

Great bus journeys of the world

Jenny Sheridan plans to explore all the bus routes that pass through Battersea. She starts with the 19.

An intrepid prospect: a diagonal voyage across London from the river up to the distant heights of Finsbury Park. At Battersea Bridge I board the 19 and find my favourite seat – top deck, front row, left hand side. It's low tide and the afternoon sun is shimmering on the grey-brown mud and wrinkled water. To my right Albert Bridge is still shrouded in plastic.

Chelsea

The Chelsea leg of the journey starts with a reminder of hard commercial times: the development in the Kings Road stands empty, many months after completion. But the glamorous and rich fill the tables outside the Bluebird Café (once an ambulance station). The bus passes several garden squares – Paultons, with its voluminous plane tree, narrow Carlyle, flower-filled Markham. Just past Glebe Place is a small terrace of early 18th century houses where Ellen Terry the actor and Carol Reed, director of *The Third Man*, lived.

The bus stops opposite Chelsea Old Town Hall. A bride emerges, in scarlet with a rather brave bouquet of orange flowers. A group of teenage girls in leggings and vest tops blow kisses to each other at the stop, shrieking "Ciao guys, love you." The Methodist Church shows a different face of Chelsea; it runs a drop-in centre and night shelter for homeless people.

Much of the relatively new building we pass has a welcome quirkiness, rather than the bland St George-isms we see on our side of the river. And at Sloane Square there are two superb modern interpretations of distinguished buildings at the Saatchi Gallery (formerly the TA barracks) and Peter Jones.

Round the corner the bus tiptoes into the even more rarefied air of Sloane Street. I love this part: it makes me laugh. From the top of

the bus you can see into the palaces of luxury shopping – Armani, Dior, Prada. They are invariably empty, peopled only by slim black-clad staff with nothing to do. Presumably they are forbidden from reading, or dancing the polka or playing ping pong with rubies, so they stand about, seeking forlornly for customers.



Hyde Park corner

The billionaires' ghetto at One Hyde Park lies ahead after the usual bottleneck at the top of Sloane Street. The Ukrainian oligarch who paid £136 million for a flat – sorry, "residence" – apparently pays only £1,375 in council tax.

Hyde Park Corner, and we enter tourist London. No horse guards trotting through Decimus Burton's arch today, but I nod to Battersea sculptor Charles Sargeant Jagger's sombre war memorial. I wonder if the tourists queuing outside the Hard Rock Café have noticed the Athenaeum Hotel's exuberant planted wall, now sporting pink fuchsias and yellow daisies among the green vertical jungle.

Green Park's on our right, Lord Palmerston's sadly deserted mansion on the left, then there's the Royal Academy with its splendid courtyard, St James's Church and the Ritz. More tourists on the steps



around Eros at Piccadilly Circus, then on, between Soho and Chinatown, into theatreland. The crowds thronging the pavements – tourists, workers, locals – look more diverse here.

Bloomsbury

Up Charing Cross Road there's an enormous Crossrail hole where once stood the Astoria. We enter another of central London's villages, Bloomsbury, stopping outside Hawksmoor's fine St George's Church (left) before glimpsing the British Museum and refreshing ourselves with the green of Bloomsbury Square. James Smith and Sons advertises not only its famous umbrellas but "life preservers, daggers and swordsticks", a reminder of the dangers of 19th century London.

A homeless young man sits with a bottle of wine in a doorway in faceless Theobald's Road. There's a quotation from Nietzsche on Conway Hall: "Is Man one of God's blunders or is God one of Man's?" There's more green at Gray's Inn, where lawyers' quills have scratched for 700 years. Now it's uphill into Clerkenwell. Rosebery Avenue is a viaduct, giving exciting side-views into streets below. The Old China Hand pub offers ping pong, Sadlers Wells offers *Fela!*

Islington

Islington was once a fashionable Georgian village, rather similar to Clapham. I can still see its elegant side-streets and squares, as well as Upper Street's chain stores, vintage clothes shops and trendy restaurants and the 1920s town hall, stiff with civic pride. So far, so familiar,

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but at Highbury Corner I enter unknown territory. In St Paul's Road there's scruffy paintwork, an organic restaurant, tomatoes in window boxes, then a 'lifestyle boutique' called Pixie Moon. . We cross a railway bridge, the Overground from homely Clapham Junction.

