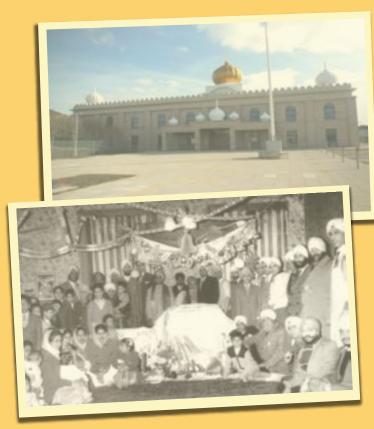
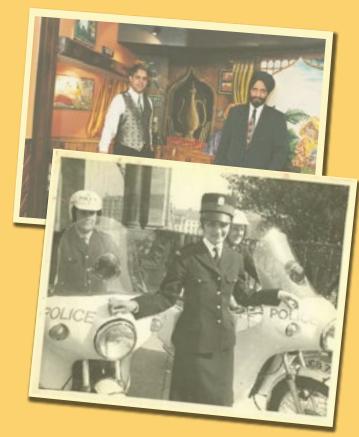
CONTRIBUTION OF SIKHS IN SCOTLAND

COMPILED BY COLOURFUL HERITAGE - JUNE 2023

















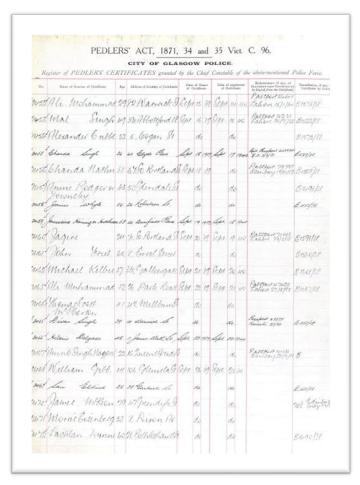


Sikhs in Scotland

The Sikh faith-based community has been present in Scotland for over a century and a half. The first documented Sikh, <u>Maharajah Duleep Singh</u> arrived in Perthshire in 1855 when he resided at Castle Menzies in Aberfeldy. He also had his first son in Aberfeldy who is buried in the nearby Kenmore Kirk. The next wave of migration was in the early to mid-1920s when prominent Sikhs of the Bhat/Bhatra community established themselves in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The bulk of Sikhs in Scotland come from families who immigrated during the late 20th century. Glasgow has the most significant Sikh population in Scotland with nearly 20,000 Sikhs.

Early employment

Many of the early Sikh settlers started their working life as pedlars (door to door salesmen) and their names along with others from the South Asian community are contained within the Police register for pedlar's certificates granted, at the Mitchell Library archives in Glasgow.



An extract from the Police register containing names and addresses of pedlars granted certificates, Glasgow, © 1940 Copyright CSG CIC Glasgow Museums and Collections: Glasgow City Archives

There was a warehouse situated on 23 Nicholson Street in the Gorbals area of Glasgow owned by Noor Mohammed Tanda and Atta Ashrif called 'Tanda & Ashrif'. Very often the pedlars gathered there to purchase goods such as garments for selling which were given to them on credit by the owners in order to help the new arrivals from India & Pakistan. This was also a hub for the men from various faiths and backgrounds to get together and socialise with one another and discuss the days events, exchange news and to play cards.



Pedlars standing outside Tanda and Ashrif's warehouse at 23 Nicholson Street, Gorbals, Glasgow, 1953 © Colourful Heritage

All pedlars required a certificate in order to work and these were usually issued by the local police for a specific time period such as a year. They were to be kept at all times on the pedlar as a form of identification to show customers or to law enforcement officers. Anyone operating without one would be fined. As a pedlar they would travel far and wide often on buses, trains and by foot no matter what the weather with their suitcases or trunks filled with various goods such as jumpers, children's clothes and ladieswear. Some pedlars even travelled and stayed as far afield as Stornoway e.g., Khair Singh in the 1930/40s along with Duleep Singh and a few other South Asian pedlars.

They provided a much-needed door-to-door service to the Scottish communities that lived out of town in rural areas, especially for the women who did not have easy access to shops in their own area or to transport to get to the stores in the city. After World War 2, very often they sold items on credit to their customers who would pay them back in small instalments in order to help them out and to build trust with them. This often meant several trips to see their customers to collect their money and show them new stock. They also kept a cash book or diary to make a note of who owed them money and how much was owed, with deductions noted regularly (see section on Jagat Singh for pictures).

