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Bonus Content



For an even more in-depth exploration, scan the QR code and delve into our digital heritage trail, which takes the journey across London! It features enlightening essays by notable academics and community historians, offering a wealth of knowledge to enrich your journey through time and will leave you with a profound appreciation for the shared history of India and Britain.

Welcome to the Empire and Partition Heritage Trail - Westminster Edition. Step into an immersive journey to transport you through critical historical events in India and Britain from 1600 to 1972. As you explore various locations in London, you'll unravel the intertwined history of trade, colonial India, its partition, and the lasting impact it has had on its people. Discover influential figures, significant events, and key organisations that shaped a shared history between India and Britain. This trail promises a unique and educational experience and provides a deeper understanding of the connections between these two nations. Let the Empire and Partition Heritage Trail - Westminster Edition begin!

Introduction

The History 1600-1972

Queen Elizabeth I granted a charter on December 31, 1600, forming the East India Company (EIC). The company traded spices, textiles, and goods in India, gaining influence through territorial and tax control and even a private army. Company General Robert Clive was instrumental in the EIC's gain in wealth and territory, making himself one of the wealthiest men in the world in the process.

Over time, the EIC became a ruling power in parts of India, exploiting India's resources, committing atrocities against Indian civilians and employing a "divide-and-rule" strategy, which created tension between ethnic and religious groups. Following the Indian Uprising of 1857, the British government took control of India from the company, turning it into a British colony.

By the mid-1900s, the movement for Indian independence grew stronger and was led by figures such as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. However, there were significant disagreements about the outcome of Indian independence. Jinnah wanted to secure rights for Muslims and, by 1940, demanded a separate nation for India's Muslims, whilst Gandhi supported a united India. The British government eventually agreed to grant India its freedom and later, accepted Jinnah's demands.

On 15th August 1947, India gained independence, and the country was split into two separate nations: Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority East and West Pakistan. Pakistan gained its independence a day earlier, on 14th August 1947.

Lord Louis Mountbatten - the last Viceroy of India - played a crucial role in overseeing the country's independence. Sir Cyril Radcliffe was appointed to draw a border between India and Pakistan; the contentious boundary is known as the "Radcliffe Line". Later in 1971, East Pakistan declared its Independence from West Pakistan, and Bangladesh was born. The partition of India was hasty, resulting in the largest mass migration in history, communal violence, the tragic loss of lives and the displacement of millions of people.

The EIC and British rule in India also impacted migration and shaped the demographic and cultural landscapes of various regions in Britain. Sailors, "lascars", employed on British trade ships settled in port cities like Glasgow, London, Liverpool and Cardiff. Returning British officials often brought back servants and nannies, "ayahs"; others came for economic or educational reasons.

In the postwar and post-partition era, the British government invited subjects from the former colonies to fill the UK labour shortage in the manufacturing, healthcare, and transportation industries. Centuries of interactions between South Asian communities and British people have enriched and shaped Britain's food, language, clothing and industry and continue to do so.

REMEMBERING PARTITION

Empire & Partition Heritage Trail

1 ST JAMES'S PALACE MARLBOROUGH ROAD, STREET, JAMES'S, LONDON SW1A 1BQ

The Round Table Conferences took place between November 1930 and December 1932 to discuss India's constitutional development. Over 100 delegates from India and Britain participated, including Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Sir Dr Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Lord Irwin, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Dr Shafaat Ahmad Khan, M.R. Jayakar, Sardar Ujjal Singh, Aga Khan III and Cowasji Jehangir. Collectively, they proposed a united all-India federation with British control reservations and safeguards for minorities. The recommendations were published in a White Paper in March 1933 and debated in Parliament. Despite not materialising before India's independence in 1947, the conference influenced the Government of India Act (1935), granting India partial autonomy.

2 CAXTON HALL 8-10 CAXTON STREET, LONDON SW1H 0AQ

Caxton Hall was the site of the inaugural meeting of the All-India Muslim League Party on the 6th of May 1908 and some of the first Jummah prayers in London, organised in 1908 by the Sudanese - Egyptian actor and activist Dusé Mohamed Ali. On 13th March 1940, Udham Singh, a Punjab revolutionary, avenged the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of 1919 by assassinating Sir Michael O'Dwyer, the former Governor of Punjab, in Caxton Hall. Singh was convicted of murder and sentenced to death. While in custody, he adopted the name 'Ram Muhammad Singh Azad', a combination of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh names that ended with the Hindi/Urdu word for freedom - Azad.

3 MILLICENT GARRETT FAWCETT STATUE PARLIAMENT SQUARE, LONDON SW1P 3BD

The statue of Millicent Fawcett honours the British suffragist leader and is Parliament Square's first monument to a woman and also its first sculpture by a woman. The plinth is engraved with forty-nine names of members and supporters, including Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, a founding member of the Suffragette movement, the daughter of the last Maharajah of Punjab and goddaughter to Queen Victoria - the Empress of India. Sophia was also a Women's Tax Resistance League member, whose slogan was 'No Vote, No Tax'. During the First World War, she nursed troops at Brighton Pavilion and other hospitals for Indian soldiers.

