
GREAT FOOT JOURNEYS OF THE WORLD NO 1

Mike Roden takes a break from the buses this time and strolls through the history of the Worlds End area of Chelsea.



The walk starts at the south-west side of Battersea Bridge, near the bus stop. You're crossing the river on Joseph Bazalgette's 1890 replacement for the 1771 wooden toll bridge commissioned by Earl Spencer.

Turn left along the embankment – officially Cheyne Walk and named after William Cheyne, Viscount Newhaven the owner of Chelsea Manor until 1712. The statue of James McNeil Whistler is the work of Nicholas Dumbleby (younger brother of David and Jonathan).

Across the road what's now 91 – 101 Cheyne Walk was originally one property known as Lindsey House which was built in 1674 and is probably the oldest house in Chelsea.

Whistler

An ornate LCC plaque on the wall of number 96 celebrates Whistler who lived here from 1867 until 1878 and it was here he painted the iconic portrait of his mother. Next door at number 98 there's a blue plaque commemorating Marc Brunel, who lived here with his son Isambard from 1808 until 1824.

As you walk along here you should remember that until Bazalgette's building of the embankment – completed in 1874 as part of his scheme to create a modern sewage system – the houses here were much closer to the river.

At number 104 on the corner of Millman's Street one of the plaques commemorates artist Walter Greaves – the son of the boatman who used to row Turner on the river. In his turn he did the same for Whistler. The second plaque on number 104 recalls the poet Hilaire Belloc's short stay there from 1900 – 1905.

Number 114 was until 1991 the home of the Kings Arms. Then the singer Bryan Adams moved nearby and – disturbed by the pub's noise – he bought it and promptly closed it down. That's the story anyway. It would have horrified Hilaire Belloc: 'when you have lost your inns drown your empty selves, for you will have lost the last of England.'

JMW Turner spent the last years of his life at what is now 119 Cheyne Walk being looked after by his old landlady Sophia Booth. The neighbours assumed that the pair were married and he was known locally as 'Puggy Booth'. He died here in 1851. There is an ornate metal commemorative plaque on the wall.

At number 120 a plaque honours Sylvia Pankhurst who championed the use of militant tactics in the Votes for Women campaign. She lived here from 1906 to 1909.

Construction of the high rise World's End Estate began in 1968 after the demolition by the council of 11 acres of 'low standard' Victorian housing. It was completed after several delays in 1977.

Heading past the boatyard we come onto Lots Road, once known as Pooles Lane and arrive at the riverside park called Cremorne Gardens. It's located on the site of the pier to which from 1845 to 1877 steamboats arrived carrying visitors to the original Cremorne Gardens, with its wooded groves, theatre, tea-rooms, fine dining opportunities and other genteel pursuits.

Splendid

There is an excellent information board in the park, which stands next to the splendid wrought iron gates which once stood at the Gardens' entrance on Kings Road. This is a pleasant place to sit on a

sunny day, with an excellent view across to St Mary's Church.

London's premier Victorian attraction gradually went downhill as a seedier element gradually started to dominate the entertainments on offer. Large number of prostitutes plied their trade, and bare-knuckle boxing contests brought in in gamblers and a less respectable clientèle.

Eventually the opposition from locals reached such a pitch – especially from the local ratepayers association – that the annual licence application was rejected and the Gardens closed for ever on 5 October 1877.

Developers soon moved in to fill the space and the resulting grid of streets of terraced houses leading off Lots Road is more or less what we can see today.

Power station

The transformation of the Lots Road Power station into the frontage of the 'exclusive' Chelsea Waterfront development is almost complete. This power station – claimed at the time to be the largest ever built – eventually powered most of the railways and tramways in the Underground Group. It ceased operations in October 2002.

Across from the power station is the entrance to the 606 Club which operates from the basement at 90 Lots Road. The jazz club moved here in 1988 from 606 King's Road (explaining the name).

Next door to Chelsea Academy is the Lots Road Pub and Dining Room. It was called the Balloon Tavern when it opened in 1869, referring to the hot-air balloon displays which were a popular attraction at Cremorne Gardens. Craft ale fans will be spoiled for choice here.

