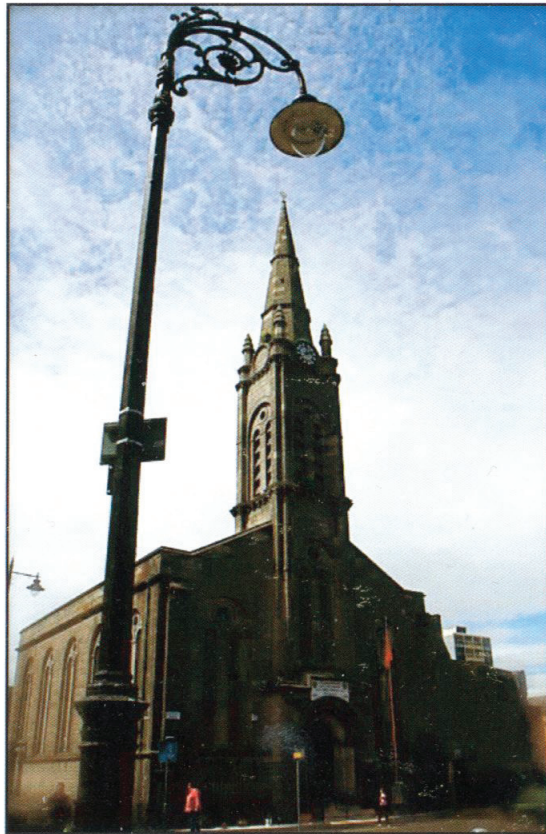


The Gurdwara in Edinburgh

A short history of the Sikh Gurdwara



Welcome to the Gurdwara



INTRODUCTION

The Sikh community development began in Edinburgh in 1958 with small family groups from relatively the same area in Punjab. Their initial stop was London from where they travelled to various parts of Scotland, eventually settling in Leith in Edinburgh: Hamilton Street, Wilkie Place, Springfield Street and St Mary's Street were the main areas of residence.

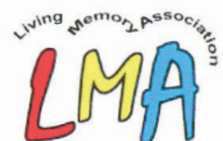
A Sikh place of residence will always have a dedicated place of worship. As a community develops, their want for a common place of worship becomes a need. The Sikh place of worship is known as the Gurdwara and not Temple as it is commonly mistaken. Translated, Gurdwara means the 'doorway to the Guru'. The word 'Guru' means that which takes us from darkness to light. This book is a celebration of the Gurdwara in Edinburgh.

We would like to thank all the contributors for sharing their stories and photographs for this project. Special thanks to City of Edinburgh Museums and Galleries for their photographs. Thanks to Trishna Pall Kusbia Singh, from Sikh Sanjog, who was the community worker for this project on the Gurdwara. Thanks also to Miles Tubb and Shula Hawes from the Living Memory Association for all their hard work on the project.

We would like to acknowledge the warm welcome we received on our visits to the Gurdwara and the excellent meals that we were offered and enjoyed!

The project was made possible thanks to a grant from Leith Neighbourhood Partnership and funding from the Big Lottery - Memory Bank Project.

John McCaughie
on behalf of the Living Memory Association



Contact Details

Guru Nanak Gurdwara, 1 Sheriff Brae, Leith, Edinburgh EH6 6TJ

Please note times for Sunday Dewan are as follows:

Japji Sahib:	11.00am - 11.30am.
Gurbani Kirtan:	11.30am - 12.30.
Katha:	12.30 - 1.30pm.
Dewan Smapti:	1.30pm.
Guru Ka Lungar:	1.45pm.
Punjabi class Saturday:	1pm - 3pm. (during school term times)

Gurdwara Tel No: UK 0131 553 7207.



Ek Onkar means “God is One.” The symbol is an emblem of the Sikh religion and is found on Gurdwaras (Sikh temples) around the world. Ek Onkar forms the cornerstone of Sikh belief in the unity and oneness of God. This fundamental teaching of Sikhism, that there is only one Essence or one reality that sustains all is paramount to the understanding of Sikh beliefs.



The Khanda is one of most important symbols of Sikhism. In the centre of the insignia is the two-edged sword which symbolises the Creative Power of God which controls the destiny of the whole universe. On the outside of the two-edged sword, we can see two swords: On the left is the Sword of Spiritual Sovereignty (Piri); On the right is the Sword of Political Sovereignty (Miri). There must always be a balance between the two, and this balance is emphasised by a circle inside. This circle is what is called a *Chakra* or *Chakkar*. The *Chakra* is a symbol of all embracing Divine Manifestation.

CONTENTS

History of the Bhats	page 5
First Sikhs in Edinburgh	page 7
Working Life	page 15
Hopefield Terrace	page 19
Academy Street	page 24
Sheriff Brae	page 27
Festivals	page 31
Edinburgh Life	page 34
Births, Deaths and Marriages	page 38
What the Gurdwara means today	page 42

Living Memory Association
The Stables, 64/1 The Causeway,
Duddingston Village,
Edinburgh EH15 3PZ

www.livingmemory.org.uk

History of the Bhats

The word Bhat is a diminutive of the Sanskrit word meaning 'bard'. The word Bhatra is a corruption of the term Bhat-Rai.

Bhats in the Punjab

Since Bhat Sikhs were itinerant missionaries, they did not take to settled life. In the 16th and 17th century the mobility of the Nanakpanthi Bhats saw the scattering of the community in several parts of India. As the small band of bard singers travelled northwards to the Punjab, their numbers increased substantially from the host villages they sheltered and preached to. It was from the Punjab they gained their greatest numbers and it was there they settled. Most of the Punjabis from all walks of life who embraced Guru Nanak's teachings from hearing the bards of these travellers, joined the Bhats and became Sikhs. Hence, Bhats' surnames include those from Jats, Khattris and Rajputs among others.

According to H.A.Rose (Glossary of Punjab Tribes and Castes, 1911), 'many Bhats first settled along the banks of the Ganges in the Bijnor district of the United Provinces. They then migrated to Hoshiarpur and Sialkot, and later were to be found in the great town and places all over India'.

