



Golden Tours Foundation

Remembering Indian Soldiers in WW1
19th November 2016
Event Report



25 November 2016



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Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
1 Executive summary	2
2 Government representation	4
2.1 Lord Dolar Popat – Conservative Party Whip	4
2.2 Gareth Thomas – Labour MP, Harrow West	5
2.3 Rekha Shah – Mayoress of Harrow	5
2.4 Anil Sabharwal – Air Attaché for the Indian High Commission	6
2.5 Bob Blackman – Conservative MP, Harrow East	6
2.6 Navin Shah – Assembly Member, GLA Brent and Harrow	7
3 Special presenters	8
3.1 Malcolm M Deboo – President, ZTFE	8
3.2 Behram R Kapadia – Vice President, ZTFE	8
3.3 Nitin Palan – Chair, Golden Tours Foundation	9
4 Cultural programs	10
4.1 First World War in Focus: Empire and Commonwealth on the Western Front [video]	11
4.2 Sai School Children	12
4.3 First World War in Focus: Empire and Commonwealth in East Africa [video] ..	13
4.4 Andrew Kerr – The Kashmir Rifles, a remarkable tale of endurance in the Tropical East African Campaign.....	14
4.5 Selena Carty – Black Poppy Rose Project	14
4.6 Minou Cortazzi – How Indian Cavalryman rescued the Baha'i spiritual leader Abdu'l Baha during WW1	15
4.7 Dr Shuja Shafi – Remembering the contribution of the Nizam of Hyderabad in WW1.....	15
4.8 Jack Lynes – Indian Jewry and the First World War.....	16
4.9 First World War in Focus: Empire and Commonwealth in Palestine [video] ...	17
4.10 First World War in Focus: Empire and Commonwealth in Gallipoli [video]	18
5 Closing	19

1 Executive summary

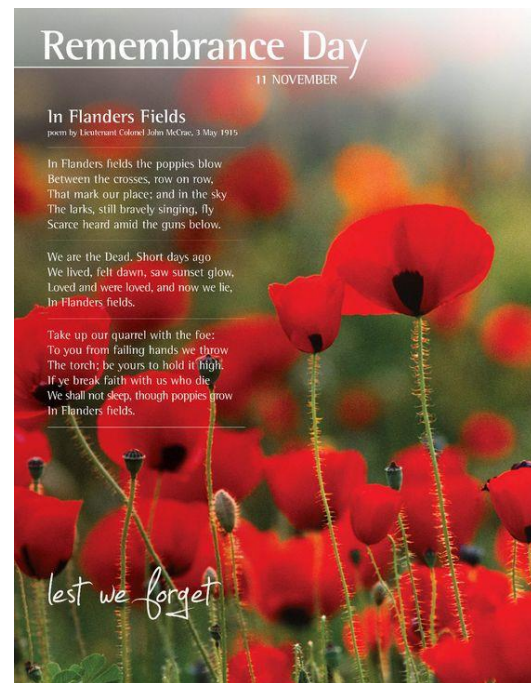
A packed Zoroastrian Centre in Rayners Lane was host to the Interfaith Week and centenary commemoration of the contribution of all Indian soldiers during the First World War on Saturday, 19th November 2016. The programme was organised jointly by Golden Tours Foundation (GTF) and the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe with sponsorship from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and was the first such attempt to bring together all faiths and communities in this remembrance.

Government support

The event was attended by dignitaries including Conservative Peer Lord Popat of Harrow, Air Attaché of the High Commission of India Air Commander Anil Sabharwal, Mayoress of Harrow Councillor Rekha Shah and local Members of Parliament Bob Blackman (Harrow East) and Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) all of who lent their support to this great initiative.

Special presenters

President of Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe and the local host, Malcolm Deboo while welcoming guests spoke about the importance of Inter Faith week, "Now in its eighth year the Inter Faith Week reflects the diversity of our country and the great importance of understanding each other and living well together." He added, "The First World War started on 28th July 1914, while Great Britain joined on 4th August 1914, and ended on 11th November 1914. The First World War was for the first time in history considered a total war, because all of the population of the main nations involved were called into service in one way or another. Multitude of communities from the Empire and Commonwealth volunteered to serve the King Emperor and Great Britain. Many who served were from the Black, Asian, Minority and Ethnic Communities and their contribution to Great Britain was immense however, sadly much of their contribution has been ignored and forgotten."



The Vice President of the ZTFE, Behram R Kapadia read out a message from Lord Karan Bilimoria, patron of the Zoroastrian community. Bob Blackman, MP of Harrow East reminded the audience of Harrow's own local hero, "The noted war hero Lieutenant William Leefe Robinson VC, who was born in South Coorg, in Karnataka South India, on 14th July 1895 died in Harrow on New Year's Eve 31st December 1918."