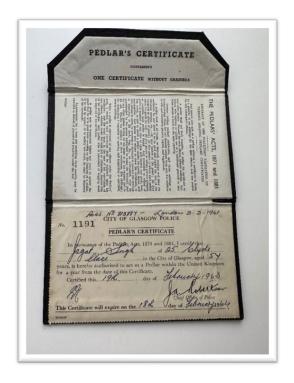
Jagat Singh

Jagat Singh was one such pedlar who came to Glasgow in 1938 and initially worked as a door-to-door salesman. He travelled on foot or by bus daily, in all weathers as far as Stirling, Cowdenbeath, Callendar, Cowie as well as around Glasgow. In the evenings he worked at

home as a tailor living at 25 Clyde Place in the Gorbals making bespoke gentlemen's suits, shirts, and trousers. He specialised in tartan shirts. During the war he worked in the munitions factory in Bishopton and passed away in 1964 from cancer having been with his family for only 7 years after they joined him in 1957. His family still stay in Glasgow and have provided images of his certificate and cash book. These early pioneers faced incredible hardships and gave everything of themselves so that their families could have a better life.



Jagat Singh, 6th February, Glasgow, 1956 © Ravinder Kaur Nijjar





Jagat Singhs pedlar's certificate, City of Glasgow and his cash book © Ravinder Kaur Nijjar

Some Sikhs and others within the South Asian community went onto work in the Govan ship yards or with Glasgow Transport Corporation as bus drivers and bus conductors (Click to watch 'Journeys to Glasgow' - a short film about South Asians working at the GTC which is playing at the Riverside Museum). Others went onto work in a variety of other roles ranging from being self-employed in opening a variety of different shops e.g., hardware stores, travel agents & establishing Cash & Carries to now working in all fields of employment including working as lawyers and doctors as well as many other roles within the NHS as well as politics.

Gurdwaras in Scotland

Gurdwaras are places of congregational assembly and worship for the Sikh community. The first Gurdwara in Scotland was believed to have been established in the unconventional setting of a top floor flat of a tenement building in 79 South Portland Street in Gorbals in Glasgow. The property was bought on 25th March 1952 from Mr Lal. It was spearheaded by Messrs Tersem Lal, Jiwan Singh Pall and Jagar Singh Natoowala who personally contributed money to purchase the property. These early pioneers became the first committee members of the Gurdwara along with a few others.

The committee then approached others within the Sikh, Muslim and Hindu student communities to contribute towards funds for purchasing the property. Some of those that contributed were Messrs Kher Singh Rakhra, Jagat Singh Nijjar, Bishan Singh, Sant Singh Pall, Lohra Singh Landa as well as some of the earliest pioneering Muslim arrivals of Noor Mohammed Tanda who came in 1916 to Glasgow and Fateh Mohammed Sharif who came in 1926 as well as many other small businesses that operated in the Gorbals area at that time. Many of these contributors still have descendants living in Glasgow today. You can hear the story of the first Gurdwara from the grandson of one of the founders Mr Jiwan Singh Pall, Mr Gurdev Singh Pall.



First Gurdwara for the Sikh community opens in Glasgow in the top floor of a tenement, 79 South Portland Street, Gorbals, 1953. © Mr Gurdev Pall Singh



From the eight Gurdwaras in Scotland, four are in Glasgow, one in Edinburgh, one in Dundee, one in Irvine and with the latest opening in 2020 in Aberdeen. Glasgow has two purpose-built Gurdwaras, with the first one located in the heart of Pollokshields on Albert Drive called 'Glasgow Gurdwara Guru Granth Sahib'. It is inspired by traditional South Asian architecture and has a similar golden dome as the holy shrine in Amritsar. It was completed in 2013 at a cost of around £4 million. It comprises of a large prayer hall, education centre for children and adults to learn to read, write and speak Punjabi to A-level as well as practise their faith.



