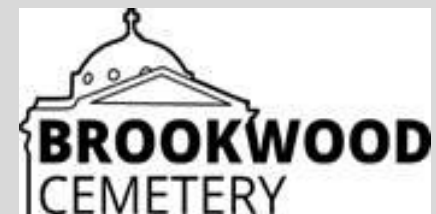


# The living and the dead: Exploring minority burial grounds in Brookwood Cemetery, Surrey



Ole Jensen,  
June 2024



# The project in a nutshell

- Lottery-funded two-year project, led by Woking Asian Business Forum
  - September 2020 to October 2022
- Budget approx. £90k
- Local stakeholders: Brookwood Cemetery, Brookwood Cemetery Society, Surrey Heritage Centre, The Lightbox (Woking-based museum/gallery)

# Objectives

- To document the history of minority burial grounds in Brookwood Cemetery and their usage by minority communities
- To improve popular awareness of minority burial grounds at Brookwood Cemetery
- To enhance mutual understanding and collaboration between minority communities (didn't happen – due to COVID)

# 'The living and the dead'



- Cemeteries as records of the past *and* representing a living heritage.
  - History *and* memories
- 'Cemeteries act as bridges between two worlds – the home of the living and the metaphorical home of the dead, the home of origin and the home of settlement' (Francis et al, 2005, p 195)
- 'Muslim burial grounds as spatial expressions of community identity and solidarity' (Ansari 2007)
  - A record of pre-existing communities
  - Emerging spaces where communities can express their identities

# Importance of minority burial grounds



- Cemeteries can play role in
  - Preserving a sense of cultural identity – and a place for this identity
  - Creating a sense of community beyond the immediate family
- Decision to bury in ‘new’ country of residence rather than repatriate the dead
  - Step in grounding a new identity – buried in British soil and belonging to a minority community
  - Establishing a new ‘home’ for the deceased, the living, and future descendants (role of welfare organisations)

# Minority communities in Brookwood Cemetery



- Nationality: Swedish, Latvian, Serbian, Italian (no distinct burial ground).
- Religion:
  - Zoroastrian (1862, first Zoroastrian burial ground in Europe)
  - Catholic
  - Greek Orthodox brotherhood
  - Muslim: Ismaili, Bagh-e-Zehra, Ahmadiyya, Dawoodi Bohra, Jammatt, Nasserpuria Memon, Turkish and Turkish Cypriot

# The emergence of Brookwood Cemetery



- The London burial crisis
  - Population of London doubling 1801-1851
  - Health risks – 1848 cholera outbreak, resulting in +60,000 deaths in Britain
- 1852 burial act
  - Closure of church yards deemed overfull and a danger to public health
  - New burial sites/cemeteries had to be part-consecrated in order to meet needs of local non-Anglican populations

