, among others, the superintendent of the London Fire Engine Establishment, James Braidwood, when a warehouse exploded. The fire was the catalyst for the founding of the London Fire Brigade in 1866.

### Deftware

If you want to visit City Hall – home of the Greater London Authority – you can get off at the next stop, and walk across Potters' Field, opened in 1982 and re-landscaped in 2007. A potters' field is a burial ground for paupers on land previously used to dig clay and thus of no agricultural use. In the seventeenth century Delftware was produced in this area by Dutch refugees, and the existence of a small disused burial ground was recorded in the nineteenth century. Whether this was actually a potters' field is open to speculation, but that's what the park is called.

Very soon we turn onto Tower Bridge

road, and cross the historic bridge. I 'alight' at the next stop and walk down to the Tower of London. My visit there is another story.

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