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‘Heave Half a Brick at Him’: Hate Crimes and Discrimination against Muslim Converts in Late Victorian Liverpool

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Abstract

Throughout the existence of the Liverpool Moslem Institute, 1887-1908, there were many incidents of discrimination, intimidation, violence and other acts of hate directed toward the British converts to Islam. This was particularly evident during the first decade after the group’s founding. The band of Muslims, led by Sheik Abdullah William Henry Quilliam, faced continued opposition, be it disruptions of events and religious services, or violent street fighting. This article explores the incidents of hate and discrimination, the milieu in which they occurred, and the reaction of the Muslim community. A brief comparison to the experience of the contemporaneous American Muslim converts also is presented.

Introduction

A history of violence against England’s religious minorities spans at least ten centuries. One of the earliest recorded events occurred in 1190 AD when as many as 150 Jews were killed in a wave of violence that spread across the country. Anti-Semitic violence dotted English history up through the twentieth century. As well, beginning in the sixteenth century, state sponsored anti-Catholicism turned increasingly violent and became murderous by the eighteenth century during wars with France and Spain, leading to brutality against Catholics of all nationalities residing in Britain. More than 200 people died during this period of strife.¹ Again in the nineteenth century, episodes of anti-Irish, anti-Catholic bloodshed erupted. Despite the British Empire’s vast worldwide holdings, large segments of the populace living at its heart feared and loathed immigrants and unfamiliar ideas. Panikos Panayi notes, “No newcomers who have entered Britain in the last two centuries have escaped hostility on a significant scale.”² With a bit of gallows humor, a cartoon in *Punch* from the 1870s satirized the English street’s inclination towards violence when confronted with the unknown. In it, one man asks, “Who is that?” and another replies, “Why he’s a stranger,” to which the first retorts, “Heave half a brick at him.”

Liverpool experienced outbreaks of sectarian violence in the 1830s and 1840s, and by the mid-1880s emerged as the center of anti-Irish, antagonism.³ Ron Geaves comments on the city’s sectarianism, “Children in Liverpool were brought up from an early age to be aware of the symbols of their own religious denomination, and to regard adherents of even rival Christian

denominations in terms of a series of hostile stereotypes.”⁴ Thus, it was not astonishing that Liverpool’s bigots were primed for a reaction to Muslim converts in the late 1880s.

In May 1887, William Henry Quilliam, solicitor and temperance advocate, delivered a lecture on “Fanatics and Fanaticism” to the Liverpool Temperance League. Otherwise unremarkable, the speech caused a stir when Quilliam introduced Islam and extolled its prohibition against intoxicants. He delivered the same lecture a month later to the Birkenhead Workingmen’s Temperance Association at Queen’s Hall. There, he went a step further, declaring his conversion to Islam. The Christian members of the Liverpool Temperance League were alarmed at his conversion and reports of attendees’ interest in Islam. The League published the entire lecture in pamphlet form, but soon replaced it with a copy excluding the sections on Islam. Incensed, Quilliam threatened legal action if the unredacted version was not published. In response, the League withdrew all copies and refused to publish the tract altogether. Quilliam was stricken from the lecture roster of both the League and the Young Men’s Temperance Society. Another temperance organization, the Independent Order of Good Templars, for which Quilliam was an officer, banned his membership.⁵ These were the first of many acts of discrimination against Muslim converts in Liverpool over the succeeding two decades.

This essay presents a chronological exploration of the discrimination and hate crimes directed toward the Liverpool Muslim converts and the environment in which these events occurred. For the purposes of this study, hate crimes and discrimination are defined as: physical and attempted physical violence on people or property; threats and intimidation; insulting behavior; interruption of religious services, lectures, and celebrations; or vandalism, theft, and loss of employment and other opportunities based upon conversion to Islam.

Background and Early Years

The Crusades left a wake of distrust and enmity between the West and the Islamic World. Over centuries, the English developed preconceived notions of Muslims that were well-entrenched by the Victorian era. These ideas were an underlying force behind the bigotry the Liverpool Muslims faced, but they do not fully explain the level of vitriol displayed. According to Gilham and his reading of convert Djaffar Mortimore’s take on the issue, even the Muslim converts were hesitant to join Islam due to a general “antipathy to other faiths, naturally imbued from the cradle of western teaching.”⁶ On the other hand, Geaves attributes the hate directed towards the fledgling Liverpool Muslim community as a reaction to political events in the Empire, specifically, “They would intensify during periods when Muslims were involved in rebellions against or in opposition to British colonial expansion.”⁷ Ansari suggests that the fanatical attacks were caused by local newspapers stirring up bigotry with ceaseless articles imbued with the old stereotypes and prejudices about Islam’s supposed intolerance, backwardness, and unbridled support of polygamy.⁸ Lastly, Beckerlegge argues that the British Muslims’ defense of the Ottomans and support of the caliphate, a perceived “dual allegiance,” caused the strife. Beckerlegge’s argument, put in simpler terms, was that Muslim converts were considered traitors—native Britons turning away from societal norms and embracing the “enemy.” The latter theory appears to get at the mindset of the street toughs conducting most of the persecution, but it was likely some combination of all of the theories that played a role in building a hostile environment around the diminutive group.

