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Introduction

The history of Christmas charity in England dates to the medieval period, when manor lords held feasts for their peasantry. This practice waned dramatically by the Tudor period and all but disappeared in 1647, when Christmas festivities were outlawed by the Puritan controlled Parliament. Although the monarchy and Christmas were restored in 1660, charity during the season was diminished, a downward trend that continued into the eighteenth century as the tradition of opening aristocratic households to feed the poor was generally halted.[1] By the early nineteenth century, Christmas was neither widely celebrated nor popular. In nearly half of the years between 1790 and 1835, *The Times* did not mention Christmas.[2] Nonetheless, philanthropy during the season never fully ceased, although institutional charities and bequests had largely taken over from aristocratic households.[3]

Christmas charity made a dramatic comeback in the mid-1840s largely due to popular works of literature such as Charles Dickens's (1812–1870) novella *A Christmas Carol* (1843). Ebenezer Scrooge's 'social redemption' both encouraged and warned the middle and upper classes of their duty towards the less fortunate. As John Storey argues, 'If what was invented was commercial out of instinct, it was charitable out of a sense of fear and guilt.'[4] In the wake of Dickens's and others' intertwining Christmas, charitable giving and Englishness, a relentless onslaught of depictions of starvation in Christmas fiction arose, reinforcing this narrative.[5] Likewise, Dickens's tale brought forth a nostalgia for the imagined English Christmas traditions of

widespread charitable giving, the eating of certain foods and other customs that were never truly part of English culture, such as providing meals, sweets and presents to poor children.[6]

In Liverpool, at this same point in history, increasing poverty led to the city being referred to as 'the black spot on the Mersey' and later, 'squalid Liverpool'. In response to the social crisis among impoverished Irish immigrants, the Catholic Church in the city built up a parish-based social welfare system. Many Protestant denominations responded in kind but usually met with less success. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, a large proportion of charity in Liverpool was restricted to members of denominations.[7] As a result, John Belchem states, 'There were those who fell outside any safety net, victims of the uncoordinated expansion of social intervention in Victorian Liverpool.'[8] Adding fuel to the fire, between 1891 and 1911, the population of Liverpool increased by nearly 250,000 people, or by 45 per cent.[9] There are no clear statistics of poverty or unemployment rates during this period in Liverpool; however, Lucy Kilfoyle describes the city at this time as being in its 'richest-poorest heyday'.[10]

Coinciding with this era, a new type of Christmas charity emerged in England, one 'designed to provide a festive experience for the poor'.[11] In Liverpool, the major non-denominational Christmas charity organization was the Hot Pot Charity headed by the sitting Lord Mayor and prominent citizens of the city. Starting in about 1885, the charity annually provided up to 6,000 tins with precooked meat, potatoes, onions and seasonings, purportedly enough food for a family of ten. They also distributed thousands of pounds of bread, tea, jam and coal to other people in need.[12] Nonetheless, this was not enough to help all of the hungry in the city. It was in this milieu, in the late 1880s, that the precursor to the Liverpool Muslim Institute (LMI) formed when a group of Christians converted to Islam under the leadership of Abdullah Quilliam (1856–1932). Soon after, providing Christmas meals for the needy became a hallmark of the group, but one that has not previously been examined in any detail. Beginning in 1887 or 1888, and for the next two decades, the members of the LMI would feed thousands of hungry people from the local community on Christmas Day as well as on some Islamic holidays and other special occasions.[13]

In December 1889, the Liverpool Muslims moved to their permanent quarters in Brougham Terrace, having previously held meetings in Mount Vernon Street. Their first event at Brougham Terrace was the Christmas feedings. The *Liverpool Weekly Courier* reported the occasion and thus printed what was probably the earliest mention of the meals by the press:

> The new premises were inaugurated by a substantial breakfast given on Christmas morning in the future 'mosque' to 230 poor children of the neighbourhood, but chosen indiscriminately from the most destitute of that class. After the feast the youngsters were amused with songs, recitations and instrumental music and thoroughly enjoyed the treat, which is quite a departure in the history of the Moslems.[14]

Nearly a decade later, in 1898, the LMI had hit its stride in providing Christmas meals. That year, the institute's newspaper, *The Crescent* (edited by Quilliam), published unprecedented coverage detailing the events surrounding the feedings. Based on examination of descriptions from other years, albeit less detailed in each case, 1898 appears to be a typical account of Christmas Day at the LMI. Thus, the proceedings of 1898 are thoroughly examined in this chapter and supplemented with pertinent details from other years to fill in gaps. By doing so, an image emerges of what it might have been like to witness the events leading up to and on Christmas Day at the LMI in the mid-to-late 1890s.[15] This chapter also explores the LMI's motivations for the feedings, fundraising and preparations for the meals and Christmas celebrations, juxtaposed with major Islamic holidays, and analyses reaction to the feedings by other Muslims and the local press.

