

Thames soundwalk: Blackfriars, Southwark, & Millennium Bridges

The River Thames between Blackfriars and Southwark bridges has to me always felt like the heart of London. Despite the thousand, and more, years of human construction and never ending re-construction the river has maintained its power. The strength of its currents and the force of the tides is experienced on every visit. They have an impact on everything that happens and one knows that they are the real presence here.

This soundwalk follows the river banks on both side and seeks to listen to the many interactions between the force of nature that is the Thames and the human activity that it has attracted over the centuries. The soundscape is constantly dynamic, so every visit will be, in its own way, different. This map outlines possible routes and shows some of the spots where recordings were made on May 16 or 17 2022. They can be heard online on the radio.aporee sound map by clicking the given links.

- 1) **Blackfriars Bridge traffic and the faint river, Sea Containers House, 20 Upper Ground, London SE1, UK.** <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56859>
A passing river taxi creates river waves barely audible above the traffic.
- 2) **Parallel sonic worlds: crossfading from above to below water and back, Blackfriars Pier, White Lion Hill, London EC4V 3QR, UK.** <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56876>
Standing on the river bank watching the boats pass the sound they make underwater is inaudible. However, it is loud and often strident. This recording uses a hydrophone and normal microphones. The track starts above water and slowly crossfades below the surface. Water slopping against the pier is heard from both, albeit differently, but the sound of the boats only underwater. A coot calls at the beginning, its voice echoing off the water surface and from the river bank.
- 3) **London's loudest building site from under the Millennium Bridge? Thames Embankment, London, UK.** <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56864>
This site is being redeveloped and plans show that the new building will have a roof with gardens and walkways. Currently it is one of loudest building sites in town - constant pneumatic drills and whining machines easily audible on the opposite river bank and further. Amazing how much noise is created by 'caring constructors' for a 'green' development! In quieter moments it's possible to hear passing footsteps resonating in the metal of the Millennium Bridge above.
- 4) **Extraordinarily loud building site amplified by the narrow passage, 107 Queen Victoria St, London EC4V 3AL, UK.** <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56865>
The narrow passageway between the site and the City of London School amplifies the drilling and demolition sounds to even higher levels.
- 5) **Walk through air conditioning alley (Kennet Wharf Lane) to the river, Vintners Place, 68 Upper Thames St., London EC4V 2AF, UK.** <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56873>
Walking from Upper Thames Street along Kennet Wharf Lane to the river one is enclosed by the industrial buildings on either side and immersed in sound from a succession of air conditioning outlets. When reaching the river bank loudspeakers can be heard. It is a guide on a passing tourist boat talking about the historic sites in view.
- 6) **Hightide waves slopping against the embankment wall, Queen Street Place, London EC4R 1AG, UK** <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56856>

The Thames is a fast-flowing river and tides rise and fall surprisingly quickly. At this point when the tide is high you are extremely close to the water and can easily see, hear and feel the strength and power of the current.

