

# Mosque Museum

Bobby Shamroze and Robynne Sanderson

The heritage-listed cameleers' mosque, on the corner of Williams and Buck streets in North Broken Hill, has been looked after by the Broken Hill Historical Society since 1968, in partnership with Broken Hill City Council, which acquired the land in 1967.

The mosque is a unique part of Broken Hill's rich heritage, with links to the early Afghan and Indian camel drivers. In the early days of Broken Hill, the term 'Afghan' was used to refer to people from what is now northern India and Pakistan, as well as Afghanistan.

The mosque was built in 1891 at the North Camel Camp, on a site which had been used for worship since at least 1887. It was the first mosque to be built in NSW. Broken Hill's Afghan community also contributed money towards building a stone mosque in Adelaide and these two mosques are the oldest surviving in Australia.



*An early photo of the mosque and camel camp  
Photo 90\_1\_4512 from Outback Archives, Broken Hill City Library*

Broken Hill's mosque had fallen into disrepair by the 1960s but was renovated by the Broken Hill Historical society and then re-dedicated on 21 September 1968. One room of the Mosque Museum is still a functioning prayer room and to this day visitors are asked to remove their shoes before entering the prayer room.



*Mosque in early 1960s before Historical Society restoration. Photo from Bobby Shamroze*



*Bobby Shamroze outside the mosque in 2018.  
Photo by Robynne Sanderson*

A small single-room mosque, originally located at the old West Camel Camp, was moved to the grounds of the North mosque many years ago. This mosque, a very small wood and iron building, is currently located in the grounds of the Mosque Museum and it is the only known physical link to the West Camel Camp.

Next to the mosque is a ground-level wash trough where, in accordance with Islamic tradition, Afghans would wash the dust from their feet, hands and face before walking across the stepping stones and entering the mosque to pray. Also in the grounds of the mosque is one of the few remaining wagons used by camel drivers. This wagon was used by Poujen Khan.



*Wash trough outside the mosque*

The mosque's museum room contains numerous items of historical interest, including some of the original stepping stones which led from the wash trough to the door of the mosque. Below are photos of some of the other items on display inside the mosque.



*Rabab (Afghan musical instrument) and ornate leather flask*



*Parts of wooden framework ('trees') used on camels to support load  
Photos on this page by Robynne Sanderson*

## From the pages of history—Shamroze Khan's camels



*Shamroze Khan. Photo supplied by Bobby Shamroze*

Shamroze Khan, a camel dealer and driver, was the father of Bobby Shamroze, the Historical Society's current caretaker of the Mosque Museum. Below are some extracts from old newspaper advertisements about Shamroze's camels.

### FOR SALE BY TENDER

24 camels: 6 Bull Camels and 4 Cow Camels, broken to harness and pack.

14 Bull Camels, broken to pack only, including packs, hobbles, tarpaulin and ropes. All Camels and Gear in good order and condition. No old Camels.

Address Tender to

Shamroze, Port Augusta West. If sold I will deliver at Cockburn. (*Barrier Miner*, Wed 12 February 1919, p. 3)

### AT SALE YARDS, WEST BROKEN HILL

Monday, 25th June, at 3 o'clock. Dalgety and Co will sell by auction on account of Shamroze, of Port Augusta.

40 Camels, comprising 12 Bullocks (well broken), 3 Bulls and 7 Cows (well broken), 5 Bulls (unbroken), 13 Unbroken ages 2 to 4 years.

2 table-top waggons (splendid order), 24 sets Harness. Terms cash. These Teams are now travelling overland from Port Augusta. The Owner intends making a trip to India and is a Genuine Seller. (*Barrier Miner*, Wed 13 June 1923, p. 2)

## Preservation

In 2017 Broken Hill's City Council successfully applied for a NSW Government grant of \$113,000. This grant, to be matched by an equal amount from the City Council, will be used for much-needed major repairs to the Mosque Museum building, as well as the small wood and iron shed (former West Camel Camp mosque), fences and grounds.

The Mosque Museum was inspected by a local builder during 2018 and in February 2019 the City Council will call for tenders to supply conservation and repair work. It is hoped that work will commence during 2019. Due to the extensive nature of the work, the mosque will need to be closed for the duration of the renovations. The City Council has offered to assist with storing the historic items from the mosque during this time.

