

The Silent Witness II
By Brenda Benton (BSTS Member)

It was with great expectation that I prepared to watch the Shroud of Turin programme shown on BBC TV on Easter Saturday. I was not disappointed, in fact, the programme far exceeded my expectations. The effect it had upon me was as profound as the one I had when I first became aware of the Turin Shroud through the film, "The Silent Witness," in 1978. This was a life changing experience that happened a few months before the death of our only child, who was just 3 years old. I was so moved by the reality of Christ's suffering and this helped me to come to terms with our loss. Since joining the Shroud Society in 1998 I have kept up to date with the ongoing work of many dedicated people who have given their lives to study the mystery of the Shroud. I have not always understood all of the scientific data I have read in the magazine, but this programme explained it in a way I could easily understand. It was like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fitting into place. As I watched the programme it evoked so many memories that inspired and encouraged me. It also gave me new insights on which to ponder. I would like to thank the programme makers, and all those who were involved in the making of it, for giving me a wonderful record of my experiences over the past 30 years. This programme was made with a sensitivity and reverence we rarely see today. Rageh Omar was the perfect choice to present this deeply moving programme. Congratulations to everyone involved.

A Review of the Recent BBC Shroud Documentary

By Barrie Schwartz

As you may have noticed, the Shroud has been in the news a great deal in the past few months. Although it is typically in the news during the Lenten season each year, this recent publicity is due mainly to the premiere of a new BBC documentary about the Shroud titled: Shroud of Turin - Material Evidence. The program, produced and directed by David Rolfe, the director of the the award-winning 1978 Shroud documentary, The Silent Witness, aired in the U.K. on BBC2 on Easter Sunday, March 23, 2008.

Since the film has not yet aired in North America, I have been unable to include any detailed information about the program on the website. I did mention it last year (see the 2007 Website News page <http://www.shroud.com/late07.htm#film>) and there was an article by David Rolfe about the program in the December 2007 Issue (<http://www.shroud.com/pdfs/n66part4.pdf>) of the BSTS Newsletter . However, I have received hundreds of e-mails asking me for details about the new program and its controversial content. Fortunately, David sent me a DVD so I could view the program myself and write a review for the website. It is still unknown when the program will air here in North America, or on which network, but I will post that information on the website as soon as it becomes available. In the meantime, here is my personal review of the program.

The program is hosted by Rageh Omaar, a television journalist who, according to Rolfe, "came to fame on the roof tops of Baghdad where he reported the war for the BBC." Although he will not be familiar to American audiences, his articulate delivery and his intelligent style make him a credible presenter on the subject. And the program was filmed using the latest high definition video technology (although I only viewed a standard definition version on the DVD I received).

The lead-in to the program immediately addresses the controversial radiocarbon dating of the Shroud that took place in 1988. A dating that concluded the Shroud was manufactured between 1260 and 1390. It then suggests that new evidence that has called the 1988 dating into question will be revealed in the program. We are then taken to the Turin Cathedral where the Shroud is permanently stored, and where Rageh reveals to us that the Turin authorities have granted permission for the Shroud to be filmed exclusively for the program, thus providing the viewer with the opportunity to see the Shroud in high definition video for the first time. Rolfe takes us behind the scenes of the high definition filming and gives the viewer a closeup look at the Shroud, its features and its image properties, in a segment that should look truly striking when viewed in high definition. Hopefully, it will be broadcast in high definition when it reaches America. I am also hopeful that the program will be distributed on the newly standardized high definition Blu-Ray DVD's.