As Brits, the Liverpool Muslims were regarded as having betrayed their upbringing, Christianity, and the Empire which was predicated on the superiority of British culture. They openly embraced eastern ideas and practices and were not satisfied with simply practicing their religion behind closed doors. One commenter, defending acts of violence against the converts wrote, "It is not the private and inoffensive worship of Mohammed that is objectionable, but the public advertisement of him."⁹ The Liverpool Muslims publicly performed the call to prayer, and wore fezzes, turbans, and robes on occasion. Lastly, they not only converted to Islam, but actively sought new converts, thus compounding the other issues. Up to this point, most immigrant Muslims did not proselytize and were more likely to face hostility for their race or nationality than for their religion.

On rare occasions, local newspapers described hate crimes and discrimination against the Liverpool Muslims, but most accounts come exclusively from articles in *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World*, weekly and monthly news periodicals of the Liverpool Moslem Institute (LMI) from 1893-1908. Details of non-violent episodes were initially common, but decreased in favor of reporting violent behavior such as assaults, vandalism, street fighting, and stone throwing. Information on non-violent and less-violent encounters only trickled out in annual reports of the LMI, reminiscences and histories of the group, and buried within news reports on events where the hate crime was mentioned as an afterthought. An example of reticence concerning commonplace violent acts comes from an 1891 account by Fatima E. Cates, the second convert and first woman of the group. She notes, "Now we have a nice little mosque, fairly comfortably furnished, but the mob still annoy us by throwing mud and stones; however, we persevere, and are still making fresh converts."¹⁰ Persecution had become a facet of being Muslim in their mindset and experience. The incidence of violence was spread across the history of the LMI; however, some periods saw more aggression than others. The first decade (1887-1897) saw the worst of it, with violent crimes tapering off dramatically in number and seriousness after the turn of the twentieth century.

Quilliam's first converts came as a result of his temperance lectures at Vernon and Queen's Halls. J. Djem Ali Hamilton was the first to join Quilliam. Before converting, Hamilton was asked, "Have you carefully considered what you are going to do? You will have to face ridicule, and perhaps persecution." He confirmed he was ready and repeated the *kalima* (declaration of faith) and became a Muslim. Soon after, Quilliam launched a Sunday lecture series on Islam. He often spoke in front of mobs intent on silencing him through a cacophony of shouts, animal noises, horns, banging, and foot stomping as well as regular salvos of projectiles aimed at him and attendees. Quilliam would stand at the podium for as long as it took for the crowd to tire and let him speak.¹¹

The persecution faced by the Liverpool Muslims during the early years was captured in a 1900 obituary for Fatima E. Cates. The obituary notes,

It is impossible to describe the manner in which these Islamic converts were derided, the insults and indignities to which they were subjected, and the personal violence that was oftentimes used against them. The windows of the little hall in which they held their meetings were repeatedly broken with stones, and roughs and Christian bigots frequently entered the room and made disturbances therein, while, in the street, the Muslims were stoned and pelted with decayed vegetable matter and rotten eggs, and followed by a crowd shouting after them. On several

occasions ruffians, unworthy of the name of men, lifted up horse manure from the road and rubbed it over our late sister's [Cates] face.¹²

The LMI's newspapers were not published until 1893, leaving reminiscences such as this the only record of the incidents prosecuted against the nascent Muslim community.

Cates not only faced an unreceptive public, but also immediate hostility from her mother who tried to burn a Qur'an that Quilliam had lent her when she showed interest in the religion. Cates would lock herself in her room to escape her mother and she was threatened whenever the Qur'an was seen. She began carrying the book with her for fear it would be destroyed if put down or left at home. Her mother watched her movements, confiscated incoming and outgoing letters, and locked Cates in the house to prevent meetings with Quilliam and Hamilton. Threats and ridicule continued for years after her conversion with Cates' fiancé in cahoots with her mother. Ironically, the fiancé later became a member of the Liverpool Muslim community.¹³

