

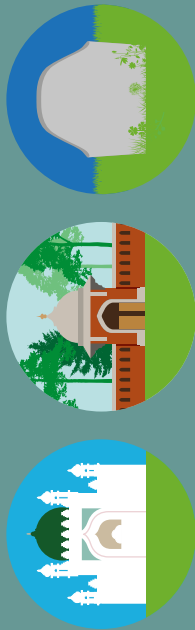
This trail was researched and developed by the
Everyday Muslim Heritage & Archive Initiative.

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The Shah Jahan Mosque
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Britain's Muslim Heritage Trails

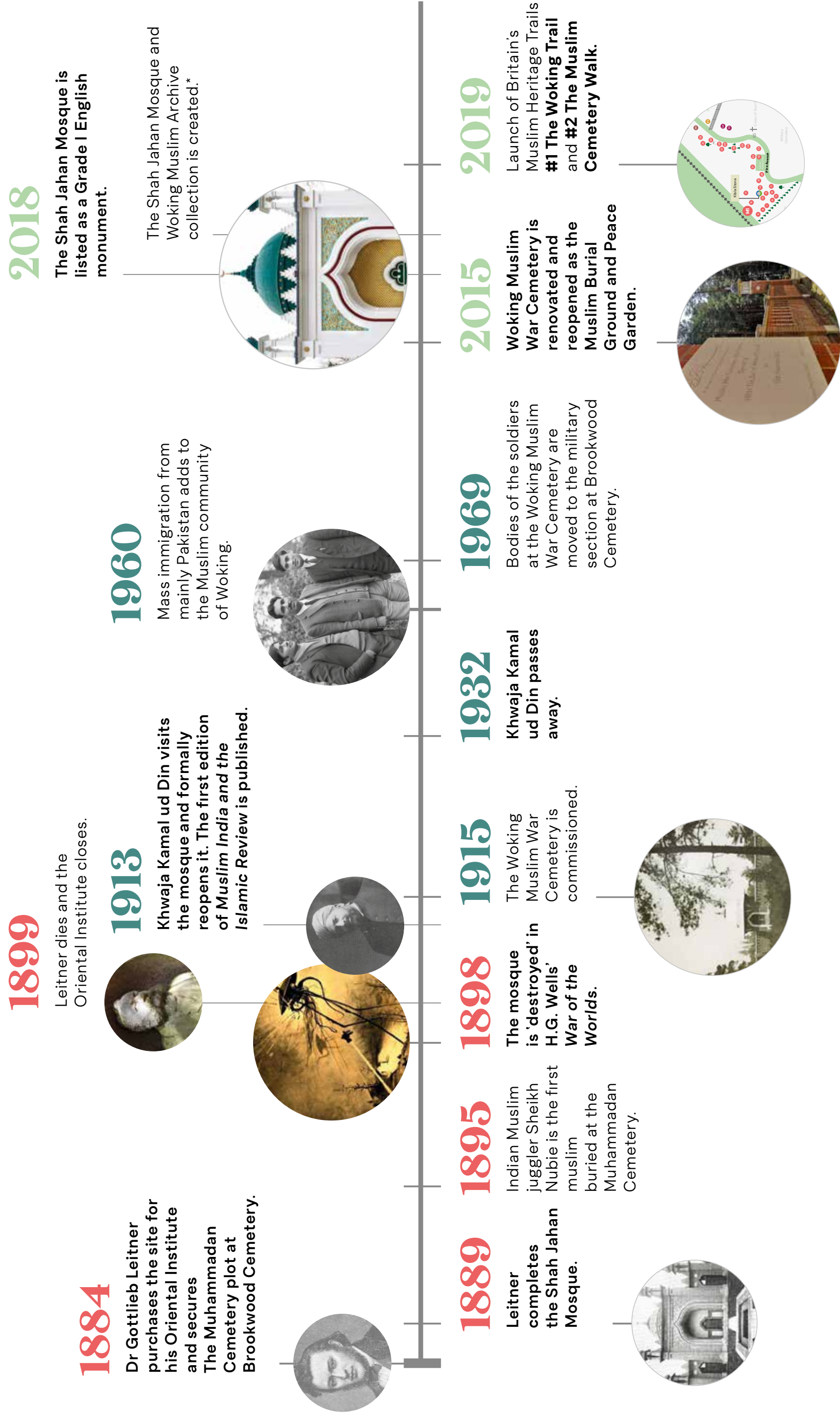
#1 The Woking Trail



Welcome to Britain's first self guided Muslim heritage trail.

