

# Bahá'í Buildings in England

## Project Number 7078

Prepared for Historic England by  
Professor Emma Tomalin  
The Centre for Religion and Public Life  
University of Leeds  
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*Abu'l-Qasim Afnan (L) with Dorothy and John Ferraby at 27 Rutland Gate, around 1954<sup>1</sup>*

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# **Bahá'í Buildings in England: executive summary**

## **Overview**

The aim of this research was to provide Historic England (HE) with information about buildings that Bahá'í use in England so that HE can work with communities to enhance and protect those buildings now and in the future. It focused on three main questions:

- Where are Bahá'í buildings and how many are there?
- What kinds of buildings do Bahá'í communities use and what do they use them for?
- What is the value of these buildings to the communities and individuals?

### ***Where are Bahá'í buildings and how many are there?***

Overall, we identified six Bahá'í buildings from our desk-based mapping exercise and interview (see Appendix 1). We have included the grave of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and its environs in this number. To the best of our knowledge, this is the total amount of buildings that are owned or rented long-term by Bahá'í communities in England.

### ***What kinds of buildings do Bahá'í communities use and what do they use them for?***

The formal place of worship for Bahá'í is called a 'house of worship' and there is not one in the UK. The main centre is in London and is located in a reused residential property. The centres in Brighton, Bristol and Liverpool are all former residential properties. Centres are for administrative purposes, places where Bahá'í can meet and worship.

Although not yet a centre as such, a former guest house has been purchased in Bristol - flat number 2, at 17 Royal York Crescent, Bristol, a Grade II\* listed terrace of 46 houses - where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed on two occasions (1911 and 1913). The aim is to develop it as a place of worship with added displays and facilities for visitors.

### ***What is the value of these buildings to the communities and individuals?***

- As a focus for the Bahá'í community to meet and worship
- As places of spiritual connection and significance, related to key figures in the faith
- To help to spread the Bahá'í teachings
- Administrative centres for Bahá'í local and national institutions

# Bahá'í Buildings in England

## 1. Introduction

In 2012 Historic England (at that time known as English Heritage) held a series of consultations on minority heritages in order to develop a more inclusive approach to its National Heritage Protection Plan (NHPP). The findings presented in this report came about as a result of a consultation on faith groups and their history and heritage in England. It emerged that Historic England needed to increase its knowledge about the heritage of the buildings of other faith groups in Britain in order to help assess their significance and understand how they are used and valued. To begin to address this gap, an initial scoping project was carried out on Buddhist Buildings, which has been completed (Tomalin and Starkey 2016, 2017; Starkey and Tomalin 2016). This report comprises part of the second phase of the research, which focused on Hindu, Jain, Zoroastrian and Bahá'í buildings in England. Separate reports have been written for each of these four faith traditions.

### 1.1 Aims of the research

Specifically, the aim of the project on minority faith buildings has been to 'scope and assess current knowledge of the buildings and relevant practices' for different communities in England in order to:

1. 'Enable HE and the sector to develop its expertise and protect [these buildings] appropriately'
2. To better understand the heritage, nature and significance of these buildings for their respective communities/users
3. To better understand the ways in which building use reflects and enables religious practice and other activities

For all the traditions studied the research has involved two main parts: 1) a literature review and desk-based mapping of different buildings across England, linked to various minority faith traditions; 2) a more detailed study involving qualitative research on a selection of these buildings, involving face to face interviews.

## **2. What does Historic England want?**

### **2.1 Background**

In 2012 English Heritage (now Historic England) ran a series of consultations as part of a project considering 'under-represented heritage'. Two of these focused on faith buildings. Regarding religious heritages in England, the majority of HE's case work focused on Christian buildings, especially those in the guardianship of the Church of England, as these constitute a significant proportion of England's listed buildings.

At this time there was less knowledge about, or experience of, working with some minority faith groups. HE wishes to develop its expertise and build capacity to work with communities from any religious tradition to help support the protection of the historic environment. This is the case both as new heritage is created and becomes eligible for statutory protection and as faith groups adopt or inherit existing heritage assets and need to care for them. No national survey exists to say where buildings of many minority faiths are and what characterises them. Furthermore, in order to advise local authorities on proposals for change to listed buildings Historic England would benefit from a clearer picture of what kinds of changes different communities might wish to carry out to make existing buildings suitable for their new function. Work on Jewish heritage has been ongoing for some years and in addition to churches and chapels, synagogues are often buildings with historic fabric. However, there has been less focus on other faith traditions, whose buildings are generally not as old due to relatively recent patterns of migration to England.

Faith buildings commonly have a special value to the community that uses them and often to a wider community that lives and works around them or uses them for other community purposes. In order to provide consistent advice, it is important to appreciate both the individual history of a place of worship and the aspects that are important to a local community and to the wider heritage sector.

Historic England has a dual role of advising Government on which buildings might be added to the statutory list of heritage assets and in advising owners and local authorities in relation to existing listed buildings. To fulfill this it seeks, through this project and others, to provide a baseline of information on which to build in order to expand the knowledge of minority faith buildings and their significance.

C20th buildings have been a priority area for HE, and faith buildings is one element of this programme of work. Even amongst Church of England churches, which are relatively well covered by the List, it has been shown that 20<sup>th</sup> century ones are under designated and that they are more likely to be demolished (Monckton 2014: 129). This could apply to other C20th faith

buildings (that fit the designation criteria of being more than 30 years old), therefore it is important to scope the landscape of those buildings, with an aim to showing the histories of minority faiths in England and providing an opportunity to provide protection for those eligible.

