

Transcript of Podcast 049: London (South of the River)

{Intro.

BIGGSYTRAVELS:

So I'm here on the High Line in NYC, chilling out in the sunshine before I head back to London this afternoon, when literally 20 minutes ago I overheard a conversation from an elderly couple talking all about London, how great it is, how they wish they could visit Europe again this year, and it did make me fully appreciate how lucky I am to commute in London and live just outside. So I really guess that one person's 'back yard' is another person's 'other side of the globe'. So we should really be doing more stuff in our home town, because people the other side of the planet would love to be there too.

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{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a fortnightly series looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Brit with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

With thanks to Steve Biggs, from Biggsytravels for my pre-theme comment this episode. In keeping with the overall vibe of the pod, it's the longest introduction I've had to-date. I think. I mean I'm not going to go back in time and check them all, but it feels like it should be.

Anyway. How have you all been in the last two weeks? I hope you're all well, or at least, you know, doing the best you can given the circumstances. I've not been too bad, I mean obviously mentally I'm dubious, but that was ever thus. Physically I'm fine, been doing Parkrun in the damp, and noticing that while I'm quicker when I wear my minimalist running socks rather than being completely barefoot, it's not as much of a speed gain as you'd expect - only about 20-25 seconds or so on average over 5km. The folks at the Parkrun noticed my footwear too - either way it's a way for me to be slightly more sociable than I usually am at these things.

I have been out and about twice since my last pod - I met my friend (and occasional contributor) Clazz, who blogs as An Orcadian Abroad, on Sunday in Glasgow; her and her hubby were in town for a concert and decided to meet up with me in a pub before they headed back home. Then Saturday just gone I found out that about 500 metres from my flat is a cafe that hosts live stand-up comedy events, and there was one that very night with on the bill a comedian called Elliott Simpson, who is, as far as I'm aware, the only comedian on the circuit who uses asexuality as his material. It's incredibly rare to have two aces visible 'in the wild' so of course I had to pop along and say hi. I even got a selfie, damn I'm such a fanboy. Fanenby? Fanby? I've no idea. But English is such a beautiful language that I'm sure we can invent a word for that and in even two years everyone will have forgotten where they first heard it.

Uhm. So. The most important news here though is the departure of my flatmate Laura. In all honesty, she wasn't exactly enamoured about it either, but she got a job back in London, one that didn't allow her to work remotely. And it's a job exactly in her field of expertise and one she can use to very much develop her career, so it made perfect sense for her to go back. It's a real shame as we were starting to develop a vibe for Glasgow life, and it would have been great to start exploring more things together, but needs must.

So now I'm living alone, for the first time since June 2018, and while obviously there's a Laura shaped hole here which is taking longer to get over than I'd expected, even though we knew it would happen eventually, equally there's a lot of positives to having my own space. And I'm not looking to get anyone in to flatshare

either; now I'm on my own I'm intending to keep it that way. There's something to be said about being able to be yourself, free of any stresses about what other people around you are thinking, having to make sure you're not irking a flatmate with your actions or whatever.

It also means I won't have to put up a Christmas tree.

Anyway, let's get on with the episode, because this is going to be a long one. Buckle in.

Now, this is a geographic pod, and in most of my other pods and posts about a specific place, I've talked about the background and history of it, my experiences of being there, and bring in contributors telling me of their experiences when they've visited it. However, this is London, one of the larger urban areas in the world, and one which most people, even if they've never been to it, kinda know already a bit about. There's not a great deal of point in my telling you about the overall history of the place, nor about its culture, and certainly not about how it feels to visit.

In addition, you might be confused as to why I, purveyor of lesser-attested places, who goes 'beyond the brochure' and 'off the beaten track' would choose to do a podcast about, of all places, London. I mean, London's almost the very definition of tourist-sites, right? It's one of the world's most visited cities, after all.

However, let me take you right back to my second ever podcast episode. It was on 'Hometown Travel'. And the reason I made that episode was because of the principle that most people don't explore what's close to home. The area covered by the Greater London Authority has a population of 9.4 million people and an area of 1,569 square km, a similar size to the Aland Islands between Sweden and Finland, and twice the size of Bahrain. For those listening in the USA, you can just about fit four Londons into Delaware. Your Mileage May Vary of if you think that would improve, well, either. Also, as a Brit, until I wrote that sentence I guess I just wasn't quite aware of just how small Delaware is. Basically, what I'm saying is, there's an awful lot of people who live within London, and most of them live, relatively speaking, some distance away from the centre.

In fact, London is made up of boroughs, just like New York City. However, The Big Apple only has five; The Big Smoke clocks in with a massive 32, *and* the City Of London which is its own separate weird entity thing. When people think of 'London', when people say they're going to 'London', they usually mean they're going to the central area, also known as Zone 1 and bits of Zone 2 of the London Transport network, and at most they'd set foot in like seven or eight of those boroughs. And, to be honest, with good reason, as my longtime friend and recent flatmate Laura was only too keen to remind me when I originally asked her to contribute to a pod on London a couple of years ago.

{Laura Lundahl}

London has always been my favourite city in the world. I've visited countless times and I've lived there for a year and a half. And I'm not exaggerating here, I literally know every street between Tower Bridge and Earl's Court, and between the River and Oxford Street.

When Ian asked me to record something for this podcast he told me to focus on the lesser known aspects of the city, but I kind of just told him 'no'. I've been to many of the lesser known areas, and I've lived in both Woolwich and Lewisham, and you know what, Central London is better! {giggles} I love Central London. The only popular destination in Central London I don't like is Camden. But I really don't like Camden, like I vehemently despise Camden. It's as dirty as hell, and not in the cool grungy way they're trying to go for. I don't like the bars there, the market's not that exciting, and it's just kind of gross. I don't love Camden.

But the rest of the city is fantastic. The museums are absolutely world-class and are free. The only other city that can compare is Washington DC because the Smithsonian is also well done and free. And when I lived in London I would often pop into the museums if I needed to use the restrooms and figured I may as well pop into the national Gallery instead of a pub. And my absolute favourite of the museums is the Natural History museum. I went there at least once a month. The building itself is ungodly stunning, and that's just, well Natural History is cool. The giant earth thing that you ride the escalator into still gives me a thrill. I would {giggle} literally I would go in, I would ride the escalator, I would go back down the stairs, I would ride the escalator again, go back down the stairs etc etc, I would do this like five or six times. I love that thing. So, free bathrooms, cool escalator rides, what can you lose?

My favourite walk in the world is on South Bank of the Thames from Lambeth Bridge to Tower Bridge. I lived at London Bridge for a year and I went to Grad School on The Strand at Kings College which is next to Somerset House. I debated between UCL and King's, and I literally went with Kings in the end because Somerset House is so pretty, and every day to and from class I walked the South Bank of the Thames, and that never got old because how on earth could that walk ever get old.