Scotland's first purpose-built Glasgow Gurdwara Guru Granth Sahib, Albert Drive, Pollokshields

The second purpose built Gurdwara is situated in the West end of Glasgow in Berkeley St called 'Central Gurdwara Singh Sabha'. It is situated next to where the first Sikh elderly care centre was opened by Mr Sewa Singh Kohli (see 'Notable Sikhs' section below for information

on him) called Mel Milaap Centre during the 1980s. It took 16 years of fundraising and 6 years of construction which was completed in 2016 at a cost of around £8.5 million. It also has a beautiful golden dome along with several South Asian style pillared 'chattri' (dome) structures adorning the top of the building. Sikhs worship and take part in religious services at the Gurdwara. The Gurdwara is also a learning and community centre, with Punjabi classes being offered to A-level as well as the opportunity to learn 'Keertan' (sacred verses from the Holy Sikh Scripture the Guru Granth Sahib Ji) and musical instruments such as the 'harmonium' and 'tabla' (hand drum). It also features an amazing exhibition charting the growth of the Sikh community in Glasgow, the Sikh religion beginning with the Sikh Gurus, Sikh Beliefs, Sikh women, Vaisakhi, Sikh identity and form etc. There is also information on the contribution of Sikh soldiers in the two World Wars as well as details of Sikhs who were awarded a Victoria Cross fighting with the Allies in WW1 and WW2.

All Gurdwaras around the world provide langar, a free vegetarian meal, offered to all who visit the Gurdwara started by the founder of the Sikh religion Guru Nanak Dev Ji. They also feature a 'Nishan Sahib' triangular flag featuring a 'Khanda' emblem hoisted on a tall flagpole outside the Gurdwaras. These beautiful traditional architecture buildings which are purposebuilt places of worship, have not only enhanced the skyline of Glasgow but also represent a strong symbol that represent the identity and sense of belonging of the Sikh community in Scotland.

Vaisakhi

Sikhs celebrate the <u>Vaisakhi festival</u> every year in April to commemorate the creation of the Sikh Nation, the Khalsa in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Sikh Guru. The Scottish Sikh community marks this occasion by having an annual procession called the 'Nagar Kirtan' which has been taking place in Glasgow every year since the first one in April 1992.



Five members of the Khalsa lead the Vaisakhi procession through Glasgow

Notable Sikhs in Scotland - Past & Present

There are several notable Sikhs in Scotland that have made a significant contribution to business, politics and many other fields of work and service. The following are just a small selection of some of them:

Sewa Singh Kohli MBE – Also known as 'Papa Ji' to his immediate family was a well-known community leader and businessman amongst the Indian community in Scotland. He was born in 1909 and graduated from Punjab University Lahore with an honours degree majoring in Punjabi, Persian and English. From 1941-48 he worked in NW railways and was a trade union activist going on to be a leader from 1948-59. In April 1962 he came to Glasgow with his family arriving soon after. He started a business 'Bedi & Kohli (BK) Trading to import Indian foods from Shamrock St then Maryhill Rd. He also owned a restaurant in Cumbernauld and then was better known for his Kohli Travel, which is run by his son Aman.

His love of Urdu & Punjabi Poetry encouraged him to develop Washington Street Arts Centre in Glasgow showcasing Punjabi Folk Dance & Music. He also worked as the Asian Community Arts Development Officer for the then Strathclyde Regional Council.

He is also thought to be the founder of the Glasgow Mela. In the 1990s he worked tirelessly to create his brain child the 'Mel Milaap Centre' – A community centre for the South Asian elders in Glasgow.



Sewa Singh Kohli MBE, Courtesy of the Kohli family

His work was recognised when in 1998 he was awarded an MBE for his community work and in 2008 was awarded the Lord Provost of Glasgow's Special Award for Services to Community Relations. He made a significant contribution to Glasgow both politically and culturally. He passed away in Glasgow aged 92 in April 2012, 60 years after arriving in Glasgow. To find out more about him click <u>here</u>.

<u>Sawarnjit Matharu</u> –Born in India and having moved to Glasgow at the age of five, Sawarnjit grew to defy the expectations of friends and family to become Scotland's first South Asian (Sikh) Police Woman in 1974 when she was just seventeen years old. She joined the force in order to help the South Asian community as she was fluent in English and Punjabi.

She also has a Q&A style <u>'Herstory'</u> available answering questions and shares her story in her own words.



