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# Great Bus Journeys of the World No 7

Mike Roden takes a trip from south to north on the 295



My starting point today is the bus stop on Falcon Road just before the railway bridge. This shabby gateway to Clapham Junction still needs a lot of work to make it look welcoming. Anyway, off we go, turning up St Johns Hill. On one side there's the mock Tudor frontage of the Windsor Castle pub which dates from 1890 and on the other is the Grand which opened as a music hall in 1900, and has since served as a cinema, bingo hall, and nightclub. It has now been fully refurbished and (in PR speak) 'is again poised to retake its place as a jewel in the crown of music venues'.

## Chad Varah

The bus turns down Plough Road, dominated by the Winstanley Estate. The row of run down houses next to St Peter's Church has recently been demolished and the vicarage with its splendid display of wisteria is no longer hidden. Chad Varah, founder of the Samaritans was vicar of St Peter's during the 1950s.

After heading left down York Road the bus is soon circling the Wandsworth Gyration roundabout and crossing the river via Wandsworth Bridge it heads into Hammersmith and Fulham. In 879 Danish invaders, sailing up the Thames, wintered near here. During the 18th century this part of Fulham had a reputation for debauchery, and its gambling haunts and brothels were a magnet for the dissolute wealthy of London. The Wandsworth Bridge Tavern was built long after that in 1881, and is now confusingly called the Hurlingham – the upmarket club of the same name is more than half a mile away – and I'm pretty sure they

don't play polo in the pub garden.

The trees along Wandsworth Bridge Road have been comprehensively pruned and look very skeletal against a grey and forbidding sky. Here on the edge of Chelsea many of the shops are a little more upmarket, with a fair number of furniture, kitchen, bathroom and fabric stores. As the bus approaches the New Kings Road the road becomes more residential. Ahead is the edge of Eel Brook Common named after the brook which ran through it. A quick right and left, and we're on our way up Harwood Road to Fulham Broadway.

Slowing to a halt at this busy crossroads, we stop near Fulham Old Town Hall, opened in 1890 and now a shadow of its former self. This Grade II listed building has been on the market for a very long time.

## Emporium?

A year ago the building was set to be transformed into a 'quintessentially British' lifestyle emporium when the council agreed to sell to an American company best known for making McLaren baby buggies. At the moment it still looks like a quintessentially British abandoned building needing an awful lot of TLC.

On we trundle along Dawes Road, another mainly residential street. Just after the Mitre pub the bus stops at Shorrolds Road. It was on Monday 28 July 1986 that estate agent Suzy Lamplugh went missing after meeting a client named in her diary as 'Mr Kipper' at a property on this road. Her body has never been found nor her killer convicted.

We pass Charing Cross

## Sights to see:

**The Grand, Clapham Junction;  
Fulham Old Town Hall;  
Albert Chevalier, music hall star**

Hospital which moved from near Charing Cross in 1973 when a new building was opened on the site of the former Fulham Hospital.

## Holst

The bus heads under the Hammersmith Flyover, and into the bus station. After a very short wait, we're out again into the traffic passing the Hammersmith Apollo, opened in 1932 as the Gaumont Palace cinema, and undergoing many changes of name and use since. On Shepherds Bush Road we pass the imposing frontage of the Grade II listed Hammersmith library, built in 1905 and now about to receive a £2million revamp to enable the borough's scattered archives to be stored in one place.

We're in a slightly more affluent neighbourhood now as we come into Brook Green. Gustav Holst taught at the nearby St Paul's Girls School and wrote the well-known 'Brook Green Suite' for strings for its junior orchestra.

A map of 1841 shows that this area was largely undeveloped, with much open farmland. The name Shepherds Bush may have originated from the use of common land here as a resting point for shepherds on their way to Smithfield Market. As in so much of London residential development began inexorably in the late nineteenth century, as London's population expanded.

Now this is the home of the O2 Shepherds Bush Empire and the

award-winning Bush Theatre. The area has changed enormously in the last few years of course, with the building of the Westfield shopping centre, and for years was in traffic chaos. Everything is much more organised now, and the bus turns swiftly away from Westfield, past the very posh residences on Royal Crescent and onto St Anns Road.

### Blue plaque

On the wall of 17 St Anns Villas there's the first blue plaque I've spotted on the journey. It commemorates music hall star Albert Chevalier (1861-1923) whose most famous song was 'My Old Dutch', about a couple who've been married for forty years, and (as performed by him on stage) are about to be separated for ever as they're sent into segregated dormitories in

the workhouse. Not a dry eye in the house! 'Dutch' of course is rhyming slang for Duchess of Fife – wife.