This trail is set in and around the town of Woking in Surrey, which is home to three of the most important Muslim heritage spaces in Britain: the country's very first Muslim cemetery, originally called, the **Muhammadan Cemetery** (1884), Britain's first purpose-built mosque, the **Shah Jahan** (1889) and the first Muslim military cemetery, the **Woking Muslim War Cemetery** (1915).

Timeline





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

These two beautiful buildings are all that remain of the ambitious project the Hungarian-Jewish linguist and scholar, Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner dreamt of towards the end of the 19th century - a grand centre for the study of the east called The Oriental Institute.

The Shah Jahan Mosque

The mosque is one of four places of worship Leitner is said to have wanted to develop on the site to represent the world's four major faiths: Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism. However Leitner passed away in 1899 having built only the mosque and the Sir Salar Jung Memorial Hall.

The mosque bears the name of its key donor, the Sultan Shah Jahan Begum (1838-1901), ruler of the British-Indian princely state of Bhopal, who reportedly contributed £5,000 for its construction in 1889.

The mosque was designed by local Anglo-Irish architect William Isaac Chambers in a style that echoes Indian Mughal architecture, which was developed in India between the 16th and 18th centuries. Its features include a large central dome, a spacious arched portico flanked by two smaller bays with arabesque niches overlooking a water feature - this was originally square and later replaced by the round fountain seen today. One unusual feature about the Shah Jahan is that it has no real minarets. All four of the minaret-like features serve ornamental purposes only. The mosque's design encapsulates 'the spirit of 19th-century 'Orientalism' says British Muslim author and architect Shahed Salem.

The mosque was initially used as a place of worship for students attending the Oriental Institute, but after Leitner's death and the closure of the institute, the mosque fell into disrepair and in all likelihood would have been demolished had it not been for an Indian lawyer, Khawaja Kamal ud-Din, who heard about the mosque during a visit to London. The Khwaja, with the help of several notable converts and influential Muslims, managed to acquire the mosque in 1913 and return it to its original purpose. He also founded a Muslim mission and publishing house on the site, where the *Islamic Review* journal was produced up until 1971.

Early drawings and photos show that the mosque's brickwork was originally exposed and some of its features painted in vivid yellows, pinks and reds. Therefore, the current colours are not original. The dome was painted green by the 1960s, and the all-white facade is the result of a 'makeover' for Ken Russell's 1977 movie, *Valentino*, in which the mosque makes a brief appearance. However, almost all of the mosque's structure is original. The only changes are the perimeter wall, fountain and small extension (an indoor ablution area), all added later.

The mosque's size reflects the tiny congregation Leitner expected to use it. The interior features the original *mehrab* (niche) which has the first chapter of the Qur'an, *Surah al-Fatihah*, inscribed on it. The *mehrab*'s orientation towards Makkah in Saudi Arabia was aligned with the help of a ship's captain. The hall is square and above each corner is a honeycombed design containing the 99 names of *Allah* (God). The mosque windows are covered in stars that may have been a nod to Leitner's Jewish roots. The widespread use of green is not an original feature but common in mosque design as green is said to have been the favourite colour of the Prophet Muhammad.

The mosque was inherited by the current community after they came to Woking from parts of the Indian sub-continent from the 1960s onwards. They quickly outgrew the historic building and expanded the premises by developing the structures opposite the Shah Jahan. These now function as the main mosque areas and where the main congregational prayers take place. In March 2018 the Shah Jahan became the first mosque in Britain to be listed as a Grade I English monument.

Sir Salar Jung Memorial House

Built around the same time as the mosque, the Sir Salar Jung Memorial House is a two-storey, red brick building that resembles an Indian colonial villa with two bays flanking a decorative arched entrance. Like the mosque windows, the first floor balcony has a pattern made of stars. The building was originally a guest house but is now the mosque library, administration offices and Imam's private residency. It was named after Sir Mir Turab Ali Khan, Salar Jung I (1829-1883), the Prime Minister of Hyderabad, because he financially supported Leitner's project.

Key to map:



The Shah Jahan Mosque and the Sir Salar Jung Memorial House



The Woking Muslim War Cemetery, now known as The Peace Gardens



The site of the original Muhammadan Cemetery inside Brookwood Cemetery



Walking route



Driving route



Train line



Train station

Did you know?



Aliens and Mods!

The Shah Jahan was 'destroyed' by aliens in Woking resident, H.G. Wells' famous sci-fi fantasy, *War of the Worlds*, and when the Modfather of Indie music, Paul Weller was growing up on Stanley Road, his mother was the mosque's cleaner.



