

SHARED ROOTS IN FAITH

Interview by Fathima Begum

Transitions in Faith Whitechapel from 1965 - 1985

1965, scattered around the streets of Whitechapel are Synagogues. They were filled with daily worshippers, old men and women and children alike.

Whitechapel was the hub of an inter-generational Jewish community. Central to the community were their family businesses, bakeries, Synagogues and clothing stores catering for the needs of the entire community.

“And the Jewish people used to be in East London, they used have a bakery...and they were good and there was a lot of places of worship in East London. There was one now in Brick Lane, it turned into a big one.”



Bethnal Green Road Markets

The essentials practices of Jewish daily life were readily met in this area, the community was strong, respected and catered for the needs of everyone. But now the

changes are very evident. “I have to buy the Halal food. The only trouble is where we used to buy the food from; the Jewish Shop is that they’re not here. So I have to go to Golders Green and buy our food.”

Fast-forward to 1970, the Jewish community have started to swiftly migrate from East London to North London, where the heart of the Jewish British population still exist today.

“Once a month and they open in...what you call it...in holidays. There’s a new year coming they’ll be open. The trouble is in our faith we’re supposed to have 10 people before we say the prayer. We can have the prayer but we can’t open the arch and get the 5 books of Moses to read we cannot do that.”

In Whitechapel today, the Jewish community is a marginal group and is outnumbered by the Islamic faith.

In the 1970s a slow and steady influx of economic migrants had a profound effect on the demographics of the East End.

The decrease in one religious community saw a rise in another. “I used to see the factory workers, all of doing factory work...they’re living 7/8 people used to live in one room. One group would go to work in the day time, while somebody sleeps...”



Whitechapel Bell Foundry

The Bengali Muslim community not only suffered poor living standards originally, just as the Jewish community did, but were subject to fascist taunts and jeers. They did not remain dormant and protested against racist attitudes; the work of these men had eventually paid off as the East End became the heart of the Muslim community. Originally, there were very few facilities available for Muslims. “It was very difficult, only one person started, Tozmir Ali, in East London Mosque at the time... they didn’t know the regulation that Muslim people needed to be buried as soon as possible.”

The plight of this generation of men should never be forgotten, they worked hard to ensure they would be able to bring their wives here and raise their children safely. “I think living standards have improved...everything is on your fingertips, you want to study, go to any shop and get whatever you like, and before they only used to have one box of dates.

Things are much, much better... There were very rare facilities for post and anti-natal facilities. Government have now looked into it, even in Tower Hamlets... Life is much better here in an Islamic point of view.”



Whitechapel Road and East London Mosque

Whitechapel