

From Holy Island to Harehills *James Anthony SSF*



Last year, at 6.0 o'clock in the morning, it was the sound of the seals singing (or moaning, depending on your mood) far across the sandbanks; now it is Mr Khan's taxi engine warming up before he drives off to pick up his first passenger. Then it was the wind-swept dunes, the roar of the waves on the north shore and the cry of the curlew. Now the roar is of the traffic on the Roundhay road, and the cries most likely in

Urdu or Pashtun.

Holy Island is an extraordinary place. Although it has a quiet and peaceful beauty, it is a magnet for tourists and pilgrims and tourist-pilgrims and of the half a million annual visitors many come into contact with the brothers and are helped by them in various ways. In a place so dominated by history it is good for people to be reminded that the ancient faith is still a living reality. Much of my time was spent alone in the large vicarage garden, knocking it into shape, but I was increasingly drawn into the life of the village and to the needs of pilgrims. We used to speak to many groups from parishes and schools about the Island and the monastery and its history, and then left it to the Island to exert its influence.



The brothers came to Leeds to live in a situation similar to that in which most people in Britain find themselves, - in a city. Harehills was chosen because it was a very mixed area and seemed a good sort of place to be. It was not too far from the centre of Leeds, and there were convenient bus routes. After six months in rented accommodation we are now in a small terrace house and are getting used to living in what might be called inner city. The people on our street are mostly Kashmiri from a small district in Pakistan. Further away are people of Caribbean stock, and Bangladeshis. Everywhere there are asylum seekers, from Iran and Iraq, from Afghanistan, from Eritrea and from several other African countries, in particular Zimbabwe. There are also a lot of Polish people and other Eastern Europeans.



The idea was that we would begin to live here and ministries of some sort would emerge. Well, they have. It turned out that St Aidan's church, where we worship, was very much involved with asylum seekers, and we were drawn into that. James and Kentigern go to the drop-in twice a week at the church hall and chat to the 60 - 100 men, women and children who turn up for

a meal, to meet their friends, or to get help with asylum claims. There is also an English class and computer classes where we help.

We were invited to a meal by a local friend, and met someone who ran another charity for asylum seekers and so were drawn into that as well. This local charity helps asylum seekers on a one to one basis, teaching English or befriending. Now all the brothers are involved, in one way or another, in ministering to asylum seekers. In addition John has become a voluntary chaplain at St James Hospital and a volunteer at a local hospice.

It would be a truism to say that Harehills is very different from Holy Island. There are obviously more concrete and bricks here. There is more litter, more noise and more traffic. You could say that there is more need; certainly a more obvious need. Yet the lives of the brothers are not all that much different. We get to know our neighbours, and we gradually become accepted in the area. We meet people we know in the street and chat to them. We get invited to people's houses. This is the same on Holy Island or in Harehills. In both places there are the same human problems of living in community; sometimes in too close proximity, which brings friction and bickering, or sometimes in an unwanted isolation with the aching loneliness that that brings. If our ministries are to have any integrity then we will share the human predicament of our neighbours, not from a superior position, but from being amongst them; not the statement that "they need help; we will help," but "we all need help in our human mutuality". *f*