There exists a general gap in scholarship in this area of the built environment generally, so that while there is a large academic literature on migration and diaspora in England, within this literature, there is little on the buildings that illuminate aspects of these histories and most discussion has not been systematic nor carried out with respect to issues of heritage protection or architectural character.

## **2.2 Specific areas where knowledge is lacking and key areas of impact**

Our conversations with HE have highlighted three main areas where knowledge is felt to be lacking and which this project aims to address:

1. Where are Bahá'í buildings and how many are there?
2. What kinds of buildings do Bahá'í communities use and what do they use them for?
3. What is the value of these buildings to the communities and individuals that use them?

The following areas of impact have been signaled as important for HE and have been drivers for this project.

## **2.3 Impact that is achieved by this project**

1. To suggest terms that can be added to the terminology that is present in the 'Thesaurus of Monument Types' so that it reflects the range of minority faith traditions in England. There is a need to have a more comprehensive repository of terms so that people can access the information that they want and also so that they can use the use appropriate terms when recommending buildings for listing. Our aim is to identify key terms, including those for key architectural features of minority faith buildings where appropriate.
2. To make suggestions for new buildings that should be listed or currently listed buildings that should be upgraded.
3. To update and amend details on the 'heritage list' which do not generally reflect the reuse of listed buildings by minority faith traditions in England.
4. To make suggestions for relevant 'principles of selection' for the listing of minority faith buildings as well as guidance for how to protect and treat buildings which are already listed but are now occupied by faith groups.



5. To create a contact list for HE to connect with relevant minority faith organisations.
6. To develop a timeline of the history of minority faith buildings in England.
7. To add to the HE archive and the NHLE, including recent photographs and up-to-date information.
8. Produce data that can be used to write an 'Introduction to Heritage Assets' resource on different minority faith traditions in England. These are potted histories of England's 'heritage assets' that are relevant for the general public and other non-academic stakeholders. This could include architects and town planners who increasingly encounter the buildings of diverse religious traditions in their work.
9. To raise awareness of these buildings to the general public.

### 3. An introduction to the Bahá'í Faith in England

#### 3.1 Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith



**'Abdu'l-Bahá<sup>3</sup>**

The founder of the Bahá'í faith, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), came from a background of Shia Islam and the Bábí faith; Smith 1996: 13, 19). It is distinct from Islam but has some Islamic elements. The founder of the Bábí movement was a merchant called 'Siyyid 'Alí Muhammad, who took the title of the Báb – meaning “Gate” in Arabic'.<sup>2</sup> He declared that there was to be a new message from God delivered by a new Divine Educator. Perceived as a threat by the Islamic authorities he was eventually executed in 1850. Bahá'u'lláh was one of the Báb's main followers and soon people turned to him for guidance.

Thrown into jail, he experienced a vision from God who identified him as the Divine Educator prophesied by the Báb. He ended his days in the city of Acre in present day Israel and 'revealed His most important work, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, the repository of laws for the Bahá'í dispensation'.<sup>4</sup>

His eldest son, Abbás (known as 'Abdu'l-Bahá - meaning 'Servant of Bahá' – 1844-1921) became the head of the Bahá'í movement upon his father's death and began to work with new communities being set up in the West.

According to Bahá'í teachings, belief in God cannot be directly known but he has revealed himself through a series of divine messengers including Abraham, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Each of these founded one of the world religions and therefore all religions come from the same source and are essentially 'one'. This current age, according to Bahá'u'lláh, is one where humanity has reached maturity and is capable of building a peaceful and prosperous civilization. The overarching teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the oneness of humanity. He has enunciated a number of principles to contribute towards the

realization of this vision and these are promoted by Bahá'ís and the Bahá'í community:

- the abandonment of all forms of prejudice
- assurance to women of full equality of opportunity with men
- recognition of the unity and relativity of religious truth
- the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth
- the realization of universal education
- the responsibility of each person to independently search for truth
- the establishment of a global commonwealth of nations
- recognition that true religion is in harmony with reason and the pursuit of scientific knowledge<sup>5</sup>

### **3.2 The spread of the Bahá'í Faith to England**

Smith tells us that

From the outset, the movement was imbued with a strong missionary ethos, and a widespread expansion was soon set in train. This expansion was concentrated in Iran, but also came to include the Caucasus (1860s), Egypt (1860s), India and Burma (1870s), Russian Turkistan (1880s), and North America and Europe (1890s)' (1996: 88). Until expansion to the west, Bahá'í had remained a movement within Islamic settings and cultures, but with the entrance into USA and Europe it entered a 'new cultural milieu' (1996: 95). Although they were small in numbers the 'Western Bahá'ís enjoined a freedom and access to resources that enabled them to play a vital role in the further expansion of the faith (1996: 95).

According to the Bahá'í UK website 'from its earliest years the Bahá'í faith has had connections with Britain'<sup>6</sup>

The Times of London published an account of the new religion on 1 November 1845. Irish physician Dr Cormick attended the Báb in Tabriz in July 1848. In the 1870s Bahá'u'lláh commented favourably on the British parliamentary system and commended Queen Victoria for the ending of slavery by her government. And Cambridge University orientalist Edward Granville Browne was granted four interviews with Bahá'u'lláh, in the Holy Land, in April 1890.<sup>7</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá himself visited England twice and was knighted in 1920 for his humanitarian work in Palestine after during this first World War.