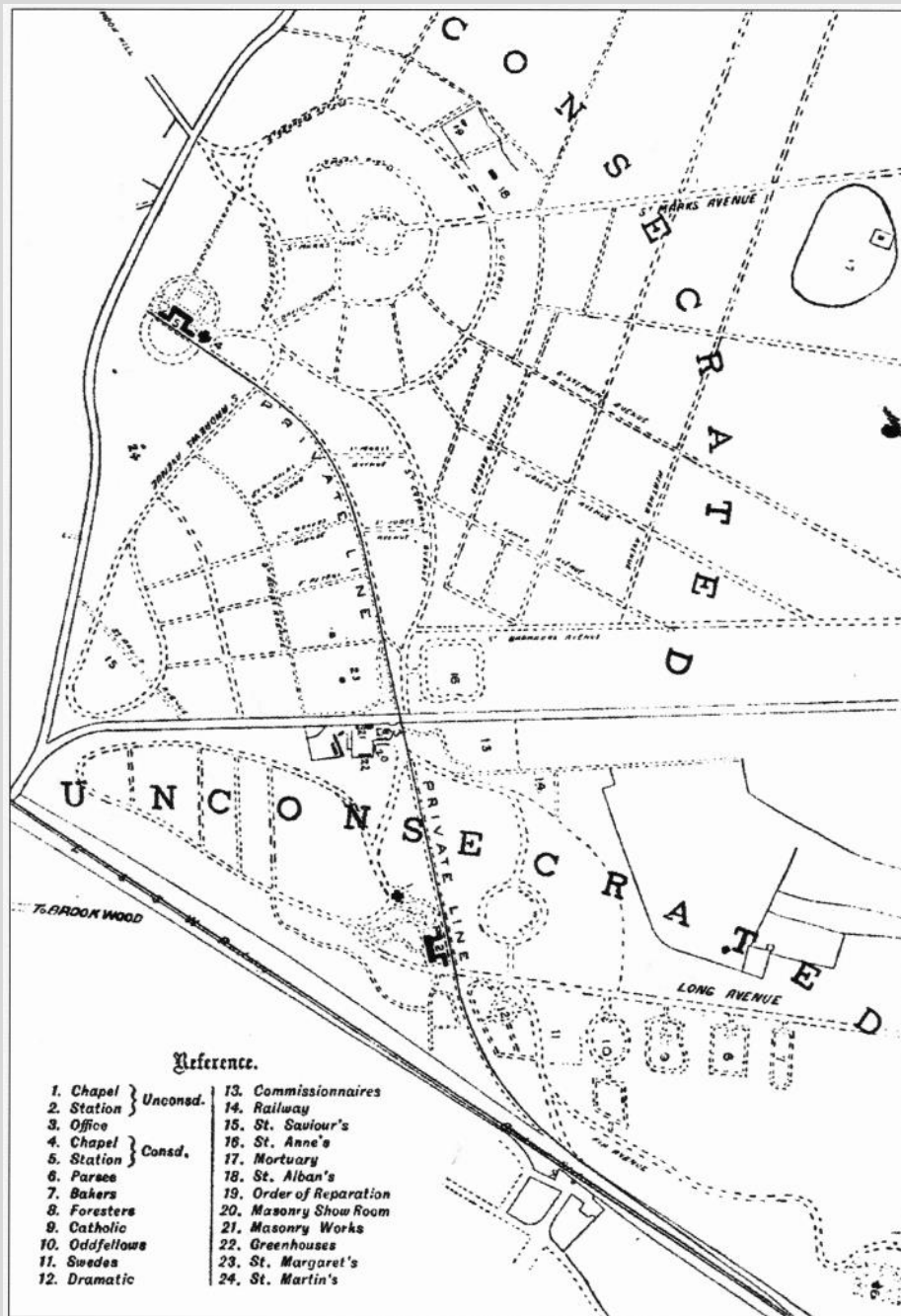
# Brookwood Cemetery

- Opened 1854, London's necropolis – with 500 acres the largest cemetery in UK, 25 miles SW of London
- Owned by London Necropolis & National Mausoleum Company
- Business model based on railway link to London, daily 'dead trains' from Waterloo Station.
- Consecrated and non-consecrated sections.