Communities had also spread to Rawalpindi and Lahore, as well as East Punjab. Of the 22 Gauts (surnames), India's Colonial historian, H.A.Rose lists 13 found in Sialkot in 1911, namely Bance, Bhatti, Potiwal, Digwa, Gami, Gojra, Kag, Kasbia, Lande, Larr, Lohia, Rathore and Raud.

By the late 19th century and early 20th century, the Bhat Sikhs whilst on their missionary work, travelling from village to village and town to town started to sell their merchandise throughout India. Their success lay in their spirit of enterprise, price manipulation and extension of price.

However, their religious duties were kept up. Those Bhat Sikhs of Brahminical origin even began astrology and fortune telling whilst peddling to customers. Gradually as the community became resourceful, they would start peddling further afield such as Singapore and Malaysia. By the 1920s they were travelling to Europe and in particular, Britain, where they took over the peddling profession from the Jewish community.

During the partition of the Punjab in 1947, many Bhat Sikhs were affected, and were uprooted as a large majority resided in West Punjab, including in Sialkot, Rawalpindi, Lahore and Lyallpur (now known as Faisalabad). Many settled in East Punjab in India after 1947, whilst others scattered to other states such as Haryana (Ambala), Rajasthan, Delhi and even Calcutta. Partition also further gave the Bhat Sikhs a reason to move abroad to such places where the male members had earlier been peddling.

The Bhat Sikhs today are concentrated now mainly in Patiala, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur and Bhatinda districts in the Punjab.

Settling in the United Kingdom

In 1947-8 came the upheaval of the partition of the sub-continent of India, which led to Sikhs from the region, which later became Pakistan, settling in Delhi and other areas of India besides the Punjab. The Bhat Sikhs are the pioneer Sikh community to migrate to Britain. Whilst most men from other Sikh communities were finding a foothold in Britain in the early 1950s, the Bhats had already established themselves as a settled community all over Britain in port towns and cities.

Bhat Sikhs first started coming from the Punjab to Great Britain in the 1920s. Among the first were Hakum Singh Rathore and his sons in 1926, who settled in Glasgow. They would come in small groups of about half a dozen men.

During the whole of the 20th century Sikhs have been moving into English speaking parts of the world, but the largest single migration occurred between 1956 and 1973 when well over 100,000 came to Britain from the Punjab for economic reasons. There are now over 300,000 Sikhs in Britain. The total population of the Sikh Diaspora may be as many as one million.

Leith is a mixed community where approximately one hundred and fifty Sikh families live. Most of the Leith Sikhs are Bhatra Sikhs, who were traditionally a vendor class, in the Punjab they were mainly selling wares door-to-door, small shopkeepers and expert fortune-tellers. They mostly came from the Punjab, which eventually became the state of Pakistan following independence from British Rule in 1947. However this has changed recently with a large number of Sikhs from other communities and overseas students moving into the area. Overall, the majority of Sikhs in Leith are still from the Bhatra community.

References www.bhatra.co.uk

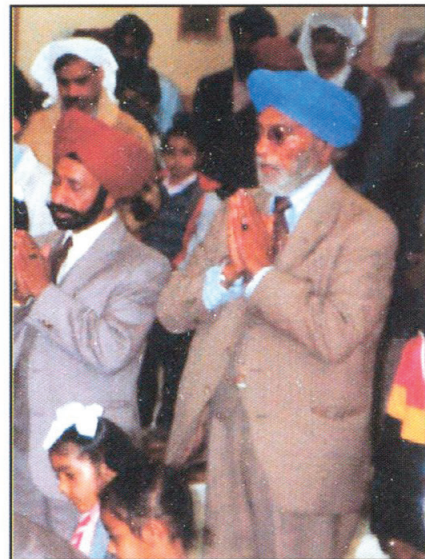
First Sikhs in Edinburgh



Tunda Singh Kusbia and
Mela Singh Potiwal (seated)
in 1952

My father, Harnam Singh Bhai, was one of the first Sikhs that came to Scotland, in 1956. He really enjoyed it and told us the people were brilliant. He was born on 30th December 1914 in Lahore, Pakistan and spent the early part of his life in the retail business before moving to Scotland aged 42. He moved with his wife, Mata Rij Kaur and five children, thus becoming one of the first Sikhs to settle in Scotland.

Lucky Singh Bhai



Harnam Singh Bhai

Our parents came from the Punjab. I remember my mum saying it was always dark here, the sun never shone, and you could never get anything you needed. They used to send for their spices and curry powders. Anyone who came from India, and they were few and far between, used to bring things with them. They came on the boats which took 21 days, three weeks. I think my family came to Edinburgh for a better life and once the men had made enough money they brought their families over. They worked hard, saved up and bought a house. That was what was most important.

Baldev Singh Kusbia

My father-in-law was one of the first Sikhs to die in Edinburgh. His wife, Lahb Kaur, and children were still in Amritsar. My husband was six years old and my brother-in-law was twelve. Their mother realised they only had six days left before her passport, with her two boys on it, expired. She took the decision to fly out to Britain and lived in rented accommodation. She was very religious and her religion kept her going. She eventually ended up in Edinburgh. In those days Wednesday was a half-day and as most of the men had shops, the service was conducted then because it suited them. When festivals fell on a different day, my mother-in-law would argue it should be held then, not on the Wednesday just because it was convenient. She'd say, 'I'm going to go, join me if you wish', and because she knew how to hold a service, people came.

Asha Kour Bhaker



Sawan Singh Bhaker with his son Gurbachan Singh Bhaker



Karnel Singh Landa



Luchmi Wanti Landa

Karnel Singh Landa and Lehna Singh Bhaker were both very involved in the setting up of the Gurdwara, from the 1960s until their deaths.

I was born in Pakistan. I got married in Delhi when I was 16. First, my husband came over to Edinburgh and then two years later I joined him with our children. I've been here nearly 40 years. I came over here on a plane.

Akbal Kour Landa



Lehna Singh Bhaker

I came to Scotland in 1955. We came to Edinburgh from Bombay. The journey from Delhi to Bombay took us two nights and three days. I'd never seen a ship in my life. We got on the ship and it took 19 days from Bombay to Southampton. Then we had to get a train to Edinburgh. We first came during the winter time. It was snowing, I'd never seen snow. I used to cry, it was that cold. My father was here and my grandmother, my mother's mother.

