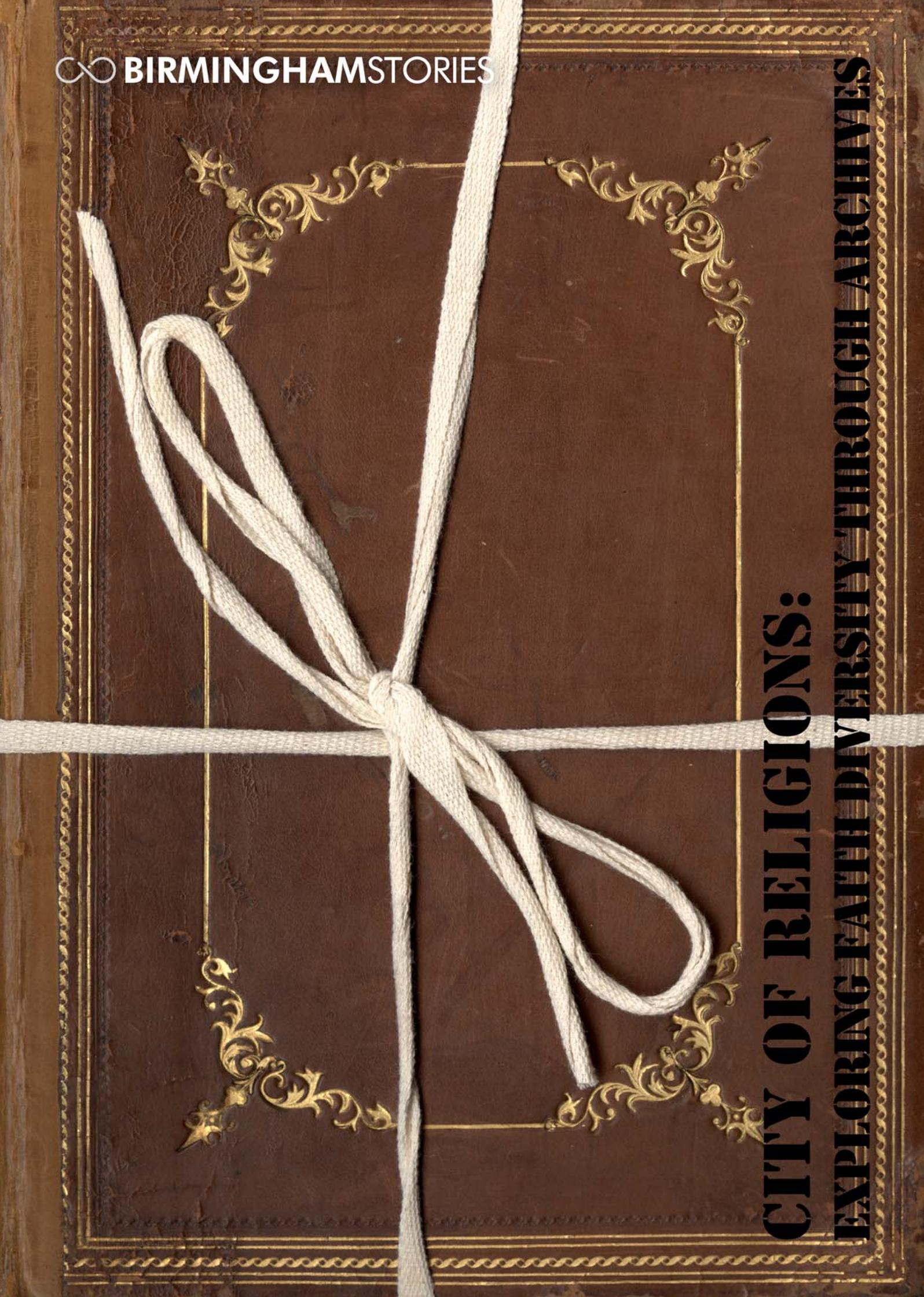


**CITY OF RELIGIONS:
EXPLORING FAITH DIVERSITY THROUGH ARCHIVES**



City of Religions: Exploring Faith Diversity Through Archives

Contents

City of Religions: Introduction

Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Birmingham

Early Catholic Histories in Birmingham

Faiths in a Changing Skyline: Aspects of Black and Asian Worship

Contemporary Issues: Faith and Conflict

Summary of Key Issues

Sources from Birmingham Archives and Heritage Collections

General Sources

Written by Dr Andy Green, 2008.