# Brookwod 1890



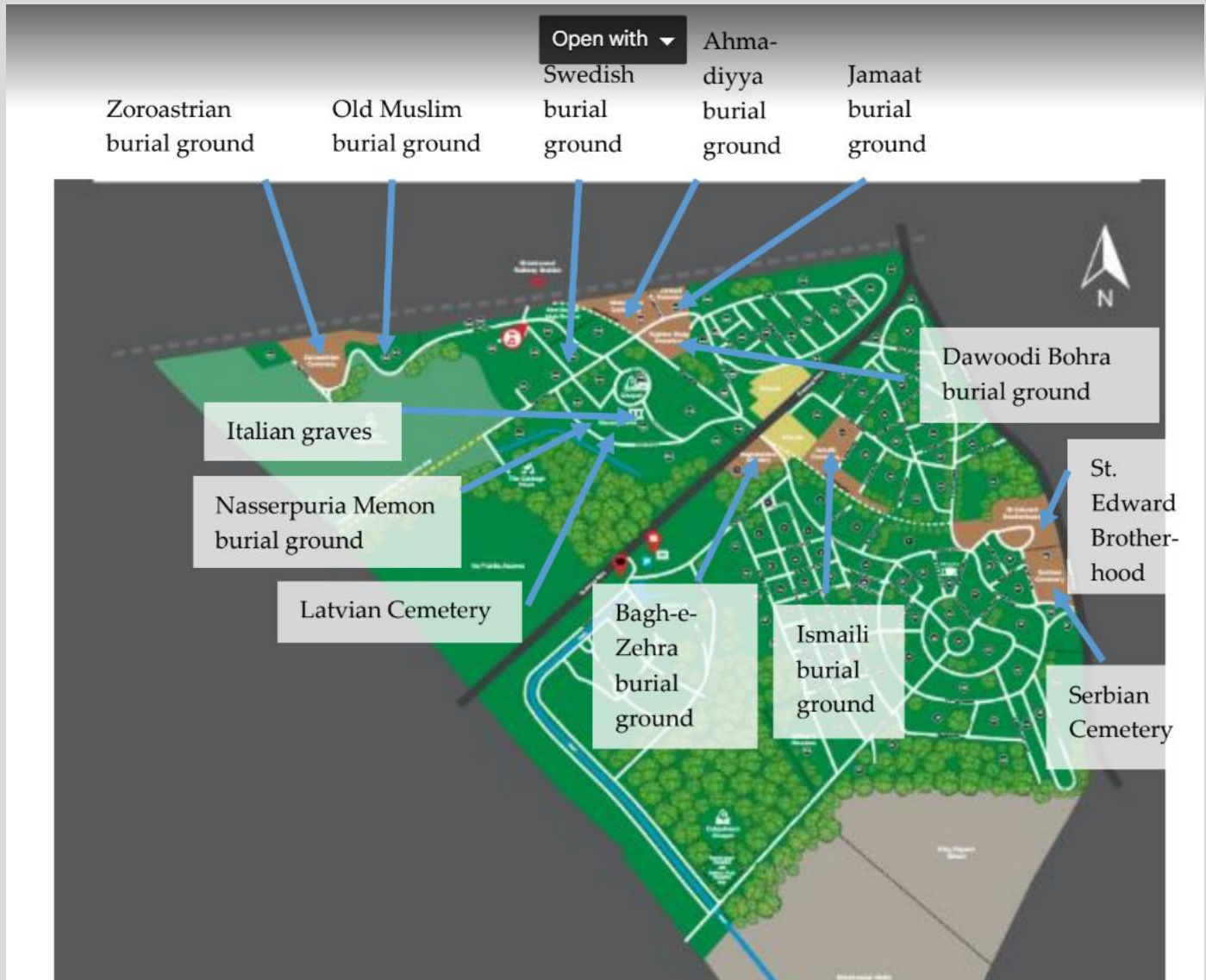
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| 1. Chapel      | } Unconsd. | 13. Commissionnaires    |
| 2. Station     |            | 14. Railway             |
| 3. Office      |            | 15. St. Saviour's       |
| 4. Chapel      | } Consd.   | 16. St. Anne's          |
| 5. Station     |            | 17. Mortuary            |
| 6. Parsees     |            | 18. St. Alban's         |
| 7. Bakers      |            | 19. Order of Reparation |
| 8. Foresters   |            | 20. Masonry Show Room   |
| 9. Catholic    |            | 21. Masonry Works       |
| 10. Oddfellows |            | 22. Greenhouses         |
| 11. Swedes     |            | 23. St. Margaret's      |
| 12. Dramatic   |            | 24. St. Martin's        |

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(John Clarke's collection)



