



# The Shah Jahan Mosque & Sir Salar Jung Memorial Hall (1889)

The Shah Jahan Mosque and Sir Salar Jung Memorial Hall (SSJMH) are all that remain of the ambitious project conceived by Hungarian-Jewish linguist and scholar, Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner. The two buildings were originally a part of a grand institute for the study of the east called, The Oriental Institute. The mosque is believed to have been one of four places of worship for Christians, Muslims, Jews and Hindus Leitner had wanted to develop on the site. However after opening the Oriental Institute, Leitner only managed to build the mosque and library (SSJMH) only.

The building of the mosque was financed by the ruler of the British-Indian princely state of Bhopal, the Sultan Shah Jahan Begum (1838-1901), who is believed to have given Leitner £5,000 towards its construction. This is the reason the mosque bears her name today. Alongside the mosque, Leitner also built the two storey Memorial Hall, which is named after Sir Mir Turab Ali Khan, Salar Jung I (1829-1883), the Prime Minister of Hyderabad who is believed to have also financially supported Leitner's project. The SSJMH now serves as the mosque library and Imam's residency.

After Leitner's death in 1899, the mosque fell into disuse as there was no local Muslim community there to inherit it, and could well have been demolished had it not been for the Indian lawyer, Khawaja Kamal ud-Din, who arrived in London in 1912 to pursue a legal case and explore opportunities to further the cause of Islam in the West. The Khwaja, with the help of several notable converts and influential Muslims, revived the mosque and turned it into a flourishing centre of British Islam a publishing house of Islamic literature. He also founded the Islamic Review journal, which was published from the mosque from 1913 up until 1971.

The mosque was then inherited by the large influx of Muslims from the Indian sub-continent who began arriving from the 1960s onwards. They expanded the mosque premises to accommodate the growing community. This expansion integrated the buildings opposite the historic mosque, where the majority of the mosque's activities take place today. In March 2018 the Shah Jahan Mosque became the first mosque in Britain to listed as a Grade I English monument and the SSJMH was awarded Grade II status.

### Shah Jahan Mosque

The mosque was designed by local Anglo-irish architect William Isaac Chambers in a style that echoes Indian Mughal architecture and has led to the mosque being described as a 'mini Taj Mahal'. This style of architecture was developed by the rulers of South Asia during the 16th and 18th centuries and the mosque displays many of the conventions including a large central dome, which Chambers made more spherical than the classic 'onion shape' seen all over the subcontinent. He also integrated a spacious central arched portico and flanked it in the classic Mughal style using two smaller bays with arched arabesque niches. These features once overlooked a square water feature - the round fountain was added later. One unusual feature about the mosque is the Shah Jahan has no real minarets. All four of the minaret-like features serve only ornamental purposes. Author of The British Mosque, and architectural and social history, Shahed Salem says, the mosque was designed to capture "the spirit of 19th-century 'Orientalism ... The Woking Mosque could be considered as the architectural equivalent of this Orientalist fantasy."

The entire structure is original except for the perimeter wall, which along with the small extension to the left of the entrance, are later additions - the latter, an indoor ablution area. The mosque's brickwork was originally exposed and some features are believed to have been painted in vivid yellows, pinks and reds. None of the current colours are original, although the dome was green by the 1960s. The all-white facade is the result of a 'makeover' financed by the makers of Ken Russell's 1977 movie, Valentino, in which the mosque makes a brief appearance.

The mosque's interior reflects the tiny congregation Leitner expected to use it. It has a capacity of around 70 worshippers, and is far too small for the community here today. Individuals do still come and perform prayers inside it, but the main congregational prayers take place in the halls opposite. When the Khwaja first entered the mosque in 1913, he was greeted by a 'floor chock-full of straw and other rubbish' and 'an old copy of the Quran placed on a carved wooden receptacle - Rihal - lying in a corner'.

The mosque's interior features the original mehrab (niche) which points towards Makkah in Saudi Arabia - the direction all Muslims face in prayer. According to an 1889 news report, to ensure this was accurate, Chambers consulted the captain of a famous shipping and logistics company who was brought on site to confirm this. The niche has the first chapter of the Qur'an, Surah al-Fatihah, inscribed on it. This mehrab is where many of the mosque's illustrious imams would have stood including the famous Qur'an translator, Marmaduke Pickthall.

Historic images show the mosque once had a stunning wooden mimbar (pulpit) in the Turkish-Ottoman style. This was in the mosque up until the 1960s, but its whereabouts now are a mystery.

The mosque's hall has a square footprint, and each corner of the interior ceiling features a honeycombed stucco design, inside which are the 99 names of Allah (God) according to Islamic tradition. The use of green throughout is not original but common in mosques all over the world, as green is deemed the Prophet Muhammad's favourite colour.

