

WALKING
by
MIKE
PRIESTLEY



Roots are showing on a trip to the past...

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Although the urban sprawl has largely swallowed it up, Wibsey retains a character all its own. MIKE PRIESTLEY left his country walk boots at home to stride the streets - and revisit his roots

Can a place be in your genes? I've never lived in Wibsey but strolling around it felt like going home. The Priestley tribe first established itself in this area many centuries ago, at Priestley Green near Norwood Green. It spread southwards into Halifax but also to the north, fetching up in the then cut-off hilltop village of Wibsey.

And there it thrived for many generations, producing among many other sons and daughters Enoch Priestley, the local politician and worthy who ended Wibsey's isolation by championing the building of a massive sloping embankment and, on top of it, St Enoch's Road (from then on people could get between Wibsey and the centre of town without going the winding way).

It also produced my grandfather, Harold, who was born and grew up in White Lane off Wibsey Bank. It was off to Wibsey that I took myself on a bright November morning, armed with a copy of the local history group's excellent 2004 publication *Four Walks In & Around Wibsey*, to find out something about the place and why it's so special to the people who live there.

My aim was to cover as much of the four walks in the book as possible in a couple of hours, aware that would only give me a flavour of the place. The writers suggest that each walk should take up to one-and-a-quarter hours.

I started, as recommended, in the busy High Street outside the White Swan Inn, where round the back is a lant spout from where urine ran from what presumably was a privy into a barrel. The ammonia it contained was used in the production of cloth. Walking down towards Holroyd Hill, I passed the large, triangular space in the middle of the road which used to contain the Tithe Barn and Black Dog Inn, among many other buildings. Strolling on down the hill, I passed the Salvation Army headquarters (a Wesleyan chapel used to stand on this site) on the way to Warburton Place, immediately beyond which, behind a hedge, was the large house built by Joseph Warburton in 1753.



Wibsey Horse Fair

Joseph's son and grandson were apothecaries and his great-grandson was a GP

Further down Holroyd Hill I arrived opposite the top of Wibsey Bank, with the former Co-op building on the right. Harold Priestley was born in the street which crosses this halfway down. I didn't go in search of the house though, not knowing the number.

Instead I crossed over (with care, because the traffic whips up and down this road from Odsal Top), noted the fancy 1790 datestone between number 6 and 8, and walked back up Holroyd Hill to a single-storey building butting on to the pavement, which was once home to the Antinomians, one of Wibsey's first recorded religious groups.

Higher up was the Holroyd Hill Hotel, built in 1830 on the site of the former workhouse where John Wesley preached in 1747 (where didn't that man preach?).

A little further up the hill, a detour right into Hardy Street revealed a good example of the way one-storey and two-storey cottages were built in among and alongside each other in a way which is to be found all over Wibsey. That's what gives the place much of its charm.

Returning to the main road I walked up to pass the Market Tavern looking out over the space where the Tithe Barn and Black Dog Inn used to stand. Just beyond it, half to the right, stood what the booklet advised me was the oldest dated house in Wibsey, once a single home but now divided into

two. The datestone high on its gable end declared that it was built in 1626 and the large "R" is said to refer to the Rooks of Royds Hall, Rook being Lord of the Manor at that time.

This house, says the booklet, was probably at the heart of the village in ancient times.

Walking behind the pub and then taking the short snicket along the side of the working men's club I found myself in a little terrace known as Tempest Green which led via a fold into Chapel Street and then Acre Lane. This is an attractive part of Old Wibsey, with its 17th and 18th century cottages.

The route took me into the High Street and on past the Windmill Inn, behind which is a terrace of cottages built with the stone from the windmill which was demolished in 1838.

I passed Priestley Terrace (more likely named after Enoch than Harold!) and carried on to cross Upper George Street, walk past the Liberal Club, cross North Road and pass the launderette.

There, across the road, was the famous expanse of muddy grassy known as Wibsey Fairground. Wibsey Horse Fair was known for miles around.

Animals were bought and sold here and were put through their paces along Fair Road, Folly Hall Road and Reeve Road. The streets filled with people, stalls and livestock.