Motivations for the feedings

The motivations for the Christmas feedings most often expressed in *The Crescent* were helping the needy, as prescribed in Islam, and educating the public about Muslims' respect and reverence for Jesus as a non-divine prophet. These are nicely encapsulated in the opening paragraph of *The Crescent*'s coverage of Christmas Day 1899:

> Apart from the good work of assisting to feed the hungry and assist the poor and the needy, two essentially Muslim virtues, the custom is a happy one, as impressing upon the general body of the public the fact that Muslims have a sincere respect for the memory of Jesus in his true position as *Sidna-Issa* [our master Jesus], the prophet of Allah.[16]

This sort of preamble to the coverage of the feedings was typical across the years. The Christmas celebrations also attempted to allay Christian fears of Islam as foreign, and to start a conversation in the press about that faith more generally, as was related in *The Crescent* in 1898:

> For centuries Islam and its Prophet have been maligned and misrepresented, until the average English man or woman has come to regard the Turk as a bloodthirsty monster, steeped to his lips in human gore, and the Mussulman as a fierce fanatic, ever hungry for the blood of the Christian. The first step, therefore, required to be taken was to remove so far as possible these deep-rooted prejudices and erroneous ideas, and replace them with a truer conception of the noble and glorious teachings of Islam.[17]

However, these efforts may have been blunted by the converts' penchant for mercilessly mocking Christians. There are countless examples, including from 1895:

> The day on which Christians believe that the prophet *Isaa* [Jesus], whom they in their blind credulity worship as God incarnate in human flesh, was born, is always a day of activity among the English Muslims at Liverpool, as on that occasion they embrace the opportunity of exhibiting to the *Nasaranee* [Christians] that although they reject and condemn the false and blasphemous notions the latter hold as to the divinity of Jesus, yet that the True Believers honour and respect the memory of Christ the prophet and apostle of the One only true and undividable Deity, and further exemplify to the world, in a most practicable manner, that the religion of Islam inculcates almsgiving to the deserving poor and the needy as one of the pillars of faith.[18]

The British Muslims also used the feedings as an opportunity for *da'wah*, the propagation of Islam. Ali Köse bluntly states that 'Quilliam undertook social work in the interest of spreading Islam', including the Christmas feedings.[19] In 1896, at the culmination of Christmas Day activities, Quilliam was quoted as saying: 'Ten years ago, they called me a madman, five years ago they pelted me and my brother Muslims with mud and stones, tonight they cheer us. Perhaps in another ten years they will believe with us, *Inshallah* [God willing].'[20] Still, Quilliam was explicit about not proselytizing at the Christmas feedings, as he stated, 'Islam scorns to reach a man's heart by means of his belly!'[21] Therefore, at best, the Christmas feedings were a passive form of *da'wah*.

The British converts always straddled the culture of their birth and the culture of their adopted faith. Humayun Ansari argues that Islamicizing Christian practices was central to the converts' identity: 'By adopting rituals, such as the singing of suitable hymns at Sunday services in the mosque and celebrating Christmas as a way of conveying respect for Jesus as a prophet, we learn about how Quilliam sought to construct an indigenous British Islamic tradition, stripping it of its perception as an alien and unsuitable faith in the popular

imagination.'[22] Jamie Gilham furthers this point: 'All local Muslims were able to practice a syncretic form of the school of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence (the dominant creed in the Ottoman Empire) with familiar "Christian" elements and partake in its socio-religious activities. Indeed, Quilliam himself actively encouraged fellow Muslims to develop their faith through a combination of prayer, fasting and festivals.'[23] When Cairo-based Ottoman visitor Yusuf Samih Asmay (d.1942) asked Quilliam why they held the Christmas festivities, Quilliam reportedly said, 'We have to follow the national customs of the country.'[24]

As with the other syncretic practices of the British Muslim converts, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Christmas celebrations also served as a comfort to the former Christians during the season. Their families who had not converted to Islam would have celebrated Christmas as would many of their non-Muslim friends and associates. The descriptions of the events and general cheerfulness with which they were undertaken seem to dispel the notion of a cold calculus of putting on a good face to allay fears of Islam or convert more Christians. It can be argued that they were simply enjoying the season, fellowship and ultimately the English, or British, culture of their birth.