www.connectinghistories.org.uk/birminghamstories.asp



Photo: Nick Hedges, 1976. [MS 2478]



Robert William Dale. [Portraits Collection]



Photo: Nick Hedges. [MS 2478]

City of Religions: Exploring Faith Diversity Through Archives

Once known as the 'city of a thousand trades', Birmingham's history of diversity has also made it an important 'city of religions'. The first religious migrants into the area were probably Jewish settlers from Eastern Europe, Germany and Russia, who arrived around the 1730s. Accompanying long ongoing patterns of migration into the area, many different global spiritual perspectives have now changed and challenged the city's cultural and physical identity.

In Birmingham today, Mosque, Gurdwara and Temple are now commonly seen alongside Cathedral, Synagogue and Meeting House. As the range of worship grows, the arrival of new faith groups into the city is linked to historical processes deeply rooted in struggles for civic rights and religious freedom. Archive and heritage sources can supply us with materials that guide us towards important information concerning the evolution of these faith histories. These pages will introduce just some of the collections that allow us to explore how religion has formed an integral aspect of work, family, and everyday life in Birmingham.



Abraham Cohen, Jewish Anti-Nazi campaigner. Singer's Hill Centenary. [LF 19.8]



Washing the feet, Austin Road United Church of God, Handsworth, 1987. Photo: Vanley Burke. [MS 2192/A/Q/1]



Rev. Peter Stanford. Faces and Places, Vol 4. 1894 [BCOL]

Key Debate:
what role does religion play in the life of your community?

Religion and Society: in Eighteenth Century Birmingham

Many historians have argued that Birmingham has a long history of being home to, and tolerant of, many creeds and religions. Exempt from the 'five mile act' of 1665 which sought by law to enforce conformity to the established Church of England, Birmingham was seen as a 'safe harbor' for those who had undergone religious persecution, including Jews, Quakers and Unitarians. This link between religion and society has regularly framed accounts of the town's early character: '...part of the reason for its growth was its freedom from rules. It had no charter to shackle it, and no ancient craft guilds to block enterprise [...] Strong minded and determined, Baptists, Presbyterians and Quakers infused the place with energy' (Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men*, 2002). However, behind this image of tolerance, those who embraced different religions could still be faced with social exclusion - or physical violence.



Priestley Collection by Samuel Timmins. [IIR10]

was subsequently destroyed during the fierce anti-radical riots in Birmingham in 1791. Caricatured as 'Gunpowder Joe', Priestley's sermons in fact stressed his devotion to 'reason' and religious and political independence.

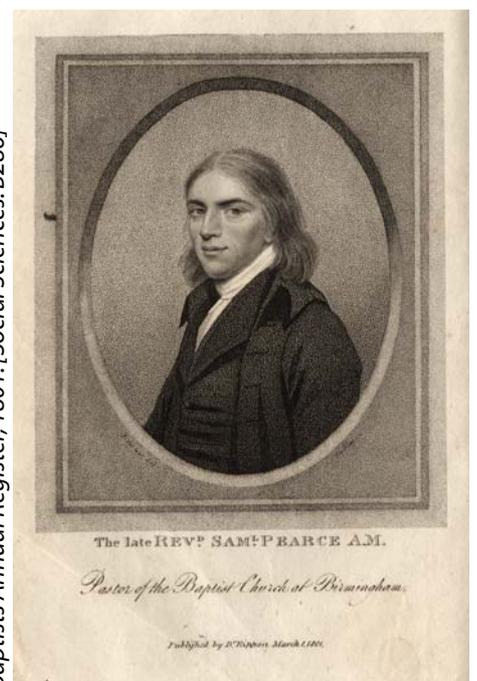
"We should interest ourselves not only for our relations, and particular friends; not only for our countrymen; not only for Europeans, but for the distressed inhabitants of Asia, Africa, or America; and not only for christians, but for Jews, Mahometans, and Infidels!" Joseph Priestley, *Sermon on the Slave Trade*, 1788.