Baldev Singh Kusbia



Baldev and Harbhajan Singh Kusbia

We came on the boat which took two or three weeks, a long journey. My dad told us it takes a long time to go to UK, it's very far and Indian people used to say we're going across the seven seas. He said the people in the UK are a very honest people, they leave milk outside for the milkman, they don't lock the doors, we just knock and come in. We thought, 'That must be a very good country with very honest people.'

Kuldip Singh Bhakar

Article from the Evening News, 2nd April 2002
announcing the death of Mata Ji Tej Kour Singh,
one of the first settlers in Edinburgh:



Grandson's Tribute as pioneering Sikh dies aged 105

One of the first Sikh women to settle in Edinburgh from India has died aged 105. Meta Ji Tej Koursingh passed away peacefully in the city's Victoria Hospital last Thursday. Mata Ji first came to Edinburgh from Pakistan in 1945 with her husband, Inder Singh, and moved into Springfield Street, Leith, later moving to Elm Row. Today her grandson, Mr Harbhajan Singh Kasbia, revealed the family needed a DNA test to find out how old she was. He said there had been no such thing as a record of births in India at the time his grandmother was born and she had forgotten her age over the years.

'She was the most remarkable woman I knew and her memory was fantastic. She was independent and strong until the day she passed away. She still remembered things that happened in Pakistan when it was still a part of India and the military movements and she spoke about the past often but over the years it became difficult to remember her age so we asked the hospital if they could help and they obliged.'

A DNA test was carried out and family were astonished to be told she was 105.

'She loved fruit and jelly and had never touched alcohol in her life and, up until a couple of years ago, she was still able to climb steps up to three floors, so we were a bit surprised to find out she was actually 105.'

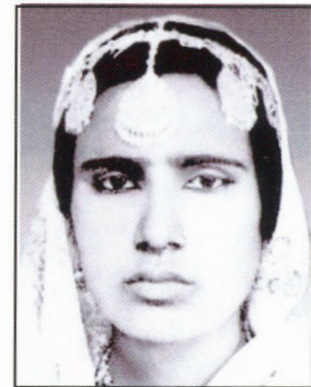
Mata Ji became a widow in 1959 and spent her elderly years looking after her extended family, which includes 17 grandchildren and 55 great great grandchildren. Mr Singh said his grandmother was well known in the Sikh community in the Capital and across Scotland.

'We have had so many calls and cards from people that she knew across the country. She lived for her family and will be sadly missed.'

Article from the Edinburgh Evening News, 15
December 2007

Community in mourning for its Queen of Queens

Lachmi Wanti Singh Landa, one of the most significant matriarchs in Edinburgh's Sikh community, has died after a short illness at the age of 86.

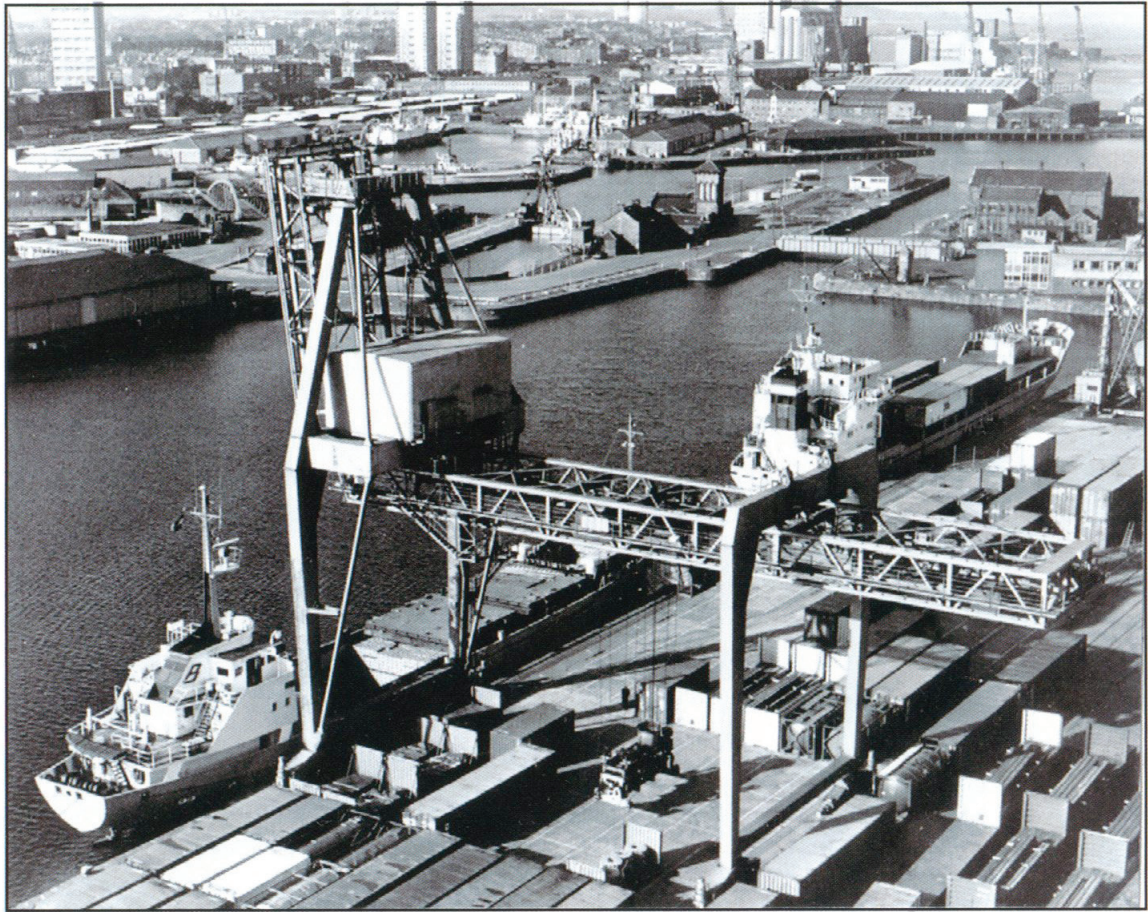


Lachmi Wanti Singh Landa was born in Delhi in 1921 and migrated to Edinburgh more than 60 years ago. In 1944, she married Karnel Singh and, as was customary, she set up home with her husband and his family in a small town near Lahore in the province of Punjab, which at that time was part of India. When India was partitioned by the British authorities in 1947, the unrest caused by the creation of Pakistan and an independent India caused one of the greatest population movements of the 20th century.

