

Turin 2010 by Hugh Fitzpatrick

When the trip to see the Shroud was proposed in the June 2009 BSTS magazine, I did not expect to be able to go. Because of the encouragement and generosity of my family and friends, my hope became a reality. And so I was one of the 22 BSTS members who flew from Stanstead to Turin airport on Sunday 25 April, despite the erupting Icelandic volcano.

What a varied and pleasant group of Shroudies we proved to be. Members had travelled from around Britain – places included Cornwall, Grimsby and Mossley, and one from Malaysia. I met everyone for the first time. In the past I had only ever met two people involved in the BSTS – Arthur Crawford from Nottingham and John Tyrer from Manchester. I was delighted to meet Reggie Norton and his wife Beatrice. We were privileged to have Mark Guscini as our guide in Shroud and Sudarium studies – and how to get into the Shroud museum without too long a wait (twice).

After two days to get acclimatised to Italy and Turin in particular, we were ready for our glimpse of the Shroud. It was interesting to find that we were there a week before Pope Benedict XVI made his visit.

On Tuesday afternoon, we snaked our way into the viewing area. The Shroud was brightly lit in its display area. I had not expected to have such difficulty seeing the bloodstains. I found it even more difficult to see the image.

By the end of the three minutes we were allowed, my eyes were still trying to get used to the lighting and still only beginning to discern the image. I had waited 55 years for those three minutes. It is not that I became a “doubting Thomas”. I have always known that the Shroud was the linen cloth that wrapped the dead body of Jesus.

It was just that I could not make out where the nail holes were, nor where the hole made the soldier’s lance was to be found.

Outside the cathedral, in the warm Italian air, I felt disappointed and rather numb. What would I be able to tell Maureen, my wife, when I returned home? Certainly not that I had had a deeply spiritual and life-changing experience.

If Richard Wimbleby had not said, after lunch in a pleasant restaurant, that he would like to go back and say a prayer in the cathedral, I would have been left with an increasing sense of frustration and anti-climax. Richard, Marianne McDonald and I went back to the cathedral, walked unimpeded up the steps and entered.

To say I was surprised to see the Shroud in full view behind the main altar is an understatement. For the next half an hour I could focus my attention on seeing what I had not seen earlier – the distinguishing marks caused by scourging, being nailed to the cross and the savage crown of thorns. I was like Thomas, seeing the resurrected Christ. The search that had lasted 55 years had been fulfilled. “My Lord and my God!”