Joseph Priestley and the Birmingham Riots, 1791

This can be seen in the case of Joseph Priestley, an important Unitarian minister, scientist, author, abolitionist and 'Lunar Society' member. Priestley's Non-conformist views and his support for the French Revolution both contributed to perceptions of him as an anarchic figure who wanted to overthrow Church and State. Priestley's house

Rev. Samuel Pearce and Cannon Street Baptist Church

Samuel Pearce was another powerful example of the strength of Non-conformist worship in 18th century Birmingham. In 1790, under Pearce's guidance, Cannon Street Baptist increased its congregation among those whose felt excluded from churches that served the wealthier classes. Pearce also pursued an interest in the abolitionist movement. His name can be found not only on the Birmingham 'subscriber list' to Equiano's 'Narrative' of 1790, but also on an important work entitled *An Account of The Life of David George from Sierra Leone in Africa Given by Himself in Conversation with Brother Rippon of London and Brother Pearce of Birmingham* (1793). As a founding figure of the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), Pearce is believed to have learned Bengali in the hope of taking up missionary work abroad. One of his sermons was addressed to lascars who were 'far from home, and in a country of strangers' (Baptist Register, 1798). However, fragile health prevented him leaving Britain and he died in Birmingham in 1799.



Baptists Annual Register, 1801. [Social Sciences: B286]

Key Debate:

how much did religious diversity contribute to early civic growth in Birmingham?

Early Catholic Histories in Birmingham

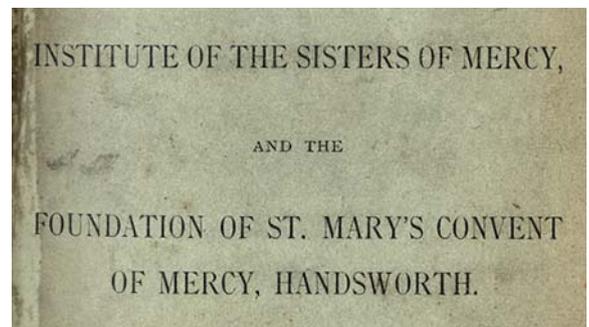
Early sites of Catholic worship in Birmingham included a small chapel situated off Broad Street (1786) and another in Shadwell Street (1808). By 1834, it was decided that the town should have a 'commodious and splendid church'. The result was the Cathedral of St. Chad (1841). This was the first Roman Catholic Cathedral to be built in England since the Reformation. In the same year, a number of 'Sisters of Mercy', based in Handsworth, began visiting the sick and educating Catholic children in the town.

At this time, many Catholic families and workers faced religious intolerance. The crisis of the 'Potato Famine' had caused a surge in the number of poor Irish Catholics in Birmingham, who were portrayed as a threatening force by the town establishment. Although the Catholic Emancipation Act (1829) officially ended legal religious discriminations, tensions increased and the Murphy Riots (1867) highlighted deep strains of anti-Irish feeling in the town. William Murphy was a Protestant agitator who sparked violence in the Park Street area by preaching anti-Catholic sentiments outside of Carr's Lane Chapel, an Irish Catholic area. The discrimination that faced Catholics and Non-conformists in the 18th century was vented upon the new migrant Catholics in 19th century Birmingham.

Framing these changes in the religious landscape, St. Michael's Catholic Church on Moor Street, opened in 1862, stands on the original site of Joseph Priestley's Unitarian chapel, destroyed during the Riots of 1791. Standing by Carr's Lane Church, this site connects faith histories in many ways. It was used by post war Polish settlers and is now also reused by Polish Catholics who have recently begun to settle in the city.



St. Chad's Cathedral. [Birmingham Slide Collection]



'The First Sister of Mercy', 1892. [B'ham Institutions B/12]



St. Michael's, Moor Street. [Birmingham Slide Collection]

Religion, Art and Industry

St. Chad's Catholic Cathedral stood near Birmingham's original gun-quarter, where many Irish families lived and worked as industrial craftsmen. Designed by the famous architect A.W.Pugin, its spires were a stunning monument to the aesthetic and spiritual values of the 'gothic revival'. Inside the building, much of the impressive iron work was carried out by an important local firm belonging to John Hardman, a key employer and philanthropic force in the Catholic community. Another important figure in Birmingham was Cardinal Newman, a convert to Catholicism who founded the 'Oratorian Congregation' of Birmingham in 1848. The Oratory stands in Hagley Road.

Key Debate:
what other areas of inner city Birmingham hold important Catholic connections?