Lachmi Singh was among the thousands of Sikh refugees who fled from fighting during the civic unrest and, at eight months pregnant, she was forced to walk for more than 60 miles into the safety of a town in the south-east of Indian Punjab. Her first daughter, Raspal Kaur, was born in 1947, and four more children followed.

Lachmi began the journey to Scotland in 1958. On arrival in Scotland, Lachmi's family settled in St Mary's Street in Edinburgh and she went on to have eight daughters and six sons. Most of the family is now located around Gayfield Square and Pilrig and many of her sons have gone on to become successful businessmen. Her son Akkie, a bus driver, also made his name as the first Sikh to be allowed to wear a turban to work. Lachmi's dedication to family life was significant. In total, she had 63 grandchildren, 85 great grandchildren and one great great grandchild.

A further 34 wives and husbands have married into the clan; all members of a family who knew Lachmi as the 'Queen of Queens'. It is estimated that Lachmi was directly related to more than a third of Edinburgh's Sikh community. The admiration with which she was regarded extended beyond her immediate family, throughout Edinburgh's 600-strong Sikh community.



Leith Docks (photo courtesy of The Museum of Edinburgh)

We were excited on the boat, we'd never seen a ship before. We had dinners in the restaurant. I didn't know what a restaurant was. I'd not seen knives and forks before, we'd used our hands. We couldn't handle it, we had to stay in our cabins and have our food. We got Indian food on the ships.

Baldev Singh Kusbia

Sikhs came into Britain very early, 1929 and they travelled on big ships as there was no flying at that time.

Kuldip Singh Bhakar

We first moved to Springfield Street, the old Khyber Pass, there used to be five families that lived there, my grandmother, my mother's mother and her two brothers and their two nieces used to stay there. We stayed with our grandmother.

I was born in New Delhi in 1954. I came to Britain when I was a year old. I arrived in Southampton, then we were in London for a short period and after that moved to Liverpool for a number of years. I remember the terraced houses. It was Carlington Street, in Toxteth area. From Liverpool we moved up to Edinburgh. My mother's parents were staying there and they asked us to come up beside them. We moved into Tennant Street in Leith. I'd be four or five when we came to Edinburgh. We lived in a tenement block. There were eight of us in a two bed-roomed flat.

Harbhajan Singh Kusbia



When we came to Scotland it was a different world, one we'd never seen before. There were trams here when we first came. The trams and the traffic were nothing like what we had in India; cars, trams, cycles, lights. It was hard when we first came here. If it wasn't for our elders I don't think we would have kept our religion. In those days, people were friendlier and more welcoming to you. When we first came here, when we were settled in, nobody kept their doors shut, everybody used to come and go.

Working Life

We came here for work, like most other people. People normally come to earn money. Indians and Pakistanis first did door-to-door business. I did that too. I came in 1949. After that I opened a shop. When the children grew up, they went to work in the shop.

Sampuran Singh Bhai



Leith Dry Docks
(photo by Peter Stubbs)

I left school on the Friday and started at the shipyards on the Monday. I was fifteen. The first year you're just a wee message laddie but you're still picking up things. I had my five year apprenticeship. The theory side was at Telford College, day release. I got my City & Guilds in Mechanical Engineering. I completed my apprenticeship, left the shipyards and then got a job with a ship repairing company and stayed there for two years to gain more experience. I travelled around with this job. I was thinking about the Merchant Navy, offshore, but I'd just got married. So I talked it over with my wife and decided to go for it. I worked on the oil tankers in the Persian Gulf, Far East and America.

Harbhajan Singh Kusbia



Akbal Singh: Taken in 1971, victorious after winning the right to wear his turban at work. He was the first Sikh to go on the buses in Edinburgh.

My first job was with William Cummings Box Maker at Murano Place out at Leith Walk. I earned £3 for a 40 hour week. I turned 19, got married and became self employed. I was a peddler like my dad. After a few years I found it hard going door-to-door, some bad days, some good days so I decided I'd go into business. I started doing the markets because it made ends meet. Then I found the markets hard as well and so I opened a small grocer's shop in Leith. My wife helped me. The children's school and the house were near the shop. Eventually things went better and I opened a draper's shop and my sons helped me in the business. I was a self-employed business man.

Kuldip Singh Bhakar

I started work in the 70s, my first job was at John Mitchell's Timber Yard in Balfour Street. I moved onto Dobson's timber yard and worked there for 4 years. After that, when I was 18 years old I started driving a tractor inside the yard, taking timber around and learnt to drive. An old boy who used to be a lorry driver there retired and I was offered the job. In those days you didn't need an HGV licence, as long as you had your own licence and before he retired he taught me, I used to drive lorries there. I drove lorries for a long while. In 1992 I got my first shop in Anandale Street.

Baldev Singh Kusbia



At work: Chiman Singh Landa and Gurcharan Singh Landa at their shop in Junction Street, Leith



Jaswant Singh Bhai, now deceased, started off as a door-to-door clothes salesman in Leith in the 1950s. He worked his way up the career ladder and went on to own the famous Relax Market in Leith.

Edinburgh Guru Nanak Gurdwara has developed to its current state as a result of tremendous voluntary work and faith by the first generation of immigrants, our elders, in the 1960s. This proud self reliant group armed with only a suitcase and a few words of English as their method of self sustaining, seeded a community in Edinburgh.

Over the past 45 years we have grown to a community of over 650 family members. Recent growth contribution has been from immigration from England, Ireland and from India.

Hopefield Terrace (formerly known as Hope Terrace)

The first temple that we had in Edinburgh was in Hopefield Terrace in Leith. In Edinburgh there was about twenty, twenty-five families. I must have been 7 or 8 and we used to look forward to a Sunday to go there to see all our wee mates. It was a top flat converted into a temple. One room was used for the congregation where the holy bible was kept. We had a kitchen and a room was converted into a dining area. A vegetarian meal was done every Sunday.

