

WE BELONG HERE TOO:

A HISTORY OF MUSLIM

CONTRIBUTIONS

TO BRITAIN

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We Belong Here Too: A History of Muslim Contributions to Britain



Troops at the Qasr Al Kharana fort, Jordan, during World War II | Source: Flickr @whatsthatpicture



MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN: EID UL FITR CELEBRATIONS, 1941
Source: Imperial War Museum

Introduction

Since the turn of the century, Britain's Muslim community has had to defend itself from an array of vilifying tropes. Owing to a series of horrific terrorist attacks carried out by a minority of extremist ideologues over the last two decades, British Muslims in general have often been wrongly framed as threats to their country's national security. High-profile cases of South Asian men with Muslim names preying on vulnerable young women have encouraged fear-mongering narratives about Muslim 'grooming gangs,' even though government statistics show most offenders to be non-Muslim white men¹. Anxiety around demographic change has led some to postulate paranoid conspiracy theories of alleged plots to replace Britain's Anglo-Saxon Christian population with Muslims. These examples form only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the Islamophobic tropes that have been deployed in public discourses about Britain's Muslims. In fact, all of them seem to be unified by what might be described as one, overarching 'master trope': that Muslims are 'outsiders,' who despite being in Britain, are not part of it. According to this framing of modern Britain, Muslims are 'alien citizens,' newcomers to Britain who have not yet woven themselves into her social and cultural fabric.

This report seeks to undermine that pernicious narrative. It does so by drawing from a range of secondary sources to outline a select number of episodes in Britain's history in which Muslims and the influence of Islam have played a role in steering the country's direction. The report does not provide an exhaustive history of Muslim interactions with Britain; that is not the purpose of this report. The purpose of this report is to simply demonstrate, using a select few core examples, that Muslims have played a vital role in shaping Britain's socio-cultural development for literally hundreds of years. Nor does this report look at the influx of Muslims following the end of World War II and into the 1960s and 1970s. Largely, it avoids analysing this period because doing so would feed into the false notion that Muslims started entering Britain in this period. Instead, it endeavours to show that Muslims have far deeper roots in this country. Firstly, we will set the scene by turning to analyse in greater depth some of the discourse that has emerged in recent years presenting British Muslims as a fifth column in British society.

1. Home Office. December, 2020. Group-Based Child Sex Exploitation: Characteristics of Offending: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fd87e348fa8f54d5733f532/Group-based_CSE_Paper.pdf



MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN: EID UL FITR CELEBRATIONS, 1941
Source: Imperial War Museum

Muslims as 'Citizen Aliens'

For many years now, certain politicians, journalists and activists have sought to portray Muslims as living within, but nevertheless being apart, from Britain. The 4 million strong Muslim community stubbornly refuses to accept Britain's way of life, according to this view. As Saeed points out, right-wing tabloids have often presented this diverse body of people as "an alien other"². However, the opinions of British Muslims towards the country and their place within it paint quite a different picture. Far from harbouring hate toward the nation and wanting to unmoor themselves from it, opinion polling consistently shows that the majority of Muslims feel a strong sense of attachment to Britain. For example, one poll found that 61% of British Muslims saw Britain as "my country" and 94% of them disagreed that Muslims should live separately from non-Muslims³. In a separate poll carried out the same month as the July 2005 terrorist attacks in London, 66% of

British Muslims disagreed with the statement that "the Islamic faith is not compatible with Western democracy"⁴. One shock poll from 2009 carried out by Gallup found that more British Muslims (77%) "identified with the UK" than non-Muslims (50%). Undermining any notion that stronger self-identification with the Islamic faith corresponds with a weakened sense of 'Britishness,' the same poll found that 75% of that 77% *also* identified strongly with their religion⁵. This serves to undermine the Islamophobic notion of 'dual loyalty,' which says that Muslims' loyalty is split between Britain and Islam⁶. As Andrew Brown for *The Guardian* put it at the time, the poll's results showed that, "there is no correlation between religious observance and feeling alienated from the society around you ... [even though] this is what the society around Muslims believes"⁷.

Nevertheless, since the early-to-mid-2000s, public-political discourse has continued to project the fiction that British Muslims wish to live separately from their non-Muslim counterparts, undermining socio-communal cohesion and the possibility of shared sets of norms and values. Proponents of this kind of argument may point to examples like the 2016 government-commissioned Casey Review into Opportunity and Integration - at the time heavily criticised by human rights bodies and activists - which

2. Amir Saeed. October 9, 2007. Media, Racism and Islamophobia: The Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Media. *Sociology Compass*: <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00039.x>

3. UK Polling Report. NOP Poll of British Muslims: <https://pollingreport.uk/articles/nop-poll-of-british-muslims>

4. Muslim Opinion Survey. Channel 4: https://www.channel4.com/news/media/pdfs/top_lines.pdf

5. Duncan Graham. May 7, 2009. More Muslims Identify Themselves as British Than Rest of Population. *The Telegraph*: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/5287105/More-Muslims-identify-themselves-as-British-than-rest-of-population.html?WT.mc_id=tmgoff_psc_ppc_performancemax_dynamiclandingpages&gclid=EAlaIqobChMlu4T-9buOggMVjc3tCh-2btwijEAMYASAAEgLQ-PD_BwE

6. Akbar Shahid Ahmed. March 27, 2019. 'Dual Loyalty' Is A Slur - One Muslims Face All The Time. *The Huffington Post*: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/muslims-dual-loyalty-ilhan-omar_n_5c926403e4b08c4fec334b6b

7. Andrew Brown. May 7, 2009. Muslim Attitudes Survey: A Closer Look. *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/andrewbrown/2009/may/07/gallup-muslims-islam>

claimed that high levels of segregation exist among minority communities, particularly Muslims.⁸ However, the deeper social and psycho-cultural reasons for any possible high concentration of Muslims, or any ethno-religious group, in a given area must acknowledge deeper social and psycho-cultural factors that might be at play. For example, some peer-reviewed academic research has suggested White British homeowners are more likely to move house if people with Pakistani or Muslim sounding names buy a home in close proximity.⁹ At the same time, others have highlighted the tendency among South Asians, most of whom in the UK are Muslim, to quite naturally seek out housing near to family members and friends. Such complex demographic dynamics can lead to the false impression of 'ghettoisation' among Muslim communities. It is therefore important that policy-makers and media figures endeavour to understand the nuances of these dynamics, rather than fanning the flames of division by deploying half-baked tropes about alleged tendencies among minorities toward self-segregation.

Unfortunately however, multiculturalism¹⁰, once held up as an example of British tolerance and pluralism, has become a scapegoat in right-leaning media for the natural insecurities that many Brits felt after the 7/7 terrorist bombings¹¹. Highlighting this narrative, the Chairman of the



Commission for Racial Equality, Trevor Philips, warned that multiculturalism had put the UK in a position where many cities were "sleepwalking to segregation" between racial and religious groups¹². Well-established journalists, such as Melanie Phillips, released books which argued that Muslims living in Britain had not sufficiently embraced or assimilated to 'British values' and the 'British way of life'¹³. Others took a slightly different angle; then-Policy Exchange Chairman and future Home Secretary, Michael Gove, published his book *Celsius 7/7*¹⁴, whose basic thesis is that Islamism had been allowed to go unchallenged in the West because the latter had lost confidence in its own values, which it needed to reassert. As some scholars have pointed out, throughout the 2000s and the 2010s, an entire industry emerged on the political right whose raison d'être appeared to be the demonisation of Muslims¹⁵. What such discourses share in common is an exclusionary tendency to frame Muslims as

8. Matthew Taylor. December 5, 2016. Casey Report Criticised for Focus on UK Muslim Communities. The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/dec/05/casey-report-criticised-for-focus-on-uk-muslim-communities>

9. Gwilym Pryce. 2019. Not So Welcome Here? Modelling the Impact of Ethnic in-Movers on the Length of Stay of Home-Owners in Micro-Neighbourhoods. Urban Studies Journal: <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/139611/>

10. Can be understood as a society in which distinct ethnocultural groups coexist, maintaining their own values and heritage, while also working together toward a shared common good

11. James Slack. July 7, 2006. Why the Dogma of Multiculturalism Has Failed Britain. The Daily Mail: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-394631/Why-dogma-multiculturalism-failed-Britain.html>

12. Ibid.

13. Melanie Phillips. 2006. Londonistan: How Britain Created a Terror State Within. Gibson Square Books Ltd.

14. Michael Gove. 2006. Celsius 7/7. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

15. Nathan Lean. 2012. The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims. Pluto Press.

being a problematic community who refuse to participate in Britain's way of life." Casual observers are left with the impression that these two systems - Islam and Britishness - are mutually exclusive; only came into contact with one another in the twenty-first century and are still figuring out how to coexist. Yet, this simplistic narrative pays no regard to the rich history of largely positive interactions between Britain and Islam that have been occurring since at least the 1500s.