Fundraising and logistics

Over the years, the Liverpool Muslims developed several ways to fund and otherwise supply food, sundries and services for the Christmas meals. From at least 1896 to 1899, the first event held was a concert in support of what was dubbed variously the Christmas Free Breakfast Fund, Christmas Breakfast Fund, Christmas Free Meals Fund, Christmas *Zakat* (almsgiving) Fund, *Zakat* Fund for Free Meals to Poor People, *Zakat* Feast, *Zakat* Festival or Winter Feast. The concerts were held in late November or early December in the institute's large lecture hall and occurred in place of one of the weekly group meetings such as the Liverpool Muslim Literary and Debating Society. The well-attended concerts consisted of multiple entertainments by female and male LMI members and supporters. Examples of the entertainments were electricity demonstrations, magic shows, songs, various recitations and other amusements.[25] In 1898, the concert took in 11s. 1d. and the following year, 7s. 7d.[26] The funds required to stage a feeding were between £6 and £7 in addition to other food and material donations. Thus, the concerts were not a significant source of revenue for funding the Christmas meals, however, they were a means of deferring some

costs as well as providing an opportunity for light-hearted communing within the group before embarking on the Christmas preparations.

Staging an event such as the concert would have necessitated an ad hoc committee, which generally formed in one of the weekly gatherings held at the LMI. It is unclear if concert preparations were dealt with by the *Zakat* Fund Committee, which handled all aspects of *zakat* distribution, not just at Christmas, or if the concert necessitated a committee of its own. However, it appears that it was clearly differentiated from the Christmas Free Breakfast Committee, tasked with preparing for the actual meals. Although the latter committee's title varied year to year, it was often not formed until mid-December, too late to have arranged the concerts.

The committee for preparing the Christmas meals had several designations in *The Crescent* to describe its function, ranging from the Christmas Free Breakfast Committee or *Zakat* Committee to 'special' or 'executive' committees. Once again, they were formed at other group meetings. For instance, in 1895, at the LMI Amateur Dramatic Company meeting on 18 December, or in mid-December 1899 after a Sunday lecture by Quilliam.[27] The committee structure consisted of Quilliam as chairman with a secretary and treasurer, and a dozen or more other members filling out the main body. Membership of the secretary and treasurer roles changed virtually every year, and additional officers in some years included a vice-chairman and a secretary to the Ladies Committee. The officers were exclusively men except for the secretary to the Ladies Committee, despite women making up a large portion of the overall committee membership and volunteer force for the festivities.

The committee work consisted of meeting several times in the weeks leading up to Christmas to make sure that donations and preparations were on track. The week before Christmas was particularly busy for the committee in general and for individual members tasked with carrying out tasks to ensure the event's success. Issues that needed to be considered were ticket printing and distribution; adequate seating, tables, crockery and utensils; decorations; volunteer assignments for Christmas Eve preparations and both Christmas Day feedings; entertainment; food and drink purchases and delivery; and donation collection books and funds collection.

The Muslims donated to support the Christmas meals as part of their obligatory *zakat* contributions, which is set out in the Qur'an (76:8): 'And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan and the captive', but they also raised funds through other means. Some members were given collection books and tasked with obtaining subscriptions specifically for the Christmas

Zakat Fund. The number of credited cash supporters in any year was relatively small compared to the membership of the LMI, especially considering that many of the contributors were not even Muslim. For instance, twenty-three people were listed as either collectors and/or contributors in 1898, thirty-seven in 1899, twelve in 1900, forty-six in 1901, thirty-five in 1902 and fourteen in 1903.[28] However, these lists were not exhaustive, as not all contributors wanted to be named. Moreover, there was often a note stating that some subscription books were outstanding, and a few contributors would have given donations in smaller amounts in the collection box or by other means. In all years mentioned above, Quilliam donated exactly £1 1s. of his own money, an amount that seems to have become his customary donation. He was also one of the chief subscription collectors, taking in an additional £1 to £2 each year. Therefore, he was responsible for nearly a third to one-half of the requisite cash donations for the feedings annually, which was in line with his overall financial support of the LMI.