We're nearly at our destination now, past Latimer Road station, under Westway, and along almost entirely residential streets until we reach Ladbroke Grove named after James Weller Ladbroke, who developed this then rural area in the mid nineteenth century. It's just over an hour since I left Clapham Junction and the bus reaches its final stop, the Ladbroke Grove Sainsbury's superstore, situated on a prime site between the canal and the railway.

It was here that the Ladbroke Grove rail crash between a commuter train and an express occurred on 5 October 1999, killing 31 people and injuring more than 520. The inexperienced commuter train driver

had accelerated through a red signal which, an inquiry later ruled, was hard to see and had been 'passed at danger' seven times before. Major changes in the formal responsibilities for management and regulation of safety of UK rail transport ensued. A memorial garden, partially overlooking the site, is accessible from the adjacent Sainsburys car park.

### Overground

It is now ridiculously cold for the middle of May, and it is raining, and after a brief call to inspect the plumbing facilities inside the store, I consult the various buses on offer to me, and step onto the next 295 bus to go back to Shepherds Bush and catch the Overground swiftly back to Clapham Junction.

## Give a helping hand to the birds and the bees

You can be a wildlife saviour on your balcony, says Jenny Sheridan

I don't want to depress you, but the country's wildlife is in decline. The recent report *State of Nature* paints a sad picture of species dying off, ranging from skylarks to hedgehogs. In London, the loss of birds and the invertebrates on which they feed is caused by the reduction in wild spaces, due to the building boom and to house-owners concreting or decking over their gardens.

But all is not lost. All of us can do something to keep our capital green and biodiverse. In this article I will focus on how you can make a difference if you have a tiny garden or just a balcony.

### Buzzing

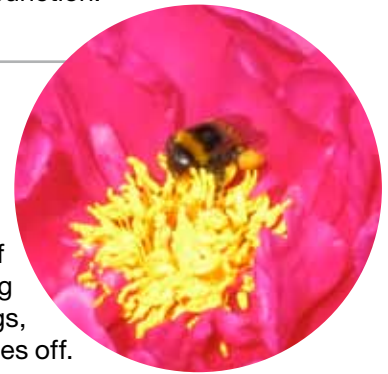
The first thing to do is use your eyes constructively. The Thrive garden and the Old English Garden in Battersea Park are good places to spot bees and other insects, as well as being blissfully relaxing places to sit or wander. Stop and look at the shrubs and flowers; which ones are buzzing with bees? Are there butterflies fluttering nearby? Make a note of their names (the flowers, not the butterflies) or ask one of the Thrive volunteer gardeners. Then beetle off to Homebase to pick up a packet of seeds or a plant.

If you have space for one or two shrubs then try to mimic a natural hedge. Birds love to hop among the twigs of hazel, cotoneaster or berberis, all of them attractive shrubs. Hang a bird feeder among them, so that birds feel safe from predators as they approach their food. Sparrows, which are in decline generally, seem to flourish in some parts of Battersea. Blue tits, great tits and dunnocks and, if you're lucky, greenfinches will also come to a feeder.

Buddleia is well known for attracting butterflies. While the common kind is too large for a balcony – unless it's growing out of the brickwork – you can now buy patio plants. A smaller butterfly plant is the sedum, which flowers late in the summer or even autumn, when there are few nectar-bearing flowers around. 'Autumn Joy' and 'Xenox' are two attractive varieties. If you have a shady wall, covering it with ivy gives shelter to insects, nectar for butterflies and winter shelter and food for birds.

Ponds are great for birds to drink and bathe in. Not so easy on a balcony, you might think. But an old casserole can make a birdbath, and it's fun to see a young blackbird step in and shake itself vigorously,

droplets of water flying off its wings, before it flies off.



### Nourishment

It is quite hard to have a succession of flowers throughout the year in a small space, without spending a great deal. However, try to have something in flower both early and late. Pulmonarias (lungwort) are trouble-free, flower February to March and provide nourishment to early-flying bumblebees. Herbs are as useful to insects as they are in the kitchen, especially rosemary, thyme and hyssop. Lavender also attracts insects and needs little looking after, though you need to cut it back carefully after flowering. Watching a bumblebee disappearing into a foxglove is a rural joy perfectly accessible to Londoners.

One plus point of balcony gardening is the lack of one species of wildlife: slugs and snails are less likely to make it to higher levels. *Wandsworth Council has an Eco fund [www.wandsworth.gov.uk/ecofund](http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/ecofund). Grants are available to groups or individuals who have a project to improve the local environment. Deadline 31 July 2013.*