

Stirchley from the Top Deck

Script into town... from Cotteridge into Selly Park

General banter between Vera and Doris

Oooh, Vera, look at this upholstery, it wasn't like that in my day, goodness! And all this plastic – used to be metal and wood back then! Had some wear and tear, but lasted well...

Ladies and Gentlemen, girls and boys, have you picked a good bus to travel on today?! We've not been on along this route for a good many years, I remember when it was run by Birmingham City Transport – the number 36 tram, started back in 1904. Me and Vera have been riding along here since,,, well we don't want to show our age... we were conductors on these trams until they upgraded the fleet at Cotteridge depo in 1950. Then we were on the buses, semi-automatic.

The trams back then were faster than cars – we used to race to over take them... 40miles an hour... only problem was, the drivers had some difficulties stopping suddenly... remember when George knocked that copper off his bicycle just past the veg shop! That was so funny. Had to keep a straight face mind at the time...

Oh those were the days! Don't worry – you'll be hearing all about them – exploring those hidden gems of Stirchley: the whispers of lives before.

Just down Lifford Lane on the right is the Roadhouse... a great canal-side music venue, I think our Derek's lad's played there... and beneath us is Camp Hill train-line – I remember getting off to see my aunt at the old Hazelwell Station on Cartland Road. It closed during the war – there's talk of it being reopened. I've heard it all before. Anyway, I'm a bus person me.

Imagine.... once upon a time most of this would have been farm land – the Fordhouse farm, and the churning of the mills, then the clanging of the factories... the old iron foundry; down Fordhouse Lane once stood the Arvin Meritor factory, making axels and brakes for cars – remember, Derek used to work there, and the Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds Screw and fixings manufacturer – right there, where Wicks is now... oh and remember that unusual smell coming from the printmakers just off the Pershore Road... a bit further along...

Oh remember the post office just here on the right, about where that garage is now. Rose used to work there, remember. What happened to Rose? She went to work down the road at Cadbury's. That's right – she didn't like being the only woman working there. Of course, it wasn't like working on the buses, they let anyone in... speak for yourself! Of course they wouldn't let us drive. Only be a conductress. Or a clippie. I heard they let women drive the trams in Scotland. Who told you that? Was that Rose who told you that? I don't know where she gets her facts from...

On the left is the Fruit and Veg shop – been there since I can remember – you can get a deal or two there that's for sure. Good plants too. Oh and the

Birmingham Bike Foundry – recently moved next door to Stirchley Wines. Friendly folk the both of them. And I've been known to ride a tandem in my time, but as I say, prefer the bus myself.

There's so much history here along this high street – whizzing past us – plenty of fine restaurants; plumbers, builder supplies, you can get your fireplaces... your sofas, vacuums, carpets, tellys: kit your whole house out down here you could. As you can see on the left we've even got ourselves a Dutch Consulate. I remember when that was the school uniform shop. And a bank.

Now where were we... Whitmarley, yes, used to make metal bits and bobs, componants, for this and that – cars I think. Heard about some students making it into a Social Centre – and putting on art exhibitions, and giving out free books... whatever next ay?

Oh it's the Stirchley Prospects shop! Open on Tuesdays and Thursdays until Christmas – they've recently been making traffic jam! Actual jam, but based on how much traffic there is... like, damsons are cars, strawberries are buses, blackberries are bikes... or something like that. I know what you're thinking, I'm a daft banana... but really it's an interesting place – if you have as many memories as we have about Stirchley then you should pop in and look around – fascinating stuff.

I've got many memories of Stirchley Community school – good and bad... as we all have I'm sure... ooh and on the left up Mary Vale Road I've spent many an hour listening to the finest jazz in Bournville Social Club – foot tapping away, smelling Cadbury's chocolate in the air... beautiful.

Do you remember in 1965 when the Church of Ascension burned down? The traffic was terrible. Did they shut off the road? I can't remember. You could feel the heat from a mile away. Then they build a kwicksave on it. That shut down a long time ago.

The split in the road... this dates back... as far as we can track – this was the centre of Stirchley Street– the village, with the oldest house, and the what used to be the Stirchley Institute up here on the right – set up by Cadburys for the community. The beloved swimming baths were opened alongside the library at the beginning of the last century. I remember going to a dance or two at the baths... the Stirchley Baths Ballroom – remember Den Jones and his Dance orchestra? Loved it. Remember our Rose, she used to be the first one up... now those really were the days. Bring it back I say.