# MINORITY BURIALS IN BROOKWOOD CEMETERY – AN OVERVIEW

BURIAL GROUND	TOTAL BURIALS BY END 2021	SOURCE
AHMADIYYA	474	HEADSTONE COUNT
BAGH-E-ZEHRA	442	CEMETERY RECORDS
DAWOODI BOHRA	434	HEADSTONE COUNT
ISMAILI	1831	HEADSTONE COUNT <sup>5</sup>
ITALIAN	NA <sup>1</sup>	
JAMAAT	208	HEADSTONE COUNT
LATVIAN	500	CEMETERY RECORDS
MAHOMEDAN <sup>2</sup>	390	CEMETERY RECORDS
MUSLIM <sup>3</sup>	4159	CEMETERY RECORDS
NASSERPURIA MEMON	12	HEADSTONE COUNT
SERBIAN	243	HEADSTONE COUNT
SWEDISH	676	CEMETERY RECORDS
TURKISH/TURKISH CYPRIOT <sup>4</sup>	NA	
ZOROASTRIAN	600	ZOROASTRIAN TRUSTEE

# First minority burial grounds



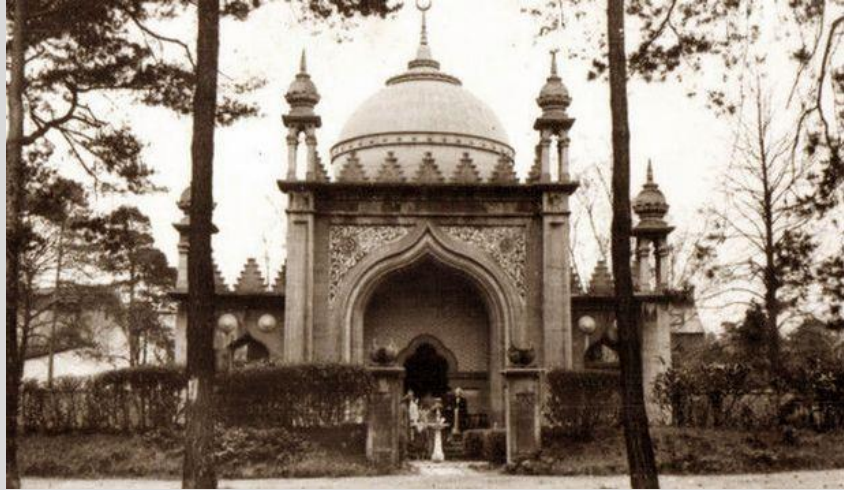
1857: Swedish burial ground

1859: Catholic burial ground

1862: Zoroastrian burial ground

1884: First Muslim burial ground  
in the UK

# First Muslim burial ground in the UK



- Established 1884 by Dr. Leitner, founder of the Oriental Institute in Woking – and the Shah Jahan Mosque (1889, first purpose-built mosque in the UK)
- Marked by Qibla Stone recording how ‘Muhammedans’ should be buried in the plot



*‘The graves of Muhammedans are so dug as to allow the body to lie with its face towards Mecca. The graves should be 4ft deep with a side recess at the bottom for the body. Nothing should press on the body when placed in the recess which is then closed with unburnt bricks. The grave is then filled with earth and a mound raised over it.’*

(Clarke 2006, p236)

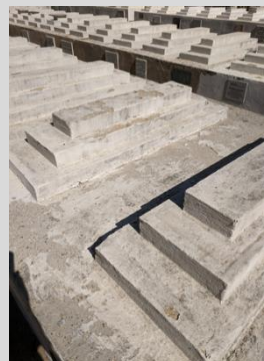
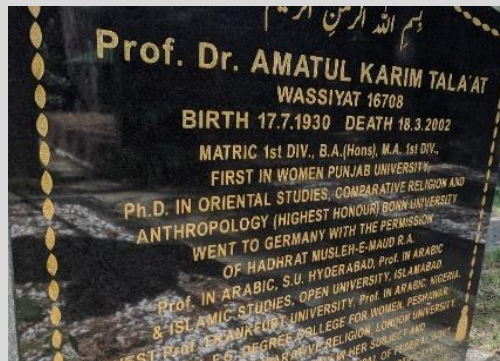
# Post-WW2



