

The Silent Witness II

David Rolfe

Rageh Unwraps the Shroud

The Shroud had never been far from my thought ever since I made my first film on the subject way back in 1976 – The Silent Witness. It spoilt me for documentary projects. Never again would I find a subject so deep and so full of mystery. And believe me I tried – nothing came close. So imagine my delight when John Jackson invited me to Colorado to see some of the fruits of his team’s work over the last couple of decades. That was the spur to try again and get something off the ground and a few months ago – to mark the 20th anniversary of the C14 test – the BBC commissioned me to make a new film. The presenter will be Rageh Omaar who came to fame on the roof tops of Baghdad where he reported the war for the BBC. He now picks his projects and I am delighted to say that he has picked this one.

The world has not exactly been starved of Shroud docs over the last few years. All the digital channels – the History Channel, Discovery, PBS and some other independents have all had a crack. The producer of one of them – which majored on the Leonardo da Vinci theory to the exclusion of virtually everything else – reveals something of the problem the subject faces. When told that the da Vinci theory was simply untenable she said – and I quote: “I know, but it’s such a great story.”

Well, in my experience, you do not need to make stuff up to tell a good story about the Shroud. The problem is that – thanks to C14 – there are now a couple of generations that know virtually nothing about the subject. This means, inevitably, recapping material that the readers of this journal will be familiar with so please bear with it as I hope you will be in for some interesting surprises by the time the film finishes. I also need to avoid some of the debates that are fascinating to Shroudies but somewhat esoteric to those blissfully unaware of the Shroud’s existence.

The new film will be in High Definition and this is excellent news when so much of the really interesting stuff is in the minutiae of the fibrils. It will be my first production in this new and technically demanding medium. The effort and expense is surely worth it having seen the first rushes.

Our schedule will take in Oxford and the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art. Dr. Christopher Ramsey who now heads it was a student there when the Shroud was tested. He brings a personal recollection of that fateful event for the Shroud in modern times. He will cast his eye over some new attempts to see if there could have been anything awry.

We will also be filming in the States, Jerusalem and, of course, Turin. When I made The Silent Witness Father Peter Rinaldi was there to help and make things possible. I am delighted to say that we are fortunate in having the assistance of Bruno Barberis to advise and assist in opening up the whole subject.

So, with much anticipation and some trepidation, filming has begun. I would like to think that we might have the same impact that greeted *The Silent Witness* thirty years ago. Coming out at Easter it created a worldwide sensation and was sold to almost every country around the world within a very short time. I cannot complain at the slot designated for the programme: 9:00pm on Easter Saturday on BBC2. I hope I have said enough to make you set your recorders.

Further news about the programme will emerge on: www.performancefilms.co.uk.