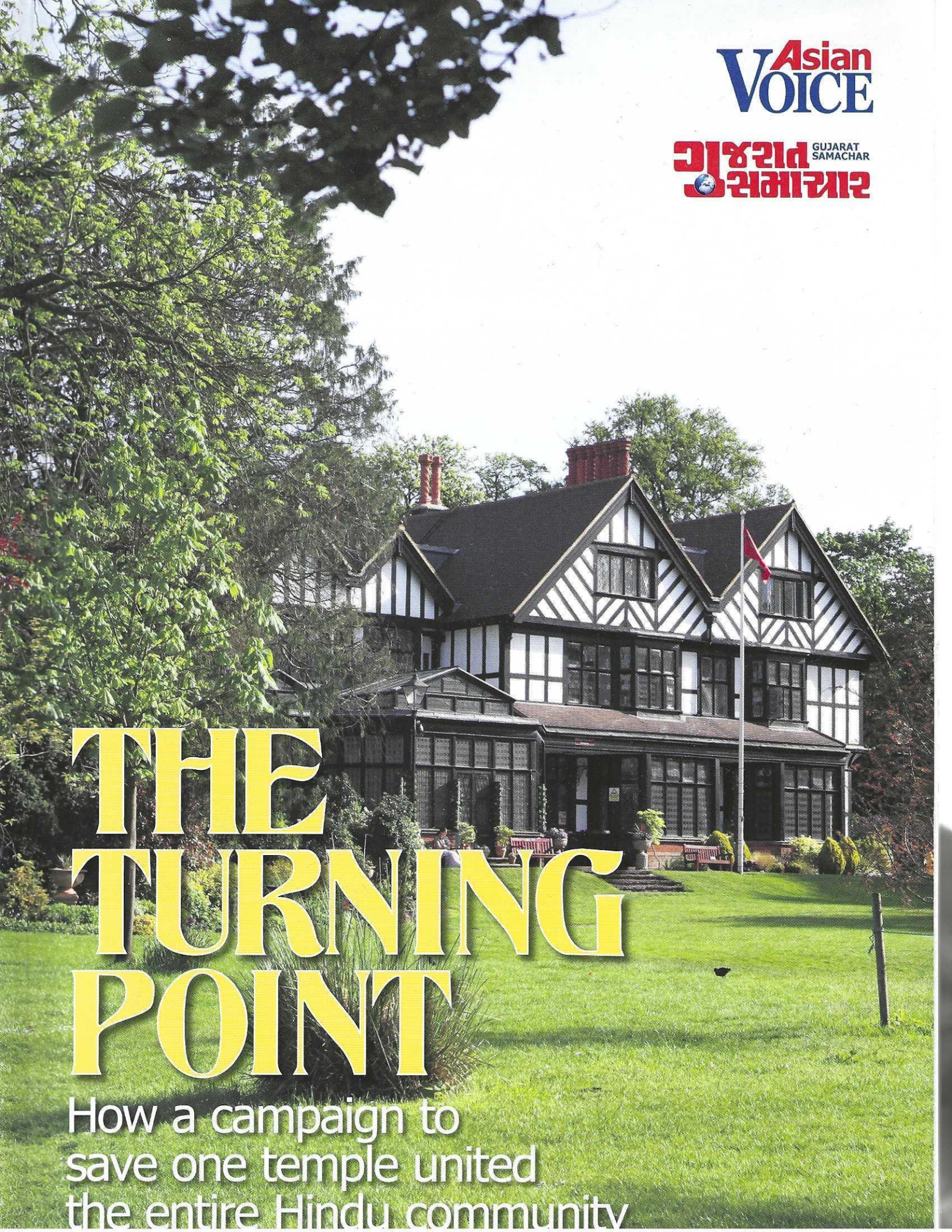


**VAsian
VOICE**

ગુજરાત GUJARAT
સમાચાર SAMACHAR



THE TURNING POINT

How a campaign to
save one temple united
the entire Hindu community



United we stood for a just cause

The Hare Krishna Temple Defence Movement was launched when all the legal avenues to keep the Bhaktivedanta Manor open for worshippers were exhausted and the highest court in the European Union ordered to shut its door. This was 20 years ago.

It is appropriate that all of us celebrate together the 20th Anniversary of how the campaign to save the temple united Britain's Hindu community, garnered support from the non Hindus and non believers. It is not a victory celebration. The campaign succeeded because it was waged with total commitment to the peaceful and non violent means. It was very painstaking and expensive from the legal proceedings, but we must acknowledge that eventually both the local authority and the Central Government accepted the validity of just demands of Hindus and they, however belatedly, consented the right of the worshippers to visit the temple be unhindered.

This souvenir is published to celebrate such a historic landmark. It is a humble effort to recollect the gigantic contributions made by the community. It could perhaps help Hindus and other minority faith followers to realise how to work with united efforts and present their problems to the power that may be in this wonderful country.