Political figures, even Prime Ministers, have contributed to this misunderstanding. For example, in December 2006, then-Prime Minister Tony Blair gave what would become a famous speech titled *The Duty to Integrate: Shared British Values*¹⁶, whose essential theme appeared to be one of chastising Muslims for their purported refusal to integrate. Former Prime Ministers David Cameron¹⁷, Boris Johnson¹⁸, Theresa May¹⁹ and former senior cabinet officials like Home Secretary Suella Braverman²⁰, have all regurgitated similar notions. Official government reviews such the 2016 Casey Review into Opportunity and Integration echoed the argument for greater integration among British Muslims, and even went

so far as to call for an "integration oath"²¹. Think tanks have published reports bemoaning an alleged "decline in Britishness," pointing to an increase in Britain's ethnic minority population as being the source, particularly among the Muslim and Asian demographic, as if 'Britishness' and the presence of Muslims are somehow mutually exclusive²².

There is little to no acknowledgment by any of these officials or in any of these reports of the weighty historic role and significant contributions to Britain's socio-cultural life, and indeed national security, made by her longstanding Muslim communities. What this all points to is the propagation by certain political officials and media pundits of a fallacy which essentially frames the Muslim community as being a new addition to the UK. Strictly speaking, it is true that Muslims only began to settle in Britain in significant numbers following World War II. However, there were significant political and cultural interactions between the Islamic world and the UK that shaped the historic trajectory of the latter much earlier than this. It is to these episodes will shall now turn.

16. Speech on Multiculturalism and Integration. December 8, 2006. Number 10 Downing Street: <https://web.archive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20080909022722/http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page10563>

See also: Will Woodward. December 9, 2006: Radical Muslims Must Integrate, Says Blair. The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/dec/09/religion.immigrationandpublicservices>

17. Oliver Wright. July 20, 2015. David Cameron: We Must End Muslim 'Segregation' to Tackle 'Scourge' of Extremism. The Independent: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/david-cameron-we-must-end-muslim-segregation-to-tackle-scourge-of-extremism-10403087.html>

18. Aubrey Allegretti. August 6, 2018. Boris Johnson Mocks Women in Burkas Who 'Look Like Bank Robbers.' Sky News: <https://news.sky.com/story/boris-johnson-mocks-women-in-burkas-who-look-like-bank-robbers-11463209>

19. Myriam Francois. June 4, 2017. Theresa May's Talk About British Values Puts All Muslims Under Suspicion. The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/04/theresa-may-british-values-muslims-terror-threat>

20. Ned Simons. September 26, 2023. Suella Braverman Says Multiculturalism Has 'Failed' In Anti-Migrant Speech. The Huffington Post: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/suella-braverman-says-multiculturalism-has-failed-in-anti-migrant-speech_uk_6512da83e4b018d0253a6bdc

21. GOV.UK. December 5, 2016. The Casey Review: A Review into Opportunity and Integration: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration>

22. Ethnos Research. 2005. The Decline of Britishness: A Research Study: http://www.ethnos.co.uk/pdfs/10_decline_of_britishness.pdf

Offa's Coin

Many are unaware of the fact that some of the earliest evidence of Islam having an impact upon British history goes all the way back to the 8th century. At that time, England was not a united polity, but was instead divided up into various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Mercia was one such kingdom, and corresponded roughly with the regions of England now known as The Midlands. Mercia was ruled over by a man named Offa who was known as a formidable warrior king²³. Among his achievements as a ruler, it is widely believed that Offa was the first monarch to introduce the penny into England as trading currency. Among the coins he had minted were those that strongly resembled the gold dinar that was used by Caliph al-Mansur, the ruler of the Islamic Abbasid Caliphate. Of greater significance is the engraving found on the gold coin. While on one side it reads "OFFA REX," meaning King Offa in Latin, on the other one can clearly see Arabic carvings which read, "there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Messenger" (prayers and peace be upon him)²⁴.

It remains a subject of historical debate why the Christian ruler of an Anglo-Saxon fiefdom would have sought to have the Islamic declaration of faith (Shahada) minted onto his coins. Indeed, theories abound. For example, one such theory says that the coins were merely an exotic gift by Offa for the Pope. This may seem an odd gift for Offa to send to the worldwide ruler of one of the major denominations of Christianity, but it is known that other coins from the Islamic world bearing the names of Christian princes were found in Rome at the time²⁵. However, some claim that the most feasible explanation is that Offa was



attempting to emulate coins that could be used for international trade in The Mediterranean region at the time, particularly with Islamic Spain, also known as Andalusia²⁶. However, the rationale behind Offa's decision-making is not particularly relevant." The interesting fact of the matter is that some of the earliest, if not the very earliest, coins to be minted and used in the UK had a strong Islamic influence. From its very inception as a commercial entity, the rulers of England were acutely aware of the importance of the Islamic world, and acknowledged this in the conduct of their international affairs, as is symbolised by Offa's coin. Indeed, as is pointed out by professor Sophie Gilliat-Ray, "[t]he very existence of this coin indicates some degree of influence of the Islamic world upon Anglo-Saxon economics and politics"²⁷.

23. Sophie Gilliat-Ray. 2010. *Muslims in Britain: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press. pp.5-10.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. Sophie Gilliat-Ray. 2010. *Muslims in Britain*. Cambridge Uni



Queen Elizabeth I and the Muslims

In the year 1558, 25-year-old Elizabeth, the only surviving child of the notorious King Henry VIII, became Queen of England. In order to divorce his wife, Elizabeth's father, Henry, had separated the Church of England from the Catholic authorities in Rome, ultimately leading to The Protestant Reformation in England²⁸. This led to Pope Clement VII excommunicating Henry from the Catholic Church, and decades of religious conflict in England between Protestant and Catholic communities. Upon assuming the throne, Elizabeth, whose mother Mary had been a Catholic, attempted to calm the religious civil wars that had brought much bloodshed and misery that had tormented the country for so long²⁹. However, simmering grievances endured, particularly among Catholics who considered Elizabeth to be an illegitimate Queen because the marriage of her parents had not been given divine sanction by the papacy in Rome. In 1569, a major Catholic rebellion erupted in the north of England aiming to topple Elizabeth's reign. Although Elizabeth was able to suppress the uprising using with force, this led to an increase in Protestant-Catholic tensions,

and also made clear that under Elizabeth, England would not be returning to Catholic dominion. Then, the following year in 1570, Pope Pius V issued a statement in which he declared Elizabeth outside of the Catholic fold and also disparagingly referred to her as "the pretended Queen of England and the servant of crime"³⁰. All of this is important context for what would come soon after.

