

# Building Zoroastrianism in England Project Number 7078

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**Zoroastrian House**  
**Former Art Deco-style Grosvenor Cinema, Rayners Lane, North London**  
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# **Building Zoroastrianism in England: executive summary**

## **Overview**

The aim of this research was to provide Historic England (HE) with information about buildings that Zoroastrians 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 Zoroastrian buildings and how many are there?
- What kinds of buildings do Zoroastrian communities use and what do they use them for?
- What is the value of these buildings to the communities and individuals?

### ***Where are Zoroastrian buildings and how many are there?***

Overall, we identified 4 Zoroastrian buildings from our desk-based mapping exercise and interview (see Appendix 1). We have included the Zoroastrian Burial Ground in Brookwood Cemetery and the Farohar sculpture at Vekateshwara Balaji Temple. To the best of our knowledge, this is the total amount of buildings that are owned or rented long-term by Zoroastrian communities in England. We visited the Zoroastrian Centre in the former art deco Grosvenor Cinema in Rayners Lane. An additional centre is opening in 2018, in Feltham in a former office block.

### ***What kinds of buildings do Zoroastrians communities use and what do they use them for?***

The formal place of worship for 'Zoroastrians is called a 'fire temple'. This is the structure that houses a consecrated fire, but sometimes also an unconsecrated fire. Most include an audience or assembly hall for communal worship and general gathering, 'a place for washing and performing kusti prayers, a prayer room that has access to the fire. The fire itself is placed on a square plinth, known as a takht, or "throne", which may be enclosed. The fire sanctuary is called the gombad' (Rose 2011: 132).

There is no fire temple in the UK that houses a consecrated fire, (the most sacred grade of fire that is kept alight continually). An unconsecrated fire is found at the Zoroastrian Centre, Rayners Lane Harrow. Similarly, the new temple in Feltham will not have a fully consecrated fire but will have a prayer room and inner sanctum for an unconsecrated fire.

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

- As a focus for the Zoroastrian community to meet and worship
- For carrying out life cycle rituals

# Building Zoroastrianism 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**

## **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 Zoroastrian buildings and how many are there?
2. What kinds of buildings do Zoroastrian 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 Zoroastrianism in England

#### 3.1 A history of Zoroastrianism and its key beliefs, teachings and practices

Zoroastrianism is the name given to religion of the Iranian prophet Zarathushtra – or Zoroaster. He received a vision from ‘Ahura Mazdā, the Wise Lord, who appointed him to preach the truth’.<sup>1</sup> Zoroaster faced opposition to his teaching by both civil and religious authorities. As Deboo writes:

Although historians contest the date of Zarathushtra’s life (some at 1,600 BCE, others 500BCE), there is more general agreement that he was from the River Oxus region, currently North Eastern Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The main body of Zoroastrian scripture is known as the Avesta, of which the *Gathas* are attributed to Zarathushtra. They are metrical compositions, similar to the Rig Veda [the earliest text attributed to Hinduism] (2016: 170).

Zoroastrians believe in one creator God creator called Ahura Mazdā and that while this ‘good’ deity is positive creative energy, it stands in opposition to ‘evil’ destructive energy known as Angra Mainyu: as Hinnells writes ‘God...is the eternal, wholly good creator...(and there is) a wholly independent source of evil’ (1996: 8).

Individuals can keep chaos and evil at bay by constantly performing Humata, Hukhta, Huvarshta (good thoughts, good words, good deeds) and it is a person’s duty to choose these over evil. As Luhrmann tells us ‘The central story of the religion is that the human individual participates in a battle between good and evil in which his own freely chosen actions determine the outcome. It is usually accepted that God will ultimately win this cosmic war but only through human initiative’ (2006: 152).

The central text of Zoroastrianism is the Avesta, which has five parts:

Its religious core is a collection of songs or hymns, the Gāthās, thought to be in the main the very words of Zoroaster. They form a middle section of the chief liturgical part of the canon, the Yasna, which contains the rite of the preparation and sacrifice of haoma. The Visperad is a lesser liturgical scripture, containing homage to a number of Zoroastrian spiritual leaders. The Vendidad, or Vidēvdāt, is the main source for Zoroastrian law, both ritual and civil. [The Vendidad also gives the early geography of the Avestan lands together with an account of the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/658060/Zoroaster> (accessed 26 July 2016)

perfect creation of countries by Ahura Mazdā and the penetration of evil. It also includes the story of how Yima (the Zoroastrian Noah) saved the creation from being destroyed by evil]. The Yashts are 21 hymns, rich in myth, to various yazatas [an adorable being worthy of worship] and ancient heroes. The Khorda Avesta (or Minor Avesta) has short extracts from the entire Avesta including] hymns, and prayers for specific occasions [including daily worship].<sup>2</sup>

The Avesta was originally transmitted orally and written down around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Sections of it were destroyed following the conquest of Iran by Alexander. Following the toppling of the Seleucid Greeks, the lost Avesta was re-collated. By the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE the Avesta had been codified into 21 volumes divided into 3 sections (good thoughts, good words and good deeds) and covered religion, creation, cosmology, science, medicine and law. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century only a tenth of the 21 volumes of the Avesta existed, because of destruction of Zoroastrian texts following the Arab conquest of Iran in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE and the persecution by other groups during the last millennium.

Both water (Aban) and fire (Atar) are associated with purity and are involved in purification rituals that form the basis of Zoroastrian religious practice and both are present in the fire temple (dar-e mehr (Persian) or agiyari (Gujarati)), with Zoroastrians typically praying in the presence of fire. Both water and fire are also vulnerable to pollution, which means that rituals involving either have to be carried out under conditions of strict purity. Thus, the mouth and nose must be covered by a mask when carrying out rituals.

Zoroastrians wear a Sudreh (sacred shirt known as the garment of the good mind) and a Kusti (sacred thread known as the advantageous path finder) – worn as a belt, collectively known as the ‘armour of faith’ and a protector against evil (Hinnells, 1996: 22). Zoroastrians pray up to five times daily in the direction of the sun. Traditionally when someone dies their body is laid out in a Tower of Silence (dokhma/daxma), a circular roofless structure, where the body is dried by the hot sun rays and eaten by vultures. Since there are no vultures and often the sun is not shining thus there is no Tower of Silence in England and many Zoroastrians are instead cremated or buried in Brookwood Cemetery, Woking (see Box 2).

Rose (2011) explains that in the diaspora, most Zoroastrian practice is located in the family and the home and there is a focus on daily prayers and Jashans (ceremonies of praise and thanksgiving):

there is no specific day of worship in their liturgical calendar [which] means that nowadays most Zoroastrians only congregate for seasonal festivals, to celebrate a life-cycle ritual of one of their members, or for an educational program. Many groups try to meet more frequently...and there may be a regular program of study classes for adults and children on the weekend or in the evenings (2011: 123).

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/45645/Avesta> (accessed 26 July 2016)

However, as Hinnells points out, in the diaspora in Britain, Zoroastrians favour communal worship and religious practice in a way that is less common in India, for instance, where people are more content to visit temples alone (1996: 266).<sup>3</sup> He suggests that

living as a scattered minority in Britain Zoroastrians have different needs: to congregate together and through those communal meetings to give and receive mutual support, to establish and reaffirm social networks that will help in marriage, and to be in a group where they can be themselves without the need for explanation (1996: 266-267).

