



SHAH JAHAN MOSQUE

STUDENT CASE STUDY

OVERVIEW

The first purpose built mosque in Europe (outside of Muslim Spain), the Shah Jahan mosque is strongly linked to the growth of British Islam in the late 19th and early 20th century. Today the mosque is a historical Grade 1 building and is also a registered charity.

Since 1995, the local community has renovated the mosque and restored its original elegance. The largest hall has the capacity to hold up to a 1000 individuals and is utilised by male worshippers primarily for Jumma (Friday), Taraweeh congregations during Ramadan, Eid congregations and other important religious celebrations.

IT IS WAS THE
FIRST
MOSQUE IN
THE UNITED
KINGDOM,
BUILT IN 1889.



ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES



Dr Gottlieb Leitner, a Hungarian Jewish linguist approached Sultan Shah Jahan Begum, the female ruler of the Indian princely state of Bhopal, to fund the construction of the mosque. She provided £5,000, which saw the construction commence in 1888 and finish in 1889. The architect was William Isaac Chambers, using a design of late Mughal style.

The original mosque can hold up to 60 worshippers and continues to be utilised for daily prayers. However, since the weekly congregations far exceed this capacity the mosque was fortunate to be able to redeem the lease on a number of buildings which it had been leased to James Walker in 1994.

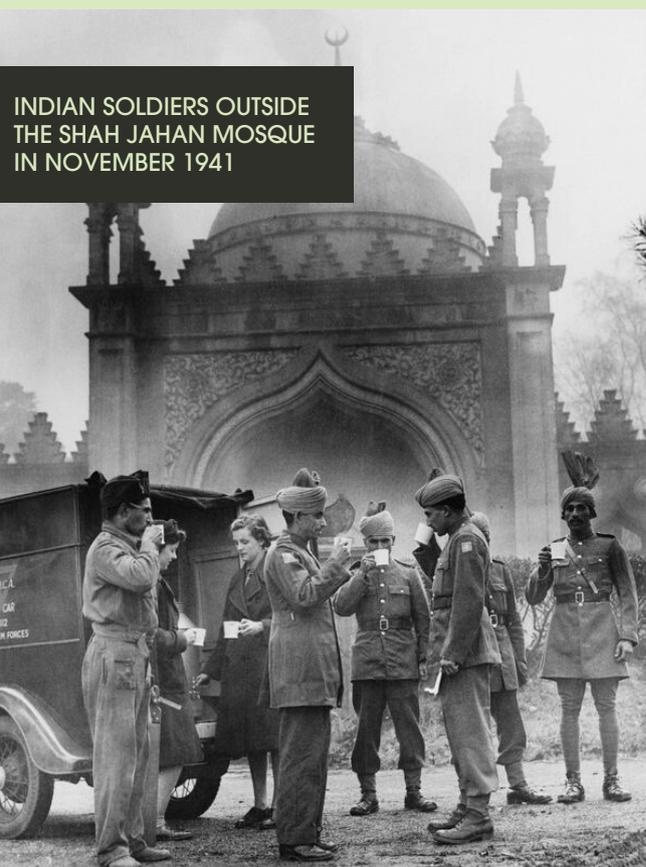
COMMUNITY PROFILE

HOW IS THE SPACE USED BY THE COMMUNITY? WHAT DOES IT SERVE THE COMMUNITY?

