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# **Tree-Ring Analysis** of Timbers **from Hardwick Old Hall, Doe Lea, Near Chesterfield, Derbyshire**

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# **Tree-Ring Analysis** of Timbers **from Hardwick Old Hall, Doe Lea, Near Chesterfield, Derbyshire**

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# **Summary**

One hundred and five samples with a wide-ranging distribution within Hardwick Old Hall were obtained for tree-ring analysis. Ninety-one of these samples were measured of which eighty-six were analysed. This analysis produced six site sequences of which three were dated.

The main site chronology consists of thirty-nine samples with 216 rings spanning the period AD 1375 - AD 1590. The second chronology is made up of five samples, with ninety-eight rings spanning AD 1481 - AD 1578. A third site chronology has two samples with 103 rings spanning AD 1484 - AD 1586. Four individual samples were also dated. Three other site chronologies, accounting for 16 samples, remain undated. Twenty measured samples remain ungrouped and undated.

The majority of timbers sampled appear to have been felled over a short period in the late sixteenthcentury especially for the construction of the Hall. Work appears to have proceeded in all areas simultaneously, there being no clear evidence on dendrochronological grounds for the separate phasing of different patts.

It is known from documentary sources that work on the Old Hall was begun in AD 1583 and was largely completed by the time construction was suspended in AD 1590 when work began on the New Hall. Tree-ring analysis appears to be entirely consistent with such an interpretation of the documents.

From the interpretation of the sapwood it would appear that some timbers used in the late sixteenthcentury construction of the Old Hall were reused, having originally been felled in the very late fifteenth to very early sixteenth centuries. It is possible that these reused timbers were original to the earlier minor manor house, which is known to have existed on the site, and to have been incorporated into the Old Hall.

# **Keywords**

Dendrochronology Standing Building

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*Opinions expressed in CJA reports are those oj the author and are not necessarily those oj English Heritage.* 

## **TREE-RING ANALYSIS OF TIMBERS FROM HARDWICK OLD HALL, DOE LEA, NEAR CHESTERFIELD, DERBYSHIRE**

### **Introduction**

The ruined remains of Hardwick Old Hall present an impressive monument on the line of low hills rising to the east of the MI motonvay (SK462637; Figs land 2). This part of Derbyshire boasts in impressive collection of such sites with Chatsworth, Bolsover, and Sutton Scarsdale all being within a short distance of Hardwick and each other.

The history of the site is known from a wide range of documentary sources. The name most commonly associated with Hardwick, particularly with the elegant and refined "New Hall" (Fig 3) across the way from the Old Hall, is Bess. She was born at Hardwick, probably around AD 1520 (the exact date is not known), her father, John Hardwick, owning a minor manor there. Bess grew up here until she married her cousin Robert Barley. Upon Robert Barley's death in AD 1544 Bess married Sir William Cavendish, Treasurer of the Chamber to the King, a man with properties in five counties. Cavendish was persuaded to purchase the estate at Chatsworth and make Derbyshire his home county. The new house at Chatsworth was begun in AD 1552, signifying the beginning of Bess's mania for building palatial homes. Sir William died in AD 1557, followed by Bess's third husband, Sir William St Loe, in AD 1565. She married for the fourth time in AD 1568 to George Talbot, sixth Earl of Shrewsbury, but separated from him in AD 1583 (he died in AD 1590).

From the time of her separation from Talbot in AD 1583 Bess began converting the old manor house at Hardwick which she had inherited from her own family, generously enlarging it into a substantial mansion. It is this enlarged structure which became known as Hardwick Old Hall, and is the subject of this report.

It is likely that the Old Hall incorporated the earlier manor house, probably in the irregular gabled part. To this Bess added two wings at either end, each with a Great Chamber and each having state rooms on the top floors. These rooms had plasterwork by Abraham Smith, as well as having, for their time, unusually large windows. However, despite the lavish amounts expended upon it, the Old Hall was not built from the beginning to one design and the irregular planning of rooms and facades was the result of ad-hoc adjustments as the work progressed.

In AD 1590, seven years after work on the Old Hall had begun, Bess' husband, the Earl of Shrewsbury, died and she began another home, Hardwick New Hall. This was a far more ambitious undertaking on a clear plot of grolmd across the way from the Old Hall and built to a new and entirely up-to-date plan. Work on the New Hall was completed in short order and in AD 1597 Bess was able to move in. The Old Hall was then allowed to decay.