- Rapidly increasing Muslim population in the UK
  - From South Asia and East Africa
- Brookwood remains only cemetery in London region with designated Muslim section
- Expands into inclusive, 'Pan-Islamic' burial ground in Brookwood Cemetery, up to 1970s
  - Muslim burials across denominations



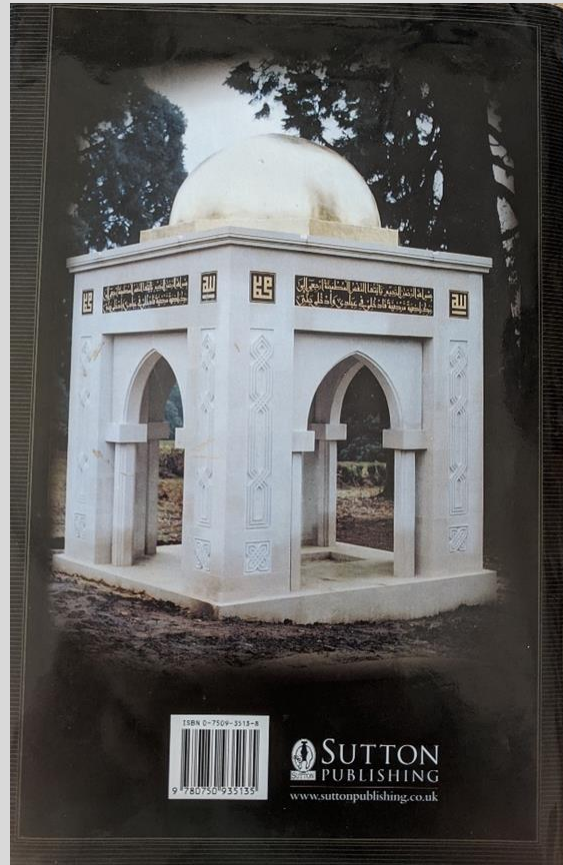
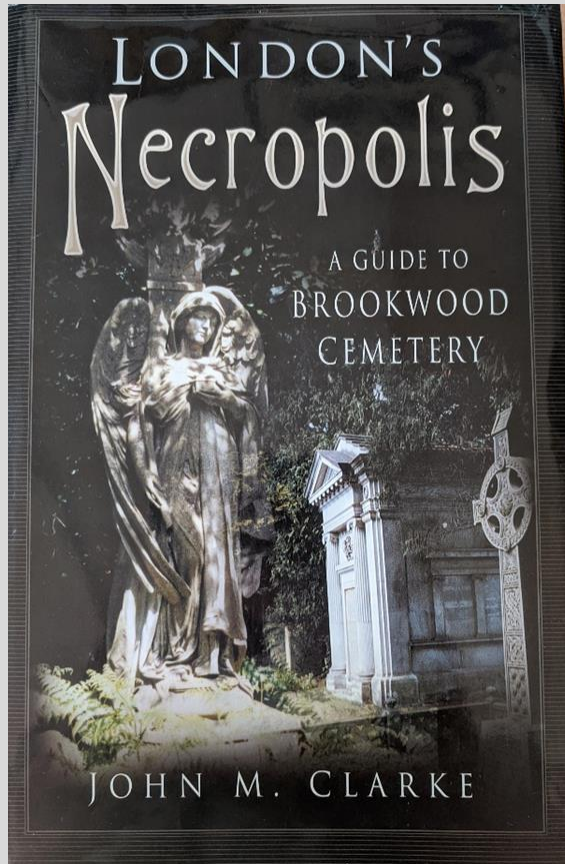
# The emergence of smaller community burial grounds



