# Photographer Nudrat Afza chronicles Bradford’s fading Jewish community and interfaith solidarity



In a poignant exploration of interfaith connections, Nudrat Afza's project “Kehillah” captures the essence of Bradford's almost-forgotten Jewish community through her striking photography. Born in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, and raised in Bradford, Afza's journey began in 2013 when she was transporting her 90-year-old Jewish friend, Lorle Michaelis, to the local Orthodox synagogue. During this drive, Michaelis shared the unsettling news that it would be the last service due to dwindling attendance. The synagogue was subsequently sold and redeveloped in 2015, a turning point that compelled Afza to document the rapidly diminishing Jewish presence in her city.

This concern is not unfounded. Bradford's Jewish community, which once boasted around 3,000 members—bolstered by an influx of refugees during World War II—has dramatically declined. Today, the remaining community gathers at the Bradford Reform Synagogue, the last of its kind in the area, which now has about 30 members. Yet in a remarkable act of solidarity in 2013, the local Muslim community intervened to save the Reform Synagogue from closure. They raised funds, supported by a significant grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, enabling essential repairs to the Grade II-listed building, which was initially established in 1880-1881. This episode underscores the interwoven fabric of Bradford’s religious communities, highlighting a respect and collaboration that often goes unreported.

The images from Afza's book portray a melancholic yet hopeful narrative. She uses vintage cameras to document the remaining synagogue interiors, community events, and even the somber Scholemoor Cemetery, where many Jewish families have laid their ancestors to rest. The photographs not only serve as a testament to a fading community but also as an artistic expression of her respect for its history. “A lot of the people have died since the photographs were taken,” Afza reflects, noting the urgency of her work—an urgency spurred by the diminishing numbers at Saturday services, where she could once count the attendees on her fingers.

Kehillah also acts as a counter-narrative to the prevalent discourse surrounding Muslim-Jewish relations. “When I came to Bradford, I was aware of other religions, as well as my own, and we had nothing but respect for that,” Afza explains. Her project dismantles the stereotypes that Jews and Muslims are always at odds, portraying instead a community where bonds of kinship are fostered through shared cultural experiences.

Afza's artistic pursuits, including her previous series documenting various aspects of local life—from female football fans to derelict buildings—were often conducted amid personal challenges. A dedicated carer for her daughter Khadijah, who was born with a severe health condition and sadly passed away in early 2025, she managed to carve out time for photography during hospital visits. This deeply personal lens adds a layer of poignancy to her work, intertwining the struggles of her family’s past with her broader narrative on communal identity.

Now, as Bradford holds the title of UK City of Culture for 2025, there is a burgeoning optimism about the diverse communities within the city. Afza asserts, “There’s a wide range of communities today and they do their best to work together.” However, she also acknowledges the need for investment in local resources as part of a revitalization effort that extends beyond mere cultural recognition.

The “Kehillah” exhibition, showcasing her work at the Dean Clough Galleries in Halifax from August 16 to October 19, serves not only as a celebration of a fading community but also as a poignant reminder of the stories that landscapes, buildings, and people tell—stories that might otherwise vanish without documentation. For Afza, this exhibition is a call to remember and respect the intricacies of communal life in Bradford, where diverse backgrounds can indeed coexist in harmony, enriching the fabric of society itself.

Kehillah by Nudrat Afza is published by Dewi Lewis, priced at £30, embodying both the weight of history and the hopeful threads of community still being woven today.

**Reference Map**

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 5
2. Paragraphs 1, 2
3. Paragraphs 2, 5
4. Paragraphs 1, 4, 5
5. Paragraph 2
6. Paragraph 2
7. Paragraph 2

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/09/kehillah-nudrat-afza-dean-clough-galleries-halifax-exhibition-bradford> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2025/may/09/kehillah-nudrat-afza-dean-clough-galleries-halifax-exhibition-bradford> - In April 2013, Bradford resident Nudrat Afza, a Muslim woman, drove her 90-year-old Jewish friend, Lorle Michaelis, to the local Orthodox synagogue. Michaelis informed her that it would be the last service due to insufficient attendance, leading to the synagogue's closure and redevelopment in 2015. This event inspired Afza to document Bradford's declining Jewish community through photography, culminating in her 'Kehillah' exhibition at Dean Clough Galleries in Halifax from August 16 to October 19, 2025. The exhibition features images capturing the essence of the community before it disappears.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/dec/20/bradford-synagogue-saved-muslims-jews> - In 2013, Bradford's Reform Synagogue faced closure due to dwindling numbers. The city's Muslim community intervened by raising funds, securing a £103,000 National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, and ensuring the synagogue's survival. This act of interfaith solidarity highlights the strong community bonds in Bradford, where people from different backgrounds respect and support each other.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/sep/08/muslim-woman-who-photographed-bradford-last-synagogue-jewish-worshippers-nudrat-afza> - In 2019, Nudrat Afza, a Muslim photographer, showcased her 'Kehillah' exhibition, capturing the last 45 Jewish worshippers in Bradford's only remaining synagogue. Despite financial constraints, Afza documented the community's dwindling presence, highlighting the importance of preserving cultural heritage before it disappears. The exhibition received support from Arts Council England and was exhibited at the University of Bradford.
* <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/inside-bradford-community-shaped-city-22285749> - Bradford's Jewish community, once numbering around 3,000, has significantly declined over the years. The community peaked during World War II with an influx of refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe. Today, the Bradford Reform Synagogue remains active, serving as a place of worship and community center, despite the reduced numbers. The synagogue's resilience reflects the enduring spirit of Bradford's Jewish heritage.
* <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/bradford> - Bradford's Jewish community dates back to the mid-19th century, primarily composed of German Jews attracted by the city's industrial growth. The first synagogue was built in 1873, and a Reform community was established in 1880. Over time, the community faced challenges, including a significant decline in population, with numbers dropping from about 700 in 1968 to approximately 170 in the mid-1990s.
* <https://holocaustcentrenorth.org.uk/blog/bradford-synagogue-its-history-and-architecture/> - The Bradford Synagogue, located at 7 Bowland Street in Manningham, Bradford, is a Grade II listed Moorish Victorian building, recognized as the oldest Reform synagogue outside of London. Established in 1881, it serves as a testament to the city's Jewish heritage and continues to host services and interfaith events, despite the community's declining numbers.