### The sampling **brief**

Sampling and analysis by tree-ring dating was commissioned by English Heritage. The purpose of this was to establish possible phasing of the Old Hall in connection with the surviving accounts and to assess the **significance of the site for its more accurate management in relation to its conservation. The English Heritage**  brief therefore called for the sampling of timbers in a munber of different areas of the Hall. In particular it requested sampling of the timbers of the main staircase to establish whether or not it pre-dates that of the New Hall and whether or not it is later than the kitchen, pantry, larder, and other rooms below it. To determine this relationship the timbers of those rooms were to be sampled also. Where possible the timbers of the rooms above the kitchen and pantry, that is those of the first, second, and third floors were also to be sampled.

## **Samoling**

Sampling first began in January 2001, with the timbers of the main staircase being cored first. Unfortunately work was brought to a halt by the outbreak of foot-and-mouth-disease, and sampling could not be resumed until October of that year. In the meantime a programme of conservation work on the Smith plasterwork was initiated calling for the setting up of scaffolding reaching to the parapets. A number of timbers that would **otherwise have been out** of reach **were now accessible.** 

Thus, from the available timbers 105 core samples were obtained. Each sample was given the code HDW-A, (for Hardwick site "A") and numbered  $1 - 105$ . Timbers were selected for sampling on the basis of their appearing to have sufficient rings for reliable dendrochronological analysis or having some sapwood, where it existed (or at least the heartwood/sapwood boundary), or both. Unfortunately, due to the ruined nature of the site and its long-term exposure to the elements, much of the softer parts of many timbers, that is the sapwood, and some of the heartwood too, was decayed.

Most of the timbers at the Hall consist of lintels of doorways or windows, or joists or main bridging beams of **room floors and stainvays. Many doorways and windows contain two lintels. In such cases the lintels are**  described by compass directions, as being either the north, south, east, or west lintel, as well as being as being noted as the inner or outer of the two where this might help with timber location. Where there are three lintels the term inner or middle lintel is used. Most other timbers, joists etc, are numbered and described from north **to south, or from east to west as the case may be.** 

An attempt has been made to sample all rooms on a collective basis, so that each room is accounted for by a **consecutive number of samples. Because of the nature of access and works in progress on site etc, this was not always possible, and some rooms have samples of** non~consecutive **numbers. However, the positions of all**  the saroples have been located on plans and drawings provided by English Heritage, reproduced here as Figures  $4 - 9$ . Using these drawings, and the sample descriptions in Table 1, it should be possible to find the position of each timber cored. One of the difficulties of these drawings is that they are intended to show the ftoor-plan of each level only, the timbers themselves are not shown. Sample numbers are placed on the plans **at, or arrows point to, the approximate position** of the **timber concerned.** 

It might be noted at this point that many timbers have some evidence for reuse by way of apparently redundant mortices or peg holes etc. It is sometimes difficult to be certain about this redundancy because adjacent timbers, to which the remaining joints might have been related, may have been removed. Other older looking timbers, particularly window and door lintels, appear as if they might have been moved or at least reset. It is known that major conservation and repair works were undertaken at Hardwick Old Hall in the late AD 1950s **and early AD 19605, with the insertion of modem oak and the extensive use of concrete. This repair work may**  have added to the difficulty of finding timbers that are an original integral group.

The Laboratory would like to take this opportwuty to thank a number of people who assisted wholeheartedly with this project. Firstly we would like to thank Lucy Worsley of English Heritage East Midlands Office in Northampton who toured the site prior to sampling to discuss the timbers. The Laboratory would also like to thank the English Heritage custodial and events coordination staff on site, in particular Christine Poulson for her unstinting help and hospitality during the cold early days of sampling in January and February. The Laboratory would also like to thank the staff of "Safe and Sound Scaffolding" of Chesterfield who provided such a steady platform close to the upper timbers for coring.

### **Analysis**

Each of the 105 core samples was prepared by sanding and polishing. It was seen at this point that 14 samples had less than about 40 rings, too few rings for satisfactory analysis, and the annual growth rings of these were not measured. A further five samples with only  $40 - 53$  rings were, however, measured. Although strictly speaking such samples also have too few rings for satisfactory tree-ring analysis they were included in the hope that, having a large amount of data from the other samples, these shorter ones might cross-match and date too. In the event, however, it was decided not to include them in the analysis. The data of the remaining eighty-six measured samples with fifty-four rings or more were then compared with each other by the Litton/Zainodin grouping procedure (see appendix). The data of all the ninety-one measured samples are given at the end of the report

At a minimum *t*-value of 4.5 six groups of cross-matching samples could be formed. The relative positions of the cross-matching samples in each of these groups is shown in the bar diagrams, Figures  $10 - 15$ . The cross**matching samples of each group were then combined at their relative positions to form site chronologies. Each**  of these site chronologies was then compared with a series of relevant reference chronologies producing dates for three of them The *t*-values for the dating site chronologies are given in Tables  $2 - 4$ .

