

Report on YPS Bradford 'Faith Trail' tour

The outskirts of Bradford are not the most obvious of places to spend a day out, yet that is where a coach-full of YPS members found themselves on a warm, sunny Saturday in May. John and Shirley Bibby had worked hard designing a tour that was unusual, surprising, interesting and pleasurable. We were to experience the Bradford Faith Trail, which is available for anyone to take, free, on the first Saturday of every month. Through visiting these places of worship, we were to follow the demographic history of the city as peoples from across the world arrived to settle and find work.

Our first port-of-call was the Roman Catholic Church of St Peter, a large unusually plain Romanesque revival church of 1933, where we were welcomed by John Joyce who was to be our guide for the morning. He explained that there had been a substantial, mainly Irish congregation when the church was built, but that that had largely fallen away to be partly replaced by Polish and Slovakian Catholics who now hold their own services there. After a brief description of the Catholic faith, we were shown the various devotional fixtures and fittings in the church before being offered very welcome refreshment.



A brisk walk along the Leeds Road soon brought us to the Abu Bakr Masjid, a Deobandi (Pakistani Sunni) mosque of some size and elegance built about fourteen years ago. Here we were met by Imam Fazal Dad, a young and very energetic schoolteacher who 'runs' the

masjid in his spare time. After leaving our shoes at the entrance, Fazal Dad gave us the full tour of this light and airy building, including the two ritual washing rooms (m&f), whilst telling us much about the canons of the Islamic faith. He was more than happy to answer our many questions, including a number of 'difficult' ones, which he deflected with much wit and charm.



Leaving the masjid, we walked a few hundred yards through untidy and run-down streets of back-to-backs to the Shree Lakshmi Narayan Mandir, Bradford's only Hindu temple, opened by the Queen in 2007.

After again shedding our shoes at the entrance, we were shown up into the sun-filled temple hall where we were met by Mr Balakrishnan who introduced us to the highly decorated white porcelain gods and goddesses, including Ganesh the elephant god, that were ranged along the back wall on a raised podium. Our guide's talk was pleasantly interrupted by a visiting doctor who runs his own private hospital in



northern India where he specializes in performing cures for the most intractable diseases. Would we like to take his card and contact him if we were not able to find a cure here? Tearing ourselves away from these delightful people, our exit from the temple was enlivened by the arrival of an Indian wedding party in stretch limos. The beautiful young couple themselves were in a bright red Ferrari – a wedding present, we assumed.



Our next stop was at the Guru Gobind Singh Ji Gurdwara Sikh Temple which, in contrast with the last, was quite plain and simple. It is the first purpose-built Gurdwara in the UK, and was opened in 1972. Leaving our shoes again at the entrance, we were given orange headscarves to wear, as the hair must be kept covered at all times. Our host here was Mr Govinder Singh Dhaliwal, who invited us to sit for a while on the carpeted floor of the Diwan Hall to witness a few minutes of the weekly reading of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the Sikh Holy Scriptures, which were being read in a clear voice by a young woman sitting beneath a decorated canopy. We were all becoming aware of a delicious smell of curry spices drifting up from the Langar Hall, or dining room, below. It is a Sikh tradition that anyone visiting the Gurdwara should be given a meal, cooked and served by volunteers from the Sikh community. So we were invited to join the queue waiting to pick up a tray of vegetable curry, with saffron rice and yogurt, along with flat bread – a delicious repast. Many of the local community chose to eat seated cross-legged on the ground but we opted to sit at long tables, near some rather fierce-looking bearded and turbaned gentlemen with swords whose framed visages glared down on us from the walls.



Much refreshed, we were ushered into a side room where our host and a colleague outlined to us the history and main tenets of the Sikh faith, but all too soon we were away again, this time back to the coach to drive up to Lister Park in the Manningham district, to visit Cartwright Hall Art Gallery.



Built in 1904, the Art Gallery is in a style known as 'Bradford Baroque' and was gifted to the city by the wealthy mill owner Samuel Cunliffe-Lister in memory of Edmund Cartwright, inventor of the power loom. It houses fine collections of Victorian and contemporary arts and, during our visit, was showing special exhibitions on such disparate themes as Sikh turbans, images of Jane Morris, and cartoons by Leeds born artist Glen Baxter.

There was time for a stroll in the sunshine around the Moghul-inspired formal gardens in Lister Park before embarking the coach to our final destination, the Bradford Reform Synagogue, off Lumb Lane. Although surrounded by dereliction (including a fine stands of Japanese knotweed – *Fallopia japonica*) this building is another of Bradford's architectural gems being, both



inside and out, one of the most notable examples of 19thC 'Orientalist style' in British synagogues. We were shown around by Nigel Grizzard, one of the few surviving members of the once flourishing Jewish community in Bradford who explained something of its history. The synagogue was forced to close in 2012 and was almost sold but for fund-raising efforts and donations from Muslim benefactors in the city. This included the famous Sweet Centre restaurant just around the corner, where we were to enjoy a most fortifying evening meal before heading home.

One was left with the feeling that Bradford, for all its social and other problems, is leading the way in breaking down cultural barriers through its innovative 'Faith Trail'. People of any faith or no faith are made to feel welcome and, perhaps by sharing food or through discussions or witnessing a ceremony, one can only be impressed by the positive community spirit that emanates from all these places of worship.

Jim Spriggs
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