BHAKTIVEDANTA MANOR

STUDENT CASE STUDY
OVERVIEW

Bhaktivedanta Manor, UK home of the Hare Krishna movement, is located in the parish of Aldenham in Hertfordshire.

It was founded after the London temple for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), located at Bury Place near the British Museum, became too small for the growing number of participants. A group of devotees settled on the building we know as the Bhaktivedanta Manor today.

GEORGE HARRISON OF THE BEATLES PLAYED A HUGE ROLE IN FUNDING BHAKTIVEDANTA MANOR.
The estate that the Manor sits on originally belonged to Geoffrey Picot in the 13th century, and was home to various wealthy families during the subsequent centuries. In 1884, it was purchased by George Villies who demolished and reconstructed a mock-Tudor building in its place, the building we know as the Manor today. When there was a need for a larger home for the Hare Krishna movement, George Harrison of the Beatles, purchased the building as a gift to ISKCON.

The Manor building has undergone extensive renovation to restore it to its original 1884 mock-Tudor self. However, it has also been adapted to facilitate the large numbers of visitors and overcrowding of the visiting community by constructing extra space. In 2020, a 200m² Shree Krishna Haveli was constructed (pictured above), designed to fit within the estate’s existing characteristics, including the rustic farm and original mock Tudor mansion. Being in Hertfordshire, they used materials such as oak, timber, tiles and traditional red brick with stone paving to respect the heritage of its local surroundings.
Following the government coup by General Idi Amin in 1971, 100,000 Hindus were expelled from the country and a large number of settled in London. With the majority of them already familiar with or a supporter of the Krishna movement, they became regular visitors of temples in London.

Bhaktivedanta Manor had become a popular visiting place for the large Hindu population of London during the 1970s, which was rare in the UK. With the manor attracting up to 15,000 visitors per day during the Janmashtami festival, the manor received complaints from locals, causing threats from the council to shut it down. However, after a new property was acquired, and an agreement was made between the council and the ISKCON devotees, there was an allowance for 6 days each year where the number of visitors attending the Manor was allowed to exceed 1,000 people.
HOW HAS THE COMMUNITY USED THE SPACE IN THE PAST, TODAY AND HOW WILL IT BE USED IN THE FUTURE?

PRESENT

The main activities at the Bhaktivedanta Manor occur around the temple room, which contains an altar of carved wood and gilt with three domed shrines. The rest of the manor consists of a shop selling souvenirs, a bakery, a farm, college facilities, ashrams (a place of religious retreat), a primary school and a theatre, used for performances of bhakti yoga and stories illustrating Krishna. Kirtan call-and-response singing, a type of religious or spiritual musical form, is also taught at the Bhaktivedanta Manor College. The newly constructed haveli has also acted as a popular venue for weddings.
REFLECTIONS

HOW HAVE COMMUNITIES OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC HERITAGE HAD A VOICE IN THE PLANNING AND DESIGN OF SITES THAT ARE SIGNIFICANT TO THEM?

The Bhaktivedanta Manor has served as a sanctuary for many years for new Hindu Indians migrating to London, when it was uncommon in the 70s for such a place to occur. When there was a threat to close the manor in 1980, and several complaints against the manor in 1985, the manor was close to being shut down in 1994. However, 36,000 people joined together in protest by marching to the British government’s offices at Westminster. After purchasing some neighbouring land, the devotees effectively saved the manor, allowing it to continue to operate as a place for teaching, worship, meditation and provision of religious facilities.