**The BBC 60K**

Special Southwark Cyclists Healthy Ride for Easter Monday, 2023

Report from Ride Leader Werner Wiethege

The British Broadcasting Company had been founded in October 1922 and started broadcasting the following month. Auntie deserves to be honoured with a healthy ride and it's a good excuse to extend our range and explore locations far beyond Southwark.

Route checks on Good Friday and Easter Sunday had been pleasant and dry; maybe that had used up the allocation of good weather or it was just regression to the mean. The forecast for the bank holiday was bleak and correct. Capping the number of riders at twelve had been unnecessary, lots of cancellations in the morning and only five turned up at the Needle on London Bridge for the start.

Just like the government we had planned cuts for the BBC, in our case shorter routes which left out some sites, but everybody was happy to try the 60km version.

We set off shortly after 10:00am and reached the first location in a few minutes, the only one south of the river but very close to Westminster and therefore ideal for Question Time. You expect theatres in a hospital but there is one in Guy's where it's not the anaesthetist who sends you to sleep.

*0.8km Greenwood Theatre,* [*https://www.tvstudiohistory.co.uk/bbc-studios-in-london/the-greenwood-theatre/*](https://www.tvstudiohistory.co.uk/bbc-studios-in-london/the-greenwood-theatre/)

Wet roads are thought to make punctures more likely which may at least partly explain the bad luck of a first puncture even before we crossed the river. We arranged to rejoin later and went over Blackfriars Bridge to 55/56 Lincoln's Inn Fields, the Queen's House (now part of the LSE). Some touch screens don't work well with wet fingers, that made communication with the missing rider more challenging.

*4.8km Queen's House,* [*https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/queens-house/*](https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/queens-house/)

Visiting the former site of the English-by-Radio department of the BBC World Service had qualified us to take the inscription on its former main building, Bush House, personally: "To the Friendship of English Speaking Peoples".

*5.3km Bush House,* [*https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/buildings/bush-house*](https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/buildings/bush-house)

Walking to the next stop might have been quicker but we rode around Aldwych and turned into the newly pedestrianised bit of the Strand opposite Somerset House. A plaque commemorates the building from which the first BBC radio signals were cast broadly.

*5.7km Marconi Wing,* [*https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/research/heritage-trail#marconihousestrandlondon*](https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/research/heritage-trail%23marconihousestrandlondon)

Another short hop took us to Savoy Hill and Savoy Place, the BBC's first offices and studios were in the IET building.

*6.0km Savoy Hill,* [*https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/buildings/savoy-hill*](https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/buildings/savoy-hill)

Past the Michael Faraday statue, one of Southwark's finest, and the Embankment and across Trafalgar Square to 12 Lower Regent Street where the BBC recorded panel games with live audiences (in living memory), e.g. I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue, the Goons and (without an audience) H2G2 – The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy.

*7.6km Paris Theatre,* [*https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris\_Theatre*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Theatre)

We had forgotten about tourists during the last few years but The Mall near Buckingham Palace was the busiest I have seen. As if there was nothing else to do in London on a very wet Easter Monday morning than to stand in the rain and watch the changing of the guards. Somehow we got away without being caught by a shouting soldier and squeezed through the human wall to reach the safety of Constitution Hill. Hyde Park Corner was the first point where the alternative routes split and while we stopped to review the plan the punctured rider caught up with us. Still a net loss of one, as two riders decided they were wet enough and turned round. So just four of us along South Carriage Drive till that inner tube deflated again and we were down to three and soon afterwards to two as somebody's home was very close and dry and warm. Just the bare minimum left: leader and backmarker.

Nobody screamed for fluid intake or outlet, so straight along Ken High instead of a planned detour via the cafe in Brompton Cemetery. As it was reasonably empty and not the usual traffic jam it didn't take long to leave the hostile environment. When wands segregated us from cars we checked a street sign, yes we had left RBKC and reached Hammersmith & Fulham. We crossed Hammersmith Road to look at the plaque on the building replacing the King's Theatre.