The six site chronologies were then compared with each other. There was, however, no further satisfactory cross-matching between them with acceptably high *t*-values, this despite three of them having overlapping date spans. Each of the six site chronologies was then compared with the twenty-four remaining ungrouped samples that had sufficient rings. Again there was no satisfactory cross-matching.

**Each of the remaining twenty-four ungrouped samples with sufficient rings, ie in excess of 54, was then**  compared individually with a series of relevant reference chronologies for oak. This indicated dates for a further four samples, HDW-A14, A16, A17, and A26. The *t*-values for the dating of these four samples are given in Tables  $5 - 8$ . Each of the component samples of the undated site chronologies, HDWASQ04, 05, and 06, was also compared individually with a series of reference chronologies in an attempt to date them **separately. There was, however, no satisfactory** cross~matching.

The analytical information discussed above can be summarised as below.



#### **Interpretation**

Almost all of the six site chronologies created contain samples from different parts of the Hall. This is particularly so with site chronology HDWASQOI, which is made up of thirty-nine samples from ahnost all parts of the building. The exception to this observation might be the two samples from the kitchen pantry (HDW-A95 and A96) in the undated site chronology HDWASQ6, see Figure 15.

The dated site chronologies, and indeed the undated ones, show some variation in the relative positions of the heartwood/sapwood boundaries on their constituent samples. In site chronology HDWASQOI for example the earliest heartwood/sapwood boundary is at relative position 101 (AD 1475) on sample HDW-A34 with the latest being at relative position 216 (AD 1590) on sample HDW-AI9 (see Fig 10). These two samples are from timbers of the low larder and the closely adjacent kitchen ceiling respectively. Similarly in the undated site chronology HDWASQ04, sample HDW-A59 from the wall of the viewing platform has a heartwood/sapwood boundary of 96 relative while that of sample HDW-A68, from the third floor, is at relative position 142 (see Fig 13).

This can perhaps be further illustrated by grouping the dated samples by sampling area, as in Figure 16. It will be seen for example that samples from the low larder represent timbers that were probably felled in the very early sixteenth century, HDW-A34, as well as in the late-sixteenth century, HDW-A36. Similarly, the samples from the nursery include timbers felled in the late-fifteenth century, HDW-A87, and those felled later, as with that represented by sample HDW-A86.

This mixing of samples might suggest two things. Firstly, that older timber is being reused. Secondly that the timber felled later was felled as and when needed and distributed about the building during construction, and not felled for and used in discrete locations. It is possible that an on-site timber yard was established from which timber was taken. This of course supposes that not too much timber has been moved about the site during subsequent repairs and renovations.

This notion of continuous felling, rather than separate stages, can perhaps be illustrated if we take all the dated samples and simply present them by last ring order, as in Figure 17. Furthermore this appears to show that two basic periods of timber felling are represented. The earlier felling phase is represented by a small number of samples that have heartwood/sapwood ring dates in the late-fifteenth century ranging from AD 1465 for sample A26 to AD 1494 for sample A37. Using a 95% confidence limit of 15 - 40 rings for the amount of sapwood on mature oaks from this part of England, it is estimated that the trees represented were felled in the period AD 1480 - AD 1505 and AD 1509 - 34 respectively.

The later phase is represented by a larger group of samples that have heartwood/sapwood boundaries in the later sixteenth centuries, ranging from AD 1540 on sample A85, to AD 1578 on sample A86. Using the same confidence lintits for the number of sapwood rings as above it is estimated that the trees represented were felled in the period AD 1555 - 80 and AD 1593 - AD 1618 respectively.

In this respect the timber represented by sample A19 is an anomaly. This sample has a heartwood/sapwood boundary date of AD 1590. The usual figure of  $15 - 40$  sapwood rings would give the timber an estimated felling date in the range AD 1605 - 30, somewhat later than all the others, and well after work is believed to have ceased on the Old Hall. Either the timber has fewer than 15 sapwood rings or it is indeed felled later and **represents an inserted repair timber or a late continuation** of work.

#### **Conclusion**

It is difficult to make a firm conclusion about the felling of the timbers sampled at Hardwick Hall. It would certainly appear that some of the timbers used here were felled sometime between the late-fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century. It is possible that these represent timbers felled for the construction of the earlier manor house owned by John Hardwick, Bess's father, and then reused in the Old Hall when that was built along with timbers felled especially for the purpose.

On the basis of the tree-ring dates obtained it is not possible to say that anyone part of the Old Hall is distinctly younger or older than any other part of it. From the very gradual change in the relative position of the heartwood/sapwood boundary, from AD 1540 on sample A85 to AD 1578 on sample A86 (see Fig 17), it appears that building work probably took a relatively short time and finally stopped in AD 1590. Bess began work on the Old Hall in AD 1583 and it was largely completed when she began work on the New Hall in AD 1590.