Sawarnjit Matharu, the first South Asian female Police Cadet in Scotland, Glasgow, 1974, courtesy Sawarnjit Matharu

<u>Dilawer Singh MBE</u> – He was the first South Asian Sikh Police Officer in Glasgow. Singh spent more than 30 years with Strathclyde Police, latterly as an Inspector, and worked for six years in serious organised crime serving in HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland. He has raised thousands of pounds for different international charities through his sporting exploits. He has an entry on our <u>digital timeline</u> under the years <u>1970</u> & <u>2014</u>. Further reading about him can be found <u>here</u>.





Left: Dilawer Singh MBE, in his Police uniform, Glasgow, 1970s. Right: Dilawer Singh outside Buckingham Palace after receiving his MBE medal, London, 2014. © Dilawer Singh

Trishna Singh OBE – Trishna was born in Glasgow in the 1950s, a first-generation Scottish Bhat Sikh. She is the Founder and Managing Director of Sikh Sanjog (which started in 1989 as Leith Sikh Community Group), the only Sikh Family Support charity in Scotland and Punjabi Junction Social Enterprise, the first Sikh women's Social Enterprise in Scotland. She has over 30 years of experience working in the voluntary sector. Having left school aged 13, she went onto graduate from Glasgow University with a degree in Community Learning and Development in 2007. In recognition of her immense services to the community, she is the first Sikh woman in Scotland to have received an OBE in 2014. Her work is centred on the thematic areas of Community Development Gender- Social Justice, Civic Engagement, Race Equality and Human Rights. She was appointed first Honorary Sikh Chaplain to Edinburgh University in 2012 and is currently part of the Chaplaincy team. She has extensive knowledge and understanding of the Sikh religion and culture from the lived experience of women. In June 2022 she published her memoirs, 'A Silent Voice Speaks' about her story.

Her wealth of experience together with knowledge of ethnic communities in particular the women of the Bhatra Sikh Community in Scotland and their needs has resulted in her being asked to represent the Sikh Community in a variety of arenas, both statutory and voluntary.



Trishna Singh OBE, Courtesy of Sikh Sanjog

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar – A former teacher she has made a significant contribution in the interfaith field for over thirty years. She has initiated many projects to promote interfaith dialogue, respect and peace between communities nationally and internationally. She is the Sikh representative on the Scottish Religious Leaders Forum and Advisor to Sikhs in Scotland. Ravinder Kaur currently serves as the Chair of Religions for Peace (RfP) UK Women of Faith Network, Vice Chair of Religions for Peace UK and a former member of the International Women's Coordinating Committee for the RfP Global Women of Faith Network. She was also Co-Chair of RfP European Women of Faith Network from 2006-2014 developing women of faith networks across Europe and is currently a member of the Executive Board. She served for 15 years on the Executive Committee of the Interfaith Network for the UK, former Chair of Scottish Interfaith Council and is the honorary Sikh Chaplain at Glasgow University.

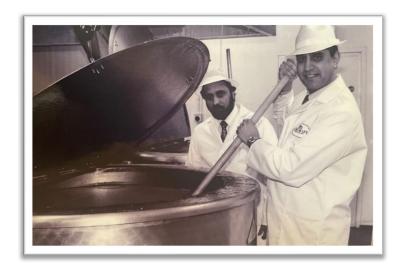
In 2013 she was given the Lifetime Achievement Award from Scottish South Asian Women's Association and in 2023 the Lifetime Achievement Award for Multi Religious Peace Building

from Religions for Peace International and the Ansari Institute, Chicago. She is also the daughter in law of Jagat Singh (see above section).



© Ravinder Kaur Nijjar

Charan Gill MBE - is one of the biggest names in the food and catering industry. He is often referred to as 'The Curry King' of Europe and is the founder of Harlequin Restaurants at the Ashoka West End in the 1990s. He arrived aged 8 to Glasgow in 1963 with his parents and worked as an apprentice in Yarrow ship yards. In order to boost his income, he worked as a waiter in the Ashoka West End which he later bought in 1984 when he was aged 29. By the age of 49 he owned 17 restaurants. He was the owner of the Ashoka curry house chain which he sold. He was also the pioneer of 'home deliveries' in the restaurant business. He was also a singer in a bhangra group called the 'Bombay Talkie'. In 1998 he was awarded his MBE for services to the food and catering services. He has also written a book called. 'Tikka look at me now'. His family story also features in the 'Glasgow Story'.





