



## When Lunchquest went to the Leeds Indie Food Festival

When I spotted the Kickstarter associated with the Leeds Indie Food Festival, many months ago, I was really taken with the idea of a grassroots collective of local businesses and food enthusiasts coming together to put on a festival that more accurately reflected their ideals, rather than the tired, corporate beast that the city's established food festival had apparently become.

I bunged them a tenner and absent-mindedly noted that I should probably go along for part of it, if time allowed. When an odd, largely unexplained note appeared in my calendar saying that I was going to Milan in mid-May for five days, leave from the 9-5 gig was secured, although a comprehensive explanation of what this Milan plan actually was has not yet been forthcoming...

With days matching nicely, I booked a train ticket and a hotel and headed to Leeds for a couple of days.

As with many festivals, I'm more a fan of immersing myself in the atmosphere rather than attending lots of events and this was the case once more. Accordingly I contacted the organisers and asked for a programme of recommendations.

What follows in this mini-Guide is the summation of those recommended places, along with a little off-piste action of my own devising.

One thing not included is a reflection on my trip to Leeds Market, pictured above, which in many ways was the most profound experience of my time in the city. Standing in front of one of the many fish stalls, noting that half the produce was Scottish then wondering why we have nothing to rival this in Edinburgh, was chastening indeed. We have restaurants to match and/or aspire to everything else I saw, but none of the supporting "infrastructure" that this market offers is there. That's a project for another day, though...

Overall, huge thanks go to all of the organisers of the Festival, in particular Matt Dix who was kind enough to correspond with me and upon whose recommendations this guide is built.

Lunchquest  
May 2015

## Bundobust

Fresh off the train with the sun on my back, the buzzing metropolis of Leeds looked in fine shape to my weary eyes. I was in need of lunch and with a heavy bag in tow proximity was important, so the Indian street food and craft beer kitchen confines of Bundobust beckoned.

With dishes that lend themselves to grazing, the menu guidelines recommend one dish for a snack, two for lunch or three for dinner. I quite liked this as it offered good potential both for solo and group dining, which isn't always the case with tapas style places, whatever the native cooking style.



I was hooked by the mention of idli sambhar, with flying saucer rice dumplings in a lentil broth topped with coconut chutney. This was an excellent opener, brightly seasoned with the dumplings first rate.



To this I added the egg bhurji which came with puffed flatbread. This would easily slip into anyone's top ten hangover-busting dishes. It packed just enough chilli heat to keep things perky and the bread was light and lovely. The only thing I'd change is that I prefer scrambled eggs done

rather runnier, but there were no complaints on the flavour front.

I matched these dishes with their house beer, the Bundobust coriander pilsner. This was like a coriander lassi in lager form. I could have sat there drinking it all day long. The rest of their beer selection across taps and bottles was pretty impressive, too.

So overall, Bundobust was a hugely enjoyable first stop on the Leeds Indie Fest trail. As a reference point, I'd say it's somewhere between [Babu Kitchen](#) and [The Vintage](#), so perhaps what [VDeep](#) (although I've still not been there) is trying to do. Whatever the case, it was really good and entirely pleased me.

I ate: idli sambhar; egg bhurji

I drank: Bundobust coriander pilsner

I wore: pink shirt

Total bill: £13.10



# The Reliance

When I'd sought recommendations for where to dine in the city, the resounding message was that there was one place that was completely unmissable: The Reliance. Accordingly, it was the only place I booked ahead of time, dining there on my first evening in the city.

I'd come across a mention of their much-vaunted charcuterie on a swift stop off at [North Bar](#), on the way, so was clear this had to be tried. I was a little early for my table, so paused for another in a long succession of swift halves in their front bar area, which was just charming.

Having been shown to their bright backroom dining space, complete with open kitchen, I was pleased to spy the charcuterie board on their keenly priced pre-theatre set menu. This took care of starters, once I'd told the waitress she was in charge of choosing the two best meats from the available selection of four.

