
Great Bus Journeys of the World No.2

Mike Roden takes the 49 from Battersea to White City.



There was a time when to ride the 49 bus from its terminus, the intrepid traveller would need to make their way to Crystal Palace. Luckily, these days the starting point is on Battersea Rise.

So off we go, turning left onto St John's Road. This street saw the worst of the SW11 disturbances and looting last year and the Party Shop on Lavender Hill is still boarded up after the disastrous fire. Luckily it soon found a temporary home in Debenhams (which of course will always be known as Arding and Hobbs by older locals).

Lost river

This road junction is particularly chaotic at the moment because 'improvements' are taking place, and things aren't helped by the new Travelodge taking shape behind its yellow fencing. Eventually the lights change to let us across onto Falcon Road where we pass the Falcon Inn, a reminder that this road follows the course of one of London's 'lost rivers'. The Falconbrook begins as twin streams in Tooting and Streatham, merging not far from Clapham Common and heading north to Battersea. At Ingrave street the hidden stream turns westward, and probably emerges into the Thames near Cotton Row.

One side of Falcon Road reminds us how much was swept away in post-war clearance, dominated as it is by the Winstanley and Kambala Estates. To our right it's mostly cafés, takeaways and hairdressers. Wetherspoons Asparagus pub on

the corner harks back to the famous 'Battersea bundles'.

Turning right onto Battersea Park Road we find ourselves on another street with limited shopping opportunities: takeaways, a few charity shops, a Sainsbury's local and two chemists. Things are redeemed a little by the famous Antipasto, whose half price nights ensure that every table is taken, and where you're almost certain to bump into another Society member. And a couple of doors away is the Latchmere pub, with its award-winning Theatre 503, (see page 13).

Left on to Battersea Bridge road now, and almost at once we pass the flats which stand on the site of the Bridge Lane theatre. This provided a home in its final years for a theatre group run by Corin and Vanessa Redgrave. Perhaps a good place for a commemorative plaque.

Royal College

Just before we reach Battersea Bridge we see the magnificent new Royal College of Art Dyson building, to be opened officially in the autumn. The public face of the building with its large ground floor exhibition gallery should go a long way to help revitalise this part of north Battersea.

Up and over our wonderful river and into Chelsea and along the King's Road following for a few minutes the same route travelled by Jenny Sheridan on the 19 bus (*Battersea Matters* Autumn 2011). Turning up Sydney Street, we pass St Luke's church, built in 1820, to replace the

then parish church – now known as Chelsea Old Church – which was too small for the area's growing population. Among other claims to fame, Dickens' ill-fated marriage to Catherine Hogarth began here in 1836, and I'm told that St Luke's has the tallest tower of any London parish church.

Gallic

Onwards to South Kensington station, gateway to the museum quarter. There is a Gallic flavour to many of the shops and restaurants here – the French consulate is nearby, and on Harrington Street we pass the Institut Français, which incorporates Ciné Lumière. Bute Street opposite has a farmer's market every Saturday – particularly good for vegetables.

It's always busy round Gloucester Road station, the traffic is very heavy and the going is slow but it does give us a chance to consider Gloucester Road. Although it has its fair share of bars and bistros, the street still retains a London village feel, with useful things like dry cleaners, a hardware shop, and a large newsagents and stationers.

At Palace Gate we have a very good view of Kensington Palace through the winter trees. Of course it will forever be associated with Princess Diana and that strange week after her death when the area in front of the palace was buried under a vast mound of more than a million bouquets of flowers.

Lunchtime is approaching, and the shops along Kensington High Street



are getting busy. The flagship store of Derry and Toms has long gone of course, but the 1930s Art Deco building remains, with Marks and Spencer taking pride of place. The famed Roof Gardens are still there too, with over 70 full size trees, a flowing stream stocked with fish and three resident flamingos. Well worth a visit if you get the chance.

There are few other points of interest here. George Gilbert Scott designed St Mary Abbots church, on your right, which was completed in 1869. And the Commonwealth Institute in front of Holland Park, abandoned for more than a decade, will soon be given a new lease of life as the new home for the Design Museum, if an £80m scheme goes ahead.

Bedsitland

We are now almost at our destination as we turn right up Holland Road which is very long, and frankly very boring, apart from the odd glimpse of the Olympia conference centre. This is bed-sit land with a vengeance – large houses which need a lick of paint, a few convenience stores, and here and there a cheap hotel.

The bus used to turn into Shepherd's Bush Green at this point and circle round for the return journey but now it heads inexorably towards the Westfield shopping complex.

Do take the trouble to go right to the end of the line, and take a look at the White City bus station, especially the bus garage. This impressive building was originally a generating

Sights to see:

The RCA Dyson Building, Chelsea Old Church, Gloucester Road village, Kensington Roof Garden, Westfield Shopping Centre, the restored White City Bus Garage

station for the Central line, but eventually fell into disrepair. It has now been lovingly restored as an overnight bus depot, with its glazed cream, green and brown bricks, typical of London Transport colours of a century ago.

It's just a short walk back to the Westfield centre for a cup of coffee, and as this whole journey took nearly an hour, we make our way to Shepherd's Bush station and take the Overground back to Clapham Junction.