The "pinnacle of the mosque had vanished" is how Woking resident, H G Wells' describes what the Martian Heat-Ray did to the Shah Jahan Mosque in his classic sci-fi fantasy, War of the Worlds. When the Modfather of Indie music, Paul Weller was growing up in nearby Stanley Road, his mother, Anne used to be the cleaner at the Shah Jahan Mosque.



### Sir Salar Jung Memorial House

Built around the same time as the mosque, the Sir Salar Jung Memorial House - written in green above the main entrance - was named in honour of Sir Mir Turab Ali Khan, Salar Jung I (1829-1883), the Prime Minister of Hyderabad. According to the Khwaja, it was originally built as a 'guest house' by Leitner. The two-storey building has the air of a colonial villa with two bays flanking a decorative arched entrance. Like the mosque, these features echo the Indian Mughal style. The first floor balcony has another feature consistent with the mosque - geometric patterned stars. These all complement the red brickwork and stone surrounds. According to the journalist, Dr Ashiq Hussain Batalvi, the building was named in memory of the former PM of Hyderabad because Sir Salar Jung gave Leitner financial help towards his project. Today the building houses the mosque's library, main administration office, a small kitchen, a meeting room and the private residency of the current mosque Imam. The building was granted Grade II listed status in March 2018.

### Famous Faces

As the epicentre of British Islam, the Shah Jahan had many famous visitors. This includes, the Sultan Jahan Begum, daughter of the mosque's key donor in 1925, founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah (pictured) in 1932, Saudi Crown Prince Amir Saud and Faisal in 1935 and 1939, the Emperor of Abyssinia, HIM Haile Selassie in 1936, the Agha Khan, HH Sir Muhammad Shah in 1957 and the Duke of Kent, Prince Edwards in 2003.

### Birthplace of 'Pakistan'

According to reports, the mosque was where notable Muslims like Choudhrey Rehmat Ali met around 1932 and came up with the name 'Pakistan' for the new Muslim homeland in the sub-continent. 'PaK' was apparently chosen because it contained the first letter of places that would be integrated into the new country and because it also meant 'pure' and 'clean'.

### Sir Salar Jung I

Considered the greatest Prime Minister of Hyderabad, Mir Turab Ali Khan was born in Bijapur in 1829 into a family of nobles who held important roles under various Indian rulers including the Nizam of Hyderabad. He became PM at the age of 23 and is remembered for constituting the courts of justice, establishing schools, organising the police and addressing numerous other state infrastructure. He is also remembered for supporting the British in India's First War of Independence or the 'Indian Mutiny' in 1857. Sir Jung was knighted by the British. He died of cholera in February 1883.



# The Woking Muslim War Cemetery - Peace Gardens (1915)

The Woking Muslim War Cemetery was commissioned in 1915 after First World War German propaganda forced the British to take appropriate measures in ensuring their non-Christian subject soldiers were having their final rites observed correctly. For Hindus and Sikhs this meant being given an open air cremation spot on the downs in Patcham near Brighton - where the Memorial Chattri was built in 1921. To bury Muslim soldiers, this space on Horsell Common was purchased by the War Office from the Earl of Onslow due to its proximity to the Shah Jahan Mosque.

The cemetery was designed by architect T H Winney in the pseudo-Mughal style of the nearby mosque. This featured a domed archway, known as a chattri and ornamental minarets on each corner of a red-brick perimeter wall. The work was completed by local company, Ashby & Horner Ltd in 1917.

The site became the final resting place of 18 soldiers who fought in the first World War, one Officer Cadet from Sandhurst, and eight more soldiers who died fighting in World War II. Three of these were not British but of North African origin, fighting for the Free French Forces (FFF). This was the army of the French government-in-exile in London, led by Charles de Gaulle during WWII. The names of every one of these soldiers in now carved on the memorial stone at the far end of the gardens. Those who died fighting for the British came from all over modern day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Until 1921 local people looked after the grounds and then the upkeep was taken over by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC). In 1969, due to the desecration of several graves, the CWGC decided to exhume the bodies and move them to the larger Brookwood Military Cemetery. The 24 British soldiers were placed in plot 2A in the British section, and the three FFF soldiers were placed in the French section.

By 1984, despite being recognised as a Grade II listed monument, the site had become neglected and fallen into disrepair. In 2011, locals began calling for the grounds' renovation and work began in 2013 to turn the space into a 'peace garden' for remembrance and reflection. It was officially opened in November 2015 as 'the Muslim War Cemetery - Peace Garden', also known as 'the Muslim Burial Ground and Peace Garden' by HRH Prince Edward, The Earl Of Wessex.

The features of the renovation are inspired by classical Islamic garden design marrying water with nature and reflecting symmetry and balance. Note the central water feature, the mirrored planting of the 27 Indian Silver Birches - one for each fallen soldier, the two stone 'prayer mats' either side of the centre line and the circular pathways. Even the plants in each bed.