Left: Charan Gill MBE mixing up a curry at 'Spice Of Life', Glasgow late 1991. Right: serving in one of his restaurants, Glasgow, 1999. © Charan Gill MBE

Pam Gosal MSP - A Scottish Conservative politician who has been a Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) for West Scotland since May 2021. She made history being the first Indian Sikh MSP and one of the first woman of colour elected to the Scottish Parliament. At her oath taking she recited the Mool Mantra (A Sikh Prayer) then took oath in English becoming the first person to ever do so, not just at the Scottish Parliament but in the whole of the UK wide Parliament. She also chose to wear a fusion outfit consisting of a traditional Indian sari in silk tartan by Scottish designer, Joyce Young. Both the Mool Mantra and wearing tartan highlight her mixed heritage and identity of being a Scottish Sikh.



Pam Gosal MSP being sworn in during the Oath & Affirmation ceremony held at the Scottish Parliament, May 2021. Courtesy of Pam Gosal MSP.



© Pam Gosal MSP, Edinburgh, 2021

Rupa Mooker – An employment lawyer by day, she is the Director of People & Development at MacRoberts LLP. She has extensive experience presenting and hosting experience in radio, events and media work. She also hosts her own show on a local community radio, Awaz FM and has appeared as an expert guest on various radio programmes and was the lead person in the BBCs Landward programme about Maharajah Duleep Singh (see below). Rupa has also hosted and compered at several charity and high-profile events including the Scottish Asian Business awards and the Glasgow Mela.





Rupa Mooker on location filming the story of Maharajah Duleep Singh for BBC Landward at Castle Menzies in Aberfeldy, 2022

Charandeep Singh BEM – He is the Deputy Chief Executive at the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, Scotland's largest business network. He received a British Empire Medal in the Queen's New Years Honours List 2021 and was awarded the inaugural Pride of Scotland Award & Man of the Year Award for Services to Charity. He was named one of the most influential PR professionals in the world on the PROPEL 100 List. Charandeep is the founding member and Director of the award-winning national charity, Sikhs in Scotland, established in 2009 and Founder of The Sikh Food Bank. He also served as the Secretary and Board Member of The Glasgow Gurdwara from 2013 - 2020.

<u>Sanjeev Kohli</u> - An actor, comedian and writer who moved from London to Glasgow aged 3 years old. He is best known for his role as "Navid" in the television show "Still Game", and has starred in several other productions including the Glasgow based drama 'River City'. He also was the presenter for the BBC's Asians Network during the 1990s. He has also written for 'Goodness Gracious Me' and 'Chewin the Fat' sketch comedies

Useful Colourful Heritage Resources About Sikhs in Scotland:

1. Schools Resource Pack – Unit 1 & 2 on the British Indian Army (BIA) can be downloaded from the Colourful Heritage website which features the story of WW2 veteran Naik Gian Singh VC who still has family in Glasgow. Unit 4 features some information around civic connections within the Sikh community up until 2020. Unit 5 also features information related to Sikh identity featuring Sikh tartan and the story Sinita Potiwal who manages a Social Enterprise Community Café in Leith.



- 2. <u>British Indian Army</u> (BIA) This web page on the Colourful Heritage website has several resources about the BIA including <u>2 posters</u> featuring World War 2 (WW2) veteran Naik Gian Singh VC, Sophia Duleep Singh & Mrs Ragbir's story. Colourful Heritage videos related to the BIA of people that have lived experiences related to Glasgow are:
 - a. Mr Charanjit Sangha (son of WW2 veteran Naik Gian Singh VC) In this short, subtitled video Charanjit from Glasgow shares the story of his late father, WW2 veteran Naik (Captain) Gian Singh VC talking about his role in the British Indian Army's 15th Punjab regiment during the Burma campaign. He describes him joining the army aged 17 and how he captured an anti-tank gun from the Japanese. It was for this act of bravery and selflessness that he was presented with his Victoria Cross by King George VI, in a ceremony at Buckingham Palace on 16th October 1945. The Victoria Cross medal is the highest and most prestigious decoration of the British honours system. It is awarded for valour "in the presence of the enemy" to members of the British Armed Forces. This is a good clip for pupils to watch.