The first significant incident of mob violence against the Liverpool Moslem Society, as the group was initially known, occurred in the spring of 1889. A party of Christians armed with "bludgeons" and "brickbats" stormed a Muslim meeting threatening Quilliam with "such a thrashing as would teach him not to preach the doctrines of Islam in England anymore." Jemal-ud-deen Bokhari Jeffery, not a Muslim at the time, prevented a brick from being thrown at Quilliam. Jeffery was then set upon by three instigators, but he was able to throw each of them down a flight of stairs. The remaining troublemakers were corralled and forced into the street. The Muslims had stood their ground and proved they would not stand for their personal safety being compromised. The scuffle left J. Ali Hamilton roughed up and another Muslim with a stab wound. Jeffery, incensed by the acts of the so-called Christians, converted to Islam that night and became a stalwart of the LMI until his death in 1903. Quilliam wrote of Jeffery and the early years, stating, "[He] might have remained a Christian but for the conduct of those enemies of the True Faith, who determined by a course of violence and persecution to strangle it at its birth... For a considerable period, the Muslim meetings were continually interrupted and disturbed by the interruptions made by an organized band of fanatical Christian rowdies and swashbucklers."¹⁴

A few months later, the Liverpool Muslims were forced out of Vernon Hall. The landlord exclaiming that they "would not have it occupied by any person who did not believe in Christ crucified as the Redeemer of the World!"¹⁵ In the end, this act helped the Liverpool Muslims. Although left adrift for several months, by December 1889 they moved to 8 Brougham Terrace and established a permanent location for a mosque, library, offices, and other spaces to conduct their business. The site became the Liverpool Moslem Institute.

Permanent Home—Liverpool Moslem Institute

In the fall of 1891, John J. Pool, a Christian writer on Islam, visited the Institute and attended their services. Upon exiting the mosque, Pool witnessed homeless youth he ironically referred to as "street-arabs" and other "roughs" throwing stones at the building and parishioners. He wrote, "The little band of the Faithful did not, however, seem to mind the persecution and disturbance much. I felt, however, that it was a disgrace that such things could be done in an English city with impunity. Where were the guardians of the public peace? Conspicuous by their absence!"¹⁶ These small scale attacks were commonplace at the Brougham headquarters and foreshadowed

larger, organized attacks. On November 16, 1891, a horde attacked the mosque. The muezzin was stoned and fireworks, rocks, bricks, and mud were thrown into the building. Many Muslims were beaten and injured by projectiles.¹⁷

The local press' response to the incident was mixed. The *Daily Post* abhorred the incident, while the *Liverpool Review* charged the Muslims with instigating the melee by performing the call to prayer. Regarding the muezzin, the *Review* stated that he, "Was doubtless the red rag that aroused the mob's active antagonism, for such a glaring advertisement in England...cannot escape ridicule, and naturally tempts thoughtless and excitable opponents to resort to practical joking and violence." The article continued, "Here it is most incongruous, unusual, silly and unwelcome, and the man who stands howling on the first floor of a balcony in such a fashion is certain to collect a ribald crowd, anxious to offer him a copper to go into the next street, or even ready to respond to his invitation with something more forcible than jeers." Further defending the violence the paper put forth the notion, "If prevailing customs are not sensibly respected, hard knocks are the inevitable consequence, and should arouse little sympathy...Lawlessness and disorder, as a rule, are reprehensible, but are sometimes—like all extremes—necessary and defensible." The police eventually dispersed the crowd.¹⁸

Two weeks later, a Muslim funeral was disturbed. On this solemn occasion, Christians gathered to watch the proceedings and were enraged at the Muslim rituals and prayers performed over the deceased. It was reported that the interlopers made an attempt to throw Muslim parishioners into the grave with the body. A year later, another Muslim funeral progressed without acts of violence; however, Muslim mourners were warned that they faced prosecution unless they ceased reciting Muslim prayers in a Christian churchyard.¹⁹

In March 1893, neighborhood youth that Quilliam described as "whose whiskers and sense are alike among things unseen," broke a mosque window with stones. Later in the day, presumably the same perpetrators tossed tiny shards of glass across the prayer area. At the time, *The Crescent* downplayed the incidents, labeling them pranks and not "persecution." However, the Muslims' tone changed when a newspaper editor accused the Muslims of exaggerating acts against them.²⁰ In response, *The Crescent* noted, "We can assure him that it has been purposely under rather than overstated, and we are prepared to give day and date for every matter mentioned in our article."²¹ The Muslims downplayed the incidents, as they had so many others, but were indignant about charges of exaggeration, having faced years of continuous bigotry.

Quilliam summed up the hostile events from this period, stating, "Our place in Brougham Terrace has been attacked more than once; we have had to make our way out from service through a howling mob, we have had nearly every window in the front of the house smashed to atoms, and on one occasion one of our members was badly stabbed in the face." He continued, "The force of public opinion, as represented by mud and stone throwing, has been directed against most religious innovators, and Mohammedans in Liverpool were not likely to come off scot-free. We might have fared worse than we did...It is true that we are still under police protection, but things are, on the whole, very quiet in Brougham Terrace now."²² As Quilliam commented, the police and city officials were squarely on the side of law and order and helped the Muslims as much as possible. They often provided protection through extra patrols or stationing an officer near the mosque.