# The Muhammadan Cemetery - The Brookwood Cemetery (1884)

The Brookwood Cemetery is a Grade I listed Historic Park and Gardens. It was opened in November 1854 by the London Necropolis & National Mausoleum Company (LNC) as the London Necropolis or (Great) Woking Cemetery, and was the largest cemetery in the world.

The cemetery was famous for its very own railway funeral service, that allowed London's dead to be transported with their mourners from the capital to the Surrey countryside for a burial. To facilitate this, private stations complete with all the necessary facilities were constructed in both London and Brookwood, and part of the old platform for the cemetery's North Station can still be seen backing onto the Dawoodhi-Bohra Najmee Baag private burial ground on Chapel Avenue.

Almost from the off, the LNC tried the attract the patronage of London's diverse communities, guilds and fraternities. As a result, plots were bought or rented by, amongst others, The Corps of Commissionaires, the Dramatic Equestrian & Musical Sick Fund, the Swedish Church, and the Oriental Institute. The section that Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner set aside in 1884 cost £550 a year and was acquired to bury any Muslim students that came to his institute and passed away. It was marked by a marker stone referred to as the 'kibla stone' which identifies the space as the 'Muhammadan Cemetery reserved by the Oriental Institute Woking' - a 'Muhammadan' was a term historically used to describe a Muslim and kibla is the arabic term for the direction towards Makkah, in Saudi Arabia, the direction towards which Muslims face when performing their prayers and when they are buried. Dr Leitner's Muhammadan Cemetery was the first Muslim space reserved anywhere in Britain for the exclusive use of Muslims and the first Muslim Cemetery in northern Europe.

The kibla stone, complete with inscriptions can still be found in the original plot, now identified as M1 on the map. The stone also describes how 'Muhammadans' should be buried. It is not known for sure if anyone from the Oriental Institute was actually buried in the Muhammadan Cemetery, as the first known Muslim to be buried here was a Sheikh Nubie who died in 1895. Born in Bombay in British India in 1860, Nubie was brought to England to perform as a juggler at Queen Victoria's Empire of India Exhibition at Earl's Court. He reportedly died of pneumonia en route to meeting the Empress of India at Windsor in July 1895, and was brought to Brookwood as it was known there was a Muslim cemetery there. Nubie's grave location is no longer known.

## Notable Residents of the Muhammadan Cemetery

For a more complete list of the famous residents of the Muhammadan Cemetery, refer to Britain's Muslim Heritage Trail #2, The Muhammadan Cemetery Walk.

### Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner (14 Oct 1840 - 22 March 1899)

The founder of Britain's first Muslim cemetery and purpose-built mosque is a himself in the Anglican section, south of Cemetery Pales in plot 2 under a hug oak backing onto the old cemetery railway. A large bust marks his grave. Born in Hungary into a Jewish family, Leitner spent his formative years in Istanbul learning Arabic, Turkish and studying Islam. He was appointed Interpreter to the British Commissariat in the Crimea at the age of 15 and later became Professor of Arabic and Muslim Law at King's College London. Leitner then spent many years teaching in India and helped to found the University of Punjab, before coming to England to set up The Oriental Institute in Woking.

### Rt Hon, Sir Rowland George Allanson-Winn, 5th Baron Headley (19 Jan 1855 - 22 June 1935)

Also known as 'Al-Haj Sheikh Saifurahman Rahmatullah El-Farooq, Lord Headley is in the very first row of graves approximately the 16th plot in. He was brought up a Protestant and became a Civil Engineer who converted to Islam in 1913 and alongside Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din founded the Woking Muslim Mission at the Shah Jahan Mosque in Woking. In 1923, he became the first British Peer to perform the Hajj. At the time of his death, he was raising money for London's first mosque in West Kensington.

### Muhammad Marmaduke William Pickthall (7 April 1875 - 19 May 1936)

Lying in the sixth row and the fifth grave in from the road is the author of the first English translation of the Qur'an by a native English speaker, Marmaduke Pickthall. The English novelist, was the son of an Anglican priest and friend of British wartime Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill. As a novelist, he was highly regarded by D H Lawrence, H G Wells and E M Forster and wrote stories set in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Yemen and Turkey. He first began learning Arabic on a trip organised by his family's church contacts to Palestine. After his conversion to Islam in November 1927, Pickthall began work on The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, probably the most influential English translation of the Qur'an in history. It was authorised by Al Azhar and published in 1930.



### Key:

- The Shah Jahan Mosque
- Woking Muslim War Cemetery also known as The Peace Gardens
- The Muhammadan Cemetery also known as Brookwood Cemetery
- Route by walk with approximate time
- Route by car with approximate time
- Train line
- Train station