Zoroastrianism became the official religion of the Median and Persian Empire in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE but by the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE the imperial phase of Zoroastrianism was over following the Arab conquest of Iran. Islam was the religion of the Arab conquerors and Zoroastrianism was reduced to a 'religion of a tiny, oppressed, and persecuted minority' (Hinnells 1996: 3). In the 10<sup>th</sup> century a base was founded in Gujarat, India, by a group of Zoroastrian religious refugees from Iran. Their descendants in India are known as Parsis - literally meaning 'those who came from Persia', relating to the fact that they 'are descended from Persian Zoroastrians who immigrated to India to avoid religious persecution by the Muslims'<sup>4</sup>. They mainly settled in South Gujarat and Bombay (Mumbai) and later became a particularly important group in business and politics under British colonial rule. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century they began to seek new places for business including in China, Singapore, East Africa, Aden and Britain (1996: 5) and by 1861 there were enough Parsis in Britain to establish a formal association – The Religious Funds of the Zarathushtrians of Europe, known today as the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe Incorporated (ZTFE) - 'making this the oldest of the formally constituted South Asian communities in Britain' (Hinnells 1996: viii).

There are two types of Zoroastrian community present in Britain today. The first of these are the Parsis that constitute the majority of the Zoroastrian community and the remainder are the Iranian Zoroastrians (Hinnells 1996). The Zoroastrian community in England and Wales today numbers 4,105 according to the 2011 census<sup>5</sup> and is made up by people from urban and rural India, Pakistan, East Africa, Aden, Iranian Zoroastrians and those that were born in Britain. While Hinnells, writing in 1996, tells us that British Zoroastrians probably constitute the largest community outside of Iran and the Indian sub-continent, this is no longer true with the USA and Canada having more Zoroastrians than the UK. As with the Jain and Hindu communities in Britain many settled first in East Africa and then came to Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. Iranian Zoroastrians also came to Britain from Iran after the Iranian revolution in 1979.

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<sup>3</sup> The Romans brought an offshoot of Zoroastrianism to England and in the 1970s a Mithraic temple was found in London ([http://zanc.org/intro\\_to\\_z.html](http://zanc.org/intro_to_z.html) accessed 26 July 2016)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/444672/Parsi> (accessed 26 July 2016)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/datablog/interactive/2012/dec/11/census-religion> (accessed 26 July 2016)

## 3.2 Zoroastrian organisations and buildings in England

### 3.2.1 The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe Incorporated

In 1861, 'The Religious Funds of the Zarathushtrians of Europe', was established near Paddington Station, London. In 1909, it was incorporated and changed its name to 'The Incorporated Parsee Association of Europe'. In 1971 it was changed to 'Zoroastrian Association of Europe Incorporated'. Since 1979, it is known as the 'Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe Incorporated (ZTFE). The ZTFE initially did not have its own building although plans to establish a 'house of prayer' existed from the beginning (Hinnells 1996: 109). The association did make occasional use of Sir Ratan J. Tata's (a famous Parsi industrialist) mansion, York House,<sup>6</sup> in Twickenham (1996: 117) for its meetings (see Box 1).

#### ***Box 1: York House, Twickenham***

##### **York House, Twickenham**

York House has 3 listing entries (fountain, Grade II, List Entry Number: 1250324; York House, garden walls wrought-iron gates and boundary walls along Sion Road on the east side and Riverside on the south, Grade II\* List entry Number: 1263365; York House , Grade II, List Entry Number: 1001548).



© *Johnathan Cardy*<sup>7</sup>

'Built in the 17th century (but added to in subsequent centuries), this fine house stands at the eastern end of a drive which is entered at the junction of Richmond Road and Church Street. It was acquired by the Twickenham Borough Council in 1924 and since 1965 it has been the municipal offices of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, housing the Mayor's parlour, committee rooms and two public halls. By 1990

<sup>6</sup><http://www.twickenham-museum.org.uk/detail.asp?ContentID=55> (accessed 26 July 2016)

<sup>7</sup>Jonathan Cardy (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>), (accessed 26 July 2016)

most of the council staff had been transferred to the new Civic Centre next door and major restoration and renovation work was carried out in York House.’

It was acquired in 1906 ‘by its last private occupier, Sir Ratan J. Tata, the Indian merchant Prince who was knighted in 1916. A wealthy industrialist and director of many companies, [Sir Ratan J. Tata] too was frequently absent from his Twickenham house, but he is still fondly remembered by some of the older inhabitants of the borough who attended the children’s parties which he gave there [and for his philanthropic activities.] He is also remembered as the installer of the large Italianate fountain with its flamboyant statuary which dominates the riverside portion of the garden. After his death in 1918, his widow, [Lady Navazbai R. Tata] resided there until 1922.’<sup>89</sup>

There were concerns from religious authorities back in Bombay that the British Parsis intended to set up a fully consecrated temple and the authorities back in India had to be assured that this was not the case, as it raised concerns about the ‘questionable religious practices of the diaspora communities who, it was feared, were taking unauthorised steps’ (Hinnells 1996: 109). Early on, Parsis arranged to create a cemetery in London, buying a plot at Brookwood cemetery, since the sailing ships took too long to reach Bombay and they could not be buried in Christian graveyards (see Box 2). The dead are traditionally laid out in the open air to be dried by the hot sun rays and eaten by vultures in Towers of Silence but that was not feasible in England.

***Box 2: Brookwood Cemetery: The Zoroastrian Burial Ground and the Wadia and the Tata Mausolea***

**Brookwood Cemetery: The Zoroastrian Burial Ground and the Wadia and Tata Mausolea**

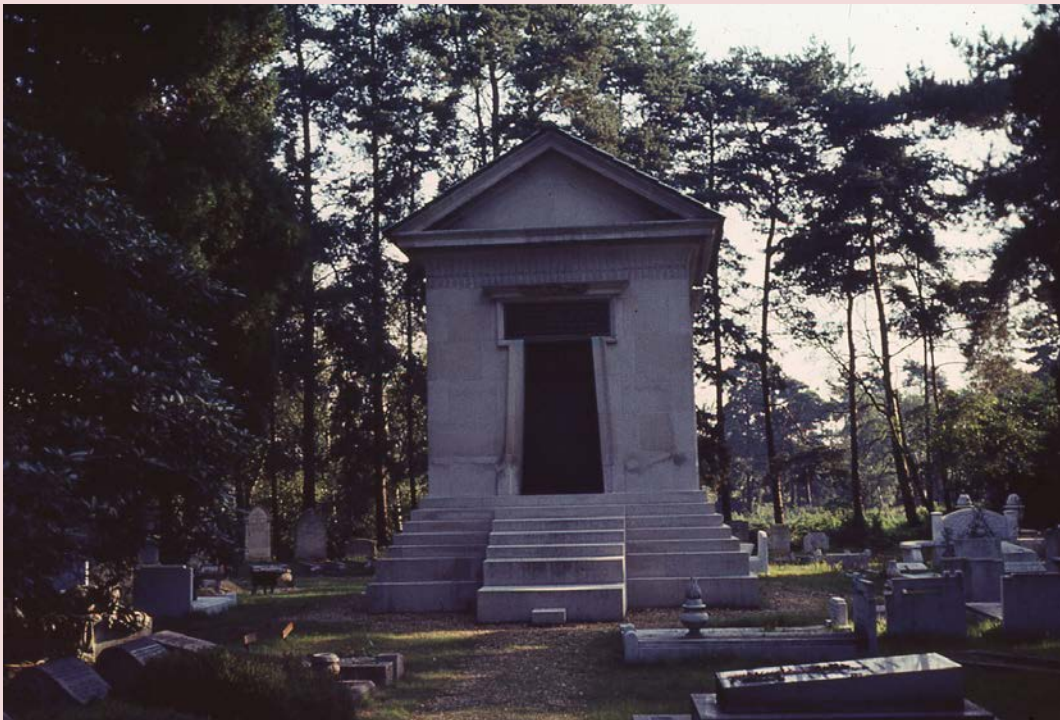
In 1862 the Zoroastrian community in England acquired a burial area in the cemetery at Brookwood near Woking. A new bungli (chapel) for prayer and the performance of purification rituals was opened at the cemetery in 1901, following the re-designing of the cemetery by Sir George Birdwood. He used the mausoleum of Nowroji Nusserwanji Wadia CIE as the central axis and focal point, which was designed on the mausoleum of Cyrus the Great in Pasargadae, Iran, the capital of the Achaemenid Empire under Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire. Cyrus the Great is also known as ‘Cyrus the Anointed’ in Isaiah II of the Jewish scriptures, and his decree of religious freedom in the Persian Empire, known as the ‘Cyrus Cylinder’ is at the British Museum. Rose tells us that ‘the specifically Persian features of the cemetery were introduced by the Orientalist and polymath Sir George Birdwood’ (2013: 225).

