

Sri Guru Singh Sabha (Southall)

A History: 1958 - 2019



1950s

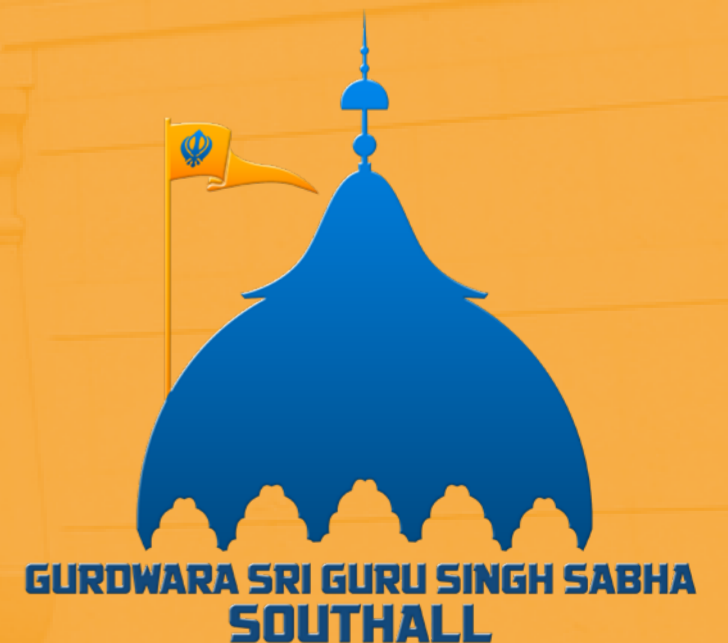
Shepherds Bush Gurdwara

In the 1950s the only Gurdwara in London was established in Putney in 1911 by the Khalsa Jatha: British Isles (London). In 1913 it was moved to 79 Sinclair Road, London W14 (Shepherds Bush), following a donation from Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala.

The “*Shepherds Bush*” Gurdwara, also known as *Bhupinder Dharmsala*, held weekly Diwans in the early 1950s and in 1954 appointed a full-time Granthi.

This Gurdwara acted as a temporary refuge, transit point and a community-cum-social point and was an integral part of the “journey” of most early Sikhs, arriving in Britain in the 1950s.

Shaheed Udham Singh stayed at this Gurdwara.

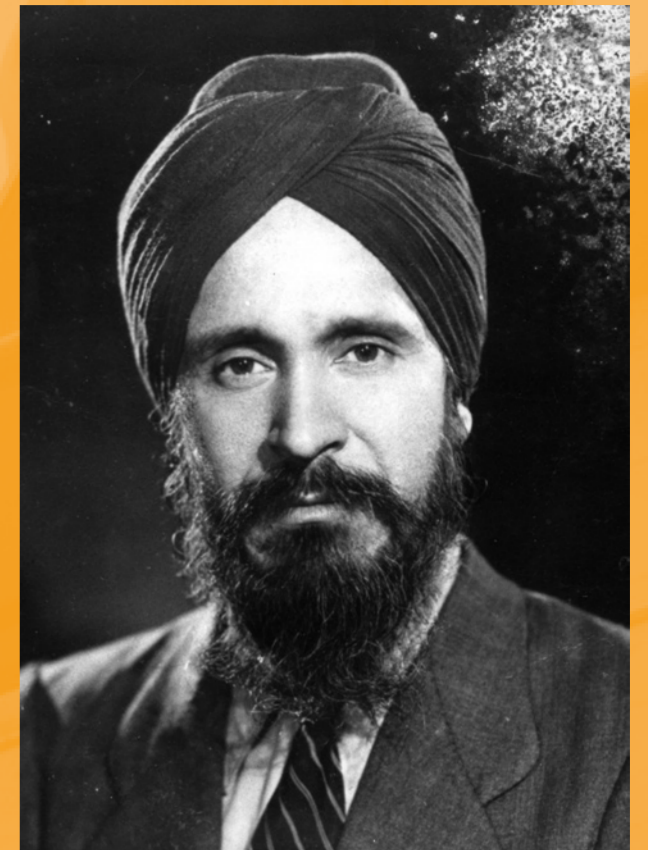


Supported by

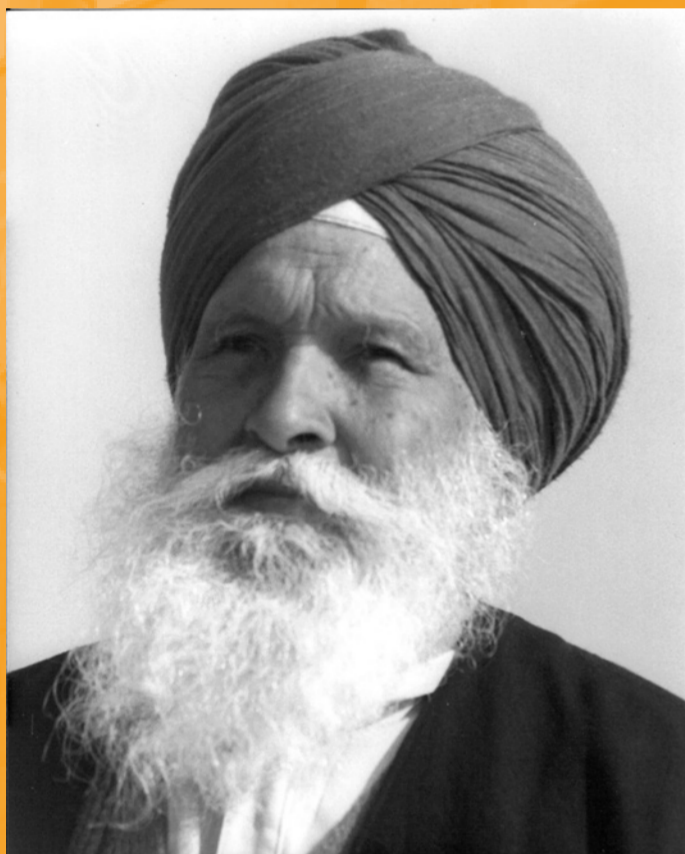




Shackleton Hall



Sohal Singh Rai (Akali)



Dharam Singh Sandhu



Jaswant Singh Dhami



Ram Singh Flora



Surjit Singh Bilga

1958

Sikh Cultural Society: Shackleton Hall

Sikhs from Southall using the Shepherds Bush Gurdwara established the Sikh Cultural Society, the first Sikh organisation in Southall, to work towards setting up a Gurdwara in Southall and to provide a platform and voice for the Sikh community.