And then there's the Kensington neighbourhood, my favourite place in the world; I love Kensington. And the parks, oh my god the parks. London is the greenest city in Europe as it has more park space than any other city. And they use it really well - both St James and Regent's Park are stunners, and Hyde Park is nice because it's so big that you can easily feel like you're alone in the wilderness, even when it's crowded.

So, I'm sorry Ian for using my little spot to talk about the parts of London that people already go to, but there's a reason people go to them. I've been to many of the outer areas and I've never been that fussed with them. Like, they're fine, but they don't have that same magic. There's nothing really out there that really warrants the tube ride out there for me.

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Laura, who now of course has moved to that exciting and well known central London borough of * checks notes * Harrow. The streets look pretty on the pics she posts to Instagram Stories, though.

But her contribution does highlight why I'm doing this pod. Those other 24, 25 boroughs of London - what's out there? *Is* there anything that warrants the tube ride out there, or is Laura right?

Furthermore, remember even in central boroughs like Southwark, like Kensington & Chelsea, like Westminster, people still live and work; behind the high streets and the museums there is a normal everyday world that tourists rarely choose to see. The concept of Hometown Travel is seeing what lies in the places where people, you, me, everyone, lives, rather than always concentrating on the places where everybody goes. Few people live within Royal-Spotting distance of Buckingham Palace. And let's be honest, those that do are unlikely to be listening to this podcast.

You also have people like Amanda, host of the Thoughtful Travel Podcast, who've been to London several times but only really to the centre, and want to know more about what lies elsewhere in the city

{Amanda Kendle - Not A Ballerina

As an Aussie, growing up here in Australia, London was this amazing place, but we all kind of felt 'familiar' with it, I mean, we were playing Monopoly, the British version of Monopoly, not all these fancy ones they have now, and so all of those kind of iconic spots in London were, you know, indelibly printed I suppose, because we just know all those street names, and all of that London stuff. And I've been, hmmm, four or five times, maybe more, usually on the way to somewhere, a short stop-over, and I just don't love it yet, and I feel a bit guilty for that. I'm not a huge big city person, but there are big cities I love; I love Berlin, I'll keep going back there, I want to spend more time in New York City, but on the whole I'm not a huge city fan, so it's partly that, but, I just haven't found the right way to kind of fall in love with London yet. I feel like there's more to be had for me there, but I just don't know where it is yet. Something beyond the Monopoly Board I guess.

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Nat, from Natpacker Travel, says the same thing.

{Nat - Natpacker Travel

I don't really go there that often, I never get out to the boroughs; I always stick to the centre. I know I really should get out and explore more of London, but because I don't go often, it's always to the centre, and it makes London really difficult for me and is probably part of the reason why I love it and hate it as well.

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So, in this episode, I'm going to be looking at London. But not necessarily the London that you know and which is well-explored; rather, I'm going Beyond The Monopoly Board to bring you thoughts and information from places you might not have even heard of, with help from some of the people who live there. This is as much a learning curve for you listening as it has been for me – there's quite a few of these boroughs I've not been to yet. In addition, when I was writing it, I quickly realised there was so much to say about them, and, you know, because there were so many of them, that I figured I'd have to split the subject over two episodes. There are a couple of podcasts I listen to which pull off an hour and a half, even two hour episode, effortlessly and with style. This is not one of those podcasts, plus they have more than one person hosting them.

So. Using the river as an arbitrary, yet natural, starting point, let's work clockwise, starting in the south. That means that first on the list is Bexley. I've never been to Bexley Borough. I don't know anyone who's ever admitted to going to Bexley Borough, so it's absolutely fantastic that my pod has started with what is already an unknown quantity. It's one of the only boroughs to have no Transport For London operated rail links – neither the underground nor the overground come out this far – all it has are buses and suburban railways. It's as 'Outer London' as you can get.

Consequently it's very suburban, with small towns pretty much running headlong into each other. There's some parks and a small nature conservation area at Erith marshes, but aside from that it's a borough where people live. Ideal for this kind of podcast, really, you'd've thought.

Indeed, one of the only things I'd heard about the place was quite damning: a famous quote from the local comedian Linda Smith, who came from Erith. "Erith isn't twinned with anywhere but it does have a suicide pact with Dagenham.". We'll come onto Dagenham, briefly, later.

My research has pulled up a few things though. Arguably the most 'touristy' is Hall Place and Gardens, just outside the centre of Bexley Village, a 16th century stately home that was originally built for the then Lord Mayor of London, Sir John Champneys. Over the following centuries it passed through many hands, and ended up being used as a school, an American military spy base, and a council building, before being restored and turned into a well-to-do tourist attraction. Because everyone seems like an old-style country house.

Another old house in the borough is Red House, in Bexleyheath. Built in 1860, it was co-designed by the architect Philip Webb, and William Morris, a notable textile designer and activist who I'll talk about in more depth later. The house was planned to be the latter's family home, but he seems to have over-estimated himself and his value and downsized after five years. It's an oddly designed house; built in an L-shape with the main living room upstairs, and with windows that were placed for internal ambiance rather than fitting to any standard design or pattern. It is also red, yes; not just red brick walls but also a red tiled roof. The whole design is very much in keeping with Morris's preferences and tastes; he was one of the leading lights in the so-called 'Arts and Crafts Movement', which favoured traditional designs and decorations, and which fed directly into the Art Nouveau movement. Anyway, the house is now owned by the National Trust and you can visit it.

The only other things to note are the large Russian gun from the Crimean War that stands by a main road junction in the centre Welling (because apparently Welling was where some workers at the nearby Woolwich Arsenal were given accommodation during World War One, and this was the Arsenal's way of thanking the town), and Erith has the longest pier in Greater London (at 135m). While I don't imagine there's a lot of competition for that particular accolade, it must be pointed out that puts it longer than those at bona-fide seaside resorts such as Skegness and Cleethorpes, and not that much shorter than South Pier Blackpool, which has a theme park on it.

{section-dividing musical ident}

The London Borough immediately to the west is Greenwich. This is home to Martha, who runs the May Cause Wanderlust blog, and she's kindly recorded this for me about her borough.