- 1975: Ahmadiyya burial ground
- 1978: Jamaat burial ground
- 1982: Nasserpuria Memon burial ground
- 1982: St Edward Orthodox brotherhood moving in
- 1983: Dawoodi Bohra – *Nahme bagh*.
- 1984: Bagh-e-Zehra burial ground.
- 1985: Ismaili burial ground
- 1985: Serbian Orthodox Cemetery

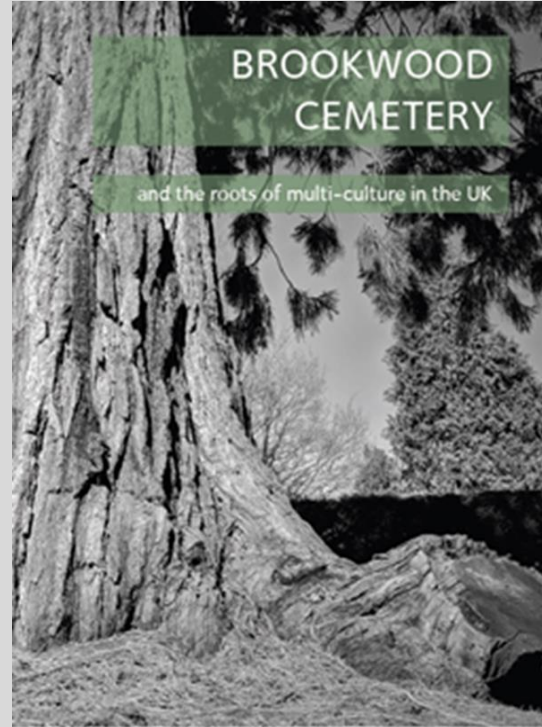
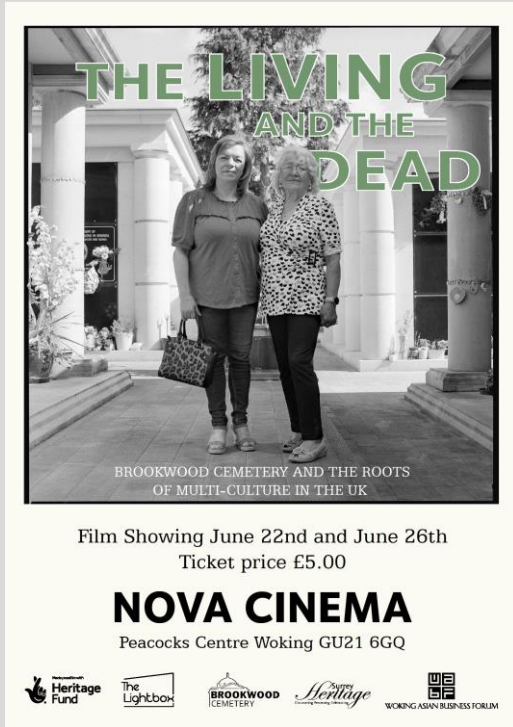


# Looking to the future



- By 2020, more than 70% of all burials in Brookwood were Muslim
- Many Muslim minority communities in Brookwood have run out of space – Ahmadiyya, Shi'a, Jamaat, etc
- Move to exclusive burial grounds
  - Ahmadiyya in Eashing Cemetery, Godalming
  - Shi'a in Eternal Gardens burial ground in Kent
  - Jamaat to cemeteries in North London

# Outputs



- 20 oral histories deposited with Surrey History Centre
- 1 hour documentary, [Brookwood: The Living and The Dead on Vimeo](#)
- Month-long exhibition at the Lightbox in Woking
- 32 page booklet, printed in 1,100 copies
- 4 guided walks in Brookwood Cemetery
- 2 talks in Surrey History Centre
- ~~Brookwood Cemetery app~~



Thanks for listening!