

## The Secret Life of London's Bridges

In its long and chequered history, Hungerford Bridge has been neglected, demolished and bombed, before being transformed in one of London's most spectacular makeovers. Isambard Kingdom Brunel built the original suspension bridge to connect the South Bank with Hungerford Market, a competitor to Covent Garden Market located at Charing Cross. At the time, it was one of the longest suspension bridges ever built. The innovative design attracted the attention of pioneering photographers. A fragile snap taken shortly after the bridge's opening in 1845 by William Henry Fox Talbot – who invented the 'calotype' technique that dominated photography until the 20th century – is among the earliest photographs still in existence. But despite its photogenic appeal, the bridge was not a success. Even Brunel wasn't a fan, writing in his diary that he had 'condescended to be the engineer of this, but I shan't give myself much trouble about it'. The bridge was demolished just 15 years after it had been built and was replaced with a crossing made of wroughtiron lattice girders sufficiently strong to bear the steam trains that served the newly opened Charing Cross station. Hungerford Bridge remained a workaday railway bridge until 2002 when it underwent a dramatic conversion. A pair of elegant suspension footbridges were added – named the Golden Jubilee Bridges in honour of the 50th anniversary of the Queen's accession – and suddenly it became one of the Thames's most visually striking and popular crossings. It was a remarkable turnaround, but not the first piece of luck that the bridge has enjoyed – Hungerford is the only Thames bridge to take a direct hit during the Second World War. Fortunately, the bomb didn't detonate.

*"I have always liked Hungerford Bridge. Squirrelling one's way over with pedestrians heading to and from the Festival Hall or Hayward Gallery sometimes feels illicit. It is our nearest equivalent to the Pont des Arts"* – Charles Saumarez Smith

Paul Clements, *Strutt & Parker: &London Magazine*, Spring 2015