

The Chattri is a war memorial in the English city of Brighton and Hove. It is sited 500 feet (150 m) above the city on the South Downs above the suburb of Patcham, and is accessible only by bridleway. It stands on the site where a number of Indian soldiers who fought for the British Empire were cremated during the First World War. The structure has Grade II listed status, reflecting its architectural and historic importance. In 2017, as part of the 100th anniversary of World War I, the site of the Chattri was dedicated as a Fields in Trust Centenary Field because of its local heritage and significance.



India was part of the British Empire during the First World War, and more than 800,000 Indian soldiers fought for the Allied Powers. During the four years of fighting, thousands of wounded combatants were brought to Britain to be treated in makeshift military hospitals. Three were established in Brighton; one was the town's famous royal palace, the Royal Pavilion. King George V is said to have decreed that Indian soldiers were to be treated at the Pavilion, apparently believing that the flamboyant Indo-Saracenic building would provide familiar surroundings. In December 1914, 345 injured soldiers were transported to Brighton by train and were transferred to the hospitals. The King and Queen, Mayor of Brighton, Chief Constable of Brighton and other dignitaries visited frequently, and careful arrangements were made at the Royal Pavilion to provide for the different dietary and other cultural requirements of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims.

Although the great majority of soldiers recovered from their injuries, some died. The 21 Muslim men who died were taken to the Shah Jahan Mosque in Woking, Surrey, and buried in accordance with Islamic tradition in a new cemetery.

The bodies of 53 Hindus and Sikhs were taken to a remote location high on the South Downs above Brighton, where a ghat (funeral pyre) was built so they could be cremated and their ashes scattered in the English Channel. This funeral rite was again carried out in line with religious custom. In total, 18 men who were treated at the Royal Pavilion died, ten of whom were cremated on the ghat.

The 56 other victims died at the Kitchener Hospital—now Brighton General Hospital—or a temporarily converted school at York Place.

In August 1915, soon after the last cremations at the ghat site, a lieutenant in the Indian Medical Service and the Mayor of Brighton, Sir John Otter, planned the establishment of a memorial to the soldiers who had died in Brighton. Lt Das Gupta made the proposal, but Otter took on the project almost single-handedly; after leaving his position as Mayor he chaired Brighton's Indian Memorials Committee. In December 1915 he made a proposal to the India Office for a memorial on the ghat site and another in Brighton town centre; Sir Austen Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for India, agreed this in February 1916. In July of that year, the land on which the ghat stood, and the immediate area around it, was transferred from the Marquess of Abergavenny to the ownership of Brighton County Borough. At the same time, the India Office agreed to share the cost of

building and erecting the memorial with Brighton Corporation (the forerunner of the present Brighton and Hove City Council), on the understanding that the Corporation would be responsible for the town centre memorial.

A young Indian architect E. C. Henriques from Mumbai, who was completing his studies in England designed The Chattri; Sir Samuel Swinton Jacob, an English architect who was responsible for many buildings in India and who helped pioneer the Indo-Saracenic architectural style, provided guidance.



Construction work started in August 1920 and continued until the end of that year. Brighton Corporation owned the memorial and took responsibility for its maintenance, and a cottage was provided nearby for a caretaker. This added £1,117 (£41.2 thousand in 2018) to the final cost of £4,964 (£183 thousand in 2018).

The Chattri was unveiled on 1 February 1921 by Edward, Prince of Wales. By the 1930s, the memorial had fallen into disrepair. The caretaker had died, nobody had replaced him, and the cottage had been demolished. The India Office, which had received many complaints about The Chattri's condition despite the Brighton Corporation having taken full responsibility for its upkeep, liaised with the Corporation and the Imperial War Graves Commission in an attempt to encourage action. Between them, they planned a new maintenance policy and agreed to reduce the amount of surrounding land belonging to the memorial; in 1920 a 2-acre (0.81 ha) area had been created around it.

The Second World War intervened and the whole area was requisitioned by the Army. By the end of the war, The Chattri was covered with bullet holes after being used as a target by troops practising their rifle shooting.

After the war, the War Office agreed to pay for repairs, and The Chattri was restored to its original condition. Starting in 1951, the Royal British Legion undertook annual pilgrimages to the memorial, and also contributed to its upkeep. Although the pilgrimages ceased in 1999, the Sikh community has led a similar annual ceremony each year since 2000.





The Chattri was built at the exact location where the funeral pyres were constructed for the cremation of the 53 soldiers. This is an isolated, windswept position on the South Downs 500 feet (150 m) above Brighton. The only access is from a path off a bridleway between the A27 Brighton Bypass at Patcham and the Clayton Windmills at the top of the Downs. The bridleway, which at that point runs along a ridge between Hogtrough Bottom and Deep Bottom, is part of the Sussex Border Path, and The Chattri is at the northern extremity of the City of Brighton and Hove, on the border with the Mid Sussex district of West Sussex.

