

JALSA SALANA UK – Review of Religions – SHROUD OF TURIN EXHIBITION

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Jalsa UK

The Jalsa Salana UK is the annual gathering of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and takes place in the Hampshire countryside in England. The event attracts 10,000s of people with the official attendance figure for this year's Jalsa well over 38,000.

Review of Religions Exhibition

Over the past two years the Review of Religions magazine has held an exhibition at the Jalsa event and opened it up to all guest of the Jalsa. This has allowed thousands of people, from all over the world, to benefit from the items on display. One feature of this exhibition has been a dedicated Shroud of Turin exhibition, including a life-size replicate of the famous cloth.

What is the Shroud of Turin?

The Shroud of Turin is believed by many to be the original burial cloth using to wrap the body of Jesus after he was taken down from the cross, following the Crucifixion. The cloth bares a remarkable and unexplained image, as well as blood markings consistent with what would be expected from someone who had been Crucified.

The Shroud of Turin is the perhaps the most famous religious relic in the modern world. The public viewings of the Shroud are limited, and are heavily attended. The last public exposition of the Shroud was in 2015 where an estimated 2 million visitors came to Turin to view the Shroud from around the world.

A faint image is visible upon the Shroud, and it is the formation of this image that has puzzled scientific experts for decades, leading to the Shroud becoming well-known outside only religious circles. In 1978 the first, and to date only, detailed scientific examination of the Shroud of Turin was carried out by a group of 24 scientists. The group, known as Shroud of Turin Research Project, Inc. (STURP), spent 2 years planning the examination. They conducted their analysis over 5 days and nights. Their primary goal was to determine the scientific properties of the image on the Shroud and what might have caused it.

To this date the exact image formation mechanism remains unknown. No one has been able to re-produce a Shroud, like the Shroud of Turin, with the same physical and chemical properties. To add further to the debate and mystery of the cloth a carbon dating test, of one corner of the cloth, suggested the cloth was not the original that wrapped Jesus, but a 14th century creation.

The visual nature of the Shroud, the detailed depiction of the Crucifixion, the unexplained image on the cloth, and it's supposed exposure as a 14th century fake through carbon dating all combine to make the Shroud a fascinating cloth that attracts huge attention.

Pam Moon's Shroud Exhibition with Life-Size Replica

The Shroud exhibition, brought to the Jalsa for the past two years by Pam Moon, details how the marks on the Shroud of Turin align with the accounts of the Crucifixion found in the New Testament.

The replica was produced using original photographs taken by Barrie Schwartz, the official documenting photographer of the STURP team who studied the Shroud in 1978. The replica has been produced to match the original Shroud's dimensions. The replica contains the same visible details seen on the Shroud; the marks from the 'Crown of Thorns', evidence of whipping, a pool of blood from a wound in the side, and blood flows from the wrists down the arms.

Over the past 2 years the exhibition has allowed visitors to the Jalsa to get up close to this replica and see for themselves these details. Pam's exhibition brings the story of the Crucifixion to life, showing what a 1st Century Roman nail looked like, as well as a replica Roman flagrum which would have been used to whip victims prior to crucifying them. The flagrum was a whip-style weapon with dumbbell shaped pieces of metal at the end, and there is evidence on the Shroud of this weapon being used across the whole of the back of the body. Visitors to the exhibition were able to feel for themselves the weight of the metal pieces of the flagrum and get some idea of the brutal punishment inflicted on Crucifixion victims.

A new addition in the 2016 Shroud Exhibition at Jalsa Salana was the inclusion of a life-size image of a 1st century burial tomb. This photograph enabled visitors to appreciate the burial tomb was a large area carved in stone, in to which people could walk around, rather than a grave.

This year Pam was able to bring three team members with her: Luigi Antoniaz, Brenda Benton and Stuart Benton. All of Pam's team spent countless hours on their feet talking to visitors about the Shroud. During the quieter times several conversations took place between members of the team and Pam's team. In particular, I had several interesting conversations with Brenda & Stuart, where they shared the story of how they got involved with the Shroud as well as contact details of other Shroud experts whom I can follow up with.

Barrie Schwartz – the leading world expert

Barrie Schwartz is known as the leading world expert on the Shroud of Turin. He was the documenting photographer for STURP in 1978 and in 1997 build Shroud.com, the largest online website dedicated to the Shroud of Turin. Barrie's boundless energy and unique expert insight in to the Shroud of Turin has given a very special feature to the Shroud of Turin exhibition at Jalsa Salana. Both this year, and in 2015, Barrie has delivered presentations to packed audiences detailing his first hand experiences from examining the Shroud and explaining what we know about the Shroud from the scientific evidence.

