

## GREAT BUS JOURNEYS NO 32

Mike Roden takes a very long trip on the 390 from Victoria to Archway Station

Note: The first part of this journey from Victoria to Oxford Street was covered extensively in the Spring 2020 edition of Battersea Matters (Great Bus Journeys No 26 – the 13)



Left to right: Animals in War memorial, Park Lane; Selfridges, Oxford Street; mural, Whitfield Gardens; staircase in the St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel, Euston Road; Maiden Lane Estate, Camden; the murderer George Joseph Smith

It's strangely quiet here at the Grosvenor Gardens bus stop. Marshal Foch's statue looking towards Victoria Station is usually surrounded by backpackers and people eating their lunch but today only the pigeons are bothering him. This is the second stop after the station and the bus is fairly full downstairs. But there's plenty of room upstairs. We set off up Wilton Road.

At Hyde Park Corner we turn onto Park Lane past the Queen Elizabeth Gate with its centre piece featuring a lion and a unicorn. This was designed by sculptor David Wynne whose 'Boy on a Dolphin' on the Embankment should be familiar to many of you. The opening ceremony by the Queen in 1993 celebrated her mother's 90th birthday and it has become known as the Queen Mum's Gate.

Park Lane was once a quiet rather muddy country lane. It's now home to expensive hotels and high-end car dealers, though there is a Londis with added service station halfway along which always seems a little out of place.

The Animals in War memorial arrived in November 2004 and was unveiled by Princess Anne. It pays tribute to those animals – including horses, mules and dogs – that died in the wars of the 20th century. As it says on the memorial: 'They had no choice.'

The notorious Marble Arch mound is still being dismantled, and the cats' cradle of scaffolding and wooden struts has hi-vis jacket clad figures swarming over it. It failed abysmally in its aim of bringing extra footfall to Oxford Street after lockdown and so far has cost Westminster Council £6.5m – a little more than the projected £1.25m!

We leave the arch and the mound behind and head smartly along Oxford Street. Unlikely though it may seem, London's premier shopping street follows the line of a Roman road, the Via Trinobantina, which linked Hampshire with Colchester. From the middle ages as Tyburn Road it was the route taken by prisoners on their final journey from Newgate Prison to the gallows at Tyburn.

There aren't many people around. It's not long after ten in the morning, and Selfridges has only just opened for the day's business. Founded by Harry Gordon Selfridge in 1908 it is still apparently the second largest shop in the UK after Harrods.

Not far away the House of Fraser is no more. After several troubled years the store finally closed in January. The Art Deco building will be converted into an office complex with gyms, shops, and a rooftop restaurant. Nearby John Lewis has had problems of its own recently but survives to fight another day.

### Manor

We hit Oxford Circus and cross Regent Street – the nearby tube station is one of the busiest on the underground network. The bus turns onto Tottenham Court Road just before we reach the station which bears its name. This was once the road to the Manor of Tottenham Court. The manor was described as Totehele in the Domesday Book, and by the end of the fifteenth century as Totenhale Court. The road was largely rural in nature until well into the 19th century.

In the mid-1960s some of Goodge Street's cafés gained a reputation as the source of 'illicit substances'. Donovan's 'Sunny Goodge Street' was one of the first pop songs to explicitly mention

drug-taking. I assume it's a much staid place now. A little later we pass Goodge Street station which opened in 1907 as Tottenham Court Road station. The station down the road was then called Oxford Street. A couple of years later the two stations took up their current names.

### Lunch spot

Whitfield Gardens occupies the site of a half-acre burial ground. The LCC acquired the land in 1894 and opened it as a public space. Long a popular lunch spot, it has recently been completely refurbished by Camden Council with new paving and seating. Also restored to its former glory is the huge Fitzrovia Mural, depicting life in the 1980s.

Across the road is Heal's Furniture Store. It has operated on this road since 1818 and took up residence here on a former farmland site in 1840. Curiously the lease demanded accommodation for 40 cows. These cowsheds were destroyed by fire in 1877. No sign of any farms now, although a 17th century farmhouse along here was not demolished until 1917.