Sixty-six of the 86 measured samples with sufficient rings, or over 82%, have been grouped into dated and undated site sequences, or dated individually. It is a feature of the analysis of this site that many of the samples, particularly those in site chronology HDWASQ01, cross match with each other with very high tvalues, values of  $t=6$  and 7 are common, with some 9s, 10s, and 11s also being seen. This suggests, as intimated by the documentary evidence, that many of the timbers do indeed come from the sarne local **woodland source.** 

Twenty satisfactory measured samples remain ungrouped and undated. Most of these have sufficient rings for satisfactory analysis by dendrochronology, though some have low numbers of rings.

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Table 1: Details of samples from Hardwick Old Hall, Doe Lea, Derbyshire



 $\sim 10^{-10}$ 

 $\sim 10^{-10}$ 

# Table 1: continued



# Table 1: continued



Table 1: continued



 $\bullet$ 

## Table I: continued



# Table I: continued



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**nm = rings not measured** 

 $h/s =$  heartwood/sapwood boundary is last ring on sample

c = complete sapwood on timber, all or part lost in sampling

 $\label{eq:2.1} \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}\int_{\mathbb{R}^3}\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}\left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}\right)^2\left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}\right)^2\left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}\right)^2\left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}\right)^2\left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}\right)^2\left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}\right)^2.$ 

 $C$  = complete sapwood retained on sample

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#### Table 2: Results of the cross-matching of site chronology HDWASQOl and relevant reference chronologies when first ring date is AD 1375 and last ring date is AD 1590



#### Table 3: Results of the cross-matching of site chronology HDWASQ02 and relevant reference chronologies when first ring date is AD 1481 and last ring date is AD 1578



#### Table 4: Results of the cross-matching of site chronology HDWASQ03 and relevant reference chronologies when first ring date is AD 1484 and last ring date is AD 1586



#### Table 5: Results of the cross-matching of sample HDW-AI4 and relevant reference chronologies when first ring date is AD 1517 and last ring date is AD 1574



#### Table 6: Results of the cross-matching of sample HDW-A!6 and relevant reference chronologies when first ring date is AD 1502 and last ring date is AD 1565



 $\mathcal{L}^{\text{max}}_{\text{max}}$  and  $\mathcal{L}^{\text{max}}_{\text{max}}$ 

#### Table 7: Results of the cross-matching of sample HDW-A17 and relevant reference chronologies when first ring date is AD 1477 and last ring date is AD 1562



#### Table 8: Results of the cross-matching of sample HDW-A26 and relevant reference chronologies when first ring date is AD 1375 and last ring date is AD 1465



 $\sim 10^{11}$ 



Figure 1: Map to show general location of Hardwick Hall

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Figure 2: Hardwick Old Hall to show general plan of the Hall, and the East and West Lodges

 $\overline{a}$ 

Figure 3: The New Hall at Hardwick, begun in AD 1590, as seen from the Old Hall





Figure 4: Pian of ground floor of Great chamber to show sample locations

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Figure 5: Plan of lower main staircase and ground floor service rooms<br>to show sample locations

 $\mathcal{L}^{\text{max}}_{\text{max}}$ 

Figure 6: Plan of first floor to show sample locations



N

 $\frac{1}{4}$ 

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 $\mathcal{L}$ 

Figure 7: Plan of second floor to show sample locations



Figure 8: Third floor plan to show sample locations



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 $\sim 10^{-1}$ 

Figure 9: Plan of fourth floor to show sample locations



Figure 10: Bar diagram of samples in site chronology HDWASQOI Relative Off- Total heart/sap set rings boundary position  $\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|} \hline \text{A87} & \text{no h/s} & \text{no h/s} \hline \end{array}$ ---- $30$   $34$   $h/s$   $101$ 24 **A** 100 **h**/s **b** 104  $\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}\n \hline\n 462 & & & & & 105 \\
 \hline\n & 58 & & & 105 \\
 \hline\n\end{array}$  $29 \t\t h/8$  106  $\frac{h}{s}$  106 112  $\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|}\n\hline\n & A20 & \text{no h/s}\n\end{array}$  55  $\overline{\phantom{a}}$  $42$  77 119 31  $h/s$  89 120 53 no h/s n ---51 **a**  $A67$  **b**/s **b**  $A67$  **b**/s **b**  $A67$  **b** ...  $45$  118 --- $36$  no h/s  $128$ ---85 81 166 76 **171** 171 77 b/s | A77 b/s | b/s | 98 | 175 59 117 176 57 120 177 90 90 180 63 **117** 180  $127$  54 181  $129$  54 183 85 **184** 18405 **184** 185 186 53  $132$  185  $127$  58 185 97 88 185 76 110 172 115  $h/s$  190 35  $h/s$  156 191 97  $h/s$  95 192  $\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}\n\hline\n & A54 & h/s & 66 & 193 \\
\hline\n\end{array}$  $125$   $h/s$  69 194  $85$  h/s h/s 109 194  $86$  h/s 110 196 87  $h/s$  110 197 110  $h/s$  87 197 113  $A46$  27C sap 85 171  $\boxed{\text{A101}}$  h/s  $\boxed{97}$  199  $143$   $h/s$   $73$   $216$ 



