

OBITUARY

Robert Bucklin, M.D, J.D.

With the death of Dr. Robert Bucklin on September 19 the Shroudie world has lost one of its most distinguished and gentlemanly medical specialists. Never has the medical case for the Shroud's authenticity been more succinctly and more convincingly conveyed to the widest possible audience than by Robert Bucklin for David Rolfe's award-winning cinema and TV documentary *Silent Witness*. Via life-size negatives of the Shroud laid out in his Los Angeles laboratory as if these were an actual crucified body, Bucklin explained the wounds of crowning with thorns, scourging and crucifixion with such gentle authority and matter-of-factness that the scenes involving him were arguably the most powerful single contributor to the documentary's winning of a BAFTA award. Personally, I will never forget his quiet, clinical explanations of the terrible injuries. Or his calm gazing direct at the camera to conclude with heart-melting emphasis: 'The markings on this image are so clear and so medically accurate that the pathological facts which they reflect concerning the suffering and death of the man depicted here are in my opinion beyond dispute.' Such authoritative assessment by a seasoned medical specialist, talking about the very basics of the subject from within his own field of professional expertise, represents the very lifeblood of what Shroud research *should* be all about.

Born in Chicago, Robert Bucklin took his medical degree at Loyola University School of Medicine and his doctorate in laws at the South Texas College of Law. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War he served in the 4th Medical Laboratory in France and Germany with the rank of Captain. There followed employment in various laboratories as pathologist and medical examiner, including the St. Mary's, St. Luke's and Veterans Administration Hospitals in the state of Michigan. Deeply impressed by the Shroud researches of French surgeon Dr. Pierre Barbet, Bucklin affirmed his support for the majority of Barbet's conclusions, and wrote his first Shroud medical article in 1958. Two years later he presented a paper on the subject at the International Congress of Legal and Social Medicine held in Vienna, and in 1961 contributed his first article to the international Shroud journal *Sindon*, as published by Turin's Centro Internazionale di Sindonologia. In this article 'The Medical Aspects of the Crucifixion of Christ' he made clear that he had experimented on himself as part of his evaluation of the physical agonies that crucifixion Shroud-style involved: 'I have had the opportunity to suspend myself on a large crucifix for a short period of time and in so doing I learned the value of the foot support. Without it, the strain on the arms and wrists is so intense and the pain so great that it would be impossible to stand it for more than a very few minutes.'

By the late 1970s Robert Bucklin had been appointed Acting Chief of the Forensic Medical Division in the Los Angeles County Coroner-Medical Examiner Office, one of the USA's busiest units for forensic medicine. Legend has it that he was the role-model upon which the US TV series *Quincy* was based, and certainly it was while he was medical examiner for Los Angeles that he attended the first United States Conference of Research on the Shroud of Turin in Albuquerque, New Mexico, held March 23-24, 1977. It was at this meeting that I met him for the first time, Bucklin deeply impressing me by his altogether quieter and less assertive manner than that of most of his fellow-American attendees, several of whom would within months form themselves into STURP, the Shroud of Turin Research Project. Shortly after the Albuquerque meeting Bucklin was filmed by David Rolfe for the *Silent Witness* documentary, and in 1978 he

travelled to Turin for the Second International Congress of Sindonology, though he did not take part in STURP's direct examination of the Shroud that followed this.

The radiocarbon dating of the Shroud in 1988 failed to shake Bucklin's belief in the Shroud's authenticity. Health problems sometimes prevented him and his beloved wife Patti from attending overseas Shroud conferences, as at CIELT's Symposium in Rome in June 1993, when Dr. Gilbert Lavoie read his paper on his behalf. In retirement he and Patti moved to Fort Myers Beach, Florida, and Judith's and my last meeting with them was at a small gathering of Shroud researchers in Kaufman, Texas, September 13 and 14, 1997. Always with a view to furthering Shroud research in the US, shortly after this meeting Bucklin became a Director of AMSTAR, the American Shroud of Turin Association for Research, though declining health precluded him from taking more than a largely passive role. Robert Bucklin's support for Pierre Barbet's researches of seventy years ago has sometimes been criticised for being over-simplistic, other medical researchers pointing to errors and misjudgments by Barbet which Bucklin tended to ignore. With characteristic modesty, Robert Bucklin, in his paper for the 1993 Rome conference, personally assessed his then four decades of Shroud research work as 'a mere drop in the bucket compared to the continuing highly technical work that continues to be done.' But if there is any validity to the now increasingly recognised efficacy of homeopathic medicine, Robert Bucklin's 'drop in the bucket' was, in truth, a most subtly mighty one...