

A BEAR PIT, A MANOR HOUSE AND CASTELLATED TOILETS

These were just a few of the sights which some 35 Trust members and guests saw and heard about on our recent walk round Headingley, expertly led by local historian Eveleigh Bradford.

It was a chilly but dry morning when we assembled at St Michael's Church, in the centre of Headingley. This is the third place of worship on this site, the first being a chapel of ease built in 1619 on part of the old village green to serve the people of Headingley, Burley and Kirkstall. It was a small chapel – similar in size to Adel church – and as the population grew there was a need for a new church. In 1837 the foundation stone for a new church – designed by R. D. Chantrell – was laid. However Chantrell's church lasted only 50 years before the continuing growth of the population led to the building of the current church to a design by the distinguished church architect, John Loughborough Pearson, then also engaged on the building of Truro Cathedral. Opened in 1886, the church was not without controversy, particularly because of concerns over its impact on the graveyard, but there was strong support for it from the great and good of the area. In particular Charles Tetley, churchwarden for 53 years, was a major benefactor of the new church.



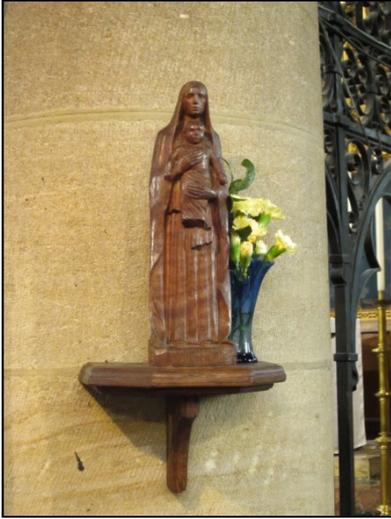
St Michael's Church, Headingley

From St Michael's we walked down to the site of the former Leeds Zoological and Botanical Gardens, which were created in twenty five acres of land round what is now Cardigan Road. The impetus behind them came in 1837 when a committee was set up to provide recreational facilities for the people of Leeds, as was being done in other cities. The winning design proposed an elaborate and complex scheme involving lakes, conservatories, greenhouses, walks and terraces as well as a zoo but funds did not permit its realisation – the company set up to establish the new gardens only raised some £11,000 rather than the £20,000 planned. In particular the zoological aspects of the enterprise were significantly scaled down and the only exotic animal purchased (in 1841) was a brown bear, kept in a bear pit. The Gardens opened in 1840 but the combination of an entry charge and Sunday closing meant that few working people could visit and in 1848 the Gardens were closed and sold. They were then leased by the showman Tommy Clapham who reopened them as Leeds Royal Gardens with reduced admission fees and improved access from the newly opened Burley station. But the Gardens still failed to make money and were closed in 1858 – among the items then auctioned by Clapham was the brown bear. The land was developed for building and all that is left of the Gardens are parts of the surrounding wall, and the bear pit, now owned by the Civic Trust and recently restored by the removal of self-sown sycamores.



Members and guests at The Bear Pit

Returning up Chapel Lane – the historic road from Burley to the chapel of ease in Headingley - we paused to admire Sydney Kitson's War Memorial, the former St Michael's School building (now the parish centre, opened as a charity school on 1783 and converted to a National School in 1844), and the two pubs which stood by the village green, the eighteenth century Skyrack and the older drovers' pub, the Original Oak. Passing by the site of the historic oak tree which marked the centre of Headingley until it fell in 1941 we arrived at Headingley Hall, the former Headingley Manor House and now a residential care home, where we were treated to mid-morning coffee courtesy of Peter Hodkinson, Managing Director of Westward Homes which runs Headingley Hall. While there Eveleigh sketched in the Hall's history which dates back to Anglo-Saxon times. This grand building passed through many hands and was for a number of years the main residence of the tenant of the nearby Home Farm (visible further along Shire Oak Road and now occupied by the Yorkshire College of Music and Drama). From 1832-54 it was occupied by George Hayward, agent for the Cardigan Estate, which owned much land in the area. Hayward was involved with local improvement work including the rerouting of the Leeds-Otley turnpike (Otley Road as we now know it).



Madonna carved from The Shire Oak

Turning our back on the attractive houses built in Shire Oak Road after the land was sold by the 7th Earl of Cardigan – he of Crimean war fame – to finance his extravagant lifestyle, we made our way to the rather less attractive Arndale centre built in the 1960s on former villa gardens, and across to Alma Cottages. These mid-nineteenth century workers' cottages have what the Leeds Pevsner calls "some of the grandest outside privies in England; in blocks of two with crenellated parapets" – sadly no longer used for their original purpose! Winding past other attractive old cottages we arrived at the Rose Garden on North Lane, site of the monthly Headingley Farmers' Market, and originally the orchard of the large Tannery House which occupied the site of the former Lounge cinema. From here we could see the former Headingley pumping station, now converted into a pub (part of the station's garden was used to build a police station and library in the 1890s and was until recently the Headingley Community Centre). North Lane itself retains a variety of small local shops and at its far end, near South Parade Baptist Church, the gatehouse of the former Headingley House, once the home of John Marshall whose Temple Mills we all know.

Finally we walked down Bennett Road, past George Corson's 1884 Parochial Institute with its striking sculptured panel of St Michael (not St George as alleged in Pevsner) defeating the dragon, to the former Bennett Road school. Opened as a new Board School in 1882, it closed in 2006 because of falling primary school numbers and has since been converted into the successful Headingley Enterprise and Arts Centre (HEART) which was celebrating its first birthday and provided a good place for lunch and a rest.

If we were fortunate that the weather stayed fine we were doubly fortunate in our guide, for Eveleigh Bradford was a mine of information on the area. It was clear we had only scratched the surface of what Headingley has to offer so we may book her for a return visit!



Gothic privy Alma Cottages

Martin Staniforth
Chair of LCT Activities Committee
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