Nitin Palan, Chairman of Golden Tours Foundation speaking to the audience said, "the contribution of soldiers from ethnic communities especially Indian soldiers during WW1 was considerable, but much of the story is missing from the public domain. As we journey together and put these facts in front of the Community, Schools, Museums and the Army I feel confident that they will want to share the history in its entirety." This event was part of GTF's project "Remembering Indian Soldiers in WW1" to broaden the engagement and understanding of WW1 sharing the heritage with the Hindu and communities such as the Zoroastrians, Jains and Buddhists. This shared history is relevant as in today's multi-faith Britain with more than a million people from these faiths have made the UK their home. The project's emphasis is engaging with the younger generation by providing a 'relevancy' framework of how their ancestor's contribution on the world stage impacted the future paths of the two nations in terms of independence, migration and national identity.

Cultural presenters

Among the guest speakers and experts were renowned names such as;

- the author of "I Can Never Say Enough About the Men – A History of Jammu and Kashmir Throughout their World War One East India Campaign" Prof Andrew Kerr,
- Genealogist, Historian and Founder of the BlackPoppyRose Selena Carty,

- Immediate Past Secretary General of Muslim Council of Britain Dr Shuja Shafi, Chairman of Harrow Interfaith
- Jack Lynes who shared the paper by Author of Honours and Rewards in the British Empire Anthony N Pamm on Indian Jewry.
- The students from the Sai School in Harrow dressed in soldiers' uniforms from the World War period marched their way into event and each child read out their thoughts and poems honouring the fallen.

Several presentations, videos and personal stories were shared on the Zoroastrian/Parsi contribution, stories from the Trenches from Nepalese, Maratha communities, story of a cavalry man who rescued the Baha'i spiritual leader in the Great War and an account of the contribution of the Nizam of Hyderabad during the War were all shared.

The event was supported by the National Army Museum and Armed Forces and highlighted the immense contribution and sacrifice made by countless South Asian, Black, Minority and Ethnic volunteers from the British Empire and the Commonwealth countries who fought shoulder to shoulder.

2 Government representation

2.1 Lord Dolar Popat – Conservative Party Whip

Lord Popat opened by paying tribute to all those that gave their lives for freedom in the First World War. He recollected this was referred to as the 'great war' and the 'war that would end all wars' and lamented this has not been the case.

He noted the broad global involvement of the Indian effort, across Africa and Europe and what would become the Middle East. Twelve Indian soldiers were awarded the Victoria Cross. And at this point when we are celebrating the centenary of this event, we need to remember that India answered the call for the side of right. History teaches us that there cannot be peace without war. Great Britain itself has long stood as a source of life and hope and a million Indians joined others to fight side-by-side, defending a great country and its values.

He closed with a quote from John McCrae's poem, '*In Flanders' Field*'.

'Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw,
The torch; be yours to hold it high.



Lord Dolar Popat

2.2 Gareth Thomas – Labour MP, Harrow West

Gareth recognised the National Army Museum and the Golden Tours Foundation for putting this together. Note, it was important to him to acknowledge this effort so due to personal commitments he brought his young daughter with him.

He recognised how often we talk of the efforts of Britain's during the first world war, particularly during these centenary years. However, we frequently forget the efforts of people from other shores that supported Britain in these struggles. He hopes these efforts won't be a single effort but become a regular annual part of our remembrance ceremonies, particularly in Harrow where the Indian population is so numerous.



*Gareth Thomas
Labour MP, Harrow West*

2.3 Rekha Shah – Mayoress of Harrow

Mayoress Shah expressed her thanks to the Zoroastrian Centre for organising this event, particularly as part inter-faith week. It is important that we remember while we must be proud of our heritage, we should celebrate being British, be proud of our community cohesion as well the diversity that is part of our modern culture.

She hopes that the model set by soldiers a century ago that stood together, fought together and when necessary died together is continued in our communities as part of our respect for their effort.



*Rekha Shah
Mayoress of Harrow*

2.4 **Anil Sabharwal – Air Attaché for the Indian High Commission**

The Air Commander spoke extempore on his observations of the Indian efforts in the first World War. He thanked each of the distinguished representatives and presenters for their efforts in creating this event.

