

Culture-Led Regeneration Writ Large

A 'circular' walk from Somerset House to Temple Bar
Designed by Dr Erica Pani

Introduction

Welcome to your second London Alternative Walk. The walk will take you from Somerset House on the Strand, across the Hungerford Bridge, along to the Millennium Bridge where we will go back across the river towards St Paul's Cathedral and then along Fleet Street to Temple Bar.

Similar to Walk One of this London Alternative series, the purpose of this walk is for you to observe and reflect on the outcomes of diverse culture-led regeneration initiatives and the theoretical implications of what you discover and/or perceive.

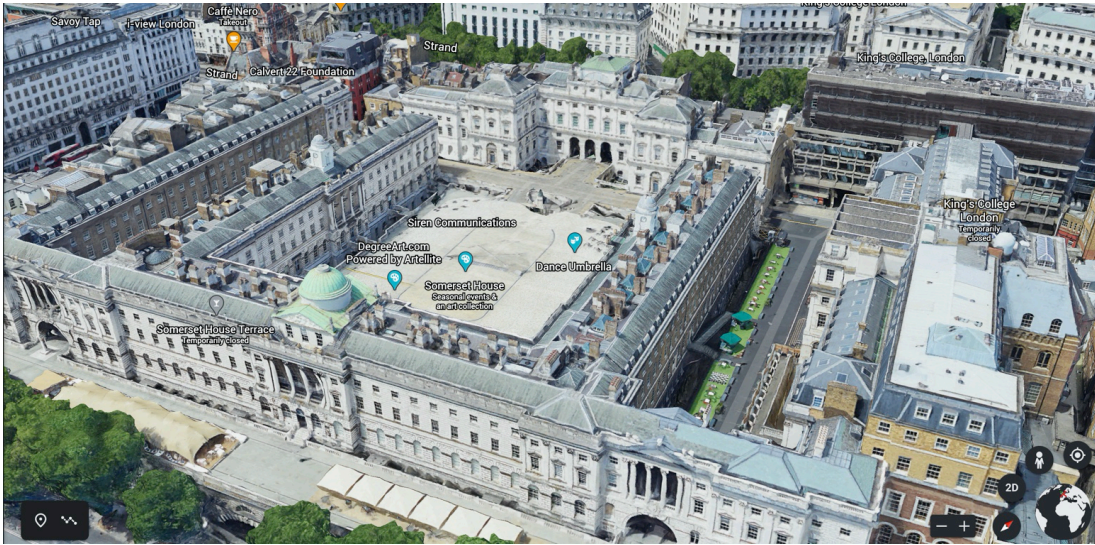
Worth Watching!

Before you set out on the walk, it is well worth taking a look at this short film (12 minutes). This is a link to a 1964 film by the British Film Institute of the development of the South Bank. It is a brilliant archive showing how culture, in particular the arts, was central to the post-World War II regeneration efforts. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyQLA_hFfb4&t=127s

The Route:

➔ Arrive at Somerset House via whatever route suits you best. Enter the building and make your way into the main courtyard.

STARTING POINT



Constructed in the neoclassical style on the site of a former palace, Somerset House, in its current form, dates back to the late 1700s. It was built amidst criticism that this area of London had no great public buildings – certainly none that could generate pride in the city. Today, it is a major tourist attraction, hosting one of the UK’s largest ‘cultural innovators’: ‘a creative community, working globally across art, technology, business and social enterprise’ (Somerset House, 2023).

🕒 **Stop One:** You are now standing in the courtyard of Somerset House on the North side of the River Thames. This is a public space, which, in the summer hosts outdoor film events and in the winter, it has an ice-skating rink. Not that long ago (just up until the late 1990s) it was a civil service carpark. Nowadays it seems extraordinary that there would be such a large space dedicated to parking cars in central London. At the time, however, we were all just coming to grips with the idea that these sorts of spaces provided amazing opportunities for residents and tourists in the city.

Reflection: *Think about the diverse attractions that Somerset House provides: its galleries, its public spaces, and its different ‘temporal’ activities. You could literally unpack the history of this one spot as a microcosm of ‘culture-led regeneration’ in London. If you did, what would you explore?*

➔ Leave the courtyard as you came in and make your way to the Hungerford Bridge / Golden Jubilee Bridge (by the Embankment). Cross the river towards the Royal Festival Hall. What a sight the river provides!