 $\sim$ 

White bars = heartwood rings, shaded area = sapwood rings  $h/s =$  heartwood/sapwood boundary is last ring on sample C = complete sapwood retained on sample



00 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120 years relative

I I

Figure 13: Bar diagram of samples in site chronology HDWASQ04

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# Figure 15: Bar diagram of samples in site chronology HDWASQ06

White bars = heartwood rings, shaded area = sapwood rings<br> $h/s$  = heartwood/sapwood boundary is last ring on sample<br> $C$  = complete sapwood retained on sample



Figure 16: Bar diagram of all dated samples by sampling areas in order of last ring date

 $\mathfrak{c}$ 

White bars = heartwood rings, shaded area = sapwood rings  $h/s =$  heartwood/sapwood boundary is last ring on sample  $C =$  complete sapwood retained on sample

Figure 17: Bar diagram of all dated samples in order of last ring date





White bars  $=$  heartwood rings, shaded area  $=$  sapwood rings  $h/s =$  heartwood/sapwood boundary is last ring on sample  $C =$  complete sapwood retained on sample

Data of measured samples  $-$  measurements in 0.01 mm units

12311911213314614517218010611710274129139125164111133134214

438421206110100 91 79179288184141156112179 87 51 59 50 76136

191121104 81154213 212 215 223 274 273 273 227 263 226 225179234257251

98 95 101 83 59

97 104 54 72 77 69 83 75 70 67 90 81 81 84 81 93 87 89 91 101

89126199198224232210148144208228217166164204257164 120 154 160

311 178 189268234268319458358

227 148 182 126 193252260270

## APPENDIX

#### Tree-Ring Dating

#### The Principles of Tree-Ring Dating

Tree-ring dating, or *dendrochronology* as it is known, is discussed in some detail in the Laboratory's *'An East Midlands Master Tree-Ring Chronology and its uses for daling Vemacular Buildings'* (Laxton and Litton 1988b) and, for example, in *Tree-Ring Dating and Archaeology* (Baillie 1982) or *A Slice Through Time* (Baillie 1995). Here we will give the bare outlines. Each year an oak tree grows an extra ring on the outside of its trunk and all its branches inside its bark. The *width* of this annual ring depends largely on the weather during the growing season, about April to October, and possibly also on the weather during the previous year. Good growing seasons give rise to relatively wide rings, poor ones to very narrow rings and average ones to relatively average ring widths. Since the climate is so variable from year to year, almost random-like, the widths of these rings will also appear random-like in sequence, reflecting the seasons. This is illustrated in Figure 1 where, for example, the widest rings appear at irregular intervals. This is the key to dating by tree rings, or rather, by their widths. Records of the average ring widths, one for each year for the last 1000 years or more, are available for different areas. These are called master chronologies. Because of the random-like nature of these sequences of widths, there is usually only one position at which a sequence of ring widths from a sample of timber with at least 70 rings will match a master. This will date the timber and, in particular, the last ring...

If the bark is still on the sample, as in Figure 1, then the date of the last ring will be the date of felling of the oak from which it was cut. There is much evidence that in medieval times oaks cut down for building purposes were used almost immediately, usually within the year or so (Rackham 1976). Hence if bark is present on several main timbers in a building, none of which appear reused or are later insertions, and if they all have the same date for their last ring, then we can be quite confident that this is the date of construction. If there is no bark on the sample, then we have to make an estimate of the felling date; how this is done is explained below.

#### The Practice of Tree-Ring Dating at the University of Nottingham Tree-Ring dating Laboratory

*I. Inspecting the Building and Sampling the Timbers.* Together with a building historian we inspect the timbers in a building to try to ensure that those sampled are not reused or later insertions. Sampling is almost always done by coring into the timber, which has the great advantage that we can sample in situ timbers and those judged best to give the date of construction, or phase of construction if there is more than one in the building. The timbers to be sampled are also inspected to see how many rings they have. We normally look for timbers with at least 70 rings, and preferably more. With fewer rings than this, 50 for example, sequences of widths become difficult to match to a unique position within a master sequence of ring widths and so are difficult to date (Litton and Zainodin 1991). The cross-section of the rafter shown in Figure 2 has about 120 rings; about 20 of which are sapwood rings. Similarly the core has just over 100 rings.