Faiths in a Changing Skyline: Aspects of Black and Asian Worship



Austin Road United Church of God Crusade, Handsworth, 1987.

[Photo: Vanley Burke. MS 2192/A/Q/115]

Religion often frames our knowledge and understandings of the long history of black and Asian migration into Birmingham. For instance, the earliest reference we currently have about the black presence in Birmingham is an entry for Ann Pinard, 'a Black', buried at St. Philip's, Birmingham, 12 January 1773.

Today, the great depth of black spirituality in Birmingham can be glimpsed through documentary photographs. Two images in this learning guide are from Vanley Burke's collection, 'Redemption Songs'.

Even in the 19th century, a black Christian presence had already begun to exert itself as a personal and political force in the civic growth of Birmingham. George Cousins, born in the Caribbean, was perhaps the first black minister in the West Midlands, based for a time in the Cradley Heath area (1837-39). Rev. Peter Stanford was another extraordinary spiritual leader. Originally born into U.S. slavery in 1859, Stanford's escape to freedom eventually led him in 1889 to become minister of a Baptist church in Highgate. Meanwhile, a book entitled *'The Asiatic in England'* (1873) recorded that an Asian presence was also already becoming a part of working class Birmingham. Slater, a Christian missionary, briefly noted that a 'Dada Bhai' ran an 'oriental' lodging house in Lichfield Street. What would have been the religious identity of those who passed through the house? How would they have practiced faith?

Building Faith in the 20th Century

The growth of 'new' faith communities as a result of migration in the 1950s and 1960s needs to be seen as part of this much longer historical context. As in earlier periods, the welcome given to black Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims was divided. *'Faith in the City of Birmingham'* (1988) suggested that 'Newly arrived black and Asian Christian immigrants had expected a church going nation and a welcome as equals in the Christian faith. Generally they found neither.'

Gradual changes in the urban landscape reflect social transitions linked to religion. For example, Birmingham's first Muslim burial ground was opened at Lodge Hill Cemetery in 1942. As black and Asian faith communities built social bonds through religion, it was often old disused churches or schoolrooms that were readapted for new purposes (see right). Gradually, Birmingham saw the emergence of sites such as Central Mosque in Balsall Heath and the Sikh Gurdwara on Soho Road. These powerful buildings reflected the growing pride, confidence and strength of religious diversity in Birmingham.



Graham Street: originally a 19th c. Baptist Church

[Slide: Churches and Chapels 17BAH]



Graham Street today: Ramgarh Sikh Temple

[Photo: Dr Andy Green, 2008]

Key Debate:

what do the images (above right) tell us about Birmingham's past and present landscape?

Contemporary Issues: Faith and Conflict

From the 'riots' of 1791, to 19th century debates over religion and civic rights, to 20th century conflicts over the building of new spaces of worship, Birmingham has always played a central role in debates about religion. In this context, contemporary issues such as 'Islamophobia' emerge not simply as the 'problem' of one particular community, but as part of a wider interconnected set of social and historical questions concerning how we feel about faith, culture, work, education, and national identity.

Many spiritual leaders in Birmingham have argued that society should protect the rights of each individual in choosing to follow their own faith. As part of this ongoing struggle, archives and heritage collections can also be used as a resource to combat the prejudice against faith and to share and discuss untold histories. For example, the photograph (top left) is contained in Nick Hedges *I'm A Believer: Religion in the West Midlands*. It reflects a far more thoughtful and constructive response to the issue of Islam in the West Midlands than is usually portrayed in the media. It is a symbol for not just one faith, but the many that make Birmingham a 'city of religions'.

