
Great Bus Journeys of the World No 21

Mike Roden travels from Putney to Warren Street on the no 14 bus



The bus starts at the excellent Green Man pub which has stood on the edge of Putney Heath since around 1700. This area was notorious for the activity of highwaymen who preyed on those staggering home from the pub, and a rather improbable legend recalls that Dick Turpin stored his guns upstairs.

There was apparently a local saying “pistols for two and breakfast for one”, recalling the duels fought on the Heath. In May 1798, the then Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger fought a duel with William Tierney, the MP for Southwark. Each fired twice but all the shots missed. Sounds more exciting than a Commons debate!

Copperfield

The bus makes short work of the trip down the hill, arriving at the station which has been serving Putney since 1846. The railway began a housing boom in what had been a quiet riverside community and city gents and their families flocked there.

Parts of St Mary's Church near Putney Bridge date from the fifteenth century. The church was substantially rebuilt in 1836 with more extensive work finally completed in 1982 following a 1973 arson attack that gutted the building. In 1647 it hosted the Putney Debates on the English constitution, and much later Dickens set the ill-advised wedding between David Copperfield and Dora Spenlow here.

Until 1729 the ferry was the only way to cross the river. The nearest bridges then were at Kingston and London Bridge. It's said that in 1720 Sir Robert Walpole's plan to go to Fulham was frustrated by the

ferryman's refusal to budge from the pub on the far side and fetch him. Furious, he began the campaign which resulted in the bridge being built.

Apparently Putney Bridge is the only bridge in Britain to have an ancient church at both ends. Apart from the fifteenth century tower dominating the church of All Saints Fulham, most of the present building was rebuilt in 1880 – 1 by Sir Arthur Blomfield.

The 1976 horror movie *The Omen* starring Gregory Peck begins in nearby Bishop's Park, and ends with a bizarre accident where a priest is impaled by a lightning conductor on the church tower that is dislodged when it is hit by lightning.

The bus heads up Fulham High Street, passing a pub with the unlikely name of the Temperance. This grade II listed building was built in 1910 for a company called Temperance Billiard Halls Ltd. They had several such halls in London. Hard to think now of billiards being associated with non-alcoholic beverages.

The bus turns onto Fulham Road, dominated here by residential property ranging from Victorian villas to modern apartment blocks.

Fulham Library was built in 1908 by Yorkshire born architect Henry Hare who included an etching or carving of a hare in all his buildings. Couldn't spot it, I fear, as we whisked past on our way to Chelsea.

We pass the Fulham Broadway shopping complex which includes the underground station which until 1952 was called Walham Green.

And now we get a good view of Stamford Bridge the home of Chelsea FC since the club was founded in

1905. The ground opened in 1877 and for a quarter of a century was used for athletics rather than football.

A couple of minutes more and we stop outside Chelsea and Westminster Hospital which recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of its move to this site. Until 1989 the site was home to St Stephens Hospital.

At the junction with Beaufort Street is the Cineworld cinema which opened in December 1930 as the short-lived Forum theatre. Closing as a theatre it became an ABC cinema. Over the years it has increased the number of screens and gone through several changes of ownership

Medicine

The far end of Fulham Road is dominated by medicine. The Royal Brompton Hospital started life in the 1840 as the Hospital for Consumption and Diseases of the Chest and is still the UK's the largest specialist heart and lung medical centre. Its next-door neighbour is the Royal Marsden founded in 1851 by Dr William Marsden as the Free Cancer Hospital, which was the world's first hospital dedicated to the study and treatment of cancer.

This part of London was dubbed Albertopolis after Prince Albert encouraged the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition in 1851 to use the exhibition proceeds to buy land to create a cultural and scientific area. Turning up Cromwell Place the Natural History Museum is ahead of us, and a right turn takes us past the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The site across the road from the museum was once owned by the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee. Plans to build the

Left to right: William Pitt the Younger; Bishop's Park, Fulham; the Royal Brompton Hospital; the Ismaili Centre, Kensington; Denmark Street



Note: All of the Great Bus Journeys have been cleverly extracted from *Battersea Matters* and can be downloaded from www.batterseabus.co.uk



long-awaited National Theatre there were dropped because the site was felt to be too small.

