

Mosques

1. The First Mosque

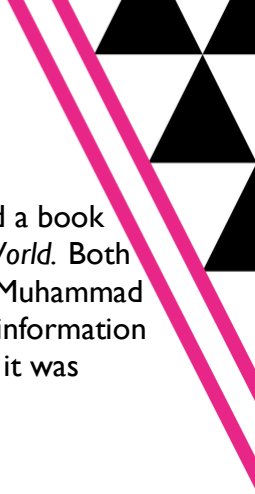
One aim of this unit is to encourage and support the development of historical literacy in RE. There are different ideas about what historical literacy is and historians endlessly debate the term, but our meaning is quite simple. Historical literacy is not about knowing the historical facts of an event or phenomena (in this case the first mosques) but in understanding that there are many different histories about mosques and that a key part of the way young people engage with knowledge about mosques is that they should be able to evaluate and engage critically with different histories. We would not expect pupils to be able to make firm judgements about which history they think is true (or even if truth is a relevant question) but they should be able to understand that all histories are authored by different groups, that there are multiple histories and that every history represents a different world view.

We present three brief histories:

1. The majority of textbooks used in schools present a particular type of historical narrative about the origins of Islam. The traditional understanding of the first mosques is that they were built as part of the process by which the prophet Muhammed established Islam as a new religion in the 7th century. There is a Hadith and a passage in the Qur'an that says that Abraham built the first mosque when he built the Ka'ba in Makkah. Some argue that the Ka'ba is not a mosque but a sacred site and that the first mosque is the Quba mosque that Muhammad helped to build with his own hands in CE 622. He had been invited to Madinah and was traveling with his companions across the desert. One version of the narrative is that when he was unable to make a choice about which clan he should stay with he let his camel roam free. It settled near an oasis whereupon Muhammad bought the land and with his followers help began to build the mosque. The features of this important mosque are still found in most mosques around the world; it was built around a courtyard and there was a niche at the front of the prayer space (the mihrab). This mosque is famous because it is said the Prophet spent 14 days praying here and that this is where the first Friday prayers were held.

This version of the history of the mosque associates the practice of attending a mosque as well as its design with the earliest days of Muhammad's prophethood. It takes the references to the mosque, how and why it was built from the Quran and Hadith as evidence of the historical origins of the Quba mosque.

2. Some scholars and commentators argue that the mosque as we understand it does not have its origins in the events surrounding the early life of the prophet. Scholars who promote a strand of 'revisionist' Islamic history argue that there is no historical evidence that the cities of Makkah or Madinah existed during the lifetime of Muhamad. This scholarship challenges traditional accounts of the founding of the Quba mosque. John Wansbrough, an expert on early Islam, argues that there is no agreement amongst Muslims about the text that should comprise the Quran until the third Islamic century (800 CE) and that until that time there were multiple versions of the Qur'an. He argues that any information about Islamic practices or the origins of Islam, including mosques, do not necessarily originate from the time of Muhammed. The historian Patricia Crone, who studies the origins of Islam, also makes this claim. She is controversial for deliberately using non-Islamic or non-Arabic sources. She has argued that Makkah and therefore the Ka'ba was not the centre for early Islam but another place in Northern Arabia. She withdrew some of her analysis in her later life but Tom Holland, a journalist, has developed her ideas. Tom Holland's presentation of this



revisionist history is found in a Channel 4 documentary called *Islam: The Untold Story* and a book called *In the Shadow of the Sword: The Battle for Global Empire and the End of the Ancient World*. Both the film and the book are controversial in claiming that there is no written evidence of Muhammad until 70 years after his death. Holland argues that the Qur'an is not a reliable source of information about the early days of Islam including the existence of mosques, because, like the Bible it was written over a period of hundreds of years and there were many different versions.

The Tom Holland documentary is on You Tube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNihlTTZ5HE&t=31s>

3. One of the oldest mosques in the world is not in Arabia but in China. The Great Canton Mosque, sometimes called the 'lighthouse mosque' because of its very tall minaret, was probably built around 627 CE, during the Tang dynasty, five years before the estimated death of the prophet. It was originally built of wood and has been rebuilt many times. According to some traditions Islam was brought to China via companions to the Prophet as they followed the Silk Road. This was a network of trading routes between China, the Middle east and Southern Europe that is famous for spreading culture and beliefs across the Far and Middle East. Muslim traders settled on China and the Far East, founding Islamic communities and building mosques.