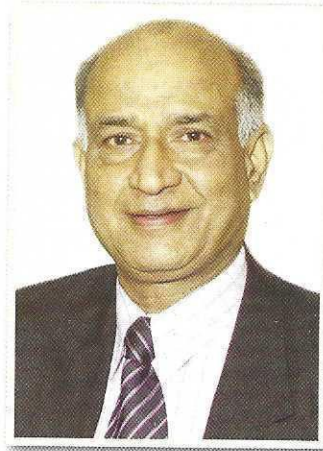
This special issue is dedicated to those many thousand Hindus and non Hindus who took part in scores of events during the campaign. It is also dedicated to the understanding and acceptance of the villagers surrounding the Manor. This makes us all very proud that we reside in Great Britain. There were no losers in this campaign because it was not a war and ultimately everybody emerged as winners. The process of reconciliation is everywhere to be seen.

We are celebrating the launch of the souvenir on 20 March 2014 at a reception in the House of Common, hosted by the Rt Hon Keith Vaz, who was involved in the campaign at every stage. It is also befitting that Rt Hon Simon Hughes, Minister for Justice and Civil Liberties and Lord Dolar Popat, Government Whip and Lord in Waiting, who both helped the campaign will be present. It is also our humble tribute to the devotees of ISKCON especially the leadership at the Bhaktivedanta Manor. We dedicate most humbly to Lord Krishna, whose teachings inspire, energise and empower us and to the enormous contribution, the hardships, the sacrifices of those several thousands who took part in rallies, vigils, protests, outside the offices or residents of the local leaders as well as party head quarters in London, irrespective of the vagaries of the weather.

It is important to remember that not a stone was hurled in anger, no glass was broken. Even our oral slo-

rudeness or provocation.

It was unfortunate that the establishment of the Hertsmere council decided to prosecute the temple under misguided premises of noise and traffic. It was deeply saddening and hurtful, when they tried to justify their exaggerated claims by using racially motivated manoeuvres. Thank goodness, since then so



much water has flown under the London Bridge.

When some 12 representatives of the Hare Krishna Temple Defence Movement came to visit the Karma Yoga House (offices of Asian Voice and Gujarat Samachar), they had almost made up their mind to wind up the campaign as the European Court of Human Rights had turned down their repeated plea to keep the temple open for worshippers.

I must admit that before I promised my full support I considered the pros and cons very carefully. The HKTDM representatives pledged their total commitment to win this battle through peaceful and non violent means. They promised me that they will spare no efforts, they will stop not till the honourable objectives were met. We all were able to, as if, listen to the message of Lord Krishna, "Arise, Awake, and stop not till the goal is reached."

The objectives have been realised. It also gives us ample knowledge on how any problem of the believers should be handled. Purity of purpose, unity of action and the commitment to a peaceful and conciliatory approach, rather than confrontation is the most appropriate in all such difficult situations. Never suffer in silence, never surrender but give and take is very important to resolve any dispute.

I was doing my duty. My publications, my team members and my readers were able to serve His mission. I am grateful that so many put so much faith in various initiatives I proposed. I am most grateful for the help from one and all, above all those women and men, young or not so young, who sacrificed so much. **They are the real heroes.**

With utmost appreciation to all those who helped the campaign.

Yours in service of a vibrant faith tradition.

Hare Krishna, Jai Mata Di, Om Namah Shivaya

CB Patel



Leading the Manor's Efforts

It is a great honour to write something for this commemorative magazine, marking 20 years since the deadline date of 16th March 1994 on which Bhaktivedanta Manor was due to close to the public. That was the day that the largest of the Campaign marches to save the temple took place. It was a day of immense significance to the Hindu community of UK. Many felt that their community had come of age. They had taken action to assert their right to enjoy all the natural privileges of British life without government interference.

Srila Prabhupada's mission was under threat, but our faith and conviction in him gave us the strength to work hard and protect his Temple at all costs. Our Campaign to safeguard worship at Bhaktivedanta Manor is remembered today just as much as it was in May 1996, when we learned that all our endeavours, everything we had been through together, had been worthwhile.

Together, we continue to remember the troubles and anxieties; and how, amidst such adversities, Lord Krishna reciprocated with our sincere prayers. Every person who helped in that Campaign, in whatever capacity, was and remains a special soul, very dear to the Lord. Once again, saying 'thank you' is simply not enough.

There were many Campaign marches and events throughout the ten-year struggle, but the one in March 1994 was the largest and probably best remembered. 37,000 of us marched together for a cause that we knew was right. Unity was our strength and faith kept us going through dark times.

The Campaign and all its aspects is recorded as one of the most exciting and amazing pastimes of Bhaktivedanta Manor's history. It was my pleasure to

in whatever capacity Krishna had allowed.

