

MOSLEM MOSQUE

NOTES FOR TOUR GUIDES¹

1. If weather is suitable, group visitors in vicinity of camel wagon.
2. REMARKS
 - (1) When Broken Hill was discovered in 1883, camels were the principal means of transport in the district. First introduced into South Australia by Sir Thomas Elder in the 1860s, then spread to western New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia.
 - (2) Most inland towns of any size had their CAMEL CAMPS, situated on the outskirts of the towns – such as Wilcannia, Bourke, Marree, Port Augusta, etc.
 - (3) Broken Hill had two camel camps – one at west Broken Hill on the corner of Kaolin and Brown Streets – and the other at north Broken Hill. The two later amalgamated.
 - (4) The camel drivers and their families² were brought to Australia with the teams of camels – from Pakistan, India and Afghanistan.
 - (5) Being Moslems they built their own MOSQUE – a simple structure but it filled their needs.
 - (6) At any time from the 1880s to the 1920s there could be seen hundreds of camels being loaded up with supplies for the outback. Some camels travelled in a “string” (one behind the other), and the remainder pulled camel wagons.
 - (7) The camel wagon on view was made at Charlotte Towers, Queensland, around 1880. Can be used as a bullock wagon, or as a camel wagon. As a bullock wagon there would be a pole in front, to which chains would be attached to bullock yokes: as a camel wagon there are two sets of shafts. The wagon carried about 12 tons³ of supplies – drawn by about 16 camels.
3. WATER CHANNEL

Before entering the Mosque the Moslems would remove their footwear and stand at the edge of the channel. A boy (equivalent to an altar boy) would pour water over their feet. The Moslems then entered the door by using two stepping stones, made of concrete. (Show the two marks where the stepping stones were situated – the stones are now inside the building, for safety). The old door has been blocked off. In the early days, residents in the neighbourhood would hear the ‘caller’ – calling the faithful to evening prayers.
4. MOSQUE BUILDING – ANCILLARY ROOM
 - (1) Sign visitors’ book (if so wish), receive leaflets, admission fees collected (adults 10 cents, children 5 cents).
 - (2) Explain that – The Joinery Works next door wished to acquire the block on which the deserted, derelict old Mosque building stood, in order to extend their factory. Around that time (1965) the Broken Hill Historical Society had been formed, and persuaded the Broken Hill City Council to compulsorily take over the block (for which the owner was compensated) and fence it. The Society then renovated the building which had been abandoned for over 20 years, and had suffered extensively from vandalism. The work was completed in time for the 1968 Festival, when it was officially opened, and re-dedicated as a Moslem place of worship. Moslems from South Australia took part in the ceremony.

¹ All spelling, information and views are the author’s and particular to the time the notes were written. They do not necessarily reflect the current views of the Broken Hill Historical Society.

² Most cameleers came to Australia as indentured labourers, single males hired for a fixed period.

³ 10886.2 kilograms.

