

WOKING MUSLIM MISSION CENTENARY



Lord Headley and Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din in 1913

“His Lordship had his photograph taken with me. He hopes that by publishing this photograph we can dispel Rudyard Kipling’s notion that ‘East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet’, and show that the Prophet of Arabia has brought together the East and the West.” —

Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din writing in January 1914.

Booklet compiled by Dr Zahid Aziz

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*Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din with some English converts to Islam outside the
 Woking Mosque in 1926*

(From the Islamic Review, February 1926)

About Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din (1870–1932)

- Born in Lahore, 1870, in a scholarly family.
- Graduated from the famous Forman Christian College in 1893.
- Under the influence of his missionary teachers at the College, he considered becoming a Christian.
- Read a book by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, which convinced him of the truth of Islam.
- Started a legal practice in 1898. But was inspired by the Founder to present Islam to the world.
- From 1908 onwards he went all over the Indian subcontinent delivering lectures on Islam at multi-faith conferences.
- September 1912: Arrived in London to plead a case before the Privy Council, but with intention of setting up an Islamic mission.
- February 1913: Started the monthly *Islamic Review*, which was published till 1970.
- August 1913: Opened up the disused Woking Mosque and established his Mission there. Had Woking Mosque declared as a public Muslim place of worship. Named it the Shah Jehan Mosque, after the Muslim lady rule of Bhopal who financed its construction.
- October 1913: Met Lord Headley, who became his close associate and fellow-worker in the propagation of Islam.
- August 1914: Left England, concluding his first visit, and returned to Lahore, performing the Pilgrimage at Makka on the way back.
- Made three more visits to England till 1926, further consolidating the Woking Muslim Mission. Wrote several books.
- With Lord Headley: went to the Pilgrimage at Makka via Egypt; also went to South Africa and India to seek support for the ideal of the propagation of Islam, especially the work in the U.K.
- 1928: Created Trust to build mosque in Central London. This Trust was later merged into the present-day Regents Park Mosque Trust.
- Died at Lahore in December 1932.

Looking back to the Woking Muslim Mission after 100 years

The year 2013 is the centenary of an event which was to place the town of Woking on the world map, in particular the map of the Muslim world. It would lead to Woking being visited for the next fifty years or more by kings, statesmen, ambassadors, generals, intellectuals, students, business men, and other leading figures from all over the Muslim world, as well as British aristocrats, scholars, linguists, writers and soldiers who had embraced Islam. Woking came to be described as “a miniature of Mecca” in the West.

On 24th September 1912, there arrived in England from Lahore, a city in British India, a man called Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din (1870–1932). He was by profession a lawyer and by vocation a lecturer and orator on the religion of Islam and comparative religion. He came to plead a civil case before the Privy Council in London, the highest court of appeal for Indian cases at the time. However, his plan beyond that was to present Islam in this country on public platforms and correct the very serious misconceptions about Islam and Muslims, under which the people of Britain and its religious and political leaders were labouring. He soon came to know of the existence of the mosque at Woking. It had been built in 1889 by Dr G.W. Leitner, a European scholar and linguist who had helped in India in the establishment of the University of the Punjab at Lahore. The mosque was part of his proposed Oriental Institute, which never came to fruition. The cost of the construction of the mosque was largely donated by Begum Shah Jehan, the Muslim lady ruler of the state of Bhopal in India, and the cost of the land by the ruler of the Muslim state of Hyderabad Deccan.

Opens the Woking Mosque

From 1889, past the death of Dr Leitner in 1899, to the year 1913, the mosque was opened only on special occasions and was generally derelict and disused. Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, while considering where to base his missionary activities, first visited the mosque in January 1913. In the summer of 1913, with the help of two prominent Indian Muslims who held

high official positions (Sir Abbas Ali Baig and the Right Honourable Syed Ameer Ali), the Khwaja had a trust created to take charge of the property and its status declared as a mosque open for the use of all Muslims. He moved to the mosque as Imam in mid-August 1913 during the month of Ramadan, and opened it for regular use for the first time, with the call to prayer being sounded five times a day from 12th August onwards. In the house next to the mosque, he established the Woking Muslim Mission.

The purpose of opening the mosque was not merely to provide a prayer venue for Muslims in Britain. The Khwaja considered his most important work as being to place an accurate image of Islam before the British people, as the religion which best fulfilled the needs of the modern times. Leading Muslims in the Indian subcontinent considered this as an utterly mad and foolhardy venture, doomed to failure. How could Islam be acceptable in Britain, the country which dominated the world with its most advanced civilization, based on Christianity and science, while Muslims were considered to be mere barbarians following a primitive faith unacceptable by any modern standards? How could the British, with their mighty rule over a large part of the Muslim world, including the country from where the Khwaja came, take spiritual guidance from someone belonging to their subject races who was promoting his inferior religion? Yet the Khwaja was convinced that, if the real and true Islam was presented in Britain, refuting its prevalent, distorted image, people would become sympathetic to it, and many of them would succumb to its appeal and attraction. He derived this conviction, drive and energy from his contact with his spiritual mentor, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908).

Launches the *Islamic Review*

Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din launched the monthly *Islamic Review* in February 1913, which remained in publication till around 1970. Besides containing articles on religious issues, it published news relating to Muslims internationally and in Britain. Its archives are a unique source of the history of Islam and Muslims in Britain during those years.