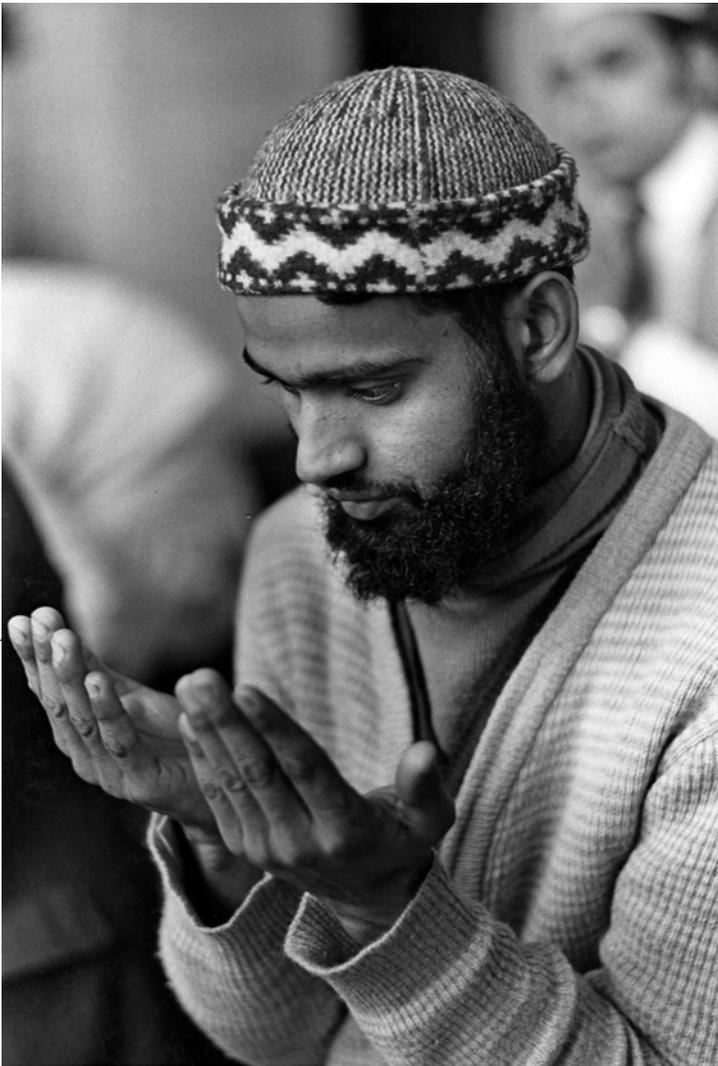


Photo: Nick Hedges. [MS 2478]



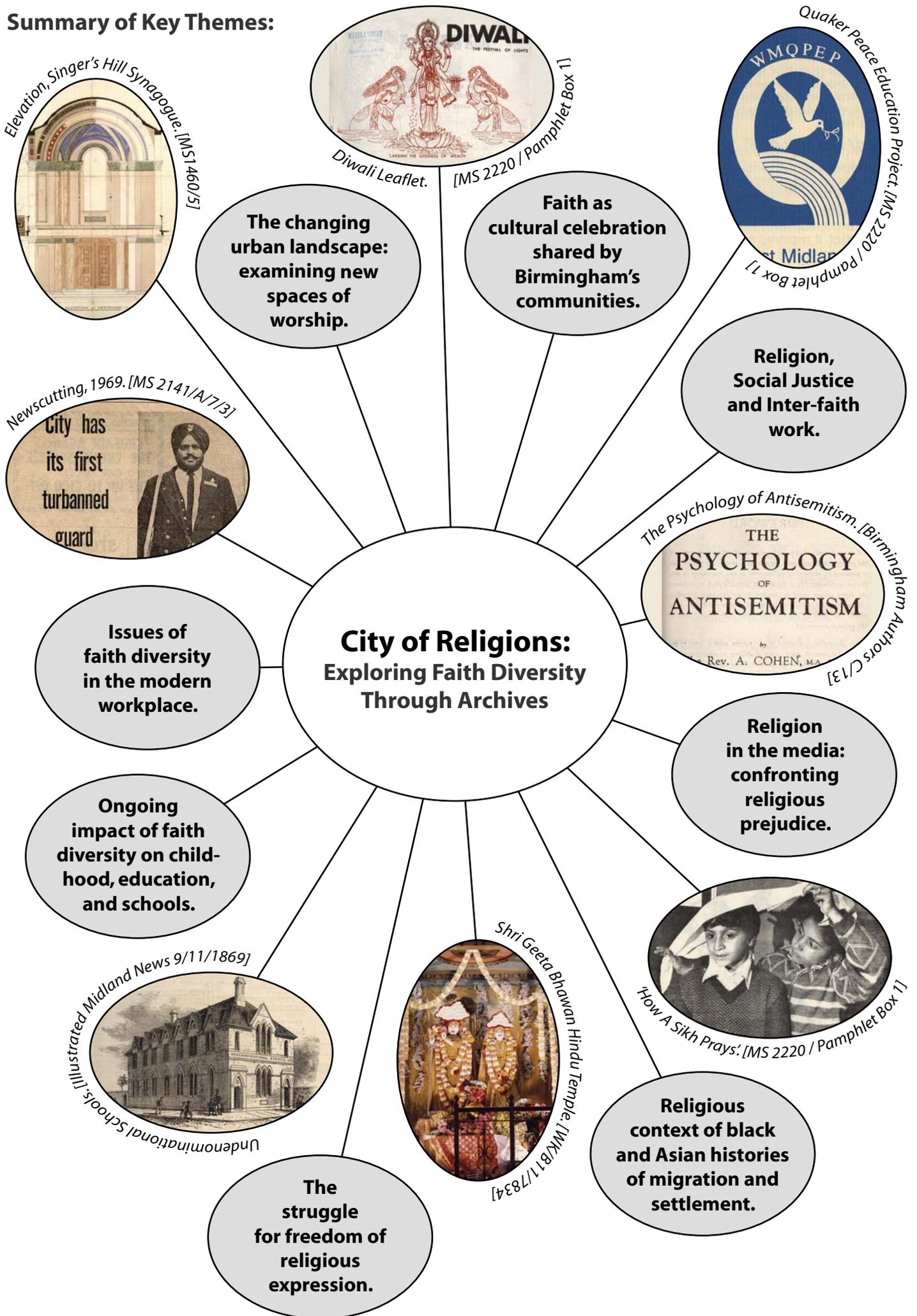
Dar Ul Uloom Mosque. [WK/B11/7807]

