

Shoghi Effendi in Scotland, and the Eagle and Pillar at his Resting Place



Transcribed from the Tape of Ruhiyiyih Khanum speaking in Edinburgh Bahá'í Centre in Aug 1981

Eagle and Pillar at Shoghi Effendi's Resting Place

Tape 26a - 16:19

Well, I don't see any reason why I shouldn't answer this question now; I wouldn't have answered it 30 years ago, but I'll answer it today.

Eagle's Purchase in Edinburgh

Where exactly was the eagle that was used as a model for the one on the Guardian's grave purchased?

Down on Princes Street [in Edinburgh], going down the hill towards Holyrood Castle; in that direction, on the left hand side, there was a very very famous antique shop, run by a woman who somebody yesterday in an antique shop told me they knew very well. I thought she was Scottish; she was Jewish, and she was Mrs something-or-other, I don't remember the name, and she's since passed away, and the shop doesn't exist any more;

Shoghi Effendi Furnishing the Holy Places; His Taste and Sense of Proportion

but when we came here, Shoghi Effendi was furnishing the mansion and adding to the things in the Holy Places; if he saw things that were appropriate, he added to the ornaments in the Shrines and removed things that were inferior in quality or damaged. He never looked for antiques in the true sense of the word; he was neither a connoisseur, nor was he interested in trying to build up an antique collection: he was interested in trying to create an effect, and he had a genius, frankly, for doing it; this marvellous, marvellous sense of proportion, and if you go to the Holy Places and look at them with the eye of a connoisseur, if you do know anything about antiques you'll see that a great deal of the stuff is not good at all: it wouldn't come under the heading of an antique; but he had such taste, that he arranged it in such a fascinating way that it looks like a million dollars, whereas the initial outlay was very little, so he used to buy things, as I said, for this purpose, and mainly in England;

Description of the Edinburgh Eagle

and as we were here in Edinburgh, we had a look around to a few places - one of them was that woman's shop; and there was this beautiful eagle, which is now in the archives, and it's on a sort of a

cliff of wood, it's very Japanese, and this eagle that I think was made of bronze or something, and silvered, is very lovely; you've seen Shoghi Effendi's tomb with this eagle on the top, and it has one wing down and one like that, and you really can't tell whether the bird is just coming in or just going off, it's a very beautiful position. Well he loved that thing, and we had it sent back to Haifa, and he liked it so much!

Shoghi Effendi's Tastes

He didn't like lots of things, Shoghi Effendi had very limited - you might say specific - tastes; he liked a few dishes, and a few this, and a few that, and conservative more or less and simple; but what he liked, he liked very much,

The Eagle in Shoghi Effendi's Work Room; His Exertions of Work

and he liked that eagle, and he put it on a table near his bed in his bedroom, which was also his office. I couldn't get him to separate the two, because he would sit at his desk and work, and when he was too tired to sit up any more, he would get into bed and work - and of course I used to remonstrate, that it's not good to have your office and your bedroom one room, you should have them separate so you can go to bed here and have a rest here, and then that's the place you work - but he couldn't: he had too much work to do, and that was the way he had to do it. So this eagle was in that room, and he enjoyed it so much,

Corinthian Column, and Shoghi Effendi's Desire for One

and then all Guard[an ever wanted was]¹ a column - he wanted a Corinthian column, and of course he'd seen them in Italy and other places, and although he had the archives building, he wanted one; and I said, "Well Shoghi Effendi, I don't see how you can have one, I don't know where you'd put it - you just can't put a column like that, you know, all by itself!" - and he accepted that, but he looked (laughs) a little dubious about it, as much as to say, "I still want my column!" So something very strange happened.