Woking becomes Britain's national centre of Islam

With Woking as his base, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din went around Britain giving lectures on Islam. His activities were reported in national newspapers such as *The Times* as well as local papers such as the *Surrey Advertiser* and the *Woking News and Mail*. The British Pathe news organisation filmed more than a dozen occasions at the mosque between 1914 and 1958, and these film clips can be viewed on its website.

Soon the Khwaja gained many British converts to his faith, among them people of high education and some titled persons. The most famous of them was a peer of the realm and distinguished civil engineer, Lord Headley, who, after accepting Islam in November 1913, worked tirelessly to help the cause of the Woking Mission till his death in 1935.

Numerous books on Islam were published from Woking, many of them written by Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din himself. In 1917 the monumental and voluminous English translation of the Quran with extensive commentary, by Maulana Muhammad Ali of Lahore, the first such work by a Muslim available in the West, was published from the Woking Mosque.

The Woking Mosque and Mission became the national centre of Islamic activity in Britain. Its Imam was regarded by the government as the de facto head of the Muslim community of the U.K. The Eid prayers at Woking were, till the mid-1960s, a national event for Muslims of Britain. It became commonplace for visiting dignitaries of international fame from the Muslim world to call at the Woking Mosque. Kings, princes, presidents, sultans, generals, statesmen, political leaders, diplomats, high government officials, writers and intellectuals from Muslim countries came to Woking to visit the mosque and attend functions organised by the Mission.

A Muslim, observing the Eid-ul-Adha gathering at Woking, a festival which takes place on the occasion of the great Pilgrimage to Makka, wrote in 1930: "Almost all Muslim nations in the world are represented in the gardens of the Mosque, prostrating themselves before their God and magnifying the Most High, even as they magnify Him at Mecca on this

sacred occasion. Woking is the only town in the world which becomes on such days a replica in miniature of the Ancient House of God in Arabia.”

Sacrifices of Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din and the Woking Mission staff

Initially working with the barest of help, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din arranged for staffing of the mission from India. The missionary and administrative staff which came from the Indian subcontinent had, like the Khwaja, to make great sacrifices. The journey to England took at least three weeks by sea and rail. Here they were faced with an entirely unfamiliar environment, suffering hardships and deprived of all the cultural and social facilities for Muslims which only started becoming available here in the 1960s. They left families behind, and the normal means of communication with home was by letter. People today cannot conceive that coming to the U.K. in those days was not an alluring prospect. It was the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, mainly, whose members made the sacrifices to provide the staff, literature, scholarly resources and finances for the running of the Woking Muslim Mission.

Lord Headley and Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din go to Makka for *Hajj*

Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din concluded his first visit to Britain in August 1914, returning again in 1916. He made four visits in all. At the end of his third visit, in June 1923, he accompanied Lord Headley to the pilgrimage at Makka, a journey widely covered in the press here and in the Middle East. On the way, they passed through Egypt where public meetings were held in Lord Headley’s honour. They paid a call upon Field-Marshal Lord Allenby, the British representative in Egypt, who sent a report of their visit to the Foreign Secretary in London, Lord Curzon, these two men being famous figures in British history.

Other contributions of Woking Muslim Mission

During the two World Wars, the Woking Muslim Mission extended its support to Britain, in the same way as the British public did. During the First World War, Kitchener’s famous appeal “Your King & Country Need You” was published in the *Islamic Review*. In 1914 the Imam of the Woking Mosque was invited by the War Office to approve a site for a

Muslim cemetery for the burial of soldiers who died here after being wounded in the battle-fields of France and Belgium. The Imam suggested that the cemetery should be better located in Woking. The War Office accepted his suggestion, and as a result a cemetery was established within Brookwood, which also came to be used as a general Muslim cemetery.

When the Second World War began, the Imam of the Woking Mosque declared in his Eid sermon in November 1939: “Muslims are ordered [in the Quran] to sacrifice their lives not only to save their own mosques but the religious houses of other peoples as well. ...the very fact that synagogues have been pulled down in Germany upon the slightest pretext makes it obligatory upon us Muslims to throw our weight into the cause of the Allies”.

A Muslim convert, First World War veteran, and Woking resident by the name of Major J.W.B. Farmer (1897–1966), M.B.E., M.C., who was also a trustee of the Woking Mosque, was awarded the M.B.E. after the Second World War “in recognition of Meritorious Service in the Home Guard” in Surrey.

The Woking Mission also supported various just Muslim causes around the world and brought them to the notice of the public and press in this country. As early as 1917 it publicised the case for justice in Palestine. The best minds from all over the Muslim world used to meet at the Woking Mission House, where they held discussions on problems facing their countries. The campaign for an independent Muslim homeland on the Indian subcontinent, with the proposed name of Pakistan, started from a meeting of students at the Woking Mission House in 1932.

Various Muslim U.K. national organisations also had either their birth at the Woking Mosque or sought assistance from the Woking Mission in their early days. The first public meeting of the “British Muslim Society” was held at the Woking Mosque on 20th December 1914. The first ever “Congress of Muslims living in the U.K.” was a gathering called by the Woking Mission, and it was held as a two-day event on 25–26 June 1952 at the Woking Mosque.

Origin of Central London Mosque was from Woking Mission

The Central London Mosque in Regents Park owes its origin to the Woking Muslim Mission. The plan to build a Mosque in Central London was proposed by Lord Headley during the First World War. This was followed up in the 1930s by the creation of a Trust, collection of funds, purchase of land, and even laying of the foundation stone in West Kensington, near Olympia. This Trust, whose original members were headed by Lord Headley and Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, was later incorporated into the Trust that controls the Central London Mosque in Regents Park today.

