

SPECIAL FEATURE

From a Forgotten Memorandum:

A Visit to the Oxford Research Laboratory 7 July 1988

by the Editor

One of the advantages of moving house (not to mention also moving continents), is that you come across items that you had forgotten even existed. One such item was a memorandum I made, purely for my own reference, following a meeting with **Professor Edward Hall** of the Oxford Research Laboratory on 7th July 1988 in company with **Susan Black** of the BSTS Steering Committee. The date was notably after Professor Hall and others had been to Turin and viewed the Shroud (thereupon returning with the samples for carbon dating), and before the samples had been run at the Oxford laboratory. Professor Hall was typically forthright in his views, but the notes I took are revealing for why Oxford delayed working on the samples (countering some recent silly speculation on this), also for Hall's opinion on Dr. McCrone's work, and for his personal feelings concerning how the Shroud's image might (in his view) have been forged. The text follows:

When we [Susan Black and myself] arrived Professor Hall had just finished a half-hour phone call from **Luigi Gonella**, and said that he would be relieved when the whole Shroud business was over. But he thought that due to the G Colinetti Institute now making themselves felt, the announcement of the results (to follow a meeting in Turin) would not now take place until October. Someone was already going on holiday shortly, **Michael Tite** would be away in August, and he, Hall, would be away in September.

Prof. Hall acknowledged that he had found the Shroud very impressive on viewing it in Turin. Having spent several hours viewing it, including with a hand lens, he felt quite confident that it was not painted. He found no sign of paint responsible for the image. Instead he subscribed to the "hot statue" theory. In the case of the blood, he thought this genuinely was blood, though most likely pig's blood. Questioned about the pathological convincingness of this latter, he acknowledged this, but told the story of Lindow Woman, and how he had had two policemen come to his office with a woman's head, wanting to know if this dated from 1960 or later. A pathologist had identified this as a woman thought to have been murdered by her husband (they had met and married the same day), and explained a variety of features as proof that the head was identifiable with a photo of the murdered woman. [In fact this was prehistoric]

[Hall then gave an opinion of Dr. Walter McCrone that I have deleted as unnecessarily offensive.] He [Hall] said that McCrone was probably right about the Vinland Map, but for the wrong reasons. He relied too much on just visual assessments made from looking under the microscope. Hall expressed surprise that the Shroud had survived the 1532 fire, q.v. the high temperature that would have been involved with the silver having melted.

Of the carbon dating itself, Hall said that although he and the others knew which samples were which, Hedges did not have the codes, and for him it really would be done blind. He thought **Prof. Damon** [of Arizona] had been very ill-advised to allow Prof. Gove to look over his shoulder. [There followed here a disparaging remark about Prof. Gove, inventor of the AMS system used by the three laboratories who carbon dated the Shroud.] The reason why Oxford had

not run their samples until now was because they had initially shut the carbon dating operation down because of the introduction of a new ioniser that enabled one less stage in the carbon dating process. They first had problems starting up again, then the computer which, up to then, had been efficient, went down. Someone "up there" did not want the Shroud tested!

The Laboratory itself, reached from Hall's office by crossing a yard, is cluttered. Immediately inside the doorway are the ionisers. Further along, the Accelerator - the idea behind it that after all the voltage, only the Carbon 14 should remain. The apparatus for the cooking of the sample, over a Bunsen burner, seemed surprisingly modest compared to Harwell's.

Professor Hall could offer no good reason for the discrepancy between the Harwell and the Oxford Carbon 14 dates [with regard to Lindow Man]. He said that Harwell were good on normal sized samples, but it is the stretching of the method to small samples that raises the problems. He did not see much of a future for the Harwell facility [this proved correct]. Part of the carbon dating work is environmental, though less in this country than elsewhere.

Professor Hall showed the washing of the sample being done in a locked upstairs room amid "radio-active" signs. We were shown the computer printout on which the Shroud sample reading would come, like a large Olivetti typewriter. Hall showed electron-microscope photographs of the Shroud sample before processing. He mentioned some peculiar material was found on it which [I explained] may have come from the blue surround. There were also a number of sodium chloride crystals. The fibres of the Shroud could be seen to be in very good condition. He said of the Shroud edges that there definitely was a selvedge. With regard to pollen he remarked on the transport of Sahara dust, and how it really proves nothing.