To watch Charanjit's full interview sharing his father's story and his own experience of moving to Scotland, click <u>here</u>.

b. WW2 veteran Darbara Singh Bhullar – He was Scotland's last known South Asian surviving WW2 veteran from the South Asian community who fought in the Burma campaign as part of the BIA to help protect Britain. He decided to move from India to Glasgow in order to live close to his son in the later years of his life and passed away in 2021. The English subtitled video clip featured in his title is him sharing in his own words his experiences fighting in Burma. To hear his full story including life before and after the 1947 partition of colonised India into Pakistan and India, click here.



The late WW2 veteran Darbara Singh Bhullar (middle) lays a wreath along with Prince Charles (left) at the VJ75 commemoration service at the National Arboretum Burma railway line memorial, Staffordshire, August 2020

3. <u>BBC Landward clip – Maharajah Duleep Singh</u> (featuring our volunteer Rupa Mooker, Oct 2022) – highlighting Scotland's long standing heritage and connection to Punjab (at castle Menzies, Aberfeldy) through the last Sikh ruler Maharajah Duleep Singh (who came in 1855) and his father Maharajah Ranjit Singh. Also shows the nearby grave of Duleeps son who was buried at Kenmore Kirk and was the heir to the Sikh empire, buried right here in Scotland! [His daughter Sophia Duleep Singh was a suffragette and helped in the war efforts. She features in one of our <u>posters</u>]

4. Mr Gurdev Singh Pall Interview

Part 1: Forefathers and migration – shares the history of his grandfather that came to Glasgow in the early 20th century.

Part 2: The Gurdwara &identity - shares the history and an image of Glasgow's first Gurdwara on the top floor of a tenement in the Gorbals.

Part 3: Integration, Sacrifices & Scottish people – shares the difficulties his family and he had in integrating and the sacrifices they had to make. He also gives an insight into the welcoming nature of the Scottish people.

- 5. Mrs Daljit Kaur (Head of Punjabi Classes at Albert Drive Gurdwara, Glasgow)- These are two short clips with photographs of Daljit's father wearing a turban when he originally arrived in Glasgow and how he had to sacrifice his religious identity and go against his religion to cut his hair in order to get a job. This is a good story for pupils to hear to learn of the difficulties faced and sacrifices made by many Sikhs in fitting in therefore affecting their employment chances.
- 6. a. <u>Sawarnjit Matharu</u> (recent clip) Scotland's first Sikh policewoman's story (20 mins) for Colourful Heritage featuring an iconic picture of her aged 17 beside police bikes. She shares her family story of migrating to Scotland and growing up and attending school in Glasgow before becoming a Police cadet.
 - b. <u>HerStory: Sawarnjit Matharu</u> this is a 1 to 1 interview for the <u>'HerStory'</u> series by Colourful Heritage where she shares why she joined the Police force taking inspiration from her working mum, the barriers and challenges she faced entering into this

profession and how she overcame them. She also shares what she learned and enjoyed the most in this job.

