

# **Collaborative Doctoral Award: Religious Heritage in Transition: Sikh Places of Worship in England**

Research area: Under-represented Heritage

Supports: NHPP 4DI – Places of Worship

## **University Partner**

University of Leicester

## **Project Summary**

Scoping work by English Heritage on Sikh and Hindu faith buildings (6340: 3.9.13) identified key areas of work needed to enhance our understanding of Sikh heritage and values associated with gurdwaras by Sikh communities. English Heritage aim to address important elements of often invisible or transitory aspects of our national story by learning about what a particular faith group considers of 'value' in their buildings, and how the surrounding community approaches them. It aims to raise the profile of Sikh built heritage and its values and provide an evidence base for assessing national significance.

An in-depth study will build close local relationships to draw out specific and more general trends and attitudes, and a locally based PhD studentship is the most appropriate method for delivery within EH. The University of Leicester has recently completed a 'Mapping Faith and Place in Leicester' project (AHRC funded and supported by the University's Knowledge Transfer scheme). It was strongly supported by Leicester City Council and Leicester Council of Faiths; good connections with English Heritage were established. It developed a strong, supportive network with local faith communities, hence local resources and networks exist to support the project. The Sikh community in Leicester is one of the largest in the country (in proportion and actual numbers), and 9 gurdwaras are now established within the city. This forms the basis and feasibility for the current proposal.

This research takes as its starting point the need to understand contemporary values associated with Sikh faith buildings in England. This includes community attitudes to faith buildings, (new or re-used); the critical faith elements in any place of worship; the mobile histories of Sikh community worship; and the ways in which the adaptation of buildings illustrates different types of value. Traditional approaches to building classification, heavily reliant on 'primary function' may be insufficient for re-used buildings and yet potentially far more significant.

English Heritage's Conservation Principles sets a framework for assessing the historic environment using aesthetic, architectural, evidential and communal values. The project will consider how communal values can be legitimately assessed and how locally-held values of poorly understood assets can be brought to bear on assessments of significance required within the planning process. For statutory designation English Heritage approaches are guided by its Principles of Selection thematic guides and information to enable an enhancement of the places of worship guide is a key objective.

The use of private houses or converted buildings for minority faith groups is to some extent documented. Less well understood is the value placed on the building itself, and the impact this might have on building conservation strategy within a wider community.

Much more than places for public worship, gurdwaras provide a wide range of social services. As such an exploration of the concept of worship, its inclusion of a range of service activities and their distribution throughout a building's spaces is an important element of the work.

### **Contact Details**

Research Student: Clare Canning ([cc418@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:cc418@leicester.ac.uk))

Historic England Supervisor: Dr Linda Monckton, Historic Environment Intelligence Analyst - Social Impacts ([linda.monckton@historicengland.org.uk](mailto:linda.monckton@historicengland.org.uk))

University Supervisors: Dr Ruth Young ([rly3@le.ac.uk](mailto:rly3@le.ac.uk)) & Miss Deirdre O'Sullivan ([dmo@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:dmo@leicester.ac.uk)), University of Leicester

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