- (3) The ancillary room was used as a waiting room for Moslems prior to entering the Prayer Room. It was also used for the washing of the dead. (On the occasion of a Moslem funeral, cases of fruit were distributed to neighbouring children to commemorate the occasion). Although the Mosque may be used for religious ceremonies by Moslems it has not been so used to date.
 - (4) The SHOW CASE contains a number of items which were in the original Mosque, plus other items of interest which have been added:
 - (a) Coloured cloths – used to hold Koran (never held in bare hands).
 - (b) Various manuscripts in Arabic.
 - (c) Peacock feather fan – used by the MULLAH (priest) in hot weather.
 - (d) Braided vest – typical of colourful garments worn by the Moslems.
 - (e) Walking stick used by the last Mullah, Abdul Fazulla – has no religious significance.
 - (f) Camel bells used when camels were hobbled.
 - (g) Nose piercer, and nose pegs. Camels were held down while nostril pierced, then peg placed in position with pointed end outwards. Cord the attached to peg, so camels can be controlled in a ‘string’ – see photograph on wall showing camel team at Tolarno Station in 1914.
 - (h) Various photographs of camels pulling wagons, loaded as a team, or being ridden.
 - (5) The iron framework under showcase is remains of a camel riding saddle – the wooden ‘trees’ are part of cargo saddle to which bales of wool, etc., were roped.
 - (6) The two stepping stones, upon which Moslems walked in bare feet after having feet symbolically washed.
 - (7) Notice board containing Moslem literature etc. See newspaper cutting of visit to Mosque of High Commissioner for Pakistan (Mr. Aslan Malik) with wife and son in 1970 – also letter indicating gift of two items for Prayer Room (referred to under heading of Prayer Room).
 - (8) Cloak and cap on wall, formerly property of Shamrose Khan.
 - (9) ‘Opening of Koran’ wall chart, precedes all readings from the holy Koran (equivalent to Christian bible).
 - (10) 20 gallon water tank near door – several camels always carried water on long trips.
 - (11) Inform visitors that an undertaking was given to Moslem community that footwear would be removed before entering the PRAYER ROOM. Visitors to remove footwear.
5. PRAYER ROOM
- (1) As stated in the leaflet a Mosque may be a tent in the desert, or a very elaborate expensive building – but no images or attempts to portray the appearance of Mahomet are permitted. The only items which may be displayed in a Prayer Room are of the type shown.
 - (2) The Mosque faces MECCA (in Saudi Arabia), the Holy City – west-northwest of Broken Hill. The Mullah or priest (sometimes called the IMEM) stood in the alcove, facing west (with back to congregation), and the faithful knelt on the prayer mats. The Mullah would read from the Koran, then turn and face the congregation and would explain the text to them – either sitting on a stool, or cross-legged in the alcove.
 - (3) The pictures on the wall – CENTRE: MECCA, in the centre of which is a huge meteorite. When a Moslem makes a pilgrimage to Mecca he is classed as a HADJI (a very distinguished honour). LEFT: The tomb of Mahomet at Medina, Saudi Arabia. RIGHT: The tomb of Mahomet’s grandson, or one of his grandsons.
 - (4) The Koran on corner table. This is in poor condition from being exposed to the weather, but was originally used in the Mosque.
 - (5) Various texts on the wall contain extracts from the Koran. The text (white on blue background at left) is the same as is shown in English in the ante-room. Similar text on right is equivalent to the Golden Rule (‘Do unto others . . .’).

- (6) Prayer Mats. Two new mats donated by South Australian Moslems at opening of Mosque in 1968; others from various sources. Mats show Mosques from other parts of the world. Note coloured hanging lamps stitched on mats – one of the few opportunities to bring colour into the Mosques. Most important mats from Broken Hill Mosque are the two ordinary household mats – these were used by the last Mullah for many years (note the worn sections where feet and knees touched mat).
- (7) Bookshelves. Contain copies of Koran in Arabic and English. White cap as used by male Moslems (women wore veils over heads). Sundry book dealing with Moslem religion – see one showing proper method of using prayer mats (green plastic covered book).
- (8) Items donated by High Commissioner for Pakistan.
 - (a) Prayer beads in book case, came from mosque in Middle East. Prayer beads are not standard item, but are permitted.
 - (b) Ghee oil lamp above alcove. Small container in bottom of lamp holds 'ghee' oil (that is from butter fat of female buffalo - - holy oil, therefore, not polluted). Pronounce ghee as the 'gy' at end of word 'piggy'. In some Middle East Mosques hundreds of ghee oil lamps are lit and hung around the buildings. Very picturesque sight.
- (9) Ceiling lamp. This has no special significance but is typical of lamps used.

6. CONCLUSION.

The Broken Hill Historical Society has preserved the Mosque (only ten in Australia) because it represents a reminder of an interesting and unique phase in the development of Broken Hill and the West Darling district of New South Wales. In the 1920s motor vehicles gradually took over the cartage of supplies to and from outback places, and the camel teams moved to Western Australia and Northern Territory. The last team left Broken Hill for the far north of New South Wales in 1929, but some camels were retained on sheep station properties etc. for dam-sinking and sundry work. By the late 1930s camels had been completely replaced by motor vehicles. There are none in the Broken Hill district nowadays.

There are many descendants of Moslem families living in Broken Hill. They have married into the community, but do not follow the Moslem religion.

It would have been a great pity if the abandoned Mosque had been demolished to make way for a timber and joinery works.

R.H.B. KEARNS, MBE.

BROKEN HILL

15th April 1973.

The 10 Mosques in Australia: Broken Hill, Canberra, Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide, Shepparton and Mareeba (added Preston (Vic), Lakemba (NSW) and Port Kembla (NSW). Moslem services in other places (Sydney, Melbourne, etc.) are conducted in private homes. There are 25,000 Moslems in Australia.