⊙ Stop Two: The Royal Festival Hall



The South Bank of the Thames is historically the poorer bank of London, as the city has primarily developed North-wise. In the industrialization years, it was mainly a place of docks, power generation and industries, where the working class settled.

World War II strongly influenced the initial ideas for a South Bank regeneration process. By 1941, London was devastated by bombings; the South Bank, with its warehouses, docklands and energy generators, was badly hit. In 1943, Patrick Abercrombie, an influential planning academic, was asked (alongside municipal architect, John Forshaw) to redesign a post-War London. His project proposed a more modern, less polarized city, in which the South Bank would provide a shared space for all Londoners away from the pressures of business; where they could unite around art and culture.

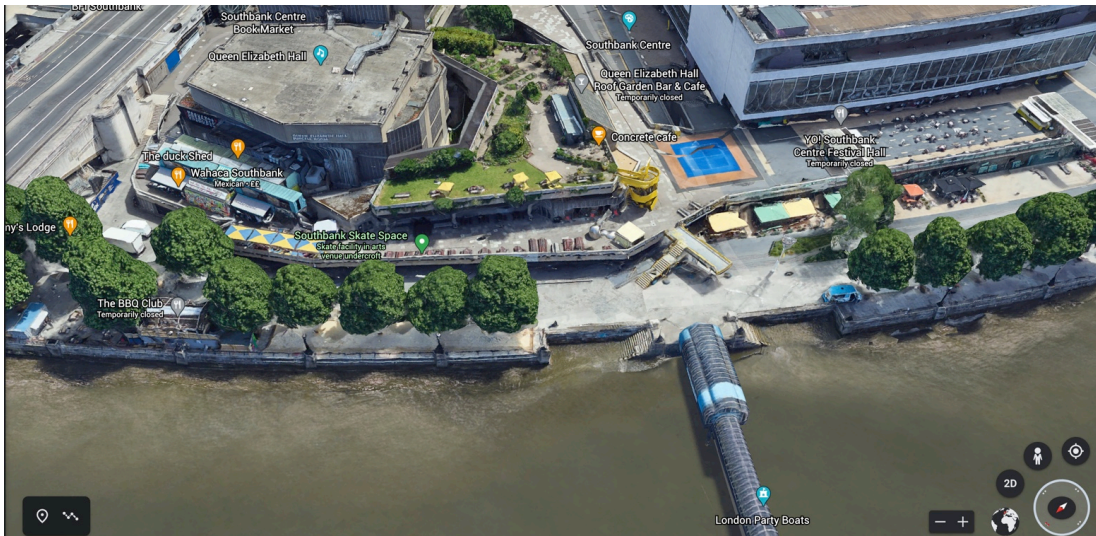
Although his plan was not completely followed, it left an important heritage: the 1951 Festival of Britain. Its purpose was to present a strong image of London after World War II, and a 'place-making representation' to give to the world – much like the World Fairs or Olympic Games do today.

The Festival of Britain was fundamental in creating the entertainment-use that you see here today. As you look around this area, think about how the entertainment-uses that started here back in the 1950s have slowly crept along the south side of the river.

Reflections: *Do you think the Royal Festival Hall has met the goal of providing a shared space for all Londoners to enjoy? What about its goal of projecting a 'place-making image' to the rest of the world: is it an attractive culture-led tourist destination? What fires your interest about this complex?*

➔ Keeping the river on your left hand side, make your way to Stop Three (towards Waterloo Bridge).

Stop Three: The Under-Croft Skate Park



The open space situated below these brutalist buildings was informally appropriated by skateboarders in the 1970s. The space was not designed to be a skatepark, but rather it is a “found space”, later also adopted by street artists and other urban subcultures as well. Over the decades, the South Bank Centre has actively limited the spaces the skaters can use, including installing physical barriers between pedestrians and the park.

In 2013, the South Bank Centre presented a £120m redevelopment plan to refurbish existing buildings and install a ‘floating’ glass pavilion to accommodate a full rehearsing orchestra. To proceed with this, the skatepark needed to be moved elsewhere. The proposal was to relocate it under the Hungerford Bridge.