In 1958, the Society started hiring Shackleton Hall on Shackleton Road and hosting prayers once a month on Sundays, with Sewadars preparing basic food at home and serving it as Guru Ka Langar at the Hall.

The Society's founding members included:

Sohan Singh Rai (Akali)
Jaswant Singh Dhami
Ram Singh Flora
Karam Singh Khela
Surjit Singh Bilga
Dharam Singh Sandhu
Attar Singh
Chacha Darshan Singh
Gurbaksh Singh
Phuman Singh Sohal

In the preceding years, Shackleton Hall became an established place of worship and also as a venue for Sikh weddings and other religious celebrations.



11 Beaconsfield Road

1963

Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha: Bingo Hall

The Sabha was established by Sikhs from Malaysia and Singapore and from 1963 started hosting prayers in the Bingo Hall at 1 The Crescent, Southall every Sunday mornings.

The Sabha's founding members included:

Bibi Gurdial Kaur Brar
Kesar Singh Mund
Balwant Singh Basrakay
Dharam Singh Sandhu
Balwant Singh Gill
Bhai Ranjodh Singh Deewana
Bhai Phuman Singh
Bhai Gurcharan Singh.

1964

The first Gurdwara: 11 Beaconsfield Road

In 1964, the Sikh Cultural Society purchased 11 Beaconsfield Road, a house for £4,200 and established it as the first Gurdwara in Southall.

Meha Singh, became the first full-time Granthi in Southall.

However, complaints from white neighbours led to Ealing Council imposing restrictions on the numbers of people using the Gurdwara, playing of religious music and devotional singing which severely restricted the Gurdwara's functioning.



1964

The second Gurdwara: The Green

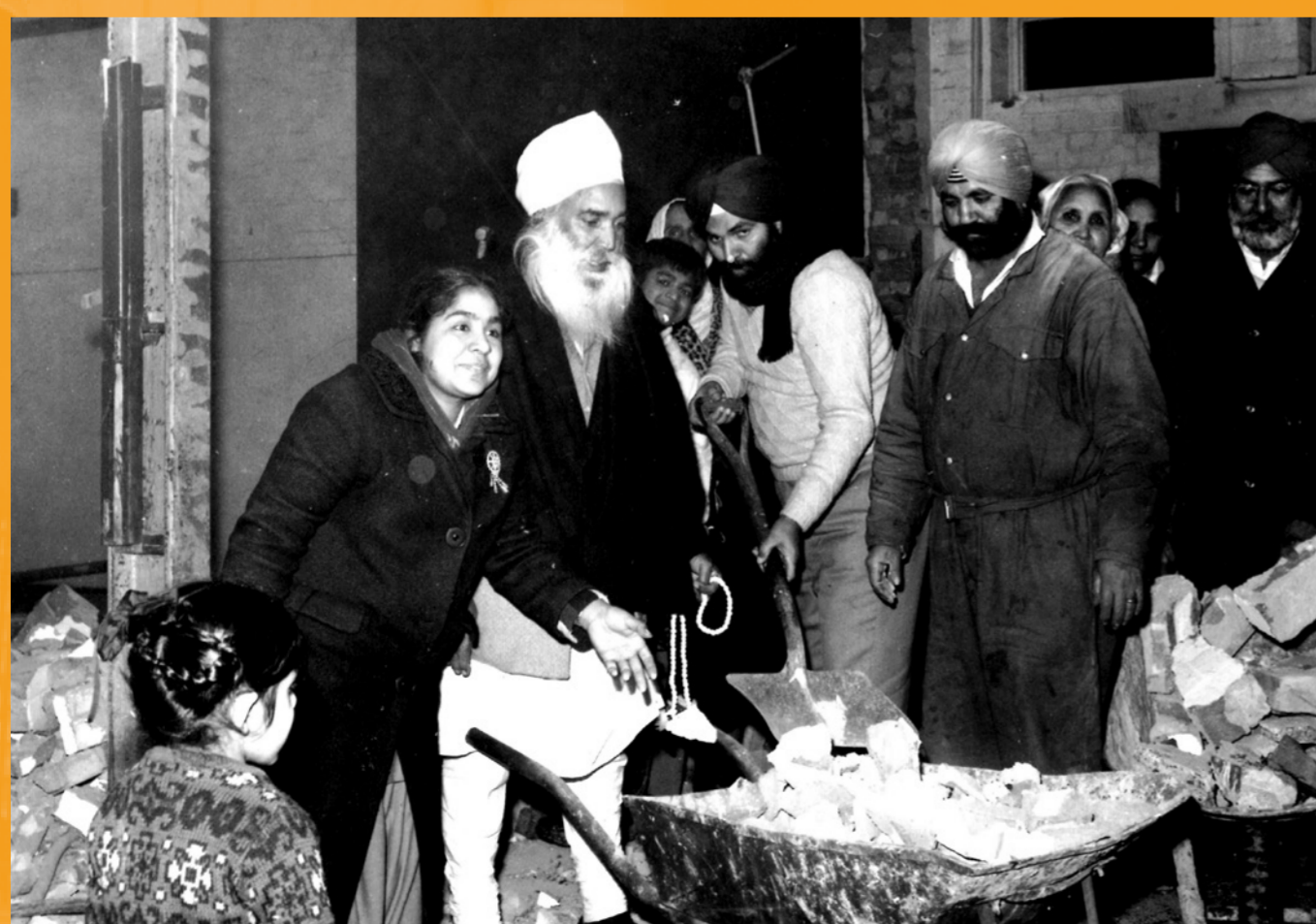
The Sat Sang Sabha purchased the Hall adjacent to St. Anslems Church on The Green for £6000 and opened the second Gurdwara in July 1964, to coincide with the Shaheedi Anniversary of Guru Arjan Dev Ji.



