

The Organic Chemistry of Museum Objects

*John S. Mills
Raymond White*

Butterworths

**The organic chemistry
of museum objects**

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The Organic Chemistry of Museum Objects

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Preface

The aim of this book is to provide an account of the composition, chemistry and analysis of the organic materials which enter into the structures of objects in museum collections. This project was embarked upon in the belief that there is a need for such a compendium, both on the museum side and on that of the academic chemist, and in the hope that it may bring the two closer together. The literature of conservation and that of chemistry overlap only to a small extent, and while most conservators and other technical museum personnel are at least aware (through the medium of the *Art and Archaeology Technical Abstracts*) of the existence of the relevant chemical literature, staff in the universities often know rather little of the more practical or *ad hoc* research scattered through the conservation journals.

A book intended for both chemists and non-chemists must involve some compromise, and only part of the text will be of interest to both parties. The chemists will not need the introductory chemistry of Chapter 1 while conservators and curators, perhaps even students, may not feel the need to inform themselves fully on, say, the chemistry of shellac. However, the book is intended to be read: it has not been compiled as a reference handbook of materials though it may partly serve this function for the natural products.

A word should be said regarding our policy both on coverage and on referencing. Both of these are generally more comprehensive on

topics for which there exist no adequate books or review articles—resins and lacquers are a case in point—and in consequence there is no particular correlation between length of a chapter and the practical importance of its subject. A correlation between length and chemical complexity is more likely but even in the larger chapters no attempt is made at completeness.

Despite their practical importance, the major structural materials such as wood or skin products, are relatively simple chemically. These materials are included so as to be seen in their chemical context but they really need the individual treatment which, it is hoped, they will receive in due course in this Series. With regard to references, the later ones are always preferred to those of earlier years; prior to 1960 references are mainly confined to those of historical interest.

We thank our colleagues in the Scientific Department of The National Gallery for their help with our enquiries and their patience when practical investigations have sometimes been delayed by our preoccupation with this book. Our thanks are also due to the Consultant Editor, Professor Norbert S. Baer, and Mr. Stephen G. Rees-Jones, the Series Editor, for reading the manuscript and making many suggestions for improvements.

John Mills
Raymond White

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