And up Bournville Lane on your left we have what used to be called Stirchley Street Station... or to you all here... Bournville Station. Did you know that? Why did they change it? If it ain't broke don't fix it, that what I say.

Arh, the Co-operative, was a Ten Acres and Stirchley cooperative society store, or TASCOS for short– what a landmark. To think that the idea for this the coop store was started up in someone's living room – just back there by the Friend's meeting house... Some of you might know Harrods in London? Well this is what our old coop building used to look like until the 1970s... when they knocked it down and rebuilt it. Lets hope they've learned

something there. The coop has played an important part of Stirchley life over the years... and in fact had its own education centre, long demolished, down Hazelwell lane on the other side of the one-way system.

And we had cinemas... three of them... one here on the right, the Pavilion, used to be films, bowling and bingo all under one roof, til it closed in the late 60s – glad it's opened again now, Bowling and gym... strange how there are gyms all over the place, but no cinemas... I heard about a community group round here putting on film nights in odd places – Stirchley Happenings, that's right, didn't they do one at the curry place up the road? Yes, and one above the Three Horse Shoes pub. I remember going to the Oxfam Stomp annual jazz bash upstairs there, they hold it at the Billesley pub now I think. Oh Stirchley's still got it in her – still a hotbed for jazz – there's a band playing in the British Oak in a few weeks time – that'll be good – Duke Ellington covers. Just my cup that.

(Talking about cups – Doris, you haven't got your flask on you have you, I'm gasping – remember we always had a flask of tea with us, standing up most of the day we were, had to have a cuppa every now and again...) I'm thinking that after our shift we should head to the British Oak on the otherside of the one way road system – there's a Bonfire there tonight – what time's it start? 6pm? I'll meet you there for a cuppa, that'd be nice. Some of you should come a long too – it'd be nice to see a few familiar faces there? What do think? Yes, that'd be nice.

I'm so glad they kept the front of the Cox, Wilcox and Co factory. They used to make small sprit lamps and stoves. Nice little place they had here.

The Dogpool Hotel – had many a name change over the years. Always been good for bands though, so I've heard. Yes, whose playing tonight, anyone? I can't see from here...

Well, look at the time, we need to get going, we said we'd meet Rose and Derek... catch up on some more tram and bus nostalgia. Thanks for listening! Nice to meet you all, be sure to keep your tickets safe – you never know when they might be inspected, or when someone might ask for your memories, and then you can show them your ticket, and share your experience of Stirchley... and we might see you in the Oak later for bonfire night!

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I've been told every first Tuesday of the month there's a vibrant market happening over at Stirchley working men's club on the left – there was one last Tuesday – our Brenda got a nice loaf and some tasty preserve. I'm looking forward to the Christmas one, I hope they have carols like they did last year... and down the road is Ten Acres and Stirchley Cooperative Society club, where there more jazz and rock and roll nights than you can shake your bus pass at. At the bottom of that road is a derelict site where Eccles Caravans factory once stood for over 30 years, and since then a BT factory. This space waits patiently for its destiny.

Ooh have you ever played bowls at that indoor bowling place? No but our Derek used to be a real champion at bowls. He was telling us about when the community centre opened – thanks to Stirchley Community Group – back in the 80s. There's some really committed people in this area I tell you that for nothing – every month they hold Neighbourhood Forum meetings there on a Monday night – our Rose goes sometimes. She enjoys her cup of tea at the start of the meeting, and mince pie at Christmas. They're a friendly helpful bunch so I've heard – all ages attending, representing their bit of Stirchley. Especially with news of all these supermarket planning applications coming in left right and centre. Got to have your say, ay Vera/ Doris?

Anyway, the Forum lot, they help organise that Hazelwell Fun day with the council that happened back in September – remember, with the duck race, and Elvis impersonator. I loved him, he was great, he's really my cup! Yes, we've got some great parks and the allotments just down the bottom here. You wouldn't know it from the road. But we've got loads of green spaces – Stirchley Park, Muntz Park, the River Rea – the canal and railway on the other side, beautiful green corridors. Mind you, I do love my roads too... being brought up on the trams.

And up Bournville Lane on the other side of the one-way section is what used to be called Stirchley Street Station... or to you all here... Bournville Station. Did you know that? Why did they change it? If it ain't broke don't fix it, that what I say.

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Other

When someone gets on or off bus Good afternoon / thank you sir/ madam,
have a good day

audience participation

Did you know that madam? Did you know that sir?

Ooh Vera, do you remember that bloomin pole? Oh that was such a
nightmare. Possibly add something in about the difficulty of running trams -
need more research...