

Special Interest Day - 5th March 2026 at the Bowling Club

An Introduction to Islamic Art and Architecture.

With James Allan



Arabic Calligraphy: The destruction wrought by Muslim Fundamentalists is only one side of Islam and Islamic art is outstanding for its serenity, its elegance and its beauty. In the first lecture we shall look at the art of Arabic calligraphy, the supreme art of the Islamic world. Don't worry, you don't need to know Arabic in order to appreciate its beauty! The lecture will also draw attention to the role of Arabic calligraphy in Middle East politics today.

Geometry and the Arabesque: In our second lecture we shall consider Geometry and the Arabesque, following the latter into the range of floral designs current in later Islamic art. We shall see how geometry and the arabesque combine to make highly intricate, but deeply satisfying, designs in a range of media. There is another aspect to Islamic art however, figural art. It is mistakenly believed, both by Muslims and non-Muslims, that Islamic art is non-representational. We shall explore Islamic art's figural side and show how widespread figural art really is, even, most surprisingly, in some religious settings highlighting sectarian divides in the Islamic world.



Domes and Minarets: While images of Romanesque or Gothic cathedrals may linger in our memories, most of us would be pressed to describe a typical mosque. We shall look at 3 of the most important forms, typified by the Friday Mosque in Cordova (now the cathedral), the Mosque of Suleyman the Magnificent in Istanbul and the Royal Mosque in Isfahan. The lecture explores their different styles and the minarets and domes that enhance their skylines and illustrates the rich designs, whether in mosaic, tile or other media, that adorn these buildings. It also asks whether sectarian differences between Sunni and Shia belief affect mosque design.

An Introduction to Islamic Art and Architecture cont.

Our Speaker : Now retired, James Allan was curator of the Islamic Collection and Keeper of Eastern Art at the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford University where he also set up an inter-faith exhibition service and taught Islamic art and architecture. He leads tours to the Middle East and has published numerous articles and books on Islamic Art, the most recent being The Art and Architecture of Twelver Shi'ism: Iraq, Iran and the Indian Subcontinent.

Timetable

10:00 Doors Open
10:30 Lecture 1 – Calligraphy
11.30 Coffee and Biscuits
1200 Lecture 2 – Geometry
13.00 Lunch (Please bring your own)
14.00 Lecture 3 – Mosques and Minarets
15.00 Q & A and finish

Price: £33 for members and £38 for guests

Please pay by bank transfer to:

Arts Society Cheltenham at Lloyds Bank Sort code: **30-95-72** Account no: **02351190**

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To book: Please email Anne Irvine at earvine4@gmail.com quoting your name, the name of a guest if you are bringing one, and your contact phone number.

Venue: CHELTENHAM BOWLING CLUB, Suffolk Square, Cheltenham GL50 2DX