Harbhajan Singh Kusbia



Inside Hopefield Terrace, 1965

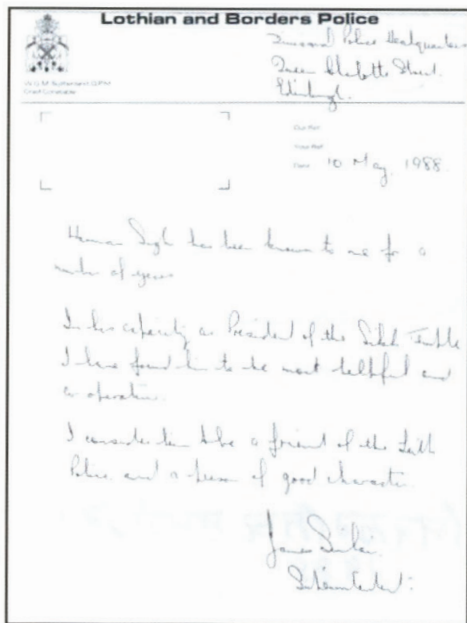
Left to Right: Kuldip Singh Bhaker, Gurmeet Singh Bhai, Jasbir Singh Bhai, Hazur Singh Bhai, Waleti Singh Bhai, Sewa Singh Bhai

My first memory of the Gurdwara is in Hopefield Terrace in the 1960s.

Sampuran Singh Bhai

I remember going up the hill and up the stairs. There was a butcher's down there, right in the corner, at one time.

Ragbir Singh Landa



A letter from Lothian & Borders Police stating that Harnam Singh is known as a friend and a person of good character.

From the very beginning in Hopefield Terrace to the present day, Harnam Singh 'Lehri' enjoyed various roles of responsibility within the temple committee. These included president, secretary, chief cashier and chief advisor. He had a close working relationship with the Chief Superintendent of the Lothian and Borders Police Force.

Lucky Singh Bhai

Punjabi class held at Hopfield Terrace. Children from the Bhai, Kusbia, Bhaker, Swali, Rhatore families



We had a small temple in 7 Hopefield Terrace. Two gentlemen donated that flat and moved away to Newcastle. That family was well off, with three or four hundred pounds, it was a lot of money then, no one else had that amount of money.

Kuldip Singh Bhakar

The temple at Hopefield Terrace started in 1960. Before that we had prayers every morning and evening and special prayers on Sunday in our own houses. Our own temple made a huge difference. We couldn't forget about our own language and culture plus we were learning more about our own gods and religion than before. We didn't even have a proper priest at the time. We used to meet every Sunday and whoever could do the nine prayers used to conduct the service. My grandmother's cousin was a baptised Sikh and he used to do most of the ceremonies. He read from the Shri Guru Granth. It's difficult to read, very deep.

Baldev Singh Kusbia

I started going to the temple in Hopefield Terrace when I was about six. It was a flat and it had been decorated.

Lucky Singh Bhai



Inside Hopefield Terrace, 1965

Top back row (from left to right): Kuldip Singh Bhaker, Tehl Singh Bhaker, Baldev Singh Kusbia, Balwant Singh Rahtore.

Middle row: Gorkhia Singh Bhaker, Karnel Singh Landa, Hazur Singh Bhai, Tunda Singh Kusbia.

Front row: Mulka Singh Digwa, Sewa Singh Bhai, Sampuran Singh Bhai, Swarn Singh Kusbia, Munchee Singh Bhai, Jaswant Singh Bhai, Chiman Singh Rahtore.

It was in Hopefield Terrace for 5 or 6 years then moved to Academy Street and in 1976 we moved to Sheriff Brae.

Gurcharan Singh Landa



Hopefield Terrace: Visit from High Commissioner of India c. 1965

1st left back; Rajiminder Singh Digwa. Left-right; Swaran Singh Kasbia, Gurcharan Singh Rhatore, Lehna Singh Bhaker, Harnam Singh Bhai, Hazur Singh Bhai, High Commisioner of India Jit Singh Swali, Karnel Singh Landa, Swaran Singh Landa, Tunda Singh Kusbia. Front child Jagmohan Singh Kusbia.



Leith Sikh community prepare for a wedding in the 1950s



Sewa Singh Bhai and Satpal Kour Bhai: The first couple to be married in Hopefield Terrace Gurdwara



Swaran Singh Landa and Pyar Kour Landa



Baldev Singh and Kulwinder Kour Kusbia

Both couples are going on their first visit to Hopefield Terrace for a blessing after their weddings

Academy Street

We got another place in Academy Street in another tenement. The other people who stayed in that stair were from our own community, four houses of cousins and uncles with the temple on the top floor. It was financed entirely by the community. We never took out loans, we got donations and aid for things upfront.

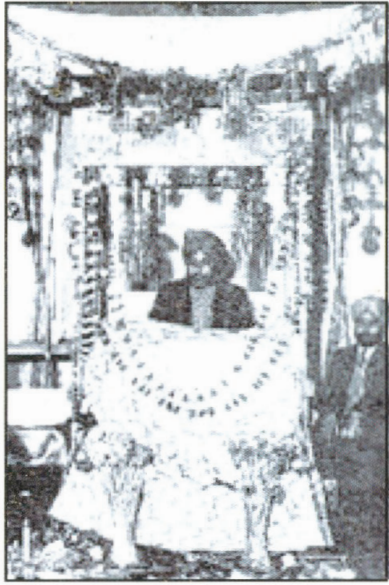
Baldev Singh Kusbia



Left to right: Joginder Singh Roudh, Kartar Singh Landa,
Sapuran Singh Bhai

We came from India in 1965 and the Gurdwara was at Hopefield Terrace. It moved in 1970 to Academy Street because they needed bigger premises. The community was growing.

Kulveer Singh Bhaker



Chiman Singh Landa

I was on the first floor and the Gurdwara was on the top floor. I eventually bought the Gurdwara.

Sampuran Singh Bhai

In 1970 we moved to 11 Academy St, Leith. This again was a top floor flat but larger. It consists of three fairly large bedrooms, kitchen and sitting room. Similarly the wall between the sitting and bedroom was knocked down to convert into a large worship area.