Last year Bhaktivedanta Manor celebrated its 40th Anniversary and now we and the younger generations can look to the next 40 years with optimism. Srila Prabhupada's dream is being fulfilled and, as it continues to unfold, there will no doubt be many more exciting pastimes for us all to experience.

This magazine includes messages from VIPs and remembrances of the Campaign years which provide a glimpse of what we were dealing with at that time. Many, many people were involved on all kinds of levels. It is simply not possible to include everyone; nor is it possible to represent every single aspect of the Campaign. But, this magazine is an attempt to give the readers a flavour of what happened and the energy and feelings experienced by such a wide community of devotees and supporters.

Memories shared by Akhandadhi das:

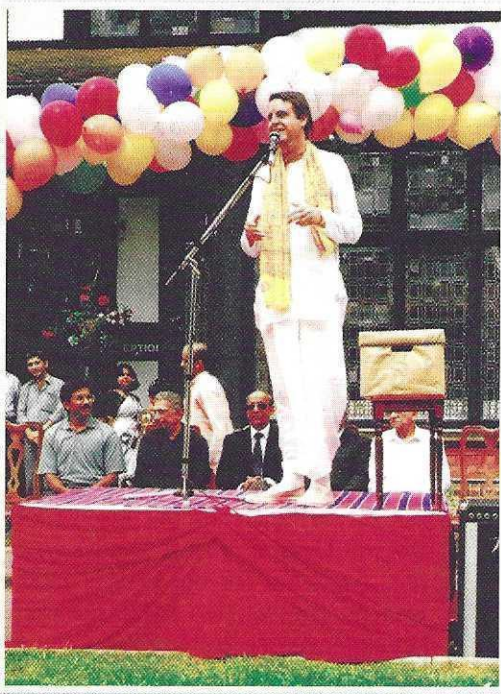
The battle to save Bhaktivedanta Manor

Some stories of the Campaign say it lasted 10 years, it actually lasted 23 years. It started in 1973, started when we first moved in.

Bhaktivedanta Manor was established thanks to the kind gift from former-Beatle George Harrison. From its early days, it began to attract many Hindu worshippers delighted to discover a beautiful Krishna temple so close to their new home in London. Almost immediately, there was a strong reaction from local residents and the newly formed Hertsmere Borough Council to try to control visitors to the Temple. Mukunda Maharaj was working hard to counteract negative publicity and negative things people were saying about the Temple.

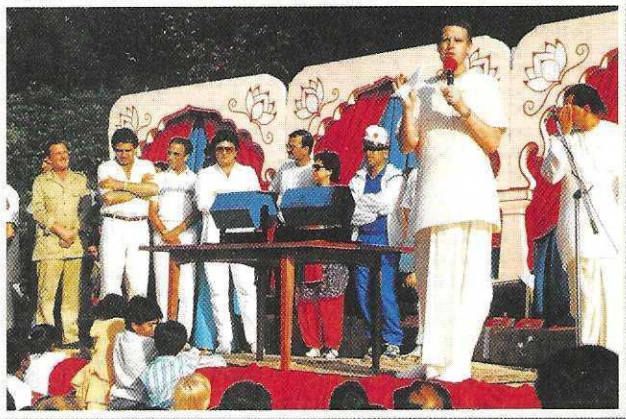
The first Enforcement Notice we received was in 1979. At that time Hertsmere Council simply wanted to stop all public worship. At that time, Vichitravirya das was coordinating our legal defence and I was lucky to have been a junior assistant to him. We were fighting the same threat we were to fight later on! It was actually Vichitravirya das who was the first to suggest that we should have an alternative access route the Temple, thus diverting traffic away from the village. We walked the potential route together and worked out that, to connect the back of the Temple's land to Hilfield Lane, we had to buy pieces of land from two or perhaps three different people. One of the landowners lived in the village and was staunchly against us, so at that time it looked like the alternative access option was an impossibility.

We found ourselves in the village hall with the lawyers busily negotiating a deal. Finally, they came up with an agreement that they would allow us to continue to use Bhaktivedanta Manor for public worship provid-



Akhandadhi Das speaks to a crowd in front of Bhaktivedanta Manor about the latest efforts to save the temple from closure





On the lawn at Bhaktivedanta Manor, Akhandadhi Das gives a rousing speech to the tired but happy participants who walked all the way from Wembley to raise funds

ing there were only six festival days in a year and on all other days we were not allowed to organise an event likely to attract more than a thousand persons. We considered that to be acceptable and peace seemed to descend on the village of Letchmore Heath.

That agreement was put into action during the 1980s and I was liaising with the Council, making sure that they were informed about the arrangements for our six allocated festival days. We actually enjoyed a very good relationship with the Hertsmere officers between 1981 and 1985.