I also turned over main course selection to her, being steered towards the Erdinger battered haddock and chips.

The cured meats were soon with me accompanied by pickles and good bread. The chorizo proved to be very tasty, but the fennel salami was the undoubted star, packing an absolute wallop of porky aniseed flavour. It was just splendid.



The main course was unlikely to live up to this blisteringly good starter, but it had a damn good try. The chips were excellent and the succulent and plentiful fish encased in lightly crisp batter just lovely.

I rounded things out with surprisingly good espresso, demonstrating that the place takes every aspect of their offering seriously and maintains an excellent standard throughout.

So overall, it was another one in the win column at The Reliance. Everything I sampled was of really great quality, with the fennel salami likely to live long in my flavour memory. I'm happy to join the praise chorus in dubbing this a must-visit on any trip to Leeds.

I ate: chorizo and fennel salami charcuterie board; fish n chips

I drank: bitter, water, espresso

I wore: two-tone shoes

Total bill: £17.10





## Hot Stuff

Of course, this wasn't my first trip to Leeds, but aside from a flying visit that took me to Friends of Ham for the first time, last year, my previous visits had been for beery, football weekenders, many years ago.



I was there for Lucas Radebe's testimonial, don't you know, the highlight of which was Gordon Strachan's outrageously lamping into Jay-Jay Okocha after the Nigerian had attempted one too many step-overs for the fiery ginger's liking.

Anyhoo, my dining experiences during those visits were brief and functional, with the only place that really sticks in the memory being one of the cavernous late-night pizza/kebab joints in the train station arches. For old time's sake I gave the place, called Hot Stuff, a visit.

I was there hours before business would start booming, but it had been a long day with many beers so I was ready for the stroll home much earlier in the evening than in Lucas's days of commanding the penalty area.

I kept it simple with a pepperoni pizza, which was promptly prepared by the smiley counter man. It took a while to cook, which indicated a thick base awaited me, but I was on my way soon enough.

The topping was where the fun was at, with the pepperoni of decent quality and the cheese profuse. It had a nice herby kick to it, too. The base was fairly tough going, though.

So overall, it would have been remiss not to give this fondly remembered place a visit, but it was far from the best meal I had on this trip. It did round out a cracking day though and did its job of warding off the worst of the following morning's hangover.

I ate: pepperoni, pepper and herb pizza

I wore: skinny tie

Total bill: £4.90



## The Greedy Pig

Top of the breakfast recommendations, from all and sundry, was The Greedy Pig, just along the street from The Reliance. With a morning constitutional having sharpened my appetite, I popped in to check it out.



It's a compact place with seating at four tables on a little raised podium and a few further shelf seats next to the serving counter. I plonked myself at the latter as the podium tables were rammed. It thinned a bit as I ate, but this just brought a fresh wave of devotees.

The full breakfast seemed the way to go so I ordered that. They had some interesting specials on, including crispy pig's head and venison sausage sandwiches. There was also mention of homemade brisket burger. This all looked ripe for further investigation if only I'd had more time.

The breakfast was soon with me looking much as expected. It was of really good quality with the sausage and hash brown the standout items on a plate of tastiness. The recommendations were dead-on, once more.

I'd accompanied breakfast with a mug of tea, but I noticed they stocked [North Star](#) coffee, so ordered an espresso to go. This rounded things out beautifully.

So overall, The Greedy Pig is an outstanding place for a delicious, well-priced and super tasty breakfast. It set me up very nicely for another day of soaking in the Indie Food Festival merriment. You must visit when you're in town.

I ate: bacon, sausage, egg, tomato, hash brown, mushroom, beans, sourdough toast

I drank: tea

I wore: festival pinstripes

Total bill: £5



## Patty Smith's

It was to the [Belgrave Music Hall & Canteen](#) that I headed on my second lunchtime in the city to give the twin charms of Patty Smith's and the Dough Boys a try. First up, I put the burger folks through their paces.