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: Statue of Whistler, Chelsea Embankment; World's End Estate; 606 Club; Lots Road Auction Rooms; backwards clock, 430 King's Road; Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood



Lots Road now takes a sharp turn to the right. If you've ever had your car clamped you may have had to travel here to the Chelsea Creek Vehicle Pound. Seekers after bargains will enjoy visiting the Lots Road Auction house.

Head into the estate along Burnaby Street. At the junction with Uverdale Road you'll see the Chelsea Ram. This was built in 1887 but failed to get a licence and for nearly a century it was a parish hall.

Turn left onto Uverdale Road and keep going until you reach the entrance to Westfield Park which was created on land freed up by demolishing four streets affected by bomb damage. There's a path at the top of the park, leading out onto Kings Road, past the Health Centre. Turn right here and walk briskly until you've reached Edith Grove.

Stand near the Co-op store and look across at the Paddy Power betting shop. From the 1880s until the end of the 1960s this was the site of the Wetherby Arms. It was here that in 1962 bassist Bill Wyman met up with and joined the Rolling Stones.

A little further along, at number 488 is the very expensive Rocco Borghese Lighting Shop. Back in the 60s you'd have found the 'psychedelic boutique' Granny Takes a Trip here. It sold expensive good quality clothes which tended to attract an elite clientèle, which just added to its legendary status. The shop closed in 1974.

Hippie

There were many such icons of the alternative 60s culture in this part of Chelsea. Dartrey Terrace was obliterated by the World's End Estate, but before it disappeared the former Home

and Colonial store was occupied by Gandalf's Garden. This counter-cultural community centre flourished for a short time at the end of the Sixties as one of the 'in' establishments of the hippie and underground scene.

And what of the name World's End, which has been applied to this area at least since the 17th century when we find the first records of an inn with that name. One reading of the name points out that 'end' is simply an Old English word for a field and the name may be agricultural rather than apocalyptic. The current pub dates from 1897. It went through a shaky period some years ago but it seems to be thriving again now.

Pheasants

Keep walking along. Nothing of particular interest in the shops here although City Meat – a mixture of butchers and deli – usually has game for sale: rabbits, pheasants and so on.

Almost directly opposite Cancer Research, you'll see a real survivor. Vivienne Westwood and her then partner Malcolm McLaren opened their first shop here in 1971, changing the name as their ideas evolved, until fixing on Worlds End Store in 1979. The famous backwards-running clock is still here.

Escape the bustle of Kings Road by taking a walk round the Moravian burial ground on Millman's Street. This dates from 1751 when there was an attempt to found a Moravian community here. It's now owned by the Fetter Lane Moravian congregation which lost their city chapel to bombing in 1941.

The World's End Bookshop has been a fixture here since 1986. It sits at the foot of the Moravian Tower - probably

the ugliest building in Chelsea. A late 1960s council development, it was riddled with faults and by the 1970s was essentially falling apart and facing demolition. In 1988 it was sold and revamped as private flats, with (to my mind) ghastly custard-coloured cladding.

Theatre

Across Kings Road just along from Park Road you'll see the Mestizo Restaurant. Until 2003 this was the Man in the Moon which housed a popular fringe theatre.

Beaufort Street is journey's end. On the opposite corner is Beaufort House – a trendy cocktail bar and restaurant. In 1975 this was the Roebuck pub where their manager Malcolm McLaren introduced the Sex Pistols to John Lydon – soon to be known as Johnny Rotten. He was given an impromptu audition, got the job as their lead singer, and the age of punk began in a Chelsea pub.

By the 1990s the Roebuck was gone. Not even a plaque on the wall to record the historic moment. And that more or less sums up the history of the Kings Road. It's there but only as a memory.

In this short article I can only scratch the surface of the history of this part of Chelsea. Much of the information came from a website called Sixties City which covers the length of Kings Road starting at Sloane Square. (<https://sixtiescity.net/Culture/KingsRoad2.htm>). Time to visit one of the hostleries that has not been overtaken by time, I think.