The program traces the Shroud's history back through the centuries and uses interviews with experts and an animated graphic timeline to illustrate the cloth at various historical points in time. I found this timeline quite effective and felt it made the key points simple and easily understandable for the novice viewer (and for those of us who are historically challenged). Filming was done on location in Italy, England, Israel and the United States. It should be noted that some of the historical points made in the film are somewhat inaccurate. For example, the Pray Manuscript is mentioned as a "recent" discovery, yet it was first discovered by Ian Wilson in 1970 and published in his 1978 book, "The Shroud of Turin," a full ten years before the infamous c14 dating. (Note: Wilson told me recently that he did not initially notice the tiny but critical "L" shaped burn holes that the artist included in the illustration and that, in my personal opinion, is the final bit of evidence that ties the manuscript convincingly to the Shroud. His

attention was drawn to the Shroud-like pose, the absence of thumbs, the very unusual nudity and the herringbone weave, which was enough to convince him that the image was related to the Shroud. The burn holes were first noted by French researcher Pere Dubarle in 1986, two years before the c14 dating and first brought to public attention in a paper presented by Prof Jerome Lejeune at the 1993 Paris Shroud Conference). These details are most important to avid Shroud scholars and far less critical to the casual viewer. In general, I don't believe they detracted from the program, although some researchers are sure to disagree with me.

The program features physicist John Jackson, co-founder of the 1978 STURP team and founder of the Turin Shroud Center of Colorado, and discusses his new hypothesis regarding the 1988 radiocarbon dating of the Shroud, based on possible c14 enrichment of linen due to the CO (carbon monoxide) in the atmosphere. According to Jackson, a 2% contamination could skew the resulting date by as much as 1400 years. Rather than attempt to describe Jackson's theory myself, I asked John to write a short article to describe it in his own words. You can find it at this link: A New Radiocarbon Hypothesis by John Jackson at <http://www.shroud.com/pdfs/jackson.pdf>.

In his introduction to Jackson, Rolfe seems to imply that he is the primary American researcher studying the Shroud, a statement that many other researchers might find somewhat arguable. At one point, Jackson is given sole credit for work that was actually done collectively by many of the STURP team members. Despite these inaccuracies, the program still treats the Shroud in a more positive manner than any documentary in recent years. And Jackson appears very relaxed, articulate and confident in what may be his best television appearance ever as he takes us through his thirty years of research on the Shroud. Included was a rather detailed description of the controversial sidestrip theory, with which some researchers strongly disagree. No mention was made of Ray Rogers' peer reviewed chemical analysis of the c14 reserve sample. Of course, one can only squeeze so much information into a one hour program.

Much to David Rolfe's credit, when it came to Jackson's newest theory, he contacted Christopher Ramsey, current director of England's Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit, one of the three laboratories that carried out the tests in 1988, and brought the two scientists together in the program. Ramsey agreed that Jackson's hypothesis has merit and further agreed to work with him to test it over the next year. He admitted that this could have some impact on the 1988 dating and with twenty year newer technology now available, it was worthwhile reopening the issue. It is important to note however, that they will NOT be testing samples of the Shroud of Turin itself, but other linen samples that could validate Jackson's hypothesis. In spite of Ramsey's seemingly positive attitude regarding the Shroud in the program, I must note the following quote from the Oxford University press office, which was published on L'italoEuropeo's website:

Professor Ramsey said: "I am always willing to consider any serious suggestions of why the dating might not be correct and to do further tests to investigate such suggestions. In this sense, I keep an open mind - as I would about any scientific investigation. However, my strong intuition, based on my experience in this field, is that the new hypothesis will not challenge the accuracy of the original radiocarbon dating exercise."

Regular website viewers will also recognize a number of other well-known Shroud scholars in the program, including Mark Guscin and Dr. Niels Svensson, whose work often appears on this website. Guscin provides the viewer with a detailed look at the Sudarium of Oviedo in one of the historical segments and Svensson discusses the medical aspects of crucifixion with Peter Dean, British Forensic Medical Examiner. Rebecca Jackson shares her insights into the Jewish aspects of the Shroud, while Mechthild Flury-Lemberg compares the Shroud directly to the Pray Manuscript. Although the program might not satisfy the most demanding Shroud scholars (what

ever does?), it should be an excellent program for the general public. All in all, a lot of ground was covered and David Rolfe should be given high praise for accomplishing something that has not been done in years by ANY television documentary. He created a worthwhile, solid program that should leave the viewer with the understanding that all the answers to the Shroud of Turin are not in yet. I think that is the most we can ever hope for in a one hour television program in today's media jungle.