Features of Islam as presented from the Woking Muslim Mission

In this article, we must also note the general picture of Islam as presented from the Woking Muslim Mission. The distinctive features of Islam as emphasised through this Mission's work are that:

- The beliefs and practices of Islam are simple and rational, and to be understood in the light of knowledge and reason. There are no dogmas, mysteries or rituals imposed upon a believer.
- The teachings of Islam are broadminded and tolerant. Islam accepts others religions as being originally revealed by God, acknowledges good in people of other faiths, grants complete freedom of religion to all, and urges friendship between faiths.
- In Islam there is no priesthood which controls the way to God.
- Islam creates a universal brotherhood of people of all countries, races, colours, classes and cultures, disregarding all such distinctions.
- Islam is not tied to the local culture of any Muslim country.
- It is a religion of unity, whose followers should be united by its fundamental teachings, but who respect one another's differences.

Legacy of the Woking Muslim Mission

During the 1960s Muslim migrants, mostly from Pakistan, arrived in the U.K. and settled in various towns and cities, forming communities of increasing size. Muslim religious centres and mosques began to spring up around the country, catering to the religious and cultural needs of their local Muslim communities. The Woking Mosque too went into the hands of

other management who turned it to the use of the local Muslim population. From 1968 onwards, it ceased to be the national centre for Muslims of the U.K. and to serve its international role for the Muslim world. The Woking Muslim Mission no longer operated.

The passage of time since then, however, has proved that the picture of Islam as presented by the Woking Mission is needed more than ever before in order to solve the problems of the Muslims in the U.K. and to improve their standing in the country and their relationship with the wider community. Islam as preached from the Woking Mission was the very opposite of the religious extremism, isolation and separatism from general society, and wholesale rejection of all modern ideas, which are the attitudes, rightly or wrongly, associated with Muslims living in the U.K. today. The Woking Mission did not teach that Muslims should become an inward-looking community, living in isolation and regarding the outside society as a threat. Instead of this, Muslims must communicate and interact with the wider society, explain their faith to others sympathetically, respond to criticism in a dignified manner, present to others the best they can offer from their values, and accept from others the best they have to offer. In responding to offence or grievances, whether real or perceived, Muslims must be temperate and abstain from violence.

The Woking Mission also showed how Muslims could be true to Islam and yet fit into British society and life. For this they must correct some of their own religious notions which are not justified by Islam, and they must bring about reform of certain Muslim cultural and social practices which are not part of the religion of Islam but merely local customs in some places in the Muslim world which are now proving harmful.

The website www.wokingmuslim.org, managed by the writer of this article, is devoted to compiling all the available information and records, in the form of printed material, photographs, newsreel film clips, about the history and activities of the Woking Muslim Mission.

About Lord Headley (1855–1935)

Photo shows Lord Headley during his visit to India of 1927/28.

- Educated at Westminster School, and Trinity College, Cambridge, gaining degree in Mathematics.
- Became civil engineer. Went to India in 1896 for construction of a road. Later became President of the Society of Engineers, London.
- Protestant by birth, also studied Catholicism. Became disillusioned due to sectarian intolerance and blind acceptance of doctrines.
- Succeeded his cousin to the title of Lord in January 1913.
- Announced acceptance of Islam in November 1913.
- After embracing Islam, worked for cause of Islam in Britain. Wrote books and articles, made speeches, raised funds.
- Campaigned for building a mosque in central London. Was founding member of Trust which purchased land for mosque in West Kensington, whose assets went to the Regents Park mosque.
- With Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din: Went to the Pilgrimage at Makka (July 1923), passing through Egypt, visited South Africa (1926), toured India (1927–28) to raise funds.
- Died June 1935. Buried at Brookwood Cemetery, Woking.
- A few minutes before he breathed his last in London, Lord Headley scribbled a note for his son and heir, which ran: *“Means permitting I should like to be buried with my brother Khwaja.”*



Lord Headley's acceptance of Islam, November 1913

“At a meeting of the Islamic Society held in London on Saturday evening, it was announced that Lord Headley had become a convert to the Mahomedan faith. In a letter read at the meeting Lord Headley wrote, ‘Those who know me will believe I am perfectly sincere in my belief’.” (*The Times*, ‘Court Circular’, 17th November 1913)

“After a career which has included amateur boxing, civil engineering, the editing of a local newspaper, and expert advice on coast erosion, Lord Headley, aged 58, became a convert to Mohammedanism. The conversion was announced at a meeting of the Islamic Society, held at Frascati’s, Oxford Street, by the Rev. Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, who is attached to the Mohammedan Mosque at Woking.” (*The Daily Sketch*, 17th November 1913)

His statements as to why he embraced Islam appeared in several newspapers including the *Daily Mail* and *The Observer*. He wrote:

“Having briefly given some of my reasons for adopting the teachings of Islam ... I can only hope that others will follow the example — which I honestly believe is a good one — which will bring happiness to anyone looking upon the step as one in advance rather than one in any way hostile to true Christianity.” (*The Observer*, 23rd November 1913)

Lord Headley's Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makka), July 1923

On 3rd July 1923 Lord Headley and Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din arrived at Port Said in Egypt from London on their way to the Pilgrimage. In the welcome speech from the specially-formed Reception Committee, their host observed that Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din was the spiritual sun that had dawned on the horizon of the West, and Lord Headley, having, like the moon, absorbed his light, was shedding his lustre amongst his countrymen. The British High Commissioner, Field-Marshal Lord Allenby, wrote a brief report for the British Foreign Office about their visit in which he said:

“I have the honour to inform you that Lord Headley, accompanied by Khoja Kamel ed Din, the Imam of the Mosque at Woking, arrived at Port Said on the 4th instant and, after visiting Cairo and Alexandria, left yesterday for Jeddah in order to take part in the Pilgrimage. Considerable publicity was given to his visit to Egypt before his arrival here... Reception Committees were formed in Port Said, Alexandria and Cairo, and in each of these towns Lord Headley was the object of most marked attention, while the meetings which were held in his honour were remarkable for their enthusiasm. Lord Headley showed himself as an ardent Moslem and the speeches which he made revealed great devotion to the Mohammedan faith and attracted considerable attention. On his arrival at Port Said he was met by His Britannic Majesty’s Consul as a matter of courtesy and he subsequently called on me here.... he wished to assure me as High Commissioner here that his visit had nothing to do with politics and was undertaken solely for religious purposes.”

After the Pilgrimage, *The Times* published the following news:

“Writing on August 22nd, our Cairo Correspondent gave the following account of the experiences of Lord Headley, who is a Moslem:— Lord Headley, who has just returned to Cairo after completing the pilgrimage to Mecca, has brought back with him two pieces of the Kiswa, or Holy Carpet, presented to him by King Hussein. ... The King sent his motor-car to Jeddah to convey him to Mecca, and to take him back to the seaport when the pilgrimage had been completed. ... Lord Headley and his companion, the Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, Imam of the Woking Mosque, were during their stay in the Hejaz the guests of King Hussein... ”. (30th August 1923)

Lord Headley spoke about his Pilgrimage at the First Annual General Meeting of the British Muslim Society in October 1923. The speaker who introduced him said: “Lord Headley faced the scorching heat of Arabia, and bore it with a smile on his face, and never complained. He slept four nights on the ground without a bed. All this he did for his love of the Faith he has adopted, and not for any political end. These hardships were to him blessings, for his reward lies elsewhere.”

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MUSLIM INDIA

AND

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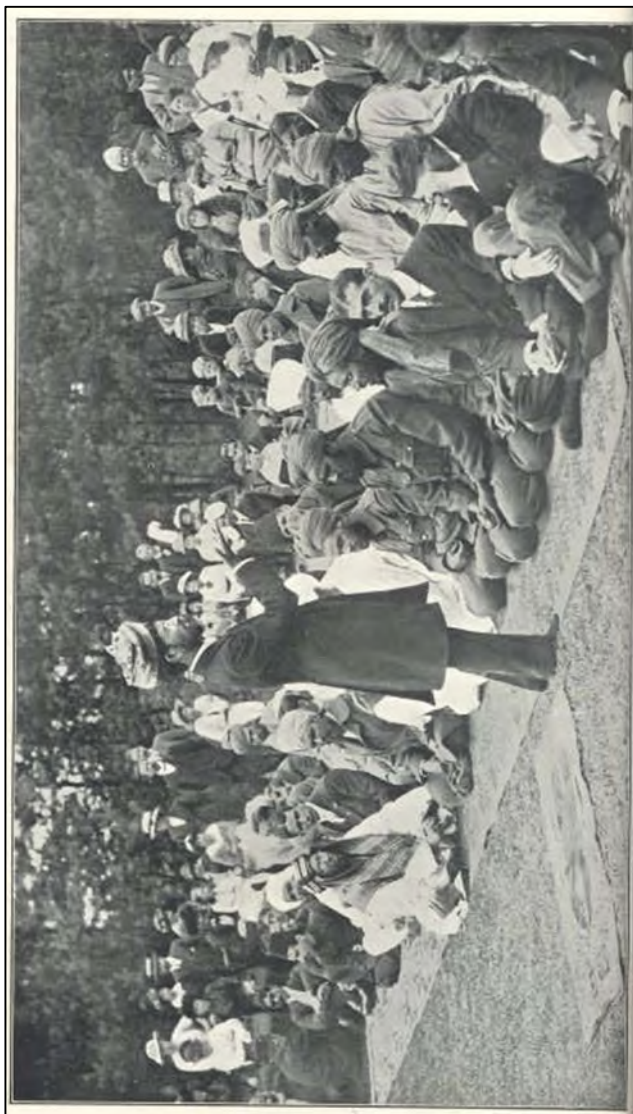
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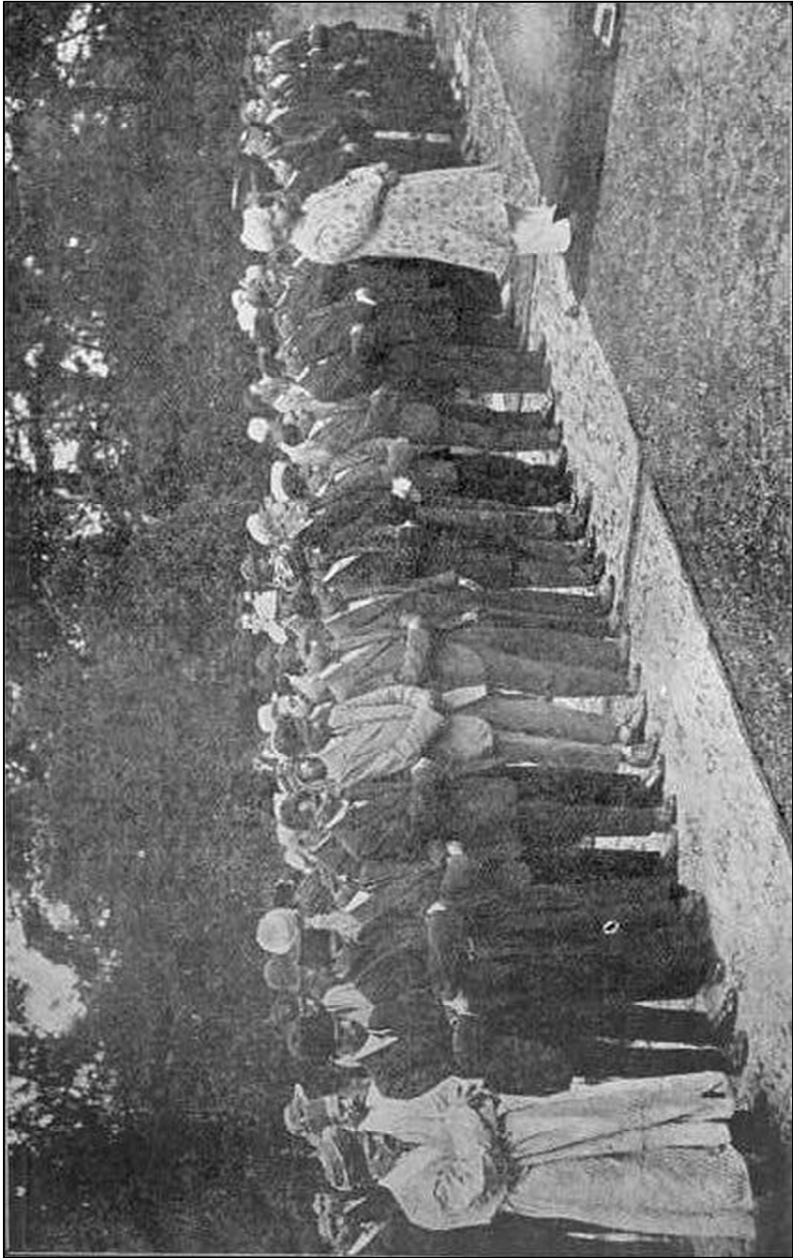
Front cover of the first issue of the Islamic Review, February 1913.

