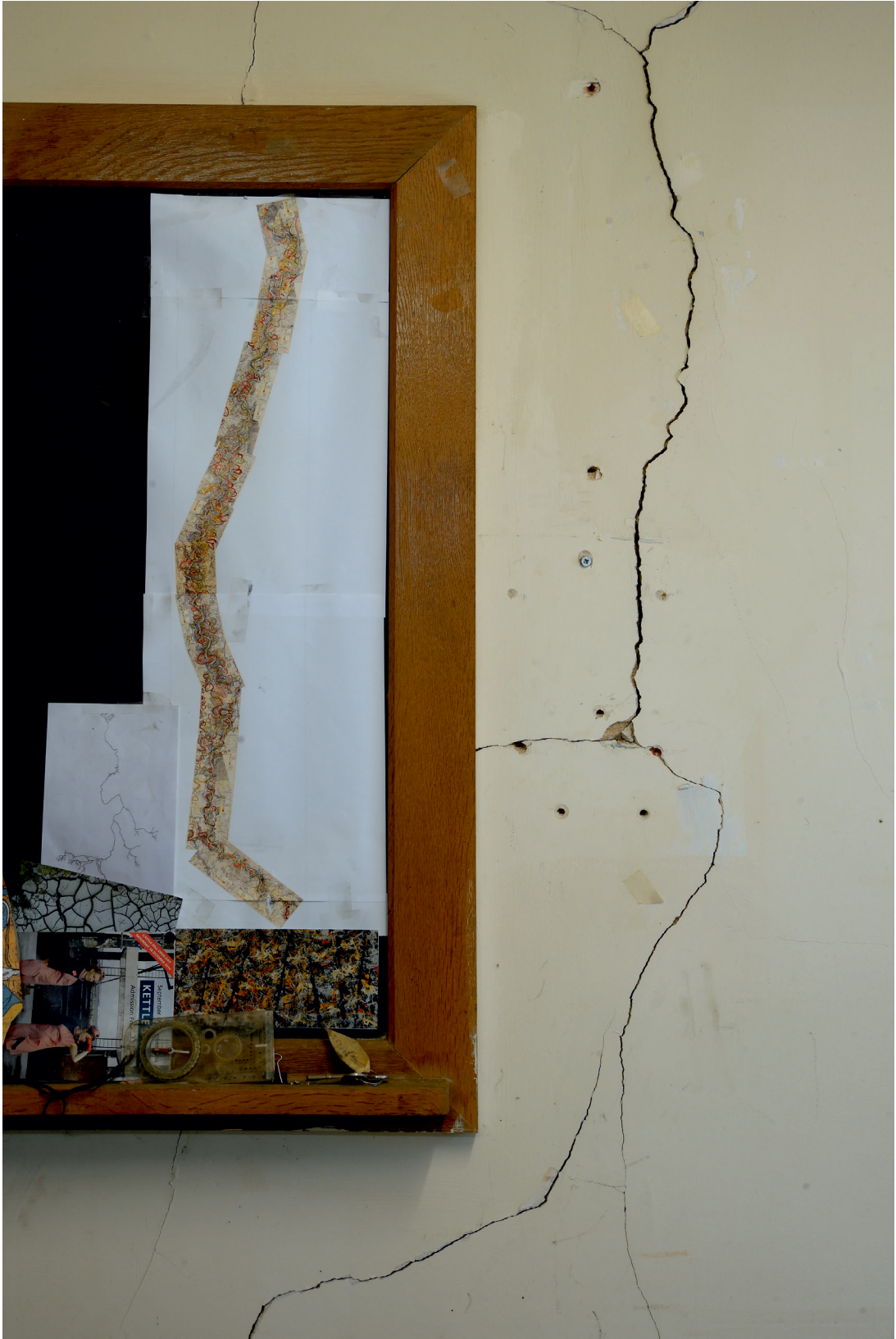


A Book of Sites





McDONALD INSTITUTE MONOGRAPHS

A Book of Sites

River Great Ouse floodplain and
mid-stream island investigations
at Barleycroft Farm/Over,
Cambridgeshire

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with Mark Haughton

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Frontispiece: A Riverine Wall – For years, Evans had a wide array of evocative river imagery plastered against the back door of his CAU office. Effectively a ‘thinking wall’, it was one of a number in the room. In this case, preparing to vacate the office, some of the door’s display components were reassembled on its aged blackboard (accounting for the picture’s somewhat contrived quality). There, resonating with a distinct ‘river-suggestive’ wall crack – the Unit’s University buildings being rather dilapidated – this echoed with Fisk’s great ‘long-version’ rendering of the Mississippi’s palaeochannels included here and, beside which, is one of the artist Maya Lin’s river-pattern works. Amid the blackboard’s ledge clutter, the Mississippi flows, as it were, down into Jackson Pollock’s Blue Poles (1952). A long-time favourite, the latter’s ‘poles’ somehow always seemed evocative of Site H’s Post Alignments (see Chap. 3).