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.richmond.gov.uk/local\\_history\\_york\\_house.pdf](http://www.richmond.gov.uk/local_history_york_house.pdf) (accessed 26 July 2016)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



**Inscription on Mausoleum of Nowroji Nusserwanji Wadia CIE**  
**© The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE)**



**Mausoleum of Nowroji Nusserwanji Wadia CIE**  
**© The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE)**

The cost of the re-designing and landscaping of the cemetery was donated by a well-known philanthropist Mrs Jerbai N Wadia, in the memory of her husband Nowroji Nusserwanji Wadia CIE who was a mill magnet. The new 'chapel' was known as the 'Wadia Bungli' and replaced a previous bungli, where the last rites were conducted for deceased Parsi and Irani Zoroastrians. In 1978 the well-known Iranian philanthropists Arbab Rustam Guiv and the Zartoshty Brothers donated funds to build a side extension



to incorporate toilets and a Mobed's changing room. Another extension was built in 1997 and the original roof replaced in 2011.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ztfe.com/cgi-bin/MainPage.cgi?section=Events> (accessed 26 July 2016)



The Wadia Bungli  
© The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE)

The burial ground is best known for the mausoleum of Nowroji Nusserwanji Wadia CIE, which forms the central axis and the three mausolea for members of the Tata family, which are at the periphery and 'stand in a row, raised on a terrace, with that of Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata in the centre.'<sup>11</sup>



**Tata Mausolea**  
© Robert Freidus<sup>12</sup>

The middle mausoleum is for Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata (1839-1904), born into a family of Parsi priests in Navsari, Gujarat in 1839. Jamsetji passed away in Germany and his body was brought to Brookwood. He is known as the father of the industrial revolution in India. The building is Achaemenid Persian in character, 'with decorative features such as the rosettes and a winged sun on the frieze and gates made of bronze.'<sup>13</sup>

The mausoleum to the right, was built for Sir Ratan J. Tata, Jamsetji's younger son (1871-1918).<sup>14</sup>

The most elaborate mausoleum is the one to the left, built for Jamsetji's older son, Sir Dorabji J. Tata (1859-1932). It 'is the most flamboyant of the three buildings'. The style combines Achaemenid Persian and Classical features and has, in addition to elaborate bronze work, polychromatic ceramic plaques to either side of the entrance depicting Median (Kurd) and Persian body guards on sentry duty bearing spears.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup>[http://www.mmtrust.org.uk/mausolea/view/156/Tata\\_Jamsetji\\_Nusserwanji\\_Mausoleum](http://www.mmtrust.org.uk/mausolea/view/156/Tata_Jamsetji_Nusserwanji_Mausoleum) (accessed 26 July 2016)

<sup>12</sup><http://www.victorianweb.org/art/architecture/cemeteries/34.html> (accessed 26 July 2016)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup>[http://www.mmtrust.org.uk/mausolea/view/367/Tata\\_Ratan\\_Mausoleum](http://www.mmtrust.org.uk/mausolea/view/367/Tata_Ratan_Mausoleum) (accessed 26 July 2016)

<sup>15</sup>[http://www.mmtrust.org.uk/mausolea/view/366/Tata\\_Dorabji\\_Mausoleum](http://www.mmtrust.org.uk/mausolea/view/366/Tata_Dorabji_Mausoleum) (accessed 26 July 2016)



**Ceramic Plaques at the entrance to the Mausoleum of, Sir Dorabji J. Tata**  
**Photos: author's own**

Our interviewee, Malcolm M. Deboo, current President of the ZTFE, told us that in 1861, when the ZTFE was established, 'there are only 50 of us'. The first property bought by Zoroastrians in Great Britain, however, did not belong to the 'The Religious Funds of the Zarathushtrians of Europe' but another organisation called the Parsi Social Union that was set up in 1906 to support Parsi students in the UK. It bought a property at 38 Chalmers Street in Edinburgh, known as 'Broacha House', in 1909 (today this address is student accommodation for the University of Edinburgh). The property was later sold, because the behaviour of the caretaker made it difficult for Parsi students to rent rooms, and the proceeds were donated to the ZTFE.

Hinnells tells us that (1996: 284) 'the need for a Zoroastrian centre has been a conscious priority from the inception of the association in 1861'. In 1914 officials in The Incorporated Parsee Association of Europe (renamed the Zoroastrian Trust Fund for Europe - ZTFE - in 1979; Hinnells 1996: 144) began to look for a property in London for 'offices of the Association and the provision of rooms for religious and ceremonial functions and a resting place for dead bodies prior to the funeral, for temporary accommodation of strangers who might need it' (1996: 123). They bought the lease on 168 Cromwell Road, South Kensington, London SW5, in 1920, but sold it in 1925 as it was not suitable for their needs and within 4 years they bought the freehold on 11 Russell Road, Kensington Olympia, London W14 8JA. Deboo told us that

In Russell Road there was a prayer room. There was a social room. There was a table tennis room. There was a billiard room. [In] the social room the idea was to have gatherings...to get the youngsters together, so it was like a youth club.

Then again in 1931 plans emerged to find a larger property. This took till 1969, when they bought 88 Compayne Gardens, West Hampstead, London NW6 3RU (see Box 3). Deboo told us that

When we moved to Compayne Gardens in West Hampstead it was a larger version of what was at Kensington, except the fundamental thing was that our then priest, especially one who then became a head priest, Dastur Dr Sorabji Hormusji Kutar, a veteran of the Second World War, felt that we need a proper consecrated prayer room (see Box 3).

This desire for a fully consecrated temple had also been a long time aim of the ZTFE more widely and although a prayer room (Setayash Gah) was set up in Compayne Gardens it did not house a consecrated fire. As Deboo explained:

Because a fire temple here is what we call not consecrated. In Zoroastrian fire temples in India they're only open for Zoroastrians, i.e. Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians. Here the community has never quite got round to doing it, primarily because of internal politics, of mixed faith marriages, who can access, who can come in and who cannot come in. But also more so is that you have the issue of racism if people barge in and destroy things. Things used to happen. 20 years ago we were not in the multicultural interfaith [society] as we are today, you had the National Front and all that. Also, you see, the statutory agencies like the Fire Brigade were not that sympathetic to us burning a permanent fire.

Thus, the need for a large hall for gatherings and a consecrated temple had not been met at the premises.

**Box 3: Zoroastrian House: 88 Compayne Gardens**

**Zoroastrian House: 88 Compayne Gardens**



© *The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE)*

Zoroastrian House, 88 Compayne Gardens, West Hampstead, London NW6 3RU, was used by the ZTFE from 1969 to 2004. In 2005 ZTFE relocated to the Zoroastrian Centre in Rayners Lane (see Box 6). The building was sold to a Jewish charity, which operates a Jewish nursery there. Prior to this, the building was a Catholic Convent school, from 1932.<sup>16</sup>

Zoroastrian House in Compayne Gardens had a prayer room (Setayesh Gah) within which was an inner-sanctum with floor-to-ceiling walls housing a large fire-urn and ordained with ritual implements.