On November 5, 1893, a large crowd gathered in the lecture hall of the LMI to hear Quilliam's address on "The Prophecies of Muhammad." Early in the lecture, four boys, two women, and two men entered the hall and created a commotion as they took their seats. Near the

end of the lecture, one of these men shouted, “Ye are men who walk in the shadow of darkness.” Quilliam objected to the outburst, but remained civil and asked the man to leave. The boys then stomped their feet, kicked furniture, and produced as much noise as possible to keep Quilliam sidelined. The leader of the gang yelled, “I have a commission from the Lord Almighty to come here tonight to bear witness in this heathen temple that the blood of Jesus Christ, his only son and our Saviour, can only save you from eternal fire.” One of the women shouted, “This is a den of devils, this is the gateway of hell, and all those present are devils and the sons of devils and are going to hell!” The interlopers were escorted toward the exit. In a final parting shot, one of the women pointed at Quilliam stating, “This man is sent by the devil to deceive you and lead you into eternal fire,” then she pointed at the fezzes worn by men in the audience and said, “and these are the devil’s regimentals worn by his soldiers!” Once outside, the scene continued, one of the men haranguing the Muslims as a crowd gathered. His rant continued as he moved up and down West Derby road, before the police removed him.²³ Prior to this incident, there had not been a major disturbance at the mosque for months, which Quilliam credited to Captain Nott-Bower of the police (who had intervened after the June 17, 1892 attack), providing increased protection.²⁴

In July 1894, the Liverpool Muslims gathered at the docks to bid Quilliam farewell on a journey to West Africa to attend the festivities surrounding the consecration of the Shitta Bey Mosque in Lagos. Dozens of Muslims shouted “Allahu Akbar!” as onlookers stopped to watch. The Muslims were elated that no disturbance or ill word was directed towards them.²⁵ The Muslims allowed the respite in violence to develop a false sense of security and acceptance after months of peace. The following year would see a series of violent acts as well as threats of violence.

On the night of January 6, 1895, A. Hassan Radford stepped out onto the balcony of the mosque and began performing the *adhan* (call to prayer). A mob formed across the way and pelted him with snowballs filled with stones, mud, and ice. Several struck him and he suffered a deep wound to his hand. The police arrested one perpetrator, George Jones, an apprentice baker and Sunday school teacher. During court proceedings, the man was reprimanded and told to “leave these people alone, and let them worship God in their own way.” His response, “They are heathens, and don’t worship God.” The Judge, after claiming that the man “deserves severe punishment” gave Jones only a warning after the man promised to stay away from the Muslims.²⁶

Five months later, on the night of May 20, 1895, Quilliam and several Muslims attended a meeting at Brunswick Wesleyan Chapel, Moss Street, Liverpool, concerning reports of atrocities against Armenians by the Turkish army. The meeting was held to put forth a petition to parliament condemning acts against the Armenians. The Muslims countered with a motion for the public to wait until the British Commission of Inquiry had completed its investigation and presented its findings. When Quilliam seconded the motion he was mercilessly jeered and shouted down. As he continued, noting that he personally knew the Turkish officers accused of giving orders to persecute the Armenians and that they could not have given such orders, pandemonium broke out. Shouts of, “You ought to be burned alive,” “Burn him,” “Strangle him,” reverberated through the church. Quilliam responded, “I dare say you would dearly like to burn me. If you had the power I am sure you would do it, just as your fellow Christians burnt the Muslims in Spain centuries ago... You are nice people to demand toleration for the Christians in Armenia.”²⁷

A month later, two windows were broken at the mosque on the occasion of an Englishwoman marrying an Indian man.²⁸ That same year in October, another attempt was made to injure members of the LMI. A strong length of wire was tied to the iron railings just above the top step of the staircase outside the mosque. By its placement atop the steep staircase, the wire might have seriously injured or killed any victims who tripped and fell headfirst down the stone steps. The plan was foiled when Quilliam, running late for prayers, bounded up the stairs and plucked the wire with his walking stick. No perpetrators were found.²⁹

In August 1897, the Liverpool Muslims celebrated the anniversary of Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II's accession. After speeches and festivities a fireworks display began, which drew a large crowd of non-Muslim Liverpoolians to the street outside the LMI. Most were simply enjoying the show, but several crowd members yelled, "Down with the Turks," "To hell with the Mohammedans," "Remember Armenia," and other declarations. Unfulfilled by harsh words, a group of ruffians stormed the mosque, reaching the lobby before being rebuffed by the Muslims. In what was described as "hand-to-hand fighting," the mob pushed forward again, but the Muslim phalanx drove them back into the streets. Unable to gain entry, the toughs threw stones hitting three Muslims. With a cry of "Allahu Akbar!" the Muslims charged the stone-throwers as the police arrived and the street fight ended. Still, random stone throwing occurred as the Muslims walked home.³⁰