It was not much later that Catholic Spain, then a major European military and economic powerhouse, started bearing down on England in solidarity with Rome³¹. Spain ordered that English merchants were no longer allowed to enter its rich markets, including in the Spanish Netherlands, isolating England economically from vital trading ports³². Worse still, there appeared to be a very real possibility that Spain would initiate military hostilities against England, with the ultimate aim of invading the country and removing Elizabeth by force and resorting England to the Catholic fold. In response to this crisis, the Queen needed to offset the power of Rome and its loyalists by shoring up England's overseas alliances. As is illustrated by the historian Professor Jerry Brotton, to do this, Elizabeth made an unorthodox move: she turned her gaze beyond Europe toward the shores of the Islamic world³³. The Ottoman Empire was a natural choice owing to its own longstanding fierce rivalry with Spain. Elizabeth also initiated ties with the Shah of Persia and the King of Morocco³⁴. There is evidence to show that, as England's economic and political relations with these Muslim countries

28. Alison Weir. 2007. *The Six Wives of Henry VIII: Find Out The Truth about Henry VIII'S Wives*. Vintage Press.

29. Alison Weir. 1998. *The Lift of Elizabeth I*. Ballantine Books.

30. Jack Scarisbrick. February 20, 2020. *Was Pius V Right to Excommunicate Elizabeth I?* The Catholic Herald: <https://catholicherald.co.uk/was-pius-v-right-to-excommunicate-elizabeth-i/>

31. Jerry Brotton. 2017. *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World*. Penguin books.

32. Jerry Brotton. September 17, 2016. *Englnd's Forgotten Muslim History*. New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/18/opinion/sunday/englands-forgotten-muslim-history.html>

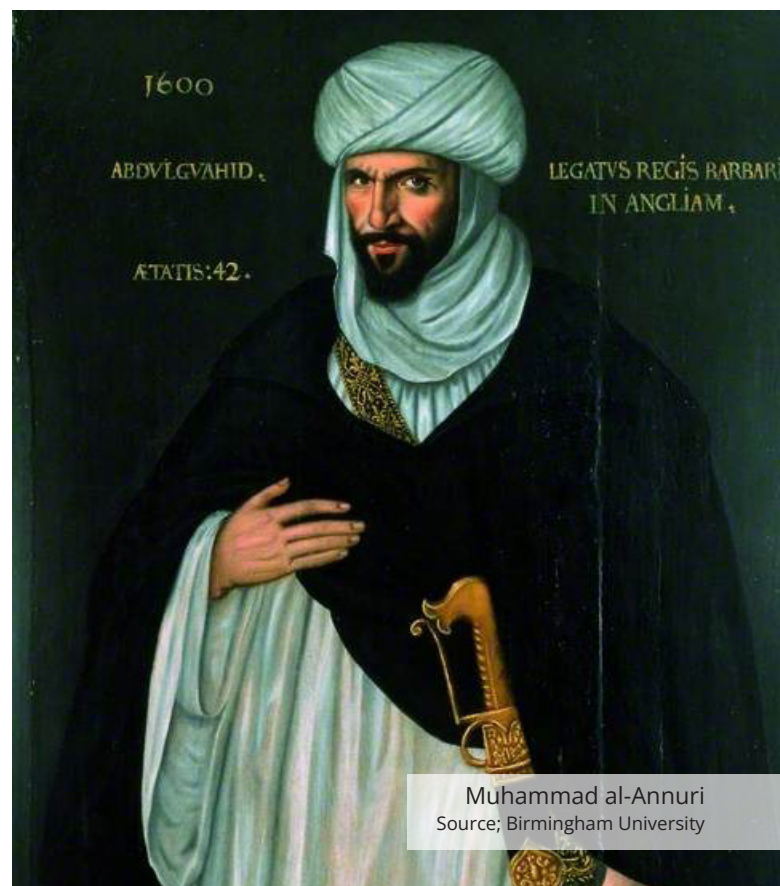
33. Ibid.

34. Jerry Brotton. 20 March, 2016. *The First Muslims in England*. BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35843991>

developed, Elizabeth's personal relationships with their rulers grew. Elizabeth wrote letters to her newfound Muslim friends, including Sultan Murad of Turkey, who she described as "the most mighty ruler of the Kingdom of Turkey, sole and above all, the most sovereign monarch of the East Empire"³⁵. During this time, English merchants became active across the Arab lands that at the time were under Ottoman dominion, including in present day Iraq and Syria. Far from being treated with suspicion and hostility in these lands, there is evidence to show that these tradesmen were welcomed by the Muslims. As Professor Brotton notes, "[t]hey were far safer than they would have been on an equivalent journey through Catholic Europe, where they risked falling into the hands of the Inquisition"³⁶.

At the same time, Muslims from the various empires with whom Elizabeth struck diplomatic relations relocated to London, where they showcased their deftness and skill in a variety of areas, from musicians to tailors and weavers³⁷. Unbeknownst to many, when Elizabeth's merchants returned from one trip to Persia in 1562, they brought with them a young Muslim servant girl who Elizabeth referred to as her "dear and well beloved," who is even said to have also functioned as a personal fashion advisor to the Queen³⁸. Alongside those with more typical day jobs, England's alliance with these nations also opened the door for those with more elite occupations. In the late 1580s, Turkish and Moroccan diplomats moved to London for official business³⁹. Highlighting just how deeply ties had developed, and in a move that seems very hard to imagine

today, in 1589 the Moroccan ambassador Ahmed Bilqasim made a state visit to to England surrounded by an entourage of Moroccan merchants. The purpose of his visit, according to historians, was to propose an Anglo-Moroccan military alliance against "the common enemy of the King of Spain"⁴⁰. A decade later, another Moroccan emissary named Muhammad al-Annuri made a trip to London, where he ended up staying for about six months in Westminster. Locals recalled seeing Ambassador al-Annuri, along with the dignitaries who had accompanied him from Morocco, observing their Islamic duties throughout their stay. One recalled they, "killed their own meat within their house" and "turned their faces eastward"- towards the Holy city of Mecca - "when they kill anything"⁴¹.



35. Jerry Brotton. September 17, 2016. England's Forgotten Muslim History. New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/18/opinion/sunday/englands-forgotten-muslim-history.html>

36. Jerry Brotton. 2017. This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World. Penguin books.

37. Jerry Brotton. 20 March, 2016. The First Muslims in England. BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35843991>

38. Jerry Brotton. 2017. This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World. Penguin books.

39. Jerry Brotton. 20 March, 2016. The First Muslims in England. BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35843991>

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

This active and dynamic period of great Anglo-Islamic interaction was, however, to come to an end. When Elizabeth passed away in 1603, her successor James the 1st decided to settle tensions with Catholic Spain through a policy of appeasement, which decidedly cooled relations between England and its Moroccan, Persian and Turkish allies. Nevertheless, what this fascinating episode of Elizabethan history demonstrates is that there are long and deep ties between the UK and the Islamic world. Some may simply dismiss this part of British-Islamic history as nothing more than the product of strategic necessity; the result of an English Queen desperately searching for new alliances in the face of a potentially existential crisis: an invasion by Catholic Spain. However, such an argument would miss the histories that organically grew out of this cross-cultural interaction: namely, the thousands of Muslims who moved to London to establish new homes, and the seemingly genuine personal relationships that were struck between the rulers of England and the major Muslim powers at that time.

The Age of Empire: the British East India Company & The Lascars

In the year 1858, the British Crown instituted its imperial control over the Indian subcontinent, establishing what became known as The British Raj, meaning *kingdom* or *state*. This meant that Britain came to

rule over the region's significant Muslim population, consisting at the time of about eighty million people located in present day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh⁴². Previously, large swathes of the Indian subcontinent had been under the effective control of the East India Company, which was formed in the 1600s under Queen Elizabeth the 1st to exploit trade in the far East, specifically in the regions of the Indian Ocean and southeast Asia⁴³. The company however grew into its own kind of parastate entity, or as historian Roos described it, "part-trade organisation, part-nation-state" which became "one of the biggest, most dominant corporations in history"⁴⁴. Alongside a fleet of hundreds of ships, the East India Company effectively controlled strategic shipping lanes and vital ports all over the world; it had numerous governments in the colonised world under its auspices, and even had its own private army of over 250,000 soldiers, twice the size of Britain's then-constitutional army⁴⁵. Owing to its sheer power and influence, the company had a total monopoly on British trade activities in the East.

The Company made its full-fledged transformation into the holder of a subcontinental empire following its victory at the battle of Plassey in 1757, which saw a few thousand company soldiers face off against the army of the ruler of the wealthy Indian province of Bengal. It would later transpire that a host of Indian bankers covertly supported the British by convincing a bulk of the Indian army not to fight the

42. Francis Robinson. 1999. The British Empire and The Muslims World. Chapter featured in: Judith Brown and Roger Louis, The Oxford History of The British Empire. Oxford University Press. pp.398-420.

43. For reading on the East India Company, see: Tirthankar Roy. 2016. The East India Company: The World's Most Powerful Corporation. Penguin Books. William Dalrymple. (2020). The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company. Bloomsbury.

44. Dave Roos. June 29, 2023. How the East India Company Became the World's Most Powerful Monopoly. History.com: <https://www.history.com/news/east-india-company-england-trade>

45. Ibid.

company's men⁴⁶. After the company's victory against the Indian army, it was able to secure broad taxation rights, which it plundered from locals in the vast areas it controlled⁴⁷. Yet, despite the image of power and conquest, the company was proving to be a headache for the Crown back in England. Due to the vast amount of trade it was handling, the company continued to run into financial mismanagement problems, which eventually led to Parliament passing the India Act of 1784, thereby transferring the company's India operations, including its landholdings, directly into the hands of the British government⁴⁸.