## Visits and events during 2018

There was a steady flow of visitors to the Mosque Museum throughout 2018, with more people touring the mosque by appointment rather than via the 2 pm tour on a Sunday afternoon. Some of the visitors during 2018 were people with heritage connections to the local Afghan community and they were thrilled to be able to visit a place with such a strong link to their family history.

The last practising mullah of the mosque was Zaidullah Faizullah, who died in 1960. He was the grandfather of Bobby Shamroze, who regularly shows visitors through the mosque. Visitors are fascinated to hear from someone who has such a close connection to the early camel drivers and the Afghan community.

A significant event occurring during May 2018 was Broken Hill's Heritage Festival. The festival included a 'Broken Hill Mosque Talk and Tour' by Bobby Shamroze. The tour of the Mosque Museum was popular with visitors and, as a memento, visitors were presented with bags of lollies specially made by Janet Shamroze in the tradition of the Afghan celebrations in Broken Hill's early days.



*Looking from the Museum room into the Prayer Room. Cabinet on left of the Prayer Room contains a Koran believed to be around 150 years old.*



*Visitor Book in the Mosque Museum  
Photos by Robynne Sanderson*

## Acquisitions

Two new prayer mats were donated during 2018 by a Muslim Society in Melbourne. The prayer mats will be placed in the mosque after forthcoming renovations to the mosque are completed.

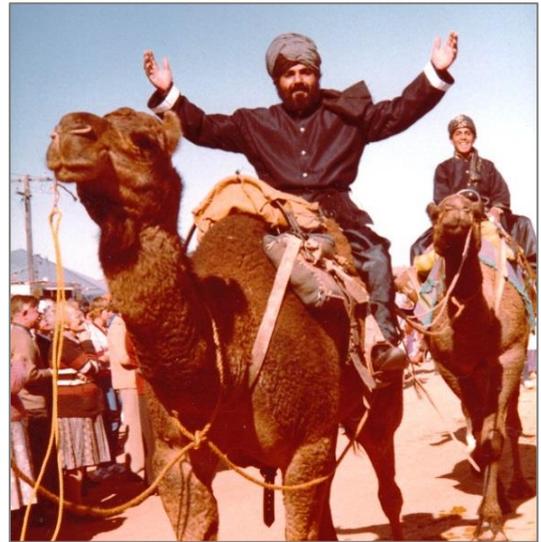
A jacket which belonged to Shamroze Khan was formerly displayed at the mosque before being donated to Broken Hill's Migrant Heritage Museum where it is now on permanent display.

### *About the authors:*

*Robert (Bobby) Shamroze, whose full name is Amminnullah Shamroze, worked in shearing sheds from 1956 to 1964, then on the South Mine until it closed in 1972. After that Bobby worked at the North Mine, firstly as an underground miner and then as a security/ambulance officer and PROTO watchman (Underground Rescue) until 1990. He has been a member of the Historical Society and looking after the mosque for over ten years.*

*Bobby is a son of Shamroze Khan and, on his mother's side, a grandson of Zaidullah Faizullah, who was the last practising mullah of the Broken Hill Mosque.*

*To the right, Bobby is riding a camel during Broken Hill's centenary year, 1983. Bobby's son Randell is riding another camel in the background.*



*Photo supplied  
by Bobby Shamroze*

*Robynne Sanderson, who has been a member of the Historical Society since 2016, began her working life at the Zinc Corporation mine in 1976. In the early days she worked as a punch card operator, feeding information into a huge computer with far less processing power and memory than today's phones. Robynne worked as a computer programmer at the mine for several years, then taught Information Technology at TAFE for 18 years, until 2016.*

*Robynne currently works as a volunteer at Outback Archives and she also works at Under the Silver Tree Bookshop. She has been involved in music throughout her life. She has played the organ at St James Church for 38 years, plays clarinet in the Broken Hill Civic Orchestra and has been the musical director of Broken Hill Community Voices choir since 2005. She also leads the Village Strummers ukulele group, formed in 2013, and works as a music tutor.*

*Robynne wrote a history of St James Anglican Church for their centenary in 1990. She also researched and presented a paper, 'The Cornish influence on music in Broken Hill', at the 2017 Biennial History Seminar at Kernewek Lowender Cornish Festival in South Australia.*