

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Westminster		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 13 Architecture, Built Environment and Planning		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Creating Historical and Cultural Recognition of the British Mosque		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2015 - 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Shahed Saleem	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Lecturer	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> Sept 2015+
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016 – Dec 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Shahed Saleem's research into the unique, and understudied, architectural type of the British mosque has resulted in several impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced Historic England's preservation practice by enabling them to identify mosques for heritage listings, resulting in three new listings and the upgrading of two others, affording these buildings with protection for future generations.</li> <li>• Integrated the contribution of British Muslims within the narrative of British culture and heritage, leading to greater appreciation of both the buildings and the community.</li> <li>• Motivated the Muslim Council of Britain to engage with cultural preservation.</li> <li>• Facilitated a major change in the V&amp;A's approach to its Islamic collection.</li> <li>• Provided an exemplary model of direct educational engagement with the V&amp;A collections.</li> <li>• Enabled the V&amp;A to meet its strategic aim of diversifying its audience base.</li> <li>• Created a demonstrable sense of belonging and legitimacy for British Muslims.</li> <li>• Broadening the field of architecture within academic study such that it is more inclusive.</li> </ul>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Historic England commissioned Saleem in 2010 to undertake his project on the British mosque, which took 8 years to complete. As a practising architect, the first five years of research consisted of initial exploratory work and devising his research method. Upon joining University of Westminster in 2015, Saleem began focusing on specific mosques, honing his innovative research method into a template that allowed him to piece together a cohesive overall narrative of each building from a range of sources. The outcome of this work is Saleem's 2018 monograph <i>The British Mosque: An architectural and social history</i>, which articulates the history, aesthetics, and urban development of Islamic architecture in Britain and is the first study of its kind [1].</p> <p>Despite its 120-year presence in the country, there had been no previous study of the mosque as an architectural type in Britain. This is because architectural history has traditionally relied upon the existence of documentary evidence and accounts which chart the historical course of a particular building and from which a historical narrative can be constructed. Consequently, architectural history is largely constituted by buildings of social significance, as these are the ones for which such evidence exists. Further, these are, generally, exceptional examples of architectural fabric. The mosque in Britain is, for the most part, a wholly different type of building. Built by migrant communities whose settlement in Britain is relatively recent, there is little documentary evidence regarding both their lives and the buildings they have built. Mosques are largely community built and grassroots endeavors. They are largely self-designed and built incrementally over a long period of time. In order to write an architectural history of such a dynamic building type, a new methodology of architectural history research and writing was required.</p> <p>Saleem's research method began with the use of digital media technologies. Saleem used Google Earth to identify the UK's 1500 mosques and, from such aerial and "street view" images, categorised these buildings into three sub-types: converted houses, adapted buildings, and purpose built. Given the lack of relevant documentation, for instance early photographs and drawings, in order to track the history of these buildings Saleem consulted both local council archives and online websites either managed by the mosque organisers or by persons independently documenting relevant materials for community purposes. Further, Saleem liaised with the mosques to search their own, usually uncatalogued, archives for planning materials. Through his background as an architect, Saleem was able to analyse such documents in a way</p>		

as to reconstruct the process that underpinned the designing of the mosque and the manner in which the planning authorities were engaged. By undertaking building visits, and assessing alterations and extensions, he was also able to gauge how different the mosques now were from these initial plans.

In light of the minimal documentation, Saleem developed his method in two further ways, both innovative within the field of architecture. First, he consulted academic sources from the fields of history and sociology that address the situation of Muslims in Britain in a broader sense, allowing him to contextualise the architectural history of these buildings in accordance with information on regional migration and settlement patterns. Secondly, Saleem undertook and recorded interviews with various persons related to the mosques under examination, creating an oral history concerning the buildings. Any anachronisms, conflicts of remembrance, and new information arising from the recording of multiple voices and perspectives were followed up by Saleem in order to produce as rounded, and credible, an account as possible. Saleem's methodology has thus provided a successful model for an emergent trend in architecture by which social and oral histories are drawn upon in order to provide architectural histories for buildings that are relatively new and used by migrants.