{Martha - May Cause Wanderlust}

So, let me start by saying I love London, I think it's one of the most exciting, interesting, vibrant cities in the world – I've lived here for twenty years and I haven't got bored of it. There's obviously loads to do in the centre

of London, lots of things to do, sites etc. For me I love to wander some of the different neighbourhoods and sort of just absorb the vibes of London. But there is more to do beyond the centre, beyond Zone 1, and something that I often recommend to friends and family that come to London is to visit Greenwich. The borough of Greenwich is in SE London and it's on the river. And what I normally advise people to do is to perhaps do whatever they're doing in the centre of London and then get a boat out to Greenwich. I think there are tourist boats you can take, I'm sure there are, I don't know too much about them. What I normally recommend people do is to take The Clipper, which is kind of like the river bus service. It's recently been rebranded Uber Boat, and it's these low wide catamarans that run a route and connect people along the river, and they're pretty fast, so you can pick up a boat in Embankment or at the Millennium Wheel, or near London Bridge, Blackfriars, and at the Tower of London, and it'll take you sort of heading out east to Greenwich. It's quite nice, you go under Tower Bridge which is always fun, and then it goes quite fast once it's out of the centre of London, so you go past Canary Wharf and around the Isle of Dogs, and then as you come to Greenwich you get a really nice approach because you see all the grand military buildings, because there's the military academy there, or the naval academy, so it's got this sort of grand buildings on the docks, and then you also see these tall masts from the Cutty Sark, which is a really old sail boat that is, there's a museum now, it's apparently famous for being a super fast sailing boat that used to bring tea halfway across the world to Britain. So there's a museum there you can kind of go all around and in the boat, or you can admire it from the outside for free, which is always quite nice.

So once you're in Greenwich it's a really nice kind of small town feel. There are chain shops and chain bars and that kind of thing. But there's probably more independent shops than other places, so it does have a slightly more independent feel. There's a really interesting nautical shop if you're into boats, seeing as we're talking about boats. There's an indoor covered market which is nice, there's an independent cinema, and then just outside the town there's a really big park, it's a lovely park, there's lots of places to sit and have a picnic if the weather's good, and of course in the park is the Greenwich observatory, which is there right on the point where you've got the Greenwich Meridian, so it's the Prime Meridian that basically marks the line of Longitude that's neither east nor west, it's kind of Longitude Zero. It's quite a nice thing to do cos you can go to the line and put one foot on either side and be sort of literally half in the west and half in the east. There's a museum there all about it that you can go into, or not, you know, don't think that you have to go in there to enjoy that spot. And where it's up is it's sort of up in the park, fairly high up, so there's a really lovely viewpoint from there, down across the park, across the military buildings and looking out towards Canary Wharf.

So it's just a really nice spot for something slightly different in London. It's kind of got that perhaps small town feel within the big city, so it's a really lovely thing to do if you've got a day or half day spare when you're in London.

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Ah, the Greenwich Meridian, home of Greenwich Mean Time, the 'Zero Hour' of Time Zones. I'd love to say this was because it made sense to have the International Date Line, the exact opposite of the Greenwich Meridian, pass through as little land as possible, which meant sliding it between Alaska and the Chukchi Peninsula of Russia, but let's face it, I know, you know, we all know, the real reason why. [For the record, the two Diomed Islands, in the middle of the Bering Strait and the closest Russia and the USA get to each other, is around 169°W. The exact opposite point from this is therefore 11°E, which means the Greenwich Meridian should actually be the Nuremberg Meridian. But anyways].

Greenwich is also home, well Woolwich specifically, to Britain's first McDonald's restaurant, opened in, I believe 1974, on Woolwich High Street. Still open.

{section-dividing musical ident}

South of Greenwich is the borough of Bromley. Now, one fact about Bromley is it contains by far the highest natural point in London; Westerham Heights, on the very southern edge of London itself, at 245m, and part of the North Downs that run from Surrey to the coast of Kent at Dover. No other point in London is over 200m, so it's very striking. Bromley is also the largest of the London Boroughs (153 km²), which makes it very slightly larger than that well known and oft-visited New York City borough, Staten Island. [Stat-en. Short 'a']

Much of Bromley is 'Green Belt', so the borough as a whole has quite a rural and village vibe to it. It may come

as no surprise then to learn it's the site of the famous aerodrome and former RAF base at Biggin Hill, and it certainly won't come as a surprise to learn that Bromley council went to court to forbid its use for commercial flights, given its quiet and residential setting. Biggin Hill is, of course, most famous for being one of the main bases for aircraft during the Battle of Britain in the early days of World War Two. It's believed over 1,400 German planes were shot down by sorties from Biggin Hill, with the corresponding loss of just over 450 crew (both combat and groundstaff). Replicas of a Supermarine Spitfire and a Hawker Hurricane stand outside the old chapel on site that served the RAF base.

You can still fly to/from the airfield in private planes, and you can take flying lessons here. In fact, you can still see WW2-era planes in operation here, and even fly alongside them, albeit mostly heavily-restored ones, and not in them. Like they'd ever let someone like me anywhere near a Supermarine Spitfire. That's just asking for trouble, that is.

From overground to underground (no wombles here, they come later), Bromley is also home to the Chislehurst Caves, a series of underground caverns and passageways covering around 35km under this part of south London. It's technically more accurate to call them the 'Chislehurst Mines', as their origin lies in pre-Roman times when an area of several km was dug out for the mining of flint. Some believe the caves were also used for druidic ritual, including human sacrifice, but there's no evidence ever been found for this and let's be honest, 'ritualistic' always tends to mean 'we don't know for sure, but this is likelier than most'. I swear if archaeologists of the future dig up our football stadia, without any other evidence they'll come to the same conclusions. But then I suppose football is a religion to some.

The caves were expanded during both the Roman and the Saxon periods, and were well used for over a millennia. Once the demand for flint had abated, however, the caves took on a number of other weird uses, from growing mushrooms to hosting rock concerts. Mushrooms like a dark, dank, environment, and one enterprising chap had the idea of making use of these caves to grow a variety of experimental 'shrooms as it was an almost perfect environment. No, not those kinds of 'shrooms, though you never know what grows accidentally. Anyway, even though they stopped the industry in the 1930s, the caves are still technically owned by the company so they could well start again at some point.

As for the rock concerts; the acoustics are wonderful down there and during the 60s and 70s there was a growing passion for 'intimate' gigs (unadvertised concerts with a small but knowing audience); not just local bands either - the likes of Jimi Hendrix and Led Zeppelin played here. The tradition continued into the 90s with the development of 'rave' culture - unfortunately although the caves themselves are (naturally) soundproofed, the road out is not, so the noise of ravers going home at 3am at the height of the 'second summer of love' was too much for 'Middle England' and the caves lost their license. Much to the chagrin of Led Zeppelin who wanted to do an anniversary concert down there in the 2000s but as a result couldn't get insurance.

