

A Forgotten Memorial from Abdullah & Mariam Quilliam to the Ottoman Sheikh-ul-Islam

Looking through the Ottoman archives in Istanbul, archive enthusiast M. A. Sherif came upon a fascinating document about Britain's first Imam and Sheikh-ul-Islam, Abdullah Quilliam. This is what it says

On 11 May 1900, Abdullah Quilliam - Britain's first Sheikh-ul-Islam - and Mariam Lyon, accompanied by five members of the Liverpool Muslim Society, submitted a "respectful memorial" to the Ottoman Consul General in Liverpool in order to have their marriage regularised. It took the form of a hand-written document of three sheets, including signatures of the petitioners and witnesses. There is also a confirmatory note by the Consul General, with an official consulate seal, written in French as this was the working language of Ottoman diplomats in Europe.

The document was found in the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, in a file including other Embassy papers on Quilliam.¹ Professor Ron Geaves in his pioneering biography alluded to Quilliam's "convoluted" private life.² This petition supports this observation as well as offering new detail (see Appendix 1).

Quilliam was first married to Hannah Johnstone in 1875 and the couple had four children between 1879 and 1885 - Robert Ahmed, Elizabeth, Harriet and William Henry Billal. Professor Geaves also describes Quilliam's "liaison" with "a chorus girl, Mary Lyons" - note, not 'Lyon'.³ He adds, "from this liaison Quilliam had one son, Muhammad Henry, and four daughters, Fatima, Ayesha, Miriam and Habeebah."⁴

The petition states that Mariam Lyon was the daughter of one Thomas Lyon, and twenty years old when this matrimonial arrangement began "on the 21st day of September 1883". This was eight years after Quilliam's registered marriage to Hannah - so it could not be legally recognised because of the bigamy law. Professor Geaves correctly notes that the union with Mariam Lyon resulted in four daughters - Ethel Mariam (though not 'Miriam'), Lily Ayesha, Florence Zuleika (not 'Florence Fatima'), Mary Habeeba - and two sons, Henry Mahomed and Ismail, the youngest who died one month old. This means in 1885, Quilliam became a father twice in the space of four months as Mariam gave birth to Ethel Mariam on 28 January, and Hannah to William Henry on 20th April.

In total Quilliam had nine children, with a grandson noting that he was "always very fair with his wives, children and grandchildren. We were always allotted a holiday in his Manx home."⁵

Professor Geaves also writes, "It can only be assumed that the Sheikh had carried out the wedding in the Mosque, although he would later honour her wish for a legal marriage after the death of Hannah". The petition confirms the presence of Djamaluddeen Bokhari Jeffery as a witness to the 'marriage' ceremony in September 1883. Jeffery "was one of the first converts who had listened to Quilliam in 1887... he was an old friend of the Sheikh and was initiated by him into the Ancient Order of the Zuzemites in 1876."⁶

In the 1891 Census, the entry for the Quilliam household residing at 3 Saxony Terrace includes 'Mary Quilliam' as 'wife'. This is again the case for the 1901 Census, when the family were residing at 42 Rufford Road.⁷ This was not strictly true, because Quilliam's legal wife Hannah was still alive. This is perhaps why, when Florence Zuleika married George Ellick in 1909, the register records her surname as Lyons, not Quilliam.⁸ It was only later that year after Hannah's demise that Mary and Abdullah Quilliam were legally married.⁹

Professor Geaves observes, "the mystery is how he [Abdullah Quilliam] managed to keep his families out of the media spotlight considering the scrutiny he was under in Liverpool from 1893 to 1907. He was certainly aware that people speculated on his love life . . .". Perhaps this was the same audacity that led Quilliam to shed one persona and take on the identity of another in 1908. Another curious observation is how the phonetic variations of one name - Lyon, Lyons, Léon - loomed so large in his life.

M. A. Sherif

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Sheikh: Abdullah Quilliam, the official head of the British Muslim community according to the Ottoman Caliph, pictured here in a traditional Ottoman fez.

