

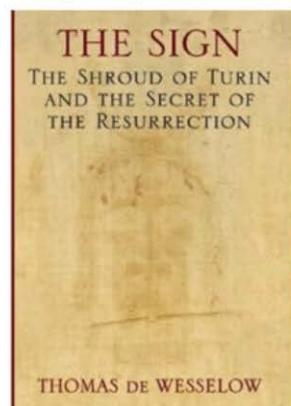


## BSTS and the Future

Above is a snapshot of a very select group of the membership taken in 2012. I am not certain what the total membership of the Society was then, but you may be looking at around 10% of them. However, thanks to Brenda and Stuart Benton who manage our circulation I can tell you that we are now at 185 with a readership larger and growing fast. Our membership is international with more members from overseas than the UK.

This rare gathering was held in Beaconsfield in Buckinghamshire and had assembled for a talk given by Thomas De Wesselow (Front row second from right). To his left is Reggie Norton, former treasurer and stalwart of the Society, to his right is me then Pam Moon. Second row far right is Antony Luby who had travelled down from Scotland. We did not take a register so there my ability to name check ends. I hope everyone else present is well and remain members. It would be good hear from you if you are.

Thomas De Wesselow, MA, PhD is a Cambridge based expert on renaissance art and had developed something of an obsession with the Shroud. He had just published what became an international “bestseller” on the subject entitled “*The Sign*”. This was a brave thing for an academic to do as he acknowledged that the subject was (and remains) “toxic” in academic circles. So, why did he? “*Try as I might I just couldn’t resist it as an intellectual puzzle...I am an art historian, not a theologian, so I can approach the problem from a new angle.*”



Thomas gave us a very detailed, well-illustrated and persuasive lecture on why the Shroud could not be what the C14 verdict proclaimed i.e. the product of a forger or anyone else from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The lecture was filmed and is available here<sup>22</sup>.

So, what *was* the image then? Here it started to become clear just why he had decided to venture into this “toxic” territory. In conversation with me he revealed he had a Christian upbringing but then, like the Bishop of Durham, repudiated the idea of a “literal” resurrection. His studies of the Shroud as a possible renaissance “art” object had made him aware of the “Maillard reaction” theory proposed by the highly respected Shroud scientist and member of STURP, Ray Rogers. In short, this states that the Shroud image may have been created “naturally” by the same chemical process that turns bread and meat brown when subjected to heat. To quote the conclusion from the paper by Rogers and Arnoldi published on [www.shroud.com](http://www.shroud.com):

“We can now formally propose a completely natural hypothesis for image formation. Impurities in ancient linen could have been suspended by the surfactant property of a Saponaria officinalis washing solution and they would be concentrated at the cloth surface by evaporation. Reducing saccharides would react rapidly with the amine decomposition products of a dead body. This hypothesis is the first one, which can explain the very peculiar distribution of colour on the Shroud fibres. Such a natural image-production process would support the hypothesis that the Shroud of Turin had been a real shroud. However, these observations do not prove how the image was formed or the “authenticity” of the shroud.”

Tom was an art expert and not qualified to assess the plausibility of the above hypothesis. (NB. To date no one has succeeded in replicating a recognisable or meaningful image of any sort using these principles and none are known to exist. To be fair, no one has actually tried except a documentary team’s inconclusive experimentation. You can view Barrie Schwortz’s account of this event here: <http://bitly.ws/8Mmo>).

However, the concept of a potential natural explanation for the Shroud’s image fired Tom’s imagination and, though he did not venture into this in his lecture, his book’s final chapters and its overarching purpose argue that the Shroud, and its “accidentally” produced natural image was, itself, regarded as *The Sign* from God the disciples had every reason to expect if Jesus was who he said he was.

<sup>22</sup> <https://vimeo.com/117793165>

So, according to Tom's theory, the tomb was not "empty". Jesus's body lay there dead and covered by the Shroud. What amazed the women and gave rise to Christianity was not the absence of the body but the image they saw on the Shroud when they removed it to wash the body. Jesus's body was left in the tomb to decompose as all Jewish burials of that time were before being transferred to an ossuary and eventual obscurity. According to Tom, Jesus's resurrection was in the ethereal form of a fluke, naturally occurring image on His Shroud.