The British government, and before it the East India Company, ruled over a significant Muslim population in the Indian subcontinent consisting of about 80 million Muslims. Many Indians, mostly driven by economic opportunity, made the decision to voyage to England. One of the first major groupings of Muslims to come from the subcontinent to the UK were *Lascars* (sailors), who started arriving in the 1800s and were employed by the East India company to work on its merchant vessels, often doing gruelling and high-risk work that British sailors avoided. While other types of people left the subcontinent for England, such as servants and scholars, as one historian of this period pointed out, "more

Indian seamen than any other class went to Britain"⁴⁹. While some of these sailors were Hindu and Christian, the vast majority were Muslim, "supported by traditions of travel through that exist throughout the Islamic world and that already links Europe and Asia"⁵⁰. Britain's imperial expansion continued to encourage immigration to the UK from Muslim-majority countries. Significantly, when Britain opened the Suez Canal in 1869, there was a massive boom in trade that brought Yemeni and Somali labourers to work at the ports of Cardiff, Liverpool, Pollokshields and London⁵¹.

Because they needed easy access to dock yards, many of these seamen stayed in port towns and cities. Some Lascars were able to settle permanently in England, but others visited for a few months at a time, often making the journey several times in their working lives⁵². As noted above, Lascars were initially employed by the company to fill manpower shortages that resulted from British sailors deserting their posts or falling sick. Then, during the Napoleonic War of 1803-1815, many British sailors were redeployed to fill combat roles in the navy and military, there was a large spike in the number of Lascars who were employed and who came to Britain⁵³. Between 1803 and 1813 over 10,000 lascars from the subcontinent visited British towns⁵⁴.

46. William Dalrymple. (2020). *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company*. Bloomsbury. Dave Roos. June 29, 2023. How the East India Company Became the World's Most Powerful Monopoly. History.com: <https://www.history.com/news/east-india-company-england-trade>

47. Ibid.

48. Ching Yet Lin. October 8, 2022. How The British East India Company Went From Commercial to Territorial. The Collector: <https://www.thecollector.com/british-east-india-company-from-commercial-to-territorial/#>

49. Michael H. Fisher. 2005. *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857*. p.32.

50. Ibid, p.4.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid, p.33.

53. *The Lascars: Britain's Colonial Sailors*. Our Migration History: <https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/the-lascars-britains-colonial-era-sailors>

54. Michael H. Fisher. 2005. *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857*. p.140.

By the mid-1800s, around 12,000 lascars were visiting Britain each year ⁵⁵. By the advent of World War I, covered in more depth below, lascars totalled around 17.5% of the overall number of mariners manning British ships - around 51,000 men ⁵⁶. As is further explored below, many of these men also played a significant role in Britain's war effort in both world wars one and two. Eventually, when a growing number of Lascars were able to permanently settle around UK ports in cities like London, Liverpool, Cardiff and Glasgow, they formed the basis of the earliest working-class Indian, mainly Muslim, communities in Britain ⁵⁷.



This created small enclaves of diversity, where these newcomers were able to mix with the local population, sometimes even marrying working class English women. While some continued working as boatmen, others set up shops where they could sell items seen as exotic to the local population, like curry powders, incense,

55. Ibid, p.152.

56. The Lascars: Britain's Colonial Sailors. Our Migration History: <https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/the-lascars-britains-colonial-era-sailors>

57. Ibid.

58. Michael H. Fisher. 2005. Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857. p.166.

59. BBC News. September 29, 2005. Curry House Founder is Honoured: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4290124.stm>

60. Mixed Museum. Sake Dean Mahomed and Jane Daly: <https://mixedmuseum.org.uk/amri-exhibition/sake-dean-mahomed-and-jane-daly/>

61. Teltscher, Kate (2000). "The Shampooing Surgeon and the Persian Prince: Two Indians in Early Nineteenth-century Britain". *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. 2 (3): pp. 409–23.

62. Teltscher, Kate (2000). "The Shampooing Surgeon and the Persian Prince: Two Indians in Early Nineteenth-century Britain". *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. 2 (3): pp. 409–23.



tea and perfumes ⁵⁸. One such former East India Company employee was Sake Dean Mahomed, who had a British wife called Jane, and set up in London what was to be one of Britain's first Indian restaurants in 1810⁵⁹. In a demonstration of entrepreneurial genius, Mr Mahomed's establishment even offered a home delivery service that would take freshly cooked curries to the doors of hungry customers, foretelling the service offered by Deliveroo by centuries.⁶⁰ Mr Mahomed is also credited as being the man who introduced shampoo to Europe via a luxury bathhouse that he owned in Brighton called *Mohamed's Baths* ⁶¹. The venture became such a success with the elite that kings George the 4th and William the 4th sponsored it and sometimes underwent the therapeutic steam and vapour baths that were on offer. Mr Mohamed was even appointed as the "shampooing surgeon" to both rulers ⁶².

Not all seamen from the subcontinent who ended up in Britain had the business acumen of Mr Mohamed. When there were lulls in sea work, many of the lascars would end up waiting around for new work to arise, often running out of funds and

falling into poverty. In order to provide these sailors with lodgings and food while waiting for the next voyage with the East India company, Christian missionaries set up accommodation at West India Dock Road in London called the “Strangers’ Home for Asiatics”⁶³. While the home was initially set up using donations from private individuals, Parliament forced the East India Company to take responsibility for the Lascars’ situation, which resulted in its directors paying hundreds of pounds annually to the home⁶⁴. Due to the large concentration of Muslims located at the home, one lascar is said to have described it as “a home for Mohammedans in the Christian capital”⁶⁵. A copy of The Qur’an and pictures of Mecca and Madina are said to have adorned some of the walls of the home⁶⁶. In this sense, the home was not simply a place for out of work Muslim seamen to stay until regaining employment; it was one of the first iterations of an organic Muslim community in Britain, one that perhaps imagined it possible to be both Muslim and part of British society at the same time.

Prominent Historic British Converts to Islam

As Britain deepened and expanded its imperial sphere, this naturally resulted in cross-cultural interaction and intrigue. While most Brits carried on with their day-to-day

business, probably unaware of the Islamic faith of the newcomers from the colonised world, there were those Brits who were tuned into the Islamic faith. Most, but not all of them hailed from aristocratic families, and came into contact with Islam through extensive voyages through Muslim world, relations with Muslim social elites fostered by the connections of empire, as well as through literature and the arts⁶⁷. However, there were also a great many British people from what would typically be seen as working-class backgrounds, such as seafarers, who embraced the faith. Many of these figures made strides toward sowing Islam into the socio-cultural fabric of 19th century Britain, laying the early seed for the establishment of a Muslim-British identity. These people were arguably the forerunners of the hundreds of thousands of white Britons who identify as Muslim today.

The earliest named English convert to Islam was a man named John Nelson. Not much is known about Mr Nelson, although what is available of the historical record is not only fascinating, but demonstrates just how widespread conversions to Islam were among Britons at the time. Nelson was a servant aboard an English vessel on a journey to Tripoli in present day Libya in the 1580s and fascinatingly according to the historical account, he was just one of “many hundreds” of similar converts⁶⁸. In fact, it is believed that there were armies in

63. The Open University. Strangers’ Home for Asiatics and South Sea Islanders: <https://www5.open.ac.uk/research-projects/making-britain/content/strangers-home-asiatics-africans-and-south-sea-islanders>

64. Michael H. Fisher. 2005. Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857. p.392.

65. Diane Robinson-Dunn. Lascar Sailors and English Converts: The Imperial Port and Islam in late 19th-Century England. History Cooperative: <https://archive.ph/20120802143210/http://www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/seascapes/dunn.html#selection-251.0-255.21>