The High Commissioner of India came to open the Gurdwara, Mr Lobo. The house was bought for £300 for the Gurdwara.

Gurchan Singh Landa

We could get 60 to 70 people in the Gurdwara. A wall was knocked down and there was separate room where the kitchen was.

Kulveer Singh Bhai



Making Parshadh: Gurchan Singh Landa and Sewa Singh Bhai



One of the many attractions at the Leith Festival in 1971.

Members of the Sikh community in Edinburgh provided their own brand of music at an international night in Leith Town Hall.

From left to right: 1st row Gurbachan Singh Bhaker, Swaran Singh Roudh, Sapuran Singh Bhai, Jaswant Singh Bhai.

2nd row: Ronak Singh Rathour, Kuldip Singh Bhaker, Karnel Singh Landa, Swaran Singh Kusbia.

3rd row: Mewa Singh Bhai, Lehna Singh Bhaker, Ryminder Singh Digwa, and Kartar Singh Landa.

Sheriff Brae and Mill Lane



The Gurdwara in its current location on Sheriff Brae

The building was formally St Thomas' Church, Manse and schools. In 1976, the building was purchased by the Edinburgh Sikh community for use as their Gurdwara. The building is important in townscape terms, the spiral along with the Sikh Insignia at the top, the Khanda, provides a focal point along Mill Lane.

Harnam Singh Bhai, my father, was pivotal in securing the premises and the certificate to allow the building to be used as a Sikh Temple. During the negotiation period there was a lot of interest from other organisations for the use of the building. Due to the close relationship built by my father he was able to secure the building for the Sikh Temple.

Lucky Singh Bhai



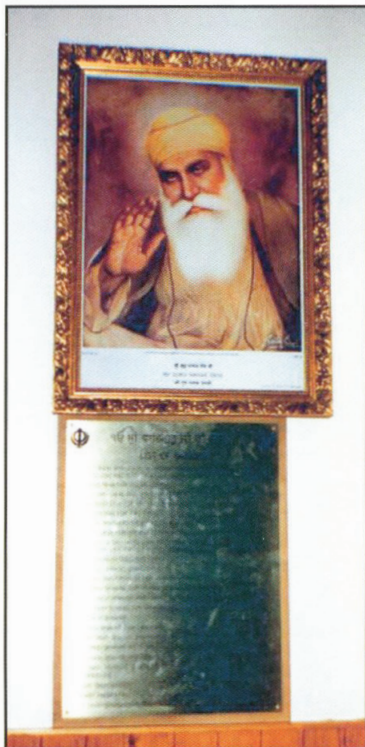
We brought the church very cheaply. I think they wanted the space to be used as God's place. We are grateful to the Council for giving us the building, we felt it was such a big space. It's been about thirty years now and even this temple is getting too small. We're thinking about extending it now but it will be a lot of money to extend and maintain. Everything is funded by the Sikh community, whatever they can afford to donate.

Kuldip Singh Bahkar





Inside Sheriff Brae 1988



There was a big fire at the Gurdwara which caused a lot of damage. At one time there used to be one of these big furnace heaters, a big metal one, in one of the rooms. Somebody broke into the temple, and I don't think they would have done it deliberately, but this heater fell. They must have tried to run away and knocked it and it caused a lot of damage. But we were very lucky, the people of Edinburgh were very good, we got a lot of donations and support from people. We've always had good relations with the community.

Ragbir Singh Landa



Visit from Sikh leader, Sant Baba Jaswant Singh Ji of Ramdass Amritsar,
at Sheriff Brae



Festivals



Vaisakhi 2005

Vaisakhi is to commemorate the Sikh religion being born. That is when the identity started, you know long hair, the dagger and bangle. Everyone is equal, everyone's the same.

Kevin Singh Bhai

When we were little kids we'd go to the Gurdwara at Hopefield Terrace and light the candles for Diwali. After the ceremony the families would get together for a meal.

Harbhajan Singh Kusbia

The Vaisahki is the new year for the Sikhs. We organised a parade with the local authorities and police. The first one went brilliantly, just a short one, along Junction Street, Constitution Street, Bernard Street and back to Gurdwara. We re-routed it; Pilrig, Leith Walk, Duke Street and back to the Gurdwara. We're hoping to do one up Leith Walk and the Ross Bandstand, with an open service there. People from different cities in the UK come up for the march and the celebration. It's grown from 150 to 600. So lots of preparation on the cooking side of it. After the parade families would get together. We'd share it around. Food, presents, refreshments, gifts. You'd phone relatives in UK and India.



Vaisahki 2008

The police do really help us when we have our Vaisakhi walk, the council and the police have always been very, very helpful.

Ragbir Singh Landa



Vaisahki 2009

On special days, like holy days, the birth of our gurus, we'd have a gurburb. That's in memory of our gurus. We have 10 gurus. We'd get all done up, a special occasion, it would be a Sunday. These gurburbs are held over three days. The Granth Sahib (Holy Book of Sikhs) is read from beginning to end. They start on a Friday and finish on a Sunday with a community meal which is always vegetarian.



The truck is loaned every year for the parade by Mr Jagdish Singh Bhaker of Lochened Motor Company

Edinburgh Life

When the women came across to this country they had never worn coats. It was so cold. They felt very uncomfortable. For about thirty years, especially in Scotland, all of those women who came in the early days never ever went out the house without their coats on. It didn't matter if it was a boiling hot summer, and you got really hot summers then, you weren't allowed to go out without your coat because it was seen as disrespectful. Even when women got married. Women remember walking down Leith Walk thinking, 'It's roasting, these people must think that we're mad having to keep our coats on'. It was a gradual progression to say, 'I'm not going to wear a coat when it's very hot, but I'll keep my shoulders covered and wear a cardigan.'

I was only 7 years old when I came to Edinburgh. I've never moved out of Edinburgh. People here are brilliant. I went to Bonnington and DKs - David Kilpatrick's. My children were born here and my grandchildren born here too.

Kulveer Singh Bhai

I came from India in 1949. I was 15 or 16 years old. I lived with my bother-in-law and sister in Glasgow for a couple of months then Dundee and Aberdeen. Then came to Edinburgh and settled.