The first Muslims came to China as envoys and traders around 651, less than 40 years after the rise of Islam in Arabia. Traditional Chinese architecture is based around low buildings and tall traditional buildings were rare. This means the earliest mosques in China were often built in a similar style to other Chinese buildings. They may have had a minaret but they would also have had pagodas, pavilions and courtyard gardens. The Great Canton Mosque is a blend of Arabic and Chinese architecture and design. There is Arabic calligraphy on the walls and the pillars but it resembles Chinese writing because it is positioned and spaced like Chinese characters.

Historians argue whether it was companions to the Prophet who came to China and founded the mosque but there is evidence from Chinese manuscripts dating from that time the mosque existed and they founded an important settlement there.

How can these extracts support historical literacy in relation to the first mosques?

Understanding that there are many histories is a first step. Each of the presentations above represents a particular history, they are based on particular worldviews or ways of seeing the world. They reveal different approaches to the idea of evidence and also the idea of truth. Historians often disagree about what counts as evidence and whether sources can be trusted. To engage with this is part of historical thinking.

LESSON 1:

The First Mosque

Whose histories?

Students will explore each of these 'histories' in turn. Questions and activities are suggested to allow students to peer behind the histories and consider the outlook or worldview they can detect.

NB: a PPT is provided with suggestions as to images to search for online, titled 'I The First Mosque'. You will also find questions and information in this PPT to support your teaching.

- 1) Start with the Quba mosque. Information is found in 'The First Mosque' worksheet. Find images and save in the PPT to display. Students answer the question *what is the first mosque*. Students should give an answer based on at least one piece of evidence.
- 2) Secondly, read the information on the worksheet 'I Where was the First Mosque?' Display the map suggested on the PPT which shows the world at the beginning of the 8th C. Can you locate Makkah? Can you locate other places named, such as Petra and Constantinople? Students might find it hard to answer this question, *where is the first mosque*, because the issue is complicated. Discuss what makes the question hard to answer. It is fine not to know! Not knowing is part of this picture, as you can see.
- 3) Read the information on the slides 'Revisionist history' and 'Islamic history' on the PPT. As you can see, the question of the geographical origins of Islam are not just historically complicated, there are feelings and opinions involved as well. For each of the views on the slide (Tom Holland, David King and Amaal Muhammad al-Roubi), discuss where each person seems to be coming from. Imagine they are characters in a novel- how could students describe their feelings, outlook and perspective?
- 4) Finally- find and display images of the Huaisheng Mosque in China. There is no worksheet. Information and images are given on the PPT. Does this change anything? Can students suggest 'whose' history this Chinese mosque belongs to?

2. Finsbury Park Mosque and Freedom of Speech

Finsbury Park Mosque (also known as the North London Central Mosque) is an ordinary city mosque. It has five stories, it can accommodate 2,000 people, it acts as a community centre for the local Muslim community and is heavily involved in nearby charities. It is also an extraordinary mosque; in the recent period it has been the centre of two controversies that illustrate some of the tensions and issues that face Muslims in England today as well as the question of free speech in relation to Islam. Free speech is an important issue because some people argue that while we should be respectful and tolerant of the beliefs of others we should also be permitted to criticise them if we disagree with them. This unit examines two of those controversies and provides a snapshot of some of the issues that Muslim communities must consider in their daily lives.

Background – Mosques in England

The most recent figures from the office of national statistics (2018) say that 5.1% of the population of the UK are Muslim, that's 3, 372,966 people. Comparatively 5% of Swiss people, 9% of French people and 4.5% of Germans are Muslim. There are over 1,500 mosques or prayer rooms in the UK but less than 20% of them are purpose-built. Purpose-built mosques are often easy to identify because of the dome and the minaret. According to a YUGOV poll, 70% of British people have never been inside a non-Christian place of worship and almost 90% of Britons have never visited a mosque. Around 50% of all Muslims attend a mosque once a week and most mosques act as a community centre.

Accusations of extremism and terrorism

Mustafa Kamel Hamza, known later as Abu Hamza, came to England from Egypt in 1979 to pursue a Western lifestyle. During his first years in England he worked as a nightclub bouncer and manager of a strip club. He converted to Islam in the 1980s, gained British citizenship and travelled to Pakistan, and Afghanistan to fight for the Mujahideen. When he returned to England he had lost a hand and one eye. In 1997 he began attending Finsbury Park mosque and to preach there as an Imam. During that time he was well known for including anti-Western statements in his sermons, he described the invasion of Iraq as a war against Islam and claimed that the September 11th attacks in the USA were a Jewish plot. In 2004 the home secretary, David Blunkett declared that Hamza was unfit to be a British citizen. By the time Hamza was removed from his position as Imam only 50-60 people attended Friday prayers but the mosque was regularly featured in the news as a hot-bed of radical Islamic extremism. In 2004 Hamza was arrested by British police and charged with 15 offences under the Terrorism Act. In 2006 he was convicted for inciting hatred and soliciting murder. He was not found guilty of involvement in any terrorist activity. He was later extradited to America where in 2015 he was sentenced to life imprisonment in a supermax prison in Colorado for terrorism related offences. These offences included his role in the 1998 kidnapping of Western tourists in Yemen that left four hostages dead.

