

London.

We crossed the river for the first time together
4 girls, 14/15 years old, 4th of September 2006
It was the day The London Paper was first published

We spoke to the men in the streets giving paper away for free
We took seventeen between four of us for no other reason than
We thought this is what you did in central London

“They’re so rich here they give out newspapers without asking for any
money!”

4 girls, 14/15 years old from South London
Where estates separate, streets divide and postcodes define difference –
We were much more similar to our Northern/Eastern/Western cousins
Than I like to care to admit

1 girl, 14 and a half years old from South London
Who before had only crossed the river with her parents
On ill-fated shopping trips to Oxford Street and
In the back of a battered Peugeot 406 to collect Ghanaian relatives
From Heathrow at five in the morning

She began travelling beyond Elephant & Castle roundabout more often
With friends who began to tell their teachers what they were doing;

Yes, Miss, of course us going up into London counts as schoolwork!

Learning latitude from the Northern Line and longitude from the District

That guy who busks behind the Royal Opera House
Plays Chopin’s Nocturne Op.9 No.2 on a battered old blue recorder

You know that building on the Strand was built in 1866
That’s literally mental Miss, that’s like,
Literally even before you were even born!

Citizenship is not so hard to understand
When you see that pregnant woman
Fall over and run to give her a helping hand

If you walk through the right market at six in the morning
You can try food from 87 different countries, at least

I don’t know why no-one’s put a roof on The Globe yet, Miss,

Did everyone in Shakespeare's time just always get really wet?

Question:

If London's big river is 215 miles long and
the average person can walk 3 miles an hour,
how long would it take to walk the length of the Thames?

Answer:

6 days, Sir. Not me though, I'm lazy. And when could you go to the loo?

Question:

If there are 4 coffee shops built within 1 mile of an inner city borough
Between the early-August holidays and the Christmas coffee rush,
How many coffee shops will there be in London in 3 years?

Answer:

Too many.

Question:

How long are we going to be talking about London, Miss?

Haven't we learnt everything yet?

Answer:

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It was the day The London Paper was first published
We sat on the Southbank,
Squatting over sand in the shadow of the millennium's new eye
That every Londoner forgot to go on until circa 2009

We won't forget this day we told ourselves

We won't forget the way this feels

We will keep walking through our city
until our feet are red and raw and sore
and force us all to kneel