



God with us in Headingley and Hyde Park

Most people will recognise this building as The Left Bank but to me it will always be the church where I grew up, St Margaret of Antioch in Cardigan Road.

It holds strong memories for me, I was baptised there and attended regularly as a child, joining in many of the activities the church offered. The entrance was not like this in the 40's and 50's, I remember the back wall to be plain, solid brick and the church always felt cold and drafty but it had a warm heart. It was very friendly and welcoming and definitely felt like a caring church family.

It was used by many different people and I remember when I was young the Russian Orthodox Church in exile were given use of one of the side chapels which I found fascinating.

By the late 50's many families began moving away and students started to occupy the local houses but it was still a thriving church and many people came from a distance to worship there. After several years of fundraising the back wall was redesigned, though it was beyond the budget to extend the church as had been originally intended. It was completed in 1963 and the lovely windows were incorporated and the back extension added which gave space for coffee after services and much needed toilets.

By this time I had more or less left Leeds though my parents continued to be members of the church. The area had changed and attendance declined and the upkeep was costly so in 1995 the church was closed for worship and left empty with the congregation moving to All Hallows. It was feared it would be demolished. It was a magnificent, listed building almost cathedral like in size with wonderful acoustics designed by Temple Moore.

Almost ten years later the, by then pigeon infested building (due to holes in the roof and windows), was saved from dereliction by a group of Christians who bought it and worked hard to restore it and eventually becoming known as The Left Bank.

I returned to live in Leeds in 2003 and around that time went along to an open evening which enabled people to look inside for the first time. A small group of singers had been invited to show how good the acoustics were. I sat in that magnificent space listening to beautiful music with tears rolling down my face I was so overcome by the emotions and the memories that the church held for me. I have been back on a few other occasions and it is wonderful to see the space being loved and used to reach out with so many community activities.

As I have got older I've increasingly appreciated how important my early Christian upbringing was and am thankful for all those people I knew and who have prayed for me over the years. It's good to remember how important earlier experiences of faith are.

Maybe our prayers which seem unheeded now will make a difference to our children, friends and family in their futures. We are called to pray continually.

'Rejoice always, pray continually and give thanks' 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18



This photo of the inside, was taken last year. The altar, pulpit, choir stalls and font remain.