
GREAT BUS JOURNEYS NO 33

Mike Roden takes the long ride from Waterloo on the 76 to Tottenham via Ermine Street



The 76 bus from Waterloo Road to Tottenham attracted me because it takes in bits of London never before included in any Great Bus Journey (GBJ). So here we go, past the BFI Imax building with its huge screen. At the end of July the BFI will resume management from Odeon Cinemas who have run it since 2012.

At the end of Waterloo Bridge the bus turns onto the Strand towards Aldwych. This section of the trip has formed part of many GBJs so I'll sit back for a while. We enter the City of London on Fleet Street, passing the pedestal topped by a dragon, symbol of London since the 1300s. Temple Bar once stood here – a physical barrier regulating trade with the City. The baroque arched gateway which filled the gap from the 1700s until 1880 was re-erected in Paternoster Square in 2004.

The heart of the newspaper industry has long since stopped beating here, though every street name seems to echo reporters bellowing 'Hold the Front Page!' Just one example: Bouverie Street was the home of the *News Chronicle* which closed in 1960. The *News of the World* was here too, until Wapping claimed it in the mid-1980s.

From the twelfth century the massive Carmelite Whitefriars Priory stood here. Remains of its crypt were discovered in 1895, and restored in the 1920s when the *News of the World* developed their offices. Later the ruins were moved but apparently there's a window in the basement of 65 Fleet Street from which they can be viewed.

No time for St Paul's Cathedral today as we turn onto New Change and head on past St Paul's tube station. On King Edward Street we encounter one of London's hidden gems – Postman's Park. Opened in 1880 this contains

a memorial with 54 plaques, each dedicated to an 'ordinary' person who gave their life in an attempt to save someone else. It was the brainchild of eccentric artist G F Watts who took the view that 'The material prosperity of a nation is not an abiding possession: the deeds of its people are.'

He originally planned for 120 plaques. The most recent was added in 2009; it honours Leigh Pitt from Thamesmead who drowned after rescuing a small boy from a canal. So there are still 66 places to go. Feel free to make a nomination.

Just beyond the park we pass St Bartholomew's Hospital. No space here for its fascinating history though I can't resist reminding you that a laboratory here was where – as recounted in *A Study in Scarlet* – Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson first met.

Memorial

At Moorgate tube station on 28 February 1975, 43 people were killed and 74 seriously injured when a southbound Northern City Line train crashed into the end of the dead-end tunnel beyond the platform. The accident is probably the worst ever on the underground network. We're passing Finsbury Square now where you'll find a memorial to those who died. On City Road we pass Bunhill Fields, a Nonconformist burial ground dating from the 1660s. It's the final resting place of John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe and William Blake, along with many other leading intellectuals and radicals. It closed in 1853.

After the slow grind round the City Road roundabout we find ourself on New Road, passing Shoreditch Park before turning right onto Baring Street alongside the Regents Canal. Streets of terraced housing were created for canal

workers and their families. Wartime bombing devastated much of the area and in 1945 the bomb damaged homes were cleared and prefabs were erected to house the many families made homeless. This temporary solution lasted for nearly 20 years before the prefabs were finally condemned. The site was redeveloped between 1964 and 1973.

The bus heads north on Southgate Road past Rosemary Gardens, a much needed green space for playgrounds and a sports area. This area is known as De Beavoir, after the family who sold this land for development in the 1820s. The housing here is more established, with a rather gentrified feel. Locals refer to this area as Beavertown, which craft beer fans will recognise as the brewery which produces Neck Oil. The Beavertown Brewery was founded in 2011 by Logan Plant, son of Robert, the voice of Led Zeppelin.

Soon the bus arrives at the busy A10. This follows Ermine Street, the Roman road that ran from Bishopsgate to the legionary strongholds of Lincoln and York. Here it's called Kingsland Road and though it changes its name a few times, this is our route for the rest of this trip.

Turkish

We're in Dalston – one of the villages which eventually formed Hackney Parish. With the arrival of the railways the farms and fields disappeared and it merged into the ever-expanding city. The much-hyped café-cocktail bar vibe which characterises this part of London is missing at this time of day. I pass so many Turkish eateries and Caribbean shops I give up taking notes. Just to give you a flavour, I spot The Rocksteady 'a venue for people who want a good time

Left to right: The former Daily Express building, Fleet Street; a plaque in Postmans' Park; John Bunyan's tomb, Bunhill Fields; Turkish restaurant, Dalston; interior of the Rio cinema

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



with good people', or Stunt Dolly – an ethical hair salon, 'vegan, cruelty free, organic, gender neutral, sustainable'. Pizzerias rub shoulders with halal butchers.