The combination of Tom's academic credentials and the publicity machine of the Penguin publishing empire got Tom an international TV and radio tour. That is how the world works. Nevertheless, we must be grateful for Tom's demolition of any notion that the Shroud was what the C14 team branded it as so damningly. i.e. some form of 14<sup>th</sup> century "painting". Interestingly, regular readers of this journal will know that the "independent" invigilator of the C14 test, Prof. Michael Tite, has long since disavowed this theory himself stating that it probably did wrap the body of a crucifixion victim. But, obviously, a medieval one. Mmm... If you have yet to hear Tite articulate this, you can find it here: <http://bitly.ws/8MmM>.



The Society has had other events in recent times notably the talks Ian Wilson gave in Bristol and Leeds on his 2018 visit to the UK from his home in Australia.

The question I want to ask is - how much more can we do? And why should we do it now? By the end of this year we will be, by the common consent of most historians, a dozen years from the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event that created the Shroud. I hate to say this but knowing the average age of the majority of our members, Shroud scholars and Shroud-interested persons generally, notwithstanding the current ravages of the coronavirus, unless we do something about it this anniversary may well arrive with very few able to step up and proclaim both the injustice done to the Shroud by the C14 test and what it may represent at that auspicious time.

It was a bunch of ordinary Galileans, men and women, not unlike, for their time, those in the picture at the top of this article. Look what they achieved. If all 185 current

subscribers made it a goal to recruit *just one* other person, (preferably a younger one), for each issue between now and 2033, we would have a body of just under 350,000! At current average subscription rates this would provide an annual income of £7m. More realistically, perhaps, if we hit only 5% of that target it would still amount to a subscriber base of 17,500 and revenue of £350k per annum. Think what we could do with that.

We have a great core team in place, Brenda and Stuart Benton on circulation, Philippa Foster on distribution and now a former professional accountant (Rev. Philip Moon) as treasurer. Please consider coming to join us. There is important work to do. We have a need for someone to look after publicity so if there is anyone with experience in that and/or PR I would love to hear from you. Anyone with experience of fundraising for a worthy cause would also be welcome.

I make no apology for making our journal a campaigning one. The BSTS will remain open to all well researched papers of integrity from whatever source. At one point we even appointed arch Shroud sceptic Hugh Farey as editor in the days when his own views appeared to be objective. Unfortunately, that changed when he published a paper on his own medieval theory on Academia<sup>23</sup>. It includes this crass optical illusion. Stare at the four dots in the middle for 20 seconds or so then switch your gaze to the blank space to the right.



Impressive, isn't it. But it is a cheap trick. It has absolutely no relevance to the image on the Shroud. What made it more offensive was Farey's styling of himself as "Former editor of the BSTS Newsletter." Only his promise to stop styling himself as such, remove the offending illusion, and correct the historical errors in his paper pointed out to him by former BSTS editor Mark Guscin, prevented him from being the first ever expulsion from the Society. The fact that his paper remains unaltered on Academia

<sup>23</sup> <http://bitly.ws/8MGh>

shows how misplaced our Society's tolerance was. Take a look at the face on the cover of this Journal. It needs no trickery to fool the eye. He gazes back at you - face to face.

Make no mistake. Any effort to restore the Shroud of Turin to a subject worthy again of serious academic study and which might lead to the contemplation of authenticity with all its implications is an anathema to the intellectual and academic establishment. This is why they turn a blind eye to the disingenuous and unscholarly efforts at denigration I have described.

I would argue that in the late 1980s, for a variety of reasons, the erosion of the Church's status as any kind of authoritative influence over secular matters – academic and scientific in particular - was hanging in the balance. To emphasise this state of affairs church attendance was also in decline. At the risk of overreaching let me confess a "Mea culpa". In the early 1980's I went to work at LWT, one of the UK's largest ITV companies. They had a very active unit making worthy documentaries on a variety of minority issues. In 1982 Channel 4 came on stream in the UK with a very specific remit.

To champion unheard voices. To innovate and take bold creative risks.

To drive innovation and take more risks than other channels. To inspire change in the way we lead our lives. To stand up for diversity across the UK.

Channel 4 would seek to commission most of its programmes from independent production companies. All in all, this has proved to be a very successful initiative and it spawned a legion of independent companies who have made the UK a world force in production.