Other means of cash donations included: children of members and children of the Medina Home orphanage (explained below) collecting pennies, the LMI collection box and even members no longer living in England, such as L. Hanifa Jones donating 7s. while she was in America in 1898.[29] In three of the four years enumerated, 1899, 1900 and 1903, a balance due to the treasurer to pay for the Christmas feedings was still outstanding in January, by more than £2 and £3 in the latter years. Any shortfalls were likely paid out of the general *Zakat* Fund. From 1901 to 1903, when Ramadan (the Muslim month of fasting) fell in December, Muslims were inspired to give more, with £6 to £7 collected before Christmas in those years. An account from 1903 provides us with a sample of the types of purchases the funds might cover. More than a third of the funds paid for bread, bun loaf and seed loaf (Williams and Norrie – £2 12s. 6d.); nearly a third was spent on beef and other groceries (George Fletcher – £1 9s. 1d.), tea (Pegram's – 14s.), collection books, tickets and other printing (12s. 6d.); and the remainder was spent on extra mugs, jugs, a new bench, table covers, tacks, a tin opener, postage, coal and wood and extra cleaning.[30]

There were many non-cash donations of provisions as well as discounts offered at either wholesale or at cost prices. In 1898, the following was acquired at such discounts: meat, tea, coffee, sugar, butter and mustard from John Fletcher (wholesale); milk from Billal Ambrose (at cost); and crockery from Alderman Ephraim Walker (wholesale). Also that year, Mrs. Evans lent tablecloths for the occasion and Quilliam donated a dozen spoons, five-dozen tin plates and several small banners.[31] The previous year, Poole's Golden Bonus Tea Company donated

five pounds of tea.[32] In 1899, the following donations were made: Hutchinson's Karo Tea Company, ten pounds of tea; A. E. Toulzac, twenty-eight pounds of sultana cake; J. M. Hay, twenty-two pounds of sugar; and Ethel Mariam Quilliam, a length of muslin and time spent sewing tea bags from the cloth.[33]

After funding and provisions acquisition, attention was focused on the people to be fed. Although they never wanted to turn a hungry person away, to bring order to the feasts, the Muslims eventually implemented a ticket distribution system to limit the feedings to a manageable size. It is unclear when tickets were first used; however, in 1895 and 1896 respectively, a pre-set number of 500 and 600 people was mentioned prior to Christmas and at least indicates a move towards limiting the number of people to be served.[34] In 1897, it was mentioned in *The Crescent* that the LMI, 'every Christmas distributes tickets to hundreds of poor starving Christians'.[35] By then, tickets had been firmly established. Up to three weeks prior to Christmas, the poor would present themselves at the LMI or the Medina Home to apply for tickets. In 1898, there was an anecdote about Quilliam and Walid Feridoun Preston, LMI treasurer, being followed for a quarter mile by people begging for tickets, which they were apparently given.[36] In 1900, the tickets were distributed at the LMI on the evenings of 22, 23 and 24 December. There are some indications from that same year that the LMI used the demand for tickets to decide whether to have multiple sittings at each meal and thereby expand the total number of people to be fed.[37]

The final preparations for the meals began late on Christmas Eve, when two to three dozen Muslims assembled at the institute. The group mainly consisted of men, but also included women and youth from the Osmanli Regiment, a militaristic wing of the LMI's Liverpool Muslim College.[38] The disparity in gender is likely due to the nature of the manual labour required for the initial organization of the premises. The Muslims arranged tables and seating, decorated the hall with banners and other items, set up the food preparation area and arranged the fireplaces for the next day, breaking only for *salat al-'isa* (night prayer). This initial spurt of work usually lasted until nearly midnight. At around 6.00 am on Christmas Day, the next wave of work would commence, when one or two members would arrive to warm up the rooms by lighting the fires. A little while after, a handful of other helpers would arrive, including Quilliam and members of his family. By 7.00 am there would be a strong contingent of workers ready to get started with the tasks assigned to them. Duties ranged from staffing the cloakroom or the front door to prevent early arrivals from venturing into the hall, to preparing tea and coffee, setting tables, carrying trays of food and

jugs of drinks and slicing loaves of bread and meat. The early arrivals included more women than the previous evening's proceedings; the adult LMI members who volunteered on Christmas Day 1898 comprised twenty-five women and forty-four men, many participating in both morning and evening feedings.[39] At around 8.00 am, the Muslims broke for *salat al-fajr* (dawn prayer) led by Quilliam, by which time more than three dozen Muslims were assembled. The group then quickly ate breakfast before opening the doors to the large crowd waiting outside the institute.[40]