With a magnificent sounding "dirty burger" as the main element of their offering, I was immediately hooked in. Although I couldn't muster the appetite for their epic sounding session fries (massive tray of fries covered in all manner of goodness), I added a portion of their splendid-enough sounding regular fries.

As the friendly counter woman promised, within eight minutes my items were ready for collection at the counter. With the burger wrapped in the usual modish paper, my first attention was to the chips, which were crunchy, light and really nicely seasoned with salt flakes. Thumbs up.

The burger lived up to its name looking a right dirty mess on first inspection. I strapped in for a messy eat.

Each element, from the excellent meaty burger, to the wonderfully resilient bun, to the pokey chipotle sauce, to the crunch from pickles and veg, was delivered to an excellent standard. This was a burger of considerable distinction and quite the best burger in this style that I've sampled for a good long while.

Edinburgh's own [BBL](#) burgers still nail it on overall flavour and juiciness, but this was accomplished stuff which pleased me greatly.

So overall, Patty Smith's was another hugely impressive dining experience. If Leeds were to become a more regular stopping point for me, this place would definitely be near the top of the list of haunts as the atmosphere was fresh and buzzing, and the food matched it every step of the way.

I ate: dirty burger and chips

I wore: blue

Total bill: £7.45





## Dough Boys

The second half of my lunchtime double bill at the Belgrave Music Hall & Canteen was a trip to the Dough Boys slice bar for some pizza. Behind the smartly tiled concession, the folks were hard at work preparing things having managed down a considerable lunchtime queue with alacrity.



Prior to 7pm during the week (5pm at weekends), their slices are all half price, which is a cracking deal. Given the burger I'd just had from Patty Smith's was pretty substantial I managed to restrain myself to sampling just one slice. Mention of a "wet nun" special had me immediately hooked.



This comprised black pudding, hot dogs, pickled chilli and a dijon dressing. I'm sure the wet nun connection is immediately apparent to you all, but it eluded me.

With the slice freshly heated, I was soon on my way back to my prime people-watching spot.

It proved a highly enjoyable eat with the toppings just outstanding. It was great to see a "provenance board" at their stall listing where all the excellent ingredients had come from. This was yet more evidence of smart work from a very accomplished operation.

So overall, the Dough Boys are fine purveyors of the pizza craft. I'd be glad to sample more of their combos, an impulse that seemed to recur with every new place in Leeds that I'd tried, so far. I suspect another visit to their buzzing food and drink hub is absolutely required.

I ate: "the wet nun" pizza slice

I wore: action footwear

Total bill: £1.50



## The Real Junk Food Project at Bar Santiago

It was good to cross paths, albeit quite haphazardly, with the Real Junk Food Project, the folks who inspired the [Edinburgh chapter](#) that's been popping up in [Union of Genius](#), amongst other places.

They have a real footprint across the city in Leeds, with eight cafes or projects running Pay As You Feel cafes at various points across the week. The latest of these runs at [Santiago Bar](#), a funky and diverse watering hole in the Grand Arcade, from 12-5pm, Thursday to Saturday each week

I'd popped in during their slightly chaotic launch evening, where there was live music, various nibbles and more substantial bites, all delivered with a general air of fun and celebration.

I managed to intercept a tasty spicy pork sausage, initially, then a dainty little pastry case of "beef style pate" came my way.

Fish goujons with lemon mayonnaise arrived hot on the heels of the roast chicken with paprika slaw. Both were very good.



I had miles to go before I slept, so didn't have the opportunity to linger much beyond the initial forays, but it looked set for a fun evening.

It's great to have a city centre venue supporting them to bring to the project to a new, wider audience. The scale of things is certainly something to which the Edinburgh project should aspire, in time.

So overall, it was great to check in with the inspirational trailblazers that are the Real Junk Food Project. It was impressive to see first hand what can be achieved once this concept has firmly taken hold in a locality, so I look forward to tracking both the Leeds and Edinburgh projects as they develop and evolve.