Attack on Finsbury park Mosque

On the evening of 19th June 2017 a 51 year old man, Makram Ali, left the mosque and fainted. As he fell to the floor people rushed to help him. A waiting van sped up and ran him down. The van driver, Darren Osborne, was pulled out of the van by three of the worshippers from the mosque. As an angry and frightened crowd turned on Osborne it seemed as though they were trying to attack him. Mohammed Mahmoud, the mosque's Imam, protected Osbourne from the crowd by standing in front of him until the police arrived. He later told reporters that he wanted to prevent a "cowardly reaction" to a "cowardly attack". Osborne was jailed for a minimum of 43 years for the murder of Mr Ali and for trying to murder others outside the mosque. When he was sentenced, Mrs Justice Cheema-Grubb told Osborne: "This was a terrorist attack. You intended to kill."

Free speech and Cartoons

Finsbury Park Mosque has been at the centre of several debates about free speech. After the attack the Guardian newspaper printed a cartoon by Martin Rowson of a white van emblazoned with "read The Sun & Daily Mail". The scene was a replica of the scene of the attack. The implication was that The Sun and Daily Mail newspapers encourage racism and hatred of Muslims and that they were implicated in creating a political climate which prompted Osbourne to attack the mosque. The Daily Mail newspaper responded by denying the accusations of racism and accusing the Guardian of fake news. In the public debates that followed one of the issues was whether it was acceptable for newspapers like the Sun and the Daily Mail to criticise Islam and write negative things about Muslims without being considered racists.

The second incident around the question of free speech involved Katie Hopkins. Katie Hopkins is a commentator with over a million followers on Twitter. She is well known for her views on immigration and race relations in England, she has compared migrants to cockroaches and said they spread like the 'norovirus'. After Twitter banned her and permanently suspended her account she began posting on Instagram. She paid for a 'white lives matter' banner to be flown over a Manchester City vs Burnley match in 2020 as the footballers took the knee in support of Black Lives Matter. Burnley football player, Ben Mee, said that his club was 'ashamed and embarrassed by the banner'. She is also well known for her negative comments about Islam and Muslims. In 2020 she tweeted "Finsbury Park mosque just after 8.00pm. Officers attacked. 5 representatives of the Religion of Peace arrested. Zero media coverage." She implied that the attack on police officers was carried out by members of the Finsbury Park mosque. After her comments the mosque hired a solicitor to make a case against Hopkins and Hopkins issued an apology on Instagram and Parler.

LESSON 2:

Finsbury Park Mosque

- 1) Start by looking at the information about Finsbury Park Mosque on the PPT (2 Finsbury Park Mosque), as well as general information about mosques in the UK. If your students are not from or around London, show Finsbury Park on a map of London- it is close to Arsenal's Emirates Stadium!

If you think your class would benefit from further information about Mosques in the UK, check out this service called 'Visit my Mosque': <https://www.visitmymosque.org/> It is supported by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the largest umbrella organisation of Muslim communities in the UK. The MCB has just elected a female General Secretary for the first time, 29- year old Zara Mohammed. The Visit my Mosque website has general information and videos about mosques as well as a virtual tour.

For further information to gain a sense of the texture of British Muslim life, the MCB is running a campaign to improve women's access to mosques: <https://mcb.org.uk/project/women-in-mosques/> and has produced information in conjunction with Black History Month to explore black British Muslims: <https://mcb.org.uk/project/proudly-muslim-and-black/>

The Open University provides this link for people who wish to research their local mosques: <http://www.open.ac.uk/arts/research/religion-in-london/sites/www.open.ac.uk.arts.research.religion-in-london/files/files/ecms/arts-rl-pr/web-content/Muslim-Resources.pdf>

The 'Everyday Muslims' website documents Muslim heritage and identity in Britain. There is information about the first purpose-built mosque, including lots of other fascinating studies: <https://www.everydaymuslim.org/>

- 2) Two news pieces present information about a notorious imam at Finsbury Park Mosque: Mustafa Kamel Hamza, or Abu Hamza (2 Hamza Convicted!). These are presented from the point of view of the mosque itself, and from a point of view of a general North London news service. Once groups have read the two news pieces, here are some activities to make sense of the story:
 - Highlight information that BOTH sources agree on in the same colour. In two different colours, highlight phrases which portray a DIFFERENT take, standpoint or way of expressing in each source.
 - Extract the information that both sources agree on.
 - Discuss the tone and point of view of each different news source. Can groups identify if the journalist has a particular sympathy, outlook or viewpoint, or is it impossible to say?