The main use of the caves however in recent times was during WW2. Due to its location and situation - an extensive arrangement of deep caves on the edge of London, close to the strategic targets in Kent like Biggin Hill airfield, and capable of housing a large number of people - they became almost an unofficial town of scared citizens. At one point the population down here numbered upward of 15,000 people. In the caves were shops, a hospital, a barbers, a cinema ... it pretty much functioned as a normal town, just underground and temporary. It was also quite an egalitarian setup - if you had lost your home during the bombing, you didn't have to pay for anything, while those who were using it as a 'shelter' could pay for food, for lodging, etc, and the moneys raised were used to subsidise those who had lost everything. (Interestingly, after the war, all the unspent proceeds were given to the Dr Barnado's charity, and while it's not recorded how much was left over, it's likely that it ran into the thousands of pounds).

People using the caves as semi-permanent shelter were housed in what amounted to dorm accommodation; whole ranks of bunks, three beds high, were laid along some of the caves. The bed you were in was assigned when you first 'checked-in', and remained yours for the duration of the war; if you'd been amongst the first, or could prove a need, you may even have been assigned a small alcove you could put a curtain across, otherwise regardless of income or status, you got what you were given.

It was pretty safe down here, and the shelters attracted people from across the South-East - indeed people chose to become 'permanently resident' rather than making the trip back home every day; staying here for

upwards of two months was reasonably common. In all that time though, there was only one registered birth; although many people fell pregnant, usually they were taken to one of the nearby above-ground hospitals in the daytime. This particular baby however decided to appear during one of the air raids.

{section-dividing musical ident}

Now. There is a point in South London where five boroughs nearly converge. In the suburb of Crystal Palace, Bromley, Croydon, and Lambeth meet at a crossroads. 81m further north, Bromley, Lambeth, and Southwark meet (at a bus station, of all places), and then 700m further north, Bromley and Southwark meet Lewisham at a roundabout. But before we talk about Crystal Palace itself (which is technically also in Bromley but as upcoming contributor Hannah, from *Hannah's Holidays*, points out, Croydon kinda could claim it), let's quickly slide North into Lewisham and Southwark, because they're there and won't take too long.

The 'capital' of Lewisham is Catford. The name Catford is believed to derive from a ford crossing a nearby river being used by ... not cats, but cattle. Despite this, the Catford (Shopping) Centre has a huge fibreglass black cat over the main entrance, because why not.

Another thing of note in Lewisham is the Horniman Museum, which is one of those museums set up as a result of someone avidly collecting, well, 'stuff', through their lifetime. In this case, the tea trader Frederick Horniman ended up collecting some 350,000 objects, mostly related to natural history, including rather too many stuffed animals. Stuffed as in taxidermy, not as in cuddly toys. There's also a number of ethnographic exhibits, no doubt obtained through, uh, dubious means. But mainly it's animals. At least the totem pole outside is a genuine reproduction carved for the purpose by a Native Alaskan; he didn't nick that.

Lewisham also has a stone circle, of the type commonly found across more westerly parts of the UK. To the best of my knowledge it's the only stone circle within the boundaries of London. It contains twelve large granite stones and two tall shadow-casting stones, and it's all remarkably well preserved. As it should be, considering it dates from around the year 2000. That's AD, not BC. They were erected in Hilly Fields Park to commemorate the turn of the Millennium. The park itself is just over a century older, and its creation is as a result of local activist Octavia Hill, herself one of the founders of the National Trust but her name here is coincidental, rousing the neighbourhood and helping them raise funds to purchase the park to prevent it being developed for housing. It now hosts a 3-lap parkrun, if there are any Parkrun Tourists listening.

I'm also aware of the so-called 'Battle of Lewisham', in August 1977, where the National Front tried to march across the borough and lots of people tried to stop them, but that's almost certainly a tale for a different pod.

{section-dividing musical ident}

Neighbouring Southwark is actually pretty popular with tourists and I wasn't originally going to include it in the pod, but then I figured 'I might as well'. There's enough here that people don't know. But let's start with something everybody knows.

{Nat - Natpacker Travel}

One of my favourite things to do is to go and see a Shakespeare at the Globe Theatre. Now the Globe Theatre is a reconstruction, but it's amazing and the best thing is you can see a Shakespeare play for a fiver, which is just ridiculously cheap. Although they are the cheap seats, so you are actually the peasant rabble, you are standing, but that's great, it makes such a good atmosphere, and it's like you've been transported back to Shakespeare's day essentially, and that's such a great experience. I pretty much do that every time I go to London.

Natpacker Travel again there, talking about London's Globe Theatre, on the north side of Southwark. But let's go from there and head east a bit, to Rotherhithe, where you find something a little ... unexpected.

As I'm sure you all know, London is home to many different nationalities (indeed I seem to recall a journalist set out to find people from every country in the world there, and only missed out on three). However, while the Bangladeshi, Polish, Jamaican, and Nigerian communities are well known, Rotherhithe has a small community from Finland, originally settlers working on shipping in the 1870s. And to that end, there is a Finnish Seaman's Mission and associated Finnish church (it's Lutheran, by denomination). On the first Sunday

of every month, Mass is celebrated in Finnish, probably the only church in London to do so.

It's not just a place for religious worship though; it serves as a link to the community as a whole, so Finns and Finnophiles can meet up there and chat, and eat some Finnish delicacies at the cafe (or buy some at the shop to take back home), or even, get this, the site has a genuine Finnish sauna. What Rotherhithe can't guarantee though is the associated external snow. The site also offers basic accommodation, operating a bit like a hostel with 2 6-bed and 2 ensuite 4-bed dorms.

Incidentally, the Nigerian community of London is centred on the suburb of Peckham, in the east of the borough. Peckham itself is mostly famous for being the setting for one of the UK's first and most successful Black-centred sitcoms (specifically, Guyanese), starting in 1988. Indeed it's still the longest-running sitcom in Channel 4 history, at 6 years and 71 episodes. The site itself still exists, it's on Bellenden Road (stop giggling at the back), and in real life was a barbers shop called Desmond's even, but that had closed by 2008, replaced by a picture framers. Last I heard that was closed and the site was vacant.

There was another sitcom set in Peckham but the name escapes me. I don't recall it being very good though.

Southwark is also home to several small museums, including the Brunel Museum back up in Rotherhithe. This is the old engine house that served the Thames Tunnel - it's where the pumps were located that pumped water out of the tunnel. This tunnel, by the way, was the first tunnel in the world to be built under a navigable river - that is, a river that was wide and strong enough to allow boats to sail along it. I say first; some believe the Babylonians did it under the Euphrates 3000 years previously, tho there's no evidence of this, and in any case you'd've thought if they did it once, others would have followed. The Thames Tunnel, by the way, opened in 1843 as a pedestrian walkway, of all things, before being turned into a railway tunnel in the 1860s, and is still open - it currently carries the, uhm, London Overground line between Rotherhithe and Wapping.

