



Inner Temple Library



Architects of Indian Independence

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Gandhi in London
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In 2007 the world celebrated the 60th anniversary of the granting of independence to India and the foundation of Pakistan, and it was fitting for the Inner Temple to commemorate the central role played by four former members of the Inn: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (admitted 1888, called 1891, disbarred 1922; reinstated 1988); Jawaharlal Nehru (admitted 1909, called 1912); Clement Attlee (admitted 1904, called 1906) and Mohammad Ali Jinnah (admitted *ad eundem* 1931). Although not contemporaries at the Inn, their common background in legal training doubtless contributed to the success of their subsequent negotiations in India. So what do the archives tell us about their time at the Inner Temple?

Apart from his vegetarianism, and the difficulties this caused at formal dinners, Gandhi did not stand out from his fellow Indian students. Adopting the appearance and manners of an English gentleman on his arrival in London, although somewhat ill at ease in the capital, he was admitted to the Inn on 6 November 1888. He gave his address as 20 Baron's Court Road, West Kensington, and paid an entry fee of £140 11s 5d, including a returnable deposit of £100. His call to the Bar, on 10 June 1891, was proposed by A G Marten, Master of the Bench. Gandhi records in his autobiography, *The Story of my Experiments with Truth*, a passage concerning his time at the Inn:

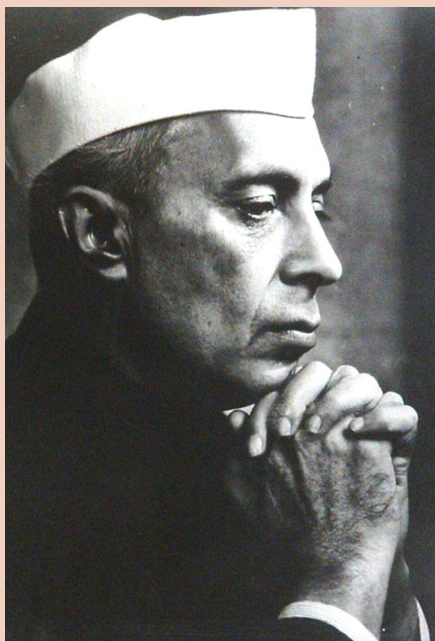
There were two conditions which had to be fulfilled before a student was formally called to the bar: 'keeping terms', twelve terms equivalent to about three years; and passing examinations. 'Keeping terms' meant eating one's terms i.e. attending at least six dinners out of about twenty-four dinners in a term. Eating did not mean actually partaking of the dinner, it meant reporting oneself at the fixed hours and remaining present throughout the dinner. Usually of course everyone ate and drank the good commons and choice wines provided. A dinner cost from two and six to three and six, that is from two to three rupees ... I often ate nothing at these dinners, for the things that I might eat were only bread, boiled potato and cabbage. In the beginning I did not eat these, as I did not like them; and later, when I began to relish them, I also gained the courage to ask for other dishes.

On 12 June, two days after call, he set out for his homeland where he began to practise as a barrister, albeit without much success. However, after gaining legal employment in South Africa, he found his voice and, as the idiom goes, the rest is history. It was not until 1922 that Gandhi's name reoccurs in the records of the Inn, in a letter from Lord Ullswater to the Treasurer (Master Dickens) on 8 April of that year: *'What about Gandhi? He is I believe a member of the Inn. Ought he to remain so? Ought he not to be disbarred? I understand that he has been tried and sentenced to 6 years' imprisonment'*. Once details of Gandhi's conviction had been confirmed by the India Office, the Benchers' decision to disbar him became inevitable. It was not until 1988, a century on from his admission, that he was to be posthumously reinstated.



**Gandhi plaque unveiling,
Inner Temple Library
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Jawaharlal Nehru was more accustomed to the English way of life than Gandhi on his admission to the Inn on 11 January 1909, having followed the traditional route of his English contemporaries – Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge. His tutor at Trinity, Dr W M Fletcher, recommended him as 'a man of good character, gentlemanly behaviour, who was likely to be popular and successful'. However, Nehru was an indifferent law student, commenting later: 'law studies did not take up too much



**Jawaharlal Nehru
© The Inner Temple**

time and I got through the Bar examinations, one after the other, with neither glory nor ignominy'. Nevertheless, his education in England gave him a confidence, proficiency in advocacy and knowledge of the English legal system which were to prove invaluable in his later life as a politician. Ironically, Nehru should have been disbarred by the Inn in the same way as Gandhi, since he was convicted of 'incitement to rebellion' in May 1922 and sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment, one of several prison sentences he incurred. Presumably, Lord Ullswater and his fellow Benchers failed to notice that he was an Inner Templar.

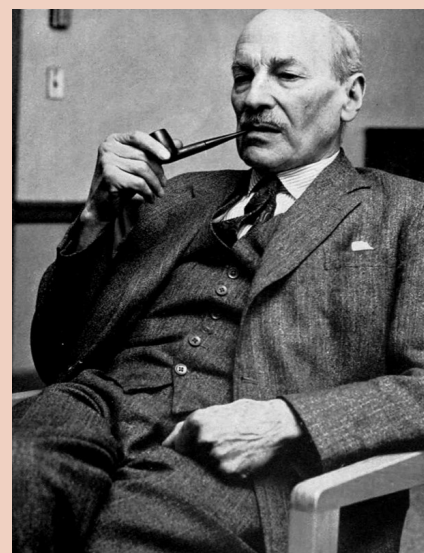


Mohammad Ali Jinnah
© The Inner Temple

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who had been admitted to Lincoln's Inn in 1893 and called to the Bar there three years later, joined the Inner Temple in 1931 on his return to England to practise as a barrister. Disillusioned by the failure of his proposals to safeguard the position of Muslims in India, the Bombay lawyer took chambers in King's Bench Walk, from which he practised until 1934, when his supporters lured him back to India. The Inn's archives record only his *ad eundem* admission. However, it is almost certain that he made good use of the Inn's facilities, including its library, catering service, and maybe even its car park.

Clement Attlee, who served as Prime Minister from 1945 to 1951, played a key role in the achievement of Indian independence. His choice of Lord Mountbatten as the last Viceroy, endowed with discretionary powers of negotiation, and his promotion of the necessary legislation through Parliament were to be decisive in enabling the speedy transfer of power to the new nations. Admitted to the Inner Temple on 30 January 1904 and called to the Bar on 19 November 1906, Attlee practised as a barrister until 1909, before turning to politics. On being asked, in 1951, by a member of the Inn, the Rt. Hon. Sir David Hirst, for his recollections on his early years as a barrister, Attlee replied by return of post from 10 Downing Street, 'Dear Hirst, I remember nothing about my first year at the Bar. Yours sincerely C R Attlee': a typically succinct answer! However, Attlee was to retain a strong association with his Inn, residing for a number of years in King's Bench Walk before his death there in 1967. A memorial service was held for him in the Temple Church.

On 14 May 2007, the Inner Temple in association with the Attlee Foundation hosted the 25th annual Attlee lecture, delivered by Kamallesh Sharma, High Commissioner for India, in order to mark the 60th anniversary of Indian independence and to pay tribute to the contribution made by Attlee and his fellow alumni. It was a well attended and memorable occasion.



Clement Attlee