In short, the methodology deployed is novel in architectural history terms, and involves a combination of oral histories, planning records, local archive searches and mosque files. This innovation has been recognised in the field with his monograph being awarded a commendation in the RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) [President's Award](#) for Research in 2018 in the category of History & Theory, being shortlisted in the Historic England Angel Award for Excellence in Architectural Research in 2018, and its shortlisting for the Society of Architectural Historians GB, Alice Davis Hitchcock Award 2019.

Extending out from his work in this celebrated monograph, Saleem drew upon his research base in order to further explore the manner in which the communal building of the mosque functions as a mediator for the identity of British Muslims [2]. Saleem narrativises the history of the mosque across twentieth-century Britain and situates it as an intrinsic part of the exploration and articulation of post-war Muslim diasporic identities, through which Muslims in Britain have negotiated both their global and local positionings. In this way, the mosque in Britain is characterised by Saleem as part of a complex entanglement between architecture, nationhood, and belonging.

Elsewhere, Saleem has examined, under a range of interpretive frameworks, the visual strategies employed by Muslim diasporas in Britain and Europe in the making of their mosques and explored the prospective role their diasporic relationship to Muslim history plays in the formulation of a Muslim visual culture [3]. Reflecting on his own practice as an architect, and drawing on his research into Muslim architectural history in Britain, Saleem presents the Shahporan mosque in East London, which he designed, as an example of how an alternative relationship to Muslim history and the manifestation of identity might emerge.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] Saleem, S. 2018. *The British Mosque: An architectural and social history*. Swindon: Historic England. [Awarded a commendation in the RIBA [President's Award](#) for Research in 2018 in the category of History & Theory.]
- [2] Saleem, S. [2020](#). Mosque and Nation, in Pandya, S. ed. *Architecture, Nation, Difference*, special issue of *National Identities* (22:4): 463-470
- [3] Saleem, S. 2016. Building and Becoming: The Shahporan Mosque and the Unfolding of Muslim Visual Identity in London. in: Quash, B., Rosen, A. and Reddaway, C. (ed.) *Visualising a Sacred City: London, Art and Religion*. London: I.B. Tauris: 205-218

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

#### **Cultural Impact through the Enhancement of Historic England's Heritage Listings**

According to Historic England's Head of Communities Research: "The mainstream narratives of architecture and architectural history haven't taken into account the contribution of mosques largely because nobody knows what's there and where it is, so it's kind of been invisible" [a-i]. As the Head of Places of Worship Strategy at Historic England ("Strategy Head" herein) states, in

order to correct this omission Saleem was “commissioned to improve understanding, recording and protection of places of worship. Historic England sought an overview and explanation of Islamic architecture in Britain, recording the buildings adapted and used by Muslim communities that have become part of England’s urban fabric” [a-ii].

Highlighting Saleem’s research project as “**a good example of external expertise bringing additional knowledge to Historic England**” in a way that has enabled them to enhance their **preservation practice**, the Strategy Head states that Saleem’s creation of a geographical index of mosque buildings was especially useful: “From the gazetteer, Historic England was able to identify a number of the earliest or otherwise most interesting examples. In our capacity as adviser to the Secretary of State for DCMS [Digital, Culture, Media & Sport] we assessed these buildings and recommended them for Listing. [...] As a result in 2018 the Secretary of State agreed to list” and upgrade the listings of the mosques in the table below [a-ii].

Mosque	Original Heritage Status	Change due to research
Shah Jahan Mosque in Woking (1888-89)	Grade II*	Grade I; identified as Britain’s first purpose-built mosque
Salar Jung Memorial Hall, Woking	Not listed	Grade II
8 Brougham Terrace, Liverpool	Grade II	Grade II*
The London Central Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre in Regent’s Park (1970-77)	Not listed	Grade II*
The Fazl Mosque, Southfields (1925-26)	Not listed	Grade II
28-32 Howard Street, Bradford	Grade II	List description amended to include the history of the building’s use as a mosque

As the Strategy Head points out: “Listing marks and celebrates a building’s special architectural and historic interest, and also **brings it under the consideration of the planning system, so that it can be protected for future generations**”; this is to say that Listing status confers the buildings [official protection](#), determining conservation requirements and controlling urban development interventions that could have negative impacts [a-ii]. Listing status can also be crucial for attracting conservation and preservation funding.