Over to the left I get a quick glimpse of Warren Street Station before the bus turns onto Euston Road, past the buildings of University College Hospital. We arrive at Euston bus station after passing the London and North Western Railway War Memorial commemorating the 3,000 LNWR employees killed in the First World War.

The station itself is named after Euston Hall in Suffolk, the ancestral home of the Dukes of Grafton, the main landowners in the area when it opened in 1837 as the terminus of the London and Birmingham Railway. The old station

building was demolished in the 1960s.

We head back onto Euston Road, turning past the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Gallery. In 1865 Garrett Anderson was the first woman to qualify as a doctor in England. In the early 1890s she founded the New Hospital for Women (later renamed the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital). The hospital closed in 2000 and lay derelict until UNISON purchased and restored the building. It now forms part of the UNISON Centre.

The British Library was part of the British Museum until 1990. Its new home was built on the disused site of the Midland Railway's Somers Town Goods Yard and Potato Market. It was opened by the Queen in 1998.

### Magnificent

Its neighbour is George Gilbert Scott's magnificent Gothic pile (the former Midland Grand Hotel) which opened in 1873 and closed in 1935. A preservationist campaign led by the Victorian Society thwarted a sixties plan to demolish the building, and in 1967 both the Hotel and St Pancras and Kings Cross stations were Grade I listed. The building closed in 1987 and remained empty until planning permission was granted in 2004 for it to be redeveloped into a new hotel. The luxury St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel opened in 2011.

St Pancras International – home of Eurostar – is often called the 'cathedral of the railways'. It was officially opened in November 2007 by the Queen and Prince Philip.

In the late 20th century, the area

around neighbouring Kings Cross became notorious for its seedy and downmarket character. Major redevelopment in the 21st century included restoration of the original roof, and the station's rehabilitation was helped by its association with Harry Potter, particularly the fictional Platform 9¾.

We turn left past Kings Cross and head up York Way towards the Regents Canal. On the edge of the canal is Kings Place which was opened in 2008. Home to seven floors of offices, public spaces, art galleries, and a café, restaurant and bar and London's first new concert hall for 25 years, it's also the HQ of the *Guardian*.

Crossing Regents Canal, the bus passes Copenhagen Street where the Danish ambassador lived in the late 1600s. Copenhagen Fields became known for radical demonstrations like the one in April 1834 when thousands marched from Copenhagen Fields in support of the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

The rest of this trip takes some forty minutes during which time I notice few interesting or quirky details to record – which is after all the main point of these journeys. This area was greatly redeveloped in the 1960s and 1970s by Camden Council which purchased disused railway land for housing developments. In 1971 it acquired 22 acres of land which would become the Maiden Lane Estate.

### High rise

Despite the acres of modern housing estates built at that time, much more

renewal was needed and that is under way with a vengeance. Lots of high rise apartment blocks interspersed with building sites, and many large areas cleared ready for development. There are few visible pubs or shopping streets with their usual range of takeaways, hairdressers, betting shops and convenience stores. I hope they are there somewhere, but I didn't see them.

Occasionally there are a handful of survivals from the late Victorian or Edwardian periods, with rows of terraced cottages facing onto the main road. And then the housing does change as we approach Tufnell Park – entering long streets of more established suburban semis. There is a small shopping area around the tube station, but we're soon back into Metroland.

We near Archway station, opened in 1907 as Highgate station. This area was once seen as part of North Holloway, but when the station changed to its current name in 1939 the area gradually became known as Archway. There's a fairly substantial shopping area but nothing of real interest to report here.

### Murder

The only claim to fame that stands out is that Archway was the location of the third and final 'brides in the bath' murder. George Joseph Smith drowned Margaret Lofty in the bath just two days after he had married her in December 1914.

As I dismount from the bus, the gloomy thought is reinforced as it occurs to me that my quickest way home will be to cross the road and catch the 390 back to Euston and the Victoria Line.