Alfred Bader fonds

Correspondence

Alfred Bader / Out of the Blue Responses
1988-92

Alfred Bader
Out of the Blue RESPONSES

Dr. Alfred Bader
924 East Juneau, Suite 622
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202
Phone: 414/277-0730
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A Chemist Helping Chemists

February 11, 1998

Mr. Clifford J. Wharton
522 Davidson Road
Croydon
Surrey CR0 6DH
ENGLAND

Dear Mr. Wharton:

Thank you for your letter of February 5 with the copies of the responses you received about my Prussian Blue painting.

Do check the people I thanked in my *Chemistry in Britain* article and you will find that I have been talking - often at great lengths - with some of the people you contacted, for instance, Dr. Frank James at the Royal Institution and Peter Funnell at the National Portrait Gallery.

The most interesting letter you received is the one from Robin Hamlyn, the Curator of the Tate Gallery. This parallels a letter from the curator of the Metropolitan Museum in New York who had written to the previous owner that he thought that the painting almost certainly was by Thomas Sully. Unfortunately this is not correct. Sully monogrammed all of his works and kept a very careful diary of all the paintings he did. This is certainly not included.

I have had a good many letters, many of them asking whether I would consider selling the painting. There is general consensus that the teacher certainly is not Davy, but Brande. But there are questions whether the student is Faraday, in part because Faraday did not part his hair the way it is depicted in the painting. It has been suggested, albeit without proof, that the student might be Brande's son; I believe he had several.

I think that the answer will come from some remark in one of the memoirs or one of the literary gazettes covering the period from 1820 to 1830. Unfortunately we do not have a very good library in Milwaukee dealing with early 19th century British publications. And anyway, I would not know where to look.

I will just have to leave it to chance and hope that someone will make the connection in my lifetime.

With many thanks for your help, and best wishes, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

AB/nik

Dr. Alfred Bader
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A Chemist Helping Chemists

February 2, 1998

Professor H. F. Shurvell
Professor Emeritus of Chemistry
Department of Chemistry
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6
CANADA

Dear Professor Shurvell:

In response to your interesting letter of January 26th regarding my Prussian Blue painting, I do not know of any pigments that were introduced after 1828 that might be in my large work. Certainly if it contained titanium dioxide, for instance, I would know that it is a 20th century painting - but it does not.

Unfortunately I can not be with you in August, but perhaps you know that we generally plan to be at Queen's at the end of October.

With best wishes, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

AB/nik

DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY
Tel 613 545-2616
Fax 613 545-6669

Queen's University
Kingston, Canada
K7L 3N6

January 26, 1998

Dear Dr. Bader:

I was very interested in your article in the November 1997 issue of *Chemistry in Britain*. In the two paintings (Figs. 1 and 3), the student, the teacher and the experiment are the same. However, many details of your painting differ from the 1827 work. For example, the table, the tablecloth, the teacher's (low-backed) chair, the drapes behind the teacher, etc. are clearly different features. I wonder if any of these items might contain a clue to the date of your painting?

In your article you mention that your painting may date from a much later period (1840 to 1860) than the Oxford painting of 1827. Were there any major new developments in pigments available to artists between these periods? My reason for asking is prompted by my interest in Raman spectroscopy - a non-destructive, in-situ technique for analysis of compounds such as pigments in paintings. It might be possible to identify in your painting a pigment that only became available after a certain date. Just a thought!

The reference to Prussian blue reminded me of a demonstration that I used to do for my CHEM 248 class (surface chemistry and colloids). I collected a freshly prepared precipitate of Prussian blue in a Bűchner filter. I then converted it to a colloidal suspension by pouring a solution of oxalic acid through the precipitate. The large particles became dispersed into much smaller colloidal particles which then passed through the filter paper.

I am Chair of the *44th International conference on Analytical Sciences and Spectroscopy* to be held at Queen's in August this year (see enclosed notice). Dr. Alison Murray of the Art Conservation Department is organizing a session on Art Conservation. It occurred to me that it would be very nice if you could make one of your visits to Queen's coincide with our meeting. Then we could invite you to give a talk on your Michael Faraday paintings investigation.

