

## UNLOCK WALK 2024

This year's Walk took place on 27 April and was in Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham. I had an appointment in the afternoon which I did not want to change, so decided to do a short stretch of the walk during the morning. I travelled to Shepherds Bush and started off, passing a Sikh Gurdwara on the way to St Clement's Church, Notting Dale. This is a splendid church, consecrated in 1867, in an area which in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was populated by 1000 people and 3000 pigs. I met the Vicar, Gareth Wardell, and another priest Mother Pippa, and also Gareth's lovely Labrador who stationed himself in the sanctuary. The church is close to the Grenfell Tower and contains several memorials including a painting completed before the terrible fire; it shows a crowd scene, and some of the people depicted lost their lives in the fire. There is a memorial garden just outside the church. The church also has fine Kempe stained-glass windows depicting St Agatha, St Agnes, St Clement and St Peter.

The team also serves St James Norlands, and in 1992 the then vicar established the ClementJames Centre which provides support for local people in various ways – academic, help with numeracy, literacy and well-being. and also specific advice on practical matters such as housing benefit. The church opened up in the small hours on 14 June 2017 while the fire was raging and it continues to support the community; on a happier note, the seeds of the Notting Hill Carnival started with jazz gigs organised by the church.

The walk led past the Grenfell Memorial Wall to Notting Hill Methodist Church, another late 19<sup>th</sup>-century building with a congregation of people from many different countries. The church has several floors, used for different activities, and the top floor hosts the very attractive and spacious worship area. I was impressed with the beautiful flower arrangements and also the African-inspired woodcarving and paintings displayed in the stairwell. "We aim to continue serving our changing community, whilst challenging injustices both near and far." The church was very welcoming.

The walk went on to Ladbroke Grove. Close to the tube station is the Museum of Brands, which displays examples of brands/packages through the decades. It also has a subtropical garden which I visited, and I met one of the volunteers who tends it. The garden contains banana, mimosa and kiwi trees, among many other plants and cacti, and they are trying to raise money for a greenhouse. I was surprised to learn that subtropical plants could survive in the open air, but the garden is surrounded by walls on the north, east and west sides, so it is protected. It is a memorial garden dedicated to the memory of those who died from AIDS or HIV, survivors of these illnesses, and their carers. The garden contains many ashes; it has won awards and is a venue for summer parties, taking up to 120 guests.

Not far away was Portobello Road, and our next church – the Salvation Army. There is a large room on the ground floor which is used for worship, but on this Saturday (and every other Saturday) it was full of second-hand clothes and other items for sale, and it was busy!

Walkers were directed to a room at the back where hot drinks, biscuits and pastries were on offer. The Army has been active in the area since 1878. "We worship as a community on Friday morning.....before the tourists descend at the weekend!"

The SA provides food, shower and laundry facilities and other good things to those who need them, and there is Bible study. "Prayer underpins all we do in the week."

I was glad to escape from the crowded Portobello Road, into the much quieter Talbot Road. Nearby was the beautiful All Saints Church, another Anglo-Catholic building and I enjoyed looking around there. I went on and along Aldridge Road Villas where there is a blue plaque celebrating the Indian statesman Sardar Vallabhbhai Javerbhai Patel, who lived there for a while, presumably while he was studying law at the Inns of Court. He was the first Deputy Prime Minister of India after independence and died in 1950.

I finished my stretch of the walk at Westbourne Park station. I always enjoy doing the whole walk, but Saturdays are busy and sometimes there are clashes. But I look forward to next year's Walk, and I am grateful to my sponsors who enabled me to send a decent donation to Unlock.

Juliet Chaplin, May 2024