# Northern Monk Refectory

It was a bit of a magical mystery tour to get to the Northern Monk Brewery and Refectory, although it's really ridiculously close at hand from Leeds city centre. I simply contrived to make life difficult for myself by "going with my instincts" when Google would have been a much better bet. Still, it's how you see the world, I suppose.



The brewery's first floor taproom and refectory is airy and spacious with many fewer tables than could conceivably be crammed into the space. This gives it an atmosphere that's buzzing but discreet, with a sense that big parties and dating couples would thrive equally well of an evening.

After having grabbed a beer and menu, then taken a seat at one of their industrial tables, I supped and contemplated. The food is by [Grub & Grog](#) who were also collaborating on the Noisette Cafe, north of the river.

Their selection seemed heavily reliant on an unlikely dominating force: cauliflower. It was good to see a veggie option listed first on the menu, but most other dishes featured cauliflower mash as an element and you could even order more as a side. I'm a big cauliflower fan, so was delighted by this.

The dish that caught my eye was the beef heart steak. This would not be my first heart eaten in the last month or so, after having had short-horn heart at a fabulous lunch at [L'Escargot Blanc](#), a few weeks back. I matched it with an Eternal IPA, which proved a hoppy treat.



The dish was soon with me, looking... well...hearty. It proved outstandingly good and very probably the best single dish of my trip. The heart was beautifully cooked, retaining moisture and flavour aplenty, and the accompaniments, including the pervasive cauliflower mash, were excellent. I have rarely

been so entirely sated by a single dish. With the skies darkening, I decided to retire to an alternative city centre location, after a much needed constitutional.

So overall, I was mightily impressed by the Northern Monk and its excellent food from Grub & Grog. It was a completely fitting centrepiece dinner to my time in the city. It will be first stop next time I'm in the environs.

I ate: beef heart steak, cauliflower mash, braised beans, hops and malt

I drank: Eternal IPA

I wore: striped socks

Total bill: £11.10

## Buca di Pizza

With a couple of the recommended Italian places out in Headingley proving just a little too far away for my languid ways, I took a gamble on a place that I'd passed a couple of times on my travels, giving a pizza purveyor called Buca di Pizza a try.

The place had a great wine cellar vibe to it, feeling a little like a more expansive version of Edinburgh's [Whigham's](#).



Their menu is pizza-centri, as the name suggests, which suited me nicely. It also had a focussed selection of Italian-inspired cocktails. I gave their negroni cambiato a try, but the prosecco topped negroni didn't quite work for me. It blunted the selling points of the main elements, rather than sparking harmonious interaction.

But as the pizza and subsequent beers proved, this was still a place of pleasing quality.

I'm a great fan of egg-topped pizzas, so couldn't resist a go at one of those and when the question of how I'd like my egg cooked was raised, I was pleased to relay that soft and runny would be just grand.

The thinness of the base meant the arrival of the pizza was very prompt. I tucked in with considerable relish, enjoying every crunchy based, ricotta-laden mouthful. It was really good stuff.

I rounded things out with a little taste from their Italian craft beer selection. The wheaty freshness of the Isaac from Rome's [Baladin](#), was impressively good.

So overall, Buca di Pizza served me very nicely. Their pizza was very good and their drink selection full of interesting options. I'd recommend a visit, if you haven't already tried it.

I ate: pizza Fiorentina

I drank: negroni cambiato

I wore: two-tone shoes

Total bill: £15.30



## Hepworth's Deli

My final morning in the city represented something of a challenge as I still had quite a lot of places to visit before I boarded the northbound train. After checking out of the hotel, I strolled towards Thornton's Arcade, with the first of two stops being at Hepworth's Deli.



This compact little place has four tables plus shelf seating, so holds about the same number of folks as yesterday's breakfasting spot, The Greedy Pig. The place has a more refined feel to it, though.

Their breakfast and brunch selection is wide and varied. My eye was caught by their egg bread, which promised brioche French toast with fried eggs and crispy bacon. I started the day with a good pot of tea while the dish was prepared to order.

