

Twin Cities



River Irwell and Manchester / Salford

The conversation during the sermon on Sunday 5th September, 2010, led me to reflect on the humour which seemed to be aroused by my mention of Manchester and Salford as twin cities, set on either side of a river.

Admittedly we do not seem, at first sight, to be in the same league as Budapest or Minneapolis and St. Paul's, but as a Mancunian, I do feel a sense of deep attraction to my home town, especially when it lies hidden and I feel protected from it by 200 or so miles!



River Mississippi and Minneapolis / St. Pauls



River Danube and Budapest

My memories of childhood do not fill me with any sense of the beauty of my home town. Manchester was a major target for the Luftwaffe and for my early life, it remained a bomb site. Little seemed to be going on with regard to re-building the city and I remember playing on bomb sites as a child as a normal activity. Of course, I didn't realise at the time how awful this was. I just thought that this was normal life. Manchester is now a thriving and fine city, must sought after for housing, nightlife and culture. Not to mention football! All this started off a little bit of reminiscing for me.



This is the lock on the Rochdale canal, just a few yards from where I used to play football on the “red rec” as we all called it. In fact it was a disused and wrecked tennis court, with the stanchions for the nets still set into the surface and which we boys used as goal posts and sometimes kicked by accident, leaving us writhing on the floor in agony!

The lock was forbidden territory. My Gran told me that if I ever went near it, “Jimmy Green Teeth” would get me. It worked. I was always very scared of the canal. Although I saw plenty of kids walking over the lock gate, very cockily balancing in

defiance of the deep drop on one side and the deep water on the other, I never had the courage to try it myself.

Part of the fear was that anyone could see at a glance that this was not a healthy place to fall into. The canal was then a major dumping ground and at any time you could see a collection of old beds, mattresses, dead dogs and other delicacies, just to warn anyone about catching some horrible disease if the water went anywhere near your mouth.

This is a photograph of the school nearest my house. It was a C of E Aided Primary, with strong links to my parish Church of St. Wilfrid. Wilfrid is a great northern Saint and we were always proud of our dedication. He lived in the 7th and 8th centuries.



St. Wilfrid's School, Bexley Street

In fact, I was only to attend this school for the first and final years of my primary education as I was sent away to an Open Air school between the ages of 5 and 10.



These two buildings stood opposite each other on Oldham Road. For my mother and her children, the Church was a central part of our life. To my father, the Shears Hotel was the church! I remember being asked by my mother, one day when I was about 14, to go and ask my father to come home from the pub. I went inside expecting a horrible place but the pub was really nice, with different rooms, waiters, smoke, of course, but very friendly. I was recognised by some of the men at the bar and they called my father over to me, very nicely. I really ought to make the effort and write my take on the life of Manchester, 1946-1966.