

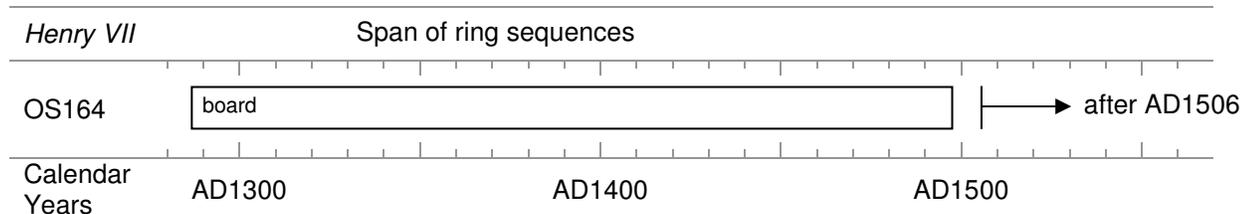
Dendrochronology - *The scientific term for dating wood.*

We've recently been working on a number of paintings on wooden panels and managed to find 4 panels belonging to the same tree circa 1505, which leads me on to the latest topic for this studio newsletter.

Wood has been used as a painting support from very early times, most obviously in the explosion of painting in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries in The Netherlands, but also in Germany and England.

Dendrochronology is the scientific study of dating certain types of wood in an attempt to establish the age of certain paintings. Typical types of timber where data has been collected are oak, beech and spruce.

The growth of a tree is greatly affected by different weather conditions and when cut into cross-sections, exposes visible rings, some of which are much fatter than others. The fatter the sap growth, the wetter the year. There might have been 3 wet years, followed by 10 dry, 2 wet, 2 dry etc. It is like sliding two rulers together until a match is found. This gives us the date of the rings in the tree and the last year of growth for the piece in question.



Results of the analysis of a panel painting, with a date for painting taking into account missing rings and seasoning

The storage of the timber and its drying process must also be considered when determining the actual use of the timber. Therefore, if a tree was cut in the year 1500 one takes off the sapwood of say 5 years minimum, and the timber is dried for 2-6 years on average. One is looking at a piece of wood that was usable in 1511/1512. This of course only tells us how old the piece of timber is, this does not tell us how old the painting is. A 'faker' could have used timber from old pieces of furniture and painted over it!

A very slow but obvious pattern can be spotted when one inspects the various tree rings and these can then be compared with the recorded rings and spacing that is in our database.
