

## A Path to the Shroud

### Tristina Wheelwright

Seeing that face – His Face – for the first time changed my life for ever. Like so many turning points, it didn't seem all that significant at the time. Only gradually did I begin to realise its impact.

In my early twenties I hoped to become a portrait painter and was lucky enough to have two pictures accepted for an exhibition at The Royal Society of Portrait Painters. My very supportive grandmother was so delighted that she sent me a small cheque to buy a memento to mark my first milestone. After a lot of thought I decided on a one-volume encyclopaedia, to learn more about the world around me. As I leafed through the pages, a tiny



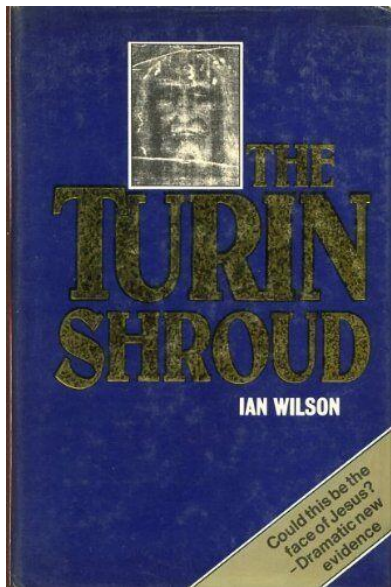
black-and-white photograph of a man's face – scarcely bigger than a postage stamp – caught my eye. The brief caption only mentioned that it was a holy relic kept in Turin Cathedral. From time-to-time afterwards that unforgettable tiny face always came back to haunt me.

In the 1960s (pre-computer days) it was very difficult to find out information about the Turin Shroud. Local libraries and bookshops had practically nothing of any help, which was tantalising. That very tiny image was unforgettable – terribly battered, yet compassionate and full of forgiveness; being interested in faces, I was intrigued and longed to know more about it.

In the years that followed my life was full of new and exciting experiences. Falling in love with and marrying an amazing man, having two wonderful children and moving from London to a bigger house in Essex with a large garden, kept me fully occupied. It was a lovely, happy time and looking after our little family and pets meant that my days were full and didn't leave much energy to pursue any other interests of my own.

It must have been in a newspaper that I saw an advertisement for a forthcoming Holy Shroud of Turin Exhibition in Westminster Cathedral from April to July 1979. I wasn't

a Roman Catholic, but it was such a wonderful opportunity that I simply had to find a way to go and see it! My kind and long-suffering husband offered to look after our two little daughters (then six and three), three dogs, two cats and two hamsters for a whole Saturday, so that I could go up to London and see it.



The exhibition (and its very helpful catalogue) was like walking into Aladdin's cave – almost too much to take in and understand immediately. Seeing the replica of The Shroud used in David Rolfe's film *the Silent Witness* was deeply moving and almost a physical shock. There was also a little pile of application forms to join something called The British Society for The Turin Shroud – so I signed up on the spot! In the Cathedral Bookshop I bought a copy of Ian Wilson's first Shroud book and began to read it on the Tube and train journey home. It was like the answer to a prayer and was crammed with so much detail of every aspect of the history, facts and theories and everything then known about The Shroud. (Sometime later I saw the film and a further exhibition at Layer Marney Tower in Essex – where I was able to touch and feel that same replica shroud.)

Joining the BSTS was one of the best decisions I have ever made: several times a year, then as now, they sent out a Newsletter which collated all the latest information about Shroud research around the world. It gave details and brief reviews of all recent publications and lectures and also the results of the latest experiments. From the outset it struck me that they were always scrupulously fair – giving equal mention and space to all books and discoveries both for and against the authenticity of The Shroud. I saved up and bought copies of as many books and taped talks as I could afford, covering many different opinions and aspects of research. It was thrilling and I loved the journey it led me along. But, my lack of scientific training often meant spending hours delving into dictionaries, encyclopaedias and reference works like *Gray's Anatomy* to try and understand as much as possible about the research!

I hope the BSTS will forgive me for mentioning that they must have faced quite an uphill struggle to stay afloat in the early days. I still have a Newsletter and Statement of Accounts (June – September 1980) showing a bank balance of £342.59p! The annual subscription fee was incredibly small and certainly didn't reflect the truly enormous volume of research and very hard work that the Editor (Ian Wilson) must have put into producing every single fact-filled issue.