- 7) **Mid foot tunnel under Southwark Bridge, atmosphere, 2 joggers, Queen Street Place, London EC4R 1AG, UK.** <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56866>
Utterly constant sonic atmosphere of the foot tunnel under Southwark Bridge. There are some nice historic pictures of the bridge and the area in tiles on the walls. The distant bleeps are from the City of London waste site nearby. Two lunchtime joggers and a woman with a dog pass during the recording.
- 8) **North Thames side atmosphere mid tide waves, Thames Exchange, 10 Queen St Pl, London EC4R 1BE, UK.** <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56867>
This section of the Thames footpath passes under bridges and follows narrow lanes. The air conditioning in the adjacent buildings gives a unchanging airy drone - essentially a constant sonic fog - which envelopes all other sounds. When the tide is down waves on the beach are heard, as are more distant traffic, sirens or planes. Right behind me is one air conditioning outlet. Others are either side. The view is potentially interesting, but it is not a place to linger.
- 9) **Very loud air conditioning in the foot tunnel under Cannon Street station, 22 Cousin Ln, London EC4R 3TE, UK.** <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56874>
Another tunnel for the Thames footpath and another loud air conditioning outlet. It is always dry and homeless people sleep here. It is beside the Banker riverside pub, very popular at lunchtime and a couple of historic cannons (guns) are placed incongruously nearby. Typical City of London juxtapositions. Tourists and joggers pass by.
- 10) **Lunchtime crowds on beautiful day, 1 Angel Ln, London EC4R 3AB, UK**
<https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56868> Many come here to eat lunch beside the river, particularly on such a warm sunny day as this.
- 11) **mid river Southwark Bridge atmosphere**
The City of London's quietest bridge. There is slightly less traffic and it is often slow moving. Trains rumble across Cannon Street Station bridge. The river feels at it's most enclosed here.
- 12) **South Bank atmosphere beside the Globe Theatre**
The sounds of tourism, footsteps, many different spoken languages.
- 13) **Parallel sonic worlds: Birch trees in wind & Tate Modern riverside, 53 Bankside, London SE1 9JE, UK.** <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56858>
The bright green birch leaves looked beautiful as they shimmered in the wind on this sunny day. The sound is quiet but easy to hear. The movement also creates a vibration in the wood of the tree. This track uses a combination of normal and contact mics to crossfade from the outside atmosphere, where a distant guitarist entertains in front of the Tate Gallery, to the internal fluttering as picked up by a contact mic on the tree itself. When the wind drops the vibration in the wood disappears too.
- 14) **Parallel sonic worlds: Millennium Bridge deep drone and atmosphere, Thames Embankment, London, UK** <https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56855>
The Millennium Bridge has long been known for its musical drones. The steel wires that prevent you from falling into the river sing when it's windy. It is not audible with normal ears but can be heard by touching the side of your head to the hand rail and listening to the sounds inside. Over the years several sound art pieces in the nearby Tate Gallery have

revealed and exploited the sound. Contact microphones will pick up the sound. This track uses both normal and contact microphones and crossfades between them, from the outside to the parallel sonic world inside. People's footsteps, wheeled cases and baby's chairs also resonate the metal of the bridge.