66. Michael H. Fisher. 2005. Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain 1600-1857. p.421.

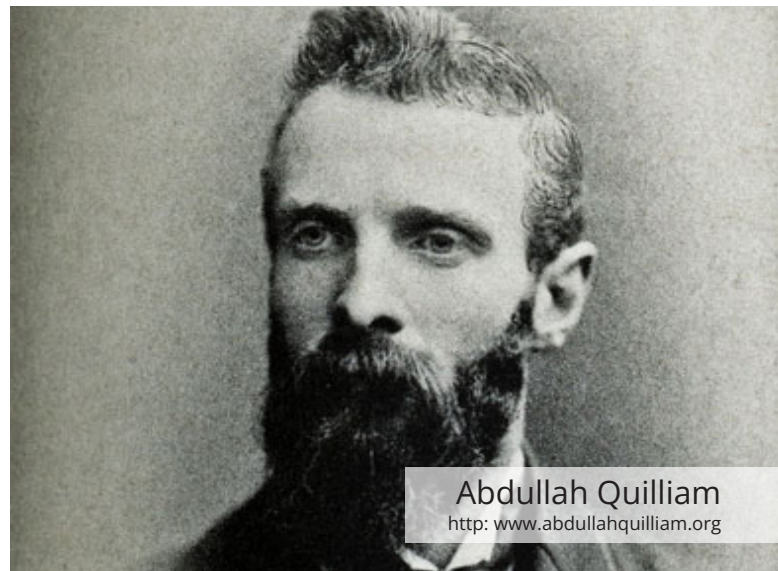
67. BBC News. May 19, 2019. The British Victorians Who Became Muslims: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-eng-land-48069763>

68. Sophie Gilliat-Ray. 2010. Muslims in Britain. Cambridge University Press. p.16.

North Africa that were made up entirely of European converts, a great many of whom were from the UK⁶⁹. As historian of Islam Gilliat-Ray has noted, “[r]egardless of precise numbers, the extent of conversion was perceived as high ... so much did the direct encounter with Islam and the subsequent conversion to ‘Mohamedanism’ concern Britons that the topic appears in literary and theological writings in every decade in the period under study [1558-1685]”⁷⁰. As is the case today, the reasons for such conversions were varied, but many Brits who visited the lands under Ottoman rule were said to be deeply affected by the peaceful coexistence between Muslim, Christian and Jew and the general equality of opportunity that existed ⁷¹.

Around that period - the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries - interest in Islam was growing among British writers and historians. In 1649, the first translation of The Qur’an into English was published by an anonymous author, although many believe that it was done by a man named Alexander Ross, a chaplain to King Charles I. Titled *Alcoran of Mahomet*, the translation caused much controversy among English parliamentarians, with many concerned that it would lead to a wave of conversions to Islam among the British people⁷². Echoing the kind of anti-Islamic fear mongering that was to come in future generations, one former high-ranking soldier named Colonel Anthony Weldon circulated

a petition against the publication of The Qur’an translation and requested that MPs dispatch policemen to seize the print and arrest those involved, fearing that it could, if released, lead to a wave of conversions among the native British population⁷³. Ross himself was even arrested for daring to publish The Qur’an, but ended up making a powerful argument in front of Parliament. Doing so was necessary, Ross argued, in order to understand the nature of the alleged Islamic enemy⁷⁴. In the end, owing to recently passed laws that allowed for freedom of religious practice, the publication was allowed to go ahead unhindered ⁷⁵.



As the amount of cargo Britain was bringing back from its overseas empire continued to increase, the size and significance of particular docks grew. One dock that gained prominence due to the amount of cargo passing through it, and one that is sometimes referred to by some as “the first

69. Linda Colley. 2002. *Captives: Britain, Empire and The World, 1600-1850*. Princeton University Press.

70. Sophie Gilliat-Ray. 2010. *Muslims in Britain*. Cambridge University Press. p.16.

71. *Ibid*, pp.16-17.

72. Sophie Gilliat-Ray. 2010. *Muslims in Britain*. Cambridge University Press. p.19.

73. Samir Jeraj. December 13, 2022. *The Mystery of the First English Qur’an*. Hyphen: <https://hyphenonline.com/2022/12/13/the-mystery-of-the-first-english-quran/>

74. Sophie Gilliat-Ray. 2010. *Muslims in Britain*. Cambridge University Press. p.20.

75. *Ibid*.

port of Empire," was Liverpool⁷⁶. Indeed, one scholar described it as "a city characterised by constant motion ... of people, products and ideas"⁷⁷. Ties with countries such as Egypt and of course India meant that this maritime city became a hub for cultural exchange between Britain and the Islamic world, and would end up being the staging ground for the emergence of a small but influential British-Muslim community, with one man standing out as its leading light: William Quilliam, or Abdullah Quilliam, as he became known. Quilliam was born in 1856, and had worked as a journalist, solicitor and a leader of various civil society groups in the northwest of England⁷⁸. In 1882 he travelled to Morocco, where he immersed himself in study of the Arabic language, and after being captivated by the truth of Islam became a Muslim in 1887. Quilliam quickly gained renown across the Islamic world and was conferred with the title of 'Sheikh al-Islam of the British Isles' by the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Abdul Hamid II.

Quilliam was a highly productive member of society, and as a Muslim pioneered a number of institutions dedicated to Islamic learning. For example, he opened The Liverpool Muslim Institute thanks to funding he was given by his personal friend, Prince Nasrullah Khan of Afghanistan⁷⁹. Most of

the institute's regulars are said to have been people from working class backgrounds in the area⁸⁰. The institute included a masjid (mosque), library and lecture theatre. From the institute, Quilliam and his colleagues also published a weekly Islamic newspaper between 1893 to 1908, *The Crescent*, which covered social, political and of course religious issues going on in the UK and beyond⁸¹. Perhaps one of Quilliam's most moving endeavours was his establishment of an orphanage that he called Medina House, where non-Muslim children were raised within an Islamic values' system⁸².

There is little doubt that Quilliam played a hugely significant role in establishing an indigenous British Islam, so much so that present day Muslim scholars such as Sheikh Abdal-Hakim Murad have described him as "the founder of the Anglo-Muslim movement"⁸³. It is estimated that around 600 people became Muslim by Quilliam's hand, many of whom became influential figures in their own right⁸⁴. One such individual was Robert Stanley, a grocer and tea trader from a working-class background and who became the Conservative Mayor of Salford in Manchester in the 1870s. Much like Quilliam, Stanley was highly involved in his local community, and sought to improve the lives of those who were

76. Sophie Gilliat-Ray. 2010. Muslims in Britain. Cambridge University Press. p.39.

77. Diane Robinson-Dunn. Lascar Sailors and English Converts: The Imperial Port and Islam in late 19th-Century England. History Cooperative: <https://archive.ph/20120802143210/http://www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/seascapes/dunn.html#selection-251.0-255.21>

78. Sophie Gilliat-Ray. 2010. Muslims in Britain. Cambridge University Press. p.39.

79. Diane Robinson-Dunn. Lascar Sailors and English Converts: The Imperial Port and Islam in late 19th-Century England. History Cooperative: <https://archive.ph/20120802143210/http://www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/seascapes/dunn.html#selection-251.0-255.21>

80. Yahya Birt. October 1, 2019. Britain's First Muslim Mayor: Reshid Stanley (1828-1911): <https://yahyabirt.medium.com/britains-first-muslim-mayor-robert-reschid-stanley-1828-1911-2afda9dafad5>

81. Ibid

See also: Sophie Gilliat-Ray. 2010. Muslims in Britain. Cambridge University Press. p.40.

82. Abdullah Quilliam Society. About Abdullah Quilliam: <http://www.abdullahquilliam.org/about-abdullah-quilliam/>

83. Abdal Hakim Murad quoted in in Sophie Gilliat-Ray. 2010. Muslims in Britain. Cambridge University Press. p.40.

84. Abdullah Quilliam Society. About Abdullah Quilliam: <http://www.abdullahquilliam.org/about-abdullah-quilliam/>

less better off than him. For example, he sought to improve the water supplies in his town by commissioning the construction of a reservoir⁸⁵. He also set up a fund for workers who had been fired from their jobs for not voting in Parliamentary elections in line with their bosses⁸⁶. Stanley was also keenly involved in international affairs, and advised the Ottoman Caliph Abdul Hamid II on how to carry out farmland reforms across his Empire, which the Caliph implemented⁸⁷. The lives of these people demonstrate that not only is there a long history of Islamic interaction with Britain, but that there is arguably a uniquely Anglo-Muslim identity, that has long had a home in some of Britain's finest cities.