To ensure that we are getting the date of the building as a whole, or the whole of a phase of construction if there is more than one, about 8 to 10 samples per phase are usually taken. Sometimes we take many more, especially if the construction is complicated One reason for taking so many samples is that, in general, some will fail to give a date. There may be many reasons why a particular sequence of ring widths from a sample of timber fails to give a date even though others from the same building do. For example, a particular tree may have grown in an odd niche, so odd indeed that the widths of its rings were determined by factors other than the local climate! In such circumstances it will be impossible to date a timber from this tree using the master sequence whose widths, we can assume, were predominantly determined by the local climate at the time



Fig 1. A wedge of oak from a tree felled in 1976. It shows the annual growth rings, one for each year from the innermost ring to the last ring on the outside just inside the bark. The year of each ring can be determined by counting back from the outside ring, which grew in 1976.



Fig 2. Cross-section of a rafter showing the presence of sapwood rings in the corners, the arrow is pointing to the heartwood/sapwood boundary (H/S). Also a core with sapwood; again the arrow is pointing to the H/S The core is about the size of a pencil.



Fig 3. Measuring ring widths under a microscope. The microscope is fixed while the sample is on a moving platform. The total sequence of widths is measured twice to ensure that an error has not been made This type of apparatus is needed to process a large number of samples on a regular basis.

![](_page_52_Picture_2.jpeg)

Fig 4. Three cores from timbers in a building. They come from trees growing at the same time. Notice that, although the sequences of widths look similar, they are not identical. This is typical.

Sampling is done by coring into the timber with a hollow corer attached to an electric drill and usually from its outer rings inwards towards where the centre of the tree, the pith, is judged to be. An illustration of a core is shown in Figure 2; it is about 15cm long and 1cm diameter. Great care has to be taken to ensure that as few as possible of the outer rings are lost This can be difficult as these outer rings are often very soft (see below on sapwood) Each sample is given a code which identifies uniquely which timber it comes from, which building it is from and where the building is located. For example, CRO-A06 is the sixth core taken from the first building  $(A)$  sampled by the Laboratory in Cropwell Bishop. Where it came from in that building will be shown in the sampling records and drawings. No structural damage is done to any timbers by coring, nor does it weaken them

During the initial inspector of the building and its timbers the dendrochronologist may come to the conclusion that, as far as can be judged, none of the timbers have sufficient rings in them for dating purposes and may advise against sampling to save further unwarranted expense.

All sampling by the Laboratory is undertaken according to current Health and Safety Standards. The Laboratory is insured with the CBA.

- 2. Measuring Ring Widths. Each core is sanded down with a belt sander using medium-grit paper and then finished by hand with flourgrade-grit paper. The rings are then clearly visible and differentiated from each other with a result very much like that shown in Figure 2. The core is then mounted on a movable table below a microscope and the ring-widths measured individually from the innermost ring to the outermost. The widths are automatically recorded in a computer file as they are measured (see Fig 3).
- *3. Cross-maiching and Dating the Samples.* Because of the factors besides the local climate which may determine the annual widths of a tree's rings, no two sequences of ring widths from different oaks growing at the same time are exactly alike (Fig 4). Indeed, the sequences may not be exactly alike even when the trees are growing near to each other. Consequently, in the Laboratory we do not attempt to match two sequences of ring widths by eye, or graphically, or by any other subjective method. Instead, it is done objectively (ie statistically) on a computer by a process called crossmatching. The output from the computer tells us the extent of correlation between two sample sequences of widths or, if we are dating, between a sample sequence of widths and the master, at each relative position of one to the other (offsets) The extent of the correlation at an offset is determined by the *I-value* (defined in almost any introductory book on statistics). That offset with the maximum t-value among the I-values at all the offsets will be the best candidate for dating one sequence relative to the other. If one of these is a master chronology, then this will date the other. Experiments carried out in the past with sequences from oaks of known date suggest that a t-value of at least 4.5, and preferably 5.0, is usually adequate for the dating to be accepted with reasonable confidence (Laxton et al 1988a,b; Howard et al 1984 - 1995).

This is illustrated in Fig 5 with timbers from one of the roofs of Lincoln Cathedral Here four sequences of ring widths, LIN- C04, 05, 08, and 45, have been cross-matched with each other. The ring widths themselves have been omitted in the bar-diagram, as is usual, but the offsets at which they best cross-match each other are shown; eg. C08 matches C45 best when it is at a position starting 20 rings after the first ring of 45. and similarly for the others The actual t-values between the four at these offsets of best correlations are in the matrix. Thus at the offset of +20 rings, the tvalue between C45 and C08 is 5.6 and is the maximum between these two whatever the position of one sequence relative to the other.