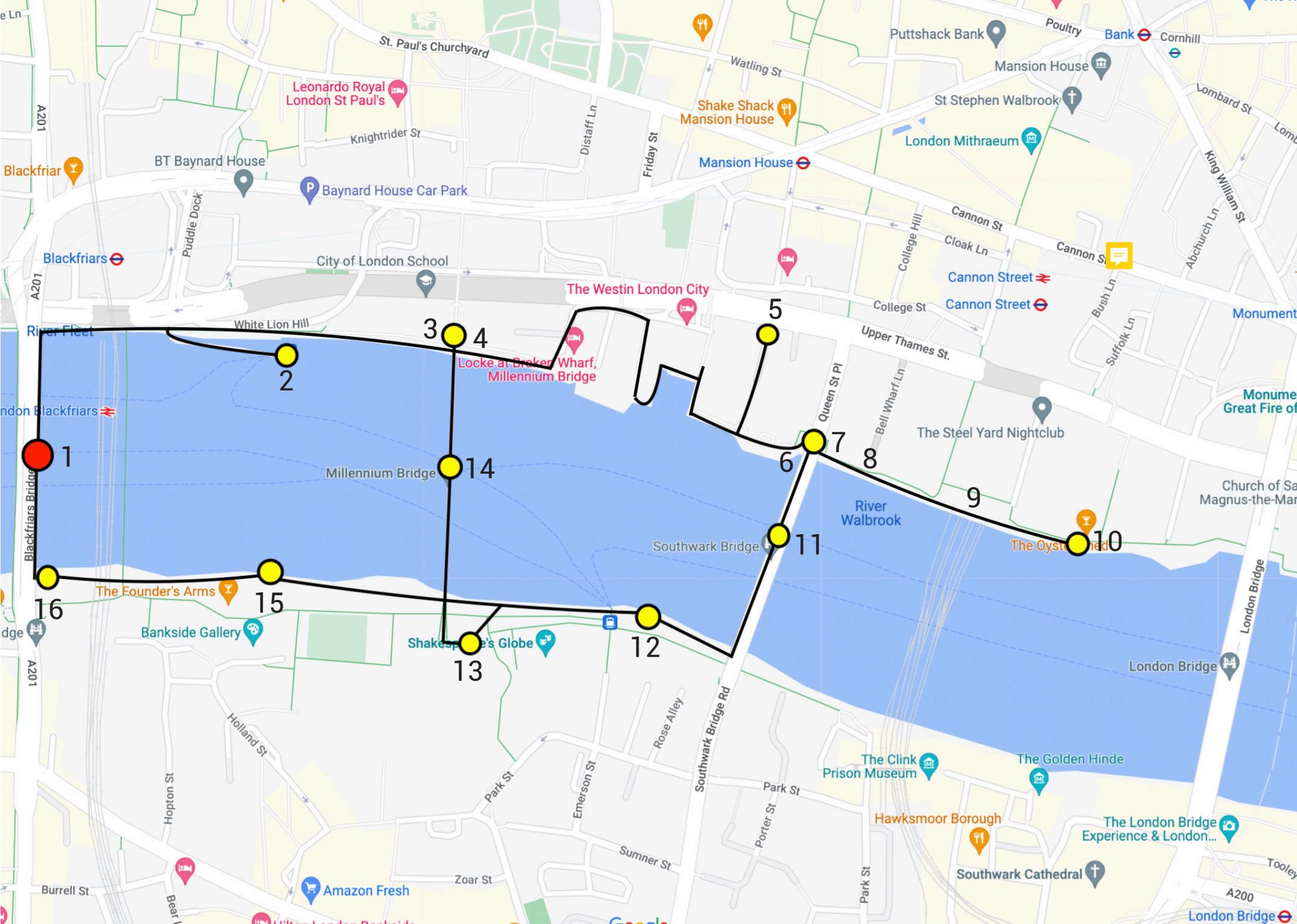
15) Thames waves on steps to the beach as the tide rises, 52 Hopton St, London SE1 9JH, UK

<https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56863>

16) River waves and a folk musician, Blackfriars Bridge, Blackfriars Bridge, London SE1 9UD, UK.

<https://aporee.org/maps/work/?loc=56857>

On the river path one walks through short tunnels under bridges, beside river beaches, more tunnels and open spaces in very quick succession. All have different soundscapes and an acoustic character that constantly change according to weather tides, time of day, season and people's activities. Here the waves slosh on a beach fast disappearing under the rising tide as a folk musician plays in the tunnel under the road. He taps the beat with his foot. There's a certain rhythmic similarity with the waves.



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Leonardo Royal London St Paul's

BT Baynard House

Baynard House Car Park

City of London School

The Westin London City

Locke at Broker Wharf, Millennium Bridge

Millennium Bridge

Southwark Bridge

River Walbrook

London Bridge

Bankside Gallery

Shakespeare's Globe

The Clink Prison Museum

The Golden Hinde

Hawksmoor Borough

The London Bridge Experience & London...

Southwark Cathedral

Amazon Fresh

Google

London Bridge

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

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12

Burrell St

Hopton St

Holland St

Park St

Emerson St

Sumner St

Rose Alley

Southwark Bridge Rd

Porter St

Park St

Tooley

A200

London Bridge

Church of St Magnus-the-Martyr

Monument Great Fire of London

Monument

Abchurch Ln

King William St

Lombard St

Cornhill

Bank

Poultry

Mansion House

St Stephen Walbrook

Puttshack Bank

Watling St

Shake Shack Mansion House

Mansion House

Friday St

Distaff Ln

Knightrider St

St. Paul's Churchyard

Puddle Dock

White Lion Hill

Upper Thames St.

Queen St Pl

Bell Wharf Ln

Bush Ln

Suffolk Ln

Cannon St

Cloak Ln

College Hill

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