Compayne Gardens was extended in 1982 but by 1990 it was becoming overcrowded. Thus, it was decided to relocate to a larger premises with a consecrated fire temple as desired by some members. Being a residential area, parking space was not sufficient and the house was not large enough any longer due to East African Parsis coming in the 1960s and Iranian Zoroastrians after the 1979 revolution, as well as following an increased interest from the youth in the community (Hinnells 2005: 401). In October 1992 'the Zoroastrian Centre New Premises Fund' was set up and in 1993 a booklet was produced called 'The Unimpeded March of the Zoroastrian Spirit into the Twenty First Century'. The idea was to purpose build a new premises and to have a fully consecrated fire temple, making it the first in the West. A separate structure would be built to house a consecrated Atash Dadgah fire that could only be visited by Zoroastrians and would also house the mobed's (priest) accommodation. Zoroastrians and members of other faiths would both be able to use another separate structure. However, there was difficulty finding a new site and in 2000 the ZTFE bought a disused cinema in Harrow, North London, where most Zoroastrians in London live, for £1,358,000 with half the sum donated by the wealthy Zartoshty Brothers.

There was a plan to include a consecrated Atash Dadgah in this new building and a report was produced with input from a high priest and religious scholars in India - 'Consecrated Atash Dadgah: the first traditionally consecrated Zoroastrian Fire Temple in the West, enthroning an ever-burning fire' (Deboo and Jila 2001; Hinnells 2005: 203; Rose 2011: 135). The report argues that 'an ever-burning, consecrated fire would receive more respect from the Zoroastrian community in London' (Rose 2011: 135). The plan received approval from Dastur Dr Firoze M Kotwal, a high priest from India, with a recommendation that 'a team of full-time *mobeds* (priests) to be employed from seminaries in India, but that if necessary *para-mobeds* (lay assistant priests) could tend the fire' (Rose 2011: 135) in case it was difficult to source full time priests in the future. In the end the obtaining statutory planning permission from Harrow Council proved to be challenging for the ZTFE to establish a consecrated Atash Dadgah in the space earmarked adjoining the Zoroastrian Centre building and instead they have an unconsecrated Atash

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol9/pp152-153> (accessed 26 July 2016)

Dagdah and the fire is ritually lit for ceremonial occasions and then allowed to naturally go out (see Box 4).



#### Box 4: Zoroastrian Fire Temple

##### Zoroastrian Fire Temple

'Fire temple' is the word used for the structure that houses a consecrated fire, but sometimes also an unconsecrated fire. Most include an audience or assembly hall for communal worship and general gathering, 'a place for washing and performing *kusti* prayers, a prayer room that has access to the fire. The fire itself is placed on a square plinth, known as a *takht*, or "throne", which may be enclosed. The fire sanctuary is called the *gombad*' (Rose 2011: 132).

'There are three "grades" of sacred fires: each one, in ancient times, corresponded with a sector of society, and each grade has a different level of holiness and ritual purity...'<sup>17</sup>

1) ***Atash Dadgah***: 'The first, and most humble grade of fire is the Atash Dadgah...This is the household fire, the fire of the householder class. It can burn in any clean place, such as a well-kept home or a Zoroastrian meeting-house...Like all sacred fires, it is treated with ritual and respect: priests who recite in front of it must wear a special face mask in order to prevent breath or spit to touch the fire: these are regarded as unclean in Zoroastrian traditions. And no one must ever blow on the fire or blow it out....'<sup>18</sup>

The Atash Dadgah comprises a single fire and can be unconsecrated, in which case it is allowed to go out after the ritual, or consecrated, in which case it must be kept burning.

2) ***Adur Aduran***: 'The next grade is the Adur Aduran, which means "fire of fires." This grade, which is connected with the warrior class, burns in fire temples. It is kept constantly burning, or at least smouldering, by a team of priests who add new wood to it five times a day....'<sup>19</sup>

It includes 4 different types of fire and is housed in a building called an atash kadeh (Iran) or agiary (India) (Rose 2011: 133)

3) ***Atash Bahram***: The third, and highest grade of fire, is called the Atash Bahram, or "fire of victory." This is the fire of kings and royalty....The rituals for its creation may take a year to work, and it must be composed of embers from a thousand and one fires, each from a different occupation of society...'<sup>20</sup>



**Burning fire (Atash Behram) in the Zoroastrian temple of Yazd, Iran, believed to have been burning since Parthian era 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, oral tradition believes it to be much older (temple built 1934)  
Photo by Adam Jones<sup>21</sup>**

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.pyracantha.com/Z/atarsh.html>(accessed 26 July 2016)

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*

<sup>21</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yazd\\_Atash\\_BHEram#/media/File:Zoroastrian\\_Fire\\_Temple,\\_Yazd.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yazd_Atash_BHEram#/media/File:Zoroastrian_Fire_Temple,_Yazd.jpg) (accessed 26 July 2016)



## Box 5: The Grosvenor Cinema

The Grosvenor Cinema (1936)



© Richard Coltman, *Modernist Britain*<sup>22</sup>

The Zoroastrian Centre is today located in the Grade II\* listed former Grosvenor Cinema, on Alexandra Avenue in Harrow, which opened in 1936 with Jean Hersholt in “The Country Doctor”. It received Grade-II listed status in 1981 and was re-listed with Grade-II\* in 1984. It is listed as ‘Ace Cinema’ (to which it changed its name in 1981), list entry Number: 1079729.

It was on the English Heritage ‘at risk’ register and features as a building that has been saved in the ‘Saving London Report’<sup>23</sup>, which tells us that the Ace Cinema is

one of London’s most striking, and least-altered, Art Deco cinemas, distinctive for the great sculptural feature in the shape of a stylised elephant’s trunk which rises over the entrance canopy. The interior retains a splendid foyer and auditorium complete with streamlined 1930s décor....it was refurbished in 2002-03 by Burrell Foley Fisher Architects as the European headquarters of the Parsee and Zoroastrian Community, retaining the original interior spaces and decorative features.<sup>24</sup>

It was designed by a London-based architect Frank Ernest Bromige LRIBA (1902-1979), whose other works include the ‘former Kingsland Empire in Dalston, the Dominion Acton (later the Acton Granada, now a bingo hall) and the Dominion Hounslow...’<sup>25</sup>

According to one source:

It is most notable for its fantastic facade, sometimes referred to as ‘the elephant’s trunk’. The auditorium had a seating capacity for 1,235, with 830 in the stalls and 405 in the circle. The stage was 44 feet deep, and there were six dressing rooms. There was a cafe located in a sunken area in the centre of the main foyer.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.modernistbritain.co.uk/post/building/Grosvenor+Cinema+Rayners+Lane/> (accessed 6 February 2018)

<sup>23</sup> <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/saving-london/saving-london.pdf/> (accessed 27 July 2016)

<sup>24</sup> <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/saving-london/saving-london.pdf/> (accessed 27 July 2016)

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.modernistbritain.co.uk/post/building/Grosvenor+Cinema+Rayners+Lane/> (accessed 26 July 2016)

<sup>26</sup> <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/11167> (accessed 26 July 2016)



**The Original Café**  
© *Late John Benzing & others.*

Another source tells us that:

The front elevation of the building is very dramatic. At the left corner, three sets of double doors provide an entrance to the foyer. These are set beneath a stepped, curved canopy. Above, the facade is formed of three curved, white-rendered bays: a central, convex-curved bay and two shorter outside ogive-curved bays. The two outside bays have full height metal-framed windows following the same ogive-curve. Within the central bay the curve of the windows is reversed, in a bold, concave curve.

