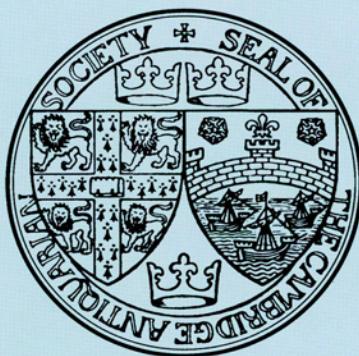

Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

**Volume XCVII
for 2008**



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Associate Editor (Archaeology) Professor Stephen Upex

Published by the Cambridge Antiquarian Society 2008
ISSN 0309-3606

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Reviews

Tim Malim and Sue Oosthuizen

A Woodland Archaeology: Neolithic sites at Haddenham and Marshland Communities and Cultural Landscapes from the Bronze Age to the present day

Christopher Evans and Ian Hodder 2006
McDonald Institute Monographs, Cambridge. xxi + 389pp. 189 illustrations, 102 tables; & xxv + 509 pp. 280 illustrations, 160 tables.

These two large volumes document the work of Cambridge University's Haddenham project, a seven year programme of fieldwork to investigate two exceptionally important Neolithic monuments (a causewayed enclosure and long barrow) and their immediate hinterland, as well as the subsequent changing cultural use of the landscape (including Bronze Age burials, Iron Age settlement, and Romano-British shrine) in response to severe changes in environmental conditions over several thousand years. The location of the Haddenham Delphs, which form part of the gravel terraces of the Great Ouse where it enters the fens, situated on the margins of the Isle of Ely and the Cambridgeshire fen edge, places it in an area particularly sensitive to climatic change and rising water levels. Although principally site-focused, the publications place the sites in their contemporary landscape context, a study which has also benefited from 15 years of developer-funded exposure of buried landscapes on the Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire Ouse terraces. Widespread ethnographic analogies from around the world are included as specialised insets to help with interpretation of prehistoric fenland phenomena, by using such studies to demonstrate the variability of human affinity to local environments and the symbolic adaption of natural features, as well as illustrating more ephemeral events such as communal gatherings.

Twenty years after the termination of fieldwork it is excellent to see such fulsome results presented in the format of a detailed, conventional archaeological report supported by excellent graphics, which flies in the face of the profession's debate on the need to reduce publication to synthetic overviews with data confined to an archive! Although not always the easiest narrative to read, here we have chapters containing the data from in-depth analyses, together with the strategy, methodology and logic by which interpretation has been reached, so that a fully informed, critical assessment of the research and conclusions can be made by the reader. The project also exemplifies the benefits that can be derived from a fusion of experienced field archaeologists, working with teams of enthusiastic workers and students, and operating within the sphere of university-based research: the publications have an extensive list of contributors in addition to the main authors, many of whom were then research students and who are now established senior academics. The crafting together of university training excavations, government work scheme grants, and English Heritage funding demonstrates how a creative approach to project organization can lead to valuable archaeological research – an innovative approach further exemplified by the pragmatic use of a dinghy during the excavations to ferry diggers across the Ouse, cutting down on a long road journey!

A Woodland Archaeology is structured in an orthodox manner, with chapters setting the scene and then concentrating on landscape surveys and site excavations, sub-divided into the results from each season's fieldwork. Artefact and ecofact analyses are presented as individual data-sets, and then drawn together in overview discussions. Of particular interest to me was the fascinating study and reconstruction of the long barrow's timber chamber. The final parts of the volume examine parallels for the monuments and their place within the eastern region (the size of Haddenham's causewayed enclosure at 8.75ha testifies to its regional significance), as well as with the Thames Valley and Wessex areas. A rather eclectic vision of Neolithic community is given by comparison to three paintings by Pieter Breughel. The title refers to a constant theme of the book, a life in the woods and the transformation of the landscape from woodland through initial clearings, with later development to cultivated plots and mobile forest pastoralism. The architecture and symbolism of the two monuments are seen in terms of the influence that a life amongst trees would bring, with limited visibility, a forest wall at the edge of human

clearance paralleled by the palisades of the causewayed enclosure, and the entrusting of the dead to the bowels of a tree as represented by the bark-faced exterior of the mortuary chamber.

