

Visits to faith communities in Birmingham

Thoughts about Birmingham

[Link to video](#)



When I first came to Guernsey after being brought up in Birmingham I became aware that a lot of the children here had not visited the UK.

It was obvious that when the children came to go off island either for work or university, they would have no knowledge of the vast differences between Guernsey and the UK.

Before the children went to Birmingham they had the idea that Birmingham was full of people from different races, very industrial and dirty. I really don't think they had any notion of what Birmingham is really like.

Pupils were very excited at the airport. Three had never flown before. When we arrived in Birmingham it was a hot sunny bank holiday, everyone was in high spirits (but well behaved). We went to Stratford-upon-Avon YHA and settled in, had our lunch (everyone was surprised at the excellent food at the YHA, Steve and I included!)

After lunch we went to the Buddhist community – the Buddhist who was scheduled to show us round was absent so we had an audience with the Abbot – who often features on BBC programmes! The pupils were very attentive and there was time for 'reflection' while we were there and question/answer session. The pupils were very calm when they left there it was a totally different experience for them.

Day 2

We travelled to Birmingham by train (quite a few had not been on a train) We alighted from the train at Hall Green and met the coach. As we had a little time to spare I decided that we would go and look at 'Sarehole Mill' (Tolkien – Lord of the Rings fame) in Hall Green (pupils were only allowed to step off the bus to take photographs)

We visited the Mosque and met Professor Akhtar who gave a talk and pupils were surprised that over 5,000 men worship at the mosque each Friday. It is the biggest Mosque in Europe. A lot of Muslims in the west use it as a place of pilgrimage.



Outside the mosque



Inside the mosque

Lunch was on a canal boat – most of the children had not experienced this and enjoyed it together with the commentary about the local area.

In the afternoon we took the coach to the Gurdwara – the children were made a great fuss of – we were shown around the Sikh Gurdwara and were privileged to go into the room at the very top of the building where the Guru Granth Sahib is kept.



Canal boat



Eating at the langar

After the tour the pupils were given a langar meal and a tin of quality sheet and 9 litres of orange to take with them. Needless to say the pupils said they enjoyed the visit to the Gurdwara best!

Visit to the Ikon Gallery – we were met by the Manager and shown around the exhibition which was 'very modern'. Part of the exhibition showed a display of music and art and we were informed how the Artist had used music to create his pictures.

I am sure the pupils had seen nothing like this before and some found it a bit bizarre.

Day 3

Again we travelled on the train to Birmingham met, the coach and made our way to the Hindu Temple – The pupils were amazed at the statues and the various buildings on the site. We were shown round by an 'Irish' lady who had married a Hindu and converted so she was able to give a 'western view' of her new religion which was very useful. After the tour the children were given a meal of different types of curry and rice which they all enjoyed.

Lunch was at the Nature Centre in Birmingham (we gained free admission – I have known the Manager for a number of years, which was handy). The pupils enjoyed the new experience of seeing animals of all kinds and being able to have their lunch in such brilliant sunshine outside.

In the afternoon we visited the Orthodox Synagogue – we were given a very informative tour of the Synagogue, which is under threat of closure. At present very few Orthodox Jews live in the Birmingham area. The synagogue was awash with lots of very expensive artefacts (scrolls, candelabra, stained glass) – pupils were able to spot the similarities with a Christian Church and make a connection between Christianity and Judaism.



At the synagogue



At the synagogue

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Birmingham has a very large Art Gallery which is filled with all kinds of paintings

The Pre-Raphaelite movement started in Birmingham, and is featured in the gallery.

Pupils were able to assess the differences in the two galleries.

Day 4

We packed up and made sure everything at the YHA was left in good order, we then went into Stratford-upon-Avon and visited Shakespeare house where he was born – given a tour which the pupils again enjoyed.

Lunch was at MacDonald's – I thought this would be a good experience for the pupils as in Guernsey there are no fast food outlets – needless to say the pupils were thrilled!

Pupils are still taking of their experience in Birmingham and I quite often find the pupils who took part showing other pupils the pictures outside my room and explaining to them about their experiences there.

I know that they have a very different view of Birmingham now. They know first hand that Birmingham is a very clean modern city with many people from different races living together – a very tolerant City – I am sure many of the pupils who took part will be visiting the City again. Yes it is still industrial in parts but we should remember that the 'lunar' society is in Birmingham. Many inventors lived in Birmingham e.g. James Watt – Matthew Bolton – William Murdoch

I do think the trip has helped pupils have a much better understanding of a multi-cultural society and why religion is important to a lot of people. It gave them a positive view of how people can live in harmony with one another and not be 'fighting' which is usually the only thing reported in the national press and TV.