The void created between the curves is filled by a stylised concrete form, likened to an elephant's head and trunk. From the roof parapet of the central bay a feature of projecting concentric curves - forming the elephant's 'head' - protrudes from the facade, descending down in an elegant curved shaped - forming the 'trunk' - to rest on the canopy below. Either side of the trunk, wide, full height metal-framed windows provide light into the building.<sup>27</sup>

In 1937 the cinema became part of Oscar Deutsch's Odeon cinema chain and was renamed the Odeon in 1941 and then the Gaumont in 1950, as part of the Rank Organisation. Then in 1964 it reverted back to the Odeon name and in 1981 reopened as the Ace Cinema, before final closure on 6 October 1986. 'In 1990 the building was converted into the Grosvenor Cine/Bar Experience nightclub, later becoming the Studio Warehouse nightclub. In 2000 the building was purchased by Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe to serve as a place and worship and European headquarters. The building has since been restored and renovated.'<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.modernistbritain.co.uk/post/building/Grosvenor+Cinema+Rayners+Lane/>

(accessed 26 July 2016)

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*

## **Box 6: The Zoroastrian Centre, Rayners Lane, Harrow**

### **The Zoroastrian Centre, Rayners Lane, Harrow**

#### ***A new location***

By 1990 the search for a larger new property nearer to public transport links had begun. The 3 storied Victorian terrace house they had been in since 1969, at 88 Compayne Gardens, was no longer big enough and there had been some complaints about noise and parking. So the search began for a much larger property nearer to public transport. Deboo told us that all the money was raised from within the community. It was not desirable for one managing committee to take a mortgage as they are only in elected for a 3 year term, neither was it appropriate to seek grants from central or local government because this is a Zoroastrian place of worship, and used mainly by Zoroastrians, so it would not be 'ethical' to use taxpayer's money in this way. Deboo explained that

In the 1990s when we started fundraising it took us up to about [the year] 2000 to get enough money. By that time of course property prices were beginning to escalate. The other factor was getting places for community centres was not easy because as you know councils earmark buildings for schools, hospitals etc, but community centres are a no-no. So it was very difficult to find a suitable place. Also at the same time we did not want the new centre to be way out of London....fortunately this place came along...

[It is] 'Grade II\*', which is very much verging on Grade I. If you go downstairs the auditorium ... virtually the whole ...downstairs including the ceiling and the projector room and everything is all Listed.'...We've got pillars that are Listed, we've got mirrors that are Listed....Cream tea was served in the pit in the old days, so the pit is Listed. We wanted to level it off by putting a transparent floor over it, so it would be easier for our senior citizens, but English Heritage refused....We opted to work together with English Heritage. It was initially not easy but in the end it was beneficial. And of course at the end of the day English Heritage are pleased and so was the local community, because the listed building had been preserved.'



**Ritual taking place during funeral rites on 'main stage',  
photo taken from balcony seats  
Photo: author's own**

### ***Objections and challenges***

According to the English Heritage 'Saving London' report:

Cinemas with fine interiors need sensitive uses that can utilise large principal spaces without the need for intensive subdivision. This is an inspirational example of the creative reuse of a fine cinema, whose auditorium now provides a splendid setting for colourful and vibrant religious and cultural celebrations.<sup>29</sup>

Deboo explained that many in the community were not keen about taking on this building and preferred to look for a site where they could purpose build a temple and community centre:

When the community saw the state of the building, it was not like what you see today, it was a dingy place, totally stinking with alcohol, the carpets you could stick to, it was smelly with smoke. We're avid non-smokers. We had difficulty convincing the community to invest in it. Of course today it's different ...and...We're, opposite a London Underground Station and bus stops, car parking space, close to the motorway and not far from Heathrow. That way it's the ideal location. Also, neighbours don't complain....They make more racket than we do, the pubs or the nightclubs. Being a former cinema the auditorium is virtually soundproof.

Today the local community are pleased that the building is now conserved and is no longer a

<sup>29</sup><https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/saving-london/saving-london.pdf/> (accessed 27 July 2016)

night club. Moreover, the Zoroastrian Centre also contributes to the neighbourhood 'for example, we use a local printers, we use the local shops and a local bakers, banks. It sustains employment, as such.'

The building was bought in 2000 and the Zoroastrian Centre was inaugurated on the opening day of the Eight World Zoroastrian Congress in June 2005 after it had been totally renovated. However, Deboo explained that

When it came to the planning issue we had two big hurdles: English Heritage; and Harrow Council. Initially it was but the relationship improved and ZTFE employed architects recommended by English Heritage for the conservation of Grade II\* listed buildings...English Heritage were happy because our building is now included in English Heritage books as one of the few art deco buildings of the period that are off the endangered list of the period.

When we got this building we just got the keys, no plans, no drawings, nothing, everything had to be made up from scratch and our architects had to re-do everything. Fortunately, we were assisted by local residents who were members of the cinematographic society and had kept taken photos of the building over the years. When we purchased the building, it had holes in the ceilings, water was coming in when work commenced on the lift shaft to install a lift, because the drains were broken. We wanted to put a lift to the projector room which is the prayer room so it would be easily accessible for ours senior citizens. The drains were repaired and also the entire roof. Literally so many things happened.'



© *The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (ZTFE)*

One area of contestation with English Heritage was about the signage at the front of the building announcing 'Zoroastrian Centre'. However, ZTFE were able to show the photos of the original cinema, which were obtained from the local cinematographic society and to the original drawing for the cinema that included signage and to make a successful case on the basis of that evidence.







**Photos inside the Zoroastrian Centre  
© Late John Benzing & others.**

### ***The 'Fire Temple'***

Within this building much has been left as it was originally built but one room that has received a makeover is the former projector room which now houses the prayer room (Satayesh Gah) and the unconsecrated Atash Dadgah. As Deboo explained:

What you see...is an actual inner room where the sacred fire is housed in a Zoroastrian fire temple, known as the Atash Aduran (church grade) or the Atash Dadgah (chapel grade). The sacred fire for an Atash Behram (cathedral grade) will be housed in a much larger room because it's an Atash Behram....The role of fire in Zoroastrianism is initially seen as divine energy, it's the seventh creation of Ahura Mazda...Without fire we cannot live. The Zoroastrians see the actual fire in the temple as a universal protector. The consecrated fire is seen by Zoroastrians as an actual living entity, because it is ritually fed daily with wood by the priest who looks after the fire. The oldest Zoroastrian temple fires are burning in Yazd, Iran, which are over 2500 years old, while the oldest fire in India is in Udvada, a sleepy village about two hours by train or car north of Mumbai, consecrated by the first generation of Zoroastrian religious refugees...The unconsecrated fire at the Zoroastrian Centre is ritually lit daily in the evening since ZTFE has employed full time priest from India in 2014...Last August the fire was lit for 11 days 24/7 when we had the 10 day remembrance prayers for the departed souls and when we celebrated New Year on the 11<sup>th</sup> day, which was the first time in the history of the UK Zoroastrian community. More wood would be required, but just now the wood used is enough for it to go off after the ceremony is done. The role of fire in a fire temple in Zoroastrianism is...seen as a conduit to communicate between the devotee and the creator God.



