**Science and Conservation at the National Gallery, London: the 1950s to the 1970s**

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The laboratory at National Gallery, London, was founded in 1934 to carry out physical examination of paintings using X-radiography, infrared photography and similar techniques; chemical examination of the materials present was not then carried out. After the Second World War, the Weaver Committee set up in 1947 to examine the cleaning of pictures at the Gallery recommended the employment of a Research Chemist to investigate problems associated with cleaning and conservation and a small chemical laboratory was set up in 1948. It soon became clear that to examine the original materials used by the artist an additional scientist was needed and in 1949 Joyce Plesters was employed. Detailed study of the varnishes used became possible with the help of two Nuffield scholars, Ian Graham and John Mills, from 1951, the latter being on the permanent staff from 1961.

From the outset, close collaboration with the Gallery Conservation Department was essential to build up a good working relationship and to understand the problems under investigation. Through the 1960s and 70s, study of the paintings was inseparable from fundamental research on the materials of paint and varnish and the development of improved techniques for their examination. The financial climate was not particularly good during these years, but the intellectual climate was thriving: the Scientific Department benefitted from the advice of an independent committee of research scientists, which enabled information to be shared and sometimes access to be given to techniques that were otherwise unaffordable.

Gallery scientists could, and did, publish research in scientific journals, but the publication of *Studies in Conservation* from 1952 gave them and their conservation colleagues a journal where their work would be read by those in the field. Garry Thomson, then Scientific Adviser to the Gallery Trustees, thought it important that the collaborative work carried out by the Scientific and Conservation departments should have another outlet and the first issue of the *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* appeared in 1977. He did not think it would have a long life, but volume 40 appeared in 2019. The series has documented developments in scientific examination and conservation treatment, and also collaboration with art historians to give rounded and informative discussions of study of the paintings.