"Some people would rather have a... completely white society because they feel that Asians have come and exploited everything. They're entitled to their views but I think that simply as Muslim Pakistani, Asian girl I would think that we... have a right to live in this country because it's people like my grandfather who've worked in the industries that have helped build up the British economy."

*Shahista Zamir, Millennium Archive.
[MS 2255/2/145]*

Key Debate:
how can we ensure that issues of faith are addressed in ways that include, rather than divide communities?

Summary of Key Themes:



City of Religions: Exploring Faith Diversity Through Archives

Sources from Birmingham Archives and Heritage Collections

Archives:

Collections and Materials on Non-Conformists History in Birmingham

Birmingham has large collections on local Non-conformist histories. This includes family papers, society reports, diaries, church records, minutes and leaflets. For example, Quaker histories are represented through a range of collections including: The Galton Papers [MS 3101]; The Quaker Reading Society [MS 2160]; Humphrey Lloyd Papers [MS 1061]; Papers relating to Charles Pumphrey [MS 2013]; Papers of the Cadbury Family of Birmingham [MS 466]; The Joseph Priestley Collection [ref: Samuel Timmins].

Political, Cultural and Religious Collections

The Birmingham Hebrew Congregation Archive, c. 1807-2006 [JA]
Papers of the Indian Workers' Association, c.1959-1998 [MS 2141]
Papers of Avtar Jouhl and the Indian Workers Association, c.1956-2005 [MS 2142]
AFFOR (All Faiths For One Race) [MS 2220]
Banner Theatre [MS 1611]
Council for the Sikh Gurdwaras [MS 2302]
The Millennibrum Oral Histories [MS 2255]

Faith Diversity in Oral History Collections

The Charles Parker Archive [MS 4000]. Charles Parker (1919-1980) was a BBC documentary radio producer, and a writer, singer, actor and founder member of the theatre company Banner Theatre. The Parker Archive recordings reveal his interest in understanding the role of religion in a changing society. Recordings on 'faith' include: I Chose Where To Stand: The Life of Else Rosenfeld [MS 4000/6/1/30]; Instant Salvation [MS 4000/6/1/34]; Meditation for Good Friday [MS 4000/6/1/15]; St Peter at Saltley [MS 4000/6/1/24]; Blessed Assurance [MS 4000/6/1/35]; Way of Life: New Wine into Old Bottles [MS 4000/6/1/36]; The Asian Teenager [MS 4000/6/1/56]; Caught Up In Two Minds [MS 4000/6/1/79]; The Great Divide [MS 4000/6/1/78].

Photographic Collections:

Birmingham Sacred Spaces. Part of the 'Warwickshire Photographic Survey' [WK/B11/7800-7836].

