

**U3A Bikers  
Bermondsey and Rotherhithe  
Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

Under grey skies, the riders assembled at Brockwell Lido, well wrapped up against the cold. A passer-by kindly took the group photo before we set off. A fine group we are!



Our route today was to Loughborough Junction, thence to Burgess Park where we met Daniella by the lime kiln by arrangement.

Continuing across New Kent Road and Long Lane we were in the historic area of Leathermarket, passing the grand building, the Leather, Hide and Wool Exchange.

By way of Tanner Street and Old Jamaica Road we arrived at Dockhead and St Saviour's Dock which lies at the estuary of the Neckinger River (now completely lost underground). Jamaica Road, with its cycle path led to the coffee stop at Bartons Café, a venue with plenty of indoor seating.



Most of the group settled very comfortably downstairs in a room lined with books; some riders settled in the outdoor seats.

Coffee finished, I noted that there was a marked reluctance to leave the snug surroundings of the library, but we were - eventually – on the move again, by-passing some road works and soon arriving at Bermondsey Wall.

From here we headed downriver to our first stop on the Thames at Kings Stairs Gardens.





Dr Salter's Daydream is here, installed in 1991, and commemorates the Salter family. An elderly Dr Salter sits on a granite bench looking towards his daughter, Joyce.

Further down, a cat sits on the wall; Ada walks with her spade in hand from planting a tree, towards her daughter.

This is a "daydream" because Dr Salter in old age is remembering his young daughter when she was still alive (Joyce died age 8 from scarlet fever). Ada is shown holding a spade because she was very active in the "beautification" of Bermondsey through tree planting schemes. In 1920, Alfred was the local MP, Ada was Mayor of Bermondsey.

In 2011 sculpture was stolen. In 2014. The local community campaigned and raised funds to replace it. This time the new Dr Salter's Daydream included a sculpture of his wife Ada (omitted from the original), to celebrate the work of this couple who dedicated their lives to helping to improve living conditions for the local community.

Directly opposite are the excavated foundations of King Edward III Manor House dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. At that time the house was surrounded by a moat on three sides and the River Thames on the remaining side.

Continuing on down -river we came to St Marychurch Street and two tiny buildings (1821), the Rotherhithe Engine House (housing a fire engine) and the Rotherhithe Watch House. The latter was established as a base for constables of St Mary's Parish in 1821 which was in a useful position on the edge of the churchyard to guard against body snatchers.



The Watch House was provided with a beadle (a parish constable associated with the church), a constable and 14 watchmen, operating in shifts during the day and night. There is a cell in the basement beneath the building, where suspects could be held.



Adjacent to the Watch House is St Mary Rotherhithe free school, a charity school founded in 1613 for the education of the sons of seafarers and supported by voluntary contributions.

It was originally located next to the church of St Mary the Virgin and then moved in 1797 into the building with the scholar statues;. It is thought to be the oldest elementary school in London.



Across the road is the 18th-century St Mary's Church, the local Church of England parish church in Rotherhithe which is particularly proud of its connections with the Pilgrim Fathers. Christopher Jones (captain of the Mayflower) is buried in an unmarked grave.

In 1838, when the *Temeraire* was broken up (q.v.), some of her timbers were used to build a communion table and two bishop's chairs.

The Mayflower pub claims to be the oldest pub on the Thames.

There is a notice inside which reads as follows:  
"UNATTENDED CHILDREN WILL BE SOLD TO THE  
LOCAL WORKHOUSE". It's the only pub where you  
can buy American stamps!



There is also a book that records the names of all American visitors who are descendants of the 100 Pilgrim Fathers, Puritans who left because they felt that the country was in an ungodly state.

The next stop was at the Brunel Museum, The engine house and the boiler house , designed by Sir Marc Isambard Brunel (father of Isambard Kingdom Brunel), were part of the infrastructure of the Thames Tunnel and these were used to power a pump required to remove water from the tunnel.

This was the first tunnel to be built under a navigable river. During the 18 years it took to complete (in 1843); ten workers died; Isambard nearly died when the river broke through the tunnel roof. We pondered on the thought that - had he drowned - so many great structures he subsequently built would probably not have been built!

The tunnel was designed for use by horse-drawn carriages, accessed by a spiral slope but this proved to be impracticable. It was then used as a pedestrian route. In 1869 it was converted into a railway tunnel for the East London line which, since 2010, has been part of the London Overground railway network, so we've all travelled through it at some time.



Further on we arrived at Cumberland Wharf, the approximate site from which the "Mayflower" set sail to America in 1620. On its return, the ship was left to rot in the river.

Nearby stands a curious life-sized statue, "Sunshine Weekly and the Pilgrim's Pocket". It depicts a boy reading a 1930's comic and an astonished 17th century Pilgrim listening to him. In the pilgrim's pocket is an A-Z, dated 1620! A frisky Staffordshire Bull terrier clamours for attention. The statue reflects the area's past connection to the Pilgrims and was erected by the Mayflower Tenants Association in 1991.

Continuing on we arrive at the Surrey Water and the Rotherhithe Street bridge on Rotherhithe Street which is not that old. It was built in the 1930s to replace a bridge over the original entrance to the old Grand Surrey Canal. To the right is Surrey Basin Lock and Surrey Basin.

This design of bridge is described as a "single-leaf rolling lift bridge"; also as a "Scherzer rolling bascule lift bridges" after the American engineer William Donald Scherzer who refined the bascule design into the rolling lift bridge.





The original Bascule design (for example, Tower Bridge) used a single large axle, whereas the rolling lift bridge has a weighted counterbalance that rolls back on a hinge. There is a video of the bridge opening at: <https://www.mfoot.com/blog/2016/06/26/historic-remnants-1-the-bascule-bridges-of-rotherhithe-and-surrey-quays/>

Beneath our feet is the **Rotherhithe Tunnel**, some 75 feet below. Given its length (1.5 km), ventilation is essential. There are four ventilation shafts: two topped by cupolas and two plain ventilators set back from the river.

The cupolas have staircases which once allowed pedestrian access to the tunnel, but they were closed due to damage in the Second World War and have never reopened.



The Salt Quay pub here lies at the entrance to Surrey Basin, once the route into the Grand Surrey Canal and the Surrey Docks.

Rotherhithe was famous for its shipbuilding, ship-repair and ship-breaking businesses. There was a large dry dock near here by 1739-46, the John Beatson yard, which was Rotherhithe's best known shipbreaker.



In 1838 *HMS Temeraire*, immortalised in a painting by JMW Turner, was broken up here.

Leaving the river we headed along the Albion Channel to Canada Water, then on to Southwark Park Pavilion Café for our lunch stop.

Then it was on to Burgess Park where riders headed back to Peckham or Brockwell Park, perhaps better acquainted with the rich history of this part of the River Thames.

A big thank you to Denise for leading the second group on the ride.

*Riders: Andrew Burke, Daniela Walther, Denise Davie, Irene Rosenfeld, Jan Rae, Jane Evan, John Clements, John Davies, Julie Stent, Mark Stones, Martin Dale, Mary Burke.*

*Acknowledgement: source material from Wikipedia*

*Ride Leader: John Clements*

*Report: John Clements 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024*