

Shroud of Turin Exhibition

All Saints Church, Rockwell Green, Somerset

Millions of people believe the Turin Shroud is the burial cloth of Jesus but for others, it raises many questions. An exhibition covering all aspects of this enigmatic cloth recently took place in the very beautiful All Saints Church of Rockwell Green, Somerset. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that arrangements for this event had been long in the making, two years in fact, but through the hard work and determination of a small group of parishioners led by Tony and Angela Setter, exhibition owner Pam Moon was finally able to turn their dreams into reality on Friday 10th September.

Just as we were finishing setting up the exhibition displays, we witnessed a very moving experience as an early visitor turned up at the church, which Pam has related below:

"Phil and I, with Michael and Lynne, set up the Shroud exhibition at Rockwell Green in Somerset on Tuesday, a great day, with beautiful weather and wonderful hospitality from our hosts. Late in the afternoon, a young woman walked into the church after the set up. She said, "I've never been in this church before." Then a little tentatively she said, "Can I look around?" By the time she had read the boards on the Passion she was in tears. At the same time a butterfly flew into the church and the most extraordinary pool of red light fell onto the black and white image of Christ. A luminescent glow started at the spear wound, worked its way across the heart and then surrounded the crown of thorns like a crimson halo. I've seen some wonderful effects on stained glass windows before, but nothing like this!"



Installing exhibition information boards

On seeing the lady sitting in front of the black and white image of Jesus clearly upset, Lynne offered her a tissue and a glass of water. She said that her faith had been lost for a long time and felt that she was called to the Church. At this point we let her know that a butterfly had entered the Church with her. Her face lit up and it seemed that hope entered her heart, we spoke briefly and she ended up staying for the talk. There really are no words when you witness something like this."

The sun shone brightly during this four-day event which saw over four hundred visitors

pass through the doors to see the various artefacts, images and information boards, as well as the centrepiece of the exhibition: a full-sized replica of the Turin Shroud. A hundred of these visitors were children from the local Rockwell Green Primary School. With bags of curiosity, awe and wonder, along with many inquisitive and brilliant questions they were led through the Passion and the Easter Story, but more of that later!

Although many of the visitors lived locally, some had travelled great distances to attend the event. There were even visitors from overseas, including a lady from Texas, USA and a young man who lived in Berlin, Germany. The exhibition also welcomed a few of our local BSTS members. People came for very personal reasons and several chose to sit quietly in reflection – occasionally in tears – as they looked and connected to the face of Jesus.

For our hosts Angela and Tony Setter, who had twice had to postpone plans for this exhibition due to lockdowns caused by the pandemic, the wait had all been worthwhile.

“Tony and I stood back in awe at the transformation our Church had just undergone, there in front of the Altar was the full-length replica of the Turin Shroud, we noted the bloodstained cloth, the pitting over 120 marks made by the scourging, the nail marks through the wrists and heels, here truly was someone who had given up his life to save us. His Love shone through.



Exhibition visitors in front of the full-sized Shroud of Turin replica

We have all been through such a traumatic time over the last months with Covid, I hope we have all learnt more than we have ever done before about simple love, giving and receiving help not only from family and neighbours but strangers too. I was one who experienced months of shielding and for me the black and white dorsal image of Christ was saying ‘My peace I now give to you’.

On the incredible painting by Andrew Smith depicting Christ crucified, which Pam kindly brought as part of the exhibition, our morning visitors saw it transformed by external light. As the light streamed in there were tiny gaps in the canvas at the point of the spear wound on Christ’s body. As the light shone through these apertures it looked like beads of sweat. Then on the Sunday after the service we witnessed the light shining through the whole canvas and the frame on which the painting was placed reflected a cross in exactly the position of Jesus’ body. And

this phenomenon alone moved many.

We will never know the effect this exhibition has had on individuals, but for Tony and I we are so grateful that it has brought people of all faiths and some with no faith at all together to share this amazing experience”.

As Angela and Pam’s experiences demonstrate, many people were drawn to the exhibition but some of the most enjoyable discussions we had were with the children from Rockwell Green Primary School. Their headmaster had warned that the attention span of these children would probably be only 20 to 30 minutes but this was far from the case! In fact, every class that attended stayed for nearly an hour and the children remained fully engaged, with the teachers having to stop the flow of questions as they rounded them up to leave. Some of the children even brought their parents over the weekend to see the exhibition! The headmaster also attended one of these sessions and left a lovely comment: *“An incredible ‘Awe and Wonder’ experience where the children were able to investigate, ask questions and develop curiosity, thank you”.*

We had the most wonderful questions and reactions from the children as they explored the exhibits in their small groups. One memorable incident took place in front of the full-sized Shroud replica. When the group was asked, “Can anyone see the face on the Shroud?”, a little hand shot up in the air as fast as lightning as a boy with wide eyed expression jumped-up, saying, *“I can! I can!”*. We invited him to show everyone and with his hand still stretched up in the air and his little eyes popping out of his head, he rushed over and proudly pointed out the face on the cloth. When the other children responded with a *“WOW!”* his face lit up. The same little boy was equally excited by the sight of the full-sized image of the Tomb.

The children asked many, many questions and there is a very famous saying that comes to mind: ‘Out of the mouths of babes!’ One of our favourite questions was, *“What’s God’s Dad called?”* and another, *“What did God do before he made everything?”*.

There were many people, including Rev. Martin Beaumont, who generously volunteered their time, from helping with the set up and take-down of the displays and providing a beautiful menu of refreshments, to guiding people around the exhibits. They created a real sense of a community working to make the event a success and we will warmly remember the time we spent working alongside them.

Visitors Comments

To close this short summary of our special time at All Saints Church Rockwell Green, we’d like to share some of the visitor’s comments:

Nicky from Taunton – *“This has renewed my Christian Faith”*

Philippa from Wellington – *“I found the image of the face of Christ very moving”*

Jude, Bradford West Yorkshire – *“Emotional”*

Wendy from Yeovil – *“So glad I came- always wanted to see the Shroud and this came very close. What else could it be? But the Shroud of Jesus”*

Brian from Wellington – *“Very thought provoking, very good exhibition”*

A.S., Dallas Texas USA – *“Excellent exhibition! The visual aids brought an entire historic event to life! Thank you”*

Anon – *“Very well laid out exhibition. Such an interesting subject shown with grace in a beautiful setting”*



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