- Write a Tweet from EITHER @finsburyparkmosque OR @NLNews to reflect the differing viewpoint. They might not be that different, depending on the groups' assessments.
- How different are the sources? Create an 'opinion line' ranging from 'completely in support of Hamza', to 'completely against Hamza'. Groups choose where each of the two articles lie. Discuss whether the different viewpoints are marginal or extreme based on this.

3) Free Speech, Islamophobia, Violence and Finsbury Park Mosque

Use the images suggested on the PPT and information on the sheet: '2 Free Speech and Violence' to make sense of these three events. Firstly, a man was killed outside Finsbury Park Mosque due to a terrorist attack against the mosque and Muslims. Secondly, a cartoonist accused the Sun and Daily Mail newspapers of contributing to a culture of Islamophobia. Thirdly, Katie Hopkins falsely implied that members of Finsbury Park Mosque had attacked police. She was later forced to retract her statement.

Here are some suggested activities and discussion points:

- Discuss how far terrorism, racism and free speech should be a subject studied in RE. What are arguments that it is relevant to a study of religions and what are arguments that it is not relevant to RE? Read this interesting article about talking to teenagers about terrorism: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-40011787>
- have students heard about 'no platforming'? This is where people with views found to be hateful or discriminatory are refused a platform, such as at a University debate. Discuss the benefits of 'no-platforming' people like Katie Hopkins. Discuss the dangers.
- Identify from the stories what events are EXTERNAL to Finsbury Park Mosque. What events are caused by people or forces outside the mosque's control? Identify the events that are part of the mosque's work and within its control. Depending on this analysis, discuss how far the attack on Finsbury Park Mosque is anything to do with the mosque.
- If you have studied fundamentalism as part of the lesson on Malala Yousafzai- can students detect any fundamentalist views here?
- Create a newspiece EITHER for Finsbury Park Mosque community newsletter, OR the North London Local showing different sympathies and points of view. These can be short, no longer than 500 words. Collate and compare as a group.

3. The Egyptian Woman's Mosque Movement

The Egyptian revolution in 1952 overthrew the royal family and established a Republic that ended British colonial rule. The new government, lead by Nassar, wanted to create a more liberal society, they were socialist and wanted to make sure that Islam and socialism were merged. They initiated a program of modernising Egypt. This included promoting 'moderate' forms of Islam, such as by choosing Imams for the government-approved mosques. In the 1970s there was more political, religious and political upheaval in Egypt. Anwar Sadat was elected President in 1970 and he aimed to establish friendly relations between Egypt and America as well as allowing Islamist groups to gain more influence. Islamist groups were made up of people who wanted to minimise the influence of Western culture and beliefs in Egyptian society. Some of Sadat's reforms caused economic hardships, there were bread riots and more and more people were blamed the way Egyptian society had become more Western for the growing unemployment and hardships. In 1981 Sadat was assassinated by a group called the Egyptian Islamic Jihad who aimed to overthrow the government and replace it with an Islamic state.

Women's Mosque Groups (the Dawa' movement)

In the late 1980s women began to meet in mosques to discuss the Qur'an and to talk about what it meant to be a Muslim woman. They would gather together to read the Qur'an and to teach themselves, one of the women would lead them in prayer and they would discuss how they could be good Muslims. A central issue for them was how to apply the teachings of the Quran to their own lives and then to reflect on how they could change themselves. They believed that secular society made it more difficult for them to apply Muslim teachings to their daily lives and they were interested in finding ways of being *more* Muslim. An example of this is described by Amal who was a part of the women's mosque movement. She was outgoing, outspoken and very confident in public and social situations. She struggled with the idea of shyness (al-haya) which she believed was required by God because she felt she would be a hypocrite if she pretended to be shy when she was really outgoing. Over time she came to realise that she would have to struggle to make herself shy so that eventually it came to be second nature to her. Attending the classes and discussions at the mosque helped her understand how she could change herself to become a better Muslim.