Muslim Contributions to the British War Efforts During World War I & World War II

By 1910-1912, when the British empire was at its peak, and around 86-94 million Muslims were contained within its imperial sphere of influence. This timeframe was significant for Britain, as it was in the year 1914 that London and her allies entered a state of total war against Germany and Austria-Hungary in what became a seminal event in world history: World War I. While the conflict ended in a victory for Britain and the allies, it was certainly a pyrrhic one as the death and destruction caused by the conflict was of stratospheric levels. It is estimated the overall number of military and civilian casualties was around 40 million. Approximately 20 million were killed and about 21 million wounded⁸⁸. *The Great War*, as it became known, is a defining feature of Britain's identity, with the nation taking part in symbolic rituals to mark out its remembrance each year on November 11. What is less known among Brits however, is the role played by Muslims who fought alongside British soldiers to defeat the threat of the Central Powers. According to the research of Dr Islam Issa at Birmingham City University, at least 885,000 Muslim soldiers were recruited for the war effort, mostly from the Indian subcontinent⁸⁹. The National Muslim War Memorial Trust says that, "[a]t least 2.5 million Muslim soldiers and labourers from all over the world



Punjabi Muslims, France, WW1
Source: Wikipedia

85. Yahya Birt. October 1, 2019. Britain's First Muslim Mayor: Reshid Stanley (1828-1911): <https://yahyabirt.medium.com/britains-first-muslim-mayor-robert-reschid-stanley-1828-1911-2afda9dafad5>

86. BBC News. May 19, 2019. The British Victorians Who Became Muslims: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-eng-land-48069763>

87. Yahya Birt. October 1, 2019. Britain's First Muslim Mayor: Reshid Stanley (1828-1911): <https://yahyabirt.medium.com/britains-first-muslim-mayor-robert-reschid-stanley-1828-1911-2afda9dafad5>

88. Reperes. World War I Casualties: <https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/reperes112018.pdf>

89. Emma McKinney. January 27, 2016. New Research Reveals Almost 900,000 Muslims Fought in WW1. The Birmingham Mail: <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/new-research-reveals-900000-muslims-10793910>

fought with the allies forces with dignity and honour”⁹⁰. In fact, it was the significant Muslim contribution during World War I that led then-Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, to say that, “we are the greatest Mohamedan power in the world and one-fourth of the population of the British Empire is Mohamedan. There have been no more loyal adherents to the throne and no more effective and loyal supports of the empire during its hour of trial”⁹¹. Military historian Major Gordon Corrigan has said that the role of the British Indian Army was absolutely vital to helping fortify the front line on the Western Front, which ran 440 miles from the Belgian coast through France to the Swiss border, which prevented the German army from reaching the English Channel⁹². Yet, despite their sacrifices, research has shown that only around 22% of Brits are aware that Muslims fought with Britain in World War 1 and only 2% are aware of the “full extent of their sacrifice”⁹³. Touching on this problem, Conservative Party member of the House of Lords, Mohamed Sheikh, noted at a speech he gave on Muslim contributions to Britain’s WW1 effort, “[t]he significant part played by the Muslims is not widely acknowledged and the sacrifice they made and the suffering that they endured need to be fully appreciated”⁹⁴.

Muslim battlefield contributions were not limited to World War I; when World War II ignited in 1939, Muslims were again ready to add to Britain’s manpower. Estimates say that around 5.5 million Muslims fought with the allies against the Axis Powers during WWII, with nearly 1.5 million of them being killed on the battlefield⁹⁵. This included around 2.5 million soldiers from the British Indian Army, about 40% of whom were Muslim, as well as African Muslim-majority countries under Britain’s imperial control⁹⁶. While the exact number of Muslim combatant casualties is unknown, around 87,000 soldiers from the British Indian Army perished⁹⁷. While Indian Muslims made by far the biggest contribution, smaller contingents of Muslims from other parts of Britain’s empire also signed up to fight against the Axis Powers. For example, around 9,000-12,000 Palestinians from mandatory Palestine fought with Britain against the forces of Hitler and Mussolini whose forces has captured parts of North Africa⁹⁸. It is important to stress that the sacrifices made by these men cannot be overstated. Many of them voluntarily left family members and friends in their home countries to fight for Britain, a foreign nation. Arguably, such sacrifice holds even more gravitas than fighting to defend one’s own country.

90. National Muslim War Memorial Trust. The Role of Muslims in WW1: <https://www.muslimwarmemorial.org/education/the-role-of-muslims-in-wwi/>

91. David Motadel. 2016. Islam and the European Empires. Oxford University Press. P.267.

92. Somaiya Khan-Piachaud and Ayman Khwaja. November 2009. Forgotten Heroes - The Muslim Contribution. Emel: https://www.emel.com/article?a_id=1699

93. Mike Lockley. January 9, 2017. The ‘Forgotten’ Army of 400,000 Muslim Soldiers Who Fought for British Freedom in World War 1. The Mirror: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/forgotten-army-400000-muslim-soldiers-9589884>

94. Mohamed Sheikh. The Contribution of Muslims in The First World War. Conservative Muslim Forum: <https://www.conservativemuslimforum.org/the-contribution-of-muslims-in-the-first-world-war/>

95. National Muslim War Memorial Trust. The Role of Muslims in WWII: <https://www.muslimwarmemorial.org/education/the-role-of-muslims-in-ww2/#:~:text=It is said that 5.5,approximately 1 million were Muslims.>

See also: Hussein Ibish. Second World War record of Muslims is Worth Marking: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/opinion/comment/second-world-war-record-of-muslims-is-worth-marking-1.462418>

96. Dr Azeem Ibrahim. April 24, 2014. How Muslims Won the Second World War. The Huffington Post: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-muslims-won-the-secon_b_5202541

97. National Muslim War Memorial Trust. The Role of Muslims in WWII: <https://www.muslimwarmemorial.org/education/the-role-of-muslims-in-ww2/#:~:text=It is said that 5.5,approximately 1 million were Muslims.>

98. Ibid.



The most significant contribution made by Muslims to Britain's wartime strategy was not in the European theatre, but in the Asia Pacific Region against Hitler's key ally in the east, the Imperial Japanese Army, in what was known as the Far East Campaign⁹⁹. The Indian Army, air force and navy all fought shoulder-to-shoulder with their British and American allies to halt and then push Japanese forces back North, after they had advanced South through China and South East Asia and captured Singapore from the British in 1942. By the time of Japan's surrender in August of 1945, the British Indian Army has received around 6,000 awards for gallantry, which included around 31 Victoria Crosses for bravery in battle. Many of these men received the cross for their contributions across various battlefronts, including in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia¹⁰⁰. The reasons for their being granted the Victoria's Cross are varied, and include the clearing of multiple minefields so that allied forces could cross to reach enemy-held terrain, as well as consistent bravery in the face of enemy attacks despite having sustained serious injuries¹⁰¹.

99. Ibid.

100. Marika Sherwood. March 30, 2011. Colonies, Colonialism and World War Two. BBC History: https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/colonies_colonialism_01.shtml

101. Ibid.

102. The National Archives. Who Was Noor Khan? <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/who-was-noor-khan/>

See also: Usaid Siddiqui. October 28, 2020: Noor Inayat Khan: The Forgotten Muslim Princess Who Fought Nazis. Al-Jazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/28/noor-inayat-khan>

103. Dalya Alberge. January 14, 2021. Life of Indian Princess Who Fought Nazis to be Told in TV Series. The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/14/life-indian-princess-fought-nazis-tv-series-noor-inayat-khan>

104. Second World War Experience Centre. Noor Inayat Khan - SOE: <https://war-experience.org/lives/noor-inayat-khan-soe/>

105. Ibid.

106. The London Gazette. April 5, 1949: <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/38578/supplement/1703>

Beyond armies, individual Muslims also made outsized contributions to the allied campaign. One prominent example is that of Noor Inayat Khan¹⁰², whose bravery on behalf of the anti-Nazi effort has been increasingly acknowledged in recent years in film and television series¹⁰³. Noor, whose father was a well-known Sufi mystic from India, volunteered with Britain's Special Operations Executive to support the French resistance against the Nazi regime which had invaded and was occupying France¹⁰⁴. While in France, Noor operated as part of a network of undercover radio operators, who would use radio signals to transmit intelligence on Nazi operations to the allies back in London. Within months, the Nazis had started to capture members of the network, prompting London to call for Noor to return. Notwithstanding the imminent danger, Noor refused to leave, insisting that she wanted to remain in her post¹⁰⁵. Noor was eventually arrested around October 1943 and violently interrogated by Nazi authorities. However, according to the Nazi director of the prison at which Noor was held, she refused to give any information whatsoever. Noor was then executed in September 1944 at Dachau concentration Camp. An April 1949 edition of the London Gazette announced that Noor had been posthumously awarded the George Cross, saying that she had "displaced the most conspicuous courage, both moral and physical over a period of more than 12 months"¹⁰⁶.

