



On two wheels along the Thames

Greta Brambilla has a rather adventurous bike route for us this month, which takes a full morning or a good chunk of the afternoon so make sure you're prepared, with sunny weather on your side. The route takes you into town and makes full use of the train network.

To start, cycle down Twyford Avenue and onto Fortis Green, going straight over and down Queens Avenue. In the centre of Muswell Hill, turn left at the roundabout onto Dukes Avenue (enjoy the steep descent but watch out for the sleeping policemen).

At the bottom of the road, head straight into Alexandra Park with the boating lake on your left. Make your way down, following the path which eventually becomes a rubble road, and veer left at the bottom to enter Alexandra Palace station. Here you take the Great Northern service to Finsbury Park. Bikes

are allowed on the train outside rush hour; just make sure to give the other passengers enough space.



Marvellous sight: Hammersmith Bridge

Take the tube all the way to Hammersmith, exit and ride up Beadon Road, veering right after The Swan pub and then on through the underpass. Once onto Hammersmith Bridge Road cross leisurely over the Thames – it's a marvellous sight and all for pedestrians or cyclists only!

Over the bridge take a right to cycle on the river path, with a detour up Barnes High Street, which will eventually appear on your left, to admire the nearby pond. Circle back via Station Road, Cleveland Road

and Cleveland Gardens. Then continue, all the way up to the cemetery if you have the energy.

Otherwise turn around and retrace your route to get back to Hammersmith Station, Ally Pally and then home.

If you'd like to spend a bit longer in Barnes, however, admiring the river view, The Waterman's Arms is a local gem where you can sit on the outdoor balconies upstairs while enjoying a delicious pub lunch: the perfect pit stop!



Well-earned break: A riverside drink

This is an inexpensive 20-minute journey where you just need to change platforms at Finsbury Park to carry on to King's Cross. Once there, head outside the main station and take lift C ahead on your right hand side. Go down a floor and pick up lift F for the Hammersmith & City line. This is a tube line where bikes are allowed on every station and train, again outside weekday rush hours. Folded bikes are allowed on all lines at any time.

When one reads these strange pages of one long gone...

Russell Raphael explains how his mission to demystify an 'impossible' novel has led him to believe it could be the greatest book ever written.

It all started with a post on local social media: did anyone fancy meeting weekly in a pub to read *Ulysses* by James Joyce? It finished with my publishing a book on the novel itself. Strange where life goes.

It was February 2020. I'm a lawyer and no literary academic and having limped once through Joyce's book I realised I needed help to understand it and what better way than sharing views with like-minded people down the pub, the Clissold Arms.

Two weeks later: full lockdown. We switched to video meets and carried on, although generally it was me reading and I'm afraid butchering the Irish accent. Reading aloud especially in a group is an amazing way to learn. We realised that the book was far from easy but not the impossible nightmare people think and was often very funny.

We took it slowly, line by line, and as I grew in confidence I felt I could offer more, so through the learning organisation U3A and other contacts I found 40 or so people committed to attend my 20-plus online lectures explaining the book.

I was determined to demystify it and show that with a little help the enthusiastic reader can get to grips with it and enjoy even some of the infamously dense passages. So much is to be enjoyed. It is funny, very rude and with various dips along the way, life affirming.

Meet the cast

The three main characters are: Stephen Dedalus, a 22-year-old version of Joyce himself at that age, a young pretentious know-it-all; Leopold Bloom,



Masterwork: Russell Raphael with his book on Joyce's novel

a middle-aged non-pretentious practical sort of chap who is generally content except that he suspects his wife Molly will be unfaithful to him that afternoon and, being of Jewish heritage, he's also something of an outsider in 1904 Dublin; and finally Leo's wife Molly Bloom. We hear everyone else's views on her throughout the book (lots of mansplaining) but have to await the final amazing episode to get her version of events.

It's all set on a single day, 16 June 1904, but in so many

respects is timeless in what it reveals and teaches. A book for all time. Possibly the greatest ever written.

An Understanding of Ulysses is available from www.russellraphael.com, selected bookshops and as an e-book for Kindle. The original reading group starts up again this month, in a pub or online, as guidelines permit. It will be ideal for both first time and more experienced readers. To join, use the Contact link on www.russellraphael.com

Alleyway art sale in aid of food bank

Hazel Mason, of Summerlee Avenue, N2, reports on a pop-up art sale in aid of Finchley Foodbank, which is run by dedicated volunteers at St Mary's Catholic Church in the High Road.

Just before Christmas some members of the East Finchley Open Artists group were delighted to give an additional boost to Finchley Foodbank by holding a sale of artwork in one of East Finchley's many back lanes.

Our lovely neighbours braved the wet and cold to visit the stalls of pottery, jewellery, cards and seasonal handicrafts. We could hardly believe the sum of money raised. It was over £1,000. Thanks to all who came to buy artwork and seasonal gifts to raise money for the charity.

The food bank will continue to need our local support. As other food banks have closed, they have opened their doors to those beyond the borough of Barnet and, as they say on their website, they work from a position of trust and respect, and welcome all who visit them in need.



Garage sale: Ceramics and artwork raise funds for the food bank