Envisaging the Column and Eagle at Shoghi Effendi's Passing

After he passed away - I won't go into that, because it upsets me too much; but it was very sudden as you know - and when I was driving away from his grave (I went and visited it just before I left London with Mrs Collins) and the car was driving away from the grave - of course there was nothing but flowers there - in front of my eyes, I saw the whole thing - I saw the foundation and the column, and the globe and the eagle just like that, and I made a little sketch, I remember, in the car - tiny little thing like that,

Decision for the Design at the First Conclave in Haifa

and when I went back, and all the Hands of the Cause came to the Holy Land and had the first Conclave, the first meeting to think about rescuing the Faith from this terrible catastrophe and holding everything steady till we could have the House of Justice, I showed them this sketch, and I said, "This is what I feel we should build over the resting place of the Guardian" - so it was decided that's what we would do; couldn't possibly move him, wasn't the time to think about it, and so on;

Journey of Eagle to Rome to the Architects and back to Haifa

and I didn't know where to get an eagle, and then suddenly one night, I thought, "Well what about that eagle in his room?" - because of course, his room was closed up after he passed away; and I went up, and carried this thing down in my arms, and the Hand of the Cause Mr Faizi was there, and Alice Kitter, who was living with me at that time; and Faizi got off in a corner, and stood on something; and he held this eagle way up like that, and then I looked at it, and I realised that it was perfect! So I took it in my arms, and wouldn't let anybody else carry it, and took it to Rome with Dr Giachery. We got the architect who had helped in building the Shrine and the stones for the archives and so on, and he came up and showed him what we wanted, so he made the design, brought it full scale while I waited in Rome so we could approve of the proportions, and then I left the eagle there to be enlarged to the appropriate size, and then of course in the end it came back to Haifa. Dr

¹ gap of a few seconds in the tape where it had snapped and been cello-taped back together

Giachery, I remember, brought it home. So that's the story of that very beautiful eagle - and it came from Edinburgh.

Postscript - Across the Holy Land

As well as the above transcript of her talk, Ruhyyih Khanum during her visit also stated to one present that in driving up to look for antiques, they did so without visiting any of the believers. When they saw the eagles over the shop where Fredrick Street meets Queens Street, they were inspired to reproduce them over the Holy Land, and in purchasing the eagle from the antique shop they then had a template to use.

Shoghi Effendi in Scotland

Tape 26b - 01:34

Two Visits to Edinburgh

I am very very happy to be here in Edinburgh, and this is my third visit here. I came here with the beloved Guardian Shoghi Effendi many many years ago, right after the war; and then we came back a second time,

Ruhyyih Khanum's Scottish Ancestry (Aberdeen and Jedburgh)

and he said, "I'm going to take you to the home of your ancestors" which part of my family came from Aberdeen so Aberdeen was the home, so to speak, of my Ancestors in one part of Scotland, and Jedburgh on the border was the home of my father's people, the Maxwells, and on my father's other side through his mother; he was a MacBean and a Sutherland probably; of course, must be a lot more other clans involved, because they were so intermarried - but I've always felt, for some reason that I don't really know, tremendous kinship for the Scottish people, I've always considered myself since I knew what a Scot was, that I was a Scot, although the other half of me is English-American background - but I never feel any raging affinity for that part of it, but I always feel very strongly Scottish, and I don't know why -

Montreal Armistice Parade, Aged 8

I don't think I took it in what Scotland was, or the Scotch were, until I was about eight years old, when the armistice parade took place in Montreal, and I and my cousins all went to the home of an aunt, who had a very good view of the parade, which took place on the main street and was very impressive and very long; after all it was *the* armistice parade in Montreal, and we could overlook it from the windows of her apartment - and for the first time that I recollect having any exposure to it, so to speak, I heard the bagpipes, and I remember still I was quite small of course, and that this thing just went through me like fire you see, and I began to get uneasy and I couldn't understand what was happening to me, and my father looked at me. He said, "It's because you're a Scot" (laugh) - and you know, I think that's true, I don't know, I suppose it's true of all of us,