Yours sincerely,

H. F. Shurvell

H. F. (Gus) Shurvell,
Professor Emeritus of Chemistry

Dr. Alfred Bader
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Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202
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A Chemist Helping Chemists

January 9, 1998

Dr. B. V. Mather
28 Hawthorn Road
Belle Vue, Shrewsbury
Shropshire SY3 7NB
ENGLAND

Dear Dr. Mather:

Thank you so much for going to so much trouble, as indicated in your thought-provoking letter of December 31st.

If you will read chapters 17 and 18 of my autobiography, *Adventures of a Chemist Collector* which is offered by the Royal Society of Chemistry, you will see that I buy, sell, and give away a great many paintings every year. Also I started my professional work as a chemist in the 1940s as a paint chemist.

This does not mean that I cannot be fooled occasionally. Within the last five years I purchased two paintings each of which Christie's believed were by 17th century students of Rembrandt. But my excellent conservators proved that they are really 20th century fakes.

This is certainly not the case with my large painting which is certainly 19th century but it just is not possible chemically to say whether a painting was painted in 1827 or in 1850.

Of course you put your finger on the key question: For whom was such a large and well-painted work intended? When we have the answer to that, I will gladly send my cheque for £1,000 and also learn the name of the painter.

With all good wishes, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

AB/nik

MR. B. V. MATHER
28 HAWTHORN ROAD
BELLE VUE
SHREWSBURY
SHROPSHIRE
SY3 7NB

31st December, 1987

Dear Dr. Bader,

Thank you kindly for your reply to my letter of last November 7th.

I can appreciate that you have taken some pains to have the painting re-lined; this is not unusual in the past. Your men I presume is very good.

However, I don't know if you are aware of the techniques available. I mentioned an R.I. lecture by a man from the National Gallery in London (on TV several times last summer). This drew attention not only to pigment analysis, but to analysis of sections through paint layers. "Period" pigments are of course still available, and one could make them oneself.

The R.I. lecture also drew attention to re-use of canvases: X-raying here. The use of I.R. reflectance spectroscopy can often show restoration or overpainting, and a

particularly interesting example was the N.G.'s own "Arnolfini Wedding" by van Eyck. (I like Eyck!)

I was suggesting that as a precautionary measure as the chair looks later than (say) 1827 and the posture of the seated main character is cramped. This seems odd. The type of chair was common in lounges and even libraries quite recently.

The question of isotopic analysis of minerals has come up over the last year or so, and offers the opportunity of tracing the gold, for instance, as apparently extent in mediaeval paintings. South African and Russian (eR) golds are readily distinguishable. Similarly with lapis lazuli. This is said to have caused some consternation, on the quiet. What with the possibility that only up to 300 out of 950 Rembrandts are genuine...! Obviously, dedication work may leap forward a good deal using multiple-element isotope scans.

I must have added the (PS) belatedly for I kept no note of it; not my usual practice.

In closing, I am a little suspicious of the large painting because I cannot readily imagine for whom the painting would be intended: probably not a chemist or even scientist. Discovery – or didacticism?

Yours sincerely, Bernard Mather

Dr. Alfred Bader
924 East Juneau, Suite 622
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A Chemist Helping Chemists

December 26, 1997

Dr. B. V. Mather
28 Hawthorn Rd.
Belle View
Sarewsbury 5Y3 7MB

Dear Dr. Mather:

Ms. Lalitha Gopinath at Chemistry in Britain has kindly forwarded to me your interesting letter of November 7.

My large painting was relined by the ablest conservator I know and he has assured me that there is nothing under my painting and that the pigments are all the period. Also a good conservator can distinguish between a 20th century paintfilm in a fake and that of an early 19th century painting.

Of course the artist staged the student and teacher. No chemist would ever work in such an elegant chair but such chairs were made before 1827.

You are quite right in pointing out how important the year 1827 was in Faraday's life. That was the year when his first book was published and it may well be that the painting in Oxford was produced to make a plate for a book. My hope is that a print relating to either painting exists and whoever sends me a xerox copy of that will receive the £1000.

I can understand that the work of Burne Jones came to your mind: He probably looked at works like these, influenced by Sir Thomas Lawrence.

Unfortunately, I have difficulty reading all of your writing, particularly in your "p.s.".

With all good wishes for 1998, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

AB/nik

c: Ms. Cath O'Driscoll, Features Editor, *Chemistry in Britain*

Chemistry
IN BRITAIN

2/12/97

Dear Dr Bader,

Please find enclosed a letter that was sent to us concerning your article. This is for your information only.

Regards,

Lalitha Gopinath.