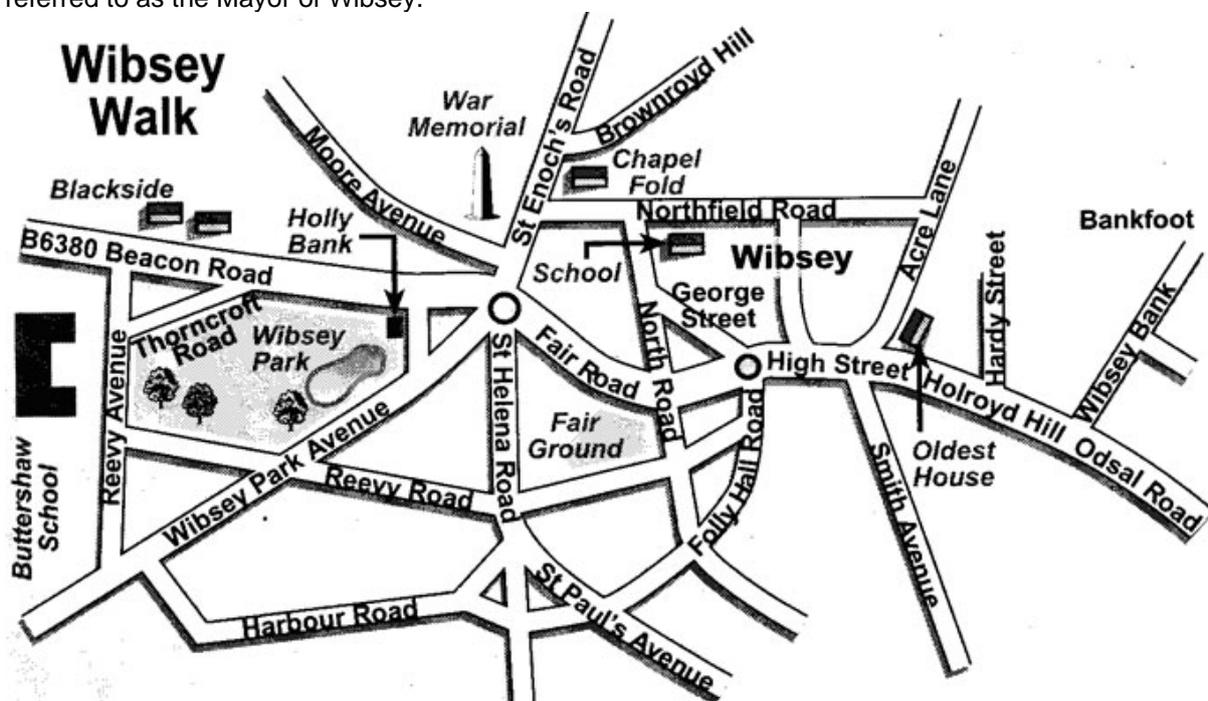
A turnaround saw me returning to Upper George Street to pass the cottages and the pub adjacent to Lower George Street. The booklet told me that the "upper" and "lower" referred to two separate beds of coal which were worked there, and the "Georges" were two foremen at different pits.

I carried on past the school on the right into North Road and followed this right to the T-junction with Oakdale Avenue.

Just across the road, to the left, a snicket led to a delightful little backwater - Chapel Fold, including the former Broom Hill Hall dating from the early 17th century and, on the right of it, its former kitchen wing (now a very desirable residence).

My route took me round the end of this, along another snicket, into the residential road beyond and via a left turn to arrive at St Enoch's Road opposite the Dog and Gun pub.

I crossed the road, walked up past the car-sales showroom and the war memorial (unveiled by the Earl of Harewood in 1938) to the roundabout and headed along Beacon Road. Again, more attractive low-slung cottages and solid houses. And on the left, at the right-hand side of the top of Kilner Road behind high walls and a gate, was Holly Bank, the solid house built by Alderman Enoch Priestley - a selfmade man who took over the butter and egg shop run by his widowed mother in Holroyd Hill and developed it into a successful business. In the park nearby is a memorial to the man who was often referred to as the Mayor of Wibsey.



Continuing along Beacon Road I crossed the end of Thorncroft Road, past the Horse and Groom and the working men's club (Wibsey has three). A little further along, opposite the Wesleyan Reform Chapel, was another delightful jumble of houses, Slackside. The double-fronted house that stands out from the rest is where the Slackside Wesleyans used to hold their school before the chapel across the road was built.

Page 3 Walking with Mike Priestley in Wibsey village

Running out of time now, I walked a little further along Beacon Road then turned down Reevy Avenue to cross Thorncroft Road and, before long, go through the gate into the park. Following the main drag between the playing fields I soon arrived at the lake with its ducks and geese and walked round it to the exit into Wibsey Park Avenue.

A left turn here took me back to the roundabout at the top of St Enoch's Road. One day I'll do the rest of the walks in the booklet, and at a more leisurely pace.

- If you'd like to learn more about Wibsey, the local history group meets at 2pm on the second Monday of each month between September and July at the Conservative Club in North Road, opposite Wibsey Library. All are welcome. Copies of Four Walks in Wibsey are available for £2 from Wibsey Library. The local history group has also published a 2006 calendar featuring pictures of Wibsey past and present. It, too, is available from Wibsey Library, price £3.