Eid-ul-Fitr, 13th August 1915: The Imam, Maulana Sadr-ud-Din, delivering the sermon in the grounds of the Woking Mosque. Three Muslim soldiers of the British Indian army in the First World War are in the front row.

A report appeared in the 'Graphic' newspaper of London, 20th August 1915. It states there were some fifty Muslim soldiers present here.



Eid-ul-Adha, 8th October 1916: Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din leading prayers in the grounds of the Woking Mosque.

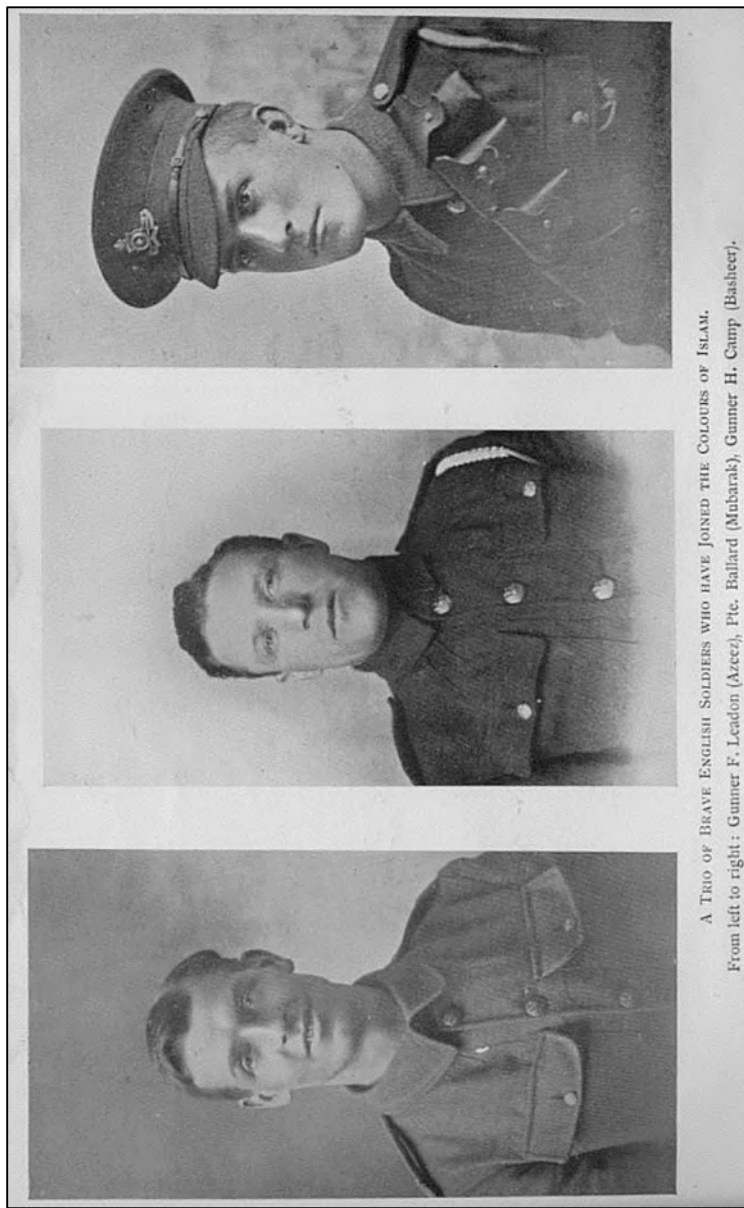


Eid-ul-Adha, 8th October 1916: Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din delivering sermon.



