

A short walk around Harehills

Harehills is an area of migration. The rural poor who came to work in the mines and factories in the early 19th century, the Irish and East European Jews in the later part of that century, people from the Caribbean, Pakistan, Bangladesh of the 1950s & 60s, to more recent arrivals, Poles, Romanians, Russians, Kurds, Iraqis, Iranians, Eritreans, Chinese, Somalis, Zimbabweans.



Leave the St Aidan's Community Hall, turn right and walk down hill to join Roundhay Road. Look to your left a view over Leeds city centre but at the bottom of the hill in front of you is a red brick corner building with an ugly sign saying "Community Links", the former Yorkshire Penny Bank is now home to several community projects, one being Solace that works in the area of mental health for asylum seekers and refugees.

Pause to give thanks for the city of Leeds, for its many cultures, faiths and ethnicities. Pray for those who continue to find themselves here seeking sanctuary for one reason or another. For God's many blessings on our own journeys through life.

With your back to the view walk in front of St Aidan's Church - the blue plaque will give you the dates; we will see the church again at the end of the walk.



Next comes Banstead Park. Several streets of housing were demolished to create this green space, "a lung for Harehills" in the early 1980s. The housing, mostly council, had become dilapidated and needed updating – many still only had an outside toilet even at the time of demolition. Older local people see this park as a plus and a minus; it is well used by many of today's young people for play and relaxation but also drug dealing and drunkenness and the older people remember families losing their homes and being

moved out of the area by authorities who thought they knew best.

Pause to give thanks for green spaces, for our breath, for our shared spaces and common land. Pray for those

whose lives are buffeted by authorities, even well-meaning ones, who fail to take enough account of the story of the ordinary person.

On the other side of the park is Trinity United Church being Trinity Methodist, Harehills United Reformed and Gledhow Road United Reformed who came together in this building in 1983, about the same time as the park was being built. There was an older building that was pulled down, land was sold off to build the housing complex that you see around the church and a worship space and hall was created. The building is also host to a Zimbabwean congregation that meets for worship on Sunday afternoons. You can see the sign for a community café that meets most Wednesdays.

Pause to reflect on the many threads of Christianity – a sign of our disunity or our diversity? Give thanks to God that we live in a time and place where denominations get along with each other peaceably and in good faith; pray that the wisdom we have learnt will help us in our relations with those of other faiths.

If you cast your eye to the other side of Roundhay Road (trams rattled along here once) you will see some slightly more elegant terrace housing, though now mostly divided in to flats. The road in front of you was the dividing line between two very different building projects in the late 19th century. The houses on the other side have stables with hay lofts, houses this side of the road are back-to-back and your front step is the pavement. Leeds is still a city with stark contrasts between rich and poor; the area you are in is amongst the poorest in the country, further along this route if you look up Roundhay Road to the distant trees (you'll see a sign for the BP petrol) where Roundhay is amongst the wealthiest.

Pause to reflect on inequality in our cities and in our country and in our world. Pray that God may give us a heart for justice and a fairer distribution of the resources of the world.

As mentioned, Harehills is an area of immigration, with one of the more numerous being of folks who would identify (or be identified) as Muslim. By far the majority would have their ancestry from the Mirpur district in Azad Kashmir in northern Pakistan. In Harehills the next biggest group would be the Bangladeshis who would trace themselves from Sylhet in the north-west of the country. The primary motive for migration was economic. Besides the 'pull' factors of demand for labour in Britain from the 1950's onwards in cities where industry was expanding, there was also a 'push' factor in certain areas of the subcontinent. Mirpur suffered from unemployment, and the quality of the land was poor. In the early 1960s, 100,000 people were displaced by the construction of the Mangla Dam. Many who had relatives in Britain used their compensation money to migrate and search for work. There are, however, equally poor areas of Pakistan that have no history of migration to Britain.



In Mirpur there was a tradition, stretching over several generations, of service in the British army and the merchant navy. Mirpuri men had both a tradition of travelling from their homes to work in the services and strong bonds of loyalty to Britain forged through the years of the Raj. Many of the pioneer settlers arrived in Britain as seamen or soldiers before or during World War II. They decided to stay here in order to earn and save money that would benefit kinsfolk at home. In so doing, they became the first links in a 'chain of migration'.

According to this idea, a lone immigrant 'makes good', news of his success reaches his country of origin, and other members of his family and friends, usually, like himself, young and

single come to join him (in those days it was usually 'him').



Walk up past Raja's restaurant (Indian Sikh owned - opened in 1983, same time as the park & Trinity church) once you are near the bus stop, on the other side of the road is the Bangladeshi Centre – former site of Harehills Elementary School, the stone gate pillars on the left was the boys' entrance, the girls' was a little further along on your right. The Bangladesh Centre was built 1989 and was the joint effort of the Leeds City Council and the members of the local Bangladeshi community with the aim of providing education, training and meeting facilities for the welfare of the local Bangladeshi community. The principle mosque attended by Bangladeshi's is the Shah Jalal mosque which we will catch a glimpse of, off to the left, when we reach Lambton Grove in a bit. Behind the Centre is Bankside primary school (one of three in the area), recently expanded and built on a bit of land where once the vicarage for St Aidan's Church stood.

