

Obituary - H. David Sox. 1st General Secretary of the BSTS 1936 - 2016 by Ian Wilson



David Sox (seated) and his partner Alan Offerman

Amongst longevity's more onerous chores is the writing of obituaries for those whom you have outlived - for me inclusive of some of those who have been most sceptical towards the Shroud's authenticity. Thankfully in the case of Dr. Walter McCrone, or Professor Edward Hall and of Professor Harry Gove I have felt able quite genuinely and sincerely to praise their professionalism and to speak of them kindly, despite the sharp differences in some of our opinions. Try as I might, however, such indulgence is altogether more difficult in the case of H. David Sox, formerly entitled the Revd. David Sox, first General Secretary of this Society.

David Sox was born in Hickory, North Carolina in 1936. Both his father Samuel and his grandfather Enoch were Church ministers, and Sox in his turn studied at a seminary before becoming ordained as an Episcopalian minister in 1961. After serving at chaplaincies in both New York City and San Francisco, in 1974 he moved to London to become a teacher at the American School in London's St. John's Wood. Soon after he involved himself with England's then very small world of individuals interested in the Shroud, including myself, and in early 1977 he hosted at his very plush Kensington apartment preliminary meetings for what would become this British Society for the Turin Shroud. Prominent in my recollection of the Kensington apartment is its immaculate order and glass cabinets containing expensive-looking *objets d'art*. Furthermore there was always a restrained but distinctive touch of the camp about Sox, both in his speech and his manner. Nevertheless only much later would it emerge that he was already living at this apartment with a fellow American, Allan Offermann, who would be his partner throughout the rest of his life. With hindsight such a lifestyle choice may well have a bearing on the surprising closeness that Sox claimed to the Shroud's then owner, ex-king Umberto II of Italy, whose

leanings of a similar kind have been independently noted. In his 1988 book *The Shroud Unmasked* Sox declared he 'came to know' king Umberto as early as 1976, and 'visited with him' at his Villa Italia in Cascais, Portugal 'many times until his [Umberto's] death in 1983.'

Back in the late 1970s Sox's skills at inveigling himself into exalted and influential company seemed to be entirely beneficial to Shroud interests. Thus in June 1977, on his own initiative, and inspired only by an article that he had read in *Time* magazine, Sox penned these opening words to Professor Gove, U.S.-based inventor of the then brand-new 'AMS' method of radiocarbon dating that would ultimately be used on the Shroud:

Dear Prof. Gove

I write this in strictest confidence. You may know about the Turin Shroud or not. A great deal of very quiet diplomacy has been going on in hopes to have it carbon dated using small samples which have already been removed for other purposes. I have been involved in this process and Dr. Walter McCrone has been a valuable contact. Under no circumstances would I want him to know that I have approached you.

Four months later, again in very large measure due to Sox's ever personable and energetic diplomacy, there came into being the first ever London Symposium on the Shroud, held at the Institute of Christian Studies, St Margaret Street, London, with a panel of speakers that today would be positively galactic. These included war hero Group Captain Leonard Cheshire VC, whose writings on the Shroud were my first introduction to the subject; Anglican Bishops Hugh Montefiore and John (*Honest to God*) Robinson, Don Piero Coero-Borga, director of Turin's Centro Internazionale di Sindonologia; Drs. John Jackson and Eric Jumper, Chicago-based microscopist Dr Walter McCrone; Swiss criminologist Dr Max Frei - plus a certain young David Rolfe and Ian Wilson. Directly from this event the British Society for the Turin Shroud sprang formally into being with Leonard Cheshire as its Chairman and Sox as its first General Secretary.

Yet while in the earliest stages Sox seemed to be the model supporter of the Shroud's authenticity, as early as January 1979 the first cracks began to appear. Conveying something of the climate of subterfuge and the clandestine that was Sox's modus operandi is a letter that Leonard Cheshire sent to me on the 22nd of that month:

“A couple of people have just spoken to me in the course of the last few days about some comments attributed to David in his capacity as Secretary of the Society. I do not have the literal quote, but the

allegation is that he has been strongly attacking the Shroud Authorities in Turin. This I gather is both an attack in general and in particular regarding the carbon 14 test. If this is true, what do we as a Society feel? Our policy has always been to retain good relations with Turin and to conduct any differences of opinion in a friendly and objective way. Clearly David has every right to speak as he likes as an individual, but if it is true that he has done this by inference in the name of the Society I think we have a right to have been consulted in advance."