It's also the location of Nunhead Cemetery, one of the 'Magnificent Seven', the seven great cemeteries of London, which I'll talk more about when we come to Hackney, in my next episode, but Nunhead is the second largest of them. It was relatively abandoned for much of the 20th Century and although now reopened for burials and visits, it consequently still has more of the feel of a woodland with graves in; indeed it's been designated a nature reserve. There's a monument to the 'Scottish Martyrs' - political reformer activists (despite their name, only two of them came from Scotland) who campaigned for universal suffrage in the late 1790s, and were transported to Australia for their troubles. It's also the last resting place of Sir Charles Fox, inventor of the railway point, and co-builder of the Crystal Palace, which ... seems to get everywhere in this part of South London.

{section-dividing musical ident}

And so, to Croydon.

{Seanna - Seanna's World}

I love parts of London that aren't normally on the radar. So I used to live in Croydon, and not even Croydon itself, but a little place north of Croydon called Thornton Heath, which was rough to say the least but it was very much a community atmosphere. It has a nice park called Grangewood Park where you meet dog walkers, and everyone was just so friendly. There was a lot of crime there, and it's not maybe so much a tourist destination, but worth checking out for a local vibe.

And then you've got 'main' Croydon, East Croydon, that area, and Croydon is really interesting cos on the surface it looks a bit like a 'cookie cutter' high street, it's got all the chains, it's got the pedestrianised area, it's got people selling giant balloons in the street, but there are a few hidden gems, so a little ways away from the centre, if you jump on the tram, yes it's the one place in London that still has a tram, you can get to a really cool place called Lloyd Park, it's just got trees and forests and it's great for running and walking, and you don't feel like you're in Croydon at all. And in the middle of Lloyd Park, bafflingly, there's just this really decrepit Chinese restaurant, it just feels so out of place, and there's karaoke there, and it feels like ... it's very strange but it's just quite a nice little respite. And just not far from Lloyd Park there's a windmill. So you wouldn't think of Croydon ... Croydon's seen as a very concrete place, but there's an actual windmill in Croydon.

*Aside from that, aside from the forests and the windmills, there ... Croydon's got an edge to it, so it's got some cool street art, it's now got the **Box Park**, which is a happening kind of shipping container place full of street food and really nice meals, and it's got a really young vibe, it's not as wanky as Shoreditch but it's trying to be, but it's got a lot of hope about it. So yeh, Croydon's a really cool place.*

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That was Seanna, from Seanna's World, giving a brief overview of the borough and its vibe. Interestingly, continuing the 'happing' 'cool' vibe (and here I fully accept I'm middle-class, white, and northern), the musical genre of Dubstep was developed here. Big Apple Records, one of the leading record labels, was based in a record shop in the centre of the town (on Surrey Street), and the borough is the origin of many Grime and Rap artists - one of the biggest artists from here is Stormzy.

Croydon is the second largest of the London boroughs by population (386,000 people), it has four times tried to become a city (it's one of the largest admin areas eligible which isn't) but was refused each time. The last time the reason given for refusal being it 'having no separate identity to the rest of Greater London', which is a pretty sharp burn, if you ask me.

Croydon battles with Harrow for being the site of the UK's first road traffic accident fatality; Harrow has a plaque commemorating one in 1899 I'll talk more about next episode, but there's a news report of an accident in Purley, in what is now the Borough of Croydon, almost exactly a year earlier where a car suddenly lost control, swerved, went through a fence, and hit an iron post; the driver died of his injuries the next day. In either case, both are preceded by the first recorded road accident to kill a pedestrian, in August 1896, which took place in ... Crystal Palace Park, which as you now know, is in Bromley but we're going to talk about it here.

Or rather, as mentioned earlier, Hannah is, along with an overview of other aspects of Croydon.

{Hannah Simmons (transcript provided by her)}

What do Pickles, the dog who found the Jules Rimet trophy after it was stolen in 1966, and Amy Johnson, the first woman to fly solo from London to Australia, have in common? Well, both of these exploits took place, or began, in Croydon. The Jules Rimet trophy was awarded to the winners of the FIFA World Cup from 1930 to 1970. On 20 March 1966, 4 months before the finals were to be held in England, the trophy was stolen from Westminster Central Hall. 7 days later, on Beulah Hill in the borough of Croydon, Pickles - a black and white collie - found the trophy in a garden bush. There is now a blue plaque on a nearby tree commemorating it.

Meanwhile, in May 1930 Amy Johnson took off on her record breaking flight from Croydon airport, the UK's first international airport. The airport was opened in 1920 with flights to Europe, and later long haul routes to Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Australia. The following 15 years were a boom period for the airport. Numerous well-known names either flew through the airport as passengers or as pilots from Winston Churchill, Charles Lindbergh, Bert Hinkler, Amy Johnson, Charlie Chaplin, John F Kennedy and Rita Hayworth. During WWII the airport became an RAF base and was attacked during the Battle of Britain. After the war, the airport returned to civilian use, but due to the lack of expansion space a new airport was built in west London, later renamed Heathrow. Heathrow expanded and in 1959, Croydon airport closed. Whilst a large part of the original site has now been built over, the terminal building still exists, with a plane mounted out front and the former control tower has a visitors centre.

I was born in Croydon, raised in Croydon and lived here for most of my life. I've moved away on occasion, but always ended up back here, in part due it being much more affordable than the rest of London, due to its "unfashionable" status. But it does have a number of hidden gems.

The borough itself is hilly, and as such as contains two of the highest points in south London. The first is in Crystal Palace Park. Now, technically, there is an argument that says this is not in Croydon, that it is in Bromley and yes, the park is technically administered by the London Borough of Bromley. But the area known as Crystal Palace is the meeting point of 5 south London boroughs - Croydon, Bromley, Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham. And given that the football club of the same name is firmly a Croydon based team - and it's definitely worth a visit on match day to Selhurst Park to see the likes of Wilfried Zaha ply their trade -

I'm claiming the park under Croydon.

A little bit of history on the park - in 1851, the Great Exhibition was moved from Hyde Park to a park in Sydenham. This Exhibition was a huge glass building that became known as the Crystal Palace, which in turn gave its name to the park and area it was based in. It was visited by thousands of people and elevated the area, turning it into a kind of Victorian theme park. The FA Cup final was played in the park between 1895 and 1914, whilst first class cricket matches were played in 1864. But one of the biggest attractions was, and still is, Dinosaur Court. This contains 15 replica dinosaurs including plesiosaurs and iguanodons. They were the first dinosaur sculptures in the world and represented the scientific knowledge at the time. Later advancements in knowledge have shown that they have many inaccuracies, but they were a huge attraction when they first opened. The Crystal Palace itself burned down in 1936, in a fire so intense that it could be seen in 8 different counties across the south east of England. It's believed some 100,000 people came to the area to watch the fire. All that remains of the building are the terraces it sat on complete with sphinxes. But with views to central London in the north and the North Downs in the south, along with the National Sports Centre, a maze, the TV transmitter, a concert bowl and, of course, Dinosaur Court, the park is well worth a visit.

