

BRITISH SOCIETY FOR THE TURIN SHROUD

Officers; Ian Wilson (Chairman); Susan Black (General Secretary);
Dr. Michael Clift (Membership Secretary); William Sinclair (Treasurer)

Mailing address; 21 Stanley Gardens, London NW2 4QH

23 September 1988

Dear Members,

On the Recent "Leaks" ...

In view of many still unresolved questions concerning the Shroud carbon dating results, this is an interim letter, for members' guidance and information, prior to a full Newsletter, which will follow as soon as official results are released, and the situation is clearer.

As members can scarcely fail to have been aware, ever since early July there have been a spate of press rumours that the Shroud has been carbon-dated to sometime in the mediaeval period. The rumours have chiefly come from this country, and began with a 'gossip' piece in the *Sunday Telegraph* "Albany at large" column of July 3, intimating "In spite of the intense secrecy surrounding the investigation I hear signs that the linen cloth has been proved to be mediaeval". Other media around the world picked the story up and assumed the source must have been the Oxford laboratory, obliging Professor Hall and Dr. Robert Hedges to write a letter to *The Times* protesting that as at that date [July 9] they had not even begun the processing of the Shroud samples, due to the installation of new laboratory equipment.

Towards the end of July the rumours were rekindled as a result of pre-publicity surrounding the BBC *Timewatch* television programme "Shreds of Evidence". The programme itself (transmitted 27 July) leaned heavily in favour of mediaeval date, despite the fact that Oxford had still not yet completed its work on the Shroud. The programme had just one 'expert' consultant, the Revd. David Sox.

Hardly had this wave of publicity died down before on 26 August the *London Evening Standard* ran as its front-page lead story "Shroud of Turin Really is a Fake". Accompanying this was a seemingly authoritative article by librarian Dr. Richard Luckett of Magdalene College, Cambridge, cryptically remarking that "laboratories are rather leaky institutions" and "a probable date of about 1350 looks likely". This again generated media stories all round the world, yet both the Oxford laboratory and Dr. Michael Tite of the British Museum insisted that they knew nothing of how Dr. Luckett had come by his information, and had had no dealings with him. When in a telephone enquiry to Dr. Luckett I asked whether the Revd. David Sox had been his source, he hastily changed the subject.

On Wednesday 14 September the *Sunday Times* contacted me requesting me to supply three panels of information on the Shroud, its known history, and the background to the carbon dating, to accompany an article in which the Science Correspondent would set the

scene for the formal announcement of the dating results at the end of this month. The material was faxed to them, then just prior to publication I was told that the plan had been radically changed because of new information that the Shroud had been dated to between 1000 and 1500 AD. The Science Correspondent refused to divulge his source for this, and since my own contribution had become reduced to one panel that bore little resemblance to the original, I withdrew my name from this. On 18 September the *Sunday Times* carried the front page headline "Official:

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Turin Shroud is a Fake", accompanied inside by the Science Correspondent's full page feature "Unravelling: The Riddle of the Shroud". This included some of the background material supplied by me, plus the new "leaked" information on the dating, which although described as "official" was backed up by no directly quoted source. Since checks with Professor Hall of Oxford and Dr. Tite of the British Museum again established that neither had been responsible, I complained to the *Sunday Times* Editor with particular regard to the "official" headline. This prompted a conciliatory phone call from the Science Correspondent who when challenged directly, admitted that his source had been the Revd. David Sox. He said he had in front of him the Revd Sox's already complete book about the Shroud's mediaeval date, awaiting publication the moment this news becomes formally released.

Sadly, as evident from a *Daily Mail* article of September 19, Professor Gonella and Cardinal Ballestrero in Turin have attributed the succession of apparent "leaks" emanating from England to malicious breaches of confidentiality on the part of the Oxford laboratory scientists and Dr. Tite. It seems clear that they have been mistaken, and that the true source of possibly all the leaks is the single non-English clerical gentleman whose identity will now be self-evident. This individual's means of obtaining his "inside" information (which can only have come from Arizona or Zurich), and his motives for flouting the confidentiality that all others have respected, can only be guessed at. His only explanation to me was that he "thinks" he knows the result by a "fluke". Not being party to the same source(s), I can neither confirm nor deny the information's truth, only deplore the insidious and underhand means by which it has been disseminated.

If indeed all three laboratories date the Shroud to the Middle Ages, then of course this news would be serious, unsettling and deeply disappointing to those of us who have pursued seeming valid evidence for the Shroud's authenticity. But it would be wrong for any of us simply to follow unquestioningly the inevitable slick "fake" judgments of the media. As was made clear in *Newsletter* no. 14, carbon datings are not infallible, and certainly not "proof" in themselves of anything. Only if and when someone demonstrates beyond all question (perhaps by replicating Dr. McCrone's findings) *how* an artist produced an image as extraordinary as that of the Shroud, or how, a crucified body did so, will the Shroud enigma genuinely be near to a solution. Until then, subject of course to your own support, your Society will continue its own quiet existence, its research efforts now redoubled to persuade Turin to allow the ancillary image analysis work which should have accompanied the carbon dating, but which (as explained in the last Newsletter) Professor Gonella ultimately refused.

As previously remarked, *Newsletter* no. 20 will follow in the wake of the release of the true official results, due from Rome and the British Museum either at the end of this

month or early next. A BBC QED film, with new information on the Liverpool image, will be transmitted at around this same time.

Yours sincerely,
[signed]
Ian Wilson, B.S.T.S.