Less than two years later the cracks had widened markedly. This was from a letter that I sent to Leonard Cheshire on 17 December 1980:

*"You will know already something of the findings of Walter McCrone....Originally there was to have been a joint article by Dr. McCrone, David Sox and myself in the Sunday Times to coincide with the time Walter McCrone released his official report on the Shroud. Then a month ago Walter McCrone wrote to me suggesting that I might write his part for him, with an additional contribution from David Sox. A copy of this letter was sent to David who would seem to have made his own arrangements with the Sunday Times, specifically excluding any contribution from me. At around the same time David Sox asked to resign from the Society, without any proper explanation, but suggesting that members might not like the critical stance he takes in his book *The Image on the Shroud* due to be published January 18 [1981]. Quite what is afoot is uncertain. I have been told by some individuals that David has told them he no longer believes in the authenticity of the Shroud. To me he has denied this, but remains extremely secretive about the contents of his book, and I can only view this with suspicion."*

In the event such concerns proved justified. The release of Sox's *The Image on the Shroud* served to widely publicise Dr. Walter McCrone's finding of traces of iron oxide and other artists' pigments on sticky tapes that the 1978 STURP scientific team had applied to various points on the Shroud's surface. These findings Sox increasingly asserted to be clear evidence that the Shroud's image was by the hand of an artist, dismissively telling a London *Observer* reporter:

"So far as I am concerned, if the existence of paint is proved, that is the end of the shroud as a miraculous object."

But this dramatic volte-face in his affiliations, cloaked as it was in such an atmosphere of subterfuge and intrigue, would prove a mere curtain raiser to the yet more clandestine part that Sox would play in the key event that he himself had set in train by his 1977 letter to Professor Harry Gove: the 1988

carbon dating of the Shroud. As is well known, a single sliver of linen was cut from the Shroud on 21 April 1988 and samples from it apportioned to three radiocarbon dating laboratories, Arizona, Zurich and Oxford, all of which used Gove's AMS method. The laboratories' relevant scientific personnel were all bound by a strict agreement not to disclose their findings to anyone prior to a collective announcement that was to be made under the overall auspices of London's British Museum once the results from all three laboratories had been properly collated.

The first laboratory to run its sample was Arizona, on 6 May, 1988 and from the timing of what followed all the indications are that it has to have been someone from this American laboratory who first breached the confidentiality agreement. Yet instead of the breach manifesting in the United States, it did so in London, with a 'gossip' piece by socialite Kenneth Rose in the *Sunday Telegraph's* "Albany at Large" column. Neatly described in his 2014 obituary as 'unencumbered by wife and family', on July 3, 1988 Rose intimated that 'in spite of the intense secrecy surrounding the investigation I hear signs that the linen cloth has been proved to be medieval'. The Oxford laboratory quickly quashed the immediate suppositions that the leak must have come from them, pointing out that because of technical glitches they had not yet processed its Shroud sample. Then, with the fuss barely abated, on 27 July the BBC transmitted a *Timewatch* documentary 'Shreds of Evidence', leaning heavily towards the Shroud being found to be of medieval date, and with one single 'expert' consultant: David Sox.

A month later the London *Evening Standard* ran as its front page lead story '*Shroud of Turin Really is a Fake*'. Astonishingly, the 'authority' behind the story was Dr Richard Luckett, Pepys Librarian of Magdalene College, Cambridge, a lifelong bachelor academic with no known previous connection to the Shroud, or to carbon dating. According to what Luckett told the *Standard*: 'a probable date of 1350 looks likely' and 'laboratories are rather leaky institutions', On my telephoning Luckett directly and after some preliminary courtesies asking him point-blank if his source had been David Sox he very hastily changed the subject.

Six weeks later the fact that Sox already had substantial and longstanding insider knowledge concerning the Shroud carbon dating, and had been the source of at least some of the leaking, became confirmed beyond all doubt. On 18 September the London *Sunday Times* carried a front page headline 'Official: Turin Shroud is a Fake' - this despite the fact that the accompanying story carried no authority from Professor Edward Hall, head of the Oxford laboratory or from the British Museum's Dr. Michael Tite,

both of whom directly confirmed to me that it had not come from them. When I duly complained to the *Sunday Times'* Editor the newspaper's Science correspondent phoned me specifically in order to justify his use of the word 'Official'. He admitted that Sox had been his source, Sox's own original source of information evidently being sufficiently reliable that already printed and on the desk in front of the Science correspondent was an advance copy of Sox's book *The Shroud Unmasked: Uncovering the Greatest Forgery of All Time*, evidently awaiting publication the instant that the carbon dating laboratories formally released their findings