In late September 1897, the Institute's Literary and Debating Society held a discussion on "Is swine's flesh suitable for human food?" Many opinions were expressed on both sides of the issue, much of which was humorous on the part of the defenders of porcine foodstuffs. One such defender generated quite a round of laughter when he referred to Quilliam stating, "I admire your chairman. He is a decent sort of chap, but see how thin he is... I think it is from not eating pork chops." Near the end of the proceedings, Abdul Kadir Khan was making his summation when a man from the visitor's gallery shouted "I love pig, I love pork," and began throwing black-pudding (sausage generally made from pig's blood mixed with pork lard and oats) at the audience. Several of the projectiles hit Ghazi Essad Poulmear in the face and the back of the head as he stood to reply to Khan's words. The man escaped, despite the efforts of some Muslim attendees to catch him. The crowd was riled, but Quilliam was able to calm emotions by using humor.³¹

A week later, the opponents of the Liverpool Muslims tried a different tack—this time they filed false reports concerning possible child abuse at the LMI's orphanage, the Medina House for Children. A distraught woman entered The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and gave notice that children were screaming in agony at the Medina House. The police were called and they broke into the orphanage to find a startled house matron, but all of the children asleep, unharmed. The police promptly explained the situation and apologized; however, the commotion had caused a large agitated crowd to gather outside. The police assured the crowd that the situation was normal, but they lingered not believing the officers.³² A similar accusation was leveled against the home a little while later, but again was found to be false.³³ After these incidents, Quilliam placed the English enemies of Islam in three unflattering categories, "Some of these narrow-minded bigots content themselves with assuming an air of smug self-righteousness combined with a sweet superciliousness which would be laughable were it not contemptible, others exhibit their Christian charity by throwing stones or hurling vituperation against the Muslims, a third class have not even the moral courage to adopt the 'eave 'arf a brick at 'is 'ead' argument, but exhibit their vindictiveness by concocting and

covertly spreading idle, false and malicious slanders and silly stories about Islam, its followers, and the place in which the services are held.”³⁴

A Brief Review of Contemporary Problems in the United States

In the United States, negative reaction to the American Muslim converts contemporary to the LMI was relatively civil in comparison to the reports from England. Many of the reported incidents concerned Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, the former U.S. Consul to the Philippines and newspaperman, whose Indian-backed mission to bring Islam to the United States was inspired by Quilliam. Instead of hostility, Webb’s efforts were often met with bemusement or indifference. However, several instances proved to the contrary. In particular, when Webb proposed to create colonies of Indian Muslims in the southern United States, much of the reaction was negative, including headlines in local papers near where the colonies were to be located that included, “No Heathen Need Apply,” “Invasion,” and “Pensacola Threatened with Mohammedanism.” As well, an editorial from Detroit stated that immigrants, “who will not amalgamate with our nation, who will always remain alien in race and religion, had better stay away from our shores.”³⁵ It must be noted that there were many editorials supporting the colonies that might have brought economic revival to impoverished areas and an opportunity to convert the Muslims to Christianity.

Another incident of incivility occurred when Webb attended the Parliament of Religions held in conjunction with the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893. Despite a multitude of conflicting religious beliefs and practices presented at the meeting, one of Webb’s lectures was the only to be interrupted by members of the audience. They hissed and shouted “no!” during his mild defense of polygamy when he stated, “There are conditions under which it is beneficial.” Later in the lecture, Webb was challenged by a Qur’an toting missionary reading passages from the holy book to counter Webb’s claims. All of which, was unprecedented at the interfaith gathering.³⁶ The *Chicago Tribune* noted, “It was the first time since the opening of the Parliament that any decided signs of disapproval have greeted a speaker. Confucian, Buddhist, Parsee, Jew, and Christian have preached their doctrines side by side on the platform without arousing anything but hearty applause”³⁷ A few days later, the *Tribune* also published a cartoon on the front page depicting Webb prone on the ground, turban lying beside him, and a woman beating him about the head with an umbrella. The caption, “Mohammed Webb’s defense of polygamy not well received at the Congress of Religions.”³⁸

Another example of troubles faced by American converts was The First Society for the Study of Islam, an offshoot of Webb’s movement, which was led by Emin L. Nabokoff and John A. Lant. The group became affiliated with the LMI at Quilliam’s request as Nabokoff was a former member of the Liverpool Muslims before moving to New York. In late 1893 and throughout 1894, the group had their meetings disturbed on many occasions by Christians opposed to Islam. In particular, a group of led by Armenian immigrant, Gamaliel K. Davidyan, and Paul Behman, a Persian convert to Christianity, dogged the group for many months. On December 18, 1893, at the group’s second meeting, Davidyan spoke out of turn making false claims about Muslim beliefs and challenging the Muslims to a debate in the middle of the proceedings and further calling them “bad people.”³⁹ Davidyan and his confederates would from

then on make their presence felt at all meetings of the Muslims. Several weeks later, Davidyan came reinforced by 10 other Armenians.⁴⁰ When he was unsuccessful in taking command of the proceedings on multiple occasions, Davidyan tried to rent the meeting space from under the Muslims; rebuffed by the landlord, he was allowed to rent the space immediately after the Muslims.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the First Society's meetings broke up in a raucous frenzy on several occasions with each group trying to gain control of the speaking platform.⁴² The constant disruptions were a major cause for the failure of the movement because it scared away new members and caused a temporary hiatus from meetings that soon became permanent.

