

A Personal Report on the 2016 50th Annual Jalsa Salana Convention

By Barrie Schwartz

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As you may remember, last year I attended the 49th Annual Jalsa Salana Convention near Hampshire, England at the gracious invitation of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the staff of their excellent 114 year old publication, *Review of Religions*. The convention was a great success with more than 35,000 attendees, and you can read my [Personal Report on the 2015 Jalsa Salana Convention](#) for details and photographs of the event. I was pleased and honored to be invited again this year and attended the 50th annual convention on August 12-14, 2016.

I have to admit that I was much more comfortable at this year's event because of my experiences last year. Since then I have gotten to know the Ahmadiyya community even better and feel their true spirit of love and respect in every aspect of our ongoing relationship. As she did last year, **Pam Moon** brought her beautiful Shroud Exhibition, which again was displayed in the *Review of Religions* marquee. Also with Pam were her friends **Brenda and Stuart Benton** and **Luigi Antoniaz**, all volunteers with Pam's exhibit organization. Brenda and Stuart are longtime members of the **British Society for the Turin Shroud** and both are very knowledgeable about the Shroud. They were able to assist Pam at the exhibit and helped answer the many questions raised by the thousands of visitors who saw the display over the three day event. Also attending the convention and helping to answer questions from his own unique perspective was **Hugh Farey**, Editor of the *BSTS Newsletter*.

My role was slightly different at this year's event, and I gave only two Shroud lectures in the Review marquee, one for the men and a separate one for the women. (Men and women are typically separated, similar to the Orthodox Jewish tradition). The rest of my time was mainly spent answering questions and interacting with the countless visitors to the exhibit, which included many dignitaries and politicians this year. I also did a number of television and radio interviews over the three day event and once again, appeared with my friend **Arif Khan** on a 30 minute live television program broadcast by MTA (the Ahmadiyya satellite network) to nearly 120 million viewers in Africa! Last year's program (which went out to only 50 million viewers!), is now available on YouTube at this link: [Jalsa UK - Shroud of Turin - MTA Africa \(2015-08-23\)](#). We hope to see a copy of this year's program online in the near future as well. Arif has also written and shared with us his excellent preliminary article on the Jalsa, which will most likely appear in a future issue of *The Review of Religions*. Here's a link: [2016 Jalsa Salana UK by Arif Khan](#).

Attending this year's Jalsa was more like a homecoming for me. I was again picked up at Heathrow by my dear friend **Arif Khan**, the Deputy Editor for the Christianity section of the Review, who took me on a quick shopping spree for my grandchildren. Their birthdays are both in August and they naturally expect me to bring them something from London. Our next stop was Arif's home, so I could see his wonderful wife and daughters again! They have truly made me a part of their family and it is great to be greeted by their smiling faces after a long transatlantic airplane flight!



The Review of Religions Team

Our next stop was the site of the Jalsa event itself, which was held in the English countryside near Guildford at the same massive dairy farm as last year. This was the final setup day as the Jalsa officially opened the next morning. After passing through security, we walked to the Review marquee where I was greeted with lots of warm embraces by the entire *Review of Religions* team! Among the many team members present were **Amer Safir**, the Chief Editor of the publication (who had visited me here in Colorado earlier this year) and **Shahzad Ahmad**, Editor of Islam and Contemporary Issues for the magazine and the man responsible for organizing and planning the exhibits within the Review tent. It also gave me the opportunity to finally meet Pam's associates **Brenda and Stuart Benton** and **Luigi Antoniaz** in person. This was their first Jalsa and Brenda wrote a touching article about her experience titled, [My First Visit to Jalsa Salana](#), which she graciously allowed us to share with you here.

Because of the huge success of the 2015 exhibit, this year's marquee was considerably larger than last year's and the extraordinary display of ancient Qurans from the private collection of our dear friend **Razwan Baig**, along with Pam's Shroud Exhibition, were already set up when I arrived. After several hours spent renewing old friendships and reviewing our plans for the next three days, we adjourned for dinner and the hotel.