The Listings of these mosques also has the broader cultural impact of **integrating the contribution of British Muslims within the narrative of British culture and heritage**. As Heritage Minister (2018-19) Michael Ellis MP states: “Our historic buildings tell the story of Britain’s past and the people, places and events that shaped them. By listing these beautiful mosques, we are not only preserving important places of worship, but also celebrating the rich heritage of Muslim communities in England” [a-iii]. This view is shared by the Historic England Strategy Head, who adds: “The project served to [...] recognise buildings of the Islamic faith for their national special interest and contribution to our built heritage, and promote wider public understanding of the buildings of Islamic faith in England. [...] As a result of the research we have **a far greater appreciation and insight of these buildings, their communities and role within British culture**” [a-ii].

This recognition of British Muslims’ cultural contribution has had both national and international reach, with the announcement of these status upgrades resulting in over 30 press articles in across the globe (from the [BBC](#) and the [Guardian](#) to the [Hindustan Times](#), the [Malay Mail](#), and [Al Arabiya](#)) [a-iv]. The listings have also been reported on by numerous British Muslim community groups such as the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Group and the London Central Mosque Trust [a-iv]. In this connection, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) also emphasises that Saleem’s “research into the history of the mosque in Britain and the granting of heritage status to the selected mosques is of huge significance to the Muslim community as it is **the first time that the contribution of Muslims to the culture and architectural history of this country is formally and officially recognised**” [a-v].

Further, the above research and impacts it has achieved have **motivated the Muslim Council of Britain to engage with the cultural preservation of this community’s heritage**: “Since the

publication of the British Mosque, and the attention that it has brought to the built fabric of British Islam, the MCB has become a permanent member of the Historic England Places of Worship Forum. Through this position the MCB can advocate for mosques that are of historic significance and of heritage value” [a-iv]. This change in the practice of its Research & Documentation Committee is such that: “This has led to the MCB developing a proposal for a comprehensive survey of the built fabric of mosques in Britain, which will be used to enhance Historic England’s records of heritage assets. Furthermore, the list descriptions of mosques that are in already listed buildings will be amended to include their history as mosques” [a-v].

### ***Impact on Creativity via Collaboration with the V&A***

The curators at the V&A (Victoria and Albert Museum) approached Saleem following the publication of output [1], because the “book highlighted a largely unknown part of the architectural history of Britain, and one that we felt needed to be platformed” [b-i]. Their collaboration has resulted in an installation at the museum, planned for 2021, which draws on “Saleem’s unparalleled expertise in this area, developed through his research for the book but also his work as architect for several mosques”, which “has been invaluable to both the intellectual framework of the pavilion, and to its design” [b-i]. The Assistant Curator in Designs at V&A adds: “Without his knowledge and network, an installation of this kind would not have been possible” [b-i].

The Ramadan Pavilion Saleem has “conceptualised and designed” is considered “the V&A’s headline installation” for the London Festival of Architecture 2021 [b-i]. The Assistant Curator points out that it will have extensive reach to the public given that “[a]s part of the one-way system installed to ensure the V&A is COVID secure, all visitors to the Museum will enter via this route, passing the pavilion as they enter” [b-i]. Saleem’s engagement with the V&A on the creation of this installation has had a significant impact in a number of ways.

It has impacted their creative practice, **marking a major change in the V&A’s approach to its Islamic collection**: “Prior to Saleem’s collaboration with the V&A, the history of the mosque in Britain was not represented in the V&A’s collections or programming. Despite having one of the largest Islamic collections in the world, the culture of British Islam, has fallen between collections. Saleem’s book and his collaboration with the V&A have drawn attention to this hugely important part of the architectural and social history of Britain” [b-i].

It has also impacted on the V&A’s approach to its educational remit. Noting that the “V&A was established as an educational institution”, the Assistant Curator in Designs at the V&A states that: “The project that Saleem has facilitated with his students at the University of Westminster is **an exemplary model of direct engagement with the V&A’s collections for the purpose of contemporary design**” [b-i]. The project involves Architecture students from Westminster collaborating in the design development of the installation as part of their coursework by engaging with the V&A collections, the curators, and with the architecture of the museum’s own building [b-ii]. While the students have benefitted through this engagement and learning experience, so too have the V&A team: “With a subject as complex as Islamic architecture, it has been an enormous benefit to engage with the views of Saleem’s students. **The ideas of the students, and their diverse perspectives, has both challenged and strengthened the design of the pavilion, to the V&A’s benefit**” [b-i].