*16.9km King's Theatre,* [*https://www.tvstudiohistory.co.uk/bbc-studios-in-london/kings-theatre-hammersmith/*](https://www.tvstudiohistory.co.uk/bbc-studios-in-london/kings-theatre-hammersmith/)

A few years ago the next stage would have been almost impossible but Cycleway 9 mitigates some of the horror of the Hammersmith gyratory. At the cost of quite a few lights where cyclists have to wait, but we had a lucky run and hit a few greens in a row. A brief look at the much improved Hammersmith Bridge and the river before we reached another BBC plaque. Early Dr Who episodes had been recorded here and (not much to do with the BBC) Southwark Cyclists (many moons ago) rode there each year in January or February for a Sunday afternoon programme of cycling films (sometimes with those on screen also on stage and Eileen Sheridan an honoured guest).

*18.3km Riverside Studio,* [*https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/riverside-studios/*](https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/riverside-studios/)

We picked up C9 again and followed it until Kew Bridge where it currently terminates and then continued past the highly recommended Museum of Steam and Water in Brentford. Ealing (another borough added to the Healthy Rides list) Studios are better known for cinema productions but it was (and is) used by other companies. The BBC filmed inserts for Cathy Come Home and other productions there.

*26.7km Ealing Studios,* [*https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/ealing-studios/*](https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/ealing-studios/)

The weather had improved, we dared to take off some waterproof layers before we enjoyed outdoor refreshments in Walpole Park. Somewhere the buildings changed from suburbia to industrial estate and we arrived at the ride's outermost point, BBC Park Western in North Acton. It's still used by the BBC as the standing set for Silent Witness.

*31.4km BBC Park Western,* [*https://www.doctorwholocations.net/locations/bbckendalavenue*](https://www.doctorwholocations.net/locations/bbckendalavenue)

It's not easy to get away from BBC Park Western: the canal, Brunel's railway and the A40 all are barriers to the north. We picked Cycleway 34 to take us east, it runs parallel to the A40 and you still get the noise and pollution but it's better than that busy road. QPR fans had made Good Friday's route check more congested but no fans around the stadium on this Easter Monday. The lovely Hammersmith Japanese Garden provides a nice approach to Wood Lane and the TV Centre. The BBC's commercial wing still has some studios there and it recently worked well as bait to divert protestors from other BBC studios. TV centre is also used by other companies but most of the site has been converted to flats. No security guard stopped us this time and we looped the Helios fountain, which may have been a mistake.

*37.1km TV Centre Wood Lane,* [*https://www.tvstudiohistory.co.uk/studio-category/bbc-tv-centre/*](https://www.tvstudiohistory.co.uk/studio-category/bbc-tv-centre/)

Another chance to see the Japanese Garden before passing Gaumont Terrace in Lime Grove. The BBC buildings have been replaced by housing. The name remembers one of the companies which used it before the BBC "temporarily" took it over in 1949.

*38.4km Lime Grove,* [*https://www.tvstudiohistory.co.uk/bbc-studios-in-london/lime-grove/*](https://www.tvstudiohistory.co.uk/bbc-studios-in-london/lime-grove/)

Two left-turns and we stood outside the Odeon in Shepherd's Bush, formerly the Empire and then the TV theatre.