It is standard practice in our Laboratory first to cross-match as many as possible of the sequences of the samples in a building and then to form an average from them. This average is called a site sequence of the building being dated and is illustrated in Fig 5. The fifth bar at the bottom is a site sequence for a roof at Lincoln Cathedral and is constructed from the matching sequences from four timbers. The site sequence width for each year is the average of the widths in each of the sample sequences which has a width for that year. The actual sequence of widths of this site sequence is stored on the computer. The reason for creating site sequences is that it is usually easier to date an average sequence of ring widths with a master sequence than it is to date the individual component sample sequences separately.

average sequence of ring widths with a master sequence than it is to date the individual component sample sequences separately

This straightforward method of cross-matching several sample sequences with each other one at a time is called the 'maximal t-value' method. The actual method of cross-matching a group of sequences of ring-widths used in the Laboratory involves grouping and averaging the ring-width sequences and is called the 'Litton-Zainodin Grouping Procedure'. This was developed and tested in the Laboratory and has been published (Litton and Zainodin 1991; Laxton *et al* 1988a). To illustrate the difference between the two approaches with the above example, consider sequences C08 and C05. They are the most similar pair with a t-value of 10.4. Therefore, these two are first averaged with the first ring of C05 at  $+17$  rings relative to C08 (the offset at which they match each other) This average sequence is then used in place of the individual sequences C08 and COS. The cross-matching continues in this way gradually building up averages at each stage eventually to form the site sequence.

4. *Estimating the Felling Date.* If the bark is present on a sample, then the date of its last ring is the date of the felling of its tree. Actually it could be the year after if it had been felled in the first three months before any new growth had started, but this is not too important a consideration in most cases. The actual bark may not be present on a timber in a building, though the dendrochronologist who is sampling can often see from its surface that only the bark is missing. In these cases the date of the last ring is still the date of felling.

Quite often some, though not all, of the original outer rings are missing on a timber. The outer rings on an oak, called sapwood rings, are usually lighter than the inner rings, the heartwood, and so are relatively easy to identify. For example, they can be seen in two upper comers of the rafter and at the outer end of the core in Figure 2. More importantly for dendrochronology, the sapwood is relatively soft and so liable to insect attack and wear and tear. The builder, therefore, may remove some of the sapwood for precisely for these reasons. Nevertheless, if at least some of the sapwood rings are left on a sample, we will know that not too many rings have been lost since felling. Thus in these circumstances the date of the present last ring is at least close to the date of the original last ring on the tree, and so to the date of felling.

Various estimates have been made for the average number of sapwood rings in a mature oak. One estimate is 30 rings, based on data from living oaks. So, in the case of the core in Figure 2 where 9 sapwood rings remain, this would give an estimate for the felling date of 21 ( = 30 - 9) years later than of the date of the last ring on the core. Actually, it is better in these situations to give an estimated range for the felling date Another estimate is that in 95% of mature oaks there are between 15 and 50 sapwood rings. So in this example this would mean that the felling took place between 6 ( = 15 - 9 ) and 41 ( = 50 - 9) years after the date of the last ring on the core and is expected to be right in at least 95% of the cases (Hughes et al 1981; see also Hillam et al 1987).

Data from the Laboratory has shown that when sequences are considered together in groups, rather than separately, the estimates for the number of sapwood can be put at between 15 and 40 95% of the cases with the expected number being 25 rings. We would use these estimates, for example, in calculating the range for the common felling date of the four sequences from Lincoln Cathedral using the average position of the heartwood/sapwood boundary (Fig. 5). These new estimates are noW used by us in all our publications except for timbers from Kent and Nottinghamshire where 25 and between 15 to 35 sapwood rings, respectively, is used instead (Pearson I

More precise estimates of the felling date and range can often be obtained using knowledge of a particular case and information gathered at the time of sampling. For example, at the time of the dendrochronologist may have noted that the timber from which the core of Figure 2 was taken still had complete sapwood. Sapwood rings were only lost in coring, because of their softness By measuring in the timber the depth of sapwood lost, say 2 cm, a reasonable estimate can be made of the number of sapwood rings missing from the core, say 12 to 15 rings in this case By adding on 12 to 15 years to the date of the last ring on the sample a good tight estimate for the range of the felling date can be obtained, which is often better than the 15 to 40 years later we would have estimated without this observation.

## **T-vaJue/OITset Matrix**

![](_page_55_Picture_170.jpeg)

J.

## **Bar Diagram**

![](_page_55_Figure_3.jpeg)

Fig 5. Cross-matching of four sequences from a Lincoln Cathedral roof and the formation of a site sequence from them.