During His first visit, from 4 September to 3 October 1911, He spent time in London and Bristol and gave His first public address in the West at the City Temple Church in London. He returned to Britain at the end of 1912, arriving in Liverpool by steamer from New York on 13 December. During this second visit He attended a theatre performance for the first time in His life, gave an address in Manchester College,

Oxford, travelled to Edinburgh and Bristol and gave a talk at the Woking mosque. He left London for Paris on 21 January 1913.<sup>8</sup>



### ***Shoghi Effendi***<sup>9</sup>

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá died Shoghi Effendi, his eldest grandson and whom the Bahá'ís call "The Guardian", was appointed as head of the Faith by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He had studied at Oxford University<sup>10</sup> and died in London on 4 November 1957, laid to rest in the New Southgate Cemetery.

Most Bahá'ís in England are indigenous converts rather than immigrants.<sup>10</sup> According to the UK Bahá'í website the first English people to become Bahá'ís were Mary Virginia Thornburgh-Cropper – known as Minnie – and her mother, Harriet Thornburgh. Both were Americans living in London. In 1898 they were part of the first group of Western Bahá'í pilgrims to visit

'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land. The pilgrimage was organised and largely funded by their friend Phoebe Hearst, a wealthy American philanthropist who was herself a Bahá'í.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Minnie Thornburgh-Cropper***<sup>12</sup>

© National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom.

Minnie Thornburgh-Cropper is seen as the 'mother' of the British Bahá'í community with the third of the three founders of the British Bahá'í community being Miss Ethel Rosenberg, who 'learned about the Bahá'í Faith from Harriet and Minnie and became a Bahá'í in about 1899'.<sup>13</sup> She learnt Persian so that she could help 'Abdu'l-Bahá (and later Shoghi Effendi) with translations of the Bahá'í writings. Again, according to the UK Bahá'í website:



The Bahá'í community grew very slowly at first, but its growth accelerated when Sara, Lady Blomfield, widow of the distinguished architect Sir Arthur Blomfield, became a Bahá'í in 1907. Lady Blomfield was a capable and inspiring organiser – after the First World War she became a pioneering supporter and worker for the Save the Children with Eglantyne Jebb. She became an active Bahá'í and, because of her high social standing and hard work, raised the status of the British Bahá'í community.<sup>14</sup>

A small group of Bahá'ís formed around Lady Blomfield with others coming together in the Manchester area around 1906 and, a little later, Bournemouth. 'Abdu'l-Bahá died in 1921, and 'the Bahá'í Faith in the United Kingdom declined in activities and numbers until the mid-1930s, when an influx of young Bahá'ís revived the community'.<sup>15</sup>

In 1936 the Bahá'í Journal was published for the first time and summer schools begin alongside a winter conference. A National Spiritual Assembly, first formed in 1923, was legally incorporated in 1939 and Bahá'í communities were set up in other parts of the country. In 1939 the Bahá'í Publishing Trust – now Bahá'í Books UK – was set up by the famous American painter, Mark Tobey, who lived in Britain between 1930 and 1938 and 'began to hold Bahá'í study classes at Dartington Hall, a school in Devon. He also gave lectures in Torquay. As a result of this activity two famous artists became Bahá'í: Bernard Leach, the renowned potter, in about 1940; and Reginald Turvey, the 'spiritual father of South Africa' in 1936'.<sup>16</sup>

### **3.3 The Bahá'í 'House of Worship'**

The main Bahá'í place of worship is called a 'House of Worship' or Mashriqu'l-Adhkár:

The institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, translated as "The Dawning Place of the Mention of God", was ordained by Bahá'u'lláh Himself. It is a pivotal concept of Bahá'í community life, giving concrete expression to the unity of devotion and service.

Bahá'ís in localities throughout the world are today planting seeds from which Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs will eventually grow. The process begins with simple efforts to open personal and collective spaces for prayer. Acts of service then become integrated into an evolving pattern of activity and more sustained efforts to infuse aspects of community life with a devotional spirit become possible. The eventual establishment of a physical edifice marks another important stage in the fulfilment of Bahá'u'lláh's vision for Houses of Worship.<sup>17</sup>

A Mashriqu'l-Adhkár has a standard design consisting of a central building - House of Worship – and should also include a number of other 'dependencies':

'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that, through the provision of education, healthcare and other services it is also to support the social and economic progress of the community and afford shelter, relief and assistance to those in need. In this connection, 'Abdu'l-Bahá anticipated that subsidiary branches—such as a hospital, school, university, dispensary, and hospice—would gradually be added to a House of Worship.<sup>18</sup>



In terms of places of worship there are currently eight 'continental' Bahá'í 'Houses of Worship' in Chicago, Panama, Chile, Samoa, Germany, Sydney, Uganda, and New Delhi, which are open to people of all religions. There was a further one, the first one, in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan that has since been destroyed and another has recently been completed in Chile. The first two 'national' Houses of worship are to be built in The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Papua New Guinea. A small number of local Houses of Worship are also being erected. So as one can see the process of building Bahá'í Houses of Worship is at an early stage across the globe.