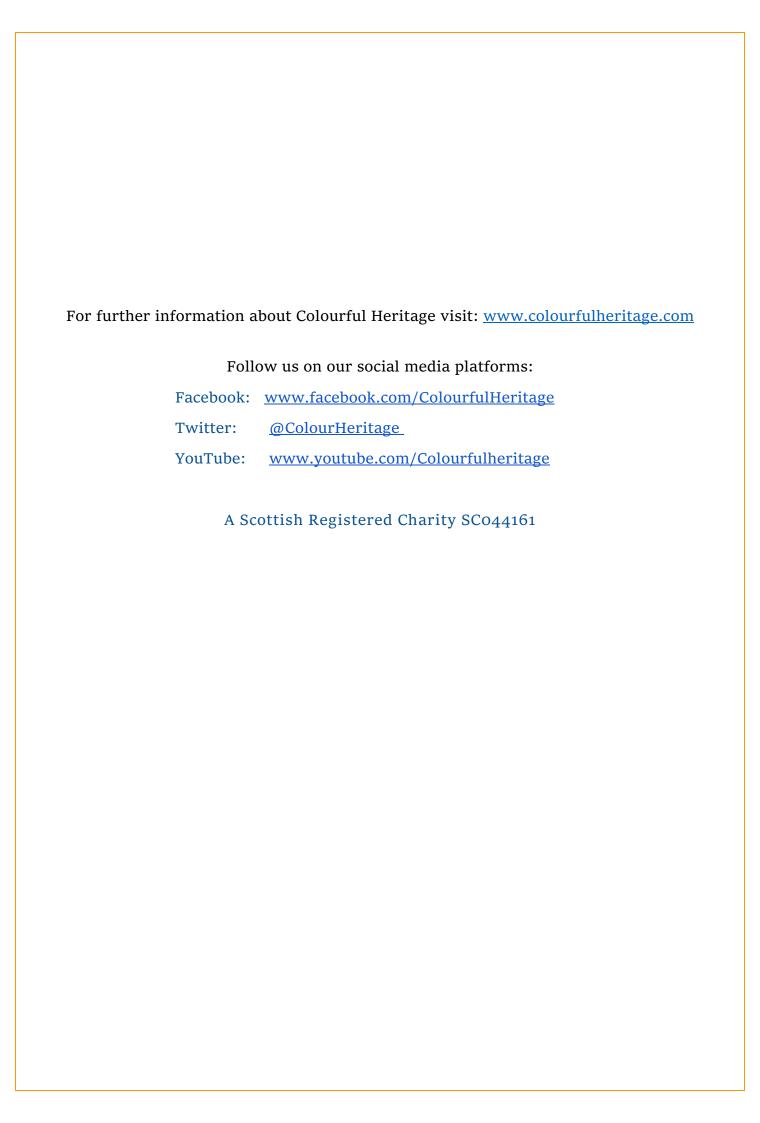
- c. <u>Sawarnjit's 1974 video interview with the press</u> This is from Moving Image Archive featuring Sawarnjit interviewed on the South Portland Street Suspension Bridge in Glasgow soon after her selection. The clip also shows the first Sikh Policeman in Scotland, Mr Dilawer Singh in this clip. Includes activities for pupils. Both these clips are good to show pupils especially the latter
- 7. Dilawar Singh 1st South Asian Policeman in Scotland. He has an entry on our <u>digital</u> <u>timeline</u> under the years <u>1970</u> & <u>2014</u>.
- 8. Mr Nehar Singh Rakhra He is known to be one of the oldest working entrepreneurs from the Sikh community who at the time of making this film (aged 89) was still working at this business. He arrived in Glasgow just before 1947 India/Pakistan partition and shares his sentiments about partition. He also shares how he started his business and secrets to becoming a successful entrepreneur.

There are many other interviews of the Sikh & Hindu community in our <u>video section</u> of the website to explore.

Below is a list of a few free digital resources created by Colourful Heritage for pupils and their parents to be aware of for future use and to share with friends & family are:

- A. <u>Digital Schools Resource Pack</u> A pack consisting of 5 individual units for teachers, pupils and families to discover the contribution of the British Indian Army in WW1 & 2 (Unit 1 & 2), and Scotland's South Asian community contribution to Entrepreneurship (Unit 3), Politics (Unit 4) and their migration history (unit 5). All complete with several images, suggested lesson plans and activities.
- B. <u>Digital Timeline</u> Based specifically on the South Asian history in Scotland that starts in 1855 till present day. You can see various Sikh heritage entries once you start scrolling the various time frames starting from the first entry of 1855 marking the arrival of Maharajah Duleep Singh. There are countless other entries e.g., opening of first Gurdwara in 1953 to the first Sikh MSP Pam Gosal being elected in 2021.
- C. <u>Heritage Trails</u> Includes two resources, <u>Glasgow Trails</u> and <u>Scotland Trails</u> (an interactive map that shows South Asian heritage including Sikh Heritage. E.g., the Jewellery of Duleep Singh is on display in Edinburgh)
- D. <u>Our Journey</u> A short promo film with a selection of clips from our video archive featuring Daljit Dilber, Nehar Singh Rakhra and Sawarnjit Matharu.

To find out more about the resources we have created and offer, check out this blog called <u>'Preserving Scotland's South Asian & Muslim Heritage'</u>.





For further information about Colourful Heritage visit our website at: www.colourfulheritage.com

Follow us on social media to keep track of our work!

A Scottish Registered Charity SC044161









ColourfulHeritage



