

# Husaini Islamic Centre Open Day 2011

The Husaini Islamic Centre, Peterborough hosted its 5<sup>th</sup> public open day on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2011, welcoming people from all different cultures and faiths to experience and learn about the Islamic faith.

## Islamic Artefacts Zone

This year the open day presented a wide range of exhibitions and galleries for visitors to observe and participate in. The main gallery exhibited a collection of Islamic and Persian inspired ornaments and artifacts sourced from the city of Esfahan, courtesy of the Iranian Cultural Centre, London. The range of ornaments included a showcase of various disciplines of intrinsic craftsmanship which included Persian metalwork, woodwork, ceramics and carpentry. Many of the designs of the artifacts dated back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Iran was under the rule of the Safavid Empire. During this time Isfahan not only became a powerhouse for Arts and Crafts but also a centre for the rise of Islamic Philosophy and provided a base for arguably the greatest Islamic Philosophers. Visitors had a chance to look around the various displays of Handcrafted Persian rugs, marquetry and enamel coated metalwork to name a few. The exhibit was also fortunate to obtain a collection of the pictorial version of the Shahnameh, a Magnus Opus poetic timeline of Persian history which traced back from the Islamic period up until the mythical history of Persia.



## DISCOVERY ZONE



With a highly successful scientific exhibition last year, the interactive room played host to another major feature for this year's open day. The room was converted into mini "Who wants to be a millionaire" style interactive quiz show. The session was presented by the Ahlulbayt TV team which included Dr. Rebecca Masterton, Sheikh Ayoub and Sayed Zaffar Abbas. It was the chance for our visitors to gauge their knowledge base regarding Islamic beliefs and practices. The participants were prepared with a handheld interactive device which allowed them to respond to the questions shown on the screen. The event was a hit as participants buzzed their answers whilst engaging in deep discussion with the experts on controversial matters arising regarding the Islamic faith. The event allowed the hosts to explain certain aspects of the Islamic faith that are often misunderstood, such as the concept of Jihad. The intention for such an event was to try and remove any misconceptions and prejudices others may have of the Islamic faith and its success in doing so was reflected by the feedback received from those who participated.



## DISCOVERY ZONE

Guests also had a chance to view displays on Islamic belief as part of the Discover Islam poster exhibition. Another featured aspect of the room was the 'Inspired by Muhammad' campaign exhibition. It allowed the visitors to appreciate how Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was an inspiration to many Muslims and non-Muslims alike on various issues including the environment, medicine and social justice.



## COMMUNITY AND CHILL OUT ZONES



The second main hall was setup for visitors to get an insight into the community work that the Islamic Centre is involved in. The madressah stand allowed visitors to get a glimpse of what the youngsters of the community learn in Saturday school as well exhibiting some of the projects that they had previously been a part of. Part of the hall also provided an avenue for visitors to kick back and relax on a majalis style seating arrangement whilst sampling the Kahwa (Arabic coffee) or for the tea drinkers, some refreshing mint tea.



# ISLAMIC ARTS AND CRAFTS ZONE

Like the previous year, the first floor was dedicated to Islamic Arts and Culture. However this year the Islamic Centre was exceptionally lucky to have a contemporary Muslim potter. Visitors had a chance to not only view the various works of the potter but also be part of creating a large open day mural signifying unity and cohesion of all the visitors taking part in the open day. This proved to be one of the highlights of the day for our visitors, as the interactive element of contributing to a collaborative piece demonstrated the willingness of the participant to be part of a more inclusive and encompassing member of the wider Peterborough community.



The hall also exhibited a local artist who displayed his work and discussed the inspiration for his very elaborate and striking art pieces. The hall also hosted a Hijab exhibition that consisted of a three tiered display. One part of the exhibition show pieced various styles of Islamic attire. The other parts focused on the various differences in such attire on a global scale and a mural displaying written statements from women and children alike as to what Hijab meant to them. The section guides encouraged questions regarding the wearing of the head dress and provided demonstrations to allow the visitors to sample what it was like to adorn such attire.