Sampuran Singh Bhai

We lived in two rooms, one room was a sitting room, a dining room in the day and a bedroom at night. They have a luxury life nowadays and spend an hour in the bathroom. We just had a tub and shared the water.

Kuldip Singh Bhakar

My children went to Trinity School. They learnt English quickly but we spoke Punjabi at home. I like Punjabi. Some children can't speak it now. I only learnt a little English from my children.

Akbal Kour Landa



Mata Lahb Kour

My brother came in 1953, Coronation year. I came in 1957. I was 11 years and went to school at James Clark's. I had a business, a couple of shops but now I'm retired.

Gurchan Singh Landa

In India I knew people that worked for me but in Edinburgh I had to do everything myself. There was a lot of hard work. Sikh families tended to live close together, predominately in the same streets. In a stair there'd be four or five Sikh families. When I got married there were three separate Sikh families on the same landing. In Edinburgh I started going to the swimming pool organised through Sikh Sanjog. Once a week, on a Friday afternoon, we went to swimming sessions at the pool that were for women only.

Akbal Kour Landa

People wanted to fit in with the crowd so a lot of people cut their hair. You were with them by cutting your hair or by not wearing the turban. That was unfortunate.

Harbhajan Singh Kusbia



Harbhajan Singh Kusbia, aged 12



Harbhajan Singh Kusbia, aged 16

Our education in India was different to here; you sat on the floor, learnt everything. Here, the language was very hard to learn, I had no English when I arrived. There was a different way of doing things and we had to adjust. Eventually we did. It was difficult for the teachers to explain to us. We had no formal lessons to learn English, we just had to pick it up.

Baldev Singh Kusbia

I remember the first snow we had, I didn't like it then and I still don't now.

Akbal Kour Landa

I remember the snow, one foot deep in Easter Road.

Sampuran Singh Bhai

I started school when I was 5 years old. I started at Holyrood Primary, then went on to Jimmy Clark's Secondary. School was lovely. We didn't learn much at that time but it was nice. We had no problems. You had the bullying problem which you all always had but apart from that I had a lot of friends. I didn't even realise till I was about 16 or 17, and I came in to Leith, somebody told me, 'Oh you're black and I'm white', and I said, 'What is that?' I was brought up with basically, 'normal' people you could call them. I was invited to houses at for Christmas parties, we had the dumplings and always had a silver thruppence in the dumplings. It was just great, it was lovely. All my friends were white people. I never had any coloured friends.

Ragbir Singh Landa



Births, Deaths and Marriages

The Gurdwara comes into our lives for weddings, funerals, the birth of a son or daughter, engagement parties and holy days. The whole of the city would get invited. Now it's only by invitation so it's much smaller. The Gurdwara is a very important part of the Sikh culture and people.



(The late) Chiman Singh Landa and Swaran Kour Landa:
Taking their grandson to Sheriff Brae for a blessing

We can't take our baby out the house for the first 6 weeks or let anybody in, apart from your own relatives. After the six weeks then you take them to the temple and you bow to the temple and you have to get the baby to do that as well then you get the priest to do a prayer for you.

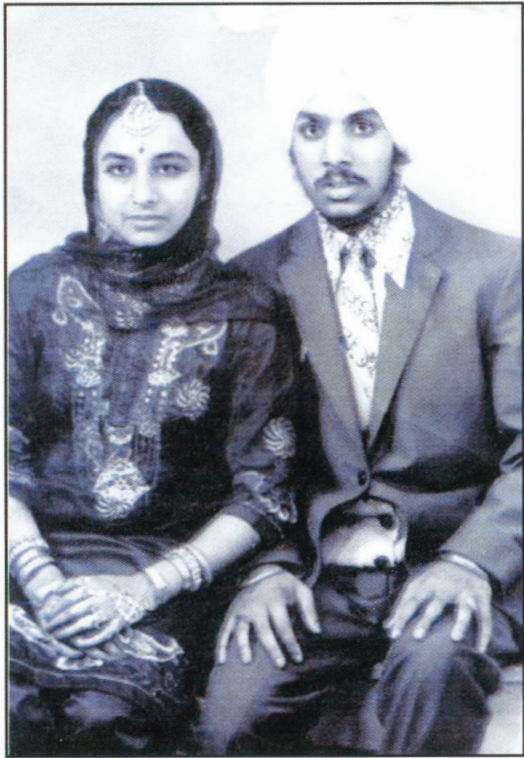
Ragbir Singh Landa



Male members of the Sikh community outside the Gurdwara at Academy Street, 1974 - Wedding Day of Harbhajan Singh Kusbia

In 1974 I got married. We got the blessing at Academy Street. Everybody used to socialise. There's a change in the closeness of families, now. We would invite lots of people. Things fell apart. People couldn't attend weddings. They had shops. The invites stopped. Men, women and children would have a celebration maybe a day or two after the wedding in a hall in Edinburgh. I stayed in the Gurdwara overnight. They would feed you. The marriage would take place the next day. We'd go to the girl's house and receive the dowry and take it back in the coach. Or come back another time to collect it, if it didn't fit. Now you'd just get it from Argos. There would be a substantial amount of gold and jewellery. It is quite an expensive thing. But it's a smaller affair now, less people.

Harbhajan Singh Kusbia



Ragbir Singh Landa and
Rani Singh Landa

I had an arranged marriage in Leeds. Those days when we got married there wasn't the same weddings you have now, videos, big halls, cameras, nothing like that. Whoever had a camera used to go with them. I didn't even see my wife till we got married. Actually when you got married, say you got married on the Monday, your wife came home with you on that Monday night. She went away on the Tuesday or Wednesday and these days she'd go back home to her parents to do a final 6 weeks with her parents again. So you wouldn't see your wife till six weeks later till you went and collected her.

Ragbir Singh Landa



Harbans Kour Kusbia with her grandson and granddaughters outside the Gurdwara after the naming ceremony for the birth of Dilal Singh Kusbia, grandson of Tunda Singh Kusbia, in 1989

When somebody died everybody gets together, the grieving's done together, the funerals are done together, it's quite a vast turn out. Then after the funeral day, there are three days reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, our holy script. That's read in the family's house, it's read day and night. After the third day everybody goes back down and it closes up and then you leave the family to do their own private grieving.