The second of the viewpoints is in Addington Hills. The view spreads into central London, whilst the hills themselves are a great space for a walk, and nearby Lloyd Park is fantastic if you want a picnic or a game of disc golf. With 114 acres, if you move away from the main field and you are guaranteed to find a little slice of isolation.

Whilst on the subject of open spaces, at the south of the borough, there is a great hike covering a number of commons. At almost 10km long, it's a part of the London Loop walk. Incidentally, Addington Hills is also a part of the London Loop walk just in a different section. Section 5 of the loop takes in Riddlesdown, Kenley Common, Coulsdon Common, Happy Valley, Devilsden Woods and Farthing Downs. It's a great walk. See the Transport for London website for more details.

If that isn't enough, the borough is home to the BRIT school, one of the countries only free performing arts school. Alumni include Adele, Amy Winehouse, Tom Holland and Jessie J and many more. Addington Palace is the former summer residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury whilst the Whitgift almshouses in the town centre were formed as a hospital for poor and needy people and is now a Grade 1 listed building. And in Shirley, you can find one of the few surviving large windmills in London, which opens to the public once a month.

Finally, if you're wondering how to get to all these places, as well as being incredibly well connected on the trains, Croydon is home to London's only light rail network. The trams link through the town centre, through the suburbs and out to Beckenham in the east and Wimbledon in the west. It only opened in 2000, but is the fourth busiest light rail network in the country.

So Croydon is definitely well worth a visit.

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In a way it's a good thing Croydon Airport closed. Given our penchant for naming things after distinguished artsy locals, it may well have been named 'London Peggy Ashcroft Airport', or, even, shudder, 'London Ralph McTell International Airport'. Although arriving at some very Art Deco designed terminal buildings would be quite a cool throwback; I've always liked Art Deco.

The other thing I noticed when I went to Crystal Palace park was a small bushy maze. This maze commemorates the foundation of the Girl Guide movement. At a Boy Scout meeting in the Crystal Palace park in 1909, Baden-Powell noticed how many girls had turned up, and as a result decided to create a, literal, sister organisation. The maze itself is more of a labyrinth, in that there are only a small number of dead ends, while in the centre there's a mural and memorial to the concept of Guiding.

{section-dividing musical ident}

Next to Croydon is the borough of Sutton. It's a small borough compared to those around it, and while I have been there, it was only very briefly to Sutton town centre (to have lunch and to take some pictures of street art

before heading further west). There is quite a bit of street art, both painted and physical, on the main street and surrounds, to be fair; it's one thing the town is specifically noted for. This includes a couple of murals on Sutton life and history, a statue of a naked man on a horse (something to do with communication, idk, I gave up on symbolism after 'A-Level English'), and the obligatory sculpture to commemorate the millennium. Since my visit, Sutton has also installed, not just the standard Rainbow crossings for Pride, but also the UK's first Transgender-coloured pedestrian crossing. Which is interesting, given ...

... my research on the area as a whole has given me the impression it's ... the sort of place my Daily Mail reading mother would like. It's a place of parkland, of villages, of what is often represented as Middle England life. One example of this is that 35.1% of land in the borough is taken up by gardens, the highest of any borough in England. In addition, Sutton was described by a government official in 2005 as the being most "normal place in Britain". Whatever that means. I suspect it means 'people like me are glared at'. All the more impressive they acknowledge Trans Rights, really.

On the theme of Middle England though, the area around Carshalton is famous for lavender fields, and every year the fields are covered with the bloomy pastel tint of Instagrammers posing for stylistic photographs in front of the flowers. In addition the village itself is contained mostly within a conservation area so retains a certain aesthetic charm. If it weren't for the Instagrammers, I guess.

Sutton Borough's main greenery though (and it has several) is at Nonsuch Park. This is decent sized park, large enough so its Parkrun is 2 laps rather than 3, and also to hold an average of 450 participants. I've never been to a Parkrun that big; a quarter of that still feels large to me. The park's name comes from its history; it was the site of a huge palace built by Henry VIII in the late 1530s, the scope for which gave it the tagline 'there's none such place like it' in Europe. At least, this would have been true had it ever been completed; work stopped when Henry died ten years later and the whole thing was pulled down in the 1680s. Probably much to the annoyance of the ghosts of the villagers of Cuddington, which had been demolished to make way for the palace in the first place. You can see its replacement - Nonsuch Mansion - but it's not the same. You can get married there, and stay there afterwards too if you fancy spending £1,700 per night. But don't worry, that includes the price of continental breakfast. I'm assuming that's the price for exclusive use of the apartment on the second floor (it's not a hotel, but, rather, a local government building) that has 11 bedrooms, but still ...

Somewhat smaller, of a similar vintage to the original Palace, is the Whitehall Historic House, in Cheam. It's a timber-framed structure, covered on the outside with distinctive white weatherboards and has an equally distinctive slightly tilted protruding section above the front door which makes the whole thing look like it's giving you a kind of curious glare. It's unclear what it was used for when it was built - possibly a house, or possibly a building for meetings or administration. It's now a museum, providing information about local life over the time the house has stood. Local history is a fascinating and often overlooked aspect of history, and where better to display it than a genuine Tudor house-sized building.

{section-dividing musical ident}

Leaving Sutton, we head north, into Merton. And here we hit the first of the many major religious sites on our journey across London. The Baitul Futuh Mosque, in Morden, built in 2003, is touted as one of the largest mosques in Western Europe, although it's hard to derive anything more specific than that. What I can tell you is that it can hold 13,000 people, half of which can be at prayer at any one time. Its dome reaches 23m above the ground and is made of stainless steel, while the minarets reach 25 and 36m up. It's built on the site of an old dairy factory (of the kind that delivered milk to houses, in case you're confused as to why there would be a herd of cows in south-central London), and indeed one of the minarets is the refashioned chimney of that factory.

While I'm not going to say it's on a par with the ornate designs and spectacular vistas of mosques in more Islamic countries, it's certainly eye-catching and large enough to be worth a detour.

Merton's main point of interest though is being the home of 1970s ecologists The Wombles. The majority of Wimbledon Common lies within the borough, and it's here that they were said to roam, living underground and clearing litter from the paths and grass of the Common itself.

