

Muslims in the UK

The presence of Muslims in Britain has been one that dates back many years. The trade and commerce routes of the nineteenth century increased the contact between Britain and Muslim countries particularly when British merchant ships began to recruit foreign seamen to work on them. By 1842, some 3,000 Muslim seamen - know as 'lascars' - were visiting Britain every year, some of whom married and settled here, in cities such as Cardiff, Liverpool, Glasgow and London. One of the oldest communities is the Yemeni community of Cardiff, where municipal records show that a mosque was in operation there in 1860. The first purpose built mosque was in Woking in 1889.

Despite this process continuing, with Arab seamen arriving in Britain in the 1920's, the largest migration of Muslim communities began in the 1950's. Coming mainly from rural areas of South Asia, in particular the Indian subcontinent, Muslim migrants arrived in the UK primarily to aid the shortfall in labour following the Second World War and settled mainly in the inner-city areas of London, the industrial towns of the Midlands, and the textile towns of Lancashire, Yorkshire and Strathclyde. Despite the initial intention to return to their countries of birth, once some of the migrants had become reunited with their wives and begun families here, Muslim communities flourished in Britain.

These were again bolstered in the 1980's by South Asian Muslims entering Britain as refugees following expulsion from Kenya and Uganda, and again in the 1990's with refugees coming from Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo, this time fleeing war and famine.

At present, there are an estimated 2 million Muslims in the UK, with over 55% being British born. However, as with the global community, the British Muslim community is constituted from a vast range of different national and cultural origins. Not only this, but there are also a significant number of convert Muslims of British or European origin. Muslim communities are present throughout the entirety of the UK, although the greatest concentrations are located in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Bradford.

Muslims can also be found participating in all walks of British life. From corner shops to tandoori restaurants; from law and accountancy to IT; from the NHS and education to transport and public services; from politics and media to the arts, fashion and sports, the Muslim presence is strong - and promising. Today, in Britain, there are two elected Muslim Members of Parliament, one elected Member of European Parliament and four Muslim members of the House of Lords. In contemporary British society, Muslims are an integral part of the fibre of its multi-cultural life.

Further Resources

FAIR

<http://www.fairuk.org>

BBC Islam site

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/islam>

MUSLIM BRITAIN - a Guardian special report

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/religion/muslim/0,12135,739179,00.html>