The contribution of India to the war effort [1.1mn men] is almost equal to the Indian Army today [1.3mn men] which is the third largest standing army in the world. This effort was made before mechanisation, before air travel and in a time when disease or insects were as strong a threat as enemy fire. He acknowledged the Indian Royal Flying Corps, which was formed in 1918 and has evolved from this effort to become today's modern Indian Air Force. He was proud to say this allegiance formed by need has endured and today Britain and India continue to conduct joint military exercises and are prepared to stand together in the future, just as they did in the past.



*Anil Sabharwal
Air Attaché for the Indian High
Commission with his wife*

2.5 **Bob Blackman – Conservative MP, Harrow East**

Mr Blackman suggested in our remembrance that while our images are of the Western Front, this was a truly global war. We must take the message to schools, communities, places of worship that this was not a war of British while men. This was a collection of people from across the Empire moved great distances to fight in places that were not familiar environments. They suffered deprivation, exposure, disease and illness. Influenza killed more people after the war than died during the fighting.

We need to remember all these people and their sacrifice across the globe for this great war. We have to maintain these relationships so we can be stronger together to face the risks of the future.



*Bob Blackman
Conservative MP, Harrow East*

2.6 Navin Shah – Assembly Member, GLA Brent and Harrow

Mr Shah emphasized the core of the Zoroastrian beliefs [Good Words, Good Thoughts, Good Deeds] and their importance in creating a multi-faith society now and in the future. Despite so horrific a war, we went on to have more atrocities; the holocaust, the second war and ongoing struggles in the Middle East. We must carry the torch that men in the First Great War taught us regarding multi-cultural tolerance and unity.



*Navin Shah – Assembly member,
Brent and Harrow*

3 Special presenters

3.1 **Malcolm M Deboo – President, ZTFE**

Mr. Deboo, President of the ZTFE introduced the event as the launch of interfaith week. He brought messages of the importance of interfaith week and quoted Theresa May who referred to it as ‘an excellent opportunity to celebrate the incredible diversity and richness of Faith Communities in Britain.’

He went on to outline the impact that WW1 had on bringing faiths closer together by necessity to defend what was the Commonwealth of Britain. It was a total war that enrolled all the people of many countries into service in one fashion or another and through the emerging air forces and use of zeppelins, moved the war from the battle field to the home front. In this total war, the many minorities and commonwealth countries rushed to enrol and take support for the UK. We need to assure we always remember these efforts.



*Malcolm M Deboo
President, ZTFE*

3.2 **Behram R Kapadia – Vice President, ZTFE**

Mr. Kapadia, the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe Vice-President delivered a message from ZTFE Patron Lord Karan Billimoria - CBE, DL. The message titled ‘The Role of Indian Soldiers in WW1’ summarised the contribution [+1.1mn soldiers] and sacrifice [+74,000 fatalities] of India for the war effort. To put this in perspective, the enrolment of India and what is now Pakistan is roughly equivalent to the entire current Indian population of the UK today.

India Gate, a tribute to India’s fallen soldiers is one of Dehli’s biggest attractions and India remains committed to the creation of a national war memorial near this landmark. The centenary of this war is an excellent time to recognise this effort and the continuing distinguished service of the Indian Army around the globe.



*Behram Kapadia
Vice President, ZTFE*

3.3 Nitin Palan – Chair, Golden Tours Foundation

Mr. Palan introduced the Golden Tours Foundation and their Heritage Lottery funded project 'Remembering Indian Soldiers in WW1'. He reminded us that remembrance is essential to relevance. Things we don't remember, soon won't matter. The objective of the project was to assure that the efforts of the Indian soldiers remain relevant to our children.

While this is an effort today to remember Indian soldiers, the future direction is to remember not just Nepalese, Indian, Sikh, West Indian soldiers, but to just remember that soldiers fought together. We should become an inclusive community just as they built a collective war effort. He closed by mentioning his hopes that in the future, India will begin proper Remembrance Day celebrations to recognise their efforts.



*Nitin Palan
Chair of the Golden Tours Foundation*

4 Cultural programs

'When Britain went to war in 1914 its professional army of three quarters of a million men was small by European standards and suffered huge casualties in the early battles of the war. Over the next four years, 8 million men were conscripted or recruited into the British armed forces; almost half came from outside the UK. Without their service and sacrifice, Britain would have lost the war.

They came from across the Empire, from the plains and the mountains, from tiny islands and vast continents, serving on every front from the Equator to the Arctic Circle. Wherever they came from, they served the same cause half a world away from home. And one in ten of them never made it back.'

[National Army Museum Video Series – First World War in Focus]



*Subadar Khudadad Khan VC
10th Baluch Regiment, c1935
[National Army Museum Archive]*

4.1 First World War in Focus: Empire and Commonwealth on the Western Front [video]

By the end of 1914 the Western Front had frozen into trench warfare from the Swiss border to the channel. The new British commander, Douglas Haig planned to break the stalemate by attacking across the River Somme.