They were not political and most of the women didn't vote in the elections because they thought it was more important to change themselves than to change society. The women came from all sections of Egyptian society and from all age groups although most of the women were between twenty and fifty. At one point there were so many women meeting in mosques that they became known as the *Women's Mosque movement* and because the women were trying to become more religious it is sometimes called the *Piety Movement*. In some mosques the groups would be quite small but in others over 500 women would meet every week. In some mosques the imams (who are male) would offer to lead the prayers for the women but the women insist that they should lead their own prayers. They also believed that it was their duty to teach other women and to create communities round the mosque where women would feel welcome and a sense of belonging.

The Women's mosque movement is the first time in Egyptian history that such large numbers of women have gathered together and it is the first time that women across the country have engaged in religious activity in mosques which are usually male centred.

What is feminism?

There are many different types of feminists, the meaning of the word has changed over time and it can mean different things to different people. For some women feminism is about standing up for equal rights for women. They see the inequalities that women face as something that can be addressed through changing the law or through making people more aware of the challenges that women experience, this is normally called liberal feminism. Radical feminists often identify male sexism and the patriarchy as the main cause of women's oppression, they are more likely to believe that the structures of society are innately oppressive and need to be transformed. Most feminists want equality before the law and the right to decide how they dress and behave, their careers and to be independent. The idea that women should act, dress or behave in certain ways would be outrageous for many western feminists.

Muslim feminism

There are many different types of Muslim feminists. Some Muslim women call themselves feminists, some are liberal or radical feminists. Some Muslim women believe that western feminism ignores their particular concerns and issues and is really only interested in what western women who live in secular societies want. Many Muslim women believe that the Quran and Hadith can be interpreted in many

different ways and that some of those ways privilege justice and fairness for women but in a Muslim context. Some western feminists think that being a feminist and being a Muslim is a contradiction, for instance they may think that wearing the veil is something that oppresses women, but Muslim feminists may believe that when they chose to wear the veil, they are exercising free will. Writers like Saba Mahmood think that western feminists ignore the way many Muslim women are working out what it means to be a woman on their own terms and that western feminism is only one way of looking at the world.

LESSON 3:

The Egyptian Woman's Mosque Movement

1: Egyptian context

- a) Find Egypt on a map. Brainstorm what the class know about the country- pyramids, tombs and pharaohs might come up!

Find out about modern Egypt, such as from these tourism adverts;

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfxQy5A_tHs#

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCdoHRR4JB8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3KqP69xuPc>

- b) Read 'A very brief history of modern Egypt', on the document; '3 The Women's Mosque Movement'. This is to set the scene. Egypt was a 'protectorate' of the British Empire until 1952. Egypt was not formally occupied and colonised by the British, but Britain exerted influence in all significant political and economic matters, shaping Egypt's decision to suit British preferences.
- c) Under the very brief history are four general desires in modern Egyptian society; the desire to have friendly relations with the West, a desire to live as an Islamic society, the need for economic stability and a desire to be liberal and moderate.
Find an example of each of these general desires or preferences in the history. Shade each a different colour and shade the corresponding historical evidence

2: The Women's Mosque Movement

- a) Return to the very brief history of modern Egypt. Are the class surprised to see women involved in the independence protests? There is further information on the subsequent PPT slide about women's role. Investigate the assumptions and expectations that lie behind student's reaction. If they are surprised, why are they surprised?
- b) Read the second page of the information sheet, '3 The Women's Mosque Movement'.
 - a) Ask students to share their impressions in pairs or small groups. Display the questions on the PPT: *What surprises you? What do you find interesting? What do you not agree with? What do you not understand? What can you not relate to? What do you support or agree with?*
 - b) The general desires present in Egyptian society post-Independence are given on the same slide. Are any of these desires given priority in the Women's Mosque Movement? Do some desires seem to be more important than others?
 - c) Finally, return to expectations discussed about women discussed at the start of this section. Have students' expectations and assumptions changed or stayed the same?

Extension: if you have looked at the Muslim Council of Britain's campaign to bring more women into British mosques in the first lesson, can students make any connection? What are the major differences?

3: What is Feminism?

- a) Read the 'what is feminism?' options on the PPT. Give students time to discuss whether they think all these actions and ways of seeing are feminist? Are some more feminist than others? Are some more attractive to students than others?
- b) Show the subsequent slide depicting differences and shared concerns in Western feminism. We will learn about Muslim feminism. Do student predict a difference between Western and Islamic feminism?
- c) Read about Muslim feminism on the information sheet or PPT slides.
- d) Ask students to create a Venn like the 'Western feminism' diagram, showing what Western and Islamic feminists share and what differs.