



Reflections of war from Muslim man on a mission

ZAHID AZIZ MARKS THE CENTENARY OF THE OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST WORLD CONFLICT WITH A COMPILATION FROM THE ARCHIVES OF WOKING'S MOSQUE

A WOKING man has produced a comprehensive account of Islam in this country during the outbreak of the Great War.

Entitled *Muslims in Britain and the Start of the First World War*, Dr Zahid Aziz's 24-page booklet is a fascinating record containing news and thoughts published at that time.

It chronicles the story of Muslim missionary Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, who arrived in England in 1912 from Lahore, in what was British India.

His aim was to put the teachings of Islam in their true light to dispel the 'distorted and ugly' misconceptions that generally prevailed in the West.

Derelict

When he came across the mosque in Woking (now called the Shah Jahan) it was derelict and generally disused, so he had it permanently opened in August 1913 and established the Woking Muslim Mission.

It provided a prayer venue as well as a meeting place and became the centre of Islamic activity in Britain.

Khwaja had also launched a monthly publication, the *Islamic Review*, in February of that year. Meanwhile, having worked tirelessly

■ by Rachel Saker

for both, he had planned to return to India in 1914 for a couple years. But his plans were scuppered by the outbreak of the First World War on July 23, quickly followed by Britain's declaration on August 4.

Excerpts from reports Khwaj read to Lahore read: "Within 10 days the world has changed altogether. On August 4 Great Britain issued an ultimatum to Germany, war being declared at midnight. Never before have events proceeded with such lightning speed. Now there is war all around."

"Today, on August 5, seven powers are ranged in the field of battle, trying to destroy one another. Austria and Germany are on one side, with Russia, France, Belgium, England and Serbia on the other. News has been received that Poland is also involved."

"It is absolutely astonishing. European diplomacy has been preventing these disastrous days from coming. But events have acquired their own momentum with such speed, all human proposals proved fruitless."

"The problem was that before one crisis could be resolved, another raised its head. The present British



ISLAMIC REVIEW – missionary man Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din digging in the grounds of the mosque back in 1913

government tried very hard, firstly, that peace should be maintained, and if not, then Britain be kept out of this world conflagration.

"The rulers of the British state cannot be praised too highly. They tried every way to extinguish this international fire, but fate made events pass so rapidly that the people had to jump into it."

Khwaja also spoke of the heartache when he wrote: "The world in its



POSTCARD – town's mosque in 1905



GATEWAY – Woking Muslim Mission

history has never before witnessed the bloody scenes that will come into view. In every country, not thousands but hundreds of thousands of young men are bidding farewell, perhaps for ever, to children, wives and mothers.

"Ah, what a heart-rending scene. Photographs in newspapers of soldiers departing brings tears to my eyes. Thousands of weddings have taken place in the past week or two, and today the bridegrooms are

separating from their brides. For more than 20 years, this tribulation has been hovering on the horizon of Europe. Every nation considers it legitimate for its survival to utterly destroy another. The less blood is shed the better."

Khwaja also spoke of the 'exemplary' attitude of the English. He wrote: "Western nations have followed a path highly worth emulating. Until yesterday there were two political parties but these have set aside their differences."

"The scene in the House of Commons on August 3 was worthy of great respect. When Sir Edward Grey presented the policy of Government, the first to support him was opposition leader Bonar Law."

"I think the will of God has joined our destiny with that of Great Britain."

The Woking Muslim Mission continued through both World Wars until 1968, as did the *Islamic Review*, which folded in 1970. It is now a unique chronicle of the history of Islam and Muslims in this country.

● VISIT www.wokingmuslim.org to read Dr Aziz's full compilation, *Muslims in Britain and the Start of the First World War*.