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Lord Headley and the Islamic Review - Jamie Gilham

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“The Woking Mosque Gang”: Victorian Muslim Dissenters - Dr Mohammad Siddique Seddon

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Pan-Islamism at Woking: A Forgotten Legacy - Yahya Birt

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10. Ibid., 9; R. Geaves, *Islam and Britain: Muslim Mission in an Age of Empire* (London, 2018), 111–13.
11. Kidwai, *Islam in England*, 12.
12. Ansari, *Emergence of Socialist Thought*, 17; Hasan, *From Pluralism to Separatism*, 9–51, and especially 29, 34–5 for Kidwai’s uncommon ideological socialist-Islamist take on the Indo-Persian *qasbati* synthesis.

The Shah Jahan Mosque, Woking, 1889 - Shahed Saleem

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Muslim Burial Ground and Peace Garden: Memorial to Britain’s Fallen Muslim soldiers - Dr Zafar Iqbal

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The Quilliams; Popular Conservatism and the New Trade Unionism in Liverpool - Yahya Birt

1. R. Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Liverpool: The Life and Times of Abdullah Quilliam* (Markfield, 2010), 28–35; M.S. Seddon, “Abdullah Quilliam: A Revolutionary Socialist?” in J. Gilham and R. Geaves (eds), *Victorian Muslim: Abdullah Quilliam and Islam in the West* (London, 2017), 7–24. I should record my thanks to Jamie Gilham, Matthew Sharp and Jamil Sherif for their helpful feedback on a draft of this essay.
2. R. Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Liverpool*, 135; *The Crescent* [hereafter TC], 2 March 1898; P. Smith, “‘A Proud Liverpool Union’. The Liverpool and District Carters’ and Motormen’s Union, 1889–1946: Ethnicity, Class and Trade-Unionism”, *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, Autumn 2003, 1–38, definition of “business unionism” paraphrased from that provided on 11n51.
3. S. O’Leary, “Rethinking Popular Conservatism in Liverpool: Democracy and Reform in the Later Nineteenth Century” in M.J. Turner, *Reform and Reformers in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Sunderland, 2004), 157–74; J. Smith, “Class, skill and sectarianism in Glasgow and Liverpool, 1880–1914” in R.J. Morris, *Class, power and social structure in British nineteenth-century towns* (Manchester, 1986), 158–215; P. Walker, “Archibald Salvidge (1863–1928)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35921>.
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5. Mason, “John Houlding”; TC, 11 March 1908.
6. Smith, “A Proud Liverpool Union”; G.D.H. Cole, *An Introduction to Trade Unionism* (London, 1918), 116; E. Taplin, *The Dockers’ Union: A Study of the National Union of Dock Labourers*,