4 MAHATMA GANDHI STATUE PARLIAMENT SQUARE, LONDON SW1P 3JX

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a British-trained Indian lawyer and freedom activist. Gandhi's political activism developed while practising law in South Africa and fighting for the rights of Indians living there. Upon returning to India in 1915, Gandhi led campaigns to improve the lives of Indian peasants and labourers through non-violence (ahimsa) and devotion to truth (satyagraha.) In 1919 he joined the Indian National Congress and remained an influential figure in Indian politics until the end of his life. He opposed the partition of the Indian Subcontinent along religious lines and advocated for a united and independent India.

5 THE CLIVE STEPS - LEADING TO THE ROBERT CLIVE MEMORIAL KING CHARLES STREET, LONDON SW1A 2AQ

On 31st December 1600, Queen Elizabeth I granted a royal charter to a group of more than two hundred investors from the City of London to form the East India Company (EIC). The company accumulated considerable wealth through trade and many atrocities against Indians, which included exploitation, harsh taxation, war, and indentured slavery. As the EIC grew in power, it extended its influence into Indian politics and governmental affairs.

One of the most instrumental figures in expanding the EIC's rule over India was the company's general, Robert Clive. Under his leadership, they won the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and took control of Bengal - the world's wealthiest region - defeating the Nawab of Bengal. This made EIC very powerful, and Clive became the richest self-made man in Europe. In 1773, despite evidence of Clive's and EIC employees' greed and corruption, Clive defended his actions to Parliament and was cleared of any wrongdoing yet, the press described Clive as 'Lord Vulture'. During the EIC's rule of Bengal, the region suffered a devastating famine, and an estimated 10 million people died of starvation and disease. Clive committed suicide just two years later.

6 FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH & DEVELOPMENT OFFICE KING CHARLES STREET, LONDON SW1A 2AH

Between 1867 and 1947, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office in Westminster housed the India Office, a British government department established to oversee the administration of India. The Government of India Act (1858) took away full administrative control of India from the East India Company (EIC) and gave it to the British Crown. The furniture and other possessions of the EIC were moved into this building. The building is designed in Italianate style and features an orientalist interior named the 'Durbar Court'.

7 STATUE OF EARL MOUNTBATTEN HORSE GUARDS ROAD, LONDON SW1A 2AD

Lord Louis Mountbatten was a naval officer who served in both World Wars. In March 1947, he was appointed the last viceroy of British India and oversaw the power transfer from British hands to independent India and Pakistan. On 3rd June 1947, he announced the partition plan and transition date - 15th August 1947. The plan outlined the details of independence, including the principles of partition, sovereignty and the right to a constitution. The short two-month period between the plan's announcement and the transition date caused immense chaos, mass forced migration and fuelled deadly communal violence.

8 THE NATIONAL LIBERAL CLUB 1 WHITEHALL PLACE, LONDON, SW1A 2HE

The National Liberal Club (NLC) was established by William Gladstone in 1882 to provide club facilities for Liberal Party campaigners. The staircase of the NLC houses paintings of figures related to the empire and partition, including Queen Victoria named The Empress of India in 1876 and Maharaja Duleep Singh, the last ruler of the Kingdom of Lahore in Punjab. In 2023, a new painting of Muhammed Ali Jinnah was added, the founder of Pakistan. Jinnah was a barrister trained at Lincoln's Inn in London. He was also the leader of the All-India Muslim League party, founded to secure the interests of India's Muslims. Jinnah worked to establish the new nation's government and to aid the millions of Muslim migrants who emigrated from neighbouring India during the partition in 1947. On 14th August 1947, when Pakistan was declared independent, Jinnah was sworn in as its first Governor-General.

9 NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY ST. MARTIN'S PLACE, LONDON WC2H 0HE

The National Portrait Gallery was built in 1856 and was the world's first national public gallery dedicated exclusively to portraits. The gallery features portraits of figures involved in the partition of India. This includes Cyril Radcliffe, appointed to mark the border between India and Pakistan. Radcliffe had never visited India and knew nothing of its complex regions, faiths or cultures. He was given five weeks to create two independent nations - a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan. The provinces of Punjab and Bengal were split in half, and almost fourteen million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims found themselves in the 'wrong' country. Families became separated, and decades of British divide-and-rule principles caused suspicion between faith groups, leading to mass genocide. An estimated two million people lost their lives. The partition caused the largest forced migration in history.

10 CLARIDGE'S HOTEL BROOK STREET, LONDON W1K 4HR

East and West Pakistan were divided by distance, cultural, language, and identity differences. West Pakistan held more political and economic power, fuelling opposition and eventually, an independence movement in East Pakistan. The movement's most notable activist was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The UK's Bengali community consequently became politically organised, forming the UK Awami League in Tower Hamlets, a British branch of the Bangladeshi political party which championed East Pakistan's interests and, later, its independence. During the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, Rahman was imprisoned. Following the end of the war and his release from Pakistan, Rahman visited London and held his first press conference on 8th January 1972 at Claridge's Hotel. He also met British Prime Minister Edward Heath and was officially declared the Prime Minister of Bangladesh on 12th January, 1972.