September 1916: *Three British soldiers of the First World War embrace Islam.*

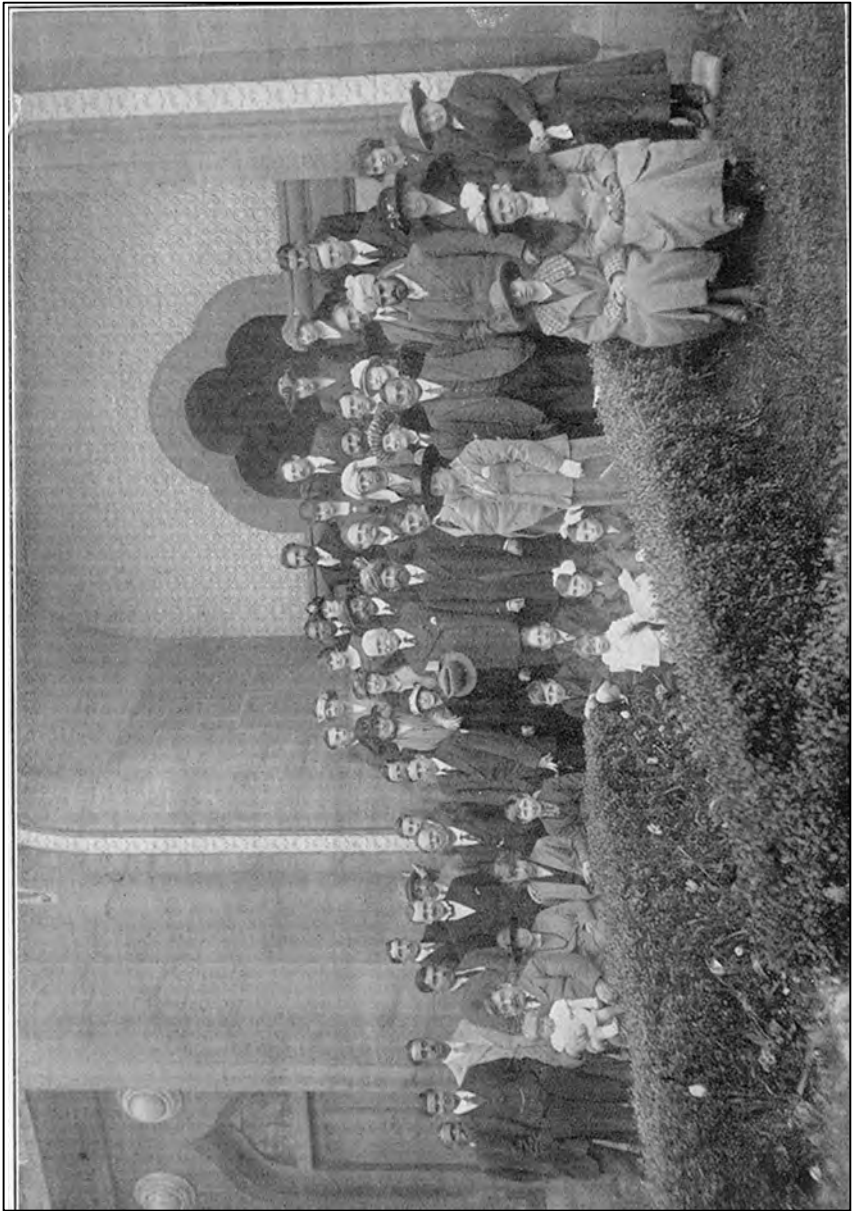
The *Islamic Review* (Urdu edition) writes: “Indian troops have shown their loyalty and bravery on the battle fields of France, and Muslims are among them. Muslims also have their English religious brethren in the war. We hope they will show the true qualities of a Muslim on the battle field: courage and bravery.”



Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din with a group of converts to Islam, in front of the Mission House of the Woking Mosque.



March 1920: *The outgoing Imam, Maulana Sadr-ud-Din, with Mission staff, helpers and converts, including Lord Headley, outside the Woking Mosque.*