1966

Havelock Road Gurdwara

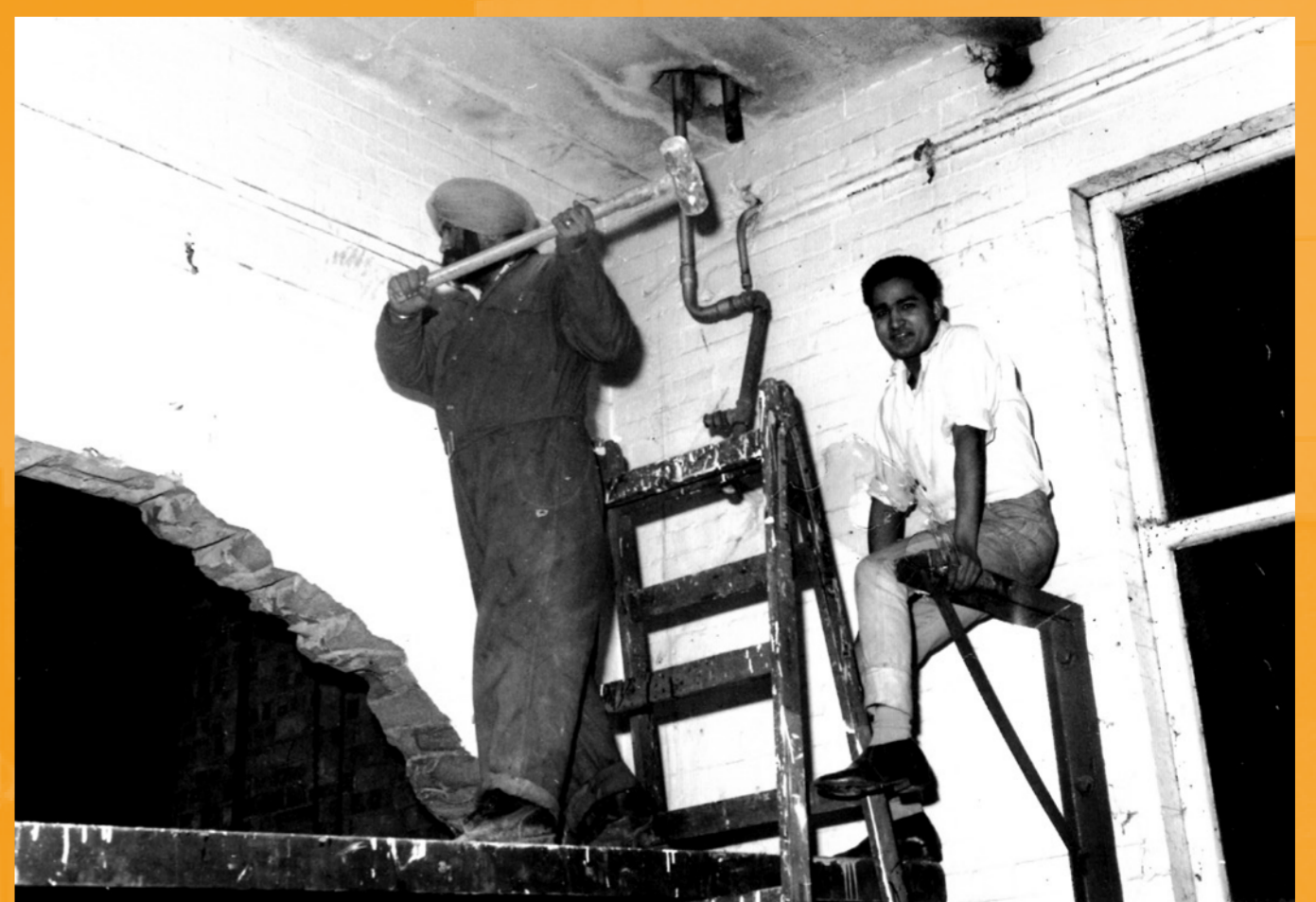
The Havelock Road site, previously a milk dairy, was purchased for £26,000. Sewadars worked around the clock and within 3 weeks had completed extensive building and renovation works to convert the disused building for use as a Gurdwara.



1967

Formation of Sri Guru Singh Sabha (Southall)

The Sikh Cultural Society and Sat Sang Sabha merged to create a unified Sikh body, Sri Guru Singh Sabha (Southall) to meet the needs of the growing Sikh Sangat in Southall, promote Sikhism and to provide a platform and voice for the Sikh community.





1967

Opening of Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara: Havelock Road

Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara on Havelock Road was officially opened on 27 January 1967. The official opening ceremony was performed by Sant Prithipal Singh of Patiala.

The honour of hoisting the Nishan Sahib at the new Gurdwara was bestowed upon Gurbachan Singh Gill, whose generosity and devotion made the acquisition of the Gurdwara building possible.

The Khanda of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, used to baptise the first Sikhs in Anandpur in 1699, was brought over from Darbar Sahib, Amritsar for Amrit Parchar.