When it arrived it looked profusely mountainous. It comprised delicious crisp bacon, a slice of French toast, then two further slices where the middle had been cut out and eggs fried in the middle. This was wonderful stuff, tasting every bit as good as it looked. I was a very happy bunny.

So overall, the breakfasts of Leeds can be given a further ringing endorsement on the basis of my visit to Hepworth's. I was super impressed with their fresh take on a classic. I'd be happy to recommend you visit when you're in town.

I ate: egg bread, bacon and fried egg

I drank: tea

I wore: blue shirt

Total: £7.95





## Noonshine Cafe

A stop at the Noonshine Cafe, a supergroup pop-up at the [Tall Boys Beer Market](#), featuring Grub & Grog, the [Leeds Bread Co-op](#), North Star coffee and [Noisette Bakehouse](#), hosted in the upstairs space at the Tall Boys shop, was an absolute must, so I popped in on my final morning.

With one of the folks from North Star at the helm, the coffee was in safe hands. I tried their Tanzanian single origin, which the chap told me came from one of only four bags currently in existence. It was outstandingly good stuff, with solid claims on being the single best espresso I was served on this trip.

The North Star folks are currently running a [Kickstarter](#), which you should seriously consider backing.

To match this excellent coffee, I added a spiced apple doughnut from the Leeds Bread Co-op. This was a lovely little ball of goodness much in the same style as the ricotta filled beauties you get at [Twelve Triangles](#). I was highly appreciative of its sugary charms.

The venue was an unexpected delight with the downstairs bottle shop packing in quite an array of impressive beers, then the tasting room cafe upstairs bedecked with smart artwork about the perception of brewing.

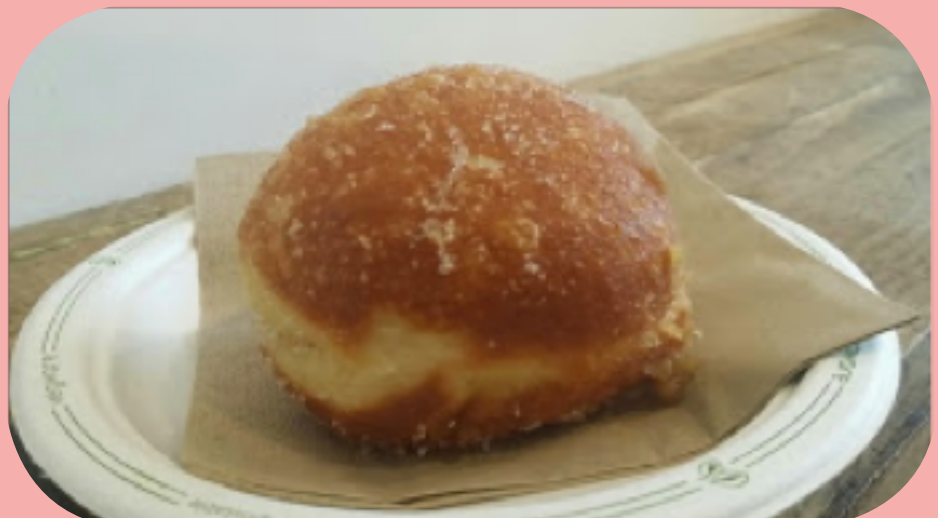
So overall, I really enjoyed my brief stop at the Noonshine Cafe. It allowed me to see a distilled selection of great local businesses in one location. It was a great way to spend my final mid-morning in the city.

I ate: spiced apple doughnut

I drank: espresso

I wore: herringbone jacket

Total bill: £3.50



## Friends of Ham

To round out what had been a pretty spectacular couple of days, I returned to Friends of Ham for a farewell board of delicious grazing plenty.

Their specials included a Scottish selection, with [Great Glen Charcuterie](#) to the fore, but it seemed a little silly for me to choose that, so I opted for their selection put together specifically for the Festival. This was way more food than was required for one but I gratefully accepted the challenge.