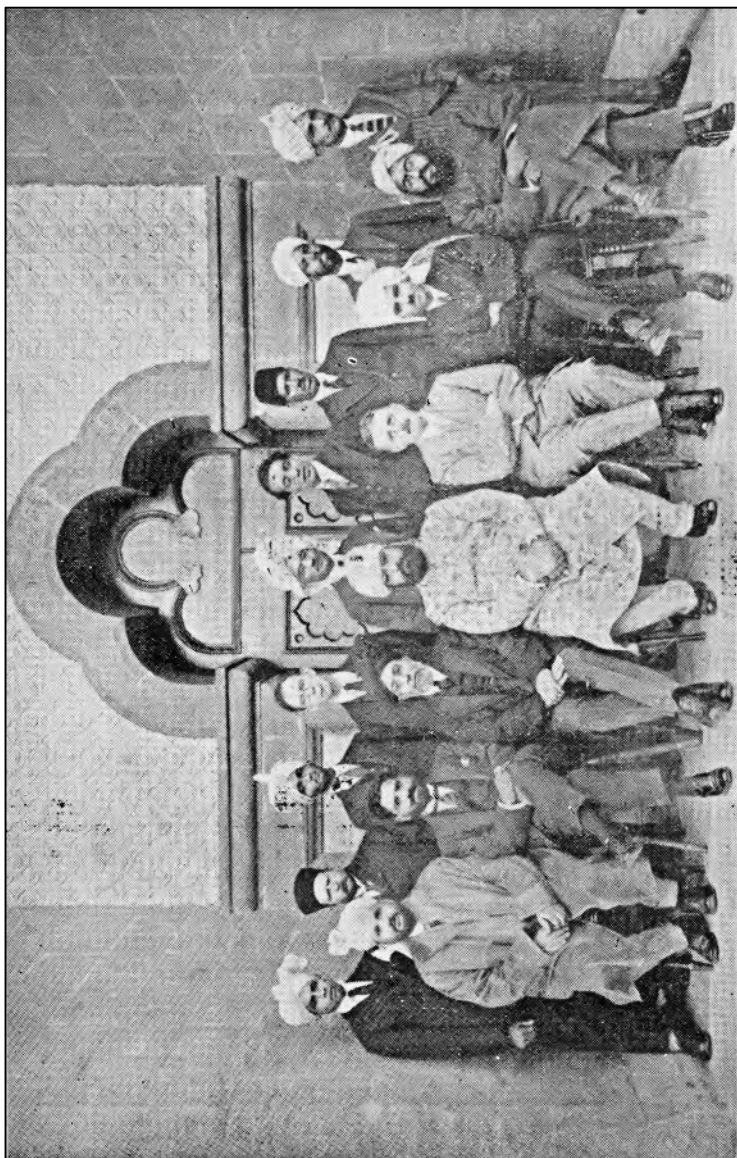


September 3rd 1921: Children of the London and South West Railway Servants' Orphanage entertained by Woking Mosque staff.



THE CHILDREN OF THE L. & S.W. RAILWAY ORPHANAGE (WOKING) ENTERTAINED BY MUSLIMS

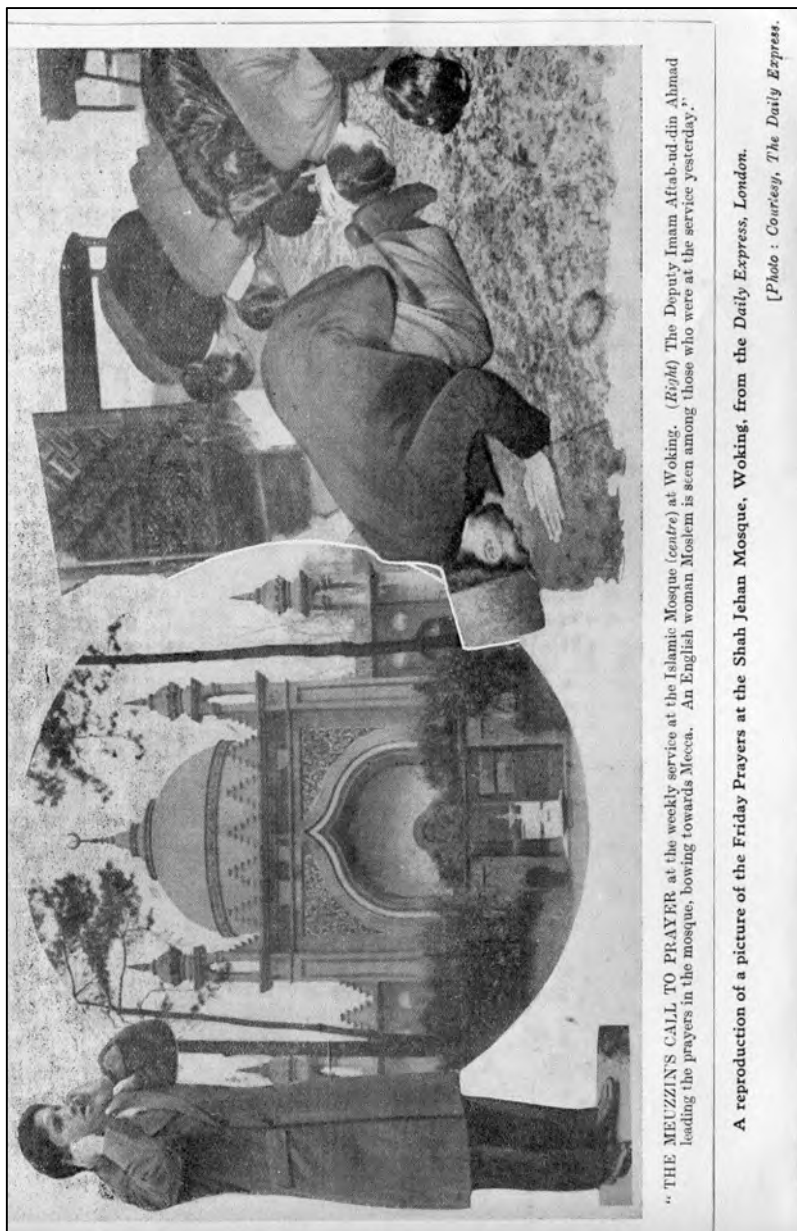
December 1922: Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din (seated, centre) with the staff and associates of the Woking Muslim Mission. Marmaduke Pickthall is seated third from right.



Eid-ul-Fitr, 2nd March 1930: Imam, Maulvi Abdul Majid, delivering the sermon. Some 400 Muslims attended these prayers.