In reaction, the under-croft skaters founded a non-profit community organization called ‘Long Live Southbank’ to combat the redevelopment and relocation plans. After 17 months of legal battle, an agreement was struck to keep the skatepark in its current place, with the South Bank Centre recognizing its historic and community value.

Additionally, Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios was commissioned to refurbish the skatepark by the South Bank Centre. They re-opened parts of the park that had been closed off since 2004, replicating the original brutalist architecture and replacing any obstacles in their original spots.

Reflections: *What value do you think the South Bank Centre has seen in the under-croft skatepark? What do you think about a community organisation winning such a battle on this valuable site?*

➔ Keeping the river on your left hand side, make your way to Stop Four.

📍 Stop Four: The National Theatre and IBM



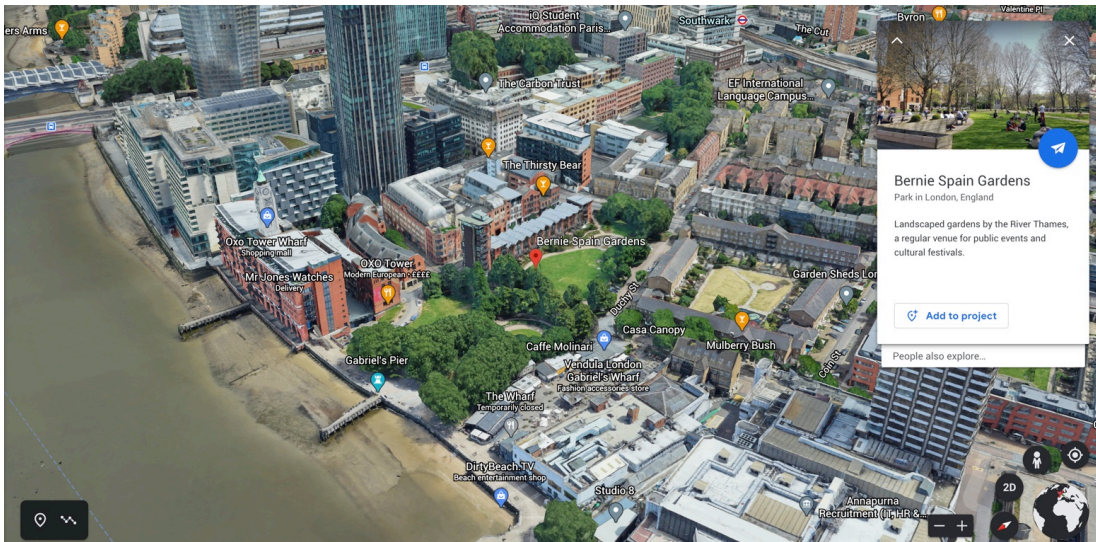
As you can see, you are now standing in front of the National Theatre, designed in the 'Brutalist' style by Denys Lasdun. It was completed in 1976. As discussed, the cultural and entertainment sector were major contributing factors in shaping the South Bank redevelopment, and this 'renewal' has had a strong impact on the area in terms of population, land value and use. In addition, the 'uplift' in value and popularity that the regeneration has created can be seen in the building next to the National Theatre. This is the headquarters of IBM, also designed by Lasdun, and completed in 1983.

In 2020, the current owners of the building, (United Arab Emirates-based Easa Saleh Al Gurg Group) and its architects AHMM, proposed to extend the building to offer IBM more space and to provide shops on the ground level. This may seem a very sensible use of space given that land values are rising and retail is strong. However, development is often balanced by other factors in planning. In the UK, an important consideration is heritage. In June 2020 the UK Government acted in line with the advice of Historic England and awarded the building Grade II statutory protection, meaning that any redevelopment would go through a stricter route to consider the historic fabric of the building. Whilst the redevelopment went ahead, the historic integrity of the building was preserved.

Reflections: *Planning is about balancing one outcome against another. Here the authorities were trying to allow for economic growth while maintaining the look, feel and history of a building. Planners were therefore limiting the full force of the market to simply reap the highest profit it can. When it comes to culture-led regeneration, what do you think about this 'power dynamic'?*

➔ Keeping the river on your left hand side, make your way to Gabriel's Wharf, which is adjacent to your next Stop (Five). On your way, consider who is actually using the South Bank. Who is present? Who is missing?