Pause to remember and pray for the people of Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Our many historic connections, for all that people from those lands have contributed to this country.

The large red brick building just along from the Bangladesh Centre is now Connect Housing, a housing association that has some supported accommodation in the local area for elderly and vulnerable adults along with general purpose social housing stock. The building was the Constitutional Club "which featured booze, billiards and card games" along with ballroom dancing and a bowling green at the back.



"The area has got to change with the people who live here". We will walk along Roundhay Road to the busy junction then take a right in to Harehills Road, but in the meantime notice the great variety of shops. Over the years the different communities who have lived here have made these shops their own. In former times there were banks, post offices, high end dress shops (one where the Abu Bakar supermarket is now), Viennese Bakers, jewellers and all the usual things from the days before supermarkets. Today on our walk you could find a Lithuanian deli (here since the 70s), Iranian restaurant (patronised by Jamie Oliver), South Asian jewellery, Ethiopian café, Kurdish run mobile phone shops, Iranian dress making, Filipino mini-market, Iranian deli, Indian and Pakistani sweet shops, Kurdish bakers, Polish Deli, a range of barbers (it's a cheap way to set yourself up in business when you are new to a country) and a great variety of small, family run, Asian shops with a couple of big Asian supermarkets. A plethora of cheap takeaways supply the current wave of young hopefuls, here to seek their fortune or safety, with the no-fuss, greasy fuel that young men thrive on.

Pause to reflect on multi-cultural Britain. Give thanks for the variety and diversity of people who have made a home

in Harehills over the years. Pray that as migrant communities draw together for support, that they may also be able to connect with those who are different to themselves.

Where the KFC is now was the Harehills Picture House, one of three cinemas in the area, all now gone. The Bet Fred was a post office with the royal mail sorting office to the rear (the derelict building). As you walk up the hill of Harehills Road you will see on the right hand side the older back-to-backs with the pavement as their front step, over to the streets on the left you can see the slightly higher-end buildings with a little bit of a garden to the front. Back in the day people either found employment locally with the many tailoring shops (Burton's tailoring factory which is nearby employed over 10,000 at its peak) or even in a couple of local collieries that were open till the 50s



but many more used the excellent transport connections provided by the tramway to seek employment all over Leeds and used Harehills as their home base.

Many of the street names (famously, repetitive; Lambton Grove, View, Place, Terrace, Street) are English aristocratic families, few with any connection even to Yorkshire. Over on your left you will come to St Augustine of Canterbury's R.C. church, built in 1936. The multiculturalism of

Harehills is very visible at St Augustine's; the church has masses for Ukrainians, Indians and Zimbabweans in their own languages.

Pause to give thanks for our Roman Catholic brethren. For Pope Francis as he offers a fresh leadership and perspective on how to engage with the modern world and especially his care for the poor of our world.

A little further along is a rather sad looking closed-down church building; this was one of the congregational churches that merged in the early 80s to become Trinity United. It became a community centre for a while, then a mosque, then a school for the mosque (madrassa) and now it is a carpet warehouse.

Continue walking up Harehills Road till you come to Conway Drive at the top end of Banstead Park, if you look up the hill you can see the dome and minarets of the Bilal Mosque begun in the mid-90s. At weekday evening prayers perhaps 60-70 men attend, this number increases for the Friday midday prayers to more than 2,000. The community first worshiped in the (then closed) congregational church you have just passed, when this proved inadequate for their needs land was purchased on what had been the Kershaws Optical Glass factory. The building is more than just the mosque (the worship space), it is a complex of buildings for use by the community for meetings, education and celebrations.

Pray that Christians would have a better understanding of the different expressions of Islam and that we would interact with our Muslim neighbours and friends with wisdom and discernment.

Further along on the left is another of those large red brick buildings, the former Gipton Board School that became the Harehills Middle School that is now 'Shine', an office, conference and events centre that offers advice and support for new businesses. Find an entrance to the park and stand at the top of the hill and survey the view over

Leeds. Down at the bottom left-hand corner are the buildings of St Aidan's Church. The vicarage (built about twenty years ago) stands on land that was the building for Radio Relay that installed most of the original telephone cabling for the area. Between the vicarage and the hall there is currently a car park but this was the site of the Clayton Hall, older members of the congregation have memories of amateur theatrical productions, with a revolving stage and green room, there was a school canteen and rooms that were used by church organisations such as the Men's Society. The church itself, built in an unusual Basilica style, contains a famous mosaic by the Belgium artist Brangwyn that tells (in a very loose way) the story of the life of St Aidan. The Church has a very diverse community coming from a variety of countries, cultures and backgrounds. Many different languages are spoken; the Sunday Parish Mass is conducted in English, although the Gospel is also read in either Shona, Farsi or French.



Prepared for BCDD by Brother Kentigern of the Society of St Francis October 2013.