White marble from Sicily was used for the body of the memorial. It sits on a plinth of grey stone which stands over three blocks of granite which cover the slabs used during the cremations. The Chattri takes the form of a tall, domed pavilion, rising to 29 feet (8.8 m) to the finial at its apex. The base is square, and the eight columns carrying the dome start with square bases before becoming octagonal halfway up. The base of the dome is then octagonal. The plinth bears an inscription in English, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu, the text of which was prepared by Sir John Otter:

To the memory of all Indian soldiers who gave their lives for the King-Emperor in the Great War, this monument, erected on the site of the funeral pyre where Hindus and Sikhs who died in hospital at Brighton passed through the fire, is in grateful admiration and brotherly love dedicated

See also: <http://www.chattri.org> and <http://www.black-history.org.uk/20th.../1921-the-chattri/>

As readers of the winter e-newsletter will know, our interest was piqued by the reason for siting the burning ghat here, rather than by the memorial itself!

Here, credit Royal Pavilions & Museums, Brighton & Hove, is an image of a watercolour by Clem Lambert painted in 1920 and showing the original burning ghat:



But why HERE??? It is neither near the hospitals where the soldiers were nursed, nor by the sea, where their ashes were scattered in accordance with their religion? We still don't know despite asking such diverse sources as the Marquess of Abergavenny; the Sikh community and the many members of various Brighton past Facebook groups. Maybe one of you may know?

The closest we can come is to speculate that the soldiers' original wish to be cremated next to the sea was thought to be impossible because of the local population's presumed objections (remember that cremation at all had only been legal for a short time in this country, and 'open' cremations not undertaken at all, usually.) See <http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk/index.php?page=open-air-pyres> for more information (and an amazing piece of social history which has nothing to do with this story). The site does face east, is remote from the town, but as close as possible to the sea and at the time belonged to the Marquess whose permission was given for this use.

**Many thanks indeed to Sian Spencer (Williams) for the photographs above, taken in August 2018**

A search by **Lis Eastham (Ferguson)** in the Brighton Herald et al, digitised by Royal Pavilion & Museums: <https://bit.ly/2LxSAQh> threw up this fascinating article:



# The Indian Memorials.

BY SIR JOHN L. OTTER.

The presence of Indian soldiers fighting for the empire in the lines of battle in western Europe deeply stirred the imagination of the country, and will always be regarded as a salient event in the great war.

Brighton received their wounded. Gladly she surrendered for their use the Royal Pavilion and the Dome, buildings dedicated to her social, political, and artistic activities, and gave a great welcome to the men whose valour and loyalty symbolised the unity of the empire. A better selection of place could not have been made. The Oriental character of the architecture, and of the decorations of the Pavilion and Dome; the beautiful gardens; the fact that they were being entertained as honoured guests in a former palace of the King, gave the men deep pleasure.

"I AM IN PARADISE."

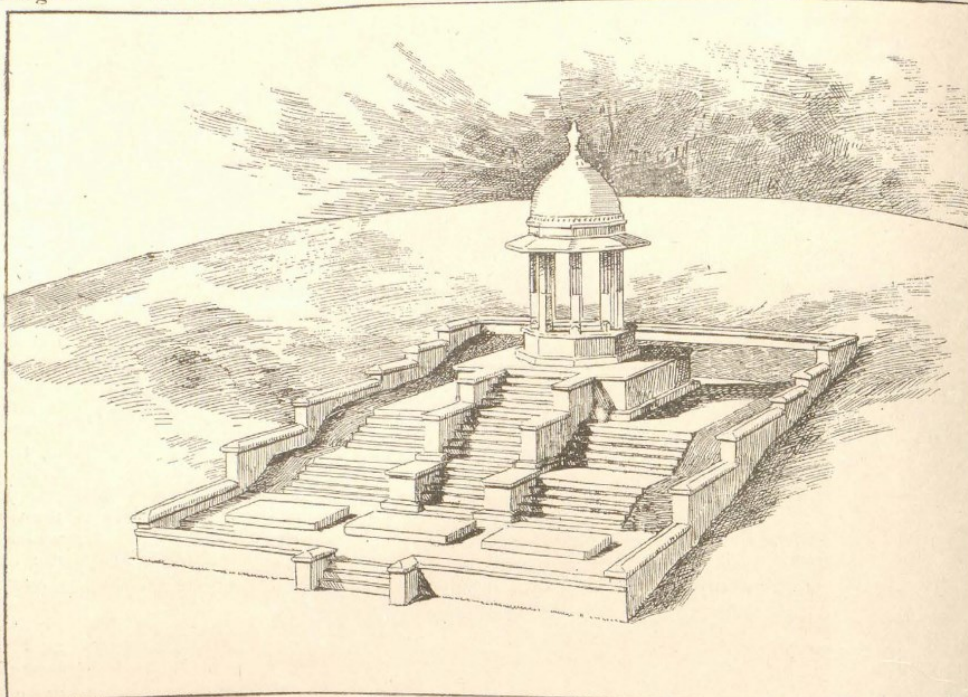
As an illustration of the impression made on them the following story is apt. In the late autumn of 1914 a wounded Mahomedan soldier was brought to Brighton and laid in the Dome. He had come from rain, cold, and gloom, and had been unconscious, or almost so, during the journey. He recovered consciousness soon after his arrival. He saw the brilliant light from the great chandelier, and the colours of the mural paintings showing barvelly. "Praise be to Allah," he murmured, "I am in Paradise." All went well with the Indian hospitals. The British officers were sympathetic, and won the affection of the men. Sir Walter Lawrence, Chief Commissioner,

medical profession.