***Bahá'í House of Worship, Kampala, Uganda<sup>19</sup>***

A House of Worship is to be open for all people to worship God whatever their religion and only the holy texts of the Bahá'í faith and other religions are to be read there, with sermons forbidden. Scripture dictates what they should look like and they are all circular in shape with nine sides. They each have domes, although this is not essential. Pictures, statues, images, pulpits and altars are forbidden and they all comprise a single room with seats facing the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká, Israel. Despite this formula each is actually unique in terms of materials, landscaping and architecture, reflecting local cultural, social and environmental elements.<sup>20</sup>



*Interior of the Bahá'í House of Worship, Sydney<sup>21</sup>*

The House of Worship is to be distinguished from a Bahá'í centre or Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds (Arabic, sacred fold) which serves as the heart and home of a Bahá'í community, the seat of the national governing body known as the National Spiritual Assembly, and an administrative centre. Shoghi Effendi recommended that

The Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds should include the secretariat, treasury, archives, library, publishing office, assembly hall, council chamber and the pilgrims' hostel. He also stated that its functions would be complementary to those of the Bahá'í House of Worship, and that it would be desirable if both these buildings would be on the same site.<sup>22</sup>

### **3.3.1 Bahá'í buildings in England**

In England there is no House of Worship and only a few Bahá'í communities have premises, with others meeting in people's houses or renting rooms for worship (see appendix 1). Our interviewee explained that

The stage of development of the Bahá'í community throughout the world means that there is only a limited number of Houses of Worship. It is a young faith, just over 170 years old; so think of Christianity back when it was just 200 years old. There is a Continental House of Worship on every continent, and there are some national and local houses of worship being established at the moment, but the size of the Bahá'í community in the UK doesn't warrant the building of House of Worship at present...



One can pray anywhere, so Bahá'ís and their friends gather frequently in their homes or rented premises for prayer....it can be held in their home, it can be held in a park, it can be held anywhere, informally or formally, regularly or from time to time. As the Bahá'í community evolves and matures and becomes more deeply embedded in a society, a House of Worship emerges and it becomes a formal building where Bahá'ís as well as people of all backgrounds from the surrounding area will come to visit and pray.

Today there are 5,021 Bahá'ís in England and Wales, according to the 2011 census.<sup>23</sup> While there is no House of Worship, the National Bahá'í Centre or National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds is at 27 Rutland Gate, London SW7 1PD (see Box 1). Other important places for Bahá'ís in England are the resting place of Shoghi Effendi, in New Southgate Cemetery and the newly acquired property in Bristol which 'Abdu'l'Bahá visited on two occasions.



**Shoghi Effendi's resting place is in the New Southgate Cemetery, Brunswick Park Road, New Southgate, London N11 1JJ  
©National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom.**

**'It is a special place of prayer for Bahá'ís from all over the world.'**<sup>24</sup>

Prior to moving to 27 Rutland Gate there had been centres in a number of locations including one opening in

September 1929 at Walmar House, Regent Street. The center was then moved to Grosvenor Place, then Lancaster Gate, then 46 Bloomsbury Street in 1937, and 1 Victoria Street in spring 1944. A National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds (q.v.) was purchased in 1954 at 27 Rutland Gate in the prestigious district of Knightsbridge, London. Closed for fifteen months of renovation [in 1989], it was re-opened and re-dedicated on 14 April 1990.<sup>25</sup>

One online source, taken from an account given by an early Bahá'í in London, Dorothy Ferraby, tells us that



During the Blitz the National Assembly went on meeting quite regularly outside London. Once it was clear that the Blitz was continuing (after the first shock or two and one night when we didn't go home at all and we had to stay together all night in London) we organised ourselves. We had assembly meetings on Sunday mornings. We held Nineteen Days Feasts quite regularly on the nearest Saturday afternoon as these were quiet times. And we kept going perfectly well – we even had a public meeting now and again on a Saturday afternoon. Nobody was hurt in London until right at the end of the war. I used to go through a bit of shrapnel now and again. I went to the Bahá'í Centre (46 Bloomsbury Street) on the way home from work every day, to make sure it was still there (and to pick up mail etc.) but I couldn't stay as I had to rush home while there was still some transport to get home with.<sup>26</sup>

***Box 1: The National Bahá'í Centre or National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds***

**The National Bahá'í Centre or National Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds, 27 Rutland Gate, Knightsbridge**

The National Bahá'í Centre premises was purchased in 1954, formerly housing a hostel funded by a charity called the Actor's Orphanage Fund, which took care of destitute children of actors and actresses, 'for older children or those attending vocational classes in the capital.'<sup>27</sup> It is located in one of the most prestigious London postcodes and our interviewee told us that 'during the early stages of the development of the faith in London a number of the Bahá'í centres would have been rented.'

The property at 27 Rutland Gate is today the

administrative centre for the National Spiritual Assembly, it is the seat of the National Spiritual Assembly...the governing body of the Bahá'í community of the United Kingdom, which is elected annually by the Bahá'í community...It consists of a body of nine members and it meets here and...guides and directs the affairs of the Bahá'í community. So there is no leader as such within the Bahá'í faith, it is the body, it is the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly that [governs]...So because it is the Seat of this body, it is a very precious place.

Our interviewee told us that the building is 'not just the administrative centre of the Bahá'í faith of the United Kingdom, but it also has a spiritual significance as well' and prayers and devotional meetings are held at the property, which is a registered place of worship. Moreover, it is relevant for Bahá'ís globally since the funeral cortège for Shoghi Effendi left from there when he died in 1957.



**Photo: author's own**

He continued that in the

basement we hold some precious archival materials associated with Bahá'u'lláh himself, the founder of the Bahá'í faith, also of 'Abdu'l-Bahá his son. Once a year we have an open weekend for the Bahá'ís to come, and they can see the precious relics at that time...clothing and gifts which Bahá'u'lláh for example gave somebody. Just things associated with him, or his writings in original - we call them tablets - or letters written by him in his handwriting.