There is also much discussion on territories with a useful comparison of the distribution of causewayed enclosures and artefact densities set against their topographical contexts. The riverside nature of the Haddenham sites is reflected in a longer catchment area of 25km than those projected for more upland causewayed enclosures and long barrows (12.5–15km), and the importance of the river as a major route of communication is emphasised. The size of the Neolithic population that would have constructed the causewayed enclosure is estimated at 300–600 with parallels drawn to the Huron of North American temperate forests living at a ratio of 24 people per square kilometre. A final theme that is explored in the discussion is that of increasing inundation, a shifting wetland/dryland boundary, and suggestions are made to the possibility for folk memory of the drowning of Doggerland. The location and design of these early Neolithic monuments are interpreted as having derived from local landscape factors such as the river, because until their construction there was no local tradition for a special place or type of monument on which to model these new Neolithic structures.

Marshland Communities is a more diffuse and fragmented volume, a consequence of its subject matter which covers excavations of the later prehistoric and historic components of the Delphs landscape, and a documentary study of its post-medieval drainage. The volume is structured chronologically and chronicles the shifting emphasis between ritual and domestic use of a diminishing area of dry land. The earlier chapters are divided into detailed reports of principal elements, such as Bronze Age barrows and enclosure, Beaker pit and lynchet system, Iron Age shrine and settlement enclosure complex, as well as ancillary domestic and stock enclosures and field systems as part of the wider Iron Age landscape. This shows development from temporary and open settlement closely tied to dry land communities, to permanent enclosed settlements with looser links to other communities. At a regional level this is explored in terms of the boundary between the Alyesford-Swarling culture south of the Ouse and the more conservative fenland culture north of the Ouse.

The intensive study of the Haddenham V Iron Age enclosure and its phased re-use exemplified by several roundhouses, forms one of the two major themes of the second volume, and a series of studies attempt economic and social reconstruction of the community suggesting a 15 member household, with ample land (30–35ha) for 300 sheep and sufficient arable cultivation to support the population at more than self-sufficiency. Settlement would have been at the 2.5m contour, just above seasonal water meadows.

The re-use of the Snow's Farm Bronze Age barrow for the construction of a Romano-British shrine (Haddenham III) and its associated artefactually rich deposits including plentiful evidence for sheep

sacrifice, forms the second major theme. This site is described as a fenland "tell" and incorporates John Bromich's 1950s investigations (as well as a fascinating biography of John Bromich as an inset), and some extracts of the way in which local amateur enthusiasts thought about their buried landscape.

The final three chapters discuss the changing landscape in Roman and post-medieval times, and a discussion on communities, boundaries, settlement hierarchies and places of ritual practice, environmental and landscape sequences, social fabric and loss of its cohesion at periods of stress in a marginal environment. The Roman chapter plays host to publication of the results from the contemporary WEA investigations of the Willingham fen edge, including a valuable reassessment of ceramic dating showing that contrary to previous interpretation there was no catastrophic hiatus in the 3rd century, and that the shrine on the Delphs was located in the "outlands" for settlement that had retreated to the upland. It also provides fresh evidence on the direction of the Roman canal of Car Dyke in this area, linking Cottenham with Willingham Mere, and then on to the Huntingdonshire fen edge at Colne.

The chapter on land reclamation provides a useful comparison from historical sources and more recent communities for the authors' interpretation for earlier communities based on the archaeological evidence which is explored in the final chapter. This covers issues such as consistency in the densities of fen edge occupation and land-use (stocking and yields), presence of squatters versus rights of common grazing for upland communities or those "up-Ouse", long-term continuation of drainage systems, transhumance models leading to "strategic procurement within a niche environment" and establishment of permanent settlement with local sub-stations. The final section has a retrospective lament for shortcomings because of constraints in data and the methodologies of the day (innovative though they were for the 1980s). In my opinion the authors and contributors have little to be concerned about, as these volumes are a tribute to their intellectual, organizational and field archaeological skills, from which all those interested in the study of the fenland landscape will greatly benefit.

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