**Atash Dagdah**  
© *Late John Benzing*

### **3.3.2 World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO)**

A more recently formed Zoroastrian society is the World Zoroastrian Organization (WZO) founded in England in 1980 Shahpur F. Captain, the then President of the ZTFE, along with the members of the ZTFE Committee and a few notable Zoroastrians from outside of UK. The first meeting of the WZO Committee was held on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1980 at Zoroastrian House followed by a Jashan Ceremony. The WZO operated from Zoroastrian House at 88 Compayne Gardens, West Hampstead, and all its files and records were stored at there with the Committee meeting monthly. In 1984, after the demise of the High Priest, Dr. S.H.Kutar, some internal divisions led to the WZO leaving Zoroastrian House and its records and files were removed to the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Rumi Sethna in Purley, Surrey. The officials of the WZO worked from home for many years, but in 1990 a small place was purchased as an office, a former florists' shop, which was bought for around £40,000.<sup>30</sup>

The WZO was set up to assist Zoroastrians fleeing from Iran after the 1979 revolution and today it also supports Parsis, including in India (Melton and Baumann 2010: 3145). Thus, it has a different emphasis in terms of its focus and activities to the ZTFE, in that it is a worldwide body with an emphasis on

<sup>30</sup> My thanks to Mr Darayus M. Motivala for these details.

fund raising, giving charity and organising seminars. By contrast the ZTFE focuses more closely on the national Zoroastrian community in Britain and its religious needs. It is also reported that the WZO is more liberal about areas of contestation such as inter-faith marriages. Traditionally it has been desirable for Zoroastrians to only marry other Zoroastrians but this has become more difficult due to the fact that they have had to settle in countries with tiny Zoroastrian populations. Thus, there is a danger that the community may die out altogether in some settings. The ZTFE has been stricter about this than the WZO, which has no restrictions upon who can come into a temple and be in the presence of the sacred fire, as well as upon who can marry and convert to Zoroastrianism.

The WZO currently has its offices in London in a former shop, 135 Tennyson Road South Norwood London SE25 5NF, and the UK based committee meets once a month. Many WZO members tend also to be members of the ZTFE since it the national body and attend the Zoroastrian Centre religious ceremonies also take place. The WZO organises an annual seminar in London and occasionally regional seminars. However, it has recently purchased a new property in Feltham which will open in 2018, providing a community centre as well as religious facilities. This will make it the second fire temple in the UK (see Box 7).

### ***Box 7: World Zoroastrian House, Bridge House, Feltham***

#### **World Zoroastrian House Bridge House, Feltham**

The WZO has its headquarters in London in a former shop, in Norwood London, which was purchased in the early 1990s. Prior to that the WZO met in people's houses. In order to co-ordinate activities more effectively, to have a place to hold meetings and for storage space the Norwood property was purchased. However, this premises was not large enough to serve as a community centre nor to host any religious activities. A sizable donation of £500,000 in April 2013 meant that the WZO could actively look for a new property to house their office and this was followed by a further donation of £1 million from the Firuz Madon Foundation in 2014. After looking at a large number of properties, a property in Feltham – Bridge House - was selected and purchased for £1.8 million:

It is in a leafy area, easily accessible from a mainline station and buses. It is a three storied building, with parking area for 22 cars and a public car park next door. The property is currently occupied by a tenant (a school in fact) to generate income whilst we decide on our priorities for the refurbishments. Their lease is until the end of August next year after which WZO will start its refurbishment programme. Our plan is to use half the floor space and lease the remainder to short-term tenants to cover running cost. Subject to the necessary funds being received, we shall have a Banqueting / Seminar Hall with AV facilities a Setayesh Gah [prayer room], a fully equipped kitchen, a library, an administrative office and a meeting room. We shall install a lift and make it fully accessible for people with mobility problems...WZO anticipates that the refurbishment programme will cost in the region of £750,000 (Hamazor 2015: 4).

The WZO plan to open the centre sometime in 2018 and it will serve as a community centre, hosting seminars and social-cultural events, and will be 'open to all Zoroastrians and their families, irrespective of whether they were born into the religion or have chosen to take this path and also to non-Zoroastrians' (Hamazor 2015: 4). It will also have a prayer room with an

unconsecrated Atash Dagdah, as in the Rayners Lane temple (see Box 5).



**Bridge House, Feltham**  
© *World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO)*

According to WZO secretary Darayus Motivala: 'In the 35 years we've been operating most of our work has been done from members' homes so it will be nice to have a community centre at last.'<sup>31</sup>

### 3.3.3 Other Zoroastrian associations and their buildings

There are a few other Zoroastrian associations in England but they do not appear to have their own premises. These include the North London Zoroastrian Association set up in 1982, Harrow Zoroastrian Group, the Zoroastrians of South London and the North West Zoroastrian Community (NWZC) set up in Manchester 1987.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, it is worth mentioning the sculpture of a *Farohar* (the best known symbol of Zoroastrianism) that has been established on 'Parsi Hill' outside the Hindu Vekateshwara Balaji Temple in Tividale, West Midlands (see Box 8). As an interfaith gesture the Balaji Temple plans to establish 7 hills outside the

<sup>31</sup><http://www.getwestlondon.co.uk/news/west-london-news/zoroastrian-hq-open-feltham-9794623>; <http://www.zoroastrianstories.org/ten-stories/darayus-and-arnavaz-motivala> (accessed 26 July 2016)

<sup>32</sup><http://www.nwzc.org.uk/#section-about> (accessed 26 July 2016)

temple to symbolize different faiths. It does not appear though that this location is used by Zoroastrians for ritual purposes.

## **Box 8: Parsi Hill**

### **Parsi Hill**

According to the website of the Hindu Vekateshwara Balaji Temple in Tividale, West Midlands:

In 2013 the Zoroastrian Parsi Hill was inaugurated and a Farohar was unveiled by Lord Karan Bilimoria and Kashmira Cooke, the sister of the rock star Freddie Mercury. The sculpture was constructed by Black Country artist Luke Perry and made from Tata Steel.<sup>33</sup>