## TO END THE DAY



Outside in the compound, visitors mingled with community members whilst sampling the array of eastern and western refreshments on offer. As some let themselves wind down and take in their experiences of the day, others kept busy at the Islamic book stall.

Various guests commented on the feedback forms supplied, and the following is a sample of some of the comments received regarding the event:

*“Just a quick note to say thank you very much for the experience and opportunities to engage with very nice people on the day. I personally felt very comfortable and proud that such an event opens doors and educates those who are uninformed.” Snowy Aga - Community Engagement Officer*

*“The open day at the Huseini mosque on Burton Street was a beautiful celebration of Islam as a religion, as a code of life, and of Islamic cultures across the world..... A moving event!” Dr. Kaveri Qureish*

*“For a long time, I have been both frustrated and saddened by the lack of awareness of True Islam in the wider community. Instead, we have been bombarded with the media's 'spin'-infused absurdities. Your group, in my opinion, has taken major steps in dispelling these media-led myths in just a few hours once a year. I have nothing but the utmost respect and admiration for what you have achieved and would like to thank you for enabling me to be a part of it.” Moriom Grillo-Henry – Artist in Ceramics*

## More Feedback

*"On entering the Husaini Islamic Centre on Sunday afternoon to attend the Mosque Open Day, both my husband and I were overwhelmed by the welcome and friendliness of everyone we came into contact with. We were particularly amazed at the confidence of the children and their enthusiasm to lead us around and tell us about their faith. They were an inspiration." Sue Ward -Religious Education Adviser for Cambridgeshire/ Peterborough and SACRE*

*"The open day at the Burton Street mosque surpassed my expectations and each year I learn more about my Muslim brothers and sisters and the Islamic faith.....The art work, pottery and pictures were stunning.....The event was well attended and I must congratulate all those involved." Gillian Beasley – Chief Executive, Peterborough City Council*

All comments received were positive and encouraging in nature. The intention of the open day was to educate the local community of the fact that Islam and its true followers portray a message of peace and humanity for all. It is hoped that the success of this event will bring a renewed revival at communities getting together and working towards a more cohesive, ethical and humanitarian society at large.



To fully appreciate the impact the open day had on our visitors, on the next page is an article posted in a newsletter of the Roman Catholic Parish:

**MOSQUE OPEN DAY HUSAINI ISLAMIC CENTRE, BURTON STREET, PETERBOROUGH.  
SUNDAY JULY 10TH 2011.**

**“Discover the diversity, experience the richness of Muslim Heritage”** was the banner headline of the leaflet advertising this event. Boy! did it live up to its billing. A small delegation from Wisbech, joining with many people from other places, were treated to a stunning and memorable experience of the above. Starting with the warm welcome from our young guide and carrying on as we progressed through the Discovery Zone, the Muslim Heritage Zone (which contained some outstanding examples of Islamic artefacts and Ceramics), a community presentation, the Prayer Hall and traditional Tea and Coffee Tasting. The whole afternoon was marked by the warmth of our hosts, who could not do enough to help us understand their Faith and what it meant to them. What also impressed was the number of young people of both sexes, enthusiastically and reverently explaining how their faith enriched their lives and made them better people.

In the community presentation we were taught among other things the real meaning of ‘Jihad’. This much misunderstood word stands for striving, firstly within oneself to be a better person and only secondly striving to defend one’s country and people, when they are under attack. In answer to the inevitable question as to how one squares this beautiful faith with the behaviour of the bombers of 9/11 and 7/7 our hosts were at pains to point out that these people did not represent Islam and are repudiated by all good Muslims. Our hosts were very willing to answer any questions and there was no ducking the difficult issues.

Overall this was an outstanding display of the best of a religion and its followers. One came away feeling that the world was a better and more hopeful place. Pity more people didn’t have the chance to come. Hopefully it will come around again next year. And if it is does, don’t miss it. *Sean Finlay, Diocesan Committee for religious understanding.*