On 1 July 120,000 British, French, Bermudan, Rhodesian and Newfoundland troops attacked on a front of 20,000 yards. The aim was to seize a six-mile-deep chunk of German-held territory. The first day of the Somme resulted in the worst casualties ever suffered by the British Army.

<http://www.nam.ac.uk/microsites/ww1/videos/empire-commonwealth-western-front/#.WDgM6md76H8>



*Members of an Indian Labour Battalion reading papers during a work break, c1917
[National Army Museum Archive]*

4.2 Sai School Children

The Sai School of Harrow was launched in 1995 as a multi-faith and human rights program. The Sai citizens program was started in 2004 to match each children's group to a local charity and the British Legion in South Harrow was one of the first projects; children took on the sale of poppies.



The Sai School children youth's group for India 1914

The children youth's project gave a display of precision marching and with a back-ground slide of photos of Indian military regiments in the war, they read poetry or letters they had chosen or composed on the war.

The Sai School will take a further part in the Remembering Indian Soldiers in WW1 project in early 2017 when members of the project team will visit and work with a group of students.

4.3 First World War in Focus: Empire and Commonwealth in East Africa [video]

The Allied strategy of blockade – cutting Germany off from food and ammunition – meant that Germany's African colonies were a prime target. Togoland [now Togo], Kamerun [now Cameroon] and German South West Africa [now Namibia] were all captured within 18 months, but German East Africa's [now Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi] resistance to the vastly superior forces thrown against it was one of the most extraordinary stories of the war.

Fought across an area greater than the size of Britain, France and Germany combined, it was a war of mobility and guerrilla tactics, fought in tropical jungles and vast swamps. Lions, crocodiles, snakes and parasites were an even deadlier threat than the enemy. Disease killed thirty times as many men as combat.

<http://www.nam.ac.uk/microsites/ww1/videos/empire-commonwealth-east-africa/#.WDgRbWd76H8>



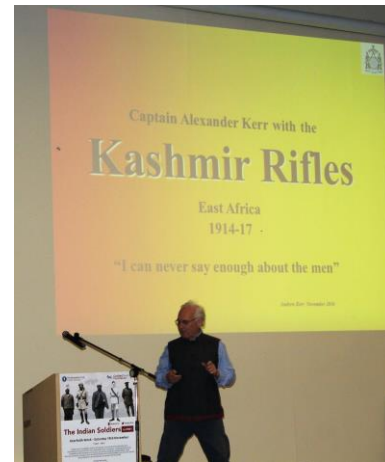
*Askaris moving a field gun into position
[National Army Museum Archive]*

4.4 Andrew Kerr – The Kashmir Rifles, a remarkable tale of endurance in the Tropical East African Campaign

Mr. Kerr gave a presentation from a personal prospective. The experience of his grandfather in WW1 and the Kashmir Rifles.

One challenge for serving in the armed services of Britain was that the Navy in 1914 drew roughly 70% of the defence budget. In 1914, the British army could only deliver 100,000 soldiers to the fields in France so the need to recruit from other areas was clear.

The Kashmir Rifles existed since the mid-1820s and was a professional unit that had been involved in previous military actions. The Jammu, as they were properly called in India were recruited from the Dobra people so were a split of Sikh, Muslim and roughly a third were Gurkhas. His presentation was rich in photos frequently taken by or presented to his grandfather and from his private collection.



Andrew Kerr

4.5 Selena Carty – Black Poppy Rose Project

Selena Carty is an Afrocentric genealogist who helps people find their cultural heritage from the African continent. She created the Black Poppy Rose to make people aware of the contributions of African black people to the war efforts. She mentioned more than just the soldiers; there are the women who supported their husbands and raised their children, the communities that were displaced by the battles.

Her presentation was rich in facts regarding the African continent and its history. She went on to highlight some of the many famous contributors to the war effort from African countries.



Selena Carty

4.6 *Minou Cortazzi – How Indian Cavalryman rescued the Baha'i spiritual leader Abdu'l Baha during WW1*

Ms Cortazzi is the community leader of the Baha'i faith and she briefly explained the strong common history of the Baha'i and the Zoroastrians with Iranian or historically Persian Farcié. One of these roots is in the Baha'i spiritual leader who is revered as the manifestation of God. So closely tied are these faiths, the Baha'i recognise Zorostra as a prophet of God.