Christmas feedings

The crowd would have been gathering since at least eight o'clock on Christmas Day morning, likely pondering the unfamiliar gold star and crescent above the LMI entrance as well as the green Islamic standard fluttering in the cold morning air. The sharply dressed boys of the Osmanli Regiment, parading replete with red fezzes, would have presented another striking juxtaposition with the hoard of people described as follows:

> Ill-clad Christians … old and young, boys and girls, men and women, halt and lame; the old man tottering with the aid of a stick, and the young mother with her little infant at her breast; the stalwart man and the puny child – all poor, all wretched, all ill-clad, and most of them strangers to the use of soap and water and the advantages of personal cleanliness, but all Christians.[41]

Not all of the attendees were British or Christian; some were immigrant Jews from countries such as Russia and Poland. About thirty minutes before the doors opened, those with tickets were queued according to gender and age, forming lines of boys to the left, girls to the right and the elderly up front. Each line was overseen by an officer of the Osmanli Regiment, while other LMI members officiated as required.

At nine o'clock, the LMI doors were propped open, and the groups were led in, the older adults first, followed by the youngest children, then the girls, lastly the boys and young adults. Two members of the Osmanli Regiment collected tickets and led the guests into the lecture hall, where they were presented with a cavernous space refurbished and enlarged only three years earlier, dedicated just in time for the Christmas meals of 1895. The entrance hall and openings around the stage were in the Moorish style and the lighting, cornices and frieze were Arabesque. The mouldings were salmon in colour, and the arches were fitted

with wrought iron inset with azure and rose-coloured glass.[42] The walls were decorated with various banners and plaques with Arabic inscriptions as well as flags of many Islamic lands, such as the crimson with white star and crescent standard of the Ottoman Empire; the simple red and black field flags of Morocco and the Emirate of Afghanistan respectively; the sword-wielding lion and sun banner of Persia; and the striped flag of the 'Sudanese dervish'.[43] This must have presented an impressive, if not bewildering, exotic aspect for the guests. They were led to tables by members of the LMI, still separated into the groupings established before entering the hall.

The seating of over 200 guests took between ten and fifteen minutes, during which time a cacophonous 'hubbub of conversation' commenced.[44] At precisely 9.15 am, the conversation ceased when Quilliam blew a whistle and took to the stage to give a short speech. He wished the group glad tidings of the season and then described how the food would be served, and his expectations for their behaviour. Specifically, he assured them that there would be enough food for all and requested that they remain polite and patient with each other and the servers. The crowd agreed and applauded. Quilliam then assured those assembled that no religion would be preached on this occasion, but the requisite prayer of thanks in the name of 'God, the Merciful and Compassionate' was in order. Again, the crowd applauded. Quilliam asked them to repeat the following lines in unison: 'Be present at our table, Lord. Be here and everywhere adored. Thy creature bless and grant that we may feast in paradise with thee.'[45] He then proceeded to say *bismillah* (invocation: 'In the name of Allah') in Arabic and, without further delay, the food was served.

The meals for the breakfast and the evening tea were the same and went unchanged throughout the years. First, large plates of beef sandwiches and bread and butter were carried into the hall, followed by tea, coffee, milk and condiments such as mustard and sugar. Last, heaps of seed loaf and bun loaf were brought in on platters.[46] There are hints at the amount of food and drink needed for the two meals. In describing the work required to prepare the food in 1898, it was estimated that, laid end-to-end, the loaves of bread sliced by the volunteers would have reached eighty feet in length. The bun loaf, seed loaf, meat and butter were of 'similar relative quantities'.[47] Furthermore, roughly ten pounds of tea and twenty-two pounds of sugar were supplied for the feedings, along with many gallons of coffee.[48] The tea and coffee required constant attention from workers boiling water in large cauldrons and brewing the drinks before filling large jugs and urns, which were turned over to a separate detail of workers. Quilliam oversaw the entire venture.