According to the Bahá'í UK website, the National Bahá'í Centre building serves a number of purposes:

- it is the seat of the National Spiritual Assembly, the community's national governing council;
- the National Assembly's administrative offices are housed here;
- meetings of many different kinds – arranged by Bahá'í agencies and by other organisations – take place, such as receptions, diplomatic functions, interfaith meetings, devotional gatherings, and other events;
- a well-stocked bookshop serves the needs of all those who would like to purchase a wide range of Bahá'í literature.<sup>28</sup>

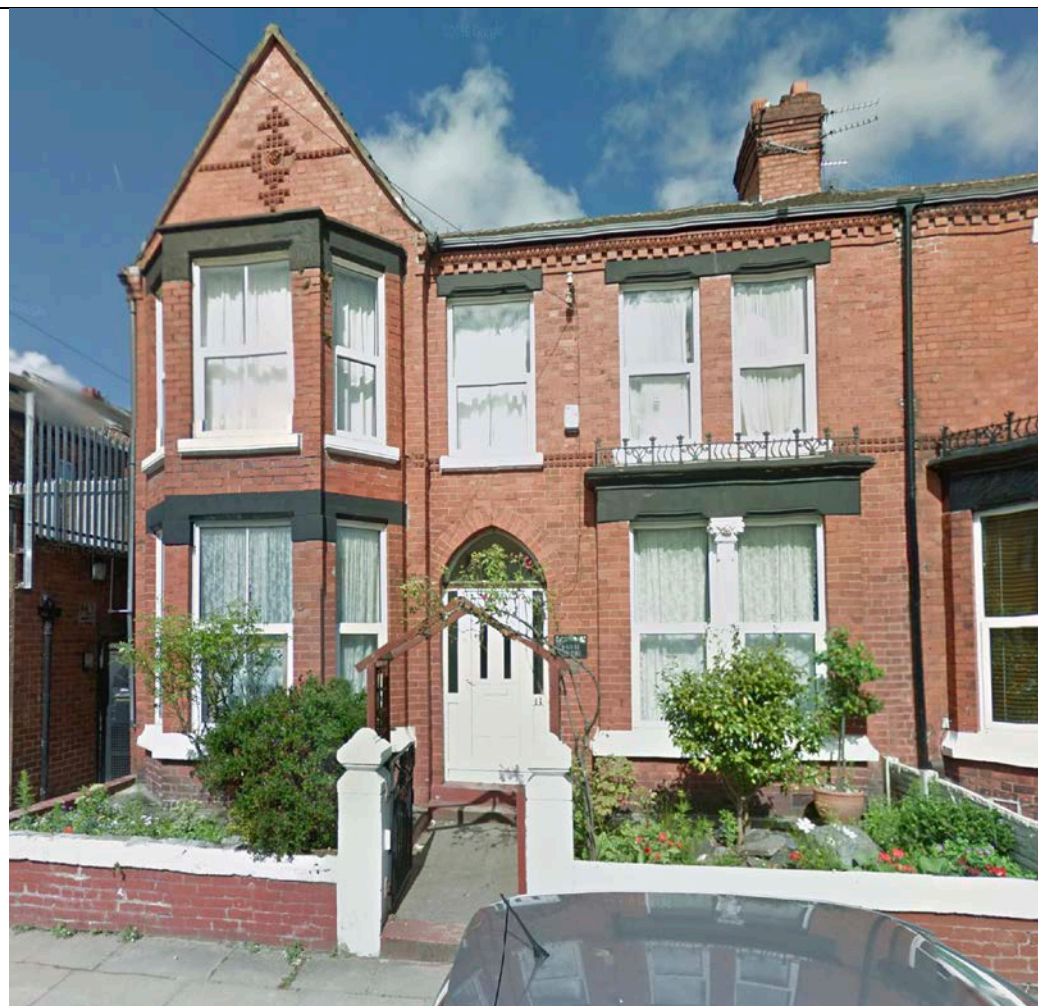
In England there are about 90 Local Spiritual Assemblies, elected bodies that govern the affairs of a local Bahá'í community but only a few have centres or local Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds (see appendix 1).<sup>29</sup> In addition to the London centre (see Box 1), there is one in Brighton and Hove, in Bristol, and in Liverpool. There used to be one in Manchester<sup>30</sup> and Newcastle. In Manchester the property has now been sold and a rented premises has been acquired in its place. In Newcastle the property is currently for sale and the community

instead will use homes, hired facilities and venues owned by other organisations.