Poor Susan Black (the General Secretary) had a terrible time, because a large amount of her BSTS mail (including subscriptions) was stolen by thieving neighbours in the flat below hers. Eventually she had no choice but to take them to court, which resulted in their eviction. While clearing up the mess they left in the flat she found masses of opened BSTS correspondence hidden under a carpet. She then had the horrible experience trying to cope with the death of her mother and at the same time sorting out which subscriptions had been paid and which stolen.

Among many other books I read Pierre Barbet's *A Surgeon at Calvary* which was heart-breaking and very harrowing, but it also explained so much about the Crucifixion which The Bible didn't mention. Dr Michael Clift (for many years the General Secretary of BSTS) advertised a talk on 'The Patient in The Shroud' to be given in London in April 1993: another occasion when my husband 'held the fort' so that I could attend. Michael's talk explained much more fully and in layman's language a great many technical points. At the end he answered questions with much patience and good humour, and then treated all the attendees to large slices of his most delicious home-made fruit cake! After that we became friends-by-post, and all his notes and cards to me were always adorned with amusing small cartoons of his beloved cats. He was a kind and larger-than-life character (in every way) and I still miss him.

Over the years, the BSTS Newsletter has provided a mind-blowing quantity of information in the 94 copies I have and often reread. It has covered very fully an extraordinarily wide range of subjects and theses about every conceivable aspect of the Shroud's known and posited history, and every theory about how it possibly came into being. Thanks to Secondo Pia's miraculous discovery of the photographic negative image in 1898, the wonderful face of Jesus Christ and the terrible sufferings of His wounded body have been accessible to all who seek for answers. Sadly, not long after Pia shared his discovery with the world, he was cruelly ridiculed and accused of forgery by cynics, and he came to regret ever publishing his belief-changing find. It would be nice to think that when, in 1931 (when Pia was in his seventies), Giuseppe Enrie's professional photographs proved the truth of his own discovery, and I hope that perhaps he felt that finally he was vindicated. We owe him an enormous debt of gratitude.

Since those days many have attempted, and failed, to replicate the image on that 14-foot-long piece of herringbone woven linen. The eagerly anticipated result of the Carbon 14 tests came as a real shock, especially the very unpleasant and brutally smug way in which the three scientific representatives delivered their conclusions at the British Museum press conference. Fortunately, the loudly proclaimed dates of 1260–1390 have been disproved in several ways by, among other things, the Pray Codex in Budapest (dated no later than 1195). This shows not only the herringbone weave but also the 'L' shaped holes and the so-called 'poker holes'. All of the pre-agreed strict protocols of the Carbon 14 testing were completely ignored, and the chosen strip of linen came from a single corner piece – one of the most handled parts of the fabric –

which had already been subjected to many physical tests, and possibly even repairs, since its documented history began. It is to be hoped that if another Carbon 14 test is ever allowed by the Pope, much greater control and far more careful rules will apply and be strictly adhered to.

The most skilful replicators and theorists have so far been unable to explain or show how anyone – even as late as mediaeval times – could have the necessary skill and medical knowledge to create an image that has proved to be 3D! A great many people have attempted to paint the likeness with various substances and chemicals or wrap material around a model covered in organic media, or scorch the surface with blasts of heat. But none have come at all close to the original. All have produced distorted versions, and no one has managed to explain how grains of pollen from very defined areas along the Shroud's presumed journey from Jerusalem to Turin, via Edessa, Constantinople and France, could have adhered to the surface, if the Shroud was a fake. In the end, all these many and varied attempts have only further confirmed that The Shroud is genuine and unique.

Some representatives of various religions have feared that trying to analyse and uncover medical and other data within The Shroud might detract from its 'holy mystique' and lessen peoples' reverence for such an awesome and powerful relic. But for most the opposite seems to happen. So miraculous and truly moving is the Face that many previously non-religious people (some of them BSTS members) who have taken an interest out of curiosity – have since found their own unexpected answers and become Christians.

Perhaps, after all, The Shroud doesn't need to prove its own authenticity: for almost two thousand years Christians have accepted it at face value as a testament to the agonising suffering and Passion that one man endured to pass on a message of forgiveness and hope to all mankind. One only has to look, with humility, into that wonderful Face to believe that this Man really was the Son of God. His Face carries a beautiful and incredible message of love to the hearts of all who seek.

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