The board comprised porchetta, cumin beef, intriguing blood and chocolate chorizo, and an unpasteurised goat's cheese. I matched it with a fresh [Kernel](#) pale ale from their excellent selection.

My food was soon with me on a refreshingly simple white plate. There was a lot of deliciousness crammed in, with a profusion of the chorizo, a good wedge of cheese and generous slices of the pastirma and porchetta, accompanied by cornichons, frozen grapes, oatcakes and focaccia.

I tried different combinations of everything, but what was absolutely clear was that this was all tremendous stuff. If you had to pin me down to one favourite item, I think it was the cumin beef as it was so beautifully judged, with the beef strongly scented but not overpowered by the spicing.



It brought down a fittingly accomplished curtain on what had been an amazing couple of days.

I couldn't have been more impressed with Leeds or the Indie Food Festival they'd brought together to showcase the independent heartbeat of the city.

So overall, Friends of Ham remains an absolute gem of a place. I can think of few places in the whole of Britain where I feel so completely at home in the presence of great beer and thoughtful produce. If you've not visited you really must.

I ate: Leeds Indie Food Festival board - porchetta, pastirma beef, blood & chocolate chorizo, petit blaja goat's cheese

I drank: Kernel pale ale, Darkstar hophead, Kernel black IPA

I wore: grey tie

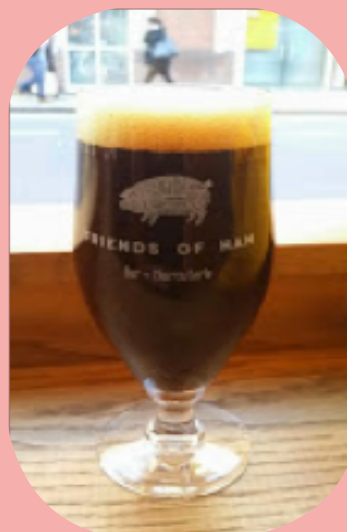
Total bill: £25.30

## The Leeds Beer Trail

With my trusty beer team not there to keep me on the straight and narrow, I had a fairly haphazard approach to drinking during my time in the city.

As outlined in the Bundobust review, I opened proceedings with a coriander pilsner which worked very nicely with the spicy food. It would be interesting to try it "out of context" to see if it held up on its own.

My next stop was at North Bar, home outlet of [North Brewing Co.](#) I tried one of their own, the latest Prototype pale ale, which was light and very drinkable. I stuck with pale for another swift half of Schrodinger's Cat from [Atom](#). This had a nice light bitterness to it. Both were very pleasing afternoon tipples.



Next stop was at the much-vaunted Reliance, ostensibly to sample their food, but I also crammed in a couple of quality beers. I opened with a [Rooster's](#) Buckeye, a "free range beer from Yorkshire" which seemed location appropriate. It was another pale session beer, which was fast becoming my standard serve, but it didn't quite float my boat.

I followed this with a much more assured bitter, brewed specially for the Reliance by [Acorn](#). This was crackin' stuff that again was the kind of thing I could have supped all day.

I had a quick stop for another pale, this time at the Belgrave Music Hall & Canteen, where they were serving a custom-brewed Festival ale. It was light and refreshing stuff.

I managed a couple of decently lengthy stops at Friends of Ham. On the first visit, I sampled the special collaboration with one of our Edinburgh favourites the [Hanging Bat](#). Under the title BatPig, this porter was dark and lovely stuff that drank really well.

I had a Penny Lane pale, to follow. It was light, zesty and fresh, so really brightened the middle part of the evening. I rounded things off with a Pacer pale from [Summer Wine Brewery](#). This had good balance and plenty of backbone. It was an assured close to proceedings.

Day two started with a lunchtime trip to the Belgrave Music Hall, where a [Kirkstall](#) pale



was first up. This was a pretty gentle re-introduction to matters with a crisp golden lightness pervading. [Hand Drawn Monkey's](#) Jephers Darkside was up next. It was another bright, light and dangerously drinkable one, which was dispatched in record time.