Many cultures

The bus swings north-east and even further uphill. The far north feels different from down south. The roads are wider, the houses bigger, there's an airier, more spacious, top-of-the-world feel. We reach the top of the big dipper and start to trundle downhill. Ah, I know where I must be, though I can't see the

stadium.... There's the Arsenal Fish Bar, the Gunners Tavern and Arsenal barber, the Emirates Grill. An area of small independent shops and restaurants it reflects many cultures: Vietnamese, Arab, Turkish, Italian. There are several Middle Eastern cake shops, dripping with delicious calories. I'm glad I'm on the bus, far above temptation. I spot a tiny corner shop with a clay oven, specializing in naan bread.



Street names

It's a literate area too; there are at least two charity bookshops. And what interesting street names. I

wonder what the background is for Melody Lane, not to mention Vivian Comma Close. (I learn later via Google that Vivian Comma was a calypso singer and kite flyer, originally from Trinidad).

Past the well-known mosque, we reach at last the 19's terminus, Finsbury Park Station. It has been a fascinating afternoon, but it did take over an hour and a half, so perhaps I'll get the tube home.

One of the great bus journeys of the world? Well, maybe it's not up there with the Karakorum Highway or Saigon to Bangkok. But it starts from home, it has history, green spaces and the wonders of London and best of all, for those of us lucky enough to have a Freedom Pass, it's FREE.

Thrive is thriving

Susan Stuart, manager of the project in Battersea Park, describes its current work

Thrive uses gardening to change the lives of people with disabilities. In October 2010, HRH Princess Alexandra visited us to celebrate completion of the first phase of the Battersea Garden Project's redevelopment. She was joined by over 30 of Thrive's clients and volunteers to open the Herb Garden facilities, a renovated workshop and training room, a purpose-built glasshouse and redesigned gardens.

Second phase

Thrive has now raised £320,000 of the £510,000 needed for the second and major phase of the project, the creation of purpose-built facilities at the Main Garden. With those funds in place we're ready to start but delays in agreeing the leases to provide security of tenure mean that the building is unlikely to commence before late autumn.

In the meantime, we're still busy fund raising. Having raised the majority of funds so far from charitable trusts and legacies, we're hoping the local community will step forward! Please help by coming to

one of our fund raising events or you can find out how to donate by contacting us directly. Our wonderful plants – just as good as the garden centre but better value – are popular at local events. This year we took part in the Open Squares weekend, Summer in the Square and Newton Prep's summer fair. This autumn we're holding a Halloween Fest for children on 29 October and a Christmas coffee morning and fair on 24 November.

Rapid growth

Despite the disruption from the ongoing works, the project has grown rapidly. In 2010, 288 disabled people took part in our gardening programmes, that's up from 118 in 2009. Thrive gardeners are justifiably proud of what they achieve. Our work to renovate and restore Battersea Park's Old English Garden is really showing some results now and groups of Thrive gardeners are also taking part in the restoration of the gardens at Fulham Palace. Our work skills programme *Working it Out* has been

running for just over 18 months and many people are now well on their way to getting a job or securing a college place. Earlier this month over 50 clients came along to an event at Fulham Palace. They heard a talk from industry specialist Jonathan Pettit about the huge range of career opportunities, met with careers advisers, found out about courses and were able to network with employers.

Life-changing

Rob, pictured below, started gardening when he met Battersea horticultural therapist Woody at the Springfield Hospital. Since joining Working it Out, Rob has got a job in a garden centre and says "meeting Woody from Thrive has changed my life". Find out more about Rob on our website (thrive.org.uk)