THE BURNING GHAT.

The Mahomedans who died were buried

lain, then Secretary of State for India, received it with great favour, and, with the kindly consent of his Council,



PROPOSED DOWNS' MEMORIAL.

at Woking. The bodies of the Sikhs and Hindus were burned at a spot on the Downs about five miles north-east of Brighton, and the long and elaborate rites prescribed by their religions were, I believe, always observed.

It is there, on the site of the burning ghat, that Brighton's memorial will be

undertook to provide half the cost. The Council of the Borough with characteristic patriotism, warmly approved the scheme, and voted the necessary supply.

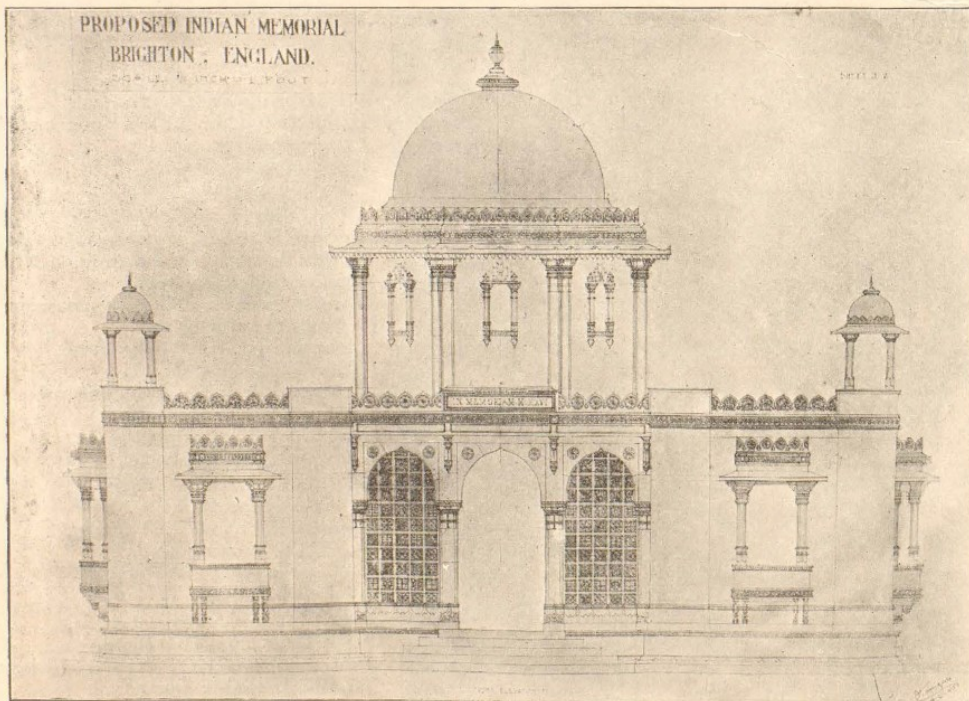
The monument will take the form of what, in India, is called a "Chhatri," that is, a dome supported on pillars. It will be purely Indian in architecture, and agreeable in every respect with the taste of the Hindus, and with the customary character of memorials of the dead erected by them.

## SOME NOTABLE DESIGNS.

The design was prepared by Mr E. C. Henriques, a Hindu of Bombay, though bearing a European name, and under the advice of Sir Swinton Jacob, the architect of many notable buildings in India. The dome and pillars of the Chhatri will be of white marble; and for the other parts, stone from the Forest of Dean, Stancliff, and Shepley will be used.

The design of the other building figured here has also been prepared by Mr Henriques, in agreement with the suggestions of Sir Swinton Jacob. This will be a splendid gift to the town of Brighton from Indians as a memorial of gratitude for the hospitality shown to their fellow countrymen. It will be erected on the front, but the precise site has not yet been determined. The work will be executed in India, and the material will be white Indian marble. The promoter of the scheme is the Sirdar Daljit Singh, until lately a member of the Secretary of State for India's Council.

The building will afford rest and shelter to visitors, who through its latticed windows will look on the sea which joins England to India.



made frequent visits, and delighted patients, orderlies, and cooks with his interest in their welfare. He speaks Hindustani with so much ease that he can use it for pleasant banter as well as for serious matters. The King came twice. The number of deaths, relatively to the number of patients, was very small. Quick recoveries amazed the

erected. The thought that some visible memorial should be raised to mark Brighton's vivid experience, and to express, indeed, also the feeling of the nation, was a natural one, and must have occurred to many; but it happened to be my privilege, as Mayor, to make a practical proposal to that end in 1916. Mr Austen Chamber-