Ⓞ Stop Five: Gabriel's Wharf and the Coin Street Development



When you reach Gabriel's Wharf, you may notice a 'shift' in how the area feels. Instead of imposing architecture, the 'café-culture' here is (perhaps) more 'down to earth'. This is because it forms part of an impressive community victory that is rather unique in the history of British Planning, especially in this valuable area of London.



➔ Take a look around the Wharf and notice the shops and cafes, etc. then come back out to the river and turn right into Bernie Spain Gardens. The Gardens are named after a (once) local resident and founding member of the Coin Street Action Group: Bernadette Spain (1936-84). Bernie spent her life working tirelessly to challenge inequality in health and housing. Walk through the Gardens and exit onto 'Upper Ground'. Turn right and head towards Coin Street, taking close note of the housing around you.

As noted, Coin Street is a rather unique experience in the British planning history. In the late 1970s, there was tremendous pressure to use this 13-acre site for a major re-development in keeping with the changes that we have seen on the Southbank so far. A project, designed by Richard Rogers, was proposed for a group of 16-story office blocks with a shopping arcade, what would have been the tallest hotel in London, and new footbridge across the Thames. However, the planned development sparked considerable community protests from nearby residents who had long-felt disenfranchised. They wanted to see the area, which was pretty run-down at the time, improved as a place for family housing, a park and a continuation of the riverside walk.

Under normal circumstances it would be hard to see how a local community group could stand up against such market pressure to develop. However, the politics of the time and land ownership played to the benefit of the residents. Indeed, a key factor in determining the outcome of the conflict was the

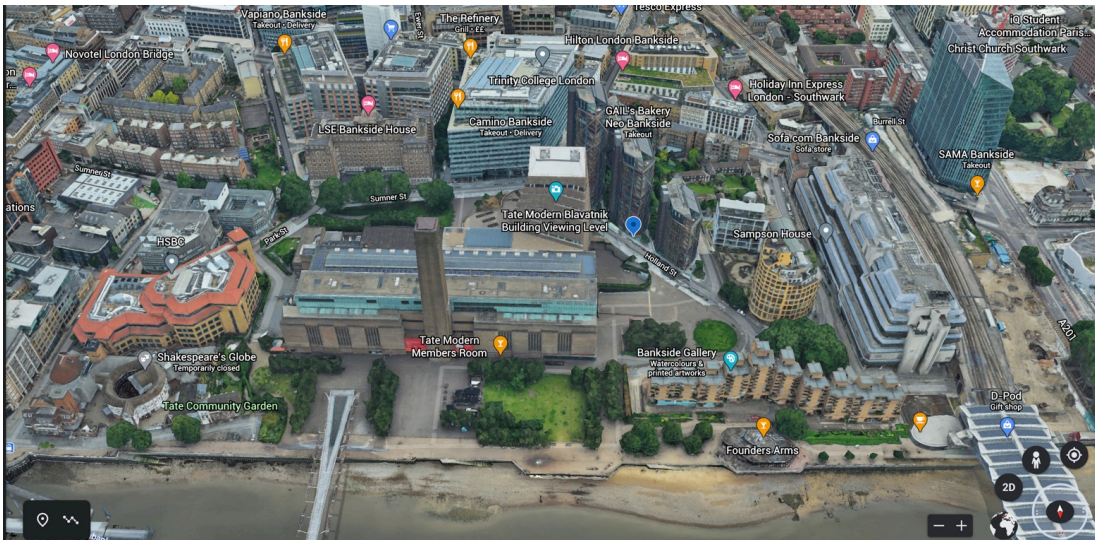
Greater London Council election. The previous administration had supported the Rogers-led regeneration, but the new Labour Party administration took up the cause of the local community. The GLC owned half the site and this gave it some leverage. They also changed the zoning of the local plan, immediately decreasing the commercial value of the land. In 1984 the developers pulled out and sold their half of the site to the GLC. In turn the GLC then passed on the ownership of the site (including the OXO Tower and buildings) to a non-profit company set up by the community group. They also provided a £1M loan to the community, which was then able to develop the site for their desired uses.