Each table grouping was supervised by a small cadre of LMI volunteers to service the needs of the guests, serve platters of food and refill drinks. It was reported that many ate the food as if they were famished, whereas others savoured the meal as if it may have been the heartiest of the year. A cheer rose from the crowd at the appearance of both the seed loaf and the bun loaf. The crowd was allowed to linger and fill their stomachs with as much food as they wished, some apparently exclaiming 'enough' when they could hold no more.[49] When entertainment was provided in the morning, it was usually in the form of recitations or musical performances such as a pianoforte or organ solo towards the end of the sitting. In years of greater need, a second sitting would occur around 10.00 am, otherwise the event ended no later than 10.30 am.[50] The assembled cheered when Quilliam asked if they had had enough to eat, and the Osmanli Regiment escorted the crowd from the hall. On more than one occasion, a spontaneous cheer was given for Quilliam and the Muslims as the full-bellied poor filed out of the hall. Upon reaching the street, each guest was presented with the gift of an orange, and clothing was distributed to the neediest.[51] Without delay, in the hall, the men gathered up the plates, saucers and cups, while the women washed them. The tables and chairs were rearranged, and the space cleaned and prepped for the evening tea.

Perhaps, at this point, some of the Muslims made their way to the Medina Home for Children, escorting the older children of the home who had helped with the breakfast. By 1898, the home was about two years old, having been created in the last days of 1896, when Quilliam issued a notice to discuss its viability. The idea of the home was reputedly spurred when a Jewish woman approached Quilliam on the street asking to have her child taken in and brought up as a Muslim. Parents were willing to pay a small amount of money for their children to receive a good home with proper care and feeding and allow the parents to work, find lodging for themselves and carry on with their lives. Although all of the first children offered to the home had been male, Quilliam made it clear that he was in favour of taking in both boys and girls. Their parents had to sign papers waiving rights to the children and agree to them being raised as Muslims. A local Muslim convert, L. Hanifa Jones, made a motion to call the institution the Medina Home for Children, in homage to the Prophet Muhammad's fleeing Mecca for the safe confines of Medina.[52] A few years later, Yusuff Nunan described the rationale for the home's creation as, 'in order to rescue from the workhouse, from pernicious surroundings, and even from starvation, those poor, innocent little children who come into this world uncared and unasked for'.[53]

Oddly, the children of the Medina Home were treated to a more traditional celebration of Christmas than the LMI's rhetoric purported. In 1897, the children had a plum pudding, oranges, biscuits and a large cake. Furthermore, presents such as dolls, trains, other toys, furniture and clothing were given to the children by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.[54] This was acknowledged and celebrated in *The Crescent*, obviously with the support of Quilliam and the matron of the Medina Home. At Christmas 1898, the children were served special food, including a 'plump' turkey given by Quilliam, and several Muslim women gave gifts such as clothes, dolls, games, colour picture books, tea sets, rattles and more. Quilliam also donated a swing and an iron shovel. *The Crescent* was glowing in its appreciation for the donations and the happiness it brought to the children. It stated, 'One little boy got possession of a toy drum, and never ceased to play it all the day except at meal and prayer times.'[55]

At about 5.00 pm, volunteers reassembled at the LMI and the Muslims performed *salat al-magrib* (sunset prayer) before preparing food for the night's festivities. The evening tea generally had a significantly higher attendance and almost always required two sittings. Throughout the years, attendance averaged 200–300 in the morning and 300–400 in the evening. In 1908, it was claimed in *The Crescent* that, across two decades, the combined number of people fed during Christmas, *Mawlid* (Prophet Muhammad's birthday), after funerals and other occasions totalled about 22,000.[56] That figure is impossible to corroborate. Feeding 500–700 people per year at Christmas for twenty years would account for roughly 10,000–14,000 of the stated number. In 1903, the total number fed up to that point was listed at 13,000.[57] It seems unlikely that 9,000 additional people were fed in the subsequent five years, considering that the total number had been increasing by only about 1,000 per year. However, if *Mawlid* and other feedings not reported in *The Crescent* were included in the 1908 total, perhaps the number was accurate. Due to the larger number of guests, the volunteer ranks swelled up to a hundred during the tea, compared with half these numbers in the morning. In one case, fifty Indian sailors passing through Liverpool stayed to help after attending *salat al-'isa* at the institute.[58] Some of the workers would have been the same as in the morning, but many only volunteered for one service. Not all of the helpers were Muslim, but rather friends and family of members of the LMI, interested supporters and those connected to Quilliam through the Temperance Movement.[59]

