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 LARGE PRINT / Standard Print.A memorial to Lady Blomfield

A memorial to Lady Blomfield A very special goal achieved

A VERY SPECIAL goal has been achieved for the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom in recent weeks. After several years of painstaking negotiation and planning, a befitting memorial has been erected at the grave in north London of Sara Louisa, Lady Blomfield, one of the most distinguished of the Faith's early western believers.

Sítárih Khánum

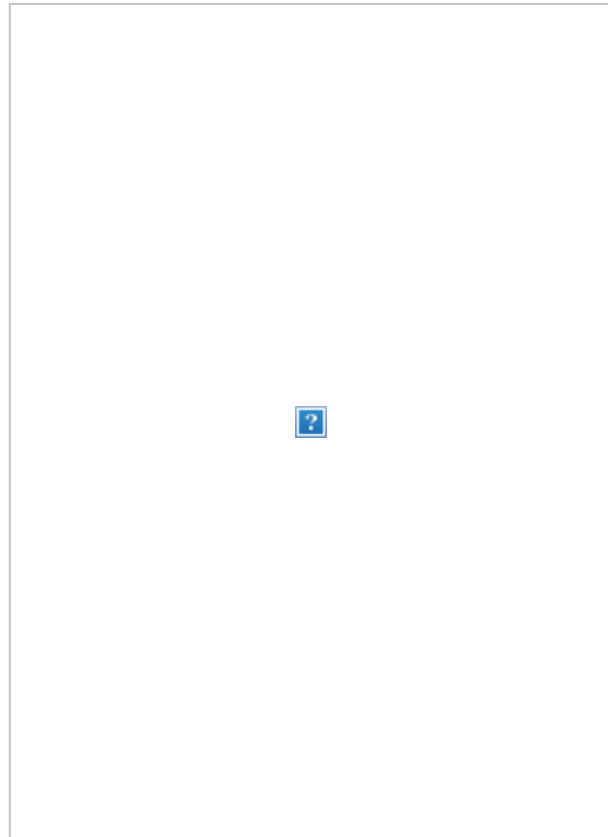
Lady Blomfield was one of the most remarkable women of her age. Born in Ireland to a Catholic father and Protestant mother whose marriage broke down owing to religious tensions, she achieved considerable renown as a London society hostess, the second wife of the distinguished architect Sir Arthur Blomfield. While many women of her generation and position occupied themselves primarily with polite society, Lady Blomfield spent her life in social and humanitarian activity. She was a fearless supporter of the suffragettes and

a protector of the rights of women, children, prisoners and animals, a defender of the oppressed and an ardent promoter of peace and interreligious understanding. She is perhaps best-known now for her involvement in the establishment of the Save the Children Fund in the aftermath of World War I and as an active early promoter and defender of the Faith.

Lady Blomfield's acceptance of the Bahá'í teachings in 1907 marked the turning point in a lifelong quest for spiritual truth. Her declaration appears to be the first case in Britain or Europe of a person of Irish birth becoming a Bahá'í. Through her identification with the Cause came an increased desire to see justice and equality established in the world, a concern expressed in her selfless involvement in all manner of philanthropic causes as well as in direct service to the needy or oppressed, including her intimate involvement with the League of Nations and the welfare of the world's children.

Lady Blomfield's services to the Faith were extensive. She spent invaluable time with 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris and her copious notes of his many talks and conversations formed the substance of the book, Paris Talks. She established a Bahá'í centre in Geneva and promoted the Bahá'í teachings amongst the establishers of the League of Nations.

