
ISLAM: CEASELESSLY CHARITABLE



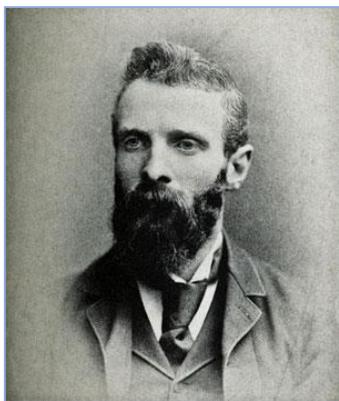
Commemorative plaque outside 8 Brougham Terrace.

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Islam is a faith that is charitable, generous, and community-centred.

This is evident in the religion's Victorian origins here in Britain. 8 Brougham Terrace (Kensington, Liverpool) is [Grade II* listed](#) site, widely-recognised as Britain's first mosque – The Liverpool Muslim Institute founded by Abdullah Quilliam in 1887. Although only lasting until 1908, the new religious body transformed into an entity far more than a place of worship, it became a centre of education, an advocate of inter-faith interactions, and a protector of Liverpool's poverty-stricken.

Born in Liverpool in 1856 [William Henry Quilliam](#) was an ordinary man with an extraordinary story. Raised as a Christian he practised as a criminal defence lawyer. Upon ill health, he travelled to the warmer climate of Morocco. It was during his travels that he converted to Islam and changed his name to Abdullah. Determined to make a difference, and to apply the teachings of his new faith, he purchased 8 Brougham Terrace and established the institute.



Portrait of Abdullah Quilliam.

[Photo Courtesy of the Abdullah Quilliam Society](#)

The hospitality displayed by the Institute on its official opening day, (25th December 1889) is a clear indication of the positive influence this diversification in religious belief, has had and continues to have on the local communities of Britain. On this Christmas, Quilliam welcomed hundreds of penniless children into the mosque

and provided them with a Christmas dinner. This simple act of kindness became a tradition for the Institute, with subsequent dinners being reported upon by local newspapers such as the [Liverpool Mercury](#), and the Institute's own publication [The Crescent](#). The [Abdullah Quilliam Society](#), a team dedicated to restoring the mosque, have done a fantastic job in making [The Crescent](#) easily accessible online. This primary source not only provides an insight into Islam in England between 1893-1908 but details other admirable efforts of the Institute to better the lives of Liverpool's children. From this resource, I learned that Quilliam set up Medina House Orphanage at 68 Sheil Road for children who had been abandoned, or unable to be cared for by their parents. Also, the Institute established both day and boarding schools for Muslim boys, complete with cricket and football teams. A school for their female counterparts was opened in February 1893.

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Provision of education was at the heart of the humanitarian work done by the Institute, with languages, photography, and science classes all being taught at the mosque, which facilities consisted of a library, a laboratory, a museum, and its own literary society. This dedication to learning is a legacy continued by the Abdullah Quilliam Society today. When discussing the Society's long-term vision with Mumin Khan, the co-founder, and CEO, he detailed

their plans to create facilities that ran parallel to those originally created by Quilliam. They hope to construct a library, a classroom, a media-room, [a restored Victorian kitchen](#), and museums about the work of Quilliam and Islam within the building. Mr Khan said, "once this is done it will be an iconic building and an iconic project for the good of the community."

My favourite detail, amongst the larger picture of endless kindness shown by Liverpool's first Muslims, is the open-door policy the Institute fostered. For example, In *The Crescent*, it is advertised that strangers were welcome to attend the 7pm lecture held at the Institute every Sunday. This will have brought people of all different backgrounds together, encouraging a positive atmosphere of tolerance and interfaith communication. It is commendable that Muslims, [today](#) as well as in the past, are so tolerant in the face of prejudice and hostility. Mr Khan confirmed that a hostile attack occurred on the Institute's "Muezzin – the person that leads the call to prayer," in 1891 he said that "200-400 people gathered outside on a winters day and threw snowballs at him." Despite such incidents, Mr. Kahn said how important it is for the Society to be following in the footsteps" of Quilliam by "setting up a dialogue between our neighbours, friends, between Muslims and Non-Muslims, to show what Islam is all about," and in order to "clear the misthoughts and perceptions people have from the media."

The Society continue to demonstrate this neighbourly ethos of Islam, successfully generating an inclusive community like their predecessor. One of the Mosques current projects, that Mr Khan spoke about involves [teaming up with the Fans Supporting](#)



the Victorian Kitchen © Hannah Smith



[Foodbank](#): "every now and then we ask the congregation to bring food to the Mosque and then we will deliver a van full of food to the foodbank, who will then distribute this to the poor people of North Liverpool." In an attempt to tackle the issue of homelessness in Liverpool, the society has also made donations to the [Whitechapel Centre](#).



The past work of Quilliam and the Institute and the ongoing work of the Abdullah Quilliam Society deserve to be highlighted and applauded. They serve as shining examples of what Islam truly stands for - a faith that is ceaselessly charitable.

(Top) Interior of the Main Hall of the Moslem Institute, during Quilliam's Life. [Photo Courtesy of the Abdullah Quilliam Society.](#)

(Bottom) Restored interior of the Main Hall, complete with Victorian-style Arch décor. Now open to the Community. © Hannah Smith.