The first Granthis at the Gurdwara were Bhai Mal Singh, Gyani Khem Singh and Gyani Gurdeep Singh.





1967

First Nagar Kirtan Procession

The first Nagar Kirtan procession, the first in the UK, was held on Sunday 22 January 1967.

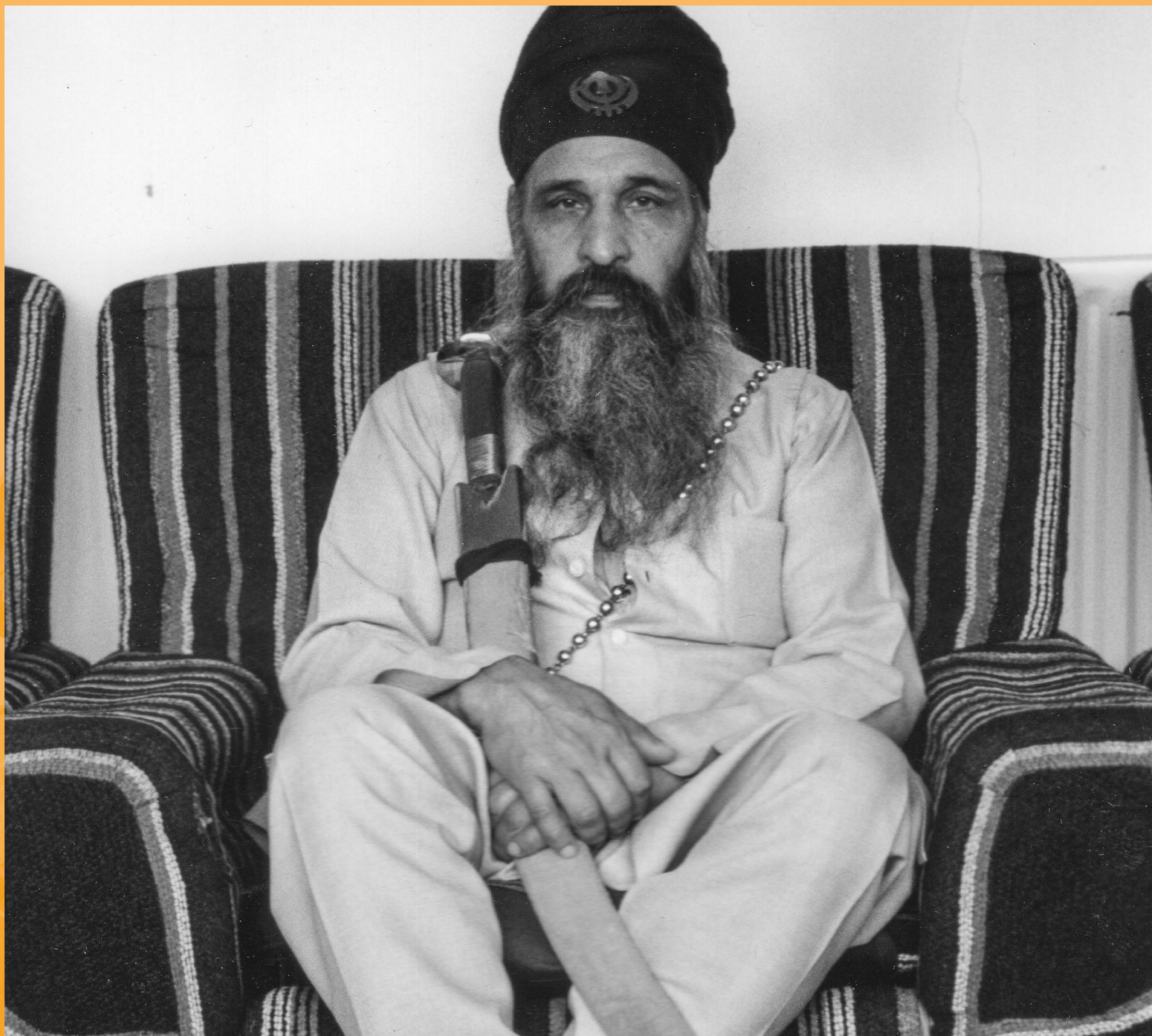
The Nagar Kirtan started from Havelock Road Gurdwara and followed into King Street, The Green, Beaconsfield Road, Woodlands Road, The Broadway, South Road, The Green, King Street and back to the Havelock Road Gurdwara.

An estimated 7000 people participated in this first Nagar Kirtan.

The honour of being the first Panj Piaras (Five Beloved Ones), who walked barefoot in extremely cold weather, was bestowed upon Sardars:

Swaran Singh Punia
 Mohinder Pal Singh Bedi
 Gyan Singh Randhawa
 Harcharan Singh
 Baba Assa Singh Grewal





Beant Singh Dhatt

1984

Park Avenue Road Gurdwara

Sri Guru Singh Sabha purchased this site for £1,200,000 to use as a Gurdwara in order for a new and bigger Gurdwara to be built to replace the Havelock Road Gurdwara.

1985 - 1992

Threat of Repossession of Gurdwara buildings

The attack on Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar on 3rd June 1984 by the Indian Army, the killing and massacre of innocent Sikh civilians in Delhi and other cities across India and imposition of a virtual 'state of emergency' in Panjab were seismic events with catastrophic consequences and impact on Sikhs worldwide.

In 1985, new groupings of Sikhs, previously marginal to the Gurdwara's 'body politics' and under the umbrella of the 'International Sikh Federation' took control of both the Havelock Road and Park Avenue Gurdwaras. Internal and legal disputes engulfed and paralysed Sri Guru Singh Sabha (SGSS) until 1991 when the High Court restored democratic processes.