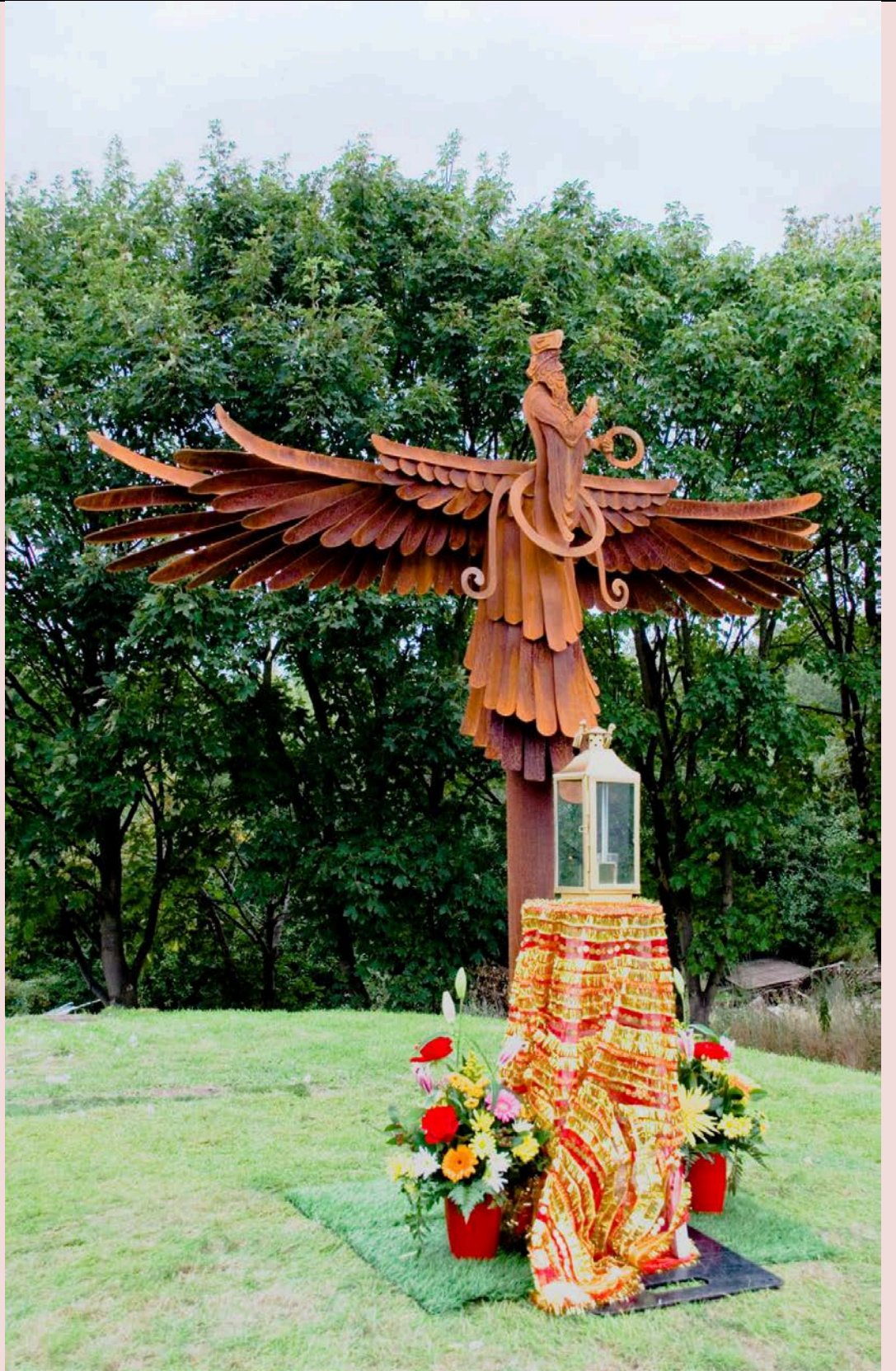
According to the ZTFE annual report:

On September 28th 2013 over 350 Zoroastrians travelled from across the UK to the Balaji temple & were joined by Hindus & people from other faiths to make it a very special day at the temple. The giant 25 acre site is the second biggest Hindu site in Britain & on Saturday one of the man made hills was dedicated to the Zoroastrian (Parsi) faith.



**The Farohar on Parsi Hill**  
**Photo: author's own**

<sup>33</sup><http://www.venkateswara.org.uk/ViewDetailedTempleNews.aspx?data=M25OpAHiGrt1VZT hbZHVI6wnkolkdGZYLgl9As3NiqSL2f1UNkSJ%2fNhi9SD6PcNC> (accessed 26 July 2016)



The Farohar  
© Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple





## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction

*It is inevitable that Zoroastrianism will be different in some ways in Britain from how it is in the old centuries... The obvious difference... is the lack of material provision – no full-time professional priesthood, no fully pure consecrated temple, and no Tower of Silence (Hinnells 1996: 261).*

Zoroastrianism in England is a long way from its roots in Persia and as the above quotation suggests its continuing existence has meant adaptation and compromise. Most Zoroastrians in England are known as Parsis and are from the Indian subcontinent but of Iranian ethnicity, themselves or their ancestors having emigrated from South Asia (India and Pakistan) and East Africa. Others are Iranian Zoroastrians, coming to England directly from Iran to escape persecution mainly since the Iranian revolution in 1979.

### 4.2 Selecting buildings

The Zoroastrian community in England and Wales today numbers 4,105 according to the 2011 census<sup>34</sup> and so far has only established one place of worship, the Zoroastrian Centre, in Rayners Lane, Harrow (see Box 5) run by the ZTFE, established in 1861 as the Religious Funds of the Zarathushtrians of Europe. However, in 2015 another organization, the WZO, established in 1980, purchased a premises in Feltham, Middlesex, so that they can move from their cramped office space in a former shop in Norwood and establish a community centre and place of worship (see Box 6). Before the WZO established their office in Norwood it held meetings in the home of Hilda and Rumi Sethna.

The ZTFE has also occupied progressively larger and more functional buildings as the size of the community has grown and it has become more settled and established. As outlined above in section 3, they began meeting in houses, including the impressive stately home York House, belonging to Sir Ratan J. Tata, and then purchased several progressively larger properties and today now occupy the large former Grosvenor Cinema near Rayners Lane underground station in London. This fits a familiar pattern of shifting building choice as minority faith communities establish themselves in new surroundings. This is nicely captured in an article by Peach and Gale (2003) where they outline the progression of the relationship between the British planning process and minority faith groups (and how this is manifest in changing building types) as the latter establish themselves in properties to enable practice and community building (2003) (see Box 9).

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<sup>34</sup><http://www.theguardian.com/uk/datablog/interactive/2012/dec/11/census-religion> (accessed 26 July 2016)

### **Box 9: Change and progress: Peach and Gale's four stage cycle (2003)**

#### **Change and progress: Peach and Gale's four stage cycle (2003)**

1. **'Tacit change and planning denial'**: places of worship are established in residential houses, often without planning permission since 'Faith communities were often unaware that British planning regulations require official permission to change the use of premises' (2003: 482).
2. **'The search for larger premises'**: this most frequently involves the adaptive re-use of existing buildings – 'often conversions of disused chapels of churches or the conversion of factories, cinemas, or other commercial premises to places of worship' (2003: 482).
3. **'Purpose-built premises: Hiding and Displacement'**: this involves 'hiding the buildings from public view of truncating their iconic features' (2003: 483).
4. **'Purpose-built premises: Embracing and Celebration'**: this is where the full range of architectural features are on show (2003: 484-5).

Whereas Peach and Gale's study (2003) focused on Hindu, Sikh and Muslim buildings where communities have moved through the complete cycle, for Zoroastrians in England we only find stages 1 and 2. There are no purpose built temples and none of the reused buildings have been externally adapted to resemble Zoroastrian temple architecture as in Iran or the Indian subcontinent.<sup>35</sup> Prior to purchasing the former Grosvenor Cinema in Rayners Lane the ZTFE had wanted to find a site to purpose build a temple which would make it possible to have a separate Fire Temple only used by Zoroastrians, with a permanently burning Atash Dagdah. This would be possible because the high purity conditions could be met. In the end it was not possible due to challenges in obtaining planning permission for the proposed design to build a temple in the designated space adjoining the Zoroastrian Centre. In the end a larger Setayash Gah (prayer room) was incorporated in the projector room in the former Grosvenor Cinema, but not one that is fully consecrated. Similarly, the new temple in Feltham will not have a fully consecrated Atash Dagdah but will have a Setayash Gah (prayer room) and inner sanctum for an unconsecrated fire.

#### **4.3 Developing the buildings**

Although neither Zoroastrian organisation in England has (yet) purpose built a temple/place of worship, they have adapted or plan to adapt their existing buildings including in ways that require planning permission and engagement with heritage bodies. While only an extension was built at 88 Compayne Gardens, in 1983, the work done by the ZTFE at their premises in Rayners Lane has required greater co-ordination including working with English Heritage to restore the building reflecting its Grade II\* listed status. Planning permission was needed to make alterations to the building, including the installation of a lift, and for change of use from A3 to D1 (community centre). While the new centre of the WZO in Feltham is located within a modern office space, it will require planning permission to install a lift and for change of use.

