

Stirring Up The Past

Synopses for Website

Stop One – Mill Hill Chapel and Jogendra Sen

We meet the Genius Loci – the protective spirit of the city of Leeds. They tell us a little of the city's history and the changes that they've witnessed over the years. They introduce us to Mill Hill Chapel and to Dr Joseph Priestley – who used to be the minister there. We hear about Dr Priestley's many scientific achievements. The Genius Loci introduces us to some of the other people who have worshipped at the Chapel, and we listen to them singing in their graves.

We turn our attention to the War Memorial and think about those members of the Chapel congregation who lost their lives in the two World Wars. Amongst them is Jogendra Sen, who introduces himself to the audience. He tells us about his journey to Leeds, his studies at the University and his connection to the Chapel. We learn about his friendship with Miss Cicely Wicksteed and his decision to join the Leeds Pals regiment on the outbreak of World War One.

We end this section by finding out Jogendra's fate. We leave behind the chapel to journey to our next destination.

Stop Two – The Philosophical Hall

We take a moment to look at the site of the Philosophical Hall – the former home of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society and the city's first museum. We think about some of the people (and animals) who spent time there over the years. Among them is the Armley Hippo, which lived in Leeds around about 130, 000 years ago.

We also meet Nesyamun, an ancient Egyptian Priest from the reign of Ramses XI. We also meet Mr John Blayds, the man who brought Nesyamun to Leeds. We hear about Nesyamun's unwrapping and his narrow escape from a bomb in World War Two.

Stop Three – Mr Pablo Fanque

We meet the famous Victorian Circus owner, Mr Pablo Fanque. We learn about his life in Victorian England and his journey from rags to riches and back again. Pablo talks about his experiences as a man of colour in 19th Century England. We hear a little about the acts in the circus and the amazing spectacles that Pablo performed in. We learn about Pablo's personal life and the tragedy that struck when his wife, Susannah, was killed in an accident. We end our encounter by hearing of Pablo's posthumous fame – immortalised in a song by the Beatles.

Stop Four – The Leeds Library

We pay a visit to The Leeds Library – the oldest subscription library in the country.

We meet one the librarians – Mrs Mary Robinson – who worked there in the early 19th Century. She tells us about the founding of the library and describes what the building was like inside.

We also learn about a famous book, which was written by a Leeds man called Thomas Harvey. From the pages of the book, we hear the voice of an enslaved young man called James Williams, who talks about his life in the West Indies as an "apprentice". We learn how James's words helped to change the law in the late 1830s.

Stop Five – Leonora Cohen

We pause outside a jeweller's shop, which was once a chemist's owned by Thomas Harvey. Here we encounter a woman, who is planning an act of protest. Her name is Leonora Cohen and she is angry that women are not allowed to vote. In 1913, she visited the Tower of London and broke a jewel case there to draw attention to her cause. We hear Leonora talking to herself as she tries to find the courage to act. As we do, we learn a little more about Emmeline Pankhurst and the campaign for Women's suffrage.

Stop Six – Briggate / Kirgate Intersection

We take a moment to stop and think about the names of the streets in Leeds. We find out the origins of the names of two of the most important streets – Kirkgate and Briggate. We also discover some unexpected poetry, carved into the pavement and the benches on the street.

Stop Seven – Kirkgate / Vicar Lane Intersection

We contemplate the outside of Kirkgate Market. We think about the building and what goes on there. We learn about the market's origins and hear about the "eyesore" upon which it is built. We also hear the voices of some of the traders who have worked there over the years.

Stop Eight – Michael Marks and the Penny Bazaar

We visit the Penny Bazaar in Kirkgate Market. This is a replica of a stall that was opened by Michael Marks, a Jewish man who came to Leeds as a refugee in the late 1800s. This was the beginning of the famous Marks and Spencer brand, which now has stores all over the world.

Here, we meet a woman called Agnes Spencer. She and her husband are thinking of investing money in Michael's business. Through her words, we learn a little more about Michael Marks's story - including his flight from Eastern Europe and his early years as a peddler of penny goods.

The Genius Loci bids us farewell and reminds us that we are all a part of Leeds's continuing story.