
Great Bus Journeys of the World No 19

Mike Roden takes the scenic route to the City on the number 11.



Back in 1906 when route no 11 was introduced it ran from Victoria to Hammersmith via Chelsea. Nowadays it sets off from Fulham Town Hall and arrives at Liverpool Street station taking in some of the most historic sites in the City. You'll have to imagine the first part of its meanderings via New Kings Road, as I join it at the Beaufort Street stop in Chelsea.

Kings Road has been covered comprehensively in other bus journeys (go to batterseasociety.org.uk) so forgive me if I shut my eyes during this part of journey and open them again as the bus arrives at Sloane Square. This is dominated by the Peter Jones store which started life here in 1877, originally occupying just three properties, eventually expanding to cover most of the block. The current building dates from the 1930s.

Mozart

Heading down Lower Sloane Street the bus turns onto Pimlico Road which is now overshadowed by the towers of the Chelsea Barracks development. A bronze statue of Mozart aged eight stands in the centre of Orange Square, marking the prodigy's stay in a house in nearby Ebury Street in 1764.

And so we trundle onto Buckingham Palace Road towards Victoria Station. There are signs that the manic home improvements which have been taking place for ever are coming to an end and a sparkling new ticket hall opened on Bressenden Place in January. By this time next year there will apparently be step free access throughout the station. This will afford some relief to

those tourists who insist on bringing suitcases the size of small wardrobes.

The bus weaves its way to Victoria Street. Rather like the station the interior of Westminster Cathedral is still not quite finished, but it's been in that state for rather longer having been consecrated in 1910. For a modest fee you can take the lift up the cathedral bell tower and enjoy tremendous views over London and beyond.

There is a brief hiatus during the winter when tourism slows to a trickle, but the floodgates have opened again and the visitors have returned to Parliament Square staring in wonder, or bewilderment or possibly both at the Mother of Parliaments while taking selfies with Big Ben behind them.

Parliament Street becomes Whitehall, and the Cenotaph approaches. I told the story of how in 1920 this 'empty tomb' became the focus of remembrance for the all the unknown warriors of the great war in my account of the 87 bus journey (*Battersea Matters* Spring 2013).

Steely-eyed armed police keep an eye on the cluster of tourists gathered outside the gates of Downing Street. There are lots of interesting things I could tell you about number 10, but instead I'll pass on the information that the house's last private inhabitant was called Mr Chicken. Frustratingly we know nothing else about him.

Scaffold

However, we do know that the Banqueting House, just up the road, is all that remains of the Palace of Whitehall. In January 1649 Charles I stepped out of a window onto a

hastily built scaffold to meet the axeman. These days visitors can lie back on giant bean bags and stare up at the magnificent Rubens ceiling.

The bus moves swiftly past Trafalgar Square and we enter theatreland. First up is the Adelphi. Since it opened in November 1806 it has operated under no fewer than seven different names and from four different buildings on the site.

Luxury

Further along is the Savoy Theatre built by Richard D'Oyly Carte on the site of the old Savoy Palace as a showcase for the work of Gilbert and Sullivan. The profits from their comic operas enabled D'Oyly Carte to finance the building of London's first luxury hotel, unsurprisingly named the Savoy. Afternoon tea there will set you back anything from £52 upwards, with not a Marmite sandwich in sight.

The Lyceum Theatre has been showing *The Lion King* since 1999, which makes you wonder whether there's anyone left who hasn't seen it. The theatre itself arrived here in 1765. In its early days it hosted a variety of entertainments including Madame Tussaud's first London exhibition. At the end of the nineteenth century Henry Irving and Ellen Terry made frequent appearances here.

Now we take a short detour along Aldwych. In Anglo-Saxon times there was a village here called Lundenwic (London trading centre) probably using the mouth of the Fleet river as a harbour. Abandoned by the time of Alfred the Great it became known as Ealdwic (old trading town) and by 1211 its name was recorded as Aldewich.

Left to right: A statue of young Mozart, Orange Square; the face of Big Ben's clock; the Savoy Hotel; El Vino's, Fleet Street; statue of Queen Anne outside St Paul's (photo Colin Smith), St Bride's (photo John Salmon)



Leaving Aldwych, we pass the Victorian Gothic hulk of the Royal Courts of Justice on one side and St Clement Danes on the other. One of Wren's post Great Fire churches, it was severely damaged during the Blitz. After restoration in 1958 it was adopted as the central church of the RAF.

We're now entering the city at Temple Bar where the Strand becomes Fleet Street. A stone gateway designed by Christopher Wren stood here until 1878 when – to ease traffic congestion – it was replaced with the current winged dragon memorial. On the right is Inner Temple Lane leading down to Temple church, and the Inner and Middle Temple Inns of Court. Wren's original arch can now be seen in Paternoster Square next to St Paul's.

The church of St Dunstan-in-the-West is famed for its chiming clock, with figures of two giants, perhaps representing Gog and Magog, who strike the bells with their clubs. In 1828, when the old church was demolished, the clock was sold to the Marquess of Hertford who installed it at his house in Regent's Park. It was returned to the church by press baron Lord Rothermere in 1935.

El Vino's

And there is our first mention of Fleet Street's long association with newspapers. Strange how little is left of that era. But there's El Vino's wine bar (no longer refusing to serve women at the bar) and Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese pub to remind us of the legendary liquid lunches that journalists enjoyed before dashing back to yell 'Hold the front page'.

You can hardly miss the art deco magnificence of the *Daily Express* building, which opened in 1932. Opposite that building is St Bride's Avenue leading to the church of the same name. During restoration following Blitz damage it was found to stand on a site which had been home to at least six other churches. It's been dubbed the journalists' cathedral.

Replica

Onto Ludgate Hill we approach St Paul's. Wren's masterpiece was not completed until 1712, during Queen Anne's reign, and a statue of the monarch was erected at that time. The original statue deteriorated so much that in 1886 the Corporation of London stumped up the cash to commission a replica, and that's what we see now. You can attend Sunday service or choral evensong here without paying, but they discourage sightseeing so you'll have to stay in your seat.

The bus stop near St Paul's is a good place to break your journey if you want to visit Tate Modern, as you can walk down to the river and cross the Millennium Bridge. On the way you'll pass the Firefighters' Memorial which records the names of over 1000 men and women who have died on duty in the fire service.

The Bank of England has had its home on Threadneedle Street since 1734. I've learned that term 'Old Lady of Threadneedle Street' may refer to a real person called Sarah Whitehead. Her brother Philip who worked for the bank was executed for forgery in 1811. Sarah became 'unhinged' with grief and every day for the next 25

years she went to the Bank asking for her brother. When she died she was buried in the old churchyard that became the Bank's garden, and according to legend her ghost has often been seen here. Nothing wrong with a good legend, I say.

Onto Broad Street now and we're near journey's end. It's taken well over an hour, and there's not much more to report, apart from a glimpse of the former Natwest Tower, now known somewhat boringly as Tower 42.

And so we reach the rather shabby back door of Liverpool Street Station. Time for a coffee before heading back to Battersea.

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