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/a-rare-glimpse-inside-a-zoroastrian-temple-in-new-york\\_us\\_570563d6e4b0537661888a74](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/a-rare-glimpse-inside-a-zoroastrian-temple-in-new-york_us_570563d6e4b0537661888a74)

#### 4.4. Zoroastrian building terminology

Zoroastrian places of worship are known as 'fire temples', but instead of directly using this term the WZO and the ZTFE use the terms Zoroastrian House and The Zoroastrian Centre. This is because these terms are easier to understand in English but also because neither premises houses a fully consecrated fire. Traditional terms for fire temple which are used within the Zoroastrian community itself include:

*atashkadeh* (Iran) or *agiary* (Indian) – fire temple

*gombad* - the inner fire sanctuary

setayash gah – prayer hall

dar-i mihr (Iran) – fire temple, prayer hall

#### 4.5 The function of the buildings and who uses them

British Zoroastrians, according to Hinnells, are more likely to use their places of worship for communal activities compared to those in Asia, as they are relatively few in number and feel a greater need to come together collectively (2005). The Zoroastrian Centre in Rayners Lane has both a religious and a community function for Zoroastrians in the UK, mostly originating from South Asia. The building is used for jashans, monthly, seasonal and annual religious festivals and life cycle rituals such as navjotes (initiation ceremony), marriages and after death ceremonies (not funerals). It also runs educational seminars, inter faith meetings and gatherings, hosts groups for children and youth and visits from schools and universities and open days for anybody to visit. The ZTFE has tended to have stricter rules about mixed faith marriage (compared to the WZO) and has been more likely to restrict some areas of the centre only to Zoroastrians, particularly in the prayer room when the fire is lit during ceremonies. However, the main hall of the building – which used to be the cinema stalls – is sometime rented out to other communities (e.g. for Tamil weddings and other rites of passage ceremonies and also political elections) and is also used for charity events. By contrast the WZO (which involves more Iranians and converts) has been less strict about intermarriage and who can be a Zoroastrian and all areas of the new centre in Feltham will be open to all. It is not uncommon for different groups within a particular religious tradition to be divided over issues such as marriage and conversion and to create alternative spaces for religious practice. Membership of WZO consists of Parsis, Iranis, those who have married outside the community and their families, and the new Zoroastrians. WZO also has a 'Friends of WZO' membership category which allows people who do not claim to be Zoroastrians but are interested in Zoroastrianism and WZO to become members.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4.6 Conclusion: The value of buildings for Zoroastrians

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<sup>36</sup> My thanks to Mr Darayus M. Motivala for these details.

It is common for Zoroastrians to carry out rituals in their homes but the literature I have read as well as the people I have spoken to also emphasize the importance of having a place to meet collectively for social, cultural and religious events. Having a designated place of worship/centre/temple is important for strengthening the community as well as carrying out the necessary rituals such that the religion can continue to exist in England. Although certain compromises have been made – as outlined in the quotation at the start of this section – this has been necessary in order to keep the tradition alive in a foreign setting.

## 5. Appendix 1

**Table 1: Zoroastrian Buildings in England**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Use</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Rural/Urban/Suburban</b>	<b>Listed or Not</b>	<b>Additional Notes</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Website/Email</b>
<b>Zoroastrian Burial Ground, Brookwood Cemetery; Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (Incorporated) (ZTFE)</b>	Woking, Surrey	Burial ground and mausoleums	Purpose built from 1862 onwards	Suburban but a rural location	N/A	N/A	Glades House, Cemetery Pales, Brookwood, Woking GU24 0BL, United Kingdom  Phone: 01483 472222  Email: info@brookwoodcemetery.com	<a href="http://www.brookwoodcemetery.com/nonconformist-burial-grounds/zoroastrian-burial-ground/">http://www.brookwoodcemetery.com/nonconformist-burial-grounds/zoroastrian-burial-ground/</a>
<b>World Zoroastrian Association(headquarters)</b>	South Norwood, London	Support for persecuted Zoroastrians, organises seminars.	Former shop	Urban	N/A	The WZO has recently purchased a new property in Feltham, Bridge House, and will move there in 2018 or 18. The building is an office block.	135 Tennyson Road South Norwood London SE25 5NF	<a href="http://www.w-z-o.org">http://www.w-z-o.org</a>

<b>Zoroastrian Centre; Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (Incorporated) (ZTFE)</b>	Rayners Layne, Harrow, London	Zoroastrian practices and lifecycle rituals; fire temple; community centre, inter-faith meetings, support for persecuted Zoroastrians, organises seminars.	Former Art Deco Grosvenor Cinema, that opened in 1936 and closed in the 1980s	Urban	Yes	Previously - Zoroastrian House at:  168 Cromwell Road, South Kensington, London SW5, between 1920 to 1925.  11 Russell Road, Kensington Olympia, London W14 8JA between 1929 to 1969.  88 Compayne Gardens, West Hampstead, London NW6 3RU, between 1969 to 2004.  In 2005 ZTFE relocated to the Zoroastrian Centre in 440, Alexandra Avenue, Rayners Lane, Harrow, HA2 9TL	440 Alexandra Avenue, Rayners Lane, Harrow HA2 9TL Phone: 020 8866 0765. Email: <a href="mailto:secretary@ztfec.com">secretary@ztfec.com</a>	<a href="http://www.ztfec.com/cgi-bin/MainPage.cgi?section=Events">http://www.ztfec.com/cgi-bin/MainPage.cgi?section=Events</a> ; <a href="https://www.flickr.com/photos/78719580@N06/14684018540/">https://www.flickr.com/photos/78719580@N06/14684018540/</a>
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<b>Vekateshwara Balaji Temple</b>	Tividale, West Midlands	Not sure	Purpose built	Rural	No	Hill outside temple where three dimensional sculpture of the 'Farohar', one of the best known symbols of Zoroastrianism has been erected.		<a href="http://www.w-z-o.org/news.aspx?headline='Zoroastrian%20(Parsi)%20Faith%20Hill'">http://www.w-z-o.org/news.aspx?headline='Zoroastrian%20(Parsi)%20Faith%20Hill'</a> ; <a href="http://parsihilluk.wordpress.com/sponsors-and-the-legacy/luke-perry-talks/">http://parsihilluk.wordpress.com/sponsors-and-the-legacy/luke-perry-talks/</a>
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## 6. Appendix 2: Suggested additions to the NHLE

### 1. York House, Twickenham, Richmond Upon Thames.

York House has 3 listing entries

- fountain, Grade II, List Entry Number: 1250324;
- garden walls wrought-iron gates and boundary walls along Sion Road on the east side and Riverside on the south, Grade II\* List entry Number: 1263365;
- York House , Grade II, List Entry Number: 1001548, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1001548>.

Suggested amendments (in red font):

'In 1906, York House was bought by **the famous industrialist and Zoroastrian Sir Ratan J. Tata**, who undertook substantial alterations to the gardens. **The house was occasionally used for meetings by 'The Religious Funds of the Zarathushtrians of Europe', founded in 1861.** A sunken garden was laid out south of the House and the former river meadow was converted into a hedged formal garden with a rosery and a substantial fountain brought from Lea Park, near Godalming. Sir Ratan J. Tata died in 1918 and in 1922 his widow decided to return to India. Before the House was sold an auction lasting five days took place in the grounds, during which much of the garden statuary, such as a carved stone pagoda, a Roman cistern, a lead fountain, a marble well-head dated 1642, and a life-size Venus were sold.'

### 2. Ace Cinema, Alexandra Avenue, Harrow

Grade II\*

List entry Number: 1079729, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1079729>

#### **Suggested amendments:**

In 2000 the building was purchased by the Zoroastrian Trust Funds for Europe (ZTFE) and in 2004 the ZTFE opened the Zoroastrian Centre. It is used for Zoroastrian practices and lifecycle ritual; as a fire temple, as a community centre, for inter faith meetings, to support persecuted Zoroastrians and for occasional seminars.

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