Outside of the converts, there was also an egregious case of discrimination against a group of immigrant Muslims trying to enter the United States as noted in *The Crescent*. In November 1897, six Syrian Muslims onboard the steamer *California* were not allowed to enter the country through New York on the basis of the Immigration Act of March 3, 1891, which among several other classes of people, excluded polygamists from admission to the country. However, the immigration Board of Special Inquiry, grossly overstepped its authority in expanding the definition of polygamist to include not only those with multiple wives, but also Muslims who simply declared a belief in the Qur'an as divine revelation and its position on polygamy. The line of questioning was simple, "You believe in the Qur'an?" "The Qur'an teaches polygamy?" "Then you believe in polygamy?" When the answers were in the affirmative, the final judgment was rendered, "You won't do," and six unmarried Muslims were summarily deported as polygamists.⁴³

Without the colonial considerations of the British Empire, and the real threat of war spreading in Southern Europe or in colonies with significant Muslim populations, the American government and populace at large reacted to the American converts very differently than their British counterparts. As well, the American religious scene of the late nineteenth century was very much an open marketplace where non-traditional faiths and beliefs were being explored. Gilham notes, "While Webb encountered some hostility back home, Americans did not tend to find his faith or his mission inherently discordant with American culture, or an intolerable addition to its pluralistic landscape."⁴⁴ Oddly, the British converts, facing threats to their lives and livelihood persisted for more than a decade longer than the Americans, who faced no real threats or actual violence.

Waning Incidents in Liverpool

After the first decade, the incidence of violence and discrimination dropped dramatically with only occasional outbreaks and no sustained campaigns of mob activity from 1898-1908. By 1898, the violence had ebbed, but discrimination and intimidation still lingered. That year's minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Institute noted that A. Hassan Radford and Ibrahim Suleiman were discharged from their employment for attending the mosque and being a "Turk" respectively.⁴⁵ Also, Quilliam, no stranger to hate mail, published one of the letters so that the wider world could experience a typical bigot's views in his own words. James Blacker wrote, "I will keep an eye on your doings and I will oppose you on all occasions when opportunity offers, for your rascally Mahomedan views and pestilent Islamic professions, and I will cause the name of Mahomedanism to stink in the nostrils of all honest men. My own opinion is that you are a Jew in disguise, and one of those who killed Christ, the living God...I shall see you burning

in hell.”⁴⁶ Blacker was able to cast a wide net in his diatribe, offending Jews and Muslims alike. Nevertheless, Gilham notes that by May 1900 members believed that progress toward tolerance of the Muslims could be measured by the fact that only two windows had been broken during the previous month.⁴⁷ Earlier that year a drunken woman interrupted prayers, cursing the parishioners before stumbling away.⁴⁸

In March 1902, the Liverpool Muslims were celebrating Eid-al-Adha (Celebration of Sacrifice) at the mosque. At one point, “Christian ruffians” made an attempt to force entry to the mosque, but they were prevented by the young men in attendance. The hooligans retreated and pelted the mosque with stones and mud, striking four female attendees, one requiring medical care for a wounded wrist. As well, they broke several windows, the fanlight over the door and fouled the facade of the building with mud. A non-Muslim reporter covering the event became an unwitting part of the news when he was assaulted with mud while leaving the mosque.⁴⁹ This was one of the last mob incidents reported at the mosque and there had not been many in the preceding few years.

In 1904-05, very few incidents of intolerance towards the Muslims were reported, and were not much of a concern to the LMI, as evidenced by the short blurbs in *The Crescent*. There was a report of a break in at the mosque and theft of a donation box, the second occurrence in as many months.⁵⁰ On the last night of 1904, the mosque’s muezzin, Mahomed Abdul-Latif, was attacked by drunkards on his way to the Institute. They first ripped off his fez, knocked him down, and kicked him until he passed out. He was eventually able to make his way to the mosque and received medical attention, but was left in considerable pain.⁵¹ The report of this act in *The Crescent* was non-sensationalistic and was blamed more on street criminals engaged in their handiwork, rather than religious persecution as the earlier events had been described. It appears that the relative dearth of violence against the Muslim in the preceding years changed their view of the community around them. Also, Mahomed Abdul-Latif was not a Brit and his treatment, although still a hate crime was more likely due to his ethnicity than his religion. During this period there were often violent acts against immigrants of all kinds, including those who were Muslims.