Famous Faces

The Shah Jahan has been visited by several famous figures including the daughter of the mosque's key donor, Sultan Jahan Begum, founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Saudi Crown Princes, Amir Saud and Faisal, and the Emperor of Abyssinia, HIM Haile Selassie, amongst others.



Birthplace of 'Pakistan'

The mosque is reportedly where notable Muslims involved in the foundation of Pakistan came up with the country's name in the 1930s. 'Pak' was chosen because it contained the first letter of the places that made up the new country and because it meant 'pure' and 'clean'.



Sir Salar Jung I

Mir Turab Ali Khan was born in Bijapur in 1829 into a family of nobles. He is remembered as the greatest Prime Minister of Hyderabad for his social, political and structural reformations. He is also remembered for supporting Britain in India's First War of Independence or the 'Indian Mutiny' in 1857. Knighted by the British, Sir Salar Jung died of cholera in February 1883.



The Woking Muslim War Cemetery - Peace Gardens (1915)

The Woking Muslim War Cemetery was commissioned in 1915 to bury Britain's Muslim subject soldiers. The location was chosen for its proximity to the country's only mosque at the time.

The cemetery came into being after Maulvi Sadr-ud-Din, a missionary from Lahore based at the Shah Jahan mosque, insisted the British develop something that was fitting and sympathetic to the culture of the soldiers who had made the ultimate sacrifice. The resulting Indo-Saracenic design was created by architect T. Herbert Winney, and featured a *chhatra* (domed pavilion) at the entrance and ornamental minarets on each corner of a red-brick perimeter wall. The work was completed in 1917 and the site became the final resting place of 18 soldiers who fought in World War I, one Officer Cadet from Sandhurst, and eight soldiers who fought in World War II.

Three of these were French subjects that died fighting for the Free French Forces (FFF), the army of the French government-in-exile in London. The British subjects came from parts of modern day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Until 1921 local people looked after the cemetery and then the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) took over. The CWGC decided in 1969 to move all the graves to the larger Brookwood Military Cemetery, placing the British subject soldiers in plot 2A of the British section, and the three FFF soldiers in the French section.

By 1984 the now empty site had become badly neglected and fallen into disrepair, despite being listed as a Grade II monument. In 2013, following calls for its renovation, work began on the site to turn it into a 'peace garden' for remembrance and reflection. The site was officially reopened in November 2015 as part of the World War Centenary commemorations by HRH Prince Edward, The Earl Of Wessex as 'the Muslim War Cemetery - Peace Garden'.

The renovation of the space was inspired by classical Islamic garden designs. Various natural elements come together in a symmetrical layout around a central water feature. These include 27 Indian Silver Birches - one for each fallen soldier, two stone 'prayer mats', a series of colourful plants and a circular pathway. The names of the soldiers that were once buried here are now carved on a memorial stone at the head of the gardens.



The Muhammadan Cemetery - The Brookwood Cemetery (1884)

The Muhammadan Cemetery was established in 1884 by Dr Leitner exclusively for his Oriental Institute to bury Muslims.

This plot sits within the Muslim sections of Brookwood Cemetery and was the very first Muslim space established in Britain. The plot is marked by a stone known as the 'Kibla Stone', which is still visible today. It identifies the space as the 'Muhammadan Cemetery reserved by the Oriental Institute Woking'. 'Muhammadan' was the historic term used to describe a Muslim and *kibla* is the arabic term for the direction towards Makkah in Saudi Arabia, which is the direction Muslims face when performing prayer and when they are buried.

The Kibla Stone also describes how Muslims should be buried. There is no evidence that anyone from the Oriental Institute was ever actually buried in the Muhammadan Cemetery as the first known recorded burial there was for a Sheik Nubie in 1895, an Indian juggler who performed at the Empire of India Exhibition.

Nubie's grave location is no longer known, but the site became the final resting place for a number of famous Muslims including Abdullah Quilliam, founder of Britain's first mosque in Liverpool, Marmaduke Pickthall, the famous Quran translator and one of the last Ottoman Princesses, HH Hayriya Aisha Durr-i-shahvar Sultan. To learn about the other amazing Muslims buried here, pick up **Britain's Muslim Heritage Trail #2: The Muslim Cemetery Walk**.

Please note: The Muhammadan Cemetery is now known as plot M1. 'Muhammadan' is an archaic term used to describe a Muslim, and one some Muslims find derogatory and offensive today.