***Box 2: Bahá'í Local Ḥaḏíratu'l-Quds in England***

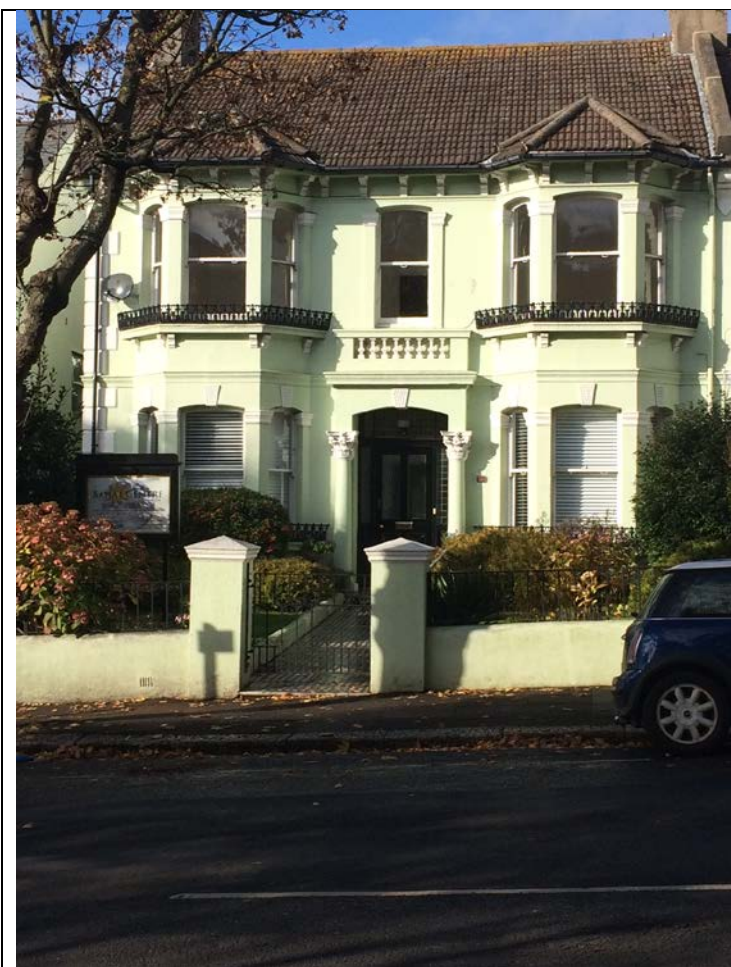


**Bristol Bahá'í Ḥaḏíratu'l-Quds**  
**8 Church Rd, Bristol BS5 9JA**  
**©2018 Google – image date: August 2017**



**Liverpool Bahá'í Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds**  
**3 Langdale Road, Wavertree,**  
**Liverpool, L15 3LA**  
**©2018 Google – image date: July 2016**





**Brighton Bahá'í Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds**  
**19 Stanford Ave, Brighton BN1 6GA**  
**Permission to use photo from Brighton Bahá'í Centre**

Our interviewee told us that recently an important building had been acquired in Bristol 'an apartment in Bristol where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed when he visited' (see Box 3).

***Box 3: Flat number 2, at 17 Royal York Crescent***

Flat number 2, at 17 Royal York Crescent  
©National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom.







**Royal York Crescent**  
**©National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom.**

Our interviewee told us that:

It is a place where Bahá'ís would wish to come and visit as 'Abdu'l-Bahá, one of the most important figures in the Bahá'í Faith stayed there. He visited on two occasions [1911 and 1913]. It used to be a guest house and the owner of the guest house was a Bahá'í [Wellesley Tudor Pole] and he invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá down to rest because 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been travelling through America and Europe including Britain. So he went down there for a couple of days on two occasions and stayed there. He didn't rest, he was very busy meeting local people. But this is where he stayed. So in that sense the association with 'Abdu'l-Bahá is very precious to us... It's a terrace of houses and the old guest house has since been converted into apartments. So there's probably about 10 apartments within it and we had the opportunity to acquire one of them which included a meeting room where 'Abdu'l-Bahá met the local community

Another source tells us that:

'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Bristol in 1913 was well represented in the press. *Clifton Chronicle* dated 22 January 1913, for example wrote an article on a "Persian Reformer Message to Clifton", reporting of "a large number" of visitors of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's at the Guest House.... To a representative he was reported to say: "I am most delighted and pleased with the situation of Clifton and surrounding valleys and hills. Therefore before returning to the Orient I have come here to spend one night. In reality the people of Clifton are very intelligent ... May they become the means of creating good fellowship between children of men..." (*Clifton Chronicle*, Vol III, No 3231, January 22, 1913).<sup>31</sup>

An article in the Bristol Post explains that

The faith's leaders have asked to turn it into a cross between a museum and a place of worship...[they] want to undo all the changes that happened since 1913, and restore the rooms back to how they would have been when 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed there. "In memory of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit, the flat will therefore be used as a place to experience

peace, to read, study, reflect, pray and meditate and be inspired and to have a cup of tea and leave," they added.<sup>32</sup>



**'Abdu'l-Bahá on Royal York Terrace**  
**©National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom.**





**Outside the Clifton Guest House**  
**©National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom.**

## **4. Thematic discussion and key questions to consider from fieldwork**

### **4.1 Why are there so few Bahá'í buildings? Is this purely to do with the relatively small size of the Bahá'í population in England or are there other reasons?**

Today there are 5,021 Bahá'ís in England and Wales, according to the 2011 census,<sup>33</sup> with about 90 Local Spiritual Assemblies - elected bodies that govern the affairs of a local Bahá'í community. However, only a few of these have actual centres with others meeting in hired rooms and people's houses.<sup>34</sup> In addition to the National Centre or National Ḥaḏíratu'l-Quds in London (see Box 1), there is the Brighton and Hove Bahá'í centre; the Bristol Bahá'í Centre; and the Liverpool Bahá'í Centre.

The main reason that the Bahá'í faith has less buildings in England than most other faith traditions is to do with the size of the community. The homes of people are adequate in most communities for local and neighbourhood gatherings.

### **4.2 Does the lack of a 'house of worship' get in the way of Bahá'í practice and does the community plan to establish one? Where do Bahá'ís tend to practice?**

The London centre is a 'place of worship' but not a 'house of worship', the technical term used by Bahá'ís for their most special religious buildings. Our interviewee told us that the relatively young age of the faith is one reason why there are not yet many houses of worship and in particular the community in the UK is too small to require one. Our interviewee explained that

One can pray anywhere, so Bahá'ís and their friends gather frequently in their homes or rented premises for prayer....it can be held in their home, it can be held in a park, it can be held anywhere, informally or formally, regularly or from time to time. As the Bahá'í community evolves and matures and becomes more deeply embedded in a society, a House of Worship emerges and it becomes a formal building where Bahá'ís as well as people of all backgrounds from the surrounding area will come to visit and pray.