In September 1905, an American Christian clergyman from St. Louis was granted access to the mosque for a tour. In the middle of the visit the American became indignant, demanding that the Muslims show him the icon of Muhammad to which they “bow down.” The Muslim guide informed the visitor that no such practice occurs in Islam and when the man continued his harangue, he was asked to leave the premises. His terse response being, “I am going to witness for Christ in the temple of his crucifiers.” To which the Muslim guide responded by physically throwing the man out of the building. In the street the clergyman caused a stir and a crowd gathered, but instead of the reaction that occurred many times in the early history of the Liverpool Muslim community, the man was taunted and accused of being drunk by the passersby. The police eventually restored order with the man threatening to bring charges against the Muslim guide who handled him indelicately, however, the man was never heard from again.⁵² This was the last notable incident at the LMI.

An explanation for the drop in hate crimes against the LMI and its members during the second decade of their operation appears to be due to a combination of factors, including their steadfastness in the face of intimidation; Quilliam’s general support from key members of the local establishment, including law enforcement; recognition of the LMI’s good works in the

community with charity, especially for orphans and the poor; and lastly, the Muslim's outward unwavering support for the British monarchy in particular during Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, which struck at charges of unpatriotic behavior. A little bit early, but nonetheless an apt description of the Muslim's change in fortunes came from the Sheffield *Sunday Telegraph* in 1899, the LMI was "now regarded with kindly tolerance, or perhaps one had better say indifference."⁵³ Ironically, this latter period of "tolerance" coincided with increased hostilities between Britain and Turkey, the Sultan in particular. This is in direct contradiction of Geaves theory of a correlation between violence against the Liverpool Muslims and the level of agitation between Muslims and the British Empire, although his theory holds true prior to this period of the LMI. However, Quilliam was adept at balancing unflinching support for both the monarchy and Turkish Sultan. His calling into question aspects of the British colonial administration and "fanatical" Muslims left authorities and critics flat footed in response to his evenhandedness.

Conclusion

The Muslim converts of Liverpool sustained their presence in the city despite more than a decade of persecution from members of the surrounding community. The persecution began at the group's inception and was so commonplace the early members could hardly separate being under siege from other aspects of their faith. There are many theories regarding the vitriol directed toward the group, but the starkest conclusion revolves around the converts' perceived renouncement of Britishness and their unapologetic outward declaration of the Islamic faith coupled with active proselytization. The group's second decade saw many fewer acts of hate, but still an occasional outburst occurred well after the turn of the century. Despite this, the Muslims gained some measure of acceptance before other forces outside of the focus of this study tore the group apart. Due to historical, political, and cultural differences, contemporary American converts to Islam fared much better than their British brethren. A further study of opposition to or acceptance of converts in other British cities during this period and later would be an interesting complement to this study.

NOTES

¹ Panikos Panayi, "Anti-immigrant Violence in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain", in *Racial Violence in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, rev. ed, London: Leicester University Press, 1996, pp. 5-6.

² Ibid, p. 3.

³ For more information concerning anti-Irish violence in Liverpool see, Frank Neal, *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience, 189-1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988.

⁴ Ron Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain: The Life and Times of Abdullah Quilliam*, Markfield, Leicestershire: Kube Publishing, 2010, p. 65.

⁵ "'Fanatics and Fanaticism'", *Crescent*, September 8, 1898, pp. 138-139.

⁶ Jamie Gilham, *Loyal Enemies: British Converts to Islam, 1850-1950*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 107.

⁷ Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain*, op. cit., p. 66.

⁸ Humayun Ansari, "*The Infidel Within*": *Muslims in Britain since 1800*, London: Hurst & Co., pp. 82-83.

⁹ John Wolffe, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain, Vol. V, Culture and Empire*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997, p. 346. Reprinted from "Moslemism in Liverpool", *Liverpool Review*, November 28 1891, p. 14.

¹⁰ "How Our Late Sister Fatima E. Cates Became a Muslim", *Crescent*, November 21, 1900, p. 324.