Whoever it was at the Arizona laboratory who may have leaked the C14 result to Sox, and why, can of course only be guessed at. Circumstantial evidence may suggest the laboratory's computer guru Timothy Linick. Linick's half brother Anthony was a fellow-teacher of Sox's at the American School in London. On p.147 of *Unmasked* Sox quoted directly from Timothy Linick: 'If we show the material to be medieval that would definitely mean that it is not authentic...' Disquietingly, and notably a mere ten weeks' after the carbon dating results were published under his and the other Arizona scientists' names in the prestigious science journal *Nature*, Linick died in mysterious circumstances, possibly suicide. All that Sox would disclose to me, on my questioning him prior to the release of the C14 results, was that he 'thought' he knew the result by a 'fluke'...

During the last few years of his life - after four decades of living in London - Sox and his partner Alan Offermann moved back to the States, to Palm Springs in California, where he died after a short battle with colon cancer on 28 August 2016. A *bon viveur* with some undeniable wit and charm, Sox is to be condemned neither for his choice of lifestyle nor for his change of mind on the Shroud's authenticity. What is indefensible is the utterly underhand, squalid and self-serving way that he behaved with the insider knowledge that he had gained - by whatever means - concerning a very high profile scientific test that, because of its religious sensitivity, deserved only the most impeccable standards of integrity from all involved. And such behaviour was particularly disgraceful coming from a man who, for part of his life at least, styled himself 'Revd.'. For this reason, and only for this reason, this obituary must count as by far the most negative and distasteful that I have ever written. As Editor David Rolfe is aware, I have done so very reluctantly, and only because I am one of the very few to have been in a position to know at least some of the most salient facts. The rest Sox took with him to his grave...

Editor's Note: In this day and age it is no longer appropriate to draw any inferences from an individual's sexuality. However, the life and period in question goes way back to well before this day and age. For David Sox's first

30 years homosexuals had to disguise their very nature as the practise was illegal in the UK. It is not surprising, therefore, that a chameleon-like persona might develop purely in self-defence. However, in retrospect it is evident to me that Sox, as far as the Shroud is concerned, was, for want to a better description, a “double agent”, determined, behind the scenes, on discrediting it and using his “supportive insider” status as a cover.

*When (as described in my article on page 4 of this Newsletter) I withdrew from the project to film the Shroud’s C14 test because the protocols were abandoned, Sox stepped in and offered his services to the BBC. Under his “consultancy” the film’s narration used the most deceptive language to disguise the fact that key protocols had been abandoned. Viz. Narrator: **“If the samples look similar, none of the labs will know which is the Shroud.”** At the time this was written Sox already knew that the samples **did not and could not** look similar. He allowed the viewer to believe that the Labs had indeed performed the test blind. This was untrue and he knew it.*

The Shroud’s pedigree comes in for plenty of questioning and undermining from its avowed detractors and sceptics. That’s fair enough. However, it seems that the Shroud’s reputation has suffered most from those who were entrusted to treat it fairly but could not, for their own private reasons, bring themselves to do so. D.R.

An Osseous Remain [sic] on the Face of the Turin Shroud
G. Lucotte and T. Thomasser
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Review by Hugh Farey

The latest offering from Professor Gérard Lucotte, seventh in his series of accounts of his electron microscope researches into the debris on a single square millimetre of sticky tape, describes a piece of bone. Under a microscope, even a scanning electron microscope, the little blob, about 5 µm across, resembles a shapeless lump of semolina (“fine (100nm-1µm) well-delimited micrograms”). Identification depends not on its appearance, but on the very fine probe Energy Dispersive X-Ray (EDX) spectroscopy analysis of a spot in the middle of the top surface. This revealed Calcium and Phosphorus in exactly the correct proportions for bone, together with Chlorine which the authors attribute to salt, and an organic component. At one edge of the blob the organic component was much enhanced, suggesting the presence of cartilaginous connective tissue. There was also an abnormal (1%) proportion of lead. Remarkably, Lucotte claims he was able to compare his findings with an earlier investigation of a fragment of bone from Mary Magdalen, finding them a reasonable match. Unusually for Prof. Lucotte, he specifically mentions “the man whose face image is imprinted on the Turin Shroud” and suggests that his bone fragment may originate in a fracture of the nose. This is quite a departure from the scientific distance he normally keeps from subjective discussion.