In 1984, after the sale of our centre at Croome Court in Worcestershire, Bhaktivedanta Manor became again the main focus for ISKCON's work in the UK. This entailed more householder devotees living in the area. This was not a problem in itself, until several families purchased houses in Letchmore Heath. There were further raised eyebrows when some devotees took over the village shop. Local residents raised the alarm that ISKCON intended to take over the village and property prices would plummet. Action was needed. Fourteen letters of complaint were sent to Hertsmere Council and a Councillor who lived in Letchmore Heath and also happened to be the head of the Planning Committee took up the banner on behalf of the village residents.

Hertsmere applied for a court action against us because they claimed to have counted more than one thousand visitors visiting on some Sundays which weren't one of the six festival days. When they presented the figures, it showed that they were counting white visitors separately from Indian visitors. Somehow or other they thought that was an acceptable practice!

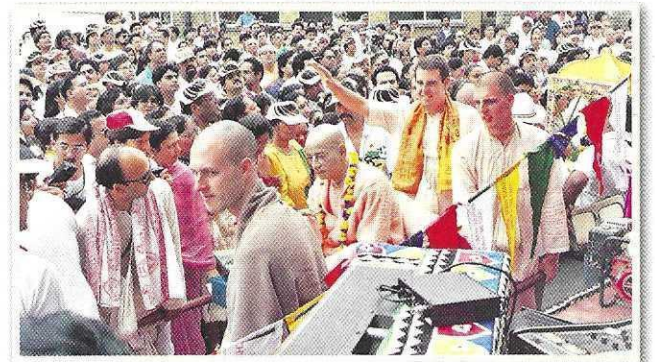
At the High Court, the judge looked at our original agreement and commented that it lacked clarity. "Is it a thousand people at any one time, is it a thousand people spread over the day? This is the worst drafted agreement I have ever seen!"

It was a temporary victory for ISKCON, because we knew it wouldn't end there. We then had negotiations with Hertsmere throughout 1986 trying to see whether there could be any proper agreement. But they didn't want to budge – the temple must stop Hindus visiting on Sundays.

So, in January 1987, they hit us hard with the main Enforcement Notice, the one that was the subject of the main Campaign: they wanted us to stop all festivals and public worship – not just on Sundays! That would have meant basically the Manor was allowed to operate only as a small theological college for a maximum of fifty residents only, with no one else allowed into the building.

At that time, we didn't have a Patrons' programme, but there were stalwart devotees who later became the first Patrons. We called together a group of the most committed devotees including Ramesvara das and Harivamsa das. We asked how we should respond and, if we were to defend ourselves against Hertsmere, we would need substantial funds to pay our Campaign legal fees. They unanimously agreed to help!

A Public Inquiry was set for October 1987, but it was delayed in order to explore a mutual settlement which entailed finding an alternative site where we could establish a new purpose-built temple. This was a profound issue. We loved the Manor, we were settled here; but at the time, the offer seemed an opportunity to build something special for the Deities in the area.



A murti of Swami Prabhupada, was carried by the devotees along the entire 11-mile walk. Akhandadhi Das (right) urges the crowd on

Different potential sites were identified and eventually we decided on a 40-acre site on Dagger Lane owned by London Regional Transport and considered suitable for Green Belt development. So, in 1988, we submitted two planning applications: one to develop Dagger Lane as a new temple and community centre; and the other for the access road crossing St Bart's Hospital land and the Wildmore land behind the Manor. We had agreement from the Wildmores but not yet from the St Bart's - but we put in the application anyway. Hertsmere refused the road almost outright but we only lost getting consent to Dagger Lane by one vote.

With no access road granted and no new temple site, we were forced into the Public Inquiry to test the Enforcement Notice. There was a second Public Inquiry the following February to appeal against the refusal on the Dagger Lane site. The decision for both Inquiries didn't come through for another full year.

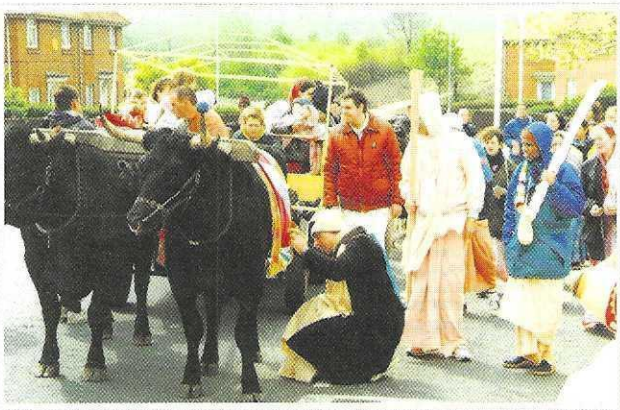
Just a couple of months before the decision was released, Sir Jay Gohel told a meeting of the Campaign supporters: "Nothing is irreversible in a democracy"



Pandava Sena & other youth regularly protested outside the entrance to the temple in the Letchmore Heath Village

Basically, he was politely telling us we were not going to get it. Another one of our supporters had met with the Secretary of State for the Environment – the effective decision-maker - Chris Patten MP. He was asked by the government "Will the Hindus riot if we refuse the Temple?" He answered honestly, "No they won't". This seemed to him to seal the Temple's fate.

