

# The British Society for the Turin Shroud and the Future of this Newsletter

*- a special reflection from Ian Wilson*

When this Society was founded back in 1977, its founder members included a significant proportion of academics and others with professional expertise, many of whom were eager to apply these skills to the many branches of human knowledge that the Shroud touches on. As but three examples, Dr. John A.T. Robinson, - the Bishop of Woolwich of *Honest to God* fame - contributed his in-depth knowledge of New Testament scholarship. Veteran genealogist Noel Currer-Briggs applied himself to studying the genealogies of French Crusader families linked to the Shroud's history, and Manchester-based textiles expert Dr John Tyrer enthusiastically tackled technical matters relating to how the Shroud was manufactured as a textile. In the spirit of the Society being non-denominational and without any party line on the Shroud's authenticity, public meetings of the Society included guest speakers who argued both for and against the Shroud's authenticity, based on their particular area of expertise. All this was in realisation of a dream that had been espoused, amongst others, by the then recently deceased Dr. David Willis, the very dedicated former Guildford-based medical practitioner who did so much during the previous decade to foster and develop my personal interest in the Shroud.

Understandably, the passage of time and in particular, the radiocarbon dating result in 1988, have adversely affected the Society's impetus, reducing its membership numbers and limiting the range of its activities. During the greater part of the last two decades just two editors, myself (up to 2001), and Mark Guscin (up to the present), have maintained this Newsletter as virtually the Society's sole public activity, with the single exception of the very successful BSTS trip to Turin in 2010. And ironically, both Mark and I are domiciled outside the UK.

But what has greatly saddened Mark and myself in recent years has been the decline in the volume and the quality of serious articles being submitted for Newsletter publication, the shortfall being particularly marked from the UK, and particularly in the field of intelligibly-written science. An editor cannot edit a Newsletter effectively if he or she does not receive a steady flow of high quality articles, news items, reviews, etc. On the Internet, although there is no shortage of websites with 'information' and amateurish theorising about the Shroud, both for and against its authenticity, all too much of it is painfully third hand and poorly informed, such that if the Newsletter were to accept articles with this kind of material, it would relinquish the commendably high ideals that were set by the Society's founders back in 1977. Speaking personally, as one of the disquietingly few survivors from that era, I would prefer to see the Society die forthwith rather than for it to be allowed to degenerate into yet another Shroud chat-room.

In the field of articles on Shroud history the problem is less acute. Despite my being theoretically retired from writing books I remain very active re- searching a variety of aspects of the Shroud's history, in particular the life and writings of Geoffroi de Charny, the Shroud-owning French knight on whom I am preparing a long-term but potentially very promising academic study (one

major reason why I have no wish to return to the editorship). Hence together with Hugh Duncan, as another regular contributor to this Newsletter who is also most helpfully partnering some of my researches, I anticipate no shortage of any historical articles for future issues of the Newsletter.