She actively called upon her friends in the British parliament to defend the persecuted Bahá'ís of Persia. She acted in loco parentis for Shoghi Effendi when he was studying in Oxford and accompanied him back to Haifa on the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She was one



Lady Blomfield, "Sítárih Khánum"

of the distinguished western believers invited to consult with Shoghi Effendi about the future of the Cause following his discovery that he was now the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. When Queen Marie of Romania was expected to visit Haifa, Shoghi Effendi called on Lady Blomfield to join him and the Greatest Holy Leaf in the Holy Land to welcome her. The Queen's itinerary was diverted by her interfering advisers, but Lady Blomfield spent the time interviewing members of the Holy Family about their memories – stories which formed the basis of her timeless book, *The Chosen Highway*. The book also provides an inspiring account of the period when she gave up her home to 'Abdu'l-Bahá on his historic visits to Britain in 1911 and 1913. It was He who gave her the name "Sítárih", meaning "Star".

In addition to all these activities, Lady Blomfield served many years on the London Spiritual Assembly and the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles. She spoke at the first Summer Schools in this country, hosted firesides, Holy Days and "at home" meetings, supported artistic activities in the community including a Bahá'í Theatre Group in London, and maintained correspondence with Bahá'ís all over the world.

Lady Blomfield's passing on the last day of 1939 was widely mourned. Reflecting on her mother's final moments, her daughter Mary Basil Hall wrote that "in the overwhelming sorrow of parting from a wonderful personality and a deeply loved mother, it is hard to rejoice in the gladness that is hers....From the earliest days her valiant spirit meeting sadness and difficulties with radiant acquiescence and invincible faith. It was as if she knew what rare privilege awaited her, since she it was who welcomed 'Abdu'l-Bahá to her home when he came to England. She was one of those 'Waiting Servants' who, down the ages, have recognised and acclaimed the Messengers of God in this Day."

Lady Blomfield was buried at the Hampstead Municipal Cemetery. Later, in 1950, the mortal remains of her daughter, Mary – herself a devoted Bahá'í and member of the National Spiritual Assembly for five years – were also interred in the same grave. Mary was given the name "Parvine" by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It was partly thanks to a generous contribution to the National Fund from her Will that the National Spiritual Assembly was able to purchase 27 Rutland Gate, hence the Drawing Room being known originally as the Parvine Room.

Over the years, the grave of Lady Blomfield and her daughter had fallen into considerable disrepair through the absence of any direct family members, so much so that when members of the Camden Bahá'í Community went to find it, it was only identifiable once thick clods of earth and grass were pulled away to reveal the names. Approaches were made to the cemetery authorities to see if the Bahá'ís could put up a new gravestone. To comply with the law, advertisements were placed to find out if any surviving members of the family had any objection to the restoration taking place. There was no response and the work proceeded. Now the grave of Sítárih and Parvine will become a cherished visiting place for Bahá'ís from all over the world, and a centre of inspiration for the British Bahá'ís in particular.

Visiting the grave

Visiting the final resting places of our spiritual forebears can be a great source of grace and bounty. In a tablet addressed to Lady Blomfield's coworker Ethel Rosenberg, 'Abdu'l-Bahá comments,

“...as to the other resting places of martyrs and holy souls, it is pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God if a person desires to draw nigh unto Him by visiting them.”

Elsewhere, the Master stated,

“I long to visit the graves of the friends of God, could this be possible. These are the servants of the Blessed Beauty; in His path they were afflicted; they met with toil and sorrow; they sustained injuries and suffered harm. Upon them be the glory of God, the All-Glorious. Upon them be salutation and praise. Upon them be God's tender mercy and forgiveness.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful*, p. 12

Hampstead Municipal Cemetery is to be

found just off Fortune Green Road as it joins Finchley Road. The nearest Underground station is West Hampstead on the Jubilee Line. Lady Blomfield's grave is to be found by entering through the main gates, turning right at the first avenue and then immediately left onto a gravel path running parallel to the main drive. After about 100 yards there is a black marble headstone with the name Helena Narkowicz on it. Enter the section at that point and Lady Blomfield's grave is in the sixth line of graves and one grave to the right.



The National Spiritual Assembly wishes to record its deep appreciation to Mr David Lewis, Mr Ron Batchelor and Michelle Wilburn for their dedication to and successful completion of this project.

Rob Weinberg