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Acknowledgements – *The Long Run of Things*

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Aside from some of Gwill Owen's shots of Site 9's Ringwork, the site photography was largely undertaken by their respective directors. Only during the late-in-the-day Plant Site excavations was Dave Webb in post as the Unit's photographer; with Dave also providing the volume's studio imagery. Including reworking of hand-drawn early-days graphics, most of the site drawings herein are the work of Andrew Hall, with the finds' illustrations variously undertaken by Vicki Herring, Laura Hogg and Paul White. Jane Matthews enabled digital plan access and provided computational area-data.

Amongst the travails contributing to the book's delay was the partial collapse of the roof within the University's storage facility in West Cambridge's former Sterling Short's Bomber Factory. With the materials contaminated, their subsequent cleaning was facilitated by Jessica Rippengale, and the Unit's finds section staff – led by Emily Banfield – have greatly helped the provision of difficult to obtain finds archives (with Emily's prehistoric expertise furthering outstanding last-minute identifications and contributing to this volume). In the era of the sites covered herein, their finds were variously processed under the supervision of Julie Boreham, Norma Challands and Justin Wiles.

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Running for so long, the project has benefitted from the input and cooperation (and 'tolerance') of a succession of County Council planning archaeologists; the early-era holders including Bob Sydes, Louise Austin, Simon Kaner and Andy Thomas.

With the book covering the project's beginnings, it amounts to a going back to the early years of the CAU (when its Director Generals were, successively, Ian Hodder and Martin Jones, both strong supporters of the project). Then ARC, the Hanson Quarry fieldwork – not just at Barleycroft/Over, but also Fen Drayton, Meadow Lane (St Ives) and Colne Fen, Earith – was fundamental to what the Unit became. For this, now spanning decades, we are grateful for the co-operation of many in that company. In this capacity four, though, must be singled out: Hilton Law and, before that, John Bown, Ian Briggs and Brian Chapman. Although at times surely tried, their appreciation of what was attempted at Barleycroft/Over has only been exemplary. Indeed, Brian, on leaving Hanson shifted to Forterra and there 'hosted' the excavation of Must Farm's pile-dwelling settlement. Having thereby facilitated so much of the region's wetland archaeology, now with his retirement, it is only appropriate that Brian is amongst those to whom this volume is dedicated.

This he shares with John Coles. Sadly passing away over the last year, John was always a key player and strong advocate of Fenland archaeology. With Haddenham's earlier investigations lurking behind it, in the '90s the Unit's participation in English Heritage's Fenland Management Projects (FMP) was certainly instrumental for the CAU's development. Aably managed by John, not only did it provide a subsequent basis of relevant specialist input (e.g. Murphy, Palmer and Wiltshire) but many of the sampling techniques presented here were also practiced on its sites. Not to be overlooked here is also, of course, David Hall. A staunch supporter and colleague of long standing (to whom one of the Haddenham volumes was duly dedicated), up until his sad passing last summer, the Unit greatly benefited from his wry humour, Medieval pottery skills and astute landscape 'eye'.

Christopher Evans, Cambridge, December 2023
(Revised 2024)

I would have gone down the Meander years ago if I'd known it existed ... the original winding river appeared so entwined in the remote past of Anatolia, or Asiatic Turkey, as to have forfeited any geographical place in the present. The Meander was no more accessible than the mythical Styx or the mislaid Rubicon, or so I supposed until the day I came across it.

... Windings being, of course, what I was to expect from the Meander. The river's course ... was so sinuous that the Meander had established its byword reputation even before the first historians went to work; the earliest of them all, Herodotus, chose as his default simile the river that reached the sea just forty miles north of his home city, now Turkey's foremost tourist mecca of Bodrum, to describe a particularly mazy stretch of the Nile (Seal 2012, 1-2; emphasis added).

These few bookcases, however, were [Jorges Luis] Borges' pride. "I'll tell you a secret," he once explained. "I like to pretend I'm not blind, and I covet books like a man who can see. I even covet new encyclopedias, and imagine *I can follow the course of rivers in their maps and find wonderful things*" (Manguel 2006, 185-6; emphasis added).