

As the second article in my new ‘Paradoxical Documents’ series, written exclusively for this Newsletter, I had hoped to provide BSTS members, in this Winter issue, with a long and privileged preview of some of the first results from what I call ‘Project Charny’. However – and indirectly as a result of the pandemic - this article has needed to be deferred until the next issue.

Project Charny, first announced in this Newsletter back in 2012, was conceived largely as a leisure pursuit upon my retirement as a working author. The intention was a long-term trawl through all known original documents pertaining to Geoffroi de Charny, the fourteenth century French knight at the heart of the Shroud historical mystery on the off chance of coming across some overlooked document that might shed new light on how, when, where and from whom the Shroud came under his care. During the years since some very significant (and positive), findings have been achieved, often in quite unexpected ways. Some of these findings will change the way that we need to think about future approaches to the Shroud’s history. Others will overturn certain theoretically long established ‘facts’ even relating to the Shroud’s supposedly firm history from the 1350s on. My new ‘Paradoxical Documents’ series will gradually introduce and explain these matters in the course of the next two or three years.

However, intended for this Newsletter was a lengthy article on Geoffroi de Charny’s poem known as the **Livre**, or **Livre Charny**, i.e. ‘Charny’s Book’. Written in a medieval French that is difficult for any non-specialist to fully comprehend, this 1,937-line poem has not seemed to include any reference to the Shroud, and French literati have mostly scorned it as of low literary worth, resulting in it never previously having been translated into English or indeed any other modern language, including French. However, because it seemed to contain some autobiographical snippets, and its strongly pious elements promised some potentially important insights on Charny’s religious mindset, eight years ago I decided to attempt at least a rudimentary translation, a task for which Hugh Duncan (already well-known for his contributions to this Newsletter), very generously volunteered his help, aided by his colleagues at the International School of Nice.

Gradually a translation of sorts became achieved, although this was often clumsy, and the exact meaning of a number of passages continued to elude us. Most unexpectedly, however, two long overlooked manuscripts of the poem came to light that turned out to be original to Charny’s lifetime, datable to a single year. These revealed insights on his life and writings that although they are of significance for the history of the Shroud, are of more immediate importance for specialist historians and literary scholars, correcting their current understandings of Charny’s life and writings in a number of absolutely fundamental ways.

These new insights not only needed to be written up in a suitable academic form that would satisfy an ultra-critical academic readership, they also needed to gain acceptance

and publication either by a university press or by an independent academic publisher of the highest calibre. In 2018 such acceptance came from Dr Richard Barber, co-founder of the highly respected publishing company Boydell & Brewer, which specialises in books on medieval history and literature. Furthermore, Dr Barber most valuably introduced into the project the highly experienced Nigel Bryant, a translator of medieval French widely acclaimed for his published translations of several Arthurian romances and chronicles, also the biographies of William Marshal and Bertrand du Guesclin.

So has come into being – and as I approach my eightieth birthday - my first-ever book directed specifically and uncompromisingly to an academic audience: **The Book of Charny with the *Livre Poem* edited and translated by Nigel Bryant**. Originally this was scheduled to be published at the end of this current year, in which circumstance this Winter issue would have contained the long article fully exploring Charny's *Livre* poem and explaining its implications for better understanding Charny's involvement in the Shroud's history. However, largely due to difficulties caused by the coronavirus pandemic, which has seriously slowed the process of obtaining illustrations and permissions from major libraries, the book's publication has been deferred until April 2021. A full disclosure of its findings in this Winter issue would therefore have been too early, hence its deferment until the Summer, when the book will already be in print.

In the interim members can look up the advance notices of the book at <https://boybrew.co/Charny> on Boydell's website. The yet to be posted cover will be of interest in its own right. Because the book is academic, its price is characteristically high (with equally characteristically, not a cent of it going the author!). However, any members who are interested can take advantage of a 35% pre-publication discount by ordering direct from Boydell, either by using offer code BB135 at the website checkout or by calling Boydell & Brewer's distributor, Wiley, on 01248 843 291. BSTS subscribers in the USA can call Casemate on 610-853-9131. Needing to be said upfront is that only six pages specifically discuss Charny's involvement with the Shroud; nevertheless, they are a game-changing six pages.

Furthermore, what cannot be emphasised enough is the ground-breaking nature of Nigel Bryant's translation of the *Livre* poem, and how important this is bound to be for future Shroud studies, in particular for its insights on Charny's mindset, irrespective of whatever opinion anyone may hold on the Shroud's authenticity or otherwise. Hugh Duncan and I, in our struggles with Charny's medieval French, had tried as hard as we could to maintain a line-by-line translation of the verse. Even so, matching the rhyme was impossible from the outset, and an exact meaning often remained obscure. When Nigel Bryant came onto the scene he forthrightly set aside any such endeavours in favour of translating the poem into straight, continuous prose, and with astonishingly successful results. It is as if the gulf of six and a half centuries has been swept aside and we find ourselves sitting side-by-side with a remarkably candid and self-deprecating

Charny who is sharing with us all the hardships, the perils and in particular, the embarrassments of pursuing a career as a tournament performer, a professional soldier and a crusader. For a battle-toughened warrior Charny's unassuming piety, likewise his transparent integrity, is extraordinary. As Nigel Bryant has remarked, there is nothing else quite like the poem in all medieval literature – yet this is the man who stands at the very heart of the Shroud historical controversy, whether as complicit in a massive fraud, or as somehow the acquirer of a perennially enigmatic relic that even in his lifetime was already more than thirteen centuries old...

\*\*\*\*\*

I am very pleased to welcome to our team as Deputy Editor, Canon Andrew Willie. We share five decades of fascination with the Shroud, both of us triggered by Ian Wilson's pioneering research which resulted in Ian's own best-selling book, *The Turin Shroud* and my film, *The Silent Witness*. Andrew has published his own short book on the Shroud which is informed by his lifetime of priestly experience. It is a delightfully concise, insightful, and multi-dimensional read. It is fulsomely endorsed by Dr. Rowan Williams and others and also has a wonderfully eclectic bibliography. It is available through the BSTS for just £10 including postage within the UK. Send a cheque for £10 made out to British Society for the Turin Shroud to: The Treasurer, BSTS, Brewood Vicarage, Sandy Lane, Brewood, Stafford, ST19 9ET. You will not be disappointed.

David Rolfe, Editor, BSTS Newsletter.