- 1889–1922 (Leicester, 1985), 86–7; P.J. Walker, *Democracy and Sectarianism: A political and social history of Liverpool, 1868–1939* (Liverpool, 1981), 105; LM, 23 Jan 1895; TC, 11 March 1908. Paul Smith provides the most comprehensive, well-researched history of the MQRWU and its later iterations, and I am reliant on it here. Despite its impressive coverage, however, Smith has entirely passed over Abdullah Quilliam’s role in the carters union as legal advisor and then president between 1890–1908.
7. *Islamic World*, IV/43, Nov 1896, reproducing “Men Who Are Talked About”, *Liverpool Porcupine*, 21 Nov 1896; TC, 29 Jun 1898, quoting from *Liverpool Manx Worthies*; TC, 12 Jul 1905, reproducing a report from the *Liverpool Freeman*, 6 Jul 1905. Quilliam qualified as a solicitor in 1878, and started practice immediately in Church Street then Elliot Street and finally Manchester Street.
8. LM, 11 Oct 1892, 21 Dec 1894, 23 Jan 1895, 9 Mar 1895, 20 Sept 1895, 19 May 1899, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 21 Feb 1901.
9. TC, 13 May 1896, 3 Jun 1896. The silver medal was inscribed on the front with Abdülhamid’s *tughra* (signature) with Ottoman arms and the reverse read: “This Order was founded in the year 1800 of the Hijra of the Prophet. This decoration is for those who are sincere and courageous on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. We have granted it to Alderman John Houlding of Liverpool, this 18th day of Dhul-Hijja, 1313 (answering to 1 May 1896). [With spelling corrections.]” For more on Quilliam’s role as “Sheikh-ul-Islam of the British Isles” see J. Gilham, “Abdullah Quilliam, First and Last ‘Sheikh-ul-Islam of the British Isles” in J. Gilham and R. Geaves, *Victorian Muslim*, 97–112.
10. TC, 17 Nov 1897; LM, 9 Dec 1897.
11. LM, 19 Nov 1900.
12. Smith, “A Proud Liverpool Union”, 38; B. and S. Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (London: Longmans & Co, 1911), 426; see TC, 7 Dec 1904 for an example of a typical report of an annual general meeting, one in which Quilliam was re-elected president.
13. J. Gilham, *Loyal Enemies: British Converts to Islam, 1850–1950* (London, 2014), 101–2; TC, 19 Dec 1906, 12 Jun 1907, 3 Jul 1907, 8 Jan 1908.
14. TC, 17 Oct 1900, 14 Nov 1900, 27 Feb 1901, 1 May 1901, 19 Jun 1901, 23 Apr 1902, 16 Dec 1903, 7 Dec 1904; LM, 2 Nov 1900; *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 17 Jan 1906, 20 Jan 1906; Smith, “Class, Skill and sectarianism”, 181–2.
15. TC, 20 Nov 1907, 11 Mar 1908; Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain*, 257–8; Gilham, *Loyal Enemies*, 120; for Robert Ahmed Quilliam’s death date, see Civil Registration Death Index, Q1, 256. He is listed as dying in March 1954 at the age of 79 in Liverpool North.
16. E. Taplin, *Near to Revolution: The Liverpool General Transport Strike of 1911* (Liverpool, 1994), 7–21; J. Bohstedt, “More Than One Working Class: Protestant–Catholic Riots in Edwardian Liverpool” in J. Belchem (ed.) *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour* (Liverpool, 1992), 173–216.
17. Tom Mann, *Memoirs* (London, 1923), 268; Smith, “A Proud Liverpool Union”, 15–16; Walker, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, 199, 253; C. Wrigley, “Tom Mann (1856–1941)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/34854>.
18. Mann, *Memoirs*, 270–3; Taplin, *Near to Revolution*, 14.
19. See *The Transport Worker*, 1/1–6, Aug 1911–Jan 1912. Even his older brother Robert Ahmed contributed a piece on “The Advantages of Organisation”, TTW, 1/3, Oct 1911, 70–1.
20. Mann, *Memoirs*, 302, citing the *Weekly Citizen*, 11 May 1912; T. Griffiths, *Collected Plays for Television* (London, 1988), 179–232, quotation at 181.

Appendices

Sheet 2 hand written

We the undersigned memorialists namely William Henry Abdullah Quilliam Effendi and Mariam his wife hereby declare

Al-hamdu l'illah Musulman iz Hashadu an l'illa illallah! Wa Hashado anna Mahomedar rasul – Allah! We have been husband and wife since the 13th day of Shaban 1300 Dated this 11th day of May 1900 Answering to the 11th day of Muharrem 1318 W.H. Abdullah Quilliam [signature] Mariam Quilliam [signature] Witnesses

We the undersigned Ismail Redjib Bey of 74 Leyland Road Southport near Liverpool and of Salonica Merchant and Ottoman subject - Shaheen Suleiman of 38 Warren Street in the City of Liverpool and formerly of Beyrout Interpreter of the Railway Company and Ottoman subject - Jamal-ud-deen Bokhari Jeffery of 1 Lowther Street in the City of Liverpool Merchant Vice-President of the Liverpool Muslim Society - Henry Nasrullah Warren of 18 Albion Street Everton Liverpool Professional analyst, Fellow of the College of Chemists and Professor of Chemistry to the Liverpool Muslim College & Wahid Feridoon Preston of 11 Albert Road Preston near Liverpool Fellow of the London Society of Science and Treasurer of the Liverpool.

Sheet 3 hand written

Muslim congregation hereby certify that we were all present at the office of the Ottoman Consulate in Liverpool when Sheikh William Henry Abdullah Quilliam and Mariam his wife both of whom we know to be Muslims and members of the Liverpool Muslim Society made the annexed declaration relating to their marriage and the births of their children and we hereby testify that to our knowledge and belief the whole of the statements therein made by them are true in every respect whatsoever.