Our interviewee explained that for Bahá'ís, 'worship and service are seen as one thing'. While you can worship anywhere, the formal house of worship becomes the 'centre of the community' where there will also 'be other buildings such as an orphanage, a hospital, a home for the aged, ...it's a place where people would come in the morning, they would pray together and

then they would go and they would work and they would serve their communities.'

Therefore, if a house of worship were to be built in Britain then it would be more than just a place of worship but the centre of a community where various forms of social service were also put into action.

#### **4.3 Do Bahá'ís have a concept of 'sacred space'?**

Although there is no formal house of worship, our interviewee suggested that the notion of 'sacred space' is important for Bahá'ís in England:

Bahá'u'lláh's resting place [in Haifa] is a sacred place. I mean there's a lovely prayer of Bahá'u'lláh which is "Blessed is the spot, and the house, and the place, and the city, and the heart, and the mountain, and the refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land, and the sea, and the island, where mentioned of God has been made and His praise glorified." So [there is] the concept of a blessed spot or sacred space. But it can be in someone's heart as well.

...Back in 1957 when Shoghi Effendi passed away he was buried at New Southgate Cemetery. We now own the area of the cemetery surrounding where he is buried. So you see ...there's a place which marks the place where Shoghi Effendi is buried and it's got a large wall around it and it's landscaped beautifully...So one feels a sense of sacredness when you walk into it, you feel it's a special place when you walk into it. Beauty would be associated very much with sacred places. If you go to the Bahá'í gardens at Haifa around the place where Bahá'u'lláh is laid to rest, you really do feel the beauty of it. It's quite extraordinary actually.

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this section, we summarise our conclusions and provide some recommendations for Historic England according to the discussion in section 2 of this report - 'what does Historic England want?' The key points of interest on which our research focused are summarised as follows:

- Where are Bahá'í buildings and how many are there?
- What kinds of buildings do Bahá'í communities use and what do they use them for?
- What is the value of these buildings to the communities and individuals?

### **5.2 Summary**

Bahá'ís are members of a small minority faith in England, that first made its mark in the 1890s. We identified four Bahá'í buildings that function as administrative centres, places for Bahá'í to meet and worship, and as locations from where Bahá'í teachings can be disseminated more widely. We have also identified the former Clifton Guest House in Bristol where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed on two occasions (in 1911 and 1913), and Shoghi Effendi's burial ground in New Southgate Cemetery, London.

There is no formal 'house of worship' in the UK, there are only eight Continental Houses of Worship globally, and although our interviewee thought that many will be established over time, there were no plans for this at present. Bahá'ís can worship anywhere, and the religion does not have set rituals that require sacred spaces for their performance. An important function of some of the buildings is the role that they play in celebrating and keeping alive the memory of the important historical figures in the faith. This report makes this information available to the public and heritage bodies, as well as details of the relevant people and groups to contact for more information (see Appendix 1).

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Given the small number of buildings and the fact that these are reused residential properties that have not been significantly adapted for purposes of worship, the recommendations are small. We have identified six Bahá'í buildings in England, with three of these heritage sites being of particular significance to Bahá'ís in England and across the world: and the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds in London; the former Clifton Guest House in Bristol; and the the resting place of Shoghi Effendi.

Two of these Bahá'í buildings in England are listed: the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds in London and the former Clifton Guest House in Bristol. The National Heritage List for England should be updated to reflect the current use of these buildings in order to ensure that minority faith traditions begin to be reflected in the recording of the heritage of England.

According to our interviewee, the London centre in Rutland Square has special significance for Bahá'ís in Britain. It is the seat of the National Spiritual Assembly 'the National Bahá'í Centre you could say, it's not just the administrative centre of the Bahá'í faith of the United Kingdom, but it also has a spiritual significance as well'. It is also significant in that 'it was from here that the funeral cortege of Shoghi Effendi left. So in many ways it's very precious to us'. Shoghi Effendi is buried in London which also means that his burial place is 'the most special or sacred or spiritual focal point for the Bahá'ís of the world in relation to London'.

Concerning the Clifton Guest House with its association with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, one of the central figures of the Faith, once it has been fully renovated and has been officially opened, it will hold an even greater meaning for the

worldwide Bahá'í community. Indeed, while visiting this guest house 'Abdu'l-Bahá is known to have blessed each room and promised that it would become a centre of peace and rest for pilgrims from both the East and the West.

Finally, the resting place of Shoghi Effendi is the most sacred spot in England for the entire Bahá'í world community. With regard to the Guardian's Resting Place, Shoghi Effendi was not only the grandson of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, but more importantly he was the only individual to be appointed as its Guardian. For this reason, this site is uniquely important to Bahá'ís all over the world with thousands of visitors each year.

All three locations are therefore of particular significance to the Bahá'í community in the United Kingdom and globally. They are regarded as heritage sites by the millions of Bahá'ís across the world.

## 8. Glossary of building terms

'House of Worship' or Mashriqu'l-Adhkár - the main Bahá'í place of worship. None exists in the UK.

Bahá'í centre or Ḥaḏíratu'l-Quds (Arabic, sacred fold) - the heart and home of a Bahá'í community, the seat of the national governing body known as the National Spiritual Assembly, and an administrative centre. Also used for worship. There are regional/local Ḥaḏíratu'l-Quds in addition to a national centre.

