

GREAT BUS JOURNEYS OF THE WORLD No 30

Mike Roden travels from Putney to Baker Street on the 74.



My journey begins at Clapham Junction station where I take a train to Putney. It's then a short walk down the High Street to catch the 74 bus and set off towards the river. There was a ferry here from the 1300s until the first timber bridge was built in 1729. The current bridge – designed by Joseph Bazalgette – dates from 1870. At the bridge we pass St Mary's Church, in 1647 the venue for the Putney Debates on the English constitution. It was on this bridge that in March 1953 the serial killer John Christie – mentioned in my recent trip on the 52 bus – was arrested.

This is the only bridge in England with a church at either end. All Saints Fulham occupies a site where there has been a church for more than 900 years though most of the current building dates from the late nineteenth century.

Nice café

Heading along Fulham Palace Road we pass Bishops Park where you'll find Fulham Palace, home for 1300 years to the Bishops of London. In 1973 Hammersmith Council took charge and it's now a museum and conference centre (with a nice café). The bus passes Fulham Cemetery – generally known as 'Fulham Old', which opened in 1865. We turn right onto Lillie Road past the Recreation Ground. Sunday league football has been played here for generations.

This road was laid out in 1826 on land owned by Sir John Scott Lillie, but most of its late Georgian housing has long gone. Only its 1835 public house, originally 'The Lillie Arms' is still there. It's one of the oldest pubs in Fulham and was renamed the 'Lillie Langtry' in 1979. Known as 'the Jersey Lily' Langtry was a successful actress and courtesan who lived in this area. One of her many

admirers was Bertie, Prince of Wales (the future Edward VII), who may have popped in for a cup of tea on one of his visits to the nearby Exhibition Grounds.

The site on the other side of Lillie Road was once occupied by the Empress Theatre. It was built in the late nineteenth century for flamboyant Hungarian showman Imre Kiralfy. It was large enough to house thrilling epics such as 'Nero and the Destruction of Rome' but it's not clear how many such shows were actually staged there. After the first world war it reopened as the Empress Hall and became a venue for spectacular shows on ice. It closed in September 1958. It was replaced by a modern commercial office block called the Empress State Building which is currently occupied by a specialist division of the Metropolitan Police.

We pass the ornate frontage of the entrance to Brompton Cemetery which opened in 1840 and is still used for burials. Around 200,000 people are buried here, and among the many notable graves are those of Emmeline Pankhurst, and John Snow, the epidemiologist who demonstrated the link between infected water and cholera. And fittingly Sir John Scott Lillie is also buried here.

Wonderground

Passing West Brompton Station, we're now on Old Brompton Road. The Earls Court Exhibition centre closed in 2014 and has since been demolished. The ambitious development scheme for the area has been delayed, but during the summer this was the site of the London Wonderground. It had a colourful fairground atmosphere, with classic rides, and noisy bandstand performances, and outdoor bars, and street food; perhaps you managed a visit.

On Warwick Road we pass the entrance to Earls Court tube station. Nearby Phillbeach Gardens is a garden square built in 1876 on the site of farmland. Phillbeach Gardens had its fifteen minutes of fame in 1985 when police cornered James Baigrie here. He was an escaped prisoner serving a life sentence for murder. Armed with a sawn-off shotgun he barricaded himself in his van and refused to surrender. After tear gas was fired into the van, he shot and killed himself. The siege lasted 44 hours.

Mansion blocks

There's a Tesco superstore ahead of us now as the bus turns right onto the A4, usually known as Cromwell Road. After half a mile of Edwardian mansion blocks dotted with hotels, convenience stores and occasional restaurants the bus pauses at the stop by the private Cromwell Hospital. This was established in 1981 by the Bank of Credit and Commerce International reputedly to provide healthcare for the Abu Dhabi royal family. It was bought by BUPA in 2008.

The nearby Sainsbury's superstore occupies part of the site used by BEA's West London Air Terminal. Established in 1957 it allowed passengers to check in and receive their boarding passes before being ferried by coach to Heathrow airport. The check in desks were closed in 1974, but bus services to the airport continued from here until 1979.