On the 16th March 1990 the government issued the decision that said that the Manor should close within two years and that they wouldn't allow a new Temple at Dagger Lane! We appealed to the High Court but the court determined that there were no grounds on legal issues that could be considered. So, we then put our case to the Court of Appeal and that got refused. We didn't have great hope in these appeals, but at least, the process brought us extra time. That final refusal was on 16th March 1992 that determined that the two years notice for compliance with the Enforcement Notice would begin from then.



Bullock cart on the streets of London spreading awareness of the Manor campaign

This meant the deadline for the temple to close was 16th March 1994.

Coincidentally, the day we were turned down at the Court of Appeal was also the first day of campaigning for the 1992 General Election and, on that day, Glenys Kinnock, wife of then party leader Neil Kinnock, came to visit the Manor to lend her support on behalf of the Labour Party.

The government had encouraged us to try to find an alternative site. But, other local Councils were afraid to have us. The best option that had turned up was a property near St Albans that was of interest, but it was

too expensive to buy the land and also build a Temple. Guided by two senior devotees, Vicitravirya das and Abhirama das, I concluded that the idea of re-locating was too expensive and not in the community's best interests. We would be better to focus our resources on getting the land to build the access road.

We had huge reservations about moving the Deities; and the Manor was extra special to us historically and spiritually because Srila Prabhupada had spent so much time here.

So, we then dedicated our whole effort to getting the land for the new access. We were assisted by one particular member: Venilal Vaghela who had contacts within the relevant committee of St Barts Hospital. St Barts used to own the Manor from the Second World War and up to 1972. They had run it as a nurses' training centre and they still retained the field just behind our farm.

After lots of encouragement and negotiation, in November 1993 with our deadline looming, St Barts eventually agreed to sell us the strip we needed. My personal feeling at the time was that Radha and Krishna had intervened at the crucial moment. We now had the land and there was now no obstacle for us to put pressure on the government to grant permission for the road. They had no longer any excuse that the idea for the road was impractical or unachievable.

The closing date of 16th March 1994 was fast approaching and we needed to do something significant on that day. The 16th of March that year was a Wednesday, a difficult day to get people together. Would we get the response we needed in the middle of the week? Would our community come out in support of the temple in the numbers we required to wake up the government to our cause?

We decided Wednesday 16th March was the day. No other day had the same significance. We would trust our community to respond. We were to go to central London and to the heart of Parliament. This was to be the biggest demonstration of the Hindu community that Britain would ever witness. Our main campaign programme, The Hare Krsna Temple Defence Movement headed by Naresh Chadha along with stalwart Cllr Frank Ward led the charge. Inspired by C B Patel, the HKTDM and CB embarked on a Dharma Yatra in which they visited Temples and communities throughout Britain gaining support and commitment to send coaches to London for the march. The Patrons Council organised the logistics of travel, food and communication so that everyone attending the march was well looked after – and briefed on what they needed to do. Meanwhile, the newly formed Pandava Sena were developing a name for themselves as enthusiastic campaigners.

Sure enough on 16th March 1994, 37,000 people gathered at Red Lion Square in Holborn and marched in a sea of orange scarves and protest banners to the War Memorial in Westminster. It was just incredible. To some observers it might have seemed a little militant – but we kept fully to our principles of dharmik protest.





Akhandadhi Das along with members of the temple on one of the many protests outside Parliament looking for 'British Justice'

leagues to vote for or abstain in the voting.

This meant that we again had to submit our appeal to the Department of the Environment. That appeal was heard in two parts, in February and June 1995. This, we knew, was the crunch Inquiry.

Fortunately, the inspector appointed to adjudicate seemed more amenable than the previous. He particularly liked Sruti and he later said Sruti was "his mate throughout the whole thing". We actually had a very strong case; we had the land in hand and all the issues regarding the road seemed well thought out and prac-



Protesters sitting on the road outside the Houses of Parliament

tical with minimal impact on other neighbours and road users. But, then they said, "Okay you've got the land for access but you haven't got enough land for festival parking". This was true.

So, whilst the Inquiry was going on, we went back to the Wildmore family and asked, "can we do the full deal. Let's take all of your 40 acres!" Within a couple of



Protesters standing with police outside the Houses of

days we'd signed the contract! They were very happy and, of course, we were very happy! The last practical obstacle had been cleared. Now, it really was just in the hands of the government.

The final decision then went to John Gummer MP, Secretary of State for the Environment. We continued our campaigning in the meantime and were prosecuted at Luton Crown Court for holding the Janmashtami festival in the summer of 1995. I think I'm the only person in Britain today that has a criminal conviction for organising a religious festival!