Ragbir Singh Landa



Harnam Singh Bhai (in blue turban)

Harnam Singh Bhai was involved in the Sikh Temple obtaining a licence to conduct wedding ceremonies and have their own registrar. This in turn allowed the Sikh community to build close relations with other communities all over the country.

Lucky Singh Bhai

When somebody died the whole community came to a standstill, in a good way, to support that family. Nowadays nobody thinks there's any need for the support, but there is. They think they just pay their respects at the funeral and that's it. They've taken that Western concept of funeral, end of story. Then you've got people from the Western community making their influence in the workplace, saying when somebody in our family dies we just have to come into work, but that's their culture, our culture's not like that. Western culture is beginning to erode that, saying if you work in a Western workplace you have to adapt to everything, but you don't!

What the Gurdwara means today

No one can ever turn you away from the temple, no matter which religion, colour, whoever you are. Anytime you come you're more than welcome, doesn't matter who it is. We never force anyone to join the religion unless they want to themselves, from the bottom of their heart.



Suckcharan Kour, Sharan Kour, Trishna Kour,
Ravinder Kour and Mandeep Kour.

These Sikh ladies made history by being the first home grown tutors from the Bhatra Sikh Community in Edinburgh to teach in the Gurdwara

The Gurdwara is important in a spiritual way, community way and social way. It's a huge part of the Sikh community. You do meditation, prayer, *sewa*, the English definition would be work, not chores but you're doing it for the ten gurus. It's a huge part of the Sikh religion. There's also the social side, the celebrations, Diwali, Vaisakhi. The congregation gets together. The Gurdwara is fundamentally for knowledge, it's the first place you get knowledge of the Sikh religion.

Kevin Singh Bhai

When I was younger I was more interested in Hibs. I think the older you get the more interested you get in the temple. There's definitely a lot more knowledge available now. One of my cousins is heavily into Sikhism and he always says, "Everyone's got that torch inside them and once it's lit it can never be put out". It just needs that spark.

Kevin Singh Bhai

My grandmother explained to me that we are Sikh and we help people who are weak. You can't do nothing when someone is being attacked, you have to put yourself in danger to stop this because it's a valiant act, it's satisfaction for your soul.

Simon Singh



People listening to a talk given by Edinburgh University, 2009

Our faith is a state of mind at first, a way of thinking, along the lines of being a nice person, basic human needs.

Simon Singh

Edinburgh is the only city in the UK that has one Gurdwara for all the Sikh community. Glasgow has 4 Gurdwaras, Birmingham up to 10 and more in London.

Kulveer Singh Bhai

Sikhism is about being in the middle, you have to live in this world by the rules of human kind, you have to have a family and children, not shut yourself up, that's not going to help humankind.

Trishna Singh Kusbia



The community is getting bigger all the time. Things are getting bigger and better and we have a lot of events. We teach youngsters. We want to keep our Sikhism as much as possible.

Kuldip Singh Bhakar

Punjabi Class 2010

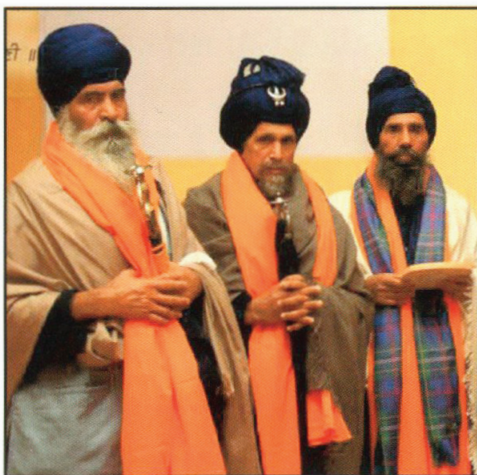


Punjabi class held at Sheriff Brae, 2008

Work of the Gurdwara in the community

Leith has a long history of people arriving and settling on its shores from all over the world. Different communities, representing many religions, cultures and traditions, have helped to make Leith one of the most vibrant areas of Edinburgh. However, due to pressures of daily life, many people rarely get the chance to meet and mix with neighbours. We seek to encourage the engagement of different communities during Leith Festival and beyond. We see the way forward as:

- taking part in events such as Leith Festival
- organising seasonal events
- collaborating with others to enhance community integration



Visiting speakers promoting Sikhism to younger people at the Gurdwara

Left picture: Bhai Inderjit Singh Khalsa (2nd left)



Banda Singh Bahadur and William Wallace event in Stirling Castle 2010



(l-r) Gurmeet Singh Landa, Ragbir Singh Landa, Councillor Gordon Munro, Giani Sukwinder Singh 'Maskeen', Cardinal Keith O'Brien, Sukdev Singh Bhai, Wege Singh Landa



Cardinal Keith O'Brien on a visit to the Gurdwara

Back: Wege Singh Landa, Suckchain Singh Kusbia, Akbal Singh Landa.
Front: Jairaj Singh Landa, Cardinal Keith O'Brien





Chardi Kala Jatha are a group of young American Sikhs. They have been trained in classical Raag Kirtan in Amritsar by Ustad Narinder Singh Sandhu and more recently Bhai Balbir Singh Ji. The Jatha have toured the world singing Kirtan and have had the privilege of Kirtan Sewa at Sri Harmandir Sahib Amritsar on many occasions.

We have over the years made links with local, national government and other private, voluntary and statutory bodies to ensure that they are aware of the interests of the Sikh faith communities. As we are now 1st, 2nd, 3rd and even 4th generation Sikhs living in Scotland.

We seek to advance the public knowledge and understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the Sikh faith to other faith communities. We promote mutual understanding and good relationships between people of different religious faiths in Scotland.





Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh Ji of Birmingham and Victor Spence, Secretary for Interfaith Edinburgh visiting the Edinburgh Gurdwara during Interfaith Week 2008.



Alex Salmond on a visit to the Gurdwara (left) Sukdev Singh Bhai, (right) Ragbir Singh Landa



£2.50

All proceeds go to support the Edinburgh Guru Nanak Gurdwara Punjabi class