## 7. Appendix 1: Bahá'í Buildings in England

Name	Location	Use	Type	Rural/Urban	Listed or Not	Additional Notes	Website/Email
<b>Brighton and Hove Bahá'í Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds</b>	19 Stanford Avenue, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 6GA	Study circle groups, children's classes, junior youth groups, devotional gatherings – open to all people	Large double fronted semi-detached house	Suburban	No		<a href="http://www.brightonbahais.org.uk/contact_us/the_bahai_centre">http://www.brightonbahais.org.uk/contact_us/the_bahai_centre</a>
<b>Bristol Bahá'í Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds</b>	8 Church Road, Lawrence Hill, Bristol BS5 9JA	Historical commemorations, study circles, devotional meetings, children/junior youth classes – open to all people	Semi-detached house on street corner	Urban	No		<a href="http://www.bristolbahais.org.uk/about.html">http://www.bristolbahais.org.uk/about.html</a>
<b>Former Clifton Guest House</b>	Flat number 2, at 17 Royal York Crescent, Bristol, BS8 4JY	Aim to develop it as a cross between a museum and a place of worship	Construction of terrace, reputed to be the longest terrace in Europe, started in 1791 and in 1820.	Suburban	A Grade II* listed terrace of 46 houses (most of which are divided into flats)  List entry number: 1219600	Former Clifton Guest House, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed on two occasions [1911 and 1913].	<a href="http://www.bristolbahais.org.uk/about.html">http://www.bristolbahais.org.uk/about.html</a> ; <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_York_Crescent">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_York_Crescent</a>

<b>Liverpool Bahá'í Hazíratu'l-Quds</b>	3 Langdale Road Wavertree Liverpool L15 3LA		Semi-detached house	Urban	No		<a href="http://www.liverpoolbahais.org.uk">http://www.liverpoolbahais.org.uk</a>  <a href="mailto:info@liverpoolbahais.org.uk">info@liverpoolbahais.org.uk</a>
<b>Shoghi Effendi's burial ground</b>	New Southgate Cemetery, London, N11 1JJ	Resting place of Shoghi Effendi and special place of prayer for Bahá'ís from all over the world.	Shrine, memorial garden	Urban	No	Shoghi Effendi passed away in London in 1957, and is buried at the New Southgate cemetery.	<a href="http://www.bahai.org.uk/re/sources/locations">http://www.bahai.org.uk/re/sources/locations</a>
<b>UK National Bahá'í Centre or National Hazíratu'l-Quds</b>	27 Rutland Gate, London SW7 1PD	-Seat of the National Spiritual Assembly, the community's national governing council; -National Assembly's administrative offices -Meetings arranged by Bahá'í agencies and by other organisations -Devotional gatherings -Book Shop		Urban	Yes Grade II listed  List entry Number: 12 35363  27-42, RUTLAND GATE, 23 AND 25, RUTLAND GATE	Purchased in 1954, formerly housing a hostel funded by a charity called the Actor's Orphanage Fund, which took care of destitute children of actors and actresses.	<a href="http://www.bahai.org.uk/re/sources/locations">http://www.bahai.org.uk/re/sources/locations</a>





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## 9. Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Image from <https://bahaihistoryuk.wordpress.com/2012/11/20/dorothy-ferraby-1904-1994/>; used with permission of National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom. (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bahai.org.uk/the-bah-faith/central-figures> (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá%27%C3%AD\\_Faith#/media/File:'Abdu'l-Bahá\\_portrait.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá%27%C3%AD_Faith#/media/File:'Abdu'l-Bahá_portrait.jpg) (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bahai.org.uk/the-bah-faith/the-bah-teachings> (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bahai.org.uk/the-bah-faith/uk-bah-history> (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e2/Shoghi\\_Efandi.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e2/Shoghi_Efandi.jpg) (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>10</sup> The UK Bahá'í Histories Project is collecting the stories of individual Bahá'ís who currently live in the UK, or have lived here in the past (<https://bahaihistoryuk.wordpress.com>) (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bahai.org.uk/the-bah-faith/history/early-british-bahs> (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.bahai.org.uk/the-bah-faith/history/early-british-bahs> (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.bahai.org.uk/the-bah-faith/history/1920s-1930s> (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.bahai.org.uk/the-bah-faith/history/1920s-1930s> (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.bahai.org/action/devotional-life/mashriqul-adhkar> (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.bahai.org/action/devotional-life/mashriqul-adhkar> (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>19</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá%27%C3%AD\\_House\\_of\\_Worship#/media/File:Baha%27i\\_House\\_of\\_Worship,\\_Kampala,\\_Uganda.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá%27%C3%AD_House_of_Worship#/media/File:Baha%27i_House_of_Worship,_Kampala,_Uganda.jpg) (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>20</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá%27%C3%AD\\_House\\_of\\_Worship](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá%27%C3%AD_House_of_Worship) (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>21</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá%27%C3%AD\\_House\\_of\\_Worship#/media/File:Bahai\\_temple\\_sydney.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahá%27%C3%AD_House_of_Worship#/media/File:Bahai_temple_sydney.jpg) (accessed 29/07/16)

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

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- 23 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/datablog/interactive/2012/dec/11/census-religion> (accessed 29/07/16)
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- 25 <http://www.momen.org/relstud/uk.htm#inst> (accessed 4/8/16)
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- 32 <http://www.bristolpost.co.uk/why-baha-i-religious-leaders-want-to-restore-bristol-flat-back-to-1913-and-create-visitors-centre/story-29581293-detail/story.html> (accessed 4/8/16)
- 33 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/datablog/interactive/2012/dec/11/census-religion> (accessed 29/07/16)
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