During this turbulent period, the finances of SGSS were left in dire straights, with SGSS left burdened with a colossal £2.1 million debt to its bank. The threat of repossession of the Gurdwaras was only averted after the personal intervention of Sardar Manmohan Singh (ex Prime Minister of India) who helped secure a negotiated debt repayment deal between SGSS and its bank.

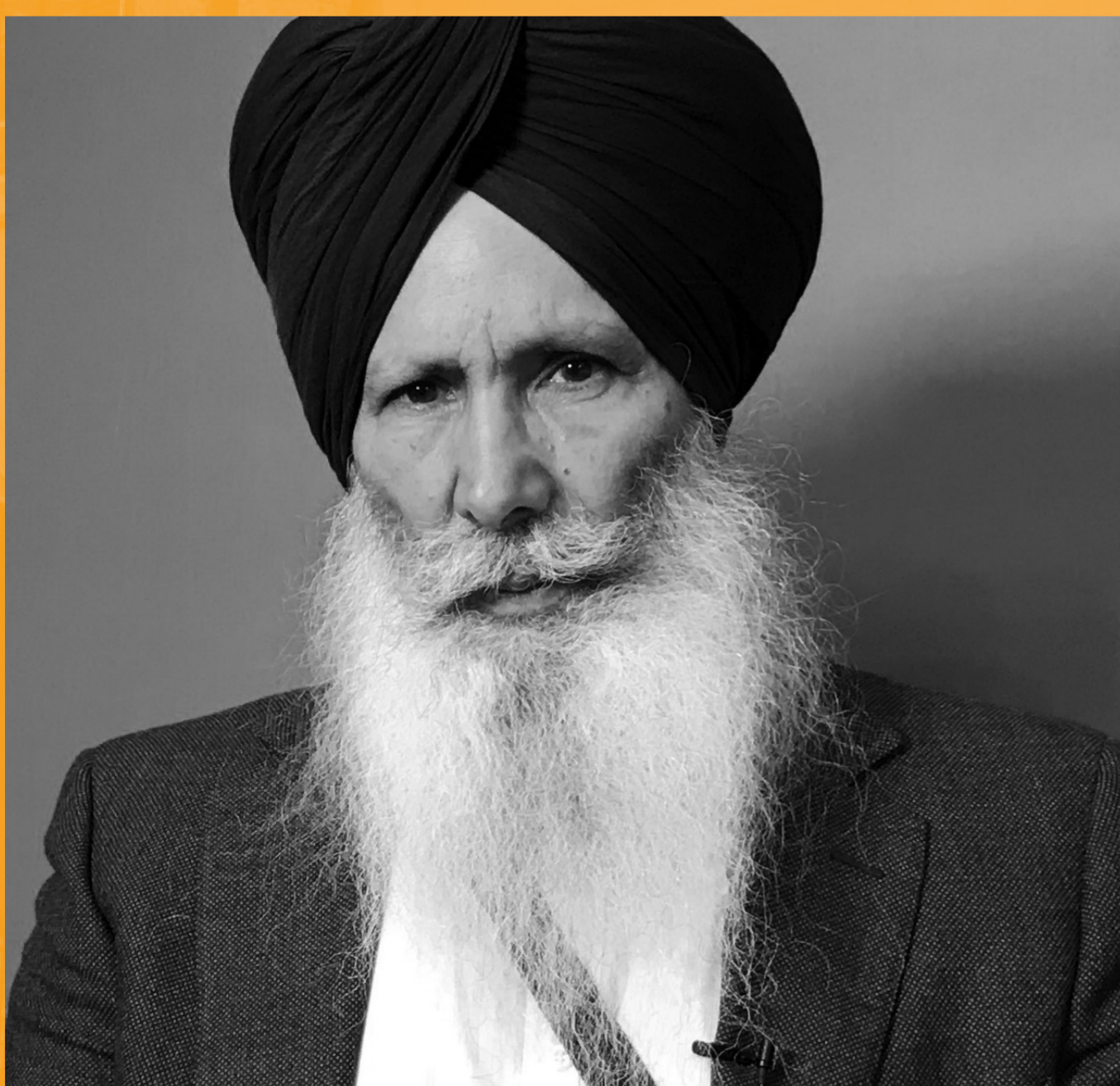
As part of this deal and to avoid repossession of its Gurdwara buildings, SGSS successfully raised and repaid £200,000 in 15 days and £600,000 within 6 months – a herculean task.



1994

The first democratic election since 1983

Himmat Singh Sohi was elected as President in 1994 and a new chapter in the history of SGSS began.



1994 - 2003

Realisation of a Dream: A new Gurdwara on Havelock Road - The biggest in Europe

Buoyed by the successful repayment of massive debts and recovery from the brink of bankruptcy, new elections, increased community confidence in SGSS's leadership led by Himmat Singh Sohi, the long cherished dream of building the new Gurdwara was resurrected.

In 1998, Architects Co-Partnerships Ltd were commissioned and engaged the Sangat in the design and vision of the new Gurdwara.

The building works for the new Gurdwara began on 13 April 1999 at a cost of £17 million. SGSS relocated to and refurbished the Park Avenue Gurdwara during the construction period.

On 30th March 2003, Havelock Road Gurdwara was officially inaugurated by HRH Prince of Wales – Prince Charles.



Panjabi Language: Preservation & Development

SGSS has been at the forefront of the advancement of Panjabi language since the early 1960s.

In 1969, SGSS started hiring Featherstone High School and appointed 2 volunteer teachers to run Panjabi Language classes in the evenings and subsequently started Panjabi classes at the Havelock Road Gurdwara.

By 1972, SGSS was employing 23 teachers teaching Panjabi evening classes, including 10 teachers at Featherstone Road School, 2 in Cranford High School, 3 at Lady Margaret Road Middle School.

