

TEMPLECOMBE PANEL-PAINTING CARBON DATED

In an interesting curtain-raiser to the Shroud carbon-dating, on November 20 last year Dr. John Gowlett of the Oxford Laboratory travelled with his wife to Templecombe in south Somerset to take tiny slivers of wood from the "Shroud" panel painting in Templecombe's Church of St. Mary. This panel painting, which came to light in a Templecombe cottage during the 1950s, is believed to be a copy of the Shroud face made while the latter was, hypothetically, owned by the Knights Templars (who had a preceptory in Templecombe) during the so-called "missing years".



The Templecombe panel: a rare photograph from before its restoration of the 1950s

Dr. Gowlett's procedure was filmed for a documentary on the Templars, "A Head of Time", shown at 5.30 pm. Easter Sunday on TSV, the independent television station serving Plymouth and the South-West.

According to the vicar of Templecombe, the Revd. Edward Davies, who watched the programme, the Oxford laboratory revealed that the panel, said to be of Spanish oak, could date from as early as AD 1280. This would effectively confirm its Templar ownership.

Although Dr. Gowlett has subsequently moved to take up a new post in Liverpool, the Oxford Laboratory is expected to issue a formal report on the dating in due course. Meanwhile further work has been carried out on the same panel by Anna Hulbert, a Courtauld-trained conservator of panel paintings and mediaeval wall paintings, who participated in the rescue of Florence's art treasures in the wake of the disastrous flood. She has made some interesting finds in the course of her work, including traces of a hitherto unsuspected original diaper pattern on the panel. This, along with the carbon-dating, offers intriguing new corroboration of the historical hypothesis that the Shroud was first the Image of Edessa (known to have been ornamented with a diaper or trellis decoration), and then was owned by the Knights Templar.

Anna Hulbert has kindly agreed to give an illustrated lecture on her Templecombe findings to the British Society on Friday October 16, 7.30 pm at the Foreign Press Association, 11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1 (see separate application form with this *Newsletter*). Attendance at this talk is strongly recommended, but prior booking is essential in case arrangements need to be changed, and those attending notified accordingly, in the event of the Shroud testing being held at this time.