After the last sitting, at about 8.00 pm, the guests were escorted out of the hall. Those who were not staying for the entertainment were given leftovers to take home.[60] With the tables cleared and the seating rearranged to face the LMI

stage, the guests were readmitted for the evening's entertainment, usually to overflowing capacity. Often the entertainment included some sort of musical performance. For instance, one year, Quilliam's sons performed on the zither and fairy bells accompanied by a mandolin; another year, Mr. Fry's amateur Pierrot troupe performed.[61] Other musical entertainments were pianoforte solos performed by LMI members. Sample selections may have included the '*Hamidieh* March' (Ottoman imperial anthem) and the 'Turkish Patrol March'.[62]

Since as early as 1892, a hallmark of the evening entertainment was magic lantern shows featuring hundreds of slides. During this period, common Christmas leisure activities for adults and children were concerts, pantomimes and magic lantern slide shows.[63] Quilliam's slides often showed scenes from his travels around England, the Isle of Man, France, West Africa, Ottoman cities such as Constantinople and other 'Eastern' lands. Furthermore, in any given year, there may have been selections of comic, coloured or moving slides accompanied by appropriate piano music. Quilliam invariably provided the narration while LMI members H. Nasrullah Warren, Thomas A. Ridpath and other volunteers operated the oxy-hydrogen light source and slides.

The programme of entertainment ended between 10.00 and 10.30 pm, and the visitors were ushered to the exits. As in the morning, the events often finished with a round of cheers initiated by the appreciative audience. After the crowd had dispersed, Quilliam addressed the volunteers assembled in the lecture hall:

> Both Christ and Mahomed taught that the one who fed the hungry and assisted the poor was sure of a reward in paradise. A good conscience is a prize. The knowledge of good works done in the cause of humanity is a comforting solace to the mind, and that, I am sure, each of you must enjoy tonight.[64]

Islamic festivals and events at the LMI

The Islamic festivals and other events celebrated at the LMI were distinct from the Christmas festivities but had some features in common with them. In February 1899, less than two months after the well-covered 1898 Christmas feedings, *The Crescent* again provided unprecedented coverage of another celebration, *'Id al-Fitr* (festival of breaking the fast), marking the end of Ramadan. In July 1900, the paper also covered the celebration of *Mawlid*.[65] The Islamic events were more insular festivities. Although non-Muslims were present at '*Ids* (Muslim religious festivals), unlike at Christmas, they were not the focus of attention.

As with Christmas, LMI committees were formed to ensure the success of Islamic festivals and events, and would likely have had similar numbers of participants, each assigned a variety of duties. The difference between Christmas and *'Id*s was apparent from the very beginning in 1899: at sundown, to mark the end of Ramadan, percussive fireworks were fired into the air; later that evening, the final portion of the Qur'an was read, *salat al-'isa* performed and several Muslims remained to put the finishing touches on decorations and preparations for *'Id al-Fitr*.[66] The following day, special prayers were performed and, in the evening, celebrations commenced. The LMI and Medina Home for Children were decorated as for the Christmas meals but with Ottoman and Islamic banners and bunting on the exterior and 'Bengal lights' illuminating the front of the building.[67] There were also Islamic emblems and scripture from the Qur'an adorning the interior walls, and coloured lanterns lit the hallways. Unlike Christmas, when Quilliam's sole item of Muslim clothing was generally a red fez, for the Muslim celebrations he wore flowing white and gold robes decorated with medals from the Ottoman sultan. Children and youth from the Muslim College and Medina Home wore 'Zouave' dress, likely some combination of pantaloons, vests and turbans or fezzes.[68] Attendance was also broadened for the Muslim celebrations: whereas only older members of the Medina Home for Children attended the Christmas Day meals to assist, all pupils from the Medina Home and the Muslim College were expected to attend Islamic festivals and other events.

In the lecture hall, the Muslims gathered to hear speeches and conversion testimonies. This was followed by reading letters and telegrams expressing congratulations and felicitations from afar. Then, a concert performed by several female members of the institute as well as more fireworks, musical selections and recitations filled the night. In 1903, other entertainments included a cinematograph display, a short comedy entitled '*Rubaiyeh's* Romance' written by Quilliam's elder son, Robert Ahmed (1880–1954), a mechanical contraption called 'The Flying Horse' and parlour games. The festivities ended just after midnight with the playing of the '*Hamidieh* March' in honour of the Ottoman sultan-caliph.[69]