Until 1976, Panjabi language was not being taught in any school.

In 1988, SGSS supported by campaigners such as Merhanwan Singh and Swarn Singh Kang successfully got schools to offer Panjabi language as an option, to all pupils from Year 7 onwards, leading to the first Panjabi Language teacher being appointed at Featherstone High School and subsequently in other schools.

SGSS's efforts established Panjabi Language as a recognised and mainstream language.

2009

Khalsa Primary School

Efforts to establish a faith school to improve and advance the education of Sikh children in Southall were first initiated in 1981.

Khalsa Primary School, a mixed sex and voluntary aided school caters for children aged from 3 to 11 and is located at Norwood Hall, Tentelow Lane, Southall. It is built on land purchased by SGSS for £2.8 million from Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College.

Khalsa Primary opened on 1st September 2009 and moved to its new, purpose-built building in 2010.

SGSS Presidents



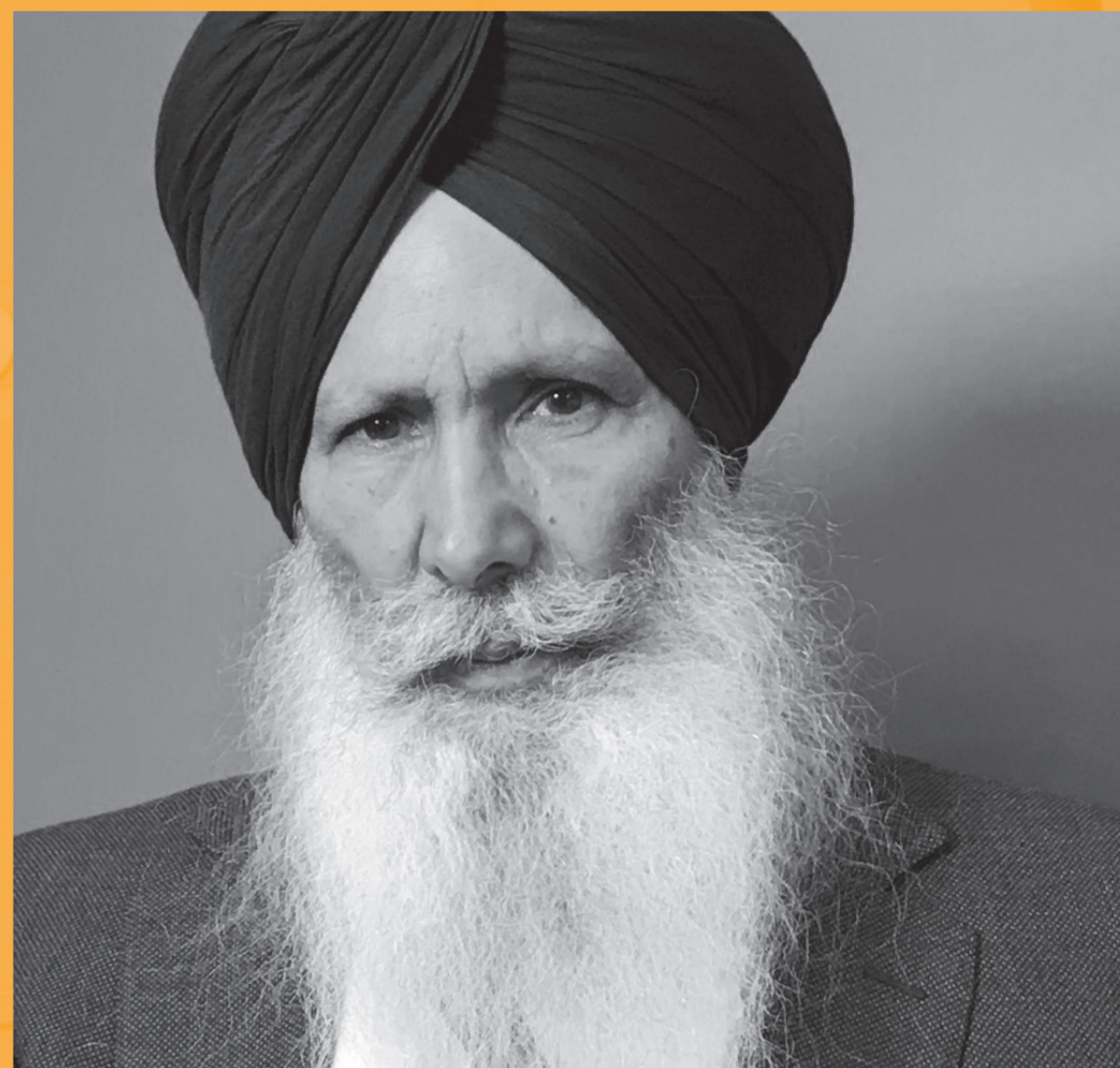
Gyani Amolak Singh



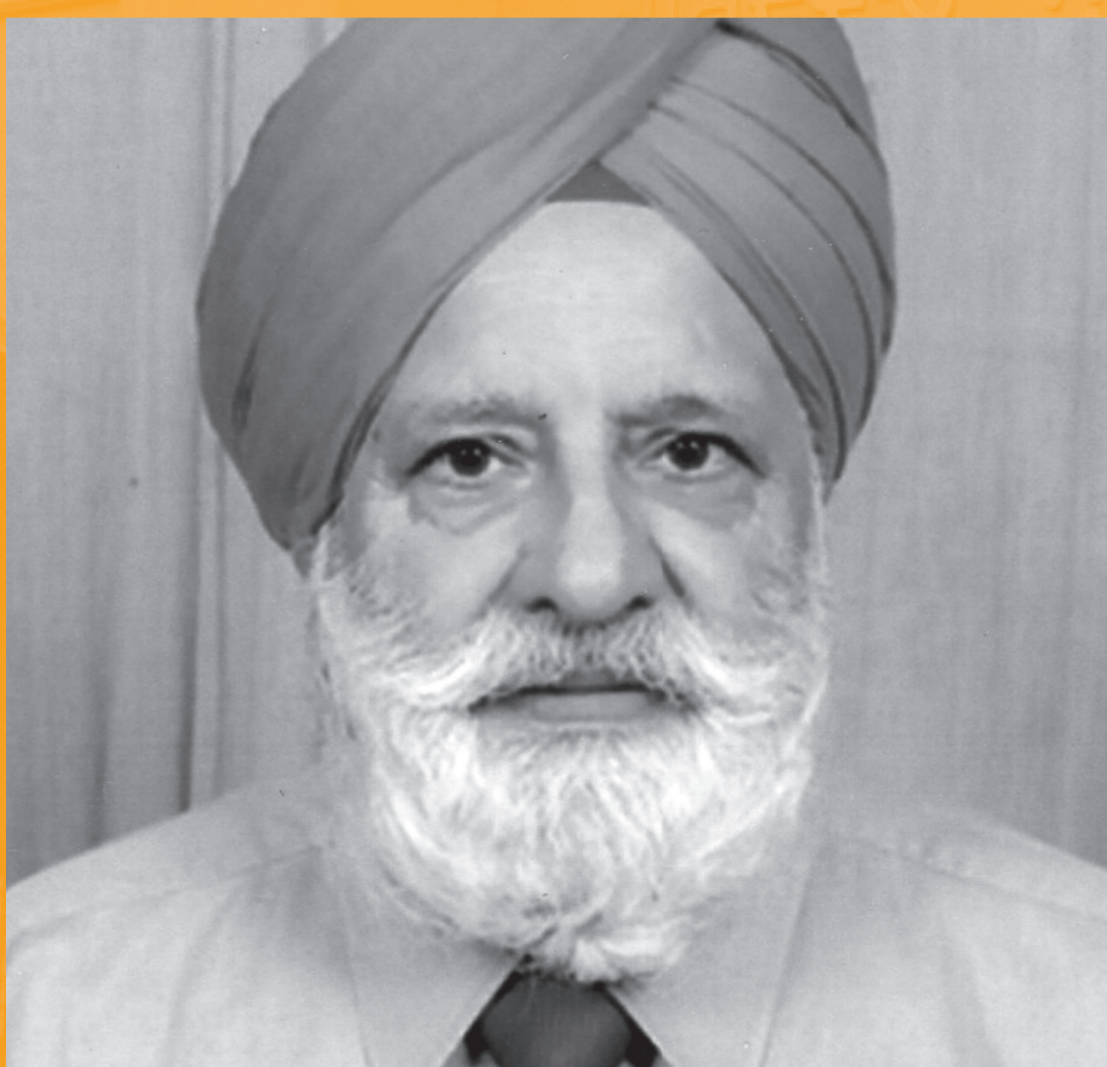
Malkit Singh Grewal



Surjit Singh Johal



Himmat Singh Sohi

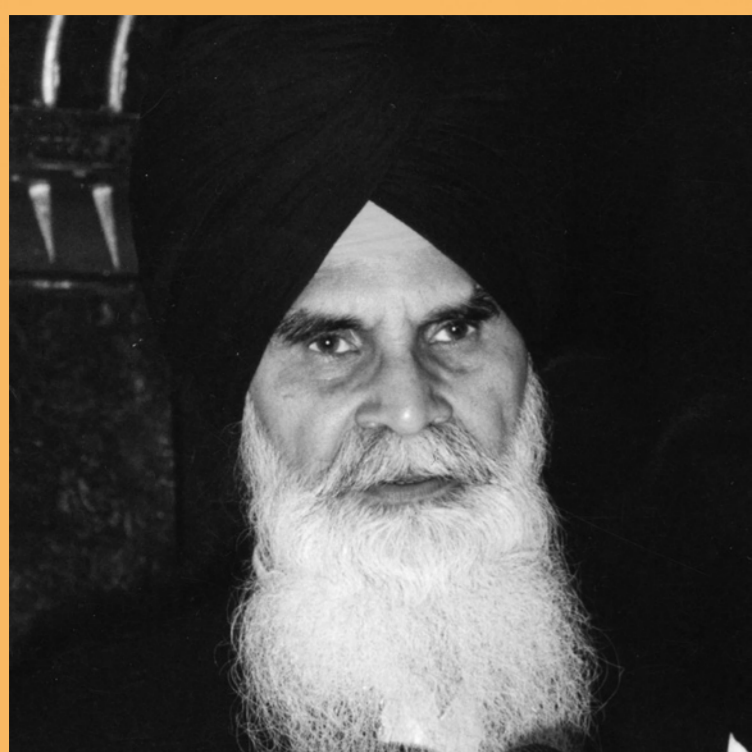


Didar Singh Randhawa

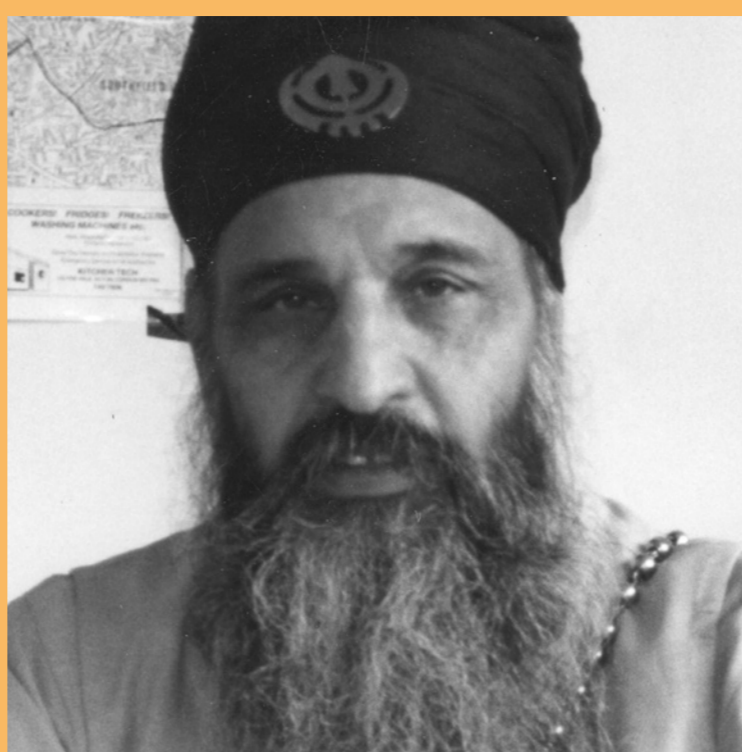


Gurmail Singh Malhi

SGSS General Secretaries



Bachittar Singh Dhinsa



Beant Singh Dhatt



Harpal Singh Brar



Surinder Singh Purewal



Manjit Singh Bhuttar



Harmeet Singh Gill

Sri Guru Singh Sabha: Structure and Elections

SGSS is a registered charity, managed by 21 Management Trustees and Property Holding Trustees.

The Management Trustees consist of a President, General Secretary, Treasurer and 18 Management members who are elected every 2 years.

The Property Holding Trustees act as custodians of the Gurdwara properties and are appointed by the General Body Meetings, which are held twice annually.

