

# ST. LUKE'S & CHRIST CHURCH CHELSEA

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## REMEMBRANCE



On Sunday 10 November, Remembrance Sunday, there will be a 10.30am Matins service of Remembrance, joined by the Scouts from the 9th Chelsea Scouts Group. The Sung Eucharist service at Christ Church will begin at 10.55am in order to have the Act of Remembrance at 11am. There will be 8am Holy Communion and 3pm Choral Evensong services taking place at St Luke's as usual. □

### Rav Singh – Remembrance Anglo-Sikh and Sikh History at St Luke's Church, Chelsea

St. Luke's Church houses a remarkable monument in memory of the Punjab Frontier Force (PFF): The Piffer Chapel. This chapel commemorates one of the great fighting units of the Indian Army, with a repository of memorabilia of the PFF, who carved out an epic reputation on the North-West Frontier of Punjab during the Second Afghan War (1878 – 1880).

The history of the PFF commences with the formation of the Punjab Irregular Force, which was formed to protect the Punjab province after the Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848-49). Having faced the Sikh armies on the battlefield, the British recognised the stalwart Sikh soldiers as formidable warriors and began to raise military units in the province. By 1865, the military units were organised into the PFF, comprising specialised units of all arms: Mountain, Artillery (five batteries), Cavalry (five regiments) and Infantry (eleven regiments) and the Corps of Guides. Regiments of the PFF, known more popularly as the Piffers, served with distinction not only on the North-West Frontier but also during The Indian Mutiny (1857), The Boxer Rebellion in China (1900), The First World War (1914-1918), The Third Afghan War (1919).

PFF comprised regiments of different martial races: Sikhs, Panjabi Muslims, Pathans, Dogras and Gurkhas. The Indian Army, was a volunteer regular army with no conscription. A recorded oath of the 4th Punjab Infantry for volunteer recruits joining the regiment reads:

"I.....inhabitant of.....son of.....swear by the Gooroo Grunth Sahibjee (holy scripture of the Sikhs) and if I tell a falsehood may the Gooroo Grunth Sahib cause misfortune to descend upon me, that I will never forsake or abandon my Colours, that I will march wherever I am directed whether within or beyond the Company's Territories, that I will implicitly obey all the orders of my Commanders, and in everything behave myself as becomes a good Soldier and faithful servant of the Company, and failing in any part of my duty as such I will submit to the penalties ascribed in the Articles of War, which have been read to me."

With the Partition in 1947, departure of the British and the subsequent creation of modern-day India, Pakistan and West Pakistan (now Bangladesh), there

was some anxiety about the preservation of the memorials that had been set up in the garrison churches of the Punjab region. After disappointing responses following approaches elsewhere, the rector and wardens of St. Luke's Church agreed to receive the memorial brasses, stone plaques and memorabilia from India. A sanctum was created in the crypt of the Church, and a Piffer chapel was designed in a section of the main church. Both the sanctum and the chapel were dedicated on 3 June 1951 by the Bishop of London in the presence of Field Marshall Sir William Slim and General Lord Ismay.

All the regiments that made up the PFF are commemorated in the chapel. The badges of the fourteen units are carved on glass screens, the wooden walls and on the chapel chairs. The altar frontal is presented in the red, gold and green colours of the regiment. Other items on the wall of the chapel narrate the story of the force, including a plaque detailing the origins of the chapel. Several flags and colours hang in the chapel, including those of the 2nd Punjab Infantry - a regiment that played a prominent part in the suppression of the Indian Mutiny in 1857. The union flag that flew over the PFF Brigade Headquarters in Kohat (lowered for the last time on the 15 August 1947) is found here together with a Book of Remembrance listing the names of former PFF officers.

The church is proud of its association with the PFF, with daily prayers for political and religious tolerance taking place within the chapel. Article submission by: Rav Singh, a little History of the Sikhs – Walking Tours, Day Trips, Study Visits

Standing and pausing for a moment in the PFF chapel, it is hard not to feel as if you are stepping back in time and standing in a regimental church on the North-West Frontier in the late 19th century. Since 2014, Rav has been bringing small groups of visitors to St. Luke's as part of Sikh History Walking Tours on the Streets of Chelsea, helping to preserve and bring alive the stories of the PFFs. Rav continues to express his thanks to the St. Luke's Church community for the warm welcome he and his various walking groups receive during visits to the Church. □