There was, however, still a need for money. What the community group had been doing – i.e. renting out available open land in their ownership for car parking – was only a temporary resource. Having purchased the OXO Tower (an ex factory and electricity generating station that had lain abandoned since the 1970s), the Coin Street Community Builders redeveloped it, and rented out the very valuable top floor of the tower to a high-end restaurant. The profits went to cross-subsidize local social housing, and community-oriented designer workshops and galleries on the lower floors. More recently, a similar cross-subsidization has taken place with the regeneration of parking space in Doon Street. The sale or letting at less than half market-rent of 236 flats will result in new leisure facilities for all community members, including a swimming pool.

Reflections: *Looking around where you are, what policy recommendations might you suggest to city managers trying to spur local economic regeneration through culture-led activities? Has the Coin Street development hindered the attractiveness of the area to tourists and locals, or has it brought in an interesting angle, as well as a more 'people-centred' approach to regeneration?*

➔ Keeping the river on your left hand side, make your way to your next Stop The Tate Modern Art Gallery.

Stop Six: The Tate Modern



As previously discussed, since the Festival of Britain in 1951, entertainment and the arts have been key elements in the regeneration of the South Bank. Such 'co-location' of art and culture has become a business in-and-of itself for many cities, allowing them to market themselves in an increasingly competitive global environment. The redevelopment of Bankside Power Station boosted this aim further.

The 'iconic' power station was designed by Sir Gilbert Scott in the early 1940s. The building consisted of a massive turbine hall, boiler house, and centrally placed chimney. Although it provided many local jobs, by the 1950s, pressure was mounting to close the plant due to increasing air pollution. However, politics and economics allowed it to continue operating until 1981.

In 1992, the Tate Trustees (of the Tate Gallery) announced their desire to create an international modern art gallery in London, and by 1994 Bank Side Power Station had been selected as the site. In 1995 Swiss architects Herzog and DeMeuron were appointed to convert the building into a gallery. Their plans retained much of the original character of the building, which, as you can see, remains a stunning landmark on the South Bank.

The Tate Modern opened in 2000, immediately boosting tourism into the area. Since its inauguration, it has attracted over 40million visitors, created over 4000 local jobs and generates some £100million annually in economic benefits to London. It is one of the UK's top three tourist destinations.

Reflections: Apart from being part of the overall cluster of galleries and other cultural activities across London, the Tate Modern has helped boost a more localised cluster, including Bankside Gallery, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, the Golden Hinde, the Clink Prison Museum, and many hotels and restaurants. Yet, whilst many attractions have remained strong, others have failed (e.g. Vinopolis). *If you did a quick SWOT analysis of this local cluster, what strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats would you highlight? What makes this local cluster "stick"? What has contributed to the failures? What could be interesting to investigate about this 'local' cluster?*

➔ You will now cross the River Thames using the Millennium footbridge, headed towards St Paul's Cathedral and Paternoster Square. Spanning the gap between St Paul's and the Tate Modern, the bridge forms an important link between the north and south sides of the river.



The Millennium Bridge – the first bridge to be built over the Thames in 100 years – was opened in 2000. It was part of a design competition commissioned by the London Borough of Southwark. A consortium of Arup (engineers), Foster and Partners (Architects), and Sir Anthony Caro (sculptor) won the competition. Despite its “shaky start” (it was temporarily

closed due to a design fault that made it wobble substantially when people walked across it) the bridge has proved to be a great attraction and addition to London's ‘cultural offering’.

⊙ Stop Seven: St Paul's Cathedral and Paternoster Square



Completed in 1771 after the Great Fire of London (1666) destroyed its predecessor, and designed in the English Baroque style by Sir Christopher Wren, St Paul's cathedral is not simply a major place of worship (it is the Mother Church of the Diocese of London). This iconic building – the ‘view’ of which (from multiple angles) is protected by planning legislation – epitomises how religious architecture can add to the cultural regeneration of a city. It's famous copper dome, viewing platform, and ‘whispering gallery’ attract both international and domestic tourists, as well as pilgrims wishing to experience its cloistered spaces. At the same time, it is home to a spectacular body of art, including carvings by Grinling Gibbons, gilded murals by Sir James Thornhill, and modern artworks by Yoko Ono and Sir Antony Gormley, amongst many others.

