

AKC Essay Competition - Coversheet

- Complete all sections of this form and ensure it is the first page of the document you submit (either copy and paste this page into the front of your work, or begin your work on subsequent pages of this form).
- **DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON YOUR WORK.**
- Pages should be clearly numbered.

Student ID number (e.g. 1712345) NOT your K number	1712345
---	--------------------

Degree Programme (where applicable)	BSc Philosophy, Politics & Economics
Department (where applicable)	DPE
AKC Year (1, 2 or 3):	1

Essay question number:	2
Essay Title:	Choose any two buildings featured in the series and discuss how they offer different visions of London life.
Deadline:	23:59, Sunday 26 April 2020
Date Submitted:	Sunday 26 April 2020
Word Count (max 1500 words):	1504 excluding footnotes, titles & bibliography 1633 including footnotes

AKC Essay Competition - Coversheet

Complete all sections of this form and ensure it is the first page of the document you submit (either copy and paste this page into the front of your work, or begin your work on subsequent pages of this form).

DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON YOUR WORK.

Pages should be clearly numbered.

DECLARATION BY STUDENT

By submitting this essay, I declare the following:

This assignment is entirely my own work. Quotations from secondary literature are indicated by the use of inverted commas around ALL such quotations AND by reference in the text or notes to the author concerned.

ALL primary and secondary literature used in this piece of work is indicated in the bibliography placed at the end, and dependence upon ANY source used is indicated at the appropriate point in the text.

I confirm that no sources have been used other than those stated.

I understand what is meant by plagiarism, including self-plagiarism.

I understand that plagiarism is a serious academic offence that will result in disciplinary action being taken and may result in my withdrawal from the AKC programme.

I understand that essays which do not include references and a bibliography will not be read.

My word count is accurately stated above and I understand that essays which are more than 10% over the word limit may not be considered by the AKC Steering Committee.

Choose any two buildings featured in the series and discuss how they offer different visions of London life.

The Spring AKC lecture series focussed on narrating the story of London from all angles — be it cultural, religious, literary, or historical — through the medium of nine various buildings. Although all were remarkable architectural feats, the two that particularly stood out to me for their ability to portray such different visions of London life were the Barbican Estate and Arts Centre and the East London Mosque in Whitechapel. In spite of their close geographical proximity, both assert a distinct narrative with regards to class, culture, and historical identity.

The East London Mosque and the Barbican are both architecturally noteworthy buildings that dominate their respective East London landscapes. They both seem somewhat detached and out-of-place in their surrounding seas of concrete: the Mosque appears as a burnt orange beacon of hope and faith in the midst of minuscule local eateries and council estates; the Barbican pays an exceptional homage to Brutalism, as it sinks below glossy towers and glass skyscrapers. They both symbolise unity and community, as their overlapping construction period is reflective of a more hopeful time, where Britons, both old and new, came together to conceive of something that would ultimately become an unmistakable icon in its respective locality. However, although the initial purposes and conceptions of both buildings pay homage to this vision of 20th Century London, how this has persisted in the present day paints a very different picture.

The East London Mosque was built over the course of several decades, founded on the premise of providing Muslims from South Asia — which was then under the British Raj — ‘a Mosque in London worthy of the traditions of Islam and worthy of the capital of the British Empire.’¹ It was a tribute, and a thank you for their service. The community that it was built for at the time has retained its likeness with its current inhabitants of predominantly working class Bengalis, who historically worked as seamen in the East London Docklands. The Mosque was designed and conceived of by a group of both British and Asian aristocrats who founded the London Mosque Fund in 1910, and gathered at the Ritz Hotel in their aim to provide this essential institution for the Asian working class, and after Secretary George Lloyd’s insistence that the absence of a mosque in London was a ‘scandal,’² the Fund was backed by the House of Commons, as well as other foreign powers, such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In addition, although the Mosque follows Sunni Islamic tradition, it was founded by a Shiaite, Syed Ameer Ali, and an Ismaili, Aga Khan — two broadminded visionaries from distinct religious paths, ensuring that inclusivity and diversity was embedded into the Mosque’s very roots.