With compliments

28, Hawthorn Rd.,
Belle Vue,
Shrewsbury,
SY3 7NB

7th November, 1997

Dear Sir,

Out of the Blue

Alfred Beder's quest is in keeping with the scientific regard for correct attributions and authenticity. The puzzle does suggest one or two things, but in general I recall a Royal Institution lecture earlier in the summer (TV broadcast) on the subject of science in paintings.

The first step would be to X-ray the large (and possibly the small) canvas. This would establish whether or not it was overpainted and so account for its 1816-30 dating. It was quite common to re-use old canvases in this way, for the material was expensive. Indeed, some 20th century forgers have used old canvases, not to mention old parchment, to perpetrate fraud.

Secondly, analysis of the pigments employed (isotope) might indicate the source and date of the paints/colours. Isotope distributions particularly might identify a particular artist – they usually mixed their own colours. (Some of Turner's secrets went to the grave with him).

Still on the larger painting: the chair seems to me unusual for very early 19th Century, though I am no antiques expert. The studded rivets particularly, and the green leather seem more typically mid-century — vide House of Commons seats.

Identification of the chair and its earliest possible date would materially help. It is curious that there are arms on the chair. No-one trained on a chair would have it so as the elbows would catch.

Regarding the small picture, the date of 1827 may imply that it commemorates the RI lectures, and the monogram may be just so; the style suggests it may have been used to make plates for a bound volume perhaps containing Faraday's lectures?

The name of Burne-Jones came to mind, but he was born only in 1833, most of his oils (exquisite technique) being 1870's and later. He was at Exeter College, Oxford and was a founder-member of a window-making company — hence his interest in dyes, perhaps? The "kiln" appearance looks quite modern, too — possible to date it by bulb shapes & contours?

Names of dyes from the time go from Manchester green to Bismarck brown, with many treasures before the plethora led to — mainly — catalogue numbers.

Yours sincerely, B V Mathias

P.S. Could someone remind what is the Hanschkuhn reason?

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A Chemist Helping Chemists

December 26, 1997

Mary Virginia Orna, OSU
Editor, *Chemical Heritage*
315 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106-2702

Dear Mary Virginia:

Thank you for your kind letter of November 10th to which I replied briefly from England.

Now please find enclosed the correspondence I have had regarding the canvas marks and also a copy of the marks which could be seen at the back of the canvas. In a future, larger article it might make sense to reproduce the canvas marks.

Since the publication of my article in *Chemistry in Britain* I have had all sorts of letters, only one of which is important, from Dr. Robin Spring, and I enclose copy of his letter. May I impose on you to share this with Arnold who was of course the first to suggest that the teacher is Brande. I would very much appreciate your and Arnold's thinking about Dr. Spring's comments.

Other letters have enquired how much the painting costs and if it is for sale, whether it might not be a 20th century fake, would I fund a research project to find the answer, at a British university, etc. All of these were easily answered.

One reader even sent me a dream story - what imagination!

The *Wisconsin Academy* reprinted the *Chemistry in Britain* article and I enclose copy.

With all good wishes for a healthy and happy 1998, I remain,

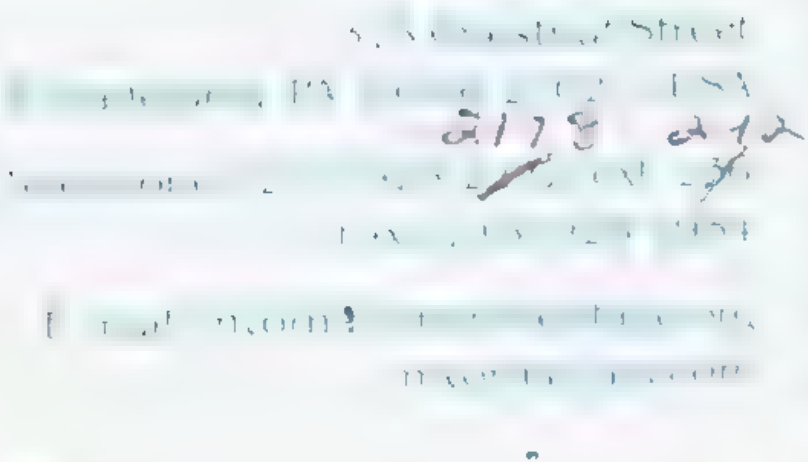
Yours sincerely,

AB/nik

Enclosures

Mary Virginia Orna

Editor



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November 10, 1997

RECEIVED Nov 12 1997

Alfred Bader
924 East Juneau Street, Suite 622
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Alfred:

Congratulations on the publication of "Out of the Blue" in the November issue of Chemistry in Britain. You have certainly had some very able help in your quest to track down the artist who painted Figure 3. As always, your endless curiosity, and the "new things and old" that you manage to extract from your vast storehouse of knowledge, only lead to even more questions than answers. May your tribe increase, especially among today's students!