At the junction with Balls Pond Road and Dalston Lane we pass Dalston junction station and the A10 becomes Kingsland High Street. This stretch is slightly more downmarket, with a couple of betting shops and a pawnbrokers. But opposite that establishment is a promising, though shuttered, site. The sign above the shop reads F Cooke Live Eel Importer. A local history site tells me it was a traditional pie and mash shop, established in 1862. Now it's a branch of Draughts, the board game café. Very Dalston

It's the same mixture as before until the bus stops at the popular Rio Cinema. In 1909 this was an auctioneer's shop which the enterprising Clara Ludski purchased and turned into the Kingsland Palace cinema. After buying up neighbouring properties Clara was able to open the Kingsland Empire in 1915. It's now a registered charity and as part of its recent refurbishment the new basement bar was named the Ludski in honour of the cinema's founder.

The A10 transforms itself into Stoke Newington High Street. One thing I haven't seen much of on this stretch of the trip is pubs. And here is the White Hart. Its exterior is late Victorian but there has been a pub here since at least 1625.

Carrying on through endless small shops and cafes it dawns on me that although the occupiers are different there would have been just as many small businesses here in the 1890s as now. Our own Battersea High Street, now almost entirely residential, was lined with shops a century ago

One business which is largely absent from most local high streets these days is the bookshop. But not here in Stoke Newington. The bus stops nearby so I can glance at a clearly thriving business. This 'proudly independent and award winning' bookshop has been here since 1987.

And there's another pub – the Coach and Horses which dates back to the 1700's. Its major claim to notoriety is that it was one of the hangouts of the Kray twins and their gang.

Wilderness

Leafy relief from the endless built up area comes with Abney Park Cemetery. Some time ago we passed Bunhill Fields, which like all inner London cemeteries was fated to close eventually. To provide an alternative a group of City nonconformists bought this site which opened in 1840. Anyone could be buried here regardless of their religion and it quickly became the main Dissenters' burial ground. It was originally laid out as an arboretum and after 1970 when the cemetery company went bust and the place was abandoned it became a wilderness haven for wild life. It's now owned by Hackney and managed in partnership with the Abney Park Trust.

The bus heads up a gentle hill through a mainly residential area. In the 1200s this was Sandford Hill, where a sandy ford crossed a tributary of the river Lea. Now known as Stamford Hill, in the late eighteenth century it attracted wealthy merchants, notably Moses Vita Montefiore, an Italian Jew who died here in 1789.

From the early twentieth century the Jewish population increased, as people moved from the East End. It has a large, fast growing population of

ultra-orthodox Hasidic Jews now usually known as 'Haredi'. They have their own schools, places of worship and kosher food shops. The men wear frock coats and black hats and it is the sole British Jewish group still to speak Yiddish. Their desire to stay completely separate and administer their own laws and justice has caused some friction with the local authority and the police – especially when the community chose to ignore all lockdown restrictions.

We're now on the edges of Tottenham with a mixture of everything from late Victorian terraces to thirties semis and post-war flat developments. Tottenham is generally thought to refer to Tota, a farmer, whose hamlet was mentioned in the Domesday Book. 'Tota's hamlet' over time became 'Tottenham'.

At the junction with Seven Sisters road we pass the overground and tube station of the same name. Apparently the name derives from a circle of seven elms planted in the seventeenth century with an ancient walnut tree at their centre.

There's an open feel here to what has become a very wide road. Like most London villages, Tottenham's rural nature vanished with the advent of the railway and mass development of housing for the lower-middle and working classes. The bus is now passing through the main street of a bustling small town which sums up everything we've seen on this trip. Since the mid-twentieth century Tottenham has become one of the most ethnically diverse areas in Britain and as in Dalston and Stoke Newington it shows in the huge ethnic range of shops and eateries.

A calm leafy green space appears: Tottenham Green was laid out as a park in the early 1900s. The war memorial contains 499 names of those who died in two world wars.

The elegant Edwardian baroque town hall was placed on English Heritage's 'at risk' register in the early 2000s but with careful restoration the building has been transformed into an attractive and useful venue for the local community.

And that's almost it. A few minutes later the bus finally leaves Ermine Street and turns down Monument Way towards the bus station. I work out that the quickest way home is to take the 76 to Seven Sisters station and return to Victoria and the trusty 170 which will drop me outside my door.