➔ Take a look around before heading across to Paternoster Square.

Paternoster Square is an urban development now owned by the Mitsubishi Estate. It was redeveloped in the 1960s after heavy bombing during the “Blitz” of World War II destroyed most of the buildings in the square but, somehow, left St Paul’s Cathedral unscathed. As well as being an important tourist attraction, the Square is home to a vibrant financial cluster including the London Stock Exchange, Goldman Sachs, and Nomura and Merrill Securities.

The Square has a number of stories that could be investigated when it comes to ‘culture-led’ regeneration. The first is about design and taste. Look around you and try to determine what is new and what is original. Are the neo-classical features reproductions? Is there any architecture here that you think is 17th Century? The answer is that whilst some original pieces do remain, much of the development is a ‘pastiche’. Generally speaking, architects and heritage planners don’t like this space because it tries to reproduce a past style and is therefore ‘fake’. However, many people, including King Charles III, find it pleasing. This tension makes development in sensitive areas – like here, around St Paul’s Cathedral – very tricky.

Reflections: *Provided it ‘works’, does it really matter that much of the area is ‘fake’? What are your thoughts?*

The second is about public space vs privatised public space. The square, though it is open to the public, is private. It is controlled by private security firms that can close the space as they see fit. The most famous closure in recent history was against the Occupy movement protests of 2011. The Occupy movement occurred worldwide in protest of global political and economic inequalities. In London, the movement occupied and created camps in many public spaces, including the steps of St Paul’s Cathedral. However, Paternoster Square was able to close itself to the public.

Reflections: *What would it mean for a culture-led regeneration strategy if more ‘public spaces’ were actually in private hands? Would it surprise you that many of the spaces that you have walked through today are actually private, or at least, under private surveillance?*

➔ Make your way out of Paternoster Square and head along Fleet Street to Temple Bar, your eighth and final stop. As you leave the Square, pay attention to the heavy gates that can form the barrier between what is public and what is private. We’ll be referring back to these soon.

⊙ Stop Eight: Temple Bar



You should now be on familiar ground, close to the LSE and the Royal Courts of Justice. There are a few things to observe here. First, the significance of Temple Bar is that it marks the boundary between the City of Westminster (headed up the Strand) and the City of London (headed back along Fleet Street). A memorial to the Bar's past comprises a statue of a dragon sitting on top of a pillar in the middle of the road. While the dragon is the symbol of London, the memorial itself has a connection to Paternoster Square. The gate that you looked at as you left to Paternoster Square used to be located on this spot. It was Temple Bar Gate (also designed by Sir Christopher Wren), and for 200 years it sat on Fleet Street regulating trade between the 'two cities'. It was removed in 1878 as Fleet Street needed to be widened due to heavy road traffic. It was dismantled and stored in Farringdon Yard where it stayed for 10 years.

In 1889, Lady Meux, who is described as “a banjo playing barmaid who married a wealthy brewer”, purchased the gate and had it erected at her Hertfordshire home in a bid to convince Victorian high society of her respectability. In 1976 the Temple Bar Trust was founded with the purpose of bringing the gate back to London. This was finally achieved in 2001 at a cost of just over £3million pounds. It was placed at Paternoster Square.

For sure, it is interesting to think how an historic gate came to be situated in an entirely new setting amongst a pastiche of classical architecture. However, the story serves to underscore the importance of 'heritage markers' in the quest for culture-led regeneration.

Reflections: London is teeming with such heritage markers, many of which are noted in tourist guides and on guided walks such as this. Indeed, you can search on the internet for just about anything 'cultural' to do with London and find that someone, somewhere has created 'economy' from it. *As a student of Geography with Economics, what aspects of such dynamics might you like to explore?*

You are now at the end of Walk Two. Time for a sit-down!