At the beginning, there were very few such independent companies able to take on "ambitious" programmes as their costs could not be readily underwritten. So, it was often the existing ITV companies, LWT, Thames, Granada etc. that fulfilled this particular function. All these companies, along with the BBC, under legislation - or charter in the case of the BBC - had to submit any religious programming to a panel of bodies representing the religious establishment. Channel 4 would be free of such an obligation.

John Ranelagh was Channel 4's commissioning editor for religion and had voiced and interest in a programme on the "Historical Jesus". As I understand it, John Birt, then head of LWT, offered to make such a series for Channel 4. Rumour had it that he was motivated to do so by his education at the well-known bastion of Catholicism,

Ampleforth. Once this was known competition among producers within LWT to be appointed to make it was fierce. I made my pitch and, on the strength of my earlier BAFTA-winning film *The Silent Witness – An Investigation into the Shroud of Turin*" I got the job. Happily, LWT also accepted my recommendation for Ian Wilson to write the book to accompany the series.

Ian had introduced me to the Shroud as early as 1976 and that had triggered the great adventure of making the film. (An adventure that had me at the wrong end of a loaded gun on three occasions. But that's another story.) Little did either of us know in those pre-internet days just what else was going on around the world on Shroud research. Ian's historical and art detective work had produced the Mandylion connection and that had been enough to set in motion the financing of the film. Only then, and largely thanks to Peter Rinaldi, S.D.B., who Ian also introduced me to, did we become aware of it in time to include it in the project. The rest of that success story is now history. I digress.

My experience making *The Silent Witness* had taken me from atheism to confirmation. My experience making what became the 3-part series *Jesus - the Evidence* was to (almost) reverse the process. The researcher appointed to assist me on the series was Jean-Claude Braggard Ph.D. A couple of decades later he would go on to become Head of BBC TV Religion. He dived into the subject with all the unfettered academic rigour one would expect and, indeed, hope for. In the process, he discovered the huge gap that then existed between what academic theologians were discussing within their own somewhat cloistered and comfortable world and what they and the clergy they taught were actually preaching to the laity in the pews.

In short, many concurred with the German scholars typified by Bultmann and Albert Schweitzer which rendered anything we could be certain about the historical Jesus to very little indeed. And what we could know made him unrecognisable as the figure of popular conception.

As a recent convert, I was shocked to find this disparity, and, as I now understand, too "immature" in my faith to be able to reconcile this newly discovered gap between what the theologians preached to the laity and their own personal reconciliations with it. If you have a mind to you can view a clip from the film using the link at the end of this article.



**Jesus - The Evidence 1984**

*A reconstruction of the Council of Nicea*

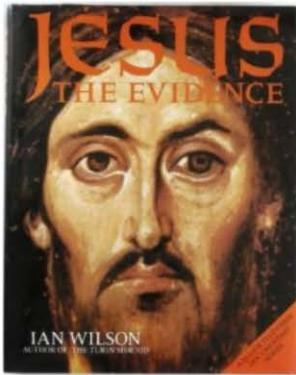
When it hit the screen at Easter 1984 it already had a storm of publicity around it thanks to a virulent campaign run by a youthful evangelical alliance. It did cause a storm.

<p><b>OUTRAGE AT TV SERIES</b> Church leaders slam 'evidence'</p> <p>Christians throughout Britain have slammed controversial London Weekend TV series,</p> <p><b>A call to boycott distasteful TV</b></p> <p>During the showing of the Channel Four series <i>Jesus - The Evidence</i>, we urged our readers and their churches to complain to advertisers whose commercials appeared next to the programmes. We enjoyed</p> <p><b>LWT series is blasted</b> By Cheryl Markosky</p>	<p><b>Vain bid to postpone TV series</b></p> <p><b>THE Conservative MP for d.n. Mr. Simon Coombs, in vain last week to postpone the showing of London Weekend Television's controversial documentary, "Jesus Evidence," in response to protests by constituents</b></p> <p>The first of three one-hour programmes went out last Saturday on Channel 4 in spite of a letter from Mr. Coombs, backed by a number of other MPs, a Chamber of Commerce and Mr. Bonner. The letter told Mr. Bonner</p> <p><b>Intent to shock denied</b></p> <p><b>THOSE who applaud the repeat of the Franco Zeffirelli film "Jesus of Nazareth" under the direction of David W. Rofe, maker of the memorable award-winning</b></p> <p><b>Plea for 6-month delay in showing of 'Jesus' series</b></p> <p><b>By Canon D. W. GUNDREY Churches Correspondent</b></p> <p><b>CHANNEL 4 has been asked by a group of</b></p>
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There were marches against the series as far away as the USA and New Zealand and the Queen, as Defender of the Faith, let it be known through the head of the IBA (Independent Broadcasting Authority) that she was not amused. (A detailed academic paper by Dr. Richard Wallis about this whole adventure can be found here: <http://bitly.ws/8Qh4> and one of the most controversial sequences can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/352056341> (Password: LWT1984)).

