

SHROUD EXHIBITION IN BOURNEMOUTH

At Easter there opened in a small side-street just off one of Bournemouth's main thoroughfares an exhibition grandly entitled 'The Turin Shroud. A Major Exhibition. Is this the Face of Jesus, or the World's Greatest Forgery?' According to a very professional-looking full colour publicity leaflet 'This exciting exhibition offers the chance to investigate one of the strangest phenomenon [sic] of history, the amazing blood-stained cloth which bears the image of a crucified man and which for centuries has been known as the shroud of Jesus.' In much smaller print the leaflet continues 'Now, for the first time, you can discover this fascinating relic through a specially commissioned facsimile...' The leaflet goes on to claim: 'Recent tests have dated the shroud to the 13th. century but new and amazing evidence, revealed in this exhibition, throws doubts on the results and re-opens the controversy. Is this really the shroud of Jesus?'

The news of this exhibition was a considerable surprise to officers of the BSTS, for no outside organization was known to be mounting an event of this kind, and the leaflet gave no clue. Personal visits to the exhibition revealed even more of a surprise. Several dozen very familiar-looking photographs were on display, illustrating most aspects of Shroud studies: reconstructions of the wounds of crucifixion, the STURP scientific examination, Dr. Max Frei's pollen grains, Byzantine works of art, and much else. The photographs were familiar, because close inspection revealed that many had been reproduced directly from books written on the Shroud in the last few years, including Rodney Hoare's and Ian Wilson's. Indeed some of the photographs were the personal copyright of these two individuals. Equally familiar was a video presentation being shown, unmistakably the BBC Timewatch on the Shroud made in 1988, shortly before the carbon-dating.

The puzzle is that the organizers of the Exhibition had made no approach to the BSTS, to Rodney Hoare or to Ian Wilson, nor, so far as continuing enquiries have revealed, to their publishers, for the usage of any photographs. From enquiries to the Editor of BBC Timewatch it was learned that he too had not been approached.

So who is behind the Exhibition, which has an admission charge of £2.80? According to enquiries made by the *Bournemouth Evening Echo* he is Dr. Michael Ridley (the exact nature of his doctorate is uncertain), who lives in Dorchester, and trades under the names of 'World Heritage' and 'Independent Museums and Exhibitions'. Ridley has already been under scrutiny by the *Echo* for staging, over 18 months, an exhibition of five Chinese warriors from the famous 2,000 year old terracotta army unearthed near the Chinese town of Xian. Enquiries by the *Echo* have so far failed to ascertain that any authentic statues from Xian have ever been supplied to Ridley.

The Shroud exhibition is continuing to be staged every day, 9.30 to 5.30 at what Ridley calls the Bournemouth Exhibition Centre, Old Christchurch Lane, Bournemouth, next door to a continuing exhibition of replicas of the terracotta warriors, the 'originals' having allegedly been returned. Inevitably, legal opinion is being sought. Watch this space...