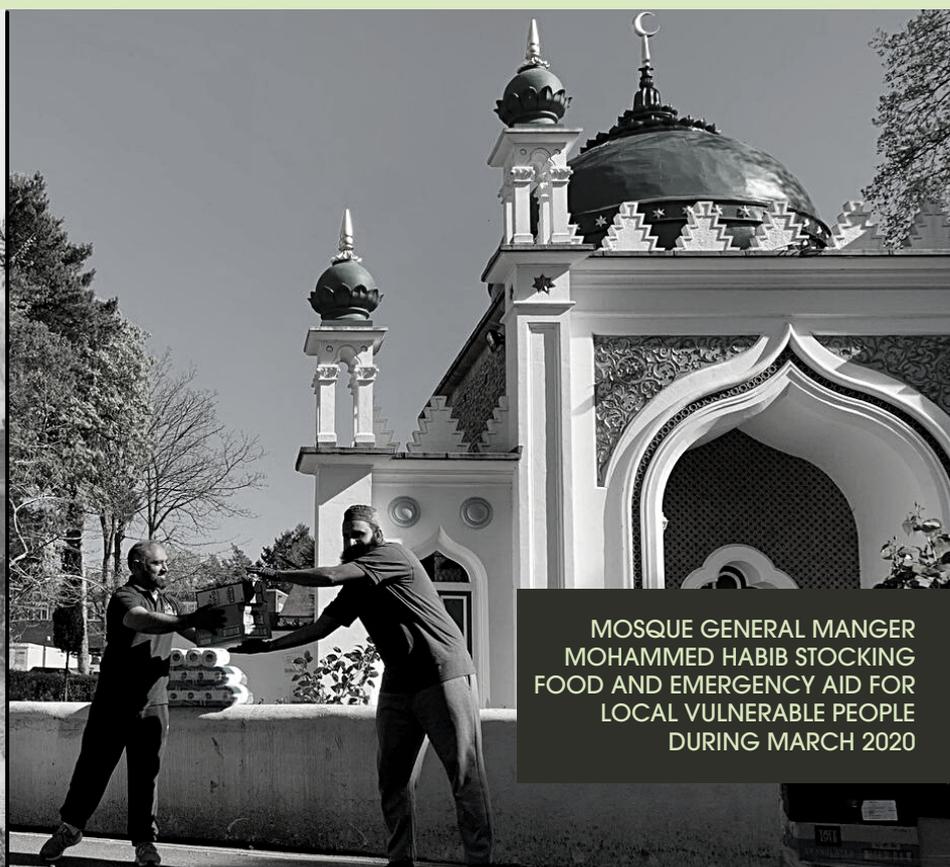
The Muslim community is small in the South East region, at 2.3% of the total population, just ahead of South West and North West regions which show the lowest numbers in England. In the 1960s, there was a large Pakistani migration to Woking to take up employment in local plastics and rubber factories.

Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din (an Indian Lawyer) purchased the mosque from Dr Gottlieb Leitner's son in 1912 and set up residence in the Imam's house and established daily prayers in the mosque. With helpers arriving from India, he founded the Muslim Mission Woking to spread the message of Islam to people living in the UK. He did a lot of this work with Lord Headly, a qualified engineer and Muslim convert.

We met the Mosque General Manager Mohammed Habib, who kindly gave us a lengthy tour of the spectacular building and grounds. He has led much of the design on the latest updates, respecting the original plans. A huge piece of work was the renovation of the extension in 1994.



INDIAN SOLDIERS OUTSIDE THE SHAH JAHAN MOSQUE IN NOVEMBER 1941



MOSQUE GENERAL MANGER MOHAMMED HABIB STOCKING FOOD AND EMERGENCY AID FOR LOCAL VULNERABLE PEOPLE DURING MARCH 2020

USE

HOW HAS THE COMMUNITY USED THE SPACE IN THE PAST, TODAY AND HOW WILL IT BE USED IN THE FUTURE?

PAST

Established as an educational "Oriental Institute" with the purpose of enhancing the study of culture and history of India and the Islamic world, it enabled visiting dignitaries from India to stay and study in culturally sympathetic surroundings. It also enabled Europeans being posted to India to learn the language and culture.

PRESENT

It acts as a fully functioning mosque, offering a number of services to the Islamic community including marriage/Nikah services, funeral services and Islamic education. During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, it was instrumental in providing supplies to the local community, in particular the most vulnerable of Woking.



REFLECTIONS

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

The client and architect in this instance are not of diverse ethnic heritage, but both the users and the chief funder for the construction are.

The most interesting thing here is seeing the passion that buildings pass onto individuals once they spend enough time in them. The General Manager Mohammed Habib uses his historical knowledge of the building to learn more about architecture. The modifications that have taken place over the more recent years have been faithfully in keeping with original designs. We see that there are blurry lines between the client and the designer.



QUOTES

“The mosque is on probably the third colour scheme of its history, so these aren't the original colours. Originally, it was Bath and Bargate stone, the dome a peachy colour. There was a film shot here in the 70s called Valentino. The director paid for the mosque to be painted all white. In the mid-60s, the first wave of migrants from Pakistan came. In the 90s, they went for what looks like the Pakistan flag colours - green and white. Green is significant in Islam, so I don't think that was what they intended to make it look like. Green is one of the five favourite colours of the Prophet, may peace be upon him. It's also a colour which represents peace. Scientifically, it has a calming effect.”