The Barbican, on the other hand, was conceived of by young architectural students hired on the premise of providing social housing for the middle-class professionals of London, in the effort to reconstruct and rebuild the city after WWII.³ The intended appeal of the vast architectural feat was its exclusivity and safety, which was reinforced externally by the estate’s seemingly impenetrable walls and the building being seemingly devoid of a clear entrance. These intentional design elements were meant to deter any passersby who had not been previously acquainted with the building, be it socially or by way of a sufficiently high income, from entering the modern-day fortress — a direct contrast to the Mosque, whose wide, open gates beckon and welcome its guests inside for worship.

This is the first clear instance of how both buildings show different views of London life: they were both founded to serve two distinct socioeconomic classes. The Barbican was a home for the middle-class professionals aiming to climb the economic ladder, whereas the Mosque was a space for the lower class working Muslim man, who had first been a colonial servant of the British Raj, and was now an industrial servant of the Docklands. The Mosque is a persistent reflection of Britain’s colonial past and its struggle with embracing multicultural identities, whereas the

¹ Humayun Ansari, “A Mosque in London worthy of the tradition of Islam and worthy of the capital of the British Empire’: The Struggle to Create Muslim Space, 1910–1944,” in *India in Britain*, ed. Susheila Nasta (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2014): 80.

² Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Exotic England, The Making of a Curious Nation* (London: Portobello Books, 2015), 194.

³ “The Barbican: A Middle Class Council Estate,” Youtube.com, accessed April 24, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFDpqRxym_A.

Barbican is contrastingly built on the essence of progression — both in an economic and cultural sense. The design of the estate itself encapsulates this, as the planners' intentions to retain residents was manifested by providing progressively larger apartments for inhabitants to move into as they manoeuvred up the pecking order of economic society, and consequently, the estate itself.

In its endorsement of artistic and cultural progression, the Barbican also encompasses a broad range of architectural styles, inspired mainly by Milanese and Italian design, thus reflecting its intrinsic values of openness and togetherness into the realm of the British middle-class. Yet, the air of middle-class exclusivity and sentimentality that was weaved into its very fabric during its construction remains present to this day — a clear cut contrast from the foreign-born working class demographic frequenting the Mosque in Whitechapel, merely 1.5 miles away. Renowned British designer, Vivienne Westwood, embodied this sentiment when she described visiting the Barbican as 'a privilege, a treat, an occasion... you feel you're protected in this large complex by the pleasure of it all.'⁴ The Barbican remains, in its entirety, a haven for middle-class entertainment and artistic expression, and an epitome of a modern, progressive and forward thinking version of London fit and friendly enough to live alongside the narrative of the cultural elite. It has been endorsed by the younger generation as a building that is no longer imposing but rather is something to experience, credited in particular to British grime artist Skepta's approval of the estate through filming his 'Shutdown' music video⁵ in its premises. However, unlike the Mosque which remains intact in its working class roots, still primarily frequented by the descendants of its initial inhabitants, the Barbican estate is now entirely composed of luxury housing — an ode to the failure of social accommodation in the 1980s under the Thatcherite 'Right-to-Buy' scheme.⁶

