**1846** The British won the First Anglo-Sikh War but did not take over the Sikh kingdom (although it did take land). They immediately recruited Sikh soldiers from the old Sikh Khalsa Army.

**1848-1849** The British defeated a Sikh rebellion during the Second Anglo-Sikh War and this time took over the kingdom of Maharaja Duleep Singh. They hunted down Sikhs who might oppose them.

**1850** The British sold off the property of the old Sikh government but gave Duleep Singh’s greatest treasure, the Koh-i-noor diamond, to Queen Victoria. They hired some unemployed Sikh soldiers from the Mazbi community (formerly sweepers and therefore at the bottom of the Indian caste system) as road labourers.

**1851** Regulations required Sikh recruits to Britain’s Indian Army regiments to go through the same Sikh ceremonies that had been used when joining the old Khalsa Army. They still took an oath to be faithful to their religion but instead of Duleep Singh they swore to be faithful to Queen Victoria instead. They also had to agree not to cut their hair. The British paid a Sikh to read out from, and care for, a copy of the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib. It was saluted by British officers when it was moved around and wherever possible Sikh soldiers were given the day off during Sikh religious festivals. A tent was put up wherever the regiments were sent to be used as a gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) where the holy book was kept.

**1851** Queen Victoria’s husband, Prince Albert, had the Koh-i-noor diamond cut in Amsterdam so that it could be set in a brooch for her. It was reduced in weight by over 40%.

**1854** Maharaja Duleep Singh arrived in Britain to be educated as an English gentleman and was befriended by Queen Victoria and the royal family. He had only just become a Christian. The British continued to recruit Sikh soldiers.

**1856** When recruiting in Punjab a tall bearded Sikh of about 35 was approached by the British officer Captain Rattray after he had been passed over three times. In a private meeting the Sikh pointed to three scars on his body saying “These are ones (*wounds*) received at Ferozeshah and Mudki (*battles of the First Anglo-Sikh War*) fighting against you! I was faithful to my salt then (*faithful to the Sikh government who had paid him*). Do you think I would be false to you now? Take me and you will never regret it.” This Sikh recruit afterwards served the British loyally and bravely as he said he would.

**1857-58** Muslim and Hindu sepoys (soldiers) in Northern India mutinied against British rule (with support from some Indian rulers). Those Sikhs who were loyal to the British, including some small Sikh kingdoms who had kept their independence, helped to fight against the Sepoy Uprising (Indian Mutiny). The British were desperate to recruit trustworthy Indian soldiers. Mazbi Sikhs defended themselves bravely and fought off the rebels like experienced soldiers.

The British now saw Sikhs as more reliable soldiers than either Hindus or Muslims who had rebelled against their rule. Becoming soldiers in British Indian regiments gave back pride to some Sikhs and good pay to send home to their families who often lived in poor villages.

**1858** The British Government assumed direct rule of India from the East India Company. British Christian missionaries tried to convert Sikhs in Punjab to their religion. There were a few successes, mainly amongst the Mazbi Sikhs in the military.

**1860** Sikh cavalrymen in the British Indian Army were part of a joint Anglo-French force sent to fight in China during the Second-Opium War. A new law in British India stopped ordinary Indians from carrying weapons. This improved law and order and encouraged Sikhs who traditionally carried weapons to enter the army as a way of carrying on doing so.

**1867-68** Sikh troops were sent to fight in Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia) in Africa as part of a British Expeditionary Force.

**1873** Four Sikh boys from fairly wealthy families living in Amritsar, a major Sikh city, announced they intended to become Christians as a result of contact with Christian missionaries. This sparked a new religious movement among Sikhs to try and prevent any more converts to Christianity.

**1874** A European-style clock tower was built by the British in the grounds of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. It was taller than the temple itself and criticised by many European visitors.

**1877** The British considered selling off the Golden Temple at an auction. This was called off after a special kind of lightening called “ball lightening” appeared in the temple. The incident was seen by many Sikhs as a miraculous warning.

**1878-80** Sikh troops were sent to Afghanistan during the Second Anglo-Afghan War. Sikh cavalrymen formed part of a British and Indian army that set off from Malta in the Mediterranean Sea to take control of Cyprus as part of a secret agreement with the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire.

**1884** Sikh troops were sent to protect the construction of a railway at Suakin, an African Sudanese port on the Red Sea.

**1887** Two regiments called the 35th Sikhs and 36th Sikhs were founded. Maharaja Duleep Singh, the last Sikh ruler of the Punjab, plotted to overthrow British rule in India and regain his lost kingdom with the aid of Russia and other Indian princes. British officers were sure of their Sikh soldiers’ loyalty but one Christian missionary reported that “In the bazaar (*market*) a few days ago three Sikh soldiers said to our preachers ‘When Duleep Singh comes we shall cut off your heads’.” The British prevented Duleep Singh returning to India and the plot came to nothing.

**1893** Maharaja Duleep Singh died in a Paris hotel. He was buried in Elveden Church in Norfolk near the English country estate where he lived during his exile from India.

**1897** 21 Sikh soldiers of the 36th Sikhs were killed in the Battle of Saragarhi defending their isolated post on the North-West frontier of India against 7,000 Afghan tribesmen. The soldiers were awarded medals by the British and their bravery was praised by British MPs in the House of Commons in London. It helped to prove what was called the ‘Martial Races theory’. This said that the best and most trustworthy Indian soldiers should be recruited from the most warlike peoples of Northern India like the Sikhs who were supposed to be braver and tougher than other Indians.

**1900** Sikh troops were sent to China as part of an international fighting force, including soldiers from Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, Britain and the United States. This force fought against the Chinese ‘Boxer Rebellion’.

**1901** The 47th Sikhs regiment were founded.

**1905** The Prince and Princess of Wales (later King George V and Queen Mary) visited the Golden Temple in Amritsar during their tour of India.

**1907** A new medal for bravery called the Indian Distinguished Service Medal was introduced for Indian soldiers.

**1911** Indian soldiers were made eligible for the Victoria Cross.

**1914** Sikhs who formed part of the British Indian Army rushed to fight the Germans on the Western Front in France and Belgium were the first to arrive at the French port of Marseilles in the autumn.

**1915** Lt. John Smyth, a British officer commanding Sikh soldiers on the Western Front, asked for Sikh volunteers to accompany him carrying a load of bombs across land criss-crossed by German fire. His mission succeeded but all eight of the Sikh volunteers were either killed or seriously wounded. Smyth was awarded a Victoria Cross, one Sikh was given the Indian Order of Merit and the other nine Sikhs the Indian Distinguished Service Medal. Smyth said afterwards that he felt that the Sikhs had not received enough recognition for the part they played.