

RESTORATION OF A GEORGE II MIRROR, CIRCA 1750

By Nancy Chinnery



This lovely small mirror (23in. x 48in.) arrived in the workshop with its top missing and a shoe box full of bits. I enjoy a good jigsaw puzzle so I was keen to get started.

It was soon obvious that the surface was covered with a thin bronze powder based paint, but that beneath this there were no signs of any additional gesso or paint layers. The bronze powder coating was easily removed with spirit methyl chloride, wiped on and quickly wiped off with swabs dampened with meths.

The original surface underneath was in beautiful condition, a rich tawny peach colour with a fair amount of original gilding evident.

Now the fun really started. All the "bits" were assembled and pieced together. Although quite a lot was missing, the corresponding "reflection" on the other side was intact to take patterns of.

Lime wood was attached with animal glue to the gaps and carved to match the pattern. The new carving was given four coats of gesso, which was then sanded, washed in and re-cut. The gesso was ochred and sized to match the original bole. All the new repairs were gilded with 23.5 carat gold as well as areas of missing gold on the original, approximately 20%.

Then the challenge of matching the new with the old! In this case it was easy because the existing gilt surface was so beautiful, worn but very soft. With dry brushes, rottenstone and meths it was a case of carefully thinning the new gold to blend in with the old. The highlights were then burnished and the whole mirror given a coat of parchment size to protect it.

By the end of this project I had grown very fond of the little dog or maybe it was a goat and the completed restoration is shown on the right.