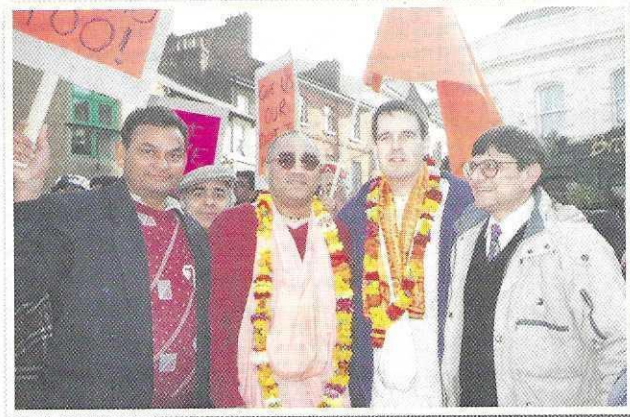


Akhandadhi Das being lifted up as he comes out of the Luton Crown Court after being Prosecuted for holding Janmashtami

they ever came to power.

I think we had assumed that hell would freeze over before Hertsmere would never change colour, but for a short period, from May 1996, it actually happened. It became Labour controlled! Cllr Brian Stanley asked to meet with us to sort the issue out. Meanwhile, without our knowing, Naresh did something very interesting. He contacted the press and there was a clip on the ITV midday news saying "The Campaign for Bhaktivedanta

In May 1996, the landscape of British politics was changing and we always had a very good relationship with the Labour Party thanks to the years of networking and campaigning by Frank. The local Labour party had made it their policy to support us and to grant the road if



Akhandadhi Das & Atmanivedana Swami join the thousands of supporters waiting outside Luton Crown Court after being prosecuted

Manor is taking a new twist. Hertsmere Council is now controlled by Labour and they are meeting with the members of the Temple...They might work out a new deal".

The Department of the Environment realised the government would lose face with a refusal in the face of Hertsmere's new complexion -so they suddenly





The special soil conditions on the temple land allowed us to use an old but highly effective technique of lime stabilisation and the road was well built in record time

faxed over their decision. While we were meeting the Labour leaders at Hertsmere, I received a call from Tribhangananda das at the Manor who explained, "There is a fax just come from the DOE, I think it's a decision letter...It's a huge ream of fax paper!" "Wow what does it say?" He replied, "I don't know. I think it might be good, but you really can't tell clearly from these things."

I then said: "Alright. Don't say anything to anyone. We're on our way!" The whole team returned to the Manor to check through this mighty fax. Sure enough, they had granted everything we wanted: public worship, public festivals and the access road!

Our elation could not be described! There was some big celebrations and joyous kirtans that night!

But the road still had to be built before we could celebrate the Janmashami Festival just three months' away.

To construct a new road 2/3 mile long so quickly seemed another impossible task, but again Lord Krishna smiled kindly on us. Our engineer realised that the special soil conditions on the temple land allowed us to use an old but highly effective technique of lime stabilisation and the road was well underway. The biggest delay was likely to be the changes required to the A41 – but amazingly, these fitted in with the Highways Authority schedule and were done within weeks.

The day before Janmashtami, a string of lorries poured out the chippings to complete the road to the Council officers' satisfaction. The road was finished, the Temple was saved and, the next day, Janmastami could be celebrated without threat or worry.

There's no doubt that this Campaign represents the best example of the ability of the Hindu community of UK to unite and dedicate time, energy and money to combatting an injustice against its own community. I apologise that in these few words, I have not given full credit to all those who took part and played such a crucial and significant part in the overall efforts.

I am particularly indebted to:

C B Patel who was a constant and brilliant friend to us throughout the entire Campaign. His encouragement and ideas helped me on so many occasions.

Naresh Chadha and his team of the HKTDM kept the pressure on the government for six long years.

Councillor Frank Ward was known as Arjuna for his steely determination to keep up the fight and never concede to defeat.

The Pandava Sena and the rest of the youth supporters brought a vibrancy to the Campaign and showed that our young people care as much for their culture and religious as the older generation.

The Patrons Council were the guiding intelligence of the Manor and they organised, steered, financed and facilitated the energies of the temple's congregation into the Campaign activities.

I was constantly aware of the sacrifices, troubles and anxieties that were suffered by both the Temple's ashram devotees and our congregation during all the years of the Campaign. And, it is wonderful that Lord Krishna rewarded all of them with the opportunities not just to continue their worship and service at the temple, but to be able to develop the facilities and programmes



The Patrons Council were the guiding intelligence of the Manor and they organised, steered, financed and facilitated the energies of the temple's congregation into the Campaign activities

in so wonderfully.

And, I am especially grateful to my fellow devotees within ISKCON who were so active behind the scenes helping the temple to function in very difficult circumstances whilst also playing their part in the Campaign efforts.

In particular, my friends, Pranabandhu das and Srutidharma das were my most dear confidantes and aides. A friendship forged by walking through fire together lasts forever.