The *bar diagram* represents these sequences without the rings themselves. The length of the bar is proportional to the number of rings in the sequence. Here the four sequences are set at relative positions *(offsets)* to each other at which they have maximum correlation as measured by the *I-vallles.* 

The *I-value offset* matrix contains the maximum t-values below the diagonal and the offsets above it.

Thus, the maximum t-value between C08 and C45 occurs at the offset of +20 rings and the t-value is then 5.6.

The *sile sequence* is composed of the average of the corresponding widths, as illustrated with one width.

Even if all the sapwood rings are missing on all the timbers sampled, an estimate of the felling date is still possible in certain cases. For provided the original last heartwood ring of the tree, called the heartwood/sapwood boundary *(H/S)*, is still on some of the samples, an estimate for the felling date of the group of trees can be obtained by adding on the full 25 years, or 15 to 40 for the range of felling dates.

If none of the timbers have their heartwood/sapwood boundaries, then only a *post quem* date for felling is possible.

- 5. *Estimating the Date of Construction*. There is a considerable body of evidence in the data collected by the Laboratory that the oak timbers used in vernacular buildings, at least, were used 'green' (see also Rackham (1976 )). Hence provided the samples are taken *in situ*, and several dated with the same estimated common felling date, then this felling date will give an estimated date for the construction of the building, or for the phase of construction. If for some reason or other we are rather restricted in what samples we can take, then an estimated common felling date may not be such a precise estimate of the date of construction. More sampling may be needed for this.
- 6. Master Chronological Sequences. Ultimately, to date a sequence of ring widths, or a site sequence, we need a master sequence of dated ring widths with which to cross-match it, a Master Chronology. To construct such a sequence we have to start with a sequence of widths whose dates are known and this means beginning with a sequence from an oak tree whose date of felling is known. In Fig 6 such a sequence is SHE-T, which came from a tree in Sherwood Forest which was blown down in a recent gale. After this other sequences which cross-match with it are added and gradually the sequence is 'pushed back in time' as far as the age of samples will allow. This process is illustrated in Fig 6. We have a master chronological sequence of widths for Nottinghamshire and East Midlands oak for each year from AD 882 to 1981. It is described in great detail in Laxton and Litton 1988b, but the components it contains are shown here in the form of a bar diagram. As can be seen, it is well replicated in that for each year in this period there are several sample sequences having widths for that year. The master is the average of these This master can now be used to date oak from this area and from the surrounding areas where the climate is very similar to that in the East Midlands. The Laboratory has also constructed a master for Kent (Laxton and Litton 1989). The method the· Laboratory uses to construct a master sequence, such as the East Midlands and Kent, is completely objective and uses the Litton~Zainodin grouping procedure (Laxton *et al* 1988a) Other laboratories and individuals have constructed masters for other areas and have made them available. As well as these masters, local (dated) site chronologies can be used to date other buildings from nearby. The Laboratory has hundreds of these site sequences from many parts of England and Wales covering many short periods.
- *7. Ring-width Indices.* Tree-ring dating can be done by cross-matching the ring widths themselves, as described above. However, it is advantageous to modify the widths first. Because different trees grow at different rates and because a young oak grows in a different way from an older irrespective of the climate, the widths are first standardized before any matching between them is attempted. These standard widths are known as ring-width indices and were first used in dendrochronology by Baillie and Pilcher (1973). The exact form they take is explained in this paper and in the appendix of Laxton and Litton (1988b) and is illustrated in the graphs in Fig 7. Here ringwidths are plotted vertically, one for each year of growth. In the upper sequence (a), the generally large early growth after 1810 is very apparent as is the smaller generally later growth from about 1900 onwards. A similar difference can be observed in the lower sequence starting in 1835. In both the widths are also changing rapidly from year to year. The peaks are the wide rings and the troughs are the narrow rings, hopefully corresponding to good and poor growing seasons, respectively. The two corresponding sequences of Baillie-Pilcher indices are plotted in (b) where the differences in the early and late growths have been removed and only the rapidly changing peaks and troughs remain only associated with the common climatic signal and so make cross-matching easter.

![](_page_57_Figure_0.jpeg)

Fig 6. Bar diagram showing the relative positions and dates of the first rings of the component site sequences in the East Midlands Master Dendrochronological Sequence, EM08/87.

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![](_page_58_Figure_0.jpeg)

Fig 7. (a) The raw ring-widths of two samples, THO-A01 and THO-B05, whose felling dates are known. Here the ring widths are plotted vertically, one for each year, so that peaks represent wide rings and troughs narrow ones. Notice the growth-trends in each, on average the earlier rings of the young tree are wider than the later ones of the older tree in both sequences.

(b) The Baillie-Pilcher indices of the above widths. The growth-trends have been removed completely.

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