

Charity minute book, 1910



Dr Jamil Sherif reveals the history of the East London Mosque Trust, home to the first Muslim archives in Western Europe INTERVIEW BY ROSEMARY COLLINS

London has been home to a Muslim community for several hundred years. However, it was only in 1910 that efforts began to raise funds for the capital's first mosque as a place of worship, led by Syed Ameer Ali, a judge and scholar and the first Indian to be appointed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Despite support from prominent Muslims in Britain and abroad, as well as non-Muslim citizens including civil servants, writers and politicians, the East London Mosque was not inaugurated until 1941. It now occupies purpose-built premises on Whitechapel Road. Last year its archives were inaugurated as the first Islamic archives strongroom in Western Europe. As Dr Jamil Sherif, chair of the East London Mosque Archives Steering Group, explains, the archives' collection includes the London Mosque Fund minute book, which sheds light on the mosque's creation.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE MINUTE BOOK?

The minute book is a record of the meetings of the trustees and other mosque organisers going back 100 years, and it's

really the crown jewel of the archives' collection.

The minute book records a great deal of information right back to the first meeting in 1910, including how the London Mosque Fund raised money; how it invested the funds when they were established; the search for property; how the fund helped other organisations in the interim period before it bought the premises for the mosque; and also sensitive issues about dealing with other organisations. It's very rich in terms of social history.

In addition the minutes are in beautiful handwriting for the first 150 pages. It's only later, from the 1930s onwards, that you get inserts of typewritten sheets.

HOW DID THE LONDON MOSQUE FUND ORIGINATE?

At the turn of the century the Muslim community

VISIT US

EAST LONDON MOSQUE ARCHIVES

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The archives document the mosque's activities, including minutes, annual reports, marriage records and conversion records.

It had been felt for a long time that the capital city of the British Empire needed a mosque, but this idea crystallised in around 1910/1911 mainly thanks to

the efforts of one individual, Syed Ameer Ali – a retired judge who settled in England because he had an

English wife. He called a meeting and the London Mosque Fund was set up, to be run by trustees. They were a combination of the great and the good from the British elite of the time, together with some settled businessmen and diplomats.

in London was made up of different groups. There were the Lascars, who were merchant seamen, and then there were students coming to study at the Inns of Court, as well as a few settled businessmen.

'It had been felt for a long time that the capital city of the British Empire needed a mosque'



Syed Ameer Ali was a remarkable individual. He was also a writer, and as well as setting up the London Mosque Fund, he created the Red Crescent Society to help the Ottomans during the war in the Balkans. The love of his life was a lady called Isabelle Konstam who he married in around 1884 – her sister was a very famous actress of the day, Gertrude Kingston. Syed Ameer Ali and Isabelle had two sons.

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...maluddin who was
...ensure the mosque and the
...House, for the present, for
...resolution that Mr Quirk
...act as Treasurer of the
...to and Mr Arnold as
...of the Board of Trustees.

...and before the meeting a
...of the accounts of the London
...d up to the 15th November
...pointed out that the balance
...in the banks including
...was £5206.6-0. He was
...est £100 now and another
...5th January 1911.

Confirmed
Kamran Ali
22nd January 1911.

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the London Mosque Fund was held on January 22nd 1911 at 111, St. James Street, S.W. at 5 p.m.

Present:-

- The M. Hon. Muneer Ali (in the chair)
- The Excellency Munda Sikri M.D.
- Mr. Moina Abdul Shaffar Khan
- Mr. Abbas Ali Haig
- Mr. E. A. Latif
- Mr. A. S. Quirk
- Professor F. W. Arnold

Mr Quirk reported that he had invested £100 as decided at the last meeting.

Letters from Khwaja Kamaluddin and Mr. Abdul Haq (Secretary of the Islamic Society) were read, asking for a grant of money for the payment of the rent of a building in London for the purposes of a Mosque.

The chairman explained that no grant could be made from the Mosque Fund without reference to the Trustees.

Proposed by Mr. Abbas Ali Haig and seconded by Mr. Latif:-

That this Committee do recommend to the Trustees to sanction a grant of £120. a year out of the income of the Trust Fund in deposit with

Both were also active in the mosque project, so it's a nice example of how family tradition carries on.

WHAT DOES THE MINUTE BOOK SHOW US ABOUT BRITISH SOCIETY?

It shows us many things. For example, it shows the persistent efforts from 1910 to raise funds to bring together people for a common purpose. It also reveals a lot about cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims in a venture they agreed on; how the trustees negotiated for property; why they initially decided to settle

for a property in the East End rather than elsewhere; and also generally how institutions in the Muslim community developed in the first half of the 20th century.

WHAT WAS THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN THE EAST END LIKE IN 1910?

The East End docks have always been a very important maritime port, right from the days of the East India Company. You had merchant seamen from India, East Africa and South Africa working as hands on decks in the engine rooms, or setting up the sails. So right from the 19th century some Muslim

sailors would jump ship or marry, and they would settle down in the East End.

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE THE FIRST MUSLIM ARCHIVE IN WESTERN EUROPE?

It's a great opportunity to start a movement, so that other mosques and similar institutions invest effort in preserving their own records, rather than them being lost when trustees retire or pass away. There's a culture slowly emerging to preserve the history of different sections of British society, so we can have a more complete narrative of how modern Britain came to be.

WHAT OTHER DOCUMENTS DO YOU HAVE?

A wide range. We've got formal governance records like the minute book, and a lot of correspondence with Government, local authorities and London Transport, including negotiations to arrange for a bus stop to be placed by the mosque so that worshippers could travel easily. Also during the Second World War there was rationing, so you have a request for additional sugar rations for the festival of Eid al-Fitr after Ramadan, the month of fasting. Such small insights are very rich in social history. 🍀