The Campaign to save Bhaktivedanta Manor from closure was the highlight of my life – not because of the prominence it gave; nor even because of the incredible result achieved – but because it allowed me the association of so many wonderful people and the chance to share a fantastic spiritual journey in the service of the Lord.

Akhandadhi das

Temple President of Bhaktivedanta Manor 1982-95. Today, he speaks regularly on BBC Radio 4's Thought for the Day slot and hosts courses, retreats and other functions at Buckland Hall in Wales

Messages from the Decision-makers

I'm delighted to send my best wishes to worshippers, members and supporters of the Bhaktivedanta Manor Temple as you commemorate the 20th anniversary of the campaign which helped keep this special place of worship open for future generations to use and enjoy.

Two decades on from the campaign the temple continues to thrive while providing a tranquil and spiritual place for people from all over the country to worship and visit. I was fortunate in being able to see Bhaktivedanta Manor for myself just a few years ago where I received an incredibly warm welcome that I will never forget. I recall its stunning beauty and peaceful atmosphere so I can understand why people campaigned so hard to keep it open.

But this anniversary doesn't just remember the work of the Temple's members and congregation – it celebrates the moment when thousands of people from different backgrounds and faiths: Hindus, Sikhs and Jains came together to help save a place of great importance to so many people.



David Cameron MP
British Prime Minister

I am delighted to send my best wishes to all those who worship at Bhaktivedanta Manor as you observe the 20th Anniversary of the campaign to save the Manor. I know that the campaign reached across faiths, bringing together over 30,000 Hindus, Jains and Sikhs, including many members of the Labour Party.

As Leader of the Labour Party, I believe that our country's great strengths lie in its tolerance for all and passion for equality. From this has flowed diversity, with people of all different faiths living side by side. The Labour Party I lead will remain a champion of religious freedom and equality.

I am proud that Bhaktivedanta Manor holds such a prominent place in British life and I look forward to seeing Bhaktivedanta Manor continue to grow from strength to strength.



Ed Miliband
Leader of the Opposition

The victory of the ISKCON's Campaign has gone down in British history as an event of great religious significance. The marches, protests, letters, meetings, the public inquiry process, indeed every stage of the Campaign was conducted with utmost dignity and integrity. We had never before seen the community act with such unity.

More so than ever, Britain is a multi-racial and multi-cultural society. Freedom of worship is one of its foundations. The victory of Bhaktivedanta Manor Hare Krishna Temple led by its outstanding campaign ensures that the principle continues to remain a reality to all communities.

(originally published 1996 in 'Victory')



Keith Vaz MP

Member of Parliament for Leicester East. He is the longest-serving Asian MP and has been the Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee since July 2007. He was appointed as a member of the Privy Council in June 2006

Twenty years ago, Britain witnessed a momentous occasion. Over 30,000 people protested peacefully and made a simple request, that they along with many thousands of others like them, should be allowed to continue to worship at Bhaktivedanta Manor. The Conservative Government of the day rose to the occasion and since then the Manor has regularly attracted tens of thousands of worshippers on a regular basis.

As one of Britain's premier Hindu temples, practicing the world's oldest religion, the Manor is held in special regard by Hindus throughout the country and its reputation has spread to the four corners of the world.

It is a place of spiritual comfort and peace: a place which countless people turn to in their moments of despair as well as joy.

From its difficult beginnings, Bhaktivedanta Manor is now very much part of the fabric of the nation. Long may it continue to prosper.



Shailesh Vara MP

Member of Parliament for North West Cambridgeshire and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice



Messages from the Decision-makers

Today Bhaktivedanta Manor is one of the most revered and universally recognised spiritual institutions in the world. As well as being the main home of ISKCON UK, Bhaktivedanta Manor has ingrained itself in the cultural landscape of Britain. But it was not always so.

20 years ago, when the forces of prejudice and bigotry loomed, against overwhelming opposition from Hertsmere Council and the Government, 36,000 men, woman and children from all faiths and walks of life gathered in Westminster and spoke with one voice – Save our temple!

This momentous event turned the tide in the struggle and Bhaktivedanta Manor has since gone from strength to strength. It has been an honour and a privilege, as a Member of Parliament, to play a small part in its life and work.

ISKCON's values of cleanliness of body and mind, mercy to all living things and truthfulness are values which carried it through its struggle in 1994. They are values that attract followers worldwide, values that live inside each of us and values that will still ring true years from now when future generations celebrate on this historic day.



Barry Gardiner MP

*Member of Parliament for Brent North since 1997.
A great friend and supporter of Bhaktivedanta Manor*

My early days in Brighton were associated with the Beatle's generation. They were the flavour of my college days and as the pioneer of modern-day pop music.