Dated this 11th day of Moharrem 1318

J. Bokhari Jefferey [signature]

[two signatures in Arabic]

H. Nasrullah Warren [signature]

Walid Feridon, Preston [signature]

N. gl. 3019

N. ll 27-33

Nous, Consul Genéreal Ottoman à Liverpool certifions que les signatures de W.H. Abdullah Quilliam et Mariam Quilliam, apposeés au-dessous de la déclarations de mariage au contre , et les signatures de Ismail Redjib Bey, Shaheen Sulaiman, Bokhari Jeffrey, Henry N. Warren et Walid Faridon Preston, temoins de la date declaration de mariage, ont été apposeés a-dessus en notre presence. En foi de quoi nous avons délivré le present et y avons apposé notre sceau.

Liverpool, le 14 MAY 1900

LE CONSUL GÉNÉRAL

M. Kamil [signature]

[Circular Seal of the ‘CONSULAT GENERAL DE TURQUIE Á LIVERPOOL’, together with 6 Ottoman postage stamps, numbered 136 to 141 and overwritten ‘14 MAY 1900’ and the note ‘Droit perçu selon art 13: Pres 161’]

Appendix 1

The Respectful Memorial

Sheet 1 handwritten

The respectful memorial of William Henry Abdullah Quilliam Effendi, Sheikh of the True-Believers in the British Isles and Mariam Lyon otherwise Quilliam his wife showeth:

Your memorialist William Henry Abdullah Quilliam is the only son of Robert Quilliam formerly of the City of Liverpool England now deceased and was born on the 10th day of April 1856.

Your memorialist Mariam Lyon or Quilliam is the only surviving child of Thomas Lyon also formerly of Liverpool aforesaid also now deceased and she was born on the 16th day of June 1863.

On the 21st day of September 1883 your said memorialists with the knowledge and consent of their respective parents exchanged marital vows and promises and of their own free will and accord intermarried one with the other according to Muslim custom & usage. At the time of such marriage of your said memorialists there was no Cadi, Hodja, Imam or Sheikh in the city of Liverpool and no properly organised community in Liverpool or in England and it was therefore impossible to have such marriage registered and the English law does not recognize marriages contracted between Muslims in accordance with Islamic usage in fact the law of England has been solemnly declared to be that the English law only recognizes as a marriage the union for life of one man and one woman according to the Christian faith.

The witness Djamalud-deen Bokhari Jeffery whose signature is annexed hereto as a witness to this memorial was present on the said 21st day of September 1883 on the occasion of the said marriage between your memorialists and was one of the witnesses to such marriage. All other witnesses to such marriage are now dead.

From and after such marriage until now your said memorialists have lived happily together as husband and wife and rendered to each other all such duties and obligations as Muslim husband and wife are bound so to do and have been known to and recognized by all the members of the Muslim community in Liverpool and to other residents in that city as husband and wife.

There have been born as issue of the said marriage six children and no more namely:

Ethel Mariam Quilliam born on the 28th day of January 1885

Lily Ayesha Quilliam born on the 7th day of December 1886

Henry Mahomed Ibn Abdullah Quilliam born on the 14 day of January 1888

Florence Zuleika Quilliam born on the 28th day of May 1890

Ismail Quilliam born on the 15th day of October 1893 & who died on the 7th day of November 1893

Mary Habeeba Quilliam born on the 24th day of May 1897.

All the above-named living children are residing with your memorialists.

Your memorialists respectfully requests His Highness the Sheikh-ul-Islam to register the above marriage as from the 21st day of September 1883 answering to the Muslim date of the 13th Shaban 1300 and to grant a certificate of marriage to your memorialists as from that date in order that no question may thereafter arise as to the legitimacy of your memorialists’ children as before named And your memorialists will forever pray. Dated this 11th day of May 1900 WH Abdullah Quilliam [signature] Mariam Quilliam [signature] Carried forward to the next page

5. Mahrup Shah (d.1915), Muslim soldier buried at Brookwood Cemetery: Photographs of collected material, 1917-2014 (SHC ref Z/632). Our online research guide can be found at http://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/themes/subjects/military/india-woking/mahrup-shah/

6. Ahmadiyya Muslim Association, Woking: Records, 1978-2017 (SHC ref 8859). An online guide to the Woking Ahmadiyya Community can be found at http://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/themes/subjects/diversity/amc/

7. The Woking Muslim Mission website http://www.wokingmuslim.org/ has digitised surviving copies of the *Islamic Review*.