Membership of SGSS is open to all Sikhs aged 18 years and over.

Sahajdhari Sikhs can stand in elections as candidates for Management Trustee positions.

Only Amritdhari Sikhs can stand for the positions of President and General Secretary.

Prior to 1977, a combination of representatives of different interest groups, Sewadars and others promulgating Sikhism nominated negotiated and selected a Committee to run the affairs of SGSS annually.

From 1977, formal elections were introduced and are now held every 2 years.

Presidents

1977 – 1978	Gyani Amolak Singh
1979 – 1981	Malkit Singh Grewal
1981 – 1983	Gyani Amolak Singh
1983 – 1985	Surjit Singh Johal
1984 - 1994	No elections held
1994 - 2000	Himmat Singh Sohi
2000 - 2008	Himmat Singh Sohi
2008 - 2012	Didar Singh Randhawa
2012 - 2017	Gurmail Singh Malhi
2017 - 2019	Gurmail Singh Malhi

General Secretaries

Ranjit Singh Saroya
Bachittar Singh Dhinsa
Gurdip Singh Sahota
Beant Singh Dhatt
Harpal Singh Brar
Dr Parminder Singh Garcha
Surinder Singh Purewal
Manjit Singh Buttar
Harmeet Singh Gill

Timeline of key developments in history of Sri Guru Singh Sabha (Southall): SGSS

- 1958** Sikh Cultural Society established
Shackleton Hall, Shackleton Road, hired from 8am-12 noon once a month on Sundays for prayers
- 1960** Gurdwara at Shackleton Hall starts opening on a weekly basis
- 1962** Sikhs from Malaysia & Singapore start using Bingo Hall at 1 The Crescent as a Gurdwara and establish Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha
- 1964** Sikh Cultural Society buys 11 Beaconsfield Road for £4,200 and sets up first permanent Gurdwara in Southall

Sat Sang Sabha purchase building on The Green for £6,000 and set up second Gurdwara
- 1967** Havelock Road Gurdwara, purchased for £26,000 and opened on 22 January 1967 to coincide with the 300th 'Prakash Utsav' (Anniversary Birthday) of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji

Sikh Cultural Society and Sat Sang Sabha merge and create a single unified organisation: Sri Guru Singh Sabha (Southall)

First Nagar Kirtan procession held in Southall and in UK
- 1973 -1976** SGSS supports Baldev Singh Chahal's national campaign and government introduces legislation exempting Sikhs from having to wear crash-helmets when riding motor-cycles
- 1980** First Worldwide Panjabi Conference and gathering of writers sponsored by SGSS
- 1983** SGSS acquire freehold of land adjacent to Havelock Road from Ealing Council for £10,000.
- 1984** Park Avenue Gurdwara site purchased for £1.2 million
- 1985 -1990** Indian Government attacks Golden Temple complex in Amritsar. SGSS and community protests against massacre of innocent Sikh civilians in Delhi and other cities across India

SGSS 'taken over' by Khalistan movement supporters and SGSS engulfed by internal conflict and legal disputes

SGSS's debts spiral to £2.1 million & its bank threatens repossession of Gurdwara buildings
- 1990 - 1993** Democratic control and governance restored in SGSS

SGSS reaches negotiated debt repayment agreement with bank,repays £800,000 within 6 months and avoids threat of repossession of its Gurdwara buildings
- 1994** Election held and Himmat Singh Sohi elected President
- 1997** Construction works of a new £17 million Gurdwara, the biggest in Europe, commence at Havelock Road
- 2003** New Havelock Road Gurdwara inaugurated by HRH Prince of Wales – Prince Charles on 30th March.
- 2008** Didar Singh Randhawa elected as President and Surinder Singh Purewal as General Secretary
- 2009** Khalsa Primary School opened
- 2012** Gurmail Singh Malhi elected as President and Manjit Singh Buttar elected as General Secretary
- 2017** Gurmail Singh Malhi elected as President and Harmeet Singh Gill elected as General Secretary
- 2018** SGSS purchase 2 additional plots of land adjoining Park Avenue Gurdwara site for £4.2 million