Despite her making the ultimate sacrifice for Britain, Noor's story has only recently gained mainstream acknowledgement¹⁰⁷. While such recognition marks an important milestone, it is unfortunate that it has only come after decades of focus on other wartime figures, such as Alan Turing and Douglas Bader, to the exclusion of figures like Noor. It is clear that Muslims played a significant part in defeating the Axis Powers, and it would not be unreasonable to question whether the war would have been winnable without the heroism of these people. Even in the famed Battle of Dunkirk, many Muslim and black soldiers fought as part of the British and French armies, although this incontrovertible fact often goes unacknowledged¹⁰⁸. In fact, as some critics have argued that the film stands guilty of "whitewashing" history because it features almost no non-White faces, despite the fact that Royal Indian Army soldiers were heavily involved in the evacuation effort¹⁰⁹. Indeed, demonstrating just how significant the Muslim contribution was to the British and allied effort, wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill wrote in a letter to U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt that, "*[w]e must not on any account break with the Moslems, who represent a hundred million people, and the main army elements on which we must rely for the immediate fighting*"¹¹⁰. Churchill was not the only British official to hold the Muslim role in such high esteem.

Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief in India, acknowledged the contribution made by India - over 40% of whose army was Muslim - when he said that Britain "couldn't have come through both wars [World Wars I & II] if they hadn't had the Indian Army"¹¹¹.



WOKING MUSLIM
BURIAL GROUND
Source: Imperial War Museum

107. Dalya Alberge. January 14, 2021. Life of Indian Princess Who Fought Nazis to be Told in TV Series. The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/14/life-indian-princess-fought-nazis-tv-series-noor-inayat-khan>

108. Robert Fisk. January 23, 2018. When you Watch Dunkirk, Remember that it's a Whitewashed Version Which Ignores the Bravery of Black and Muslim Soldiers. The Independent: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/dunkirk-france-1940-french-soldiers-algeria-commonwealth-white-wash-a7874501.html>

109. Sunny Singh. August 1, 2017. Why the Lack of Indian Army Faces in Dunkirk Matters. The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/01/indian-african-dunkirk-history-whitewash-attitudes>

110. Dr Azeem Ibrahim. April 24, 2014. How Muslims Won the Second World War. The Huffington Post: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-muslims-won-the-second_b_5202541

111. The Open University. Making Britain: Discover How South Asian Shaped the Nation, 1870-1950. Second World War (1939-1945): <https://www5.open.ac.uk/research-projects/making-britain/content/second-world-war-1939-1945>

Implications & Policy Recommendations

This report has shown how, contrary to popular Islamophobic tropes, interactions between Britain and Islam/Muslims did not begin with twenty-first century wars in the Middle East or terrorist attacks. Indeed, it has briefly demonstrated how the relationship between Islam/Muslims and Britain has been one of dynamic interaction. The report will now identify three key interdependent implications which flow from the above, and which shall be briefly outlined in turn.

It should be abundantly clear that Muslims are not 'alien' newcomers to Britain's shores. Quite the contrary, for hundreds of years Muslims have been making varied and vibrant contributions to Britain's socio-cultural development, while also being important pillars of local communities. Clearly then, any presentation of Muslims as a group who fall outside of the course of Britain's historical trajectory simply demonstrates ignorance of the latter. Therefore, the first big implication is that the Muslim contribution to Britain should be acknowledged in public discourse, such as in the history curricula of schools and by scholars of British history, a welcome course correction that is gradually starting to happen ¹¹².

Secondly, what the sociological observation that Muslims have made significant contributions to Britain illuminates is the reality that Muslims have a well-established

home in Britain. Neither they, nor their religion, are perpetual 'guests'; always outsiders to be treated with suspicion. Given this, a narrative that presents and celebrates a uniquely 'British Muslim history,' framed as a sub-story within Britain's broader national narrative, should be nurtured and deployed to combat the Islamophobic notion that the Muslim is an 'other' who does not belong to Britain and to whom Britain does not belong. Thirdly, at a time when Britain is going through a reckoning with its imperialist past, especially through policies designed to decolonise educational curricula and to incorporate the histories of people from the formally colonised world, putting the rich story of Islam/Muslims in in a proper perspective is crucial to contributing to this needed change. Any effort to forge a postcolonial identity which properly reflects the contributions made to the nation by all groups will not be complete without telling the story of Britain's Muslims. Unfortunately, as it stands, this is a necessity that has so far been resisted by some within the current government. For example, in March 2024 Chancellor Jeremy Hunt made the positive move of announcing that £1 million would be put into building a war memorial to Muslim soldiers who died fighting for Britain in the two world wars. While this development is welcome, it was criticised by a number of Conservative Party officials who, quite strangely, questioned the need for such a monument ¹¹³. It is in the spirit of these implications that this report now turns to conclude by making broad policy recommendations in three court areas: education, media and politics.

112. For an example, see Jerry Brotton. 2017. *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World*. Penguin books.

113. Eleni Correa. March 10, 2024. *Tory MPs Criticise Plans for Memorial to Muslim Soldiers Who Died in World Wars*. The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/mar/10/tory-mps-criticise-plans-for-memorial-to-muslim-soldiers-who-died-in-world-wars>

See also, Brendan O'Neil. March 7, 2024. *Who Could Object to a Muslim War Memorial?* The Spectator: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/why-would-anyone-object-to-a-muslim-war-memorial/>

Education

Any realistic strategy for combating socially embedded prejudices will acknowledge that such a task is likely going to be a multigenerational effort. Therefore, it makes sense to place heavy emphasis upon broadening the perspectives of our young people through decolonisation of school curricula, which means placing greater emphasis of the contributions made to human knowledge by non-European peoples. A key focus of policymakers therefore should be to ensure that primary and secondary schools incorporate the history of Muslims in the UK into their curricula on a range of subjects up to the GCSE level. The UK Department for Education should set out clear guidelines for how schools in England and Wales can incorporate into their syllabuses contributions to knowledge and social progress made by Muslims. Education Scotland should aim to do the same. Ofsted should be empowered to oversee and ensure that said guidelines are being translated into the delivery of high-quality classroom content in line with its 2023-2027 equality objectives¹¹⁴. To be clear, the main focus of such content should not be religious education. While bolstering the religious literacy of young people is important, the main purpose is to ensure that awareness of Muslims' historic role in shaping Britain is increased. In schools across Britain, pupils are taught a great deal about the epochs that characterised Britain's history - from there medieval period to the Victorian era - but the role of Muslims, such as those discussed above during the Elizabethan period, should also

be acknowledged. When teaching about the two world wars, not including the massive sacrifices of Muslims from those counties colonised by Britain is simply unacceptable today.

More broadly, the significant Muslim contributions to the hard sciences, mathematics and philosophy should be given the acknowledgement they deserve. Historians of science note the foundational roles played by Muslims in helping to establish fields such as astronomy, algebra and medicine¹¹⁵. The influence of Muslims such as the Persian polymath Ibn Sina, known in the West as Avicenna, who is acknowledged by some as "the father of early modern medicine"¹¹⁶, should be given proper acknowledgement in history curricula in school education. During the 8th-15th centuries, Islamic cosmology built upon the works it had preserved from ancient Mesopotamia and Greece to revive and deepen the field of astronomy, producing new methodologies for enhancing our observations of the stars. Indeed, many of these figures laid the foundations for the European scientific revolution of the 16th century, and therefore our very conceptions of reality itself. For example, the theories of the 10th century Muslim-Egyptian astronomer, Ibn Yunus, were later built upon by the Catholic astronomer, Nicolaus Copernicus, in his construction of the heliocentric model of the solar system, which showed that the earth revolves around the sun¹¹⁷. Ibn al- Haytham, a Muslim physicist from

114. Ofsted's Equality Objectives 2023-2027. Gov UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsteds-equality-objectives-2023-to-2027/ofsteds-equality-objectives-2023-to-2027#equality-objective-1>

115. See Howard R. Turner. 2010. *Science in Medieval Islam*. University of Texas Press.

See also John W. Livingstone. 2017. *The Rise of Science in Islam and the West: From Shared Heritage to Parting of The Ways, 8th to 19th Centuries*. Routledge.