I accept that the film series had looked at the evidence and found the glass half-empty. Fortunately, Ian Wilson, with his much more mature faith and approach than mine, looked at the same evidence and found it half-full. I commend his book to you.

Some of the criticism of the series was justified. I had allowed my own somewhat naïve shock at what the research had revealed to colour the method of presentation though the facts about the then present theological “vogue” for want of a better word was accurate. This was revealed when the Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, was interviewed about the programme and revealed his own personal “non-literal” take on the resurrection. (Shortly after, you may remember, he was appointed Bishop of York and lightning struck the tower.)



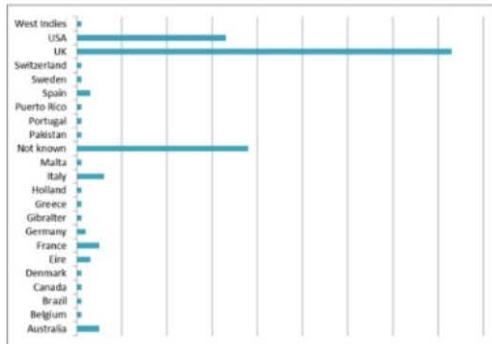
Why am I telling you all this? I am trying to recapture a sense of the public’s evolving perception of the authority to be placed in the hands of the Bible and the Church as opposed to the secular world and academia in particular at this time. Why did the Church decide around that particular time, of all times, to submit the Shroud to a Carbon 14 test? Graphs indicate that the downward direction of the line depicting church attendance was getting steeper. The success of Ian’s Shroud book and *The Silent Witness*, particularly in Italy, had been a big boost for the Shroud. The evidence presented *was* compelling. Might a positive 2000-year-old C14 date do something to turn the tide?

Imagine, for one moment, the C14 test had produced a 2000-year-old dating of the Shroud. While some detractors would have clung to the fact that you could not be certain the victim was Jesus as there were thousands of crucifixion victims, they would have been in a very tenuous position. There is no doubt in my mind that it would have been a huge boost for the Church and a “rebalancing” for want of a better word of the historical “battle” between Science and Faith dating from Galileo through to Darwin. The last thing the bastions of secular academia wanted to see was such a reversal of fortunes. Ignoring Deuteronomy 6:16, and Matthew 4:7 - “*Do not put the Lord your God to the test,*” the Church decided to “Roll the dice.”

By standing aside and appointing the British Museum to be the independent invigilators of the test they made sure that, whatever the result, no one could accuse the Church of meddling with or influencing the result in any way. They also had every expectation

that the process would be conducted fairly. How wrong they were! If you have not yet seen the film I made with Pam Moon about the whole process then please view it here: <https://vimeo.com/326801807>. Feel free to download it and share it with as many as you can. That is what it is for. Hopefully you can use it as a method of recruitment for our society.

I am delighted to say that we have a new treasurer to succeed Benedict Lawrence who has stood down after a number of years and returned to his native India. He will be succeeded by Rev. Phil Moon who, prior to becoming ordained, was an accountant so we remain in very good hands.



We will take advantage of the situation to enable us to be more formally constituted and to reflect the fact that our Society has become truly international in scope and be able to grow and take our message and “mission” further and faster.

Your support of our Society is not just a subscription to another magazine. It is a vote for justice and, hopefully, a pledge to do whatever you can within your own power and sphere of influence to put the Jesus of Nazareth who walked on Earth, was crucified and rose again back where He belongs to the millions who need him most. Let us imagine, for a moment, that The Shroud of Turin might just be the means that was intended to do this - 2000 years on. Even if the chances of this being so were remote would it not be worth taking that chance? And doing whatever within our power to make it so?

David Rolfe.

Editor of the Newsletter of the British Society for the Turin Shroud.

July 2020.