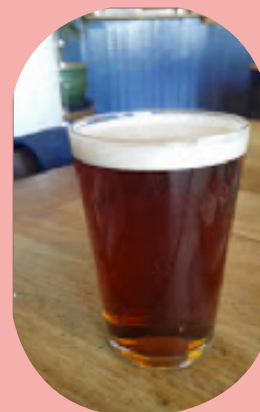
It was then on to old school [Whitelock's](#), established in 1715, for a swift half of Washington Red by [Great Heck](#). This was a classic afternoon downtime beer.



I had a quick stop at Santiago Bar led immediately to [Northern Monk's](#) Chennai Export Porter. This was heavy, but with a lighter sweetness to it. The tap selection wasn't great beyond that, so a [Beavertown](#) 8-ball IPA was my stop-gap selection.

Inspired by the Chennai porter, I hot-footed it to where they brew it at the Northern Monk Brewery. Their taproom and refectory was quite a place with some fun items on their menu.

I kept loyal to the house starting with a Monachus pale ale which was a highly drinkable opener. I followed with an Eternal session IPA, which sat nicely alongside the food I sampled. It was a complex and hoppy offering which nicely offset the rich beef heart I munched.



Next stop was the [Brewery Tap](#) on New Station Road to sample the work of the [Leeds Brewery](#). I started with a Monsoon IPA. This had a lovely deep amber hue to it and was crisply light and quaffable.

I followed with a Gathering Storm stout, which had a good toasted oat thing going on.

I had one final stop on the evening and it was an interesting one on the beer front. Buca di Pizza had an interesting selection of Italian craft beers from it I chose a wheaty Isaac. It proved a tasty and crisp close to the evening.

It was back to Friends of Ham for more light snacking and beering, the following lunchtime, to conclude my visit in a place of singular class. There'd been a [Kernel](#) event and tap takeover the previous evening, so this excellent brewery still dominated the tap offerings. I started with a really good pale ale, light, fruity and thirst quenching; the ideal start to the day.

I followed with [Darkstar](#) Hophead, which was as you might expect and brightly hoppy, with good floral notes. I rounded out my days in the city in suitably triumphant style with a rousing Kernel black IPA, which almost made me miss my train.

This was a lot of beer in a short space of time, and it will require some further reflection, but everything was served well and there was barely a false step taken across all the things I sampled. Leeds is, for sure, a great place for any fan of well produced, carefully considered beers.



## The Leeds Coffee Trail



I kept things pretty simple on the Leeds coffee trail, trying the espresso at a number of different places.

First up, not least because it's so close to the train station, was [Layne's](#). Having been confidently described to me as comfortably the best coffee place in the city by many good judges, expectations were set high. These were entirely met.

The espresso I tried was an Ethiopian from [The Drop](#) and had excellent balance to it. It was a double thumbs up from me.

Next up was [La Bottega Milanese](#), which as the name suggests is an espresso bar in the Italian style. With sipping singles from £1, this was another high-class place, albeit in a completely different style, aesthetic and feel to Layne's. The setting, in a smartish shopping centre, seemed rather incongruous, but I still liked it very much.

[Mrs Atha's](#) was the next stop for a little wooden board of delights that would not have pleased the [We Want Plates](#) lobby. The coffee was impressively good, though.

[Opposite](#) in the Victoria Arcade served me a really good Squaremile Redbrick. I caught up with the Layne's pop-up at Belgrave Music Hall, where I tried another really nicely made Redbrick, too.

In between all of this, I had a stop at The Reliance, where their [Union Hand Roasted](#) was prepared to a surprisingly good standard. The Greedy Pig did me a very good North Star Dark Arches blend with my breakfast, too.

The parting highlight was an outstanding [North Star](#) Tanzanian single origin at the Noonshine Cafe. It was bright and refreshing and exactly what I needed to perk up my morning. It ended my Leeds espresso adventures on the highest of high notes.