As a tourist and a 'foreigner', the biggest take-out from Wimbledon Common is just how big it is. It's seriously

impressive just how much land is still wild and open so close from the centre of London – in my head it was going to be a small park, but in reality it's a huge expanse of scrubland, forest, and open countryside. I came in from Wimbledon Village, a quite pretty, preserved, part of London with old buildings and a certain style, and an hour and a half later (having seen virtually no-one aside from the occasional jogger and a few golfers), I was in a council estate in Kingston borough (somewhat unexpectedly, on several counts).

The Common itself is a protected 'Biological Site of Special Scientific Interest' (meaning it can't be developed because the flora and fauna in the area are worth preserving), and covers an area of 460 hectares. As you know I'm not very spatially aware, so I had to look up that this is similar in size to just under 460 rugby pitches, or 1½ times the size occupied by the 'City of London'.

At its heart is Wimbledon Windmill. Built in 1816, it's a pretty well-preserved example of its type, although long since out-of-use – it ceased operation in 1864 because the local landowner wanted to use the space for residential and commercial development, but there was such local opposition to it that the local council acquiesced and designated it as 'common land', preserving it in perpetuity – as an indirect result the windmill itself became a house. It's now a museum, detailing windmills in general as well as this one in particular, and has detailed models of how the mill would have worked in its heyday. Unfortunately it's only open on weekends and bank holidays; my visit was on a Thursday ...

Incidentally, the Windmill itself has a link to Crystal Palace; it was here that, in the early 1900s, Lord Baden-Powell wrote parts of his seminal work 'Scouting For Boys' (that launched the Boy Scout movement).

Elsewhere in the Common are the foundations of iron-age hillforts and the sites of possible Roman camps, although very little remains now save vague ramparts in the ground. Much of the Common is made up of a series of footpaths and horse-riding trails passing through scrubland and forest; apart from the occasional cottage in the middle of the trees, it does feel like you're in the middle of the countryside rather than in the suburbs of one of the largest cities in the world; it's definitely a good place for relaxation and exercise.

I didn't see any Wombles though. I guess they were scared off by my noisy presence.

Wimbledon is, of course, also famous for sport, being the home of AFC Wimbledon (everybody's second favourite football team, whose origins are well known and who now finally have moved back to play in the borough, albeit at the expense of motorbike racing), and of course it's the home of British Tennis – the All-England Wimbledon Club being the home of one of the Majors on the Tennis Circuit and a representation of the sport in itself. But sport is the subject for another pod, another time.

But going back to Wimbledon Windmill for a second. It marks the point in Wimbledon Common where the land becomes Putney Heath and Merton ends. So let's quickly womble across the border, into the Borough of Wandsworth.

{section-dividing musical ident}

Now, while it's not necessarily one of the most frequently *visited* boroughs, within its boundaries is one of the most popular places in the entire country. And I use the word popular quite incorrectly. And while I'm not suggesting you go to Wandsworth specifically to *see* it, the likelihood that you'll at some point pass through or step onto Clapham Junction Railway Station is pretty high. It sees more trains pass through than any other station in Europe, and some years more passengers change trains here than enter/exit it, making it overall the busiest station in the UK. Given that you're likely to end up here at some point, especially if you're exploring South London, you may be interested to know in the main passageway at the top of the stairs from one of the platforms is a statue of a dog on a piece of luggage. Which feels like one of the most difficult things on the Internet to search for, but I have a picture of it, so there.

The railway station, despite its name (because Clapham was seen as more 'well-to-do' by the railway company when they built it!), is in Battersea, a suburb famous for its old power station (and recently opened Power Station Station on the London Underground) and its animal rescue centre. Both of which are well known and therefore out of scope for this podcast. Battersea's obligatory green area is Battersea Park, which amongst other things contains a peace pagoda - a Buddhist pagoda that is designed to remind people that peaceful ways of coexistence exist and why are we all fighting each other. There's many of these around the world; they are

mostly built and looked after by Buddhist monks, and the first was constructed in Japan in 1954, for reasons that should be fairly obvious. This is the only one in London and was built in 1985.

What else is in Wandsworth? Here I've hit a problem, since my brain is now focussed on walking out of Tooting Broadway tube station, walking down a road kicking a can, then climbing a lamp-post, all to the strains of the tune that Americans will know as 'Oh Christmas Tree' while the rest of the world has very different connotations, before shouting "Power To The People", and making a baby cry. Or something. If You Know, You Know.

Another 1970s pop-culture reference is that one famous scene in A Clockwork Orange, where the main characters attack a tramp, famous scene from the film, well that was shot in an underpass at the Wandsworth Bridge Roundabout; to be precise it's one of the subways that goes to Trinity Road. Please do not try to recreate the scene for your Tik-Tok pleasure.

{section-dividing musical ident}

So let's head back South. Once you get beyond Wimbledon Common, London stops feeling like London and starts feeling like commuter belt satellite towns, especially as you head into what was once Surrey. No more so than the next borough along, the *Royal* Borough of Kingston Upon Thames. It's crowning factor, quite literally, is that its home to The Coronation Stone. This is a large piece of sandstone, a Sarsen or Saracen stone of the similar type found at Stonehenge and other stone circles in southern England (tho not in Lewisham), which is believed to have been used during the coronation of several pre-Norman Kings of England, including Aethelstan in 924 AD who is generally considered to have been the first King Of England (mainly because he conquered York from the Vikings and then called *himself* 'rex anglorum' – King of the English).

Note that the name Kingston doesn't mean 'King's Stone'. Language unfortunately doesn't work like that. There is a regal connection however; it means King's Manor, Estate, or Homestead.

Kingston is now home to Seanna, from Seanna's World, who I'll now let tell you all about it.

{Seanna - Seanna's World}

I've recently moved to somewhere very different to Croydon, and that is the beautiful, leafy, Kingston-Upon-Thames. It's not somewhere that is usually on the tourist trail and it's not somewhere that I'd really considered living, because it's quite posh, but it's got the river so I've moved onto a boat there. And I love being on the river, it's a really peaceful atmosphere. I'm opposite a little park called Canbury Gardens, which isn't one of the main ones; you probably hear about Richmond Park which is about 20 minutes out of the centre of Kingston, and Bushy park which is just the other side of the river from Kingston. But Canbury Gardens is right on my doorstep and it's just this small park, but the atmosphere there is incredible. You get people having barbecues, and having parties, and they bring tables and chairs, and you get whole families of people just enjoying their Sundays like it's their own back garden.