I have a question about the tax stamp found on your painting. Were the excise duties on painters' canvases paid at the time of the purchase of the canvas? If so, were records kept of such purchases in official record offices, or by the vendor, presumably Thomas Brown of High Holborn, in this instance? If records were kept at all, it might be possible to track down the name(s) of purchasers from that era, thus narrowing your search.

In any event, the whole story is intriguing, but it may take a better person than Sherlock Holmes to come up with the clues that you seek. Good luck! And please keep us posted here at CHF.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With every good wish to you and Isabel, I am

Sincerely,

Mary Virginia

Mary Virginia Orna, OSU
Editor, *Chemical Heritage*

Dr. Alfred Bader
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Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202
Phone: 414/277-0730
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A Chemist Helping Chemists

December 26, 1997

Dr. John F. Spencer
Manager, Investigation Support Unit
School of Conservation Sciences
Bournemouth University
Dorset House, Talbot Campus
Fern Barrow, Poole, Dorset BH12 5BB
ENGLAND

Dear Dr. Spencer:

A trip to England has delayed my responding to your kind letter received in Milwaukee on November 17.

My painting depicting the production of Prussian Blue was restored by a very able conservator and he and I are convinced that my painting is early 19th century and is not a copy. The painting in Oxford is dated 1827 and is probably based on my painting.

Of course the artist staged the sitters. No working chemist would sit in such an elegant chair.

I have already received some interesting leads and hope that chemists and art historians in Britain will help me find a solution.

With best wishes for 1998, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

AB/nik

RECEIVED NOV 1 7 1997

INVESTIGATION SUPPORT UNIT

Vice-Chancellor:
Professor Gillian L Slater
MSc MA DPhil CMath
FIMA FRSA

School of Conservation Sciences

Head of School
Professor Bryan J H Brown
BSc PhD FRGS

Dr Alfred Bader
924 East Juneau Avenue
Suite 622
Milwaukee
Wisconsin 53202
USA

Dear Dr. Bader,

Out of the Blue. Chemistry in Britain, November 1997.

Your article, as was your recently read book 'Adventures of a Chemist Collector', has brought an enhanced interest and harmonisation with chemistry, for me, by an unexpected route. Through your weighing up of the pros and cons of what earlier chemists did and did not do and the science within the subject of the painting I have broadened my knowledge of the history of chemistry and of its artisans. But what about those other artisans, represented in the painting, perhaps they can lead to the answer to your puzzle by their own 'unexpected routes'.

Question, for example, the elegant chair back. Who would have had such an obvious masterpiece of craftsmanship in their house let alone the laboratory, whose style is it?. Question also the chandelier, its style, the glass lamp envelopes (or are they gas/oil), quite a delicate looking array and why bother to show a hook in the ceiling to the left of it. Has it, or any other item, any particular significance such as enhancing the standing of the characters. What ever the purpose these things tell us something of the character of the artist, his background, his experiences and what influenced him in life. e.g. Why in your own painting did you change the style of the chair. If it is 20C style then clearly the painting is a copy and no doubt the chair a favorite of the artists from some experience.

Similar questions should be asked about the table, its proportions and style and those distinctive feet to the legs; about the copper skillet bottom right, and its riveting of the handles; about the books and their bindings; about the clothing and when those items shown became fashionable.

The article raises questions associated with the chemistry and its apparatus and perhaps you have already considered my suggestions above. If so forgive my presumptuousness but if not then historians and museum specialist in social artifacts should be able to help. Here at Bournemouth University , School of Conservation Sciences, we have active archaeologists, conservators and links with local museums. Perhaps if the answer to the puzzle is not forthcoming by other means you might consider commissioning a research project along the lines suggest above.

My best wishes for a fruitful search.

John F Spencer
Research and Consultancy Support Officer.
Manager, Investigation Support Unit.

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