By the Natural History Museum the bus turns down Queensberry Place and heads towards South Kensington station. It stops briefly then returns to Cromwell Road past the V&A and then the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, better known as Brompton Oratory. This is home to the Congregation of the Oratory of St Philip

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

Left to right: Putney Bridge, Emmeline Pankhurst, buried at Brompton Cemetery; The Cromwell Hospital; Brompton Oratory; the Mound, Marble Arch, Sherlock Holmes statue, Baker street



Neri in London. Neri was canonized by Pope Gregory XV in 1622. Among other things he is the patron saint of humour and joy. Rather surprising since he lived as a hermit and ate only bread and water sometimes sprinkled with herbs. Sounds a bit joyless to me!

The Victorian terracotta splendour of Harrods is suddenly upon us. Charles Henry Harrod moved here from Stepney in 1849, hoping to profit from the forthcoming Great Exhibition in nearby Hyde Park. His son built the business into a thriving retail operation and by 1881 was employing one hundred people. Despite a disastrous fire at Christmas 1883 Mr Harrod bounced back and the store was quickly rebuilt on the same site. After several subsequent changes of ownership Harrods is still a magnet for those well-heeled enough to shop there. Needless to say I've never been inside.

Gallows

From Knightsbridge Station, we head for Hyde Park corner which is still relatively quiet. Very soon we're on Park Lane, once a rutted country lane running alongside a tall brick wall which hid the park from view. In 1714 this was known as Tyburn Lane since it ended at the site of the Tyburn gallows where public executions took place until 1793. It was one of several roads adopted and improved by the Kensington Turnpike Trust because they had been so badly damaged by heavy carriage traffic that in the winter they were positively dangerous for travellers.

Improvements to Hyde Park in the 1820s made Park Lane an attractive place for the wealthy to build their London houses. Notable early residents included the 1st Duke of Westminster, the Dukes of Somerset and Disraeli.

Many of their houses are now the site of luxury hotels such as the Dorchester.

Mound

Approaching the Cumberland Gate, Marble Arch comes into view. Originally planned to mark the state entrance to Buckingham Palace it was moved here in 1851. It now has a companion towering over it. This is my first – admittedly quick – look at the installation known as the 'Mound'. It doesn't look too bad to me and is gradually greening up with immature trees clinging hopefully onto the slopes.

It's busy enough – possibly because during August it's free – with a stream of visitors stolidly climbing up the metal stairs towards the viewing platform which at under 100 feet up affords less than stunning vistas of Oxford Street, and the Park. Whether Westminster Council has achieved its aim of increasing footfall here seems doubtful. Costs approaching £6m are unlikely to be recouped. When the Mound is taken down next January, the grass will be reused on green roofs and the trees replanted along Oxford Street. I'm pretty sure the views would be better from the top of Primrose Hill.

We travel briefly along a strangely quiet Oxford Street past Primark – still an improbable presence here so close to Selfridges – and turn up Portman Street and past Portman Square which has been home to at least three dukes, and countless baronets and earls.

For a few minutes we move towards Marylebone along Gloucester Place through Georgian townhouse territory. Notions that the area's name derives from Marie la Bonne, or 'Mary the Good' are probably unfounded. The parish does take its name from its church which was dedicated to St Mary, but it

was originally called Marybourne, since the original church was built on the banks of the Tyburn (or Tybourne).

The bus stops near Old Marylebone Town Hall, completed in 1920. The home of Westminster's Register Office, it's hosted the weddings of over 120,000 couples, many of them celebrities. Paul McCartney married Linda Eastman here in 1969 and his current wife Nancy Shevell in October 2011 and Ringo Starr tied the knot with Barbara Bach in 1981.

And so we reach journey's end at Baker Street Station one of the original stations of the Metropolitan Line which opened in January 1863. The Sherlock Holmes statue near the station was unveiled in 1999. Scanning a QR code from a plaque on this 'talking statue' will send you a simulated phone call supposedly from Holmes himself (actually actor Ed Stoppard). With tourists of any nationality in short supply the statue is largely being ignored today.

Residents of the luxury flats built above the station in 1929 were served by the Chiltern Court Restaurant. It offered – according to an advertisement of the time – 'Perfect Cuisine and Faultless Service'.

Whether the Metropolitan Bar – built into the old headquarters of the Metropolitan Railway – quite fits that description I can't say. It is now a Wetherspoons pub but despite that – according to *Time Out* – it's a 'charming and characterful place', festooned with Metropolitan memorabilia, from decorative ceiling crests to framed Underground posters.

Too early for me to pop in and order a champagne cocktail so I head down to the Jubilee Line to head back to Clapham Junction via Waterloo. But the Metropolitan Bar sounds as though it's worth a visit.