Lord Henry Stanley of Alderley; Britain’s First Muslim Baron - *Maryam Ibrahim*

1. Jamie Gilham, ‘Britain’s First Muslim Peer of the Realm: Henry, Lord Stanley of Alderley and Islam in Victorian Britain’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 33, 1 (2013), pp.93-110

2. WordPress.com [internet] Forgotten Victorians [updated 2017 March 17; cited 2018 March 23]. Available from: https://williamgray101.wordpress.com/tag/alderley-park/

3. Amadiyya Anjuman Isha’at Islam Lahore (U.K.), Muslim Mission, Death of Lord Stanley of Alderley, reported in the *Review of Religions* from Quilliam’s paper [cited 2018 March 23]. Available from: http://www.wokingmuslim.org/pers/quilliam/rev-rel2.htm

Art and Imagination in British Muslim Life - *Hassan Mahamdallie*

1. Touched by Wonder: Art and Religion in the 21st Century. Ziauddin Sardar http://ziauddinsardar.com/2013/07/touched-by-wonder-art-and-religion-in-the-21st-century/

2. Shut down but not silenced: Isis play Homegrown demands to be staged, Lyn Gardner, Guardian 8 March 2017 https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2017/mar/08/isis-play-homegrown-national-youth-theatre

A Forgotten Memorial from Abdullah and Mariam Quilliam to the Ottoman Shaikh Ul Islam - *MA Sherif*

1. Y. PRK. A. Dosya 12, Gömlek 54, Tarih 1318 C 25 [corresponding to 19 October 1900]

2. R. Geaves, *Islam in Victorian Britain, the Life and Times of Abdullah Quilliam* (Markfield: Kube, 2010); p.52

3. Jamie Gilham in his *Loyal Enemies, British Converts to Islam, 1850-1950* (London: Hurst, 2014), also adopts ‘Lyon’ as Mary’s surname.

4. Ibid., p.52-53

5. Ibid., p.54

6. Ibid., p.119

7. PRO RG12/2990; RG13/3499

8. ‘Marriages registered in July, August and September 1909, p. 227. Note not ‘Lyon’, but ‘Lyons’!

9. op.cit. Gilham, p.76

Britain’s Black Muslim Champion of the Colonised - *Yasmeen Arif*

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2. Sherwood, Marika (2011; first published online 2010): Ali, Duse Mohamed [known as Duse Mohamed]. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Available online at https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/59530

3. Ian Duffield 1992. ‘Duse Mohamed Ali, Afro-Asian solidarity and Pan-Africanism in early twentieth-century London.’ In J.S. Gundara and I. Duffield (eds): *Essays on the history of Blacks in Britain: from Roman times to the mid-twentieth century*. Aldershot: Avebury

4. Ian Duffield 1976. Duse Mohamed Ali: his press and public. In K. Niven (ed.) *The commonwealth writer overseas*.

5. African Times and Orient Review 1912. ‘Foreword’. Vol. 1, no. 1 published July 1912

6. Innes, C.L. 2002. *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

7. *African Times and Orient Review* 1912. ‘A word to our brother’. Vol. 1, no. 1 published July 1912

8. *African Times and Orient Review* 1917. ‘Today’. Vol. 4, no. 1 published January 1917 p2-3

The Importance of Representation in the Archives - *Di Stiff*

1. Woking Muslim Mission and Literary Trust later became the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha’at Islam Lahore (UK). Our online guide to the Woking Muslim Mission and the early days of the mosque is at http://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/themes/subjects/diversity/lahore/

2. Shah Jahan Mosque, Woking: Publications, 1929-2002 (SHC ref 7831)

3. Woking Muslim Mission and Literary Trust, Shah Jahan Mosque, Woking: Correspondence and Publications, 1920-1985 (SHC 8382). Surrey History Centre’s online research guide to Woking Muslim Mission and the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha’at Islam Lahore can be found at http://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/themes/subjects/diversity/lahore/

4. Mohammad Ilyas Raja of Woking: Correspondence and photographs relating to his service as a Woking Borough Councillor and Trustee of the Shah Jahan Mosque, and involvement in Woking Muslim community charity and cultural events, 1914-2018 (SHC ref Z/454). An online research guide to Cllr Raja’s papers can be found at http://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/themes/subjects/diversity/shah_jahan_mosque_woking/papers-cllr-raja/ A guide to papers of Major Alaf Khan can be found at http://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/themes/subjects/military/india-woking/alaf-khan/