- ¹¹ “Brother J. Ali Hamilton”, *Crescent*, December 20, 1899, pp. 388-389.
- ¹² “Death of Sister Fatima Elizabeth Cates”, *Crescent*, November 7, 1900, p. 298.
- ¹³ “Late Sister Fatima E. Cates”, op. cit., p. 323-324.
- ¹⁴ “Death of the Vice-President of the Liverpool Muslim Institute”, *Crescent*, September 2 1903, p. 156.
- ¹⁵ “A Short History of the Progress of Islam in England”, *Crescent*, January 19 1898, p. 35.
- ¹⁶ John J. Pool, *Studies in Mohammedanism, Historical and Doctrinal with a Chapter on Islam in England*, Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co., 1892, p. 400.
- ¹⁷ “Progress of Islam in England”, op. cit., p. 35.
- ¹⁸ Quoted in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, op. cit., p.347
- ¹⁹ “Progress of Islam in England”, op. cit., p. 35.
- ²⁰ “Our Editorial Notes”, *Crescent*, April 1, 1893, p. 84.
- ²¹ “Muhammadans in England”, *Crescent*, December 30, 1893, p. 397; “Editorial Notes”, *Crescent*, December 30 1893, p. 395.
- ²² “Islam in England”, *Islamic World*, April 1894, pp. 3-4.
- ²³ “Scandalous Outrage at the Mosque”, *Crescent*, November 11, 1893, pp. 340-343; “Religious Rowdyism”, *Islamic World*, November 1893, pp. 26-27.
- ²⁴ “Scandalous Outrage at the Mosque”, op. cit., p. 340.
- ²⁵ “Islam in Liverpool”, *Islamic World*, June 1894, pp. 40-41.
- ²⁶ “Snowballing the Muezzin,” *Crescent*, January 23, 1895, p. 27; “The Snowballing of the Muezzin”, *Crescent*, January 16 1895, p. 19; “Snowballing the Muezzin”, *Crescent*, January 30 1895, p. 34.
- ²⁷ “Astonishing the Armenian Agitators”, *Crescent*, May 29, 1895, pp. 172-175.
- ²⁸ Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain*, op. cit., p. 65.
- ²⁹ “Another Outrage at the Mosque”, *Crescent*, October 23, 1895, p. 267.
- ³⁰ “Anniversary of the Sultan’s Accession”, *Crescent*, September 8, 1897, pp. 563-567.
- ³¹ “Extraordinary Incident”, *Crescent*, September 29, 1897, p. 604; “The Extraordinary occurrence at the Debating Society”, *Crescent*, September 29, 1897, p. 620.
- ³² “The Latest Christian Trick”, *Crescent*, September 15, 1897, pp. 579-580.
- ³³ “Annual Meeting of the Liverpool Muslim Institute”, *Crescent*, June 29, 1898, p. 406.
- ³⁴ “Latest Christian Trick”, op. cit., pp. 579-580.
- ³⁵ Brent D. Singleton, “Minarets in Dixie: Proposals to Introduce Islam in the American South”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2006, pp. 440-443.
- ³⁶ Brent D. Singleton, ed., *Yankee Muslim: The Asian Travels of Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb*, Rockville, MD: Wildside Press, 2007, p. 38.
- ³⁷ “Islam is Preached”, *Chicago Tribune*, September 21, 1893, p. 9.
- ³⁸ “[Cartoons]”, *Chicago Tribune*, September 24, 1893, p. 1.
- ³⁹ “Mahometanism and Woman”, *New York Daily Tribune*, December 18, 1893, p. 5. For more information concerning the disturbances, see Brent D. Singleton, “Brothers at Odds: Rival Islamic Movements in Late Nineteenth Century New York,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2007, pp. 476-477.
- ⁴⁰ “Davidyan Against Nabakoff”, *Evening Sun*, January 1, 1894, p. 5.
- ⁴¹ “Conflict of Two Religious Sects”, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 8, 1894, p. 1.
- ⁴² “Mohammed a Bone of Contention”, *New York Times*, January 22, 1894, p. 5.
- ⁴³ “Six Polygamists Shut Out”, *New York Times*, November 18, 1897, p. 11; “Six Mohammedans Deported”, *Atlanta Constitution*, November 19, 1897, p. 1. The Syrians were: Ali Assail, Abdullah Mohamed, Ahmed Ali, Ali Mohamed, Abdullah Ahmed, Abdullah Hassan, and Ali Hassan. “[News Notes]”, *Crescent*, January 19 1898, p. 42.
- ⁴⁴ Gilham, *Loyal Enemies*, op. cit., p. 108. For a further examination of the marketplace for Islamic ideas in late nineteenth century America, see, Patrick D. Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 1: White American Muslims before 1975*, Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- ⁴⁵ “Annual Meeting of the Liverpool Muslim Institute”, op. cit., p. 406.
- ⁴⁶ “Christian Courtesies”, *Crescent*, November 16 1898, p. 299.
- ⁴⁷ Gilham, *Loyal Enemies*, op. cit., p. 111.
- ⁴⁸ “How a Christian Female Visited the Liverpool Mosque”, *Crescent*, February 28, 1900, p. 137. The account is related as a poem.

⁴⁹ “Celebrating the Courban Bairam at Liverpool”, *Crescent*, March 26, 1902, p. 195.

⁵⁰ “[News Notes]”, *Crescent*, May 31, 1905, p. 346.

⁵¹ “[News Notes]”, *Crescent*, January 4, 1905, p. 10.

⁵² “Editorial Notes”, *Crescent*, September 6, 1905, p. 153.

⁵³ Quoted from, Gilham, *Loyal Enemies*, op. cit., p. 111.