The Mosque depicts a vision of London life through the lens of an attempt at multiculturalism and the fundamental acceptance, tolerance, and encouragement of different faiths and traditions. Its existence and its history epitomises the importance of what was initially a mere foreign presence in British society — a notion that was renewed with Prince Charles attending the opening of the London Muslim Centre in 2004, embodying a role as Defender of All Faiths. Whitechapel, where the Mosque is situated, has been the historical home of various other religious communities, such as the Jewish Radicalist movement of the late 19th century run by Aaron Lieberman, and the Christian Social Mission run by Dr. Barnardo and William Booth of the Salvation Army⁷ — epitomising Peter Ackroyd's notion of the collective memory of location generating historical continuities of inhabitants.⁸ Yet, the Mosque also serves as a constant reminder of the hostile sentiment that has tarnished Britain's past and continues to stain its present — elements of which still exist in the modern day, irrespective of how many attempts are made to progress society. Enoch Powell's notorious 'Rivers of Blood' speech given in 1968 was the catalyst in a stream of targeted racist and anti-immigrant protests directed at the Mosque, which culminated in a letter signed by the 'Anglo-Saxons' being sent to the house of worship, threatening against 6000 Indian & Pakistani settlers⁹. In doing so, a precedent was set, as the Mosque still receives frequent hate mail to this day. The Mosque and its community is often shrouded in controversies relating to extremism and radicalisation, and the Whitechapel area epitomises feelings of segregation, as 'many among the white working class have felt increasingly excluded,'¹⁰ as 'foreigners' are seemingly given immediate priority over the locality's historic residents. This has spurred on the appeal of far-Right politics to the 'neglected interests of local white communities, at the same time as Islamists have appealed to Muslims.'¹¹ An institution founded on the premise of multiculturalism now seems to be 'perpetuating division'¹²

⁴ "Barbican Centre Annual Review 2006/07," Barbican.org.uk, accessed April 23, 2020,

https://www.barbican.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2017-08/488Annual_Report_06-07.pdf.

⁵ "Skepta - Shutdown," Youtube.com, accessed April 26, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQOG5BkY2Bc>.

⁶ "Right to Buy," Politics.co.uk, accessed April 26, 2020, <https://www.politics.co.uk/reference/right-to-buy>.

⁷ "Our history," SalvationArmy.org.uk, accessed April 25, 2020, <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/our-history>.

⁸ Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (London: Random House, 2001).

⁹ AKC Lecture 1, January 20, 2020.

¹⁰ Sarah Glynn, "PLAYING THE ETHNIC CARD – politics and segregation in London's East End," *Urban Studies* 47, no. 5 (2010): 18.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 19.

— its brick walls serving as a constant reminder of London’s turbulent past. The images of cultural progression and cohesion that thrive in the Barbican’s fortress seem worlds apart from here.

Ultimately, it is my own identity as a British-Pakistani Muslim that enabled these two particular buildings to make such a profound personal impact on me, in their ability to relay perfectly the two lenses and perspectives through which I see my own London life. One draws on the past — it narrates a history embedded in the mixing and merging of two distinct cultures and faiths, united in service and worship, but tarnished by hostility and division. The other illustrates a picture of what London aims to be and wants to be — a city brimming with progressiveness, modernity, and culture, where any and all are welcome. The flaws and shortcomings that the existence of one may bring are rendered void by the complementary existence of the other, and although the visions detailed by these buildings are indeed different, the emotions they evoke within me are the same: a sense of calm, of community, and of hope.

Bibliography

AKC Lecture 1 given by Dr Daniel DeHanas of the King’s College London Department of Theology and Religious Studies on The East London Mosque: Building an Islamic Whitechapel, 20th January 2020 — primary source.

Ackroyd, Peter. *London: The Biography*. Vintage, 2009.

Alibhai-Brown, Yasmin, and Dawn Solman. *Exotic England: The Making of a Curious Nation*. Portobello Books, 2016.

Glynn, Sarah. "Playing the Ethnic Card: Politics and Segregation in London’s East End." *Urban Studies* 47, no. 5 (2010): 991-1013. doi:10.1177/0042098009353630.

Nasta, Susheila. *India in Britain: South Asian Networks and Connections, 1858-1950*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

"Right to Buy." Politics.co.uk. December 11, 2011. <https://www.politics.co.uk/reference/right-to-buy>.

"The Salvation Army." Our History | The Salvation Army. <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/our-history>.

"The Barbican: A Middle Class Council Estate," Youtube.com, accessed April 24, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFDpqRxym_A.

"Barbican Centre Annual Review 2006/07," Barbican.org.uk, accessed April 23, 2020, https://www.barbican.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2017-08/488Annual_Report_06-07.pdf.

"Skepta - Shutdown," Youtube.com, accessed April 26, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQOG5BkY2Bc>.

¹² Ibid, 20.