Instead we have the Ismaili Centre – a religious, cultural and social space specifically designed for the Ismaili Muslim community in Europe. This elegant building is often open to the public during Open House weekend and is worth a visit – especially the wonderful roof garden.

On Brompton Road we pass the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (aka Brompton Oratory) which dates from the mid-1870s. We move from God to Mammon as we pass Harrods, currently owned by the state of Qatar. The store's motto is *Omnia Omnibus Ubique* (all things for all people, everywhere). It should probably continue *Si Potes Praestare* (if you can afford it).

At the end of Park Lane we stop at Hyde Park Corner station. The nearby Wellington Arch is worth a visit. Go up to the top and gaze across at Apsley House, the home of the Iron Duke for many years. This once had the address No 1 London. These days you should write to 149 Piccadilly W1J 7NT, though it's rumoured that letters to the original address will still be delivered. Give it a try and let me know how you get on.

The bus safely negotiates the traffic hell that is Hyde Park Corner and we arrive at the Hard Rock Café. This international business which includes cafes, hotels, and casinos started here back in 1971, the brainchild of two young Americans. In 1979, the cafe began covering its walls with rock and roll memorabilia, a tradition which expanded to others in the chain. In 2007 Hard Rock was sold to the Seminole Indian Tribe of

Florida and the company HQ is now in Orlando. Strange but true!

Sometimes the traffic along Piccadilly makes it quicker to walk, but the bus moves fairly swiftly alongside Green Park – said to have originally been swampy burial ground for lepers from the nearby hospital at St James's – past the Athenaeum Hotel with its gorgeous planted green wall and the Japanese Embassy.

The Ritz, that emblem of luxury or decadence (depending on your point of view) opened in 1906. It became popular at the end of the first world war, and was the place to stay for politicians, socialites, writers and actors. Noël Coward was a notable fan.

Livelier

The Royal Academy is celebrating 250 years since its foundation and its anniversary summer exhibition has been curated by Grayson Perry. As you might expect it's a little livelier than usual. The Times called it 'an enthusiastically democratic spectacle that breathes a gust of new life into longstanding tradition'.

Nearing Piccadilly Circus now, we see St James Piccadilly. Designed by Christopher Wren this was consecrated in July 1684. The church was severely damaged in the Blitz. Luckily many of the precious interior fittings had been protected prior to the raid and survived, including the marble font where both William Blake and William Pitt the Elder (father of the duellist we met on Putney Heath) were baptised.

Piccadilly Circus was created in 1819. It was not until 1893 that the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain was erected in honour of Lord Shaftesbury.

Originally in the centre of the circus, in the 1980s it was moved to the southwestern corner. Commonly referred to as Eros the famous statue is in fact his brother Anteros, who apparently symbolises Shaftesbury's selfless love and concern for the poor.

We're now on the last leg of our journey heading up Shaftesbury Avenue. The road was built between 1877 and 1886 by the architect George Vulliamy and the engineer Sir Joseph Bazalgette to provide a north-south traffic artery through the crowded districts of St. Giles and Soho.

This of course is the heart of theatreland, with the Lyric, Apollo, Gielgud and Queen's theatres clustered together on the west side of the road before we reach Charing Cross Road where we find the Palace Theatre, noted for its long-running shows. And true to form the award-winning *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* is still showing.

J K Rowling is also responsible for a surge of interest in Denmark Street further along. Her Robert Galbraith novels star Cormoran Strike, the private eye with a prosthetic leg who lives and works in an office above one of the shops there. Fans of the books and now the recent TV serialisation regard it as a place of pilgrimage!

I realise that I've have been here on your behalf quite recently. I'm now retracing part of the journey I took on the 24 to Hampstead. (For a detailed account see *Battersea Matters* Summer 2017 which you'll find at the newsletters section on our website).

Thanks to years of building work, the road taking us past Tottenham Court Road station is not in great condition, and the bus bumps and lurches along. We cross the notoriously polluted Oxford Street, which Westminster Council has decreed will never be pedestrianised. (Never say never!)

A few more minutes and we arrive at Warren Street station – journey's end. I make my way down to the Victoria Line and am home in just over half an hour.

For anyone planning to try this trip I'd recommend starting here, finishing at the Green Man for a well-deserved drink. I assure you nobody's seen a highwayman for ages...