A Forgotten Memorial from Abdullah & Mariam Quilliam to the Ottoman Sheikh-ul-Islam

On 11 May 1900, Abdullah Quilliam - Britain’s first Sheikh-ul-Islam - and Mariam Lyon, accompanied by five members of the Liverpool Muslim Society, submitted a “respectful memorial” to the Ottoman Consul General in Liverpool in order to have their marriage regularised. It took the form of a handwritten document of three sheets, including signatures of the petitioners and witnesses. There is also a confirmatory note by the Consul General, with an official consulate seal, written in French as this was the working language of Ottoman diplomats in Europe.

The document was found in the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, in a file including other Embassy papers on Quilliam. Professor Ron Geaves in his pioneering biography alluded to Quilliam’s “convoluted” private life. This petition supports this observation as well as offering new detail (see Appendix 1).

Quilliam was first married to Hannah Johnstone in 1875 and the couple had four children between 1879 and 1885 – Robert Ahmed, Elizabeth, Harriet and William Henry Billal. Professor Geaves also describes Quilliam’s “liaison” with “a chorus girl, Mary Lyons” – note, not ‘Lyon’. He adds, “from this liaison Quilliam had one son, Muhammad Henry, and four daughters, Fatima, Ayesha, Miriam and Habeebah.”

The petition states that Mariam Lyon was the daughter of one Thomas Lyon, and twenty years old when this matrimonial arrangement began “on the 21st day of September 1883”. This was eight years after Quilliam’s registered marriage to Hannah – so it could not be legally recognised because of the bigamy law.

Professor Geaves observes, “the mystery is how he [Abdullah Quilliam] managed to keep his families out of the media spotlight considering the scrutiny he was under in Liverpool from 1893 to 1907. He was certainly aware that people speculated on his love life . . .”. Perhaps this was the same audacity that led Quilliam to shed one persona and take on the identity of another in 1908.

M. A. Sherif

M. A. Sherif is a biographical researcher who has written about the lives of Qur’an translators Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Marmaduke Pickthall, and the famous English convert Abdullah Philby. Sherif has also recently completed a comparative biography of Abul A’la Maududi and Malek Bennabi.
**The Islamic World**

6. See for example references above and also Nafisa Keep (1895).

16. Lambert-Hurley S.


14. Handbook of Texas Online, Sandra L. Myres, Viele, Teresa

The Crescent, Volume V, No 112, 6th March 1895; The Crescent, Volume V, No 123, 22nd May 1895

3. Halliday F.


9. Abdelwahid, Duse Mohamed Ali

13. J. Gilham, Matthew Sharp and Jamil Sherif for their helpful contributions.

5. Ibid

12. Fidler C. ‘The Impact of Migration upon Family Life and Thoughts for the future


9. Anvari, H 2001 ‘pluralism: a comprehensive, well-studied area of Muslim


7. Memoirs of the Khilafat Movement, 1918–24

6. See for example references above and also Naafsah Keep (1895) The Position of Women under Islamic Law in The Islamic World ii (23)


3. Halliday F.

2. Horsell Common Preservation Society. The Peace Garden


References

Britain’s First Muslims: Stories of Early British Muslim Women 1846–1948 – Dr Soraya Cherifvalli Contractor

1. The Crescent, Volume V, No 110, 20th February 1895; The Crescent, Volume V, No 112, 2nd May 1895

2. The Crescent, Volume V, No 110, 20th February 1895; The Crescent, Volume V, No 112, 2nd May 1895


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Appendix 1
The Baqir Memorial
Sheikh Handwritten
The respectful memorial of William Henry Abdullah Quilliam (Effendi, Sheikh) of the True Believers in the City of Liverpool and to whom I swear allegiance in every respect.
Your memorialists, Henry Mahomed Ibn Abdullah Quilliam, the oldest son of Robert Quilliam and of the True Believers in the City of Liverpool, born on the 16th day of June 1859, and his wife, Ethel Mariam Quilliam, born on the 28th day of January 1885, are here writing to inform your Memorialists, Alfred Robert Preston and Maryam Ibrahim, that a marriage has taken place in Liverpool and that it is recognised by English law as a valid marriage.

On the 21st day of September 1883 your said memorialists were present at the marriage of your said memorialists, Ethel Mariam Quilliam, born on the 28th day of January 1885, and Alphonse Philip Henry Daniell, born on the 19th day of October 1850.

We, the Memorialists, declare that the marriage was solemnly conducted in accordance with the ancient custom and usage of Liverpool and that the marriage was witnessed by the following persons:

1. Divorce was anathema to the Lincolnshire Quilliam household, and the name of the family was held in high esteem by the local community. The Quilliams were a prominent family in Liverpool, and their contributions to the city’s history are still remembered today. The memorial addresses the legal recognition of the marriage between Ethel Mariam Quilliam and Alfred Robert Preston, who were both members of the Muslim community in Liverpool.

The marriage certificate, known as the "Baqir Memorial," was presented to the Liverpool Register Office on the 10th day of November 1883. The certificate was signed by the following witnesses:

1. J. W. Daniell
2. H. N. Warren
3. M. Kamil
4. W. H. Abdullah Quilliam
5. A. R. Preston

Sheikh Handwritten

The above-named children are living and well.

The memorial also addressed the legal recognition of the marriage between Lilian Ernestine Quilliam, born on the 13th day of March 1888, and John Henry Daniell, born on the 21st day of March 1888, who were both members of the Muslim community in Liverpool.

The marriage was solemnly conducted in accordance with the ancient custom and usage of Liverpool, and that the marriage was witnessed by the following persons:

1. Alfred Robert Preston
2. H. N. Warren
3. M. Kamil
4. W. H. Abdullah Quilliam
5. A. R. Preston

Sheikh Handwritten

The above-named children are living and well.

The memorial also addressed the legal recognition of the marriage between Maryam Ibrahim, born on the 7th day of December 1886, and John Henry Daniell, born on the 21st day of March 1888, who were both members of the Muslim community in Liverpool.

The marriage was solemnly conducted in accordance with the ancient custom and usage of Liverpool, and that the marriage was witnessed by the following persons:

1. Alfred Robert Preston
2. H. N. Warren
3. M. Kamil
4. W. H. Abdullah Quilliam
5. A. R. Preston

Sheikh Handwritten

The above-named children are living and well.

The memorial also addressed the legal recognition of the marriage between Lily Ayesha Quilliam, born on the 7th day of December 1886, and John Henry Daniell, born on the 21st day of March 1888, who were both members of the Muslim community in Liverpool.

The marriage was solemnly conducted in accordance with the ancient custom and usage of Liverpool, and that the marriage was witnessed by the following persons:

1. Alfred Robert Preston
2. H. N. Warren
3. M. Kamil
4. W. H. Abdullah Quilliam
5. A. R. Preston

Sheikh Handwritten

The above-named children are living and well.

The memorial also addressed the legal recognition of the marriage between Ethel Mariam Quilliam, born on the 28th day of January 1885, and Alphonse Philip Henry Daniell, born on the 19th day of October 1850, who were both members of the Muslim community in Liverpool.

The marriage was solemnly conducted in accordance with the ancient custom and usage of Liverpool, and that the marriage was witnessed by the following persons:

1. Alfred Robert Preston
2. H. N. Warren
3. M. Kamil
4. W. H. Abdullah Quilliam
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The above-named children are living and well.

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