The Vanley Burke Archive contains a wealth of materials collected by the documentary artist as part of his interest in the role religion plays in people's everyday lives [MS 2192].

Derek Bishton and Ten.8. This archive includes photographic collections by important Birmingham based photographers who often focused on the theme of religion [MS 2478]. It includes the Nick Hedges series, 'I'm a Believer: Religion in the West Midlands' [MS 2478/A/3]. The archive also contains a large range of newspaper cuttings on the theme of religion, comprising materials on black-led churches during the 1980s, and the attitudes of the major religions towards racism and poverty [MS 2478/C/26].

Prints by Sukhvinder Ubhi [MS 2265 & WK/B11/8021-8049].

See also: Home Front [MS 2546]; Blackheart Man [MS 2547]; Sangeeta Redgrave Collection [MS 2356]; George Hallett Collection [MS 2449]. The Benjamin Stone Collection and The Helen Caddick Diaries [MS 908] both contain vast numbers of late 19th and early 20th century images of cultures and religions.

City of Religions: Exploring Faith Diversity Through Archives

Primary Printed Sources:

Zoe Josephs, *Birmingham Jewry 1749-1914* [BCOL: 19.8]
Zoe Josephs, *Birmingham Jewry Volume 2* [BCOL: 19.8]
Zoe Josephs, *Survivors* [BCOL: 19.8]
The Birmingham Jewish Recorder Newspaper Collection, 1935 onwards [L19.8]
Harry Levine, Jewish Community in Birmingham. Five volumes of newspaper cuttings, 1937-1948 [LF19.8]
Rev Peter Stanford, *From Bondage to Liberty: The Life Story of the Revd P. T. Stanford* [L78.1STA]
Ernest Cashmore, *Rastaman* [L21.85]
Birmingham Newspaper Cuttings: Muslim Communities in Birmingham 1965-2004 [Black History Collection]
Dawn: Magazine of the Islamic Cultural Centre Birmingham [Black History Collection]
Sheldon, *Early Methodism in Birmingham* [BCOL: 18.3 SHE]
O'Donnell, *The Pugins and Catholic Midlands* [BCOL: 17 O'DON]
'The First Sister of Mercy', 1892 [Birmingham Institutions B/12]
The Birmingham Slide Collection

General Sources

Secondary Reading:

Tahir Abbas (ed.) *Muslim Britain* (2005)
Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within. Muslims in Britain Since 1800* (2004)
Robert Beckford, *Dread and Pentecostal: a political theology for the black church in Britain* (2000)
Viv Broughton, *Black Gospel* (1985)
Carl Chinn, *Birmingham Irish: Making Our Mark* (2003)
Yousef Choudhury and Peter Drake, *From Bangladesh to Birmingham* (2001)
Robert Darden, *People Get Ready! A New History of Black Gospel Music* (2005)
Peter L. Edmead, *The Divisive Decade. A History of Caribbean Immigration to Birmingham in the 1950s* (1999)
Ian Grosvenor, Rita McLean and Siân Roberts (eds.) *Making Connections. Birmingham Black International History* (2002)
Ian Grosvenor, 'Faith in the City': *Religion, Racism and Education in 1960's Britain*.
Paedagogica Historica Supplementary Series V pp.281-197 (1999)
Rosina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes* (1986)
Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain. 400 years of History* (2002)
Christine Ward-Penny, *Catholics in Birmingham* (2004)

Websites - Museums - Libraries - Institutions:

www.movinghere.org.uk - archive sources relating to 200 years of migration to Britain including the West Midlands
www.singershill.com - Birmingham Hebrew Congregation official website
www.somethingjewish.co.uk/articles/498 - Something Jewish website. A History of Birmingham Jewry, Arthur Chesses
www.bbc.co.uk/birmingham/faith/faith_in_your_community
www.sikh-heritage.co.uk
www.sikhsinbritain.com
www.tandana.org
www.centralmosque.org.uk
www.sikhcybermuseum.org.uk - an educational project that focuses on Anglo Sikh History
www.shcc.org.uk - website for the Birmingham Shree Hindu Community Centre
www.geetabhawan.co.uk - website for the Shree Geeta Bhawan temple
www.respectcoalition.org - materials on the 'Respect' coalition, with link to West Midlands area

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