But there was another side to the Beatles. Deeply enshrined in them was the spiritual need for peace in our unsettled world. This they found in their visit to Rishikesh in India. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi provided the power of meditation. On their return to London George Harrison met the disciples of Shрила Prabhupada and through his donation a building was bought and is now universally known as Bhaktivedanta Manor in Hertsmere.

This sleeping village and the local Council was at the centre of an epic struggle with the followers of the Hare Krishna movement.

The locals did not like number of visitors who attended the village for worship at Bhaktivedanta Manor. They didn't like the number of cars that passed through the village for access to the Manor. The Council objected to the building being converted into a place of worship. They applied for a closure on planning grounds.

Enter the Gujarat Samachar and Asian Voice and its fearless editor CB Patel. The Council's attitude was a classic case of NIMBY (not in my back yard). The General Election was looming and a massive petition and demonstration convinced the politicians that the local Council was wrong.

I also took up the matter to ensure that discriminatory grounds were challenged by the then Commission for Racial Equality. Bhaktivedanta Manor was saved.

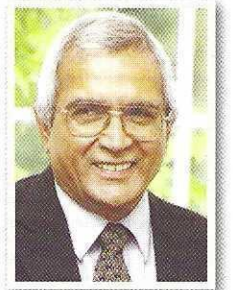
It has continued to provide spiritual guidance and the powers of prayers to scores of Hindus who visit this place of pilgrimage.

Of course problems surface from time to time.

For example the RSPCA put to sleep one of the cows because they asserted it was suffering through old age. Little regard was taken of the feelings of the worshipers and the fact the holy cow has a special place in their beliefs.

A high level meeting was arranged in my office and the RSPCA deeply regretted the action it had taken without proper consultation with the community. The result was a replacement cow was donated and an agreement was sought to ensure that agencies would liaise closely with the community on future occasions.

This is a brief synopsis of struggle for religious freedom in a multi-ethnic Britain. More importantly it is an example that obstacles can be overcome when community is united over a common purpose. May the Manor go from strength to strength to provide religious guidance to the generations of our children born here.



Lord Navnit Dholakia

*Liberal Democrat politician and the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords.
Lord Dholakia is one of the most senior Asian politicians in Britain*

Messages from the Decision-makers

The Campaign to Save Bhaktivedanta Manor in the 1990s demonstrated just how important it is to our community. The Manor represents a haven of spirituality and tranquillity, a source of education and wisdom, and above all a place where we are all reminded of the power of our faith.

The Campaign to save the Manor marked an historic moment for British Hindus; the first time in Britain that Hindus had come together on mass to be heard. All sections of the community had come together and the Asian media in particular had played a pivotal role in getting the community's voice heard. The marches and protests were unprecedented; no one had seen a campaign like it and it was a great testament to the importance of faith and prayer in Britain.

Twenty years on, we should use this anniversary to reflect on the important role the Manor continues to play in our community. At a time when so many in the world are persecuted because of their faith, I am proud to be a member of a Government that continues to defend people of every faith around the world. This anniversary is a timely reminder that this protection begins at home and we should continue to promote the practise of faith free from persecution everywhere we can.



Lord Dolar Popat

In July 2010 he became a member of the House of Lords as a Life Peer and is the first Gujarati to represent the Conservative Party at Parliament.

Happy 20th Anniversary of the Campaign to save Bhaktivedanta Manor! Congratulations and I hope you have many more positive decades to come.



Glenda Jackson MP

Former famous actress and Member of Parliament for Hampstead and Kilburn since 1992. She has given much moral support to ISKCON's Food for All project which helps the homeless in north London.

When I was selected as the Labour Party Parliamentary candidate for Watford in 1995, I was already very familiar with the Campaign. As the daughter of Councillor Frank Ward, I had attended the Temple regularly from the age of 14, taking part in demonstrations and helping my father prepare his numerous communications to Hertsmere Borough Council and the local media. I knew that many of the Hindus living in and around Watford placed huge value on their right to worship at the Temple but they needed politicians to defend those rights, not to attack them. I spoke at meetings at the Temple in support of the campaign, committing the local Labour Party to put its principles into practice by defending those rights. I regularly attended and supported the Watford Hindu Group events, where I already knew so many of the people from their visits to Bhaktivedanta Manor and their fight for justice.



The Labour Party has always promoted equality and protected religious freedoms, so I was proud when elected as the Member of Parliament for Watford on the 1 May 1997 to reiterate my support and that of the Labour Party to the on-going work of Bhaktivedanta Manor. The Campaign to Save the Temple had been won but the fight to make it a growing and valuable part of our local community continued. I was proud to work with the Temple over 13 years as Watford MP. The lesson we must all learn from this is not to sit back and wait for others to defend what we hold dear, but to recognise that fighting for justice is the duty of us all. May I wish Bhaktivedanta Manor and all those who worship there, many more years of success.

Claire Ward

Member of Parliament for Watford from 1997- 2010. Amongst other roles, she advises the Labour Party on Hindu community affairs