Shoghi Effendi and Bagpipes

there's something about the bagpipes that makes our blood tingle, and it goes right straight through us, and I can't truthfully say that it went through Shoghi Effendi, the head of the Bahá'í Faith, but he didn't particularly object to the bagpipes, let's put it that way, and he knew that I liked them very much;

Shoghi Effendi's Two Scottish Trips, by Train and Car

so when we came up here to Scotland in two different trips that we made (I've been trying to recollect exactly where we went; the first time we came up by train, and the second time we had a car at our disposal, and that made it easier to get around) we went - let's see - we've been to Loch Lomond, Gleneagles, Stirling, Edinburgh, Glasgow - we went over once to Glasgow together - and to Aberdeen; and of course, we might have stopped at some small places motoring from Edinburgh to Aberdeen, but I don't recollect at this point what their names were.

Shoghi Effendi and Scottish Dancing at Gleneagles

I can remember one incident - I think it must have been at Gleneagles, I can't think where else it would have been - and after dinner in the foyer of the hotel, people were dancing Scottish reels in

their kilts, and Shoghi Effendi thought it was beautiful: he thought it was lovely music and very very graceful dancing, and I can remember now how much he enjoyed that,

Ruhiyyih Khanum's Visit

and I'm so sorry that on this occasion in Scotland when I've come here after so many years, I haven't either heard the bagpipes once, although I heard the flute: that was the nearest I got, and I appreciated it, and I haven't been able to see any Scottish reels, but perhaps another time, who knows!...

Miscellaneous

5 May 1921 Letter from Kaushal Kishore Bhargava in Glasgow

...But you know Bahais are always so hospitable and loving. Next morning I met brother Shoghi Rabbani Effendi, who even came to Glasgow to meet me...

14 Jan 1975 Letter from Ruhiyyih Khanum to the Edinburgh Assembly

Dear Baha'i Friends,

I recently read the good news that an important site in Edinburgh has been presented to the Faith as the spot for the future Baha'i Temple of that city. This news not only made me very happy but I felt the urge to write and tell you that the beloved Guardian was very fond of Edinburgh, visited it more than once, considered it a most beautiful city, loved the Scottish people, and that the eagle surmounting his grave, although Japanese in origin, was purchased in that city! I thought this might bring happiness to your hearts and particularly to the generous donor of so precious a plot in that historic city.

With warmest loving greetings to you all,

[Signed:] Ruhiyyih

The Scottish - from a 1985 Pilgrimage

On Pilgrimage in 1985, two of the Edinburgh Baha'is were present at the Master's house, which was then Ruhiyyih Khanum's residence. The pilgrimage parties were then 80-strong, and after a devotional was completed, Ruhiyyih Khanum arose to leave and as she was doing so, she turned to everyone present, and suddenly announced, emphatically, "The Guardian loved Scotland and the Scottish friends very much!" and she left the room.

The Scottish - from Violette Nakhjavani, 2011

Ruhiyyih Khanum often in special occasions and usually not in public used to say, "The Guardian liked three peoples in particular - the Scots, the Germans and the Italians." Then she would give her own understanding of this choice, and say, "Maybe it is because all these three nations have some important points in common. They are essentially and innately, generally speaking, God-fearing and spiritual. Secondly they are again generally speaking intelligent, intellectual and yet have the element of emotion, they are heart people. And thirdly, they are adventurous, courageous and bold." Now all of this is comment made by the beloved Guardian to his wife, and her personal interpretation. Shoghi Effendi was a close friend and admirer of Dr. Esslemont, and often speaking of him, would comment that he was a Scots. He also loved and admired W. S. Maxwell, Ruhiyyih Khanum's father, for nobility, his uprightness and his saintliness. He enjoyed what he called "his Scottish dry sense of humour."

Directions to the Resting Place : <http://www.bahai.org.uk/shoghi/index.htm>

Updated Text : 2011-05-27

Transcriber : David Merrick, Edinburgh

All comments appreciated : <http://www.paintdrawer.co.uk/david/email.php>