

## RED FACES AT THE OXFORD RADIOCARBON LABORATORY?

BSTS textile specialist John Tyrer was tickled to be sent the following cutting from the *Oxford Star* of 11th April, which appeared under the headline 'Grandma Joan rattles the boffins':

- RED-FACED boffins from Oxford University dropped a clanger when asked to date ancient rock paintings by South African bushmen.
- Their carbon dating tests estimated the rock [paintings] to be 1,200 years old, but they were dumbfounded when grandma Joan Ahrens said she painted them just 11 years ago! The rock shock started when a schoolboy South Africa came across the paintings and his art teacher called in Natal Museum.
- They in turn sent the rock to Oxford University's radio carbon accelerator unit - which found the Turin Shroud was a medieval fake - and their results confirmed the rocks were the first bushman painted rock.
- Then 72-year-old Mrs Ahrens saw the articles and revealed she had painted them in art classes. They had been stolen by vandals and thrown into the bush. Dr Robert Hodges, who headed the University team, said; "We dated the material on the rock. It's all a bit unfortunate."

Enquiries made to Professor Michael Tite, Director of the Oxford Laboratory produced the following response: 'We dated the organic material on the stone but warned the submitter that the date had no meaning until this material had been identified. This was never done, and yet they still publicized the date which of course provides no information of the actual date at which the stone was painted.' We are still left wondering what paint used by Mrs Ahrens in her art classes could possibly have been composed of materials 1,200 years old'

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