

# A MECCA IN WOKING FOR 1,000 MUSLIMS

## Ex-Colonel leads the prayers

BY A STAFF REPORTER

About 1,000 Muslims made the pilgrimage to Woking, Surrey, yesterday for the festival of 'Id al-Adha, for which millions of other members of the faith travel to Mecca.

They came to Woking's mosque, the oldest in Britain, mostly from the home counties, though their roots were in countries as widely dispersed as Pakistan, Indonesia, and Libya.

And to drive home further the international quality of Islam, they were led in prayer by a British Muslim, Colonel Abdullah (Bryan) Baines-Hewitt, aged 63, president of the Muslim Society of Great Britain.

The mosque at Woking, built in 1889, is not big enough for festivals of the importance of 'Id al-Adha, which ranks with Ramadan in the Islamic calendar, so a marquee was used for prayers.

### Spirit of sacrifice

'Id al-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifices, celebrates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son at God's command. Though Abraham was subsequently commanded to sacrifice a lamb instead of his son, 'Id al-Adha still celebrates the "spirit of sacrifice".

Elsewhere in the world, Muslims were yesterday slaughtering sheep to celebrate the day. In Britain Muslims were asked to send the price of a sheep, about £8, to the mosque for charitable work.

Al-Hafiz B. A. Misri, Imam of the Woking Mosque, explained: "In the United Kingdom adequate facilities are lacking for the slaughter of animals by individuals." The Muslims regard the grounds of the Woking Mosque as a sort of little Mecca—as much a social meeting place as a religious one.

Colonel Baines-Hewitt, retired from the Royal Engineers since 1957, became a full-time practising Muslim in 1930 while a captain in the Army in Iraq.