The Daily Express reported on Friday prayers at the Woking Mosque held on 26 February 1932 in its issue of 27 February 1932, and published this photo.



2nd May 1939: Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad celebrated at Portman Rooms, Baker Street, London. Imam of the Woking Mosque, Maulana Aftab-ud-Din Ahmad, is on the stage, third from right.



10th May 1940: Muslim soldiers of the British Indian Army at the Woking Mosque. They were serving with the British Expeditionary Force which was sent to France and Belgium to repel the German invasion.



The first leave party from the Indian Contingent with the British Expeditionary Forces, at the Shah Jehan Mosque, Woking, to say their Jum'a prayers on Friday the 10th May, 1940.

Congress of Muslims in Great Britain, 25–26th June 1952, at the Woking Mosque, the first assembly of its kind. In the front row are: the Imam Dr S.M. Abdullah, 7th from right (wearing turban), Major Farmer is 4th from right.



*Scene from a typical Eid gathering of the 1950s at the Woking Mosque.
Flags of various Muslim countries can be seen flying.*



Eid-ul-Adha, 30th July 1955: Pakistan High Commissioner Mr M. Ikramullah with his family and friends on steps of the Woking Mosque. About 1300 people attended the prayers.



Eid-ul-Fitr, 19th March 1961: Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman (wearing glasses), with Imam Maulana S. M. Tufail (right, wearing light-coloured cap). About 4000 worshippers attended. The event was reported in the national and local newspapers.

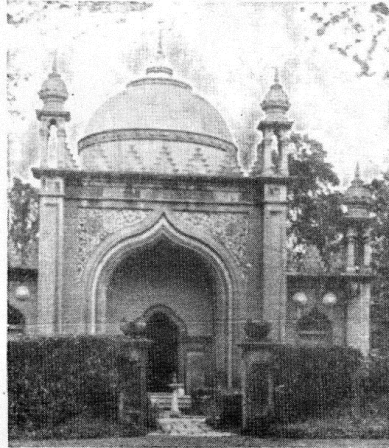


THERE ARE NO SECTS IN ISLAM

The Festival of Adha **(SACRIFICES)**

'Id al-Adha (1384 A.H.) in commemoration of the Great Sacrifice of Ishmael by the Great Patriarch Abraham, will be celebrated at

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PRAYERS 11.30 a.m.

LUNCHEON 1 to 3 p.m.

DIRECTIONS FOR TRAVEL TO WOKING

MORNING TRAINS: LONDON (Waterloo) to WOKING

Dept. Wat.	8.27	8.50	8.57	9.27	9.50	9.54	9.57	10.27	10.50	10.54
Arr. Wok.	9.08	9.18	9.38	10.08	10.17	10.25	10.38	11.08	11.17	11.25

Day return 2nd class by train: 10s. 6d.

From Woking Station the Mosque is a quick 12 minutes walk. Exit on platform No. 5. If you have somehow missed the last train as shown above, take the next. You may still be in time to join a part of the ceremony. Volunteers are requested to take the three early trains.

Those travelling by car from London, please take A3 as far as Cobham (about 20 miles from London) then A245 as far as West Byfleet (4 miles from Cobham) and then to Woking (3 miles from West Byfleet). (Vide The Automobile Association Member's Handbook, 1964 Map No. 10). Allow approximately an hour and a half to reach Woking from London by car.

THERE ARE NO SECTS IN ISLAM

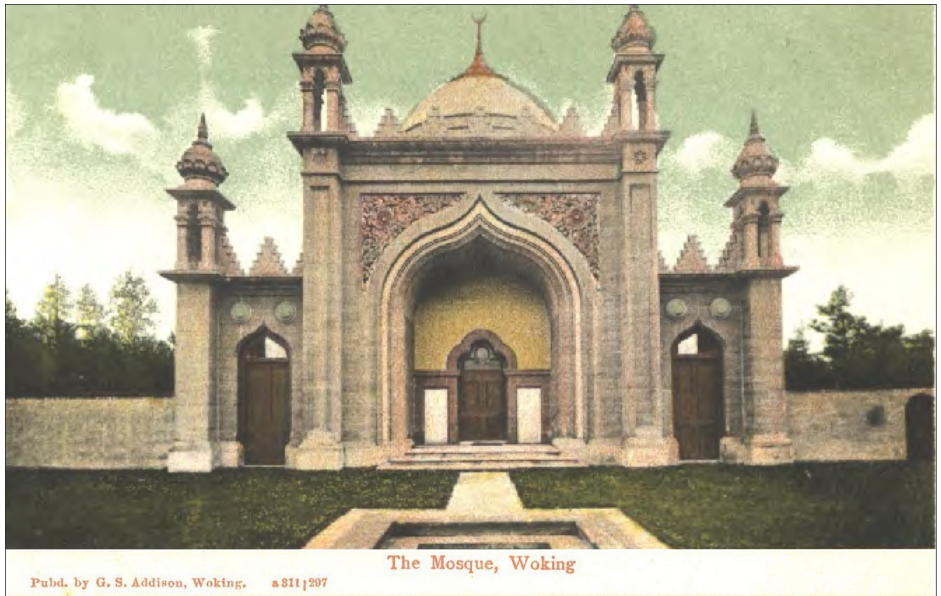
The Imam, The Shah Jehan Mosque, Woking.

Our new Telephone No. is Woking 60679

April 1965: Open invitation for Eid-ul-Adha at the Woking Mosque



Two colour picture postcards from 1905 with photo of the Woking Mosque



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