Sample Resources:

Stop One:

- Graham, F. (2005). Project success: An appraisal of winning cultural spaces. Retrieved from: <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/project-success-appraisal-winning-cultural-spaces/docview/1430479530/se-2>
- “This courtyard used to be a car park” - *The Guardian*
<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2000/jan/31/artsfeatures1>
- “The Opening of Somerset House”
<https://www.publicspace.org/works/-/project/b034-opening-somerset-house>
- <https://www.somersethouse.org.uk>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somerset_House

Stop Two:

- Williams, K. R. (2018). *Making space, making history: cultural work, heritage and the production of space at Southbank Centre*. (Unpublished Doctoral thesis, City, University of London)
<https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/21906/>
- Conekin, B. (2003) *The Autobiography of a Nation: The 1951 Festival of Britain*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/venues/royal-festival-hall>
- <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Festival_of_Britain
- <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/the-festival-of-britain>
- The Festival of Britain: a Brave New World
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Vmzq1s7xgE>

Stop Three:

- Ben Campkin (2013) *Remaking London: Decline and Regeneration in Urban Culture* – Great book available from LSE Library.
- “Southbank skateboarding gets a new lease of life” BBC London
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ls61fy4gF0c>
- <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/blog/articles/skating-history-story-undercroft-skate-space>
- https://www.skateparks.co.uk/london/southbank-skatepark/#google_vignette
- <https://metropolismag.com/projects/southbank-centre-undercroft-renovation/>

Stop Four:

- Newman, P. and Smith, I. (2000) Cultural production, place and politics on the South Bank of the Thames, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24(1): 9-24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.00233>
- “A brief introduction to Denys Lasdun” Historic England
<https://heritagecalling.com/2019/09/02/denys-lasdun/>

- “Blow for AHMM South Bank scheme as Lasdun’s IBM building is listed” Greg Pitcher Architects’ Journal
<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/blow-for-ahmm-south-bank-scheme-as-lasduns-ibm-building-is-listed>
- <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_National_Theatre

Stop Five:

- Baeten, G. (2001) Urban Regeneration, Social Exclusion and Shifting Power Geometries on the South Bank, London, *Geographische Zeitschrift*, 89(2/3): 104-113. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27818903>
- Brindley, T (2000) 'Community roles in urban regeneration: New partnerships on London's South Bank', *City*, 4(3): 363-377.
- Coin Street Developments - <https://coinstreet.org/about-us/our-developments/>
- Coin Street Community Builders “Doon Street”
<https://coinstreet.org/our-developments/doon-street/>
- Coin Street Community Builders “History” <https://coinstreet.org/about-us/history-background/>
- “Unexecuted design for the Coin Street Development, South Bank, Lambeth, London, for Greycoat Commercial Estates Ltd: elevation for part of an office building in a large commercial development” RIBA
<https://www.architecture.com/image-library/RIBApix/image-information/poster/unexecuted-design-for-the-coin-street-development-south-bank-lambeth-london-for-greycoat-commercial-/posterid/RIBA85105.html>

Stop Six:

- Hyslop, D. (2012) Culture, Regeneration and Community: Reinventing the City, *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement*, 5: 152–165.
<https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/INFORMIT.912771806785379>
- Serota, N. and Hyslop, D. (2011) Art and culture in regeneration: Tate Modern, Bankside and London, *Journal of Urban Renewal*, 4(4): 328-336.
- “The Politics and Economics of Technology: Bankside Power Station and the Environment, 1945–81” Stephen Murray <https://www.tandfonline-com.gate3.library.lse.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1080/03058034.2019.1583454>
- <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tate_Modern
- <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/tate-modern>
- <https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/projects/263-the-tate-modern-project/>

Stop Seven:

- Günter Gassner (2017) Wrecking London’s skyline? *City*, 21(6): 754-768. DOI: 10.1080/13604813.2017.1408994

- Carmona, M. (2015) Re-theorising contemporary public space: a new narrative and a new normative, *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Place-making and Urban Sustainability*, 8(4): 373-405, DOI: [10.1080/17549175.2014.909518](https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2014.909518)
- <https://www.stpauls.co.uk>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Paul%27s_Cathedral
- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Saint-Pauls-Cathedral-London>
- <https://paternostersquare.info>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paternoster_Square
- <https://occupylondon.org.uk>

Stop Eight:

- <https://www.thetemplebar.info/history.html>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_Bar,_London
- <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/attractions-museums-entertainment/temple-bar>