

COTTON ON THE OXFORD CARBON DATING SAMPLE

Kindly brought to our attention by the Revd. Kim Dreisbach of Atlanta is a hitherto unnoticed report in the journal *Textile Horizons* of December 1988 concerning the Shroud sample supplied to the Oxford radiocarbon dating laboratory.

Apparently the British company Precision Processes (Textiles) Ltd of Ambergate, Derbyshire was asked by the Oxford laboratory to help identify certain 'foreign' fibres observed, isolated and extracted from the Shroud sample prior to its destruction during the carbon dating process. According to Precision Processes managing director, Peter South: "It was while the sample was undergoing tests at the radiocarbon acceleration unit in Oxford that Professor Edward Hall noticed two or three fibres which looked out of place. He mentioned this to his friend Sir James Spooner, chairman of Coats Viyella, to which our firm belongs. Consequently, after several telephone calls, the minute samples, which looked like human hair, were sent to us."

Magnified two hundred times by a Precision Processes microscope the fibres became immediately identified as cotton. This might have been explicable as merely from the cotton gloves worn by members of the STURP team in 1978, but for the subsequent information imparted by Peter South: "The cotton is a fine, dark yellow strand, possibly of Egyptian origin and quite old. Unfortunately it is impossible to say how it ended up on the Shroud, which is basically made from linen. It may have been used for repairs at some time in the past, or simply became bound in when the linen fabric was woven."

This is not the first time that cotton strands have been identified on a Shroud sample. The Belgian Professor Gilbert Raes observed the same on the sample he studied in 1973, and he deduced that this was a strong indication of Middle Eastern manufacture. Clearly it could be of great interest to learn more both of the age of this cotton, and of the exact reason for its presence on the Shroud.