Further, the installation helps the museum to meet the V&A’s strategic aims “to diversify our audience base to reflect the wider local and international community” [b-i]. As per Saleem’s proposal, “the Ramadan Pavilion will serve as a hub for RTP’s events, **enabling the V&A to directly engage with the wider Muslim community**. The pavilion will support and anchor an educational programme and a number of talks on the subject of contemporary Islamic architecture” and has given the curators “the opportunity to strengthen an existing relationship with the Muslim charity, Ramadan Tent Project (RTP), who as well as sponsoring the pavilion will be holding a series of events in the pavilion throughout Ramadan” [b-i].

### ***Social Impact via Broader Recognition of Muslim Contributions to British Culture***

Saleem’s research and its related impacts have brought a minority, and often marginalised, culture to the attention of broader audiences. The social impact of this is emphasised by the Muslim Council of Britain: “**This recognition offers British Muslims a place in the history of the nation, and a provides them with a sense of belonging and legitimacy that is otherwise sorely lacking in public discourse**. There are not many other spaces of public life where the

contribution of Muslims to Britain's life and culture is articulated in such an overwhelmingly positive way" [a-v].

That Saleem's research has created a sense of inclusion is evident from the following, unsolicited, testimonies from British Muslim architecture students who have written to Saleem from other institutions. For instance, one student wrote: "I was incredibly pleased to come across your book, thoroughly covering the history of Mosques in Britain, as this isn't something that has been properly researched before. [...] **it is very refreshing and hopeful to see a successful modern academic bringing [I]slam in this field**" [c-i]. Another student stated that: "Identity is an issue that British Muslim millennials, like myself, continually struggle with, given the tug of war between religion, culture and nativity. However after reading this book I realised that parts of my identity were concretised in the walls, minarets and plaster of Mosques all over Britain. From seeing historical photographs of those that first stepped into a whole new culture, to reading about the developments of vernacular architectural style, **I became aware of my place in a timeline of an evolving subculture of British identity**. This book instilled within me a new found respect for the 'traditional' yet helped me to understand what the future could look like. For the first time in my life, I felt proud of being the same, but also proud of being different" [c-i].

A graduate of another institution writes that: "Your research allowed me to feel liberated and empowered, amidst a time of great political friction between Islam and the West, [it] provided a positively refreshing moment to step back and appreciate the beautiful distribution of what the physical forms of a democracy, a free and fair Britain look like - a young, but thorough history of Britain's Mosques. This collation of research allows for further discussion and recognition from a wider community, to see Islam under a different light which biased media propaganda has relentlessly prevented. This also **allows the BAME [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic] architectural community to feel more inclusive and relevant in Architectural research and discussion**, which is [more] crucial now than ever" [c-ii].

As indicated, such social impact is also enabled through the broadening of the field of architecture within academic study such that it is more inclusive. This is communicated by a non-Muslim student who writes: "In my research through New York University London, Saleem's work was fundamental in understanding the broader context of British religious architecture beyond the Christian context and enabled me to create a more evenhanded discussion of religious identity and its manifestations in the built environment. Furthermore, his identification of absences within mainstream heritage recognition **paves the way for further exploration of how heritage representation could become more diverse and inclusive** by reexamining historic narratives and conceptions of fabric-based heritage listing" [c-ii].

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[a] (i) Momin, S. [2018](#). *Al Arabiya*. 'More mosques being given heritage status in UK to celebrate history of Muslim communities' (ii) Testimony from The Head of Places of Worship Strategy at Historic England (iii) *Historic England*. [2018](#). "British Islamic heritage celebrated by Historic England" (iv) Spreadsheet of media interest in Saleem's work; over 30 entries. Compiled by Sabina Ana Cioboata (v) Testimony from Muslim Council of Britain, Research & Documentation Committee

[b] (i) Testimony from Assistant Curator, Designs, at V&A (ii) *V&A: The British Mosque Pavilion* proposal document

[c] (i) Unsolicited testimony on social impact (ii) Testimony from external graduates.