116. Richard Colgan. 2010. *Advice to The Young Physician: On The Art of Medicine*. Springer US.

117. Shannon Stirone. February 14, 2017. How Islamic Scholarship Birthed Modern Astronomy. *Astronomy Magazine*: <https://www.astronomy.com/science/how-islamic-scholarship-birthed-modern-astronomy/>

present day Iraq often referred to as “the father of modern optics,” discovered how humans perceive light, showing that it travels in a straight line into our eyes but not back out¹¹⁸. In fact, it was Ibn al-Haytham who developed the scientific method itself - the idea of carrying out experiments repeatedly in order to test a theory - upon which all modern science depends¹¹⁹. The scholarship of 9th century mathematician, Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, also from present day Iraq, provided the foundational systems of mathematical logic that were eventually used by British mathematician Alan Turing to break Nazi codes during World War II, and which proved instrumental in defeating Hitler. These examples are just the tip of the iceberg, and Muslim contributions to our shared understanding of reality have been monumental. Education in history and the sciences that underplays the role of Muslim thinkers whose work paved the way for the European scientific revolution does a grave disservice to the shared heritage of humanity.

Media

In order to better reflect the ethnocultural diversity of Britain in 2024, there is an urgent need for policymakers to explore how minority group recruitment and retention in the media sector can be encouraged. Evidence that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people are hugely underrepresented in the media sector is overwhelming¹²⁰.

According to the Media Diversity Institute, the number of Black British (3% of the population) journalists stands at a meager 0.2%, while Asian British (7% of the population) journalists make up 2.5% of the media workforce¹²¹. In comparison, white journalists make up 94%. According to the same institute, just 0.4% of journalists are Muslim, despite Muslims making up 6.5% of the population. Increasing the diversity of the media sector, especially among journalists, editors, producers and directors, is crucial to ensuring that voices representing previously marginalised histories are given a platform to help chart the coverage of Britain’s press and broadcast media. Therefore it is crucial that initiatives are built which make the media sector more accessible to Muslims and people from minority backgrounds. Such initiatives would not only entail outlining measures to break down structural barriers and institutional biases that hinder recruitment, but also working to make careers in this sector desirable to Muslims and other minority communities. At the same time, Muslim communities need to understand the importance of encouraging their young people to enter careers in the media sector. Muslim civil society groups and media institutes should consider collaborating to establish initiatives geared toward awareness raising in Muslim communities about the benefits of careers in the media sector, such as influencing the public debate toward Islam in Britain.

118. Jim al-Khalili. January 4, 2009. The ‘First True Scientist.’ BBC News: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/7810846.stm>

119. Shannon Stirone. February 14, 2017. How Islamic Scholarship Birthed Modern Astronomy. Astronomy Magazine: <https://www.astronomy.com/science/how-islamic-scholarship-birtherd-modern-astronomy/>

120. Muslim Engagement and Development. 2019. Policy Pledges Muslim Manifesto 2019: https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/MEND-Muslim-Manifesto-2019_15.11.19.pdf - pp.58-61.

121. Angelo Boccato. January 10, 2023. Urgent Need to Improve UK Media Diversity. Media Diversity Institute: <https://www.media-diversity.org/urgent-need-to-improve-uk-media-diversity/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20Black%20journalists,higher%20at%202.5%%20of%20the>

Politics

There is a two-way street when it comes to political engagement: politicians need to engage more with Muslims and Muslim issues, and Muslims need to engage more with politics. The government should foster better relationships with mainstream Muslim civil society organisations - including MEND - that can demonstrate they have the support of Muslim communities, as recommended by the 2017 Citizens UK report, *Missing Muslims: Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All*¹²². As it stands, the government has been doing the opposite by ostracising such groups by erroneously labelling them as 'Islamist,' and potentially even 'extremist'¹²³. Such politically-driven policy making is a great shame and misses the opportunity to forge stronger dialogue, as such organisations can act as bridges between politicians and Muslim communities, and it is through them that both of those groups can better understand and engage with one another. Politicians need to better equip themselves with the right kind of language and issues-based knowledge that they can tailor their policies and narratives around, and this applies to all minority groups, not just Muslims. However, in the case of Muslims, by discussing the historic contributions made to the country by Muslim communities in parliament, politicians would be sending out the message that parliament is a Muslim-

122. Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life. 2017. *The Missing Muslims: Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All*. <https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/2017/07/the-missing-muslims-unlocking-british-muslim-potential/> - p.46

123. Paul Seddon & Dominic Casciani. March 14, 2024. Michael Gove Names Groups as He Unveils Extremism Definition. BBC News: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-68564577>

124. Homa Khaleeli. March 25, 2017. Sayeeda Warsi: 'Where Are My Grandkids Going to Call Home? What World Will They Grow Up In?' The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/mar/25/sayeeda-warsi-where-are-my-grandkids-going-to-call-home-what-world-will-they-grow-up-in>

125. Jonathan Foster. September 24, 1994. Entryism or Racism?: Labour Turns Down One in Four Asians for Party Membership Amid Fears of a Local Takeover. The Independent: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/entryism-or-racism-labour-turns-down-one-in-four-asians-for-party-membership-amid-fears-of-a-local-takeover-1450963.html>

126. Rachel Russel. May 8, 2024. Leeds: Green Party Councillor Motrin Ali Apologises for Gaza Comments. BBC News: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-68970097>

friendly space. While there are currently a record 19 Muslim MPs in parliament, some of them have spoken at length about the Islamophobic prejudice they have faced there¹²⁴. It is therefore important that officials publicly employ discourses that reflect Muslim contributions, while condemning Islamophobic rhetoric when it does rear its sinister head, in order to make the political realm seem welcoming and accessible to Muslim communities. British Muslim history events held in public-political forums, such as parliament and local councils could also be indispensable in fostering an environment of inclusivity.

The Government, other parliamentarians and significant actors in the media sector will need to change the way that they engage with and frame politically active Muslims. In the past, when Muslims have felt alienated from the political space and chose not to engage with it, they were presented by some as 'segregationists.' On the other hand, when they do try to play a role, they can find themselves implicitly accused of 'entryism'¹²⁵. This was highlighted most recently during the 2024 local council elections when some Muslims who were elected as councillors were treated with suspicion for expressing support for the people of the beleaguered Gaza Strip¹²⁶.

In those same local elections, Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party suffered significant losses among Muslims¹²⁷ owing to its earlier refusal to back calls for a ceasefire in Israel's war on Gaza, leading to a realisation among some of the party's leadership that it would need to "rebuild trust with Muslim communities"¹²⁸. In response, a grassroots group called The Muslim Vote issued a list of 18 points that Labour would need to fulfil in order to rebuild that trust. In response, right-wing media outlets published alarmist articles implying the entryist conspiracy theory¹²⁹. What the aforementioned demonstrates is that, when Muslims do organise their communities and plug themselves into politics, the well-worn trope of the 'dangerous other' attempting to infiltrate and subvert British society quickly resurfaces. As the percentage of the British population who identify as Muslim is projected to continue growing in the years ahead - thus increasing the likelihood of greater levels of Muslim participation in politics - there is a pressing need for public educational campaigns of the sort mentioned above which stress tolerance, pluralism and a Britain for all.



127. On average, Labour support dropped by 8 points compared to the year before in wards where more than 10% of voters identify as Muslim. According to a BBC analysis, in 58 local wards where "more than one-in-five residents identify as Muslim, Labour's share of the vote was down 21% on 2021." See BBC News, Labour Must Rebuild Trust with Muslim Voters, Says Senior MP: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-68956784>

128. Middle East Eye. May 6, 2024. UK Labour Says Party Needs to Rebuild Trust with Muslims After Gaza Backlash: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-senior-labour-mp-says-party-needs-rebuild-trust-muslims-after-gaza-backlash>

129. Matthew Lodge. May 6, 2024. Revealed: The '18 DEMANDS' Muslim Vote group issued to Keir Starmer after dozens of pro-Gaza activists were elected to councils across UK - from cutting military ties with Israel to 'ensuring insurance quotes don't cost more for someone called Muhammad. The Daily Mail: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13386393/Muslim-vote-list-demands-Keir-Starmer-Labour-Gaza-Palestine.html>

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