Another place I need to recommend in the area is pretty much within Canbury Gardens is a pub called The Boaters Inn, and it's one of my favourite pubs in all of London. It's a little bit pricey for food, but they have things like vegan fish & chips, vegan burgers, and lots of meaty food for if you're that way inclined, and they have live jazz on a Sunday night and it's just one of my favourite places in London.

Kingston is a place, like Croydon, it has a lot of the cookie-cutter high-street shops and pedestrian precincts, and like Croydon it doesn't look that special on the surface. A lot of people from out the area go there for shopping, and that's not my kind of vibe at all. But if you go a little bit away from the high street there's a really cool street called London Road, and it's quite famous because it's got a piece of art which is lots of red traditional English phone boxes tumbling over in a line, so they're all kind of knocking each other over, and people like to climb on this; students on their drunken nights out, or kids, they're not supposed to climb on it, it's supposed to be art, but it's a really cool thing, and then down that road there's more 'unusual' shops, away from the main high street culprits, so you've got charity shops, a little vintage shop with some really nice finds, there's a little health food, not health food, traditional medicine, where they do like massages, acupuncture, and things like that, and there's a natural hairdressers, and it's just a little bit quirkier and not something you'd usually associate with the Kingston area.

Those are my highlights but the main thing for Kingston about me (sic) is the green space, I mean, I think it's probably one of the best areas in London for green space so I'm going to be staying there a while.

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{section-dividing musical ident}

To the northwest of Kingston, opposite Seanna, and the only one of the 32 boroughs to cross the River Thames, is Richmond Upon Thames. The bridge nearest the town centre, connecting Richmond to neighbouring Twickenham, is called Richmond Bridge and, as it dates from the 1770s (albeit with a little redesign in the 1930s), it's the oldest surviving bridge across the Thames in London. Those with an interest in Latin American affairs may like to note that very close to the eastern end of the bridge is a bust of Bernardo O'Higgins, the first president of Chile. He studied History and The Arts in Richmond in the late 1790s. Yes that's a very Irish-sounding name; his dad was from County Sligo and emigrated to Chile because apparently Irish Catholics were allowed to go to Latin America without restrictions, presumably for colonial anti-British reasons.

The borough of Richmond is home to ... my notes say 'lots of posh buildings and parks'. Which is true - over 100 parks and open spaces, including Richmond and Bushy Parks, which Seanna mentioned earlier, but an even bigger draw on that score is Hampton Court Park and of course Palace. It was built in the early 1500s by Thomas Wolsey, Archbishop of York, but he 'donated' it to King Henry VIII shortly before his death. Wolsey died naturally, but there's a feeling had he lived, he would have soon after died quite ... unnaturally. King Henry VIII had a similar view of stakeholder management as Joseph Stalin.

Anyway. It's still owned by the Royal Family, it's bigger in scope than Windsor Castle, and you can even visit the Queen's bathroom. It is very unlikely you can avail yourself of the royal, er, 'throne' though. I'd talk about it more but a) talking about Hampton Court Palace is rather like talking about Buckingham Palace; even though it's far out of central London (Zone 6), it's a place most people know about and have heard of, even if they may not know exactly where it is. And b) I make a very bad Brit, but I find royal palaces and stately homes quite dull. Sorry!

Another place in the borough that everyone should have heard of are the botanical gardens at Kew. It's just over 120 hectares in size (you'd have thought by now I'd know what a hectare is. Listener, I do not know what a hectare is, or what I mean is, I can't visualise it), and it has more than 50,000 species of ... 'things that grow', on view. Including, of course, what is regarded as one of the foulest-smelling plant in the world, the *Amorphophallus Titanum*, which only blooms once every few years, and then only for a few hours each time, but given the scent when it does so has been reported to be between rotting fish, sweaty socks, and faeces, it's probably just as well. No-one needs a plant that smells like a teenager's bedroom. Kew Gardens was the first place outside of Sumatra anyone managed to get it to bloom, incidentally.

Between the two is Strawberry Hill House, one of the oddest-looking buildings in London. It looks a bit like ... imagine a low-rise castle that you might find in an old computer game or animated story, with a variety of windows and turrets, and a tower on the far side where the Big Bad End Boss is likely to be. Now imagine it pure white, and like it's been put on top of a wedding cake. Or possibly *is* the wedding cake. It's described as neo-Gothic, one of the first buildings in that subgenre. I'd probably describe it as '8-bit nostalgic'.

It was built in the 1740s for Horatio Walpole, son of Robert Walpole, the retrospectively-titled 'First Prime Minister of England'. Although a minor politician, Horatio seems to have been mostly concerned with writing; he wrote hundreds of letters to contemporaries, which provide a great insight into life at the time. He also dabbled with books, and indeed Strawberry Hill House had its own printing press. One might argue his main legacy on these scores though is the first coining of the English word 'serendipity' (something that is fortunate in a good way).

Anyway, you can visit it. Or just stand outside and pretend you're Super Mario or something.

Richmond is also home to Alexei, from Travelexx, who here talks mainly about parks.

{Alexei - Travelexx

Richmond is an area which is I think almost criminally overlooked by a lot of visitors to London. I think when people look at a map it almost looks like it's a little too far away from the city centre, but it's actually in Zone 4. It's only about a 25 minute journey from London Waterloo, and it's really not far, or difficult to get to either.

But it actually offers a lot to visitors. I mean, it's a beautiful little town centre where you can explore little alleyways, look at some of the houses that date as far back as the 16th and 17th centuries, there's loads of cool pubs, cafes, little restaurants to relax in, and of course you've got the River Thames where it's possible to take boat trips, or just literally just relax with a picnic from a nearby market.

My favourite thing about Richmond of course is Richmond Park. It's ... I mean calling it a park is almost doing it a disservice. It's like a huge forest really, which is home to thousands, well hundreds of deer, I don't know about thousands but sometimes it feels like there's thousands of deer in there. There's an absolutely sprawling space, it's popular with cyclists, with families doing picnics, with runners, walkers, and there's just so much to do. There's a plantation there, where you can basically, it's almost like a little botanical garden where you can check out, it's called the Isabella Plantation, you can check out beautiful flowers and blooms throughout the year. I just do my little walk around the park on a weekly basis, and it's like my little space where I unwind and I'm able to walk around and have my thoughts and listen to some podcasts and so on. It's a fantastic way to spend a day, or even half a day if you get there early enough, so definitely think it should be on more itineraries with people visiting London.

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{usual end jingle}

And on that note, I'll finish this exploration of London, South of The River. Join me next time for adventures on the North side, including more World War Two references (of course), but also haunted buildings, some very niche museums, and the pub that features in one of the most famous board games in the world. Until then, wobble on, and if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

{Outro theme tune, same as intro, just a different bit of it}

{Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.

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Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}