The LMI and Medina Home were decorated for the *Mawlid* celebrations in a similar manner as at *'Id al-Fitr*. At sundown and the turning of a new day, Muslims gathered at the LMI and Quilliam would deliver a lecture in the large hall. The Muslims then moved to the mosque for a *du'a* (prayer of supplication) and a special service in honour of the Prophet Muhammad. The following day was a holiday for the Muslim school children and that evening there would be a

feeding of the poor from the neighbourhood. Although not mentioned, it can be assumed that the organization, fare and preparations would have been similar to the Christmas meals since that process was virtually unchanged across this period. In 1900, it was estimated that 500 hungry people were fed on *Mawlid*. One divergence from Christmas was the participation of staff from the Ottoman consulate in Liverpool. Small amounts of money, toffee and sweetmeats were also given to children as they left. After the dinner guests dispersed, the Muslims engaged in entertainment and games until about 10.00 pm.[70]

Reactions to the feedings

Muslims from around the world participated in the Christmas festivities as they passed through Liverpool or as a result of their membership of the LMI. However, few records have emerged detailing their opinions of the Christmas celebrations, or the views of Muslims abroad. One that has recently come to light is by the Ottoman Yusuf Samih Asmay, who levelled a charge of *bid'ah* (innovation in religious matters) against Quilliam when referring to *'Id al-Fitr* and *'Id al-Adha* (feast of the sacrifice marking the end of the annual Hajj, or Pilgrimage to Mecca): 'Mr. Quilliam has increased them to three by adding to these two religious Eids the Eid of [Christ's] birth, which is called "Christmas".'[71] Asmay called such perceived unorthodoxy at the LMI 'Qulliamist innovation', and regarded the community as more like a Sufi order,[72] dubbing its members 'the Quilliamiyya'.[73] Ottoman uncomfortableness with the LMI's Christmas festivities seems to be further corroborated by the lack of participation by Ottoman consulate personnel in the feedings, in contrast to their involvement on Islamic holidays.

On the other hand, the Liverpool press was supportive of the LMI's Christmas efforts. In the early years, local newspapers such as the *Liverpool Daily Post* and *Liverpool Mercury* covered the events as the reporters witnessed them, with little editorializing and a tendency to use positive terms such as 'generosity' and 'kind-hearted' while noting that the occasions were non-sectarian and not used for proselytizing.[74] In 1897, the coverage changed with the *Mercury* providing broader coverage of the event and broaching Muslim beliefs about Jesus and Islamic theology more broadly, and the *Liverpool Daily Courier* followed suit in 1898.[75] By 1899, the *Daily Post* stated: 'Islam is not anti-Christian, but rather a semi-Christian faith.'[76] In 1901 and 1902, Christmas fell in Ramadan and both the feedings and the Muslim fasting garnered special attention and admiration.[77]

These same years marked a change; it is likely that the LMI started handing out copy to reporters with details about the numbers fed, who participated and information about Muslim beliefs. This assertion is based on the local newspapers printing nearly identical articles with only minor edits differentiating them. Again, in 1907, nearly the same article covering the feedings was published in several local newspapers.[78]

Based on the Muslims' motivations for the feedings and the reaction by the local press, the Christmas Day events were a success. The Muslims were acknowledged for feeding their hungry neighbours, an act of charity that the newspapers tied directly to their Islamic faith. Further, the message that Islam respected and venerated Jesus became standard in the press coverage. Although it took nearly a decade before the press hit all the points on Islam that Quilliam and his Muslim community had hoped for since they began the feedings, the motivations for these eventually lined up rather well with their coverage in the local media.

Conclusion

From nearly its inception, the LMI made Christmas a cornerstone of its calendar of activities, philanthropy and social outreach to non-Muslims. It was a multifaceted, complex undertaking, which had become well-organized by the mid-1890s, requiring assistance from LMI members, young and old, as well as from non-Muslim supporters. Their motivations ranged from religious obligation and explaining the role of Jesus in Islam to promoting Islam more generally and keeping in touch with a central feature of British Christian culture. Nonetheless, the distinct activities during *'Id*s and *Mawlid*, although still Westernized, showed an evolution towards a more Muslim cultural life, a time to celebrate as Muslims without the glare from as many outsiders or feeling obligated to tone down their 'otherness'. Although some Muslims certainly looked askance at the LMI's Christmas celebrations, the Liverpool press reaction was supportive of the Muslims' work, indicating that the Muslims were largely successful in fulfilling their aims.