Minou Cortazzi

She shared the historically detailed story of one contribution of Indian Cavalryman to the first war and specifically to the Baha'i people. Abdu'l Baha, their leader in the late 19th Century who was under threat from the Ottoman leader during the battles between Turkey and Britain. He was intended by the local authorities for Crucifixion both as a means of execution and to destroy the Baha'j Shrine, located in Haifa. This is the most revered place in the Baha religion, the direction their people point in daily prayer.

British Forces under General Allenby were tasked with defeating the Turkish forces at Jerusalem. In 1918 in a change of plan supported by Allenby who was sensitive to the Baha'i plight, the Jarpool Lancers were sent to set a point of security for the shrine. In September, troops of the Jarpool took Turkish forces by surprise and despite the loss of their leader, captured two machine gun posts and 1350 prisoners. They won the security of Haifa and the freedom of the Baha'i leader, Abdu'l Baha.

4.7 *Dr Shuja Shafi – Remembering the contribution of the Nizam of Hyderabad in WW1*

Dr. Shuja Shafi pointed out that wars are a part of our history. We need to study the past wars to understand what factors will



Dr. Shuja Shafi

create the future potentials. Within weeks of Britain's declaration of war on Germany, it was clear that the British effort was not going well and reinforcements beyond Britain were going to be needed if they were to avoid loss of the war. He reinforced the statistics of over 1mn soldiers from the Indian continent coming into the war effort on behalf of the Empire and almost 50,000 giving their lives for the effort.

4.8 Jack Lynes – Indian Jewry and the First World War

Mr. Lynes was kind to step in at the last moment and present this program, replacing Anthony Pamm.

Mr. Pamm's work was a historical and statistical study of Judaism in India at the time of the first World War and it's part in the war effort. Including the four different classifications Mr. Pamm uses for Jews in India in the early 1900's, their total population probably only numbered about twenty thousand.

While other groups were noted for their non-military contributions, the Bene Israel Community, one of the older groupings settled in Bombay were most noted for their efforts in battle. The Bene Israel community had already established a distinguished record in the Bombay Presidency Army since the mid-eighteenth century.

Mr. Pamm's report made an interesting side note that the Indian Army actually only numbered 150 thousand at the outbreak of the war. Therefore, the more than one million men that took part in the war effort had to be grown internally first, before it could be exported. This reflects a ten-fold increase in standing military effort, a strain on their national resources. Among this Army, the Indian Jewish content numbered around 178, one of whom was awarded the Victoria Cross. There were seven other noteworthy awards of distinction.



Jack Lynes

4.9 First World War in Focus: Empire and Commonwealth in Palestine [video]

The disaster of Gallipoli in 1915 ended British hopes of a swift knock-out blow against the Ottoman Empire. And a long slog through Sinai and Palestine ensued.

But in April 1917 the British General Edmund Allenby took over. As a believer in mobile warfare, he decided to encircle Gaza rather than risk another failed assault. Mounted British Indian and Anzac troops and the Arab Egyptian Labour Corps that supported them, would be vital to Allenby's plans. He ordered his troops to drive deep into the desert and take Beersheba.

<http://www.nam.ac.uk/microsites/ww1/videos/empire-commonwealth-palestine/#.WDqTgGd76H8>



*General Sir Edmund Allenby in Jerusalem, 1917
[National Army Museum Archive]*

4.10 First World War in Focus: Empire and Commonwealth in Gallipoli [video]

By the end of 1914 the Western Front was locked into trench warfare. And, for the Allies, attacking the Ottoman Empire, knocking it out of the war and opening an ice-free supply route to Russia seemed to offer a way to end the stalemate. The crumbling Ottoman Empire had allied itself with the Central Powers but its attacks on British-ruled Egypt failed and the Allies turned their attention to the Straits of the Dardanelles.

The naval bombardment, in March 1915, nearly succeeded but disaster struck: three Allied battleships hit mines and sank. The attack was abandoned and a land invasion of the Gallipoli Peninsula was attempted.

<http://www.nam.ac.uk/microsites/ww1/videos/empire-commonwealth-gallipoli/#.WDgTNmd76H8>



*Troops of the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade in the trenches of Gallipoli, 1915
[National Army Museum Archive]*

5 Closing

Nitin Palan thanked all the contributors for a spectacular, multi-participant programme put together to coincide with the opening of Inter-Faith week.

He closed with a prayer that in the future, we will come together to remember all sacrifices to the war without focus on faith or origin.

The India1914 website [www.india1914.com] will post:

- links to the videos presented today from the Army War Museum
- photos from today's event
- low resolution videos of the presentations where available



'Cadbury girls' build care packages for troops
[National Army Museum Archive]