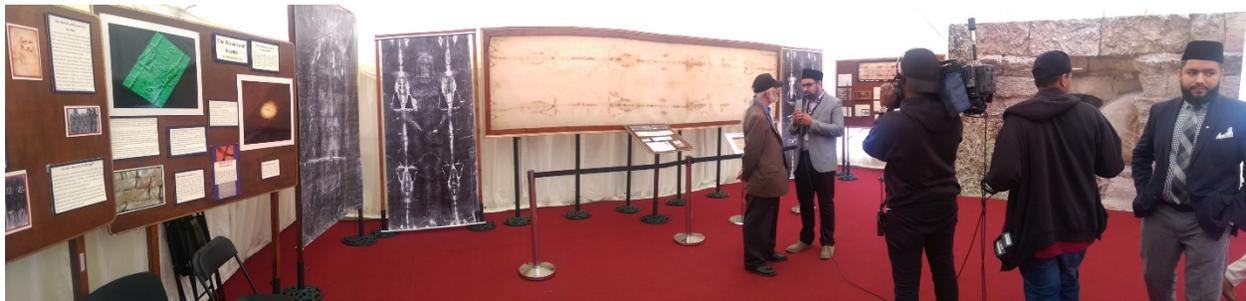


Edward Ssekandi, Vice-President of Uganda, speaks with Pam Moon at the exhibit



Right Honorable Earl Howe speaks with Barrie Schwartz and Pam Moon

The next three days were something of a blur for me. The flow of visitors to the marquee was virtually non-stop and Pam, Brenda, Stuart and Hugh had their hands full in front of the lifesize Shroud replica, answering questions and meeting with dignitaries. And there were a lot of dignitaries! Perhaps the most notable visitors were **His Excellency Edward Ssekandi**, the Vice-President of Uganda and the **Right Honorable Earl Howe**, Minister of State in the House of Lords and Deputy Leader of the House of Lords in England, although there were many more. But the highlight for all of us was the visit to the exhibit by **His Holiness, Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad**, the Spiritual Leader of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Pam and I had both met and spoken with him last year and were honored at the opportunity to do so again.



There was considerable media coverage at the Jalsa and I believe every media outlet came to visit the Shroud Exhibition in the Review marquee at some point during the three day event. The final count indicated this year the attendance topped 38,000 people. Here are some links to other media coverage of the 2016 Jalsa Salana:

[Press Release: More than 584,000 people join the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community](#) – Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat International – August 16, 2016

[More than 30,000 Muslims gather for Britain's biggest Islamic meeting to reject extremism](#) – Express.co.uk – August 15, 2016

[More than 30,000 Muslims converge for Britain's biggest annual Islamic gathering to reject violence and extremism](#) – The Daily Mail – August 14, 2016

[Annual Ahmadiyya Jalsa Salana UK 2016 - Largest Muslim Convention](#) – Channel 4 YouTube video – August 13, 2016

[Love for All, Hatred for None: 30,000 Muslims Pledge for a Peaceful Caliphate](#) – Sputnik News – August 13, 2016

['It's a beautiful thing': Ahmadi Muslims find strength at UK gathering](#) – The Guardian – August 12, 2016

[30,000 people to gather in Alton for Western Europe's biggest annual Muslim convention](#) – Eagle Radio – August 12, 2016



Meeting with an old friend

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to thank the many people responsible for making the 50th Annual Jalsa Salana such a great success! From His Holiness and the warm and gracious welcome we were given to our sponsors at *The Review of Religions* and every member of their wonderful Review team (which I consider myself to be a part of) to the larger Ahmadiyya community and the amazing organizers of such a massive convention. And to Pam Moon, for her beautiful exhibit and her amazing team of Brenda and Stuart and Luigi, and to *BSTS Newsletter* Editor Hugh Farey, who all stood there hour after hour answering countless questions and discussing the Shroud with literally thousands of people. To my dear friend Razwan and his amazing Quran exhibit. And an extra special thanks to Stuart Benton for the great photographs of the event that he made available to us for this article. In fact, I am including a few more at the end.

I am also thrilled to report that we have been invited back again next year for the 51st Annual Jalsa Salana and I am already looking forward to it!



Pam Moon, Hugh Farey and Brenda Benton hard at work answering visitor's questions



The crowds were often huge and packed the large marquee
(Note Pam Moon in red blazer at far right)



Barrie and Brenda enjoy a rare quiet moment during the event



One section of the Review marquee with the part of the Quran Exhibit in the foreground