

Ian Tyers, speaking about his dendrochronology project on the Brown Gallery Jacobean portraits at Knole, during an oral history interview with Veronica Walker-Smith at Knole on 10th July 2015

(I.T.): Let's start with the Brown Gallery portraits. When I was first in Knole, we were doing the Brown Gallery portraits, a project with the National Portrait Gallery students. We've done 3 groups of these, and we've ended up analysing 22 of 44 which is an unbelievably rare group of long gallery portraits. And the outcome of that is it has enabled us to demonstrate that the same trees have been used for vast numbers of these panels and that we can link the patterns of the trees and we know the dates of the last rings in these panels. We know all of this material has come in from the **eastern Baltic** and these are therefore part of the typical usage of that kind of material for high quality joinery in most 16th century and early 17th century.

(V.W-S): For the layman, then, Ian, do you take a painting and analyse it in the lab, or do you take a sample, and if so, how large?

(I.T.): So if we were doing timbers in the roofs here, and we *have* done timbers in the roofs here, we'd come here and we'd take samples out of the roofs and those would be half an inch in diameter and cut down into the middles of trees. When we're doing paintings, we don't drill them and take cores out of them because they're not big enough to do that, and people don't really like us to do that anyway because you end up losing paint!

What we're very lucky - the other panels in this room are more typical - (this group) they have *detachable* frames - and you can take frame off and the end- grain timbers are exposed - at a point where there is **no** paint, and we can work on the *ends* of those boards.

This Brown Gallery group is *very* unusual because the framing you can *see* is *applied* onto the boards themselves and it doesn't actually detach. But fortunately, **under** the framing you can still see the backs of, still see the bottoms of the panels. So we worked on these here in the Brown Gallery one particularly freezing January - we had 3 layers of coats on, and we had to go and run around the block every hour to keep warm - and we analysed that material using electronic measuring machines and computers and microscopes, actually sat *here* in the gallery. And we took them off the walls, we analysed them and we put them back on the walls. And at the same time the conservators were checking conditions for flaking and all those other sorts of things, so it was a double job. So that's what this is and this is what a typical group of panel painting job would be.