It was Barrie who got the Review of Religions teams linked in with Pam Moon and her exhibition. It did not take long at all for the relationship of the team with Barrie to become a highly collaborative one. We viewed him as an expert and mentor, yet he emphasised to us that he was just one of the team.

The biggest challenge for Barrie, as well as for me managing his schedule during Jalsa, was trying to get from one location on the site to the next location of his next appointment. Following his short yet memorable speech to the entire Jalsa gathering in 2015 Barrie has become extremely well known within the Ahmadiyya Community and many wanted to talk to him and welcome him back to the Jalsa. Barrie met everyone with his usual enthusiasm all the way through the event, including in the late evenings outside the hotel he was staying at.

It is a great privilege to have him at the event for all three days and the team are hoping he will become a permanent feature at the Jalsa.

Hugh Farey – editor of the British Shroud of Turin Society (BSTS) Newsletter

Another Shroud researcher who came to the Jalsa, via an introduction by Barrie, is Hugh Farey. Hugh is the editor of the BSTS Newsletter. One key aspect about Hugh is that he, on balance, believes that the Shroud of Turin is not the authentic burial Shroud of Jesus, but a medieval forgery. Having Hugh present at the exhibition gave an added dimension, as he was able to discuss the problems with certain aspects of the Shroud and evidence for it being a forgery. Having this range of views within the group, and also some healthy debate and difference of opinion, meant we had more accurately recreated the reality of the Shroud research world; a world where varying opinions all hotly contested.

I felt one incident in particular helped show Hugh's passion for helping to explain the Shroud of Turin to others. To allow him to help demonstrate, especially to the young, how a Shroud wrapped around a body would lead to both the frontal and dorsal sections he decided to employ a prop. On the second day of the Jalsa he went out early before the day began to a local toy shop and purchased a small child's doll. With the doll, and a roll of paper, he was then able to show all visitors how the Shroud was said to have wrapped the body.

Visitors to the Exhibition

Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad (adba) visited the exhibition again this year and spent several minutes in the Shroud exhibition. His holiness met the Shroud experts at the exhibition and was keen to know the details of what additions had been made to the exhibition in 2016 at the Jalsa compared to the first exhibition at the 2015 Jalsa.

Many dignitaries and world leaders were in attendance at the event and several took time to visit the exhibition. Two notable visitors to the exhibition were the Right Honourable Earl Howe, minister of state in the UK for defence and the deputy leader of the House of Lords, and His Excellency Edward Ssekandi, the Vice President of Uganda. Both examined in detail the Shroud replica and asked questions of the Shroud experts at the exhibition.

Interfaith Aspect

"[The Ahmadiyya Community] would invite a Jewish man, to discuss a Christian relic, at a Muslim Organisation!" – Barrie Schwartz – Jalsa Salana 2015

The coming together of members of Judaism, Islam and Christianity in the organisation and running of the Shroud Exhibition was another key aspect of its importance and significance to those involved in planning the event. Barrie Schwartz, the leading world expert on the Shroud of Turin, highlighted this coming together of members of different faiths as one key reason he was so fully supportive of the being part of the Shroud exhibition at Jalsa Salana.

In a time when there is widespread conflict and turmoil in the world, often linked to religious differences and intolerance, those involved in this exhibition felt it signified an important unity between those of different faiths.

Future Exhibitions

Plans are in progress for future Shroud Exhibitions organised by the Review of Religions teams. It is the aspiration of the organising committee that the range of material and speakers at the event continue to increase and allow visitors to obtain even more information around this most enigmatic of cloths.

Shroud Exhibition – Special Guests [this may work as a full-page spread with photos of each?]

Barrie Schwartz – the world leading expert on the Shroud of Turin. Documenting photographer for the first, and only, detailed scientific examination of the Shroud in 1978.

Pam Moon – creator of the Shroud of Turin exhibition and Shroud researcher.

Brenda & Stuart Benton and Luigi Antoniaz – members of Pam’s team involved in taking this exhibition to a range of venues and helping explain the features of the Shroud to people.

Hugh Farey – newsletter editor for the British Society for the Turin Shroud.