*38.9km BBC Television Theatre,* [*https://www.tvstudiohistory.co.uk/bbc-studios-in-london/television-theatre/*](https://www.tvstudiohistory.co.uk/bbc-studios-in-london/television-theatre/)

The paths on the Shepherd's Bush Green are the safest escape from Wood Lane and we would have been even safer if some courier on an e-bike hadn't blocked the path across the Green just before the lights turned red. Maybe we had annoyed Helios earlier or perhaps we shouldn't have mentioned that the sun had come out, Hubris struck and we had to wait a few minutes in a downpour before the lights turned to green. At least we found shelter on the other side until the rain stopped. Around the back of Holland Park and over Holland Park Avenue we got to Lansdowne Rise, the steepest segment of the ride and the gradient which puts the Hill into Notting Hill. We met the three barriers (road, rail and canal) again but Westbourne Park Passage goes over the railway and under the A40, the short stretch of Harrow Road over the canal wasn't too bad. Planning law must have been more liberal in the 1930s when the use of the building was changed. BBC Maida Vale had previously been a roller skating palace and club. The long building would have been ideal for skating.

*44.4km BBC Maida Vale,* [*https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/buildings/maida-vale*](https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/buildings/maida-vale)

We saw a bit of Little Venice before crossing Marylebone Road to return to central London. We started a cluster of sites with 35 Marylebone High Street. First BBC publications were edited there but it then was used in other ways. The concert hall extension on the fifth floor sticks out a bit when you look at the skyline.

*48.5km 35 Marylebone High Street,* [*https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/marylebone-high-street/*](https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/marylebone-high-street/)

The next, the 1932 Broadcasting House, was enlarged a few years ago and most London BBC activities are now concentrated there. It may also have London's only de-branded coffee shop, visible through the window of the One Show studio and therefore with a neutral facade, not in the familiar blue.

*49.4km Broadcasting House,* [*https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/buildings/broadcasting-house*](https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/buildings/broadcasting-house)

On the other side of All Souls was Queen's Hall. Until 1941 this was a 19th century concert hall and the birthplace of the Proms, long before the BBC was founded.

*49.5km Hall& St George's Hall,* [*https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/research/heritage-trail#queenshallampstgeorge%E2%80%99shalllanghamplacelondon*](https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/research/heritage-trail%23queenshallampstgeorge%E2%80%99shalllanghamplacelondon)

It wasn't far to the next stop. The former home of the B.B.C. Overseas Services has an address on Oxford Street but the plaque is conveniently at the rear in Market Pl and we could avoid Oxford St.

*49.8km 200 Oxford Street,* [*https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/research/heritage-trail#200oxfordstreetwestminsterlondon*](https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/research/heritage-trail%23200oxfordstreetwestminsterlondon)

Back over Regent St and a long loop around Cavendish Sq to look at a plaque for BBC School Radio in 1 Portland Place.

*50.7km 1 Portland Place,* [*https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/research/heritage-trail#1portlandplacewestminsterlondon*](https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/research/heritage-trail%231portlandplacewestminsterlondon)

[*https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/camden-palace-theatre/*](https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/camden-palace-theatre/)

The roof of the Langham hotel diagonally opposite was used by the BBC for broadcasts during the war. It would have provided a good view but must have felt very exposed during a raid.

*50.8km Langham Hotel,* [*https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/the-langham*](https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/the-langham)

Another view of Broadcasting House when we turned left into to Portland Place and rode up to Regent's Park. We should have joined the other cyclists and done a few loops of the Outer Circle but managed only a short segment anti-clockwise and left the park via Chester Close North. It's not only a quiet way to Camden but also offers interesting views of the less glamourous backsides of some of London's most expensive properties, front stucco and back bricks. Only one stop remained. The former Camden Palace Theatre is impossible to overlook at the southern end of Camden High Street. The home of light entertainment felt appropriate for the end of our long list of BBC locations.

*53.9km Camden Palace Theatre,* [*https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/camden-palace-theatre/*](https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/camden-palace-theatre/)

To complete the set, we looked to the right of the Palace, shouted Mornington Crescent and declared ourselves winners. As we still had to get back to the Needle we picked up CS6 in Royal College St and completed the ride in a bit over five hours.

Setting a new record for the percentage of riders abandoning can be blamed on the weather but the number of registrations and the length of the waiting list shows that there is interest to go beyond the usual Saturday ranges.